The Hungry Tide (2004) is a rare blend of fiction and anthropological research. This novel is limited in its spatial and geographical terms. It connects human and landscape. Unlike his other novels like The Circle of Reason (1986), The Shadow Lines (1989), The Calcutta Chromosome (1996) or The Glass Palace (2000) which extend to large spaces, The Hungry Tide veers around the one unique place, bhatir desh of the Sunderbans. The Sunderbans is the largest delta in the world, formed by three great rivers emptying into the Bay of Bengal: the Ganges, the Brahmputra and the Meghna.

This novel is a remarkable milestone in the postcolonial South Asian Literature. It merits a detail description of the changing moods of the ebbs and tides that claim lives and destroy people’s livelihood and reminds the readers about the natural catastrophe of Asian tsunami of 2004 that claimed around two million lives. The archipelago is a strip of land squeezed in between the Bay of Bengal which is the setting of the novel. Sunderbans is the natural habitat of many endangered species including the Royal Bengal Tiger, crocodiles, species of snakes, crabs, birds and the Irawaddy dolphins and is the home of the mangrove forest or Sundari trees.

However, it is also a politically problematic zone caught between the tussle of refugees and the state: “there is no prettiness here to invite the stranger in: yet, to the world at large this archipelago is known as ‘the Sunderbans’, which means the beautiful forest” (8). Amitav Ghosh states in an interview about his choice of the Sunderbans as the setting of the novel, “I have always been drawn to places that are off the beaten track. Typical settings don’t interest me.” (http://www.curledup.com/intagosh.htm)

The beauty and complexities of “an immense archipelago of islands...stretching...from the Hooghly River in West Bengal to the shores of Meghna in Bangladesh...”(4) draw the attention of the readers in the whole novel. The novelist informs the readers about the forests and rivers of the place. Mangroves are one of the important features of the Sunderban, “A mangrove forest is a universe unto itself, utterly unlike other woodlands or jungles. There are no towering, vine-looped trees, no ferns, no wildflowers, no chattering monkeys or cockatoos. Mangrove leaves are tough and leathery, the branches gnarled and the foliage often impassably dense” (7-8).
Then the readers are informed about another term mohona, “The rivers’ channels are spread across the land like a fine-mesh net, creating a terrain where the boundaries between land and water are always mutating, always unpredictable. Some of these channels are mighty waterways, so wide across that one shore is invisible from the other... When these channels meet, it is often in clusters of four, five or even six... In the language of the place, such a confluence is spoken of as a mohona” (7).

The novelist demonstrates the uncertainty of hitman life and the rage of Nature in the Sunderbans: “At no moment can human beings have any doubt of the terrain’s utter hostility to their presence, of its cunning and resourcefulness, of its determination to destroy or expel them. Every year dozens of people perish in the embrace of that dense foliage, killed by tigers, snakes and crocodiles” (8).

There seems to be a specific reason for the novelist’s choice for this landscape of Sunderbans as the setting of the novel in order to put the struggle of the displaced people as the locus of attention who have to strive for the possession of land. After much of commotion, the migrants’ confrontation to secure land for themselves reveals that Amitav Ghosh, once again, employs his characteristic ideal utopia present in a revolutionary form by the subaltern agency.

The Scottish capitalist Sir Hamilton’s endeavours to settle in the Sunderbans was approved as a great ideal but these migrants were not allowed to go ahead on their way to build a place for themselves. They were conceived as outsiders because the place was chosen as a Nature reserve by the government. Their forceful eviction leads to a massive massacre which accentuates the theme of the relationship between humans and Nature. It seems that these people are ranked below trees and animals in the government’s hierarchy. This massive massacre is reminiscent of the quasi-socialist movement present most notably in The Circle of Reason in which a group of people attempt to live without the use of money.

Nirmal’s diary veers around a historical event related to the expulsion of refugees from the island of Morichjhapi in the Sunderbans by the Leftfront government of West Bengal in 1979. This act of state violence, for Nirmal, was a disloyalty of the ideals that left-wing politics in the post-partition era had supported. The refugees were forcibly evicted and many of them killed. The whole incident shattered Nirmal and he never recovered from the trauma. The repercussion of the
incident on his psyche can be retraced in the reverberations of Balaram in *The Circle of Reason* and Tridib in *The Shadow Lines*. All these characters encounter a violent state of political or social affairs which leave them obsessed and blown apart. In the present novel, the story of Morichjhapi is shown as the last traumatic expression of Bengal’s partition and it is a vital *sutra* (thread) with which the novel is woven.

There seems to be a link between the plight of the settlers in the Sunderbans and the poor common people of modern life who are left amidst all the chaos and tumult to handle on their own. The venture of the novelist is to create a forum for these subalterns to raise a flag for human assertion with their compact struggle. The chapter “Morichjhapi” talks in detail about the incidents that shaped the forceful eviction of Dalit refugees (who were originally from Bangladesh) from the island in the name of “a protected forest reserve” (119).

These refugees came here from “a government resettlement camp” in the forests of Madhya Pradesh which they felt, was like a prison. “They were surrounded by security forces and forbidden to leave...the local people treated them as intruders, attacking them with bows, arrows and other weapons” (118). This chapter is a powerful illustration of the author’s stance for the selfish political undercurrents of the Indian politics where the underprivileged and the deprived are forced to be a mere observer of their own pitiable plight. Amitav Ghosh hints at empowering his subalterns by lending them voice and spirit of their own in the process of human assertion.

In the chapter “Besieged”, the author talks about the way the people of Morichjhapi are mistreated, hunted and killed by the police. The policemen asked them “to turn back, to return to the shore they had come from” (254). The people began shouting in unison, “Amra kara? Bastuhara. Who are we? We are the *dispossessed*” (254) [italics original]. Their ill-treatment is continued in chapter “Crimes” where the author puts humanistic views about these dispossessed people whose “existence, was worth less than dirt or dust” (261). On the other hand, the policemen were making announcement like so-called activists, “This island has to be saved for its trees, it has to be saved for its animals, it is a part of a reserve forest, it belongs to a project to save tigers, which is paid for by people from all around the world” (261). It is Kusum who articulated her views and wondered about these people.
“who love animals so much that they are willing to kill us for them?...this whole world has become a place of animals, and our fault, our crime, was that we were just human beings, trying to live as human beings always have, from the water and the soil. No human being could think this a crime unless they have forgotten that this is how humans have always lived- by fishing, by clearing land and by planting the soil”(262)[italics original].

Then, there is another chapter “ Alive” which describes the plight of the refugees through the rumours that people like Horen brought. The gangsters were hired to scare the new people, “They burnt the settlers’ huts, they sank their boats, they laid waste to their fields” (279). Amitav Ghosh, thus, convincingly presents the refugees’ fight of survival against both other people and the animals.

The author focuses on the way the refugees are ignored and neglected in the new place they are forced to live in. Kusum met some refugees in a town called Dhanbad who were “like ghosts, covered in dust, strung out in a line, shuffling beside the railtracks” (164) who originally lived on Sundarbans’ edge in Bangladesh. The system drove them to a settlement camp. An old woman related the story to Kusum, “We’d never seen such a place, such a dry emptiness” (165). They searched for a right place and found “a large empty island called Morichjhapi” (165).

To own a piece of land in the place, they sold everything they had but the police stopped them to go ahead. Kusum felt their grief and resolved to stand by them, “...these were my people, how could I stand apart? We shared the same tongue...They too had hankered for our tide country mud...” (165). When Kusum related this whole incident to Nirmal and Horen, Nirmal sensed “them walking, these thousands of people, who wanted nothing more than to plunge their hands once again in our soft, yielding tide country mud” (165). It seems as if it is the author’s plea before the law makers of the country to think about the humane concerns of the migrants and their desires and hopes.

The author describes the pathetic plight of such migrants by quoting from Rainer Maria Rilke’s Duino Elegies:

Each slow turn of the world carries such disinherited
Ones to whom neither the past nor the future belong. (165)
The chapter “Dreams” demonstrates the struggle of the Bangladeshi migrants for making their life possible on the island. Nirmal told in detail about the dreams that these migrants saw and the attempt that they successfully made in making their dreams real. He observed the new paths, fences around the plots of land and fishing nets and exclaimed in excitement “that I was watching the birth of something new, something hitherto unseen” (171). He compared this endeavour of these people with S’Daniel Hamilton’s attempt but he noticed a vital difference, “this was not one man’s vision. This dream had been dreamt by the very people who were trying to make it real” (171).

The novelist also points to the fact that nothing is significantly reported or informed about these people. The narrator presents the shocked consciousness of Nirmal and Nilima after reaching the islands as they realized that:

…the realities of the tide country were of a strangeness beyond reckoning. How was it possible that these islands were a mere ninety-seven kilometers from home and yet so little was known about them? How was it possible that people spoke of so much about the immemorial traditions of the village India and yet no one knew about this other world, where it was impossible to tell who was who, and what their castes and religions and beliefs were?...Where was the gold that was to have been distilled from the tide country’s mud? (79)

The conflict between the people of the Morichjhapi island and the government authorities is significant against the factual background of the role of the CPI(M) which was responsible for primarily encouraging refugees to settle in the Sunderbans until the late 1970s, then instigating a movement to evict them in the name of conservation in 1979, and in early 2000, sanctioning the same land for the wrongly envisaged Sahara ecotourism project.

The essential components of the landscape of the Sunderbans are given utmost prominence in the novel through their discrete functioning. Mangroves, rivers, animals, aquatic animals and muddy areas are an integral part of the Sunderbans. The novel focuses on the detail description of the importance of the functions and indispensability of the existence of such creatures and attempts to show that there is an integration of ecology and human beings in the big scheme of Nature.
The novelist acknowledges the significance of the flora and fauna of the islands; talking minutely about dolphins; their habitats, way of living and also the tides and storms. Catching crabs is not just an activity for a means of livelihood for people like Fokir but it is also a sign of the awareness of the indigenous people who understand the delicate system of ecology. When Fokir fills his pot of crabs and shows it to Priya, it is here that the narrator draws the attention of the readers to one of the essential creature of the Sundarban in helping the mangroves sustain:

Their feet and their sides were lined with hairs that formed microscopic brushes and spoons. They used these to scarp off the diatoms and other edible matter attached to each grain of sand. They were a sanitation department and a janitorial team rolled into one; they kept the mangroves alive by removing their leaves and litter;...Didn’t they represent some fantastically large proportion of the system’s biomass? Didn’t they outweigh even the trees and the leaves? Hadn’t someone said that intertidal forests should be named after crabs rather than mangroves since it was they-certainly not the crocodile or the tiger or the dolphin- who were keystone species of the entire ecosystem? (142) (Italics mine)

It is here thinking about the crucial role of crabs that Priya comes across an idea that it is the crabs, “without them he [Fokir] would not have known to lead her to this pool where the Orcaella came.” Piya considers crabs to be ruling “the tide of her destiny” (142).

