

The Criterion

December 2012

ISSN 0976-8165

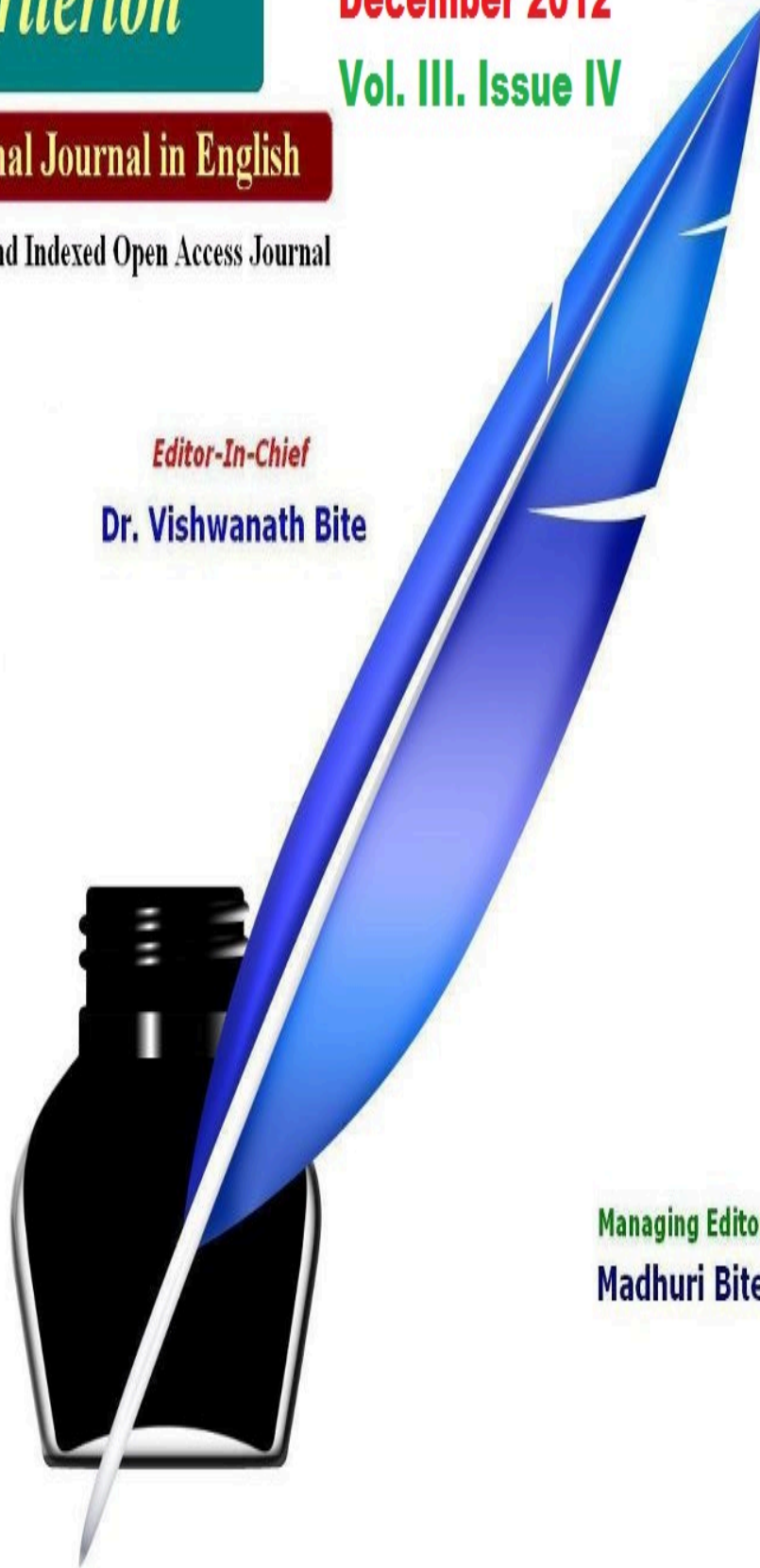
Vol. III. Issue IV

An International Journal in English

Quarterly Refereed and Indexed Open Access Journal

Editor-In-Chief

Dr. Vishwanath Bite



Managing Editor

Madhuri Bite

www.the-criterion.com

criterionejournal@gmail.com

**(Dis)homing Texts: An Interrogation of Ideological Perspectives in Ghosh's
The Hungry Tide and Guha's *The Bounty of the Goddess***

Dr. Saswat S. Das

Assistant Professor,

Department of Humanities and Social Sciences,

IIT Kharagpur.

&

Dr. Bipasha Som

Lecturer,

Madras Christian College, Chennai.

. . . So that my India was just that: 'my' India, a version and no more than one version of all the hundreds of millions of possible versions. (Rushdie, *Imaginary* 10)

. . . Translation is not secondary but is rather a *condition* of the original. . . the structure of the original is marked by the requirement to be translated. (Royle 57-58)

The comment made by Salman Rushdie in his much acclaimed *Imaginary Homelands* may be treated as an effective tool to grasp the con/text of Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* in which the author has primarily harped on the multiplicity and fluidity of national existence while interrogating the nationalist discourse, flooded with the ideas of stable culture and identity. While Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* persistently focuses on the destabilization of the essentialist notion of identity, Buddhadeb Guha's *The Bounty of the Goddess* holds tenuously to the idea of homogeneous or collective national identity—nation as absolute and fixed.

