CHAPTER THREE

Beyond Borders: Hybridity and Cross-Cultural Matrix
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What is theoretically innovative, and politically crucial, is the need to think beyond narratives of originary and initial subjectivities and to focus on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences. These 'in-between' spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood . . . (Bhabha, The Location of Culture 2)

While Edward Said’s theory of Orientalism strives to recuperate the lost identities of countries, once under colonial rule, the focus is only on European colonisation of Asia, Oceania and Africa between the seventeenth and the twenty-first centuries. However, colonialism has been a continuous process since the beginning of time and the colonisers as well as the colonised have a long history of subjugation and liberation, with associated cultural encounters and lasting influences upon their identities. Besides, there has been the ongoing phenomenon of movement or displacement due to natural calamities or needs. In the context a return to the roots in terms of undoing the cultural impact is as much impossible as the search itself is inevitable. On the other hand, this situation does not point towards a resignation to a rootless confusion of identity, but throws into relief, identity being a dynamic edifice at personal as well as collective level. Here thinkers like Homi K. Bhabha come
to the rescue, questioning the fixity of identities, when meanings are merely attributed within a structural context and not predetermined.

In the context of world history that abounds in wars, fought to preserve the integrity of identity and the purity of cultures, Ghosh, in line with postcolonial thinkers like Homi K. Bhabha, conceives of identity as an ephemeral concept. Bhabha perceives identity as a liminal reality. Bhabha quotes Martin Heidegger in *The Location of Culture*, identifying borders as the places where something makes its “presencing” rather than borders as defining differences (1). Following Derrida, Bhabha deconstructs identities, arranged in binary opposites across borders with clearly defined spaces in between. These interstitial spaces are places for cultural confluence, negotiation and hybridity, rather than spaces demarcating differences.

Bhabha speaks of cultures in a perpetual state of flux. Underlining the futility of looking for the origins of cultures, done in the pretext of discussing the purity of cultures, Bhabha observes: “Beginnings and endings may be the sustaining myths of the middle years; but in the fin de siècle, we find ourselves in the moment of transit where space and time cross to produce complex figures of difference and identity, past and present, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion” (*The Location of Culture* 2). Bhabha seeks to highlight the ceaseless movement across seeming boundaries. For Bhabha, the border is the place where conventional patterns of thought are disturbed and can be disturbed by the possibility of crossing. At the border the past and the present, inside and outside cease to operate as binary opposites. Instead they comingle
and conflict continuously. Hybrid identities are never total or complete in themselves. They remain perpetually in motion.

Ghosh analyses the concept of identity in various dimensions, in multiple socio-political contexts, along the history of time. John C. Hawley underlines Ghosh's themes as, “the role of the individual in the broad sweep of political events; the dubious nature of borders, whether between nations and peoples or between one literary genre and another; the role of the artist in society; the importance of narrative in shaping history” (5). Ghosh considers identity as unrestricted by cultural polarities, hence beyond definitions. He is by principle universal and global in outlook but never totalitarian. He respects and represents diversity and global citizenship alongside cultural affiliations and rootedness.

If there is one aspect that stands out in Ghosh's sketching of identities, it is their ephemerality resulting from the arbitrariness of boundaries. In his interview to Hawley, Ghosh says: “What interested me first about borders was their arbitrariness, their constructedness—the ways in which they are 'naturalised' by modern political myth making” (9). This arbitrariness of boundaries creates spaces for exchange and negotiation of differences, where concrete boundaries would have kept difference exclusive. Boundaries cease to exist as physical reality and become mere shadow lines. This is the central theme of Ghosh's novel, *The Shadow Lines*.

The entire novel *The Shadow Lines* revolves around the central mystery of Tridib's murder during the sectarian violence in Dhaka in 1964. As the
novel relates the micro histories lost amidst the meta-narratives of the First World War, India's struggle for independence and the 1964 riots in Pakistan and India, it sounds the multiple dimensions of human identity. In the novel, identity disentangles itself from bindings to nation, religion, region and age, and emerges as an ephemeral reality constructed and not preexisting.

In *The Shadow Lines*, imagination is a paradigm for the structural creation of meaning, illustrating how reality is not physical, but the mind's perception of the same. Therefore reality becomes a plurality with different inventions existing in different minds. When the narrator is chided by his cousin Ila for his childlike excitement in traveling through the underground in London, he says: "I could not persuade her that a place does not merely exist, that it has to be invented in one's imagination" (*SL* 23).

Ila, being a daughter of a diplomat, had travelled all over the world, all through her childhood and early teens. But all along she had been forced to keep the traditional standards and values. She had craved to identify herself with the other students in her schools, adapt their culture, but she had never been able to and hence she had been alienated. In Ila's perception every new place followed the projection of a stereotype from her mind slightly rearranged. Whenever she encountered a new place she picked out and focused upon certain pieces from her stereotype based on necessity, like the school or the ladies' wash room. The narrator relates, "I had a glimpse at that moment, of those names on the map as they appeared to her: a worldwide string of departure lounges, but not for that reason, at all similar, but on the
contrary, each of them strikingly different, distinctively individual, each with its ladies hidden away in some yet more unexpected corner of the hall . . .” (SL 22).

In the endless migrations Ila had been forced to do, the schools have been her centres and she does not recollect much about the uniqueness of the places. Ila remembers only the necessities like “the ladies, not because she wanted to go, but because those were the only fixed points in the shifting landscapes of her childhood” (SL 23). Among the plural constructions of reality there can be no privileging based on percentage of truth, for there can be no objective truth, as the narrator goes on to say, “that her practical, bustling London was no less invented than mine, neither more nor less true, only very far apart” (SL 23).

When speaking of personal identity, Tridib brings in the metaphor of living in stories. His experience may be compared to Said’s “textuality of the world,” where the world is never free from the constructs of discourses. The narrator remembers Tridib’s saying, “we could not see without inventing what we saw . . . we had to try because the alternative wasn’t blankness—it only meant that if we didn’t try ourselves, we would never be free of other people’s inventions” (SL 34-35). It is this idea that Ghosh frames in his interview as, “I think this interest arose because of some kind of inborn distrust of anything that appears to be ‘given’ or taken-for granted . . . I think these lines are drawn in order to manipulate our ways of thought: that is why they must be disregarded” (Hawley 9). Ghosh’s disavowal of established definitions springs
from the understanding of the arbitrariness of borders, and believes in creating meanings, identities.

In "Imaginary Homelands," Salman Rushdie defines meaning as "a shaky edifice we build out of scraps, dogmas, childhood injuries, newspaper articles, chance remarks, old films, small victories, people hated, people loved; perhaps it is because our sense of what is the case is constructed from such inadequate materials that we defend it so fiercely, even to death" (12). Identity which may be taken as contextually synonymous with 'meaning,' according to Rushdie, is constructed from shreds of various discourses and relationships with the outside world, and is not predetermined. Hence there can be no smooth homogenous blend of the contributing factors to create a perfect hybrid and a definite identity.

Mondal describes identity as "enabled by and constructed through language, and the coherence of our sense of 'self' is meditated through the narrative we tell about ourselves, both personal and collective" (90). Tridib tries to impart this art of consciously creating realities to the narrator, so that he may be free from others' constructs and defining boundaries. When playing houses as kids, Ila creates a role play with Magda, her doll and an imagined version of Nick Price, living her fantasy love for Nick Price through the game, where Nick rescues Magda from Denise, a jealous girl who tries to hurt her. But actually Nick had abandoned Ila when she had been beaten up. Ila starts crying at the end of the role play remembering the actual happening. The narrator, who does not understand the reason, yells her down, asking her
“not to be a damn-fool girl, it was just a story, about a stupid doll, and there she is, crying her eyes out as though she’s been living in it” (SL 201). Tridib counter-argues saying, “Everyone lives in a story . . . stories are all there are to live in, it was just a question of which one you choose . . .” (SL 201).

