

A Comparative Analytical Approach on Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* in the National Contexts of India and Overseas



Jebun Ara Geeti, PhD,
The University of Sydney

ABSTRACT: Amitav Ghosh's much-acclaimed novel *The Shadow Lines* generally explores the history of traumatic memories of cultural dislocations, and the Partition between India and Pakistan in 1947. Since it was published in 1988, the text has been widely studied and explored by numerous critics from diverse geographical and cultural backdrops particularly in India, the UK, the US, and Australia. It is amazing that the book has received multifaceted evaluations and assessments across the globe that have rendered a fascinating impact on its critics and readers who have admired the book as both contemporary and classic. It is important to note that "national context" remains a vital and influential criterion in evaluating any scholarly work that has the potential to become a part of world literature. Besides, analysing Ghosh's reception from India and three major western countries can significantly foreground different or alternative patterns of literary criticism that can refrain a popular author from being misjudged. Often a general analysis of significant works of a transcontinental author can be partial or restricted in an increasingly globalised literary scenario of the world. Thus, this paper aims to examine the influence of prominent national institutions based in India, the U.K., the U.S., and Australia in shaping the critical reception of this contemporary postcolonial author.

KEYWORDS: Partition, Dislocation, Geographical Boundaries, Identity Crisis, East-West Dilemma

INTRODUCTION

This paper explores the critical reception of Amitav Ghosh's popular novel *The Shadow Lines* (1988) in the national contexts of India, the UK, the US, and Australia. The focus of this paper is to define how literary critics in four national contexts evaluated postcolonial history differently, or somewhat similarly, and how that affects their reception of Ghosh. Apart from India I have carefully selected Ghosh's reception from the UK, the US, and Australia while Ghosh's works are widely read and analysed in these three major countries. It is important to note that national context has always been an effective standard in assessing any scholarly work that has the potential to become a part of world literature. The evaluation of an author's critical reception through national context can be more feasible in case of postcolonial writers who are mostly transnational and diasporic in nature and can foreground different or alternative patterns of literary criticism that can refrain a popular author from being misjudged. A general or worldwide analysis of scholarly works of a transcontinental author like Ghosh can be partial or restricted in an increasingly globalised literary scenario. Thus, this paper critically examines the influence of prominent academic publishers and journals based in India, the UK, US, and Australia in shaping the critical reception of this transnational author. All the critics examined in this paper from each nationality independently epitomize their national evaluation of Ghosh's much acclaimed novel *The Shadow Lines*. I believe this paper has significant implications for a deeper understanding not only of Ghosh's work, but also of postcolonial theory and writing practice, as well as its connections with globalization and cosmopolitanism. The analytical and critical methodology employed in this paper well reflects the contemporary literary criticism made on Third World Literature. In addition, this research can be an effort to move hegemonic sites of knowledge from the center to the periphery that can also challenge the center periphery binary. In particular, this paper interrogates the historical, cultural, and social motivations behind both Indian (subaltern) and Anglo-American (hegemonic) reception of Ghosh's popular work. It is interesting to note that, analysing Ghosh's reception of this novel in four national contexts, this paper finds theoretical alignments of the idea of nationalism, imperialism, cosmopolitanism, and utopianism.

The book which held formative influence in triggering the flourishing of Indian writing in English was indisputably Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981), while Amitav Ghosh played the most influential role in the subsequent literary movement of Indian writing in English since eighties. Rushdie's novel was published in 1981, but it was Ghosh's first novel *The Circle of Reason* (1985) that has initiated a completely new inclination towards Indian novels in English. His second novel *The Shadow Lines* (1988), and his third novel *The Calcutta Chromosome* (1996) placed him in the line of contemporary emerging authors of the world. However, Ghosh exactly gained his popularity from his second novel *The Shadow Lines* (1988), that won him the most prestigious Sahitya Academy Award in India for fiction written in English. It is worth noting that Indian English novel gained

A Comparative Analytical Approach on Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* in the National Contexts of India and Overseas

financial success for the first time through the publication of Bikram Seth's *A Suitable Boy* (1993), not through Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines*. Seth's book was written on the theme of money and imagination which overnight turned him India's first millionaire novelist. R.K. Dhawan, an eminent critic of Ghosh notes that, at that time Bikram Seth "was paid a handsome amount of Rs. 2.5 crores as advance royalty for the novel by the British publishers, Orion" (Dhawan 1998, 11). In the early nineties *A Suitable Boy* (1993) became a landmark in Indian literary scenario that was also short-listed for the Booker Prize but could not win it in the final stage, as the Booker Committee wanted more editing. However, the book has a tremendous sale that has stimulated many emerging Indian writers who were envisioning to writing novels in English professionally. In the late nineties, Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997) won the Booker prize and accelerated the trend of the popularity of Indian novels across the world. Though the book was a feminist novel, but Roy was highly capable in making a criticism of the hypocrisy of the communist party through an approach of an autobiographical novel.

