

I. Contesting Nation: Amitav Ghosh's Voyage to Alien India

Amitav Ghosh's writings spring from the loopholes of history of Indian land and people. His characters contest against the concept of 'shining India' in that they represent unrecorded lives and cultures from rural peasants to the refugees of partition. This research elaborates the widening gap between 'modern' Indian nationality and 'subaltern' subjectivity in Ghosh's narrative. Ghosh portrays the lives of underprivileged rural peasants and refugees of war in *The Hungry Tide*, Ghosh's sixth work of fiction. This research pays specific attention to the impact of debates in Indian historiography generated by subaltern studies. The work goes on to identify interlinked sets of themes in Ghosh's fictions, in the novel for discussion: the problem of Indian nationalism, the interpenetration of power and knowledge in the colonial archive, the search for indigenous forms of knowledge, and the phenomenon of violence and ethnic conflict. This research project attempts to elucidate the historical exclusion of refugees and peasants after the independence of India from English colonial regime. Many people, thereafter, were made the victim of partition. Moreover, the division of Pakistan has exacerbated the plight of economically backward: they became landless, jobless and even nation-less. They were deprived of identity as they could not make it to national policy making. This work critically employs the voice of 'subalternists' in order to narrate the gauged voice of 'unrecognized' peasants and refugees in Ghosh's novel.

Ghosh records the dialogue between history and individual in India during the past two decades. Amitav Ghosh has anticipated and did so much to shape the common subject matter. "The first is the novelist's abiding interest in listening to the voice of the anonymous individual, the typical person who is unrecorded in

history,” (15) John C. Hawley observes the pattern of Ghosh’s narratives. Hawley further writes:

Ghosh narrates the life of an obscure servant and his master in *An Antique Land*, a mysterious urchin living in an Indian train station in *The Calcutta Chromosome*, and an overlooked fisherman in *The Hungry Tide*. His concern with the recuperation and the rendering of individual experiences operates against a kind of totalizing theory that habitually consigns subalternity to oblivion. (16)

Another critic, Samir Dayal, writes that “Ghosh is interested in what might in cultural studies terms, but also in literary studies terms, be called the articulation of fragile subject in everyday life” (qtd. in Hawley, 16). The subject which is fragile because ordinary, and interesting because it is precisely the ordinary, slips through the fingers of the academic historian or even the methodologically scrupulous social anthropologist.

The force of identity crisis has become one of the most potent issue of Ghosh’s novels. His characters witness the increasing number of emergent states and of separatist movements all over the world. Nationalism is born of the notion of a common heritage of a people that stretches over a long past and shared ethnic and/or religious roots. This is particularly so in the post-colonial era where the issue of identity is an urgent quest for Third World countries attempting to assert their individuality as nations and shed the yoke of having been culturally oppressed for a significant period of their history. One does not have to delve very far into history, though, to find that most, if not all, nation-states today are further from the notion of purity, unity, and shared heritage than their official ideologies would like to think. Peoples have moved in time and space and have become

culturally and religiously commingled in ways that modern demarcations of nationality fail to consider. Consequently the dreams of nationality have become artificial, not only in the sense of being man-made but also in being inadequate: if they unite one group along a certain criterion, they inevitably divide along another. As Amitav Ghosh puts it in an interview, “today nationalism, once conceived of as a form of freedom, is really destroying our world, the forms of ordinary life that many people know” (*Newsweek* 52).

The works of Amitav Ghosh explore the issues of national borders. The novels outline the historical process by which they have come about, and the resulting ironies that affect people's lives at times. They depict the incomprehensible ways of life in the post-colonial era full of contradictions. Beginning with *The Shadow Lines*, the issue of borders and partitioning history is explored in the specific case of India, resulting in a myriad of insider-outsider configurations and in the problematic of how to narrate this partitioned history in writing. This is then fleshed out in *An Antique Land*, which crosses those precise national boundaries as well as going beyond the present into the past to a time where they did not exist. In both texts a complex relationship with other nations is constructed, predominantly with the colonizer, while in the latter text, with a Third World country, namely Egypt. Such multiculturalism survives into Ghosh's *The Calcutta Chromosome*, but in a way that explodes the idea of cultural, religious, national or other definitions of identity. Hind Wassef traces this idea in “Beyond the Divide: History and National Boundaries in the Work of Amitav Ghosh”:

The characters are uprooted and located in a zone where they are only connected by their links to the scientific and counter-scientific

researches under way. In all these texts, there is a conscious intention on the part of the author to construct a history. It is a personal history in the sense of being motivated by the narrator's personal need for introspection to search for the origins of the present and it is alternative to the written or known 'broad sweeps' of official history, consisting of 'historical' events or people from which 'ordinary people' and a more genuinely human experience has been left out. (75)

This task of recording an alternative history has become identified with the role of the postcolonial writers like Ghosh. The discourse of most postcolonial writers today would echo these same notions and would reveal the same inconsistencies. The reality of most of the borders of Third World countries are drawn up in this century. Some are divided by colonial power and not by the 'sovereign' nation-state itself, mostly cutting through existing religious or ethnic groups, would undermine the myth of nation and must therefore be omitted from the national memory. Indeed, these borders become all-important for the nation which it must protect for its own salvation.

In the older imaginings, where states are defined by centres, borders were porous and indistinct and sovereignties faded imperceptibly into one another. As Ghosh asserts,

Hence paradoxically enough, the ease with which pre-modern empires and kingdoms were able to sustain their rule over immensely heterogeneous, and often not even contiguous populations for long periods of time. The greater freedom of movement in the world [. . .] in the twelfth century, people

developed a much more sophisticated language of cultural negotiation than we know today. They were able to include different cultures in their lives, while maintaining what was distinct about themselves. (*Newsweek* 52)

Central to Ghosh's works is the idea of the exclusiveness, the non-porous nature of modern borders which is brought to the forefront when contrasted with the inclusiveness of older communities where no concept of nationality with all its modern trappings of passports and visas existed.

Ghosh, one of the most widely known prominent Indian literary figure in English, is accepted as a productive writer not because he produced book after book but because of his dexterity in managing his personal experiences and the epochal events of human history. He was born in Calcutta on 11 July 1956. His father was first a lieutenant colonel in the army and, later a diplomat. Ghosh grew up in East Pakistan, Srilanka, Iran and India. As a young person he was extremely influenced by the story of partition, Independence and even Second World War. These stories made an indelible feeling in his mind. He learnt it through political and military subterbuges and by his parents, family members and neighbours.

He began his academic career from the Doon school in Dehradun and received graduate in History from St.Stephen College, Delhi university in 1976 and post graduate in sociology from the university in 1978. He worked as journalist for *The Indian express* in New Delhi. Later he joined Delhi school of economics as a lecturer in the department of Anthropology. After some year he received a scholarship at Oxford University. In 1980 he went to Egypt to do field work in the village of Lataif. Since then he has been visiting fellow at the center for social science, at Trivandrum, Kerala (1982-83), a visiting professor of

Anthropology at the University of Virginia (1988), the University of Pennsylvania (1989), the American University in Cairo (1994), and Columbia University (1994-97), and distinguished Professor of comparative literature at Queens college of the city University of New York (1999-2003). In the spring of 2004, he was visiting Professor in the department of English at Harvard University. He currently lives in Brooklin, New York with his wife Deborah and their children, Leela and Nayan.

Ghosh started his career as novelist after his Ph.D. His first novel is *The Circle of Reason* (1986). The so-called deformity of family and individual, the tussle between local elite and ignorant peasants, and exploitation that the local politician exerts over economically backward people are the major themes of this novel. The writing technique of the book is magic realism and picaresque. It is a saga of flight and pursuit, this novel chronicles the adventure of Alu, a young master weaver who is wrongly suspected of being a terrorist chased from Bengal to Bombay and on through Persion Gulf to North Africa by a bird watching police inspector. It presents history as a collective memory which existed in the the past into all that happens in the present. It won the Prix Medicine Stranger, one of the France's top literary awards. His second novel *The Shadow Lines* (1988) which depicts the family history is divided into two parts--'Going Away' and 'Going Home.' It focuses on narrator's family in Calcutta and Dhaka and their connection with English family in London, then his return visit to the family home in Dhaka in 1994. It evolves postcolonial situations--cultural dislocations and anxieties--in the period between 1962 and 1979. It won the Sahitya Academy Award, India's most prestigious literary prize. His third novel is *In an Antique Land* (1992) which deals with theme of history and cultural displacement, alientation and the complexities of imaging another person's view of reality. His next novel is *The*

Calcutta Chromosome (1996) set in India and U.S.A. He makes his unique experiment in it by combining various themes and techniques. He amalgamates here literature, philosophy, history, psychology and sociology. It won the Author C Clarke Award. His another famous novel is *The Glass Palace* (2000) which principally is set in Burma, India and Malaya. In it he uses realistic technique. It won the grand prize for fiction at the Frankfurt International e-Book Award in 2001.

His next famous novel *The Hungry Tide* (2004) is a story set in Sundarban, West Bengal area. It has realistic technique and divided in two sections—‘The Ebb’ and ‘The Flood.’ It is as famous as his best selling novel *The Glass Palace*. It won the Hutch Crossword Book Award in 2006.

