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History of (un)transability, the native experience and the role of silence in

Amitav Ghosh's The Hungry Tide

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Abstract

Why are the 'natives' uncomfortable in their 'translated' homes? Who is trying to 'translate their experiences and why? Why is Amitav Ghosh fascinated with 'history' and with the identity of the 'native' in 'postmodern' times?' In general terms, 'historicism' is a belief that no critical account of a text can be complete without a sense of the historical context in which it was produced and received. With the help of the historicity Ghosh probably connects past with the present, which creates a complete picture of the postcolonial world. How should the native be conceived? What are images of the 'native.' Can we devise another way of conceiving otherness that is free of an image? Ghosh, through his novel *The Hungry Tide*, tries to invoke 'histories,'

‘struggles,’ ‘movements,’ ‘texts,’ and ‘contexts’ to reconnect to the native. In doing so tries to pick up a genuine problem of the native/ marginal for which he (the native) struggled in the past and creates a work of fiction in which the natives are viewed from a contemporary postcolonial lens, and they appear one of us our equals and our images, in our shapes and in our forms.

Key words: Native, postcolonial, history, silence, image and untranslatability.

We “already know by instinct;
we’re not comfortably at home
in our translated home”

(Amitav Ghosh, *The Hungry Tide* 206)

Why are the ‘natives’ uncomfortable in their ‘translated’ homes? Who is trying to ‘translate their experiences and why? Why is Amitav Ghosh fascinated with ‘history’ and with the identity of the ‘native’ in ‘postmodern’ times?’ With the help of the historicity Ghosh probably connects past with the present, which creates a complete picture of the postcolonial world. Leela Gandhi says that ‘Postcoloniality is just another name for the globalization of cultures and histories’ (126) Adam Roberts studied Fredrick Jameson’s concept of ‘historicity’ and remarks that a totality/ complete picture must be achieved in order to interpret and understand the world of art. He remarks, “In general terms, ‘historicism’ is a belief that no critical account of a text can be

complete without a sense of the historical context in which it was produced and received. In Marxist traditions, the term has been more carefully argued through, with particular attention being paid to what ‘history’ is in the first place. He remarks, “For Jameson everything must be historicised; even historicism itself. ‘Always historicize!’ Adam Robert quotes Satya Mohanty (47), ‘all [of] Jameson’s work’ is concerned with ‘two key questions central to contemporary theory’ (Mohanty 97). The first of these questions is: what are the bases and validity of *interpretation*, and in particular, how do the metaphors used by interpreters – critics say – shape the interpretations they undertake? The second question has to do with *history*, and the ways history is represented. It doesn’t take much to see that these are likely to be central issues for any who call themselves Marxists. Interpretation, for instance, is something that happens in many forms, from reading a book and interpreting what it is about to ‘reading’ the world around us. Any Marxist is going to insist that the world we live in is not simply *there*, that it is not a mere accumulation of facts, but is instead interpreted. You mig think of your country as a glorious and heroic embodiment of valor and honor, or you mig think of your country as an oppressive regime where the rich get richer and the poor get poorer. Either way you are *interpreting* the world around you. This process of interpretation is deeply involved in the dominant ideology of the society in which you exist, so anyone interested in forms of interpretation is going to need to be open to theories of the way ideology works. One of the roles of any Marxist critic is to open people to the possibility that their interpretation can be questioned. Robert finally summarizes that interpretation must be rooted in history: “any critic – including Jameson, – has been shaped by the particular cultural and political forces of his or her environment, and these give him or her a set of preconceptions, of ways of approaching questions that inflects the issue in certain ways. We can’t help this, and none of us are ‘pure’ or free of these constraints. At the same time, we

want to be able to claim that our interpretations are better grounded than opposing interpretations. But if all interpretation is relative, how can we say one interpretation is better than another? Jameson is not altogether hostile to the persuasiveness of much deconstructionist thought, but nonetheless he does believe there is something in which interpretation can be – in fact, has to be – grounded. To put it in bald terms, Jameson grounds his interpretation in *history*: it is history that provides the basis of judging competing interpretations. (50)

Edward Said writes, “The experience of empire is a common one” (xxiv) Bhabha has pointed out, “Fanon is far too aware of the dangers of the fixity and fetishism of identities within the classification of colonial culture to recommend that “roots” be stuck in the celebratory romance of the past or by homogenizing the history of the present” (9) Ghosh needs history to reconstruct the past so that he can connect well with the “native” or the subaltern. Patrick Williams and Laura Christman in their edited book titled *Colonial Discourse and Postcolonial theory* write that ‘Colonial discourse analysis has concerned itself with, among other things, the ways in which the “subaltern” native subject is constructed within these discourses.’ But Gayatri Spivak points that “we postcolonial intellectuals are told that we are too Western...I could easily construct a sort of “pure east” as a “pure universal” or as a “pure institution” so that I could then define myself as the Easterner, as the marginal or as a specific, or as the para- institutional” (8) Leela Gandhi remarks, ‘The metropolitan constitution of ethnicity as a ‘lack’ leads critics such as Rey Chow and Gayatri Spivak to question and complicate the longing ‘once again for the pure Other of the west.’ (Gandhi 126) Although according to Leela Ghandhi Chow argues, ‘The native is no longer available as the pure unadulterated object of Orientalist inquiry- she is contaminated by the west, dangerously un-Otherable’ (127) Leela Gandhi recalls Spivak’s famous interrogation of the risks and rewards which hunt any academic pursuit of subalternity

