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Communal Riots as Political Absurdity in Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines*

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This thesis entitled **Communal Riots as Political Absurdity in Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines*** submitted to the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University by Mr. Chudamani Rijal has been accepted by the undersigned members of the thesis committee.

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Abstract

Amitav Ghosh's novel *The Shadow Lines* centres on two families; The Dattas of the Calcutta and the Princes of London, and revolves around India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and London. It narrates the woes of people, who have lost some of their near and dear ones in the communal riots that almost have been a feature of most nations in Indian sub-continent. This violence has largely evolved due to the paucity of political incompetency and pseudo communal feelings prevailing among the leaders of the South Asian countries.

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I. Introduction: A Sketch of Shadow Lines

This research work focuses on “communal riots as political absurdity” based on Amitav Ghosh’s second novel *The Shadow Lines*, published in 1988. It traces the histories of two families, one Indian and one British, and exposes the senseless nature of the violence for the cause of political borders; that accompanied the division of the Indian state of Bengal and Punjab, leading to the formation of Pakistan in 1947 and eventually, Bangladesh in 1971.

Communal riots are common in India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh and, in recent days, in some parts of Nepal, too, they have been reported. Since the independence of India from the British rule in 1947, there have been several riots resulting in loss of hundreds and thousands of lives and leaving homeless to even more population. In India, communal riots are common amongst the Hindus and the Muslims and in Pakistan between the Shia and Sunni sects of Islam. However, in the recent days, it is not limited in the Indian sub-continent, but also has spread in many parts of the world.

The Shadow Lines is a tale of agony of two families; the Dattas in Calcutta and the Prices in London, who were the victims of uprising. The story unfolds from the unnamed narrator’s perspectives, which is a young lad of around ten years and resides in Calcutta with his father, Mr. Datta, who seems to work in a multi-national company, his mother and his grandmother, who is a headmistress in a local girls’ school. The novel follows one man narrative, the unnamed narrator and is based largely on flashback techniques. The storyline does not follow a straight line of narration but often moves to past, as most of the incident narrated, has taken place in the past. However, it starts from the childhood fantasizing of the unnamed narrator and into his adulthood. He depicts his grandmother’s life, which is living in the trauma of being dejected from her native land, Dhaka.

After the British rule was over in India in 1947, India formally was divided in two nations; India and Pakistan. This partition was a result of communal feelings between the

Hindu and Muslim leaders. The Muslims advocated in favour of a separate nation for the security of Islam and its followers, as India was Hindustan for the Hindus. Eventually Pakistan was formed on August 14, 1947 one day prior to the independence of Republic of India. However, this partition also could not stop the communal massacre in the name of religion. Especially the states of Bengal and Punjab were largely affected due to the violence, resulting in mass killing of Hindus and Muslims by anti sectarian people. Several attempts by the national leaders of both the nations, to reduce the communal disharmony were unheard and sadly, are in practice even today.

The Shadow Lines depicts the agony of such people, who lost their near and dear ones in the riots, and even more were forced to quit their homeland. In this very background, *The Shadow Lines* unfolds. The grandmother of the unnamed narrator was born in Dhaka, attended Girls College in Dhaka and later was married to an engineer and with whom she left for Rangoon. But, sadly she could never return to her homeland, as the rioters burned down her home and killed many of her relatives. At the old age, she dreams of her large house in Dhaka, and finally in 1984, when she goes to Dhaka to meet her only living relative – Jesthmosai, he doesn't recognize her and when so does, rejects to follow her to Calcutta. Still more, grandmother encounters another riot, where her cousin, Tridib is killed by the angry mob.

Amitav Ghosh, one of the best English writers of post-colonial India was born in Calcutta on 11 July 1956. His father was first a Lieutenant Colonel in the army and, later a diplomat. Ghosh grew up in East Pakistan, in Sri Lanka, Iran and India. He attended the Doon School in Dehra Dun, and then received a B. A. (with honours) in History from St. Stephen's College, Delhi University in 1976 and an M. A. in Sociology from the University in 1978. He, also received a diploma in Arabic from the Institut Bourguiba des Langues Vivantes, in Tunis, Tunisia, in 1979, and then a D. Phil. in Social Anthropology from St. Edmund' Hall,

Oxford University in 1982. As part of that course, in 1980 he went to Egypt to do field work in the village of Lataifa. He worked for a while as a journalist for The Indian Express newspaper in New Delhi. Since then he has been a Visiting Fellow at the Centre for Social Sciences, at Trivandrum University, Kerala, including many such assignments.

In the spring of 2004, he was Visiting Professor in the Department of English at Harvard University. He spends part of each year in Calcutta, but lives in New York with his wife, Deborah Baker, and editor at Little Brown and Company, and their children, Leela and Nayan.

In 1984, a momentous year for India; there was separatist violence in Punjab, a military attack on the Sikh temple of Amritsar, the assassination of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, there were riots following assassination, and there was the gas disaster in Bhopal. It was as if George Orwell's infamous date for the apocalypse had been set with India in mind. Many peoples' lives were irrevocably shaken by these events and, it seems, Ghosh's was one of them.

Riots always have played an important role in his writings, as riots were part of his living in Calcutta and Delhi. Violence was slowly being an integral part of many major cities in India and Ghosh's presented in most accurate fashion. *The Shadow Lines*, his second novel is only a trend in the line of such novels; he was to write in days to come.

The Shadow Lines is principally the story of sufferings of peoples' woes and pains invited by the innumerable communal riots. However, the subjects Ghosh would choose to address and his style, he would employ were still in flux. But the events of 1984 seem to have solidified his thinking in both regards.

The riot of 1984, which is one of the cruxes of the stories in *The Shadow Lines*, was directed principally against Sikh men. As their ramifications unfolded, he recalls, "It was not just grief I felt, rather, it was a sense of something slipping loose, of a mooring coming unmoored."

somewhere within. Over 2500 died in Delhi alone, who were like many other members of my generation,” (48). Tridib, one of the characters in the novel was only twenty seven, when he became the target of the angry mob in Dhaka. This very incident is one of the major events that unfold layers of mysteries in the novel.

For Ghosh, such riots were unbearable pain and on top, he was worried as they were rooted in the culture of the people. Ghosh depicts his bitterness in *Imam and the Indian* as:

I grew up believing that mass-slaughter of the kind that accompanied the Partition of India and Pakistan, in 1947, could never happen again. But that morning, in the city of Delhi, the violence had reached the same level of intensity. [. . .] How do you explain to someone who has spent a lifetime cocooned in privilege that a potentially terminal rent has appeared in the wrapping? (52-53)

During the period, he had been writing *The Circle of Reason* in that “baking rooftop hutch,” and its style was very much in a Salman Rushdie vein of imaginative serio-comic storytelling – a flight of fancy that had only the loosest ties to actual historical events. But 1984 changed all that: it is as though the next novel, *The Shadow Lines* was written by someone else entirely. Here the style is, if anything, more sophisticated – but less fantastic. Here the history of Partition is very real, indeed, but its broad strokes are used to paint a backdrop against which a personal struggle of the young protagonist and his family gets the spotlight. Why this change happened (and continues) is one of the questions that we will want to explore as we move through his corpus of writing.

This was not to be the final shaping influence in his work, of course. Indeed, Ghosh has by now become a bit notorious in his bold embraces of new genres and styles when he undertakes a new project. In her review of *Dancing in Cambodia, At Large in Bruma* for *India Star* Meenakshi Mukherjee speaks for many when she observes:

We have now come to expect each new Amitav Ghosh book to be different from what has appeared before. The wistful evocation of memory to reflect on divisions of land and people in *The Shadow Lines* had nothing in common with the disjointed magic realism of his apprentice novel, *The Circle of Reason* (1986). Neither, however, prepared any reader for the febrile frenzy of *The Calcutta Chromosome* (1996) where the history of Malaria research is spliced with this story of subaltern subversions of Western science. The conflation of genres in *Dancing in Cambodia, At Large in Burma* is quite unlike what was tried by Ghosh's other non-fiction work, *In an Antique Land* (1992). In *In Dancing in Cambodia*, travel, history, cultural commentary, political reportage shade into one another, the whole permeated with ruminations on freedom, power, violence and pain. Other histories and other geographies come alive and align with our own through Ghosh's translucent prose. (12)

Mukherjee underscores in this Amitav Ghosh's refusal to be categorized, his rebellion against the templates of genre. Are his books, such as *In An Antique Land* or *The Calcutta Chromosome*?

It is unusual for a novelist to produce as rich a body of essays as Ghosh has. He did work as a journalist of course, and perhaps has always had an interest in reaching different audiences – some prefer reading fiction, others prefer shorter essays on less obviously imagined topics. Yet even in these more prosaic works, Ghosh typically tells one story after another, eliciting from readers a sense of engagement that might otherwise be missing. We can begin our discussion of Ghosh by looking at these essays in one extended sweep, since they are usually looked at only in passing, as a support for discussions of his fiction. If we see what issues motivate his political, historical, and anthropological work, though we will be

well positioned to consider the informing interests that manifest themselves in other ways throughout his novels?

