

Memories And Nostalgia Imbued In The Shadow Lines By Amitav Ghosh

Dr Khushboo

Assistant Professor
Magadh Mahila College, Patna

Fayezah Iqbal

PhD Scholar (English)
Patna University

The collective memories and nostalgia of the past are decisive tools that do form the basis of the power and political dynamics of the present. The novel *Shadow Lines* (1988) by Amitav Ghosh encapsulates this phenomenon by dissecting socio-cum-political vagaries and the entangled identities in India from 1965-1971 through the trajectory of memory, nostalgia, and remembrance. It takes readers through convoluted pathways of memories etched on the psyche of the Indians, who survived and witnessed political upheavals, right from the freedom struggle, to the creation of East Bangladesh in 1971. Each character derives their identity and recognition from the memories of their cultural, social, and political exposure, inclinations, and conditioning.

The second-generation characters like Tridib and the narrator with strong fascination and lingering memories of Europe appear as misfits and can neither rigidify nor confine their emotions and identity to one nation. Whereas Thamma succumbs to nostalgia when she decides to meet her separated Jethamoshai despite the furious civil wars going on in Bangladesh in 1964. The paper aims to shed light on the constant struggle of these characters to fit into their status quo and political correctness against the inertia of overwhelming nostalgia associated with their times and individual lives.

The characters can be seen trapped in the bubbles of fervent pleasant and unpleasant memories with their land and cultural bonding based on which they build and orient their perspectives towards their present which in turn collectively affected the socio-political scenario at large of those times. There have been more works in literary fiction and on an experiential scale in the 20th century to study, analyse and shed light on such poignant and humanistic sufferings. One such work in contemporary times is *'Identity and Experience at the India-Bangladesh Border-The Crisis of Belonging(2020)'* by Debdatta Chowdhary, which is an empirical study of border narratives between India and Bangladesh and refers to borders as the line of convergence and negotiations, rather than a

periphery. Another book ‘*Train to India: Memories of Another Bengal (2009)*’ by Maloy Krishna Dhar spans the period of partition to the creation of Bangladesh and underscores the potency of memories in creating history. The book brings to the fore the modes of condition for the representation of refugee conditions and the impact of such representations on literature and artistic endeavours and narratives.

Moving on to *The Shadow Lines*, we can analyse the entire concept of memories and nostalgia in the book by trifurcating the complete theme into three sub-topics:

- **Different sets of memories and their impact on the psyche of characters**
- **Cultural and sociological repercussions of strong attachment to the memories**
- **Continuing resonance and relevance of individual tribulations in *The Shadow Lines* in present times**
- Different sets of memories and their impact on the psyche of characters:

To begin with, the oldest character, the grandmother of the narrator, Thamma, fondly cherishes the memories of the freedom struggle of India and finds true solace in being patriotic to her motherland. The thought of laying down her life and departing with the most-prized possession like her gold necklace comes naturally to her. Her memories of having lived in a completely traditional joint family set up with conservative values, in the era of British-ruled India and witnessing the freedom movement shape her very distinctly from the other characters. The same factors make it extremely difficult for her to understand the inclinations of Tridib to explore the world in a free-spirited manner. Or to understand the non-conformist temperament and values of Ila brought up in London. At the same time, the nostalgia of kinship ties and longing to meet with her once once-parted Jethamoshai(uncle) is so strong that she is ready to put her life in danger once she learns about him being alive and living in Dhaka, Bangladesh.

On the other end of the spectrum is the youngest character of the novel, the narrator, born and brought up in independent India, educated in an English-medium school of Kolkata, and influenced and fascinated by the extensive worldwide knowledge poured in by Tridib. He has grown up being fascinated by the exotic lifestyles of his cousin and uncle, Ila and Roby living in London and meetings with May Price. These chequered and cherished memories of his childhood etch such a deep impression on the narrator’s mind that despite having lived and grown up in India in patriotic conditioning, he strongly yearns for exploring the vivid historical accounts of the second world war times in England and the western world.