The novel represents the sacred elements in the landscape of the narrative. Its central character is the river Ganga and its omnipresent deities are Bon Bibi and Shah Jongoli, the protectors of the forest and waters. Sometimes the landscape is described as sacred and at other points of time, it is described physically. The novel opens to the beauty of the mythic description of river Ganga from the locks of Siva, “…there is a point at which the braid comes undone; where Lord Shiva’s matted hair is washed apart into a vast, knotted tangle. Once past that point the river throws off its bindings and separates into hundreds, maybe thousands, of tangled strands” (6). And later, the river is portrayed in a way to show the banalities of a mundane life:
He remembered the Malta as a vast waterway, one of the most formidable rivers he had ever seen. But it was low tide now and the river in distance was no wider than a narrow ditch, flowing along the centre of a kilometer-wide bed. The freshly laid silt that bordered the water glistened in the sun like dunes of melted chocolate. From time to time, bubbles of air rose from the depths and burst through to the top, leaving rings upon the burnished surface.

How would the boat’s passengers make their way across that vast expanse of billowing mud? (24)

Thus, there is a marked shift from river’s sacred description to everyday sphere. There is a discernable tension which seems to arise from a curious blend of affirmation of faith in the celebration of life and the related activity of living. On the one hand, the narrative affirms desire, sorrow, passionate intensity, blind faith, disappointment, pain and love and on the other hand, the inherited Indian traditional awareness of renunciation in the repeated image of Siva in celestial compassion and sacrifice (tyaga) are deeply embedded through realization, detachment, calmness and wisdom of Fokir. He embodies the divine in human form with his yogic physique, detachment from worldly possessions and faith in Nature.

The justification of the Sunderbans as the locus of attention in the novel can also be seen in its status as a place for the various interfaces among human beings, animals and Nature. All these interfaces seem to form a particular pattern. This pattern is shaped by different points of view which consist not only of human beings but of animals also. All of them appear to be a part of polyphony of varied thought processes. This serves as a fertile ground for the fusion of human life and natural life. The garjon (roar) of tiger and the breathing sounds of dolphins are the fine illustrations of animal voices. There are characters in the novel striving to fuse with the natural life and the elements of landscape, the dolphins, the tiger and even the cyclonic storm tend to interact with the human life. This way, the whole landscape is demonstrated as a strong character of the novel.

Amitav Ghosh seems to have a specific reason to allot the leading role of the novel to Piya so as to defend the life of the animals and make cause for their conservation. Piya advocates the safety of tiger in a village when she tries to stop the angry mob from killing the animal. Kanai argues that “animal’s been preying on this village for years. It’s killed two people and any number of cows and goats...” (294).
Piya does not see any point in killing animals in the name of saving the human life and keeps on arguing, “You can’t take revenge on an animal” (294). Kanai gets on thoughtfully, “It happens every week that people are killed by tigers. How about the horror of that? If there were killings on that scale anywhere else on earth it would be called a genocide, and yet here it goes almost unremarked: these killings are never reported, never written about in the papers. And the reason is just that these people are too poor to matter…Isn’t that a horror…that we can feel the suffering of an animal, but not of human beings?” (300-301) She is also told that the officials of Forest Department will decide the fate of the villagers for killing a tiger. Kanai gives hint, “There’ll be arrests, fines, beatings. Who knows what else?” (297)

The ecological concerns of the novelist are highlighted through the killing of the tiger. The tiger killing in the novel changes into the carnivalesque spectacle with the angry villagers burning with rage setting fire to it; attacking it with their staves and “screaming in a maddened bloodlust, Maar Maar!” (295) Amitav Ghosh presents the pathetic condition of both human beings and animals through the opinions of Kanai and Piya.

The title of the novel here suggests multiple meanings. It may propose the hunger of water constantly swallowing the land creating such circumstances responsible for the plight of human beings and animals alike. The “hunger” may also point to that of the poor who are forced to struggle for their life in the name of the environment and scarcity of resources. The “hunger” may also point to that of tiger which is losing its habitat and is constantly threatened by poaching and is on the verge of extinction. Thus, there is a noticeable projection of human and animal voices which are at the periphery waiting to be heard and acknowledged. Animals are also marginalised beings which do not have any say in the larger ecosystem. Moreover, their position of marginality is emphasized towards the end of the novel when the cyclonic storm seizes the whole of Sunderbans and even the ferocious tiger is reduced to a vulnerable point.

Piya emphasizes her argument that animals are “intended” to be kept in their habitats by Nature: “Just suppose we crossed that imaginary line that prevents us from deciding that no other species matters except ourselves…Once we decide we can kill off other species, it’ll be people next…” (301). The novelist presents both of their
views equally in a convincing way, perhaps favouring none and leaving the readers to decide which one to support. As stated by Huttunen in his examination of the novel, “The Hungry Tide also uses the construction of multiple views that may be antagonistic but are nonetheless given equal status in the narrative” (The Ethics of Representation 73).

It may even then be argued that Kanai and Fokir and the villagers are more anthropocentric who believe that the tiger which strays into the human habitat and obstructs their smooth life is to be killed. But Piya values nature independently of its usefulness to humanity and argues for the extension of ethical concern to include all life on the earth; not just human life. She holds the view that the great plan of Nature with the interrelationship of living and non-living beings must not be impeded by disastrous human activities. She undertakes a miniature project on the vanishing species of dolphins in the Irawaddy river in the Sunderbans, hoping that such localised endeavours to save the marine mammals may be an inspiration to others to venture into this novel field.

The novelist presents the opposing human angle of being threatened by the attacks of tiger through the experienced mind of Nilima. She is anxious to know about Kanai’s willingness to head into jungle because she believes “that for outsiders it’s very hard to conceive of the dangers” (239). It is through her that the novelist informs his readers about the tigers of tide country where “even young and healthy animals were known to attack human beings…large parts of the forest were subjected to daily submersions…this raised the animals’ threshold of aggression by washing away their scent…there was nothing that could be done about it” (241). Nilima then tells Kanai that a tiger once “swum all of the way across the Bidiya’s mohona and back again” (242). She tells him that many measures have been taken to avoid tigers’ attack sometimes “several pools had been excavated to provide the tigers with fresh water.” The author grows sarcastic here making Nilima comment, “They were providing water for tigers! In a place where nobody thinks twice about human beings going thirsty!” (241) Later, someone suggested to make clay models of human beings but that plan also failed. Then a forester came with an idea of wearing mask on the back of head but it also did not yield any result. The people of tide country believe that “if you see a tiger the chances are you won’t live to tell the tale” (242).
Through the intertextual link to Rilke’s *Duino Elegies* (a copy of which in a Bangla translation dominates the whole novel), Amitav Ghosh seems to share the poet’s views on the alienation of human beings from Nature and animals. Amitav Ghosh finds language to be one of the dividing factors. In Rilke’s views, humans are not at home in their “translated” world. However, Rilke’s idea of Nature as something unreachable by humans does not come through in the short excerpts that are located in Nirmal’s diary. The novelist manages to build a crossing point for the interfaces of natural life and human life by hinting at communication of its own kind by putting together myriad voices creating a pattern in the narrative to allot credibility to all these voices like the voices of the West activists, indigenous voices, animal voices and river voices.

Animals are, no doubt, hostile to human beings in the Sunderbans as illustrated strongly through man-eating tigers but these animals are also described as “working” together with people, as in the case of dolphins helping fishermen to round up fish for mutual benefit (168-169) or represented as equally migrant or equally massacred by wars as human beings (305-307). All organisms such as plants, animals, micro-organisms and human beings as well as the physical surroundings interact with each other and maintain a balance in Nature. Mangroves are natural barriers against natural disasters and they are the essential members of the eco-system. Crabs keep the mangroves alive by removing their leaves and litter, without them the trees would be ruined. Dolphins are human friendly and peaceful marine mammals. They have acute sensory perception to gauge atmospheric pressure and to give forewarning to the fellow creatures against impending natural calamities which makes them unique.

Fokir and Piya sit in the boat “listening companionably to the Orcaella” (157) and when he starts humming a tune, Piya finds his voice “alternately lively and pensive, but it mirrored her mood and she felt a sense of perfect contentment…against the percussive counterpoint of the dolphins’ breathing” (157). This is a “magical hour” with “greater happiness” for her. All this makes her curious to know about Fokir’s family, interests, anxieties and married life. She thinks Fokir’s wife would be grateful to God “for giving her a husband who was young, with fine clean limbs and wide, deep eyes, someone who could almost have been the dark god of her prayers and dreams” (158). She reflects that “there was the immeasurable distance that separated her from Fokir. What was he thinking about as he stared at the moonlit
river? The forest, the crabs? Whatever it was, she would never know: not just because they had no language in common but because *that was how it was with human beings, who came equipped, as a species, with the means of shutting each other out*” (159) [italics mine]. Speaking to the other always includes the speaker’s intention to hide some part or the other from the listener. The narrator comments that “speech was only a bag of tricks that fooled you into believing that you could see through the eyes of another being” (159) which further shows the incapability of language.

If one notices carefully, Fokir is the only character who completely fuses into the natural life and it is rendered possible only because here in the Sunderbans, the indigenous people, like Fokir, are sensitive to hear the point of view of ecology through the silence of dolphins, the voice of river or the roar of tiger. He actually inspires Piya to be aware of the animal and river voices as they together hear “the dolphins’ breathing” (157). He is an uncontaminated soul with a selfless gift of sacrifice for someone he truly loves.

During the storm, they climb up the tree and Fokir “tie them both to the tree trunk.” He saves her by being a strong wall of protection; bearing every blow of storm on his body, consequently, giving him up to the rage of Nature. The storm makes Piya aware “as if death had announced its approach and there was nothing to do but to wait for its arrival” (383). Fokir’s body becomes “her shield” and “[their] bodies were so close, so finely merged that she could feel the impact of everything hitting him…”(390). The intensity of Fokir’s concern to save Piya from the storm is mentioned, “She could feel the bones of his cheeks as if they had been superimposed upon her own; it was as if the storm had given them what life could not; it had fused them together and made them one” (390).

The voice of the river is rendered audible through the judicious use of the language of the narrator which seeks the self, love and freedom in the watery place:

Piya’s eyes …fell to the currents playing upon the river’s surface: it was as if a hand, hidden in the water’s depths, were writing a message to her in the cursive scripts of ripples, eddies and turbulence, and when the wind blows on the water, you see ripples and waves, but the real river lies beneath, unseen and unheard. (258)
The interface of the voice of the river is discerned in the novel through the legend of the goddess Ganga’s descent and the accompanying image of jowar and bhata (the flow tide and the ebb tide) that are controlled by Chandra, the moon god. Amitav Ghosh addresses the predictable crossovers that arise when an intuitive, mythical and oral tradition with its many gods and goddesses (comprising the ruling forest deities such as Bon Bibi and her brother Shah Jongoli, who protect fishermen and honey gatherers from man-eating tigers and crocodiles) meets a modern, materialist, rationalist, scientific written one.

