CHAPTER – III

THEMATIC APPROACH
The selection of different themes by the author in his novels is the field of study in the present chapter. Ghosh has so many ideas, which he presents through the selection of themes, which have an entertaining story but are also innovative. The Circle of Reason has a totally different theme in comparison to The Shadow Lines. Such is the case between The Calcutta Chromosome and The Glass Palace.

We can uncover innumerable things in Ghosh's themes such as, the role of memory, history, the life and the conflicts of the people of village, scientific element, suspense, comic events, Gandhian philosophy, and so on. But one common thing is present in all his novels that they are all set mostly within the boundaries of Asia, if we find some details of countries outside Asia we can find it in The Circle of Reason.

Moving from place to place, Ghosh's characters keep floating in the novel; they even do not form any relationship worth the name. They keep telling their stories, trying to link up plot of the novel but too little avail. Ghosh does not probe deep into their minds in The Circle of Reason. The ghetto at al-ghazira is very picturesquely described: every character is given a tale, but no habitation, nor roots. They remain fable characters, passively in a significant way. The post-modernist tendency is to show what they are and not who they are. K. Damodar Rao analyses it in a simple way: "In The Circle of Reason the attempts of the novelist are obviously oriented to floating the events and characters through a medley of metaphors and select ideas. (The Novels of Amitav Ghosh 32).

According to Geeta, Brahman is the basis of all things and is not itself a thing. Brahman does not exist in time but time is in it. Thus ego has neither beginning nor end. Hence it suggests that life moves in a circular pattern. In this
way life is a journey, which has a definite initial point and final point. Taking clues from Indian philosophy, Amitav Ghosh chooses a circular pattern for his first novel. After reading and rereading the novel, we can realize that besides the circle existing in the title of the novel, many other circles are formed within the novel. Deriving three gunas, Satwa, Rajas and Tamas from The Bhagavadgita, Ghosh names the three sections of the novel accordingly. Each section of the novel is dominated by the mode (Guna) as it has been named where as Satwa is described as light of consciousness by most of the scholars. Ghosh prefers to call it reason. The concept of reason is very much western and it is associated with many traits like the power to think rationally, scientific way of discriminating between right and wrong, a state minus superstition, progressive attitude and civilized way of life.

The novel opens in a village named Lalpukur where a boy arrives with his aunti, Toru-debi. The boy’s head is not like a normal one but it is too huge with knots and bumps. The boy is named as Alu because of the odd shape of his head. Alu is the central character of the novel through which we can witness all the action of the novel. Alu’s uncle Balaram had a habit to watch heads of people to analyze them, which he tried on Alu:

Balaram often wished there was something to be learnt from Alu’s physiognomy. The nose was of the kind which the Barbarini manuscript names Lunar-short, with a rounded end. But those were mere classifications; there was nothing to be learnt from them. Looking at his face, nobody could have called the boy handsome or ugly. If there was a word for it, it was ordinary. In fact, with his
Balaram, while studying in college in Calcutta used to buy old secondhand books for the reason that so many precious things can be found in those books. One day a little away from the wrought iron gates of Presidency College he absent-mindedly picked up and paid for a tattered old book. It was called Practical Phrenology. Balaram’s observation of heads goes on but he always thought that a special head is something different and he had never encountered it. Balaram finished his bachelor’s degree in Science and was trained as a schoolteacher. A feeling to serve the needy people was always present in his plans. He left Calcutta after a dispute with his elder brother and came to Lalpukur where he joined Bhudeb Roy’s School. Bhudeb Roy is the one and only person who later becomes the reason for Balaram’s family’s death where Alu escapes in a miraculous way.

Bhudeb Roy had a very strong will to be powerful and lust for money. He acted as a landlord in Lalpukur and all his actions remind us of the ancient feudal system. He did so many things without telling his schoolteachers. Once he said all the students to bring fifty rupees. When Balaram knew, he protested but Roy told him that is was not a matter of teaching but an administrative matter. Bhudeb Roy had planted a new high-yielding seed but he did nothing. Three classes of schoolboys did most of his harvesting on pain of being failed in their examinations. When Balaram protested feebly Bhudeb Roy told him, it was a part of the botany practical and also that he always believes in a judicious mixture of

stocky build and being as he was, neither tall nor short nor dark nor fair, Alu would have been nothing other than ordinary to look at if it were not for his head.

(The Circle of Reason 10-11)
practical and theoretical knowledge. He shared all the annual prizes between his five sons. He paid bribe to the Inspector of schools to receive more grant. He organized feast for the whole village. He bought a six-foot image of Ma Saraswati with spinning decorative electric lights. He did all these things to prove his supremacy in the village but Balaram for all these things began to hate him and both of them never knew when the enmity between them began which Bhudeb Roy started.

The result of continuous protesting started to come when Toru-debi found her pond covered with dead fish. There was a family of weaver's in which Maya, her brother Rakhal and her father lived. The family later joined hands with Balaram in the fight against Bhudeb Roy. As the story runs the tension between them also raises. Bhudeb Roy complains to the Assistant Superintendent of Police Joyti Das about Balaram and declares him a confused extremist who has no respect for order. Joyti das listened to him quietly but not agreed to Bhudeb Roy's logic.

The theme also throws light on the India of that time and the great scientists as well. Balaram's father heard so many odd things about the Presidency College and was afraid that his son would not be able to adjust his life in a big city. But Balaram as a man of reason had some different thoughts:

Balaram knew of Presidency College, too it was there that Jagadish Bose had taught two young men Satyen Bose, who was to appropriate half the universe of elementary particles with the publication of the Prose - Einstein statistics; and Meghnad Saha.
whose formulation of the likeness between a star and an atom had laid the foundation of a whole branch of astrophysics.

(The Circle of Reason 41)

Balaram was always worried about Alu because after reading his skull he declared that there was a disastrous combination going in him, which was firmness plus combativeness. Alu also not spoke a word about his likes and dislike; he always did what he wanted to do. He started to go to Rakhal’s father Shombhu Debnath’s house where he sat silently without uttering a single word watching him sitting in his looms. Alu watched him carefully while making cloth. Now the boy wanted to learn weaving. Balaram was now happy because Alu now ultimately had shown some signs of positiveness. He declared weaving as a great thing and connected it with reason. Balaram said:

And so weaving, too, is hope; a living belief that having once made the world one and blessed it with its diversity it must do so again. Weaving is hope because it had no country, no continent. Weaving is Reason, which makes the world mad and makes it human.

(The Circle of Reason 58)

Balaram is not only obsessed with reason but cleanliness too. Once in Presidency College he was the hero of his campaign about clean underwear. Now in Lalpukur he started his holy fight against germs. The news anyhow went to Jyoti Das who was investigating officer in the case about Balaram declaring him extremist:

Later it was a puzzle. Jyoti Das lost himself in that labyrinth of cause and effect. While writing his report he found a newspaper
cutting in the file, a yellowed scrap of paper, left there perhaps by some conscientious clerk. ‘Teacher battles with germs,’ it said ‘saves thousands’. The report claimed that Lalpukur had stayed germ – free when thousands of other villages on the border were consumed by disease, because of the efforts of one Balaram Bose, a teacher, who had doused the village in waves of antiseptic.

(The Circle of Reason 83)

While observing The Circle of Reason we see so many things happening twice or more but the book Life of Pasteur makes a Circle, which is evident through the characters. The book is very well connected from the beginning to the end of the theme of novel. This one book does so many things. Following the postmodernist tradition, Ghosh uses metaphors in the novel, which form circles. The most important metaphor is this book which Balaram, his friends Gopal and Dantu and Alu like for their own reasons. In all there are three copies of Life of Pasteur in the novel- Balaram’s, Gopal’s, and the copy that Balaram gifts to Dantu. The book functions at various levels. Highly influenced by Pasteur, Balaram feels that Alu lacks passion and he reads out a passage from the book to Alu describing Pasteur’s courage to give untested vaccine for rabies to a ten year old boy bitten by a rabid dog. At the end of the passage Alu cries. But on one occasion it is Alu who saves this book from fire. The book plays a very vital role in developing Alu and Balaram’s intimacy. Later on, when Alu takes refuge at Gopal’s place, Gopal gives him a bundle of his clothes, some money and a copy of Life of Pasteur. Now Alu accompanied by this copy, boards with Mariamma. Significantly, not the reading of the book, but its pages come to the help of
Karthamma who refuses to deliver the baby without signing papers and then Prof. Samuel tears the pages of the book and gives it to her to sign. The copy of Gopal is left behind in Al-Ghazira. But later on, Alu comes across the copy of *Life of Pasteur* in Mrs. Verma’s library. This is Dantu’s copy, which was gifted to Dantu by Balaram. The book completes the whole circle. However, this time, Mrs. Verma and Alu cremate the book with Kulfi’s corpse as it to suggest the completion of the circle.

