MODE OF NARRATIVIZATION AND HISTORIOGRAPHY OF AMITAV GHOSH'S *THE HUNGRY TIDE*

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History in its broadest sense is the totality of the past; but in a more specific sense history is the recorded event of the past. Historiography deals with the written records of the past vis-à-vis how the historians have so far 'attempted to understand' them. So it would be preferable to say that historiography refers to the writings of the historians. But the historians' attempt to search the past may not be fully covered. Besides history is based on the relation between fact and evidence. And the evidence may be biased or mistaken, fragmentary or unintelligible because of the linguistic change. But more than that history is a production of power – "history is a discourse about . . . the past" (Sturrock, 1986, p.56). So, there is no 'true' story to be 'found' in history. "Truth is dependent on somebody having the power to make it true" (Jenkins, 2003, p.38). Jenkins's assessment is that history is not the same as the past – "history is never for itself ; it is always for someone" (Jenkins, 2003, p.21).

Like *The Shadow Lines* in *The Hungry Tide* Ghosh's focus is on the 'minor riots', caused mainly by the partition of the Indian subcontinent, that had been deliberately neglected by the dominant national historiographers . These 'minor riots' assert the national identity of a people. But the documentation of that 'minor events' may wobble the ongoing truth of a nation. Ghosh's searching mind has placed them in his fiction to form the neat narrative of historiography. Ghosh has foraged for the suppressed history and in order to make foray into the accepted historiography he has placed the neglected history in his texts in promulgating and forming the uncovered knowledge of the national historiography. So Ghosh has mainly used a narrative technique that develops through a process of acceptance and refutation and thus problematizes the national historiography. To confront the multilayered, suppressed history his narrative moves backward and forward. Hence, disruptions between the past and the present arise in his fiction time and again. As if, these disruptions indicate the clash between the present identity and the lost identity and lead to the notion of the search for identity. Hence, almost all the characters walk down the lane of memory repeatedly – it is true in the case of S'Daniel or to the event of Morichjhapi. Moreover, to reach this, Ghosh has searched from the ancient myth to the recent history and all are conflated in his text and, in consequence, those have become co-texts.

Historicity of the Dreams of S'Daniel

It was 1900s. India was under the British Raj. A 'visionary Scotsman', S'Daniel had an idea "to build a new society, a new kind of country. It would be a country run by co-operatives . . . Here people

wouldn't exploit each other and everyone would have a share in the land" (Ghosh, 2004, p.52). A century later, that dream still hovers in the postcolonial India caught in Piyali Roy's words – " it's something to do with being a person of Indian origin" (Ghosh, 2004, p.398).   Thus the novel synthesizes several strata of Indian history or more specifically of the history and people of Bengal and the ' tide country' is here in microcosm. The story of *The Hungry Tide* is the story of a people. It not only commemorates the history of the concerned people but also problematizes the concept of it.

Ghosh's essential concern in *The Hungry Tide* revolves round the 'Massacre of Morichjhapi'. As a postcolonial writer, he has also depicted the colonial distortions in the Indian subcontinent caused by the British Raj. Like Conrad's Lord Jim or Dickens's Pip Ghosh has depicted S'Daniel. S'Daniel is the founder of Lusibari, now called Hamilton House. The story narrates the meteoric rise of a 'fortune' seeker Scotsman who came to Calcutta as 'young Daniel' and 'joined Mackinnon and McKenzie'. Paying heed to the lesson of his school teacher in Scotland -- 'labour conquers everything'-- soon he became "the master of an immense fortune, one of the richest men in India", (Ghosh, 2004, p.50) within the span of a short time. This provides room for Ghosh with an excellent historical 'background' against which he could 'foreground' the discourse of ugly politics – the politics of the socio-political-and cultural ideologies that ruled the land. The British came to India as fortune-seekers. Their ultimate aim was to exploit the land under the camouflage of 'Calvinist ideal of adulthood and maturity' (Nandy, 2000, p.15). Thus Ghosh as an anthropological historian tries to find out the truth behind the activities of the British force in India.   By juxtaposing the timeless past as well as the present Ghosh, an anthropologist, has been able to display his acute historical sense. He has placed literary and non-literary texts side by side allowing his readers to read and evaluate the former in the light of the latter. He draws his readers' attention on the issues of the State Power -- and how it was handled in the colonized India, with its accompanying 'mind-set',

> Kanai burst into laughter. 'And look what he ended up with', he said. 'This rat-eaten islands'. (Ghosh, 2004, p.53)