The novel celebrates the presence of myth as a powerful tool that can connect not only the past with the present, but also the world of endangered animism with the world of faceless technology and an obsolete language, that is, the Bangla dialect, spoken of the local inhabitants of the Sunderbans such as Fokir, with a global lingua franca, that is, English spoken by Piya. The chapter “The Glory of Bon Bibi” highlights in detail the reverence that people of tide country have for their deities. The myth of Bon Bibi and Shah Jongoli is believed to be the part and parcel of their life. It also points to the gleaming confluence of two religions- Hindu and Muslim as the myth of Bon Bibi and Shah Jongoli alludes to Arabic and Bangla words making them realize a universal fact that “the rich and greedy would be punished while the poor and righteous were rewarded”(105).

The novel also presents an erotic image of desire and anxiety of the river goddess in the opening pages of the novel that are illustrated in the following phrases: “the braid comes undone”, “the ragged fringe of her sari...half wetted by the sea” (6), “many layers of beguilement”, “the water tears away” (7), “this strange parturition, midwived by the moon”, and later, Rilke’s verse : “we who have always thought of joy/as rising...feel the emotion/ that almost amazes us/ when a happy things fall”(8). This seems to hint at the generic depiction of the goddess Ganga as concubine of Lord Siva who has contained her in his locks. In the Hindu mythology, the river Ganga is shown as receptacle for Siva’s semen and from her womb, the semen takes on embryonic form and the war god Karttikeya was born. She is portrayed as Ma Ganga, the water goddess nurturing all life forms in her depths. Her descent in the locks of Siva caught the fury of Parvati who is upset at the thought of her husband’s co-wife. Therefore, in the novel, through their speech(less) but passionate bonding with Fokir, the unmarried and ever-moving Piya may be seen to play Ganga’s role to Moyna’s jealous Parvati with Fokir as the ecologically conscious, attractively shaped, modern, caring and crafty Siva.
It is relevant to consider the use of the image of boat in the novels of Amitav Ghosh as an intermediary space where antagonistic forces come together in almost all his novels. In *The Circle of Reason*, the boat *Mariamma* is a space for diverse group of people like Alu, Zindi, Professor Samuel, Kulfi, Karthamma who bring together their life experiences; in *Sea of Poppies* the ship *Ibis* is a galaxy of myriad characters like a rajah, an opium addict, lascars, a French woman, a mulatto and the migrant labourers who live their destined lives. In *The Hungry Tide* also, Fokir’s boat is the space to share a relationship between two completely different characters from different places, castes, classes and professions.

Fokir’s boat is a medium for Fokir and Piya to link their differences and come across. Piya feels safe and secured on the boat and there comes a moment when “all she wanted was to be in this boat, in this small island of silence, afloat on the muteness of the river” (84). His boat is also a reminder to her of her own past, her mother, her mother tongue Bangla which was not taught to her, “They were almost lost to her, those images of past, and nowhere had she less expected to see them than on this boat” (96).

For Fokir, the shore from where he begins his journey on his boat to the waters of the Ganga delta can be seen not just a geographical space but also a phenomenological site of femininity that makes possible his relationship with Piya on the water. Interestingly, this is also the point where the river Ganga meets the ocean and Fokir meets Piya and shares with her a common space. This merging of the selves facilitates him to interact with her on many levels even without language. They interact with great easiness on the boat, which is free of cultural norms of behaviour that would be expected from them. Piya does not perform as the upper class woman who may be hesitant to form a relationship with a lower-class boatman. When storm seizes them, they realize the bare truth of their intense relationship, “She could feel the bones of her cheeks as if they had been superimposed on her own; it was as if the storm had given them what life could not ; it had fused them together and made them one” (390).

Piya understands the remarkable gift of perception Fokir has for Nature. Nature has a “kind of rhythm” and very few people like him can adapt to that. “It’s like he’s always watching the water- even without being aware of it...I’ve never met
anyone with such an incredible instinct: it’s as if he can see right into the river’s heart” (267). She also tells Kanai, “Fokir’s abilities as an observer are really extraordinary.” Such praise is enough to make Kanai jealous of an illiterate, silent Fokir.

The novel also deconstructs the reputation of the Sunderbans as an uncanny forest and constructs the harsh reality of its hazards. It rouses the readers to be aware of the real and unnoticed life of the people living there. The tough life of the tide country is discussed in detail in the chapter “Nirmal and Nilima.” In one of the villages, named Lusibari, “hunger and catastrophe were a way of life...The soil bore poor crops and could not be farmed all year round. Most families subsisted on a single daily meal...Many died of drowning and many more were picked off by crocodiles and estuarine sharks...thousands risked death in order to collect meager quantities of honey, wax, firewood and the sour fruit of the kewra tree. No day seemed to pass without news of someone being killed by a tiger, a snake, or a crocodile” (79).

It is pertinent here to discuss the crucial role of the cyclonic storm in the novel. The uncertainty of storms in Sunderbans is always responsible for visible changes in and on the land. They are instrumental in creating turbulence in water but paradoxically they also contain stillness in themselves. The storm in Piya’s life brings to her the moment of clarity of perception and she is able to have clear vision with a promising future by serving the people around. The same storm overcomes Fokir’s life giving Piya a very tough lesson of life that sometimes we tend to sacrifice our lives for the safety of our dear ones. The true meaning of life is to live it for others. This storm plays a transformative role in Piya’s life. It changes her narrow outlook. It is just because of Fokir’s connection to Lusibari that Piya begins to call the island her home with the ease. Her body also visually merges with Moyna’s as Moyna gets her hair short and Piya is seen in Moyna’s sarees. Nilima can barely differentiate these women from a distance. The storm uproots the grassy land, washes away the fertile surface of the soil leaving it barren and fresh for a rebirth.

Another significant conflict between human beings and animals is shown through the storm as occurring in the eye of the storm when Piya watches the tiger but it is no longer powerful against the rage of storm to harm either Piya or Fokir. The stillness of storm “within the storm’s eye” (389) is also mentioned in the novel that...
birds and animals try to remain in the eye of storm to be safe. Thus, the cyclonic storm represents the super human force empowered to control all living beings. It represents the inscrutability of Nature where the human beings are incapable of getting through its impenetrability.

The tide in the novel serves to teach the stark reality of modern life. The tide that kills Fokir makes the others realize the insignificance of border and boundary present between science and religion. They also realize that science can not stand up before the fury of Nature. The tide also exposes the transitory nature of human life put against elemental forces. If also shows the relevance of those things that are relegated as unfit for the demands of the new world order. The tide is thus, an agent of Nature, which leaves in its wake the realization for a need of dialogue with the indigenous culture of the world.

The most important character of the novel, Fokir is not a complete free agent. He is a subaltern who exercises agency to counter certain hegemonies which are represented by the corrupt poachers in the guise of officers in the Forest Department. His analogy to Kalua of *Sea of Poppies* (2008) can be observed who is also a marginalized character but has a stout physical power (in Fokir’s case, it is his strong emotional sensibility) and also Kalua’s soothing and wholesome relationship with Deeti is reminiscent of Fokir’s communicable relationship with Piya which makes the serious concerns of the novelist evident in the favour of lending voice and life to the marginalized and silent group of society.

Fokir is gifted because he can use an alternative structure of power based on his traditional native knowledge of the river, a power that finally saves the life of the polished and highly educated Piya, who has no knowledge of the ways to battle the elements and is unable to survive without her comfortable hi-tech gadgets. Her power boosters, Global Positioning System (GPS) and bottled war are all signs of corporate globalization and are eventually unable to cope with the elemental force of Nature and her uproar in the phenomenology of water. Fokir represents all those people who have basic knowledge of Nature and are not affected by the so-called modern advancements. Mondal views *The Hungry Tide* as a song of the earth which is sung by its people who are not swamped by “the hungry tides of either development or environmentalism” (Mondal, *Contemporary World Writers* 19).
Amitav Ghosh builds an arduous pattern where different characters translate the reality of life differently. He seems to touch upon the crucial concept of translation. It is not merely the matter of language. One lives in the translated world where discursive totalities are poured in the mind through systems of knowledge and belief. Transformation is manifested in all forms of life in Sunderbans. Nirmal records his views about the tide country, "...in the tide country, transformation is the rule of life: rivers stray from week to week, and islands are made and unmade in days." (224). Nirmal believes that Rilke’s words are true in case of the tide country that “life is lived in transformation” (225). Nothing can be sure there: “There are no borders here to divide fresh water from salt, river from sea...The currents are so powerful as to reshape the islands almost daily- some days the water tears away entire promontories and peninsulas; at other times it throws up mew shelves and sandbanks where there were none before..." (7).

This section reflects on the manifestation of translation and transformation as mediums of hybridity. These act as the driving forces of the entire novel. Kanai Dutt, an astute linguist, speaking six languages who works as a professional translator in Delhi, quotes a noteworthy line from Rainer Maria Rilke’s *Duino Elegies*, “Life is lived in transformation” (225), which seems to be the whole message of the novel. Here, the attention is called to the act of translation where the translation of the genres, the translation of experience into word, the translation of untranslatable emotions, the untranslatability because of lack of linguistic skills. All these are represented through the characters of Fokir, a native speaker of a Bengali dialect, and Piya, a Western-educated, English speaking diasporic ethnic Bengali who has lost all memory of her mother tongue. Significantly, the novelist puts a rhetorical question, “How do you lose a word? Does it vanish into your memory, like an odd toy in a cupboard, and lie hidden in the cobwebs and dust?” (93)

The issue of translation is raised many times in the novel, as shown in the following examples, “Speech was only a bag of tricks that fooled you into believing that you could see through the eyes of another being...” (159). “This was the only animal that forgave you for being so little at ease in your translated world” (328). “When the wind blows on the water, you see ripples and waves, but the real river lies beneath, unseen, unheard...” (258). And at a point of time, Kanai, the translator recalling that , “...he too had concentrated his mind this way...but the vistas he had
been looking at lay deep within the interior of other languages ...And he remembered too, the obstacles, the frustrations, the sense that he would never be able to bend his mouth around those words...it was pure desire that had quickened his mind then and he could feel the thrill even now- except that now that desire was incarnated in the woman who was standing before him, in the bow, a language made flesh” (269).

There is a remarkable moment in the novel where the paradox of representation is portrayed through Kanai (interestingly who is himself a professional translator) Here, he seems to be robbed of the language (which is his means of livelihood) when, left on the mudbank, he sees the tiger, “The sounds and signs that had served, in combination, as the sluices between his mind and senses had collapsed: his mind was swamped by a flood of pure sensation” (329). Although, the whole novel is, in a way translated in English as the life and culture of the place that it seeks to represent is experienced through the medium of local dialect, Bangla and its other variants.