Since the British Raj had left India for good, many of the Indian writers have still been dealing with the freedom struggle portraying the vivid pictures of the arrogance and exploitation of the foreign rulers. Obviously, the incredible progress of the historical or the postcolonial novels in India are the resultant effects of the degrading, and an exploitative colonial past particularly after the Second World War. The most important historical event emphasized by many Indian novelists is the partition of the subcontinent in 1947 that had left a lasting religious and political crisis between Hindu and Muslims, between geographical identity and the traumatic separation. That very Partition caused tremulous riots, communal fury, forceful evacuation, dislocation where "at least one million Hindus and Muslims lost their lives" (Kapadia 2001, 23). Why Ghosh chooses to write about the traumatic memory and Partition in *The Shadow Lines* is a bit autobiographical. He was born several years after India's independence while "her mother grew up in Calcutta and her memories were of Mahatma Gandhi, non-violence and disobedience, and the terrors that accompanied Partition in 1947" (Dhawan 1998, 19). Ghosh's mother's memories were like childhood stories to him, while the image of divided India always casts a profound shadow on his tender mind. His sense of the past became more intense because his father worked in the British-Indian army, and his stories were of the war and about the predicament of his fellow-Indian army officials and soldiers. Brinda Bose, a devout critic of Ghosh comments that, Ghosh is "concerned with the Indian/ South Asian diaspora in different regions of the world, and he hones his novelistic skills in areas (both geographical and thematic) that overlap with his research interests" (Bose 2003, 17). She argues, "Diasporic identity in its inherent fracturedness clearly intrigues him; he analyses this 'space' with reference to its histories. Patterns begin to emerge as he travels between cultures/lands that diasporas straddle (India/Bangladesh/England in *The Shadow Lines*; India/Egypt in *In An Antique Land*; India/Burma/Malaya in *The Glass Palace*)." (Bose 2003,17). However, from Bose's perception of diasporic identity, *The Shadow Line* focuses on the burden of India's colonial past that has impacted heavily on the postcolonial migrants across the world. Another critic of Ghosh Suvir Kaul notes the public and private memories in this novel which he thinks "enormously productive and enabling but also traumatic and disabling" (Kaul 2018, 269). Kaul also emphasizes that the novel is "constantly engaged in the imaginative renewal of time" (269) through the stories told by the unnamed narrator, his grandmother, his cousin Ila, his uncles Tridib, and Robi, and the British woman May. Following Kaul's observation, it is noticeable that throughout the novel the author recreates a question in the minds of his readers, do you remember? that exerts a pressure to identify what weighed heavily on the memories of the past. That very question helps assessing the book as a memory novel which skillfully engages the personal lives and historical events in three countries: India, Bangladesh, and England. However, the purpose of this paper is not to explain the salient features of the memory and Partition rather to present a comparative analysis of the reception of this novel from India, the UK, the US, and Australia.

The Shadow Line (1988) is evidently a postcolonial novel being a product of specific histories of Indian subcontinent in the twentieth century that deals mainly with the Diaspora of East Pakistan where the unnamed narrator's family is Hindu who flees from their home in Dhaka after the creation of East Pakistan. They befriended an English family, the Prices, developing a cross-cultural attachment with them. The narrator of this novel encounters different, often contradictory version of national and cultural identity through the major characters in the novel –his grandmother, his cousin Ila, and his scholarly uncles Tridib, and Robi. The narrator's grandmother is depicted as sternly an idiosyncratic woman, who is a militantly nationalistic and holds a noteworthy influence on the narrator's whole life. Symbolically the grandmother might be termed as an embodiment of the national and cultural identity, who thinks national freedom can only be achieved through bloodshed, massacre, killing and nihilism.

However, the purpose of this paper is to make a comparative analysis how the history of Partition, traumatic memories of dislocation and a profound longing for the past are assessed differently or similarly by the critics of India, the UK, the US, and Australia. Following are the key points that have emerged from the analysis of Ghosh's reception in four selected countries. These crucial points would help analyzing how divergent analysis of this text affects the understanding of Ghosh's critically acclaimed novel *The Shadow Lines*.

A Comparative Analytical Approach on Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* in the National Contexts of India and Overseas