The third character worth noting is **Ila**, who lives and grows up in London and various cities in England during the tenure of her father's service as Indian ambassador to England. She lived in that country at a time when India was newly freed and the colonial imprints were quite strong. Ila grows up with little sense of Indianness or her own culture. Instead, the memories of her childhood of adapting to English ways for gaining approval and acceptance dominate and haunt her psyche strongly thus building her into a person who appears misfit both to the Indian and British ethos. Ila's mother Mayadebi is as much awed by the colonial manners, culture, and ways which is clear by her intense liking in feeling accepted, befriending, and socialising with Britons in her neighbourhood, from the Price family.

Ila, Tridib, and Roby are characters who are never understood rightly by their contemporaries, especially Thamma, and were made to feel alienated by their relatives living in India except for the narrator. Roby and Tridib are in particular characters equally distraught with the rigid notions of patriotism, boundaries, and political bloodshed after they are exposed and have lived through global politics and connected to many countries. They freely explore the global political scenario and seek interest in the interconnectedness of world events like a world war, and the legend of various political parties rather than clinging to just one regional identity or political affiliation.

- **Cultural and sociological repercussion of strong attachment to the memories:** Distinct cultural implications and social repercussions develop in the continuous play of an intricate web of memories of independence struggle towards political affiliations and global happenings. An unending curiosity about the world and desire to transcend boundaries are some of the recurring sociological consequences (social interaction and social pattern) among the new age or the second and third-generation characters of the novel in post-independent India. The characters like Tridib, the narrator, and Roby mark a sharp divergence from the binary values of nationalism, culture, and identity. Characters like Ila, Mayadebi, and Shaheb, the Ambassador to England who live in London, and are directly exposed to the highly fetishised European land show willingness and adaptability to shed some of their characteristic cultures and assimilate with the new western ethos. Among these, Ila, the youngest of them, has lived and experienced the ways and cultures of various cities throughout the world and is uninterested in the historical accounts of Tridib about these countries. She also remains indifferent to her native

culture and faces bullying and unacceptance even in the foreign land despite her utmost efforts to embrace the land and its cultural framework.

Whereas, the first-generation characters of post-independent India like Thamma who have survived and witnessed the indelible memories of freedom struggle and India's transition to an independent sovereign country after years of colonisation constantly revive their patriotism. Thamma, her son, and her daughter-in-law find their entire being rooted in their traditional and cultural inception. Thamma, particularly practises enormous restraint in her emotional yearnings for her homeland Bangladesh in undivided India, while balancing it strongly with her allegiance and loyalty to India as the supreme thing in her life. Her strong memories of forsaking her ancestral home and extended family for choosing to remain in India drive many of her values like rejecting Western modern values totally that Ila clings to, and finding happiness in the nation's prosperity and peace.

- **Relevance and resonance of individual tribulations essayed in *The Shadow Lines* in the present times**

The sentiments of colonial bias and ostracisation faced by Ila while adapting to English ways, the colonial hangover in Mayadebi, and the unyielding attachment to Indian tradition and community in Thamma find resonance today too albeit in subtle ways. Besides, the narrator's equally strong longing for both Western and Indian values can also be seen today among the Indian diaspora living abroad. Such sentiments commonly and profoundly exist today and can be evinced through the collaborated report of Grant Thornton's South Asia Business Group, Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce & Industry (FICCI), and the High Commission of India, London, England. The report published in February 2020 provides an insight into the contribution, experiences, challenges, and journeys of growth of entrepreneurship of the Indian diaspora in the UK in the light of the following facts:

- The Indian diaspora living in the UK has become one of the largest and 6th biggest migrant groups in the country. According to the High Commission of India, London, the number of Indian migrants was 1.5 million until 2021.
- The diaspora is reported to have made huge economic contributions to the country with 654 diaspora-owned companies with an annual turnover of £100,000 and above. These companies had a combined annual turnover of £36.84 billion and they contributed together to over £1 billion of corporation tax and also invested nearly £2 billion through capital expenditure.

