

INTRODUCTION TO INDIAN WRITING IN ENGLISH

The rise of the Indian Writing in English is, at the onset, to be located historically. The first connection that we should be looking at is the introduction of the English language as a medium of instruction in India and the introduction of English literature as a subject in the Universities. Macaulay's Minute introduced in 1833 provided for the introduction of English as a medium of instruction with the claim that "the English tongue would be the most useful for our native subjects." While presenting his famous minute, Macaulay admitted quite candidly that he had not read any of the Sanskrit and Arabic books and yet did not desist from making such a pronouncement: "...A single shelf of a good European library is worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia. ...All the historical information which has been collected in the Sanskrit language is less than what may be found in the paltry abridgements used at preparatory schools of England..." India, thus became a kind of testing ground for the launch of English literature in the classroom at a time when English Universities were still steeped in the Latin and Greek classics. English was, as a result, introduced in educational institutions, Courts and offices thus dislodging the traditional use of Arabic and Sanskrit as a mode of communication and documentation. Lord William Bentick announced in 1835 that the government would "favour English Language alone" henceforth and would move towards "a knowledge of English literature and Science through the medium of English language alone." The Wood Dispatch of 1854 proclaimed the establishment of the Universities at Bombay, Madras and Calcutta and thereafter made the English language accessible to students, professors and also the officials of Government offices. To begin with the introduction of English at these levels had some interesting repercussions. What is pejoratively called "Babu English" today became the first offspring of the unholy encounter between the British English language and the unwilling Babu. The 'art and craft' and discomfort with which they used the language in the offices in course became a matter of derision. In the arena of literary studies too English began to assert itself.

The first Indian novel in English was Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's *Rajmohan's Wife* appeared in 1864. This novel was set in a Bengal village. Through a simple domestic story it highlighted the central concern: that of the virtue of renunciation over self-love. Salman Rushdie referring to the same sense of artifice and discomfort of the earliest users of the English language calls this first novel written by an Indian in English a 'dud'. Bankim Chandra Chatterjee (1838-1894) who went on to attain a high stature as a writer produced other novels in his mother tongue, Bengali, of which *Anandmatha* (1882) and *Durgeshnandini* (1890) deserve mention. The beginning of the twentieth century saw a gradual growth of the novel form in English in India. Romesh Chandra Dutt was an important figure writing at that time. He occupied important Government posts before retiring as the Diwan of the Royal Baroda State. He wrote six novels in Bengali, out of which two he translated into English: *The Lake of Palms* (1902) and *The Slave Girl of Agra* (1909). Both these novels were published in London and were hailed as writings with dense plots and vivid characterization. Some other writers of this era include: T. Ramakrishna who wrote *Dive for Death* and Swarna Ghoshal who wrote *The Fatal Garland*. Krupabai Sathianandan wrote *Kamala, A story of Hindu Life* (1894) Bal Krishna, *The Love of Kusama* (1910), Sir Joginder Singh, *Nasrin* (1915), Rajam Iyer Vasudeo Shastri (1905) and A. Madhavan in *Thillai Gobindan* (1916). These are all historically valuable as links in this chain that was fast becoming the body of Indian Writing in English. However one name that stands apart from this body is that of Rabindranath Tagore. It would be inapt to appropriate him as a writer of English because he wrote with equal felicity and grace in Bengali. As a matter of fact he was not known as a writer alone but as an equally accomplished poet, playwright and painter. He was above all a visionary, a man who conceived institutions like *Vishwabharati* and gave to the world an ingenious model of Education. *The Home and the World* (1919), *The Wreck* (1921) and *Gora* (1923) have all been translated from Bengali to English. However, the book that made Tagore a world literary figure fetching for him the highest honour that can be accorded to a litterateur, the Nobel in 1912 and more importantly is considered as a significant ground that provided a spiritual interface between East and West and if the reader has still not guessed I refer to *Gitanjali*. Written in 1913, it elevated Tagore to a literary immortality.

The Big Three The following years saw many a story of success in the field of Indian Writing in English. **William Walsh**, the English critic picked out three of the most famous writers of the literary circuit at that time. Mulk Raj Anand (1905-), R.K.Narayan (1906-2000) and Raja Rao (1909-) became the trinity of Indian writing in English. Speaking of The Big Three, Walsh said:

“It is these three writers who defined the area in which the Indian novel was to operate. They established its assumptions; they sketched its main themes, freed the first models of its characters and elaborated its particular logic. Each of them used an easy, natural idiom which was unaffected by the opacity of a British inheritance. Their language has been freed of the foggy taste of Britain and transferred to a wholly new setting of brutal heat and brilliant light.”

However the three being early representatives of the use of English language in describing an Indian experience a struggle characterized their attempts. The sustained structure of the novel form too added to the arduous nature of representing Indian life in English. Moreover the novel being essentially a Western form, imposed certain limits and also subsequently modified the Indian experience. Rao pointed out in the preface of *Kanthapura*, “One has to convey in a language that is not one’s own the spirit that is one’s own. One has to convey the various shades and omissions of a certain thought movement that looks maltreated in an alien language.” He further adds that even though English is a language of our intellectual make-up it is not that of our emotional make-up.” **Mulk Raj Anand** started his career with the novel *Untouchable*. It was a unique work because the convention of Indian works having the highborn and the privileged as central protagonist was broken down. The hero, *Bakha* is a low caste sweeper boy and the novel is a description of the experiences that he undergoes in one day and as they impinge on his consciousness. The structure of the novel draws extensively from James Joyce’s *Ulysses* in the use of stream- of – consciousness technique. Apart from this Western influence (he was also a member of the famous Bloomsbury group of writers in London too) another important quarter, which affected his writing, was the idea of socialistic society as propounded by Mahatama Gandhi. The

solution to Indian casteism that was given in *Untouchable* was in accordance with Gandhiji's idea of dignity for the low-born. His other novels, *The Village* (1939), *Across the Black Waters* (1940), and *The Sword and the Sickle* (1942) are also works with a reformative agenda. Unlike the flamboyant Anand with Western influence was the unpretentious and unassuming **R.K. Narayan** whose first book was *Swami and Friends* (1935) He created the fictitious region of Malgudi – a small South Indian town – “a blend of oriental and pre-1914.” The characters are the small time residents of this town and go about their quotidian concerns. However out of this daily humdrum emerge certain life-affirming, brilliant flashes that the writer captures for the reader. Except for his work. *Waiting for Mahatama*, which features the Quit India Movement of 1942, current political issues do not figure in his writings. *The Dark Room* (1938) is the story of Savitri married to a callous husband Ramani. *The Guide* (1958) was one of his most appreciated works. It tells the story of Raju the guide and his love for Rosie whom he first meets as a client's wife. **Raja Rao** has produced four novels and a collection of short stories till date. *Kanthapura* (1938), *The Serpent and the Rope* (1960), *The Cat and Shakespeare* (1965) and *Comrade Kirrilov* (1976) and *The Cow of the Barricades* (1947- short story collection). *Kanthapura* is the story of a South Indian town that is affected by the Civil Disobedience Movement. What is interesting about the book, however is the narrative technique used by Rao. The story is told through the voice of the old woman inhabitant of the village who uses the structure of the traditional folk epic, the *puranas*. The book fuses the spirit of the traditional religious faith of the village with that of the Nationalist Movement.

Writers of the New Writing

Between The Big Three and what is called the New writing in Indian English of the 1980's some writers of the 1950's writers like Anita Desai, Khushwant Singh and Arun Joshi have made their presence felt on the scene of Indian Writing. **Anita Desai** (b. 1937) is one of the established writers of this period. She has published eight novels till date of which the most famous are: *Cry the Peacock* (1965), *Clear Light of the Day* (1980) which was short listed for the Booker Award and *Fire on the Mountain* (1977) for which she was awarded the Sahitya Academy Award in 1978. **Arun Joshi** has four novels to his

credit: *The Foreigner* (1963), *The Strange case of Billy Biswas* (1971), *The Apprentice* (1974) and *The Last Labyrinth* (1981). Both these writers represent the modernist-existential strain in Indian Fiction in English. Before **Khushwant Singh** made his foray into writing he dabbled in Journalism and law. His two novels: *Train to Pakistan* (1956: Published as Manomajra) and *I Shall not Hear the Nightingale* (1959) depict the human tragedy behind the Partition of India in 1947. He is also recognised as an erudite Sikh historian.

Rushdie Era

“Condemned by a perforated sheet to a life of fragments, I have nevertheless done better than my grandfather because while Aadam Aziz remained the sheet’s victim, I have become its master.”

