CHAPTER-IV

Chapter IV

Displacement of One's *Persona*

Amitav Ghosh's novels deal with the most contemporary issues such as modern man's perennial problems of existential crisis, problems of alienation, problems of restless, rootless and unsettled, problems of marginalization etc. His novel *The Hungry Tide*, depicts the unfulfilled hopes and aspiration of the post war and post partition subaltern classes of the subcontinent.

Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* explores the issues of identities exemplified in the story of the realization of characters. The migrants are perceived of as trespassers; they face the wrath of the local people there and are subjected to torture, attacks and resentment. The people of the tide country have been facing a cultural displacement along with their diasporic experience. The experiences of the migrants are at times advantageous and at times detrimental to their lives. Therefore the reader experiences a two-way response to migration by the arriving migrants in tide country.

In *The Hungry Tide*, Ghosh takes his readers on a cruise to the exotic Sundarbans, a labyrinth of rivers and islands, often subjected to catastrophic floods, storms and famine. It is infested with snakes and crocodiles and is the home for the Royal Bengal tigers and the endangered Gangetic dolphins known as Orcaella. The waves are treacherous and no one dares to make a home here except the truly dispossessed and displaced who are unwanted and who have nowhere else to go. Men are mostly fishermen who depend on the river and sand for fish and crab for sustenance. Each day of their life is unpredictable and the survival is precarious on those islands and also referred to the 'tide country.' Eliza Joseph quotes the words of Shampa Chatterjee in the article

"Morichjhapi Revisited: Historicizing Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*" who remarks, "Ghosh's book is all about the dichotomy - "wild life versus human suffering or destruction of the ecosystem versus human survival . . .""" (119).

Ghosh elaborates an expulsion of a group of people who are not located in a new and foreign land but are displaced because it is a land which brings them face to face with a new way of life, a different environment, they are not accustomed to and are made to live with people different and unfamiliar to them. This is a forced migration or conflict induced displacement. The characters like Piyali, Kanai, Nirmal, Nilima, Fokir, Kusum, Horen and others have gone through a kind of identity crisis because of displacement and diasporas along with 'cultural appropriation' based on other values.

Ghosh fictionalizes the painful struggle and traumatic life of the settlers at Morichjhapi reserved for the conservation of tigers. It is important to keep the land reserved for tigers while human beings should be simply eradicated. The huge amount of economic resources that pour in for the conservation of tigers from different environmental protection groups, enable the forest officials to put their own interest, interest of the forest department and of the Government as their foremost priority. Strangely, deaths of human beings are allowed to continue in the area for centuries.

Amitav Ghosh presents the political sham that is involved in the name of protecting animals and their natural habitat at the cost of innocent lives. He provides an interesting subaltern perspective with Nilima's records of the human-animal dynamics in the tide country: "'Just imagine that!' said Nilima. 'They [forest department] were providing water for tigers! In a place where nobody thinks twice about human beings going thirsty!" (241).

The refugees fight for survival, become the victim of Morichjhapi after the water and food supplies were cut off to the islands to coerce the refugees to flee. The question of rootlessness and deprived classes who are the subaltern agents, sit there helpless and listen to the policemen making their announcements, hearing them say that their lives, their experience, was worth than dirt or dust. When hounded by the police, the desperate outcry of the refugees, are "Who are we? We are the dispossessed'" (254), speaks of the utter failure of modern nation state to voice the moorings of its underprivileged lot.

Migrants experience a sense of rootlessness that could only be made stable with a possible return back home. This further leads to a feeling of alienation as the migrants are in constant search of their identity. What they are and where they belong are questions that nag their minds. They are not able to let go of their old identity nor are they content with their new distinctiveness. What emerges is a sense of belonging that creeps into their minds creating further complications. They are clueless if they should either submerge themselves into the new place and its people or cling on hopelessly to their own nationality. While hankering for the land of their birth they are also placed in a fixed position troubled by the new identity they are absorbed into.

