Transnational Adolescence and Youth of Colonial and Postcolonial Period in Amitav Ghosh’s *The Shadow Lines*

*The Shadow Lines* by Amitav Ghosh presents a colourful panorama of adolescents and youth set against the temporalities of the colonial and postcolonial period. The adolescents and youth extol and try to negotiate between fantasy and reality, individual and social, autonomy and dependence. The narrative of *The Shadow Lines* displays a semblance to Gabriel Garcia Marquez, though to a lesser extent, it very intricately forges into disruptions. It moves around three generations of three family trees and sieves through many amusing configurations of adolescents and youth. The skilful and shrewd narrative overshadows the theme of growth, in fact at one-go superficial reading. The novel merely seems to be intended for family saga within and without the periphery of the nation-state. However, a deeper level of reading with intensity reflects that it is not less brewed with the theme of maturation as in any bildungsroman or entwicklungsroman. It was Ian Almond ‘Postcolonial Melancholy: An Examination of Sadness in Amitav Ghosh’s *The Shadow Lines*’ who specifically recognised such canonical strictures in the novel in Bibhash Choudhury edited monograph *Amitav Ghosh: Critical Essays*. There is certainly something of a maturing process in *The Shadow Lines* even if the book’s fragmentary, non-linear structure makes this difficult to see. Although not quite a bildungsroman, Ghosh’s novel does narrate the development of an imagination from the narrator’s childhood devotion to Tridib’s presence . . . (Almond 61). It would be an injustice if the due recognition is not offered to Suvir Kaul who perhaps for the first time focused on the theme of growth. Her essay – ‘Separation Anxiety: Growing Up Inter/National in *The Shadow Lines*’ (2002), published with the Oxford Educational Edition of the novel, identified several connections with the bildungsroman elements (the coming-of-age themes) in the novel. Her essay discusses the narrator’s development into adulthood and subjectivity formation through the ideas of modern Indian citizenship and national identity. Though the essay is merely a hint on this
issue the elaboration is perhaps inevitable to foreground the psychological aspects which are, of course, undeniably concocted with history, nationality, travels and cartographical distinctions.

Ghosh is one of those prominent contemporary novelists in India whose works find space in institutional curricula. His novels are capable of catering the need of both national and international readers, critics and intellectuals as well. The novel basically revolves around the third generation of characters although the first and second generation characters also have irrevocable influences on them though in varying degrees. The three families’ trees, one of which Lionel Tresawsen of England, has Alan Tresawsen, Elisabeth, Mr Price and Mrs Price and their two children Nick Price and May Price. Other two are though traceable to same lineage, are divulged into a separate family, identifiably immigrants from East Pakistan, now Bangladesh. The narrator’s grandmother, who was married off to an engineer in railways posted in Burma, lost her husband at the age of thirty-two. She managed a job of teaching with the help of some sympathetic railway officials in Calcutta where she spent her next thirty-seven years. The readers recognise her as Tha’mma in the novel. Mayadebi, on the other hand, was married to a reputed family of Dutta-Choudhuri’s diplomat son, an officer in Foreign Service of Calcutta. Thus two family lineage, i.e. Tha’mma and Mayadebi as the first generation, Jatin Datta Choudhuri, Queen Victoria, Narrator’s father as the second generation are substantially abridged by Tridib as the middle passage between the second and third generation that includes the narrator, Robi and Ila. Similarly, Lionel Tresawsen and Alan Tresawsen represent the first generation, Mrs Price and Elisabeth represent the second generation and Nick and May Price represent the third generation respectively. Even though the novel presents the configurations of adolescents and youth of the third generation i.e. Robi, Ila and the narrator, the adolescent and youthful characters of the second generation also occupy a distinct space. Their past is related through inferences and conveyed to the next generation as a legend. But the characters between the passages of the second and third generations, i.e. Tridib, is one of the dominant characters that works as modifier, qualifier and mentor to the third generation characters.
Tridib, the second son of Himangshu Shekhar Datta-Chaudhuri, appears through the narrator’s memory on the very first page of the novel. He is eight years old in 1939 when he goes to England with his father Himangshu Shekhar Datta Choudhuri and mother Mayadebi. The period of his birth, his childhood and the passage through adolescence stage are the indicators of growth of a new self and personality. It is very significant that his childhood witnesses one of the most gruesome realities of the world history. He is born between the two world wars.

It is well known to all how the two world wars had influenced the population of the world. The horrible experience had more adverse effect on the young generation of the world. So, Tridib’s witness of the Second World War has greater significance in the author’s viewpoint. He is an alienated creature but academically sound. Though he goes to England and Dhaka, the impact of war and the people whom he has come across, remains imprinted perennially in his memory. The memory of England, especially May Price, has deeper affiliations to his mind. May had been a child herself at the time when Tridib visited her in England. But back in Calcutta, she grows up constantly with Tridib in his memory. Tridib’s once in a lifetime journey traverses the whole gamut of experiences and powerful reflections in his inner self and individual behaviour. He lives at Balygunge house in Calcutta with ageing grandmother and remains bachelor that makes enough reason for his relatives to comment on his irresoluteness and his being. The comment of Tha’mma, the narrator’s grandmother, is worth mentioning. According to her opinion – “...he’s is a loafer and wastrel, Tridib wastes his time” (3-4). She completely disapproves Tridib and the lifestyle that he chooses to lead.

Tha’mma treats him sometimes on his visit to her because he is the son of the only rich relative of Choudhuri family. But she never allows him to stay longer. She presumes that his presence would influence her grandchild, the narrator in the long run. For her, Tridib is “like a baneful planet” (5). He chooses to stay back in Calcutta instead of moving abroad to avoid his father whom he can never get along. He is least concerned for his father or his reputation as a diplomat. But the narrator admires his Tridib kaku. Tridib is his eye-giver to the world, though not a role model. He as a child observes Tridib:
His digestion was a mess; ruined by the rivers of hard-boiled tea he had drunk at roadside stalls all over south Calcutta. Every once in a while rumble in his bowels would catch him unaware on the streets and he would have to sprint for the nearest clean lavatory – condition known as gastric. He would shoot through the door straight into the lavatory . . . When he emerged again he would his usual nonchalant, collected self. (4-5)

However, he never denies the ‘special omelette’ offered to him by the grandmother at the narrator’s house as a token of hospitality towards the only rich relative of hers in Calcutta.

Tha’mma though disapproves of him for leading his life meaninglessly away from his parents, she would have possibly changed her attitude towards him. Tridib’s likes and dislikes for his father doesn’t matter much but his compromise with prospects and career enraged Tha’mma a lot. Hence, he has “showed him up as an essentially lightweight and frivolous character” (6). She also would have considered him, had he agreed to marry someone rich. But he always declines the proposal with a mild laugh. Tridib is a person who “lacked that core gravity and determination which distinguished all responsible and grown up men a sure sign that he was determined to waste his life in idle self-indulgence” (6). Her prejudice against Tridib may have some validation in her own subjective understanding and modulations. But she has the capacity to identify the specialities that Tridib does essentially possess. It is a judgment against all odds. Her pity is something significant to focus on Tridib. She says: “Poor Tridib… there is nothing in the world he couldn’t have done with his connections – he could have lived like a lord and run the country. And look at him – oh, poor Tridib! Living in that crumbling house, “doing nothing” (6). Her partial admiration is not based on the qualities that probably earned through his academic achievement or personal experiences. The narrator believes that there’s nothing genuineness of pity in her expressions. Her pity is rather an expression of fear that she has carried on due to his good connections with the aristocracy.

Tha’mma perhaps would have transcended all her prejudices without considering his academic pursuits and the level of knowledge he has earned throughout his growth. Tridib is a Ph. D. scholar in Archaeology researching on Sena Dynasty of Bengal. The
narrator is surprised at Tha’mma’s opinion on Tridib. She discredits his achievement outright, although she is herself a school teacher. She has reverence for such higher level of academic pursuits. But the narrator is unable to understand the fact. He says: “She had an inordinate respect for academic work. She saw research as a lifelong pilgrimage which ended with a named professorship and marble bust in the corridor of Calcutta University or the National Library” (7).

The narrator’s understanding of Tha’mma’s such disapproval is due to his recurrent visits to the street corners of Gole Park. She witnesses Tridib wasting his time with the young men at the street corner addas and tea stalls around. She believes that gathering at the addas are “all fail cases . . . the sons of “poor mothers, flung out on dung-heaps, starving . . .” (7). Thus, her prejudices against Tridib are spun out of Tridib’s indulgence at the addas that she believed to be the perennial occurrence. The usual addas that Tridib participate are well known as a place where wide ranges of population throng in the evenings. The addas form with the participation of “talkative population of students and would be footballers and bank clerks and small-time politicos” by the roadside between Gariahat and Golepark (8). Tridib is a “familiar figure” in those addas though he does not belong to any of those professionals (8). But he is listened, tolerated and enjoyed by his company. Yet there is always an expression of “tired withdrawn air of a man who has risen from some exhausting labours and ventured out to distract himself” (8). Tridib contains a “vast reservoir of abstruse information”. Whenever he is asked to talk about any topic he can relate it in detail as if he has fine grip over almost all the subjects like – “Mesopotamian Stellae, East European Jazz, the habits of arboreal apes, the plays of Garcia Lorca” (9). His ability to relate to any given topic makes him the centre of attraction in those addas. But he is always self-engrossed, brooding, detached within those circles around him. His preference to visit those coffee houses, bars, street corners, addas are the means to hide his alienation. These places never do promise one a good relationship with longevity rather it provides the visitors' different ways of entertainment and tastes in their own fashion. Tridib too, perhaps, is a frequenter to such places only with a hope to forget some inner tidal waves. Although he does not belong to any of those groups in addas, he receives attention partly because of his lineage, and also because of his laudability or unbelievable shrewdness in response. In contrast, his physical
appearance never has been the cause of such attraction. His physical disposition altogether has a waspish face, thin in stature with tousled hair and eyes sparkling behind spectacles.

Tridib does not hesitate to offer counsels to people in any occasions. He has the ability to advise one about how to appear in particular examination – can predict the probable questions – capable of suggesting the perfect attire in facing an interview. Interestingly his tips for examination or prediction on probable questions are found full proof at the end. But his suggestions sometimes turn out to be horrible and end up with terrible backfire. Hence, the narrator’s observation to this effect is – “. . . there was a causal self-mockery about many of the things he said which left his listeners uncertain about whether they ought to take what he said at face value or believe its opposite” (10). Such confusing counsels made him a conflictful figure. His closeted personality, his extraordinarily higher academic achievement (in those days), non-committal on the family background are more than enough to spread rumours against him. People even can’t help doubting his associations with the Maoists.

Sometimes, Tridib enjoys behaving like a prank. He fools people using his untapped ingenuity to build up a story at the very moment of any situation. He may target any age group for the purpose. He doesn’t refrain from playing tricks even with the eight-year-old narrator. Once, he remains away from the Gole Park addas for sufficiently long time. This makes his acquaintances wonder if something has happened to him that has kept him for so long. The narrator, the great admirer of Tridib, pays a visit at his Balygunge home and finds as usual reading and smoking cigarettes on the roof of the house. Seeing him enquire about the reason for his absence, Tridib immediately persuades him not to disclose anything regarding his whereabouts. With his all certainty and serious manipulations Tridib says: Don’t tell him a thing. Do you know what? I think I may have discovered the mound where the kings of the Sena Dynasty used to bury their treasure. If the government finds out, they’ll take everything. Don’t say a word to anyone and don’t come here again for a while- you may be followed by secret agents” (11). The narrator impeccably thrilled, enthralled, wordless, buries the secret in the grave of his heart. Later on, when he reappears at Gole Park, he again plays the trick by
reconstructing a story. When one of his acquaintances asks him the cause of long time absence, he fabricates another false story. The conversation between Tridib and his acquaintance is worth noting:

“Away? Where?”

“I’ve been to London,” he said, “to visit my relatives”.

His face was grave, his voice steady.

“What relatives?”

“I have English relatives through marriage”, he said. “A family called Price. I thought I’d go and visit them”. (11)

He, very nonchalantly in his own mood, relates the story without caring for those sceptic expressions of his listeners. He makes up the story and presents before them as if it is an authentic detail. No one, therefore, even for a moment, understands that he has never returned to London after his first and last visit in 1939. But he is so through in his detail that he exactly tells about the family of Mrs Price. He tells them about Mrs Price and her daughter May and Nick and their house located at 44 Lymington Road and the Hampstead tube station. His trip to London had been two decades ago but he is capable of manipulating detail in such a way that he can even tell the condition of the Prices at that present moment. A person’s physical growth from childhood to youth or adulthood comes across a number of transformations, which more or less obviously affect Nick and May as well. Nevertheless, his intent analysis does not go astray in terms of finding out the real physical appearance of May or Nick even after so long years. He fools them further when in the middle of his false story of his visit to London is cut short by the narrator. When the narrator becomes impatient for playing tricks on those curious audiences, he can’t tolerate any longer. So, he cries out: ‘Tridib-da, you’ve made a mistake. I met you last month, don’t you remember? You were in your room, lying on your mat, smoking a cigarette. You were looking for . . .” (12)

Tridib’s false story is detected within seconds by the listeners and he has to bear the humiliation with special derogatory accolades of fraudulence, falsehood and laughter.
He is no more taken into confidence with all his mental make-up then onwards. He remains just a joker, a crooked nut. They understand that he is there just “to bamboozle people and play jokes on them” (12). As soon as Tridib leaves the adda of the day, the narrator realises his mistakes. Now he understands that the hero of his belief has already lost faith among his acquaintances and he is the only person to diminish his patron’s reputation by disclosing his falsehood before the public. His childish innocence has hardly the capacity to grasp the situation. But it is too late. He repeatedly tries to convince them but in vain. He tells them that Tridib really did visit London in 1939, and the places and the persons that he referred to were all real. But his attempt returns no fruit. The reference to May in his story whom they have chuckled at the thought of finding more spicy about the relationship just before a while, vanishes at the narrator’s disclosure.

Tridib’s first journey to abroad i.e. London in 1935, from a typical Indian metropolitan city like Calcutta, makes a difference to his growth. The devastation of war-stricken London remains imprinted ever in his memory. It is then, he is acquainted with Mrs Price and her family members. Through her, he also gains the privilege to witness other Londoners of Mrs Prices’ acquaintances. He is the witness to one of the most horrible episodes of the modern history, i.e. world war along with his mother, May’s mother and Mr Alan on Solent road. The house of Mrs Price at 44 Lymington Road, Sumatra Road joined with west End Lane, the cherry tree in the garden, the cricket field by the Lymington road, and the terraced houses along the road are permanent impressions. The most importantly, the memory of May Price particularly remains a perennial impression in him. However, this is completely veiled from the world. Tridib is withdrawn from the bustles of the outside world. The ebb and flow of his imagination are unpredictable. The feelings that he has nurtured for her is unknown to anybody until a correspondence is established almost after two decades of his last visit to London in 1959. The first three letters are just formal and courteous social transactions that comprised of dropping in few lines on the well-being of both the families or sometimes Christmas wishing. But the fourth letter establishes very important connections between the duos changing the whole courses of their lives. Tridib unbelievably conveys a whole episode
of pornographic description in the letter that he claims to be the eye witness. She is stunned, furious, puzzled, inhibited but somehow irresistible that brings her to India.

Though Tridib is represented as considerably daring enough to disclose his feelings towards her through the letter, he is essentially shy with the female sex, a typical Indian youth. The first meeting between Tridib and May on Howrah platform is one of the most amusing parts of the novel. He has never expected that a girl whom he has expressed his feelings, without having proper acquaintance throughout two decades would, greet him with two full kisses on both the cheeks. He is so embarrassed that his courage fails to get a straight eye contact with her. It is the rarest scene people witness in India. Their mouths are wide-opened including the narrator’s and his father in stupefied amazement. On realising the fact of the situation, his embarrassment shoots up to its extreme height.