-- Salman Rushdie in *Midnight’s Children*

The next watershed in Indian Writing in English came with the publication of **Salman Rushdie’s** *Midnight’s Children* which went on to win the Booker McConnell Prize in 1981. *Midnight’s Children* took its title from Nehru’s speech delivered at the stroke of midnight, 14 August 1947, as India gained its Independence from England. This is a book that talks about a man who is born on the midnight of 14-15 August in 1947 (the day on which India attained independence). The biography of a man is from its inception, therefore, entwined with that of the nation. The **self-conscious narrator**, Saleem Sinai, provides us with an alternative version of India’s modern history from his *point of view*. In the beginning of the novel, we are told that the protagonist “was born in Doctor Narlikar’s Nursing Home on August 15th, 1947,” more precisely, “on the stroke of midnight...at the precise instant of India’s arrival at independence.” The time of his birth matters because it has made him “mysteriously handcuffed to history, Thus Saleem born as he is on the fateful moment in Indian history is a special **autobiographer** because his life story moves in the same timeframe as that of the newly independent nation. Consequently we see that Saleem’s version of history is different from that which we know about. In his personal version of history, he largely draws upon Indian mythology and supernatural events, endows the midnight’s children with magic power, and employs the fairy tale opening “once upon a time.” (See the discussion of **Metafiction**) In addition (his)story reflects his desire to “achieve the significance that

the events of his childhood have drained from him. He is an interested party in the events he narrates.” In fact, Rushdie here challenges the Western conventions of unity, continuity, and objectivity in writing history. The usual dichotomy between history and fiction gets blurred. In this novel and others in the Indian scene inspired by Post- Modern tendencies the trend of what is called **metafiction** is seen. Metafiction is characterized by the employment of a self-conscious narrator and the awareness with which (s)he uses ideology in structuring the novel. In 1970, it was the critic William H. Gass who wrote an essay in which he called the post-modern novel’s self-reflexive tendency as metafiction. Influenced by certain tendencies in Postmodernism even other genres like history have undergone a critical assessment through which they concluded that the features of history writing like objectivity are lost to the inherent alignment of the historian with positions of power. Patricia Waugh also provides a comprehensive definition by describing metafiction as “fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artifact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality”. Metafictional works, she suggests, are those, which “explore a theory of writing fiction through the practice of writing fiction”. Mark Currie highlights current metafiction’s self-critical tendency by calling it “a borderline discourse, a kind of writing which places itself on the border between fiction and criticism, which takes the border as its subject”. Waugh further suggests that metafiction exhibits, “a self-reflexivity prompted by the author’s awareness of the theory underlying the construction of fictional works,” And that, “contemporary metafictional writing is both a response and a contribution to an even more thoroughgoing sense that reality or history are provisional: no longer world of external verities but a series of constructions, artifices, impermanent structures. Therefore, history no longer functions as a discipline of the only legitimate documentation of the past events; instead, it is an **ideological** product.” This awareness about history and other realms of knowledge being ideologically motivated can help us restructure the conventional forms of these disciplines. As the current trends of Indian Writing in English show writers are keen to not only to experiment with the form

of the novel and destabilize the features that were considered as essential in conventional novel writing but also seek a rewriting of certain events in Indian history. So whether it is Salman Rushdie treating history and religion with a celebratory irreverence or **Mukul Kesavan** attempting a revision of the Civil Disobedience Movement from the point of view of the Muslim Congressmen, or the scores of personal memoirs, giving a personal record of public events, a sceptical look at history has characterized great

deal of Indian Writing in English for the past few decades. Most of these authors have been a part of the infamous history—they have either witnessed or been affected by events like partitioning of the country and consequently the writing of it. It is not unnatural then that they as witnesses to the discrepancy between lived events and recordings of them become their natural critics to this entire enterprise. Some like Kesavan who is himself a historian claims to achieve through fiction that which history has denied to him. According to Jon Mee this rewriting of historical themes through novels are ‘responses to debates currently circulating within Indian culture and from this perspective the desire to return to Indian History might be seen as the expression of a generally critical attitude to the form of nation-state that has emerged since 1947.’ In 1983, Rushdie published the novel *Shame*, described by himself as “a deeply satirical fairy tale about Pakistan’s ruling circles” It was short-listed for the Booker Prize in 1984. On September 26, 1988, Rushdie published his novel *The Satanic Verses* for which he had to face the ire of many Islamic nations. Since the declaration of a formal *fatwa* against him by the Iranian leader Ayatollah Khomeini he has lived in an undisclosed location in London from where his subsequent works have come out.

Saleem Sinai’s reworking of history with the use of mythical elements is usually associated with the mode called **Magical Realism** in Literature. This Magical realism is characterized by two contradictory perspectives, one based on a rational view of reality and the other on the belief in supernatural. Magical realism differs from pure fantasy because it is set in a normal, modern world with realistic depiction of humans and society. According to Angel Flores, magical realism involves the fusion of the real and the fantastic, “an amalgamation of realism and fantasy”. The presence of the supernatural in magical realism is often connected to the primordial or “magical”, which exists in concurrence with modern rationality. It is the fusion of polar opposites. The term “magical realism” was first introduced by Franz Roh, a German art critic. To him, it was a way of representing and responding to the mystery of reality. In his use of Magic Realism Rushdie is said to have been influenced by the author Gabriel Garcia Marquez who makes its extensive use in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*.

Amitav Ghosh (b. 1956) has brought the rigour of scholarship in novel writing. From the first book *The Circle of Reason* (1986) that he wrote to his latest work of fiction *The Glass Palace* (2000), a thorough research on the sociological and historical aspects of the subject he deals with has characterised his writing. A winner of Sahitya Academy award for his novel *The Shadow Lines*, he has traveled

extensively to Egypt, Myanmar and Cambodia to research his books. His early experiences in childhood that took him all over South East Asia were also responsible in giving him a broader perspective on issues than one fixed in New Delhi. Unlike his glib contemporaries, Amitav is known for keeping his narrative stable and at the same time achieving the criticism of issues in an elegant way.

Another important writer to emerge at this stage was **Arundhati Roy**, a trained Architect from Kerala. Her novel *The God of Small Things* (1996) tells the story of the Syrian Christians of Kerala and went on to win the Booker Prize in 1997. Set in Kerala in the 1960s, the book is about two children, the twins Estha and Rahel, and the dreadful consequences of a critical event in their lives, the accidental death-by-drowning of a visiting English cousin. In a delightful and lyrical language, the novel paints a vibrant picture of life in a small South Indian town, it talks from the perspective of small children and exposes the hypocrisy of the adults in their life. It also takes a look at the Indian Caste system from a non-hindu perspective. The book was lauded for its creative use of language and Salman Rushdie describes it as being “full of ambition and sparkle.” Roy has built her reputation as an activist-writer and has articulated her concern on many issues like displacement of people due to construction of dam proposed over Narmada River (Narmada Bachao Andolan) and the repercussions of mounting nuclear weapons.

Others like Amit Chaudhari, Vikram Chandra, Vikram Seth, Upamanyu Chatterjee, I.Allen Sealy and Shashi Tharoor have also,with their works, contributed to this burgeoning field and a discussion of their works will merit many more pages which is out of bounds for the present.

The developments taking place in the Indian Writing in English for the past two or so decades have been, to say the least, very exciting. These have belied the opinion of those critics who believed that English could never attain the height in expression that other Indian languages had attained. That view has to be done away with because English language is now being used with an ease and felicity that was not seen before. It is fast becoming the language of people’s (those who use it) emotional expression; evidence to the fact is its elegant and creative use by the Indian writers today. Languages have to be viewed not as political but cultural objects. The growth that English has seen is fast making it an Indian language and the one, that is truly pan Indian on account of its being accepted,unlike Hindi, by both North and South. However the claim that English still represents a largely metropolitan experience

cannot be wholly denied. In order for English and English Literature to function as an authentic medium of Indian experience it has to represent an India with its varied reality. Makarand Paranjape says in this regard, “Indian English literature needs to prove its credentials by aligning with people at large who make up this country. It must not end up becoming a creature of surplus elitism, sustaining and augmenting its unearned privileges. Instead of being an exotic, hot-house plant sustained only in the ultra-violet light of reflected glory, it should be able to survive in the soil of this country, in the harsh sunlight of self-reliance.”

A Timeline of Amitav Ghosh’s Life

1956 Birth of Amitav Ghosh at Calcutta

1976 Graduated from Delhi University

1978 M.A. (Sociology), Delhi University

1982 Ph.D., Social Anthropology, Oxford University, England.

1986 Published *The Circle of Reason* (a novel), Roli Books (New Delhi) Awarded the *Prix Medicis Etrangère* (1990).

1988 *The Shadow Lines* published, Ravi Dayal (New Delhi) Awarded the annual prize of the Sahitya Akademi (Indian Academy of Literature) and Ananda Puruskar, Calcutta.

1992 *In An Antique Land* (non-fiction, Ravi Dayal (New Delhi), Subject of 40 minute TV documentary by BBC III, 1992. New York Times Notable Book of the Year, 1993.

1996 *The Calcutta Chromosome* (a novel), 1996, Ravi Dayal. Under film contract with Gabriele Salvatores, Oscar-winning director. Won the Arthur C. Clarke award for science fiction.

1998 *Dancing in Cambodia & At Large in Burma*, (Collection of Essays) Ravi Dayal (New Delhi)

1999 *Countdown*, Ravi Dayal, New Delhi.

2000 *The Glass Palace*, Ravi Dayal, New Delhi. The famous withdrawal from the nomination race for Commonwealth Award. Awarded Grand Prize for Fiction at Frankfurt, 2001.

