Chapter III: A Critical study of *The Shadow Line*
3.1. Introduction:

*The Shadow Lines* is a second novel of Amitav Ghosh, which is a *Sahitya Akademi* Award winning novel. It is divided into two parts, *Going Away* and *Coming Home*. It brilliantly shifts from past to present and from present to past. The story is told by a nameless narrator in recollection. It is an account of a middle class Bangali family living in Kolkata. Thomas F. Halloran remarks in his article,

*The Shadow Lines* presents three generations of Indian and British families who experience the build up to, the actuality, and representations of the 1947 partition in Bengal/East Pakistan specifically, but figuratively in India as a whole. [Halloran: 2009: 45]

However, the principle aim of this chapter is to focus on critical study of *The Shadow Line* and draw out notions as Colonial Desire and Hybridity.
2.2. A Critical study of *The Shadow Line*:

The novel begins in 1939 with the outbreak of Second World-war when Tridib, narrator’s cousin went to England. The narrator remembers his grandmother Tha’mma and her younger sister Mayadebi as Maya-thakuma. The narrator recounts Mayadebi ‘like a film star or a politician whose picture I had seen in a newspaper. …Mayadebi was twenty-nine when they left, and Tridib was eight.’ [Ghosh: 1988: 3] She has a husband who works in Foreign Service as diplomats. She had four sons named Jatin, Kaku, Tridib and Robi. Jatin was two years older than Tridib, who is an economist with an U.N. and therefore he was always out of India with his wife and daughter named Illa. Robi was very close to his mother and the used to accompany them whenever they went.

Tridib was the only son of Mayadebi who used to spend most of his life in Culcutta. He was twenty one year’s elder to the narrator. It was in his company that the narrator learnt about the real world. He was narrator’s uncle and also his guide. The narrator’s grandmother has not good opinion about him and she advises to the narrator as to keep distance away from this irresponsible man. He was research student works on Archeology and spent his most of life in ancestral house with his aging grandmother. ‘Tridib was an archaeologist; he was not interested in fairylands: the one thing he wanted to teach me, he used to say, was to use my imagination with precision.’ [Ibid: 24] Tridib was a good story teller. He used to tell about the narrator about the world he had seen. He used to speak on all subjects in the evenings and his listeners waited for him eagerly. He had a ‘thin, waspish face, his tousled hair and his bright black eyes glinting behind his gold-rimmed glasses, ‘I would be close to bursting with pride.’ [Ibid: 9] He preferred neutral places like coffee houses, bars, and street-corner *addas*. He was very
shrewd and worldly-wise in his dealings. He used to guide students in their studies. He also instructed them how to be successful in interviews.

Tridib stopped visiting his aunts and the narrator, and stayed at his ancestral house. During this reside, he told the narrator about his experiences and his journey of England. After few days, Tridib was again found at his old *adda*. He told his listeners about his stay in England and about his girlfriend May Price. Tribid’s grandfather was a judge in the Calcutta High Court and May Price’s grandfather lived in India during the British rule. They became friends. Later Lionel Tresawsen, the grandmother of May Price went back to London.

In 1939, Tribid went to England with his father. Then May Price was a little girl. They stayed with the English friends. Tribid’s father was operated upon in London. Later May Price visited Calcutta and met the narrator. Then after seventeen years the narrator again met her when he went to England on a year’s research grant. Meenakshi Malhotra points out the character of Tridib:

> **Product of an era prior to the historical development of nation status, the untold story in The Shadow Lines symbolizes a sense of lost wholeness, an ideal frozen in time. This romanticized quasi-mythical story of another time counter acts and balances Tridib’s pornographic letter to May. In very different ways, both demonstrate Tridib’s desire for a space free of history and painful collective memory. [Malhotra: 2003: 169]**

Tridib’s presence in the narrative provides momentum to the story and an impetus to the narrator.
Tridib remains a puzzle to most of the characters in the novel. There seems to be a scheme ‘even his madness’. But he is a man who looks up a high to the stars and travels in the galaxies. The narrator is highly impressed with Tridib for his insight and imaginative faculty. He informs Ila that Tridib has given him new words to travel. ‘I knew that the sights Tridib saw in his imagination were infinitely more detailed, more precise than anything I would ever see. He said to me once that one could never know anything except through desire, real desire, which was not the same thing as greed or lust; a pure, painful and primitive desire, a longing for everything that was not in oneself, a torment of the flesh, that carried one beyond the limits of one’s mind to other times and other places, and even, if one was lucky, to a place where there was no border between oneself and one’s image in the mirror.’ [Ghosh: 1988: 29] Thus, he is intuitive and imaginative person. He possesses the power of recollection and contemplation. He has a habit to seeing things, places and people in his imagination. This tendency enters into his being so deep than he often makes love with his beloved May Price.

The narrator’s grandmother Tha’mma was a retired Headmistress, a disciplinarian head of the family, lived near the house of her sister Mayadebi. She had faith and old, accepted values of life, and looks down upon those who do not fall in line with her. She was born and brought up in a joint family in Dhaka, her grandfather was an advocate. She was married to an Engineer with Railways in Burma. Therefore, she passed the first twelve years of her married life in Railway colonies. In 1935 her husband caught a chill while supervising the construction of a culvert, and died of Pneumonia. Thus, she became a widow when she was a young woman of thirty two.

