NEW ORIENTATIONS

Amitav Ghosh’s
The Shadow Lines
A Critical Companion

With a Foreword by John Thieme

Edited by
MURARI PRASAD
Amitav Ghosh’s
*The Shadow Lines*
A Critical Companion

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The novel journeys across these borders, promoting a humanist vision of relationships with a fluency that makes its moments of horror viscerally shocking—far more so than the grand guignol violence of many classic tragedies. Finally, though, it moves towards a moment of resolution, a fragment to shore against its ruins, that reasserts its humanist vision.

*The Shadow Lines* encourages readings that see it as a brilliant allegory of the deleterious effects of political partitioning and colonial power hegemonies and, as Murari Prasad points out in his Introduction to this collection, several of the essays included foreground the extent to which the novel’s practice moves against the binary divisions that are generated by narratives of national and other communal identities. As such it is a work that seems even more relevant today than when it first appeared two decades ago. Paradoxically perhaps, its backward glance towards Partition and the Civil War reflects forward to our early twenty-first century situation, in which global imperatives continue to promote divisions and inequalities. It is a novel that insists on transcending political pressures in favour of a broader-based humanist vision of both national and global relationships. It offers escape from the artificial shadow lines that divide what it sees as Bengal’s two mirrored communities and from the sense of difference expressed in the narrator’s consciousness of being unequally twinned with his English doppelgänger, Nick Price. Such humanism has been unfashionable in leftist discourses, such as poststructuralism and postcolonialism, in recent decades. It is, however, a creed that has affinities with a range of sub-continental value-systems, and in Ghosh’s case its most obvious departure-point is the humanism of such Bengali artists as Rabindranath Tagore and Satyajit Ray, whom he acknowledges as influences. Finally, though, and perhaps most importantly, *The Shadow Lines* is one of those rare pieces of fiction that both embodies a political message and moves beyond it to a point where it is almost forgotten amid its human dramas. It is a roman à clefs that subverts the conventions of this genre, as Ghosh’s storytelling brilliance engulfs us in the lives of its characters—the narrator’s love for Ila, the unbearable account of Tridib’s death—in a manner that swallows us up and makes us suspend critical analysis.

Reading *The Shadow Lines* is as urgent today as it was when the book first appeared and this collection, which brings together much of the best commentary—old and new—on the novel, will be an invaluable aid to its readers.

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Introduction

Murari Prasad

...The Shadow Lines... became a book not about any one event but about the meaning of such events and their effects on the individuals who live through them... I had to resolve a dilemma, between being a writer and being a citizen. (Amitav Ghosh, "The Ghosts of Mrs Gandhi," The Imam and the Indian: 60, 61)

Exactly two decades have passed since the publication of The Shadow Lines (1988), Amitav Ghosh's arguably the finest novel. Ghosh gained international critical acclaim and also received the Sahitya Akademi Award, India's highest national recognition for a writer, following its publication. The book resonates with typical concerns that impel Ghosh's talent, and have become his trademark. Yet its narrative performance is conspicuous in that this novel is, at its heart, a probing meditation on communal proclivities leading periodi-cally to spontaneous combustion, on factitious frenzy and divisive tilt, on human lives spilling over national boundaries — their nation-based identities getting destabilized thereby. It is a distinguished book by any standard, a bewitching piece of work by a sophisticated mind. Made from complementary narratives seamlessly interwoven — some personal, some historical, some traditionally fictional — the novel has the components of a paradigmatic postmodern text as well as the defining characteristics of postcolonial fiction. By reversing the conventional stance on received historio-graphy and foregrounding suppressed stories from the subjugated periphery it adds postcolonial flavour to its theme and, at the same time, displays postmodern hallmarks, particularly in its treatment of the complex fictional material in a non-chronological memory narrative.

Various versions of national identity come into sharp and telling focus as Ghosh's wall-eyed-sensibility swivels around, but "all these versions emanate from", as Vinita Chandra points out, "[a] privileged class position" (in Bose 73). While Chandra notes the limitations of Ghosh's narrative perspective, including the lopsided representation of female subjectivity, she gives full marks to Ghosh for what he has primarily set out to do in the novel. She concludes her estimation of
The Shadow Lines quite positively:

Ghosh is addressing crucial issues concerning the writing, and the role of historiography in relation to the ways in which national identities are constructed. He is attempting to uncover the silences and omissions of the dominant historiography and the influence of these suppressed memories on commonly received notions about the nation and its past. The rewriting of history has acquired an urgency due to its appropriation and dubious revision by political parties, and more significantly, its use in election campaigns and in inciting inter-religious hostilities. Thus, mythology carries the weight of historical fact. The danger of this revisionism lies in its ability to select and highlight certain historical facts or events, and to arbitrarily align them with others, in order to create a narrative that succeeds in polarizing different sections of society through its simplistic construction of identities. It is against this dangerous appropriation of history and its foreclosing of syncretic possibilities that Ghosh attempts to represent a past, and a national identity, that is multi-layered, complex, and interwoven rather than binarized. (Emphasis mine, ibid.78)

Thus the “limitations” of Ghosh’s novel do not undermine its characteristic strengths.

Ghosh succeeds in re-fashioning the flexible, permeable identity of the nation by questioning its competing master narratives informed by skewed impression of South Asian culture. The unnamed narrator negotiating diverse temporal and spatial plains configures the concept of a nation that can cope with the intermeshing of cultures. Robert Dixon’s assessment of Ghosh’s novel is quite cogent:

[The Shadow Lines is …] a fictional critique of classical anthropology’s model of discrete cultures and the associated ideology of nationalism. The ‘reality’ is the complex web of relationships between people that cut across nations and across generations … so that the novel builds its critique of cultural borders upon the notion of a universal humanity. (Dixon 7)

The narrator uses his “imagination with precision” to validate, or invalidate, different versions of private stories to make sure that the different fragments align and the nation is studied, to borrow Homi Bhabha’s phrase, through a new “narrative address”. He neither shares his grandmother’s militant nationalist fervour nor does he plump for Ila’s idea of a deracinated nationless state. He recognizes the power of imagination whereby he can attain clarity of vision to see through “false stasis” (Hawley 81) in human relations. As Neelam Srivastava says, the narrative of the nation in The Shadow Lines is “determinedly aporetic, in highlighting the uses, and, at the same time, the limits of historical knowledge. It is… a figure of the nation” (in Bose 87-88).

Engagingly, The Shadow Lines has been discussed and analyzed from disparate points of view. Critics have commended Ghosh’s sensitivity to cross-cultural collisions and his ability to convey his concerns in a poignantly imagined tale. The principal brilliance of the book is the way it situates its characters in the historical currents of the postcolonial milieu. Crucially, the reflective gravity and imaginative-historical embroidery are ingeniously combined to animate the narrative with originality and truth of observation. Ghosh also plugs in the partition trauma following the vivisection of Bengal into East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) and West Bengal. “The partition of Bengal”, as Menakshi Mukherjee had noted in 1971, “[…] which has provided material to the Bengali novelist for two decades has not yet been tackled head on by any Bengali novelist writing in English” (Mukherjee 194). The Shadow Lines is perhaps the first Indian novel in English wherein the memories of Bengal’s cleavage are psychologically explored and given a unique spin in the narrative by interrogating the arbitrariness of cartographic determinations.