Patterned upon the rhetoric of democratic India, an India pretending to be intangible to the theories of dilution, Guha's novel goes on to refine the concepts of rootedness and fixity, the essentialist tools for building national consciousness and sustaining the sense of belongingness that this consciousness exudes. Unlike Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*, Guha's novel does not seem poised to mirror the postmodern state of "becoming" (Colebrook 1), or yield space to the tools of destabilization that the former works with. Rather it seems keen not only to contest the fragmentary essence of a nation that Ghosh's text stresses upon, but to reject the entire postmodern baggage, including Ghosh's optimistic rendition of Bhabha's "in-between" in his text.

A cursory glance at the novel's plot will perhaps enable us to re-construct its author's gaze, not the panoptic gaze of a traveler, a kind of touristy look, but an "immanent" (Colebrook 55) view, penetrating deep into, and speaking from within, the depths of the text. Guha's novel houses characters, mainly tribal, the Oraons living in perfect harmony within the mystery and the incorruptibility of the natural surroundings, the jungles and hills of the Palamou region of East India. The narrator of this tale, Sayan Mukherjee, an upper class Bengali from the city of Calcutta, is charmed by the beauty of this place, though his arrival amidst its bucolic surrounding for the sake of his job is a stern reminder of our banal existence, failing to come to terms with the mysterious aura of the Jungle, which seems to exist beyond the familiar cityscape as an "irreducible other" (Hand 116). However, Sayan's fascination for the atavistic charm of his

surrounding is what enables him to come to terms with its alienating “otherness”. In fact, Sayan not only craves to be one of those among whom he lived, the Oraons who for him stood for the reality of India, but he also falls in love with the servant girl Titli working in his home. If on one hand, this marks a permanent rupture with his previous self, on the other, it brings about an unanticipated consummation with the *other*. (The popularity of Ghosh’s text within the academic circles, unlike that of Guha’s, not only indicates the skewed relationship between the two genres of writing, IWE and *Bhasa*, but also encourages one to take the liberty of critically engaging with Ghosh’s text, without elaborating its plot in much detail.) In contrast to Guha’s *The Bounty of the Goddess*, Ghosh’s *The Hungry Tide* displays the limitations of the collectivist approach to national identity while interrogating the official history of its nation, which tends to establish a singular and unified national consciousness down the passage of time. In fact, Ghosh embarks on his project of problematizing the ability of a nation to establish “deep horizontal comradeship” by not only questioning its possession of a singular national history, but also by toying with this history’s epistemological claims: “To hear this story is to see the river in a certain way . . . That there is a further twist to the tale . . . comes as a surprise because it is never told and thus never imagined” (Ghosh 6).

On the other hand, a conventional narrative aims at bolstering the power-structures of a society. It not only re-narrates those episodes of history that contribute to the construction of a homogenous national consciousness, but also serves as an effective device for erasing the markers of heterogeneity (Bhabha, *Nation* 253), or performativity, those incidents and episodes that problematizes the concept of nation hood, or more precisely exposes it as powerful metaphor. While, at the first sight, Guha’s novel confirms to the demands of a conventional narrative, training its reader in the art of grounding an elusive nation hood, a restless signifier without a home or a signified, Ghosh’s *The Hungry Tide* offers a contrapuntal exercise, an exercise in (de)essentialising nation, releasing it from those stable anchoring points that we find liberally scattered within the former’s text.

In fact, from the very beginning Ghosh’s novel places its characters’ dreams and aspirations, frustrations and longings side by side, unfolding their private histories quite passionately in the forms of little stories captured within the notebook of the failed revolutionist Nirmal. The graphic portrayal of the history of this place seems to be a reliable medium to illuminate the fissures that national historiography is made up of, those that the repressive state apparatuses overlook or wrap up within its images of coherence and stability. In other words, while the national historiography, the grand narrative, reflects an institutionalized practice of silencing those events that threaten its “teleological”(Royle 68) ends, Ghosh’s text re-visits them in order to tell their tale. His emphasis upon the Morichjhapi massacre is a case in point. In fact, it is by re-visiting this “forgotten” episode in history that Ghosh dwells upon the inadequacies and the pretensions of national historiography: “I know that after the storm passes the events that preceded its coming will be forgotten” (Ghosh 69)

Ghosh dwells upon Morichjhapi massacre not only to show how poor are devastated by nation making exercises, which often arise out of a cartographer’s fancy (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 31), or his whimsical drawing of arbitrary lines that ironically determine a nation’s space and time, but also to distinguish these poor in terms of their struggles and aspirations that constantly seeks to defy the borders of a nation, forging bonds not in terms of sociological determinants,

essential constituents of nation's exclusivity, but by a desire to unite with sufferers everywhere. Kusum's tremendous urge to join the group of refugees fleeing from the rehabilitation camp in Dandakaranya towards the tide country in Sundarbans in fact interrogates the ground rules of achieving solidarity, those that the official history of a nation sanctions. "These were my people . . . we shared the same tongue, we were joined in our bones; the dreams they had dreamt were no different from my own" (Ghosh 165).