Commenting on the varied technique of Ghosh, Tabish Khair in *Amitav Ghosh: A Critical Companion* writes:

Ghosh's novels while they are each different from the other, also take up certain themes for discussion. This shaping which Ghosh honestly acknowledges is something that different contributors to this casebook have tackled in different ways. The discussion itself, though, does not conform to any one ideological or literary perspective: my efforts editor has been to include as many different papers of high academic standards. (1)

Ghosh is tremendously different from one book to another, as he keeps on shifting from one perspective to the other. When, in *Imam and the Indian*, he raises the issue of faction between the Imam and the Indian, in *The Calcutta Chromosome*, he goes on to trace the history of subaltern people and their role in shaping up of the history behind the findings of anti-malaria chromosome. In his latest novel *Sea of Poppies* (2008), he narrates a tale of drugs lord during the Colonial era in India.

However, one of his favourite topics he raises in almost all his works in communal differences, which give rise to clash and even riots. Many of these incidents of riots are depicted in this *The Shadow Lines* as well as in *The Imam and the Indian*. Recalling one of the violences that took place in the year 1984, he writes in *The Imam and the Indian*:

I was twenty eight. The city I considered home was Calcutta, but New Delhi was where I had spent all my adult life except for a few years away in England and Egypt. I had returned to India two years before, upon completing a doctorate in Oxford, and recently found a teaching at Delhi University. But it

was in the privacy of my baking rooftop hutch that my real life was lived. I as writing my first novel, in the classic fashion, perched in a garret. (46-47)

Already he was identifying writing as his real life, distinct finally from his teaching and research.

However, there are many critics, who opine that *The shadow Lines* is more than a story on communal riots. Novy Kapadia opines that the title of the novel is perhaps the most philosophical statement in the novel. In *Amitav Ghosh's: The Shadow Lines*, he opines:

The Shadow Lines, or the lines that not only define our human shape but our inner struggles to choose between darkness and light, are an intricate part of all human existence. Shadows, like time, are both tangible and intangible at any given moment or realm of perspective. They are a fleeting, generically depicted, generally distorted representations of us, and they can only be viewed in the proper light. Ghosh uses shadow lines as a way of telling us that the way we view ourselves is not always the way that others view us, and until we can gain a deeper understanding of ourselves we will remain in the shadows of our own enlightenment. (67)

Ghosh manages to speak excessively of shadows, darkness and light, weaving them subtly into the context of what he is trying to convey. He uses the terms both realistically and metaphorically to show that the shadow we cast – the one other people can see – is not always an accurate reflection of which we really are. Nick was not the hero he seemed to be and when May reveals this to the boy, they are in the process of moving from light to dark, both in physical environment and knowledge of the truth. In a way, a shadow is like a "fair weather friend" in that it appears to us only when the sun is directly overhead. While every human being casts a unique shadow, a common theme can be seen in them all, namely that

they are just as much a part of us as they are detached from us. This is another realm in which Ghosh metaphorically uses the elements of shadow lines to tell his story.

Kapadia is of the opinion that the novel is not only based on communal riots, but is; “It is, far from being Diaspora, concerned with obscure social and ideological issues to evacuate the traces of submerged network of traces in the aftermath of free India” (52). Ghosh gives voice to the issues of people, who have been negated by the history and are forced to live in the “Shadow.”

Throughout literature's long history, shadows have been used as metaphors for secrets. Things hidden in the shadows, things which we cannot see though we can vaguely make out their outlines, these are the traditional metaphors which Ghosh cannot avoid. Ghosh demonstrates that when secrets come out from behind the shadows and are exposed to the stark, revealing brilliance of daylight, they do not immediately evaporate. Secrets tend to linger long after they've been exposed because the fact that they were hidden in the first place casts strong shadows of doubt upon the person keeping the secret. The revelation of these secrets can have severe consequences, such as being kicked out of school or being labelled a liar. Though the grandmother's "letter from the grave" is eventually dismissed, its mere existence taught the boy some valuable lessons.

While the title *The Shadow Lines* can be read in a thousand different ways, and the significance of shadows throughout the novel can be interpreted with vast distinctions, one thing remains clear. The shadows that all human beings reflect are as unique to the individual as each written word is to a talented author like Amitav Ghosh.

Furthermore, the destabilisation of our sense of time is further complicated by the way the novel disorients the reader's sense of spatial difference. The novel moves seamlessly between its three major locations: Calcutta, London and Dhaka. Events in one place are strangely mirrored in the others. The game of houses that the narrator plays with Ila under the

table in Bengal is doubled by the cellar under the Prices' house in London. The riot in Calcutta that terrifies the narrator when he is a schoolboy is the mirror image of riot in Dhaka in which Tridib is killed.

The borders between nations, of course, as the novel goes on, become shadow lines. The narrator's grandmother is shocked to find out that there is no clearly marked difference on the ground between India and East Pakistan (now, Bangladesh) when she travels back to her old home. The grandmother's point of view is a narrowly nationalist one. As a girl she dreamed of fighting against the British and dying for her country's freedom.

In the context, Ranajit Guha in Introduction to *Subaltern Studies* opines:

Parallel to the domain of elite politics there existed throughout the colonial period another domain of Indian politics in which the principal actors were not the dominant groups of the indigenous society or the colonial authorities but the subaltern classes. This was an autonomous domain, far from the subaltern classes. This was an autonomous domain, where the narrator weaves labyrinthine incident invited by the communal woes. (30)

The representative of subaltern people in the novel is the grandmother of the narrator, who has suffered the pain of being discarded from her own house in Dhaka, as she was of minority Hindu family; whereas, the representative of upper class of people, in the novel is the Prices in London. However, when it comes to colonizer's perspective, they were the Dattas and the Prices; as, they came from upper Brahmin class and were an unwritten authority in the society.

This complex concept of the colonizer, as the colonized makes the novel a complex network of people scattered all over the Indian sub-continent and into London. It weaves the story of people of all natures and types intermingled in an eccentric family history spread in continents. In the context, Kapadia writes:

Amitav Ghosh's novel weaves together personal lives and public events, out of intricate web of memories, relationships and images. Ghosh, with an art that I think is rare builds a vivid and moving story. Its focus is the meaning of political freedom and the force of nationalism, the shadow line between people and nations – which is the source of terrifying violence. (87)

People of all classes and creeds from various walks of life are woven in the riddle of political and social intrigues, which have stolen their mental peace. And, of course, it is the politics of border that is responsible for this unrest and chaos.

II. Politics of Communal Riots

II.1 Communal Riots

Riots are offence against the public peace, and are interpreted as any tumultuous disturbance by several persons who have unlawfully assembled to assist one another. They often use force as a weapon against anyone opposing them in the execution of some enterprise of a private nature. Such demonstration is often in a violent manner, to terrorize and press the opponent or the responsive authority. In general understanding, riots are unlawful assembly to impose a group's opinion and ideas before a larger and, often powerful body.

Communal riots are violent disturbances by a certain community or race of people to impose their authority and principle or make their demand fulfil, targeted on opposite community of people. Communal is related to a community or a group and hence, communal riots are of a certain group against the anti-groups. In the context, communal violence does not just lie in recalling scholarly definitions, rather to address our popular understanding of what communal violence is. This is because violence of such kind has an active political dimension in both versions of English and Hindi languages, namely *sampradayik danga-fasad*, which produces an instant codified meaning in India and South Asia.

The years between the two World Wars bore witness to a radical transformation in the Indian political scene. During this time the anti colonial struggle developed into a powerful mass movement, and its leading party, the Indian National Congress moved from well-ordered annual meetings and polite calls for constitutional reform to the demand for complete political independence and extensive debate on the conditions that would make for social and economic independence at the same time. By the end of this period, indeed, when at the outbreak of the Second World War, the British colonial rulers looked for its cooperation in the pursuit of the war, the Congress was insisting on 'independence now.' It

was then very much the party in waiting demonstrably ready and able to head a successor regime.

Historians of all shades of opinions have recognized this advance – or at least, some aspects of it. To many the strength and popularity of the Congress and the nationalist movement appeared as a steadily rising curve all the way from the late nineteenth century, with only occasional and negligible downward movements. Citing the difficulties that came in the way of communal peace, Ravindra Kaur writes, "The ascent was seen to be especially steep in the period after 1919. From the Hindu nationalist R C Majumdar to the secular liberal Jawaharlal Nehru and the Marxist R P Dutt, nationalist and anti-imperialist writers seemed to at one on this point" (124).

The fact that lessons in communal harmony and communalism are part of school text books is state sponsored political discourse. It means that such state sponsored truths are adding to the pre-existing meaning created, played out and remodelled continuously. Thus, any attempt to answer the aforementioned issues must include an appraisal of the popular public perception and the hidden meanings therein.

One of the most quoted interpretation of communalism or 'communal ideology' in India is of Marxist historian Bipan Chandra. He makes a systematic classification of causes of communal riots. He sites three reasons for communal violence, each one succeeding the other, as;

The first step is the creation of an exclusive religious community based on common political, economic, social and cultural interests. The very use of expression like interests of Hindu or Muslim community points to an acceptance of communal ideology. The second step is to articulate irreconcilability of the interests of the two communities. The third and final is

when the interests of the two communities not only become exclusive and irreconcilable but also mutually hostile. (qtd. Ravindra Kaur 25).

