CHAPTER – II

THE SHADOW LINES AND TRACES OF COLONIAL HISTORY

Post colonialism marks to the alliance of performance known as ‘commonwealth’ in which the colonial experience is the central bond that brands and includes the life of post-colonial people. It also refers to the period after the colonial rule and its control. The focus of post colonialism is on the people who were once under the rule of colonialism and on “the product of human experience, but human experience of the kind that has not typically been registered or represented at any institutional level” [1]. Colonialism is an obligation of colonial forms on pre-colonial societies. Post-colonialism is a progressing process as it is an extension of colonialism. The colonial fight-back has been a powerful event in the history of both the west and the non-western world, in shaping its culture, literature, politics and history. The colonial insecurity occupies materialism and spirituality or else considered as the gainful and the cultural uniqueness.

Consequently, after the beginning of colonialism but not after decolonization, the society that is affected by the colonial process or the programme of western imperialists for cultural superiority is termed as “post colonial”. The Post Colonialism is a multidimensional cultural development which represents the universal mentality of a particular epoch of history as shown by ideas, beliefs or the spirit of the time. The post-colonial discussion offers different perspectives of colonialism. The crack between colonialism and post-colonialism has become an observable fact. The major problems of post-colonialism are the
post colonial individuality of minor groups, their ill-treatment and subjugation, dislocation, homesickness, and the loss of language and culture.

Amitav Ghosh’s *The Shadow Lines* draws the situations, troubles of the individuals that arise out of political decision relating to national boundaries as well as impact of violence and victims in communal-riot and political riot. As Amitav Ghosh is a sociologist as well as an anthropologist his novel, *The Shadow Lines* no doubt exposes the lives of individuals in the society where the political freedom and social standing of individual are endangered by the splitting up of the nation.

Ghosh’s narrative organization can be calculated by matching up with the fundamentals of the story with the ideological and aesthetic development throughout the novel. To sketch the story of *The Shadow Lines*, Tridib saw May Price as a little boy when he went to England with his parents in 1939. The friendship between the two families started when Mrs Price’s father, Lionel Tresawson and Tridib’s grandfather, Mr Justice Chandrashekhara Datta-Chaudhuri, met in Calcutta at séances. By the time Tridib meets May in India in 1962, their friendship through correspondence since 1959 has matured into love. The narrator’s grandmother, Thamma, is Tridib’s mother, Mayadevi’s elder sister. The narrator, who was born in 1952, is of the same age as Ila, Tridib’s niece and Mayadevi’s granddaughter. Ila’s father and Tridib’s elder brother, Jatin is a travelling UN official, while Tridib stays home in Calcutta. Although disliked by Thamma, Tridib, with his plentiful details on a variety of subjects, becomes almost the narrator’s mentor. The narrator, again in spite of his grandmother’s displeasure,
is also increasingly obsessed with Ila’s nomadic lifestyle, while she is obviously hooked of Nick Price, May’s youngest brother. May and Tridib, though on the margin of the narrative, become central to the novel’s anxiety.

The narrator recalls his two accidental meeting with May: one in 1963-64, when she went along with Thamma, Mayadevi and Tridib to bring the uncle of narrator’s grandmother, Jethamoshai, from Dhaka to Calcutta and has been a witness to the slaying of Tridib in an event of public violence; the next, when the narrator locates her in London in 1979-80, during his visit to London on a year’s research grant to collect matter for a Ph.D. thesis. The narrator recalls his meeting with May in 1961, when he was nine years old: “I met May Price for the first time two years after that incident, when she came to Calcutta on a visit. The next time I met her was seventeen years later, when I went to London myself” (TSL13). Thus the novel relates the events that have taken place in the years 1939-40, 1960-63 and 1978-79 in an unsystematic way but the narrator focuses on these reminiscences in the 1980s and manages these vague experienced and spatruins into a logical sequence to stage postcolonial situations as well as cultural displacement and anxiety, and presents the issue of broken nationalities in close and successful meets for good amount.

Although, the story provides events chronologicaly with a passage of time in colonial India when the narrator was not even born, it encloses a good deal of postcolonial moments, and all the episodes are understood in real-time focus to enlighten the narrative declaration. The year 1939 is historically significant because of the outburst of the Second World War and the unique turmoil on the
Indian subcontinent coming in its rouse. Mayadevi’s visits to London around this
time, her close contact with the Price family and the Tridib-May element of the
story are bestowed by Tridib twenty-one years later to the narrator, who is an
eight-year-old inquisitive child in a detailed account. May was a little baby when
Tridib met her in London. A passionate bond has developed between them over
correspondence which went beyond the shadow lines of nationality and cultural
boundaries.

Amitav Ghosh journeys around the bewildering haul between Tridib and
May and the existing bond between the two families taxing distance and
substantial borders even as the countries they belong to are potholed against each
other. This search for invisible links and “indivisible sanity,” arraying across the
realities of nationality, cultural separation and cultural intolerance to argue against
the innately unfathomable ethnic distance or, to borrow Dipesh Chakrabarty’s
phrase, “a deafness to the other” [19], is the central theme of The Shadow Lines.
The author questions the fixated affirmation of difference because of geographical
boundaries and celebrates the union of aliens pulled together by self-propelling
compassion and affection. Lionel Tresawson and Justice Chandrashekhar Datta-
Chaudhuri, Tridib and May, Jethamoshai and Khalil rise above the existing fervour
and narrow-mindedness, rachatred and collective antagonism originating from an
enhancement of borders, that is, a clash of national and cultural particularities.

The Shadow Lines describes many societies and places of earlier India. The
novel covers the greater life of Tridib as well as narrator’s grandmother, Thamma,
his cousin Ila and the English girl May Price. The life of mere characters are
narrated in pre and post colonial period at her place and how they paid heavy price for freedom on the aspect of riots. Amitav Ghosh through this novel explains the life of people of Indian subcontinent and how they faced violence and how riots harmed the society. Vivid description of riots of 1964 with equal similarity of any other riot of other times and places with its deadly impact on the lives of people are met with author’s outstanding narrative technique. The novel develops the narration of fiction artfully, various themes such as the theme of violence, freedom, partition of India, communal frenzy and national boundaries. It also reveals the society of middle class with its tragic social conditions followed by violence in riots.

R. K. Dhawan, while introducing the novel, The Shadow Lines illustrates that destructions of India in 1984—such as separate violence in Punjab, murder of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, setting fire to Sikh houses in Delhi have greatly influenced Amitav Ghosh, who has written the novel The Shadow Lines after these events. R. K. Dhawan expresses the background and Ghosh’s statement as: Within a few month, Ghosh started his new novel which he eventually called ‘The Shadow Lines’, a book that led him backward in time to earlier memories of riots, once witnessed in childhood. [2]

Ghosh says that the novel has become a book not about any one event, but about the meaning of such events and their effects on the individuals who lived through them. “Everyone lives in a story… because stories are all there are to live in, it was just a question of which one you choose” (109).
Amitav Ghosh, during his childhood days was fed with the stories of partition, the fight for independence and the Second World War. Thus history has become Amitav Ghosh’s ardent zeal. It is not surprise that his fiction is enveloped with both political and historical perceptions. He has used these memories to create the notion of independence and its abundant implications in the modern world, which is the leading theme of The Shadow Lines, by interestingly interweaving reminiscence, history and present-day life.

