Chapter Seven

Translating Life-Worlds

The Hungry Tide

Myths have a vital meaning. Not merely do they represent, they are the psychic life of the primitive tribe, which immediately falls to pieces and decays when it loses its mythological heritage, like a man who has his soul. A tribe's mythology is its living religion whose loss is always and everywhere, even among the civilized, a moral catastrophe. — C.G. Jung, *The Modern Mind*, 1965

On the country has gathered the idea of a natural way of life: of peace, innocence, and simple virtue. On the city has gathered the idea of an achieved centre: of learning, communication, light, [...] the city as a place of noise, worldliness and ambition; on the country as a place of backwardness, ignorance, limitation. A contrast between country and city, as fundamental ways of life, reaches back into classical times. — Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City*, 1973

Amitav Ghosh's anticolonial spirit finds its consummate expression in *The Glass Palace*. His next novel *The Hungry Tide* (2004) is less ambitious in scope than the epic grandeur of its preceding one. In stark contrast to the diasporic peregrinations that dominate the bulk of Ghosh's oeuvre, the action of *The Hungry Tide* is located in the swampy mangrove forests at the mouth of the Gangetic delta. Contemplating on this marked shift, Ghosh confesses that the novel, intimately related with his family, initiates the return of an expatriate writer: "This is my first book that is completely located and situated in Bengal and it was very important to me for exactly that reason [...] I feel in some mental and emotional way that I'm in a process of returning – which will take me a long, long time – and it is currently underway" (*The Chronicle Interview*, 3). One of the major enterprises in this novel is to synthesize two antithetical life-worlds, in fact his own schizophrenic split: "For myself, even though I'm very much a part of urban India, indeed the urban world, my mind has always been drawn to the marginal, the remote and the rural. So it came as almost a natural thing for me to want to write about these aspects, to see in what ways I could reconcile them" (*The Chronicle Interview*, 5). Indeed, syncretism is Ghosh's literary credo.

The Hungry Tide has had a multifarious critical reception. Emphasizing the intimate nature of Ghosh's most humanistic venture, John C. Hawley contends that "[i]f much of Ghosh's writing mediates on the arbitrary and vexing nature of national borders, this book is surely obsessed with more personal divisions between men and women" (131). Anshuman A. Mondal, on the contrary, chooses to focus on the thoroughly impersonal "government servants and government machinery as a corrupt system of power which seeks knowledge only for the purposes of political control and believes other forms of knowledge to constitute a threat" (66). Some critics bring in different theories of identity to expostulate their thesis. Attempting a comparative study of *The Hungry Tide* and Rohinton Mistry's *A Fine Balance*, Debashree Dattaray believes that the two novels "reveal how 'nation', in the Indian context may be interpreted as a collection of linguistic identities or a composite religious and socio-political identity" (143). Arguing in a similar vein, Nishat Zaidi considers the novel as "yet another addition in Ghosh's project of heteroglossic national identity" (76). Departing from all these contentions Hywel Dix forthrightly terms the novel a "narrative of dispossession" (127). Such diverse literary interpretations of the same novel reveal its intricate nature.

The architectonics of space form a major organizing principle in a narrative. Expatiating on the novel's specialty to interweave the global and the local, Ghosh observes in his essay "The March of the Novel through History" that

> [t]he novel as a form had been vigorously international from the start; [...] And yet, the paradox of the novel as a form is that it is founded upon a myth of parochiality, in the exact sense of a parish – a place and charted, a definite location. A novel [...] must always be set somewhere: it must have a setting, and within the evolution of the narrative this setting must, classically, play a part almost as important as those of the characters themselves. Location is thus intrinsic to a novel. (*II*, 294)

Almost all of Ghosh's preceding novels traverse an extensive geographical terrain. While *The Circle of Reason* spreads across India, the Gulf region and northern Africa, *The Shadow Lines* shifts between London, Dhaka and Kolkata across different temporal divides. While *In An Antique Land* and *The Calcutta Chromosome* interweave the past and the present connecting India and Egypt and India and the United States respectively, The Glass Palace encompasses vast swathes of India, Burma and Malaya. In contrast, *The Hungry Tide* examines the

microcosm of human experience in the wilderness of the archipelago of tiny islands and the labyrinthine waterways of the Sundarbans. Location does not merely serve as the background in *The Hungry Tide* with human subjects in the foreground. Instead, the Sundarbans becomes one of the principal agents in the action and probably the most memorable figure to emerge from the events. This extensive geographical terrain, the novel's chronotope, is the dominant metaphor for porosity of all rigid compartmentalizations. In his perceptive review of the novel, Alok Rai asserts that "in speaking about 'the tide country', Ghosh seems to have found the perfect landscape, one that 'says' almost everything that he has been writing about for so long and with such eloquence" (1). In this remote environment where nature is found red in tooth and claw, all demarcations diffuse:

> 'There are no borders here to divide fresh water from salt, river from sea. The tides reach as far as three hundred kilometers 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.' (*The Hungry Tide*, 7)

In this tide country where environment is transformed every moment, nothing is certain and stable. By fusing time-space as an inseparable whole, the novelistic chronotope of the Sundarbans subverts the binaries of culture/nature. Bakhtin describes the artistic chronotope thus: "spatial and temporal indicators are fused into a carefully thought-out, concrete whole. Time as it were thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history" (*The Dialogic Imagination*, 84). This primal landscape, presented as a colossal and mysterious figure, is Janus-faced. Its richly evocative description as "the trailing threads of India's fabric, the ragged fringe of her sari, the *ākchol* that follows her" (*HT*, 6) is juxtaposed with its destructive aspect: "'At no moment can human beings have any doubt of the terrain's utter hostility to their presence, of its cunning and resourcefulness, of its determination to destroy or expel them'" (*HT*, 8). There is no hospitality in the tide country. Ghosh's uncanny waterscape that alternates between being subject and object, victim and victimizer, land and water can never really be "home" because it can never provide stability, security and freedom from fear. It is a space where the perceiver finds himself simultaneously "at home" and "not at home." Further, there is a sense of a primeval secret buried deep in the

earth itself when Nirmal speaks about "how skilful the tide country is in silting over its past" (*HT*, 69, also 229). The Sundarbans is an embodiment of post-structuralist space with a palimpsest of differentiated human and natural activity existing in a state of perpetual tension. An emblem of dynamic space it is an apt illustration of the Foucaldian concept of "heterotopias" which represents "the space in which we live, which draws us out of ourselves, in which the erosion of our lives, our times and our history occurs, the space that claws and gnaws at us" ("Of Other Spaces", 23).

The Sundarbans is not simply an isolated remote environment with no substantial interaction with mankind. A site of polysemous layers, it is a zone of contact between multiple cultural, national, and religious communities:

> This is after all no remote and lonely frontier – this is India's doormat, the threshold of a teeming subcontinent. Everyone who has ever taken the eastern route into the Gangetic heartland has had to pass through it – the Arakanese, the Khmer, the Javanese, the Dutch, the Malays, the Chinese, the Portuguese, the English. It is common knowledge that almost every island in the tide country has been inhabited at some time or other. (*HT*, 50)

It is thus a palimpsest of "sedimented layers of socialization, one within the other, one on top of the other, until a complex natural-social landscape occurs" (Murdoch, 1). But such is the all-absorbing nature of this Titanic landscape that it reduces all historical processes and cultural formations into nothingness: "the specialty of mangroves is that they do not merely recolonize land; they erase time. Every generation creates its own population of ghosts" (*HT*, 50). W. R. Greer believes that choosing the Sundarbans as his setting allows Ghosh "to create a setting where everyone is on an even footing [...] the hostile environment erases all social strata because everyone is an equal in the struggle to survive in the hostile environment"(1). The threatening topography of the Sundarbans, elides differences between the First World and the Third World, the local and the global, the rural and the urban, the traditional and the modern, and among linguistic, religious, and class barriers. Nature serves as the agent to level all social and cultural hierarchies.

Human history enmeshes with geographical features to create the image of a total organism, a composite being that conforms to the postulates of post-structuralist new geography's emphasis on "heterogeneous relations" between "natural and social and the human and the non-human" helping "human

geographers to reach across the human-physical divide" (Murdoch, 3). The idealist Nirmal who privileges mind over matter in his contention that "'[a] place is what you make of it'" (*HT*, 283) tries to achieve a microcosm/macrocosm interface in his conception of spatial imagination: "'For him it meant that everything which existed was inter-connected: the trees, the sky, the weather, people, poetry, science, nature. He hunted down facts in the way a magpie collects shiny things. Yet when he strung them all together, somehow they did become stories – of a kind'" (*HT*, 282-283). This inclusiveness is Ghosh's literary credo. Novel/spatial imagination is hence the over-arching phenomenon that embraces the totality of lived experience.

