Before analyzing the concept of transcending nation in any work of literature in general and novel in particular, it is required to study the relationship between nation and novel. Amitav Ghosh himself establishes this relationship when he says:

The novel as a form was vigorously international from the start; we know that Spanish, English, French, and Russian novelists have read each other’s work avidly since the eighteenth century. And yet the paradox of the novel as a form is that it is founded upon a myth of parochialism, in the exact sense of a parish – a place named and charted, a definite location. A novel, in other words, must always be set somewhere: it must have its setting, and within the evolution of the narrative this setting must, classically, play a part almost as important as those of the characters themselves. Location is thus intrinsic to a novel; we are at a loss to imagine its absence, no matter whether that place be Mrs. Gaskell’s Cranford or Joyce’s Dublin. A poem can create its setting and atmosphere out of verbal texture alone; not so as a novel (Ghosh, 2005: 110).

Novel is very intricately related to the idea of place- both geographical and psychological and therefore novel and nation have been evolving simultaneously. On the other hand, the literary forms like drama and poetry that are not so closely related to place are on decline. Amitav Ghosh further attests the relationship between novel and place when he says:
This, then, is the peculiar paradox of the novel. Those of us who love novels often read them because of the eloquence with which they communicate a ‘sense of place.’ Yet the truth is that it is the very loss of a lived sense of place that makes their fictional representation possible (Ghosh, 2005: 119).

This statement makes it clear that the idea of modern nation is a product of discursive practices including novel. Therefore, a discussion on the ways and means to transcend nation and its impact on the Orient is based on discursive construction of nation. There are innumerable definitions of nation and nationalism however, the one given by Deleuze and Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus* is adopted and adapted for study of nation, nationalism, transnationalism and the act of transcending nation in Amitav Ghosh’s *The Shadow Lines*. According to them, “a nation-state, in the most diverse forms, is precisely the State as a model of realization (Deleuze: 456). Nations are not born out of vacuum rather they are “constituted in an active struggle against the imperial or evolved systems, the feudal systems, and the autonomous cities” (Deleuze: 456). However, once they emerge, they themselves become the source of violence as “they crush their own ‘minorities,” in other words, minoritarian phenomena that could be termed “nationalitarian,” which work from within and if need be turn to the old codes to find a greater degree of freedom” (Deleuze: 456) becomes a permanent feature of nations.

A close study of *The Shadow Lines* reveals the presence of the idea of nation as “minoritarian phenomena that could be termed “nationalitarian,” through the incidents related to the life of Ila in London, Grandmother’s idea of nationalism and murder of Tridib by a nationalist mob in Dhaka. Another major relationship foregrounded in this novel is between national land and the citizens. Deleuze and Guattari theorize this relationship as:
The constituents of the nation are a land and a people: the “natal,” which is not necessarily innate, and the “popular,” which is not necessarily pregiven. The problem of the nation is aggravated in the two extreme cases of a land without a people and a people without a land. How can a people and a land be made, in other words, a nation—a refrain? The coldest and bloodiest means vie with upsurges of romanticism. The axiomatic is complex, and is not without passions. The natal or the land, as we have seen elsewhere, implies a certain deterritorialization of the territories (community land, imperial provinces, seigneurial domains, etc.), and the people, a decoding of the population (Deleuze: 456).

It indicates that nation is constituted of numerous elements having a very intricate relationship with each other, Deleuze and Guattari highlight this relationship between people, capital, land, discourses and structures of nation and modern state as:

The nation is constituted on the basis of these flows and is inseparable from the modern State that gives consistency to the corresponding land and people. It is the flow of naked labor that makes the people, just as it is the flow of Capital that makes the land and its industrial base. In short, the nation is the very operation of a collective subjectification, to which the modern State corresponds as a process of subjection. It is in the form of the nation-state, with all its possible variations, that the State becomes the model of realization for the capitalist axiomatic. This is not at all to say that nations are appearances or ideological phenomena; on the contrary, they are
the passional and living forms in which the qualitative homogeneity and the quantitative competition of abstract capital are first realized (Deleuze: 456).

It means capital, the most important factor behind colonialism and now neo-colonialism is also the most important part of modern nation state even in case of newly independent states. It implies that any act of transcending nation is an effort to move from one kind of capitalistic structure to another kind of capitalistic structure. The idea of transcending nation has nothing to do with bringing out positive changes in the life of people. Furthermore, only the people who are constituents of nation can transcend the nation, mere citizenship of a nation does not enable one to transcend the nation. One must possess a nation to transcend it as in case of Ila’s family that is in the government service for many generations and enjoying all the privileges due to this position. On the other hand, the poor people, the outcastes, and the rag pickers are not even considered citizens, rather they are considered burden on the nation and equated with filth despite the fact that they have made largest contribution in the nation building. The question is whether these people can transcend the nation, when they do not have a nation in the sense Ila has. Tha’mma is located in the middle of these two points. She is trying to claim a nation for herself, which is evident from her bid to show herself more patriotic than Ila’s family.

Benedict Anderson’s work on nation and nationalism is very relevant to the understanding of ideas of nation in the world of *The Shadow Lines*. He agrees with Deleuze and Guattari when he says “nationality”, “Nation-ness” “as well as nationalism, are cultural artefacts of a particular kind” (Anderson: 13) that are imagined by “political community” and are “inherently limited and sovereign” (Anderson: 19). The emergence of nations coincides with the emergence of capitalism that created new kinds of “flows” which
manifest in the imaginative construction of nation that is far from being homogeneous rather fraught with inconsistencies. To prove this point Anderson refers to President Sukarno’s view that Indonesia has endured three hundred and fifty years of colonialism despite the fact that “Indonesia is a twentieth century invention, and most of today’s Indonesia was only conquered by the Dutch between 1850 and 1910” (Anderson: 19). Echo of this concept can be heard in almost whole of the Third World including India, the locale of this novel. The so-called nationalist politicians in these countries try to create the myth of ancient nationalist culture by erasing many historical facts from the memory of people. For instance, most of the newly independent countries were created as a political unit by the colonial powers as their borders were drawn not by these countries but by the colonizers to suit their requirements to rule over other countries.