The irony deepens as the reality of Sundarbans ensues out of Fokir's narrative, the margins of a dominant epistemology, rather than Piya's encyclopedic familiarity with the historical details. Her limitations are mirrored within Nilima and Nirmal's official knowledge of village life, which fails to capture the reality of Sundarbans. If on the one hand, Piya's encounter with Sundarbans, not unlike Nilima's and Nirmal's, is an encounter with the *other* or the "unknowable" (Hand 17), on the other Fokir's encounter is like coming to terms with his own self. However, with Piya listening to Fokir's singing with pleasant surprise and realizing rather instinctively that the latter did not resemble any "Indian music she had ever heard before", Ghosh's interrogation of official history reaches its peak. This could also be seen in Ghosh's depiction of Sundarbans, vying for attention along with those of his characters: "How was it possible that people spoke so much about the immemorial traditions of village India and yet no one knew about this other world . . ." (Ghosh 79).

On the other hand, Guha goes on to reaffirm the singularity of national histories, partaking of that collectivist imagination of a single coherent past of the land he chooses to depict. There are no gaps and silences that his narrative seems to open up in order to legitimize the construction of "alternative" (Bhabha, *Nation* 262) histories. The accidental discovery of the thousand years old cave painting in the jungle, the logo-centric (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 117) presence within its alienating otherness, not only yields a clear insight into the antiquity of this place, or the richness of Indus civilization, but also triggers off that struggle for the production of cultural identity, commonly associated with the texts of postcolonial resistance. The beauty of the jungle and hills of the Palamou, which the narrator Sayan enjoys, calling it rather spontaneously, the beauty of India rather than the beauty of a specific locale tempts the reader to review the homogeneity of a nation not as a construct, but as something instinctual and divine: "I closed my book and settled back against the pillow . . . and thought how astonishingly beautiful, how prehistoric yet surprisingly modern our country is: Oh, India!" (Guha, *The Bounty* 76).¹

If on one hand, Guha revisits popular religious myths in his texts to fore-ground the metaphysical core of nations, on the other he employs them to urge the poor and the unlettered to play an active role in the nation building exercise. In fact, it is by reconnecting with of the legend of "kojagori Lakshmi puja" that Guha affords a microscopic view of the entire nation: "On that night every part of this vast country, every small, unknown, sleeping village of hill and forest, even this tiny Valumar, would be bathed in the milk-white light of the moon" (Guha, *The Bounty* 456).²

What is equally inspiring is Guha's view of the poor and unlettered within his text. If on the one hand, they seem idle, caught in an eternal cycle of poetic undoing (Murray 46) on the other they betray their potentiality for experiencing divinity every moment of their lives. In fact, it is this

potentiality that gives them the strength, not only to spearhead the struggle for resisting the hegemonic forces of the West, but also to secure the essential Indianess of our culture: "My God is my country. The God I care for all the time will surely care for me" (Guha, *The Bounty* 229).³

On the other hand, Amitav Ghosh problematizes the post-colonial quest into nation's pure past, or what Agamben calls "a prelapsarian point prior to the split"(Murray 28), the point hidden from the "palimpsestic"(Murray 81) realities of the present. In fact, Sundarbans steps into history of mankind with colonial intervention, pretty much like India did. As a product of Scotsman Daniel Hamilton's humanizing mission, Sundarbans is perforated by "foreign" influence from the beginning, an influence strongly evident in the hybrid names of places like Lusibari, Jamespur, Annpur and Emilybari. In fact, they are indicators of cultural hybridity, overshadowing the dreams of monoculturalism of Indian nationalism and national history. Ghosh gingerly indicates the presence of "foreign elements" in every unnoticed day to day aspect of our lives by the name of the widely appreciated sweet meat in Kolkata—"ledigeni". In fact, the name of this sweet has its origin in the name of Lady Canning. The term "Royal Bengal Tiger" also happens to be coined by English naturalist J. Fayer. "And as the population grew, villages sprouted and S'Daniel gave them names. One village became "Shobnomoskar", "welcome to all", and another became "Rajat Jubilee", to mark the silver jubilee of some king or the other. And to some he gave the names of his relatives" (Ghosh 51).

