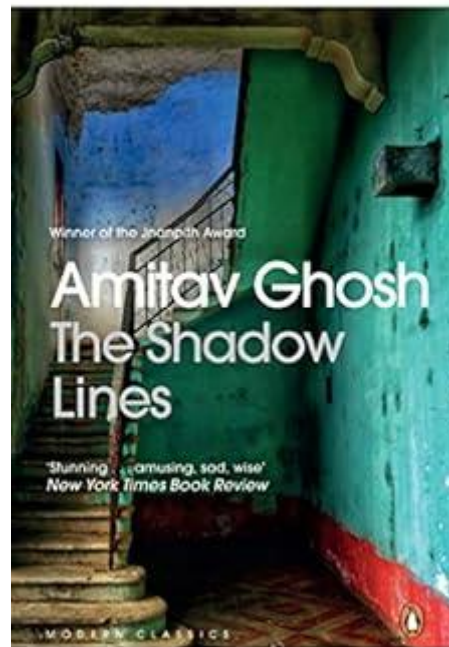


Memory as ‘The Prime Mover’ of The Plot in Amitav Ghosh’s *The Shadow Lines*

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Abstract

Amitav Ghosh is one of the most significant literary voices to emerge from India in recent decades. *The Shadow Lines* was published in 1988, four years after the sectarian violence that shook New Delhi in the aftermath of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi’s assassination. *The Shadow Lines* can be read as a memory novel where the characters are maneuvered and manipulated by the memory of Tridib’s tragic death. Each of these characters is affected differently and their experiences weave into a single plot. The narrator in *The Shadow Lines* calls up a stream of recollections in the form of

flashbacks, a testimony that the nature of these memories is unpleasant and haunting. The past invades the present, enriches and transforms it, and even reshapes the progression of the events eventually strengthening the structure of the plot. As memory provides the narrative trigger in this novel, Amitav Ghosh allows his narrator's memory to play freely and form loops of stories inside the story rendering chronology and space redundant. Violence has many faces in the novel, but Tridib's tragedy subtly resonates till the end of the book and comprehends the total senselessness of the post-Partition riot that claimed Tridib's life. Being a memory novel, it captures the shock of emotional rupture and estrangement, giving voice to the silence resulting from the personal and national trauma in the subconscious of the characters. This critical investigation would focus on Ghosh's use of memory as a fictional device to pull the memory fragments into plotting the story.

Keywords: *The Shadow Lines*, Amitav Ghosh, Memory; Imagination; Psychoanalysis; Nostalgia; Trauma; Reconstruction; Partition; Riot

Introduction

Every attempt to describe historical events necessarily relied on narratives, that as Hayden White points out, “display the coherence, integrity, fullness and flowers of an image of life that is and can only be imaginary” (1987, p. 24). The emphasis is on the imaginary dimension in all accounts of events relying on various forms of imagination that have more in common with the production of a narrative or fiction. Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* (1988), demonstrates how individual and family memories mirror social and historical transformation. Not only does the novel point to the importance of historical events shaping private lives, it also underlines the role of displacement and relocation in shaping the imagination and memory. Since memory is at the heart of the novel, this article seeks to highlight its significance by critically examining the role of memory in the plotline. All these stories-within-stories are united by the thread of memory and imagination as the novelist treats both memory and imagination as a driving force of the narrative. Within the flashback narrative framework, the narrator traces events back and forth in time, from the outbreak of the Second World War to the late twentieth century, observing how political events invade private lives. According to French philosopher Pierre Nora “Memory is life, borne by living societies founded in its name (...) History, on the other hand, is the reconstruction, always problematic and incomplete, of what is no longer” (1989, pp. 8-9). While for Nora “History is perpetually suspicious of memory and its true mission is to suppress and destroy it”

(1989, p, 9), for Ghosh memory is always skeptical of literary history that can be manipulated by politicians and historians.

Methodology

This qualitative study applies the Textual Analysis method, primarily drawing upon a seminal textbook, *The Shadow Lines* by Amitav Ghosh as the primary source for the foundational understanding and exploration of the research topic. The methodology integrates a systematic search, selection, and analysis of secondary sources published by scholars like national and international articles, interviews, journals, textbooks, and other relevant sources within the field of interest. Themes, theories, and critical arguments were identified, dissected, and cross-referenced with other supplementary literature to provide a comprehensive understanding of the subject. The study places significant emphasis on elucidating, analyzing, and contextualizing the theoretical underpinnings essential to the understanding of the research topic. Theoretical constructs within the textbook, such as Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis theory and Cathy Caruth's trauma theory serve as pivotal frameworks guiding this investigation.

