

Conclusion

The dissertation has shown Amitav Ghosh's critique of colonial modernity in two broad arenas—(a) epistemology, (b) gender and sexuality. Chapter Two, Chapter Three and Chapter Four deal with epistemology and identity. Chapter Five addresses issues of sexuality and identity. Chapter Six attends to the questions of gender and identity. Ghosh has not offered his critique through abstract proposition. Being a fiction writer who is alive to human predicament, Ghosh has embedded his critique in the subjectivity and identity of his characters. An analysis of the identity of his characters uncovers the underlying critique of colonial modernity. The dissertation has examined Ghosh's handling of identity of certain characters in order to address the 'problematics' of colonial modernity.

I have looked at the characters' identity through three modes: (a) identity as an instance of interpellation, (b) identity as a mask, and (c) identity as a means of resistance to colonial modernity. It is important to mention here that these three modes do not necessarily cancel each other. Balaram, Alu, Nirmal and Kanai are embodiments of individuals' interpellation by the dominant ideology of modernity. Mr. Burnham and Mrs. Burnham exemplify how identity can be deployed as a mask to hide true self. Jyoti Das, Mrs. Verma, Mangala, Lutchman and Baboo Nobokrishna Panda exemplify how identity formation is a strategic means to resist the imposition of colonial modernity. On the whole, the three modes, which are spread across the chapters, reveal the uncertainties and contradictions inherent in colonial modernity as well as show how identity formation is a means of resistance to the hegemonic discourse of colonial modernity.

Modernity came to India via colonialism which tried to propagate the former as a universal model or 'truth without parenthesis.' According to Walter D. Mignolo, 'the rhetoric of modernity' strives to reproduce 'the logic of coloniality.' The most significant weapons of

modernity to produce and continue coloniality are, of course, epistemology and sexual-cum-gender roles. What I have shown with reference to the select novels of Ghosh is that the universal model of modernity is accepted, resisted, subverted, undermined and translated in colonial/post-colonial encounters. Trajectories of Ghosh's characters demonstrate that complex process of permutation and combination.

My study of Balaram's character reveals that he is a prototypical colonial subject who has been thoroughly moulded in the epistemological dice of modernity. He forms his identity consciously on the basis of rationality. He thinks himself to be a rational, autonomous subject who has taken the cudgel on behalf of Reason to address various social ills in India. But what he is not conscious about is the 'difference, exclusion and marginalisation' engendered by modernity. He takes Louis Pasteur as a model scientist whose research was aimed to eradicate disease from the entire world. But he fails to fathom the historical context of Pasteur's research; he never digs into the role of Pasteur's research in colonial expansion. He decontextualises Pasteur and emulates the scientist in his universal fight against germ. Similarly, he glorifies weaving as a universal manifestation of Reason, forgetting to look into its dark history and its close link with colonialism. In his implementation of Reason, he never thinks of the suitability of the Western model in the Indian context. As a result, all his ventures in Science become a series of disasters. In his quest for Reason, he ends up as the most irrational and illogical person. On the whole, he is an example to illustrate how modernity continues to produce colonised subjects in post-colonial times. Balaram's nephew Alu demonstrates the same process of psychological subjectification by Western epistemology. He introduces his uncle's philosophy in distant al-Ghazira, with similar disastrous results. In fact, Balaram and Alu never enter into dialogue with Western epistemology that they emulate. They can be identified as "subject of knowledge," the third category of subject recognised by Gagnier (*Subjectivities*, 8). Their identities, constituted by

their “thoughts, assumptions, beliefs and affects,” make them typical neocolonial subjects (Elliott, xxxi). They are nothing but the products of Western epistemology.