May is another character represented in the novel as an adolescent grown up in London. She is the daughter of the Prices born during the high time of Second World War as well. She is a baby in the cradle when Tridib meets her at 44 Lymington Road’s house in Hampstead. She turns up a musician by profession later on. She plays Dvorak Cello Concerto at the Royal Festival Hall when the narrator discovers her in England. She lives on the first floor of a house away from her parents that view out on Islington Green. She leads a simple hand to mouth kind of life with her little source by participating in various concerts. According to her, she has spent most of her time working for Amnesty and Oxfam and a couple of other relief agencies, especially, to raise funds for the rehabilitation of the earthquake hit people in Central America. According to Tridib, while replying to his companions at Gole Park adda:

She was not sexy, not in the ordinary way – she was thickest with broad shoulders, and not very tall: she wasn’t beautiful or even pretty in the usual sense for she had a strong face and a square jaw, but she had thick straight hair which came down to her shoulders in a glossy black screen, like a head-dress in an Egyptian frieze, and she had a wonderful, warm smile which lit up her blue eyes and gave her a quality all her own, set her apart. (11)
She is a student of Royal College of Music and she plays the oboe and wishes to join an orchestra. The physical description of May by Tridib at the Gole Park adda is very precise and almost accurate though he has never the opportunity to interface her for the last two decades. His correct idea based on assumptions is validated by the narrator when he goes to England after fifteen years of that incident on a year’s research grant. He meets May in a concert at the Royal Festival Hall. He describes her physical appearance:

Her hair was still cut exactly as I remembered it from the time she had stayed with us in Calcutta: falling thick and straight to her shoulders, mantling her head and sides of her face; but where I remembered it as dark and glossy. It was streaked now with bands of grey which shimmered when they caught the light. Her shoulders, always broad for her height, had thickened; she seemed almost top-heavy now, for she hadn’t added an inch to her waist . . . She had deep line running from the corner of her mouth to her nose, and her eyes, which had once been a clear, bright blue, had grown pale prominent. (14)

Time travels a wide distance of fifteen years but her physical appearance remains almost unchanged except changes in the colour of her hair and eyes. When May comes out of the Festival Hall after the concert and approaches through the last stragglers, the narrator discovers “her shoulders rolling, like a boxer’s”. The narrator is puzzled because “her voice had a deep, gravelly, almost masculine texture; he couldn’t decide whether it had always been like that or whether it had changed” (15).

On the other hand, the narrator’s description of May Price is worth mentioning. His description is synthesised with the English Month, May. Though he has not met her before, he develops his own ideas in his imagination: “I had developed a theory about her name. Her name had puzzled me at first: I’d wondered why she had been named after a month. Then I read somewhere that English buttercups flowered in May. The rest was easy: obviously, she was called May because she looked like a buttercup” (163). Whether May looks like a buttercup in the month of May is not ascertained in the narrative. But she is obviously presented as a character whose mere existence ensures pleasure to every person in touch and also gives the proof of the existence of a genuine human being. The beauty of buttercup is truly comparable to May in the novel.
May is an ardent devotee and practitioner of music. She belongs to a music school background. Her devotion towards music is evident from her attachment even during foreign travels. She brings her recorder there too, and practices by listening and repeating the scales on the recorder. She spends hour-long practice sessions sitting on the floor of the narrator’s guest room. Her great devotion and consistency gain her mastery in the concerts. She plays it without much effort in the concert. She does not frown while she plays it at the Festival Hall. Her mastery gives the impression of a veteran player in the instrument.

The growth of May Price since her childhood to adolescence and beyond has been like any other European child. She is a confined person within her native land engaged in music and other charitable tasks. The representation of May is not like other contemporary European adolescent girls. She is neither seductive nor appealing due to her physical appearance. She is not extraordinarily beautiful as one who can make her opposite sex irresistible towards her. The inner feelings, emotions, sexual urges remain cocooned within her. But she is truly an earthly being. She has her desire, her wishes, expectations and sexual orientations with different features. She confesses her inner feelings before the narrator later on. She reveals that her adolescent frolics are as humane as any other adolescent of her age. She admits that she almost fell in love with a school boy trombonist who hardly had time to think over her overtures. The feelings of common human beings that wants ‘to befriend’ someone kindled up through unrecognised infatuation. But she withdraws from that delicate thought unfathomably as soon as she and Tridib had started correspondence since 1959.

The relationship between May and Tridib reflects a unique dimension of humanly attachment not less than a fairy tale. Tridib, who himself has been just eight years old then, remembers the new born baby May even after two decades though it has spanned more than two decades since 1939. But the temporal and spatial differences no way diminish the parallel growth of May down the lane of his memory. She grows up in Hampstead in reality but she also keeps growing up in Tridib’s pool of imagination. The correspondences through cards are gradually replaced by “short chatty letters exchange of photographs almost penfriend like . . .” (17). Nevertheless, the fourth letter of Tridib
addressed to May Price paved a turning point in the relationship between Tridib and May. The letter is the most important document to reveal the character of both Tridib and May. The letter is both self-expository and delusional for them. It is capable to reflect the primordial desire that keeps haunting Tridib and May throughout their growth somewhere in the sub-conscious/unconscious repository.

May perhaps can hardly imagine that a letter triggered from a ‘pen-friend like’ acquaintance from a youth of India would make her impatient and disturb her internally to such a degree. She is simple, down to earth being. She is a myth-breaker of European adolescence as perceived from the Indian perspective. The usual image of European adolescents from the Indian imagination is one, who is morally degraded, culturally irresponsible, economically sound but socially uncontrollable. But May does not resemble to any such predilections. The general image of European adolescents that he/she is amoral, too worldly, abusive, racist etc. is dismantled by the image of May.

The simplicity of May is emphasized by her life at Islington. She lives there alone in a room where the television set turns on and off with her entrance and exit from the room. It works as a companion to fill the void. The room is housed with a very little furniture of ordinary standard. She has “an armchair, a desk and a large bed pushed up against the wall at the far end of the room” (16). She preserves the few cushions as a part of comfort covered by bright Rajasthani mirror works on them. But these are merely objects to fill up the room rather than with a purpose to comfortable sitting arrangements in her room. They are spread around in disorganized manner. She also has a small “collection of Russian novels in Paperbacks, miniature music scores and illustrated health books” (158). The room is also a place of boarding dozens of scrap papers. She has her old photograph of hers hanging by the wall, a symbolic of her past memory. The bed which seems to be the part of her comfortable night sleep actually remains unused. When the narrator returns with May in a drunken state after the wedding party from Mrs. Price’s house, she refuses to sleep there. Instead she persuades the narrator to sleep on it. The conversation between May and the narrator tells us much about the life of May. She does not care for such worldly things and her justification to disregard towards such comforts is worth-mentioning:
“I don’t sleep on the bed anyway, she said, picking out the sachets of pot-pourri”.

“Oh really?” I said. “So if you don’t sleep here, whose bed do you sleep in?”

She flashed me a quick, bright glance. “I sleep over there”. She said pointing across the room, at the floor.

“Where?” I said.

Without answering, she opened a cupboard and took out a thin mattress, a couple of blankets and a sheet, and carried them across the room. Kneeling, she unrolled the mattress and spread it out on the floor. It was very thin; not much more than a sheet.

“You can’t sleep there”, I said in astonishment. “I don’t believe you do. Why’ve you got a bed then?”

... 

“Why do you do it?” I said. “It must be horrible sleeping down there”.

“It’s not too bad”, she said briskly. “No big deal as they say on television. After all, this is how most people in the world sleep. I merely thought I’d through in my lot with the majority”. (158)

Her arguments in favour of not maintaining the minimum standard of livelihood perhaps have no connection with Gandhian doctrines. But it elaborates on her character as essentially a compassionate being. She feels for others, the downtrodden and prefers to ‘through in’ her ‘lot with the majority’. The narrator himself belongs to a more orthodox religious belief founded in Hindu scriptures. But he is astonished at the reversal of upholding the beliefs and doctrines by an English adolescent like May so genuine in Hinduistic religious society of India.

Her feelings for others cast beyond race, religion, class, gender, genes and nation/state periphery. She feels for others and comes forward so as to help them in her own fashion and capability. She feels for Tridib after prolonged internal emotional
struggle within that compels her to visit Tridib in Calcutta. She feels for Ila, Nick and the narrator. Most significantly, she feels for that earthquake hit poor people in Latin America. Her hand to mouth living does not forecast constraints in her welfare activities. She joins Red Cross, Oxfam etc. to raise funds by stooping down to a beggar-like condition at Oxford Street and Regent Street. She crinkles her collection box and collects money for those people with whom perhaps she has never come across and never has the opportunity to see the lands they do inhabit. She is a Londoner but feels beyond its periphery to far off lands – America, India, Bosnia or Bangladesh.

She is uninhibited in her mission to earn good for others. Her trip to Dhaka with Tha’mma and Tridib is an extreme example of her compassionate feelings for others no matter what it might bring into her life. The day on which they return from the Jindabahar Lane by fetching the ninety years old Tha’mma’s Jethamosai while she, Tridib, Robi, Tha’mma, Mayadebi, the driver and a security personnel drive ahead in a faltering pace, sets the rarest example of a great soul. It is one of the most gruesome episodes of the novel. They are all ducked into the car as all of a sudden the angry mob swerves up ahead and surround the car. They break the front glass and try to catch them in their grip. But the security personnel threatens them with a small revolver by two gunshots in the air. Instead of retreating, they encircle around the car. Everyone in the car expect the hopeless situation of their inevitable death at the hands of that angry mob. But the rickshaw of Khalil on which the old man is boarded, come closer and the entire mob jump like hungry mongrels upon those innocent persons. No one dare to stop or even look behind to do something to rescue them. But May is completely different. She jumps out of the car though neither Khalil nor the old Jethamosai has any relationship with her. She feels for them despite the certain impending death. She can’t resist herself though she is a feeble creature against the huge, irrational and angry mob. Robi, a small kid but the eye-witness of that entire ghastly incident says later on:

. . . I see May: she’s tiny shrunken, and behind her is that rickshaw, reaching heaven wards, like a gigantic ant hill, and its sides are seething with hundreds of little man.
May was screaming at us; I can’t hear a word, but I know what she’s saying: those two are going to be killed because of you – you’re cowards, murderers, to abandon them here like that. (246)

Thus her character appears as huge image and all the rest as merely some dwarfs around. It is not that blood vein affinity to encourage one or to sacrifice one’s own life for the sake of near and dear ones. It is irrespective of race, gender and citizenship. She is carried away under her intuitional urges. There is a sharp contrast between her image and others who are keenly associated with the old man. Mayadebi and Tha’mma are the descendent of the same family, and through them, so are Tridib and Robi. Even the driver and the security personnel should have better understanding or say sympathy for sharing the same nation. But May as a foreigner to the nation, yet having sympathy for the old man and the rickshaw puller Khalil bears a distinguished attitude towards humanity. It seems rather ironical that Tha’mma and Mayadebi, who are so much enthusiastic and restless by the prospect of meeting the old man after such a prolonged separation, turn out to be selfish and reconciling to the situation. From the moment Tha’ma unravels the news of her Jethamosai being alive and still in the old house counting the last days of his life, she is impatient for rescuing the old man. The news has been sufficient enough for her to revere about the childhood memory in Dhaka. But the moment she stands in tight corner, all the affections for her Jethamosai and the firm determination to bring him back to India, fades away within no time. May, later on, relates the reaction of Tha’mma to the narrator: “Your grandmother screamed at me. She said I didn’t know what I was doing, and I’d get everyone killed. I didn’t listen: I was a heroine. I wasn’t going to listen to a stupid, cowardly old woman” (250).

She hovers above common beings in the novel by listening to her intuitions. It is her courage, sacrifice and compassionate feelings for others. She sets an exalted example of humanity when the world is engrossed into violence, riots, wars and hopelessness.

There is another episode as well when May displays her feelings of genuine human race during her sight – seeing at Diamond Harbour in Calcutta with Tridib and the narrator. They drive in the old Studebaker on a Sunday to Diamond Harbour. She suddenly spots a stray dog whimpering; succumbed to fatal wound by a car. She wants to
help it but Tridib and the narrator are not diligent enough. She can’t understand how one may pass by without noticing or without a trial to help the poor animal. She screams at last and compels Tridib to stop the car. Tridib insists on not to stop and take risk of tampering a dog already in severe pain and anguish. He can’t stop her anyway; she is determined to do her task. She takes a penknife and a handkerchief out from her handbag to help the whimpering dog. She trembles with fear but there is nothing in her mind except the zeal to help that poor dog. Tridib tries to prevent: “You can’t do this, he said. It’s too dangerous. It can still bite; it’s probably rabid” (172). His appeals have no effect on her. Instead, she rebukes Tridib for inaction: “Can’t you help a bit? She said. All you’re for is words. Can’t you ever do anything?” (173).

Finally, Tridib gives up and helps May hack the dog to its death in order to release it from that severe hell – like pain. The narrator, though a child of eight, comprehends the horrible attempt of May and her mental state. There is not much worth of a life than the life of a human being. But May is different, sensible, kind and irrepressibly courageous. She goes beyond her capacity in order to help anyone in which the flame of life permeates through.

May is an angel on earth with unworldly associations of a common, modern and selfish person. She does what she sees around – any object to sympathize with – corporeal pangs, riot hit victims, natural calamity devastated people irrespective of nationality or race. But most importantly, she possesses a unique comprehending power of tumultuous violence within one’s self. She tries her best to soothe an emotionally desperate person as well. There is no valid judgment, rationality or compulsion in boarding a boat which hardly promises safe anchorage. The best illustrations are her understanding of internal turbulence within the self of Tridib, and later, on the narrator’s. She doesn’t meet Tridib personally ever in her life except in her infancy in the cradle. Neither she bears the memory of that period nor finds any reference to Tridib barring a few occasional elaborations through her mother Mrs. Price. But the letter of 1959, bearing a full pornographic description of a couple in intercourse state at the end of West End Lane, in a war hit dilapidated Cinema Hall, intrigues her and re-directs the course of her life. It enrages her predictably. She is furious for breaking up the silence of her
privacy by a person whom she has never met. She wants to discuss with her mother regarding Tridib’s letter but surprisingly she doesn’t do so. When Mrs. Price inquires about the letter, she merely says: “Oh! Nothing very much. He’s invited me to visit India” (145). Whether it is the encouragement of her mother to visit India or the pleasure of travelling across Indian sub- continent do not matter. But she does come all the way scared and also wondered herself at responding the invitation. Then, obviously, somewhere in the corner of her heart, it is again the urge to soothe a desperate soul without caring that she might get flashed away. Hence, the narrator says: “She wasn’t used to being helpless; she was used to doing things. She always had been” (166). It is always her priority to help others rather than being helpless. She believed in doing: so her visit is indeed another mode of helping the emotionally desperate person Tridib. She is wondered at her sudden travel about five thousand miles away to India just as a part of responding a letter sent by someone from her past life whose identity is still not clear before her. Her visit otherwise bears no any reason, no compulsion. She is frightened and locks herself inside the hotel of Delhi and tries to understand whether it is her curiosity some other reason that has compelled her to travel across the continents.

She wants to argue it as a part of her curiosity at first but rejects the idea as it inevitably negates the reason for being curious. It is a riddle for her. However, the readers constantly feel the tendency of May helping out those in needs. The letter of Tridib is a first of its kind tantalizing, abashing and infuriating within herself. But at any rate, it is a part of helping others and by doing so she is trying to earn her own complacency.

The spectrum of May supporting the others spreads up to the narrator also. She tries to stand by him at the time of destituteness and comes up with the uncomfortable feeling. It is a part of usual human nature as well as extraordinary inner beauty to support him in the way she does. The wedding party episode of Ila and Nick at the Price’s at 44 Lymington Road reflects her sensitive and genuine humanly feelings for others. The narrator brings a minute Silver Salt Cellar for Ila as a wedding gift. But there is something throat choking for him he can not understand properly. He does not understand why the wedding of Ila with Nick has accumulated so much impatience in him. On his way to 44 Lymington Road, he reaches the West Hampstead tube station but it is quite
early. He finds a pub nearby and orders the half-pint beer for him. It is a coincidence to meet a Lebanese journalist in the pub and gulps good rounds of wine with him. He even forgets the gift pack he has so cordially brought for Ila. As he reaches the wedding party, he is offered wine once again. He ends up couple of more rounds as if he wants to defeat the agony of his heart by draining the wine. Consequently, he falls asleep in an armchair. When he wakes up he finds May trying to bring him to his senses. Everyone leaves the party including Ila, Nick, Mrs. Price and other guests. Nobody seems to notice the condition of the narrator. But May comprehends the probable outcome the narrator might face. So, she dismisses the idea of the narrator to go back to Fulham himself and takes him along to her home at Islington.