A sympathetic railway official got her appointed as a school teacher in Calcutta. She worked there and rose to be the principal of that school and retired as
successful principal. Thamma was a woman of convictions; she thought that the world would go haywire if woman were not there to keep their men folk straight and upright. She acted as a monitor over her family. She had her own notions of a responsible man. Regarding to this Sarika Auradkar writes in her book entitled *Amitav Ghosh: A Critical Study*:

> Anybody who felt to live up to her notion was an utter failure in life. She thought that a responsible man who was one who could find a good job for himself, no matter how he came by it, and settle himself in the customary was a married man. [Auradkar: 2007: 44]

Being traditional she could not approve of any man or woman living in European style. She disliked Mayadebi’s husband for his ultra-modern fashion. She disliked Ila modish behavior.

Thamma is a central character in the novel. In fact, *The Shadow Lines* is very much her story; the narrator remembers how Tridib had called her ‘a modern middle class woman’. Sarika Auradkar talks about attitude towards common middle class life,

> She would thrive believing in the unity of nationhood and territory, of self-respect and national power, which was all she wanted, a modern middle class life, a small thing that history had denied her in its fullness and for which she could never forgive it. [Ibid]
Thamma lives a happy life in Calcutta, but when she goes to Dhaka her native city, she is the unsuspecting witness to the most awful acting in her life rioting mob kills her aged uncle and her young nephew. The novelist presents Thamma’s early life as a story told by her to the narrator. She was born in 1902 in Dhaka and grew up as a member of big joint family. ‘Theirs was a big joint family then, with everyone living and eating together: her grandparents, her parents, she and Mayadebi, her Jethamoshai – her father’s elder brother – and his family, which included three cousins of roughly her own age, as well as a couple of spinster aunts.’ [Ghosh: 1988: 121] After her grandfather’s death, her ancestral house had to be partitioned.

Thamma had known the terrorist movement amongst nationalists in Bengal, during her college life. ‘…about secret terrorist societies like Anushilan and Jugantar and all their offshoots, their clandestine networks, and the home-made bombs with which they tried to assassinate British officials and policemen; and a little about the arrests, deportations and executions with which the British had retaliated.’ [Ibid: 37] There was a classmate who was a member of Terrorist organization. Once, as the lecture was going on, the police officers entered into the class and arrested the classmate. Because of that young man planned to kill an English Magistrate in Khulna district. In her youthful enthusiasm she had dreamt to terrorists like Khudiram Bose and Bagha Jatin who had been betrayed by treacherous villagers who in turn had been brought with English money. Therefore, Thamma had wanted to work for the terrorist, to run errands for them, to cook their food, to wash their cloths, and to render some help. After all, the terrorists were working for independence.

Thamma was a witness of political actions during colonial phase. There was a major political event of partition. In 1947 the partition took place in India and
Dhaka becomes the Capital of East-Pakistan. This partition divided nations as well as Thamma from her native city, but the public events did not have a direct impact on her so much as the demands of her personal life. The novelist focuses on the life of Thamma from her retirement in 1962 to her death 1965. It was at the time to the narrator suffered the worst of fears in Calcutta, that his grandmother had gone on visit to her sister, Mayadebi who was in Dhaka. Her husband had his posting in East-Pakistan when the idea was mooted that she should visit Dhaka, she had wonder whether the border between India and East-Pakistan was marked by trenches or something, what could be the dividing line between the two countries? Then her son explains: ‘This is the modern world. The border isn’t on the frontier: it’s right inside the airport. You’ll see. You’ll cross it when you have to fill in all those disembarkation cards and things.’ [Ibid: 151-52] When Thamma flew into Dhaka, accompanied by Tridib and May Price, who had come on a visit to India, and met her sister, the grandmother’s question was: ‘where’s Dhaka? I can’t see Dhaka.’ [Ibid: 193] For the dream image of her native city had vanished long ago. One important reason for the grandmother to go to Dhaka was her desire to see her old house and bring her uncle, Jethamoshai, to India.

In London the narrator met May price when she was playing in an orchestra in a theatre. After the show, May Price took the narrator to her place. May Price tell the narrator about her friendship with Tribid. In 1957, Tribid was twenty seven and May nineteen years of age. He had begun a long correspondence. Tribid went to London in 1939 and left London in 1940. Since then they wrote to each other. Since then Tribid lived in Calcutta. The narrator grew as a boy in company of Tribid. He liked Tribid who was rather the alter-ego of the narrator. He became the narrator’s mentor. The narrator was sixteen when he was to go to Delhi for college education. His niece Ila came from Indonesia for her holidays. Along with ila, the narrator visited the where they used to sit on a bench with arms in each other’s
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waists. They shared moments passed together with Tribid in Calcutta. When Tridib goes to Dhaka with her grandmother to carry his maternal grand uncle, he is attacked by the communal mob and killed. His death has been regarded as a sacrifice. He died while saving May Price.

