7 Finding an Appropriate Term to Capture the Human—Environment Relationship: saṁsāra

Previous chapter was an attempt to elucidate the islanders’ relationship with their environment. The narrative of ‘occurrence of land’ reveals a very different notion of islander’s experience of the environment. This chapter will continue to comprehend this different notion. Along with, this chapter will also reveal my challenges as a researcher to grapple, articulate, and translate this notion of environment as accurately as possible.

From an in-depth reading of these narratives, one could derive that the narrators have mentioned about the dynamicity of environmental entities and relational existence of environment in reference to their day-to-day experiences. While describing environmental changes of that region, these unique features associated with their conception of environment, repeatedly get reflected in the narratives. Almost all of the narrators have articulated the same notion of environment from their varied contexts. In the following, a few excerpts of those narratives will exhibit the same notion from a first-person perspective. The first two of the following excerpts denote the dynamicity of the environment, and the last two capture the relational reality.

“Now there is a huge sand dune on the river-bund of south G-plot. However, no one can ensure anything, maybe within a day, this sand dune can get completely abolished. It is just like a magic. It is difficult to assume that how the river would flow.” [FLDN]

“Easterly wind is the most dangerous one. Commonly, we know that during spring tides the water will be full till embankment, and the river will go far away during neap tides. But no one can ensure anything, easterly wind becomes the deciding factor. Two major floods, 82’s flood and 2010’s Aila, nevertheless, did not occur during spring tide. These occurred during neap tide when water level is usually very low. In this kind of situations, easterly wind becomes the deciding element, so we call it ‘the king.’” [FLDN]

“I cannot count how many times in a day I go to the river. The river is just beside; even you can say that the land of this house also, a few years back was in the river. … During the low-pressure time, the sound of the river waves is so alarming that you would think that the river is going to grasp you.” [FLDN]

“As a resident of the Sundarbans, flood is not a new phenomenon for us. It is not something that we feel scared of. During floods, we will not get food, we cannot do farming—that’s all, but no one will die due to that. The tide will bring the flood and after that during ebb water will drain out—that is the feature of this river-bounded place. It is like those red crabs that stay at the beaches. Whenever the tide comes they will go deep into sand holes, again come out during ebb. People in G-plot live exactly like that.” [FLDN]

What does it mean to be in the midst of the environment? The residents of the G-plot, as per their geographic location, live their life surrounded by rivers and the Bay of Bengal. Living
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a life by accepting these realities always seems challenging from an outsider’s perspective. The above narratives clearly depict that the way islanders conceptualize the environment is quite different from the outsider’s conception of it.

To illuminate the cause behind the difference between insider’s and outsider’s perceptions of the environment of a particular place, Tuan (1975)\(^1\) argues how experiences play an important role to make a place a centre of meaning. Tuan (1991) elaborates that narratives help to grasp a place that is “deeply humanized world” and narratives also explicate how experiences turn a place into a centre of meaning. He says:

Outsiders say ‘nature,’ because the environment seems barely touched. Insiders see ‘homeplace’—an environment that is familiar to them, not because they have materially transformed it but because they have named it. It is their place—their world-through the casting of a linguistic net.\(^2\)

In earlier chapters, the hermeneutic analysis of the narratives and the islanders’ narratives of ‘occurrence of land’ demonstrate that ‘change’ is an essence of the Sundarbans land and the environment. These experiential accounts or narratives-descriptive guide us to grasp the embodied experience of the Sundarbans environment. It also shows, for the islanders, the ‘homeplace’ Sundarbans becomes a centre of meaning through their experiential understanding of their surroundings.\(^3\) Close-reading of the narratives shows that for the islanders, there is hardly any static conception of the environment, instead they preserve a unique conception of the Sundarbans’s environment. This unique conception of their surroundings on one hand, holds the dynamicity of the environmental entity, on the other hand, elucidates the relational existence of the environment. For the narrators, the environment is not only an aggregation of biotic and abiotic components. The dynamic and the relational presence of the surroundings are the essence of their understanding of it. Living a life in the midst of the environment enables them to appreciate the dynamicity and relational existence of it. With this insight, I feel it is necessary to ask how it is possible to translate this very different notion of environment articulated by the islanders.