There is sharp contrast between the character of May and Ila in this episode. The condition of the narrator remains unnoticed by Ila, the closest relative in a foreign land and a very good friend since childhood. But neither does she show her little courtesy at such condition of the narrator. Instead May appears as different person and much agreeable to take him to Islington with an apprehension of any untoward incident. Her offer though badly forfeits. The narrator in a drunken state tries to seduce her all the way to Islington. Later that night, the narrator attempts to rape her which May perhaps has never dreamt in her life. His rounds of drinks intensify the impact – the cold air of the night while riding with May begins to stir his bestial instincts. He recollects his bestiality later on: “. . . the sting of the air woke me; my began to tingle as it did after a-oil massage on a winter morning: I could feel the skin, the hair, on my scrotum and my thighs coming alive. It was as though a part of my body had discovered in my drunkenness, a means of pricking me on to look for a means of mourning Ila’s marriage” (156). The narrator’s mourning over Ila’s marriage with Nick leads him to drink heavily for he seeks to intensify it further by re-directing vengeance towards someone else. May’s consoling hands on his shoulder in the car is misused as opportunity for caressing. He even puts his arm around her shoulder, kisses her and runs his loathful tongue over her earlobe. On the other hand, May, instead of throwing him out of the car, remains quiescent to support the man-turn beast, the narrator.

The incident of May’s bedroom is the extreme example of her great disposition as
a divinely angel. The narrator, out of his bestial instinct, jumps over her. Instead of sleeping quietly, he attempts to devour that lonely helpless women – most importantly, a beloved of his demised uncle Tridib whom he regards as the eye giver to the world. Besides, she is much older to him. She can’t predict that a heavily drunk person may turn wolfish at any time. Though she is scared, plussed and concerned about her dignity, she supports him: first of all – as a human being, secondly, – as an acquaintance since his childhood in innocence phase, and finally – as a niece to her demised lover Tridib. Nevertheless, these reasons are beyond one’s perception when the benefactor becomes prey at the hand of a fallen scoundrel. The narrator doesn’t hesitate to collect her closer to his bosom. He kisses her and out of his feat of bestiality tries to fondle her breasts, suck the nipples despite her forceful resistance. Shamelessly, he tears off her clothes and compels her to duck between her knees.

May, in fact, appears as a possessor of great perseverance. She is tolerant in all extremes. She is capable to tolerate a drunkard, a lost soul with waspish eyes and melancholic character. May is represented as one, who can understand emotions, a follower of humanity even when she is faced with awkward situation in a foreign land. Her livelihood by participating in a few concerts in London decodes her complete being. She believes in meeting the fundamental needs rather than lavishness and abundance. The worldly comforts can hardly beckon her into its grips. She understands the human essences that drive a power in her determination, zeal to feel good, compassion and co-ordinate towards others in needs. Though she sets the example of challenging simplicity, she perhaps never shuns being truthful to her conscience.

In certain occasions, she doesn’t spare her own brother Nick. The dinner party on a Christmas Eve at 44 Lymington Road organized by Mrs. Price reveals such unique co-existence of multiple human essences in May. During their dining table conversation when the narrator asks about Nick’s stay in Kuwait, he relates airy hoaxes regarding his career and prospects. He wants to impress before Ila and the narrator that he had been to Kuwait to make some money. But Nick is too incredulous in his tone but continues with a shrug: “And what did I get? He said. Bloody old Kuwait. That’s what comes of being born too late . . . Kuwait! . . . what’s its like out there, it’s bubble that’s going to burst any
day now. That’s why I got out while there was still something to get out of” (108). He
never feels a need to tell the truth. However, May who is an audience to the entire
conversation, she doesn’t hesitate to speak the truth or the reason behind Nick pulled
himself away from that Gulf country. Rather she tries to warn her brother not to relate
such half-truth before the guests. She adds: “Nick, isn’t it fine you stopped lying about
this Kuwait business? . . . But you’ve begun to believe it yourself . . . you ought to be
able to stand up and tell the truth. You were brought up to tell the truth, just as I was”
(109).

Indeed May bears a distinguished nature of upholding the truth. There is nothing
she likes to conceal or concoct. She is truthful to her conscience, to Tridib in
reciprocating the desire, to her mother, and the narrator. She is capable to look at the eyes
of other people and speak out whatever is true. Neither does she want to conceal her
foolish, almost suicidal attempt in Dhaka nor her reproach blaming herself as the cause of
Tridib’s death. Again, when the narrator is about to return India after completion of the
year’s research grant, she is truthful to inner urge. As the narrator seeks permission for
the departure, she, with tearful eyes, pleads him not to go because she feels lonely. It is
difficult for her to lead a lonely life any further.

The self integration of May as truthful, perseverant and humane is illumined by
her divinely innocence. She is childlike in displaying her innocence. It is beyond dark
seamless boundary that conjures up her image as a symbol of innocence. This brings her
straight to India, feels for the whimpering back-broken stray dog on the way to the
Diamond Harbour in Calcutta. The narrator has a fascination for her innocence that he
feels make her particular among the crowds. There is curiosity, reason, arguments,
truthfulness, forgiveness and perseverance. But her innocence has something unique
inimitable, a compelling urge. Hence, the narrator’s statement beautifully describes the
character of May:

To me it seemed that May’s curiosity had grown out of a kind of innocence; an
innocence which set her apart from all the women I knew, for it was not the
innocence of ignorance, but a forthright, unworldly for among the whom I knew
like my mother and my relatives. There were none, no matter how secluded, who
were free of that peculiar, manipulative worldliness which comes from dealing with large families – a trait which seemed to grow in those women in direct proportion to the degree to which they were secluded from the world. (169)

Innocence of May is admixture with her curiosity. Her visit to India following pornographic letter of Tridib is partly under her curiosity of arousing such different feelings in her and partly her curiosity to explore the world beyond London, the English socio-cultural perspective. Her curiosity also seeks to substantiate the person who has brought sea change in her complete outlook towards herself. She is physically unknown to Tridib, but how a person can gauge her growth so minutely in his imagination founded in childhood memory. Most importantly, what the assuring preoccupied notion Tridib’s may have in his belief to re-direct her simple living. Though the curiosity plays a vital role, it is her innocence all the time that tries to explore the mystery beyond her physical and mental boundary.

The narrator is one of the most important characters in *The Shadow Lines* often considered as narrator-protagonist by some critics. Amitav Ghosh delineates a full length growth of the narrator since childhood to youth. He is at the age of eight when the novel opens. Ghosh very intricately displays the growth of the narrator through different phases and different historical development in different locations. He is taught by Tridib, as he admits, to use his imagination with precision. Tridib is an ‘eye-giver’ to him to see the world with particular outlook. But Ghosh actually delineates him as an observer – a silent observer to both factual and imaginative details of the characters that depict the cross-cultural and also socio-political ethos of the novelist’s world.

The narrator is brought up in a small house at Gole Park in the suburban area of Calcutta with his parents and Tha’mma. It is a place where the immigrants from East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) settle down before the partition. His Tha’mma is also one of such immigrants who has come across the border much earlier. He is the only child of the family and a centre of his parents’ and Tha’mma’s manipulative upbringing in middle class society. His childhood is fostered within his small home with three elders, school, cricketing in the Gole Park and sometime witnessing the Gole Park addas of Tridib by the small tea-stalls or Paan-shops, with occasional outings.
The narrator leads a typical middle class life where he has to negotiate between individual freedom, desire and choice. His father is a worker in a rubber factory and mother a simple housewife. The life of the narrator is not much influenced by his parents as by his Tha’mma. He has a very good understanding and cordial relationship with them. But his course of life is prominently charted out by his strict disciplinarian Tha’mma. She is a retired headmistress and believes in the traditional values and imposes her typical idiosyncrasies that constructed her subjectivity. Hence, she believes such ideologies need to be transported wholesome to the narrator. The narrator being an only child of the family gains attention of all, especially of his Tha’mma who seeks his companionship sometime. Thus the narrator has the only privilege to share his views with Tha’mma and spend time with her.

The narrator compares himself with his uncle Tridib but Tha’mma never compromises on such comparisons, instead, she says: “No, he looked completely different- not at all like you” (5). She tries to keep the narrator at a distance from Tridib, Ila and also from the neighbouring children. For her, Tridib is a ‘baneful planet’ whose influence upon the narrator and his father may apprehend in its grip. He is a ‘loafer, a wastrel’ so; she stubbornly wants a distance from him. The narrator can’t understand why she has so much aversion for the least means of modern mode of entertainment. Thus his life is circumscribed off modern thoughts and media. There are no television set, no any sports item allowed inside his home. There is only a radio set which is meant for only occasional evening news. A set of Ludo is the only game the narrator must compromise with during his illness days only. However, Tha’mma likes Robi who is a well built kid and so she persuades her grandson sometimes to be as strong as Robi. She insists him to run to the Gole Park and back home and kept her eyes on till he is vanished by the corner. The narrator describes the environment of his home in the following way:

As for herself, she had been careful to rid our little flat of everything that might encourage us to let our time stink. No Chess Board nor any pack of cards ever came through our doors; there was a battered Ludo set somewhere but I was only allowed to play with it when I was ill. She didn’t approve of my mother listening to the afternoon radio play more than once a week. In our flat all of us worked
hard at whatever we did: my grandmother at her school mistressing; I at my homework, my mother at her housekeeping, my father at his job as a Junior Executive in a company which our time wasn’t given the slightest opportunity to grow mouldy. (4)

Tha’mma strictly maintains the codes where nobody would ‘stink’ the time. It is tightly packed schedule – no room for play or entertainment and no resources for such opportunities. His childhood in the early sixties is thus devoid of opportunities, amenities, and equipments. The narrator enjoys occasional cricketing sessions with his friends in the Gole Park or sometime playing football in the streets. His neighbourhood from the Gole Park to Gariahat is full of shacks of the refugees by the roadside from the East Pakistan. It is the outskirt of Calcutta. So the narrator’s friends from the central Calcutta believe the place to be at far distance and often ask if he comes to school by train. Tha’mma’s schema for the narrator as a part of his playing games is to allow him to play cricket and occasional run towards the lake. It is a kind of imposition where the narrator does not have the choice but to submit. He says: “My cricket game was the one thing for which my grandmother never grudged me time away from my homework”. Time and again his Tha’mma says: “You can’t build a strong country . . . without building a strong body” (8). Later on, she repeats the same tinge of enthusiasm to encourage the narrator by referring to well built Robi: “Watch Robi, he’s strong, he’s not like the rest of you in this country” (35).

Her favour for occasional cricket, football and runs by the lake are the reflection of her consciousness on the health issues but more significantly, her training to the grandson to build a strong nation. However, there is always an impression of threat on the face of the narrator for his grandmother. She doesn’t refrain from putting up corporal punishments whenever she finds her grandson diverting from the tracks she has prescribed. When the narrator is a nine year old child, he is late from Tridib’s adda who appeared there after a long time. The gossipers discover Tridib making them fool as the narrator becomes a medium to expose him. He tries to rectify his mistake. But in this process, he already becomes an hour’s late and books himself to inevitable punishment. He describes the reaction of his Tha’mma:
In her controlled, headmistress’s voice she asked me where I had been, and when I didn’t answer she raised her hand, drew it back and slapped me. Where have you been? She asked again, and this time I blurted out that I’d been down at the corner. She slapped me again, really hard. Haven’t I told you, she said; you’re not to go there and waste your time? Time is not for wasting, time is for work. (13)

For Tha’mma, the roadside addas are strictly prohibited place where only the ‘fail cases’ dwell upon and stink their time. So, the narrator is also restricted visits to such places because there is already an example of Tridib who has spoilt himself by being a frequent visitor to such addas. She believes in judicious utilization of time. If the time is not properly used for work then it will put the narrator in the same ‘fail case’ category.

Childhood of the narrator has not much integration with his peer groups. The novelist does not put detail on his peer groups of neighbourhood or school mates. There is reference to his friend Montu, a boy of his same age, who belongs to Muslim community. But the intimacy between the two friends is not much more than evening cricket games, peeping through the windows or accompanying each other in the school bus.

Ghosh very skillfully casts the shadow lines of wars, violence, riots and natural disasters or fascist phenomenon, some kind of forces at work ever undercutting the edges of growth, whether Tridib and May in London or the narrator in Calcutta. He presents a gruesome reality the narrator comes across in his childhood. The Hindu-Muslim riots beginning with the lost replica of the prophet of Jammu spreads throughout Jammu and Kashmir raising slogans in Pakistan and East Pakistan to Calcutta. The Muslims attack on the Hindus in East Pakistan is back lashed within no time in Calcutta. The entire episode of violence, though visualized in the background, passes with the cinematic pace, comments on the impact of growth of the narrator.

The narrator witnesses one of the gruesome realities of his life in 1964, the day on which first cricket Test Match between England and India is played at Madras. His innocent mind is destabilized by comprehending the stark reality of violence. He can’t understand the logic nor can seek an outlet to his reactions. This incidence takes place
just few days later when his Tha’mma, Tridib and May leave for Dhaka to bring Tha’mma’s Jethamosai back to Calcutta. The narrator, unaware of the riots ever that have been taking place across the border, can’t correlate the thread of its origin in Calcutta. He does not want to go to school on that day in order to hear the cricket commentary in the transistor but can’t gather courage before his Tha’mma. So, as usual day, he carries his satchel and the water bottle, and reluctantly waits for his school bus. The bus is a little bit late than other days. But as soon as he climbs in, there is something unusual because the bus is almost empty. He discovers that only a few boys are sitting together at the last bench. There is no such commotion of school children. He can’t perceive something wrong and unusual. Everybody stares at him and are astonished at fetching the water bottle. The conversation between the narrator and his friends, on fetching the water bottle along, is more than enough to depict the condition of childhood in riot-hit Calcutta of that time:

On my right was a plump boy called Tublu . . . “What’s the matter?” I said to him. “Haven’t you seen a water bottle before?”

“. . . So you’ve brought one too? . . . He hasn’t brought any water today; his mother’s given him a bottle of soda.”

He glared at the cowering boy, and ordered him to tell me why he hadn’t brought any water.

I still remember the tearful, sing-song sound of the boy’s voice as he told us that his mother hadn’t let him drink any water that morning, because she’d heard that they had poured poison into Tala Tank that the whole Calcutta’s water supply was poisoned. I remember how we listened to him and made him repeat what he had said. (199)

For the narrator and his companions, the word ‘poison’ is itself more than sufficient to terrorize their minds. At least they have an idea that ‘poison’ is dangerous; hence, they need to avoid it. This makes the narrator pour down the water bottle. There is knowledge in one hand and there is ignorance on the other. But the terror of the poison overcomes their knowledge and influences their psychology. Later on, when the narrator
recollects, he tries to seek the answer that has been a metaphor in childhood: “I remember we didn’t ask him any questions- not who ‘they’ were, nor why ‘they’ had poisoned their own water. Everything fell into place now – the emptiness of the streets, the absence of other boys – it all fitted. There were no more questions” (199). The childhood in extreme position does not require any substantiating logic neither it seeks proof of its existence in reality. But for them, it is a reality that exists only in saying. There is no question of believing it or not. Anyway, the terror pierces into the childhood psyche no matter whether it carries any rationality or truth in it.

It is very significant that the novelist wants to depict the psyche of the children rooted in their particular culture, beliefs and religion. There is not much elaboration on the psychological influence of religious beliefs. No any conflict of any kind has been described in the novel. They do read in the same school, play together but as soon as the identification of the vandalizers comes, the pronoun ‘they’ spontaneously reminds the children about the Muslim community. They do not know the difference between being a Hindu or a Muslim. But spontaneous indication must have its lineage through the elders, through the society in which they grow up. They have believed that since Montu is a Muslim boy he must know about such anti-social activities. So, Tublu is confident that they will know at Gole Park the next day. The other companions in the bus know that Montu is a Muslim boy and he is the friend of the narrator. But he wants to hide his intimacy with Montu without any reason for sure at all. He simply lies that he has not seen him for long. Somewhere inside his heart he is happy that he does not appear the next day. The racial discrimination between the growing children is thus made inevitable in the novel that has to construct their subjectivity in the long run.

Again, as the children reach the class, there is something unusual because it has merely a few boys there and Mrs. Anderson, their teacher shows no any interest to call up their names. But after sometime, they forget everything and concentrate in their lessons as a normal day. But it does not last long because half-way their lesson, there is faint, scattered noise. There is curiosity around the classroom and the children try to peep through the window. They understand that the noise is not any kind of demonstrations because they are used to it. The narrator says how they are familiar with demonstrations:
“It sounded like voices, many voices, but it wasn’t the orderly roar of a demonstration. We were used to demonstrations going past our school; it happened every other day and we never gave them a thought” (201).

