The Novels of Amitav Ghosh: Interpretations in Literary Geography

Ph.D. Thesis

By
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THE NOVELS OF AMITAV GHOSH: INTERPRETATIONS IN LITERARY GEOGRAPHY

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the award of the degree
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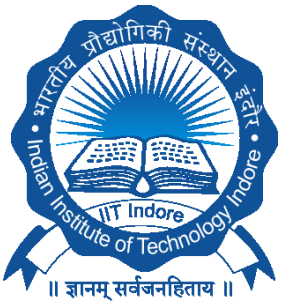
by

SAGARIKA CHATTOPADHYAY



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CANDIDATE'S DECLARATION

I hereby certify that the work which is being presented in the thesis entitled **THE NOVELS OF AMITAV GHOSH: INTERPRETATIONS IN LITERARY GEOGRAPHY** in the partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the degree of **DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY** and submitted in the **DISCIPLINE OF ENGLISH, Indian Institute of Technology Indore**, is an authentic record of my own work carried out during the time period from July, 2011 to September, 2016 under the supervision of Dr. Amarjeet Nayak, Assistant Professor, Indian Institute of Technology Indore.

The matter presented in this thesis has not been submitted by me for the award of any other degree of this or any other institute.

Signature of the student with date
Sagarika Chattopadhyay
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This is to certify that the above statement made by the candidate is correct to the best of my/our knowledge.

Signature of Thesis Supervisor #1 with date
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SAGARIKA CHATTOPADHYAY has successfully given his/her Ph.D. Oral Examination held on _____

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Signature of External Examiner
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Ms. Sagarika Chattopadhyay

Dedicated

to

My Parents

SYNOPSIS

The Novels of Amitav Ghosh: Interpretations in Literary Geography

Introduction:

Franco Moretti in his book *Atlas of the European Novel* (1998), explains rather succinctly how literary geography could refer to either space in literature which is fictional in nature, or literature in space which is a historical space and alludes to a provincial library to cite an example. This thesis falls under the category of discovering and understanding space(s) in literature, though the approach it takes especially in regards to engaging with geography is different in its treatment from Moretti's engagement with the discipline. A literature survey of the field suggests that the term 'literary geography' in itself has meandered through many methodological debates. Though geographers relied heavily on creative expressions of landscapes in novels, the text was always held as an unauthentic, unscientific source of data and never equivalent to an accurate description of a given landscape, however appealing be its subjective description. The 1970s saw a major change in this direction especially after the structural movement and the rise of the social sciences that invited interdisciplinary approaches and the text was now seen as far more contextualized and grounded in literary theories and consequently available to multiple interpretations. Bertrand Westphal (2007) explains how the postmodern condition involves in the study of space, a coherence through heterogeneity since the understanding of space is so variegated. Space could be absolute space, or space could be imbued with values as Yi Fu Tuan (2001) suggests or space could be social borne out of the human activities as proposed by Neil Smith (1984). Sheila Hones (2014) in her recent work in the area of literary geography justifies that for this interdisciplinary approach to work , "space—whether geographical, narrative, or literary— has to be understood not as a fixed and measurable frame within which action takes place but rather as the product of action: an active dimension of interrelations,

intertextualities, and multiplicity" (5). This thesis is a maiden research attempt in the direction of such an inter-disciplinary approach and takes a small step towards contributing to the corpus of literary geography, through a study of Amitav Ghosh's novels using the notion of scales.

The works of Amitav Ghosh are chosen since it is hard to categorise them under a single rubric of national or postcolonial or any other because of the way they appropriate space. The author himself is averse to all manner of categorization and considers the novel as the fullest expression of dealing with human experience whatever be the subtext of the narrative. Events surrounding history, anthropology, environment, travel or nation are enlivened only through the characters' experience of the same and it is this experience that steers the narrative or builds the story. Given such an environment for all of Ghosh's texts, fictional space and geographical space become two significant components of explicating the variability of reading what Ghosh's texts offer. However, this study is weary of methodological gaps in application of a purely geographic concept such as scale to the narrative which comprise two chapters. Theories found appropriate to the context at hand are applied to elicit the desired interpretations.

Research Gap:

The recent international conference on "Literature and Geography: The Writing of Space throughout History" held at the Universite Jean Muolin, Lyon in March 2015, published its conference proceedings in Cambridge Scholar Publishing in 2016. A survey of the papers in the book covers areas like literary cartography, travel narrative and geography, geographical novels, geopolitics, among others. Papers covered under the section "Geography and the mapping of literary genres" deal with travel writing but the focus remains more towards mapping the world than looking at fictional space. The impact of literary space within the text in generating the story does not find mention. Likewise the essay, "Amitav Ghosh's Historical and Transcultural Geographies in *Sea of Poppies* and *River of Smoke*" dwells upon different issues like Free Trade, displacement and also mentions

embedded narratives with the text. The riverbank or littoral finds mention in passing but fails to elicit how landscape is used by Ghosh to build the narrative. Collection of essays on Amitav Ghosh's works like *In Pursuit of Amitav Ghosh: Some Recent Readings* (2013) or Chitra Sankaran's *History, Narrative and Testimony in Amitav Ghosh's Fiction* (2012), lay emphasis on history, postcolonial aesthetics, cosmopolitanism, disapora, etc. with an exception of only a few essays dealing with narrative about the waters or landscapes in Ghosh's texts. But none of the essays attempt to study Ghosh's novels from a literary geographical perspective. The works of Franco Moretti (1998, 2000), Sheila Hones (2014), Bertrand Westphal (2011), and Noel Castree (2005) in the direction of literary geography and geography are very helpful in forming an understanding of spaces within and outside the text and how they may be appropriated.

This thesis in its use of scales as a means of spatial differentiation attempts to study the contestation between social spaces and natural landscapes to answer questions like- How do these interactions influence the narrative surrounding waterways? What is the nature of human practices that generates such a strong topophilia (Yi Fu Tuan) that in turn influences the subjectivity of the characters in question? Noel Castree mentions how life worlds formed out of attachments formed between human beings and their environment ran out its course in geography. The works of Neil Smith and Hilary Winchester (2013) do not mention interaction between social space and natural landscapes like forests but choose to keep these spaces widely separated. This thesis excavates spaces of interactions between these disparate zones through Amitav Ghosh's stories since it is unable to ignore a deep connection between them. The thesis deems to arrive at various contours of what a geographical consciousness could be.

Research Questions and Objectives:

Given the literature survey in the preceding section and the research gaps mentioned, this thesis attempts to raise the following research questions: (1) How can one interpret the novels of Amitav Ghosh from the perspective of literary

geography? (2) How does the notion of scale address a reading of spaces that are created within the text? These questions are answered by defining the following objectives: (1) Amitav Ghosh's novels are studied with an aim to explore and excavate spaces created within the novels such that they may be read against the grain of selected literary theories, (2) the thesis attempts to apply the notion of scales to waterways and the body, while using the narrative to expand the concept further by delineating interactions between different kinds of geographical spaces that enunciate scale formation and (3) the first two objectives are instrumental in establishing a conversation between fictional space and geographical space that allow studying Amitav Ghosh's novels from within the discipline of literary geography.

Methodology and Discussion:

This thesis focuses on studying the novels of Amitav Ghosh from a literary geographical perspective using the concept of geographical scales as the organizing principle for the study. This concept was proposed by Neil Smith (1992), a well known Marxist geographer, in his seminal article "Contours of a Spatialised Politics", in which he describes the construction of geographical scales as a primary means through which spatial differentiation takes place. The use of geographical scales only lays the basic foundation for the thesis and the arguments formed in the course of the thesis are made comprehensive by bringing together various theories from literature, philosophy and geography. Since the study is grounded in literature and geographical scales is rooted in the discipline of geography, an attempt is being undertaken here to establish an interface between the two disciplines. The intention of studying Amitav Ghosh's novels from a geographical perspective emerges out of the need to understand space(s) in the texts considered here, with an aim to enunciate a reading that is not necessarily entrenched in a particular literary theory. This is not to say that realism, or postcolonialism, do not inform the narrative discourse but a cultural trope like 'bhakti' and the kind of spatial reading it elicits may call for a very different kind of geographical sense of space. The implication of such an

understanding is important for this thesis since the thesis begins with an analysis of spaces and what they represent outside the conventions of theories they are grounded in and then move on to exploring scales through a lens of contestation and cooperation circling around culture and economy. And finally the aspects of culture and economy are left behind only to be overtaken by motivations of the human subject (Pile and Thrift) that act in consonance with the 'nature' (Noel Castree) that surrounds them.

The first core chapter titled, "Literary Geography and Scales: A Conceptual Framework", begins with a literature review that brings to fore the disciplinary interface between literature and geography. It is important to note that the references primarily come from two directions, those made by trained geographers extending themselves towards literature, for example, Douglas Pocock (1981), Marc Brosseau (1994), Joanne Sharp (2000) , Mike Crang (2000), Yi Fu Tuan (2001), etc. and literary theorists extending themselves towards geography like Franco Moretti (1998), Bertrand Westphal (2007), Sheila Hones (2014), etc. This study falls in the latter category which is an upcoming area of study and also extremely variegated in terms of issues and approaches that comprise the field. The chapter then moves on to carrying out critical reading as proposed by Joanne Sharp from *Flood of Fire* (2015). This form of interpretation is significant because it preempts a shift in considerations that entitles texts to generate their own spaces that are not incumbent upon an environment outside the text in terms of literal geographies but in fact move towards imagined geographies, and also for that matter upon literary theory that may envisage upon taking a text in a predetermined direction. The instance from the novel is a report in the *Calcutta Gazette*, stating the proceedings of a judicial enquiry regarding Zachary Reid's acquittal on event of the death of a subedar, Bhyro Singh at the hands of an indentured migrant, Kalua, on the Ibis and the consequent escape of Kalua, along with two convicts and a crew member. The gazette systematically reports testimonies by witnesses in support of Zachary and his non involvement with the mishap aboard the ship. The *Calcutta Gazette*'s reportage is formal, a reading of which gives the impression of being in a court hearing, but for the

passage that records Baboo Nob Kissin's outlandish testimony with references to the Creator and his avatar in a language singularly unfamiliar to his British employees. The chapter analyses the illogic of Nob Kissin's divinations embedded in cultural references that could transport a culturally informed reader or an indigenous citizen attending the court sessions to imagine divine play. But for others the testimony could draw ridicule or create humor. The analysis suggests the necessity of exploration of tropes like bhakti that encourage a spatial consciousness rooted in the way of life for a large community of people.

The second core chapter, "Amitav Ghosh's Novels: A Slide Through Literary Conventions and the Emergence of Geographical Consciousness", studies two movements regarding the novel, first being the novel as a genre itself and its function along with its placement in the world, and second, the spatiality created within the novel itself. These considerations speak to the primary contention that each literary convention defines its own space, but this space is pliable and open to negotiations such that a slide across frameworks is made possible. This chapter uses Meenakshi Mukherjee's notion of realism in the novels R*ajmohan's Wife* (2009) and *The Home and the World* (2005) to understand the protean nature of representation determined by the situatedness of the novels in a specific socio-cultural clime, and how spatialities created within these narratives veritably contest the demands of realism of the times. Women protagonists from both novels, travel from the 'andarmahal' (inner sanctum of their homes that represent modesty, lack of spatial sanction, and agency) of their homes to the outside. And their journeys establish them as strident, and moving away from the conventions of the novelistic form, to forge their own identities. This chapter stresses that subtle spaces exist within texts that must be interpreted for their own sake such that the slide across theories is made possible. The chapter goes on to employ Franco Moretti's (2000) concept of distant reading, using humour as a literary device and analyses at length the notion of bhakti (devotion) as demonstrated by Baboo Nobo Krishno, in *Sea of Poppies* (2008). Moretti's claim that foreign presence makes local characters behave in strange ways appears true when one studies the character of Nob Kissin in particular, but the

text does not allow the strange behavior to get lost in the maze of storytelling. Instead the narrative event of Nob Kissin's appearance in conjunction with Zachary is made overtly visible, lifting every instance out of the mode of the texts' storytelling.

The third core chapter titled, "Waterways in the texts of Amitav Ghosh" attempts to build upon the specific elements of geographical scale. Though Neil Smith discusses some scales like body, home, urban, region etc., he states that the scales he discusses are not the only geographic scales that exist, and a set of scales cannot be fixed to encompass all that geographical scales constitute. One of the fundamental arguments supporting this statement is that geographical scale is "hierarchically produced as part of the social and cultural, economic and political landscapes" ("Contours of a Spatialised Politics", 66). Therefore any landscape that contains these interactions will result in some manner of scale formation. Since the ocean is being studied as geographical scale, the dialectic between competition and cooperation especially between the socio-cultural and the economic aspects in *River of Smoke* (2011) and *Sea of Poppies*, is the subject of study for this chapter. The socio-cultural versus economic contestation is not linear in that both are embedded in the imperial norms of trade, in the Indian Ocean littoral (Michael Pearson) and stories that circulate within the littoral spaces to construct the Indian Ocean world. This chapter applies the notion of fabulation, in a specific mode as suggested by Stephen Muecke in *Indian Ocean Studies: Cultural, Social, and Political Perspectives* (2010). Fabulation entails a specific process of coming into being and this section explores fabulation in regards to the mental landscape of Bahram Modi, wherein his longing for Che-mei, his second wife from Canton, does not achieve realization on land but finds fulfillment in his opium inebriated state. This exploration is important since geography and literariness are brought together to outline a space that offers greater value to the individual being than material commodity in the form of opium.

The fourth core chapter, "Bodies in Movement, Practice and the Virtual Medium", studies the space of the body and its interactions with the surrounding landscape through a structure/agency dualism. According to Steve Pile and Nigel Thrift (1996), the human subject is difficult to map because it does not have precise boundaries, and something that cannot be counted as singular but only as a mass of different and sometimes conflicting subject positions is especially suited for a literary geographical explication. The variability in the notion of the body through its placement in different geographical landscapes, its own inherent qualities and the interplay of the virtual medium through which the body may migrate, become key focal points of exploration in this chapter. The chapter begins with the body of Kalua, from *Sea of Poppies*, in movement and the evolution of Kalua's subject position by the end of this movement. The text is set in the imperial period and is beset with contestation from caste and imperial politics. What is reached at the end of Kalua's movement gets picked up by Fokir's character in *The Hungry Tide* (2004), set in current times, challenged by modern means of survival which threatens his indigenous skills of livelihood. How Fokir's body interacts with the wild Sunderban terrain and the harmonies and disharmonies achieved in contest with social space is analysed here. Finally the indigene is seen rediscovering itself through cyberspace in *The Calcutta Chromosome* (1996), set in the future. Nature and science engage in a dialogue through a virtual medium that enables transfer of knowledge. These notions are positioned in different time zones and through each positioning the scalar realizations of bodies are found to recuperate spaces and how we may understand them.

Conclusion (Brief Summary):

One of the chief contentions of this thesis was to find a method that enabled looking at the novels of Amitav Ghosh from a perspective that was not circumscribed by a literary theory. Keeping in mind that the form of the novel following a literary convention would read in a specific way and only overlook other possible interpretations led to exploring the notion of space as a means to

read a literary text. There is no single established method for such a reading but the recently flourishing area of literary geography has begun exploring what literary space entails. The first core chapter offers a conceptual framework with an attempt to set off a conversation between the disciplines of geography and literature. The chapter concludes by suggesting that Neil Smith's enunciation of the scale and Nirvana Tanoukhi's (2011) interpretation of the postcolonial novel as a reading of the postcolonial condition from a distance using the example of the Yoruba sculptor of the Man and his Bicycle, weave in a geographical scalar concept to that of literary criticism. The spatial contestation invokes the matter of spatial access and how the individual embodies it. Just as the scalar distance in reading of literature limits interpretations such that the postcolonial condition gets confined within landscapes with a fixed geographic imaginary, which is very imperial in nature. In the face of such a crisis, Franco Moretti's proposal that space as such is created within the novel and is not dependent upon the form of the novel in question so much so that each space determines its own kind of story, offers reprieve. It is from this point that the next chapter begins its journey of excavating spaces in novels rooted in different literary theories and attempting to read them against the grain.

Nirvana Tanoukhi's seminal essay "The Scale of World Literature" on what it means to apply scales to literature and what kind of reading that enunciates is the point from which the second chapter takes off since the novel and the representations it offers are put to test using space as artefact. This chapter concludes that it is not necessary for unorthodox or less traversed spaces to fail to exist in the face of generalized notions of space since different human practices create and make use of different conceptualizations of space as explained by David Harvey (2006). In his wide analysis of literary critics from across the world (from mid seventeenth century to mid eighteenth century novels from Russia, Italy, Spain, China, Japan, etc.), Moretti finds that the narrative voice trying to bring about the 'compromise' between the foreign form and local material is the one which stands to be the most unstable. One of the primary reasons for the same stems from the motivation of the narrator to somehow translate the traditional

conventions of a culture into interpretive signposts for an eclectic readership. The awkward marriage between foreign plot, local characters and local narrative voice asserts its awkwardness, very differently in Ghosh's *Sea of Poppies*. Looking back upon *Rajmohan's Wife* by Bankim Chandra Chatterjee and his inability to strongly position Matangini in the text owing to the novelty of the literary form being adapted for writing along with issues of readership and social ethics in question, Ghosh's novels are a case in point. Interspersed in the middle of the serious setting of migration of indentured labour on the Ibis, is an incidence difficult to place in the schema of the larger context of the novel. Ghosh chooses humour as a literary device to bring together Baboo Nob Kissin Pander (the devout Vaishnava priest), and Zachary, the second mate of the ship. The interactions between both revolve around the theme of bhakti, which is drawn outward toward the metropolis from the inner sanctum of one's faith, wherein bhakti is practiced as a way of life. The analysis shows the dichotomies of spiritual and material domains of anticolonial national life as proposed by Partha Chatterjee (1994), problematised by Nob Kissin's practice of bhakti for whom the inner and the outer spaces are cohesive instead of being distinct. The premise that a multiplicity of readings is possible for Amitav Ghosh's texts grounds the thesis to the deployment of scales and the scalar jump that spatial differentiation offers.

The third core chapter begins with an exploration on Neil Smith's foundational essay on scales and how Homeless Vehicles contest the specificity of the urban scale while performing the scalar jump of breaking out of the spaces that officiate their everyday living. Thereafter this explication is applied to the characters of Deeti and Kalua from *Sea of Poppies*. The river offers the scalar jump in undoing some of the strictures that land denies. The river represents a similar non-specificity of spatial vacuum without its attendant regimen of social norms, as do the Homeless Vehicles of the evictees from New York city. Deeti experiences a sense of freedom for the first time on the waters, by the river's edge just as Kalua is no more an obscure presence as he was on land. The river offers scalar relief to both the characters, as they traverse through the very landscape that constricts their freedom. The freedom experienced by both is not merely

about escaping social barriers but about experiencing themselves and their inner motivations, which finds expression in the way their lives are transformed by the choices they exercise. The dichotomy of freedom versus injunctions, in the opium trade are influenced by the scalar constructions around the opium business carried out on land versus at sea. Derek Gregory's (2001) notion of enframing nature is used to elaborate how space in the colonial project was projected as a static, by holding nature at a distance, and worked upon to be systematized. The landscape of the Ghazipur factory is explored and later the Indian Ocean scape is explored to study the effects of the opium trade in *River of Smoke*. The chapter goes on to explore the Indian Ocean itself as an important site of study, given the recent revival of scholastic interest on its region. The ocean itself is the scale of representations and marked by histories and cultures, yet non-deterministic and labile, difficult to ascertain in terms of fixities in identities, practices, economies, or even territories. This chapter concludes with a specific kind of geographical consciousness attained through the study of the rivers, ocean and its littoral areas. And this consciousness is situated in landscapes that are either free from imperial discipline or material engagements of trade and profits that apparently shape indigenous progress or transform these influences through the action of agents like migrants and people for whom the everyday life experiences of family and love destabilize given spatial foundations. Additionally, waterways also inspire fabulations through which are realised the true motivations of indigenes like Deeti or Bahram. Amidst untamable landscapes and imaginations lies the syncretic space of the littoral that is home to ever evolving ways of life and livelihood undergirded by the ocean as an unmistakable presence.

In the fourth core chapter, the subject of body as scale provides points of continuation from the previous chapter on waterways since some of the spaces that undergo changes on the waterways owe it to bodies in movement or bodies in action. What kind of spatial differentiation these activities generate and how transformative they are when interacting with surrounding landscapes, make for enunciation in this chapter. The space of the body and its interactions with the surrounding landscape is studied in this chapter through structure/agency dualism.

The dualisms are important parameters which mediate subject formation and the consequent impact they have on how the body acquires meaning. Does the body acquire meaning only in relation to social rules and sanctions existent in structures outside itself or does it have its own internal meaning? This question is especially important since Neil Smith's notion of body as scale founds itself on the body as a social construct whereas this chapter attempts to look at the body stripped to its bare essentials, and deriving meaning from its inherent qualities. Another essential feature that is dealt with here is the body working closely with raw geographical landscapes that are not social in their construction and therefore the geography such a subject maps is guided by motivations that are unconventional and yet syncretic so far as bridging very different landscapes are concerned. This chapter draws from David Harvey's (1974) theory of subsistence, and Noel Castree's (2005) exhaustive analysis of nature apart from other theories.

Thus this thesis attempts to pick specific strands like 'landscapes' which are used to build upon waterways as scale just as there is an attempt to build a case for 'geographical consciousness' using ideas like 'geographical imagination' forwarded by Edward Said (1985), while Ernst Cassirer (1944) is referred to for the inexplicability attached to perception of space. In his book *An Essay on Man*, Cassirer, is unable to explain the native's sense of space that enables him to negotiate every bend in the river with precision, a function of some form of abstract knowing and yet this knowing cannot be theorized so far as efforts to plot the very landscape a native traverses, onto a map. When a literary text is read with the notion of geographic consciousness in mind, one discovers unorthodox and abstract spaces that slide across multiple literary conventions given to systematized reading. This is when one begins to look toward scapes like the Indian Ocean, or the body as geographical scales that operate in the realm of shifting ontologies.

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LIST OF PUBLICATIONS

A. Papers Published:

- Chattopadhyay, Sagarika and Jaya Shrivastava,"Transitional Identities and the Unhomed Space in Monica Ali's Brick Lane and Tishani Doshi's The Pleasure Seekers", *Asiatic* 6.1(2012): 113-125.
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- Chattopadhyay, Sagarika and Amarjeet Nayak. ""Emergence of Geographical Consciousness in the Realist and Postcolonial Novel", *Muse India*. Issue 69 (2016):1-8.

Presentations at National and International Conferences/Seminars

- "Geographical Scales and the Novels of Amitav Ghosh" in the American Comparative Language Association (ACLA) Annual Conference at Seattle, U.S.A**.** for the seminar "Shifting Cultural Geographies", 26th to 29 March, 2015.

- "Waterways in Amitav Ghosh's Texts: A Scalar Approach" in the Indian Association for Commonwealth Literatures and Language Studies (IACLALS) Annual Conference at BITS Goa, 12th to 14th February 2015.

- Other-Isation: A Diasporic Experience In The Life Of An Immigrant Woman In The "Homecoming" By Sunera Thobani in UGC National Seminar on Voicing the Silence: Redefining English Literary Studies 17th to 18th February 2012 at Mata Jijabai Government P. G. Girls College, Indore.

- Participated in X Theory/Praxis Course of the Forum of Contemporary Theory, Baroda held at Osmania University Centre for International Programmes during June 18 – July 14, 2012.

- Attended Summer School at the Institute of World Literatures, Harvard University, U.S.A in the year 2013 (June 24 – July 19) and presented the paper entitled "Tracing the Transnational in Amitav Ghosh's *River of Smoke*".

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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Background

Franco Moretti, literary scholar and critic, in his book *Atlas of the European Novel* (1998), explains rather succinctly how literary geography could refer to either space in literature which is fictional in nature, or literature in space which is a historical space and alludes to a provincial library to cite an example. This thesis falls under the category of discovering and understanding space(s) in literature, though the approach it takes especially in regards to engaging with geography is different in its treatment from Moretti's engagement with the discipline. A literature survey of the field suggests that the term 'literary geography' in itself has meandered through many methodological debates. Though geographers relied heavily on creative expressions of landscapes in novels, the text was always held as an unauthentic, unscientific source of data and never equivalent to an accurate description of a given landscape, however appealing be its subjective description. The 1970s saw a major change in this direction, especially after the structural movement and the rise of the social sciences that invited interdisciplinary approaches and the text was now seen as far more contextualized and grounded in literary theories and consequently available to multiple interpretations. Scholars like Bertrand Westphal (2011) working on the interface of geography and literature, explain how the postmodern condition involves in the study of space, a coherence through heterogeneity, since the understanding of space is so variegated. Space could be absolute space, or space could be imbued with values as eminent human geographer Yi Fu Tuan (2001) suggests or space could be social, borne out of the human activities as proposed by Neil Smith (2010). Sheila Hones in her recent work in the area of literary geography justifies that for this interdisciplinary approach to work , "space— whether geographical, narrative, or

literary— has to be understood not as a fixed and measurable frame within which action takes place but rather as the product of action: an active dimension of interrelations, intertextualities, and multiplicity"(*Literary Geographies*, 5). This thesis is a maiden research attempt in the direction of such an inter-disciplinary approach and takes a small step towards contributing to the corpus of literary geography through a study of Amitav Ghosh's novels using the notion of scales.

The works of Amitav Ghosh are chosen since it is hard to categorise them under a single rubric of national or postcolonial or any other because of the way they appropriate space. The author himself is averse to all manner of categorization and considers the novel as the fullest expression of dealing with human experience whatever be the subtext of the narrative. Events surrounding history, anthropology, environment, travel or nation are enlivened only through the characters' experience of the same and it is this experience that steers the narrative or builds the story. Given such an environment for all of Ghosh's texts, fictional space and geographical space become two significant components of explicating the variability of reading what Ghosh's texts offer. However, this study is weary of methodological gaps in application of a purely geographic concept such as scale to the narrative which comprise two chapters. Theories found appropriate to the context at hand are applied to elicit the desired interpretations.

Amitav Ghosh was born in Calcutta in 1956 and grew up in India, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. He received his bachelors and masters degrees from the University of Delhi followed by a PhD in social anthropology from the University of Oxford. He is the author of *The Circle of Reason* (1986), *In An Antique Land* (1993), *The Calcutta Chromosome (1996), The Shadow Lines* (1998), *The Glass Palace (2000)*, *The Hungry Tide* (2004), and the Ibis Trilogy: *Sea of Poppies* (2008), *River of Smoke* (2011), and *Flood of Fire* (2015). Apart from his fictions Ghosh has authored many fascinating non-fiction works as well and written prolifically on a wide variety of subjects. His recent non-fiction work entitled *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable*

(2016) is remarkable in its amalgamation of short stories before it turns to the history and politics of climate change. This thesis draws from *The Great Derangement*, on the insights it offers, on what it means to 'know', through a short story involving the displacement of Ghosh's family from their village in Dhaka in the face of floods. Ghosh's novels are consistent in their engagement with movement spanning large distances separated by sea or land. In an interview given to Makarand Paranjpe and Tapan Ghosh, Amitav Ghosh comments, "Only the novel can incorporate every aspect of human existence…Balzac and Herman Melville did not feel any hesitation in writing about financial systems or the natural world"(*In Pursuit of Amitav Ghosh*, 26). And indeed this remains the cornerstone for all of Ghosh's works in their diversity of landscapes and physical movements that occupy his narratives, which in turn are interspersed with numerous micro-movements at the level of the characters' body, psyche, or their everyday lives embedding the larger movements and transforming them.

Ghosh has been critically acclaimed for his works, some of which are listed here. The *Circle of Reason* was awarded France's Prix Médicis in 1990, and *The Shadow Lines* won two prestigious Indian prizes the same year, the Sahitya Akademi Award and the Ananda Puraskar. *The Calcutta Chromosome* won the Arthur C. Clarke award for 1997 and *The Glass Palace* won the International e-Book Award at the Frankfurt book fair in 2001. In January 2005, *The Hungry Tide* was awarded the Crossword Book Prize, a major Indian award. *Sea of Poppies* was shortlisted for the 2008 Man Booker Prize and was awarded the Crossword Book Prize and the India Plaza Golden Quill Award. *River of Smoke* (2011) was shortlisted for the Man Booker Asian Prize and *Sea of Poppies* (2008) was shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize. Ghosh was shortlisted for the 2015 Man Booker International Prize in recognition of his body of work.

The recent international conference on "Literature and Geography: The Writing of Space throughout History" held at the Universite Jean Muolin, Lyon in March 2015, published its conference proceedings in Cambridge Scholar Publishing in 2016. A survey of the papers in the book covers areas like literary

cartography, travel narrative and geography, geographical novels, geopolitics, among others. Papers covered under the section "Geography and the mapping of literary genres" deal with travel writing but the focus remains more towards mapping the world than looking at fictional space. The impact of literary space within the text in generating the story does not find mention. Likewise the essay, "Amitav Ghosh's Historical and Transcultural Geographies in *Sea of Poppies* and *River of Smoke*" dwells upon different issues like Free Trade and displacement, and also mentions embedded narratives with the text. The riverbank or littoral finds mention in passing but fails to elicit how landscape is used by Ghosh to build the narrative. Collection of essays on Amitav Ghosh's works like *In Pursuit of Amitav Ghosh: Some Recent Readings* (2013) or Chitra Sankaran's *History, Narrative and Testimony in Amitav Ghosh's Fiction* (2012), lays emphasis on history, postcolonial aesthetics, cosmopolitanism, diaspora, etc. with an exception of only a few essays dealing with narrative about the waters or landscapes in Ghosh's texts. But none of the essays attempt to study Ghosh's novels from a literary geographical perspective. The works of Franco Moretti (1998, 2000), Sheila Hones (2014), Bertrand Westphal (2011), and Noel Castree (2005), in the direction of literary geography and geography are very helpful in forming an understanding of spaces within and outside the text and how they may be appropriated.

This thesis in its use of scales as a means of spatial differentiation attempts to study the contestation between social spaces and natural landscapes to answer questions like- How do these interactions influence the narrative surrounding waterways? What is the nature of human practices that generates such a strong topophilia (Yi Fu Tuan) that in turn influences the subjectivity of the characters in question? Noel Castree mentions how life worlds formed out of attachments formed between human beings and their environment ran out its course in geography. The works of Neil Smith and Hilary Winchester (2013) do not mention interaction between social space and natural landscapes like forests but choose to keep these spaces widely separated. This thesis excavates spaces of interactions between these disparate zones through Amitav Ghosh's stories since

it is unable to ignore a deep connection between them. The thesis deems to arrive at various contours of what a geographical consciousness could be.

1.2 Research Questions and Objectives:

Given the literature survey in the preceding section and the research gaps mentioned, this thesis attempts to raise the following research questions: (1) How can one interpret the novels of Amitav Ghosh from the perspective of literary geography? (2) How does the notion of scales address a reading of spaces that are created within the text? These questions are answered by defining the following objectives: (1) Amitav Ghosh's novels are studied with an aim to explore and excavate spaces created within the novels such that they may be read against the grain of selected literary theories, (2) the thesis attempts to apply the notion of scales to waterways and the body, while using the narrative to expand the concept further by delineating interactions between different kinds of geographical spaces that enunciate scale formation and (3) the first two objectives are instrumental in establishing a conversation between fictional space and geographical space that allow studying Amitav Ghosh's novels from within the discipline of literary geography.

1.3 Methodology and Discussion

This thesis focuses on studying the novels of Amitav Ghosh from a literary geographical perspective using the concept of geographical scale as the organizing principle for the study. This concept was proposed by Neil Smith (1992), a well known Marxist geographer, in his seminal article "Contours of a Spatialised Politics", in which he describes the construction of geographical scales as a primary means through which spatial differentiation takes place. The use of geographical scales only lays the basic foundation for the thesis and the arguments formed in the course of the thesis are made comprehensive by bringing together various theories from literature, philosophy and geography. Since the study is grounded in literature and geographical scales is rooted in the discipline of geography, an attempt is being undertaken here to establish an interface

between the two disciplines. The intent of studying Amitav Ghosh's novels from a geographical perspective emerges out of the need to understand space(s) in the texts considered here, with an aim to enunciate a reading that is not necessarily entrenched in a particular literary theory. This is not to say that realism, or postcolonialism, do not inform the narrative discourse but a cultural trope like 'bhakti' and the kind of spatial reading it elicits may call for a very different kind of geographical sense of space. The implication of such an understanding is important for this thesis since the thesis begins with an analysis of spaces and what they represent outside the conventions of theories they are grounded in and then move on to exploring scales through a lens of contestation and cooperation circling around culture and economy. And finally the aspects of culture and economy are left behind only to be overtaken by motivations of the human subject (Pile and Thrift) that act in consonance with the 'nature' (Noel Castree) that surrounds them.

The second chapter titled, "Literary Geography and Scales: A Conceptual Framework", begins with a literature review that brings to fore the disciplinary interface between literature and geography. It is important to note that the references primarily come from two directions, those made by trained geographers extending themselves towards literature, for example, Douglas Pocock (1981), Marc Brosseau (1994), Joanne Sharp (2000) , Yi Fu Tuan (2001), etc. and literary theorists extending themselves towards geography like Franco Moretti (1998), Bertrand Westphal (2011), Sheila Hones (2014), etc. This study falls in the latter category which is an upcoming area of study and also extremely variegated in terms of issues and approaches that comprise the field. The chapter then moves on to carrying out critical reading as proposed by Joanne Sharp from *Flood of Fire* (2015). This form of interpretation is significant because it preempts a shift in considerations that entitles texts to generate their own spaces that are not incumbent upon an environment outside the text in terms of literal geographies but in fact move towards imagined geographies, and also for that matter upon literary theory that may envisage upon taking a text in a predetermined direction. The instance from the novel is a report in the *Calcutta*

Gazette, stating the proceedings of a judicial enquiry regarding Zachary Reid's acquittal on event of the death of a subedar, Bhyro Singh at the hands of an indentured migrant, Kalua, on the Ibis and the consequent escape of Kalua, along with two convicts and a crew member. The gazette systematically reports testimonies by witnesses in support of Zachary and his non involvement with the mishap aboard the ship. The *Calcutta Gazette*'s reportage is formal, a reading of which gives the impression of being in a court hearing, but for the passage that records Baboo Nob Kissin's outlandish testimony with references to the Creator and his avatar in a language singularly unfamiliar to his British employees. The chapter analyses the illogic of Nob Kissin's divinations embedded in cultural references that could transport a culturally informed reader or an indigenous citizen attending the court sessions to imagine divine play. But for others the testimony could draw ridicule or create humor. The analysis suggests the necessity of exploration of tropes like bhakti that encourage a spatial consciousness rooted in the way of life for a large community of people.

The third chapter, "Amitav Ghosh's Novels: A Slide Through Literary Conventions and the Emergence of Geographical Consciousness", studies two movements regarding the novel, first being the novel as a genre itself and its function along with its placement in the world, and second, the spatiality created within the novel itself. These considerations speak to the primary contention that each literary convention defines its own space, but this space is pliable and open to negotiations such that a slide across frameworks is made possible. This chapter uses Meenakshi Mukherjee's notion of realism in the novels R*ajmohan's Wife* (2009) and *The Home and the World* (2005) to understand the protean nature of representation determined by the situatedness of the novels in a specific socio-cultural clime, and how spatialities created within these narratives veritably contest the demands of realism of the times. Women protagonists from both novels, travel from the 'andarmahal' (inner sanctum of their homes that represent modesty, lack of spatial sanction, and agency) of their homes to the outside. And their journeys establish them as strident, and moving away from the conventions of the novelistic form, to forge their own identities. This chapter stresses that

subtle spaces exist within texts that must be interpreted for their own sake such that the slide across theories is made possible. The chapter goes on to employ Franco Moretti's (2000) concept of distant reading, using humour as a literary device and analyses at length the notion of bhakti (devotion) as demonstrated by Baboo Nobo Krishno, in *Sea of Poppies* (2008). Moretti's claim that foreign presence makes local characters behave in strange ways appears true when one studies the character of Nob Kissin in particular, but the text does not allow the strange behavior to get lost in the maze of storytelling. Instead the narrative event of Nob Kissin's appearance in conjunction with Zachary is made overtly visible, lifting every instance out of the mode of the texts' storytelling.

The fourth chapter titled, "Waterways in the texts of Amitav Ghosh" attempts to build upon the specific elements of geographical scale. Though Neil Smith discusses some scales like body, home, urban, region etc., he states that the scales he discusses are not the only geographic scales that exist, and a set of scales cannot be fixed to encompass all that geographical scales constitute. One of the fundamental arguments supporting this statement is that geographical scale is "hierarchically produced as part of the social and cultural, economic and political landscapes" ("Contours of a Spatialised Politics", 66). Therefore any landscape that contains these interactions will result in some manner of scale formation. Since the ocean is being studied as geographical scale, the dialectic between competition and cooperation especially between the socio-cultural and the economic aspects in *River of Smoke* (2011) and *Sea of Poppies*, is the subject of study for this chapter. The socio-cultural versus economic contestation is not linear in that both are embedded in the imperial norms of trade, in the Indian Ocean littoral (Michael Pearson) and stories that circulate within the littoral spaces to construct the Indian Ocean world. This chapter applies the notion of fabulation, in a specific mode as suggested by Stephen Muecke in *Indian Ocean Studies: Cultural, Social, and Political Perspectives* (2010). Fabulation entails a specific process of coming into being and this section explores fabulation in regards to the mental landscape of Bahram Modi, wherein his longing for Che-mei, his second wife from Canton, does not achieve realization on land but finds

fulfillment in his opium inebriated state. This exploration is important since geography and literariness are brought together to outline a space that offers greater value to the individual being than material commodity in the form of opium.

The fifth chapter, "Bodies in Movement, Practice and the Virtual Medium", studies the space of the body and its interactions with the surrounding landscape through a structure/agency dualism. According to geographers, Steve Pile and Nigel Thrift (1996), the human subject is difficult to map because it does not have precise boundaries, and something that cannot be counted as singular but only as a mass of different and sometimes conflicting subject positions is especially suited for a literary geographical explication. The variability in the notion of the body through its placement in different geographical landscapes, its own inherent qualities and the interplay of the virtual medium through which the body may migrate, become key focal points of exploration in this chapter. The chapter begins with the body of Kalua, from *Sea of Poppies*, in movement and the evolution of Kalua's subject position by the end of this movement. The text is set in the imperial period and is beset with contestation from caste and imperial politics. What is reached at the end of Kalua's movement gets picked up by Fokir's character in *The Hungry Tide* (2004), set in current times, challenged by modern means of survival which threatens his indigenous skills of livelihood. How Fokir's body interacts with the wild Sunderban terrain and the harmonies and disharmonies achieved in contest with social space is analysed here. Finally the indigene is seen rediscovering itself through cyberspace in *The Calcutta Chromosome* (1996), set in the future. Nature and science engage in a dialogue through a virtual medium that enables transfer of knowledge. These notions are positioned in different time zones and through each positioning the scalar realizations of bodies are found to recuperate spaces and how we may understand them.

Chapter 2

Literary Geography and Scales: A Conceptual Framework

2.1 Introduction

This thesis focuses on studying the novels of Amitav Ghosh from a literary geographical perspective using the concept of geographical scales as the organizing principle for the study. This concept was proposed by Neil Smith, a well known Marxist geographer, in his seminal article "Contours of a Spatialised Politics", in which he describes scales as "the construction of geographical scale is a primary means through which spatial differentiation "takes place"" (62). The use of geographical scales only lays the basic foundation for the thesis and the arguments formed in the course of the thesis are made comprehensive by bringing together various theories from literature, philosophy and geography. Since the study is grounded in literature, and geographical scales are rooted in the discipline of geography, an attempt is being undertaken here to establish an interface between the two disciplines employing the concept of geographical scales. The intent of studying Amitav Ghosh's novels from a geographical perspective emerges out of the need to understand space(s) (Henri Lefebvre, 1991; Edward Soja, 1996; Franco Moretti, 1998; Derek Gregory, 2001; David Harvey, 2006 and Neil Smith, 2010) in the texts considered here, with an aim to enunciate a reading that is not necessarily entrenched in a particular literary theory. This is not to say that realism, or postcolonialism, do not inform the narrative discourse but an unlikely cultural trope like 'bhakti'(devotion) and the kind of spatial reading it elicits may call for a very different kind of geographical sense of space. The implication of such an understanding is important for this thesis since the thesis begins with an analysis of spaces and what they represent outside the conventions of theories they are grounded in and then move on to exploring scales through a

lens of contestation and cooperation circling around culture and economy. And finally the aspects of culture and economy are left behind only to be overtaken by motivations of the 'human subject' (Pile and Thrift) that act in consonance with 'nature' (Noel Castree) that surrounds them.

