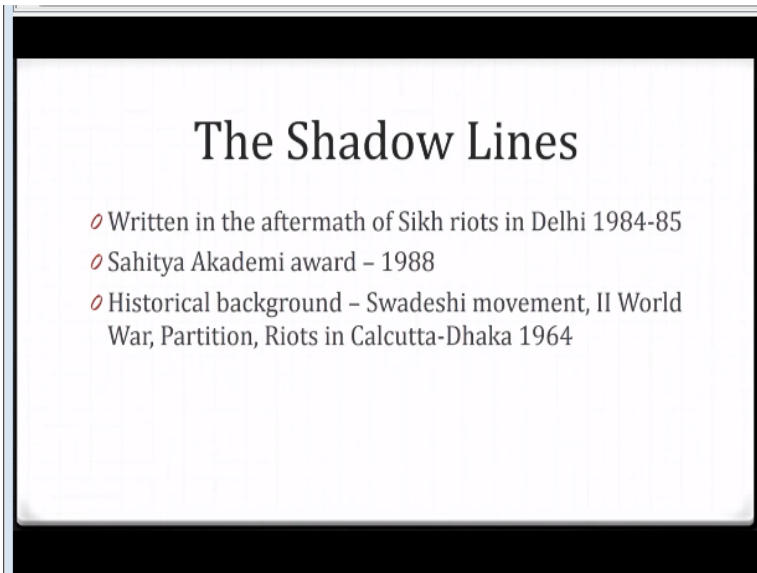


Indian Fiction in English
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Lecture- 21
The shadow Lines by Amitav Ghosh

Good morning and welcome to yet another session of the NPTEL course Indian fiction in English, in today's session we take a look at this brilliant novel written by Amitav Ghosh title The shadow Lines. This is considered as one of his best works and owns verse one of the representative works of this entire journal Indian fiction in English. We begin taking a look at the background or the context in which the novel was written.

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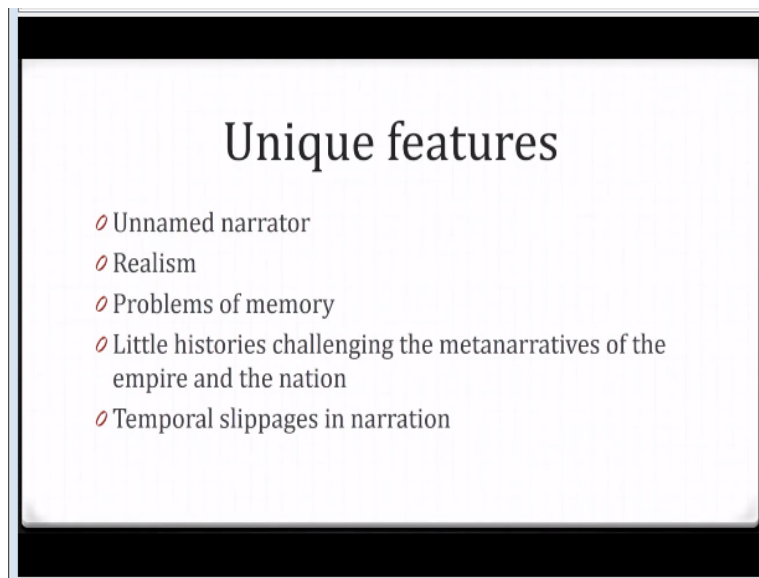
This work was written in the aftermath of Sikh riots in Delhi which was in 1984-85. So, this is historical understanding is very important efficient some of the episodes of the novel and also to understand even the title, the shadow Lines how arbitrary and how unreal they are, when we talk about political patricians. This work quite write fully one the site academy what in 1988. And this was yet another way in which Indian writing in English made it is in roads into the general body of Indian writing Indian literature itself.

When we talk about the historical background there are certain events of National importance which have made there in routes into this narrator. And in that sense it also requires a certain

kind of an understanding of even Swadeshi movement are the second world war partition, the riots in Calcutta-Dhaka in 1964 so on and so forth. So, at label this is a novel which also takes into account noticed events which are part of a national imaginary.

But also certain kinds of events which have assumed importance and significance of cross borders. For example an even such as a world war or partition which did not affect just one region or just one nation. But all the nations which were part if which we sharing the same border this novel the shadow lines also has certain unique features.

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The first of them being an unnamed narrator, there is a narrator who is present write from the beginning till the end of the novel and he leads is through the various time frames and the various narratives of the novel the various of lot sequences of the novel, but nevertheless we do not get to know the name of the narrator and this is a very deliberate employee and employed by writers it is course.

In order to also indicate that this could be the narrator could be just about anybody you of course get to know we of course get to know about the gender of the narrator. He is a male narrator but we also get to know certain things about his educational qualification, his background, his social background, his family background, the kind of ties that he has it has personal and professional liable.

But nevertheless we do not get to know even a little bit of an indication about his name, though this is written in an experimental fashion in terms of the various times frames which have being brought together within the plot structure, it continues employee the future of realism and that sense it continues to be seen as a realize novel. And this is also where you need futures especially in the post rush the accurate rush the beginning experimenting with was loneliness of those modernism and magic realism at the same time.

And it was only a natural expectation the reviewers and readers that the post rush the generation the post rush the writers for also follows suite and we will engage with the nation in through the mode of magic realism. But here we find writers such as Amitav of course define these norms and define these expectations in continuing do write in the age all in the age old form of realism.

