

CHASING GHOSTS AND MAKING HISTORY: GHOSH, TAGORE, AND POSTCOLONIAL INDIA

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A DISSERTATION

Submitted to
Michigan State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

English- Doctor of Philosophy

2015

ABSTRACT

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This dissertation focuses on the works of Amitav Ghosh and tries to see how literature has tried to negotiate the gaps within the historiography of postcolonial India. It discusses the relationship that exists between historical and literary narratives and the specific points where silence can enter historiography and how literary narratives deal with that silence. I use Michel De Certeau and Hayden White to brood on the conceptual similarities and differences between history and literature. Michel Rolph Trouillot's model of silence in history is used in conjunction with the literary narratives of Ghosh and Tagore with the backdrop of South Asian history of the 20th century. The specific historical moments in question in this work include the Swadeshi movement in Bengal, the Partition of India and the anti-Sikh riots of 1984. This dissertation also argues that the role of the writer when faced with such a calamitous event like the Indian Partition is not just to harken the mind to the pictures of violence but to show the readers the positive human stories entrenched within the annals of the violence.

To My Gurus: Devapriyo Sanyal, Dr. Mou Chattopadhyay, and Dr. Salah Hassan

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am greatly indebted to Dr. Salah Hassan for his unwavering support and encouragements. I would also like to thank Dr. Singh, Dr. Pillai, and Dr. Harrow for helping me shape my work.

The most profuse assortment of thanks goes out to Devapriyo Sanyal and Mou Chattopadhyay for believing in me at a time when I really needed to believe in myself. If you two had not been present at that moment in time in my life, I would have been like the wounded zebra on Pi's boat, soon to be eaten up by that hyena.

I am thankful for the wonderful memories that I made in Michigan thanks to my friends at ISA, Indian Students Association, the OISS and the various sports clubs I have been a part of. To name a few in this list is to omit an entire world of helpful names. So to all of you I give my heartfelt thanks and warm hugs.

Lastly, I would like to thank my family for their unwavering love and support even in the time of cholera. Ma, Baba, thanks for everything. Shreelina, you made it possible for me. Gubburani, daddy loves you!

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....	1
The Question of Narratives: Literature, History and Ghosh.....	2
Chapters.....	15
 CHAPTER 1: SILENCING THE PAST: A READING OF <i>THE CALCUTTA</i>	
<i>CHROMOSOME</i> AND “THE HUNGER OF STONES”	19
Silencing the Past.....	19
The Hunger of Stones.....	25
The Calcutta Chromosome.....	37
 CHAPTER 2: TAGORE IN GHOSH: THE HUNGRY TIDE OF IMPORTED	
POLITICS.....	54
Introduction.....	54
“Our real problem in <i>India</i> is not political. It is social”.....	55
The Hungry Tide Country.....	74
Morichjhapi, Indian Politics, and the Sundarbans.....	85
Majhi.....	102
 CHAPTER 3: CRACKED BY A SHADOW LINE: READING ICE-CANDY-MAN AND	
THE SHADOW LINES	110
Introduction.....	110
Ice-Candy-Man.....	114
The Shadow Lines.....	123
Conclusion.....	150
 CHAPTER 4: 1984: AMU AND WRITING THE GHOSTS OF MRS GANDHI.....	154
Amu and History.....	154
The Ghosts of Mrs Gandhi and The Writer’s Dilemma.....	165
 CONCLUSION.....	174
 BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	177

INTRODUCTION

This dissertation is about the fiction of Amitav Ghosh and its play with Indian history and its silences. Ghosh's novels have consistently expressed a strong interest in what he regards as the alternative "cultural connections and narratives excluded by the writing of history in the West" (Bose 216). Ghosh acknowledges that such exclusion happens in India also and his narratives strive to deal with these exclusions by forming a fictional bridge between literature and history. During another interview (with Chitra Sankaran) Ghosh stresses the point that as Indians who had been colonized for three hundred years, a historical self-awareness is extremely important to feel their way into a responsible presence in the world (3). This self-awareness is possible through literature at the point where it meets history. But there are conceptual differences between literary and historical narratives. My interest in this study is in the representation of history in literary works of Amitav Ghosh. I am not making a claim that literary narratives can function as history. But I do dwell on the relationship that exists between history and literature. Through the next four chapters I will try to show how literary narratives work with history and with each other's articulation of that history in the writings of Amitav Ghosh. But first it is important to ruminate on the scholarly discussions on the use of narratives in history and its relationship with literature. In the next section I will be looking objectively at the role, capacity, and limitations of fiction as a model of historical narration.

The Question of Narratives: Literature, History and Ghosh

For the purpose of my work, I want to assert that my reading of history is not situated on the fictionality of it but on the literariness of its narrative. Thus the method with which I am reading history in the context of this dissertation is less concerned with the multiplicity of its enunciations but is more interested in the idea of a silence or absence that is always associated with that utterance. I borrow this use of the narrative idea of history from Michel De Certeau and in this section I will try to show the key concepts he expounds on the writing of history and how it leads into a discussion of the main points of prominent historical narrativists.

As Michel De Certeau contends, the initial enunciation of history is nothing more than a narrative. The received meaning is essentially an imposition that is expressive only in the present time. The reception of the text is the performance of an operation that eliminates otherness and its dangers, which in turn, leads to the construction of a picture which is deliberately constructed by using those chosen fragments or brush strokes that are connected with the present and completes the picture puzzle that the present thinks is essential for the enunciation of its history.

De Certeau asserts the distinction between historiography and fictional narratives as being dependent on their respective functions in the social contexts. So while the writing of their narratives bear similarities, the functional aspects of their enunciations bear differences in both reception and perception. He establishes that there is always a historicity of history, which implies a movement that links an interpretive practice to a social praxis (21). This makes history fluctuate between a direct reference to a practice or a reality, while it also remains a closed discourse or a text that “organizes and concludes a mode of intelligibility (21).” He goes so far as to certify history as a probable myth as it combines the *thinkable* and the origin, in conformity with the way in which a society can comprehend its own working (21).

To explain this further, what he means by the movement of history from interpretive to social praxis is that the relation of history with the real has undergone a change through the process of selecting historical *facts*, which is the product of a social praxis, which in turn creates a legibility of the history with the present. So a historical fact is already the sign of an act and has a constituent meaning attached to its utterance. What enunciation does is it leaves silences about “certain problems” that leaves traces of the past, which historiography does not include in its social praxis. This points to the prevalence of suitable locations in which the history can be enunciated that is based on the particular praxis of observations. The corollary to this reading can be the argument that with the changing locales and co-ordinates of observation, the historian’s story can undergo changes. But this change is dependent on not only the clear demarcation between the past and the present but it is also charged with the idea of a certain suitability inherent in the *objective* rendition of the event whose ideological constraints might have been found suitable on the very basis of its removal from the present.

The above thought points to the mobilization of historiography based on the congruent discourse of which it is thought to be a part in the present. This position is what gives it the tendency to appear as real, or as De Certeau says, its chosen reality becomes the center of attention. He differentiates history on the basis of its focus: one type “ponders what is comprehensible and what are the conditions of understanding”, while the other “claims to reencounter lived experience, exhumed by virtue of a knowledge of the past (35)”. The first issue indicates the scope of history to form a working relationship and method of acknowledging the documents which render the vocation into existence. This leads to the choice of intelligibility that might produce the *facts* of the historical discourse, and consequently an epistemological understanding arising out of the choice of preserving the documents and the relationship that will

it will exude in the society in which they will be practiced. The second issue is built around the “lived experience” the historian has with the past in a bid to “resuscitate” it, to restore the “forgotten” and meet again the people of the past through the traces left behind. As De Certeau says, the second tendency also “implies a particular literary genre, narrative, while the first approach, much less descriptive, prefers to compare series that make different types of methods emerge (36)”. De Certeau acknowledges that while there is tension between the two forms, there is no opposition. So if the historians realize the new found importance of a forgotten figure they have the ability to re-arrange their documents to reflect the changes that have been made.

The labor of narrating the history is dependent on the difference between the past and the present. This differentiation carries with the task of understanding the form of the originary limit what posits a reality as the “past”. The technique of making history necessitates the task of resurging the dead souls back into the realm of history by accommodating them a space which, if we revisit my comments above, presents the system of social praxis with a changed set of documents, and a new set of connections with the present. If one critically engages with this method of looking at the practical manifestations of a changed course in historical documentation and its subsequent utterance, another set of problems will surface regarding the limitation of legibility that come with the emergence of new facts. This might be the problem of the other, or as mentioned previously, the silenced. The re-emergence of the silenced might reconfigure the entire praxis of historical enunciation, with the set of traces and mentions of course, which might entail a further accommodation of the historical discourse.

It has to be mentioned here that I am not concerned with De Certeau’s thesis on the writing of history. My interest is the description of the idea of history which he asserts. The utterance of the past carries with it the task of interring it. As De Certeau regards this writing as a

tomb as it both honors and eliminates. The constituent of a society is its presence in the present time which is made possible by the demarcation by the past from the present through historical writing. According to De Certeau, this space is founded by the literary. The historical text is performative, uses death to articulate the law of the present, and affects the perception of meaning through its practice. Through its performativity, historiography imposes upon the follower a will, a wisdom, and a lesson. The narrativity of this performative discourse is supported by what it tries to hide, which is the dead. This, according to De Certeau is the ambivalence of historiography. It vacillates between “producing history” and “telling stories”, but “without being reducible to either one or the other” (102).

The reception of history as a narrative is equivalent to the reception of a text which has eliminated otherness and its resistance to accomplish the performativity of a completeness that is made up of fragments of the past. These fragments complete the puzzle of enunciating historiography in the present time. De Certeau claims that the integration of the stories into the society manifests in the retailing in even the most private of places, during evenings at the fireside (287). The word “history” can be found vacillating between the two poles of stories that are recounted (*Historie*) and what is produced (*Geschichte*). This vacillation creates multiple meanings urged on by the effort to create a meaning, the subsequent effort to create another, and more effort to create a new one. This consequently resembles a process that is embellished by the simultaneous presence of a presence and an absence. As De Certeau says, “In a word, historians create absences” (288). Using Freud’s text on the demoniac neurosis, De Certeau asserts, in Tom Conley’s words in the introduction to his translation, “historiography is constantly being rewritten in the abyss between the idea of the repressed and the fear of its continuous return (xix)”.

As Wim Weymans observes, De Certeau's definition of historiography makes him occupy a unique position in contemporary discussions of historical theory. He asserts the narrativist principle of historiography while on the other hand his position does not claim a boundless fictional representation of history as fiction. Instead, De Certeau tends to expound the actuality of historical events that can be grounded in scientific models.

Transitioning swiftly onto the leading historical narrativist so to speak, Hayden White asserts that even though historians and literary writers may be interested in different kinds of events, the nature of their discourses and their objectives are often the same. Both writers of novel and history have the same inclination towards providing a verbal image of reality. The novelist may do so by using rhetorical techniques like metaphors and other forms of symbolism whereas the historian is more adept at using specific steps emanating from a source like the archive but language is at the core of the success of both forms of narratives. He even goes so far as to claim that both the historian and the novelist try to construct a "real" domain of human experience. In *Metahistory*, White emphasizes the historian's dependence on four rhetorical tropes – Metaphor, Metonymy, Synecdoche and Irony. White observes that there is no conflict between the two kinds of truth that the historian and novelist want to portray. Both history and literature must cater to the truth of correspondence and the truth of coherence. In his essay, "Fictions of Factual Representation", White claims that all written "discourse is cognitive in its aims and mimetic in its means" (122). Just like a novel is a form of historical representation, history, too, is a form of fiction (122). He goes on to say that every historical discourse is constituted by a certain philosophy of history, implicitly or explicitly. He asserts that the principal point of difference between history and the philosophy of history "is that the latter brings the conceptual apparatus by which the facts are ordered in the discourse to the surface of

the text, while history proper buries it in the interior of the narrative, where it serves as a hidden or implicit shaping device” (127). Every history has its myth and just like different fictional modes are based on different identifiable mythical models, different historiographical modes can be used to tabulate the facts within the chronicle of episodes occurring in a specific time space location. This set of narratives are intrinsically capable of producing different connotations- moral, cognitive, or aesthetic- depending on the particular fictional matrix. Historians are less dependent on *linguistic* self-consciousness as they treat language to represent the narrative of the discourse so that the cognitive persona of the author remains invisible in the text. Fiction writers are not constricted by this threat of the language and can use it to assert their critical apparatus.

In the essay “The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality”, White identifies three basic kinds of historical representation: the annals, the chronicle, and the history proper (9).

Annals are collections of episodes that do not produce a narrative or a story and hence fail to produce a cognitive reality of the past. Chronicles are real events that the human consciousness regards as unfinished stories. It is through history that narratives give an insight into the nature of “real” events. The historical narrative can transform the past into a story by giving it a fullness. This fullness is achieved through the rendition of a plot, which is sustained and narrated through a central or authoritative point of view. In his essay, “The Historical as Literary Artifact”, White states that the emplotment of history can happen through the creation of a narrative that can be tragic, comic, satirical or romantic¹. It is however the absence of the *social centers* that prohibits the annals to employ a narrative mode of presentation. It is the narrative which also creates the

¹ In *Metahistory*, White also states that there are four modes of argument (formist, mechanist, organicist, contextualist) and four modes of ideological presentations (anarchist, radical, conservative and liberal).

need for a *moral* justification or significance of the story. Whites asserts that narrativity is intimately related to and probably also a function of the need to moralize reality that is “to identify it with the social system that is the source of any morality that we can imagine” (18). According to White, this theory of narrativity can always be applied in *factual* story-telling and probably in fictional story-telling as well. Every historical narrative wants to moralize the events or the plots it depicts. It also tries to create an allegory or interplay between the stories from the past and the present as well. It is impossible to perceive annals and chronicle forms as aesthetically viable methods that produce a narrative without moralizing, even though they exude realism in their representation.

Lloyd Kramer concurs with White and states that the fictive or imaginary dimensions in the accounts of events do not suggest that the events themselves are fictional or that any of the descriptions is dependent of the various forms of imagination (101). Dominick LaCapra proposes two crucial questions as to how history and literature are mutually interrogating each other. The first question is on how literary texts process or write the history in context through both through symptomatic or formal procedures. Another issue that he raises is how texts are read differently with the changes in the literary field and the socio-cultural and political contexts. LaCapra proposes two responses to the question of relating history and literature: “One might be seen as ‘immanent’ quest for thoroughly grounded knowledge in relation to which literature or ‘the literary’ may be an object to be assimilated, perhaps even taken to be an irritant. The other is at times a variant of the quest for transcendence, with the literary given a transcendental or quasi-transcendental status that may be construed in post secular or displaced religious terms” (13). Taking LaCapra’s assertion in the context of my work, I am more interested in the first case where the literary text is an image or an offshoot of a social event (war, treaty, genocide) or

structure (like capitalism or communism), of which it becomes a document of the period or “perhaps of transhistorical forces (13)”.

In his essay “Narrative and the Real World: An Argument for Continuity”, David Carr argues against the idea that real events lose their continuity when narrativized. He says that narrative account does not always present a distorted image of the picture it relates. He not only stresses about the continuity at play between narrative and reality but also asserts the community of their form. Using Husserl’s analysis of time-experience, Carr asserts that the lived experience is built up on a structure connecting the past with the present and hence has a specific narrative sequence. This sequence might not have the beginning-middle-end structure of narrative and hence might not cater to a sequential emplotments but it does have a “means-end” (122) structure of action that is common to history, literature, and life. He critiques Louis Mink’s assertion that stories are not lived but told “in being lived and lived in being told” (126). Not only does narration create meaning through reflecting and imitating something that exists independently of it, it also intertwines with action and creates meaning in the course of life itself. Talking about narrative texts as literary artifacts, whether fictional or historical, Carr claims that it must be regarded as an extension of the primary features of the structure of the events they depict. Thus a historian’s story about a community might be different from the story the community tells about itself. But the form is the same. He contends that second-order narratives in history can change or improve on the stories of the first-order narratives and can also affect the reality they depict by enlarging its views of its possibilities. While histories work with the community, fiction does it for individuals.

The above discussion points to relationship (s) that exist between historiography and literature. Both depend on the use of linguistic tropes and narrative structures to emplot and

present their main points. Literature cannot make a *truth* claim like history but the ideas of the “real” and “truth” are ambiguous anyway. Both historical and literary narratives are present in a specific instance of plot in time and try to present a condition which is more factual in the case of history and fictional in literature. There are some important conceptual dangers of using literary texts as historical plots with social centers.

One can begin by quoting Aristotle: “Where the historian really differs from the poet is in his describing what has happened while the other describes the thing that might happen (17).” But then again with our very discussion of the importance of narrative in history, the Aristotelean mode of thinking is compromised. In her book *The Distinction of Fiction*, Dorrit Cohn makes some cogent arguments about the inherent fictionality of literature. She stresses on the *nonreferentiality* of fiction and discusses the importance of referentiality for non-fiction writing. Narratives like historical works, newspaper articles, biographies, are subjects to the question of *truth*. They have to pass the certain requirements of verification before they can be approved as historical narratives. Fictional narratives on the other hand are not required to be judged for their truth claims and hence are *nonreferential* which negates their claims as historical narratives. Cohn goes on to give examples of when a reader reads a fictional narrative he will probably not go scurrying to check the archive to see the claim to truth for the narrative.

..... nonreferential allows one to discriminate between two different kinds of narrative, according to whether they deal with real or imaginary events and persons. Only narratives of the first kind, which include historical works, journalistic reports, biographies and autobiographies, are subject to judgments of truth and falsity. Narratives of the second kind, which include novels, short stories, ballads and epics, are immune to such judgment. (15)

Robert Scholes has stressed the differences in the rules governing history and fiction. The main difference he states is that in fiction, the text itself can create the event whereas a historian has to check carefully to ensure that the event he is writing about did actually occur before he “entextualizes” it. In other words, the production of history is perennially dependent on the existence of an archive which acts as what Cohn would regard as the referential point.

History is a narrative discourse with different rules than those that govern fiction. The producer of a historical text affirms that the events entextualized did indeed occur prior to the entextualization. Thus it is quite proper to bring extratextual information to bear on those events when interpreting and evaluating a historical narrative. Any important event which is ignored or slighted by a historical narrative may properly be offered as a weakness in that narrative. It is certainly otherwise with fiction, for in fiction the events may be said to be created by and with the text. They have no prior temporal existence, even though they are presented as if they did. (211)

History stems from archives which are what Hayden White regard as *facts* but the representations of those facts create ambiguous truth claim as they are dependent on the *representation* of the emplotment by historians in their narratives². The varying mode of representations lead to the question of *interpretation* when it comes to the truth claims of historical narratives. Again, archives are not storehouses of *truths* though they may contain facts and I will visit this question in the next chapter. The point I am trying to make here is that a

² See Hayden White’s essay, “Historical Emplotment and the Problem of Truth”, in Sam Friedlander ed. *Probing the Limits of Representations: Nazism and the “Final Solution”*, pp. 37-53.

literary narrative has a role at the point, where Scholes says, “any important event is ignored or slighted by a historical narrative”. It is here that the element of fiction can try to create an alternative narrative against the grain of the historiography that displays this “weakness”. But one has to be careful in the description of this alternative or deviant story, as it is after all, just a story without an archive to fall back on, in most cases at least. That is why fictional narratives have points of nonreferentiality. A referential point does not make a narrative truthful but it does show a narrative arising out of facts. I will visit this possibility in the next chapter but it will suffice to say for the time being that historical novels try to operate in the interstitial spaces between the gaps in historical narratives. They fill out those spaces with characters who then operate on the perceptions of the audience. Remembering Carr’s essay, one can add that history is more interested in the narrative of the community while literary texts can speak for the individual, though there are exceptions to this rule. Biographies and autobiographies do speak more about an individual than the community but as Cohn says, historians have come to regard biographies as a “lesser” form of history. Fiction however does not produce a “lesser” form of narrative when the emphasis is on the individual; the individual in literary narratives become *characters*.

Coming back to Amitav Ghosh, I am inclined to point out Brinda Bose’s observation that Ghosh shows a consistent predilection towards a conscious attempt to render history into fiction in a way he can challenge history’s implacability with the former’s potentially more humane qualities. Ghosh has himself said that the “difference between the history historians write and the history fiction writers write is that the fiction writers write about the human history. It’s about finding the human predicament, it’s about finding what happens to individuals, characters.

I mean, that's what fiction is... exploring both dimensions, whereas history, the kind of history exploring causes, causality, is of no interest to me (Bose 18)."

In another interview³ Ghosh has claimed that he finds history at the heart of the novel. He thinks that every novel is a historical novel as "it is an account of something". He has said that the major difference he finds between himself and "Anglo-American" historical writers is that he does not believe that history is moving towards "something – some sort of good point. I don't believe it has a teleology or that it has a redemptive message." When asked about the capacity of the novel to create history, he replies that novels create narrative and in some sense history too but then he immediately adds that what interests him about the novel form is its ability to engage in a "telling of history". This is a rather interesting statement and as I have shown above, theoretically the novel or fiction form has some basic conceptual differences with the idea of historiography. But what Ghosh is trying to assert here again maybe is the filling out of the spaces or gaps between historical narratives through the creation of his fiction. In the same interview Ghosh has observed the affect his novel *The Hungry Tide* has had over people's awareness of the Sundarbans. He says that before the novel was published, the people of Calcutta had a curious indifference towards this "astonishing wilderness" that was literally so close to them geographically.

I think one of the reasons for this refusal to perceive is that in the popular imagination the Sundarbans was a wilderness that had no narrative. It had no imaginative existence.

³ Ghosh, Amitav. Interviewed by Azeen Khan. "History is at The Heart of the Novel." *Novel: A Forum on Fiction*, 2012. Web. 20 August 2014.

When I was writing *The Hungry Tide*, I would often think to myself: will the act of writing this novel make this forest real? Will it give it an imaginative life? I do think to some degree it has done that. If you compare what was written about the Sundarbans before and after *The Hungry Tide*, you'll see a difference. I think it is just this: a narrative makes it possible for people to perceive and think about places, and moments in time, that were previously unseen or invisible⁴.

The “no narrative” part of the Sundarbans was replaced by the story of his novel. It gave rise to an *emplotment* which then captured the perception of the people of Calcutta. What Ghosh means by creating history through his novel is basically to be read as the establishment of a narrative that makes people visualize, think, and remember the “unseen” gaps in cultural or geographical history. This opening up the perception of the audience is what Ghosh comes to regard as probably the most important feature of the novel.

Novels have many contributions. I wouldn't say this is its singular contribution by any means. But it is one thing that novels can do. They can open windows of perception. Take *Sea of Poppies*, for example. It brought the Opium trade to life for many people – before that the subject had more or less vanished from public memory. It's extraordinary that opium, which has played such an important part in Asian history, had vanished from public memory in India.⁵

In the above discussion we have established the idea that there is a relationship between history and literary narratives. However, history is not literature and the latter cannot claim to

⁴ Same interview.

⁵ Same interview.

produce the former. But literature can be used to fill in the gaps or fissures that exist in history by opening up the perception of the reader to “unseen or invisible” narratives. It accomplishes this by using imagination. For Amitav Ghosh, the telling of the human side of the story is the most important aspect of his narratives. He has also emphasized the role literature plays in opening up or adding to people’s perceptions about ideas, places and history.

Chapters

As a Bengali growing up in Calcutta, one cannot escape the name of Rabindranath Tagore. His novels, short stories, dramas, songs, and poetry were a part of our classrooms, our living rooms, book festivals, weddings, *pujas*, birthdays, and funerals. India’s first Nobel Laureate, Tagore has been a figure who has loomed large over Bengalis through the decades. A major part of my work is dedicated to the interplay of Ghosh’s narratives with that of Rabindranath Tagore. It has to be noted that I am not claiming that *an anxiety of influence* is at play here between Ghosh and Tagore. It might be, but that is not the focus of this study. I am focused on the treatment of Tagore’s theories of nationalism, and foreign education in India and I try to see how Amitav Ghosh uses Tagore to emplot his own fiction.

When asked about the main literary inspiration in his writing, Ghosh has stated that “Tagore is an obvious literary influence” (Bose 216). Tagore’s political writings are more moral than academically critical. Ranajit Guha says that though his points are well argued, his writing sometimes borders on being uncomfortably purple (5). The cliché that he is at heart more an artist and a philosopher than a political scientist can actually be applied literally to Tagore. He bases the majority of his argument on the age-old traditions of India and celebrates the diversity of India, not by imposing it, but by highlighting the fact that the differences are the key ingredients behind the beauty of the Indian milieu. In “Nationalism in India,” Tagore warns

against the material dependence that comes with the idea of emulating the nationalistic protocols of the West. He does not chastise the West for its failure to connect with the human side of social living. He simply points out that it was England's way of structuring her own system of living and beliefs. However, the application of the same system in India will eventually bring in an unbridgeable ethical and moral gulf between the citizens. It is his conviction that what "India most needed was constructive work coming from within herself" (201). He challenges the country to prove to the West that Indians have within them the strength of moral power (201). *Ghare Baire* brings out the results of such an *immoral* and forceful approach.

A quick note on the choice of the texts: I have specifically chosen the works of Amitav Ghosh that deal with the history of *India* post 1947 and its literary expressions. As such I do not deal with his later novels like *The Glass Palace*, *Sea of Poppies* or *The River of Smoke*. I wanted a Tagore text that deals with Indian nationalism and the Swadeshi movement and after much deliberation I chose *Ghare Baire* over *Gora* and *Char Adhyay* because of its narrative's more robust links with the Swadeshi movement. *Ice-Candy-Man* gives us a glimpse of the women's narrative from Pakistan on the immediate effects of the Partition and I wanted to use it in a comparative reading of *The Shadow Lines*. Lastly, I went with the Amitav Ghosh essay "The Ghosts of Mrs Gandhi", because it fit nicely with the side of Ghosh that I had been wanting to talk about for a long time. In the context of the Indian Partition and the decades of sectarian violence arising out of it there is a certain authorial responsibility in the depiction of carnage and bloodshed and I visit this topic with the reading Ghosh's essay. There is a dearth of commentary on the non-fiction works of Ghosh and I wanted to visit that aspect of his prose writing.

In Chapter 1, I discuss the method by which silences work within a historical narrative through my reading of Michel-Rolph Trouillot's book, *Silencing the Past: Power and*

Production of History. I then read the Ghosh's translation of the Tagore short story "The Hunger of Stones", and then use the traces and mentions left by it as a potential archive for the emplotment of a *fictional* history within pages of the novel *The Calcutta Chromosome*.

In Chapter 2, I deal with the text of Amitav Ghosh's novel *The Hungry Tide* and try to use the lens of Tagore's writings on nationalism and the Swadeshi movements in reading the novel. Though the Sunderbans are located at the extreme periphery of the nation, it displays the unified hybridity that Tagore had implored his followers to inculcate. The lingering moment in time of the mythological framework as depicted by the figure of Bon Bibi accentuates the relevance of the specific human condition of the region. Simultaneously, the predicament of the Marichjhapi refugees is steeped in the violence of the Partition. The collective redefinition of a tide-country identity invites the encroachment of an imposed uniform nationalist discourse. The utterance of the rehabilitation camps does not make the violence fade; the plaintiff cries of the refugees resonate with an ethical warning against the nation's prevaricating attempts to throttle their voices. I discuss Tagore's ideas about militant Indian nationalism and *Swadeshi* movement and talk about his warnings against the prospect of communal unrest post-independence. The novel *Ghare Baire* anchor the narrative's main tenets on the obvious ferocity of the changes brought about by the Swadeshi movement and the Partition respectively. I end this chapter with a brief analysis of an almost forgotten Bengali novella, *Majhi*, as I transition into my discussion about the literature of the Indian Partition in the next chapter.

In Chapter 3, I talk about the silences of history in India in terms of the historical treatment of Partition and the latter communal riots. I look at the role and limitations of literature and imagination in the depiction of those silences in my discussion of *The-Ice-Candy-Man* and

The Shadow Lines. I also talk about the important issue of trauma and what it means to survive bloody events like the Partition and riots.

In my final chapter, I do a study of the supposed vanishing history within postcolonial India. We see a similar silence surrounding the 1984 Delhi riots in my discussion of the movie *Amu*. As a postcolonial citizen of India, one can feel the anguish of the Partition in our daily lives. Using an essay written by Gyanendra Pandey, I explore the making and silencing of history in modern India. The third text in this chapter is a short memoir written by Amitav Ghosh recounting his images of the 1984 riots. Here the treatment of the same silence is quite different. Ghosh contemplates the ethical approach of the writer when confronted with violence. He uses Dzevad Karahasan's vision of the role of literature to brood on the duty of the writer when it comes to expressing *apocalyptic* violence in human life.

The question that I want to raise here is about the role a writer should play when confronted with the ghastly scenes of sectarian or ethnic violence. The readers of the postcolonial world are very much aware of the violence of colonialism, all the time. But does recounting the gory images over and over again help the human psyche to heal? In the midst of all the despair and anger, healing is crucial. There is a certain sense of responsibility in the writing and reading of works that deal with inhumane terror. And this sense of responsibility inhibits any clear answer to this question. I argue that ethical responsibility of the writer should be moored not on the history *of* the violence but the history *behind* the violence.

CHAPTER 1: SILENCING THE PAST: A READING OF *THE CALCUTTA CHROMOSOME* AND “THE HUNGER OF STONES”

Silencing the Past

In this chapter I will be first exploring Michel-Rolph Trouillot’s book *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* where he discusses the methods in which silencing occurs in the process of historical production. I will then dwell on the literary narratives of Tagore’s short story “The Hunger of Stones”, and Amitav Ghosh’s novel *The Calcutta Chromosome* and try to show how Ghosh builds on the Tagore short story to create his fiction. I will then use Trouillot’s method to articulate the *fictional history* Ghosh creates in his novel by using traces in both his and Tagore’s narratives, and by reading Tagore’s short story as an archive itself for his *fictional history*. It is imperative to note upfront that I am not trying to press for a reading of *The Calcutta Chromosome* as a historical narrative. What I am interested in is essentially the concoction of a history within the literary, where the historiography does not make any truth claims outside the domain of the text. So essentially the treatment of the two literary works under scrutiny will be done under the assumption of a closed discourse which will extend only to them and the signs and traces contained within them.

In his book, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*, Michel-Rolph Trouillot contends that history is always produced in a specific historical context and that historical actors are also narrators and vice versa (22). He affirms that historical narratives are always produced in history. As a social process, history employs people in three distinct capacities: agents, actors and subjects. *Agents* are role specific people whose class or social position designate the aforesaid function. Examples of agents include workers, slaves, masters,

mothers etc. *Actors* are the collection of capacities that are contingent upon a specific time and space and the comprehension of their presence and role is dependent on a precise historical moment. He gives the example of a comparative study of African-American slavery in Brazil and the United States that are congruent upon the particular histories that are being compared. As historical narratives are dependent on specific situations and co-ordinates of knowledge production, they have to deal with human beings as actors. People are *subjects* of history when they are aware of their vocality arising out of their conscious position regarding a particular issue or subject. For example, the fight for Indian independence from the British made the people of the Indian National Congress at the time the *subjects* of history.

Trouillot is concerned not with the meaning of specific narratives but with the process behind their formation. It is through the differential exercise of power that one narrative is produced while another might be silenced. He asserts:

Silences enter the process of historical production at four crucial moments: the moment of fact creation (the making of *sources*); the moment of fact assembly (the making of *archives*); the moment of fact retrieval (the making of *narratives*); and the moment of retrospective significance (the making of *history* in the final instance)" (26).

So a history is always made up of sources, archives, a narrative and the final significance of the emplotment of the narrative. A historical narrative can also be a collection of silences that enter the process at different times and are directly connected to the narrative that is being produced. Again the above are conceptual tools that can overlap into each other. For example, if a silence enters history at the source, it will also affect the production of the archives and consequently the

narrative and its subsequent *meaning*. If the silence enters at the creation of the narrative itself, through an interplay of power, the significance of the narrative can get altered as well.

Consequently, the process to identify these silences will be unique depending on the particular case. The study of a historical narrative cannot be accomplished by a “mere chronology of its silences (28).” Power can have multiple entries into a narrative and is always found to work together with it from multiple angles. So power may enter the narrative at the moment of “retrospective significance” and shape it accordingly. Power may enter at the very source and have a say on the creation of the archive.