Kanai bursts into laughter, as he finds no relevance between the dreams of S'Daniel and the present 'rat-eaten' situation of Lusibari. The New Historicist faces the same problem as Kanai does -- that there is no proper truth in the recorded history. Hamilton's dream reaches us through Nirmal's notebook based on the 'signed paper' of S'Daniel. The paper was written under his direction, as 'he bought the land from the British Sarkar' and became its ruler. The 'signed paper' is therefore a piece of history written during the British colonial period by a ruler. Jenkins says in *Re-thinking History,* "history is not the same as past. The history is always for someone .That history always has a purpose. That history is always about power" (Jenkins, 2003, p.14).   History is therefore a product of discourse. Moreover, the 'dominant discourse' can make any information a version of 'Truth'. Daniel's dream 'on the signed paper' may therefore be a product of 'Power' and Nirmal's khata still retains it as an effect of 'dominant discourse'. However, a postcolonial writer reassesses the colonial history. Therefore, Kanai 'turns the paper' and asks Nirmal: "But what is it all for? If it wasn't to make money, then why did he go to all the trouble? I don't understand". (Ghosh, 2004, p.53) . We the readers can make out nothing, as there is no 'true' document to 'check against it'. To reshape the 'nation' Ghosh, a postcolonial writer, problematizes the colonial history of India. The author turns back to find out the true history related to 'Hamilton's-abad'. Nevertheless, he never succeeds in his retrospective assessment and interrogation. Jenkins says, "no account can re-cover the past as it was because the past was not an account but events, situations, etcetera. As the past has gone, no account can ever be checked against it but only against other accounts . . . [but] there is no real account" (Ghosh, 2004, p.53). Kanai does not find the relevance of the past to the present. The dreams of S'Daniel seem fuzzy to Kanai when he reassesses it in the light of the present.

As a postcolonial writer, Ghosh carries out a thorough research for the traditional history and asks about the Eurocentric 'truth' in history. In *The Hungry Tide,* Ghosh has projected Kanai to carry out the search through the recorded history. Nirmal delivers the story to Kanai. Moreover, from Kanai the readers come to know the background, related to the foundations of Lusibari and the settling of its inhabitants. Hence, the whole story is narrated in flashbacks. But between the dreams of S'Daniel and our knowledge of it there rest many other 'voices' (or writings) which are discursively structured. Therefore, we can never reach the truth. As there is no 'fundamentally correct text', we can neither 'check' nor 'accept' the received history. So the author's search proceeds, looking back and after. Repetition is, therefore, embedded in the fictional structure – the story-within-the story or according to the Structuralists, the story itself has a 'binary structure'.

What the novel offers is not a happy and comforting return of the past but a historical legacy of the present. But the new historicists claim that "there is no fundamentally correct 'text' of which other interpretations are just variations; variations are all there are" (Jenkins, 2003, p.14). So Hamilton's 'meteoric' rise, his dream to build a socialist country, his discussion with Tagore and Gandhi are iffy and contingent upon thorough scrutiny. But against which historian(s') accounts can we check it ? As there is no 'accuracy' in any historian's interpretations, we may agree with Steven Giles's observation that what has gone before is "always apprehended through the sedimented layers of previous interpretations and through the reading habits and categories developed by previous current interpretive discourses" (Jenkins, 2003, p.14).

In the beginning of the 20th century S'Daniel dreamt of a country, not affected with caste and religion -- a society based on equality and run by co-operatives'. He said, "This place could be a model for the country" (Ghosh, 2004, p.52). In the colonized or pre-independent India, the land was dedicated to the people who led the life of 'manual labour'. They came desperately "for a *bigha* or two. And this land here was in their own country, not far from Calcutta (Ghosh, 2004, p.51).

S'Daniel wished to construct a country of those people, for those people and by those people. However, in the post-independent India those have-nots were forbidden there--'evicted' from there. Ghosh a postcolonial writer has looked back to reassess the history behind the 'Morichjhapi massacre' in the postcolonial India. Nirmal's notebook records the history behind the event -- both its reasons and effect -- how the most oppressed people were tortured in inhuman way in their country East-Bengal and in India. When a postcolonial writer textualises history, he raises some questions to problematize the traditional way of looking at and assessing the history. He wants to subvert the West's notion of history. Ghosh has claimed through Nirmalbabu that he knows the history behind the Morichjhapi event better than anyone (Ghosh, 2004, p.69).