Ila goes on to live in her story and marries Nick Price. The narrator’s grandmother creates the story of the upside-down house for herself and her sister, Mayadebi, a choice of place to escape into when their house is not very happy to live in. The upside-down house is an alternate identity, a standby for home. Tridib chooses to psychologically fit into the story that Snipe tells him during the air raid in London; “an old story, the best story in Europe . . . when Europe was a better place, a place without borders and countries . . . the story of a hero called Tristan, a very sad story, about a man without a country, who fell in love with a woman-across-the-seas . . .” (SL 205-206). He falls in love with May Price, whom he had seen as a baby.

Rooted in Snipe’s story, Tridib creates a story of two strangers meeting in a ruined theatre, signifying lack of historical or cultural moorings, as a model in which he would like to meet May Price, his pen friend. Tridib wanted “them to meet as the completest of strangers—strangers-across-the-seas . . . to meet far from their friends and relatives—in a place without a past, without history, free, really free, two people coming together with the utter freedom of strangers” (SL 159). Tridib wants to create a relationship that would not be defined by any social or cultural norm, across boundaries of race,
nationality, age, colonizer-colonized polarization or formality, but led by pure desire.

Tridib’s death, as May realizes, is an act of willing sacrifice, of unexplainable cause or motive. Tridib gets out of the safety of his car and confronts the angry mob, knowing full well that he would be killed. His death is a mystery. The narrator wonders, “It seemed so wanton and senseless—and so uncharacteristic, for he was a realistic, practical, and above all, cautious man” (SL 250). Tridib’s death is a text that he construes to create his identity, which underscores the senselessness of borders. It may be compared to the suicide of Bhubaneshwari Baduri described in Gayatri Spivak’s polemical essay, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” as the text of a silenced subaltern. Tridib is also a subaltern, as his death along with its significance is silenced in the roar of the meta-narratives of history and cultural difference. When the narrator attempts to trace the religious riots of 1964, he notices that the riots are not given due importance. This silencing may be seen as a result of the governments’ practice of protecting the constructs of national integrity and illusions of peace and order.

In various places in the novel there is the blurring out of boundaries of nation, religion, race and other lines of demarcation, due to the incongruity between physical space and perceived space. Boundaries cease their existence in concreteness and traverse into ephemerality as “looking-glass border(s)” (SL 257). The Shadow Lines debates and evolves the theme of national identity to the utmost concreteness possible. The novel phenomenally moves from the
question of the concreteness of national identity to the arbitrariness of boundaries. The tapestry of the seeming solidarity of national identity unravels from a pre-existent reality to a disturbingly doubtful mirage, with questionable significance in the modern age. Simultaneously, boundaries and borders are revealed to be dynamic constructs that create new meanings rather than physical realities that signify differences. The narrator’s grandmother’s is the most significant voice for these ideas, sharing eminence only with Tridib.

National identity in the Indian context is a mega mosaic that is often perceived too close and hence not comprehended for its integral inherent diversity. Indian identity is rooted in cultural diversity. While multiculturalism is an omnipresent phenomenon in countries world over, there is always a legal privileging of one culture as the national culture or homogenisation into a uniform culture. However, in India, neither of these aspects has shaped national identity. Indian identity is rooted in plurality.

The word “nation” is derived from the Latin nation, which stems from nasco. It means “I am born.” The Encyclopedia Americana defines “nation” as a large number of people “who see themselves as a community or group who generally place loyalty to the group above any conflicting loyalties. They often share one or more of the following: language, culture, religion, political and other institutions, a history with which they identify and a belief in a common destiny. They usually occupy contiguous territory” (751). After the Second World War, the essentialist practice of nation was questioned by writers like Salman Rushdie, Vikram Seth, Amitav Ghosh, Bharati Mukherjee, Jhumpa
Lahiri and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, who emphasized the reality of multiple identities and cultural pluralism. Benedict Anderson declared that "nationalism invents nations where they do not exist" (15). Most of the times, the political unity, which is a binding force, operates at the psychological level.

Benedict Anderson defines nation as "an imagined political community." According to him, the nation is "imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign. It is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (Anderson 15). In this line of thought India is an imagined political community. Bhabha, in his introduction to *Nation and Narration*, writes "Nations, like narratives, lose their origin in the myths of time and only fully realize their horizons in the mind's eye" (1). The association of the term, 'horizons' to national identity, replacing borders is perfect, as horizons are perceived lines and not concrete ones. Ghosh's novels project national identity as a construct bound by ever changing horizons. Ghosh explores the vision of such a world that has no borders but horizons. As John Mee observes Ghosh "thinks across cultures rather than beyond them" (91).

In tracing a family across three generations, the first contemporaneous with the freedom movement and independence, the novel traces the sea change in the conception of national identity, from Tha'mma, the narrator's grandmother, to Ila, a representative of the modern age. To Tha'mma, the nation is worth dying for as well as killing for. As a college student, she had
wanted to belong to the terrorist groups fighting for freedom. When her classmate had been arrested, having been accused of plans to assassinate an English magistrate, she had regretted not having identified him earlier and hence having failed to help him. While speaking of her conviction later to the narrator, Robi and Tridib, she says, “I would have been frightened . . . But I would have prayed for strength, and God willing, yes, I would have killed him. It was for our freedom: I would have done anything to be free” *(SL 43).*

Tha’mma is seriously averse to Ila living in England in the pretext of freedom. Her ideal of national identity makes her consider Ila’s settling in England as an impropriety and a lack of claim. She passionately proclaims, “Ila has no right to live there . . . She doesn’t belong there. It took those people a long time to build that country; hundreds of years, years and years of war and bloodshed” *(SL 85).* Tha’mma conceives of nation as defined by war in line with Western belief. The identity of belonging to a nation, which was always seen as a mere inherited tag, is seen as a birthright claimed by a shared history of fighting to create the country. Tha’mma declares, “Everyone who lives there has earned his right to be there with blood: with their brother’s blood. They know they are a nation because they’ve drawn their borders with blood” *(SL 85).*

Tha’mma’s conviction that borders are drawn with blood further substantiates the conception of nation as a narrative one lives in. The national borders are what one has wrought for oneself and the identity is as real and strong as one believes it to be, proved by the sacrifice one is ready to make for
the sake of the nation, in other words, living in a story as Tridib would have put it. In Indian history this philosophy is all the more significant in the context of Partition, during which the population divided between itself into two and chose an identity different from the other. The divided groups believed in the significance of their differences and borders so much that to draw the lines as boundaries they shed blood. Probably, this aspect influenced Tha’mma into imagining the meaning of British national identity.

*The Shadow Lines* looks for a renegotiation of dynamic concepts like nationalism, self, reality and history. For the discussion of nationalism, Tha’mma, Ila and Tridib are juxtaposed with their varying ideals and philosophies of life. Tha’mma is on the quest for an ideal free nation all through her life but her ideal proves dynamic and elusive. Though she perceives her concept of nation to be perfect, it keeps changing throughout.

Tha’mma compiles a definition for a nation based on the blueprint she deduced in England in the context of the World War. She says: “War is their religion. That’s what it takes to make a country. Once that happens people forget they were born this or that, Muslim or Hindu, Bengali or Punjabi: they become a family born of the same pool of blood. That is what you have to achieve for India, don’t you see?” (*SL* 86). But this idea is passionately criticized by Ila, who is disillusioned with national identity. She claims that she is a free thinker, and respects freedom. Ila probably is a serious follower of globalisation. She calls Tha’mma, a “warmongering fascist” (*SL* 86). Contrary to Ila’s conception, the narrator describes Tha’mma as someone who wants to
“thrive believing in the unity of nationhood and territory, of self-respect and national power” (SL 86). Thamма believes in national integrity, which the Partition and Tridib’s murder shatters. Her national identity becomes a schizophrenic condition resulting from unresolved border issues.

Whatever be the shades of meaning inferred from Tha’mма’s ideas about a nation, she unconsciously touches upon the identity of a nation as a matter of choice and a structure made of narration of whatever the members involved do together having decided their side. Probably Tha’mма puts her finger on this conception because this is what coincides, fits with the evolution of India in the context of independence and simultaneous Partition, where Partition has ushered the birth of more than one nation with schizophrenic identities and split personalities that can never be independent of one another.