This remote location has an accretion of historical layers that is deeply rooted. For anyone who is easily deceived about the absence of history in this space, Nirmal's contention serves as a perfect reminder: "yet in the tide country, where life was lived on the margins of greater events, it was useful also to be reminded that no place was so remote as to escape the flood of history" (*HT*, 77). That forces of history do have an impact on the wilderness is cogently expressed by the novelist himself:

> [...] you don't expect to encounter history in a place like that. The strange thing is that when you look at any place closely, you discover that a place that seems empty of history is actually deep layered. It is like an onion; you can just keep peeling layers and never come to a core; there is always more. This proved to be exactly the case with the Sundarbans: there was layer upon layer of things to be seen and heard. (*The Chronicle Interview*, 2)

The narrative interweaves oral cultures of myth/folklore with written historical records. Exploring the history of the place, Nirmal's diary begins with the Hindu legend from the Puranic tradition of Shiva controlling the vibrant and torrential Ganga in his braids thereby preventing the universe from drowning. The region, however, owes its existence not to this popular version of the myth but to its lesser known twist which "comes as a surprise, because it is never told and thus never imagined" (*HT*, 6). This version explains that "there is a point at which the braid comes undone; where Lord Shiva's matted hair is washed apart into a vast, knotted tangle. Once past that point the river throws off its bindings and separates into hundreds, maybe thousands, of tangled strands" (*HT*. 6). Myth/legend thus narrates a sacred history. It relates an event that took place in primordial Time. It

describes how through the action of Supernatural agents the Cosmos or only a fragment of reality came into existence.

"There is no village in India, however mean", asserts Raja Rao in his Foreword to *Kanthapura*, "that has not a rich *sthala-purana*, or legendary history, of its own" (v). The Sundarbans, too, has its *sthala-purana* or spatial history, the legend of Bon Bibi. Such is the specific rootedness of this history that even Kanai, a skilled translator, acknowledges his inability to translate Bon Bibi's hymn when Fokir chants it: "in those words there was a history that was not just his own but also of this place, the tide country" (*HT*, 354). Even the city-bred Nirmal who dismissed this myth as "'all the usual stuff [...] Gods, saints, animals, demons'" (*HT*, 102) and dubbed it "false consciousness" (*HT*, 222) finally concedes that "those words were much more than a part of a legend: this was the story that gave this land its life" (*HT*, 354). The Bon Bibi legend not only provides means for human behaviour to the tide country people but also gives meaning and value to their lives. By ceremonially recounting the myth or by performing the rituals associated with it, these marginalized beings "live" the myth, seized by the sacred, exalting power of the events recollected or re-enacted. The myth "lives" in Fokir and "in some way, perhaps, it still plays a part in making him the person he is" (*HT*, 354). The illiterate Fokir has internalized the myth to such an extent that since his childhood "*these words have become a part of him*" (*HT*, 248, italics original). "Living" a myth entails a genuinely "religious" experience elevated from the mundane, everyday existence. The "religiousness" of this experience is due to the fact that "one re-enacts fabulous, exalting, significant events, one again witnesses the creative deeds of the Supernaturals; one ceases to exist in the everyday world and enters a transfigured, auroral world impregnated with the Supernaturals' presence" (Eliade, 19). The mythical events are hence not only commemorated but also reiterated and re-lived. The essence of myth lies in repetition, not change. What it implies is that through the re-enactment of the myth one jumps out of linear or chronological time and lives in the primordial time. The mythical figures become contemporaneous with the present and all temporal divisions are dissolved:

> To re-experience that time, to re-enact it as often as possible, to witness again the spectacle of the divine works, to meet with the Supernaturals and relearn their creative lesson through all the ritual reiterations of myths. In short, myths reveal that the

> world, man, and life have a supernatural origin and that this history is significant, precious and exemplary. (Eliade, 19)

As a "vital ingredient" of human civilization, myth thus "expresses, enhances and codifies belief; [...] safeguards and enforces morality; [...] vouches for the efficiency of ritual and contains practical rules for the guidance of man" (Malinowski, 101).

Transmitted orally across different temporal epochs, the cultural narrative of Bon Bibi does have a written version. It is attributed to a Muslim author Abdur-Rahim bearing the title *Bon Bibir Karamoti orthat Bon Bibi Johurnama* ("The Miracles of Bon Bibi or the Narrative of Her Glory"). Kanai, who witnessed the theatrical representation of the legend, was surprised to see that unlike the conventional Hindu mythologies it was set neither in the heavens nor on the banks of the Ganges but in the Arabian city of Medina with mosques and minarets at the background. This cultural syncretism permeates the linguistic sphere as well. For Nirmal the folklore manifested "*a strange variety of Bangla, deeply interpenetrated by Arabic and Persian* [...] *the pages opened to the right, as in Arabic, not to the left as in Bangla. Yet the prosody was that of much of Bangla folklore*" (*HT*, 246-247, italics original). Dissolving generic boundaries by combining prose and poetry, the folklore is indeed "*a strange hybrid*" (*HT*, 247, italics original). What is more hymns to the figurines of Bon Bibi and Shah Jongoli are recited as in any other household Hindu puja, but they all begin with invocations to "Bismillah" of the Queen and repeatedly refer to Allah. To the American cetologist Piya, a denizen of a remote life-world, Fokir's worship of Bon Bibi in this hybrid manner seems to be a "strange little ritual" (*HT*, 152). This exchange of identities between Hindu and Islam religions and their harmonious co-existence elucidate Vladimir Propp's observations on folklore as a site of palimpsest where the past and the present enjoy simultaneity:

> [...] in cases where history produces new forms of life, new economic achievements, new forms of social relations [...] older forms do not die off or become replaced by new one. The old continues to co-exist with the new, either simultaneously or by creating different hybrid combinations. (58)

This translation of Hindu gods into expressions of Islamic divinity is a "nonmodern" instance of "cross-categorical translation" (Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, 83) which brings to mind an eighteenth-century Bengali

religious text called *Shunya-puran*. The translation is based on local and particular exchange, enunciates Gautam Bhadra, and not on a universal set of rules:

> One of the major features of these types of cultural interaction [between Hindus and Muslims] is to be seen at the linguistic level. Here, recourse is often had to the consonance of sounds or images to transform one god into another, a procedure that appeals more...to popular responses to alliteration, rhyming and other rhetorical devices – rather than to any elaborate structure of reason and argument. (65)

Cutting through the limitations of space and time, the legend of Bon Bibi consolidates the community life of the primitive society of the tidal people as they "enter into ritual, acquiring in this new contest a magic significance (which is in general highly specific as regards its cultic or ritualistic meaning). Ritual and everyday life are tightly interwoven with each other"(Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 12). The Bon Bibi cult and the histories of the Sundarbans are thus seamlessly interwoven. There is thus no "overarching censoring/limiting/defining systems of thought that neutralize and relegate differences to the margins" (Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, 86). Every life-world has its own particular rules of functioning which produces what may be called "affective histories" that cannot be assimilated to some abstract universal. This transcultural fusion of elements in the Sundarbans confirms Nirmal's contention that

> [...]*the mudbanks of the tide country are shaped not only by rivers of silt, but also by rivers of language: Bengali, English, Arabic, Hindi, Arakanese and who knows what else? Flowing into each other they create a proliferation of small worlds that hang suspended in the flow*[...]*the tide country's faith is something like one of its great mohanas, 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, italics original)

The space of the tide country thus subsumes the totality of lived experience.

Human settlement in the Sundarbans was initiated by a philanthropic Scot shipping magnate Sir Daniel Hamilton. A "monopolikapitalist" (*HT*, 50), Hamilton was a strange amalgam of individualism and idealism. A man of great enterprise, he purchased ten thousand acres of land in the Sundarbans from the colonial government and invited impoverished and dispossessed people to begin fresh agricultural projects with the precondition that all differences and barriers between them would have to be sloughed off: "'Here there would be no Brahmins or Untouchables, no Bengalis and no Oriyas. Everyone would have to live and

