



**Vidhyayana - ISSN 2454-8596**

An International Multidisciplinary Peer-Reviewed E-Journal

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Indexed in: ROAD & Google Scholar

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**Deciphering Dexterities and Anxieties**

**in *The Shadow Lines* by Amitav Ghosh**

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## Abstract

Amitav Ghosh's dexterities and anxieties in one of his artistically crafted novels, *The Shadow Lines* (1988) are examined in the current research paper. Amitav Ghosh's arrangement of components, such as the novel's world and scenario, incidents and individuals will be examined along with the technique of telling and recalling the story, are also examined, with an emphasis on how they are constructed in combination with his major thematic interest. Because memory serves as the novel's narrative trigger, Amitav Ghosh's prompt enterprise is examined as an important element of his narration structure. The novel's architecture is dismantled utilising narrative terminology drawn from Russian Formalism as well as Structuralist mediations to demonstrate Ghosh's creative art. In addition to discussing the novel's narrative structure technique, this article examines Ghosh's investigation of georeferenced pronouncements in the context of Bengal's division into Bangladesh and West Bengal, as well as his support for liberal sensitivity and interim solution in a culturally diversified setting

**Keywords:** *Communalism, Partition, Nationalism, Russian Formalism, Structuralism*



## Introduction:

Amitav Ghosh manages to stand out from other colleagues for the estimable clarity and candour of his writing. Amitav Ghosh displays vividly sympathetic towards the complexity of human connections in culturally diverse situations. He has created a name for himself as a master storyteller who has received widespread critical acclaim. His inventiveness was evident already in his very first fiction, *The Circle of Reason* that gained critical acclaim for its strong content and form innovation. In this picaresque narrative, Ghosh's enduring consideration about the role of culture and colonialism is clear. However, the story goes far beyond establishing a basic axis that separates tradition and modernity. As a result of continual migrations, border crossings, and inter-cultural fluxes, Ghosh suggests the idea of 'complex cultural imbrication (Khair 36). In *The Shadow Lines*, the author's obsession with transnational cultural dynamics, particularly his sophisticated assessment of the select notions of different beliefs, obtains a new emphasis and complexity.

## Narrative Style in *The Shadow Lines*:

*The Shadow Lines*, while exposing new levels of the author's technical prowess, it also examines the author's fundamental concern with larger, transnational humanity with remarkable perceptions into concerns of cultural nationalism and socialism. Ghosh's apprentice novel departs totally from Salman Rushdie's method of 'imaginative serio-comic storytelling' (Hawley 3) or 'disjointed magic realism' (Mukherjee). He now has a supple and nuanced mnemonic story to offer. To dwell on religious violence and factional conflict in the Indian subcontinent, he uses memory activators or "wistful evocations of memory" (Mukherjee *Dancing*). Evidently, his acute story-telling skills play a key role in welding the narrative elements to the story's emotional core. To carry the major narrative load, Amitav Ghosh amalgamates isolated and non-sequential components of time and space. Frequent transitions in narrative from one period to another, as well as the seeming chronicity, serve as a counterbalance to imperial history or national narratives – a vital tactic in the novel for unpacking personal conundrums and traumas of people. The focus of this research is to look at the symbolic exchanges within the text of *The Shadow Lines*, and the method by which



Amitav Ghosh turns his raw material of life and memory into a fine fiction. Ghosh's experience of the split that followed Partition and the resulting breakdown in the interpersonal bonds of the communities on both sides of the border inspired the novel. The method by which his involvement is reduced into a captivating narrative is just what makes his perspective worthy of examination.

Technique distinguishes 'content' and achieved content, and it differentiates experience and art as well. According to Mark Schorer:

"Technique is any selection, elimination, or distortion of the world of action, any form of rhythm imposed upon the world of action by which our perception of the world of action is enriched or renewed". (Aldridge 68).

One of the fundamental goals of narratology, is to pry open the narrative's 'langue' or inner structure. Technique alters *fabula* into *sjuzet*, as the Russian Formalists theorised narrative aesthetics. *Fabula* is an amorphous, craftless story, whereas *sjuzet* is a story or narration that has been formed. In other terms, the *sjuzet*, or the circumstances in which the story is told (*fabula*), might change the perception of what the story is about. (Walsh) These concepts are related to *histoire*, a concept by Gerard Genette, which is the narrative raw material and *récit* that is narrative text.

