

THE QUEST FOR HOME IN AMITAV GHOSH'S THE SHADOW LINES, THE GLASS PALACE, AND THE HUNGRY TIDE

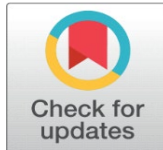
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ABSTRACT

The present paper sheds light on the intricate themes of home, identity, and displacement in Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines*, *The Glass Palace*, and *The Hungry Tide*. Ghosh intertwines personal narratives with larger historical contexts, analyzing the impact of events such as the Partition, colonialism, and postcolonial transitions on the individual and collective psyche. His narratives challenge conventional notions of belonging and borders, employing vivid metaphors, allegories, and intergenerational stories to reveal the complexities of identity formation. He portrays the fluidity of identity and the dissonance between emotional and geographical conceptions of home, illustrating how displacement, exile, and migration alter the human experience. Through characters grappling with exile, memory, shifting boundaries, identity crises, and the loss of homeland, the paper highlights the universal human quest for belonging amidst political upheavals, cultural dislocations, and social transformations. By exploring the intersections of nationalism, diaspora, and memory, Ghosh critiques artificial divisions and dismantles myths of fixed identities. His works transcend individual stories to underscore displaced communities' resilience, adaptability, and agency. His oeuvre invites a rethinking of concepts like home, identity, and belonging in an ever-changing historical and cultural landscape by presenting a poignant reflection on the enduring struggle to reconcile fragmented identities within a globalized and divided world.

Keywords: Home, Borders, Boundaries, Identity, Displacement, etc.



1. INTRODUCTION

In literary works, Home is not merely a physical space but a complex and multifaceted construct encompassing emotional, cultural, and psychological dimensions. For many writers, the idea of home extends beyond a shelter or a familial domain to include a sense of place, history, and community. Literature often explores the dissonance between the idealized idea of home and the lived experiences of displacement, exile, migration, and alienation. In this sense, the quest for home is frequently portrayed as a literal and metaphorical journey toward understanding and self-realization. Postcolonial literature addresses the fragmentation of identity and belonging resulting from colonization and its aftermath. The quest for home in these works is often a struggle against physical and emotional dislocation, highlighting

the enduring ties to one's homeland despite the passage of time and the imposition of artificial borders. The universal appeal of the quest for home also finds resonance in diasporic literature, where the tension between the homeland and the adopted land forms a core narrative thread. For authors like Jhumpa Lahiri and Salman Rushdie, home becomes a space of negotiation between tradition and modernity, memory and reinvention. In Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, for example, the protagonist's journey is intricately linked to the collective history of a newly independent India, where the concept of home is constantly shifting. Diasporic writers often depict home as a site of hybridity, where identities are reshaped and reimagined. This dynamic understanding of home emphasizes its fluidity, challenging fixed notions of belonging and highlighting the transformative power of displacement and cultural encounters.

In postcolonial theory, thinkers like Homi K. Bhabha and Edward Said have contributed significantly to the discourse on home and displacement. Bhabha's concept of "the third space" highlights the hybridity and fluidity of identity in postcolonial contexts, where the concept of home is often contested and redefined. According to Bhabha, the experience of displacement creates a liminal space that allows for the negotiation of new identities and cultural meanings. This perspective is particularly relevant in analyzing diasporic literature, where the home becomes a site of hybridity and transformation. Similarly, Said's work on exile and Orientalism examines the complexities of home as both a physical and symbolic construct, shaped by power dynamics and historical narratives. His exploration of the contrapuntal nature of exile underscores the duality of home as a space of belonging and estrangement.

The quest for home is not limited to geographic displacement but extends to existential and psychological realms. Modernist writers like Virginia Woolf and James Joyce explored the interior landscapes of their characters, exploring how the concept of home is constructed through memory, perception, and emotional attachments. Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* examines the brief nature of home, capturing its ephemerality and its connection to time and personal identity. Similarly, Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* portrays the protagonist's journey of self-discovery as a quest for a metaphorical home- a place of intellectual and spiritual belonging. In contemporary literature, the quest for home continues to evolve, reflecting the complexities of globalization, migration, and identity politics. The works of authors like Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and Mohsin Hamid address the challenges faced by individuals navigating multiple cultural contexts and contested spaces of belonging. Adichie's *Americanah* explores the experience of Nigerian immigrants in the United States, where home becomes a fluid and contested concept, shaped by race, class, and transnational identity. Hamid's *Exit West*, on the other hand, employs elements of magical realism to depict the journey of refugees escaping war-torn regions, highlighting the universal longing for safety and stability amidst uncertainty. These narratives reaffirm the enduring relevance of the quest for home in capturing the human condition.