Trouillot is not interested in the question about the authority that wields the power in a story. He draws attention instead to the process that enables power to work with history. Power is there even before the creation of the narrative and contributes “to its creation and interpretation (29).” Power enters history at the source and its play can lead to the creation of an alternative narrative as well, where, again power enters at the source. This alternative story has its facts as well. Trouillot states that facts are always meaningful and are not created equal (29). When a *trace* is produced it also creates a silence. Trouillot invokes Derrida just once in his book briefly talking about the “there is no life beyond the text (145)”, while discussing about Disney’s decision to drop its plans for Virginia Park. He does not really trace his use of *trace* to Derrida. My reading of Trouillot’s *trace* does point to a Derridean⁶ use of the term, albeit, in a less open-ended stance. *Trace* for Trouillot is a simultaneous presence and absence of a sign that can be attributed to a previously established narrative. The presence of the trace signifies a narrative or sign system that is now absent.

⁶ See Chapter 2 *Of Grammatology*, pg 61.

Trouillot states that there is always a play of power in the production of a narrative and its alternative. Facts are never neutral or meaningless as it is measurable from the point of power that is present in the narrative. Some facts tend to be privileged over the other. This leads to the creation of both traces and silences. Not all occurrences are noted in the beginning. Some occurrences are engraved in individual or collective bodies while others are not. Some can leave physical markers while some others do not. What occurs in history leaves traces, some of which are concrete, like buildings, dead bodies, censuses, monuments, diaries, political boundaries. This concrete trace limits the range and significance of a historical narrative. This is one of the main reasons for which not *any* fiction can pass for history. As Trouillot says, the materiality of social-historical process sets the stage for future historical narratives. For example, the Victoria Memorial Hall, located at the heart of Calcutta, signifies various traces of history. One can look at it and remember Calcutta's colonial past. It can be looked at as the embodiment of colonial success in India while it can be regarded as the symbol of India's independence from imperialism. It can also be thought of as an attempt by the British to recreate the Taj Mahal. However, there are also limits to the tracing of the past with the Victoria Memorial Hall. It cannot be regarded as a gift from the people of Swaziland nor can it be interpreted to be a trace of the brutality of the Khmer Rouge regime.

It has not yet been determined as to how differences or as Trouillot says, "lived inequalities", yield unequal historical power. The distribution of historical power does not necessarily replicate the inequalities lived by the actors. Historical power is not a direct reflection of past occurrence or a simple sum of past inequalities measured from an actor's perspective or from the standpoint of any "objective standard" even at the forced moment. As is

quite apparent, Trouillot's use of the concept of power is essentially Foucauldian⁷. For Foucault, power is something that circulates and cannot be quantifiably appropriated. Functionally it is like a thread or chain which makes the individuals circulate through it and hence circulates itself between different individuals who are always at a point where they are simultaneously acting upon or are acted upon by power⁸.

Power for Trouillot is a relation, not repressive but productive. He understands that power works at the micro-level and is not wielded just by the dominant discourse of the state. It is the question of how power works that interests him more than what exactly it is. Similarly, sources do not encapsulate the whole range of significances of the occurrences to which they testify. Further, the outcome itself does not determine in any linear way how an event or a series of events enters into history (47).

The archive has to be devalued if the system of silence has to be unearthed. Silence in the source or archives is an active and transitive process (47). Similarly, any presence or absence in the archive or sources is a creation and never neutral or natural. It means that on a scale of truthfulness, there is a value that can be attached to the silence and the presence of mentions. There is always a medium that engages in the silencing and privileging. History is the amalgamation of the mentions and silences, which means that there is always a mention and a silence attached with a historical narrative.

⁷ See Foucault's essay "On Power". *Politics, Philosophy and Culture: Interviews and Other Writings, 1977-1984*.

⁸ See Foucault's essay "Two Lectures" in *Power/Knowledge.: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*, ed. by C. Gordon, trans. by C. Gordon and others. New York: Pantheon Books, 1980. Print. 77-108.

In the following reading of the two literary works in question, I will be treating them as being in a historical relationship with each other in a closed discourse where the information and traces left by the Tagore short story is used to produce a narrative which completes the production of a *fictional* historiography in *The Calcutta Chromosome*. The former acts as the physical marker for the creation of *fictional* facts in the latter that leads to an *unthinkable history* within the closed discourse.

The Hunger of Stones

“The Hunger of Stones” has been one of the most celebrated short stories written by Rabindranath Tagore. The original Bengali version, reprinted by Ananda Publishers in their recent Tagore short story collection entitled *Golpoguchho*, cites 1895 as the year of its composition. The English translation of “The Hunger of Stones” was first published by Macmillan in 1916 and was titled “The Hungry Stones”. It was part of an anthology of Tagore’s short stories which had been translated by various writers. There was no editorial note designating the name of the original translator behind the English version of the story. For the purpose of this essay, my discussion will focus mostly on the translation Amitav Ghosh has included in his book *The Imam and the Indian* where he retitles Tagore’s short story as “The Hunger of Stones”⁹.

Tagore’s story begins when the unnamed narrator and his theosophist cousin meet a stranger on a train during their trip back to Calcutta during the Durga Puja holidays. Neither one of the three characters are named in the story. The three of them spend the night in a railway waiting room as they hope to catch the connecting train to Calcutta. It is here that the story is told in the first person narrative by the stranger. It is interesting to note that in his translation entitled “The Hunger of Stones”, Ghosh uses the word *station* while in the previous translation, the word *junction* is used to describe the railway station where the three gentlemen spend their night. In the original Bengali version of the story, Tagore uses the English word *junction* as well. *Junction* has been an important term for the Indian Railways and has a common use to describe a larger than usual railway station, where the tracks are changed for the plying locomotives as they go

⁹ All quotations in this essay, if otherwise not mentioned, will be from the Ghosh translation.

towards their various destinations; one can travel to any part of the country from a junction. It is a place of constant business and movement where people disembark from trains only to embark upon new ones as they continue towards their respective destinations. Junctions also are important places of convergence and divergence where travelers from all corners of the country meet and different languages are spoken; the light does not set in a junction as the stream of people, trains, vendors and general business are always illuminated by artificial lights. A station on the other hand can be much smaller, unidirectional, in darkness with few people around, and most importantly, is stationary. Trains are required to stop at all junctions while they might not stop at a simple station. Junctions are inclusive while mere stations are exclusive and in some cases, forlorn and desolate. The lack of movement might signify a lack of change, life and in some cases, both. Ghosh's station does not have the word *railway* to qualify it as a place of life. The only description we get of the station is that there is a waiting room and that it takes basically one entire night for the train to arrive. In a bigger railway junction, trains just keep coming and going; one does not need to wait for hours in order to catch a train to an important place like Calcutta. While in Ghosh's station, the travelers have to wait; it is as if the stationariness of the place stifles time. The main narrator eventually makes a bed for himself so that he can get some sleep before the train arrives. The torpor of the place injects within him a slumber with which he tries to fight off the stagnant time.

It is never revealed where the station is located though we are told that the two friends are awaiting a train for Calcutta where after a recent trip to the country-side. With just one train plying to Calcutta in what seems like the entire night, the desolateness of the place is highlighted. As the story is narrated by the stranger, we do not hear of any more travelers; the company of the

trio is intervened into only when the train arrives in the morning.¹⁰ For the Bengali audience, the waiting room of a railway station elicits a known response because the station of “The Hunger of Stones” is revisited in subsequent Bengali adventure novels. Saradindu Bandyopadhyay’s short stories on the ghostly adventures of Borda had a heavy penchant for starting their narratives in desolate railway station rooms¹¹. In arguably the most popular Bengali adventure novel of all time, *Chander Pahar* (The Mountain of the Moon), young Shankar is posted as a lonely station-master in a remote part of Kenya, as the British are building railway tracks to connect their expanding empire¹². Feluda in *Sonar Kella*, too is stranded in a remote station in the desert of Rajasthan. The most famous of Tenida’s adventure narratives, *Charmurti* has some of its most important events unfolding in a train. The list of Bengali narratives that take the railway station as a key location is, simply put, just too long to tabulate in the scope of this essay. But the idea of a dimly lit lonely station with limited train availability, enshrouded in darkness with only the

¹⁰ Further reading on the topic of railways in India and fiction on Indian railways see: *Railways in Modern India*. Edited by Ian J. Kerr. New York: Oxford University Press, 2001. Print. Aguiar, Marian. *Tracking Modernity: India’s Railway and the Culture of Mobility*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010. Leer, Martin. “Odologia Indica: The Significance of Railways in Anglo-Indian and Indian Fiction in English.” *Angles: On the English-Speaking World: Vol. 1: Unhinging Hinglish: The Language and Politics of Fiction in English from the Indian Subcontinent*. Eds Nanette Hale and Tabish Khair. Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum, 2001. pp 41–61.

Also see Bond, Ruskin. *Penguin Book of Indian Railway Stories*.

¹¹ For the Borda stories, see the 5th volume of *Saradindu Omnibus*. Ananda Publishers Limited. Ed. Protul Kumar Gupta.

¹² Published in 1937, *Chander Pahar*, is a popular Bengali classic adventure novel. It depicts the story of a young Bengali middle-class boy who goes to East-Africa to work in the construction of the pre-First World War British devised railroad system. His adventures take him from Uganda and Kenya to Rhodesia; he encounters ravaging lions, venomous snakes, fierce baboons and the wrath of a volcanic explosion among other experiences.

feeble flames of an oil lantern as a source of light, in the middle of nowhere, bereft of any sign of humanity, has been a frequently used trope in Bengali literature.

Calcutta on the other hand is more than a sign of life; it also signifies the Empire. It is the colonial center and the train is its messenger. As the narrator moves closer to Calcutta he is made aware of The Great Game between Russia and Britain, something about which he had been totally oblivious during his travels in the country side.

We'd had no idea that there were so many unheard-of-goings-on in the world: that the Russians had advanced so far, that the British had so many hidden designs, that there was so much trouble brewing amongst our own rajas and maharajas—we had been entirely at peace with the world till then, not having known anything about all this. (327)

As the narrator and his friend move closer to Calcutta, they come to know about the prevalent political intrigue and colonial turf wars. It seems that they had been cut off from the colonial narrative and had little clue about the ramifications of the British political designs on India. The unnamed station is designated as the place where the countryside ends and the Empire starts. It is stationary and immutable, and touched by the busyness of the Empire through the plying of that train, it is like a point of native consciousness, where the railways can be regarded as an instrument of conquest. It is at this point where the stranger recounts his tale.

He baffles his audience with the way he is dressed and remains unnamed throughout. He is dexterous in his oratory skills and keeps everyone interested in his lectures because of his seemingly vast knowledge about absolutely everything. He introduces the concept of the Great Game to the narrator and his companion and when they are taken aback by the information, he

says with a tight little smile: “There happens more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are reported in *your* newspapers” (326).

With the word *your*, the stranger immediately creates a divide between himself and his two traveling companions. Privy to the workings of the political center, he boasts about the knowledge his position grants him. At the same time, his utterance can be interpreted as a case of a confused hybrid identity bestowed upon him by the colonial condition. The allusion to *Hamlet* sets the tone for a supernatural story while at the same time weaves a tragic element around his own persona. The reference to Shakespeare draws allusion to his English education as well. It is as if his importance in his current company is marred by a foreboding of a tragic flaw emanating from his confusion about his own identity. His self-importance makes him the central figure of his tales while relegating the narrator and his cousin to the role of Horatio.

The stranger recounts his experience by letting his two listeners know that having quit his old job in Junagadh State, he soon took up a position for the Nizam’s government in Hyderabad and his first posting on account of his youth and good health was in the outlying town of Barich where he was in charge of collecting cotton revenues. The powerful and proud history of both the aforementioned princely states had by this time been compromised by the encroaching tendencies of the British Empire and as such had already been converted into British protectorates or client states. A chunk of the revenue that he was collecting for the Nizam would end up into the vault of the Empire¹³. His experiences and various employments give the history

¹³ For a colonial narrative about the Nizam(s) of Hyderabad see: Hastings, Fraser. *Our Faithful Ally the Nizam*. London: Smith, Elder and Co, 1865. For more modern or postcolonial versions see: Regani, Sarojini. *Nizam-British Relations, 1724-1857*. New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company, 1988. Linton, Harriet Monken; Rajan, Mohini. *The Days of the Beloved*. Berkeley, University of California Press, 1974.

included in the narrative an onion like layered structure. The probable demise of the Junagadh State lands him a job for the dwindling government of the Nizam. While posted there his encounters within the haunted palace of Shah Mahmud II recount the remnants of the layer of the onion which the Nizam had taken over.

Once evening came, I would feel myself caught in a web of rapture. I would become a different being, a character in an unrecorded history of centuries ago. My short English jacket and my tight pantaloons would begin to seem oddly incongruous; with the greatest care, I would put on a red velvet fez, loose leggings, a flowered shirt and a long silk achkan, with a colored attar-scented handkerchief. Then, putting away my cigarettes, I would light a great hubble-bubble filled with rosewater, and sink into a high upholstered sofa. And thus I would sit, as though I were waiting in the most eager suspense for some extraordinary night-time tryst. (334)

The above passage denotes appositions of the West and the East. The “short English jacket” is juxtaposed with the “red velvet fez” that is emblematic of the Islamic traditions of the Nizam; “a flowered shirt” with “attar-scented” handkerchief; “cigaretters” with a hookah. Ghosh mentions an *unrecorded* history whereas the original translation talks about an *unwritten* history. Ghosh’s deliberate use of *unrecorded* in place of *unwritten*, can be thought of as being emblematic of the obscurity or silence the current layer of history within the short story, has sought to veil over the previous period. History can be recorded and written. It can be re-written. It can also exist without being written, an obvious example of which would be the case of oral histories. It can also live in memories. It seems as if the romanticized spectral aura of the palace, silenced by the passage of time, and deleted by the new layers of historical traces, wants to re-inscribe its

presence through the vessel of the unnamed stranger. His failure to grasp the silence of this ghostly document of barbarism is a vacuum which still haunts him. The silence of this moment is reinforced by the adjectives used to allude to the ethereal presence of the palace; it is described as the “looming in solitude,” and built on a “remote and lonely site.” There is no proven sign of life anywhere. In the original translation, it is said that Shah Mahmud II had built the palace for his “pleasure and luxury.” But Ghosh in his translation says that the Sultan had erected this mansion as “his house of pleasure.” The allusion to Coleridge’s *Kubla Khan* and his dome of pleasure can be made in this case and like the dome, the palace is a corporeal entity built on the sacrifices of the time and its milieu. But the inside is empty—the corporeal outside is filled with a void.

In *Silencing the Past*, Trouillot states that the materiality of the socio-historical process sets the stage for future historical narratives. He argues that history can begin with the embodiment of material masses like buildings which invariably traps the audience in the corners of its architecture. The bigger the mass, the more conspicuous is its historical materiality. Thus objects like castles and the pyramids intimidate by their physical vastness making the audience feel small and inefficient.

The bigger the material mass, the more easily it entraps us: mass graves and pyramids bring history closer while they make us feel small. A castle, a fort, a battlefield, a church, all these things bigger than we that we infuse with the reality of past lives, seem to speak of an immensity of which we know little except that we are part of it. Too solid to be unmarked, too conspicuous to be candid, they embody the ambiguities of history. They give us the power to touch it, but not to hold it firmly in our hands--hence the mystery of their battered walls. We suspect

that their concreteness hides secrets so deep that no revelation may fully dissipate their silences. We imagine the lives under the mortar, but how do we recognize the end of a bottomless silence? (29-30)

The presence of the palace points to both the ambiguity and physicality of its historical narrative within the literary. It also symbolizes what Walter Benjamin might regard as an example of a document of civilization which by its very presence also produces a *source* for an alternate archive or document (257). The palace is also a *trace*, whose presence symbolizes the very absence of its earlier narrative which is alluded to with the mention of its “bottomless silence”.

Ghosh continues to play with a nuanced treatment of the idea of silence to describe this void. His translation points to the silence of the fountains and that “no fair footsteps resound on the white marble.” Whereas in the original translation, we are told that “the fountains play no longer...white feet no longer step gracefully on the snowy marble” (54). This constant beckoning of the word *silence* seems to numb the sense in a way contrary to how the fragrances of the “rosewater,” “bathing-chambers,” “attar-scented handkerchief,” are brought to the forefront by the narrative. It seems as if the scent of the past can be *traced* in the desolate corners of the mansion while the sound of it having ever lived, is somehow lost. The description of the whiteness of the marble induces within the reader a cursory glance at a comparison between the palace and the famous Taj Mahal. And just like the Taj Mahal, the palace is a mausoleum of memories and pleasure, silenced by the ravages of time but still standing erect as a benchmark of a proud era of barbarism; the spectral vision of the eunuch is a direct reference to this barbarism. As the unnamed stranger tries to find his way around the ethereal figure of the black eunuch, the “erect sword” falls to the ground. This reference to an erect sword belonging to a eunuch in a

house of pleasure is fascinating; it makes an obvious reference to the frustration the narrative presents for the stranger in its lack of fleshly attainments. The desire of pleasure is never fulfilled and remains obscured by the indigo veil beyond which he could hear the faint whispers of the courtesans.

However, the very fact that the palace still exists reminds the characters of its physical presence, which in turn harkens the mind to the possibility of a narrative beneath the present layer of history. The spectral visions within the palace then stand to be regarded as voices emanating from the depths of a history which has been hidden but continues to challenge the present to return to the past. Its manifestation therefore is ghostly as the knowledge of its existence haunts the present¹⁴. The very physicality of the palace, its historical materiality, is a testament to a previous living construction of it. The present, however, cannot deny the erstwhile living, breathing presence behind the construction. Something with a valid and documented past can be a ghost. Its presence remains haunting because of the lineage of the past. This is what makes the stranger's narrative transcend the epistemology of the locals at Barich who have always been awed by the spectral presence of the palace, which they regard as ghostly. They are caught within a definition of the palace and its history which is constructed within the known dimensions of documentation. The palace is a physical document of the past but is at the same time, ghostly in its countenance. The narrative of its inside however wants what Trouillot might term as a retrospective evaluation. Without this evaluation, the *fictional* historical narrative of the palace is imperceptible. Thus the first time the stranger senses the bathers in the Shusta, it seems to him that he is as invisible to them as they were to him: "Dream or reality, the unseen mirage

¹⁴ See Derrida. *Specters of Marx*.

from two hundred fifty years ago that had presented itself before me vanished in the twinkling of an eye (330).”

The *idea* of the reality of two hundred and fifty years is a mirage; a mirage does not exist. It does not have a physical presence. It cannot be quantified. But “reality” supposedly exists because it is living, breathing, with an inside, and an outside and can be narrated. But the tracing of the past through the physical presence of the palace makes it devoid of mirage like qualities. As the stranger gets enamored by the immutability of the un-reality of the past, he starts imagining “that this ineffable, unattainable, unreal setting was the only reality on earth, that everything else was a mirage” (332). The character of Meher Ali transcends the boundary between the past and present as he had been a witness to the glorious past of the palace. Meher Ali’s figure also transcends the domain of the natural. He is regarded by the local inhabitants as a mad-man. His piercing cries haunt the premises of the palace and startle the stranger: “Stay away, stay away. It’s a lie, all of it’s a lie (337).” In the original translation, the word *false* is used, which is replaced by Ghosh with the word *lie*. In this context, *lie* is more deliberate than *false*. A lie is always created by an agency, be it external or internal to a context. The interchange of the words in this case might fill a vacuum of understanding within the narrative which creates the mirage of the lie. The image of the palace is a lie as it points to the recorded vision of a previous layer of history. However, this record might be a superficial rendition of the version of history that gives shape to the present which in its turn, thinks its position to be ideologically and physically threatened by the era whose place it has usurped.

Tagore’s narrative does not name any of its main characters. The original narrator, his cousin and also the stranger in the train are left unnamed. Their existence cannot be quantified and classified by traces and documents emanating from the history outside the pages of the story.

The text however is created by the recounting of experiences but it remains a mirage as the ending of the story is not heard and hence the retrospective understanding of the archive contained within the palace is not unearthed. The sudden arrival of the train to Calcutta leaves the narrator's story open ended for his two listeners, who subsequently start a fight over their respective claims and questions about the validity of the story. Everyone remains a question; while it is made certain that the stranger cannot be depicted within the fixed religious, social and cultural indices of the Empire, the narrator and his friend are talked about even less. The title that Ghosh chooses for his translation is "The Hunger of Stones"; the original translation, as previously indicated, used the title "The Hungry Stones." The movie version of the story, directed by Tapan Sinha, had the title of *The Hungry Stones* as well. The replacement of the adjective "hungry" with the noun "hunger," indicates a state or condition. The palace of the Shah is built of white marble. The stones are immutable, unchanged by the course of external history. The palace is a direct example of a construction which stands as a vanguard for an invisible, absolute *condition* of an unrecorded hunger to create history.

The title, "The Hunger of Stones", alludes to the hunger or power of stones; stones are inanimate and do not exhibit the qualities of hunger and pain. They are also heavy, and seemingly impenetrable and in some case immovable, inscrutable and immutable. To the average onlooker, a stone is bereft of life and any discourse of subversion. It is an object without political significance. However, its power lies in the very immutability and inscrutability associated with it. Attributing the trait of hunger to stones anthropomorphizes them. They are also a part of nature and is insensitive and passive to history. Silenced stories or narratives of *the other* are like stones; they might exist in the archives but the records are never retrieved to give credence to their narrative or the play of power robs them off a narrative itself. A ghost is the

remnant of an erstwhile life. A stone is and has always been without life. The hunger of stones is then the power the silenced past is hungry to exude. It can *traced* back to a particular time in space and geography. The word hunger is an aggressive word—it denotes the most essential characteristic of any living creature and organism. Bereft of this element of life, the stones within the palace of the Shah, are just stones. To the stranger, they emanate a certain aura of opaqueness because of their muteness and inscrutability.

The important themes of our reading of “The Hunger of Stones” have been the idea of an unfinished story about a silent and ghostly past, allusions to trains and railways stations, a looming presence of colonial times at the background of the narrative and mentions of place names like Barich and Calcutta. I will now look at *The Calcutta Chromosome* and see how it tries to create an *imagined* history from the traces and mentions contained within the Tagore short story. Again, this discussion is contained within a closed discourse between the two literary works and takes into consideration the creation of an *imagined* history.

The Calcutta Chromosome

Published exactly a hundred years after Tagore wrote “The Hunger of Stones,” Ghosh’s novel *The Calcutta Chromosome* exhibits a strong intertextual resonance with the former. It records the silent history of the discovery of the vector for the malaria virus by a clandestine group of subalterns, which is quite dissimilar to the accepted accounts of the Nobel Prize winning Ronald Ross and his scientific find in his Calcutta laboratory. “The Hungry Stones” is like a platform on which Ghosh creates his “The Hunger of Stones”. Ghosh then proceeds to use the Tagore short story as a constituent of his fact assembly; it is part of the *archive* on which he retrieves his fictional facts and creates an imagined history through *The Calcutta Chromosome*.

The plot of the novel is a very complicated one. Murugan, an employee of a public health company Lifewatch, through the reading of a series of *traces* is convinced that the discovery of the Malaria parasite was led on by a secret society and not Ronald Ross, the British scientist who was awarded the Nobel Prize for Medicine in 1902 for his work on the life-cycle of the malaria parasite. Murugan had a theory that some person or a group had systematically interfered with Ross’s experiments to push his research in certain directions while leading it away from others (31). Murugan is introduced through his former colleague Antar, who comes across the remnants of his ID card on his computer screen. The novel weaves a circuitous narrative and tries to trace the story behind Murugan’s disappearance and his research on the counter-science group who had helped Ronald Ross with his discovery. There are incarnations and reincarnations of characters like Lakhaan/Lutchman/Ramen Halder and Mangala/Mrs Aratounian/Urmila/Tara, who are indelibly involved in Ross’s project. Juxtaposed with the fictional characters are historical figures like Ronald Ross and D.D. Cunningham. The narrative uses *mentions* and

traces which lead Murugan on with his search about the secret history behind the malaria vector discovery.

Murugan tries initially to publish articles proposing a Secret History of malaria research and is ridiculed by the academia for whom a historical narrative cannot exist around unrecorded events, which after all, are beyond the scope of the known and defy scientific methods. His revised article fared no better than the original. The new piece bore the unfortunate title “An Alternative Interpretation of Late 19th Century Malaria Research: Is There a Secret History?” It met with an even more hostile reception than the earlier version, and it only served to brand Murugan as a crank and an eccentric (31). The narrative of the novel from this point proceeds to elaborate the traces, mentions and archive on which Murugan manages to put together a history of the Calcutta chromosome.

The materiality of the historical process is present in the notes of Ronald Ross and more conspicuously in the physicality of his lab by P.G. Hospital in Calcutta. As Murugan discovers, the memorial arch in front of Ross’s lab states: “in the small laboratory 70 yards to the southeast of this gate Surgeon-Major Ronald Ross I.N.S. in 1898 discovered the manner in which malaria is conveyed by mosquitoes (34). This material presence lends credence to the accepted narrative about Ross’s great scientific discovery. His lab notes are part of the archive that creates the narrative. But for Murugan, the silences within the lab notes are the points where he finds traces for his *fictional* history about the discovery of the malaria virus. He tells Antar each and every minute detail about Ronald Ross’s research. He claims that he has tracked Ross for every one of the five hundred days from 1895 leading up to the discovery in 1898; he knows everything about Ross’s whereabouts during that time, which slides he looked at, what he actually saw, who was with him, and who was not with him. All the details he knows stems from Ross’s habit of writing

everything down. “You’ve got to remember: this guy’s decided he’s going to re-write the history books. He wants everyone to know the story like he’s going to tell it; he’s not about to leave any of it up for grabs, not a single minute if he can help it” (44).

An example of *tracing* in the novel occurs when Urmila is literally forced to buy fish from a young lower class peddler. The fish was wrapped in a plastic bag in which Urmila finds a xerox copy of a page from the Colonial Services Gazette dated January 12, 1898. The page contained eight columns each designating announcements on the transfers and other administrative moves involving British officers. As she is about to throw the paper into the waste bin, she notices that one of the announcements has been underlined in ink. The paper is a *trace* on which the underlined portion is a *mention* in the archive that leads to the *fictional* historical narrative in the story. Squinting at the page, Urmila reads, “Leave approved for Surgeon-Colonel D.D. Cunningham, Presidency General Hospital, Calcutta, January 10-15...” (148). The next page was quite puzzling as well as it contained the passenger list for “South-Western Railways” dated January 10, 1898 for Compartment 8. In the list, the name “C.C. Dunn” is underlined. The last page from the Colonial Services Gazette dated January 13, 1898 had another announcement underlined. It stated: “The public is notified that Surgeon-Colonel D.D. Cunningham is currently on leave pending his retirement. He will be replaced by Surgeon-Major Ronald Ross of the Indian Medical Service” (149).

Later on Murugan takes Urmila to Ronald Ross’s laboratory by P.G. Hospital and tells her that the person who had set up “one of the best equipped research laboratories in the whole of the Indian subcontinent (164)”, was Surgeon-Colonel D.D. Cunningham. Murugan informs Urmila about his *story* of how Surgeon-Colonel D.D. Cunningham had been thwarting Ronald Ross’s attempts at joining him in his state-of-the-art laboratory for more than a year, when

suddenly in January 1898, Cunningham handed in his resignation and left for England in a great but silent hurry. His departure resulted in the formal transfer of Ronald Ross to Calcutta.

Murugan conjectures that something must have happened to Cunningham that made him leave so suddenly. He looks at the date on the railway reservation chart and *traces* C.C. Dunn's travel to Madras. He had already known about a certain C.C. Dunn who was in Madras around that time but he had never connected him with D.D. Cunningham. But Urmila's paper became "the missing link" that tied it all together (168).

Murugan recounts to Urmila that he was trying to update the malaria *archive* at his place of work when he came across an interesting report on a localized epidemic thirty miles south of Alexandria in Egypt. He had always been puzzled by the report that the British health officer had submitted about the incident. It reminded him of a similar outbreak that had happened about twenty or more years back in Luxor. Piqued by curiosity, Murugan had posted some queries on some chat groups on the World Wide Web. One day he found an anonymous message that was an excerpt from a book written by a Czech psycho-linguist. It talked about one Countess Pongrácz who had disappeared in Egypt in the year 1950 near the hamlet where the above outbreak had happened. Murugan discovers that the same Countess Pongrácz was in India in January 1898 when she was just nineteen years old. An ardent "guru-gourmet", she was the most important disciple of a Finnish spiritualist named Mme Liisa Salminen and more importantly, "she noted down everything that happened to her guru" (171). From this mention of the Countess's notes, Murugan is led to the archival record of the night of January 12, 1898. It is noted by Pongrácz "that a portly ruddy-faced Englishman in his late fifties" (173) showed up in the assembly of the Spiritualists and introduced himself, finely and with some hesitation, as C.C. Dunn. Murugan affirms that as a witness, the Countess Pongrácz's accounts of the séances were

incoherent and sometimes would end up being a *mélange* of Eastern European languages. The corresponding representation of C.C. Dunn's experience at the *séance* leads the frightened Scotsman to flee India in a hurry.

Murugan contends that there were forces at work that pulled strings to get Cunningham out of India as he was regarded as the biggest obstacle to Ronald Ross's move to Calcutta. Consequently, he was also the greatest impediment to the solution of the malaria puzzle. His lab was the only one on the continent where Ross had a "snowflake's chance" of making any headway through the mystery of the virus. That is why Cunningham was forced to leave India and Urmila's "fish wrappings" coaxed Murugan to "pull it all together" (178). Thus we have seen how the traces and mentions left by the counter-science group leads to the creation of an archive of meanings for Murugan. This cluster of meanings made Murugan concoct his narrative. The silences that entered at the source of Murugan's narrative chose the selection of evidence through the inclusion and exclusion of meanings and created the archive on which Murugan's history, or retrospective significance, of the malaria puzzle is accomplished. But he himself was a part of the whole "malaria puzzle" as he was led on his search by sign postings throughout the different stages of his *fact* finding. Power had led entered his tracking of the *real* history behind Ronald Ross's discovery, and just like the latter was moved into a particular direction with his scientific research, Murugan too is driven towards his "crossing" which ends with him realizing the whole scheme of events at the end: "That's just the problem", said Murugan, "My part in this was to tie some threads together so that they could hand the whole package over in a neat little bundle sometime in the future, to whoever it is they're waiting for" (253).

This is the right time to dwell on what Tabish Khair has termed the issue of subaltern agency in the novel. In his essay, "Amitav Ghosh's *The Calcutta Chromosome*: The Question of

Subaltern Agency”, Khair talks about the colonizer’s failure to grasp the rationality behind the subaltern’s *agency* to create a counter-science. He uses the word *agency* as the capacity of a subject who situated in a particular discourse to act with a certain degree of freedom from the control of another subject who is located in another specific discourse (144). He therefore separates the discourses of the colonizer’s with the subalterns and attributes the success of the creation of the narrative of the latter through this very difference. He states that Ross and Cunningham fail to discover the Calcutta chromosome but Mangala and Lutchman are able to do so because of the failure of the colonizer’s concept of rationality in understanding the colonial subaltern.

Lutchman and Abdul Kadir walk into Ross’s life to help him with his experiments. In fact it was Lutchman, the dhooley-bearer, who plants the idea into the scientist’s head that the malaria virus was transmitted by a single species of mosquito. Ross never sees the manipulations of his experiments as he is emblematic of the Eurocentric history that could not comprehend the idea of a subaltern power putting the silence into Europe’s history about India. As Murugan observes: “He thinks he’s doing experiments on the malaria parasite. And all the time it’s he who *is* the experiment on the malaria parasite. But Ronnie never gets it; not to the end of his life (67)”. The Eurocentric issue was the purveyor of any and all definitions on India and as Khair states, the colonial discourse about India’s lack of history was not just the result of alienation but also a justification of the Raj’s presence in India (153).

