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**The Shadow Lines:**

***A quest beyond borders***

by

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A Paper

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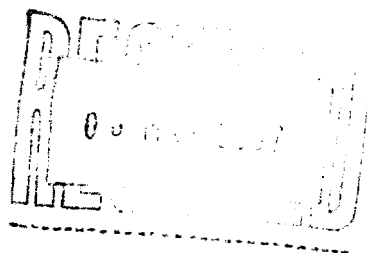
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## Introduction

We are born within boundaries of nations. The inevitability of territorial identity is a concept that has been challenged by the subjective needs for 'spaces' in recent years. Therefore, most studies reflect a natural tendency to give up on 'places' and focus on 'spaces'. Space inherently indicates a free-floating area which, unless given specific dimensions, is a flexible concept that accommodates any life. This space may give birth to hybridity, confusion, melancholy, disillusionment, continuity, interstitiality, creativity, diaspora, or even surrender of the self. In other words, this space offers absolute freedom to steer identity to any direction that it chooses to align itself with, at any point of time. In a postmodern, postcolonial or rather de-colonized world, the self is relieved from the burden of specificities. What then forms identity? How does nationalism fit its mould? Can identity be over and above fixed spaces? If so, is it the burden of hybridity that gives birth to diaspora? Is it the same burden that leads to systematic repression, resilience, and finally, oblivion? If ever the self chooses to live within the circle of life again, does it give birth to a new person burdened by history and in a state of "in-between-ness"? This essay will attempt to discuss these questions in the light of Amitav Ghosh's novel, *The Shadow Lines*.

Amitav Ghosh was born in Calcutta on 11 July 1956. His father, Shailendra Chandra Ghosh, was an officer in the British Indian army and later a diplomat in independent India. His mother, Anjali Ghosh was a mother raising children and taking care of domesticities. Ghosh's childhood was spent in Dhaka, Calcutta, Colombo and Iran with his sister, Chaitali. He also attended a boarding school in Dehra Dun in Northern India and he graduated with honors in history from University of Delhi in 1976 and he received an M.A degree from the same university in 1978 in sociology.

Ghosh's Ph.D. was on social anthropology from Oxford in 1982. In the meantime, between 1974 and 1978, he also worked as a reporter and editor of *Indian Express*. From 1982 to 1983, he was a visiting fellow at the Centre for Development Studies in Kerala, India. Between 1983 and 1987, he taught in the department of Sociology at the Delhi School of Economics, University of Delhi. Ghosh's forte in sociology, history, social anthropology allowed him to accommodate multiplicities in his perspective. It has also enriched his literary productions.

*The Shadow Lines*, Ghosh's second novel, was published in 1988 and received the prestigious Sahitya Academy Award in the following year. The novel excavates personal and social history and some racial riots in some parts of the-then East Pakistan and mainly, in Calcutta, India. The novel originated after the assassination of Indira Gandhi which revived his memories of the 1964 riots in Calcutta, and Dhaka. The repetitive pattern of violence is reflected in his novel and is based on historical reality. Ghosh has created a complete piece of fiction integrated through characterization. The time sequence in the story is jumbled: the crucial events occur in 1960's, but the narrator is recalling them in 1980's and they are rooted in the period just right before the First World War.

In 1939, thirteen years before the narrator was born, his twenty-nine year old great aunt, Mayadebi went to England with her diplomat husband, the Shaheb and their son, Tridib. Mayadebi was the only sister of the narrator's grandmother, often addressed as 'Tha'mma' in the novel. His grandmother never approved of Tridib, whom she considered lazy. The narrator, however, loved Tridib's story-telling abilities and narratives that never allowed time to "stink". As a result Tridib took ample advantage of the narrator's youthful gullibility. Tridib, the slightly whimsical character, acts as an organizing principle in the novel. His life is governed by higher-

order needs such as creative thinking, understanding and love. He is guided by his own self and he guides the narrator, being his mentor.

Tridib has two brothers. One is two years older and works for the United Nations. His name is Jatin. The other is Robi, who is much younger. Tridib is the only who had spent much of his life in Calcutta. In England, there's another family that the narrator is linked with. Mrs. Price, her daughter May and her son, Nick live in North London. Her husband has died recently. As it happens, Mrs. Price's father, Lionel Tresawsen had been stationed in India when she was young, and he had become a good friend of Tridib's grandfather who was a judge in the Calcutta High Court. The narrator meets May when she first comes to India and then once again after seventeen years, when he is visiting England. He is at that point researching at the India Office Library for a PhD thesis on the textile trade between India and England in the nineteenth century. By then May is a cellist in an orchestra. She shares her memories of Tridib with the narrator at that time. She notes, for example, that in 1959, when she was nineteen and Tridib was twenty-seven, they had begun a long correspondence.

Another character who plays a noteworthy role in the novel is Ila. She is the narrator's cousin. She has traveled widely but appears to be a little jaded although she is seemingly more sophisticated than the narrator. She marries Nick and lives in Mrs. Price's house in London, but the narrator registers the tensions between Ila and her philandering husband. 1962 proves to be a momentous year for the narrator's family. It is the year when the narrator turns ten, the year his father becomes a General Manager, and the year when his grandmother retires as headmistress at a girls' school where she had spent twenty-seven years. By 1964, the grandmother accidentally meets up with a poor relation in Kolkata who lives near a dump and learns from her that her family house in Dhaka is now occupied by grandmother's uncle, Jethomoshai,

who is now over ninety, and by Muslim refugees from India. Coincidentally, her sister Maya had just moved to Dhaka where her husband had been posted. So, grandmother decides to visit Mayadebi and bring Jethomoshai back to India. When she finds her uncle, Jethomoshai doesn't want to go to India anymore. As he declares:

Once you start moving you never stop....As for me, I was born here, and I'll die here. (211)

But they get him in the car and attempt to leave. They soon find that their way is blocked by a mob. May urges Tridib to get out of the car and retrieve Jethamoshai. But Tridib is captured by the mob and killed. After Tridib's death, the narrator is sent to stay with his mother's brother in Durgapur; Tridib is cremated and May leaves for London that same day; Mayadebi and her family return to Dhaka. After all of this has happened, there is an uneasy silence in the narrator's memory about the events leading to Tridib's death until he moves again to London to do archival work for his dissertation when he meets May for the second time. This silence has, however, been something of a puzzle for the narrator no doubt because it relates to his traumatic memories of 1964 riots which he was possibly blocking. What leads to the end of the long silence is a chance remark he overhears about the 1964 riots that prompts a personal crisis and leads to an exploration of the scene of the trauma. As he recounts the events, he recalls snippets of conversations with relatives and friends that suggest that they, too, had been redefined by their experiences that day.

The characters in the novel are subtly shaped. The three generations depicted in the novel have traversed the historical fractures of pre-Partition and post- Partition situations. They represent phases of the history of the Indian subcontinent and have experienced some of the major colonial and communal conflicts of the region. The link between the colonizer and the colonized in this case started with Tresawsen and Mayadebi's grandfather and continues for two more generations and is finally given

meaning at the end when the narrator meets May and is reconciled with the past after having come to terms with it. In between this initial friendship and the temporary reconciliation, history has led the families through different paths. The Partition of 1947, mirrored by the division of family property in the novel, divides the “brothers” who belonged to what was undivided Bengal for centuries, people who wouldn’t kill each other for greed or faith, and who hung on to the single dream of Nationhood throughout colonial occupation.

Ghosh’s portrayal of partition takes readers a few steps closer to reality as he sketches borders that separate familiar memories, leads to intense passions and gives birth to fratricide. The shadow line running between India and Pakistan altered identities overnight after partition. The line that perhaps lay in the subconscious of the people of the two lands was reflected in the borders enforced by nationalist governments. As a result an Indian began to think of herself only as a Hindu and Pakistani a Muslim. Hence, the shadow lines in the novel depict the realities of a divide that led to disillusionment and division between people. Ghosh points to fractures noting that all nations are products of ruins and bloodshed.

