Chapter II

Transitional Characters

Transitional characters undergo changes in their lives and are normally dislocated either because of some natural calamity or human tragedy brought out by war or disease. Volitional migration is another form of escaping an oppressive system which promotes caste or class or gender inequalities. The political system also forces individuals to migrate either as punishment or political convenience. Simply it could be exigency of the time too.

Amitav Ghosh’s new novel _The Hungry Tide_ (2004) is set in the extensive archipelago of tiny island and labyrinthian waterways known as the Sundarbans. Stretching from India to Bangladesh, this little known tide country offers no visible borders between the river and the sea, and sometimes not even between land and water. In this desolate and mysterious place of mangroves and mudflats, the poor villagers lead a precarious existence. _The Hungry Tide_ involves Piya, a young Indian-American cetologist, who has come to the Sundarbans to study a rare species of the river dolphin. There, she meets Kanai a Bengali business man living in Delhi, who acts as her translator, and Fokir, an illiterate fisherman, who guides her through the dangerous waters. The novel dynamically weaves their stories together with the environmental and political history of this isolated region. Though it is impossibly remote and impassable, in Ghosh’s treatment this beautiful, treacherous and dynamic place becomes a provocative symbol of the modern world.

In our legends it is said that the goddess Ganga’s descent from the heavens would have split the earth had Lord Shiva not tamed her torrent by tying it into
his ash smeared locks. To hear this story is to see the river in a certain way: as a heavenly braid, for instance, an immense rope of water, unfurling through a wide and thirsty plain. (*THT* 1)

Over the past half-century, social scientists have explored the relationship between India’s Great tradition rooted in Sanskritic culture and the myriad little traditions of the subcontinent’s six lakh villages. In traditional India, Milton Singer quotes the pioneering anthropologist Robert Redfield: “In Civilization there is a great tradition of the reflective few, and there is a little tradition of the largely unreflective many”. While that framework may help outsiders make sense of India, few Indians think in terms of Great and Little Traditions. A more natural way to consider a community’s relationship to the larger culture might be in terms of India’s many rivers, small and great. Rivers run through India. Little ones are fed by the mighty. (*THT* 6-7)

The islands are the trailing threads of India’s fabric, the ragged fringe of her Sari, the achol that follows her, half wetted by the sea.

Yet, each of these channels is a ‘river’ in its own right, each possessed of its own strangely evocative name. When these channels meet, it is often in clusters of four, five or even six: at these confluences, the water stretches to the far edges of the landscape and the forest dwindles into a distant rumour of land, echoing back from the horizon. In the language of the place, such a confluence is spoken of as a mohona—a strangely seductive word, wrapped in many layers of beguilement. (*THT* 6-7).

Ghosh’s visiting the Sunderbans that delta part of West Bengal that is a mess of island and rivers known collectively as the Mouth of the Ganges, the novelist Ghosh
saw in his mind’s eye a foreign girl encountering a local fisherman. It was this visual image that inspired his latest novel, *The Hungry Tide*. His writing is often prompted by an image and the story that follows as he “unpacks” that image and follows its implications into various and sometimes surprising directions, in this case the clash of western and traditional sensibilities, the conflicting demands of the human and animal worlds, and the precariousness of survival in the face of a hostile and unpredictable environment.

*The Hungry Tide* is the work of a novelist at the peak of his powers. It is similar in style and tone to Ghosh’s overlooked masterpiece, *The Glass Palace*. But the similarities, its smaller scope and more limited range of characters makes it feel much more accessible than the earlier novels. Ghosh has managed to turn *The Hungry Tide* into a veritable page turner, beautifully controlled and plotted, while sacrificing none at his trademark historical sweep.

*The Glass Palace* is virtually an epic of South-East Asia. It simultaneously tells the story of the Indian National Army (Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose) during the Second World War, the advent of modernity in Burma including especially the role of the rubber and teak trades in British colonialism and the plight of Indian migrant workers in place such as Malaysia at a time of widespread displacement and general chaos. Each of these parallel sub plots is essential to the novel’s major conceptual plot and the presence of each is the product of considerable research on the part of the novelist. Through juxtaposition Ghosh suggests a number of compelling ties between Bengal and the rest of South East Asia. He makes through the novel a major geopolitical claim for unifying modern South-East Asian history. This broad scope of
careful research and attentions to detail is unparalleled amongst Ghosh’s Indo-Anglian peers.

The novel opens with the chance meeting of Kanai, a wealthy translator from Delhi, and Piya, a young marine biologist of Indian descent who’s just arrived from United States to study the Irrawaddy dolphin’s behaviour. Kanai, always on the look out for attractive women invites her to stay with him at his aunt’s home on the farthest inhabited island of the Sundarbans, where he is going to retrieve a recently found journal written by his late uncle. Piya has no intention of accepting his invitation.

“You’d be surprised how many places in the Sundarbans have names that come from English’,

Kanai said. Lusibari just means “Lucy’s House.” “Lucy’s House?”

Piya looked up in surprise. As in the name “Lucy?

‘Yes’. A gleam came into his eyes and he said. “You should come and visit the place. I’ II tell you the story of how it got its name.

‘Is the invitation? Piya said, smiling.

‘Absolutely,’ Kanai responded, Come. I’m inviting you. Your company will lighten the burden of my exile.’ (THT 13)

Ghosh has long been interested in what he calls the “first encounter” narrative. The Hungry Tide is between Piya, an American of Indian parentage, a cetologist in pursuit of the river based Irrawaddy dolphin and Fokir, an illiterate local fisherman. Ghosh was intrigued by the idea of someone from the wider world plunging into circumstances where they have no means of communication with a very local culture.
“Kanai spread the map out and used a finger tips to trace a winding line through the tidal channels and water ways. ‘Canning is the railhead for the Sundarbans, he said, ‘and Lusibari is the farthest of the inhabited island. It’s a long way upriver; you have to go past Annpur, Jamespur and Emilybari. And there it is Lusibari’” (THT 13).

Part of the idea behind The Hungry Tide was to shine light on this area that is little known within India. But even within Bengal, the Sunderbans is really a kind of area of darkness. People don’t think of it, they don’t write about it, they don’t look at it. This is such a strange thing. For the ordinary tourist, the Sunderbans doesn’t offer much. You will never see the tigers; there is no wildlife to be seen. Sometimes you may see a crocodile, a few birds, but it is not like going to the Serengeti or some resort; it offers nothing to tourists as such. But, at the same time, it is a place of incredible beauty and presence. To appreciate it, tourists would have to be there for quite a long time for three or four days at least because the beauty of it reveals itself very slowly. Although the book has deep personal links, it is all fiction. Certainly nothing like this happened, but in a way a lot of real experiences get invested even in a fiction of this kind.