The above situation draws a parallel with Trouillot’s inference about how Western epistemology had viewed the Haitian revolution to be a non-occurrence. It was impossible for Eurocentric epistemology to believe in the traces that might lead up to a comprehension of an

actual revolution by slaves in Haiti. He attributes the failure to a process of systematic archiving that ultimately made the revolution vanish from the pages of Western history narratives.

Speaking about the unfathomable organizing prowess of the invisible subalterns, Murugan tells Urmila:

Fact is we're dealing with a crowd for whom silence is a religion. We don't even know what we don't know. We don't know who's in this and who's not; we don't know how much of the spin they've got under control. We don't know how many of the threads they want us to pull together and how many they want to keep hanging for whoever comes next. (180)

According to Murugan's theory, the people behind the discovery of the mosquito as the vector of transmission of malaria is an organized group; Murugan uses the word "crowd," as in a crowd it is very hard to differentiate between the faces and the people. A crowd is present in a cluster, seemingly incoherent and disorganized and hence is easily different from a group which can be smaller, more coherent and most importantly, mostly systematized. However, the crowd here is organized as well and they are essentially a group though their discursive presence cannot be catalogued by the dominating ideologies as they fail to distinguish their comprehensible actuality. The sentence – "we don't even know what we don't know"—is the gist of argument he introduces to Urmila. The entities within the palace in "The Hunger of Stones" are ghostly because ghosts are like traces and have recorded past and can be quantified and actualized by the known dimensions of history. Similarly, these people for whom "silence is a religion," do not exist to the "normal" public as their past and present are not documented. They are organized, powerful and manipulative. Their power stems from their invisibility. They are not just the marginal people who are caught at the periphery of the dominant center; instead they are the ones

who are at the center of a discursive index from which the circle is drawn. They allow the circle to be drawn in such a way so as to make them seem like marginal. Thus the very idea of them being puppeteers of a more dominant discourse is not subversive, but ridiculous. People at the supposed center of the power circle are not aware of their dominating presence. The very fact that Murugan can see through their veil and un-recordedness, is again a thread *they* let loose to move their puppet (Murugan) to the place and position they want him to be at. The ending of the novel proves that Murugan's conscious attempt to publicize their authenticity was itself a ploy governed from the outset. The same can be said about how Urmila is led to meet Murugan (where she is manipulated by the young fish vendor) and consequently to the body transcendence that occurs between her and Mangala. Murugan says:

Now let's take this one step further. If you did believe this, it would follow that if you wanted to create a specific kind of change, or mutation, one of the ways in which you could get there, is by allowing certain things to be known. You'd have to be very careful in how you did it, because the experiment wouldn't work until it led to a genuine discovery of some kind. It wouldn't work, for instance, if you picked someone out of a crowd and said: "Yo here's a two and here's another; add them up and what do you get?" That wouldn't be a real discovery because the answer would be known already. So what you would have to do is to push your guinea-pigs in the right direction and wait for them to get there on their own.

(179-180)

The narrative here is basically proposing a counter-science as the foundation of conventional science and progress. If science is premised on making things known through a method of hypothesis, experimentation and conclusion, the counter-science is cloaked in silence. The

success of Mangala's venture hinges on making Murugan the guinea-pig, just like Ronald Ross was part of the process before. Malaria, the medical scourge of the tropics and also an impediment to the Empire, had killed thousands through the ages. In the 19th century, the disease was researched by scientific minds in Europe, eager to establish the vector of contagion, ultimately yielding the prestigious Nobel Prize to Ronald Ross, who was assisted in his discovery by Mangala and the marginal men who worked with her. During his conversation with Antar, Murugan spells out the long history of malaria. It has been a plague on the human population from the dawn of civilization and across the globe, in the Arctic Circle, freezing mountaintops, deserts and is a master of disguise, the difficulty in its diagnosis has been aided by its penchant to imitate the symptoms of various other ailments (47). Murugan names the upper echelons of the European scientific community of the era who were involved with malaria research. Laveran, Robert Koch, Danilewsky and Romanowsky, W.G. MacCullum, Bignami, Celli, Golgi, Marchiafava, Kennan, Nott, Canalis, Beauperthy (48-49)—all of them were attracted towards discovering a solution against this medical menace. But it was Ronald Ross who ultimately discovered the real cause of the disease in colonial India. The narrative depicts the complex path that lead Ross to make his scientific discovery. However, this discovery was essentially the product of an alternative imperceptible set of actions, orchestrated by Mangala and carried out by her and her crew.

Doc Manson wants to get the malaria prize—for Britain, he says, for the Empire: fuck those krauts and frogs and wops and yanks.....he's looking for someone to carry the torch for Queen and Empire. Guess who walks in? Ronnie Ross. (59)

The top prize for the mighty Empire was won by the marginal people, working behind common sight, in secrecy and all the time playing the role of puppeteers, pulling the threads of history

where their appearance is silenced by a selective archiving, where it is them (power) who enters the process at the source and selects the constituents of its archive. When Antar asks for proof, Murugan replies: "...secrecy is what this is about: it figures there wouldn't be any evidence or proof" (87).

The trope of *silence*, much akin to the Tagore short story, has a strong presence in the *Calcutta Chromosome*. The very first time the reader is introduced to Phulboni, he is seen giving a public lecture.

Mistaken are those who imagine that silence is without life; that it is inanimate, without either spirit or voice. It is not: indeed 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. (24)

The silence here is not inanimate, and has both voice and spirit. It is not nothingness, but rather something that evades conventional perception and is transcendent. It also has a place and can be heard. The Word is the precursor to this silence and the silence cannot exist without it just like in order to comprehend the "truth", the mind needs to function. So the Word is the power that puts silence in the discourse. This motif is drawn upon through the character of Phulboni at various times in the novel. Later on during the same speech he says:

The silence of the city...has sustained me through all my years of writing: kept me alive in the hope that it would claim me too before my ink ran dry. For more years than I can count I have wandered the darkness of these streets, searching for the unseen presence that reigns over this silence, striving to be taken in, begging to be taken across before my time runs out. The time of the crossing is at hand, I know, and that is why I am here now, standing in front of you: to beg—to appeal

to the mistress of this silence, that most secret of deities, to give me what she so long denied: to show herself to me (27).

The mistress of the silence is Word, or power. Power has created the silence at the very source of the narrative of the Malaria virus discovery. It has also led to the selective operations behind the creation of the archive (something I visit later on) behind the discovery.

Elsewhere Phulboni says:

For more years than I can count I have walked the innermost streets of this most secret of cities, looking always to find her who has so long eluded me: Silence herself. I see signs of her presence everywhere I go, in images, words, glances, but only signs, nothing more.....I have tried, as hard as ever a man has to find my way to her, to throw myself before her, to join the secret circle that attends her, to take the dust of her heels to my head. By every means available, I have sought her, the ineluctable, ever-elusive mistress of the unspoken, wooed her, courted her, begged to join the circle of her initiates, (104)

The images, words and signs are the *traces* that the alternative historical narrative of the Word has left behind. It is the collection of materials through which Phulboni can comprehend its narrative. The mistress of this silence is inescapable because of her material presence, yet, elusive and unseen by him. Her power lies in this invisibility which makes her inscrutable under the gaze of eyes emanating from the co-ordinates of knowledge production outside. She is always on the inside, looking out, unfathomable from the outside. The invocation of the image of a deity is brought as textual references at various points of the narrative. Murugan unearths an image of this deity when he tries to escape the gaze of the toothless young boy (36) and also when D. Cunningham seeks the help of Madame Salminen (173-176). When Cunningham has

the supernatural exorcist like moment, Madame Salminen says that he is beyond any help: “There is nothing I can do: the Silence has come to claim him” (176). The invocation here is to the Valentinian cosmology, in which the most powerful deities were Abyss and the Silence.¹⁵

The insinuation of silence as a method or a part of a gnostic reverence and culture is symbolic of the workings of the subalterns as they try to manipulate their all-pervasive invisible cloak in order to create a discourse in hiding. The malaria research topic as mentioned in the narrative is supposedly one example of it. There is no specific count to refer to the exact positions and cases these manipulations have conducted themselves. The accounts of men of power like Grigson, Cunningham and Farley, who were forced to make way for their experiments to be successful bear testimony to the efficacy of their vision. People like Mangala, Lutchman, Abdul Kadir simply did not exist to the outside world as a threat and hence were invincible due to being invisible.

And isn't that the scariest thing there is Ant? To hear something said, and not to know who's saying it? Not to know who's speaking? For if you don't know who's saying something, you don't know why they're saying it either (91).

The reference here to unknown voices and sounds, again, is a testimony of the aforementioned undocumented-ness; unless the Empire knows the speaker, it is impossible for it to identify the resistant ideology. There is speech, but there is no identifiable speaker; the speaker is not recognized. The subaltern cannot speak because the subaltern supposedly has no access to recognizable discourse. Mangala's discourse or counter-discourse is not recognizable or audible

¹⁵ See Dunderberg, Ismo O. *Beyond Gnosticism: Myth, Lifestyle and Society in the School of Valentinus*. New York: Columbia University Press. 2008.

to the imperial scientists as their systematic archiving about Mangala (who is symbolic of the subalterns) creates a narrative that makes the Western historiography oblivious to their discursive credence.

Further manipulation of the archive is proven by the disappearance of Farley's notes. Murugan is initially able to track down some notes of Farley, who he claims, had the penchant for jotting down every little thing in his diary. But when he goes back to the library to retrieve the letter, it cannot be found.

The trouble is, Farley's letter was uncatalogued, and I only saw it that one time. I put it back, and filled out a form asking for permission to Xerox it. But it wasn't there the next time I looked. The librarian wouldn't believe me, because it wasn't on the catalogues. I've never been able to find it again, so strictly speaking I still don't have my smoking gun (101).

The un-documenting as revealed in the above lines suggest an omniscient presence of a watchful eye, which, since it is uncatalogued, does not "really" exist. On the other hand Murugan comes to know about Grigson's near death encounter with Lutchman because of the notes that Grigson used to keep about his daily lives. The archive of Grigson's notes are not made to disappear by the counter-science group as it steers Murugan towards a direction of *their* choice.

The narrative speculates whether the actual goal of the subaltern "scientists" was to get a cure for malaria. According to Murugan what they really wanted was to attain immortality through the act of transmigration of soul from one body to another. He gives a long medical harangue to Urmila about a possible existence of a special chromosome in the rarest of cases which might make this possible. He also articulates why people like Mangala were at a more advantageous position to seek a solution for the aforementioned miracle.

One of the reasons why the Calcutta chromosome can't be found by normal methods is because, unlike the standard chromosomes, it isn't present in every cell. Or if it is, it's so deeply encrypted that our current techniques can't isolate it.....Let me put it like this: if there really is such a thing as the Calcutta chromosome only a person like Mangala, someone who's completely out of the loop, scientifically speaking, would be able to find it—even if she didn't know what it was and didn't have a name for it. (206-207)

Thus in order to discover an unscientific Calcutta chromosome, western medical ideology has to be forsaken. It is not possible to tabulate and capture the resonance of a discovery whose roots are not in the medical science discourse. But for an entity like Mangala or Laakhan, who are outside the domain of known science, it does have a possibility as their wisdom stems from a knowledge which cannot be inferred and categorized by known scientific principles. Their very existence as a purveyor of this knowledge transcends the limits of imperial science and even the effects of imperial domination which are passing and inconsequential relative to Managala's metaphysics. . Or to take this one step further, the Empire cannot resist them as their story is not worthy enough to be in the Western archives. Ironically the meaning conveyed in the systematic production of the archive leads to a belief that the Empire is allowed to exist because it is a gargantuan guinea-pig at the hands of these practitioners of secrecy.

Using Trouillot's terms, the narrative of *The Calcutta Chromosome* undermines the historical production of the discovery of the malaria virus. It introduces a silence directly at the source or the moment of fact creation. The silence allows the trace of scientific and colonial discourses about Ronald Ross's discovery. So instead of tracing and silencing a counter discourse, the narrative here silences itself and hence enables the tracing and mentions of Ross's

discovery. The “unrecorded history” here means the very silencing aperture that comes into play at the onset of the creation of *facts* surrounding Ross’s legacy. The *agents* (using Trouillot’s meaning of this term) of this silencing are the subalterns involved in the creation of the narrative.

Apart from the obvious use of the *silence* motif there are some other fascinating intertextual elements between “The Hunger of Stones” and *The Calcutta Chromosome* as regards to names of places and the local histories. As mentioned previously, “The Hunger of Stones” starts with the narrator and his friend meeting a stranger on a train to Calcutta. This motif of the railways feature prominently the narrative of *The Calcutta Chromosome* as well. The railway station is where Mangala is found and Mrs. Aratounian leaves a note that she was going to catch a train at eight thirty to Renupur from Sealdah. Grigson follows Lutchman’s railway signal lamp and is trapped on a bridge with a speeding locomotive heading towards him. In the last half seconds he jumps and the fenders miss him by a fraction of an inch. Phulboni takes the train to Renupur and has his fantastic near-death encounter by the railway tracks.

The stranger in the Tagore short story remains unnamed throughout the narrative. However, we are told that he was employed by the Nizam of Hyderabad’s government and was posted as a cotton revenue collector in a town called Barich. It is also revealed that Barich was situated near the Aravalli mountains and that the river Shusta flowed through it. Extensive research had led me to believe that there was no town called Barich under the Nizam government’s jurisdiction. Keeping the Aravallis in mind, if one follows the map of both the 19th century and present South Asia, there has never been a river named Shusta which trudged through the Aravallis. Keeping the geographical locale in mind a reading of Indian history will also reveal that Mahmud Shah II was a Sultan belonging to the Muzaffarid Dynasty of Gujarat, and a study of the map of that period indicates the Aravallis to be quite a distance away from his

kingdom. Although Tagore's story refers to his palace as simply a house of pleasure and it need not have been constructed within his political domain per se. Evidently, the above inferences reveal fictitious elements in the place names, or in context of the story, undocumented place names within the domain of the Empire.

The Calcutta Chromosome, interestingly enough, charts a geographical map emanating from the Tagore story. Phulboni gets his first job in the remote provincial town of Renupur. It is the same town where Farley is supposedly murdered. The town boasted of a tiny railway station. We are also told, that a train connecting Calcutta to the cotton market of *Barich* passed through it every other day.

As the crow flies, Renupur was no more than three hundred miles from Calcutta but the journey was a slow and rather tedious one, meandering as it did through Darbhanga and a wide swathe of the great Maithil plains.....Indeed, the station of Renupur owed its existence more to the demands of engineering than to the requirements of the local population....it was really little more than a signboard and a platform attached to a siding.....The station was the smallest Phulboni had ever seen, smaller than those tiny village stations...(212-215).

Darbhangha, a town in northern part of the Indian state of Bihar, gives a current geographical credibility to Renupur. The reference to Barich and its cotton market is a direct allusion to "The Hunger for Stones." The narrative has already informed us at this point that Reverend Farley used to live for a time in Barich, "in the eastern foothills of the Himalayas" (114). There is a river called Shasta in Nepal, at the foothills of the Himalayas so to speak, though not on the eastern part. The description of the desolate and tiny station in Renupur again draws a resonance with my discussion of the station in the Tagore story. The reader is told categorically that Renupur is

connected to Calcutta by an occasional train every other day. One can only speculate as to the railway junction Tagore had brought forth in his narrative; but to Ghosh, the importance of this forced allusion is in keeping with the open admission on his part about the influence “The Hunger of Stones” has had on his novel. As one reads through Phulboni’s adventures at night in the deserted railway station, the mind can very well veer off to the station of Tagore, or even the station in the remote part of Tanzania where Sankar is employed in *Chader Pahar*.

In conclusion, in this chapter I have tried to show how silence works through history. I have then explored “The Hunger of Stones” as part of a larger archive for *The Calcutta Chromosome*’s narrative in a closed discourse. I have also tried to show the method by which the Ghosh novel tries to create a fictional counter history to the dominant scientific and colonial historiography. Murugan dwells into the existing archive of the malaria case study to create a meaning which is changed by the involvement of the subaltern’s discourse; he also determines his own retrospective significance of the scientific discourse, which creates a new meaning for his fictional history about Ronald Ross’s discovery. Ghosh also uses the motifs of silence, railways, and place names from the Tagore story, which acts as a physical material trace for his narrative.

CHAPTER 2: TAGORE IN GHOSH: THE HUNGRY TIDE OF IMPORTED POLITICS

Introduction

This chapter is divided into two connected parts. In the first part, I will look at Rabindranath Tagore's critique of the Indian pre-independence nationalist movement. I will discuss how he represents his political positions, the education system and the social aspects of life in the Indian villages. I will then proceed to read his novel *Ghare Baire* in the aftermath of the swadeshi movement in Bengal. The second half of this chapter is focused on a more detailed textual analysis of Amitav Ghosh's novel *The Hungry Tide*. Through these two sections, I will try to show how the Ghosh novel can be read along the lines of Tagore's warnings about the inevitable violence of postcolonial India's imported political principles. This failure is located through the social fabric of the Sundarbans culminating in the massacre at Marichjhapi. I will also try to highlight the treatment of the history of the Sundarbans and the Marichjhapi massacre within the novel's narrative by asserting that the emplotment of its characters give a credence to the filling up of the historical vacuum surrounding the region and its vagaries.

While revisiting Tagore through a text like Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*, the social Tagore cannot be felt outside the domain of the political. It is both the political and the social, which have molded the importance of Tagore in a discussion of the Indian anti-colonial nationalist movement. However, Tagore was never a prominent political figure as such. He was a cultural icon whose literary achievements made him a public figurehead. While Gandhi was *Bapu* or the father of the Nation, Tagore was the *Gurudev*.

“Our real problem in *India* is not political. It is social.”¹⁶

The idea of an Indian nationalism reached its zenith during the four decades leading up to the country's independence from Britain in 1947. Apart from the obvious pro-nationalist and anti-British vantage point there was a second school of thought, something which Ashis Nandy calls, the civilizational process, which in a way looked at the idea of nationalism as an essentially Western import and an offshoot of global capitalism (6). For these thinkers, nationalism, which they thought was rooted in Western medievalism (Nandy's term) and was a pathological purveyor of homogenization, was a misnomer when it came to a practical implication towards the socio-cultural motifs inherent in an undivided South Asia. According to Nandy the most powerful architect of this school of thought was India's first Nobel Laureate Rabindranath Tagore. Tagore's arguments mostly adhered to the pluralistic cultural traits the subcontinent had always exhibited in its modern era and for him the opposition to the import of Western nationalism had to be based on the realization of the diverse yet intrinsic concepts of tolerance within the myriad differences of India's classes, castes and cultures. Tagore's theses on contemporary Indian nationalism and politics should be read with his critique of the education system and the unique case of India's diverse society, which for him, had only a pluralistic socio-political solution.

For India, Tagore thought that this mode of imported nationalism, which did not take into consideration the inherent diversity of India, and tried to foster a non-pragmatic unity of culture through politics, would be a failure. He is skeptical about the intrinsic violence inherent within

¹⁶ Tagore., *Nationalism*, p 102.

the British mode of nationalism; he regards it to be lacking in humane traits, which will subject the diverse populace of India to the same quest for inhumane and violent nationalism that they have so strongly been fighting against. In his book *Nationalism* (written during the time of World War 1), Tagore states true emancipation from the British yoke will not come from political freedom alone. He fears that Indian nationalism is aiming first and foremost towards political freedom and will soon emulate the machinations with which people will be able to control other humans based on their economic needs.

Those people who have got their political freedom are not necessarily free, they are merely powerful. The passions which are unbridled in them are creating huge organizations of slavery in disguise of freedom. (73)

He regards this violent and menacing nationalism as another avatar for imperialism that robs the society of civility and the freedom to take part in their cultural diversity. For Tagore this kind of a stance subjected the society to be a pawn in the hands of nationalist politics, which he states, is not for India. Later on in the same essay he writes:

It is the aspect of a whole people as an organized power. This organization incessantly keeps up the insistence of the population on becoming strong and efficient. But this strenuous effort after strength and efficiency drains man's energy from his higher nature where he is self-sacrificing and creative. For thereby man's power of sacrifice is diverted from his ultimate object, which is moral, to the maintenance of this organization, which is mechanical. Yet in this he feels all the satisfaction of moral exaltation and therefore becomes supremely dangerous to humanity. He feels relieved of the urging of his conscience when he

can transfer his responsibility to this machine which is the creation of his intellect and not of his complete moral personality. (107)

Western nationalism for Tagore is like a machine, bereft of any higher moral ground and absolves man from his humane responsibilities. It is an organized power whose main goal is to become stronger. It is a construct of the intellect without the soul where the nuances of India's social fabric will get lost under the principles of a uniformly imposed automated organization built around power and economic profit. It is a process, which creates mechanical beings that place the nation above the moral code of humanity. He warns that successful nationalism is innately selfish and breeds selfishness within the nation that is manifested through its commercial possessions and territorial expansions (31). In "The Call of Truth," Tagore writes that alien government in India is like a chameleon which can change skin very easily. What is most disturbing however is that he seems to forebode a postcolonial situation where the colonizer is replaced by India's own government as a practicing mechanical locomotive of forced nationalism.

Today it is seen in the guise of the Englishman, tomorrow it may take the form of some other foreigner, and the following day, its malignity unabated, it will bear the semblance of our own countryman. We may try to hunt down the monster of alien rule with lethal weapons, but it will baffle us every time by changing its skin and complexion. (254)

In another one of his essays, "Nakaler Nakal," Tagore talks about the limitations of imitating the European style and culture as it is after all an imitation. The only way to foster an Indian nation is not through imitation but through the exploration of the internal and not the external (European). Thus, the problem of India cannot be solved with politics according to

Tagore. It can only be solved with society or *samaj*. Michael Collins in his essay “Tagore, Gandhi and the National Question”, highlights the contrast that Tagore brings forth in his writings between politics and society. It is true that Tagore tries to replace the ideology of the nation with the concept of a *swadeshi samaj*. Society for Tagore has no concealed motive like the nation-state; “it is a spontaneous self-expression of man as a social being. In order to explain the native spiritual positions inherent in the Indian society, Tagore delves deep into the Hindu *Upanishads* and also the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* to talk about the importance of a brotherly communion through a spiritual bond of an order higher than petty politics of the nation.

The threat of a foreign designed education system is a germane breeding ground for imported thoughts. Tagore discusses the vagaries of a forced education in the *samaj*.

....it is my conviction that my countrymen will gain truly their India by fighting against that education which teaches them that a country is greater than the ideals of humanity.¹⁷

This imported education leads to imitation. Imitation leads to a false ideology, which in turn curbs the spiritual progress of the society.

In his letter to Myron Phelps, dated 4th January 1909, Tagore writes, “One need not dive deep, it seems to me, to discover the problem of India; it is so plainly evident on the surface. Our country is divided by numberless differences – physical, social, linguistic, religious; and this obvious fact must be taken into account in any course, which is destined to lead us into our own place among the nations who are building up the history of man. The trite maxim ‘History

¹⁷ *Nationalism* p.105

repeats itself” is like most other sayings but half the truth. The conditions which have prevailed in India from a remote antiquity have guided its history along a particular channel, which does not and cannot coincide with the lines of evolution taken by other countries under different sets of influences”¹⁸. Tagore gives instances of political changes in the American colonies and in the 18th century France, but adds that in India there is a melee of deep-seated social forces and complex internal reactions which is caused by an intricate juxtaposition of race, ideas, and religions. For lack of a better term, Tagore regards this juxtaposition as the race problem of India. This *great burden of heterogeneity* can lead to the evolution of a *great synthesis*.¹⁹

During his presidential address in the 1908 Bengal Provincial Conference held in Pabna (now in Bangladesh), Tagore talked about re-shaping India’s education system to suit the social and spiritual needs of Indians. He suggests that the system should be built through and around the very innateness of Indian history and society. In many of Tagore’s essays he argues for a reconditioned education system in India, removed from the model that the British had placed in practice during the colonial era.

The educated Indian at present is trying to absorb some lessons from history contrary to the lessons of our ancestors. The East, in fact, is attempting to take unto itself a history which is not the outcome of its own living. Japan, for example, thinks she is getting powerful through adopting Western methods, but, after she has exhausted her inheritance, only the borrowed weapons of civilization will remain to her. She will not have developed herself from within. Europe has

¹⁸ *Oxford India Tagore* p.255

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p258.

her past. Europe's strength therefore lies in her history. We, in India, must make up our minds that we cannot borrow other people's history, and that if we stifle our own, we are committing suicide. When you borrow things that do not belong to your life, they only serve to crush your life. And therefore I believe that it does India no good to compete with Western civilization in its own field. But we shall be more than compensated if, in spite of the insults heaped upon us, we follow our own destiny (276).

Tagore categorically separates Indianness from Westernness. He looks back at the colonial era and reminds the audience that it is only fleeting. In the long scheme of Indian history and culture, the intrusions and inclusions of Western ideologies must not be accepted without understanding the complications of the assimilation. It is imperative for the Indians to accept the lessons of their own history and not be prejudiced and disillusioned by the encroachment of foreign ideals. Western civilization is built on tenets that are only commensurate with its own history. If India needs to fight the British using the same ideologies that have been forced upon them it will only be a losing effort. The strength of Indian resistance has to be derived from the lessons learnt in the avenues of South Asian cultural locations. A blind embrace of British induced education system will never allow Indians to realize the force of their cultural resistance. In order to escape this false education, Indians have to delve into their own past and present. India's present can be fathomed only when one looks at the conditions and societies of the villages. Tagore goes on to say that India lives in its villages and the only way the country can truly prosper and evolve into a world power is through a steady improvement in the living conditions of rural India, something which he explores with clarity in his novel *Ghare Baire* (The Home and the World); the novel

visits the problems of the imported concept of nationalistic revolution in the villages and the concomitant problems arising from it.

As Amiya Chakravarty writes, Tagore was against any ideas and ideals that displayed any tendencies of foreign encroachment and exploitation. He emphatically condemned any nationalism that was pompous or aggressive (181). Tagore was one of the more important leaders of the Swadeshi movement at its onset. He was the principal figure who had instigated the common people to wear *Rakhi* in protest against the Partition of Bengal in 1905²⁰. In an essay entitled- “Swadeshi Samaj”- Tagore discussed the avenues through which India could become a self-reliant and independent nation and thus nurture its talents and growth in ways to provide its inhabitants the highest level of intellectual and moral satisfaction (A. Chakravarty 181). But as the Swadeshi movement took a turn for a violent subjugation of morality in the form of forced participation, exaction of dues and strict nationalist rituals, Tagore gradually removed himself from its fringes and thereafter became one of the sharpest critiques of the movement which he had helped immensely to take shape (S. Ghosh 83). His objection lay in the appropriation of the moral, social and intellectual rubrics of the anti-imperialist movement by something, which he came to regard as *radical nationalism* that did not take into consideration the needs of the common mass but was besotted by corrupt ideals and greed much of which was situated on Western ideals. For him the salvation of India’s social problem lay in the foundation of the groundwork that will create a better life for the political periphery, or namely the innumerable villages of India.

²⁰ Further reading on Bengal Partition see Joya Chatterji. *Bengal Divided*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.

In his book, *The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal 1903-1908*, Sumit Sarkar states that the Swadeshi movement was brought to a “halt primarily by internal weaknesses, and particularly by the failure to close the age-old gap between the bhadralok and the masses. The real Achilles' heel of the movement was its lack of a peasant programme, its inability to mobilise the peasants on issues and through idioms which could have had a direct appeal for them (75).” Michael Sprinker states that “extremists’ failure derived from their inappropriately importing Western political ideals into the Indian context; it lay above all in their incapacity to grasp the solidity and perdurance of the caste system, in India (111).” Tagore himself asserted that peasants were being forced to buy expensive and inferior goods and to face colonial oppression for a cause that might seem alien and nebulous to them. And they were subjected to this torture by the Hindu elites “who had treated them so long with contemptuous indifference or at best with condescension. Peasant apathy could not be broken by eloquent speeches, articles, and songs on brotherhood and common devotion to the motherland, however sincere (79)”. Sarkar cites a letter that was printed by *Bande Mataram* on 17 May 1907 where Hindu-Muslim struggle is described as being between “the ignorant multitude and the educated few...the low class Mohomedans represent manual labour and the Hindus with a sprinkling of higher class Mohomedans represent capital” (81).

Sarkar identifies important changes in Tagore following the 1907 riots. He openly acknowledged that the root of the problem lay in the practice of old Hindu social tradition where the Muslims are looked upon as inferior in status. Secondly, he urged that people not get moved by the oratorical rhetoric of the Swadeshis as that does not take into consideration the vast ocean of difference that lies between the educated elites and the socially downtrodden Muslims and

Hindus. He also spoke against the social ostracism that was being practiced against the poor farmers when Swadeshi ideas were not embraced by them.

The alternative which Rabindranath puts forward is, as before, patient, sustained, unostentatious constructive work in the villages—organising associations, introducing cooperative techniques in agriculture and handicrafts, instilling a sense of unity and self-reliance among the raiyats, so that national consciousness really reaches out to the masses (84).

Tagore urged people from all sections of the society and from all religions to come together and do constructive welfare work. He visualized this mass contact approach as the key to fostering a united and non-violent movement against the Bengal Partition. Sarkar asserts that the extremists also believed in the mass contact approach but wanted to achieve it through lofty “rhetorics, songs and festivals” (84). The Swadeshi riots made Tagore re-think some of his earlier thought processes. He broke away from extolling the glorious Hindu past and insisted on eradicating all sectarian divisions and building “of a Mahajati in India on the basis of a broad humanism” (85). Sarkar states that this anti-traditionalist stance could be found in virtually all of Tagore’s post-Swadeshi writings. The implication of this new thought would lead Tagore to disband many of his previously stated Hindu traditionalist thoughts.

Thus from that time Tagore’s literary efforts were partly directed against this fanatical manifestation of a desired freedom which he felt was not commensurate with the ancient and diverse civilization that was India. One serious example of this effort is the much read and quoted novel *Ghare Baire* (The Home and the World). In this novel whose locale is *muffasal* (countryside) we see Bimala, a simple housewife and her husband, Nikhilesh, the wealthy and morally upright landlord living a harmonious existence with their Muslim and Hindu subjects before Sandip, Nikhilesh’s close friend, a radical Swadesi enters the fray. Their peaceful life is

changed drastically upon Sandip's introduction; a powerful orator whose ideological views on nationalism is molded on militant principles, Sandip destroys the seemingly unquestioned *mita* (friendship) between the local populace with his radical demands on the poor Muslim peasants of the village. Bimala, swayed by Sandip's "vision", at first is horrified at the communal carnage which subsequently arises from his actions. The moderate and morally upright husband Nikhilesh, realizes that the Swadeshi sanctions will only have an adverse effect on the local poor Muslim traders and will only lead to communal unrest. At the end of the novel he eventually dies in order to pacify a communal carnage which arose out of the seed planted by Sandip's nationalist rhetoric. Tagore's main point if it could be summed up in a few lines was that Indian nationalism which does not take into consideration the communal differences would lead to a blurring of the border between nationalism and communalism in the long run. As Nandy also highlights, *Ghare Baire* additionally, offers a unique perspective on the nature that anti-imperialist politics should take in a multi-ethnic, multi-religious country like India where the colonial economic policies have encouraged the growth of a complex set of dependencies. In this social system, the downtrodden and political periphery might be dependent more on the colonial system for their well-being and economic sustenance than the privileged and the powerful. In such a social system, any nationalism, which forcefully advocates a uniform position against colonialism, will only lead to unequal sacrifices and hardships for the poorer and the weaker that will further produce sharp divisions in the social fabric of the country even if it eventually leads to a successful decolonization movement (19).

For Tagore, the task of creating a successful Indian society had to start from the village. In *City and Village*, Tagore writes:

...the task that lies before us today is to make whole the broken-up communal life, to harmonize the divergence between village and town, between the classes and the masses, between pride of power and spirit of comradeship. Those who rely on revolution, seek to curtail truth in order to make it easy. When thereafter enjoyment, they shun renunciation; when they incline to renunciation, they would banish enjoyment from the land and subdue man's mind by cramping it. What we, of Visva-Bharati, say, is that the nature of man is but deprived if truth be not offered to him in its wholeness, and from such deprivation comes his disease and his despair²¹.