It engages with the problems of memory as you would figure out as in when read the novel, it is mostly about recollections. So, there is a certain kind of failure that is a certain kind of limitation which is in horrent will be in the aspects of memories. So, these problems, these limitations are also part of the narrator, interestingly these the problems and the challenges of recalling or forgetting.

They do not hump with the narrative, they do not limit the narrative in any way on the other hand enhance it in multiple ways rather than a union linear narration. And we also find the emergence of a many little histories and this process as indicated in the beginning. We do have very definite and a very straight forward in case when with history through out there are various historical, real historical incidents which are being referred to and in this process we find many many little histories emerging.

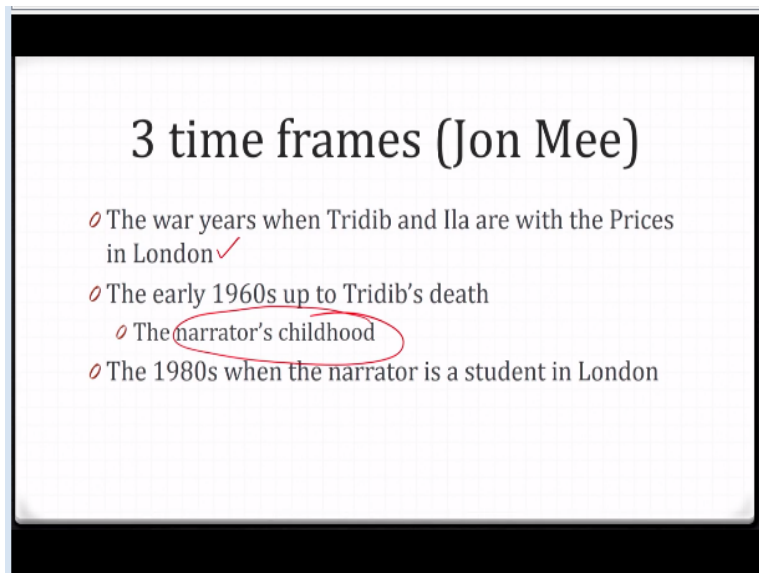
And these little histories which are of personal nature, but also have a national importance given the context and which these memories are late out. These little histories they also begin to challenge the metanarratives of the empire as well as the nation. This is extremely important because there is a certain way in which the novel is set both in the contemporary as well as in a

colonial past. Because some of the realities related to the rights the world war the partition their interlinked with the colonial past.

So the novel draws extensively from colonial past as well as from the contemporary which is part of independent nation. So, there are these metanarratives of the empire and the nation which are already always already available and these little histories narrated by the narrator as well as recall through the memories, so different characters and the novel they challenge these metanarratives.

We also find temporal slippages in narration again I stated earlier they do not limit the narrative on the other hand. They only enhance the multiple ways which the narrative of the nation is being present.

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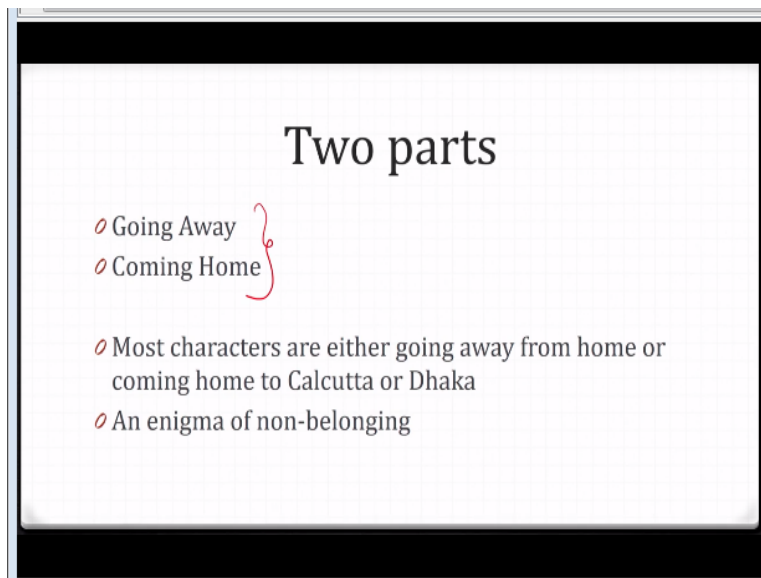


Jon Mee one of the (()) (06:17) critic of Indian fiction English he has identify 3 major time frames and the novel as an when you begin to read the novel which you would find that shifting between different time frames. It will be useful to have these 3 basic frame works and mind, every incident which is part of the novel every plot which is part of the novel falls into one of these 3 time frames.

The first one is a war years when Tridib and Ila are with the prices in London the references of the second world war. And the second time frame is the early 1960s and it last almost under Tridib's death and this is also the phase when we get know extensively about the narrator's childhood which forms major part of the understanding of the novel. And the third part with third time frame is a 1980s when the narrator is a student in London.

And this is where we also read the resolution if you make call it which is part of the novel. And these 3 time frames are not presented in any particular order and definitely not chronological order **in** on the other hand we find that it keeps shifting from one times scheme to the other end also from one location to the other. So, it definitely requires a close reading to identify these major time frames. And also put in the particular plot a plots in particular episodes within these 3 time frames.