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\(^3\)As the purpose of this chapter is to find an appropriate term to describe the islanders’ experience of their environment, here, I am consciously refraining from using the term environment and instead using ‘surroundings’, especially, when I am referring to the islanders’ perceptions.
i. **The Existing Terms: A brief analysis**

This section would revolve around evaluating various existing terms to denote the notion of environment in English as well as the translations of those terms in Bengali.\(^4\) The purpose of this evaluation is to see how far these existing terms can grasp the notion expressed by the narrators.

The word environment, following the etymological roots, can be seen to have derived from the word ‘environ’. Environ means what is surrounding us. Extending the word environ, environment denotes “state of being environed”.\(^5\) The word environment precisely defines the condition in which a person or a thing lives or is placed. From this point of view, environment is nothing but the aggregation of the components which are environing us. Similarly, the Bengali word ‘paribesh’, a common translation of environment, can also be traced back to the word ‘paribeston’. Paribeston also means environ. Following that, paribesh can be considered as the word that aptly describes the components that are surrounding us. Thus, both the words, environment and paribesh, describe the elements and the surroundings within which an individual is placed in. These terminologies, however, capture neither the dynamicity nor the relational reality of their surroundings as depicted in the narratives. Instead, these terms seem to indicate a certain static condition, a stable outside that sustains human and other things inside.

In this regard, one obvious suggestion could be to use the word ecology, as it is also a widely-accepted word that can denote the surroundings of an individual. If we closely see the word ecology, it defines the study (logy) of habitat (eco). Instead of asking what is environment if one asks what is ecology, it precisely explains the ‘relationship of living things to their environment’.\(^6\) Marshall (1992)\(^7\) emphasizes that ecology and its major concepts to grasp the natural world, deal with organisms and their environment as an integrated whole. Ecology puts a special emphasis on living entities and studies how a living entity relates to non-living things as well as other living entities. In a way, ecology as a term focuses on the relational existence. In this regard, in Bengali vocabulary, ecology has been translated as ‘bastabya bidya’. In Bengali, ‘bastabya’ originates from the word ‘bastu’ which denotes the dwelling place and ‘bidya’ refers to knowledge. Following that, ‘bastu bidya’ literally refers to knowledge about the place of dwelling. As a translation of ecology, bastabya bidya also refers to the knowledge

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\(^4\)As the mother-tongue of the narrators is Bengali, a regional language of India, I attempt to see whether the equivalent terms of various chosen English words in Bengali, can precisely grasp their notion or not.


about the relation between living entities with their environment. In Bengali vocabulary, however, bastabya bidya as a translation of ecology, remains rather confined to textual references. Whereas, in common usage of this term in Bengali, bastu bidya or bastu shastra refers to the traditional Hindu system of designing architecture in such a way that a building follows the law of nature and becomes an ideal place for inhabitation. One can find very restricted usage of the word indicating ecology, and more often, it is commonly used to refer the knowledge of housing or architecture. Hence, on one hand, though ecology as a word according to English dictionary is capable of capturing the relational existence of human beings and the environment, it falls short to grasp the dynamicity in the surroundings, mentioned by the narrators. On the other hand, the translation of ecology in Bengali is quite limited to textual references and its common usage fails to capture the semantic space of the word ecology.

At this juncture, one might evoke the term nature as a possible translation. First of all, this term is loaded with various definitions and has often been overused in different discourses. Secondly, nature, generally, points towards a transcendental realm and refers to the cosmological order. For both of these reasons, nature becomes a problematic term to refer to.\(^8\) In Bengali, the translation of nature is either ‘prakriti’ or ‘nisarga’. Both the words point towards some supreme realm that is also transcendental. I found, during interviews, quite often the narrators equate prakriti with the universe. Here, one could say that nature offers a sense of eternity and holistic existence. The common notion about nature or prakriti is that it is unfathomable. And thus, it is commonly equated with the super realm or God. Hence, I consciously refrain myself from delegating the word nature or its Bengali equivalents as the appropriate terms that can represent the notion of surroundings as depicted by the narrators.