The above quotation summarizes some important tenets in Tagore's thoughts. He places great importance on the repair of the "broken-up" communal life by seeking less distancing between the different classes. The words are directed mostly at the division of class inherent between contemporary India's cities and villages. The barrier of class, caste, and social status are the hurdles placed by the man's love for power. Nowhere is this more manifest than in the villages. In the aftermath of Swadeshi movement, Tagore visits the problematization of village communal life with his rendition of *Ghare Baire*.

Tagore's *Ghare Baire* elaborates its narrative during the height of the *Swadeshi* movement in Bengal. Sandip is introduced as a flamboyant character, dexterous in oratory skills and has a natural knack of moving people to fit his own cause. The flame of the *Swadeshi* had

²¹ Oxford India Tagore., p.272.

already started to spread through Bengal even before his arrival. Bimala notes the engulfing fire of the idea:

One day there came the new era of Swadeshi in Bengal; but as to how it happened, we had no distinct vision. There was no gradual slope connecting the past with the present. For that reason, I imagine, the new epoch came in like a flood, breaking down the dykes and sweeping all our prudence and fear before it. We had no time even to think about, or understand, what had happened, or what was about to happen.

My sight and my mind, my hopes and my desires, became red with the passion of this new age. Though, up to this time, the walls of the home—which was the ultimate world to my mind—remained unbroken, yet I stood looking over into the distance, and I heard a voice from the far horizon, whose meaning was not perfectly clear to me, but whose call went straight to my heart. (26)

The ambivalence about the idea has to be noted; full of zest and fire, involving the common masses in sweeping gestures, the concept however was inherently alien. It brought about a rupture between “the past and the present”. It is symbolic of the estrangement from India’s history and social milieu that Tagore had warned would eventually happen if India followed in the political footsteps of the British. The “new epoch” came in like a flood and broke down the dykes and swept away the prudence of the people. Flood is powerful and it is severely destructive when it goes out of control. The breaking of the dykes and the impairment of prudence signifies the very facets of the Swadeshi movement that had alienated Tagore from it. Indian nationalism was the flood Tagore had warned about that will create an eventual and long

lasting chaos. The initial euphoria will be the result of the rhetorical appeal and the involvement of the masses which will not give people “time to think” and comprehend about “what was about to happen”. This blindness will rob the people off their senses (“sight and mind”), while the immediate passionate zeal will make them unsure about what lay in the “far horizon”. The “new” ideas, “new” epoch, “new” times will cut the voices of the future and past from the present.

Common folks like Bimala like the idea yet is unsure about the logistics involved. Nikhil, the moral index of the story, dismisses the fire within the idea as *destructive excitement*. Sandip however convinces the unsuspecting, including Bimala, with his fiery rhetoric.

When, however, Sandip Babu began to speak that afternoon, and the hearts of the crowd swayed and surged to his words, as though they would break all bounds, I saw him wonderfully transformed. Especially when his features were suddenly lit up by a shaft of light from the slowly setting sun, as it sunk below the roof-line of the pavilion, he seemed to me to be marked out by the gods as their messenger to mortal men and women.

From beginning to end of his speech, each one of his utterances was a stormy outburst. There was no limit to the confidence of his assurance. I do not know how it happened, but I found I had impatiently pushed away the screen from before me and had fixed my gaze upon him. Yet there was none in that crowd who paid any heed to my doings. Only once, I noticed, his eyes, like stars in fateful Orion, flashed full on my face. (31)

The description of Sandip in the above passage is an idealized and romanticized version of a passionate nationalist. His oratory prowess can move the people who are swayed by the fervent

zeal of his motives. His face is illuminated not just by the passion of the moment, the yellow light of the setting sun casts him as the messenger of God himself, immediately elevating him to a pedestal and distancing him from the mere mortals. His words therefore has a divine sanction and empowers his rhetoric as the ultimate authority of the topic in discussion. Bimala is moved by his starry eyes that ‘flashed’ full on her face. The word, ‘fateful’, stands for the inevitable acquiescence Sandip’s ideals will get from the audience who will undoubtedly be moved into action based on his instructions.

In his essay, “Ghare Baire *in its Times*”, Sumit Sarkar suggests that the internal conflicts in Nikhil “constitute the real heart of the novel (148).” Nikhil is the responsible reformist against whom the uncontrollable passionate zeal of Sandip is judged. He epitomizes Tagore’s notion of the non-centrality of the state in the lives of the people²². Nikhil tells Bimala that he worships Right, which he believes is far more powerful and important than his country (29).

Nikhil on the other hand, dismisses Sandip’s lofty rhetoric as mere hypnotic texts of patriotism; when Sandip tells him that he regards his country as God, Nikhil retorts by asking him how he can worship his country as God when his worship entails hatred towards other countries that must also theoretically exist as gods in the canvas of Sandip’s rhetoric. He is repulsed by the tyranny involved in the fulfillment of Sandip’s goals. The cheap consolations of hatred are as urgently necessary for him as the satisfaction of his appetites. Sandip regards himself and the Swadeshis as the flesh-eaters of this world and munches on the idea that force is the only way he thinks his country will be wrested from the clutches of the invaders; greed for

²² See Partha Chatterjee. “Histories and Nations”. *Nations and its Fragments*. pp 95-115.

power is only a collateral. It is the only end result that attracts him and his ideals. Nikhil's moral ideas are for the poor anemic creatures and not for the true patriot. This scheme of a virulent patriotism spreads like a conflagration and influences the young generation who find themselves engulfed in its flames without realizing the tyrannical force with which it has draped itself. Nikhil and Master try to douse the flame by trying to instill a tolerant strain of thought in the minds of the youngsters but their efforts meet with ridicule and disdain. Threats are carried out with actions against the Zamindars and the poor Muslim peasants who do not fall in line with the demands of the swadeshis. Sandip quotes Krishna from *The Mahabharata* to justify his Karma. He concerns himself only with the deed and not the results. Chandranath Babu warns him that the people are not ready ideologically to absorb his militant principles.

"What is it then that you do want?" asked Chandranath Babu.

"Thorns!" I exclaimed, "which cost nothing to plant."

"Thorns do not obstruct others only," he replied. "They have a way of hurting one's own feet."

"That is all right for a copy-book," I retorted. "But the real thing is that we have this burning at heart. Now we have only to cultivate thorns for other's soles; afterwards when they hurt us we shall find leisure to repent. But why be frightened even of that? When at last we have to die it will be time enough to get cold. While we are on fire let us seethe and boil". (59)

The allusion to thorns is symbolic of Tagore's warning against seething, unbridled, fanatical patriotism under the guise of the Swadeshi movement. Sandip wants to create obstacles for the British but the same set of obstacles will hurt his own people who will be crushed by the weight

of the economic sanctions of the movement. This hurt will also be a physical punishment as the terrorism emanating from his actions will bring down the crushing baton of the British on the helpless population. It is clearly shown in the passage how Sandip feels no qualms about the collateral damage of his actions as that is the revolutionary way according to him. He is prepared to hurt the British even if in the process the countryside gets engulfed in violent sectarian flames. He simply wants to add fuel to the fire burning in his heart so that conflagration melts away his adversaries. Once independence is gained, the patriots can tend to the act of dousing the fire. He promotes his ideas with a flaming passion and states that only death can stop the seething zeal of the movement.

Tagore clearly tries to draw out the futility of the precarious road Sandip's ideals take. His flaws are manifested through his greed, his tyrannical militancy and absolute disregard for the moral and social freedom of the people involved in his sketch. Chandranath Babu's warning about the dangers and risks inherent in his plan forebodes the peasant uprising that happens near the end of the novel. Sandip tries to persuade Nikhil by claiming that his despotism is for the greater good of the motherland. But Nikhil tells him that "to tyrannize for the country is to tyrannize over the country" (108). Nikhil acts as Tagore's caveat against the Swadeshis; he tries to reason with Sandip about the discontent his actions would create among the poor Muslim peasants who will not be able to face the financial hardships emanating from the ban in sale of foreign goods. As the plot progresses, it becomes clear to Sandip that not all strata of the society are willing to follow his dictum. He is particularly unhappy from the protests of the Muslim peasants; exasperated, at one point he acknowledges that the Muslims need to be suppressed for his plans to succeed.

“Our work proceeds apace. But though we have shouted ourselves hoarse, proclaiming the Mussulmans to be our brethren, we have come to realize that we shall never be able to bring them wholly round to our side. So they must be suppressed altogether and made to understand that we are the masters. They are now showing their teeth, but one day they shall dance like tame bears to the tune we play.”

"If the idea of a United India is a true one," objects Nikhil,
"Mussulmans are a necessary part of it."

"Quite so," said I, "but we must know their place and keep them there, otherwise they will constantly be giving trouble."

"So you want to make trouble to prevent trouble?" (120)

Poised like this, the tenets of the revolution would seed only hatred and trouble and that is what happens at the end. Young Amulyo loses his life, Nikhil is seriously wounded and Sandip runs away. In the above passage, Sandip claims that the Swadeshis will never be able to bring the Muslims to their side. This very utterance proves that the Swadeshis, irrespective of their claims for a united India, never thought about the Muslims to be on their side anyway. The propulsion to call them the eventual “masters” of the Muslims connotes a deep-seated hierarchy at play whose seeds were there from the very beginning of the movement. The proclamation of brotherhood between the Hindus and the Muslims is thus shown to be a veneer. The thought of “tame bears” negates the perception of a true united India; the Swadeshi movement is shown to be dominated by the upper class Hindus like Sandip and Harish Kundu and their lofty ideas in reality are bereft of any inspiration of equality between them and the lower class Muslims. The

narrative basically warns of bloody sectarian violence if the goal of this nationalist movement is ever met. Written more than thirty years before India's independence and eventual partition, the novel seems to assimilate within its pages the premonition of a South Asian holocaust.

In the same chapter, Sandip discusses his dream of creating a goddess out of the motherland. He argues::

"I have long been nursing a plan which, if only I could carry it out, would set fire to the whole country. True patriotism will never be roused in our countrymen unless they can visualize the motherland. We must make a goddess of her. My colleagues saw the point at once.

"Let us devise an appropriate image!" they exclaimed.

"It will not do if you devise it," I admonished them. "We must get one of the current images accepted as representing the country—the worship of the people must flow towards it along the deep-cut grooves of custom." (120)

The visualization of a goddess in the guise of the homeland is again quintessentially a Hindu trope. The "deep-cut grooves of custom", speaks to the Hindu custom of idol worship. Sandip is a Bengali and the *puja* of the goddess *Durga* has been a Hindu custom in Bengal for centuries. During the *Durga Puja* festival, the goddess descends on earth to vanquish the demon *Asura* in order to save humankind from its demonic wrath. The British is equated with *Asura* here but it also creates a divide between the Muslims of the population. Thus, "true patriotism", can be attained only if the device created to carry it out has a Hindu image at its core. Nikhil sees through the ideological division and warns Sandip that the image of the goddess will merely be

an illusion for the country as the true symbol of its unity cannot be attained through only a Hindu mythological framework as it will cast aside a major chunk of the Indian population to whom the image will be simply a forced construct.

The narrative vindicates Tagore's position against any imposition of a foreign ideal on a populace who are ideologically not prepared to bear the burden. More importantly it constitutes Tagore's thesis of non-centrality of the state in the lives of the people. It talks about the inherent inequality of class in the social rubric of India where uniform nationalistic policies will create hardship for the people at the lower end of the class struggle. Tagore acknowledges the imposed dominance of the Hindu elites on the Muslim subjects in the areas of politics, economics, and social stature and places an emphasis on the eradication of these differences through mutual co-operation and respect.

The Hungry Tide Country

Amitav Ghosh's novel *The Hungry Tide* is a tale of the tide country of the Sundarbans. Piya, the female protagonist is a marine biologist from U.S.A. Born of Bengali parents she is however untrained in the simplest nuances of the language. She visits the Sundarbans in search of *Orcaella Brevistoris* or the commonly called Irrawaddy Dolphins and her path crosses with that of Kanai, a self-proclaimed *modern* Indian man from the metropolis, a successful businessman who is proficient in multiple languages. Piya also meets Fokir, an illiterate man of the region, who is a destitute, but astute reader of the vagaries of the tide country. Her adventures are juxtaposed with a double narrative of facts and fiction. It is in this crossing of the *truth* and the *invented story* that the narrative locates the failure of the modern nation state of India to give a proper vantage point to its socio-political periphery, namely the Sundarbans.

The novel beckons an interesting reading of the particular historiography of the region, which is steeped in a mythological framework. From the 21st century neo-colonial perspective the Sundarbans stand here as the neglected political periphery inside the postcolonial state. The motif seems to highlight the prevaricating attempts of the neo-colonial towards its colonized subject, viz. the political periphery, which in this case is the populace of the tide country. Piya's conspicuous bafflement is underlined through a careful delineation of the history and present identity of the tide people. Piya's parents were immigrant Bengalis who had settled initially in Burma but they were forced to return to India at the onset of the Second World War. Her father believed in his theory that Bengalis do not travel well as their eyes are always turned backwards towards their place of origin. Hence when her family finally moved to the US, her father decided to relinquish all his ties with Bengal in an effort to fit in properly with his new country. That is the reason for which Piya was never taught Bengali. Her linguistic vacuum is the vessel in which

the writer deposits his words. Language is an essential trope employed by the novel. Ismail Talib in his essay, “Ghosh, Language, and *The Hungry Tide*,” notes that Ghosh felt that he was translating the novel from Bengali into English as he was writing it (135). The Bengali writer Sunil Gangopadhyay had actually thought that the novel was originally written in Bengali (Talib 135)²³. In an interview, Ghosh says that *The Hungry Tide* is “centrally about the dilemmas of language (Chambers 34). Kanai is a translator, dexterous in many languages. Piya is bereft of any knowledge of the local language. She develops strong feelings for Fokir inspite of the verbal vacuum between them. At different stages of the plot, both Moyna and Fokir make Kanai realize the futility of his professional prowess in the tide country when he fails to comprehend that words are just air, like ripples on water but the real river of understanding lies beneath the surface, deep within the murky waters of the region (258).

Piya, like her father, initially has her eyes turned forward but during the course of the narrative she embraces a proclivity towards her roots. On the other side of the coin, the Marichjhapi refugees (whom we meet later in the novel) are in a state of ideological doldrum; they want to look forward in a backward pattern. They are in a postcolonial *state* of constant migration, forcefully evicted from their original habitat because of the Partition and again dispossessed due to a political violence. Ousted from their autochthonous roots, they fail to travel well and their gaze is constantly fixed back to the tide country.

²³ For further reference see: Chambers, Claire. “‘The Absolute Essentialness of Conversations’: A Discussion with Amitav Ghosh.” *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 41, no.1 (2005): 26-39. Web.

The narrative deploys a dual glance towards the past and the present in a gesture of what Nilanjana Chatterjee regards as a delayed-reaction deterritorialization (18), with Piya and the Marichjhapi refugees being the two poles of its manifestation. For Piya this deterritorialization is self-imposed, both ways, while for the latter this is imposed from the outside, first through Partition and secondly through political indifference. *The Hungry Tide* on the surface is not a story focused on the Partition of the subcontinent. However, the narrative cannot escape the echoes of that drastic moment in Indian history. As Suvir Kaul has pointed out, “in contemporary India, the burden of Partition is known in its reiterations, in the continuing forced movements of families and local populations away from the neighborhood, the city, the region that they know as home” (4). This reiteration of continued forced movement is where one can locate the stigma of delayed-reaction deterritorialization. The perennial question of *belonging* as an aftermath of the Partition is invoked in this dichotomy of the refugee. But more importantly, what this text does is a rendition of a cultural standpoint which locates the displaced not under the glare of religion but through the auspices of a unique hybrid identity which is based on a nativist mythology.

For this I have seen many times, that the mud banks of the tide country are shaped not only by rivers of language: Bengali, English, Arabic, Hindi, Arakanese and who knows what else? Flowing into each other they create a proliferation of small worlds that hang suspended in the flow. And so it dawned on me: the tide country’s faith is something like one of its great mohonas, a meeting not just of many rivers, but a circular roundabout people can use to pass in any directions—from country to country and even between faiths and religions. (247)

The word, “mohona”, meaning confluence, signifies the junction point of rivers in the Gangetic Delta before the mouth of the river widens to embrace the vastness of the Bay of Bengal. Thus the distant, peripheral, locale of the Sundarbans is where the great Ganges finishes her journey. She bears with her the blood, sweat and tears of the entire country; the earthiness of her muddy water symbolizes the confluence of the multifarious atoms of the great and ancient civilization built around her. The *mohona* is the spot where man-made physical boundaries are forgotten. It is the point where different cultures, symbolized by the various rivers, meet and mingle freely and fluidly on their way to the open vastness of the sea.

The mythology of Bon Bibi is one such important hybrid expression; the story starts from an Arabian background and culminates in the tide country. The principal characters are Bon Bibi, the goddess of the forest, the savior of the poor tide people, her warrior brother Shah Jongoli and Dokkhin Rai the villainous demon, the oppressor of the innocent and the poor. The story starts at Medina, where a childless pious Muslim man Ibrahim is blessed by Archangel Gabriel with a pair of twins, Bon Bibi and Shah Jongoli. As time passes, Gabriel visits the family again and notifies the twins of their divine task of making the far off *country of eighteen tides* fit for human habitation. As instructed by Gabriel, the twins set off for the tide country that was ruled by the malicious demon Dakkhin Rai. Soon enough a great battle ensues between the good and the bad, and Dokkhin Rai is defeated. But the merciful goddess decides to spare Dokkhin Rai’s life and even goes on to pronounce one half of the tide country as his, provided he does not cross the boundary. This part would remain strewn with wilderness, while the remaining region was soon made fit for human dwelling through the gracious benevolence of Bon Bibi. As the novel says, this division brought order to the land of eighteen tides, with its two halves, the wild and the sown, being held in careful balance (103). However, the perennial fight between good and evil

would soon manifest its ugly head when human greed intruded to upset the tranquil order.

Having established the order of existence in the tide country, the legend of Bon Bibi spins out a tale about the consequences that can befall communities when this sacred order is disturbed.

This corollary story introduces us to the sad legend of a young, pious and destitute orphan by the name of *Dukhey* (Bengali: Sad), the index of goodness and innocence in this tale. The villainous uncle Dhona employs Dukhey in a merchant fleet as it sets sail through the tide country's many rivers and channels. The fleet makes its way down the rivers of the tide country until it reaches the island of *Kedokhali Char*, which according to legend, fell under the aegis of the malicious Dokkhin Rai. As the story goes, the sailors find themselves lured into the magical entrails of the forest where they are tantalized by the sights of a lucrative cornucopia of plump bee hives and other riches. But the moment they approach these, some magical utterance simply makes the treasure vanish from their grasp. Fighting off despair, the sailors are then approached by the demon king who promises Dhona a shipload of riches in exchange of a taste of Dukhey's flesh. Enamored by the prospect of such impending wealth, Dhona agrees to the proposal of Dokkhin Rai. As soon as he acquiesced to the plan, "creatures of the forest, the demons and ghosts, even the bees themselves, began to load Dhona's boats with a great cargo of honey and wax" (104). Once the ships are loaded with the cargo, Dhona summons Dukhey and ordered him to fetch some firewood from the forest. The poor orphan, comprehending his forthcoming plight, tries to plead with his uncle but to no avail. As he makes his way back from the collecting the firewood, his misgivings are confirmed and he found himself marooned on the island with the boats nowhere in sight. Standing alone in the dense forest the boy is trapped between the two unavoidable boundaries of the Sundarbans, the river and the forest. Suddenly he becomes aware

of the terrifying presence of a Dokkhin Rai disguised as tiger stalking him from a distance.

Muted by his terrible situation, the stupefied orphan begins to call for Bon Bibi's assistance.

Bon Bibi was far away, but she crossed the waters in a n instant. She revived the boy, taking him into her lap, while her brother Shah Jongoli dealt a terrible chastisement to the demon. Then, transporting Dukhey to her home, she nursed him back to health. When it was time for him to return, she sent him back to his mother with a great treasure trove of honey and wax. Thus did Bob Bibi show the world the law of the forest, which was the rich and greedy would be punished while the poor and righteous were rewarded. (105)

Shamita Ghatak in her book *Sundarbaner Katha* (Tales of Sundarban) discusses the lore of Bon Bibi. The legend is more than a religion in the region, it is a culture born out of the necessity to foster a level of unity among not only the Hindus and Muslims but out of the urge to conquer a wild terrain in a united front against all natural obstacles. There is a wild river, colloquially called Matla or the drunken river; ferocious predatory animals like the Royal Bengal Tiger are on land and the ever present silent killer, the ravenous crocodile is in water. The region is also starkly impoverished and subject to destructive cyclones. During one of their conversations, Nilima tells Kanai that according to her calculation, a human being is killed by a tiger every other day "at the very least" (240) in the Sundarbans. Where is the solace in living under such exigent circumstances? The solace seemingly lies in the very challenge of surviving against the apparent insurmountable odds. Bon Bibi is a harmonious and benevolent entity amidst the furor of nature; she represents the unseen benevolence of an existence that is constantly marked by nature's unrelenting fury. She is more like a compass, guiding the locals through the maze of the tidal creeks and channels towards an anchoring shelter. It is the promise

of a sanctuary within the forest divided into two segments—one belonging to Bon Bibi and the other being occupied by the evil Dakkhin Rai. Thus, when the local people are trapped by any natural calamity, the compass of their legend tells them that they might have erroneously entered the kingdom of the evil demon Dakkhin Rai. The peaceful existence of Hindus and Muslims has been borne out of this very daring adventure which is a constant summon in the lives of the local people. For them, the difference in religion has been overshadowed by the urge to create a tradition through the intermingling of the two.

Like Tagore's philosophy of the moral over the political, Bon Bibi stands for the united diversity of the region. Her tale is also the *law* of the forest, where the bad and the greedy will receive punishment and the just and moral will be rewarded. Caught between the twin blades of the venomous forest and the carnivorous river, the very survival of the locals is based on the abstract dependence on this law. The figure of the tiger, ever-present albeit silently, epitomizes the destructive yet brilliant opulence of the bad, the Satanic figure of Dokkhin Rai. Thus when Kusum's father is saved from a cataclysmic storm on the banks of a forlorn island, he designates his survival to the benevolence of Bon Bibi and erects a shrine at the very spot in order to commemorate his gratitude for her. But when he is killed by a ravenous tiger in plain sight, Kusum's memories of the incident becomes filled with her own plaintive prayers for Bon Bibi's intervention which never arrives. As she struggles to comprehend the non-fruit of her earnest request, it is Horen who reasons with her: "Bon Bibi's heard you....sometimes this is the means she chooses to call those who are closest to her: men like your father, *bauleys*, they're always the first to go" (109).

It is this archetypal belief in the power of the goddess' benevolence, which makes the lives of the local populace bearable in the face of a tumultuous struggle against the destructive

forces of Mother Nature. In the Sundarbans, nature gives and also has the power to snatch everything away. Nirmal during one of his voyages on Horen's boat, shares the story of *Bernier's Travels*, based on the experience of a French priest Francois Bernier who visited India in the year 1665. As he recounts how the traveling Europeans were stupefied by the astounding beauty of a rainbow made by the moon in an unknown spot amidst the myriad creeks and islands of the region. Horen immediately opines that they must have been at a place called *Gerafitola* where one can still see this miraculous sight. Nirmal rubbishes his claim stating how could Horen even being to know the place when all these happened more than three hundred years ago. However, this immutability in the face of the changing course of history and the rivers of the delta is emblematic of the constant compass of knowledge production that have innately bound the tide country people with the shifting currents. The creation and destruction of their lives by the elements are symbolic of this constancy. Nirmal tries to negate this compass by regarding it as "false consciousness" (101); talking to a young Kanai during one of his visits to the Sundarbans, Nirmal pities the local populations' predilection towards the imaginary miracles of gods and saints; but as he gradually embraces the reality of the tide country, he himself is mesmerized by the false consciousness he had so despised as a young revolutionary. The fatalistic aura of their existence creates a new corridor of understanding for Nirmal. As he later on speaks to a young Fokir about the crushing storm of 1930 he says the following:

Imagine, Fokir...Imagine the lives of your ancestors. They were new to this island, freshly arrived in the tide country. After years of struggle they had managed to grow a few handfuls of rice and vegetables. After years of living on stilt-raised platforms, they had finally been able to descend to earth and make a few shacks and shanties on level ground. All this by virtue of the badh. And

imagine that fateful night, when the storm struck, at exactly the time that a *kotal gon* was setting in; imagine how they cowered in their roofless huts and watched the waters, rising, rising, gnawing at the mud and the sand and they had laid down to hold the river off. Imagine what went through their heads as they watched the devouring tide eating its way through the earthworks, stalking them wherever they were. There was not one among them, I will guarantee you, my young friend, who would not rather have stood before a tiger than have looked into the maws of that tide. (203)

The tide is more ravenous and murderous than the tiger. The word, “devouring”, signifies the hungry tide as it “eats” its way, “gnawing” through the mud and the sandbanks. Yet, at the same instant, one realizes that the very existence of the people is dependent on the ebb and flow of the water which caters to the livelihood of the paddy farmers, fishermen and the boatmen.

Sufia Mendez Uddin in her essay “Bonbibī, Protectress of the Forest,” locates Bonbibī as a saint of Muslim origins. But she points out that the better known Bengali Muslim saints like Khan Jahan Ali and Shah Jalal have *mazars* or “tombs, within larger compounds that include mosques where people revere their memory. Among the many activities at these shrines, people make vows and seek the aid of the saint. In contrast to these other saints, Bonbibī has no mazar, though being a ‘mythic’ figure is no bar to having a mazar” (302). In order to ward off the evil effects of Dakkhin Rai, *gunins* or fakirs accompany the working parties into the forest and chant Arabic mantras and some intricate rituals. The Hindus of the region have erected shrines of Bonbibī across the region and these house the clay idols of Bonbibī.

Both Muslims and Hindus believe her to be a superhuman power in the forest, and there in lies her broad appeal. With her brother as her sidekick she slips easily

into the form seen so frequently among the goddesses of Bengal, partially explaining her familiarity to Hindus, and in fact often understood to function as, and is treated as if she were, a Muslim “goddess,” without any sectarian uneasiness. Because Bonbibī is a figure of tremendous power, she is worshipped (with Bengali-style *puja*) in whatever conception is locally convenient. (Mendez Uddin 302)

In his diary, Nirmal reminisces about his experiences in the BonBibi shrine in Garjontola. He expected a Hindu puja with the typical Hindu incantations of the *Devi*’s name and the pronunciation of the *slokas*, or Hindu chants of prayers, mostly in *Sanskrit*. But instead he is surprised when Horen starts the worship by invoking *Allah*’s name.

Bismillah boliya mukhey dhorinu kalam/ poida korilo jinni tamam alam/ baro meherban tini Bandar upore/ taar chhani keba ache duniyar upore

{In Allah’s name, I begin to pronounce the Word/ Of the holy universe, He is the Begetter the Lord/ To all his disciples, He is full of mercy/ Above the created world, who is there but He}. (246)

As Mendez writes, the ritualistic demonstration that revolves around the worship of the deity is a mix of Islamic and Hindu patterns of veneration of the Supreme Being. Yet the ideology of worship is intrinsic to the region, an autochthonous expression. Here, at the far corner of the country, the specters of regionalism finds preponderance over the aura of nationalism; this regionalism is a creation of a hybridity which had nothing to do with the Partition, independent India’s nationalism or the two dominant religious ideologies in question. Its quasi-secular ideology is an expression of a hybrid nativism that is inherent in this region. As Nirmal writes in his diary, the predilection towards this regionalism outscores the nationalist

vantage point. It not only questions the efficacy of the post-Partition nation state but it also highlights the problems the political periphery faces in its dis-affiliation with or from the center. Nirmal, who brands himself as the *unbelieving secularist*, just as the post-Partition Indian constitution regards itself, is perplexed by the uniqueness of Bon Bibi's worship. He is unsure about the religiousness of Bon Bibi as it does not follow the pattern of simple Hinduism or Islam; gradually he comes to realize that Bon Bibi is as much a part of the life of the tide people as the ravenous tide and the man-eating tigers. It might not make sense to the unbelieving secularist, as he is the product of postcolonial Indian nationalism. This ambiguity is what Tagore might regard as the pocket of diversity, unrealized by the all-encompassing nationalist agenda of the new Indian constitution. Fearful of the pre-independence era, and wary of the religious divisions leading to the Partition, the postcolonial state has hijacked these pockets of unique divergence to promote a forced unity in diversity, a phrase coined by Tagore but used in the school history books to denote the nationalist agenda of the state. That might explain why, Kanai, the city man, in spite of his education and mastery of several languages feels an unexplained jealousy towards the bumpkin Fokir. Perplexed by the unusual land and its ways, Kanai is at a loss to embrace his own epistemological vacuum. Fokir on the other hand, illiterate and unkempt, without the styles of the cosmopolitan world, is dexterous enough to survive through the myriad hardships that come his way. He is the man of that soil while Kanai is an imposter who does not belong there. Just like Nirmal during his initial stay at Lusibari, Kanai is not adept at embracing the intrinsic shades of differences that lay between him and the local ideologues.

Morichjhapi, Indian Politics, and the Sundarbans

In his essay “After the Revolution: The Fate of Nationalism in the New States,” Clifford Geertz divides the history of decolonization into four phases of nationalism.

If, keeping all the limitations of periodization in mind, one divides that history into four major phases—that in which the nationalist movements formed and crystallized; that in which they triumphed; that in which they organized themselves into states; and that (the present one) in which, organized into states they find themselves obliged to define and stabilize their relationships both to other states and to the irregular societies out of which they arose—this incongruence comes plainly into view. The most obvious changes, those which caught and held the attention of the entire world, occurred in the second and third of these phases. But the bulk of the more far-reaching changes, those altering the general shape and direction of social evolution, occurred or are occurring in the less spectacular first and fourth. (238)

If one reads Geertz in context of the Indian nationalism during and after the period of decolonization and subsequent independence then the entire process can be divided into four distinct phases. First phase is the organization of the nationalist movements with the construction of a political structure based on the party system and mainly the anti-colonial ideology. The second phase was the moment of independence that was followed by the third phase where the post-independence constitution and political structures were framed. However, it is the fourth phase that lasts the longest with its deliberate attempt at congruency, which for a diverse secular democratic state like India was always going to be a challenge. The continuing attempt of organization is less spectacular than the period that saw the Quit India Movement or the moment

of independence but is also the most important and a never ending challenge for the postcolonial state as it posits its post-independent nationalist ideology as a culture. With this deliberate position comes imposition as well. It is this imposition, which had frightened Tagore.

Geertz echoes Tagore when he says that for the colonized, nationalism came to “mean, purely and simply, the desire—and the demand—for freedom....the nationalists would make the state and the state would make the nation” (239-240).

This difficult task of making the nation, post-independence, is a task that might have been diluted by the euphoria of the freedom struggle. As Geertz mentions:

Indeed, the very success of the independence movements in rousing the enthusiasm of the masses and directing it against foreign domination tended to obscure the frailty and narrowness of the cultural foundations upon which those movements rested, because it led to the notion that anti-colonialism and collective redefinition are the same thing. But for all intimacy (and complexity) of their interconnections, they are not. Most Tamils, Karens, Brahmins, Malays, Sikhs, Ibos, Muslims, Chinese, Nilotes, Bengalis, or Ashantis found it a good deal easier to grasp the idea that they were not Englishmen than they were Indians, Burmese, Malaysians, Ghanaians, Pakistanis, Nigerians, or Sudanese. (239)

The above passage beckons the invariable pitfall of a collective national consciousness post-independence. It is interesting to note the choice of divisions Geertz gives. For example, in the Indian case, he uses the examples of Tamils, Brahmins Malays, Sikhs, Muslims and Bengalis. While Sikhs and Muslims are people with different religions, Bengalis and Malays are dissimilar because of their geographical locations, languages etc. Brahmins are a caste within Hinduism itself. So Geertz asserts that the pre-independence nationalist euphoria in India will fail to

translate itself in the time after independence and the intrinsic divisions between people of different religions, cultures, intra-divisions within a culture and religion, will linger on and create problems for the myriad milieu. In a way, as noted in our prior discussion, Tagore had warned against the same impending problems facing India after the possible departure of the British. The problem of this collective re-definition for Tagore was synonymous with the imposition of a nationalist ideology on the varying social aspects of a greatly diverse country like India. During one of his lectures, Tagore states what terrifies him most about India's imported nationalism:

.....it is the aspect of a whole people as an organized power. This organization incessantly keeps up the insistence of the population on becoming strong and efficient. But this strenuous effort after strength and efficiency drains man's energy from his higher nature where he is self-sacrificing and creative. For thereby man's power of sacrifice is diverted from his ultimate object, which is moral, to the maintenance of this organization, which is mechanical. Yet in this he feels all the satisfaction of moral exaltation and therefore becomes supremely dangerous to humanity. He feels relieved of the urging of his conscience when he can transfer his responsibility to this machine which is the creation of his intellect and not of his complete moral personality. (quoted in Soares 107)

The above passage is strongly indicative of Tagore's insistence on developing the moral side of the society over the political. He looks at Indian nationalism as the clone of a giant machinery which is keen on maintaining the wholeness of its organized power, that is, the constant running of the nation machine with the state as the engine. The obsession with strength and power robs the machinery off its most vital component: the moral high ground of its constituents. The people

who keep this political clock ticking is forced to deviate from the righteous path of self-sacrifice as the operation of this machine is totally dependent on the mechanical and not human heart beats.