PARTITION, MEMORY, SPACE, AND IMAGINATION

It is important to note that the critics from India and three other countries of *The Shadow Lines* equally talked about the discourse of nationhood within a geographical demarcation, analyzing an inexplicable trauma linked with the Partition between India and Pakistan. Vinita Chandra, One of the Indian critics signify the role of suppressed memories in *The Shadow Lines* which threaten the tidy narrative of history and national identity. These memories indicated by Chandra involve Hindu-Muslim clash, communal violence, and riots that the critic thinks have been “deliberately wiped out of the national memory” (Chandra 2003, 68) of India, because these memories disclose the history of exploitation, partition, and foreign enemies. In comparison to Chandra, UK-based critic Jon Mee focuses on the family relationship illustrated in this novel through the presence of memory and imagination that is both autobiographical and chronicle. Unlike the Australian critic Golnar Nabizadeh, here the “memory” indicated by this UK-based Jon Mee is not that “stream of conscience” used by James Joyce in his *Ulysses* (1922) rather a remembered family history. Another Indian critic A.N Kaul criticized Ghosh for being too willing to privilege imagination over history. Kaul thinks that the novel represents an irresponsible retreat from “the real world as constituted in and through history” (Kaul 2018,308). However, UK-based Jon Mee finds similarity with Kaul of what he thinks about the “romantic trope of transcendence” (Mee 2003, 98) in this novel. Mee is confirmed that, Kaul saw echoes of the English romantic poets in this novel suggesting a phrase from the novel “the glimpse of a final redemptive mystery” which is taken from a Wordsworthian noun “Glimpse” (Gill 2012, 40). On the other hand, according to John C. Hawley, a US-based critic of this novel explains that *The Shadow Lines* is all about the “fears on memories” (Hawley 2005,70) where the unnamed narrator remains traumatized with the memories of riots in 1964, and successfully overcomes it during the riots in 1984. Hawley notes that, the plot of this novel is deeply attached to the memories of many Indian, Pakistani, and Bangladeshi which is like a journey back and forth to the traumatized memory of the arbitrary nature of nations and borders. Interestingly, an Australia critic Bill Ashcroft interprets the role of memory differently. He thinks that the metaphors of memory, maps, place, and national identity in this novel emerge as an embodiment of a Nation. Ashcroft interprets memory as a crucial point linked with diaspora, that occurs as nostalgic phenomenon and finally becomes the place of identity. He explains, “the narrator’s memory is a story of stupefying fear and life-changing trauma. But it slips out of the space of history until he can rediscover it in a newspaper. That such a traumatic and devastatingly life-changing occurrence can disappear from history, demonstrates that memory occupies the same dimension as history, but a different space” (Ashcroft 2012,7). However, another Australian critic Nabizadeh perceives space preoccupied with an ethics of memory of individual and cultural. She explains that, through the spaces of memory, the narrator connects various memory-forms, including family gossip, photographs, and newspapers which she terms as “disparate spatio-temporal nodes” (Nabizadeh 2012, 39). She also identifies memory in this novel as a driving force deeply connected with desires like sexual desire, the desire for alterity, and the thwarted desire for nationalism. Unlike the other critics, this critic emphasizes the role of desire in *The Shadow Lines* that comes through a contradictory social, nationalistic, and sexual form. Nabizadeh thinks Ghosh’s portrayal of Tridib generates an idea of force that can act as the by-product of separations. She quotes from Judith Butler who explains that the “signature of history” (Butler 2003:469) bears the mark of its traumatic past, a past that is made up of personal, familial, and cultural traumas. Unlike the critics from other three countries, Nabizadeh strongly refutes the idea that Illa holds less imaginative power than Tridib, and the narrator. She explains that. Illa never lacks imagination as her power of imagination becomes evident through her memories of bullying, exclusion, and racism at her school in London. She refers to Illa’s imaginative “Playing House” in Calcutta, the idea of her secret room in a dark place, and her projection of a school for her doll Maghda, all these came from an ingenious mind. However, it is worth noting that the stances of Indian critics are a bit different from the critics of the UK, the US, and Australia while the Indian critics clearly examine the inference of memory and imagination attached to the history of partition.

THE SHAPING INFLUENCE OF GENDER

In comparison to the critics of this novel from the UK, the US, and Australia, the Indian critics focus more on the discourse of gendered power and its shaping influence on the female characters. It is mentionable that Indian critics Vinita Chandra and Meenakshi Malhotra are sturdily critical on Ghosh’s portrayal of the seminal influence of Indian patriarchal culture. They explain, Ghosh’s character Illa is markedly expected to be a representative of feminine idol of Indian culture, simply because she is a woman. Chandra also criticizes Ghosh for portraying women as stereotypical in relation to men and to the cultural, sexual, and national codes. She compares Ghosh’s portrayal of the grandmother’s confined idea of militant nationalism with the prudence and sagacity of the narrator’s uncle Robi, who is portrayed as a person possessing intuitive moral convictions and courage. Chandra comments, “unlike Thamma’s morality and convictions which are formed by internalizing the rhetoric of the dominant patriarchal, nationalist culture, Robi is less influenced by external power structures. His morality comes from within” (Chandra 2003, 71). She also assessed Ghosh as biased in portraying women as traumatized victims rather than interventionists in national progress in India while the English woman May is represented as more rational who is able to think globally, act humanly and analytically. Here Malhotra noticed an appropriation of certain discourse of gender in connection to the crucial question of freedom and nationalism, while she finds out a contradiction between individual freedom and all-embracing notion of nationalism.