The thirteen essays in the present volume look at the novel from different viewpoints. Seven of these essays are reprints while six are especially commissioned for this anthology. In their essay “TSL Goes to College: Of Postcoloniality, Politics and Pedagogies”, Brinda Bose et al investigate how the book is presented and taught in the first year syllabus of B.A. (Honours) English at Delhi University. In a useful and elegant frame they look at the book’s reception, canonization, and role in pedagogy. The essay places the novel in context of other prescribed texts and historicizes the text’s place in the curriculum. The authors have made excellent points about the role of The Shadow Lines as a set text in Indian undergraduate education and grounded their points in empirical observation.

The book echoes Ghosh’s concerns narrated in his other works. Fakrul Alam, in his essay “Enmeshed in Differences: Amitav Ghosh’s Fictional Location and The Shadow Lines”, identifies Ghosh’s essential vision with his quest for rooted cosmopolitanism and his focus on the pitfalls of nationalist consciousness. He argues that Ghosh is an authentic exponent of ‘glocal’ vision, but without endorsing
globalization hook, line and sinker. The theme of cosmopolitanism in *The Shadow Lines* is examined with remarkable breadth, amplitude, and theoretical sophistication in Shameem Black’s closely-argued paper, “Cosmopolitanism at Home: Amitav Ghosh’s *The Shadow Lines*”. The author addresses some of the tensions in current theoretical postulates on home and cosmopolitanism. As she notes, the two realities are collaborative, and one can flourish as a flexible global thinker in domestic spaces with familial bonds. Cosmopolitan sensibility is not antithetical to the energies of domestic life nor does it lead to emaciation of familial bonds. However, it entails a sympathetic perspective on and openness to unfamiliar territories.

Ghosh’s book is recontextualised in a perceptive paper by Claire Chambers, “Riots, Rumours, and Relics: Amitav Ghosh’s *The Shadow Lines*” in the light of research into communism in the works of social scientists such as Sudhir Kakar. This is an interesting point which really acquires force in the author’s new-historicist analysis. But, more importantly, the paper argues for an essential naivete in Ghosh’s treatment of communalism in *The Shadow Lines*. Easily the most interesting aspect of the paper is how the author argues Ghosh’s treatment of the Hazratbal theft of the prophet’s hair to be quite misrepresented politically. The reading seems to imply that Ghosh’s work is productive insofar as it accords with nonfiction accounts of Partition, and culpable when it diverges from Claire’s account of communalism in Kashmir. By concentrating on Ghosh’s political elisions she makes a remarkable contribution to the critical study on *The Shadow Lines*.

In his essay “Cosmopolitanism, Class and Gender in *The Shadow Lines*”, which we unfortunately could not include in this anthology, Nagesh Rao historicizes the politics of Ghosh’s novel and relates it to the current discourse of diaspora, hybridity, and migrancy. He also points out the interesting parallels and contrasts between Ghosh’s critique of the nation and of nationalism in his novel and Benedict Anderson’s theory of nationalism in his influential study, *Imagined Communities*. Ghosh’s novel was published five years after the publication of the first edition of *Imagined Communities*, and Ghosh was probably aware of Anderson’s position on the subject of nationalism. Rao considers *The Shadow Lines* an exemplary novel for its interesting engagement with the contradictions surrounding the issue of nationalism and emerging cosmopolitanism.

Ghosh’s internationalism comes into focus from several lenses. Tuomas Hutunen is of the view that Ghosh’s point of openness to the ‘other’ is akin to Emmanuel Levinas’s theory of the ethical. At the centre of Levinas’s philosophy is the criticism of the ontological assumptions of Western philosophy. In Levinas’s view, the ‘other’ is appropriated by the same, or the self, through the basic idea of the self as the producer of (discursive/linguistic) meaning to the world. In Levinas’s view, the ‘other’ ultimately escapes the cognitive powers of the knowing subject. In other words, the ‘other’ exists outside the ontology of traditional Western philosophy, which conceives of all being in terms of objects that can be internalized by consciousness or grasped through an adequate representation. Ghosh’s narrative is powered by the vision of preserving the self and the ‘other’ as independent and self-sufficient, but still in mutual relationship with each other. The Self/Other dialectic as well as the narrative resolution thereof is discussed differently by Maria Elena Martos Hueso. She argues that Ghosh implies the potency of collective, or inclusive, consciousness for ecumenical alliance sustained by the heteroglossia inherent to Indian culture. Applying Bakhtin’s theoretical model to her analysis of the Self/Other divide in the novel, she suggests that Ghosh has proposed the enriching dimension of dialogical encounter.

Further, heteroglossia as a typical characteristic of Indian culture is also invoked by Sharmi Patricia Gabriel to examine Ghosh’s critique of the artificiality of binary categorizations and constructions of otherness in her paper, “The Heteroglossia of Home: Re-routing the boundaries of national Identity in Amitav Ghosh’s *The Shadow Lines*”. Gabriel notes that the novel’s thematic as well as structural dynamics interrogate separatist nationalistic discourses. Indeed, the narrator’s evolving consciousness and maturity proclaims his heteroglossic identity. His discovery that cartographic divisions are not “corporeal substance” consolidates his imaginative understanding of a heteroglossic national dynamic. Thus Ghosh’s novel re-narrates the nation in terms of its heteroglossic complexity vis-à-vis the notions of exclusionary nationalism represented by Tha’mma.

The limits of essentialist nationalism espoused by Tha’mma have also been analysed by Anjali Roy. In addition to this point, Roy engages with the novel’s perspectives on local history or, as she puts it, ‘microstory’ to fill in the gaps in the dominant mainstream history of India’s freedom struggle and Partition. Significantly, Ghosh’s book participates in post-national community formation by emphasizing incipient threats to the central strength and sanity of postcolonial India. The lack of a viable Indian postcolonial identity is, too, the main thrust of Ian Almond’s argument in his paper “Post-colonial
Melancholy: An Examination of Sadness in Amitav Ghosh’s *The Shadow Lines*, although his reading of the novel goes along a different track. According to Almond, “the inimitable tristesse [sadness] in the search for identity” is central to the book. While the book focuses on the human and offers “the consolation of the menschlich [human]” as the only response to “the terrors of . . . non-identity”, Almond asserts that pervasive pessimism rather than positive affirmations is its distinguishing drive. On the other hand, the postcolonial aspects of the novel are viewed from a different perspective by Nyila Ali Khan. She makes the plea that Ghosh privileges utopian universalism often at variance with cultural nationalisms emphasized by postcolonial scholars.