Apart from fictions, he has written non-fiction, a gripping and meticulously researched travelogue, *Dancing in Cambodia* and *At Large in Burma* (1998) which depict his perception about the socio-political situation in both Cambodia and Burma, two countries which practiced the politics of extreme isolation in the recent past. He has also written booklet *Countdown* (1999). It expresses the nuclear lobby in both India and Pakistan. Ghosh was nominated for the American society of magazine editors Award for reporting in 1999 for it. Thus, the above discussed books and booklets have established Ghosh as one of the prominent figure in Indian writers writing in English.

Gaurav Desai, in “Old World Orders: Amitav Ghosh and the Writing of Nostalgia,” traces the uses of nostalgia in Amitav Ghosh's works. Desai writes: “the all too common structural affinity of such nostalgia with discourses of purity and authenticity is challenged in Ghosh's narratives” (125). Ultimately finding

Ghosh's creative use of nostalgia to be politically inspiring, the essay questions which historical processes the nostalgic narratives may elide. Desai reiterates:

Written as a history in the guise of a traveler's tale, Ghosh's narrative is at once a travelogue, a detective story, a romance with a lost world, and an anthropologist's attempt to write a dialogic ethnography. It is not a text that is immune from some of the slippages of what we now commonly recognize as the Orientalist imaginary, but its participation in that discursive economy is calculated, ironic, or self-consciously belated. One way of describing his book is to suggest that the two main narratives interwoven are those of anthropology and history. (126)

These visits are arguably those of a writer less invested in the formal profession of academic anthropology and more those of someone seeking to reconnect with a community of friends left behind. They are also the visits of a writer who has, in the intervening years, found a renewed interest in the historical connections between foreign lands, the subject of his study, and India, which is, "as passports often say his country of origin" (126). It is at this juncture, then, that the historical narrative enters the frame. Desai's project in the above article is to draw on some of this scholarship in order to examine the political as well as aesthetic tensions in Ghosh's imaginative reconstruction of this older world and especially his attempts to link it with our own contemporaneity. It should be clear by the end of this exercise that the point is not to criticize Ghosh's fidelity to the historical record but rather to understand the dynamics of what he calls the "production of history" (126) in a nostalgic mode. Desai suggests that the all too common structural affinity of such nostalgia with discourses of purity and authenticity is challenged

in Ghosh's narrative, where cultural, racial, and economic hybridity, mixture, and exchange appear as privileged terms. A central part of his project is to track, in both the historical and anthropological accounts, the political valences of these alleged mixings and to question what other processes they may elide. Since the writing of nostalgia is as much about the forgetting as the remembrance of the past, he attempts to foreground what it is that the text forgets in its desire to weave a nostalgic narrative.

In March 2001, Amitav Ghosh's novel *The Glass Palace* (2000) was named the Eurasia regional winner of the Commonwealth Writers' Prize. The award seemed to affirm Ghosh's reputation as a novelist and journalistic commentator--both modes of writing in which his close work and training as a social anthropologist inform a careful narration of international dynamics. But Ghosh, unaware that his publisher had entered the book for competition, was dismayed by the news. In a letter to the Commonwealth Foundation withdrawing his novel from the running for the overall prize, Ghosh explains his dissatisfaction with the term 'Commonwealth Literature':

So far as I can determine, *The Glass Palace* is eligible for the Commonwealth Prize partly because it was written in English and partly because I happen to belong to a region that was once conquered and ruled by Imperial Britain. Of the many reasons why a book's merits may be recognised these seem to me to be the least persuasive. (20)

Stephanie Jones in "A Novel Genre: Polylingualism and Magical Realism in Amitav Ghosh's novels" traces how Ghosh's novels inscribes "a magical real sensibility of quotidian extreme and wild coincidence against both bounded ideas

of language and history” (431), grounding ‘Commonwealth literature’ and theorizations of postcolonial literature as apparently boundless. The perception of a linear shift from the British Empire into a world of discrete but co-operative nations is challenged by Ghosh’s portrayal of a teeming world of transverse histories, in which the smaller terms of community belie the ideologies of nation-- and the apparently organic, rooted terms of ‘community’ are themselves collapsed into a recognition that all people can be traced back to histories of displacement and migration. “This diffusion of ‘big history’ into the long movements and strange moments of diaspora is most crucially drawn out through Ghosh’s enchanted exploration of the ‘polylingualism’ of language,” (431) Jones writes. Jones quotes Deleuze and Guattari towards an answer to the question ‘What is a minor literature?: “Deleuze and Guattari celebrate the ‘revolutionary’ potential of writing that ‘makes use of the polylingualism of one’s own language’ (qtd. in Jones 431). She further quotes:

They [Deleuze and Guattari] suggest that this may take the form-- as in Franz Kafka’s writing--of a pared, dry, ‘willed poverty’ in which ‘nothing remains but intensities’. Or, it may operate by ‘exhilaration and overdetermination’ to bring about ‘all sorts of worldwide reterritorializations’ of language. Picking out the affinities between the exuberant, surfeiting language of Ghosh and the iconic ‘Indian English’ of Salman Rushdie, critical responses have tended to read the text as too diffuse and too obscure as compared to Rushdie’s slick pace and honed, precipitate, ‘polylinguistic’ style. (432)

Against this trend, Jones's paper argues that where Rushdie's delight in the patterns and possibilities of language sometimes threatens to overwhelm the telling of specific, peripheral histories, the apparent awkwardness of Ghosh's text reveals a more sober challenge and a contained, wary sense of consolation. "Like Rushdie, Ghosh's etymological diversions privilege an oral mode of storytelling that distends and subverts the ideologies of empire and nation arguably inherent in the traditional novel genre," she argues, "but Ghosh's narrative refuses to be brought full circle to sanction a fabulous sense of magical realism glossing the continuation of colonial patterns of exploitation and oppression under the rubric of globalization" (433).

Jones characterizes it as a technique for undermining the fixity of borders of the binarisms imposed by the totalizing systems of imperialism, and more broadly, the imperialism of totalizing systems. Homi Bhabha takes this further when he writes more absolutely of magical realism as "the literary language of the emergent postcolonial world" (6). Responding to this view, Aijaz Ahmad deplores postcolonial perspectives--both critical and literary--that play through post-structuralist practices and consolidate around "metropolitan theory's inflationary rhetoric" (69).

But far from indifferently free-floating away from the conception of a long past, this tradition of thinking is more often weighed down and itself disconcerted by the recognition of the limits of historiography. The perception of a sometimes-emancipating devolution of history into discourse--dismissed by Ahmad as a reification of textuality--is more often accompanied by a pressure, verging on panic, of the need to negotiate and constantly renegotiate subject positions. This shifty border between challenging and retrograde deployments of deconstructive,

magical real techniques is brought into more specific relief by both the tenor and sparseness of critical responses to Ghosh's fictions.

In his essay "After Midnight: the Novel in the 1980s and 1990s" for *A History of Indian literature in English*, Jon Mee both recognizes and qualifies the importance of Amitav Ghosh to the recent renaissance in Indian writing in English which has outdone that of the 1930s. He writes, "the domestic drama, family romance, Indian myth and mock epic have all been deployed to re-imagine India and Indian-ness in terms of an open-ended heterogeneity" (324). The idea of unity so central to the years of nationalist struggle and the building of the new nation state has been displaced by an urgent need to question the nature of that unity. Mee recognizes Ghosh--who has variously used and subverted all these genres, and more--as offering "perhaps the most sustained response to the opportunities created by Rushdie's precedent" (324).

Thus, Ghosh's works portray the uneven relationships between nation-states which is mostly the result of colonialism. Furthermore, his works penetrates through the life of colonized subjects. The present research has been divided into four chapters. The first chapter consists of an introduction to Amitav Ghosh, a brief outline of his works, outline of present study, and critical review of literature from the perspective of Subaltern Studies. The second chapter presents Subaltern theory as methodology to interpret the text. The third chapter will analyze the text at a considerable length. It will sort out some of the extracts from the text as an evidence to prove the hypothesis of the study. The fourth chapter is conclusion of this research.

II. Reinventing Revolution through Literary Criticism: Subaltern Studies

Subaltern Studies takes a position which is now well known among those practicing literary criticism. Themes such as the relative autonomy of subaltern consciousness and action, the need to make the subaltern classes the subject of their own history, the failure of the Indian bourgeoisie to speak for the nation, and the existence of two domains of politics have provided a fresh critical thrust to much recent writing on modern Indian history and society.

The term "subaltern" has been adopted to postcolonial studies from the academic works of the subaltern group of historians who aimed to promote a systematic discussion of subaltern themes in South Asian studies. In theory, the term subaltern as Ranjit Guha announces in his editorial of *Subaltern Studies I* (1982) is used as "as a name for the general attribute of subordination in South Asian society whether this is expressed in terms of class, caste, age, gender, and officer or in any others way" (VII). He includes rural gentry, impoverished landlords, rich peasants and the upper middle peasants into the category of subaltern class. He admits that they "could under certain circumstances act for the elite" (8). He claims that Subaltern Studies will study the history, politics economics and sociology of subalternity "as well as the attitudes, ideologies and belief systems, in short, the culture informing that condition" (VII). Subaltern Studies is doubtful towards the contemporary history and culture as the historiography of the nationalism had long been marginalized by elitism-colonialist elitism, and the bourgeois elitism, both the product of colonialism. Hence the purpose of the subaltern studies project was to redress the imbalance created in the academic works by a tendency to focus on elite culture, in south Asian historiography with the recognition that subaltern cannot be understood

except in binary relationship with domination. Subaltern Studies has committed itself "to rectify the elitist bias characteristics of much research and academic work in particular" (VII). Ranajit Guha stresses the need to analyze the consciousness of the subaltern very clearly to bring out how it kicked feudal values.

