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Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*: The Ebb and Flow of History

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Abstract:

The largest delta in the world, the Sundarbans is a unique place in the world with its ever changing ecology and topography. Set in the delta, Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* explores the porous borders of the region in terms of a political and physical analysis. The narrative gives a brief effect of political changes to the common people in the aftermath of the partition and the formation of Bangladesh, and the hardship the people had to face with no fault of their own. Ghosh explores how porous the Indian border is with Bangladesh in the Sundarbans and throws a light on the complex issues of social and political division in the society and state. He sets the story through the ever challenging nature of the Sundarbans and the endless struggle of the people in the region. Further, the novel explores the sensitive issue of environmental conservation and Ghosh poses a difficult question – Should a government allow clearing of forests and jungles for human settlement at the price of losing wild animals or stop such settlements at the cost of human beings?

Keywords: mangrove, tide, partition, refugee, cetologist, Morichjhapi.

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 (Ghosh 2005:7).

Amitav Ghosh's sixth novel, *The Hungry Tide* is set against the Sundarbans, a swampy archipelago in the Bay of Bengal where mangrove marshes are infested with snakes, crocodiles and tigers. Nothing is certain in the Sundarbans as the tide changes the environment daily and everything in life is dreary. The life in this place is threatened as many hundreds of people are killed every year by the dreaded tigers. The people are quite helpless and they often become prey to this dangerous species for they are not allowed to kill the tigers as the government has announced them as a protected species. And also they are liable to severe penalties if they harm or kill this life threatening animals. So the life of the people in this environment is not very safe and they lead a frightening life as anyone can become a prey to tigers and other reptiles like snakes and crocodiles (Wikipedia).

The island is far-off from the prettified world of Seattle and is by no means an easy place for the people who are condemned to live and die there. "There are no borders here to

divide fresh water from salt, river from sea. The tides reach as far as three hundred kilometres inland and every day thousands of acres of forest disappear underwater only to re-emerge hours later” (Ghosh 2005:7). At the beginning of the twentieth century, Sir Daniel Hamilton had dreamt of creating a utopian society there. “He wanted to build a place where no one would exploit anyone and people would live together without petty social distinctions and differences” (Ghosh 2005:53). But the tide is so cruel that most women become widows at a young age and the farming in those lands are almost impossible as the fields are often flooded with the hungry tide wiping out everything that comes its way and making their survival a tough one. A diverse natural habitat is often created when fresh and saline waterways come across each other.

The Hungry Tide is about the struggle for each inhabitant to find his place in the world. Ghosh keeps narrating the incidents of the ancient times that happened in the tide country bringing forth and keeping the readers intact with the stories of the local deities, scientific information, the life history of each character and Nirmal’s journal of what happened to Kusum and her son. Ghosh shows his concern for the individual human being throughout the novel. The novel is divided into two sections – ‘The Ebb, Bhata’ and ‘The Flood, Jowar’. The entire action takes place in the largest delta in the world – the Sundarbans. The Sundarbans is not only famous for its dense mangrove forests and tides but also the dangerous Royal Bengal tiger, a unique species of the big cat that loves the human flesh. As history shows, the Bengal tiger has ended the lives of many thousands of people and the inhabitants of the islands have also killed many of them in their encounter with the big cat but it happens to be a preserved species. The result is that “there had been a series of confrontations between the settlers and the government forces” (Ghosh 2005:119), and it is such conflict that Ghosh has set at the background of the novel. The narration moves in and out of past and present in a cinematographic technique and he does not stop his method of mingling facts with fiction. The tide comes twice daily and uproots everything that is permanent. It is against this natural force that the tide people struggle to create a strong foothold amidst all the hardships of life. Giving a symbolic comment on the natural course of life in this region, John C. Hawley remarks:

. . . just as the natural tides of the area tend to obliterate the sense of permanent division between land and sea, Ghosh’s characters gradually learn to recognize the transient nature of the divisions between individuals – of whatever social class (Hawley 132).

The story of *The Hungry Tide* centres on the two visitors to the Sundarban community – Kanai Dutt and Piyali Roy, and their communication with that community and with each other. Kanai, a Bengali-born Delhi resident, in his forties, is going there after a break to meet his aunt Nilima who is seventy-six years old. He has been forced to come as his late uncle Nirmal had willed a journal to him and Nilima would not mail it to him. The journal had been lost but found again after nearly twenty years of Nirmal’s death. And it is the contents of the journal which will make him probe deep into his family history.