2.2 The Geography and Literature Interface

Literature review on the interface between Geography and Literature do not indicate a uniform terrain of exploration in the field. In fact discussions continue on a halting basis to bring together the two disciplines which tend to get entangled in methodological disputes. This section deals with a literature review that brings to the fore literature addressing the disciplinary interface between literature and geography. It is important to note that the references primarily come from two directions, those made by trained geographers extending themselves towards literature, for example, Douglas Pocock (1988), Marc Brosseau (1994), Joanne Sharp (2001) etc. and literary theorists extending themselves towards geography like Franco Moretti (1998), Bertrand Westphal (2011), Sheila Hones (2014) etc. This study falls in the latter category which is an upcoming area of study and also extremely variegated in terms of issues and approaches that comprise the field.

Nevertheless, the enthusiasm and an urge to look at literary texts using geography's disciplinary lens has resulted in emergence of areas of enquiry like geocriticism, ecocriticism, literary geography etc. None of these categories are exclusive in themselves but converge and diverge on different points. For the purpose of the thesis we will confine ourselves to literary geography. Before getting into a probable interpretation of literary geography itself, a brief summarization is made to understand the geographer's standpoint in employing literary texts. Most geographers understand that the subjectivity literary creativity brings to a landscape remains amiss in plain geographic description of the same. As well known geographer, Douglas Pocock states, "We doubtless all have our favourite literary landscape depiction, where the quality of the observation is more memorable…than the exactitude of conventional maps or tables of statistics

for the same" (*Humanistic Geography*, 12). Another very interesting observation that finds consistency in literary depiction of landscapes especially by romantic poets is the need to romanticize nature in the face of rapidly growing industrialisation in England. This thought is echoed by Kenneth Mitchell in the chapter "Landscape and Literature" which is part of a collection of essays in one of the often referred to texts *Geography and Literature: A Meeting of Disciplines*. Kenneth Robert Olwig takes this idea a step further in the essay "Literature and Reality: the Transformation of Jutland Heath",

> "Just as the pastoral convention tends to exaggerate the idyllic qualities of country life, thus providing a foil against which to counterpose the unnatural life of the town…If the rural ideal is to appear not as an 'escape', but as 'the genuine form of the world', then the actual urbanized world must be 'inverted'." (*Humanistic Geography*, 52)

This inversion becomes necessary so that the given reality of the urban world is made to look like a deceptive reality or untrue (52). Here itself one finds the initial germs of a rural-urban, natural-denaturalised binary coming into play. One of the important factors that human geographers contend upon is, the human experience that is laid on a place conferring meaning to it. Towns, economy, development occurring by harnessing nature is what lead to the creation of a social space, or humanly produced "second nature" (*Uneven Development*, 33) as Neil Smith terms it. This makes man superior to nature, as opposed to proximity to nature wherein man would constantly need to yield and adjust to his/her natural surroundings. Why is the natural setting then held in such nostalgia? Does it indicate that despite conventional literary depictions of hostile environments alienating man, and making him/her look insignificant, there are other kinds of possibilities that lie afoot, telling a different story? This question can be answered somewhat effectively by taking into consideration the literary text itself and the kind of representation it makes for, how it defines nature, geography or spaces and how interactions between these elements are seen as a continual process of affirmation and cooperation instead of conflict or contest.

The use of imaginative literature in geography emerged from a need to understand landscapes and regions not just as geographical features but as spaces evoking, "man, meaning and values in geography" ("Geography's Literature", 334) Brousseau explains. The aesthetic elements were used to bring out the experience of place, be it through relations with the environment, through regional themes or with the insideness and outsideness of a place as Pocock suggests. Brosseau too points to the relevance of geography's turning to literature for different points of view like, vivid description of a place, spatial experiences, problems of representation and "trying to draw parallels between the history of geographical and literary areas" ("Geography's Literature", 333). Therefore, geography enhanced its scope to see a place beyond its elemental features and began understanding it as an entity or an effect of processes, human, cultural or environmental. Literature was an important element in eliciting the subjectivity of a place, "words alone, used in an appropriate situation, can have the power to render objects, formerly invisible because unattended, visible, and impart to them a certain character" ("Language and the Making of Place", 684). Yi Fu Tuan observes possibilities in a mere rise on a flat surface becoming something far more as it opens up to other places. David Harvey's concept of spatial relationality or an internal relation among things or an event coheres with Tuan's theory on linkages between spaces. The scope of viewing space as such also went through dramatic changes with ideas forwarded by David Harvey who phenomenally expanded the boundaries of everything that can and does comprise space. The flexibility and unconventionality of this eclectic listing makes it worthwhile to study space across categories and also make it available for comparison. Douglas Pocock, Kenneth Mitchell and Kenneth Olwig unanimously express the literariness brought to landscape depictions being compounded with the human condition. The novel works as a link between physical geographies (in other words, the outside world) and the internalization of the experience of place expressed through human subjectivity. Brosseau thus comments that realism in a novel "simply shifts from the representation of the outside world…to the interpretation of its subjective evaluation" (338). Theoretically this journey goes

through a sequential progression of how physical space is experienced and what kind of space-making it leads to. The experience of space deals with representation of spaces, relation with the environment, sense of home, rootedness, rootlessness, etc. Further these experiences of space lead to space-making activity by remapping those very locations either through mental appropriations like love or Bhakti, or through cultural and vocational practices, like those performed by characters like Deeti, Fokir, Baboo Nob Kissin, etc.

2.3 Geography's Engagement with Literature

Geography's engagement with literary texts has raised many questions surrounding the soundness of literary works and the nature of representations that they elicit, accruing to literary works only a subjective creativity and therefore distanced from the accuracy of factual description of a place. Geographer Marc Brosseau explains the initial apprehension by geographers towards borrowing from literary works. "Literary sources were not rejected but simply ignored, as they were considered unfit to serve as solid scientific data" ("Geography's Literature", 334). But the initial anxiety was slowly replaced, given the understanding that literary works were socially and culturally contextualized, in which they were set, produced and consumed, and these narratives also worked as a strong medium of critiquing the reality of the times. Brosseau also points to a very important fact that has brought about a turn towards literature in the twentieth century and that is how much literature expresses, different ways of conceiving space and place that redefines our relationship to the literary text. "In this sense, it is the text in its difference and that of the space it generates that have become the focus" (348). This point is significant because here begins a shift in considerations that entitle texts to generate their own spaces that are not incumbent upon an environment outside the text in terms of literal geographies but in fact move towards imagined geographies and also for that matter upon literary theory that may envisage upon taking a text in a predetermined direction.

This idea is strongly impressed upon by geographer and academic, Joanne Sharp in her seminal essay "Towards a Critical Analysis of Fictive Geographies" (2000) wherein she critically reads Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* from three perspectives, voice of the text, the context of writing and the reception. Brosseau's survey of literature's influence on representation of geographical spaces suggests the shifting influence of literary conventions, validity of the author's engagement with place(s), socio-cultural milieu, gender perspectives, and historicity of a place. Geographers often relied on literary expression of spaces to justify their stance about landscapes. But a linear adaptation from literary works towards geographical theorization is not quite so easy since every literary work carries its own aesthetics which determines how space gets represented in fictional works. The significance of the form of the novel in its enunciation of space is repeatedly pointed out by Brosseau since he recognizes that a novel has a particular way of writing its own geography.

It is only logical to bring in Joanne Sharp's "Critical Analysis of a Fictive Geography" to stage an initial argument regarding the novelistic form and the part it plays in exploring space within a narrative. Sharp dwells upon two elements of the form of the novel in her analysis of Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* (1988), namely 'voice' and 'context of writing' the text. According to her, the literary voice is crafted in a certain way to show how different types of writings function to create descriptions. "Textual strategies draw readers into the text and allow them 'the suspension of disbelief' characteristic of novelistic fiction. These modes need to be studied to see how the literary work functions to reinforce and/or subvert norms and standards" ("Towards a Critical", 331), thereby facilitating the formation of different ways of thinking about the world. She goes on to describe the sense of fragmentation and movement in Rushdie's novelistic world portrayed through the disjointed experience of his hybrid characters. Rushdie employs several literary devices like magic realism, black comedy, traditional mythology to create a multi-dimensional textual world prodding the reader to grapple with multiple experiences in the textual world all the while ensuring that the reader does not settle comfortably into unidirectional

understanding of interpreting the text. While pitching the narrative to be read as realism of the times, Rushdie describes places and events recognizable to the reader but also complicates the validity of events and places through unconventional juxtapositions between the Ramayana and Western advertisements, Western TV images and Indian literature. All of this is intended towards imagining a contemporary globalised society or "contemporary (post) modern media-ted world" (332) as Sharp refers to it. What kind of critical reading can one anticipate for Ghosh's texts in wake of the 'spatial limbo' that Sharp suggests remains to be seen in the following section, through Baboo Nob Kissin's character in Amitav Ghosh's Ibis trilogy. Nob Kissin is a native Indian and an agent to Benjamin Burnham, owner of a shipping company.

2.3.1 Applying Joanne Sharp's method of Critical Reading to *Flood of Fire*

When we apply the voice and context of writing to *Flood of Fire*, the last novel in the Ibis trilogy, the historical context of opium trade and its realism brought forward through fictionalised events of opium cultivation, opium factories and its consequent transportation to China is deeply cut through the voice of Baboo Nob Kissin, a devout Vaishnava devotee. Nob Kissin's vocation as the shrewd accountant to Burnham corresponds to the external reality of imperial presence in India finding expression through the British trade, and the transforming face of the provincial city of Calcutta into a metropolis. But unlike the hybrid characters in Rushdie's novels, Nob Kissin's external pursuit is simply a means towards fulfilling his inner objective of union with the Divine. The physical spaces of the metropolis or the Ibis are not reflective of Nob Kissin's interiority and Nob Kissin is certainly not a hybrid seeking an ideological rationalizing of his identity between devotee and 'gomusta'. Instead the strength of his devotion transforms the external spaces of the Ibis, gangetic waterfronts or the court where he testifies in favour of Zachary into sites of union with the Divine. By doing so, the imperial presence is cast into a spatial limbo and Nob Kissin's language is held

incomprehensible within the imperial linguistic idiom once again rendering the vocabulary of the master redundant against its indigenous counterpart.

Amitav Ghosh uses humor as a literary device in *Sea of Poppies*, where Baboo Nobo Krishno's bhakti, is a subject of great hilarity oddly strung together with the seriousness of the opium trade and migration of indentured labour, within the given space of the Ibis, a ship that formerly used to carry slaves. The text succeeds in breaking the linearity of the narrative as it goes on to creating an unusual spatial consciousness dealt with in greater detail in the third chapter. Nevertheless a small example from *Flood of Fire* (2015) is used here to highlight what Ghosh's narrative aims to achieve. The instance from the novel is a report in the *Calcutta Gazette*, stating the proceedings of a judicial enquiry regarding Zachary Reid's acquittal on event of the death of Subedar Bhyro Singh at the hands of an indentured migrant, Kalua, on the Ibis and the consequent escape of Kalua, along with two convicts and a crew member. The incidents were of an extremely grave nature and Zachary being the second mate on the Ibis, stood responsible for them. The gazette systematically reports testimonies by witnesses in support of Zachary and his non involvement with the mishap aboard the ship. The *Calcutta Gazette*'s reportage is formal, a reading of which gives the impression of being in a court hearing, but for the passage that remarks upon Baboo Nob Kissin's testimony whose, "phrasing…was…filled with outlandish expressions…In one of his flights of fancy Mr. Burnham's gomusta proved himself to be a veritable chukker-batty, describing Mr. Reid as the 'effulgent emissary' of a Gentoo deity" (8). The second edition of *Hobson Jobson: a Glossary of Colloquial Anglo-Indian Words and Phrases*, edited by William Crooke was published in 1902, with an intent to interpret at best, use of colloquial terms, words, and as the complete title suggests - phrases, and kindred terms, etymological, historical, geographical and discursive, to understand everyday terms of encounter by speakers, "to express something not capable of just denotation by any English term" (*Hobson Jobson*, xvi). This justification immediately creates a distance between the referent and its representation, untranslatable through language and ideology as well. Keeping this distance in

mind we focus on the word 'chukker-batty' here. The *Hobson Jobson* glossary defines Chukker-batty in two ways , first, " This vulgarized Bengal Brahman name is, as Wilson points out, a corruption of chakravartti, the title assumed by the most exalted ancient Hindu sovereigns, an universal Emperor, whose chariot-wheels rolled over all (so it is explained by some)" (216), and second, "Then the Bikshuni Uthala began to think thus with herself, 'To-day the King, ministers, and people are all going to meet Buddha . . . but [a woman how can I contrive to get the first sight of him ?'] Buddha immediately, by his divine power, changed her into a holy Chakravartti Raja."" (216). In essence Chakravarti is the omniscient being, possessor of all wisdom, or in simple terms the divine creator of this world. The *Calcutta Gazette* parodies Nob Kissin's claims of being a Chakravarti, the possessor of all knowledge that leads him to look upon Zachary as Lord Krishna, the 'effulgent emissary', undoubtedly on a mission. The logical court language, and its political efficacy surrounding the severity of incidents on the Ibis, is doubly parodied, by Nobo Krishno's testimony borne out of his bhakti or devotion but incomprehensible to the court. Devotion and the grounds for divine play are a space incomprehensible in the face of a court language, legal practice, or action befitting a social world. Nobo Krishno's matronly figure and his thirst to have visions of Krishna may also be likened to Uthala herself, who is transformed into a chakravarti so that she may chance upon Buddha. The distance between the referent, that is a 'Chakravarti' and its representation of Baboo Nob Kissin and his outlandish remarks expressed in the Gazette's reportage handed out by Justice Kendalbushe are too far apart to enable a comprehensible bridging that should suite the text's narrative, or the readers sensibility. But the apparent illogic of Nobo Krishno's bhakti creates a space for itself by bearing mention in the gazette, amidst its somber language and also by favourably influencing Zachary's acquittal. Therefore the voice and the context of the text create a parallel world divined by Nobo Krishno, while it undergirds bhakti as a way of life. As if, the incidents on the Ibis were merely a ruse for Zachary to execute his divine play and it was none other than Nobo Krishno who knew of this divine mission. The reception such an incident draws from the reader could have several reactions,

from complete ridicule, to humour, to considerations that may want to look further and understand the implication of such instances not only for the text but also in factoring in an aspect of a cultural life that played a pivotal role in the everyday lives of a large community of people.

What Sharp tries to indicate through the critical reading she does is that such a treatment of the text results in creation of spaces that are unfamiliar to the reader and her perception and expectation upon accessing the text are not always met with. Sharp indicates Rushdie's use of culturally inflected language and the author's discretion to explain or leave the meaning obscure, as a deliberate stance either to leave the uninformed reader out of the novelistic space or force her to make meaning. Sharp, also refers to the use of a highly variegated combination of extra textual references by Rushdie that range from, "the Ramayana to Western advertising, the content and form of Bollywood films to religious texts of Eastern and Western orthodoxies. The juxtaposition of these diverse, sometimes apparently incompatible, references breaks up the linear flow of Rushdie's narration of events" (332). This unconventional placement of inter textual references is Rushdie's version of creating a contemporary globalised society, "In the contemporary (post) modern media-ted world, this is indeed the form in which a large number of people receive their information about and knowledge of the world" (332). And, lastly commenting upon the reception of the novel, Sharp comments how the illegibility of cultural contexts and language may have lead to confuse readers, including or excluding some from the textual space. But the actual reception of the novel was quite the contrary as the novel was termed blasphemous by religious figures.

Before plunging into the geography of the text and its relation to the world, how must a text be read and interpreted, and its placement in the wider sphere of literatures from across the globe, one can sum up from the preceding section that literature's engagement with geography bases itself on the enunciation of a space making project rooted in, the "nature of human experience" ("Geography and Literature", 97) and articulation of "life worlds or places" (97) as Pocock suggests. These articulations are much more than what the

text offers structurally, or even strictly theoretically, but that theory helps to push the narrative a little further to distill spaces that alter interpretations itself.

2.4 Literary Geography

Literary geography, as the term suggests, brings together two disciplines, 'geography' and 'literature', but the nature of interaction between these two disciplines raises many complexities. Sheila Hones raises a few points in this direction:

> "One of the most fundamental issues in literary geography has been…the question of whether its key terms refer to discipline or to subject matter. On the one hand, the term 'geography' has been used to refer not only to the theories and practices of an academic field but also to the spaces, places, and phenomena of the physical world. On the other hand, while the term 'literature' has at times been used to refer to literary studies as a discipline, it has more commonly been taken to refer to literary texts as primary sources." ("Text as it Happens", 1303)

The article points out that both disciplines are guided by certain methodologies and it necessitates the acceptance and "validity of other contextually conditioned approaches, and write as well read across borders" (1311). Hones' article emphasizes on spatiality within the text as well as its historical extensions, but the essential point that she makes is that literary geography understands that a text is open to multiple interpretations that can be brought out through very divergent theoretical approaches. Mike Crang's response to Hones's article stresses that literary studies' engagement with spatialities in texts opens up for "different sorts of connections to be fostered" ("Commentary", 4). This thesis does attempt at understanding spaces within texts by relying on literary theory, but the theorization is varied as it draws from philosophy, geography and literature fostering connections that become coherent in enunciating literary space making.

In her chapter titled "Narrative Space in *Let the Great World Spin*", Sheila Hones speaks about moving away from a reading practice a geographer would do of a space in *The Great World* organized according to identifiable locations to

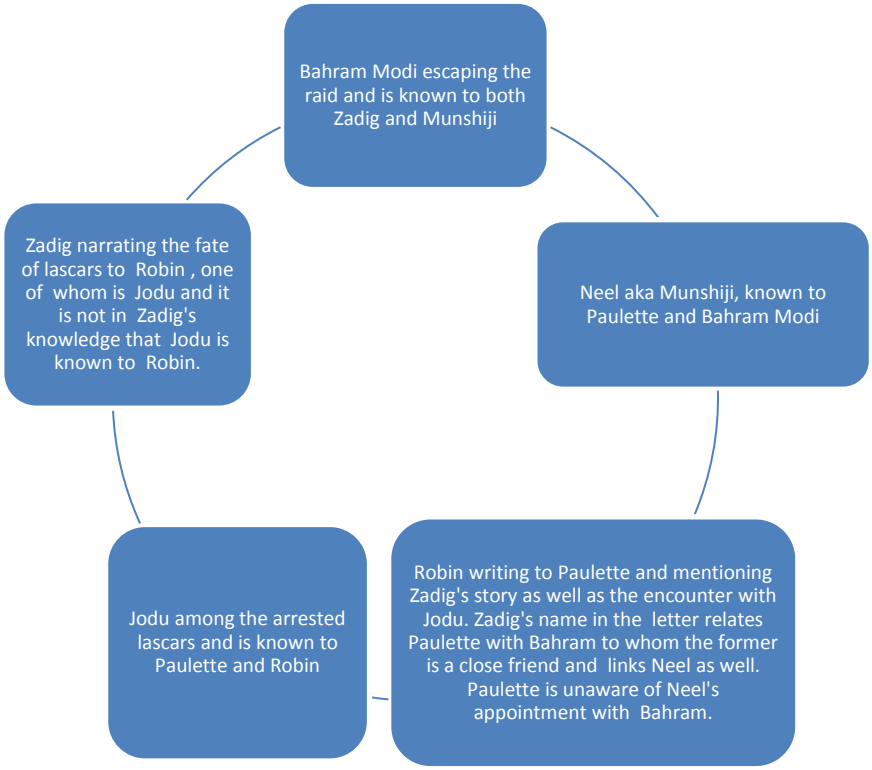
consider the question of how the novel writes space. She explains that the phrase "writes space" suggests an understanding of geographical space that has been heavily influenced by recent work in geography and spatial theory.

> "So the shift in emphasis from locations to space reflects a specific change in metageography, which is to say, a move away from an understanding of the world as a set of places located on a fixed spatial grid and toward an understanding of the world as a set of elastic networks, distances, and relations, with place happening in space as a here and now made up of multiple and interacting theres and thens." (*Literary Geographies*, 70).

For example in *River of Smoke*, the narrator has a way of narrating events that links characters indirectly or directly known to each other. The Creek Factory incident is an interesting case in point wherein the incident of the factory raid brings together a number of characters, some of whom are physically present at the scene and some of whom are only thought of by the characters witnessing the incident. Having declared an embargo on the illegal import of opium entering into Canton, the Chinese military raid one of the British houses that is in the process of offloading fresh barrels of opium communicated to the house through the Pearl river. The emperor's troops begin a series of swift arrests which spare none including the powerful Chinese opium mafia leaders, to the lascars being used as labour to haul the cargo. Robin Chinnery, a painter by profession is witnessing the scene and narrates it in a letter to his childhood friend Paulette, the daughter of a French botanist who nurtures an immense interest in plants herself. Paulette is aboard the ship called the Redruth when Robin is writing to her from Fanqui Town. Robin mentions Jodu as one of the arrested lascars in the raid, since Jodu and Paulette were like siblings from birth, brought up by Jodu's mother. Jodu, Paulette and Robin had shared a common living premises in Robin's home during the course of their childhood. Jodu's story begins with Paulette in the *Sea of Poppies,* the setting being a village by the river's edge. Jodu is not given textual space in the *River of Smoke*. Both Jodu and Paulette have known Robin in Calcutta (their story is mentioned in the *River of Smoke* as a flashback and not in *Sea of Poppies*). Robin also mentions Zadig Bey in his letter to Paulette, who is a

friend of Bahram Modi's, Bahram being a chief opium trader from India. In the narrative, Bahram flees the Hong premises during the raid and escapes arrest. He reaches his quarters and is met with by Neel, formerly a zamindar from Bengal but currently working as an accountant to Bahram Modi. Neel and Paulette become known to each other on the Ibis enroute to Mauritius. The only link between Bahram Modi and the novel *Sea of Poppies* is through the character of Ah Fatt, who is Modi's son and Neel's friend from Alipore jail. They travel on the Ibis as convicts and spend time together in Canton. In describing the Creek Factory incident the narrator coalesces different time zones and spaces that compels the reader to criss-cross through the trilogy and at once make associations over space and time.

Raid at the Creek Factory bringing together different space and time coordinates



In other words it is an understanding that assumes, as Marcus Doel puts it, that space is neither "'behind' something, functioning as a backcloth, ground or continuous and unlimited expanse…nor…'between' something, as either a

passive filling or an active medium of (ex) change." Doel suggests thinking of space more as a verb than a noun. "To space—that's all. Spacing is an action, an event, a way of being" (*Thinking Space*, 125). This example brings out one of the important aspects in the treatment of space as relational, in the narrative wherein space becomes the underlying event between two texts. This logic is followed in exploring the inner and outer domains of spatial representation in the third chapter. The analysis is extended through different literary conventions and by doing so pushes Hones' approach of understanding spatiality within a single text.

Continuing this line of thought about what spatiality in a text means and its interconnectedness through the narrative(s), it will be prudent to bring in Marc Brosseau's comment about literary geography in the chapter entitled "In, of, out, with and through: New perspectives in literary geography" ,

> "The alternative character of…fictive geographies…is found, rather, in their particular use of discursive and narrative possibilities (poetic language, style, narrative techniques, literary conventions, montage, composition, etc.). In the process, it became necessary to involve literary criticism in order to make this relationship between form and content more concrete or explicit." (*The Routledge Handbook of Literature and Space*, Location 466)

This reflects the theoretical justification for the third chapter while laying grounds for adopting the notion of scale in the following two chapters. Brosseau further contends that the second line of inquiry in the field is to be understood in the context of "geography's more intense engagement....Focusing on the politics of cultural representation in general and literary representation in particular" which seek to "unpack the role of space and place in the dynamics of identity and difference at various scales" (Location 471). In the specific use of scale, the thesis attempts to push the analysis of spatial differentiation beyond Derek Gregory's treatment of production of nature within the purview of imperial geography. Brosseau does not fail to emphasise enough on the importance of Gregory's espousal of imaginative geography within the colonial context stating that imaginary geography maybe viewed as a conquered form of imagination. In the treatment of waterways as scale, this conquered form of imagination is forcefully

overruled by introducing the notion of fabulation contextualized within the frame of opium trade's material value. In doing so the use of scale becomes a departure as its scope goes beyond imaginative geography in problematising the oceanic space and waterways in Ghosh's narratives.

Hsuan L. Hsu in the chapter "Literature across scales" explains how the notion of scales is favourable towards appreciating manifold ways in which texts traverse geographic boundaries. He states,

> "Concerns with power, exploitation, and agency in literary and critical accounts of scale-jumping resonate with cultural geographers' discussions of spatial fixes and "power-geometry." Two threads run through many literary and critical accounts of scale-jumping: a cosmopolitan drive towards making meaningful connections between and across scales, and a material focus on the violence, immobilizations, and vulnerability produced by capitalism's uneven geographical development." (*The Routledge Handbook*, Location 4493)

This point is extensively explored in chapter 5, in the analysis of both Kalua and Fokir's contestation against the spaces they reside in and traverse. The scale of the body becomes a syncretic medium in its access of spaces that collide with each other and in doing so beg consideration towards cooperation between Neil Smith's contention of first nature represented by wild nature, and second nature which is socially produced. The scale of the body is explored through the notions of topophilia, or love of the land that imbues between the body of the subject and his surroundings an exchange that transforms both the landscape and the subject. This exploration extends Neil Smith's premise of the body as scale by charting it along natural geographies. One of the most compelling reasons that makes this thesis a study of literary geography is that the exploration of spaces within the narrative is being done using the geographic element of scale. Scale is being used in different ways throughout the thesis to read both geographical space and textual spaces. For instance the chapter on waterways deals with how the scale of land and river constrict or offer freedom to the characters Kalua and Deeti in *Sea of Poppies* and in doing so, the regulations set by imperial geography on land do not succeed on the river, consequently opening up a textual space which can

accommodate the union between Kalua and Deeti which otherwise seems quite inconceivable on land. Scale is also used to understand both the oceanic and littoral spaces through economic contestation pitted against fabulations. This encourages against reading geographic spaces like the Indian Ocean as merely imperial and nothing more than being a prolific trade route for the British Empire. Before the thesis enters into the exploration of scales it recognizes that a singular understanding of fiction ingrained in a literary theory seems improbable without reading it for and against the grain of theoretical paradigms. The following section brings into conversation literary theories and how they allude to space within the narrative.

This thesis understands that literary theory encompasses a geography of its creation which poses as a problematic at times since it tends to subsume the spaces in the narratives within fixed spatial correlates. In the postulation on geographic consciousness proposed in chapter 3, the thesis states, that most geographical locations are ontologically predetermined to a large extent so far as the socio-cultural, political reality of these spaces is concerned and the expectations from them thereof only reinstates Said's own theory about authors carrying the affects of the geography they occupy into the aesthetics of their own writings. He explains as someone who grew up in the pre-World War Two colonial world, how he found it a challenge not to see culture as antiseptically quarantined from its worldly affiliations. He states that, "In thinking of Carlyle or Ruskin, or even Dickens and Thackeray, critics…relegated these writers' ideas about colonial expression, inferior races, or "niggers" to a very different department from that of culture, culture being the elevated area of activity in which they "truly" belong" (*Culture and Imperialism*, xiv). Said argues that it is important to read texts in connection with the imperial process "of which they are manifestly and unconcealedly a part" (xiv). One of the fundamental reasons for Said to have made this charge was to reinforce the presence of the colonial geography underlying the subtext of literary productions which conveniently subsumed such spaces thereby conferring the text with a monolithic oriental gaze. In response to his premise Said carries out a contrapuntal reading of Jane

Austen's *Mansfiled Park* (1992) to identify the actual colonial world sitting repressed beneath the narrative.

> "The novel's direct references to the plantation are limited to a handful of offhand remarks, but it is precisely in such passing references, Said insists, that such texts "include, even as they repress" the reality of colonialism. Bertram's English estate, in this sense, is built on Caribbean soil. Said's influential contrapuntal approach reads canonical colonial texts to understand what he called the "social space" that facilitated the broader colonial project, beneath which could be located "the actual geographical underpinnings" of colonialism." (*The Cambridge Companion*, 211)

All the more reason to understand geographic consciousness about casting a reflexive eye on the notion of space implying, that just as imperial geography may seem to impose a spatial impasse on possibilities for freedoms, characters like Kalua or Bahram Modi or even Paulette see more than just an impasse in the spaces surrounding them as they defy these impasses. The following passage illustrates this point.

In the essay "Walter Scott and the Geographical Novel", Celine Sabiron, points out the emphasis on geographical landscapes that Scott makes in his novels. Citing Tom Bragg's statement about the mimetic relationship between space and narrative, Scott evokes how a character's knowledge of the landscape or the lack of it results in negotiating the landscape successfully or otherwise (*Literature and Geography*, 211). This negotiation measures and tests, encounters the characters make with unknown or uncertain spaces which results in steering the narrative in a particular direction. The essay attempts to articulate if geographical considerations within a text are possible apart from the history that a given space may embody within the narrative. In *The Antiquary*, the novel's titular antiquary Jonathan Oldbuck, espouses the historical significance of his estate grounds. Sabiron critiques Oldbuck's description of the depression in the fields of Marathon as a profound site of the historical battle between the Persian and the Greeks preceding the war between the Agricola and Caledonians. But his illustrious description is deconstructed by a mendicant called Edie Ochiltree for whom the ruins of Marathon are nothing more than the remnants of a wedding

barbecue. Sabiron points out, “Through this character, Scott warns the reader against a historical reading of space, inviting him to look at the landscape and read it without any prejudice or bias. In addition to being a repository of folk wisdom and local history, Ochiltree is the character who has an outstanding ability to navigate the novel’s spaces, to read into the palimpsest of space” (212). The point of this passage supports the aim of this thesis to look upon spaces outside predetermined destinations.

Just like Ochiltree’s ability to navigate through the palimpsest of space, Baboo Nob Kissin’s ability to appropriate space is guided by an inner motivation of Bhakti which stands quite outside the dictates of a purely imperial geography which would have characters towing the imperial line, behave very differently. Characters like Bhyro Singh and Kesri Singh, who are recruits in the East India Company unit are classic examples of individuals who reinstate the imperial geography be it on land or at sea, as they assiduously pursue the divisive practices of caste and rank enforced by the British rule. Anupama Arora, rightly points out how Captain Chillingworth, the British captain of the Ibis and Subedar Bhyro Singh, the Indian overseer in charge of maintaining discipline aboard the ship, “maintain absolute imperial division between “us” and “them”” (“The Sea is History”, 35), “asserting themselves as the ultimate lawgivers on the ship” (35). That it is the imperative of literary geography to identify within the narrative such spaces which stand on their own is what this essay informs us. From a Saidian point of view regarding subsumed geographies to Scott’s bold assertion to look at a space ahistorically, the next section looks at contemporary postcolonial concerns on space within postcolonial fictions.

Is it possible to conceive of literary spaces from a perspective that is not necessarily dependent upon a postcolonial or realist lens but on an individual’s motivation or desires? We can understand through the narrative how spaces within the text draw outwards these desires and motivations and compel us to look at these spaces differently. In the book *The Cambridge Companion in the Postcolonial Novel* (2016), Robert Zacharias extensively discusses the evolving

debates surrounding space in postcolonial theory and fiction. Zacharias remarks on the seminal essay "Of Other Spaces" by Michel Foucault, "nowhere does he explicitly acknowledge how thoroughly…colonial space is structured by a singular geopolitical perspective, or how the conceptualization of the colonies as an "other" space effectively positions the colonizer's space as normative" (*The Cambridge Companion*, 209). One could aver from this statement that the coloniser's imperative had been to replicate the metropolis in a new country rather than facilitating the occupied territory to find its own identity. Foucault's elision of the Algerian decolonization war in his essay prompts Gayatri Spivak to comment on this oversight as the topographical reinscription of imperialism not informing Foucault's presuppositions ("Can the Subaltern Speak?", 85-86) since the severity of the decolonization war was so brutal, it would be hard for the French to ignore it for a very long period of time according to Spivak. Edward Said too comments on Foucault ignoring the imperial context of his own theories (*Culture and Imperialism*, 278). Said emphasizes that the aesthetics of novel writing during the 19th and 20th centuries were very much influenced by the imperialism of the times. In citing all these debates, Zacharias primarily aims towards the excavation of spaces in postcolonial fictions which operate as counter-sites to being simply imperial geography. In a compelling close reading of the space of the Evil Forest from *Things Fall Apart*, Zacharias illustrates that upon the arrival of the Christian missionaries, they request to build a church in the village of Mbanta. The local leaders happily offer the growing religious community "as much of the Evil Forest as they cared to take" (*Things Fall Apart*, 109). Each clan had its Evil Forest, the narrator explains, a place that was "alive with sinister forces and powers of darkness" (109) and the leaders had offered this land as a "battlefield" to test the missionaries' "boast about victory over death" (109). However, to their surprise, the missionaries not only accept the land, but go on to build their church in the forest without suffering any retribution from the forces of darkness, a lack of punishment that is interpreted as evidence of missionaries' "unbelievable power" (110). Zacharias questions as to how does

one understand this space and it would be prudent to quote at length the explanation offered by him in this context.

> "On the one hand, what is at stake here is clearly a specific, concrete location, a literal place that is the beginning for a process that will culminate in the wider area's colonization. On the other hand, what makes it possible for the missionaries to build on that particular site, and what subsequently imbues that building with the power that will facilitate the colonial project, are competing conceptualizations of that space….In Soja's terms, the missionaries of Achebe's novel transgress the taboos surrounding the Evil Forest with impunity because they hold to an entirely different understanding of the lived social space itself. The point, emphatically, is not that missionaries are proved "right" in their demystification of the Evil Forest; after all, they promptly re-sacralize the location, constructing a Christian church on the site. Nor is it particularly important that the competing social visions of the forest are routed through religion…Much as scholars have recognized the political assumptions behind the argument that the widespread de-sacralization of temporality in the eighteenth century resulted in a universal, homogeneous, and empty time, the de-sacralization of space does not result in an abstract empty space that is experienced equally around the globe…. The key point, rather, is that while the missionaries in Achebe's text accept the offer to build in the Evil Forest because they reject the Igbo's sacralization of it and see it as "merely" natural space, even this very idea of "natural" is produced as part of the missionary/ colonial project. As Soja reminds us, the space of "nature" is socially produced, an idea "filled with politics and ideology, with relations of production, and with the possibility of being significantly transformed." Indeed, the missionary's understanding of the Evil Forest as being merely natural is deeply ideological, signifying the form of precolonial "emptiness" or "blankness"…which actively anticipates the colonial encounter. In this context, it makes little sense to argue whether the Evil Forest of Achebe's novel is ultimately a "real" space or an "imagined" one – it is both real and imagined, and for this reason, its implications stretch well beyond the churchyard. Fittingly, the novel's final words reveal that the new District Commissioner has plans to write a history of the area with a deeply political name that will inscribe it onto both the colonial map and the linear narrative of historical progress: The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger. The Evil Forest, and the host of similar places that can be found across postcolonial fiction, are the "counter-sites" of postcolonialism, places where the spatial multiplicities of colonialism are most pressing and conflicted, and thus laid open toward the future." (222-223)

Zacharias concludes by indicating that if Foucault was looking to understand colonial spaces as heterotopias, which are simultaneously represented, contested,

and inverted places which are "outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality," ("Of Other Spaces", 4) it is to places such as these that he could have turned. Though Zacharias elicits a case for counter-sites like the 'Evil Forest', the analyses is left open for interpretations as to how such a space maybe read. In this light the sub section on "Fokir's body and the Sunderban Landscape" in Chapter 5, consistently asserts agency of the wilderness of the Sunderban landscape upon social space mediated through the body of Fokir and his vocation as a fisherman.

The preceding passage shows how postcolonial scholars too beg reading spaces within the postcolonial text from a different lens. One of the important effects of the spatial turn was the decoupling of the notion of progress with temporality which in the colonial context meant a temporal demarcation of the colonized space before and during the course of imperial occupation as pre-modern and the period following decolonization as the advent of the modern, leading to progress and modernization. Bertrand Westphal explains that the concept of temporality that had dominated the pre-war period had lost much of its legitimacy and the " weakening of traditional historicity, alongside the decoupling of time and progress, has made possible the valorizing re-reading of space" (*Geocriticism*, 25).

The repeated assertion of this thesis to read spaces by 'unglunking' it, answers the question "why literary geography" and the "how" of its effectiveness by validating Bahram Modi's progress in *River of Smoke* in the colonial era, and also how the Western notion of progress is held in much less value by Bahram as against his inner motivations, under the subsection "Of Fabulations and Valuations". Commenting upon Edward Soja's statement that the "despatializing historicism" of the late-nineteenth and early twentieth century "occluded, devalued, and de-politicized space" (*Postmodern Geographies*, 4), Robert Tally remarks, that "After the two world wars, these spaces reasserted themselves in critical consciousness" (*Spatiality*, 13) and that the dominant, time-focused discourse of the prewar era that served to mask underlying spatial realities began

to get exposed. Therefore the Indian Ocean being a vibrant trade route between India and China is read in the thesis not merely as imperial in its geography but a harbinger of indigenous progress.

Likewise discussions on Baboo Nobo Krishno's appropriation of space through Bhakti and its treatment through humor encourage the reader to look at literary space in unaccustomed ways as they excavate counter-sites in the form of Vrindavan divined by Nobo Krishno in his mind as well as through the figure of Zachary, the second mate of the Ibis. This alludes to Joanne Sharp's mode of critical reading of a text as well as to Franco Moretti's claim that the story makes its own spaces. This subsection does a quick bird's eye view on the issue of authenticity of representation in realist and postcolonial literary theory while understanding distance as a condition of reading a text, and space as a mode of going against what theory suggests.

Who is the autochthonous being, what is the locale, country, world of his/her inhabitance, and which literature or theory comes closest to representing him/her happens to be the subject of endless debate. "…we are all already contaminated by each other, that there is no longer a fully autochthonous *echt*-African culture awaiting salvage by our artists (just as there is, of course, no American culture without African roots)" ("Is the Post- in Postmodernism", 354). *Man with a Bicycle*, a wooden sculpture of Yoruba origins, the touchstone of Kwame Anthony Appiah's seminal article "Is The Post- in Postmodernism the Post- in Postcolonial?" inspires a somewhat harsh critique on postcolonial literature terming it "*comprador*" (348). The sculpture's contemporaneity (Yoruba man with a bicycle) appeals James Baldwin, one of the commentators, for the show on African art organized in New York in 1987. The terms of contemporaneity though are suspect, since in Baldwin's eyes the placement of the bicycle (a signifier of modernity) against the Yoruba native is seen as a novelty, unlike its usual presence elsewhere rendering the landscape of Yoruban Africa premodern. Appiah's own contention about the sculpture is like this,

> "*Man with a Bicycle* is produced by someone who does not care that the bicycle is the white man's invention: it is not there to be the other to the Yoruba Self; it is there because somebody cared for its solidity; it is there because it will take us further than our feet will take us; it is there because machines are now as African as novelists." (357)

In the supposed unexpected juxtaposition of the bicycle with the Yoruba man, the Yoruban sculptor is interested in viewing the cycle as a material possibility affording the Yoruba man to travel far and fulfill his mission. The sculptor is free from the anxiety of pairing the indigenous man with a modern invention, for had he felt the oddity of this pairing, the notion of a Yoruba man travelling far as he marked new territories would never be imagined. The marriage between the Yoruba man and the bicycle is much like a wedding between foreign form (the novel), with a local voice as Franco Moretti puts it. Appiah's comprehension of the bicycle being as African and not an 'other' to the Yoruba self implies a similar inclusionary vision for the novel towards its local counterpart. Of course the journey will be one full of obstacles and bumps but together they traverse a terrain which encourages making of new geographies. The spatial limbo Nob Kissin's voice casts in the narrative shifts our attention from the routinely rehearsed terrain of imperial geography to the unchartered mentalscapes of a devotee. Ghosh's experiment with a character like Nob Kissin is about reading a text from a position that allows another kind of imaginary- a possibility of viewing the indigenous geography from a devotee's eye.