Thorough examination of the most commonly used terms—environment, ecology and nature, reveals that these three fall short to capture the nuances present in the islanders’ descriptions of the surroundings. Along with it, neither in Bengali vocabulary nor in English, there is any comprehensive term that can capture these nuances, entirely. Particularly due to this, I really feel that any existing terms that describe human beings’ relationship with their surroundings will not be enough to portray the narrators’ perceptions. The relational reality and the acknowledgement of the dynamicity are the specialty that the narrators have recurrently pointed out in different contexts. In this regard, a frequently referred Bengali term by the narrators comes to my mind, which is ‘samsāra’. Here, I would like to clarify that the narrators

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have not really used the term saṃsāra to denote their surroundings. Rather, the word saṃsāra has a very different connotation in its colloquial usage in Bengali, and I will elaborate that in the next section. Nevertheless, I argue that the word saṃsāra can still be a potential term to capture the islanders’ perception. In the following section, I will carry out the hermeneutic of saṃsāra to extend its semantic space to plausibly capture the perceptions of the islanders.

ii. Hermeneutic of the Concept Saṃsāra

Saṃsāra, on one hand, is a well-known concept in Indian philosophy with its own connotations. On the other hand, saṃsāra\(^9\) as a Bengali word possesses quite a different notion that does not match with its philosophical concept. These two diverge notions of saṃsāra, led me to do a hermeneutic of the term. To carry out this hermeneutic, I will, first of all, borrow the methodology from Cameron (2014).\(^{10}\) Cameron extends Gadamer’s (1991)\(^{11}\) hermeneutics, which reveals the connection between language and the world, in the context of environmental hermeneutics. Cameron in his essay establishes the importance of this connection, as it offers how a concept like nature can be a living concept, instead of a static one, and constantly, gets transformed by incorporating various worldly experiences. He points out that the creation of a concept is based on receiving feedback from worldly experiences. Once a concept gets created, it gets embedded in the language and subsequently, begins to structure our experiences. Furthermore, Cameron highlights Gadamer’s critique of human nature of hypostatizing world and concepts as it creates illusions. Pertaining to this nature of hypostatization, human beings are prone to refrain themselves to critically scrutinize expectations that are conceptually constituted to comprehend the world. Consequently, a disappointment might arise due to the divergence between expectations and real-world experiences. A thorough evaluation of this disappointment can bring forth a shift in the expectation by extending or reinterpreting the concept, while taking account of our actual worldly experiences. Otherwise, the concept remains the same and the disappointment persists. In this regard, Cameron elaborates that Gadamer proposes to transcend this illusion by “revealing the continuous, dynamic, historical, and

\(^9\)The word saṃsāra is actually a Sanskrit word. In Bengali, saṃsāra is pronounced as ‘sangsar’. In the rest of this dissertation, however, I will use ‘saṃsāra’ to denote both its meanings in Sanskrit and in Bengali.


hermeneutic interaction of concept and world in concrete experiences”. Borrowing from Gadamer’s hermeneutics, Cameron also emphasizes that the relationship between concepts and the world is a dynamic one, and he explains it through the three step hermeneutic process. Here, it is important to highlight that in Indian philosophical traditions, saṃsāra is a well-known concept with its own connotation. In the next a few paragraphs, following the methodology set by Cameron, I will try to give a hermeneutic understanding of the concept saṃsāra to show how this term can rightly capture the narrators’ sense of the environment as a dynamic entity and as possessing a relational reality, whereas the other similar terms such as environment, ecology, and nature completely fall short in this regard.

The first step is to explore the ‘inherited presupposition’ about a concept. In the Upanishad, around 600BC, the term saṃsāra can be traced to have first appeared. It is one of the primary concepts of Vedic and Buddhist philosophy. Samsāra is basically a Sanskrit word, and in these traditions, saṃsāra is closely associated with the concept of the ‘cycle of birth and rebirth’. The concept of saṃsāra is an upshot of the notion that there is only one reality, the world. Although the world is considered as the only reality, it is experienced in two different ways, saṃsāra and nirvāṇa. Samsāra is the relative world that is experienced by each and every individual differently. Here, one could possibly ask what does this ‘relative world’ indicate? Relative world is the experience in which, an individual from a first person point of view, distinctly perceives the world as an aggregation of objects that interact causally in space and time. According to its conception, samsāra is the dependent world that appears differently for each individual. As indicated, it is the opposite of another kind of experience of the world, nirvāṇa. Nirvāṇa is the world that transcends any kind of dependence. It denotes the world in its true form. In this regard, the traditional Indian philosophical thought indicates that avidyā (ignorance) is the root cause that eventually leads one to create this dependent world or saṃsāra. Due to the ignorance or avidyā, an individual gets engrossed in her everyday world and remains trapped in the saṃsāric realm. In Vedic philosophy, as Ryan (1999) clearly points out, karma (action) becomes the deciding factor, as karma of an individual decides whether it will be possible for the individual to transcend this realm of the dependent world or to go beyond