Literature Review

The Shadow Lines, Ghosh's second book, has gained more critical acclaim than any of his subsequent works. He was awarded India's most prestigious literary award, the Sahitya Akademi award for *The Shadow Lines*. The past is recalled as a living, breathing entity that continues to flow into the present. Each character is an individual and integral to the flow of the story. The plot of *The Shadow Lines* is woven around actual historical events like the Second World War and the post-Partition communal riots which broke out in certain parts of India and Pakistan. Due to being unable to change history, one usually takes advantage of memory compatible to his or her viewpoint. Yet, the memories that one chooses to forget are more important than the ones one chooses to remember, and this is the key point that Ghosh attempts to impart to his readers. Memory as an abstract entity exceeds the bounds, transcends the time scale, and moves beyond any kind of restrictions. Therefore, constant shift of time, going back and forth, and incessant transfer from present to past and conversely is another appealing factor. The primary emphasis of the research will be placed on memory deploying the theoretical perspectives of memory studies. Sigmund Freud's (1899) psychoanalysis theory and Cathy Caruth's (1996) trauma theory serve as pivotal theoretical frameworks guiding this investigation. Bearing in mind

Freud's emphasis on the experience of unconscious and conscious awareness of memories, Ghosh uses the unconscious memories as a tool to unfold the repressed traumatic past experience and make it a part of the present that is evident in the novel. Ghosh's crucial reproduction of the riot-hit individuals across the two countries has been chiefly achieved by the protagonist's conscious memories intertwining with broader historical and political contexts which align with Freud's concepts of conscious memories emphasizing the character's attempts to make sense of their past and reconcile conflicting emotions related to personal and historical events.

Freud's theory of childhood experiences shaping an individual's memory and psyche has a connection with *The Shadow Lines*. Ghosh, in *The Shadow Lines*, grapples with the childhood traumatic period of the 1964 riots that is evoked by the sectarian violence in Delhi. The narrator's relationships with other characters in the later phase of life, as depicted in the novel, are intricately influenced by childhood memories filled with emotions and perceptions, underscoring Freud's belief in the importance of early experiences in shaping memory. Again, through the application of psychobiography rooted in Freud's psychoanalytic theory, the author and his life might be examined in relation to the novel *The Shadow Lines*. This novel was written in 1984, in the aftermath of Indira Gandhi's assassination when Delhi was upturned by the bloodthirsty mobs that attacked the Sikh community killing, raping and looting. This was the memory that brought Ghosh back to 1964 when a similar mob attacked Hindus in Dhaka where Ghosh, then a child, was living. Cathy Caruth's examination of trauma in *Unclaimed Experience* (1996) finds manifestation in the narrative of *The Shadow Lines* which mainly centers around the traumatic events of the unimaginable atrocity that happened in the religious line due to the post-Partition bitterness. Tridib's death bears the seeds of trauma for the days to come and eventually haunts other characters traumatically throughout the novel.

Elements of Memory and Imagination

Innumerable memories of different kinds have gone into the making of the novel. There are individual differences in memory. The excerpt from Plato's *Theaetetus* is the famous metaphor of the memory as a block of wax, "that is comparatively pure or muddy, and harder in some, softer in others" (McDowell, 1973). Here, the harder is the less sensitive, and softer is the more sensitive which results in shallow or deep memories. Ghosh/his narrator is blessed with a softer memory that facilitates him to remember so much in such minute and vivid details. These memories are recollected and transformed into the material of narratives. The manifestation of this shallow and deep memory is discernable when

Ila easily forgets their childhood memories, she is very surprised by the way the narrator remembers every detail. On the other hand, Tridib and the narrator possessing a profound memory are still jubilant and hopeful about their surroundings and whatever life is going to offer them. The saving grace is their lenient memories are well preserved and used to invigorate themselves in the crisis of life. As stated by Manjula Saxena:

“Memory is a psychological process as much integral to our consciousness as thinking is. We use these faculties consciously or subconsciously when different experiences leave their impresses on our minds, without our becoming aware of this. Memory is both rational and emotive pertaining to the cognitive and the affective parts of personality. Literary artists, novelists alike have acknowledged the presence of emotive element in memory.” (2002, p. 27)

Emotive memory is a proper instrument and sustainer of the creation of a work of literary art and is “more gratifying than the purely objective, disinterested kind of thinking” (2002, p. 27). Ghosh the novelist makes the narrator of his novel recall his own experiences with a fondness that is an emotive element. While walking with Ila toward the Lily Pool bridge, the narrator clearly remembers the days when they were children. The narrator could not forget because he says: “Tridib had given me worlds to travel in and he had given me eyes to see them with”. (Ghosh 1995, p. 20). Whereas Illa's world compared to the narrator's is a barren one who records only the details of the ladies' toilets, although she has travelled all around the world since her childhood.