work together'" (*HT*, 51). In the constantly shifting, phantasmagoric terrain of the Sundarbans, the visionary Scot desired to create a utopian world where each individual would enjoy a fluidity of identities and manifest a plethora of selves: "'He dreamed of a place where men and women could be farmers in the morning, poets in the afternoon and carpenters in the evening'" (*HT*, 53). Like his predecessors in *The Circle of Reason*, Balaram and Alu, Hamilton intended to establish an egalitarian society run by co-operatives "'where people wouldn't exploit each other and everyone would have a share in the land'" (*HT*, 53). What is more, this "'new kind of country'" (*HT*, 52) was not only well advanced in ideas but also in technology. The tide country boasted telephone connections long before they were established in the metropolis of Kolkata. Many islands in the region were named after Hamilton's relatives – Jamshedpur, Annpur, Emilybari. The house in which he lived was named Lusibari, a pidgin version of "Lucy's House". It was named after his kin who unfortunately died on her voyage to India. If Hamilton's idealism and persistence made these remote islands fit for human habitation, the arrogance and short-sightedness of the colonial administrative machinery almost brought about their destruction. British officials in colonial India urgently needed a suitable location in eastern India to establish a port which would rival Bombay on the Western coast. The hasty, impulsive decision of the imperialists to build the projected sea-port on the storm-ridden Matla river matched the crankiness of Mohannad Bin Tughlaq, the mad Sultan of Delhi: "' [i]t was a bee from the same hive that stung the British. They got it in their heads that they needed a new port, a new capital for Bengal — Kolkata's Hooghly River was silting up and its docks, they said, would soon be choked with mud'" (*HT*, 284). Henry Piddington, a scientific soothsayer, warned the British government about the unpredictable nature of the Matla and the bleak prospects of the envisaged projects. But the British Viceroy Lord Canning's haughtiness and his cherished desire to name the port after him brushed aside all warnings. The phenomenon of place-naming was a common colonial practice as "the renaming of colonized territories [...] played an important part in the domination of these territories" (Bohata, 11). Piddington's apprehensions were dismissed because he "after all, was nothing but a lowly shipping inspector and [...] stood very low in the Ingrej scale of caste" (*HT*, 286). Ignoring his advice, Canning established his new port which was, as anticipated, decimated not by a cyclone but by a minor storm. Thus

the port "that was to be one of the reigning queens of the eastern oceans, a rival to Bombay, Singapore and Hong Kong, became instead the Matla's vassal — Canning" (*HT*, 287). The abandoned port "'*a post office on Sunday*'" (*HT*, 287) is a relic of punctured British pride, a dark chapter in colonial history, unrecorded in official versions. The fact that the tide country has been involved in the developments of metropolitan modernity proves that the rural world, far from being an empty and homogeneous one, has always been touched by cosmopolitanism.

The silencing or subalternizing propensities of colonialist representations are often evident in elite representations within the colonized. Subaltern studies affirm the notion of resistance to elite domination and re-direct attention to the disenfranchised sectors of society. They insist that the "reclamation of tradition and the (re-) construction of national culture after colonialism require a recovery of popular consciousness across the full range of its social articulations" (Lazarus, 8). Subaltern studies with its attention to "the small voice of history", is a corrective to both colonialist and bourgeois-nationalist historiography. Since the history of the ruling classes is realized in the state and "official" history is the history of states and dominant groups, the history of subaltern social groups, believes Gramsci, is necessarily fragmented and episodic. The task of the modern, egalitarian, subaltern historian is to rectify this imbalance in historiography with its exclusive focus on elite representations. Ranajit Guha's famous manifesto highlighting the "failure of the Indian bourgeoisie to speak for the nation" ("On Some Aspects of the Historiography of Colonial India", 5) formulates the gospel of the project:

> What is clearly left out of the un-historical [elitist] historiography is the *politics of the* people. For parallel to the domain of elite politics there existed throughout the colonial period another domain of Indian politics in which the principal actors were not the dominant groups of the indigenous society or the colonial authorities but the subaltern classes and groups constituting the mass of the labouring population and intermediate strata in town and country — that is, the people. This was an *autonomous* domain, for it neither originated from elite politics nor did its existence depend on the latter ("On Some Aspects of the Historiography of Colonial India", 4).

Subalternity encompasses the undocumented experiences of marginalized social groups. It also includes plural ways of being in the world that remain "untranslatable" into modern, rational forms of historical consciousness.

Smothering all differences, totalitarian historiography explains discrepant "life-worlds" like an insurgent tribal's religious motivation for his rebellion in terms of secular knowledge. A subaltern historian resists this overarching explanatory mechanism of History which assimilates all "differences" into a blanket of sameness. For Dipesh Chakrabarty these "subaltern" pasts represent

> moments or points at which the archive that the historian mines develops a degree of intractability with respect to the aims of professional history. [...] these are pasts that resist historicization [...]. Subaltern pasts, [...], do not belong exclusively to socially subordinate or subaltern groups, nor to minority identities alone. Elite and dominant groups can also have subaltern pasts to the extent that they participate in life-worlds subordinated by the major narratives of the dominant institutions. (*Provincializing Europe*, 101)

History writing thus "assumes plural ways of being in the world" (*Provincializing Europe*, 101). Against the excesses of mainstream History which is entwined with the rationality of the state and implicated in the practices of suppression, subaltern historicality recalls the past in the phenomenology of everyday life. Hence, suggests Ranajit Guha, "one should turn to the poet and the fiction writer to learn how to represent in language the lived presence of historicality in everyday practice" (Chatterjee, "Introduction", 16). The primary object of the subaltern historian is "of making an absence into presences, of peopling a vacant space with figures":

> The task now is to fill up this emptiness, that is, the representation of subaltern consciousness in elitist historiography. It must be given its own specific content with its own history and development. [...] Only then can we recreate not merely a whole aspect of human history whose existence elitist historiography has hitherto denied, but also the history of the "modern" period, the epoch of capitalism. (Chatterjee, "Peasants, politics and historiography", 62)

The idealist Nirmal's journal which records the plight of the dispossessed refugees in Morichjhapi against the brutalities of state oppression therefore serves as a vital subaltern testament.

A leftist intellectual and a college teacher in Calcutta, Nirmal was dissociated from his family in Dhaka by the events of the Partition. A product of a family renowned for public service, Nilima is soaked in middle class culture. Nirmal's vitality has an irresistible charm of its own and in Nilima's eyes he becomes invested with the mystery and romance of an unknown mode of existence: "it was as if the light of idealism in his eye was a flame and she a moth"

(*HT*, 76). Despite her family's strong resentment, Nilima marries Nirmal. Before long Nirmal's leftist leanings lead to his detainment by the police, an incident that has a debilitating effect on his psyche. Nilima's family stands by the couple in their distress and it is by their initiative that Nirmal is appointed a teacher to run the Lusibari school in the Sundarbans. Interestingly, their arrival in Gosaba coincides with the annual celebration of the founder Sir Daniel Hamilton's birthday which is "observed with many of the ceremonial trappings of a *puja*" (*HT*, 78). The visionary Scotsman is revered by the locals as a "venerated ancestral spirit" (*HT*, 78) if not as a deity. Recognizing the altruistic endeavours of the Scot, the city-bred couple's entire perspective undergoes a radical transformation: "It shamed them to think that this man — a foreigner, a Burra Sahib, a rich capitalist — had taken it upon himself to address the issue of rural poverty when they themselves, despite all their radical talk, had scarcely any knowledge of life outside the city" (*HT*, 78). What they experience in the islands is utter destitution. Life is lived in the extremes at the mercy of nature because of economic compulsions. While the men venture out into the waters for livelihood, the women dress themselves as widows "trying to hold misfortune at bay by living through it over and over again. Or was it merely a way of preparing themselves for that which they knew to be inevitable" (*HT*,80)? Grappling with the question, "'[w]hat is to be done?'" (*HT*,80), the idealist Nirmal reads Lenin's pamphlet repeatedly without any definite solution, the pragmatic Nilima mobilizes a women's union. While the Hamilton Estate is crippled by lawsuits, Nilima's union continues to grow and gradually culminates into the Badabon Development Trust. As the supreme authority of the Trust, Nilima with her resolve and enterprise elevates into *Mashima*. The Trust is her own exclusive domain, a forbidden zone for her husband.

Nirmal finds his cause elsewhere. Hounded out from their homeland in Bangladesh during the Partition, a group of refugees were rehabilitated in the forests of Dandakaranya in central India. Officially termed "'resettlement'" (*HT*,118), their existence was continuously scrutinized by security forces as in a concentration camp. While these poor rural people were ruthlessly exploited both by Muslim communists and upper class Hindus in Bangladesh, they were looked upon as intruders in central India and often attacked with weapons by the locals. In 1978, a hoard of refugees repatriated from the parched lands of Madhya

Pradesh to the marshlands of the Sundarbans in search of livelihood. These poor people settled in the islands of Morichjhapi, a protected forest reserve. This brought the state government into a series of confrontations with the refugees and it was determined to evict them. Inspired by the resistance of these Dalits, Nirmal's dormant revolutionary instinct comes to the forefront and he identifies himself with them. Reflecting on her husband's revolutionary zeal, Nilima contends that

> '[m]en like that, even when they turn their backs on their party and their comrades, can never let go of the idea: it's the secret god that rules their hearts. It is what makes them come alive; they revel in the danger, the exquisite pain. It is to them what childbirth is to a woman, or war to a mercenary'. (*HT*,119)

Nirmal thus plunges himself into the struggle between a group of powerless refugees and a dominant political force.