The second most important thing, which has a great hold on the lives of the characters, is carbolic acid. Balaram finds solace in carbolic acid, which he uses to cleanse the society of germs. Balaram only prefers carbolic acid. He had his own reasons for that, other mercury based disinfectants were ‘Created by the Great Adversary, Robert Koch, who had so tenaciously and falsely opposed Pasteur and so ‘it had to be carbolic acid, that masterly brain child of Lister’s, Pasteur’s friend and great disciple. Balaram uses the same carbolic acid in his war against Bhudeb Roy as first he marches to the place where Bhudeb Roy is addressing people and hurls carbolic acid. And later he stands outside his house surrounded by drums of carbolic acid. Balaram’s Vehemence about carbolic acid becomes important in Al-Ghazira too as Ras people set out to clean all places with carbolic acid. Finally Mrs. Verma pours it into the mouth of Kulfi instead of Ganga Jal and therein comments Dr. Mishara that ‘the world has come full circle’. Cleansing germs, corruption (Bhudeb Roy) and commercialization, carbolic acid finally performs the spiritual act of making body pure and holy.

There was also a new habit developing in Bhudeb Roy. Sometimes in the evening he sat in his verandah with his sons and his men. This was a type of
'Durbar' where the 'great thinker' Bhudeb Roy answered each and every question of his men and the villagers. The questions were of all types, relating to money, attitude of god, spirituality and so on. But one thing was final that Bhudeb Roy's arguments were final and no one could protest it. One time in this mood Bhudeb Roy forgot his enmity with Balaram and in a very strange state of mind he ordered to one of his son to do a holy job. At that moment he had nothing but goodwill for the world. In his elation, he even told one of his sons to take a sackful of coconuts over to Balaram's house.

On the other hand Balaram's wife was afraid as any other common housewife. He thought that Bhudeb Roy has everything, manpower, money and hold in the villagers as well as the local police. She complained to Balaram from time to time that he does not understand the reality. She said this in her own way with a sense of fear and declared Balaram responsible for all this. Once she said to Balaram:

You see, Toru-debi told Balaram in the kitchen that right while they were eating their dinner, in his own way Bhudeb-babu really likes you. He respects you, he wants your friendship. He's a nice man in his own way just like everybody else. If only you read a little less and knew the world a little more.

(The Circle of Reason 92)

One thing is common in the theme of The Circle of Reason that it is based on the progress of every individual in their own way. Alu, the central character who disliked study starts weaving which provides him pleasure and satisfaction. He feels that this was the ultimate thing for which he was born. He connects it to
his progress and creativity. Balaram a true follower of reason tries so many things from his college life such as the reading of heads, campaign for clean underwear and ultimately the carbolic acid. All these things are connected with the perfection in his life. He thinks to save people through acid is a holy job and is pleased with it. On the other hand Bhudeb Roy thinks that through wrong actions and manpower he can do whatever he likes. He did so many false things, fraud with students, selling the parts of the crashed plane and the feeling of being God for the people of Lalpukur. All these things were absolutely wrong but he thought that he is progressing. In the other section of the book we find Jyoti Das relating progress through the birds which he watched regularly. On the other hand his colleague in Al-Ghazira believes in hook or crook for success. The other characters in Al Ghazira like Zindi, kulfi, Prof. Samuel, Chunni, Abu Fahl, Zaghloul and Hazz Fahmi define life and progress in their own way and express it through their actions. All the characters of the novel try to go ahead in life, they try to achieve a better place in comparison to the present one. But it is a notable fact that they all witness failure. Even Alu, who in the last section of book returns to India proves that he is moving in a fixed circle, he tries but is unable to break the circle.

Assistant Superintendent Jyoti Das’s love for birds is also shown as completing the Circle. Jyoti Das was the Incharge Officer in Alu’s case. He also went to Gopal’s house to search for Alu, but luckily Alu escaped few hours ago. The description of the migratory birds show us that they are the part of the circle because they come from different countries in order to escape from intolerable heat or cold and after few months they return to their native land. Same is the case of Alu who in the end prepares to return to India.
Joyti Das had a habit that whenever he watched a beautiful bird, he started to tell others present there about the bird. But sometimes he controlled himself feeling that he was in the job of police and not of a bird watcher:

Das spotted a Malabar Kingfisher on a telegraph pole and turned in his seat as they drove past it. What’s the matter? Dubey said curiously. It’s a ..., Das began and stopped himself just in time. He remembered an occasion at the Academy when, interrupting one of Dubey’s monologues on their colleagues, he had pointed out a pheasant-tailed jacana.

(The Circle of Reason 159)

The Circle of Reason offers a grim exploration of the expressions of migrancy, where reason and capital become metonymic, circulating forces in the world. Focusing on a motley group of migrants drawn from various parts of India on an imaginary island al-Ghazira and then Algeria, the novel marks of this passage, this history. The chapter entitled ‘Becalmed’ is the most revelatory and powerful in articulating Ghosh’s vision of globalization. Here, we get a sense of the different lives, motives, and aspirations of the passengers of the rickety boat Mariamma which is taking them to al-Ghazira as migrant labourers. Incidentally ‘Mariam’ is the South Indian name for Mary and Mariamma means Mother Mary, which includes ‘amma’ (‘mother’ in Tamil). They are all headed for al-Ghazira, a prosperous incompetent Indian Police apparatus and an absurd charge over a ridiculously escalated petty conflict between his ‘Scientific’ uncle Balaram and the traditional corrupt village Landlord Bhudeb Roy: Zindi, a madam who runs a house of prostitution in al-Ghazira after she was banished from her matrimonial
home on account of her barrenness, Karthamma and Kulli who have been picked up by Zindi to be prostitutes there; Rakesh, an ex-travelling salesman of Ayurvedic laxatives which he could never sell; Professor Samuel who propounds theories about queues; and others.

Zindi's vocal response is especially interesting for its insistence on naming prostitution as 'work' and the women as 'hard workers', so as to legitimate both, women's sex-work and her own 'entrepreneurship'. This gesture attempts to accord prostitution the status of being productive labour, serving it to dignify it and make it visible as parts of the global economy. As Arjun Appadurai comments:

This can be read as an attempt to negotiate 'imagined lives', and to 'fabricate identities' despite and from the concrete conditions and conventions of her (Zindi's) life – 'imaginative appropriation' that are involved in the construction of agency in a deterritorialized world.

(Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization 33)

Ghosh is far too talented a writer to leave us with less than an ambiguous effect, even at his weakest. Despite the liveliness, intelligence, poignancy and zest for affirmation of the third part, the problem remains serious precisely because of the importance of the novel as a whole. And they are not problems with easy solutions, for they have yet to be resolved by our understanding, action and process of living. The problem of human survival has become dependent on finding the connection between a full conception of relationship and of social change. The Circle of Reason provides a direction and also indicates about the
problem which we find in the last line of the novel which says 'Hope is the beginning'.

The Shadow Lines is the most celebrated novel of Amitav Ghosh, a novel which gave him name and fame as a top class writer. In the first reading we feel that the theme of the novel is about partition and freedom but it also has so many things such as attachment for birthplace, individual freedom for which the characters are struggling, emotions, realistic presentation of mob violence during the riots, the role of memory and history. All the major events are discussed and described by a nameless narrator who in the beginning of the novel is nine years old but tells us about all the major things which happened before his birth.

In The Shadow Lines Amitav Ghosh successfully uses the novel form to express his political vision—a vision that questions the relevance of freedom, both on private and public levels. Political freedom had been achieved apparently through non-violent means but Hindu-Muslim riots had erupted in several parts of India and also in the newly created Pakistan. Common people were caught between the greed of self-seeking politicians, fanatic religious leaders and their cohorts, power-wielding corrupt bureaucrats and anti-social elements always looking for opportunities to exploit any situation to their own advantage; and the unseemly haste with which the Labour government in Britain decided to transfer power. It is on record that Lord Mountbatten, the then Viceroy of India and later the first Governor General of free India, got his reforms commissioner, Mr. V.P. Menon, to draw up in just a few hours.