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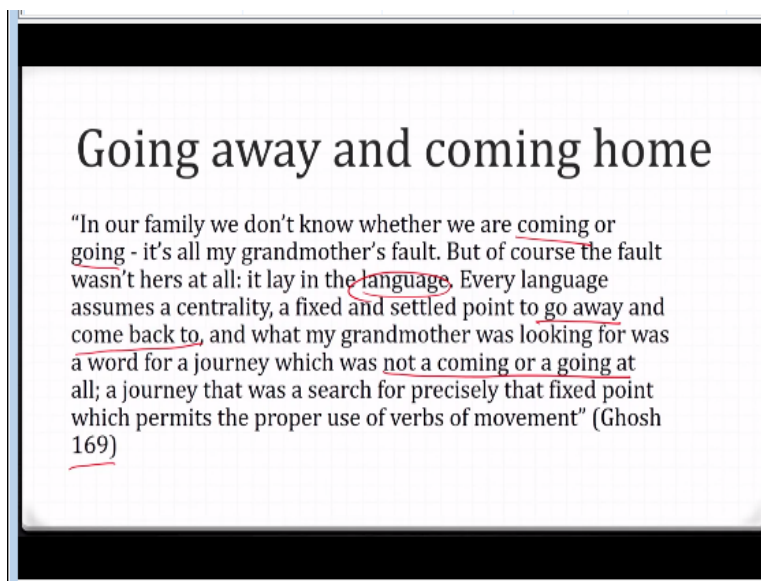


And the novel also has 2 parts which title going away and coming hope the first half is going away and the second half is coming home. And throughout this narrator we begin to realize that most of the characters in this work of fiction that either going away from home or they coming home which is to Calcutta or to Dhaka and there is this enigma non-belonging which dominates the entire narrative.

And just part of the characteristic of most of the characters is well and some the critics have also felt that perhaps is going away an indication of us skipping from home going away from home. And coming home is in a way coming back to reality and there is this constant between what is real and what is imagine just is rush began to challenge the ideas of the imagine history and the ideas of the real history.

We find this same through being used in rather different ways in course as well. We at there are certain episodes where we almost find difficult different shade between the real incident and the imagined incident. The real person and the imagine person which there in the narrators mind, the narrators memory and his load experience is they play a very significant part even determining whether certain characters and certain kinds of emotions are going away or coming home. The novel itself offers certain kind of an intervention to when while talking about the ideas of going away and coming home in.

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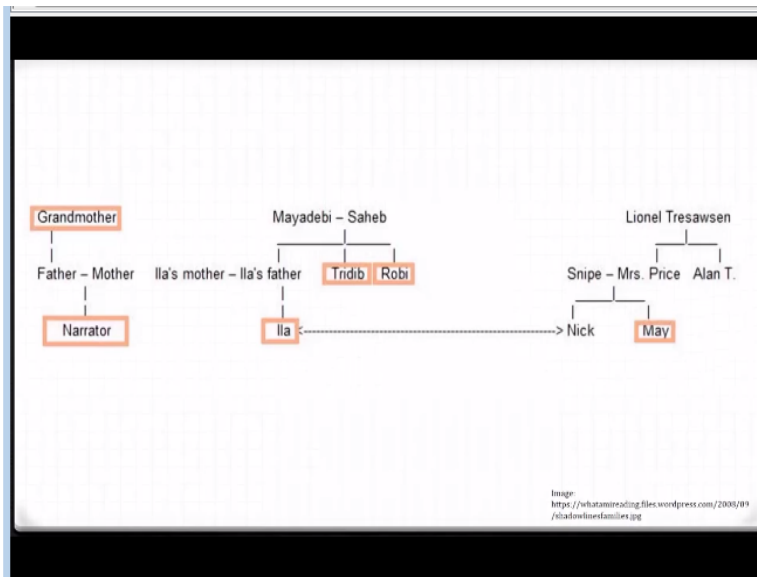


The novel in page 169 we find the sort except which I would like to read out to you. In our family we do not know whether we are coming or going, it is all my grandmother's fault. But of course the fault was not hers at all, it lay in the language. Every language assumes a centrality a fixed and settled point to go away and to come back to, but my grandmother was looking for was a word for a journey which was not a coming or a going at all.

A journey that was a search for precisely that fixed point which permits the proper use of verbs of movement, here we find a play with language and also reference to the Bungalow language. And we find that the most novels of the post 1980s they engage playfully with the aspect of language and here Ghosh is also driving home the idea that even language does not have a fixed meaning forget about the playfulness of mind and memory even the language which we take for granted on a day today basis even the language which we assume have got fix a signified and signifiers even they do not have any fixed meanings.

And this is how Ghosh tries to engage with the playful idea of language to engage with the playful idea of going away and coming home. Even till the end when the narrator, he is away from home temporarily he is away from home but in a certain way he is also come home and this is the ambiguity which the novel engages with throughout leaving as in this difficult position as to decide whether the characters have come home or whether they are still when away.