A Comparative Analytical Approach on Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* in the National Contexts of India and Overseas

This critic notes that, Illa's search for individual freedom in London was not understood by the grandmother at all, as a result Illa was harshly criticized. She comments, "Thamma's views on freedom and the nation, her severe criticism of Ila's choices fit into and are part of larger cotemporary discourses of gender and nation. To be more precise, they are indicative of the uneasy fit between overarching nationalism and individual freedom(s) of its citizens, especially its women" (Malhotra 2003, 163). Malhotra clarifies that the grandmother's "freedom" lies only in an anti-colonial struggle based on political freedom and revolutionary terrorism, because Ghosh reflects a narrow understanding of national freedom by his female protagonist who only perceives a blood-thirsty notion of freedom. To explain the temporal anomaly within nationalism based on the natural division of gender, Malhotra quotes from Cusack who states that, "women are represented as the atavistic and authentic body of national tradition...Men, by contrast, represent the progressive agent of national modernity (Cusack 2004, 545). The critic claims that, as women are bound to bear the burden of cultural tradition, it exerts a heavy pressure on them. To accelerate her claim, Malhotra quotes from Nira Yuval-Davis, "The burden of representation on woman of the collectivity's identity and future destiny has also brought about the construction of women as the bearers of collectivity's honour" (Yuval-Davis 1997, 45). However, Malhotra criticizes Ghosh for imposing an idea of sexual and cultural definition unequally and differently because in *The Shadow Lines*, a man is represented as an active agent in socio-political transition while a woman is merely a conveyer of cultural tradition. Besides, Ghosh only focuses on the middle-class endeavor for national freedom evading the working class, the peasants, the oppressed poor, and the women. A bit similar interpretation of gendered expectation is focused by US-based Shameem Black, who thinks that the homes and families in this novel place different burdens on different genders. Tridib and the narrator naturally find liberty from the spaces of their home and family, but the same space is not true about Ila, who is expected to become a committed Indian woman. In the context of home and family, Illa frequently fails to live up to the ideals of both her Indian and European communities. Black comments, this set of gendered expectations becomes more obvious when Illa's young uncle Robi in India teaches her, "Girls don't behave like that here...You can do what you like in England" (Ghosh 1988, 88). Black comments, "while male characters in *The Shadow Lines* often find domestic engagements to be liberating sources of cosmopolitan power, female characters frequently do not" (Black 2006, 47), thus, according to Black Ila's inability to imagine a lasting cosmopolitan freedom offers a strong social assessment of how home and family can constrict the choices of women. According to Black, Ghosh suggests that to enable cosmopolitan liberation from repressive family practice, the "female characters must directly confront the sources of that repression in domestic spaces." (Black 2006, 47)

COSMOPOLITANISM, UTOPIANISM, AND GLOBALIZATION

In *The Shadow Lines*, One of the most striking points that Ghosh's US and Australia-based critics observed is the idea of Cosmopolitanism, interestingly which is almost undiscussed in the analysis of India and UK-based critics of this novel. Bill Ashcroft, an eminent Australian critic notes that, *The Shadow Lines* focuses on the emergence of a vibrant utopianism that happened in India during 1947 paving the way for other colonial states into post-colonial independence. Ashcroft links that utopianism with cosmopolitanism, which he thinks is affected by globalization, with the growing diasporic movement of people. He explains, "by the later decades of the twentieth century, however, utopian thinking began to take a very different turn, -one affected by globalization, with its increasing mobility and diasporic movement of peoples- a direction that might be cautiously given the term cosmopolitanism" (Ashcroft 2012, 11). He also finds a difference between the powerful utopianism of twenty-first century and the nationalist utopianism of the twentieth, which he terms as cosmopolitan utopianism. What Ashcroft thinks is that this cosmopolitan utopianism reaches beyond the difference and classification of race state, and movement. Here he refers to Paul Gilroy's *After Empire* (2004) and Edward Sid's *Freud and the non-European* (2003) who emphasize that the element of hope circulate around the possibility of freedom from nation, from the construction of borders, and freedom from identity itself. Ashcroft finds these characteristics uphold utopianism which is deeply attached to the notion of a different world. Unlike Ashcroft, another Australian critic Robert Dixon criticizes Ghosh's utopian humanism, finding it a problem when contemporary theories of colonial concept become globalized. He expresses his concern that, "Ghosh's investment in a utopian humanism is one version of a problem that besets contemporary theories of colonial discourse- their tendency to become globalized." (Dixon 1996, 21). Dixon also finds irony and danger in postcolonial subjectivity when it is universalized. The critic particularly notices this problem in the works of Homi Bhabha, Gayatri Spivak and Amitav Ghosh. However, Ashcroft does not categorize this novel directly as utopian but demonstrates very well how we can find hope for a different future within different geographic and cultural boundaries. In fact, Ashcroft identifies cosmopolitanism in Ghosh's condemnation of constructing borders in *The Shadow Lines*. Another Australian critic Paul Sharrad interpreted cosmopolitanism from a different approach. He introduces an idea of post-colonial space relating to this novel that incorporate diaspora, exile, partition, and national allegory which he mentions collectively as an alternative of "movement" (Sharrad 2009,88) in early Commonwealth Literature. Sharrad notes that, the new vibes of globalization have re-emphasized this movement in a new way which he explains as a trend for a cosmopolitan world, and a new kind of universalism, in which "diaspora" and "exile" lose their painful "human meaning" (Sharrad 2009, 90). However, the US-based critic Shameem Black defines cosmopolitan elements in this novel from a different viewpoint. She thinks