Before the people could realize the political and social implication of the partition, they were swept of their feet by a wave of violence that swiftly became a
tide. Hundreds of people were killed, raped and butchered on either side of the border, and for those who survived the catastrophe the experience was so traumatic that the memories of those grief-stricken days haunted them for years to come. For millions of people the independence of the country brought terrible but unavoidable suffering and humiliation, a loss of human dignity and a frustrating sense of being uprooted. Fifty years have passed by since India became ‘free’. The Bengali diaspora has been dispersed to distant lands. Some have gained success in new associations and developments. The sense of loss of one’s identity, the connection with one’s baari remains. Baari is where one’s ancestors have lived for generations. For the East Bengali, 15 August 1947 is the Partition day, not India’s Independence Day, a day that deliberately bifurcated the Bengali Community. If the purpose of partition was to gain freedom, then that freedom was a ‘mirage’.

In The Shadow Lines, the story is woven around two families, the Datta–Chaudhuris of Bengal and the Princes of London and their relationship which spans three generations. Beginning in colonial times, and ending a little after the creation of East Pakistan in the 60s, the story narrates significant events – private and public and their meaning as they touch and reveal the character of the members of these two families. The setting for these events is equally extensive and includes three countries – India, England and Bangladesh, which makes the novel truly international. The political theme of the novel is obvious. According to the blurb the novel focuses on the meaning of political freedom in the modern world. It is about the force of nationalism. The Shadow Lines we draw between people and nations, which is both an absurd illusion and a source of terrifying violence. But the novel really gain force from the manner in which the private
upheavals besetting these two families are mirrored in public turmoil – the Blitz in wartime London, Civil strife in past partition Dhaka and a riot in Calcutta.

Tridib is one of the most important characters in the novel. It is he who is the mentor of the eight-year-old narrator. Tridib plays the key role in the novel from beginning to the end, after his death also because there is a confusion in which May thinks that he died because of her mistake. Tridib is a well-educated person but the narrator’s grandmother dislikes him:

My grandmother didn’t approve of Tridib. He’s a loafer and a wastrel, I would sometimes hear her saying to my parents; he doesn’t do any proper work, lives off his father’s money. To me, she would only allow herself to say with a sardonic little twist of her mouth: I don’t want to see you loafing about with Tridib. Tridib wastes his time.

(The Shadow Lines 3-4)

Tridib was the son of ‘Mayadebi’ the only sister of narrator’s grandmother. Grandmother never liked his habits of standing on roadside stalls, drinking tea and smoking cigarettes. But there was some reason for which the grandmother loved his presence, mainly because Tridib and his family were their only rich relatives. The grandmother sometimes pitied him for doing nothing but this was not true:

Of course even she would acknowledge sometimes that Tridib did not really do ‘nothing’. In fact, he was working on a Ph.D. in Archaeology – something to do with sites associated with the Sena dynasty of Bengal. But this earned him very little credit in my grandmother’s eyes. Being a school teacher herself, she had an
inordinate respect for academic work of any kind: she saw research as a life long pilgrimage which ended with a named professorship and a marble bust in the corridors of Calcutta University or the National Library. It would have been a travesty to think of an irresponsible head like Tridib’s mounted in those august corridors.

(The Shadow Lines 7)

In the view of grandmother if Tridib wanted to marry she could find a very rich wife for him but there were no signs of his marriage. She always said that in comparison to other men of his age he was the most irresponsible person and had a sure sign that he was determined to waste his life in idle self-indulgence. Ghosh has presented some light moments through Tridib’s activities especially at the time when he visited the narrator’s family:

But of course, she knew, though she couldn’t admit it, that he had really come to nurse his stomach. The truth was that his digestion was a mess: ruined by the rivers of hard boiled tea he had drunk at roadside stalls all over south Calcutta. Every once in a while a rumble in his bowels would catch him unawares on the streets and he would have to sprint for the nearest clean lavatory. This condition was known to us as Tridib’s Gastric. Once every few months or so we would answer the door bell and find him leaning against the wall, his legs tightly crossed, the sweat starting from his forehead. When it established to everyone’s satisfaction that he had come on a family visit, he would sink into sour ‘good’ sofa and the ritual of the family visit would begin.
The eight year old narrator was greatly impressed by Tridib, because of his knowledge and hold on so many types of subjects such as Mesopotamian Stellae, East European jazz, the habits of arboreal apes, the plays of Garcia Lorca and so on. The narrator always remain close to him when he talked, actually he at that time felt a sense of pride. But even at those times, when he was the centre of everybody’s attention, there was always something’s a little detached about his manner. The narrator judged that Tridib did want to make friends with the people he talked to and that perhaps were why he was happiest in neutral, impersonal places – Coffee houses, bars, street corner addas the sort of place where people come, talk and go away without expecting to know each other any further. The narrator then understood this part of his personality in which he always chose to come all the way from Ballygunge to Gole Park for his addas – simply because it was far enough for him to be sure that he wouldn’t meet any of his neighbours there.

Sacrifice for the country is the ultimate unifying force for her. She has a sense of respect not only for India but also for all the nations with the feeling that they also had suffered to maintain their freedom. When the narrator tells her that Ila is studying in London and could settle there, she argues with him:

Ila has no right to live there, she said hoarsely. She doesn’t belong there. It took those people a long time to build that country; hundreds of years, years and years of war and bloodshed. Everyone who lives there has earned his right to be there with blood: with their brother’s blood and their father’s blood they’ve drawn their borders with blood. Hasn’t Maya told you how regimental flags
hang in all their cathedrals and how all their churches are lined with memorials to men who died in wars, all around the world? War is their religion. That’s what it takes to make a country. Once that happens people forget they were born this or that, Muslim or Hindu, Bengali or Punjabi: they become a family born of the same pool of blood. That is what you have to achieve for India, don’t you see.

(The Shadow Lines 78)

The grandmother’s concept of nationalism was different from that of Ila. Consequently, for the country to be united, to define itself, it needs borders. Thus a nation ends up defining itself in opposition to other nations, particularly to its neighbours. The partition of the ancestral house in Dhaka illustrates this point. The significant point is that Tha’mma almost came to believe in her own story just as in the case of the nation she believes that the opposite happens across the borders. Her brand of nationalism is one which, ‘shuts other people out’, which defines ‘Us’ against ‘Them’. She draws a psychological as well as a physical boundary around herself and those who claim the same national identity. Therefore she is circumspect of any “Indian” who lives beyond the borders:

But she doesn’t have things, I retorted, trying to keep my voice in control. You know that. She has to live on pocket money; she doesn’t have the money to buy things like that. Besides, she doesn’t want things. She spends her spare time going on demonstrations and acting in radical plays for Indian immigrants in East London. You know that when she was here last, you asked me yourself: Has Ila become a communist? She’s a greedy little slut, my grandmother.
said pounding on the bed clothes with a fist she had not the strength
to clench properly, I can’t understand why you’re defending her.
You tell me then, since you know her so well: why does she live
there, if it’s not for the money and the comforts.

(The Shadow Lines 79)

Further, Tha’mma’s nationalism sustains itself by a desire to perpetuate the
values of common heritage and by striving towards building a better nation. She
forces her grandson to exercise regularly to build a strong nation by building a
strong body. Her nationalism falls under the category of primordial view. The
primordialist argues that every person carries with him through life ‘attachments’
desired from a place of birth, kinship, relation, religion, language and social
practices that are ‘natural’ for him, ‘spiritual’ in character, and they provide a basis
for an easy ‘affinity’ with the people from the same background. But the novel
shows some serious complications in the above-mentioned view. She struggles to
find her place of birth but is forced to realize that no amount of bloodshed can
make the borders real. By highlighting the fact that even after partition there might
not be any “difference” between the two regions across the border, the novel
questions the ideology of nationalism.

The Shadow Lines questions prevailing percepts and ethics which man
inherits blindly. The value of political and social freedom is no longer stable,
exclusive, permanent and immutable as Tha’mma and Ila had believed and with
Tridib the novel emphasizes the relevance and significance of human
relationships. This alone can lead to an attainment of genuine freedom. Man is free
to decide on a course of action which is found to affect a whole group of people. a
nation and mankind. Every individual shares the responsibility of establishing a code of values which would ensure peace and solidarity for mankind.