The Sunderbans is a wilderness, it’s like forest. In some sense, your don’t expect to encounter history in a place like that. The strange thing is that when you look at any place closely, you discover that a place that seems empty of history is actually deeply layered.

“The Sunderban”, which means “The beautiful forest: There are some who believe the word to be derived from the name of a common species of mangrove the Sundari tree, Heriteria minor. But the word’s origin is no easier to account for than is its present prevalence, for in the record books of the Mughal emperors this region is named not in reference to a tree but to a tide – bhati. And
to the inhabitants of the islands this land is known as bhatir desh—the tide
country, except that bhati is not just the “tide” but one tide in particular, the ebb-
tide, the bhata. This is a land half submerged at high tide: it is only in falling that
the water gives birth to the forest. To look upon this strange parturition,
midwived by the moon, is to know why the name “tide country” is not just right
but necessary. (THT 8)

It is like an onion; one can just keeps peeling layers upon layers and never come
to a core; there is always more. This proved to be exactly the case with the Sundarbans.
There was layer upon layer of things to be seen and heard. This is not surprising. The
Sundarbans was the approach route to the Gangetic lands; for millennia people have
been coming through there. The great Chinese traveller Fahien stayed in the region for
two years. Similarly, there are reports about European travellers in the Sundarbans,
among them Marco Polo, who also visited the Andaman Islands. The more closely one
looks the more he discovers. This is precisely the sort of depth and layering that one
will find there.

It was also very exciting to explore the deep layering of Bengal. The Hungry
Tide belongs to the Bengali tradition of the river novel. What is interesting is that
Bengal is such a land of rivers; it is surprising that every Bengali novel is not a river
novel. But the novel not only portrays Bengali life, but it also uses Bengali words like
gamchha [checked towel or cloth] for the sake of authenticity. The reason gamchha
occurs at that point in the text is because Piya, who grew up in America, looks at it and
suddenly remembers that there is such a word. It is at this point that she suddenly
realizes that the word has a personal resonance that she herself finds it difficult to
understand. She is trying to understand the resonance because, in some way, she associates the word with her father.

In the Sundarbans, drinking water is a huge problem. There was this German biologist who went there and decided the reason why the tigers were killing human beings was because they didn’t have fresh water. At enormous cost, fresh water wells were dug for the tigers and water was plentiful, while human beings there had no fresh water. They were looking on these wells being dug for the tigers while they themselves and their children were dying because they didn’t have access to fresh water. If one can care for the environment, does that mean one doesn’t care about the plight of human beings, especially impoverished people or indigenous people.

In *The Hungry Tide*, Kanai is someone from modern India. His world is moving so quickly. He is rich and makes money. Yet, Kanai can’t forget that there is this other India, represented by Fokir. It is always at the back of his mind. It is true of most Indians; even the Indians who drive fast cars and go to nightclubs remember and know that there is this other world out there. This often has very good effects. One remarkable example is the Indian information technology company Infosys; its founder has been exemplary in putting money into river development projects, among others. There is an awareness of this other world. Just as Indians are quick to embrace the fast moving contemporary world, Kanai is a part of that experience, Piya is a part of that experience and Fokir is a part of the experience. Many people who live there and who in some sense are content with the life that the Sundarbans offers them.

*The Hungry Tide* is the story of Piya, Fokir and Kanai, a sophisticated Delhi based translator visiting his aunt Nilima who lives on an island where she runs a local welfare trust. Her husband, Nirmal, a poet and one time political activist, is dead, killed
in a massacre of refugees, and Kanai has come to read his account of the very tragic events.

Nilima’s circumstances were utterly unlike Nirmal’s. She was from a family well known for its tradition of public service. Her grandfather was one of the founding members of the Congress party and her father was an eminent barrister at the Calcutta High Court. As an adolescent Nilima had developed severe asthma and when it came time to send her to college her family had decided to spare her the rigours of a long daily commute. They had enrolled her in Ashutosh College, which was just a short drive from their home in Ballygunge place. (THT 76)

The other main descriptions are the landscape that determines so much in the characters’ lives. The precarious part of the world, subject to tide and cyclones that can wash away islands on a daily basis, is forever changing. Human life is cheap: Three hundred thousand people killed in the 1970 cyclone, a figure that still staggers Ghosh.

That’s one of the reasons why this storm became so famous. There are people, scientists who believe there is a mysterious connection between earthquake and storms. But this was the first known instance of these two catastrophes happening together. ‘So what happened, sarr?’ In Kolkata tens of thousand of dwelling fell instantly to the ground Englishmen’s palaces as well as houses and huts. The steeple of The English Church toppled over and came crashing down. They say there was not a building in the city left with four walls intact. (THT 204)

Aside from the various intertwining character plots, it has only two conceptual plots. First, it explores the plight of displaced peoples, here specifically a group of
refugees from Bangladesh who found themselves in confrontation with the Indian state. The other conceptual question is how humans share a complex and dangerous ecosystem with animals, here dolphins and tigers.

The dolphins are being studied by Piya, a marine biologist of Bengali descent who discovers some strange behavioural quirks amongst Irawaddy Dolphins in a tide pool while visiting the island on a grant. And the Bay of Bengal is one of the only habitats where Bengal Tigers continue to live in the wild. They are zealously protected by various international environmental groups. But in the name of tiger preservation, human lives are threatened; the tiger routinely mauls and often kills islanders. Though there are the obvious modern devices that might be used to protect the islanders, the state allows the deaths to continue Ghosh argues, human lives are valued somewhat lower than those of tigers. The tide country is perhaps a relatively a remote corner of Bengal. But it is also possible to see it as a separate region. The protagonist Kanai, a professional translator, is entrusted with the note books of his deceased uncle, and comes across the following explicative passage:

There were six grown men in the house and they knew they had been presented with an opportunity unlikely ever to be repeated. This tiger was not new to their villages; it had killed two people there and had long been preying on its livestock. Now, for the few minutes it was in the pen, it was vulnerable, because to make its escape it would have to leap vertically through the hole in the roof: even for a tiger, this would not be a simple feat, not with a calf in its jaws. (THT 292)

The Sundarban are as real and as alive as any character in The Hungry Tide. The reader is drawn into the world of mangroves, maneaters, and mankind. It is a testament
to Ghosh’s power of description and humanistic empathy that one fully embraces the life of the Sundarbans. Declared a world heritage site for the wealth of its biodiversity, the Sundarbans are at the same time ferocious and fragile. Famous for the Bengal tiger with its taste for human flesh, these wetlands and jungles are regularly transformed by floods that make cartography a futile science of shifting maps and by cyclones that are like tsunamis – huge walls of water that recently brought tragedy to South Asia.

