Chapter 5

Subversion as Theme and Technique

Amitav Ghosh’s novels constitute an oppositional discourse that seeks to repudiate and subvert the hegemonic centre. The subversive instinct is deeply ingrained in the decolonising process that is directed against colonial oppression. The subversive vision enshrined in Ghosh’s fictional world works against the cultural transformation manifest in the growing westernisation, individualism, homogenisation of culture and the emergence of a bourgeois perspective. The subversive vision that makes up a major theme of Ghosh’s fiction finds expression through a variety of subversive techniques such as multiple narrators, use of irony, fantasy and magic realism.

Ghosh’s continuing obsession with Indian history is defined by his social commitment and ardent nationalism. The fictionalised history reflects the deterioration of values and idealism in contemporary Indian society: The Indian reality is rediscovered through the exploration of the past and the recreation of the present. *The Shadow Lines* for instance presents post-colonial situations, cultural dislocations and anxieties in the period between 1962 and 1979 and interprets the issues of fractured nationalities. It focuses on the changing patterns of middleclass ethos in India during the pre-Independence and post-Independence era and the lives of the characters in the novel are determined by their idea of
freedom which in turn is shaped by the history of the times. The readers are transported to the consciousness of characters trapped between the “Shadow Lines” in the contemporary bedlam of prejudice, dogma and narrow nationalism.

The colonial period is characterised by the adoption of a nationalist perspective in its resistance to colonial domination. In The Glass Palace, Ghosh presents a pen picture of the temperament leading to nationalist upsurge. One of the army officers, Haridayal says:

It was strange to be sitting on one side of a battle line, knowing that you had to fight and knowing at the same time that it wasn’t really your fight knowing that whether you won or lost, neither the blame nor the credit would be yours. Knowing that you’re risking everything to defend a way of life that pushes you to do the sidelines. It’s almost as if you’re fighting against yourself. It’s strange to be sitting in a trench, holding a gun and asking yourself: Who is this weapon really aimed at? Am I being tricked into pointing it at myself? (TGP 406).

National expectations rose high during the post-independence days. But what followed was a sense of betrayal and despair resulting in a sense of betrayal and despair resulting in total disillusionment. Ghosh’s fictional characters share this disillusionment. However, the failure of
nationalist experiments prompted an introspection that questions the efficacy of ideological foundations on which the nationalist movement was founded along with the discourses of decolonisation. The independence of the nationalist culture and the colonial culture was thus revealed necessitating a redefinition of the Indian context, independent of misgiving prejudices. This awareness of an objective redefinition has greatly influenced and motivated decolonising struggles against western domination in both the discursive and socio-political fields.

Colonialism got established with the help of political and economic control, but cultural domination was needed to ensure its sustenance. The colonial process entailed the dismembering and distortion of national histories. Decolonisation necessitated the objective presentation of facts that challenged western historiography. Amitav Ghosh’s depiction of the socio-political and cultural history of India subverts the fabricated history constructed by the colonial masters. Retelling of colonial history in the post-colonial situation has ideological underpinnings. The recollections of Gyani Amreek Singh in *The Glass Palace* is a case in point:

We never thought that we were being used to conquer people [...] we were told that we were freeing those people. That is what they said – that we were going to set those people
free from their bad Kings, of their civil customs, or some such thing. It took us a long time to understand that in their eyes, freedom exists whenever "they rule" (TGP 224).

Ghosh’s narratives of history thus attempts to create an alternative view of the society, culture, politics and other issues that beset the nation from an Indian perspective, as opposed to the colonial one. This subversive vision of the post-colonial text differentiates it substantially from its western counterparts. Emphasising the relevance of historical fiction in the post-colonial context Aparna Dharwadkar observes:

Historical fictions can work precisely to neutralize or repudiate the figurations of institutional history and can serve as alternative sources of historical knowledge for audiences ideologically resistant to the dominant narratives [...] fictions involving history must inevitably draw attention to the inherited problems of historical representations even as they represent history and invest it with new (but not necessarily ideal) meanings (43).

