were reduced to eating grass. The police had destroyed the tube wells, the settlers were drinking from puddles and ponds and an epidemic of cholera had broken out. Kusum was starving herself to feed Fokir. She subsisted on a wild green called jadu-palong.

Kusum’s agony reveals the callousness of the Government. The poor and underprivileged have to bear the brunt of all injustice and humiliation in society. Her plight represents the untold misery of the helpless and the deprived, the wretched of the Earth. Her words are a testimony to this, “the worst part was not the hunger or the thirst. It was to sit here, helpless, and listen to the policemen making their announcements, hearing them say that our lives, our existence, was worth less than dirt or dust.” (HT- 261)

Ghosh also highlights the indifference of the city people towards the rural masses and their problems. On reaching Hamilton Estate, in Lusibari it had surprised Nirmal that an Englishman, James Hamilton had founded the islands for the poor masses:

“A foreigner, a Burra Sahib, a rich capitalist – had taken it upon himself to address the issue of rural poverty when they themselves, despite all their radical talk, had scarcely any knowledge of life outside the city.” (HT-78)

Nirmal’s comrades, his college mates who had stayed back in Calcutta were lured by the city life. Unlike Nirmal most of them had given up the ideals that they once professed and held coveted positions in Calcutta. They had
not been able to resist the power, recognition and position that the city guaranteed even if it meant compromising their ideals. Nirmal identified one of his friends, now a prominent writer, from his college days, who had long given up on his ideals:

He laughed in the cynical way of those who, having never believed in the ideals they once professed, imagine that no one else had done so either. (HT-192)

Even Kanai represents the typical Urban Indian male who looks down upon rustics. He is a successful businessman, an interpreter and in the opinion of his aunt, Nilima, “Kanai’s problem is that he’s always been too clever for his own good. Things have come very easily to him so he doesn’t know what the world’s like for most people.” (HT-251) Hence in Garjointala, he feels small beside Fokir. His knowledge of the past, about the Sunderbans and his easy manner hurts Kanai’s pride. Fokir seems to have an edge over him. In his frenzy he abuses Fokir. And this shows the attitude of hatred for the ‘other’- the poor, the inferior, and the uncivilised:

“His anger came welling up with an atavistic explosiveness, rising from sources whose very existence he would have denied: the master’s suspicion of the menial; the pride of caste; the townsman’s mistrust of the rustic; the city’s antagonism to the village.” (HT-326)

The advancement in medical science was a part of the colonial enterprise. Europe was on the march towards progress, industrialisation and technological advancement. The
achievements of mainstream Western science during the 19th century established Europe’s claim to superiority in the field of scientific discovery and medical science. In his first novel The Circle of reason Ghosh deals with the achievements of Louis Pasteur and his discovery of the germ. In The Calcutta Chromosome he traces out the medical history of malaria and points out how the desire to achieve a breakthrough in malaria research was rooted in the Empire’s desire to usurp the entire credit for the discovery of the malaria parasite. Though there were other European scientists from France, Germany, Russia, and Italy etc who had done pioneering work in the discovery of the parasite but finally Ross succeeded in his research and gained the credit. Ghosh critiques the English attitude that led to the entry of Ross in the research for the discovery of the malaria parasite:

“Ross wasn’t a Pasteur or a Koch: he just didn’t have as much variety to his game. His stuff on malaria was about the only cutting – edge work he ever did. And even that was a freak one-off thing.”

The attitude of Ross’ father who diverted his son’s interests from poetry to medical science represents the pragmatic approach of the West to achieve superiority and credit in all possible fields of knowledge:

…. There’s no goddam service here doesn’t have a Ross in it, you name it, Civil Service, Geological Service, Provincial Service, Colonial Service … There’s this outfit that’s short on Rosses right now: the Indian Medical Service. (CC-45)
Ghosh points out the assumptions regarding the expertise and seriousness that is associated with the seriously engaged scientists of the West:

“He looks in the mirror and asks himself: What’s hot in medicine right now … What’s going to bag me a Nobel? And what does the mirror tell him? You got it: malaria there’s where it’s at this season.” (CC-45)

The chosen area of the British research scientist was a meticulously planned effort to secure distinction in the respective field. Moreover Ghosh questions Western assumptions of rationality and knowledge. It is ordinary lab assistants with little attributes of Western logic or rationality who overpower Ross. Because of their advance knowledge of the malaria parasite and its efficacy in curing syphilis, Ghosh grants them the status of the real achievers, of the ones embarking upon a major breakthrough in the field of medical science.

