



HUMANITY IN AMITAV GHOSH'S THE HUNGRY TIDE

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Abstract

The Hungry Tide, the sixth novel by the Indian-born writer Amitav Ghosh, unfolds a distinctly contemporary narrative that interweaves adventure, unexpected human attachment, questions of identity, and the weight of historical memory. The novel is situated in one of the most enigmatic and ecologically complex regions of the world – the Sundarbans. Located off the eastern coastline of India in the Bay of Bengal, this vast deltaic expanse comprises a dense maze of fragile islands, creeks, and mangrove forests that are in a state of constant transformation. Life in the Sundarbans is marked by extreme uncertainty and vulnerability. Human habitation exists in uneasy coexistence with a hostile natural environment, where encounters with man-eating tigers are a persistent danger and survival is never guaranteed. Alongside these natural threats, the inhabitants are continually exposed to social instability, political unrest, and the looming possibility of displacement and eviction. The tides, unpredictable and merciless, frequently inundate the land without warning, erasing settlements and livelihoods in moments, and leaving behind trails of destruction. Against this backdrop of relentless natural and social adversity, Ghosh constructs a narrative space charged with paradoxical beauty and menace. It is within this landscape of awe and danger that the paths of three individuals, each originating from vastly different social and cultural worlds, unexpectedly converge. Their encounters in the Sundarbans give rise to profound transformations, revealing how human lives, histories, and identities intersect and reshape one another in spaces governed by uncertainty, resilience, and change.

Keywords: Sundarban, Mammals, Labyrinth, Island, Dolphin.

In *The Hungry Tide*, Amitav Ghosh ventures into a literary terrain that is at once geographically distinctive and imaginatively profound, conjuring a singular and compelling world shaped by history, myth, and lived experience. The Sundarbans emerge not merely as a physical landscape but as a richly textured narrative space brought vividly to life through Ghosh's evocative prose. At the same time, the novel delves into a far more elusive and complex terrain, the inner landscape of the human spirit. Through its unfolding events and character interactions, the narrative persistently interrogates the limits of human understanding, posing a fundamental ethical question: to what extent can one individual ever fully comprehend the depths, motivations, and sufferings of another?

The novel offers a powerful portrayal of the land and its inhabitants, foregrounding the relentless struggle for survival in an environment marked by constant threat and uncertainty. The people of the Sundarbans live in continuous confrontation with natural forces such as tides, storms, and the ever-present danger of the Royal Bengal tiger, within surroundings that inspire both fear and reverence. Despite the region's proximity, barely a hundred kilometers from the metropolitan city of Kolkata, the delta has long remained marginalized, dismissed as an inhospitable expanse of mud, mangroves, and predatory wildlife. Its impoverished inhabitants, though resilient, are often rendered invisible within dominant social and political narratives. Yet, as Ghosh demonstrates, literature possesses the power to recalibrate perception. Through his narrative, the intricate network of rivers, their confluences with the sea, the scattered islands, and the dense mangrove forests acquire a vivid presence, compelling readers to recognize the beauty, complexity, and human significance of a landscape too easily overlooked. In this sense, *The Hungry Tide* not only illuminates an unfamiliar world but also expands the reader's imaginative and ethical horizon.

The narrative of *The Hungry Tide* unfolds along two parallel trajectories that gradually intersect and deepen the novel's thematic complexity. One narrative strand centers on Piyali Roy, known as Piya, a marine biologist raised in the United States by her ambitious father. Although of Indian origin, Piya is culturally distanced from her ancestral roots and does not know Bengali, the language of the region she visits. Her arrival in the Sundarbans is motivated by a scientific quest: to study the behavior and habitat of the endangered Gangetic dolphins. During her journey by local train to Canning, the gateway to the Sundarbans, she encounters Kanai Dutt, a cosmopolitan translator and businessman en route to Lusibari, one of the remotest islands of the delta. Kanai's aunt, Nilima, a dedicated social worker, has lived and worked there for nearly five decades. Kanai invites Piya to accompany him to Lusibari, thus initiating the convergence of personal, professional, and ideological journeys.