The living conditions of the migrants as described in the novel bring out their sufferings in an alien land, Dandakaranya:

> 'They called it "resettlement",' said Nilima, 'but people say it was more 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.'

> The soil was rocky and the environment was nothing like they had ever known. They could not speak the languages of that area and the local people treated them as intruders attacking them with bows arrows and other weapons. (118)

These helpless refugees are entangled in an even greater battle of life and death. The displaced people in Morichjhapi fall prey to the false hopes and promises given by the Political CPI (M) party that readily lost interest in the refugees' predicament once the party won the elections. The novelist not only exposes the duplicity of the government but also questions the impartial and unfair treatment that is meted out to the weaker sections by those in power and authority.

In the new land, migrants driven out of their country by force are befuddled of their position while undergoing a confused state of mind. The migratory resettlement in a foreign land leaves the migrants with a sense of oddity, no identity and a feeling of estrangement. In a new place amidst new people they live in fear and apprehension. They are left in the lurch with no security to their lives and existence. They are clueless about their future and hesitant of what lies ahead. Displaced people constantly live in trepidation and uncertainty, pessimism and gloom; at times placing the migrants in severe untoward positions in their lives.

Annu Jalas in the article "Dwelling on Morichjhanpi: When Tigers Became 'Citizens', Refugees 'Tiger-Food" comments on the sudden prioritizing of the animals over humans in the Sundarbans followed by the Morichjhapi incident made permanent change in the violent nature of the tigers:

> Shrugging off the colonial and national drape off this bhadra image, it portrayed the animal as one whose gentle, inoffensive nature was irretrievably transformed into that of a man-eater following the bloody events of Morichjhanpi. Highlighting this transformation of their tiger was a way, for the villagers, of reclaiming the forgotten pages of a history which had relegated them to oblivion, an injustice they felt they had been done by the urbanized elite who believed tigers were more precious than them, the nimnobarner or nimnobarger lok." (1758)

In fact these low caste people were conceived merely as tiger food and thus their lives mattered little to the elites. The geographic migrations always confused the established power about their Identity. Government regarded settlers as squatters and land grabbers, whereas they genuinely believed that they are true natives of the place.

Kusum returns to her homeland after eight years as a refugee to claim her share of land. This was expected because normally no human being is devoid of this intense longing of claiming citizenship, identity, home, nation, which is always a tenuous and self-conscious task. Kusum, spirited, tough and full of life flees to Morichjhapi with her son, Fokir to join the refugees of Bangladesh, who become the cause of her life. This concept of self as potentially unified with a place and an aspiration for psychic unity with the needy becomes her hub of freedom. She serves as a true reality of the Sundarbans.

Kusum's self-assertion leads her to the tide country and makes her stretch out a helping hand to refugees and tribal. She decides to fight for the cause of these refugees as she feels aghast at the irrationality of the nation-state, which is willing to butcher people to save animals. Kusum, touches at the core of the issue when she asks herself:

> *Who are these people, . . .who love animals so much that they are willing to kill us for them? Do they know what is being done in their names? Where do they live, these people, do they have children, do they have mothers, fathers? As I thought of these things it seemed to 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. (261-62)*

When Morichjhapi is in turmoil, Kusum, one of the springboards of resistance approaches Nilima for medical help and also to safeguard her people through her 'Union'. Nilima refuses, as she does not want to distant herself from the government and get into trouble by aligning with the refugees, as ". . . she could not afford to alienate the government" (122). She makes herself clear by saying, "'*I simply cannot allow the Trust to get involved in this. There's too much at stake. . .you have no ideas 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. I can't take that chance*'" (214). She is insensitive to the cause of the people of Morichjhapi who have been imagined as violators of the Forest Act. The voice of bureaucracy that speaks through her is revealed in her words to Kusum: "*Those people are squatters; that land doesn't belong to them; it's government property. How can they just seize it? If they're allowed to remain, people will think every island in the tide country can be seized. What will become of the forest, the environment?*'" (213).