A Comparative Analytical Approach on Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* in the National Contexts of India and Overseas

that the idea of cosmopolitanism should be “more committed to recognizing “the world” through the home” (Black 2006, 45), as Ghosh signifies home and the world as collaborative rather than competing, which signifies the intimacy between the familial and the foreign. She notes that, Ghosh put emphasize on homes and families in a postcolonial environment which provide an alternative to the nation, to the domestic spaces, and relationships. Black put forward that the novel presents some ideas of cosmopolitanism that suggest imperial privilege. She mentions, through the figure of May, the novel moves from a self-centered form of cosmopolitanism to a more durable form of postcolonial cosmopolitanism. It becomes obvious when Tridib dies before the eyes of May in a violent mob in Dhaka but May remains unharmed being an English girl. She herself admits her imperial privilege at the end of the novel: “I could have gone right into that mob, and they wouldn't have touched me, an English memsahib” (Ghosh 1988, 308). Unlike the Australian critics, Black emphasized that, the most striking anti-imperial form of cosmopolitanism occurred at the final moment of Tridib's life, when he rushes to protect the vulnerable individuals in a fierce mob notwithstanding the culture or religion. Tridib's sacrifice shows that the cosmopolitan action is inseparable from family responsibility, while he tried to save all; from a Muslim stranger to an English woman, making no distinction between kinship and cosmopolitanism.

NATIONALISM AND NATIONAL IDENTITY

Unlike the critics from India, the UK and Australia, US-based Thomas Halloran analyses that, partition enforces the nationalistic desire in this novel to perceive identity in terms of borderlines. Thus, through exploring the relationship between nation and identity within a geographical reality this critic interpreted *The Shadow Lines* as national allegory placing it beyond individual connections where the connotation constitutes the whole nation. He states that, the novel is multidimensional in nature, but it suggests national allegory because, “it is unavoidably a postcolonial novel, or quite simply, a political novel. That is to say, Ghosh may be free of writing the novel as the Indian nation, but that does not stop him from exploring bigger questions of nation and nationality.” (Halloran 2015, 47). The critic also notes a conflict between the role of personal and political in Ghosh's work though the attention is given to the national issues. Here he refers to Frederic Jameson's essay “Third World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism” where Jameson clearly explains the term relationship between personal and national destiny. Jameson states that, “All third-world texts are necessarily, I want to argue, allegorical...particularly when their forms develop out of predominantly western machineries of representation, such as the novel” (Jameson 1986, 69). However, this commonality made by Jameson overlooks a large body of Western literature concerned with nation building. However, Halloran refers to Timothy Brennan to heighten his argument: “Race, geography, tradition, language, size or some combination of these seem finally insufficient for determining national essence, and yet people die for nations, fight wars for them, and write fictions on their behalf.” (Brennan 1988, 49). Unlike Halloran, Indian critics Novi Capadia and N. Eakambaram analyzed the idea of Nationalism as inevitably linked with political violence. They refer to the grandmother's warmongering notion of national freedom who dreams of gaining independence only through bloodshed, sacrifice, killing, and annihilation. They also note that, this idealistic vision of the homeland is shattered when Tridib is killed before her eyes in a violent communal riot in Dhaka. Thus, Tridib's death changed the grandmother's perception towards a bloodthirsty notion of freedom. Capadia comments, “this is a novel which acknowledges the restlessness and political turmoil of the times” (Kapadia 2001,123), where the grandmother raised a crucial point that triggered the notion of violence, “We have to kill them before they kill us.” (Ghosh 1988, 237). Both Capadia and Eakambaram focus on the Hindu-Muslim riots as the root cause of violence, which they think is not organized by the state, and beyond any control of any specific political strand. Capadia notes that, Tridib's death is the climax of the political theme in this novel, where the overall focus is on the meaning and nuances of political freedom in contemporary life. Interestingly, UK-based critic Jon Mee also considers riots as striking cause linked with Hindu-Muslim clashes which are not organized by the state thus excluded from the public record. Unlike the critics from India, this UK-based critic notes that, national politics in this novel “is contrasted with the politics of communities” (Mee 2003,92), thus, the personal stories ignored by the nation-state is only for larger unities. From a different analysis, US-based Halloran focuses on the destructive power of borders, which rendered a harsh reality to new-founded India, Bangladesh, and Pakistan which were previously stronger, and united. Halloran focuses on the innocence of the narrator's grandmother, who explores her birthplace in Dhaka being unable to comprehend the meaning of borderlines. Halloran thinks, this naive query highlights the arbitrary notion of dividing land and people. He also points out that, one of the most violent nationalistic characteristics in this novel is to realize that the violence is illegitimate if “there is not a concrete manifestation to justify the means towards independence.” (Halloran 2015, 53) Here the critic stresses on the difficulty in deconstructing borderlines through Ghosh's portrayal of the grandmother's aging uncle who prefers to remain in East Pakistan and violently refused to go back to Calcutta even amidst the riots that threatens his safety. Halloran notes, this is a sharp denial to acknowledge the conflicts based on nationality. The critic further explains that this novel complicates our understanding of nationalism through the presence of Ila, who is unable to distinguish nations and fails to develop any attachment to the ideals of nationality. Through travel, Ila has the access into different cultures beyond Indian borderlines, yet she constantly focuses on constructing her own borderlines. For Ila, travelling is not about crossing borders but establishing her own identity. According to