2001 *The Imam and the Indian*, Ravi Dayal and Permanent Black, (New Delhi)

Amitav Ghosh's Works: A Critical Sketch

Ghosh is one of the better-known Indian Writers writing in English today. Born in 1956 in Calcutta, he had his school education at the famous residential Doon School in Dehradun. Though he belonged to a middle class Bengali family, his childhood had varied influences that set him apart from the typical *Bhadralok* (middle class) value system. While growing up in his grandfather's Kolkata home where the sitting room was lined with bookshelves, (he talks about it in the award winning essay "The Testimony of my Grandfather's Bookcase") Ghosh became a voracious reader. By the age of 12, he had devoured Mikhail Sholokhov's *And Quiet Flows the Don*, a gift from an uncle. He admits in an interview that in the Bengali culture writing is greatly valued and that was his inspiration. His father, Lt- Col. Shailendra Chandra Ghosh served the British army in Myanmar and was an avid storyteller. These stories about the exotic lands told to him as a young boy were to greatly affect the canvas of his imagination. He also admits as to how these early family experiences were to have a far reaching influence on his literary creations. He quotes the example of *The Glass Palace* (2000) that grew out of his uncle Jagat Chandra Dutta's experiences as a timber merchant in Myanmar. The fact that the family was constantly on the move, owing to his father's official assignments, also had its effect on young Amitav. Even though he was in a boarding school he got to visit and live in Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. "Because of that I could understand what it is like to be a Sri Lankan and a Bangladeshi in relationship with 'India,'" he says. This sensibility pervades many of his works and one sees that the Indian Subcontinent is frequently

decentered from Delhi to other capitals like Dhaka and Mandalay. He graduated from Delhi University and with an Inlaks scholarship went to Oxford for his DPhil in Social Anthropology and Philosophy. During his research he came across the papers of a 12th century Tunisian Jew, Abraham Ben Yiju, in a Cairo synagogue. He learnt from the papers that he had come to Mangalore via Egypt and lived there for 17 years. This formed the seminal idea of what would be Ghosh's third book, *In An Antique Land* (1992). Ghosh returned to India in 1982, and worked in the Centre For Developmental Studies in Thiruvananthapuram (Kerela) for a year. He describes the period as the most peaceful in his life. He started work on his first book *The Circle of Reason* (1986) while still in Kerela and completed it in Delhi. He talks of his days in Delhi and his struggle as a fledgling writer. He says in an interview "I was living in the servant's quarters on top of someone's house. With the Delhi sun beating down at the height of the summer, I would sit in a *lungi* and furiously punch away at my typewriter." His writing career began at the Indian Express newspaper in New Delhi and in 1986 his first novel, *The Circle Of Reason*, went on to win one of France's top literary awards, the Prix Medici Etrangere. His writing career had taken off well from here on and subsequent years saw him becoming a recipient of many coveted awards, including the 1999 Pushcart Prize and the Arthur C. Clarke Award for his highbrow thriller, *The Calcutta Chromosome* (1996) Witnessing the 1984 Anti-Sikh riots in Delhi in the wake of Indira Gandhi's assassination had a profound effect on him. "I think it was essentially after the 1984 riots that people recognised the dimension of the communal problem in India." He wrote about it in *The New Yorker* and it became a point of departure for his novel *The Shadow Lines* (1988). Though the book does not deal with the '84 riots per se, it has dealt with the pathology of riots and civil strife in a more encompassing manner. In the year 2001 he was in news for having withdrawn his book *The Glass Palace* from the shortlist of Commonwealth Writer's Award because he felt that such awards continue to abet the very institutions (the British Empire) that he tries to fight through his writings. In a letter written to the Prize Manager of the foundation he contests the very idea behind Commonwealth as a category... 'As a literary or cultural grouping ... it seems to me that "the Commonwealth" can only be a misnomer so long as it excludes the many languages that sustain the cultural and literary lives of these countries. ...the ways in which we remember the past are not determined solely by the brute facts of time: they are also open to choice, reflection and judgment. The issue of how the past is to be remembered lies at the heart of *The Glass Palace* and I feel that I would be betraying the spirit of my book if I were to allow it

to be incorporated within that particular memorialization of Empire that passes under the rubric of “the Commonwealth”.’ The literary community hailed this withdrawal as being exemplary and worthy of emulation. On the subject of recreating historical events through his novels, he draws up the distinction between ‘state history’ and ‘human history.’ He says in an interview that the difference between the history historians writes and the history fiction writers write is that the latter write about ‘human history’... ‘ it is about finding out the human predicament. It is about finding out what happens to human individuals, characters...on the other hand is the kind of history exploring causes...Causality is of no interest to me.’ In these times driven by media, Ghosh has consciously cultivated a low profile. He believes that the excessive pressures created by the *media circus* (as he calls it) on young writers cripple their creativity and take attention off the most important task: that of writing. Ghosh is presently based in America, where he first met his wife, Deborah Baker, who is a senior editor with the publishers Little, Brown and Company. After teaching anthropology and comparative literature in various universities in America, Ghosh is now distinguished professor of Comparative Literature at Queens College, City University of New York. He lives in New York with his wife and children, Leela and Nayan.

Critical Summary of the Novel

The Shadow Lines (1988) can be viewed at one level as a story of a Bengali family through which the author presents, analyses and problematises many issues that are being debated in contemporary India. The story cleverly engages in its main body characters spanning three generations of this family. The story of these characters is not told in a contextual vacuum, it instead corresponds to the growth of Calcutta as a city and India as a nation over a period of three decades or more. Significantly, private events in the author’s life and other important characters take place in the shadow of events of immense political significance. The family too is not there typically as a spectacle but as a means to ‘discuss’ these issues that are at the heart of this work. So there is Tha’mma, the grandmother of the unnamed narrator through whom the issue of the Bengal Partition and the whole idea of **Nation**, Nationalism and Nationhood gets discussed. There is Tridib, the eccentric Historian cousin through whom the idea of **history** being problematic gets highlighted. Then there is the third generation Ila, the narrator’s second

cousin through whom the author brings to fore the issues of **diaspora** and **racism**. The role of the narrator is also central to the extent that it is he who articulates the ideas held by these characters and also integrates these subjective viewpoints and experiences to highlight that both public discourses like history and personal discourse like anecdotes are incomplete till they are integrated. The role of the narrator is also crucial to the structure of the novel, which is one of story within story told in a non-linear way. The novel has also been analysed by the critic Suvir Kaul in the essay “Separation Anxiety: Growing Up Inter/National in *The Shadow Lines*” as embodying elements from the *bildungsroman* (coming of age) tradition of the novel. M.H.Abrams describes the term *bildungsroman* as a ‘novel of formation’... ‘the subject of these novels is the development of the protagonist’s mind and character, as he passes from childhood through varied experiences –and usually through a spiritual crisis – into maturity and recognition of his identity and role in the world.’ *The Shadow Lines* witnesses the growth of the narrator from an impressionable 8 yr.old in the Gole Park flat in Calcutta to an assured adult through the book. However, the growth of the narrator is not physical alone but seen in relation with the growth of ideas on ‘... nationalism, nation states and international relations...the narrator’s itinerary into adulthood ...is necessarily framed by these larger public questions...it becomes not merely a male *bildungsroman*, an authorized autobiography, with its obvious agendas and priorities, but also a dialogic, more open-ended telling of the difficult interdependencies and inequalities that compose any biography of a nation.’ The novel begins with the eight-year-old narrator talking of his experiences as a schoolboy living in the Gole-Park neighbourhood in Calcutta. He introduces the reader to the two branches of his family tree- the families of his Grandmother Tha’mma and that of the Grandmother’s sister, Mayadebi. According to the acclaimed critic Meenakshi Mukherjee this rendition in the novel amongst other details helps the reader feel the ‘concreteness of the existential and emotional milieu...the precise class location of his family, Bengali *bhadralok*, starting at the lower edge of the spectrum and ascending to its higher reaches in one generation, with family connections above and below its own station...’ The grandmother is a schoolteacher and the father is a middle rung manager in a tyre company. The family of Mayadebi is more affluent, her husband being a high-ranking official in the foreign services, with one son, Jatin being an economist with the UN and the younger one Robi being a Civil Servant. Only Tridib of her sons is not successful in the material sense, however of his ability the reader is left in no doubt as even though eccentric, he is the one who is the repository of all the esoteric knowledge. He can talk on length

about issues as diverse as the sloping roofs of Columbian houses and the culture of the Incas with equal ease. He is also the one who transfers to the young narrator a profound love for knowledge. The sisters Tha'mma and Mayadebi are thick with each other, however the former is perennially on her guard on the issue of accepting help from the latter. In this regard it is important to talk about her past experiences. As a young woman living in Dhaka (prior to Bengal Partition) she is married off to an Engineer posted in Burma. However she loses her husband very early and is left with the prospect of raising her only son single handedly. What follows is her struggle to make ends meet and her subsequent career as a schoolteacher in Bengal. She raises her only child independently and lives a spartan life where *wasted time stinks*. Her self worth goads her to abstain from becoming dependent on her affluent relations. In the midst of the narrative she retires from

school and her life really comes a full circle. One of the important facets of Tha'mma's worldview that we have to consider is her perception of historical events and her notions of Nationhood and Nationalism. As a young woman she finds herself in the greatly charged milieu of 19th century Bengal when the Extremist strand of Nationalism was in its full glory. As a college going young woman she upholds these young extremists as her true heroes and secretly desires to be a part of such extremist organizations as *Anushilan* and *Jugantar*. She idealises these young men who indulge in clandestine extremism with the larger goal of Independence in mind. At the same time as a product of Western Education, her idea of Nation as an entity is borrowed in its entirety from England. She tends to associate gory wars passion, sacrifice and blood baths with the creation and grandeur of nations. 'War is their (the English) religion. That's what it takes to make a country. Once that happens people forget they were born this or that...that's what you have to achieve for India.' She particularly likes her nephew Robi who, according to her, has besides, a fine education a fine body that is essential for the enterprise of nation building. To the fact that she is a dislocated Bengali (from the Eastern side) she does not pay much attention and like a typical middle class character is too involved in matters of livelihood to bother about these issues. Life is simple for her- she believes in the values of honesty and hardwork and has been a tremendously scrupulous teacher and mother. She believes so completely in the ideal of hard work that when she meets her poor migrant relatives she can think of no other reason but lack of hard work as the reason for their penury. She gives no thought to the event of Partition that is partly responsible for the dislocation and destitution of the family. It is only when she plans to visit her sister in