In his interview with Chitra Sankaran, Ghosh stresses he has always been drawn towards elaborating the ethical predicaments in his characters, and the observation of morality can itself be through an immoral predicament, as we see with the Marichjhapi massacre. In an interview with Neluka Silva and Alex Tickell, when he is asked about his main literary influences, Ghosh repeats a point made earlier that Tagore has been one of the “obvious literary influence” (216)²⁴. The case of the Marichjhapi refugees is a prime example of the political imposition that Tagore had forecast. The working of the nationalist machine robs the people of Marichjhapi from their home and their very uniqueness.

The Partition of India witnessed the largest migration of people in the modern history of Asia. In the north-west of India, the migration was swift and brought about by de-colonization and territorial re-distribution (Zolberg 126). But in the east, the migration continued through the next few decades in a way which Nilanjana Chatterjee regards as “delayed reaction deterritorialization” (37). In her dissertation, titled *Midnight's Unwanted Children and the Politics of Rehabilitation*, Chatterjee puts forward a detailed analysis of the refugee problem in Bengal in the period after the Indian Partition of 1947. Citing a table released by the Government of India's Department of Rehabilitation, Chatterjee shows that between 1947-1976, there were a little more than 5 million refugees who had trickled into India from East Pakistan; nearly 4

²⁴ He repeats this in many other places. See.: <http://www.calcuttaweb.com/articles/aghosh.shtml>

million sought refuge in West Bengal. This estimate of course does not include the 9 million people who fled the war in Bangladesh in 1971, the majority of whom ultimately went back after the war was over (26-27). In his 1999 book *The Marginal Men*, Prafulla K. Chakrobarty gives a vivid description of some of these rehabilitation camps which were set up in places like Dandakaranya, U.P, Bihar and Orissa. Dandakaranya, essentially a vast expanse of a virgin, un-irrigated land of dense forests, is a prime example of what Chakrobarty calls as one those “hastily improvised schemes for the dispersal of the refugees” (163).

In the late 1970s about twenty five thousand East Bengali refugees hailing from the tide country left their Dandakaranya re-settlement camp and encroached into an uninhabited twelve mile long island of Marichjhapi in the Sundarban delta. Their settlement lasted for about a year before the government succeeded in its effort to forcibly evict them amidst a furor over human rights violation and plenty of bloodshed. The refugee’s argument was based on an earlier made promise of the Leftist government in West Bengal, which had actually supported their incursions across the border a few decades back. The ruling party in the state at that time was Congress and the Left Front was the main opposition in the state assembly. With thousands of refugees pouring in through the border between India and East Pakistan (in the early 50s), the squatter culture was established vehemently²⁵. Within the passage of two decades as more and more refugees kept trickling in, especially in the wake of the war of 1971, the ruling Left Front led by CPI (M) completely changed their stance against the refugees. Instead of settling them in places of their choice, they were forced into the aforementioned re-settlement camps where conditions were very bleak and in some cases, unsanitary.

²⁵ Squatters would simply take over land and properties, coining the phrase *jobordokhol* in Bengali. Their forced rehabilitation was deemed revolutionary by the communist Left Front while the ruling Congress party opposed their incursions.

The Left Front minister of West Bengal, Ram Chatterjee, visited the refugee camps and was reported to have encouraged them to re-settle in the Sunderbans. As 15,000 destitute families made their way towards Marichjhapi, they were devastated on learning that the left-front had veered off from their original policy and were asking them to head back to their re-settlement camps²⁶. While many refugees were arrested, some managed to escape official harassment and settled down in Marichjhapi. They were able to establish a “viable fishing industry, salt pans, a health center, and schools over the following year” (Mallick 107).

Displeased with the forced settlements, the government of West Bengal pronounced their occupation of Marichjhapi as unauthorized and on January 26, 1979, began an economic blockade of the settlement with thirty police boats. The community was tear-gassed, huts and buildings were burnt down, while tube-wells and fisheries were also destroyed in an attempt to cut out food and water supply (107). With the media favoring the refugees, journalists were restricted from accessing Marichjhapi. The Chief Minister, Jyoti Basu, urged the media to curb their penchant for sensationalism and to support the eviction in the *national interest*. The press was branded as being “bourgeois” and was chastised for colluding with the refugees and the opposition. Severe censorship was put into place. The government feared that the concession to one settlement will lead to a line of concessions for immigrants from Bangladesh (Mallick 107-108).

As the situation worsened, a news surfaced about the frequent use of teargas and the sinking of their boats when some of the refugees were trying to procure food and water and

²⁶ The description of the massacre See: Mallick, Ross. “Refugee Resettlement in Forest Reserves: West Bengal Policy Reversal and the Marichjhapi Massacre”. *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Feb 1999. 58:1, pp 104-125. Web.

worst of all, starvation deaths. On January 27, 1979, total curfew was imposed into and out of Marichjhalpi under the Forest preservation act. Section 144 of the Criminal Penal Code was imposed making it illegal for five or more people to be together at any time. The Calcutta High Court ruled in favor of the refugee supporters and prohibited any interference in their movement and their access to food and water. The Government furiously denied their involvement in the implementation in any blockade and with the help of the police union, which was in their pocket, continued to oppress the settlers. From May 14 to May 16, 1979, forcible evacuation of the refugees was carried out. Muslim gangs were hired as enforcers (Mallick 110-111). As journalist Ranjit Kumar Sikdar observed, “young men were arrested and sent to the jails and helpless young women were raped by the police (quoted from Mallick 112).” Hundreds of men, women, and children were murdered and their bodies were dumped in the river. The Bengali daily, Ananda Bazar Patrika actually published some photographs and the opposition in the State Assembly staged a walk-out in protest. Unfortunately, no criminal action was legally laid against the perpetrators and no official investigation ever took place. The then Prime Minister of India, Morarji Desai, did not want to antagonize the support of the Communists for his government. The refugees, however, complained by visiting members of the Parliament that thousands had perished because of disease, starvation, and malnutrition during the blockade. Of the fourteen thousand three hundred and eighty eight families, ten thousand two hundred and sixty families returned to their previous places. The remaining four thousand one thousand and twenty eight families perished in transit, died of starvation, exhaustion, and many were killed in Kashipur, Kumirmari, and Marichjhapi by police firings (Mallick 111).

While the operation was deemed successful by the CPM, opinion was divided within the party mostly because of the mishandling of the situation by the party leadership. The consensus

was that issue could have been utilized to develop a mass movement for the refugees. Many felt that this was a missed opportunity to develop a solid communist base among them (Mallick 111). Ironically, the CPM used Marichjhapi to re-settle some of their own supporters, who made full use of the facilities constructed by the departed refugees (Mallick 111). Ross Mallick notes, “For the next thirteen years, the only reference to the massacre in the academic literature was a short summary of the West Bengal Human Rights record by Sajal Basu. The opposition had compared the massacre with the one at Jalianwalah Bagh. Expert, there was no Hunter Commission to investigate this one, which was soon forgotten. When eighty Communists were killed in West Bengal by the Congress government in 1958, Jyoti Basu had stated that there was “nothing but dead bodies between him and the government benches” (113). The massacre of 1958 came to be known as the martyr day. But, “the Communist’s own massacre created a much more muted reaction and was soon forgotten” (113). At the time of publication of his essay (1999) on Marichjhapi, Ross Mallick notes the utter silence of the massacre in the Bengali academia except a brief administrative note on the incident by a West Bengal human rights officer (111). The other significant work was the doctoral dissertation by Nilanjana Chatterjee (as mentioned previously). In his Author’s Note at the end of 2004 edition of *The Hungry Tide*, Amitav Ghosh reiterates the continuity of the silence about the massacre by mentioning only Mallick and Chatterjee’s works as being “the only historical treatment available (402)”. The word *treatment* can be read here as part of a recuperative therapy from the violence of the historical silence. Ghosh’s *treatment* of course is through a fictional narrative and he mentions it as the beginning of the Author’s Note by asserting that the main characters of his narrative are fictitious.

The Hungry Tide builds itself up and accesses the silence of the massacre through Kanai’s reading of Nirmal’s diary. Nirmal’s character is interestingly narrated through a series of

letters he had left for his nephew Kanai to read. Once a professor of English in Kolkata, Nirmal's fiery rhetoric calling for a communist revolution and his affiliations with the underground revolutionary movements of the time bear similarities with the rhetorical vivacity of Sandip in Tagore's *Ghare Baire*. And like Sandip, Nirmal too fails to live up to his lofty rhetoric and is forced to move to the tide country in order to recuperate from his poor health. He is appointed as the headmaster in the local school of Lusibari, a part of the estate, which was once run by Sir Daniel Hamilton.²⁷

On his arrival at Lusibari, "Nirmal was initially horrified at the thought of being associated with an enterprise founded by a leading capitalist" (78), but the couple is soon brought to realize the important role Hamilton had performed in his untiring efforts to create a better life for beleaguered and perennially neglected local populace.

It shamed them to think that this man—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. (78)

The political talk around a Western ideology can be "radical". However, as Tagore discusses many times, it is the action, which needs to be justified and commensurate to the milieu in question. The young couple's vexation at witnessing the acute poverty of the region stands out as a silent inference of the failure of a Western political concept to posit accurately its relevance in a social life comprised of certain essentials, which are intrinsic to that region only.

²⁷ Though this fact is never mentioned in the book, Daniel Hamilton had a close friendship with Tagore whose communication with the former can be read in *Selected Letters*.

For their first few months on the island they were in a state akin to shock. Nothing was familiar; everything was new. What little they knew of rural life was derived from the villages of the plains: the realities of the tide country were of a strangeness beyond reckoning. How was it possible that these islands were a mere ninety-seven kilometers from home and yet so little was known about them? How was it possible that people spoke so much about the immemorial traditions of village India and yet no one knew about this other world, where it was impossible to tell who was who, and what their caste and religions and beliefs were? (79)

The above rhetoric harkens the mind back to Tagore's insistence on improving the life of the villages for India to be a successful nation. The questions which fleet through the minds of the couple are laden with the irony of a silence whose existence they had not been made aware previously. In spite of the region's physical proximity with Calcutta, it was an alien land for them. It spoke out loud the severe challenges inherent in the idea of a free Indian nation.

"Immemorial" traditions of village India derives a sarcastic countenance towards the memory of the tradition that has been the salient feature of Nirmal's communist ideals. The destitute state of Lusibari reminds the couple of the terrible Bengal famine of 1942, "except in Lusibari hunger and catastrophe were a way of life" and that even "after decades of human settlement, the land had still not been wholly leached of its salt. The soil bore poor crops and could not be farmed all year round. Most families subsisted on a single daily meal (79)". The embankments continued to give way to bouts of severe flooding; hunger drove the local people to hunting and fishing, occupations which perennially put them in a dogfight against the elements. Many drowned; some were consumed by the prowling crocodiles and the estuarine sharks. The mangroves had little promise as a source for economic improvement yet "thousands risked death in order to collect

meager quantities of honey, wax, firewood and the sour fruit of the *kewra* tree. No day seemed to pass without news of someone being killed by a tiger, a snake or a crocodile.” (79)

As Nilima settles down in her new home, the vagaries of the Sundarbans keep her awed. She makes a startling observation—most of the women on the island dress up as widows. She deciphers that this routine was basically a soothsaying gesture, preparing all the women for an eventuality which they have braced themselves with since childhood. The plight of the actual widows was far worse and their abominable condition leads Nirmala to establish Badabon Trust for the welfare of the local women.

...yet in the tide country, where life was lived on the margins of greater events, it was useful also to be reminded that no place was so remote as to escape the flood of history. (77)

Both Nirmal and Nilima gradually understood that the world of the tide country is a world unto itself. While history continued to be constructed outside in its own ways, the social life of the tide country seemingly runs on an entirely different co-ordinate of knowledge production. This geometry of a unique existence is dependent on tolerance, adjustment and confluence. It seems as if the people here soak in the differences constructed outside their region and churn out a confluence of ideas and identity which are morally linked to an existence of mutual stability.

Badabon was a word Nirmal loved. He liked to point out that like the English ‘bedouin’, *badabon* derived from the Arabic *badiya*, which means ‘desert’. ‘But “Bedouin” is merely an anglicizing of Arabic,’ he said to Nilima, ‘while our Bangla word joins Arabic to Sanskrit – “bada” to “bon”, or “forest”. It is as

though the word itself were an island, born of the meeting of two great rivers of language—just as the tide country is begotten of the Ganga’s union with the Brahmaputra (82).

It is this confluence of different religious and cultural values which give the Sundarbans its own specific microcosm. If we read Tagore in conjunction with the text of *The Hungry Tide*, the similarity in the social rehabilitation of the religious differences through the cultural amalgamation of the same in the awakening of a tradition suited to the moral code of living in the region becomes quite conspicuously apparent. As Kalyan Sengupta points out, for Tagore “our basic commitment to the good of others is grounded in an intellectual, philosophical understanding of the nature of reality” (10). The nature of reality is governed by the *Brahman*, the Infinite Personality which caters to the moral need of each individual and connects everyone with what Tagore calls the universal soul. It is this moral code which binds human beings together in a filial bond, growing and learning through the differences that exist between them, without discounting the fact that they are different.

Nirmal’s communist idealism had actually led him to the Sundarbans; heckled by his peers in Calcutta, he goes to the tide country to weave his idealism in an effort to influence the local population. However, he subsequently suffers from a drastic disillusionment as he slowly realizes that communism, like Tagore’s critique of western nationalism, fails to adapt to the tide country as if to prove to him that his ideas really have no fulfillment or utility in the tide country. Decades later, this abandonment of communist principles is completed during the massacre at Marichjhapi. As the standoff between the authorities and the refugees continue, Nirmal’s health deteriorates due to his genuine concern for the displaced. When the family doctor rebukes him for neglecting his health, Nilima replies:

Ever since his retirement, my husband, having little else to do, has chosen to involve himself in the fate of these settlers, in Morichjhapi. He does not believe that a government such as the one we have now would act against them. He is an old leftist, you see, and unlike many such, he truly believed in those ideals; many of the men who are now in power were his friends and comrades. My husband is not a practical man; his experience of the world is very limited. He does not understand that when a party comes to power, it must govern; it is subject to certain compulsion. I am afraid that if he learns of what is going to happen he will not be able to cope with the disillusionment—it will be more than he can bear.

(276)

So Nirmal was an old Leftist idealist but he failed to comprehend that “when a party comes to power, it must govern.” This is a jolting realization for him and strongly resonates with Tagore’s warning of Indian nationalism turning the subsequent government into an organized machinery. This machine has to govern and the execution of its governmental decisions are not built on morality and ethics. It is this vestigial optimism around his communist ideals that ultimately leads to his severe disillusionment when the standoff reaches an inhumane plain. As the police kept on watching, hoodlums hired by the communist government of West Bengal, wreak havoc on the refugees. A mute spectator of the event, Nirmal gradually retreats into his shell as if to symbolize his realization of the violent manifestations of imported western concepts into a milieu which have no use for them.

In our discussion of Trouillot’s theory of historical silence it has been pointed out that silences enter the process of historical production at four crucial moments: the moment of fact creation or the making of *sources*; the moment of fact assembly or the making of *archives*; the

moment of fact retrieval or the making of narratives; and the moment of retrospective significance or the making of *history* in the final instance. In the specific case of the Marichjhapi incident, we have seen enough archival retinue to establish the notion that it is the stage of making of narratives that leaves a historical vacuum surrounding the event. Consequently, the moment of retrospective significance is compromised in such a way that historiography fails to mention in detail the human element of the massacre. The narrative of *The Hungry Tide* devotes two chapters, aptly named—"Beseiged" and "Crimes"—to lend a literary voice to that vacuum. The narrative delineates the tension following the imposition of Section 144. As the days passed more and more rumors about official atrocities against the settlers started to surface. Unable to stop himself from responding to the incessant barrage of news, Nirmal accompanies some local school teachers to undertake a survey of the situation. As their motorboat approached Marichjhapi, they saw a billowing cloud of smoke emanating from the island. Soon they spotted government motorboats patrolling the waters. The atmosphere was tense and it was evident that the police was stationed to stop people from both entering and exiting the island. Cutoff from the outside world, the inhabitants were desperate to replenish their exhausted supply of provisions. Nirmal and his friends watched a local wobbling *nouko* being overloaded with people and supplies in an attempt to somehow slip its ways past the police cordon. However, it was soon intercepted by the officials who threatened severe action if the boat did not stop in its course. As the settlers kept on pleading, warning shots were fired by the police. Seeing the life-threatening situation unfolding before his eyes Nirmal hoped with baited breath that the people on the boat would turn back. But to everyone's surprise they joined their voices in unison and shouted: "Amra kara? Bastuhara. Who are we? We are the dispossessed (254)."

The plaintive cry is described as being wafting across the water, not as a shout of defiance but symbolic of a human condition. Nirmal strings the defiance with the entire order of humankind through a quest for finding the very answers that it seeks. The cry reverberates with the question that many millions have asked previously following the catastrophe of 1947. The discontent with the idea of the nation that makes the refugees dispossessed in their very place of birth resonates with the sadness of the Toba Tek Singhs of this world.

The settlers on the boat negate the state order vehemently and tells the police that they will not budge. Standing on his motorboat, Nirmal is moved by the beauty of their vehemence and realizes that they truly belonged to the very place that they are refusing to leave, a notion that questions the very nation building narrative imposed on them. The historical archive of the incident permeates through the narrative of the novel through the fictional depiction of these human episodes. While a newspaper simply spoke about rumors regarding police boats ramming through the boats of refugees, the fictional portrayal vividly sketches the eventual capsizing of the settler's boat as a police launch rams into it and throws every man, woman, and child onto the river.

The siege is shown to have gone on for days. Despite careful rationing, food had run out and the inhabitants of the island were forced to eat grass. The destruction of the tubewells by the police made the people drink from puddles and ponds which resulted in a severe outbreak of cholera. Based on the historical archive of the incident, Mallick writes that a refugee named Saphalananda Haldar somehow managed to evade the police curfew and swam to the mainland to inform the Calcutta press of police brutality on the region (110). Ghosh revisits the incident of Haldar though he does not name him. Haldar's adventure brought legal notice to the matter and the Calcutta high Court imposed a ban on the on-going police barricade deeming it illegal. The

siege was ordered to be lifted. This victory is described in the narrative as being an important shot in the arm for the people of Morichjhapi. However, the police were not out of view yet as they continued to patrol the island urging the inhabitants to evacuate.

The character of Kusum embodies the plight of the settlers. The lack of food and clean water turns her body into a skeleton and sucks out all life energy from her. Nirmal assumes that Kusum has starved herself in order to feed her young son. She had actually fed herself on a local green vegetable called *jadu-palong*, which eventually led her to suffer from dysentery. When Nirmal offered her some essential provisions, like rice, daal, oil, she refused saying that they have to take the food to the leader of her ward, following the island's procedure in dealing with the crisis.

The picture drawn in this depiction is rather poignant. Kusum breaks down and tells Nirmal that the worst part was not hunger or thirst but the constant realization that the lives of the refugees meant so little to the government officials. They would sit and listen helplessly to the policemen announce that their lives and existence were worth less than dirt or dust; that the island had to be saved for its flora and fauna, its animals and they have to leave it because it is a part of a reserve forest. With hunger gnawing at their bellies, the refugees would listen to these words continuously and would wonder how the state could love animals so much that they are willing to kill human beings for them. Rumors eventually reached Nirmal that busloads of outsiders were assembling around the island. They were hardened criminals and gangsters from the cities. He sets off with Horen in the dark of the night to bring Kusum and Fokir back with them. Evading detection, Horen manages to steer his boat to the island. But Kusum refuses to leave. After a lot of cajoling, she agrees to send Fokir away with Horen. The novel does not

speculate on the nuances of the final last attack on Marichjhapi but the reader is told that along with several other inhabitants of the island, Kusum too is killed in the skirmish.

For Tagore, *Ghare Baire* epitomized the inherent problems of the nationalism of the contemporary period. Nearly a century after Tagore's novel, *The Hungry Tide* looks at the Indian Partition and contends that the only solution for a harmonious existence exists in the appreciation of the cultural differences as well as the brotherly bond between the two sides. It invites attention on a much neglected section of the Indian population, the Sundarbans, and tries to point out the similarities that have been borne out of the peaceful co-existence of Muslims and Hindus through the introduction of the mythological character of Bon Bibi. She is not a Hindu goddess. Neither is she conventionally part of Muslim orthodoxy. The figure of Bon Bibi transcends the differences between the two religions, forming a bridge of communal recognition and a bond grounded in local belief systems. In *Ghare Baire* much of the criticism is directed at the Swadeshis for their militant nationalism. In *The Hungry Tide*, the political hypocrisy of the ruling Left Front government of West Bengal is scrutinized in a sardonic gaze. As Chakrabarty has pointed out, the government had very little inclination to solve the *Udbastu* problem as the concerned individuals had already been relinquished of their voting rights. Just like in *Ghare Baire*, the lofty and high strung ideals of Sandip are revealed as a sham; similarly in *The Hungry Tide*, Nirmal realizes the hollowness of the communist ideals to which he had once dedicated his life when it came to a practical manifestation in the Sundarbans.

Before we turn to the Partition narratives in the next chapter, the above discussion of *The Hungry Tide* gives me an opportunity to turn to a relatively unknown Bengali novella that exhibits what Tagore might have regarded as the ideal humanism against the backdrop of communal hatred.

Majhi

I want to end this chapter with a brief discussion of a novella I accidentally picked up during a long walk through the great College Street in Kolkata. A cursory glance at the list of important authors of the 20th century Bengali novel form will not reveal the name of Dipendranath Bandyopadhyay. Very little is known about him; he was born in the year 1933 and died in 1978. *Majhi* was supposed to be the first part of a volume entitled *Agami* but he never got around to finishing the remaining parts. He wrote and published *Majhi* in the year 1951 and it was his first novel. After his death in 1978, the novel was again published in the *Sarodiya* (Puja) edition of the magazine *Ghoroya*. My choice of a brief discussion of this novel is built on my inference that this novella stands out in the area of Partition literature as being emblematic of an unbridgeable resistance against the sectarian divide. It transcends history in the depiction of the communities and as such has a unique position in the entire gamut of Partition literature.

It is a utopian rendition of the failure of nationalism to coax the periphery under its hegemonic policies. The story revolves around two villages one on each side of the river Padma named the East Village and the West Village. The first part of the novella is focused on these two communities and their daily lives and interactions with each other. While the West Village was primarily a Muslim enclave, the East Village had mainly Hindu inhabitants. Their lives were made up not on the basis of the differences in their religions but the sweet conjoining of them. In a way, they were a human mixture of the Bon Bibi myth, letting each other's sectarian divisions amalgamate into a new hybrid consciousness built on what Tagore might have regarded as universal humanism.

The narrative makes references to how the two villages were established more than a century back when two Hindu and Muslim travelers founded them amidst the dense forestry of

the region which had never seen the light of human inhabitation previously. It is in allusion to their atavistic sense of community based on similarities and not the religious difference that their lives were built upon.

The urban civilization had not touched them, the class hierarchy had not touched them, religious fiendishness had not touched them, ever. Consequently communal clashes were alien constructs for them. They knew only of the West Village and they knew there was a strange world outside all of this, something which had never touched them as well.²⁸

Allusions are drawn repeatedly to the camaraderie and kinship that existed between the founders of the two villages, Janardan Bhuiyan and Osman Chaudhury who were a Hindu and a Muslim respectively; their friendship is the foundation upon which the bond between the two villages is built. The common word that is to be inculcated in the reading is *mita* or friend; Janardan and Osman were friends and Janardan sacrificed his life in order to save his friend's son from a deadly snake bite; mighty Padma is treacherous in her glorious savagery, yet she is a *mita* of all villagers as their livelihoods are so stringently dependent on her existence. The allusion to the mighty yet ravenous river is reminiscent of the description of the Sundarbans in *The Hungry Tide*. Two of the major characters Arjun (Hindu) and Afzal (Muslim) are *mita* as their families are related by the sacrifice of Janardan Bhuiyan. This friendship is the root of their lives and from time immemorial (beginning of their settlement) the two villages have been inextricably linked with each other's existence. The villagers in *Majhi* play out this bond of love in its innocent glory till the outside world (the political center) infringes on their domain. It is

²⁸ All translations of the Bengali text of *Majhi* are mine. There was no English translation available at the time of writing this essay.

when one of their own goes to Dhaka that the blameless denizens come to know that there is a country called India. This is how the realization dawns upon them:

They came to know that there indeed is a country called India, that the Company is no more, that this is the time for Swaraj. They also came to know about the Mahatma. He is the Lord Krishna of this era. He is immune to the bullets of the Raj, they cannot even penetrate his human skin. They have heard about the thing called electricity which can now be found in the towns, that people can speak within white screens, that the white powder they use on their faces make them look fairer. Amidst all this knowledge they have only one question—is it really true as the Babus have said—that the Hindus and the Muslims are two *jatis*. (27)

The idea of India as a sudden invention is broached; the villagers were aware of the East India Company but they had never heard about India. The name of Gandhi and the idea of Swaraj were new to them as well. They had not been privy to the modern Western inventions of the cinema and talcum powder. Most importantly they become knowledgeable about the possible divide between a Hindu and a Muslim on the basis of their *jati*.²⁹ In a manner, the villagers are like Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden till they take a bite of the fruit of knowledge imported from metropolitan Dhaka.

This reference to *jati* is what makes the villagers become aware of their own distinctive religious affiliations. *Jati* can be regarded as the common word to designate divisions in terms of caste, class, and religion. In *The Nation and Its Fragments*, Partha Chatterjee gives a good

²⁹ See: Kumkum Chatterjee. “The King of Controversy: History and Nation-Making in Late Colonial India.” *The American Historical Review* (2005) 110 (5): 1454-1475; Swarupa Gupta. “Samaj, Jati and Desh Reflections on Nationhood in Late Colonial Bengal”. *Studies in History*. December 2007 vol. 23 no. 2, pp.177-203

background of the influence of the ideology of *jati* in the construction of the history of each community. The very division of *jat* (caste) has always been crucial for the Hindus while the distinction of *jatis* has been important for both the communities. Each *jati* has its own quality and is defined by what it is and what it is not. With the introduction of this concept of *jati*, the idea of a hierarchy is introduced as well (176). Thus the introduction of the concept of *jati* is incumbent on the idea of a division through difference. The political manipulation from the outside is highlighted in this narrative as being the main culprit behind the subsequent segregation of the erstwhile *mitas*. When the narrative talks about the goons from the towns who come and force the “innocent” people of the two villages to take up arms against each other, it is trying to re-enact the horrors of communal nationalism that Tagore had warned against. While the shadow of Tagore might loom in more of a distinct manner over this novella, the theme of outsiders coming into villages and sparking unrest is a common motif among Partition literature of this period. Khushwant Singh develops the theme in his *Train to Pakistan*, Bhisham Sahni writes about it in his novel *Tamas*, Amrita Pritam also does the same in her novella *Pinjar*. It seems as if there is always an outside catalyst, which brings with it the tenets of communal violence on both sides. After Arjun returns from the town he tells Afzal:

The town doctor Nibaran whispered into my ears—get out of here as fast as you can Arjun; be careful while you still have time. With the English going away for good, India is to be divided into two countries. Our East Bengal will become a Muslim land while West Bengal will be for the Hindus. (24)

Nibaran asserts on Arjun his premonition that East Bengal will become a Muslim land and not East Pakistan while West Bengal will be for the Hindus and not Indians. For Arjun and Afzal who symbolically stand in for million others like them, this division becomes important

not on nationalist lines but on communal lines. The recognition of *jati* insinuates the division of the land.

The main protagonist is an octogenarian boatman, Sanatan, who is a mute witness to the sudden demise of *mita* among the two villagers. The description of the *Majhi* is quite relevant in context to of an autochthonous consciousness. Born in a Hindu family from a distant village he was ostracized by his family for marrying a Muslim girl, Mumtaz. But not stopping at simple ostracism some militant Muslims had cut out his tongue as well. Fed up with the virulent demonstration of this militant hatred from both the sides the young couple decided to set sail for a place of dreams whose innocence had not yet been ravaged by the beast of *jati*. That is how they came upon the two villages, had settled there peacefully, living a life of blissful contentment. This romantic idealism of the novel relies on this portrait of Sanatan and his wife as the index of humanity and goodness against which the changes in the other characters of the novella are judged. Having been the official boatman for more than sixty years he has been the harbinger of brotherly love and companionship for the inhabitants of the two communities, a veritable confluence point in person whose presence is crucial for the maintenance of this bond. He revels in his job of rowing the denizens into each other's territories and is depicted as a sponge whose muteness has been the witness to many a tale of comfort, anxiety, joy and personal misery. With the passage of time Sanatan the boatman has become so intrinsic to the lives of the villagers that his personal history and name have vanished into oblivion for them; he is the archetypal *majhi* for everyone. Devoid of any tag of a *jati*, Sanatan is the epitome of humanity and its sheer existence for the people.

It is the question of *jati* which having been introduced into the two villages by political influences from the outside, which makes matters hostile for the inhabitants. The Muslims are

told that it is time that they regain their dominance on the land which was rightfully theirs before the advent of the British. The Hindus are told that it is their sacred duty to restore the honor and dignity which they possessed as the original inhabitants of Hindustan. With the introduction of this feeling of *jati*, two communities are produced out of one and they turn vigorously against each other, threatening to wipe out the other's existence. A date is set for the final destructive confrontation. As everyone waits with bated breath for the outcome, the instigators are shown conversing amongst themselves, conspiring on how to share the profits that will result from the forthcoming carnage. They epitomize the greed and lust for the spoils of sectarian violence and Partition literature and history is replete with references to mercenaries from the outside coming in and pillaging villages in the name of religion and communal revenge.³⁰

The description of the radical transformation of feelings towards those who once considered brothers is presented in a poignant fashion by the author. Time and again, allusions are drawn to the sweet memories that had bonded the two villages in a brotherly embrace for so long. People are shown shedding tears for their old friends who have suddenly become staunch enemies because of their different *jati*. Women are beaten by tense husbands, children are beaten by nervous mothers, and even the birds stop chirping in preparation for the coming bloodshed. In the meantime, both the Hindus and the Muslims take turn to ask Sanatan to which *jati* he belongs. When he just smiles at them, each side takes him to be the "other" and threatens him with execution. The Hindus tell him even if he is spared his wife will not be as she is Muslim.

³⁰ See Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan*; Bhisham Sahni's *Tamas*; Penderel Moon's *Divide and Quit*; Kamla Bhasin's *Torn from the Roots*; Mihir Bhattacharya's *Bishad-Brikhyo*; Kamleshwar's *Partitions*. These are just a few in a very long list of works worth mentioning.

With one day left till the professed day of mutual carnage, suddenly the old memories get the better of the village leaders and they cannot get themselves to fight their brethren. Their aggression stops one step short of actualization. The feelings of sobriety and penance is mutual; they are able to get out of the aggressive veil that the political hand from the outside had been able to place on them and sees their common heritage and culture. *Jati* takes a back seat to humane *Dharma*, a duty which has bound them together since the dawn of their habitat. After a brief spell of hiatus, life returns to normalcy and the sudden fire of hatred is stubbed out from their lives.

