

## The Shadow Lines: Trauma of Partition

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**Abstract:** *The following article is an attempt to trace trauma in memory of the characters of the novel, and how those memories haunt these characters. Memories of each character are intertwined with memories of other characters. This article has tried to show how characters find it difficult to come to terms with past which they are part of, how they find it difficult to breach the silence of words. It is a historical novel, and attempts have been made to treat each documentation of history with vigil. It has also been shown how an event of history bears the seeds of trauma for the days to come. In The Shadow Lines the history is not just a time in past, but it is a time replete with memories where trauma of war and riot can be found in every nook and corner. There is also a commentary on what has caught the imagination of characters: war or riot. This analysis is preceded by tracing source of trauma in psychology with reference to Freud. What he talks about departure and its relation to trauma proves to be very significant when the themes of departure and arrival are dealt with in the novel. Freud's interesting take on history becomes helpful in maintaining a uniform structure of the article.*

**Key Words:** *Trauma, Memory, History, Partition.*

In the second section of his book *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud opines that shock of mechanical nature may cause to arise in a person “traumatic neurosis” (8). War is one of such forces of mechanical nature causing traumatic neurosis. The clinical picture of the trauma is subjective suffering – weakening and shattering of the mental function, which however manifests itself in hysteria. Freud calls this condition hypochondria or melancholia. Trauma of war may involve trauma which is as terrible as that of the trauma of peace. This trauma of peace is without the mechanical force. Fright, fear, apprehension are summarily rejected by Freud as synonym expressions of danger. In his opinion, apprehension or angst cannot produce traumatic neuroses. Later Freud says that fixation on experience brings about trauma. To make things clear Freud's reference to *Tasso's Jerusalem Liberated* is significant. The story reads:

The Hero Tancred has unwittingly killed Clorinda, the maiden he loved who fought with him disguised in the armour of an enemy knight. After her burial he penetrates into the mysterious enchanted wood, the bane of the army of the crusaders. Here he hews down a tall tree with his sword, but from the gash in the trunk blood streams forth and voice of Clorinda whose soul is imprisoned in the tree cries out to him in reproach that he once more wrought a baleful deed on his beloved. (16)

The above story, according to Freud, is a poetical portrayal of fate. Now the actions of Tancred, in Cathy Caruth's opinion, represent the experience of trauma repeating itself inexplicably. Caruth finds out that the story goes beyond this repetition compulsion. Tasso's killing is not just an unconscious act. It is also about a voice. We seem to bypass the voice which releases through the wound. Now what is this voice about? Is it about truth? Caruth maintains that trauma is not locatable in an individual's past but in its much assimilated nature. Caruth thinks that the question of history was raised first in the nineteenth century in Freud's *Moses and Monotheism*. Fictionalization of the Jewish past has its confrontation with trauma. In a letter written to Arnold Zweig in 1934 Freud claims that Moses created the Jews, which is not very far from the truth as the very term does not appear in the Bible. In the biblical account the Jews were called Hebrews or Israelites. He claims that the Jews eventually murdered Moses and also repressed the deed. The religion he introduced was finally abandoned by the Jews who later worship other gods. He has also mentioned in the letter about the undying hatred for Jews. So the significant moment of Jews history is not the return to Canaan, “the land in which they had lived as foreigners” (Exodus 64), but the repression of a murder and its trauma. Therefore, Freud resituates history of the Jews to be the history of trauma. Freud claims that the Jewish historical memory filters through the traumatic repression. Freud argues that there is an indirect reference of the murder of Christ to the murder of Moses. The departure of the Hebrews from Egypt in order to arrive to Canaan, the Promised Land is an arrival to a history which is not their own. That is why as far as history is concerned they will always be foreigners to a history which is shared.