The confusion of identity troubles Tha’mма when she learns, that she has to fill in particulars regarding her place of birth, when she lands in Bangladesh. A confusion of identity in the same line is signified by Salman Rushdie in the confused nativity of Saleem Sinai in *Midnight’s Children*. Tha’mма feels nervous about the fact that “her place of birth had come to be so messily at odds with her nationality” (SL 168). But the incongruity runs deeper than just filling in of details. Though Thа’mма hailed India as her nation, Dhaka is her home town. When Thа’mма seems worried about something, regarding her trip to East Pakistan, her son tries to comfort her citing her various previous trips to Dhaka when she was in Burma. She spontaneously replies: “Oh *that* . . . It wasn’t the same thing. There weren’t
any forms or anything and anyway travelling was so easy then. I could come home to Dhaka whenever I wanted” (SL 168). This accidental slip in which she refers to Dhaka as her home is more significantly true than her claim to belong to India. Being an Indian is her constructed identity. The context also captures how the concept home has been problematised by Partition, positioning nationality at odds with home.

The Partition of Bengal is a major historical event that not only disrupted the harmony of the Bengali society but also shook the very roots of Bengali identity. It is a recurrent concern in Ghosh’s novels as seen in The Shadow Lines as well as in The Hungry Tide. Partition has been a major theme in the entire corpus of Indian Literature following independence from British Rule. Tha’mma’s experience about national borders as a Bengali from the Bangladesh side who moved to India later is not unique but something shared by a huge population at that time. In the history of India, the creation of the nation is almost synonymous with the Partition, both in the creation of the nation as well as the events related to it. They are bound as two sides of a coin captured in the metaphor of “looking-glass” (SL 73). Tha’mma’s experiences emerge out of the conflict between the significance and insignificance of boundaries.

Tha’mma is originally from Dhaka and moves out after her marriage before 1925. She spent her early years of marriage in Mandalay. After the death of her husband in 1935, she moved to Calcutta where she was offered a job in a school on compassionate grounds. By then as her parents were also
dead, she did not think of going back to Dhaka after the Partition in 1947, when Dhaka became the capital of East Pakistan. Though she was nostalgic about her home, Dhaka, she never went back as she identified India as her nation and not Pakistan. After Partition, "There was no question of going back" (SL 138). The narrator relates, "she would often think back on Dhaka—the old house, her parents, Jethamoshai, her childhood—all the things people think about when they know the best parts of their lives are already over" (SL 138).

In deciding to cast her lots with India, Tha’mma decides her national identity simultaneously forsaking Dhaka, her native place. Concurrently, she disinherits part of her early life, incidentally creating an inner trauma. But as a determinate woman, she designs her identity. This national identity that Tha’mma chooses is not completely voluntary because her job in Calcutta plays an important role in the decision. However, the boundaries are no less real to her. After decades of having accepted India as part of her identity, Tha’mma wishes for reconciliation with her paternal uncle's family.

Way back her father and uncle had fallen out and the very house had been divided by a wall. The old bitterness had remained so strong that till her parents' death there had been no thought of reconciliation. When she learns that her uncle, Jethamoshai, as she calls him, is living alone in Dhaka, she feels sorry for him and wants to bring him back. She ponders: "Poor old man . . . Imagine what it must be like to die in another country, abandoned and alone in your age" (SL 149).
A different dimension of nationalism is seen in Jethamoshai's discourse, when he bluntly refuses to leave Dhaka for India, in spite of the tension in the atmosphere. He asserts: "I know everything, I understand everything. Once you start moving you never stop. That's what I told my sons when they took the trains" (SL 237). He proclaims his identity: "I don't believe in this India—Shindia" (SL 237). His argument rings with truth, underlining the arbitrariness of borders, when he says, "It's all very well, you're going away now, but suppose when you get there they decide to draw another line somewhere? What will you do then? Where will you move to? No one will have you anywhere. As for me, I was born here, and I'll die here" (SL 237).

A dilemma in identity and sense of belonging is voiced by Professor Mohammed Sarwar in a similar context of Ram Janma Bhoomi agitation in Tharoor's Riot: "The national mind has been afflicted with the intellectual cancer of thinking of “us” and “them”. Where do Indian muslims like myself fit in? I've spent my life thinking of myself as part of “us” – now there are Indians, respectable Indians, Indians winning votes, who say that I'm really “them”! (114). In Mohammed Sarwar's case, he is excluded from his chosen society while Thamma has the freedom of choice in casting her lot with India. However in Bangladesh Thamma would have been the same plight as that of Sarwar. On the other hand, Jethamoshai's stance is similar to Sarwar's. Sarwar in speaking of his association with India says:

... I love this country. I love it not just because I was born here, as my father and mother were, as their parents before them were,
not just because their graves have mingled their bones into the soil of this land. I love it because I know it. I have studied its history, I have travelled its geography, I have breathed its polluted air, I have written words to its music. India shaped me, my mind, my tastes, my friendships, my passions . . . (Riot 112)

Sarwar's views and Jethamoshai's perceptions regarding their roots are identical though the ways in which they are expressed differ. This way of identification with the native land stands incongruent with the changes wrought through history as during the Partition or later during other cross-cultural tension. These narrations further throw into relief the schizophrenic confusion in identity because of the misconception of borders and differences, as concrete phenomena, forgetting their dynamism.

Jethamoshai identifies his nativity with his nationality and refuses to hitch his wagon with the political dictates. His question poignantly problematizes national boundaries. He shows no concern for the principles that dictate a boundary. But he is wise about the lack of temporal definitions to boundaries. His conviction to stay on in Dhaka, which is his place of birth, is an assertion of his sense of belonging and he is ready to risk everything for the sake of it. He draws an individual, independent identity, and in the context of his existence, faces the consequence of death, being killed by the fanatic mob. In his case too identity becomes a phenomena designed by choice and not predetermined, though his nationality matches with his nativity.
Juxtaposed against these dimensions of national identity and the charm it holds for characters like Tha’mma and Jethamoshai, Ila seeks an escape from the encumbrance and restrictions of traditional Indian nobility and its culture. She wants a kind of freedom from Indian cultural restrictions. When she tries to dance with someone in a club, Robi creates a scene and stops her. When she demands the reason, Robi says: “You can do what you like in England . . . But here there are certain things you cannot do. That’s our culture; that’s how we live” (SL 97). Ila gets into a rage and cries: “Do you see now why I’ve chosen to live in London? Do you see? It’s only because I want to be free . . . Free of you! . . . Free of your bloody culture and free of all of you” (SL 98).

Displacement becomes an important theme in Ghosh’s fiction. Jethamoshai’s and Tha’mma’s aversion to the predicament of a refugee arises from the refugees’ lack of right to decide their locality and hence identity. They have lost their freedom to narrate their identity and hence become scrub swept aside by grand narratives. The Hungry Tide deals with such a struggle of a group of refugees to carve their niche in the world.

Home becomes a problematic zone. To Tha’mma, India is “her invented country” which she believes is also her uncle’s home, while to her uncle the established country of Bangladesh is his home. The uncle regrets his son’s migration to India. Home, the symbol of identity ceases to be identified with the place of birth as a rule. It becomes the place one deliberately identifies with.
A similar choice of home is seen in *The Hungry Tide* which portrays the refugees' fight against the government, proclaiming the island of Morichjhapi as their home. They die for the cause of establishing the island as their home. When the government authorities lay siege upon the island and round up a boat of islanders threatening them to abandon the island, they cry out in anguish: “Who are we? We are the dispossessed” (*HT* 254). The struggle of the islanders at the face of death, to establish a home, an identity, evokes this thought in Nirmal about the concept of home: “where else could you belong, except in the place you refused to leave” (*HT* 254).