The commune established by these "unhistorical" squatters in Morichjhapi is considered to be extra-ordinary by the idealist Nirmal. Witnessing "*the birth of something new, something hitherto unseen*" (*HT*,171, italics original), Nirmal feels that Daniel Hamilton's utopian project is being translated into a concrete reality but with a vital difference: "*this was not one man's vision. This dream had been dreamt by the very people who were trying to make it real*" (*HT*,171, italics original). The revolution of this subaltern consciousness from below initiates Nirmal's transformation. These marginalized beings organized themselves and created the edifices of a micro-society which impresses Nirmal: "*It was an astonishing spectacle — as though an entire civilization had sprouted suddenly in the mud*" (*HT*,191, italics original). They had set up their own government and also taken a census. What they now endeavour is to make their voices heard in the world outside and mobilize public opinion rather than being falsely represented in government files as "*destroyers*" and "*gangsters*" (*HT*,172, italics original). For this purpose they invite the urban intellectuals to a sumptuous feast to orient them about their hapless condition. The impressed guests deliver extensive speeches extolling the efforts of the settlers but their hollowness is revealed by one of Nirmal's erstwhile friend Khokon: "'*You can't make an omelette without breaking eggs*'" (*HT*,192, italics original). Considered as eggs or insignificant non-entities, these marginalized beings would soon be driven out of the island or meet a silent death.

While the visionary Nirmal completely aligns him with the refugees in Morichjhapi, the worldly-wise Nilima chooses to keep safe distance from them and urges Nirmal to do the same. She prefers to "'stay on the right side of the government'" (*HT*, 214) because she does not intend to antagonize the politicians for the welfare of the Badabon Trust hospital. Hence, if the settlers in Morichjhapi are "'*human beings*'" for Nirmal who "'need medical attention as much as people do anywhere else'" (*HT*, 213, italics original) Nilima dismisses them as "'*squatters*'": "'*that land doesn't belong to them; it's government property. How can they just seize it*'" (*HT*, 213, italics original)? While Nirmal asserts his subjectivity against oppressive government machinery, NIlima's subjectivity is repressed. James Kavanagh believes that "[w]e now understand this process of 'subjection' as working largely through an address to unconscious fears and desires as well as rational interests, and we understand it as working through a multiplicity of disparate, complexly interconnected social apparatuses" (310). Most certainly, Nilima's individuality is crushed by a "Repressive State Apparatus" which function "'by violence', [...] massively and predominantly by *repression* (including physical repression)" (Althusser, 145). The miserable refugees refuse to succumb to the terror tactics unleashed by the people in power. Besieged by the onrushing police, a group of refugees carrying provisions for their fellow islanders in a boat proclaim in unison: "'*Amra kara? Bastuhara. Who are we? We are the dispossessed*'" (*HT*,254, italics original). The plaintive cry of these wretched people forces Nirmal to interrogate his own identity and his space in the world:

> *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?* (*HT*,254, italics original)

Inspired by the settler's defiant spirit, Nirmal's series of self-questionings meets a happy resolution: "*Where else could you belong, except in the place you refused to leave. I joined my feeble voice to theirs: 'Morichjhâpi chharbona!*'" (*HT*,254, italics original). Nirmal's narrative is an eye-witness account of police atrocities unleashed on these dispossessed in quest of their homeland. To quell the desperate cries of the settlers, the patrolling police motorboat suddenly picks up speed and destroys the boat full of passengers and provisions. The announcement of the

High Court order which declares that the siege is illegal and has to be lifted is just a lull before the storm. Already the condition of these people is destitute and with all supplies stopped they are being starved to death. It is sheer inhumanity on the part of a callous state machinery to declare that the island has to be evacuated for the preservation of ecological balance. Through the grievances of Kusum, the subaltern voice articulates its plight of living on the age:

> *'Saar', [...] '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. [...] 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*,261-62, italics original).

It dawns on the resigned Nirmal that the fate of Kusum and the others on the island is doomed forever. While he is stunned into insanity by administrative brutalities, his wife wryly comments that her husband is an unpractical individual whose "'experience of the world is very limited'" (*HT*,276, italics original). The psychiatrist from Kolkata who comes to treat Nirmal dismisses the settlers as "'*a nuisance*'" (*HT*,275, italics original). Nirmal gives Nilima the slip, surreptitiously enters Morichjhapi with Horen, and documents his experiences the night before the imminent police onslaught. He was later found on the embankment in Canning and lived only a couple of months after the evacuation. His diary survives as a vital subaltern testament.

Nirmal is a witness to the events leading up to the holocaust. His journal does not narrate the carnage, presumably because it interrupted his composition and later drove him insane. Nevertheless, he was well aware of the impending catastrophe and could anticipate the inevitable: "*I am out of time*" (*HT*,277, italics original). He fits the bill for Agamben's concept of the witness, a person who has experienced an event from the beginning to the end. He is a witness that possesses a memory of "things seen at close hand" (34), a "superstes witness" capable of bearing testimony to the events as experienced (17). Agamben classifies the superstes witness under several rubrics. On the one hand, there is Primo Levi, the "perfect example of the witness [...] the 'proxy witness', a superstile who has survived and recounts his experiences in Auschwitz" (16, 34). On the other hand is the Muselman, the "complete witness" or the "true witness" (47), the one who could not survive, and is unable to recount his experience. Living in close

proximity to the victims and driven out of his mind by violence, Nirmal operates between the poles of speech and silence; his journal is a vivid rendition of the events. While he inscribes the incidents in his journal "*every moment takes on a startling clarity; small things become the world in microcosm*" (*HT*,148, italics original). The dominant metaphor that he uses for himself is of "*some misplaced, misgendered Scheherazade*" who tries to delay the inevitable trauma with the power of his stories: "*I am trying to stave the night off with a flying, fleeting pen*" (*HT*,148, italics original). Explicit is the reference to princess Scheherazade of *Thousand and One Nights* who weaves a complex amalgam of stories to postpone her death. In Ghosh's "The Hunger of Stones", a translation of Tagore's "Khudito Pashan", the protagonist declares that it "seemed to me that a night from the Thousand and One Nights had transported itself here from the realm of fiction" (*II*, 332). When Horen asks Nirmal engrossed in his copy of Bernier's "Travels": "'Saar, what is that you're reading? Are there any stories in it? Why not tell me too, since we have such a long way to go'" (*HT*,145), the latter translates to him not only from one language to another to make it accessible to him but also from the written form to the oral form of storytelling. Nirmal's emphatic "'All right, then, [...] Listen'" (*HT*,145) is an archetypal beginning in the oral tradition.

Nirmal is very much aware of the silencing propensities of official history as also the ephemerality of life in the tide country. In the tidal world time is shaped with each ebbing and rising tide, "*that after the storm passes, the events that have preceded its coming will be forgotten*". He is fully aware "*how skilful the tide country is in silting over its past*" (*HT*, 69). Nirmal records the incidents in detail to prevent his memories from being erased. In a post-structural world which celebrates the destabilization of the nature of signification and rejects the power of language to reflect empirical reality, Nirmal demonstrates the humanistic faith in logo centric security: "*I was once a writer; perhaps I can make sure at least that what happened here leaves some trace, some hold upon the memory of the world*" (*HT*,69, italics original). Nirmal not only records the experiences of the settlers but also writes his own self, about his vacillations and his ideals. Most revealing is his confession that he is indeed a split-self torn between his wife and "the woman who had become the muse I'd never had; between the quiet persistence of everyday change and the heady excitement of revolution — between prose and poetry" (*HT*,216). His sense of oneness with the refugees and

his spiritual passion for Kusum transforms his self. Gradually, he experiences the withering away of his unbelieving secularism as he begins respecting the myth of Bon Bibi. His rational, secular, Marxist consciousness dismissed religious devotion to Bon Bibi as "*false consciousness*" (*HT*,222, italics original). This, coupled with the horrors of religious fanaticism during the Partition, forbids him to identify with any sets of religious beliefs. But the strong beliefs of Kusum and Horen and their acts of worship in the middle of the mohana at Garjontala make the invisible very much visible to Nirmal. They thrust on him the idea that they had just crossed the imaginary line that separated the realm of human beings from the abode of Dokkhin Rai and his demons. He

> *[r]ealized, with a sense of shock, that this chimerical line was, to her and to Horen, as real as a barbed-wire fence might be to me. [...] it occurred to me that in a way a landscape too is not unlike a book — a compilation of pages that overlap without any two ever being the same. [...] On occasion these pages are ruled with lines that are invisible to some people, while being for others, as real, as charged and as volatile as high-voltage cables.*" (*HT*,222, italics original)