This is what he calls extreme communalism or fascistic communalism. His conceptualisation of communalism as some sort of disease, that 'has entered even the bones' is the basis of understanding for those thinking in binaries of communal/secular.

Communal riots are largely based on action-reaction scenario, where each community fuels the conflicts further. The eruption of violence is somehow always linked to a kind of provocation from the other side. Thus, Muslims and Hindus, somehow, become equal partners in the instigation of violence or at least in the creation of a potentially inflammable situation. The need to create ethnic balance, even in clear instances of one-sided massacres, somehow seems equally between Hindus and Muslims or Hindus and Sikhs, lacks a degree of objectivity and trustworthiness to such speech or text. However, case studies of various riots show that religious minorities suffer the most in terms of loss of lives and property. This is not to suggest that members of the religious majority, namely Hindus, do not suffer during the violence, but that the perverse logic of number of deaths and extent of material loss points to minorities as the major sufferers.

In each case of violence, there is provocation from the minorities – for example, Sikhs celebrating the assassination of Indira Gandhi in Delhi; or Muslim molesting Hindu women in Godhra – that later justifies the actual violence. The construction of such carefully balanced narratives of massacres has become defining feature of any violence termed as 'communal.'

Communal seems to have acquired a meaning that has far outgrown its literal one, that is, something shared by a community. Its noun based derivative 'communalism' now denotes hatred for the other community in an almost ahistorical and decontextualised mode. The role of state institutions, political organizations and media, in instances of conflict,

remains un-reflected and detached from the idea of two inimical communities opposed to each other. The very concept of community itself within 'communal' seems to have fixed, timeless and unchallenged characteristics to it. It implies the existence of a pre-fabricated entity of community that is essential to actualize any inter-community violence. The mobilisation aspect, plural recognised symbols, is thus completely overlooked. This gives a natural, self-propelling quality to any event classified as communal.

Association of politics and communal riots is as clear as the bright day light, as in most cases they are politically backed and motivated. Citing the co-existence of communal riots and politics side by side, Ram Puniyani writes:

Communal riots and politics have co-existed in the world since ancient times. However, the recent manifestations of religious being exploited to further political interests have become much more overt. An intensification of communal violence over the last two decades has made this clear to us in India and abroad. (1)

Penetration of politics in communal riots has intensified and worsen the matter to the farthest level, at least so is proved in the Indian sub-continent case.

Politics and communal riots have penetrated into the twentieth century, as well. The beginning of the twenty-first century has been marked by one of the most dastardly crimes, ever in human history. The world witnessed with helplessness two airplanes ramming into the World Trade Centre, New York and killing almost three thousand innocent lives. In the immediate aftermath Osama bin Laden thanked the Allah for this event. At the same time US President George William Bush announced that this was an act of Islamic terrorism and that the US would initiate a war of terror, a crusade against Islamic terrorism. This resulted in an attack on Afghanistan where bin Laden was thought to be hiding then, which led to the killings of thousands of innocents.

This act somehow has interrelationship and interference of politics in communal issue. Kaur finds deep penetration of politics in violence, especially when it comes to Islam. He writes, "Islam always has been isolated from the main stream of world politics. They were taken as something mysterious and were ever suspected of doing something wrong, which had its impact in the Islam nations" (23). Similarly, in the context of world politics and communalism Punyeni writes:

Communal violence takes off from the religion and ends in killing the people belonging to a particular religion, in this case Muslims. However, these are no exception. Politics over the last three decades has been conducted in the name of religion. It began with the overthrow of Raza Shah Pehlavi and the rise of Ayatollah Khoemani in Iran and after the partition of Indian and Pakistan in late 1940s. (2)

In both the cases, it was celebrated as a revolution in communal issue backed by a specific race and religion, which ended up in an attempt of amassing the rival groups and race.

Communalism is often born from religion. Religion inspired violence; called communal violence in South Asia is often described as a ritual or a pact of violence between social groups that keeps the community boundaries in place. In common parlance such violence is described as 'internecine' induced by rivalry or mutual hostility between religious groups for example Hindu-Muslim, and as such, considered a phenomenon unique and indigenous to India and South Asia at large. Kaur explains this feature as:

Such expression tend to convey an image of, somehow, evenly matched groups partaking in a ritualised outbreak of violence in the last two decades, however, challenge this widespread notion of two inimical religious groups engaged in reciprocal violence. The violence is not only mostly anti-minority,

for example anti Sikh in Delhi 1984 and anti Muslim in Gujarat in 2002; it is also evidently aided and abetted by the local authorities. (23)

In Gujarat, the callous intent of the state was clearly demonstrated when the state's chief minister followed violence with a celebratory journey of pride through Gujarat. The show of restraint/remorse that is normally associated with the state executive, in case of such turbulent events, was far from the chosen strategy of justifying the killings as a Hindu reaction to repeated Muslim provocation and mischief. That the state's stance on violence was widely approved by its majority constituents was visible in the re-election of a political leadership accused of negligence partisanship and lack of empathy for minority groups.

A historical understanding of the progression of religious separatism allows us to see contemporary religion based violence not as a clinical virus but as an often contested trajectory of community construction in South Asia. Communal violence has challenged the naturalness by focusing on the organisational aspects of riots in India. The fact that not all hostilities lead to actual instances of violence, leads one to question what triggers off riots in a given locality at a particular moment. Explaining this scenario P. Brass writes, "It is a development of 'institutionalised riot systems' wherein specialists undertakes conversion of incidents between members of different communities into communal riots" (12).

The tradition for the occurrence of violence is often accepted in terms of the spread of communalism in society. It is proposed as a self explanatory feature of Indian society that should account for any given mass killings, sexual violence, expulsion of people from their homes and destruction of their property. Such demonstrations turn the focus away from active mobilisation of volunteers and the organization of actual violence. The role of informal locality based socio-religious networks that may be activated to sustain violence needs to be looked into the organizational aspect of violence. This also requires fragmenting and

challenging the prevalent concept of 'communal violence' that largely defines the contemporary political discourse on violence in South Asia.

At present in England and in most of the United States, an assemblage of three or more persons is required for the disturbance to be considered a riot; in a few states, a disturbance resulting from the assembly of two people may be so considered. Moreover, in England and in much of the U.S., a disturbance is held to be a riot whether the parties assemble for the purpose of committing a lawful act or an unlawful one; in some states the acts committed must be in themselves illegal. Each member of a riotous assembly is guilty of riot and may be punished accordingly; the mere joining of the group, while tumult is in progress, constitutes an offence.

Rioting in most of the U.S. is punishable as a misdemeanour in common law; it is generally punishable by fine or imprisonment of up to three months. The penalties are more severe when the rioters are armed or when the object of the riot is to prevent enforcement of the law. In recent years, however, more severe legislation has been enacted in some states and by the federal government. Interstate travel in order to incite a riot is now a federal offence. In many states, statutes provide that persons injured as a result of a riot may recover damages from the municipality in which the riot occurred.

II.2. History of Communal Riots in Indian Sub-Continent

After several centuries of foreign rule, of which the British phase was the last, India finally obtained its independence in 1947. This consummation of a wish long nurtured was not, however, without its darker aspects. The process of splitting independent India was accompanied not only by violence to the political, economic, and social organization of the country, but by the loss of thousands of lives in communal strife. India, as is inevitable when any person attains its political freedom, discovered that its troubles had only begun.

Early in December 1946 the British government made one last attempt to work out a method for bringing the Congress Party and the Moslem League together in the Constituent Assembly, which was to shape India's political future. Viscount Wavell, the last viceroy of India and the Indian political leaders, including Jawaharlal Nehru, effective head of the interim government, and Mohammed Ali Jinnah, chief of the Moslem League, went by plane to London and the conference began on December 3. Prime Minister Clement Attlee and other British government leaders interviewed the Indians separately. By December 4, the anticipated deadlock was complete, and on December 6 the conference ended in failure, with the British asserting that they would not accept a charter for a new government in India unless the Moslems participated in its framing. This statement was necessitated by the apparent intention of some of the Congress Party leaders to proceed without the Moslems and prepare a constitution for an India in which the Hindus had an overwhelming majority.

A spirited debate began in the House of Commons in London on December 11, when Attlee officially announced the failure of the conference. In this discussion, which lasted two days, former Prime Minister Winston Churchill accused the Labourites of favouring the Hindu element and warned that a civil war might be the consequence. Sir Stafford Cripps, speaking for the Labour Government, was still hopeful that a way out of the impasse could be found. In general, however, the debate added little to what had been said many times before, and the Commons, without a vote, merely expressed itself in favour of further efforts to find a solution. Addressing the upper house on December 16, Lord Pethick-Lawrence, Secretary of State for India, reiterated that Great Britain could not accept Nehru's proposal that the Congress Party frame a constitution without Moslem participation. He reminded the Indians that in any case Parliament would have to approve whatever plan was finally agreed upon.