The important factor for this negation lies in the morality and belief in a common bond of civilization which the writings of Tagore had envisaged. The two communities despite their religious differences embraces the inherent *mita* in each other because of their common civility; they respected this common history and cultural heritage and hence could fight off the ideological attack to which they were subjected. The utopian ending of the novel tries to re-write the dystopian violence of the Partition. It tries to create a literary image of the subcontinent that has been denied to them by history.

In his introduction to *The Partitions of Memory*, Suvir Kaul states that there is a hunger for Partition stories because they not only address the religious and social divides of the past, but they are also associated with the contemporary reality of India. He states that the consequences of the Partition can still be felt both in India and Pakistan and the Mano Majras of this world are still torn apart. South Asians need these stories to “put to rest the ghost trains that wail in our sleep (18).” He gives the example of Khushwant Singh’s *Train to Pakistan* as a near utopian village that gave solace to hearts torn apart by the violence of the Partition. But he also asserts that it is also imperative, that one should not lose sight of the critically acute “accounts of the

dismemberment of communities and places (18).” In our reading of *Majhi*, we visited the utopian village that can put to rest the ghost trains of the Partition. In our discussion in the next chapter we will look into the critical accounts of dismemberment of communities and places.

CHAPTER 3: CRACKED BY A SHADOW LINE: READING *ICE-CANDY-MAN* AND *THE SHADOW LINES*

Introduction

This chapter is not focused on the history of the Indian Partition but on the literary narratives that arise out of that history. I am also not going to discuss the overall effects of Partition in India and Pakistan as that subject has been talked about at a level where no dissertation can even come close to summarizing it. My interest is mainly based on reading of specific literary works about the Indian Partition and what their narratives tell us about the Partition and its continuing legacy within the scopes of their narratives.

I have chosen two novels for this purpose: Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice-Candy-Man* and Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines*. While the Sidhwa novel takes us directly to the moment of the Partition, *The Shadow Lines* is set much later in time though its narrative cuts through borders and times and situates the reliving of the Partition experience and its trauma through memory. My intention is not to dwell on the history of the Partition but more on the prolonged human response to it. No discussion of Partition will be complete without going through some of the problems of nationalism in modern India and its relationship with sectarian violence and this topic does arise in my discussion. I will also briefly trace the issue of the silences of history in the modern historiography of India and the ways the two texts take up the issue. But my main attention will be on the traumatic history and its re-enactments that are enmeshed within the rendition of the Partition and its reverberations. In India any literature on borders and sectarian violence can be linked with the events of 1947. Before I come to the discussion of the novels, it is important for me to shed some light on the two effects of trauma on which I will be basing my

argument: the *latency* regarding its moment of occurrence and the concept of *surviving* the trauma.

Cathy Caruth states that the story of trauma is the narrative of a belated experience that has an endless impact on one's life. One's trauma is inextricably linked with the trauma of another through the narrative emanating from another's wound. She uses examples from Duras and Lacan to situate this notion of the *address* that demands a listening and a response from the reader of the story. This encounter with trauma, both at the moment of its occurrence and its subsequent address, is replete with the possibility of a history that is not congruent with the simple models of experience and reference. She argues that this rethinking of reference does not eliminate history but re-situates it at a point where *immediate understanding* is muffled. Using Freud's *Moses and Monotheism*, Caruth asserts that for a history to be a history of trauma, its referential moment of occurrence is not fully perceived (18).

To explain this concept further, what is meant here is that when a traumatic event happens, at the very moment of its occurrence, individuals might not realize the dent of the moment in their psyche. Let us say, during the Calcutta riots of 1964, a man manages to survive a brutal knife attack. As he is escaping, his mind does not register the moment in its totality. However, as days or weeks or months go by, his mind starts showing a *delayed* response or symptoms to the shock of the moment in the past. These symptoms are the result of a condition that Freud call *traumatic neurosis*.

In *Beyond the Pleasure Principles*, Freud observes a psychotic disorder that unavoidably imposes historical events on the mind. Comparing war neuroses with the symptoms of accident neurosis, Freud infers that in trauma the outside has gone inside without any mediation. He argues that "it is traumatic repetition rather than the meaningful distortions of neurosis, that

defines the shape of individual lives” (Caruth 59). This leads him to ask the question what it would mean to understand the history of trauma (60). He concludes that any accidents with a direct threat to life can produce traumatic neurosis. The important question, however, was not the reaction to the event but the response to the experience of survival. Freud asserts that it is not the bodily injury that works at the bottom of the development of the neurosis but the more important question is “what does it mean for *consciousness* to survive” (61). The consciousness creates a barrier which protects the living being “within an ordered experience of time” (61). The shock that breaks the mind’s experience of time causes trauma. It is the “missing” of the experience of death that creates the experience of shock of the mind as it belatedly tries to grapple with the experience that it has missed. The trauma comes back in the dream not as a response of the direct experience but in an attempt to comprehend the meaning of it that was missed. The survivor is forced to imbibe himself in this threat of death over and over again as he wants to know what it would feel like to actually experience it. Since the mind cannot grasp or face the possibility of its demise, the act of survival becomes an ongoing “testimony to the impossibility of living” (62). To survive a trauma goes beyond the escape of a near-death event; it is the intrinsic repetitive cycle of reliving the experience that challenges the survivor. The consciousness repeats the enactment of the destructive event in an endless cycle. As Caruth infers, “the history of the traumatized individuals is nothing other than the determined repetition of the event of destruction” (63). She gives the example of war survivors who attempt to commit suicide after actually having survived the war as their minds are traumatized by the repetition of their near-death experiences. The violence of history therefore imposes on the human psyche a formation of history that is an endless repetition of the previous violence.

The traumatic fright can be found not only in the dream itself but in the experience of waking up from it: “It is the experience of *waking into consciousness* that, peculiarly, is identified with the reliving of the trauma” (64). So the idea of trauma is confronted not only with the experience of facing it but also the consciousness of surviving it without knowing. Repetition is an attempt to claim that survival. To understand history as a history of trauma, one has to regard it as a history “experienced as the endless attempt to assume one’s survival as one’s own” (64). This incomprehensibility of survival is the driving motive behind Freud’s principle of the death drive.

In my discussion of the next two novels, I will be trying to show how the questions and fissures of history and trauma create the emplotments of characters and their narratives.

Ice-Candy-Man

A cursory review of Partition narratives reveals to what degree it is dominated by male voices and patriarchal discourses, whether in the political context or in the private narratives of families which bore the brunt of this traumatic maelstrom. One can even go so far out to say that there has been a deliberate patriarchal veil which has tried to muffle the voice of the women who had the ill-fortune of *crossing the border with the enemy*. In her influential study of the narratives of the women who had seen the partition from close quarters, Urvashi Butalia points out the different predicaments that the women faced while speaking about their experience of the violence of partition:

Partition is so much a part of ‘family’ histories, and also because the families are often fearful of ‘letting’ their members speak about Partition without the elders, usually the men, being around—it was always the men who spoke. If addressed directly, the women would defer to the men. In separate interviews, whenever those were possible, women would often begin by saying they had nothing to say, nothing, that is, of any importance. (*The Other Side of Silence* 280)

The Indian Partition not only saw the massacre of around 1 million people in the sub-continent, and a mass migration of about 15 million people, but an estimate of 75,000 women were abducted and/or raped during the crisis of national becoming. Butalia suggests that between 33,000 – 50,000 Hindu and Sikh women and about 21,000 Muslim women “were captured, abducted, raped by members of the other community” (“Censorship” 81). Considering the fact that Sidhwa’s novel “is the first Partition Anglophone novel from the subcontinent that tells the female version of the story” (*The Other Side of Silence* 227), the narrative like many others of its

kind fails to convey the retrograde motion of those women *who did cross the border*. I would partly agree with Shashi Tharoor and say the focus of the story has a dual lens; one is Lenny's coming of age, and the other captures the saga of the Partition, which actually precipitates this loss of innocence in the protagonist: "...though it looms large in its pages . . . Ms. Sidhwa's novel is about a child's loss of innocence . . .[and] about servants and laborers and artisans caught up in events they barely understand, but in which they play a terrible part."

Instead of voicing the female silences what Lenny does is basically offer a neutral, and naïve, portrayal of the perplexing circumstances of the time. Deepika Bahri in her essay, "Telling Tales: Women and the trauma of partition in Sidhwa's *Cracking India*," argues that Sidhwa's Lenny does the job of articulating the experiences of abducted women during that period. She quotes Cathy Caruth: "the traumatized person...carries an impossible history within them, or they become themselves the symptom of a history they cannot entirely possess" (226).

As far as a traumatized person carrying the history of those around her is concerned, Lenny definitely does that. But again as Caruth has said, it is an impossible history. The term impossible history is replete with the problematics of possibility and impossibility. Taking Caruth's position the corollary question is then what is the possibility for those traumatized people actually to articulate their own history of violence? In fact, early on in her essay, Bahri writes that Lenny is basically established by Sidhwa as a sympathetic conduit who gives tone to the suffering that could all too easily lapse into prelinguistic stupor even if it were given permission to express itself. She 'reads' with a concentrated gaze the script in the void where a tangible record of the events and the suffering should have been. Some portion of the horror that Ayah has known passes through Lenny in reaching the reader (225). Well, Lenny as a sympathetic conduit does her job. But Lenny the naïve *baby*, never actually gets to *know* Ayah's

experiences after her abduction; she is not *told* what really happened to Ayah, not at least as a first person account of her ordeal. Nor does she de-silence the memory which Hamida brings with her. She is more of an “amanuensis,” “a neutral medium that can carry and convey the suffering that would silence its worst victims” (Bahri 224).

One of the effects of Partition has been the trend of narratives that cannot cross borders and Sidhwa’s novel instantiates the rupture by ending with Ayah’s departure from Lahore. In the context of historical novels, one needs to ask how memory functions in the narrative? Are the moments of remembering or recalling the past associated with the present or another past event or the future? In other words, is memory a trope of the narrative? Or is the novel itself a project of remembering that which has been silenced by the historiography? If so, then one must demonstrate a silencing of that which needs to be remembered; in the case of *The Ice-Candy-Man*, it would be the abduction of women. Lenny is traumatized indirectly, through the violence experienced by others, and so the important idea here is witnessing. She bears witness to events that she does not understand, and the actual physical violence is the occasion- just as she *witnesses* the men making advances on Ayah. It is her ability to see without understanding that produces the material for the narrative. The sectarian and sexual violence might be better understood for what they are – part of a civil war as that is as much about violations of the sacred or spiritual (religious beliefs) as it is about violations of the physical (women’s bodies). On one hand, the novel might be critiqued because the violence seems to be made secondary or simply a pretext for Lenny’s transformation or entry into the realm of knowledge. On the other hand, the novel clearly tries to unsettle conventional historical accounts or perspectives of the Partition by making Lenny, a child, and Ayah, a servant, the central figures of the narrative, which otherwise are excluded from the official narratives of the Partition.

Lenny's knowledge is continuously shaped by the conversations around her. It is to be understood that when Lenny talks about the *Radcliffe Commission* dealing out "Indian cities like a pack of cards" (140) and the British playing gods (140) she is definitely dealing with information passed onto her by the adults. But in her subtle exclamation of the fact that she becomes a Pakistani in a snap, "just like that" (140), we again get a glimpse of her innocence and that innocuous statement is enough to make us realize the complications of the situation. One character which immediately springs to mind in this connection is the figure of the great grand uncle of the narrator in Amitav Ghosh's novel *The Shadow Lines*, about whom I talk in greater detail in this chapter. The other character with whom Lenny can be likened is that of Toba Tek Singh, the mentally retarded Sikh from the short story "Toba Tek Singh". Like Lenny, Toba Tek Singh epitomizes the political subaltern caught in a jigsaw puzzle of colliding discourses. We are immediately reminded of Manto's story when Lenny says:

There is much disturbing talk. India is going to be broken. Can one break a country? And what happens if they break it where our house is? Or crack it further up on Warris Road? How will I ever get to Godmother's then? (92)

The film adaptation of the *Ice-Candy-Man* is incidentally named *1947 Earth*. The entire movie is based on Lenny's experiences *in Lahore*. Pir Pindo never makes it into the movie. Characters like, Adi, Godmother, Slave Sister, or Oldhusband too are not to be found in the movie version. The focus in the movie is definitely more on the Partition than on Lenny's growing up into maturity around her experiences of the Partition in Lahore. The Masseur plays a significant role and the love triangle between Ayah, who is named Shantabai in the movie, the Masseur and the Ice-Candy-Man is the platform on which the narrative focuses the trauma of the Partition. In fact, the movie ends at the point when Ayah or Shantabai is being kidnapped by

Muslim hooligans. Then as an epilogue, the narrator (now grown up) alludes to Ayah's whereabouts after her kidnapping in a short monologue. The image on the screen at this point concentrates on a blurred womanlike figure, mysterious in her non-identification.

The film version gives the Ice-Candy-Man a proper name, Dil Nawaz (the winner of hearts). The transformation is more conspicuous in the film, mainly due to the visual representation of the Partition turmoil at Lahore. But the focus in the movie is more on events which were sidelined in Sidhwa's narrative. Thus when Dil Nawaz finds the massacred bodies in the train from Gurdaspur, which had his sister in it, the entire collective memory which has haunted the people in the sub-continent, is suggested, gestured at and successfully recalled. It is no longer the story of the demise of Lenny the *baby's* innocence, it becomes the story of a saga, or the story of recollecting a haunting memory, not of Lenny, but of the people who can still recollect and live the trauma. This collective envisaging of the trauma of the Partition has been gestured at many times on-screen. I would say that Amrita Pritam's Punjabi story *Pinjar* (translated into English by Khushwant Singh as the *Skeleton*) is the one film which does try to work itself into this de-silencing aperture. But it too falls short when it comes to airing the story of the women *after they crossed the border*. It is the story of a Hindu girl Puro who is all set to marry a suitable Hindu groom (Ramchand) when she is abducted by a Muslim man by the name of Rashid. The story focuses on her experience after that, how she is disowned by her family and she embraces Islam and marries Rashid. It is a poignant tale of trauma and literal partition of the self and the socio-communal identity. Later on after the Partition, Puro decides to stay back in Pakistan with Rashid; she refuses to join her family in India, that is, she does not cross the border. Lajo, her sister-in-law whom she rescues from her rapist, is supposedly "welcomed" back

to her family, though we never come to know what happened to her afterwards. In an interview, Amrita Pritam has said:

The most terrible happening of the times was the Partition. I still shiver when I think of those blood-drenched days. I had already spoken of the fate of women in the frenzy in my poetry. After Partition Shahnawaz Khan and Mrinalini Sarabhai were involved in the rehabilitation of abducted girls. I would listen to the stranger than fiction stories that they told me. It was thus that Puro of Pinjar took shape and the novel wrote itself.³¹

The narrative of *Ice Candy Man* comes close to this when Ayah resurfaces and Hamida is introduced into the plot of the novel. But along with it the narrator focuses the reader's attention on the importance of the feminine maturation she undergoes both physically and mentally. While at the same time she is tormented by her dreams of the riots at Lahore and she is also deeply perturbed by her indiscretion, by her compulsion to tell the truth, which eventually leads to Ayah's abduction. She blames her "vile, truth infected" (184) tongue for Ayah's fate. She is haunted by her memories: "And when I do fall asleep the slogans of the mobs reverberate in my dreams, pierced by women's wails and shrieks – and I awaken screaming for Ayah" (213). Sidhwa's portrayal of the Recovered Women's Camp is a brief glimpse of the sociological trials of the "fallen women" (214). Lenny sees Hamida at close quarters, but again she gets only a brief glimpse of her ill "fate" (214). She comes to know that Hamida had a "good husband" (222) who will not allow her to see her children, that she was kidnapped by Sikhs from her family in Amritsar, and "once that happens, sometimes, the husband – or his family – won't take her back"

³¹ Nirupama Dutt in *The Tribune*: Chandigarh, Sunday, February 20, 2005.

(215). Lenny cannot understand the reason behind this; she asks her Godmother – “Why? It isn’t her fault she was kidnapped” (215).

Lenny drops hints about Hamida and the reader in a round-about way guesses what has happened to her. But she is not allowed space to delineate *her* voice; her memory is grotesque. She has perhaps deliberately voided her story for this reason. But there was room for more depiction, of her family, of her origin, of *her* story, not during and after her abduction, but before her kidnapping and after her recovery. This brings us to Ayah, *the* woman figure of the novel (considering that Lenny is a child and her sexuality is just developing). Ayah literally vanishes from the text after her abduction to resurface for a few pages near the end. In the meantime we get an *idea* as to her whereabouts after her abduction through the conversations between various characters. In fact her presence still dominates the pages even when we miss her physically. Lenny thinks everyone is looking for her and her memory of Ayah haunts Lenny: “Looking for Ayah. We are all looking for Ayah” (192).

We are gradually told that Ayah is now married to the Ice-Candy-Man, that she is heavily associated with Hira Mandi, the red-light area of Lahore, that she is no longer the person Lenny knew, that she has changed, that she does not want to face Lenny’s family again because she is *ashamed*. Lenny realizes the cause of her shame. She comes to understand that fallen women are not for the common society. She also comes to know that society is not for the fallen women too; once you fall, you do not come back up, your friends stop being your friends and you become an alien; thus Ayah no longer remains the Ayah that Lenny knew and loved, she becomes Mumtaz, the noor(heavenly light) of the *othered* society. Lenny feels the deep loss and she is ashamed by her indiscretion for revealing Ayah’s hideout and more ashamed to realize the cruel insensitivity of the society of which she is a part.

‘Ashamed?’ I say surprised. And even as Godmother says : ‘She has nothing to be afraid of ,’ I know Ayah is deeply, irrevocably ashamed. They have shamed her. Not those men in the carts – they were strangers – but Sharbat Khan and Ice-candy-man and Imam Din and Cousin’s cook and the butcher and the other men she counted among her friends and admirers. I’m not very clear how – despite Cousin’s illuminating tutorials – but I’m certain of her humiliation. Sensing this I more than ever want to see Ayah : to comfort and kiss her ugly experiences away. (253-54)

But when Lenny eventually gets to meet Ayah, she is in for a deeper shock. She realizes more, but this realization has a price. She *faces* the reality of seeing a *fallen woman* whom she knew, before her fall. She wants to hug the Ayah she knew, but could not get herself to love the person that Ayah has now become. She is puzzled by her gaudy attire, by her mannerisms. She knows now that *her* Ayah is lost forever into the annals of her memory. She feels it, yet she cannot really voice her realization meticulously: “Where have the radiance gone and the animation gone? Can the soul be extracted from its living body? (260).”

Mumtaz tells Lenny and Godmother of her wish to go back to her family in Amritsar. Godmother is skeptical about the chances of her family accepting her back. She voices her concern to Mumtaz, but she is adamant about her choice. She cannot forget “what happened (262)”, she can never forgive the Ice-Candy-Man. When Godmother asks her to accept the past as her fate and to forgive her husband and start a new life, Mumtaz replies, “I am past that...I’m not alive (262).” The picture that the narrator draws here is a poignant one. But the picture is short and the picture fades away when Ayah *crosses the border* into Amritsar. We are never told how she was received by her family. We are never told the fate of this *fallen woman*. We get to

know that her memory of what happened to her is traumatic but we never get to *know* her memory. We never get to know the de-silencing around her re-turn to the *accepted* society once she goes back to Amritsar.

The Shadow Lines

The Shadow Lines is a novel built in a bildungsroman style with the main narrator growing up and visiting the important episodes through his memory with a continuous overlap of timelines. The narrative build-up is quite interesting as there is no omniscient narrator yet the different episodes are concocted and woven through the various stories he hears from the other characters. He uses his imagination to frame the experiences of the other major characters. The most important focus of his narrative is the relationship he had with his uncle Tridib and it is mostly through Tridib's experiences that he creates his tales. The title of the novel stands for the abstract borders that separates states. In my discussion of *The Shadow Lines*, I will be concentrating on the idea of border formation as envisaged in the narrative; I will also be looking at the how the main characters deal with the ideas of nationalism and history in post-Partition India and the traumatic effects of riots in the aftermath of the Partition. The narrative of the novel does not just critique the historiography of modern India and the silences it creates, it also acknowledges that narratives of the imagination will fail to replace the archive on which the history is based. While it is true that the narrative shows the silences of modern Indian historiography, it also fail to lay claim to an appropriation of it. That is why the narrator struggles to find words to express the silence that has gripped him over the years following Tridib's death. The narrative might question the truth claims of history but it also negates the notion that imagined tabulation of personal stories can replace the archive on which the historiography is referenced. Consequently, the narrator struggles to give meaning to Tridib's death as his emplotment does not have a string reference point.

Thamma's character can easily be read as a yearning for the pristine anti-colonial nationalism of the pre-Independence era that unified all Indians against the British. However, I am inclined to infer her legacy as a continuation of the militant struggle, which has now morphed into what Tagore had warned against—a violence of inhumane proportions that has defined the subcontinent on the basis of *state* defined shadow lines. The apology here is not for the shadow lines only, but it is also for the process that had started during the period of British Raj. The only difference is that the perpetrators have changed.

The Shadow Lines is replete with images arising out of the Indian Partition. While it does not evoke any direct narrative of the event, characters are shown to be constantly in a forced movement out of its effects. Suvir Kaul has pointed out that “in contemporary India, the burden of Partition is known in its reiterations, in the continuing forced movements of families and local populations away from the neighborhood, the city, the region that they know as home” (4). For Thamma this movement is at times immensely baffling. Born in Dhaka, Thamma moved to Calcutta as a school teacher after her husband died in 1935. Circumstances and then the Partition of 1947 prevented her from visiting Dhaka for a few years. Later during the 1960s, while living near Golepark, she would meet elderly people who had crossed the border because of the Partition. It is from them that she learns that her uncle might be staying in a place called Garia. In an effort to patch up an old family feud, she visits Garia. On her way, she sees the shanties of refugees who had poured in across the border in the wake of the Partition. She feels an abrupt disdain towards the refugees and when her son points out that they too had immigrated from across the border, she points out that it happened *before* the Partition. While at Garia, the narrator manages to catch a close view of the shanties and the squatters, but his relative forbids

him to look there as it is “dirty.” When Thamma learns that her uncle still lives in Dhaka, she comments: “Imagine what it must be like to die in *another* country, abandoned and alone in your old age” (135).

She refers to her former home as another country. The narrator notices her misty eyes at the thought of rescuing her uncle and “bringing him back where he belonged, to her *invented* country” (137). For Thamma, nationalism is born out of the bloody sacrifice which she witnessed in the war against British colonialism; it is militant but without any inside or outside, all-encompassing in its sensation of sacrifice for the nation. This nationalism respects borders and states governing those borders. The fight for independence was built on the idea of a secure Indian map whose boundaries would forever be closed to foreign invaders. That is why Thamma tries to legitimize her Indian citizenship by telling her son that she moved to Calcutta *before* the Partition while the refugees are looked upon disdainfully because their move to Calcutta flouted the security of the border. It is the creation of this map which has transformed her place of birth inside the shadow line of a foreign country. Talking to the narrator about England, she says:

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 and their son’s blood. They know they’re a nation because they’ve drawn their borders with blood.....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? (78)

Similar to the allusion drawn in *Ghare Baire*, war here becomes a religion, and the nation is the secular God, produced out of an act of faith. People engage in war to express their devotion to the nation. Tagore had presaged the occasion of bloody borders based on the examples set by Western nationalism that would eventually emulate the same violence India had been trying to overthrow. As discussed previously, for Tagore, Indian nationalism was the breeding ground for a discontent that could not be pacified by following British political dictums. The independent India that Thamma and her contemporaries had set out to create, depicts the shadow lines borne out of the nationalist bloodshed based on the model of England's national self-creation.

Ironically, Thamma coaxes the narrator to replicate for India the same blood bond that she sees the English to possess for their nation. In her ideal, she locates a strong and independent India as distinctly emulative of the nationalism she had once grown to admire. At the same time, while looking at the scenario subjectively she finds a dazed bafflement in comprehending the birth of the border between her and Dhaka. Her comprehension of her nationality legitimizes the border while at the same time she realizes that her birthplace has suddenly become a part of an alien country. The dilemma of being de-legitimized by the nation in which she was born is a question, which she finds unfathomable. Thus, she is placed in a strange quandary when she has to fill up the visa form to travel back to the country of her birth. She fails to understand "how her place of birth had come to be so messily at odds with her nationality" (152).

Thamma also offers an implicit critique on the boundary definitions of the sub-continent, which she indicates, is a product of this national division. The narrator points out Thamma's surprise when she expects to see the border between India and East Pakistan conspicuously physical in its establishment but learns that the border is not comprised of barbed wire fencing and soldiers are not positioned facing each other on either side of this shadow line.

But if there aren't any trenches or anything, how are people to know? I mean, where's the difference then? And if there's no difference both sides will be the same; it'll be just like it used to be before, when we used to catch a train in Dhaka and get off in Calcutta the next day without anybody stopping us. What was it all for then—partition and all the killing and everything—if there isn't something in between? (151)

Thamma is trying to make sense of the war by creating a physical border between India and East Pakistan. It is as if the communal riots take a nationalist tone in her mind; it becomes taxing for her comprehension to grasp the concept of bloody borders formed *because* of anything other than the will of the nation-state. Many years later, the narrator realizes the confusion Thamma had faced while filling out her visa forms. She is vexed and tells her son how in yesteryears she could “come” home to Dhaka so easily from her travels abroad without filling up any sort of extensive paperwork. The narrator responds to her comment:

I jumped to my feet, delighted at having caught her out—she, who'd been a schoolmistress for twenty-seven years.

Tha'mma, Tha'mma! I cried. How could you have 'come' home to Dhaka? You don't know the difference between coming and going (152)!

This confusion between coming and going--the novel is divided into two parts: the first part is called “Going Away” and the second part is called “Coming Home”--, and locating one's place of birth in *another* country perplex the old lady. When she eventually meets her uncle in Bangladesh, she exclaims that she has come home at last. In Dhaka, she fails to recognize the city of her birth. She keeps asking from time to time, “Where's Dhaka? I can't see Dhaka (193)?” Asked to stay at Dhanmundi, Thamma exclaims that it is for foreigners. But Tridib

quickly makes her realize that she is as much a foreigner in Dhaka as Tridib's British girlfriend May, in fact more so as May does not even need a visa to visit Bangladesh. Her uncle, *Jethamoshai*, refuses to leave his home and travel with them to India. He is adamant on his principle that borders are flimsy, once you start moving, you cannot stop.

I understand very well... I know everything, I understand everything. Once you start moving you never stop. That's what I told my sons when they took the trains. I said: I don't believe in Indian-Shindia. It's all very well, you're going away now, but suppose when you get there they decide to draw another line somewhere? What will you do then? Where will you move to? No one will have you anywhere. As for me, I was born here, and I'll die here. (215)

The figure of this senile old man is very much reminiscent of the character Toba Tek Singh, the mentally retarded Sikh in Sadat Hassan Manto's short story. Toba Tek Singh just could not make out where and why his little village of the *same name* (his village too was called Toba Tek Singh) passed into after the Partition. He wanted to return to his own village, his own home; he did not want to go to India or Pakistan. During a pre-arranged exchange between lunatics of the two countries at the Wagah border, he dies in the no man's land and thus confirms the fact that his home is in his land, in his village and not in either India or Pakistan and that his village was *his* and was not meant to be a part of either country.

There, behind barbed wire, on one side, lay India and behind more barbed wire, on the other side, lay Pakistan. In between, on a bit of *earth* which had no name, lay Toba Tek Singh. (524)

This short story exemplifies an important difficulty facing the people of the region who were witnesses to the Partition, both directly and indirectly. It even problematizes the notion of a nation when one considers the ending as quoted above. It makes us wonder whether it was an all-encompassing nationalism that the people at the periphery of the dominant political discourse, really wanted. The village of Toba Tek Singh is emblematic of those millions who were stranded at the edge of this discourse. It makes us recollect the villages of Pir Pindo in Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice-Candy-Man* and Mano Majra of Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan*, just a few microcosmic examples out of an unaccounted for macrocosm of India at the moment of partition. To them the idea of a nation was simply a myth away from their contemporary reality, an imposition from the political center.

It is obvious that the narrative of *The Shadow Lines* critiques the concept of postcolonial borders of the nation states of the subcontinent. *Jethamoshai* posits the idea firmly; his family is forced to leave East Pakistan because of the Partition. He stays behind and is eventually killed as he is making his way to India, all because of an incident in far-off Kashmir that had sparked off sectarian violence throughout the subcontinent. Thamma too is baffled by the invisible borders as she tries to come to grips with her false ideology of making nations through bloody borders; Tridib is killed because of it; while Indian national history hides the Hazratbal incident and the following communal disturbance under a veil of silence. Decades down the line, the narrator revisits the violence of this silence during his argument with Malik and desperately tries to find some evidence of historical coverage about the riots of 1964.

One afternoon in 1979, during his PhD research, the narrator, with some friends, went to attend a lecture at a library in Delhi. After the lecture was over, the group made their way to the canteen. They surprised each other with their recollections of their lives during the Indo-Chinese

war of 1962. They agreed that it was the most important event that involved their country which they witnessed during the time, except the narrator who declares that the war with China has faded in his memory in comparison with the riots of 1964. Much to the surprise of the group, none of them had a working memory of the incident. When Malik asks exactly what had happened in the riots, the narrator is struck with a mute recollection of the events that he fails to express in words.

There was a riot, I said helplessly.

There are riots all the time, Malik said.

This was a terrible riot, I said.

All riots are terrible, Malik said. But it must have been a local thing. Terrible or not, it's hardly comparable to a war.

But don't you *remember*? I said. Didn't you read about it or hear about it? After all the war with China didn't happen on your doorstep, but you remember *that*?

Surely you remember—you *must* remember? (221)

The statement that “all” riots are terrible robs the 1964 riots of its specific identity; it was just one riot in the long line of riots, nothing spectacular as the memory of it has been wiped out. Yet the people do remember the war of 1962, though it happened effectively at the border of the country. It was also a war that India lost. But the memory of that is living and breathing because the idea of the nation was at stake. So a lost war, fought thousands of miles away at the border of the country finds a comfortable couch in the middle of the memory room but a riot which killed nearly as many people as the war is relegated to a dark nook of the mind by its seeming unutterance. This silence stems from the idea that unlike war which united the country as a nation,

the example of a communal violence questions the very legitimacy of the nation and hence is covered up somehow under a rug of obscurity. To prove his point, the narrator takes his friends to the library to look at the newspaper files concerning the event. His findings, or lack of it, in a way answers his earlier question about the silence of the riots in the memory of the people.

In my earlier discussion of Trouillot's work, it has been asserted as to how silence can enter during the stage of archiving of knowledge which is essentially a process where meanings are made through a combination of their absence and presence. Vinita Chandra argues that Ghosh tries to reveal the manner in which the riots are conspicuously erased from the national memory as they function to challenge and disrupt Indian historiographies "neat" narratives of wars against foreign enemies which are fought outside the borders and display the "methodology and rationality of organized warfare" (67). In order to achieve this goal, the historical archive needs to be complicit in the systematic erasure of the memory of the riots. As the narrator sifts through the huge volume of newspaper archive pertaining to 1964, he struggles to find any historical reference to the riots. He confesses to his friends that he does not remember the month or date of the event which makes their job much harder. Malik tells him that if they cannot verify his facts with the information contained in the newspaper archive, his account of the 1964 riots will indeed be proven to be a figment of his imagination. The *nonreferentiality* of the event will make the riot a fictional enterprise.