Nirmal's realization affirms multiple ways of being-in-the-world, difference and heterogeneity and the limitations of the artifice of modern reason. His recognition of the rural's religiosity is a celebration of the autonomous subjectivity of these marginalized beings, an attempt to bridge the gap with the nonmodern: "*To me, a townsman, the tide country's jungle was emptiness, a place where time stood still: I saw now that this was an illusion, that exactly the opposite was true.* [...] *here, in the tide country, transformation is the rule of life*" (*HT*,224, italics original). In the Sunderbans where the mangroves can recolonize a denuded land in double quick time, transience governs the lives of the people. The self-transformed visionary, standing in the ephemerality of his conditions, quotes his inspiration Rilke: "'*life is lived in transformation*'" (*HT*,225, italics original). Having gained a profound insight into the power of completed transformation, its stronger existence, and the terror that it represents, Nirmal finds in the tide country landscape a strange beauty bordering on the sublime that Rilke evocatively describes: "'*beauty is nothing/ but the start of terror we can hardly bear,/and we adore it because of the serene scorn/ it could kill us with*'" (*HT*,69, italics original). The resourceful and enduring creatures of the natural world live on the pre-conscious side of reality. These instinctive creatures, Nirmal contends after the poet, detect the humans' uneasiness with the world of language and thought:

"'we're not comfortably at home in our translated world'" (*HT*,206, italics original). Bringing in Rilke to voice his opinions, Nirmal expresses his own empathy with the dolphins and establishes a continuum of self-awareness and understanding: "'some mute animal/ raising its calm eyes and seeing through us,/ and through us'" (*HT*,235, italics original). Nirmal represents is very much alienated from the world by language. He is a denizen of a world translated through stories and fails to interpret correctly the practical reality surrounding him. Like Tridib in *The Shadow Lines*, with whom Nirmal shares a spiritual affinity, he is destroyed by the violent actions of the real world. He delineates the multiple tropes of the tidal landscape in his journal. What he highlights is the expatriation of human beings from one space to another and observes an intimate bond between humanscape and landscape that Bakhtin emphasizes: "It is necessary to find a new relationship to nature, not to the little nature of one's own corner of the world but to the big nature of the great world, to all the phenomena of the solar system, to the wealth excavated from the earth's core, to a variety of geographical locations and continents" (*The Dialogic Imagination*, 234). Nirmal's life-long project has been to fuse his revolutionary ideals and Rilke's poetry, his engagement with the history of *bhatir desh* (tide country) and his concern for the displaced refugees. Professing to be a historical materialist but the least materialist in his actions, Nirmal, sums up Kanai "'was possessed more by words than by politics. There are people who live through poetry and he was one of them'" (*HT*,282). Historical materialism, for Nirmal, "'meant that everything which existed was interconnected : the sky, the weather, people, poetry, science, nature'" (*HT*,282-283). A practicing deep ecologist, Nirmal thus rejects the dualism between humans and nature promoted by Western philosophy and calls for a return to a monistic, primal oneness between human beings and the ecosphere:

> Deep ecology is concerned with encouraging an egalitarian attitude on the part of humans not only toward all *members* of the ecosphere, but even toward all identifiable *entities* or *forms* in the ecosphere. Thus, this attitude is intended to extend, for example, to such entities (or forms) as rivers, landscapes, and even species and social systems considered in their own right. (Sessions, 270)

This shift from a man-centred to a cosmos-centred system of values is the cardinal doctrine of Nirmal's philosophy.

Nirmal's journal and his socialist ideologies provide an alternate perspective to the clash between government agencies and the immigrants. A social worker and a practical thinker, Nilima works women's welfare and childrens' education in the tide country. Years of hard work and dedication have gone into the making of the Bada Bon Trust hospital and the school in Lusibari. These establishments signify cultural changes in the Sundarbans. Timeless human endeavour has populated the islands with human presence providing a new definition to the land teeming with alternative economic opportunities:

> Such was the hospital's reputation, Moyna said, that people now came there from great distances. ... Over the years, a number of tea-shops, guest-houses, and stands for cycle-vans had taken root and flourished. Directly or indirectly the hospital now provided employment to the majority of Lusibari's inhabitants. (*HT*,132-133).

It doesn't take long for Kanai to appreciate "the sheer scale of Nilima's achievement" (*HT*,131). Nilima's "sheaf of files" (*HT*,240) and records provide an alternative perspective on the animal-human dynamics in the region and raise issues on wildlife conservation. She contends that at least a hundred people are killed by tigers each year. This figure is only that of the Indian part of the Sundarbans and if the Bangladesh side is included the number is twice that. The region is indeed a war zone between the animal and the human world. The tigers' encroachment into human settlements, contends Nilima, might be because of "the peculiar conditions of tidal ecology, in which large parts of the forest were subjected to daily submersions. The theory went that this raised the animals' thresholds of aggression by washing away their scent markings and confusing their territorial instincts" (*HT*,241). The demarcating lines between human space and the animal world are blurred. The novel probes deeper into the problems of the human-animal dynamics. Strangely, although the number of people killed by tigers is always on the ascending side, environmentalists pour in economic resources for the conservation of tigers. Like Kusum, Nilima raises a typical subaltern question with her wry observation that the forest department was "providing water for tigers! In a place where nobody thinks twice about human beings going thirsty" (*HT*,241)!

The narrative explores the encounters of two cosmopolitan, multicultural professionals with the local environmental-cultural aspects of the tidal land. While Kanai is a Delhi based linguist who runs his own translation firm, Piya ia an

American cetologist of Bengali origin researching on a rare species of Gangetic dolphin, the Orcaella. Their paths cross each other on the train to the Sundarbans. Both these characters look at the rural world through the cosmopolitan lens and their worldviews are reshaped by actual engagement with local people and cultures different from them. A mediator and a translator, Kanai learns to understand him better. Piya, who "had no more idea of what her own place was in the great scheme of things" (*HT*,35) finds her sensibility moulded "in a place where she felt even more a stranger than elsewhere" (*HT*,35). Their experiences give credence to the contention that a cosmopolitan worldview is constantly in a process of becoming rather than being.

Kanai's first visit to the Sundarbans was way back in the 1970s when as a young schoolboy he was "rusticated" to live with his uncle and aunt for misbehaviour in school. He was amazed at the population in the tide country and learnt from Nirmal that it is only in films that jungles are empty of people: "'Here there are places that are as crowded as any Kolkata Bazaar. And on some of the rivers you'll find more boats than there are trucks on the Grand Trunk Road'" (*HT*,17). He absorbed all his experiences with a child's customary sense of wonder. His only friend in the island was Kusum, a girl in her mid-teens. It was with Kusum that Kanai witnessed the theatrical performance of *The Glory of Bon Bibi*. This theatrical spectacle arrests Kanai's attention and grips his emotion to such an extent that he "was utterly absorbed and even after the show had ended was unable to erase some of the scenes from his mind". Verisimilitude is created through content rich and lifelike and extricated from the existential to the aesthetic plane. This aesthetic pleasure, which art's fictionality vouchsafes, results from a non-utilitarian, nonmoral, absolutely disinterested perception of art. The performance creates for Kanai an illusion of reality: "The terror he had felt when the demon charged Dukhey was real and immediate, [...]. No less real were the tears of joy and gratitude that flowed from his eyes when Bon Bibi appeared at Dukhey's side" (*HT*, 105). While Kanai was mesmerized, Kusum wept profusely as she understood the vital difference between art-world and the world of existential reality. Unlike the fictional world, Bon Bibi never arrived to save her father when the tiger attacked him in spite of Kusum's fervent prayers for help. However, a successful work of art works inwards. It leaves a detritus at the bottom of a consumer's being. This emotional deposit permeates and shapes his entire

personality unawares. It does so primarily by activating his imagination, by intensifying and refining his emotion. It is thus "by placing the reader in his own affective state of mind, the poet, without inculcating doctrines, directly forms character" (Abrams, 329). The myth of Bon Bibi that Kusum has internalized is further grounded in her psyche by her art-experience.

Nilima's request occasions Kanai's next visit to the tide country decades later. His late uncle Nirmal has left behind a journal meant specifically for him. Written a long time back, the seemingly lost journal has been accidentally found in a remote corner of the house. In his chance meeting with Piya on the train to Canning, Kanai introduces himself as "'a translator, and an interpreter as well, by profession'" (*HT*, 10). Translation does play a vital role in the narrative. A linguist who knows six different languages and possesses a translation agency, Kanai acts as the mediating agency between the English-speaking Piya and the indigenous tide-country people with their local dialect. Nirmal's journal is interspersed with intertextual elements from Rainer Maria Rilke's *Duino Elegies*, originally composed in German. Nirmal read Rilke's poems in "*Bangla and English translation*" (*HT*,68, italics original). When Kanai narrates to Piya the unofficial history of Canning port he renders the story he himself heard from Nirmal with a word of caution: "'But don't forget: I'll be translating in my head – he would have told it in Bangla'" (*HT*, 283). The metaphor of translation seems to underline the phenomenon of communication across the barriers of linguistic divides in a multilingual world. As an interpreter Kanai mediates not only between the divisions of language, but also between temporal divides and modes of representation, be it writing or speech. The motif of translation also questions the traditional philosophical procedure of reducing languages as the tool of discrete and unequivocal concepts. A genuine discipline of thought, translation "becomes a place where one's language is made to feel its finitude, even its failure, so providing a threshold to its unthought"(Clark, 80). What is questioned is the autonomy of the subject in the knowledge system.