Since, the history of the ruling class is realized as the history of the state and the dominant group, Gramsci is interested in the historiography of the subaltern classes. For him, subaltern "refer to those group in the society who are subject to hegemony to the ruling classes" (215). He has argued that the history of subaltern group is necessarily fragmented as they were always the subject to the activities of the ruling groups. Obviously, they have less access to the means by which they can control their own representation and to culture and social institutions. Only permanent victory can break that pattern of subordination which cannot be achieved immediately. Here, Gramsci is concerned with the intellectual role in subaltern's political and cultural movement against the hegemony of ruling class. Since, the subaltern people do not have the means and strategy to get access to the power position; it is the role of the intellectuals to represent them the way. Only then they can become the revolutionary figures who can struggle against hegemony for their independence.

Guha claims that the difference between the elite and the subaltern lies in the nature of political mobilization. Elite mobilization was achieved vertically through the adoption of the British parliamentary institution, while the subaltern classes through traditional organization of kinship and territoriality as class associations. The strategy of the political mobilization demonstrates the link between the colonialism and bourgeois nationalism. The bourgeois nationalists

adopted the legacies of colonialism. To some extent, they are the successors of the colonial regime. The elite historiography also claims “that the Indian nationalism was primarily an idealist venture in which the indigenous elite led the people from subjugation to freedom” (2). It is clear that the elite historiography ignores the roles that subaltern classes played during anti-imperialist movement. Likewise, the national narratives or the bourgeois nationalism fails to speak on behalf of the people as the postcolonial nationalist project imposes on elitism. Clearly, in a way this kind of project is undertaken with western biasness. As a result, the subaltern issues and themes, as quoted by R. Radhakrishnan in his book *Diasporic Mediations*, “do not figure out in the nationalist equation” (147). Referring to Partha Chatterjee, he argues that nationalism is problematic as “it sustains and continues the threatening legacies of Euro centrism and Orientalism” (194).

Despite the fact that colonialism expands inhuman violence and injustice on people, the colonialist historiography claims that colonialism was based on people’s consent. In fact, it crowns colonialism with hegemony in the name of people’s consent. Hence, undoubtedly, “the rule known as Raj was dominance without hegemony” (*Selected Subaltern Studies XVII*). Guha in his essay “Dominance without Historiography” asserts that colonialism involved dominance without hegemony. It proceeded on with the help of exploitation rather than consent of the people. The people resisted against the colonialism. The colonial historiography, however, simply overlooks their resistance, always busy in proving the British rule as based on people’s assent and undermines the injustices inflicted upon the people. Above all, there are some native historiographers also who fall prey to the discourse of colonialism and it is so called elite project. All

these factors are responsible behind the emergence of colonialism as a project of imperialism that involved the assent of the ruled.

Contrarily, Guha asserts that colonialism was a rule without hegemony, the hegemony either created out of exploitation or simply the imagination of the colonialist historiographers while they wrote Indian history. In fact, they had written only a little portion of history. The South Asian history was just one stage in the colonial career of the colonialist historiography. After the independence, the bourgeois nationalism became the successor of the colonial legacy. Like colonialism; bourgeois nationalism also adopts the coercion. Therefore, the bourgeois nationalism is also dominance without hegemony. Guha therefore remarks: "in short, the price of blindness about the structure of colonial regime as a dominance without hegemony has been, for us, a total want of insight into the character of the successor regime (elite nationalism) too as dominance without hegemony" (307).

Subaltern Studies aspires to "rewrite the nation outside the state centered national discourse that replicates colonial power knowledge in a world of globalization" (20). Subaltern Studies therefore has brought a paradigmatic shift in the perspective through revision of the elite historiographies. Subaltern Studies as a new kind of history, "consists of dispersed moments and fragments which subaltern historians seek in ethnographic colonialism" (20). This kind of historiography, of course, "constitutes subversive politics because it exposes form of power/knowledge that oppresses subaltern people and also because it provides liberating alternatives" (20). In the process of inquiring colonialism, and aftermath, "the historians and the postcolonial critics stand together against colonial modernity to secure a better future for subaltern people, learning to hear

them, allowing them to speak, talking back to powers that marginalize them, documenting their past. The historians should aspire to create a liberated imagined community: “unlike magical realists they should not make themselves free from the shackles of chronological-linear time” (20). It is not necessary that Subaltern Studies must always talk of Indian historiography. In recent years, Subaltern Studies has expanded to include work on other regions and has inspired Subaltern Studies initiatives in other historical and geographical contexts as well. In a way it has acquired a global phenomenon. As a postcolonial cultural critique, Subaltern Studies aspires "to restore the integrity of indigenous historians that appear naturally in non-linear, oral, symbolic, vernacular and dramatic forms" (20).

Subaltern Studies now tends to take resort to cultural as well literary modes to inquire into history. As Priamvada Gopal states in his article "Reading Subaltern History," "history like literature, has the capability to produce post-positivist knowledge which would not teach an experience from its living contexts, denuding it of a range of significances" (140). “The first emancipation act that the Subaltern Studies project performs in our understanding of tribes, castes or other groups,” Veena Das writes in her article "Subaltern as Perspective," to restore to them their historical being" (314). David Ludden states that “subaltern studies has become an original right for a new kind of history from below, a people's history free from national complaints" (12).

Gayatri Spivak in her seminal essay "Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography" gives a deconstructive reading to the activities of subaltern studies group. She tries to assess their works: she comes to realize that it somehow resembles deconstruction which puts the binary oppositions like elite/subaltern under erasure. Their project in her view is rather a positivist one as it aspires to

investigate, discover and establish a subaltern or peasant consciousness. Spivak however, thinks that "consciousness, here is not consciousness- in general but a historicized political species, subaltern consciousness" (338). In fact, "Deconstructing Historiography" made an influential contribution to subaltern and postcolonial studies. For scholars caught between the desire to deconstruct the concepts such as "the individual subject" as a political imperative to recover the histories of actual subjects-social and historical agents capable of initiating or undertaking action-who had been marginalized by history, Spivak offered a helpful way out. Acknowledging a certain commitment to represent the subaltern, she advocated a "strategic use of positivist essentialism in a scrupulously visible political interest" (338). Dipesh Chakrabarty in his essay "Invitation to a Dialogue" asserts:

The central aim of Subaltern Studies is to understand the consciousness that informed and still informs political actions taken by subaltern classes on their own, independently of any elite initiatives. It is only by giving this consciousness a central place in historical analysis that we see subaltern as the maker of the history s/he lives out. (374)

Guha's view clarifies that the alleged peasant consciousness is a strategy they have got to adopt for establishing subaltern people as an autonomous domain having their own history. Spivak finally suggests subaltern studies group to follow "reading against grain" approach because it "would get the group off the dangerous hook of claiming to establish the truth knowledge of the subaltern and his consciousness" (356). Guha's "The Prose of Counter Insurgency" shows tribal revolts as the subaltern rebellion which is totally different from nationalism. For

Guha, it is important to understand the rebellion as motivated and conscious. Similarly, in David Ludden's words, "subaltern studies entered in the academic scene by asserting the complete autonomy of lower class insurgency" (10).

Nonetheless, subaltern consciousness has been always a critical point of subalternity. Jim Masselos, as quoted by David Ludden, thinks that "the essentialist notion of the peasant consciousness is a stereotype of resistant subaltern people" (22). However, the peasants or subaltern groups tend to resist the elite domination. Even when they took part in the anti-imperialist movements like non-co-operation, disobedience and quit-India under the elite leadership of the political parties, they resisted the bourgeois nationalism as well as indigenous elite leaders by disobeying their orders. They would take part in the movements in their own traditional ways. This tendency shows their assertion of freedom and self-identity. Yet, we should not only forget the "defiance" as Gautam Bhadra says, "is not only characteristic behaviors of the subaltern classes" (63), but also 'submission to authority' is equally important feature of their behaviors. The defiance and the submissiveness constitute the subaltern mentality. In reality, subaltern consciousness is always in rife with this serious conflict. Likewise their history, their consciousness too tends to be fragmented as well as complex one. After all they are subject to the elite hegemony.

