

Subject	English
Course/ Paper Code & Title	ENGH-H-DSE-T-5/ Partition Literature (6 <sup>th</sup> Semester)
Title of the Module	'Toba Tek Singh' by Sadat Hasan Manto
Module Id	
Objectives	To introduce a literary analysis of the short story "Toba Tek Singh" written by Sadat Hasan Manto
Key Words	Partition, madness, displacement, identity, trauma
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Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* published in 1988 is a significant contribution to the postcolonial literature of Indian writings in English. In this novel Ghosh writes about the boundaries between nations and people and how they become a source of trauma and violence. The novel tells the story of three generations of the narrator's family spread over Dhaka, Calcutta and London taking up characters from different nationalities, religions and cultures.

The **Title** of the novel is perhaps the most philosophical statement the novelist makes asserting that 'The Shadow Lines', or the lines that not only define our human shape but our inner struggles to choose between darkness and light, are an intricate part of all human existence. Shadows, like time are both tangible and intangible at any given moment or a realm of perspectives. They are fleeting, generically depicted, generally distorted representations of ourselves, and they can only be viewed in the proper light. Ghosh uses shadow lines as a way of telling us that the way we view ourselves is not always the way that others view us, and until we can gain a deeper understanding of ourselves we will remain in the shadows of our own enlightenment.

The very title of the novel *The Shadow Lines* refers both to lines of separation, and the invisible links that bind the people of different countries and nationalities together. The novelist rejected in one way the idea of nationalism and somewhere accepted the idea of globalism. The title becomes an ambivalent symbol. It suggests the dichotomy of one's mind, the shadow lines that pervade the minds of the people. Ghosh acknowledges no separate national or cultural realities, he strongly believes that all such demarcations are shadow lines, arbitrary and invented divisions.

The narrative begins in the year 1939 with the outbreak of Second World War and ends in 1964 with the eruption of violence between India and Pakistan. In 1939, Tridib, the narrator's uncle, then aged eight is taken to England, and in 1964 he is murdered by a street mob in Dhaka.

His childhood experiences in war-time London and his violent death twenty five years later in Dhaka constitute the main theme of the novel.

Within the framework, Ghosh traces the lives of characters from India and Bangladesh before and after Partition and the effects of the Second World War in London. He also depicts the consequences of the riots of 1964 in the lives of individuals hailing from both India and East Pakistan.

While the first section 'Going Away', portrays the events that had taken place in England during the Second World War including the intensive German bombardment on the fateful night September 1940, when Dan and Alan Tresawsen, friends of Tridib's family died; the second section 'Coming Home', describes the effects of Partition on the lives of people in India and East Pakistan.

Nationalism and political freedom acquired different connotations after Independence and Partition. Earlier, Indian nationalism was a concept used as a weapon by the freedom fighters in their struggle against foreign rulers. But this struggle didn't ensure the territorial integrity of India. After Partition, the meaning of nationalism in India changed to exclude people on the other side of the border, both in East and West Pakistan. Ghosh explores the different perceptions of Partition, nationalism and political freedom in this section, highlighting the division of Bengal and the suffering caused by Partition through the narrator's grandmother's story.

The grandmother's early life is told as a story by her to the narrator. Born in 1902 in Dhaka, she grew as a member of a "big joint family ..., with everyone living and eating together ...." But when her father died, the ancestral home was partitioned because of a family dispute. While studying in college for her B.A. in history in Dhaka, she became familiar with the terrorist movement among nationalists in Bengal. After marriage, the narrator's grandmother, born and brought up in Dhaka, came to Calcutta, many years before the Partition of Bengal into East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) and West Bengal (which is part of India). Thus she didn't face the trauma of being uprooted from her place of birth during the time of Partition. But even though she didn't suffer materially, the emotional wound had a great impact on her. Seventeen years after Partition, when the grandmother went to visit her relatives at Dhaka, she realized when filling the disembarkation card "how her place of birth had come to be so messily at odds with her nationality." The author shows that this bewilderment is shared many people who suffered intensely due to the Partition of the country. When the narrator's father told his mother (the narrator's grandmother) that she couldn't see any dividing line, the grandmother was puzzled and asked him:

... where's the difference then? And if there is no difference both sides will be the same; it'll be just like it used to be before, when we used to catch a train in Dhaka and get off in Calcutta the next day without anybody stopping us. What was it all for then - partition and all the killing and everything – if there isn't something in between?

The drawing of a line on the map forced numerous Hindu families to flee their ancestral homeland in East Pakistan to settle in Calcutta and vice versa many Muslim families to migrate to Pakistan after being uprooted from their homeland in India. Riots are a corollary to Partition. Describing the riots of 1964, Ghosh relates how they took the lives of Jethamoshai (grandmother's uncle), Khalil (the rickshaw puller) and Tridib (the narrator's uncle). Their deaths are depicted vividly through the recollections of Robi, Tridib's brother and May, Tridib's lover. When the narrator meets May in London she describes it to him: ... We were on our way back from your father's ancestral house ... The car was stopped. By a mob. ... Some of them attacked us. They broke the windscreen and injured the driver. We had an armed security man with us. He fired a shot at them. They drew back. They might even have gone away. But your grandmother's uncle (Jethamoshai) was following behind us. In a rickshaw. The man who had looked after him (Khalil) all those years was driving the rickshaw. The mob went after them instead. ... I began to run towards the rickshaw. I heard him (Tridib) running after me. He caught up with me, and push me from behind. I stumbled and fell. ... Tridib ran into the mob, and fell 12 Amitav Ghosh, *The Shadow Lines* (Delhi: Ravi Dayal Publisher/Permanent Black, 2005) 151. 59 upon their back. He was trying to push his way through to the old man, I think. Then the mob dragged him in. He vanished. ... When I got there, I saw three bodies. They were all dead. They'd cut Khalil's stomach open. The old man's head had been hacked off. And they'd cut Tridib's throat, from ear to ear. 13 The novel shows how communal fanatics thrive on the spreading of rumours which reinforce the feelings of anger and cause violence. The rumours of poisoning of water, the trains of dead bodies all rouse communal frenzy and increase the violence. The narrator recalls his school days. The violence in Calcutta had started on January 1964, the day the first Cricket Test Match of 1964 Series against England at Madras commenced. The school bus was nearly empty because of the rumour that the whole of Calcutta's Water Supply has poisoned. Even the young minds were conditioned to believe that it was 'they' (the Muslims) who had poisoned the water and there was no doubt or question of the authenticity of the information: "... Soon after, one by one, we unscrewed the caps of our bottles and poured the water out." The message that the novel gives is of the

relevance of the study of the trauma of Partition and how the communal violence invariably follows the same pattern of suspicion, distrust, rumour, looting, raping and killings.

*The Shadow Lines* aptly reveals that the cultural divide, communal struggle and misunderstanding are in a state of crisis in India. The political allegory, the contemporaneousness of the motivations for riots is very sensitively handled. However, the novel also shows how futile it is to draw lines and to expect people to stay within neatly drawn religious boundaries; and it shows that there is a thin line between life and death, unless we value life and care. The novel raises many political and ethnic questions but over and above, there is hope. The tenderness and concern that the narrator feels for Tridib, Ila and his grandmother; the strength of the narrator's mother and her loving and caring attitude, the bonding and the affection between the Prices and the Datta-Chaudhuris—these vignettes of hope and love endure throughout the novel.