One disturbing feature of life in Calcutta / Dhaka and such cities is the increasing tension between the Hindu and Muslim communities and the eruption of violence which takes its toll of innocent lives and destruction of public as well as private property. Violence is also one of the major part of the theme of The Shadow Lines. Novy Kapadia rightly points out:

Amitav Ghosh’s greatest triumph is that the depiction of communal strife in Calcutta and erstwhile East Pakistan, and its continuation in contemporary India, is very controlled and taut. There are no moralizing or irrelevant digressions. Lucidity and compactness is achieved primarily by his unusual narrative device.

(The New Indian Novel in English: A study of the 1980’s 208)

Everyone loves freedom and is ready to achieve it at any cost. But sometimes reality and illusion are connected to each other so closely that one cannot think what is going to happen. The above things became reality for Grandma and others when they went Dhaka for their purpose. When they reached there, the old lanes appeared to be normal. However the normalcy proved to be illusory, as while returning they confronted not only empty lanes, but also a violent mob. The narrator asks May about that accident. She tells the narrator:

We were on our way back from your grandmother’s ancestral house, she went on. The car was stopped. By a mob. I’m sure you know that some of them attacked us. They broke the windscreen and injured the driver. We had an armed security man with us. He fired
a shot at them. They drew back. They might even have gone away.

But your grandmother’s uncle was following behind us. In a rickshaw. The man who had looked after him all those years was driving the rickshaw. The mob went after them instead. Your grandmother wanted the driver of our car to drive away. She shouted at him to get away, fast. I shouted back at her and got out of the car. Your grandmother screamed at me. She said I didn’t know what I was doing, and I’d get everyone killed. I didn’t listen; I was a heroine. I wasn’t going to listen to a stupid, cowardly old woman.

But she knew what was going to happen. Everyone there did except me. I was the only one who didn’t. I began to run towards the rickshaw.

(The Shadow Lines 250)

But ultimately there was no way to save them from dying. May is always guilty – conscious whenever she listens or remembers about Tridib. Tridib’s death is the most tragic moment in the novel. May further described his death:

I heard Tridib shouting my name. But I kept running. I heard him running after me. He caught up with me and pushed me, from behind. I stumbled and fell. I thought he’d stop to take me back to the car. But he ran on towards the rickshaw. The mob had surrounded the rickshaw. They had pulled the old man off it. I could hear him screaming. Tridib ran into the mob, and fell upon their backs. He was trying to push his way through to the old man, I think. Then the mob dragged him in. He vanished. I could only see
their backs. It took less than a moment. Then the men began to scatter. I picked myself up and began to run towards them. The men had melted away, into the gullies. When I got there, I saw three bodies. They were all dead. They'd cut Khalil's stomach open. The old man's head had been hacked off. And they'd cut Tridib's throat, from ear to ear.

(The Shadow Lines 250 – 52)

The novel puts to test some of the personal experiences, relations, memories and historical processes in which the realization of the futility of metaphor on the one hand and an awareness of the 'illusion of knowledge created by deceptive weight of remembered' are evidenced at many levels. This process of testing is achieved by constant juxtaposition of silence with powers of communication, and of experimental realities with those nations supposed to have been theorized, defined and categorized. The pathetic situation if finding oneself beyond or below the categorized parameters throws into relief some seemingly undefined, vague and unreal conditions. The novelist approaches this incongruous element from different angles by applying different frames of reference covering different areas of human experience. If irony is one mode of reference, silence is the other mode of reference as well as response, a strategy to probe deep into the validity or otherwise of words and notions. The questions dealt with are both experience and eloquence. These words, all by themselves, cannot encompass the subtleties of coming and going which overlap any number of times. And when national boundaries are constantly drawn and re-drawn, the meaning could take an ambiguous turn while the processes of coming and going get marginalized. Girish
Kamal rightly comments, "Past and future meet across religious, political and cultural barriers in a confusion of emotions, ideals, intentions and acts, leading to a shattering climax". (Indian Express Magazine 5)

Above all, the narrator's interaction with Ila teaches him some harsh truths about emotional relationships. The narrator is always at Ila's mercy. When as a young boy his mother tells Ila and her family how eagerly he had waited to see her, the narrator is shocked with Ila's behaviour and also is angry on his mother who tells each and everything to Ila's family:

Now listen to that, said Queen Victoria looking at me fondly. What a sweet little man. Do you hear that Ila? He asks about you every day. Ila smiled and turned her head away with a tiny shrug. I knew then, for certain, that she had not asked about me as I had about her. At that moment I hated my mother. For the first time in my life she had betrayed me. She had given me away, she had made public, then and forever, the inequality of our needs; she had given Ila the knowledge of her power and she had left me defenseless; naked, in the face of that unthinkable, adult truth: that need is not transitive, that one may need without oneself being needed.

(The Shadow Lines 44)

There is a moment in the novel when Ila and the narrator have to stay in a single room for a night. Ila, who was feeling uneasy due to hot weather removes her jacket. This time the narrator becomes out of control because he was breathlessly watching her:
She was in a thin blouse now; I could see the outline of her breasts and even the shadow of the mole above her nipple.

It's hot in here actually, she said, undoing the buttons of her blouse. I don't think I'm going to need any night clothes. Why, you're staring, she laughed in surprise. I'll have to turn my back on you again. I didn't know, she said. You were always the brother I never had. I'm sorry. If I'd known, I wouldn't have behaved like this.

(The Shadow Lines 111)

She is not insensitive or deliberately exploitative, but she makes him aware of his own sexuality and of his own response. When Tha'mma sees that his adolescent infatuation has developed into an adult passion she warns him that Ila can be compared to prostitutes. The truth however is very different. Ila is much a victim of her husband and of the patriarchal world. She expresses it to the narrator:

But I never did, you know. You see, you've never understood, you've always been taken in by the way I used to talk, when we were in college. I only talked like that to shock you, and because you seemed to expect it of me somehow. I never did any of those things: I'm about as chaste, in my own way, as any woman you'll ever meet.

(The Shadow Lines 188)

This, too, is a realization that the narrator needs to acquire in his progress towards emotional maturity. Ila is not like Tristran, Tridib's ideal lover, who transcends nationality. She is struggling to solve her problems. She is a divided self, constantly trying to compensate for her weaknesses and unhappiness.
May plays a very important role in *The Shadow Lines*. She is as exotic as Ila, and therefore as much an object of desire. She is solidly a part of her own culture and shares none of Ila's anxieties and insecurities. The boy-narrator is infatuated with her as much as he is infatuated with Tridib and everything about Tridib, so that his feelings for her become a marker, as it were, of his self-identification with his mentor Tridib. In a sense, she stands in the way of his attainment of selfhood, though she is much more sympathetic and kindly than Ila.

As the product of an alien culture, she cannot comprehend the realities of the Indian situation. Once she had forced Tridib to kill a dying dog with a penknife, in a way that foreshadows Tridib's own death, for she forces Tridib to go to help Jethamoshai and Khalil in the middle of a rioting mob in Dhaka. She refuses to acknowledge the certain danger that Tridib faces. As a result Tridib is killed by the violent mob.

May's generosity helps the narrator to accommodate himself to his world and to reconnect himself with the people he had left behind. This is a major theme of the Indian storytelling tradition, in which individual development is ultimately a social phenomenon and whether it is linear or looping in narrative technique it sees personal growth as a part of the process of socialization. The narrator of *The Shadow Lines* is always aware of his position and part in the continuing story of family relationships and national identity, his disillusionments, his pain, his triumphs are as much those of his society as they are his own. Suvir Kaul rightly comments:

The narrator's personal story becomes as extremely self-conscious meditation on the themes of nationality, internationality, cultural
and historical self-determination, as also on the enormously conflicted transition from the temporary certitudes of the nationalist freedom struggle to the disillusions and discontents that have marked India as an independent state.

(Oxford Literary Review 1-2)

Unlike the traditional protagonist, he is never alienated or estranged from his community. He never feels he must struggle on alone in a hostile or indifferent world. The mark of his adulthood is not his new ability to withstand alone the pressures of society in his perception of the meaning of existence, but, rather, the widening and deepening of his imaginative understanding of interpersonal and social relationships. The shadow lines between nations and cultures that the novel presents are in fact a metaphor for the shadow lines between people who have so much in common as to be almost the other’s image. His new maturity enables the protagonist to accept and then to soar above and beyond these divisions.