Subaltern and Literature

While launching the project of subaltern studies, the members of Subaltern Studies Group had not thought about literature as such. Their aim was not to prove a certain theoretical strategy to analyze the literary works. they headed to make an empirical study of the culture of those people who have no access to hegemonic power. The Subaltern Studies in their first three volumes, attempted to establish

the peasants as an autonomous domain. As Priamvada Gopal remarks, "subaltern studies was transformed from a somewhat provincial, albeit intervention, area studies enterprise into cutting edge theoretical one with the publication of the volume, *Selected Subaltern Studies* edited by Ranjit Guha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak with the forward by Edward Said" (146). Spivak examines Subaltern Studies with the linguistic as well as literary mode. In her seminal essay "Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography" she announces that Subaltern Studies is concerned with representation of consciousness or culture of the subaltern classes more than the change as whole. Actually, Spivak's primary focus was to present woman as subaltern or the subaltern women as subaltern group. Spivak can be said to be the first postcolonial theorist with fully feminist agenda. She finds literature a good platform and utilized it to render feministic mode to subaltern studies. In her translation as well as deconstructive reading of "Mahasweta Devi's Stanadyini" (*Subaltern Studies* V), she reinforces literary as well as feminist modes of subaltern studies. Similarly, in her essay "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism," she criticizes the role of literature in the cultural representation of British imperialism that emphasizes the role of literature in the socio-political as well as cultural representation of any location should not be ignored. Of course, the literature related to colonial agency has produced enough misrepresentations and manipulations, however, literature has the capacity to produce positivist knowledge.

In her essay, "Deconstructing Historiography", Spivak confines Subaltern Studies within the representation of the culture of the subaltern people. Later on, the writers like Ghosh, Susie Tharu contributed their writings to Subaltern Studies. Said prompts us to question western representations of the East. Bhabha

asks us to submit the actual encounter between the West and East--in his case India--to the closest examination. And Subaltern Studies is also concerned with the cultural representation of subaltern people. In this sense, there is close affinity between post colonialism as well Subaltern Studies. Both of them represent suppressed and marginalized groups. Post colonial literary writings deal with the issues like diaspora, cultural encounter, hybridity etc. involved with the third world people.

Postcolonial writings mainly speak on behalf of the third world people whether they are in their own nation or living in other metropolitan location as immigrants. Likewise, subaltern studies speaks for the subaltern people. The Subaltern Studies is motivated by the desire to save the subaltern people and their culture from misrepresentation. Thus, the culture of indigenous people emerges as the convergence for subalternity and postcolonial literatures. With the help of the technique like magic realism, the postcolonial literature tries to demonstrate various aspects of the indigenous culture disrupted by colonialism and aftermath.

The Subaltern Studies as a postcolonial critique aspires to inquire elite historiographies including colonial historiography. It tries to deconstruct the colonial historiography and aspires to establish subaltern historiography. In fact, both the postcolonialism and subalterns have adopted the appropriate language and the theoretical strategies derived from poststructuralist linguistic model to speak on behalf of the marginalized groups. Indeed, both of them are interrelated discourse that can speak on behalf of the many sided and the complex tissue of human predicament through language and literature.

Subaltern Women

When Subaltern Studies Group emerged, it had not taken up the issues concerning woman so distinctively up to the last three volumes. Only with the publication of *Subaltern Studies IV*, the Subaltern Studies Group came to be attentive towards women's issues. Of course, there were few essays that slightly touched the women issues. However, only with the inclusion of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in *Subaltern Studies IV*, Subaltern Studies entered in the new domain as feminism. Spivak comes with fully feminist agenda. Pointing out the vulnerable points of Subaltern Studies, she clarifies that subaltern as a discourse to speak on behalf of the marginalized groups has not paid attention to women as doubly colonized both by the patriarchy and colonization. She is amazed at "its indifference to the subjectivity, not to mention the indispensable presence of the woman as the crucial instrument" (358). She aspires to restore the significance of the concept-metaphor women in the context of Subaltern Studies to which the core members of the Subaltern Studies Group had ignored. Her feminist agenda includes the complicity of female writers with imperialism.

The subaltern people also took part in the anti-imperialist insurgency as the members of indigenous elite class and the members of the bourgeois nationalist did. However, their contribution was simply overlooked by the colonialist and bourgeois nationalist historiography. Likewise, the subaltern women despite their potentiality and contribution remained unheard the way the subaltern insurgents despite their active participation on the anti-imperialist insurgencies. Spivak therefore admits that "woman is neglected syntagm of the semiotics of insurgency" (359). In other words, she aspires to show the complicity between the subject and object investigation: the subaltern studies group and

subalternity. This complicity leads the historians and the theorists to ignore the simple exclusion of the subaltern as female (sexed) subject.

In her witty commentary "A Literary Representation of the Subaltern: Mahasweta Devi's *Standyini*," she argues that women's subjectivity and their voice are denied upon male's desire. Whether a woman is looked from above merely as the sexual object or from below as the goddess, she is reduced into the object of the male's desire. In the essay, she has pointed the parallelism between Jashoda the subaltern and Jashoda the divine. The icon of Jashoda the divine is, in fact, used to dissimulate the exploitation inflicted on Jashoda the subaltern. On the one hand, she has been turned into an object of males desires. On the other hand, especially as she feeds their children with her milk, she has been turned to an object of worship. Further, she has been equally linked with the mother country, Here in whatever way she is perceived, male's desire is obvious in the demonstration of her subjectivity. So, she often gets reduced to an object of male's desire. The male perception always wants a woman to be a sacrificial being who can be the expectable of his desires. In truth, the gaze from below is only male's strategy to hide the traces of oppression he inflicts on his female counterpart through his gaze from above. Spivak states: "through a programmed confounding of the two kinds of gaze, the goddess can be used to dissimulate women's oppression" (129).

Spivak's another influential essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" makes a remarkable discussion of the feminist problems involved with representation of women issues. She argues that the subaltern people cannot speak themselves. They have got to be represented and there is problem in representation. In the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and their voice is

overshadowed by the voice of the investigator and interpreter. The subaltern female is even more deeply in shadow. The elite intellectual represent the subaltern voice filtered through their elitist perspective. Here, her focus does not mean that she speaks for or has the intention of speaking for the female subaltern. Rather, she is motivated by the desire to save the female subaltern from misrepresentation. In the essay that takes the issue with the branches of post-structuralism, Spivak examines the nineteenth century British colonizers over what she calls widow sacrifice: “the burning of widows on the funeral pyre of their deceased husbands” (45). Spivak concludes that none of the parties allowed women the potential victims of this practice to speak.

The British text construct a position for the woman in which she is made to represent western individualism and by implication a superior western civilization that emphasizes modern freedom, while the Indian ones represent her as choosing her duty and tradition. Although both parties claim that they have rural women on their side, the women themselves remain unheard. Both the white men and the brown deny her subjectivity. The white men reduce the native women into an object/creature to be protected. In that conflict between the two perspectives of the white and brown, women subjectivity gets ignored or lost. Moreover, the Hindu males claim that Hindu mythology works as a camouflage that helps the Hindu males to suppress the heinous subordination they impose upon their female counterparts. She equally criticizes the white males for trying to call the custom as barbaric ritual. Actually, they too are not concerned about brown women. In fact, they are demonstrating their hegemony by proving the Indian males impotent and barbaric through their misrepresentation.

Whether it is the East or the West, the women are denied the position from which they can speak on their own as both spaces are patriarchies in which women are turned into the object of the male's desire. As Spivak states "there is no space from which the sexed subaltern subject can speak" (103). Between patriarchy and imperialism, subject constitution and the object formation, "the figure of woman disappears" (102). Colonialism appears to be hazardous to females than to males of the colonized spaces. Analyzing the problems of the category of the subaltern by focusing on the female subaltern, Spivak views, "in the context of colonial production, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow" (83). She claims that the woman is doubly subalternized in the colonized patriarchal spaces. After examining the case of Bhuvaneshwari's suicide, she concludes that "the subaltern cannot speak" (104).

The critics have attempted to interpret this statement on various ways. Mostly, it has been interpreted as the lack of means and strategy on the part of subaltern to speak on their own. The problem is that they have got only the dominant language at their disposal. Therefore, it is necessary for them to appropriate this dominant language or voice if they really want to be heard. Again the problem is that it will be the voice mediated by the elitist voice or language the way postcolonial discourse as Spivak thinks is mediated by colonialism. In this sense, subaltern subject resembles the position of postcolonial discourse itself. Similarly, Ranjit Guha in his essay "Chandra's Death" attempts to demonstrate the nature of women's subordination within patriarchy. Likewise, Susie Tharu, Teaswini Niranjana, Kamala Visweswaran have carried on the women issues in the subsequent volumes. Kamala Visweswaran says: "women are not accepted as proper subjects, but it does register and seek to certain their agency" (124). She

however believes "that it is at the point of erasure where the emergence of the subaltern is possible" (124). Here, she counters Spivak's argument that subaltern cannot speak. She argues that we recognize the effect where the gendered subaltern is felt, woman as subaltern. Her strategy of presenting the women in such a way clarifies her position in the colonial as well as patriarchal society where woman's voices and deeds always remain unheard.

