

Indian Partition of 1947 as Traumatic Rapture: An Analysis of Trauma and Memory Through Bakhtin's Chronotope in Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines*

ALTAF AHMAD KHAN

PhD Scholar at the School of Language and Linguistics Studies (SOLLS), Faculty of Social Sciences & Humanities, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Malaysia

p111042@siswa.ukm.edu.my

Corresponding Author: *

Altaf Ahmad Khan

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ABSTRACT

One of the significant events that created a rapture in the political, geographical, and psychological history of South Asia is the division of India in 1947, which resulted in instantaneous destruction and psychological trauma. In the fiction of partition, it is represented as an overarching chronotope with dislocation and disjuncture in time. *The Shadow Lines* (1988) by Amitav Ghosh is an important work of fiction on the topic of partition and it attempts to portray partition in its artificial borders and violence as an event that is not in the past but continues to shape the present. Through the non-linear and dialogic narrative structure, Calcutta, Dhaka, and London come together as chronotopic spaces through the interweaving of memory and imagination, where trauma and violence of partition bring a fractured identity which transcends time and geographies. The aim of this article is to examine Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* as a literary text of partition trauma and memory through the theoretical framework of Mikhail Bakhtin's idea of chronotope. The study is guided by trauma theory and postmemory, where partition is considered a continuous process that challenges time and space, creating dialogic recollection. The article argues that Ghosh's text creates a transformation of partition, not as a historical event, but rather as a spatial-temporal concept in terms of physical borders, violence and memory. The study's chronotopic reading advances postcolonial literary criticism by illustrating that trauma in *The Shadow Lines* is spatially embedded and temporally recursive, facilitating dialogical healing.

Keywords: Indian partition Trauma, Postmemory, Chronotope, Borders, *The Shadow Lines*

INTRODUCTION

Other than the division of geography based on government boundaries, the Indian Partition of 1947 also represented a major disruption of lived space and historical time. As a result, millions of people were displaced due to the major changes that occurred on the borders of the Indian subcontinent, and this led to traumatization of the affected individuals (Ghosh, 2025, p.60).

However, the harmful effects of partition cannot be seen in the past, as they still echo through the generations, bursting out in the form of fractured identities, inheritances, and conflicts. As far as the representation of partition in literature is concerned, it is not represented in terms of history, but in terms of a process that still continues to shape one's perception of time and space (Sabrin, 2020, p.42). The continuation of this theme through Ghosh's narrative can be understood through Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of

chronotope, which discusses the interrelation of time and space. This study argues that partition in the text is not just viewed as a history of division but as a space in which divided time and space are ethically reunited through human imagination and memory.

In the discourse of literature, partition has come to figure not just as a background occurrence but also as a determining force that influences the narratives of time, space, and identity. There is a clear obsession with scenes of rupture and exile in partition fiction that implies that the trauma of partition is one that lingers in the present (Ghosh, 2025, p. 60). One of the most interesting literary treatments of this period of historical tragedy can be found in Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines*, which offers a conceptualization of partition as a state of being rather than a specific political event. The novel, published in 1988, uses fractured narratives to describe its characters as they are affected by partition displacement and borders, acknowledge partition as a process rather than an event. As per Bakhtin's theory that chronotopes influence the understanding of historical events as dynamic processes shaped by individual experiences, the boundaries of 1947 do not circumscribe the memories and associations of shared spaces. There is a non-linear connection to time and space in the narrative that depicts events simultaneously from different temporal and spatial contexts (Mim, 2024, p.24). This chronotopic logic is crucial in *The Shadow Lines*. Chronotope in the narrative serves as site where time and space relations crystallize in a single entity, informing both storytelling and human experience (Khan & Harris Satkunanathan, 2025). From this perspective, partition might be seen as a hegemonic historical chronotope, one that shatters linear time, dislocates space, and produces moments of irreversible transformation. Ghosh suggests that border-making in 1947 did not simply divide space; it produced new spatial realities that reconfigured identity memory and belonging,

The narrative form of the novel overcomes the distances between Calcutta, Dhaka, and London, demonstrating how the spatial divisions of partition cannot contain historical time (Roy

2015, p. 22). The 1947 riot and the 1964 Dhaka riot are comparable, and this can be exemplified in the death of Tridib. This creates a chronotopic space that complicates the idea of partition as an event in itself, bringing together the past, the present, and the future, as well as dissolving boundaries of nation and identity. The text challenges the idea of borders, showing them to be "shadow lines" or imaginary lines that can lead to violent outcomes (Kumar, 2015, p. 70). Through the interviewing of memory and national history, Ghosh shows how partition continues to influence daily life, informing subjectivity beyond the actual boundaries drawn in 1947. The riot in Dhaka in 1964, which leads to Tridib's death, becomes symbolic of how partition violence continues to resurface in subsequent decades (Ghosh, 2025, p. 60).

This study, therefore, aims to explore how *The Shadow Lines* works to transform the Partition from an event into an ongoing condition, marked by the presence of physical boundaries, memory, and violence, which are all spatial-temporal in nature. The article uses Bakhtin's idea of chronotope to explore how Ghosh uses space in relation to trauma and stretches the idea of time beyond 1947 and how it facilitates healing through dialogic memory. The research attempts to contribute to the study of the event of Partition by highlighting the chronotopic features of trauma and the potential of the novel to heal the histories of the past into new, shared, and responsible narratives of the past.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Amitav Ghosh's novel *The Shadow Lines* (1988) has been examined through various analytical lenses, including postcolonial theory, trauma and memory studies, diaspora studies, historiography, and spatial criticism. The text explores themes of nationhood, borders, communal violence, and diasporic consciousness, focusing on the psychological effects of the partition and its influence on collective memory concerning the riots in Dhaka and Calcutta (Chander & Verma, 2024, p.117). Postcolonial criticism consistently emphasizes. Ghosh's efforts to deconstruct nationalist certainties and boundaries (Bharali,

2012; Kasikhan, 2015). These works contend that Ghosh criticizes the ideological formation of the nation-state, perceiving borders as mainly political abstractions or symbolic constructs. Kumar (2015) argues that the narrative challenges the belief that nationhood is fundamentally based on geographical factors. By illustrating “violence in artificially drawn territories”, the novel refers to the failure of national boundaries to ensure community cohesion, undermining optimistic views of independence (p.69).