However, the differences between these two texts are not absolute. Rather they hide the "uncanny"(Bhabha Nation 313) potential of the language to turn upon it-self, a potential that brings strange overlaps between texts, threatening their encyclopedic status, their "dialogicity" ensuring that they speak to their readers in a singular voice. In fact, here one could refer to the famous Agambenian claim that negativity lies at the heart of language, splitting every signifier from the signified, and our symbolic selves from our real selves. (Myers 2003) Though the striking difference between these two texts, the kind that this work registers, displays the extent to which language can be shaped according to their authors' intention, or their commitment to two brilliantly opposed intellectual constructs, the unanticipated overlaps between these two texts provides fresh examples of language's elusive potential, its potential to play against their authors' will, making and marring flickers of meaning that ceaselessly expand the boundaries of texts. In fact, Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* as well as Guha's *The Bounty of the Goddess*, pretty much like other texts, embody the tremendous potential of the language to operate against their author's will while disseminating its magnetic appeal, its attraction for new sites of meaning, which interrogate a text's unity, hinging upon an assertion that it shelters the real meaning. If on the one hand Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*—a text geared to Rushdie's legacy and voicing Bhabha's concerns—eventually succumbs to the uncontrollable play of language, making way for the new sites of meaning, including the ones Guha had eagerly planted in his text to refine the political and the religious rhetoric of our nation. On the other hand Guha's *The Bounty of The Goddess*, driven by the urge to clearly establish its goals, fails to resist the "disclosive potential"(Clark 48) of the language, accommodating every meaning that this disclosive turn gathers, including those that displays Ghosh's intellectual commitments. In fact, both these texts embody each other's concerns, fascinations and goals so much so that they fail to convey anything in particular. If they show anything at the end, it is the potential of the language to clearly violate their authors' intention and plant its own meanings, its innate ability to mingle other voices, both real and unreal, from the past and the present into an unrecognizable

muddle. If the obvious potential of the language mirrors the ontological claims of their authors, its uncanny ability to turn upon itself mirrors what Derrida calls "hauntology"(Royle 50), the intrinsic potential of every piece of writing to be haunted by multiple ghostly voices/presences.

Thus Guha works with the idea of singularity of national histories only to acknowledge at the beginning of his novel the constructive influence of the English men on the nation's history. His thick Palamou forest that "mimics"(Bhabha, *Nation* 318) the real nation to some extent ironically grows out of the hands of a lone English man "Johnston Sahib", the planter of many seedlings during the time of the British Raj in that region. If on one hand such an acknowledgment alienates the author from himself, marking the ghostly arrival of voices within texts, on the other, they metamorphose Palamou forest into a palimpsestic presence. The perpetual tension between the language of this text and its author's becomes even more obvious as the recognition of the white men's contribution to the shaping of the counters of the locale does not inspire the author to recognize the hybridity of his nation's past, the ostensible subject of this text's *other*, *The Hungry Tide*. However the play of the language continues, undisturbed by the binary that the author goes on to resuscitate in his exclamation: "Although they came to exploit us, the Englishmen loved their work"(Guha, *The Bounty* 51).⁴

Though Guha finds no gaps or silences within the official history of nation, he does not fail to register that the material and intellectual progress of the educated elite of the country was at odds with the abject poverty of the uneducated poor rustic villagers. If on the one hand, the author displays hesitation to interrogate the progress of the elite, on the other, he betrays an urgency to dub the soil of the villages amidst jungle as real: ". . . there is very little similarity between those women of urban India and the women of real India, such as that which sleeps in Valumar"(Guha, *The Bounty* 405).⁵

However, this does not prevent the author from adopting an organicist view of nation's history. For him, not only the colonial history of the united struggle against the foreign oppression but, the pre-colonial or even the Paleolithic history of the land shapes the nation into a unified whole: "Aren't we so lucky? We've had a meeting with history, or rather, with prehistory"(Guha, *The Bounty* 53).⁶

On the other hand, it may seem that the play of language in *The Hungry Tide* is arrested, or tamed to suit the author's intention, particularly when Ghosh unhesitatingly critiques ideas like deep horizontal comradeship across the nation and the feeling of pan-Indian sensibility, yielding to the differing and often clashing markers of identity that greedily violates the sense of nationhood. However, a sustained engagement with the play of language within the text may prove otherwise, exposing what the Heideggerians may say, its "world disclosing" potential (Clark 62). While Ghosh intends to create a world with tools borrowed from the likes of Bhabha, the language of his texts intends otherwise. In fact, it ends up erecting its own world, a world that secures the Indian sense of nationalism, which the author had set out to interrogate. Though Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* does not crudely display an exercise in silencing its author, there are places/sites within this text where language speaks in the voice of a poor, unlettered Indians of Guha's text, reaffirming its faith upon: "healthy federation in politics, along with a magic-like and loose knit unity of our cultures" in order to achieve a "new secular national culture"(Satchidanandan, "Difference" 6)

If on the one hand, language of this text secures the idea of the recognition of internal divergence within the boundaries of nation, on the other it accentuates the “essential spirit of Indian culture” that is constructed around “the proliferation of differences”(Zaidi 117) or eternal process of continuous deferral, the "differance"(Royle 13). This may be seen as an excellent example of language’s performativity, its uncanny spirit to turn upon it-self, replacing the sites of meaning that the author had opened up with its own, yet not something entirely original. In fact language in Ghosh’s text as well as that of Guha always seems to be "made up of traces and remnants, marked by a ghostly logic of death and survival"(Royle 64). What is even more revealing is the structure of this novel, a structure that surfaces with repeated readings. Surprising as it may seem, the novel is structured like an extended piece of "dialogue and creative interaction among different languages, cultures and sections of people" (Satchidanandan,"Difference" 6) which for Satchidanandan is a much compelling source of national solidarity in case of a multi-cultural and multi-religious nation like India "whose very voice is a conglomeration of voices, and whose very civilization has never been a monolith"(Satchidanandan, "Difference" 6).