12Cameron. “Must Environmental Philosophy Relinquish the Concept of Nature?,” 112.
samsāra to attain nirvāṇa or not. In Buddhist philosophy, as Loy (1983)\textsuperscript{16} aptly describes, craving, conceptualizing, and causality are the three factors that together decide whether an individual can go beyond the realm of samsāra and can attain nirvāṇa or not. Hence, it can be concluded that samsāra in every tradition is conceptualized as that relational reality of the world which comprises of all the attributes that impede one to attain nirvāṇa and therefore, it is considered as an obnoxious realm to dwell in. Due to different reasons put forth by various traditions, an individual fails to realize the ultimate reality of the world and falls back into this wheel of samsāra—the cycle of birth and re-birth.

In Indian philosophical traditions, the concept of suffering is also integrally connected to the concept of samsāra as it shows how suffering or duḥkha leads one to get caught in this cycle of birth and re-birth. Matilal (2002) in his essay, Holy Men,\textsuperscript{17} describes life experience of human beings in the realm of samsāra is equal to pain and anguish. He shows how pain or duḥkha or suffering becomes the central issue of the Indian philosophical schools. These schools attempt to demonstrate that “our earthly existence, our profane life, our everyday routine, is not to be regarded as final”.\textsuperscript{18} Indeed, these strive to establish that there is a sacred existence which is beyond this mundane one, for human beings to attain to. To attain this scared existence, one needs to overcome duḥkha. According to Matilal, duḥkha is neither a physical suffering nor a mental agony. Rather, duḥkha can be translated as a combination of hedonistic pain, short lasting physical and mental pleasure, and the pervasive and abstract types of unhappiness that originate from the realization of the conditioned existence of human beings. In the realm of samsāra, as Matilal would say, the human existence is caught up in a conditioned state where one cannot access her free will, though we are considered as free agents. On the contrary, nirvāṇa is an “unconditioned state of freedom”.\textsuperscript{19} Until one realizes the essence of duḥkha, the individual remains caught in the cyclic order of birth and rebirth in samsāra and is unable to attain nirvāṇa. Thus, samsāra becomes the repetitive implementation of life events, which Danto (1972) has mentioned as “despair of life”.\textsuperscript{20} Borrowing from Danto’s argument that this despair of life makes Indian philosophy to promote the need to endeavor for moksha or nirvāṇa or otherworldly lives, Matilal establishes that Buddhist idea of duḥkha=samsāra, is actually not only restricted

\textsuperscript{16}Loy, “The difference between Samsāra and “Nirvāṇa”.
\textsuperscript{18}Ibid., 373.
\textsuperscript{19}Ibid., 371.
\textsuperscript{20}Danto 1972, 48, as cited in Matilal “Dukkha, Nirvana and Holy Men,” 374.
in Buddhist first noble truth but also perpetuates to other Indian philosophical traditions. Hence, it can be concluded that where nirvāna is a blissful experience of the human existence and a transcendent reality of human’s free will or unconditioned existence, saṃsāra consists of the everyday reality encumbered with duḥkha or pain.

In his second step, Cameron shows how Gadamer incorporates phenomenological reflection to explain the relation between the world and the concept. In Bengali vocabulary, saṃsāra is quite a common term and is being used to denote family affairs and matters arising on a day-to-day living. The philosophical concept of saṃsāra and its negative undertone, however, do not prevalently exist in its common usage. I think, here it is worth to explore the phenomenological experience of saṃsāra. In day to day life, individuals refer to the word saṃsāra to explain about their relationship, liabilities, and the constant need for adapting to changing circumstances. Not only the proximate relationship, but people also refer to a distant relationship or a universal connection with other human and non-human beings by the term ‘jagat saṃsāra’—where ‘jagat’ represents the universe and ‘saṃsāra’ literally denotes family.