Genette has also provided a complete narrator typology. Referring to Genette, the extradiegetic storyteller is the seemingly detached third-person narrator, whereas the auto-diegetic narrator uses the first-person narrative throughout the story. Unlike the former is not an indifferent, but trustworthy and all-knowing, machine, whereas the later is a person who is in charge of the festivities. However, the idea remains the same in both cases of narrative and it works on focalization of Genette's perspectives on storytelling and to add to the study of Amitav Ghosh's ability in *The Shadow Lines*, there is typology of narrators. It's worth noting that the novel's nameless first-person narrator is both autodiegetic and autobiographical. The major source of external and internal focalization, as well as the narrator. Internal focus refers to thoughts and feelings characters, whereas external focus refers to the actions of characters. The term "focalizing" refers to both; the characters' and narrator's thoughts and feelings. It



would be examined further how the focalization procedure is meticulously arranged by the narrator in *The Shadow Lines*, tells events from a two-decade perspective and also revisits the present to re-enter in significant events related to the novel consisting dynamics from a bygone era.

The first-person pronoun "I" threads a range of incidents and referential embellishments, including invasive views regarding the emotional and/or psychological states of the characters into the milieu of narrative, in *The Shadow Lines* the narrator's individual and domestic relationship with other people is revealed through some dialogues and sentences, which is keeping with his personal and honest involvement throughout the narrative. In this novel, the narrator is clearly both the exterior and interior focaliser. He speaks about experience of incidents and persons, as well as those evoked from past memories, as an external focaliser. While as an inside focaliser, he continuously delves into the psyche of others to know their feelings and moods that underlay their demeanour. The usage of 'I' and 'me' with other signifiers, displays that narrative's spatial-temporal aspects match to the narrator's experiences. According to Meenakshi Mukherjee:

“The narrator remains not only the ‘large lucid reflector’ but also the agentive site where random shards of memory are realigned towards some measure of coherence”. (260)

When questioned out about idea of narrative style that is compatible with his objective as a fiction writer, Amitav Ghosh seem to be interested in the strength of Proustian remembrance in a conversation with John C. Hawley:

“The narrative structure of Ford Madox Ford’s *The Good Soldier* made a huge impression on me when I first read it, in my teens. My interest in Proust was born when I found out, many years later, that Madox Ford had been influenced by *Remembrance of Things Past*. However, I did not read *Remembrance of Things Past* until 1985, after I’d written my first novel *The Circle of Reason*. This was about the time that I was starting my second novel, *The Shadow Lines* and Proust certainly had a great impact on that book.... Proust’s



influence on *The Shadow Lines* is clearly evident I think, even in the structure of its sentences. Similarly, it was in deference to Proust that the narrator of *The Shadow Lines* was left unnamed. But Proust's influence is evident also in the ways in which time and space are collapsed in the narrative of *The Shadow Lines*. I remember that at the time my ambition was to do with space what Proust had done with time: that is, to make completely different instances of a continuum immanent in each other". (Hawley 8-9)

### **Narrative Voices:**

The narrative voice in *The Shadow Lines* conjures a variety of memories in a net of various associations, similar to how Proust tumbles interested in the main events of his childhood when tasting a special cookie dipped in a cup of tea. The act of remembrance converts events that happened into a throbbing feeling of what's been lost, the lines between time and place blur with that. The events in history undertaken by the fiction includes the liberation movement in Bengal, the Second World War, the Partition of India in 1947, and the sudden riots in East Pakistan and India just after the 1964 Hazratbal incident in Srinagar. The work conveys the anguish of psychological dislocation and estrangement, as well as the harmful possibilities of the tension within people cleaved by discriminatory politics, and it is not a plain and dull restatement of those crucial historical periods. Ghosh's novel's materiality as appropriated history runs across the storylines, fusing the historical occurrences into a captivating plot. We can associate a text with contemporaneous sub-texts and corroborate the writer's view about that particular era along with environment erecting in the novel by reconstructing the past through homes, photos, maps, road names, newspapers, ads, and other concretizations. The main episodes, when seen in sequence, appear to be part of a chronological continuum, and the narrator's perception of the characters spiralling into madness or languishing in sullen apathy to cross-cultural currents can be felt.

By contrasting the story's raw bones with the intellectual and aesthetic enhancements throughout the text, Ghosh's tale organization can be evaluated. When Tridib went to Britain



with his family in 1939 to write *The Shadow Lines*, he encountered May Price as a small child. Lionel Tresawsen who was Mrs Price's daddy and he was Tridib's grandpa, Mr. Justice Chandrashekhara Datta-Chaudhuri, managed to meet during séances in Calcutta and formed a friendship. Tridib encounters May in 1962, after a correspondence dating back to 1959, and their friendship has blossomed into love. Tridib's mom, Mayadebi's older sister, is the narrator's grandmother, Thamma. The narrator is just the same generation as Ila who is Tridib's niece and Mayadebi's granddaughter. Jatin who is Ila's father and Tridib's older brother, is a United Nation's employee who travels a lot, while Tridib remains in Calcutta. Despite Thamma's hate for him, Tridib becomes the narrator's tutor thanks to his vast knowledge of a range of subjects. Despite his grandmother's displeasure, the narrator grows increasingly enamoured of Ila's nomadic existence but she is clearly attracted towards Nick Price, May's younger sibling. However, even if they appear marginal, May and Tridib become crucial to the novel's themes.