Baldwin's wide remove from the African landscape lies far from making him an authentic commentator of Yoruba art. A similar case is posited on the postcolonial writer whose "double dependence on the university and the European publisher" (348) at best makes the writer a competent inventor of the native landscape that he sells to the West and to his native compatriots as well. Appiah's alluding to the 'post' in postcolonial novels is a context that not only rejects the Western imperium but also the nationalist legitimizing project of the bourgeoisie that hearkens to a past of autochthonous ancestors who shape an originary background of the nation. But we are all already contaminated and 'post' in postcolonial novels according to Appiah speaks to a fundamental appeal to human

suffering an "ethical universal" (353). A point that contrasts Appiah's assertion of the postcolonial novel located more towards a universal ethics is that of Robert Young for whom the resistance narrative of postcolonial literatures is "locked to a particular problematic of power" (216) which it foregrounds tirelessly. And this is so because of the existent imbalances of power in the world and how they play out. It is important to understand that this problematic of power is very specific so far as the geography from where it emanates goes and resistance narrative too is guided by the specificities of this geography. Another point, not so much of difference but conditionality that Appiah and Young make, is about the realist criteria grounded in the context of local cultures, traditions etc. The criteria is important in postcolonial literatures according to Young since it articulates ways in which "larger historical events are felt on the pulses of the people who undergo them" (218). For Appiah the realist criteria apart from hearkening to the originary past which according to him is already inflected is also burdened with the anxiety of creativity. How much to invent/alter to appeal a wider readership and what is lost in terms of this compromise. Meenakshi Mukherjee too alludes to the anxiety of "Indianness" (166) in *The Perishable Empires* (2003) before concluding the chapter with Amitav Ghosh's novel *The Shadow Lines* that in her opinion betrays no such anxiety as it "attempts to prove nothing" (184). One of the ways of getting around the debate of the situatedness of a text and most encouragingly so would be to attempt making inroads into the local settings and contexts that the narrative offers. Like in *Things Fall Apart* (2001) an Igbo village and its local settings can be analysed to understand how an African text maybe opened up for comparative study in a theoretical strategy that scholar and critic, Nirvana Tanoukhi believes, begins with Africanness and progresses towards an Africa as a possibility ("African Roads", 460). A detailed textual analysis of this point has been carried out in Chapter 3, along with an exposition of spaces generated within realist and postcolonial texts. Tanoukhi echoes Appiah's implied philosophy of the "lack of geographical consciousness" (456) of the Igbo people and their matter of fact existence in precolonial times. An unselfconsciousness that is evident in the works of sculptors like Francis Akwasi of Kumasi who specialize in carving

for international markets in the style of traditional sculptors ("Is the Post- in Postmodernism", 338). The imitations by these natives are free from space clearing motivations that inscribe a piece of art with the individualism of postmodern times. The sculptor's motivation apart from economic self-sufficiency is a happy proliferation of his craft where a piece of high value art harmoniously coexists with other plastic arts.

The endeavour of exploring geographical scales as a literary approach is entirely new as Tanoukhi states in her widely circulated essay "The Scale of World Literature" (2011). Geographical scale, Neil smith explains, depends on societal activity for its construction which in turn produces or is produced by the geographical structures of social interaction ("Contours", 62). The materiality of spatial construction comes in handy since it allows a certain freedom of performance that seems otherwise to elude the somewhat tight classifications of literary works. Tanoukhi brings out wonderfully how the Yoruba sculpture *Man with a Bicycle* is laden with the imaginary burden of the premodern (since that is how Africa is created in the postcolonial novel of the 60s).The juxtaposition of the Yoruba native against the bicycle instead of inspiring possibility suggests an impossibility of movement in the comment by James Baldwin "His errand might prove impossible" (qtd. in "Is the Post- in Postmodernism", 339). On the other hand Appiah's critique of the image, elicits the solidity of the bicycle preceding any other concern but the fact that the cycle will take the Yoruba man much further than his feet. The Yoruba man's landscape dictates his progress much more than a distant reading of the sculpture as postcolonial novel.

This thesis is interested in excavating scalar distance in terms of spatial differentiation that occurs within the text, as a means to reduce the reader's scalar distance from a text in her interpretation and reception of the same. The explication of space from within the literary geographical framework becomes essential towards reducing this distance. Amitav Ghosh's novels are well suited to a geographical scalar approach for a number of reasons and some are pointed out here. Ghosh's novels are hard to categorise under a single rubric of national or

postcolonial or any other because of the way they appropriate space. The locale, nation, or worlds exist as nested spaces in his narratives, instead of hierarchised denominations seeking orderly ascension. The narratives do not get stuck in terms of locales or nationalities, they are constantly on the move also works towards pushing the boundaries of what a realist or postcolonial novel might be and this considerably alters the way one may read Ghosh's novels. While Sharp comments upon the structure of the text mirroring the structure of the world Rushdie creates, as well as the stance that different narratives create descriptions of a certain kind, Appiah's essay only reinstates the need to read a novel beyond postcolonial or realist motivations. Tanoukhi's emphasis on the specificity of a text by going into the context and setting of a text furthers Appiah's thesis of reading each text singularly. By keenly studying the context and setting of a text, the form of the novel is found enabling in pursuing the specificity of the text thereby discovering the Indianness of a novel and progressing towards India as a possibility.

From the preceding sections we can come to a working theoretical framework according to which literary works emphasise on experience of spaces and space making activities. By becoming conscious of the form of fiction we deal with we can expect specific delineation of spaces in consonance with the structure of the texts. When this premise is positioned in a literary geographical frame, the text becomes the key player in generating its own geography. Brosseau argues "think of novels as geographers in their own right, who generate geographies from within" (*The Routledge Handbook*, Location 462). Describing two main lines of inquiry within contemporary literary geography, Brosseau explains the first line of inquiry approaches "literature as a kind of alternative geographic epistemology" (Location 457). The second examines literature from a postcolonial perspective along the lines of Said's works. It also broadly defines sociological perspectives and treats it as a form of discursive intervention in the cultural and spatial politics of identity and difference. This thesis takes recourse through both the approaches since the choice of texts involved warrants engagement with postcolonial theory, though is not restricted to just Said. Thus the thesis works around literary theories grounding the novels under consideration

and yet treating the texts as agents producing its own geographies as is explored in chapters 3, 4 and 5.

2.5 Scales

This section deals with a brief explanation about geographical scales and how it is important for the thesis. The concept of scales itself being contentious, this section clarifies different perspectives of scales available and how they are employed to avoid conflating notions of scales when applied from different perspectives.

Scale is a concept of geography and is not indistinct from space since scales according to Neil Smith are "levels of representation, experience and organization of geographical events and processes" (*Dictionary*, 724) that unfold in space. The cartographic and methodological aspects of scale are not applicable for this study since cartographic scales entail units of measurement denoting the expanse of distance a map covers in its depiction of the earth and the extent of detail this depiction involves. To quote from the *Dictionary of Human Geography* (2009),

> The traditional definition in cartography refers to map resolution. All maps represent the world by reducing the size and diversity of its component spaces for visual display, digitally or on paper. Cartographic scale expresses the mathematical relationship between the map and the Earth, usually denoted as a representative fraction. For example, the small fraction, 1:500,000, indicates that one unit of distance on the map represents 500,000 units of Earth space. Such a map would show large expanses of terrain – much more than say, the larger fraction of 1:24,000. Hence the common confusion between large-scale (or large-fraction) maps that show less space but typically more detail, and small-scale maps that show more space, but with less detail (*Dictionary*, 664).

Methodological scale is more empirical in nature in terms of employing the appropriate scale or scales that address the research question at hand, "This is the scale or resolution of data collection, with the familiar cascade from micro (body) to macro (globe)" (*Dictionary*, 665). It involves various analytical complexities, like social patterns and processes that may be sorted according to

their scale of operation and, thus ensure an appropriate match between research questions and the scale of analysis when developing a research design (665). Thus both cartographic and methodological scales are applicable to empirical experiments and measurements in the field of geography, but geographical scales are about the production of scales themselves which result out of social activities and processes. According to the *Dictionary of Human Geography* (2009) the third kind of scale namely the scale of social production, also named geographical scale by Neil Smith is viewed as a spatial scale that does not, rest as a fixed platform for social activity and processes,

> …but are instead outcomes of those activities and processes, to which they in turn contribute through a spatially uneven and temporally unfolding dynamic. This recursive relationship between social processes producing scales and scales affecting the operation of social processes is one aspect of the socio-spatial DIALECTIC: the idea that social processes and space – and hence scales – mutually intersect, constitute, and rebound upon one another in an inseparable chain of determinations. (665)

This definition is aimed at clarifying the point that theoretically, space/spatiality do not conflate with scales at all; on the other hand there exists a significant mutuality between the two, since one is a consequence of the other, that is social processes produce scales and the creation of scales effect social processes. Space has been dealt with as metaphor through the thesis whereas scale has been used as a concept of spatial differentiation and spatial contest. For example the chapter "Waterways in the texts of Amitav Ghosh" establishes the Indian Ocean as scale wherein the theoretical understanding of scale as discussed by Neil Smith is retained through the chapter while theories like imaginary geographies, fabulation etc. are used to frame spatial metaphors which enhance the concept of scale when applied to water bodies. The attempt to establish waterways as scale broadens the corpus of scales comprising, body, home, community, urban region, nation and the global as discussed by Neil Smith

A similar concern regarding conflating the notion of scales and space is voiced by Adam Moore, when he argues that as much as scales may be borne out of socio-economic processes, scales may also be looked upon as epistemological

or as a representational trope, he quotes Marston "Possibly the only point about which geographers are in agreement is that scale is not a fixed or given category, rather it is socially constructed, fluid and contingent" ("Rethinking Scale as a Geographical Factor", 204). However, a well rounded explication of scales especially in relation to waterways and the body is dealt with in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5, to specifically enunciate its given role in the proffered contexts.

Adam Moore explains in his article "Rethinking Scale as a Geographical Factor" (2008), human geography's increasing engagement with scales which mirrors developments in popular culture and social science. Though he mentions the summary rejection of the notion of scales by human geographers when scales are referred to globalization literature, geographers do talk of a fluid and changing world of spatial relations "and have consequently developed a greater interest in processes of scale making, rescaling and the politics of scale" (204). Giving a brief historical description Moore explains that the first cohort of geographers to take up theoretical questions of scale and scale politics emerged from the Marxist-influenced, political-economic tradition of geography.

> "In the 1970s they began to examine how forces of capitalism were shaping and reshaping space in the post-Fordist era, and in particular the role of the production of scales in facilitating these processes. Prior to this point scale was primarily treated as inert, abstract space, and the central scale questions for human geographers were operational and methodological – that is, identifying the spatial levels at which specified processes operated." (204)

Moore, argues that in the definition and attributes of scale, it is possible to identify two diffuse but discernible trains of thought that roughly align along materialist-idealist lines. The first attribute often promulgated by political-economic geographers is, to see scales as material socio spatial entities: Neil Smith describes them as the 'materialization of contested social forces' ("Contours", 66) and 'platforms for specific kinds of social activity … platforms of absolute space in a wider sea of relational space' ("Scale", 725). "Scales, from this standpoint, are not independent geographical heuristics, but correspond to real

material processes, events and spatial formations" (204). According to Neil Smith, several propositions are involved in scale building: first, the construction of geographical scale is a primary means through which spatial differentiation takes place. And this aspect is particularly explored in the thesis through the texts of Ghosh. The second feature of scales as per Smith is, an understanding that geographical scale might provide us with a more plausible language of spatial difference and third, the construction of scale is a social process:

> "…scale is produced in and through societal activity which in turn produces and is produced by geographical structures of social interaction; and fourth, the production of geographical scale is the site of potentially intense political struggle. If these propositions have even partial validity, then a theoretical exploration of the production of scale might help to provide both a language and a set of connections for dealing with spatial difference." ("Contours", 62)

The third point is contentious since it posits the birth of scales in a social space only. But the thesis brings out how scale constructions happen as a result of interactions outside the social space as well. And this aspect gets highlighted when we study natural landscapes interacting with social spaces which are imbued with material activities of trade, culture, and other kind of practices.

Geographer K. Jones's idea that two kinds of spaces exist, 'spaces of dependence' and 'spaces of engagement', and, that we should think of scales not as areal units but as networks of interaction is important. Spaces of dependence she considers fixed, such as "localized arenas within which individuals are embedded by their social, employment, or business interests" ("Scale as Epistemology", 25). Spaces of engagement, she concludes, are those "sets of relations that extend into spaces of dependence, but also beyond them to construct networks of association, exchange, and politics" (25). There is merit in the idea that the construction of scale proceeds through representational practices and that scales may thus be "understood as situated relationally within a community of producers and readers who give the practice of scale meaning" (26). She goes on to point out that this construction is continually contested and that scale is the result of contestation, and "how it is resolved at one moment may be quite

different from how it is resolved at some later time" (26). This point too is very important and enriches Smith's own contention when he states "scale is the criterion of difference not between places so much as between different kinds of places" ("Contours", 64). The concept of scales and its application will be alluded to as we proceed through the thesis wherein examples from texts will be used to explicate the context at hand. Though the thesis will begin by studying scales through material processes of trade and culture, Jones' conception of scales as representational and produced by readers who give it meaning will be instrumental in suggesting a shift in the way scales may be perceived by the end of the fifth chapter.

An important conclusion to this section on scales is the employment of scales both as relational and embedded. Both aspects achieve different purposes pertinent for this thesis. The embedded nature of scales and the fixed geography they define are important owing to a concentration of power within them and also for demarcating borders between spaces. Mike Crang ascribes to embedded scales the formation of meta-regions like the Mediterranean. But when scales are viewed as relational not only do they link fixed geographies but disturb the sanction of concrete borders by making them permeable. One can extend the notion of permeability to even consider linking the scale of landscapes to the scale of the body.

2.6 A Brief Historical Sweep of Space by Neil Smith and the Problematic Surrounding Social Space

The geographical basis of the thesis involves looking at the notion of geographical scales that emerge within social space. How these notions come into existence will be discussed in this section apart from enunciating how these theories are important in reading Ghosh's texts. Neil Smith, in his book *Uneven Development: Nature Capital and Production of Space* (2010), describes how space is confounded with matter by the Greeks. Though Aristotle and Plato were able to separate space more and more from matter, seeing the two as independent, they too agreed upon the "unseparability of space and matter" (97). Thereafter came

the Newtonian conception of space wherein Newton made a distinction between absolute space and relative space. Absolute space according to Newton did not have any relation to anything external, itself remaining constant and immovable in nature whereas he considered relative space as some movable dimension or measure of absolute space. A question that comes to mind is why is it so important to separate space from matter and have separate notions of absolute and relative spaces. Reading through the works of geographers like Neil Smith (2010) and David Harvey (1996) convey the idea that in the earlier conceptions of space, space was understood as a term integrated with nature, "space, substance and meaning were one" (*Uneven Development*, 96). This kind of thought becomes problematic when space creation activity is perceived within a capitalist framework in which case space is 'social' or in other words "the relativity of social space is determined by the particular social relations that obtain in a given society" (103). The social space in question here is one that is independent of external first nature but a consequence of being humanly produced second nature. First nature is described as external nature by Smith, a nature which is "pristine, God-given, autonomous" (11), and the raw materials from where are used to build society. The problem therefore lies in this distinctive conception of social space seen through the frame of economics only, since social space is imbued with social practices borne not just out of market economies, but based on emotions and lived experiences of everyday life. If one were to bring both emotions and lived experiences of everyday life under the umbrella term of culture, then different cultures will be found to shape themselves around different geographies. In which context it would be pertinent to mention Fernand Braudel's landmark work *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, which describes a Mediterranean culture around the Mediterranean. For example, Braudel comments that the Mediterranean comes into existence through human ingenuity, effort and work to continually recreate it (276). This in fact could be made the very basis of spatial differentiation that Smith describes when he talks of geographical scales as the "criterion of difference…between different kinds of places" ("Contour", 64). Such a differentiation distinguishes the littoral spaces

from those of the inland, in customs, manners, social structures, economies etc. This spatial differentiation also elicits a differential politics so far as social and economic cooperation and competition are concerned. Though scales are placed within the regions of social spaces, the inevitable presence first nature exerts on social lives occasioned by the interface between these two natures warrants a re-examination of scales across geographies spanning both first and second natures.

2.7 Dialectics in the Representation of Nature

The dialectics involved in the representation of nature may be a way to surmount the discussion in the previous section. Noel Castree in his book *Nature* (2005) states that in contemporary geography there are, broadly speaking, three main variations on the idea that our conceptions of nature are just that: "we routinely confuse with the things they denote" (124). The first he mentions as 'myths' and 'orthodoxies' or false beliefs that have become influential, like the idea of nature being wild and inhospitable standing in stark opposition to the social world. Literary depictions of nature through folklores are often ignored in a real world. But for indigenous communities these lores are pivotal in negotiating and living in relative harmony with nature. Second, "geographers have shown how surrounding ideas of nature are woven into the process of hegemony… that is, rule by consent rather than coercion" (124). This is almost a corollary to the preceding point since contestation and not cooperation is looked at as a means to exist. Stories and their generative emotions do much to humanize the natural. This particular point has been amply fleshed out in the fifth chapter titled "Bodies in Movement Practice and The Virtual Medium". Finally, Castree states that still other geographers maintain that what we call nature is an effect of discourse, wherein representation and reality 'implode'. Castree explains that, speech, writing, imagery and also sound are some of the ways in which we re-present nature to both ourselves and others. Nature is depicted through song and poetry to film and novels in society, conveying people's understandings of nature through these from.

> "When it comes to those things we classify as natural, these various forms of representation all arguably have two things in common. First, because nature cannot speak for itself – be it our bodies, a dolphin, a tree or microbe – we must *speak for it*. In other words, we routinely re-present nature in the sense of being its representative, just as a politician stands for his or her constituents. Second, any act of speaking for those things said to be natural inevitably involves a second element of representation: a *speaking of*." (*Nature*, 124)

This 'speaking of' as per Castree entails depicting, framing or staging nature in ways that the person doing the representing thinks is most fitting. But given the space of literature, this representation cannot be entirely innocent or simplistic. It is overlaid both by informed means of representation like the usage of theories as well as imagination. Perhaps when geographical spaces are made to interact with literary spaces, the fixed notions of nature are bound to be addressed. Ghosh's works are remarkable for upsetting the hegemony of representation in language and practice, against framing nature.

It is befitting to mention here the positioning of landscapes and their representation throughout the thesis in continuation with Castree's dialectics on the subject. Since this thesis is about literary geography, landscape being one of the elements explored in conjunction with economy or the body and thus is expressed and employed in various ways. In its introduction to the book *Envisioning Landscapes, Making Worlds: Geography and the Humanities* (2011), landscapes are understood as experienced, lived, looked at and produced by natural processes as well as cultural processes (Location 475) and this definition is well suited to the method of employing landscapes in the thesis. For example in the chapter "Waterways in the texts of Amitav Ghosh" the Wordy market is explored for its unusual geographical feature which lends itself to unconventional forms of conducting business. Its market is an economy which is inclusive in nature, serving the needs and fashion interests of severely cash short people.

The mutuality of landscapes, psychic lives and literature are explored in the thesis using notions of fabulation, topophilia, imaginative geography and the

cultural production of space. However this thesis would like to draw attention to a fascinating concept of landscapes called *tinai*, from Dravidian texts dating back to the sixth century. Martha Ann Selby explains this sort of geographical constructions as *process,* of telling spatial stories and "how, through imaginative and expressive acts and performances, space becomes a "practiced place" in the Tamil region" (*Tamil Geographies*, 2). In the *ca ̇nkam* corpus of poems, the earliest recorded literature in Tamil literatures dwell extensively on the poetic aesthetic of "*akam* ("inside"), with love as their subject matter, and poems of *pu ̇ram* ("outside"), with war and public life as their subjects…. A*kam* and *pu ̇ram* are…complex concepts that…pervade Tamil culture…encompassing such "interior/exterior" pairings as heart/body surface, kin/non-kin, and home/world" (7). But these demarcations, Selby explains are successful only when delineated through the specific ecotype of tinais or one of the five "landscapes," into which space is organized, and that correspond to the major ecotypes (*nilam*) of the Tamil region: hill, field, pasture, seashore, and wasteland. Each of these zones are mood invested - the regions of kurinji (forested hills corresponds to the mood – lover's union), mullai (pastoral tracts corresponds to the mood – patient waiting for the lover's return), marutam (wetlands or marshes corresponds to the mood – jealous quarreling) and neytal (littoral corresponds to the mood – lamenting the lover's absence) and palai (dryland/scrub corresponding to the mood of separation) ("Can the Tinai", 2).

While exploring the mood investment of space in Baboo Nobo Krishno's divining the space of Vrindavan on the Ibis in Chapter 3, the thesis relies more on Gerard Hoffman's ("Space and Symbols") notion of mood investment which works more as a narratological device of converting the colonial space of the Ibis into a space that corresponds with the character's inner desires. Unlike Cankam poetry, the text does not use direct allusions of spaces like Vrindavan since these are more mental geographies that occupy the character's mind and are set in contestation against a setting of colonial control that are in opposition to such divinations. Though the ecotypes of the tinais are evocative of bhakti both in the Shaivaite and Vaishnav traditions, they cannot be employed effectively to push

the notion of landscapes to support the context at hand. Also the aesthetic tradition of tinais are fixed in their emotive aspect tied to the ecotype under discussion whereas instances tied to the emotive aspect of landscapes explored in Chapter 3, 4 and 5 do not necessarily correspond to the categories fixed by tinais. Selby explains how,

> "*Tinai* is an extremely difficult word to translate neatly. The word "landscape" and the phrase "poetic situation" are currently the accepted and the most widely used definitions, but there is a problem with both. The problem is one of scope and boundary. *Tinai* is, in a very real sense, the artistic space circumscribed by the poets, along with everything contained therein….In fact, the *Tolk ¯appiyam* stresses that emotion (or mood) is the only thing within a *tinai* that is actually fixed…."(*Tamil Geographies,* 24-25)

The problem of scope and boundary as Selby admits are in fact difficulties owing to which this concept cannot be employed here. However, eco-critical readings of wilderness address the reading of landscapes in context to the wilderness of the Sunderbans and how human and non-human spaces may interact more cohesively. Greg Garrard argues that "Wilderness narratives share the motif of escape and return … but the construction of nature they propose and reinforce is fundamentally different" (*Ecocriticism*, 59). In contrasting between pastoral narratives and wilderness narratives, Garrard explains that the latter represented sharp distinction between forces of culture and nature.

Fokir is most at ease as he dwells on his boat journeying the wild mangrove channels indicating his escape from a social space that he finds oppressive. For Fokir though the proverbial return from wilderness is about finding mutuality in motivations and objectives that harmonise the wild spaces with those of the social. He finds such an opportunity in assisting Piya, a cetologist from USA, wherein wilderness and science form a harmonious alliance transforming the representation of the wilderness from uncivilized to humanized. Deep in the waters of the Sunderbans, resting on Fokir's boat while in pursuit of tracing the habitat of group of dolphins who are circling the boat, the air is interspersed with their "quiet regular breathing" (*The Hungry Tide*, 157) forming

percussive counterpoints to Fokir's humming, Piya muses on what it means to communicate,

> "She imagined the animals circling drowsily, listening to echoes pinging through the water, painting pictures in three dimensions - images only they could decode. The thought of experiencing your surroundings in that way never failed to fascinate her: the idea that to 'see' was also to 'speak' to others of your kind, where simply to exist was to communicate". (159)

The aesthetics of representation is complicated with another kind of association wilderness is linked with and that is with the "primal mind" (*Ecocriticism*, 61). Garrard points to the inevitable difficulties of wilderness readings being associated to the primal mind as against the cultural mind. This idea is not lost in *The Hungry Tide*, when we encounter the innate distrust Kanai, an interpreter from Calcutta harbours towards Fokir. In and through their conversation, the artifice of the so called cultural mind invested in the social mannerisms of city dwellers is pitted against the hardness of Fokir's unrelenting dislike and recognition of Kanai's hypocritical ways. This aspect is dealt with in detail under the sub section "Fokir who only knows how to fish", in Chapter 5.

2.8 Space

This section attempts to look at the notion of space as a concept that goes beyond geography. We need a definition that reveals to us the presence of space in everything that surrounds us and space as a heuristics as well. Edward Soja recognizes a need to expand the limits of one's geographical imagination. He mentions in the introduction to his book *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places* (1996), how scholars and citizens have begun to "think about the *spatiality* of human life in much the same way that we have persistently approached life's intrinsic…social and historical qualities" (2) while the social and historical qualities of space remain inflected by lived spaces.

Henri Lefebvre is heralded for his landmark work on the notion of space from the perspective of lived space. "A further necessity is that space – natural

and social, practical and symbolic – should come into being inhabited by…a higher reality" (*The Production of Space*, 34). Lefebvre uses the analogy of light as something that can be considered a higher truth, since we can see in light, light alludes to life and knowledge but incidentally, Lefebvre joins this truth with authority which he explains is not apparent but in effect a reality that governs space, social space in particular. According to Lefebvre, social space is the space of society and social life and man must find or lose himself within this space through a set of tests. These tests could simply be activities and their repetition that augments these spaces and in turn serves authority. Chapter 5, explores a rift in this conception of social space by the sheer refusal of the protagonist to recognize himself through a spatial code assigned to him. For him the truth lies elsewhere, in the rugged landscapes that he negotiates.

Lefebvre offers a trialectics of space that comprises three ideas, i) social practice- a society's secretion of space which it does by deciphering what space means to it, ii) representation of space – conceptualized space, the space of scientists, planners, urbanists and iii) representational spaces – "space as directly lived through its associated images and symbols, and hence the space of 'inhabitants' and 'users'"(39). Lefebvre explains that these spaces are passively experienced, "which the imagination seeks to change and appropriate. It overlays physical space, making symbolic use of its objects" (39). This aspect of space is the mainstay for this thesis, since this is the kind of space that writers create and dwell in. Soja expands Lefebvre's idea of lived space by conferring to it aspects of mystery, partial unknowability and non-verbal subliminality (*Thirdspace*, 68). The idea of space as a subliminal experience rings powerfully with Kalua's character in *Sea of Poppies*, since his relationship with space is a silent one, not necessitating expression or assertion but an experience that he feels through his quiet living in a cattle pen with his bullocks. His home is qualified by words like "unlit darkness" and "doorless entrance" (*Sea of Poppies*, 53) into which things disappear, giving the impression of a non-place, a vacuum so deep that only Kalua can exist in it and all else vanishes. This space is counter-space, a space of resistance brought forth through Kalua's silence and hence potent. Soja concedes

to lived space being home to writers, artists, philosophers, ethnographers etc. who describe spaces. Nevertheless one could argue about spaces described by writers as being those discovered and appropriated variously by characters and events gracing the narrative. Soja concludes his discussion of lived spaces by making a very important point, in relation to lived spaces overlaying the physicality of spaces:

> "Combining the real and imagined, things and thought on equal terms, or at least not privileging one over the other *a priori*, these lived spaces of representation are thus the terrain for the generation of "counterspaces", spaces of resistance to the dominant order arising precisely from their subordinate, peripheral or marginalized positioning." (*Thirdspace*, 68).

Just as Zacharias' argument towards counter-sites in postcolonial fictions that are left open for further interpretations, Soja's discussion of lived spaces resonate very strongly with Said's and Robert Tally's premise of subsumed spaces that cannot be kept hidden or suppressed anymore in narratives. Lived spaces are powerful tools for bringing to surface either the forgotten spaces of deep jungles like the Sunderban landscapes or marginalized spaces like Kalua's abode, demanding reiteration and interpretation. Lived spaces are any man's ownership of space, for him to assert, dwell in or travel in. For example the Ibis' hold which formerly carried convicts and still showed symptoms of its former cargo perceived through the stench inside the hold, its darkness, worn out wood etc, is transformed into an enlivened space through conversations among girmitiya (migrant) women. Deeti, a key protagonist in the novel, experiences her first sense of cultural expansion when she shares culinary recipes of mango achar (pickle) with other women from different cultures aboard the ship:

> The close proximity, the dimness of the light, and the pounding drumbeat of the rain outside, created an atmosphere of urgent intimacy among the women; because they were all strangers to each other, everything that was said sounded new and surprising; even the most mundane of discussion could take unexpected twists and turns. It was astonishing to discover that in making mango achar, some were accustomed to using fallen fruit while others would use none that were not freshly picked; no less surprising was it to learn that Heeru included

> heeng among the pickling spices and that Sarju omitted so essential an ingredient as kalonji. (*Sea of Poppies*, p.241)

This utterly common place exchange transforms the dingy hold of the ship, as its slave narratives from the past history of Ibis' travels are overwritten by tales of lived experiences of simple village women and their methods of pickle making. Scales can be conceived here as a literary tool encouraging a cross over from reading a particular space as slave narrative to indigenous space making activity encapsulating a slice of life in the everyday world of any common village woman. Ghosh's narratives are extremely effective in using the everyday lives of people to reinterpret spaces and imbue them with new meaning.

In Harvey's opinion the material space is a world of tactile and sensual interaction with matter, and one of the ways of experiencing space, through elements, moments and events are "constituted out of a materiality of a certain kind" (*A Critical Reader*, 279) just like space can also be represented through emotions and affects. Harvey opens up the conception of space on a multi-dimensional scale:

> "Space often elicits modification. Complications sometimes arise from the modifications (which all too frequently get omitted in the telling or the writing) rather than from any inherent complexity in the notion of space itself. When for example, we write of 'material', 'metaphorical', 'liminal', 'personal', 'social' or 'psychic' space…we indicate a variety of contexts. Similarly when we construct phrases such as spaces of fear, of play, of cosmology, of dreams, of anger, of particle physics, of capital, of geopolitical tension, of hope, of memory or of ecological interaction…then the terrain of application defines something so special as to render any generic definition of space a hopeless task. " (*A Critical Reader*, 270)

This definition offers enormous freedom in understanding space and also in interpreting it. There need not be a prescribed methodology to understand space and recruit it to adhere to one discipline only. Harvey offers his own triad of absolute, relative and relational spaces charted over a matrix that offers multiple combinatory possibilities such that various aspects of space from walls, bridges, mountains to surrealism, vertigo or claustrophobia may be conceived. Harvey

illustrates this through a story of an affluent gated community in New Jersey shore. “Some of the inhabitants move in relative space on a daily basis into and out of…Manhattan where they set in motion movements of credit and investment moneys that affect social life across the globe, earning…immense money power” (284) which they pump back in to the gated walls to procure “exotic foods and wondrous commodities they need to secure their privileged lifestyle” (284). The inhabitants feel a vague fear, threatened by an undefinable, visceral and unlocatable hatred for all things American arising in the world out there and they call it terrorism. This fear one could argue is relational, since it arises in the minds of the people inside the gated walls and is experienced as a subliminal feeling of the smallness and fragility of their territory as opposed to the bad wide world outside. This causes them to raise their walls and simultaneously raises the limits of their fears too. “Meanwhile, their profligate consumption of energy to power their bullet-proof humvees…takes them into the city. Then, in the compelling …depiction of chaos theory, a butterfly flaps its wings in Hong Kong and a devastating hurricane hits the New Jersey shore and wipes out the gated community”(284). Many residents die too afraid to step outside and in this mass of destruction a lone scientist who had recognized the danger, rescues the woman he loves and belonged to this gated community. Harvey comments, “In the telling of a simple story of this sort it proves impossible to confine oneself to just one modality of spatial and spatio-temporal thinking. The actions taken in the absolute space only make sense in relational terms” (284). Harvey’s story prompts us to reverse the lens to a space outside the gated world and exploring how the narrative changes when we apply it to *The Calcutta Chromosomes* (1996).

2.8.1 Harvey’s Spatial Triad applied to *The Calcutta Chromosome*

The background of the story goes that Ronald Ross’s discovery of the malaria parasite was supported by a group of indigenous people who planted clues in his experiments, their own research being more advanced than Ross’s. So our community of indigenous scientists, live outside the gate and are far removed from the affluence afforded to Harvey’s elite community. Our group of counter-

scientists (their experiments are unrecorded and scientifically inexplicable) travel in relative space, between Renupur, a remote village in Bengal, and Sealdah Station; a portal to go into other worlds from where characters appear and disappear, and the city of Calcutta. Renupur is a space relational to the narrative since it is the progenitor of the story itself; both Mangala and Lakhan, (her trusted assistant) originate from Renupur and are the harbingers of the famous method of interpersonal transference that is key to genetically transferring desired characteristics across generations. The chromosome passes through various bodies, Mangala - Mrs. Aratounian –Urmila and Tara who are/is in effect the same person travelling in time just as Lakhan – Murugan and Antar are the carriers of the chromosomes in the male body. Renupur's relation to the absolute spaces of Calcutta with its monuments and buildings of brick and mortar is curious since the existence of Renupur remains questionable in itself. Calcutta's gatedness is severely breached by all those who are a part of this mysterious experiment. Mangala leads her team through the experiments to isolate the Calcutta Chromosome in Ronald Ross's laboratory which lies at the back of a hospital. The laboratory is the absolute space whose absoluteness is contentious since the space represents enlightenment of Western scientific knowledge, wherein the orderliness of Ross's experiments are rudely manipulated by a scalpel wielding indigenous woman slicing pigeon heads. Phulboni, a writer of local tales broadcasts his love for Her (his mysterious muse) on television, which is being watched by Mangala in the current avatar of Mrs. Aratuonian, a retired school teacher. Mrs. Aratounian is disgusted by such an open lament unlike our woman from within the gated community, who accepts our scientist's affections. Phulboni remains the scorned lover until his subsequent birth as Antar and is united with Tara, through the cyberspace of Ava. A space which is relational in its aspect of time and space since events determine the kind of spaces the narrative may want to enter or exit from. In the story, physical spaces are over layered by imagination such that absolute, relative and relational space, become at once collaborative in their enterprise to build the story of *The Calcutta Chromosomes*. In his discussion on the postcolonial sci-fi aesthetic of *The Calcutta*

Chromosomes, Hugh O' Connel remarks that the narrative's control over futuricity and futurity emphasizing not only,

> "interconnectedness and the undermining of the individual narrative for the necessity of the multitude's narrative, but also information, knowledge, and material necessity. In this sense, a postcolonial politics needs to develop a desire not only to recover so many tragically lost pasts, but also to recover possible futures seemingly lost by imaginations held captive to late capitalist epistemologies. ("Mutating Towards", 792)

Harvey's spatial triad maybe seen as a spatial solution to the narrative complexity of tying in multiple stories within the text and more importantly in imagining futures and recovering pasts which would otherwise be held captive to not just capitalist epistemologies but theoretical epistemologies of aesthetics as well.

2.9 Conclusion

Smith's enunciation of the scale and Nirvana Tanoukhi's interpretation of the postcolonial novel as a reading of the postcolonial condition from a distance using the example of the Yoruba sculptor of the Man and his Bicycle, weave in a geographical scalar concept to that of literary criticism. The spatial contestation invokes the matter of spatial access and how the individual embodies it as much does a distant reading of literature surrounding the local Igbo village by a Western academe and the limitations of interpretation that can understand the postcolonial condition by confining it within landscapes that subscribe to a geographic imaginary which is very imperial in nature. Franco Moretti proposes that space as such is created within the novel and is not dependent upon the form of the novel in question, "There is no picaresque of the border, or *Bildungsroman* of the European in Africa: *this* specific form needs *that* specific space - the road, the metropolis" (*Atlas*, 70). Rather Moretti considers space to be inside and not outside the narrative, "that shapes it from within" (70), so much so that each space determines its own kind of story. Brousseau's proposed methodology in the generation of literary geographies within a text through the study of literary conventions and styles will be woven together with scales and different

representations and of interpretations of space in the texts selected for this thesis. There is an attempt to arrive at different senses of geographical consciousness through the thesis.

Multiple dimensions of looking at Ghosh's texts by weaving in geography, space, scales, literary styles are employed here. This entails implicating imperialism or caste through trade routes on the ocean, which is one of the many subjects explored here. Lefebvre's notion of lived space is implied throughout the text and enriched by a close reading Ghosh's stories while plotting lived spaces across scales. David Harvey's idea of geographical imagination which he considers enabling 'individual(s) to recognize the role of space and place in (their) own biographies and to relate to the spaces (they) see around them, and recognize how transactions between individuals and between organizations are affected by the space that separates them, is also a point of enquiry throughout the thesis. "…to judge the relevance of events in other place…to fashion and use space creatively, and to appreciate the meaning of the spatial forms created by others'" (qtd. in *The Dictionary*, 283), and by ourselves one could add is what is being aimed at in this study. The third chapter begins with this premise and explores fictional spaces emanating within texts such that they may be read against the grain of theories that ground them.

Chapter 3

Amitav Ghosh's Novels: A SlideThrough Literary Conventions and the Emergence of Geographical Consciousness

3.1 Introduction

Two movements regarding the novel are considered for this chapter, first being the novel as a genre itself and its function, along with its placement in the world, in other words the space of the novel and second, the spatiality created within the novel itself. These considerations speak to the primary contention that each literary convention defines its own space, but this space is pliable and open to negotiations such that a slide across frameworks is made possible.

This chapter begins by articulating different kinds of spatialities involved in two literary conventions namely, the realist novel and the postcolonial novel, and how Amitav Ghosh's novels can be read for and against the grain in both. The specific motivation behind choosing the realist novel emerges from the historical situatedness of this convention so far as the emergence of the novel as genre is concerned. The postcolonial novel has been picked since it is one of the significant developments in the path traced by the evolution of the novel, especially keeping in mind a new geographic imaginary that works towards shedding assumptions that constantly question agency of the postcolonial periphery to perform and succeed in the modern world. The importance of this exercise is to establish that a text's existence is specific and relational to its surroundings, both immediate and distant. This notion also speaks to Nirvana Tanoukhi's case for the African novel, in the chapter titled "African Roads" from the book *The Routledge Companion to World Literature* (2012), wherein each

novel is begged singular consideration as opposed to hasty categorization within theoretical bounds. Tanoukhi lifts conflicting critique on Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (2001), above terse theoretical polemics, to suggest the openness a text provides in understanding the many collectivities of narratives within the region of what may be called 'African'. She expands upon this premise by citing how the opening chapter of the novel is a "psychoanalytic reading (*The Routledge Companion*, 456) of Okonkwo, the hero in relation to his father, Unoka. Okonkwo's fame as a wrestler had spread across nine villages, and he was "as slippery as a fish" (3) easily defeating difficult adversaries. Okonkwo had consciously groomed himself into this aggressive yet capable farmer and wrestler, unable to bear the shame of his father's incompetence in securing the needs of his family. Quoting Achebe critic, Abiola Irele's comment on the spatial vagueness of the description of Okonkwo's fame in the first chapter of the novel, Tanoukhi posits that Achebe brings together "local scenes and Igbo customs…description of habitations and landscapes…an ethnography of the communities values and mores"(456) in the subsequent chapters. This according to Irele portrays the Igbo tribal world in all its specificity of daily routines and rituals "attuned to the natural rhythms of its living environment" (qtd. in *The Routledge Companion*, 456). For example, the annual yam festival called the "Feast of the New Yam" (27) beautifully depicts a slice of life from the Igbo people's daily existence.

> "The new year must begin with tasty, fresh yams….All cooking-pots…and wooden bowls were thoroughly washed….Yam foo-foo and vegetable soup was the chief food in the celebration. So much of it was cooked that, no matter how heavily the family ate…there was always a huge quantity of food left over at the end of the day….The festival was now only three days away. Okonkwo's wives had scrubbed the walls and huts with red earth….then drawn patterns on them in white, yellow and green….then set about paintings themselves with cam wood and drawing beautiful black patterns on their stomachs and on their backs."(*Things Fall Apart*, 27-28).