During general conversations with the islanders, many people often invoked the idea that ‘Saṃsāra is a play or a drama’. No one has a choice to decide whether to partake in this samsaric realm; rather everyone by default is an actor of that play. The word is also attached with the connotation that in saṃsāra, pain and pleasure comes in a cyclic order and nothing is permanent in it. Therefore, everyone will experience pain as well as pleasure, or happiness and sorrow. In Bengali, the proverb ‘Sukh Dukhha Pala Kore Ase’ also means the same, joy and sorrow comes in turn. Through this notion of cyclic order, saṃsāra creates a ‘cyclic world’ where nothing is static or permanent, and it also points to the repetitive occurrence of life events. In this way, the term saṃsāra is capable of signifying the dynamicity of our lives. Here, I would like to posit that where life is intricately connected to one’s surroundings and where the dynamicity of life and the dynamicity of surroundings do not remain separate from each other, the term saṃsāra is equally capable of capturing the notion of dynamicity of one’s surroundings.

Furthermore, in its common usage, saṃsāra refers to the mundane existence. It denotes the relationship of every individual with other human beings and life-forms. Another proverb that I would like to mention in this regard is: ‘the family is like the forest: if you are outside, it is dense; if you are inside, you see that each tree has its own position’. In this proverb, family actually refers to saṃsāra, and the proverb tries to communicate that though from the outset sāṃsāric realm seems complex and full of liabilities, from inside one can realize that an

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21 Cameron, “Must Environmental Philosophy Relinquish the Concept of Nature?”
individual or an entity in the saṃsāra has one’s own demarcated position and clearly defined responsibilities. One’s position and responsibilities actually define one’s association with others. That is how for each individual, saṃsāra manifests differently. In this manner, saṃsāra also echoes the concept of a relative world, where the world is experienced by each individual differently. By considering this articulation of saṃsāra, one could argue that there are subtle but definite differences between saṃsāra as a philosophical concept and saṃsāra as a phenomenological experience. In an everyday world, the phenomenological experience of saṃsāra and its articulation elucidate that the experience of saṃsāra is not same for everyone, every individual creates one’s own saṃsāra through one’s relations with other human beings, lifeforms, and other worldly entities. Thus, for each of us, saṃsāra refers to certain relationship, entities, responsibility, and emotive experiences. This articulation and understanding of saṃsāra take us to Cameron’s argument\(^\text{22}\) that this subtle difference between experiences and concept can induce a disappointment in our expectations.

The disappointment between this ‘inherited presupposition’ and experience leads towards the third step where borrowing from Gadamer, Cameron argues against the hypostatization of any concept. Instead of carrying a concept just like a dead one, it is necessary to reconstitute it by taking account of the disjunction between the concept and experiences. The disappointment created from experiences, therefore, leads towards the reinterpretation of the concept. This dynamic relationship between a concept and the worldly experiences can only make a concept a living one. At this juncture, this reinterpretation is necessary for the concept saṃsāra. As discussed above, saṃsāra as a philosophical concept defines a realm where everyone suffers and remains trapped, however, the phenomenological experience of saṃsāra indicates human life and life events, the relational reality of each person amid various living and non-living entities. It also shows that how a change in outside, can induce a change in one’s inside. This, in a way, illuminates one of the fundamental truths of life, which is change; as one Bengali proverb, ‘Paribartan e jiboner niyom’, denotes exactly the same sense. Thus, the dynamicity of outside as well as inside drives our lives and the realm of saṃsāra. Here, I think, it would not be wrong to argue that, in this sense, saṃsāra indeed a relational reality to one’s surroundings which constantly gets modified by outer changes and inner motives. Hence, I posit, saṃsāra appropriately provides the opportunity to grasp the perspectives as articulated by the narrators. In the everyday world, our relationships with our surroundings are actually like dwelling in saṃsāra. Human beings with very special attributes create this relational reality of

\(^{22}\)Ibid., 113.
samsāra. In this manner, the realm of samsāra has a very special association to each and every human being according to one’s own lived-experience. Therefore, I see, introducing the concept samsāra to articulate and comprehend the dynamic and relational reality of our surroundings will not be a futile attempt.