The themes of *The Shadow Lines* revolve around space, time, identity, memory, hybridity, and nationalism. The novel is a non-sequential and hesitant journey back and forth to the centre of the trauma—the murder of the narrator’s uncle—that is as remarkable for its psychological sophistication as its deft handling of the complex theme. Space and time interact intensely in the novel. The narrator had noted that Trideb had “worlds to travel in and he had given him eyes to see them with” (20). Ila, on the other hand, could never understand what those hours in Tridib’s room had meant for the narrator, “a boy who had never been more than a few hundred miles from Calcutta” (20). When the narrator had first visited London, it was as

though he had just stepped into the set of his favorite film: he marveled at everything that made Tridib's stories concrete although Ila simply grew impatient at them. The narrator could not persuade her that "a place does not merely exist, that it had to be invented in one's imagination...so that although she had lived in many places, she had never traveled at all." (21). Tridib's gift to the nameless narrator had been "imagination with precision" (24). The narrator valorizes Tridib's sense of adventure that led him to imagining places in time as well as in space.

His Grandmother vision is very different. When she finally makes the momentous trip to Dhaka, she refuses to believe that she is, in fact, *there*. She is also mystified by the notion of borders. The narrator marvels that people invest such power in the lines of maps. Despite his fascination with atlases, real and imaginary, it does take the narrator quite a while to face the arbitrary horrors that his grandmother saw so honestly on the spot. As if to tie the book to the first one, *The Circle of Reason*, Ghosh has his narrator draw a circle on a map—though not, perhaps, a circle of "reason" where Khulna is the centre and Srinagar the circumference. Ghosh goes on to interweave the multiple elements of history, time, identity, silence, and nationalism in the pages of the novel. His recurring themes include the role of the individual in the broad sweep of political events; the dubious nature of borders, whether between nations and peoples or between one literary genre and another; the role of memory in one's recovery of identity in the march of time; the role of the artist in society; hybridity and diaspora and the importance of narrative in shaping history.

Apart from his engagement with history, Ghosh's works also contain a wealth of almost encyclopedic information on other subjects. If in *The Circle of Reason* we find ornithology, phrenology, the technology of handloom weaving, the etymology of cotton, episodes from history of science, *The Calcutta Chromosome* has



microbiology, genetics, linguistics, and computer science. *The Glass Palace* shows familiarity with teak logging, elephant lore, rubber plantations, photography, jungle warfare, regimental traditions in the army, while changing automobile models mark the passage of time. The easy crossing of borders is a hallmark of Ghosh's writings. Some critics accuse *The Shadow Lines* of having promoted mindless celebration of 'hybridity' promoted by globalization. This criticism is not valid as the references to the Price family, or Tridib's penchant for tales of exotic lands and his intimate familiarity with London *circa* 1940 are all marks of Ghosh's portrayal of sensibilities and insecurities of Bengali *bhadrolok*.

The list of critics who are referred to in this paper include: Homi Bhabha, Ashish Nandy, Stuart Hall, Benedict Anderson, Amartya Sen and Marc Auge. The plot of the novel has parallels drawn in England and the fact that the narrator finally meets May and finds an answer to his question and is able to even partially resolve his queries brings us close to Bhabha's theory of interstitiality. Most of the characters are hybrid and belong to the diasporic community. There are time and space shifts through out the novel, yet every space and every minute is representative of personal spaces of the characters. Each possesses a new border and each of them creates their own ideology. Nandy's 'intimate enemy' writes back and creates a new reality which aspires to reconcile the underlying, subconscious indifference to post colonial pain. Stuart Hall's concept of cultural identity will be studied in the paper in an attempt to trace the cultural differences that exist between races and which give birth to fresh identities every time the borders change.

'Imagined communities', a concept of Benedict Anderson is apt for the study of *The Shadow Lines* as Ghosh agrees with Anderson on the communities drawing imaginary lines and spaces in order to form their own identities. Amartya Sen's

concept of multiplicities in identities is also used in the paper to denote the multiple elements in an individual. An Indian is not only an Indian; he or she has other identities to cling on; for example, he or she may be a musician, a yogi, or even a painter. Many other multiplicities may enrich his or her life. That is why, Ghosh's May and Tridib come together; that is why the nameless narrator finds his peace in May; that is why the Muslim rickshaw puller takes care of Jethomoshai. The anthropologist, Marc Auge's term of 'non-places' can also be applied to Ghosh's novel as there are no definite boundaries between the two Bengal; the narrator's fascination with atlas only leads him to a greater conviction of evaporating borders in the world. Apart from these major critics, essays of some other critics have also been discussed in the paper. For example, Manjula Saxena's essay on *The Shadow Lines* being a memory novel, Premindha Banerjee's piece on 'The Narrator and the Chronicling of Self in *The Shadow Lines*', Alka Kumar's essay 'Nation As Identity' have also been briefly discussed in the paper. These papers have helped me mull theory out of the story and have aided me to study the psychological, historical, and social aspects of the novel.

This paper evolves around the central theme of '*The Shadow Lines*' being a quest beyond borders. It interrogates a political consciousness baptized in the crucible of nation divides. Ghosh's narrative tears one part of the globe to another with breathtaking speed. Whereas maps are supposed to be representative of a corporeal reality, are seen as illusory, the 'mirrors' are seen as reflective of the true self and hence are regarded as substantial. There are no neutral, impersonal places in Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines*. For Tridib, a place does not merely exist but it has to be invented in one's imagination (24). But for Ila, a place just exists and is no more than a utility. The younger generation in the novel has inherited a nation, which is stricken with dissension and disunity. Yet there are places like Dhaka and Calcutta, which are

closely related to each other than ever before, so much so that the narrator had only to look into the reflection in the mirror to be in Dhaka. These areas were irreversibly symmetrical through patterns of mutual discord and mutual concern of the people, on both sides of the border. The various sections of the novel reiterate that personal identity is connected with political realities and that no freedom is unequivocal. Notions of borders are like shadow lines, yet often real and rigidly drawn. The paper attempts to establish that borders are porous and transgression without causing violence and bloodshed is what Ghosh dreams of.

## Identity in *The Shadow Lines*

Amitav Ghosh stresses the concept of Identity throughout the novel, and connects it with the imagination. Violent acts that change the world increase complexities for the inhabitants of a convoluted universe. This is how disparate groups emerge in different parts of the world affecting each other. However, Amitav Ghosh rejects the overarching system of civilizational and religious partitioning. This sort of partitioning adopts a singular approach which sees human beings as members of exactly one group but this can be a way of misunderstanding nearly everyone in the world. There is a need for plurality of affiliations. Viewing identities in terms of a singular affinity can be disastrous. Amartya Sen in his *Identity and Violence* quotes Oscar Wilde in his preface: "Most people are other people...as their thoughts are someone else's opinions, their lives a mimicry, their passions a quotation." Riots in the subcontinent often take place as a result of people identifying with a fostered sense of religious identity which turns out to be a weapon they use to brutalize others. The world gets into a volatile situation when such divisions are created and when a human being is labeled as a Hindu or a Muslim. Ghosh reexamines and reassesses such a process of labeling from the perspective of post-colonialism and religious fundamentalism. Many believe that a dominant communal identity is only a matter of self-realization and not of choice. However, as Sartre argued in 'Portrait of the Anti Semite', "The Jew is a man...whom other people look upon as a Jew; it is the anti Semite who makes the Jew." In opposing external impositions on one's identity, Shakespeare's Shylock brilliantly states: "Hath not a Jew eyes? Hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions? Fed with the same food, hurt with the same weapons, subject to the same diseases, healed by the same means, warned

and cooled by the same winter and summer, as a Christian is?" (*The Merchant of Venice* by William Shakespeare from Act III, Scene 1).