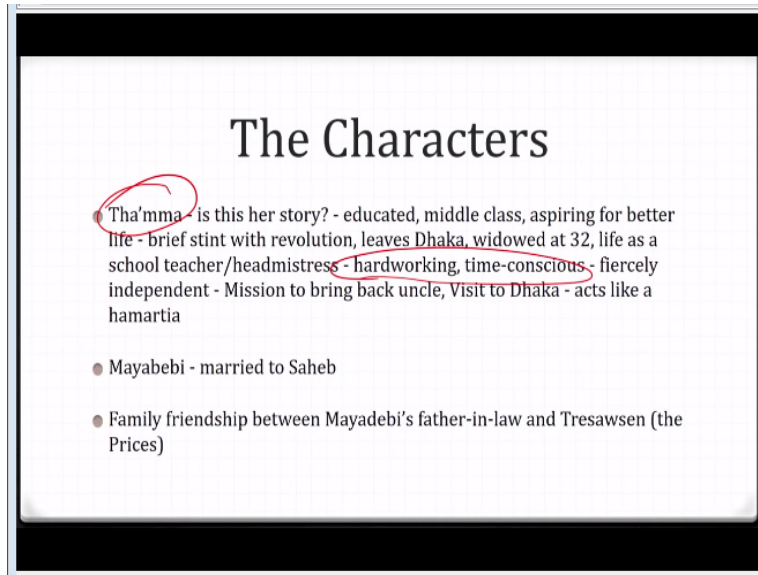
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So, introducing here I try to introduce the major characteristics and there is also the relation between them which is being illustrated over here. So, I will give a brief description of each the characters and then show this illustration to you again, so that it will make more sense to you. I however strongly also encourage that you should have a first and reading of the novel to be appreciate what this illustration is all about just a summary will not work.

You need to engage with novel in order to figure out how these lives and trying together in how they in have a different time frames and different template spaces and still remain connected to each other primarily through the idea of memory.

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The Characters

- Tha'mma - is this her story? - educated, middle class, aspiring for better life - brief stint with revolution, leaves Dhaka, widowed at 32, life as a school teacher/headmistress - hardworking, time-conscious - fiercely independent - Mission to bring back uncle, Visit to Dhaka - acts like a hamartia
- Mayabebi - married to Saheb
- Family friendship between Mayabebi's father-in-law and Tresawsen (the Prices)

So, these are the characters Tha'mma is the major character and it is almost possibility to say that the shadow lines is her story. When we meet she is quite old but we get to know that she is educated she belongs to the middle class. She is one of those who is aspiring for better life and also encourages and which are the same for everyone in her family. She has got a brief stint with revolution she had to leave Dhaka when she was very young.

She was widowed at 32 and she had a hard life but nevertheless she continued to lead her life as a school teacher and later as a head mistress. And we find it she could successfully race the children and also establish herself in the society. And she comes a crosses being this hardworking, time-conscious person who continues to remain the same to the end of her life and according to her time is like a toothbrush.

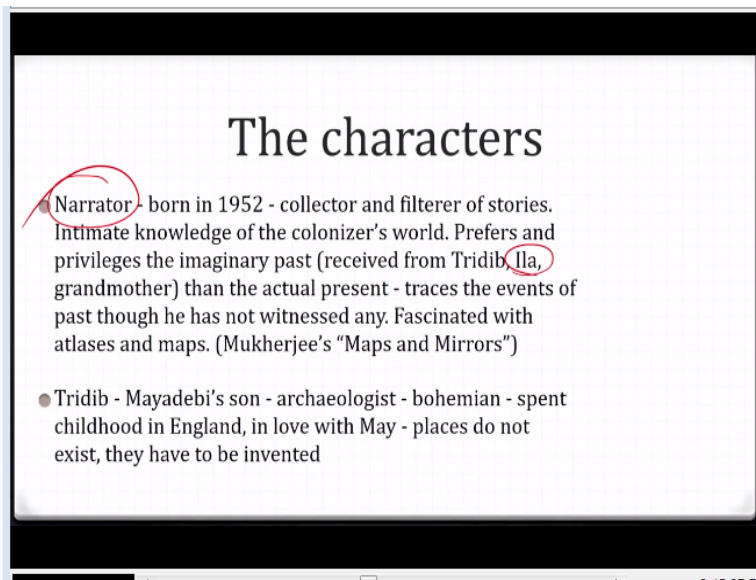
If you do not use it, it will begin to stink, it will rotor way, so that is the idea of time the tree has which is in stuck and trust with Tridib who seems to be whiling away his time according to grandmother. And Tamil is also firstly independent women though she has got radical ideas about

what freedom is and what independence is because though she is the kind of women who appreciates and who holds her ground for a women may be independent life.

She is unable to appreciate the kind of live that Ila leads in fact grandmother at some point even ends up calling Ila as a hold, that decide one of the major episodes of this novel is Tha'mma's mission to bring back her uncle for this for which she also visit to Dhaka which acts like an event of hamartia in Tha'mma's life. And in the Ghosh of the novel itself you also find Tha'mma's time.

And there is Mayabebi who is Tha'mma's sister and she is also married to Saheb and we also find certain kind of a family friendship between Mayabebi's father-in-law and Tresawsen which is the families also referred to as a prices.

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The slide is titled "The characters" in a large, bold, black font. Below the title, there are two bullet points. The first bullet point is preceded by a red circle and contains the text: "Narrator - born in 1952 - collector and filterer of stories. Intimate knowledge of the colonizer's world. Prefers and privileges the imaginary past (received from Tridib, Ila, grandmother) than the actual present - traces the events of past though he has not witnessed any. Fascinated with atlases and maps. (Mukherjee's 'Maps and Mirrors')". The second bullet point is preceded by a black dot and contains the text: "Tridib - Mayadebi's son - archaeologist - bohemian - spent childhood in England, in love with May - places do not exist, they have to be invented".