The immediacy of the text draws us deep into a very Igbo world, one that cannot be encountered elsewhere. Tanoukhi's comment on the matter-of-fact existence of a society that lacked geographic self-consciousness before the advent of colonization, and yet asking to read the text for its African-ness seems a bit

misplaced since, it is the singular specificity of the cultural practices and lives of the Igbo people that in itself defines their geographical consciousness. And that this geographical consciousness does not need to rely on a condition like colonization to realize itself remains paramount. However it can be argued that when the text is subjected to comparative methods of study then literary criticism demands a different lens to analyse the text. And it is towards this endeavour that Tanoukhi forwards Appiah's views concerning the decontextualisation of a text every time it is read against a canon, instead of reading each text as a specific encounter (458) such that some of those encounters are available to readers to be made their own as opposed to cultural contexts remaining tangible only within certain geographic boundaries. The specific encounter enunciated by Tanoukhi gets contextualised in a text when the narrative leads to creation of spaces within the text that are either deeply embedded or so intricately woven that it demands a specific kind of reading to draw attention to it as well as explicate the significance of these encounters. At this point the concept of 'distant reading' as proposed by Franco Moretti in his seminal essay, "Conjectures on World Literature" (2000), is brought in to take up from world literary motivations, a mode of decoding that enables reading of culturally imbued contexts. The spatiality associated with such an enunciation finally culminates in a geographic consciousness that crystallizes the focus on geographical scales as a mode of study for this thesis with specific attention to waterways and body as scales.

"If geographers undertake to entertain a relationship that is more dialogical with a literary text, they cannot overlook the specificity of its form…and of its singular use of language in order to be sensitive to the particular way it generates another type of geography, to the particular way it writes people and place, society and space" (Brosseau, *Routledge Handbook* 346-47). Inadvertently, the form of the novel has a singular part to play in the way it projects space. Bringing forward the development of the novelistic form and its role in generating and describing geography from within the text, from chapter two via the theories of Marc Brosseau, Joanne Sharp and Nirvana Tanoukhi's analysis of Appiah's notions of representation in a novel, reading Sea of Poppies

while situating the text in Franco Moretti's mode of distant reading is amply justified for the following reason. Moretti does not approach the novel as an isolated creation but situates it within the trajectory of the historical evolution of the novel whereby every novel is characterized by history, socio-cultural influences and literary conventions of the times as well as literary works that preceded it while forming a connecting link to the works that will follow. Though a literary text is situated within this evolutionary trajectory, it is unique owing to the specific literary style and technique that it follows. Alluding once again to literary geography's methodology of looking at fictive geographies through the use of poetic language, literary conventions or narrative styles in the text, Moretti's theory of distant reading, addresses both the larger picture of the literary world and its influence on a text and the text as a single entity. This rationale suits the formulation of this chapter since it begins with an analysis of the placement of two realist novels in the evolutionary course of realism in India and simultaneously considers their novelistic styles before moving on to more pragmatic concerns of livelihood in a postcolonial reading of *The Hungry Tide.* The literary geography in *Sea of Poppies* is thereafter commented on by addressing elements like livelihood and bhakti which are also themes in the preceding novels but achieve greater harmony in *Sea of Poppies.*

3.2 On the Realist Novel

Representation itself is a protean concept, ever contextual and evolving. A brief illustration is used to show how the representation in portrayal of female characters gets contextualized differently in three novels, *Rajmohan's Wife (*was originally published in 1864 by Bankim Chattopadhyay)*, The Home and the World* (written by Tagore in Bengali and appeared in book form in 1916) and *Sea of Poppies* (2008), written at different points in time. The justification behind selecting these texts lies in their situatedness in time and the consequent socio-political, cultural reading that it inspires. This notion of historical situatedness is proposed by Bakhtin wherein he discusses how concrete social conditions

construct the work at a particular time and place (Donals, 174) so much so that it defines, "choice of subject…choice of content, the selection of form, and the connection between form and content" (qtd. in Donals, 174). For example, *Rajmohan's Wife* belongs to the category of the early Indian novel, in fact it is the first Indian novel written in English which makes it especially suited for study in this chapter since one of the objectives of this chapter is to look at the place of the novel in the world. Meenakshi Mukherjee, in her book *Realism and Reality*, explains the predicament of Indian authors of the times in adapting the form of the novel:

> "The society represented in the novels of Scott, Dickens and Thackeray was very different from the society Indians lived in which in turn was already different from the traditional agrarian life of previous generations which had been the stable cultural background – a background which the extension of British rule had partially disrupted. Since the early novels were written in urban areas by English educated people, this discontinuity was a vital issue. It was responsible for their inability to find a fictional form suitable for the new city society, a form which simultaneously allowed novelists to employ, without doing violence to the mid-nineteenth century 'Indian life'". (6)

Rajmohan's Wife and *The Home and the World* form two important landmarks in the journey of the novel during the 19th and the 20th centuries which are quite prominently discussed by Meenakshi Mukherjee in both *The Perishable Empire* and *Realism and Reality: The Novel and Society in India* and an extensive chapter titled "Epic and Novel in India" in Franco Moretti's *The Novel: History, Geography and Culture*, a 2006 publication. Apart from Mukherjee, *The Home and the World* is also explored by Anjaria Ulka in her book *Realism in the Twentieth Century Indian Novel: Colonial Difference and Literary Form* a 2012 Cambridge University Press Publication. Both the novels are studied in these texts for their experimentation with the form of the novel itself accompanied by the realisms they portray. A second compelling reason that makes the study of these novels well suited to the discussions in this chapter is that *Rajmohan's Wife* and *The Home and the World* offer a cultural synergy while connecting with *Sea of Poppies* in terms of traditions, customs, ideologies, and also in terms of natural landscapes that grace these narratives. More importantly in light of the literary

geographical implication of the thesis, a more thoroughly rehearsed justification behind the selection of texts is enumerated upon in the following section.

This chapter is designed to understand the existence of textual spaces in the select narratives and by doing so adapts literary geography as a method to reading a text. Robert Tally explains, how literary geography implies "a form of reading that focuses attention on space and spatiality in the texts under consideration…it also means paying attention to the changing spatial or geographical formations that affect literary and cultural productions" (*Spatiality*, 80). And this he suggests "can involve looking at the ways that literature registers the shifting configurations of social space over time, as well as the means by which texts represent or map spaces and places" (80). This is in a sense captured by the shifting inner and outer terrains as we move from *Rajmohan's Wife* to *The Home and the World* to *Sea of Poppies*. The inner and outer spaces evolve in their connotations with the evolution of the novel as form through the texts mentioned above. And in this context the novels chosen are important since they are significant markers in the trajectory of the evolution of the novel in the Indian literary landscape. For example the romanticism of Matangini's journey through the forest represents Radha's 'abhisara' or separation from Krishna, indicative of Vaishnav poetic elements in *Rajmohan's Wife*, following the aesthetic of relying upon epics and religious lores as representational elements in the novel. Given this premise, *Rajmohan's Wife* (2009), does much to showcase the rural Bengal landscape, its way of life, social norms and etiquettes followed within and outside the house.

However in *The Home and the World*, Rabindranath Tagore introduces the readers to the characters' thoughts instead of an omniscient narrator as in the case of the previous novel. Consequently, the context and representation of the inner and outer are transformed since the space of the boudoir or andarmahal are aligned with thoughts of Bimala's domesticity and the sitting room becomes the site for inspired rhetoric stoked by the frenzy of the freedom struggle. The rationality and abhisara elements of the inner and outer are seamlessly

communicated in Baboo Nobo Krishno's character in *Sea of Poppies*, for whom the sharp dichotomies of the inner and the outer spaces are negotiated with veritable ease. In breaking the linearity of the novel and interspersing the seriousness of the novel's theme with humour, Ghosh plays with the novel's form and succeeds in communicating the inner and outer terrains of Bhakti and imperial geographies, which remain disparate and conflicted in the earlier novels discussed. Also the textual spaces transform significantly in offering increasing agency to the characters as we traverse through the novels. As the chapter title indicates, "A Slide through Literary Conventions", the readings from the selected texts scale the distance from inner to outer and back to inner effecting different results. The space each character reaches by the end of the narratives are far more invigorating than the space each had occupied at the beginning of the novels, but the extent of freedom that the narratives could have achieved gets problematised owing to experimentations with the form of the novel itself.

3.2.1 Matangini and her fears in *Rajmohan's Wife*

The narrative is a love story revolving around Matangini and her journey outside her home and in a sense outside everything that defines a woman's life in a rural setup. Matangini, the daughter of a poor Kayastha (a person from the kayastha caste) is married to Rajmohan, a man from the adjoining village. Rajmohan, is adept in expedient ways of earning a living, and even though he is without an inheritance or formal education, he is capable of providing for both Matangini and himself. But Rajmohan is given to raging tempers and directs his malevolence in keeping Matangini confined within the boundaries of the home. Not only is stepping out a sin, but the rules of the zenana must apply to the outer perimeters of the home as well. On stepping out of the house to fetch water from the well, an act Matangini very rarely performs, Rajmohan furiously accosts her. Having emptied the contents of the pitcher which Matangini had filled, he turns to her,

> "'Well, queen, where have you been?' The woman firmly whispered back, 'I had gone to fetch water.' She was standing like a statue exactly on the spot where her husband where had asked her to stop. 'To fetch water!' taunted Rajmohan. 'But with whose permission

> did you go out?' 'With nobody's permission.'…'Have I not forbidden you a thousand times?'…The woman proudly replied, 'I am your wife.' Her face reddened and her voice began to be choked. 'I had gone because I thought there was nothing wrong in it.'" (12)

This encounter brings to the fore Matangini's fear as well as her courage. What also becomes evident is Matangini's ability to reason outside the norms of a patriarchal system that infringes even the way a woman ought to think. "I had gone because I thought there was nothing wrong in it" (12). There are several instances in the narrative that illustrate a subtle juxtaposition of iron social norms bearing down on Matangini and her trembling resistance against these impositions. It was uncharacteristic for novels of the times to project women as strident characters. As Mukherjee comments for *Rajmohan's Wife*, "Women's agency is foregrounded, but with a simultaneous reminder of the disruptive social potential of its assertive aspects" (*Rajmohan's Wife*, 135). So the novel thwarts any attempt toward establishing a female protagonist in a role antagonizing social norms. Elaborating upon the denouement of the novel, Mukherjee comments that while suitable justice is meted out to all the characters, Matangini is given an abrupt closure despite episodes from the novel enunciating the strength of the female protagonist who loses sustenance till the novel ends. The disruptive aspect of Matangini's characterization is the contentious romance angle outside the wedlock, an event that did not enjoy narrative space in nineteenth century Indian fiction. Commenting specifically on the issue of romance or courtship in English novels, Mukherjee delineates the realism of a woman's position in Indian society at the time:

> "In the late nineteenth-century India not only were conventions of marriage restrictive, even social intercourse between the sexes was not common in the upper classes. Where girls were married off before puberty there was very little scope for emotional relationships of the kind depicted in English novels….In the contemporary Indian setting however, romantic love could only be illicit, involving either a widow or a courtesan- since only these two categories of women were without legal 'proprietors'…. and…outside structured society, love of this kind was however doomed from the very beginning. In depicting the man-woman relationship each major Indian writer attempted in his own way to negotiate the demands of the novel with its in-built emphasis on self-

> determination with the intransigence of contemporary social reality." (*Realism and Reality*, 70)

While describing how women were positioned in the novelistic mode by Indian writers, Mukherjee does indicate that creating a character following a realistic mode of representation that was a "dominant mode of British Victorian novel" (*Realism and Reality*, 68) was tricky since 'individualism' and the agency afforded to the individual "was not easily reconcilable with the hierarchical and role-oriented structure of Indian society" (68). Inhibited individual choice afflicted both men and women within the Indian social structure, the plight of women being more regressive in nature. The resultant tension accompanying this strained projection of realism translated into restrictive spatial access since the protagonist's life moved within narrow spaces allowing no scope for mobility, economic self sufficiency or vocation. This conundrum gets amplified when applied to the plight of female protagonists. But despite the compulsions of realism in the nineteenth century Indian novel, the narrative offers Matangini the scope to journey from the inner sanctum of the home to the outside.

A compelling example in this direction is when Matangini braves a storm and walks through dense forest in the middle of the night to reach her younger sister Hemangini's house, to inform her husband, Madhav, of an impending dacoity which Rajmohan has planned. This journey to Hemangini's house is fateful because the story reveals Madhav and Matangini's love for each other which they cherish even in the present day. The intensity of their emotions is palpable when Madhav meets Matangini and yet their meeting shows restrain, fettered by social norms. "Then, as if under the maddening agony of soul, she grasped his hands in her own and bending over them her lily face so that Madhav trembled under the thrilling touch of the delicate curls…" (54). The space of the forest is also an expression from Vaishnava poetry as Mukherjee suggests in the afterword to the novel. "Matangini's solitary journey in the dark night through the forest… echoes of Radha's *abhisara* in Vaishnava poetry, when she braved the elements to meet Krishna" (138). Therefore the space of the forest is

transformative since Matangini's fears are conquered and the narrative instance of her journey is able to stand up against the realism of the times.

In the scheme of the narrative, Matangini is made to confess her love for a person who is not her husband and by doing so Mukhrejee feels the author pushes her into "uncharted and ambiguous territory from which neither romantic sympathy nor colonial justice can deliver her to a positive future" (*Rajmohan's Wife*, 134). The narrative element of abhisara, or separation between lovers finds propriety in Matangini's journey through the forest. The forest's geography is the only landscape which offers her the sanction for her love which the plot denies. And therefore love travels outward from the confines of the home towards the zamindar's house through the jungle and storm. Gaston Bachelard's notion of the forest is introduced in the evocation of the forest as landscape owing to its poetic element of imagining space. Robert Tally comments on Bachelard's approach to space, "Bachelard's Poetics of Space deals with the interior spaces of the mind and the imagination….his exploration of the inner spaces of the imagination continues to exert influence over writers, whose work ventures far beyond the simple pleasures of the well-furnished domicile" (*Spatiality*, 116). Tally mentions Bachelard's works being less attuned to the geographical project but relying upon the premise marked out in the previous chapter on frameworks, literary geography is definitely about the experience of place. *Rajmohan's Wife* as a narrative style does not concern the protagonist's thoughts etc, therefore a phenomenology of the signification of the forest through Bachelard succeeds in eliciting a meaningful analysis of the fortuitous journey Matangini makes.

Nature plays the intermediary in facilitating the journey by providing for dark spaces of concealment which are also spaces of protection and shelter. In the middle of her journey Matangini seeks refuge in the dark recesses of the forest pool, hiding herself from the dacoit gang. The forest which was a source of all her fears at the beginning of her journey becomes her benefactor now. She sinks her body into the pool waters, "where the spreading branches of the bur cast a deep shadow, she sat immersed to her chin, so that nothing but her head was visible"

(42). The camouflage is so complete that forest and human are indistinguishable. Matangini loosens her hair into the dark water to conceal her fair face, "so that not even the closest scrutiny could now distinguish from above the dark hair floating over the darkened pool" (42). The forest consumes Matangini, taking her deeper and deeper into its immensity which reflects Matangini's own immensity, concealed from her, by society. French philosopher, Gaston Bachelard, in his celebrated book, *The Poetics of Space* (1958) delineates a philosophical explication of the space of the forest that reveals the immensity within ourselves. This immensity "…is attached to a sort of expansion of being that life curbs and caution arrests, but which starts again when we are alone. As soon as we become motionless…. immensity is the movement of motionless man" (202). The forest inspires this immensity in Matangini and her condition of non movement is supported by the silence of the forest. The topography of the forest is enclosed within itself and open to the possibilities that lie within the spaces that it encloses. It offers passage to those who travel through it but this passage involves transformation, and is not immediately apparent since the forest with its "unearthly forms…malignant silence" (*Rajmohan's Wife*, 40) acts towards camouflaging its own purposes. "Forests, especially, with the mystery of their space prolonged indefinitely beyond the veil of tree-trunks and leaves, space that is veiled for our eyes, but transparent to action" (202-203). It is only after her journey through the forest that Matangini is able to confess her love to Madhav after many years of suffering in silence. The realism of Rajmohan's Wife is not complicated through intricate narrative or stylistic mode of narration. The explication of the wooded space of the forest and the brief encounter Matangini has with this space results in Matangini experiencing the forest in a certain way which liberates her only if momentarily. In the narrative this brief moment is the only sanction achieved towards empowering the protagonist as opposed to the entire text.

3.2.2 Bimala's agency in *Home and the World*

This section shows how *Home and the World* achieves more in offering agency to its female protagonist Bimala. Keeping in mind exigencies of the times and their influence on the motivations of the novels of that era, intrinsic qualities of womanhood, like displaying courage in love, sense of honour, emotional vulnerability, sustain themselves through the times. This is not to essentialise women, but to state the point that what gets established as realism is greatly influenced by a laying over of the aesthetics of the times in the scripting of a novel or in the words of Mukherjee, "realism is just another narrative mode using a different set of literary conventions" (*The Novel: History, Geography and Culture*, 596). For example, in *Rajmohan's Wife*, Matangini's portrayal is severely critiqued by Meenakshi Mukherjee as a non agent female stereotype, hearkening to past ideological idiom of the ever sacrificing woman**.** The unexpected denouement of the novel has Matangini consigned to her father's home and living her remaining years until an early death, may be recognized as the authors' confusion in trying to remain rooted to the indigenous tradition and garnering the allegiance of the Indian reader over his attempt at writing in English to woo the British reader. The realism of the social scene in rural Bengal, in this case gets contextualized by the readership in question (especially so because Bankim Chattopadhyay wrote very successful novels only in Bengali thereafter). Mukherjee rightly questions "whether realism can ever be true to life" (596), when she argues that the novel in India was certainly not a dedicated reproduction of the British Victorian realism even in it's very early stages in India. The preceding section on *Rajmohan's Wife* corroborates Mukherjee's claim, by showing that the narrative does elicit spaces within the text that are unconventional in nature and embolden Matangini's character at least within the space of her journey through the forest. A divergence though from Matangini's character, especially through everyday living may be seen in Rabindranath Tagore's portrayal of Bimala in *Home and the World* (2005). Critiqued as a commentary on the excesses of the nationalist movement disguised as patriotism in *Home and the World*, Bimala is shown to journey from the 'andarmahal' of the

home to the 'baithak' or sitting room, which represents the world. The andarmahal, also depicts Bimala's mental scape, her thoughts and ideals.

The novel begins with Bimala's reflections as a devoted wife, steeped in the ideals of devotion or bhakti that she emulates from her mother whose love for Bimala's father, "poured out and plunged into a sublime ocean of beauty when she carefully peeled the fruits for my father…kept aside the paan for him…sprinkled with keora water" (2). Literary scholar and critic, Swagato Ganguly mentions in the introduction to *Home and the World* is a break from narrative conventions followed by Tagore wherein the omniscient narrator is replaced by introducing the readers to the characters' reverie. Unlike Matangini, Bimala is shown to be prolific in her thoughts and speech. Home educated into English literature and cultural mores at the behest of her husband Nikhilesh, who is pursuing his MA in Calcutta, Bimala's marital home is modern and liberal in keeping up with traditions. He constantly encourages Bimala to step outside the inner chambers, "The world outside maybe in need of you" (10). But Bimala resists this insistence by claiming that Nikhilesh is her world and she nurtures no personal aspiration for the outside. However, Nikhilesh's insistence on inviting the world into the home sparks small but remarkable turns like Nikhilesh's grandmother gradually acquires a taste for the things of the world. Bimala remarks, "Thanks to the unholy age of modernism, a day came when her evenings would be incomplete unless her granddaughter-in-law read her stories from English books" (12-13). The innocent adventure of worldly intrusion into the home takes on a serious turn with the entry of Sandip, a political revolutionary.

The archetypal devotion Bimala has for Nikhilesh, expressed in her boudoir undergoes transformation into passion for Sandip, when he enters their living room. The living room becomes the world, as it gets punctuated by heated debates around the Indian nationalist movement. Sandip cleverly discerns the shift in the dynamics of the living room, "Since my arrival the drawing room in Nikhilesh's home has turned into ambiguous space, neither indoors nor outdoors. From the outside I had access to it and from within, the Queen Bee did." (45).

Sandip does not accord the inner or the outer spaces to Nikhilesh leaving him out of these spaces altogether. Nikhilesh is a distanced entity in the midst of growing intimacy between Sandip and Bimala whom he fondly calls Queen Bee. The transition from the inner space to the outer is accompanied by the transition in Bimala's character in her unorthodox love for Sandip. Nikhil is aware of his own outside-ness, feeling like an evictee in his own home, he tries to see himself from the outside wondering how he looks through Bimala's eyes. Bimala is slow to realize her deception at the hands of Sandip, which reaches its climax when she robs her own home and having crossed the threshold of the inner quarters with a bag full of coins she is filled with remorse "The silent night sat near my head, pointing fingers at me. I had failed to separate my home from the world" (150). The home and the world having collapsed into each other result in spaces in conflict. Perhaps the playing field of the nationalist movement is too complex and overpowering to be held within the home, which is guided by the fragile threads of relationships and cannot be confused with idealisms masquerading in the world.

Priya Joshi, in a fascinating study on consumption of English novels in India between 1850 to 1900, observes that the Indian population was particularly fond of novels high on the melodramatic content. She avers,

> It was this clarity and singleness of vision … most appealing to Indian readers, who discovered in the melodramatic mode not just consolation but a way of "plotting" and seeing the world that was fully commensurate with their own fantasies and desires for wish fulfillment. That these fantasies were not just individual ones of personal grandeur and wealth, but larger cultural and political fantasies of freedom and liberation from the British in part explains the extended appeal of the melodramatic mode throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in India. (*The Novel*, 507-508)

A similar melodrama besets *Home and the World* wherein a bid to realizing oneself frustrates Bimala's realistic aspirations to such a large extent that she merges the inside and the outside spaces of her life, which ought to have stayed apart. Unlike Matangini's journey through the forest symbolising the abhisara

element offering her the momentary experience of immensity by virtue of the journey she undertakes through the forest on a stormy night, the abhisara element in *Home and the World* is structured more towards erotism garbed under the ruse of Vaishnav padabalis (devotional songs in the Vaishnav faith recounting stories of the partings and meetings between Radha and Krishna). An imaginary outside is recreated by Sandip to accommodate a vision of Bimala as the revolutionary mother figure who is quickly transformed into a passionate lover. Bimala recognizes within herself the arousal of passions on hearing Sandip chant 'Vande Mataram'. She muses on the peculiar similarity between the song in the heart of the country and the song in her heart. She looks at the country side and forest beyond the walls of her home, and the passions of the fearless revolutionary without the moorings of a home become the passions of a lover on a frantic journey to unite with her beloved. Bimala's world is a misrepresented space on which she projects a magnified image of herself which is neither in the home nor in the world. The abhisara element succeeds only to the extent of creating some hasty imagination in Bimala's mind which loses import soon after she realizes Sandip's deception. Ganguly describes Sandip's nationalism as a foreign import, "Sandip's nationalism is merely a magnified form of self-love, a species of materialism borrowed that is from Europe" (*Home and the World*, xi). Therefore the abhisara element which succeeded in lifting Matangini's character from the inner domains of her home and her fears to the journey outside does just the opposite for Bimala. Bimala's journey to the world is a vexed one in which the distant natural landscape remains inert towards empowering her. The distant exterior on the contrary creates a false charm of the national movement which is transported into Bimala's drawing room. Ganguly astutely charts the cartography of the home as the landscape of the self and traces the furrows of nationalism in Bimala's and Nikhil's heart(h),

> "In terms of the cartography of the swadeshi self the household, particularly the inner chambers where the women reside, is the bastion of tradition and expresses one's cultural core, whereas one ventures outside to meet the world…Nikhilesh…makes it a point to

> decorate his drawing room with swadeshi objects preferring a common brass pot over an expensive European vase." (*Home and the World*, xiv)

Nikhilesh prefers the unself-consciousness natural beauty of his brass pot to the artifice of a European vase and thus in keeping with the swadeshi logic, indigenous is equated to spontaneous, organic and homely.

Anjaria Ulka, in her book *Realism in the Indian Novel*, elaborates how *Home and the World*, anticipates the "formal and representational crises" (16), that came to occupy the writers in the 1930s quite consistently. "The text is structured over eighteen interspersing chapters, each narrated in the first person and headed with a narrative tag – "Bimala's Story"…"Nikhilesh's Story" and "Sandip's Story" (16). Ulka suggests that the fragmented narration anticipates literary modernism while it tries to interrogate the issues of utilitarianism, materialism and ethics of nationalism. She further explains that in following this fragmentary mode of narration, appearing like entries in a diary with each individual recording their version of events, the serialized effect of a textual narration is not followed, allowing individual narratives to build history created through live ongoing events in the characters' lives. According to Ulka, "the whole story is thus a bricolage of these different narrations of these different events…representing the discontinuity of history-as-present" (23). Ulka suggests that the discontinuity gives the novel a sort of futurity in evincing a possible resolution between the "Nikhilesh-Sandip split" (23) represented by a humane and rational approach in practicing nationalism as against a violent form of propagating nationalism through fiery rhetoric. And in the midst of an ideological struggle about nationalism, this form of narrative hints at an attempt at realist(ic) aspiration that Bimala could nurture in the future.

According to Ganguly, Bimala's character bears sustenance on her own account, instead of being shaped by other characters in the text. However, one can contrast the momentariness of the outside that influences Matangini bringing out her immensity before it lapses into the confines of the home, with that of Bimala, who encounters the outside within her home leaving that space permanently

altered. Though a complete crossing over never does happen for Bimala, indicating her success in retaining her devotion towards Nikhilesh, the space of the home is not the same anymore. Both in the case of *Rajmohan's Wife* and *Home and the World*, the realism of women characters are contextualized by the requirements of the times, but what is interesting is that in neither texts the true character of women in love gets completely foreshadowed by narrative norms. The geographies in both the novels help the protagonists to loose and find themselves while their journeys through the textual spaces do follow narrative norms, however the texts do push in the direction of creating spaces that emancipate the characters of Matangini and Bimala, if only momentarily.

3.3 On the Postcolonial Novel

Lived experience and the local in context to the postcolonial novel, could be considered as a natural sequel to the preceding section on representations in realist novels, since both these aspects work towards recovering those spaces which were left out during the nationalist project that marked representation in the realist novels in English, especially during the early decades of the post independence era. Given the postcolonial literary agenda to project residual effects of colonialism and references to political backlash in the form of uneven economic development, the idea of lived experience in the everyday and the local offer a somewhat different take on the postcolonial perspective in *The Hungry Tide* owing to two reasons. First, lived experience or the ordinary, effectively offsets the understanding of everyday living in specific relation to Henri Lefebvre's premise of the 'everyday' resulting from a systematized order of production and consumption closely interlinked and "inscribed within structures" ("The Everyday", 9). Second, the local needs to be experienced in its immediacy and state of unvarnished existence. *The Hungry Tide* (2004) reveals deep ecological spaces that remain distant and immune to the effects of capitalism which have spread their tentacles into inner reaches of Lusibari in Sunderbans. What preserves this immunity is the plying of the local skill of fishing practiced by a humble fisherman Fokir. Fokir's knowledge of his vocation is not structured

within any system for it cannot be harnessed or controlled within the bounds of a capitalist system. But what does lend an unusual flavor to his trade practice is its close link to the geography of the mangroves and inland waters borne out of a thorough knowledge of the landscape. The close proximity with nature and the vocation of fishing are both embedded within the local, which according to Arif Dirlik preserves "received forms of local society" (*The Postcolonial Studies Reader*, 464). The local society is a space that repudiates modern ideologies (463), by resisting progress or assimilation into a global socio-cultural, economic pattern. Fokir's trade falls outside the format of a global economy, the flipside of which is that the future for the survival of such a vocation seems bleak for its scope toward contributing to the modernization project seems limited. But the text offers reprieve in this direction when it brings together, both Fokir and Piya, a cetologist from America, into a collaborative venture. Their alliance is a coming together of two individuals from sharply contrasting worlds, having no common grounds for language, culture, social practices, yet sharing a world that revolves around their love and understanding of rivers, tides and marine life. Their worlds become meaningful on a boat that cuts across social disparities that would become apparent on land conditioned by the different spaces they would occupy:

> "It was surprising enough that their jobs had not proved to be utterly incompatible – especially that one of the tasks required the input of geostationary satellites while the other depended on bits of shark-bone and broken tile. But that it had proved possible for two such different people to pursue their own ends simultaneously – people who could not exchange a word with each other and had no idea what was going on in one another's head – was more than surprising…." (*The Hungry Tide*, 141)

Piya's highly scientific world of marine biology is brought to lie close to the material rudiments of Fokir's fishing. The difference in the material accomplishments of their respective fields is overarched by the expertise of their individual skills. "…when her glance happened accidentally to cross Fokir's,…she saw something in his expression that told her that he too was amazed by the seamless intertwining of their pleasures and their purposes" (141). Despite Robbie Goh's argument that *The Hungry Tide* brings into focus two

different economies "the cash-driven knowledge-intensive economy of the global, and the physical oppressive economy of the local" ("The Overseas Indian", 350), Fokir and Piya are bought together in an understanding of each others' worlds. The isthmus of their worlds lies in their work and their skills, bridging the chasm of who they are in their private worlds. However regressive Fokir's private space maybe as it is heavily weighed down by an "urbane materialism" ("The Overseas Indian", 352) that compels to wrench out of him a regular wage, Fokir's spirit thrives in his humble and highly skilled vocation of fishing the tidal waters. An awareness of the economies that are associated with the local and global spaces in the novel gets problematised and offers a counter version of everyday living not being a regimented experience in light of "repetitive gestures of work and consumption" ("The Everyday", 10) as Lefebvre suggests. Kelwyn Sole, speaks of the South African quotidian which holds within itself the possibility to transform, though set against the backdrop of uneven development and a global capital system that is constantly revolving around abundance and lack of resources which are being produced simultaneously (*Postcolonial Studies and Beyond*, 185). In *The Hungry Tide* what holds good this transformation, is the incessantness and rudimentary aspects of Fokir's vocation. A vocation which stands against as well as sustains itself in light of the ever enclosing clutches of intruding capitalism which is not merely mercantile in nature but manipulates our lives, such that participating in the social and capital arena is made inevitable. In a conversation between Kanai, a translator from Calcutta and Piya, regarding "to get on in the world" (220), enterprise is defined by success in the world, but an enterprise like Fokir's in his efficient understanding of the narrow and intricate channels of the mangroves and the workings of tides, in his knowledge of marine life, and the sheer absence of the desire for worldly success are held in utter disregard. But it is this remove from performing in and for the global landscape that is transformative, since it preserves Fokir's locality and his lived experience.

The immediacy of Fokir's landscape implies an unvarnished state of existence since the rustic mode of living on inland water channels while negotiating the wilderness devoid of language and in utter silence do not fit into a

routinely rehearsed social discourse. Piya and Fokir's wanderings over the mangrove waters liken these watery trails to Foucault's heterotopias. For one can geographically point out the physical existence of such landscapes but how does one trace the watery trails over open waters or through narrow channels, or mark the site of Fokir's boat as it stands stationary on the waters and at other times drifts along with the tide. These trails reflect Piya and Fokir's coming together in their unuttered knowing of nature, their mutual understanding forming a sort of counter site which reveals the incapacity of language to grasp fully the "meaning of human spatiality" (Soja, *Thirdspace* 57). In this light the postcolonial condition is about preserving and appreciating ways of life that no longer fit the domain of modern ways of life.

The first two sections on the realist and the postcolonial novel indicate that there are spaces within a literary text that enable us to read against the grain of literary conventions. And this realization brings us to the next section of this chapter which focuses on the concept of distant reading as a mode of interpreting texts by focusing on spaces inherent in them.

3.4 Foreign Form-Local Material

According to literary scholar Franco Moretti, the modern novel, produced world over, does not owe its making to British or European conventions of the novel because of the enormous variety of local influences that the novel has been inflected with. In his wide analysis of literary critics from across the world (from mid seventeenth century to mid eighteenth century novels from Russia, Italy, Spain, China, Japan, etc. novels did consciously try to adapt the European novel form), Moretti finds that the narrative voice trying to bring about the 'compromise' between the foreign form and local material is the one which stands to be the most unstable. One of the primary reasons for the same stems from the motivation of the narrator to somehow translate the traditional conventions of a culture into interpretive signposts for an eclectic readership. These experiments according to Moretti did not meet with much success, owing to either structural inconsistencies in the novel brought about by trying to string together themes

which were found uneven within certain cultural contexts or a hypertrophic narrator who compromises the plot by overt justification of culturally conflicting elements. Citing Brazilian critic Roberto Schwartz's analysis of the novels of Machado de Assis, Moretti explains how in some cases the structural weakness of the novel may turn into its strength since the representation of the Brazilian ruling class in the novel remains true to its character in real life:

> "…the 'volatility' of the narrator becomes 'the stylization of the behaviour of the Brazilian ruling class': not a flaw any longer, but the very point of the novel: 'Everything in Machado de Assis's novels is coloured by the *volatility*—used and abused in different degrees—of their narrators. The critics usually look at it from the point of view of literary technique or of the author's humour. There are great advantages in seeing it as the stylization of the behavior of the Brazilian ruling class. Instead of seeking disinterestedness, and the confidence provided by impartiality, Machado's narrator shows off his impudence, in a gamut which runs from cheap gibes, to literary exhibitionism, and even to critical acts". ("Conjectures", 66)

Thus Moretti proposes the idea of 'distant reading' as a condition of knowledge which allows you to focus on units much smaller or larger than the text, through devices, themes, tropes or genres and systems ("Conjectures", 57). The idea of distant reading as opposed to close reading is to go beyond a focused attention given only to certain texts which are considered to be part of the canon so much so that Moretti considers the exclusiveness of the canon and the solemn and serious consideration given to it an almost theological one (57). Looking at the variety of texts analysed as part of Moretti's exercise, one also gathers that thematically, a socio-cultural perspective seems to strongly underpin all these texts. And the unfamiliarity, awkwardness or the lack of it depends upon the treatment of these socio-cultural contexts in texts irrespective of the type of novel in question. Also the local narrative and foreign form misfit is the very stepping stone from which to analyse the text, since it is this misfit that contributes towards the making of the non-European or non-British novel. Another case in point is the fact that the journey of this adaptation or misfit has yielded to a space for experimentation with the text at the level of form and also in treatment of themes which can be opened out with greater freedom and alacrity, as opposed to times

when issues like cultural prudishness or culturally appealing to a wider readership restricted local material to find full expression.

The awkward marriage between foreign plot, local characters and local narrative voice asserts its awkwardness (if at all), very differently in Ghosh's *Sea of Poppies*. In contrast to *Rajmohan's Wife* by Bankim Chandra Chatterjee and his inability to strongly position Matangini in the text owing to the novelty of the literary form being adapted for writing the novel, along with issues of readership and social ethics in question, Ghosh's novels favourably bring about the cohesion between the foreign plot and local narrative misfit that Moretti mentions. Interspersed in the middle of the serious setting of migration of indentured labour on the Ibis, is an incidence difficult to place in the schema of the larger context of the novel. Ghosh chooses humour as literary device to bring together Baboo Nob Kissin Pander (the anglicised version of Baboo Nobo Krishno Panda, a devout Vaishnava priest), a gomusta with Benjamin Burnham, the owner of Ibis and Zachary, the second mate of the ship. The interactions between both revolve around the theme of Bhakti, which is drawn outward toward the metropolis from the inner sanctum of one's faith, wherein Bhakti is practiced as a way of life.

According to Moretti, any literary device may be used to study a text to effectively read the socio-cultural underpinnings within it. But this usage is contextual to the notion of distant reading as proposed by him in a bid to understand texts that fall outside the convention of European or British novels. Distant reading can be done by using literary devices, themes, tropes, genres and systems, to read texts in new ways. This thesis adopts humour as a suitable literary device to study *Sea Of Poppies* as it applies Moretti's theoretical intervention of distant reading to the text. The theme of Bhakti and humour are used to explore the mismatch of foreign material and local form so as to be able to have a sensitive reading of instances in the text that are heavily imbued with cultural tropes. Humour is being studied from the perspective of incongruity, or juxtaposition of mismatched cultural frames, that compel the reader to understand the discourse at hand differently. The trope of irony, catachresis in particular is

employed using examples from the text. The use of tropes also look at a historical consciousness in the narrative as a deliberate move by the narrator in driving the discourse in a direction that does not limit reading the humorous event as merely postcolonial or imperial. Rather it opens up the space to understand strands of life in the Indian context which were integral to its culture and people. Humour as narrative event forms part of a small explication to push forth the point as to how the narrative breaks the seriousness of the context at hand to present an issue that is integral to the Indian way of life. Space creation from a narrative perspective is also looked at. And all the above considerations are brought together to explore what kind of geographic imaginary gets created within the text.

The aspect of humor strongly underpins a sociological critique of events and circumstances as it facilitates the primary contention of staging of foreign form and local material, running through this section. The idea of humor works effectively in the novels of Ghosh as a mode to assert space for cultural contexts that are foreign and unfamiliar within the setting of the text which is very imperial in its socio-historical context. But even when read today, in a postcolonial condition, raises questions regarding those very cultural contexts remaining unexplained and unaccomodative so far as the form of the novel is concerned. For example, the irrationality of Baboo Nob Kissin's behavior embeds a way of life (bhakti or devotion), which governed a large populace within the Indian sub continent. The path of devotion was vast and intricate offering many choices for people to opt from, and following these pathways created for them self-identity and a mode of self assertion. Moretti's claim that foreign presence makes local characters behave in strange ways appears true when one studies the character of Nob Kissin in particular, but the text does not allow the strange behavior to get lost in the maze of storytelling. Instead the narrative event of Nob Kissin's appearance in conjunction with Zachary is made overtly visible, lifting every instance out of the mode of the texts' storytelling. An event according to Peter Hühn, in narratology is one that affects a significant change of a special kind in the sense of being decisive and bringing about unpredictable turn in the narrated happenings, a deviation from the normal, expected course of things (81). This

change is brought about with the help of a character with reference to a social context that acquires special relevance such that the event is a deviation from what is normal and expected (81). Though the scope of this study is not rooted in a narratological analysis, the recurrence of the funny scenes between Nob Kissin and Zachary foregrounds a narrator who is deliberate in staging these events that mark a departure from the seriousness of the context at hand and also breaks the chronology of the text in seeming not to fit in with the logical and sequential progression of the text. There are a few interesting points to consider here, first what does this kind of staging do for the text spatially, where spatiality is considered from the perspective of the form of the novel (a character who seems to be problematising the national space- the inner and outer domains- when viewed through the eyes of Baboo Nob Kissin from inside), and humorous space (the discourse of humour and how does it open up space for alternative interpretation).

3.4.1 Spatiality within the Text

According to Mieke Bal, the topological location of a character in space can determine how a story is being presented. The character represents a point of perception situated in a space and the character's reaction to it and also bringing their senses to bear on that space (*Narratology*, 133) as a consequence of living in it. The argument is that such a perception creates a geographical imaginary that contrasts the context at hand not only problematising the predetermined spatial perception of the narrative event under study, but perceiving it in a completely different manner. For example in *Sea of Poppies*, on meeting Zachary for the first time, Baboo Nob Kissin begins to create an imagery of Brindavan, a place associated with Krishna's childhood and his sport with the Gopis (cowherd girls) and the consequent use of allusions to Krishna like, "Ghanshyam", "Slayer of Milkmaids's Hearts" or "Butter-Thieving Lord" (146) indicating Krishna's divine play or 'Leela'. These allusions will raise in the minds of the culturally informed reader a rain swept geography, with trees dripping droplets at waterfronts which are full of flirtatious cavorting by Krishna around the gopis, while Krishna's eyes

drink "from the pool of a maiden's love-thirsty lips" (146). The imagery is so powerful that Nob Kissin is transported from the space of the Ibis which is strongly embedded in a colonial setting and creates a similar perception in the minds of the reader, into a space that is not only far removed in space-time from the current setting but is fantastical in nature as it invokes an imagery of the supernatural.