Marcel Proust in his novel *In Search of Lost Time* (1913-1927), distinguished voluntary and involuntary memories. The feeling of being suddenly transported to our past and reliving intense and emotional memories triggered by a smell, a taste, a sound or a visual sensation is illustrated in the *Madeleine de Proust* story (Proust, 1913-1927). Based on Proust's view of “remembering as a creative act, as the creation of joyful moments in which present and past are brought together” (Proust, 1913-1927), the idea developed in Van Campen's book (2014), is the aesthetic qualities of memories that is the power of memory in terms of creativity and the pleasure associated with the collection of involuntary memories:

“Proust believed that involuntary memories possessed an aesthetic quality. For him, the coinciding of aesthetic awareness in the present with an aesthetic awareness from the past was what made involuntary memories so special. The sensory stimulus and the memory of sensory

images, sounds, tastes, and smells had an artistic quality and provided important material for Proust the artist.” (Campen 2014, p. 16)

In *The Shadow Lines*, memory and imagination interplay in unison. Memory recalling certain incidents and imagination weaving memories. Memory and imagination interweave effectively to create an artistic element in the novel. Since the narrator is gifted with the imaginative power to travel through his mind's eyes aided with memories, he enjoys an expansive view of various places of the world, though he has not traveled outside Calcutta before his admission to Delhi College. It is as if he lives through the stories of other characters. As Tridib once told him: “Everyone lives in a story... because stories are all there are to live in, it is just a question of which one you chose ...” (Ghosh 1995, p. 182).

The driving force of the plot largely depends on the mastery of the narrator to remember incidents communicated to him by other characters. The facts of war-torn England were handed down to him by Tridib who very skillfully communicated those events with a touch of his imaginative power. Even though the narrator later in his life has the chance to visit London, everything seems very familiar to him, which is the work of memory and Tridib's minute description. The English Price family is also introduced as a part of the memory when the boy narrator remembers Tridib explaining his absence from the Gole Park addas for a long time:

“... he told them (Tridib's acquaintances) that he had been to stay with old Mrs Price, who was a widow. Her husband had died recently. She lived in north London, he said, on a street called Lymington Road; the number of their house was 44 and the tube station was West Hampstead. Mrs Price had a daughter, who was called May.” (Ghosh 1995, p. 11)

Thus, memory plays a very significant role to present facts the way they are done by the narrator and Tridib. As the narrator recounts about Tridib: “But of course, among other things 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” (Ghosh 1995, p. 24). Together the uncle and the nephew are able to build a dream house of their memories, where fact and fiction are mingled to fabricate an imaginary world.

In *The Shadow Lines* the main characters possess a high sensitivity, retain though unconsciously their experiences, and relate them to the experiences of the other characters. In the case of Tridib, May Price and the narrator, memory works in parallel with imagination enabling them to judge the present better by shading light of the past. It is quite strange how Tridib as a child watches two people making

love in a rubble inside a warehouse and remembers it vividly, only to send it as a letter to May Price much later as a grown-up. He wants to meet her in that way “... –as a stranger, in a ruin. ... as the completest of strangers—strangers-across-the-seas ...” (Ghosh 1995, p.144). It is a significant episode to show how Tridib’s memory, charged with imagination, fantasies about a world of his own. Rajeswari Sunder Rajan says: “One of the chief loci of value in *The Shadow Lines* is the visual imagination ... the viewer’s exercise of memory and imagination enables him to ‘see’ in the mind’s eye, more vividly than actuality ...” (pp. 287-298). In the same way, the narrator's imagination fills gaps in his memories, blurring the boundaries between reality and fiction, highlighting how imagination can influence the reconstruction of past events. In the novel there is persistent emphasis on the freedom of individuals to create their own stories distinct from others to avoid being mixed with someone else's construction of reality. Perhaps that is why Tridib persuades the narrator to learn to imagine precisely and create his own world. Being able to invent stories makes one independent from other people’s inventions. Such persuasion can metaphorically denote independence and freedom from everything that are imposed on. In a larger scale, it seems that Ghosh attempts to impart that there are no subaltern people or any colonized state as long as they are independent from the other’s invention.