In the post-colonial Third World, these borders have become very important for the nations and their citizens, because in most of the cases the majority group invents an ancient national culture and want all citizens to follow it therefore anyone unwilling to conform to this internal colonization is rendered homeless within the nation. As compared to earlier dynastic empires, modern nation states are “legally demarcated territory” (Anderson: 26). The monarchial state of earlier times was defined by the centers and the “borders were porous and indistinct and sovereignties faded imperceptibly into one another (Anderson: 26). This is the reason how the “pre-modern empires and kingdoms were able to sustain their rule over immensely heterogeneous and often not even contiguous populations for long periods of time (Anderson: 26) without any communal riots or the problem of national identity.
Ghosh further adds to this concept by problematizing the national borders not just the ones on the boundary but also the ones in the psyche of the people, according to him, the greater freedom of movement in the world.... In the 12th century, people developed a much more sophisticated language of cultural negotiation than we know today. They were able to include different cultures in their lives, while maintaining what was distinct about themselves (Ghosh, 1993: 52).

Ghosh in this novel questions the non-porous nature of national boundaries especially the ones in the psyche of people, to cross these borders is much more difficult as compared to political borders. For instance, many characters in the novel cross national borders without any difficulty but crossing psychological boundaries proves most difficult and risky as is evident in case Tha’mma’s mental landscape where national boundaries are clearer than on the land, and Tridib’s murder at the hands of purportedly nationalist mob.

This “textual attitude” (Said: 83) towards nation and nationalism has a long history starting right from the day when printing became a reality. Anderson investigates the mode of writing evolved after print capitalism that both precipitated the creation of imagined communities of the nation-states and the structures “which made it possible for rapidly growing numbers of people to think about themselves and to relate themselves to others in profoundly new ways” (Anderson: 40). Print capitalism changed the “flow” of capital in society and carved nation out of a borderless society, and marginalized all deterritorialized social spaces as Aijaz Ahmad says:

As we look back at some of the most powerful developments up to the eighteenth century, we find that the locus of literary production- certainly
for those immense movements which changed the face of India in their own
time - was most frequently not the urban elite but the life-process of the
artisanate, the peasantry, the women, the shudras, the precariously located
clusters of dissent. With the arrival of the printing presses, however,
‘literary’ has come to mean that which we see in printed form, and because
of this privileging of print in a predominantly non-literate society, the social
weight in the very process of literary production has shifted towards the
leisured class and the professional petty bourgeoisie, away from the
alternative modes of preservation and transmission which do not involve
print and are then involved also in modes of evaluation rather different from
those of the print culture (emphasis in the original) (Ahmad: 254-255).

This is how the print capitalism changed the face of society in India. It started
territorializing the nation by establishing intimacy between newly emerged author and
reader the two constituents of nation on a very different level by marginalizing the pro-
people non-nationalist discourses. According to Hind Wassef print capitalism allows,

[F]or simultaneity of events which depicts the throbbing activity of the
different members of the nation imagining but unaware of each other’s
existence. The disseminated information, particularly in the newspaper,
builds the community around it by allowing for sharing of common “facts.”
This has particular relevance to The Shadow Lines where the most important
event for the narrator, the riots which lead to Tridib’s death, risks being
eternally lost if not recorded, and is denied the national importance that
would earn it a place in the press. This shows the separation that exists
between official history and the more personal history the narrator is engaged in writing. Indeed the importance of writing is construed when it is the written word that defies forgetting and survives the passing of time by entering History (Wassef: 77).

At one level, print capitalism establishes communication between the writer and the reader at another level it distances them from the “life-process of the artisanate, the peasantry, the women, the shudras, the precariously located clusters of dissent” (emphasis in the original) (Ahmad: 254) and pushes them towards the mental landscape where they create “Imaginary Homeland” as Salman Rushdie explains in a different context when he says, “alienation” of writers either physically or psychologically from the nation means that they “will not be capable of reclaiming precisely the thing that is lost” therefore they “create fictions, not actual cities or villages but invisible ones, imaginary homelands, Indias of the mind” (Rushdie: 10) that comes in conflict with the real nation.

The Third World ruling elite is alienated from the real life with all intricate relations with different elements across time and space. At one level, this alienation is due to socio-economic and political location of the ruling elite at another level when it tries to know life in its own country it does so through the texts written, published and canonized by the Orientalist scholars who had their own prejudices and limitations when they documented the life. Amitav Ghosh points at this textual attitude of the ruling elite in Orient through Tha’mma’s ideas of nationalism, which are more exclusive than inclusive. She, who is herself a refugee and wants to bring one of her relatives from Dhaka who will be a refugee in Calcutta, has utmost dislike for the lower caste refugees. She considers them cause of all problems and equates them with filth. Before the arrival of the refugees, Calcutta was
full of “rice fields running alongside the road; it was the kind of place where rich Calcutta people built garden houses” (Ghosh, 1988: 145). However, after the arrival of the refugees the same place is “as filthy as a babui’s nest” (Ghosh, 1988: 145).

Despite his achievement, in questioning nationalism Ghosh fails to transcend the upper caste religious nationalism because he diagnoses its cause in the nature of individual while the real cause lies in the historical construction of the consciousness of the Orient. This particular tendency in the novels of Amitav Ghosh makes him a post-modern novelist as the novelists of post-modernist era he tries to free literature from the

[L]imited spheres of nationalism, language, or ethnicity. The cages in which writers were once confined have now been sprung open. Essentially, the problem of alienation is less acute today, because the world is so much more complex, so polyglot, so full of competing voices, that most writers have become nations unto themselves (Alter: 13).