Because of riots, massive identity shifts follow divisive politics. People with broad identities such as Indians or Asians have now been branded with narrower labels such as "Hindu" or "Muslim". The carnage that follows divisiveness has much to do with "herd behavior". As Hall states in 'Cultural Identity' (1993) such carnage ensue when people are made to affirm their newly detected belligerent identities, without subjecting them to critical examination. People become transformed in the process. The whole process is characterized in Huntington's 'The Clash of Civilization and the Remaking of World Order' where the author contrasts Western civilization with Hindu, Islamic, Buddhist civilizations and so on. People engaged in riots or wars should not have to obliterate other distinctions. Yet partitioning of people continues on the basis of singularity of identities.

History and background should not be the only way of looking at ourselves, argues Amartya Sen in his book, *Identity and Violence*. He stresses the various categories that a human being belongs to. Sen, in most parts of the book discusses the possibility of having multiple identities of being an Asian, an Indian citizen, a Bengali with Bangladeshi ancestry, an American or British resident, an economist, a dabbler in philosophy, an author, a Sanskritist, a strong believer in secularism and democracy, a man, a feminist, a heterosexual, a defender of gay and lesbian rights, with a non religious lifestyle, from a Hindu background, a non-Brahmin, and a non believer in an afterlife. Yet all these identities, according to him, may evaporate under communal pressure and the "I" too often may disappear in the process.

Sen, in his last chapter, has recollections of a certain Kader Mia, who was essentially a Muslim. He seemed to possess no other identity at all for the "vicious

Hindu thugs” who confronted him in a riot. He then moves on in his book to discuss the Indo-Pakistan war of 1971 and proves that the identity divisions that took place then were “along the lines of language and politics, not religion, with Muslim soldiers from West Pakistan brutalizing – and killing- mainly Muslim dissenters.” (170) Sen’s Kader Mia died a victimized Muslim, but he was also a poor laborer who was unprotected and was out in the street looking desperately for work. “In the Hindu-Muslim riots”, Sen says, “Hindu thugs killed poor Muslim underdogs with ease, while Muslim thugs assassinated impoverished Hindu victims with abandon.” (171). Sen, in resisting miniaturization, quotes Derek Walcott dealing with his integrated understanding of the Caribbean saying that he had never found a moment when “the mind was halved by a horizon, for the goldsmith from Benares, the stone cutter from Canton, As a fish line sinks, the horizon sinks in the memory” (Derek Walcott, *Names*). Sen imagines a universe in which he and Kader Mia can jointly affirm their common identities, where their minds will no more be halved. Amitav Ghosh, in a similar manner attempts to focus on the pluralities of identities by which one can not give up earlier ties, present associations, affiliation, just because the nations have erected a wall between them.

In Amitav Ghosh’s *The Shadow Lines*, after the narrator’s Dhaka visit and Tridib’s death in a communal riot, the pressure of grief had taken its toll on the narrator’s grandmother, Tha’mma, who now resorts to unreasonable hatred against Muslims. Under pressure from her, the narrator lied about not meeting Montu for over two months; under pressure other facts are repressed for over fifteen years. The memory of loss and violence is dealt with long after the riot had occurred. Yet there are moments towards the end of the novel when Robi is seen confronting Rehman Shaheb, “gripping the table, his knuckles white” and telling him how exactly he

remembered the incidents of 1964 so vividly: "I remember it because my brother was killed there, he said. In a riot-not far away from where my mother was born. Now do you see why I remember?" (237). Tridib's sacrifice provokes anger yet it also attempts to reconcile the psyche of the surviving Robi, narrator, Ila and May.

In the essay "Cultural Identity and Diaspora" collected in *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory*, Stuart Hall suggests that there are two different ways that one can think about identity. Identity can be defined in relation to a "shared culture"; specifically, identity reflects the shared historical experiences and cultural constructs which give us a stable "frame of reference" amidst political and historical shifts. But identity, even though rooted in a shared cultural experience, is also based upon individuality--the notion that everyone is "different" and "unique" in some way. This distinction proves to be very helpful when discussing postcolonial literature because, as Hall points out, postcolonial subjects' identities belong to a historical, communal identity as well as to "becoming" something new as they interact with and are influenced by other cultures, which is to say by diasporas (392-403). Ghosh's novel stands to testify the subconscious adoption of a foreign culture by many of its characters. For example, Ila's tendency to be western, Tridib's reference to travels and places, the narrator's imagination about London, the friendship between the Prices and Tridib's family are sufficient to prove this point.

In another essay, "Who Needs Identities", Hall states that identity is free from the politics of location. Hall maintains that identities are not irreducible entities which have stagnated. Identity is always in process and can not be abandoned or sustained or won or lost overnight (Questions of Cultural Identity, 1996). Postmodern lives have accepted uncertainties and multiplicities and have, as is the case with Ghosh and many of his contemporaries, been haunted by the post Partition memory and roots and

yet have managed to move ahead. This shift in location constitutes the journey of a pilgrim who, as per St. Augustine, like Abel does not build a home but believes in the temporality of the world. 'I' becomes a pilgrim through time. In the process, truth always remains elsewhere. The 'I' walks with a purpose while wandering in the land of no destination. While the waiting is always 'here', the gratification is always 'there'. The project of forming identity is the journey from 'here' to 'there'. Discovering, inventing, assembling, or even buying identity is no longer the goal; the aim is to prevent identity from being inflexible.

Postmodern identity is all about avoidance of fixation. The identity of the pilgrim cum artist however has shifted to a *flâneur* or a stroller (Baudelaire) who perceives everything episodically as surfaces. The flâneur then becomes the tourist whose 'home' is a quest for shelter from hostilities and violence. Artists like Ghosh seek space and would like to cross frontiers with ease. In *The Shadow Lines*, Ghosh attempts to trace the narrator's space which portrays identity parallel to acceptance, redemption and relocation. For Ghosh, borders do not confine identities from crossing them any more. At the same time, political demarcation in the name of statehood, at times, prevents exchanges between people. Amitav Ghosh regrets such non-porous borders, and confronts the restrictions of geography. Artists like Ghosh cross shadow lines; novelists like Rushdie often "fall between two tools, straddling between two identities which are always plural and partial" (*Imaginary Homelands*) by living in the imagination in a manner that links India with diaspora. Writer-activists like Arundhati Roy calls herself a mobile republic (The end of Imagination, *Frontline* and *Outlook* on July 27, 1998). This space in between borders that they live in and pursue often mirror their doubles attempts to reconstruct history and reinterpret dreams. Disillusionment may happen in the process of displacement, but Ghosh defends the



new by maintaining that “Knowledge is self contradictory; ...that to know something is to change it.”(The Calcutta Chromosome: page 103-104, 1994). The insider-outsider configurations may clash, the once conceived identity may suffer assaults of memory and indignation, yet the journey goes on.

Ghosh chooses a convoluted world as he moves ahead. National boundaries do not restrict the soul and therefore, when Bhabha claims: “National consciousness, which is not nationalism, is the only thing that will give us international dimension”, in *Nation and Narration* (1993) he even considers the possibility of a new “figure of cultural difference whereby the anti-nationalist, ambivalent nation-space becomes the crossroads to a new transnational culture.” While following Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth*, Bhabha perhaps recognizes that national consciousness does not reconstitute a primordial community. He realizes that a new transnational culture can emerge out of the interstices of the grid work of the system of nation-states. The anti-colonialist is not a pure nationalist. He can be crossing boundaries to a metropolis such as Rushdie’s Elowen Deeowen in *The Satanic Verses*, which may turn out to be what Bhabha characterizes as “a city that the minorities come to change the history of the nation”(DissemiNation, *Location* 139-70;originally published as part of *Nation and Narration*).

Where does Ghosh stand then? Along with most of his characters he has embarked on a diaspora which allows movement beyond a dated location and an entry to the space of global citizenship. That location is well-defined by R. Radhakrishnan, in his ‘Diasporic Mediations’:

“It is the space of the hyphen that tries to coordinate, within an evolving relationship, the identity politics of one’s place of origin with that of one’s present

home....with my diasporic displacement there is a 'now' and a 'then' to my life, underwritten by a 'here' and a 'there'(xiii-xiv).