The story begins in colonized India when the novelist was not yet born and it encompasses significant number of post-colonial events, and almost all the occurrences are apprehended in concurrent attention to emphasise the narrative resolution. 1939 is a noteworthy milestone in history because it marks the beginning of World War II and the massive disturbances that followed on the India and other Asian countries. The journey of Mayadebi to London around at such ghastly times, her close relationship with Price family, and the subplot of Tridib-May are told to the storyteller who is just an eight years old child. This story is told by by Tridib some 21 years later. Tridib first saw May when she was a baby in London. Through letters, they have built a loving relationship that has transcended nationality and social boundaries. Amitav Ghosh delves into the enigmatic attraction that exists between Tridib and May, as well as the enduring kinship that between both families despite the fact that their countries are at odds.

“*The Shadow Lines*’ central theme is the search for invisible links and indivisible sanity all across realms of nationality, cultural segregation, and



racial discrimination in order to counter the inexplicable ethnic distance or a deafness to the Other”. (Chakrabarty 2151).

Author raises concerns about the compulsive assertion of difference based on geographical limits and praises the coming together of aliens brought together by self-propelled empathy and attachment.

Amitav Ghosh succeeds in tackling these concerns with several powerful discoveries by eschewing traditional mimesis or diegesis instead and relying on memory as the story's basic drive. A dynamic form of literary perspective is used by the first-person narrator, whose memories give the narrative's structure. Dipesh Chakrabarty opines:

“Memory is a complex phenomenon that reaches out to far beyond what normally constitutes a historian’s archives, for memory is much more than what the mind can remember or what objects can help us document about the past”. (2143)

*The Shadow Lines* does have the speaker or respondent within the tale through mysterious diegetic voices. Usage of techniques like paralipsis (the narrator's omission of some events pertaining to the main characters focalized), ellipsis (omission of some events), analepsis (a retrospective narration), and prolepsis (the omniscient narrator's reference to some future event of the story) in the book's framework to deceive the demeanour of incidents and the tiers of impermanence are also notable in *The Shadow Lines*. Ghosh, on the other hand, makes clever use of free reported speeches to provide the memory's structural frame. He uses it in combination with such a credible, genuine narrative tone to interweave Ila's and her mom's recollections of their home in Sri Lanka in following manner:

“Their house was in a quiet part of Colombo where diplomats and senior civil servants and people like that lived.... It was a big house with large verandas and a steeply sloping roof covered with mossy tiles. The garden was at the back.... here was only one problem: adjoining on to the garden at the back, was a poultry farm. This caused Ila’s mother a good deal of worry... for she





had heard that snakes were certain to appear wherever there were chickens.... One morning, soon after they moved in, their cook Ram Dayal came running upstairs and burst in upon Ila's mother who was taking her mid-morning nap in an easy chair on a veranda upstairs... And right he was, Queen Victoria said, her voice shrill with amazement... But being as she was the daughter of a man who had left his village in Barisal in rags and gone on to earn a knighthood in the old Indian Civil Service, she retained her composure". (24-25)

Furthermore, Ghosh masterfully employs mixture of informal and formal language, which is common in multi-lingual or bilingual people. Ila's mother utilises quasi English – something of a regional slang – as a demarcation strategy to negotiate advantage and rejection in dialogic moments like the excerpt described above. The ideolectal/sociolectal distinction between the characters' and the narrator's language is objectified. The impetus for such usage of language in the text stems from the superior undercurrents of undermining Standardized English while causing a syntactical attack on it, in addition to providing local flavour and variations of meaning. However, there are significantly fewer instances of style-shifting in Amitav Ghosh's novel than in fictions of Salman Rushdie and Arundhati Roy. Unlike them, Amitav Ghosh may not provide translations or explanations for the non-English elements he introduces.

### Usage of Syllepsis:

Ghosh's use of sequential syllepsis and regional syllepsis is particularly appropriate and tailored to his artistic endeavour in which the story has become the device by which the remembrances arrive together to generate a memory-driven meaning. Memory recalls the events' continuous texture, which is then mediated by the narrator's mediating consciousness. The narrator's story is scanned, probed, and counterpointed by others' narratives, but he is only apparently infallible as his explanation is scanned, questioned, and argued against by narratives of the others. Although the novel's narration is an intensively memory process, the



fictional components, such as individuals and physical situations, arranged in the cycle of pivotal episodes, have almost a mimetic integration. The events are rearranged to create a sense about the episodes in a constructing manner. It also measures the stresses between personal reminiscence and national episodes. In other terms, the inconsistencies among emotional sensibility and historical analysis of events.