This construction of home as a place one claims to belong to further emphasizes the definition of the nation as one’s “invented country” (*SL* 151). This constructedness or the inventedness of the concept of nation is responsible for the dynamic nature of national identity and simultaneously of the boundaries and differences that define it. Tha’mma perceives this factor when she travels to Dhaka. All through the prime part of her life Tha’mma had witnessed the tension, passion and bloodshed on account of the Partition’s borders. Hence it comes as a shock to her that there is no promiscuous or even a clear border dividing India from East Pakistan. When her son asks her if she really thought, “the border was a long black line with green on one side and scarlet on the other . . .” she replies, “Of course not. But surely there’s something—trenches perhaps, or soldiers, or gums pointing at each other, or even just barren strips of land” (*SL* 167).
She is deeply disappointed that all the uproar and bloodshed pertaining to Partition has created no visible difference. The creation of the nation India had not been a proclamation of unity but rather a declaration of difference and exclusivity in the context of Partition. So Tha’mma looks for the significance of the borders drawn with blood but finds it nowhere. Her disappointment springs from the gap between the illusion of concrete difference and the reality of sameness across looking-glass borders.

The looking-glass borders that do not substantiate differences are disturbing. The narrator muses: “They had drawn their borders, believing in that pattern, in the enchantment of lines, hoping perhaps that once they had etched their borders upon the map, the two bits of land would sail away from each other like shifting tectonic plates of the prehistoric Gondwanaland” (SL 257). However hard one tries, borders cannot be concretised. The narrator further examines how the border has drawn the two places into sharing an identity, more so than before the Partition. A similar situation occurs temporally and spatially far away, in England. With the First World War round the corner, Tresawsen compares moving from Germany to England to “stepping through a looking-glass” (SL 73).

The narrator relates how the border has created not a separation, but a yet-undiscovered irony: “. . . the simple fact that there had never been a moment in the four-thousand-year-old history of that map, when the places we know as Dhaka and Calcutta were more closely bound to each other than after they had drawn their lines . . . a moment when each city was the inverted
image of the other, locked into an irreversible symmetry by the line that was to
set us free—our looking-glass border (SL 257). As Bhabha would observe,
borders become places of cultural confluence and negotiation. Differences
reduce from polarities to mutual identification.

Ghosh creates another metaphor to present the theme of illusionary
borders that do not keep apart differences: the upside down house. It may also
be considered an analogy that sheds light on Partition. The partitioning of
Tha’mma’s house in Dhaka bears a metaphorical relationship to the
Partitioned independent India. As a child Tha’mma used to imagine stories
about her uncle’s side of the house for Mayadebi, her little sister. Tha’mma’s
ancestral house was partitioned between her father and his brother, by a wall
due to family misunderstanding. But the bitterness over the misunderstanding
was never forgiven that the two brothers never ventured across the wall to
solve the problem. Hence the unknown other side came to be imagined in an
opposite image as the upside down house.

Initially the imagination of the other side of the wall served to entertain
or threaten Mayadebi. But at times it became a place one yearned for as a
different possibility. Tha’mma recollects: “. . . I would make up stories about
that part of the house. Everything’s upside-down over there, I’d tell her; at
their meals they start with the sweets and end with the dal . . .” (SL 139).
That the upside down house is a metaphor can be inferred from the clue when
Tha’mma goes on to say, “their books go backwards and end at the
beginning . . .” (SL 139) like the Islamic texts in Pakistan. As the sisters grew
up, the uncle’s house was often the butt of their jokes. But, when things were not very happy on their side, “It seemed a better place,” into which they wished to escape (SL 139). Here the differences become less disagreeable.

The arbitrariness of borders is Ghosh’s central theme. The title of the novel, *The Shadow Lines* is appropriate as differences are more perceived than are concretely present. National identity, along this development of thought about boundaries, becomes a dynamic construct with doubtful roots. Nation, which is in one context a cultural and political construct and a historical claim of identity by a united group or population, becomes a shaky edifice.

In Tha’mma’s case, shared blood and nativity call for her faithfulness elsewhere. She says: “We’re the same flesh, the same blood, the same bone, and now at last, after all these years, perhaps we’ll be able to make amends for all that bitterness and hatred” (SL 142). This deep seated doubt regarding nation-home is one of the central themes of the novel. On one hand, there is the traditional scenario, where nation is identified with one’s nativity and on the other hand in the modern *milieu*, there is a contradiction between nativity and nationality due to migration triggered by colonial displacement, commercial engagements or natural reasons. In Indian history the Partition is one such *milieu* that has contributed to an identity crisis where the migrants seem to be condemned to a sort of a limbo, a *trishanku*.

When Tha’mma speaks of the possibility, “Come home to Dhaka”, the narrator, even as a small boy teases her, “How could you have ‘come’ home to Dhaka? You don’t know the difference between coming and going!” (SL 168).
This state of confusion regarding centrality of location becomes part of the family lore, where years later it was a shared family joke, "You see, in our family we don't know whether we're coming or going—it's all my grandmother's fault" (SL 169). So long as the fixity and static dimension of identity is taken as the standard, lack of centrality is a fault. But any identity being a construction goes a long way in explaining Tha'mma's inability to sustain a fixed central location as her national identity.

The narrator in a lighter vein, places the blame for the lack of fixed identity on the language itself, actually explaining the hybrid nature of identity. He states: "Every language assumes a centrality, a fixed and settled point to go away from and come back to, and what my grandmother was looking for was a word for a journey which was not a coming or a going at all" (SL 169). Tha'mma is on an ongoing quest for identity in a context of "'in-between' space" which appears never to be resolved (The Location of Culture 2). She is caught within Bhabha's interstitial space between historical ambivalences and forcefully alienated cultures. However, as she personally observes, behind this huge dilemma of belonging, pulled between seemingly opposite poles, there is no obvious difference, held apart by the boundaries. She wonders, "I mean, where's the difference then? And if there's no difference both sides will be the same . . . What was it all for then – partition and all the killing and everything—if there isn't something in between?" (SL 167).
The narrator looks back at the time just before the First World War, when four young people as diverse as Alan, Dan and Mike (all probably English), and Francesca, a German Jew live together. Ila and her roommates in London are equally diverse in origin as well as in principle. But they share a common vision regarding borders, differences. The same vision inspires Indian Hindus to shelter Muslims and Pakistani Muslims to help Hindus during periods of sectarian violence, risking their lives and belongings. The same kinship makes Khalil, a poor rickshaw man, support and care for Jethamoshai, even beyond his means, and in the end lose his life.

Tha’mma is not able to reconcile with the conspicuous differentiation in the name of religion or political boundary as against the total lack of obvious differences. This lack of perfectly exclusive cultural identity is what Bhabha speaks of in The Location of Culture: “Cultural difference must not be understood as the free play of polarities and pluralities in the homogenous empty time of the national community. The jarring of meanings and values generated in the process of cultural interpretation is an effect of the perplexity of living in the liminal spaces of national society” (232). This is exactly the kind of perplexity that Tha’mma feels, and she is only a representative of a population, a generation. She tries to take account of her milieu and seeks to understand the cultural difference that dictates her political identity as an India alienated from her nativity, Dhaka. The efforts, however, are futile as she is primarily guided by the traditional definitions of nation and cultural identity.
The lack of significant difference and the arbitrariness of boundaries that Tha’mma and the other major characters perceive are cleverly set as the context for the revelation of the central mystery of the novel, that is, the murder of Tridib by religious extremists or nationalist fundamentalists in Dhaka. Tridib is killed by an excited angry mob along with Jethamoshai, and Khalil, the Muslim rickshaw puller, who is identified as a traitor. The tension at that particular time is due to the loss of the Prophet's hair and the communal riots that followed.

As Ian Almond says, Tridib is "Ghosh's archetypal imagination; more than anything else, he is the creator of words par excellence, the one who has developed the gift of reality-fabrication to its highest, most sophisticated degree" (63). Tridib teaches the narrator to understand history not from books but from experiences. The narrator realises the futility of freedom through the gruesome death of Tridib. It is also the climax of the novel. Every word that describes the events of 1964 is the product of the narrator's struggle with silence: "The enemy of silence is speech, but there can be no words without meanings . . . when we try to speak of events of which we do not know the meaning, we must lose ourselves in the silence that lies in the gap between words and the world" (SL 218). It takes fifteen years for the narrator to discover the connection between his nightmare and Tridib's death. May Price describes the way Tridib was killed: "Then the mob dragged him in. He vanished . . . When I got there, I saw three bodies. They were all dead. They'd
cut Khalil's stomach open. The old man's head had been hacked off. And they'd cut Tridib's throat, from ear to ear” (SL 250-51).