The same mechanism of internalisation of the ethos of modernity is instantiated by Nirmal and Kanai. Being bred up in modern education, they discredit the indigenous forms of knowledge embedded in folklore and myth. They try to comprehend the enigmatic, liminal site of the Sunderbans and the lived experience of its inhabitants on the principle of Western epistemology. Their attempts fail and they get disillusioned with the universal applicability of modernity. This realisation initiates a transformation of their self and identity. From proud, diehard rationalist, they become humble believers in the non-rational, imaginative and instinctive forms of knowledge and understanding. On the other hand, Horen and Kanai embody the viability of non-modern, indigenous epistemology to grapple with the danger-laden reality of the tide country. Horen and Fokir can be said to belong to Gagnier’s fourth category, the subject of body, who is intimately linked with the environment. Balaram and Alu in *The Circle of Reason* and Nirmal and Kanai in *The Hungry Tide* can be said to retain, in Partha Chatterjee’s words, “the essentialist character depicted in Orientalist discourse” (*Nationalist Thought and the Postcolonial World*, 38). Because of uncritical internalisation of the rhetoric of modernity, they become ‘object’ of colonial discourse. Their search for autonomy turns out to be a futile project; they end up as over-determined products of Western epistemology. Their predicaments only reinforce the ironies of colonial modernity.

In my analysis of Mr. Burnham and Mrs. Burnham, they turn out as using their cultural identity to mask their true selves. Ghosh has presented both of them as propagators of sexual ethics of modernity only to expose the hiatus between their preaching and practice. Mr. Burnham’s overt identity as a righteous, high-minded colonial philanthropist turns out a sham when we get to know his real masochist self. Similarly, Mrs. Burnham’s social identity as a righteous, ethically-strict *memsahib* turns out to be nothing but a mask to hide her

unhappy, sex-hungry, love-deprived, bisexual self. They are the very contradictions of what they purport to be. Their desire to teach the world the strict sexual ethics underpinning colonialism and modernity is fraught with the deepest irony. They just do what they vow not to do. The conflict between their social identity and their libidinal desire makes them split personalities. They exemplify how abstract idealism fails before the lived experience and human predicaments. In my view, through them Ghosh has undermined the sanctimonious sexual ethics of colonial modernity.

But Ghosh is not merely interested in showing ideological over-determination of colonised subjects or in exposing the double-standard of the colonisers; he is, in fact, very much concerned to show how the characters put up resistance to colonial modernity. Ghosh's take on resistance from colonised subjects resembles Partha Chatterjee's take on nationalist resistance. Instead of being passive, the colonised subject "is seen to possess a 'subjectivity' which he can himself 'make'...while his relationship to himself and to others have been 'posed, understood and defined' by others, i.e. by an objective scientific consciousness, by Knowledge, by Reason, those relationships are not acted by others" (*Nationalist Thought and the Postcolonial World*, 38). It is for this reason identity formation is an effective means to question and undermine Western epistemology as well as gender roles. I have analysed the process of identity formation of certain characters in order to show how the universalist ethos of Western modernity is dismantled and undermined in post-colonial scenario. In Ghosh's oeuvre, this concern of contesting Western modernity through subjectivity and identity is found from his very first novel to his latest novel till date. In *The Circle of Reason* Jyoti Das and Mrs. Verma initiate the process of discarding identity which was imposed upon them by Reason. Jyoti quits his police job and goes to Germany with the hope to begin a new life. Mrs. Verma burns *Life of Pasteur*, the single most significant book in her life, and becomes a new person who values humanity, not the dry dictates of Reason. Mangala and Lutchman

carry the process of rejecting Western modernity through identity formation to a new level. They develop a mechanism for plural, ever-evolving identity that defies the cognitive boundary of Western epistemology. The same process of contesting Western epistemology is taken to an altogether new height by the reconstitution of his identity by Baboo Nobokrishna Panda. What he undermines is the heterosexual gender norms so much valued by colonial modernity. By getting transformed from a male, colonial servant to an *ardhanariswara*, he disrupts the smooth functioning of colonialism in many ways. The transformation of his identity is inscribed in the mystical *ardhanariswara* legacy of Indian culture. His very identity involving female consciousness in male body frustrates the male/female binary endorsed by colonialism. Moreover, his new androgynous identity endows him with a power to covertly subvert the colonial authority.

