

A discussion on:

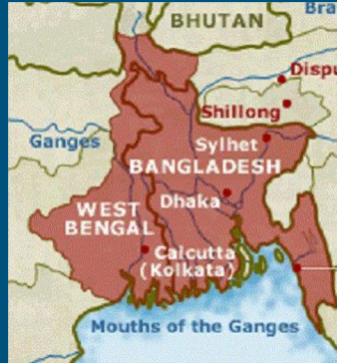
The Hungry Tide

by Amitav Ghosh

Geographical Setting/History

Where did it happen?

- Sundarbans
 - Between Bangladesh and West Bengal
- Lusibari
 - “Tide country”
 - Filled with predators



Historical context?

- 1757 - English East India Company
- 1857 - Anti-colonial riots
- 1858 - British colonization
- 1920 - First settlers arrive in Lusibari
- 1947 - Indian Independence Act
- 1979 - Marichjhapi Massacre
- 2004 - Indian Ocean Tsunami
- 2005 - Novel takes place

The Sundarbans and Myth



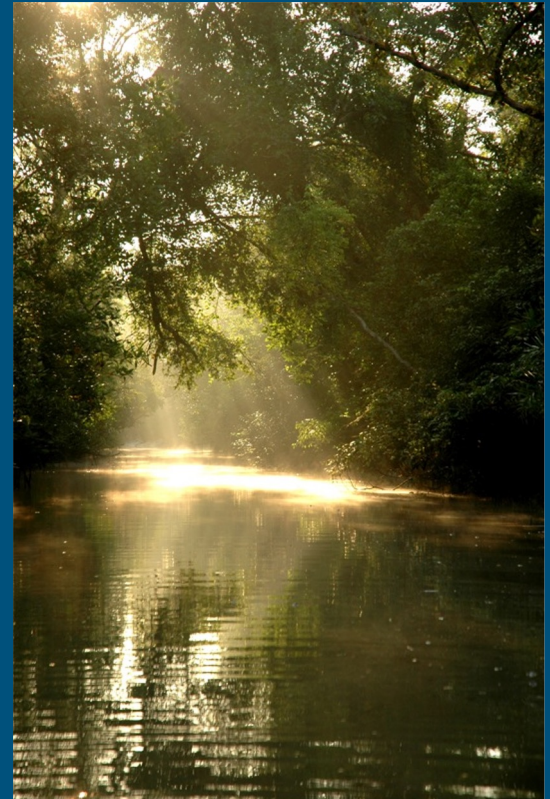
Pg. 6 - In our legends it is said that the goddess Ganga's descent from the heavens would have split the earth had Lord Shiva not tamed her torrent by tying it into his ash-smeared locks. To hear this story is to see the river in a certain way: as a heavenly braid, for instance, an immense rope of water, unfurling through a wide and thirsty plain. That there is a further twist to the tale becomes apparent only in the final stages of the river's journey – and this part of the story always comes as a surprise, because it is never told and thus never imagined. It is this: there is a point at which the braid comes undone; where Lord Shiva's matted hair is washed apart into a vast, knotted tangle. Once past that point the river throws off its binding and separates into hundreds, maybe thousands, of tangled strands.

The Land and its Connection to Myth

What properties of myth and story are interwoven between the setting of the novel? Where do we see the setting intertwine with myth and why is that significant? What does myth teach us about the land?

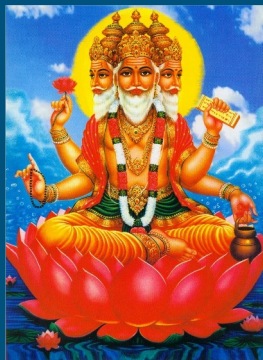
Pg. 150 “Tell me children,” I would begin, “what do our old myths have in common with geology?” ...

“Think about it,” I would say, “and you’ll see. It’s not just the goddesses – there’s a lot more in common between myth and geology. Look at the size of their heroes, how immense they are – heavenly deities on the one hand, and on the other the titanic stirrings of the earth itself – both equally otherworldly, equally remote from us.