> "Could it be then, that this ivory-tinted Rupa was exactly what Ma Taramony had warned him of: a Guise, wrapped in veils of illusion by the Divine Prankster, so as to test the quality of his devotees faith?" (146)

Brindavan, is staged as a spatial fantasy, in terms of "mood investment" ("Space and Symbols", 3) that the character brings to the space which he is not occupying in the physical sense, since he is placed on the Ibis, but as Gerard Hoffman, literary critic and scholar suggests, "Inner conflicts are transferred to spaces and objects, become embodied with them" (3). What Nob Kissin does while kneeling outside Zachary's cabin on the quarter deck of the ship is to transform that space from what it is to the uncanny imagery of the supernatural owing to his inner struggle as a devotee in constant quest of Krishna. Ma Taramony's foreboding, as indicated in the above quote, is the primary motivation of his life that his eyes are tirelessly seeking out clues that point to the divine in this ephemeral world.

The inside-outside dichotomy can also be alluded to very well here, representing Nob Kissin's interiority of bhakti as a way of life as opposed to his more worldly pursuit as gomusta to Benjamin Burnham, the owner of Ibis. Nobo Krishno quickly establishes himself in the city, becoming a gomusta, a person of considerable responsibility in Benjamin Burnham's shipping company. Ramanujan's incredulity will not fail him in this instance either where Nobo Krishno's inner piety manifests itself in ways that, "his shrewdness and intelligence did not go unnoticed…they appreciated also his eagerness to please and his apparent limitless tolerance of abuse" (*Sea of Poppies*, 163). Apart from his business acumen Nob Kissin's piety finds humanitarian expression, "he had acquired, over time, a wide circle of friends and acquaintances, many of whom relied on him for advice in matters pecuniary and personal" (164). The outer

expression of diplomacy and cunning may be looked upon as a manifestation of the very same piety that makes Nobo Krishno so devout. The inner and outer lived spaces of Nobo Krishno are cohesive as they are entirely motivated by his spiritual seeking or Bhakti. Nobo Krishno's inner and outer domain co-mingle with each other in ways that somewhat problematises Partha Chatterjee's theory of the distinct existence of the inner and the outer domain and also the premise that the 'outside' is where practicality reigns supreme. A further exploration on this aspect will be dealt with in a sub section ahead in this chapter.

3.4.2 Humour through Incongruity

In yolking together Nob Kissin with Zachary, cross cultural frames are made to clash and the incongruity that emerges, opens up spaces for interpretation that would otherwise have remained unexplored buried under the semantics of an oriental discourse. Neal Norrick, adds that "diversities in life experiences can strike as funny and tellers may use them as a form of narrative humor. Variations between cultures…provide obvious sources of humor"("Conversational", 86). According to Ned Norrick, humour is used to disrupt normal communication "forcing hearers to make sense of some incongruity, to discard contextually obvious meanings" ("Humour in Oral History", 88). This premise can be explored through a humorous interaction between Nob Kissin Baboo and Zachary. The former looks upon Zachary as an incarnation of Krishna, the dark skinned lord, and searches for tangible clues to confirm his belief. Unable to satisfy his curiosity, Nob Kissin advances towards Zachary's neck to see if it is blue, fashioned after another powerful god in the Hindu pantheon, Shiva, the god of destruction, also known as Neel Kunth, or the blue throated one.

> "Startled by the gomusta's lunge, Zachary was quick enough to slap his hand away…'You crazy or something?' Chastened, the gomusta dropped his hands. 'Nothing, sir,' he said, 'just only checking if kunth is blue.' 'If what is *what*?'….'You cussing me now?'" (147).

The incongruity in this interaction is funny since Nob Kissin's innocent enquiry after Zachary's neck or Kunth being blue, is misunderstood by Zachary as a pejorative remark. The incongruity of cross cultural frames can be viewed as being in diametrical opposition to each other. The blue Kunth of Shiva, is symbolic of continence, a state wherein a vice is held within oneself and slowly transformed. But Zachary's understanding of Kunth as a cuss word could be interpreted as a site of sin. The cussing may also be looked upon as castration of Zachary's manhood in a bid to feminize him by associating him with the female genitalia.

The incongruity is not only left unresolved with every attempt by Nob Kissin to divinize Zachary which the latter regards with suspicion, but diligently asserted through every interaction between the two throughout the text. If the given instance is looked at from the point of view of incongruity theory as proposed by Schopenhauer, according to whom, incongruity occurs when two objects are thought through one concept and "the identity of the concept is transferred to the objects: it then becomes strikingly apparent from the entire difference of the objects in other respects, that the concept was applicable to them from a one sided point of view" (*The World*, 13). If viewed from the lens of oriental discourse, applying Schopenhauer's theory could be deduced in two ways. One, Baboo Nob Kissin, is indeed a "Baboon" (164), a ridiculous figure harnessing outlandish notions of personality worship towards Zachary as god incarnate, completely outside the understanding of a culturally foreign reader of the text. Also Zachary, could be seen as a tolerant man who apart from his surprise towards Nob Kissin's weird behavior, remains civil towards him, upholding the image of the refined Occident gentleman. However well both the characters may be subsumed under oriental semantics, when viewed from an Indian way of thinking, Nob Kissin, does not appear out rightly ludicrous, despite the humor being retained on account of the clash of cultural frames and the sharp contrast that emerges when a culturally ignorant reader perceives the interaction between these two figures.

Another example of incongruity can be understood through the following illustration. Interspersed in the middle of the very important activity of acquiring official documents from Zachary, the second mate of the ship Ibis, Nob Kissin's ears hear the sounds of the sea shanty 'Heave away Cheerily' on Zachary's penny whistle which lead him to go into fantastical imaginations about Zachary being the possible avatar of Krishna, a vision of whom he has starved for, for so long. "Was it really a flute, Lord Krishna's own instrument, that had started to play….although the tune was unfamiliar in itself, was set to Gurjari, one of the most favoured ragas for the singing of the Dark Lord's song" (145). The sea shanty that Baboo Nob Kissin chances upon is a form of work song sung by the sea crew in chorus, while performing group activities like the process of loading cargo, setting sail or pushing and pulling (Whates, 260). The shanties were considered to be influenced by songs of African Americans, while loading cotton bales in Southern America ("Music in the World"). Zachary's humming of this tune hearkens to his own African American roots, being the son of a Maryland freedwoman. The incongruity between a sea shanty and Gurjari raag is apparent, but not to Nobo Krishno whose rationality is permanently invested in divinations of the Lord. The irrational permeates Baboo Nob Kissin's outer domain, and yet this very outer domain is a site for all rational activities efficiently executed by him. A simplistic dismissal of faith as irrational may not be entirely justified given bhakti or devotion as an immensely important way of the inner or spiritual domain in the Indian mode of life. In the post-Chaitanya (a great saint, who considered himself to be Radha, Krishna's ardent devotee and lover) phase, one of the fundamental devotional attitude of bhakti was called raganuga bhakti, originating from an unbearable desire or thirst for God in the being of the devotee. One of the methods of practice of this form of bhakti allowed its followers to practice the faith "while participating in the ritual procedures of social and personal life as laid down by the shastras" (Chatterjee, 184). Baboo Nob Kissin's life embraces all aspects of raganuga bhakti in his life spanning the inner and outer domains of his existence.

This consistency of Nob Kissin's devotion though encased in humour, alludes to the incessantness with which the path of devotion was practiced as a way of life. AK Ramanujan's essay "Is There An Indian Way of Thinking" attempts at fleshing out the 'Indian' as highly inconsistent. Drawing from his father's example who was a south Indian Brahmin gentleman, Ramanujan explains how his clothes though representative of his inner life were interspersed with Western influences. A Mathematician and a Sanskrit scholar, he was visited by mathematicians from abroad and local astrologers alike. Ramanujan's scientific temper would find it difficult to reconcile the ease and intelligence with which his father would resolve so called dichotomies which did not seem compatible to him at all. This suggests a sort of cohesion in the Indian way of thinking, a cohesion that does not necessarily distinguish between the outer and inner. Alluding to the often illustrated example from *A Passage to India*, Mrs. Moore is found musing over the indeterminacy between inside and outside in India. Referring to a wasp that has perched itself on a peg she thinks, "Perhaps he mistook the peg for a branch…Bats, rats, birds, insects will as soon nest inside the house as out, it is to them a normal growth of the eternal jungle, which alternately produces houses trees, houses, trees" (Forster, 30). This reference especially speaks to the dichotomies found in Baboo Nob Kissin's character. One finds in Baboo Nob Kissin's character shrewd intelligence which he uses to further the interests of his British employers. But despite his strengths Nob Kissin does not take offence at the insults hurled at him by them. There is an innocence in Nob Kissin that even insults connoting a deity in some remote or lewd fashion instead of causing him pain become reasons to celebrate the reminiscence of the Lord. For example, Burnham "often mocked his gomusta by addressing him as 'my Nut Kissing Baboon'… 'baboon', in any case, was not a term to which Baboo Nob Kissin could really object, since that creature was but an avatar of Lord Hanuman (164). Baboo Nobo Krishno's sincerity of devotion only amazes the reader since the circumstances of his everyday living however difficult they may be, are seen to strengthen his faith. The cohesion of spaces be it the forest and home in Forster's novel or Ramanujan's explication of the Indian way of life and its

indiscernible limits of outer and inner, pervade Nobo Krishno's life as devotee as well.

3.4.3 The Inner and the Outer for Nobo Krishno

Nirvana Tanoukhi supports the foreign form, local reality adaptation in scholar and critic Partha Chatterjee's explication of the inner and outer domains of the Indian way of life during the early nineteenth century. The cognitive mapping that split social life into external economic domain and inner spiritual domain gave indigenous people an opportunity to choose a site of autonomy for themselves. According to Chatterjee, anticolonial nationalism was divided into two domains, the material and the spiritual. "The material is the domain of the "outside" (*The Nation*, 6), represented by economy, statecraft, science and technology etc. This is the domain of Western supremacy which had to be acknowledged and "its accomplishments carefully studied and replicated" (6). The spiritual on the other hand denotes the inner domain which is marked by the essential cultural identity (6). Therefore living, especially in the colonial metropolis was two pronged, first being the imitation of the Western skills in the material domain or the 'outside' which necessitated a drive to "preserve the distinctness of one's spiritual culture" (6) on the inside. Another important argument that Chatterjee makes is that the 'outside' is "where practical considerations reign supreme. It is also typically the domain of the male" (120). Keeping in mind Chatterjee's premise, cohesion between the inner and the outer maybe looked at in novel ways through Baboo Nob Kissin's character, the outer landscape of whose life is an expression of his inner landscape, defined by a strong faith or Bhakti towards his chosen deity, Krishna.

Nob Kissin's divine aspiration towards having a vision of Krishna being united with him takes him on a journey from Ahiritola, "an inexpensive waterfront neighbourhood of Calcutta" (162) to the center of the metropolis. The metropolis is a signifier of the seat of imperial activity, a space governed by authority and practical pursuits and conquests, making it very masculine in nature. Nobo Krishno's journey takes place at the behest of Ma Taramony, his spiritually

evolved aunt according to whom Nobo Krishno must go out from the inner sanctum of a dedicated life of the bhakta to becoming a man of the world, earning money to fulfill the dream of building a Krishna temple. The space of bhakti is internal to a being, governed by love, surrender, and the unseen because there is little to show in terms of manifest outcomes, making bhakti feminine. Here surrender must not be understood as subjugation but a perspective that looks beyond dichotomies of inner or outer, spiritual or secular, or even conqueror and conquered, since the objective is union with the divine, and the material dichotomies are but pathways that one must traverse to reach the ultimate goal. The rationale of 'success' in the metropolis is altogether different from the rationale that governs bhakti as a way of life, in and through the various differentiations that are charted within the bhakti movement.

Chatterjee talks of various internal differentiations within the Vaishnava stream of bhakti in its practice and attainment of spiritual realization. For example, in the parakiya bhava, the devotee looks at himself or herself as Radha, desiring for Krishna as his or her illicit lover. Ramanujan comments that the parakiya bhava, where the word parakiya, means anothers',

> "To unite with another's' woman is more poignant…in the search for a state beyond social good and evil; another's' woman, unlike one's own wife, is inaccessible, and in being so gives the devotee a hint of the inaccessibility of the lord himself." (*Collected Essays*, 329).

Nobo Krishno's love for Ma Taramony evokes the parakiya bhava since she is his guru and physical union is forbidden under the circumstance. But the proffered inaccessibility does much to inspire surrender where the path of devotion does not guarantee success or achievement, but the joy of devotion lies in following the path. "Ma Taramony…had promised him that his awakening was at hand…which were sure to be manifested in the unlikeliest places and in the most improbable forms" (*Sea of Poppies*, 145). Despite repeated rebuttals from a confused Zachary to Baboo Nob Kissin's hints and clues to Zachary about the latters reincarnated self, Nob Kissin's faith remains unshaken. Zachary is the inaccessible goal

offering no semblance of any hope towards Nob Kissin's fulfillment of the prophecy. In another form of Vaishnava bhakti called the sahaja bhava, it is believed that the true spiritual self resides in the body and through the discipline of practices one could realize the union of Krishna and Radha within one's own body that too without denying or annihilating one's physical existence (Chatterjee, 185). Baboo Nobo Krishno is acutely aware of Ma Taramony's presence growing within him, and the consequent arousal of deeply maternal feelings towards Neel, the zamindar of Rashkhali, whose down fall has occurred at the hands of Baboo Nob Kissin himself. The growing maternal instinct also manifests itself in Nobo Krishno's physical appearance and that problematises the space of the Ibis, which is very masculine in nature. Nobo Krishno, "Every day offered some fresh sign of the growing fullness of the womanly presence inside him-for example, his mounting revulsion at the maistries and silahdars…when he heard them speak of breasts and buttocks"(423). Baboo Nobo Krishno's transformation is a gradual one as suggested by Sahajiya bhava form of bhakti, where the spiritual self invested within the being may be realized through the gradual transformation of love from gross desires to divine love. Chatterjee comments well when he articulates,

> "It is well apparent from the histories of minor sects that the varying intensities of their affiliation with the larger unity, the degree of "eclecticism," the varying measures and subtleties in emphasizing their difference and their self-identity reveal not so much the desire to create a new universalist system but rather varying strategies of survival, and of self assertion." (*The Nation*, 186)

The absolute moment of realization of his longing presents itself to Baboo Nob Kissin when he spots Zachary's name on the Ibis crew list recorded against the under the word 'race' – "black" (256). "Baboo Nob Kissin…needed no other confirmation; it was exactly as he had known…the outward appearance of the messenger was but a disguise for his inner being" (256). This instance is another example of a clash of cultural frames, the consciousness of what 'black' implies to Zachary and Nob Kissin is unbridgeable. Despite the cultural distance in

inferring the meaning of 'black' from an African-American context by Baboo Nob Kissin, the affirmation of Zachary's blackness meant:

> "the barrier that separated Baboo Nob Kissin's spiritual and material lives had begun to dissolve. Till then he had always been careful to separate the sphere of his inward striving from the domain of his profane existence as a cunning and ruthless practitioner of worldly arts….his inner life had flooded into the channel of his gomusta-dom and the two streams had gradually merged into one vast, surging flow of love and compassion." (*Flood of Fire*, 256)

Sea of Poppies captures different strains of bhakti through Baboo Nobo Krishno's evolving selfhood and each manifestation translates into different kinds spaces that either relate to the body itself, or create juxtapositions against spaces that are imbued with imperial politics or inspire fantastic imaginations. But bhakti is also seen permeating power centers like the imperial metropolis and complicating it through humour and incongruity all the while asserting itself within these spaces. The literary geographies of the inner and the outer domains result in space making activities by Baboo Nobo Krishno owing to his imaginations of these spaces at times experienced through his Bhakti and at other times experienced through the stark juxta-positioning of the imperial metropolis as against his own interiority. The inner and outer domains are strongly elicited in their influence upon narrative circumstances in *Sea of Poppies*, than its restrictive articulation in *Rajmohan's Wife* and *Home and the World*. Nobo Krishno's geographical consciousness may manifest itself through different kinds of activities that fulfill his official duties but inwardly his bhakti is the motivation that weaves together the spaces he traverses. Baboo Nobo Krishno and the instance of his bhakti leads us to analyzing what the inner and outer mean to Deeti in *Sea of Poppies*. Does the narrative succeed in offering Deeti sustainable spatial access that moves towards interpretations in literary geography?

3.5 What does inner and outer space mean for Deeti?

Sheila Hones explains certain positions regarding space from the perspective of literary geography:

> "The key point has been the reconsideration of the assumption of "an absolute ontology of space [in which] space is understood as a geometrical system of organization" and the challenging of that simple view of container space with a relational view, which understands space "as being constituted and given meaning" through human and nonhuman practices and interactions. The work of spatial theorists has unsettled the common assumption that events occur in singular, bordered locations and that locations are unambiguously positioned in geometric space, and this in turn has led to the destabilization of the equally common idea that literary setting can only be understood in terms of a static frame of real-world locational reference. Recent developments in spatial theory are in this sense relevant for work in literary geography because they make it possible to widen the scope of literary geography from its previously narrow focus on description and location: working with this reconfigured spatial vocabulary, readers become able to engage with texts not only as narratives of plot events situated in space but also as a literary recognition of the ways authors, characters, plot events, and even readers participate in the making of narrative space." (*Literary Geographies*, 76)

Three key points isolated from Hones' explication to build upon this section are, 'space being relational and meaning conferred upon it through human and non-human activity', 'the negation of the notion about unambiguous position of locations in space' and 'the characters' agency in making of place'. These three elements have already found expression in some form in the preceding sections, but here we look at them in specific relation to Deeti and her work.

Deeti leads the life of a householder, in a village on the outskirts of Ghazipur lying on the edge of Ganga. She is wedded to Hukum Singh, a Rajput, working for the British opium factory in Ghazipur town. Deeti works in her poppy field collecting poppy sap and gathering poppy leaves that are made into 'rotis' and later sold to the Ghazipur poppy factory. Her surrounding is deeply colonial in its geography, in that the economies of living and livelihood are severely affected by imperialism, particularly the business of poppy. "The 'roti' was indeed the name by which these poppy-petal wrappers were known…they looked exactly like the round wheat- flour rotis Deeti had packed for her

husband's midday meal" (6). Deeti's everyday living is punctuated with a strong presence of poppy, meals comprising "a dish of stale alu-posth" (7), poppy oil for Kabutri's hair, and Deeti's personal possession of Akbari opium, which is sparingly used as a medium of financial transaction. Earlier to the British imposing strict imposition on cultivation of opium, wheat would be grown as a winter crop alongside other pulses. The straw from wheat helped in addressing needs such as mending thatched huts. A thin opium cultivation by the farmers would be used to preserve opium reserves as medicine, to be consumed during festivities or sold to nobility. The forced injunction by the British to cultivate poppy alone resulted in depleting indigenous resources.

> "…now the factory's appetite for opium seemed never to be sate. Come the cold weather, the English sahibs would allow little else to be planted; their agents would go from home to home, forcing cash advances on the farmers, making them sign asami contracts." (*Sea of Poppies*, 29-30)

This landscape is empowered through the cultivation of poppy and serves the interests of the imperial masters while occupying the domestic spaces of people's livelihoods. The only unambiguity that prevails upon a land that once bore the imprint of an indigenous life and its people has been turned into a mechanism of control over them. Whatever meaning the local population of farmers conferred on their farms does not exist anymore and neither does Deeti's character exert any agency on the external landscape she resides in. However one finds a continuum from the inner space of her home to the outer space atop a cliff in Mauritius, in the form of Deeti's shrine. This personal space displays Deeti's own interpretation of devotion through her paintings and drawings dedicated to kith and kin. The humble shrine of Ghazipur is transformed into a site of annual pilgrimage attended by three generations of Deeti's family in Mauritius. "*Deetiji-ka-smriti-mandir*" (*River of Smoke*, 8) is located on a wind whipped cliff, "geological anomaly-a cave within a spur of limestone…there was nothing like it anywhere else on the mountain" (3). The cave entrance has a flat chowkey, a chowkey being a space of intersection between routes converging from four directions. "But any islander would know that in Kreol the word 'chowkey' refers also to the flat disc

on which rotis are rolled" (6). The space of Ghazipur and the opium rotis that Deeti baked are replaced by daal puris and parathas that grace celebrations of the Colver family annual pilgrimage. The location of the cave facing the ocean inspires repeated telling of stories about Kalua's escape to Deeti's grandchildren. It will be meaningful to bring in Edward Said's notion of imaginative geography here wherein he suggests, "…space acquires emotional and even rational sense by a kind of poetic process, whereby the vacant or anonymous reaches of distance are converted into meaning for us here" (*Orientalism*, 55). On the space atop the mountain, geographic boundaries that accompany social, ethnic and cultural spaces in expected ways, as Said expresses, are fulfilled in most unexpected ways for Deeti. It is a relational space that has its own existence as a result of Deeti's drawings and annual pilgrimage. The cave through Deeti's agency is imbued with meaning and represents a family legacy instead of being obscured into wilderness. This finally brings us to the notion of geographic consciousness and what it implies.

3.6 Geographic Consciousness

The term geographic consciousness is not a technically coined term so as to enable offering a formal definition. An attempt is being made to build a narrative around it, since it has important implications for this thesis. The term is sensitive to multiple dimensions such as geographic imagination, indigenous performance in the modern world, ocean as a site of experience, body as scale and its aspects when charted along the cartographies of land and sea. One of the functions of such a consciousness is to draw outward towards the field of action, motivations that govern the interiority of an individual, region, or a nation. This drawing out is significant since in a world that is geo-politically charged and economy driven, geographic topographies however big or localized are strongly inflected by these influences. When considered from a temporal perspective, current times are more acutely affected by these conditions and it becomes very difficult to identify spaces that are distant or outliers to the same. The case here is being made to bring to light that most geographical locations are ontologically predetermined to

a large extent so far as the socio-cultural, political reality of these spaces is concerned and the expectations from them thereof. This premise draws support from Derek Gregory's exposition on Said in the chapter entitled "Edward Said's Imaginative Geographies" wherein Gregory espouses Foucault's interest in understanding how "spaces were designed to make things seeable in a specific way" (qtd. in *Thinking Space*, 316) to explain the power dialectics inherent in the gaze towards the orient. Coming back to looking at spaces from a perspective that encourages to 'not' to see in a specific way, we need to look for hidden or deeply embedded spaces that escape such predeterminations. Or one must identify what are referred to as geographical artefacts by geographer, Mike Crang, like a cultural practice, (*Dictionary of Human Geography*, 130) that makes distinct even those spaces heavily trafficked by global influences. If one moves back in time, to the colonial era in particular, the premodern occupies wider geography and also exerts itself far more robustly in the metropolitan space of the times. When the interiority of the individual subject or geography in question acts itself out or travels outward it transforms spaces while undergoing creative transformations in itself too. And this action is imperative to geographic consciousness since this travel bends ontological norms of spaces dictated by globalization in the current times and historical consciousness at all times for specific geographies in question. Such instances find expressions in literary works and given the fictional nature of the genre, it becomes possible to amplify such projections to achieve imaginations that could become the reality of tomorrow. Also, such imaginations allow us to understand the nuances of history beyond recorded documentations. When a literary text is read with the notion of geographic consciousness in mind, one discovers unorthodox and abstract spaces that slide across multiple literary conventions given to systematized reading. This is when one begins to look toward scapes like the Indian Ocean, the body or even knowledge as geographical scales that operate in the realm of shifting ontologies. In a constant reassertion about literary theories taking a text in a predetermined direction, some more clarification is offered in light of strengthening the position geographic

consciousness makes in forwarding the premise about unorthodox spaces existent within the narrative.

In the section titled "Postcolonial Space: Real or Imagined" from the chapter "Space and the Postcolonial Novel", Robert Zacharias carries out a telling critique of *The Mimic Men*, that suitably answers the charge against literary theory taking a text towards a predetermined end. Zacharias' discussion is drawn upon to comment on close readings from Amitav Ghosh's texts and to illustrate how theories have been used to elicit a spatial reading of the novel that defines its own geography. Zacharias remarks "while Said was set on identifying the "actual" colonial world that sat repressed beneath Jane Austen's Mansfield Park, one could just as easily begin a consideration of postcolonial space in the fictional "bastard world" of V. S. Naipaul's novel *The Mimic Men*" (212). Zacharias explains that Naipaul's novel set in Isabella, is an imagined Caribbean island moving through the various stages of decolonization. And midway through the novel, as Ralph Singh drives through the foothills outside the city, passing racially and ethnically segregated villages resulting from the island's colonial history, including the "Negro areas," the "Indian areas," the "mulatto villages," and so on; "the Caribs," meanwhile, "had been absorbed and had simply ceased to be." For Ralph Singh the passage through the foothills was like being in an area of legend, where "the rise and fall and extinction of peoples, a concept so big and alarming, was concrete and close." (*The Mimic* Men, 146). Zacharias explains that Ralph Singh is uninterested in the specifics of "actual" history but deeply invested in the past.

> Naipaul's account of an imagined colonialized island displays the postcolonial spatialization of history, in which the various stages of Caribbean colonialism – of conquest, genocide, slavery, indenture, hybridization, and independence – are manifested in the "little bastard world" that is Isabella. Ultimately, however, Naipaul is more interested in the contours of colonial subjectivity than he is in colonial landscapes. *The Mimic Men* explores how colonial subjects, alienated from their own culture and landscape, come to internalize the colonial power structure. It is Naipaul's exploration of colonialism as a condition of subjectivity, for example, that draws Homi Bhabha to the novel as part of his analysis of colonial mimicry. (*The Cambridge Companion*, 212)

Bhabha argues that the result of colonial mimicry is about the imperial dream of replicating a single culture across the globe in representational terms as a "flawed colonial mimesis," (*Location*, 125). This replicating is flawed in that the colonizer produces a mimic subject "that is almost the same, but not quite," a threatening "comedic turn from the high ideals of the colonial imagination" (122) that ultimately destabilizes the colonial discourse by revealing its underlying ambivalence. Though the ambivalence underlies the colonial discourse there remains an altogether independent indigenous discourse that thrives in the agency of its indigeneity and nurtures no confusions regarding its motivations and the means adopted in asserting them at the very heart of the colonial metropolis. In discussing the interiority and the exterior surroundings of Baboo Nobo Krishno in this chapter, a similar point is evoked, but taken much farther since Baboo Nobo Krishno, the devout Vaishnav bhakta is the true progenitor of Boboo Nob Kissin, the apparent comedic mimic. In the avatar of Nobo Krishno who rules the interiority of the shrewd gomusta, whose external identity of a Baboo plying his trade for his colonial rulers , continually problematises the imperial geography he operates in. Zacharia argues that Naipaul's narrator is self-consciously but unflaggingly colonial, affecting the mannerisms and habits of the British even as he is moving the country toward formal independence. "… he believes both the island and his own life to be but pale imitations of the "reality" that is the imperial center" ("Space and the Postcolonial", 213). "We pretended to be real," Singh explains, "to be learning, to be preparing ourselves for life, we mimic men of the New World." (*The Mimic Men*, 175). In his reading the cynicism of Naipaul's portrait of Singh, Zacharias points out how Naipaul undermines Bhabha's brief use of the novel as an example of the destabilizing force of mimicry.

> Nonetheless, Bhabha's reading of Naipaul's complex portrait of Ralph Singh exemplifies a broader critical shift in postcolonial studies away from direct considerations of concrete geographic space. Colonial subjectivity outlives the legal structure of the colonial project, and for Bhabha – as for many others – subjectivity itself has become the central "space" of the postcolonial novel. (213)

Baboo Nobo Krishno unlike Naipaul's Ralph Singh, is not unconcerned about the colonial landscape. He transforms the space of the English court with his "…flights of fancy" (*Flood of Fire*, 8) steeped in devotion, to a space that likens tales from religious lores sending the listeners into raptures about the glory of God. One could well imagine a temple courtyard full of devotees, some with their eyes closed, some with tears rolling down their cheeks, full of emotion listening to the glorious deeds of their deity. Baboo Nobo Krishno emulates this scene and the oddity of his fervency in delivering his testimony in a court that is incapable of translating his flight of fancy, establishes a spatial agency that is very indigenous and cannot be intruded upon by a colonial landscape. On the other hand the court space unbeknownst to the colonial masters who occupy it, is infringed upon by Baboo Nob Kissin's illogical divinations. Such an instance is atypical considering a postcolonial text wherein the narrative somehow relinquishes the agency of an indigenous space to a colonial power. Amitav Ghosh's narratives offer many such examples throughout the novels considered for this thesis. This example has been previously explored in detail in the sub-section on a critical reading from *Flood of* Fire further enumerating upon how unfamiliar spaces are created within Ghosh's narratives that do not quite fit a postcolonial or realist representation of space within a text. Binayak Roy, comments well when he argues that "Ghosh's works occupy a critical juncture between postmodern and postcolonial perspectives, exploring the potentialities and limits of postcolonialism as also evading any strategic alliance with postmodernism" ("Reading Affective", 49).

3.7 Conclusion

This chapter shows that every text contains in it space making activities which can be viewed quite objectively without the attendant influence of literary theories of realism, or postcolonialism. One may reconsider the example of the representation of women from the section 'On the Realist Novel' to understand what is being suggested here. In *Rajmohan's Wife*, Matangini, charts her own course of action driven by her love for Madhav which isn't something unnatural

though literary convention of the times may dictate otherwise citing the cultural environment in which the narrative is set. Though Meenakshi Mukherjee, comments upon the influence of the English models of the novel with an emphasis on romantic love and its consequent influence on Bankim to bring together the male and female protagonists who profess love for each other, despite their marital alliance to others, Matangini is "made to appear sinful" (*Rajmohan's Wife,* 149) owing to her deep anguish that follows her professing love to Madhav. The argument does not necessarily justify the limitations of the novel as pointed out by Mukherjee, because a reading of the episode "Love Can Conquer Fear" does not appear unnatural in its narrative of Matangini's unconventional journey. Is it quite impossible to conceive a woman overcoming her fear of society and chart her own course of action driven by her motivation to protect her loved ones? Likewise in *Home and the World*, though liberal thought and free intellectual interactions between men and women prevail in the zamindar household, Bimala, remains steady in her love towards Nikhilesh, despite momentary wavering. Therefore in the first example, love travels outward from the confines of the home towards the zamindar's house. And, in the second novel, love travels from the bedroom to the boudoir; the former represents the intimate space of communication between Nikhilesh and Bimala, their ideals, hopes and dreams whereas the boudoir represents the space of ideological conflict between Sandip, Bimala and Nikhilesh, where Sandip signifies interference in the form of nationalist romanticism from the outside, that threatens to upset the delicate harmony of Bimala's 'ghar'. Likewise, Fokir forges a new kind of spatiality through his choice of vocation that straddles between wild and social landscapes.

It is not necessary that unorthodox or less traversed spaces fail to exist in the face of generalized notions of space. David Harvey makes an important point about how space elicits modification when different notions of spaces are referred to for instance, material, personal, social or psychic spaces which "indicate a variety of contexts that so inflect matters as to render the meaning of space contingent upon the context" (*David Harvey*, 270). It is at this point that Harvey emphasizes that the notion of space shifts from the query of "what is space?" to

"How is it that different human practices create and make use of different conceptualizations of space?" (qtd. in *David Harvey*, 275). This initiates the discussion on scales that come into existence as human practices set against different frames of space, like social space, or the space of the ocean or the mindscape and the imaginations that germinate from it. Thus the landscapes of various human activities mapped in the narratives emerge from some manner of spatial contestation. The central argument being that the narrative has inherent in itself certain freedoms which can be read against the grain of theories to push against their boundaries. The premise that a multiplicity of readings is possible for Amitav Ghosh's texts grounds the thesis to the deployment of scales and the scalar jump that spatial differentiation offers.

Chapter 4

Waterways in Amitav Ghosh's Texts

4.1 Introduction

"Waterways in the texts of Amitav Ghosh" is the first in the series of the two chapters that will explore and attempt to build upon specific elements of geographical scales like waterways and the body. Though Neil Smith discusses some scales like body, home, urban, region, etc., he states that the scales he discusses are not the only geographic scales that exist, and a set of scales cannot be fixed to encompass all that geographical scales constitute. One of the fundamental arguments supporting this statement is that geographical scale is "hierarchically produced as part of the social and cultural, economic and political landscapes" ("Contours", 66). Therefore any landscape that contains these interactions will result in some manner of scale formation. Just stating this premise is far too simplistic since it would entail a systematic construction of waterways as scale which this chapter attempts to do. Waterways as scale is selected for study since waterways are a predominant feature in the novels of Ghosh being considered for this chapter, namely, *Sea of Poppies* and *River of Smoke.* The inherent nature of waterways leads to space creation activity which yields geographic consciousness in the characters from the text. This consciousness comes into being through phenomena and processes that evolve out of geographic interface between ocean and land, and oceanic travel.

The endeavour of exploring geographical scales as a literary approach is quite new. According to Neil Smith, geographical scale depends on societal activity for its construction which in turn produces or is produced by the geographical structures of social interaction. The materiality of spatial construction becomes a crucial element behind theorizing the concept of scale formation as it enables understanding freedom of performance in reading and

comprehending a text from dimensions that otherwise elude the somewhat tight classifications of literary works. What materiality additionally does, is to open up a text in terms of possibilities of achieving freedoms that would languish if viewed from the lens of specific literary conventions like realism, postcolonial theory or world literature. Geographical scales follow the material processes that shape a landscape. Trade and culture happen to be two important processes that are seen shaping the landscapes of Ghosh's texts. However the postcolonial novel, especially those set in the colonial era, many a times seem to cast a temporal freeze on indigenous progress, on the contrary *Sea of Poppies* and *River of Smoke*, despite their strong imperial tenor, fail to overshadow the simultaneous movement and rise of the native Indian. In this context, the Indian Ocean and the ship Ibis become important sites of study. The Indian Ocean is studied as a zone of cultural and commercial circulation during the colonial rule, and also for what it foregrounds in terms of freedoms lost or won for the migrating indigene like 'Kalua' in *Sea of Poppies*.

Geographic consciousness is about experiencing spaces in a manner that they are not ontologically predetermined given the exigencies of the times. It is about discovering spaces wherein lie possibilities of action that attribute new meaning to the space in question. The geographical feature of oceans is unique since it is associated with a kind of indeterminacy in terms of boundaries or allegiance to a national space. Historian and geographer, Karen Wigen rightly points to the ocean as "a crossroads, a site of interaction-a space of passage, rather than a place to settle and control" (*Immanuel Wallerstein*, 139). For cartographers in the 1950s, a true ocean would be defined as a "bounded body of water, vast in scale, abutting the surrounding land masses on most sides" (146). Though this definition comments on the physical aspect of the ocean, cartographers recognize interstitial spaces within the oceanic region that are zones of intensive cross-cultural exchange. What is additionally interesting is that natural features like winds and currents that organize the oceanic waters into weather sub-systems are in themselves connected and therefore fixing a geographical identity on the vast swathes of water, especially as extension of land, belies terrestrial logic of

boundary formation. Nonetheless, since the ocean is being studied as geographical scale which is a spatial means of arbitrating the social and economic contradiction between cooperation and competition as Smith defines it ("Scale", 725), the concept of geographical scale as dialectic between competition and cooperation especially between the socio-cultural and the economic aspects in *River of Smoke* and *Sea of Poppies*, is the subject of study for this chapter. The socio-cultural versus economic contestation is not linear in that both are embedded in the phenomenon of cosmopolitanism of the eighteenth century and imperial norms of trade which get further problematised when influenced by terrestrial and maritime logic.

4.2 Neil Smith's Homeless Vehicles and Kalua's Scalar Jump

Neil Smith makes some important points about geographical scales, in his seminal essay "Contours of a Spatialised Politics", explaining how "the construction of geographical scale is a primary means through which spatial differentiation takes place" (62). He uses the example of the vehicle for homeless people, evictees in New York city in the year 1988, designed by New York artist Krzystof Wodiczko, as an example to push the point as to how this vehicle rescales the spaces of access for the evictees such that "they stretch the urban space of productive and reproductive activity, fracture previous boundaries of daily intercourse, and establish new ones. They convert spaces of exclusion into the known, the made, the constructed" (60). By doing so, they redefine the scale of everyday life for homeless people. The Homeless Vehicle becomes a means of mobility for the evictees to access new spaces to sleep, to scavenge and even escape from police harassment. The vehicles disturb the organization of the cityscape in terms of uncalled for visual presence, but more importantly work towards expanding the boundaries of spatial access that have been denied to them and by doing so fight against their social dislocation. The evictees are perforce compelled to remain invisible or move constantly through the city, since no space within the urban landscape is rightfully afforded to them. Spatial differentiation in this case ensues when organized urban landscapes are traversed upon by the

evictees in their Homeless Vehicles. The specificity of the urban landscape is altered, forced to accommodate the non specific movements of the evictees. As a consequence, organized space that is shaped by received social norms and an urban politics that excludes evictees, is made unstable by the forced presence of evictees and the non specificity associated with them in terms of the spatial vacuum they dwell in. The instability arises out of a discomfort in becoming aware of the existence of a spatial vacuum and that it could invade the secure perimeters of city dwellers. What if the manicured pathways of the city are littered with objects scavenged by evictees? How does one deal with the awkward sight of Homeless Vehicles, or the motions of daily routine being followed by a homeless individual in an open space that a city dweller has the privilege of performing within the privacy of his home? Thus the specificity of urban space is contested by the mobility Homeless Vehicles provides the evictees in pursuing their daily lives which now enters spaces that circumscribes them. In scalar terms, Smith explains this movement as the scalar expansion of self-centered control and the contraction of official scale. It can be inferred from the above account of Homeless Vehicles for evictees that the expansion and contraction of scales is directly related to occupation of space(s) and movements in or across it.

It will be useful to draw an example from *Sea of Poppies* illustrating how spaces that contain characters are crossed, following changes in the nature of the landscape. What is interesting here is that 'land' acts as a geographical feature of restraint and domination. Smith's explication of geographical scales as a "technology according to which events or people are…contained in space" (*Uneven Development*, 230), acquires complexity when different geographical landscapes operate differently in providing scalar relief or scalar restraint to the characters in question. Kalua's abode in the chamar basti is a quarantined space that must not be crossed into by other castes. Kalua is an outcaste belonging to a community of people who deal in leather works and are referred to as 'chamars'. Social customs exercise rigid control on the physical access Kalua has with others, "Kalua…was careful to keep his face hidden…Hukam Singh, as a high caste Rajput, believed that the sight of his face bode ill for the day ahead…Thus

they would sit, conversing amicably enough, but never exchanging glances" (*Sea of Poppies*, 4). Deeti, is Hukum Singh's wife and, the boundaries of her home are guarded by the impenetrable walls of patriarchy. The poppy fields surrounding her hut, are an iron imposition of a disadvantaged economics on the farmer, making him permanently dependant on the Raj. The farmers in the area are forced to cultivate poppies that barely provide for their needs, and are further drawn into pecuniary conditions by a system of contracts that pushes them into deep debts. The spaces that surround both Deeti and Kalua strip them of agency, and offer no scope for expanding the scale of self centered control, ("Contours" 60), for either character. Hukam Singh dies and Deeti decides to commit 'Sati', burning on her husband's pyre. Her decision to commit sati is the only way to save herself from the unacceptable prospect of Chandan Singh, Deeti's brother in law, forcing himself upon her, a circumstance which is inevitable after her husband's death. Deeti is saved from the funeral pyre by Kalua and both of them escape their tormentors, sailing away on a makeshift raft. Lying beside Kalua on the river shore, happy at being alive, unburdened by her fate, Deeti hears,

> "…the whispering of the earth and the river and they were saying to her that she was alive, and suddenly her body was awake to the world as it was never before, flowing like the river's waves, and as open and fecund as the reed covered bank." (179)

The river offers the scalar jump in undoing some of the strictures that land imposes. The river represents a similar non specificity of spatial vacuum without its attendant regimen of social norms, as do the Homeless Vehicles of the evictees from New York city. Deeti experiences a sense of freedom for the first time on the waters, by the river's edge just as Kalua is no more an obscure presence as he was on land. The river offers scalar relief to both the characters, as it traverses through the very landscape that constricts their freedom. The freedom experienced by both is not merely about escaping social barriers but about experiencing themselves and their inner motivations, which finds expression in the way their lives are transformed by the choices they exercise. One such transformative act occurs when they marry each other by the riverside - the escaped widow of a rajput married to an outcaste, an act incomprehensible on

land. “Plucking a few long hairs from her head, she strung the flowers together to make two garlands…when the exchange of garlands had bound them together, they sat for a while, awed by the enormity of what they had done” (180). Kalua and Deeti’s act of marriage becomes the progenitor of claiming such spaces as have not been claimed before. As Smith emphasizes, scale is not simply a spatial solidification or materialization of contested social forces and processes but is an active progenitor of specific social processes (“Contours”, 66). How should one then understand the spatial access claimed by this act?