Theoretical Perspectives

Freud emphasizes that the unconscious part of the mind has an impact on our behavior because of is the host for feelings of anxiety, memory, pleasure and pain. Freud states these repressed memories which lie in the unconscious mind rise up only in hidden forms in dreams, in language slip of the tongue, which are so-called (Freudian slip), in creative work that may create art and including literature (Bilcik, 2018). We act as director, actor and interpreter of our own dreams. There is a relation between dream and literature as the feelings of conscious and unconscious originate in our mind (Freud, 1899). The impact of desire or wish in language lead literary critics to compare abstract writing with dream which express the mystery of unconscious desire or tension of the writer and that an artistic work is a production of the writer's own particular mental events. This relevance is obvious as the sectarian violence that erupted in Delhi after Indira Gandhi's murder in 1984 is an echo of the larger socio-political landscape that Ghosh explores in *The Shadow Lines*. Ghosh utilizes vivid imagery to illustrate the horrors of the violence unleashed upon the Sikh community which he witnessed firsthand. In *The Shadow Lines*, Ghosh uses the flashback technique to reconstruct the painful lives of the individuals, and their tragic ends using his own memory stratagem. The narrator relied on the swirl of memories that

have been assimilated from the recollection of the other characters who witnessed the incident. Ghosh's crucial reproduction of the riot-hit individuals across the two countries has been chiefly achieved by the protagonist's conscious memories intertwining with broader historical and political contexts which align with Freud's concepts of conscious memories emphasizing the character's attempts to make sense of their past and reconcile conflicting emotions related to personal and historical events.

Another aspect of Freud's theory in his chapter "On Screen Memories" in the *Psychopathology of Everyday Life* (1901, chapter IV) that has a connection with *The Shadow Lines* is his emphasis on childhood experiences shaping an individual's memory and psyche. (Conway, 2006, pp. 548-550) argues that memories of childhood events, and in the very earliest memory are endemic in autobiographical memory and can be frequently observed when any period of life is sampled. Conway (2006) additionally cites Freud's idea that these pale memories are not simple fragments of past experience. Such memories often depict the rememberer in the memory, a perspective one could not have possibly had at the time. Freud's implication is that memory has been 'worked over', has had the perspective added after the formation of the memory (1901, chapter IV). Ghosh, in *The Shadow Lines*, grapples with the childhood traumatic period of the 1964 riots that is evoked by the sectarian violence in Delhi and uses fictional space imaginatively to formulate the narrative on a humanistically centered, through the prism of the contextual present. The novel's events are all based on true events, but it is told from the point of view of fictional characters whose lives have been completely transformed as a result of political, social and national changes. The truths uncovered reflect the perspective of both the novelist and the period equally. In the novel, the childhood experiences also shape the narrator's memory and psyche through his interactions with Tridib, his Thamma, cousin Ila and his family, the experiences of decisive moments that profoundly influence his understanding of the present. These childhood memories, laden with emotions and perceptions, shape his relationship with others in the later phase of his life, reflecting Freud's belief in the significance of early experiences in memory formation. Again, through the application of psychobiography rooted in Freud's psychoanalytic theory (1949), the author and his life might be examined in relation to the novel *The Shadow Lines*. This novel was written in 1984, in the aftermath of Indira Gandhi's assassination when Delhi was upturned by the bloodthirsty mobs that attacked the Sikh community killing, raping and looting. This was the memory that brought Ghosh back to 1964 when a similar mob attacked Hindus in Dhaka where Ghosh, then a child, was

living. These decisive dreadful historical incidents shape his realization of the divisions created by political boundaries that affect individual identity.

Memories are peculiar experience-near symbols of the self that both reveal and conceal goals, purposes, desires, and images of the self in the past. Freud emphasizes the experience of unconscious and conscious awareness of memories in his chapter “Error” in the *Psychopathology of Everyday Life* (1901, chapter X). Freud's theoretical interpretation of the failure of everyday memory was in terms of motivation, unpleasant experiences and ideas are 'forgotten' for good reasons. Their recall is resisted, their content inhibited, because they threaten, in both minor and major ways, the stability of the self (1901, chapter X). Ghosh's technique of using unconscious memories as a tool to unfold the repressed traumatic past experience and make it a part of the present is evident in the novel. Each character has their unique consciousness of the past which makes a private world for them from which they either gain strength or suffer from the traumatic memories. Memory, therefore, plays a different role in the lives of the characters to determine the kind of lives the characters would lead at present. The detailed versions of Tridib's death, the most sensitive part of the story, which comes at the end of the novel, seems to be the natural outcome as the characters, who witnessed the ghoulish incident, need an outlet for all the pent-up sadness they repress and eventually get themselves freed from that long fifteen years of silence which they suffered in their individual cells. Besides, Freud's theory of the “repetition compulsion” suggests that individuals unconsciously repeat past traumatic experiences in an attempt to resolve them. This repetition and parallel can be easily recognizable between historical events such as the Second World War and the Riots of 1964. The characters in *the Shadow Lines* seem to be trapped in a cycle of historical repetition, struggling to reconcile and make sense of the past.