Moses the name means in biblical account someone drawn out of water. He was a Jew who was brought up in Pharaoh's court. Later he had been advised by the God to return to his people as their leader. But in Freud's account Moses was born an Egyptian, chose to lead the Jews to monotheistic religion. R Z Friedman in his article *Freud's Religion: Oedipus and Moses* says Freud does not consider the Bible as a work of literature but partly a documentation of history:

He does not contend, however, that the bible is work of literature. Thomas Mann might write a novel about the Jews in Egypt, but the Bible is not a novel on the same subject. Freud adopts another approach – namely that the Bible is an account, a serious albeit primitive historical account compiled in an ancient time of events....The Biblical account, Freud seems to believe, may be partial, fragmentary, distorted and uncritical, but it is historical account. The truth of the Bible for Freud then lies in the accuracy of its account. (140)

About Moses he says he really was a leader but he was not a Jew. The Israelites did leave Egypt but the dramatic exodus did not happen. However, Caruth claims that Freud's central insight in Moses and Monotheism is history. It is not a history of any individual but at the same time it is. Caruth claims that Trauma is that in which each other's history is implicated. The attempt of this analysis will be towards such a history mingled with trauma – something this reading purports to find out in Amitav Ghosh's *Shadow Lines*. In first couple of pages of the novel the narrator has his grandmother not approving of Tridib because she thinks he wastes his time. For the narrator's grandmother "time was like a toothbrush: it went mouldy if it was not used" (4). When he asked her of what happened to wasted time, she replied that it begins to stink. She even got rid of everything that might lead the narrator and his family to the past, lest their time stinks. The author wonders should he catch the glimpses of the past if he goes past Gole Park. He used to pass by this lane with Montu, his early childhood friend, where Nathu Chaubey, the paanwala used to sit in a stall at the corner of the lane. Tridib could also be seen at street-corner addas. The memory that the author is sharing is around the time of 1960s – a time when the earliest refugees of the East put up on Gariahat Road in a few shacks scattered around. Later in the novel we shall see narrator's grandmother will meet up many people coming across the border from the east because of partition. She has befriended them in her frequent visit to the park after her retirement as a head mistress. On another occasion she looks down upon the refugees. She thinks they are filthy. When her son compares themselves to the refugees, She quickly snaps back saying they are not refugees because they had come to India long before partition. Once we find love in her for her people and the very next moment she despises the refugees. Do they change after crossing the border? They certainly change for her. She refuses to recognize them as her people after they cross the border and come to India. Does she hate them because they are not successful as she has become after leaving her country? Suvir Kaul in his article *Inter/National in Amitav Ghosh's The Shadow Lines* says that even if she "loses her belief in the ability of borders to demarcate that space called home, she recovers the faculty she had repressed as useless: memory. She had long insisted that nostalgia as a weakness." (140) Kaul further states that her return to Dhaka makes her aware of her dislocatedness, and the fact that she has no home but in memory. The theatre of war cleanses her of the memory of messy violence. She has managed a job in a school in Calcutta after her husband's death. At that time at the age of 30 she brought her son up and made sure that he establishes himself. Despite that she has not come to terms with the past, with the fact that she does not live in the country of her birth, and that one of her relatives still lives there, that her own house is now being shared with the refugees from Bihar and UP.

The history also witnessed a Maoist upsurge at the time. The narrator says everyone young was turning Maoist at that time. There had been a terrorist movement amongst nationalists in Bengal. There were secret societies like Anushilan and Jugantar. They run clandestine networks and made bombs to assassinate British officials and policemen. British had also retaliated with deportations and executions. Tridib seemed to have trusted no one except perhaps his family. Is that the reason behind Tridib being secretive about his family and circumstances? The narrator's grandmother recalls about a boy in the early nineteen twenties. He had been a member of one of the secret terrorist societies since a tender age of fourteen. She gives an account of what he went through at that age in order to serve for the cause.

He had been exercising with them in their gymnasium, learning to use pistols and make bombs, smuggling their messages and running errands. A few months before he was arrested he had finally been initiated into the society. The first mission they had given him was to assassinate an English magistrate in Khulna district. All his preparations were ready; he was to leave for Khulna at the end of that week. But the police found out – their network of informers was legendary. The boy was tried and later deported to the infamous Cellular Gaol in the Andaman Islands.

She describes of how their class was interrupted halfway through a lecture. Students whispered but remained subdued lest they draw the attention to themselves. The lecturer tried to protest but he was silenced. She was frightened too. She admitted to have grown up with a party of policemen raiding every now and then in those days. When Tridib asked her of what exactly did she think about everything happening around her or, even what she thought of the boy, she said she used to dream about him, for the narrator thinks she was fascinated by the stories of Khudiram Bose, Bagha Jatin. She had always wanted to do something for the terrorist. The narrator thinks that Had she known about the boy,

she would have gone to Khulna with him, stood by his side holding pistol in her hands, but he was not sure whether she would have killed him or not. To this question she said she would not have been too frightened to pull the trigger. Narrator's grandmother has always been concerned for freedom, even at the cost of war. Later in the novel we shall find out how she will give away her only chain which has been a part of her, which is the only first gift given to her by her late husband. She gave it away to the fund of the war with Pakistan.