Time and space are familiar categories animating Ghosh’s fiction. Krishna Sen’s polished essay in this collection is a compelling attempt to explore how time and space work in *The Shadow Lines*. She argues that Ghosh privileges space over time in this novel as the organizing principle of the narrative. Tridib transcends deceptive reflection of the self and the narrator emulates that too. Sen explicates the signifying transactions in Ghosh’s representation of space to show how it holds the key to the novel’s meaning. She analyses the semiotic signification of psychic mapping with theoretical sophistication to demonstrate the structural and thematic use of space in the novel. Dynamic space appropriates the dimension of space as well as the idea of history. As Sen notes, this novel exploits spatial time in such a way that space/time duality is dismantled. Tridib inhabits, to borrow Soja’s term, ‘Thirdspace’ and beckons the narrator over. He uncovers the sedimented remains of past history whereas Ila is arrested by the map of herself. Thus Ghosh maps the mode of different characters’ travel in the novel to lay bare spatial history in the book.

Apart from its thematic complexity, *The Shadow Lines* also has striking formal features. The novel’s narrative validity supported by the coincidence of temporal, spatial and material co-ordinates is positively interpreted by Nivedita Bagchi. The history thus reconstructed by the narrator’s filtering and framing consciousness in the novel devalues the West’s penchant for chronology and order. The intricate narrative methodology embedded in oral narration at least adumbrates the possibility of reconstructing Indian history and, indeed, undermines colonial historiography. Further, the role of memory in reconstructing the past is analysed in the paper by Murari Prasad. By using different narrative terms, the novel’s construction is taken apart to demonstrate Ghosh’s innovative art. Besides dealing with the novel’s narratological technique, the author looks at Ghosh’s interrogation of cartographic determinations against the background of Bengal’s vivisection into East Bengal and West Bengal and evaluates his espousal of secular tolerance and alternate cartography in a multicultural scenario. The essay also assesses the novel against some of the major critiques of it.

Thus Ghosh’s novel has been viewed from vastly different angles in this anthology. Indeed, *The Shadow Lines* can sustain many rereadings – so intricately orchestrated it is. The thirteen essays are complemented by an up-to-date bibliography for those who wish to explore the novel further and analyse some aspects of this novel that may have escaped the net of these studies. I am thankful to all the contributors, and particularly Claire Chambers, Krishna Sen, Tuomas Huttunen, Maria Elena Martos Hueso and Brinda Bose for making fresh attempts to interpret and expound Ghosh’s preoccupations in this novel from diverse perspectives. Since *The Shadow Lines* is prescribed as a set text book in many universities in India and abroad, I hope this volume of essays will help generate further discussions in the classroom and encourage students and researchers to engage with the book in newer ways.

**Works Cited**


Murari Prasad


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Cosmopolitanism at Home:
Amitav Ghosh’s *The Shadow Lines*

Shameem Black

What does it mean to be at home in the world? In this essay, I explore how modern cosmopolitanism might paradoxically emerge through an embrace of domesticity and kinship. Understood here as the imaginative and ethical process of opening the self to the strangeness of an expanding world, cosmopolitanism offers a specific way of inhabiting the transnational and transcultural currents of contemporary globalization. I argue that such cosmopolitanism should be less invested in a traditional idea of feeling “at home” in the world, and more committed to recognizing “the world” through the home. As the fiction of the Indian writer Amitav Ghosh illuminates the intimacy between the familial and the foreign, his work suggests that a robust cosmopolitan sensibility requires close attention to the energies of domestic life. Those who immerse themselves within kinship networks and family spaces ironically emerge as the most flexible cosmopolitan thinkers, while those who evade the power of the domestic also fail to flourish as transnational citizens. Ghosh’s work teaches us to understand the home and the world as collaborative rather than competing realities, and this concern for home enables a contemporary cosmopolitanism that critiques masculinist and imperialist visions of world citizenship.

In Ghosh’s work, the idea of home emerges most forcefully as a doubled form of physical and social architecture. Houses, flats, roofs, and domestic artefacts shape the inner world of the novel, while the bonds of extended kinship networks provide metaphorical structures within which the characters develop over time. While houses and families are not synonyms for each other, they both gesture towards domestic structures of feeling that seek to place individuals within literal and figurative forms of dwelling. Through these physical and symbolic spaces, Ghosh explores one vision of what Anthony Appiah
calls “rooted cosmopolitanism” (Appiah 1998).

Since contemporary theories of cosmopolitanism have often valorized “the world” in opposition to “the home,” I begin this essay by documenting this tension in modern scholarship. While scholars of domesticity have exposed homes and families as sites of complicated social power, modern theorists of cosmopolitanism have frequently proven reluctant to abandon associations that affiliate “the home” with bounded forms of community, such as the nation, and thus these theorists tend to interpret domestic spaces and familial bonds as obstacles to cosmopolitanism. Some critics view cosmopolitanism as a “thin” form of identity that lacks the richness of given culture found in “thick” domestic spaces and relationships (Walzer 1994).

In asserting the mutually constitutive nature of home and world, Ghosh’s fiction actively participates in this theoretical debate over the character of modern cosmopolitanism. For Ghosh, homes and families in a postcolonial environment frequently provide alternatives to the nation, and so his domestic spaces and relationships ironically share more with cosmopolitan perceptions, actions, and ideals than they do with the practices of bounded communities. His fiction implies that cosmopolitan visions, far from being enervated abstractions, emerge within the thick worlds of daily life and inherited social bonds. In a reading of Ghosh’s novel The Shadow Lines (1988), I show how central figures model cosmopolitan perceptions by imaginatively embracing sites of domesticity. I then explore two obstacles to such cosmopolitan perceptions in the novel: the problem of gender and the problem of imperialism. While male characters in The Shadow Lines often find domestic engagements to be liberating sources of cosmopolitan power, female characters frequently do not. The novel suggests that in order to enable cosmopolitan liberation from repressive family practices, female characters must directly confront the source of that repression in domestic spaces. Similarly, the novel uses its commitment to domestic signifiers to critique alternative ideas of cosmopolitanism that connote the legacy of imperialism. By advocating an ideal that emerges through the claims of home, rather than in opposition to such claims, Ghosh articulates a progressive form of cosmopolitanism.

Cosmopolitanism is an old concept, emerging etymologically from its roots in ancient Greece. Translated as “citizenship of the world,” the word itself immerses us in a rich history of changing ideas about literal and figurative forms of belonging. As contemporary scholars have begun to grapple with the intellectual challenges of an expanding planetary world, the rhetoric of cosmopolitanism has offered new ways to consider actions, identities, and ideas that undermine the power of well-defined social borders. In contemporary scholarship, cosmopolitanism has been used to describe the condition of exiles, refugees, and strangers as well as of world travellers, elites, and intellectuals. As a rhetoric comfortable describing psychological identities, cultural geographies, political visions, aesthetic practices, and ethical principles, cosmopolitanism currently offers a powerful and sometimes contested language for lives lived across social borders. In my reading of The Shadow Lines, I use the word “cosmopolitan” to connote an attitude of open engagement with unfamiliar people and places. As Ghosh’s fiction poignantly reveals, it is entirely possible to gain a wealth of transcultural experience without ever attempting to embrace others unlike oneself. Cosmopolitanism gestures toward this ideal of sympathetic perspective-taking, which places a positive value on openness to unfamiliar parts of the world.

