

## Space As a Metaphor In Amitav Ghosh's The Shadow Lines

**Pritha Singh Kushwah**

MA Second Semester  
English With Culture Studies  
Christ Univerity, Banergatta Campus  
Bangalore, Karnataka

HHH

### **Abstract**

*Amitav Ghosh treats fiction creatively and incorporates elements of historical issue and personal experiences. His 'The Shadow Lines' is an exceptional piece which beautifully takes us to the journey of invisible borders. Ghosh has entwined the consequence of colonialism on the culture and society of two major cities: Calcutta and Dhaka. Indeed, the novel inherently contains the element of postcoloniality, narrated in a non-sequential manner, but the mental spaces used by the author becomes significant as the story unfolds. The main aspect of the paper is to critically decode the structure of the novel through the lens of postcolonial spatiality. The analysis seeks to examine how space becomes place of contact and conflict. It also aims to look at the mental spaces in the memories that haunt the narrator and the characters throughout.*

**Keywords:** *metaphor, territorial, diaspora, postcolonial, identity*

The text incorporates juxtaposition of the events in the lives of two families with very different cultural upbringing from two different places, India and England. It is a novel that encompasses a family saga spanning three generations. The events that occur are mostly in Calcutta and London but they signify the major historical episodes that took place during that time in India. The narrator of the novel is nameless like a spectator who is present through out for an objective presentation of the events. The young Indian nameless narrator has gone to London to study but as he is born in the post partitioned India, in 1952, he tries to comprehend the events that happened before and after his birth. As a diasporic, he experiences multiple upheavals that frame his diasporic identity which comprises of both sameness and differences bounded by the geographical and territorial sense of being. The novel is in two parts: Going Away and Coming Home. The two chapters cover the stories of his relatives, particularly his grandmother Thamma and uncle Tridib. The narrator praises Tridib (the narrator's second uncle) because he (Tridib) possesses vast general knowledge and has a unique and eccentric attitude for events and locations. It is Tridib who has taught the narrator that how one should use their imagination precisely. Due to

this narrator is able to break free from the boundaries surrounding him. Unlike the family of narrator the narrator was deeply affected by the death of Tridib. Tridib died in communal riots that happened in Dhaka in 1963-64. We see that the narrator is on the search to find the reason for his death. The narrator's grandmother Thamma is one of the major characters who value time a lot and dislikes Tridib for not respecting it. But there is something in Tridib that fascinates the narrator. It is his point of view and the way he looks at the events which is different from others. Tridib taught the narrator to use imagination so that he can frame the metaphors of space. This creative use of imagination helps the narrator to blur the geographical boundaries. Death of Tridib do not impact his family but the narrator explores the reason of his death. Tridib loves May Price and puts himself in danger to save her from the communal riots of 1963-64 in Dhaka. His death is the core of the text as it reflects the tensions of the religious fundamentalism and its outcome. The narrator finds out the truth of Tridib's death years later when he attends a conference on South Asian history in London. He recollects the images of Calcutta in the space owned by his memory. He maps mentally space and time to find a link between his "nightmare bus ride back from school and the events that befell Tridib and others in Dhaka." (Ghosh2005;214) The non linear movement in the text brings to the fore-front the important historical movements like the Swadeshi Movement, The Second World War, the partition of India, the communal riots in Dhaka and Calcutta, the Maoist Movement, the Indo-China War, the 1965 India Pakistan War, the fall of Dhaka in East Pakistan and the creation of Bangladesh. Amitav Ghosh is thus successful in giving us a text that brings forth the differences of race, language and religion. While dealing with a concept of nation which is complex as well as unstable due to its spatial presentation that makes it a post-colonial as well as diasporic text. Amitav Ghosh take us to the events of 1947, when India got free from the British Empire. Thamma is a witness to this freedom which bought the partition of India. She witnesses her disillusionment to find her birth place Dhaka separated from her by bloodshed and lines on the map as a part of different country. This leads to a feeling of hatred for the

West Pakistani fellow citizens. She supports the freedom struggle during the 1965 Indo-Pakistan war and becomes a hopeless aggressive nationalist suffering the dilemma of misplaced citizenship.