The Shadow Lines is very important for the study of various kinds of nationalism such as orthodox nationalism of Tha’mma, Price family as humane face of the British nationalism generated colonialism, nationalism that causes communal riots and renders its own citizens homeless. Life and occasional outbursts of narrator’s grandmother gives an idea of nationalism that starts with romanticism and transforms into orthodox nationalism and finally into fascism. Her encounter with nationalism starts during her college days before the formation of the Republic of India. She was born, brought up and educated in Dhaka, which turns into enemy territory after the departure of colonial authorities, to borrow Deleuze and Guattari’s idea; nation was deterritorialized and reterritorialized not only in terms of geography but also psychologically.
She narrates her college life experiences of nationalism to her grandson and recollects how the police arrested one of the students in her class for taking part in nationalist activities. However, Tridib who is depicted as a transnational subject calls it “terrorist movement amongst nationalists in Bengal” who are experts in “home-made bombs with which they tried to assassinate British officials and policemen” (Ghosh, 1988: 41), without taking into account the atrocities perpetrated by colonial authorities on people. On the other hand, Tha’mma gets emotional while narrating this story as the narrator sees her “drawing her knuckles across moist eyes” (Ghosh, 1988: 42). At this juncture the villagers who are not yet co-opted into the discourse of nationalism and still people without nation (in the discursive sense) handover these nationalists to the British, are called “treacherous villagers who had been bought with English money” (Ghosh, 1988: 43), without considering the fact that many of the nationalists were fighting for abstract ideals and their nationalism was useless for poor people, untouchables and farmers because it was not for eradicating social discrimination but for maintaining it.

She still carries an unfulfilled dream of her participation in the nationalist movement. She says if given a chance, she would have killed the British for freedom. Here the author problematizes her desire to be free through the outburst of Robi, who based on his experiences considers this desire fatal for people because pictures of dead people in Newspapers in “Assam, the northeast, Punjab, Sri Lanka, Tripura – people shot by terrorists and separatists and the army and the police” have only one reason “everyone’s doing it to be free (Ghosh, 1988: 271).

This statement reveals the inherent contradictions in the grandmother’s nationalism and points it out as a divisive idea at least in the Third World. This violent aspect of
nationalism that Robi locates elsewhere is also present in his own family, in the character of the grandmother who once harbored a romantic idea to free Dhaka from the colonial rule. However, the same place has become, under the sway of another kind of nationalism, a hostile place to be destroyed at any cost therefore, she donates her jewellery “to the fund for the war” (Ghosh, 1988: 261). She tries to convince the narrator in particular and entire nation in general when she says “For your sake; for your freedom. We have to kill them before they kill us; we have to wipe them out” (Ghosh, 1988: 261). Her hatred for the cultural other that also become political other is foregrounded when she cries, “We’re fighting them properly at last, with tanks and guns and bombs” (Ghosh, 1988: 261). She tries to justify this fascist nationalism by alluding to European nationalism and tells the narrator that England as a nation was created with “hundreds of years, years and years of war and bloodshed (Ghosh, 1988: 85-86). Each person living there has contributed “their brother’s blood and their father’s blood and their son’s blood. They know they’re a nation because they’ve drawn their borders with blood….War is their religion (Ghosh, 1988: 85-86).

The writer tries to justify the violent nationalism of Tha’mma through a statement on Indian nationalism by Europeans. It is about the experiences of Shaheb, Tridib’s father when he went to England for the first time and staying with Price family there one of their family friend “Mike had taken an immediate dislike to the Shaheb” (Ghosh, 1988: 69) taking him as an other to his European self. When Shaheb answers, “I’m Indian. Mike shut one bleary eye and looked him up and down. You don’t look much of an Indian to me (Ghosh, 1988: 69). Mike asks him “Killed any Englishmen yet?” when Shaheb answers no Mike retorts him “what makes you Indian then” (Ghosh, 1988: 69)?
She demands same kind of warmongering from her fellow citizens, which they display sometimes on the political national border and sometimes within the nation in the form of communal riots. Tha’mma is a representative of large number of people for whom unity of nation can come only through imposition of homogeneity she expresses this popular sentiment as, “That’s what it takes to make a country” people have to forget “they were born this or that, Muslim or Hindu, Bengali or Punjabi: they become a family born of the same pool of blood. That is what you have to achieve for India” (Ghosh, 1988: 86). Very ironically, when there is no external enemy to fight with the Indian nation fragments into so many contesting identities.

The elements of fascism visible in the character of Tha’mma in particular and a large section of middle class that Ila calls her “warmongering fascists” (Ghosh, 1988: 86) is defended by the author in a very subtle manner when he says, “she was not a fascist, she was only a modern middle-class woman…. All she wanted was a middle-class life in which, like the middle classes the world over, she would thrive believing in the unity of nationhood and territory, of self-respect and national power; that was all she wanted – a modern middle-class life (emphasis in the original) (Ghosh, 1988: 86).

Here despite being a critic of all kinds of fascisms Ghosh fails to locate the micro-centers of fascism in ordinary people like Tha’mma as highlighted by Jacques Lizot:

But fascism is inseparable from a proliferation of molecular focuses in interaction, which skip from point to point, before beginning to resonate together in the National Socialist State. Rural fascism and city or neighborhood fascism, youth fascism and war veteran’s fascism, fascism of the Left and fascism of the Right, fascism of the couple, family, school, and
office: every fascism is defined by a micro-black hole that stands on its own and communicates with the others, before resonating in a great, generalized central black hole (emphasis in the original) (Lizot: 118).