‘drew attention to the complicated relationship between the knowing investigator and the (un)knowing subject of subaltern histories. For how, as she queried, ‘can we touch the consciousness of the people, even as we investigate their politics? With what voice-consciousness can the subaltern speak? Through these questions Spivak places us squarely within the familiar and troublesome field of ‘representation’ and ‘representability.’ How can the historian/ investigator avoid the inevitable risk of presenting herself as an authoritative representative of subaltern consciousness? Should the intellectual ‘abstain from representation? Which intellectual is equipped to represent which subaltern class? Is there an ‘unrepresentable subaltern class that can know and speak itself.’ And finally, who are the ‘true’ or ‘representative’ subalterns of history’(Gandhi 2) Leela quotes Spivak again by reminding us that Spivak concludes her ‘provocative essay by categorically insisting that the subaltern cannot speak’ (Gandhi 3)

Rey Chow wants to raise the same questions perhaps in the second essay in the *Writing Diaspora* namely ‘Where have all the natives gone?’ which is extensively referred to, where Chow examines the images of the ‘native.’ She retorts, ‘How are we then to conceive of the native? Devise another way of conceiving otherness that is free of an image.’ (48) Chow’s solution is an extended politic that considers the cultural other in terms of Rousseau’s (by way of Lucan) “big other.” She does so as a way of getting at a more general definition of difference without essentializing privileging any specific form of alterity: ‘My invocation of the big other is... not an attempt to depoliticize the realities of displaced identities in the post-imperialist world; rather it is an attempt to broaden that politics to include more general questions of exploitation, resistance, and survival by using the historical experience of the “native” as its shifting ground.’ (49-50) Uncovering the dangers of looking behind the image of the “native” for

a “true voice,” Chow points to the “gaze” of the native before becoming an image. Chow’s alternative not only recognizes an essential untranslatability of subaltern discourse into imperial discourse (35), but it does so tactically, with the native at the centre of inquiry’. Rey Chow notes, ‘Ever since Jean-Jaques Rousseau, the native has been imagined as a kind of total other- a utopian image whose imaginary self-sufficiency is used as a stage for the incomplete (or antagonistic) nature of human society. Rousseau’s savage is “self-sufficient” because he possesses nothing and is in that sense indifferent and independent. The true difference between the savage and civil man is that man is completable only through others; that is, his identity is always obtained through otherness: the savage lives within himself; social man lives always outside of himself; he knows how to live only in the opinion of others, it is so to speak, from their judgment alone that he deserves the sense of his own experience.’ (WD 49) Chow clarifies that ‘Rousseau’s idealism continues to be picked up by intellectuals such as Kristava, Barthes, Serres and others’ who ‘(mis)apply it to specific other cultures’ but Rousseau’s savage is before separation, before the emergence of object petit a, the name those subjectivized, privatized, and missing parts of the whole.’ She calls the ‘native’ the ‘big Other’ and suggests inclusion of ‘more general questions of exploitation, resistance, and survival by using the historical experience of the “native” as its shifting ground.’(WD 49)

Born in Calcutta in 1956, Amitav Ghosh, is a prominent writer in India. His family originates from East Bengal and migrated to Calcutta before partition in 1947. Much of Amitav Ghosh’s personal investment in his novels derive, it seems, from his awareness of being an ‘oriental’. Ghosh is a postmodern author as he breaks away from all rules and seeks to follow cosmopolitan principles of existentialism. Ghosh approaches nature from multiple perspectives. He includes the question of origins, nostalgia, the everyday migration, education, kinship and