Ila is a major woman character in the novel. Rajeshwari Sundar Rajan observes that ‘male characters in The Shadow Lines are passive and female characters show growth and dynamism.’ [Rajan: 1988: 289] Ila is a character who wants to get rid for her cultural rules in order to enjoy her present. Rajan further states:

Ila and grandmother are ‘unrooted’ characters, typifying two of the characteristic forms of twentieth century diaspora: Ila is the post-colonial cosmopolitan, while her great-aunt is a refugee. Constant travel has paradoxically made Ila impervious to novelty, blunted her curiosity and vision, so that although she lived in many places, she had never traveled at all. [Ibid]

However, Ila represents the new face of modern woman who wants live freely and find a sense of fulfillment in her present alone. She has a practical and empirical bent of mind. The narrator’s grandmother, Thamma, is her just opposite who feels perplexed after being uprooted from Dhaka. She continues to travel new places to find a secure footing. She feels suffocated in Calcutta and finally decides to settle own in London by marrying an English young man Nick. Here she hopes to live freely. It is ironical that she enjoys her rootlessness in modern world. The grandmother calls her whore and asks her grandson to keep away from her. But the narrator enjoys and relishes relationship with Ila. She represents post-colonial female perspective. Vinita Chandra writes:
Ila occupies a central position in the novel in relation to the narrator’s exploration of self-identity. The narrator’s unwritten desire for her is located in her exotic, western clothes appearance and behavior. Through the fantasies of being accepted and popular in the western milieu that Ila constructs for the narrator as a child and adult, the novel focuses on her anxieties about being rejected by the western culture that’s she strives to embrace while at the time consciously repudiating her Indian background. [Quoted By Sharma: 2010: 44]

When Ila’s parents were in Colombo, Ila had a number of experiences there. One day early in the morning Ila was reading a book in her lawn. Suddenly there was a splash under her chair near the pond. She saw a shadow rippling, crawling into the pool. It was a big snake. Ila cried and found it difficult to slip away. At last the snake moved aside and Ila was safe.

One day the narrator, Ila and Robi visited a pub. The narrator wanted to tell Ila about Tribid and his world of imagination. Ila came to Calcutta with her parents. They met each other and rest of the younger ones enjoyed each other’s company. Once the narrator, Ila, Tribid Nityananda and Ila’s mother were together in the car. It was the time of festivals and it was very difficult to go beyond Dakshineshwar temple. Gradually the car moved along the Grand Trunk road. After sometime, the car entered a big house. Ila took the narrator to one side of her house to show him the elegant view around. She led the narrator to an underground cellar which was unknown to others. There was a huge, very big dining table in the dark room which the narrator’s grandfather had brought in 1890. After three years of this
incident, the narrator took May Price to this dark cellar to show her the underground room and the huge dining table.

In London, the narrator met Ila and Robi at the Indian Student’s Hostel in Bloomsbury where he was staying. They took the narrator with them and went to meet Nick. Nick was waiting for them on the platform. He was wearing a blue suit, a stripped institutional tie and dark overcoat. He greeted everyone. They reached the house on Lymington Road. The narrator was excited on visiting this house. Mrs. Price welcomed the guest from the India. The narrator liked the house and the hostess alike. Back in India, Tridib had shown the narrator a picture of this house, and one particular room. He saw a number of photographs in this house. By now Ila and narrator had become intimate and they played a number of games in the dark room. The narrative at this juncture shows the psycho-sexual growth of Ila and the narrator. Then the narrator tells the reader about the last days of his grandmother. He also narrates about one evening party which he attended along with Ila and Robi in Calcutta. He told his ailing grandmother about Ila and her frank views. After few months, the narrator’s grandmother died. He was informed later. The narrator spent his autumn in London and he was feeling very lonely. One day Mrs. Price invited Ila, the narrator at the family dinner. Nick and May were also there. Ila came late. She was smiling, dressed in Knee-length boots and a shirt. She informed the gathering that she had got a job. The narrator enjoyed the dinner and the company. There was blizzard blowing outside and the narrator had to stay there with Ila.

In the narrative, Ila is the only female character who is totally cosmopolitan and dynamic. She is against the suppression of her female sexuality and individuality. She tells the narrator that she wants live in London in order to ‘free of your bloody
culture and free of all of you’ [Ghosh: 1988: 88] She becomes a victim of cultural contradictions. Meeenakshi Malhotra finds Ila ‘struggling towards a post-colonial identity while still trapped in the history of colonialism.’ [Opp. Cite. 2003: 167] Ila is powerful character whose presence in the story cannot be ignore by other character. Ila had got married in London to Nick Price. Nick had decided that it would be fun to have a Hindu marriage ceremony. Preparations were already underway in Calcutta. Ila’s parents were in Calcutta to look after the arrangements. After this ceremony, Ila and Nick had planned to go to Africa for their honey-moon. The narrator joined the dinner party of Ila’s marriage in London. He got drunk and May Price took him to her apartment. He made an unsuccessful attempt to seduce her but a sound scolding sent him to bed like an obedient boy.