This question can be answered from two different perspectives, the relational aspect of scales and the Bakhtinian concept of routes. First, the relational aspect of scales according to both Jones and Crang involve establishing networks within and across spaces so much so that “relational approaches focus upon how activities embed processes and promiscuously entwine with connections of varying spatial extent” (*Political Space*, 256). The spatial extent of land and river vary in the politics of control each geography exercises. The river around the upper reaches of Calcutta flows freely without recruitment to the state’s agenda towards transit purposes or trade. The river corresponds to Smith’s notion of first nature and therefore is wild and free and it is this very essence of the river which facilitates Kalua and Deeti’s escape as well as expansion of the self- centered control through a scalar jump across geographical terrain. The second view would be Bakhtin’s ‘chronotope of the road’ which Margaret Cohen describes having a plot line comprised of random and chance events and encounters linked together with little causal connection. A cast of characters including “the most varied people,” (*The Dialogic Imagination*, 243) who meet on this profound social space, and a “thematics where encounters collapse hierarchical distances that usually separate people in other areas of society” (“The Chronotopes of the Sea”, 647). The collapsing of hierarchical distance in the fateful coming together of Kalua and Deeti befits this narrative event. It also begs us to reconsider the tenuousness of social scales which are believed to function within recognizable social spaces only. The illegitimacy of the Ganges flanking an unknown Ghazipur village legitimizes Kalua and Deeti’s union much like

Matangini realization of her immensity in the forest. Unlike Rajmohan's Wife, Deeti and Kalua's expanded scales of control is sustained throughout the text. Rather the narrative tension is maintained by rupturing socially composed spaces of control through the event of Deeti and Kalua's union till the very end of the text. The spatial vacuum that the river offers is also symbolic of a journey which has no immediate destination for either Deeti or Kalua. Later in the narrative, they recruit themselves as indentured labour on the Ibis, a migrant ship bound for Mauritius.

When viewed from a literary perspective, the micro-narratives of Deeti and Kalua are set free from motivations that constrain them from the effects of a regular postcolonial discourse, in that the legitimizing ideas of neither caste nor cultural reception as an aftermath of imperialism, work for the narrative. Both characters recruit themselves on the Ibis, a ship that carries indentured migrants, and transforms the scales of their existence from subaltern to something much larger. Kalua, the strongest man aboard Ibis, kills Bhyro Singh, his oppressor, while consciously retaining the sense of his caste. The Ibis is a site of expansion or in Neil Smith's words becomes a scale of expanding self-centered control and at the same time contracting the scale of official control. Interestingly, the connotations of migrant as commodity, is subverted on the Ibis afloat the Indian Ocean. One can look at migrant as cargo of very little value, especially the way migrants are transported, crammed in the hold of the ship, much like the ballast, cargo of a specific type used to keep the ship stable. The hold in the Ibis, ran along the entire length of the ship having only a curtain to separate the women's section from the men's. The hold windows were sealed for fear of river thugs, etc. and also to keep out the rain which allowed no air inside this closed space and very little light too. When Deeti looks into the hold for the first time she feels as though, "she were about to tumble into a well" (231). The migrants are confined to the hold of the ship and only those who served their turn to row were allowed on the upper deck. Otherwise, the upper deck was accessible only to the crew and the overseers. The condition of the hull was opressive and the heat it trapped made the migrants feel as if their flesh were "melting on their bones". It takes a

mutiny at the end of the narrative, after the killing of Bhyro Singh, for the latch of the dabusa to be severed forever and Kalua to find his release. Identities come undone and the official space no longer exists. What is once held exilic undoes itself to pliable conditions for Kalua, the girmit and the chamar all at once. The ocean and the Ibis rescale the geographies of the space he now occupies. And the slide across geographies becomes essential to obtain a perspective of how the selfsame bodily scale of Kalua evolves from non-agency to agency and also redefines ideologies like the 'subaltern'.

It is important to note a crucial point that Smith makes in context to scales here; the concept of geographical scale as a dialectic between competition and cooperation internal to capital is not the only theorization of the scale, but that scale is a project of 'opposition' as well (*Uneven Development*, 229). The most labile and appropriate exposition of 'opposition' in context to this thesis that Smith makes is 'spatial differentiation'. According to the Neil Smith, geographical scales refer to the dimensions of specific landscapes that come into being through specific processes in the physical and human landscape. The geographical scale is in no sense natural or given. It is specific to certain historical and geographical locations, changing over time, sometimes rapidly sometimes slowly, and in some cases a scale that operates in one society may fail to appear in another. Geographical scale, then, is a central organizing principle according to which geographical differentiation takes place. It is a metric of spatial differentiation; it arbitrates and organizes the kinds of spatial differentiation that frame the landscape such as, specific geographical scales can be conceived as platforms for specific kinds of social activity ("Scale", 725). Geographical scale can be seen as a means of both containment and empowerment and according to this perspective, the construction of geographical scale is a process of profound political importance. "'*Scaling places*'- the establishment of geographical differences according to a metric of scales – etches a certain order of empowerment and containment in the geographical landscape….Inherently contested, the establishment of geographical scale is equally a spatial means of arbitrating the social and economic contradiction between cooperation and

competition" ("Scale", 726). The Indian Ocean as geographical scale works well since the spatial differentiation that arbitrates social and cultural processes, shape the Indian Ocean. This chapter, apart from looking into the politics of opium trade, will also be looking at what is referred to as the 'human ocean', which involves tales of individuals, journeying on the ocean or living on the ocean's littoral. These tales are touched by "miracles of cultural contact" as Fernand Braudel (*The Mediterranean*, 257) terms it, coming into being owing to a shift from "terrestrial to maritime logic" (Jamal and Moorthy, 13), a phenomenon that inhabits the oceanic space and cannot be replicated on land.

The Indian Ocean is an important site for events that unfold in both *Sea of Poppies* and *River of Smoke*. The Indian Ocean in *Sea of Poppies*, takes on many roles, like the ocean being home to a seafaring crew and a consequent way of life that is complete with its set of crew members playing different roles, use of language, and rules of engagement. The ocean works towards upsetting power dynamics structured by caste and empire while it charts a route of migration and is a metaphor for journey itself. Oceanic storms result in generating phantasmic imagination lending an element of mystery to the narrative. *Sea of Poppies* culminates in a storm and the escape of five members from the Ibis. "It was as if the tufaan had chosen her to be its confidant, freezing the passage of time and lending her the vision of its own eye" (*River*, 16). In *River of Smoke*, storms lead to the undoing of the main character, Bahram Modi, a prominent opium merchant from Bombay. The Indian Ocean is not only a route for transporting opium, with its own politics in trade circles but is layered with the intrigue of fabulations and imaginings emanating from opium addiction.

A third important feature of the Indian Ocean is the littoral space, which is a hub of multicultural, multinational interactions. It is a space that offers immense flexibility in harboring artistic pursuits from painting of rare flowers to calligraphy, a zone that offers multi-cuisine experience on small flotillas that flank the coastline, flea markets that cater to goods for all manner of people and the Accha Hong, that houses opium traders, wherein terms of engagement involve

an amalgamation of serious economic transactions, dealings and negotiations, and the easy bustle of a second home away from home to many like Bahram Modi. Bahram's residence enjoys hosting people for dinners and treating them to culinary pleasures that are a unique wedding between Cantonese and Parsi food. The waterside of Pearl river is also dear to Bahram because his home is made complete through his second wife Che-mei and son Ah Fatt. Canton is the place that Bahram recognizes to have given him a life; otherwise he would have been a "prisoner in the Mistrie mansion" (*River*, 347). Bahram associates the place 'Canton' not just with successful business but having "learnt to live" (347). Canton had begotten him a son and the love of Chi-mei, and it had given him the space to be the Bahram that he could not be in Bombay. Therefore Canton offers Bahram the space for extending his self, forging powerful social contacts, making friends and enriching himself culturally.

4.3 Of Theoretical Possibilities: Ocean as Scales

The notion of scales forms the cornerstone for this chapter owing to certain pliabilities in its theoretical conceptualization not only within the regions of human geography but also to what it offers the literary domain in terms of a spatial reading of the text. Neil Smith defines scales in *The Dictionary of Human Geography* as, "one or more levels of representation, experience and organization of geographical events and processes" ("Scale", 724). Smith nominates geographical scale to a different order from its companion scales, the cartographic and methodological, since the former is shaped by "specific processes in the human landscape" (725). Trade and culture on the Indian Ocean are two processes that are considered for this chapter since these lay out a specific dialectic in understanding progress and indigenous identity as well as freedoms that may help to read against the grain of nationalist or postcolonial motivations.

The Indian Ocean itself is another important site of study, one because of the scanty attention given to it in maritime studies, though a revival of scholastic interest on its region is seen in recent times. Two, because of incessant theoretical in-betweenness ascribed to it by Shanti Moorthy and Ashraf Jamal in the book

Indian Ocean Studies which forms a part of the Routledge Indian Ocean Series. The Indian Ocean is held universal and diverse at the same time, intensely local and yet unquestionably connected globally, neither fully authentic, nor bemoaning cross-cultural influences, neither a newer Orient nor "culturally minoritarian" (*Indian Ocean*, 6). The Indian Ocean region is technologized by the micro narratives of seafaring communities, some like the 'lascars' on the Ibis, to whom the sea is a constant home and some like the 'girmits' and traders who touch land only to be reclaimed by oceanic journeys. The ocean itself is the scale of representations and geographical event as Smith suggests, marked by histories and cultures, yet non-deterministic and labile, difficult to ascertain in terms of fixities in identities, practices, economies, temporalities or even territories. These meditations bring us to the next section of the paper which considers the affects and effects of the opium trade in *River of Smoke.*

Fernand Braudel's landmark work *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II* (1972), describes a Mediterranean culture around the Mediterranean littoral. For example, Braudel comments that the Mediterranean comes into existence through human ingenuity, effort and work to continually recreate it (276). This in fact could be made the very basis of spatial differentiation that Smith describes when he talks of geographical scales as the "criterion of difference…between different kinds of places" ("Contours", 64). Such a differentiation distinguishes the littoral spaces from those of the inland, in customs, manners, social structures, economies, etc. This spatial differentiation also elicits a differential politics so far as social and economic cooperation and competition are concerned.

4.4. Indian Ocean Littoral: "Miracles of Cultural Contact"

This section explores the miracles of cultural contact and before delving into the cultural elements of the narrative it explores the geographical characteristic of the land and water interface spawning indeterminate boundaries. Describing port cities in *The Indian Ocean*, Pearson describes port cities as a "quintessential merging of town and sea, the conduit through which maritime and terrestrial

influences mingle and merge" (31). This aspect is well reflected in Ah Fatt's (a prisoner aboard Ibis) depiction of Canton, which Neel, a convicted Zamindar and Ah Fatt's friend, finds interesting since Ah Fatt's descriptions are riddled with elisions that leave much room for exercising one's imagination about the place. The sea port of Canton,

> "…lay far inland…separated from the ocean by an intricate tangle of swamps, sands, creeks, marshes and inlets. The river port is shaped like the hull of a ship and the Walled City also known as the Forbidden City, outlines the river front of the port. Between the water and the city's walls lay a shoulder of land that was as turbulent as a ship's wake…this stretch of shore was so thickly settled that nobody could tell where the land stopped and the water began. Sampans, junks, lorchas and smug-boats were moored here in such numbers as to form a wide, floating shelf that reached almost halfway across the river's width: everything was jumbled, water and mud, boats and godowns-but the confusion was deceptive, for in this teeming, bustling length of silt and water, there were distinct little communities and neighbourhood." (*Sea of Poppies*, 376)

The communities and neighborhoods mentioned here circle around different activities of trade and transactions that lace the waterways. Numerous activities are involved in servicing requirements of large ships and their crew moored along ports or anchored down river. Markets and economies flourished towards these ends. An interesting example of the Wordy market is described here to support this thought. The Wordy market is not like any other market and what makes it unique is its geographical location emanating out of the interface between land and waters. Further, these geographies are problematised through Smith's notion of first and second natures as discussed in the previous chapter.

As opposed to the clearly demarcated areas of function between first nature and second nature, in case of maritime studies, this demarcation becomes problematised for two reasons. First, though oceans form part of physical space, this physical space comes geographically in contact with the coastal space that is a socially determined space, and this contact results in emergence of interstitial spaces of socio-cultural practices that are specific to the littoral zone. The nature of geographical differentiation that comes into play here leads to social practices

that operate not just around informal economic environments but unusual geographical landscapes. For example, in *River of Smoke*, the "Wordy Market" (114) is a market that is held in an open field "adjoining one of the tributary creeks of the Singapore River" (114). Most people access the market on different kinds of boats through the river creek. One of the specialties of this market is that it uses barter system to transact goods apart from currency transactions. "…over the two decades of its existence the Wordy-Market had gained an unusual renown…but for those of slender means and pinched purses-or those with no coins at all, but only fish and fowl to barter-this market, listed on no map…was the place to go" (115). The location of this market draws to it sailors and lascars especially since this market once catered to soldiers' uniforms only. Incidentally, the Wordy-market owing to its unique geographic location, invites circulation of a specific nature of goods, like a diverse collection of garments, where every garment uses material or textures belonging to the ocean, oceanic journeys or relates in some ways to the community of seafaring people. "tunics of stitched selvage", pea jackets recovered from fernan bags of drowned shipmates" (114) are a few examples to quote from. This apart, the uniqueness of the market also lies in offering curious options in fashion for a common folk that can afford fancy clothing procured through simple barter. "Where else could a fisherman trade…a canonical rain-hat for a Balinese cap? Where else could a man go, clothed in nothing but a loincloth, and walk away in a whalebone corset and silk slippers" (115). Trade around the littoral shaped up very differently from its mainland counterpart especially on account of unconventional trade routes that were fed by sea or ocean. As K.N Chaudhuri elaborates in his seminal work on the Indian Ocean, "the main sea lanes of the Indian Ocean served as conduits of trans-continental as well as inter regional, trade" (*Trade and Civilisation*, 169). Sugata Ray's theory upholds this point when he describes the bazaar nexus in the Indian and Chinese chain of trade and finance.

> "The concept of the bazaar here is quite removed from the narrow and ahistorical notion of it as atomistic person-to person transactions. Instead the bazaar refers to wholesale commerce above the level of local markets and even more

> importantly to the indigenous money market which finances, through promissory notes…and other negotiable instruments." (*A Hundred Horizons*, 13-14).

This aspect of the Wordy market and its methods of trade soften the edges of economics by making it human friendly and inclusive by providing for all kinds of people. The markets also suggest a kind of openness wherein a character like Vico, Bahram's purser, who is immaculate in his ensemble, walks down the very paths of the market as someone like Ah Fatt, in coarse clothing. The littoral space is instrumental in the development of such an economy owing to the unfathomable cultural mix of people that inhabit and travel between littoral spaces and this space accommodates everyone. From markets we move to the cultural variety of the Canton water edge as described in the passage that follows.

Michael Pearson in his article "Littoral Society: The Concept and the Problems" builds upon the concept of the littoral society both in geographic and cultural terms. He states:

> "…there is such a thing as littoral society, that is, that we can go around the shores of an ocean, or a sea, or indeed the whole world, and identify societies that have more in common with other littoral societies than they do with their inland neighbors. Location on the shore transcends differing influences from an inland that is very diverse, both in geographic and cultural terms, so that the shore folk have more in common with other shore folk thousands of kilometers away on some other shore of the ocean than they do with those in their immediate hinterland. Surat and Mombasa have more in common with each other than they do with inland cities such as Nairobi or Ahmadabad."(353-354)

The intent of beginning this section with this description of littoral societies is not so much to make comparisons between littoral societies from different zones but to study different cultural influences that inflect a single zone, in this case the Canton waterfront in *River of Smoke*. Pearson's article remains confined to describing fisher folks and how their trade spans both land and water, whereas Ghosh's narrative is more evocative in bringing forth the cultural miracle on shore that Braudel alludes to. Robin Chinnery, Paulette's childhood friend, describes to her the scene on the Canton waterway through a series of letters. The first letter in

the series echoes Pearson's claims of similarity between locations on waterfronts from across the world. Describing the island of Whampoa on the Pearl river, Robin states, "I have the impression that the village is to the Pearl River what Budge Budge is to the Hooghly-a ramshackle cobbily-mash of godowns, bankshalls and custom-khanas" (179). As Robin approaches Canton, the waterways get crammed with vessels of different kinds and the island of Honam is "laid out with gardens, estates and orchards" (180) which look very pastoral and closely resemble "the fields and forests of Chitpur" (180) that lie across the river from Calcutta. Apart from geographical resemblances between the Canton and Calcutta waterfronts, Canton, is diverse in its architectural representations as well. Robin describes the foreign enclave called Fanqui-town that houses factories from different countries. His expectation of the trade enclave's uniformity of architecture is reversed by a "reminder….of pictures of places that are far away-Vermeer's Amsterdam…Chinnery's Calcutta….buildings with columns, pilasters….tiled roofs… colonnaded verandas with the same khus-khus screens" (182) as one sees in India. Rhoads Murphey explains the nature of port cities as a space that is open to the world, such that races, cultures, ideas and goods "from a variety of places jostle, mix and enrich each other" (qtd. in *The Indian Ocean*, 32). Robin's description of the Fanqui-town befits Murphey's claims:

> "In a way Fanqui-town is like a ship at sea, with hundreds of men…living crammed together in a little sliver of a space.… there is no place like it on earth, so small yet so varied, where people from the far corners of the earth must live, elbow to elbow." (185)

The littoral space spawns cultural characteristics that are unique depending upon the location in question and this aspect is explored in here especially with reference to *River of Smoke*. This cosmopolitanism is very much the result of the littoral space which is exposed to a vivid cultural exchange. "To speak of the human ocean then, is to…harness human cultural practice to the element which has made it possible" (Moorthy and Jamal, 14). Allan Villiers, in his fascinating book *Monsoon Seas* (1952) describes cultural practices followed by the inhabitants of the Persian Gulf in negotiating purchase of pearls. Villiers

accompanies a trader by the name of Sheikh Abdul Razzaque on one of his tours to a prospective client. The negotiations are unique in that the seller and buyer engage in drinking coffee and eating sweet confectionary while having an unhurried conversation about diverse things before the bargain is approached. Villiers is particularly curious about a red flannel cloth that Razzaque uses to clinch the deal. "the sheikh would at last grab a spare piece of red flannel…over the right hand of the nakhoda…and conduct the final negotiations by manipulation of fingers, according to some ancient code…in complete silence" (238). The specialized skill of pearl buying is endemic to the Persian Gulf whereas handling boats suited to waterways of different regions is important in sustaining trade on the Pearl river. When Baburao, a young sailor from Canton arrived at Asha Didi's boat, belonging to her father who ran the victual business in supplying eatables to ships at the Calcutta harbor, Baburao, falls in love with Asha and eventually joins the family to offer them his services. One of the chief reasons for the family to accept him was his ability in handling any kind of boat. "the sampans of the Hooghly were quite different from…the 'three-board' of the Pearl River. Being upcurved both in stem and stern, the Hooghly version was more like a canoe…and handled …differently" (326). Baburao is born to the waters and his skill both at handling the boat and the business lead him to marry Asha.

The ways in which a littoral space affects a common form of greeting in locales of Bengal, is effectively evoked in an instance of Asha didi's kitchen boat, from *River of Smoke.* Asha didi's father was a Chinese immigrant who set up a business of supplying victuals for Chinese ships docked at the Calcutta harbor. Ah Bao, a sailor from Canton, marries Asha and spends considerable time in Calcutta, managing his father in-law's business before heading to Canton with Asha didi. Asha didi's kitchen boat supplies Indian food for sailors and other members of the Indian community on the Pearl river. Apart from the pleasure of the Indian food it was also the pleasure of speaking in Bengali that led Neel to seek Asha didi out whenever he could. "….she greeted him in Bengali, with some perfectly casual phrase, something like *nomoshkar,kemon achen*? – words that

would have seemed banal in a Calcutta alleyway, but had the sound of a magic mantra when pronounced on a Canton kitchen boat" (*River*, 328). The joy of experiencing the local in the global, appears to fulfill an unconscious desire in Neel when he sees Asha didi in her sampan. The local is punctuated with an expanded habitat of meaning as a result of the intersection between divergent cultural scapes such that the Bengali phrase "nomoshkar, kemon achen?" assumes a global connotation.

The ocean itself makes for undefined geographies that cannot be claimed singularly by nation, vocation or identity. According to maritime studies, the Indian Ocean region is seen mediating contrasting denominations while remaining in flux, the only constant being the circulation of people, cultures, material and ideas.[1] There are numerous micro narratives of seafaring communities, some like the 'lascars' on the Ibis, a milieu of sailors from diverse cultures, with their unique jargon of seafaring language, and some like the 'girmits' who evolve into cosmopolitan beings. Appiah's idea of the cosmopolitan is being alluded to here, "It would be as if someone asked you where your home was and you said "anywhere" or "everywhere" (*The Ethics*, 218). This statement problematises the impermeability of borders from many accounts which is also a recurrent theme in Ghosh's novels. The 'coming together' of particularities within the larger set of cosmopolitanism is three pronged, not so much as an intent to highlight the particular dialectic of cosmopolitanism, but to understand the human processes that construct a certain geographical scale. Kavita Daiya rightly remarks that the transitional space occupied by migrants like Deeti links, "communities across borders through…discourses of material and emotional belonging" ("No Home", 37-38). This longing is so strong that Deeti, becomes the matriarch of Kalua's family, which now extends into three generations, and this large family is located on the islands of Mauritius. Deeti brings together her Bhojpuri cultural background to amalgamate with the Mauritian, language, food and cultural practices. Apart from this, two important politics that inflect this cosmopolitanism are, first, an ease of belonging to her surroundings that converts the newly occupied space to place. "*Deetiji-ka-smriti-mandir"* (8) or Deeti's temple of

memories, in *River of Smoke* is a cave atop a hill, the walls of which have been painted by Deeti, eternalizing the moment of escape and freedom, of her husband Kalua and his compatriots from the Ibis. And second, is the value laid over this place[2] marking an annual pilgrimage for the family which is spread far and wide within the inner reaches of Mauritius and yet rooted to a moment in time which repeatedly recovers the memory of the birth of the Colver family. A birth that associates itself to the ocean, an undifferentiated geographical feature that cuts across nations yet connects them. And an equally undifferentiated Colver family nuanced by many particularities, which are neither Indian, nor Mauritian or both.

Finally, the proffered cosmopolitanism of the littoral spaces in the narratives could be about a geographic imaginary that points to a new kind of regionalism. A third polemics surrounding cosmopolitanism is perhaps Ghosh's attempt at dislodging the centre-periphery binary of a Euro-American geography as center as against Asia as periphery. *River of Smoke* (2011)*, The Glass Palace* (2000)*, The Calcutta ChromosomeI* (2008), *The Circle of Reason* (1986), forge a coming together of a larger geographical area with intense travel and dwelling that makes for an alternative world connected by the Indian Ocean. Though Mukherjee suggests that Ghosh's works are free from the absurd activity of segmenting the world into first and third regions (*The Perishable*, 185), there seems to be a deeper concern that underlies Ghosh's work, if one were to argue in favour of foregrounding a particular geographical region. It is important that the scale of human processes be seen stretched across an expanded region to be able to understand better the micro-narratives of people and their lives which get lost in a bid to totalize a national tradition or fall into the universalizing trap. And also how, such a region affects freedoms, of dwelling, of acquiring new meanings, and of access. Tanoukhi's insistence on the "setting and context"[3] ("African Roads", 456-457) of each novel being important to understand not only the many spaces within a nation and a region, but also the context of this region when viewed from the lens of the world and how it affects a change in that larger idiom. Locating Ghosh's novels or the contexts of his narratives in the geographical scape of literatures are not merely about uncovering deep notions of historical

provincialism that Dipesh Chakrabarty talks about in his book *Provincialising Europe* (2000). It is as Ghosh avers, an act of distancing oneself from one's immediate environment, "In other words, to locate oneself through prose, one must begin with an act of dislocation" (*The Imam and The Indian,* 305).

Dipesh Chakrabarty explains historicism as a "measure of the cultural distance that was assumed to exist between the West and the non-West" (7). He adds that this distance in the colonies legitimated into ideas of civilization, ascribing to a Europe embodying this civilization in the form of capitalism, modernity or Enlightenment. The ability to self rule itself, looked upon as the highest form of governance was not bestowed upon the colonies, since they were not yet civilized enough to do so, thus confining the non-West to an "imaginary waiting room" (8). Till colonial rule and education ensured a certain level of development, some people would be consigned to waiting rooms in a way alluding to a spatial limbo which has no time ascribed to it. The time that elapsed before this waiting room period historically is referred to as the pre-modern and the time that follows coming out of the waiting room is the modern. When it is said that Ghosh de-scribes the European context by writing history in the making, one refers to novels like the Ibis trilogy and characters like Bahram, Kalua, Deeti and many more who etch distinctive spaces for themselves which are outside the 'waiting room'. Bahram was a successful opium trader and ship builder by his own right in a time that could be ascribed to as the waiting room period. It is at this point that we may look at the Indian Ocean as meta-region to reinstate de-scribing the European context of writing history through a scalar analysis.

4.4.1 Indian Ocean as Meta-Region

Braudel explained his methodology in the treatment of the history of the Meditteranean to be based upon an intuitive understanding of social forms and structures related to a systematic theory of historical changes (*Asia Before Europe*, 5). For the historians of the Indian Ocean, Chaudhuri comments, Braudel's studies of the Mediterranean and the emergence of capitalism in world history remain a necessary point of departure. His description of food, clothing

and housing as the ground-floor of material life merits close investigations of societies other than those of Europe as he included the Ottoman Empire, India and China in his study of civilizations.

In contrasting his own approach to the Indian Ocean with Braudel's, Chaudhuri points out, "Anyone who writes about the Indian Ocean from a European perspective, whether social or geographical, is acutely aware of the contrasting images between the two worlds and the difficult task of capturing these nuances in words" (12). Braudel excluded from his study mental perceptions, the impact of ideology, and the influence of religion. His intellectual interest remained focused on the interplay between historical processes such as capitalism or mechanisms of social control and physical systems like the climate or the environment. "Braudel saw the unity of the Mediterranean as being the product of the unities of material life and the physical environment" (25). However, according to Chaudhuri, Braudel never quite explained what he meant by the totality of a historical situation which guided his methodology in the study of the Mediterranean and the principles which establish such a totality. One way of responding to a totalising historical situation would be through relational constitution of space as Beat Kumin explains.

> "In contrast to 'essentialist' understandings, which endow given units – a town, pays historique, region or even vast geographical landscape such as the Mediterranean – with specific characteristics shaped by environmental and socio-economic structures, more recent conceptualizations envisage space as the dynamic product of interactions between locations, objects and human agents, that is to say as situational syntheses dependent on mental perceptions and the networks in which individuals find themselves" (*Political Space*, 8-9).

This contention ties in well with David Harvey's assertion of space being relational, just as it echoes strongly with Chaudhuri's method of approaching the Indian Ocean as multiple interacting subsets, related to each other. These interacting subsets according to Chaudhuri are elemental spaces such as the sea, desert, fertile lands and mountains, all fall into the Indian Ocean region woven

together through interactions between traders, nomads, migrants, seafarers etc. "By this reasoning, there is a principle under which each element of the set 'Indian Ocean', Arabs, Indians, the Chinese and so on, is integrated into a common pattern of history" (Asia Before Europe, 28). Robin Chinnery, a painter from Calcutta describes the variety of the great number of denizens who come and make Fanqui town their home in a letter to Paulette. "They come from Sindh and Goa, Bombay and Malabar…Calcutta and Sylhet…these differences mean nothing to the gamins who swarm around the Maidan" (*River of Smoke*, 185). The Maidan is a space with such a maddening profusion of cultural diversity that Robin Chinnery, a painter from Calcutta refers to it as a "caravanserais" (185).

The Indian Ocean, therefore, radiates into multiple scales negotiated via sea travel and trade. Ghosh's narratives incessantly draw attention towards an Indian Ocean world, and there often seems to exist a motivation towards creating a non-West as Inderpal Grewal describes it, "unlike Gilroy's Atlantic within which Africa was subsumed in favour of the cultural productions of those created in the new World, Ghosh's project was to produce a new map of Old World as the world without Europe" ("Amitav Ghosh: Cosmopolitanisms", 184). Given Chaudhuri's premise about the inter-connectedness within the Indian Ocean region, Mike Crang's concerns about the treatment of oceanic routes and the littoral as relational spaces as opposed to fixed scales is an one important since one may need to turn the lens backward to reassess the need to view the Indian Ocean and its region aspiring to form a meta-region. Crang comments,

> "the mercantile era, when oceans connected centers of coastal settlement into networks of seaborne commerce, diaspora, and empire, the maritime city often maintained a tenuous relationship with the landed empire of its hinterland'. Melaka served as the major entrepôt between the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean, and in James Scott's view 'Melaka in 1500 before the Portuguese conquest was with its polyglot, trading population probably more diverse, open and cosmopolitan than its contemporary trading port, Venice'. Burke argues that we should see Venice as an information centre for trade and commerce between east and west – an open, porous city composed of flows moving through it. As Kümin suggests in the introduction to this volume, followers of Braudel then replaced one fixed scale (the nation) with another (the

> meta-region such as the Mediterranean). Most accounts have long since accepted that no scale may be natural but focus upon the production of scales through political action and contest. In this way we need to constantly look at whether we have an ontological or epistemological category for analysis, or one where reflexive political action transforms a category of knowledge into one of power". (*Political Space*, 257)

Ghosh's project with the Indian Ocean certainly points towards a valorisaion of the Indian Ocean region which he does by recounting stories of Indian traders, migrants, sea-faring sailors and their interactions with residents living in port cities. As much as Crang's concerns towards replacing one fixed scale with another, or in other words the scale of the nation with the scale of a Mediterranean meta-region are justified, it is also important to understand that Ghosh's project towards constructing a non-West along the Indian Ocean littoral encourages us to look at the littoral geography as a concentration of power within a community of people who were guided by their own enterprise. It is important to acknowledge the significant players and entire communities whose activities and interactions were foundational in building the opium trade and making it such a lucrative enterprise for the colonizers.

And yet the nature of landscape involved in the dissemination of trade and culture is such that they continuously yield to an incessant flow of goods and people on oceanic routes rendering the aspired meta-region labile and open to any kind of essentialising, be it in terms of identities, cultures or even concentrations of power. Heather Sutherland brings out the status of flux on the Indian Ocean routes very well.

> "These fabled waters might have seemed remote from Southeast Asia, but in reality goods moved so frequently between the Bay of Bengal and the South China Sea that both formed part of the wider Indian Ocean trading system. Each had its own specific integrating rhythms, but the links between them helped determine their internal patterns of exchange.…Southeast Asians were involved in both long-distance and local networks, reinforcing identities to which modern political borders were utterly irrelevant. Moreover, physical location did not necessarily determine, let alone fix, membership in an apparently 'geographic' category: the density of connections and strength of economic or cultural orientation could be more decisive". ("Southeast Asian History", 3)

Antoinette Burton gives a more literal expression to this flux playing out in *Sea of Poppies* as she speaks about the recasting of national geographies and creation of worlds or ecumenes "by interrupting the boundary markers that have arbitrarily carved up the subcontinent and by using ocean worlds as ecumenes" ("World Histories",74) . She further enumerates on the "raucously inhabited, fully-embodied worlds through which characters hurtle, and in so doing, shape the territorial limits and possibilities of the landscapes they traverse"(74). Thus the scales of fixed geographies are rigorously negotiated owing to interactions between the geographies of water and land.

Ghosh is remarkable for building his narratives based on the event of the opium trade and bringing to light the character of Bahram, fashioned after Gujarati traders in the opium business in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The section on fabulation discusses making of stories in the littoral spaces in the wake of the opium trade, some of these stories were personal and others were incidents about the sea faring and littoral communities. These stories are difficult to replicate on land, the geography of the imperial landscape offering lesser scope to express oneself and command some degrees of freedom. The fluid space of the ocean as well as the littoral and the opportunities it offered in terms of progress and redemption from the temporal freeze of the waiting room are discussed here forward.

The intuition is that there is something more at work here, like a space clearing activity, suggesting existence of spaces that may not necessarily be laden with the burden or obscurity of either history or geography, but are spaces in the making. Taking together Chakrabarti's criticism of European historicism appropriating history of the non-Western nations, a history in the 'waiting', and every text of Ghosh that de-scribes the European context by writing a history in 'making', marks fresh territory. From cultural amalgamation and unique trade practices to a regionalism of a new kind, we move specifically to the exigencies of the opium trade as experienced on land and sea to understand the literary

spaces it generates and how it communicates with geographies that surround these spaces.

4.5 Awash in Opium

The opium trade to China was constantly racked up in debates between monetary gains to the British treasury against the evil effect it had on its consumers besides rendering the Chinese Empire redundant with opium addicts. The *Bristol Selected Pamphlets* state, "Opium taken at twenty, if its use be freely indulged in, kills at thirty; and it is estimated that every year one hundred thousand Chinese are destroyed by this fatal habit. A British merchant has said that "…there is no slavery on earth to name with the bondage into which opium casts its victims" (11). The opium export boomed in India from the mid sixteenth century until the mid nineteenth century, single handedly monopolized by the British empire which led to a considerable amount of silver to flow into the Indian markets alongside the empire. "Chinese silver moving to India in partial payment for Indian exports helped to supply the increasing silver needs of the currency system of India. The Indian silver rupee had become the basic medium for the entire Indian Ocean trading zone by this time" (Richards, 9). This abundant cash flow draws the young Bahram Modi, son-in-law to the Mistries, a leading ship builder in Bombay, who works as their apprentice, to establish an export cell to the company and embark upon his journey to Canton, after some heavy persuasion against stiff resistance from the family about the vagaries of such a trade. Bahram is confident and very quickly establishes himself as a successful and wealthy opium trader. "rare was the Indian merchant who could boast of travelling to Canton more than three or four times-but Bahram had made the journey fifteen times in the course of his career" (45).

Bahram's story lies in contrast to the strict injunctions laid on the peasants cultivating opium. This contrast will be drawn by bringing to light the essential differences between land and sea, in what can be harnessed on land does not hold on sea. This section employs the concepts of geographical imaginary, as proposed

by Derek Gregory wherein he articulates dominion over nature, the European notion of "temperate nature" ("(Post)Colonialism", 89) which is without excesses and is moderate. Such a moderation seems improbable on the ocean that is governed by phenomenon like oceanic storms, waves, currents etc. Gregory suggests a second notion of nature which is wild and untameable, and cannot be harnessed towards activities to further civilisation. Though oceanic pathways served as active trade routes humanized by trade links and cross pollinating littoral societies with cultural influences, a single storm could do much towards changing the course of history for characters like Bahram or Kalua. These micro-narratives are important since they generate a particular kind of story which is about the Indian Ocean world. And this story making has been termed 'fabulation' by Muecke.

4.5.1 Opium Trade: On Land and On Sea

The dichotomy of freedom versus injunctions, in the opium trade are influenced by the scalar constructions around the opium business carried out on land versus at sea. Gregory, elaborates as to how space in the colonial project was projected as a static, by "enframing nature" ("(Post)Colonialism, 92), where the world is set up as a picture and treated as picture. What Gregory means by this is that the colonial project sought to hold nature at a distance, held as an object and worked upon to be systematized. The Ghazipur factory offers exactly this kind of a vision that frightens Deeti when she encounters it for the first time. Deeti, who is used to living in a hut surrounded by open fields, is repeatedly awed at the gigantic proportions she witnesses. The architecture of the opium factory is governed by symmetry and largeness of space that are of unnatural dimensions. Looking into the weighing shed she pulls back in apprehension, "Such was the length of the shed that the door looked like a pinprick of light…along the floor, stood many gigantic pair of scales, dwarfing men around them" (*Sea of Poppies*, 92). The description of the factory is constantly punctuated with words that allude to magnitude, "immense iron roofed structure", "enormous square columns" (93), that contain within them organized activity of weighing, storing and packaging

opium. The dimensions of the factory imply the scale of imperial dominion over indigenous landscape. Even raw, free nature is systematized to fit the imagery of colonial enterprise, "the Ganga seemed to be flowing between twin glaciers, both its banks being blanketed by thick drifts of white-petalled flowers. It was as if the snows of the high Himalayas had descended on the plains" (3). The Ganga and the Himalayas, two of the country's most formidable geographical features are bent around to serve opium production. Ganga, feeds major mainlands from the north through to the south with nourishment that makes the soil fertile for crops, and the waters itself are a rich source of marine food. But the Ganga, in the imagery drawn by Ghosh seems to be meekly nurturing the opium produce, wherein even the vast sweeps of opium fields resemble the mighty Himalayas, that seem to have been brought down to the plains, stripping the country of its protection from the north. The factory represents a regulatory site of imperial discipline that offers practically no scope for scalar expansion aptly represented by the non-agency of Hukam Singh. Hukam Singh's opium addiction leaves him incapable of any willful action, except for the work that he renders in the opium factory as if the little will that he possesses is harnessed by the empire. Much like the "circling torsos" (94), in the opium factory, with vacant and glazed eyes that " managed to keep moving, as slow as ants in honey, tramping, treading…these…men had more the look of ghouls than any living thing that she had ever seen"(95), Hukam Singh's personal life is completely sabotaged by his addiction. Gregory explains that imaginary geographies thus are "*orderings* in the double sense of both bringing an essentially external order to colonial societies…and of commanding their members to make themselves present as intrinsically colonial subjects" ("(Post) Colonialism", 86) implying how "subaltern populations are defined by their nominal 'lack' of attributes" (86).

Gregory offers a brilliant exposition on the interpretation of the European gaze on the indigenous landscapes when he describes Claude Levi Strauss's opinion on the landscape of India from an airplane, "It is like a tapestry with the wrong side showing" (qtd. in *Social Nature*, 87). According to Gregory, this reflects an uncanny of the European ideal that yields itself to the "imperfections

of an alien landscape" (87). But Gregory emphasises that indigenous geographies are far from being featureless planes and that the colonial production of space hinges on the colonial production of nature. He takes this idea further by implicating cultural practices, and natural organisms and physical systems having the capacity to make a difference in this landscape such that other natures endowed with gigantesque or monstrous powers "threaten to overwhelm colonial cultures and to exceed the space available for their presentations" (87). And in this light the factory at Ghazipur and the attendant enframed nature that it dictates can be contrasted with *deetiji-a-smriti mandir*, inside a cave at the summit of a cliff facing the sea. The cave has been humanized by people at some earlier time and its wilderness offers Deeti reassurance. The height of the cliff and its perilous location commanding the view of the ocean towers over the constructed dimensions of the Ghazipur factory. Climbing up the mountain one would suddenly come upon the cliff side "dropping precipitously into the sea…the sound of pounding surf would well up from the edge of the cliff" (*River*, 5). The cave is free from imperial discipline and made its own by Deeti. By facing the ocean, it continually reiterates the freedom attained by the escaped migrants of the Ibis. And these individuals grace the walls of her cave temple immortalizing the characters on the Ibis, while keeping the story of their escape alive through annual narration of the event at every "Grans Vakans" (*River*, 3).