The Shadow Lines questions the concept of militant nationalism. The incidents described in the last part of the novel substantiate Benedict Anderson's statement that the nation is “an imagined political community.” After fifteen years, when the narrator goes through the archives of Nehru Memorial Library, New Delhi, to recover the traces of the event, he cannot find a mention of Tridib's death in the newspapers. He realises that personal tragedy has no place in the nation's history.

The theme of The Shadow Lines is the need to transcend nationalism if one seeks real freedom. This idea runs like a thread in Ghosh's The Shadow Lines and Mukul Kesavan's Looking through Glass. Both the novels deal with the theme of Partition, though of different periods. Both the novels are examples of critical historiography. In both, the events are arranged so as to fuse the past and the present, deviating from the conventional historical impulse. Looking through Glass begins with the description of Dadi's ashes being taken to Banares by the nameless narrator because “Dadi had written it in her will that she wanted them tipped into the Ganga at Kashi” (7). Dadi's wish has nothing to do with the holiness of Banares. It is “her salaam-in-death to the martyrs of 1942, many of whom had come from Banares and its neighbourhood” (7). Both The Shadow Lines and Looking through Glass focus on the violence of the mob during riots which affect thousands of innocent people. Both the novels describe turbulent periods in Indian history.
While the theme of ‘shadow lines’ develops, Tridib’s murder is placed strategically, juxtaposing the ideals of identity against the mirage like reality. The theme is highly significant in the backdrop of the racist penalizing of the Sikhs that followed the assassination of Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi, which triggered Ghosh personally into writing *The Shadow Lines*. The novel at any time gains significance in a country rent by intercultural tension and extremism.

According to Mondal, Western scientific rationality influences systems of knowledge in order to create the idea of cultural polarities, which in turn “has political consequences that have shaped the modern world” (85). Mondal observes: “The notion of a pure culture and authentic cultural identity—a Self—that is posited against an absolute Other was most influentially realised in the formation of nation-states and national traditions” (86). But this kind of identity creation is only “a mental construct” (Mondal 87). In India, where one expects to witness differences across borders, one meets disappointment. The bewilderment arising from the discord between the conception of the tangibility of borders and the reality of the chimera-like nature of borders produces a unique alienation, which the narrator describes as “the special quality of loneliness that grows out of the fear of the war between oneself and one’s image in the mirror” (*SL* 225).

Though Ghosh underlines the constructedness of fixity of identities, he never undermines their significance. Mondal in studying the theme of nationalism in *The Shadow Lines* writes, “Nations are both ‘real’ and
‘imaginary,’ material and immaterial” (88). To Ghosh, identities are not less significant than they are dynamic. Again, though the role of self is significant in creating an identity, it is not the sole factor. In The Hungry Tide, Ghosh captures in the Sundarbans, Bhabha’s liminal space where cultures come into confluence and make their presence.

Ghosh’s novels present the world at various times as an ever changing cultural mosaic as Bhabha visualises. Hybridization is an ongoing process of negotiation. When migrants and refugees are displaced and relocated, they attempt to create a hybrid culture generated through discursive activity. Ghosh foregrounds this concept in his novels, The Hungry Tide, Sea of Poppies and River of Smoke.

According to Homi K. Bhabha, cultures are not a matter of being, but becoming. Like traditions, cultures are invented. Bhabha argues that cultures come after the hybridizing process, rather than existing before. Cultures are part of an ongoing process. This concept has important consequences for discourses on human rights. In “On Writing Rights,” Homi K. Bhabha expresses his views on human rights discourse: “The value of Universality comes with our growing awareness that to fulfil our ends—of equality, freedom, well-being—, or to find a means to survive our fates—of pain, oppression, humiliation, failure—we need to belong to the solidarity and the community of Others, be they Neighbours or Strangers, and through their alterity derive a sense of agency” (183).
In *The Hungry Tide*, Ghosh focuses on the psychological trauma and physical hardship experienced by the refugees at Morichjhapi. The central idea of *The Hungry Tide* is based on the need to belong to the solidarity and the community of Others. Bhabha’s argument is that “the language of rights and obligations, so central to the modern myth of a people, must be questioned on the basis of the anomalous and discriminatory legal and cultural status assigned to migrant, diasporic, and refugee populations. Inevitably, they find themselves on the frontiers between cultures and nations, often on the other side of the law” (*The Location of Culture* 175). Bhabha’s emphasis is on the postcolonial prerogative which seeks to affirm and extend a new collaborative dimension.

Diasporic formation has various dimensions. Slavery and indentured labour are the causes of dislocation as described in *The Glass Palace* and *Sea of Poppies*. Fear of persecution forces people to move from one place to another as experienced by the Jews. Political strife creates diasporic situation as portrayed in *The Hungry Tide*. Differentiating diaspora from casual travel, Avtah Brah explains that diasporic journeys are essentially about settling down: “The manner in which a group comes to be ‘situated’ in and through a wide variety of discourses, economic processes, state policies and institutional practices is critical to its future. This ‘situatedness’ is central to how different groups come to be relationally positioned in a given context” (444).

The novel centres in the fluidity of identity. Identity is perceived to be in a constant state of flux. Of the various factors that continually influence
identity, history and geography play opponents in this novel. What the former creates, the latter destroys and what the latter moulds the former reshapes here. This is a recurrent phenomenon in the novels set in Bengal because of its significant location in the historical and geographical maps. Bengal that beats around a unique ecosystem, the mangroves in the geographical map is divided between two neighbouring countries by a line of tension.

While historical predicament divides a till then united community citing reasons of religious differences, the people who shared a collective identity based on synchronisation with nature and geography are unable to adapt to the new predicament, the displacement and the estrangement that accompany Partition. The people of the tide country identify with their natural environment irrespective of the country to which it belongs. It is this signification of home as tide country that makes Kusum, an Indian, join the Bangladesh refugees in their exodus towards Morichjhapi. Kusum says: “I listened to them talk and hope blossomed in my heart; these were my people, how can I stand apart? We shared the same tongue, we were joined in our bones; the dreams they had dreamt were no different from my own. They too had longed to watch the tide rise to full flood” (*HT* 165).

Ghosh’s choice of the Sundarbans as the locale of the novel absorbs the mangrove forest into the list of characters. The environment pervades the novel as Nature does in Wordsworth’s poetry. The natural splendour, beauty and might stand on par with that of Nature in Wordsworth’s “The Stolen Boat Ride” or Coleridge’s “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner.” The Sundarbans
stand as the foremost metaphor of ephemerality. As described in the novel, “There are no borders here to divide fresh water from salt, river from sea. The tides reach as far as three hundred kilometres inland and every day thousands of acres of forest disappear underwater only to re-emerge hours later. 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 new shelves and sandbanks where there were none before” (HT 7). The very environment defies boundaries and change is the way of life with the tide country. There is a constant reshaping of land. The land becomes a metaphor focusing on the theme of dynamic boundaries.

Inspired by the transience of environment, Ghosh underscores the impermanence of borders in the other dimensions that determine identity. There is a surprising communion of characters in the novel like Piya and Fokir, and Kanai and Kusum. Piya is an Indian born American cetologist with no knowledge of the Bangla language or the culture of the place while Fokir is a simple tide country fisherman. They are drawn together in a close union by their shared identity with nature. Kanai, who comes from the city, is drawn towards Kusum, a common village girl. After a career long silence, Nirmal finds his muse in Kusum so as to recount the history of the Sundarbans and the Morichjhapi massacre. As John C. Hawley points out, “just as the natural tides of the area tend to obliterate the sense of permanent division between land and sea, Ghosh’s characters gradually learn to recognize the transient nature of divisions between individuals—of whatever social class” (132).
At the core of *The Hungry Tide* is the passionate struggle of the refugees from Bangladesh and people with no political space from other places to establish a niche in the island Morichjhapi in the Sundarbans. The refugees who settled at Morichjhapi originally came from Bangladesh where they were oppressed and exploited both by Muslim communalists and by Hindus of the upper castes. The settlers attempt to claim the uninhabited island and make it their home, in the style of early men. But the government moves to oust them from the island in order to restore it to the tiger population of the place under Project Tiger. The juxtaposing of the humanitarian concern of establishing a home for the homeless against organised governmental environmentalism is an important area of inquiry in *The Hungry Tide*, which registers the sufferings of the voiceless subaltern.