Meanwhile, the Constituent Assembly convened in New Delhi on December 9, attended by 205 members nearly all of whom belonged to the Congress Party or were elected

with its help. The 73 Moslem League delegates boycotted the Assembly from the beginning, although a few Moslem members of the Congress Party and several Sikhs were present. Also, the 93 representatives of the Indian princely states were absent. As president, the Assembly elected Dr. Sachchidananda Sinha, a lawyer and journalist from Bihar. Almost at once the Assembly became involved in questions of procedure. The most important motion was that of Nehru on December 13, in which it was proposed that the Assembly resolve that India be proclaimed an independent sovereign republic. This motion was not acted upon before the Assembly recessed on December 23.

Early in January Mohandas Gandhi advised the Congress leaders to placate the Moslems, and on December 6 the party's general committee voted by a count of 99 to 52 to adopt a more conciliatory attitude. This action, however, was followed by the resignation of two Socialist members from the committee. One of the issues that divided the Congress from the Moslem League and inspired the latter's boycott of the Assembly was the voting procedure to be followed in Sections B and C of that body. These two sections contained the delegates from northwest and northeast India, where the Moslem population was concentrated. Unhappily, the Hindus and Moslems were not able to come to terms on this matter.

The Assembly reconvened on January 20, and on January 22 unanimously passed Nehru's resolution in favour of an independent republic, but four days later it again adjourned. This time it was cancelled until April, feeling that it could not function in the face of the Moslems' refusal to take part in its deliberations. On January 31, the Working Committee of the Moslem League, meeting in Karachi, declared that the Assembly was illegal and demanded that it be dissolved. In turn, the Congress Party demanded that the Moslem League withdraw its five members who were serving as ministers in the interim government. At this stage it was obvious that only drastic action could resolve the crisis.

The third element in the Indian political picture, the princely states, also entered the situation at this time. The Chamber of Princes met late in January at New Delhi, with 60 rulers present and 158 of the 561 states represented. On January 29 the princes adopted a resolution expressing their willingness 'to render the fullest possible cooperation in framing an agreed constitution' for India. However, they also made it plain that each state was to enter the new constitutional setup of its own will, and that the new government would not automatically inherit the constitutionally paramount position long enjoyed by Great Britain.

The princes also expressed fears that participation in the Assembly might open the door to democratic agitation and reforms in their own domains. The refusal of the Moslem League to have anything to do with the Assembly made the princes wary of committing themselves to it too strongly. Nevertheless, they authorized a committee to meet with one representing the Assembly, and on February 9 it was revealed that this joint body had reached an agreement to examine the question of how the Indian states should be represented in the Assembly, where 93 seats had been allotted to them or approximately one seat for every million of their inhabitants. However, before this work could be completed, the stalemate in India, added to Britain's financial crisis, had brought about Attlee's epoch-making announcement of February 20.

August 14, Admiral Mountbatten, who had just been made an earl, addressed the Pakistan Assembly at Karachi, bidding the new Dominion good luck and farewell. Similar ceremonies were held at New Delhi on August 15 to inaugurate the Dominion of India. Mountbatten, although giving up his now abolished office of viceroy, remained as governor-general of India.

While these events were occurring, the religious prejudices of Hindus and Moslems were producing a mounting toll of dead and injured and of property loss. The communal riots occurred in regions where the two great religious communities lived side by side, as in

Bengal and the Punjab. The latter was a zone of particularly acute friction, where the religious cleavage was complicated by the presence of over 3,000,000 Sikhs, a vigorous and warlike people. Both Moslems and Hindus had organized semi-military bodies in the Punjab, but the coalition government of the province outlawed these organizations and arrested eight high officials in the Moslem League. The Moslems were highly resentful and on the following day precipitated a riot in Lahore which had to be quelled with tear gas. The government soon withdrew its ban on the Moslem National Guard and its Hindu counterpart, but arrests continued. The League, taking a leaf out of Gandhi's book of political tactics, engaged in civil resistance.

However, the violent communal riots that had its first recorded existence as far as 16th century have not been lessened, or subdued but is in practice even in post modern era. It is in taking huge toll on both the fractions of people. Early in 1964 fighting between Hindus and Muslims produced tension that was comparable to the riots that preceded partition in 1947. The center of the strife was Calcutta, where 100 persons were killed and thousands injured. The army was forced to take control of part of the city after police failed in their effort to protect Muslims and their property from Hindu mobs.

The violence erupted when it was learned in Calcutta that Muslim mobs had killed many Hindus in border districts. The Muslims were aroused by the theft of a religious relic, a hair said to have come from the prophet Muhammad – from a mosque in Srinagar in the Indian sector of Kashmir.

As such, then onwards to date, there have been several communal violence in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and even few such disturbances are heard in Nepalese cities, as well. Whatever the reason behind such violence may be, it is the common folks whose lives and property are at stake. The communal strife, especially after the division of India and Pakistan has claimed lives of hundreds and thousands of people, but still does not

show any sign of slowing down, thanks to lack of political determination displayed by the political leaders.

The 1960s and 70s saw the emergence of a more detailed historiography, based on recently released government documents and collections of private papers. The notion of a giant clash between imperialism and nationalism in the sub-continent was now increasingly contested by several groups of historians. Their researches focused on the regional variation of the Indian nationalist movement and the contradictions within it. Not only was the earlier vision of the unity of the movement challenged, as a result the continuity and indeed the very existence of the movement was again called into question in the writings of some of these scholars. Yet the mass of contemporary evidence, official and non-official, regarding something then perceived as a strong and lasting nationalist struggle remained. Faced with this stubborn fact, the revisionist historians found it necessary to admit that the nationalist movement was not entirely a political illusion. However, their new interpretation of its development marked a return to the stance of the post liberal colonialists, only marginally modified by new data.

II.3. Religious Fundamentalism and Politics

Fundamentalism refers to a religious or political movement based on a literal interpretation of and strict adherence to doctrine, especially as a return to former principles. In simple understanding, religious fundamentalism is a movement with strict view of doctrine based on the welfare and upliftment of one group of religion followers. Most of the riots, in the past or present are directly linked with religious fundamentalism.

Political or not, the politics of religious communities – now called communalism encircled dream like the coils of a snake. Even the political reconstruction of Indian history was the idea of the fundamental unity of India. This fundamental unity could never be materialized except in text books. John Thieme hints this utilitarian concept as:

Something that had long been assumed, this notion was now advanced, in opposition to colonialist assertions about impossibilities of uniting Indians, as a scientific and demonstrable truth. This fundamental, essential unity of India was based, it was said, on the natural geographical barriers that surrounded the subcontinent and marked it off from the rest of the world; an ancient culture and practice that linked together the most distant point in the land; and, in some late recessions, the economic self-sufficiency of Indian the interdependence of its various parts. (247)

Thus, there is no country marked out by the sea and the mountains so clearly to be a single whole as India. This geographical wholeness explains one of the central features of Indian history, the urge to political unification in defiance of vast distances created out of the communal disharmony.

Religious fundamentalism is an emerging extremist phenomenon in the world at large. But in different sociopolitical milieus it assumes different forms. One common trend of religious fundamentalism is that in almost cases it tends to be fascist in nature. In the South Asian nations' context the emergence of radical religious groups has added to the communal woes giving rise to fundamental and fascist forces. These forces are directly and indirectly supported by various political wings, which, in turn use them mere as vote banks.

Common people are unmindful of religious boundaries, the elite society who felt threatened due to the rise of lower sections in the wake of industrialization, education, the possibility of land reforms, and elimination of nobility were the ones to use religion in the political space. The Hindu League and Muslim Mahasabha – RSS are such formations and they, though appearing to be opposed to each other, shared a lot in common. One of the recent examples of religious fundamentalism backed by politics was in post Gujarat after the infamous violence of 2001 erupted, when a coach of the Sabramati Express was torched

killing 58 innocent people. This was deemed as an act of Islamic terrorism and it triggered off communal riots that claimed life of the thousands. In the post violence scenario, the then Hindu chief minister Narendra Modi, arranged a *Rath Yatra* (chariot procession) as a symbol of win over the Islam elements – a clear indication of the strong association of communal violence and politics.

In the global scenario, too, there are clear indications of religion laced politics. The so-called 'War on Terrorism' by the west in leadership of the United States of America is one or other way supporting biasness against the innocent Muslim. Alexander Stiller, who is a west based critic, questions this mentality of the west. He doubts the west intention in context of War on Terrorism. He questions on the American mentality, as clear from President Bush's speech:

When President Bush used the term 'crusade' to describe the war on terrorism, was he inadvertently revealing religion roots in American patriotism? In short, religious sentiment, long considered the prime enemy of nationalism, actually one of its founding elements. (qtd. Religion, Power and Violence 28)

It is a known fact that the west always has been biased against the east, and when it comes to Islam it is susceptible. They doubt the religious sentiments of the Islam and consider them as 'dangerous elements' and believe in them crushing them, through the power of politics.