The narrative goes back and forth in history. Tridib's family had to go to London for his father's operation in 1939, the beginning of the Second World War. He also told the narrator and Ila, his niece, that Alan Tresawsen, Mrs. Price's brother had worked in Left Book Club in London before the war. The narrator was reminded of the club when he chanced to see a sign board which reads Victor Gollancz. It is the same club which the narrator enquired after a woman while Ila was showing him around London. Victor Gollancz, a publishing house was a part of the club. Ila did not remember any part of it. On the other hand, to the narrator the past seemed concurrent with the present when he had seen the sign board. Tridib had told quite a few war stories to the narrator. He remembers one when he was asked by Nick, Mrs. Price's son, to show the way leading to his house. He finds out the Solent Road and told them how bombs exploded most of the houses along the road, how the two floors of Lymington Mansions were burnt down by an incendiary bomb on the first of October, 1940. He told them of what he had heard from Tridib back in Calcutta. Although he believed it to be true, Robi thought Germans had not developed bombs of such calibre. Now if history can be traced the two main periods of bombing are the period of 1940-41 and 1944-45. In the early hours of 19<sup>th</sup> September, 1940 seven bombs fell between Mill Lane and Sumatra Road. Nineteen people got killed and the same numbers of houses were destroyed. The narrator had not expected any part of the history before reaching the Solent Road, Neither had he ...expected to see what Tridib had seen...I had not expected to see rubble sloping down from burnt-out houses like spree in a mountain quarry, with a miraculously undamaged bathtub balanced precariously at the top, nor had I expected to find the road barricaded by policemen while the men from the Heavy Rescue Service tried to dig beneath the rubble for the lost pensioner. I had known that I would not see uprooted trees or splintered windows or buckled flagstones: I had expected nothing of all that, knowing it to be lost in a forty year old past. (57)

But he did not believe in what he did see presently. Tridib's version of the Solent Road seemed truer to him. He wanted to see England as he once saw her in her finest moment, in the war. The trauma of war has captured the imagination of the people living in London at that time. In 1940, tins of toffees were being dropped by enemy aeroplanes. Snipe, Mrs. Price's husband said it was an attempt to demoralize the population by getting at the children. As for Mayadebi, she was worried that Tridib would surely find one of those tins. She was worried because he was the only child left in Lymington Road. All the other children were sent out of London. In 1964 Calcutta has witnessed trouble too. It was just after the war with China in 1962. Narrator's father was relieved to have sent his mother, Tridib and May, Mrs. Price's daughter to Dhaka. Bangladesh is not safe either. The narrator admits to have seen the name Dhanmudi everywhere, in books, in newspapers. Sheikh Mujibur Rahaman lived in Dhanmudi and there he died. One fine morning he was gunned down in his own balcony. Reading these reports the narrator wonders had Robi been there, thirteen years old, he would have heard those first bursts of gun fire,

...run to the roof and seen the old man's body crashing to the driveway, leaking blood, before Nityananda or his mother came running up the stairs behind him, and clapped their hands over his eyes and whispered breathlessly in his ears: Don't look, don't look – it's just a game. (195)

In Calcutta, at that time classes in schools were being suspended, schools being shut, tanks being poisoned – Tala tank being one of those tanks. One day the narrator and his classmates saw a "column of grey smoke rising into the sky" (202), but could not locate its source. There was an ocean of desolation in them. But the narrator says that they were more petrified with fear than they are fearful of the trouble.

Unlike the narrator Ila lay claim to history as she happened to have grown up in a place which had experienced history. She thinks she is a part of history and the future political people will look to people like her as people will look for people like Alan Tresawsen, Mike, Dan and Francesca. Only the last one of the group survived the Second World War. Tridib told the narrator about this group earlier. Tridib would despair because he was not sure of what is more real, the dirty bathtub and the bedrooms that they shared or, the fact that the three of the four of them would be dead after the Nazi-Soviet pact.