Amitav Ghosh, who is one of the leading and the outstanding influential writers of Indian Writing in English, has no conviction and belief in national borders and geographical boundaries that divide and separate both the country and its people from their own people as well as from other neighbouring countries and their people under the suspected reason of religion and community. Ghosh observes history as the course of events that brings about dislodgment, actions and movement and in the end substituting solid markers with shadow lines, intimidating the ideas of the past in the contact of the present. Hence, his narratives offer a vulnerable and all-round view on the present-day problems of the worlds that he writes about.

Amitav Ghosh’s The Shadow Lines reflects Ghosh’s political conviction and vision with fine destination of freedom of individual particularly political freedom from ethnic point of view. In the novel, Ghosh has the courage to show that politically motivated meaning of the concept of freedom are applied to divide the people and nations and that creates the distance among communities and people. Such a concept shows the way to deracination of many families. However,
Ghosh tries successfully in bringing about or stressing for equal societal membership particularly without consideration of race or religion, with reference to his political vision instilled with the human story, while projecting human life of past and present with future vision on the plane of situation prevailed in the pre-independent country.

In *The Shadow Lines*, the major themes like concept of freedom, violence, partition of a nation are all interlinked with life of middle class families. Ghosh has a deep insight into the cause of violence and its meaning. *The Shadow Lines* focuses on the theme of freedom and man’s longing for free and decent life of peaceful living. The thematic occupation that Ghosh has taken up in this novel is that of crossing boundaries of nation having varieties of culture and nationality. The fields of action in the novel to develop these themes are India, Pakistan and Bangladesh and England while evaluating the theme, Ghosh links events of present and past.

The theme of violence in *The Shadow Lines* is expressed in an advanced level when the death of Tridib takes place. The extreme effect of violence is not only on body but also on the very soul and emotions of human being. The narrator loved and recognized Tridib as a heroic life form. So the farthest point of violence imposed on the narrator is so intense that he is baffled and so agonized that he is taken aback with shock and grief and does not find the words to discuss Tridib’s death and also fails to accept the tragic death of Tridib. Amitav Ghosh who is a sociologist, proclaims through the medium of a novel the tragic effect of violence on the human being – causalities mostly unprivileged class of the society, i.e.
Middle class families, as his social obligations, a warning to the society of the nation, any nation across the continents, to be aware of such violence. Here Ghosh steers the reader to dispose of such fundamentalists, anti-social elements deeply rooted and hidden in the society under erroneous belief of communal, political motives. *The Shadow Lines* basically combines public events and personal lives of the people, mostly middle class families.

Other than the thematic occupation, Ghosh focuses on the theme of partition of India and its consequent tragic effects on the minds and emotions of the people. Ghosh projects the futility of bifurcation of a nation to create two nations, one east and another west. The outcome of such moves to draw a line across the nation is not happy state of affairs for the people not coming under preview of privileged class of the society. Neither it solves the basic problems nor does it soothe the agony and anguish of displaced persons. On the contrary the partitioned people face existent problems. Thamma in *The Shadow Lines* inquires whether she would be able to see the boundary between India and East Pakistan. Gosh writes through this character: “And if there is no difference both side will be the same, it will be just like it used to catch a train in Dhaka and get off in Calcutta next day without anybody stopping us. What was it all for them? Partition and all the killing and everything – if there is not something in between.” (151)

However, there are some divisive outlooks about the meaning of political freedom instilled in *The Shadow Lines*, which deals with the theme of political problem and communal riots affecting individuals. Mr. A. N. Kaul in his article *A Reading of The Shadow Lines* expresses: *The Shadow Lines* is a metaphor for evading rather
than exploring political realities, how can Ghosh be interested in the real possibilities and the real difficulties going on beyond nation divisions – that is, in the possibilities of a further historical formulations when for him scarcely exists? [3]

In *The Shadow Lines*, Ghosh deals with the problems of individuality opposed to nationhood, the representation of history and in due course concludes that all border lines are imaginary limitations. He takes history into bits, the frontiers of nationality, culture and language. The novel highlights the expression of the craving to approve the post-colonial experience and to attempt a rebuilding of public history.

Ghosh tries to establish the futility of lines among people and the present India and Britain countries. However, Mr. M. K. Bhatnagar writes about politics in the novel as: Politics in the novel has to be integrated with patterns of life traced, and has to function as the germinal nucleus fermenting the human story. Politics, thus, is to be presented in art through the medium of living men and women and their actions. [4]

There is nothing as intentional or truth based fact. All truths in the world are shaped by the situation within which it is practised or experienced. The novelist has taken effort to rebuild history on its own sense of individual reminiscence and analysis. *The Shadow Lines* gives a picture of the anguish, the death and the destruction caused by a shadow line of partition that could not undo the shadow line of bond. In the novel, the past joins together elegantly with the present as it echoes the agitation and chaos of the period and its connotation in the current milieu. The novel transacts the independence movements, the partition and the
ensuing public outburst with the history of World War II. Amitav Ghosh investigates the historical variables, the meaning of existing India, the cross cultural friendship and beliefs.

The running activities on political issues through the story of Ila's friend in U. K. and of Wick Price believing early British colonial theory abandons his job as C. A. in Kuwait due to political indifferences are presented clearly. The novel reflects the conflicting trends of nationalism and political convictions. Ghosh shows that political freedom has different meaning for different people. The above are some aspects of outcome of Amitav Ghosh's The Shadow Lines depicting political perception of sociological problems and communal violence, which awaken the reader, individual into rethinking about political solutions of individuals problems. Thus the novel creates long-lasting considerable impressions on the minds of individuals about political decisions for elucidation of civil turbulence arising from communal activities of fundamentalism.

Ghosh is interested in going beyond the deception of history books and political events to the mechanism of personal and social exchanges during and after postcolonialism in The Shadow Lines. Ghosh believes that history is spoken through real people who have experienced the historical events in reality. As each character in the novel expresses, through their own story, the period of history concerned, then the record of history ceases to be a sheer data or a collection of abstract facts. Freedom and nationalism are two relative notions and the Narrator's thought process as well as the driving features of the novel is reflected by the different characters of the novel. Everyone celebrate India's Independence Day on
15th August 1947, but for the East Bengali, it is the day of Partition, a day that deliberately divided the Bengali community. It is here that Ghosh brings out the uselessness of drawing lines across a nation.

Amitav Ghosh’s art of presentation of uselessness of national boundaries are very tactful as can be derived from the dialogue of grandmother’s request to old uncle to shift to India. He says: Once you start moving you never stop that’s what I told my sons when they took trains I said: I don’t believe in this India—Shindia. It’s all very well, you’re going away now, but suppose when you get these they decide to draw another line somewhere? What will you do then? Where will you move to? No one will ever have you anywhere. As for me, I was born here, and I will die here. (219)

The Shadow Lines does not deal solely above ideology of nationalism but it also deals with the theme of violence and the theme of partition. Ghosh through The Shadow Lines criticizes militancy is nationalism and considers it a feeling that it creates antagonists who lead the violence and Ghosh’s such views resemble Bertrand Russel’s view: Nationalism is undoubtedly the most dangerous vice of our time for more dangerous than drunkenness, of drugs, of commercial dishonesty. [5]

The above have resulted in long-lasting effect of violence that creates venomous corrosion in the society instead of creating feeling of sensible peaceful co-existence nurturing to constructive advancement.