The Anahita, Bahram's ship, is a veritable site of indigenous progress not only owing to the rich cargo it carries but also owing to the diversity of cultural milieu it imbibes from the Indian Ocean littoral. "…he liked…. the severe Dutch buildings, the Chinese temples, the whitewashed Portuguese church, the Arab souq, and the galis where the long-settled Gujarati families lived" (61) at Malacca. The pleasures of cultural opulence hangs heavy on the "cargo knowledge" ("Fabulation", 32), laid on the opium trade. Muecke explains the term as the language of the colonizer imbued with a sense of having found the truth, but a truth that is partial since it is fictive, as it contains only half the story, which is pitted against a material reality that would suggest otherwise. Since the teller of the story is the colonizer, it is fraught with omissions and commissions

that will only create a story appropriate to fit the annals of the colonizer's history books. Therefore cargo knowledge works in a way to delude the indigenous citizen into believing in the value of the cargo and recruiting his enterprise to serve itself. Led by the cargo knowledge of economic progress, Bahram devises ingenious ways of packaging the opium cargo in ways that render minimal damage, "breakages were rare….he had never, in the course of a single voyage, had to write off more than a chest or two" (28-29). Not only is Bahram adept in devising ingenious ways of packaging but also taking great precaution in keeping the contents of his cargo a secret to dissuade pilferage and also to conveniently secure hefty insurance sums against losses.

Oceanic storms were a constant source of anxiety for traders, and one of the ways of securing the ship against shipwrecks was to counterbalance the cargo using ballasts or heavy weights that would be placed in the bilge of the ships. K.N. Chaudhuri mentions how ship owners during the eighteenth century would use ingots of iron, heavy metals, etc. as ballast (*Trade and Civilisation*, 184). But economics played a part here as well since the cargo space had to be used in a way to maximize profits. Chaudhuri mentions the use of crates of dates as ballast in ships bound from the Middle East to India, Africa and South East Asia wherein the ballast would double as cargo (184). But in case of the Anahita, Bahram uses the opium consignment to double up as ballast since it is placed in the hold of the ship carefully hidden from public gaze. The contrast in the valuation of the ballast makes for interesting interpretation in the text. Opium which is doubled to be used as ballast is guised as material of much less value as opposed to the opium in Anahita's hold. Perhaps, the cargo knowledge of the colonizers, in the literal sense of wealth associated with the opium trade, is not transported to Bahram in its degrees of efficacy. The storm on the ocean dislodges any residual stupor Bahram harbours towards what he truly holds valuable. "As they lay sprawled in the angle between the deck and bulwark, loose balls of opium came cannoning down to crash into the timbers. Each ball was worth a sizeable sum of silver – but neither…. had any regard for their value" (32). Bahram intoxicated by the opium is reminded of Che-mei. The texture of opium mingled with the bilge waters in

the ships hold turns gooey and slimy, and covers Bahram when he loses a footing in the hold. The raw opium is much more powerful than when inhaled, and creates illusions in Bahram's head. Bahram loses a tenth of the cargo in the storm and eventually his life in his desperate bid to sell the banned cargo to a trader much later in the text. Unable to bear the shock of failing to clinch the most lucrative deal according to his sound business judgments, Bahram commits suicide. But for the Chamber of Commerce and its British traders, the inflexible ban on opium cargo by the Chinese emperor culminates in a war.

4.5.2 Of Fabulations and Valuations

This section explores the notion of fabulation in relation to Bahram's opium stupor contextualized within the region of maritime studies. In the book *Indian Ocean Studies*, which is a collection of a number of essays on the Indian Ocean from social, cultural and political perspectives, Stephen Muecke, refers to the idea of fabulation as a way to recreate the Indian Ocean world. Muecke's argument to use fabulation as a means to explore the Indian Ocean world stems from a desire to pay attention to all manner of cultural production, practiced or produced through literary enterprises. What necessitates fabulation as a way of articulation is that it questions "analytic writing what it has learned" ("Fabulation", 39). Muecke argues how Western discourse constructs representation of Asian worlds based on the binaries of subject-object, self-other which are so distanced that it is impossible to bridge the gap between the two. It becomes important to know all about the Indian Ocean culture as a channel that connects people from different zones, especially referring to Michael Pearson's observation of how littoral communities as far apart as Surat and Mombasa have more in common than they do with their inland counterparts ("Littoral Society", 354). This kind of connectivity gives birth to cultural exchanges that spawn making of stories through conversations that become fabulations. What is interesting is that these fabulations do not follow epistemic pathways to transform themselves into close ended stories or singular factual details, but become popular culture amalgamating both stories and real life to create an Indian Ocean world.

Fabulation entails a specific process of coming into being and this section explores fabulation in regards to the mental landscape of Bahram Modi, wherein his longing for Che-mei, his second wife from Canton, does not achieve realization on land but finds fulfillment in his opium inebriated state. This exploration is important since geography and literariness are brought together to outline a space that offers greater value to the individual being than material commodity in the form of opium. The landscape of the ocean charged with imperial motivation is transformed to accommodate Bahram's inner desires that do not care for his cargo or its value thereof. With the storm doing considerable damage to his consignment of opium, Bahram, "had no thought…for the losses he suffered…his eyes and his mind were focused instead, with an almost clairvoyant concentration on Che-mei" (33). Coming out of the hold of the ship, Bahram is faced with two different kinds of portents, one of losing his Munshi, and two sailors who have been thrown overboard, but the most significant portent is the loss of the ship's figurehead, 'Anahita', an angel who "watched over the waters" (34). Symbolically, the lost figurehead could mean that the ship is no more guided by its celestial overseers. The Anahita is now exposed to the charge of the rough sea that is not determined by either the mores of trade nor faith and superstition tied to Shireenbai, Bahram's wife in Bombay. Instead Bahram desires to indulge in the portent of Che-mei's visions that accompany his opium stupor.

Margaret Cohen quotes Herman Melville's notion of the ship as "a bit of terra firm cut off from the main; it is a state in itself and the captain is its king" (qtd. in *The Novel Vol*. II, 663). The ship as metaphor cuts across scales demarcating land and ocean, social space and nature and even imperial progress set against indigenous progress. The Anahita on the ocean is much like the terra firm cut off from mainland and while on the ocean is a state in itself. But the hegemony of this state (signifying the empire) and the state of the ship having run into an oceanic storm are completely reversed. Bahram as captain of the ship reels under a deep opium stupor and having fallen off his assumed chair of captaincy, is unable to steer the course of his ship much less the destiny of the empire tied to hefty profits from the opium trade.

From a literary point of view, the micro-narrative of Bahram's tale is difficult to lodge within nationalist or postcolonial constraints owing to its strange non-community or allegiance to a nationalist ethic against the evils of opium trade. An abrupt end to indigenous progress problematises the aims of postcolonial representation at hand. Bahram chooses to unabashedly pursue the opium trade for what it brings, in terms of wealth and gentle romance and a coveted son. Bahram rises in ranks within the community of British traders and is proud to be admitted into the Chamber of Commerce, but does not find allegiance there either. The only commitment that is 'real' is that of being a resident of the Indian Ocean littoral, especially his encounters with Chi-mei in her sampan and his quarters in Achha Hong that he so covets. The geographical event of the Indian Ocean here is the travel and Bahram's community is that of his crew and the opium itself, which anthropomorphizes itself into Chi-mei with every single instance of opium stupor. The travels are both material and fantastical, and both uncover sometimes tenderly and at other times harshly, the portent of 'cargo knowledge'.

The event of opium trade is arbitrated by two very different kinds of landscapes, that of the ocean and of 'fabulation'. Deleuze and Guattari enunciate the concept of fabulation in reference to the arts as 'being of sensation' (*What is Philosophy*, 164) wherein the state of 'being of sensation' is reached through percepts and affects. Percepts evoke the presence of the human subject in non-human landscapes of nature wherein the human figure is absent and yet "entirely within the landscape" (164). Bahram's opium induced fantasies occur in a non-physical plane that is populated by none other than Che-mei who is deceased. The settings of his meetings with Che-mei during these fantasies, be it his living quarters in the Accha Hong with its countless artefacts or sublime boat rides are made tangible by Che-mei who is but an absent-presence in these mental states. Travelling in Che-mei's boat, now owned by a man named Allow, Bahram conjures his union with a mystery woman, who acts and looks like Che-mei. The fantasy ends when Allow informs Bahram of reaching the river bank and confirming that no one else was aboard the boat. But they discover a set of water

puddles leading from the boats edge to Bahram's quarters on the upper deck intensifying the mystery. The narrative works towards unifying the physical landscape of the waters and the non-physical presence of Che-mei as a device to expose what Bahram truly holds dear to him. Waterways support Bahram's desire by raising in him the affect that follows the percept of his experiences. Affects are about becoming, becoming others, such that it effects "the transition from one state to another: to extract a bloc of sensations, a pure being of sensations" (*What is Philosophy*, 167). Bahram is no more the dogged opium trader of the material world but a pure being of sensations and the affects wrest from him the falsehood of what he projects outwardly driving him towards his true becoming. At some point waterways and fabulation become coterminous, much like 'becoming' (*A Thousand*, 273), the ocean is a humanized presence that stirs the inner motivations of who we are and what we want. What materiality constrains, fabulation achieves in spinning conversations between Bahram and Che-mei, that he cannot have with her anymore.

A second example illustrating the idea of fabulation working, "best hovering between the oral and written, the real or imaginary" (*Indian Ocean*, 33) and as a process that hears "the discursive frameworks which are the practice of putting words together as knowledge" (33) is portrayed in the episode of the Ibis running into a cyclone. After the fated killing of Bhyro Singh, mayhem ensues aboard the ship and the crew loyal to the deceased Subedar thirst for Kalua's blood. A furious cyclone breaks out on the ocean and the timing of the storm corresponds with Kalua, Neel, Jodu and Serang Ali's escape from the Ibis on a long boat. Deeti standing on the upper deck of the Ibis is lifted up a few feet off the ship as she witnesses the escape and the safe arrival of the fugitives on the shore. If fabulations are about the situation of missing people asking to be remedied, then Deeti's retelling of the story fills the gap of the ships log books accounting for the escaped fugitives as dead. Deeti 'sees' the discursive frameworks practised towards putting together knowledge that suits the coloniser's beliefs.

> "No one who heard Deeti on this subject could doubt that in her own mind she was certain that the winds had lofted her to a height from which she could look down and observe all….the tufaan had chosen her to be its confidante, freezing the passage of time and lending her the vision of its own eye". (*River of Smoke*, 16)

The oceanic storm is both real and imaginary, it assists Deeti in fabulating the story of Kalua's escape as she stands suspended between land and the sky.

4.6 Conclusion

Waterways in Amitav Ghosh's novels lend themselves to questioning, subverting, restructuring, rescaling, constructs that function with distressing success on land. The waterways provide escape, places to hide, scope to disappear and reappear. The ways of the water are irrational for there is no country, and the locale is vast swathes of water with the occasional calm of the littoral. The waterways are a site of expansion or in Neil Smith's words waterways become a scale of expanding self-centered control and at the same time contracting the scale of official control. Interestingly, the connotations of 'cargo knowledge', or migrant as commodity, is subverted on the Ibis afloat the Indian Ocean. The Ibis voyage begins with a foreboding of colonial discipline which is dislodged given the storm on the Indian Ocean that tips the scale transforming Ibis from a site of oppression to one of release. Identities come undone and the official space no longer exists. What is held exilic undoes itself to pliable conditions of Kalua, the girmit and the chamar all at once.

This chapter concludes with a specific kind of geographical consciousness attained through the study of the rivers, ocean and its littoral areas. And this consciousness is situated in landscapes that are at a remove from imperial discipline or material engagements of trade and profits which apparently shape indigenous progress or transform these influences through the action of agents like migrants and people for whom the everyday life experiences of family and

love destabilize given spatial foundations. Additionally, waterways also inspire fabulations through which are realised the true motivations of the indigene like Bahram. Amidst untamable landscapes and imaginations lies the syncretic space of the littoral that is home to ever evolving ways of life and livelihood undergirded by the ocean as an unmistakable presence. A link that is carried forward to the next chapter is the connotation of the ship Ibis and the freedom it offers Kalua. Kalua's freedom is a promising narrative event as against Bahram's motivations that are unable to transition from his mental scape to his living world. What are those factors that liberate Kalua and other characters, are explored as one of the points of continuation to "Waterways in Amitav Ghosh's Texts".

End notes

1. The Indian Ocean is held universal and diverse at the same time, intensely local and yet unquestionably connected globally, neither fully authentic, nor bemoaning cross-cultural influences, neither a newer Orient nor "culturally minoritarian" (Moorthy and Jamal, 6).
2. Tuan states that "a place is a special kind of object. It is a concretion of value, though not a valued thing that can be handled or carried about easily; it is an object in which one can dwell" (12). "What begins as undifferentiated space becomes place as we get to know it better and endow it with value" (6).

Chapter 5

Bodies in Movement, Practice and the Virtual Medium

5.1 Introduction

The subject of body as scale provides points of continuation from the previous chapter on waterways since some of the spaces that undergo changes on the waterways owe it to bodies in movement or bodies in action. What kind of spatial differentiation do these activities generate and how transformative are they when interacting with surrounding landscapes makes for enunciation in this chapter. The space of the body and its interactions with the surrounding landscape is studied in this chapter through structure/agency dualism[1] (*Mapping the Subject*, 4). The dualisms are important parameters which mediate subject formation and the consequent impact they have on how the body acquires meaning. Does the body acquire meaning only in relation to social rules and sanctions existent in structures outside itself or does it have its own internal meaning? This question is especially important since Neil Smith's notion of body as scale founds itself on the body as a social construct whereas this chapter attempts to look at the body stripped to its bare essentials, and deriving meaning from its "inherent qualities" (*Mapping*, 3). Another essential feature that is dealt with here is the body working closely with raw geographical landscapes that are not social in their construction and therefore the geography such a subject maps is guided by motivations that are unconventional and yet syncretic so far as bridging very different landscapes are concerned. And finally, the context of the body in cyberspace is looked at as a way to look beyond literary theory.

According to geographers, Steve Pile and Nigel Thrift, the human subject is difficult to map because it does not have precise boundaries, "something that cannot be counted as singular but only as a mass of different and sometimes

conflicting subject positions" (*Mapping*,1). The variability in the notion of the body through its placement in different geographical landscapes, its own inherent qualities and the interplay of the virtual medium through which the body may migrate, become key focal points of exploration in this chapter. The chapter begins with the body of Kalua, from *Sea of Poppies*, in movement and the evolution of Kalua's subject position by the end of this movement. The text is set in the imperial period and is beset with contestation from caste and imperial politics. What is reached at the end of Kalua's movement gets picked up by Fokir's character in *The Hungry Tide*, set in current times, challenged by modern means of survival which threatens his indigenous skills of livelihood. How Fokir's body interacts with the wild Sunderban terrain and the harmonies and disharmonies achieved in contest with social space is analysed here. Finally the indigene is seen rediscovering itself through cyberspace in *The Calcutta Chromosome*, set in the future. Nature and science engage in a dialogue through a virtual medium that enables transfer of knowledge. These notions are positioned in different time zones and through each positioning the scalar realizations of bodies are found to recuperate spaces and how we may understand them. Neil Smith's concept of body as scale is discussed below as a point of initiation into the links that will be established later in the chapter.

5.2 Neil Smith: Body as Scale

According to Smith the scale of the body is the primary physical site of personal identity, and this identity is socially constructed. "The place of the body marks the boundary between self and other in a social as much as physical sense, and involves the construction of a "personal space" in addition to a literally defined physiological space" ("Contours", 67). Social construction and personal space become subject to factors like natural landscapes and communities which become instrumental in setting borders and also dissolving them so far as establishing personal space is considered, in the sections to follow in the chapter. Social construction and Judith Butler's "cultural locus of gender meanings" (*Feminism as Critique*, 129) are problematised while considering Kalua's (an

outcaste) sexuality and its violation thereof. An often presumed trait of the outcaste, in portrayals in fictional works on Dalits (an outcaste within the Indian caste system), is their simple mindedness pit against enormous physical strength. Kalua occupies the peripheries of the chamar basti, living in a cattle pen with his two white oxen. The invisibility of Kalua's personal existence is in stark contrast with the visibility his size and dark body offer to those who look at him and exploit him for various pursuits. The landowning families of Ghazipur use Kalua as a means of entertainment and commerce by making him fight in wrestling bouts, but a climax is reached when Kalua is nearly forced to mate with a "large black mare" (*Sea of Poppies*, 56). bell hooks' reference to hypersexuality and its association with the black male body (*We Real Cool*, 63) finds uncanny resonance here as well, as if Kalua's formidable size and the colour of his skin qualify him to be nothing more than an animal himself. Marion Young suggests that "scaling of bodies" appropriates corporeal differences (*Justice*, 123) or one could extend the argument and say, scaling of bodies appropriates corporeal similarities, across genders that are entrenched in caste politics. For instance, the scene of Kalua's violation is witnessed by Deeti, wife of a high caste rajput who is impotent and an opium addict. She is raped by her brother-in-law on her wedding night at the behest of the groom's mother, (proliferation of the family lineage being sacrosanct to a highly patriarchal system), unknown to Deeti since she is drugged on opium. "Ever since the night of her wedding, Deeti had been haunted by images of her own violation" (57). What she witnesses causes her to think "So it could happen to a man too? Even a powerful giant of a man could be humiliated and destroyed, in a way that far exceeded his body's capacity for pain?" (57). Smith contends citing Simone de Beauvoir that "masculine culture identifies women with the sphere of the body while reserving for men the privilege of disembodiment, a non-corporeal identity" (qtd. in "Contours", 67). Kalua's violation works to undermine masculinity framed by denying embodiment, suggesting how it is as much prone to corporealisation as a female body. In the section titled "Bodies in Movement Expressed through the Figure of the Subaltern and Migrant", the latter half of Butler's statement about the body being a cultural

locus of gender meanings, questions if the body is free from cultural imprint and is natural, are dealt with through the notion of 'element of surprise' in Kalua's bodily movement. Smith avers that gender meanings and culture tie the identity of the body very closely with its internal differences. So much so that the "dialectic of identity and difference is central to the definition of scale but nowhere more important than with the body" (Butler, *Feminism* 67). But this notion too gets problematised when one considers the kind of landscape on which gender, culture, identity dialectics play out. This particular notion has already been discussed in the preceding chapter where the scalar jump from land to river displays the transformation in Kalua's agency.

Young argues how cultural imperialism "consists in a group's being invisible at the same time that it is marked out and stereotyped. Culturally imperialist groups project their own values, experience, and perspective as normative and universal" (*Justice*, 123). And therefore victims of cultural imperialism are rendered invisible, is a statement that finds ample resonance in the example elaborated upon in the previous passage. Smith goes on to assert that the body is a site of biological reproduction, having specific needs "that are equally social in definition and delivery….Care for the body, physical access to and by the body, and control over the body are the central avenues of contest at this scale" (67). Taking his argument further Smith elaborates that even if women do not necessarily monopolize the scale of the body, contests at this scale are dominated by gender[2]. This chapter looks at the concept of the cyborg in *The Calcutta Chromosome*, as a notion that goes beyond gender, since what gets perpetuated are personality traits that can exist freely in a man or woman. The scale of the body is charted across different landscapes and finds expression through unconventional modes of movement, practice and becoming cyborg. The geographies traversed are imbued with spatial contest, imperialism, capitalism and 'isms' that occupy structures through which societies and individuals function.

5.3 The Body in Movement Expressed Through the Figure of the Subaltern and the Migrant

Movement in this particular section is being comprehended from two aspects, one of movement as action and the other through the state of being a migrant. These two aspects are considered here since both through action and the state of being a migrant, a new subjectivity is achieved. Pile and Thrift describe how the idea of travel and movement are bound up with a new image concept that will produce a new subject position. "…forging such an image-concept requires the recognition of new spatialities" (21). And this aspect is significant because new spatialities problematise the structure/agency dualism and how they confer meaning on the body. This premise gets illustrated through an example from *Sea of Poppies*, wherein Kalua, the outcaste relies on bodily movement to outbid the elements and norms of social structure, that have laid the irremovable marker of caste upon his body. Caste gets intricately associated with physical confinement or in other words spatial access is severely circumscribed. But Kalua's action exerted through bodily movement marks a geography that is unprecedented when conceived through a mere subaltern lens. The occasion is Deeti's forced sati and the pyre on which she is placed is converged upon by crowds from far and wide to witness. Kalua has witnessed the scene from a distance and planned to act, intending to save Deeti. "Kalua bided his time, counting, … to calm himself: his main asset …was neither his power nor his agility, but… his element of surprise – for even he, with all his strength, could not hope to fight off fifty men" (177). And so at the opportune moment, he wields the bamboo platform tied to a rope into a whirling action clearing a "path through the crowd – people fled from the hurtling projectile, like cattle scattering from some whirling demon" (177). According to Henri Bergson if the body is capable of exercising a genuine and "… *new* action upon the surrounding objects, it must occupy a privileged position in regard to them" (*Matter and Memory*, 20). Bergson goes on to explain that laws of nature determine to a calculable extent a necessary action that plays out itself at the required hour. This explication though based on locomotion communicated

between the brain and the body, is interceded by the mind in the form of thoughts. In the mental region the activity of movement is formed through a sequence of images via interplay of thoughts, which indicate how the image will get played out in space. And in the event that fulfills the action of movement as conceived by the individual, spatial limitations are broken. What sets Kalua's action apart is his realization about the 'element of surprise' in his bodily movement which qualifies to be the genuine action as suggested by Bergson and does not depend on practice, in other words "eventual actions" (20), to fulfill itself in space. This aspect of human body as the site of action and the mind relying on perception is held outside the influence of consciousness that could limit (in this specific case), Kalua's success in carrying out the action. Kalua's action is not impeded by his caste consciousness, and what he can and cannot do if he has to abide by social norms but something else prevails, and that is the body and its movement. The momentariness of spatial access on land that Kalua achieves is not lost on us. But the freedom of access extends itself to the waters that carry Kalua and Deeti downstream before they become girmits on the Ibis.

In a reading of Ghosh's *The Glass Palace*, Nicky Gregson's chapter "Agency : Structure", in the book *Spaces of Geographical Thought* brings out the parallel workings of agency and structure. Gregson explains Marx's dictum about men making history but not in the conditions of their own choosing as a reflection of Rajkumar, the successful timber merchant in Burma, whose timber yard is bombarded on the event of Japanese air raids on Rangoon, resulting in huge losses. Gregson explains agency here as,

> human agency and an agency that is understood as intentional, purposive, meaningful action/s; structure is the conditions that simultaneously enable, frame, suggest and constrain action/s. We can see both clearly in the portrayal of Rajkumar …. On the one hand Rajkumar has plans for his business – a classic instance of intentional action. But on the other, these plans are themselves moulded and shaped by conditions.
> (*Spaces of Geographical*, 22)

In view of the structure/agency debate being a vexed one, Gregson believes in the concerted action of both factors acting out in the world. Rajkumar's character in *The Glass Palace* is seen to exert himself throughout the text towards establishing

himself as a successful timber merchant. His journey from an 11 year old assistant at a food stall to a timber merchant maps countless feats of bold agency that match up against the odds thrown at him via social rules and sanctions. Thus Gregson's reading of the text and interpreting it as a seamless narrative of structure/agency dualism is justified in the novel. But a similar notion may not be the case in *Sea of Poppies* since Kalua's intentionality comes through very sparingly, albeit powerfully, in both the given instances of saving Deeti from the funeral pyre and in the killing of Bhyro Singh. For the most part Kalua's agency lies dormant at the periphery of a structure that is far too dominant a presence in his life for him to even consider acting against.

The emphasis on these two events in the narrative for being so striking, then is posited on Kalua's bodily movement, his 'element of surprise' which echoes Tim Creswell's notion of mobility alluding "to do something. Moving involves making a choice within, or despite, the constraints of society and geography....Mobile, embodied practices are central to how we experience the world….Our mobilities create spaces and stories – spatial stories" (*Geographies of Mobility*, 5). Nigel and Thrift quote Merleau-Ponty's theory about the bodily experience of movement not being a case of mere theoretical knowledge but as something that provides us "with a way to access the world" which is recognized as originial (qtd. in *Mapping*, 6). The body in movement has a spontaneity of its own, making its access to the world and object original. This stance stands in opposition to the cultural inscription of the body making its behavior predictable. The boundaries for the body then are already set, for both the subject and society, to perform within set cultural norms. Movement in Kalua and Fokir's case resists being culturally marked allowing the body to perform and practice freely.

Kalua's bodily movement is further explained via the concept of Kairos thought of as "timing," or the "right time," (Sipiora, Rhetoric and Kairos, 1). Sipiora explains this fundamental notion in ancient Greece, carrying a number of meanings in classical rhetorical theory and history, including ""symmetry," "propriety," "occasion," "due measure," "fitness," "tact," "decorum," "convenience,""proportion," "fruit," "profit," and "wise moderation," to mention

some of the more common uses" (1). Sipiora draws from John E. Smith's differentiation between the concepts of chromos and kairos as follows: "[W]e know that all the English expressions "a time to" are translations of the term "kairos"—the right or opportune time to do something often called "right timing. This aspect of time is to be distinguished from chronos which means the uniform time of the cosmic system" (qtd in. *Rhetoric*, 2). By tying together the right time to do something inherent in Kalua's bodily movement, Kalua's kairos impacts the narrative in terms of disrupting the chronos, the uniform time of the cosmic system which does not correspond to the heterogenous time of indigenous progress. Left to the exigencies of uniform cosmic time, Kalua would never become an agent in disturbing the dominance of the imperial master through the likes of Bhyro Singh and continue his role at the periphery of the discourse as a mute and weak agent. Further linking this disruption to being important drivers in changing the direction of the narrative, Frank Kermode's explanation of 'kairos' being that point of time between a fictional beginning and an end, which is filled with significance, and charged "with a meaning derived from its relation to the end" (*The Sense of an Ending*, 47) acquires full justification in how Sea of Poppies ends. The novel ends with Kalua's escape, additionally, Kalua and Deeti's union by the riverside following Kalua's act of rescuing Deeti also marks the end of the section titled 'Land' in Sea of Poppies, before the narrative enters into the section titled 'River'.

A useful corollary to the timeliness of Kalua's actions may be related to the chronotope[3] of being on the waters. Scholar and literary critic, Margaret Cohen in the chapter "Chronotopes of the Sea", talks about the white waters signifying the malevolent elements of a sea or ocean and how such a space affects the narrative space,

> "In keeping with its status on the edge, white water is not only a dangerous space but a dangerous time, a representation of time as crisis….the time of white water is full, indeed almost to the point of overflowing the container of the narrative. It is a moment when time is experienced by the protagonists as in short supply, when timing is all, when a maneuver must be made under the impending threat of death." (*The Novel : Forms and Themes*, 658).

Cohen's argument of white waters as representation of time in crisis offers further credence to Kalua's element of surprise and indeed the sudden outbreak of the storm, becomes the "stasis of being becalmed, immobilized in ice" (*The Novel*, 658). The moment in fact does heighten the reader's sense of crisis time as Cohen suggests and urgency of time in the experience of reading the story coincides with the time in the narrative itself. The "narratives set on the ship board dwell on the in-between space of passage" (664) and the characters must negotiate this passage through stringent working conditions and the sadistic application of brutality and violence all the while sacrificing their comfort and ego. The conditions on the Ibis are not far from what is being described here. Work being an immensely important way of surviving the rigours of sea-faring, Cohen comments that the relation of the body to that of the ship necessitates the use of the body and intelligence in staging the resistance against the dominion of the ship's hierarchy. Kalua's movements embed a politics borne out of the body, Kalua's body being the figure of the polis interacting with the space of the ship that represents politics, economics and the social.

One way of linking somewhat effectively bodily action and movement to politics in the social arena would be to bring in Agamben's idea of "inclusive exclusion" (*Homo Sacer*, 12). Kalua's depiction in the text is characterized by his lack of a language, a perpetual muteness and his simple mindedness. "…Kalua's body had gained at the expense of his mind, which had remained slow, simple and trusting, so that even small children were able to take advantage of him"(54). But the narrative repeatedly bolsters Kalua's muteness with acts of great physical power which translate into powerful actions that become significant points in the course of the narrative, like Kalua's retrieval of Deeti from the funeral pyre, his being offered the position of a girmit on account of his strength and finally his killing of Bhyro Singh. A link is constantly established between Kalua's physicality and his being (physical and existential) the harbinger of critical moments in the narrative. One may link this association of the physical body to that of the political being in *Foucault, Freedom and Sovereignty* by Sergei Prozorov in which he establishes Agamben's association between the "zoe

(physical life of man as species)" and the "bios (political life)" (*Foucault*,104). Prozorov focuses on Agamben's dismantling of Foucault's theory of the two being exclusive of each other through his idea of "inclusive exclusion"(*Homosacer*, 12) which means to establish that the sovereign power cannot separate the "bare life of human being from its positive social identity"(104), and that one is inclusive of the other. That a politics is essentially created when man as per Agamben "opposes himself to his own bare life and, at the same time, maintains himself in relation to that bare life in an inclusive exclusion" (12). In Kalua, the political life is suffused into the bare life, the difference being less explicit as Kalua's physical power *is* (emphasis added) in a sense his subjectivity. This argument draws further credence from the assertion Agamben makes in distinguishing between the bare life and political life given by Aristotle in *Politics* that political life entails language which is a manifestation of "the fitting and the unfitting, the just and the unjust" (qtd. in *Homosacer*, 12). Kalua's lack of powerful oratory does not belie his capacity to perceive and act upon the fitting and unfitting or the just and unjust. The structural difficulties of social life is not lost on him but contrary to action borne out of a purely political consciousness Kalua's response to his surroundings is more natural and uncomplicated. This subjectivity helps to give Kalua a social identity that makes him a colonial subject only to outgrow it at a later stage. It is important for Kalua the subaltern, to have a colonial subjectivity such that he may become the new subaltern with its access to the center. The state of being a migrant brings together both the aspects of movement and the political owing to the very condition that result in migration and affect those in the process of migration.

Paul White explains migration as geographical movement that occurs as a "concatenation of economic, political and social circumstances" (*Literature and Migration*, 1). He goes on to explain how population movements transform people and places bound in the migratory experience. It changes people's mentalities, "new experiences result from coming together of multiple influences and peoples, and these new experiences lead to altered or evolving representation of experience and of self-identity" (1). White explains that these forms of

representation manifest through food, dress, political ideology and literary productions as well. One of the elements of migration that is important to the context of Kalua and his 'being' migrant is how identities are redefined. White explains that "many migrants may not have held a particularly strong view of their ethnicity prior to movement" (3) which not only get challenged but forge new perceptions of self-awareness. Kalua leads a simple and quiet life in the Chamar-basti in complete acceptance of his caste and the practice it demands from him. His person is so shy and trusting that "even small children are able to take advantage of him" (S*ea of Poppies,* 54). The moment of registering himself as a girmit or indentured labour on the Ibis begins to foster the awareness of his existence. This is the point before the migration journey is taken and Kalua needs a name to sign up for the journey. Having committed the outrageous task of fleeing with Deeti, he is cautious in giving his first name afraid of being caught by Deeti's family members. Kalua gives out his father's name and follows it with his own. Mr. Doughty, the British official recording the name gives it a new form and Kalua becomes 'Maddow Colver'. This name has a powerful impact on Kalua,

> "Deeti standing beside her husband, heard him whisper the name, not as if it were his own but as if it belonged to someone else, a person other than himself. Then he repeated it,…a third time, the sound of it was no longer new or unfamiliar…" (284).

With the new name, Kalua assumes a new identity for himself on the ship, being one of the strongest men aboard. Through the course of the journey, Bhyro Singh, the subedar on Ibis who is also Deeti's relative, discovers Kaula's true identity and intends to whip Kalua to death. In the midst of the whipping Kalua asks Bhyro Singh,

> "Malik-what have I ever done to you?
>
> The question-as much as the bewildered tone in which it was asked –further enraged Bhyro Singh. Done? he said. Isn't it enough that you are what you are?...
>
> Yes, what I am is enough…through this life and the next, it will be enough…this is what I will live through, again and again and again." (488)

Kalua's acceptance of his caste under the current circumstance is very different from his acceptance of being a Dalit in the Chamar-basti of Ghazipur. At this point it may be argued that Kalua's zoe overshadows his bios, that at this point the awareness of the politics of his existence far supersedes his uncomplicated outlook towards his life. Kalua, the man who hardly speaks, emphasizes his castehood and the commitment he has toward living it again and again. And yet the rhetoric is short lived quickly followed by action which is Kalua's subjectivity. One may raise the question as to why the transformation in Kalua's subjectivity is possible only owing to his migrancy and not possible on land. It could be reasoned that waterways have inherent in them the characteristic to undo official structures of discipline, ridden in imperial or caste politics that get undone on the waters. It can be stressed that while the physical landscape bound Kalua, on the Ibis, Kalua's spatial existence is much like the evictees from New York, who occupy a spatial vacuum. And spatial vacuum does not embody a particular physical space which is owned by Kalua, except for his own body. Therefore accompanied by the condition of his migrancy, Kalua is enabled to break out of spatial barriers owing to the double movement of migration as well as that of his body. While tied to a post and receiving whiplashes from Bhyro Singh, Kalua keeps up with the count of every pace and movement made by Bhyro Singh and the whip. He breaks down each movement to its time element. "By this time, the drumbeat in Kalua's head had attuned itself so accurately to the subedar's paces that he knew when the lash was uncoiling through the air, and he knew, too, exactly when to pull his hand free" (488-489). And yet again employing the 'element of surprise', Kalua manages to kill Bhyro Singh, creating a new space for himself or in other words Kalua at last owns his body which can no more be violated by another.

Margaret Cohen in her book *The Novel and the Sea* refers to the significance of work and practical reason as a means to survive the difficulties of oceanic voyages and also the politics of hierarchy on the ship.

> "Practical reason is an embodied intelligence, drawing on the diverse aspects of our humanity….The arenas of practical reason are specific shifting situations, often harboring unruly forces that can be negotiated but not controlled". (*The Novel and the Sea*, 2)

She further comments that the heroism of skilled work substitutes for education and love and the "amoral freedom of movement corresponding to the juridical notion of the "freedom of the seas"" (11). This practical reason links both Kalua and Fokir together since the geographies of their actions relate to waterways. Though Kalua's method of negotiating the waterways rests more heavily on his bodily actions, Fokir's practical reason encompasses both his body and his fishing skills.

5.4 Fokir's Body and the Sunderban Landscape

Fokir, the humble fisherman in *The Hungry Tide* and the impossible Sunderban landscape are merged together both being impervious to external influences. The urban versus rural opposition reflected in the "master's suspicion of the menial" show, how the rigid terrain of the Sunderban transposed on Fokir's person allows him to see through urban hypocrisy becoming a reason for his disinterest toward success in the world. The honesty of Fokir's trade whose very nature relies on the difficulty of the terrain gets contextualized giving Neil Smith's premise of external nature and human social behavior as part of it. According to Smith external nature is internalized in the process of social production. The dichotomy between nature and its raw existence seems to stand at polarity with motivations of commerce which exists within the boundaries of social space, referred to as humanly produced "second nature" (*Uneven Development*, 98). Fokir exists somewhere in the middle passage between the first and second nature, relying heavily on the natural landscape of the Sunderbans and plying his trade and making his skills available to science. This section enunciates the dichotomy of body as a social construction versus body having its own consciousness. The play of both these conceptions unfolds over a global capitalist terrain showing once again how the structure/agency dichotomies are molded by the body.

Hilary Winchester, in the chapter "Bodies as Landscapes" explains that bodies are not only 'natural' but that they are "constructed, imbued with meaning and intensely political. A body is a landscape which can be redefined and contested and which lies at the intersection of many complex discourses" (

Landscapes, 173). She goes on to enumerate how bodies may be seen as socially constructed, reflecting powerful ideologies but what she refers to as bodies being sites of resistance only goes as far as performing acts that are culturally transgressive. Though the point she makes relates to bodies that act within the social sphere, according to Winchester bodies which do not conform to the hegemonic norm are marginalized (173). This point is important when the body is viewed in specific relation to a geography that in itself is not part of the social landscape. Winchester admits to ignoring the natural landscape as a site of engagement in her work while drawing attention to the fact that her research on the body as landscape courses unfamiliar terrain. This section is a point of departure because it tries to analyse interactions between the body through the subject of Fokir, a humble fisherman, in the mangroves of Sunderbans and his close association with nature wherein 'nature' is held external (*Uneven Development*, 15) to the social sphere. The dichotomy between the two aspects came about in the developed economies since nature was something that required to be objectified with the intent of subduing it towards the purpose of sustaining and developing the social sphere. A geography that is rarely imagined is one that perpetuates co-existence of nature and man, without one engulfing the other. Occasional mention of the natural landscape, for example in Winchester's book, describes human habitation in close proximity to nature at odds with organized systems of economy[4].

Amitav Ghosh wrote in the article "A Crocodile in the Swampland" against Sahara India Parivar's (a giant conglomerate) project to develop a high end tourism complex on the Sunderban mangroves, designated a World Heritage Site and Biosphere Reserve[5]. Ghosh clearly states how slippery politics swings the government's decision towards clearing or occupying the biosphere reserve lands,

> "In 1979, the Left Front government evicted tens of thousands of refugee settlers, mainly Dalits, from the island of Morichjhapi. The cost in lives is still unaccounted, but it is likely that thousands were killed. The eviction was justified on ecological grounds: the authorities claimed that the island of Morichjhapi had to be preserved as a forest reserve.

> It is scarcely conceivable that a government run by the same Left Front is now thinking of handing over a substantial part of the Sunderbans to an industrial house like the Sahara Parivar. The Sahara Parivar's project would turn large stretches of this very forest, soaked in the blood of evicted refugees, into a playground for the affluent. Although forgotten elsewhere, in the Sunderbans the memory of Morichjhapi is still vividly alive: would it be surprising if the people there took this project to be an affront to their memories and a deliberate provocation?" ("Crocodile")

It can be understood that capitalism is a powerful motivator in dictating bureaucratic course of action and that the very logic used as a pretext to preserve the lands were now being thwarted in favour of a commercial project. Two important points come to the fore through this passage that help to ground the argument around the terms of interaction between Fokir and the Sunderban landscape. First, the way nature is viewed, from perspective of commerce and the way the indigene looks at it. This formulation explains how success is alluded to by Fokir. Second, the aspect of interaction between the human and non-human world brings forth how landscapes are imbued with meaning conferred upon them through human activity and what stirs the human body to respond to its environment by way of certain practices that correspond to the specificity of a place.

5.4.1 Viewing Nature – Utility versus subsistence

One of the prevalent ways in which nature was viewed by geographers in the 1960s and then increasingly so in the 1990s was nature as 'de-naturalised'. In a seminal study on the evolution of the concept of nature in geography, Noel Castree in his book *Nature*, states how geographers claimed that nature was "social through and through and only apparently natural" (109) given to remaking and reorganizing by humans. This notion had its roots in Malthus' claim of increase in resources of the world in arithmetic progression while population increased in geometric progression. This vision has been hegemonic in establishing consumption patterns of natural resources among the economies of the world that are acutely disproportionate. What Malthusian theory points to is the finiteness of resources which if distributed across large populations obviously

would result in less being available to individuals. The theory therefore is grounded in a shrewd utilitarianism implying control of resources and thereby controlling nature. It veils over the reality that scarcity of resources is not a function of nature, since what 'is' a 'resource' and its scarcity or excess gets determined by society at large. David Harvey argues that subsistence levels of individuals are decided by their biological needs. Anything outside of that gets determined by their "historical and cultural circumstances" ("Population, resources", 235). His stance against the concentration of wealth in the hands of the elite few and the unwillingness to share it with the needy cause him to remark:

> "1. we can change the ends we have in mind and alter the social organization of scarcity;
> 2. we can change our technical and social appraisals of nature;
> 3. we can change our views concerning the things to which we are accustomed;
> . . . To say that there are too many people in the world amounts to saying that have not the imagination, will or ability to do anything about propositions 1, 2 and 3." ("Population" 236).

Harvey's call to 'change the ends we have in mind' and to 'change our views concerning the things we are accustomed to' almost stokes a mutiny in a society that augurs for more and more. To subsist with just as much needed is inconceivable and thus to exist in close proximity to nature can only be fraught with danger, and the only possibility that is comfortable is a de-naturalised nature. What Harvey suggests is a philosophical leap into an existence that we have lost touch with and are weary to explore.