How have theories of cosmopolitanism understood the value of home? One of the most common colloquial visions of cosmopolitanism defines metaphorical world citizenship as the condition of being “at home in the world.” Connoting an ideal of elite mobility, cultural sophistication, and high social status, this image evokes the vision of cosmopolitanism popularized in the transatlantic eighteenth century by the philosophers who shuttled between Europe and North America (Schelereth 1977). This symbolic investment in elite cultural capital and imperial privilege has troubled modern scholars, who demonstrate how easily such conceptions of cosmopolitanism allow powerful subjects to assert themselves across expanding global frontiers. Timothy Brennan’s At Home in the World: Cosmopolitanism Now (1997) uses the phrase as a form of criticism, not praise, and most scholars who support the rhetoric of cosmopolitanism seek to sever its ties to elitism, complacency, and neoimperial privilege. If being “at home in the world”, signals an alibi for expansionist or suffocating forms of power, it suggests the ethical tension between what we assume to be proper “at home” and what we assume to be appropriate in “the world”.

While critics of cosmopolitanism express their discomfort with the implicit privilege of “being at home”, supporters of cosmopolitanism also frequently convey their distrust of the rhetoric of dwelling. For many scholars, images of home and family perpetuate the nationalist, communalist, or provincial sensibilities that contemporary cosmopolitanism seeks to elude. Though home and family are
not identical, both are often associated with structures of feeling that particular uses of the word “cosmopolitan” frequently malign. Families often seem to conjure essentialist visions of belonging, offering a metaphorical language that makes the social construction of community seem natural and inevitable. For many scholars, the rhetoric of “hearth and home” reflects a desire for comfort and security that ultimately bolsters the most divisive and exclusive of social ideas. Even Amitav Ghosh refuses to romanticize the spaces of home and family. Although I argue that dominant threads of The Shadow Lines celebrate the possibility of the domestic, the novel also dramatizes how homes can mimic the exclusionary tactics of nationalism and communalism. When standing acrimony between the narrator’s ancestors grows intolerable, two brothers literally anticipate the political solutions of subcontinental Partition by building a wooden wall to bifurcate their shared house. “In later years it always made my grandmother a little nervous when she heard people saying: We’re like brothers,” the narrator tells us. “What does that mean? she would ask hurriedly. Does that mean you’re friends?” (TSL 123). Both the architecture of dwelling and the social ties of kinship can enable distinctly uncospolitan walls that imprison certain subjects while keeping others out.

When scholars speak of a community’s need to celebrate confining ideas of home and family, therefore, they understandably condemn how quickly homes can prove prisons. Feminist scholarship, in particular, frequently emphasizes how repressive regimes of gendered power can shape domestic spaces and kinship bonds (Armstrong 916). As institutions of community power, families often appear in modern literature as tyrannical agents that constrain the development of selfhood. As the guilt-ridden protagonist of Ba Jin’s Chinese modernist novel Family (1933) suddenly realizes, “No, not just I, but also our family and society, are all murderers!” (Jia 240). Such exclusion and violence seems at odds with the ideals of cosmopolitanism.

If we consider cosmopolitanism in ethical terms, as a question of affiliation and responsibility to others, many theorists contend that the obligations of cosmopolitanism cannot be fully reconciled with the claims of home and family. Modernist writings, such as Theodor Adorno’s Minima Moralia (1951), suggest that the ethical demands of home and family vanish with the onslaught of modernity. “The house is past”, Adorno declares in his aphoristic set of meditations on twentieth-century culture. “It is part of morality not to be at home in one’s home” (Adorno 39). In contemporary accounts which draw upon the Stoic division of the world into concentric circles of allegiance, the family often occupies the tightest ring while cosmopolitanism appears on the outermost edge (Nussbaum 9). As two extremes on this spectrum of scale, the concepts of “the home” and “the world” seem to offer reconcilable ethical priorities. Scholars sceptical of cosmopolitanism often contend that cosmopolitan principles and actions pose a threat to the integrity of family bonds. When cosmopolitanism is defined as allegiance to general humanity over loyalty to specific groups, these sceptics suggest that cosmopolitan values place us in particularly painful predicaments. “Why not conclude, with William Godwin”, the philosopher Sissela Bok inquires, “that if two persons are drowning and one is a relative of yours, then kinship (or, presumably, nationality) should make no difference in your decision as to whom to try to rescue first?” (Bok 39). Designed to remind us of the deep hold families claim on our emotions, our ethical choices, and our imaginative capacities, this question implies that cosmopolitanism cannot accommodate the rich biases of family life.

Both sceptics and champions of cosmopolitanism often shape provocative analogies from psychoanalytic readings of the bourgeois family. One position defines the family as a place of psychological withdrawal, where individuals find refuge from otherwise courageous or challenging encounters with a broader world. Equating families with nations, religions, and ethnic groups, this argument contends that cosmopolitanism represents a mature identity that rejects the infantilism and neuroses of group ties (Hill 7). Against these equations of cosmopolitanism with adulthood, other theories suggest that cosmopolitanism might itself embody an infantile ethos. Feeling at one with the world, in these readings, mimics the oceanic consciousness of infantile life before the boundaries of social division (Robbins 170). Since recovering this undifferentiated stage is perhaps at best a utopian hope, cosmopolitanism might appear as a childish illusion that we must ultimately outgrow. To other theorists, the childlike quality of cosmopolitanism is cherished rather than disparaged. Infants all over the world need the same basic requirements to grow and thrive, although these needs will be met or denied in culturally specific ways, and for some thinkers this shared past provides the hope of future cosmopolitan empathy (Nussbaum 142). Whether cast as childish regression or valued as childlike wisdom, these arguments reinforce the idea that true cosmopolitanism stands apart from the chaotic social discipline of family life. Cosmopolitanism seems to sit uneasily within the presumptive teleology of family
relations and the hard social work of growing up.

Against this diversity of theoretical scepticism, my essay joins in the burgeoning project of attempting to break down walls between home and world. As postcolonial theorists show how the world often enters the home through the force of trauma, they reveal how sites of dwelling enable confrontations with a larger world (Roy 1995). In Homi Bhabha’s vision of the “unhomely”, social traumas infiltrate domestic spaces to generate psychological ambivalences within them (Bhabha 141). But while this insight establishes a powerful connection between the world and the home, it suggests that the relationship between the two is essentially dystopian. Although The Shadow Lines often speaks directly to the historical traumas that forge unhomely experiences within domestic life, the novel ultimately envisions robust and valuable ways of simultaneously inhabiting world and home and this engagement enables a form of rooted cosmopolitanism. Such an identity, in Kwame Anthony Appiah’s terms, entails being “attached to a home of his or her own, with its own cultural particularities, but taking pleasure from the presence of other, different places that are home to other, different people” (Appiah 91). The optimism of this vision, with its emphasis on attachment and pleasure, speaks to the yearnings that thread themselves through The Shadow Lines. While this pleasure can often be difficult, the novel honours the desire to actively imagine rather than passively accept one’s world.