Having secured the necessary government permissions, Piya hires a steamer accompanied by an official guard. However, she soon realizes that a small, manually navigated boat would be far more effective for observing dolphins closely. While attempting to negotiate with a local fisherman named Fokir, she accidentally falls from the steamer into the river and is swept away by the strong tidal current. Demonstrating extraordinary courage and instinctive compassion, Fokir risks his own life to rescue her from drowning. Although they share no common language, Fokir is able to understand Piya's scientific purpose through visual cues from her flashcards and subsequently guides her to locations where dolphins are frequently found. After several days of exploration, they return to Lusibari, where Fokir lives with his wife, Moyna, and their son, Tutul.

Piya later prepares for a journey to the river's confluence aboard a larger motorized boat, locally known as a bhotbhoti, with Kanai accompanying her as a translator. Fokir follows them in his small boat and eventually joins Piya in her search for dolphins through narrow waterways. Unbeknownst to them, a powerful storm is approaching the region. While Kanai and others retreat to the safety of Lusibari, Piya and Fokir are caught in the open and take refuge by tying themselves to a tree with a sari. The storm devastates the island, and amidst its ferocity, a massive uprooted tree strikes Fokir, resulting in his tragic death. Piya survives and is rescued, and profoundly transformed by the experience, she resolves to remain in Lusibari to pursue a larger and more sustained research project, thereby reaffirming her ethical and emotional commitment to the land and its people.

The second narrative strand of *The Hungry Tide* centers on Nirmal, Nilima's husband, whose intellectual and emotional trajectory offers a deeply reflective counterpoint to the novel's contemporary action. Formerly a college lecturer in South Kolkata, Nirmal and Nilima are compelled by circumstance to relocate to the Sundarbans, where he assumes the role of a school headmaster while Nilima devotes herself to social work. Unlike his pragmatically inclined wife, Nirmal possesses a markedly poetic and idealistic temperament. He maintains a diary in which he records his observations, reflections, and emotional responses to the lives of the people inhabiting the fragile and marginal landscape of the Sundarbans. This diary becomes a crucial textual artifact in the novel, preserving Nirmal's ideological struggles and ethical engagement with the region.

Set against the turbulent political backdrop of the late 1970s, this narrative revisits the tragic episode of the Marichjhapi settlement. Large numbers of refugees from East Pakistan, who had earlier been relocated to Dandakaranya as part of a government rehabilitation scheme, began returning to the Sundarbans. Accustomed to riverine life and alluvial landscapes, these displaced communities found it impossible to survive in the arid terrain of central India. Seeking dignity and belonging, they settled on Marichjhapi, a government-owned island, and painstakingly transformed it into a thriving colony. However, the West Bengal government viewed this settlement as illegal encroachment and initiated a brutal eviction drive. The refugees, having already endured displacement and loss, resisted with desperate resolve, resulting in violent confrontations and the death of many settlers.

Nirmal becomes emotionally and ideologically aligned with the refugees' struggle, seeing in it the embodiment of human aspiration, resistance, and betrayal by political power. In the aftermath of these events, he mysteriously disappears, leaving behind his diary as a testament to his convictions and disillusionment. Years later, Nilima entrusts this diary to her nephew Kanai, urging him to read it and arrange for its publication so that Nirmal's voice and the suppressed history it records might not be lost to oblivion. Although Kanai begins reading the diary, it is tragically lost in the river before he can complete it, symbolically mirroring the erasure of subaltern histories and the fragile survival of memory in the face of natural and political forces.