In the novel, Fokir never forgets that Kanai is a representative of the world that destroyed his world. Whenever one has been in the Sundarbans, one of the things that really sensitizes someone to the nature of the moral dilemmas. In fact, the scale of debt in the Sundarban is not trivial. According to the forest Department, in the Indian Sundarbans, the tiger kills seven dozen of people each year. Anthropologists think that the figure is massively underreported, that as many as 200 people are killed there each year. In any other part of the world, this would be considered a major national problem. So this is just an index of the facts that the impoverished people dying are extremely poor and don’t have voice.

Ghosh as an anthropologist is fascinated by the stories that people tell, the local mythologies that subvert the official, religious, perspicacious investigation into the local reality, and with it critique of the official version of history. The tide country people have an epic narrative that they pass on orally. They have a kind of local religion, they worship a Goddess called Bon Bibi, but the epic of Bon Bibi is strongly inflected by Islamic influences.

The setting was Medina, one of the holiest places in Islam. Here lived a man called Ibrahim, a childless but pious Muslim who led the austere life of a Sufi Fakir. Through the intervention of the archangel Gabriel, Ibrahim became the father of blessed
twins, Bon Bibi and Shah Jongoli. When the twins came of age, the archangel brought them word that they had been chosen for a divine mission: they were to travel from Arabia to the country of eighteen tides- athhero bhatir desh- in order to make it fit for human habitation. Thus charged, Bon Bibi and Shah Jongoli set off for the mangroves forests of Bengal dressed in the simple robes of Sufi mendicants. (*THT* 103)

The destitution of the tide country was such as to remind them of the terrible famine that devasted the Bengal in 1942, except in the Lusibari where hunger and catastrophe were a way of life. They learned that after a decade of settlement, the land had still not been wholly leached of its salt. The soil bore poor crops and could not be formed all year round. Most families subsisted on single daily meals. Despite all the labour they had nothing to eat. Each such inundation rendered the land infertile for several years at a stretch. The settlers were mainly of farming communities and had been drawn to Lusibari by the promise of free farmland. Hunger drove them to hunting fish, and the results were often disastrous. Many died drowning, and many more were picked off by crocodiles and estuarine sharks. Nor did the mangroves offer much of immediate values to human being yet thousands risk death in order to collect meagre quantities of honey, wax, firewood and the sour fruits of the kewra tree. No day seemed to pass without the news of someone killed by tiger, snake or crocodile. It’s a difficult life that leaves most women widowed at a young age, a land barely farmable if the saltwater of the hungry tide can be kept from flooding their fields Nilima noticed that:

In the tide country girls were brought up on the assumption that if they married, they would be widowed in their twenties or their thirties if they were lucky. This assumption was woven, like a skein of dark wood, into
the fabric of their lives; when the men folk went fishing it was the custom
for their wives to change into the garment of widowhood. (THT 80)

Piya Roy, an American scientist who has come to study the rare Irrawaddy
dolphin which lives in the rivers of the tide country and Kanai Dutt, a Delhi
businessman, educated as translator and owner of successful translation business comes
to the island of Lusibari to visit his aunt, Nilima. Kanai is proud and arrogant and not
above using his status to get his own way:

She had seen nothing else of note. Even though she hadn’t known what to expect
she had not foreseen as complete a blank as this. That these waters had once
contained large numbers of dolphin was known beyond a doubt. Several
nineteenth century Zoologists had testified to it. The discoverer of the Gangetic
dolphin, William Roxburgh, had said explicitly they the freshwater dolphin of
Ganges delighted in the labyrinth of river and creek to the South East of
Calcutta. This was exactly where she was yet, after hours of careful surveillance
she had still to spot her first dolphin. (THT 42)

Piya often works in the area where she knows neither the custom nor the
language, and she survives for days on just energy bars and overtime she studies river
dolphin. She comes to the Sundarbans to find more of this rare creature, but her trip
fails to begin well. With an official permit, she was forced to use a government
approved guide and guard, but she finds herself at their whims until events land her in
the small boat belonging to Fokir, who is fishing for crabs with his son. Fokir takes Piya
to Lusibari:
Now it was the fisherman who was in front of her, squatting on his haunches and looking into her face with an inquiring frown. Slowly, as her shivering passed, his face relaxed into a smile, with a finger on his chest, pointing at himself, he said, Fokir. She understood that this was his name and responded with her own: ‘Piya’, with a nod of acknowledgement, he turned to the boy and back again, and she knew he was telling her boy was his son. (THT 63)

Kanai had been to Lisibari as a teenager sent by parents to rusticate for his pride and arrogance. He is now being summoned by Nilima because of a package left to Kanai by her late husband Nirmal, which was found some twenty years after his death. Nirmal and Nilima came to the Sundarbans when his revolutionary ideas became too dangerous in Calcutta. Nilima founded a cooperative which brought help, medicine, and ultimately a hospital to Lusibari. Nilima’s establishment of a Non-Government Organisation (NGO) – the Bardaman Trusts, and her conversation with local women highlight a pragmatic way to make positive contribution in an unfamiliar society through institution and community building. The Trust’s success is nonetheless limited for, while Nilima is able to procure funds through her connections to metropolitan affluence, her reliance on governmental support both political and financial means that it must function along a politics of compromise. The strong indictment occurs when Nilima refuses to help those refugees denounced by government edict, knowing well that the hospital and the Women Union as a whole had sacrificed for this. The outcome of her utilitarian choice will ensure that the local women, and especially widows, continue to have access to the Trust’s ever increasing number of services in medical, paralegal and agricultural fields.
Nirmal spent his career as the headmaster of a local school for a short time. Around this time Kanai was visiting a young woman named Kusum who passed through their lives. The package now left to Kanai contains an account of the events at the end of Nilima’s life, which revolved around Kusum, her son Fokir, and the catastrophic struggle of the dispossessed to form a new society on the island of Morichjhapi:

Eight years went by and then we began to hear rumour about refugees coming to lay claim to Morichjhapi, people said Kusum was with them, that she had returned from the mainland as a widow and had brought her son with her. I found out exactly where she was living and two or three times rowed past her house in my boat, but I could not summon the courage to go in. That day when I took your uncle to Kumirmari, all I could think of was Kusum, and how close she was. (*THT* 363)

The refugees are a special class of people who live in a state of transition endlessly uprooted from their native land; they find it difficult to settle down permanently in an alien land. They live with a sense of not belonging to the land where they have migrated to. Even their dwellings are not permanent as they are forced to live in camps and other temporary shelters in the form of tents or makeshift homes. Seasonal inland migration also leaves people homeless or shelterless. The poor labourer and the indigent people find themselves at the mercy of nature and their masters who rule over them.