The narrator’s comment reflects that the period ebbs through recurrent demonstrations, frustrations and slogans. The growth of children, adolescents and youth has been under the phantom of such issues. But on that particular day, it is not the usual noise of demonstrations with “one voice followed by a dozen and then again a moment of silence” (201). It has been rather “a shout followed by another, in a jaggedly random succession, and then, suddenly silence” (201). The narrator and his companions turn anxious, astonished and puzzled. There is a kind of threat whose intensity they are not able to perceive themselves. The narrator describes the whole situation in the following words: “There is a uniquely frightening note in the sound of those voices – not elemental, not powerful, like the roar of an angry crowd – rather a torn, ragged quality, a crescendo of discords which you know, because of his slippery formlessness of the fear it creates within you, to be the authentic sound of chaos the moment you hear it” (201). The description presents a scene in which the narrator and his companions have to face. This condition narrates extreme tottering and helpless in childhood. There is a feeling of an inevitable chaotic moment beyond the capacity of resistance. The consistency of the situation compels their teacher Mrs. Anderson to stop her classes. The children feel trapped in ardent darkness as the teacher closes the windows. As soon as Mrs. Anderson has left the room they open the window and see a strange column of grey smoke rise into the sky, a familiar symbol of latest rage of the mob. They unknowingly shift into a terrain of unfamiliar land; beyond childhood frolics and merry-making moments. The match between England and India that has been so important and curious issue for them a while ago vanishes all of a sudden. The classes are dismissed and announced for sending them back home in the school bus.

The atmosphere outside the school is more threatening because another surprise of the day waits for them. The entire school campus is surrounded by a huge number of armed police men. It is more than enough to intensify their childhood mental state. As the children drive off, the situation turns more apprehensive. They have never come across
more horrible situation than this one. In a sense, it is like resonance of Dhaka episode only differentiated by location and brutal killings before the naked eyes there. There is no sign of any familiar life on the way. The pavements are empty, the vendors are pulled down and the everyday passers-by are vanished from the street. The street is rather occupied by armed policemen.

There is obviously something eerie in the entire atmosphere indicative of disastrous outcome. The narrator feels that even the people standing at the corner have something mischievous in their quiet and watchful eyes. He recollects Tha’mma who has been away to Dhaka a week or so and thanks God that they are absent to witness the day’s strange proceedings. The narrator and his companions inside the bus observe a rickshaw passing behind towards the corner but can not fathom at the placement of the rickshaw behind. It is, as if, repetitions of the Dhaka incident which the narrator does not know till his young-adulthood. The bus takes a narrow road but as they turn towards Park Circus, suddenly they see the mob ransacking the circus and gradually turning towards the bus. But the bus driver shows his courage and skill and drives away as fast as possible. The narrator’s companion, Tublu, starts crying at the thought of possible disaster at any moment. The narrator describes the grimness of the situation:

It would not be enough to say we were afraid: we were stupefied with fear . . . The particular fear has a texture you can neither forget nor describe. It is like the fear of the victims of an earthquake, of people who have lost faith in the stillness of the earth. And yet it is not the same. It is without analogy, for it is not comparable to the fear of nature, which is the most universal of human fears, nor to the fear of the violence of the state. (204)

In order to describe the magnitude of the design, the novelist brings a large number of metaphorical references. He compares it to the natural phenomenon – such as “desert in a flash flood, special quality of loneliness that grows out of the fear of the war between oneself and one’s image in the mirror” (204). It is beyond expression in words and the narrator and his companions feel in that situation. The childhood of the period thus becomes doomed and irreconcilable that internalizes petty impressions forever. This is beyond everyday’s different types of frights and terrors for it would ever operate
throughout the process of their maturation.

The nightmare experience and the possible impact on the narrator’s innocence in 1964 cannot be understood without his self declaration. It takes him at least 15 years to establish a connection between the incidents of the school and the school bus or the Dhaka incident. But conspicuously prior to that incidence, he also experiences war of 1962 between China and India. But it is a happy announcement rather than an experience of panic outbursts of utter horror. He relates this experience through his memory later on how in the month of October of 1962, his father announced the breakout of war between the countries. There is sharp contrast between the innocence of childhood and the gruesome realities of the war in the conversation between Thaa’mma and the narrator. The narrator’s excitement that “There’s a war, a war with China” is aligned with Tha’mma’s satisfaction that Nehru has finally decided to teach those “Chinkies” (Chinese) a good lesson (219).

The Indo-China war is a kind of behind the screen affair. So, the narrator is not able to comprehend the seriousness of the issue nor does he seem to be affected by the war. The elders like Tha’mma or his father are anxious with the issue. As Tha’mma hears the news of the war from her grandson, she is excited. She laughs and gives the narrator a hug and says: “Let's hope we teach them a lesson” (220). But the narrator is unaware and dipped into an extraordinary euphoria. He remembers, later on, how they could distinguish the Chinese aircrafts from the Indians and the mother’s donations of bangles, ear-rings as funds for the war. He even remembers how he and other sold little paper flags at the street corners to collect money for the war. The children of his age are unable to understand and realize the effect caused by the war. He recollects the childhood memory of Indo-China war: “We could remember how the euphoria had faded into confusion as we slowly realized that the Chinese had driven the Indian Army back; how we had wondered whether they were going to occupy Assam and Calcutta.” (220)

Nevertheless, the childhood of the narrator is influenced by the direct exposure to the violence than the violence in the background. His recollection of violence of both riots and the war is reflected through the degree to which he claims to be more drastic and gruesome. When he attains the young adulthood stage, his scary moments are
diagnosed as the riots rather than the war. This is evidently pronounced during the conversation later with Malik in 1979 in the Teen Murti House Library in New Delhi. Recollecting the war, the Marxist Malik relates about his father who has been a parliamentarian father who entered into the Foreign Secretary’s bungalow in his stressful mind for the war. For Malik: “It was the most important thing that happened in the country when we were children” (220). But the narrator claims that there is something more important than the war. So, Malik counters: “you tell us then – what was more important than the’ 62 war?” (220). The narrator finds nothing to counter Malik than the childhood memory that has an indelible impression in his mind. The conversation between them is quite indicative of this point:

“Suddenly for no reason that I can remember”, I said: “what about the riots . . .?”

“Which riots?” Said Malik. “There are too many”.

“Those riots”, I said. I had to count the years out of my finger.

“The riots of 1964”, I said.

Their faces went slowly blank, and they turned to look at each other. (220)

It is spontaneous outburst of his childhood memory of 15 years ago receded somewhere in his subconscious. Therefore, as in a Freudian slippage, the incident reverberates in his memory, and thereby, the utterance of the truth is obvious. His friends are Delhiite born but he is grown up in Calcutta. The locations are different but there is perennial watermark in their memories. The narrator’s friend Malik and others too have come across such riots. The terrible riot of Calcutta in 1964 and the other parts of the country including Delhi has no distinction. But it authentically establishes the fact that the growth of Indian children surely had passed through violence, terror, riots and war. Here, Amitav Ghosh presents a unitary existence of such happenings in India where children are caught between the dilemma of the past and the apprehension of future. A few lines later, the discussion between the narrator and Malik represents the intention of the novelist: “This was a terrible riot”. The impression of terror between two adolescents has different configurations and magnitude. But it works as vital point to declare their
unconducive maturation in the novel. After all, the narrator or Malik or any of their mates in that conversation, is a part of riots, violence or war. But they are not away from their past. Their memory still realizes the terrible time of their childhood. It affects their growth psychologically indeed.

The subjectivity of the narrator develops into a more complex level when viewed through the episode of game called Playhouse under that huge table of Ila’s home at Raibazar. The episode is significant for disclosing the narrator’s psychosexual development. His contingent cramming of childhood memory and identification of ‘other’ is reflected in this episode. Both Ila and the narrator are of same age but they are dissimilar in their thoughts and ideology. The narrator is a child with simple understanding. He lacks the astuteness of Ila in fabricating story in reality and also in illusion. The narrator also develops a kind of rivalry against Nick. The game played by Ila and the narrator is the upsurge of the repository in Ila’s psyche. But the narrator is ignorant about Ila’s past memory, taking shape in oblique way. He is insulted as worthless by Ila during their conversations. Though she assumes the role of a grown up wife and the narrator as husband for Ila, the narrator is not “good for anything”. He is a “fool” and a ‘coward’ she scowls to him: “Aren’t you meant to be a boy? Look at me: I’m not scared” (47). The darkness of the abandoned room is scary for the narrator but it is a place for Ila to build up a house. For her, a real house can be in dark and secret place. When the narrator, later on, asks in the cellar of the Prices’ house about the same question on choosing the place for a house, it is worth noting: “Why don’t you play here in the drawing room or there in this garden or out there where they play cricket?” Ila is prompt enough to respond: “You can’t play Houses out in the garden . . . It has to be somewhere dark and secret…” (69). The dialogism of the novel throws light on the psychological responses of both the narrator and Ila. The narrator is skeptical on the character of Ila. He doesn’t want to disclose his feelings before her. For him “dark and secret” is something heinous, sinful or probably obscene. But Ila is more open to her feelings that she has accumulated in London and other foreign places. She is used to such games with Nick inside the cellar of the Prices’ house in 44 Lymington Road.
The narrator is curious on the intimacy between Ila and Nick. So he raises number of questions to estimate his character and physiology. When she declares that it’s the game she plays with Nick. He is too eager to know him. She introduces him that it is his house where they stay in London and play the game under the cellar. The narrator is insistent on the detail of Nick. Ila explains him that he is bigger and much stronger than he is. He has yellow hair and falls over his eyes. He can even touch his hair with the help of his tongue. The entire description presented by Ila incites a kind of dislike, fear disgust and jealousy. So, he says: “He must be filthy, I said. Eating his own hair” (50). But Ila accurately judges the mental wave of the narrator on knowing the physiology of Nick and replies: “You’re just jealous; Ila said grinning, because your own hair is so short. Nick looks sweet when his hair falls over his eyes: everyone says so” (50). It is through dialogism that the novelist hints towards the inherent issues of the novel. He avoids any detail or first hand account on any issue. The narrator’s condition or rather his psychological reaction is not dissimilar than the Lacanian identity formation. The concept of Lacan’s mirror stage is deferred rather than further enhanced. As he says, that the identification of other is a continual process, here, Ghosh presents the narrator at a juncture which brings distinction between self and other. The narrator himself discloses:

After that day Nick Price, whom I had never seen, and would, as far as I knew, never see, become a spectral presence beside me in my looking glass; growing with me, but always bigger and better, and in some way more desirable- I did not know what except that it was so in Ila’s eyes and therefore true. I would look into the glass as there he would be growing, always faster, always a head taller than me, with hair on his arms and chest and crotch while mine were still pitifully bare. (50)

This disclosure of the narrator authentically directs towards two psychological aspects in character development. First of all, the image the narrator sees through reflection in the mirror, is not like him. It is a ‘spectral presence’ that threatens the narrator. It is difficult and powerful, bigger and also better than the narrator. So, there is a castration threat for the narrator. He is not capable to contest though he is one of the contestants for the object of desire ‘Ila’. He is a rival to Nick but he is not equally
powerful. He is compelled to maintain silence as his rival contestant is capable to ‘castrate’ him. Secondly, for the narrator Nick is ‘in some way more desirable’ because he is ‘bigger and better’. This concept necessarily brings colonial discourse in its purview. As in Frantz Fanon or Aime Caesar, the colonial subject is always desirable for the native subject. Nick is a representative of the colonial subject more competent, powerful, and bigger. Since he cannot be challenged or contested, the native subject, having no other alternative, is bound to submit and accept his supremacy. When the narrator compares between himself and the colonial representative Nick he finds him complete in all respect with hair on his ‘arms, chest and crotch’ while the narrator’s ‘still pitifully bare’. For the narrator, hair on arms, chest and crotch symbolize the competency to devour the native through the destructive power of oppression. The colonial subject can sexually oppress the native subject and also capable to castrate any contestant against his object of desire.

The episode under that huge table in Ila’s Raibazar’s house is conspicuous for the initiation of adolescence discourse of the novel. Age about 8-9 years old is regarded by the adolescent psychologist as the most important transformative period. The children of this age group gradually move towards the initiation of adolescence. It is a pre-pubescence process in which the novelist presents the narrator and Ila under that table playing Houses. The narrator’s astonishment at the naked body of Ila in transformative phase and Ila’s sense of shyness, struggle to hide her breast with her folded arms, are evidences how the novelist wants to depict the initiation of adolescence in the novel. A part of that episode may substantiate the validity of the logic:

“She reached for the hem of her dress, slipped it over head and draped it over her shoulder”. She is wondered at her physiological changes: “There” she said, grinning, hugging her chest. “Look, I’m changing”. *She is bare-chested and naked, but for her blues frilled underwear.* She looks very thin and fragile – her dark body is a wispy shadow in the gloom. Her shoulders are pointed and the bones forming sharp-edged ridges under the skin. I was puzzled by her stick-like bones. I stretched out my hand and ran my fingers over her china-thin ribs, up to the ridges of her shoulder and along the curve of her arm, down the sharp angle of her elbow, and up again, to the nut-like wrist she had dug into her chest. There
was a spot above her nipples, a tiny little bump.

“What’s that?” I said, rubbing it with my thumb.

“Stop that”, she said giggling.

I thought I could feel the bump rolling under her skin, like a tiny pea or a mustard seed, embedded inside. I pinched it, wondering whether it would burst. She shivered, and I shivered too; taking myself by surprise.

“Stop that”; she said sharply. But I couldn’t stop- I was curious about her bump. Intrigued by its velvety hardness; I wondered whether it had a taste. I wanted to feel it with my tongue. (71-71)

This part of the narrative is undoubtedly reveals the novelist’s intention in explaining the initiation process of adolescence. There is a self-admiration of her body on the gradual physiological changes. She wants to explore herself and wants to let others know about it. Hence, she invites the narrator to watch: ‘Look I’m changing’. The narrator is immediately caught up with the sense that she is different. There is curiosity that compels the narrator to proceed towards Ila and run his fingers over her thin ribs, towards the ridges of her shoulder, along the curve of her arms and towards her chest. There is sudden wave of feelings, the rise of desire, truly a primitive desire lapping against the narrator’s psyche. He wanted to feel her, touch her. His entire attraction is shifted suddenly to that spot above her nipples that has a tiny black bump. As the narrator rubs against the bump, Ila releases a feel of shudder. It is indeed a tantalizing sensation she experiences for the first time. Her feminine disposition is awaken and the sensibility is reflected through her mild protest and embarrassment. The narrator, on the other hand, is carried away by that primitive desire. Hence, he wants to ‘feel the bump rolling under the skin like a tiny pea or a mustard seed, embedded inside’. He wants to exploit that primitive desire by pinching it to know whether it would burst. The novelist represents the initiation process through reciprocal exchange of feelings by both Ila and the narrator. It is the novelty of expression. The Freudian Oedipal stage of touch is reverberated through their reciprocal reaction. The line ‘she shivered, and I shivered too’ is somewhat an announcement of initiation of adolescence by the novelist in his extraordinary fashion.
The transition from oral to genital sex is beautifully put on the way through this episode. The desire of infancy or oedipal stage has so far been guided by the pleasure principle but now it has sought the way to gratification through genital means. The narrator is surprised by the bump but he wants to gratify his desire in the guise of curiosity. Hence the narrator’s feelings as expressed: ‘I wondered whether it had a taste’ ‘I wanted to feel it with my tongue’ elaborates on the sojourn of transforming object of desire. It replaces the Freudian pleasure principle and shift towards psychosexual development: a prepubescent first step towards the borderline of adolescence both for Ila and the narrator.