The notion of trauma as a “crisis of representation” was introduced to literary studies in the framework of poststructuralist thinking notably by Cathy Caruth's *Unclaimed Experience* (1996). For Cathy Caruth (1996), trauma is associated with “the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, the uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena” (1996, p. 11). Caruth (1996) further substantiates the idea of latency as indicated by Sigmund Freud to suggest that the victims of a traumatic event remain latent for the time being; however, they hide somewhere until something evokes them back. Moving further on to the notions of trauma, it refers to the collective emotional destruction resulting from a traumatic experience or events in the past. The novel *The Shadow Lines*, mainly centers around the traumatic events of the unimaginable atrocity that happened in the

religious line due to the post-Partition bitterness through characters like Tridib, Jethamoshai, and Khalil. They were brutally killed by an unruly mob in a communal riot in East Pakistan, Dhaka. Tridib's death bears the seeds of trauma for the days to come and eventually haunts other characters traumatically throughout the novel. They find it difficult to come to terms with the past of which they are part of, to breach the silence of words. The trauma of Partition and the subsequent riots is transferred across the generations. Seventeen years after Tridib's death, the narrator learns the truth from two eyewitnesses, Robi and May. It was a nightmare with really no route to escape for those who were present there to witness that ghoulish killing. They endure this traumatic memory all their lives.

How Memory Performs

In the opening of his essay "Separation Anxiety; Growing up / Inter/National in Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines*" Suvir Kaul (1994) points out that: "Do you remember? – in *The Shadow Lines*, this is the most insistent question that brings together the private and the public". Kaul declares that this question "shapes the narrator's search for connections, for the recovery of lost information or repressed experiences, for the details of great trauma or joy that have receded into the archives of private or public memory" (1994, p. 125-145). The riots in Khulna and the ensuing demonstration turned violent on the 4th of January 1964. This demonstration is "branded in the narrator's memory" (Ghosh 1995, p.222) because Tridib lost his life in the aftermath of this riot. The narrator has motives in narrating from the sources of memory. First to communicate the political turmoil beneath the facade of his childhood years in Post-Partition India. Next to save his memories from slipping into the realm of forgetting. The narrator is anxious to hold on to the past and to document its significance. In 1979 the narrator recollects the events of 1964 because he is determined not to let the "past vanish without trace; I was determined to persuade them of its importance" (Ghosh 1995, p.271). The narrator uses memory not merely to comprehend the individual and collective cultural past that has been confounding him for fifteen long years, but also to figure out "what" and "how" to remember. That is why the narrative reflects a constant process of introspection; as Louis James states, "If *Circle of Reason* is about knowledge, *The Shadow Lines* is about knowing" (1999, p. 56).

Real life seldom follows a neat chronology. It follows a repetitive nature consisting of overlapping and of-repeated incidents re-enacted and re-lived by individuals in various ways. Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* is a proclamation of the fact that life refuses to follow a sequential pattern, while memories help to create one's private narratives as distinguished from the majestic narratives

established by society. As Meenakshi Mukherjee says in her essay: “In *The Shadow Lines* there is a repeated insistence on the freedom for each individual to be able to create his own stories in order to prevent getting trapped into someone else's construction of reality” (pp. 255-267). Again, Pallavi Gupta says about this feature in the novel: “With regard to history, since it is individual and private, each mnemonic effort becomes an attempt at historicization and each recollecting individual becomes an amateur historian” (2001, p. 75-82). Memory of the past has become a reliable way to give meaning to the present. This becomes a genuine norm for Tridib, because: “... he was working on a Ph.D. in Archaeology – something to do with sites associated with the Sena dynasty of Bengal” (Ghosh 1995, p.7). Archaeology relies on justifying the present based on the shreds of evidence from the past. In *L'écriture et la différence*, Jacques Derrida writes: “All stories and histories are a perpetual revelation of the past, yet obstinately turned toward the present” (1978, p. 314).