Ghosh uses Kusum's voice to apprise the readers how the government had stepped up pressure on the settlers: "Policemen and officials had visited [the place] and offered inducements for them to leave. When these proved ineffective, . . ." (223) they

resorted to threats of physical violence as their next strategy. The island was besieged by boatloads of policemen waiting for orders to attack. Kusum is able to instigate the radical spirit in Nirmal. She tells Nirmal about the fierce steadfastness of the settlers, braving thirst and hunger, brushing aside the threats of police violence, as they listened to the callous, dehumanizing announcements thrust at them through loudspeakers: " "*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 round the world*"" (261). Kusum wondered who those people were who " . . . *love animals so much that they are willing to kill us for them?"* (262).

Nirmal joins Kusum developing an ideological intimacy. He, who is a revolutionist and a humanist, is quick to retort that it was discrimination against the settlers. He says "*Were the dreams of these settlers less valuable than those of a man like Sir Daniel just because he was a rich shaheb and they impoverished refugees?'"* (213). Nirmal finds poetry in the life of the settlers and sprinkles an ink of revolution in their struggle. His quest for identity is attained by his identification with the settlers of Morichjhapi. He shares the existential struggle of the settlers and their shouts instill an inquisitive search for his own identity, the nature of his belonging: "*And as I listened to the sound of those syllables, it was as if I were hearing the deepest uncertainties of my heart being spoken to the rivers and the tides. Who was I ? Where did I belong? In Kolkata or in the tide country? In India or across the border? In prose or in poetry?* (254).

Nirmal's transformation is effected by his embracing the life of a revolutionist in the cause of the dispossessed and the displaced. He feels that he has been leading a lonely

life earlier and it is through his participation with the lives of the marginalized and the socially deprived Kusum that he comes to learn his mission in life. Ghosh highlights that it is only through the eyes of the disadvantaged people that the people like him undergo psychic transformation, resulting in realization of their selves. The past in Nirmal and his dialogues with young Kanai mark the 'human-concern' for the lives of refugees.

It is Horen who knew Kusum and Nirmal better than anybody else and his words cleared all misapprehensions about them. Horen knew that Nirmal loved Kusum for the spirit of freedom and liberation from oppression that she signified and fought for with selfless devotion. Horen tells Kanai how the soldiers came in boats and dinghies and " they burnt the settlers' huts, they sank their boats, they laid waste to their fields'" (279). Women were rapped and thrown into the rivers and dozens of settlers were killed. Horen says " 'Whatever you can imagine them doing, they did' (279). He continues to say that no one knows for sure what had happened to Kusum and Nirmal. In his words " . . . What I've heard is that a group of women were taken away by force, Kusum among them. People say they were used and then thrown into rivers, so that they would be washed away by the tides. Dozens of settlers were killed that day. The seas claimed them all'" (279). Kanai agrees that ". . .what Kusum stood for was the embodiment of Rilke's idea of transformation'" (282).

Helpless people like Kusum have been subjected to miserable conditions for no fault of theirs. The question that emerges here is what the sacrifice of Kusum means to her nation. She fights against all odds for her peoples' welfare but her sacrifice means nothing to her nation. Fighting selflessly for the rehabilitation of her people Kusum leaves behind her family, her only son, Fokir. She deprives Fokir of her love and care for

the sake of the collective good of her people. The entire loss is of the young Fokir who lives his life without the warm comfort of his mother, the only family that he has. In spite of all that the small family of this mother and son has no place in the history of the nation.

The truth is perhaps painful because though Kusum gives up her family and son for the people of her country, history has not been sensitive enough towards a contribution by unhistorical people. Nirmal may have written down in his notebook every detail of the event along with Kusum's participation and sacrifice leaving it behind for his nephew, Kanai with the hope that Kanai will spread the word. The novel approaches the question of refugees from the human angle and exposes the apathy of politicians from across the borders. Ghosh informs in the author's note that the event is completely wiped out from the public discourse except for Nirmal's diary, which has been recovered after many years of his death.