The narrator’s first adolescence phase has not been discussed much in the novel. There is a hint of it which indicates the continuous mental struggle with dilemma and indignation. After three years of Table episode, he takes May to that same place where they had the germination of adolescence. The conversation between May and the narrator indicates about the continuity of his initiation of adolescent feelings. But the novelist takes up some important issues of the narrator’s middle adolescence and the late adolescence. When both Ila and the narrator are in their sweet sixteen, Ila and her parents visit the narrator’s family in Calcutta before leaving for his college in Delhi. It is a short holiday and they drop in from Indonesia. Ila is already a gorgeous beauty. So, the narrator’s Tha’mma comments: “Our Ila is growing into a real beauty” (18). But both of them like their childhood habits are disinterested in the conversation between their parents and walk away towards the lake. As soon as they spot an empty bench, they recollect their childhood memory. It is a sweet memory where they don’t find any boundary of sex or relationship. They are both engrossed in themselves; arms around each other’s waists, pretending to count the birds on the little island and hurry off towards the Lily Pool Bridge. It is re-occupied by a sudden silence: a completely metaphorical silence, because there is no particular reason of this breach. There is something that prevents them to advance towards that previous intimacy. Finding no other option, the narrator simply talks about their visit to Tridib’s house in the summers with Robi where they had listened to him attentively as always even on those sultry heat of the afternoons about “behavioural differences between the Elapidae and Viperidae families of snakes or the design of the temples of Karnak” (19). In one of such afternoons, Tridib tells them
about ghastly detail of a tribal community who practise the ritual of circumcision. On hearing such rites, both the narrator and Robi instinctively all of a sudden cover up their groins while Ila laugh at them. But Ila’s response on that day in her sweet sixteen is something unexpected for the narrator: “Mere vagina-envy, she said, laughing and I tried to keep my face impassive as though I was accustomed to girls who used words like that, but I could tell she didn’t remember” (19).

The childhood memory that the narrator recollects and shares with Ila is a part of the novelist’s design to represent the preoccupied notion of castration threat. The narrator is not capable to drive away that threat. Besides, Ila’s response to that incident as ‘mere vagina-envy’ is the voice of an emergent modern feminist as if challenging the patriarchy. She is uninhibited and negates the importance of any cultural codes. Hence, the narrator is impassive; he rather assumes to be so who is nurtured within that cultural codes of India. The last line of the quote ‘but I could tell she didn’t remember’ actually defends the argument that the narrator has undergone any changes in his psychological set up that he kept upholding since his childhood: be it the memory with Tridib, Robi or Ila or his primitive desire towards Ila repressed so far. There is indifference in Ila’s response but the narrator stealthily maintains his previous feelings, which is, of course, underscored by the social codes.

The narrator’s repression of desire frequently emerges throughout his growth. In one of his summer vacations, while studying in Delhi University, Ila joins him with her sudden trip to Calcutta as it is vacation of her college in London. So, with the help of her diplomat father arranges an urgent ticket and visits the narrator and Robi who have already arrived. The trio meets at Ila’s Elgin Road home and spends lethargic moments there. The narrator, already attracted towards Ila’s beauty, is immediately caught up with the repressed desire once again. She is ‘improbably exotic’ to him.

It is a dull afternoon with remarkable heat of the summer. The narrator, Robi and Ila, all of them more or less belong to the same age group, hence, they share a friend-like relationship among them. Ila, as usual passive towards Indian moral code of conduct, lay down reclining in an armchair. She is heedless to her posture that becomes somehow erotic to the narrator. She is wearing a jeans and a T shirt but her posture makes a gap
between the top and the jeans revealing the hollow of her stomach glowing in the darkness. The breasts that heave up and down with the respiration of Ila, is enough for the narrator to plunge into the primordial sexual desire. The description of the moment and the narrator’s reaction to it is one of the most remarkable parts of the novel to comment on the psychosexual development of the adolescent narrator and Ila:

… her small pointed breasts have thrust the thin cotton of her T-shirt into two gentle points which harden with her breathing, and then swell away again into dark circles, one of them dotted with a tiny black mole. She flops about in the chair, heedless of her body, childlike, and I bracing the muscles in my thighs to contain the dull, swelling ache in my groin, have to roll over on my stomach and look at a magazine, though that makes the pain much worse, like the throbbing of a tourniquet, as though something were about to burst in my balls. (81)

The narrator’s repression of desire is not receded in the region called unconscious by Sigmund Freud. It is rather submerged temporarily into the sub-conscious level of the narrator’s psyche that seeks frequent outlets. The desire, that takes shape in the pre-pubescence, is carried forward but its emergence is not merely in sudden slips because it constantly remains in subconscious only curtailed by the narrator’s superego administered by the social taboo. Otherwise, the sexual desire is oriented so forcefully that he would have dismantled the entire barrier to satiate his pleasure. This episode elaborates on the narrator’s involvement in adolescent frolics.

Their visit to the Grand Hotel on Ila’s insistence, later on, is an illustration of gradual conversion towards western culture. It comments on how the western culture beckons the Indian adolescents and youth. They are visitor to that Grand Hotel on the pretext of a party but they go to to enjoy the cabaret and drinks. Both the narrator and Robi still reflect their consciousness of Indian culture and social codes. But their visit is a part of comment on how the western culture influences Indian adolescents and youth.

The narrator can be identified as inhibited and self-reflexive person. He is an adolescent who enjoys the company of his friend circle and likes to share drinks. The episode elaborates on the narrator’s deep-rooted search for the repressed desire. He is not
outspoken. He feels in his heart but unable to give any outlet to it. When the entire party in that Grand Hotel’s bar ends up in bullying, fighting and quarrelling Ila leaves utterly displeased. The narrator wants to stop her but he can’t. When she leaves the spot in a taxi and screams out that she wants to be free of all, the narrator is found talking to his own self: “You can never be free of me . . . If I were to die tomorrow, you would not be free of me. You cannot be free of me because I am within you . . . Just as you are within me” (89). The utterance of the narrator justifies the view that he feels as other half of Ila. She is his own image, which he, under ignorance or sometime intuitive demands, often seeks completion of his own ‘self’ by complete conglomeration.

The narrator’s childhood attraction is carried forward to his adolescence period and beyond. It is ascertained by his Tha’mma and himself, when the narrator is just ahead of his final year examination in Delhi University. His Tha’mma alleges him that he has a hidden attachment with Ila. She claims a clarification repeatedly on his relationship with her: “Tell me: what does that English whore mean to you?” (90). It is a surprise for the narrator that Tha’mma perceives for so sure about his feelings for Ila. The relationship is never disclosed to anyone not even Ila has any idea about the narrator’s feelings. The narrator is even self-deceptive to his own feelings for her. However, he admits to himself on being astonished at his Tha’mma’s claims over the relationship. Tha’mma is a keen observer and she is one of the powerful mediums to open up the youthful activities of the narrator. Before his departure to Delhi for his final examinations, he takes vow before her but she is shrewd enough to detect his vagrancy during his college days. She is fully conscious of the facts: both his feelings for the ‘English whore’ (Ila) and his frequent visits to the red light areas of Delhi. She is furious for both the activities and exclaims: “Why have you let that whore trap you? . . . I knew its she who’s sent you into the arms of those whores you go to in Delhi. Do you think I don’t know? Did you think I would allow it?” (91). Her inquisitive words are no less than an explosion. There is truth in both the allegations. But it tells more about his hypocritical activities of adolescence period. It raises the question whether he is carried away by that unsaturated primitive desire for Ila that led him to the destination of the prostitutes. For he is neither in a position to disclose his feelings for Ila nor there is any adequate means to give outlet to his repressed desires. The psychologists of adolescence put forward the explanation that this type of
adolescents finding no suitable or socially acceptable means often resort to such anti-social activities. Hence, the narrator’s desire for Ila caged in that phobia of social taboo seeks fluidic outlet in the arms of those prostitutes. He is not capable to explicate his feelings nor has the courage to confess his disrespectful visits to red light areas with his college friends. He is suffocated, aloof and furtive within himself. There is no any confidier except to express his astonishment and confess to his own ‘self’: “I have never understood how she learnt of the women I had visited a couple of times, with my friends; nor do I know who she saw that I was in love with Ila so long before I dared to admit myself” (93). Again, the three-line length letter of his grandmother to the Dean of the College, written in shaky handwriting kindles enough to shake his world of pleasure. He somehow manages to convince the Dean that he has never been to the whores as mentioned in the letter except some disreputable places like Chanakya Cinema and Khyber restaurant at Kashmiri Gate. He is successful to escape his certain rustication from the college.

Tha’mma’s letter is a comment on the Indian family relations where the elders play a crucial role in the growth of an individual and its consequent identity formation. Her interference in the narrator’s personal life, his likes and dislikes has been constant since the narrator’s childhood. It does not even spare him in his adolescence and youth. She is far away from Delhi, but she keeps on influencing and transgressing into the narrator’s life even when he is growing up as mid-adolescent and beyond. The letter to the Dean of the college is a kind of imposed authority to the narrator. He says: “I was so shaken by the sight of her resurrected hand, reaching out to me after her death, as it had all through my childhood …” (93). She is an undeclared authority in his childhood to decide the course of his life constantly throughout his growth.

The narrator’s visit to London on a year’s research grant is very important to understand the inner disturbances under the burden of his repressed desire. His first meet with May Price in London, after her concert, cannot straight be linked with his desire. But his desire already kindled for Ila since childhood is well presented in the eve of Christmas dinner party hosted by Mrs. Price at 44 Lymington Road. The narrator meets Ila at the Cellar of the Prices as if the repetition of the Raibazar episode of their
childhood. There is very strange emotive outflow between the narrator and Ila. But neither of them speaks out the inner feelings for each other. Ghosh, very astutely, indicates the hidden feelings of Ila. The novelist’s version on Ila’s preference to stay back is unclear: “That’s fine by me, said Ila, giving me tight conspiratorial little smile. I nodded my assent, my heart bursting with hope” (110). In both the cases, the desire is unclear. Ila’s ‘conspiratorial little smile’ is indicative of two conclusions: one – the hope of meeting her childhood relative cousin cum friend (the narrator) and the other – the prospect of an opportunity to give vent to her repressed desire still unexplored. The term ‘conspiratorial’ is indicative of something unethical, hidden and probably heinous. Similarly, in the narrator’s case, ‘my heart bursting with hope’ connotative of two assumptions: first – the hope of repeating the childhood frolics of Raibazar, and the second – the hope of meeting his primitive desire. Conspicuously, the novelist presents the flames of feelings in equal terms but avoids authenticating the equal needs.

Back in the cellar, both of them concede the reversal of playing houses under that huge old table in Raibazar. Now the cellar replaces the table. There is, of course, no repetition of playing houses. But there is repetition of almost similar events. The undressing moments of Ila and the reaction of the narrator in the childhood is same when Ila undresses. The narrator has similar impulsive curiosity during Ila’s undressing in Raibazar. But it is far different, a novel feeling, a strong pull obviously more than mere curiosity. Both of them shrug in childhood on body contact and now too they shrug. Significantly, that was imitation of adults in pubertal first cycle but now it is a process to seek completion of that cycle no matter the process is underscored by the circumstances and the realization of sacred relationship as well. The undressing in the Raibazar episode for Ila is an imitation of adult behaviour in a family, and the narrator’s reaction is merely a curiosity. Considering the episode under the cellar, it is the final explication of the narrator’s desire. When Ila is just draped in a towel from armpits to her thighs, he believes Ila to be more “than any human form” (111). His repression of desire fails and he concedes: “I could not sit still anymore. I stole up behind her and put my hand on her bare shoulder” (111). Ila put the hand away when the narrator tried to touch her ‘bump’ in childhood but now she merely giggles. She just protests, rather a womanly feeble protest by saying ‘Take your hand away’. The inner feelings of Ila makes her turn around
and face the narrator. Her smile on the face vanishes somewhere and ‘ran into the narrator’s arms and hugged’ him. The conversation and the description that follow the exchange of feelings at the apex point of emotion, is one of the most important keys to elaborate on both the narrator and Ila:

“You poor man”, she said.

Her voice was full of pity.

“You poor, poor man”.

She reached up and ran a hand over my face. It was only then that I felt the tears running down my cheeks.

“I didn’t know”, she said. “You were always the brother I never had. I’m sorry. If I had known, I wouldn’t have behaved like this”.

“It doesn’t matter I said”. (111)

The desire initiated in childhood is resurfaced in their youth. However, there is a shadowy line that functions as a barrier for the both. The narrator tames strong desire for Ila but the social institutions do not permit pursuit his needs. Ila, on the other hand, would have nurtured a feeling beyond any verbal definition. It astonishes her but not strong enough to defy the overtures of the narrator. Instead of defying, protesting or announcing judgment, she runs into his arms. Interestingly, no any pre-conversation takes place before she submits to the narrator. Hence, the intensity of their feelings may be easily perceived. But she has only sympathy now because she has already given her commitment to Nick. The line ‘you were always the brother I never had’ is a true vow to the social norms and apprehension towards social taboo. But the next line, ‘If I’d known, I wouldn’t have behaved like this’ is indicative of probable dismantling of that barrier had she known it before. The barrier founded by the social norms, has been prescribed by the Hinduistic society. It is observed across the Hindu religious culture in India and beyond. It is stronger in a typical Bengali Bhadralok society. The culture is maintained and transformed continuously since one’s childhood to the later stages of life. The departure of Ila the very next moment from that cellar saves the narrator and Ila from
breaching the social norms that disapproves their relationship as taboo.

The narrator’s infatuated desire is at the crossroad of legitimacy and illegitimacy. Ila is, however, decisive and committed to Nick and she derails her momentary fresh wave for the narrator and proceeds for Nick. But the narrator understands the critical position in which he and Ila have to come over. He is capable to perceive the unequal needs because his object of desire is also the object of desire for Nick, and the ‘object’ itself submits to his rival. The entire situation is unfavourable for him. It is difficult for him to concede the fate because the acceptance gives him unintelligible pain. Within no time of her departure, he recollects the childhood memory and admixtures the whole condition in the following way:

I saw Ila again and again as she was when she stepped out of that car at Gole Park, eighteen years ago; on that morning when she wrenched me into adulthood by demonstrating for the first time, and forever, the inequality of our needs. And when she did not come back to the cellar that night, I knew she had taken my life hostage yet again; I knew that a part of my life as a human being had ceased: that I no longer existed, but as a chronicle. (112)

The narrator’s condition is not much different than the life of a hostage whose life can be blown away at any moment. There is extremity of his feelings, his desire that cannot be rewarded. He feels his life has already ceased to exist and whatever he recollects is a part of chronicle. Nevertheless, his feelings for Ila is intensified gradually. He very often runs miles to Stockwell instead of in a tube. By resorting to physical toil, he attempts to overlap the inner pangs that have accumulated throughout his growth. He wanders along the banks of the Thames, through Soho or around Trafalgar Square. In his feat of struggle to the state of forgetfulness, he sometimes finds himself humming up the tune of a Hindi movie song- ‘Beqaraar karke hame yun na jaiyen . . .” (94). In his obsession, the narrator finds himself in awkward position because, at times, suddenly he does not understand the mood of the time in which he hums up. The song itself becomes an illusory shadow that keeps on tracking him wherever he moves. The tune is a strange company: “On nights like that I would pray for the tune to go away, to leave me alone. At times, I would even think that I had beaten it, that it had gone: I would drop onto a bench
Certainly, the narrator tries his best to keep himself away from Stockwell. But all his attempts are futile because he cannot keep himself away more than three days. As he counts the distance and buzzes that particular time on the way, he finds himself running faster towards Stockwell. It is a state of metaphor for the narrator: neither he is able to gauge the distance nor he can find any justice to seek mutual love. His observation through the magazines, storylines or movies elaborates on the metaphor of love. He does not understand how the man in love can measure his love to secure a token of love. He finds no reason whether the price of a diamond or jewellery for a girlfriend causes much difference in reciprocity of love. His consistent attempts to convey his feelings are always a big failure. In his solitary brooding, he analyses his condition, the cause and justification of his delay and dilemma: “I walked those miles, in the hope that the sheer force of those numbers would speak to Ila, tell her all the things I dared not to say for fear of losing even her friendship . . .” (97). The narrator abstains from putting up the genuine justification to his dilemma. He is skeptic to his own position because Ila is his cousin sister. His accumulated desire is submerged under the social inhibitions. Besides, he is not open to his honest feelings. He is self-deceptive, partly because his childhood has been spent in utter suppression of his elders. His upbringing demands the subscription to the cultural mitigation and firm religious vow in his life style.