Although the present is defined by the memories of the past, it is very evident that there is nostalgia for the good old days as against the realistic present. Nostalgia, the fond memory of the past which Ghosh uses through flashbacks serves as braiding the fragmented memories expressed by individual characters. This nostalgia is a dominant note in the narrative mainly exhibited through Thamma, who continually remembered Dhaka. This terrible nostalgia impels her to go back to Dhaka where Tridib was killed in a communal riot. The past by recalling memories has been reconstructed in two ways - the nostalgic past which Thamma recalls and recounts to the narrator, and the past of Tridib's brutal killing. These two memories on which the plot of this novel is framed and advanced are being contrasted. Thamma's memories are nostalgic and unreal and also the reason why she goes back to Dhaka along with Tridib to rescue her Jethamoshai who she believes is surrounded by the enemy but at the same time was her birthplace. On the other hand, the tragic death of Tridib which the narrator attempts to reconstruct relying on the memories of Robi and May is more real. The past that Thamma remembers is the pre-Partition past when Bengal was one and inspired by the freedom movement, the past when she came to know about a young revolutionist who happened to be her classmate, a hero in her nationalistic ideology. Thamma's notion of achieving freedom was different from Tridib and Ila's as about Tridib, Thamma says, he is “a loafer and a wastrel” (Ghosh 1995, p.4). Though Tridib, a wastrel in Thamma's eyes, is a hero in Dhaka, his death has been caused by the obstinacy of Thamma, and both her hand in his death and his heroism are something that she will never understand. Thamma's memories are like an illusion and just to give that false illusionary memory a true colour she served as

the cause of Tridib's death. Many of Thamma's memories are stirred by her disapproval of the present and of characters like Tridib and Ila. This rejection is associated with her memories of the freedom movement against British rule and her growing up in a social background of respect for old traditions and values. She can neither understand nor appreciate Ila's desire for freedom, which to her simply means that Ila prefers to live like a whore. Nor can she understand Tridib's urges for freedom, which to her realization is not willing to take responsibility. Despite Thamma's recollections that she was ready to do whatever it needed for the sake of her country, her boasts even to go to the extent of killing someone to be free, she has done nothing to prove her determination, and her last attempt to get her false imagination to be true causes the violent climax of the novel. Thamma's past is a mirage of her imagination. In her mission to rescue Jethamoshai who doesn't want to be rescued and to meddle with other people's lives and correct the lapses in the past, Thamma succeeds only in bringing about the deaths of three people. The frenzied mob "cut Khalil's stomach open. The old man's head had been hacked off. And they'd cut Tridib's throat, from ear to ear" (Ghosh 1995, p. 251). So, the book suggests that the present must confront the past and look it in the eye which otherwise by working on the opposite plane has caused the tragic death of Tridib. While it is Tridib's death that the narrator tries to reconstruct with the help of May, what is conveyed very clearly is Thamma's role in that unnecessary death. Thamma who had talked about freedom and sacrifice was quite willing to leave the old man to his fate. It was Tridib, the wastrel, the loafer who had gone to the old man's defiance but had been unable to resist the mob. The events in Dhaka, therefore, stress the unreliability of Thamma's nostalgic memories.

Moreover, concerning May Price, her innate humanitarian trait drives her to rescue Jethamoshai and Khalil in the face of the frenzied mob regardless of the grave danger that it may cause to the rest of the world. Many years later as she recounts the ghastly murder of Tridib to the narrator, she admits her vain attempt to save them as imprudent: "I didn't listen; I was a heroine. I wasn't going to listen to a stupid, cowardly old woman... Then the mob dragged him in. He vanished" (Ghosh 1995, p.250). Though her memories and sense of guilt torture her relentlessly, gradually she comes to the understanding that Tridib sacrifices himself not only for her sake but for everyone present there. Because the bloodthirsty mob needs anyone to vent their anger. As she narrates

"... he must have known he was going to die... He gave himself up: it was a sacrifice. I know I can't understand it, I know I mustn't try, for any real sacrifice is a mystery" (Ghosh 1995, p.251). For May, it was an admission of her guilt that led her on a profound self-contemplation

journey. The strain of conflicting memories makes her true to life and distinctive in her responses to present situations happening around her. Rajeswari Sunder Rajan says: “May Price ... is impetuous and quick but committed to a more purposeful and principled social and political activism”. (pp. 287-298)