When she reaches Canning, Piya, with the Forest Department's assistance, hires a launch to explore the waters in pursuit of the Orcaella. But the boat owner and the guard turn out to be dubious and Piya feels sexually threatened. In other parts of the world Piya had been protected by the "sheer matter-of-factness of what she did" and also by her "unmistakable foreignness", but in the delta region

where she felt an absolute stranger "her appearance had robbed her of that protection" (*HT*, 34). In this grave situation, Piya is comforted by the sight of a poor fisherman and a boy – Fokir and Tutul – whom her tormenting duo tries to intimidate. Delighted by the fisherman's signs of reassurance that he knows not only the Gangetic but also the Irrawaddy dolphins, Piya pays her guides off and descends to his boat. In the process she turns off-balance and falls overboard, but is rescued by Fokir. Thus begins a relationship in which the only mode of communication is silence and signs.

Belonging to a mobile family, Piya has had a rootless existence. Her paternal grandparents were Bengalis settled in Burma who came to India during the Second World War as refugees. A peripatetic, Piya's engineer father developed his own theories about immigrants and believed that Indians in general and Bengalis in particular are poor travellers because "'their eyes are always turned backwards, towards home'" (*HT*, 250). Endeavouring to "fit in" (*HT*, 250) in his migrated nation America, he looked upon India as an illusory place from which he is fractured in both time and space. Like Ila in *The Shadow Lines*, he encapsulates the doctrine of presentism: "Where others sought to preserve their memories of the 'old country', he had always tried to expunge them. His feet were in the present" (*HT*, 87). Aiming at thorough deculturalization, Piya's parents never felt the urge to orient her about "her Indian heritage" (*HT*, 95). Hence she grows up as a deracinated migrant severed from her roots with scant traces of even her mother tongue. A further reason for her alienation is her parents' unhappy conjugal life "the accumulated resentments" of which were phrased in that language. That is why the sound of Piya's mother tongue represented "the music of unhappiness" (*HT*, 94). Because of her childhood miseries, Piya prefers emotional distance from others at all times. This explains the choice of her subject and the domain of her research because field biology "allowed her to be on her own" (*HT*, 126) without any fixed address in unfamiliar places. Fear of intimacy, contends Lois Tyson, is "often an effective defense against learning about our own psychological wounds because it keeps us at an emotional distance in relationships most likely to bring those wounds to the surface" (16). Piya's expedition with Fokir who carries "the river [...] in his veins" (*HT*, 245) initiates the birth of a new self-awareness in her.

A recluse who revels in lonely fishing expeditions with his son, Fokir is at-oneness with the natural world. The evocative descriptions of Fokir and his son Tutul sleeping together associate them with nature's animism. The repose with which the duo sleeps huddled closely together reminds Piya of the newborn dolphin and its parent: "Their chests were moving in unison as they slept and the rhythm of their breathing reminded her of the pair of dolphins she had been watching earlier" (*HT*, 138). For one reason or another, Fokir dissociates himself from society. He rids himself in the process of all social conventions and practices. His ambitious wife Moyna complains to Kanai that Fokir's actions are the exact opposite of others. While the other fishermen tie their boats together for security in the waters at night, Fokir acts on the contrary by being on his own in a desolate place because he "'can't help himself. He's like a child'" (*HT*, 155). Divesting himself of all the trappings of culture and all received ideas and values, Fokir has resurrected in spirit the pristine state in which man and nature are one as the twofold embodiment of the same amoral, primordial cosmic energy. Michael Bell's insights into primitive sensibility elucidate Fokir's and nature's single undivided totality:

> Primitive men apparently felt in all aspects of the natural world, such as weather, animals and vegetation, the manifestation of a will and a mentality somehow comparable to his own. While no doubt feeling his environment as frequently hostile, primitive man none the less felt his relation to it as continuous rather than radically transcendent or alien. (9)

Like the silent, occult force that directs Ronald Ross's scientific career in *The Calcutta Chromosome*, the primitive Fokir guides Piya in her pathbreaking pursuit of a rare species of dolphins. When she realizes the power of Fokir's intuition she is completely "baffled":

> [...] it was as though there were nothing unexpected about his encounter and he had known all along that they would be there. [...] how could he have known that they would run into a group of Orcaella, right then and right in that place? [...] how could he have known that they would be there on that day, at that time? (*HT*, 113)

What is on display is Fokir's instinctive powers intimately associated with the animal past, a radically different world of primitive subjectivity and "the subtlest sensitivity to the peculiar periodicity and rhythm of human life" that Cassirer points out: "for mythical consciousness and feeling a kind of biological time, a

rhythmic ebb and flow of life, precedes the intuition of a properly cosmic time" (Vol. II, 109). Interestingly, in a multi-linguistic world where translation and interpretation occupy a pivotal role, Piya and Fokir communicate through silence at the pre-speech level, "not just because they had no language in common but because that was how it was with human beings, who came equipped, as a species, with the means of shutting each other out" (*HT*, 159). There are two levels of consciousness, believes Humphrey, which can be distinguished: the "speech level" and the "prespeech level". "The prespeech level, [...] involves no communicative basis as does the speech level (whether spoken or written). [...], the prespeech levels of consciousness are not censored, rationally controlled, or logically ordered" (3). With silence as their alternative means of communication, Piya and Fokir manifest qualities of inwardness, subjectivity and a mode of communication that Western rationality hardly recognizes: "the idea that to 'see' was also to 'speak' to others of your kind, where simply to exist was to communicate" (*HT*, 159). In this context, the narrative undercuts the edifice of speech/language as a rational instrument of communication and privileges telepathic means of communication:

> The two of them, Fokir and herself, they could have been boulders or trees for all they knew of each other: and wasn't it better in a way, more honest, that they could not speak? For if you compared it to the ways in which dolphins' echoes mirrored the world, speech was only a bag of tricks that fooled you into believing that you could see through the eyes of another being. (*HT*, 159)

In stark contrast to the illusory and deceitful linguistic mode of communication, the dolphin "reflects back to us something more intuitive and spontaneous about ourselves, something that relates human beings to a natural world existing prior to the systematizing, regulating discourses of everyday life" (Barglow, 4). The sincere, honest world of Fokir and Piya supersedes the sophisticated world of simulations.

Fokir's futuristic wife Moyna is the perfect antipode of her atavistic husband. Spirited and self-willed, the enterprising Moyna has received a formal education overcoming all physical hardships and resistance from her family. To unsettle her ambitious plans, her parents married her off to the illiterate Fokir. Determined to qualify as a fully fledged nurse in the Trust hospital, Moyna compelled Fokir to move to Lusibari when she was a trainee. Empowered by

education and propelled by the alternative employment opportunities created by the modern hospital, Moyna unsettles the dominant order of patriarchy and establishes a space for herself. As a Third World rural woman who redraws the boundaries of her existence Moyna is a transgressor. She is, of course, not untroubled by a non-co-operating husband "who could not keep step" (*HT*, 134). A liberating female agency, Moyna yearns to be a modern woman "to lay claim to a wider world" (*HT*, 135). Signifiers of modernity, the school and the hospital are cultural constructs redefining the tidal country and fostering a change in perspective. Moyna raises the vital issue of the dialectics of change and wants her son Tutul to reject his father's vocation. She shares Nilima's deep concern for tidal ecology and calls for a ban on the new nylon nets. For the urbanized, go-getting Kanai, Moyna is a woman who "'knows what she wants – for herself and her family – and nothing is going to keep her from pursuing it. She's ambitious, she's tough and she's going to go a long way'" (*HT*, 196). The sensitive Piya quite correctly surmises that Kanai's estimate of Piya validates the choices he has made in his own life:

> It was important for him to believe that his values were, at bottom, egalitarian, liberal, meritocratic. It reassured him to be able to think, 'What I want for myself is no different from what everybody wants, no matter how rich or poor; everyone who has any drive, any energy wants to get on in the world – Moyna is the proof'. (*HT*, 219-220)

This process of knowledge formation needs to be explained. Cognition begins when an object attracts a subject and causes in him a train of sensations. The subject then organizes the chaotic sensations into his image of the object in terms of his own personality. So paramount is the subject's role in cognition that it is no exaggeration to say that "what we perceive and understand depends upon what we are" (Huxley, 287). A slave of society and seeking self-fulfillment within the social mould, Kanai dismisses the free-spirited Fokir as an unseen presence. Not unsurprisingly, he fails to comprehend the reason Moyna married Fokir and she slams it on his face: "'You're not a woman and you don't know him. You won't understand'" (*HT*, 156). Out in the waters when Piya imagines Fokir's family to be one bristling with "warmth and companionship" in which "want and deprivation made people pull together all the more tightly" (*HT*, 158) she construes from a woman's perspective, the way his wife would look up to him as a vibrant youth "with fine clean limbs and wide, deep eyes, someone who could

almost have been the dark god of her prayers and dreams" (*HT*, 158). However autonomous and steadfast Moyna may be, she carries in her mind a fundamentally unconscious image of a primordial origin as Jung explains: "Every man carries within him the eternal image of woman, not the image of this or that particular woman, but a definite feminine image. [...] The same is true of the woman: she too has her inborn image of man" (*The Portable Jung*, 173). Her egoistic assertions notwithstanding, it is the unconscious realm of the mind that grounds her self.