feminine ‘psyche interiority’ in his writings. Ghosh crosses boundaries and blurs them. Anjali Gera Roy discusses how Ghosh connects through boundaries and remarks, ‘Ghosh’s definition of borders unpacks a history of movements, travels and inter-cultural crossings that produces an understanding of space as defined in postmodern geographies. The cross-border movements of ordinary folks in Ghosh’s works convey the notion of separateness through the “historically situated subjectivities” of those who “dwell in travel. ... These connections formed across boundaries of language, gender, class, caste and location through a shared openness to the world, whether natural or acquired, are nowhere as visible as the bond that connects the marine biologist of Indian descent Piya with the fisherman Fokir in *The Hungry Tide* (2006)” (Ordinary People on the Move: Subaltern Cosmopolitanisms in Amitav Ghosh’s Writings, *Asiatic*, Vol. 6, No. 1, June 2012pp 43-44) Notions of History or science in Amitav Ghosh’s fiction have semiotic implications. Ghosh also dissolves the boundaries between fact and fiction, traditional and modern, historical and scientific. *The Calcutta Chromosome* (1996) is a very good example with astonishing range of characters, advanced computer science, religious cults and wonderful mixture of Victorian and contemporary India. In three of his novels namely *The Circle of Reason* (1986), *The shadow Lines* (1998), and *The Hungry Tide* (2004) Ghosh refers to the Bangladesh partition and its effect on the natives. He goes back in time (history/ past) and represents the natives sanctifying their causes. Here I would be dealing with *The Hungry Tide* where Ghosh has ‘historical specificity’ which makes his novel unique to a particular place (Lucibari) and a particular time (1970). He goes back to past to look out for oppressed who are faceless, voiceless; constructs images of the natives and finds out when can they (subalterns) actually speak. He discusses cultural issues, environmental issues, ethical issues, intersection of modern and traditional thoughts through intersection of east and west.

Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* (from now) is the story of an Utopian settlement founded by a Scotsman, where peoples of all races, classes and religions could live peacefully, located between the plains and sea of Bengal, an archipelago of islands, called Sundarbans. Again, Ghosh ensures that the borders are dissolved. Here are no borders to divide fresh water from salt water, river from sea, land from water, even Bangla and Arabic. is the story of Fokir. Ghosh narrates the story through the experiences of an American of Indian parentage Piyali Roy and a sophisticated Delhi businessman Kanai who uncodes Neeraj's diary. The major characters in T are Kanai Dutt, Piyali Roy or Piya, Fokir Mondal, Moyna, Tutul, Nilima, Neeraj and Horen. It's the story of the lives of the major characters and their encounters with nature and culture of the "natives" of Sundarban, the land of tides.

Ghosh masters in construction of images of the 'native,' which despite their ubiquity, remain elusive. His 'Native' works bifurcated as either timeless or historical. In his first novel *The Circle of Reason* (1986) the people of Lulukpur were 'vomited out of their native soils years ago' and 'dumped hundreds of miles away' (59-60). In *The Hungry Tide* the settlers of Morichajhapi were 'powerless' (260) and the siege continues for days. The settlers protest. Together they shout: 'Amara kara? Bastuhara. Who are we? We are the dispossessed.'(254); 'Morichjhapi chharbona. We will not leave Morichjhapi, do what you may.' (254) and 'Where else could you belong, except in the place you refused to leave.' (254) Kusum says that 'the worst part was not the hunger or the thirst. It was to sit here, helpless, and listen to the policemen making their announcements, hearing them say that our lives, our existence, was worth less than dirt or dust' (261) Kusum tells Nirmal that 'this island has to be saved for its trees, it has to be saved for its animals, it is a part of a reserve forest, it belongs to a project to save tigers' why it doesn't belong to the "natives"? 'our fault , our crime, was that we were just human beings,

trying to live as human beings always have, from the water and the soil' (262). How can we disrupt nature when we are a part of the nature? Fokir's mother Kussum and the movement of the Settlers of Morichajhapi are silent as well because their pleadings are unheard. Ghosh notes that Morichajhapi actually exists and was 'indeed founded or settled in the manner alluded to' in the novel and 'refugee resettlement in the forest reserves' and 'Morichajhapi massacre' was 'widely discussed in the Calcutta press around the time of its occurrence' (401-02). In the people who have always lived around the sea the Bangladeshi refugees are shifted to Dandakaranya plains, in Madhya Pradesh, who are dissatisfied and revolt and occupy an empty island named Morichajhapi. 'Once we lived in Bangladesh, in Khulna jila. We're tide country people, from the Sunderbans' edge. When the war broke out our village was burnt to ash; we crossed the border, there was nowhere else to go. We were met by the police and taken away; in buses they drove us, to a settlement camp. We'd never seen such a place, such a dry emptiness; the earth was so red that it seemed to be stained with blood. For those who lived there, the dust was as good as gold; they loved it just as we love our tide country mud. But no matter how we tried we couldn't settle there: rivers ran in our heads, the tides were in our blood. Our fathers had once answered Hamilton's call: they had wrested the estate from the sway of the tides. What they'd done for another, couldn't we do it for ourselves? There are many such islands in Bhatir desh. We sent some people ahead, and they found the right place; it's a large empty island called Morichajhapi. For months we prepared, we sold everything we owned. But the police fell on us the moment we moved: they swarmed on the trains, they put blocks on the road- but we still would not go back; we began to walk' (165) Although the displaced people have shifted from Bangladesh to Dandakaranya, and later they shift from Dandakaranya to Morichajhapi, their identities are not even shifting. Their identities are merged. Kussum, Fokir's mother, merges her identity with