Mehrotra (2025), broaden the scope by situating the novel within transnational and migratory frameworks. This study argues that borders and maps are significant beyond their geographical representation, profoundly impacting those who “experience their consequences” (p.804). Ghosh examines how geographical and psychological borders create trauma and alienation in characters, reflecting the historical context of the partition. (Biswas et al., 2024, p.131). The authors contend that actual borders are both cartographic and mental constructs sustained through fear and ideology. Their analysis underscores the convergence of spatial fragmentation and psychological dislocation, highlighting how Ghosh critiques the material and symbolic dimensions of boundary-making. The psychological borders are often longer-lasting and more harmful than physical ones, influencing characters' “identities and relationships” even after political boundaries are established (132). The idea of nation and borders in the novel, deconstructs monolithic national identity by exposing its reliance on exclusion and violence (Hooda, 2023, p.198). Hooda's research investigates the arbitrariness of borders and the emotional impact of nationalist fervor, advocating for ethical humanism instead of territorial loyalty, and challenges post-partition state formations (p.199).

Although academic scholarship within diasporic and transnational frameworks convincingly demonstrates the spatial mobility and identity fluidity, it focuses on to analyze diaspora as experiential theme rather than structural principle. According to Peeters (2008), home is “not territorial but relational” in *The Shadow Lines*

as it is “constituted not by geography but by networks of memory and emotion” since “Thamma's birthplace is now part of an opposite culture that shapes her self-identity” (p.32). On the other hand, Ray (2018) study moves the attention from diaspora to spatial representation and examines how “geographical settings” such as Calcutta, Dhaka, and London can be treated as a contested space for memory and identity (p.308). Further, Roy suggests that space is not only physical but also psychologically mediated so that the idea of cartographic fixity is undermined. Mehrotra (2025) study on “identity and displacement” explores that the creation of borders leads to liminal identities that are marked by ambivalence (p.804). This research argues that belonging is a process of negotiation through changing boundaries and reinforces the idea of Partition as an ongoing spatial and psychological phenomenon, where borders are both physical and psychological. Frontiers, maps, memory and geocritical methodology show the ways in which spatial imaginaries produce identity crises (Mondal 2023). This spatial multiplicity thus foregrounded reinforces the novel's subversion of cartographic absolutism.

Trauma theory and memory study have profoundly shaped recent readings of the novel by demonstrating trauma's belatedness and repetition. Sarkar (2019) foregrounds Partition trauma, interpreting communal violence as an enduring psychological wound and “repressed memory” (p .84). This research connects the novel to trauma discourse, framing trauma as thematic representation while not exploring how narrative time expresses trauma through repetition and belatedness. It explores narrative layering and temporal shifts that indicate memory disrupts linear chronology and traditional historiography. Ghosh disrupts linear historiography by blending personal memory with public history, thereby challenging official accounts of 1947 (Mim, 2024, p.2). Silence acts as both a manifestation of trauma and an ethical form of resistance, revealing psychological disruption and serving as a critique of nationalist historiography. Ghosh and Ahmed (2020) argue that Ghosh examines how personal and collective histories interconnect to illustrate the varied traumatic experiences, particularly

emphasizing post-traumatic stress disorder and its symptoms, including repetition and emotional turmoil in character psychology (P.110). Nahar (2024) positions memory “at the heart of the novel”, arguing that recollection replaces linear chronology (p.183). Nahar implicitly recognizes temporal collapse but does not integrate spatiality into this temporal analysis. Yusin (2009) focuses on silence, borders, and trauma, arguing that Partition history is marked by representational gaps. Yusin’s study aligns strongly with trauma theory, particularly Caruth’s notion of the unspeakable.

Intergenerational trauma has become an increasingly prominent focus in the literary scholarship on the text. Quayum (2024) applies the concept of postmemory to demonstrate how younger generations inherit partition experiences imaginatively rather than experientially “to rebuild, re-incarnate, replace and repair” (p.130). Memory thus collapses generational time, illustrating partition’s belated and repetitive temporality. Soni and Tiwari (2024) study engages with intergenerational trauma and memory and contends that violence “reverberates across generations through storytelling and silence” (p. 6834). They demonstrate how the novel depicts inherited grief and unresolved mourning, aligning with Caruth’s notion of belated trauma and foregrounding narrative as a medium of transmission. Spatial criticism offers the closest precursor to a chronotopic reading. Spatial scholars acknowledge spatial fluidity and temporal fragmentation, however, the integration of these dimensions into a unified theoretical model remains underdeveloped. Scholars such as Mondal (2023), Butt (2020) and Ray (2018) examine the critical relationship between memories, history, space, and place within the plotline and the border fluidity and geographical representation. While these studies emphasize cartographic instability, they rarely integrate time as co-constitutive dimension. They predominantly interpret space in metaphorical or political terms rather than considering its temporal richness.