When compared with May, Robi's traumatic memory of Tridib's brutal killing makes him prejudiced and communal in feelings without the fine distinction of judgment. While the narrator's memory of the past makes him more judgmental and rational, Robi's memory only makes him biased. His memory is induced by vengeance and resentment. In an agitated state Robi grips the table, his knuckles white, barely able to whisper to Rehman-Shahab: “I remember it because my brother was killed there, he said. In a riot – not far from where my mother was born. Now do you see why I remember”? (Ghosh 1995, p.243)

Likewise, the narrator's grandmother has no home but in memory and she is very skilled in the art of recollection. But she cannot help but show her despair when the memory of her old home in Dhaka does not match with the present realities. Her sense of displacement is evident in her first words at the airport after meeting Mayadebi: “Where's Dhaka? I can't see Dhaka” (Ghosh 1995, p195). Memory for Thamma cannot and does not add to the spice of life. What Thamma had conveniently forgotten, the narrator had preserved. Memory for the narrator even if they are borrowed from others is colourful and also audible as if visual. The narrator learns the art of living in a glowing world of memories which gives him the strength to challenge the realities of the present. On the contrary, Thamma was panicked at the realisation that her home was no longer her own. Soon the tie with her homeland was severed by the communal clash and violence that killed Tridib. She does not hesitate to show her hatred when she says that she has donated her chain for the cause of the war: “I gave it to the fund for the war. I had to, don't you see? For your sake; for your freedom. We have to kill them before they kill us; we have to wipe them out.” (Ghosh 1995, p.237)

Traumatic Legacy of the Indian Partition

In the novel, *The Shadow Lines* memory shapes the life of every individual. Suvir Kaul says in this regard: “*In Shadow Lines*, the shaping force of memory is enormously productive and enabling, but also traumatic and disabling; it liberates, and stunts, both the individual imagination and social possibilities; it confirms identities and enforces divides. Memory is, above all, a restless energetic, troubling power; the price, and the interrogator, or the form and existence of the modern nation-state.”

(268-286) They are either get liberated by the positive grace of memory or made prisoners in their own conscious cells tortured by the traumatic memory of their terrible past. Many years later, when the narrator ransacks the library shelf in search of the newspaper to defend his claim that there were riots in Calcutta in 1964, he could not find the evidence in the newspaper. At such frustrating moments he even starts doubting his memory: "... I had lived for all those years with a memory of an imagined event" (Ghosh 1995, p. 222). Searching for the news of the riots of 1964 in the newspaper, he said,

"I found that there was not the slightest reference in it to any trouble in East Pakistan, and the barest mention of the events in Kashmir. It was, after all, a Calcutta paper, run by the people who believed in the power of distance no less than I." (Ghosh 1995, p. 227)

He then becomes adamant and takes it as a challenge not to be proved wrong by the factual narratives in circulation. Getting hold of his memory, he desperately searches for the language to give voice to the silence, the traumatic memory subdued for a long time. But in the newspaper of 1964, he finds,

"The led story had nothing to do with riots of any kind nor with Calcutta: [there was] a report which ... had extended an invitation to everyone who had faith in the ideology of socialism and democracy to come together in the common task of building a new society." (Ghosh 1995, p. 223)

A moment later, the narrator detects the headline of a short report which said: "*Twenty-nine killed in riots*" at the bottom of the page. But these are just the statistics of the riots of 1964 which history records. There is no printed evidence of the trauma that each and every one is quietly suffering from, the fear of the school-boys who found "The streets had turned themselves inside out: our city had turned against us" (Ghosh 1995, p. 203). As for the narrator, every word related to the riot becomes.

"The product of a struggle with silence. ... It is not, for example, the silence of an imperfect memory. ... I know nothing of this silence except that it lies outside the reach of my intelligence, beyond words—that is why this silence must be win, must inevitably defeat me, because it is not a presence at all; it is simply a gap, a hole, an emptiness in which there are no wards." (Ghosh 1995, p. 218)

So complete is this silence that it takes almost *fifteen years* for the narrator to trace that there is a connection between the attack on his school bus by the rioters in Calcutta and the events that befall Tridib and the others in the communal violence in Dhaka. Finding out the one single cause that provoked the riots in Dhaka and Calcutta, he said in this connection: "... I began on my strangest journey: a voyage into a land outside space, an expanse without distances; a land of looking-glass events" (Ghosh 1995, p. 224) in the sense that the Hindu-Muslim riot in Calcutta and Dhaka happen on the same day on which Tridib dies. What becomes evident to the narrator as he researches the two distant and mysteriously simultaneous riots is that, beyond the logic of nation-states, an "indivisible sanity binds people to each other independently of their governments" (Ghosh 1995, p. 230). Critiquing the Partition of 1947, *The Shadow Lines* ascribes an irrationality to the nation-state, and Tridib's violent death becomes both sign and effect of the identity of memories across Partition's border. It shows how Partition bloodstained a common historical memory and displaced a whole population as refugees.