May Price come to Calcutta and the narrator wanted to show her the city and the places of interest. When she saw Tridib in the crowd, she ran towards him and embraced him. She was given the narrator’s guest room to stay which looked over the garden. The narrator along with Mjay Price and Tridib visited the Victoria Memorial and other places. May was impressed with the elegance of these places. They saw a dog lying on the road, almost half-dead. May wanted to help the animal but it was too late. She was wounded by the dog and ultimately the dog was given mercy-death. Ila and Nick Price had just returned from their honey-moon, Ila rang the narrator and it was a pleasant surprise for him. Then the narrator was in London and Ila took him to her place where Mrs. Price, the mother of Nick, open the door. Ila led him to the cellar which they had visited. It was a visit to the cellar like that in Raibazar. The narrator was reminded of Tridib and other person in his life. The underground room in the old house was the favourite place of children in Calcutta in Raibazar.
The second part of the novel *Coming Home* begins with the narrator who narrates about his childhood days spent with his grandmother and mother. It narrates the incidents happened in 1962, ‘the year I turned ten, my grandmother retired, upon reaching the age of sixty. She had taught in a girls’ high school since 1936. When she’d first joined, the school had had only fifty pupils and the premises had consisted of two sheds with tin roofs.’ [Ghosh: 1988: 115] His grandfather was an engineer with the Railways in Burma. Their ancestral house was in Dhaka but after partition in 1947, they migrated to Calcutta. His grandmother was still attached to her house in Dhaka. The narrator’s father was serving in Calcutta. Tridib and May Price were good friends. Tridib used to writes to letter to May. In one letter, he wrote to May about a sexual encounter of a stranger which he saw. ‘The man let her down then, pulled his hand out of her skirt and lifted it to his nose, rubbing his fingers together. He sniffed the tips of his fingers, smiling, and then held them against her nose. She turned her head away with a grimace, so he kissed his fingertips and laughed. She began to laugh with him too,… inside his trousers. Then he stepped back, loosened his belt, put an arm around her shoulders and lowered her to the floor.’ [Ibid: 142] He narrated it in detail and May felt restless after reading it. She thought it must have been imaginary incident. It was a pornographic letter which had also annoyed her.

One evening in March 1963, the narrator’s father returned home in happy mood. His mother asked him but he simply smiled and to wait till dinner. His father had got a promotion in his profession. He had been made counselor in the deputy high commission in Dhaka. This news made his grandmother sad. She locked herself in her room. One day his grandmother received a letter from her sister Mayadebi with an invitation to Dhaka. ‘At dinner that evening my parents were careful not to mention the letter. For a while my grandmother talked nervously about politics,
the state of education, the Prime Minister’s speech in Parliament and so on. And then, without a pause, in the same flat voice, she said: Maya’s invited me to visit her in Dhaka.’ [Ibid: 148] Mayadebi was in Delhi and she telephoned his grandmother. There uncle still lived in their old house. Mayadebi asked her sister to visit their house. It would be a return to their roots. The grandmother got the air-ticket for Dhaka on the third of January, 1964. She was excited, now for the first time. Tridib also got ready to go to Dhaka with grandmother and May.

*The Shadow Lines* deals with a story of a Bengali family through which the author presents scrutiny of many subjects that are being debated in contemporary India. The novel mostly focuses on three generations of this family. The story of these generations are not told in a relative space, but response to the growth of Calcutta as a city and India as a nation over a period of three decades or more. Significantly, private events in the author’s life and other important characters take place in the shadow of events of immense political significance. The family too is not there typically as a spectacle but as a means to discuss these issues that are at the heart of this work. So, there is Thamma, the grandmother of the unnamed narrator through whom the issue of the Bengal Partition and the whole idea of Nation, Nationalism and Nationhood gets discussed.

*The Shadow Lines* witnesses the growth of the narrator from an impressionable eight years old in the Gole Park flat in Calcutta to an assured adult through the book. However, the growth of the narrator is not physical alone but seen in relation with the growth of ideas on nationalism, nation and international relations. The novel begins with the eight-year-old narrator talking of his experiences as a schoolboy living in the Gole-Park neighborhood in Calcutta. He introduces two branches of his family, the family of his grandmother Tha’mma and second family of his grandmother’s sister, Mayadebi. The family of Mayadebi is wealthier, her
husband being a high-ranking official in the foreign services, with one son, Jatin being an economist with the UN and the younger one Robi being a Civil Servant. Only Tridib of her sons is not successful in the material sense, however of his ability the reader is left in no doubt as even though eccentric, he is the one who is the repository of all the esoteric knowledge. He can talk on length about issues as diverse as the sloping roofs of Columbian houses and the culture of the Incas with equal ease. He is also the one who transfers to the young narrator a profound love for knowledge.

As a young woman living in Dhaka, Tha’mma is married off to an Engineer posted in Burma. However she loses her husband very early and is left with the prospect of raising her only son single handedly. What follows is her struggle to make ends meet and her subsequent career as a schoolteacher in Bengal. She raises her only child independently and lives a Spartan life where wasted time stinks. As a young woman she finds herself in the greatly charged milieu of 19th century Bengal when the Extremist strand of Nationalism was in its full glory. As a college going young woman she upholds these young extremists as her true heroes and secretly desires to be a part of such extremist organizations as Anushilan and Jugantar. She idealizes these young men who indulge in clandestine extremism with the larger goal of Independence in mind. At the same time as a product of Western Education, her idea of Nation as an entity is borrowed in its entirety from England. She tends to associate gory wars passion, sacrifice and blood baths with the creation and grandeur of nations.