The story of the refugees is based on the historical events surrounding what became known as the Morichjhapi massacre and is central to the novel of this country’s social history. In 1979, lower-caste and untouchable refugees, the rootless remnants of Indian Partition, attempted to settle down in the protected forest reserves on Bengal’s
uninhabited islands. As they encroached on tiger conservation territory and refused to leave, the Left Front Government of Bengal sent in troops to remove them forcibly, resulting in large scale raping and killing on the island of Morichjhapi. Though the event was well documented at the time by journalists, the crime and its perpetrators have remained unpunished, and an independent inquiry has never been held.

*The Hungry Tide* in the Sundarbans allows Amitav Ghosh to create a setting where everyone is on an even footing. This theme runs continuously throughout the novel. Nirmal a poet at heart constantly invokes images and feelings of life as his life was poorly spent because he never lived up to his revolutionary ideals. Nilima is the practical side of their marriage, building a cooperative trust which brings hope to many lives. She, however, is unwilling to do anything that might upset the government whose favours she needs. Their middle class upbringing and college education bring them no luxury, just the gratitude and respect from the locals in the tide country for the services they provide. The vitality of the Sundarbans, however, does not come at the expense of the novel’s humans. Ghosh has given life to several fully conceived characters. Nirmal and his wife Nilima are archetypes, she, the pragmatic builder of today; and he, the deceased dreamer of a better future, who has bequeathed to his nephew, Kanai, a journal describing his last days supporting a failed utopian settlement in Morichjhapi.

The novel is in part about mankind’s relationship with nature. But central to the story is the possibility and impossibility of human relationships. At the core is the dynamics between Kanai who has come to the Sundarbans to unearth the mystery behind his uncle’s journal and Piya, an Indian-American marine biologist who is doing research on the elusive Gangetic Orcaella dolphin. Piya and Kanai have a charm inevitable about them. From their chance encounter on a train to the open ended closing
of the novel, one feels that these two opposites may just find a home in each other’s life. Like an estuarine arranged marriage, theirs is a growing love where her sweet river water can meet his salty seawater. Kanai and Piya are a metaphor for what Ghosh calls “translated world”. Kanai uses language as an instrument of power. Coming from their own shared and different great traditions, both are outsiders in the little tradition of the Sundarbans. In a way they are transitional charaters finding themselves temporarily in a land alien to them.

This is a life Kanai fails to understand. In the Sundarbans, his wealth, servants, and pride have no value. While he feels himself to be superior to Fokir, on the river he needs Fokir’s skill to provide for his survival. Piya who feels closer to the animals she studies needs Kanai’s translation skill and Fokir’s local knowledge of the river and wildlife for her to pursue her research. Piya is awestruck. Her life at the Sunderbans is a remarkable instance of symbiosis between human beings and a population of wild animals. She could not think of one. There was truly no limit, it seemed, to the cetacean gift for springing surprises. (*THT* 169)

At the centre of all these relationships is Fokir, perhaps the truest soul in the novel. He’s an illiterate man, but possesses more knowledge of the river and its wildlife than all the outsiders who do not understand him, Piya feels an affinity for Fokir and his life which matches the rhythms of his environment. Kanai, attracted to Piya and envious of Fokir, decides to accompany them on a trip up the river to study the dolphins. The three on a trip into the heart of the tide country which will bring lasting changes to all of their lives. Their bodies were so close, so finely merged that she could feel the impact of everything hitting him, she could sense the blows raining down on his back. She could feel the bones of his checks as it they had been superimposed upon her own; it was as if
the storm had given them what life could not; it had fused them together and made one.

*(THT 390)*

*The Hungry Tide* is a novel full of ideas and in Kanai’s and Piya’s world, they prefer the structure of science or business where they can view everything as black or white. In the Sundarbans here the tide changes the environment daily, nothing is certain and everything in life is a shade of gray. It is a place where tigers kill hundreds of people a year. Since they are a protected species, killing a tiger that has been preying on a village brings in the government authorities to mete out punishment. In an environment where life is fragile, the essence of any person is broken down to its core. Amitav Ghosh lets the tide country break down the barriers of both society and his characters.

*The Hungry Tide* is about the struggle of each person to find their place in the world; it is not a novel of constant action and suspense. However nothing slows the pace of novel. Amitav Ghosh keeps the pages turning with the history of the tide country. The stories of the local deities, scientific information, the back stories for each character, and Nirmal’s Journal of what happened to Kusum and her son keep the narration alive. At times, the history and scientific information start to overwhelm the story, and these carry on for a bit too long before the final voyage up the river begins. Someone already knowledgeable about the Sundarbans might find this book dragging at times with these details, but the explanation of the exotic, whether scientific, geographic, or historical, can be as engaging as the lives of the characters. A bit of judicious editing about three quarters of the way through the novel to eliminate the history of the scientific research of the river dolphin would have been helpful. For the most part, *The Hungry Tide* is a compelling novel about ordinary people who bond
together in an exotic place that can consume them all. It’s the basest of human emotions, love, jealousy, pride, and trust that will make the difference.

Nirmal was translating a story he had told Fokir, an uneducated Dalit boy whose mother, Kusum, had perished in Morchijhapi massacre. It was because of his unarticulated love for Kusum that Nirmal gave his own life to the refugees battling the government. Many translations are happening simultaneously here: history translated into fiction; oral tradition translated into activism. So subtle is Ghosh’s elegant interweaving of these politicized concerns that the reader is only aware of them as back story undercurrents helping the profluence of the surface story.

The interweaving is so tight that not only do the translations not feel oppressive, but also they lend themselves naturally to the serendipity of character meetings. One is not startled when the grown up Fokir, still illiterate, emerges heroically, saving Piya from drowning and then serving as guide, taking her to the secrets of the tide. Despite their apparent differences, American, Indian, visitor, guide, cosmopolitan, rustic, fisherman, Piya and Fokir are able to communicate with each other when they are out in the water researching Orcaellla. Their mutual passion for, and understanding of, the dolphin and its habitat develops into a love platonically constrained by the same barriers they can overcome for the research. A more fundamental constraint is the fierce bond shared by Fokir, his upwardly mobile wife, Moyna, and their son, Tutul, who represent a future of change in the Sundarbans. Quickly, the novel feathers out into a complex network of interconnected stories, myths and histories, a fitting reflection of the tributaries that run through this region. The reader is drawn into the tangled politics of corrupt administrators and desperately poor people who compete for the resources with animals beloved by environmentalists in the West. We follow the sad tales of women
sold into sex slavery, children forced into dangerous work, and men swallowed by tigers, crocodiles and the hungry tide.