The interstitiality, the existence in the middle, is what defines current times, places and identities. Ghosh's divided and decolonized subcontinent is a new place with the label of a neo-imperial nation-state that by some hegemonic process reproduces dominance in a new garb. This, in turn, breeds people like Tridib, the narrator, and Robi who struggle to find reason in this process. Ghosh perhaps dreams of a reciprocal relationship between intellectuals and the people that can provide the basis for a just and democratic postcolonial order. He differs from V.S. Naipaul's exilic status yet belongs to diaspora. Unlike Naipaul whose affiliation is with an "adopted home" in the West, Ghosh acknowledges his shaping influence to be in the language that stresses the rewards and responsibilities associated with home. Yet, despite being a settled and rooted intellectual, he appears to be caught up in a sense of anomalousness about his own place in the world.

Ghosh is perhaps best described as "cosmopolitan" who not only rejects the claims made upon him by nationalism, but also negates the assumption that he is in exile and argues that he may be well reconciled within himself and his roots. He seems to be uneasily but insistently dwelling upon a vexed and interminable present. Ghosh's writings are marked by sustained meditation on pathologies of nation-statism which deprives their subjects from the ability to imagine alternative ways of being in the world. Only a year after the publication of *The Shadow Lines*, Ghosh reflected on the role of the diaspora in Indian culture (published in 1989) and stated," it is that part of itself which is both hostage and representative in the world outside-it is the mirror in which modern India seeks to know itself."("Diaspora", 78). Ghosh's essay as well as his novel, *The Shadow Lines*\_bears witness to a crisis of a vision of India as a

democratic, liberal, secular, modern society— a vision which was to be realized through the agency of the state. The Nehruvian vision of India that Ghosh inherits is not meant to take the shape of state with a hierarchy based on variations of language, region, caste and religion that complicated the framing of Indian citizenship. Ghosh's India simply is not complete with distinct "communities." Ghosh's political and cultural dilemma in: In *An Antique Land* can however be critiqued for not getting beyond nostalgia to offer ways of dealing with an intractable political problem. Therefore Ghosh remains an intellectual who dwells purely on the maladies of the post- Independence nation-state in a somewhat elegiac mode. Here Ghosh seems to be overcoming the burden of deceased nationalism and moving towards an alternative narrative order. Yet he experiences melancholia in the process, a pathological condition Freud highlighted in which the process of mourning fails and the loss persists as an "open wound" (Freud, *Mourning and Melancholia*). The wound is mirrored through the families depicted in the novel who seem to displace the nation-state. Through these families, Ghosh has also been able to align himself with arguments of class and nations which have lost their power to command the hopes and shape the imagination of postcolonial subjects. The novelist focuses on the post-nationalistic consciousness which broaches issues of globalization, cosmopolitanism, and economic liberalization that have begun to challenge or dispense with nationalist pieties.

Ghosh's treatment of an actual event in post-Independence South Asian history, when a sacred relic, the Mu-i-Mubarak disappeared from the Hazratbal mosque near Srinagar in Kashmir in December 1963, brings a unique angle to the novel. This incident for him not only reveals the deep-seated cultural syncretism of the Kashmir Valley but also brings out another aspect of sub-continental politics: the

role of national governments in both India and Pakistan in aggravating communal animosity. As a result of their role, communities rage against each other in antagonistic relationships. The riot referred to in the novel does not originate in Kashmir, but in Khulna, a small town in East Pakistan. This incident triggers the novelist's extended meditations on cartography. The novelist draws a circle which includes half of humanity. Ghosh conveys a sense of the present haunted by the past and unable to countenance the emergence of the new because it dwells so insistently upon the old. Yet Ghosh seems to be echoing his need for a space without history that would consist of wholeness and identity.

## Hybridity and History

The word "diaspora" is derived from the Greek verb *speiro* (to sow) and the preposition *dia* (over). The ancient Greeks thought of diaspora as migration and colonization. By contrast, for Jews, Africans, Palestinians and Armenians the expression acquired a more sinister and brutal meaning. Diaspora signified a collective trauma, a banishment, where one dreamed of home but lived in exile. Other people abroad who have also maintained strong identities have, in recent years, defined themselves as diasporic, though they were neither active agents of colonization nor passive victims of persecution. Diaspora as a term has been used for revising our maps, designating a new mode of life, a dwelling-in-travel that is increasingly common in our time. Amitav Ghosh's journey to and back from his other land and 'otherness' in *The Shadow Lines* is an extensive one. The novel opens with the narrator's reference to his aunt, Mayadebi's trip to England with her son, Tridib, and her husband. The opening sentence itself establishes the tone of the rest of the novel: the voyages of natives to the West. The identity of a native formed while crossing boundaries and in the 'non-spaces' (Auge, *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Super modernity*) of our times – is what dominates the novel. The novelist starts off by introducing 'Mayadebi', the narrator's 'Maya-thakuma' and then later on drops the punctuation mark and simply naturalizes Mayadebi's name in the novel without a hint of excess in the spelling. Similarly, 'Robi' instead of 'Ravi', 'Tridib' instead of 'Tridiv' are all part of his ploy to ensure that the Bengalis were true to their spirit of identity and would remain so till the present. However, one might notice that Amitav has remained outside this scheme and has initiated this 'true-to-Bengal' attitude only in case of his characters.

The novel's second page paints a sharp contrast between the narrator and his revered hero, Tridib. Although Tridib is a "loafer and a wastrel"(p 3), and is apparently wasting time, he is better appreciated by the narrator while he's seen running at the "street corners" of the neighborhood in Calcutta instead of being comfortably ensconced in a living room sofa. But, the narrator is too young to be part of his hero and is seen barely embarking on his journey to an adult, fully formed entity. What influence the narrator are Tridib's "improbable" life, his openness, his humor, and his penchant for the unusual and the irregular. The history that has shaped Tridib is offered almost the end of the novel. Tridib is seen talking about London, comparing Mrs. Price's daughter May's hair to a head dress of an Egyptian frieze, referring to her playing the oboe at the Royal College of Music in London, and then is seen making mistakes in his narration (page 17). The gaps in memory, the error of recreation and Tridib being subjected to ridicule in the local community which doubted if at all he had been to London evokes a strong emotion in the narrator who almost hurls out the association between the Prices and Tridib's family. This takes the novel's plot to a level that almost reflects the colonial benevolence of the Prices, as if in an attempt to help them escape from their colonial burden.

A native like Tridib operates here on two levels. On the surface, the protagonist appears to be in sync with his hybrid 'Other' who has traveled to places, has made friends with strangers from alien lands, is well versed and pursuing doctoral ambitions. At the same time, when he is back in his own city of Calcutta, he is seen advising a young man to wear 'dhoti' during his interview with a Marwari business firm and adding yet another dimension of casual self-mockery to his identity. Tridib, indeed, was critiquing his own community for its extreme complicity towards the colonizer's culture when he occasionally misled his audience leaving them wondering

about the credibility of his statements such as “If you believe anything people tell you, you deserve to be told anything at all” (page 12)

Through this statement of Tridib, Ghosh questions the notion of a history being handed down to his generation and looks for the truths that are hidden in the folds of the memory of the older generation which have not been accessed. That is why the narrator looks for references in the archive of newspaper and comes up with his own version of history and reinforces, once again, the feeling that memory and history reconstitute identities. The narrator meets May in her Islington Green flat and finds in her a European altruist who is involved in a project involved in helping earthquake survivors in Central America. In contrast is his subsequent meeting with Ila, a *deshi* woman, who wants to be herself, but is really a hybrid entity, whether living in London or visiting Calcutta. At the same time, during discussion it is obvious that Ila is inclined to forget while the narrator remains a loyalist to memory. While Ila prefers erasure, the narrator loves archives. Tridib has, so to speak, forced the narrator to carry on archival work. Or as he puts it: “Tridib had given me worlds to travel in and he had given me eyes to see them with” (p 20).