The root of communal violence somehow has to do with the policy taken by the U.S., as well. Stiller narrates the scenario, as:

Samuel P. Huntington's *Clash of Civilization* based on the conflict between the backward Islamic and advanced western civilization seems to be the hallmark of American policy. Almost the contour of religious nationalism change: new outbursts and incidents bring new reactions, both hostile and conciliatory, from its secular opponents. (qtd. Religion, Power and Violence 28)

Thus, whether it is the *Ram Rath Yatra* by an Indian leader or the Guantanamo Prison set up by the U.S. in the Gulf of Cuba are politics involved in against the minority factions of the society, which will further add to the fire of communal strife.

As these upgraded and self-claimed nationalist movements are gaining ground in the South Asian nations, especially in India and Pakistan, the concept of communal harmony is still a distant dream. In a vast country like India the concept of nationalism also is clearly divided into religious sects and belief. In the scenario, communal riots are clearly at large and out of the reach of the government machineries.

Thus, it is not religion based politics nor pseudo-nationalism that can eradicate or lessen the communal fire. So, communal harmony can only be achieved through a mutual understanding based on conscience and welfare of the people of all castes, creeds and religions of all communities.

III. Communal Riots as Political Absurdity in *The Shadow Lines*

Communal Riots have been a major challenge to hundreds and thousands of people and the leaders of South Asian countries, especially India and Pakistan. Thousands of lives have been claimed by the inhumane uprising. *The Shadow Lines* is largely based on Ghosh's personal sufferings and experiences of his childhood in Calcutta.

The Shadow Lines has been narrated in two parts; 'Going Away' and 'Coming Home'. The words going and coming are used in relation to 'home' a place of one's birth and upbringing, a place to which a person is deeply attached, especially if one lives in another place. Though in the growth of human being, it would have been ideal to feel that all places are one place, and all people have one place, and s/he is a citizen of the world. However, the reality is adverse, as most people are away from home. Ghosh's characters go as far as Delhi and London on work or travel, and come home to Calcutta or Dhaka only to learn that peace is as elusive as ever.

The story is told in first person, the unnamed narrator, who is a growing up boy and is living in the shadows of Tridib, his uncle and dream mentor. Narrator lives in the shadow of the man he idolizes; and of an individual drawn into history, and social and political turbulence. The narrative technique of the novel is fragmentary. There are sixteen sections in the first part, and fifteen in the second part of the book. The sections do not add to the organic whole, as the text has a proper beginning, middle and ending. In the context, Nivedita Bagchi observes: "The story or the chief narrative line involves sporadically and is constantly interrupted and diverted by other narratives; the only fixed centre is that of the chief narrative voice through whom the other narratives are filtered" (2).

There are several lines of family introduction – that of the narrator, based in Calcutta; of his grandmother's sister, associated with Dhaka, and two further lines bringing into the story of Robi and Ila. But the blood relationships merge with those forged by intimacy, as

with the British family, linked through domicile in India. The narrator's closest links are with Mayadebi, his grandmother's sister, and with her son Tridib, the enigmatic older friend through which the "I" narrator experiences much of his life.

After years of being forced away from her home, when Thamma (grandmother) reaches her house in Dhaka she cannot believe it is her home, a phenomena experienced by many hundreds of Diaspora people. She demands to see the same old houses, shops and people when her house was displayed to her. She says:

[. . .] Turning to Mayadebi he pointed down the lane and said: That's your house – that's where Saifuddin has his workshop. My grandmother, thrown into a sudden panic, began to protest. This couldn't be it, she cried. It can't be our lane, for where's Kana-babu's sweet shop? The shop over there is selling hammers and hardware: Where's the sweet shop gone? (206)

Pain of being forced into exile from one's own home is painful but even more painful is to find that nothing of the same home recognizes after a gap of all these years. The change that has engulfed Dhaka, in all those years is disbelieving to her; however one has to adjust to the changes.

The chief narrator of *The Shadow Lines*, who remains unnamed throughout the novel shuttles his flashback from Dhaka to Calcutta and from Delhi to London. Time looms from 1981 to the 1960s and back to the 1940s, and even to the earlier years. However, the narrator's mind is drawn on the troubled time of the 1960s when Tridib, his uncle was killed in a Hindu-Muslim riot in Dhaka. At the time, when this tragedy took place, the narrator was a twelve-years-old boy. He did not realize the exact cause of his uncle's death, at least, at the time; as he was told that Tridib died in an accident. He knew the real cause of Tridib's death only in 1981 from his second uncle Robi, who was one of the eye-witnesses of the tragic incident that took place in Dhaka.

Tridib's killing is one of the most crucial incidents in the story. May Price – love interest of Tridib thinks it was her blunder that claimed his life. On the other hand, the narrator who was just a boy finds the absence of his dream mentor very sordid. He laments on knowing the whereabouts and the happenings with Tridib, but is unsuccessful to know the reality, until he turns into a grown up man and visits London. He finds May still in the shock of memory of the un-fateful day. May's state of mental trauma even after so many years is reflected as:

I thought I killed him. I used to think; perhaps he wouldn't have got out of that car if I hadn't made him, if I'd understood what I was doing. [. . .] they wouldn't have touched an English Memsahib, but he, he must have know he was going to die. For years I was arrogant enough to think I owed him his life. [. . .] I couldn't have killed him; I couldn't have, if I'd wanted. 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. (252)

The riot of 1984 in Dhaka claimed not only Tridib, but two other men, who were in an attempt to reshuffle their past with the present. The seemingly meaningless act gave lifelong pain to May, Robi, brother of Tridib and many more.

The narrator's grandmother, Thamma, who was most interested person to insist on Dhaka's trip to reorganize her childhood memories and bring back her only living relative, is the main character in *The Shadow Lines*. The pivotal narrative structure of this novel looms back and forth on grandmother's childhood in Dhaka and her youthful days in Calcutta and finally on the sufferings of her kith and kin, a boon of communal riots.

She is a woman of unwavering spirit, who endures perils without fear, struggling and working to give a safe future to her only son. The novel presents an extensive study of a grandmother's relationship with her grandchild. For both the narrator and the grandmother,

imagination is an “ideal retreat.” The grandmother’s memories have been passed on to the narrator as lively, animated stories. There is clearness in his perception because his grandmother is adept in the art of recollection. As he remembers, “I could see Kana-babu’s sweet shop at the end of their lane with absolute clarity..... For me, Kana-babu’s sweet shop, at the end of the lane was, as real as the one down our own lane” (194).

Though the Dhaka of the grandmother’s youth has changed, the memory of her house becomes an image in her mind, important enough to live for. Most of the grandmother’s vision is nostalgic. Her ancestral home in Dhaka has been occupied by Muslims after the Partition. She feels no malevolence, yet the novel recognizes the unquiet and the violent political disturbances of the times. The communal outbreak in 1964, in both India and Pakistan, leads to the untimely death of Tridib, an incident which changes the grandmother’s perception, forever. Her home in Dhaka, filled with memories of lively experiences, now becomes a reminder of death and communal violence. The idyllic vision is shattered and the grandmother begins to think in terms of “us” and “them.” The death of Tridib is the culmination of the political discourse in the novel.

The grandmother unveils and lays open to view an alarming probability that a sense of nationalism can only develop through the specific process of war and bloodshed. The inner urge that prompts her is a deep, imperative wish to be free, and so feelings of nationalism get linked to self respect and national power. As the narrator says about her as:

All she wanted was a middle class life in which, she would thrive believing in the unity of nationhood and territory, of self respect and national power: that was all she wanted; a small thing that history had denied her in its fullness and for which she could never forgive it. The private crisis mirrors public turmoil.

(78)

Grandmother can never understand thoroughly her sister Mayadebi's granddaughter Ila's desire to live in London, rootless, but free of middle class constraints. Grandmother's response to Ila is not sympathetic. She tells the narrator:

Ila shouldn't be there, she said, stammering hoarsely. She doesn't belong there. What's she doing in that country?

She's just studying there for a while Tha'mma, I said gently. [. . .]

But she shouldn't be there, my grandmother cried, pushing my hand feebly away. (77)

As the title of the first section "Going Away," suggests moving away from a space to another, Ila desperately tries to keep moving. However, she cannot escape from the nostalgia of her being the target of racial bullying, during her cross border schoolings. At the very outset we come across Mayadebi's "Going Away" from India to England with her family. At once, the concept of space is introduced; geographical space and emotional space. It is a moving away which has a tremendous impact on the narrator as a young boy, though it occurred thirteen years before he was born.

The world of a child can be vivid, almost animate in its imagination, very different from that of adults. As, he narrates as, "[. . .] When Tridib first talked to me about the journey, I remember trying very hard to imagine him back to my age, to reduce his height to mine, and to think away the spectacles that were so much a part of him that I really believed he had been born with them. (8)

Concept of political borders came to the young narrator's mind in Tridib's book fraught room, which served as an imagination to the fragile mentality. His stories were of the years he spent in London with the Price family, of the original catamaran, or the design of the temples in Konark. The one thing, Tridib says, he wants the young boy to learn is to use his imagination, "with precision" (24). Tridib can see Mrs. Price's brother, Alan Tresawsen, with

his friends walking down the road to their home – all singing and the world they are getting into. He is unable to imagine “the web of trust and affection and small jealousies that must have held it together” (67). He wonders “which was more real, their dirty bathtubs and shared bedrooms or that other reality,” (67) the war in which three of the four of them would be dead, in two years. These graphic descriptions of Tridib’s experiences in England form clear, effective pictures in the narrator’s mind. His fascination for, curiosity of England, grows.