The concept of home has been a subject of significant interest among literary theorists and critics, who have examined its various dimensions and implications. Among the most influential thinkers in this realm is Gaston Bachelard, whose seminal work *The Poetics of Space* explores the intimate relationship between spaces and human emotions. Bachelard's notion of the house as a "space of intimacy" underscores the symbolic power of home as a site of memory, dreams, and imagination. He argues that the spaces we inhabit shape our identities and experiences, making home a foundational element of the human psyche. His insights have profoundly influenced literary analyses of home, particularly with its psychological and emotional resonances.

Contemporary theorists have expanded the discourse to include the impact of globalization and transnationalism on the concept of home. Scholars like Arjun Appadurai and Doreen Massey argue that home is no longer a fixed or stable entity but a dynamic and relational construct shaped by global flows of people, culture, and ideas. Appadurai's concept of "scapes" highlights the fluid and interconnected nature of contemporary identities. At the same time, Massey's notion of "a global sense of place" emphasizes the multiplicity and diversity of experiences that define home in the modern world. These perspectives challenge traditional, static definitions of home, offering new frameworks for understanding its complexities in a rapidly changing world. The concept of home in literature and theory encompasses a rich and multifaceted terrain, reflecting the diversity of human experiences and aspirations. From psychological and emotional dimensions to cultural and political contexts, the home remains a central and enduring theme that continues to inspire exploration and reinterpretation. By engaging with the works of theorists and writers, we gain deeper insights into the universal quest for home and its profound implications for identity, belonging, and the human condition.

The Shadow Lines explores the diaspora of East Pakistan following the partition. The narrator's Hindu family flees their home in Dhaka and Calcutta after the formation of East Pakistan. Amid the devastation of the Second World War in Europe, they form a bond with the Prices, an English family, transcending cultural divides. This connection allows the English family to witness and partake in pivotal moments of the Indian family's life. The novel employs the travel metaphor to symbolize bridging boundaries and fostering cultural exchanges. The story revolves around the Datta

Chaudhuris of Bengal, the Prices of London, and the narrator's relationship with both families. Thamma, the narrator's grandmother, lived her childhood at their home in Jindabahar Lane, Dhaka, which was in India before the partition between India and East Pakistan. Ghosh puts forward the perspective that a border, supposedly unites those who are inside it as well as differentiating them from those who are other, in modern times divides more than it unites. In several instances, the author shows the partitioning of the grandmother's original home in an allegorical relationship with the nation. Tha'mma talks of her upside-down house in Dhaka and the story of that house is indeed the story of partitioned India.

The partition of the house occurs arbitrarily, defying architectural logic while claiming equality and fairness. It splits through a door, a chest of drawers, and even their father's name plaque, symbolizing the randomness of the India-Pakistan border drawn during the 1947 Partition. This border, based on the majority religion in administrative districts, similarly claimed fairness despite its arbitrary nature. As children in a joint family in Dhaka, Tha'mma and her sister Mayadebi witness a familial dispute between their father and Uncle Jethamoshai, leading to the division of their home. A literal line is drawn, splitting everything, even the commode. This material division gives rise to ideological separation; once divided, the other side of the house becomes inaccessible, even to Tha'mma and Mayadebi. Tha'mma, the elder, refers to it as the upside-down house, where everything feels unnatural. The divided household mirrors the two nations, once united but separated by historical events. Sustaining this separation requires the creation of differences. Tha'mma's stories to Mayadebi about the other side of the house reflect modern narratives of fake national pride, built on fabricated distinctions.