When the refugees were sent forcefully to Dandakaranya in Madhya Pradesh, they were treated like prisoners. Nilima describes their sufferings: “... it was like a concentration camp, or a prison. They were surrounded by security forces and forbidden to leave. Those who tried to get away were hunted down” (*HT* 118). Later all their efforts to establish a hybrid culture for a peaceful survival at Morichjhapi turned to be a failure because of the inhuman policy of the government. The Morichjhapi massacre is one of the shameful pages of history. Hardened men from cities, criminals and gangsters, assisted by the police, killed the people at Morichjhapi in 1979. Horen says to Kanai: “... a group of women were taken away by force, Kusum among
them. People say they were used and then thrown into the rivers, so that they
would be washed away by the tides” (HT 279).

The refugees from Bangladesh, when relocated in Madhyapradesh by
the government of India, did not identify with the place and craved for their
home, the mangroves of Sundarbans. The chief motive in choosing the island
of Morichjhapi is the geographical setting of the mangroves and the related
culture. Converse to the usual human identification within national
boundaries, the tide country people identify themselves with the geography. As
one of the refugees relates about the settlement camp to Kusum during the
exodus to Morichjhapi, “We’d never seen such a place, such a dry emptiness;
the earth was so red it seemed to be stained with blood. For those who lived
there, that dust was as good as gold, they loved it just as we love our tide
country mud. But no matter how we tried, we couldn’t settle there: rivers ran
in our heads, the tides were in our blood” (HT 165). The way the people
identify with the land defies the modern conception of political identity
hinging over to the most primitive means of identifying through belonging to
the geographical feature.

The Hungry Tide largely narrates the struggle of the settlers of
Morichjhapi to establish the place as their home. The settlers who are mostly
refugees from Bangladesh seek this place as they identify themselves with the
basic geography of the mangroves. All the settlers integrate with the place
wholeheartedly as they identify with the place. National boundaries do not
limit them nor appear to influence their choice. These people who choose to
live in the lap of nature simultaneously agree to wage daily battles against the various forces of nature and establish their settlement of home as early man did in the past. They just want to be left alone to fend for themselves. They are prepared to start from scratch. All that they yearn for is freedom to be part of the place and claim a nativity.

The struggle is more than just to claim a place geographically. The struggle is to claim an identity as much as to get located in a place. Identity seems a point in a multi-dimensional grid—language, culture, geography, history and education. The islanders have no solid claim under the various criteria and hence decide to start afresh. But the denial of the claim to the place and the government's attempts to thwart their efforts to settle in a peaceful place manifests as a denial of their right to live.

The identity that the people of Morichjhapi want to create in the particular geography is unbelievable for practical reasons, the place rendering their lives a precarious existence. In spite of the many dangers the people identify themselves with the place in the Sundarbans. They refuse to live in the place offered to them. They feel they are aliens in the place. As the woman from the settlement camp recounts: “We’d never seen such a place, such a dry emptiness; the earth was so red it seemed to be stained with blood” (HT 165). However, “For those who lived there, that dust was as good as gold, they loved it just as we love our tide country mud. But no matter how we tried, we couldn’t settle there: rivers ran in our heads, the tides were in our blood” (HT 165).
Identity is in a constant state of flux. What Nirmal uses to describe the Sundarbans can be attributed to the identity of a human being. As Nirmal quotes from Rilke, “Life is lived in transformation” (HT 225) and human life incarnates as a continuous struggle to define an identity while identity itself is transforming across each moment in time. While speaking of the tide country, Nirmal says that “transformation is the rule of life” (HT 224).

The refugees from Bangladesh tide country are unable to adapt in a different place when they identify the tide country, irrespective of which side of the Partition it falls, as their home. It is this identification of home that unites Kusum with the people for Bangladesh as they journey towards Morichjhapi. The settlers are marginalised people, who are of no concern to their governments, and constitute the subaltern, having been forsaken and disowned by their native countries. Though they belong to diverse cultures, their rootedness in the Sundarbans unites them with the vision of a utopia, a kind of a Dalit nation. This is the same vision that drew Sir Daniel Hamilton to create the district of Gosaba including islands like Lusibari in the Sundarbans in 1903. In both the cases one witnesses the blurring and disappearing of national boundaries in the creation of the tide country.

Concurrently there is an integral convergence of the religious cultures and languages. The faith of the tide country people revolves around the deity duo: Bon Bibi and Shah Jongoli, the former representing the Hindu pantheistic faith and the latter an Islamic champion. While mythology binds them as sister and brother hailing from Mecca, the mode of worship is a wonderful synthesis
of Arabic invocation chanted like a Hindu incantation accompanying a Hindu puja. Even the language and the meter are hybrids. The lines of the invocation “looked like prose and read like verse, a strange hybrid . . . prose that had mounted the ladder of metre in order to ascend above the prosaic” (HT 247).

Underlining the hybridity seen in the tide country it is said 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?” (HT 247). Similarly in a milieu of religious fanaticism and extremism, the tide country’s faith is identified with “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” (HT 247).

In The Hungry Tide as in The Shadow Lines there comes an East-West encounter. While in The Shadow Lines the east and the west are represented by individuals and families from the opposite geographical locations or directions, in The Hungry Tide, the representation is subtle. All the major characters are essentially Indian by birth and nationality but their cultures are inherently different. The East-West encounter is not represented by symbolical characters from both the sides. Rather the encounter is between values and cultural indicators, concepts and ideas.

Postcolonial critics before Bhabha would have seen any East-West encounter as schism, with exclusive presences arranged in a dichotomy. But in all his novels, across cultures, Ghosh creates junctions, where Bhabha would
survey cultural identity seeming to vary in a gradient as the colours of a rainbow. There is no state of compartmentalised polarities with gaps, but convenient spaces for negotiation of identity.

Piya identifies destiny with her research in Orcaella dolphins. The animals are in the verge of losing their place and identity. In such an environment, Piya lands in the tide country with the sole grip of her research and no hold on her native India, as her diasporic predicament with a disturbed domestic set up does not offer her any preparation to encounter her native land. On one hand Piya is an Indian as well as an American. On the other hand, she is neither fully Indian nor fully American. This is the status in which she finds herself when she lands in the tide country for her research.

Piya is born of Indian parents but the culture that she has imbibed is American, having been bought up in America. She has very little conscious grip of Indian culture. Yet her unconscious stirrings towards the language and certain aspects of the Bengali life have deep indelible marks in her consciousness as well as in her memory. For example, the smell of Fokir's cooking kindles in her the long lost memories from her mind about her mother's cooking. Fokir's 'gamcha' reminds her of the one her father treasured like a vice, the one he never used at the same time would not hear of parting with. The sound of Fokir's song reminds her of the tunes from her childhood memory lane.

Piya has deep unconscious roots connecting her to India. Simultaneously her accumulated ideas and thought patterns as well as the
culture that she has consciously adopted are of the West. While the predominant manifestation of her personality is of the West, the East in her springs up spontaneously. Piya’s predicament as an American Indian in a local Indian set up is totally inconvenient and uncomfortable for her till she learns to fit in at the end. Piya belongs to nowhere in a strict sense and hence easily identifies with the Sundarbans as much for the dolphins, as for the realisation of the fluidity of cultural identity and freedom from delimiting cultural definitions in the place.

Ghosh’s challenging of boundaries permeates all the spheres that influence human identity. Even identities related to gender blur out. Piya is portrayed as androgynous. The most interesting ones are the ephemerality of the line between reality and fancy, or truth and myth, and the line between the word and the meaning. Fokir’s world is a stretch of backwater between reality and fancy. At the same time Kanai’s translation of Fokir’s words for Piya merges meaning and voice inseparably, described as, “the sound was Fokir’s, the meaning was Kanai’s, and in the depths of her heart she knew she would always be torn between the one and the other” (HT 360). All this hazing of boundaries creates Bhabha’s third space, the liminal space where the real identities evolve in negotiation and hybridity.