Piyali Roy, a Bengali-American scientist from Seattle in her late twenties, lands into the world of Sundarbans in order to carry out her research work. She has keen interests in observing and studying the marine mammals and her trip is mainly focused on it. She was born in Kolkata, but her parents relocated to the United States when she was just one year old. So, she does not know Bengali and is used to the secluded life of a scientist remaining engrossed in her works. Her area of research is based on the study of marine mammals –

“dolphins, whales, dugongs and so on” (Ghosh 2005:11) and she says that there is not much talk needed in her line of work as she has to remain for days out in the water with no one to talk to and has to survive for days on just energy bars and ovaltine. She has come there to carry out her research work and find out more of these rare species living in the rivers of the tide country. In fact, her journey to the tide country is a part of her ongoing research on dolphins (*Orcaella brevirostris*) which she describes as:

. . . it would be as fine a piece of descriptive science as any. It would be enough; as an alibi for a life, it would do; she would not need to apologise for how she had spent her time on this earth (Ghosh 2005:127).

Kanai, who is a translator and interpreter by profession, is a proud and arrogant man. He is not above using his status to get his own way. He tries to be always in control of the relationships of his life. According to his aunt Nilima, Kanai is described as:

. . . one of those men who likes to think of himself as being irresistible to the other sex. Unfortunately, the world doesn't lack for women who're foolish enough to confirm such a man's opinion of himself, and Kanai seems always to be looking for them (Ghosh 2005:251).

Kanai takes great pride as he knows six languages – his native Bengali, Hindi, Urdu, Arabic, English and French. He runs a translation and interpretation agency, and offers to act as an interpreter for Piya, who knows only English. She does not have the means to communicate with the local people as she does not know Bengali but it needs to be translated for the knowledge and wisdom of the people are important for a successful research work.

Another extremely dependable guide for Piya is a character called Fokir, who is a competent boatman and fisherman. Piya's trip to the tide country doesn't begin well. Taking advantage of her solitude and ignorance of Bengali language, the government constable, along with her dubious guide, tries to dictate her, and trying to escape, Piya is almost drowned in the silty water. Luckily, Fokir saves her from drowning as well as the threatening men.

Fokir is an illiterate and ignorant being who does not understand English but he has a sound knowledge of the river and its wildlife. Piya does not know Bengali; still, the two has a perfect understanding of each other as far as Piya's desire to see the Irrawaddy dolphins are concerned and they could communicate with each other in sign language. So, Fokir rows his boat to a spot in the river where, to her great delight, she discovers a number of Irrawaddy dolphins. Naturally, she collects the desired data about their behaviour and choice of habitat, keeping in view the flow and ebb of tide. Piya, who feels closest to the animals she studies, needs Kanai's translation skills and Fokir's local knowledge of the river and wildlife to carry out her research work and he indeed proved to be very helpful.

Actually, Piya has “been sent to the Sunderbans for a fortnight, to do a small survey, on a shoestring budget” (Ghosh 2005:125). But seeing the vast multitude of dolphins in the Sunderbans, she comes to realize that “the universe of possibilities” (Ghosh 2005:125) which the tidal ecology opens to her as a cetologist may demand the whole of a lifetime. She has

opted for her present vocation “as much for the life it offered as for its intellectual content” (Ghosh 2005:126) for the following reason:

... it allowed her to be on her own, to have no fixed address, to be far from the familiar, while still being a part of a loyal but loose-knit community (Ghosh 2005:126).

At this very moment, she thinks, almost involuntarily of such distinguished field biologists as Jane Goodall and Helene Marsh. Jane Goodall worked in the mountains of Kenya and Helene Marsh conducted her operations in the swamps of Queensland. Unlike them, Piya has so far worked as a field biologist only on a limited scale, in spite of all hardships and risks, with courage and hope. And it is with this determination that she, along with Fokir and his son Tutul, reaches Lusibari where once again, she meets Kanai Dutt whom she met in the train.