All of these flow in and around the story of Piya as she enters the mangrove forest looking for Irrawaddy dolphins, which seem capable of living in either salt or fresh water. Without denying the tedium of real field research, Ghosh conveys the incredible excitement of watching this strange creature in a place of “epic mutability”. The night air is so humid that Piya can see a rainbow drawn by the moon. She’s captivated by the uniformed pulsing of glow-worms in the mangroves. She’s struck cold by the roar of man-eating tigers that stalk these root bound waters. She also watches her new guide, a local fisherman named Fokir, who speaks no English but knows the dolphin behaviour well. She’s realistic about the unlikely potential of their relationship, even ignoring for a moment that he’s married, but this is what the novel is all about transcending barriers. The fluid movement between different realms is also familiar to Kanai as a translator, but he is still caught up in class and cultural distinctions that are as starkly drawn in India as anywhere in the world. Too proud to admit that he is competing with an ignorant fisherman for Piya’s attention, he bides his time by reading his uncle’s journal, which forms a dramatic parallel narrative in the novel. Kanai and his aunt expected the journal to be in the form of poetry but it contains a fevered description of violent conflict between the government and a group of refugees settled in the 1970s. It was written about Kanai’s uncle Nirmal’s life, and it’s soaked in the old man’s bitter disappointment that he could not contribute to the Marxist revolution he hoped to witness.

While his wife Nilima indulges in practical life, helping local families by building hospital. He also supports the poor people by providing education and better
administration in education. It is a fascinating subplot that explores the collision between different kinds of idealism. Besides at heart Ghosh is a story teller not a dramatist, and this is a novel of compelling stories, both beautiful and harrowing about characters that motionlessly go through a temporary phase in their lives.

Amitav Ghosh’s *Sea of Poppies* (2008), was listed for the Booker Prize soon after its publication. The postcolonial novelist has dealt with modern postcolonial themes like migration, existential crises like alienation, loss of identity, rootlessness, displacement and hybridity with a historical vision. His multidimensional exposure of the problems related to immigration and other socio-cultural problems with a humanist, cosmopolitan and postcolonial perception makes his narration interesting. Amitav Ghosh’s narrative begins with the arrival of the ship *Ibis* thus.

The vision of a tall – masted ship, at sail on the ocean, came to Deeti on an otherwise ordinary day, but she knew instantly that the apparition was a sign of destiny for she had never seen such a vessel before, not even in a dream: how could she have, living as she did in Northern Bihar, four hundred miles from the coast? (*SP 3*)

Deeti, the woman protagonist’s life in the oppressive structure of patriarchal society is linked with the arrival of the ship. Her voyage is not merely a physical one but it is much more – a voyage of the spirit. It is a voyage of adventure too that helps her to know herself and the world around her better. Her struggle against patriarchy is an essential part of class struggle in the society where the difference between men and women is psychologically constructed. She lives a vigorous, natural life as it was the river itself that had granted Deeti the vision:
The image of the *Ibis* had been transported upstream, like an electric current, the moment the vessel made contact with the sacred water. This would mean that happened in the second week of March 1838, for that was when *Ibis* dropped anchor off Ganga Sagar Island, where the holy river debouches into the Bay of Bengal. (*SP* 10)

Deeti’s adventure in *Ibis* makes her get closer to Nature and she partakes with Nature’s strength. This is her path to happiness. In the past, her poverty and slavery gave her endless labour and sleeplessness. She had to survive on scanty food and in the terrors of loneliness. Like a soldier in battle, she had to live under continual threat of death. Now she has gained knowledge about survival at sea. She has learnt to stand shoulder to shoulder with the world’s toughest men. In the midst of her fear and worries, she finds solace in her communion with Nature and is prepared to “assume a new identity unrestricted by Third world hierarchies of caste, gender and family” (*R.K.Dhawan* 196).

Not only Deeti but also all the passengers in *Ibis* live in harmony with Nature. Hukam Singh, Deeti’s husband was wounded while serving as a sepoy in a British regiment. The disability is not as severe as to require crutches; however, he was able to make his way to the cart without any help. Deeti followed him carrying his food and water and handing the wrapped packaged to him. Hukam Singh belongs to higher caste as a Rajput so he never wants to see the people of low caste while going for a work. So Kalua, the driver of the ox cart, never moved to help his passenger and was careful to keep his face hidden from him:

He was of the leather-workers caste and Hukum Singh, as a high-caste Rajput, believed that the sight of his face would bode ill for the day ahead. Now, on
climbing into the back of the cart, the former sepoy sat facing to the rear, with
his bundle balanced on his lap, to prevent it coming into direct contact with any
of the drivers’ belonging. Thus they would sit; driver and passenger, as the cart
creaked along the road to Ghazipur-conversing amicably, enough, but never
exchanging glances. (SP 4)

Casteism is one of the major problems in India which can break the people’s
unity. Amitav Ghosh highlights the major issue which makes every Indian weaker in the
world. Here subalterns with their silenced voices experience solace in the silent world
of Nature. They gain power by absorbing the value of tolerance and oneness in spite of
their differences.

Deeti’s husband will not be able to go back to work. After the closing of
factory, his health condition gets worse day by day. Deeti realizes that she has no choice
but to save her husband’s life by medical treatment. He has become so enfeebled that he
has no strength to do his own task. The doctors spend long hours sitting at Hukum
Singh’s bedside and consumed great quantities of satua and dalpuri, while they
examined over his pale skin. The expensive medicines made with gold foil and shavings
of ivory have not resulted in any improvement. To obtain this medicine Deeti sells her
several bangles and nose rings. A week later, Holi arrives, bringing neither colour nor
joy to Deeti’s home. In Chandan Singh’s house, across the fields people are seen
dancing and drinking and shouting ‘Holi hai’. The joy cheers prompt Deeti to send her
daughter Kabutri to join the fun but she has no appetite for merrymaking and is back
within the hour. In the meanwhile there is the harvest to attend to within a short time
each poppy would have to be individually incised and bled of its sap; the coagulated
gum would then have to be scraped off and collected in earthenware gharas, to be taken
to the factory. It is slow, painstaking work, impossible for a woman and child to undertake on their own. Being unwilling to ask for her brother-in-law’s help. She forces herself to hire half a dozen labourers, agreeing to pay them when the harvest is done. While they are at work she has to attend to her husband, and thus could not keep a closer a watch as she would have liked: the result is predictably a third less than she has expected.