Tridib’s death is treated as a mystery by the characters in the novel. Most of them think May responsible for this death because she asked him to get out of the car and save Jethamoshai and Khalil. May herself feels that she is responsible for Tridib’s death. She lives with a sense of guilt and anger after his death. The mystery is solved in the last two pages of the novel when all doubts are cleared.

As we have already discussed that the main theme of The Shadow Lines is quest for freedom and partition and most of the characters are struggling to free themselves, we find, in the end some of them succeed in doing so. Such is the case of May who is always surrounded by the memories of riots and brutal murders of Khalil, Jethamoshai and Tridib in Dhaka. She in the end of the novel asks the
narrator's views regarding Tridib's death. But he remained silent. He didn't want to answer her. She says:

I used to think so too, she said. I thought I'd killed him. I used to think perhaps he wouldn't have got out of that car if I hadn't made him. If I'd understood what I was doing. I was safe you see – I could have gone right into that mob, and they wouldn't have touched me, an English memsahib, but he, he must have known he was going to die. For years I was arrogant enough to think I owed him his life. But I know I didn't kill him; I couldn't have, if I'd wanted. He gave himself up; it was a sacrifice. I know I can't understand it. I know I mustn't try, for any real sacrifice is a mystery.

(The Shadow Lines 251 – 52)

Boundaries or borders are drawn for political or geographical reasons to differentiate one nation from another. But unfortunately these boundaries create a sense of 'false nationalism', which brings nothing but a sense of loss and terrific fear of violence and death of an innocent man like Tridib. The author very finely portrays his characters especially those who live in the memories of their past and want to get rid of it. The first part 'Going Away' deals with the story of families and has some light moments, but on the other hand the second part 'Coming home' mainly deals with partition and the problems, which are born with partition. The novel ends but does not conclude. It raises serious questions about our roots, our identities and the relevance of war, riots, borders and shadow lines.

The theme of Ghosh's The Calcutta Chromosome is the search for immortality and to find a cure for malaria and syphilis. There is also one major
finding, which runs from the beginning to the end of the novel. It is Murugan’s investigation about the truth. It is concerned with both malaria parasites as well as about the search for immortality. It is Murugan who is after the past to find out the reality, however harsh it may be. He suspects that someone else was guided Ronald Ross, who was awarded the Nobel Prize for his search and experiments in the field of malaria research. He also claims that those who were guiding Ross were never searching for malaria parasite, but for the highest goal, immortality.

The Calcutta Chromosome is a medical thriller that won the prestigious Arthur C. Clarke Award in 1996, and the project was soon under a film contract with director Gabriele Salvatores. The novel's uncovering of the facts leads us to a series of ghost stories which supposed explain the puzzle set up in the opening pages of the mystery. These stories are mentioned as ‘Laakhan Stories’ in the novel which were based on the true story of a character who is a great writer named Phulboni. These stories also have connections with the brutal murders and missing of some British scientists and officials. If we only take the novel as a common detective story we may feel disappointed, but if we study it deeply we can find it including various things like medical mystery, spirit possession, investigation, the history and working of the British in the period when India was under their regime.

Most of the characters in the novel have some connection or commerce with ghosts. The mystery is driven by a virtual ghost flashing on Antar’s computer screen named AVA and demanding his investigation of Murugan. Antar’s is the 21st century protagonist who embarks on finding Murugan who has disappeared from Life Watch, North based mega – corporation with head quarters in New York
but "no office in Calcutta," is an organization that employs both men. Antar learns that Murugan's advocacy of an epistemological challenge led to his ostracism from the scholarly community and estrangement from several of his friends and associates. Much later in the narrative, we realize that Antar's pre-lifewatch existence in a small village by the banks of the Nile compels his present search for Murugan. His official assignment to find Murugan turns out to be governed by the affective and the nostalgic, and the investigation becomes a personal act of atonement for Antar's present employment by the mega-corporation.

The fact is Ghosh restores corporeal materiality of those ghosts by explaining transmigration of souls in biological terms - the lingo of chromosomes, DNA, retroviruses, and mutations well known to contemporary global cosmopolitan readers. For in Mangala's popular religious medical practice, the transfer of the human soul effected through the transmission of malaria - infected blood via the bodies of pigeon used agar - plates. This drama of corporeal restoration in the story is homologous to Ghosh's restoration of a corpse of indigenous knowledge about corporeal immortality, a knowledge that troubles the colonial medical gaze. Scientists, administrators, doctors, missionaries, computer analysts fall prey to the spectral knowledge that makes their discourse on health and cures possible but remains inadmissible in rational discourse. There are some converts to the doctrine of corporeal immortality as we see in D.D. Cunningham, Ross's predecessor, who stonewalls Ross's search for the malaria bug for almost a year before disappearing into the steamy underground of soul-switchers.

The two worlds of science and counter-science, European rationality and Indian mythology are brought together against the backdrop of Calcutta's streets.
Markets and monuments. The narrator discovers a forgotten monument in Calcutta, built in the memory of Sir Ronald Ross. The marble arch of the monument is framed in an iron gate. There was an inscription in the right side about Ronald Ross and on the left there are three verses of Ross's poem, 'In Exile'.

Murugan ran his eyes over the familiar lines:

This day relenting God
I hath placed within my hand
A wondrous thing; and God,
Be praised. At His command,
Seeking his secret deeds,
With tears and toiling breath,
I find thy cunning seeds,
O million – murdering Death.
I know this little thing
A myriad men will save.
O death where is thy sting?
Thy victory O grave?

(The Calcutta Chromosome 34-35).

Murugan, the self-appointed biographer to Ronald Ross gleefully parodies this high sounding moral sentential with bitter humour to expose how these scientific achievements barely touched the lives of the millions living at the edge of death. Murugan began to laugh as he was trying to make a joke out of that poem:

Half stunned I look around
And see a land of death-
Dead bones that walk the ground
And dead bones underneath;
A race of wretches caught,
Between the Plams of need
And rubbed to utter nought,
The chaff of human seed.

(The Calcutta Chromosome 35)

But as Murugan explains, the sudden interest of all European countries in finding a cure for malaria was not to save human lives as much as to ensure unrestricted expansion with the Third World counter narrative to the Raj enterprise, but Ghosh goes ahead to give a complicated twist story and constructs a secret history of medical research. Sir Ronald Ross it appears had been manipulated all along to make necessary deductions, while the actual guiding spirit operating behind the scene was a low-born scavenger woman called Mangala, hand picked and trained as an assistant by Ross's predecessor Dr. Cunningham to help him in his laboratory.

Meenakshi Mukherjee rightly comments about the time and space in the novel:

The time and space are so deliberately jumbled in the novel that the discontinuity itself becomes meaningful. The constant cuts and displacement contribute to the fear and suspense, to the feeling of inexorability, so integral to the thriller; the constant shifts in points of view and time—sequence erase the boundaries between hunter
and hunted and make them equally part of the same mystery, the same conspiracy, the same quest. The constant juxtaposition of different times, places, characters and kinds of pursuit extend the scope of each from the specific and the particular to the universal.

(India Today 163)

The common western notions of protagonist, of character development, and of good and evil are disappeared here and The Calcutta Chromosome suggests the superficiality and inadequacy of these ideas as it projects the validity of traditional Indian literary norms, summed up by R.K. Narayan in The World of the Story - Teller as follows:

Everything is interrelated. Stories, scriptures, ethics, philosophy, grammar, astrology, astronomy, semantics, mysticism, and moral codes – each forms part and parcel of a total life and is indispensable for the attainment of a four - square understanding of existence. The story is part of human history rather than fiction.