In *The Hungry Tide*, Ghosh delineates a string of cultural features of the micro-community of the tide country – of its human environment, placed in both contemporary and conflictive relation to the natural ecosystem and Piya’s task is to explore it. Piya’s stay with Kanai at the Lusibari Guest House for a few days arouses in him a keen interest, not really in her, but in her expedition. Kanai is attracted to Piya and is jealous of Fokir as she goes out with him most of the time to explore the dolphins in the Sundarbans. He decides to accompany them on a trip into the river to study the dolphins, in spite of his anxiety for his business in New Delhi and his desire to go back there as soon as possible. The three of them along with Horen Naskor and his grandson set out on a trip into the core of the tide country which will bring an enduring change to all of their lives.

Meanwhile, the particular region of the utopian society and the prevailing class conflict is interfered by the happenings in history. The past and present intermingle as Kanai experiences the way of life of the people in the tide country and his reading of his uncle’s journal. Nirmal Bose, originally from Dhaka, has been a college teacher of English literature in Calcutta. He has the benefit of Western Education but is irresistibly drawn to local causes. He is an embodiment of the romantic idealist in whom the poet and the revolutionary scientist co-exist. The elitist poet Rainer Maria Rilke and the revolutionary scientist Karl Marx fascinate him and “to him, what Kusum stood for was the embodiment of Rilke’s idea of transformation” (Ghosh 2005:282). It is to ward off police action against Nirmal for his being a leftist intellectual that he along with Nilima escapes to the tide country after their marriage. Subsequently, Nirmal becomes the headmaster of Hamilton High School where he serves for nearly three decades, retiring in 1978. He feels as if his life was poorly spent because he never lived up to his revolutionary ideals. Nilima is a practical woman who has done everything to set up a cooperative trust which brings hope to many lives and helps people in many ways. She, however, is unwilling to do anything that might upset the government because she needs their help to flourish the works of her Trust. They lead a simple life as their middle class upbringing and college education bring them no luxury. They just obtain the gratitude and respect from the locals in the tide country for the following services they provide:

Within a few years of Nirmal and Nilima’s arrival in Lusibari, *zaminadaris* were abolished and large landholdings were broken up by law The union Nilima had founded . . . continued to grow, drawing in more and more members and offering an ever-increasing number of services – medical,

paralegal, agricultural. At a certain point the movement grew so large that it had to be reorganized, and that was when the Badabon Development Trust was formed (Ghosh 2005:81).

Nirmal's journal takes us to a world of social, political and cultural turmoil. Nirmal writes whatever he has to say either about Kusum or about Morichjhapi itself and completes his writing in one stretch on the morning of 15 May 1979, only two months before his death. This notebook was accidentally discovered and is meant solely for Kanai, and not at all for Nilima, first because Nirmal goes to Morichjhapi without his wife's knowledge during her brief absence from Lusibari, and lastly because she has her own suspicions about her husband's relations with Kusum. Moreover, he had never spoken to Nilima about Morichjhapi before. The reason for this is the following:

Perhaps, in my heart, I knew she would not share my enthusiasm; perhaps I knew she would see my excitement about their project as a betrayal of her own efforts in Lusibari (Ghosh 2005:189).

In the journal, Nirmal is re-evaluating his life and he thinks that it is a total failure. He also thinks that his marriage with Nilima was not working well because she had dedicated herself to the Trust. Nirmal had gone to Morichjhapi to find Kusum although Morichjhapi has its own history. Along with India's partition in 1947, a large number of people from the erstwhile Pakistan crossed over to India, and similarly, during the 1971 war, there is a heavy influx of people into India from across the border leading finally to the creation of Bangladesh. A large majority of these people – refugees or immigrants – are sent to Dandakaranya, an area deep into the forests of Madhya Pradesh hundreds of kilometres from Bengal, for “resettlement” (Ghosh 2005:118). However, these people find the whole region utterly uncongenial as “it was more like a concentration camp, or a prison. They were surrounded by security forces and forbidden to leave. Those who tried to get away were hunted down” (Ghosh 2005:118). In 1978, they broke out of the camp and reach the island of Morichjhapi, almost desperately and get settled there. Morichjhapi is a protected forest reserve, and even the Left Government of West Bengal, with all its declared policy “were determined to evict the settlers” (Ghosh 2005:119) “in order to make room for wildlife conservation projects” (Ghosh 2005:59). They resent the attitude of the government and resist its move, with the result that in 1979 a large majority of them are massacred on the island (Jalais).