Amitav Ghosh offers a remarkably evocative portrayal of Lusibari, presenting it as an island shaped by the ceaseless flow of surrounding rivers, its gradual evolution over time, and the fragile hopes and aspirations of its inhabitants. Through Nirmal's diary, the narrative dwells extensively on the tragic history of Marichjhapi, foregrounding the anguish of displaced people who, despite repeated dislocations, yearned for a home of their own. Drawn to the vacant island of Marichjhapi, they established a settlement with extraordinary determination, transforming an uninhabited space into a living community. Their effort reflects a deeply human longing for rootedness and self-chosen belonging. However, this aspiration is violently crushed by the state's ruthless intervention. The settlers are subjected to inhuman treatment: police boats cordon off the island, essential supplies are cut off, tube wells are destroyed, homes painstakingly built are razed to the ground, and the inhabitants are forcibly evicted. Abandoned and unheard, they receive no assistance or sympathy, and the brutality inflicted upon them profoundly unsettles the moral conscience of Bengal during that period.



This episode raises disturbing ethical questions that resonate throughout *The Hungry Tide*. Ghosh compels the reader to confront the unsettling dilemma of whether the protection of wildlife and natural reserves is being prioritized at the cost of human life and dignity. The implicit question, whether animals are deemed more valuable than marginalized human beings, exposes the moral contradictions embedded within policies of conservation and governance.

Alongside this political and ethical critique, Ghosh's meticulous research lends the novel exceptional depth and authenticity. He seamlessly integrates detailed knowledge of the Gangetic dolphin, as well as the region's distinctive flora and fauna, into the narrative. At the same time, he presents the Sundarbans not merely as a geographical confluence of rivers and sea, but as a rare cultural crossroads where diverse communities, histories, and ways of life intersect. This unique convergence renders the Sundarbans a space of extraordinary complexity, embodying both human vulnerability and resilient cultural plurality.

The Hungry Tide also unfolds as an unconventional and deeply moving love narrative, one that transcends the limitations of language and social difference. The relationship between Piya and Fokir is marked by profound emotional intimacy despite their inability to communicate verbally. Their companionship is forged through shared journeys across vast riverine expanses and prolonged moments of silent understanding, including nights spent together on fragile boats and in trees amidst an unforgiving natural environment. The culmination of this bond occurs in Fokir's ultimate act of sacrifice, as he loses his life while protecting Piya during the devastating storm. What renders this relationship particularly striking is Piya's recognition of Fokir's emotional depth and moral worth, despite his illiteracy and marginal social position. As a highly trained scientist from the United States, Piya's decision to honour Fokir by naming her research project after him signifies a profound ethical gesture, affirming the value of indigenous knowledge, human empathy, and emotional intelligence beyond institutional or academic hierarchies.

Equally compelling is Ghosh's lyrical depiction of the natural landscape of the Sundarbans. His descriptions of the rivers at various moments, shrouded in mist during early mornings, gleaming under harsh sunlight, glowing at sunset, or shimmering beneath a full moon, are rendered with extraordinary visual and sensory precision. The storm sequence, particularly the night spent clinging to trees amid violent winds and rising tides, is so vividly imagined that the reader is drawn into the immediacy of the experience. Long after the novel concludes, the rhythm of the rocking boat and the haunting beauty of the islands linger in the reader's imagination. Set against the mangrove archipelago of West Bengal, *The Hungry Tide* also addresses complex socio-political concerns such as refugee resettlement in the forest reserves of Marichjhapi and the fragile, often violent, relationship between humans and animals within a protected ecological zone. While the narrative is fast-paced and engaging, its true strength lies not merely in plot development but in its evocative portrayal of ethical dilemmas, emotional resilience, and the enduring imprint of place on human consciousness.

The narrative of *The Hungry Tide* revolves primarily around three central figures, Kanai Dutt, Piyali Roy, and Fokir, whose intersecting lives illuminate the novel's ethical, emotional, and ideological concerns. Kanai Dutt, a bachelor in his early forties, is a successful entrepreneur who runs a lucrative translation business in New Delhi. Gifted with exceptional linguistic competence, he deploys his polyglot abilities as instruments of self-fashioning, often using them to inflate his ego and cultivate a seductive charm. Beneath this urbane exterior lies a life marked by emotional barrenness and predatory tendencies, particularly toward intelligent yet unsuspecting women. His aunt, Nilima Bose, perceptively likens his instincts to those of the Sundarbans' tigers—stealthy, opportunistic, and dangerous. Kanai's journey to Lusibari in the Sundarbans is prompted by Nilima's request that he read the long-neglected notebooks of his deceased uncle, Nirmal, a task that gradually unsettles his complacent worldview.