them. She shares the food and other things with the community when she is in utmost need and she dies fighting for their cause. (Activism) Strangely Nirmal's association with the community ends with Kamala's death and he soon dies soon after. This is the reason Kanai associates Nirmal with Kamala and questions Horen about their (Nirmal and Kamala's) relationship. He is surprised to know that both Horen and Nirmal were attracted to Kamala, Kamala chose Horen. Kanai reads Nirmal's journal and realizes his love for Bangladeshi refugees who were trying to settle in Morichjhapi. Nirmal's socialist ideologies of his youth are juxtaposed with pragmatism of his wife. Nirmal acted like a good communist who had a dream of serving 'real people'- the natives- with a wish of being interwoven with local cultures. In Fokir's Mother Kamala he found his 'authentic native' and wished to join in the movement by associating with the local leaders but fails because he is only a dreamer and realizes (after meeting a local leader) that he would not be of any help. Nilima, his wife, or 'Mashima is more practical and is always 'politically correct'. Nilima represents the image of a colonizer as she stays away from taking any moral stance for the ambiguous and problematic.

The legend of Bon Bibi – 'the goddess of forest' who 'rules over all the animals of the jungle' (28) is the myth natives really believed in. The natives believed that Bon Bibi and her brother Shah Jongoli saved them from danger and the natives relied on her for protection in the forest 'anyone can see Bon Bibi's messengers if they know where to look.' They worshiped her at a shrine at Gargentola. Their worshiping involved rituals of a Hindu puja along with Arabic invocations. The language they used 'was a strange variety of Bangla, deeply interpenetrated by Arabic and Persian. Tide country languages, 'faiths and religions' also flowed in many directions. The myth of Bon Bibi and her brother Shah Jongoli are worshiped by Fokir and other fishermen around the tidal land. They come from the Middle East and save these fishermen from

the Tiger in tidal lands of Bengal. However the process of worship of the shrine combines hindu (worshipping of an image) and Islamic (chanting of allah) rituals: “Piya stood by and watched as Fokir and Tutul performed a little ceremony. First they fetched some leaves and flowers and placed them in front of the images. Then, standing before the shrine, Fokir began to recite some kind of chant, with his head bowed and his hands joined in an attitude of prayer. After she had listened for a few minutes, Piya recognized a refrain that occurred over and over again – it contained a word that sounded like “Allah”... But no sooner had she thought this, than it struck her that a Muslim was hardly likely to pray to an image like this one”. (152) Nirmal too noted in his diary that ‘It was a ‘Hindu puja’ with ‘Arabic invocations’ ‘a strange variety of Bangla, deeply interpenetrated by Arabic and Persian.’(246) There is an uncanny resemblance between Trideb of *The Shadow Lines* and Fokir of *The Hungry Tide*. Trideb represents openness towards space and place (as he dislikes boundaries) and uses his time from the past (memory) to connect with the present. Trideb says in *The Shadow Lines*, ‘that one could never know anything except through desire, real desire, which was not the same thing as greed or lust; a pure, painful and primitive desire’ which ‘carried one beyond the limits of one's mind to other times and other places, and even, if one was lucky, to a place where there was no border between oneself and one's image in the mirror’.(*The Shadow Lines*, pp. 32). Trideb is his (the narrator's) real hero who thinks across cultures rather than beyond them. Fokir also represents openness towards space and place, by crossing the permitted limits of the river and is fined by the officials for ‘casting his net in an off-limits area’ (46).

Fokir and other “native” (262) fishermen live as human beings ‘have always lived- by fishing, by clearing land and by planting the soil.’(262) Fokir can accurately time the dolphins’ arrival by the ‘time the fog had thinned and with the tide at its lowest ebb’ and he ‘stopped his

boat at a point where the shore curved' where 'the dolphins were circling, as if within the limits of an invisible pool.' (114) The dolphins were comfortable even when Fokir took his boat very near to them. A dolphin 'was so close that she (Piya) could feel the spray from its breath' (113). Piya's task involved the use of Global Positioning System and 'required the input of geostationary satellites' while Fokir "the other" 'depended on bits of shark-bone and broken tile' (141) but 'it was not just for the dolphins that the pool was a hospitable habitat: crabs too seemed to flourish there and Fokir's catch grew steadily with each successive run.'(141) Fokir understood the temperament of the dolphins and both, Fokir and Piya, worked mutually. Even the GPS of Piya could not trace dolphins better. 'The animal had surfaced so close to the boat that she had only to extend her arm to get a reading on the GPS monitor' (114) Instead of 'disrupting each other's work' (141) they were professionally compatible and 'it had proved possible for two such different people to pursue their own ends simultaneously-people who could not exchange a word with each other and had no idea of what was going on in one another's head- was far more surprising.' (141) Fokir is an illiterate fisherman but a proud local man who guides Piya through backwaters. Piya was saved by Fokir when she fell into 'the clear waters of the open sea'. (54) Fokir touched her for the first time when he sucked out the mud inhaled by her. 'There was a sucking sensation in her mouth and something seemed to shoot out of her gullet. A moment later she felt a whiff in her throat and began to gasp for more...Even as she was struggling to swallow mouthfuls of air, it filtered through to her consciousness that it was the fisherman who was holding her' (55) She decides to go with the fisherman (Fokir) as she feels safe with him as 'From the start she had sensed a threat from the forest guard and his friend' (56) Fokir uses past (memory), the glory of Bon Bon Bibi, Shah Jongoli who travelled from Arabia to 'the country of eigeen tides-athhero bhatir desh-in order to make it fit for human habitation' (