Life is simple for Tha’mma, who believes in the values of honesty and hard work. She believes on the ideal of hard work that when she meets her poor migrant relatives she can think of no other reason but lack of hard work as the reason for their penury. She gives no thought to the event of Partition that is partly
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responsible for the dislocation and destitution of the family. It is only when she plans to visit her sister in Dhaka and when she has to undergo the usual procedure of compiling her immigration papers that she is jolted into recognizing the reality of the Partition of her state.

The character of Tha’mma is crucial to the narrative in the manner in which it brings out some of the concepts and also provides a rallying point around which other ways of looking at these are built. Tha’mma embodies a conventional even though interesting belief system, which is challenged by the other characters as well as the novelist himself. For most part of the novel she comes across as a careful, straightforward woman for whom any wastage of time or money is abhorrence. She is a principled old woman whose views on nation and nation building are remarkably simplistic. She doesn’t consider herself as a migrant belonging to the other side of the border; she has no sympathy for her refugee relatives living in a state of utter penury. Her notions of nation, nation building is straight from history books. She considers healthy young people like Robi as ideal nation builders. She is remarkably free from all traces of cynicism so evocative of victims of partition. She does not consciously criticize the phenomenon of Partition even once, there are no lengthy harangues: her critique of the Partition, nation and nationalism lies in her anecdotes. Often it is the anecdotes and the personal experiences that make her acknowledge the cracks and contradictions in her beliefs.

Tha’mma as a child in Dhaka house makes stories about the disputed upside down house (the other half of the house occupied by the uncle’s family). The artificial contractedness of the ‘otherness’ of the house is very evident and. The two nations just like the two parts of a household were united at one time but the course of history (or failure of vision) divides them and for sustaining their separation the
difference has to be created. The case of the Partition of the Indian subcontinent has been very different because the state has been forced to create a difference where none existed and show the two nations as inherently opposed. The house trope used in the novel is for obvious reasons of making the reader see through such an act when it come to the country: what is ironic is that Tha’mma who should have seen through it is blissfully oblivious of the strategy. Perhaps this oblivion is tantamount to a deliberate non-admission of facts that are deeply disturbing to her. Here the two reactions of madness that we examined earlier can be compared to the non-admission of events, a denial that the individual resorts to in order to avoid the madness that is bound to follow later. The oblivion of Tha’mma therefore becomes her survival strategy. However an indicator of this deep complex does surface later. Her decision to go to Dhaka in order to bring back her old sick uncle is a very upsetting time for her. Routine activity of furnishing her personal details while finishing the documentation for her visa forms raises fundamental doubts within her about her identity. The sane formulations of her life are threatened by some dull looking External Affairs Ministry forms. For the first time the sure shot, unruffled Tha’mma goes through pangs of some fundamentally disturbing introspection. She wonders as to how the ‘place of her birth had come to be messily at odds with her nationality’. She cannot resolve the chaos that surfaces in the patterns that are so essential to her identity.

According to Nivedita Bagchi there is ‘a peculiar construction in the Bengali language which allows the speaker to say aaschi (coming) instead of jachchhi (going)’…which is ‘especially used as an equivalent to good-bye. Thus a Bengali speaker while leaving a place is apt to say, ‘I am coming (back) instead of I am going. The grandmother’s Bengali verbs that confuse the simple acts of coming and going become a part of the family’s lore. Young people in the family joke
about this language feature that confuses movement of two opposite kinds. But interestingly, within this feature of the Bengali language lays a critique of the migration of populations during the Partition of 1947. If, therefore Tha’mma says *aaschi* (I am coming) before leaving for Dhaka, it is to be read as an announcement of her arrival to her erstwhile home rather than a *faux pas* that confuses coming and going. All going away therefore culminates only in a coming of a very different kind. The fault therefore obliquely points at the chaos of coming and going that there is in Tha’mma’s world rather than in her language. This claim is further confirmed by the fact that the book has two sub-sections: *Going Away and Coming home*. Both phrases point out the funny sense of home and homelessness that the Partition victims have experienced that allows them to dispense with a fixed point that signifies a point of departure. It is also interesting to note why a common language feature should invite ridicule from the speakers themselves. It is for grounded to draw the reader’s attention towards the fault of Partition, neither that of the language nor that of Tha’mma.

The narrator’s peculiar cousin Tridib is an unconventional character who does not fit into the genteel society of his family. He is conducting research into the ancient Sena dynasty of Bengal and is repeatedly shown engrossed in his study. Tridib does not merely happen to be a scholar of Ancient history writing a thesis on the lost Sena Empire, his’ is indeed a voice that bears the burden of a historical vision. Right from the beginning of the novel there is in him a deep consciousness about the enterprise of knowledge. He not only collects esoteric bits of knowledge, the range of which stretches from East European Jazz to the intricate sociological patterning of the Incas religiously but also shapes his own and the narrator’s orientation towards it. Tridib is a stock character Bengali literature and folklore is replete with. The narrator gets his first lessons on the business of scholarship from Tridib- where he is presented with a Bartholomew’s Atlas as a childhood gift
which remains a symbol of this transference and which resurfaces years later in the author’s hostel room in Delhi—thus signifying a lasting influence that Tridib has on the narrator and the uncle’s symbolic gift of the worlds to travel in and the eyes to see them with. That he receives Tridib’s gift of this knowledge thereafter becomes a kind of met narrative that the author will subsequently want to break out of and interrogate. However there is another aspect of Tridib that the author shows— that of a glib talker.