Though the characters of this text hail from extensively varied backgrounds, they interact with each other on a single plane, made up of network of differences, or what one may call, the syntagmatic chain of relationships, linking one with others, rather than spontaneously giving in to the sense of “becoming”, that this text is meant to dramatize. Relationship blooms not within the tangible political boundaries, but on the mystic plane where the pull towards the center seems to be at its strongest. This mysterious pull is exercised by the language, tempting us to explore what the Heideggerians may say the “un-thought” (Clark 68), the mysteries of the text, or the state of its continuous deferral, that the conventional reading/readers fail to grasp. In fact, unrecorded details, or traces pile up as we repeatedly read the text. Where from these traces arise? Do they arise out of author’s past, or they mysteriously flow in from nowhere as the language of this text chooses to speak to its readers in hushed tones, disclosing a strange unfamiliar world, ready to defy the borders of this text? One feels tempted to quote a few lines from Derrida’s most delirious breathless, overflowing essays titled “Living On”. "A text is no longer a finished corpus of writing, some content enclosed in a book or its margins, but a differential network, a fabric of traces referring endlessly to something other than itself, to other differential traces. Thus the text overruns all the limits assigned to it so far....all the limits, everything that was to be set up in opposition to writing"(Royle 64).

Kanai, a Delhi-based Bengali businessman is called back rather mysteriously to the land of his once childhood exile by his veteran aunt Nilima in order to decipher the mysteries of the “notebook” left by her deceased husband for him. Piya, an American marine biologist experiences the pull towards the land of "*kâdâ âr bādâ*, mud and mangrove"(Ghosh 51) in pursuit of her research work on marine dolphins. Though the characters experience the land through a series of inter-relationships and totemic possessions—Piya experiences the land through Fokir’s eyes who has the legends of the land living “in him” while Nirmal’s notebook gives one a peep into the troubled history of the place—what finally brings them together is not the will of the writer, but the inscrutable flow of the language. This language ensues out of writer’s hand, yet it exercises a pull towards its elusive core, or as in the case of this text, towards the mysterious environment of the Sundarbans where life is always under threat from the tidal floods, the tiger infested jungle or the crocodile infested waters. To say this is not to

lean on to the deconstructivists—those who stay with this strange pull in order to repeatedly claim that discourses are unstable—but to claim along with Heidegger that language leaps out of author's control often to give us strange mysterious configurations: "The word fails, not as an occasional event . . . but originarily. The word does not even come to word, even though it is precisely when the word escapes one that the word begins to take its first leap"(Clark 89).

It would be a futile exercise in abstraction to say that the author is not responsible for the uncanny and overarching presences in his texts. Ghosh is definitely responsible for the presence of Bon-bibi, the mythic goddess of unknown origin, in his text. But then, it would be equally unjustified to say that language does not exercise any pull towards itself. In fact, if authors had complete command on language they would not seem to be shocked by their own disclosures. Moreover, a language without its world disclosing potential would not at all be readable or of any use to the posterity. As Derrida declares while emphasizing the structure of repeatability manifest in a language:

For a writing to be a writing it must continue to "act" and to be readable even when what is called the author of the writing no longer answers for what he has written, for what he seems to have signed, be it because of temporary absence, because he is dead or, more generally, because he has not employed his absolutely actual and present intention or attention, the plenitude of his desire to say what he means, in order to sustain what seems to be written in his name. (Royle 67)

In fact, as the pull of the un-thought grows stronger in Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*, revelations pile up working towards the disclosure of a unified India, or more precisely exposing what one may call the magnetic appeal of our nation's imaginary essence. No matter how much estranged Piya feels in her land of birth, she cannot restrain herself from sensing her affinity with the latter, overshadowing her stay in Sundarbans like the "chequered towel" that Fokir gave her to use in the boat. In fact, this was a towel whose touch she could recollect, something that vaguely constituted a part of her own self, though she could not remember its name, for names were words meant to "vanish into our memory, like an old toy in a cupboard and lie hidden in the cobwebs and dust"(Ghosh 93).

However, words do not vanish in Ghosh's text. As the precious tissues of language they stick to us, carrying with them an untold tale, probably the secrets of the whole island buried under the debris of History. Piya's strange bond with *Gamchha* is a case in point. For Piya, it was not merely a word. Rather it carries within it the childhood memories, accounting for that pull she experienced towards Sundarbans and her cultural roots, or the part of her father's body perhaps, like his hair or nail clippings. The flying fingers of Fokir also exercise the same pull. She could not avert her eyes from them as they gave her the smell of home. However, the question at this point is what accounts for the inward pull that the characters experience within this text along with its readers? The author as we know never wanted to exercise this pull. Even the established reading of this text repeatedly validates authorial intentions, his keenness to impart lessons in trans-national existence and (dis) homing. So it must surely be, the language of this text, accounting for the inward pull that repeatedly seem to defy the intended configuration of the text.