The library had shelves dedicated to all aspects of India's 1962 war—"history, political analyses, memoirs, tracts—weighty testimony to the eloquence of war (222)." In another shelf was full of materials on the 1965 war, about which, Malik exclaims with a smile, "at least we won that one (222)." Having failed to make any headway with their search, the group was on the verge of retiring, when the narrator suddenly remembers an event of 1964. During a cricket

match between England and India, the debutant wicketkeeper, Budhi Kunderan, had scored a test century that coincided with the day of the riots. The group immediately resume their search and soon find newspaper references to the Madras Test Match that begun on February 10th, 1964, the day the narrator had a first-hand experience of the riot (about which I will discuss later on in this section). But the lead story had nothing to do with the riots in Calcutta but talked about the sixty-eighth session of the Indian National Congress at Bhubaneswar, Orissa. Trudging through the newspaper, the narrator at last found a reference to riots in Khulna, East Pakistan, in which twenty nine people were killed. But no mention of the Calcutta riots could be found. After his friends left, he suddenly realized that a newspaper always publishes stories a day after their occurrence. It immediately makes him search for the next day edition of the newspaper and he is at last able to find a reference to the Calcutta riots in a huge banner headline which stated: “*Curfew in Calcutta, Police Open Fire, 10 dead, 15 wounded* (224)”. In his essay “Separation Anxiety: Growing up Inter/National in *The Shadow lines*”, Suvir Kaul states that the narrator discovers that the silences are not “contingent or accidental, but are *constitutive* of the nature of Indian modernity, indeed of the identity of the post-colonial subcontinental nation-states of Pakistan” (269). The articulation of the silences acknowledges the difficult and repressed truth that states and citizens are founded in violence (269).

The lack of archival material about the 1964 riots surprises the narrator. In his essay “The Greatest Sorrow: Times of Joy Recalled in Wretchedness,” written ironically in the wake of the 1984 anti-Sikh riots, Ghosh recounts how his memories of the Hazratbal incident and concomitant problems of 1964 were vividly present in his memory, yet he struggled mightily to actually get hold of concrete, tabulated, written evidence. His research found lots of materials on the Indo-Chinese war of 1962, but no substantial work could be excavated that was focused on

the Calcutta riots. The war of 1962 was fought at the border, in “a remote patch of terrain”, and had few physical repercussions outside the immediate areas of the battle. The 1964 riots on the other hand had affected many cities and had caused plenty of human casualties. The lack of materials in the library pertaining to the event “establish in the historical memory” the notion that any battle fought at the border carry more nationalistic weight than “major outbreaks of civil violence (47).” The newspapers tend to cover these events at their immediate moment of impact and occurrence but tend to forget all about them as time passes. Ghosh wonders why civil violence in their retrospective significance are looked at being situated outside history.

Yet there was not a single book devoted to this event: a cursory glance at any library's bookshelves was enough to establish that in historical memory a small war counts for much more than a major outbreak of civil violence. While the riots were under way, they received extensive and detailed coverage. Yet, once contained, they had vanished instantly, both from public memory and the discourse of history. Why was this so? Why is it that civil violence seems to occur in parallel time, as though it were outside history? Why is it that we can look back upon these events in sorrow and outrage and yet be incapable of divining any lasting solutions or any portents for the future? (46-47)

Ghosh remembers how the events of 1984 might have prompted him to revisit his memories of 1964. Yet, the frustration he feels is not bound by any time line. To him the violence of these events were numbing but what was more confounding was that the loss of lives did not create a new the trajectory in the history and politics of the region (48). Revisiting the aftermath of the Khalistan problems of 1984, he realizes that a further partitioning of the country

will not solve the current problem. It will only lead to the creation of another subset of minorities, which in turn will end up replicating the existing socio-political dilemmas.

In *The Shadow Lines*, Ghosh tries to redress this absence in the archive.

Every word I write about those events of 1964 is the product of a struggle with silence. It is a struggle I am destined to lose- have already lost-for even after these years, I do not know where within me, in which corner of my world, this silence lies. All I know of it is what it is not. It is not, for example, the silence of an imperfect memory. Nor is it a silence enforced by a ruthless state-nothing like that, no barbed wire, no checkpoints to tell me where its boundaries lie. I know nothing of this silence except that it lies outside the reach of my intelligence, beyond words that is why this silence must win, must inevitably defeat me, because it is not a presence at all; it is simply a gap, a hole, an emptiness in which there are no words.

The enemy of silence is speech, but there can be no speech without words, and there can be no words without meanings -so it follows, inexorably, in the manner of syllogisms, that when we try to speak of events of which we do not know the meaning, we must lose ourselves in the silence that lies in the gap between words and the world. This is a silence that is proof against any conceivable act of scorn or courage; it lies beyond defiance- for what means have we to defy the mere absence of meaning? Where there is no meaning, there is banality, and that is what this silence consists in, that is why it cannot be defeated -because it is the silence of an absolute, impenetrable banality. (218)

The struggle with silence can be read as the hole in the narrative that the narrator could never bridge because of his epistemological vacuum surrounding Tridib's death. It is not the product of an imperfect memory as the entire novel is built on his recollection of events since childhood. He also admits that it is not the imposition of a state or dictatorship that has made him fail in words when it comes to expressing the circumstances surrounding Tridib's death. The silence is because of the absence of an archive on which history can employ a narrative that can make a truth claim. In the absence of that archive, the narrator is forced to "describe at second hand the manner of Tridib's death (228)". In her essay, "Fictions of Nationhood in Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines*", Neelam Srivastava has argued that the ideological stance of the narrative questions the "nature" of the modern Indian nation through a "precise imagining (80)". She says that the narrator achieves this "precise imagining" by constructing stories through memory, imagination and second hand accounts. While I agree with her interpretation somewhat, it has to be noted that second hand accounts give rise to a fictionality that he wants to reference back to the archive. It is the trauma of not knowing *accurately* why and how his uncle was murdered that plagues his psyche. The precise imagining works when Tridib tells his tales but his death creates a void which the narrator cannot fill with imprecise imagination. He wants to draw a referential inference from the knowledge he possesses about Tridib's death in the absence of which his trauma is meaningless for him, though he can feel it in his struggle to get hold of words to eradicate the silence of now knowing. That is why he does not even know where exactly the silence is situated as he is unaware of what it is suppressing. In a near-death experience, as I have shown in my discussion of Freud, there is a referential point of history in one's life. The referential response is belated but the cause of its existence is referenced. But in the case of the narrator here, it is impossible for him to fathom out the exact point of reference

behind the muteness of his own silence and struggle for words to express out that silence into a valid reason. Consequently, he cannot scorn at nor can he defy the inscrutability of it. The absence of meaning can also be read as the defying of logic in the carnage of 1964. It can also be thought of as being the absence in his core to realize the meaning of his trauma as the very cause of it is beyond his comprehension.

The trauma can definitely be located in the narrator with his response to his memory of the 1964 riots³². As a young school boy he recollects his experience of the bus rides to and from the school; the images he paints speaks of a mind that has not been able to shed the traumatic memory over the years. He was unaware of the trouble when he went to the bus stop the morning of the riots. His mind was instead preoccupied with the prospect of an Indian defeat against England in the Madras cricket test match. As he was pacing up and down the bus stop, the only thought that was on his mind was the injury to the cricket player Farouk Engineer and his rookie replacement Budhi Kunderan and how it hurt India's chances of winning the game. He noticed fleetingly that his other friends had not showed up in their usual spots for the school bus. At last he spotted the bus making its way to him but it was conspicuously more empty than it had ever been. As he embarked upon the bus he saw that only about "a dozen" boys were huddled together in the bus. As he sat down he noticed that their eyes were fixated towards his water-bottle. They told him that "they" had supposedly poisoned the Tala Tank and effectively compromised the water supply of the entire city. No one asked who "they" were and why "they" had poisoned their own water.

³² For more information about the use of idea of trauma in literature, see: Greg Foster. "Freud, Faulkner, Caruth: Trauma and the Politics of Literary Form." *Narrative*. 15.3 (2007): 259-285

We did not need to ask any questions; we knew the answers the moment he had said it; it was a reality that existed only in the saying, so when you heard it said, it did not matter whether you believed it or not—it only mattered that it had been said at all. Everything fell into place now—the emptiness of the streets, the absence of the other boys—it all fitted. There were no more questions. (200)

The narrator thus comprehends the sectarian violence that had engulfed the city. He also understood the crucial theme of that violence, that it exists in its very utterance, and the destruction it causes. Years later, the narrator realizes through his frantic search for an archive of the riots how muffled the utterance is after the moment as he struggles to find any pertinent history related to the event. The communal disharmony is acknowledged in the gaps created by the realization of the violence and the fissures within the non-mentioning of it in modern Indian history. In the bus, the other boys waited to see if Montu will be waiting at his stop for he supposedly could shed some light on the issue facing the city as he was a “Muslim”. Caught by the consternation of the moment, the narrator lies when he is asked to affirm his friendship with Montu. He recollects how his “throat went dry” and he eventually tells the other boys that he had not seen Montu in months.

I was looking out of the window when we got to Gole Park, watching the spot, right beside the tubewell, where Montu usually waited for the bus. He wasn't there. Stealing a quick glance down his lane I saw a gap in his curtain and I knew he was watching us. (200)

The spot where Montu used to wait for the bus was beside a tubewell, an observation that the narrator probably does more acutely that day as Montu was supposedly a part of “them” who had poisoned the city's water supply. He looked at his house quickly, furtively, as he did not want to

be looking at “them” in this moment of crisis. He also did not want the other boys to find out that he *knew* where Montu lived as that probably would have given away the fact of their friendship to the others. It might be interesting to note the symbolism of the “gap in the curtain”; a curtain is supposed to hide and keep secrets. But the gap compromises the secret. The allusion to the “gap in the curtain” might signify the very utterance of a communal divide that is supposed to be kept secret within the historiography of the state. But moments like the riots of 1964 create the gaps, which make the people recollect the ongoing horrors of the continued effects of the Partition. When the narrator thinks that Montu is watching them, he implies that he is one of *them*, part of the *other* side, who are watching the school bus, while it can be also interpreted as Montu watching the bus as the *other* of whom *he* is afraid.

The story of that day continues inside the narrator’s school in Mrs. Anderson’s mathematics class. The teacher is shown to be an Anglo-Indian, which is interesting to note under this circumstance; she can be said to stand for the Anglo-colonial heritage of the country, a heritage that had a lot to do with the eventual partition of the region. She was teaching mathematics, the most logical, formulaic, of all subjects. It is a sharp contrast to the rampant series of illogical events of the day. Mrs. Anderson departed from the normal formula of her class when she did not call out the students’ names at the commencement of the class.

This cause a stir amongst us because it was yet another departure from normalcy, and by then we were all silently concentrating our will on keeping everything as normal as possible. (200)

The children could hear commotion and violent noises outside the classroom. They were used to the sounds of the busy city and political marches but the noises were different this time. There

was a uniquely frightening effect of these sounds, “crescendo of discords” that created a fear of “slippery formlessness” inside them (201). After school came to a premature end, the students started their return journey on the bus and tried to grasp the desolateness of the riot ridden city. They seemed to have forgotten about the all-important cricket match as well. The vendors and the pedestrians who would throng the pavements were all gone and were replaced intermittently by patrolling policemen. The shops were all shut. Gradually they started seeing “knots of men hanging around at corners (202).” They seemed to be waiting for something to happen, probably biding their time and expecting the other side to make a move. The imagery of the violent city seething in its futility is drawn throughout the bus journey. Trouble hit them near Park Circus when some hooligans pelt stones and start chasing their bus. The driver avoided them dexterously and the bus evades their clutch. As the children got up to see the assailants, they found them laughing, “with their arms around each others’ shoulders (203)”. It seemed to the narrator that the “streets had turned themselves inside out” and that their city “had turned” against them (203).

The children were all very afraid to the point of being stupefied with fear (204). The narrator regards this fear to have a texture that he could never forget. It was not like the fear of earthquake or other natural disaster victims feel against the threat of nature, a numbing sensation as one realizes the immensity of his opponent. Nor was it a fear of the state, which the narrator regards as the commonest of all fears.

It is a fear that comes of the knowledge that normalcy is utterly contingent, that the spaces that surround one, the streets that one inhabits, can become, suddenly and without warning, as hostile as a desert in a flash flood. It is this that sets apart the thousand million people who inhabit the subcontinent from the rest of the

world—not language, not food, not music—it is the special quality of loneliness that grows out of the fear of the war between oneself and one’s image in the mirror.(204)

The quoted paragraph symbolizes the utter stupefaction under the assault of sectarian violence. The normalcy that the narrator refers to is contingent on the maintenance of a balance between the communal sentiments. The moment this balance is disrupted, like the Hazratbal incident, communal carnage can spread like a “flash flood” even on a dry and hot desert. Or in other words, the after-effects of the Partition can hit the most peaceful of people in the most peaceful of places and turn their worlds upside down. This bloody legacy of 1947 is the fear between “oneself and one’s image in the mirror”, across the shadow lines of nations and religions.

The silence the narrator relates to at multiple points in the novel is a common motif in Partition literature. There is the silence of the *othered* women; the silence of humanity; the violence of silence. However, this can be further read on two connected levels. The first, is a direct critique of the postcolonial imposition of the idea of nationhood. The second critique, as mentioned before, predates the violence on the anti-colonial nationalism, which eventually leads to a postcolonial Indian nation.

In his essay, “In Defense of the Fragment: Writing about Hindu-Muslim Riots in India Today,” Gyanendra Pandey describes how the historiography of modern India treats the history of violence as both an *aberration* and an *absence* (1). He argues that the idea of the nation-state has been elevated by historiography to the status of the end all of history. It has also led to the creation of binaries such as secular and communal, national and local, progressive and reactionary (3). What this has also done is to make the minorities fall in line with the mainstream--- a mainstream that he regards as essentially a small section of the society.

“Unity in Diversity” is no longer the rallying cry of Indian nationalism. On the contrary, all that belongs to any minority other than the ruling class, all that is challenging, singular, or local—not to say, all difference—appears threatening, intrusive, even “foreign” to this nationalism. (3)

The historiography thus tries to take care of slippages in the binary tenets by making its history vanish or rewriting it in a way so as to show the slippage as a corollary to some other machinations. According to this corollary, the Indian Partition resulted from communalism and was not the result of nationalism. But once the silence is broken, as is the case with a narrative such as *The Shadow Lines*, can we regard the de-silencing as a means of counter-hegemony to expose the vagaries of India’s imported concept of nationalism? As I proposed earlier, literature of the Partition utters the silence of the carnage of 1947 into existence. Indian historiography then can no longer regard it as an absence; its next step is to treat it as an aberration. Following on those terms, communal carnage in secular India is an anomaly and should not be confused with the idea of nationalism. However, the ideology of the modern India nation and its nationalism is what produced the *state* of India, which in turn led to the Partition. The bloody shadow lines mapped under the guise of freedom and envisaged to give form to the modern nation-state, creates more borders within the subcontinent. As a signpost, we can relate this point to Tagore’s thesis of replicating the violence of western nationalism over and over again, even after independence from the British. It is this repetition which makes Robi say the following:

Free, he said laughing. You know, if you look at the pictures on the front pages of newspapers, at home now , all those pictures of dead people—in Assam, the north-east, Punjab, Sri Lanka, Tripura— people shot by terrorists and separatists and the army and the police , you’ll find somewhere behind it all , the single word;

every one's doing it to be free. When I was running a district I would look at these pictures and wonder sometimes what I would do if it were happening in my area. I know what I'd have to do ; I'd have to go out and make speeches to my policemen saying : ... You have to kill whole villages if necessary - we have nothing against people, it's the terrorists we want to get, but have to be willing to pay the price of our unity and freedom. And when I went back home, I would find an anonymous note for me saying: We're going to get you, nothing personal, we have to kill you for our freedom. It would be like reading my own speech transcribed on a mirror. And I think to myself why don't they draw thousands of little lines through the whole sub continent and give every little place a new name? What would it change? It's a mirage; the whole thing is a mirage. How can anyone divide a memory? If freedom were possible, surely Tridib's death would have set me free. And yet, all it takes to set my hand shaking like a leaf, fifteen years later, thousands of miles away, at the other end of another continent, is a chance remark by a waiter in a restaurant. (246-247)

Robi's traumatic neurosis finds expression in the quoted passage. In London, Robi, Ila and the narrator visit an Indian restaurant run by a Bangladeshi man. As the waiter, Rehman-Sahib, starts a conversation with the trio the topic veers off to Robi's visit to Bangladesh in 1964. Rehman's fond memories of Bangladesh is juxtaposed here with Robi's traumatic memories of Tridib's death. Unable to control his exasperation on being forced to recall the event, Robi storms out of the restaurant. The above paragraph gives vent to his neurosis by making him relive the event. His criticism of nationalism is quite apparent when he points to the separatist movements in Punjab, Sri-Lanka, Assam, and the rest of the north-east India. Everyone's is doing it to gain

freedom but at what price? And where will this stop? The clashes between government agents and separatists will continue till the entire map is transcribed into tiny “free” places, and even then it will not stop. The police and other arms of the state will keep fighting to preserve their own nation and nationalism, while the insurgents will not hold back as they are searching for their own nation through their nationalism. Somewhere in this line, nationalism and terrorism become synonymous. “The whole thing is a mirage,” as it is unattainable. If freedom was possible, Robi would have been set free through his traumatic experience with Tridib’s death. Instead his entire memory is handcuffed to that moment which binds him in a traumatic struggle to break away from it. He visits that moment over and over again and the chance remark of a Bangladeshi waiter sets the wheel into motion once again and he could not hold himself together any longer.

The precedent of a militancy induced freedom through an imported concept of nationalism replicates itself within the borders of independent India. The Khalistan scenario of the 80s is a ripe example of that. The novel thus not only evaluates the problem of border formation in the postcolonial subcontinent and in turn around the world, the narrative can also be used to trace back the flaws inherent in the very concept behind the politics of building the Indian nation.

This flaw is highlighted by the abrupt conditioning of space and distance. The narrator strives to grasp the perception of border through the dictionary definitions of space and distance.

I believed in the reality of space; I believed that distance separates, that it is a corporeal substance; I believed that across the border there existed another reality. The only relationship my vocabulary permitted between those separate realities was war or friendship. There was no room in it for this other thing. And things

which did not fit my vocabulary were merely pushed over the edge into the chasm of that silence. (219)

The narrator at one point in the book does an exercise with his Bartholomew atlas whereby he realizes that “within the tidy ordering of the Euclidian space,” Chiang Mai in Thailand is closer to Calcutta than Delhi, Chengdu in China is nearer to Calcutta than Srinagar. Keeping Milan at the center, when he draws a circle with his compass, he finds that the border of the circle passes through Helsinki, Sundsvall in Sweden, Mold in Norway, a great empty stretch of the Atlantic, Casablanca, the Algerian Sahara, Libya, Egypt, the Mediterranean, Turkey, the Black Sea and some countries of the USSR. In his mind he ponders what kind of event occurring near the rim of the circle, in places like Stockholm, Dublin, Casablanca, Alexandria, Istanbul, Kiev, in “any city in any direction at all,” would bring the inhabitants of Milan out into the streets. The only answer he can find is *war*.

And so, fifteen years after his death, Tridib watched over me, as I tried to learn the meaning of distance..... It seemed to me then that within this circle there were only states and citizens; there were no people at all.

When I turned back to my first circle I was struck with wonder that there had really been a time, not so long ago, when people, sensible people, of good intention, had thought that all maps were the same, that there was a special enchantment in lines; I had to remind myself that they were not to be blamed for believing that there was something admirable in moving violence to the borders and dealing with it through science and factories, for that was the pattern of the world. They had drawn their borders, believing in the pattern, in the enchantment of lines, hoping perhaps that once they had etched their borders upon the map, the

two bits of land would sail away from each other like the shifting tectonic plates of the prehistoric Gondwanaland. What had they felt, I wondered, when they discovered that they had created not a separation, but a yet undiscovered irony – the irony that killed Tridib: the simple fact that there had never been a moment in the four -thousand -year -old history of that map, when the places we know as Dhaka and Calcutta were more closely bound to each other than after they had drawn their lines—so closely that I, in Calcutta, had only to look into the mirror to be in Dhaka; a moment in which each city was the inverted image of the other, locked into a irreversible symmetry by the line that was to set us free—our looking glass border (232-233).

Consequently, he learns the meaning of distance where distance is tabulated by shadow lines. The shadow lines are the products of nations, an epitome of their nationhood. The epistemological search for a standpoint is a nuanced but arbitrary production of a signifier without a fixed signified. The aftermath of this failed search is a production of knowledge leading to an identity that is always traumatized and in a perennial Brownian motion. States create the citizens. People do not exist as people. They are always defined by their citizenship. It seems that he extends an apology for this system of nationhood whereby war is the only event that makes people take notice of each other's existence across boundaries. He questions the legacy of these boundaries when he locates the impression that nations have shoved all their problems to their geographical peripheries whereby the disputes are pinpointed along their borders. It is an *enchantment* with lines that have made people vainly believe in the efficacy of borders. As Meenakshi Mukherjee states in her essay, "Maps and Mirrors: Coordinates of Meaning in *The Shadow Lines*": "Distance in *The Shadow Lines* is thus perceived as a challenge

to be overcome through the use of imagination and desire until space gets dissolved (256).” The problem of space happens because of “the looking-glass borders” and the continuing shifts of shadow lines.

In the case of the Indian subcontinent, such an illusion never really handcuffs the disputes to the borders; instead, as the memories of the Partition resurface (and also recede) intermittently in violent communal hatred and riots, the problems get trapped *within* the shadow lines, which restrict their solutions. The shifting plates of Gondwanaland also indicate enormous upheavals. It is as if Earth is crying out through violent convulsions as the man made tectonic plates try in vain to move away from each other.

The narrator suffers from the traumatic residue of the events that befell Tridib, or more precisely this traumatic response is the lingering after-effect of the trauma of the Partition. It is also the result of a bloody irony inherent in the idea that had been forged by *sensible people, of good intentions*. Thus when he asks the question –“Who killed Tridib? (238)” —perhaps he is asking whether he was a victim of militant nationalism? The brief references to Srinagar and the mention of the distance between Srinagar and Calcutta is in lieu with my argument when we consider the strategic importance of Kashmir vis-à-vis the post-Partition Indo-Pak relations. The history of modern Kashmir can be regarded as a prime example of the blurred nationalism arising out of the upheaval of the Gondwanaland plates.

Caruth states that history, like trauma, is never simply one’s own, that history is precisely the way we are implicated in each other’s traumas. Like Robi, Thammi and May Price struggle to win their battles against the trauma of the riots at Dhaka. One and half years after Tridib’s death, Thamma eventually showed her paranoia arising out of her traumatic neurosis. It was during the war of 1965 when she donated her beloved chain to fund the war. As the young

narrator is perplexed by her action, she screamed: “We have to kill them before they kill us; we have to wipe them out” (237). Her grandson is so stumped by her demeanor that he starts to fumble for the doorknob. Raising the voice to a screech Thamma declares that this is the only chance of killing *them*: “We’re fighting them properly at last with tanks and guns and bombs” (237). She smashes her hand through the glass front of the radio exposing flesh and skin on the sharp edges of the glass. Looking at her hand with blood drenching her sari, Thamma calmly says that she should not waste all the blood that she can donate to war efforts. The perplexed narrator is consoled by his mother saying that the war against Pakistan has made Thamma act the way she did.

The trauma of surviving the episode in Dhaka makes Thamma look at the world in the binary terms of *us* and *them*. The Muslims who killed Tridib and *Jethamoshai* were the enemy against whom she wanted to wage the war and Pakistan was symbolic of the enemy. Her smashing of the radio and the episode with the bloody hand can be linked to the death-drive symptom of Freud. She wants to get over the trauma by going for a closure either through the death of her enemies or through her own destruction.

To May Price, the death of Tridib was the direct result of the imposition of her actions in a place and time about which she was totally unaware. During a visit to London, the narrator had been postponing his meeting with May till a sudden change of events made him pay her a visit. When May asked him why he had never asked her about Tridib’s death, the narrator replies:

I told her the truth: that I hadn’t known how to ask, that I simply hadn’t possessed the words; that I had not the courage to breach her silence without a solid bridgehead of words.

You should have asked, she said. It was your right and it is my duty to try to find an answer. (250)

The novel ends with May Price and the narrator making love to each other. As they lie on the bed holding each other, the narrator confesses that he is glad for the glimpse May had given him of a final redemptive mystery (252). Jon Mee in his essay “The Burthen of the Mystery: Imagination and Difference in *The Shadow Lines*”, regards that this sexual encounter becomes a metonym for the possibility of human connections across borders. While I agree with him, I feel that the novel displays a lot of occasions where this human connection happens across borders and this event does not particularly act as the strongest metonym for that. The family has ties across borders in Bangladesh, England and Sri-Lanka, between Tridib and May, Ila and Nick, the restaurant scene where Robi, Ila, and the narrator cross path with the Bangladeshi waiter. The breaking of borders is a theme of the novel alright but the episode between May and Tridib brings a closure for the traumatic questions that had plagued them for years. For May, the question was whether she was responsible for Tridib’s death while the narrator had wanted to know exactly the exact circumstances behind Tridib’s death. The closest he had ever come to knowing the details of the incident was when Robi had lost his composure in the restaurant when asked about his visit to Bangladesh in 1964. What he had learnt from Robi that day was incoherent, though it did furnish him with information that he had never known previously. It is May who gives him a credible chronicle of his uncle’s death. The repressed memory and the sadness he had carried with him through the years found a closure with May’s narrative. The intimate encounter with May answers the silences with the words that he had failed to comprehend for such a long time. Curiously enough, the silence with which the narrator had

been grappling is replaced with words in England. As it has been stated previously, history and trauma are not constricted by personal space. It is the history of trauma that implicate us in each other's stories. The same can be said about what happened here between May and the narrator, where they bind each other with their traumatic rendition and closure about Tridib's death, while at the same time this implication sets them free by giving vent to their traumas.

Conclusion

Through the above discussion I have tried to show the silencing aperture that has been at play post 1947 when it comes to addressing the rift between the ideas of nationalism and sectarianism in the nation states of India and Pakistan. When we consider the unnamed narrator of *The Shadow Lines* growing up in his memories of silence and the young narrator of *The Ice-Candy-Man*, we are faced with their dichotomy of reverence and confusion for the states of which they are citizens and the communal dislocation which *made* them the citizens of these nation states. The inherent questioning of the predicament of the being the product of Partition is replete with undercurrents of subtle inquiries directed against the legitimacy of nationhood in the sub-continent under the known rubrics. The problematizing factor in all these cases is the impact of sectarian violence on the centrally defined rubric of nationalism. As I have pointed out earlier, Tagore recognized in the pre-partition context that once a nation state is formed on the basis of religion, its secular and democratic inspirations will always be undermined by the role of communal legitimacy.

Both the narrators in the above works suffer from a muddled perception whose origins can be rooted back to the communal disturbance of the Partition. For the narrator in *The Shadow Lines*, there is a looking back into the mirror syndrome while at the same time the character of Thamma infuses an inkling of looking forward into the future. But the critique of militant nationalism which Thamma propagates, points out the lugubrious notion of the future which the narrator carries within himself. But the most common point for both Lenny and the unnamed protagonist of *The Shadow Lines*, is concerned with this de-silencing as a means of de-traumatizing their psyche. As Suzanne A. Henke has pointed out, scripto therapy may have a discernible cathartic effect on traumatized individuals. The narrator of these two books carry the

wounds of the impossible history, which Cathy Caruth has pointed out is the burden of the traumatized person. The very idea of carrying the load of an impossible history, or in other words to give meaning to an account whose socio-psychological evaluations fail to be defined under any known and fixed co-ordinates of reference, makes this scripto therapy potent and semi-real at the same time. It is potent because of the cathartic effect it provides the traumatized minds while at the same time it is semi-real because the delineation fails to answer the key questions, which are behind the factors leading up to the trauma. As Caruth says,

For history to be a history of trauma means that it is referential precisely to the extent that it is not fully perceived as it occurs; or to put it somewhat differently, that a history can be grasped only in the very inaccessibility of its occurrence.

(18)

At one point in her book, Caruth refers to Freud's notion of reliving the trauma through the experience of waking up from a dream. For the narrator of *The Shadow Lines*, this waking up occurs with his realization of the events that led to Tridib's death; fifteen years after his death he sits through a conscious re-visit of the communal problem that eventually caused Tridib's death. Thus for him, when he finds the connection between the incidents surrounding Tridib's murder, it is a rude awakening from an unconscious slumber to a conscious retrospection. We can link this to what Caruth says in her book – "It is the experience of waking into consciousness that, peculiarly, is identified with the reliving of the trauma" (64)

The fact that Sidhwa wrote the novel while in England ties in with Freud's theory of the displaced. For Freud the act of his leaving his native land under the threat of Nazi persecution also brought with it a kind of freedom. This act of leaving is where Freud locates the "central and enigmatic core" (Caruth 22) of his theoretical explanation of trauma.

The trauma of the accident, its very unconsciousness, is borne by an act of departure. It is a departure that, in the full force of its historicity, remains at the same time in some sense absolutely opaque, both to the one who leaves and also to the theoretician, linked to the sufferer in his attempt to bring the experience to light. Yet at the same time, this very opacity generates the surprising force of a knowledge, for it is the accident, in German, *Unfall*, that reverberates in Freud's own theoretical insight drawn from the example, which is laced in the German with other forms of *fallen*, "to fall." (Caruth 22)

Both the narrators find in a foreign language the medium for the enactment of their pent up views. For both the narrators of the two novels compared here, the vacuum is epistemological. It is manifested when Lenny asks the question about how one can crack a country? It can also be seen when the unnamed narrator of *The Shadow Lines* he realizes the play of a nebulous blurring of the division between communalism and nationalism. He does not have the required vocabulary to manufacture a logical interpretation surrounding the episode of Tridib's death as he cannot equate it with a teleological view on history. Thus knowledge is produced as a mode of expression but without any fixed and hinged pathos. We see in Sidhwa's narrator a dichotomy of naivety and common sense leading up to the failure to harness the stock of memories which she had originally meant to de-silence. Thus with Ayah's disappearance, the novel comes to an end without clarifying the germane retributions and ramifications of her situation per se. The same young narrator's naivety is a weapon through which she is able to point out the broad questions of nationalism and sectarianism, especially in the context of her community, the Parsis being a minority among Muslims in what becomes the new country of Pakistan. If we look at the narrator in *The Shadow Lines* we can see this quadrophrenic divide of the past and the present,

nationalism and sectarianism; his efforts, like Lenny's is at an ethical level. Both these narrators try to scrap out the ethical maneuvers of good and bad, without actually realizing their own positions. This lack of position might be addressed to their traumatized individualities . They are witnesses but the personal trauma is also outside of them. They experience a guilt as a result of witnessing and surviving. Unable to cut through the thread of the forced discourses of nation and religion they produce the narrative to explain the Manichean dichotomy inherent in their respective positions. Being situated in the socio-political time frame of these narrators would constrain the reader in the same ethical quandary and boundary that have given rise to the two texts.

In thus relating trauma to the very identity of the self and to one's relation to another, Lacan's reading shows us, I will suggest, that the shock of traumatic sight reveals at the heart of human subjectivity not so much an epistemological, but rather what can be defined as an ethical relation to the real. (Caruth 92)

CHAPTER 4: 1984: AMU AND WRITING THE GHOSTS OF MRS GANDHI

Amu and History

As seen in Chapter 2, Tagore was a firm critic of the militant nationalism that political parties like the Indian National Congress had been trying to embrace in her efforts to rid the land of British colonial rule. Partition was not just a product of communal animosity; it was a direct result of India's failure to grasp the dangers of an imported ideology. In the modern Indian state historiography, communal violence exists as an aberration. The silence of the government and the school history books weave the fabric of this deviation as a contrast against the secular ideals of the state. Partition literature can be read not only as an argument against these silences but as a call to consciousness, as a warning that the anti-colonial nationalism itself was replete with the dangers of communal violence.