Piyali Roy, a cetologist based in Seattle, enters the narrative as an outsider driven by scientific ambition. She travels to the Sundarbans to conduct research on the endangered Irrawaddy dolphins, one of the last surviving freshwater dolphin species. While her dedication to empirical data collection, tracking dolphin movements, recording observations, and logging GPS coordinates, is emphasized, the novel occasionally casts a skeptical light on the efficacy and ethical depth of her methods. Her work appears vulnerable to chance and uncertainty, underscored by the fragility of her research materials and the unpredictable environment in which she operates. Kanai responds to Piya with flirtatious admiration, labeling her a "brave woman" for undertaking such solitary fieldwork. Yet, despite her professional resolve, Piya frequently lapses into introspection and self-pity, revealing an emotional vulnerability that complicates her scientific detachment. Through these characterizations, Ghosh juxtaposes intellectual arrogance,



scientific rationality, and emotional fragility, setting the stage for deeper ethical and human conflicts within the narrative.

The quoted passage powerfully articulates Piyali Roy's profound sense of existential exhaustion and professional disillusionment. Her words expose the emotional cost of a life devoted to scientific inquiry conducted in isolation and uncertainty. By foregrounding her lack of domestic stability, financial security, and emotional proximity to loved ones, Piya dismantles Kanai's superficial admiration of her work as adventurous or heroic. What emerges instead is the portrait of a woman acutely aware of the precariousness of her vocation and the haunting realization that her painstaking efforts may ultimately yield limited or transient results. The acknowledgment that her work feels "more or less futile" underscores a central ethical tension in the novel—the gap between idealistic scientific pursuit and the harsh realities of ecological, political, and institutional constraints. Through this confession, Ghosh humanizes scientific labor, presenting it not as a triumph of rational mastery but as a vulnerable, often lonely struggle sustained by fragile hope rather than assured success.

In contrast to Piya's verbal articulation of doubt stands Fokir, the boatman whose relationship with the Sundarbans is instinctive rather than analytical. Possessing an almost preternatural intimacy with the tidal waters, creeks, and rhythms of the delta, Fokir embodies an indigenous mode of knowledge rooted in lived experience rather than formal training. It is he who rescues Piya from drowning when she falls into the river from a forest department launch, an act that symbolically inaugurates their bond. Despite formidable barriers of language, education, and social position, communication between Piya and Fokir unfolds with remarkable ease. Their understanding operates through gesture, silence, shared attention to nature, and mutual trust, suggesting that empathy and ethical connection can transcend linguistic articulation. In this relationship, Ghosh juxtaposes scientific rationality with embodied wisdom, proposing an alternative epistemology grounded in care, reciprocity, and intuitive attunement to the natural world.

Review of the Literature

Situated between the plains of Bengal and the open waters of the Bay of Bengal, along India's easternmost coastline, lies an immense and shifting archipelago known as the Sundarbans. Composed of islands that range from vast expanses to fragile sandbars, this region is marked by perpetual transformation: some islands have endured across centuries of recorded history, while others are newly formed, shaped by the ceaseless movement of tides and silt. In this extraordinary landscape, conventional boundaries collapse—fresh water merges imperceptibly with salt, rivers dissolve into the sea, and land itself is never entirely separate from water. Tides surge deep into the forest, inundating hundreds of miles inland, while thousands of acres of mangrove forest vanish and reappear within hours. For generations, only the most dispossessed and the most resolute dreamers have dared to inhabit this perilous terrain, confronting man-eating tigers, crocodiles, and an unforgiving environment in order to wrest a fragile livelihood from the mud.