- These entrepreneurs have been contributing to numerous sectors including hospitality, pharmaceuticals, healthcare, food and beverage, retail, real estate and construction, technology and telecoms, and business services.
- Among the entrepreneurs, Ashok Rabheru who emigrated from Tanzania in 1967 faced racial discrimination while working as the only non-white person in his earliest jobs in the UK. Rabheru has currently been able to develop a central role in the IT department of one of the companies where he had worked initially. He also faced problems in accommodation due to his skin colour and in tracking down Indian food.
- Akash Mehta, the founder of a modern hair-dresser wellness brand, Fable & Mane completed his electronic engineering and a specific degree from Estée Lauder, LVMH, and Dior for his entrepreneurial pursuits. Akash also admits to the challenges he faced in his early education days but was determined to build a business in the UK beauty industry. He now strives to give platform and recognition to the people of colour and help thrive the Indian values in business and advises all Indians to stay attached to their roots.
- Mahesh Raikar who is the founder of Wrapchic, a hot destination for Indian food lovers in the UK also confronted some level of institutional bias but remained undeterred to pursue his goals. Based on his experience of 9 years of working with a hospitality giant, Compass Group, Raikar ventured into the food business. He soon received recognition for his efforts.
- Leena Malde, who has escalated the horticulture business Wealmoor and also specialised in growing, packing, and marketing subtropical fresh produce from all over the world is a strong believer in building a culturally inclusive environment devoid of nepotism. Having grown up in a diverse environment she urges people to be open-minded, focussing on capabilities and expertise and embracing diversity.
- Dr. Sanjeev Kanoria, a well-known UK-based liver transplant specialist and founder of Advinia Healthcare completed his surgical training in the country in 1987 and yearned to give back those services in India where people had inadequate services. He fulfilled his dream by opening a liver-transplant hospital in Chennai and another Suasth hospital in Mumbai.
- The CEO of B&M retail, Simon Arora feels honoured and proud of his Indian roots, and at the same time is thankful to the UK for providing him with growth opportunities. Like Dr. Sanjeev Kanoria, he also wants to serve his fellow Indians back home and help other Indians to set up their firms in the UK.

- UK-based Nikhil Shah, who was awarded the Young Entrepreneur of the Year 2019 by Asian Business Awards and Innovation Finalist 2020 by Lloyds National Business Awards is open and attached to both British and Indian ideals. He finds both values to help give an open-minded outlook.

After having known the overriding sentiments of love for Indian roots, and open-mindedness to both Indian and British cultures among the UK-based Indians, it's important to take into account the continuing practices of the British era that manifest clear signs of a colonial hangover in India. A colonial hangover or attachment to colonial imprints is also an overwhelming emotion in the novel, that orient the inclinations of the characters in a certain way. The traces of British practices can be found in the police, governance machinery, judiciary, parliament, and the Indian psyche in the following ways:

- The Indian parliament continues to use British terms during the proceedings. For instance, the Rajya Chairperson recently told the ministers to refrain from using colonial terms during the proceedings when Minister of State for Finance, P Radhakrishnan said “ I beg you” before listing the papers on the table.
- In parliament, the durwans are still supposed to be attired in colonial dress code with long turbans and have to stand in an upright position alongside the Speaker and Chairman since British times.
- Similarly, the judges in India are continued to be addressed as ‘My Lord’ and ‘Your honour’ continuing with the British legacy. However, the Supreme Court had said in 2014, that it is not compulsory to use My Lord and Your Honour in courts, however they should be addressed in a dignified and respectful way.
- In recent times, the government has tried to do away with British practices in governance. A few of these include the banning of red beacons on the official cars of ministers and bureaucrats, changing the Budget presentation date to 1st February from 28th-29th February, and merging the Railway and General budgets.
- The craze for English-medium schools in India is too well known and is a strong reminder of the people's conditioning since ages to the perceived superior value and goodness in the English language and culture and its potency to provide good global career opportunities and recognition. In a survey report of 2019-20 by UDISE (Unified District System for Education), more than 26% of the schoolchildren in India studied in English medium schools. In Delhi, Punjab, and Haryana, there are more children whose medium of instruction has been changed from vernacular languages to English and Delhi had a 60% jump in the number of students in English-medium

schools from a mere 7.5%, in 2014. The reason for the rise in enrollment was attributed to the increased aspirational urge among the masses to have their children educated in English-medium students.