Introducing samsāra, instead of the environment, ecology, or nature, as a term to put forth one’s relation to one’s surroundings, also offers a notion that each individual creates a special relation to her surroundings depending on her life course. Samsāra depicts that both the life of an individual and her surroundings go through several changes as there is nothing permanent as such, in samsāra. The acceptance of the term samsāra helps to go beyond the idea of a stable surroundings and in turn, promotes that one’s dwelling in samsāra must be in tandem with its changing surroundings, instead of intervening or curbing any changes occurring in it. Hence, I argue, accepting the term samsāra could offer a new way to comprehend the human—environment relationship. In this regard, it is necessary to clarify that samsāra precisely captures the human—environment relationship instead of just capturing a notion of the physical world, independent of the presence of human beings. The islanders’ descriptions succinctly depict how an individual is always at the centre of samsāra. Without our (human beings) presence, the articulated notion of samsāra falls apart. In this manner, I think, samsāra helps to phenomenologically approach the relationship rather than getting caught up in the theoretical understanding of environment and ecology. In one line, it can be concluded that samsāra is a term that defines the phenomenological relationship of an individual to her surroundings.

iii. Keeping the Concept Alive: Translation of Samsara

If one accepts that samsāra could be an apt term to denote the surroundings where human beings are emplaced in, then the next question arises what would be an ideal translation of this word in English. Here, I think Sarukkai (2013) provides an important insight through explaining the differences between translations of a concept and translations of a word. For translating a word, the motive is always to find out the equivalent word in the other language. Whereas, for translating a concept, it is important to comprehend the concept in a new language with its ‘meaning-bearing capacity’. Sarukkai urges to take account of the context to comprehend a concept. He argues that without translating the context, the translation of a concept in isolation becomes far more complicated and can often remain as a futile attempt. And, most importantly,

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in the process, it loses its meaning-bearing capacity. Thus, in the context of translation of a concept, translation works as a method through which the concept gets translated along with its context to entirely retain its meaning-bearing capacity. No doubt translating a concept with its context, always poses a tough challenge. In this context, transliteration could be an alternative method, where it does not require to find out a way to comprehend the concept with its meaning-bearing capacity. For example, transliterating the concept of saṃsāra in English would be same like transliterating any other proper noun. In this case, the limitation of transliteration, as Sarukkai mentions, is that it limits the scope of modifying a concept in the translated language and the concept again becomes a dead one, and consequently, the process of transmission and circulation of the concept gets severely restricted. Hence, the transliterated concept remains an ‘alien concept’ for the translated language. As I have already put forth, borrowing from Cameron (2014), that a concept should be a living one, the transliteration may not be an appropriate method to translate saṃsāra in English.

In this context, Sarukkai explains, alien concepts are that which “indicate concepts that are foreign to the conceptual structure that informs cognitive capacities of different communities” 24 In other words, alien concepts can have varied meaning for a particular community. In this sense, saṃsāra can be labelled as an alien concept too, as the philosophical conceptualization of saṃsāra clearly differs from its meaning in everyday usage and the associated notions to it. At the same time, saṃsāra as a term to articulate the notion of the environment, does not get acknowledged otherwise. Here, I would like to clarify that accepting saṃsāra as a translation of the notion of environment, does not imply that these two are same, instead, it emphasizes that there is a need to extend the boundaries of both the concepts. According to Sarukkai, alien concepts can only be meaningful through retranslation. Ambiguous initial engagement to grapple with an alien concept, can slowly make the concept a familiar one and over time extends its semantic space. Echoing with this explanation, saṃsāra, with its ambiguousness, as an alien concept in the English language, needs to be retranslated in the language. As in English, there is no equivalent word for saṃsāra, one needs to keep in mind that the translation of saṃsāra should retain its meaning-bearing capacity. In this case, the phenomenological understanding of saṃsāra, offers us a new way to grasp this concept.