As a writer of present time Ghosh has discussed, through the novel, such sensitive issues of nationalism swallowing the common man of middle class
families even, Ghosh himself says in an interview: “Today nationalism, once conceived of as a form of freedom is really destroying our world; it is destroying the forms of ordinary life that many people know. The nation-state prevents the development of free – exchange between people.” [6]

Thus the novel The Shadow Lines as well as Ghosh, project the ideological turn, the nationalism has been taken as it is valuable to assert here that The Shadow Lines was in Ghosh’s mind when he faced the riots of 1984 in India as a Professor in Delhi University. Ghosh does not comment on the riots as well as does not criticize as to who is right and who is wrong so far as riots are concerned that he simply puts the outcome of such riots in form of novel which has revealed the evils of shallow nationalism based on groups of species of mankind – groups formed on some or other religion or cultural heritage.

Thamma, the Narrator’s grandmother, belongs to the generation that had been forced to put itself out of place in 1947. Nationalism, which is the product of postcolonialism, becomes the religious sincerity for her, enlightening her on each and every contemplation and action. Thamma’s idea of freedom is that something that has to be achieved through violence and slaughter. But Thamma could never get the kind of liberty that she had visualized from India’s independence: she had to face the difficult implications of widowhood in the orthodox Hindu society that has been changed a little by the political independence. Her uncle’s analysis on the issue of nationality and migration hit at the fundamental weakness of nationalist principles: “I don’t believe in this India-Shindia. It’s all very well, you’re going
away now, but suppose when you get there, they decide to draw another line somewhere? What will you do then?’ [219]

Thamma’s effort to liberate her uncle and take him on a homeward journey ends violently and tragically with the deaths of her uncle, the rickshaw puller and Tridib. Thamma fails to see that nationalism has shattered her home and dripped off her kin’s blood, because of her obsession to the idea of nationalism. She says: “We have to kill them before they kill us”. [219] But till the end she fails to realise that in no way national liberty assures individual emancipation. Freedom seems to be an illusion as the shadow lines that divide one person from another keeps on changing. On the other hand, the new generation in the new epoch of internationalism observes freedom in a different way and one of the easily accessible systems which the narrator’s cousin Ila takes up is fleeing to the West, to England. Ila considers that freedom means liberty from the limiting traditions that restricts the individual’s activities.

Ila acts as a kind of contradictory to the Narrator, making possible for him to characterize himself through her. While he is bound to a strict and conventional middle-class brought up in Calcutta, Ila shows the way of an apparently exciting life in a foreign country; but he has ‘worlds to travel in’ in his imagination, while she remains motionless and taking no risks. He is culturally rooted to the soil of Bengal and India, but Ila has no roots and tries to find herself unworthy political activities in London and at home by purchasing herself a house and an uncertain husband. If Thamma has shown the Narrator the hazards and the barrenness of the altered philosophy of nationalism, freedom and selfhood, Ila, whose past was
discarded as the result of colonialism and her community and who tries to internalize and join in the world of the colonizer, reveals to him the emptiness of the world of the people whose races were merged as a result of postcolonialism.

The Narrator’s reminiscent account is enhanced by his uncle and guru, Tridib, who makes him understand the creative power of memory and imagination. According to Ghosh’s opinion reality lies not in the clear space but in what is induced and understood by recollection and imagination over changing ends of gap and time.

The present is Memory made livelier with the past while imagination helps to consume the sensational, the distant and by this means broadens one’s world. Tridib’s world is universal as he tries to go beyond the shadow lines of ethnic group and cultural borders with May Price. Ghosh explores the mystifying pull between Tridib and May and the firm closeness between the two families of the British and the Indians, when the countries were rough against each other. This search for unseen associations arraying across the actualities of nationality, cultural separation and racdiscrimination is the central theme of ‘The Shadow Lines’. Tridib is an optimist and he imagines of a better place, “a place without borders and countries” [145].

When May comes down from England, Tridib wishes to meet her in a wreck, in a place “without a past, without history, free, really free, two people coming together with the utter freedom of strangers” [144]. However he dies while trying to save his granduncle from the dissenters in Dhaka. Tridib’s death gives an idea about the real world impression on the optimist and exterminating him but not
before the Narrator has already internalized Tridib’s knowledge of the truth that
riots are born of gross political exploitation of collective compassions and
nationalist fervour, and that political lines cannot separate people or their common
land and authenticity. Significantly, the novel ends with May and the Narrator
being brought closer. The Narrator’s sexual relationship with May finally makes
him out with the deceased Tridib and institutes the persistence of the links with his
earlier period and between people and society.

‘The Shadow Lines’ turns around the traditional bildungsroman genre of
finding out the meaning of life through a steady finding of the borders of the world
and goes on to suggest that true development comes about only with the
comprehension that the lines as well as the world are only shadows. The novel
comes to an end with the divine and emotional belief that inventive sympathy is
what the adult must learn in order to go beyond the precincts of borders that are
man-made, subjective and transitory.

In The Shadow Lines, Ghosh fabricates the worldly and the altitudinal
magnitudes into a personal touch on which the unidentified speaker develops his
individuality. “The narrator” or the “I” the main voice controls powerfully the
sense and the appreciation of the novel. The novel is divided into two parts:
“Going away” and “Coming Home” that preoccupy the whole of the novel. The
novel relates the history of an Indian family that resides in Calcutta but has its
roots in Dhaka on the border of Pakistan. The assassination of the then Prime
Minister Indira Gandhi in 1984 and the violence and the unrest that followed have
provided the background of the novel.
The plot contrasts the existence of two different families, one an Indian family and the other, an English family. This sort of story-structure enquires the confines between the people and the geographical setting that they have inhabited. The story that swings from London to Calcutta and from Calcutta to Dhaka is told through the view point of an Indian male of today, although the real icons of the plot are the young man’s grandmother and his cousin, Tridib. The stories intertwine life in Dhaka before Partition, life in London during the war and the life that the narrator lives in Calcutta during the 1960s and his life in London of the 1970s. The unidentified storyteller gives an account in reminiscence of the people and places. Tridib has explained to him twenty years before and the exciting life of modern London that indicated the focal point of the earth. It is an undeniable truth that the narrator regards his imaginary rebuilding of the past as more exact than that of the present. It is because he lives through the narratives of other people. He believes definitely that the definite present alone can provide an inclination for the storyline of reminiscences. His standpoint of life is quite divergent to that of his cousin; the real one is Ila who takes care of the existing present alone. Unlike the narrator, she does not take shelter in the past.

The novel submits to the vague military protection between nations, land, and families as well as within one’s own self- analysis. Ghosh depicts the characters of the novel as being ensnared between two worlds. That is why, they strongly refuse to accept coping up with the conditions of both their present as well as their past. Similar to Gandhi, Ghosh is like chalk and cheese to the politics as well as the disorganized division of the land and human society which are vital to form a territory. Ghosh’s fiction makes the internal conflicts of the harmony of
contrasting yet related cultures as well as the external fights between friends and families that have been grounded by geopolitical dispute.

Ghosh’s fiction *The Shadow Lines* envelops three generations of the narrator’s family which is stretched around Calcutta, Dhaka and London, and the Prices, his English family friends. The fiction starts with the events happened in 1939 (the year when World War II broke out) and ends in 1964 with the civil quarrels in the post-partition East-Pakistan and Calcutta hammered by the revolt. The novel describes revolts at three levels. The first level being the revolts between spiritual society of one nation or State, the second level being the revolts between spiritual group in two States and the third one is the mutiny between different societies and the government. In plain words, Robi, one of the narrator’s cousins, reveals his experience while he worked for the Government:

“I’d have to go out and make speeches to my policemen saying: You have to be firm, you have to do your duty. You have to kill whole villagers if necessary – we have nothing against the people, it’s the terrorists we want to get, but we have to be willing to pay a price for our own unity and freedom. And I went back home, I would find an anonymous note waiting for me saying: We’re going to get you for our freedom. It would be like reading my own speech transcribed on a mirror” [246-247].