The words “translation”, “anuvad”, “tarjuma”, “bhashantar”, “vivartanam” are not suggested to describe the activity. However, the dominant forces driving South Asian and particularly Indian English fiction are the concepts of heteroglossia, intertextuality and plurality of peoples and cultures within the subcontinent. Owing to British rule in India, Indian faced linguistic and cultural colonization and Macaulay’s Minute of 1835 had made English language a gory battlefield of national struggle and re-appropriation. Interestingly, if one looks at the position of the novelist; he himself is a translated man educated in Delhi, Oxford and Egypt, speaks Bengali, Hindi, English and Arabic and lives in New York and Goa. He remains the centre of the vernacular debate in India (led by some regional writers like the late Harivansh Rai Bachchan, Mahasweta Devi and Javed Akhtar) because of his translated persona. These writers articulate their concerns in their regional bhasha or tongue and call these translated men and women as disaporic English writers who are given huge acceptance in the West and view them as the “spoilt brats” of the post-Empire period. Such writers criticize the Indian English-educated elites for neglecting the regional languages. But the complex issue that lies beneath this debate is that English is also the place for negotiating between cultures and is a potent space between tradition and modernity in a globalizing world. It is this English that enables Amitav Ghosh to share his experiences with remote inhabitants by means of a shared language. But ironically, it also facilitates him to communicate with Indians who might know only one of twenty-two official languages.
Bakhtin’s theory of inherent intertextuality is relevant to the argument of viewing Amitav Ghosh as an author participating in the novel as a translated man and is able to empathize with his character Piyali’s situation. According to Bakhtin, “The author participates in the novel (he is omnipresent in it) with almost no language of his own. The language of the novel is a system of languages that linguistically, mutually, and ideologically interanimate each other. It is impossible to analyse it as a singular, unitary language” (“From the Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse” 47-48).

In South Asian writing in English which has a long and complex linguistic history of polyphonic discourses and is tightened by intertextuality, translation is the multi-coloured thread that weaves through the scratched collection cover of contemporary narratives. English is the common language for Indians. Thus, the bilingual existence is entrenched in the minds of the educated class since the colonial rule which Amitav Ghosh certainly represents.

The present chapter attempts to confront the multiplicity of hybridities—the translations and transformations which frequently occur simultaneously in Amitav Ghosh’s narrative. It also questions their use as a strategy by the novelist to destabilize any construct of a homogeneous postcolonial nation, to sabotage polarity and to avoid any one kind of knowledge being given “most favoured” status. My argument in this section will be that hybridity is a tool dexterously used by Amitav Ghosh to force a conversation between oppositional forces. The novel redefines and repossesses lost ground for the Fokirs and Piyas of a globalizing world where neither can exist without the support of the other.

The novel is remarkable in its proficient employment of translations and polyphonic discourses involving the mixing and crossing of tradition and modernity and the oral and the written. Primarily, hybridity is an oppositional force to colonial, nationalist and hegemonic forces in *The Hungry Tide*. There is multiplicity in the voices, speech registers and various genres the novelist employs to tell the story. The story is told in the secret, in-between the unsaid things and the spaces of words where memory and identity live like identical twin like in the untranslatable word *gamchha*; in the verbal ill-treatment that explodes from Kanai as he is afraid that Fokir might seek Piya’s attention and affection. It is told through the differing registers of speech between the “master” and “servant” such as Kanai and Fokir; in the striking blend of
genres that continuously experience entrances and exits from Nirmal’s journal entries, in Fokir’s recitation of the oral mantras to the forest gods, his songs to Ganga, in Rilke’s poetry that is disseminated throughout the telling, in conversations between the characters; in the travelogue scrupulously maintained and the scientific data recorded and preserved by Piya, in the mixture of languages used throughout the novel, and in the powerful voice of the narrator.

The water has the transformative potential to become ice and ice has the potential to be a mirror for self-reflection. Such hybridity related to water is more relevant when read against the waterscapes of the Ganga in the novel. It is this transmutability, transformability, and translatability of water that lends Piya and Fokir a translatable space to unite. The hybridity juxtaposed with the disparate and divergent fragmentary experiences of Piya and three men, Fokir, Kanai and Nirmal is reflected through intersections, crosscutting boundaries and shifting centres of power in the narrative as well as continuous reference to a translated world and the translated word.

This continuous presence of hybridity irreversibly reasserts the postcolonial self by subverting the colonial project of homogeneity, while talking back to the methods of power and using several parallel narratives. The stories of Piya, Fokir, Kanai and Nirmal are told in separate tellings and Piya’s and Kanai’s stories occasionally meet. It seems to suggest that there are no fixed identities in postcolonial landscape of a modern and globalized India. There is, on the contrary, a constant encounter between a set of pluralistic aesthetic and moral values that often cross each other.

Hybridity is written all over the personality of Amitav Ghosh himself. It is manifested through his training as an anthropologist, his writing in Indian English Fiction and his recent tag as environmental activist and eco critic to save wild animals and forests like Sundarbans. (In an article written in Outlook magazine on Oct 18, 2004, Amitav Ghosh opposed the building of a tourist resort in the Sunderbans, the location of the present novel.)

Amitav Ghosh himself voices his concerns about being hybridized and of a mixed legacy during an interview with Jason Steger and regards English as “almost a default language for me. Bengali is my first language. When I was writing The
*Hungry Tide*, I felt as if I was translating into English. It was something to do with the tactile feel of Bengali prose.” He further puts in, “I am comfortable writing in English, worrying that it could limit my writing about India”, and raises a significant question, “But Bengali dialect is a dialect within a language that is unknown to English, so in what way do I recreate that sense of dialect in speech.” (*The Age* interview by Jagon Steger) Even in *The Circle of Reason* one can observe transnational subjects like Alu who journey from India to Egypt resort to multiple languages to communicate (see Chapter Two).

Besides this Amitav Ghosh’s proverbial lexical looseness in his essay *Dancing in Cambodia, At Large in Burma* (1998) where he mentions translation : “The friend who I had persuaded to come along with me to translate…”(7), and King Sisowath’s minister “served as his interpreter” (23). If one notices carefully, transnational and translation are here attached with more than homonyms proposing polyphony of linguistic, literary and cultural expressions that celebrate an assertion of discrepancy and separation. Homi Bhabha, like Amitav Ghosh himself, uses the term “translation” not to describe a transaction between texts and languages but in its etymological sense of being carried across from one place to another. He uses translation metaphorically to describe the condition of the present world in which numerous people migrate and change their location every day. In such a world, translation is basic. As Roland Barthes has explained:

> The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from innumerable centres of culture...the writer can only imitate a gesture that is always anterior, never original. His only power is to mix writings, to counter the ones with the others, in such a way as never to rest on any one of them. Did he wish to express himself, he ought at least to know that the inner ‘thing’ he thinks to ‘translate’ is only a ready-formed disctionary, its words only explainable through other words, and so in indefinitely. (*Image, Music, Text* 146-147)

The transformation of Piya from being an American born outsider to a complete insider is shown remarkably as Amitav Ghosh’s presentation of the rootless diasporic Indian. The harsh, incoherent experiences and the fragmentary memoryscape of Piya are internalized into the imaginary of the author. He has said in
several interviews that his displacement from his ancestral home in Dhaka at the age of seven to Calcutta and his later journeys overseas have given him the experience of a global spirit.

This regular homelessness has put him onto a world of disjointed existence that resulted from living in several places. Such living is shared by all diasporic South Asian writers like Salman Rushdie, Gita Mehta, Vikram Seth, Jhumpa Lahiri, Michael Ondaatje and many others in their works. The importance of Amitav Ghosh’s subject position in various places is translated into Amitav Ghosh’s fictional characters like Piya in *The Hungry Tide* and Malum Zikri in *Sea of Poppies*.

Arjun Appadurai’s concept of the role of memory in the twenty first century to distort the past dimensions of experience with the present can be compared to Piya’s itinerant, wandering, split and displaced condition which makes her vulnerable. Appadurai explicated,

The past is not a land to return to in simple politics of memory. It has become a synchronic warehouse of cultural scenarios, a kind of temporal central casting, to which recourse can be had as appropriate, depending on the movie to be made, the scene to be enacted, the hostages to be rescued...the past is usually another country...

The world we live in today is characterized by a new role for the imagination in social life. To grasp this new role, we need to bring together: the old ideas of images, especially mechanically produced images (in the Frankfurt School sense); the idea of the imagined community(in Anderson’s sense); and the French idea of the imaginary (imaginaire) as a constructed landscape of collective aspirations, which is no more and no less real than the collective representations of Emile Durkheim, now mediated through the complex prism of modern media. *(Globalization 1-21)*

The tension between belonging and not belonging is scrutinized and developed by Amitav Ghosh through the indefinable and muted language of memory in the novel. Hybridity between the oral and written surfaces in Piya’s unrelenting endeavours to recall her attempts to communicate with her father, and understand her
Indian culture. Her urgent need for the retrieval of a single word, *gamchha* an ordinary object, a discoloured red wash cloth that doubled as a short sarong her father clung to as a symbol of his Bengaliness, from her lost Bengali lexicon, haunts Piya right through the narrative recounts that her father kept only that “like his hair or his nail clippings” (87). It is in this negotiation between the visual memory of her father’s *gamchha* that smelt of him, and the verbal trigger of the actual word *gamchha*, as spoken by Fokir, that smells of Fokir, and is his second skin that Piya rediscovers her indigenous anchor, both figuratively and literally because it is Fokir’s *gamchha* that saves her from drowning.

Piya, therefore, must settle between the oral and the written to retrieve her identity, rooted in the recesses of the past, a past that has buried the terrible loss of her mother tongue and her biological mother. Her mother, on the opposite, had resisted exile in California, and fearlessly rebelled against being uprooted from her familiar surroundings of her homeland Bengal and her mother tongue Bengali.

Elizabeth Boone Hill’s assertion confirms Piya’s multidimensional experience of searching out the lost word: “The notion that spoken language is the only system that allows humans to convey any and all thought fails to consider the full range of human experience.” Hill argues that speech “may be the most efficient manner of communicating many things but it is noticeably deficient in conveying ideas of musical, mathematical, or visual nature” (9).