Dhaka and when she has to undergo the usual procedure of compiling her immigration papers that she is jolted into recognizing the reality of the Partition of her state. The author here delves into the whole idea behind physical and psychological spaces. Here the author talks of *Phantom distances* through the **shadow lines** that the state machinery creates in order to reinforce the idea of nation. Whereas in a large country like India where diversity abounds in every aspect of cultural, economic, social and linguistic existence nationhood is imposed over these **imagined communities** and ironically where communities exist naturally (like in the pre-partitioned Bengal) they are thrown apart with barbed wire fencing, passports and papers reinforcing a much greater psychological distance between the two. Her visit to her erstwhile home in Dhaka also turns out to be poignant in ways more than one. Her uncle (father's brother) is the only one languishing in that house because he is completely out of touch with reality and refuses to believe the fact that the country has split. Here the author echoes the idea of collective madness and normalcy. Whereas the uncle who refuses to believe in the Partition of the country is labelled mad by the so called normal people, it is in a way a collective madness that has endorsed the highly abnormal act of Partition and then driven the non conformists to the edge of madness. This old man also portrays the **violence** that **history** perpetrates. Whereas this violence is a part of the life of all the people who underwent the distresses of dislocation during Partition, it can only find an expression through the grotesque means of madness. And there is escape from it also through madness. The character of Tha'mma is crucial to the narrative in the manner in which it brings out some of these concepts and also provides a rallying point around which other ways of looking at these are built. Tha'mma embodies a conventional even though interesting belief system, which is challenged by the other characters as well as the novelist himself. For most part of the book she comes across as a frugal, no-nonsense woman for whom any wastage of time or money is abhorrence. She is a principled old woman whose views on nation and nation building are remarkably simplistic. She doesn't consider herself as a migrant belonging to the other side of the border; she has no sympathy for her refugee relatives living in a state of utter penury. Her notions of nation, nation building are straight from history books. She considers healthy young people like Robi as ideal nation builders. She is remarkably free from all traces of cynicism so evocative of victims of partition. She does not consciously criticize the phenomenon of Partition even once, there are no lengthy harangues: her critique of the Partition, nation and nationalism lies in her anecdotes. Often it is the anecdotes and the personal experiences that make

her acknowledge the cracks and contradictions in her beliefs. Tha'mma as a child in Dhaka house makes stories about the disputed upside down house (the other half of the house occupied by the uncle's family) The artificial constructedness of the '**otherness**' of the house is very evident and many critics have seen it as a foretaste of a similar exercise that the state indulges in when the Partition of a nation has to be justified and difference has to be created if it does not exist. The two nations just like the two parts of a household were united at one time but the course of history (or failure of vision) divides them and for sustaining their separation the difference has to be created. The case of the Partition of the Indian subcontinent has been very different because the state has been forced to create a difference where none existed and show the two nations as inherently opposed.

It is the fear that comes of the knowledge that normalcy is utterly contingent, that the spaces that surround one, the streets that one inhabits, can suddenly and without warning become as hostile as a desert in a flash flood. It is this that sets apart the thousand million people who inhabit the subcontinent from the rest of the world-not language, not food, not music-it is the special quality of loneliness that grows out of the fear of the war between oneself and one's image in the mirror.

The house trope used in the novel is for obvious reasons of making the reader see through such an act when it comes to the country : what is ironic is that Tha'mma who should have *seen through* it is blissfully oblivious of the strategy. Perhaps this oblivion is tantamount to a deliberate non-admission of facts that are deeply disturbing to her. Here the two reactions of madness that we examined earlier can be compared to the non admission of events, a denial that the individual resorts to in order to avoid the madness that is bound to follow later. The oblivion of Tha'mma therefore becomes her survival strategy. However an indicator of this deep complex does surface later. Her decision to go to Dhaka in order to bring back her old sick uncle is a very upsetting time for her. Routine activity of furnishing her personal details while finishing the documentation for her visa forms raise fundamental doubts within her about her identity. The sane formulations of her life are threatened by some dull looking External Affairs Ministry forms. For the first time the sure shot, unruffled Tha'mma goes through pangs of some fundamentally disturbing introspection. She wonders as to how the 'place of her birth had come to be messily at odds with her nationality'. She cannot resolve the chaos that surfaces in the patterns that are so essential to her identity. The narrator at this point cleverly talks of certain language constructions in

the Bengali language:

You see, in our family we don't know whether we are coming or going- It's all my grandmother's fault... But of course the fault wasn't hers at all: it lay in the language. Every language assumes a centrality fixed and settled point to go away and come back to, and what my grandmother was looking for was a word for a journey which was not coming or going at all : a journey that was a search for precisely that fixed point which permits the proper use of verbs of movement.

According to Nivedita Bagchi there is ‘ a peculiar construction in the Bengali language which allows the speaker to say “aaschi” (coming) instead of “jachchhi” (going)’...which is ‘especially used as an equivalent to “good-bye”. Thus a Bengali speaker while leaving a place is apt to say, “I am coming (back) instead of “I am going.”’ The grandmother’s Bengali verbs that confuse the simple acts of coming and going become a part of the family’s lore. Young people in the family joke about this language feature that confuses movement of two opposite kinds. But interestingly, within this feature of the Bengali language lies a critique of the migration of populations during the Partition of 1947. If, therefore Tha'mma says “aaschi” (I am coming) before leaving for Dhaka, it is to be read as an announcement of her arrival to her erstwhile home rather than a *faux pas* that confuses coming and going. All going away therefore culminates only in a coming of a very different kind. The fault therefore obliquely points at the chaos of coming and going that there is in Tha'mma's world rather than in her language. This claim is further confirmed by the fact that the book has two sub-sections: *Going Away and Coming home*. Both phrases indicate the queer sense of home and homelessness that the Partition victims have experienced that allows them to dispense with a fixed point that signifies a point of departure. It is also interesting to note why a common language feature should invite ridicule from the speakers themselves. It is foregrounded to draw the reader's attention towards the *fault* of Partition, neither that of the language nor that of Tha'mma. Specific addresses are remarkably highlighted in *The Shadow Lines*, the house at Raibajar, the narrator's house in Gole Park, 44, Lymington Road, the Price household, the Shodor bazaar in Dhaka and the feud-ridden Dhaka house. All these are real enough to be plotted on a street atlas. These intricate addresses have a strong power of evocation and add to the verisimilitude of the narrative. Infact these specific addresses have a power that emanates from their permanence. These addresses are more than a mere assistance in discovering location, they are the units

that survive civil political and private strife and yet remain unchanged. In this way if compared to nations as entities, specific locations outdo them in endurance. Nations are born, nations die, the cartographers and politicians rearrange political

spaces but these locations are remarkably immune to these designs. They thus become the fixities and entities with 'semiotic signification' that provide meaning to several characters, their concerns and their identities. This further becomes an instance of a personal space (and if these addresses can be seen as personal narratives) outdoing a public one. Specific addresses in the novel subvert the idea of the nation in the novel. The narrator's eccentric cousin Tridib is an unconventional character who does not fit into the genteel society of his family. He is conducting research into the ancient Sena dynasty of Bengal and is repeatedly shown engrossed in his study. Tridib does not merely happen to be a scholar of Ancient history writing a thesis on the lost Sena Empire, his is indeed a voice that bears the burden of a historical vision. Right from the beginning of the novel there is in him a deep consciousness about the enterprise of knowledge. He not only collects esoteric bits of knowledge, the range of which stretches from East European Jazz to the intricate sociological patterning of the Incas religiously but also shapes his own and the narrator's orientation towards it. Tridib is a stock character Bengali literature and folklore is replete with. Images of such figures abound, so whether it is the distant uncle in Satyajit Ray's film *Agantuk* or as Meenakshi Mukherjee in the essay 'Maps and Mirrors: Coordinates of Meaning in *The Shadow Lines*' points out the 'traveller/imaginist reminding the Bengali reader occasionally of the *Ghana -da* stories by Premananda Mitra and ...*Pheluda* stories by Satyajit Ray in both of which a boy is held spell bound by a somewhat older person's encyclopedic knowledge of other lands and civilizations.' The narrator gets his first lessons on the business of scholarship from Tridib-he is presented with a Bartholomew's Atlas as a childhood gift which remains a symbol of this transference and which resurfaces years later in the author's hostel room in Delhi-thus signifying a lasting influence that Tridib has on the narrator and the uncle's symbolic gift of *the worlds to travel in and the eyes to see them with*. That he receives Tridib's gift of this knowledge thereafter becomes a kind of metanarrative that the author will subsequently want to break out of and interrogate. However there is another aspect of Tridib that the author shows- that of a glib talker. Tridib, the eccentric uncle of the narrator has an audience in the people of the *addas* in the Calcutta neighbourhood of Gole Park. Nivedita Bagchi in the essay 'The Process of Validation In Relation To Materiality and Historical Reconstruction in Amitav

Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* ' defines the Bengali word *adda* which is seen as the place of dissemination of the historian's (Tridib's) discourse. According to Bagchi the Bengali word describes 'long, leisurely conversations within a group of people which characterises a Bengali day.' She further states that the acknowledgement of the Bengali community within the narrative is a feature of the oral narrative where the narrative is the secret of the community which further links to the idea that narratives are connected to an identifiable group. He takes on the center stage in these public street corners where people pour over *chai* and talk quotidian concerns. He is more of a performer than historian in these spaces. The Tridib of the *addas* exaggerates and manipulates information for an audience that listens to him in rapt attention with their mouths gaped in awe of his knowledge. There is another space that Tridib occupies, that of his book lined quiet room in his family house in Calcutta. The narrator confesses 'it was that Tridib that I liked the best: I was a bit unsure of the Tridib of the street corners.' Tha'mma, too thinks this behaviour at the *addas* as totally abominable and a way of making his *time stink*. What is it about Tridib of the *addas* that is distrustful? The book in describing Tridib of the *addas* and his behavioural pattern there and by ascribing to him certain statements (he lies to the audience about his just concluded trip to London) only highlights a very important issue that the book deals with: that of the **seat of the Historian** and how he occupies it in **disseminating knowledge**. It is also significant to note that here we come into contact with two facets of a historian: the diligent, quiet fact-finder and the powerful, loud mouthed one in public sphere and through the latter the book goes on to throw some questions about the political role of history. (See the note on history) The narrator gets a lesson in combining precision and **imagination** as a strategy of gaining knowledge from Tridib. The employment of imagination being necessary because a historian does not and cannot possibly has an access to all the relevant sites of the event all the time. The time and space of a historically important event may be removed many throws from the historian in which case the quality of his mastery on the event becomes dependent on his own imagination or either the imagination of historians before him. The compound word *precise-imagination* also becomes a paradox in bringing the limiting, exacting precision to bear upon the soaring, sky kissing imagination. The perspicuity of vision that the narrator cultivates thereafter by this lesson is evident in his extraordinary reactions to the space of London during his visit. He not only recognizes old buildings that Tridib had merely mentioned to him as a child, but with the same eloquence questions missing ones, the ones bombed out in action and the like. The old club building that Tridib had fondly talked about to

the narrator years ago is intact in his imagination decades later while on a visit to London. His suggestions of its existence are brushed aside by his cousin Ila whose opinion is supported by the club's absence, however the external evidence fails to satisfy him and after much effort they find out from an old timer that the club had indeed existed at the exact spot that he had pointed out and that it had been targeted during a war and reduced to rubble. The author's theoretical knowledge, therefore, of the existence of the building beats the Ila's very real but thoughtless existence. Tridib's vision works, at the same time he has the historian's itch to classify and know events *completely* rather than experience them spontaneously as Ila does. Tridib as a young man falls in love with May who is the daughter of the Price family of England. The friendship of the Datta- Chaudhary family and the Prices goes back to the Colonial times when their English grandfather, Tresawsen had come to Calcutta as an agent of a steel-manufacturing company and had later become a factory owner. The relationship between Tridib and May starts from exchange of friendly letters till the one that Tridib writes. In his letter he proposes to her by elaborately describing an intimate lovemaking episode between two people in a war ravaged theatre house in London. He proposes to meet her 'as a stranger in a ruin.... as completist of strangers, strangers-across seas' without context or history. May is initially perplexed but cannot resist his 'invitation' and finally reaches India to see him. However soon the romance in the relationship is replaced by discord. They assign meanings to happenings and things around them differently. While driving along with the child narrator towards Diamond Harbour they come across an injured, profusely bleeding and badly mauled dog. While the narrator shuts his eyes to escape the *ugly* sight, Tridib drives on with a nonchalance that shocks May completely. She asks him to drive back to the mangled animal after which follows her extraordinary show of endurance and fortitude with which she relieves the animal of its pain by assisting it to a peaceful death. Exasperated by the whole experience she tells Tridib in a huff that *he is worth words alone*. The quality of activism that we see in May resurfaces in London years later when she collects donations for destitute children. This is in sharp contrast to Tridib who is an armchair historian and lives and feeds on ideas alone. A similar situation arises in Dhaka while they along with Tha'mma, Mayadebi and child Robi are trapped in the communal frenzy that takes place while they are bringing back the old uncle left behind in Dhaka since Independence. While they meander through the riot ravaged streets of the city in their chauffeur driven car, the old uncle is following them in a rickshaw steered by the Muslim who looks after him. May observes how the mob

which first turned to them, on being repulsed, attacked the old man on the rickshaw and instead of saving him, Tha'mma displays the same nonchalance that Tridib had earlier shown towards the dog and asks the driver to drive on without looking back. May is struck with the old impulse and getting out of the car, she heads towards the mob to save the old man. Tridib cannot allow her to embrace death and therefore follows her. In the melee, the mob attacks Tridib and he is killed. The incident powerfully evokes the earlier dog episode and the promise that Tridib gets from May at that time, about giving him too the peaceful death like the dog if a situation ever arose, uncannily turns true. Of this incident the narrator gets to know only in the end when dissatisfied with other people's versions, he asks May to recount to him the cause of Tridib's death. The incident as recounted by May becomes like that missing part of the jigsaw puzzle of Tridib's death that the author is trying to look for. Ila, the narrator's cousin is another important influence on the young, impressionable narrator. She, owing to her father's job is a globetrotter and comes to settle in London. Her experience of places as diverse as Colombo and Cairo and her school years at all these exotic places woven into delightful anecdotes for the child narrator initiate for the latter his first ever flights of imagination. Along with Tridib's encyclopedic knowledge, it is cousin Ila's descriptions of her vibrant life abroad that give the narrator a flight outside the confines of his drab Gole Park flat. The cousin's colourful Annual Schoolbooks become his initiators into an unseen but alluring world outside. For Ila the immediacy of experience –personal/political is so overwhelmingly important that its context and historicity remains suspended in the background. Earlier the mere description of the city of Cairo brings to the mind of the atlas educated, historically aware narrator, the first pointed arch in the history of mankind whereas for Ila 'Cairo is merely a place to piss in.' She flits from experience to experience with a heightened sensual gusto but failing to 'arrive' at any stage in the novel to

a state of greater knowledge, insight or evolution. Tridib often said of her that 'the inventions she lived in moved with her, so that although she had lived in many places she had not travelled at all.' 'For Ila the current was the real: it was as though she lived in a present which was like an airlock in a canal, shut away from the tidewaters of past and future by steel flood gates.' However this uninhibited flow of experience in her throws up certain questions that the other narratives have either suppressed, not acknowledged or either failed to account for. This realm does not have history's linear progression of and no casts to mould and reshape experience. Her experience as an Indian in London becomes another

model of citizenship that the book explores along with Partition Diaspora and the modern Calcutta Middle class. However her personal experience first as a student in London and later that of marrying a white man throws up an entire polemic about the diasporic communities. When she narrates the story about the fantasy child Magda to the narrator, it is quite evident that the child is a consequence of her mixed marriage (owing to the child's blue eyes and fair complexion). The absolute dread that she associates with the imagined classroom of the child betrays her own sense of complexity as a woman faced with questions about race in a mixed marriage. In this regard it is important that Ila in this conversation displays a hyper emotionality, enough indication of some deep complex of feelings within her about race. Finally when Nick betrays her, her insecurity as a woman and especially as a one disadvantaged due to her race comes out in the open. Her life comes full circle from that anxious schoolgirl boasting about nonexistent boyfriends to the distraught adult finding it difficult to come to terms with an unfaithful husband. 'You see you've never understood; you've always been taken in by the way I used to talk in college. I only talked like that to shock you and because you seemed to expect it of me somehow. I never did any of those things: I'm about as chaste ...as any woman you'll ever meet.'

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

Dhaka riots. His death, its cause and manner is however not made known to the narrator in its entirety: the parents are reluctant to reveal anything just like middle class people are used to avoiding all the talk of death in front of young children. The child Robi talks of the experience with a hyper emotionality characteristic of a traumatic childhood experience that he hasn't let go off even as an adult. At a later time Robi as an adult recounts all that happens while on an evening out with the narrator and Ila. His account is complete to the extent that he as a child can only observe partially. His partial perception is not only a result of his intellectual inadequacy but also due to the fact that he is physically limited- 'an effect of that difference in perspective which causes all objects recalled from childhood to undergo an illusory enlargement of scale'- this makes him incapable of even observing the incident objectively. His account of the incident is therefore more of a cathartic outburst because it has been long repressed than an informative or insightful reconstruction of the past. The last strand in the experience is May to whom the narrator then turns for an adequate explanation. It is in London that the narrator gets to know the truth behind the death. Another aspect of modern India that the narrator brings out through the novel is the typical 20th Century phenomenon **Civil strife** and rioting especially the one that results from communal discord. It is important to mention here that *The Shadow Lines* written in 1988 was the author's response to another unprecedented event in Post-Colonial Indian scene: the 1984 Anti-Sikh riots that swept the nation after the then Prime minister Mrs. Indira Gandhi was assassinated by her Sikh bodyguards. To begin with allegedly State sponsored these riots in their magnitude were comparable to the earlier communal frenzy of 1947 partition. The novel situates the 1964 communal riots in Calcutta experienced by the narrator as a young school going boy centrally in the boy's psyche as well as in his analysis of the difference of perception that pervades the recording of such incidents. In the book these riots and the riots at Dhaka become the occasion for the acid test of our recording systems whether of our history or of our newspapers. The author does a brilliant job by the use of excessive and mundane journalese that drowns the powerful dominance that it exerts in the author's consciousness. The author finds an inadequate portrayal of such historical events in these sources and then goes on to analyze the reasons behind such silences:

By the end of January 1964 the riots had faded away from the pages of the newspapers, disappeared from the collective imagination of 'responsible opinion', vanished without leaving a trace in the histories and bookshelves. They had dropped out of memory into the crater of a volcano of silence. The

theatre of war where the Generals meet is the stage on which the states disport themselves :they have no use for the memory of riots. Through an extensive description of a day during the 1964 Calcutta riots, the narrator tells us of his experiences of the day as a school student. Through the day he along with the other children are caught in a fear psychosis while going to school. He describes the empty bus ride home where the driver falters, drives into wrong lanes and makes all the unexpected detours into unknown, deserted lanes of Calcutta to escape the mad mob. Years later while talking of the incident to his College friends in Delhi he is surprised to find that none of them seem to remember the fateful day. Eager to prove his memory right he leads some of them to the archives where he digs out old papers to support his memory. To his dismay, the newspapers paint the incident in regular *journalese*. While reading retrospectively about his own experience of communal riots in Calcutta as a child, he stumbles upon other events of the fateful day, one of which is a description of a similar riot in Dhaka. It is at this time that he is able to link up the two seemingly unrelated events and the fact strikes him that it was indeed the same riot in Dhaka that had claimed its victim in Tridib. What the others in his college cannot even seem to remember owing to their location in places that are far from Calcutta, is ironically a mirror experience of people in another country (Khulna, Bangladesh, then in Pakistan), ‘the two cities face each other at a watchful equidistance across the border.’ What follows is the author’s meditation on the idea of distance as a physical reality and as a political and psychological construct. The insignificant physical distance between the two cities (earlier one community) is stretched to an unfathomable, unconquerable political and psychological distance, often making them as different as two civilisations. Returning to civil strife and its portrayal, why are there these silences in History? Probably because, the author says, these do not cohere well with constructs like a nation that the state has so painfully nurtured earlier: ‘the madness of a riot is a pathological inversion, but also therefore, a reminder of that indivisible sanity that binds people independently of their governments. And that prior, independent relationship is the natural enemy of the government, for it is the logic of states that to exist at all they must claim the monopoly of all relation between people... ’ Is history, then an objective telling of the past events or choosing what to write in order that the underlying form is not distorted? It chooses to write about that which serves it while the rest is irretrievably silenced. The author points out that the silence he sees in history results when happenings cannot be accounted for in a given manner ‘the kind of natural silence that descends when nearness /distance, friend /enemy become terms that are impossible to define. However these

definitions in the first place become difficult because artificial differences are imposed by the state. Riots and their memory become a case in point because as Ghosh puts it they are an instance of 'pathological inversion' -i.e. violence of a state turning inwards unlike in other conflicts like war where it turns outwards. The clear definition of enemy/friend, ingroup/outgroup, I/other becomes difficult. Who is to be described as a perpetrator and who the victim becomes problematic for the state and also the reasons, if documented, subvert the idea of the idea of

the nation, therefore having no value for the governments as historical object. It is because of this choice based reportage that history is said to have an underlying literary structure. In the event of wars, on the other hand there is a well-defined enemy, a self-righteous *we group* and a legitimate action that reaffirms our notions of nationhood and our projected ideology. So there is a glory to wars, which is also violence, but one that makes sense within our defined notions of the ideas described above.

Notes on Important Aspects of the Novel

I. Treatment of History

Simply put history is the recording of actions of human beings done in the past, however if seen as a discipline that is specific to societies, one can see its significance as a disseminator of ideas. The earlier definition sees the act of recording as essentially unproblematic which is what has driven Western Historiography since Enlightenment when the content and methodology of what constitutes the subject of history today first got formulated. It was only in the twentieth century that this act of recording got problematised. Collingwood in *Idea of History (1946)* was one of the early historians to shift the emphasis from the act of objective recording outside events to the subjective realm of the historian's mind. He saw history as the record of past thoughts reenacted within the historian's mind. According to him the knowledge of an earlier era becomes possible with the historian projecting him (her) self into an earlier context. He was also the first historian to see the past events with a greater sense of complexity than as being easily understood and verifiable phenomenon that it was hitherto considered to be. With

the coming of what is called the **Postmodernism** the mode of History writing has also been challenged. The postmodernists question the basic presumption of objectivity in history writing. They argue that objectivity in a political discourse like history becomes impossible because the position of the writer becomes aligned with power. Also the historian writes from a *point of view* that he cannot wish away. Some thinkers like Hayden White have taken an extreme position on this line of reasoning and have suggested a complete obliteration of the line between history and fiction. History is written by a historian and made available to the common people through history textbooks. Here what we look at is the power connotations of history- that it flows from authority to the common people. Also the traditional subject matter of history has been the conquests of the kings and the kingdoms. As a result the traditional history writing has essentially been about kings (replaced by powerful governments in recent times) written by court (state-approved) historians in the public chronicles (textbooks). When we consider these problems of history writing, other sources of writing history emerge. In recent times the school of **Subaltern studies** has provided a solution. The word "Subaltern" literally means subordinate or low-ranking. What these historians have done is attempted to rewrite the Indian history from the perspective of the common people. The power of the pen is shifted from the "court historian" to the traditionally less powerful common people. The historians under Subaltern studies also make use of unconventional sources like stories, *kissas*, folktales, songs etc. to uncover a past written by those in power. In recent time a sense of acute skepticism has come to play in our understanding of historical reconstructions which has abundantly got reflected in our literature. Salman Rushdie in presenting to us his story through Saleem Sinai of *Midnight's Children* consciously ascribes to him statements that are half-truths and at other times completely false. This deliberate injecting of falsehood in the story is a strategy to evoke mistrust in the reader who is indirectly made aware of unreliability of all sources. These new authors have signalled death of the once existent sage-authors, the know-all reservoirs brimming with all the knowledge of all the world. What reads like a Shakespearean anachronism (the famous one being about chiming clocks in Greek times in Julius Caesar!) is confirmed in course as being deliberate and intended. The book uses the analogy of the perforated sheet where it acts as a screen for the doctor to examine the diseased body of a beautiful noble lady. The perforated sheet allows the doctor to examine the relevant body part only and shroud the rest in parda. The doctor as expected falls in love with the hidden lady (infact her limited exposure adds to the fetish all the more!), but the whole is

unfortunately not a sum total of parts as the doctor had imagined. The perforated sheet has since become a symbol of limited perception. In the context of contemporary writing in English the pressing question is: what makes the author suggest a contest between history and personal experience? As mentioned earlier the credibility of public narrations has of late come under scrutiny. Whether it is Salman Rushdie treating history and religion with a celebratory irreverence or Mukul Kesavan attempting a revision of the Civil Disobedience Movement from the point of view of the Muslim Congressmen, or the scores of personal memoirs, giving a personal record of public events, a skeptical look at history has characterised great deal of Indian Writing in English for the past few decades. Most of these authors have been a part of the infamous history-they have either witnessed or been affected by events like partitioning of the country and consequently the writing of it. It is not unnatural then that they as witnesses to the discrepancy between lived events and recordings of them become natural critics to this entire enterprise. Some like Kesavan who is himself a historian claims to achieve through fiction that which history has denied to him. According to Jon Mee they are ‘responses to debates currently circulating within Indian culture from this perspective the desire to return to Indian History might be seen as the expression of a generally critical attitude to the form of nation-state of has emerged since 1947.’ Amitav Ghosh is concerned with both these facets of history writing: its claim of objectivity and its alignment with position of powers. *The Shadow Line* tries to examine History especially the writing of Indian History and its treatment of certain events in Post-Independence India like Partition and Civil Strife. It is here that he shows the deceptive depiction of Partition by Indian History. Firstly the history writers justify partition by falsely creating difference between the two sides (refer: the upside-down house) and then completely ignoring the human suffering that it entailed. Similarly the depiction of Calcutta riots experienced by the narrator is not given any place in history inspite of the influence it exerts on his psyche. By providing stories and anecdotes as a means of relating history he provides an alternative to the public history that emanates from the centers of power and aligns it to the people.

II. Title of the Novel

The title ‘The Shadow Lines’ is evocative of one of the major concerns of the novel: that of the creation

of nations with boundaries that are both arbitrary and invented. This issue becomes more pertinent when viewed in the context of the Partition of the Indian subcontinent. That which, on surface, is projected as completely opposed to another is actually a part of it. The author uses the trope of house to explain this. As children Tha'mma and Mayadebi witness the family dispute between their father and his elder brother (Jethamoshai) that leads to the division of the house. Tha'mma as a child in Dhaka house makes stories about the upside down house (the other half of the house occupied by the uncle's family) and narrates them to the younger sister. In the other half of the house, these stories talk of everything as being upside-down. The artificial constructedness of the 'otherness' of the house is very evident and gives to the keen reader a foretaste of a similar exercise in constructing the difference between the two sides of a partitioned nation. What is significant is that the two nations were united at one time but the course of history (or failure of vision) makes them two and for sustaining their separation this difference has to be invented. It is ironic therefore that Tha'mma who was herself a creator of that artificial difference cannot see through the strategy of the state. "But if there aren't any trenches or anything, how are the people to know?" The case of the Partition of the Indian subcontinent has been very different because the state has been forced to create a difference where none existed and show the two nations as inherently opposed.

It is the fear that comes of the knowledge that normalcy is utterly contingent, that the spaces that surround one, the streets that one inhabits, can suddenly and without warning become as hostile as a desert in a flash flood. It is this that sets apart the thousand million people who inhabit the subcontinent from the rest of the world-not language, not food, not music-it is the special quality of loneliness that grows out of the fear of the war between oneself and one's image in the mirror.