Among the inhabitants of the Sundarbans exists a deeply rooted belief that the region tolerates only those of pure intent; anyone who enters its watery labyrinth without moral clarity is destined never to return. It is against this backdrop that the arrival of Piyali Roy, of Indian origin yet firmly shaped by her American upbringing, and Kanai Dutt, a cosmopolitan entrepreneur from Delhi, unsettles the delicate equilibrium of settlement life and sets in motion a chain of irrevocable events. Kanai's visit to the Sundarbans is prompted by familial obligation and intellectual curiosity: he has come to see his widowed aunt and to examine the writings left behind by her late husband, a political radical whose death remains shrouded in mystery. Piya, by contrast, is driven by scientific purpose, having journeyed to the region in search of a rare and endangered species of river dolphin. When she engages Fokir, an unlettered yet dignified local fisherman, as her guide through the intricate network of backwaters, Kanai assumes the role of translator, bridging linguistic and cultural divides. From this moment onward, both literal and metaphorical tides begin to shift.

In this novel, Amitav Ghosh once again conjures a richly imagined world, animating a singular landscape through its history, language, and myth. Yet the true achievement of *The Hungry Tide* lies not merely in its evocative portrayal of place, but in its probing exploration of a far more elusive wilderness: the human heart. At every turn, the narrative asks unsettling questions about inner danger and self-deception, about the limits of empathy and understanding. Ultimately, the novel challenges the reader to consider whether any individual can truly apprehend the depths of another's motives, fears, and desires, or whether such knowledge remains as shifting and unpredictable as the tides themselves.



The Hungry Tide stands as a remarkable feat of imaginative writing, matching the epic sweep and narrative ambition of *The Glass Palace*, one of the most celebrated works by Amitav Ghosh. Acclaimed internationally and frequently likened to the literary achievements of Joseph Conrad and V. S. Naipaul, the novel unfolds as a richly atmospheric narrative that combines romance, adventure, and ethical inquiry. Ghosh crafts a sweeping story that is at once lyrical and perilous, immersing readers in a world where natural beauty coexists with constant threat. His mastery of historical insight, anthropological depth, and imaginative intensity results in a work that is both intellectually engaging and emotionally resonant.

Set along the eastern coastline of India, the novel is located in the extraordinary mangrove archipelago of the Sundarbans, a region defined by its raw splendour and extreme vulnerability. This landscape is inhabited by man-eating tigers, endangered river dolphins, formidable crocodiles, and relentless tides that reshape land and life without warning. Against this volatile backdrop, three central figures, Piyali Roy, a marine biologist; Fokir, a local fisherman; and Kanai Dutt, a cosmopolitan translator, are brought together. As they journey into the heart of the archipelago, they confront not only ecological fragility but also the destructive consequences of political negligence and human hubris. The narrative simultaneously educates readers about the region's once-flourishing marine ecosystem, particularly the rapid decline of river dolphins, while offering a compelling human drama. Ghosh's meticulous attention to detail, grounded in rigorous research and a deep engagement with history, enables him to weave an absorbing story in which personal lives, environmental concerns, and socio-political tensions intersect with remarkable coherence and power.

Piyali Roy is a cetologist engaged in an ambitious scientific quest to study the behavioural patterns of the rare and endangered river dolphins inhabiting the Sundarbans. Though of Indian origin, she was raised and educated in the United States, and her return to this remote and inhospitable region forms part of her advanced academic research. Her journey to the tide country is both physically arduous and emotionally demanding, underscoring her commitment to scientific inquiry as well as her sense of ethical responsibility toward ecological preservation.

Fokir, an illiterate yet exceptionally skilled local fisherman, emerges as an indispensable companion in Piyali's expedition. His intimate familiarity with the rivers, creeks, and tidal rhythms of the Sundarbans enables him to navigate spaces that remain inaccessible to outsiders. Guided by instinct, experience, and an inherited knowledge of the landscape, Fokir knows precisely where the elusive river dolphins can be found. His assistance transcends mere logistical support, as he becomes a crucial link between scientific rationality and indigenous ecological wisdom.