According to A. N. Kaul in *A Reading of the Shadow Lines*, “The novel focuses on the meaning of the political freedom in the modern world, and force of nationalism, the Shadow Line was drawn between people and nation, which is both absurd illusions and a source of terrifying violence” (38).

For Ghosh, all riots cross countries and states blur all the demarcation and all the possible differences that orient people toward inhuman activities. Using the power of imagination and memory he turns the novel into a text about, “crossing frontiers – especially those of nationality, culture and language. As Kaul puts it supporting the blurb writes:

Ghosh acknowledges no separate national or cultural realities that have any value or deserve to be recognized. For him all such demarcation are shadow lines, arbitrary and invented divisions. These can lead to terrible consequences [. . .] or more frequently, to those many Indian English, East – West conflict and dilemma, which bedevil life. (300)

Extending this theme, Kaul says that the novel is about “rising national movements in the former colonies as well as savagery and violence let loose in many of the new nations” (300). At the same time, he criticizes the novel for it “evades rather than explores political realities” and takes “Ghosh’s proclamation of the death of the nationalism as “premature” since realities do not go away just because (he) calls them illusions” (303).

In the same context, Minakshee Mukherjee questions, “the idea of nationhood that is consolidated through the baptism of wars and the coercive state apparatus” (265). Ghosh in fact questions both public history and maps that give the nation an imagined shape and meaning, which give rise to pseudo nationalism, giving rise to conflicts and riots.

The narrator through these political concepts of line moves from one place (India) to other place (England) in search of cultural, emotional and political freedom. These stories told by the narrator, at times, may be confusing but they seem to be deliberate intention of the writer. Geographically, India is the protagonist’s real space, yet the stories that move to and fro from Indian sub-continent to the Europe are so fascination that it blurs the time and space of these two continents. However, the narrator's move is involved in the search for a space to call his own, emotionally and politically. This dissatisfaction is conceivably the result of the power wielded on the narrator by not only Tridib, but also his cousin Ila, who is of crucial concern in the narrator’s voyage of self discovery.

Ila has travelled the world since she was a child but has been unable to understand the worlds the narrator travels through Tridib. Ila journeys through real geographical spaces, but none of them are her own. They are mere transit points and spaces which have never belong to her. To her, the “Ladies were the only fixed points in the shifting landscapes of her childhood” (20). Ila’s quest for a space of her own can be seen from the time she is a young girl: schools are all that mattered to the young Ila; probably, because they are closest to the real spaces in the ever shifting childhood. Real spaces are important to Ila. Even as a child, she seeks almost struggles, to find one for herself.

Ila lives perpetually in the present, as she wants to forget her colonial past. She has no regard for memory either personal or cultural. Her imagination leads her into error, and her inventions bounce back on her as boomerang in the form of increasing frustration and anxiety. When, in school, she is harried and badgered by the racist Denise, one of her fellow

classmates. She expects Nick Price to come to her rescue, who however comes to take her home and not to safeguard from the bullying. As she narrates to the narrator; “Nick Price knelt down and wiped her face with the sleeve of his shirt. He helped her to her feet and taking her hand in his, he said: Come on, I’ll take you home now” (75).

However, the truth is that Nick is ashamed to be seen by his friends, walking home with an Indian. He is in fact a prey to the white culture, and so harshly does Nick’s behaviour dislodge the equilibrium of Ila’s emotional make-up that she transfers this incident to the imaginary life of her doll. The narrator imagines, her mental state as:

I tried then to think of Ila walking back from school alone through the lanes of West Hampstead. Ila walking alone in a drizzle under the cold grey sky: Ila who in Calcutta was surrounded by so many relatives and ears and servants that she would never have had to walk, as for alone, there were all waiting to walk with Ila. Ila the sophisticate who could tell us stories about smart girls and rich boys in far away countries whose names we had learnt from maps.
(76)

The pathos of a child’s search for a space of her own is brought out by Amivtav Ghosh through Ila. Only an invisible line, a shadow line divides the real and imagined space, but a child is unable to perceive it. Unfortunately in Ila, this distressfully inadequate vision doesn’t change even when the child attains adulthood.

The Shadow Lines is a complex novel interweaving memory and contemporary life, more memory than contemporary life. It is an abstract of a traumatic life of a family in Calcutta and Dhaka in 1964 when a member of the family, Tridib was killed in a communal riot. Ghosh employs the technique of the narrator, an educated young man who travels between Calcutta and London in 1981, to tell the story which contains multiple stories of his grandmother and her sister, of his uncles – Tridib and Robi, of his cousin Ila who marries an

Englishman, and of May Price, a family friend in London. Many stories that belong to the oral sphere in the extended family memory get their validation by being written in the novel – a feature of most postcolonial writing.

Ghosh depicts the urban middle class in India to whom education and professional jobs are important. Living and partly living they drift from one day to another, and so for a whole lifetime. The reward, if one is lucky, may be one's own house and a pension to lean upon. The environment of the school and of the office encourages the cultivation of the virtues of hard work, contentment, obedience, and conformity to the norms of the society. Ghosh's characters inhabit this realm of life. But when misfortune strikes their life they are left baffled. If it is at least, death or disease, they may try to comprehend it. But when violence erupts like a volcano in the public sphere, they are totally disoriented. Life seems to lose its significance.

One disturbing factor about life in Dhaka and Calcutta and such cities in Indian sub continent is the increasing tension between the Hindu and Muslim communities and the eruption of violence which takes its toll on innocent lives and destruction of public as well as private property. As long as one learns about death and destruction in newspaper and other media, one is not touched by them, but one realizes what it is all about losing a near and dear one. In fact this is what happens to the characters of Amitav Ghosh in *The Shadow Lines*.

The novel is an attempt to display the failures of nationalism and nationalist governments find voice in the character's memories and views of the partition, militancy, and the riots. The major characters here move towards a global humanitarianism, coming to grips with the realization that freedom cannot be geo-politically defined or delimited.

Ghosh's prescription for freedom in the context of the dubious meaning which political independence holds and the distortion of perspective the individual inevitably undergoes in an increasingly heterogeneous world, is closely scrutinized. There are different

extracts to represent the different ideas of freedom underlined by different world views that, in *The Shadow Lines* unfold vis-à-vis. As the narrator's grandmother says, "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" (237). The ramifications of the nationalist ethos essentials in the above quote, surface in the lives and memories of the older generations – the narrator's grandmother and her relatives, who lived their prime lives when nationalism rode the world's politics.

In another such events, Jethmoshai, the only living relative of grandma residing in Dhaka says;

I understand very well, the old man muttered. I know everything, I understand everything. I don't believe in this India Shindia. It's all very well you're going away now, but suppose when you get there, they decide to draw another line, somewhere? What will you do then? Where will you move to? None will have you anywhere. As for me, I was born here, and I'll die here. (215)

Evolving from the incidents of such denouement are the imperatives, in the younger generation, i.e. in the characters like, narrator, Robi, Tridib and May, for yet another world view, a global humanitarian approach to counter the war, riots and militancy ridden political atmosphere of the present day world.

Spanning roughly four decades from the forties to the eighties, the narrative builds on the life and interaction of two families – the one of the narrator, including Tridib, grandmother and Ila and the other of the Prices of London.

The narrative is an impressionistic rendering of a perceptive middle class youth's world of these changing times. It evolves in the stream of consciousness tradition, through sketchy, disjointed outlines of memories, associations and fancies as they pool into the narrator's mind and consciousness by way of reminiscence, fusing gradually into a coherent

pattern of stories mutually interrelated yet disparate, intersecting only laterally, spatialized in their simultaneity the profile of a multilateral world. In the fragmentary pieces, the random diversions of the narrator's memory has captured the socio cultural ambience of Calcutta and partly, of London. One finds encoded here the larger patterns of Indian society locked in its internal affiliations and antipathies.

It is a world of memories and reminiscences with the narrator recalling his past associations in order to trace the gradual shaping of his vision under the guiding voice of Tridib, an anthropologist, and who is not only his uncle but his dream mentor, too. His guide is full of abstruse knowledge from whom the narrator learns how 'to see' into the political absurdity, besides many other facts. As for the narrator, as well as for Ghosh, reality lies not in the obvious but in what is evoked and understood by memory and imagination over changing laps of space and time. This novel is all about 'seeing' and 'not seeing.'

Ghosh's characters have to deal with two types of servility – the one is to ideas spawned by history viz. the ideas of nationalism. These ideas sway even after the times to which they were relevant have passed. The other is servility to one's personal fantasies that distort one's vision. Thamma personifies the first types of the voice, while Ila represents for the second of the voice. Thamma is a typical neo-Victorian figure in her progressive view of the future and her Puritan sense of the work and discipline. Nationalism, the product of those times, carries for her the earnestness of religion, informing her every thought and deed. So her grandson must run rather than walk, that he might be strong enough to face the impending challenges to the nation. She opposed any Indian's opting for a life in England on the grounds that the English had earned their liberty and prosperity by incorporating military valour with their religion. Indians, she thought, had no rights to enjoy they had not earned.