Ila’s identity, on the other hand, becomes entangled with Nick’s and therefore she seems a lot more restless at the end. When Nick cheats on her she appears unable to react (I have tried to make sense of this sentence but it needs more work). Repression again takes toll on Ila and another phase of façade begins when she tries to cover Nick’s disloyalties. But as for the narrator, the journey down the memory lane and history has relieved him of the burden of a mystery which becomes a “redemptive” one at the end.

While Ila “has invented a narrative to make sense of her world” (Jon Mee, *Critical Companion*, ed. Khair, 2003), the narrator realizes that living means having to choose a particular story to abide by. Ila lives intensely and to her times and places are the same because they happen to look alike, like “airport lounges” or an Underground “which was merely a means of shifting venue” (p 21). Ila hardly has traveled in the real sense of the word. Her life is one always in transit; her memory is always the size of her school Yearbook, full of unknown children wearing different clothes. In the novel, Ila wears a mask, acting comfortable in a pair of jeans and a “Persian lambskin waist-coat” and pretending to be best of friends with the prettiest girl in school and longing to be the lover of the handsomest boy in class. The page of the yearbook where we have a photograph of a boy having his arms around two blondes is quickly torn away as if in a rush to overlook the truth (more details needed). Hence Ila’s space is a non-space, since the places in her memory flies past her in whirlwind fashion. Space in her post- modern, post-colonial world resembles time travel. With multiple itineraries, Ila’s identity never got rooted. Like a true postmodern hybrid entity in denial, Ila is wearing a mask and the novelist is determined to prove the point. She’s the migrant soul, in London, out in a pub with Robi and the narrator, having a whisky at Kemble’s Head and reminiscing about a past that had formed their current entities.

Ghosh, too, is a traveler in time, treating time in a non- linear manner, linking past with the present, hinting about the future. He finally amalgamates all the elements of the plot by applying tools of imagination, memory, a diasporic reality. Taking readers back to a world where “chutnification” (Rushdie) of language is in full use in daily life, the novelist introduces brilliant comic relief through a post- colonial Ram Dayal, the cook, who at the sight of a big lizard screams: “Save me, burra mem,



bachao me from this crocodile.” The conversation that follows between Ila’s mother, nicknamed by the novelist as Queen Victoria and Ram Dayal and the rest has a measured, yet apt dose of hilarity. While Queen Victoria orders Ram Dayal to “maro-it” another character called Lizzie, a Sinhalese Ayah for Ila is introduced along with her private dialect that Ila’s mother had engineered for her. The “it thing killing-killing,” “at-it garden looking-looking” phrases that she uses to communicate with Lizzie is in reality completely unnecessary as the Ayah understands and speaks English easily enough well. Yet at the suggestion of a Sinhalese civil servant, she resorts to her strange dialect that took for granted or rather condemned the Ayah almost to illiteracy.

‘Going Away’, one part of the book takes another turn here. Ghosh, the celebrated novelist, is at his best here when the narrator dons the pose of an essayist and reflects on reality in long paragraphs. His attempts to link the past with the present remains a substantial part of his desire. For the novelist the past is a constructed one, an invented and a produced period of time. The past often turns out to be a foreign country, a go-between between the reality and the subconscious. While the narrator recalls Tridib’s advice on applying desire to imagination and attaining a state where the self and the mirror would become one, Ila chooses to remain indifferent to her roots. Tridib emphasizes on the desire that would make them soar to heights where their identities would equal their passions and would reflect in truth, the real self in the mirror. With this comment, Ghosh leads us to what Jacques Lacan would call a “*meconnaissance*”, the misreading that we are prone to when we look into the mirror. Tridib revolts against an identity that is interpreted by misreadings of the self along with the interplay of society. Tridib teaches the narrator to imagine as “we could not see without inventing what we saw” (p 31).

In his essay, 'One Thousand Days in a Balloon', Rushdie, in *Imaginary Homelands*, wants to cling on to his own soul, his own dream, and advises all to hold on to the soul's "mischievous, iconoclastic, out-of-step clown-instincts, no matter how great the storm." Rushdie, too, is not weary of contradictions and paradoxes and proudly declares that he would rather live in his "messy ocean" all his life as he had fished in that same ocean for his art. So, all the traces of memory must be preserved. Similarly, Ghosh, makes his narrator resist erasure throughout the novel.

There are constant parallels in the plot that are contradictory yet are very much a part of identity. On the one hand, Ila strives to be a free spirit, encouraged by her oblivion and indifference; she mockingly refers to the "Raj" while having her whisky. On the other, the narrator is on a perennial quest for truth and to find his own space. But the space he seeks does not have the slightest semblance to Ila's father's labeled hangers which spoke of multiplicities. The mention of hangers bearing labels reading: "Calcutta Zamindar", "Indian diplomat", "English gentleman", "Would-be Nehru", "South Club tennis player", "Non-Aligned Statesman" and so on only proves Ghosh's point yet again: we only are wearers of garbs we have fashioned for ourselves for our times. The post-colonial and colonial worlds have similarities in this regard. The colonized were truly imitators with aspirations for becoming the other. The masses had lesser wrath, and gave in with complicity and obedience. And today, the decolonized subject resents the attempted erasure of the colonial world, yet finds his/herself in between spaces that do not exist, and often struggles with the concept of identity and home. The decolonized subject neither puts on the colonizer's mask, nor does has the means to completely write back in anger or relish his or her interstitiality. Hence the outcome is a mixed response to a hybrid situation. The label of identity is

one of Non-Westness (Nandy, *Intimate Enemy*, 2001), of someone too hurt to be an inheritor of the colonial legacy, too young to be globally heard, too rushed by time, and therefore hurriedly approaching a closure close to his/her own border, in an effort to finalize his/her own space, defying the map and yet creating a map of his/her own. But the postcolonial subject has attained a virtue; he/she has overcome the pain and has emerged as a survivor.

It is the generation of Robi, Tridib and the narrator that has solved the puzzle of their past, while Ila and Mayadebi come out as dissatisfied, insecure products of displacement. The other character, grandmother remains inspired by Khudiram Bose, the youngest Indian revolutionary and Bagha Jatin, the Indian philosopher who rebelled against the British rule, and are disgusted by villagers who traded their own souls for money. She is the one who would do "anything to be free." (p 39) That is specifically why she resents Ila being so wrapped up in her own world with Nick, the blonde hero who turns out to have straw-colored hair and who falls prey to the narrator's "colonial imagination" (Mee, J, *Critical Companion*, ed. Khair, 2003).

While May refers to Nick's difference from Tridib, the narrator, from herself and even from her parents, when the narrator meets Nick, seventeen years after their first meeting, he shows off the photographic nature of his memory by identifying the "boring old West Hamptstead" (p 55) and the bombed out Solent Road that he had been told about by Tridib or read about. Imagination and memory fuels the narrator's quest for identity. He compares every sight he sees in London with Tridib's version; he traces every street back to the atlas that had helped him discover outlines of alien lands a long time ago. Yet he wonders about the authenticity of these lines when he refers to people's enchantment with lines, puzzles over the circles in the globe, and wonders about the absence of people in the states only filled with citizens (p 233).

This is where the atlas becomes to him non- representative of his cognitive/s cultural space. This is also the point when a reader becomes intrigued by the novelist's attempt to link his cultural memory with reality.

Ghosh's narrator's effort to dig into the archives of his colonial history is perhaps an attempt to purely establish and trace the time line of repression. That is why so much time is invested in the narrative on Tridib looking at photographs and identifying Mike who thought that only killing Englishmen was what made Indians truly Indian or examining Dan, a possible mentor of Tresawsen, and a journalist at the *Daily Worker*. The narrator's memory greedily stores for him every piece of England as if the stored images would give him an upper hand in dealing with what was supposedly going to confront him. It was Ila who had painted England for him; it was Tridib who had sketched freedom for him; it was Tha'mma who had told him about the politics of blood; and finally it was his own quest that led him to his destiny of being the chronicler of the human cost of multiple divides. On the other hand, Ila was the first one to play "house" with him, tell him, "if we pretend it's a house, it'll be a house," and narrate the story of Magda, the doll going to a proper school, and of the wretched Denise who beat her up and of not being rescued by Nick. Ila apparently enjoys the mundane West, yet she survives only on the pocket money she gets from her parents, goes to demonstrations, and acts in radical plays for Indian immigrants in East London.

