

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

DHRUBAJYOTI BANERJEE

I

Salman Rushdie in the initial chapters of Book Three of *Midnight's Children* talks of a war situation where the major characters simultaneously hide and are lost in the Sunderbans. He describes the forests as being 'so thick that history has hardly ever found the way in' (Rushdie 1995, 359). A little later he talks of the 'historyless anonymity' (360) of these forests. Rushdie's characters undergo many disorienting experiences in the Sunderbans and are finally, almost magically, rescued from it. This reference seems to be an interesting point to start a discussion on the history of this fearful and constantly changing interface of land and water. Rushdie, using magic realist techniques, is content to stress the unreal aspects of this land. But Amitav Ghosh, in *The Hungry Tide*¹ tries to give voice to the silenced and forgotten history of this place and without deviating mostly from the classic realist mode, also documents many disconcerting experiences of the central characters which accompany the process of attainment of self knowledge.

The Sunderbans, the vast archipelago of islands that forms the Gangetic delta, is a unique place where the interplay of the tides with the islands creates an ever changing world that is ready to spring surprises for those attempting to analyse its hidden depths. In this world where the boundaries between land, river and sea are ceaselessly changing, human beings live in a precarious