The other significant characters and narrator we get to know from the narrative that he was born in 1952 and he is introduced as a collector and filterer of stories. And he also has an intimate knowledge of the colonizer's world because he engages with history with maps with Atlases with the stories of the past and of course he engages actively with the stories which are narrated to him by Tridib he was a child.

He also pre prefers and privileges and imaginary past rather than living in the real and this is something that he also inherited from the older people that he interact with such astrictive and grandmother. And also with the Ila who is his peon and also someone towards him. He develops (()) (15:07) infatuation at a later point and this narrator who remains unnamed he also has his unamiability to trace the events of the past though he has not witnessed any.

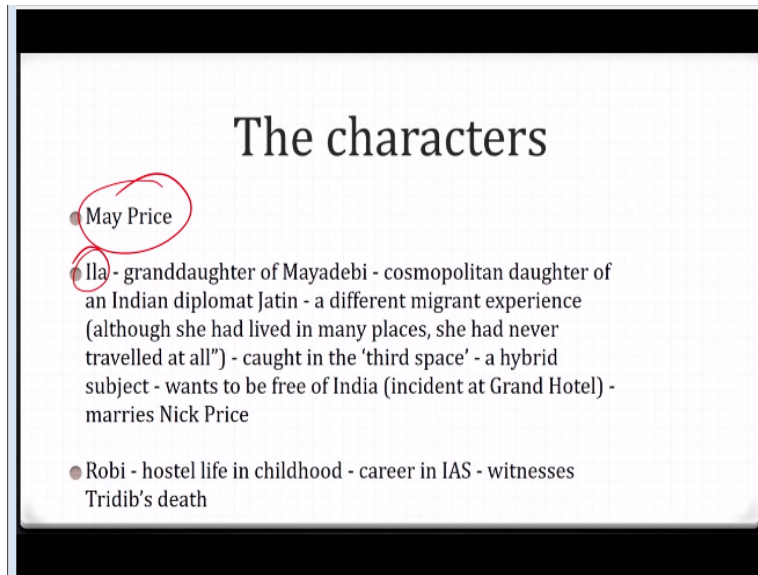
So, we find him recreating many events and incidents in the past of it he was never a part of and this is this could be partly attributed to the wonderful narrative skills of Tridib. And also partly to the great imaginative faculty that the narrator himself was assets. He is so fascinated with the atlases and maps that it also becomes an important image in the novel. And also encourage **you to** take a look at Mukerherjee's essay, maps and mirrors where she looks at the maps and mirrors is continents of meaning the shadow lines.

Tridib's other significant character whom we meet mostly all most throughout through the eyes of the narrator, narrate and counters him when he was a child and he has such a fascination for Tridib's uncle to him and he continues to remain fascinated with Tridib and his lives in his stories still the end. Tridib dies in the course of the novel and resolution of the novel is also related to how the narrator comes terms with the context.

And some of the context of Tridib's death. Tridin's Mayabebi son he is an archaeologist, he leads as a bohemian, he has spent his childhood in England we get to know that he was in love with May and he is also the one who teaches the narrator that places do not exist and they have to be invented. That is another fresh perspective that this novel brings to ask. And this we find being presented.

And stuck contrast when we look at narrator's life and Illa's life. Narrator has not visit to most of the places but all those places exist for him. Because he had invented them in his imagination all the contrary Ila is someone who have the life in which she had to travel extensively. Because her father or used to get post in different parts of the world. But nevertheless her imaginative faculty and her capacity to engage with places was so limited that she lived a life which looked almost as she had never travelled at all.

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The characters

- May Price
- Ila - granddaughter of Mayadebi - cosmopolitan daughter of an Indian diplomat Jatin - a different migrant experience (although she had lived in many places, she had never travelled at all) - caught in the 'third space' - a hybrid subject - wants to be free of India (incident at Grand Hotel) - marries Nick Price
- Robi - hostel life in childhood - career in IAS - witnesses Tridib's death

There is a May price in home with whom Tridib had a relation and you also find that the narrator becomes involved with her towards the end which also leads to the resolution of the novel and certain ways. And Ila's another fears women character and this novel who is part of almost all the characters and director in direct ways. She is a granddaughter of Mayadebi and she is also cosmopolitan person.

And she is a daughter of an Indian diplomat on in Jatin, she has a very different kind of a migrant experience and the narrator of in feels about her that although she is lived in many places. She had never travelled at all, so the many ships from one place to the other had not really affected her experience or her migrant experience in any way. And it is possible to say that she is one of those who is gotten this third space.

And she can be seen as a hybrid subject and what makes a very different is also fact that she leaves India to be free. Because she say explicitly that she wants to be free of India and there is an incident if you recall from the novel this is happens at the Grand Hotel where she has this dramatic explosion and she says that this is precisely why she want to do leave India. Because she want to do be free of India and here I also want to take a very quick look at the idea of freedoms as it is presented by characters such as Ila and grandmother.

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Freedom

Ila wants to be free of India, its people, customs, traditions, restrictions, regulations, hierarchies, bondings

Grandmother - freedom to be 'earned', like a right - "Ila has no right to live there. It took those people a long time to build that country; hundreds of years, years and years of war and bloodshed. Everyone who has lived there has earned their right to be there with blood: with their brother's blood and their father's blood and their son's blood. They know they're a nation because they've drawn their borders with blood" (Ghosh 77-78)

Because both of them are very strong female characters but they have very different ideas about freedom and they do not really come together at any point. Ila at one hand wants to be free of India people, customs, traditions, restrictions, regulations, hierarchies and bonding which she feels as very restrictive to her and will not allow her especially as a woman to be free. Grandmother on the other hand though she is lived of fearfully independent life.