Although sensitive to the dangers of mixing the home and the world, Amitav Ghosh’s work embraces the idea that cosmopolitan aspirations and family narratives can change each other for the better. In the remainder of this essay, I suggest how the logic of The Shadow Lines requires collaboration between conceptualizing one’s home and conceptualizing one’s world. Individuals in the novel develop as cosmopolitan subjects both by confronting the contours of their own domestic location and by reaching outward to imagine the domestic lives of others unlike them.

One of the pre-eminent English-language writers of the Indian diaspora, Amitav Ghosh has come to be recognized as a literary theorist of cosmopolitanism. His career spans four continents, ranging across India, England, North Africa and the United States. As an excavator and creator of cosmopolitan histories, Ghosh is shaped by the transnational circuits within which he works. For much of the time that he has been active as a writer, diasporic Indians writing in English have seemed to embody a particular vision of cultural cosmopolitanism for an urban, educated West. Beginning with Rushdie’s Midnight’s

Children (1981), the trickle of widely published and promoted Indian writers eventually grew to a flood in the mid-1990s. Within Western universities, Indian writing in English flourished in postcolonial studies under the rubric of third world cosmopolitanism, and many of the most prominent theorists of globalization have been South Asian academics. In 1997, the fifty-year celebration of India’s independence prompted publications such as The New Yorker and Granta to dedicate entire issues to Indian writing. “[A] new kind of English is finding a voice”, Bill Buford wrote in The New Yorker, “a distinctly Indian English, one that is at once local and international, of its culture and of the globe” (Buford 8). Though these American and British publications sought to celebrate Indian cosmopolitanism, they also attempted to claim such work as the natural extension of American and British innovations. Buford’s introductory essay in The New Yorker, titled “Declarations of Independence”, argues that American English set the precedent for such literary growth after independence from the British. “It is possible that we’re witnessing a similar thing now, among Indian writers”, Buford concludes (ibid.). In Granta’s special issue on India, the recognizable American rhetoric of independence yields to the monarchical British overtones of the issue’s subtitle, “The Golden Jubilee”. Indian cosmopolitanism, therefore, has not only come to embody the vibrant force of transnational identity, but also proven a sphere where Western institutions attempt to regain discursive control over these new energies. The internationalization of the literary market frequently provides a disguise for two relatively uncospoplitarian desires: the desire to exert Western control over non-Western culture, and the desire to understand Indian writing primarily as national allegory written for Western consumption.

As a fiction writer, a journalist, and a scholar, Ghosh benefits from, contributes to, but also critiques this phenomenon. His work on survivors of the Indian National Army appeared in The New Yorker’s Indian fiction issue, his novels often surface on Western and Indian college campuses, and his writings have been published in many preeminent Western periodicals and presses. However, Ghosh has often distanced himself from the celebrity worlds of this literary market. “As far as the media and [Indian writing in English] is concerned, I’ve always felt that I’ve been outside the machine,” Ghosh told an interviewer from Outlook India in 2000. “It’s a liking of privacy and besides, my publisher Ravi Dayal is very old-fashioned . . . I feel that suits me” (Ghosh 2000). In the centrefold photograph of Indian authors in The New Yorker, Ghosh is the figure out of focus in the back
of the crowd, unsmiling, seemingly disconcerted by the gaze of the camera. Although the picture appears within the pages of his own article, he emerges as the least public of the eleven individuals captured in the photograph. If part of the burden of a celebrity internationalism is to represent the nation to the West, Ghosh has often declined to provide consumable national allegories. The spirit of his work resonates more closely with Indian interpretations of cosmopolitanism, one of which we find in the anthology *At Home in the World: A Window on Contemporary Indian Literature* (2002). A multilingual collection of Indian writings both into and from English, this anthology emphasizes the impossibility of comprehensive national allegories. “India is a nation state but Indianness is not a homogenous term,” its introduction asserts (Satchidanandan et al xi). The title of the collection reclaims the phrase once associated with the elite privileges of the West, using it to describe writings in Hindi, Bengali, Malayalam, Oriya, and other Indian languages that circulate less widely within Western metropolitan centres. Like this anthology, Ghosh’s work draws our attention to a cosmopolitanism not entirely established or controlled by the literary market.

Ironically, Ghosh’s ambivalence toward the iconography of South Asian globalization has allowed him to provide powerful meditations on polycentric communities. In particular, Ghosh chooses to subvert the idea of national identity or allegory by focusing on families as emblems of cosmopolitan formation. As Ghosh wrote in a correspondence with the historian Dipesh Chakrabarty,

> Two of my novels (*The Shadow Lines*, and my most recent *The Glass Palace*) are centred on families. I know that for myself this is a way of displacing the ‘nation’ – I am sure that this is the case also with many Indian writers other than myself. In other words, I’d like to suggest that writing about families is one way of not writing about the nation (or other restrictively imagined collectivities) (Ghosh 147).

Ghosh’s claim to avoid writing about the nation is paradoxically embedded in a discourse of nationality and culture. “I do think if you are Indian or Asian,” Ghosh said in a 1997 *Kunanpini* interview, “and this is not necessarily to essentialize, that you think in terms of families” (Ghosh 173). His correspondence reiterates this point, suggesting that “[thinking in terms of families] is the case also with many Indian writers other than myself.” Ghosh argues that this non-Western emphasis on the family reflects larger historical phenomena that destabilize community institutions:

> If you break up all the overarching structures, as with colonialism, people develop a profound sense of loss in such state structures. In the U.S. you have a strong sense of faith in the nation and in the individual, but elsewhere, the family replaces the sense of a wider community. It becomes the largest sense of belonging (Ghosh 2004).

Family as an expansive rather than a limited form of community drives his narratives to search for the productive alliances of domestic cosmopolitanism.

Ghosh has often been read as the emblem of what James Clifford calls “dwelling-in-travel”, an advocate for a world in which the currents of cultural circulation form the most appropriate metaphor for human experience (Clifford 7). While scholars are right to emphasize the importance of travel, migration, and forced movement in his work, they sometimes overlook how domestic spaces of homes and families transfigure his vision of cosmopolitanism. As Clifford notes, “when travel, as in [Ghosh’s] account, becomes a kind of norm, dwelling demands explication” (Clifford 5). When Ghosh’s readers do focus on the centrality of home and family to his work, they often understand his portraits of dwelling in relation to nationalist rather than cosmopolitan imaginaries. Like a recent work on *The Shadow Lines* that shows how Ghosh’s representation of home rejects the separatist impulses of nationalism, my argument investigates the transnational energies that make themselves palpable within domestic spaces (Gabriel 2005). But rather than asserting the negative relation between home and nation, my essay documents how expansive cosmopolitan imagination depends on our ability to reconfigure our roots.