The realities of the bombs and torpedoes and the dying was easy enough to imagine – mere events, after all recorded in thousands of films and photographs and comic books. But not that order infinitely more important reality: the fact that they knew, even walking down that street (Brick Lane), that evening, they knew what was coming – not the details nor the timing perhaps, but they knew, all four of them, that their world, and in all probability they themselves, would not survive the war. What is the colour of that knowledge? Nobody knows,

nobody can ever know, not even memory, because there are moments in time that are not knowable: nobody can ever know what it was like to be young and intelligent in the summer 1939 in London, Berlin. (68)

Ila says the narrator would not understand any of it as he hardly knows England, which, as the narrator thinks is not very far from the truth. He has come to know England mostly out of Tridib's portrayal of England. But he has known the people of his own age who have survived the Great Terror in Calcutta of the nineteen sixties and seventies. This is something Ila would never understand. The narrator tried to see London through Tridib's eyes, much like he tried to imagine the trouble that befell upon those who went to Dhaka. But the Dhaka which narrator's grandmother once knew could not be found anywhere. Even her own house she remembered which she told to the narrator, had changed. G. R. Taneja in his review of the novel *Reviewed Work: The Shadow Lines* opines "The grandmother establishes in him the oneness of memory, for her neither space nor time can divide it" (365). He further adds that religion, nation, war, partition and violence divide people, but memory does not. Therefore, in her memory every detail remains intact, only the people, with whom she has the memories, have changed. It would have been even better had her uncle changed since she had left her. It is for him she went, to bring him back to Calcutta. But he would not move because he was afraid that his home would then be divided like it was divided all those years back in Dhaka when his brother was alive. The two families used to live together. But on one fateful day a wall had been erected right in middle of the house. After that they lived apart from each other.

The narrative moves from the year 1964 to 1979. The narrator tries to remember what is the most significant event happened in 1960s. His friend Malik says it was the war with China in 1962. But the narrator can only think of hearing voices running past the wall of his school, glimpse of a mob at Park Circus. Suvir Kaul in *Separation Anxiety: Growing up International in Amitav Ghosh's "The Shadow Lines"* opines that memories of riots are preserved in public discussion. They are repressed because of its inability to fully transform people. The narrator is talking about the riot in Calcutta in 1964. There is a debate among themselves as to what is worthy of mentioning: a war or, a local riot somewhere happened in Calcutta or in Khulna. Robi, Tridib's brother, remembers how a riot can be lethal as Tridib is killed in a riot not far from where his mother was born in Khulna. He remembers it as a dream and he wishes to get himself rid of the dream. Then again, he says:

How can anyone divide a memory? If freedom were possible, surely Tridib's death would have set me free. And yet, all it takes to set my hand shaking like a leaf, fifteen years later, thousands of miles away, at the other end of another continent, is chance remark by a waiter in a restaurant. (247)

Tridib's death unveils the trauma for Robi. He remembers this because of a chance remark of a waiter in a restaurant in London. He realizes that the concept of freedom is a mirage, thousands of lines drawn through a subcontinent, mere shadow lines dividing a nation. However, this introspection is exactly what his previous generation lacks. Narrator's grandmother would rather prefer a war to set things right. To her the shadow lines did exist in reality. In that sense she is more realistic than the other characters of the novel. She does not dwell on the past; rather she tries to build her future up on the experiences of the past. A N Kaul asks in his article *Who is Afraid of Shadow Lines* if another shadow line exists between experience lived or experience narrated or heard. He says narration of the imagined past excites other's imagination. Future experience thus remains contained in memory. Therefore, one cannot be sure of which is more real: imagination or memory. The narrator could never ask May what exactly happened to Tridib when they were in Khulna. In fact, He did not even know how to ask her, although she was there with Tridib that day. May on the other hand wonders why he has not asked her of how Tridib died. She said Tridib gave himself up, offered himself as a sacrificial lamb, and although why he did what he did is a mystery to May. She used to think she had killed him, as he would not have gone out of the car had she not gone out trying to save his grand uncle and the rickshaw puller form the fanatic mob. She was sure the mob would not have touched her anyway, for she was an English memsahib. But this mystery, finally revealed, redeems the traumatic memory of the narrator and May to some extent.

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