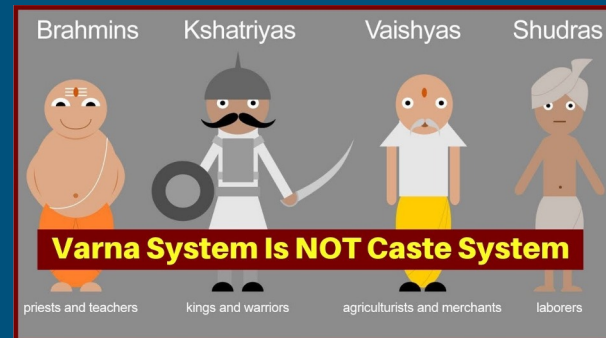
Hinduism

Religion



- Pantheistic Religion - there is one divine being that manifests itself in our reality
 - “Each of the individual personal gods is considered to be an aspect of the Divine One”
- *Brahma* is the divine oneness that is omniscient and omnipotent with an infinite number of forms
- *Atma* is the individual ‘soul’; divine consciousness manifested in all living beings
- *Sanatana Dharma* - the Eternal Truth

Culture



- *Namaste/Nomoshkar* - “I acknowledge the divine in you, that which is also in me.”
- *Varnas* (as stated in the Vedas) - Braahman, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, Shudras
 - Vedic duties evolved into determiner of societal value

Religion and Culture

Significance of Nature

- *Brahman* manifests itself in all creation equally, including nature
 - “very strong environmental conscience”
- Humans must learn to coexist with nature - non-violence



Notable Passages

- Pg. 150-152 - “Love flows deep in the rivers.”
 - Love as a divine emotion
- Pg. 168-172 - “Untold multitudes of crabs are burrowing into our *badh* [...] Because the animals ‘already know by instinct we’re not comfortably at home in our translated world.”
- Pg 194 - Dolphins are “Bon Bibi’s messengers”

Religion/Spirituality and the Land

In our previous slide of religion and culture, we noted connections to spirituality and the environment.

How does this influence the way you observe religion/spirituality?
How do you connect to the novel's exploration of religion/spirituality?

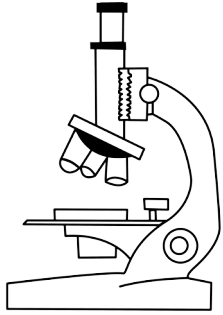


Gangetic Dolphin



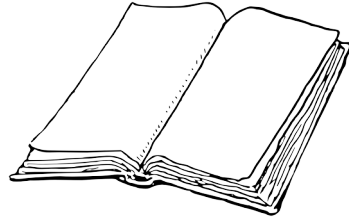
Irrawaddy Dolphin

Main Characters



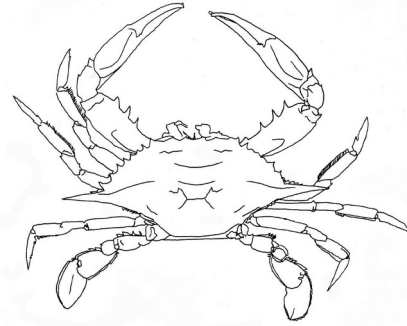
Piya

- Young American Cetologist
- Daughter of Indian immigrants
- Only knows English and travels alone



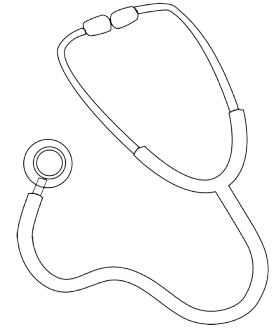
Kanai

- Middle Aged Indian translator
- From New Delhi, spent a few years in Sundarbans as a child
- In love with Piya



Fokir

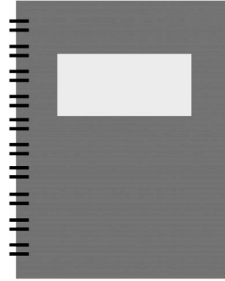
- Young impoverished crabber
- Knows no English and illiterate
- Extensive knowledge of the land
- Husband of Moyna, father of Tutul, son of Kussum, and 'son' of Horen