Ghosh's presentation of the formation and transformation of identity to resist the universal paradigm of Western epistemology is akin to Stuart Hall's proposition of 'cultural identity.' Let me here clarify that though Hall formulated his ideas in the context of diaspora and colonial imposition, I have found his basic ideas regarding 'cultural identity' very helpful to account for the resistance to colonial modernity put up by Ghosh's characters. Hall has postulated that 'cultural identity' is a contingent and strategic positioning within one's own culture to resist cultural Europeanisation. The colonised subject must use the resources of his/her culture to create a new identity. Identity which may be seen as a temporal position to articulate resistance keeps changing with the change of context. Although Hall does not altogether negate the essentialist idea of identity as a being, identity for him remains as much a matter of becoming as that of being. Mangala, Lutchman and Baboo Nobokrishna Panda are the embodiments of the process of strategic positioning within the narratives of culture. They also demonstrate that identity formation is, in the words of Peter V. Zima, a "narrative

programme,” that is, a dialectical process involving deliberate choice and self-reflection (*Subjectivity and Identity*, 11).

The transgressive identities of Ghosh’s characters remind us of Giddens’ proposition that “the self is not a passive entity, determined by external influences” (*Modernity and Self-Identity*, 2). In Ghosh’s novels, identity holds the potential to disrupt and undermine Western epistemology and consequently, pave the path for decolonisation of knowledge and being. Colonial modernity may assign non-Europeans a subjectness while at the same time denying them the “historical agency”, but the lived experience and cultural identity do have the potential to open up the space of resistance, and to throw alternative options (Basu, 1).

Thus, in Ghosh’s novels, colonial modernity is a contested site. What is at stake here is the universal paradigm of Western epistemology. What Ghosh is trying to say throughout his career, perhaps, is that the full-scale implementation of Western ideas which were imported to the colonies in the name of modernity as the only legitimate ideas is a form of epistemic violence. European ideas are European ideas after all. To delegitimise indigenous knowledge and to impose European knowledge cause disjunctures in people’s lives. The destinies of the characters show that Western modernity gets distorted and translated when applied blindly to comprehend the enigma called India. The trajectories of characters reinforce that ‘our modernity’ is quite different from Western modernity. Partha Chatterjee has reminded us that “in the world arena of modernity, we are outcastes, untouchables... The bitter truth about our present is our subjugation, our inability to be subjects in our own right” (“Our Modernity,” 151). In order to become the producers of our modernity rather than remaining as the consumers of Western modernity, we need to create an attachment with our past and our culture. It does not mean, however, a return to the recorded past; it rather suggests a strategic positioning within the resources of the past. This past is as much a matter of the past as much of the future as well. That is what the fictional characters in Ghosh’s

novels have done. Through the predicaments of his characters, he has tried to draw attention to the indigenous epistemologies which have been there for thousands of years.

To achieve true decolonisation of being, what is most needed, in Mignolo's phrase, is 'epistemic delinking' which implies a disengagement from Western ideas. If 'coloniality' is the replication of Western ideas in neocolonial times, 'decoloniality' is the call to delink from Western epistemology. Jyoti Das and Mrs. Verma in *The Circle of Reason*, Mangala and Lutchman in *The Calcutta Chromosome*, Fokir in *The Hungry Tide* and Baboo Nobokrishna in *The Ibis Trilogy* exemplify the process of epistemic delinking, and consequently, of decolonisation of being. They show that there are forms of knowledge other than Western knowledge, and these discredited, non-modern, mystical and local forms of knowledge may be very much useful in non-European places.