Even Guha's *The Bounty of the Goddess* exercises the same pull, violating its author's intention. If this text begins by appealing to a sense of national solidarity common amongst the people of its nation, a solidarity that relies upon the collective imagination of a fully integrated pre-colonial past, it ends with events where "nation ceases to be a nation"(Stalin 20). If on the one hand, Hiru, the tribal boy fails to become the member of the elite society, on the other Nankua's claim that those who love the country have no caste fails to have an impact on the socio-cultural fabric of the village where people keenly nurture hierarchical distinctions. Sayan despite his best efforts to adapt to his surroundings remains "Bamboo Babu", intriguing and mysterious for the village folks: "You and many like you live among us, but are not of us"(Guha, *The Bounty* 198).⁷

On the other hand, apart from exacting a pull on the reader, words gather rather inexorably in *The Hungry Tide* enabling Ghosh's "athhero bhatir-desh"(86) to mirror the nation's ideology of unity and solidarity, a binding force that interrogates the idea of trans-nation, posited by Ghosh from the beginning. However, the question is where does this binding force lie? May be, within author's intention, but he seems aligned with the forces of dilution from the very beginning. One may suspect it to lie within the mysterious core of the text, a core that one brings alive with repeated reading(s), the core that exercises the inward pull, or keeps texts anchored to their authors? But isn't that *core* integral to the play? Ghosh's text does not give any answer. In fact, texts or a text with pretensions of fullness cannot be held responsible for the gaps opened up by its language. Indeed, what makes Piya, "stubbornly American" by birth, or hark back to her roots, identifying with an illiterate fisherman on the basis of nothing more than the bond of a shared socio-cultural space? Further, what keeps one's sense of identity intact within the sea of languages spoken with a flourish everywhere? Is that sense of identity a result of one's proximity to the primeval mud, or one's lurking faith upon the great "mohanas"? May be all of them together, or something more mysterious than these, which language is yet to unravel. In fact, what makes up the mysterious aura of the texts is the dense play of the language, or those repeated pulls of the Heideggerian "un-thought". One could even view this as an example of the post-structuralist criticism cancelling out the role of active agency. But then, is it grossly incorrect to assume that while author creates the mysterious aura of his text, the inexplicable and sovereign play of language within it is what heightens it, or that if the author exacts an outward pull towards Bhabha's in-between space, language of his text exacts an inward pull towards the real nation— from the performative to the pedagogic. May be, may be not, but the liberated play of language continues under the overarching presence of Bon-bibi, the treacherous symbol in Ghosh's text, the locus of unity overshadowing author's inclination for dissemi/Nation. Though her essence is watery she is as true as barbed fencing to those who believe.

But is there any thorough non-believer in Ghosh's text? Is it Kanai, a professional translator, who drops his baggage of non-conformism as he suffers from the illusory attack of a charging tiger and admits of his inability to understand and translate the legend? " 'I am sorry Piya,' Kanai said. 'But this is beyond my power: he's chanting a part of the Bon-bibi legend...I can't do it' "(Ghosh 309). There may be as many non-believers as believers in Ghosh's text, but the dense play of language within it does not yield a clear insight. In fact, it mars our attempt to construct a distinct ontology by surreptitiously flooding the narrative space of his text—the space of its performance—with ambiguous symbols that cuts both ways. On the one hand, the language of this text secures its author's fancy for trendy intellectual constructs. On the other, it strangely gathers images of national resistance, the clichéd yet powerful discourses of unity in diversity. In

fact, the spiritual feel of the novel is nothing but the “other-ness” of Ghosh’s language, dedicated to the promotion of the Western intellectual legacy. The description of religious ritual and practices within Ghosh’s text is what mirrors this otherness of language, its covert mission to erect its own world. With an unusual combination of Hinduism and Islam, the palindromic utterances within this text are shot through diverse religious essences, so much so, that it is impossible to identify their origin, lost in an ocean of chants, the echoes of Bismillah and Gabriel, comfortably rubbing shoulder with the eulogization of Bon-bibi, the mythic goddess, or the glue that binds all. What keeps the characters of Ghosh’s text rooted to the place? Not merely those little superstition that Ghosh parades before the reader to prick that layer of his ontology made up of colonial logic and ratiocination, but the inward pull of the paradoxical language that Ghosh uses. The characters would have clearly marched towards the teleological goal of the writer had the writers released the language of its ambivalence. But then, language is made up of ambivalences, and writing mirrors that ambivalence. Ghosh faintly realizes this perhaps as he goes on to plant another treacherous symbol, the parallel of Bon-bibi, the *Jatra Pala*, which attracts and repels at the same time. But then Ghosh surely must not have thought that the “*pan*” chewing actors of this play would end up arousing that dormant sense of integrity, inspiring the characters of his text to exhibit what Deleuze calls the process of “deterritorialisation”(Colebrook 55), or those lines of flight, strangely opposed to Ghosh’s (dis) homing exercise. In other words, if Ghosh’s (dis) homing exercise was meant to release the characters from their moorings, their sense of place and time, the process of deterritorialisation triggered off by the language of this text acts towards releasing the characters from their places or sites, which the author had fixed for them within his narrative.