Kanai Dutt, a cosmopolitan entrepreneur based in Delhi, enters the narrative through a chance encounter with Piyali during her train journey toward the Sundarbans. Their paths intersect once more at the home of Kanai's aunt, Nilima Bose, where Kanai has arrived to retrieve a package bequeathed to him by his late uncle. As the narrative unfolds, the interconnectedness of these three lives gradually comes into focus, revealing how personal histories, memory, and circumstance converge within the complex social and ecological landscape of the Sundarbans.

Environmental Conservation

To the shifting tidal terrain known as bhatir desh, a "third land" repeatedly revealed and erased by the ebb and flow of the tides, a term that Amitav Ghosh evocatively adapts from Mughal land-records, arrive two seemingly disparate figures: a young cetologist from the United States in pursuit of the rare freshwater dolphin *Orcaella brevirostris*, and a middle-aged linguist who operates a successful translation bureau in Delhi. Their encounter is largely accidental, and for a brief period the male translator, Kanai Dutt, serves as an informal interpreter for the scientist, Piya Roy. Yet the novel does not primarily concern itself with the gradual unfolding of their personal acquaintance. Rather, its central and more sustained preoccupation lies with the layered histories of the region they inhabit.

The Sundarbans emerge as a palimpsest of lived experiences, memories, and political struggles. Kanai's aunt, Nilima, has resided on one of the islands for decades, and it is her discovery of a diary belonging to her long-deceased husband, Nirmal, that summons Kanai to the tide country. Nirmal, a Marxist schoolteacher whose withdrawal from active political engagement led him and Nilima to settle in a Sundarbans village, left behind a journal that records his reflections on past events, unfulfilled hopes, and ideological disillusionments, often punctuated by his meditative invocations of lines from Rilke's *Duino Elegies*. As Kanai reads the diary, its retrospective narrative is intricately interwoven with multiple strands: his own childhood memories of visiting his uncle and aunt, his present-day experiences as a guest at Nilima's hospital, and Piya's scientific quest, assisted by the taciturn fisherman Fokir, to



locate and study the elusive Orcaella. Through this complex narrative layering, the novel foregrounds not individual destinies alone but the collective, sedimented history of a landscape shaped by tides, memory, and human endurance.

At the core of Nirmal's diary lies a decisive historical trauma: the forcible eviction of refugee settlers from the island of Morichjhapi in the Sundarbans by the Left Front government of West Bengal in 1979. For Nirmal, an ageing Communist intellectual, this episode signifies a profound ideological rupture. Like many left-wing sympathizers of the post-Partition era, he experiences the incident as a grave betrayal of the moral and political commitments that had once defined progressive politics in Bengal. It was the very Left that had earlier opposed Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy's efforts to relocate refugees to neighbouring states, insisting that West Bengal alone bore the ethical responsibility of rehabilitating those who had crossed over from East Pakistan during the 1940s and 1950s. Yet the rehabilitation camps that were eventually established outside Bengal were marked by alien conditions and severe hardship, contradicting the promises made in the name of solidarity and justice.

Against this backdrop, the events of 1978–79 acquire tragic significance. A group of refugees escaped the inhospitable Dandakaranya camps in Madhya Pradesh and made their way to Morichjhapi, envisioning it as a place where they could rebuild their lives. They cleared land, began farming and fishing, and attempted to create a self-sustaining community. However, their settlement alarmed the Left Front ministry, which perceived it as a dangerous precedent that might encourage further encroachments upon protected forest land. In May 1979, the state responded with ruthless force, evicting the settlers in a violent assertion of authority. Many perished in the process, including figures such as Kusum in Ghosh's narrative, Kanai's childhood companion and the embodiment of Nirmal's fragile idealism. Nirmal, who remains with the refugees during their final hours, is later found wandering in the port town of Canning, psychologically shattered and irreparably transformed by the experience. As perhaps the last major trauma directly linked to the Partition of Bengal, the Morichjhapi episode occupies a pivotal and haunting position in the novel, crystallizing its meditation on betrayal, memory, and the collapse of political faith.