That this train of thought regarding non-Western epistemologies has been a constant presence in Ghosh's mind is reinforced by Ghosh's latest novel *Gun Island*. The novel proposes that the world is still miraculous, and that human world, animal world and natural world are connected by an invisible bond. Piya, the scientist, and Deen, the rationalist, try to offer scientific explanations of the miracles that they witness. But at the end, they have to acknowledge the limitation of human rationalism. There is an invisible, mysterious force in nature that defies ratiocination, and works according to nature's rules. Cinta is Ghosh's spokesperson in the novel. For her, intuition is more important than dry reasoning. Much like Fokir who had the dream of his dead mother urging him to join her, Cinta feels the presence of her dead daughter who has come to take her away. The novel, however, does not focus on splitting or transformation of subjectivity and identity of its characters. Rather, the focus is here on thematic concerns like the limit of rationalism, miracle, climate change, human and animal migration, and these concerns are conveyed through a beautifully crafted story. The novel is an attempt to address 'the improbable' which, as Ghosh said in *The Great*

Derangement, has been generally avoided by the writers of realist novels. The novel implies, through the predicament of Tipu and Cinta, that despite the revolutionary advancement in modern technology like internet and cell phones, human life remains intimately tied up with dreams, myth and intuition. *Gun Island* is the culmination of what Ghosh has been trying to say all his life: Western epistemology cannot account for everything in the world. The novel's final message is: "the possibility of our deliverance lies not in the future but in the past, in a mystery beyond memory" (*Gun Island*, 286). It reasserts a thought that threads through *The Circle of Reason*, *The Calcutta Chromosome* and *The Hungry Tide*. The novel reaffirms the efficacy of myth, legend and human intuition. Thematically, the novel reinforces what I have tried to say in my dissertation: Western epistemology is not the only valid epistemology in the world. There are other non-modern, non-European epistemologies and worldviews which can make us comprehend the beauty and mystery of the world. It is time we seek not only alternative modernities, but also alternatives to modernity.

In saying so, I do not claim that Western epistemology is false or totally ill, and non-Western epistemologies are true and good. It is not a position of binary opposition that I try to advocate; rather a position of mutual dependence, cooperation and peaceful coexistence. What the dissertation underpins is that in order to achieve decolonisation of mind, the post-colonial subjects should disengage, delink and unlearn the all-pervasive epistemology of modernity imported via colonialism. Simultaneously, they must look for the viability of indigenous epistemologies. As a novelist who conveys his themes through plot and characters, Ghosh has shown that individuals have the potential to consciously break away from the imposing Western epistemology as well as its sexual-cum-gender norms, and thus to strive to live with dignity.

Blind adherence to the ethos of Western modernity only reproduces 'the logic of coloniality' which, in turn, will continue to cause psychological and cultural subordination.

What Ghosh tries to convey through his novels is that the human world is governed by coexisting epistemologies. All of them are only options; there is no particular epistemology that is ‘the Option.’ Coexistence of multiple epistemologies can make the world, in Mignolo’s words, ‘pluriversal’ where there is no one universal epistemology. Such a world can lead us to, what Mignolo calls, ‘decoloniality.’ It will be a world where all human beings, despite their physical and cultural differences, can live peacefully, without any hierarchy or racial categorisation.

In stressing the need for ‘decoloniality,’ my dissertation signposts future researches for exploring ‘decolonial options’ in other literary works as well as in other cultural practices. The purpose of ‘decolonial options’ is “to advance projects of epistemic and subjective decolonization” (*The Darker Side*, xxviii). Decolonial scholars and activists like Walter Mignolo, Arturo Escobar and Catherine E. Walsh are actively engaged in ‘doing decoloniality.’ For them, “theory is doing and doing is thinking” (*On Decoloniality*, 7). In their thinking and doing, they stress the importance of recognising how in post-colonial societies almost everything—from education to medicine to food to literature to economy to culture in general—is replicated within the frame of reference of Western modernity. As alternatives to modernity, they posit non-Western epistemologies which embody alternative notions of economy, time, place, health, agriculture, education and the list continues. In fact, it can be said that decolonial researches are significant means to show the path for accomplishing decolonisation of mind and being. My dissertation is a small step in that direction. It indicates that in a country like India which carries the legacy of colonial modernity in every domain of life, decolonial researches are the need of the hour.