In fact, the paradox of language, or more precisely its undulating movements, structures the contours of Sundarbans. Thus one need not be surprised when an astute critic like Niashant Zaidi points out, mesmerized perhaps by the paradoxical timbre of this language, that: “The folklore represents not only cultural syncretism but also linguistic and generic syncretism”(Zaidi 112-113) or when the characters of Ghosh’s text confess in a chorus that “Pala” is the place where the “divide is obliterated, and where there is a harmonious co-existence of the conflictual voices”(Zaidi 112-113).

However, the mysteries of language remain unresolved till the end, overarching the whole narrative and ironically carrying every character of this text closer to his cultural roots. It is interesting to mark that language of this text “de-territorializes” its characters in a direction opposed to Ghosh’s exercise in (dis)homing. While little rituals of worship reminds Piya of her mother’s household Pujas, the horrible experience of spending the stormy night, shielded by Fokir’s dead body paves the way for her return to Sundarbans. Surprisingly, if the language speaks to readers in Ghosh’s voice at a few places within his text, striking a sense of disharmony amongst them, it seems haunted at others by what Ghosh perhaps secretly wishes: the materialization of the utopian dream of integrity. In fact, this is what accounts for characters’ non-confessional pursuit of unity. Fokir’s death not only exercises an inward pull on Piya, but also on Kanai, a transformed man at the end of the text, with a renewed sense of cultural roots, cutting into his illusions of being devoured by a tiger which he had in the past.

The play of language continues unabated in *The Bounty of the Goddess* too. If Guha wanted to put the fragments of nation together from the beginning, what restrains him from collapsing the

hierarchical distinctions? Is it merely the slip of his pen, or perhaps something more profound? Isn't this a case of, what the Heideggerian may say, the failure of language as a whole to correspond to its author's intention? This definitely seems to be yet another conspiracy of language against its author, yet another demonstration of its exercise in "deterritorialisation". The characters of the bounty of the goddess seem to be seized within a line of flight, opposed to the authorial intention that had perhaps meant to exhibit them as exponents of stabilization. When Hiru climbs up the social ladder to join the elites, it results not in blurring of distinctions between the two segments of society. Rather it gives birth to a renewed sense of intolerance, severing Hiru from his cultural roots on the one hand and pitting him against city-bred friends on the other. Hiru's effort to change his name into something that could sound relatively sleeker and more in tune with the elite circle backfires as the latter desist from being friends with him, reinstating class differences: "This high-born gentleman had never wanted friendship with a tribal. Yet Hiru, until recently, had wanted with all his heart to become one of his friend's people and to reject his own"(Guha, *The Bounty* 327-328).⁸

While Hiru's family wanted to marry Tusiya, their daughter, to a handsome city bred officer, the former was intent upon exoticizing the former. His voyeuristic gaze had perhaps interpellated her identity, not really the girl he would marry, but "an extraordinary girl" for one night. In the case of the *The Bounty of the Goddess*, words seem to exact an outward pull on the readers, taking them away from the author's teleological goal, from his desire to artistically render the superb cliché, unity in diversity, to a panoptican height from where they could see the *other* of this text, the haunted tale of Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*, surfacing in the form of a mini-narrative of internal conflict within the narrative of the *The Bounty of the Goddess*, a tale of intense bonding. Sister is killed for honor, a friend is killed by a friend, hierarchies flourish, and class warfare annihilates the moral conscience of a nation. What is this, if not a terrible revenge exacted by words on its author, bent upon fashioning them according to his needs? In fact, as Guha edges closer towards making his text an embodiment of his desires, or yet another tribute to the reified narratives of nationalistic resistance, his words fail him, flooding his text with contrapuntal notes. One may contest this, but where does one accommodate the proclamation of Rathi Sen, a self proclaimed unbiased man, ironically shocked at his announcement of marrying a servant girl, whose subalternity ruffled even those whom she loved: "To set up a lepers' hospice or to raise subscriptions for them is altogether different from becoming a leper oneself. The first course is noble, the admirable deed of an educated, enlightened man. The second will only bring contempt upon oneself"(Guha, *The Bounty* 344).⁹

This does not seem integral to the economy of words in Guha's text. Rather than selling the utopian dream of a unified India to its readers, it seems intent upon renewing its contact with Walker Conner's statement: "In the Hindu belt, where marriage across jati lines is anathema, how could a sense of a single jati-transcending nation nurture?"(Connor, "The Dawning" 43) No doubt, relationships flourish within the text of Guha, but at what expense? Marriage between the upper and the lower class is only possible, if the latter chooses to live according to the former's ways: ". . . she was trying to be like me. I was her only window on the outside world, a window she kept open seeking light and air. Through me she tried to adopt cultivated manners and values as well as urban Bengali cooking. Smiling sweetly she would ask, "Can I do this? Do you think I can?" "(Guha, *The Bounty* 14).¹⁰ In a text, which does not work with irony, unlike Ghosh's text *The Hungry Tide*, the ironic twists are brought about by words defying author's intention.