Perhaps this oblivion on Tha'mma's part is tantamount to a deliberate non-admission of facts that are deeply disturbing. The oblivion of Tha'mma therefore becomes her survival strategy.. Nationalism too gets redefined in various ways through experience. Whereas the *great historical project* of nationalism first undermines community (here the Bengali Community that is common between the East and the West Bengal.) to formulate nation, it then 'narrates the nation.' The theorist Bhaba sees this project as comprising of the creation of 'the narratives ... that signify a sense of 'nationness': the...pleasures of one's hearth and the... terror of the space of the other.' This idea however in the context of the Indian

subcontinent gets problematised because the *otherness* being talked of has to be created rather

than merely alluded to. People in the newly formed nations of Pakistan and Bangladesh are prompted through narration 'language, signifiers, textuality, rhetoric' to create a difference where none exists. Therefore what the book looks at is the creation of artificial difference between two nations that are inherently one. Another subtle manner in which the author exposes this strategy is by describing the experience of an Indian (Ila) outside India (London). While in London, she inhabits that space where the India-Pakistan-Bangladesh differentiation melts down. During their visit to London she takes Robi and the narrator out for dinner 'at my (Ila's) favourite Indian restaurant.' As it turns out the 'Indian place' that she has been talking about is a small Bangladeshi place in Clapham! A seemingly insignificant incident ridicules the intense feeling of difference that these two countries otherwise harbour and how these differences are reduced to a naught if viewed from a space that is outside the two. So these boundaries that are created due to political reasons seem tangible enough to be called *lines* but if analysed closely, fade away like *shadows*.

III. Structure of the Novel

Everyone lives in a story...because stories are all there are to live in.

The structure of *The Shadow Lines* comprises of two important characteristics: That of a non-linear structure and a digressive narrative. *The Shadow Lines* is a novel without a defined Beginning, Middle and an End, instead it relies on a loop-structure of a story- within a –story. This is in turn linked to the second characteristic of digressive narrative. This interferes with what is called the 'unity of theme and action' as a hallmark of good writing as perceived by the Western poetics. This novel is essentially told through stories. It is due to this fact that we can say that the narrator is more of a listener than speaker. His method of narration is in 'bringing together' available versions rather than telling new stories. Out of this coming together of varied and contradictory versions emerges a better version that is more representative and inclusive. It is without one definable speaker (see the note on history). Both these elements of an unnamed narrator and a non-linear progression are more characteristic of Indian than

Western poetics. Indian works have also traditionally not used the Western cause-effect structures, the links in the stories are non-linear and so is their progression. The western ideal of a palpable beginning, middle and end is not present in the Indian works. A story as seen in this novel is a form that is not moving towards a preconceived culmination but as being constituted of several voices, all of which serve to make it richer. The narrator tells the story from various vantage points in time and space. Most of the stories begin like jigsaw puzzles with a limited meaning but conclude with an intelligible pattern. The various parts of a jigsaw puzzle or the incomplete story are supplied by various characters. The narrator is important to the extent of bringing all of them together a task enormously important and without which inspite of their existence these versions at best remain partially meaningful. In order to evoke an insight their coming together is inevitable. The structure of the novel that brings together many stories is also important in that the ideas that seek a definition through this novel (like Nationalism, Citizenry, community etc.) are given a fuller representation through this source than the partial view given by history and the disruptive and radical one of anecdotes. The book has two sub-sections: *Going Away and Coming home*. Both phrases indicate the queer sense of home and homelessness that the Partition victims have experienced that allows them to dispense with a fixed point that signifies a point of departure.

IV. Theme of Partition in the Novel

“At the origin of India and Pakistan lies the national trauma of Partition, a trauma that freezes fear into silence, and for which The Shadow Lines seeks to find a language, a process of mourning, and perhaps even a memorial.”

(Suvir Kaul in the essay “Separation Anxiety.”) The year 1947 spelt for India a heightened consciousness of the very idea of a nation. Not only was freedom from the colonial rule ushered in and a long cherished desire of a free country made available to the Indians, it also meant that the arrival of freedom signalled a virtual dislocation for a big fraction of the population: The birth of the free nation was accompanied by excruciating labour pains of the event of Partition. Histories of both sides portray this event in passing as a misfortune that arose out of the power interests of the ‘other’ side. In the history textbooks the struggle for Independence is seen

to have concluded successfully, it was hailed as a model of the practice of the new philosophy of *ahimsa*. It can however legitimately be called non-violent only if we chose to gloss over the very existence of the event of Partition that accompanied the midnight decree of freedom- the biggest migration of human population that the sub-continent or perhaps the world has ever witnessed. It entailed loss of human life on both sides. In its magnitude it was one of the most important events in the Indian history and it affected the life patterns of thousands of families who travelled in caravans, horses, carts and cattle from West Punjab and in homemade boats from East Bengal. How does history talk of these migrants? How does history justify this act of the state at that time? Urvashi Butalia in her book *The Other Side of Silence* says that the state has strangely made no memorials to mark this momentous event. However the memory of Partition has very well been preserved by the communities in the confines of their homes through stories and anecdotes told by the way of mouth and passed through one generation to the other. Of late this interest in the documentation of the private experience of Partition has been performed by our Literature. Indian Writing in English has seen a spurt in the publication of Partition related Literature. *The Shadow Lines* is, among other issues, a book about the Bengal Partition. The experiences of Tha'mma through the trope of the divided house (as discussed earlier) clearly bring out her side of the story about the event. The story of the old uncle *Jethamoshai* captures the poignant side of the human experience of Partition and ofcourse the depiction of the penury and destitution of Tha'mma's poor relatives capture the economic effects of Partition.

V. Community and Communal Strife

The Shadow Lines takes up the issue of Partition (1947) and the author presents through it an elaborate critique of the whole idea of a nation as it emerged in the circumstances. **Community** as a condition prior to Partition is seen as an ideal state and the narratives that the community produces are seen as being more representative of their experience than history. The natural community in the Indian subcontinent across Punjab and Bengal got split into two nations following the call for Partition. What followed was the physical dislocation of 15 million people from the places that their communities had traditionally called home. Those who crossed over to the Indian side arrived landless, clueless and resourceless to be a part of the rejoicing in Delhi on the eve of country's Independence. The Partition

had thus disrupted the existence of 'natural communities'. A classification about natural and interest oriented communities is used by Sudipta Kaviraj to draw up an elaborate case about the difference between *nation* and *community*. He draws heavily on the work of the sociologist Toennies to discuss two kinds of communities: *gemeinschaften* which is the primary, traditional group, and which according to Kaviraj 'one does not make an interest actuated decision to belong.' On the other hand is *gesellschaften*, similar to modern nations, which are based on the convergence of political and economic interests. The Partition necessitates the disruption of *gemeinschaften* embodied by the old communities in Bengal and Punjab in order to create *gesellschaften*: India and Pakistan. Further, 'these imagined communities can place their boundaries in time and space anywhere they like.'...unlike the former which have 'naturally limited contours.' So whereas the former state reflects a cultural bonding, the latter is based on political interest. To these groups are also then linked their own forms of narration. Narratives, according to Kaviraj 'are always told from someone's point of view...they try to paint a picture of some kind of an ordered, intelligible, humane and habitable world...literally produce a world in which the self finds home.' The *gemeinschaften*, therefore has its own community specific narratives and *gesellschaften* acquires it in due course. Whereas the former lives in age old stories, shared in various forms by the community, the latter finds a home in Histories. Community also comes to us as a concept through the reading of the experience of Partition. Community, as it appears through the government documents gets reduced to numbers that bear the brunt of state policy. These communities are visualised by the state as characterised by one single characteristic-language or religion. These are the communities on paper and convenient as subjects for policy formulation. But 'real' communities lie outside the ambit of these documents and as Melville talks of places such as 'kokovoko, an island far away to the West and South' which is not 'down in any map because true places never are', these communities too are only lived, seldom represented. The Partition of India was based on the justification of communal tension between Hindus and Muslims but our literatures have presented to us far more complex designs of communities with composite structures that have for considerable time shared a common culture inspite of religious differences. In this regard Bhalla argues that there

are hardly any chronicles, songs, kissas and *tamashas* in Punjab, which record a long history of irreconcilable hatred between Hindus and Muslims. What the Governments never addressed was that

culture instead of religion could be an equally valid characteristic defining communities, that culture far predated religion as a constituent of a community, that it was absurd to lump together culturally alien Muslims of Bangladesh and Pakistan as one nation and force the East and West sides of Punjab and Bengal respectively to be declared a part of India. Subsequently the Nationalists construct the other side as a country politically, ethically and *inherently* opposed to itself. The Partition of India in this sense was an important event because it cartographically relocated what were once closely existing natural communities and instead formulated an *imagined community* of the nation. The history of India being the narrative of the modern nation rather than the primordial (and now secondary) community told the tale of the nation and obliterated that of the society. Riots between communities as a characteristic 20th Century phenomenon figure in the book prominently. The author also focuses on how they are portrayed variedly by the newspapers and the author's imagination. Whereas in the author's imagination they have stood out as a single most important event of his childhood, in the newspapers and other sources they do not even merit a mention. The author looks for reasons that lead to this silence in portrayal of riots by the state. The reason, of course is not far to find: the difficulty in representing an enemy that arises from *within* rather than *without*. The new age stories (literature) therefore become the narrative of the communities and make up for the silence in history when it comes to the portrayal of events like partition and riots. It records what happened to the partition victims and subsequently victims of the numerous civil strifes whose point of view always remains underrepresented because these incidents undermine the very *notion of a nation* that history purports to create. It is also ironic that post partition, people across the border share all their old stories but from a point completely separate histories. And as Ghosh points out the nature of this relationship is governed by