Recent Developments

Subaltern studies, has recently come in for a substantial amount of hostile criticism, particularly in India, on the ground that it has gone 'reactionary.' The Marxist critique of capitalism that informed the earlier volumes in the series has now been replaced--under the threatening influence of deconstructive, post-structuralist and postmodernist philosophy, it is said--by a critique of the rationalism that marked the European Enlightenment. In a situation in India where the rise of a 'religious' and aggressive Hindu right demands, an ever- more vigilant attention to the secular goals of class-struggle, democracy and socialism is in need. In a recent essay on the 'fascist' nature of the Hindu right, the eminent Indian left-wing historian, Sumit Sarkar, spells out why a critique of Enlightenment rationalism is dangerous in India today. His propositions could be arranged as follows:

Fascist ideology in Europe owed something to a general turn-of-the-century move away from what were felt to be the sterile rigidities of Enlightenment rationalism; [N]ot dissimilar ideas have become current intellectual coin in the west, and by extension they have started to influence Indian academic life; That these 'current academic fashions' (Sarkar mentions 'postmodernism') 'can reduce

the resistance of intellectuals to the ideas of Hindutva [Hindu-ness] has already become evident'. Examples: The critique of colonial discourse has stimulated forms of indigenism not easy to distinguish from the standard Sangh parivar argument, that Hindutva is superior to Islam and Christianity (and by extension to the creations of the modern west like science, democracy or marxism) because of its allegedly unique roots. (164-65)

Sarkar warns that “an uncritical cult of the 'popular' or 'subaltern', particularly when combined with the rejection of Enlightenment rationalism can lead even radical historians down strange paths” (165). For Sarkar, that bears “ominous' resemblance to Mussolini's condemnation of the 'teleological' idea of progress and to Hitler's exaltation of the German volk over "hair splitting intelligence” (Sarkar 165). Gautam Bhadra is Sarkar's example of historians who have been led down 'strange paths' by his 'uncritical' adulation of the subaltern and by their 'rejection of Enlightenment rationalism' (167).

Tom Brass, in a review article on Gyan Prakash (Prakash has since joined the Subaltern Studies collective) work, and the respected civil liberties activist K Balagopal, in an essay on the dangers of neo-Hinduism, express similar misgivings. The charge appears in a summary form: “the real importance of post modernism lies in its theoretical impact on political practice: it forbids socialism, encourages bourgeois democracy and allows fascism” (qtd. in Brass 1165). Quoting Gramsci (and thereby Romain Rolland), Brass accuses postmodernism (and his other phobias) of having distorted Gramsci: “postmodernism, popular culture and resistance theory have all combined to invert/subvert the famous dictum of Gramsci” (1165). He further writes: “instead of pessimism of the spirit

and optimism of the will, they now license optimism of the spirit and pessimism of the will” (1165). K. Balagopal blames 'postmodernists' and 'subalternists' alleged rejection of the possibility of 'objective' analysis for the inadequacies of Left resistance to the fascistic Hindutva push:

Having noted in more than sufficient detail the sins committed by secularists, it is time now to look at matters objectively, however, dubious that task may seem to the subaltern theorists and the postmodernists whose current preponderance among the progressive intelligentsia is one reason for the latter's hopelessly inadequate response to the bulldozing of Hindutva. (790)

The agenda, according to him, is that of fighting for 'equality and justice at all levels' and 'to create a real unity of all oppressed people'. This is what he sees thwarted by both “seemingly down-to-earth and untheoretical Gandhians” as well as the “incomprehensible post-modernists” whose resulting attitude of “theoretical and political flippancy is doing a lot of damage” (931).

Subaltern studies attempts to recuperate the Indian mainstream history from the exclusion of people and culture. The general objective of subalternists is to launch a project to bring unrecorded and neglected history to the light. This systematic crossing-over brings rural peasants, women, and all of the excluded cultures to the forefront. Since subaltern studies tends to address the issue of domination and exploitation of Indian people, subalternists attempt to mobilize the historically gauged voice of these people. Guha, Spivak, Bhadra and other notable theorists make it clear that there exists a race or group of people who need intellectual support to speak for them. And, this class consists of large number of Indian population. Nothing but the systematic inclusion of this group into the

development of India alone can bring the promises of independence fulfilled. The historically marginalized group of people can make the difference in the face of modern India if their voice is brought into collective nationhood.

III. Unwanted Children: Peasants and Refugees in *The Hungry Tide*

The question is certainly Spivak's: "can the subaltern speak?" However, the case of Amitav Ghosh and the recent attacks on the factuality of his mediated discourse in the testimonial *The Hungry Tide* force us to reconsider it. Gayatri Spivak's seminal question presupposes that a subaltern subject whose voice has been recorded in print is no longer a subaltern subject because the 'speaking subject' must enunciate the language of reason to be heard by Western interlocutors. That is, 'authentic' discourse is a suppressed or hidden 'truth' because of the Westerner's inability to comprehend it in its own terms; thus, subaltern subjects are forced to use the discourse of the colonizer to express their subjectivity. Against this background, this chapter attempts to extract from the debate surrounding Ghosh's text a meaningful contribution to current thinking about these issues regarding the status that the ethnicized subject as subaltern textuality have in academic circles. 'Ethnicized subjects' here means individuals who identify themselves with a group or community that considers itself, and is regarded by others, as culturally distinct from other, more powerful groups inhabiting the same national space. The contradictions that derive from the subaltern's positionality have created the conundrum in which Ghosh is trapped. Central to this contradiction is the nature of Ghosh's discourse. Authenticity and truth--if they exist at all--resist comprehension and expression.

The saga basically centers on two visitors to the Sundarban community and a native fisherman, who knows well about the Archipelago. Kanai Datta, a Delhi businessman, goes to Lusibari in the invitation of his aunt, Nilima, who is there for a long time. She runs a hospital and is an N.G.O. activist too. Going there, he reads a journal left by his uncle for him. Through this he knows his

family history and history of Sundarban. Piyali Roy (Piya), an Indio-American biologist, makes a journey to the tied country for her research on dolphins. Fokir, an illiterate man, has good knowledge about river and island. When Piya and Kanai go together towards the place from platform, they talk to each other. Kanai asks Piya of her linguistic feasibility: "you know Bengali"? (Ghosh 12). In response, she answers: "I grew up in Seattle . . . I was so little when I left India that I never had chance to learn" (12). Because of the problem of her own heritage and language she is compelled to accept Kanai as an interpreter between her and Fokir. Fokir, an illiterate fisherman, helps Piya on her research in the river. They cannot communicate each other verbally but understand each other by gesticulation. In positive response to her question about dolphin "he nodded, as if to say, yes, that's where I saw them" (47). Ghosh's novel, *The Hungry Tide* depicts the story of a group of Bengali refugees who are forced out of a forest reserve in Sundaran by Indian government and are treated as other in their own home through the Journal of Nirmal. The novel pounces back as characters seek to cross multiple barriers--the barriers of language, religion and social class, those between rural and cosmopolitan India, between urban and rural, between India and wider world.

Nilima is undoubtedly the most important mother-figure in Ghosh's novel. The nationalist ideology, suggests Partha Chatterjee, was based on a selective appropriation of western modernity by a separation of culture into a series of distinct, mutually reinforcing dichotomous spheres--the material and the spiritual; the world and the home; the masculine and the feminine. On the question of the social position of women, the nationalist ideology legitimised conservative social attitudes and patriarchal forms of authority. Writing about the nationalist ideology

of 'motherhood' in particular, Jasodhara Bagchi has observed that it took away from women all real powers (such as economic independence or decision-making authority within the family) by creating a myth about their spiritual strength and power. As a married woman, Nilima internalizes the nationalist construction of the domesticated 'Indian wife'. However, the narrator shows that Nilima challenges, in significant ways, the extremely passive role constructed for 'wife' by the nationalist ideology. Nilima, who is educated, now decides to be economically independent. By doing so, she challenges the dominant stereotype of the ideal 'Indian woman' in two major ways. The first is on account of her having a Western education. Discussing the issue of Western education for women, Tanika Sarkar points out:

Drain was not simply a matter of financial worry. It was repeatedly linked up with a more serious moral concern: that of corrupting the sources of indigenous life. The woman and the peasant as 'ideal' patriotic figures, had to be particularly careful by insulating themselves against the pretensions of this false knowledge. (12)

The material consequence of this idealisation, Sarkar suggests, was that by proscribing access to higher education to lower-class men and to women as a group, the new avenues of employment opened by the colonial restructuring of the indigenous administrative system could be monopolized by the upper-class males.

The second aspect of the dominant stereotype that Nilima challenges is by choosing to take up employment rather than accepting the financially dependent, domesticated role of the ideal 'Indian woman'. The consequences of her economic independence, the narrator shows, is that Nilima holds a position of considerable real power within her family. For instance, in a context which justifies child-

bearing and nurturing as the only legitimate social roles for women, Nilima is able to “exert her choice of establishing Bodabon Trust regarding the all-round development of refugees and their children” (129). Similarly, the narrator recalls that it was Nilima “who defined the rigorous work ethic of their family rather than Nirmal’s father” (114). The consequence of such real powers is that unlike the ideal woman who is expected to constantly negate her 'selfhood' in the service of the controlling patriarchs, Nilima develops a tremendous sense of self-pride in her achievements. The narrator says, “she [Nilima] talked to me more than she did to anyone else . . . and I could guess a little . . . of the wealth of pride it had earned her [to refuse her rich husband’s help]” (133). However, her inability to acknowledge this self-pride shows Nilima as interiorizing the dominant stereotype of 'womanhood'. Hence, she insists that she took up employment only as a 'sacrifice' for her husband's career and life. It is also this sacrificial complex constructed around the stereotype of the 'Indian woman' which cannot permit Nilima Bose to acknowledge the fact that the entire project of 'rescuing' refugees, is essentially an act of self-indulgence on her part.