Tridib as a young man falls in love with May who is the daughter of the Price family of England. The friendship of the Datta-Chaudhary family and the Prices goes back to the Colonial times when their English grandfather, Tresawlsen had come to Calcutta as an agent of a steel-manufacturing company and had later become a factory owner. The relationship between Tridib and May starts from exchange of friendly letters till the one that Tridib writes. In his letter he proposes to her by elaborately describing an intimate lovemaking episode between two people in a war ravaged theatre house in London. He proposes to meet her as a stranger in a ruin…. as completes of strangers, strangers-across seas without context or history. May is initially perplexed but cannot resist his ‘invitation’ and finally reaches India to see him. However soon, the romance in the relationship is replaced by discord. They assign meanings to happenings and things around them differently.

While driving along with the child narrator towards Diamond Harbour they come across an injured, profusely bleeding and badly mauled dog. While the narrator shuts his eyes to escape the ugly sight, Tridib drives on with a nonchalance that shocks May completely. She asks him to drive back to the mangled animal after which follows her extraordinary show of endurance and fortitude with which she relieves the animal of its pain by assisting it to a peaceful death. Exasperated by
the whole experience she tells Tridib in a huff that he is worth words alone. The quality of activism that we see in May resurfaces in London years later when she collects donations for destitute children. This is in sharp contrast to Tridib who is an armchair historian and lives and feeds on ideas alone. A similar situation arises in Dhaka while they along with Tha’mma, Mayadebi and child Robi are trapped in the communal frenzy that takes place while they are bringing back the old uncle left behind in Dhaka since Independence.

While they meander through the riot ravaged streets of the city in their chauffeur driven car, the old uncle is following them in a rickshaw steered by the Muslim who looks after him. May observes how the mob which first turned to them, on being repulsed, attacked the old man on the rickshaw and instead of saving him, Tha’mma displays the same nonchalance that Tridib had earlier shown towards the dog and asks the driver to drive on without looking back. May is struck with the old impulse and getting out of the car, she heads towards the mob to save the old man. Tridib cannot allow her to embrace death and therefore follows her. In the melee, the mob attacks Tridib and he is killed. The incident powerfully evokes the earlier dog episode and the promise that Tridib gets from May at that time, about giving him too the peaceful death like the dog if a situation ever arose, uncannily turns true. Of this incident the narrator gets to know only in the end when dissatisfied with other people’s versions, he asks May to recount to him the cause of Tridib’s death.

The incident as recounted by May becomes like that missing part of the jigsaw puzzle of Tridib’s death that the author is trying to look for. Ila, the narrator’s cousin is another important influence on the young, impressionable narrator. She, owing to her father’s job is a globetrotter and comes to settle in London. Her
experience of places as diverse as Colombo and Cairo and her school years at all these exotic places woven into delightful anecdotes for the child narrator initiate for the latter his first ever flights of imagination. Along with Tridib’s encyclopedic knowledge, it is cousin Ila’s descriptions of her vibrant life abroad that give the narrator a flight outside the confines of his drab Gole Park flat. The cousin’s colourful Annual Schoolbooks become his initiators into an unseen but alluring world outside. For Ila the immediacy of experience –personal/political is so overwhelmingly important that its context and historicity remains suspended in the background. Earlier the mere description of the city of Cairo brings to the mind of the atlas educated, historically aware narrator, the first pointed arch in the history of mankind whereas for Ila Cairo is merely a place to piss in. She flits from experience to experience with a heightened sensual gusto but failing to arrive at any stage in the novel to a state of greater knowledge, insight or evolution. Tridib often said of her that ‘the inventions she lived in moved with her, so that although she had lived in many places she had not travelled at all.’

However this uninhibited flow of experience in her throws up certain questions that the other narratives have either suppressed, not acknowledged or either failed to account for. This realm does not have history’s linear progression of and no casts to mould and reshape experience. Her experience as an Indian in London becomes another model of citizenship that the book explores along with Partition Diaspora and the modern Calcutta Middle class. However her personal experience first as a student in London and later that of marrying a white man throws up an entire polemics about the diasporic communities. When she narrates the story about the fantasy child Magda to the narrator, it is quite evident that the child is a consequence of her mixed marriage (owing to the child’s blue eyes and fair complexion). The absolute dread that she associates with the imagined classroom
of the child betrays her own sense of complexity as a woman faced with questions about race in a mixed marriage. In this regard it is important that Ila in this conversation displays a hyper emotionality, enough indication of some deep complex of feelings within her about race.