The *Shadow Lines* brings to the fore the two generations of migrant women - the narrator's grandmother, Thamma and cousin, Ila. Thamma's migrant nationalism is mirrored in Ila's migration to England; both emerge from a desire for freedom and their memories are a cause of pain and disillusionment. While Grandmother endlessly strives to relocate her lost home in Dhaka and bring her Jethamoshai back to India which turns into a nightmare of riots and murder, Ila's sole motive is to leave her native land in search of freedom and independent identity which she never finds. Both thrive on memories of childhood, relationships and a desire to belong somewhere. Thamma dies with the pain of having lost her home and her Jethamoshai, while Ila lives on with the betrayal of Nick. Thus, the novel underscores the fragility of Partition between nations as etched out in maps to suggest that nations and communities are transnational through historical memory.

Reconstruction

Though the novel follows a chronology of time, there are frequent overlapping of incidents and also parallel sets of similar incidents in different time span where the past incident helps to understand the present repeated situation better. The cellar scenes can be mentioned as much relevant in this aspect. The first time, the cellar scene is enacted in an underground damp room in the Raibazar house, when Ila plays a game with the narrator as children. The game is again played in a cellar in London, where Ila plays a similar game with Nick Price. Ila then burst into tears while telling the narrator about Nick's

heroism. Many years later, when the narrator is in London, Ila and the narrator meet in the cellar again, and Ila weeps, as she tells the narrator about Nick's infidelity. "So here we are, she said, smiling. We're back under our old table, playing houses" (Ghosh 1995, p.110). The present is aided by the past to have a deeper understanding as the narrator finds out that each time Ila cries because of Nick's betrayal, the first time when she was chased by the racists, Nick deliberately leaves her not to be identified as friend of an Indian girl, and then as a husband. Again, we get the instance of this cellar scene in London when Tridib had to celebrate his birthday in the cellar due to the bombardment in London during the Second World War. Tridib was promised by Snipe to be told a story on the occasion of his birthday as a birthday gift:

"I sat on the hard edge of the camp bed and looked around the cellar at the piles of old trunks and suitcases, the stacks of paperbacks, at the garden tools that lay rusting in a corner. Slowly, as I looked around me, those scattered objects seemed to lose their definition ... Those empty corners filled up with remembered forms, with the Ghosts who had been handed down to me by time, the ghost of the nine-year old Tridib, sitting on a camp bed, just as I was, his small face intent, listening to the bomb; the ghost of Snipe in that far corner, near his medicine chest, worrying about his dentures, the ghost of the eight-years old Ila, sitting with me under that vast table in Raibazar. They were all around me, we were together at last, not ghosts at all: the ghostliness was merely the absence of time and distance - for that is all that ghost is, a presence displaced in time." (Ghosh 1995, p. 181)

Memory, therefore, is the binding cord which fastens all the incidents into a logical sequence occurring at different stages of time. K. Ratna Sheila Mani comments on the above-quoted passage: "[It] shows how through the play of memory, the different temporal segments are fused into an image of wholeness. The significant passage also indicates the extent to which the novel insists on the interpenetration and the merging of situations, times, places, and persons." (pp. 67-74)

Conclusion

In *The Shadow Lines*, Ghosh presents the Bengali diaspora on a wider scale by spreading the story over different countries and continents. By tracing a contrast between personal memory and political history and between the space of cultural interactions, his novel underscores the ethical responsibility of understanding and transcending these divisions for a more unified, empathetic world. According to Astrid Erll (2011), the concept of "prosthetic memory," coined by Alison Landsberg

(2004), holds significant ethical consequences. It is characterized by its “ability... to produce empathy and social responsibility as well as political alliances that transcend race, class and gender” (Landsberg, 2004), which is hinted at in this novel. In an interview with Frederick Luis Aldama, Amitav Ghosh (2002) expressed: “I read a lot, and I lived very much within my own head and very much within my own imagination”. In the same interview with Frederick Luis, he further added, “I wrote my second book [*The Shadow Lines*], which was much more in a realist mood to deal with real events and real characters. *The Shadow Lines* is a very restrained in its tone, because it was a response to some ghastly events that were happening in Indian at that time.” (Ghosh, 2002)

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