

## THE SHADOW LINES

→ {Amitav Ghosh}

Published in 1988, "The Shadow Lines" is a novel by award-winning Indian novelist Amitav Ghosh. The novel, second of a three-part series, is written to capture the thoughts and ideas of many different people, constantly switching views and perspectives. For this reason, the book is named "The Shadow Lines", as a main idea of the novel is that different people have different views, none of those views capable of being completely comprehended by another. The main character of the novel is a boy named Tridib, who grows up throughout the novel, with major events, like World War II and the partition of India, happening all the while.

Born in 1956, Amitav Ghosh is an Indian writer, but is best known for the fiction he has published in English. Ghosh's first published novel was "The Circle" of Reason, the immediate predecessor to this book. Other popular books of him include, "The Hungry Tide", (2004), and "Sea of Poppies" (2008).

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The political and economic growth of India through the lines of two families - one Bengali and one English - as their lives intertwine on the multiple levels through three generations is explored in "The Shadow Lines". The novel is expressed through the memories of the characters in the two families. The novel opens in 1960s Calcutta with the nameless 8-year-old narrator who observes the intricate relationships of the main character of the novel, 'Tridib' - the narrator's cousin - and the rest of the members of the two families. It is through the memories of the family members that Ghose also looks into the story and growth of the city of Calcutta and India over the various historical events, from World War II, ~~the~~ <sup>through</sup> the bloody partition years, the Shaka and Calcutta riots in 1963 and 1964, and continuing on to the late 20th century. Hence, the memories of the characters become the shadow lines, the hidden web that connects people, and history, together. The novel's main theme scrutinises the ways in which personal lives are interweaved and affected by political and historical forces.

The novel starts in Calcutta, further moves to Delhi where the narrator goes to school and concludes in London. At the start of the novel, the child narrator presents to the readers the two branches of his family represented by his grandmother, 'Thamma', and her

sister 'Mayadebi'. Thamma, who is a retired school teacher, is stringent, pragmatic, and no non-sense woman, having lived through the gruesome time period of the partition of her native Bengal region from India. Her main aim is to reunite the entire family, particularly to bring back her uncle, 'Jethamoshai', from Dhaka. Their family is that of a middle class status. The narrator thinks highly of and looks up to Mayadebi's son, Tridib, because of his in-depth knowledge of history and his viewpoint on events and people. However, Mayadebi is disappointed over her son's lack of ambition.

The Sattachaudhari family and the Price family in London are connected together by the bond of their father figures - Justice Sattachaudhari and Lionel Treasurzen. The narrator is in love with Ila, his cousin who lives in London, but he never confesses his feelings to her. Ila later on goes to marry Nick Price. Tridib has feelings for May Price and she, too, is in love with him. However, their fate is torn apart when Tridib rescues May from a Mob during the Dhaka riots, and both Tridib and Jethamoshai are killed by the hands of the mob.

With the retelling of such events, Ghosh successfully brings forth both the personal and political history. As per Ghosh remains the gathered experiences and memories of those who lived and survived through these events. Unless there is no memory, there will be no history.

Along with this, with the use of his emphasis on locations, addresses, and the houses that the two families inhabited, such as the narrator's house in Gole Park, the Price household at 44 Lymington Road in London, and the Uncle's house in Dhaka, Ghosh instills the idea that space is what helps to establish some sort of identity. Thamma's displacement as a Bengali and her innate yearning to reunite her family by travelling to Dhaka to bring back her uncle, illustrates Ghosh's theme where questions of identity clashes with the current political reality. Thamma regards herself as a Bengali, but must travel around through Indian papers that proclaim that she is Indian. Such a dislocation and displacement in spaces reflects the displacement of identity.

## SUCH A LONG JOURNEY

→ Robinton Mistry

"Such a long journey" (1991) by Canadian-Indian author Robinton Mistry follows one man's experience of a political scandal in early 1970s India. Its themes include the tension between the personal and political spheres of life, ruthlessness, and gullibility. The novel was widely praised for its compassion and humor and was shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize for fiction.

The novel opens in 1971 to an atmospheric rendering of India and Gústad Noble, a Zoroastrian man who belongs to the small Parsi sect, praying in the evening toward Mecca. He is a peaceful man, nearly sixty-years old, tall and broad-shouldered. His nine-year-old daughter, 'Roshan' is always sick. His gifted son Sohrab wins a prestigious university scholarship to Indian Institute of Technology but chooses not to ~~enroll~~ enroll in college. Sohrab wants to be an artist, and after several heated conversations with his father, leaves home. Gústad is deeply hurt by Sohrab not using the advantages given to him. Gústad

had to pay his own way through college after his father's bookstore went bankrupt.