Finally when Nick betrays her, her insecurity as a woman and especially as a one disadvantaged due to her race comes out in the open. Her life comes full circle from that anxious schoolgirl boasting about nonexistent boyfriends to the distraught adult finding it difficult to come to terms with an unfaithful husband. ‘You see you’ve never understood; you’ve always been taken in by the way I used to talk in college. I only talked like that to shock you and because you seemed to expect it of me somehow. I never did any of those things: I’m about as chaste … as any woman you’ll ever meet.’ [Ibid: 188] The narrator is introduced as an eight-year-old child who is ensconced in a genteel middle-class existence where young children are concerned only with doing well in studies.

However the narrator finds means to escape it through his uncle Tridib who sensitizes him to the exciting enterprise of acquiring knowledge. The narrator is gifted an Atlas as a birthday gift and that becomes a symbol of sorts for the ‘transference of knowledge’ that takes place between the two. What the narrator acquires from Tridib is an extraordinary sensitivity towards knowledge, which later becomes crucial to the role of narration that he undertakes. The narrator is not only a storyteller but also the strand that brings together other available versions in order to make a complete picture. It is significant that the author himself comes across as more of a storyteller than a historian or an anecdote teller. Stories in this book are in circuitry, without definite beginnings and endings; they are indiscrete and seem to belong to no one. Here it is pertinent to point out that the author, in spite of his omniscience, is unnamed and his stories are mostly in the form of
renderings of the other characters. These stories become more intelligible when the narrator joins them into meaningful wholes after collecting all the possible versions of the incident described from various sources. A case in point is the truth behind Tridib’s death in Dhaka.

Tha’mma, Mayadebi, Tridib’s girlfriend May and Robi are the eyewitnesses to the lynching of Tridib during the Dhaka riots. His death, its cause and manner is however not made known to the narrator in its entirety: the parents are reluctant to reveal anything just like middle class people are used to avoiding all the talk of death in front of young children. The child Robi talks of the experience with a hyper emotionality characteristic of a traumatic childhood experience that he hasn’t let go off even as an adult. At a later time Robi as an adult recounts all that happens while on an evening out with the narrator and Ila. His account is complete to the extent that he as a child can only observe partially. His partial perception is not only a result of his intellectual inadequacy but also due to the fact that he is physically limited- ‘an effect of that difference in perspective which causes all objects recalled from childhood to undergo an illusory enlargement of scale’- this makes him incapable of even observing the incident objectively. His account of the incident is therefore more of a cathartic outburst because it has been long repressed than an informative or insightful reconstruction of the past. The last strand in the experience is May to whom the narrator then turns for an adequate explanation. It is in London that the narrator gets to know the truth behind the death.

Another aspect of modern India that the narrator brings out through the novel is the twentieth century phenomenon of civil strife and riot. It is important to mention that The Shadow Lines written in 1988 was the author’s response to another unprecedented event in Post-Colonial Indian scene: the 1984 Anti-Sikh
riots that swept the nation after the then Prime minister Mrs. Indira Gandhi was assassinated by her Sikh bodyguards. To begin with allegedly State sponsored these riots in their magnitude were comparable to the earlier communal frenzy of 1947 partition.

The novel situates the 1964 communal riots in Calcutta experienced by the narrator as a young school going boy centrally in the boy’s psyche as well as in his analysis of the difference of perception that pervades the recording of such incidents. In the book these riots and the riots at Dhaka become the occasion for the acid test of our recording systems whether of our history or of our newspapers. The novelist finds an inadequate portrayal of such historical events in these sources and then goes on to analyze the reasons behind such silences: ‘By the end of January 1964 the riots had faded away from the pages of the newspapers, disappeared from the collective imagination of ‘responsible opinion’, vanished without leaving a trace in the histories and bookshelves. They had dropped out of memory into the crater of a volcano of silence. The theatre of war where the Generals meet is the stage on which the states disport themselves: they have no use for the memory of riots.’ [Ibid: 230]

Through an extensive description of a day during the 1964 Calcutta riots, the narrator tells us of his experiences of the day as a school student. Through the day he along with the other children is caught in a fear psychosis while going to school. He describes the empty bus ride home where the driver falters, drives into wrong lanes and makes all the unexpected detours into unknown, deserted lanes of Calcutta to escape the mad mob. Years later while talking of the incident to his College friends in Delhi he is surprised to find that none of them seem to remember the fateful day. Eager to prove his memory right he leads some of them
to the archives where he digs out old papers to support his memory. To his
dismay, the newspapers paint the incident in regular journalesse. While reading
retrospectively about his own experience of communal riots in Calcutta as a child,
he stumbles upon other events of the fateful day, one of which is a description of a
similar riot in Dhaka. It is at this time that he is able to link up the two seemingly
unrelated events and the fact strikes him that it was indeed the same riot in Dhaka
that had claimed its victim in Tridib.

The end of novel, with the narrator and May lying peacefully in each other’s arms
offers a catharsis to the narrator’s violent, drunken earlier attempt to force himself
upon her. For this, as for her account of Tridib’s love for her and of his death, he is
grateful. At this moment, when the narrator most fully inherits Tridib’s mantle, he
does so via the second of his formative triangulations; he sleeps with May his uncle
Tridib’s love from across-the-seas. But the redemptive mystery she shows him is
only part sexual and is in fact more her providing him with an emotional
vocabulary that has allowed her and will allow him to think of Tridib’s murder as
a sacrifice.