But here lays the real issue of grandma's desire. Ghosh indicates that the nature of grandma's freedom of what she dreamt during the India's independence was simply

impossible to achieve. She had to eke out of difficult connotations of widowhood in the class-ridden Hindu society that was little altered by political independence. She becomes a foreigner to her own home in Dhaka. She was more foreigner than May Price – the English lady, who “didn’t need a visa, whereas grandma the inborn of Dhaka needed one” (195). Besides, her visit brought the greatest disaster imaginable – her uncle and nephew were killed by rioters close to her own home. The responsibility was largely hers, as she had insisted on going there and bringing away her uncle to India. Her nonagenarian uncle’s views on this issue of this nationhood and migration, expressed just before he was coaxed into leaving his house, strike at the essential unsoundness of nationalist principles, “It’s very well, you’re going away right now, but suppose when you get there, they decide to draw another line somewhere? What will you do then? Where will you move to? None will have you anywhere. As for me, I was born here and I’ll die here” (215).

Starting of movement is easy but you never know when it ends. Especially, when the movement is beyond one's control it is always difficult to complete. The “border entity” is an abstract thing that makes living bitter, as it is difficult to live in reminisces of the left past. One’s liberty and freedom is at stake and to overcome it is more than difficult.

The new generation in the new era of internationalism must view liberty differently. It should cross the frontiers of cross border identity and value. One of the easily available methods to disregard such abstract entity is to escape to the West. The narrator’s cousin Ila adopts same fashion to flee her precedent and escapes to England. For Ila freedom means liberty from the restrictive customs that delimit the individual’s activities in India. Ila represents the vast majority of the Indian youth who, enamoured of the West, tap impatient heels at their Oriental anchorage. No wonder her mother prefers butler English to plain Hindi while speaking to her Indian maid and has been nicknamed Queen Victoria by grandma.

However, this case of escape to freedom is viewed differently by grandmother. She views escape to west by Ila, in following perspective:

It's not freedom she wants, said my grandmother, her blood-shot eyes glowing in the hollows of her withered face. She wants to be left alone to do what she pleases: that's all that any whore would want. She'll find it easily enough over there, that's what those places have to offer. But that is not what it means to be free. (89)

Grandmother is true to some extent, as freedom is not an external condition merely and as shown earlier, characters like Ila are not happy. Similar is the condition to the the unnamed narrator, who tries to escape the congested and crowded nook and corners of Calcutta but finally realizes that his mental and physical prosperity is nowhere but in Calcutta, "Coming Home" (252).

The longing for freedom is universal and primitive to man but the method of its realization varies with the times. Ghosh sets his narrative in the current age. The narrator acquires the concept of global culture inspired by Tridib. Hence, when in Calcutta, the young narrator's mind roams in the London of Tridib's memories and vice versa, and Delhi seems about as far from Calcutta as London. It is the present day world besieged with militants in India (246) and famines in Africa (162). Every age is distinguished by a distinct set of problems. If geo-political sovereignty was the aim of grandma's age, intellectual independence is under threat in the present with colonizers casting their technological nets for the 'third world' mind. In such a setting Tridib's insistence upon 'seeing' remains only way to preserve one's intellectual integrity.

Memory and imagination occupy prime place in the business of political borders. For 'seeing' one needs memory but the fact of 'seeing' is nothing more than imagination. So, this concept of political freedom is nothing more than absurdity. For those like Ila, who cares not

for imagination nor for memory, ‘the current was the real’ and nothing bothers them whether the split of the nation or boundaries. For Tridib, London is ‘the bustling town’ of present. Tridib explained to the narrator that even Ila invented places like London, for every place “has to be invented in one’s imagination.” She had all along travelled with her father, a U. N. employee, from country to country and “the inventions she lived in moved, from country to country” (21). As a result, she identifies exotic places like Cairo and Addis Ababa only by the position of the ladies in the Departure of Lounge of the airport for “those were the only fixed points in the shifting landscapes of her childhood” (20).

History leaves its marks not only on a real and seen place but also in invisible concepts. The story of *The Shadow Lines* is the history of unseen political border and bloodshed in its name. For Ghosh, however trifling a matter might be, it has a huge significance and has a greater reverence to the greater reality of its times. The Citroen parked on an English roadside, the huge table in Ila’s Calcutta home – everything becomes an artefact of the times. A simple photograph taken at the Price’s during the Second World War encapsulates the entire history of England and its time. This very picture is represented in the form of political absurdity, creating hoards of emotion and personal feelings.

The picture was taken by a fresh freelance journalist for a socialist paper. The photograph portrayed leaders who had fought or had a role in the Spanish Civil War. In the photo, one was a Trotskyist who had fought the Spanish Civil War and now wrote for Left wing paper, another was an Irish nationalist, the third was of the academic snipe Mrs. Price’s husband; fourth was Tridib’s father – the suited booted Anglicized Indian. Then there was Tridib’s mother standing with baby Tridib, in her arms and veil in her head.

The picture means that be it Ila, or London, that every such picture incorporates multiple layers of meaning. The narrator always includes the ‘presences’ from the past. The narrator says that the figures from the past are all around us, thereby creating borders. “There

ghostliness is merely the absence of time and distance – for that is all that a ghost is, a presence displaced in time” (181).

Seeing with imaginative precision leads one to freedom for it has the force of detachment. To know a thing especially an idea of concept in the totality of its context is to ‘place’ it; to assimilate it in one’s mental framework and thereby to become free of it. Such detachment from things external gradually leads to the coming face to face with oneself. With one’s image in the mirror.

The picture also stood for one’s private and public sense of freedom, as the concept of freedom is defined by a bloody past, generally associated with the concept of political absurdity. The reconciliation of one’s feeling with that of the mass gives rise to such concepts. Hence, to act in such concepts freedom is being away from the reality zones.

So, political borders had been the normal humane gestures of the ones whose visions had transcended the shadow lines; and *The Shadow Lines* depicts the realities of these lines imposed upon us by the frontier ruled by the imaginative concept of the leaders, of each nation. Interestingly, it is the character of Tridib, who is lazy object to grandmother’s scorn rises to an act that turns out to be tragic heroic, while Robi the man of action and grandmother’s favourite turns his face in safety of the women paralyzed in fear. Equally significant is the fact that May and Tridib are not the only ones whose vision and therefore, emotions have not been constricted by nationalist fervour.

Ghosh observes, “As always, there were innumerable cases of Muslims in East Pakistan giving shelter to Hindus, often at the cost of their own lives, and equally in India of Hindus sheltering Muslims,” (230). These men and women demonstrates “that indivisible sanctity that binds people to each other independent of relationship is the natural enemy of government, for it is in the logic of states that to exist at all they must claim monopoly of all relationships between people (230).

While he is astonished by his grandmother's ability to see past the shadows and into the light, he is equally annoyed by it. It seems to him that a person ought to be able to keep some secrets hidden, like his "visits to the women", but at the same time he respects his grandmother's insight. While her first revelation caused him great embarrassment, her second was a truth he wished he could have faced himself long ago. He is both praising and admonishing his late Grandmother in a single breath.

The narrator's secret love for his cousin Ila was forced to remain in the shadows because the feeling itself, was dark in nature. Anything that is considered taboo, such as sexual relations between members of the same family, automatically quivers in the shadows of its own dark truths. Both of the major truths that the grandmother exposed was laden with sexual taboos, which raises the question, should they ever have been exposed at all? In light of the pain they caused, one would think not but in a world in which truth is the foundation of evolution into maturity, how can one claim that any truth should remain non-illuminated?

On the one hand, Ila's enlightenment to her cousin's feelings for her was good in that it marked a promise of change in her behaviour towards him which she hoped would help to dissipate his obsession. On the other hand, from the narrator's viewpoint, this revelation and his cousin's subsequent rejection caused him a great deal of emotional distress. Should his feelings have remained in the shadows, he may not have endured this sharp, heart-stabbing pain, yet he may have been subjected a long, slow torture instead. The answer to whether this truth should have been revealed lies in which kind of pain the narrator finds less troubling.

However, the central idea of the novel revolves around grandmother's infamous visit to Dhaka, to bring back her uncle Khalil, who she supposed had died long time ago. It was the time the narrator suffered the worst of fears in Calcutta that his grandmother had gone on a visit to her sister, Mayadebi, who was in Dhaka. Her husband had his posting in East Pakistan, now Bangladesh. When the idea was mooted that she should visit Dhaka, she had

wondered 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: its right inside the airport. You'll see. You'll cross it when you have to fill in all those disembarkation cards and things" (152).

She was worried because "she had not been able to understand how her place of birth had come to be so messily at odds with her national companion 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" (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 great uncle – Jehthamoshai, who she supposed had died long ago. No sooner she had spent a few days in her sister's house than the grandmother accompanied by Mayadebi, Tridib and May Price, and Robi set out in the Mercedes car with the driver, security guard of the high commission. The car had to stop at a particular point in the by lanes of Dhaka, and they had to walk to the old house. They discovered to their dismay an automobile workshop in what was garden in their house. Their house was crumbling and a large number of families were living there. Their uncle Jehthamoshai, now called Ukilbabu, was decrepit and bedridden, and looked after by Khalil, a cycle-rickshaw driver, and his family.

