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## The Fractured Self: Memory, Trauma, and Postcolonial Identity in Amitav Ghosh's the Shadow Lines and the Glass Palace

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### ABSTRACT

This paper is a comparative textual analysis of the two novels Amitav Ghosh authored, namely, *The Shadow Lines* and *The Glass Palace*, to discuss how the medium of memory and trauma interrelate to undermine the sense of identity in postcolonial worlds. Finding a gap in the current literature, where such themes are mostly studied separately, the study follows an interdisciplinary theoretical approach, combining the memory studies, the theory of trauma, and the theory of postcolonialism. The approach is based on close reading that is applied to examine the narrative structures and character development, the thematic inquiries, and the linguistic strategies of Ghosh. The results have shown that Ghosh purposefully disrupts established ideas of identity by using fragmented narratives that disrupt linear histories, by using silence as a tool to express unofficial traumas and as a way to criticize official historiography, and by employing a subtle response to nostalgia that critically addresses the past without romanticizing it. The novels shed light on the struggles of the individual and collective psyche against the postcolonial childhood trauma, intergenerational



memories, and the complexities of the hybrid identity within the so-called third space. It is through the confrontation with modern criticism of Western theory of trauma, along with the concept of hybridity as proposed by Homi K. Bhabha that this paper promotes a decolonial ethics of narrative and a contextual approach to world literature study is original because it explains how the methods of narration used by Ghosh are synergistic in undermining essentialised identities and, thus, creating a more fluid and morally responsible concept of selfhood in the postcolonial period.

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## 1. Introduction

The post-colonial period has significantly influenced world literature by giving rise to stories that challenge the complex relationship between memory and identity (Baytar & AVCU, 2023; Ngom, 2021). Postcolonial societies, often marked by inherited trauma, displacement, and the forced reevaluation of past events, provide a rich ground on which to study the process of constructing, challenging, and destabilizing both individual and collective memory. Memory, in this instance, is hardly an unbiased recollection of the past; it is a discontinuous, subjective, and often politicized field, in which personal experiences collide with the histories of nations and cultural traditions (Krautwald, 2024; Stefanovici and Matei, 2024; Vicera, 2021). The problem of the postcolonial subjects is how to create a coherent sense of identity through the disjointed histories when the official records regularly conflict with the oral traditions, and the echoes of the violence and oppression are still present (Luburic-Cvijanovic, 2015; Majumder and Khurajam, 2022; Parui, 2024; Sharrad, 1990). Therefore, memory and identity take a vital role as disputed locations in postcolonial fiction, and authors use these issues to express the psychological legacy of the colonial experience.

As a strict deconstructor of the relations between history, memory, and identity in different geographies and time periods, Amitav Ghosh holds a central place in the modern postcolonial literature (Hasan et al., 2025; Mohan, 2018; Mondal, 2007). The novels written by him, *The Shadow Lines* and *The Glass Palace*, are especially relevant to the current inquiry. *The Shadow Lines* challenges the indefinability of borders, both physical and emotional, by means of the non-linear storyline, which consists of personal memories and shared memories of the partition and communal violence (Ghosh, 1988; Pattanayak, 2021; "Review of Disability Studies," 2013, 2021; Soukai, 2019). It analyzes the reflection of individual and family memories in social and historical change and thus the formation of self and nation and uses



narrative techniques to predetermine the fragmented temporality and identity (Lauret, 2009; Pattanayak, 2021; "Review of Disability Studies," 2013). In comparison, *The Glass Palace* covers generations and continents and follows the upheaval and strength of a Burmese royal family and an Indian merchant amidst the effects of colonialism by Britain, thus shedding light on the unacknowledged pasts of forced migration (Chapa, 2025; "Cilt 3, Sayi 5, Guz 2014," 2014; Ghosh, 2000; Mohan, 2018; Vincent, 2021). Ghosh explains the traumatic, usually, effects of imperial power, forced migration, and cultural assimilation on the individual and communal identities through such expansive narratives (Anderson, 2016; Sreela.B, 2021). The important topicality of the works lies in their complex narrative techniques, which, along with predicting the role of memory in coping with traumas, also show the ability to disorient established conceptions of national, historical, and personal identity (Mohan, 2018; Singh, 2020).