Although the narrator’s desire for Ila remains unsaturated his relationship with May is another metaphor in the novel. The relationship of the narrator with May transforming from the day of Nick-Ila’s wedding party. It is the evening of that day on which Nick and Ila lawfully register their marriage in the registrar office in London. The narrator who is already disappointed at the unfulfilled desire for Ila, becomes drunk in a pub at the tube station. His participation at the party and unchecked rounds of drinks fires his desire to another heightened level. It is so heavy for him to stay erect on his own. Considering the condition of the narrator, May offers to take him along with her. But she has to forfeit for her sympathy. The narrator’s mischief towards May starts in the Radio cab in which both drive to May’s house. He kisses her, rubs her hand between his and
puts his arms around her shoulder. His mischief crosses the extreme limit as they reach
May’s bedroom. He attempts to devour May’s chastity like a primitive savage. He
collects her forcefully in his arms and kisses her despite strong resistances. He even
slides his hands inside her clothes through the neck and molests her. In this attempt, he
tears away the brassiere and compels her to hide her nudity between her folded arms. It is
an attempt in utter madness, a complete frustration and revengeful mind shifted from Ila
to easy prey like May. He is, of course, apologetic, embarrassed the very next morning
when he is back to his senses. But May appears quite composed, behaves maturely and
honestly. She forgives him on her judgment that he has done everything in his hysteric
state. After that incident, the relationship between May and the narrator gradually turn
into friend-like status. He accompanies May in her fund-raising drive. She also shares the
detail of her relationship with the narrator’s guide and philosopher Tridib, and the
consequent terrible death in Dhaka. At the time of separation after that fund raising drive,
the narrator seeks his apology for the last night: “I am really sorry” (176). He realizes his
guilt from the bottom of his heart. But May as usual caring and full of compassionate
feelings replies: “That’s all right . . . I was a bit scared at the time, but I didn’t really mind
– not much anyway. I was amazed actually – that anybody should think of me like that”
(176). The incident of the night makes her self-conscious about something alarming she
has never felt that way. Even in Tridib’s opinion she is not appealing when his Gole Park
adda friends sought clarification on May’s appearance: “No, she wasn’t sexy, not in the
ordinary way” (11). So, she can’t believe that she may be appealing enough to make a
much younger person like the narrator to jump on her.

That the narrator has been extremely concerned about Ila since childhood, is
constantly reminded from the very beginning of the novel. But his strange attachment
towards May is somewhere hinted towards the end of the novel. May’s stay at the
narrator’s house during her first visit to Calcutta for Tridib brought the narrator to a close
connection with her. He listened her playing oboe or rehearsing with her recorder
attentively. He sought her company wherever she happened to go with Tridib. Most
importantly, he likes the smell of her shampoo, soap and perfume. He even picked up her
pullover and sniffed it. As he grows up, he is embarrassed for such acts and confesses:
Later, in my adolescence, I was ashamed, nail-bitingly ashamed of staring her like that, sniffing at her, fingerling her clothes surreptitiously. I used to squirm thinking of how I had behaved, and then I would argue with myself, try to restore a sense of balance: she hadn’t minded, I would say, she probably liked the attention; maybe she hadn’t even noticed after all, to her I was probably like a boy from Mars. (168)

For May, he has been simply a kid, an innocent creature. But his activities and his strange ebb of feelings make the narrator a person fraught with sexual desires, hysteria and obsessions. The relationship between May and the narrator culminate into strange bondage towards the end of the novel. The narrator’s visit to May on the day before his departure from London and back to Calcutta reveals a peculiar connection between them. When the narrator sought final adieu, the description is one of the most beautiful segments of the novel:

She was in the kitchen, so I couldn’t see her face. But there was a note in her voice that made me wonder. I stepped into the kitchen and touched her arm, and when she turned to face me, I saw that her face was wet with tears.

“Don’t go”, she said. “Please; I don’t want to be alone- I’m afraid.”

I grasped her shoulder then, and she leant her head against my chest so that I could feel her face wet against my shirt. I stroked her hair, once, twice, and then, afraid of frightening her as I’d done once before, I tried to step back. She held me for an instant and then she let go and straightened up. (251)

May’s expectation from Tridib could not be fulfilled as he had receiveed his unfortunate terrific death in Dhaka. When the narrator tries to molest her chastity in his drunken state, it is a sort of rejuvenation of her dormant wish. Her amazement later that anybody would think of her as choice of object is a kind of re-emergence of the forgotten past. From the time she came out of her house and started living alone or passed her days with the sad memory of Tridib, she extremely suffers from depression. The expectation of a companion in her life had already nipped in the bud. But now she does not understand how she has developed a kind of intimacy for which she heartily has said to
the narrator: “. . . don’t go . . . please; I don’t want to be alone – I’m afraid” (251. The intense emotional constipation makes her inner strength exhausted. The narrator’s approach, though in his drunken state, emerges as a hope for another emotional support. The narrator, another heart-broken, can’t find any suitable means finds destination in May’s arms in his disappointment. May always blames herself to be the cause of Tridib’s death. However, after sharing the sense of guilt with the narrator, she overcomes the burden she has been carrying ever in her mind through those eighteen years. There is a reciprocal consolation in their togetherness. She does not insist for the narrator’s stay; neither the narrator has strong determination to leave her behind. Ultimately, he says: “I stayed, and when we lay in each other’s arms quietly, in the night, I could tell that she was glad, and I was glad too, and grateful, for the glimpse she had given me of a final redemptive mystery” (252). Both surrender to each other, and finally decide to start the life anew. There is happiness, gratefulness and satisfaction for both. The burden of Tridib in May and burden of Ila in the narrator find suitable refuge in their relationship. The narrator especially attains ‘redemptive mystery’ of his desire he has repressed so far right from the initiation of early adolescence at the sight of half-nude Ila under that huge table in Raibazar.

The character of Ila is one of the most celebrated figures that grows throughout the pages of the novel. She is a transnational figure like her parents. Her character is an apocalypse of ‘colonial desire’. It reflects the novelist’s preoccupied perception towards colonialism and successive impact on the children of a colonized nation. The transculturation, the exchanges of feelings, and social institutions between colonized/colonizer find acute deliberation in the character of Ila. In fact, Homi Bhabha’s concept of hybridization finds a suitable illustration in her character.

Ila, the daughter of a diplomat father, Jatin-Datta Choudhuri, is the only girl child in the family. This offers her an advantage to keep shifting wherever her parents move for their diplomatic job. Since her childhood, the readers recognize her as a pampered aristocratic girl. Her schooling is not confined to a place/nation; it carries her from Sri Lanka, Africa, Cairo, Algeria or Britain. Thus, she is a cosmopolitan transnational product. A great influence of modern ideas and globalization is easily discernible from
her style and personality. She is an epitome of a modern fashionable girl. She wears “clothes the like of which neither’ the narrator ‘nor anyone else . . . in Calcutta” have ever seen (18). Her dresses resemble the continental style, of Europe that she travels throughout her growing period.

The character of Ila is better understood when it is contrasted with the narrator. She is a constant traveller from one place to another whereas the narrator is confined within Calcutta till he starts college education in Delhi. For Ila, a place like Cairo is “a place to piss in” and even the underground railway in London is “merely a means of shifting venue” (21). On the contrary, the narrator’s opinion is different. His point of view sharply contradicts to hers “that a place does not merely exist, that it has to be invented in one’s imagination, that her practical, bustling London was no less invented than mine, neither more nor less true, only very far apart . . . The inventions she lived in moved with her, so that although she had lived in many places, she had never travelled at all” (21).

It is a common everyday phenomenon for Ila to keep on shifting places. She never tries to discover it. But the narrator who never has the opportunity to travel around nurtures his impressions through maps and mappings. His eye-giver Tridib makes him understand that a place does not merely exist but it needs to be invented. The Barthelomow’s scrapped map is the only source where he locates the places in his imagination when Ila introduces the places to him during her holiday visits to Calcutta. For the narrator, the names likes Addis Ababa, Algiers, Brisbane are just the dream names. Ila has a unique habit of collecting “yearbooks of the International Schools of whatever city she happened to be living” (21). It contains full of photographs of her schoolmates, friends, of parties, tennis matches, of whole classes together. The photographs generally include her pictures dressed in different designs – sometimes in jeans or a skirt and Persian lambskin waistcoat. Whenever she talks with the narrator, she also introduces the people in the photographs bearing some strange names for the narrator to articulate like – Teresa Cassano, Mercedes Aguilar, Merfeth ash- Sharqawi. In her childhood, these names mostly included her girl friends but as she grows up they are replaced by boys as well like – Calous Malekin, Cetshwayo James, Juin Nagajima etc.
The adolescence of Ila is represented as advantageous as those of any western elite adolescent. The novelist does not present her adolescence frolics as direct firsthand account. It is the memory of the narrator that retells the period with references to those photographs of their schools, yearbooks and her conversation with the narrator. She has a very close friendship with the peers. Her “closest friends” are “always the most beautiful, the most talented, and the most intelligent girls in the schools” (22). The schools are all that matters to Ila. The memory of her school days in different schools in different nations culls out some sweet memories. She recollects the memories years later in a pub called the Kemble’s Head at Long Acre: “Of course those schools mattered to me, schools are all that matter to any child, it’s only natural” (23). There is thus dissimilarity in the ways the social institutions put on in an individual’s growth. She always finds herself different than her cousin, the narrator, in terms of his behaviour, his outlook or idiosyncrasies. So, she further says: “It’s you . . . peculiar, sitting in that poky little flat in Calcutta dreaming about faraway places. I probably did no end of good; at least you learnt those cities you saw on maps were real places, not like those fairylands Tridib made up for you” (23-24). The adolescence of Ila is full of life, merry-making and interface with different places, persons and cultures. Parties, dances, fancy dresses are parts of her everyday life. She enjoys the privilege to wear whatever she likes. Her adolescent days offer the privilege of enjoyment, dates and fashions.

When both the narrator and Ila are fourteen years old, she introduces a person called Jamshed Tabrizi who appears in one of the pictures she has brought with her. He seems to be a bit “grown up man, with a face like an American film star, square-jawed and cleft-chinned with long black hair that curled down to his shoulders” (22). He is a fencing champion, the son of a rich man who is gifted “a BMW sports car for his birthday party” by his father (22). Ila tells the narrator that the guy is her boyfriend. They have also planned to go for long drive down to the beach at Pattaya on Sundays; just a few miles from Bangkok as soon as he avails his driving license. The novelist does not authenticate whether her tendency towards such activities are real or fake, because Ila narrates the detail of those photographs but she is “always unaccountably absent in the pictures” (22). Besides, in one of the photographs, the same boy appears in a group, a head taller than anyone else. However, his arms are “thrown around the shoulders of two
laughing blonde girls . . . but Ila is on the “edge of the back row, unusually in a plain grey skirt” (23). The narrator notices her position in the picture and when he again comes upon the picture a week later that page is found missing. Ghosh, thus, presents his character under the impression of light and shade effects making his readers somewhat difficult to arrive at a suitable conclusion.

The Grand Hotel episode is important in estimating the youthful days of Ila, narrator and Robi. They decide to celebrate their holidays at the hotel on the pretext of farewell party to Robi. It reflects on Ila’s happy-go-lucky life style whereas the narrator’s as skeptic, inhibited approach, and Robi’s pre-determined, self-confident and respect for own cultural heritage. The novelist frequently refers to her dresses and her appearance. As usual, she is exotic and prefers changes in taste of her appearance. When the narrator and Robi went to Ila’s house situated at Elgin Road, the description of Ila is beautifully presented: “She looked younger with her hair cut, boyish in a way, and she was thinner too, her arms were like wands, and the dimple was never quite gone from her cheek. She looked improbably exotic to me, dressed in a faded blue jeans and a T-shirt- like no other girl I had ever seen before except in pictures in American magazines” (81).

The description of Ila in the novel reminds about the impact of modernity on adolescents and youth in western countries. In contrast, the Indian youth like Robi and the narrator are still far behind trailing with the cultural ethos and tradition. The narrator pronounces the clothes of Ila as very peculiar in Calcutta for he has not seen anyone wearing the sort of clothes. The dresses of generation represent the trend of the period in which particular period they wear. In modern perspective, stylish hair, jeans, T-shirts, use of cosmetics are the means to announce the presence of modernity. Commenting on impact of modern western culture on contemporary Indian youth, Peter Ronald says: “The new world of youth in India was the idea of a pair of jeans: blue jeans, black jeans, studded jeans, jeans with patch pockets, jeans with messages, jeans, jeans, and jeans. They have become a ubiquitous symbol of youth in India…” (Ronald xix).

But this deconstruction of cultural codes in India is much delayed as evident from the narrator or Robi. Whereas Ila is already a girl well immersed into the enchanting world of modernity. Ila is a modern girl who responds to modernity, particular dress
codes that represents “sexy” dressing where Indian orthodoxical parameters are openly challenged (Ronald xxi). She is genuinely a lineage of Indian culture and tradition but the social, cultural and political institutions under whose impressions she has grown up, definitely resists being orthodoxical. It does not necessarily imply ‘sexy’ at her level of consciousness. Anyway, the narrator can not resist himself being tempted towards her as she lay on the sofa with her faded jeans and T-shirt that makes way to the “hollow of her stomach glowing in the darkness” (81).

It is a common event for her to go to pub, nightclub and participate in a cabaret or dance on the floor of a discotheque or drink wine at a public place like the Grand Hotel. But the narrator and Robi are not open to such arrangements or gatherings. When Robi does not agree to her proposal for drinks in a nightclub, she simply insults him as “the worst kind of hypocrite” (82). She is open to her behaviour, ambitions, her personal likes and dislikes. But the narrator and Robi, who occasionally smuggled bottles of rum into the college hostel room and drink night away with friends, do not want to get exposed at a place like the Grand Hotel. Despite their resistances and disinterestedness, they give in because she won’t let go once she is determined to persuade.

The dresses they wear on the day show the distinctive features of modernity and tradition impressioned in each individual. Ila is resplendent in a “silk blouse and a skirt” but Robi and the narrator are in their “usual student uniform of Kurta and crumpled trousers” (84). Ila is frequent visitor to the places like the nightclub whereas the narrator and Robi are misfit in “the poshest place like that” (84). The nightclub of the Grand Hotel symbolizes the gradual impact of western cultural values in India as well. It contains every possible comforts, decorations and amenities like – wine, dance floor, cabaret, band of musicians, and waiters on call. They order for beer and wait when Miss Jennifer, the cabaret dancer of the club, appears. She summons everyone to participate. As the show starts and the dancer tries her best to warm up the mood of the visitors, Ila also insists both Robi and the narrator to dance with the number Ol Blue Eyes. The narrator’s courage fails particularly in presence of Robi and refuses to Ila. When she insists Robi, his response is something she has never expected: “I can’t dance . . . And even if I could, I wouldn’t in a place like this. I think you should sit down, for you’r not going to dance
either” (86). It is a common activity for Ila for she is brought up in an open space where orthodoxy of Indian traditions have no place. Therefore, Robi’s prevention to dance in the nightclub is obviously disheartening and sufficient to make her furious: “You won’t let me? . . . Why, who do you think you are?” (86).

There is no reason why she can not participate in the dance. It is a moral code of conduct for Robi who pays high regards to Indian cultural values. But Ila is too offended, and out of her challenging mood, she rises to her feet despite the narrator’s pleadings not to. She pushes the narrator aside and moves for dance partner towards the two businessmen sitting little ahead. As one of the businessmen responds in disbelief, all of sudden, Robi elbows the narrator away and catch hold of the neck of Ila’s blouse with one hand and wrenches her away from the businessman. Simultaneously, he plants his palm on the chest of that businessman so forcefully, that the man swindles away about five feet. It is unexpected for everyone present in the club. He drags Ila out of the nightclub, despite her resistance. Ila can’t believe that Robi has gone to the extent breaching her freedom. Robi tries to calm her down with his cool and bossy style: “Listen Ila . . . shaking his head. You shouldn’t have done what you did. You ought to know that; girls don’t behave like that here” (88). It is a pre-occupied notion of cultural values that Robi adamantly prescribes her to follow. But Ila’s upbringing does not find any rationality for such values. She is defiant and says: “What the fuck do you mean? . . . What do you mean ‘girls’? I’ll do what I bloody well want: when I want and where” (88). There is a strong note of a liberal woman who is ready to break down the patriarchal system of dominance. She does not submit to the male-centric values. The arguments between Robi and Ila reflect the differences in attitudes, disposition and behavior as nurtured since their childhood. Ila’s counter argument is the announcement of arrival of new modern woman mentioned by poststructuralist feminist like Juliet Mitchell, Kristeva or Chris Weedon. The binary features acculturated by Ila and Robi in their respective spaces are well presented in their hot arguments. Ila’s rebellious tone – “Why not? . . . Why fucking well not?” – is well re-encountered by Robi with his acute justification stemmed by the indigenous cultural values – “You can do what you like in England . . . But here there are certain things you cannot do. That’s our culture; that’s how we live” (88).
She enjoys the individual freedom and dismisses anything that draws a line between the two opposite sexes. Her conviction is nurtured under different cultures that do not pay much value to those cultures that circumscribe the individual identity or freedom. But Robi, who has spent longer duration in India, believes in what the society has prescribed or he has understood as better. She puts up a strong reason before the narrator for not choosing to stay in India:

“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 what?” I said.