Kusum is brought to Lusibari after her father is killed by a tiger and her mother is whisked off to an unknown destination for the lure of money. Though she is looked after by the local Women's Union at Lusibari, she has to leave the place as she fears that she will also be carried off, like her mother, to an unknown place for prostitution. Ironically, it is Horen Naskor who brings her to Lusibari for sustenance and, once again, it is the same Horen who sends her off from there to pre-empt her abduction. In a way, he covers Kusum's life from innocence to experience.

Kusum gets married to Rajen before her mother dies but unfortunately he gets killed in a train accident. Then, Kusum and her little son, Fokir, journey back to Morichjhapi along with a large band of fellow travellers heading for this very island for their settlement there. And it is here that Nirmal and Horen accidentally come across Kusum as they take shelter on this island to escape the fury of a local storm. Nirmal had developed some kind of obsession with Morichjhapi but Nilima knew that there was going to be trouble and she just wanted to

keep him away from harm. But Nirmal and Kusum find themselves drawn into the refugees' struggle. Nirmal finds a strong idyllic strand in their endeavour, in this attempt by the dispossessed to possess something of their own. The fact is explained in the following words of the novelist:

. . . there had been many additions, many improvements. Salt pans had been created, tube wells had been planted, water had been dammed for the rearing of fish It was an astonishing spectacle – as though an entire civilization had sprouted suddenly in the mud (Ghosh 2005:190-191).

However, his dream of setting up a utopian society does not last long. It is brutally repressed by the government forces as:

. . . dozens of police boats had encircled the island, tear gas and rubber bullets had been used, the settlers had been forcibly prevented from bringing rice or water to Morichjhapi, boats had been sunk, people had been killed. . . . it was as if war had broken out in the quiet recesses of the tide country (Ghosh 2005:252).

In the aftermath, Kusum along with many people in the island are massacred. Nirmal, whose journal ends at the moment of the repression, having got mixed up in the events, loses his sanity and dies soon after. Actually, he had gone to Morichjhapi to warn Kusum of the danger facing the Bangladeshi refugees who had recently fled to that island from the resettlement camp in Central India to which they had been sent. It is again Horen Naskor, who saves Fokir, Kusum's five year old son and takes care of him after Kusum's death. Thus, Ghosh reconstructs the revolt of a group of resettled refugees from the then East Pakistan, their creation of a short-lived community in the Sundarbans with visible utopian-rationalist features, and the bloody retaliation of the authorities. And all these are shown through Kanai's reading of his uncle's journal.

As Kanai concludes reading the journal, he comes to learn more about Fokir who is presently guiding them. Fokir is the son of Kusum, who "was spirited, tough, and full of fun and laughter" (Ghosh 2005:218). She was the person who influenced Nirmal to take part in the revolutionary movement of the refugees. After reading the story of Kusum, Kanai starts comparing her with Moyna, Fokir's wife. Like Kusum, Moyna is also equally determined and strong-willed. Her love for further study could not be stalled by her forced marriage to Fokir, who "could neither read nor write and made his living by catching crabs" (Ghosh 2005:129). But Moyna is both ambitious and bright and her determination can be seen when Mashima remarks:

But the remarkable thing is that Moyna hasn't abandoned her dreams, She's so determined to qualify as a nurse that she made Fokir move to Lusibari while she was in training (Ghosh 2005:129).

When Kanai meets her for the first time in Lusibari, he is immediately drawn towards her. Of course, he usually gets attracted to all sorts of women, but Moyna is different. With her strong will and determination "so plainly written on her face" (Ghosh 2005:135), Kanai

immediately realizes his lost youth, his lost innocence and sees his childhood image on her face.

Moyna, on the contrary, does not understand this for her feminine instinct has put her immediately on guard and sees Piya as a feminine competitor trying to encroach upon her territory, i.e. Fokir. So, she feels happy when she learns that Kanai is also going with them in their expedition and asks Kanai to alert her husband. Meanwhile, Piya observes Moyna and Kanai under the same scientific reasoning and concludes that Kanai is drawn towards Moyna because she confirms the approach he has taken in his life with her strong ambition and determination. As Piya observes:

It was important for him to believe that his values were, at bottom, egalitarian, liberal, meritocratic (Ghosh 2005:219).