The narrator reconstructs Nilima’s visit to her childhood home: “My Grandmother starts because she has forgotten all about her uncle . . . she reminds herself that she has a serious duty to perform, that she hasn't come all this way merely to indulge her nostalgia--she hates nostalgia . . . it is a waste of time” (298). The notion of an autonomous 'selfhood' for women was viewed by the nationalist ideology as a degenerate form of self-indulgence, as being directly opposed to the 'true' feminine identity characterised by self- sacrifice and suffering. The Nehruvian ideals of austerity and nation-building were thus not gender-neutral categories but involved rigidly structured social divisions of

labour. For men, making good use of their time involved as Nilima suggests, “The business of fending for oneself in the world” (14). Consequently, Nilima’s dislike of both Nirmal and Fokir, stems from her conception that they are not able to maximise the prospects of their respective careers. For women, making good use of time involved primarily their being good enforcers of the patriarchal order. The defining norm here was the myth of the 'sexual purity' of women which condemned as dangerous and immoral the female sexuality that did not serve the patriarchy. Thus Nilima is violently repulsed by what she imagines to be Kusum's sexual promiscuity, seeing it as an immoral form of self-indulgence. The narrator, is, however, unable to see the underlying ideological connection between Nilima's rigorous work-ethic and her code of morality. He interprets her attitudes instead in terms of ahistorical values and says that she was “too passionate a person to find a real place . . . in [his] late-bourgeois world” (92).

Ghosh challenges the cultural essentialism reinforced by the nationalist ideology, as by Nilima, is evident through the narrator's reconstruction of the second major female character of the novel, Kusum. Through Kusum, Ghosh is able to problematise the conception of 'Indianness' in the diaspora period. The post-partition era in India has witnessed large-scale emigrations to West Bengal. Consequently for people like Kusum, 'nationality' and 'ethnicity' are problematic categories. Having been brought up in various places, Kusum inhabits very different social roles from those of Nilima. She attempts to actively imitate the high promises of Marxism in the Morichjhapi settlement. Consequently, Kusum finds the social roles prescribed for the 'Indian woman' inadequate. The narrator recalls an episode at Nilima’s residence: “listen Kusum, Kanai said, girls don't behave like that here” (88). “What the fuck do you mean?” She spat at him. She

continues, “I’ll do what I bloody well want” (48). Kanai fires back: “Here there are certain things you cannot do . . . that’s our culture; that’s how we live” (88).

However, the narrator suggests that Kusum's mode of self-fashioning does not allow for any effective engagement with the problems of race and culture in the post-decolonisation era. It leads rather to a pathetic dependency on, and subjection to, the metropolitan culture, as represented in Kusum's married life where her husband uses her primarily as a means of financial support and then as one among many other women with whom to have sexual relationships. Vivek Dhareshwar's analysis of Ghosh's novel is applicable here to Kusum's self-fashioning as it also leads to a ‘double exclusion.’ While Kusum actively associates herself in the community at Morichjapi, the community in turn rejects her. As the narrator suggests, even Kusum's leftist sympathies become merely another means by which she attempts an illusory identification with the metropolis through another character. The narrator poignantly reconstructs Kusum’s positions as he learns the ‘truth’ about Kusum's fabricated story.

In contrast to Kusum and Nilima, Fokir's mode of self-fashioning is presented by the narrator as the position which can enable an effective engagement with the material situation within which post-colonial identities are constituted. Like Kusum, Fokir's most dominant desire is also shown to be the effort to negate the entire network of his social relationships: “he [Fokir] did not want to make friends with the people he was talking to, and that was perhaps why he was happiest in neutral impersonal places”(119). Unlike Kusum, however, the narrator says that Fokir's desire to negate his sociality arises not from the stereotypical postcolonial fantasy of being appropriated into ‘water,’ but has to be

read as an effort to challenge imposed modes of knowledge and rearticulate the subaltern self:

I [the narrator] tried to tell Piya about the archaeological Fokir . . . the Fokir who said that we could not see without inventing what we saw, so at least we could try to do it properly. He had said that we had to try because the alternative wasn't blankness--it only meant . . . we would never be free of other people's inventions. (231)

Fokir's perspective, the narrator suggests, can critique the dominant cultural stereotypes as it presents to the subaltern subject a choice to re-narrate his/her 'selfhood' according to his/her desires: "everyone lives in a story, he [Fokir] says, they all lived in stories because stories are all there are to live in, it was just a question of which one you chose" (182). The narrator here is unable to account for the critical limitation in Fokir's perspective--that the process of elaborating a new subaltern identity involves social action rather than being merely a product of an individual choice made autonomously of society. The narrator further suggests that Fokir's perspective can challenge the dominant stereotypes as it permits one to imaginatively reconstruct time and place and thus enables one to historicise his/her context. Such a historicity generates avenues for the subaltern subject, for instance the narrator, to resist the kind of dependency generated by a perspective such as Kusum's that only engages with the immediately physical present. The narrator's implication here is that Fokir's idea of identity formation can successfully challenge the uneven power-relations.

The novelist keeps the page turning with the history of the tide country, the stores of local deities, scientific information, the back stories of each characters and Nirmal's journal about the history of Sundarban which shows a eccentric,

wealthy Scotsman named Daniel Hamilton, who bought ten thousand acres of the tied country from the British government, tried to create "Utopian Society" (50). In that community, he said, "here, there would be no Brahmins or untouchables, no Bengali and Oriyans . . . everyone would have to live and work together" (51). Kanai's revolutionary and idealist uncle Nirmal who struggled against Indian government with a poor peasant Kusum to establish their rights in Sundarban area, has said utopian society imagined by Hamilton does not exist in real world. He said to Kanai, "it was a dream; what he wanted was no different from what dreamers have always wanted" (53).

The novel tells about the massacre by government force of refugees who had settled in the village of Morichjhapi: "In 1978, it happened that a great number of people suddenly appeared in Morichjhapi" (118). Having no where else to go, many east Bengalis at home in the tied country attempted to remake their lives in India's Sundarban. But invoking the need to protect forest-- the wildlife reserves, the government harassed, threatened and even killed these refugees. They suffer from partition and they are unwanted, disowned in their native land: "they were refugees, originally from Bangladesh; some had come to India after partition" (118). Most of them were poorest rural people, suppressed and exploited by higher cast elites. In conversation with Kanai, Nilima said "most of them were Dalits" (118). They are like midnight's unwanted children. Dwellers of Morichjhapi created their own organization to struggle against the government, who neglect them from government and policy: "they had set up their own government taken a census" (172). Nirmal, a revolutionary leftist and a headmaster of a local school, had planed to help the refugees to struggle against the government.

The cult of 'Bon Bibi' shows the local myth of the dwellers of Sundarban. The story about Bon Bibi as "told by Abdur-Rahim" (354) appears to have been written down and also staged as a theater play "The Glory of Bon Bibi" (110). These shows Hindu and Muslim similarity. When Piya sees Fokir praying at a shrine in Garjontola dedicated to Bon Bibi, She hears the words like 'Allah' but the praying one is Hindu. Bon Bibi, a good spirit, fights with the evil spirits like Dokkhin Rai for control of the forest and waterways. Widowhood in Sundarban is different from the usual Hindu norms: "here on the margins of the Hindu world, widows were not condemned to lifelong bereavement; they were free to remarry if they could" (81). This shows the marginalized people of Sundarban area have their own myth which is a blend of both Hindu and Muslim religion.

One of the most persistent themes in Ghosh's novel is the realistic portrayal of national and ethnic identity, and next is realistic presentation of space and time. The novel includes very contemporary story of love-adventure, identity and history, set in the vast, intermittently submerged archipelago, largely covered by mangrove forests, that come from delta of the Ganges as it debouches into the Bay of Bengal which exist in west Bengal of India.

Ghosh's writing reflects the recent concern of anthropologist with the prosperity of cultural boundary. Through the marginalized expatriate *The Hungry Tide* seeks to contain the crisis of intra-cultural and intercultural differences. Piya, is an Indian-American cytologist from Seattle, and Kanai, is a businessman from Delhi, whose culture, custom, language, etc. are different from the people in the Subaltern. Piya comes from Seattle to carry-out research on dolphins, her monolingual and illiterate guide Fokir cannot speak English, and she does not speak Bengali because of her migration towards America. Piya needs Kanai, a

multilingual businessman, as a translator between Fokir and her. When Piya hears Fokir's chanting of a traditional song of Bon Bibi, she does not understand and asks Kanai if he can translate. The translation theme is also used in the novel. At the end of the novel, Kanai loses his uncle's written diary on which history of family, Sundarban, as well as refugees are recorded. Piya loses her written data sheet about dolphins. Fokir, a cooperative man dies. Piya decides to live in Sundarban and says that Sundarban is her home.

Ghosh shows different scenario of Sundarban area. The novel not only shows romantic and cooperative character, it also presents evil character as Dillip and Dokkhin Rai. Horen and Fokir are simple fisherman who help people all the time. Fokir's wife is educated and helps Nilima and serves in hospital. Dillip, in the name of employment, sells economically poor Kusum's mother for some purpose. Dokkhim Rai bothers weaker people and animals in the island. Thus, Ghosh selects wider world character and show their cultural difference as well as communication among them in the limited Sundarban area.