Considering the phenomenological understanding of saṃsāra, I posit, the concept of ‘world’ in phenomenology or ‘phenomenological world’ could be a plausible translation of saṃsāra. The concept of the ‘phenomenological world’ has a distinct connotation in the English

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24Ibid., 326.
language as it originates from the Western philosophical stream of phenomenology. At the outset, I would like to clarify that, here, I employ the concept of world in Heidegger’s phenomenology instead of Husserl’s lifeworld. In his magnum opus, Heidegger strictly negates Husserl’s phenomenological methodology, especially the feasibility of bracketing out the existing knowledge for attaining a pure description of a phenomenon with the help of the transcendental consciousness. In contrast to Husserl’s descriptive-phenomenological methodology, Heidegger introduces his phenomenology as a hermeneutical or interpretive understanding of the world. Heidegger readily negates the possibility of mere description of sense data. Indeed, instead of bumping into an object and describing it, Heidegger claims that human beings always press into some or the other possibilities and because of this pressing, objects meaningfully appear to us. We cannot encounter an object as a mere object; it always has to have a meaningful presence to us. Thus, our understanding of other things is always a hermeneutical understanding. Heidegger’s phenomenology argues that human beings are thrown into the world—the world is always-already there; there is no way to escape from it. The primary difference between phenomenological methodologies of Husserl and Heidegger is that Heidegger argues that bracketing of the existing knowledge and seeking for the pure description of phenomena is not plausible because as per him Dasein or the human existence is always-already “being-in-the-world.” The ‘being’ in the being-in-the-world is the meaningfulness of things. It elucidates the fact that “the meaning giving context opened up by and as ex-sistence” or in other words, human existence precedes this meaningfulness. The phrase being-in-the-world actually refers to the always-already existing meaningful engagements of human beings with the world of intelligibility. Briefly, the concept of world in phenomenology describes the phenomenological experience with other living and non-living entities due to one’s intentionality. The subjective experiential reality of the outer-physical world creates the phenomenological world. I would explore more on the concept of the phenomenological world in the next chapter. Here, I will just attempt to show how the notion of the phenomenological world commensurate with the notion of samsāra. The concept of the phenomenological world discards the ultimate universal objective truth of the world, instead, it demonstrates that through

28Sheehan, Making Sense of Heidegger, 11.
one’s engagements, an individual establishes her relation to other beings and creates the ‘phenomenological world’. Heidegger says, in the human ex-sistence, things just cannot stand separately, or it cannot stand alone. According to Heidegger, ‘world’ is not a realm constituted by objects rather each individual encounter meaningful intelligibility of objects in everyday existence as she presses into some possibility or other, and that intelligibility of things generated through those pressing into possibilities or intention to accomplish certain roles that constitutes one’s world.29 The possibilities one is pressing into, decide how each of our world would be like. In this way, each of our world is entirely personalized.30 Due to the difference in the meaningful presence of things, each of our world is different from the other’s world. In other words, my world appears to me because of my purpose and pressing into different possibilities. In this sense, phenomenological world is capable of capturing the sense of relational reality, as uphold by the narrators, quite precisely. Moreover, the notion of dynamicity can also be grasped if we understand the connection between phenomenological world, possibilities, and the external world. As discussed, the creation of the phenomenological world is contingent on pressing into possibilities, and solely, in the light of the possibilities things become meaningful. Therefore, changes in possibilities can actually lead to changes in the meaningful presence of entities as well as can alter one’s phenomenological world. This justifies that the aforementioned malleability of the phenomenological world, in turn, makes an individual receptive towards any changes happening in the external world. In this manner, the notion of phenomenological world is also capable of capturing the dynamicity one’s surroundings.