The actions focus on Mayadebi’s family, their friendship circle and their visit to the English friends and the links of narrator’s grandmother, Thamma, with Dhaka, her ancestral native city. The novelist takes the person who reads the novel into the reminiscent details of a young storyteller who, as a keen observer, adored his uncle, Tridib, as a hero who reared him on the memories of his trip to London
during the war and Thamma his grandmother, who shared with him her homesickness of East Bengal where she was born and brought up, and there is Ila, the daughter of Tridib’s elder brother, who voyages all over the world with her clever parents, who are always on the journey around the worldwide and comes home infrequently to explain the boy, who was filled with wonder, with the description of her expeditions abroad. While the narrator’s experience of travelling is based on the mind through imagination, Ila’s experience of travelling is based on the person’s real travelling. The narrator makes out that he has formed his own unrevealed world map. The narrator says that their memories, “Form a part of my secret map of the world, a map of which only I know the keys and co-ordinates, but which was not for that reason any more imaginary than the code of a safe to a banker” (196).

*The Shadow Lines* is the story of a budding boy who lives in the shadow of the man whom he represents and of an individual’s who is pulled into history as well as social and political turmoil. Tridib provides the young boy “worlds to travel in and... eyes to see them with” (20). Ila also has about the narrator’s trip of self realization. The narrator’s grandmother, Thamma, is the third main character to the construction of this novel. It is through the lively and almost a dynamic imagination of the world of an eight year old child, the shadow lines arrests its form. As an eight year old boy, the storyteller dreams of England through the eyes of Ila and Tridib. Accordingly, a fine means of elegant comment on existing actualities survives throughout the novel. It is the narrator’s mounting imagination, sympathy and scholarliness that lead the course of the novel to analysis and concern of complicated ideas in the novel.
Ghosh’s Post Colonial landing drives him to unveil the universal confrontation of misery such as the misery of broken, defect of avarice, annoyance, balanced journeying for truth and individuality, unreturned love, etc in *The Shadow Lines*. In the same way, the theme of borders and map occupy an important place in the postcolonial perspective of Ghosh because he is of the view that his people suffered to the core because of the sorting of places created by geographical borders. The novelist has no belief in national boundaries and geological borders that break up and detach people. So he regards them all as absolute man-made defences shaped by the conniving politicians who have no real intention in the welfare of the general public. The history of colonization inheritance is made accessible in the novel. The depiction of The anguish of the populace who have to experience the sharp pain of being removed and the far-reaching result of it as they have been shifted between the margins of native soil is clearly depicted by the novelist through the three deaths of the central characters. Said echoes Ghosh’s view in ‘Culture and Imperialism’ by unfolding imperialism as “an act of geographical violence through which virtually every space in the world is explored, charted and finally brought under control [7].

Another critic Mondal observes the publication of *The Shadow Lines* is of the same opinion with scholarly concern in the enquiry of patriotism and national character, which were rising rapidly into a most important annoyance controlled by post colonial criticism and post colonial approach. Ghosh developed to be identified as a unique literary genius “whose innovative textual experiments offered new insights and openings into the cluster of conceptual and theoretical concepts that
had been developed to describe, analyse and interpret the complex of colonand post colonial relations” [8].

*The Shadow Lines* interprets history not from the central part but from the margin’s residual outer limits through the post colonial image that is portrayed by Ghosh. It represents the history of the colonised people written by them in the language of the coloniser as a reply to the coloniser. It is Ghosh’s talent that he has made the study possible and recognition of history and heritage of the post colonial nation from the colonised people’s view point rather than the coloniser’s. The focal point of the colonised people reproduces the existing behaviour of post colonialism showing proof of repugnance against the colongovernment is very much obvious in Ghosh’s *The Shadow Lines*.

From the beginning to the end of the novel *‘The Shadow Lines’*, a vast number of post-colonial topics are projected as less important, so as to be analysed by the reader, throughout the consecutive details of the up-and-coming recollections of the nameless narrator who has also experienced the effects of colonisation. For the author, the novel itself is a way of highlighting and at the same time penetrating into the concept of Indian national identity and the arbitrariness of national boundaries through literature; a method which has been methodically used as a tool to transform into modern and organize the general population under the control of British Government. In due course of the novel, in his effort to find out and typify his own voice within it, Ghosh makes use of the language of the oppressor and convey his crossbred personality.
To start on with, the speaker highlights that a place’s uniqueness is shaped and recognized through narrative, photographs, maps and life histories, as it is basically fabricated through imagination. Tridib stirs up the narrator’s aptitude from his childhood, to imagine places that he has never visited and visualize the events those he has never experienced actually; “Tridib had given [him] worlds to travel in” [39], through the stories, historical facts and personal experiences that he has shared with the narrator. In the end, imagination becomes the narrator’s guide to observe the unknown world outside Calcutta and he even prefers the conclusion that journeying to various places will not satisfy the urge to identify unless one is not able to find out what is in his mind and what he is looking for; as well as if one is not able to observe places in his imagination is equal to travelling at all.

As far as travelling is considered, through the different points of view expressed by Ila and the narrator himself, the idea of travelling and imagination of places mostly comes into outside. They have been displaced from their original native soil to some other places in different ways. Ila’s worldwide travel experiences are based only in the literal sense, whereas the narrator’s journeying experiences are through the means of his imagination in the allegorical sense. The narrator holds the belief that “a place does not merely exist, that it has to be invented in one’s imagination; that [Ila’s] practical, bustling London was no less invented than [his own], neither more nor less true, only very far apart” [195]. Hence both are diasporic.

On the other hand, Ila lives by contradictory beliefs, giving full stress to the present, which she lives deeply, free from the influence or the imagining of the past or
the future. She does not possess the ability of narrator to rewind and enjoy the moments and journey through the means of recollections, as she considered travelling a granted one. Ila, as a child, has visited so many places, in contrast to the storyteller. The narrator has to depend on Tridib’s images and imagination to “see” places. This brings similarity with the narrator’s affirmation that only through re-imagining destinations one is able to be free from the inventions of others and as a consequence of the modernization that was forced by the British upon the Indians.

Similarly, the author takes effort to re-imagine Calcutta, to re-define its culture and uniqueness through the creation of what is represented as an “imaginary homeland”. The viewpoint enclosed in the novel, is progressed in its pages, providing the reader with a potential account of India from the memoirs of the author and from his imagination, as all that was lost can never be well-organized. On the whole _The Shadow Lines_ can be exemplified as “a novel of memory about memory”. The mixed ideas of national identity are not viable. Taking into consideration that no post-colonial story can be absolutely purposeful and perfect, or speak out that they own the inflexible historical truth, the novel also follows a non-linear planning of time in order to reveal that.

Moreover, the narrator of the novel appears to be completely aware of the historical facts and time allotment, as he speaks the following words: “when we try to speak of events of which we do not know the meaning, we must lose ourselves in the silence that lies in the gap between words and the world… and things which did not fit my vocabulary were merely pushed over the edge into the chasm of that silence.” Undoubtedly, the rambling mark of the past that epitomizes the novels of
the diasporic writers, such as Ghosh’s *The Shadow Lines*, permits cultural differences to be projected largely and provides room for a multicultural definition of the “self”. It expresses how diasporic displacement is not just a triumph, but a source of resourcefulness, through the reinstatement of a new bilingual person and cosmopolitan culture that takes place as a result of the defeat.