The opening of the elegiac and introspective *The Shadow Lines* plunges us into a world where the division between the home and the world seems to be especially acute. Marking the divide between the known realm of visible family bonds and the barely perceptible landscape of larger possibilities, the narrator speaks of his great aunt by her first name, Mayadebi. “It starts me now to discover how readily the name comes off my pen as ‘Mayadebi,’” he tells us, “for I have never spoken of her thus; not aloud at any rate: as my grandmother’s only sister, she was always Maya-thakuma to me” (*TSL* 3). In transgressing the language of family address, the narrator reveals his own yearnings for a public world beyond the home.
The truth is that I did not want to think of her as a relative: to have done that would have diminished her and her family – I could not bring myself to believe that their worth in my eyes could be reduced to something so arbitrary and unimportant as a blood relationship. (TSL.3)

In articulating this fervent desire for connection with the outside world, the narrator identifies himself as a thinker with cosmopolitan aspirations. This passage in Ghosh’s novel seems to reinforce the idea that the expansive world of global possibility stands opposed to the insular world of home. Family implies arbitrarily given community, whereas cosmopolitans choose their own loyalties; family signals familiarity and claustrophobia, while the mystique of the foreign suggests enticement and exploration.

However, The Shadow Lines progressively unravels the child’s distinction between the home and the world. As the narrator guides us through his memory, he cannot wrench apart “arbitrary and unimportant” family relationships from distant worlds and foreign perspectives. As he imagines a world far beyond his own experience, he reinvents his own investment in kinship and home. Cosmopolitan aspiration forms the secret double of domestic bonds, shaping one of the many shadow lines that define the interior space of the novel. The Shadow Lines frequently reveals how we are tied most deeply to what we think we oppose, and thus it exposes how cosmopolitanism is entwined with domesticity.

The Shadow Lines tells an intimate story of life in the aftermath of British colonialism and sub-continental Partition. As the nameless Indian narrator comes of age, he comes to realize that his own existence in independent India is deeply shaped by historical ties to England and Bangladesh. Although he spends his childhood within middle-class Calcutta, his upbringing reflects his awareness of an English family which casts a powerful shadow over his sense of self. He learns of this family, the Prices, through the stories of his well-travelled cousins, who teach him to imagine worlds beyond the familiar spaces of his life. In particular, he intuits the practice of cosmopolitan perception through the tutelage of his uncle Tridib. A lyrical theorist of cosmopolitan imagination, Tridib serves as a powerful if incompletely understood mentor throughout the narrator’s youth. He dies suddenly when the narrator is still a child, and only gradually does the narrator come to understand how Tridib was killed in a communalist riot in East Pakistan.

Cosmopolitanism at Home: Ghosh’s The Shadow Lines

Through Tridib, The Shadow Lines insists that robust cosmopolitanism emerges through attention to the contours of one’s home. A student of Indian archaeology, Tridib specializes in reconstructing lives very different from his own and the novel suggests that true cosmopolitanism demands careful contemplation rather than passive transcultural experience. “The one thing he wanted to teach me”, the narrator says, “was to use my imagination with precision” (TSL24). The wonderful paradox of imagining precisely defines the ideal version of cosmopolitanism that haunts Ghosh’s pages. Conceptualizing others requires the leap beyond positivism that imagination connotes, but to offer more than a self-serving fantasy of cultural difference, this practice of imagination demands a respect for the specificity and uniqueness of other lives.

This precision develops through the overlooked details of domestic life. On vacation in India, the narrator’s grand aunt entertains him with a gripping story about a cobra that threatens the life of the narrator’s beloved cousin Illa in Sri Lanka. However, after the family party, Tridib gently takes the narrator aside to suggest that the significance of the grand aunt’s tale lies not in flamboyant snakes, but in the slopes of houses in Colombo. He puts his hands on my shoulders, turned me around and asked me whether I could imagine what it would be like to live under a sloping roof—no place to fly kites, nowhere to hide when one wanted to soil, nowhere to shout across to one’s friends” (TSL 29). As Tridib turns the narrator’s attention to the details of domestic architecture, he allies cosmopolitan interest in new worlds with a renewed scrutiny of what it means to be at home. The sloping roof invokes the liminal space between inside and outside, emphasizing how houses serve as public as well as private spaces. As Gaston Bachelard argues, “great dreamsers profess intimacy with the world” by “meditating on the house” (Bachelard 66). Whereas Bachelard conceives of “the world” as the natural landscape of uninhabited space, however, Tridib offers a more firmly social understanding of the world around him. The architectural form of the roof governs the possible shape of social life and offers insights into the daily sensibilities of those who live beneath it. Through Tridib’s eyes, cosmopolitan perception requires appreciating how the lives of other people materialize in the most mundane of daily details. Fascinated by a group of European cosmopolitans who live together in London, Tridib tempers his romantic understanding of their lives with his intense desire to comprehend their “unwashed bathebubs . . . arguments over who was to pay for the sugar that week . . . [or]
quarrels over who was to share whose bedroom” (TSL 67). While the
glamorous aspects of their lives are easily conjured, the domestic
politics of everyday life make cosmopolitan perceptions and principles
real. Tridib insists that cosmopolitanism requires both the scrutiny of
one’s own home (the flat roofs of Calcutta) and the apprehension of
how others’ homes are shaped (the sloping roofs of Colombo or the
unwashed bathtubs of London).

As Tridib’s imagination revels in the nexus between worldliness and
domesticity, his romantic desire enhances this intricate interplay
between the family and the foreign. When he first meets the young
English girl May Price, Tridib’s fascination with her embodies the
larger allure of her family’s past. His imagination is particularly stirred
by May’s uncle Alan, whose heroism during the Second World War
provides Tridib with a vision of English cosmopolitan politics at its
most chivalrous. As an adult, Tridib transfers his admiration for Alan
to May, who inherits many of Alan’s cosmopolitan political impulses.
Throughout the novel, Tridib seems drawn to May for her doubling of
strangeness and familiarity. On the one hand, May asserts herself as a
cosmopolitan object and subject: she belongs to a world foreign to
Tridib, and, like him, she cares deeply about lives unlike her own. On
the other hand, May belongs to a household that Tridib considers his
second family. Since he lives with the Price family in London for a
period in his childhood, his attraction to May evokes claims of both
world and home.