Kanai and Moyna are both on the same line when compared on their theory of life. They have drawn themselves up in the society through their ambition, hard work and will power, and Moyna is the immediate example. Piya understands this and it only increases her affinity towards Fokir as she thinks:

... this was a looking-glass in which a man like Fokir could never be anything other than a figure glimpsed through a rear-view mirror, a rapidly diminishing presence, a ghost from the perpetual past that was Lusibari (Ghosh 2005:220).

Although Fokir is illiterate and his presence is almost unnoticed by people, Piya feels that he is much more practical than any one of them and that he lives in direct communion with nature which none of them can do. She also enjoys working with him as she expresses her feelings to Kanai about him:

Fokir's abilities as an observer are really extraordinary. I wish I could tell you what it was like to be with him these last few days – it was one of the most exciting experiences of my life (Ghosh 2005:268).

Meanwhile, Piya approaches Fokir to take her out to perceive the dolphins for several days or weeks. Kanai volunteers as an interpreter and together they set out in two boats - Horen's larger boat pulling Fokir's smaller one. As they near an island, they see a big mob and later, after landing, they come to know that a tiger had killed a new-born calf and the angry mob is trying to kill the tiger. The mob could not kill it with spears. So, they burn the shed where it is entrapped. Piya, with all her might runs towards the mob in order to rescue the tiger and she was dragged forcibly by Fokir and Horen to the boat. She could "hear the flames cracking in the distance and she smelled the reek of burning fur and flesh" (Ghosh 2005:295). Here, Ghosh shows the helplessness of an individual against a mob as he has shown in his earlier novels. Ghosh's way of showing a dangerous mob is repeated as 'history repeats itself.'

Horen and Kanai who have accompanied Piya and Fokir go off on their own as Kanai decides to return back to New Delhi. Actually, he is scared to have faced the tiger alone in the island. Moreover, his leave is getting over and he has to be back to his office otherwise the staffs will be worried. One more reason for his leaving the place is what he says to Piya:

It's also that I don't really have much reason to stay here, now that I've finished with my uncle's notebook. It's not as if I'm of much use to you – I think you'll be able to manage perfectly well without a translator (Ghosh 2005:333).

Soon, Horen rows his boat back towards Lusibari as Kanai has decided to go back. On their midway, they realize that something strange is going on as they see all the fishing boats rowing back. Immediately, they sense a cyclone approaching and Kanai is afraid that it might be too late to save Piya and Fokir who are still unaware of it. At this, Horen consoles him saying that the “storm won't be on [them] until midday [the next day]” and that it “gives [them] plenty of time” (Ghosh 2005:342), and they go back to Garjontola. But when they reach Garjontola, no one is to be found. At that time, Piya and Fokir are almost twenty kilometres south-east of Garjontola. Piya is happy to see a pool of dolphins there and was observing them through her binoculars. As the storm approaches, Horen decides that they can wait for the two of them no longer and he and Kanai return to Lusibari. By the time Fokir and Piya realizes the cyclone it is too late. A native instinct drives Fokir to row the boat to the nearest island with the name of Bon Bibi on his lips and shelter themselves by sitting on a branch of the highest mangrove tree, and tied themselves to the trunk. The storm comes repeatedly upon them and they are sometimes submerged under the water as big tidal waves sweep over the island. At last, everything calms down but Piya sees that in spite of all efforts and frantic struggles, Fokir has died in shielding her from the storm. By the time Horen and Kanai comes back for a possible rescue, Piya is already rowing back to Lusibari all alone in Fokir's small boat.

The novel reaches its climax in the death of Fokir and subsequent effect is an overall change in the characters of Piya and Kanai in the way they perceive the tide country. Both are shocked but they get drawn closer to the tide country with its strange natural phenomena. Piya and Kanai leave Lusibari with a heavy heart but not for long. Piya returns after a month in a very high spirit. She had recorded all the experiences in her mission to explore the dolphins in the Sunderbans with Fokir in her Global Positioning System and plans to do further research. Not only that, she has also set to raise money to help Moyna and Tutul, Fokir's family, as well as draw Nilima's Trust towards the conservation of the dolphins. She no longer feels foreign to the tide country and is all set to settle in this unlikely mud country. Meanwhile, Piya learns from Nilima that Kanai has got a home in Calcutta. He is also returning to Lusibari to rewrite Nirmal's journal that he lost in the water. It is a home-coming for both.