His wife of twenty-one years, Dilnaz, worries that his bank income won't keep the family afloat financially. She also worries about Roshan's health and consults with a neighbour who purports to be an expert in magic. The only soul in his household who never gives him trouble is his prepubescent son, Dastur.

One day, Major "Bibi Boy" Bilimoria, an old military friend, informs Gústad that he has clandestinely recruited him to deposit money into an account at the Bank of Bombay, where Gústad works. He's also tasked with signing for bags and packages the contents of which he doesn't know. At first, Gústad says he will be fighting against Indira Gandhi's representatives, a popular figure in government at the time who would become India's first female prime minister and was in office. Mrs. Gandhi didn't seek out policies that were favourable to religious minorities such as Muslims and Zoroastrians like Bilimoria or Gústad. But Gústad's moral equilibrium is soon disturbed again when he realizes that he is helping terrorists.

As his role in the politics of his time becomes better

known. Gustad starts to find death threats at work and various murdered animals lying at the foot of his door. To the best of his ability, Gustad hides the reason for these threats from his wife, whom he knows is very outspoken and would likely blow his cover.

Meanwhile, no medicine seems to be working on Rashan. Further, out of Blue, the police arrest Bilimoria. Gustad doesn't know whether to believe that Bilimoria is innocent or guilty.

To clear his conscience, Gustad travels to Delhi. He meets with Bilimoria who is bed-ridden and in prison, overheated by an illness, and speaks with menacing, if occasionally confused talk. Bilimoria admits that he actually stole a good deal of money, he handed to Gustad. The money wouldn't only be for him, however, Bilimoria had intended to share a great deal with his friends, including Gustad. Bilimoria dies, and Gustad later hears that the death was a murder.

Meanwhile, the war in Pakistan appears to be going well for India. Gustad, who had viewed in previous wars, observed how

patriotic everyone has suddenly become; he is wary of the bloodshed that comes with wars.

As the novel closes, political events heat up. The people in Gustad's relatively poor neighbourhood protest and march their way to a city building. They plan to demand the basic services that their taxes should be paying of for: clean water, uncorrupted police, basic medical service, etc. In route to the city building, the people pass graffiti - art that depicts all of India's religions in a peaceful embrace.

In a telling gesture, the city has ordered this wall to be demolished. The people protest and several die. The death cause Gustad to reevaluate his life and disappointments. He stops trying to lead a successful life through his son, Rohrab; the two reconcile and embrace after the protest.

Gustad remains a witness to the war in Bangladesh. Indian political leaders claim the war was to "liberate" the country. Though many authors, including ~~Rohinton~~ Rohinton Mistry, remain highly skeptical. Prime Minister Gandhi suppressed many opposition parties, increased censorship, fueled anti-Muslim sentiment, and was one of the reasons why Mistry immigrated to Canada.

## THE CAT AND SHAKESPEARE

→ { Raja Rao }

In "The Cat and Shakespeare" (1965), author Raja Rao offers answers to the philosophical questions. A metaphysical novel in the truest sense, the novel is an illustrious creation of Raja Rao. The cat represents the Hindu concept of Karma.

"The Cat and Shakespeare" is the story of Govindan Naik, a clerk in the Rationing office at Trivandrum. He lives next door to Ram Krishna Pai, a divisional clerk in the Revenue Board. Pai came only two years ago as a new appointee, after leaving his wife Saroja, daughter Usha, aged 5 and son Vitthal aged 3 at Pattanur. He lived in a small white house by the sea-side and eats his food at 'Home friends'. His wife's parents have thrived on piratic loot. That's why perhaps they have three-story houses at Alwaye. His natural worry is to send his children to the English convents for better education besides providing them with a three-storey house to live in.

Govindan Naik is a good conversationalist. He generally leaps across the boundary wall between their two houses, whenever he feels like talking to Pai. He is primarily interested in amassing wealth, particularly multi-storied buildings and other luxury items. He is aware of his job in the ration office as a source of extra income. His hopes and calculations of wealth and property are based on the fact that everyone needs a ration card for his food supplies during the famine years of war, for a clerk in the ration office. It is not difficult to manipulate the actual requirements of the population of the district. To show exaggerated figures of foodgrains supplied and lost in transit, the kittens by neck to safety. To the onlooker, it may appear very cruel and dangerous for the kitten to be lifted by neck as the carnivore kills its prey by crushing the windpipe and bloodpipe that is vulnerable most in the throat. But the cat that kills the mice by seizing the neck does not intend to act the same way in case of its kitten. Though the kitten dangling by neck between the cat's teeth do look no different from the mouse preyed upon, there is a qualitative difference between the two approaches of the cat on two different occasions. In the former case, it discharges the duty of a guardian who has not only to protect its progeny from the impending harm but also to ensure their efficient learning of the art of hunting their prey.