As an adult, Tridib writes a love letter to May that reinforces this
affiliation between cosmopolitanism and kinship. While Tridib’s letter
begins conventionally with a description of May’s photograph, the
letter soon segues into more unusual forms of courtship. The
photograph of May helps Tridib to picture her home in London and in
vividly perceiving the world of Lymington Road, Tridib’s imagination
leads us back in time to the London of the Second World War.
Abandoning all familiar references to May and Tridib, the letter
describes the lovemaking of a strange couple in a bombed-out London
movie theatre. At the end of the letter, Tridib suggests to May that this
unexpected alliance between strangers might offer a model for their
own romance:

(Tridib) did know that that was how he wanted to meet her, May – as
a stranger, in a ruin. He wanted them to meet as the completest of
strangers – strangers-across-the-seas – all the more strangers because
they knew each other already. He wanted them to meet far from their
friends and relatives (TSL 144).
I thought of how much [my relatives] all wanted to be free; how they went mad wanting their freedom; I began to wonder whether it was I that was mad because I was happy to be bound: whether I was alone in knowing that I could not live without the glamour of the voices within me. (TSL, 89)

He does not perceive the voices of his relatives as a constraint on his cosmopolitan engagement with unknown worlds; on the contrary, these voices provide the conduits through which he embraces foreign ways of living.

This alliance between cosmopolitanism and kinship emerges not only at the level of form (family stories provide the narrator with his window on the unknown world), but also at the level of content. The narrator honed his precise imagination by literally learning to map the domestic worlds of foreign spaces. In one of his most powerful childhood memories, he and his young cousin Ila play a game called Houses. Hiding beneath an immense imported English table in Calcutta, Ila draws in the dust the floor plan of the London house where she and her mother live with the Price family. As she invents an imaginary home, the game begins to blur the line between the foreign and the domestic (Kaul 1994). From the very beginning, the narrator intuits that homes cannot be romanticized into retreats from the dangers of the world: “something about those lines [drawn in the dust] had begun to disturb me... That can’t be a staircase because it’s flat, and staircases go up, they aren’t flat” (TSL 70). What Ila sees in two dimensions, the narrator sees in three. As he grows older, his uncanny ability to remember and imagine the fullest details of other people’s homes provides him with his greatest defence against their power. Visiting the Price household with Ila as an adult, he amazes her with his intimate knowledge of how the Prices’ world can be mapped:

Correct me if I’m wrong, but if I go out of this door and turn right and keep walking straight for a few paces, that would take me to the kitchen, wouldn’t it? And if I were to turn right before I reached the kitchen wouldn’t I come upon a flight of stairs that would lead me down the cellar if I were to go down them? (ibid. 68-69).

Like Tridib, trying to conjure the “unwashed bathtubs” of an older generation of Prices, the narrator suggests that a cosmopolitan engagement with others requires this willingness to imagine the domestic architecture of their lives.

If the novel’s most cosmopolitan imaginations are the most invested in reclaiming the domestic, the novel also suggests that alienation from home makes cosmopolitan openness difficult. As many readers of The Shadow Lines have asserted, the homes and families in the novel place different burdens upon individuals of different genders. Tridib and the narrator, both male, find a sense of liberation from their immersion within the spaces of home and family, but such is not true for the narrator’s female cousin Ila. While Ila lives the most experientially transnational life, growing up in countries all over the world, she also proves least able to experience wonder at signs of cultural difference. Though Ila sees the world through her travels, she remains trapped within an imaginative paralysis that prevents her from embracing the new communities she inhabits. When the narrator confides his longing to visit Cairo, Ila “clicked her fingers, gave herself a satisfied nod, and said aloud, inadvertently: O yes, Cairo, the Ladies is way away on the other side of the departure lounge” (ibid. 20). Mapping her world through the sterile public spaces of airport restrooms, Ila shies away from transnational engagements that might provide her with new perspectives on her life. “[T]he inventions she lived in moved with her,” the narrator tells us, “so that although she had lived in many places, she had never travelled at all” (ibid. 21). He despairs of her imaginative contraction, chiding her that “to you Cairo was a place to piss in” (ibid.). The Ladies in the Cairo airport provides the inverse of May’s bathroom on Lymington Road, for the public lavatory literally invites selves to expel unwanted waste rather than gain new perceptions of the world.

The novel suggests that Ila’s antisepctic rootlessness bespeaks her vexed status as a woman within her home and family. In both Indian and English spaces, Ila finds herself constrained by expectations about what an ideal female subject should be, and she frequently fails to live up to the ideals of both her Indian and her European communities. This set of gendered expectations emerges most clearly when Ila returns to Calcutta as an adult, only to find that her Indian relatives expect her to uphold particular practices of social restraint. “Girls don’t behave like that here,” she is told by her young uncle Robi, when she asks a man to dance in a Calcutta hotel bar. “You can do what you like in England... But here there are certain things you cannot do” (ibid. 88). This criticism of Ila’s Westernized behaviour emerges most painfully in the bitter remarks of the narrator’s aging grandmother, who in her dementia repeatedly refers to her as “that whore” and “that English whore” (ibid. 90). Ila rebels against these family pressures...
that seek to restrain her through her sexuality, and in doing so, she envisions the world beyond India as an escape from the gendered regulations of her family. “Do you see now why I’ve chosen to live in London?” Ila shouts passionately to the narrator as they leave the hotel bar. “Do you see? It’s only because I want to be free. . . . Free of you! . . . Free of your bloody culture and free of all of you” (ibid. 88-89).

But it soon becomes clear that Ila is not “free” at all in London. Trapped within a bitter marriage to her English childhood friend Nick Price, Ila only exchanges the confinement of Calcutta for a new psychological prison in her supposedly liberating world of London. Ila first begins to idealize Nick, May’s younger brother, when she lives with the Price family for a period during her childhood. In her game of Houses, the young Ila imagines Nick as a chivalrous figure who saves her from the torments of xenophobic British bullies. However, in reality, Nick appears as a far less heroic figure who explicitly fails to protect Ila from such abuse. Whereas Ila’s fantasy presents Nick as “a boy in shorts. . . . his head a blaze of yellow, rescuing a little girl from her tormentor” (ibid. 75), May’s memory gives us a Nick who “was ashamed to be seen by his friends, walking home with an Indian” (ibid. 76). The narrative suggests that Ila’s game of Houses attempts to evade the troubles of the domestic sphere, substituting wishful fantasy for precise imagination. When Ila eventually marries Nick, their relationship replicates the dynamics of betrayal that disfigure their childhood. When Nick defines his adulterous affairs with women from Martinique and Indonesia as “his way of travelling” (ibid. 188), his marriage to Ila allies the dystopias of worldliness with the dystopias of home. If Ila’s Indian relatives make themselves oppressive through their controls on her sexuality, Nick’s unrepentant adultery also constrains Ila in gendered terms. Throughout the novel, she remains trapped within these conceptions of home and world.

As Ila develops as a troubled, self-deluding ‘individual’, her inability to envision the lasting cosmopolitan freedom she desires offers a strong social critique of how home and family can constrict the choices of women (Rosenstein 2005). The novel implies that Ila remains trapped within patriarchal and colonial concepts of home precisely because she refuses to confront the power of domestic spaces and kinship networks. In asserting this correlation, The Shadow Lines exposes how the gendering of home can affect the viability of cosmopolitanism. Ila’s dissatisfaction with both home and world are twinned, emerging from her illusion that one can be had without engaging the other.