Here Ghosh has switched from S'Daniel to the 'acumen of the settlers' leader', from Lusibari to Morichjhapi, from pre-independent to post-independent India and throws the question: "It was universally agreed that the significance of Morichjhapi extended far beyond the island itself. Was it possible, even that in Morichjhapi had been planted the seeds of what might become if not a Dalit nation,then at least a safe haven, a place of true freedom for the country's most oppressed" (Ghosh, 2004, p.191). Thus Hamilton's dream to construct a country for the indentured people almost came to be materialized. Hamilton's call like the scent of mud in the tide country, was 'swelling in' their vein. When they 'resettled' in Morichjhapi: " The island had been divided into five zones and each family of settlers had been given five acres of land" (Ghosh, 2004, p.172).

This was what Hamilton cherished. He wanted to run the country by co-operatives. The true story in pre-independent India, during the time of Hamilton, is indelibly recorded in the 'signed paper'. However, there is not one iota of truth in the story in the postcolonial India. Thus, the novel embarks a 'meta-journey' through the process of validation and renunciation. Moreover, the author

has subverted the notion of purity in history as "no story – or history, for that matter – can be acceptable as the ultimate truth, since truth vary according to perspectives and locations" (Bose, 2003, p.19).

Nirmal realizes how Daniel Hamilton wished to frame this 'kadar-bada' into a model country based on Marx's 'Labour Theory of value'. Hamilton's dream is signed on a paper. Nirmal tells the story and shows the paper to Kanai. We, the readers, as co-listeners walk down the lane of memory related to Hamilton's dream. Nirmal describes: "He dreamed of a place where men and women could be farmers in the morning, poets in the afternoon and carpenters in the evening" (Ghosh, 2004, p.53).

Hamilton experienced a thrill in 'building a new society, a new country' free from religion, caste and racial boundary. There was one condition laid down by S'Daniel for the willing inhabitants to settle in the tide country, "here there would be no Brahmins or untouchables, no Bengalis or no Oriyas" (Ghosh, 2004, p.51). Therefore, people came "pouring in from northern Orissa, from eastern Bengal, from the Santhal parganas" (Ghosh, 2004, p.52). Stirred by the visionary idealism, by stream of reason, S'Daniel propagated racial harmony. This was an excellent recipe for the contemporary India. But such notions of harmony and equality were then, as are now, nothing but utopian dreams. Thus while Ghosh is sketching the colonial background of India – through the dreams of S'Daniel the problem of 'truth' in history walks side by side. It may be said that Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* is an attempt to prove that there is no 'monolithic truth' in history.

Historiography of Morichjhapi

The postcolonial discourse has, as one of its preoccupations, the reinterpretations of historical events. The motivation for such reassessment comes out of the need to understand the present itself – as the present is related to the context of history. So the event of Morichjhapi has some contending perspectives. The most striking areas are --

a. The cause(s) of the event.
b. The participants of the event (whether they were 'settlers' ,resettlers, revolutionaries or mere rootless people)
c. The nature of the event
d. The results of the event.

Brinda Bose in the introduction to *The perspectives of Amitav Ghosh* has observed of Ghosh's historical novels: "Ghosh's fiction takes upon itself the responsibility of reassessing its troubled antecedents, using history as a tool by which we can begin to make sense of – or at least come to terms with – our troubling present" (Bose, 2003, p.16). In *The Hungry Tide* the 'troubled history' of Morichjhapi is expressively worded thus: "In 1978 it happened that a great number of people suddenly appeared in Morichjhapi. . . they were refugees originally from Bangladesh." (Ghosh, 2004, p.118).

Such terms of reference as 'people' and 'refugees', 'settle' and 'resettle' acquire great importance in the discursive practices .Ghosh here presents the retrospective interrogation acquired from the postcolonial perspectives and challenges the traditional way of assessing a historical event. Those oppressed people who took part in the Morichjhapi event are 'Dalits' or 'Harijans' To show the difference 'they' or 'them' are used as opposed to Nilima's side 'we' or 'our'. Thus the novel emphasizes the theme of problematising the dominant historiography. The process of raising questions also continues. Kanai asks Nilima, "But these settlers weren't revolutionaries?" (Ghosh,

2004, p.119) Nilima identifies them, "Those people are squatters" (Ghosh, 2004, p.213). The words like 'settlers', 'squatters' , 'revolutionaries' jostle in the postcolonial world to gain the proper identification of the participants of the event.