Nilima summons Kanai because of a package left to him by her late husband, Nirmal, which has just been found some twenty years after his death. Kanai, now a Delhi-based linguist who runs his own translation firm makes his visit to Lusibari to retrieve the journal of his dead uncle, Nirmal that has surfaced after many years and to get it published if possible. When Kania revisists the island to comply to Nilima's request, he meets Piya in the train.

Piyali Roy, an Indian by birth but American by culture ventures to the tidal country of Sundarbans to undertake research on the Gangetic dolphins. Piya is headed for Canning to the Forest department office, which would give her the permit to enter the Sundarbans for her research on the marine mammals. Piya, and Kanai have more to do

with the geographical and conservational aspects of the tidal land. The novel is structured on individual quests – Piyali's quest for information about the dolphins and Kanai's quest for the circumstances leading to his uncle's mysterious death in 1979. Nevertheless, it seems destiny had other plans for Kanai and Piya.

Kanai still considers the place as culturally uninhabitable, culturally inhospitable. He solicits Piya's company at the island so as to lighten his burden of staying in a culturally marginalized place: " Come. I'm inviting you. Your company will lighten the burden of my exile'" (13). Sundarban remains a secluded place because of its geographical location and the insignificance of the so-called lower caste people in the political structure of the nation. No wonder therefore Sundarbans has always been looked upon as a land of jungle and animals with some low caste people of little importance.

The package now left to Kanai contains an account of the events at the end of Nirmal's life, which revolved around Kusum, her son Fokir, and the catastrophic struggle of the dispossessed to form a new society on the island of Morichjhapi. Kanai also sees the inhumanity of the government endeavour, and tells Piya:

> . . . aren't we a part of the horror as well? . . . it was people like you, . . . who made a push to protect the wildlife here, without regard for the human cost. And I'm complicit because people like me – Indians of my class, . . . have chosen to hide these costs, basically in order to curry favour with their Western patrons. It's not hard to ignore the people who're dying – after all they are the poorest of the poor. (300-01)

The notebook records Nirmal's sensitive and empathetic version of the struggle of the refugees relocating at Sunderbans. The refugees coming in exodus from East Bengal,

because of the communal violence during the post Partition phase of the Indian Subcontinent, pose trouble for the state. They have been relocated in Dandyakarnya in Madhya Pradesh, an arid land culturally alien to the refugees. They make the last effort to come back to Sundarbans and settle there through the co-operative system of working together disregarding the smaller divisions of caste, religion etc. The emergence of a bristling community against every hardship points to the phenomenal will power of the poor people:

> *Saltpans had been created, tubewells had been planted, water had been dammed for the rearing of fish, a bakery had started up, boat-builders had set up workshops, a pottery had been founded as well as ironsmith's shop; there were people making boats while others were fashioning nets and crablines; little marketplaces, where all kinds of goods were being sold, had sprung up. All this in the space of a few months! It was an astounding spectacle—as though an entire civilization had sprouted suddenly in the mud.* (190-91)

However this brisk society living in harmony among themselves in close proximity with nature and away from the mainstream community in Kolkata is disrupted when a tussle between the settlers and the government takes place. Nirmal who has always tried to enthuse himself with the revolutionary spirit and movement seems to have been resuscitated even when his retirement from service is nearing. Kanai who has always been concerned with himself and his own position in the society learns the sad story of Morichjhapi massacre from Nirmal's notebook. Nirmal records the struggle of the islanders in his notebook which he wants Kanai to read it and thereby thinks of the

possibility of ensuring its circulation to the wider audience: " . . . *I can make sure at aleast that what happened here leaves some trace, some hold upon the memory of the world*" (69). But sadly even this last ray of hope to bring to the world the other side of the history of the event of Morichjhapi is lost forever when Kanai loses the notebook: "I was bringing it back here, carefully wrapped in plastic. But I slipped in the water, and it was swept out of my hands" (386). The optimism with which Nirmal leaves behind the notebook for his nephew crumbles to the ground.

