

Fokir (Ghosh's novel *The Hungry Tide*) Protective

Character Fokir is a local fisherman, poor, uneducated and without hope for the future, except perhaps in the shape of his young son, who accompanies him in his boat. Fokir proves to be an honest person and a person of great dignity and personal strength. He interacts with Piya on equal terms, and he shows a chivalrous concern for her privacy when they are alone on the river together. He neglects his wife but only, we believe, in order to catch the fish that he must sell to provide for their family. Like Piya, he is a loner, who prefers to be out on the water, watching the tides and the skies. He is a true friend to Piya, rescuing her from drowning and then saving her from the force of a fierce storm, for which he pays with his own life.

Activities Fokir is a fisherman, who goes out in his boat every day, often accompanied by his son. He spends long hours paddling to special spots and then waiting for fish to bite. He also makes complicated fishing lines, using fragments of bone and ceramic tile. Then he must repair his fragile boat and fishing lines. This leaves little time for leisure, but when the occasion arises, a ceremony, for example, he likes to take a drink and to sing.

Illustrative moments

Honest Fokir's sincerity and honesty are illustrated during his initial encounter with Piya. She is partially responsible for him being forced to pay a hefty fine/bribe to a forest official, and she attempts to reimburse his loss and humiliation. While sitting in the boat, she takes out a thick wad of currency notes and counts them out, with Fokir looking on in amazement at such a large sum of money and without any idea that some of it was for him. She gives him a small amount, 'no more than she might have paid for a few sandwiches and a coffee,' but he 'examined them in disbelief, holding them at a distance from his face.' He then takes a single note and returns the rest to her, making a gesture that said the note was for his loss. His pride prevents him from taking a penny more than he felt he deserved. His honesty, in the wake of the forest official's greed, is striking. Poverty can degrade and turn ordinary people into petty criminals, but some people, perhaps the majority, have a stronger set of values than the city folk who often look down at them as inferiors.

Protective The very last scene of the book is dramatic and tragic. Fokir and Piya are caught up in a fierce windstorm on an exposed riverbank. They take shelter while planks of wood and large tree branches are hurled at them by the wind. Placing his body in front of her, to break the force of the wind and prevent the flying objects from hitting her, he digs in his heels and tries to resist the elements. Piya then tries to put herself in front of him, but his grip on her is too strong and she cannot move. 'Their bodies were so close, so finely merged, that she could feel the impact of everything hitting him...she could feel the bones of his cheeks as if they had been superimposed on her own; it was as if the storm had given them what life could not; it had fused them together and made them one.' Fokir dies from the force of the flying objects, and Piya survives. Fokir gave his life sheltering a young woman with whom he could not speak and whom he did not understand. But she was kind and gentle, and he loved her in his own way, which was to protect her from the danger of the Sundarbans.