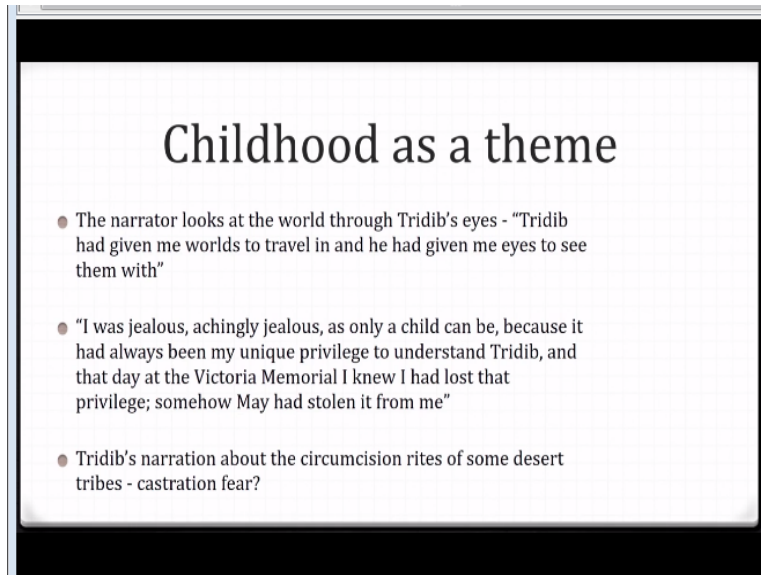
She feels at the idea of freedom that Ila has is very simple and according to the grandmother Thamma freedom is something that one has to earn it is like a right. So, I reach you from page 77-78 of the novel shadow lines by grandmother has this extensive discussion with the narrator about what she thinks is freedom. And how she maintains that Ila does not have the right to live in any other country other than the one in which she was born.

Ila has no right to live there, there is England it took those people a long time to build that country hundreds of years, years and years of war and bloodshed. Everyone who has lived there has earned their right to be there with blood with their brother's blood and their father's blood and their son's blood. They know they are nation because they have drawn their borders with blood, so this is very interesting.

Because grandmother seems to have such a violent kind of conception about how borders are drawn and blood in certain base is not a negative thing for how but it is reinforcing a positive

reinforcement for laying once claim to a land. And also access in the kind of freedom that each land offers to it is people.

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The idea of childhood emerges as a significant theme throughout because when we meet the narrator we meet him as a very young child. And we begin **we** see the world, we begin to see the characters through the eyes of this narrator who still a young child. And the narrator also has a different way of looking at the world because he looks at the world through Tridib's eyes in his own words Tridib had given me words to travel in.

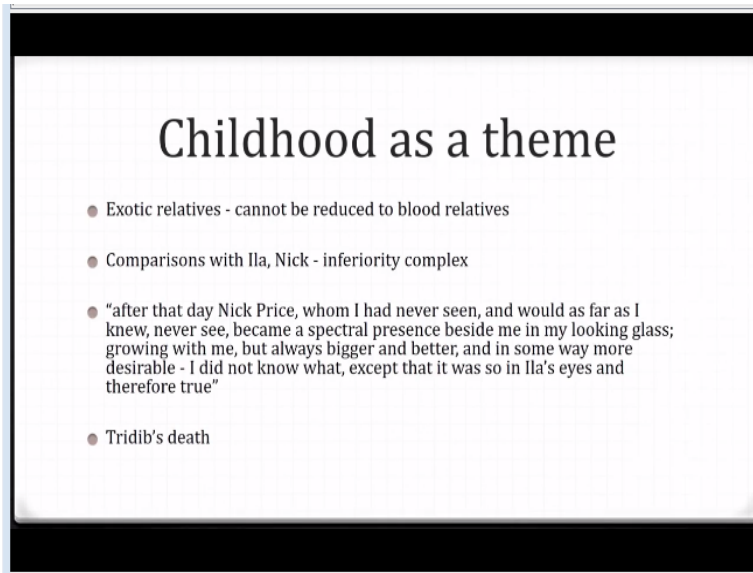
And he had given me eyes to see them with and we do find this being a kind of limitation at an aspects but it also as to earlier it enhances the narrative possibility of this work of fiction and multiple ways. And you also find that the narrator is being strange possessive of Tridib his memory his life **in** in a way that only a child can be even after his grown up there is way in which he continues to feel that he has a soul right to Tridib's world and Tridib's memory and Tridib's life.

There is this incidence where he at next I was jealous, achingly jealous as only as a child can be because it had always been my unique privilege to understand Tridib. And that day at the Victoria Memorial I knew I had lost that privilege somehow May had stolen it from me. I leave it to you

to go read the novel and understand what happen at the Victoria Memorial it was a very significant incident in the novel.

And that is one incidence, where the narrator also realizes that he share something very incredible with May price. And there are it is a certain fears which are being still in the narrator's mind and when he such as Tridib's narration about the circumcision rights of some desert tribes and that is a castration fear which is introduced into the narrator as a child and we find it to getting reflected in some of his introductions with Ila as well. As a child a narrator has got exotic relatives.