The idea of mixed rearing is further enlightened if one takes into consideration that the narration focuses on the stories of the two families, one of which is Bengali (that of the narrator’s) and the other English that have common characteristics. The flow of the novel moves backward and forward between India and England, so as to draw attention to the narrator’s mixed identity, such as he is of Indian nationality, but has received English education. Besides, Ghosh uses English language, while he is of varied opinion from the British national principle regarding literature and accordingly challenging the ‘privileging norm’, as a source to get back the India which has been lost to the English, a motherland from where he has been alienated. Eventually an assortment of details of India is portrayed in the novel, through a privileged utilization of English literature.

Nonetheless, the narrator’s grandmother, who is having well-built opinions of Indian nationalism and patriotism, strongly denounces the hybridity and identity of diaspora, as she considers a harmonized social order with clear boundaries to be ideal. Thus, she does not accept Ila’s choice to live in London, as in her opinion “she does not belong there” and “she has no right to live there” (76). She is of the conviction that each country exclusively fit in to the community that fought wars during the years to set its precincts securely with their family’s blood. She asserts
that “they are a nation because they’ve drawn their borders with blood...war is their religion” and that this is “what it takes to make a country”, supporting that the same has to be done for India, in order to build a homogeneous national identity (76).

_The Shadow Lines_ shows the troubles of the narrator’s grandmother and her loss of the sense of secure quay; a point of reference to which one returns for reassurance. Her loss was caused due to the borders forced on her. Thamma, in her own simple way “wanted to know whether she would be able to see the border between India and East Pakistan from the plane” (90). She was not looking for a stroke as such, but for some marker of segregation.

Taking into consideration the colonization that happened, the results of which cannot be reversed, such inconsistency to her views, that one and the same thing is impossible to take place, since borders may confront to create lasting identities and nations, but still culture is varied. Of course, the history of India cannot be independent from that of England and vice versa. Perhaps, the meaning of the title “The Shadow Lines”, since has no clear limits can ever exist amongst people with hybrid and diasporic identities as such, only mere labels that are defined by the huge variety of customs.

**Borders, Violence and Amitav Ghosh’s The Shadow Lines**

Ghosh presents the situation of middle class families entangled in the circumstances facing violence and striving to ease the situation and how their lives are shattered to pieces and they have to migrate. The theme of migration out of violence based on political, cultural and differences – rising so intense as to erupt
the violence like volcano are explored by Ghosh. It seems Ghosh is so much ‘concerned’ over the issue that even through the art of novel he cautions not only the readers but also the society as a whole. Impact of the novel is such that the reader is driven to think about those innocent people, living moderate lives, are becoming victims of violence and who are forced to migrate from their home. Displacements of families as a result of violence and communal riots intensify the feeling of anger and violence increases. Ghosh does not describe violence and butchered human bodies but he merely depicts the violence as newspaper reports. The narrator while reading these newspaper reports at Teen Murti House Library, sixteen years later and he as a research student is shocked to find needless violence and motivation which caused the death of his cousin – Tridib. N. Eakambaran in his article, The Theme of Violence in The Shadow Lines, comments:

“\text{Amitav Ghosh’s characters inhabit this realm of life. But when misfortune strikes their lives are in an unforeseen manner, they are left baffled. If it is, at least, death or disease, they may try to comprehend it. But when violence erupts like a volcano in the public sphere they are totally disoriented. Life seems to lose its significance.}” \text{[9]}

The characters belong to middle class society – earning their living in aspiration of better livings and they have their own world of their family and for them any disturbing of existent nature is alarming.

Through the character of Thamma novelist brings the reader to the fatal outcome of people arising out of partition of India and Pakistan as well as creation of Bangladesh. The protagonist Thamma has been criticized as fossilized specimen of
nationalism. Ghosh projects that though the demarcating boundary lines are drawn by the political machineries in power, they cannot divide the memory and experiences as Thamma believes. The novelist questions the effectiveness of borders that divide people into two different groups but they cannot delete the experiences and memories of Thamma and uncle Roby and Ghosh, it depicts that such lines of division are illusory and they are lines of the Shadows. In such an atmosphere, Thamma is projected as enthusiast of the concepts of the nation and nationalism.

About the violence Ghosh provides the comparative occurrences of violence – present and past. Repetition of violence on the same ground is shown in the novel as if Ghosh goes on to show whether man has learnt from histories. The narrator alerts the world over about creation of misfortune and communal tension prevailing all over the globe. Murari Prasad in his article The Shadow Lines – A Quest for Indivisible Sanity rightly comments:

“The narrator with his expanded horizons and imaginative understanding of the world caught up on the vertex of violence and murderous rampage stresses on the urgency of preserving the memories of saner and human transactions for cultural self-determination and inter-personal communication.” [10]

Anything is obligatory is a hazardously untrustworthy obsession, when its main purpose is to divide the human beings into clear sections on the basis of prejudiced qualities. Even then, providing a satisfactory clarification for the indisputable partitions of humanity becomes very intricate when similarity has a twist to eliminate the distinct borders, making them impossible to differentiate, like two peas in a pod. The way The Shadow Lines presents the impression of the
disaster that settles down on the pages of history: the formation of two nations on the basis of the incompatibility of two religious parties and their collective hatred is one of the many striking qualities of the novel. The two nation theory that served the basis for the East and West and Pakistan was fixed by the British India on the basis of the belief that was completely different from any possible of harmony. Borders were formed and people were compelled to get accustomed to their lifestyle and individuality according to the place where they are put in, in order to have a place for them in the nonrepresentational nations that are created by the influent people.

**Urge for Freedom of Action**

The theme of freedom and its various applications in the present time of post colonial as a whole is the prime theme of *The Shadow Lines*. Ghosh exemplifies the ideas of freedoms, such as political, social and religious, through various characters in various aspects of life of human being. Political freedom is developed through Thamma, narrator’s grandmother. The most significant freedom is political freedom. It is compounded in various walks of life of an individual pertaining to economic moral and religious. Longing and search for freedom involves violence and clash among different communal and cultural groups. The characters of the novel are mostly middle class families of the society. So their ideas of freedom are not philosophical but personal for living a decent life. Grandmother Thamma advocates political freedom and for achieving it, she is once convinced to run an errand for struggle in freedom movement. She is further exposed as committed even to kill English magistrate if needed. Ghosh writes:
“I would have been frightened, she said, but I would have prayed for strength and God willing. Yes, I would have killed him, it was for our freedom. I would have done anything to be freed.” [39]

The concept of freedom for the middle class families is not intricate but a simple concept that political freedom once acquired their plights for economic and social freedom would automatically follow. The concept of freedom sought for by Thamma, a woman of ordinary forethought is a personal trait. Ghosh further develops the concept of individual freedom through the character Ila who does not wish to remain under the pressures of cultural and traditional barriers and wish to adopt freedom of acting individually as existing in the western countries. Ila’s attitude for freedom is thus limited. Anjali Karpe, in her article The Concept of Freedom in the Shadow Lines – A Novel by Amitav Ghosh, comments: “For every character in The Shadow Lines, the concept of freedom varies at different level of experience. The extent of freedom which an individual desires is related to the constraints experienced by him and accepted as desirable or inevitable.” [11]

The character Thamma wants the freedom from limitations of economic prosperity to run her family and she believes that once political freedom is obtained her troubles would automatically develop. She is a school teacher and lives within her income honestly. Ghosh writes: “All she wanted was a middle class life in which, like middle class the world over, she would thrive believing in the unit of nationhood and territory, of self respect and national power: That was she wanted – a middle class life, a small thing that history had denied her in its fullness and for which she could never forgive it.” [78]
Here Ghosh projects the simple and inner longing and desire to be free for living normal decent life of man of ordinary prudent. Thus Ghosh has evolved many conceptions of freedom in his novel *The Shadow Lines*. But freedom and its concept are interlinked with violence and political power over the individual. The novel also discusses the themes of freedom for individual Diaspora and national and international boundaries and violence arising out of cultural and communal tensions and clashes for freedom between communal and caste group of deferent religions and faith with violence by terrorists.