103) He takes his son Tutul to Garjentola to make his connect with the past. Although, Fokir doesn't speak to Piya in English, his actions communicate. Fokir represents the silent subaltern. Fokir is happy in the company of his son and his silent expeditions to the river. For Fokir the tidal land is a part of his existence. He himself is a part of this ecosystem. He is attuned with nature and understands the nature with such an ease that Piya is impressed with his knowledge. Piya has studied the ecosystem and plans to return back after her research is complete. But Fokir will lose his existence if moved from here. As kusum tells Nirmal 'we are tide country people, from Sunderban's edge...the rivers ran in our heads, the tides were in our blood.' (165) It is not until the end, after Fokir has lost his life in an attempt to save her from storm, that Piya realizes that she herself has developed a bond with Fokir's memories and the tide country and she finds the tide country has become her lifeblood.

Piyali Roy or Piya, was 'not Indian except by descent,' (03) unable to speak Bengali and was stubbornly American. 'She was used to being dwarfed by her contemporaries.' (74) Piya tries to project an 'Anglo-American liberal humanism,' which in words of Rey Chow 'is the other side of the process of image identification', in which, she tries to make the "native" more like her by understanding his 'voice/ silences.' Chow quotes Appadurai, and says that 'persons, like things, have commodified lives: The commoditization of "ethnic specimens" is already part of the conceptualization of "the social life of things" indicated in the title of his volume. The forces of commoditization as part and parcel of the process of modernity, do not distinguish between things and people.' (WD 43) In *The Hungry Tide* Piya represents modernity as she is an American by decent. She is more of a cosmopolitan 'she was a foreigner; it was stamped in her posture, in the way she stood, balancing on her heels like a flyweig boxer, with her feet planted

apart.’ (3) She is a traveler and her work has taught her to be adjusting and self-reliant. She uses modern equipments like mobile, the binoculars, the monitor and the GPS. But her readings may not be as accurate as Fokir’s. Somehow she understands Fokir as she has something common with him. Perhaps it is the love for travel, self-reliance and home-coming. She is an outsider who gets well with the ‘native’ unlike Kanai who belongs to the place but finds himself an outsider/stranger amongst them. Piya-the ‘cosmopolitan’ identifies with the image of Fokir- the ‘native’. Piya had studied orcaella dolphins and is astonished with the knowledge and skill with which Fokir brings her close to the dolphins’ natural habitat as if it was his own home. She is engrossed in observing ‘the adult orcaella, swimming in tandem with the calf’ (153) which was very similar to the relationship Fokir had with his son. When Piya finished her task of recording the data about Orcaella she saw Fokir and Tutul, ‘They were lying on their sides, with Tutul’s small form nested inside the larger curve of his father’s body...Their chest were moving in unison as they slept and the rhythm of their breathing reminded her of the pair of dolphins she had been watching earlier. It calmed her to see them sleeping so peacefully’ (138). Piya spends a few days on his boat for her research on Dolphins and Fokir happily takes her to all the possible dwellings of the Orcaella Dolphins and the Dolphins play around his boat as if they were very familiar to him. Piya does not speak Bengali nor does she understand it and Fokir does not understand English but still he succeeds in communicating with Piya nonverbally. In Piya’s first meeting with him ‘There was a consideration in his gesture, an acknowledgement of her presence, that touched her; it seemed like the first normal human contact she had had since stepping on the launch.’(47). Piya and Fokir did not understand each other’s language but could communicate nonverbally. Their relationship is a strange one, where even when they have met for the first time Piya feels protected in his company, probably after her ugly encounter with the forest guards.

When Piya finds herself with Fokir and Tutul in their boat she feels safe. When three of them, Piya, Tutul, and Fokir, spend a few days together on Fokir's boat, they develop a silent bonding and admiration for each other. Piya is surprised at the ease with which they perform all the daily chores on the boat or near the shores, bathing, cooking, sleeping, all in the nature's lap with a definite ease, capturing the river and locating its places, understanding the mood of the river, the dolphins and even Piya. After Fokir and Tutul had done with dressing it was Piya's turn and 'As they were wriggling past each other Piya caught his eye and they both laughed' (85). Their pursuit is same to explore the nature. Fokir is also impressed with Piya's passion for the research on Dolphin. They understand each other very well and never interfere in it. In a series of events Fokir saved Piya's life and even takes her, along with Tutul, to Garjentola, the place of his secret worship of Bon Bon Bibi. Piya has never lived such an adventurous life. This phase is dreamlike for her. This is treasured memory for Piya. She wants it to be repeated again. Therefore she plans a visit to the river again.