In *The Shadow Lines*, Amitav Ghosh tried to show the conflict between East and
West, castes and religious beliefs through an eccentric post-colonial novel which
shows the colonized travelling and moving to and from the colonizer’s territory.
The novel makes the natives of the colonized country, the travelers who go to
England, the country of their colonizers, whereas in a conventional colonial novel
the westerners are made to travel to India, a country with an ancient fixed and a
self-contained culture.
The novel does not portray or present political and social turmoil’s in a simple manner, rather each of his characters’ lives through the emotional strain which is a consequence of these happenings. This hurtful experience is not limited to a particular community or people of one nationality, but it surrounded characters irrespective of their geographical and social place in this world full of man-made divisions. The cultural communication between colonizer and colonized comes to the fore initially when Ila shares her experiences and yearbooks of international schools, with the narrator. The narrator realizes the real prejudice behind the exciting picture portrayed by her; when he shares some of Ila’s stories with May, later on. But the narrator’s visit to England, years later, shows a very enjoyable change in the attitude of the people of England. This positive change however, escapes Tha’mma who despises all that is western. The grandmother thinks Ila’s western manipulate will corrupt her grandson. Although she deeply respects the spirit of nationalism in the west and the sacrifices made by them to attain their freedom, but Ila according to her, loves the west for the personal freedom that it affords. The grandmother wants India to achieve a cultural nationalism which would join the entire nation into a single independent entity. She begins her students to cook food of different states of India so that they become aware of the diversity and unity of Indian culture. The Grandmother wanted the Indians to overcome their awe and longing for the European culture.

*The Shadow Lines* depicts two types of post-colonial characters: one is the Mayadebi and Shaheb, and the other is Ila who live in close contact with the West. They live like colonizers. Mayadebi sits similar to Queen Victoria. On the other hand, the grandmother is a perfect irritate to such characters. She is a self-respecting personality who is proud to be an Indian. She admires the nationality of the English and wants the Indians too to achieve their own identity. The post-colonial writer’s choice of the colonizer’s language may be an attempt to make the
writing back, more efficient. Thamma is against Ila’s living in London, as she does not belong there and has not fought for the freedom of that country as they have. She believes in the continuation of physical borders and sanctifies them.

The characters of Tha’mma and Ila raise the stressed relationship between nationalism and individual freedom especially that of its women. In contrast to Ila and Tha’mma who are chasing false notions of freedom, May Price comes out as the only female character who, despite an underlying feeling of guilt of Tridib’s death, works diligently towards achieving freedom of individuality and conscience. Even though she is an English woman she has the courage to criticize the empire. Curtly, the narrator’s grandmother feels restless because of the partition of her ancestral home. She wants the breakdown of walls, which separate people and countries Ila has never experienced stability and runs away from the past and escaping from the present may bound by her guild at the death of Tridib achieve her freedom when she faces the truth.

The events of the story – personal and political are set in many countries like, Indian, England and Bangladesh [Then East Pakistan]. The raw material of the novel are drawn from Second World War, Indian independence, partition followed by riots, and Chinese aggression and communal riots in Calcutta in 1964. While describing riots of past by technique of uncoiling memory with its relation to similar other riots. Novel has projected the implication and impression of such riots on minds of individuals who have experienced them. The novel has concept of national identity and pride and brings out the futility of lives and boundaries drawn across countries and countries from cultural or communal as well as political motives. Ghosh endeavors to focus mainly to Dhaka and Calcutta to find the meaning of political freedom especially when partition created the boundary line.
Indian nationalism was chief weapon of freedom fighters in their struggle against British Rulers. Result of acquiring freedom was communal violence and destructions which deprive many from fruits of freedom. The novel rejects the very conception of division of nations’ solution to curb the communal clashes and violence. The novel *The Shadow Lines* concerned with the theme of crossing of frontiers—especially those of nationality, culture and language. The theme is old one in contemporary Indian novelist. But Ghosh gives it a new twist in the novel raising the dire need for solution of the problem—ethnic problem not of the people but of an individual. In one or another view the novel, *The Shadow Lines* is outcome of wide spread deadly riots and violence in India in 1984, only four years before the publication of novel, *The Shadow Lines* in 1988.

### 3.3. Summing Up:

Thus, Colonialism, Communal riots, Partition of India, the Iran-Iraq war, British invasion of Burma and World War II are few historical events that feature in the novels of Amitav Ghosh. However, *The Shadow Lines* has a unique narrative technique, sensitive handling of language and perceptive concepts of political issues. It is basically a memory novel, which skillfully weaves together personal lives and public events in three countries, India, England and Bangladesh. Ghosh’s novels occupy a unique place in the arena of post-colonial literature—

…they critique both globalization and post-colonial nationalism, by depicting the experiences of those in transition, those in between nation states, those going back and forth as travelers and migrants in search of lost homes and better lives.

[http://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/]
Work Cited:


Ibid


Ibid


Opp. Cite. 2003: 167

http://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/7898/9/09 chapter%203.pdf

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