“Free of you! She shouted back. Free of your bloody culture and free of all of you”. (88-89)

Her utterances obviously carry the tinge of an adolescent who wants to be free, self-chosen life style. Anything that cuts short her freedom cannot be culture. Hence, the prevention of Robi, on the pretext of culture, is ‘bloody culture’ for her. She hates being confined to marginal level. She scowls those slangs scarcely heard among decent Indian adolescent girls especially before one’s cousin or uncle in a Hinduistic society. She wants freedom of speech, activity, fashion, dates, travel and merry-making. Such freedom is a bad culture in patriarchal Indian society. When the narrator tries to explain his grandmother in sick-bed about Ila’s preference to stay in London; her statement is not much dissimilar than Robi’s. She says: “It’s not freedom she wants … 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” (89).

Tha’mma’s definition of freedom is quite different from Ila’s because Ila’s freedom implies whatever she does for the sake of pleasure but for Tha’mma a woman must not concede to moral degradation to the level of a whore in order to achieve freedom. Hence, Tha’mma’s opinion for Ila is not favourable. She repeatedly screams out the narrator that she is not better than a whore. Her penetrating eyes do not escape the narrator’s attachment with Ila. She says: “why do you always speak for that whore?”
Though Ila is a close relative to her, she does not like the narrator’s attachment with her. Instead she demands explanation: “Tell me; what does that English whore mean to you?” (90). She wants the narrator to maintain enough distance from Ila. The night before departure to his college, once again she comments on the issue: “Why have you let that whore trap you? . . . I know it’s she who’s sent you into the arms of those whores you go to in Delhi” (90-91). Tha’mma’s judgment on Ila is very harsh. Her opinion is founded on all the worldly experiences and orthodoxical turncoat that she is so used to. But Ila is not a degraded whore, she is the product of modern outlook, democratic education and upbringing. The judgment of Tha’mma may be considered as the opinion of a frustrated old orthodoxical lady, or a disciplinarian in her own way. There is no value of being open in thoughts and actions. For Tha’mma the cultural heritage that she has carried along, is cordial, highly esteemed and should be followed by all who bear the legacy of an Indian or a Bengali in blood. Her frustrations and displeasures are targeted towards her own sister Mayadebi and Ila’s mother who have converted themselves to cosmopolitanism. Their identities have attained cosmopolitan touch and have comprehensive influence upon the developmental process of Ila. When the narrator tells her about Ila’s childhood experience in London where she had to face the racial discrimination, she does not blame Nick but particularly to her sister Mayadebi and Ila’s mother Queen Victoria: “I don’t blame the boy (Nick). It was Ila’s fault. It was her own fault and Maya’s fault and the fault of that half-witted mother of hers. It was bound to happen; anyone can see that. She has no right to be there. She does not belong there” (77).

Tha’mma’s judgment for Ila is self-contradictory. She has no high esteem about her character and life style. But her opinion is again contrasted with when she says – Ila ‘shouldn’t be there’ that reflects her true concern for Ila. For her, there is difference between nation-state metaphors as posed constantly by Ghosh in the novel. The periphery of a nation is meant for its citizens only. Hence, Ila’s move towards another foreign land is not suitable for her growth, education, culture and for her life as a whole.

Tha’mma is obviously self-opinionated in judging Ila’s individual identity. There is frequent slippage in her opinions. So, sometimes she validates her own judgment that “she’s gone there because she’s greedy’ she’s gone there for money” (79). Despite the
narrator’s explanation in favour of Ila trying to convince Tha’mma that she has gone there not for money; she does not believe the narrator’s statement. The narrator tries to convince her that she does not run after money because she has already more than enough of it. She leads a very ordinary life living in a small house with other five students where she takes care of herself and does everything for housekeeping or other paraphernalia. But Tha’mma’s opinion is static and enlists “. . . all the things money can buy- fridges . . . colour T.V.’S and cars, calculators and cameras, all those things you can’t get here” – usually ascribed for a comfortable living. (79)

The narrator argues that she has to live on her pocket money instead of lavishly spending for comfortable things. She uses her leisure time by participating in demonstrations and acting in radical plays for Indian immigrants in East London. But all his endeavours fail to convince his grandmother. The rise of modernity in Europe and America has already taken the youth in its grip at the time while the Indian sub-continent was trailing behind. Hence, this discourse and Ila’s frequent change of locations are suggestive of Ila’s growth that divergently functions in identity construction throughout her childhood to young adulthood. There must be differences between the young-adults grown up in India and Europe. Nevertheless, Tha’mma believes Ila to be immersed in that trend of modern attitudes and practices. It mandates her to turn into “a greedy little slut” in Tha’mma’s opinion (79). The narrator’s defenses are non-reactive for Tha’mma or insufficient to redirect her judgment. Instead, she seeks the narrator’s valid reasons – “Since you know her so well: why does she live there if it’s not for the money and the comforts” (79). For Tha’mma, Ila is a transcultural breed, greedy, morally degraded dipped into all the social snobbery and also ethically sterile.

Ila’s life is vibrant, colourful and self-contented. In terms of her love life or ultimate marriage throws light on her frankness. It is the culture, people and place around which she has grown up with. Though the roots are spread to India, there is not much attachment with the socio-cultural ethos of India. It is given full length freedom by her parents who do not find any reason to prevent her from choosing a life partner alien to her society, culture or language. In a way, her life partner belongs to the colonizer’s race,
the extreme ‘other’. However, she prefers to befriend, develop intimacy and take up the most important decision of her life to become Nick’s wife. Her fondness to western people or culture is announced since her childhood days that continue to foster throughout her growth. The game of house played under the huge table in Raibajar’s house is the evidence of her such tendencies. There is a lurking illusion in her story of Magda that she claims to be well protected by the shadowy ‘other’ called Nick. But later on, it is made clear by May that her brother did not try to save her. He rather avoids her on that day because he is “ashamed to be seen by his friends walking home with an Indian” (76). May favouring Nick says: “He was very young, and at that age children want everyone to be alike” (76). But in reality, Ila never understands the discrimination not even when she becomes adolescent or young adult. The colour of European culture and fondness for the ‘other’ continues to foster along with her growth. She forgets her cultural lineage and breaks loose to do everything that Indians regard as immoral, indecent and against tradition. She does not hesitate to kiss, hug or show her love for Nick even before Robi or the narrator in the streets. She leads a life in London sharing home with male students from different nations. There is no reason why she chooses Nick as her life-mate because he is no way suitable; neither as a loyal person nor as a successful professional. Ila is represented here as an adolescent suffering from ‘identity crisis’ as Erik H. Erikson describes in his thesis on adolescence. The state in which Ila puts herself is due to her autonomy licensed by her parents. She is too vulnerable person, and consequently, she anchors herself to what James E. Marcia identifies as the Identity Diffusion. She deviates from Indian culture and tradition but considers Europeans and their culture as superior of all that mandates her to become prey. She is not a spoilt child; she belongs to respectable family like Datta-Chaudhuris. Whatesoever, she finally enters into marriage with Nick that cannot be regarded as successful story in spite of fat ransom conceded in dowry comprising a luxury flat in London and a costly honeymoon trip. Within a very short time, she realizes that the choice has compensated much more than anyone’s expectations. Nick turns out to be a deceiver to her true love. But she is an emotional fool because she can’t resist her love for him and continues the relationship with that disloyal life-mate.

The narrator’s last meeting with Ila at Trafalgar Square, on the footsteps of St.
Martin, presents a serious and anxious Ila he has never imagined. He sees her eyes “red-rimmed and swollen, as though she has been weeping through the night” as she removes her glasses (180). The narrator comes to know that she has finally understood that her husband maintains number of illegitimate relationship even after her marriage including the last Martinique girl she conversed with over phone that too surprisingly from her own bedroom. She tries to conceal her pain “with her familiar high-spirited laugh”, but it fails to deceive the narrator “the pain it carried along” (189). It reminds him of what May said before about Nick that – “He’s different, he’s not like us” (189).

The entire projection of developmental process of each individual character, especially of Ila, provides an authentic logic to inevitable colonial discourse in the novel. The character of Ila is the true reflection of ‘colonial desire’. She is the epitome of subjectified ‘native.’ She is completely under the spell of colonial power. Since childhood, her attempt to become ‘like the colonizer’ leaves her neither as colonizer not as the sheer native ‘subject’. She becomes what Homi K Bhabha terms, as a ‘hybrid’ character. She undergoes pollination process to adopt herself into that inter-terrestrial state. The process of hybridization is slow and undercurrent but progresses with a compelling impact. She loses her native subjectivity and emerges as new hybrid one of the period. The novelist beautifully presents a picture of Ila as representative of how a childhood or juvenile mind is so brittle to submit to strong ‘colonial desire.’

The character of Robi is one of the best portraits in the novel. The part of the novel spares very less space to present him with graphic description. But his presence is sufficient to occupy a distinctive place in The Shadow Lines. His growth is little bit different than the character of Tridib, Ila, the narrator, Nick or May. Robi is the youngest brother of Tridib. He is introduced at the beginning pages as “the third brother Robi . . . lived with his parents wherever they happened to be posted until he was sent away to boarding school at the age of twelve” (06). His childhood is also full of travels roaming around different parts of the world as his father keeps on shifting places due to his diplomatic job with the U.N.O. He has a very close intimacy with the narrator and Ila because all of them belong to the same age group. He is sent to the boarding school in North India where he completes his school education. He is a strongly built, firmly
determined and self-reliant boy. The narrator’s grandmother has special attraction for Robi because she likes the way he maintains his physical strength. He is physically well-groomed and mentally very strong. The narrator’s grandmother puts her finger on Robi’s strong rounded chin and says: “you get that from me, that’s mine” (35). His growth is remarkable because he is always “half a head taller than anyone else of his age, at the strength in his long sinewy legs” (35). Robi’s love for games makes him macho boy already hardened at the age of nine. His well structured physical appearance energizes Tha’mma to comment on him: “You’re strong; don’t even forget that, you’re strong” (35). For Tha’mma, he is the ideal example for other boys in the country including her own grandson, the narrator. She compares and says: “Watch Robi, he’s strong; he’s not like the rest of you in this country” (35).

The early adolescent days of Robi is not like the other common adolescents. During this age most adolescents prefer to bully, fight, and quarrel between/among the gangs. But his distinction is marked by his singular challenge to anything/anyone that befalls upon him. Yet, there is a touch of compassionate feelings for down-trodden and marginal people. He is not hesitated for a physical contest just at twelve or frighten a much older boy to protect a boy with clubbed feet. He teaches the elder boy such a lesson that the boy spends at least two days in a hospital. His mother is ever worried at such behavior because he challenges a boy much older to him. She is afraid because she develops an apprehension that Robi would later on turn temperamental. On the contrary, as Tha’mma comes to know about the incident through Tridib, she is happy and supportive as well to what he has done at that moment. She says: “of course Robi had to fight him . . . What else could he have done? Maya ought to be proud of him. I’m proud of him; but then, he’s like me, not like Maya” (36). Robi is not a bully in ordinary sense of the term. Neither does he prefer to show off his physical strength. However, he is not coward, selfish or blind to anything wrong happening before his eyes. He is very genuine to his heart and conscience. He does whatever his conscience persuade him to do.

Robi holds a very special position not only at school; he occupies such position in his college in Delhi as well. Ila believes that it is “just petit bourgeois nastiness” of Robi that prevents him to participate in public place gathering or parties. She says: “Its
mystery to me how he’s become such a legend in your college: I thought students were meant ot be defiant of narrow-mindedness. But undergraduates respect muscles, I suppose and he’s plenty of those” (82). That Robi earned attention and respect due to his well-structured physical appearance is recurrently implied in the novel. The young adults admire anyone who is physically strong and Robi is also no exception to such attitudes. However, the narrator’s estimation is authentic and quite comprehensive because he is in the same college in Delhi where they complete their graduation. The narrator is always puzzled at how Robi commanded in the college. He does not understand what special feature ordain him such status in the campus because there is nothing he may be declared as excellent. According to the narrator: “He was not unusually good at sports, just about good enough to keep a place in the college cricket eleven; he was good at his studies but not brilliant; he was not clever, not well-dressed, not talented, . . . . yet . . . he commanded a respect immeasurably . . .” (82-83). The qualities generally which gain attention among the young adults or youth as enumerated by the narrator is definitely a trend among this age group. But Robi possesses them just partially. Hence, it is strange for the narrator or anyone to concede that it is quite mysterious in his personality.

There are, of course, references in the succeeding pages in which Robi’s character is displayed at the epicenter among his peers. The narrator says that “the superhuman simplicity of his view of the world” is mediated by the “abundant physical courage” and non-hesitant in making judgment, arguments or anything fear-like to defend them” (83). The incident of expulsion of a boy from the college for asking a girl to bring ‘a cup of tea or something’ reflects his untenable courage. The college union claiming every student’s compulsory participation calls on a strike protesting the decision. Robi is the only student to stand against it. When he is threatened by them of good beating, he is nonchalant; rather provokes for a ‘physical contest’. Finally, the boys give in because everyone knows about his self-confidence and physical power. For Robi, whether the decision of the college authority was right or wrong does not matter much. He believes in what is being prescribed or demanded by the discipline of the institution. When asked later on repeatedly, he reluctantly answers the narrator: “Because a rule’s a rule; if you break one you have to be willing to pay the price” (83).
In a sense, Robi is not a youth bundled up with morality, discipline or arguments. He is the master of his will and very faithful to his intuitions. Hence, the narrator says that he has understood why his opinions always prevailed against his peers because Robi has “an intuition” to lead “him directly to what he knew he ought to do, even if he did not know why” (83-84). This extraordinary quality makes the narrator admire him for his “courage, even when it manifested itself physically . . . moral in the purest sense” (83-84). The inconveniences and difficulties can manipulate others but Robi knows well how to overcome them. Though it is physical strength at the face value, there is always a tinge of moral issue for he is always guided by his honest intuitions.

The Grand Hotel episode of The Shadow Lines is the reflection of transformative attitudes of adolescents and youth. The third generation adolescents of the novel – Ila, the narrator and Robi though share blood relations in the family, the cultural ethos they bear with distinctive features are what they have fostered throughout their maturation process in different cultures and locations. Ila has grown up outside India, while the narrator has never been outside of it and Robi has partly grown up abroad and partly in India. However, Robi is the epitome of traditional Indian adolescent despite his childhood in abroad. He is the person who upholds the value of cultural idiom nurtured so far. Of course, he indulges into occasional drinks in closeted places. His behaviour at the Grand Hotel creating obstacle for Ila to her ‘free will’ is the reflection of attitudes in which his intuitions are accustomed to. The display of his physical power is not merely for the purpose of showcasing his bully nature. Nowhere in the novel, is he presented as such, neither in the college, where the adolescents are generally found to be ‘college bullies’ in abundance.

Though his childhood has come across cosmopolitan socio-cultural milieu, there is no sign of westernized cosmopolitanism in Robi. Whatsoever, Robi’s childhood is also not less curious than most other children. In Dhaka, he hears about the possible ‘trouble’ that might take place any moment. He leans out of the window from the Chancellery if there is any. All through his way to Tha’mma’s old house and back, he is curious for the ‘trouble’. But he can not imagine that the worst part of his childhood is waiting for him and others on that day. He does not understand, neither has reasons for which his brother
Tridib loses his life in the hands of angry mob. He is unable to do anything to save him as a child. He carries this sad story buried inside his heart throughout his life. His arrogance and pain continue to disturb him. The day on which Robi, Ila and the narrator meet at the restaurant called Maharaja in Clapham, we find Robi being disturbed immediately even at the name of that place where his brother was killed in Bangladesh. He hates to get engrossed into discussion with a Bangladeshi citizen. The owner of the restaurant Rehman, unaware about his internal feelings, puts up questions excitedly on the note that Robi has lived in Dhaka from 1962-64. As Rehman appreciates Robi for remembering about the place so well, Robi bursts out: “I remember it because my brother was killed there . . . In a riot – not far from where my mother was born. Now do you see why I remember?” (243). Robi leaves the restaurant with long strides compelling both to run after him. It is the first day Robi shares his horrible experience in Dhaka. He is so impatient that he seeks to sit down somewhere for a while, relax and smoke a cigarette. The ghastly detail of Dhaka episode is recollected by him: “It’s a dream you know . . . I only get it about twice a year now, but I used to be once a week, when I was younger . . . coming, and on nights like that I try not to sleep” (243). There is a certain despair and restlessness since his encounter with the most horrible episode of his childhood that continues to steal away his night’s sleep. Its influence in his life has been so compelling that he feels himself to be imprisoned into that ghastly dream. A few pages later, he describes in detail: “I’ve never been able to rid myself of that dream . . . Ever since it first happened. When I was a child . . . if only that dream would go away, I would be like other people; I would be free. I would have given anything to be free of that memory” (246).