Strangely enough Piya notices that Fokir, the carefree fisherman in the sea, is different from Fokir on land 'the sullen resentful creature' (211). Piya realizes this when she goes to meet Fokir in the Lucibari hospital staff quarter allotted to Moyna, his wife. Piya saw Fokir squatting in the dwellings doorway 'his eyes were lowered and he was drawing patterns to the ground. He was wearing, as usual, a T-shirt and a lungi, but somehow in the setting of his own home, his clothes looked frayed and seedy in a way Piya had not thought them to be before. There was a figurative sullenness about his posture that suggested he would be anywhere but where he was' (207) As soon as he realizes that Piya is planning for the second expedition that she notices 'a grin' (211) on his sullen face, 'he had become, once again, the man she had known on the boat...was it the prospect of being back in water that had lifted his spirits' (211) Moyna, his

wife, is ambitious and wants to progress. Fokir is unable to earn and ‘there was no food in the house and no money either’ (209). All he wanted was to be in the river fishing. Moyna is dismissive of her husband and is puzzled by Piya’s attention to Fokir and she ‘wants to know why a highly educated scientist like you (Piyali Roy) needs the help of her husband- someone who doesn’t even know how to read and write.’ (: 211). And when Piya answers saying he ‘knows the river well. His knowledge can be of help to a scientist like myself.’ Moyna retorts saying ‘her life would have been a lot easier if her husband had a little more gyan (knowledge) and a little less gaan (song)’ (212) hinting and suspecting something brewing between Piya and Fokir. She tells Kanai later, ‘She’s (Piya) a woman, Kanai-babu...And he’s (Fokir) a man.’ (258) The equation between Fokir and Piya is exactly what Moyna suspects. They understand each other perfectly well. ‘They sat unmoving, like animals who had been paralyzed by the intensity of their awareness of each other. When their eyes met again it was as if he knew at a glance what she was thinking. He reached for her hand and held it between his, for a moment, and then, without looking in her direction again he moved off to the stern and began to kindle a fire in his portable stove.’ (352) or ‘yet a glance at Fokir’s face was enough to indicate that something was not quite right’ (345)

After an intense conversation with Kanai Piya understood that ‘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 Lucibari. But she also guessed also that despite its newness and energy, the country Kanai inhabited was full of these ghosts, these unseen presences whose murmurings could never quite be silenced no matter how loud you spoke. ’ (220) But after the encounter with the natives killing the tiger who entered the human settlement, Piya is taken aback to see Fokir ‘gripped’ her and ‘carried her

away, retreating through the crowd as she kicked his knees and clawed at his hands' (295) He says, 'when a tiger comes to a human settlement, it's because it wants to die' (295) Piya is traumatized to find the villagers and Fokir along with them behaving violently. Kanai reminds Piya that there is 'nothing in common' (296) between Fokir and Piya but Piya understands it only after 'a killing' (289) of a tiger by setting 'on fire' (295) And then 'it was as if their shared glimpse of the lunar rainbow had somehow broken something that had existed between them, as if something had ended, leaving behind a pain of a kind that could not be understood because it never had a name' (352-353) She is touched by Fokir twice. First when he saves her life and Piya falls in love with him. But she realizes that Fokir is very different from her.

Piya says to Kanai, 'I couldn't believe Fokir's response'

'But what did you expect Piya?' Kanai said. 'Did you think he was some kind of grass root ecologist? He's not. He's a fisherman- he kills animals for a living.'

'I understand that,' said Piya. 'I am not blaming him; I know this is what he grew up with. It's just, I thought somehow he'd be different' (297)

In Lucibari, Piya undergoes a series of events after which she finds herself confused between Fokir and Kanai. Fokir can't understand Piya's language but understands Piya and communicates nonverbally/ through his silences. Kanai on the other hand is vocal, sophisticated and he can communicate verbally with Piya and is just opposite of Fokir. When Fokir sings on the boat, a song that Piya understands the song and she also realizes that 'Although the sound of the voice was Fokir's, the meaning was Kanai's, and in the depths of her heart she knew she would always be torn between the one and the other' (360) Towards the end it was Fokir who saves Piya's life

by becoming her ‘shield,’ ‘it was as if the storm had given them what life could not; it had fused them together and made them one’ (390) Piya ‘remembered how she had tried to find the words to remind him of how richly he was loved- and once again, as so often before, he had seemed to understand her, even without words.’ (393) Towards the end Fokir shields Piya’s body from the gushing winds and dies in the attempt. This unusual love makes Piya return again to Lucibari and where she decides to spend rest of her life. She decides to preserve the image of Fokir by naming the project ‘after Fokir, since his data’ which was saved in the ‘monitor’ which was connected to the satellites of the ‘Global Positioning System’ ‘is going to be crucial to the project’ which ‘was the only piece of equipment that survived’ (398)