Several arguments have been raised regarding both the ideas of communalism and nationalism in India. Scholars like Asghar Ali Engineer and Prabha Dixit have been inclined to see the generation of communalism as etched in the modernity of the capitalist system in India whereby they locate the distinctive power structure between the established Hindu bourgeoisie and the nascent Muslim middle class as the root cause behind the communal conflicts of the present day. Asghar Ali is quick to point out the differences that segregate the ethnic discrimination of the pre-modern age and the present communal ties (5). Prabha Dixit argues that the political maneuvers of the communal kind are basically the concoction of the economic elite. She opines that the nascent Muslim bourgeoisie had very little to fall back on when it came to challenging its already established Hindu counterpart. She finds Sir Syed Ahmed's efforts at modernization of the Muslim middle class as a weak effort that was specifically concentrated on

the Muslim elite. She says that the sole motive behind this kind of modernization was actually the preservation of the old system (56). Left behind in this fashion, the down-trodden Muslim middle class took to communal principles which were their tools for fighting against the democratic and egalitarian notions of nationalism. To me it seems that this notion of communalism as a product of modernity fails to locate the germination of the concept in the 16th -17th century in India. The capitalist bourgeoisie that Prabha Dixit talks about is a modern socio-economic phenomenon in India. Before that, there was the feudal gentry class and the middle class in India is really a modern occurrence. For another notable scholar Bipin Chandra the idea of communalism is a form of “false consciousness” while nationalism is true consciousness, mainly because it provided a rational ground for the colonized to fight against the oppressive colonial regime (23-24). Randhir Singh criticizes Chandra’s notion of communalism as false consciousness under the alibi that the latter fails to employ a theoretical groundwork for the development of the ideals of communalism. Randhir Singh writes:

Nationalism serves to cover up or provide alibis for the historic default or the failure of the postcolonial class in India and increasingly turns into a legitimizing ideology for the new social order or powers that be. (1543)

Singh stresses the need to study communalism in a more historical context. Achin Vanaik locates the problem in the 19th century Hindu Renaissance movement in India. He projects his theory that nationalism in India is basically a covenant of Hindu principles and that post 1947, the nationalistic mores have been further subjugated under this guise. His definition of communalism is that it is a course that involves “competitive desecularisation in a religiously plural society—that in a competitive striving to extend the reach of religion through ideology and

control institutions—which along with non-religious factors helps to harden divisions between different religious communities and increase tension between them (153).”

In an interview with Alex Tickell, Amitav Ghosh states that Indian history tends to exclude some “alternative cultural connections” (Bose 216) much like the act of writing History in the West. Ghosh’s above statement finds a strong resonance in Gyanendra Pandey’s essay “In Defense of the Fragment: Writing about Hindu Muslim Riots in India Today,” Pandey states that one of the major violences of the historiography of modern India lies in the silence of its treatment of the question of the communal problems. In contemporary Indian historiography this kind of violence has been seen simply as an aberration (1). By aberration he means that communal violence “is seen removed from the general run of Indian history: a distorted form, an exceptional moment, not the ‘real’ history of India at all” (1). There has been a specific attempt made to homogenize and hence to normalize India with all the multifarious fragments of its society where the secular tone inherent in the formulation of the Indian constitution might be one of the major attributes behind the attempt at this unqualified homogenization of India by its historiography. What this has also done is the sketching of the Indian nation-state “to the status of the end of all history” (3). The State has become the source of the articulation of any and all historical knowledge. Thus Partition was just an act of communalism and not nationalism, the massacre of the Sikhs in north in 1984, too, was an act of communalism and not the State’s response to the Khalistani demands for a separate Sikh state which would have undermined the credibility of the sweeping historiography of the modern Indian nation-state. The assassination of Indira Gandhi helped set in motion a chain of events which had been threatening to unravel for some time.

Amu, a film by Shonali Bose, tries to unearth the violence of 1984 in a counter-narrative against the history that has made it apparently obscure. It depicts the story of a young woman who having been brought up in the United States goes back to India in search of her biological parents and finds that they were the victims of the 1984 riots in Delhi. During her search she is regularly confronted by a vacuum of history, which has tried to render the memory of the event silent. She is also baffled by how this vacuum has seeped into the socio-cultural view of the riots as well.

There is a feeling among many of the Indian, mostly state, intellectuals and historians that the majority of the evils of the postcolonial state are the consequences of colonial *state*. While I agree that once a momentous and prolonged event like colonial conquest has happened the scars of the past will be there in the postcolonial state as well. But where do we draw the line? Can the colonial *state* be fully held responsible for the vagaries of the postcolonial state? What does the construction of the contemporary historiography of India tell us? Following Pandey in his essay “In Defense of the Fragment: Writing about Hindu Muslim Riots in India Today,” the violence of the historiography of contemporary India lies in the silence of its treatment of the question of the communal problems which are born of past and present political forces and interests. The general feeling is that the state is secular; since the state is born out of politics, politics is largely secular as well. So any communal misdemeanor which occurs has to be regarded as the fault of certain “miscreants” who are not related to state politics. This “history of violence has been treated in the historiography of modern India as *aberration* and as *absence*” (1). Consequently state historians tackle the joy of the moment of independence as a mask to push the violence of Partition to the periphery of the State’s discourse.

It is here that Shonali Bose's film *Amu* introduces the obfuscated memory of one such *aberration*. *Amu* is the journey of Kajori Roy, a 21-year-old Indian American woman who has lived in the US since the age of 3. After graduating from UCLA Kaju goes to India to visit her relatives. There she meets Kabir, a college student from an upper class family who is disdainful of Kaju's wide-eyed wonder at discovering the *real India*. Undeterred, Kaju visits the slums, crowded markets and roadside cafes of Delhi. In one slum she is struck by an odd feeling of déjà vu. Soon after that she starts having nightmares. Kabir gets drawn into the mystery of why this is happening particularly when he discovers that she was adopted. Meanwhile Kaju's adoptive mother – Keya Roy, a single parent and civil rights activist in LA, arrives unannounced in Delhi. She is shocked to discover that Kaju has been visiting the slums. Although Kaju mistakes her mother's response for a typical Indian over protectiveness – Keya's fears are deeper rooted.

Slowly Kaju starts piecing together the story behind what happened to her birth parents and mother and daughter clash as Kaju discovers she has been lied to her whole life. While visiting Govind Bhai's *chai* shop the discussion veers towards the riots of 1984; Kaju's curiosity is tickled even more when they visit Govind Bhai's relative *chachaji* in a neighboring area who tells them how the Sikhs had been the majority of the inhabitants in that area before they were forced to flee after the massacre of 1984. Meanwhile Kabir had used his father's influence of a high ranking IAS officer to find out that contrary to the story that Kaju had been told by her adoptive mother, she was not the survivor of a malaria epidemic in a nearby rural village as there had been no reports of a malaria epidemic in the vicinity during 1984-85. Kaju's growing suspicion of being an orphan of the massacre of 1984 is fueled further when she discovers a smudged birth certificate from her grandma's trunk. Further investigation amidst wild guesses as to her birth parentage, finally leads to the fact that Kaju was born Amrit or Amu Kaur and that

her entire family were the victims of the riots of 1984. Her father was brutally lynched by the mob while the police and the politicians stood watching and instigating them; her younger brother went missing, never to be found again and her biological mother ultimately committed suicide unable to tolerate the emotional pain of her loss and the lack of effort on the part of the authorities to track down the perpetrators of this brutal crime.

As the narrative of the movie unfolds, taking us back and forth in time, the question that gets highlighted time and again was what were the authorities doing? Two replies are given at various stages—witnesses and victims said the authorities did nothing while the authorities including Kabir's IAS officer father, replied with silence. I would like briefly to summarize the incidents of that fateful time in 1984 in this context.

The 1984 Anti-Sikh massacre took place in India after the assassination of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi on October 31, 1984. India's Prime Minister Indira Gandhi was assassinated by two of her Sikh body guards in the aftermath of Operation Bluestar, in which the Indian Army had attacked Sikh militants praying in the Harimandir Sahib, the holiest Sikh shrine, causing damage and subsequent outrage amongst Sikhs. Over the next four days Sikhs were killed in retaliatory attacks led by Congress activists and sympathizers. The then Congress government was widely criticized for doing very little at the time, possibly acting as a conspirator, especially since voting lists were used to identify Sikh families. On November 1, 1984, large mobs largely formed by supporters of the ruling Indian Congress party from suburbs of Delhi and bordering villages of Western Uttar Pradesh descended on eastern and central Delhi. Sultanpuri, Mangolpuri, Trilokpuri, and other Trans-Yamuna areas of Delhi were the worst affected. The mobs carried iron rods, knives, clubs, and combustible material, including

kerosene. They used voters' lists to identify houses and business establishments owned by Sikhs one by one and of which the voters' lists were of course distributed to them by the politicians themselves. The mobsters swarmed into Sikh neighborhoods, arbitrarily killing any Sikh men they could find. Their shops and houses were ransacked and burned. In other incidents, armed mobs stopped buses and trains, in and around Delhi, pulling out Sikh passengers to be lynched or doused with kerosene and burnt. The death toll has been put in the range of 3000-5000 by various sources. This is how *India Today*, a leading newspaper described the incidents: “criminally led hoodlums killed Sikhs, looted or burnt homes and properties while the police twiddled their thumbs” (*India Today*, November 15, 1984).

Commissions or committees had been formed by the ruling governments to deal with and investigate this massacre— Marwah Commission, Misra Commission of Enquiry, Kapur Mittal Committee, Jain Banerjee Committee, Potti Rosha Committee, Jain Aggarwal Committee, Ahuja Committee, Dhillon Committee, Narula Committee, the Nanavati Commission (Gould 237). Strangely enough, as the film *Amu* points out, not a single person had been judiciously prosecuted till 2005. There is a scene in the movie where some Sikh widows who had lost their families in the riots tell Amu and Kabir that in spite of all the efforts on their part none of the miscreants was brought to justice as that would have entailed prosecution for the politicians who were the brains behind the operation. Crucially enough, even more than 20 years after the incident, state officials as shown in the movie do not want to talk about it. This silence has forced the witnesses and sufferers of the maelstrom into an eerie hush where even the mention of the episode brings protests from the victims themselves. In a heart rendering scene in the movie, Govind Bhai breaks down and screams that he was the one who had killed his employer Balbir Singh. As the story unfolds we come to know that during the massacre Govind, who was just a

young boy at that time, was slashed and threatened with a *rampuri* (a long knife) by some local hoodlums into divulging the whereabouts of Balbir. He had been carrying this knowledge in silence for more than twenty years and Kaju's entry into his life makes him breakdown and acknowledge his failure in a way as to make it seem that he really was the man responsible for the murder of Balbir. But as *Chachaji* consoles him saying that he was just a child at that time and he could not have done anything else, we realize the depth to which the violence of the silence has been able to reach. Without any justice being done, even the victims have become psychologically battered into regarding themselves as murderers.

In an interview, Shonali Bose tells how the government had censored the film for a restricted (R) audience even though it had no profanity and did not show any graphic images. She also stressed the fact that every one of his crew members had to sign a written contract against divulging any information about the movie before it was released as even a small false step might have provoked the government from not only banning the release but also prohibiting the shooting itself. During shooting the crew had to face multiple hardships from people affiliated with state. Once, some goons belonging to the local political constituent, Jagdish Tytler had actually showed up at the set and had demanded the production be stopped as they had heard the crew was making a movie on the 1984 riots³³. It was during the time of assembly elections and the political situation was quite tense in the state anyway. Nanavati commission, which was established by the Indian government in 2000³⁴, to undertake detailed enquiries on the 1984 riots,

³³ "An Interview with Shonali Bose: Producer of *Amu*". *YouTube*. YouTube. 30 March 2008. Web. 28 July 2014.

³⁴ "Nanavati Commission report on 1984 anti-Sikh riots submitted". *The Hindu*. 10 Feb 2005. Web. 28 July 2014.

actually submitted a report in 2005 that found “credible evidence” against Jagdish Tytler for his “hand” in the organization of the riots³⁵. Talking about the financial aspect behind the making of the film, Bose has stated that it was very difficult for her to get a producer for the movie as no one wanted to touch the subject. They had to encounter various false leads and it took them three years to write the script and raise money for it. The film was ultimately produced by her husband who is a NASA scientist and also the inventor of (at that time) the world’s smallest cellphone.³⁶

At a couple of different places, Bose has stated the censor problems her film had faced from the Indian censor board.

In India the theatrical release of the film was held up by the official censor board, which asked me to remove five lines of dialogue all of which indicted the government. Instead of replacing those dialogues with acceptable lines I allowed the characters to go silent. This had a powerful impact in Indian theaters as a ripple would go through the audience, "censor censor..."

The censor board also gave it [the equivalent of] an NC 17 rating, stating as a reason that "why should young people know a history that is better buried and forgotten." As a result of this rating, the film is banned from being shown on Indian television--even on private channels.

³⁵ Kumar, Vinay. Credible evidence against Tytler: Nanavati. *The Hindu*. 9 August 2005. Web. 28 July 2014.

³⁶ ““Amu” Director Shonali Bose”. *INDIEwire*. 25 May 2005. Web. 28 July 2014.

But after four months of holding the film up with these cuts etc. it was released in India in early 2005. It has taken an additional two years from that time to release the film in North America³⁷.

The question asked by the censor board about why Bose was trying to make a movie about something that has been “forgotten”, highlights the uneasy situation of the state when faced with the question of the sectarian violence. Both “buried”, and “forgotten”, signify the wishful death of the memory of the massacre and in turn the problem the state encountered on the face of the incidents of 1984. As stated above, Bose responded to the censor board’s demand by actually making the characters go silent during the portrayal of the censored lines. The audience in the theater immediately reacted to this with a jolt.

This sensitive disposition to any counter discourse to the state sponsored historiography has made sure that Bollywood is not utilized for any subversive criticism. If one glances through the list of films which have come out of Bollywood, it will be a struggle on his part to point out any significant deviation from this trend. Successful movies which have come close to critiquing the nationalist historiography always end up conforming to it. *Sarfarosh*, a thriller, which was released a few years back can be an example in this case. A run of the mill anti-terrorist movie, it takes the shape of how *some people* are trying to utilize the communal animosity to spread the germ of anti-nationalist sentiments among the common folks. The antagonist is a *muhajir* meaning a Muslim who had migrated from India into Pakistan during or after the Partition. He fails to gain his respect among his peers in Pakistan as he is not an authentic Pakistani and faces

³⁷ Ibid.

discrimination. In contrast with him is a police officer Salim, a Muslim who is an Indian first and a Muslim later and who fights against life threatening circumstances to prove his loyalty to his country. The example of *Sarfarosh* is useful because it deliberately avoids the problem of communalism and sectarian violence in India, yet when it comes even remotely close to challenging the dominant historiography, it veers away in a safer direction. Films which have dealt with this topic directly have taken the secure option of categorically pointing out that the concerned misdemeanor is always the influence of some *outside* forces which make the situation threatening for the common lot who are caught in the maelstrom. Even if they show political connections with non-secular activities, it is always the case of *the* bad politician who utilizes his power to create tension among the populace. This is a safer option as many Bollywood action films are focused on corrupt politicians anyway and hence the subversive threat is not present in these depictions. The antagonist in these cases is generally punished by the heroes themselves. The underlying message is that in order for the secular state to perform its duties it is important to root out these corrupt and bad elements as it is only then that the nation will be achieve harmony. However, plenty of movies have had their narratives based on the Partition or the outcome of the Partition. The cut of the sectarian violence of 1947 is too deep to be forgotten; attempts to “bury and forget” these will probably not be successful. So the trend has been to show the Partition as the aberration and hide the Punjab riots of 80s, Bombay riots of 90s and the Gujarat massacre of the 2000s under the tag of being forgotten.

The Ghosts of Mrs Gandhi and The Writer's Dilemma

This is how Amitav Ghosh starts his essay, "The Ghosts of Mrs Gandhi":

Nowhere else in the world did the year 1984 fulfill its apocalyptic portents as it did in India. Separatist violence in the Punjab, the military attack on the great Sikh temple of Amritsar; the assassination of the Prime Minister, Mrs. Indira Gandhi; riots in several cities; the gas disaster in Bhopal - the events followed relentlessly on each other. There were days in 1984 when it took courage to open the New Delhi papers in the morning.

Of the year's many catastrophes, the sectarian violence following Mrs Gandhi's death had the greatest effect on my life. Looking back, I see that the experiences of that period were profoundly important to my development as a writer; so much so that I have never attempted to write about them until now. (187)

"The Ghosts of Mrs Gandhi" presents an account of the few days of rioting immediately after the assassination of Indira Gandhi. Ghosh presents with clarity the shock on hearing the news of the assassination and also the foreboding of the prospect of an impending social maelstrom. While we get brief glimpses of the bloodthirsty rogues and thugs who were out hunting for the Sikhs, the main focus of the essay seems to be more on the human camaraderie which helped the distressed in their plights. It starts off with a Sikh man on a bus being protected from a possible lynching by his fellow travelers. Then the story shifts to the helping hand meted out to an elderly Sikh couple who would have otherwise perished in the riots. Lastly, he

delineates the peace marches he had been a part of which were successful in dousing many tense situations.

As Ghosh entered the campus of Delhi University on the that fateful day, the atmosphere was more solemn than regular days. The campus was abound with a muffled worry about the news that Mrs. Gandhi has been assassinated by her two Sikh bodyguards. Ghosh left the university in the late afternoon to visit his friend Hari Sen's house. During the bus ride, a man ran out of an office and jumped on to the bus. The route of the bus took it by the hospital where Indira Gandhi's body was being kept. Reports had surfaced that the motorcade of Giani Zail Singh, the Sikh President of India, had already come under attack from a virulent mob. But Ghosh and the people in the bus were still unaware of these developments. "Violence had never been directed at the Sikhs in Delhi" (190).

The bus soon encountered a revengeful crowd and fearing the safety of the Sikh man in the bus, a Hindu woman asked him to get down and to keep out of sight. A bicycle gang of armed goons soon surrounded the bus and demanded to know if there were any Sikhs on the bus. The driver and the passengers shook their heads in unison and requested the young men to let them go. The description of the bus ride is reminiscent of the experience of the narrator in *The Shadow Lines* when his school bus is caught in the melee of the 1964 communal riots in Calcutta. Later on in the essay, Ghosh does speak about the close connections of the events of 1984 had with his writing the novel *The Shadow Lines*.

Ghosh was twenty-eight years old at the time of the anti-Sikh riots and had just joined Delhi University as a professor after completing his PhD from Oxford. It was here, in 1984, that he witnessed the sectarian violence closely. However it takes him more than ten years to at last

give words to that experience. He states that he is unsure as to why it took him so long to write about his experiences of the riot. He knows that he is not alone with this delay as several others who participated in the march went on to publish books yet no one has written anything about the riots except in passing. It seems that the trauma of the experience might have postponed any words of description about the event. It is after ten years that he undergoes scripto-therapy by writing the narrative of *The Shadow Lines* and putting to rest his traumatic neurosis of 1984.

Ghosh draws a caveat for the utterance of an experience of this kind. His note of caution is dictated by the subject in discussion. The riots were the products of a cyclical violence with the Punjab terrorists and the Indian government on either side. He is aware that careless writing in this regard has the potential to create ethical and personal problems for the writer as under such “incendiary circumstances...words cost lives, and it is only appropriate that those who deal in words should pay scrupulous attention to what they say. It is only appropriate that they should find themselves inhibited (201).”

He talks about the dilemma he has faced as a writer and as a citizen. As a writer he had just one subject: violence (202). He wanted to write about it but he also faced a moral and ethical impasse about the results of his words. Ghosh’s reflections in this essay are colored by his reading of Dzevan Karahasan’s “Literature and War,” which he quotes a few times to make the reader understand the sense of responsibility a writer feels when it comes to expressing the human condition in the wake of a tragedy. It is the refrain from that utterance which is difficult more than the expression of the same. “...it is all too easy to present violence as an apocalyptic spectacle, while the resistance to it can as easily figured as mere sentimentality, or worse, as pathetic or absurd” (202).

A reading of Karahasan's "Literature and War" puts into perspective the responsibility Ghosh is alluding to above. Karahasan survived the siege of Sarajevo and witnessed the Bosnian conflict from close quarters. As he reminisces about what he has learnt from the experiences of the carnage, he realizes the importance of the ethical poise a writer has to display in order to not add fuel to an existing problem. It is also explicitly possible that Karahasan was suffering from the trauma of his survival and did not want to re-visit his experiences by giving literary meaning to it.

Literature for Karahasan has the power to appeal to human population and condition. It can elicit a response like no other art form and can also generate reactions in the public with words which are after all the basis of human communication and thinking. It gives a structure and a boundary to the values within which the human experience can be felt. It dictates and determines the value system which "imposes with an objective feeling that things make sense in the world" (2). It can work for and within a political system and determines the influence on people by presenting them with a set of choices within their belief systems.

The choices made within an accepted value system quite immediately determine human behavior, because the selection of values and the way we relate to them are the foundation of human ethical existence. These values and choices are most immediately articulated and determined by literature. (2)

Unlike religion and philosophy, literature presents the criteria for selection and value in such a way that it comes closest to a comprehension derived directly from the very act of living and experience. Consequently, the values are defended as being quintessentially amalgamated within the fabric of human existence. The power inherent in the teaching and written works of

sages from Plato (2) shaped the cultural system instilled certain values in it to make it work for both the ancient and modern rulers. As such, the power of literature can be utilized to control human relationships and politics.

With the invention of modern violence in the shape of destructive elements like the atomic bomb, “literature remains the single defense and proof of the unity of the world and of human actions, pointing out that there are no neutral acts, that neutral acts are simply impossible. Religion tells the same, by the way, but in a different fashion” (3). Therefore, it is imperative that literature fights for human beings and the world and not be misused to fill the gaps of an ideology and a discourse.

Karahasan understands the choices literature encounters in the face of human actions and reactions. It has the propensity to generate immediate emotions and their concomitant responses. In other words, virulent gestures or accusations or descriptions emanating from literature can spread its spite through a wild conflagration that can destroy lives which are in the middle of the narrative. The pedagogical power of literature can be misused to a “frightening degree of artlessness” (6). It distances the experience of literature and the living of its story from the ethics of responsible writing. In other words, the lived experience of a carnage like the Indian Partition will leave behind a trail of undoubtable fire if revisited over and over again through written descriptions propagated by a particular ideology with its own focus in mind.

As Ghosh writes, “it is all too easy to present violence as an apocalyptic spectacle (202).” When he reads the descriptions of war and violence, from troubled parts of the world, he is forced to ask himself the question of whether there is more to this description than just the violence. It is therefore important to excavate a form that can “accommodate both violence *and*

the civilized willed response to it” (202). In his essay he does not brood too much on the ghastliness of the riots of 1984. He is afraid of the aesthetic *indifference* that writers tend to display in their art, which enables them to actually narrate the stories.

This responsibility of the writer is a curious one as Ghosh says, he cannot join a set crowd. That is, he cannot take sides which entails that he has to practice a certain silence when it comes to describing the *apocalyptic* annals of bloodshed. Therefore, the scene in which Dil Nawaz is shown to have discovered an entire train full of dead bodies in the movie version of *Ice-Candy-Man* is left out by the narrative of the novel. That is also perhaps why the Delhiites of *Amu* are silent about the memory of 1984. The history of post-colonial nationalism of India is always under the scrutiny of the bloodshed of the Partition. Just like the legacy of colonial history cannot be erased, similarly the hurt of partition is omnipresent.

The lived experience of the riots of 1984 eventually culminated in the creation of the novel *The Shadow Lines*.

Within a few months, I started my novel, which I eventually called *The Shadow Lines* - a book that led me backward in time, to earlier memories of riots, ones witnessed in childhood. It became a book not about any one event but about the meaning of such events and their effects on the individuals who live through them. (201)

If one looks at the title of the essay, the word *ghosts* might hold some attention. As I had suggested near the beginning of this Chapter, and elsewhere in this dissertation, the spectral presence of a ghost lingers. A ghost had been living at one point. One can kill a living thing but a ghost is beyond death. It cannot be killed again. The spectral presence lingers as a memory

which points back in time to the legacy it carries with it. The plural *s* in *ghosts*, further points to multiple affects or memories. It is replete with the notion of an inescapability from those memories. The death of Indira Gandhi was a singular event but there are multiple *ghosts* of that event who haunt the pages of history. Sectarian tension can be regarded as one of the *ghosts*. Any vivid description of the riots will again harken back into the mind the memories of those few days. Like Karahasan shows, it is up to the writer to decide the on the side and description of that memory. The other *ghost* is that of the center's inability or unwillingness to control and stop the riots in a timely fashion.

The above discussion of Amitav Ghosh's meditations on the 1984 riots brings us to the other side of the question regarding the silence of Indian history. It is imperative as readers to realize the importance of this ethical dilemma regarding the exploration of the sectarian hurt of history. In *The Hungry Tide*, the case of the Marichjhapi refugees can be regarded as an iron fist example of domination of the periphery by the political center. But this chapter should warn the postcolonial reader of the dangers behind presenting a sweeping generalization about the violence of Indian nationalism. While the school texts of Bengal fail to acknowledge the presence of Marichjhapi refugees in a bid to hide the *ghosts* of the massacre, the post-Partition sectarian violence is made invisible in the mainstream classroom to protect the present and the future from returning to the memories of the *apocalyptic* violence. What to do with the violence of the past is a dilemma. As I had mentioned previously, modern Indian history can never escape the violence of the Partition. It is the promise of it being an *aberration* that keeps the *ghosts* of Mrs Gandhi under control. As Ghosh says in his essay, there has to be a realization that there is more to the description of a violence. It is extremely important to acknowledge the civilized responses to that violence as well. This realization does not just ensure an optimism for future

harmony, it also entrenches within the populations' psyche the fact that sectarian violence can indeed just be an aberration. While it is important not to neglect the hurt of that violence, it is more important to safeguard the future generations from living in the past forever. The problem with this thinking is of course a nice falling into the trap of the historiography of the modern Indian state. The state does want the aberration theory to be projected to the world and the people for its very existence. The problem is inherent in the postcolonial Indian state whose birth is founded on sectarian violence.

The imperative notion of discretion is directed towards the *description* of the violence and not against the study of the history which leads to it. Knowing the historiography *behind* the rise of sectarian or ethnic strife and the failure of an ideology that leads to that troubled moment in time is of paramount importance. The epistemological vacuum regarding the cause of an *apocalyptic* event needs to be filled with the all-important lesson of learning from the failure of that particular ideology or discourse or political maneuver. For example, in his essay, *The Ghosts of Mrs Gandhi*, Ghosh revisits the causes behind the riots. His apprehension is reserved not regarding the deliberation of that cause. It is the utter vivid description of the violent *moments* from which he is perhaps distancing himself.

The scripto therapy I had applied in my reading of the *Ice-Candy-Man* can actually become scripto punishment if the writer becomes obsessed with just violence with no remedy. Even the Marichjhapi debacle is described by Ghosh in such a way that the benevolent touches of the altruists like Nirmal, Nilima, and others are not missed. As citizens of a bloody colonial legacy, it is imperative to never lose sight of the fact that humanity does have the tendency to create a

civilized response to any act of violence. In his zeal to present the story of that history, the writer should take responsibility of presenting that side of hope and healing as well.

The movie *Amu* tries to de-silence the history of the riots. That is a role that is fitting for literature or any other art form. Knowing the history and its silences will give rise to a new retrospective understanding of the historical narrative. But to harp constantly on the negatives of human interaction will only lead to a constantly vexed perception of the human involvement in it. The task of literature, as Ghosh himself has said, is to change the perceptions of people. Knowing the history with its filled up gaps will lead to discernments about the silenced stories in history. However, it has to be kept in consideration that literature's filling up of historical gaps will not *create* a new history. It can appeal to the trajectory of historiography by making human connections that will ensure that the audience remains aware of the tragedies like the Marichjhapi massacre and the 1984 anti-Sikh riots in northern India.

In his essay "The Greatest Sorrow", Ghosh implies that the burden of history is that it has to always make a sense of the past. Using Trouillot's terms, the creation of history is always accompanied by a retrospective significance, which is the moment of the creation of the narrative. When there can be no significance found, history is tied up in the archives without making its way into the historiography of the nation. That is why modern historiography of India is forced to remain silent about the 1984 riots as it fails to make a teleological connection. Literature on the other hand can use imagination to make a connection that can give rise to a knowledge that is based on what Ghosh might say, "recollection". It has been the bane of the post 1947 communal history that it is always struggling to make positive connections between the past and the present and "in the 1980s, history itself seemed to stumble and come to a standstill (48)".

CONCLUSION

It has been my effort to show the scope of some selected historical novels to fill up the pages left blank by present rendition of a particular Indian historiography. This effort comes with the important warning that literary advances towards the purported truth claims of history is as dangerous as the silence imposed on historiography by the nation. The teleological need that modern Indian historiography brings with it cannot be fulfilled at every turn by the historical archive. The discontent arising out of this vacuum is apparent and is an unbridgeable gulf; it is unbridgeable as long as the state is involved in the final historical remuneration of the meanings arising out of the archive. History cannot be neutral and is always at the crossroad of a choice between a mention or a silence. The retrospective significance attached to the culmination of the process of history making is answerable to the positivity that supposedly has to connect the past with the present. Faced with the scope of any failure of that positive epistemology, history of modern India tends to turn the other way. However, one of its staunchest resistance can come from the pages of literature where the gaps between the historical narratives are filled up by characters whose stories and depictions carry forward with them the baton of a de-silencing aperture.

This trend of fighting history with the literary can found most conspicuously in the stories of the Indian Partition and subsequent communal disturbances. But it is also important to realize that modern Indian historiography does not only vanish when faced with questions raised by non-secular headlines. It has shown the tendency to feel ruffled at various other moments of national interests. The Marichjhapi massacre is one such example. The nation is always discontent when it fails to show a positive connection between the implementation of its national ideology and the discontent arising out of it.

This dissertation has also tried to situate the works of Amitav Ghosh in the context of the history of India post 1947. It has tried to establish a difference between the history and the telling of that history through literature. It has also tried to show the gaps and fissures present in the modern Indian historiography of the Partition and other instances of sectarian violence. It has been my aim to remain focused only on those historical events about which Amitav Ghosh has written in his novel and essays.

The angst of the postcolonial history of India always places a great burden on the mind to over-estimate the power of literature. The postcolonial mind wants to rid itself of the trauma of surviving the colonial period. It is the dream that Lacan talks about when the father sees the dead son in his sleep and feels guilty of surviving alone. We are survivors of the long colonial era when our historiography was constructed by people from Europe. We try to tell ourselves that it will never happen again. That is why as an Indian, I have always been drawn to history as it gives us the avenue to create our own narrative about our present. That is the great burden of history that we carry with us; the urge to legitimize it as our own creation about our own lives. The ideal gets threatened when we see that the postcolonial state is trying to emulate the colonial nation by expropriating history, once again, from us. The question slaps us on our face: how can this happen, again? And why are we doing this to *us*?

The interesting trait about literature is that it has the power to re-place our own history; it is not expected to replace the archival documents or to create new ones as such. It carries with it the probability of the story that can situate a literary voice against the domain of a historical archive or representation that has been systematically constructed by an outside force and after 1947, a force that was supposed to be *inside*. We are also afraid of nationalism because of what it

has done to us through centuries of colonialism. We hate it for the fact that it is violent, yet at the same time it is the flag of India that arguably protects the Indians. We salute the flag even though the colors hide the stories of the people of 1984, the Babri Masjid victims, the Godhra massacres, and as the narrator found out in *The Shadow Lines*, the riots of 1964 as well. Borders work for us as they do genuinely give us an excuse to throw our own frailties outside our line of vision. The postcolonial border is important because it protects us from the outside and also from us.

History as a teleology has been the way it has been treated in postcolonial India. But the loss of lives and destruction caused by the events of 1984, or the perennial question of Kashmir, or the Mumbai terrorist attack of 2008, severely scrutinize the teleological end of history. The faith on history is on tenuous ground. As Indians, the Godhra riots are enmeshed in our collective psyche through the image of Qutubuddin Ansari with that astonishing picture of his hands drawn together, begging for his life as Hindu extremists had his building surrounded. I remember waking up to that picture in the newspaper and the conversations of that being the headline image of the riots. More than a decade has passed after Godhra and yet the image lingers in our minds. It has found its way into the historical archive of those tumultuous few days bringing with it the realization of the new lesson of the history of postcolonial India—the human face is the teleological end to it. The sectarian violence cannot be justified by history and hence it is silent about it. But art and literature have been able to bridge the silence through the image of Ansari. People will see Ansari's picture and go to the archive looking for a historical review of the incident. This is the challenge that art always throws at the silence of history and as long as literature is present as an art form, the silences in the historical narratives will always get a voice, albeit literary, that can be heard.

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