Academic scholarship on the text acknowledges temporal disruption and spatial instability but seldom view Partition as a chronotope, which shapes narrative form, memory transmission, and

identity crisis concurrently. The aim of this research is to investigate the role of partition in Ghosh’s *The Shadow Lines* as a chronotope that involves elements of fragmentation, repetition, and border crossings, which transform time and space through memory and violence. The article will add to the existing body of knowledge by demonstrating the ways in which Ghosh represents partition as a spatial-temporal event that not only inflicts trauma but also offers possibilities for healing through memory.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

TRAUMA, POSTMEMORY AND CHRONOTOPE: A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

TRAUMA THEORY: CARUTH AND LACAPRA

In order to understand the psychological and narrative consequences of the partition of India in 1947, trauma theory offers a key framework of analyses. According to Caruth, trauma is marked in terms of belatedness and repetition, whereby the traumatic experience is not assimilated at the time of the event, but rather in retrospect through memories, flashbacks, and narratives (Caruth, 1996, p.11). In addition, Caruth argues that trauma has the potential to be in a latent state and can appear again in similar contexts in history. This psychological halt is referred to as delayed action," which is also referred to as latency (Caruth, 1996, p.7). The concept of trauma is hard to handle in the context of narration by the affected individuals because it becomes difficult to comprehend and articulate (Magishavarthini & Niranjani, 2022, p.758). This concept is especially relevant in partition fiction where violence is portrayed in silence and broken narratives rather than in linear narrative form. Traumas are quite difficult to pinpoint, which can also come in the form of dreams and fragmented memories (Whitehead, 2004, p.12). The trauma of partition is portrayed in *The Shadow Lines* in the form of recurring recollections of characters and events associated with 1964, thus showing the way trauma subverts linear time and allows the past to invade the present. Thus, Partition is seen not as a

fixed event but as a continuing psychological trauma.

The analysis of trauma is further refined by Dominick LaCapra in terms of “*acting out*” and “*working through*” trauma concepts. In his work “*Writing History, Writing Trauma*,” La Capra argues that “historical texts serve as substitutes for the missing history” (2001, p. 10), and explains how historical occurrences can deeply influence a particular group of people or an individual, limiting their prospects for a brighter future. Trauma enactment is more painful than trauma articulation since it brings up past experiences, which makes it difficult for trauma victims to gain distance from what happened, hence hindering progress in the future (Khanal, 2023, p. 99). On the contrary, trauma working through is a reflective engagement with trauma that acknowledges loss and enables ethical understanding and partial integration of trauma experiences (LaCapra, 2001, p.22). The event is temporal, affecting the present and future, with the nature of trauma being elusive, “past trauma does not completely disappear” (p. 55). According to LaCapra, that this does not result in closure and recovery but enables a responsible relationship with the past and its impact acknowledged. This difference can be seen with reference to Ghosh’s depiction of Thamma, whose nationalist ideologies and experiences of displacement reflect her internalization of trauma related to the partition. On the other hand, the narrator, May, and Robi are dealing with inherited memories, trying to understand Partition as a legacy with a complex emotional content.

POSTMEMORY AND TRANSGENERATIONAL TRAUMA

The term postmemory coined by Marianne Hirsch helps us develop an understanding of how Partition trauma transcends the generation of immediate witnesses. Postmemory underscores “the connection between the ‘generation after’ and their ancestors trauma” (Hirsch, 1997, p.19). These inherited memories function as lived experiences, which affect identity and historical consciousness. Postmemory concept mainly deals with how the succeeding generation relates to the

trauma experienced by their ancestors rather than the trauma experienced by the succeeding generation (Juncosa, 2024, p. 37). According to Hirsch’s framework, trauma is communicated through narratives and spaces, as seen in Ghosh’s novel where locations such as Dhaka and Calcutta embody collective memory and emotion. The narrator reflects on the 1947 partition in the text from a postmemory perspective, based on his grandmother’s recollections and stories told by Tridib. Postmemory is the transmission of culture and memory through material objects such as letters, photographs, and artifacts (Ebert, 2010, p.21). He uses artifacts like a map and a newspaper to form a picture of a history he has not directly experienced. The artifacts he has are incomplete and evoke a sense of absence rather than a complete history.

BAKHTIN’S CHRONOTOPE AND PARTITION AS A SPATIAL-TEMPORAL FORMATION

The concept of chronotope, which is defined as the inherent interrelation between time and space in a narrative, as developed by Mikhail Bakhtin, is the main theoretical tool in this study (Bakhtin, 1981, 84). Chronotope is an important in understanding how historical events are arranged, experienced, and narrated, and how this affects the interrelation between individuals and socio-historical events (Luo, 2017, p.39). An analysis of partition using the concept of chronotope shows that trauma is deeply connected with issues of memory and spatial-temporal relationship. In the text partition serves as a chronotope of trauma and rapture through dislocated geography and time, which shows that politics can redraw geography but not emotions, culture, and memory. Bakhtin studies the artistic connection between time and space, especially in literature, by examining the correlation between the spatial event and the timeline used to present a story (Benaidja, 2021, p.17). Ghosh’s work has created spaces such as Calcutta, Dhaka, and London, which are overlapping spaces. These spaces are related in terms of memory, narration, and emotions, which have created a timeline in a non-linear manner. Bakhtin’s chronotope enables dialogic contact between histories and multiple viewpoints,

allowing the coexistence of the past and the present in the narrative, especially when it comes to trauma related to historical events (Faizi & Taghizadeh, 2015, p. 109). Such strategy resists the monologic notions of national history and underscores the subjective nature of historical experience. In representing partition as a chronotopic phenomenon, Ghosh reveals the ongoing negotiation of trauma, memory, history, and identity at spatial-temporal intersections (Wirtz, 2016). Partition, as a chronotope, promotes healing because it allows for narratives that ethically confront inherited traumas through narratives and dialogue, aiming at a tentative reconciliation while understanding the shared experience of violence through time and generations. The chronotope concept by Bakhtin examines the relationship between time and space in literature, which is evident in the novel by Amitav Ghosh, where partition is seen as a crucial element that transcends time, geography, and generations.