“Losing a word” appears to indicate a loss of self in many diasporic writers who explore issues of identity and belonging. For example, Michael Ondaatje’s character Anil Tissera in *Anil’s Ghost* (2000) is like Piya: accomplished, orphan, single, orphan, single, diasporic South Asia-American, Anil also struggles to retrieve her own identity even as she unpacks the mystery of Sailor’s identity by searching desperately for roots in her memory for the Tamil language. In his memorable poem “Wells”, Ondaatje speaks about his own sense of dislocation and loss of identity through loss of language that Piya is saddened by:

The last Sinhala word I lost
was vatura
The word for water.
Forest water. The water in a kiss. The tears
I gave to my ayah Rosalin on leaving
the first home of my life
More water for her than any other
that fled my eyes again
this year, remembering her,
a lost almost-mother in those years
of thirsty love
No photograph of her, no meeting
since the age of eleven,
not even knowledge of her grave.
Who abandoned who, I wonder now. (Handwriting 50)

Amitav Ghosh himself quotes these lines in *Imam and the Indian* to refer to “a childhood long past” (309). He recounts his own childhood in Dehra Dun which was the outcome of the sudden exodus. He, like Piya in the novel, always feels “the bewildering pain of my [his] banishment” (308). Amitav Ghosh strongly feels that the poet is not just moaning over the separation with his caretaker but expressing “the greatest sorrow” (307) of having recognized the unseen presence of the hidden signs of ruptures in history. He concludes his discussion on the poem:

This is not merely a eulogy for Rosalin: it is an elegy of homecoming spoken in a voice that has been orphaned not just by the loss of an almost-mother, but by history itself. It is a lament that mourns the passing of the Paradise that made Rosalin possible. (*Imam and the Indian* 309)

In the same vein, Australian novelist David Malouf, in the thought-provoking novel *Remembering Babylon* searches out how the loss of language infects the main character of his novel, Gemmy Fairley, the white child nurtured by the natives in a colonized Australia, who is forcibly “civilized” again by a white settler family:

He lost his old language in the new one that came to his lips...As for things, nothing he had dealt with had been his own. He had stammered over most of them. Now they slipped away altogether, they dropped out of his life. And with them and the words went whatever thin threads had held them together, and made up the fabric of his world (65).
Gemmy, like Priya, who tries to join the dots of her past with the word *gamchha*, also searches for words in the recesses of memory to connect him to his cultural past as a white child: “It was the words he had to get hold of. It was the words that would recognize him” (32).

Coming back to the point of translation, Rushdie’s statements are relevant to the present discussion. He states that “having been born across the world” makes immigrants “translated men” (*Imaginary Homelands* 17). It is usually said that something always gets lost in translation but Rushdie maintains that something can also be gained in translation (*Shame* 90-91). Amitav Ghosh continues the belief of Rushdie and presents translation as an integral presence in *The Hungry Tide*, believing that being “translated” or being a product of two different worlds, gives Piya a rare perspective that would otherwise be impossible to achieve.

In this game of multiple hybridity, translation becomes a metaphor for hybridity and is repeated at least thirty-two times in the novel. As Carlo Gadda observes, “We therefore think of translation as a part of every system, in turn as an infinite entwining, an inextricable knot or mesh of relations.” He argues that the “summit can be seen from many altitudes; and every system is referable to infinite co-ordinated axes: It presents itself in infinite ways” (229).

The novel also acts as a tool for narrative subversion of the linear and the normative narrative as past interrupts present and vice-versa throughout. There are alternating chapters providing Piya’s and Kanai’s accounts. The novel cancels the linear method of storytelling and adopts a multi-perspective, convoluted style. The novelist attempts to shake to and fro different planes of time and place. Nirmal’s notebook, like an immense labyrinth comes in installments in between the alternate glimpses of Kanai’s and Piya’s separate trajectories, is recorded against a tormented present. The novelist emphasizes a referential narrative by using a range of destabilizing techniques, including multi-voicedness, sonic interference (by blurring the many voices of Moyna, Nilima and Horen) and the foregrounding of colonial history as narrative through Nirmal’s Marxist diary notes. The novel, thus, strives to have a sense of belonging, a sense filtered through the past and a belief that the levels of past are present.
The novel integrates both oral and written traditions of mythmaking, comprising those based in the pre-modern folk cults that combined both Hindu and Islamic elements. The novelist, in his other voice as Nirmal, the diary-keeper and narrator in the text, suggests that “the mud banks of the tide country are shaped not only by rivers of silt, but also by rivers of language: Bengali, English, Arabic, Hindi, Arakanese and who knows what else?”(247) as well as by two very different religions: Hinduism and Islam.

The novel demonstrates a flexibility of transculturation, grafting the primordial on to the contemporary, lending itself appropriately to an analysis of an alternative vision of established life. In the Sunderbans, the Hindus and the Muslims worship the same gods, despite belonging to different religions. The goddess of the forests, Bon Bibi, worshipped in almost every village, is probably synonymous with the Hindu goddess Bonodevi. The former became more acceptable with the advent of Muslim rule in Lower Bengal since the eighteenth century. (Biswajit Roy 40; Tapan Raychaudhuri 33)