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And all of them cannot be reduced to blood relatives that is how the title becomes all the most significant of here because certain lines like shadow lines. They very arbitrary and it is difficult to say with their real or unreal and as a child when the narrator compares himself with Ila or Nick. He feels very inferior and in certain ways we find that some of those complex stay with him for a long time.

This is particularly evident in the instance where Ila talks to the narrator about her boyfriend back in England who is Nick. And though the narrator had never met Nick that is a way in which becomes a very strong presence and his life throughout his adolescent years. And in the zone

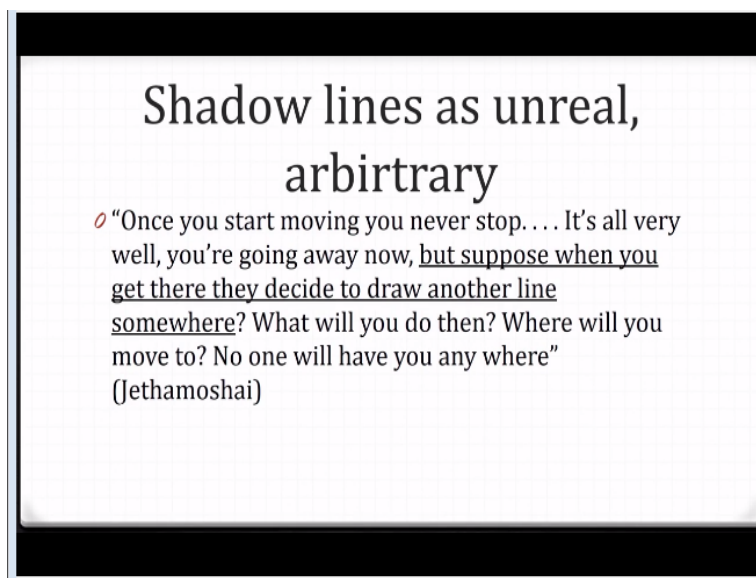
words after that day Nick price whom I had never seen and would as far as I knew never see became a spectral presence beside me in my looking glass, growing with me.

But always bigger and better and in some way more desirable, I did not know what except it was so in Ila's eyes and therefore true. An interesting future here is at just like the narrator begin to see the world through Tridib's eyes. There are many other places and many other people that the narrator begins to meet through Ila's eyes as well. So, though this entire novel is narrated from single person's point of view which is the narrator who remains unnamed.

We also get to see the world through the others eyes because that is how the narrator had always being seeing the world and had always been approaching the people and places around him. And finally even when we proved the instance where Tridib's death is being talked about and this is certain resolution which needs to be brought for that particular event. We find that there is a very strong reason for bringing in childhood as a theme.

Because only when we try to see Tridib and the life that he lead through the eyes of the narrator who is a child the entire sequence of event seem to make sense the novel itself is very conscious about the idea that the shadow lines are unreal and arbitrary.

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Shadow lines as unreal,
arbitrary

o "Once you start moving you never stop. . . . It's all very well, you're going away now, but suppose when you get there they decide to draw another line somewhere? What will you do then? Where will you move to? No one will have you any where"
(Jethamoshai)

There is this segment where one of the characters Jethamoshai he says once you start moving you never stop, it is all very well you are going away now. But suppose when you get there they decide to draw another line somewhere. What will you do then? Where will you move to? No one will have you anywhere. So, this is when Thamma the grandmother goes to pick Jethamoshai her uncle from Dhaka.

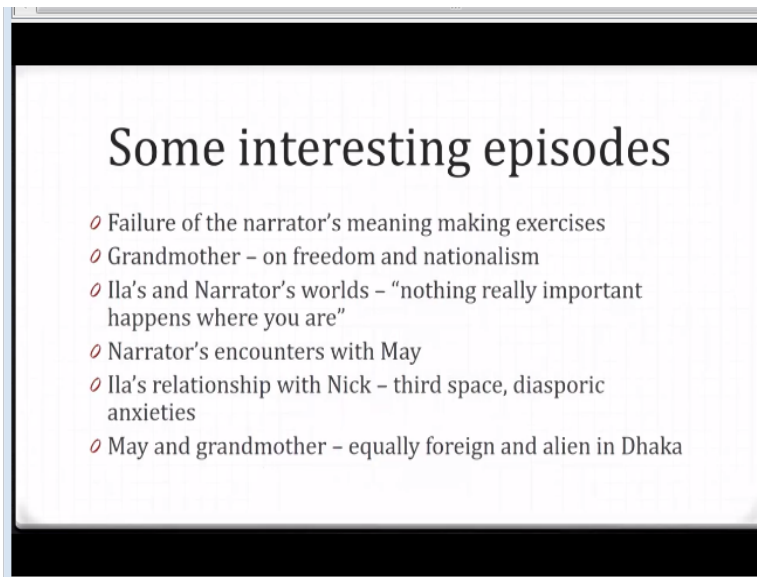
And they did also have such point in discussions about the partition about the shadow lines which are drawn between 2 lands in a rather arbitrary way could be political reasons. But personally it makes new sense to 2 common people who are separated due to certain political turbulences which they could never understand. And they failed to understand even at a later point, here it is also important to recall other Manto and his views and partition.

And we briefly breath from Toba Tek Singh one of the best written partition short stories ever and if you are familiar with the story would know that it also one of the best novel which is taken as a caustic take against the event of partition. And trying to narrated in the context of a (()) (26:25) and write from the beginning of the narration and short story Toba Tek Singh there is this confusion about where a certain place Toba Tek Singh is, so we have this character who is supposedly from a place name Toba Tek Singh.