Concepts such as trauma theory, postmemory, and Bakhtin's chronotope provide a comprehensive tool for the analysis of the novel, particularly in the context of the partition of India as a chronotope of trauma and rapture, which subverts the linearity of history and the intergenerational transmission of psychological trauma. Finally, the study foregrounds the significance of the novel in the spatialization of trauma, the mediation of postmemory, and the promotion of healing beyond the nation-state.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this study, qualitative textual analysis methods, such as the exploration of narrative structure, spatial movements, interactions of characters and trauma and memory are used on *The Shadow Lines*. The concept of chronotope, as proposed by Bakhtin, is used as a tool of analysis, supplemented by trauma theory and postmemory concepts. Scenes of important events, physical and emotional movements across multiple geographies and borders, recollections of riots, and intergenerational dialogues are examined for their role in creating partition as a chronotope of persistence.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

PARTITION AS A CHRONOTOPE OF TRAUMATIC RAPTURE AND FRAGMENTATION IN *THE SHADOW LINES*

In Ghosh's novel *The Shadow Lines*, the chronotope of partition is seen as an event of disruption and fragmentation, affecting individual identities, memory, and psychological states. Ghosh's novel shows how the characters are tormented by memories of the past, especially the historical Partition, which resulted in death, destruction, and the loss of socio-political harmony in the region (Khanal, 2023, p. 2). Ghosh interprets Partition as an ongoing framework rather than a singular historical event, emphasizing that political borders do not capture the emotional and cultural connections that surpass nationalist boundaries. The novel intertwines the chronotopic spaces of Calcutta, Dhaka, and London, blending memory and emotion, while questioning conventional ideas of geographical distance and linear time (Sikder & Talukder, 2025, p.9). Through a non-linear narrative and fragmented stories, the text explores fractured identity and history after partition. The narrator questions historical progress by intertwining cyclical time, reconstructing the past through childhood stories and family memories that link past and present.

Ghosh's narrative depicts borders as "shadow lines" on maps, and the fluidity of lived experiences, with partition resulting in the loss of home and forcing characters to live like refugees after being separated from their birthplace (Sikder & Talukder, 2025, p.10). Thamma reflects on the deterioration of her family home. She says a "kind of a place where rich Calcutta people-built garden houses. And look at it now - as filthy as baby's nest. It's all because of the refugees" (p.145). Robi was troubled by dreams of his uncle Tridib's death during the riots in Dhaka, grappling with the trauma of his brutal killing. Robi says, "[E]ver since it first happened. When I was a child, I used to pray that it would go away... But it wouldn't go;

it stayed” (Ghosh, p. 179). Partition as a historical event creates artificial borders that disrupt lives and identities. Ghosh explores the enduring trauma of this rupture through the characters' memories and experiences, utilizing a non-linear narrative structure.

NATIONALIST CARTOGRAPHY, BORDERS AND THE TRAUMA OF DISLOCATION

In *The Shadow Lines*, the narrator's grandmother Thamma perceives Dhaka as a symbol of her lost pre-Partition childhood, demonstrating how the 1947 partition impacted her identity. Her return to post-partition Dhaka after decades reveals a city transformed, reflecting both physical changes and emotional trauma, marking a significant rupture in her sense of belonging. The violence and political reordering of 1947 have rendered the city unrecognizable, not only physically but emotionally and she asks “Where’s Dhaka? I can’t see Dhaka” (Ghosh, p.141). Similarly, the narrator’s reflection for her Dhaka was not a city, but a time and “her Dhaka had long since vanished into the past” (Ghosh, p.141), a time that had ended with partition captures the essence of chronotopic fragmentation. Partition leads to a disconnection between memory and place, causing an identity crisis about home. The perspective of Thamma is informed by a revolutionary history that underscores sacrifice, violence, and territorial division as critical for national integrity and political independence. Partition is seen as a logical historical event that brings clarity and a sense of belonging with territorial demarcation. According to her, partition is an understandable historical event, offering clarity and identity through national boundaries. She equates nationalism with sacrifice, arguing that her sister's granddaughter Ila does not belong in Britain as her ancestors never sacrificed for it. Thamma points out that nations are characterized by these sacrifices as “everyone who lives there has earned his right to be there with blood: with their brother’s blood and their father’s blood and their son’s blood” (Ghosh, p.58). In the context of the war, Thamma relates violence to personal sacrifices and beliefs that “we have to wipe them out” (Ghosh, p. 172) for

freedom. Her act of sacrifice of her gold chain and blood for the war represents the spatial logic of partition, where national borders breed hatred and justify violence as an act of atonement.

Nevertheless, the experience of visiting Dhaka reveals the limits of her assumption that borders are visible and tangible. What once represented security and childhood, the city of Dhaka, is now politically and emotionally disrupted and alien. She finds that the line between India and East Pakistan is invisible but its effects are devastating (Ghosh, p. 110). Such understanding leads her to the anguished query, “But what was it all for then? – Partition and all the killing and everything” (Ghosh, p.110), which marks the collapse of the logic of nationalism in the face of individual tragedy. The return of Thamma to her childhood home in Dhaka illustrates the complex relationship between memory and trauma that is shaped by disillusionment with partition, comparing her nostalgic memory of old Dhaka to a modernized city that is characterized by bureaucratic changes (Ghosh, p.141). The concept of “time becoming visible in space” by Bakhtin comes alive with the city itself becoming a repository for trauma.