Kanai is forty two, single, knows six languages, lives in Delhi and is an ‘interpreter and translator by profession.’ (198) When Piya hires Fokir for her second expedition through the backwaters, Kanai becomes her translator. Moyna tells Kanai ‘Kanai babu, there’s no one else who knows how to speak to both of them-to her and to him. It’s you who stands between them; whatever they say to each other will go through your ears and your lips. But for you neither of them will know what is in the mind of the other. Their words will be in your hands and you can make them mean what you will. Because words are just air, Kanai babu. When the wind blows on the water, you see ripples and waves, but the real river lies beneath, unseen unheard.’ (257-258). Ghosh raises appropriate ethical questions considering the natives through Kanai. ‘That tiger had killed two people, ...If there were killings on that scale anywhere else on earth it could be called a genocide, and yet here it goes almost unremarked: these killings are never reported, never written about in the papers. And the reason is just that these people are too poor to matter. We all know it, but we choose not to see it. Isn’t that a horror too-that we can feel the suffering

of an animal, but not of human beings?(300-301) Kanai says, 'Because it was people like you (Piya)' said Kanai, 'who made a push to protect wildlife here, without regard for human costs...Indians of my class...have chosen to hide these costs' 'If there were killings on that scale anywhere else on the earth it would be called a genocide, and yet here it goes unmarked: these killings are never reported, never written about in the papers. And the reason is just that these people are too poor to matter. We all know it, but we choose not to see it. Isn't that a horror too-that we can see the suffering of an animal, but not of human beings?' (300-301)

In Kanai represents the image of the colonizer. At Gargentola, when Kanai slipped in the mud and saw Fokir smiling at his fall, he lost his control over his emotions. 'Suddenly blood rushed to Kanai's head and obscenities began to pour from his mouth: Shala, banchod, shuorer bachcha' (326). Kanai's anger came welling up rising from 'sources whose very existence he would have denied: the master's suspicion of the menial; the pride of cast; the townsman's mistrust of the rustic; the city's antagonism of the village.' Kanai had thought he had 'cleansed himself of these sediments of the past' but they had only been 'compacted into an explosive and highly volatile reserve.' (326) Kanai's conscience saw his own self as 'a great host of people-a double for the outside world, someone standing in for the men who had destroyed Fokir's village, burnt his home and killed his mother; he had become a token for a vision of human beings in which a man like Fokir counted for nothing, a man whose value was less than that of an animal' (327) The settlers of Sunderbans recognize these 'sediments of past' therefore Fokir looked through him and steps out of his field of vision. 'All right then,' said Fokir. 'I'll do as you say.' 'Raising his head, Kanai caught a glimpse of Fokir's eyes and suddenly the words withered on his lips.' (326) Kanai's image here becomes the image of the colonizer. He (Kanai in) becomes uneasy, uncomfortable and immensely self-conscious. Ngugi wa Thiong'o suggests that theorizations of

the ‘colonized subject can turn out to be theorizations of the petty bourgeois or intellectual classes of the colonized, who take themselves to be identical with coloniality itself.’ (*Colonial Discourse and Postcolonial theory*, ed. Patrick Williams and Laura Christman, 1994) Present India can be divided into ‘the privileged and the rest.’ Amratya Sen and Jean Dreze remark, ‘Some Indians are comparatively rich; most of the others toil hard for little reward; some are politically powerful; others can not influence anything outside their immediate sphere. Some have substantial opportunities for advancement in life; others lack them altogether- the dividing line of ‘haves’ and ‘have nots’ in India is not just a rhetorical cliché, but also an important part of diagnostic analysis, pointing towards a preeminent division that is important for an understanding of Indian society. (*An uncertain glory India and its contradictions*, Penguin, New Delhi, 2013) Rey Chow in ‘Where have all the natives’ gone suggests a mode of understanding the native in which the native’s existence- i.e., an existence before becoming “native”- precedes the arrival of the colonizer. She writes, ‘Contrary to the model of western hegemony in which colonizer is seen as a primary, active “gaze” subjugating the native as passive “object,” I want to argue that it is actually the colonizer who feels looked at by the native’s gaze. This gaze, which is neither a threat nor retaliation, makes the colonizer “conscious” of himself, leading to his need to turn this gaze around and look at himself, henceforth “reflected” in the native-object. It is the self-reflection of the colonizer that produces the colonizer as subject (potent gaze, source of meaning and action) and the native as his image, with all the pejorative meanings of “lack” attached to the word “image.” Hegel’s story of human “self-consciousness” is then not what he supposed it to be- a story about Western Man’s highest achievement- but a story about the disturbing effect of Western Man’s encounter with those others Hegel considered primitive.