Amitav Ghosh’s novels characteristically evince a willingness to accept the tawdry and squalid present by immersing in history. The explorative plunge into the dark labyrinths of the past enables him to dissect the history handed over to him by the colonizer and to find out the other stories differing in content and method from the official versions
constructed by imperialism. It is about the possibility of the versions of history or its provisionality that Dennis Walder writes, “History is always a matter of telling a story about the past, which means there is no single story but ‘histories’ constructed at different times according to different power structures” (9).

The post-colonial texts categorically endorse the fact that there is an active involvement of literary creation in the historical process. India, in particular, has had a historical legacy of story-telling that blends myth and reality, reassuring the writer’s role as historical witness. The post-colonial writer’s dismantling of the master narratives of the West through indigenous narrative alternatives for self-definition marks the postmodernist phase in the Indian English writing. The impact of postmodernism on the Indian English novel is in opening up a discursive space for articulation of post-colonial consciousness that challenges the Eurocentric literary hegemony. Post-colonialism and postmodernism share certain thematic concerns and textual strategies which find widely different uses in the texts. This happens because of the interdependency of the text and the context in that a text reproduces the conditions of its production which in turn is reflected in the content of the text. Commenting on the points of intersection between post-colonialism and postmodernism Linda Hutcheon in her essay “Circling the Downspout of Empire” writes:
Formal issues such as what is called “magic realism”, thematic concerns regarding history and marginality and discursive strategies like irony and allegory are all shared by both the postmodern and the post-colonial, even if the final uses to which each is put may differ (151).

Thus post-colonial writing invariably takes a political stance which aims at the subversion of the colonial approach for self-definition and self-assertion of the natives. This is what characterizes the writings of Amitav Ghosh – a subversive reading of an already established colonial version of history. He gives convincing accounts of European domination in all walks of life including discourse and challenges the version of history modelled on the European master narratives and pronounces the dire need to establish the fundamental difference between the society and culture of India and the West. Such anti-colonial counter narratives Challenge, subvert and undermine the ruling ideologies and nowhere more so than in overthrowing the hierarchy of colonizer/colonized, the speech and stance of the colonized refusing a position of subjugation and dispensing with the terms of the colonizer’s definitions (Parry, “Resistance” 176).

Committed to give voice to the oppressed and the sidelined, Ghosh’s writings resist the assumptions and practices of the dominant
system and challenge the dominant ideology that continues to condition and control the subjects in post-colonial India. The continuance of the colonial ideology is evident in the prevalence of the colonial structure and institutions even after the colonizers have left. The nationalist government that took over the regime in India proved itself but an extension of the colonial regime continuing its exploitative policies and authoritarianism. The revolutionary mask fell off soon after the eclipse of the post-independence Euphoria. The post-colonial Indian society gave room for the continuance of the colonial ideology by initiating the constitution, legal system, civil administration, education, historical and political discourses, literary movements and even attitudes and prejudices of the colonizer. This political structure is maintained by the multinational forces in operation and the global situation where the western domination is felt in fields like politics, economy, culture, science and the military.

It is only natural that colonial ideology continuing to prevail in the post-colonial period calls for resistance. The resistance offered by the nationalist forces against the colonial power structure during the pre-independence period and the conflict between the nationalist government controlled by the colonial power structure and the liberal resistance to it form part of the dialectic of post-colonial India. The nationalist resistance to colonial authority is inherently ambivalent because of its origin in the colonial discursive practice itself. Paradoxically, it is at once the source of resistance and yet an entity that represses a total
structural transformation. So the dialectical struggle in post-colonial India results in the reproduction of the colonial ideology. Such a colonial syndrome that dangles on the Indian society is traced in detail by Amitav Ghosh in his literary creations. Observing the creative artist’s realization of the continuance of the forces of oppression, Sharmila Guha Majumdar writes:

The barriers of nation, country and time dissolve in the consciousness of the author, and he reaches a tragic realization of how unscrupulous political forces continue to suffocate human aspirations (153).