**Rooted Fear of Violence**

As a contrast to the White and Black peoples, Hindus and Muslims, have no particular inborn qualities to differentiate them from each other. More than a thousand years of history they have utilized the land, culture mutually and lead their lives together, either happily or unhappily, peacefully or struggling for survival on the base of same possessions. These people would have continued to live in the same manner as they have done earlier if their destinies have not been influenced by the people who pronounced to have assumed supreme position, with its supremacy, willpower, resources and awareness. The said superiors have developed a set of judgments that has established the two groups, Hindus and Muslims which are completely hostile to one another. They achieved success in the establishment of their ideas in the first nation of the world that was built just on the root of religion: Pakistan, or the sacred land.

*The Shadow Lines* shows a crude treatment of the colonizers through its existence as a backdrop and its spreading over the environment, its changeover into
calmness, and its conversion into a constant dread, and finally, through the relating of the written act of violence that has imparted an everlasting mark on the lives of its eyewitness (Robi, May and Thamma). The harassments are inflicted directly on the children (the narrator and his schoolmates in one case and Robi in the other) through the stress and fear created in the minds rather than as act of violence. An environment that has become a character in itself, an important determiner of actions and lives is generated through the said tension and the vague yet ever obvious fear created in their minds. While the children were in the bus they feel the force of brutality when they perceive the sound noise of the revolutionary crowd, and later when they were followed by one as a fundamental fear of violence is rooted in them. They could not weigh the experience against to anything else and later, the narrator is of the perceptive opinion:

It is a fear that comes of the knowledge that normalcy is utterly contingent, that the spaces that surround one, the streets that one inhabits, can become, suddenly and without warning, as hostile as a desert in a flash flood. It is this that sets apart the thousand million people who inhabit the subcontinent from the rest of the world – not language, not food, not music – it is the specquality of loneliness that grows out of the fear of the war between oneself and one’s image in the mirror (122).

*The Shadow Lines* shows how violence creates psychological impression on the minds of people who have lived their life through such events of violence. While discussing meaning and effect of violence, the novel at the same time shows mental restlessness of section of society called majority and minority section of communities indulging in violence. The narrative methods used by Ghosh in
recollecting the past events represent the psychological track of mind. In *The Shadow Lines*, the past events are re-created in effect through the Grandmother’s response to the narrator about communal experience of Ila in London as:

Ila has no right to live there. She does not belong there. It took those people a long time to build that country ….. Years and years of war and bloodshed. Everyone who lives there has earned his right to be there with blood….. it was their religion. That is what it takes to make a country. [12]

**Real life events and the parallelism of history**

The ‘Real’ life comes into the fiction and a history goes along carefully into the flow of narration when a historical novel lays a hand on a real life event. The novel is woven around the historically real incidents with complete details of their occurrence. Everything is taken care of in such a manner that the reader is forced to postpone all disbelief eagerly, readily, even getting together with the narrator/writer, when dates and numbers are intermingled into the story. Using the real event of 10th January 1964, when the first match of the test series was to begin and its co-incidence with the riots entering into the life of the narrator is a clever device. A detailed account of the events that led to the riots is provided in the novel. Mu-i-Mubarak disappeared on 27th December 1963. Some incidents lead people to smash up public property, but their anger were focussed against the government and not against any particular religious community. Besides, the rebels belonged to almost all the religions. Pandit Nehru sent CBI to the valley and the artefact was recovered. But the damage was made already. The Pakistani “religious authorities, usually so quick to condemn idolatry, declared that the theft of the relic
was an attack upon the identity of Muslims. Karachi observed 31 December as a ‘Black Day’, and soon other cities followed suit. The Pakistani newspapers declared that the theft was part of a deep-laid conspiracy for uprooting the spiritual and national hopes of Kashmiris, and rumbled darkly about ‘genocide” (136).

In Khulna, the East Pakistani town, the dissenters as a way of showing ill feeling towards the minority Hindus on their failure to safeguard their artefacts twisted against them and many lost their lives. The mutiny soon stretched out all over East Pakistan. The stroke was soon experienced in Calcutta as immigrants from East Pakistan fled to India. On 10th January, a magnitude of people went on a wild riot, killing Muslims and destroying their properties. The armed forces were commanded when the state of affairs went uncontrollable to practise power over violence. Ultimately the riot was put to an end and everything returned to normal, as the narrator declares: “By the end of January 1964 the riots had faded away from the pages of the newspapers, disappeared from the collective imagination of ‘responsible opinion’, vanished without leaving a trace in the histories and bookshelves. They had dropped out of memory into the crater of a volcano of silence” (138). A particular person’s fixation has worked against a frenzied atmosphere which has run alongside at a large-scale to cause a staunch and proposed antagonistic clash called a riot. The Indian sub-continent has always been an observer to many such intentional massacres whose source is found in the organization of the two nation theory in the communal consciousness. These were the fruits borne by the tree of hatred whose seed was sown towards the beginning of the twentieth century.
Ghosh Projects the connotation of individual freedom in case of division of nation and what ‘home’ means to the individual when demarcation of boundary line is drawn and when the individual is facing existent challenges and perhaps, this may be the reason for giving the sub-title of the novel as _Going Away & Coming Home_. The present novel is very fine mixture of modern techniques of narration and time and space which creates an overall structure for the novel. The events and lives of the characters are projected in structural combination showing the thematic occupation of the novelist.

Tridib’s presence in the novel gathers force to the story and the drive to the narrator. Tridib loves May Price and sends her chatty letters even exclusively personal ones. It is this love affair that causes Tridib’s death in riots where he tries to save May Price who unlocks the door of the car and runs to save an old man, and Tridib is captured by the riot gang. The death of Tridib is the most dramatic and stabbing juncture in the novel and it reminds how Ghosh, while teaching in Delhi, would have experienced the wide spread riots and slaughters in India in 1984 after Indira Gandhi’s treacherous assassination. Gita Choudhary comments on the events of death of Tridib as:

“Each character would have to live with this memory and get affected by it. With his death he brings home to the narrator the meaningless of artificboundaries, the falsehood of forcing one individual’s idea over another and the disaster of misplaced ideals.” [13]

One Important point is that the novel moves generously either forward or backward, narrating the lives of grandmother, grandmother’s sister Mayadevi her husband and their children particularly Tridib. There is another English family, the Price family which is expansively connected for three generations with the
narrator’s family. Ghosh interconnects and interweaves the lives and experience of these families and that organizes the total plot structure of the novel. The novels have multifaceted stories fabricated together with certain thematic considerations like riots, violence, and freedom, political as well as individual. Arvind Choudhary rightly comments about the plot structure of the novel which provides a picture of the remnants of the postcolonial society as:

“Its focus is a fact of history, the post partition scenario of violence, but its overall form is subtle interweaving of fact, fiction and reminiscence. Its multi layered complex structure makes it difficult text, which demands perceptive reading for a richer experience. It is principally, organized through the weaving together of personal lives and public events.” [14]

About the freedom and other related issues, the narrator learns from Tridib about topical matter as well as Indian history on social political and moral levels. Tridib presents broader view of freedom. His freedom was more about to do with what one desired. Tridib explains to the narrator as:

“One could never know anything except through desire, a real desire which was not the same thing as greed or lust, a pure, painful and primitive desire a longing for everything that was not in oneself a torment of the flesh that carried one beyond the limits of one’s mind to other times and other places and even if one was lucky to a place where there was no border between one self and one’s image in mirror.” (29).