The old man failed to recognize them, and spoke ill of his relative when they were mentioned. As for going to India, he had not believed in that. The old man would have gone on his talk of about hate and not coming to India with the grandmother, but the car driver intervenes to say that they must immediately leave, as "there's going to be trouble outside" (216). So, the grandmother and Mayadebi and others depart, arranging with Khalil that he

should bring their uncle to their house in hi cycle-rickshaw telling him that he is taking him out. It is then that trouble starts. In a book-review, John C Hawley makes the following observation;

The grandmother's visit to ancestral house in Dhaka, then one of the most conflicting zones in South Asia [. . .] is surely one of the most memorable scenes in Indian fiction. Past and future meet across religious, political and cultural barriers in a confusion of emotions, ideals, intentions and acts, leading to a shattering climax. (5)

In Indian fiction this scene has its own importance, as it accumulates the past and present of political borders and the hazards invited in the form of communal riots in India and its neighbouring nations.

The climax occurs as the grandmother and her sister are returning in their Mercedes from their ancestral home and their uncle is following them in the rickshaw. When they reach to the bazaar area, they find that the shops are closed and the street is deserted, but for stray people. It was as if they were waiting for the car. In no time a lot of men surround the car, break the windscreen and the driver suffers a cut across his face. The car lurches and comes to a halt with its front wheel in a gutter. Then the security guard jumps out and fires a shot from his revolver and the crowd begins to withdraw from the car. At the same time the eerie silence is broken by a creak, and the attention of the crowd turns to the sound of a rickshaw – Khalil's rickshaw – with their uncle in it, and the people surround the rickshaw. Though the sisters could have driven away, May Price and Tridib leave the car to save the old man and they get lost in the whirlgig of the crowd. The mischief takes less than a moment and the crowd begins to melt away. The dead bodies of Khalil, the old man and Tridib lie on the road. The horror of the act is branded with fire on the memory of May Price and Robi who see the whole thing.

The Shadow Lines uniquely portrays both the physical borders that divide countries and the imaginary borders that divide human beings and both are painful, as one increases physical distance and other mental. From the image-conscious character of the grandmother to the riots that explode in the streets, Ghosh takes the reader on a fascinating journey of exploration, dissecting the characters of the story while simultaneously dissecting the human race.

The overall focus of the novel is on the significance of political freedom in contemporary life. Characteristics of many Indian novels in English, in the 1980s, politics -- national and international -- are the most important theme of Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines*. Political freedom, communal discord and nationalism, distinct features of contemporary life in the subcontinent, are some of the strands which constitute the panoramic range of this novel. Furthermore, it is an attempt to reconcile people of different classes and ethics in the bond of fraternal ties, by disposing the farcical flows of communal disorder.

Thus, the novel insists on the imperatives that assure empathy and unimpeded flow of friendship and mocks at the conception of militant nationalism, exclusive national pride and identity. A major incident in the novel, the outbreak of communal strife in Dhaka, following disappearances of the prophet's hair in Srinagar (that sparked severe communal riots in Calcutta and Dhaka in 1984), exposes the fragile demarcation of political frontiers. The message of the novel underlines the need of friendliness despite political borders and urges to look to the humanitarian side rather than communal welfare.

The sanity, desire for peace and commonsense attitude of people beyond borders has the potential to ensure improved international relations and amity. The narrator with his expanded horizons and imaginative understanding of a world shattered by communal violence urges hope towards a better tomorrow. *The Shadow Lines* stresses that the media and

public memory must keep alive the indivisible sanity or communities to prevent a recurrence of insane frenzies and communal violence.

The meaning of political borders is not above an individual's spirit for freedom and happiness. In the novel this unfulfilled search has been depicted in the form of grandmother, Robi, May and the narrator, as well. Each of these characters have been living in the trail of nostalgia intermingled in communal hatred and are in seek of freedom and peace of mind. Through these characters, the complexity of modern world is shown as a complex scenario, which has no solution.

The shadow lines are representation to show that the political borders are mere a farce, and becomes especially true when it comes to nations of Indian sub-continent. For decades, India, Pakistan and Bangladesh are indulged in never ending antagonism, thanks to communal feelings backed by religious concepts. The novel uses the shadow lines, or the political borders effectively to stress the need for a syncretise civilization, to avoid communal holocaust. Beyond doubt, political borders are the major factors in inviting antipathy to people of different communities – leading to various individual, ethical, social and national problems.

Ghosh dramatizes the violence that is at the heart of *The Shadow Lines*. Characters in the novel – Robi, May and the narrator tremble like a leaf to recollect the scene of Tridib's death, even after fifteen years of the incident. The horrible scene follows them for years and from thousands of miles away. As in Greek tragedies, the violence comes through in a terrible manner because it is conveyed through choric characters. Robi, May and the narrator perform such a role of mediation. True, the violence bears it way, but for what? People kill for freedom, but is freedom's access through violence? And after all do, they achieve it? It seems to be a mirage, as the shadow lines that divide one people from another and keep ever changing.

IV. Conclusion: Fall of Political Borders

After a thorough study and analysis of Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines*, the present researcher have come to a conclusion that the shadow lines in the novel are the representation of political borders; which have created rift amongst the people of the nations. It is the absurdity of political lines that are increasing communal disharmony among the people of the nations, and which is especially true amongst the South Asian nations.

After the independence of India and Pakistan from the British rule in 1947, there has been sharp increase in communal disharmony and violence amongst the people of these two nations, resulting in killings of thousands and displacing of even more. *The Shadow Lines* is more like a documentary of people dispersed due to the communal riots. The Dattas of Calcutta and the Prices of London have suffered and paid dearly, due to this inhumane violence. Thamma, the grandmother is disseminated from her native land, Dhaka, and even, when guest like entrance is allowed to her home; she witnesses the killings of three innocent persons for the sake of this inhumane violence.

The sufferings and the pain of losing a dear and near one and being away into an alien land, being forced to leave one's own homeland is beyond what the political borders can pay for. These borders, if not wholly, to larger extent are responsible for the decade's long riots and communal disharmony in Indian sub-continent. Most characters in *The Shadow Lines* are desperate to forget the trauma exerted on them by the political absurdity in the form of communal riots.

The Shadow Lines is a complex novel interweaving memory and contemporary life, more memory than contemporary life. It converges on the traumatic life of a family in Calcutta and Dhaka in 1964, when a member of the family, Tridib was killed in a communal riot. Ghosh employs the technique of the narrator, an educated young man who travels the between Calcutta and London in 1981, to tell the story which contains multiple stories of his

grandmother and her sister, of his uncles – Tridib and Robi, of his cousin Ila who marries an Englishman, and of May Price, a family friend in London. Many stories that belong to the oral sphere in the extended family memory get their validation by being written in the novel – a feature of most postcolonial riot dispersed family.

The 1964 Riot traumatises the narrator and he successfully blocks them until by chance he overhears the consequences of 1984 riots. It prompts up a personal crisis and a detailed unpacking of the earlier trauma – of the death of his dream mentor – Tridib. As he recounts the events, he recalls snippets of conversations with relatives and friends, which suggest that they, too, have been redefined by their experience of the un-fateful day. Take for grandmother to whom her native land Dhaka becomes an alien land and similarly, for May Price, it becomes virtually impossible to overcome the trauma invited by the death of Tridib – her love interest.

The novel is a bold description of political themes both national and international. The meaning of political freedom in the modern world is blurred by various tribal and communal issues. No society is free of minor conflicting issues like race, religion, border and ethics. These issues are complex and without any easy solutions to it. For human survival, a new perception of relationships must emerge. On the national level, Ghosh shows how different cultures and communities are becoming antagonistic to a point of no return. This is revealed as a major issue in contemporary India and its neighbouring states. Furthermore, this communal fire is spreading in the so-called developed nations and communities, which, in fact is turning to a global scenario.

Two wars fought between India and Pakistan and the bombings of the Twin Towers and the Pentagon by the Islamist extremists are examples of increasing level of violence in the local, as well as in global scenario. In the context, Ghosh realises that with the dominant tradition imposed by the nation-state is slowly spreading itself in the global state of affairs. It

is the complex mixture of culture and communal belief among the people living in different parts of the globe that has been fuelling to the woes of the communal hatred. The communal disturbances supported by political biasness are undoubtedly the major reasons for the cause.

Hence, the novel is a political allegory of communal issues, specially focused on riots that have paralyzed the nations and communities. Above all, it displays the need of moral solidarity among the communities and nations hit hard by violence. The plot of the novel is also a sincere request to the leaders of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh to reconsider and redefine their idea of political borders. Furthermore, most readers from the Indian sub-continent will find themselves to recognise the impact of riots, as a personal issue; as it is hardly impossible to find an individual in the region, untouched by the trauma. After all, communal violence has given more personal pain and destruction than moments to cherish, thanks to political absurdity.

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