... that indivisible sanity that binds people to each other Independently of their governments. And that prior, independent relationship is the natural enemy of government, for it is in the logic of the states that to exist at all they must claim the monopoly of all relationships between people. (230) It is shown how when the communities give way to nation their narration is taken over by a totalizing history. In *The Shadow Lines*, Tha'mma receives her ideas about the new nation that she comes to inhabit after Bangladesh becomes another country. Some voices in the contemporary Indian Writing in English have studied the writing and historical justification of partition in this light. Historians have tried to read a communal angle into the event and tried to trace a genealogy of such events with a 'retrospective

intelligibility' that leads to a known and expected end. It is interesting to note, therefore, in this light that while they highlighted stray incidents of communal violence in the pre-partition time to give a historical justification to the inevitable phenomenon of Partition, in *The Shadow Lines*, on the other hand riots, civilstrife and communal riots do not find expression in the official records. This happens because the same incidents, which at one time supported the political decisions will at the present only go on to, hamper its legitimacy. In both cases the community experience and its depiction suffers. The accounts of partition completely ignore the fact of the composite quality of relationships that existed between people of different religions and that there were other potent factors of their cohesion like a shared cultural ethos. *Train to Pakistan* by Khushwant Singh talks of such a definition of community in the village of Manomajra. Some of these books show the existence of an alternate religion with people of different faiths looking upon a common shrine (in this case a sandstone slab) as religious. Interestingly, this feature about close knit cohesive communities later gets transported to the imagined community of the state of otherwise riot-ravaged India.

VI. Postcolonial Literature

As students of History we have all come across the term *Colonial*. We also know that the germs of modern day economic progress of the first world countries really lie in the movement called *Industrial Revolution*. With the coming of this movement in 17th century Europe, several fundamental changes were made in the means and modes of production. With the coming of mechanical support and subsequently industry the medieval economic model of feudalism was replaced by *Capitalism*. Capitalism was spurred on by the then pervasive ideology of *Utilitarianism* inspired by ideologues like Jeremy Bentham. The chief concern of this movement was "the greatest good of the greatest number." Not only was this 'goodness' solely material in nature, it also did away with all faith in morality and right action. Therefore to look for material benefit became the chief concern of those who held the means of production i.e. the capitalists. The coming of Industry led to quick production of a large quantity of goods. To begin with this seemed like a welcome change from the earlier arduous methods of production that were both labour intensive and time consuming. However soon a new concern began

to plague the capitalists: that of depleting home markets and lack of raw materials. Simultaneously another development was taking place: the advancement of geography with the coming of sophisticated sea vessels and implements like magnetic compass. This meant that the Capitalists could not only get new places and markets to sell their mass produced goods but also find treasures of cheap raw materials. Thus began an unequal relationship between these two kinds of blocks of nations: one, mostly European, the beneficiary of Industrial Revolution looking for markets and raw materials and the other, belonging to Asia, Africa and America waiting to be exploited. This exploitation that lasted over two centuries did not remain merely material in nature. It transformed itself to other forms: it became ideological, cultural and also spiritual. If we talk of India, the colonial exploitation on the economic front included a systematic destruction of the existing Indian Industry and the exploitation of its rich raw materials that included crops, minerals and metals. Dadabhai Naoroji, the first Indian to criticize this gross exploitation of India as a colony by the British said in this regard that Britain had acted like a “sponge” sucking out all that was valuable year after year with impunity and depositing the spoils on its shores. Gradually the ambition of the Raj increased and what they desired subsequently was conquering the colony also culturally and spiritually. It is in this regard that they imposed English as a method of instruction and also introduced ‘the classics of English Literature’ into Indian classrooms. This total exploitation of India went on till the year 1947 when India attained freedom. Post World War II has seen many of these erstwhile colonies attain freedom partly as a result of sustained Popular Movements against foreign rule and partly because as a consequence of the economic ill effects of WWII most of these erstwhile colonies became incapable of supporting overseas rule. For these countries in Asia, Africa and S.America, the experience of colonialism has become a major reference point in understanding their recent history. When we see this perception in the literature of these countries we study it as **Post-Colonial literature**. In their book *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures* (1989), Bill Ascroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin say that though historically Post-Colonial means “after- colonisation”, in literature it signifies “all the experience affected by the colonial process from the beginning of colonisation to the present day.” John Theime, the editor of the famous *Arnold Anthology of Post-Colonial Literature* (1996) talks of two pivotal concerns of Post-colonialism: 1. Interrogation of Euro centric conceptions of culture; 2. Interrogation of former canonical orthodoxies of “English Studies.” The methods, modes and means of analyzing information,

perceiving life experiences and institutions have, under colonial influence always been affected by the notion of European superiority and native people's inferiority. With the coming of Post-colonialism this placement of Europe in the center as a model has ceased. The cultural systems and ethos of these new nations are now being analysed not with an outside European standard but by their own standard. It is like the locus of control has shifted from without to within. In India this talk of the change in the curriculum of English departments emerged and was first *appealed* by the introduction of a cursory paper on Commonwealth Literature. However the growing consensus on revising syllabus cannot be ignored for long. Recent years have seen a remarkable change in both the content and approach to the teaching of English in the entire country. The syllabii have not only seen an inclusion of more Indian writers writing in English but also that of Indian Writing in regional languages translated into English. Though in India we have not taken the radical route of "abolition of the English Department" as suggested by the famous Nigerian author Ngugi Wa

Th'ongo, we have certainly considered rereading the prescribed English texts and the new Indian and Other World writings with a renewed sensibility by which we are no longer the subjects. Indian Writing in English today has to shake off the western influence it has been wearing since it was first introduced and has to begin asserting its credentials more genuinely.

VII. Home /Homelessness

In the novel *The Shadow Lines* home is in an allegorical relationship with nation. Tha'mma talks of her upside-down house in Dhaka and the story of that house is in deed the story of partitioned India. As children living in a joint family in Dhaka, Tha'mma and her sister Mayadebi are witness to the feud between their father and his brother. Things come to such a pass that they think of dividing their house. This division is so tangible that an actual line is drawn in the middle of the house dividing everything including the commode. In this ludicrous detail the partition comes out for the reader as an event that

was both irrational and avoidable. Another aspect of Partition of the house that is later applied to the nation is about the ideological division that follows this material division. Once the Partition has taken place, the other side of the house becomes inaccessible to everybody including the two girls, Tha'mma and Mayadebi. Since Tha'mma is the elder one, she talks of the house as the **upside down house** in which everything is the opposite of how things naturally are. The two nations just like the two parts of a household were united at one time but the course of history (or failure of vision) divides them and for sustaining their separation the difference has to be created. These stories that Tha'mma creates to bring alive to her younger sister the situation of the other part of the house, are in spirit comparable to the modern version of fake national pride that is also likewise based on false stories of difference. Her decision to go to Dhaka, which is her erstwhile home in order to bring back her old sick uncle, is a very unsettling time for her. Routine activity of furnishing her personal details while finishing the documentation for her visa forms raise fundamental doubts about her identity. For the first time the sure shot and composed Tha'mma goes through pangs of some fundamentally disturbing interrogation. She wonders as to how the 'place of her birth had come to be messily at odds with her nationality'. She cannot resolve the chaos that surfaces in the patterns that are so essential to her identity. The book has two sub-sections: *Going Away and Coming home*. Both phrases indicate the queer sense of home and homelessness that the Partition victims have experienced that allows them to dispense with a fixed point that signifies a point of departure.

Suggested Readings

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Suggested Questions

A. Give detailed answers to the following:

1. How is the novel “The Shadow Lines” both an example of and diversion from the *Bildungsroman* (novel of growth) tradition of novel?
2. What are Tha’mma’s views on Nation and Nationalism? How do her experiences account for these? How are her views challenged in the novel?
3. How does the author use the trope of a divided feud-ridden house to discuss the issue of Partition of India?
4. Discuss the role of the narrator’s cousin Tridib in fashioning the author’s perception of life.
5. According to the author “The Shadow Lines” was influenced by the 1984 Anti- Sikh riots. How does the book deal with the question of civil strife and rioting in Modern India? Discuss in detail the

narrator's description of his experiences as a schoolboy caught in the 1964 Calcutta riots, their lasting influence on the narrator and also his subsequent questioning of their depiction in history?

6. Discuss the growth of the narrator's relationship with Ila from being a schoolboy in Calcutta to an adult in London.

7. How does the book question the writing of history? Discuss esp. the portrayal of the Partition of India in history books and how in this regard "public chronicles" are challenged by "private chronicles"?

8. What are the "Shadow Lines" that the author talks about? How is the question of invented Nationhood esp. in relation with the Partition of India discussed in the book?

9. How does the non-linear structure of the book compliment its theme?

10. Discuss the relationship of the English family of the Prices and the Dutta-Chaudhary family of Bengal spanning three-generations.

11. Who is Tridib's love-across-the sea? Discuss the relationship between Tridib and May.

12. Discuss Ila as a typical example of the cosmopolitan, travelling diasporic. Also highlight her experiences, including that of marrying Nick, which bring out her troubled racial and cultural identity?

B. Write short notes on: Partition in the novel, Nation, Diaspora, History, Death of Tridib, Robi's account of the Dhaka riot, The Upside-down- house, Mrs. Price. Nick Price, Jethamoshai, The Shadow Lines, Community, Civil Strife, Communalism.