The search for a feasible solution for this continuing colonial vestige in the Indian context generates an irrepressible dissatisfaction with the existing social conditions and intensifies the need to formulate an alternative structure that could subvert the present decadence. Resistance and subversion can be viewed as the natural indication of the presence of a domineering ideology. The prevailing colonial power structure and its continuing hegemony in various realms even after independence, combined with the intervention of neo-colonial powers persuade the community to imitate the colonial style of governance. The continuance of this system is assisted by the capitalist dispensation with its appendages like corruption desire for money and power that leads to erosion of human values. The post-independence India has
witnessed the conflictual relationship between socialism and authoritarianism; and the paradox of non-violence existing side by side with violence. The situation culminates in a re-enactment of the colonial drama. Ghosh’s novels depict the inherent contradictions faced by an emerging nation in the post-colonial period. The subversive vision in the novels goes beyond the confines of the textual strategy. Ghosh is able to delineate the dialectical conflicts within the post-colonial societies effectively as he is equipped with adequate knowledge of the social transition that took place in the Indian subcontinent and the Middle East. He undertook extensive travels and anthropological research that provided sufficient materials for his fiction. The clash of ideologies in the post-colonial societies turns the site of their conflict highly complex. This dialectical struggle is further complicated by the prevalence of multiple interests, divergent ideological positions and opposing cultural preoccupations.

The basic conflict between the domineering colonial power structure and the liberal democracy is characteristic of the post-colonial Indian situation. Ghosh takes up the cause of the oppressed in the power struggle between nationalism and colonialism. The major characters in his novels characteristically identify themselves with the oppressed and the marginalised. Uma Dey, the collector’s wife in The Glass Palace champions the causes of Dolly who was orphaned by
the onslaught of colonialism; and the princesses of Mandalay who were exiled by the British. Ghosh comments:

Uma was twenty six and had already been married five years. Dolly was a few years older. Uma began to worry: What was Dolly’s future to be? Was she never to marry or have children? And what of the Princesses? [...] were these girls to have nothing to look forward to but lifetimes of imprisonment? (TGP 114).

Later, her estrangement with Rajkumar for his illegitimate relations with the worker woman also reveals her taking sides with the down-trodden:

You – an animal, with your greed, your determination to take whatever you can – at whatever cost. Do you think nobody knows about the things you’ve done to the people in your power – to women and children who couldn’t defend themselves? You’re no better than a slaver and a rapist, Rajkumar. You may think that you will never have to answer for the things you’ve done, but you’re wrong (TGP 248).

Ghosh evidently propagates a vision of life that opposes all kinds of hegemonic oppressive systems, through his attempts to subvert the dominant power structure in the political as well as personal spheres.
The very act of writing epitomizes the spirit of liberation and hence it becomes a method of resistance and a subversive tool against oppression.

The cultural, political, economic and even intimately personal realms of the society often show impact of the dominant power structure. It even infiltrates into the day to day activities of our life manifesting itself in our attitudes, desires, hopes, prejudices and even in the use of language. This oppressive power stifles our sense of freedom and the desire for equality which in turn generates resistance at various sites, resulting in a dialectical interplay of opposites. It is this revolt operating against domineering power structure that engenders the subversive ideology. The fundamental dialectic of post-colonial culture is the oppression exerted by the hegemonic power structure and the resultant revolt of resistance towards it. Linda Hutcheon, commenting on this phenomenon states that “its (post-colonialism) revolt continues to operate within the power field of the dominant culture, no matter how radical its revalorisation of indigenous culture” (162).

The cultural confusion produced by the intermingling of various cultures that constitute the hybridised post-colonial society inlays the texts it produce with a duality. In spite of this duality of cultural dislocation, literature, has long been used by the dominant powers. Ghosh’s fictional works are his responses to the dilemmas of human existence, bearing the imprint of oppression under colonial hegemony.
It is employed as a tool to resist political and cultural dominances. Mixing the past, the present and the future, Ghosh recreates society with a fresh perspective, thereby subverting the colonial constructs.