The identification of familiar streets and shops creates an overlap between the past and present, and what is seen is an underlying tension between the past Dhaka that Thamma cherishes and the present cityscapes that fail to respond to her query “Where’s Dhaka? (Ghosh, p.141). For example, the grandmother’s persistence with the idea that “the signboard being unchanged” reflects the difficulty with which traumatic memory can be corrected (Ghosh, p. 150). This relates to the psychological challenge experienced by partition survivors in reconciling their memories with the present. Later in the narrative, the narrator thinks about her perplexity over “coming” and “going” (Ghosh, p. 111) as an identity crisis, where language’s assumption of “home” is disrupted by partition and man-made borders. Her journey is a quest for lost spatial-temporal coherence that is a product of a traumatic rapture. Even though her home remains intact, it remains inaccessible due to the borders, representing her fractured identity and fragmented present. This can be seen as an example of Bakhtin’s concept of chronotope in

traumatic narratives, showing how the past remains physically present yet temporally irretrievable in the present for Thamma (Sabrin, 2020, p. 45).

The focus of Thamma on the use of maps and borders reflects the search for order amidst chaos and the fragmented nature of her identity. Ghosh's concentration on the limitations of maps to portray experiences highlights that borders are not enough to sustain personal connections. Such contrast refers to the distinction between ideological belief and emotional reality. Thamma's identity, shaped by the borders of partition, produces a complex sense of belonging to Calcutta and Dhaka. The identity of Thamma, which is largely influenced by the borders of partition, gives rise to a complex sense of belonging to both Calcutta and Dhaka. Her relationship with the border between India and East Pakistan makes her connection with Dhaka complicated. She is "as foreign as May - much more than May" (Ghosh, p.142). Her aspiration to transport her old uncle from Dhaka symbolizes her quest to mend her fractured sense of belonging (Ghosh, p.154). Her nationalism, which emphasizes the importance of borders, is at odds with her personal experiences of dislocation caused by partition. She is the epitome of "acting out," where the traumatic event is replayed rather than processed. She is the embodiment of the inability to transcend the divide. However, Thamma's character is quite contrasting with the narrator's historical perspective as she is still traumatized from the partition. Ghosh's experiences with borders and the dissonance between memory and reality speak to the way nationalism perpetuates historical wounds.

In a similar context, Thamma's uncle, Jethamoshai, represents the resistance to the arbitrary boundaries set by the 1947 partition when he decides to stay in his Dhaka residence, which is now located in East Pakistan. His choice demonstrates that identity goes beyond religion and national identity and focuses on one's history. He says "I don't believe in this India-Shindia... but suppose when you get there they decide to draw another line somewhere... As for me, I was born here, and I'll die here" (Ghosh, p. 157). Ghosh, through his character Jethamoshai, reveals that

true identity comes from history, community, and place beyond geographical and political boundaries. The border in Ghosh's story reveals the myth of boundaries by showing how partition as a traumatic chronotope affects personal and national identity.

The old house of Jethamoshai and Thamma in Dhaka city serves as chronotopic space, symbolizing displacement and non-belonging of partition. This stable space, because of the economic factors, has turned into a dispersed space for the refugees. The narrator says that, "It was all changed... It wasn't the house she remembered, the house she had built for me in Calcutta (Ghosh, p. 151). The appearance of refugees such as Saifuddin and Khalil in the house brings the theme of migration and adaptation. Moreover, the dynamics in the house portray the paradoxes that come with partition, such as the presence of a Hindu male, Jethamoshai, who is being hosted by Khalil, a Muslim refugee (Ghosh, p.153). Jethamoshai's house reflects the stagnated chronotope, where colonial time, pre-partition domesticity, and post-Partition reality are mixed together in disarray. The event of Partition serves as a chronotope, which reconfigures time and space and confines people within a fragmented time. "The King-Emperor's portrait, buried in dust and cobwebs" (Ghosh, p. 155), becomes a relic anchoring his fractured consciousness to his pre-partition past. The way he insists on treating the visitors as "clients," his commitment to the King-Emperor, and his fixation on legal possession demonstrate how for him, time stands still (Ghosh, p. 155). Space here functions as a repository of unresolved histories. The room's mixture of legal books, mechanical scrap, and domestic items, which reflects how partition has forced incompatible worlds into an uninhabitable environment where time stagnates for individuals.

IMAGINATION, MOBILITY AND ETHICAL ENGAGEMENT WITH SPACE

In *The Shadow Lines*, Tridib offers an alternative view on the Partition and borders, prioritizing imagination and ethical curiosity over nationalist boundaries. Tridib envisions a borderless nation, aspiring for a cross-cultural state that transcends

frontiers (Nuruzzaman & Islam, 2016). He challenges the idea of fixed maps, borders and nations, suggesting that space is influenced by personal experiences, memories, and emotions that go beyond “the limits of one’s mind to other times and other places” (Ghosh, p.23), contrasting with Thamma's belief in the necessity of political and specified borders. This belief is reflected in his interest in maps, which is used to narrate stories that focus on opportunities and links beyond physical constraints (Anand & Shankar, 2025). He suggests a counter-geography to counter the dislocation caused by partition, stressing the need to observe places such as London and Cairo with sympathetic vision before visiting them. Such approach is in accordance with Bakhtin’s chronotope, which brings together time, space, and human experience in the construction of meaning (Bakhtin, 1981, p.250). The insistence of Tridib that one should “use one’s imagination with precision” (Ghosh, p.23) makes geography an ethical act, an act of entering another’s world without appropriating it. In this process, he seeks to challenge the nationalist discourse that establishes the relationship between territory, identity, and belonging. In his stories, Ghosh communicates how cities like London, Dhaka, and Calcutta are connected and focusing on human experiences that transcend political divisions (Polatti, 2021, p.75). The themes in London include war and resilience, while in Dhaka and Calcutta, they are family ties and historical conflict.