The continued migration from Bangladesh to India from the 1960s to late 20th century: The **persistent problem and conundrum of migration** illuminated in the novel through the lives of Thamma and her Jethamoshai is also an ongoing reality. The thesis of Madhumita Sarma, Ph.D. from Adelaide University, Australia on '*A Study Of Migration From Bangladesh To Assam, India And Its Impact*' in March 2015 has brought to the fore facts on this phenomenon based on field surveys conducted from 2009-2012 in Assam with the help of sources from various government and non-government agencies. The research shows that **since 1947**, there has been a continuous influx of refugees and immigrants in **Eastern India** and especially Assam from East Pakistan. Especially during the **1960s**, large-scale migration took place from East Pakistan to India, following political turbulence. The period of **1971** particularly marked the highest migration to India leading to the formation of Bangladesh. The accurate reasons for the migration are not well documented and established, but the social, economic, and historical factors and decreased land fertility, damage of property, and poor crop yield are the underlying causes behind it.

Conclusion:

The memories portrayed in *The Shadow Lines*(1988) embody the popular conscience, underlying unease and dormant fears, closely-held values, inclinations for newness, love, and strong attachments to one's roots and origin. These memories encompass the journey of characters through the Indian independence movement and their resistance to stay in their motherland, and not shed the values of the past. The nostalgia of the glorious and strong sentiments attached to the independence struggle for the country encapsulates the struggle of the characters to embrace socio-political change. The nostalgia also consists of the characters' high-spiritedness to accept the status quo of abandoning their land and living as refugees and getting recognized and accepted in a foreign land. In addition to this, characters like the narrator and Tridib can't get over an overpowering nostalgia for the West, the free exchange of democratic and modern ideals. The novel is replete with memories of transculturation and culture shock that characters undergo in the process of migrating from one country to another, embracing one set of values as supreme or absolute.

The yearning for **recognition** manifests in various ways in the characters, where some seek recognition in a foreign land instead of the cultural transformation these characters undergo. While other characters seek internal validation and recognition for their huge sacrifices made in the course of partition and war to hold on to their motherland. The memories of Ila, Roby, and Thamma's Jethamoshai of living as immigrants and **refugees** shape them and the others into different citizens, who eventually acknowledge the futility of single identity, accept and inherit multiculturalism departing from the rigid notions of regional, communal and linguistic identities. The nostalgia of the exposure to the modern ideals of third-world countries and the euphoria of independence become the foundation of identity and reconciliation among characters like the narrator and Tridib. However, all the characters converge in moments of crisis like war, partition, and loss of life, where borders and boundaries pale into significance and seem like symbolic and illusory shadow lines only to separate people from one another.

Works Cited

1. Das, Pratigya, "Are Indians still suffering from a colonial hangover?", *The Times Of India*, March 22, 2018, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/blogs/melange/are-indians-still-suffering-from-a-colonial-hangover/>. Accessed 17 Nov.2022.
2. Federation of Indian Chambers Of Commerce and Industry, "India in the UK: the diaspora effect 2.0: Celebrating generations of diaspora success", High Commission Of India, London, March 2022, <https://www.grantthornton.co.uk/globalassets/1.-member-firms/united-kingdom/pdf/publication/2022/india-in-the-uk-the-diaspora-effect-2.0.pdf>, Accessed 17 Nov.2022.
3. Ghosh, Amitav, *Shadow Lines*, New Delhi, Ravi Dayal Publishers, 1988. Print
4. Government of India, Ministry of Education, Department of School Education and Literacy, "Unified District Information System For Education Plus (UDISE+) 2019-20", July 2021, https://dashboard.udiseplus.gov.in/assets/images/pdf/UDISE+2019_20_Booklet.pdf, Accessed 21st Nov.2022.
5. Mukherji, Partha N. "The Great Migration of 1971: I: Exodus." *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 9, no. 9, 1974, pp. 365–69. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4363448>, Accessed 19 Nov. 2022.
6. Roy, Edmond. "India: A very colonial hangover", Lowy Institute, June 19, 2020, <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/india-very-colonial-hangover>, Accessed 17th Nov 2022.
7. Sarma, Madhumita. "A Study Of Migration From Bangladesh to Assam, India And Its Impact", The University Of Adelaide, March 2015, <https://digital.library.adelaide.edu.au/dspace/bitstream/2440/97379/3/02whole.pdf>, Accessed 21st Nov 2022.