S. Choudhury writes, "At the heart of Nirmal's diary is an historical event: the eviction of refugee settlers from Morichjhapi in the Sunderbans by the Left Front government of West Bengal in1979 . . . As the last significant expression of the trauma of Bengal the story of Morichjhapi occupies a central place in the novel" (Choudhury). Again the incident of Morichjhapi is worded in different ways, with different terms by different characters in the novel. To describe the event Nilima expresses the terms 'confrontations', 'clash', 'massacre' or simply 'event' and 'incident'. But the author calls the event an 'uprising'. He also calls the War of 1857 an 'uprising' as in the sentence "nothing could stop them , not even the uprising of 1857" (Ghosh, 2004, p.285). In the same way the event of Morichjhapi is evidenced discursively through the words 'clash', 'confrontation', 'event', 'uprising' etcetera. But the dominant power establishes their versions. So the place Dandakaranya, where the refugees were sent, is called 'settlement camp' although the same refugees assess it as 'concentration camp'.

In *The Hungry Tide* Ghosh has shown how 'law is created out of the discourse of the State Power—and it acts as the 'State's emissary' bearing the 'hegemonic insignia' of a colonial State. The State creates law and applies it time to time to control its subjects. To 'evict' the 'settlers' from Morchjhapi, the Left Front Government in West Bengal applied Forest Preservation Act in 1979. It announced, "All movement in and out of Morichjhapi was banned" (Ghosh, 2004, p.252). Section 144 was imposed on the area. As a result, five or more people could not gather in a place. And to implement the State's law "Dozens of police boats had encircled the island, tear gas and rubber bullets had been used, the settlers had been forcibly prevented from bringing rice or water to Morichjhapi, boats had been sunk, people had been killed …as if war had broken out in the quiet recesses of the tide country" (Ghosh, 2004, p.252). The Police used 'bullets', forced people to starve to death. But the dominant voice, as a creation of dominant discourse, is monologic. The voice of the marginal therefore fades away gradually.

But Ghosh, as a postcolonial writer, is especially concerned with uncovering the suppressed history which has so far been neglected by the dominant historiographers. Therefore, in this novel we hear the 'plurality of voices'. When the Police speedboat came roaring, and prevented the settlers' rowboat' from proceeding, they 'began to shout in unison': *Amra kara? Amra Bastuhara.*Who are we? We are the dispossessed… [And hence] *Morichjhapi chharbona.* We'll not leave Morichjhapi, do what you may (Ghosh, 2004, p.254). Therefore, Nirmalbabu records a set of questions in his note book which are typical questions in the postcolonial world: "Who was I? Where did I belong? In Kolkata or in the tide country? In India or across the border? In prose or in poetry?" (Ghosh, 2004, p.254) Thus through the event of Morichjhapi Ghosh has made visible the discourse of different characters. And in doing so, Ghosh liked to disrupt and subvert the dominant ideology—the dominant historiography.

It has already been said that the State Power creates 'law' and applies it according to its will. It also disregards the same 'law' when the exigency arises. In *The Hungry Tide* Left Front Government applies the Forest Preservation Act and section 144. Again the same Government disregarded the verdict of the High Court that "ruled that barricading the settlers was illegal: the siege would have to be lifted" (Ghosh, 2004, p.260) . Ghosh here shows how 'law' or the 'court' and its validation or invalidation is contingent upon power.

Ghosh , in one of his essays "Folly in the Sunderbans" (2004), describes the role of the same "Government that [was] thinking to hand over a substantial part of the Sunderbans to the business group,

Sahara India Pariwar for the creation of an 'enormous new tourism complex in Sunderbans. It runs contrary to every tenet of the Front's professed ideology" (Ghosh, 2004, http:/) So, power creates the hegemony of truth. In addition, history records that truth, a product of dominant discourse. We may therefore sum up the idea that there is a wide gap between history and the recorded event of the past.

Ghosh's interest also lies in the anthropological searching. So, in *The Hungry Tide* the history of the naturalist Blyth, the English clerk, Piddington, the Gangetic dolphin and many others are incorporated. Supriya Choudhury observes them as 'co-text'. He also includes, "But it is only one of the histories--part fact part fictions" (Choudhury, http:/). As a new historicist, Ghosh projects his story by merging history with fiction. He challenges historical truth and justifies that narrative and history are creations of mind. The process of looking back and after therefore continues throughout *The Hungry Tide*.

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