Although the notion of ‘phenomenological world’ can capture an individual’s relational reality and the dynamic presence of her surroundings, akin to saṁsāra, these two terms cannot directly complement each other in terms of capturing the exact meaning. In other words, the phenomenological world only possesses the meaning-bearing-capacity of the concept saṁsāra. Therefore, there is a possibility that active engagements between these two terms might lead to the retranslation of both of these in their respective scope to inquire how retranslation can add new possible meanings to these concepts in their respective traditions. No doubt this engagement will begin with ambiguity, nevertheless, it will definitely expand the semantic space of saṁsāra as well as the phenomenological world, and in this particular case, it will also enlarge the notion of environment. Therefore, the unique relationship of human beings with their surroundings and other living beings that have been captured in the islanders’ narratives, could transform our
understanding about the environment. I think, to elaborately explore this modified understanding, these two new terms could guide us to grapple with this new notion of environment. As Sarukkai suggests, “through translation and retranslation that concept gets a new meaning. Boundaries of concepts are expanded through retranslation”\(^3\) and it helps to keep a concept alive instead of just carrying it over time as an alien one. Saṃsāra as a new word to define one’s surroundings or the notion of environment, and the phenomenological world as a translation of saṃsāra, can be considered as an illustration of keeping a concept alive. Active engagement with these concepts could also offer some new insights into relating to one’s surroundings and could precisely capture the nuances of the relationship between an individual and her surroundings.

iv. Conclusion

During the field study, the core realization regarding new dimensions of environment has moved me a lot and made me rethink the very notion of environment. From the field narratives, I realize that there is hardly any uniform conception of environment that can exist in the context of the human—environment relationship. To capture, the dynamicity and the relational reality explained by the islanders, in this chapter, I attempt to find a new term to explicate the same. This chapter also provides an account of how translating a term like environment could be difficult if one tries to capture the experiential notion of it. I demonstrate why there is a necessity to ascribe a new term to capture the existing relationship that the islanders possess with their surroundings. Definitely, this different comprehension can provide a fresh outlook to rethink the conventional articulation of the human—environment relationship. At this moment, I should acknowledge that I limit myself from conducting an in-depth exploration of the influence of these two concepts on each other, especially, in terms of exploring its linguistic contribution. Instead, through this analysis my sole purpose is to explicate the complexity of translation as well as to elucidate the nuances of the human—environment relationship as I observed in this island. Saṃsāra, aptly captures this relationship with all its nuances. Now the question arises if one accepts this new term, saṃsāra, to explain one’s relations to her surroundings, then there is a need to reconsider how environmental discourses predominantly approach the human—environment relationships. As I have described that in these islands, the concept of static environment is itself an alien one, preserving and conserving the same notion of environment also seems outlandish for the islanders. Therefore, I posit, there is an urgent need to bring an

\(^3\)Sarukkai, “Translation as Method,” 328.
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... ethic that can uphold this dynamicity and relational reality of the environment or can endorse this notion of saṃsāra to preserve the Sundarbans, in its true sense.
CONCLUSION OF PART B

In this part, through a detailed description about my field study in the Sundarbans, India, I try to expound on the potential of the phenomenological research methodology to amass environmental narratives for generating a fresh understanding of the human—environment relationship. Following from the part A, where I established the need of examining the human side of the human—environment relationship, here, I, perhaps, succeed to demonstrate that the phenomenological account of everyday life of human beings enables us to realize the complexity of this relationship. By employing IPRM, I demonstrate that constant back and forth between phenomenological narratives and a researcher’s prefiguration helps to provide some unique insights into the phenomenon. In this regard, it is necessary to acknowledge that the given flexibility of IPRM at times is quite essential to tease out the nuances of the narratives. I choose to explore ‘environmental change’ as a phenomenon, however, in the process of exploring the phenomenon, the analysis of the phenomenological narratives actually offers some immediate insights about the notion of environment and also provides a fresh understanding about land and water. In this part, the analysis of the everyday affairs and the work-worlds lead me to explore the everyday mode of being of the narrators. We have seen that their engagements with the environment in their work-worlds reveal the occurrence of environmental phenomena as well as it also demonstrates a relational reality about the environment. We have also seen that they accept the occurrence of environmental phenomena, without attempting to curb them in any manner. Now, as a next step of analysis the main objective is to understand how the narrators make their life meaningful and how that influence their experience of the world. This inquiry will help to grasp the narrators’ meaning making process. This would also help to understand the narrators’ transcendent mode of being. In doing so, I will firstly expound on the notion of the phenomenological world and will try to find out the theoretical background to explore how the narrators’ encounter the environment in a meaningful manner. This, I hope, will provide a cue to understand the phenomenological way of comprehending environmental change and the narrators’ transcendent mode of being.