The imaginative outlook of Tridib questions the idea of borders, which are considered to be merely a human construct rather than a real division of the world (Polatti, 2021, p. 69). The death of Tridib in the riot in Dhaka serves as a metaphor for the ineffectiveness of borders. As his brother Roby articulates that if freedom were possible through borders “surely Tridib’s death would have set me free” (Ghosh, p.179). Tridib’s death illustrates a personal and historical tragedy, showcasing a convergence of time where past violence intrudes into contemporary life (Nuruzzaman & Islam 2016, p. 4). Tridib relates the traumas of Partition to contemporary issues, asserting that borders are “shadow lines” that do not divide shared histories, cultures, and

experiences. As the narrator says that “after fifteen years after his death, Tridib watched over me and his atlas showed me meaning of distance” (Ghosh, p. 169) and the values of geographical borders and divisions. Tridib's imagination and cross-cultural identities enable him to transcend conventional limits, seeking a space free from history, collective memory, and violence (Ray, 2018, p.310). Ghosh critiques the illusory nature of borders through Tridib's death during the 1964 Dhaka riots, refers to the futility of divisions between India and East Pakistan. The violence that transcends these borders illustrates their inability to prevent conflict even decades later.

POSTMEMORY, FAMILIAL SILENCE AND RECURSIVE TEMPORALITY

The narrator's experience of partition and its ensuing violence reflects Marianne Hirsch's postmemory concept, where familial stories and silences convey trauma (Mehrotra, 2025, p.808). As the grandson of Thamma and nephew of Tridib, his understanding is shaped by Thamma's nationalist views and Tridib's storytelling, viewing partition as an emotional reality rather than mere history (Soni & Tiwari, 2024). The narrator, born after the partition, has to rely on recollections and stories that reflects the importance of omissions in the transmission of trauma. The emotional conflict of Thamma is the conflict between her nationalist beliefs and her sorrow at the partition. Likewise, the struggles of the narrator's father and mother to verbalize the impact of violence and deaths experienced result in major silences that symbolize inherited trauma for the narrator (Ghosh, p.173). The “silences strengthen the connection to the past”, which is a reflection of Hirsch's concept of postmemory, which focuses on the untold in the construction of history (Quayum, 2024, p.128). The narrator combines Tridib's narratives, his grandmother's stories, and his own recollections to show how partition leads to a disjointed understanding of history. The narrator recollects later on, “I was sent to stay with my mother's brother in Durgapur when his body was brought back from Dhaka. He was cremated while I was away” (Ghosh, p. 173).

The parents of the narrator try to save him from the reality of Tridib's death because they think that

the boy would not be able to comprehend the importance of the event, leading to familial denial. However, later on the narrator later questions his mother regarding the specifics of Tridib's tragic death. The prompt reaction of the mother points to a series of complexities, which interest the narrator as "Who killed Tridib? You told me it was an accident. Yes, yes, my mother said quickly. Now go to sleep, don't worry" (Ghosh, p.173). The belated testimonies of Robi and May in London prove the truth of the event as perceived as a murder rather than an accident, and the impact of partition trauma through repression and disjointed narratives. Tridib links the narrator to the past through the power of imaginative storytelling, which provides emotional understanding of partition and its aftermath. The narrator explains that "Tridib' taught me and used to say, "to use my imagination with precision" (Ghosh, p.18). The narrator is guided by Tridib as he directs the protagonist to explore history through his imagination and memory, and a worldview that emphasizes emotional and empathetic connections over empirical approaches.

Ghosh demonstrates that the trauma of partition and communal violence is preserved not in history but in the "story," "emotion," and "silence," creating "postmemory," as Hirsch describes it (Soni & Tiwari, 2024, p. 6833). The narrator, who grew up in Calcutta, is heavily influenced by the stories and reminiscences about Dhaka, a place he has not visited but has reconstructed in his own imagination. The city of Dhaka is more than just a physical location; it is associated with the themes of brutality, historical erasure, and yearning (Ghosh, p.28). Partition as historical event, becomes an important emotional aspect, which affects the narrator's postmemory as well as his involvement with the city. The grandmother remembers her "childhood in Dhaka" (Ghosh, p. 89), and the grandmother reflects on the ancestral home that stands for the national disruption of the partition of 1947. The unified house splits into a divided house, much like India was divided into separate territories. The wooden "partition wall" (Ghosh, p. 91), is an omen of the legally drawn but highly effective borders.

However, the narrator's understanding of partition and its violence is informed by his experiences in London, which at first appears unrelated to the events of 1947. He learns from Tridib and May Price's recollections of the Blitz that violence and partition are global phenomena and not confined to South Asia (Ghosh, p. 42). The cityscape of London is represented as a chronotopic centre where colonial history, global warfare, and partition memories overlap. Through this space, the narrator's consciousness is seen to exhibit a recursive temporality of significant historical events like the World War II and the 1947 partition, alongside personal traumatic experiences like the 1964 Dhaka riots and the death of Tridib. The death of Tridib is not an isolated incident but a continuous trauma and a haunting specter of partition (Bharali, 2012, p.45). Partition shapes characters' worldview as seen in the narrator's experiences where the past affects the present through interpretative images and emotions. The present of the narrator is affected by his past, as seen through his experiences that lead to insights that can only be understood in retrospect (Quayum, 2024, p.131). The death of Tridib is a pivotal event in his life, and his memories are what give the narrator strength and hope in the present.