Tha'mma and Mayadebi, though born and raised in the same house, followed different destinies in life. Mayadebi married a wealthy diplomat, while Tha'mma married a railway engineer whose postings took them to various neighboring countries. Their lives converged in Calcutta after Tha'mma's husband passed away from pneumonia in 1935, leaving her widowed at thirty-two with the responsibility of a ten-year-old son and no savings. Despite never having worked before, Tha'mma held a bachelor's degree in history from Dhaka University. With the help of her husband's friend a railway official, she secured a teaching job at a school in Calcutta. She couldn't return to her parental home in Dhaka due to time constraints, and after the 1947 Partition, the possibility of going back to her childhood home vanished entirely.

After retiring from twenty years of teaching, Tha'mma begins a desire to return to her childhood home in Dhaka. Memories of her childhood home which she signified as the "upside-down house" (Shadow 138), resembling a honeycomb and dominate her thoughts. She regrets never revisiting the house and is surprised to learn that Jethamoshai is still alive, living in their old home. In her resolute way, Tha'mma decides to rescue him from what she perceives as "his enemies" (151) Muslim refugees occupying the house, whom she views as outsiders despite their status as insiders in a Muslim-dominated Dhaka post-Partition. She considered Muslim Refugees as enemies after partitioning East Pakistan which became Bangladesh later on Muslim dominated country. She wishes to visit there and bring him to her "invented country" where he "belonged" (151).

When her son reminds her that they were once refugees in Dhaka, she reacts defensively, insisting, "We're not refugees... We came long before Partition" (145). For Tha'mma, returning to Dhaka is not just a trip to a foreign country but a deeply emotional homecoming, as hinted in the title of the novel's second part, *Coming Home*. This journey forces her to confront complex questions about borders, nationality, and the meaning of home. It churned a wealth of confusion and emotion in Thamma as she contemplated the meaning of home and its location, borders, and nationality and whether the journey would mean going home or returning home. She struggles to decide whether Calcutta, where she rebuilt her life, or Dhaka, where her roots lie, is her true home. Tha'mma rationally accepts Calcutta as home, embracing India as her nation after Partition. However, a Freudian slip during a conversation reveals her emotional ties to Dhaka, as she refers to visiting it as coming "home to Dhaka" (168). This indicates that she had realistically accepted Calcutta as her "home" (168) but could not erase the emotional ties she had with Dhaka. This unresolved duality resurfaces during her journey to Dhaka to visit Mayadebi, her sister, who now resides there due to her husband's posting in East Pakistan.

At the airport, filling out disembarkation forms intensifies Tha'mma's identity crisis. When she filled her place of birth was Dhaka but her nationality was Indian, she realized that her birthplace, Dhaka, no longer determines her nationality; she is Indian but feels like a foreigner in her birthplace. When Tha'mma' was able to recognize the same Dhaka Tridib identifies her as a foreigner in Dhaka as May by saying:

"But you are a foreigner now, you're as foreign here as May – much more than May, for look at her, she doesn't even need a visa to come here. At that, my grandmother gave May a long wondering look and said: Yes, I really am a foreigner here – as foreign as May in India or Tagore in Argentina. Then she caught another glimpse of the house and shook her head and said: But whatever you may say, this isn't Dhaka." (215)

This unsettling realization highlights the disconnect between her emotional and political identities. For the first time, Tha'mma experiences deep inner turmoil, questioning how her place of birth came to clash so profoundly with her nationality. She cannot resolve the confusion in the patterns essential to her identity.

The novel's sections, *Going Away* and *Coming Home*, reflect the conflicting emotions of home and homelessness that partition victims endure. Despite her determination to bring Jethamoshai to Calcutta, he remains rooted in his Dhaka home, cared for by a Muslim family, further complicating her sense of belonging and challenging her rigid notions of identity and nationhood. Tha'mma's confusion, compounded by her grandson's teasing about not knowing the difference between coming and going, shows the displacement and fractured identity caused by Partition. As an adult, the narrator can provide a gloss on her slip:

"Every language assumes a centrality, a fixed and settled point to go away from and come back to, and what my grandmother was looking for was a word for a journey that 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". (169)