A close observation of the post-colonial society reveals that it is prone to various influence and experiences other than the colonial one. This holds good with post-colonial texts also, as Aijaz Ahmad observes that, “the ideological conditions of a text’s production are never singular but always several” (In Theory 122). So, the homogenising tendency of post-colonial discourse is decadent in spirit. Aijaz Ahmad asserts that the only unity possible in this regard is that of global operation of capitalist mode of production and socialist resistance to that mode as a counterbalance. The experiences that make up the raw material of the post-colonial text are multitudinous in that the experiences of colonialism and the cultural contexts are varied in various nations. However, the ultimate unity and inter-relationship that these multiple experiences had brought about in the contemporary society cannot be ignored. Imperialism produced a sort of homogeneity that varied with different nations. It is this fundamental unity that runs through the multiplicity of individual nations that makes post-colonialism meaningful.

Amitav Ghosh recognize this pervasive unifying force while championing the marginalised, irrespective of their race or creed. A sense of justice and humanism dissolves along with the resistance to the
to the operation of hegemonic power in his attitude to form the subversive aesthetics. *The Glass Palace* evinces rare diligence and involvement in reconstructing silenced history as part of that subversive aesthetics, excavating the dark alleyways in the context of the Second World War, giving voice to the silenced and the dropout.

Ghosh employs the thriller form in *The Calcutta Chromosome* for the purpose of subversion. Subverting the Eurocentric notion of Science as knowledge and power, Ghosh’s novel establishes that life can be sustained through a rejection of rationality and through silence and secrecy of intuition. The fictional form Ghosh adopts, enables him to destabilize the existing modes of thought and belief. The thriller that is beyond rational explication captures the chaos of contemporary life more accurately than any other form of fiction. In a world that celebrates the triumph and omnipotence of science, *The Calcutta Chromosome* puts forward the paradox that life finds sustenance through “counter science”, that celebrates intuition secrecy and silence and belies rationality. Urbashi Barat observes, “*The Calcutta Chromosome* puts forward the paradox that life finds sustenance through Counter Science” (220). The novel shows that the contemporary post-colonial world, where everything is precarious and subject to sudden change, can best be perceived through the objective correlative of bizarre incidents and unexpected turns of action. As a homogenous blend of fact and fiction,
the novel has its action set in a wide arena that encompasses the East and the West. Meenakshi Mukharjee appreciates the deliberate jumbling of time and space in this novel, saying that “the discontinuity itself becomes meaningful” (“Spine Chiller” 163). The constant juxtaposition of different times, places, characters and kinds of pursuit widens the scope of each from the particular to the universal.

Inspite of the resistance to the decadent culture prevalent in the post-colonial society, Ghosh’s characters do not advocate a total structural transformation. They evince a spirit of solidarity love and mutual co-operation against authoritarianism, violence and oppression. The personal life of the fictional characters is governed by their notion of freedom, which in turn is shaped by the history of the times. The Shadow Lines for instance, shows the changing middle class ethos in India, the failure of nationalism and nationalist governments through reminiscences of characters. The novelist adopts a narrative technique that enables him to look at partition, militancy and riots through diverse perspectives. It reinforces the subversive mode that is central to the narrative strategy employed in the novel. The major characters of The Shadow Lines evince a realization that freedom can not be politically or geographically defined or delimited. The narrator’s grandmother and other relatives, through their faint recollections, focus on the idea of freedom as qualified by the nationalist ethos. Th’amma mutters answering
to a query about her gold chain: “I gave it to the fund for the war. I had to, don’t you see? For your sake, for your freedom. We have to kill them before they kill us; we have to wipe them out” (TSL 237).

The younger generation represented by the narrator, Robi, Tridib and May, counters the war, riots and the vitiated political atmosphere by adopting a humanitarian approach that transcends regional, religious and cultural differences. The narrative of The Shadow Lines, built upon the life and interaction of the families of the narrator and Tridib in India and the Prices of London, evolves through sketchy, disjointed outlines of memories, association and fancies fusing into a pattern of stories which are conducive to the subversive aesthetics. The fragmentary microstructures capture the socio-cultural ambience of Calcutta and London. According to Nandita Sinha, “One finds encoded here, the larger patterns of Indian society located in its internal affiliations and antipathies” (145).