The narrative culminates in a search for survival methods inside a violent, hateful society of narrow divisions, and discovers love to be an excellent cure to the muck of racial conflict. As a result, the novel tackles the problem of geographical mobility and ethnic displacements while also providing a historical perspective. The novel's greater undertaking of making sense of philosophical ambiguity in complicated spatial structure and trying to seek adaptation to the emerging demands of a multicultural world, is endorsed, or rather validated, by the cross-border mobility of unknown people and refugees under an progressively globalised situation. Brinda Bose opines:

“It is no doubt fitting that in the age of an extravagantly embracing of globalization, we may claim to have closed the gap between the *other* and straddling it; certainly, the legacy of postcolonial angst today appears to have settled into a potentially numbing acceptance of bi- or multi-cultural euphoria. In such a circumstance, the diasporic imagination of Amitav Ghosh – that wrestles with an understanding of bi-culturalism as it ‘yokes by violence together’ discrete and distant identities – is essential to our understanding of our history even as it is being created”. (Bose 15-16)

Amitav Ghosh speaks about creative intercultural tendencies, arguing that we can involve the Other in mutual conversation transformation without sacrificing our traditions' originality. He presents a case for cross-border relations and inter-civilisation cooperation, attempting to match. These ‘creative improvisations, such re-appropriations of history or ‘desirable constructions of the past’ remove the partitioning of the past to open up shared doorways from the corridors between cultures (Prasad 58). The chromatic



harmony positioned in the revolving circle of the narration show that Ghosh's narrative perspective does not see "amalgamating diversity to a totalizing, uniform whole." He scans time and space with temporal and geographical syllepsis, attempting a creative reclamation of the experienced past. Even in the face of "an intractable political problem" (Viswanathan), the focaliser's expedition for connotations going through time and remembrance takes on metatextual significance.

### **Understanding Nationalism of Ghosh:**

The instability of a humanistic national identity flowing into intermittent irrational fury is addressed in Ghosh's narratorial accent on establishing links across ethnic boundaries in *The Shadow Lines*. The book does not advocate for the erasure of physical borders or the dismissing of national particularities, nor does it validate the conflict. Thamma's rejection of nationalism's pluralities implies the narrator's acceptance of the non-self. The guru has been training the acolyte toward this epistemic goal. The precise use of imagination entails connecting into the particularities of remote concrete societies while envisioning them, rather than engaging in frivolous fantasies to keep one's fantasy alive. Manipulation of such cross-cultural translations necessitates vigilant and proactive cognition and also genuine compassion. Ila's recollections in *The Shadow Lines* are brief, as she primarily recalls the thrills caused by changing sceneries during her travels. An experience set in Colombo where she discusses with the narrator exemplifies her imagination's lack of concreteness or materiality. Tridib brings Ila's cognition impairment to the narrator's attention in the report on her speech activities. Ila's memories of exotic reptiles are preserved in her senses, but she doesn't register the location's material coordinates or proper physicality in order to see her stay from an international perspective:

“Ila lived so intensely in the present that she would not have believed that there were really people like Tridib, who could experience the world as concretely in their imagination as she did through her senses.... For Ila the current was real: it was as though she lived in a present which was like an



airlock in a canal, shut away in from the tidewaters of the past and the future by steel floodgates”. (30)

She continues to live as an introverted cosmopolitan, despite her obvious wealth. She is not able to transcend ethereal borders on her journey around the world. Amitav Ghosh never provides a supreme rule of cosmopolitanism, just as Tridib does not impose any intellectual stance on the storyteller. He acknowledges disparities or shadow lines across nations and cultures without actually wanting cultural praxis to vanish, but he also emphasises the freeing and enabling power of picturing the nation and the globe in allowing dialogic accommodation.

Narrator in Ghosh's work taunts Thamma stressing over neat territorial and sociocultural limits couched in unconcealed prejudice. Jon Mee's interpretation of the novel's final word as summarizing the subject of *The Shadow Lines* is considerable:

“A final redemptive mystery is one where difference continually structures the world but imagination struggles to negotiate forms of translation with a precision that resists collapsing difference into any kind of master code”. (Khair 108).

Novel's central concern is seen in the focus placed on May's relationship with the speaker as a possible completion of Tridib's internationalism. Narratological approach alludes to the political problems at stake in Amitav Ghosh's usage of the first-person narrator as a structural concept and also serves as a distinction to the approved autobiography encompassing the biography of India before and after partition. To conclude, in attempting an expression of his worries in a well-crafted narrative, Amitav Ghosh succeeds admirably in fusing the style and politics of his novel.



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