Tha'mma finds it hard to understand why visiting Dhaka, now in Bangladesh, is so difficult after Partition. Before the country was divided, traveling there was easy. She always thought of the trip as a simple homecoming, but it was not as she imagined. When she arrives in Dhaka, she cannot believe it is the same place she once knew. The narrator, who has never been to Dhaka, can picture the city clearly through her stories. He can see the sweet shop near her childhood home and hear the noises she describes. He says, "I could see all that because people like my grandmother, who have no home but in memory, learn to be very skilled in the art of recollection" (214). In a book review, Girish Karnad comments:

"The grandmother's visit to the ancestral home... is surely one of the most memorable scenes in Indian fiction. Past and future meet across religious, political and cultural barriers in a confusion of emotions, ideals, intentions and acts, leading to a shattering climax." (4)

When they arrived to take Jethamoshai back to Calcutta, he did not recognize them. He refused to leave, saying he was already home, where he was born, and wanted to die at his home where he lived all his life. Tha'mma, Mayadebi, and others urged him to leave, warning that riots could break out at any moment, making it unsafe to stay, Jethamoshai said: "I understand very well, the old man muttered. I know everything, I understand everything. Once you start moving you never stop. That's what I told my sons when they took the trains. I said: I don't believe in this India-Shindia. 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 anywhere. As for me, I was born here, and I'll die here." (Shadow 237)

The boundaries and shadow borders turned them into foreigners in their homeland. People like Jethamoshai chose to ignore these divisions and refused to leave their homes. They saw no reason to abandon their birthplace simply because politicians had drawn a line. Jethamoshai suggests that expressions like one's home, birthplace, and country have lost their earlier sense of permanence. Despite his old age, Jethamoshai feels more at peace in his ancestral home than the narrator's grandmother, who struggles with her divided loyalties. The climax unfolds when the grandmother and her sister return in their Mercedes from the ancestral home, with their uncle following in a rickshaw. A mob attacked them and left their bodies lying on the road after killing Khalil, Jethamoshai, and Tridib. *The Shadow Lines* explores the impact of fear on memory, a fear shared across the subcontinent, which is now fragmented by borders. These borders make an individual's home the most unsafe place in the world. Jethamoshai is ultimately killed in the very place he believed to be his home.

The riots erupted in response to the theft of a sacred relic, the Prophet Mohammed's hair, from a mosque in Hazratbal, Kashmir. Reflecting on how this event caused unrest far from its original home, the narrator draws circles on his old Bartholomew's Atlas. He observes that Khulna, a city in East Pakistan where severe riots occurred, is less than 100 miles from Calcutta across the border but 1,200 miles away from Srinagar, the home of the sacred relic. Using a compass, the narrator extends the circle from Srinagar to Khulna and finds that places like Phnom Penh in Thailand and Inner Mongolia are equidistant from Khulna. This realization challenges the belief that "distance separates" (241). It shows how shared history can connect people far from their physical homes, like Kashmiris and Bengalis, who are deeply involved in each other's lives despite geographic distance, unlike communities closer together but without cultural ties. The novel provides a thought-provoking exploration of freedom, identity, and the lasting effects of borders on human experience. *The Shadow Lines* highlights how borders shape our sense of self and home, showing that their impact is not just physical but deeply mental as well.

After Tridib's death, Tha'mma's idealism quickly fades as she observes the growing chaos in the land. She adopts a militant form of nationalism, donating her jewellery to the Defence Fund. For her, the divide becomes clear between us and them, with them being those now living in her former homeland. The Partition split the natural communities of Punjab and Bengal into two nations, displacing 15 million people from the homes their communities had long called their own. Those who crossed into India arrived landless, directionless, and without resources, even as the country celebrated its Independence in Delhi. *The Shadow Lines* serves as a poignant case history, illustrating the personal tragedy caused by the numerous divisions that shattered the narrator's homeland.

Once, some college students beat Ila, and a policeman escorted her home. When questioned, Ila didn't disclose the incident at school. She had hoped Nick would stand by her and protect her, but he always ignored her at college, fearing his friends would bully him for being seen with an Indian girl. When the narrator recounted this incident to Tha'mma, she didn't blame Nick for failing to support Ila. Instead, she criticized Ila, her mother, and her grandmother for sending Ila to a country where she didn't belong. According to Tha'mma, Ila had no connection to that country because she hadn't contributed to its creation or made sacrifices for its borders. She believed that only those who had shed their blood to establish a nation truly belonged to it, as they were responsible for building it together. Since Ila hadn't participated in that struggle, Tha'mma insisted she couldn't claim it as her home.