Kusum identifies herself with the community of refugees who are journeying towards Monichjhapi though she is by privilege a native of Lucibari. She throws in her lot with them and risks everything and loses even her life to establish her identity with the people in the end. She withstands
threats, warnings and starvation to establish her identity with the people whom she believed to be her own. She foregoes the chance to save herself by going to Lusibari. Nirmal phrases this decision as: “Where else could you belong, except in the place you refused to leave” (HT 254). Kusum chooses Morichjhapi and stands by her choice till the end.

In *The Hungry Tide* Kusum represents an entire community of displaced refugees settled in Morchjhapi, who are refused the right to live. They symbolize humanity in an ecological imbalance against tigers. The choice is between project tiger and the rehabilitation of the refugees from Bangladesh. There are two overlapping displacement patterns. The refugees choose Morichjhapi because it is the place they are familiar with. They cannot scrub a living in any other place. They dare to risk their lives to create their identity.

The refugees’ claim for Morichjhapi is less for livelihood than for identity. They visualize a model society like the one Hamilton desired a generation ago and initiated in Lusibari. Sir Daniel Hamilton, the colonial master, had power as well as means to realize the dream. On the other hand, Kusum’s people have neither. Their claim to the place is dictated by need and the choice of living. They are the marginalized. Their life is of no concern to the people of power and means. As John C. Hawley says, they are the people “who come into life and pass away without rippling the waves of official history. As far as the records are concerned, they are simply among the legions of unimportant individuals . . . They are voiceless nobodies” (134-35).
The fusion of history and anthropology recreates the identity of the subaltern emerging from an intellectual debate on the conflict between humanism and environmentalism. The prime concern of the novel juxtaposes the place of man against that of other species like the Royal Bengal Tiger and the Gangetic river Dolphin on earth. The argument contrasts anthropocentric point of view with ecocentric perspective.

In the postcolonial period, the situation reminds one of colonial predicament. Ghosh understands the various problems associated with the colonial period still existing in the society in various forms at large, unidentified and unresolved. The government which is the deciding authority in this situation juxtaposes the lives of the people against the lives of tigers. The question as to who is more important is an ecological concern of anthropocentric versus ecocentric ideology. Deep Ecology questions the established idea that human beings are the most important species on earth and all the rest exist for their benefit. This precarious balance of human being against the tigers has significant place in The Hungry Tide.

In an anthropocentric society animals represent the subaltern. They exist for the benefit and of the choice of human beings. They have no choice and stand no priority against industrialization, city expansion and other forms of human greed. But the situation in The Hungry Tide is poignant when it is not the entire humanity that is balanced against the tigers but one significant group. This group is conspicuous because of its dearth in power or means. They do not have a voice. They are displaced with no claims to roots.
They call themselves the “dispossessed.” They belong to no place or society. They are treated as unwanted appendages. The government’s concern regarding the Project Tiger in Morichjhapi may not be genuine as they uphold. Nirmal points this out to Nilima, “. . . Morichjhapi, wasn’t really a forest, even before the settlers came. Parts of it were already being used by the government, for plantations and so on. What’s been said about the danger to the environment is just a sham” (HT 214).

The overlapping of the questions about the lives of the refugees and the tiger is strategic. The dilemma stems from the one root, that is, the prioritisation of the life of the centre that creates the state of the subaltern. It is the same as the colonial marginalization of the colonised. In this background, *The Hungry Tide* becomes a profoundly meaningful cacophony of subaltern voices seeking their place in the world. The islanders of Morichjhapi as well as the tigers of the Sundarbans are given no choice. Their life and their priorities are dictated by the powers outside. The foundations of the ecological concern of the tigers are themselves questionable, because such a priority is not shown to other animal species like the river dolphins, which are also endemic and endangered as Royal Bengal Tiger.

Kusum who is inspiringly strong all through her trials and tribulations of life, breaks down and cries not that she had to go hungry to feed her son, not that they were in siege, not that their lives were threatened, but that their very right to existence was denied. When the government tries to reclaim the island of Morichjhapi by force, threatening the lives of the refugees, Kusum voices
their right to live, that becomes an argument against Project Tiger: "... the worst part was not the hunger or the thirst. It was to sit here, helpless, and listen to the policemen making their announcements, hearing them say that our lives, our existence, was worth less than dirt or dust" (HT 261). Kusum quotes the police announcement, "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 ..." (HT 261). The denial of the right to live is what makes Kusum feel alienated in the world.

The character of Kusum is a remarkable feat of creative imagination. She becomes the mouthpiece of Ghosh when she voices the collective anxiety of the islanders: "Who are these people I wondered, who love animals so much that they are willing to kill us for them?" (HT 262). The words of Kusum—"As I thought of these things it seemed to me that 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" (HT 262)—focus on the problems of the subaltern.

The other side of the argument is posed by Piya in championing the tiger, when a tiger is trapped in a village and the villagers attempt to kill it. Piya argues the cause of Project Tiger with Kanai thus: "Just suppose we crossed that imaginary line that prevents us from deciding that no other species matters except ourselves. What'll be left then?" (HT 301). Nirmal's journal also ponders upon nature versus humanity. While the topic regarding the environment is sounded in different perspectives, Ghosh, not taking sides,
suggests a third space of negotiation between the groups and does not prioritise.

While the refugees and the tigers seem to be adversaries during the siege of the island, in the global commercial context they become fellow sufferers as their survival is of no concern to capitalistic society that is driven towards profit. The refugee settlers, together with the dumb wild animals in being forsaken by the society at large, constitute the subaltern. The cry of the settlers during the siege if the island at a life threatening situation, “Amra kara? Bastuhara. Who are we? We are the dispossessed . . .” might as well be the cry of endangered animals in an anthropocentric run of things (HT 254). The context erases the boundary between human beings and animals. The novel cites other examples for the symbiosis between human beings and animals. The river dolphins are portrayed as friends and saviours of human beings citing instances and evidences from reality as well as mythology.

In the government’s action to restore Morichjhapi they lay siege and later forcefully evacuated the place, killing many and arresting and transporting the rest. Fokir, Kusum’s son is the only survivor. He is totally estranged from his life and surroundings in Lusibari, where he is living with his wife and son. He is at peace only in Garjantola, an island sacred to his family. Their family shrine built by his grandfather is there. It is a place that he had visited with his mother as a boy. In Garjantola he feels close to his mother. The island is significant in the novel. In this island, Fokir’s grandfather took refuge from a great storm. Piya is led by Fokir to the subject
of her research, the river dolphins near this island and ultimately Fokir saves Piya and dies in the same land. The island in many ways signifies Fokir's identity. The waters around the island are Fokir's favourite zones for catching crabs. This is the place where he an illiterate towers Kanai, a dominating character all through the novel. The last encounter between the two is staged in this island, where Fokir's mirage like shifting identity and persona makes Kanai's ego suffer badly. Fokir, in a way, represents the disappeared community of Monchjhapi. He is integrally merged with the environment of the Sundarbans.

Fokir becomes the representative of the subaltern. Of all the characters in *The Hungry Tide*, Fokir is the most interesting creation because of his enigmatic silence. Any attempt to define him using a definite framework becomes difficult because he never expresses his feelings explicitly. However, his love and sacrifice constitute the main action of the novel. Gayatri Spivak's question—"Can the Subaltern Speak?"—gains its importance when the character of Fokir is analysed from the subaltern perspective. He cannot speak because he does speak but nobody hears it. Before his death, he says Moyna's name and Tutul's. It shows his love for his wife and son. His sacrifice is identified in his attempt to save Piya from the tidal wave. Though Piya is the narrator, Fokir is the director of the whole action:

Their bodies were so close, so finely merged that she could feel the impact of everything hitting him, she could sense the blows raining down on his back. 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 (HT 390). Ghosh elevates the character of Fokir in the last four chapters of *The Hungry Tide*.