After paying the workers, she decides to spend some money to maintain her roof whose condition is not good. When she reaches the bazaar to sell her harvested poppies, the Carcanna after her gharas of opium has been weighed, counted and tasted. Deeti is shown the account book for Hukum Singh’s plot of land. It shows that at the start of the season, her husband had taken a large advance than she had thought; the mearge proceeds were enough to cover his debt. She gets six dams for the whole harvest; this money is not enough to feed her child. When she asks for some more money the muharir replies:

Do what the others are doing, go to the moneylender. Sell your sons. Send them off to Mateech. It’s not as if you don’t have any choice. I have no sons to sell, said Deeti.’Then sell your land,’ said the clerk, growing peevish. You people always come here and talk about being hungry, hut tells me, who’s ever seen a peasant starve? You just complain, all the time khichir-michie..... (SP 154-155)

The news has come about the death of Hukum Singh. Deeti looks almost certain to meet her doom when she is forced by the villagers and brother-in-law to consider Sati (immolation on her husband’s funeral pyre) as the only option in the face of threat of more rapes by her brother-in-law, but then Kalua, an untouchable from the neighbouring village comes to her rescue. The couple flees and unites. Both Deeti and
Kalua knew that their best chance of escape lay in travelling downriver, on the Ganga, in the hope of reaching a town where they would be able to disappear into crowded places such as Patna or Calcutta. They arrived on the far side of the river to find eight men were waiting, along with one of the duffadar’s sub agent. The agent entered the names in the paper. After these agreements were sealed, they were provided with blankets, several articles of clothing and they promised to provide meals until they reached Mareech.

When Deeti and Kalua went down to the ghat they saw why the duffadar was so busy in the morning, they saw the river ahead was clogged by a huge fleet that was slowly down on the ghats of Chhapra, from upstream. Deeti and Kalua knew at a glance where the ship was coming from and where they were going:

This was the fleet of the Ghazipur Opium Factory, carrying the season’s produce to Calcutta, for auction. The fleet accompanied by a sizeable contingent of armed guards, burkundazes and peon, most of who were distributed among the smaller pulwar boats. The large vessels were still a good hour away when some half dozen pulwars pulled in. Squads of guards jumped ashore, wielding lathis and spear, and set about clearing the ghats of people, securing them for the docking of the stately patelis.

(SP 222)

The opium fleet was commanded by two Englishmen from the Ghazipur Caracanna. By tradition, the senior of the two occupied the pateli that headed the fleet while others sailed in the ships brought up by the rear. The two ships were the largest ships; they took the place of honour at the shore. The Chhapra ghats were not big in
size to accommodate many large vessels at one time and the other patelis had dropped anchor at midstream.

The novel has three parts-Land, River and Sea. The characters try to discover their true selves journeying through these which symbolically stand for the mental, spiritual and physical journey. Those who journey in *Ibis* are people with lots of aspirations and new hopes. Ghosh’s cosmopolitan vision of the world and his humanitarian outlook make him a global writer. He is aware of the impact of colonization and the resultant pain and disappointment of the colonized. His postcolonial depiction of female psyche deconstructs the patriarchal structure of womanhood. Ghosh makes voices of silent subalterns like Deeti heard.

The writer introduces a number of characters who belong to different cultures like the Rajput women Deeti and her drug-addicted husband, Kalua, a low-caste carter, Raja Neel Rattan (a bankrupt landowner) Zachery (an American sailor), Paulette (a young Frenchwoman), and Jodu (her Bengali foster-brother), Benjamin Burnham (an unscrupulous British merchant), and his Bengali agent, Baboo Nob Kissin. Neel Rattan loses his property as the English attempt to usurp power. He has become the victim of deceit and treachery. He has been shipped off to Mauritius. No sooner had Mr. Justice Kendalbushe begun his concluding address than Neel Rattan had started pounding his gavel for the disturbance broke out in the courtroom. It came to be noted that the judge omitted defenders title. The judge began again fixing his eyes directly upon Neel:

The time has come to bring these proceeding to close. Having given due consideration to all the evidence brought before this court, the jury has found you guilty, so it now becomes my painful duty to pass upon the seriousness of your offence,
let me explain that under English law your offence is a crime of the utmost gravity and was until recently considered a capital crime. (SP 135)

The judge said that he was unwilling to add further to Neel’s distress and ordered to seize all his properties and sell them to meet the debts and Neel to be transported to the penal settlement on the Mauritius Island for a period of not less than seven years. Neel was to be moved to the jail at Alipore, where convicts were usually sent to wait transportation. “One morning he found that a sheet of paper under his door. It was a printed notice in English: ‘Burnham Bros. Announce the sale of a property awarded by a decision of the Supreme Court of Judicature, a handsome residence known as the Raskhali Rajbari…. (SP 268) after looking at the notice his hands began to shake; he thought what would be the condition of the dependents. He has no clues where his wife Malati and his son Raj will go. His wife’s home is not a grand residence. He has no idea how they will live. It was the practice in the British period to put a tattoo sign on the forehead of the convict. The same practice was followed in the case of Neel. Raising the mirror to his face he saw that his hair had been cut short and two rows of tiny Roman letters had been inscribed unevenly upon the right side of his forehead “forgerer alipore 1838”.

At that time he befriends an opium addict named Ah Fatt whose parents are a Parsi man and a Chinese woman. Both Neel and Ah Fatt remain in the same cell. Ah Fatt’s physical condition is such that, he is not even able stand up. With the help of other convicts he brings him outside and places him in light. He has been so weakened that his struggles are like the squiring of an exhausted bird. After scouring his chest with a pumice stone, Neel wraps his slivers of soap in a rag and begins to wash the man’s limbs. This shows the kindness of a Zamindar towards a common man. He drags
the filthy bedstead to the direct well and places it in open sunlight so the blood sucking insects can burn. After this job when he returns to his bed he notices without any assistance:

He who by family legend had been sickly since birth, subject to all manners of illness. In the same vein, it had been said to him, too, that he would choke on anything other than the most delicate food—but already many days had passed since he’d eaten anything but the cheapest dal and coarsest rice, small in grain, veined with red and weight with a great quantity of tooth-shattering conkers and grit, yet his appetite had never been more robust. (SP 326)