(The World of the Story - Teller 5)

The thematic study of The Calcutta Chromosome indicates Ghosh’s search for the meaning of life. It would be too facile to contemplate that Amitav Ghosh in his novel has attempted to inscribe a simple scientific thriller on the fever, delirium and discovery of the malaria parasite. It would be more appropriate to recognize that he has contrived to introduce a maze of ideas criss - crossing each other to project the profound meaning and mystery of life through a visibly insignificant façade of a ‘spine - chiller’ that negates the rational view of science and the universe. The intricate relationship of time, place and characters, often
mind-boggling, propels the reader to embark on a journey of an unconfined domain of the past, present and future. The thematic originality and complexity bewilders the reader but a close scrutiny discloses that like his earlier novels, Ghosh in *The Calcutta Chromosome* has universalized the specific through the concept of quest and journey. The notion of delirium, fever and discovery superficially associated with malaria is extended to the meaning of life having identical symbolic and symptomatic significance.

Amitav Ghosh’s novel, a discourse on human quest, project characters engaged in individual search for truth, self-identity and self-knowledge. The spiritual and corporeal exploration, the promise of alternative worlds and visions, invariably compel them to shuffle between different geographic locations and points of time. The personal odyssey takes shape through individual memory and recollection of others. In *The Circle of Reason*, the progress is carried on through the stages of Satva, Rajasthan and Tamas, and finally the circle is completed by a return to Satva or Reason; in *The Shadow Lines* one moves through the bomb-scarred London, riot-ravaged Calcutta and Bangladesh to view the outside world that affects inside world and to learn the true values of man; the story of education and journey continues in a different ensemble in *In an Antiquarian Land*. Journey is a metaphor and symbol of life for Ghosh that man must undertake in search of truth and fulfillment. The same search and journey continues in *The Calcutta Chromosome*.

The verbal felicity of the engrossing novel *The Calcutta Chromosome* moves with a rapid pace and often makes one forgetful of the vacillation of time and place that separates and yet cements the major characters of the novel from
1890's to 1995. The constant shifting between three points of time-past, present and future-common in cinematic technique enables one to visualize a sequence and simultaneity in action that in turn blends the theoretical conjectures of fact and fantasy. The willing suspension of disbelief resolves and dissolves the difference between perception and imagination. The co-mingling of realism with romanticism demonstrates the extraordinary but eternal continuity of life.

All performers are explorers of some mystery: consciously or unconsciously, they move towards a preordained direction of truth. The interest of the novel lies neither in the mystery and discovery of a scientific truth nor in the ancient confrontation between good and evil but in the hidden signs that powerfully evoke the superiority of one particular culture. The novel suggests the conflicts, the problems but not all the solutions. Despite the eerie atmosphere, one must avoid labelling Laakhan and Mangala as dangerous elements. They do not represent evil. Person like Farley or the Upper-Caste stationmaster of Renupur or Countess Pongracz disappear in a perplexing manner because they are out to interfere with the mysterious life of the central characters, Laakhan and Mangala. Phulboni's adventures of Renupur dissolve the boundaries between the real and the unreal. It is difficult to ascertain the veracity of the encounter and yet, the authentic ambience of the entire drama is accepted by the Hindus (Murugan, Sonali, Urmila), Muslims (Saiyad Murad Hussain alias Phulboni and Antar) and Christians (Mrs. Aratounian and Countess Pongracz).

Ghosh universalizes the theory of transmigration of souls and the right to knowledge irrespective of class, creed and cultural separation. Ross endeavors to solve the mystery of malaria through reason or science; Mangala attempts to find a
cure for syphilitic payesis through counter-science of faith. The author seems to conform with the Indian philosophical thought Tarka - analysis and reason or Bhakti - Faith and devotion. Ross is the leader of the former method while Mangala and Laakhan are of the latter.

Murugan for the sake of convenience, often introduces himself as Morgan (a sea-dweller) to his non-Indian acquaintances. Not accidentally but deliberately, Ghosh gives him an alternate name to signify his proficiency in diving deep into the mysteries of life. His specific presence as the prime seeker of truth demands our consistent attention. Ghosh also employs the Goddess metaphor to insist on the necessity of coming back to life. No Indian reader can overlook the idea that Mangala is one of the names of Goddess Kali. Ghosh in fact reformulates the old myth.

The history of malarial research is unfolded through a compressed or extended, circular or repetitive movement of incidents, contextually different, to allow a zigzag motion through 'reality' and 'fiction' that can be apprehended only by an appropriate reading process. This quality of metafiction permits Ghosh to experiment with vision - mixing; the hard realistic and detailed picture of Robinson street, Calcutta, suddenly dissolves into the mysterious world of Laakhan and Mangala. Sonali becomes a witness to metaphysical 'interpersonal transference' of Laakhan's spirit into the body of Romen Haldar with the help of Mangala's words. Ghosh introduce a belief system that accepts interpersonal transference as a regular affair. Life's continuity is maintained through this mysterious process. Much later, we are informed that the entire show was
conducted not by Mangala but by Mrs. Aratounian, another beneficiary of the system.

The fictional reincarnation reflects the Goddess myth. If we keep the complex quest inside we can find and feel that all the characters are controlled by the spirit of the great Goddess, the archetypal mother revered by all forms of life. The chain reaction initiated by Mangala is continued by Mrs. Aratounian and then Urmila, as a never ending process. Ghosh has assigned a superior role to women. The sustained note heard through the allegory insists the presence of a secret spirit that acts through different chosen people to unravel the mystery, disease and its cure, problem and its solution. It is congenially tuned to man’s betterment. Ghosh has woven the message of Indian philosophy pertaining to the eternal human quest into the fabric of a novel.

Amitav Ghosh very well understands that this is the twenty first century and the method and manner of the show is quite different. Ava, the computer is very efficient machine, which provides Antar each and every minute detail with full address and photographs or videos. If Ava fails to recognize something, she has many ways such as microscopic structural analysis, spinning images around and around to ultimately provide a positive result. Ava is capable of searching the future as well as the past. Malcolm Bradbury studied the use of future machines or time – machines in the novels:

The novelist manipulates the time-span to move in time-past, recent and present. It is an exploitation of relation between antecedent and present, between the time span of what is told and the time it takes
to tell, between narrated time and narrational time, between matters attended to scenically and in detail and matter scanted or sketched.

(Possibilities: Essays on the State of the Novel 28)

Jaya Banerjee his article in Indian Review of Books considers The Calcutta Chromosome 'far - fetched' and compares it to the grandma's 'Bengali braid' with the thread of malarial research running through the novel. She comments:

If Ghosh ever drew his storyline on a black board he would end up with real granny's knot of a plot - each character's life intertwined with the others in some way or the other. As for direction he proceeds in ever decreasing circles until he comes to the center which is where he started in the first place.

(Indian Review of Books 43)

On the face of it, the book is about malaria - a retelling of the story of Ronald Ross’s discovery of the life - cycle of the malaria parasite much of which is available in medical history and in Ross’s own memoir. The story of Ross, the Nobel prize winning British bacteriologist is a familiar one to Indians - it is often included in school texts and his memorial arc at the entrance to the P.G. Hospital is a common sight to the pedestrian in Calcutta. In spite of that epoch - making discovery in the late nineteenth century, the disease still remains a curse in our life, continuing to take its annual toll of thousands of lives. It is one of the reasons why the story of Ross evokes at once a fascination and a sense of regret in our minds. We wonder whether these mixed feelings had stirred the imagination of Amitav Ghosh and inspired him to rewrite Ross’s Story at the fag end of the
twentieth century when other killer diseases like cancer and AIDS top the priority list of scientists and writers of science fiction.

Tarun J. Tejpal appreciates Amitav Ghosh for approaching human affairs from unconventional point of view like anthropology, medical science, psychology, history and sociology and being able to discover a considerable body of information that furnishes the basis for a provisional understanding of human beings. He expresses his views as following:

Ghosh represents 'the past' which he reconstructs for the tit-bits of 'memory' and of course 'memory' is not individual property, it is a complex cultural and historical subject to revision and amplification to zoom in on human experiences. The Calcutta Chromosome is peppered with a 'breath taking intensity and variety'. It represents the fluid interflow between rural and urban, between cultures and civilizations, the play of ideas.