Amitav Ghosh tries to blend nationalist tradition and western liberal values in his fiction. His vision is formed by a liberal approach to life and an unflinching faith in values like love, freedom, humanism and mutual respect. His novels represent a manifestation of resistance to the decadent culture of post-independence India. Ghosh subverts the homogenisation of colonial regime by intertwining the past and the present in The Shadow Lines and In an Antique Land and using the technique
of multiple narration in *The Circle of Reason* and *The Shadow Lines*. Prolonged conservations in most of the novels, the profuse employment of newspaper reports, letters and dreams are all fictional strategies aimed at reinventing the heterogeneity of the conventional society.

There is a consistent attempt to repossess histories by unravelling the tangled threads of race, ethnicity, religion and gender, in novels like *In an Antique Land* and *The Glass Palace*. The multiple voices in these novels signal a challenge to the hegemonic western world view and demand alternative visions. Ghosh goes for a narrative form that belongs to the pre-colonial times and deploys a language celebrating difference in order to subvert European hegemony. *In an Antique Land* with overlapping identities of a travelogue, history book and fiction attempts a repossession of Indian history along with that of Egypt. Ghosh’s discourse, according to Nilufer E. Bharucha, “serves to remind us that colonialism was but a brief interlude in the lives of antique lands and the amnesia induced by colonialism vis-a-vis precolonial histories needs be challenged by post-colonials” (72). The co-existence of divergent cultures form a dialectic resulting in a motley of culture with new forms of cooperation and confrontation. The complex socio-cultural experiences determine the subversive and double voiced narrative structure in Ghosh’s novels. Bakhtin comments on the double-voiced discourse which has to be viewed in the background of the social reality:
Double-voiced discourse is always internally dialogised. Examples of this would be comic ironic or parodic discourse. The refracting discourse of a narrator, refracting discourse in the language of a character and finally the discourse of a whole incorporated genre – all these discourse are double-voiced, and internally dialogised. A potential dialogue is embedded in them, one as yet unfolded, a concentrated dialogue of two voices, two world views, two languages (*Dialogic* 324-325).

*In an Antique Land* presents the post-colonial perspective of viewing the past as ennobled by idealism and the present as corrupted by oppression and cultural degeneration. The characters from the pre-colonial world represent a cultural situation where perfect harmony prevailed between the members of a society irrespective of their cultures or races. It is a world of happiness, with no conflict, no exploitation and no feeling of alienation.

Ghosh resorts to magic realism as a fictional technique of subversion. It dissolves the boundaries between the physical and spiritual truths and explores the possibilities of existence at various levels of consciousness which greatly assist subversive aesthetics. *In The Calcutta Chromosome*, Ghosh mixes hard scientific facts with folklore and asserts the Indian supremacy in the world of knowledge. The practice of folk
medicine by the character Mangala and the rustic infiltration into the world of knowledge to control “the ultimate transcendence of Nature” (TCC 90) are founded on the theory of migration of souls. Indian faith concedes the migration of human souls from one body to another by virtue of a supreme power that is all-inclusive. Mangala attempts to perform this exercise on her own about which the child in the Kalighat episode says: “Today is the last day of puja of Mangala – Bibi. Baba says that tonight Mangala-Bibi is going to enter a new body” (TCC 194). Ghosh also draws upon the Indian myth of Ganesha to illustrate the theory of “transposition of personality” (TCC 206). A judicious employment of magic realism in these instances can be viewed as a subversive practice to resist the latent colonial oppressive ideology. Thus, the novel “literally and figuratively rekindles our awareness of the rich Indian heritage to make our future progress inevitable” (Adhikari, “Continuity” 233).

The novel subverts the conventional western notions about knowledge, death, immortality and reincarnation. Murugan, one of the protagonists explains that knowledge in the conventional Western sense is impossible, because “to know something is to change it, therefore in knowing something you’ve already changed what you think you know, so you don’t really know it at all you only know its history” (TCC 88).

*The Calcutta Chromosome* strikes at the western notions about literary creativity with a subversive attack on logo centrism following
the line of the deconstructionists. Phulboni, the writer celebrity of this novel emphatically denounces the general notion that words can communicate experiences and assist to find the meaning of life. He explains: "the word is to this silence what the shadow is to the foreshadowed, what the veil is to the eyes, what the mind is to truth, what language is to life" (TCC 24).