The entire Morichjhapi event with irresolute spirit of the settlers who create a habitation for themselves in an hostile environment, the determination of the West Bengal government despites its leftist ideology to uproot these poor people using violence, the apathy of the intellectuals from whom these settlers expect sympathy and admiration reestablishes the views voiced by Ania Loomba whose words have been reiterated by Nishat Zaidi in the article "Myth-History Interface in Fiction and Nation: A Reading of Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide.*" It is said "Nations are communities created not simply by forging certain bonds but also by fracturing or dividing others; not merely invoking and remembering certain versions of the past but making sure that others forgotten or repressed" (111).

Ghosh explores the post-colonial issues like the sense of belonging. The idea of 'home' is not necessarily bound with nationalism, for the identity affirmed by nationalism, should not be taken as absolute or fixed. Ghosh's persistent preoccupation has been to deconstruct various identity forming components and their limitations. His quest for identity involves a philosophic perception, which investigates into the division among people.

The characters who live their lives around the conflicting poles of 'home' and 'homelessness' are Nilima and Nirmal. Nilima is enterprising and she can do anything to secure the space to which she belongs. She is a practical thinker and an activist who looks into the immediate problems of the settlement colony of Lusibari. Appalled by the dire poverty of the tide country people, she organized the women of the island, mostly widows, and founded the Badabon Trust, which brought help, medicine and finally a hospital to the place. Over the years her dedicated work immensely benefited the islanders and brought them a semblance of respectability and financial independence. Her life-long service to the destitute and dispossessed did not go unrewarded. The Badabon Trust was officially recognized as a model NGO in India and Nilima was decorated with one of the country's highest honours by the President.

Nilima is disappointed with Nirmal who wears unsettlement as a kind of style apparel, flapping along, away from the specificities of one's existence into a state of reckless fluidity. A selfless state, a state where one experiences a unique fusion with the world's problems is one, which Nirmal graduates. On the contrary Nilima cannot emerge out of her state of fixity, her self-created universe of Lusibari.

In the local universe of Lusibari, Moyna, wife of Fokir and Nilima are the pathfinders, incarnating the subtlest and surest ways to achieve success. Home for them is sacrosanct, for it is here that preparation to meet the challenges of life begins. Transcendence is Moyna's objective, her preparation for it starts at home; home is where she has learnt to overcome the imponderables erected by destiny. The love for her home is her greatest strength. She exploits the possibilities available here whereas Fokir's love for life across frontiers, towards which the river flows, is what sustains him.

In Kanai's case 'home' for him is the translated world, a world where language acts as an instrument to dilute the objective reality. Kanai as he claims lives in a translated world, a world to which he returns, when his love for Piya goes unreciprocated. A return to home for him means unreciprocated love and pursuit of new desires. A fine distinction is made between the statements made by Nilima and Piya on their concepts of 'home'. To Nilima ". . . home is where the Orcaella are" and to Piya ". . . home is wherever [she] can brew a pot of good tea'" (400). On one hand there are characters who see home as a site of conflict, on the other there are characters who see it as a metaphor for unity and harmony.

There is another character that comes between Piya and Kanai – Fokir, the poor fisherman from Lusibari. Born and brought up in this vast archipelago, he has a set of priorities different from those of the upwardly mobile Kanai and the globe trotting Piya. Fokir saves Piya from a boatman and the forest guard accompanying her tried to ill-treat and sexually threaten on her expedition into the river. Piya hires the service of Fokir, an unlettered but skilled fisherman, to track the dolphins in the labyrinthine rivers of Sundarbans.

Ghosh raises the debate of environmental conservation, which must take cognizance of the local issues. In the forced evacuation of the island there was a battle not just between environmentalists and the settlers, but rather between the elites of the metropolis and the hapless poor people living culturally at the lower rung of the society. Ghosh comments on the environmental issues, diagnoses the governmental attitude to the poor, hapless islanders vis-a-vis environment in the subaltern identity of the people concerned. The refugees belong to the lowest rung of the caste-ridden society and are

summarily rejected by the elite as people of any importance. Ghosh highlights this through Piya's confrontation with a mob relishing at the killing of a tiger.