(Outlook 76)

Uncertainties of day-to-day life are Ghosh's main concern in his novels. Like in his other novels, in The Calcutta Chromosome too, Ghosh invoices 'living uncertainties' because abstinence permeates all over; there is hardly anything, which has continuity and the writer, is of the view – 'to know something is to change it'. Character in the novel appear and disappear, without prior notice or intimation. It is not to say that there is a lack of coherence but they do have unity of place and time because whenever they meet and wherever they are, their inter-personal relations become sagacious even though they are shrouded in mystery.
The idea of nation thus acquires an imaginative value and a test symbolically through often more concretely through the politics of race its collective memory and desire. The psychological and emotional affiliation with the whole dynamism of nation formation also underscores what the historian calls the unavailability of real human communities in the first place. The primary meaning of nation and the one most frequently ventilated in literature was political and equated the people and the state. The clash of cultures that may be viewed as the more confederation of nationalities is dramatically introduced in the opening pages of the novel. The moment of Rajkumar, the eleven-year-old Indian's 'chance' presence in Mandalay, the ancient walled city by the Irrawaddy river, amidst the booming of English guns and the imminent imperialist threat is the first of many indicators of the transfer of power and the transition in cultural position. The 'Royal proclamation' indicates the difference between cultures:

To all Royal subjects and inhabitants of the Royal empire: those heretics, the barbarian English Kalass having most harshly made demands calculated to bring about the impairment and destruction of our religion, the violation of our national traditions and customs, and the degradation of our race, are making a show and preparation as if about to wage war with our state.

(The Glass Palace 15)

The postcolonial space that Rajkumar inhabits first by virtue being a Kala, a foreigner in alien territory, then by being subjected to colonization of another more veracious kind in participating in the great national upheaval that the British occupation of Burma entails, followed by yet another turbulent experience in
The idea of nation thus acquires an imaginative value and is fed symbolically, though often more concretely, through the politics of race, its collective memory and desire. The psychological and emotional affiliation with the whole dynamics of nation formation also underscores what the historian calls "the unavailability of real human communities in the first place. The primary meaning of 'nation' and the one most frequently ventilated in literature was political and equated 'the people' and the state. The clash of cultures that may be viewed as the ironic conflation of nationalities is dramatically introduced in the opening pages of the novel. The moment of Rajkumar, the eleven year old Indian's 'chance' presence in Mandalay, the ancient walled city by the Irrawady river, amidst the booming of English guns and the imminent imperialist threat is the first of many indicators of the transfer of power and the transition in cultural position. The 'Royal proclamation' indicates the difference between cultures:

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imperial India and his forays into the Malayan forest resources, makes him a true transnational. Out of interstices of race, class and nation in which his life enmeshes emerges the ‘in-between’ space that his culture and identity circumambulate. Saya John, the Chinese teak trader who decides to take Rajkumar under his wing instructs the latter in the life of the young Europeans who he believes taught them useful things:

The merchant thrust a finger at the silhouetted figure in the tai. ‘you see that man, Rajkumar?’ he said. ‘That is someone you can learn from. To bend the work of nature to your will; to make the trees of the earth useful to human beings – what could be more admirable, more exciting than this? That is what I would say to any boy who has his life before him.

(The Glass Palace 75)

The whole enterprise of logging timber from the forests could not have been possible without the Europeans’ ingenuity; Saya’s knowledge of this and his imitation of the white sahib’s life style involves a compromise between complete separation from the empire and complete dependence upon the empire for his existence. If the language of the postcolonial is assumed to be one of resistance then it must necessarily engage in mimicry, which is both ambivalent and multilayered. The element of compromise is reflected through the ‘mimic man’ Saya John.

The theme of The Glass Palace moves around the British rule and then to the period and struggle of Aung Saan Suu Kyi. Ghosh reflects the tendencies of Indian or any people who were under or have the influence of British period.
Ghosh minutely observes their thinking as well as their gesture and the pattern of their dressing. These details are not provided by the author as comic elements but to project the mentality of the people under the British rule who were not only obeying their orders but following them blindly as they were everything for them. This is also echoed by the author’s brief but telling description of Beni Prasad Dey, the ICS officer appointed in Ratnagiri where the Burmese Royals are held captive: “Collector Dey was slim and aquiline, with a nose that ended in a sharp beak-like point. He dressed in fine cut Savile Row suits and wore gold-rimmed eyeglass” (The Glass Palace 104) A deliberate parody of the white colonialist, Dey’s equanimity is nearly threatening to both his wife and to his English superiors.

Collector Dey’s easy defense of imperial power before the king and his endorsement of its capacity to ‘persist’ and ‘influence’ is an act in which he is at once and perhaps unwittingly, mimic man and comprador. Ghosh’s ready understanding of Dey’s behaviour and his tongue – in – check reference to the British as amader gurujan (our teachers) smacks of the some ambivalence and sense of compromise with which such acts of complicity and mimiery are attended in the colonized space.

Rajkumar, who faced an attack of the violent mob and had no roots in Burma, is also sad with the attack of British army. Ghosh has revealed Rajkumar’s empathy with the general mourning at the loss of the king and the sudden occupation of Burma:

Rajkumar was at a loss to understand his grief. He was, in a way, a feral creature, unaware that in certain places there exist invisible
bonds linking people to one another through personification of their commonality. In the Bengal of his birth those ties had been sundered by a century of conquest and no longer exists even as memory. Beyond the ties of blood, friendship and immediate reciprocity, Rajkumar recognized no loyalties, no obligations and no limits on the compass of his right to provide for himself.

(The Glass Palace 47)

Royal maid Dolly who afterwards becomes Rajkumar’s wife has the same reaction to the department of the royal family to India and her growing awareness of the new divided house as she began to notice odd little changes around her, of the maids impudence, for instance, and their unwillingness to shiko and the ambivalence of her own position. She was ‘free’ she was told, for she was slave in the erstwhile kingdom and not a ‘prisoner’ of king Thebaw and his Queen, but in her heart she knew her life was bound with that of the princesses who she had been enslaved to look after.

In the mazes of history new associations are forged, the past is recast in transformed patterns and unspoken allegiances and ‘loyalties’ are born where there were only hierarchies of power and position. The curious turn of history resulting in the making of a community constituted of what Ben Anderson calls “Characters, author and readers, moving onward through calendrical time thus turns the pages of the novel into agency for the imagined community which is the nation”. (Imagined Communities 27). Dolly in this case and by her peculiar new position of being twice enslaved in the breaking of a nation is the unconscious soil of foreign conquest. She, more than any one else, embodies the sanctity of the
Burmese Royal Family, their regal authority that seems increasingly threatened in the wake of exile and, most intensely, the quiet and subliminal aggression of dislocated subjects.

The Glass Palace has a range and sweep not easily matched in Indian English fiction. It is structured around the intermeshing relationship among four families: the Burmese King Thebaw and Queen Supayalat who were deposed by the British in 1885 and exiled to Ratnagiri in India and their entourage; Rajkumar Raha, a Bengali orphan emigrant to Burma, and his descendants; Saya John, a foundling brought up by Catholic priests, and his son Matthew and his family; and Uma, the wife (and later widow) of the collector of Ratnagiri. Their fortunes are set against backdrop of stirring historical-events the British conquest of Burma, the consolidation of the Empire in India and Malaya, the First and Second World Wars -- conceived and executed on an epic scale in a time frame of around 100 years ranging from 1885 to 1996.

The colonial powers usually win not because their cause is just but because of superior power, manipulative skill, and weaponry. Ghosh carefully charts the progress of British invasion and wryly point out that it proceeds with a smoothness to surprise even its planners. In Burma the consolidation of the Empire proceeds in the classical mode, with its standard procedures and paraphernalia in Edward Said's words: "the business of empire, once an adventurous and often individualistic enterprise, becomes the empire of business." (Modern Literary Theory: A Reader 352) Ghosh has beautifully portrayed the act of blatant symbolism in which the king's palace was converted into a British club. the
Queen’s Hall of Audience into a billiard room and Mandalay, the Kingdom of Thebaw was now confidently predicted, would soon become the Chicago of Asia.

Ghosh comes down heavily on the apathy, the inertia, and the escapism of native rulers, which made it possible for a relatively small number of men to overwhelm them. When the Burmese army surrenders before the British, King Thebaw is not even informed. Ghosh contrasts these weaknesses with the energy, the organizational skill and the initiative of the colonizers. Saya John tells Rajkumar: “It was the Europeans who saw that tame elephants could be made to work for human profit. It was they who invented everything we see around us in this logging camp. This entire way of life is their creation” (The Glass Palace 74).

But without denigrating British enterprise, the narrative makes it clear that the cause they served was morally dubious at best, downright evil at worst.