There are more than one centres of consciousness in the novel which does not offer one definitive protagonist. The western notions of protagonist, of character development and of good and evil are deliberately subverted by Ghosh for projecting the validity of Indian literary norms. R.K. Narayan rightly sums up the supremacy of the Indian Literary tradition over the superficiality and inadequacy of its western counterpart thus:

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 characters in the epics are prototypes and moulds in which humanity is cast, and remain valid for all times (5).

Postmodern fiction, refusing to penetrate into the depths of characters, reduce them and events to the level of structural strategies.
Reality is presented in its mutation and each fragmented part is invested with hyperbolic dimensions. The immediacy of experience of reality is conveyed to the reader by a variety of devices, ironic mode of narration and recreating a magical world. This propensity for metafiction urges the reader’s attention to its own techniques and processes of creation and the story telling ability gains control over the subject it handles. For the narrator hero, reality itself is surrealistic and defies description. *In The Circle of Reason* there is an obvious attempt intended to float the events and characters through a medley of metaphors and select ideas. The all-embracing structural principles of magic and irony eloquently declare the total pattern of the novel and the ideas, while characters and metaphors are explicated through attendant motifs. The characters themselves are converted into possible metaphors. Their quest is for a specific structuring of their entity in the totality of experience, however trivial and absurd it is. The characters achieve this appropriation of their significance through their manipulative or creative capabilities, while the novelist himself realizes this through magic and irony and by transferring some of his story-telling abilities to the characters.

As narrative devices of subversion, *The Circle of Reason* employs the loom, the sewing machine and the book, within a powerfully charged discourse. The very title of the novel is tempting to focus upon reason, strengthened by the commitment of Balaram Bose, the protagonist of the first part, to inculcate and spread the practice of reason. The title
‘Circle’ has structural ramifications, among which the subversion of reason, which is its own ultimate concern, is significant.

*In The Circle of Reason*, Ghosh constructs a saga of restlessness which is the characteristic feature of contemporary internationalism. The most important feature of the novel is its post-colonialist foregrounding of the social materiality. He accomplishes this through the medicine of the Empire’s language while simultaneously decentring Empire’s continued cultural hegemony through the subversive theme.

The manipulation of language serves the purpose of subversion. Balaram, the protagonist of the first part of the novel is obsessed with the word “Carbolic acid”. One of his idiosyncrasies is to initiate a community in striving to produce sufficient qualities of this disinfectant to control possible outbreaks of epidemics originating from the overcrowded shanties of refugee dwelling. In part three “Carbolic acid” emerges again when Dr. Mishra mocks Mrs. Verma for using it to wash the verandah where Kulfi’s dead body would be laid.

Ghosh subverts the accidental causes and coincidences to restore the subalterns potential of comprehensibility and historicity. Throughout *The Calcutta Chromosome* and *The Glass Palace* accidental causes and coincidences which epitomize the incomprehensible are turned into a pattern and made eminently comprehensible for those inclined to hear from and learn the language of the subaltern.
Ghosh attempts to disrupt the fictive nature of his works and create a complex ideological and intertextual connection between history and fiction by introducing quotes from original sources and authentic historical details. The contents of the pamphlet strewn among the Indian soldiers by the Indian Independence League quoted in *The Glass Palace* is a case in point. Epitomising the spirit of resistance to the imperial domination it reads thus: “Brothers, ask yourselves what you are fighting for and why you are here; do you really wish to sacrifice your lives for an Empire that has kept your country in slavery for two hundred years?” (*TGP* 391).

Ghosh has always been suspicious of the colonial aristocratic adequacy of the colonial language, especially its emotive function in the post-colonial context. Alluding sarcastically to the hollowness and hypocrisy of the society, he writes that there are “funny stories about lonely young men who lived in huge colonial mansions in remote districts and spent their time writing symbolist poetry and masturbating” (*TSL* 241). The limitation of the colonizer’s language is expressed in the description of the grandmother in *The Shadow Lines*:

Suffering from bloodshot eyes and threads of phlegm hanging from her lips [...]. And yet, when I look at her, [...] my heart fills with love for her – love and that other thing, which is not pity but something else, something the English language knows only in its absence (*TSL* 78).
The style of language also greatly varies. It is mildly comic on occasions like the one referring to 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. But […] my parents and grandmother ignoring his writings, would proceed to ask him about his family’s doings and whereabouts (TSL 4-5).