Western Man henceforth became “self-conscious” that is uneasy and uncomfortable, in his “own” environment.’ (WD 51)

Kamala (represents the native) tells Nirmal (Marxist who represents the image of the native), ‘I listened to them talk and hope blossomed in my heart; these were my people, how could I stand apart? We shared the same tongue, we were joined in our bones; the dreams they had dreamt were no different from my own. They too had hankered for our tide country mud; they too had longed to watch the tide rise to full flood.’ (165) They face the opposition of the government as well as the nature. ‘Was it possible, even, that in Morichajhapi had been planted the seeds of what mig become if not a Dalit nation, then at least a safe heaven, a place of true freedom for the country’s most oppressed?’.(191) laments Nirmal. “Were the dreams of these settlers less valuable than those of a man like Sir Daniel just because he was a rich sahib and they impoverished refugees?” (213) In Gramsci’s sense, revolution is a struggle for hegemony between opposing classes. Horen is silent but on the alert (image of the native) says to Neeraj, ‘Because it’s the fear that protects you, Saar; it’s what keeps you alive. Without it the danger doubles’ (244) The part one of the novel is called the Ebb: Bhata (01) and part two is called The Flood: Jowar (177). Silence and language flow in the novel like the Jowar and Bhata. Silence plays a very important role in the development of the novel. Whether it is the refugees and Kusum, or is it the myth of Bon Bibi and the fishermen, or Kanai- the translator and the diary through which Nirmal’s thouds are broug forth, or the relationship of Dolphins with Fokir, or the myth or reality of Bengal tiger or its Fokir and Piya who cannot understand each other’s language but still develop a strong bonding. Narrative silence tells stories of incredible beauty. Two of the chapters in the novel are entitled ‘words’- one in the first part called Bhata – The Ebb

(93), where Piya tries to understand Fokir's language nonverbally and the second chapter entitled 'words' is in the second part of the novel called The Flood- Jowar (256), where Monya tells Kanai Babu that the meaning/ 'words lies in the' translator's 'hands and' he 'can make them what' he wills. (256) 'Words are just air' says Moyna, 'When the wind blows on the water, you see ripples and waves, but the real river lies beneath, unseen and unheard'. (258)

Chow interprets the 'silence of the native-as-object- a silence not immediately distinguishable from her ascribed silence/ passivity- the indifference of the "originary" witness appears again-in simulation. Like the silent picture postcards reproduced by Allouha, this simulated gaze is between the image and the gaze of the colonizer. Where the colonizer undressed her, the native's nakedness stares back at him both as the defiled image of his creation and as the indifferent gaze that says, "There was nothing-no secret- to be unveiled underneath my clothes. That secret is your phantasm ' John Theme (The Discoverer Discovered in Amitav Ghosh- a Critical Companion, 2003, pp.130) notes, 'Gayatri Spivak asks the question "Can the subaltern speak?" Spivak answers in negative. Subalterns cannot speak. But all of Ghosh's work seems to have been directed towards wanting to answer this question in affirmative, while recognizing that the recuperation of the voice of an indigenous culture which is assumed to have existed in parallel with colonial discourse, is a problem fraught with difficulties, partly because acknowledgement of the existence of such a culture could presuppose that such a domain had an autonomous, uncontaminated existence (and all the evidence- linguistic, archeological, theological, etc.- suggests that cross pollination and syncretism always occur when cultures come into contact); and also because colonial and other forms of elite historiography have effectively occluded subaltern narratives from the scribal records of the societies.' Ghosh's hungry tide shows that the

subaltern can speak only when he is powerful. When he is close to the nature. He can even communicate with his silences. Ghosh possibly wants to suggest that by crossing boundaries of class and colonialism, Local and global, modern and traditional and by translating every event of life into a positive experience we will reach at a utopian island where we would stop being prisoners of the past and would design our future.

“So where have all the ‘natives’ gone?” asks Rey Chow, “they have gone...between the defined image and the indifferent gaze. The native is not the defiled and not not the defiled image. And she shares indifferently, mocking our imprisonment with imagistic resemblance and our self-deception as non-duped.”(WD 54) Amitav Ghosh seems attuned with Rey Chow, the sinologist, whose work applies very nicely to the south Asian literature, questions aspects of cultural politics, including the legacies of European imperialism and colonialism, essentialist notions of culture and history; conservative notions of territorial and linguistic propriety, and the ‘otherness’ ensuing from them. Chow, in ‘Writing Diaspora’, argues that “natives are represented as defiled images- that is the fact of our history. But must be represented than a second time by turning the history “upside down ,” this time giving them a sanctified status of the ‘non-duped’? Defilement and sanctification belong to the same symbolic order.”(WD 53-54) Ghosh’s contribution through his novel is that he tries to invoke ‘histories,’ ‘struggles,’ ‘movements,’ ‘texts,’ and ‘contexts’ to reconnect to the native. In doing so tries to pick up a genuine problem of the native/ marginal for which he (the native) struggled in the past and creates a work of fiction in which the natives are viewed from a contemporary lens, and they appear one of us “our equals and our images, in our shapes and in our forms?” to borrow words from Rey Chow (pg 37-38, Writing Diaspora, 1993). Ghosh establishes that their missions or

goals are filled with purpose higher than ours (Sublime) and Problem of displacement (postmodern) ‘untranslatability of the nature’s experience and the history of that untranslatability.’

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