The novelist, in fact, seems to have a defense for all his characters. In spite of appearing to have distanced herself from her post-colonial reality, Ila is vulnerable to the temptations of the West since for her the East has also not played its part right. She has been completely unable to find the ground beneath her feet in her own home; she had also wanted to be free of her culture (p 89) and had, in a sense, run away from

it. While trying to defend the estranged Ila from his grandmother's criticism, he has to confront her abrasive perspective on her: "Ila doesn't belong there...What's she doing in that country...Everyone who lives there has earned his right to be there with blood....War is their religion. That's what it takes to make a country" (pp 77-78). Grandmother's nationalistic boundaries are tightly drawn within her own space of birth; she also refers to a unified India which would have remained undivided by communal strife and tension, an India that would not have succumbed to non-secular greed and an India that would not become another "upside down house".

Memory and identity are thus two essential concepts that the narrator plays with in the novel. Through careful reconstruction of personal history and through his focus on absences and fissures in memory, the narrator recreates what had once happened, during the pre- (1939) and post- Partition (1947) period. The narrator focuses on the legacy Indians have inherited of a fractured identity in response to historical changes. Memory and identity are among the crucial mental lines separating past and present, imagination and reality, identity and mask. Ghosh remains loyal to tradition in reality as well. For example, his novel under discussion echoes an earlier novella by Conrad who had the following to say in his "Author's Note" to *The Shadow Line*:

The effect of perspective in memory is to make things loom large because the essentials stand out isolated from their surroundings of insignificant daily facts which have naturally faded out of one's mind. (p 41) It is as if the Indian author is bent on acknowledging the work of a predecessor even as he is articulating his distinctive views and dreams.

The last sentence of the novel attests that what the redemptive memory of the author gains from the company of May also applies to geographical and historical changes. Seen as departures from established reality, the Second World War, the

Independence of India, Partition and the Bangladesh War are all violent departures from the normal course of life. They are 'departures' which must lead to a 'return' of the order, a 'reunion' of those who were separated. Both Tridib and the narrator's grandmother experience the conflict between cartographic realities and the borderless land of their dreams. The two sections of Ghosh's novel, which are called: "Going Away" and "Coming Back", both suggest that each departure must be followed by a return and at the same time it may lead to upsetting of geographical boundaries. In the first part, it is the narrator who, at the end, literally 'goes away', to that England he has heard so much of during his childhood; actually, he refers to himself when at the end of that section he says: "I knew that a part of my life as a human being had ceased; that I no longer existed, but as a chronicle" (p 110). Yet, other people had already left before him, setting in motion the chain of events which leads to his own trip overseas.

In the same way, apparently the person who 'comes home' in the second part of the novel is his grandmother, for she goes to Dhaka, where she was born when it was still an Indian town, and which, after Partition, belonged to Pakistan. Paradoxically, the London the narrator creates in his own imagination is no less a home for him than the Dhaka his grandmother has never ceased to dream of in all her years in Calcutta. To stress this point, in a much quoted scene of his novel (give references), Ghosh shows us his narrator walking through the streets of London for the first time, and yet finding his way more easily there than even a native could: the city he had created in his imagination was so real that he has no problem in recognizing all its features in his walk through it. At another level, here Ghosh is conveying the burden of the colonial education received by the young Indians at home:

“I teased her with that phrase for years afterwards. If she happened to say she was going to teach me Bengali grammar, for example, I would laugh and say: But Tha'mma, how can you teach me grammar? You don't know the difference between coming and going. But, of course, the fault wasn't hers at all: it lay in the language. Every language assumes a centrality, a fixed and settled point to go away and to come back to, and what my grandmother was looking for was a word for a journey which was not a coming or a going at all; a journey that was a search for precisely that fixed point which permits the proper use of the verbs of movement.” (150)

As Ghosh implies in this passage, the language of the colonizer cannot express the shifting world of the colonized: "a part of its secret lore; a barb in that fence we build to shut off ourselves from others". Trespassing the linguistic 'shadow lines', the colonial subject creates his own language, and uses it to keep intruders out of his world. Here we see, too, how language shifts exactly like man-made geographical borders; how it divides some people, while linking others; how, in a word, it is 'shadowy', exactly like the lines separating countries on a map. It is again the narrator's grandmother who wonders how people are to know where the border between Pakistan and India lies, if there are no trenches to mark it and if there isn't anything in between?" Years later, after her death, her grandson revises her idea of lines, maps and borders, coming to the conclusion that one cannot separate two countries so easily by merely drawing a line on a map.

## History, Silence and Nationalism

"Leave India to God. If that is too much, then leave her to anarchy." --Gandhi,  
May 1942.

Gandhi's call to his people for freedom from the colonizers ushered freedom, yet the tragedy that was to follow the Partition was experienced by India as a whole. The Partition occurred in the shadow of the independence of Pakistan and India in 1947, and resulted in the largest mass-migration in human history. 12 million people relocated in the course of a few months, and in the violence that accompanied the dislocation of many people. In the Partition very often people who were victims of displacement, themselves committed acts of unthinkable violence on a small scale, sometimes against members of their own families. Violence was done by ordinary people on other ordinary people, rather than by the state. Many people have deeply submerged memories they would rather forget. Ghosh refers to similar violence belonging to the historical past to show how the lessons of history have never been learnt. Novy Kapadia in 'Imagination and Politics in Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines*' in Viney Kirpal's edited publication: *The New Indian Novel in English: A Study of the 80s* (New Delhi: Allied Publishers, 1990) comments: "The 1964 Calcutta riots could be the Delhi riots or the 1987 Meerut riots. They all follow a similar pattern, suspicion, distrust, tumor activating conditioned minds, all sources of terrifying communal violence." It is unpleasant to realize how violence repeats itself throughout space and time. Therefore, it is always easier to avoid by maintaining a silence on historical violence. Referring to the Calcutta riots of 1964, the narrator of *The Shadow Lines* confesses: "Every word I write about those events of 1964 is the product of a struggle with silence" (p 213). And then he wonders where this silence



comes from, which kind of silence it is. "It is not [...] the silence of an imperfect memory", he reflects, "Nor is it a silence enforced by a ruthless state [...] it is simply a gap, a hole, an emptiness in which there are no words" (page reference), actually, it is "The silence that lies in the gap between words and the world [...] a silence that is proof against any conceivable act of scorn or courage [...] the silence of an absolute, impenetrable banality." (pages 213-214)

According to the authors of *The Empire Writes Back*, "it is this concept of silence, not any specific cultural concept of meaning, which is the active characteristic linking all post-colonial texts. It is the same silence which also challenges metropolitan notions of polysemy, and which resists the absorption of post-colonial literatures into the new paradigms which emerge in the wake of post-structuralist accounts of language and text."

([http://www2.lingue.unibo.it/postcolonial\\_studies\\_centre](http://www2.lingue.unibo.it/postcolonial_studies_centre)).