While travelling in a ship Neel remembers his ancestors and he has good knowledge about sea journey. The ship could take as long as three days, depending on the weather and the wind, to sail downriver from Calcutta to the Bay of Bengal. Between the rivers Ganga Sagar many holy pilgrim centres were to be crossed. One of Neel’s ancestors had endowed a temple on the island, and he had visited it several times himself. The erstwhile Halder zemindary lay about halfway between Calcutta and Ganga Sagar and he knew that the Ibis would pass his estate towards the end of the second day. As he drew near his mind was filled with shards of recollection, some of them as bright and sharp as bits of broken glass. He heard the lookout cry: “Raskhali, we’re passing Raskhali!” He could see it now:

It couldn’t have been clearer if the schooner’s hull turned into glass. There it was: the palace and its colonnaded verandas; the terrace where he had taught Raj Rattan to fly kites; the avenue of palash trees his father had planted; the window of the bedroom to which he had taken Elokeshi. (SP 374)
The season of festivities has come, the city resounded with celebration, which made the silence within the people in the camp. When Diwali came the migrants marked it by lighting a few lamps but there was little happiness in them. Deeti and Kalua were the only people who believed that a ship really would come to take them away. In Alipore jail the season of festival had no fanfare. Diwali in particular was an occasion for the jemders and their gangs to compete in a fiery display and many of the jail’s inner courtyards had been lit up with lamps and improvised sparklers. The noise, food and festivity had a perverse effect on Neel:

Causing a sudden collapse in the resolve that had sustained him thus far. On the night of Diwali, when the courtyard was abaze with light, he had trouble raising from the charpoy and could not bring himself to step beyond the bars: his thoughts were only of his son, of the fireworks of year past, and the dimness, silence and denial that would be the boys lot this season. (SP 341)

Neel is now dispossessed and displaced with the tag of a criminal. This forced transition shakes his self-confidence and his will to live. As he rues over his predicament, he is overcome with nostalgia. Moreover, the colonizers Mr. Burnham, Mr. Doughty, Justice Kendalbushe, and Captain Chillingworth are mercilessly drawn. The British pretend to be favouring the Indian and their welfare while they indulge in usurping power and the territory of Indians. Neel understands the colonizer’s criminal mind but he is helpless. Ghosh makes Neel voice the continuations of the inequities of colonial power and the domination of the whites over the subalterns. One can never miss Ghosh’s descriptive power in the depiction of characters. His artistic mind depicts, “Zachary Reid was of a medium height and sturdy build, with skin the colour of old ivory and a mass of curly, lacquer-black hair”. While describing Deeti’s eyes, Ghosh
observes that the colour of her eyes “made her seem at once blind and all-seeing”. (SP 352)

Amitav Ghosh, the anthropologist, in *Sea of Poppies* depicts nineteenth century India. It is the time when East India Company connects India to the wider world by transporting convicts and indentured labourers to the Island of Mauritius. The British used ship to transport slaves and “in the years since the formal abolition of the slave trade, British and American naval vessels had taken to patrolling the West African coast in growing numbers”. But *Ibis* was used “for a different trade: the export of opium. The theme of imperialism permeates the novel as the author speaks about the past from his memory. The colonial reality of slavery and opium trade is being recorded through the perception of the historian of the imperial age. The exploitation was passively faced by the diasporic communities because of the policies of the British over Asian countries. The East India Company’s policies of commerce greatly influenced and governed their action. To increase their profits and to develop their trade, they forcefully marketed their refined opium to the Chinese. Chinese’s restrictions on free trade made the British wage the opium wars turning the sacred river, the Ganges into a sea of poppies.

Due to the imperial attitude of the British Indians as well as people from other countries the well being and desires of the Indians are not given any importance. Their treatment as subaltern is quiet evident. The artist depicts the colonial authority of the British and their misuse of power. Mr.Burnham, the owner of the slave ship, *Ibis* wishes to continue the opium trade as he gets much profit. He considers the opium wars to be “just and necessary”. Mr.Doughty echoes his views and his mind has been colonized by the British employer. Indian women too were the easy victims of molestations by those
in power. The continuing influence of colonization is seen in the sexual exploitation of Deeti and her foster daughter Paulette by their employers.

In 1883, the British government sent the accomplished linguist Sir George Grierson to look into alleged abuses in the recruitment of indentured labourers from India (known as coolies) who end up on ships bound to British plantations throughout the world. In his diary, Grierson wrote about an encounter with the father of one female coolie in a village along the Gangas: “The historical records provide only a trace of this woman, a name, processing number, a year of emigration.” (Gaiutra Bahadur 551)

*Sea of Poppies* is a social discourse. Ghosh handles the theme of migration and depicts the psychological impact of losing one’s country, language and culture. Cross-culture interactions of various characters, crossing the cultural geographical borders makes multiculturalism and transculturalism a reality. This novel with its postcolonial discourse, describes quite realistically the characters’ worldwide migrations and their immigrant experiences which force them to undergo identity crisis as they encounter doubleness of identity. Migrants face the reality of coming to terms with another place, another way of speaking and thinking. Ghosh questions the homogenizing logic of the colonizers by celebrating cultural hegemony and hybridity of different classes, race of people that lead to multiculturalism.

Being conscious of his identity as an Indian, the novelist decentres colonial authority through various means. He introduces words from the Indian languages, and from the various creoles, pidgins and slangs that are used in India and the nautical speech used in the Asian seaports since the 18th century and also barrack-room slang and the dialect of thieves and whores. He has made use of the colonial-era dictionaries and lexicons. The most important of these sources is Sir Henry Yule’s Hobson-Jobson.
Ghosh uses nautical jargon with some Hindi words and his coinages of Indian words into English: bahadur, rajah, mongoose, nirvana, avatar, maya, karma, balti, vakeel, atta, ayan, tamasha, pandit etc shows his use of language as one of his resistive strategies to resist colonial oppression and reclaim the superiority of their native culture, language, customs and beliefs, and the glory of the pre-colonial past. His mingling of Anglo-Indian pidgin and lascar jargon makes his language musical.