Moyna

- Intelligent young Nurse
- Works for Nilima
- Mother of Tutul and wife of Fokir

'Side' Characters



Nilima/Mashima

- Founded Babadon Trust and built the hospital
- Wife of Nirmal/Saar and aunt (Mashima) to Kanai

Nirmal/Saar

- School Professor and wannabe revolutionary
- Husband of Nilima and uncle to Kanai
- Witnessed the Morichjhapi massacre

Horen

- Established boatman
- Raised Fokir
- Kusum's Lover?

Kusum

- Mother of Fokir, childhood friend of Kanai
- Killed in Morichjhapi massacre

Religious Characters



Bon Bibi

- Guardian spirit of the forest
- Emphasis on nurturing
- Sister to Shah Jongoli



Shah Jongoli

- Guardian spirit of the forest
- Emphasis on defending
- Brother to Bon Bibi



Dokkhin Rai

- Demon of the Forest
- Emphasis on attacking/killing
- Often appears as a Tiger

Storyline #1: Nirmal's Notebook

- Explains events before Nirmal's death
- Nirmal & Horen are caught in a storm → reunited with Kusum
- Nirmal offers to help Marichjhapi
- Nilima does not approve Marichjhapi cause → "seed of our mistrust" p. 158
- Nirmal not significant enough in revolution → 'madness'?
- Nirmal and Horen go to warn Kusum about rumoured attack → Nirmal and Kusum stay, Horen leaves with Fokir
- Kusum presumably dies, Nirmal lives but suffers mental decay
- Horen revealed he and Nirmal loved Kusum.

Storyline #2: Present Day

- Piya meets Kanai on a train
- Fokir saves Piya from an unfortunate expedition → work well together
- Go to Lusibari → finds Kanai
- Expedition with Fokir, Kanai, & Horen
- Kanai's jungle experience with Fokir, love confession to Piya, and return to Lusibari with Horen.
- Fokir & Piya stranded during cyclone. Fokir dies → serious trauma for Piya
- Piya returns to Lusibari with new research plans. Kanai returns to New Delhi.

Discussion Questions

- What are your thoughts on the village tiger killing? Do you connect with Piya, the village, or Kanai? Why?
 - Was it right for Fokir to leave Kanai in the woods? What was his point in conducting that event?
 - What is the significance of Fokir's death?
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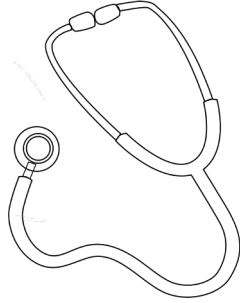
Themes

- Ecology, nature, and the tides
 - Religion, culture, and myth
 - Dichotomies and confluence
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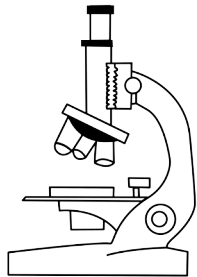
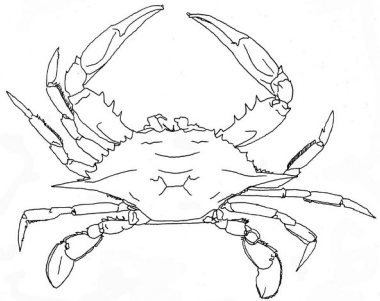
Discussion Questions



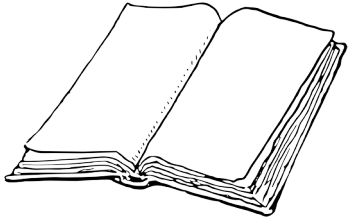
What is the significance of the tides throughout the novel? What does it mean for the tide to be "hungry"?



Discussion Questions



Though none of the main characters directly express religious beliefs, in what ways do we see them express devotion to ideas and/or personal beliefs?



Discussion Questions



What is the importance of communication in the novel?

Does the novel suggest that language is an effective means of communication or an insufficient one?

Other thoughts?