In his article "Wild Fictions", Ghosh ties in the aspect of human necessity versus utilizing nature towards human subsistence with immense care. He states that different ecologies around the world involve different kinds of balance between the harnessing of its produce vis-à-vis the limits on fishing or trawling, etc. Citing the Sunderbans, Ghosh elaborates how trawling the waters for the microscopic spawn of prawns, held to be of "great commercial value" ("Wildfictions")led to damaging the ecology of the Sunderbans. Placing the lore

of Bon Bibi's legend and her sanction towards judicious use of the mangroves' natural resources, Ghosh comments,

> "That the Bon Bibi legend is silent on this matter is a sign of its limitations in the contemporary context. But there is another, and possibly deeper limitation to this conception of balance in the legend: it is a contract drawn up and signed by a single party, and it provides for no mechanism through which to interpret the needs of the other protagonists. In this scheme of things the forest has no means of articulating its interests. It is this gap that is filled by the natural sciences, in particular the varied disciplines of natural history : they direct a gaze of concentrated interpretive scrutiny towards curtain of signs that is called 'data'. Natural history is, in this sense, the indispensable science of interpretation that allows the environment to speak back to us." (12)

With this hope Ghosh builds towards two worlds gesturing to each other wherein the language of nature is left to indigenes like Fokir to interpret and act on. Perhaps this is one of the potent reasons for Fokir to continue to fish the waters of the mangroves using nothing but his skills aligned to the natural mores of constantly shifting topographies. Observation, silence and living on the waters have no better substitute to read the signs of wilderness as against any written document which seem like a poor substitute to work from. And this is where the indigenes' view and sense of nature in *The Hungry Tide* offers hope.

5.4.2 Topophilia: Love for the land

The novel opens with Kanai, a translator and interpreter from Calcutta visiting his aunt Neelima, in Lusibari one of the Sunderban islands. Standing by the edge of the river Matla, in Canning, the mainland body of the Sunderban from where a chain of islands extend upriver, they chance upon fisherman Horen. A conversation ensues between Neelima and Horen, wherein Neelima enquires where Horen had been. To which Horen replies, "*Jongol korte geslam,* I went to "do jungle" yesterday, Mashima...Bon Bibi granted me enough honey to fill two bottles, I came here to sell them" (*The Hungry Tide*, 27-28). "I went to do jungle" is an unusual verb wherein jungle is an activity that helps Horen procure honey which contributes towards this livelihood. Instead of saying he had gone 'to pick honey', which is a common activity among the mangrove dwellers, he uses 'to do

jungle' which appears to be everyday language usage in those parts and also used very endearingly. The activity of jungle is carried out in the space of the jungle, personified by Bon Bibi, the "goddess of the forest" (28), whose beneficence is felt by the local community in their everyday life. This brings us to the idea of 'topophilia' coined by Yi Fu Tuan, which is defined as "human love of place" (*Topophilia*, 92) in specific relation to his/her environment. Before elaborating on the significance of topophilia and the affiliation it effects upon communities who live off the land, a brief narration of Bon Bibi's lore is described here. The purpose behind this enunciation is to highlight a subtle difference in the geographical treatment of the human and non-human interface which is otherwise guided by utilitarian motivations.

Legend went that Bon Bibi and her brother Shah Jongoli, were assigned by archangel Gabriel to make the mangroves fit for human habitation. The jungles were previously ruled by a demon "Dokkhin Rai" (103) who harboured hatred towards mankind "coupled with insatiable desires-for the pleasures afforded by human flesh" (103). On the arrival of Bon Bibi and Shah Jongoli, a battle ensued between them. Bob Bibi was victorious but being merciful in her victory, let Dokkhin Rai rule over one half of the tidal forest that was to remain wild. The other part of the jungle was to be made habitable. The story describes that peace was forsaken when a rich businessman Dhona made a deal with Dokkhin Rai to access the wealth of his forest in lieu of human flesh in the form of a poor boy Dukhey. Dukhey is abandoned in Dokkhin Rai's part of the forest, while Dhona's ship is filled with honey and wax. About to be devoured by Dokkhin Rai, Dukhey calls upon Bon Bibi, who comes to his rescue and deals a terrible chastisement to him. Dokkhin Rai happens to assume the guise of a tiger when he devours humans. Though the story places Dokkhin Rai at odds with mankind, Bob Bibi does not destroy him and is ever forgiving. The story establishes separate boundaries for humans and the wild, but inspite of the symbolic hostility between the two, acrimony or conquest is not imagined as a way of life. On the contrary, Horen's language suggests a dependency, reliance, and respect towards raw nature that surrounds them. According to Ghosh the Bon Bibi legend uses the

power of fiction to create and define a relationship between human beings and the natural world. It is true that a term equivalent to 'Nature' figure does not quite appear in the legend of Bon Bibi, yet nowhere is its consciousness absent; "although ecological concerns are never named, the story is profoundly informed by an "environmental consciousness". Ghosh avers, "environmental unconscious' – a phrase that is all the more useful, in my view, because it does not invoke the cultural and linguistic freightage of the word 'Nature'" ("Wild Fictions", 7).

The jungle, despite its many dangers and fears, arouses warmth and a sense of reliance among the indigenous people. Tuan explains that attachment to land may be inspired by various reasons like, land being a means of livelihood, or memories that surround incidents attached to the land, or even the aesthetics of natural beauty. Describing what a farmer feels towards his land, Tuan writes, "The small farmer or peasant's attachment to land is deep. Nature is known through the need to gain a living. French workers, when their bodies ache with fatigue, say that "their trades have entered into them" (*Topophilia*, 93). 'Jongol korte geslam' is no different in echoing such a sentiment. That the landscape of the mangroves is internalized by its dwellers is further established when Kusum, Fokir's mother, reminiscences the tide country, from her dry abode in Dhanbad, surrounded by railway tracks emitting heat and the dust from the neighbouring collieries making the environment hazy. The moment of recollection arrives when she becomes witness to an exodus of refugees from Bangladesh, marching towards Morichjhapi. "Walking on iron, we longed for the touch of mud….we dreamed of storm tossed islands, we thought of the high tide…of islands submerged like, underwater clouds" (164). This recollection is far from being idol romanticisation because, the Morichjhapi islands were indeed inhabited by Bangladeshi refugees who made the inhospitable surrounding their home. The internalization of nature is such that it evokes cooperation between the elements of nature and humans. Many such instances are drawn by Ghosh himself in his article "Wild Fictions" only to assert, "if nature is to be re-imagined in such a way as to restore the human presence within it—not as predator but partner—then this

too must first be told as a story" (12). The story being told is important since the vast spectrum of human relationship with nature as Ghosh puts across,

> "is so profoundly formed by fictional imaginings of it, no matter whether it be the stories of a writer like Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, a legend such as that of Bon Bibi or a novel like Herman Melville's incomparable, Moby Dick. It is my belief that only fiction can provide a canvas broad enough to address this relationship in all its dimensions; only in fiction can a reconciliation be affected between Bon Bibi and Saint-Pierre's recluse, between the quest of a scientist determined to prevent the disappearance of a species and the needs of a fisherman who must hunt in order to live." ("Wild Fictions", 12)

This passage compels us to look deeper into the determinants of human action and the formation of a subjectivity that displays very different terms of existence. This brings us to the second part of the analyses within this subsection that deals with Fokir's interaction with his surroundings and what stirs his bodily actions to respond to the geography he mediates in the ways he does. This is to be achieved by bringing together the concept of topophilia along with the notion of what it is to 'know' and how these two aspects result in framing the body and directing its practice.

5.4.3 Fokir who only knows how to fish

The dichotomy of social space and nature are strongly inflected with subtexts of 'wild', 'untamable', 'unruly', 'uncivilised', 'difficult', primarily aspects that are hostile towards being harnessed for a systematized socio-economic regime. And bodies that are in contact with such a landscape also have in them inherent, a hostility toward a capitalist enterprise and even a social mode of life. When Piya, a cetologist from America encounters Fokir for the first time she notices his "not wasted but very lean and…long, stringy limbs…almost fleshless in their muscularity" (46). But more importantly the aspect of his physicality that echoes the landscapes he inhabits is "a defiance in his stance at odds with the seeming defenselessness of his unclothed chest" (46). Piya

recognizes in Fokir's frame the signs of destitution which is borne out of his utter disregard towards adopting a more comfortable mode of livelihood. Once again bringing in Tuan's concept of topophilia here is important as Tuan explains how the landscape that an individual is closely associated with casts the physical form in a certain way. "For the laboring farmer, nature has entered… insofar as the substance and processes of nature can be said to embody it. Muscles and scars bear witness to the physical intimacy of the contact" (93). Tuan explains that the farmer's topophilia is compounded of physical intimacy, material dependence and the fact that "the land is a repository of memory and sustains hope" (93). Fokir has a way when he is on the river and this is something that has been inherent in him from childhood. Nirmal, a retired school teacher from Lusibari, notices Fokir's adeptness during his visit to Garjontola, a pilgrim that Morichjhapi dwellers often visited to pay their respect to the images of Bon Bibi and Shah Jongoli. When the boat touched the shore, Horen jumped down to push the boat ashore, Fokir followed instantly though the waters reached his neck. Kusum, Fokir's mother responds proudly to see this action, "the river is in his veins" (245). Piya, a cetologist from America but born to parents from India, too observes a certain knack in Fokir's way with the waters. She explains to Kanai, "It's like he's always watching the water – even without being aware of it…it's as if he can see right into the river's heart" (267). Laura White comments, "So, the knowledge that Fokir possesses about the rivers, the dolphins, and the legends of the Sunderbans is recorded not in a text, but within his body" ("Novel Vision-Seeing the Sunderbans", 525). Fokir's topophilia is ingrained in a form of knowing which is more than the simple knowledge about the countryside passed down through generations. This knowing, according to Ghosh in his recent book on climate change,

> "…harks back to something prior, an already existing awareness …effecting an instant change in our understanding of that which is beheld… The knowledge that results from recognition, then, is not of the same kind as the discovery of something new: it arises rather from a renewed reckoning with a potentiality that lies within oneself." (*The Great Derangement*, 49-54)

It is this potentiality within, much like Kalua's 'element of surprise', that makes him a fisherman with "incredible instinct" (*The Hungry Tide*, 267) and so he can be nothing else and there lies no need to be something else. The landscape is so ingrained in Fokir that the practical wisdom he carries "is marked less by ability to formulate rules than by knowing how to act" ("To follow a Rule", 57) as proposed by Charles Taylor. The strength of Fokir's subjectivity is not only attuned to the environment but also critically sensitive to the politics that threatens this landscape and the living that is entwined with it.

Towards the end of the narrative, Kanai, the city dweller, a member of the social space and embodying the socially constructed practice of vocation, manners and subjectivity is set against Fokir, someone embodying the landscape of Sunderbans in history, geography and personhood. Both are on Fokir's boat and crossing the Garjontola island that according to legends falls within Dokkhin Rai's territory, Fokir spots fresh pug marks on the wet shores and is challenged by Kanai, telling him that the marks are burrow made by crabs and what makes him think otherwise. Fokir replies, "Do you want to know how I know?...Leaning over, Fokir took hold of Kanai's hand and placed it on the back of his neck" (322) where Kanai felt the goosebumps on his neck. "That's how I know…It's the fear that tells me" (322). Fokir questions Kanai, if he feels fear, to which Kanai goes through a reverie of thoughts borne out his training with language. The landscape and its attendant impact blotted out of his consciousness and " nothing existed for him but language, the pure of structure of sound…the truth was that he did not feel fear…it was something that was accumulated in the mind, through knowledge, experience and upbringing"(322). And so Kanai dismisses his being fearful and a wordplay ensues between the two and as the dialogue progresses. Fokir succeeds in unmasking more and more of Kanai's façade. Fokir draws Kanai out from the boat onto the muddy shores for them to explore from closer at hand. Fokir retrieves a sickle from the boat and approaches Kanai, who is decidedly unsettled at the sight of the instrument. "What's that for?...Don't be afraid…it's for the jungle" (325). By now Kanai notices that Fokir was addressing him as 'tui' (an informal register) from 'apni' (formal register), "it was as though

in stepping on the island, the authority of their positions had been reversed"(325). Egging Kanai to move farther into the slippery mud, Kanai falls face forward in the slime and is caked in it. Brushing off, Fokir's hand extended for support, he breaks into an invective,

> "'…shala banchod, shuorer bacha'...his anger came welling up with an atavistic explosiveness, rising from sources whose very existence he would have denied: the master's suspicion of the menial; the pride of caste; the townman's mistrust of the rustic; the city's antagonism of the village." (326)

What Kanai had thought of the end of a purging within himself, had only settled deeper into the crevices of his psyche. Perhaps this is the reason why for the city dweller, nature as de-naturalised is easier to negotiate with, and Harvey's statement that we need to change our views about what we are accustomed to requires an inward reflection. Subsistence is an inward practice, a recognition of why we need what we need, before it spills out manifesting itself through manipulation and consumption of resources. The fear that Fokir, pushes Kanai to face is about looking at oneself, naked and unabashed. "Are you a clean man, Kanai-Babu?" (323), Fokir had asked of him. That the stresses and the imminent dangers of such a terrain can only be endured, lived and loved, only when one recognized in oneself one's cowardice, one's lies, and one's ingratitude. Bon Bibi's legend and her forgiveness of Dokkhin Rai, meant an acceptance of our failings and trying once more to clean ourselves out by facing the dangers of the landscape. Unforgiving, though it may seem in its appearance the tide country is ever compassionate, giving us one more chance with every ebb and flow, to recover ourselves and make good.

5.5 Cyborg as Body Space

The preceding sections show how the body becomes a medium of spatial access for Kalua, the dalit individual and the journey his subjectivity takes in foregrounding the body and its inherent ability to act through bodily movement. Kalua is successful in achieving some degree of freedom from the landscape that surrounds him given the imperial setting of the narrative. Kalua's success lies in

securing for himself the ownership over his own body. From the perspective of imperial geography, the degree of freedom achieved may be negligible, but from the perspective of a dalit individual, Kalua's act pushes the scale of marginalized space, both on an individual level and at the level of theoretically conceiving what a dalit space could mean. Kalua's body is a site of contestation only as long as it is infringed upon from the outside. Otherwise, Kalua's subjectivity is content to lead a simple life and does not seek to transform spaces beyond his self. Fokir's freedom goes much farther owing to his practice of fishing that scales the distance between wild terrains, humanized spaces within the wilderness and social spaces. The wilderness of the Sunderbans frames Fokir's subjectivity and also Fokir's body such that not only does he succeed in surviving the challenging landscape, but humanizes it too. Fokir's and the indigenous communities terms of engagement with the Sunderban landscape is borne out of a deep topophilia inspiring an inherent knowing that enables them to transform hostile space and yet remain open to be constantly changed by it. While Fokir is averse towards participating in the social sphere dictated by economic gains and refuses to adopt formally defined means of subsistence, he invites Pia and the scientific enquiry that she represents to merge and be supported by what Fokir and his landscape represents. Fokir's geographic consciousness is deep and wide in the impact it makes upon physical geographies as well as mental geographies that determine how we invite and interact with spaces such as wilderness that are not governed by social politics. The characteristic of such geographies are unpredictable, having a rhythm of its own and humans must learn to understand that rhythm governed by tide, storms, wildlife, death and imminent dangers.

The motivation behind transitioning from the body to 'cyborg' ("A Cyborg", 1991) comes from exploring possibilities of a continuum, what Murugan calls "interpersonal transference"[6] (93) in *The Calcutta Chromosomes*. Physical geography and social spaces are very important in shaping subjectivities and bringing out truths inherent in us, be it Kalua's recognition of his physical agility or Fokir's recognition of himself in being an expert fisherman. These

recognitions are achieved through hard struggles and must survive through the times, and what better way to preserve and perpetuate them but through a virtual medium. This section begins by looking at how one may interpret cyberspace in conjunction with the phenomenon of interpersonal transference before going over to the notion of cyborg that inextricably weaves in the body, virtual medium and nature.

The Calcutta Chromosome is a text that tells the story of the discovery of the malarial parasite by Ronald Ross who wins the Nobel Prize for it. The story spans the future, present and past, criss-crossing between temporalities, with unerring continuities of space and research. The text is a science fiction and the intrigue lies in the unorthodox manner in which research and science overcome the limits of method, place or person. This text is analysed variously by critics such as Tabish Khair for the ways in which it reclaims agency for the subaltern, by becoming initiators in the production of knowledges, outside the purview of what is termed scientific, and processed within and outside the ordered conditions of a laboratory. Hugh Charles O'Connell looks at the narrative as a longing for a form wherein the form of the novel,

> "with its constant interjecting of new stories, new participants, and further connections that move the singularity of one person's life and its distinct narrative into ever greater contact with others, we can see the novel itself as a formal register of the counter-scientific technique, where interpersonal transference becomes a guiding formal metaphor for interconnectedness and the decentering of a singular line of knowledge." ("Mutating", 791)

There seems to be a consonance in both the critics' thesis for an alternative science aka counter science aka magic at work in the texts narrative that yield itself to non-specified spaces, jumping scales of time, and entering areas of postcolonial cyberspace. The narrative opens introducing AVA/II e systems, computer which is "humanized and feminized" ("Mutating Towards the Future", 782) and Antar an employee of the International Water Council who operates the Ava feeding her with information. Connell is quick to bring in the colonial

dialectic recognizing in the Ava an imperial analogue as opposed to Antar being the human informant subservient to Ava, all in a setting which is widely distanced from the actual moment of colonialism and thereby indicates a continuum of political power play in neo-imperial times administered through 'humanised machines'.

The counter science project, has been a parallel enterprise towards the discovery of *The Calcutta Chromosome*, a chromosome which is a recombinatory gene. The counter science project headed by an indigenous woman named Mangala ran parallel to Ronald Ross's project related to the discovery of the malarial parasite in his own laboratory. Ghosh's narrative tells how the discovery of the parasite by Ross is secretly aided by Mangala and her team by planting clues for Ross to decode. By keeping the formal channels of research alive, the counter-science project pushes hard in refining its own methods of interpersonal transference. The chromosome passes through the body of Mangala and her various avatars in other births, namely, Mrs. Aratounian, Urmil and, Tara. No one knows where and in which form will appear the fountainhead of this experiment who is referred to as the 'Other Mind' since she is elusive to all but a few members of the project. In its workings, the counter-science project is read as a method of appropriating knowledge that breaks through the neo-imperial stronghold through an "Other Mind" (32) at work, an 'Other' who is not known. "To hear something said, and not to know who is saying it?"(94) leaves one uncertain about what to ascertain. The context of knowledge is problematised in the suspense of the 'who' speaks it, since there is no one person or location. Knowledge is supreme and finds expression through different mediums and time spans. Much like the Calcutta Chromosome, a gene that is not genomic since it does not belong to the twenty three pairs of genes that get passed on genetically, but exists in the non regenerative tissues of the brain and gets passed on from person to person through a process of recombination, the method of interpersonal transference is transferred onto the Ava. Much like the role reversal between Fokir and Kanai as regards agency on the muddy banks of Sunderbans is made

apparent towards the end of the novel, a similar reversal is seen between Antar and Ava's relations. O' Connell explains:

> "Coming full circle and returning to the framing narrative of Antar and Ava…we are able to ascertain that the "connections"…Murugan refers are a further mutation of interpersonal transference into the realm of cyberspace. The result of this mutation, then, also necessitates wresting control of technology from the auspices of NGOs or global conglomerates like the International Water Council and thus the desubordination of Antar to Ava." (789)

And the desubordination is made further complete when we find that Mangala through Mrs. Aratuonian through Urmila through Tara has finally managed to manipulate Ava. By the end of the novel, one finds Mangala, alive in the twenty-first century in a different body with a different name 'Tara'. "Although we are not told how, it seems…the counter scientist group has managed to take interpersonal transference into the realm of the digital, extracting the coded personality information from the biological form of the Calcutta Chromosome and uploading it to the purely informational world of cyberspace" ("Mutating Toward the Future", 789). And the code for transferring one person into another's body consequently becomes a process of fully encoding oneself in a new postcolonial cyberspace. Though O'Connell reads the novel as postcolonial cyberspace, it only strengthens the desire to read the virtual medium as a space that offers greater freedom in terms of interpreting something more that it may have to offer, bringing us to look upon both the Ava and Mangala as cyborg.

Donna Haraway defines cyborg as a "cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction" (*The Cybercultures Reader*, 291). She begins the essay by staging cyborg as a future of human ontology in the tradition of "Western science and politics" (292) that embed racism, capitalism and nature as resource for production of culture and "reproduction of the self from the reflections of the other" (292). Haraway considers cyborg as a medium that negotiates production, reproduction and imagination of territories, between the real and the material. The future she holds

as a mythic time where we all will be cyborgs owing to our reliance on machines and like the Ava, be managed by machines too. Haraway expands upon the idea of cyborg in the following way:

> "The cyborg is resolutely committed to partiality, irony, intimacy and perversity. It is oppositional, utopian and completely without innocence. No longer structured by the polarity of public and private, the cyborg defines a technological polis based on the revolution of social relations in the…household. Nature and culture are reworked, the one can no longer be the resource for appropriation or incorporation by the other. The relationships for forming whole from parts including those of polarity and hierarchical domination are at issue in the cyborg world….The cyborg does not dream of community on the model of organic family." (*The Cyberculurest*, 293)

Haraway's statement positions the cyborg as a figure of protest existing between polarities and with the freedom of travelling between them while appropriating each zone by changing it. The cyborg injects the zones of polarity, be it the public (represented by the Ava machine that is a large virtual database) with the private (represented by the Calcutta Chromosome) altering the dynamics of these zones through secrecy. And in that the cyborg is not shy of innocence being perverse in its methods, just as interpersonal transference is perverse since it eludes the domains of scientific enquiry. O' Connell explains how, in Ghosh's novel, the silence that the "…subaltern counter-scientists work within is reconfigured from a form of oppression and historical occlusion into a form of secrecy….Rather than attempting to recover the lost voices and secrets of Mangala … the novel instead tracks the mutations caused by their silence" ("Mutating Towards the Future", 778). And this silence motivated mutation, is what counters and transforms the Western neo-imperial conception of knowledge as a form of determination, of containing and arresting the inscrutably other as O'Connell states it. This description quite fits in with the cyborg's own problematic about representation of the self through others within Western domains of enlightenment that are dutifully carried forward even in the future that Ghosh's narrative is set in. Mangala and Laakhan, are transformed into Urmila and Murugan in the future times and "their silence and secrecy…no longer function as figures of subalternity, but instead

operate in the open as well-known members of Indian society….Hence the silence that starts off as imperial imposition is transformed from a marker of subalternity to a postcolonial methodology" (778). It may be stated that the cyborg is a methodology in itself that wants to find anchor in a post postcolonial or neo-imperial stance. The geographical imaginary that such a positioning invites is quite diverse since it continuously shifts between different kinds of geographic locations like laboratories, outhouses, remote rural areas, virtual spaces etc. And each of these spaces is imbued with meanings that are discussed in the section to follow.

5.5.1 Cyborg locations

Suchitra Mathur explains the cyborg in *The Calcutta Chromosome*, as "created by the establishment of connections, by the inflection of western science by native knowledges that creates these new humans whose hybridity...enables new liberating modes of being…that are not subjected to the hegemony of existing discursive formulations" ("Caught Between the Cyborg", 132). She goes on to elaborate that the relative autonomy of the cyborg mode of being and knowledge is represented by the physical spaces occupied by the counter scientists "the outhouses, anterooms, ramshackle houses under construction, and private apartments, where the actual work of "interpersonal transference" takes place, are neither completely outside the gambit of the dominant socio-political structure, nor completely controlled by it" (132). Though she describes these spaces as fringe spaces "characterized by the relative invisibility" (133), instead the hidden is brought out into the open in the narrative.

The narrative mentions Phulboni, a Bengali writer who writes many local tales about a muse who appears in different guises, at different times but is an important link in the malaria research. Phulboni's stories are a constant appeal to reach out to his muse, the unknown one, the "Silence" (108) whom he refers to as she. Systems of knowledge within India attribute the succession of life to be the function of the feminine, often referred to as 'Prakriti'. And 'She' (with a capital S) is 'Silence' (with a capital S), but this time forth in Ghosh's novel She works

in the open, discernible to the eyes of those like Murugan or Phulboni, who have learnt to see "signs of her presence everywhere" (108). The continuum of the life enhancing gene is shown to proliferate through female characters in the text. The feminine is chosen as the organizing principle of knowledge in the text, which in itself is a form of counter writing the hegemonic stance of who writes history. The location from where she speaks, is diffused, spread everywhere, splashed on the screens of the artificial intelligence Ava, or the journals of Ronald Ross, or the stories of Phulboni. Diane Nelson, argues that storytelling is itself a process of "finding things out" ("A Social Science Fiction", 247) which is a primary actant in the novel.

The laboratory where Ross carries out his experiments, represents the site of scientific enquiry; it is a vanguard of Knowledge, with a capital 'K' and this space is interspersed with a colonial imagination of the "tropics-as the hot, fertile…spaces, in which the "human" is hypothesized, tested, and re-mapped and in the sense of the tropes or figures that serve as lab equipment that produces strange alliances and emergent forms of the human" (247). Ross's laboratory hypothesized by the presence of Mangala and the group of counter-scientists in the eyes of Farley, a scientist from America, "looked nothing like any laboratory he had seen" (122). Science co-exists with brass cymbals, chantings and rituals, led by Mangala, a veritable goddess juxtaposed alongside slides carrying the recombinatory Calcutta Chromosomes. Mathur posits the semi-circular figurine of Mangala with its "simple, semi-circular mound, crudely modeled and featureless except for two large stylized eyes, painted in stark blacks and whites, on the baked clay. . . . To the right of the mound was a tiny bird, unmistakably a pigeon, clearly and carefully modeled – feathers, eyes, and all" (*The Calcutta Chromosomes*, 39*)* as an androgynous entity. The gaze of counter-science that has led to such a fashioning of the figurine is looked upon by her as supra-human representing,

> "…divine omniscience that encompasses not just the human, but also the animal (represented by the pigeon) and the mechanical (represented by the microscope) worlds. The figurine then, and by implication, counter science, may be seen as the Cyborg

> Goddess, as a mode of being that combines the artificial with the natural *and* the supernatural, that thus posits a "third" identity for third-world (women) natives which combines the past with the future, the innocence of the organic with the knowledge of the technological." ("Caught Between", 134)

The Ava too has been injected with the Calcutta Chromosome code and Antar witnesses the actors from the real world like Tara, his neighbor, inside the Ava alongside Murugan, as the Ava plays out the entire incident of the discovery of the chromosome and its dissemination. The cyborg is needy to make connections and that is what the Ava does, connecting the outside set in the future with the inside space of the Calcutta Chromosome story placed in history making this connection about crossing. Antar hears the voices inside the Ava telling him "you're not alone; we'll help you cross" (262). The scales of Ghosh's novels are therefore far from static, owing to repeated attempts to break out of singular concerns of any one theory. The familiar structures of location and knowledge are thwarted in *The Calcutta Chromosome* and yet as the text suggests, a vital part of one's life is unsuspiciously manipulated, led away from what we know to "acknowledging the impossibility of knowledge" (91). There is a sense of a deeper philosophical implication, of an interconnectedness, that the text suggests in the proliferation of the Calcutta Chromosome. The chromosome promises a "fresh start" (95), an improvement upon oneself, yet is independent of where it locates itself and in whom it does so. The chromosome suggests a continuum, a carrying forward of places and knowledges in making, constructing new scales that locate themselves variously and uninhibitedly.

5.6 Conclusion

The freedoms of the body in movement and practice are transferred to the cyborg for perpetuation through new combinations. The specificity of spaces entrenched in the histories of times and social norms are negotiated through bodies in movement and practice. Both Kalua and Forkir are subjectivities in the making and committed to their landscape. The cyborg presents itself as a

distraction given the collapse in time and space represented through the figuration of the female body as opposed to male characters in movement and practice. But what the cyborg does is that she preserves what is inherent in Kalua and Fokir. The cyborg supports Fokir and Kalua in their existence located in in-between territories of patriarchy and capitalism and discovery of new spaces that they make for themselves. Their geographic consciousness is not particularly explicable in words but an abstract knowing of who they are and how they should be in this world. The notion of the body as scales and its internal differentiation though apparent to some extent in Kalua's sexuality, is overtaken by measures of the body in movement and practice. Smith's concept of the scale gets problematised owing to the natural landscapes that bodies described here survive in, but this only expands the scope of perceiving the scale of the body.

End Notes

1. Structures allude to social rules, sanctions and prohibitions and the agency alludes to the subject's feelings, thoughts and actions.
2. "The politics of abortion, rape, prostitution, reproduction , and body-care (the provision and preparation of food, clothing, shelter, warmth, beauty) focus on access to women's bodies, work women do with their bodies, and the boundary between individual and state control over the body. The manual Our Bodies, Ourselves helped galvanize an emerging feminist movement in the early 1970s precisely because it enabled women to reclaim their bodies and control the conquest of the scale of the body; it affirmed the body as a site of struggle over which feminists staked a powerful claim. The same boundary between individual and state control of the body is contested in the politics of abortion and of sexual preference. The politics of the body are not delineated by gender alone, of course, no matter how dominant gender is at this scale. Bodily style and clothing mediate personal constructions of identity with regional, national, and global cultures and provide access to the body by the international fashion industry: Benetton leads the world in the cultural conquest of bodies in action. Gendered as it is, bodily style is also a class question. The impudence of the Homeless Vehicle and Poliscar demonstrates the Contours of a Spatialized Politics importance of access by the body to wider spaces-bodily access as a means of jumping scales-but history reveals less cryptic examples. Sallie Marston interprets the turn-of-the-century "voluntary motherhood" movement in a parallel way." ("Contours, 67-68).

3. “In coining the concept (*chronos* + *topos*), Bakhtin indicates his insight, particularly powerful for narrative, that the representation of space always entails the representation of time and that time and space are intrinsically connected, both as literary and conceptual structures. Reading between the lines of his analysis, it becomes evident that by time he means at once the time represented in the novel and the time in which its events are narrated, and that the notion of the chronotope encompasses other patterns of narration, such as the characters and plots associated with specific spaces, as well as the emotional responses they solicit from the reader. In addition, Bakhtin suggests that the chronotope is a figure of thought, working at the level of the concept and ideology. Thus, what Bakhtin calls the chronotope of the road is at once a plot line comprised of random and chance events and encounters linked together with little causal connection; a cast of characters including “the most varied people,” who meet on this profoundly social space, and a thematics where encounters collapse hierarchical distances that usually separate people in other areas of society.” (“The Chronotopes”, 647)
4. Alternative lifestyles and landscapes, such as hippy communes in the backblocks, exist in many remoter areas. The town of Nimbin in northern New South Wales is a place where hippy lifestyles flourish, where marijuana is smoked openly and where income is derived from some cottage industry, welfare payments and spending by tourists. The relatively isolated town exists as a backwater; the surrounding hills and forests contain numerous communes and religious communities living a relatively sheltered and self-sufficient existence but having only desultory commercial contact and occasional conflict with various forms of authority. (*Landscapes*,147)
5. In this article, Ghosh analyses in detail how the ecology of Sunderbans is unsuited to commercial ventures such as building tourism resorts and activities that such locations offer tourists. The geography of Sunderbans is prone to cyclones and the site selected by Sahara could only lead to endangering lives on the event of a cyclonic storm. (“A Crocodile”)
6. Interpersonal transference, is an accidental side effect of healing syphilis through the introduction of malaria by Mangala, an indigene who is employed by Ronald Ross, the man responsible for the discovery of the malarial parasite. Explaining its discovery and operation, Murugan, an employee of Life Watch company, tells Urmila, a journalist from Calcutta, how while administering the malarial cure for syphilis, she began to notice in her patients "what looked like strange personality disorders," which she eventually realized were caused by "a crossover of randomly assorted personality traits, from the malaria donor to the recipient" (212). Murugan emphasises how ‘Calcutta Chromosome’ has eluded Western science because it is “different, non-standard, unique” (212), since it follows a recombinatory pattern that “eludes standard techniques of research” (212). The

Calcutta Chromosome is only a chromosome "by analogy" as O'Connell puts it and carries biological coding of personality traits. Mangala tries to stabilize the gene by devising ways to control the kinds of traits that get passed on. O' Connell interprets the experiments by Mangala as "coming into the ability to transfer the entirety of one's selfhood into a new body. Mangala and the other counter-scientists' "genuine discovery" thus enables one to prolong their life, or at least a version of it, indefinitely" (788).

Chapter 6

Conclusions and Scope for Future Research

One of the chief contentions of this thesis was to find a method that enabled looking at the novels of Amitav Ghosh from a perspective that was not circumscribed by a literary theory. Keeping in mind that the form of the novel following a literary convention would read in a specific way and only overlook other possible interpretations led to exploring the notion of space as a means to read a literary text. There is no single established method for such a reading but the recently flourishing area of literary geography has begun exploring what literary space entails. The second chapter offers a conceptual framework with an attempt to set off a conversation between the disciplines of geography and literature. The chapter concludes by suggesting that Neil Smith's enunciation of the scale and Nirvana Tanoukhi's (2011) interpretation of the postcolonial novel as a reading of the postcolonial condition from a distance using the example of the Yoruba sculptor of the Man and his Bicycle, weave in a geographical scalar concept to that of literary criticism. The spatial contestation invokes the matter of spatial access and how the individual embodies it. Just as the scalar distance in reading of literature limits interpretations such that the postcolonial condition gets confined within landscapes with a fixed geographic imaginary, which is very imperial in nature. In the face of such a crisis, Franco Moretti's proposal that space as such is created within the novel and is not dependent upon the form of the novel in question so much so that each space determines its own kind of story, offers reprieve. It is from this point that the next chapter begins its journey of excavating spaces in novels rooted in different literary theories and attempting to read them against the grain.

Nirvana Tanoukhi's seminal essay "The Scale of World Literature" on what it means to apply scales to literature and what kind of reading that

enunciates is the point from which the third chapter takes off since the novel and the representations it offers are put to test using space as artefact. This chapter concludes that it is not necessary for unorthodox or less traversed spaces to fail to exist in the face of generalized notions of space since different human practices create and make use of different conceptualizations of space as explained by David Harvey (2006). In his wide analysis of literary critics from across the world (from mid seventeenth century to mid eighteenth century novels from Russia, Italy, Spain, China, Japan, etc.), Moretti finds that the narrative voice trying to bring about the 'compromise' between the foreign form and local material is the one which stands to be the most unstable. One of the primary reasons for the same stems from the motivation of the narrator to somehow translate the traditional conventions of a culture into interpretive signposts for an eclectic readership. The awkward marriage between foreign plot, local characters and local narrative voice asserts its awkwardness, very differently in Ghosh's *Sea of Poppies*. Looking back upon *Rajmohan's Wife* by Bankim Chandra Chatterjee and his inability to strongly position Matangini in the text owing to the novelty of the literary form being adapted for writing along with issues of readership and social ethics in question, Ghosh's novels are a case in point. Interspersed in the middle of the serious setting of migration of indentured labour on the Ibis, is an incidence difficult to place in the schema of the larger context of the novel. Ghosh chooses humour as a literary device to bring together Baboo Nob Kissin Pander (the devout Vaishnava priest), and Zachary, the second mate of the ship. The interactions between both revolve around the theme of bhakti, which is drawn outward toward the metropolis from the inner sanctum of one's faith, wherein bhakti is practiced as a way of life. The analysis shows the dichotomies of spiritual and material domains of anticolonial national life as proposed by Partha Chatterjee (1994), problematised by Nob Kissin's practice of bhakti for whom the inner and the outer spaces are cohesive instead of being distinct. The premise that a multiplicity of readings is possible for Amitav Ghosh's texts grounds the thesis to the deployment of scales and the scalar jump that spatial differentiation offers.

The fourth chapter begins with an exploration on Neil Smith's foundational essay on scales and how Homeless Vehicles contest the specificity of the urban scale while performing the scalar jump of breaking out of the spaces that officiate their everyday living. Thereafter this explication is applied to the characters of Deeti and Kalua from *Sea of Poppies*. The river offers the scalar jump in undoing some of the constraints that land imposes upon these characters. The river represents a similar non-specificity of spatial vacuum without its attendant regimen of social norms, as do the Homeless Vehicles of the evictees from New York city. Deeti experiences a sense of freedom for the first time on the waters, by the river's edge just as Kalua is no more an obscure presence as he was on land. The river offers scalar relief to both the characters, as they traverse through the very landscape that constricts their freedom. The freedom experienced by both is not merely about escaping social barriers but about experiencing themselves and their inner motivations, which finds expression in the way their lives are transformed by the choices they exercise. The dichotomy of freedom versus injunctions, in the opium trade are influenced by the scalar constructions around the opium business carried out on land versus at sea. Derek Gregory's (2001) notion of enframing nature is used to elaborate how space in the colonial project was projected as a static, by holding nature at a distance, and worked upon to be systematized. The landscape of the Ghazipur factory is explored and later the Indian Ocean scape is explored to study the effects of the opium trade in *River of Smoke*. The chapter goes on to explore the Indian Ocean itself as an important site of study, given the recent revival of scholastic interest on its region. The ocean itself is the scale of representations and marked by histories and cultures, yet non-deterministic and labile, difficult to ascertain in terms of fixities in identities, practices, economies, or even territories. This chapter concludes with a specific kind of geographical consciousness attained through the study of the rivers, ocean and its littoral areas. And this consciousness is situated in landscapes that are either free from imperial discipline or material engagements of trade and profits that apparently shape indigenous progress or transform these influences through the action of agents like migrants and people

for whom the everyday life experiences of family and love destabilize given spatial foundations. Additionally, waterways also inspire fabulations through which are realised the true motivations of indigenes like Deeti or Bahram. Amidst untamable landscapes and imaginations lies the syncretic space of the littoral that is home to ever evolving ways of life and livelihood undergirded by the ocean as an unmistakable presence.

In the fifth chapter, the subject of body as scale provides points of continuation from the previous chapter on waterways since some of the spaces that undergo changes on the waterways owe it to bodies in movement or bodies in action. What kind of spatial differentiation these activities generate and how transformative they are when interacting with surrounding landscapes, make for enunciation in this chapter. The space of the body and its interactions with the surrounding landscape is studied in this chapter through structure/agency dualism. The dualisms are important parameters which mediate subject formation and the consequent impact they have on how the body acquires meaning. Does the body acquire meaning only in relation to social rules and sanctions existent in structures outside itself or does it have its own internal meaning? This question is especially important since Neil Smith's notion of body as scale founds itself on the body as a social construct whereas this chapter attempts to look at the body stripped to its bare essentials, and deriving meaning from its inherent qualities. Another essential feature that is dealt with here is the body working closely with raw geographical landscapes that are not social in their construction and therefore the geography such a subject maps is guided by motivations that are unconventional and yet syncretic so far as bridging very different landscapes are concerned. This chapter draws from David Harvey's (1974) theory of subsistence, and Noel Castree's (2005) exhaustive analysis of nature apart from other theories.

Thus this thesis attempts to pick specific strands like 'landscapes' which are used to build upon waterways as scale just as there is an attempt to build a case for 'geographical consciousness' using ideas like 'geographical imagination'

forwarded by Edward Said (1985), while Ernst Cassirer (1944) is referred to for the inexplicability attached to perception of space. In his book *An Essay on Man*, Cassirer, is unable to explain the native's sense of space that enables him to negotiate every bend in the river with precision, a function of some form of abstract knowing and yet this knowing cannot be theorized so far as efforts to plot the very landscape a native traverses, onto a map. When a literary text is read with the notion of geographic consciousness in mind, one discovers unorthodox and abstract spaces that slide across multiple literary conventions given to systematized reading. This is when one begins to look toward scapes like the Indian Ocean, or the body as geographical scales that operate in the realm of shifting ontologies.

The future scope for this study entails a more detailed and extended understanding of the notion of geographical consciousness which will require disciplines, inviting grounds for interaction between nature and social spaces since the two cannot be kept apart. Engagements of this nature are important in enriching literary studies and to understand literary spaces within texts. Not only is it important to be able to perceive nature within social spaces as Noel Castree exemplifies in his book *Nature*, a sense of place can happen when we are ready to experience spaces of varied kinds and allow these perceptions to inform and enunciate literary spaces as well, just as a novel like *Sea of Poppies* offers much scope for enunciation of spaces that lead to discovery of literary spaces of new kinds within the text.

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