His psychological battle within poses answerless questions. He seeks reason and tries to substantiate with authentic logic but it fades away. Robi has achieved success as an administrative officer but he can’t understand why people kill others to be free. There is no definition of freedom in his thoughts. He simply expresses probability what he might have done had such incident been taken place in his area. But his thoughts give rise to endless mental debate to which he submits. There is no solution by creating borders between small places even if it might spread around the entire sub-continent. The character of Robi comments on how the novelist attempts to capture the trapped
adolescence through Robi’s turbulent cyclical utterance: “If freedom were possible, surely Tridib’s death would have set me free. And yet, all it takes to set my hand shaking like a leaf, fifteen years later, thousands of miles away, at the other end of another continent” (247).

The Shadow Lines presents a comparative and contrastive adolescents and youth of both oriental and occidental identities. Nick, the only son of Mrs. Price, and only brother of May, is introduced within the fifty pages of the novel. He is acquainted through a conversation between Ila and the narrator while playing under the huge table in Raibajar. From the conversation, the readers come to know that he has a friendly term with Ila who has been staying in their house as tenants in 44 Lymington Road, London. Both Ila and Nick go to “school together in the afternoon, and then afterwards, every evening, (they) go down together to play in the cellar” (49). Ila describes the early adolescence of Nick who is three years older than both the narrator and Ila but he is really “big… he’s very big. Much bigger . . . much stronger too” (49-50). Thus, the narrator constructs an image of Nick in his thoughts (looking glass in the novel) as narrated by Ila. He has become “a spectral presence” growing with him (50). A year later, when the narrator’s father visits to the Prices in London, on his return, he tells the narrator that he is “impressed” having seen “such a definite air of self-possession in a child of thirteen” (50). When the narrator’s father inquires him out of his curiosity what he wants to become, he replies that he wants “to be like his grandfather, grandfather Tresawsen” (51).

The narrator seeks authentication from May when she comes to Calcutta about the description of Nick such as –whether his hair was yellow or whether his hair fell over his eyes. To which May tells him – “No, yellow . . . sort of straw-coloured hair” (52-53) May tries to explain a bit more learning the narrator’s curiosity that “he’s a very grown up little boy… He knows exactly what he’s going to do after school” (50). But there is shift in what Nick has told the narrator’s father that he wants to become like his grandfather. Instead May tells the narrator that “he’s going to join a firm of chartered accountant and once they’ve trained him, he’s going to get a nice job with a huge salary – preferably abroad, not in England” (53). That Nick is different from the narrator or any other child is confirmed by May again. But she expresses her doubts and says: “You don’t know him . .
The introduction of Nick creates a picture of an adolescent, who is self-possessed, confident and desirable. It is strategically implied of oriental outlook towards the colonizer who is always regarded as bigger, stronger and desirable in colonial discourse. The impression of Nick, thus, develops as distinct species of colonizer’s race. As the narrator has heard much about Nick, he almost takes it for granted until he meets him seventeen years later in London. He identifies him immediately as soon as he sees him at the platform. He looks “very tall and broad” at the far end of the platform (55). But as he comes closer, the magnified image of Nick’s physical appearance in his imagination gradually fades away. The narrator’s previous idea that Nick was ‘taller and stronger’ turns out to be false because “most of his breadth lay in the thickness of his overcoat and that his head reached no higher up Robi’s shoulder” than that narrator’s (55). However, his hair falls over his eyes while he kisses Ila. This is very significant statement in the novel that implies Ghosh’s intention to break down the gigantic image of the colonizer’s race in reality. The image constructed so far is only ‘spectral’ rather than it’s true existence beyond innocence.

Since his childhood, Nick is arbitrarily attached with Ila. He is not a kid carried away by feelings. His relationship with Ila is not vested in equal terms as well. The story of Magda that Ila tells the narrator, while playing Houses under the huge table, contains bit fabrication in which Ila assumes to be the doll Magda and Nick as her companion. She describes the incidence takes place in the school in order to show Nick’s true concern for her. She is unwarrantedly messed up with one of her friends in the classroom on the issue of spelling. Unfortunately that fat girl is already a child bully in the classroom, and threatens her to give her a nice beating on her way back. She indeed follows later on and thrusts Ila down on the road. According to her, Nick saves Magda (her) and brings her back home. But May denies the truth in it because he leaves her on the way badly bruised. Actually he feels embarrassed to walk up together with an Indian girl. So, she returns home alone wounded while Nick takes up another street.
Thus, the character of Nick is essentially painted as racist, sexist and also selfish since his childhood. There is distinct difference between Nick and Ila according to their lineage, culture and social background. Nick already bears the gene of colonizer’s race, while Ila unaware is drawn towards him as hypnotized being. The Fanonian concept of vulture and its prey is reinforced in representing the relationship between colonizers and colonized. The colonizer’s oppression is imperative because the native has developed the notion that they are superior race ‘stronger, taller (a head taller Nick) and intelligent’.

The validity of such statement is substantiated in their successive growth form adolescence to youth. Ila falls in love with Nick and remains very honest to her feelings. But Nick’s true reciprocity is doubtful. Whenever she meets Nick, she is excited. She runs towards Nick for a hug. Nick, who is racist since his childhood, takes the opportunity to kiss her full on her mouth. But he hardly rejoices her company. He leaves her on the street or leaves her alone at the dining table. Nick marries her later on but his matrimonial relationship can be perceived as selfish engagement because he is not serious in achieving a social position through hard work even at the age of 30 or so. He tries his hand in Kuwait but he retreats and fools the narrator and others. The narrator’s repeated queries just ahead of their dinner compel him to hide the truth of his failure. Instead, he tries to justify his withdrawal from Kuwait by saying “Bloody, old Kuwait . . You wouldn’t say that if you know what it’s like out there. It’s a bubble that’s going to burst any day now. That’s why I got out while there was something to get out of” (108). But his resort to falsehood is disclosed by May who is always honest towards what she does or thinks. So, she warns him to stop “lying about this Kuwait business” (109). He disappoints the Prices in his chartered accountancy in Kuwait. He leaves the job because his boss dislikes him and fires him out of that business firm on the “concocted charges of embezzlement” (109). Instead of accepting the truth, he loses his temper and crosses the limit of least courtesy. His behavior with his own sister is too rude and sexist in nature. He is furious that his own sister exposes him before the guests. He shouts at her: “You are a liar and a bitch . . . It does not surprise me that you never got married. Who’d want to put up with that fake honesty and those staring eyes at breakfast?” (109). Both, May and Nick are given the best family support and education. But Nick has degenerated into a rude, sexist and racist in his nature. He is categorically termed as ill-tempered and
disloyal to his conscience. That he is sexist and selfish, or a dandy, can be followed through his intention of marriage and post-matrimonial relationship. There is space to recognize him as an opportunist because he expects a handsome financial support and a nice flat if he is married to Ila. Nick expects a luxurious honeymoon trip and comfortable life style. In order to obtain easy money and achieve success, he tries to influence Ila’s father “buy him a partnership in warehousing business” (99).

The comparison between Nick and Ila with regard to their matrimonial life, the readers easily figure out their attitudes. The seriousness and the due regard to a married relationship, they hold up to is, contradictory. It lacks that esteem generally found in a happily married couple. Ila likes her life partner from the bottom of her heart while Nick is frivolous. She is loyal to him but Nick is different. He is dishonest and considers his life as something with licentious debauchery. Ila is, of course, as she admits a “free woman and free spirit” (187). But she does not compromise her chastity for the sake of merry-making and worldly comforts. However, Nick is morally sterile and continues his life of debauchery even after his marriage with Ila. Ila can’t believe that her life-partner would turn out to be immoral, unethical and adulterous. She discovers it later on, when both shift to their newly bought flat after the luxurious honeymoon trip to Africa. She finds Nick’s illegitimate relationship with number of women – French, Martinique, and Indonesian women simultaneously.

The day before the narrator’s return journey to India, Ila calls him up asking any help she may extend. But the narrator, who is so closely associated since her childhood, senses out something wrong with her. At Trafalgar Square, Ila tells him impatiently the cause of her devastating emotional condition inflicted by her adulterous husband Nick. The narrator has never seen her at such a wrench out condition in his life for he has painted the picture of Ila as jovial friend. The observation of the narrator represents Ila as an extremely disturbed tragic being: “She was crying very hard. I had never seen her cry like that: her whole body was racked by the effort of her sobs . . . after that she lay with head against my chest, hiccupping, unable to speak” (187).

The narrator is always concerned for her but her marriage with his rival casts a lingering effect on it. So, when she is waiting for his other questions he says that he does
not “want to know” or “offer a sympathy” he does not feel genuinely (187). He hears the tragic consequence of her marriage and offers consolation. She discloses Nick’s illegitimate relations with so many women and Nick’s response has been too heartening to say that “he just likes a bit of variety; it’s his way of travelling” (188). She compensates more than a woman can expect in her life. The life of an untamed bird that she has selected for herself becomes desirable past. She understands that Nick has degenerated women being to the level of a thing in his perspective to be enjoyed with at any time for the sake of saturating his ‘variety’ of physical tastes. Instead of protest or rebellion, she submits to her fate. She does not want to leave him, divorce him or anything to dissect the relationship. She says to the narrator, “I can’t . . . Can’t you see that . . .?” (189). Ila is obviously a propagator of modern thoughts and ideas. She likes freedom but she is helpless because she carries the gene of a colonized race; she suffers hard but fails to resist. Though she is a hybrid of the postcolonial temporality, she strictly upholds the typical Indian value of one husband in life time.

Thus The Shadow Lines is not only replete with adolescents and youth of emerging modern world, it recoils back as well to represent the panoramic view of first and second generation. Lionel Tresawsen, who represents the first generation, appears as adolescents retold in few pages. The lineage is reproduced through the character of Nick who wants to become like his grandfather. Tresawsen was born in the village called Mabe, in southern Cornwall. Since his childhood, he represented as an ambitious child with zeal to do something very big in life. Therefore, he left his dear village Mabe, and his parents early. His zeal, to do something, necessitated detour out of England to nations across the continents. He travelled across Fiji, Bolivia, Guinea Coast, Ceylon, and works in mines, warehouses and plantations. He accepts the challenge of anything that comes his way. His adventurous journey and working spirit brought him to Calcutta one day and had destined to meet respectable Mr. Justice Chandrashekhar Datta-Chaudhuri. Both met at the meetings of the Theosophical Society in Calcutta. By that time, he was already a middle-aged man with two children Elisabeth and Alan from his wife, the former wife of a Welsh Missionary doctor.
Tresawsen’s hard-work, intelligence and curiosity made him a prolific inventor in his youth. His adventurous journeys across the nations were never motivated with the intention of hoarding money. He loved the steel tubes, children and any work that posed challenges before him. Nobody knew that Lionel Tresawsen had been a prolific inventor till his wife discovered the secret after five years of his death. Most of his inventions were done during his stay in Malaysia where he had taken out no less than twenty-five patents for gadgets ranging from mechanical shoe-horns to stirrup-pumps for draining water out of flooded mines” (52). Unfortunately, his creativity was not accorded due recognition in time. Instead, the manufacturers turned down to accept his inventions. Hence, finally, he gave up his works out of disgust. He was the best example of a hard-working person who synchronized the work culture as prime importance unlike his successor grandson Nick.

Apart from the above characters, the novel integrates the adolescent growth of second generation characters. It includes three characters basically – Tha’mma, Mayadebi and the youth who attends the same college where both the sisters study in Dhaka. The childhood of Tha’mma and Mayadebi is one of the most important episodes that comments on the mode of parenting children and its successive impact on later developmental stages. Tha’mma says to the narrator:

... You know, it’s very different from the house Maya and I grew up... a very old house growing like a honeycomb with every generation of the Bosses adding layers and extensions, until... a huge, lopsided step-pyramid, inhabited by so many branches of the family that even the most knowledgeable amongst them... become a little confused about their relationship. (120-121)

They lived in a big joint family with their grandparents, parents, Jethamosai and his family with three children and a couple of spinster aunts. All the cousins including Tha’mma and Mayadebi were almost in the same age group. It was a typical joint family where the eldest of the family members took the charge of the entire house like their grandfather. Even their father and Jethamosai were so frightened that they talked in whispers and eyes fixed on the floor. As he left for his daily routine duty to courts as advocate, the entire house had turned into an immediate noisy hub. There was rule for the
five children to parade before him every evening: “... led by their mothers into his study where they had to recite their alphabets- Bengali first and then English with their hands held out, palm downwards, and he would rap them on the knuckles with the handle of his umbrella every time they made a mistake. If they cried they were wrapped on their shins” (121). After the death of their grandfather, Jethamosai the eldest member of the family took charge of the house. He tried to maintain the strictest discipline in his own way. He was somewhat eccentric in nature for he liked to eat standing up with a belief that it would help in digestion and strange habits blowing through lips. As a part of continuing the tradition of his father, he also asked the children to recite alphabet every evening, and if any child laughs in between, he was too furious. He “would ... pound out a drum roll of raps on their knuckles, whereupon they would begin to scream their lungs out and then ... lose his temper altogether and start kicking in the shins” (122). Behind his strict discipline, he also had soft feelings towards the children. So, he often brought the children halwa and sambhar to make them feel good.

Their grandmother led a secluded life confined to herself after the death of her husband. The peaceful live-in together ceased soon after. Their mothers doubted each other with a fake notion of favouring their own children. The quarrel gradually turned to a worst point that lashed up with their husband. It did not take much time to demand the division of property. Both the parents stopped talking to each other and the family dispute ultimately reached the judicial proceedings. They issued legal notices for any trivial claims they needed to demand from the other. Finally, they settled up to divide the house in two halves with lawyer like precision. The bitterness of elders gradually cast its dark shadow over their innocent childhood. They were not allowed to meet or talk with the children of the other family. They even forgot to laugh freely and had become helpless witness to such pathetic deterioration of family ties just before their eyes.

They partitioned the house and the toilet with wooden planks. They even divided the nameplate in the middle with thin line making the letters appear in parts. Thus, the worst childhood experience remained ever inscribed in the psychic space. Tha’mma for example, bears the testimony of her ancestors. She remains strict disciplinarian both in
school as headmistress and at home as the eldest of the family members. She also continues being eccentric in her behavior.

Education of Tha’mma and Mayadebi fortunately overcomes those filial disturbances although they carry its burden alone through their maturation process. Both are graduates from the University of Dhaka. But in adolescent life in college, they become the witness of the rebellious movements initiated by the insurgent groups like Anushillan and Jugantar. They meet a well-trained cadre capable to prepare home-made bombs and assassinate British officials. The courage of that boy and the motif of those rebels are memorable experience Tha’mma cherishes in her later life. She is fascinated by the heroism of that boy whom she regards as the follower of great fighters like Khudiram Bose and the Bagha Jatin who had lost their lives in the revolt against the British. She is so inspired that she would be happy to assist them- in cooking food, washing clothes or anything like that. The boy’s image is so enthusiastic that she is ready to take any challenge against that colonial regimen: “I would have been frightened… 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 free” (39).

Tha’mma witnesses the movements, riots, police raids in her adolescent life. Along such social upheaval, her adolescent mind frequently immerses into the tempo of that time. The boy, Tha’mma’s classmate, is the representative of another youth of that turmoil period. Besides, Tha’mma is ready to go to any extent for the cause of political freedom. But her childhood leaves a permanent mark on her character and being. She remains a strict disciplinarian and influences her grandson till her death.

The novel deploys a range of methods to represent the growth of all the three generation characters. Conspicuously, no any character resembles with the other in its subjectivity. The temporal and spatial watermark is sparkingly identifiable with each character in the novel.