These micro-centers of fascism did not appear all of a sudden, there is a lot of intellectual investment by Orientalist scholars behind it that created divisive lines by textualizing religious differences. Much earlier than the publication of this novel Frantz Fanon predicted the fate of nationalism in newly independent Third World nations, where national “consciousness, instead of being the all-embracing crystallization of the innermost hopes of the whole people, instead of being the immediate and most obvious result of the mobilization of the people, will be in any case only an empty shell, a crude and fragile travesty of what it might have been” (Fanon: 148-149).

Under such circumstances “the nation is passed over for the race, and the tribe is preferred to the state” (Fanon: 148-149). He charts the stages of nationalism in the Third World as, “From nationalism we have passed to ultra-nationalism, to chauvinism, and finally to racism” (Fanon: 156). India, the locale of this novel also passes through these stages and culminates in the rule of ultra-nationalist party that invokes the glorious past oftentimes and promotes racism all the times.

According to Frantz Fanon, colonial rule is not the only reason behind the failure in the development of national consciousness in the Orient “is not solely the result of the mutilation of the colonized people by the colonial regime. It is also the result of the intellectual laziness of the national middle class, of its spiritual penury, and of the profoundly cosmopolitan mold that its mind is set in” (Fanon: 149). He further says, “the national middle class constantly demands the nationalization of the economy and of the
trading sectors.... To them, nationalization quite simply means the transfer into native hands of those unfair advantages which are a legacy of the colonial period (Fanon: 152).

This idea given by Frantz Fanon locates Tha’mma’s ultra-nationalism that represents a large section of middle class, in desire to move upwards economically. Neither Tha’mma’s family nor Mayadebi’s family ever took part in struggle for freedom, husbands of both of them worked for the colonial authorities. Unfortunately, after the death of Tha’mma’s husband her family’s economic status declined to the level of lower middle class despite having similar qualifications. On the other hand, Maya’s family enjoys all the privileges simply because they are part of national government. Therefore, her outburst on nationalism is actually a desperate effort to become a part of official nation/alism that her family is not.

If Tha’mma is taken as a representative of middle class that can even support fascism to get a share in the national resources then in her depiction Ghosh confirms to Faure’s conception of Orient and Orientals that their “bodies are lazy, that the Orient has no conception of history, of the nation, or of patrie, that the Orient is essentially mystical—and so on… unless the Oriental learns to be rational, to develop techniques of knowledge and positivity, there can be no rapprochement between East and West” (emphasis in the original) (Faure: 263). Similarly, Vatikiotis, a renowned and influential Orientalist claims that revolution in the Orient cannot be attained because the “major source of political conflict and potential revolution in many countries of the Middle East, as well as Africa and Asia today, is the inability of so-called radical nationalist regimes and movements to manage, let alone resolve, the social, economic and political problems of independence” (Vatikiotis: 12).
In this novel, Amitav Ghosh apparently problematizes the idea of nationalism however; he fails to transcend the Orientalist construction that has become a way to define Oriental nations. He ignores a very important section of leaders from India who fought against colonialism but criticized orthodox nationalism at the same time. This group of Indian leaders including Tagore, Bhagat Singh and Ambedkar escape the Orientalist construction of leadership in the Orient. Rather they were far ahead of their Western counterparts in understanding the pitfalls of nationalism. For instance, Tagore very categorically says he was not “against one nation in particular, but against the general idea of all nations” (Tagore: 131). He locates the source of colonialism in nationalism, which according to him is a device by which people who love “freedom perpetuates slavery in a large portion of the world with the comfortable feeling of pride of having done its duty” (Tagore: 132).

Even in the pre-independence era when Indians were struggling for freedom, nationalism was considered necessary, and benevolent he could call nationalism, “a great menace. It is the particular thing which for years has been at the bottom of India’s troubles. And inasmuch as we have been ruled and dominated by a nation that is strictly political in its attitude” (Tagore: 133). For him and other revolutionaries freedom was not just getting rid of the British Colonialism rather it was:

[T]o remove those social customs and ideals which have generated a want of self-respect and a complete dependence on those above us, a state of affairs which has been brought about entirely by the domination in India of the caste system, and the blind and lazy habit of relying upon the authority
of traditions that are incongruous anachronisms in the present age (Tagore: 135).

He strongly believed that in the absence of freedom from the inherited, invented and imposed traditions and thought processes “political freedom does not give us freedom when our mind is not free” (Tagore: 143). He further criticizes the kind of freedom challenged by the author through Robi in much clearer and political terms when he says:

[T]hose people who have got their political freedom are not necessarily free, they are merely powerful. The passions which are unbridled in them are creating huge organizations of slavery in the disguise of freedom…. Those who are enamoured of their political power and gloat over their extension of dominion over foreign races gradually surrender their own freedom and humanity to the organizations necessary for holding other peoples in slavery. In the so called free countries the majority of the people are not free, they are driven by the minority to a goal which is not even known to them. This becomes possible only because people- do not acknowledge moral and spiritual freedom as their object (Tagore: 143).