Ghosh questions whether Partition is a viable solution to social unrest driven by religion or political motives. It undeniably causes humiliation and distress for those forced to migrate from their home or birthplace due to sudden political changes aimed at resolving national issues. *The Shadow Lines* highlights the role of print capitalism and media in spreading nationalist ideologies, with Tha'mma as a victim of these narratives. However, her memory momentarily frees her from the constraints of official history. In Dhaka, her recollections help her recognize affinities across borders. Instead of accepting Dhaka as a foreign land, she vividly remembers the city and its surroundings, reclaiming her connection to her old home. Tha'mma's response to war news reflects how print capitalism and media foster a sense of community, shaping perceptions and experiences of identity and belonging as suggested by Anderson.

The key themes in *The Glass Palace* are Homelessness and mass dislocation, consequences of the Second World War. The novel portrays the suffering of thousands of Indians who were forced to migrate from Burma to Calcutta during the Japanese invasion of Burma in 1942. This invasion created chaos, as the Japanese clashed with the British, leaving the people of Burma in a terrible situation. They faced the threat of annihilation from either side and had no choice but to flee their homeland. Ghosh skilfully highlights these precarious conditions, capturing the turmoil and agony experienced by the displaced. *The Glass Palace* explores the decline of the Burmese empire during pre-independence India and examines how the empire's fall impacted the royal families. It also highlights the mass migration from Burma to Calcutta during the Second World War. The story follows Rajkumar, an orphan who seeks his livelihood in Burma's teak forests, and spans generations, capturing the past glory of the empire and the evolving ambitions of its royal families, merchants, and common people. These aspirations are shattered by the Japanese invasion of Burma during World War II. The novel explores themes of homelessness and the shifting identities of South Asian families in pre and post-colonial times. It portrays the violence and suffering caused by the territorial ambitions of the British and Japanese. After Japan took control of Burma in 1942, thousands of Indians and refugees were forced to migrate to Calcutta, enduring a perilous journey in their struggle for survival. Ghosh describes them as:

"They began to notice other people – a few scattered Handfuls at first, then more and more and still more, until the road become so thickly thronged that they could barely move. Everyone was heading in same direction: towards the northern landward passage to India – a distance of more than thousand miles. They had their possessions bundled on their head; they were carrying children on their backs, wheeling elderly people in carts and barrows" (Glass 467)

Ghosh portrays the plight of helpless people stranded between two nations, Burma and India as the harsh outcome of war. These individuals grapple with the overwhelming feeling of being outsiders even in their own land. They are left questioning where they truly belong and what defines their home. Ghosh compels readers to reflect on the struggles of migrants and borderland communities. He captures the grim reality of war-affected people, highlighting how they are forced into terrible situations. Beyond losing their homes, they must fight for their very survival, enduring immense challenges that test their resilience. *The Glass Palace* captures the profound impacts of violence brought about by nationalism and globalization, extending into the home, domestic spaces, and private lives. Rajkumar lives as a near-destitute refugee in Uma's Calcutta home, reflecting the dislocation and alienation faced by many. Despite all his wanderings, Rajkumar dies holding the belief that the "Ganges could never be the same as the Irrawaddy" (544), symbolizing the enduring ties to his homeland and the irreplaceable connection to the spaces of his origin. Metaphorically, Ghosh portrays a sense of being at home everywhere, emphasizing the interconnectedness of human

experiences across geographical and cultural divides. Rajkumar embodies the resilience required to navigate transitions across frontiers, having faced homelessness and destitution in his childhood. Rajkumar is suffering from the same dilemma as he is a boundary crosser who goes beyond well-defined lines of nations and family history to find a home for himself in an alien land. He confesses to Dolly:

"My father was from Chittagong and he ended up in Arakan; I ended up in Rangoon; you went from Mandalay to Ratnagiri and now you're here too. There are people who have the luck to end their lives where they began them. But this is not something that is owed to us" (310).