Kanai's sophisticated, urban self manifests a tension, a splitting of the personality or disunion. A successful man of the world, Kanai interprets life in terms of clear-cut demarcations without any knowledge of the grey patches in between. A man who disregards the past and looks forward to the future, he reveals his futurism to Piya in unambiguous terms: "'I'm not the kind of person who dwells on the past [...] I like to look ahead'" (*HT*, 198). Hence he is completely surprised at his vivid memories of the Sundarbans from his earlier visit. What Kanai fails to realize is that "memory is a repository or reservoir of records, traces, and anagrams of past events analogous to the records preserved in geological strata. There is no memory of the future" (Meyerhoff, 20). It is the unconscious, contends Jung, which is "the receptacle of all lost memories and of all contents that are still too weak to become conscious" (*The Portable Jung*, 52). Excluded from the "conscious process of adaptation" and submerged for the most part as either totally unconscious or dimly conscious, these psychic factors are "gradually deprived of value and depotentiated" (Jung, *On the Nature of the Psyche*, 39). Kanai's childhood memories, emotionally charged and lying dormant, suddenly flood back to the surface from the depths of the unconscious and catches him unawares. He recollects these single events in their original, qualitative content, conveying "a meaning of selfhood which could not be elicited from the contents of immediate experience" (Meyerhoff, 48): "It (Nirmal's house) was gone now but the image of it that flickered in his memory was no less real to him than the newly constructed student hostel that had taken its place" (*HT*, 88). "Experiences recollected in tranquility", explains Meyerhoff, "reveal a quality which is often lacking in the 'collection' of data constituting the world of immediate experience". Hence, "memories may well appear more 'real', [...] than the original experiences from which they are derived" (48).

Kanai's nightmarish experience in the tide country swamp with Fokir effects a profound change in him as he delves deep into his unconsciousness. His journey into the depths of his psyche is, of course, initiated by his dreams. Out in the waters, accompanying Piya and Fokir in their expedition, a "recurrent childhood nightmare" – the vestiges of his past – comes back to haunt him: "a dream in which he was taking the same examination over and over again" (*HT*, 316). In his dream the examiners were not his teachers but Kusum and Piya, Nilima and Moyna, Horen and Nirmal and the words "*pariksha*, 'examination', 'trial by ordeal'" haunted him. Needless to mention that recurring dreams or recurring dream images are the most reliable indicators of an individual's unconscious concerns. The very next day, the sweltering midday heat induces a kind of torpor in Kanai and as if in a dream he sees Fokir travelling to Seattle with Piya. Emotionally entangled with Piya, what Kanai unconsciously fears is abandonment. Lois Tyson's enunciation serves as an insight into Kanai's mind:

> if my nightmares begin to occur while I'm awake – that is, if the breakdown of my defences is more than temporary, if my anxiety cannot be abated, if the truth hidden by repression comes out before my conscious self in a manner I can neither disguise nor handle – then I am in *crisis*, or *trauma* (21).

For Kanai, Piya was an object of "pure desire", "incarnated in the woman who was standing before him, in the bow, a language made flesh" (*HT*, 269). Indeed sexuality seems to be "the strongest and most immediate instinct, standing out as the instinct above all others" (Jung, *On the Nature of the Psyche*, 68). Kanai's unconscious self thus projects Fokir as his potential rival for Piya's hand. Hence when Fokir spots tracks of a tiger on the shore and mentions that the animal was keeping a close watch on "strangers", Kanai suspects that Fokir "was playing a game with him, perhaps unconsciously" (*HT*, 321) by heightening the inscrutability of the surroundings. The goosebumps on Fokir's skin indicate his fear and he asks Kanai "'[c]an you feel the fear'" (*HT*, 322)? Fokir's question to Kanai is reminiscent of Horen's question to Nirmal years back: "'*Tell me, Saar, bhoi ta ter paisen? Do you feel the fear*'" (*HT*, 244, italics original)? For a rationalist, urban intellectual like Kanai "fear was not [...] an instinct": "It was something learnt, something that accumulated in the mind, through knowledge, experience and upbringing" (*HT*, 322). Cocooned within his own self, he believed that "nothing was harder to share than another person's fear, and at that moment

he certainly did not share Fokir's" (*HT*, 322). It is Horen who pointed out that "'[...] *it's the fear that protects you,* [...] *it's what keeps you alive. Without it the danger doubles*'" (*HT*, 244, italics original). The distinction between fear and anxiety is of some importance in the given context. Fear for Kierkegaard refers to "something definite" (42). A threat is detrimental by its very nature; the fear it inspires has its definitiveness rooted both in the character of the region from which the threat originates and in the entity marked out for harming. Furthermore, "the situation of inching closer without being within striking distance heightens the effect by a degree of uncertainty on the part of the frightened" (Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 179-80). The fearful Fokir and the fearless Kanai go ashore to take a closer look at the footprints of the tiger. Fokir, of course, has a reason for his daring act because his mother told him that "this was a place where you had to learn not to be afraid. And if you did, then you might find the answer to your troubles'" (*HT*, 323). Landing on the slippery banks, Kanai and Fokir experience a complete role-reversal of their authoritarian positions, as Fokir, acting as "some hapless traveller's window on an unfamiliar world" uses a rather different form of address with Kanai: "From the respectful *apni* that he had been using before, he had now switched to the same familiar *tui* Kanai had used in addressing him" (*HT*, 325). Before long, in his competition for one-up-man ship with Fokir, Kanai loses his footing in the mud and slips. Exasperated, far from accepting Fokir's help to get out of trouble, he is "powerless to stop the torrent of obscenities that were pouring out of his mouth":

> His anger came welling up with an atavistic explosiveness, rising from sources whose very existence he would have denied: the master's suspicion of the menial; the pride of caste; the townsman's mistrust of the rustic; the city's antagonism to the village. He had thought that he had cleansed himself of these sediments of the past, but the violence with which they came spewing out of him now suggested that they had only been compacted into an explosive and highly volatile reserve. (*HT*, 326)

The rational, intellectualized, cosmopolitan Kanai who has all his life stifled and negated his unconscious suddenly feels it erupting like a volcano. The façade of sophistication that has shrouded his conscious self cracks and he meets himself as something other. The translator Kanai, empowered with the instrument of language, "a transparent film, a prism" (*HT*, 327) could have a glimpse into another mind. Caught completely off-guard deep inside the inscrutable mangrove

forests and having entered the domain of the irrational unconscious, Kanai, through the "opaque, unreadable" eyes of the silent Fokir sees in him "a double for the outside world" who has decimated Fokir's village, burnt his home and killed his mother, for whom the insignificant Fokir's value was "less than that of an animal" (*HT*, 327). He realizes that the prime reason why Fokir has brought him there is that because he wanted Kanai to be judged. Loosed in a boundless expanse in which he is not habituated and experiencing himself as the object of unseen factors what Kanai feels is terror that can be diagnosed as anxiety. "That in the face of which one is anxious", believes Heidegger "is completely indefinite." As he goes on to explain:

> Not only does this indefiniteness leave factically undecided which entity within-the –world is threatening us, but it also tells us that entities within the world are not "relevant" at all. [...] The world has the character of completely lacking in significance. In anxiety one does not encounter this thing or that thing which, as something threatening, must have an involvement. (*Being and Time*, 231)

Confronted with an emptiness beyond limit, an incomprehensible scale of things beyond measure, the linguist Kanai feels emptied of language because the "sounds and signs that had served, in combination, as the sluices between his mind and his senses, had collapsed: his mind was swamped by a flood of pure sensation" (*HT*, 329). Such nothing and nowhere, a phenomenon characterized by total indefiniteness, indicate, according to Heidegger, "that the world as such is that in the face of which one has anxiety" (*Being and Time*, 231). "To be in such a world", contends Ranajit Guha, "is not to be at home in one's environment" ("Not at Home in Empire", 41). Unsurprisingly, Kanai feels "so little at ease" in his "translated world" (*HT*, 328). Standing face to face with his repressed unconsciousness is for the intellectualized urban translator an almost unbearably abnormal experience. For him it is a perfect pointer that he is a misfit in that remote world, an expose of the limitations of his civilized garb as he confesses to Piya "'[t]his is not my element [...] What happened today certainly showed me that'" (*HT*, 334). Kanai loses his composure and collapses on the mud which his quite unbecoming of his "buoyant confidence" (*HT*, 333). Recognizing the shortcomings of language as a rational medium of communication, Kanai acknowledges Moyna's observations on language that "'words are like the winds that blow ripples on the world's surface. The river itself flows beneath, unseen

and unheard'" (*HT*, 335). A remarkably chastened man after the trauma, Kanai refuses to be part of the adventure any further and prepares to depart.