If within Guha's text, *The Bounty of the Goddess*, words brings about unanticipated ironic twists, in Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*, a text working with irony, they bring about a sudden ironic reversal. In fact, lying scattered across the floor of this text in the form of ironic statements, they mock their writer's failed attempt to tame them. If in failing to economize words, Ghosh creates what the words want him to create, the image of the unified India, tied to the popular imagination of Mother India with "the ragged fringe of her sari, the alcohol that follows her half wetted by the sea"(Ghosh 6), Guha in his failure embraces Ghosh's ideals.

In fact, both these texts could be seen as vanishing texts, only if we persist in understanding texts as encyclopedic, not as open ended entities, with margins lost in the myths of their beginning. Both these texts could even be seen as displaying how their writers fail in economizing words, if only we believe—as we always did—that texts are meant to economize and exploit words to serve one's purpose. In both these texts, attempts to economize words could be seen as leading to its unmanageable proliferation, or the unbridled play of words, if only we insist on treating such prolificacy as an exception or a rare discovery. However for those who take radicalism of texts or language as normal, the critical reading of these two texts, the kind that has been displayed currently, may seem to do exactly the opposite of what critical readings over the years have done. If the existing critical reading practices have stressed upon the authorial agencies, their potential to make the words elusive by bending or shaping them in a way, necessary for redefining texts, the critical reading of texts displayed currently may seem to view language as an independent force, with a potential to "open and maintain the shared horizon within which understanding is possible, the common world that enables people to approach and make sense of things and each-other"(Clark 73).

However, the question is what implication such readings of texts have on the debate about representation of nation in IWE and *Bhasa* writing? Devastating isn't it? In fact, is there any necessity for the debate to continue when the language of the texts refuses to convey their authors' intentions, or when the ideological stand point of the author is made inconsequential by the play of language within texts? In both these texts, language speaks to its readers in multiple voices, making the whole issue of representation through language futile. In such a case does this debate have any future? Of course it does, not in a purely intellectual domain, the narrative space of the literary texts, where one gets to realize its vacuity, but in other spheres, may be in court rooms and parliaments, where intellect and politics interact, and where the struggle to tame the metaphors still goes on so they could be implemented, or rather exploited, in the purpose of reclaiming our rights and identities, those we lost during our effort to transgress the limits of our prosaic existence.

So what needs to be final word about representations and representability then? Our response shall definitely vary; rather correspond to the context in which we are situated. While in the literary texts representations may share a common fate of being known in terms of their transformability, their innate susceptibility to the play of language of the text, in a sphere where the process of intellectualization is aided by the political goals, representations would perhaps remain forever an issue of contestation. However, within an intellectual sphere, a Heideggerian response may suffice. This is a response that tells us that transformation or transformability brought about by the play of language is natural, and that the real representations are those

which do not attempt to resist their transformability. In fact, survivability of texts shall depend on the extent to which representations foreground the play of language. As the Heideggerians may indicate, Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* as well Guha's *The Bounty of the Goddess* shall survive, shall continue to haunt the posterity, as examples of two different ways in which the performativity of language creates new insights while expunging the one planted by their authors. In other words, texts by falling apart not only ensure their survivability, but also that their authors make a new beginning.

Works Cited:

Ashcroft, Bill, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin . Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts. New York: Routledge. 2000. Print

Bhabha, Homi K., ed. Nation and Narration. Oxon: Routledge.1990 Print

Clark, Timothy . Martin Heidegger. Oxon: Routledge. 2000. Print

Colebrook, Claire . Gilles Deleuze. Oxon: Routledge. 2000. Print

Colebrook, Claire . Gilles Deleuze. Oxon: Routledge. 20002. Print

Connor, Walker. "The Dawning of Nations." When is the Nation? Towards an Understanding of Theories of Nationalism. Ed. Atsuko Ichijo and Gordana Uzelac. Oxon: Routledge. 2005. Print

Ghosh, Amitav. The Hungry Tide. New Delhi: Ravi Dayal. 2004. Print

Guha, Buddhadev. Kojagar. Kolkata: Dey's Publishing. 1984 Print

Guha, Buddhadev. The Bounty of the Goddess. Trans. John. W. Hood. New Delhi: Rupa. 2004. Print

Hand, Sean. Emmanuel Levinas. Oxon: Routledge. 2009. Print

Murray, Alex. Giorgio Agamben. Oxon: Routledge.2010. Print

Myers, Tony . Slavoj Zizek. Oxon: Routledge.2003. Print

Royle, Nicholas . Jacques Derrida. Routledge: Oxon.2000 Print

Rushdie, Salman. *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-91*, London: Granta Books. 1992. Print

Satchidanandan, K. "Difference, But with Caution." *Indian Literature, Sahitya Academy's Bimonthly Journal*. xxxviii. 169(1995): 5-6.

Stalin, Joseph. "The Nation." *Nationalism*. Ed. John Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith. New York: Oxford University Press. 1994.18-21. Print

Zaidi, Nishant. "Myth-History Interface in Fiction and Nation: A Reading of Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*." *Littcrit*. 33.3 2007: 105-119. Print