Here he becomes a critic of Western nationalism propelled by capitalism, which is taken as standard form of nationalism by the politicians in the Orient because it suits the neocolonialism that extends its influence on the Orient through these politicians. Then he gives a piece of advice “my countrymen will gain truly their India by fighting against that education which teaches them that a country is greater than the ideals of humanity” (Tagore: 127) which has a universal applicability across time and space.
Instead of looking into this dimension of transcending nationalism without crossing borders, Ghosh makes his characters cross borders. Very strangely, they find the “ideals of humanity” only in the First World firstly when they stay with Price family later when Ila lives in a rented house and takes part in socio-cultural life of England. This simple way to transcend the nation by migrating to Europe depicts the Orient in Oriental Colours and is futile because only the highly privileged sections can avail themselves of it. Communalisms is not a cultural problem as projected by most of the thinkers and uphold by Amitav Ghosh in this novel rather it is a political and economic problem as depicted by Bhisham Sahni in his novel *Tamas*, a novel based on communal riots. Ghosh belongs to the first group of thinkers who believe that communal riots illustrate the failure of national culture to “live with differences” (Khilnani: 202). It recognizes the tension that exists between the homogenizing official narrative of the nation and the actual splits and contradictions of national space that Bhabha describes as “the heterogeneous histories of contending peoples, antagonistic authorities and tense locations of cultural difference” (Bhabha: 148). What Bhabha, Ghosh and other thinkers see as the root cause of communal riots i.e. cultural differences does not fit into the larger history of India that has always been a country inhabited by people of innumerable religiosities and cultures living harmoniously. The cause of communalism lies in the Orientalist’s crystallization of rather fluid religions and cultures and then in the emergence of leaders in these compartmentalized cultures contesting for power. Another major thinker Peter van der Veer also traces the source of communalism not in culture but in politics when he says, “In the construction of the Muslim “other” by Hindu nationalist movements, Muslims are
always referred to as a dangerous “foreign element”, as not truly Indian. The partition of 1947 […] has given this construction a strongly “realistic” aspect. (van der Veer: 10).

This statement indicates the role played by politicians, privileged sections, rich people, media houses, educational institutions, colonial authorities and innumerable other factors in reinforcing the naturalness of division between Hindus and Muslims despite cultural hybridity. After the partition, the lines of division did not fade rather all the forces responsible for the divide camouflaged themselves as nationalists and “justified the horror and bloodshed of partition on the grounds that the borders delineated were necessary” (Gabriel: 45) and convinced the people of middle class like Tha’mma that, “across the border there existed another reality.” (Ghosh, 1988: 241). This novel is partially successful in problematizing nationalism when Tha’mma comes to know that she would not see any borderline between India and East Pakistan, and she asks “if there’s no difference both sides will be the same; it’ll be just like it used to be before…. What was it all for then—partition and all the killing and everything—if there isn’t something in between?” (Ghosh, 1988: 167). For the Indians who have imbibed the discourse of nationalism that is orthodox and divisive in nature and believe that partition was compulsory to demarcate the boundaries not just between two nations but also between two religions.

Lines of division have special significance in this novel the characters either try to draw lines or they try to transcend lines. Tha’mma the only representative of the group who believes in national culture within national borders, is mentally deranged when her “special enchantment in lines” (Ghosh, 1988: 257) is proved a mere illusion. Tha’mma’s enchantment in lines started in her childhood when her ancestral house in Dhaka was partitioned, the family erected a wall to divide the ancestral house equally “down to the
 minutest detail” even “bisecting an old commode” (Ghosh, 1988: 136). Her uncle Jethamoshai and his younger brother become symbols of Oriental politicians for whom their own interests are more important than family. Actually, the line is between two persons who forcibly become representatives of their respective families otherwise rest of the family still have same feeling for each other as is evident from the fact that Maya’s marriage was arranged by the women of Jathamoshai’s family. However, with the passage of time the dividing line and its feeling starts dominating the psyche of people on both sides, as Tha’mma in her childhood starts inventing stories about her uncle’s house on the other side of the wall initially to amuse her younger sister. Later on, the house on the other side starts taking shape as an “upside-down house” (Ghosh, 1988: 138). For Tha’mma this myth breaks only when she actually visits the house in her old age and discovers that this side resembles her own side. However, by the time, she gets out of mythically created negative image of another half of the same house she is trapped in another binary division and Dhaka becomes an enemy territory. Dhaka does not become an enemy territory due to the presence of political boundaries in between rather it is because of nationalistic rhetoric in both states that continues to range Muslims against Hindus by posing them as each other’s other. The novel fails to indicate that identities such as Muslim and Hindus are against each other simply not because of religious reasons, rather political, social, economic circumstances and historical forces determine the contexts within which difference is constructed. Instead of looking into this dimension Ghosh locates the cause of this antagonism in individual as evident from the incident when the communal riots break out in Calcutta, narrator’s friend, Mansur is transformed into an enemy, the Muslim other in the eyes of Sikh and Hindu classmates without any rhyme or reason and just in the
span of night. Here a peep into the history of development of this divisive consciousness will change the entire story.

Amitav Ghosh assumes the national identity is rooted in the sense of belongingness to land therefore he challenges it through “Going Away” and “Coming Home” names of two chapters in The Shadow Lines. These chapters narrate two important journeys – Tridib’s journey to England in 1939 and Tha’mma’s journey to Dhaka in 1964. Tha’mma’s journey is more important here because along with physical movement it problematizes the grammar of movement when the narrator says, “Every language assumes a centrality, a fixed and settled point to go away from and 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 verbs of movement” (Ghosh, 1988: 169). Through this comment, Ghosh questions the nationalism of Tha’mma with regard to motherland that has changed from Mother Dhaka to Mother India. This change in belongingness to land has created a confusing situation for the grandmother and she says she will “come home to Dhaka” (Ghosh, 1988: 168) instead of going home to Dhaka. Later on the narrator feels that the confusion in the mind of grandmother is due to assimilation of grammar of nationalism that propounds home as a fixed thing.

To counter Tha’mma’s concept of rooted home and identity the author has created the character of Tridib for whom home lacks fixed meaning and “does not merely exist that it has to be invented in one’s imagination” (Ghosh, 1988: 23). This power of imagination plays a very important role in understanding the world because if one does not invent a world for oneself then “the alternative wasn’t blankness-it only meant. . . we would never
be free of other people’s inventions” (Ghosh, 1988: 35). Even one has to free oneself from one’s own inventions and invent fresh things continuously as in case of Ila “the inventions she lived in moved with her, so that although she had lived in many places, she never traveled at all” (Ghosh, 1988: 23).