In the intricate narrative of *The Glass Palace*, spanning two centuries, three generations, and multiple geographies across South Asia, Southeast Asia, and America, exile emerges as the central theme linking all events. For King Thebaw and his family, exile is a devastating experience that uproots them from their homeland. In contrast, for Rajkumar and Saya John, colonialism and its commercial demands offer opportunities, allowing them to move away from their original homes in pursuit of livelihood and prosperity. For them, home becomes wherever survival and success are achievable. This perspective is evident when Mathew, Saya John's son, informs Rajkumar about the impending war: "The English are preparing to send a fleet up the Irrawaddy. There's going to be a war. Father says they want all the teak in Burma. The King won't let them have it, so they're going to do away with him" (15). This moment encapsulates the displacement and the redefinition of home, driven by the forces of colonial expansion and economic exploitation. These movements have led to large-scale human dislocation, both forced and voluntary. This dislocation often results in a severance from the homeland, native culture, and traditions. The uprooted individuals grapple with the loss of their familiar world while attempting to adapt to new environments, creating a profound sense of alienation and identity crisis. These movements, both of the colonizers and the colonized, have led to profound crises of identity. In both colonial and postcolonial contexts, the notion of exile becomes a complex issue tied to ideas of home, community, religion, and nation. Ghosh's works often explore this complexity, questioning and problematizing the fixed locations of home and nation. His narratives reflect the fluidity of belonging and the challenges faced by individuals uprooted from their origins, navigating the boundaries between memory, identity, and displacement.

In the *Ibis Trilogy*, the narrative weaves together individual stories of pain and suffering into a collective journey of hope and movement toward the future. Characters such as Raja Neel Rattan of Rakshali, Deeti, Kalua, Paulette, Heera, Jodu, and hybrid couples demonstrate an unyielding spirit to survive and adapt to life's challenges. Faced with new threats, individuals from diverse economic statuses, races, cultures, and castes unite in an emotional space where familial bonds are redefined. Here, relationships are not determined by blood but by shared experiences and mutual support. Ghosh portrays the *Ibis* as more than just a ship; it is a symbol of fate and transformation, a new home for its passengers. They view the ship as a vessel capable of turning life's adversities into opportunities for renewal and growth. As the *Ibis* becomes a microcosm of their world, its inhabitants hailing from different regions, languages, and cultures transcend traditional barriers. Together, they create a community free from the constraints of religion, race, economic disparity, caste, and subalternity. The *Ibis* exemplifies cross-culturalism, blending diverse identities into a shared cultural environment, offering a glimpse of a harmonious life where they can feel at home beyond borders and boundaries.

Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* investigates deeply the concept of home within the ever-changing landscape of the Sundarbans, where land and water merge, dissolve, and remerge, creating an environment that is both welcoming and alienating. The plight of the Morichjhapi refugees becomes central to understanding the postcolonial uncanny— a paradox of being simultaneously at home and unhomed due to political and environmental instability. Here, home transcends static definitions of geography or politics, becoming a fleeting sense of belonging tied to memory and identity. For the displaced Dalits of Morichjhapi, the land is both a refuge and a site of conflict, exposing the state's inability to balance humanitarian values with rigid territorial policies. The mangroves, reclaiming human settlements, symbolize the fluidity of natural and political boundaries, challenging human attempts at permanence. This blurring of lines reflects the fragility of claiming a stable home in a region shaped by ceaseless change. Outsiders like Piya and Kanai also grapple with their sense of belongingness. Piya's Western cosmopolitanism confronts the limitations of modernity when faced with the depth of indigenous knowledge. Kanai's urban sophistication falters in the face of the Sundarbans' untamed unpredictability. Both characters embody the tension between home and exile, revealing the broader identity crises experienced in postcolonial societies, where displacement and hybridity destabilize traditional notions of belonging. Through these narratives, Ghosh critiques the fragile coexistence of humanity and nature, power and resistance, and modernity and tradition. The Sundarbans emerge as a metaphor for nations negotiating identity and justice within spectral, shifting boundaries. In this landscape, no one is ever entirely at home, and the quest for belonging remains both personal and political.