A Comparative Analytical Approach on Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* in the National Contexts of India and Overseas

another US-based critic John Hawley, Ila is the most uprooted character who travelled extensively with her family since childhood holding a very slight notion of "home". However, Hawley did not appreciate either Ila's false notion of nationalistic desire or the grandmother's bloodthirsty desire for independence. Australia-based Paul Sharrad evaluates the role of riots in a nation as the reasons for action which remain elusive despite all those brutalities and repression. Like another Australian critic Robert Dixon, Sharrad thinks that the life of others can never be comprehended fully except fragments of material evidence or imagination. According to Sharrad, the grandmother's desire for middle class comfort of a space reminds us of Jameson's idea of a Third World national allegory, which demonstrates how the nation is now part of a trans-national era of "globalized economics and labor movement" (Dixon 1996, 7). Like Dixon, Sharrad sees that the postcolonial space is the ongoing project of analyzing unequal power structures, specially between the East and the West followed by the differentials of history, race, gender, nation, and the discourse of wealth. Unlike Ashcroft and Sharrad, Dixon notes that, the diaspora of East Pakistan generates an idea that reflex a complex series of cultural crossing, a classical notion of discrete cultures and cultural uprooting. Dixon finds the narrator as representative of an uprooted culture who does never rooted in a single place rather developed in a discursive space that flows across political and national boundaries. Unlike the other critics of this novel, Dixon raises an important point mentioning that, usually the colonial novels highlight that the Westerners travel to India for their romance of an ancient, self-contained culture, while the *The Shadow Lines* focuses a different travel highlighting the East is travelling into the West. Dixon thinks that, through the Indian family's travel towards the West, Ghosh wants us to modify our expectations about Indian culture which is depicted in traditional English novels. Another distinctive point Dixon raised is that the classical ethnography decides that the culture of the native society should be assumed from a Western perspective but, Ghosh here undermines this notion by depicting Britain at war in Germany at the time of the Indian family's visit first to England in 1939, the year when Britain declared war on Germany. Thus, according to Dixon, the partition Ghosh portrayed between India and Pakistan in this novel is set against the background of an equally unstable Europe. He observes that, the parallels between England and Germany, and India and Pakistan undermine any distinction between East and West, colony, and metropolis.

WHAT MAKES THE DIFFERENCE IN VARYING RECEPTION

Different analysis of Ghosh's reception of *The Shadow Lines* from all four countries incorporate similarity, distinctness, clarity, and comparison. Thus, to comprehend fully the different stances of Ghosh's critics, it is of greater importance to detect, or to identify what has in fact made the difference. It is interesting to note that the UK-based and India-based critics made nearly similar analysis of Ghosh's selected novels, while the analysis of the US and Australian critics are a bit similar but differ greatly from the UK and India-based critics. However, the general features that emerge from the comparative analysis of the India-based critics are mostly based on the notion of national identity, geographical boundaries, and the shaping influence of gendered power in a patriarchal society. Similar to the Indian critics, several distinctive points have emerged based on the critics from the UK, US, and Australia, positioning them different from each other. In assessing the idea of national identity, The UK-based critics focus on the arbitrary nature of nationalism highlighting brutalities in geographical and geo-political borderlines. They talked more on territorial conquest, while Indian critics reflect on an impulse, and a longing for a long-cherished idea of national identity, focusing on an all-consuming trauma linked with partition, exile, and dislocations. For US-based critics, cosmopolitanism and utopianism occur as the most persuasive points, while Australia-based critics focus on the link between diaspora and globalization and align them with the idea of Cosmopolitanism. Unlike the critics from India, the US-critics see violence as an integral part in the notion of national identity, while Australian critics clearly identify nationalistic violence as reason for action despite all brutalities and cruelties. Interestingly, Australian critics did not assess partition between India and Pakistan as a memory of "trauma", rather situate it against two equally unstable countries in Europe, Germany, and England.