The other aspect of the personality of a cat is that it is fond of milk. While it drinks milk, it shuts its vision to forget existence of the whole world behind it. It denotes the cat's love of the best pleasures of life in complete disregard of the possible dangers.

Govindan Nair's indulgence in corruption and his consequent conviction can be interpreted in the light of the above two aspects. Raja Rao subtitle the story as "A Tale of Modern India". The dominant theme of the narrative is bureaucratic corruption that is the gift of the so called progressive system of British outlook and administration. There are adequate references to the banditry, thuggery, piracy upon which foundations of family business and reputation are built. This is what exactly the British as successful merchants are proud of. Their efforts are backed by their ~~to~~ intelligentsia and their imperialism is justified not only by their vested interests but also by their artists, writers and thinkers. It is thus in this context that the importance of Shakespeare can be underlined. Shakespeare has enjoyed great love and prestige in India than in his native England. There is more imitation

than integration of scholarship and wisdom so far as Shakespeare is concerned. He is criticised more at home. However, Shakespeare and the British system of administration are complementary to each other. Raja Rao seems to suggest that Shakespeare and corruption are the two most charming gifts of the British to India. There are the two myths that sustain each in perpetuation.

# MIDNIGHT'S CHILDREN

→ Salman Rushdie

Published in 1980, "Midnight's Children" follows the tumultuous transition into India's and to a lesser extent, Pakistan's independence. After the partition of British India. The story itself is allegorical with the main events being about the life of Saleem Sinai, a boy who was born at the stroke of midnight on the same day that India gained freedom from England.

Salman Rushdie, the novel's author, created the book to be a fictional biography of the country from the point of view of someone who grew up alongside the nation. Rushdie himself was born in 1947, just two months before the country's liberation. As such, he had a unique perspective on the country's adolescent years as they coincided with his own. These same ideas are injected into Saleem's story; the changes that befall Saleem in terms of wealth and identity are indicative of India's growth.

Like Rushdie's other novels, "Midnight's Children"

uses magical realism as a device to combine history with Rushdie's fictional twist on history. Rushdie also employs post colonial theory to show how imperialist handicapped countries like India trying to reestablish their culture and identity.

The novel begins as the narrator 'Saleem Sinai' urgently tells the story of his life. Born at the exact moment of India's independence from British rule, Saleem is inextricably "handcuffed to history". And his even fate is intertwined with that of his nation. Saleem's entire body is cracking, crumbling under the stress of "too much history" and he is slowly dying, disintegrating into approximately 'a hundred and thirty million particles of anonymous, necessarily oblivious, dust.' Saleem must look fast if he is to tell his story before he dies, and he begins with his Kashmiri grandfather, Adam Aziz.

Adam has just returned to Kashmir from medical school in Germany, and he is disillusioned with his traditional Indian life.

One morning while kneeling to pray, Adam strikes his nose on the ground, and three small drops of blood escape from his nose. From that moment, he vows "never again to bow to any man

er god." Soon, Tai, the old boatman, alerts Adnan to the illness of Naseem Ghanji, the daughter of a local landowner. Arriving at the Ghanjis, Adnan finds Naseem hidden behind a large sheet with a small hole cut in the center, and he is made to examine her through the opening. Over several years and many illnesses, Adnan and Naseem fell in love and are finally married, and the two prepare to move to Agra for Adnan's new university job.

In Agra, Adnan and Naseem witnesses to Mahatma Gandhi's hatred and the violence of the British military, and in the aftermath of a massacre, Adnan befriends the 'Huntingbird', a pro-Indian Muslim politician who inspires optimism throughout Agra. Adnan also meets Nadia Khan, the 'Huntingbird's' private secretary, and after Huntingbird is mysteriously murdered, Nadia takes refuge under Adnan's floorboards, much to the dismay of his wife Naseem, known in her marriage as Reverend Mother, while living under the floor. Nadia falls in love with Adnan's daughter, Murtaza, and the two are married, spending three blissful years together underground. Ultimately, it is discovered that Nadia is

impotent, and he is forced to divorce Murtaza, who is left heartbroken. She however, soon marries Ahmed Sinai, who changes her name to Ahina, and the two move to Bombay after she becomes pregnant.

Ahmed and Ahina buy a mansion from William Methwold, a British colonialist who is preparing to return to London after India's independence, and they quickly move in, living amongst the Englishmen's belongings and customs. Ahina goes into labor on the eve of India's independence, along with another pregnant woman from Methwold's estate named Varina, the wife of a poor accidental who entertains the residents on the estate. Both women gave birth at the stroke of midnight; however, Varina dies shortly after, leaving her infant son alone with the two children of midnight, a nurse named Mary Pereira switches the names of the children, effectively replacing rich with poor, in her own "private act of revolution." In the days following, Mary's guilt is so severe that she gives her services to Ahina Sinai as an 'ayah' to care for her son, Saleem, and she readily accepts. Mary returns to Methwold's estate with Ahina's, where she continues to keep her secret for several years before finally blushing it out, a victim of her own guilt.