In the postcolonial context, the novel highlights the significance of saving a lost tradition of multiple and rich religious heritages, their immense strength to provide a compass to find new identities among different religious communities in India and their influence on a new generation of youth who, like Piya are diasporic Indians and must share a highly multiracial and multi-religious world. Thus, the hub of the narrative is the recitation of a unique form of mantra that integrates the magic of Islam and Hinduism:

```
Bismillah boliya mukhey dhorinu kalam/ poida korilo jinni
Tamam alam baro meherban tini bandar upore/ taar
chhani keba achhe duniyar upore
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(From The Hungry Tide 246)

[In Allah’s name, I begin to pronounce the Word/ Of the whole Universe. He is the Begetter the Lord To all His disciples, He is Full of mercy/ Above the created world, who is there but He]

This mantra, recited by Horen in the middle of the forest, as heard and recorded by Nirmal in his diary, is in dwipodi poyaar, a twelve syllable verse that puts together oppositional ideas with a caesura, dividing each line. Amitav Ghosh tells Jason Steger in the interview that he researched on this part of the project for a year.
He observes that the solution came from Sanskrit poetics and differences in regional dialects within Bengali were suggested by characters speaking in different metres. He maintains that he first translated the verse without metre, then with metre and finally captured them in couplets. (quo in *The Age*) The incantation surprised the schoolteacher Nirmal by its hybrid nature,

I was amazed. I’d thought I was going to a Hindu puja: Imagine my astonishment on hearing these Arabic invocations! Yet, the rhythm of the recitation was undoubtedly that of a puja: how often, as a child, had I heard those endless chants, rolling on and on, in temples as well as in our home?

…the language was not easy to follow—it was a strange variety of Bangla, deeply interpenetrated by Arabic and Persian. The narrative, however, was familiar to me: it was story of how Dukhey was left on the shore of an island to be devoured by the tiger-demon Dokkhin Rai, and of his rescue by Bon Bibi and Shah Jangoli. (246)

A conglomeration of different cultures, languages and religious faiths live in harmony in the tide country. The novel makes a strong plea for a postcolonial idea of the nation which accepts, includes and tolerates different communities and their faiths, “We came to a clearing and Kusum led the way to the shrine…Here we placed the images of Bon Bibi and her brother Shah Jongoli, and then Kusum lit a few sticks of fragrant dhoop and Fokir fetched some leaves and flowers and laid them at their feet” (245-246). This scene on the island of Garjontola representing the hybrid religion of the tide country recalls the equally hybrid shrine and religion, the narrator of *In An Antique Land* finds in Mangalore on the west coast of India.

The novel acts as a bridge connecting more rigid truths which on a daily, politicized basis are only binary opposites, such as Islam and Hinduism in highly divided postcolonial India. Amitav Ghosh tries to come out with a common, sacred space in the practice of animistic worship, shared by both Hindus and Muslims, thereby carrying on his anthropological search to find a common thread among different cultures. This novel also lends a way to rethink the formation of the Indian postcolonial nation-state which is not a homogeneous and unanimous one as most nationalist discourse presents it but it is rather a fragmented, multifaceted, varied and
heterogenous entity that is continually changing shape. It is the use of these contrasting forces that abound Amitav Ghosh’s narrative which represent India as “unified through diversity” (Sirupa Roy 21).

The novel with its close engagement with transformability also celebrates the intrinsic diversity and restlessness of India. In the outlandish and eclectic canvas of hybridity that is represented in the novel, Amitav Ghosh paints on his trust and hope in human progress. Sonita Sarkar’s and Esha Niyogi De’s words need to be mentioned here to justify Amitav Ghosh’s impulse to privilege hybridity over homogeneity, where his impetus

...emerges from the author’s own alliances across the imposed divides of race, gender and culture, and through our many debates about our subjects and ourselves. As teachers, researchers and activists who have forged emotional and intellectual links to South and Southeast Asia, we write about times and territories we inhabit and visit. We live in different parts of those regions, North America and Western Europe; we participate in globalizing South and Southeast Asian countries by transporting their images within and beyond their borders. Since we work in and across institutions like the academy and (neo) liberal state, our sense of being and belonging is affected by local understandings of gendered and racialized categories of spaces and times...We negotiate and contest...homogeneous spaces that dominant political agendas supplant for the multiple material-symbolic places that we inhabit...(3)

Amitav Ghosh discovers the connection between hybridities embedded within the mixed literary and oral styles and content as he meticulously blends travel writing, letters, autobiography, biography, journal entries, Rilke’s poetry, social history and mantras. The novel is at the same time a mélange of myriad stories such as the story of the port town of Canning, the idiocy of its establishment by the British, the storms that ravage the place completely, the visionary ambition of Sir Daniel who aimed to build an ideal community after he bought ten thousand acres of land in the Sunderbans, the tale of Bon Bibi, the life-cycle of the river dolphins, and the present stories of characters like Fokir, his wife Moyna, and their son Tutul, Piya, Kanai and Nilima.
Amitav Ghosh seems to call into question the capability of language to express emotions and discursive realities in the novel. The functions of language are in the novel partly replaced by bodily gestures, facial expressions, touching, as well as by a kind of transcendental mode of contact that exists beyond discourse. Amitav Ghosh continues his characteristic dismantling of totalities and categories by using the imagery of Nature to emphasize the heterogenous and continually changing character of human societies and the unchangeable records of history. The environment of the Sunderbans leads animals and Nature to their hostile behaviour not found elsewhere and unpredictable through the previous researches in science. At other places, human beings mould, utilize and exploit Nature, in this place, there is very little to mould and the achievements of people are washed away by huge tidal waves.

Language in the novel works as a tool of adherence to a particular set of rules, social values and norms and is autocratic by nature as shown in bureaucracy and harassment Piya and Fokir suffer at the hands of the Forest Department “guide” who causes her to drown, “Looking up, she saw that the guard had taken advantage of her…the guard tore the money from his grip and slipped it into his own pocket. Then he gave the boy a parting slap and climbed back into the launch” (47). And also when, “The abruptness of this summons made Piya’s hackles rise. The man had evidently assumed she had no choice but to follow his orders, that she would put up with whatever demands he chose to make. From the start she had sensed a threat from the guard” (56-57). On the contrary, the narrative strategy of glossing, a technique comprising parenthetic translations of individual words is abundant in Amitav Ghosh’s novels. He uses it cautiously in the chapter titled “S.Daniel.” Here, the novelist establishes the importance of dialect and local language to the rest of the narrative: “British sarkar”, “Shobnomoskar” (welcome to all), “kada ar bada” (mud and mangrove) (51), “bajuwa” (bourgeoise) (52), bal to re (tell me) (117), “Amra kara? Bastuhara” (Who are we? We are the dispossessed) (254), landlords and zamindars (264), “shankor-machh” (a sting-ray) (263), “Shono, kaan pete shono” (Put out your ears) (283), “Jothariti” (teams of planners and surveyors) (284).

With the extensive use of local speech, the novelist calls into question the artifice of narrative and the way he records the written dialect (Bangali dialect) with the historicity of the rich oral traditions of the Sunderbans, the pre-colonial past and the splintered postcolonial present mingle in a single influential telling. Thus, the Bon
Bibi folk religion becomes a rich living treasure of both written and oral traditions. In the novel, Fokir recalls the many touching tales of Dukhey and his rescue from the demon-tiger Dokkhin Rai, by the reigning goddess of the forest, Bon Bibi. One tale leads to another, and the recitation of the *mantras* learnt while he was a child, from Horen, is passed on orally by Fokir to his son Tutul in a living tradition of mythmaking.

In the novel, both upper and lower classes use different registers of language. Interestingly, the registers distort in unfamiliar places such as the island where the educated Kanai is at the mercy of Fokir, who knows the habits of the man-eating tiger. Kanai is totally ignorant of ecological matters and finds himself at the receiving end when Fokir deals with him in an informal register of language, “*tui*” (normally used by a superior to inferior) instead of the usual “*apni*” (formally spoken by an inferior to a superior) Through juxtaposition of Kanai’s and Fokir’s conversation in the forest, the novelist highlights the tension between neocolonialism and resistance. It is in the boat that “the distance between Kanai and Fokir had been reduced a hundredfold…”(318) The contrast is made clear in the following lines,

...so tenacious were the habits of profession- that Fokir was using a different form of address with him now. From the respectful *apni* ...he had now switched to the same familiar *tui* Kanai had used in addressing him: it was as though in stepping on the island, the authority of their positions had been suddenly reversed (325).

Oral tradition (echoed in Fokir’s songs and Horen’s recitations) and Nirmal’s diary (recreates a disappearing performative tradition through a written record) exist side by side. The technique of glossing, thus, foregrounds the continual reality of cultural discourse, privileging the voice of the subjugated and the marginalized. It helps to give an indigenous identity to the local characters like Fokir, in the “new” English language texts. (Ashcroft 60) Amitav Ghosh makes glossing a representative tool of the challenged identity of those at the periphery.

Subversion is not achieved in the novel through language only. The novel merges in its fold history, legend, myth, poetry to become a collage of imagination as it contains fragmented memories, fractured tellings, lapses, ellipses and silences, interior monologues, dusty, moth- eaten diaries of Nirmal’s journal and musty
handwritten convoluted childhood experiences. Characters or their identities get misplaced in the novel—lost in legend, misplaced in the unending mangrove swamps of the shoreline of the Meghna river and the Madhukhali creek, the silence of the rain in the palm branches and everywhere the novelist runs after them to recover them, remember them and recreate them.

It is here that the question of characterization arises. The characters evolve through their points of view about other characters and the surroundings; other character(s)’s point(s) of view with the least interference of the narrator. Consequently, a pattern of varied points of view emerge in the novel where characters themselves attain their individual freedom to express themselves and their understanding of the surroundings and other characters.

Fokir, though illiterate, yet does not lack in any manners and etiquette. He has his own unique sense of understanding others and their individuality. His memory is so sharp that he learns the glory of Bob Bibi from her mother and is as accurate as someone who reads the prayers directly from *The Miracles of Bon Bibi or the Narrative of Her Glory*. Kusum’s point of view about her son, Fokir, is rendered authentic like that of the narrator when she told Nirmal who was surprised to see him reading accurately from the book, “It’s all in his head; I’ve told it to him so often that these words have become a part of him” (248). She senses the budding inclination of Fokir to imbibe the essence of river and Nature, “See, Saar: the river is in his veins.” (245)

The pattern of characters’ points of view about others and their understanding of the essence of the surroundings can be discerned through the study of character analysis. The intuitive insight and wisdom of Fokir are foregrounded to accentuate his perception of his family, mother, Piya, Kanai and most significantly, the river. He wins Piya’s heart and attention when he notices her suddenly along with the guard and becomes very self-conscious. He at once takes off the cloth from his head and covers his body with it “like a curtain.” Piya notices that “[there] was a consideration in this gesture, an acknowledgment of her presence, that touched her: it seemed like the first normal human contact she had had since stepping on the launch” (47).

And also when he creates an enclosed space on the boat “to give her privacy to change her wet clothes” (71) she regards Fokir for being the first one to “pay heed to
Piya and Fokir’s compatible relationship is commented by the narrator as both of them are “amazed by the seamless intertwining of their pleasures and their purposes.” “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” (141). He makes Piya so secured in his company that she does not hesitate even for a moment “heading into forest cover of that kind, but with Fokir it was different. Somehow she knew she would be safe” (151). She is totally unaware of the forest, the muddy areas and even the creatures. Fokir always comes to his rescue. It is “as though he were a pillar or a tree trunk” who is strong enough to “block her fall” (151). They communicate to each other with their gestures, intuition and their experience on water.

Piya vows within herself to be at serving ends for the happiness of Fokir’s wife and son, “She recalled the promises she had made to him, in the silence of her heart...She remembered how she had tried to find the words to remind him of how richly he was loved—and once again, as so often before, he had seemed to understand her, even without words” (393). Piya becomes “a strangely unnerving presence...a kind of human wraith, inward, uncommunicative, leaden-faced” (394) after Fokir’s death. She befriends Moyna seeing in this new relationship an attempt to enliven the bond of love she owes to Fokir.

Moyna and Piya have their own reasons to be moaning for Fokir’s demise. There is a contrast in their grief, “Moyna’s grief was all-too plainly visible in the redness of her eyes while Piya’s face was stonily expressionless, as if to suggest that she had retreated deep within herself” (394-395). Her obligation to Fokir’s family inspires Piya to reach out to her friends and colleagues “to raise money for Moyna and Tutul” (396). Piya plans to work on a project on dolphins based on the routes...
Fokir has shown where dolphins live. She, in a way, tries to build a memorial for Fokir by naming her project after him.

The novel also focuses on the expatriate Piyali Roy, a scientist who comes from Seattle (where her parents went from India) to Calcutta to visit relatives who can help her study *orcaellas*, river dolphins, in the Sunderbans. Although being Bengali, she is a complete outsider in India. She can no longer speak Bangla which she used to speak as a child. The novel approaches the expatriate Indian identity through her character with a tinge of her vulnerability inspite of their transnationality. She is simultaneously Indian and foreign and this fact makes for people hard to assess her but it also makes it easier for them to exploit her indeterminacy in the social scheme of things.