In *The Hungry Tide*, Ghosh explores home as a fragile and contested concept, intricately linked to identity, belonging, and the malleability of borders in the postcolonial world. The novel's setting, the Sundarbans, serves as a dynamic metaphor for the instability of both physical and metaphorical boundaries. For the Dalit refugees of Morichjhāpi, who seek refuge in the Sundarbans after being displaced by the Partition, the concept of home is imbued with trauma and resilience. They arrive in the tide country hoping to find a secure land to settle, only to face yet another dispossession when the state prioritizes wildlife conservation over its survival. Their experience highlights the state's failure to reconcile humanitarian needs with territorial and ecological concerns. The government's violent eviction of the refugees marks a poignant failure of the postcolonial vision of justice, relegating these marginalized communities to the status of forgotten, stateless, and unhomed victims of a political system that has failed them. In this context, Ghosh uses the Sundarbans as a metaphor for the fluid and contested nature of belonging. The displaced refugees are caught in the crosshairs of political, ecological, and historical forces, where their home search is disillusioned by the ever-changing tides of state policies and the precariousness of postcolonial existence. Through this, the novel critiques the illusion of stability in postcolonial nations, emphasizing how the experience of home is shaped by exclusion, violence, and the constant negotiation of space and identity.

In *The Hungry Tide*, Ghosh critically examines the idea of home through the lens of the uncanny, a concept Freud describes as the simultaneous presence of the familiar and the unfamiliar. For the refugees in the novel, the tide country represents both hope and loss. A place where home becomes an elusive and shifting ideal rather than a stable reality. This sense of the uncanny is heightened by the geographical landscape of the Sundarbans itself, where the boundaries between land and water are in constant flux. Ghosh uses this shifting terrain to symbolize the instability of home in the face of displacement and dispossession. The mangroves that grow and reclaim the land serve as a potent metaphor for nature's dominance over human efforts to establish permanence, suggesting that the human search for home is always at odds with the unpredictable forces of the natural world. The landscape, in its resistance to be fully mapped or understood, becomes a space where home cannot be firmly secured its impermanence mirroring the precarious existence of the refugees.

The journeys of characters like Piya and Kanai further extend the exploration of home and identity within the tide country. Piya, a cetologist trained in the West, enters the Sundarbans with scientific knowledge and technology, only to realize that her understanding of the region is limited. Her worldview, grounded in data and observation, clashes with the indigenous knowledge of Fokir, a local fisherman who navigates the tide country through lived experience and intuition. Piya's gradual transformation from a detached observer to someone who becomes emotionally invested in the land and its people illustrates her evolving relationship with the environment and its inhabitants. Through her connection with Fokir, she begins to sense a form of belonging that transcends her cosmopolitan identity. However, this sense of belonging remains incomplete. The tide country offers Piya a temporary home, but not a permanent one, much like it does for the refugees who seek sanctuary there. Both Piya and the refugees are shaped by the unstable, shifting landscape of the Sundarbans, where home is not defined by permanence, but by the ever-changing nature of belonging and identity.

The Sundarbans, like the postcolonial nation, are a liminal space. Its people, including refugees and locals, live on the edge, constantly threatened by nature and violence. This makes the home unstable and uncertain. For refugees, home is a fragile concept built on memory, loss, and resilience. Their attempt to settle in Morichjhapi was a defiant act, a desperate search for belonging. However, their eviction and massacre exposed the state's cruelty. It criminalized their existence and denied them the right to a home. Ghosh's exploration of home in *The Hungry Tide* goes beyond the geographical and political, exploring more into the emotional and existential. The novel suggests that home is not just a place, but a state of being – a fragile balance of belonging, memory, and resilience. However, in a world of displacement and dispossession, this balance is constantly disrupted, leaving individuals and communities in a state of perpetual liminality. By connecting the personal and the political, the novel highlights the need for a more inclusive and compassionate understanding of home that transcends borders and boundaries to embrace the complexities of human identity and belonging.