In other words, both Piya and Kanai readily undertake to re-enact their experiences in the Sunderbans. Both of them have lost their documents in the sea - Kanai's uncle's journal and Piya's cetological 'data sheets' but they are prepared to recollect and get back every lost text from memory. And it is quite astonishing that both of them return to the Sunderbans later. Kanai moves from Delhi and starts staying in Kolkata to be nearer the tide country so that he can visit there often, “thus moving at least halfway, towards a neo-Gandhian renunciation of cosmopolitan and metropolitan India”(Rollason 174). Commenting on Piya's new-fangled psychological ideas Christopher Rollason writes:

Piya goes further, electing to base herself and her research in the Sunderbans themselves and to learn Bengali, giving a surprising preference to the local over the global, to her Indian roots over her globalized – American identity. A makeover,

Bengali - speaking Piya could indeed have greater possibilities of communicating cross-culturally with the likes of Fokir than the 'American' whom the reader has accompanied across the book. Meanwhile, whether the future will hold any convergence of a more affective nature between Piya and Kanai is left open, but clearly their paths will cross once more (Rollason 174).

Observing the criss-crossing of characters and mystery in weaving a novel out of the resultant interaction, Sagarika Ghose makes the following remark:

Piya learns to love [Fokir] without language. Kanai, the translator of cultures, finds himself stripped down of all urban defences facing a tiger in a swamp. Fokir, the unlettered fisherman, falls in love with a woman who is an embodiment of science [Piya]. A massive storm brings death and terminates a potentially rich love. Nirmal falls in love with Kusum and finally breaks with his armchair past. Ghosh's musings on language, on translatability, on the forgotten massacre of Morichjhapi, in which dominant cultures forcibly wipe out movements from below, are deftly woven into interactions between the characters (Ghose 134).

Giving an appreciation of the mythical and mystical power of the tidal wave to revolutionize human mind she further says:

Yet the most dominant theme is of a great sweep away by water, the flood on land, the revolution in the mind. As the reigning deity of the tide country Bon Bibi, in Ghosh's vision a plural syncretic local cult, presides over this flood; she is a goddess of hope but also of vengeance (Ghose 134).

Ghosh's description of the cyclone sets all its destructive power against the all preserving hybrid myth of Bon Bibi – the goddess of the forest. The title of the novel itself gives a demonic concept of tidal cyclones. As the title suggests, the 'Tide' is always hungry for more lives. It is both the 'destroyer' and 'preserver'. It never ceases to destroy whatever comes its way – be it Fokir, Kusum's father, the many boats and ships it had sunk, or any other casualty as it is seen in the novel. The hungry tide is also a 'preserver' in the sense that it preserves the very essence of the Sundarbans. In other words, the tide is symbolic of the cult of Bon Bibi that dwells in the heart of many dwellers of the tide country in its strangely hybrid faith.

As usual, Ghosh is never tired of creating the story of the marginal and neglected individuals. In *The Hungry Tide*, through the incident of the Morichjhapi massacre, Ghosh has brought to limelight an incident in Indian History which otherwise might have been ignorant to the world. His blending of 'fiction' and 'history' is something that cannot be ignored with a nudge. The islands with its daily tides have borders more porous than the one he has created in *In an Antique Land's* Middle Age trading nations (Ghosh 1992). The Middle Age maritime trade with its porous borders comes to an end with the arrival of the Europeans. In *The Hungry Tide* the more porous borders of Morichjhapi island with its hybrid of castes and creed, refugees and farmers also suffer a death blow, but not in the hands

of a foreign nation. It receives the blow from its own government, the Leftist Government of West Bengal with all its propaganda for the people. Here, Ghosh poses a difficult question to the readers – should a government allow clearing of forests and jungles for human settlement at the price of losing wild animals or stop such settlements at the cost of human beings? And the answer is left open to the reader.

Through the novel, Ghosh has put a microcosm of the endless struggle of individuals to build a stronghold in a place as changing and illusive as the tide country. Histories are made and wiped out with no trace of it by the ever constant water with its regular tides and cyclones, and the struggle of the people is always to fight – to survive with the flow of the water. It is the ebb and flow of history of these people of the tide country that Ghosh has painted so skilfully in the novel.

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