Piya's rage reached to unbearable height when she witnesses Fokir, her companion and trusted guide on water joining the party. She intercepts and struggles to stop Fokir from hurting the animal. Piya, a cardholder of western environmentalism has always been indoctrinated in its abstract ideas and has no notion of how this is experienced by people who face it. She is utterly dismayed at the fury and joy with which the islanders catch and kill a tiger, which happens to prey in the village.

Kanai who has been with Piya struggles to reason with the latter asking her to see the incident from Fokir's point of view. Piya fails to switch her position and argues: "'This is an animal, Kanai'... 'You can't take revenge on an animal'"(294). Her concern for the natural rights of animals overshadows her sensitivity to human life. For Piya, nature is constructed as a 'place' and the narrowness of their culture's assumption about the natural world limits their ability to envision a sustainable model for the development of human society. Fokir represents the biocentric world-view in terms of broadening of human conception of global community to include non-human life forms and the physical environment.

Consequently Piya revises her earlier estimate of Fokir with whom, she believes, she communicates even when there is barrier of language and culture. Piya spends a few days in her research expedition on the dolphins with Fokir who knows every nook and corner of the dolphin's natural habitat as if it were his own home. The research work Piya undertakes requires her to be on water with Fokir, her guide on river and his intimacy effects transformation in her. Her development starts with her gradual understanding of

Fokir. She is drawn to Fokir by his extraordinary ease and expertise on water enchants her: "I've worked with many experienced fishermen before but I've never met anyone with such an incredible instinct: it's as if he can see right into the river's heart'"(267). Those few days with a series of events in Piya's life and her silent bonding with Fokir and his son, Tutul remain an unforgettable part of her life. She is touched by his essentially humane nature uncontaminated by any ideology.

According to Sukanta Das who in the article "Towards an Alternative Identity: Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*" writes "Though Piya and Fokir are separated by a number of sociological determinants like class, language, race, nationality, culture, education, etc., they however do not fail to strike amiable rapport with each other. Piya's growing relation with Fokir thus contests the concept of Identity as fixed, stable as the former develops intimacy through her sensitive approach to Fokir" (108).

Piya's identity of her obvious Americanness and a woman of science undergoes graudual intellectual and psychic transformation after her meeting and subsequent interaction with Fokir. He and Piya share a common love – love for nature and love for the Irawaddy dolphins. They have no communication barrier even though they do not understand each other's language. Piya neither speaks nor understands Bengali and Fokir knows no English. Still they share a creative and aesthetic bond that goes beyond language.

On the other hand Kanai fluent in several languages is unsuccessful in appreciating the relationship between Piya and Fokir as he fails to appreciate the limitations of nationality or language in constructing an identity for the individuals. He cannot understand how Piya, an embodiment of science could develop interest in Fokir.

In the words of Ghosh Piya's grateful acknowledgement of her fruitful encounter with Fokir is highlighted with these words: ". . . one of the most exciting experiences of my life'"(268). This is sarcastically dismissed by Kanai when he says "A sudden stab of envy provoked Kanai to make a mocking aside. 'And all that While, you couldn't understand a word he was saying, could you?"(268). He further establishes the difference between Piya and Fokir by saying " 'Piya there's nothing in common between you at all. You're from different worlds, different planets" (268).

On their journey to track the dolphins, Piya and Fokir encounter a terrible storm resulting in the eventual death of Fokir. Piya deeply mourns the tragic death of Fokir. Piya never feels the inadequacy of language in translating her unspoken thoughts and communicating them to Fokir: "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). She has the moral responsibility to look after Moyna and Tutul. As a mark of moral obligation she arranges to buy them a house and even provide college education for Tutul. Piya has chartered out her future project regarding the research work; she would undertake under the aegis of Badabon Trust, which she wishes to nickname it after Fokir and would engage Moyna in helping her with the data.