Later on, the narrator of the novel also learns to transcend the nation through imagination when he realizes that there is something more complex than the bordered reality. This solution provided by Ghosh has a problem that the official discourse of national identity with focus on divisions and differences is also invented in the imagination. A better solution lies in going back to real life and see how people living a hybrid life hardly care for the religious identities, for them struggles of routine life are more important. Amitav Ghosh depicts one such incident in the novel but not as a solution. The life of Jethamoshai, a person with orthodox religious nature who “wouldn’t let a Muslim’s shadow pass within ten feet of his food” (Ghosh, 1988: 231) is an example of ordinary masses who do not care for national identity based on religion. For him family life is the only universe in which he lives and family feuds dominate his mind therefore when his own family members leave the house he goes “around looking for people to move into the house because he was afraid his brother’s family would come back to claim their share” (Ghosh, 1988: 232). Years later Tridib reminds him that they are his relatives he at once remembers Tha’mma and Maya with antagonism “They had two daughters: one with a face like a vulture, and another one who was as poisonous as a cobra but all pretty and goody-goody to look at….They both went junketing off somewhere, … I’m just waiting for them to come back…..so that I can drag them through every court in the land up to the Viceroy’s Council (Ghosh, 1988: 236).
The author has depicted him as a person with imbalanced mind who is unaware of partition however contrary to first depiction; his sanity becomes visible when he says, “I told my sons when they took the 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 there they decide to draw another line somewhere? What will you do then? Where will you move to? No one will have you anywhere. As for me, I was born here, and I’ll die here (Ghosh, 1988: 237). This is the approach if developed by the author could have challenged the idea of nationalism. However, the author leaves this approach and takes up “minoritarian” approach to nationalism. The narrator tries to understand the problem of communalism by drawing circles on the pages of Tridib’s copy of Bartholomew’s Atlas. Here narrator’s act of “reading a map represents a profound act of faith… in the idea of the map—that the unique mosaic of boundaries and symbols corresponds to real space in what we like to call the real world” (Hall: 369). However even while dealing with the political map of the world he excludes the politics of European colonialism responsible for the creation of modern nations as political units. To establish a relationship between political map and cultural map in this region he tries to draw a circle with “Khulna at the centre and Srinagar on the circumference” and discovers geographically “Chiang Mai in Thailand was much nearer Calcutta than Delhi is; that Chengdu in China is nearer than Srinagar” (Ghosh, 1988: 255) however, culturally the situation is different as he says, “and yet did the people of Khulna care at all about the fate of the mosques in Vietnam and South China (a mere stone’s throw away)? I doubted it” (Ghosh, 1988: 256). Then he draws one more circle with “Milan as its centre and 1200 miles as its radius” (Ghosh, 1988: 256) and tries to compare it with cultural aspect of the first map “I tried to imagine an event that might happen in any of
those places which would bring the people of Milan pouring out into the streets. I tried hard but I could think of none. None, that is, other than war. It seemed to me, then, that within this circle there were only states and citizens; there were no people at all” (Ghosh, 1988: 256). Through this comparison he infers that when it comes to communal riots “Dhaka and Calcutta were more closely bound to each other than after they had drawn their lines – so closely that I, in Calcutta, had only to look into the mirror to be in Dhaka; a moment when each city was the inverted image of the other, locked into an irreversible symmetry by the line that was to set us free – our looking-glass border” (Ghosh, 1988: 257). This statement of the author only confirms Orientalist idea of Orient as incapable of handling national, cultural and religious matters. He does not go into the historicity of borders in this region before the British arrival; this region was ruled by good number of dynasties containing people of diverse cultural and religious identities, and just like Europe fighting only in wars. The situation started changing during British colonial era when political parties were established to share and contest the democratic space of electoral politics made available by colonial authorities. The political parties, which were initially established to have share in the management of the country under British rule started taking religious colors for instance, Dr. Annie Besant the founder of Home Rule League had to resign because the League had “become so intertwined with religion” (Bolitho: 83). Jinnah one of the important members of the League also resigned and when asked by Mahatma Gandhi to rejoin the League he expressed his dissatisfaction about the mingling of religion with nationalism when and wrote:

your methods have already caused split and division in almost every institution that you have approached hitherto . . . people generally are
desperate all over the country and your extreme programme has for the moment struck the imagination mostly of the inexperienced youth and the ignorant and the illiterate. All this means complete disorganization and chaos. What the consequences of this may be, I shudder to contemplate (Bolitho: 84).

It marks the beginning of imagining nation on communal lines that manifested in the communal riots in many parts of India “inspired by the old problem of cow-killing, by Muslims and Christians, … Jinnah was writing hopeful speeches, planned to awaken India to the virtues of unity, he had to contend with Gandhi’s different view, and his declaration that the Hindus ‘would not mind forcing, even at the point of the sword, either the Christians or the Mohammedans to abandon cow-slaughter.” (Bolitho: 73). Then there were political outfits like Hindu Mahasabha and Muslim League built on communal lines invented points of division in the otherwise hybrid culture of this region. These two parties were mirror images of each other. There was increase in the sphere of their influence that resulted in the increase in the size of the mirror image discussed by Amitav Ghosh in this novel. By 1947, these mirror images resulted in the partition and caused a lot of bloodshed. Even after partition these political outfits did not do away with mirror images because it has always been the easiest way to justify the violence perpetrated to strike some negotiation with the elected government or to gain political advantage. Tridib’s murder in the novel is the result of political pressure tactics otherwise; no one in the crowd knows his religion.