Cosmopolitanism at Home: Ghosh’s ‘The Shadow Lines’

Through its insistence on the interconnections between the home and the world, The Shadow Lines also critiques ideas of cosmopolitanism that connote imperial privilege. Through the figure of May, the novel charts the movement from a self-centred form of cosmopolitanism affiliated with colonial prerogative to a more durable form of postcolonial cosmopolitanism. When May first comes to visit Tridib in India during the narrator’s childhood, she espouses a set of ethical obligations that make no accommodation for the weight of local culture. This commitment to doing good, the novel tells us, ironically plays a part in forwarding Tridib’s death. May and Tridib accompany the narrator’s grandmother to her childhood home in Dhaka, where the grandmother is determined to recover a long-estranged uncle. Her impatience leads her to Dhaka at a time of high communist tension, and as Hindus in what has become, post-Partition, a heavily Muslim region of East Pakistan, the narrator’s family finds itself the target of a riotous mob. As the family flees their ancestral house, followed by the uncle and his caretaker in a rickshaw, the mob damages their car and moves to attack the two unprotected men. Quixotically determined to defend them, May jumps out of the car. “Your grandmother screamed at me,” May tells the narrator on his last night in England. “She said I didn’t know what I was doing, and I’d get everyone killed. I didn’t listen; I was a heroine” (TSI 250).

Tridib pushes May to safety and runs toward the rickshaw, where he dies at the hands of the mob. As if to emphasize May’s hubris, Tridib’s manner of death—thrust out from ear to ear—mimics a dying dog whose throat May earlier in the novel slits from pity. Her compassion for the dog, and her willingness to shame Tridib into similar compassion, remind us of the emotional tie between a particular form of Western-identified cosmopolitan action and the emotional luxuries of the British in India. May never truly feels threatened by the mob; as she says, “they wouldn’t have touched me, an English memsahib” (ibid. 251). Her English cosmopolitanism is a consequence of this special protection. Without speaking in polemic, the narrative indicts the ways in which a privileged cosmopolitanism can be a displaced assertion of self—as May admits, “I was a heroine”—rather than the selfless multiplicity towards which the narrative aspires.

With the death of Tridib, however, also dies this particular cosmopolitanism that relies on the remnants of imperial privilege. When the narrator encounters May years later, she embodies a very different form of cosmopolitanism that avoids such imperial connotations by actively engaging domestic spaces and local cultures.
May still demonstrates an ethical commitment to other parts of the world, raising money on crowded street corners for famine relief, but her cosmopolitan impulses now extend into the private spaces of her domestic life. When the narrator is invited to sleep off his intoxication in her apartment, he discovers that May’s bed is only for show:

I sleep over there, [May] said, pointing across the room, at the floor.

... [The bed]’s for people to see — so that they won’t think me odd. ... It’s not too bad, she said briskly. After all, this is how most people in the world sleep. I merely thought I’d throw in my lot with the majority (ibid. 158).

In changing her sleeping habits to express solidarity with people in other parts of the world, May abandons the dramatic, public gestures of her youth for an activity that brings cosmopolitan idealism into the world of domestic space. May’s choice attempts to reconcile two forms of domestic life in one physical location, affiliating her both with the norms of her local London community and with the social practices of very different parts of the world. While there is no evident practical benefit to May’s action, the novel suggests that her willingness to work through, rather than against, the symbolic rhetoric of home is part of what detaches her from a cosmopolitanism of imperial privilege.

We see the novel’s most vivid form of anti-imperial cosmopolitanism in the final moments of Tridib’s life, where he exemplifies the imaginative practices of his cosmopolitan perception. Although May refuses to probe his motivations for facing the mob, nor does the narrator attempt to reinvent Tridib’s last moments, the novel still provides clues into what emerges as the major moment of cosmopolitan sacrifice that the entire narrative prepares itself to hear. When he rushes to protect the vulnerable individuals in the rickshaw, Tridib’s spontaneous decision to brave the rioters makes cosmopolitan action indivisible from family responsibility. As he intervenes on behalf of a family member, a Muslim stranger, and an English woman, the political implications of Tridib’s actions cannot be reduced to any single ideology. The novel thus refuses to separate familial loyalty from cosmopolitan duty, asserting the indivisibility of the home and the world. When Tridib tries to save them all, his final action makes no distinction between kinship and cosmopolitanism, and this indivisibility is mirrored even in the telling of Tridib’s death. After May tells the narrator how Tridib died, the narrative immediately moves their story into the world of domestic actions. “That was that; that’s all there was to tell”, the narrative says. “We cleared away the dinner-plates then, I remember” (ibid. 251). In reconstructing Tridib’s death, the narrative asserts a cosmopolitanism that includes, rather than expels, loyalty to family and home.

As The Shadow Lines thus traces the invisible border between family narratives and cosmopolitan impulses, it reveals how the most powerful of cosmopolitan perceptions and ethical actions emerge within dramas of home. Homes and families, and the stories they tell of themselves, offer not contradictions to cosmopolitanism but deepenings of cosmopolitan inventions and ethics. In presenting these interconnections, the novel seeks to show us what it means to find one’s world through the home. Though it is sometimes claimed that cosmopolitan communities are idealistic illusions, narratives of multiethnic, transnational kinship in The Shadow Lines suggest that families provide one example of actually existing cosmopolitan worlds. Grappling with the importance of location, whether one’s own or those of strangers, provides the best hope for a rooted cosmopolitanism that eludes the constraints of gendered and imperial power. The most robust cosmopolitans are also the ones most bound to home.

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Microstoria: Indian Nationalism's "little stories" in The Shadow Lines

Anjali Roy

If imperialism is an "act of geographical violence through which virtually every space in the world is explored, charted, and finally brought under control", the primacy of the cartographic impulse in the anti-imperialist imagination is quite understandable. Cultures of resistance are seen to "reclaim, rename and remap the land" in their move towards nationalist self-assertion (Said 271). Amitav Ghosh's The Shadow Lines (1988) examines the relevance of nationalism's concern with geographical restoration in the context of a new borderless, global landscape. While acknowledging the contribution of nationalism in affirming the Indian people's identity during the Independence struggle, Ghosh attempts to fill up the gaps in nationalist histories by telling alternate revisionist stories suppressed or elided by nationalism's dominant discourse even as he interrogates the validity of the nation, nationalism and nationalist identity in an era of global capitalism.

Following Benedict Anderson's idea of "nations" as "imagined communities" (1992), postcolonial commentators have rigorously investigated the nation, along with other "narratives", during the last two decades. This contestation is most directly addressed in the works of the Subaltern Studies group and the historiographic fiction of Rushdie, Ghosh and others. In Imaginary Homelands (1991), Rushdie raises the fundamental question, "Does India exist?" (26) which he unravels through the central metaphor of a nation's birth in Midnight's Children (112).

Rushdie emphasizes the "mythical" nature of the land calling it "a country which would never exist except by the efforts of phenomenal collective will". Like all myths, the reality of this one, too, is predicated...
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