Piya is shown to cope up with the challenges of the local area. She is harassed by the forest guard because of money and excessive charges for hiring the launch. The owner of the launch, Mej-da makes peculiar and obscene gestures before Piya and she becomes puzzingly embarrassed and realizes her vulnerability. She has always thought that “her unmistakable foreignness” will protect her from such vile people but “It was ironic here- in a place where she felt even more a stranger than elsewhere- her appearance had robbed her of that protection…” (34) The guard makes “lurid gestures, pumping his pelvis and milking his finger with his fist”( 58) which have bruised Piya’s confidence to be “on her own in out-of-the-way places”(64) Fokir is ill-treated by the forest guard in want of bribe on the account of fishing off-limits area. The guard even shows him the rifle threatening to open fire. (45) the guard snatches the hard earned money of Fokir from his son and “slipped it into his own pocket.” (47)

Piya’s geographical and cultural dilemma is reminiscent of Ila’s as mentioned in the chapter one of the thesis. During her student days at the Scripps Institution of Oceanography in California, she was used to being dwarfed by her contemporaries, as she was the smallest in the group. When she walked into her first cetology lecture, one of her professors referred to her as “a minnow among the whale watchers” (74). The others were natural athletes and they had grown up diving, snorkeling, kayaking, canoeing, playing volleyball in the sand. Piya had never cared for sport and she had become a kind of departmental mascot- “the little East Indian girl” (74).
Piyali Roy must have been a literary representation of a real lady named Isabel Beasley, a student in Cambodia, studying the Irrawaddy river dolphins named *oracella brevirostris* in the Mekong Delta; whom Amitav Ghosh met, while he was engaged in research for writing the novel. It was Professor Helene Marsh of James Cook University, one of the world’s leading cetologists, who introduced Amitav Ghosh to Isabel. In the “Author’s Note” to the novel, the novelist has stated, “by allowing me to accompany her on a survey expedition on the Mekong, Isabel Beasley introduced me to the ways of the Irrawaddy dolphin and to those on the cetologist” (401).

Piya is immediately enthralled by Fokir’s spontaneity, intuitive knowledge, base and quick intelligence and has no difficulty communicating without a shared language and develops a deep and powerful bond with him. Their relationship has the promise of a future. However, Piya’s emotional and physical journey with Fokir is ceased by the tidal wave that consumes Fokir as he bestows the gift of life to her instead. Piya is then left picking up the pieces with Kanai, as she says in the last lines of the novel, “…it’ll be good to have him [Kanai] home” (399).

Kanai, as already discussed, is a professional translator who realizes the inability of language when he is confronted with the real situations in the landscape of Nature. His ‘pattern of work’ is strongly attached with language and discursive realities. For him, ‘Language was both his livelihood and his addiction’ (4) and he views that everything is constructed by language. His profession as a translator confirms this view that one has to try to disentangle the logics of the different worldviews of the targets of interpretation. At personal level, he enjoys the confidence of most of the characters of the novel. He made Kusum so comfortable in his company that she decided to confide in him all the burdens of her grief-stricken heart. Nirmal and Nilima both were elated to have him at home at Lusibari as he proved to be a relaxing break in the routine life of the couple. Piya also begins to share her views and experiences with him. Moyna also has a high regard for him. It is, therefore, significant to look into the vagaries of his whims that mark his personality.

In the following passage, Kanai compares his desire to understand worldviews constructed by foreign languages with his desire for Piya, who is standing nearby examining the river through her binoculars:
He too had peered into the unknown as if through an eyeglass— but the
vistas he had been looking at lay deep within the interior of other
languages. Those horizons had filled him with the desire to learn of the
ways in which other realities were conjugated. And he remembered
too, the obstacles, the frustrations, the sense that he would never be
able to bend his mouth around those words…it was pure desire that
had quickened his mind then and he could feel the thrill even now—
except that now that desire was incarnated in the woman who was
standing before him, in the bow, a language made flesh (269).

Kanai’s problem appears to be his linguistic inability to express his desire for
the other human being.

The pattern of points of view of characters about others is also noticeable in
the way Piya begins to understand Kanai and interestingly, her perception is given
credence in the narrative. She notices in him “the self-satisfied tilt of his head and the
unabashed way in which he stared at every-one around him…” (10) The way Kanai
adjusts himself on his preferred seat makes Piya think of all those people who either
because of their class pride or education assume “that they had been granted some
kind of entitlement…that allowed them to expect that life’s little obstacles and
annoyances would always be swept away to suit their convenience” (10).

In this pattern, there is a constant shifting of the presence and the absence of
the narrator. The narrator allows his characters full freedom to express themselves and
form a view about other characters and surroundings. This is done by shifting his
position backwards and sometimes just adding emphasis to the characters’ thoughts
and actions by shifting forward with his presence in the narrative. With Kusum, as a
boy, Kanai’s relationship was very unique and full of emotions but these emotions
were seen suppressed later on because of his busy materialistic routine. He spent time
with Kusum during his stay in Lusibari where she used to unburden her heart and
shared the grief of her father’s death due to a tiger’s attack. It is during one of these
incidents that Kanai felt so strongly bound to her with “an upwelling of emotion in
him” (109).

The narrator intervenes to tell the readers that “he wanted to fold her in his
arms, to ward off her grief; he wanted to wipe away her tears, he wanted his body to
become a buffer between her and the world. This was the most intense physical sensation he had ever experienced, this need to protect, to defend, to make a bodily expression of his sympathy” (109). The motive of such narratorial intervention is to emphasize the interaction and thought-process of the character(s).

The pattern of the points of view is reinforced during Kanai’s frequent meetings with Moyna and he finds her to be an unusual and remarkable woman. Having spent some time with him, Kanai gradually understands the reason of Moyna’s deeply knotted relationship with Fokir. He thinks, “There was something about him [Fokir] that was utterly unformed...she [Moyna] craved it in the same way that a potter’s hands might crave the resistance of unshaped clay” (319). Moyna’s yearning to become a nurse and give her son a better education for his secured future makes Kanai think her to be an “earlier incarnation of himself” (135).

Kanai feels her individuality strongly writ over her personality when looking at her for the first time he feels “that she was not one to be shy of pitting her will against the world” (130). Moyna is clever enough to have a point of view about the men like Kanai who play the word-tricks with women. On asking her if she has ever imagined her life with “a different kind of man”, she retorts him, “you’re just making a fool of me...You want me to say yes and then you’ll laugh in my face. You’ll tell everybody...I may be a village girl...but I’m not so foolish...I can see that you play this game with every woman who crosses your path” (258-259).

Very interestingly, Piya’s point of view and Kanai’s point of view about Moyna are interspersed in the narrative. Piya observes “a certain reassurance” in Kanai, after having known Moyna and feels that “it was as if her [Moyna’s] very existence were a validation of the choices he [Kanai] had made in his own life. It was important for him to believe that his values were, at bottom, egalitarian, liberal, meritocratic” (219). Kanai also views in a similar way when he thinks over Moyna’s dreams and desires, “What I want for myself is no different from what everybody wants, no matter how rich or poor...Moyna is the proof” (220).

Kanai leads a very fast life with every comfort within his reach. He wonders at Moyna’s loyalty towards Fokir and asks her insistently, “Can’t you see that as long as you’re with him you’ll never be able to achieve anything?”(258) Nilima judges him telling Piya, “Kanai’s problem is that he’s always been too clever for his own good.
Things have come very easily to him so he doesn’t know what the world is like for most people” (251). She warns Piya about his nature that “he’s one of those men who likes to think of himself as being irresistible to the other sex” (251).

The narrator also appears in between as interpreter of his characters’ feelings as is seen when Piya tells Kanai about her past experiences of love relationships he realizes that he has not understood her “till this moment.” He becomes conscious that “Her containment and her usual economy with words had prevented him from acknowledging, even to himself, her true extraordinariness; she was not just his equal in mind and imagination; her spirit and heart were far larger than his own” (315).

The narrator acknowledges Fokir’s genuine spirit of oneness with Nature and the shallow pride of Kanai. The novelist creates convincing pattern where Kanai confronts his true self in Fokir’s company, thereby giving freedom to the narrator to acknowledge the superiority of Fokir in the acuity and insight of the surrounding Nature. The narrator comments that it is during Kanai’s brief stay with Fokir in the forest that something that “had only been compacted into an explosive and highly volatile reserve” (326) is blown up through Kanai’s abusive language for Fokir and also the bogus consideration of his own self is entirely exploded in this incident.

Kanai tries to go ahead in the muddy area, he falls badly and Fokir comes to his help but Kanai strongly refuses him with abusive language. He suddenly feels the surge of “master’s suspicion of the menial; the pride of caste, the townsman’s mistrust of the rustic; the city’s antagonism to the village” (326). In acute fear of facing a tiger, “it was as if his mind, in its panic had emptied of language. The sounds and signs that had served, in combination, as the sluices between his mind and his senses, had collapsed: his mind was swamped by a flood of pure sensation” (329). In a letter written to Piya, Kanai confesses that “at Garjontola I learnt how little I know of myself and of the world” (353).

Moyna is also a thinking being who makes sense when she speaks. Her subtle expression about the language and its impact on others is recognized by Kanai when he tries to express his feelings for Piya and wants to share so much about his feelings with her. He then realizes the truth in Moyna’s opinion of words like winds, “That words are like the winds that blow ripples on the water’s surface. The river itself blows beneath, unseen and unheard” (335). Moyna desires to have a space in society.
by being a nurse, thereby become professionally sound and secure. Like an ordinary person, she wants to have more opportunities for her family. But her relationship with Fokir splits with silent fissures. She is unable to uncover the “unseen” and “unheard” emotions of Fokir who is more attuned to silent communication of hearts. His way of life clashes with the pragmatic progression of Moyna’s mind and energy.

Fokir’s awareness of Nature and her elements make him a real human being. It is with him that Piya understands the real meaning of being human. She has understood that he is “a human being, someone she could trust, someone who would not hurt her” (111). The comfort that she shares with him is always at its peak because Fokir is very unique in his discernment and sensitivity towards his surroundings and like minded people.

The bodily comfort that he provides her when she is shivering has made Piya come back into senses (111) and also “the bunched-up sari” used as a pillow lets her “smell the presence of the garment’s owner: it was almost as if this other woman had suddenly materialized in the boat” (111). She feels conscious about the future anxiety of Moyna about their being alone in the boat and she justifies herself with Fokir “that no wrong had been done and nothing at all had happened” (111).

Piya is wonderstruck to find Fokir to be poise and tranquil in sailing in his boat despite of odd circumstances of his life. She enquires within herself, “Did he, Fokir, understand what it meant to be the kind of person who could inspire and hold such constancy, especially when it was overlaid with so much pain and so much difficulties?” (352)

Their shared glimpse of lunar rainbow augments “the intensity of their awareness of each other” (352) Fokir miraculously knows the curious mind of Piya and soothes her by holding her hand, in a way, assuring her that everything will be fine. This experience of beholding landscape “had somehow broken something that had existed between them, as if something had ended, leaving behind a pain of a kind that could not be understood because it had never had a name” (353).

Piya is amazed to see the skill that Fokir has in steering the boat even in odd circumstances and harsh weather and is also stunned to think about his knowledge about the dolphins, “how could he have known that they would be there on that day,
at that time?” (113) Even as a child, he was very swift in the water. Kusum once claimed with pride before Nirmal, “See, Saar: the river is in his veins” (245). At another point of time, Piya is surprised to see Fokir’s untiring concentration on water, “Fokir had been rowing almost without a break since morning but she was still unable to see any signs of tiredness in him” (183).

Piya’s point of view about Fokir and Kanai are bestowed with reliability with the narrator’s comments also. At home, Piya notices that Fokir is “like a bird perching on the bar of a cage.” (208) It seems “as if he had grown accustomed to being treated as though he didn’t exist.” (209) Piya sees the contrast between Kanai and Fokir as the latter is “a ghost from the perpetual past. But she guessed also that despite its newness and energy, the country Kanai inhabited was full of these ghosts, these unseen presences whose murmurings could never quite be silenced no matter how loud you spoke.” (220)

Nirmal is, yet another crucial character of the novel whose point of view about his surroundings and people is highly regarded. He is a rare blend of philosophy and dreams. His obsession with Rilke and radical Marxism makes him somewhat equal to Balaram of The Circle of Reason who is similarly obsessed with Pasteur and phrenology. Nirmal made every effort to interpret Rilke’s poetry of transformation and Nature related to wider socio-political ideals.

He dreamt to be a part of the revolution surging in the Morichjhapi island. Kanai regards him as a historical materialist because Nirmal used to think “everything which existed was interconnected: the trees, the sky, the weather, people, poetry, science, nature. He hunted down facts in the way a magpie collects shiny things. Yet when he strung them all together, somehow they did become stories- of a kind” (282). This illustrates that he felt alienated from the world by language because he lives in a world translated through stories and fails to interpret correctly the practical reality surrounding him. This way, his similarity can be traced back to Tridib of The Shadow Lines who is destroyed by the violent actions of the real world.

Nirmal is, often, perceived in the narrative through Kanai’s point of view. His state of mind is all manifested in his notebook in which as Kanai notices, “…the lines had been written in great haste. In places there was much crossing out and filling in, and the words often spilled into the thin margin…” (67) In the beginning, Nirmal
stated that the notebook concerned Kusum who was a superseding influence on his mind and soul. He also mentioned his thought presentation which seems to be universal. One of them is, “The true tragedy of a routinely spent life is that its wastefulness does not become apparent till it is too late.” (144) He believed that his job of a school master did not allow him enough time to write “a single word”(144) or to think of working for the realization of his ideology. He concluded a passage related to his “Regret and remorse”(144) by judging himself, “To think of all the years when I had nothing but time and yet wrote not one word. And now like some misplaced, misgendered Scheherazade, I am trying to stave the night off with a flying, fleeting pen…”(148) [italics original].