While The Shadow Lines examines the author’s major frustration about wider, cross-border humanity with outstanding insights into the issues of
nationalism and socialism, it also reveals the new levels of his technical skill. What he offers is a stretchy and classy mnemonic story. He folds collectively parts of history by mnemonic trigger to be a sign on community massacre and sectarian anxiety in the Indian subcontinent. Obviously, his skilful expertise of story-telling plays an important part in connecting the narrative gears to the tale’s emotional centre. Distinct and incoherent units of time and place are conflated to carry the main narrative burden. The multiple controls in the narrative from one time-sequence to another or the apparent achronicity composes a counterpoint to hegemonic history or the grand narratives of the nation – a key device in the novel to unpack specific tight spots and distress of individuals. The novel derives its matter from Ghosh’s experience of the rupture following the Partition and the consequent crack in the affiliative links of the societies across the border. What makes his experience worthy of exploration is the method by which his experience is extracted into an absorbing story.

Thus Ghosh focuses on western culture and how Indians in postcolonial period are attracted by western culture. Such sub plot stories are linked and interwoven to bring about the completeness of the plot. The novel swings backwards and onwards and events are not recounted in a sequence. The narrator is a man with stabbing insight and figuring out the past and future of the characters. However the plot of the novel is not disturbed through such devices of back and forth as it is mixed together in combination of overall organic structure of the novel.
Apart from the above many parts of the story and events of the novel are projected as flashback, all the same in past memories and events and these are many interruptions in time. The members of three families frequently travels to and from in between London and Calcutta. The individual stories of Sahib, Ila, Mayadevi keep the reader moving from place to place. The time jumps and distance etc. these stories forms sub plot structure linked with main plot of the novel.

By turning away from conservative mimesis and by utilising memory as the only vehicle of the story, Ghosh accomplishes in fitting into place these concerns with manifold moving eye-openers. “Memory,” as Dipesh Chakrabarty notes, “is a complex phenomenon that reaches out to far beyond what normally constitutes a historian’s archives, for memory is much more than what the mind can remember or what objects can help us document about the past” [15]. The first-person narrator whose recollections endow the organization of the narrative has a mobile narratorpoint of view. Also, the guiding principles of storyline details in The Shadow Lines and the exploitation of such techniques as paralipsis (the narrator’s omission of some events pertaining to the main characters focalised), ellipsis (omission of some events), analepsis (a retrospective narration) and prolepsis (the reference to some future event of the story by the omniscient narrator) in the book’s structure to manoeuvre the nature of events and the levels of temporality are remarkably different from other novels. However, Ghosh makes dexterous use of narrationally-framed free direct and indirect speech to supply the structural frame for the memory’s content. For instance, while entwining Ila’s and her mother’s descriptions of a story about their house in Colombo with narrator
remarks, Ghosh sets up free direct speech and indirect speech in combination with a reliable, genuine narrative voice:

Their house was in a quiet part of Colombo where civil servants and senior civil servants and people like that lived. It was a big house with large verandas and a steeply sloping roof covered with mossy tiles. The garden was at the back; there was only one problem: adjoining on to the garden at the back was a poultry farm. This caused Ila’s mother a good deal of worry, for she had heard that snakes were certain to appear wherever there were chickens. One morning, soon after they moved in, their cook Ram Dayal came running upstairs and burst in upon Ila’s mother who was taking her mid-morning nap in an easy chair on a veranda upstairs. [16]

Mugger-muchh, shrieked Ram Dayal. “Save me, burra mem, bachao me from this crocodile”. He was a tall, sinuous, usually sleepy man, but now his eyes were staring from his bony face and his lips were splashed with spittle. Never heard of such a thing, Ila’s mother said to us. “Crocodile in my garden; almost fell out of my easy-chair. My grandmother and I looked carefully away from each other…. Shat up Ram Dayal, Queen Victoria [Ila’s mother] snapped. Stop bukbukking like a chhokra-boy…. And right he was, Queen Victoria said, her voice shrill with amazement…. But being as she was the daughter of a man who had left his village in Barisal in rags and gone on to earn a knighthood in the old Indian Civil Service, she retained her composure”. (24-25)

Ghosh employs with the limits of essentialist nationalism and blockades to understanding across geographical borders. The novel eventuates into a search for the
approaches for continued existence in a violent, hate-filled world of narrow divisions and finds in love an effective remedy to the cloud of ethnic nervousness. Thus the novel also concentrates on the challenge of geographical flexibility and cultural disruption with a constructive insight into history. The cross-border movement of aliens and colonizers under the increasingly globalised state of affairs sanctions, or rather authorizes, the novel’s larger scheme of cultural space, of making sense of ontological bewilderment in complicated spatiality and seeking adjustment to the emerging demands of multicultural world. As Brinda Bose rightly notes:

"It is no doubt fitting that in the age of an extravagantly embracing of globalization, we may claim to have closed the gap between the other and straddling it; certainly, the legacy of postcolonial angst today appears to have settled into a potentially numbing acceptance of bi- or multi-cultural euphoria. In such a circumstance, the diasporic imagination of Amitav Ghosh – that wrestles with an understanding of bi-culturalism as it ‘yokes by violence together’ discrete and distant identities – is essential to our understanding of our history even as it is being created. [17]

Ghosh’s cultural resourcefulness shooting from a syncretic approach, convincing as it is in its broad-minded and humanist expression, has been problematised by several critics. Gauri Viswanathan points out that Ghosh’s attitude on broad civilization or inter-community harmony eradicates the particularities of challenging groups in that “the formative energy of identity and community gradually dissipates and is replaced by frozen icons of communal solidarity.”

In The Shadow Lines, Ila is incapable of such inter-cultural discussions because she lives strongly in the present with “easy arrogance,” which limits her
cultural clutch. She revels in passing passion with places – “illusory whirl of movement” (TSL23) – and thus reveals her short-range imagination in stationary recollections. Her reminiscences are shallow in that she only remembers excitements generated by shifting landscapes during her journeys. The lack of concreteness or materiality of her imagination is exemplified in an episode set in Colombo which she shares with the narrator. As is evident in the narrative report on Ila’s speech acts, her cognition deficit is pointed out by Tridib to the narrator. Ila carries the memories of exotic reptiles stored in her senses without registering the mater-co-ordinates of the place or its appropriate physicality to see her sojourn in a transnational perspective: Ila lived so intensely in the present that she would not have believed that there were really people like Tridib, who could experience the world as concretely in their imagination as she did through her senses…. For Ila the current was real: it was as though she lived in a present which was like an airlock in a canal, shut away in from the tidewaters of the past and the future by steel floodgates. (30)

She remains an insular, though palpably privileged, cosmopolitan unable to cross shadow lines on her globe-trotting itinerary. As Tridib does not foist any ideological position on the narrator, Ghosh does not propose any master code of cosmopolitanism either. Without wishing away cultural praxis he recognises differences or shadow lines between cultures and nations, but at the same time he underlines the liberating and enabling potency of imagining the nation and the world in facilitating dialogic accommodation. Such cosmopolitan perceptions provide a countervailing pressure against the separatist propensities of Thamma’s militant and exclusive notions of nationalism as there are no “final solutions,” to
invoke Mahesh Dattani’s eponymous play, to communalist collisions. Thamma’s insistence on tidy territorand cultural frontiers couched in unabashed chauvinism is meaningfully mocked by the auto diegetic narrator in Ghosh’s novel.