And since we always talks about this placing himself the character himself gets named as Toba Tek Singh. He is in a lunatic assigner and there about to get a partition and they need to choose whether they will be in India or in Pakistan. And I read this except you now he begin asking where Toba Tek Singh was to go but nobody seemed to know where it was. Those who tried to explain themselves got bogged down in another enigma.

Sialkot, which used to be in India now was in Pakistan. At this rate it seemed as if Lahore which was now in Pakistan would slide over to India perhaps the whole of India might become Pakistan. It was all so confusing and who could say if both India and Pakistan might not entirely disappear from the face of the earth one day. This story written in 1955 it also reflects similar kinds of disturbances and the articulations about the entire bitterness with which certain lines are drawn across borders.

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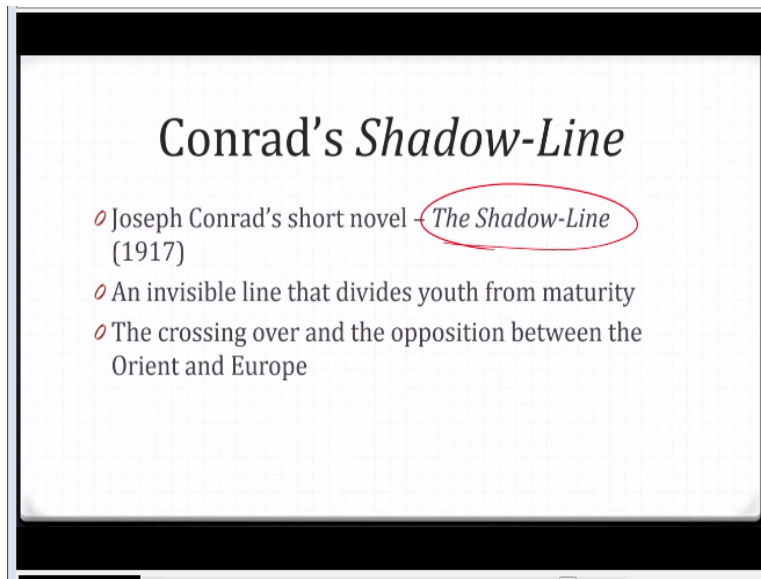
There are also certain interesting episodes throughout this novel we would not going to the details of those there is of failure of the narrators many making exercises especially towards the end. When he tries to make sense of the rite he access the newspaper reports which he also finds being tempered with flood. The events that he recalling from his memory and the newspaper reports do not seem to match with each other.

Grandmothers take on freedom and Nationalism they make an interesting discussions almost throughout and Ila's and narrator's worlds wholes but and it is some level and certain episode. Ila even feels that nothing really important happens where you are. And it is a indecency that narrator also feels other in multiple ways though Ila and narrator are related by blood though, so they say the same blood line.

And they belong to the same atnescity he finds that the worlds are so different that it becomes difficult emerge them together again. And narrators and counters with May also become to shape of the novel and multiple ways and give a sense of resolution to it as mentioned before. And Ila's relationship with Nick whom he whom she also marries eventually that is also reflection of the ideas of third space about the diastolic anxieties.

And we also find that May and grandmother one is in English women than the other is an Indian women whom moved from Dhaka. But we find that both of them are equally foreign and alien in Dhaka, so there are these very interesting things at the novel pursues. And it would be very interesting for also to engage with certain discussions around these aspects, as we begin to wrap up I would also like to draw a retention to the fact that there is a short novel by Joseph Conrad published 1917 which is title the shadow line.

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And some of the critics feel that the novel shadow line it could be seen in the context of Conrad's work as well, Conrad talk about an invisible line that divides youth from maturity. And you also talks about the crossing over and the opposition between the Orient and Europe. If you are aware the context in which Conrad was writing would also understand what he means when he talks about the orient and also but the Europe in context of colonization, as we wrap up this lecture I leave you with this variable in review by Meenakshi Mukerjee.

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No anxiety of Indianness

"Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* is . . . the one novel written in the 1980s that will survive all the rest that appeared in the boom decade. The novel betrays no anxiety because it attempts to prove nothing and interrogates rather than defines the concept of a totalizing India"

-Meenakshi Mukherjee, "The Anxiety of Indianness"

She wrote this to say the anxiety of Indianness where she argues that most Indian writers writing in English have an anxiety to present Indianness to the western audience. And towards the end of this essay she comments and she rather very (()) (30:39) puts that Amitav Ghosh's *Shadow Lines* is one novel which does not betray any kind of this anxiety which is more than evident and most of the other works.

Today in her own words Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* is the one novel written in the 1980s that will survive all the rest that appeared in the boom decade. The novel betrays no anxiety because it attempts to prove nothing and interrogates rather than defines the concept of a totalizing India. And this is a brief tribute to this novel *The Shadow Lines*. And this also continues to be one of those very few novels which is accepted by one in all.

And it continues to remain the favorite of critics and readers all over especially in the context of Indian fiction in English. What we have done today is to give a brief outline and also a background and context to the reading of *The Shadow Lines*. We do have two student presentations coming up where they will talk about certain specific aspects about the novel and also engage in detail with certain select instances from the novel, before that I again encourage you to take a look at the novel read it in original.

So, that you would also appreciate the many discussion that we had a spot of this, I thank you for listening and look forward to seeing you in the next session.