Nirmal is not all philosophical and pensive. Nilima recognizes his pragmatic approach in making it sure during the construction of the Trust’s hospital that anti-cyclone measures had been provided for. (133) It is the same large ward that people take shelter towards the end of the novel when storm strikes the island very badly. Nirmal’s point of view about the religion of the local people is helpful in understanding the embedded hybridity in their languages and beliefs. He was amazed to see the way the local people of tide country invoke Bon Bibi and her brother Shah Jongoli in mixed form of Arabic language and Bangla dialect. It relates to the hint of merging of religions and faith. He concludes “that the mudbanks of the tide country are shaped not only by rivers of silt, but also by rivers of language: Bengali, English, Arabic, Hindi, Araknese and who knows what else? Flowing into each other they create a proliferation of small worlds that hang suspended in the flow. ...the tide country’s faith is something like one of its great mohonas, a meeting not just of many rivers, but a circular roundabout people can use to pass in many directions- from country to country and even between faiths and religions”[247][italics original].

Through the landscape setting of the Sunderbans in the novel, Amitav Ghosh envisages a miniature world where everyone lives in harmony, notwithstanding their differences in cultures, languages and religion.

Nirmal’s consideration of the diligence of the natives of the Sunderbans is foregrounded as the author’s project of recognizing the efforts of the displaced people transforming their lives with the systematic set up in Morichjhapi,
I was amazed, not just by what they had built but the care they had invested in creating organizations, institutions. They had set up their own government...there were some thirty thousand people on the island...The island had been divided into five zones and each family of settlers had been given five acres of land. (172) [italics original]

Nirmal tells in his notebook that the new people planned “to mobilize public opinion, to bring pressure on the government, to get them to leave us[them] alone. They’re putting it out that we’re [they’re] destroying this place” (172) [italics original]. Nirmal clearly understands that these people just want a safe haven and a place of true freedom.

Nirmal’s voice emphasizes another concern of the novelist to fuse myths and geology in education. He told Horen the way in which he would interact with the children by relating old myths and geology. He regarded the similarity of “goddesses...heavenly deities on the one hand, and on the other, the titanic stirrings of the earth itself- both equally otherworldly, equally remote from us” (180). He would tell them about the river Ganga “the greatest of all the earth’s rivers because “it joins with the Brahmaputra in scouring a long, clearly marked channel along the floor of the bay. The map would reveal to them what is otherwise hidden underwater...there is a visible Ganga and a hidden Ganga...Put them together and you have what is by far the greatest of the earth’s rivers” (181). He thought of telling the children about the rapidity in which “their subcontinent had moved, at a speed no other landmass had ever attained before...” (181) This is the most brilliant illustration of the blend of science and myth which is one of the linguistic innovations of Amitav Ghosh to bring heteroglossia into focus.

The pattern of different voices of the characters enables the working of polyphony in the narrative. The narratorial voice is also one of the voices in the polyphony of independent and contradictory viewpoints. Amitav Ghosh gives equal independence to the characters and the narrator alike in the narrative. There is a constant shifting of voices moving back and front and it they remain ther side by side in contradiction, all the voices hold the same freedom and significance.

The narrator describes S’ Daniel’s brave effort to build “a new society” in this tide country is a utopia where there is no room for “petty little divisions and
Amitav Ghosh’s creation of global spirit Piya who is as inseparable from her GPS as Fokir is from his sixth sense having “been born across the world” sees herself as a hybrid of two different nationalities and two cultures, a creature sensitive to the shifting shores of disjunctive transnationalism, diasporic discontent and even certain itineracy. Piya’s character challenges the argument of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak:

The disenfranchised woman of the diaspora—new and old—can not, then, engage in the critical agency of civil society—citizenship in the most robust sense—to fight the depredations of ‘global economic citizenship.’ This is not to silence her, but rather to desist from guilt-tripping her. For her struggle is for access to the subjectship of civil society of her new state: basic civil rights. Escaping the failure of
Piya, in her transnational hybridity actually claims certain power that resides in vulnerability, an openness and a willingness to process knowledge from another, what her scientific colleagues term “more primitive” school. While the process of identifying one’s values and remembering one’s history is more difficult for those who have moved from one place to another, ultimately, there’s an advantage in seeing things in pieces rather than as a whole. Piya’s fragmented stories (not all of them happy about her estranged parents) such as those inseparably tied to the word gamchha, are based on incomplete and imagined instead of complete and real, reality of the events and places before her family migrated to North America. The conscious awareness of the missing pieces calls for a deeper attention to the details of the remaining bits, which would make one dig deep until all the layers are revealed and everything that could be discovered is found.

As a researcher in cetology, Piya has taken up a challenging path of life. Kanai blames her for the interest shown by her in protecting the wild life without any regard for the human cost and for being complicit with the Western patrons. Piya asks Kanai, “Do you see anything easy about what I do? Look at me: I have no money, no prospect. My friends are thousands of kilometres away” (302). The haunting sense of futility makes her all the more depressed. Still she continues her work.

The common conception that females are weak and require the protection of males is challenged by Piya, when she embarks on with great confidence to find out the original habitat of the dolphins- *oracella fluminalis* through the labyrinthine waterways of the Sunderban Rivers. Ariel Salleh, a leading ecofeminist, assesses the present international wave of feminism as follows: “…women shed the victim’s role, going on the offensive against the entire capitalist, patriarchal assault to life on earth” (*Ecofeminism as Politics* 103). It is through Piya that Amitav Ghosh expresses his evaluation of the current ecological situation. People’s greed for material pleasures has forced them to behave callously towards Nature which is now on the brink of disaster.
As discussed in the introduction of the study, the female characters in this novel are also given dynamic representation with an urge to be a part of human assertion. Nilima, Kusum and Moyna represent all those active participants who are lively and energetic to be one among all other dispossessed people who carve their own path despite of the challenges. They remind of Zindi, Alu and the people of Ras of *Circle of Reason* and Deeti, Kalua, Jodu and Paulette of *Sea of Poppies* who with their intuitive power, strength of mind, practical insight have never learnt to succumb in any condition. Nilima, in her family is “legendary for her persistence- her doggedness and tenacity”(19).

She puts in all her youth spirit, energy and emotions in building up the Badabon Trust. That’s why people adore her, “...she was capable of commanding prompt and unquestioning obedience...” (22). She is so practical and logical in her views for leading responsible life ever after the death of her husband. She tells Kanai, “…it’s not easy to deal with reminders of loved ones who’ve moved on and left you behind.”(23)

The novelist presents contradictory viewpoints of Piya and Kanai with regard to the significance of the lives of animals and human beings in the Sunderbans. In the same vein, the novelist represents the conflicting views of Nilima and Nirmal as she did not share her husband’s zeal to join people in Morichjhapi because she was more concerned about her hospital and Trust. She did not show any interest in giving “medical attention” to the new people because she did not want to earn the rage of government. Nirmal asked her why “had [she] often said that she admired what he [Sir Daniel Hamilton] did. What was the difference, then? Were the dreams of these settlers less valuable than those of a man like Sir Daniel just because he was a rich saheb and they impoverished refugees?”(213)

Nilima’s viewpoint is equally credible, “You’re not involved in the day-to-day business of running the hospital, so you have no idea of how hard we’ve had to work to stay on the right side of the government. If the politicians turn against us, we’re finished...It was for your sake that we first came to Lusibari...There was nothing for me here...But over the years I’ve built something- something real, something useful, something that has helped many people in small ways....I will fight fight for it [the hospital] like a mother fights to protect her children.”(214)
It was Nilima who understood practical life more than her husband. Nirmal believed in the newly elected Communist party and could not think that his own friends and comrades would go against their ideals in evicting the refugees from Morichjhapi. Nilima articulated her heart, “My husband is not a practical man...He does not understand that when a party comes to power, it must govern...”(275) It is the pattern of the viewpoints of characters that foregrounds Nilima’s point of view about her husband in the narrative.

Kusum is described through the viewpoints of Kanai, Nirmal and Horen. Kanai regarded her as “spirited, tough, and full of fun and laughter”(218). Nirmal was swayed away by the rhythm of her strength of mind and he felt himself “torn between my [his] wife and the woman who had become the muse I’d never had; between the quiet persistence of everyday change and the heady excitement of revolution- between prose and poetry” (216).

Horen tells Kanai that she was a formidable inspiration for Nirmal, and admits his love for her spirit, “...she had entered his blood just as she had mine. At her name he would come alive, his step would change, words would come pouring out of him...he was wooing her with his stories and tales...”(363). Kusum loved Horen as he later tells Kanai about their love, “...she took my feet between her hands and washed them clean. And then it was as if the barriers of our bodies had melted and we had flowed into each other as the river does with sea. There was nothing to say and nothing to be said; there were no words to chafe upon our senses: just an intermingling like that of fresh water and salt, a rising and a falling as of the tides” (364).

It is through the character of Kusum that the novelist brings into focus the evils of corruption in the world as he mentions “the world’s ills” (29) by pointing out women trafficking as encountered by Kusum’s mother. Such indigenous women have no source of income and are beguiled by people like Dilip (who are “linked to a gang that traffic[ed] in women” (100)) for having better chances of job in city but infact, force them into prostitution.

Moyna is mindful of the ways of taking things in her stride and making full use of the opportunities that come across her way. Nilima’s viewpoint confirms her exceptionality that she “hasn’t abandoned her dreams” (129). Nilima regards her as
“both ambitious and bright” for being a trainee nurse in her hospital. She tells Kanai about Moyna’s struggle, “Through her own efforts, with no encouragement from her family, she had managed to give herself an education” (129).

The conflict in the views of Moyna and Fokir is subtly described in the novel as Moyna is vocal sharing the differences in their relationship with Kanai but Fokir is more silent about his feelings. His perspective is articulated through Piya. Moyna loves Fokir but is unable to understand his interest in rivers. She wants him to think the way she does. She feels unsecured to see her husband with Piya, and too, a foreigner. She tells Kanai, “I was really relieved when I heard you were going to be with them” (257).

She chooses Kanai to be someone to put a check on whatever they exchange through gestures and postures, “It’s you who stands between them: whatever they say to each other will go through your ears and your lips. But for you neither of them will know what is in the mind of the other. Their words will be in your hands and you can make them mean what you will” (257). Moyna does not understand that words are not always sufficient to get an idea or an emotion across another person. She tells Kanai that only a stranger can talk to Fokir about her doubt and insecurity and justifies her belief, “Because words are just air...When the wind blows on the water, you see ripples and waves, but the real river lies beneath, unseen and unheard. You can’t blow on the water’s surface from below...Only someone who’s outside can do that, someone like you” (258).

The novel, on the whole, does offer a feasible way of representing cultural-ecological problems: it gives voice to minorities with sharp indignation against the corrupt government system. Amitav Ghosh tries to narrate entirely through the distinctive voices of several cultural groups and social classes. He recognizes the whole, but retains its diversity. This also comprises Amitav Ghosh’s remedy for the contemporary fragmentation and disorganization of the world. As has been shown, this whole may appear in the form of narrative representation of polyphonic discourse, or they may appear as “silent” transcendent realities that exist outside linguistically constructed knowledge, or a discursively realised world.

In addition to this, the argument of this chapter builds on the fact that the turbulence in water is after all responsible for the transformation in the land therefore
affecting the life on the land simultaneously. The interdependence of human life and animal life on the islands is illustrated (towards the end of the novel) through the cyclone- the storm in the water and in the lives of the people. It is the same cyclone which disrupts everything that comes in its way but there is also stillness inherent in it. The storm that engulfs Piya and Fokir swallows Fokir and the vague perception of Piya towards life. She emerges out to be a better person at the end of the novel. She reaches that stillness in her life which has enabled her to see a clear picture and she gets clarity of direction in her life. She sees the world altogether new offering new prospects. Her experience in the storm is like what Urmila in The Calcutta Chromosome experiences her new self like being in an experiment. Their world is formed new and they are ready to undertake challenges of this newly formed world.

The discussion in this chapter illustrates that with the use of different genres, cultures, language and work places the novel allows the readers an experience of reading across the local-global divisions. The novelist deals with the minutest details of the flora and fauna of the Sunderbans which bring to light the hard and tough lives of the natives like Fokir who are ready to sacrifice their life for the safe passage of a total stranger like Piya. The novel ends with a dominant image: the body of Fokir. It is a crucible of the past and it contains the bits and pieces of various histories in its essence: Fokir’s mother and Nirmal’s. His body becomes the site of a transitional space where Piya and Moyna settle for shared beginnings through the trust fund that Piya is able to gather for Tutul’s education and Moyna’s training with the help of her worldwide network of friends and colleagues. To conclude, the character-analysis in this chapter puts emphasis on the novelist’s attempt to purge all inhumane and apathetic attitudes of people and government towards the poor and the neglected migrants.