The death of Fokir brings a change in Piya and Kanai. The novelist begins to recognize that Kanai and Piya are entering into an experience that might be read as a quest for their souls. They realize the insignificance of stray individual human efforts in isolation. They also realize that science cannot stand up before the fury of Nature. Piya

talks about Sundarbans as her home. The idea of 'home' is therefore something not constructed by territorial boundary but by love, sympathy and fellow feeling. She says ". . . 'for me, home is where the Orcaella are: so there's no reason why this couldn't be it'"(400). Piya does not feel the need to go back to America. Nilima is surprised to hear Piya talking about Sundarbans as her 'home.' Piya learns to jettison all the acquired ideas regarding identities and loves a man who never shares her education, language, culture, and starts loving a place so distant from 'home.' Ghosh's quest for identity involves a philosophic perception, which investigates into the division among people.

Kanai's feeling for Fokir changes when stranded in the mud band in Garjontola island and is saved from the tiger. He treated Fokir as an inferior before the incident but later on needs Fokir's skill for his survival. He respects Fokir's knowledge of his profession, place and nature and realizes his own shortcomings. Kanai's first step towards his quest for identity starts with his acknowledgement of his linguistic skill: ". . . I learnt how little I know of myself and of the world" (353). His search for identity consists in his crossing the border – social, linguistic and cultural. The novelist emphasizes that identity of a person though dependent upon various sociological factors cannot be fixed, absolute or stable. He learns to appreciate Fokir's situation, which he has earlier been undermining.

Banibrata Mahanta in the article "Of Cultural Constructs and Human Dilemmas: Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*" writes:

> [Fokir's] life is an example of how man can develop a worldview, which does not treat nature just as another frontier. Rather it calls for extension of ethics – the broadening of human's conception of the global community

> to include non-human life forms and the physical environment. This call for cultural change is realized through Fokir's innate biorhythmic adjustment in his locality, which is in contrast to the faulty cultural assumptions of Piya and Kanai and their ability to envision an ecological sustainable human society. (66)

All the three major characters, Fokir, Kanai and Piya reflect the contrast of emotions in their relationship because of which there develops a complexity that leads to contradictions of emotions amongst them. Emotions evolve and grow and mature with the passing of time. Along with the emotions, the thinking and mindset also changes with the life changing events in one's life. Ghosh portrays people's quest for identity and their different views on home and homelessness. Through this theme the novelist brings in the struggle of each person to find his or her place in the dangerous environment of Sundarbans. The hostile environment erases all societal strategy because everyone is an equal in the struggle to survive in the hostile environment.

The novel is open ended, indicating not an end but a new beginning from all sorts of inner confusions and ignorance inherent in characters. Through the enticing narrative, Ghosh dexterously delineates these conflicts in one's identity-formation, in which nature (geography), fate (history) and human endeavour criss-cross in the life of various characters having a background in the form of cultural landscape based on *jangal*. The local cultural landscape or the visible imprint of human activity in the *jangal* reflects their values, norms and the aesthetics of their culture. This also includes how they have shaped the environment to serve their own purposes, and how they themselves become a part of

the 'total environment' by developing a 'sense of place' of their own, grown out of the experience of displacement, diaspora and a dream of a new society.

Das, Sukanta, in "Towards an Alternative Identity: Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*" says

> Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* which engages in the exploration of the question of validity of borders and constructs the notion of fluid identity as explicated in the book is well supplemented in the symbolic import invested in the constant shifting of the geographical territory of land and water. The ever-eroding border of land and water in the geographical setting of the book only supports the shifting nature of identity. (113)

The Hungry Tide is the story of one such community of people who, having come unmade from their ancestral roots, try to remake themselves in a place where, as Nirmal writes in his notebook, 'transformation is the rule of life'(224). Ghosh's fiction has always been about communities coming 'unmade' or 'remaking' themselves.

The voice of the common men, their struggle and sacrifices which go unnoticed in the annals of the history began to get a prominent voice in the fiction of Amitav Ghosh in a different way. He lets the 'tide country' break down the barriers of both society and his characters. The past looks at the present for a better future. The sufferings of the displaced are tinged with the hope of arrival and an opening of new vistas in the future.