As Saleem grows, it is clear that he is not an ordinary child. He along with many children who were born at midnight, during India's independence, were blessed with some magical powers. Saleem could hear numerous voices in his head, that were the voices of the other children born during the midnight hour of independence. Saleem attempts to organize the children, creating a forum for them in his mind, but their prejudice get the better of them, and they are unable to band together.

Saleem moves with his family to Pakistan. As civil unrest brews leading up to the Indo-Pakistani war, he is again left helpless as bombs from an air-strike kill his family. In the chaos of the bombing, Saleem is hit in the head by an airborne Spitfire, causing him to forget his name and identity. He is soon dropped into the Pakistani army and he witnesses unspeakable events, finally running away into the jungle to avoid further violence. When he emerges from the jungle, the war is ending, India is victorious, and Saleem is still not sure who he is. During a celebratory parade, he runs into Parvati-the-witch, a fellow child of midnight who immediately

recognizes Saleem. The two fall in love, and when Saleem is unable to father her children, Parvati puts a spell on Shiva, he soon impregnates her. He quickly loses interest, and Parvati is free to marry Saleem, who has agreed to father her unborn child.

As Parvati goes into labor, civil unrest in India continues, and Indira Gandhi, the Prime Minister, declares a state of emergency. Parvati gives birth to a son but unfortunately, she is killed. At the same time, Saleem is kidnapped by Shiva and taken, along with the other children of midnight, and forcibly sterilized during Mrs. Gandhi's sterilization program. Finally Indira Gandhi's emergency ends and Saleem and other children of midnight are released from imprisonment. Saleem soon finds his son and moves to Bombay, where he discovers that Mary Pereira is the owner of a local pickle factory.

As Saleem finishes his story, he decides to tell his future, and he starts with his wedding to Padma, his companion. Padma and Saleem are to be married in Kashmir; however, before they are, Saleem finally succumbs to the crick in his neck, and he crumbles into 200 hundred million pieces of dust.

# A GODDESS NAMED GOLD

→ {B. Bhattacharya}

Bhabani Bhattacharya (10 Nov. 1906 - 10 Oct. 1988) was an Indian writer, of Bengali origin, who wrote social, realist fiction. He was born in Bhagalpur, part of Bengal presidency in British India. Bhattacharya gained a bachelor's degree from Patna University and a doctorate from the University of London. He returned to India and joined the diplomatic service. He served in the United States, to which country he returned as a teacher of literary studies once he had left the service. He taught in Hawaii, and later in Seattle. In his mid-thirties, he began writing fiction set in historically and socially realistic contexts.

He is described as belonging to the social realism school of Indo-Anglian literature. His writings exhibit the influence of R.N. Tagore and Mahatma Gandhi. Bhattacharya adopted a pedagogical approach to make novels out of ideas, utilizing satire and makes his ideas more tangible through situational examples. He was honoured

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with the Sahitya Akademi Award of 1967.

"A Goddess Named Gold" is Bhabani Bhattacharya's fourth novel. It was published in 1960 and set in Senamitti. 'Sona' means 'gold' and 'mitti' means 'earth'. Hence, Senamitti means 'earth yielding gold'.

This is the story of the multiple events which occur in a small Indian village over a period of several weeks preceding the country's official independence from British rule. A young girl, 'Meera' and her grandparents are the hope and leading strength of the penniless, genuine, but often foolish villagers who are financially controlled by the crippling mortgages and high prices of the wealthy cloth-dealer and money-lender. Meera's grandfather is a wandering minstrel surrounded, in the eyes of villagers, with a supernatural halo. He gives his beloved granddaughter a magic amulet destined to turn to gold any copper object touching her body when she performs "an act of real kindness." The gift and its attendant power stimulate even further the greed and selfish cupidity of the money-lender and unbridles a series of events which culminate - after causing much stupid behaviour and a great deal of unhappiness - in demonstrating to the entire village the principle of charity and kindness, based on patriotic pride and gratefulness for one's own

Circumstances in life, as well as for the blossoming freedom of nation. The author's style and studied choice of language indicate an earnest attempt to capture in English the atmosphere of a small and poor Indian village. The effort is perhaps over-ambitious for the result is often awkward and unreal. The plot is, however, interesting and heart warming as well as humorous. The appeal would be mainly for the American reader unfamiliar with India's customs, and eager to become acquainted with them from light reading.