An individual who recoils from emotional involvement with others, Piya's mind is the theatre of consciousness within which the conflicting world views of the primitive Fokir and the civilized Kanai are in continuous dialectical interplay. While she glorifies to Kanai Fokir's "'amazing'" nature and "'incredible instinct: [...] as if he can see right into the river's heart'" (*HT*, 267), Kanai is determined to force the issue on Piya that there is an unbridgeable gap between them: "'You're from different worlds, different planets'" (*HT*, 268). Piya's fascination for Fokir receives a severe blow when she finds him in the centre of a frenzied mob frantically trying to kill an incapacitated tiger that had recently killed a new-born calf. In an act of spirited defiance, reminiscent of May Price in the Dhaka riot in *The Shadow Lines* and Uma in Rangoon in *The Glass Palace*, Piya tries to stop the infuriated mob. Far from coming to her aid, Fokir drags Piya from the scene in spite of her vehement protests. The horrible experience unsettles her and she cannot get out of it: "'It was like something from some other time – before recorded history'" (*HT*, 300).What seems barbarous from the sensitive Piya's perspective is "'just a part of everyday life'" (*HT*, 300) for Horen and Fokir. This dichotomy springs from inhabiting antithetical life-worlds. Piya is oblivious to the danger of living in proximity to the habitats of ferocious wild animals. Western patrons who put a premium on wildlife conservation pay scant regard to the poorest of the poor whose deaths go unrecorded. Interestingly, this incident serves as a perfect metaphor for the Morichjhapi incident. The difference is that while the intruding tiger is ruthlessly attacked by men armed with spears, in Morichjhapi armed police massacred a group of settlers in the name of preserving ecological balance. Kanai's response to Piya establishes the connection between the two events: "'It happens every week that people are killed by tigers. [...] these killings are never reported, never written about in the papers. Isn't that a horror too – that we can feel the sufferings of an animal, but not of human beings'" (*HT*, 300-301)? Kanai's concern articulates the vital question that his childhood friend Kusum, a victim of the Morichjhapi killings, raised a few years earlier to Nirmal: "'*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, italics original). Anyway, it

is Piya who blames herself for developing an exalted opinion about Fokir, only to be proved wrong once again.

After Kanai and Horen's departure, Fokir and Piya move forward in their expedition. Strangely they notice a disturbance in the dolphins' movements and even come across a carcass. When the boat is at anchor, nature is at its best and induces a sparkle in Piya: "The moist, unmoving air seemed to have a magnifying effect, for this moon was larger and brighter than any she could ever remember seeing" (*HT*, 351). In this magical setting, Piya and Fokir establish a telepathic mode of existence achieving a unity at their unconscious levels. While for animals the world is infinite humans are imprisoned within the grooves of their self-generated ontologies that prevent the transcending of the world of objects. Working with Fokir to locate the elusive dolphins, Piya comes to realize that despite their differences, despite being "people who could not exchange a word with each other", they are able nonetheless to experience a "seamless intertwining of their pleasures and their purposes" (*HT*, 118). Disregarding the epistemic gulf between them, Piya realizes the limitations of language because "speech was only a bag of tricks that fooled you into believing that you could see through the eyes of another being" (*HT*, 132). Originally dismissed as subaltern illiteracy, superstition and silence are reinterpreted as alternative ways of being that expose the shortcomings of Piya's scientific knowledge. The novel prioritizes language but offers seeing, or vision, as an alternative way of perceiving the world. Piya and Fokir emphasize the infinite and non-linguistic nature of a love relationship:

> They sat unmoving, like animals who had been paralyzed by the intensity of their awareness of each other. When their eyes met again it was as if he knew at a glance what she was thinking. [...] It was as if their shared glimpse of the lunar rainbow had somehow broken something that had existed between them, as if something had ended, leaving behind a pain of a kind that could not be understood because it had never had a name. (*HT*, 352-353)

The duo experiences the fulfillment of their integrative potential through self-identification with one another and enjoys the bliss of wholeness. This self-transcending emotion initiates the "feeling of integrative participation" as the self enters into "symbiotic communion with a human being, living or dead, or some higher entity, real or imaginary, of which the self is felt to be a part" (Koestler, 119-120). Enjoying the dynamics of mutual self-absorption Piya comprehends the hitherto incomprehensible music of Fokir: "suddenly the language and the music

were all around her, flowing like a river, and all of it made sense; she understood it all" (*HT*, 360). Her greater insight into Kokir's song is of course guided by Kanai's interpretation of it. Interestingly, Kanai derives meaning out of Fokir's seemingly untranslatable music after his brush with the unconscious. The spell-bound Piya finds herself vacillating between her conscious and unconscious selves, represented by Kanai and Fokir respectively": "[a]lthough the sound of the voice 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). The rhythmic pattern of her emotions is perhaps metaphorically represented by the ebb and the tide. But the predominance of the unconscious over the conscious self is perhaps complete when Piya and Fokir brave the storm to climb the highest mangrove tree and fasten themselves with the trunk at Garjontala. Fokir shields Piya with his body withstanding the full force of the storm and the massive tidal waves. With their spirits fused, their bodies also coalesce to provide wholeness to their asexual love relationship:

> Their bodies were so close, so finely merged that she could feel the impact of everything hitting him, 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)

Thus, class, caste, gender, linguistic and national boundaries collapse, and nature becomes the agency that purges all characters off their cultivated sensibilities. In a striking parallel, the culmination of Kusum's relationship with Horen moments before her death is described in similar evocative terms: "'it was as if the barriers of our bodies had melted and we had flowed into each other as the river does with the sea'" (*HT*, 364). Fokir saves Piya's life by sacrificing his own. True to their symbiotic relationship, "once again, as so often before, he had seemed to understand her, even without words"(*HT*, 393).

Fokir's selflessness affects Piya the most. Cut off from her steadfast anchor, she retreats deep within her own self and is visibly devastated with a stony expression. She becomes "a strangely unnerving presence in the Guest House, a kind of human wraith, inward, uncommunicative, leaden-faced" (*HT*, 394). Moyna's grief is well discernible in her red eyes. Fokir's dead soul unites the two women. Discarding her peripatetic lifestyle, Piya wishes to settle in the tide country, and decides to finance a house for Moyna and education for Tutul. She is

determined to raise funds for Nilima's Trust and take up the project of conservation of the endangered dolphins. Fokir's wisdom and instinctive knowledge not only saves Piya, but also inspires her to embark on the unfinished project which would eventually deepen her association with the tide country. Fokir's crucial act of hospitality inspires her to call it "home". Piya, in a significant Freudian slip, calls Nilima's abode her "home" and later clarifies it by claiming that her home is "'where the Orcaella are'"(*HT*, 400). By associating herself instinctively with Bon Bibi's messenger, who for Nirmal represents the "*gaze of the Poet*" (*HT*, 235), Piya desires to unite her fractured identity, and explore the depths of her unconscious self. Piya arrived in the tide country well equipped with an enormous amount of theoretical knowledge about cetaceans and mammals the limitations of which in this inhospitable terrain are soon exposed. Despite his obvious lack of "education" and technology, Fokir possessed an intimate, intuitive knowledge of the waters of the tide country and its animals. The narrative integrates the modernized "rational" postcolonial with the "mystic" one and proposes a newer humanist vision. Since her Global Positioning System has recorded the zig-zag pattern of her and Fokir's movements, she can commemorate the subaltern hero by naming the project after him. Unfortunately, Nirmal's journal slipped from Kanai's hands amidst the storm and was lost in the waters. But Kanai, who is also returning to Lusibari, voluntarily intends to reconstruct it from his memory; he wants to write the "story of Nirmal's notebook" (*HT*, 399) which would give Morichjhipi to the world. Leela Gandhi points out that postcolonial theory "seeks its anti-colonial counter-narrative in the written word" (*Postcolonial Theory*, 159), and Kanai's textualization and archivisation of Morichjhapi is this counternarrative.