Though Ghosh misses the opportunity to look into the role of colonialism in the process of creating cultural and religious others, he succeeds in highlighting that Europe is
also not free from the process of creating others as is evident from the kind of treatment Ila gets in England. The story of Magda narrated by Ila to the narrator is actually her own story with a slight change in the ending. Denise, the big girl who beats Ila, and Nick, her host who does not want to be seen in the company of any Asians has communal undertone, if seen in comparison to the attitude of Hindu and Sikh students towards a Muslim boy in the wake of communal riots in Calcutta.

The nation questioned by Amitav Ghosh also discriminates on gender basis. When Ila wants to dance, Robi as a spokesperson for national culture says, “You shouldn’t have done what you did. You ought to know that; girls don’t behave like that here…if I’m around. Girls don’t behave like that here. You can do what you like in England, he said but here there are certain things you cannot do. That’s our culture; that’s how we live” (Ghosh, 1988: 97). Here the author gives the easiest way to transcend by moving to another nation as she says, “Do you see now why I’ve chosen to live in London? Do you see? It’s only because I want to be free…Free of you! … Free of your bloody culture and free of all of you” (emphasis in the original) (Ghosh, 1988: 98). The grandmother, another advocate of national culture calls Ila “a greedy little slut” (Ghosh, 1988: 87) living in England for the “money and comforts” and further blames her, “She wants to be left alone to do what she pleases; that’s all that any whore would want. She’ll find it easily enough over there; that’s what those places have to offer. But that is not what it means to be free” (Ghosh, 1988: 98). The grandmother has a contempt for the “freedom that could be bought for the price of an air ticket” (Ghosh, 1988: 98). Here again Amitav Ghosh misses the opportunity to investigate the origin of this anti-women nationalism. The rights, the respect and opportunities for which Tha’mma struggles when she becomes a widow and Ila’s struggle
for freedom were curtailed by colonial hangover of Indians whose sensibilities were shaped by Victorian age.

This anti-women attitude of Indians has a lot to do with the British colonial rule. During the colonial period, the British authorities found powerful, individualized and vocal women as bad and dangerous. Therefore, they destroyed the pro-women discourses and movements and canonized the domesticated and muted women as the image of real Indian woman. In this, project of theirs they invoked the male pride of Indians, which was hurt due to the defeat at the hands of colonial authorities, and felt some assurance to regain the lost position at least in the domestic space. This new hierarchy led to the rereading and new interpretation of Brahmanical scriptures that destroyed the independent and powerful position of Indian women. Based on their interpretation of these texts the British authorities outlawed the independent, vocal women and promoted the image of domesticated and submissive woman. For instance, troupes of women singers popularly known as jhumur troupes “became objects of virulent censure” (Dutt: 29-30), because the colonial authorities disliked them as women in England in particular and Europe in general did not enjoy this much of freedom and authority. This dislike is evident from the memorandum on the indigenous work (1820) given by E. S. Montagu, Secretary of the Calcutta School Book Society. According to him, works of these women poets are to be, “lamented, as manifesting aloud the degraded state of those minds which will take such pleasure therein” (Banerjee: 149). This antagonism towards women artists was mainly because they were independent and enjoyed a respectable status. Reverend James Ward’s statement reflects the British colonial authorities’ antagonism when he compares the women jhumur troupes with a poor ballad singer and says, “A poor ballad singer in England, would be sent to the
house of correction, and flogged, for performing the meritorious actions of these wretched idolators” (Bose: 118-119).

The colonial authorities worked on two levels on the one level they tried to persuade the natives about the inferiority of this culture as Mr. Montagu succeeded in converting “one Pundit” to his viewpoint, as recorded in “Third Report of the Calcutta School Book Society” (1819-20), app. no. 2. P. 47, “Subsequently he in conjunction with some other natives concurred among themselves to express their dissatisfaction with such works…” (Banerjee: 149), secondly they took the help of official machinery. Women’s powerful discourses disappeared slowly “Because of the police, in many places their clubs have been closed down” (Lahiri: 1041). All these examples prove that the British colonial authorities in conjunction with Indian patriarchal system propounded and canonized the concept of good Indian Women and bad Indian women by using various means. This idea is so firmly engraved in the Indian psyche that almost all so-called nationalist thinkers reaffirm only these ideas in the name of decolonization.

Like a genetic engineer, the colonial intervention was successful in removing the progressive and challenging linguistic elements found in the form of women’s and lower castes’ discourses to a large extent by using various means. This social engineering resulted in a new breed of women in bhadralok homes who, by their discourses, writings, and so-called cultivated patterns of behavior replaced women’s popular culture in Indian middle class society. The women of upper strata discarded the old popular culture, which had rested on the social ties binding together women from different castes and classes. Only the women of the lower social strata who did not relinquish their commitment to it as rapidly as the others did retained that culture. Finally, even they had to grasp the logic of an altered
social world, and the old forms of women’s popular culture withered. Moreover, the males who enjoyed all artistic and cultural production by women artists started castigating the same. Now they could be heard saying,

Look at the streets of Calcutta, how the vulgar lower order right in front of thousands of bhadralok, trampling on the chests of the powerful police force, go around wherever they want to, singing extremely obscene songs and making obscene gestures” after undergoing mutation of linguistic genes in the British imperial lab (Banerjee: 147)!

British colonialism in India changed the configuration of hegemonic powers through socio-linguistic engineering, which manifested in replacing the popular pro-women culture with Vedic culture that was anti-women in many aspects and making it national culture of India. Instead of challenging the phallogocentric nationalism through highlighting the role of British colonialism, he searches for a solution in cosmopolitan upbringing of Ila. She decides to leave India to be free from so-called Indian national culture that denies her the basic human dignity and freedom. Ironically, the physical movement does not benefit her much and she finds herself trapped in the figure of exotic Oriental female. Nick marries her not because he loves her but because like the colonizers of earlier times he finds Oriental women a gateway to conquer the Orient as Ila herself accepts, “the woman who’d answered the phone was from Martinique…. He’s got an Indonesian woman in line too, somewhere. And there’s me, of course.... He said he just likes a bit of variety; it’s his way of travelling” (Ghosh, 1988: 208). This statement about Nick’s attitude towards Oriental women echoes John Donne’s poem where he equates India to a beautiful women’s sex organ:
The Nose (like to the first Meridian) runs

…………………………………………..
…………………………………………..
…………………………………………..
Her swelling lips . . . and the streight Hellespont betweene
The Sestos and Abydos of her breasts . . .
And Sailing towards her India, in that way
Shall at her fair Atlantick Navell stay . . .