Ghosh interweaves into the fabric of his narratives terms and names taken from various languages like Hindi, Arabic and Burmese. They serve as signifiers of cultural experience that are untranslatable and assert the Indian sensibility that propels Ghosh’s creative genius and draws sustenance from an Indian cultural context. As a cultural product, language can undertake the counter cultural agenda through its subversive deployment.

The process of decentralization and disunification that characterizes Ghosh’s novels is governed by their linguistic diversity. Bakhtin’s comments are relevant in the context: “The novel can be defined as a diversity of social speech types (sometimes even diversity of languages) and a diversity of individual voices, artistically organised” (Dialogic 262). This linguistic diversity is antithetical to the unitary language which expresses the idea of unification and centralisation. It is
the proper mode epitomizing the post-colonial spirit of resistance that challenges the primacy of the centre. Language being a social phenomenon represents the preconceptions and attitudes of power relations. The contradictory movements in the literary discourse which get along with the socio-ideological movements develop simultaneously with socio-political and cultural centralization and decentralization. Diversity in the fictional language can be related to the multiplicity of socio-ideological contradictions that co-exist within the society.

Ghosh’s narratives abound in hybrid constructions where the authorial voice conceals voices of others as evinced in the example from The Glass Palace:

Uma was riven by this controversy: She sympathised with the fears of the Indian minority and yet it troubled her that they believed their safety lay in what she saw as the root cause of the problem – the pattern of imperial rule and its policy of ensuring its necessity through the division of its subjects (243).

The narrative contains the objective comment of the narrator about the social condition of Indians in Burma during the British takeover. As a part of the general discourse, the narrators opinion is derived from general opinion. At the same time, the comment on Uma’s
temperament is strictly subjective. In *The Glass Palace*, there is a significant passage that has polyphonic undertones:

Rajkumar was at a loss to understand this grief. He was, in a way, a feral creature, unaware that in certain places there exist invisible bonds linking people to one another through personifications of their commonality. In the Bengal of his birth, those ties had been sundered by a century of conquest and no longer existed even as memory. Beyond the ties of blood, friendship and immediate reciprocity, Rajkumar recognised no loyalties, no obligations, and no limits on the compass of his right to provide for himself (*TGP 47*).

The multiplicity of voices residing within the narrative of unitary language suggest the plurality of attitudes, opinions, tastes, prejudices and the cultures inherent in the social milieu from which the text originates. The relationship of this plurality with the unitary language of the text negates a centralised system and shows the multiplicity of the common language. This is an act of subversion forming part of the dialectic between the variety and unity of language. A transformation of this into a social phenomenon reveals a situation where the multiplicity of cultures negates the constrained unity and craving for separate identity. It is a move towards the homogenisation of native culture by ordaining
colonial language, culture and norms. In this context, an exposition of diversity and plurality is a subversive act opposing the homogenisation of culture and the resulting acculturation.

Amitav Ghosh employs a subversive form to express a subversive theme that rejects the exploitative power structures prevailing in the post-colonial society. What he attempts to emphasise is a humane system based on equitable feeling of love and understanding. He eschews the monologic structure characteristic of the imperialistic narrative and subverts it by the meticulous usage of multiple narrators, untranslated words, irony, fantasy and magic realism. Irony and fantasy subvert the existing social order by presenting what is lacking in it and engaging in a negative relationship with it. Conversations are employed to resist the monologic voice of the narrator or the author and for the direct presentation of divergent opinions.

Amitav Ghosh presents the contradictions and confrontations in the post-colonial society offering potential resistance to the dominant ideology, at the same time collaborating with it as well. Most of his characters take a liberal humanist stance towards issues they confront, betraying this ambivalence of collaboration and confrontation. Ghosh tries to launch a resistance movement in the discursive and material practices and subverts the ideology and power structure they represent.