Amitav Ghosh in his essay *The Diaspora In Indian Culture* states that the relationship between India and Indians is more like a 'historical anomaly'. The imagination reverberates with the cultural links which can be comprehended by the 'metaphor of space'. He depicts the traces or the that which cannot be translated across the boundaries of nation-state. *The Shadow Lines* is a novel depicting lines, sometimes visible sometimes invisible creating distances among people. It allows readers to create the story in their imaginations. In his book, Ghosh investigates human relationships in the context of historical, cultural, and political circumstances both as colonisers and colonised. The book, as a postcolonial literary work, revolves around self-aware contemplation of topics such as nationality, internationality, spatiality, and historical self-determination. It is essential to notice the fact that space plays a crucial role in Ghosh's fiction, and the narrator of the novel is obsessed with the remembered and imagined spaces. The author has the ability to build bridges between individuals, locations, ethnicities, and cultures in order to show the influence of "overlapping territories, intertwined histories" in our lives which is interconnected (Said 3). The element of 'space' (be it local or global, seen or unseen) in his narrative is vital for an individual or familial transformation. These spaces somehow define the characters or bring out the 'real them. For instance, the narrator describes Tridib as someone who is easy to talk to, but he has a sense of detachment. The narrator says, "he did not seem to make friends with people he was talking to, and that perhaps was why he was happiest in neutral, impersonal places-coffee houses, bars, street-corner addas- the sort of place where people come and go away without expecting to know each other any further."

In a postcolonial text like this, space, place and identity play the primary role. Space implies a geographical or abstract site, as well as an undeclared room or area. In comparison, a place is that scene or event when space is owned. It incorporates language, landscapes, environment, cultures etc. The way an individual or group defines itself is identity. I feel *Shadow Lines* is about the relation the narrator shares with Tridib. They incorporate each other in their own personal space. Even though Trideb is killed in a communal riot, the narrator recalls something about the time and place they spent together. They're interconnected by the memory and imagination spaces (Sharma). May Price, the love of Tridib, becomes

an integral part of Tridib's personal space, even though she lives far away from Calcutta in London. She visits India, and both of them has created a space for themselves. For example, Tridib says, "this was our ruin" when he pointed out some old building. In this sense, identification, place and space become crucial in the novel. Amitav Ghosh has mentioned many places in his narration. He is of the opinion that a place must be a part of history (Ghosh). Tridib has lived in Calcutta (in an old family house), May and Ila have lived in London, Jethamoshaji in Dhaka. According to French anthropologist Marc Augue, each of these locations has a history and is linked to a sense of self. He claims that place "can be defined as relational, historical and concerned with identity." (Augue 77). All of these places inherently consist identity because they inculcate present, past and future.

"*The Shadow Lines*" has two parts: 'going away' and 'coming home. The former describes how Mayadebi went to England with her husband and son Tridib, and the latter illustrates the narrator's coming back to his home (India). Ghosh tells about the history of partition, division of borders and nationalities. The idea of identity is linked with nationality. However, these borders or lines are not visible. Thamma (the narrator's grandmother) wants to know the border that had divided India and Pakistan when she is in the aeroplane.

'But if there aren't any trenches or anything, how are people to know? I mean, where's the difference then? And if there's no difference, both sides will be the same, and it'll be just like it used to be before when we used to catch a train in Dhaka and get off in Calcutta the next day without anybody stopping us. What was it all for then - Partition and all the killing and everything - if there isn't something in between?' (Ghosh, 167). Partha Chatterjee rightly says in "*Whose Imagined Communities*" that idea of the nation under colonialism is given by colonisers. We need to keep in mind Europe and America were dominant countries. not colonised. So, is it the need for another county or partition that came from the division that colonisers created amongst the Indians in terms of Hindu vs Muslims?

It is also becoming crucial to highlight the usage of local and global spaces by the author. Ghosh succeeds in emphasising that creating a home away from home is challenging. His sole aim on the other hand, is a travel and exploring boundaries. The narrator's grandmother is ethical, a schoolteacher who never compromises in life. She chose to stay alone in India and raise her children alone after her husband's death. Thamma is someone who is not ready to come out of her principles and rigidity

(Shukla). At the same time, Ila chose to live in London who wants to be free. She says, "free of your bloody culture and free of all of you." (Ghosh 98). Ila and Thamma are both closed individuals. Finally, they succumb to defeat. Thamma's nephew (Trideb) is killed, and Ila has assimilated herself into a debatable system of thinking focused on binary oppositions to time and place (Ghosh 84).

Ghosh presents the aftermaths of colonization that impact primarily an individual to the extent that he segregates and isolates at the same time with his memory and imagination to create spaces of substance. There is a mix history with "fleeting memories, fact and fiction," manipulating space-time, splitting it, and exposing large cultural interests in short periods (Grmusá, 2009). The geographical dispersion and the hybrid identity provide a better understanding of the historical facts. Gosh has perceived history as the trajectory of events which are responsible for the dislocation. As a result the echoes of the present time makes the notion of past unstable. The central issue of the idea of identity and nationhood is included to depict the borders and their imaginary constraints. He is constantly searching for cultural spaces in dark smeared lines or maybe he is trying to search for space between the cultures.

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