Ghosh's relentless logic of the uncanny is highly symbolic. Ghostly refugees are denied homes in a land that itself lacks a stable foundation, constantly shifting and unmapped. Just as the land defies mapping due to its ever-changing nature, the dispossessed lack a fixed location or belonging. The tide country is simultaneously home and not home. Like the tides that erase all traces of human existence, the state erases intruders. The tide in *The Hungry Tide* is both a natural force and a political consequence, shaped by the rhythms of wind and water and political actions. The dispossessed become mere objects of these transformative forces. In *The Hungry Tide*, those who are most familiar with the tide country often

find themselves without a true sense of belonging. This is exemplified by Fokir, whose home, is located "close to the islands embankment ... on the periphery of the Trusts compound," (207) It reflects his marginalized position. The phrase on the periphery underscores his liminal status, existing on the edges of the established order. This precarious existence highlights the complexities of home in a landscape constantly shaped by the tides of nature and politics. This is the incident:

"Fokir was squatting in the dwelling's doorway, half-hidden by a grimy blue curtain. He did not look up and offered no greeting nor any sign of recognition. ... He was wearing, as usual, a T-shirt and a lungi, but somehow in the setting of his own home, his clothes looked frayed and seedy.... There was a fugitive sullenness about his posture that suggested he would rather be anywhere but where he was." (207)

Fokir himself is strangely elusive within his own home, echoing the novel's recurring theme of the uncanny's visual ambiguity. He avoids direct eye contact with his visitors, creating a sense of distance and detachment. Fokir seems almost like a ghost in his own home, an absent presence who yearns to be elsewhere. He appears ill at ease within the confines of his dwelling, highlighting the limitations of physical space in providing a true sense of belonging. If Fokir, within his own house, embodies a wraith-like existence, the tide country itself is teeming with such spectral figures. The history of this region is intertwined with the stories of ghosts and refugees, each seeking a place to haunt and find a sense of home. The novel powerfully depicts the traumatic impact of partition on the Indian subcontinent, showcasing the widespread displacement and dispersal of its people. Political turmoil transformed countless individuals into refugees and immigrants, leading to the emergence of diasporic communities yearning for an idealized homeland. The Morichjhapi massacre, a tragic event largely absent from official historical records, serves as a primary focus point. The narrative shuttles between the Morichjhapi incident, as witnessed by Nirmal, and the present-day expedition of Piya Roy, Kanai, and Fokir. This temporal interplay weaves together a complex tapestry of subplots and themes. Piya Roy, a second-generation immigrant researching the elusive freshwater dolphin, embodies the sense of separation and displacement experienced by many. The uprising at Morichjhapi, a direct consequence of the partition, serves as a pivotal event, grounding the novel's exploration of dislocation. Refugees, marginalized and dislocated, wander along the borders of India and Bangladesh. Even the seemingly simple journey of the fisherman Fokir and his son Tutul reflects the broader historical context of migration. These characters, through their individual experiences, contribute to the novel's overall atmosphere, one that is deeply connected with a sense of displacement and a longing for a lost homeland.

In exploring Amitav Ghosh's literary works, this paper underscores the enduring complexities of home, identity, and displacement in the aftermath of historical upheavals. Ghosh illustrates how the concept of home becomes fraught with contradictions and impossibilities, particularly in the face of historical events such as the Partition of India. In Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines*, the quest for home is deeply entangled with the search for identity and a sense of belonging amidst the confusion of divided nations. Similarly, *The Glass Palace* and *The Hungry Tide* explore the concept of home through characters dislocated by war and imperialism, showcasing the intricate interplay between memory, loss, and the human desire to reclaim a place of origin. Through narratives like *The Shadow Lines*, *The Glass Palace*, and *The Hungry Tide*, Ghosh masterfully illustrates the fragmented realities individuals and communities face in partitioned and postcolonial South Asia. The interplay between memory and geography, as well as the metaphorical representation of shifting boundaries, challenges static notions of belonging. By weaving personal histories with broader political narratives, Ghosh critiques the artificiality of borders and their role in perpetuating division, while also celebrating human resilience and the search for belonging. This examination highlights the universal struggle to reconcile cultural, emotional, and political identities within evolving landscapes. Ghosh's works serve not only as poignant reflections on past displacements but also as enduring calls to understand the fluid and multifaceted nature of home in a globalized world.

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None.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

None.

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