(Donne: 181)

When the former colonizers are no longer in a position to capture the Oriental geography then contours on Oriental woman’s body become a “way of travelling”.

Movement of people from one place to another in search of better jobs, due to natural calamities, due to social, cultural and political factors, due to personal reasons and many more factors had always been there. Ghosh uses this travel motif to challenge the idea of nation and he takes up the example of Lionel Tresawsen, Mrs. Price’s father. His journey is described as:

Lionel Tresawsen, had left the farm where he’d been born… and gone off to a nearby town to work in a tin mine; how he’d gone on from there – for no matter that he had very little education, he had deft hands, a quick mind and a great deal of ambition – to become the overseer of a tin mine in Malaysia; and then further and further on, all around the world – Fiji, Bolivia, the Guinea Coast, Ceylon – working in mines or warehouses or plantations or whatever came his way; how finally he had surfaced in Calcutta (Ghosh, 1988: 56).
It cannot be taken as a transnational journey because all the time he is travelling only within the British Empire and helping its consolidation by working for the organizations that sustain it economically. Finally, he reaches Calcutta here he develops interest in “spiritualism and begun to attend the meetings of the Theosophical Society in Calcutta, where he met and earned the trust and friendship of a number of leading nationalists… he met Tridib’s grandfather, Mr Justice Chandrashekhar Datta-Chaudhuri, who liked indulging in matters spiritual when the High Court was not in session” (Ghosh, 1988: 57). Here it becomes clear that the nationalism, which becomes the cause of communal riots, is oppressive for women, and is least interested in the uplifting the living standard of people has developed in close proximity of Hindu spiritualism initiated by Orientalist institutions such as Theosophical Society.

Throughout the novel the nation, nationalism and transnationalism discussed in the novel belongs to the middle and upper middle classes and upper castes. The people of lower strata have never been part of nation; rather they are victims of nationalism that provides full security and legal support to the rich and the privileged so that they can exploit them. The author instead of finding fault with the upper caste people, who have hijacked the nation and state, finds fault with the poor as if they have all facilities at their disposal but too timid and lazy to use them. Moreover, he does not investigate the reasons behind their poverty rather through his child narrator he constructs a scene that evokes a feeling of disgust and shame towards them. Even a cursory look into the caste based discrimination and exploitation in India, will show that the writer is partial in the depiction of lower caste people. He also neglects the vital fact that when the upper caste people migrate from East Pakistan they were provided all facilities, they got jobs and their colonies were regularized
on the other hand when the lower caste people migrated they were treated like intruders and the state and society both behaved like antagonists towards them. The author neglects all these facts and projects the lower caste people as worms in filth by choice when he says:

I could see women squatting at the edges of the pools, splashing with both hands to drive back the layers of sludge, scooping up the cleaner water underneath to scrub their babies and wash their clothes and cooking utensils… they had sacks slung over their shoulders. They were picking bits of rubble off the slopes and dropping them into their sacks. I could only see them when they moved; when they were still they disappeared completely – they were perfectly camouflaged, like chameleons, because everything on them, their clothes, their sacks, their skins, was the uniform matt black of the sludge in the pools (Ghosh, 1988: 147).

He compares them with chameleons, the creature that changes colour with surrounding and very difficult to detect. The metaphor is very important here because it puts all responsibility on the lower caste people for their backwardness and poverty. The nation cannot help them out of this situation because they hide themselves from the nation. However, the situation is just opposite there is no nation for the lower caste. Whatever nation is there it is in the grip of upper caste upper class only, which is evident from the resources at the disposal of Ila’s family. It is the same nation Tha’mma and her family wants to get through various means like—education, violent nationalism etc. very cleverly the author associates inability to work hard in the field of education with poverty and untouchability when he says, “I had grown up with it. It was that landscape that lent the note of hysteria to my mother’s voice when she drilled me for my examinations; it was to
those slopes she pointed when she told me that if I didn’t study hard I would end up over *there*, that the only weapon people like us had was our brains and if we didn’t use them like claws to cling to what we’d got, that was where we’d end up, marooned in that landscape (emphasis in the original) (Ghosh, 1988: 148).

It is contrary to the facts that rich people are rich even without any great success in education for instance Tridib is just ordinary student but has all the resources, similarly Ila has no success stories to tell as far as her education is concerned but again enjoying the life to full extent. It is the nation as an apparatus that provides for their luxurious life by exploiting its own lower caste and class people.

In this novel, Amitav Ghosh questions the idea of nation in the Orient in general and India in particular however; the question is whose nation and which nation. The nation that Ila transcends is the nation created by upper caste upper class cultural imperialism developed in the close proximity of British Imperialism. Here the author does not explore the option of moving down the caste hierarchy to escape this cultural imperialism because position of women is different in different societies and cultures across India. The Orientalized mindset compels the author to search for solutions outside the Orient. The Orient that Tridib, Robi and narrator tries to transcend is the political nation/alism owned by upper caste upper class Indians. Rest of the Indians are either uninvolved or just carrying the nation imposed on them. Thus the nation in general and Indian nation in particular is a product of capitalist colonialism and neo-colonialism and any effort to transcend it by crossing political borders is futile because it is an act of moving from one kind of nationalism to another kind of nationalism.
WORKS CITED