Piya believes that in spite of the differences of personality and social standing, Fokir and she share principles and perceptions. Kanai, from a metropolitan practical perspective, perceives the attraction between the two and points out the impossibility of any kind of relationship between Piya and Fokir, citing the lack of a common language. He says to Piya: “there’s nothing in common between you at all. You’re from different worlds, different planets. If you were to be struck by a bolt of lightning, he’d have no way of letting you know” (HT 268). The observation appears to be practical truth. But the novel takes relationships across barriers. To Kanai’s identification of fault in Fokir that he had no language in common with Piya, Fokir’s sacrifice is the text in answer. Fokir needs no language. When their lives are threatened by the storm and tidal waves, Fokir wastes no time, explaining the situation. Instead he gears into action to save both, and when the situation demands he pawns his life to save Piya’s. His sacrifice proves relationship to be beyond barriers. His sacrifice needed no language. Fokir’s sacrifice is a text, a discourse outside the structure of language that puts to rest Kanai’s doubt regarding the lack of common language at the brink of danger. Fokir needs no language to relate with Piya.

The novel also underlines the unpredictability and undefinability of human relationships within specific kinship patterns or social definitions.
While Fokir chooses to die to save Piya, his last words are the names of his wife and son. As much as his relationship with Piya cannot be categorised, so much Kusum’s relationship with Horen practically defies understanding or definition. Similarly, the regard that Nirmal feels for Kusum and the significant influence Kusum unconsciously holds on Nirmal are unusual. *The Hungry Tide* rings with the fuzziness of definitions.

The theme of translation that runs as the main thread in the novel underlines man’s way of perceiving the world around, making reality a perception and not reality itself. As a translation is removed from the original, man’s perception of the world is removed from reality. Though the perception is what leads man in his life, much of the contemporary strife stems from the perception in terms of culture and code of life. Quoting Rilke, Nirmal says, “we’re not comfortably at home/ in our translated world” (*HT* 206). Ghosh throws into relief the haziness and the arbitrariness of borders, not undermining differences.

The theme of identity vis-à-vis home runs like a thread in *The Hungry Tide*. It is an important theme in postcolonial literature. In the post-Rushdie literary scene, attempts were made by diasporic writers to foreground the transitory nature of home, especially from geographical point of view. Amitav Ghosh deals with the theme of home in *The Shadow Lines, The Glass Palace, The Hungry Tide* and *Sea of Poppies*. At the personal level, “home” is a place of peace and rest; at the social level, “home” is often relocated. *The Hungry Tide* describes the changing contours which facilitate hybridity. The immense
archipelago, interposed between the sea and the plains of Bengal, stand for the
meaninglessness of artificial borders, becoming a powerful metaphor for the
ephemeral condition of human existence. It is significant that the title of the
concluding chapter of *The Hungry Tide* is “Home: An Epilogue.” At the end of
the novel, Piya says to Nilima: “… for me, home is where the Orcaella are” (*HT* 400). Piya’s concept of home foregrounds the ephemeral condition of
borders.

Ghosh draws attention to diasporic pockets along time which act as
melting pots to cultures but does not assume a totalitarian perspective.
Hybridisation is understood as a natural process not a necessary way of life, as
illustrated by the religion and culture of the people of the Sundarbans in *The
Hungry Tide* and the inescapable failure of a religious hybrid like Din-e-lahi,
instituted by the Mughal emperor, Akbar, with perfect good intensions to bring
together a diverse people under a uniform totality.

*The Hungry Tide* resonates with the roots of identity, human or
otherwise against the background of the historic as well as the natural worlds.
In the *Sea of Poppies* and *River of Smoke*, identity takes a different shape. In
a country where identity is predominantly shaped and determined by
language, caste, birth status, region and state, on board the ship these shades of
identity are shed. The diversity across India is captured in the second part of
*Sea of Poppies*, simultaneously as it records the journey down the river Ganges.
But diverse people, on board the Ibis, come of one mind. Disregarding the
proscriptions of caste and religion, they decide among themselves, “from now
on, there are no differences between us; we are jahaz-bhai and jahaz-bahen to each other; all of us are children of the ship” (SP 356).

The bond of one community formed on board the ship, Ibis, does not evaporate with the end of the voyage. Instead the community evolves into a clan in the diasporic predicament, as narrated in the beginning of River of Smoke. The clan is led by Deeti, who becomes a matriarch, with their own cultural paraphernalia in Mauritius. The clan evolves a hybrid identity called La Fami Colver in their claimed language ‘Kreol’ not Creole. The clan locates itself in Bhabha’s in-between space, and proclaims its identity. The very name of the clan, ‘Colver’, being retained instead of the original ‘Kalua’ testifies to the plasticity of identity.

A very significant aspect of the conceived identity of Deeti’s clan is the way they create a harmony between their displacement or exile and their home or place of origin. In The Shadow Lines, Thamma is baffled with her displacement and is in a dilemma about home. She confuses between coming and going. But in Deeti’s case, home is treated as “Back There” (RS 9). Accommodating the past and the roots in India as well as the extended members of the family, continuously on the move, Deeti’s shrine had a “‘Memory-Temple’—Deetiji-ka-smriti-mandir” (RS 8). The Memory-Temple had paintings of the members of the clan in critical situations in life. It was a folk history.

In River of Smoke, Ghosh reconstructs the places associated to opium trade, especially Canton, of the time before the first Opium war. All along
from Calcutta to Canton, as Bahram journeys carrying a huge shipload of opium, the main business centres are melting pots of cultures. The weekly clothes market in the Chulia kampung in Singapore is a technical moulting spot where the clothes in offer provide identities to choose form. A person may switch identity and easily escape into a new life with new identity in that era of movement. Most of the diaspora of the period is a result of commercial ventures. Canton is an ultimate diasporic settlement that emerged out of opium trade and proves to be as temporary an ecosystem as a shadow rain pool. However, as long as it existed it was a unique cultural melting pot more than a hybrid community. Canton was unique in many aspects, particularly the chief inhabitants being bachelors. It was usually a place of sojourn but had its own cultural practices and norms, along with a language, pidgin. Canton and the waters around it were kaleidoscopic mosaics of cultures. Ghosh captures them on their move with his intense research, reconstructing the entire era.

Emphasizing the fact that “unity”, not “uniformity,” is the objective to be sought, and that “diversity in unity,” rather than “unity in diversity,” should be the goal of a new world, K. Ayyappa Paniker observes:

Indian society is, and has always been, multiracial, multilingual, multi-religious, multiethnic, and so is the world today . . . The lotus flower is many-petalled, so are the rays of the sun, radiating in a wide spectrum and covering the entire multiverse, resplendent and glorious, magnificent and gorgeous in its immaculate splendour, displaying vibrant variety and rich diversity
underlying its unity, celebrating the full orchestral symphony of diversity, resisting standardization, uniformity and homogeneity. (4)

Paniker's argument is that culture is "a mosaic, not a monolith" (4). In the postcolonial globalised milieu, there is an urgent need in the merging and emergence of cultures, and Diaspora becomes a phenomenon to contend with even when one does not physically move from one's own geopolitical space. In this context, identity, which has perpetually been evolving, reaches an intense crisis. Ghosh captures these mosaics with their inherent dynamism in his fiction.

Homi K. Bhabha's concept of hybridity, which is considered to be the most influential as well as controversial, stresses the interdependence of the colonizer and the colonised. Bhabha's focus is on ambivalence and interstitiality. He argues that all cultural systems and statements are constructed in what he calls the "Third Space of Enunciation." In his view, there is not a unified culture that would be distinctive for one particular nation. His concept of the Third Space of Enunciation presents an abstract space where the cultures of two or more opposing powers meet and mingle. His conception is marked as controversial because he rejects the notion of cultural knowledge as an "integrated and expanding code." A culture cannot become a closed system developing on its own because it needs to be put in comparison and under the influences of other cultures even if their differences are incommensurable. These incommensurable elements create cultural hybridity. In fact, human identity is shaped by the context of existence. Human context
is multifaceted and decided geographically, historically, culturally, socially and psychologically. These factors interact among themselves simultaneously, thus creating the identity of an individual or group. In an ever dynamic mosaic of cultures along the map of evolving \textit{milieu}, identity is in a constant state of flux, contrary to conceptions of pure cultures. The Fourth Chapter examines the relevance of innovative techniques employed in Ghosh’s novels and shows how the form effectively contributes to the theme.