Yet, at a political level, this silence also implies man's inability to learn the lessons of history and his passivity in front of its violence as well as his unwillingness to take sides. Breaking a silence is the same as crossing a border. Therefore, breaking the silence, like the narrator hopes to do with regard to the 1964 riots, is a political act - metaphorically, this is the narrator's way of crossing his own shadow line. Investigating Tridib's death, Ghosh's narrator also encounters silence from different quarters, but also shows that he has learnt to face the past and live in the present by the end of his story. In the very last page of the novel, Tridib's death is established as a sacrifice, and that is why his death remains "a mystery". The narrator links the end of his cousin's life to silence and mysteries creating an extreme shadow line which connects the two countries instead of dividing them. Robi's disgruntled take on borders and nationalism adds to the narrator's conviction when he wonders out aloud:

“Why don’t they draw thousands of little lines through the whole subcontinent and give every little place a new name? What would it change? It’s a mirage; the whole thing is a mirage.”(page 241) Grandmother's uncle Jethamoshai/Ukil-babu sums it up aptly, when he says “I don’t believe in this India-Shindia. ...suppose when you get there they decide to draw another line somewhere? What will you do then? Where will you move to? ...As for me, I was born here, and I’ll die here.” (213)

While Tha'mma was in college she dreamt of being part of militant groups who struck against the British imperialist rulers. On her return to Dhaka, after a span of about twenty years, Tha'mma feels like a stranger and keeps looking for her “old Dhaka”. She even feels like a foreigner in the city now. Tridib, the narrator’s eccentric but brilliant uncle, teases her by telling Tha'mma: “But you are a foreigner now, you’re as foreign here as May – much more than May, for look at her, she doesn’t even need a visa to come here.” (191) The reader is once again made to question the validity of national boundaries and the restrictions upon the free movement of people through them. Someone born in the country is made to obtain a visa to re-enter it, while the citizen of the colonial oppressing power is allowed free entry into it.

This satiric thrust is not an isolated act in the novel. The author goes on in the same vein when he talks about the old woman's ignorance about a real border. The grandmother's nationalist mentality can't perceive the reasoning behind the partition and the killing that accompanied it. Therefore, grandmother's inability to find a separate Dhaka belonging to a new country made her question the obstinacy of borders.

Ghosh tries to offer contending, ‘alternative’ visions of India and how poetry, fiction and film can revise both the communal and secular versions of national

affiliations that define current debates about 'Indian ness'. He also offers a fresh perspective on the connections and discontinuities between culture, land, map and politics in the world. In his ground breaking work, *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson, defines a nation as an "imagined political community that is imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign" (*Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. Revised Edition ed. London and New York: Verso, 1991, pp. 5-7. Through his work *Shadow Lines*, Amitav Ghosh too, is joining the fray, questioning the fixity of culture and wondering whether cultures can be contained within boundaries demarcated by maps. Ghosh's concept of a community holding on to a common ground seems pretty well-grounded in his belief in utopian universality. The partition of 1947 that led to the great divide between the Muslims and the Hindus ended up creating two separate states: Pakistan and India seemed to have shattered Ghosh's dreams. Ghosh believes that a community, when imagined and perceived based on common feelings, culture, sensibilities does not suddenly evaporate into thin air just because a political event has taken place leaving a mark on History. For Ghosh, demarcated lands are figments of people's imagination and stand for a display of power. Yet, people have identities beyond the given lines and these identities provoke people to cross the borders and become one again. The detailed description of the upside down house conveys Ghosh's sentiments on Partition. The two families fighting over property, dividing the house by a wooden divider, becoming strangers overnight, and ultimately ceasing to converse with each other is a disaster that Ghosh does not fancy. The narrator's Tha'mma describes the pain of the divide with intensity and observes sorrowfully that the line had gone through even a commode and quite ironically, through the brothers' father's name plate. Ever since the divide, Tha'mma feared the phrase: "We are like brothers" since when it comes to

real life and greed, every one becomes vulnerable to the temptations of wealth. Therefore the house had become an “upside-down-house”, a house where the two sides stood in perennial competition and wrath. Whatever was right in one household was considered wrong in the other. Hence, while scaring Mayadebi with frightening facts, Tha'mma used to choose bizarre stories about the others cooking with 'jhatas', writing with umbrellas, their books going backwards and so on and so forth. Ghosh makes the reader painfully aware of the consequences of the Partition through this simple episode of the division between two families. Ever since the partition, families have longed for their loved ones across the border. Similarly, the narrator has a Jethomoshai living in Dhaka with a Muslim rickshaw puller: Khalil on the other side. In search of Jethomoshai, Tha'mma and Mayadebi discover him in the care of Khalil, who barely has anything to eat, although he takes care of the old man. Ghosh strikes a very soft note here with this twist in the novel. He had started his journey with the globe, stressing the East and the West connections and divisions and then had gradually focused on his own homeland, India, which too underwent Partition and then finally moves towards the yet more divided countries of India and Pakistan, pointing out the pain and pathos of Calcutta and Dhaka, two cities, side by side and yet turning away from each other because of religion. Communal riots becomes Ghosh's last projection in the novel, making readers conscious of the evils of fragmentation that destroys love, unmakes cultural unity, and draws lines of hatred between lands. Tridib pays the price of the Partition with his own life while the rest of the family, relatively unaware of the riotous situation in Dhaka wakes up from the shock and realizes that a few of their own people had turned against them. The old woman's invented land had finally become a land of ruin.

Ghosh's concept of imagined communities in *The Shadow Lines* is very similar to the song sung by Gabriel Farishta in *The Satanic Verses* that mimics an old Hindi song:

“Mere Jute hai Japane, ye pantalon Inglistani. Sar pe lal topi rusi, Phir bhi dil hai Hindustani.” Which is to say, despite Japanese shoes, English trousers, and Russian hat the traveler still remains an Indian at heart. While nations emerge, to paraphrase Rushdie, the past becomes a country from where all of us have emigrated and the loss of the common past is a common loss for everyone. Yet Ghosh seems to be bent on being able to recreate the past through his imagination and using it to recreate the past links and roots. While the narrator tries to dig History out of archives, there appears loopholes and gaps all over the place as History always, as Eliot says, is full of “cunning corridors” (*Four Quartets*).

Ghosh's reality is a very subjective one and he almost confirms Rushdie's point in *Imaginary Homelands* where he says that reality depends on our prejudices, misconceptions, and ignorance as well as on our perceptiveness and knowledge”( 25). The true reality of the inhabitants is expressed in the way they cross over from one place to another. Through crossing these boundaries people become migrants and perhaps, hybrids. This is the deepest continuity of any nation which is constantly on the move.' Therefore, people move on, without land, without sufficient recognition as the people believing in their notions stay together and forge the unity of life.

Ghosh has often chosen to foreground historical events in all his novels. *Circle of Reason* mentions the 1971 war of Bangladesh, *In an Antique Land* projects the master-slave paradigm based on the notion of subaltern historiography.. Of the many words that Ghosh uses, 'partitioning' occurs frequently and it appears with all the anguish of a South Asian mind. This anguish is related to his concept of nations being

illusions. While Tridib and May look at the Victoria Memorial, May is unable to bear the sight of the monument perhaps because an unconscious colonial burden had haunted her at that point and utters: "It's an act of violence...It's an act of violence. It's obscene." But Tridib attempts to convince her that the Memorial was the ruin that they had both been looking for. Ghosh tries to reconcile with himself with the passing of time, hoping time would soothe and heal the wounds that his earlier generations were unable to live with. Perhaps Ghosh attempts to rise above the ruin and even amidst pain tries to see the light at the light at the end of the tunnel of his renewed identity. Spaces that were once so familiar become unfamiliar when time seeps in between them. That is why the narrator's grandmother couldn't see her very own Dhaka when she landed at the "glass and linoleum" airport instead at the station amidst the puffing smoke of the black steam engine. The novelist is quick to sum the disillusionment up with:

"The Dhaka she was thinking of was the city that had surrounded their old house".