The subversive potential of the novel comes from its interest in challenging received notions of normalcy and nationhood at work in mainstream politics. Ghosh's narrator traverses borders with ease and reinvents himself with all the liberating energy implied by the subaltern: a condition that allows for and acknowledges dissonance rather than coherence.

The central concern of Ghosh's narrative is to understand the consciousness that informed political actions taken by subaltern classes on their own, independently of any elite initiatives. It is only by giving this consciousness a central place in the novel that Ghosh wants us to see subaltern as the maker of the history they live.

The insurgency in Morichjhapi clarifies that the peasant consciousness is a strategy they have got to adopt for establishing subaltern people as an autonomous domain having their own history. In this way, Ghosh 'reads against the grain.' The effort of the settlers of Morichjhapi shows tribal revolts as the subaltern rebellion which is totally different from national history. For Ghosh, it is important to understand the rebellion as motivated and conscious. Similarly, the novel asserts the complete autonomy of lower class insurgency.

However, the narrator suggests that Kusum's mode of self-fashioning does not allow for any effective engagement with the problems of race and culture in the post-independence era. It leads rather to a pathetic dependency on, and subjection to, the metropolitan culture, as represented in Kusum's married life where her husband used her primarily as a means of financial support and then as one among many other women with whom to have sexual relationships. Vivek Dhareshwar's analysis of Ghosh's novel is applicable here to Kusum's self-fashioning as it also leads to a 'double exclusion': "while Kusum actively dissociates herself from the community at Lusibari, the metropolis in turn rejects her" (14). As the narrator suggests, even Kusum's leftist sympathies become merely another means by which she attempts an illusory identification with the metropolis.

Nirmal, deep in the long lost fantasy of attaining equal world (he was an active member of communist party back in Calcutta), finds his dream world materialize in Morichjhapi settlement. He says:

What I had expected? A mere jumble perhaps untidy heaps of people, piled high upon each other? That is after all, what the word 'rifi' has come to mean. But what I saw was quite different from

the picture in my minds eye. Paths had been laid, the *badh*--that guarantor of island life--had been augmented; little plot of land had been enclosed with fences; fishing nets had been hung up to dry. There were men and women sitting outside their huts, repairing their nets and stringing their crab lines with bits of bait and bone.

(171)

This realistic world which Nirmal had often dreamt in his active days resembles some place like equal and visionary world that Karl Marx had envisioned. Nirmal is ready to spare his home at Lusibari and Nilima behind. He can risk his whole professional career as a headmaster in a local school for some tiny job in that settlement. He is so-very excited with the idea that the whole dream returns back. He would continue his job of teaching, but in a different manner here. He expresses himself to Horen:

‘Look comrades, look,’ I would say. ‘This map shows that in geology, as in myth, there is a visible Ganga and a hidden Ganga: one flows on land and one beneath the water. Put them together and you have what is by far the greatest of the earth’s rivers.’

And, to follow this, I decided, I would tell them the story of the Greek goddess who was the Ganga’s mother. I would take them back to the deep, deep time of geology and I would show them that where the Ganga now runs there was once a coastline--a shore that marked the southern extremity of the Asian landmass. (181)

Nirmal would take his students to the beginning of history. He would show them that the so-called class, cast, and refugee status is not the burden they carry from past. He would tell them that all this marginalization is a fake—a hegemony

perpetrated by the people who are habitual at making comfortable life in the sweats of hundred others. He would take them to the time when there was no injustice. He would remind them that every people in the Gangetic plains were the settlers of same tribe. Thus he hopes to instill historical consciousness into the innocent hearts and mind of the children of Sundarban before they become the victims of injustice before they turn into fatalist lot.

What is significant here is that 'history' for Nirmal is considered as a homogeneous and monolithic entity. He elaborates Nirmal's concept of 'freedom': [Nirmal] did know how he wanted to meet her [Kusum] as a stranger in a ruin . . . he wanted them to meet in a place without a past without history, free, really free" (114). Thus, 'freedom' for Nirmal involves a total negation of the social past. Consequently for him, a re-definition of post-independent identity involves not a re-evaluation of the biases of neo-nationalist historiography, but a negation of the situation in which the post-Independent finds himself / herself. For him, therefore, the re-narration of the post-independence context has finally to be done at the level of individual imagination. Nirmal's mode of self-fashioning is crucial in the text as the hero/narrator himself constantly attempts to 'see' through Nirmal's eyes: "Nirmal had given me [the narrator] worlds to travel in and he had given me eyes to see them with" (20). Through the narrator's support of Nirmal's perspective, Ghosh seems to contest at one level the dominant ideology of the post-Independent metropolis which proposes the conscious self to be the locus of all meaning. The narrator is presented instead, on numerous occasions, as actively trying to reconstruct the multiple determinants of his subjectivity:

I sat on the camp bed and looked around the cellar, those empty corners filled with remembered forms, with the ghosts who had

been handed down to me by time: the ghost of the nine-year-old Nirmal, . . . the ghost of the eight-year-old Nilima . . . they were all around me, we were together at last, . . . the ghostliness was merely the absence of time and distance. (181)

Such a perspective allows Ghosh to account for the social determinations of the 'self.' The author can now address the question of subjective attitudes as they are over-determined by a specific cultural context. Thus Ghosh explains the differences in Nilima's and Nirmal's attitudes to time, for example, as resulting from their differential class-positions. Nilima's obsessive work ethic which can only sanction a notion of time to be used in order to further one's career interests typifies an Indian petit bourgeois concern. In contrast, Nirmal's tendency to 'waste' his time signifies a life of leisure and a class-position which is free of immediate economic pressures, that is, the traditional elite classes of India. The narrator recounts: For her [Nilima] time was like a toothbrush: it went mouldy if it wasn't used . . . that was why I [the narrator] loved to listen to Nirmal: he never seemed to use his time, but his time didn't stink" (114). Similarly, the narrator is presented as being aware of the fact that the unreciprocated adoration that he has for Nirmal is largely a factor of the relation of dominance by which the cosmopolitan lifestyle available to an elite Indian minority operates on the life-styles available to the lower-middle and other lower-classes. The narrator is also conscious that his fascination for Nirmal has largely to do with the fact that as a child, Nirmal provided for him the only (imaginary) access to Nilima's kind of lifestyle about which he could only fantasize in his little flat. Such a perspective also enables Ghosh to address through the narrator the crucial question of attitudes and lifestyles as they are specifically related to the access to English education in

present-day India. The narrator clearly suggests that English education, in the present situation, is actively implicated in sustaining the uneven socio-economic privileges between the ruling elite and the masses of the Indian population:

It was that landscape [at Calcutta] that lent the note of hysteria to my mother's voice when she drilled me for my examinations. I [the narrator] knew perfectly well that all it would take was a couple of failed examination to put me in permanent proximity to that blackness: that landscape was the quicksand that seethed beneath the polished floors of our house. (134)

The narrator is also able to account for the fact that English education in contemporary India is not only an index of class-position but is also related to the hankering after a particular metropolitan/cosmopolitan culture which results ultimately in stimulating the West European economy. The narrator recalls Nilima's describing the patterns of consumption of this class: "It's not just money . . . it's things: it's all the things money can buy--fridges like the one Mr. Sen's son-in-law brought back from America, colour T.V. s and cars, calculators and cameras" (79). From such a position, Nilima's efforts to mime the high-culture of Western Europe or the narrator's own fascination for her, may be read as resulting from the cultural imperialism perpetuated by English education in India. While on the one hand Ghosh seems to be contesting the Cartesian notion of the autonomous 'self' as the origin of meaning, yet on the other, the narrator's emulation of Nirmal's mode of self-fashioning leads the author to finally reinforce the ideology of bourgeois individualism. The narrator is presented as reflecting the preoccupation with a transcendent, private interpretation of significance. His ultimate goal is shown as being the attempt to achieve self-realisation in isolation,

by discovering the transcendental meaning of Nirmal's death: “[W]here there is no meaning, there is banality, and that is what this silence [of the Indian media regarding the 1964 riots of East Pakistan] consists in . . . so that is why I can only describe at second hand the manner of his death . . . I do not have the words to give it meaning” (228).

Subsequently, the narrator realises the impossibility of achieving self-realization: “he gave himself up; it was a sacrifice” (252). That the narrator's search is a direct result of his approval of Nirmal's idea of 'selfhood' is evident: his unsuccessful search for a metaphysical significance echoes Nirmal's own inability to understand the real meaning of the lives of Horen and his friends.