DIALOGIC SPACE: ENGAGEMENT WITH PAST THROUGH MULTIPLICITY OF MEMORY, STORYTELLING, TRANSGENERATIONAL DIALOGUE AND MEMORY OBJECTS

The non-linear narrative style with multiple perspectives, letters and dialogues is reminiscent of Bakhtin's concept of dialogism, which is "a form of language where meaning emerges from various voices rather than a single authority" (Amin et al., 2025, p.103). This concept emphasizes the relationship between time and memory as ethically significant, thereby presenting partition as not a historical event but a memory-space that is revisited over generations. The effects of partition are explored by Ghosh through multiple viewpoints such as those of Thamma, Tridib, May Price, Robi, and also the evolving viewpoint of narrator. The text reflects dialogic memory, linking time and space, and healing, suggests that

memory related to partition is fragmented as well as multi-dimensional. May shares her memories with the narrator coherently, transforming Tridib into a martyr, “He gave himself up so that I might be saved” (Ghosh, p.183). Significantly, the emotional distress experienced by Robi after Tridib’s death subverts nationalist ideologies by questioning the relevance of borders and sacrifices. He points out that the memory of trauma lasts beyond the boundaries set by humans, and therefore, borders are an illusion, “the whole thing is a mirage” (Ghosh, p.179).

The perspective provided by May Price on the death of Tridib is a richly nuanced temporality that questions the insider-outsider model of a postcolonial world. Her European perspective on violence, guilt, and responsibility promotes a dialogue of understanding. This relational perspective gives importance to Tridib’s death and defines it as a “sacrifice” (Ghosh, p. 183). Likewise, the contrasting views of Thamma and Ila on partition, identity, and borders show how historical trauma is perceived through generations. Thamma emphasizes the personal and emotional effects of borders and believes that partition is vital to create order and a sense of nationhood. However, despite her belief in borders, her bewilderment and question of why there are “no trenches or visible markers” (Ghosh, p.110), demonstrate their absurdity and scarring effects. On the other hand, Ila embodies a cosmopolitan viewpoint shaped by her upbringing abroad, leading her to perceive home differently. Unlike others affected by borders and partition, she lacks the emotional ties to these concepts, as the narrator says, “For Ila the current was the real: it was as though she lived in” (Ghosh, p.23). Through multiple viewpoints, traumatic events are revisited and reinterpreted through new awareness, reflecting Bakhtin's concept of renegotiated meaning (Faizi & Taghizadeh, 2015, p.109).

In addition, Ghosh examines how storytelling and intergenerational dialogue aid in partial healing and confronting past traumas related to the partition experience. Through perspectives of characters, particularly a grandmother and Tridib, the narrative reflects on themes of nationalism and fragmented identity (Fatma, 2025, p.179).The

narrator's recollections from Calcutta, Dhaka, London and intergenerational dialogue form a counter-cartography that highlights human connection over political strife, promoting ethical remembrance and engagement with unresolved traumas rather than encouraging forgetfulness (Kaul, 1994, p.138).

Photographs and other visual artifacts have a great impact on the worldview of the narrator in the text as these are important carriers of memory alongside dialogue (Quayum, 2024, p.126). Newspapers, maps, and atlases are used as chronotopic motifs to promote postmemory and healing. These carriers reflect the fragmented histories of partition, enabling the narrator and characters to engage with themes of displacement, violence, and loss while interrogating the legacy of Partition narratives across generations. Tridib’s interpretation turns maps into imaginative spaces where stories, emotions, and histories converge, as long after Tridib’s death, “He watched over me as I tried to learn the meaning of distance” (Ghosh, p.169). The compass and the circle Tridib draws on the atlas inspires the narrator to envision a world that transcends geographical and physical borders. Later on, the narrator reflects on a “fifteen-year journey to discover” (Ghosh, p. 159) the events and riots of 1964 in Calcutta and Dhaka are interconnected. The narrator discovers the motivations for the riots in Calcutta and Dhaka via newspaper reports, reinforcing journalism's importance in documenting and transmitting the memory of violence. He finally realizes: “I believed in the reality of nations and borders; I believed that across the border there existed another reality” (Ghosh, p. 159).

The narrator discovers through Tridib’s atlas that Chiang Mai and Chengdu are geographically closer to Calcutta than Delhi or Srinagar, but feels more connected to Delhi and Srinagar (Ghosh, p. 159). This emphasizes that perceptions of places are influenced more by cultural, historical, and emotional ties than by geographical distance. Events in regions like Calcutta, Khulna, Kashmir, and Dhaka are interconnected, as violence in one location elicits reactions in others, showcases the inadequacy of partition borders in containing trauma and their effect on fragmenting collective memory. As he discovers new meanings and

imagines new connections between his and the other characters' perceptions and experiences of space, he comes to understand that "Dhaka" and "Calcutta" are essentially mirror images of each other, separated by a "looking-glass border" (Ghosh, p.170); the cause of the riots that killed Tridib in Dhaka also caused the Calcutta riots in which he was trapped as a child. The narrator ultimately adopts an inclusive perspective, recognizing that human connection transcends physical distance, borders and rigid nationalism.