Some of the prevailing issues in *The Shadow Lines* can be identified as reasons behind different analysis of Ghosh's works. One of the persistent reasons is the socio-economic and political history of a country. Besides, democratic values, cosmopolitan ideas, multiculturalism, egalitarianism, gendered evaluation, and racialization are mentionable. In perceiving different stances of Ghosh's critics from each country, the socio-economic and political relation between colonized India and Britain should be identified properly. To the British empire, India was the most important territory among others, which differed greatly in terms of high population and better economy. Having low population, North America and Australia were less attracted to the British, though their government and administration were less complex than India. As highlighted in Ghosh's much acclaimed novel *The Glass Palace* (2000), the British rules developed through a combination of military force and alliances as they wanted to extend their regime in India only for their economic motif. In *Sea of Poppies* (2008), British mercenary motif became obvious through the portrayal of forceful production of opium in Indian land, and their illegal export to China. As depicted in *The Glass Palace*, the socio-political and economic history of Britain and India largely reflect on the wavering ethics of the thousands of Indian soldiers, civil servants and middleclass officials who deliberately allowed the British rule to operate. They actively participated in colonial havoc, accelerating the economic damage only for personal profit. At that time, many of the British settlers in India had contempt for the Indians and did not believe they were fit to run their own country. However, the British applied shrewd policy from

A Comparative Analytical Approach on Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* in the National Contexts of India and Overseas

England giving favours to some Indians in ruling their own country. However, India was so valuable to the British that, they were highly reluctant to lose too much control to their subjugated land.

In fact, it is usual that the UK based critics focus much on the territorial conquest than the Indian critics, while the exploitative part of the British rule is greatly focused by the Indian critics. It is noticeable that the British used a particular form of gender division as a legitimation of their rule, but noticeably failed to understand the traditional form of male supremacy both in India and Britain. The colonizers acted hypocritically when they tried to improve women's situation in India, not for their concern for women, but for their financial interests, and to sustain their political power. It becomes obvious from the appalling plight of the female workers and coolies in *The Glass Palace* and *Sea of Poppies*, where Ghosh clearly portrays how easily and openly the female workers under British were sexually abused by their Indian masters. In British India, women's identity as part of nationalistic movement was also ignored, neglected, and threatened in male privileged politics. In *Nationalist Thought and Colonial World* (1986), Partha Chatterjee considers nationalism is in complicit with the elite sections of the society, thus, postcolonial criticism reveals how individual identity and subjectivity of women's life is exploited and undermined by the Indian national leaders in their struggle for freedom. In Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines*, the major female characters from India are represented as symbol of narrow perception of national movement who only understands that the national freedom can only be achieved through bloodshed. Interestingly, in perceiving the notion of national identity, the British woman May is portrayed as a cosmopolitan thinker having much intellect than Indian women. It might be the reason that, in colonized India women were the worst victims under the male supremacy and the imperial domination. In fact, Both the domination acted upon the gender division, and are lined in perpetuating women's oppression. As a result, the India-based critics focused much on gendered power in their analysis than the UK-based critics, while the US and Australia-based critics talked little on this issue.

Australia and America are surprisingly similar in terms of their cultural, political, and socio-economic infrastructure based on their multicultural as well as cosmopolitan values. Both also share a robust democratic attitude in their exchange of economic interests and ties between people to people. It is to be noted that, after American independence, the 19th century is said to have been a golden age for the US Utopianism, while Australia has an imagined utopia, who were imagined by the Europeans for centuries before it had emerged. However, utopianism becomes a prominent point in the analysis of both the US-based and Australian critics a bit differently. In comparison to Australia, the United States is much open and friendlier who prefer to focus on individual freedom. On the other hand, Australia maintains a much better social safety net than America, participating in a productive involvement in today's globalization. The US condemns British rule while Australia is keeping British monarchy but ditched British rule. Therefore, unlike Australian critics and other critics, the US-based critics focused much on cosmopolitanism as the essence in *The Shadow Lines*.

CONCLUSION

It is important to note that this paper has not just explored different perspectives of Ghosh's critics but has identified similar and somewhat common evaluation of Ghosh's much acclaimed text *The Shadow Lines*. In doing so, one interesting point the paper has revealed that the evaluations based in India and the UK. are relatively similar than to those of Ghosh's critics in the US., and Australia. It makes an interesting revelation that each country's reception is rather connected to one theory; the reception in India is tangled with the idea of nationalism and national identity and the reception in the UK is largely focused on imperialism, while the US and Australia-based reception are predominantly linked with cosmopolitanism, and utopianism. The novel exposes an indomitable urge for national identity through struggle for independence, arbitrary nature of partition, and the perception of geographical and cultural identity that are justifiably reflected through the lens of critics of India, and to some extent in the U.K. On the other hand, the critics from the US and Australia have identified cosmopolitanism in their analysis in addition to explaining several elements of utopianism and globalization. Nevertheless, the evaluation of Ghosh's works from selected countries in this paper reflects a nation's cultural fabric that can lead us beyond the context of one nation. I believe this paper has generated a novel approach and an innovative methodology in the arena of literary criticism. This kind of methodological approach has the potential to contribute immensely to the field of regional, national, and Global Literature.