However the significant contribution of these individuals, especially Mangala and Lutchman who helped Ross in his experiment, is nowhere acknowledged by the scientist in his ‘Memoirs.’ The secret cult had chosen Ross, of all the other scientists, to achieve success in his discovery. It is Lutchman, Ross’ faithful assistant who led him in the right direction after earlier attempts by Ross to discover the parasite had failed. Lutchman had told him the possibility of discovering the parasite in a particular species of mosquitoes; the female anopheles and Ross did find them in the anopheles. It was one of the most significant discoveries of the century.
These assistants of Ross who helped him are actually used by the scientist like Worthless creatures in his work. When Lutchman walks into Ross’ lab and volunteers to drink the cocktail of dead mosquitoes prepared by Ross to induce malaria, Ross finds him suitable, a perfect chap, a worthless fellow as the subject for his experiment: “This Lutchman a “healthy looking young fellow” Ronnie notices: just the guinea pig he’s been looking for.”(CC-63)

Ross was using poor, destitute Indians for his experiment by offering them money. It was purely for pragmatic reasons – to secure name, fame and glory for himself and the British Empire. But the secret science cult had no such logic. They eliminate certain scientists like Farley and reveal the discovery only to Ross, but their aim is not to gain name. It is something far beyond the orbit of Western rationality. Their aim is purely spiritual. The human sacrifice they carry out is to achieve a higher goal – immortality. They are not motivated by worldly desire for recognition and rewards.

This reveals the colonial mindset of using ‘the other’ for furthering their selfish interests. Ghosh also depicts the survival of the colonial ideologies and the political repercussions of its policies that led to the division of India into two separate nations. The growing animosity between India and Pakistan and its serious implications are discussed in Countdown. The drive to achieve superior nuclear status, the problems of religious
extremism, insurgency coupled with the power politics of the two nations, poses a serious threat to both the countries. These are some of the issues that Ghosh deals with in this book.

**Countdown** was written after India attained the status of a nuclear power following the 1998 nuclear tests carried out at Pokhran in Rajasthan. Similar tests were conducted in Pakistan. Ghosh talks about the partition of India into two separate nations, India and Pakistan in 1947 and its ramifications. The political conflicts have strained the relations between the two nations. The political leadership in both the countries has been responsible for the hostility between Pakistan and India.

The huge amount of money spent on the defence forces of both countries deployed in the Siachen glacier has taken a heavy toll on the economy of the two nations and that too when poverty is one of the biggest issues on both the sides. The growing animosity, the rise of cross-border terrorism and the race for nuclear arms in India and Pakistan have increased the threat of a nuclear war. In an interview with Asma Jehangir, Pakistan’s prominent human rights lawyer and democratic activist, conducted by Ghosh, she spoke on the relations between the two countries and the possibility of a nuclear war. She said: “If you ask me, anything is a possibility between India and Pakistan. Because our policies are irrational. Our decision-making is adhoc. We have been surrounded by disinformation about each other. We have a historical enmity.” 28
This is sad reflection of the political deterioration in India and Pakistan due to the radical policies adopted by the governing class. The politics of the ruling classes has nothing to do with the opinion, well-being and progress of common people. Its leaders have systematically manipulated the political situation in the two countries. The drive for nuclearisation and international prestige even at the cost of the possibility of tremendous destruction and loss of human life shows the state of South Asian politics.

Thus the complex socio-political situation and ruthless drive for superior market economy as direct consequences of politics of power find effective expression in Ghosh’s fictional and non-fictional writings.

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1. Hawley, John's Interview with Ghosh, “The Writer, his contexts and his themes,” Contemporary Indian Writers in English (CIWE), Amitav Ghosh: An Introduction, Foundation Books: New Delhi, 2005, p.9. All subsequent references are from this interview.


18. Ghosh, Amitav, *In an Antique Land*, Ravi Dayal and Permanent Black: New Delhi, 1992, p.82. All subsequent references to the text are from this edition.