The first job of the novel’s central character, Rajkumar, is a sort of employment agent, transporting Indian coolies by boat to Burma to work the forest and plantation. This influx of foreign opportunity ignites enmity between the native Burmese and the Indian migrants, fueling racism and unrest in England’s new colony. The story follows Rajkumar’s ascent to wealthy landowner. In the beginning he is presented as a poor, orphaned Indian boy in foreign Burma whose own cunning helps him profit from the smallest opportunities to rise from rags to riches. But as the novel progresses, Rajkumar begins to come off as a capitalist scoundrel, a profiteer feeding off war and the suffering of others.

The Glass Palace is not only Rajkumar’s story but it also traces the lives of his children and their children, and finally winds to a close during the 1950s, with political upheaval in Burma. It tells the story of a communist regime, a return to
democracy and then the military coup by General Ne Win and the dismal state of Burma under the military rule. *The Glass Palace* is truly a multicultural novel because it deals with the legacies of conquered nations like India and Burma and the resulting tensions – not only British racism, but also between Indians and Burmese. In a section devoted to World War II, Ghosh deals with the complicity and ignorance of the Indians who enlisted for prestigious British army post, forgetting they were fighting for their own conquerors.

One of the central characters in the novel is Arjun who is a soldier. Arjun is also the name of the reluctant warrior featured in one of India’s most sacred texts, the *Bhagavad Gita*. Arjun learns too late that he has lived a thoughtless life by conforming to British ideals. Arjun is injured in a war against the Japanese army. The soldiers were searching them. Arjun hides with his subordinate Kishan Singh. Kishan Singh tells Arjun how he and the people of his village decided to join the British Army. Arjun asks him about any fear, which forced them to join the Army. Kishan Singh’s reply opens Arjun’s eyes for the first time and he realizes that following British ideals has wasted a big part of his life:

‘Sah‘b,’ Kishan Singh said softly; all fear is not the same. What is the fear that keeps us hiding here, for instance? Is it a fear of the Japanese, or is it a fear of the British? Or is it a fear of ourselves, because we do not know who to fear more? Sah‘b, a man may fear the shadow of a gun just as much as the gun itself – and who is to say which is more real?

(*The Glass Palace* 430)
Arjun believed that fighting for the British was a great thing. But one day he faced a reality about himself. Allison shouted at Arjun but he ignored that reality with his logics:

"What the hell are you talking about?" Arjun -- you're not in charge of what you do; you're a toy, a manufactured thing, a weapon in someone else's hands. Your mind doesn't inhabit your body.

"That's crap..." He cut himself short. "The only reason you can get away with that, he said, "is because you're a woman..."

*(The Glass Palace 376)*

In *The Glass Palace* it is Uma who best exposes the truth about colonialism. She had an argument with Rajkumar's son Dinu in which he opposes her thoughts against the Empire by telling her about the caste system, untouchability, widow burning etc. Dinu tells her that these things were and are a part of India and exist before the British rule. Uma accepts these truths about India but provides him an example of his country Burma:

But take the example of your own country, Burma -- they had no caste system there. On the contrary the Burmese were egalitarian. Women had a high standing probably more so than in the west. There was universal literacy. But Burma was conquered too, and subjugated. In some ways they fared even worse than we did at the hands of the Empire. It is simply mistaken to imagine that colonialists sit down and ponder the rights and wrong of the societies they want to conquer: that is not why empires are built.

*(The Glass Palace 294 – 95)*
Amitav Ghosh has projected the Gandhian Philosophy very beautifully through the character of Uma who is the widow of the collector of Ratnagiri. The character of Uma not follows the Gandhian thoughts blindly or mechanically but tries to apply it in solving the day to day problems. Uma deeply absorbs Ghandhiji's problems of Indian society very well. In her views imperialism is not a form of reform:

‘Let me be the first to admit the horrors of our own society – as a woman I assure you that I am even more aware of them than you are. Mahatma Gandhi has always said that our struggle for independence cannot be separated from our struggle for reform. But having said this, let me add that we must not be deceived by the idea that imperialism is not an enterprise of reform.

(The Glass Palace 294)

Amitav Ghosh has compared the human colonizing process through a family of green frogs. Ghosh uses symbol here to highlight the reality of the colonizers. As Dinu goes cycling on a morning in Malaya, he finds a strange thing:

He climbed gingerly up the mossy blocks and at the apex he found a massive square stone, with a rectangular opening carved in the center. He thought what was the opening for? it was just a hole now, colonised by a family of tiny green frogs. When he looked down on his rippling reflection the frogs croaked at him in deep affront.

(The Glass Palace 334)

Ghosh through the above reference wants to tell his readers that in contrast to this rather innocuous process of colonization in the natural world, stands the
human colonizing process, which is fueled not by a need for shelter or survival, but by greed and a desire for economic and political expansion.

The evils of British colonialism in India were exposed as early as 1842 in *A Memoir of India and Afghanistan* written by Dr. Josiah Harlan of Philadelphia, who has traveled extensively in these countries. In the words of Harlan's biographer, Jean-Marie Lafont:

Harlan effectively analyzes the mechanisms and consequences of British colonialism in India: Machiavellians of the invaders, rapacity of civil servants and the revenue collectors, a systematic looting of the country by a handful of colonizers, a general impoverishment of the population and a growing indebtedness of the people. Harlan also told about the vain glory of the British military units, their victories which were purchased and not won, decorations which did not recompense any military courage.

*(Dr. Josiah Harlan of Philadelphia: An American in Punjab and Afghanistan 3)*

Rajkumars introverted son, Dinu is not cut out to inherit his father’s business empire and instead becomes a photographer. Jaya, Dinu’s niece any how manages to find his address. The ‘glass palace’, the title of the novel indicates both the beginning and the end of the novel. Firstly it indicates the magnificent hall of mirrors which forms the center piece of the Mandalay residence of Burmese royalty and lastly the name of a ‘small Photo Studio’ where the books action appropriately ends.
The man behind the counter looked at her piece of paper and pointed her to the adjoining house. She stepped out to find herself looking at a pair of street-level doors that led to the outer room of a large old-style house. Then she noticed a small hand painted sign, hanging above the doorway. Most of the lettering was in Burmese, but at the bottom, almost an after thought, there were a few words in English: *The Glass Palace: Photo Studio.*

(The Glass Palace 504)

The novel ends with the description of the current political scenario of Burma with the reference of Aung San Suu Kyi. Her father was Dinu's old acquaintance from the university; his name was General Aung San. Dinu promised Jaya to take her with him and arrange a meeting with her. The one main reason of going there was that Dinu wanted to take some picture of Suu Kyi. Dinu told Jaya that Suu Kyi is the only hope for the Burmese people. Ghosh has very beautifully picturised the popularity of Suu Kyi in the novel:

A slim, fine - featured woman stepped up. Her head was just visible above the gate. She was wearing white flowers above her hair. She was beautiful almost beyond belief. Aung San Suu Kyi waved at the crowd and began to speak. She was using Burmese. She laughed constantly and there was an electric brightness to her manner. The laughter is her charisma, Jaya thought.

(The Glass Palace 541-542)

Barriers and boundaries seem to define the psyches that attend the making of nations and nationalities in *The Glass Palace*. The author seems to collapse
these margins and is metaphorically at home anywhere. Meenakshi Mukherjee in her wonderful essay on 'The anxiety of Indianness' suggests that for Ghosh, as in some of the best Indian language writers, words like 'marginality' and hybridity seem quite irrelevant. His success comes from being an individual who is not conditioned by the pressures of the global market. (The Perishable Empire: Essay on Indian Writing 134). We can say that Ghosh's writing remains unfettered by the burden of otherness. In the postcolonial project, writers of his tribe are curiously privileged because the quintessential migrant they float upward from history, from memory and from time.

The selection of various themes by Ghosh reveals that how big his canvas is. The use of memory, imagination, history, interrelations between events and happenings proves that he is not an ordinary but a master storyteller who portrays his characters as the common man with whom we meet in day-to-day life. The anger, curiosity, greed, emotional or sexual attachment, self-realization and the wish to be successful in life is projected through his characters. The meaning of success may be different for each individual but we find a relation between them, a common thing, and that is the moving upwards by struggling with the circumstances of the present and continuous efforts to get rid of the past or to make the present glorious as it was in the past. The quest on various levels by different character for achieving desired things is the common element in his themes from his first novel The Circle of Reason to the latest one The Glass Palace.
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