REFERENCES

- 1) Ashcroft, Bill, 2013. "Border free: Amitav Ghosh as a Child of Midnight", *Children of Midnight: Contemporary Indian novel in English*, Delhi: Pencraft International.
- 2) Bose, Brinda. 2003. "Amitav Ghosh: Critical Perspective". Pencraft International. The University of Michigan.
- 3) Black, Shameem, 2006. "Cosmopolitan at Home: Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines*". *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 41(3): 45-65, doi.10.1177/0021989406068734.
- 4) Brennan, Timothy. 1988. "India, Nationalism, and Other Failures." *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 87(1), 131-46.
- 5) Butler, Judith, 2003. "After Loss, What Then?". University of California Press.

A Comparative Analytical Approach on Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* in the National Contexts of India and Overseas

- 6) Chatterjee, Partha. 1989. "Colonialism, Nationalism, and Colonized Woman: The Contest in India." *American Ethnologist*, 16(9): 622-633. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/645113.
- 7) Cusack, Tricia, 2000. "Janus and Gender: Women and the Nation's Backward Look", *Nations and Nationalism*, 6(4): 541-561.
- 8) Chandra, Vinita, 2003. "Suppressed Memory and Forgetting: History and Nationalism in *The Shadow Lines*". Amitav Ghosh: Critical Perspective, Pencraft International, The University of Michigan.
- 9) Dhawan, R.K. 1998. *The Novels of Amitav Ghosh*. New Delhi: Prestige Books, 1999.
- 10) Dixon, Robert, 1996. "Traveling in the West': The Writing of Amitav Ghosh", *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 31(1) :3-24.
- 11) Ghosh, Amitav, 1985. *The Circle of Reason*, New Delhi: Penguin Books.
- 12) Ghosh, Amitav, 1988. *The Shadow Lines*, New Delhi: Penguin Books.
- 13) Ghosh, Amitav, 1996. *The Calcutta Chromosome*, New Delhi: Penguin Books.
- 14) Ghosh, Amitav, 2000. *The Glass Palace*, London: Harper Collins.
- 15) Ghosh, Amitav. 2008. *Sea of Poppies*, New Delhi: Penguin Books.
- 16) Gill, Stephen, 1991. *Landmarks of World Literature: Wordsworth The Prelude*. Cambridge University Press.
- 17) Gilroy, Paul, 2004. *After Empire: Taylor & Francis Ltd*.
- 18) Halloran, Thomas F. 2015. "National Allegory and Partition in *The Shadow Lines*", *Critical Essays*, edited by Bibhash Choudhury, 45-55, New Delhi: PHI Learning Private Limited.
- 19) Hawley, John C. 2005. "A Tale of Two Riots: *The Circle of Reason* and *The Shadow Lines*", *Contemporary Indian Writers in English*, 46-82. New Delhi: Foundation Book.
- 20) Jameson, Frederic, 1986. "Third World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism", *Social Text*, 15: 65-88. Paris: Shakespeare, and Company.
- 21) Joyce, James, 1922, *Ulysses*. Paris, Shakespeare, and Company.
- 22) Kapadia, Novy, 2001. *Amitav Ghosh's The Shadow Lines: Asia Book Club*
- 23) Kaul, A, N. 2018. "A Reading of *The Shadow Lines*' in Amitav Ghosh, *The Shadow Lines: Educational Edition*.
- 24) Kaul, Suvir, 2018. "Separation Anxiety: Growing Up Inter/National in Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines*", *Oxford Literary Review*, 15(1): 125-145. www.jstor.org/stable/44244503.
- 25) Malhotra, Meenakshi, 2003. "Gender, Nation, History: Some Observation on Teaching *The Shadow Lines*, *Critical Perspective*, Pencraft International: The University of Michigan.
- 26) Mee, John, 2003. "The Burthen of the Mystery Imagination and Difference in *The Shadow Lines*", *Critical Companion*, edited by Tabish Khair, 90-108, Delhi: Permanent Black.
- 27) Nabizadeh, Golnar, 2012. "Talismans of the Past: Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines*", *Departure and Arrival: Loss and Mourning in Literary Migrant Narratives*, University of Western Australia.
- 28) Roy, Arundhati, 1997. "The God of Small Things". India: Penguin Books.
- 29) Rushdie, Salman, 1981. "Midnight's Children". London: Vintage Books.
- 30) Said, Edward, 2003. *Freud and the non-European.*. London: Verso.
- 31) Sharrad, Paul, 2009. "The Necessary Germ": Amitav Ghosh's Fiction and Writing in the Post-Colonial Space". *Writing in a Post-Colonial Space*, edited by Surya Nath Pandey, 86- 99, New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers and Distributors.
- 32) Seth, Bikram, 1993. "A Suitable Boy". US: Harper Collins.
- 33) Yuval-Davis, Nira, 1997. *Los Angeles: SAGE*.



There is an Open Access article, distributed under the term of the Creative Commons Attribution – Non Commercial 4.0 International (CC BY-NC 4.0)

(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>), which permits remixing, adapting and building upon the work for non-commercial use, provided the original work is properly cited.