Methods and Materials for Crafting a Writing Marvel

Every writer, before embarking upon a creative project, might profitably ask a fundamental question: what knowledge or insight do I possess that my reader does not? There are multiple ways of responding to this challenge. One approach lies in offering the distilled outcomes of sustained research and lived inquiry. Even within the domain of fiction, such a point of departure carries clear advantages, for it ensures that the reader departs not only with an aesthetic experience but also with a residue of concrete knowledge and intellectual enrichment.

Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* exemplifies this research-driven imaginative engagement, being densely infused with worldly knowledge and ecological awareness. The novel is located in the Sundarbans, described as "an immense archipelago of islands... interposed between the sea and the plains of Bengal," a region whose geography itself generates powerful narrative possibilities. The landscape is defined by perpetual instability: tides repeatedly submerge and reclaim the land; entire forests rise briefly above the water only to vanish again; and freshwater and saline channels intersect, creating a uniquely complex ecological system. In this environment, water alone possesses permanence, while human habitation survives precariously, confined to fragile and shifting margins. Human life, in such a setting, must continuously negotiate space amid impermanence.

Narratively, Ghosh structures the novel through alternating perspectives, primarily those of Piya, an Indian-American cetologist from Seattle conducting field research, and Kanai, a successful entrepreneur who owns a translation bureau in New Delhi and travels to the Sundarbans to visit his widowed aunt. Piya and Kanai meet by chance on a train, where Kanai, intrigued by her presence, encourages her to seek him out in Lusibari. Kanai's aunt, affectionately known as Mashima, manages a women's hospital dedicated to supporting the marginalized inhabitants of the flood-prone region. Her late husband, referred to respectfully as "Saar," had once served as the village schoolteacher. The discovery of a manuscript he left behind, addressed to Kanai, becomes a catalyst for deeper narrative exploration, drawing Kanai into the layered histories, memories, and moral complexities of the tide country.

Both narrative strands ultimately converge upon the historical fate of a local peasant family, thereby binding private emotion to collective trauma. Kusum, once Kanai's childhood companion and object of youthful affection, later becomes the emotional focus of Saar's idealism as well. Saar's commitment to leftist principles leads him to the settlers' cooperative established on the island of Morichjhapi, where Kusum had made her home. His involvement



in this experiment in egalitarian living proves fatal, as the state's violent eviction of the so-called "squatters" results in devastation and death. While Kusum perishes in the brutal crackdown, her son, Fokir, survives, carrying forward the legacy of loss and resilience. It is this same Fokir who, years later, rescues Piya when corrupt and authoritarian forest guards deliberately push her into the river. His intimate, instinctive knowledge of the waterways becomes indispensable to her scientific research, enabling their shared discovery of crucial data on the endangered Irrawaddy dolphins and gradually giving rise to a profound, wordless bond between them.

Indeed, the novel unfolds as a series of intertwined awakenings, where each central character arrives at forms of recognition, emotional, ethical, and intellectual. Kanai, initially portrayed as self-satisfied, clever, and voyeuristically curious, is compelled to confront his own limitations and learns to acknowledge the quiet, unarticulated depth of Fokir's presence and masculinity. Piya, in turn, discovers not only her life's scientific vocation but also a renewed understanding of ambition, one that accommodates both professional aspiration and emotional humility. She finds herself torn between the lyrical authenticity of Fokir's uncorrupted existence and the familiar, orderly comfort represented by Kanai's urbane routines. Throughout the narrative, the frequent invocation of Rilke's poetry and the recurring retelling of local myths underscore the tension between language and silence, abstraction and lived experience. Ultimately, it is the water—mutable, overpowering, and indifferent, that asserts its dominance, subsuming human desire and ideology alike, and reaffirming the novel's vision of nature as the final arbiter of human endeavor.

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