Globalization leads to the loss of one’s identity and the immigrants learn to assimilate seeking liberation and fulfilment. Multiculturalism frees the characters from cultural and political repression. Sea of Poppies can be called a historical epic as the writer with his authorial insight and unique gift of storytelling narrates the stories of people against the narratives of history. The aftereffects of colonization like master-slave relationship, secondary position of women in westernized Indian society are skilfully portrayed thus: “the rules of the Raskhali household were strict in regard to which the Raja could eat with” (SP 106). Ghosh unravels a rich propertied land owner of West Bengal Rattan’s entire estate where Deeti and her son Joda take refuge. Neel’s young wife dies at the time of delivery. Her new-born girl baby, Paulette Lambert is taken care of by Deeti and gradually as time moves on, she becomes her nurse. Paulette though French by birth learns Bengali as first language. There were several other children in the Bungalow’s quarters, but only Joda was allowed free access to the main house and its bedrooms. The subjugated woman’s pathetic plight has been revealed through the perspective of her son. “At an early age, Joda came to understand that this was because of his mother’s relationship with her employer was special, in a way required her to remain with him until late at night.” Ghosh thus supplements structuralist narratology which reveals his perspective.
The characters in *Ibis* are all migrants and they face the conflict between the imaginary and the real. Mystery surrounds the lives of various characters. Their quest for identity, rootlessness, ruptured relations, multilingualism, hybridity, the nautical experiences, legacy of colonialism, and Ghosh’s love for the sea form the base of this novel. He follows the technique of a historical novelist as he supplies the needed information through the story plot. Ghosh uses MacArthur’s Account of an Opium Factory published in 1865. He recaptures the history of the opium trade and the opium war of 1838 that disrupted the continuity of trade. The British East India Company’s opium trade feels the pinch as Ben Burnham, an independent merchant has purchased the ship, the *Ibis*. Ghosh also brings before the readers’ eyes the early 19th century Indian food, opium cultivation, alcoholic drinks, drug addiction of servants working in opium factories, furniture, religious worship, nautical commands, male and female costume, trades, marriage and funeral rites, botany and horticulture, non-commissioned military officers, sexual practice, and traditional medicines. The novel *Sea of Poppies*, the first volume in his Ibis Trilogy can be called a historical epic as the writer with his unique gift of storytelling, narrates the stories of people against the grand narratives of history. The ship takes the readers across race, class and culture across the countries which cover Bangladesh, Burma, Egypt, Cambodia, Britain and America. This makes one recall the slave trade after colonization and the people’s sense of repression and resentment. The panoramic dimension of Mulk Raj Anand’s *Coolie* can be discerned in Ghosh’s *Sea of Poppies*.

This intermingling of trade facilitated mingling of race, culture, diasporic communities and nationalities which make Deeti reflect, “they were all kin now, their rebirth in the ship’s womb had made them into a single family”. In the ship Jodu, a
follower of Islam, falls in love with Munia, a non-Muslim. The French Paulette is engaged to Zachary Reid who is half white and half black. Paulette affirms that their “existence will continue uninterrupted; will it not, no matter what the drape of our clothes, or the colour of our skin. She also remarks, “From now on and forever afterwards, we will all be ship siblings, Jahaz bhais and Jahaz behans to each other. There’ll be no difference between us” (SP 356).

The novel is subversive and follows the reversal of character and social order. Ghosh’s remarkably rich stage realistically depicts the suffering of the colonised under the British rule: the compulsory cultivation of opium poppies imposed on Indians by the East India Company for the ultimate benefit of the British. The novel centres on the tragic life of Deeti. She is a young mother living by the Ganges some fifty miles east of Benares with her addicted husband who works in the British Opium factory at Ghazipur in Eastern Bihar. She grows poppies for the circumstances force her. The imperial commerce and the indifference of the British towards the rural economy of the poor Indians reveal how the lives of the poor Indians are shaped by British policy makers. This makes the people addicts to opium bringing in the economically backward Indians a moral degradation as they are conditioned to opium to forget their worries.

Ghosh’s humanistic vision of equality for men and women with his observation of their spirit of endurance makes the novel an interesting read. He deals with women’s exploitation and violence against them too. Deeti initially endures all sorts of humiliations like rape by her husband’s brother, ill-treatment by her mother-in-law, and her justifying the act saying “the earth has never seen a woman more virtuous than Draupadi” (SP 39). The devastating shipwreck, her inner conflict due to a life of suffocation due to the discrimination based on caste and class in a male-dominated
Indian society, her unhappy family situation, her emotional conflicts because of the expectation of Indian patriarchal society and the treatment of women as subalterns force Deeti to question the patriarchal authority and makes her resist the patriarchal values. Though passively resigned to her pathetic situation, she slowly gets herself empowered and fights back. She is strong and resourceful to defeat the hostile forces—be it man/woman or Nature. She remains calm and collected in the event of her husband’s death. She is reasonable in sending her daughter to her brother’s house. Though sad to cut off Kaburthi, her daughter from her life, she feels that it is no use “to weep and bemoan the influence of the planets” (SP 37). Paulette becomes an easy victim of molestation by her employer who exercises authority and power over her. Hence she hides her identity and escapes. Deeti lives a life of poverty that results in exploitation. She teaches her fellow womenfolk to face the realities of life through solidarity and female bonding. She is the conscience and voice of a world community. Their voice is sometimes in pain and sometimes in anger as they struggle for freedom from colonialism. Ghosh’s approach gives new direction to the narrative analysis of the subalterns.

Cross-cultural human relationship plays a vital part in the novel to depict the vulnerability of man against the forces of Nature. He describes the lush poppy fields, the mighty sea offering rich adventure, the relationship between man and Nature, man’s exploitation of Nature and man’s need to preserve Nature. Ghosh describes the banks of river Ganga “were shored up with thousands of broken earthenware gharas—the round bottomed vessels in which raw opium was brought to the factory” (SP 92). Sea of Poppies can be called an eco text as well.
The artist reveals the nostalgic feelings and the diasporic consciousness of those who voyage in *Ibis*. Ananda Prabha Barat observes in this regard: “The psyche of an immigrant is always tragic as a result of the tension created in the mind between the two socio-cultural environments, between the feeling of rootlessness and nostalgia” (R.K. Dhawan 53). The women recollect and share the past and the little things that would never see, nor hear, nor smell again; the colour of poppies, spilling across the fields on a rain drenched Holi. Their journey through different alien countries only indicates their quest for freedom as individuals, and their quest for identity. Their quest journey that envisages moral, cultural and social values create spaces in the host county indicating modern man’s transgression of the moral values, belief in the moral superiority of his nation and his rebellion against conventions. Ghosh has explored the possibilities of a happy world which abounds with the opportunities of redeeming love and humanism for the immigrants. *Sea of Poppies* is one of the best contributions of Amitav Ghosh to postcolonial Indian Writing in English as he identifies a historical mode to recover an indigenous culture unaffected by colonialism. To him these characters are transitional in the sense they usher in an era of change. By creating such characters who defy caste system, patriarchal domination and colonial oppression, Ghosh wants to tell the world that India was already well on its way in the nineteenth century itself to create a happy commune where everyone’s welfare and happiness are the final goals.