That Dhaka of Tha'mma had "Dhanmundi" (page 191), the magnolia ice cream carts in the hot afternoon, and was covered with the history of Sheikh Mujib. 1964's Dhanmundi had no semblance to Robi's one. This was not the old woman's Dhaka; she indeed, had become a foreigner there as much as foreigners like "May in India or Tagore in Argentina."(p 195) Grandmother's Dhaka or even Robi's Dhaka was a simple place, a city zealously guarded by its inhabitants who lived in it, cultivated it, defended it, marked its strong points and kept its frontiers under surveillance. This Dhaka was their own invention as it had been discovered by them as it stood for a shared, particular and singular identity for all of them. This handling of space can be termed cultural and this definitely concretely symbolizes the construction of a place for all those who want a particular place for their identity in

relation to their history. Identity for the grandmother and Robi is spatial and social. For them, to be born is to be born in a place and to be assigned to residence. Dhaka had become necessarily historical at the moment when the inhabitants were not living in that space any longer and had start reviewing the place and perceiving “the image of what we are no longer. The inhabitant of an anthropological place does not make history; he lives in it.” (Auge,*Non-Spaces*,2001).Therefore, the city and the other ones too had become places different from which Tha'mma, May, Tridib, Robi or the narrator remembered. The reference to a morning when Farouk Engineer was dropped as the captain of the Indian team only to be replaced by Budhi Kunderan (page 198), to a morning when Calcutta's water supply was poisoned causing the children in the bus to wonder why “they” had poisoned their own water testify early memories, repression and silence. Recollecting the children having lied to the elders about not having met Montu, a Muslim friend, for over two months, also represent a collective fear. The children realizing that they would have to choose sides as someone, somewhere had decided on the lines drawn between people, separating people from their own space and association, stand for the overall disillusionment of Ghosh. With “Our city had turned against us”, Ghosh focuses on the internal conflicts. The fear of losing a center, of losing faith in the “stillness of the earth” (p 204) was a challenge that looked like a misreading of one's own self in the mirror. It was as if whatever the self had known for so long was untrue or reversed overnight with the fist of a riot. However, people who have believed in one another for a period of time refuse to give into the chaos of the times. That is why Jethomoshai does not trust anyone but the poor simple rickshaw puller Khalil.

The idea of history coming back to haunt the present is elaborated by the novelist through out the narrative. The importance of looking back at the past for Ghosh seems to be to allow us to reactivate it, relocate it and re signify it for our times. That is the path Ghosh chooses in order to understand his past, reinterpret the future and to activate an ethics of survival that would allow him and his hybrid generation to work through to the present. This will perhaps free him of being subjected to a historically inevitable repetition without a difference. This will perhaps also make it possible for Ghosh and the diasporic community to cross that difficult borderline, the interstitial experience between what is taken to be the image of the past and what is in fact involved in the passage of time and the passage of meaning. The connection between the children's bus ride and Tridib's death did not seem to be related to the narrator till almost after long fifteen years' of silence. The fifteen years had altered his vision and had nurtured the gaps of his memory. The newspaper archives of February 1964 had records of "twenty nine killed in riots."(p 223) and had corresponding reports on riots happening in Khulna in protest of the Mui-Mubarak (page 220) being stolen. The Khulna riots had spread to Dhaka. There were "stray incidents of arson and looting" for about 7 days and then, by the end of January'64, the riot had disappeared from the "collective imagination" (page 226). But the two governments had gone on with their accusations while families in both India and Pakistan had sheltered Muslims and Hindus respectively. From this time onwards the riots started to fade in memory oblivion while the generals who ran Pakistan began meeting the Indian commanders in the theatre of war. Riots, in fact, are clashes between ordinary people and hence they lack the organized confrontations of war. Therefore, they are also often excluded from the public record hence making them the state's business. The riot also states that the nation and the state may not be the same



thing and “even in their antagonism towards each other, the rioters may be bound together in many ways that the state cannot acknowledge” (Mee, *Imagination and difference in The Shadow Lines*). A community which was bound to its neighboring one suddenly seems miles away in reality, clearly defying geographical lines. The narrator turns to a map and is amazed by the circle, by the distance of 100 miles between Khulna and Srinagar, by the Asian circle which engulfs more than half of the world population (page 226). The narrator’s frustration is symbolized by watching his grandmother hitting the radio with both hands, and of not wanting to waste blood from her bleeding hands and for wanting to donate her blood for the cause of the war in 1965 (page 233). This act of the grandmother symbolizes the frustrations of a community riddled with anguish of their disappearing identities. The war with Pakistan had wrecked Tha`mma’s psyche just as Tridib’s death took her back to her Dhaka visit. None were supposed to discuss Tridib’s death as that would be a sensitive topic to bring up. After all, Tridib’s father was a civil servant of high repute. The wars, the riots were all incidents that took place to set people free. Yet Tridib’s death hadn’t set any of them free. Divisions of borders and memory do not solve problems. They merely terminate lives and displace our sense of identity. The only way to heal the tragedy is for people like the narrator and May to come together to reconcile with the redemptive memory. Nothing and no one would be able to bring Tridib back to life; none would be able to reverse History and make Bengal unite again; none could wish and wash the border away. Hence the best possible way to handle the path would be to forgive, justify the blood by calling it a sacrifice, defend the riots as being acts of self preservation and eventually move on, learning from History, regretting it and yet despairing at the possibility of History repeating itself with the same, if not more intense cruelty.

## Conclusion:

Gandhi's satyagrahi had no fear of his body and was not to give up his Truth. A satyagrahi's practice was his precept. A satyagrahi, a civil resister, was not to give in to anger and was supposed not to cause communal quarrels. In Gandhi's India, Hindus and Muslims were to eat the same food, drink the same water and speak the same language. He was one for whom the word 'Islam' meant peace and to whom, Khilafat was to be protected.

The subcontinent has unfortunately moved away from Gandhian nationalism. Today, communal insecurities leading to regional riots are constant reminders of the negative power of fragmentation. The memory of hurt heals through time. But the land which was to be one in spirit, has itself bred multiple contentious issues in the years following independence and has continued to witness fresh hostilities amongst communities. Both the scars of colonialism and post-colonial tensions occasioned by the split between decolonized countries have added to the pain of people belonging to the same subcontinent. A deep sense of disillusionment rules the continent today and breeds conditions that make people engage in internal conflicts. While discovering the actual deep-seated identity, the people of this land paradoxically plunge into uncertainties.

People have become aware of their differences through 'aporia', a term used by Hall standing for 'doubt'. The colonized people passed their non passivity to the decolonized (not clear who passes what to home) , who in Amitav Ghosh, in *The Shadow Lines*, responds to these historical and communal fractures and attempts to rise above reductive communal loyalties. The novelist excels with his focus on his own space which is enriched with the essential tools of memory and history. His craft

is best displayed while he handles the shifting terrains of identities and entities which are divided by fragile cartographic elements. But although the painful divide persists, artists like Ghosh carry their torch forward with conviction and constant creativity.

*Amitav Ghosh's The Shadow Lines, Critical Essays*, edited by Arvind Chaudhury, presents multiple critical responses to Ghosh's novel. In the collection, Manjula Saxena characterizes it as a memory novel and sums up its main characteristic when she writes that just as the activity of a carpenter is the efficient cause of the table, similarly the act of recalling done by the author/narrator is the efficient cause of the novel. In the same collection, Premindha Banerjee comments, 'the shifting veil of narration reveals to us a young boy', bound in a web of family ties and relationships that saddle two cultures and therefore the novel is termed as the chronicle of the narrator's self (page 43).

The text is also considered to subvert the notions of truth-notions that are rooted in the cultural, sociological and historical realities. Alka Kumar notes in her essay, *Nation As Identity* that the lines in the novel that divide people, places and realities are both not only arbitrary and shadow-like but are also difficult to cross.

After *The Shadow Lines*, Ghosh wrote *In an Antique Land* (1992), a narrative that moves back and forth between two borders, one based in Egypt and the other in the distant past. Ghosh's next book, *The Calcutta Chromosome* (1995) also transgresses conventional boundaries between fact and fiction. Ghosh's next work, *The Glass Palace* (2000) features three generations of two families in Burma, India and Malaya, covering the period between 1885 and 1956 and depicting the colonization of Burma. *The Hungry Tide* (2004) is set in the Sunderbans and has a character having both Indian and American affiliations. The novel focuses on a certain Piyali Roy who is an American with Bengali origin and is unconsciously

searching for her own roots. Ghosh has continued this trend of crossing borders and crossing lines and this is what this essay has also attempted to establish. To sum up, then, the narrative in *The Shadow Lines* takes us across international borders and cultures, past, present, and different stages of our lives with an ease that leaves the readers impressed with the writer's craftsmanship and mature perspective on human relationships. In this novel and in his successive works Ghosh shows his brilliance in rising above boundaries.

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