Most of all he [Nirmal] would despair because he could not imagine what it would be like to confront the most real of their realities [of imminent death] . . . the fact that they knew. What is the colour of that knowledge? Nobody knows ... Because there are moments in time that are not knowable. Like Nirmal, the final stability of the 'self' also arises from his inability to comprehend his sacrifice. (68)

The narrator's search for a metaphysical ideal results in the narrative shifting to the subject-object opposition by which realist fiction performs its ideological function. The focus of the narrative is, in the end, on the relation of the transcendental 'self' with the transhistorical category of 'sacrifice'. The narrator's endorsement of Nirmal's perspective also implies that his concept of re-articulating the post-Independent situation contributes to the reinforcing of the de-historicising, idealist bourgeois philosophy:

The sights that Nirmal saw in his imagination were infinitely more precise than anything I [the narrator] would ever see. He said to me once that one could never know anything except through desire, real desire, . . . that carried one beyond the limits of one's mind to other times and places to a place where there was no border between oneself and one's image in the mirror. (129)

Hence, the terms by which the author proposes to articulate a liberating, alternative model of history, ultimately shows complicity with the essentialisms of bourgeois philosophy. The narrator proposes to rewrite history through the ahistorical quality of 'real desire' which by enabling a kind of Keatsian 'negative capability' will allow him to become imaginatively integrated with the object of introspection. The consequence of the narrator's endorsement of an empiricist-idealist philosophy is that contrary to his own assertions, there is an underlying continuity between the positions endorsed by Kusum and Nilima and his own perspective. The narrator recounts that Nilima has not been able to realize her ideal of 'freedom,' the middle-class dream of 'the unity' of nationhood and territory, of self-respect and national power. He also shows Kusum's active efforts to be appropriated into the metropolitan culture continues to impinge on the post-independent axis of power. As with them, his own desire to be free is also ultimately ineffectual. The narrator's recollection of Piya's ideas of freedom may be read as describing his own position:

Freedom is itself rejected as being an illusory socio-political condition. What is significant is that like Nirmal's concept of 'history', 'memory' signifies a homogeneous, monolithic essence outside discourse. Consequently, any attempt at re-reading the

selectivity of the dominant neo-nationalist historiography, as manifested in the Indian media-reports of the riots in East Pakistan, is categorically proscribed as madness. (201)

The narrator considers the violence of various anti-establishment struggles as also finally being futile. Thus, while he suggests that Nirmal's conception of the 'nation' as a profound horizontal comradeship, "a pool of blood" (78), is inadequate, he himself also describes the complex and fragile material pressures which mark the subcontinent in terms of certain ahistorical values.

The fear generated by the communal riots is a fear that comes of the knowledge that normalcy is utterly contingent. It is this that sets apart the thousand million people who inhabit the sub- continent from the rest of the world- not language, not food, not music. It is this special quality of loneliness that grows out of the fear of war between oneself and one's image in the mirror. What therefore defines the contemporary Indian nation according to the narrator is a 'special quality of loneliness.'

Hence all the characters can be seen as articulating a similar underlying concept of 'freedom' as a Platonic Ideal which has to be individually and imaginatively realised. Using 'freedom' as one of the defining motifs of the text, Ghosh's definition of 'India' seems to foreclose a materialist interpretation of the pressures which shape present-day India. The motif of 'traveling' in the text perhaps elucidates most clearly the author's implicit rejection of the logocentric philosophy that prevents him from critical engaging with the material conditions of his culture. The two sections of the novel derive their titles from the two most crucial journey to Sunderban around which all other episodes are structured. The narrator signifies, however, that Nirmal's journey is not to be understood merely in

terms of physical movement: “every language assumes a centrality, a fixed and settled point to go to and away from and come back to, and my uncle's [journey] was not a coming or going at all [but] a journey that was a search for precisely that fixed point which permits the proper use of verbs of movement” (153).

The narrator indicates at one level here that the absolute on which language is grounded is essentially one that has been 'assumed', that is, discursively constructed. Therefore, Nirmal's logocentric search for a 'pure,' homogeneous national identity in the irrevocably fragmented post-partition context has to end disastrously with the death of Nirmal.

The narrator implies that Nilima's illusory search results from her inadequate perception of the nature of politics in the post-Independent context. This perception is further shown as being reinforced by the Indian media as also by the conventional historiography, that is, a perception perpetuated by the dominant ideology which causes people to believe that distance is a corporeal substance:

I [the narrator] had to remind myself that they [the people of India and Pakistan] were not to be blamed for believing that there was something admirable in moving violence to the borders. They had drawn their borders, believing in the enchantment of lines, hoping the two bits of land would sail away from each other like the shifting tectonic plates of the prehistoric Gondwanaland. What had they felt when they discovered that they had created not a separation but the irony that killed Nirmal! 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 . . . when each city was the inverted image of the other, locked into irreversible symmetry by the line that was to set us free-our looking-glass border. (233)

The narrator says that he too had earlier believed in these deceptive precepts. The implication is that by using Nirmal's concept of travelling, the narrator has been able to effectively represent the contemporary Indian situation. Hence he says that unlike Nilima or his uncle, he has realized that maps are mirages and that Dhaka and Calcutta are essentially mirror-images of each other. But as he himself acknowledges elsewhere, such a symmetry only exists in the event of a war. Thus, he is unable to account for the very different socio-political conditions of the two nations and formulates instead a definition of India characterized by a 'special quality of loneliness.' So, the narrator's own concept of 'traveling' also does not contribute to an accurate reconstruction of the material pressures which mark present-day India. By offering a contemplative interpretation of India, the narrator remains a subject to the ideology that fosters the illusion that individuals are world-makers.

This chapter has established in the above discussion that Ghosh's representations are able to register the many-layeredness of the cultural-historical formation of post-Independent India. The specific, complex and contradictory socio-economic conditions which shape class and gender identities in contemporary India are instilled Ghosh's interpretation of the flood and tide. This instillation performed by *The Hungry Tide* offers a liberating and radical re-description of the post-Independent Indian context.

IV. Conclusion

This research has made an argument about the position from which Amitav Ghosh has attempted to construct an alternative and therefore 'excluded' history of refugees and peasants living in Sunderban in *The Hungry Tide*. This work has portrayed the themes such as the relative autonomy of subaltern consciousness and action in *The Hungry Tide*. Moreover, the need to make the subaltern classes the subject of mainstream Indian history and the failure of the Indian bourgeoisie to speak for the nation are additional themes of this work. In general, this work has provided a fresh critical thrust to much recent explorations on the loopholes inherent in modern Indian history and society underlined in Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*.

Following the critical responses on Ghosh's works, the first chapter outlines how these responses have built the foundation for yet another research in Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*. The survey of the academic works of the subaltern group of historians who aimed to promote a systematic discussion of subaltern themes in South Asian studies is the thrust of the chapter that follows. In theory, the term subaltern is used as a name for the general attribute of subordination in South Asian society whether this is expressed in terms of class, caste, age, gender, and officer or in any others way. This includes rural gentry, impoverished landlords, rich peasants and the upper middle peasants into the category of subaltern classes. Subaltern Studies, a neon light that has constructed a theoretical framework for this study, studies the history, politics, economics and sociology of subalternity as well as the attitudes, ideologies and belief systems--in short, the culture informing that condition. Subaltern Studies is conspicuous towards the contemporary history and culture as the historiography of the nationalism had

long been marginalized by elitism-colonialist elitism, and the bourgeois elitism, both the product of colonialism. Hence the purpose of the subaltern studies project is to redress the imbalance created in the academic work by a tendency to focus on elite culture, in south Asian historiography with the recognition that subaltern cannot be understood except in binary relationship with domination.

The third chapter has presented how Ghosh has re-created the history of rural peasants and refugees of Partition in the post-Independent India. The mainstream Indian 'Nationalist' history has neglected the settlers of Sunderban. This chapter attempts to extract from the debate surrounding Ghosh's text a meaningful contribution to current thinking about these issues regarding the status of ethnic subjects. 'Ethnicized subjects' here means individuals who identify themselves with a group or community that considers itself, and is regarded by others, as culturally distinct from other, more powerful groups inhabiting the same national space. The contradictions that derive from the subaltern's positionality have created the conundrum in which Ghosh is trapped. Central to this contradiction is the nature of Ghosh's discourse. The saga that basically centers on two visitors to the Sundarban community and a native fisherman, who knows well about the Archipelago, is sufficient enough to outline the contradictions in Indian nationalist discourse. Kanai Datta, a Delhi businessman, goes to Lusibari in the invitation of his aunt, Nilima, who is there for a long time. She runs a hospital and is an N.G.O. activist too. Going there, he reads a journal left by his uncle for him. Through this he knows his family history and history of Sundarban. Piyali Roy (Piya), an Indio-American biologist, makes a journey to the tied country for her research on dolphins. Fokir, an illiterate man, has good knowledge about river and island. Because of the problem of her own heritage and language she is compelled

to accept Kanai as an interpreter between her and Fokir. Fokir, an illiterate fisherman, helps Piya on her research in the river. Ghosh's novel, *The Hungry Tide* depicts the story of a group of Bengali refugees who are forced out of a forest reserve in Sundarban by Indian government and are treated as other in their own home. The novel struggles as characters seek to cross multiple barriers--the barriers of language, religion and social class, those between rural and cosmopolitan India, between urban and rural, between India and wider world.

Thus, Ghosh's narrative has portrayed the gloomy life of people living in Sunderban area. *The Hungry Tide* has shaken itself free of modernity's master narrative and from the shackles of chronological, linear time in order to recover Indian identity and nationality from the exploitation of socio-political and cultural elites. Amitav Ghosh's writings spring from the corner of history. His characters contest against the concept of 'shining India' in that they represent marginalized lives and cultures. This research explains the gap between 'modern' Indian nationality and 'subaltern' subjectivity in Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*. The work goes on to identify interlinked sets of themes in Ghosh's fictions, in *The Hungry Tide* for discussion: the problem of Indian nationalism, the interpenetration of power and knowledge in the colonial archive, the search for indigenous forms of knowledge, and the phenomenon of violence and ethnic conflict.

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