TRAUMATIC JOURNEY AND LACAPRA'S FRAMEWORK OF WORKING THROUGH TRAUMA

Robi and May Price's experiences during the communal riots in Dhaka, culminating in Tridib's death, result in lasting impacts in the form of PTSD and nightmares. LaCapra's distinction between acting-out and working-through trauma indicates that overcoming emotional turmoil requires both repetition and gradual integration of experiences (2001, p. 22). The 1964 riots in Dhaka are depicted as a pivotal event that profoundly affects the characters' lives across various locations. Robi's recurring nightmare illustrates this trauma, revealing how past violence invades the present. His vivid dream imagery, such as a "gigantic rickshaw, chaotic crowds and a man with thin face and a wispy moustache and a crooked mouth" (Ghosh, p.177), signify the traumatic cycle of repetition and his "acting out" stage of trauma. This aligns with Caruth's notion that trauma is expressed in a belated, cyclical manner, causing past events to disrupt current narratives. Sensory details in his dreams like "empty and still streets and green coconut lying in the middle of the road" (Ghosh, p.177) trap time in perpetual terror marked by unresolved violence and the inevitability of Tridib's death. Such haunting cycle of trauma is an example of acting out, as described by LaCapra. The recurring nightmares experienced by Robi is an example of the trauma of partition, which combines past and present as he continues to experience the death of Tridib, reveal the fractured and unresolved legacy of partition. The city of Dhaka, which was once a space of belonging, has become a symbol of violence, where the mob and the car symbolize the

psychological scars of the trauma caused by Partition.

Similarly, May Price experiences riots in Dhaka, and her security as an English woman is disrupted when she faces a tragedy. She considers herself responsible for Tridib's death because she urged him to face a violent mob. This experience leads to her emotional isolation in London, where she grapples with her trauma and mental health for years before confiding in the narrator. May's story represents the struggles of dealing with responsibility and the search for peace in the aftermath of guilt. Her inner self holds her responsible for the killing of Tridib, leaving her restless and express "Do you think I killed him? ...For years I was arrogant enough to think I owed him his life" (Ghosh, p. 183). Her trauma leads to an unresolved moral dilemma that disrupts her sense of time. The novel demonstrates the establishment of dialogic space through a narrator who serves as a listener and mediator, facilitating Robi and May in sharing their narratives, crucial for processing trauma via validation and acknowledgment. In Robi's traumatic journey, a Rehman-shaheb's Bengali restaurant in London serves as a chronotopic space where past and present, homeland and exile intersect (Ghosh, p. 175). Even when distant from South Asia, the venue is imbued with Dhaka memories through language, food, and conversation. Robi's memories of loss are tied to a particular geography, as seen in his nostalgic memories of "Jindabaha Lane in Dhaka, Bangladesh", but unlock in a distant geography like London (Ghosh, p. 176). This restaurant space becomes a site of trauma and memory where the memory of Jindabaha Lane in Dhaka lives on.

Processing of Robi's trauma happens when he shares memories of a riot with Ila and the narrator, describing attackers, gunshots, and Tridib's death, which is an important part of his comprehension of the complexities of history and traumatic events. He challenges the idea of freedom by analyzing the logic of borders and the separation of memories: "How can anyone divide a memory? If freedom were possible, surely, Tridib's death would have set me free" (Ghosh, p.179), illustrates the need for an elastic concept of identity that overcomes geographical boundaries. Equally,

May's London flat becomes a space where the violence of partition is encountered, connecting the past with the present. Although she is geographically distant from South Asia, she is tormented by memories of Tridib's death in Dhaka. The recognition of his death as a "significant sacrifice" (Ghosh, p. 183) emphasizes the themes of compassion and the complexities of trauma. This allows her to reconcile with her past, as it shows the healing effects of memory, expression, and human relationships in coping with partition's traumatic legacy.

The process of healing in *The Shadow Lines* has been portrayed as an intricate process of coming to terms with the past and redefining the concepts of freedom, home, and borders. According to Ghosh, healing is a process that goes beyond the lines of partition and division and helps build ethical relations. Ghosh's understanding of memory is based on human relationships and ethical understanding, which turns individual trauma into a collective memory. The trauma of partition transcends death, displacement and borders affecting various characters in different locations who continue to struggle with haunting memories, representing a generation deeply scarred by the persisting historical wounds (Biswas et al., 2024, p. 138). There is a poignant scene that involves Robi, Ila, and the narrator outside a dilapidated church in Clapham, which is their collective heritage as "three children of a free state" (Ghosh, p.179). This is evident in this scene as it shows the continued effect of partition on identities and relationships, where despite political independence, people continue to be psychologically affected by the trauma of partition. This further cements the idea of healing through solidarity and human connection, where healing is seen as a journey through the effects of partition and violence.

CONCLUSION

By using Bakhtin's chronotope, the results show that Ghosh's text contests the notion of the artificialness of borders and the rigid ideologies of nationalism, portraying memory, trauma, and interconnectivity as ideological constructs. The research proves that *The Shadow Lines*

conceptualizes the Indian partition of 1947 as an ongoing spatial-temporal phenomenon rather than a historical event that shatters the psychological and geographical spaces in the text. Through the application of trauma theory and postmemory, the study demonstrates the ways in which the partition still affects identity while promoting remembering and ethical engagement. The narrative subverts time and communicates memory across generations, implying that the partition is not only a site of division and time bound event, but a persisting point of trauma and a site for ethical engagement through memory and imagination. Ghosh breaks the artificiality of borders, nationalist ideologies, and the concept of history through his blurring of temporal and spatial boundaries, fostering human interconnectivity through storytelling, which is vital to understanding and healing historical trauma. This chronotopic analysis improves postcolonial literary studies by demonstrating that trauma in *The Shadow Lines* is recursively spatial and temporal, enabling dialogical healing and redefining the partition as a complex site where memory, geography, and ethical imagination intersect.

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