Jon Mee’s reading of the closing phrase of the novel as the epitomizing theme of The Shadow Lines is quite convincing: “[A final redemptive mystery] is one where difference continually structures the world but imagination struggles to negotiate forms of translation with a precision that resists collapsing difference into any kind of master code”[18]. The emphasis given to the relationship between May and the narrator as a tentative culmination of Tridib’s mnemonic internationalism contains the kernel of the novel’s concern. In Ghosh’s use of the first-person narrator as both a compositional principle and a variation on an authorized autobiography intersecting the biography of the pre-and post-Partition India the narratological technique speaks to the political issues at stake. To say the least, in setting out to articulate his concerns in a well-crafted narrative Ghosh passes the test of melding the form and politics of his novel with flying colours.

The origin of the nation-state can be traced back to the French Revolution of 1789. Since the ‘nation’s’ modern and recent conception; Nationalism, the feeling arising out of nationhood or belonging or devotion to the interests or culture of one’s nation, has been defined by various scholars, researchers and artists in the past two centuries in insightful yet conflicting fashion. Benedict Anderson, in his ground breaking work Imagined Communities, defines a nation as an “imagined political community that is imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign”[19] Rabindranath Tagore is rather critical and denounces nationalism as
“a cruel epidemic of evil.” [20]. Eqbal Ahmad classifies nationalism as “an ideology of difference” and “collective identity [built] on the basis of the Other.” [21]. Through his work Shadow Lines, Amitav Ghosh too, is joining the fray, questioning the fixity of culture and whether cultures can be contained within boundaries demarcated by maps. He brings forth all sides of this intellectual dilemma through his various characters and the different opinions they hold about nations and nationalism. Here we discuss the nationalistic views and ideas of the two main female characters, the narrator’s grandmother Thamma and his cousin, Ila.

One of the biggest influences on the narrator, his grandmother, Thamma epitomizes the ideals of the Nationalist movement and values of India’s national identity. She has a blind love for her nation, though her nationality is certainly questionable as she is a migrant from Dhaka during the partition of India. The inquiry into her nationality as well the determination of nationality is made when Thamma has to fill out a form on her trip to Dhaka, to persuade her nonagenarian uncle to leave Dhaka, which is in the midst of a revolution and come to Calcutta with her. While filling out the form, she fills in her nationality swiftly and without hesitation as ‘Indian’ but starts wondering about her roots and origin once she writes her place of birth as Dhaka, Bangladesh (then East Pakistan). This raises the question, even in the reader’s mind, as to how nationally is or should be determined. Does birth in a country give you right to nationality? And if so, then how does your nationality change if the borders demarcating your nation change? The author leaves the reader questioning. Later, Thamma’s uncle Jethamoshai/ Ukil-babu sums it up best, 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 Thamma was in college she dreamt of being part of militant groups who struck against the British imperialist rulers. She was fascinated by their ways, though she didn’t know much about them and wasn’t sure how to find out more about them as they operated clandestinely. One day, when a group of policemen came to her college and arrested the quietest student from the last bench as a member of the group who had been assigned to murder an English magistrate in the Khulna district, Thamma was shocked as well as rueful that she missed an opportunity to be a part of the freedom struggle. She tells the narrator that “she would have been content to run errands for them, to cook their food, wash their clothes, anything”, for she understood that she was a woman and she had to subordinate her wishes to those of the ‘active’ male members.(39)The author underscores the limited role of women in the national movement. But it is interesting to note the willingness with which Thamma is ready to take up these jobs. It gives the reader a glimpse into the lesser reported facts, like violent militancy, of the Indian freedom struggle. On her return to Dhaka, after a span of about twenty years, Thamma feels like a stranger and keeps questioning as to where her “old Dhaka” is. She even starts to feel like a foreigner. Tridib, the narrator’s eccentric genius uncle, rubs it in by telling Thamma “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.”(195).
The reader is once again made to question the validity of nations 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 satire doesn’t go unnoticed. The author goes on in the same vein when he talks about Thamma’s ignorance about a real border. She gets very offended, when the narrator’s father mockingly asks “did she really think the border was a long black line with green on one side and scarlet on the other, like it was in a school atlas?”(151) Thamma’s old Indian nationalist mentality can’t perceive the reasoning behind all the killing and partitioning “if there isn’t something in between?” and goes on to prove to fallacy of borders. (151)

Thamma’s nationalistic vein is presented once again when she bestows her most cherished ownership of a ruby that she had around her neck in a golden necklace all her life, to the “War Fund” after coming back from Dhaka. This was activated by the truth that her nephew Tridib was murdered by religious zealots during the rebellions. Contribution of money to fight against the ‘evil’ nation was the only way that a country could continue to exist. Here Anderson’s comments that “nations inspire love, and often profoundly self-sacrificing love” claims to be true (141). The author symbolizes the ideas of western nationalism and the disagreement of history to the third world through the narrator’s ‘white-washed’ cousin Ila. Through Ila, Ghosh tackles the western course of history, the history written by the champions but not essentially the true history. She articulates the western disregard for eastern or third world calamities, when she tells her shocked cousin that “nothing really important ever happens where you are.”[104] Ila does acknowledge the fact that the third world suffers a lot of rioting, famines and other
calamities, but nothing as important as revolutions or antifascist wars. The author underscores his point, by portraying an obviously biased western viewpoint and the relative significance of things in the western world.

Another Bengali writer Rabindranath Tagore makes a similarly reproachful remark on the western newspapers, saying they “take the scantiest notice of calamities happening in India over areas of land sometimes bigger than the British Isles.” (22). Ila also compares her activist living to that of Alan Tresawson and his friends during the Second World War. She notes that “there’s a kind of heroism in their pointless deaths” (104). This portrayal of the western perception goes well with Anderson’s thesis on nations, where he says that “Dying for the revolution also draws its grandeur from the degree to which it is felt to be something fundamentally pure.” (144). He goes on to say that “Dying for one’s country, assumes a moral grandeur which dying for the Labour Party, the American Medical Association or perhaps even Amnesty International cannot rival.” (144)

Ila’s views cannot totally be ruled out because as a woman there are many restrictions put on her while she is in India. A major incident where, she is forced out of a Cabaret Bar in the Grand Hotel in Calcutta by her uncle Robi, shows the reader how constrained and restrictive, life for women in India is. The author portrays her narrator’s mother as the middle-class wife, whose main aim in life is to make life for the husband and child as comfortable as possible. This certainly would not wash down very well with western feminist movements.

The questions of nationalism are hard to grasp and the answers harder still. One can’t help but remember Edgar Allan Poe’s lines – “All that we see or seem, is
but a dream within a dream.”(23). Or Robi’s discontented capture on borders and nationalism, when he suggests “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.”(147)

Amitav Ghosh thus describes the sociological problems of not an individual but of many individuals who suffer the deadly effects of violence in modern world. Alarming situations, threatening the very existence of individual, rooted in the minds of social and political groups, are highlighted as a caution to the society of modern India. Amitav Ghosh is a sociological writer in the sense that he is very sharply aware of the implications of cruelties and injustice arising from violence in practice in the society of his time. Thus, Amitav Ghosh projects socio-political problems of individuals in clash between communal groups and nationalism. Even though, the novel, The Shadow Lines transcends the restricted category of sociological novels.