## 2. Defining the Research Gap in Contemporary Research

Even though *The Shadow Lines* and *The Glass Palace* have already garnered a relatively large amount of critical interest, often existing scholarly work appraises the novels through different sets of lenses: questioning the politics of memory or analyzing the psychological consequences of trauma in the context of a postcolonial setting (Sarwar, 2022; Varghese and Devimeenakshi, 2023; Visser, 2011). There is still a substantive absence of thorough, comparative analyses that explicitly define how Ghosh uses narrative techniques to engage in active destabilisation of identity through the interrelated functions of memory and trauma, specifically in the subtle praxis of postcoloniality (Parui, 2024; Visser, 2011). There are limited studies that observationally study their combinative effect of subverting fixed or essentialised identities in both novels, even though they are recognised to have dimensions of memory and trauma (Arevalo, 2021; Sar, 2017; Varghese and Devimeenakshi, 2023). This research aims to fill that gap by providing a textual discussion through which one can see how the combination of Ghosh's narrative strategies, that is, fragmented recollections, unspoken histories, and the intricate ethics of remembering, contribute to an active, not passive, conception of identity in the postcolonial condition (Desai, 2004; Escherle, 2013; Raj, 2024; Sen and Ghosh, 1997). Thus, the study contributes to the current literature on memory and identity as an original study, not only in acknowledging that they are present but also in a thorough study of their destabilising roles.



### 3. Literature Review

#### 3.1 Memory, Identity, and Trauma in Postcolonial Research

The issue that is widely discussed in postcolonial scholarship is the strong influence of colonial legacies on memory, identity, and trauma. According to scholars, colonialism creates an original scene that defines language, identity, and the present, and postcolonial literature is proactively engaged in constructing socio-cultural trauma and dramatising the need to address colonial trauma. Traumatization of narration brings information about the colonial past, which enables the integration of traumatic memories and possibly addresses complicit relations to the past and present

In postcolonial discourses, memory is commonly held as a panacea of postcoloniality, a re-awakening of supposedly suppressed colonial traumas, necessary to understand the postcolonial self (Ngom, 2021). Such a process of remembering is neither a simple recollection, but a re-remembering which compiles a dismembered past and situates present trauma (Sil, 2015). National memory is also non-monolithic as it is a polyphony of voices that solidifies into a shared identity, which in turn determines how communities learn to cope with trauma and create narratives that either contribute or abolish oppressive systems (Sudibyo et al., 2025). Research emphasizes the social aspect of memory, particularly when it comes to refugees, where community recollections are recorded and solidarity is promoted (Sudibyo et al., 2025). Essentially, traumatic experiences of non-Western or minority groups, which are often omitted in favour of Western models of trauma and recovery, are a matter of major emphasis, with autobiographical narratives of people directly or indirectly involved in colonialism repeatedly predicting these experiences (Pujolras-Noguer and Hand, 2021, 2021). The concept of tackling this highly important field requires attention to make sure that the accounts of lived experiences are not set in the traps of colonial logic (Pujolras-Noguer and Hand, 2021). The intersectional orientations of the field of memory can provide an exceptional interpretative paradigm of postcolonial questions, especially in relation to the formation and change of identity in a complicated geopolitical and existential situation (Parui, 2024).

#### 3.2 Theoretical Disagreements and Issues Unsolved

Despite the general recognition that trauma plays a major role in postcolonial theories, there has been a considerable amount of debate about theoretical differences, especially regarding the applicability and the limitations of Western trauma theory when appropriated in postcolonial contexts. A central question remains as to whether the theory of trauma can be successfully "postcolonialized" or usefully conjoined with postcolonial theory (Visser, 2011). Critics have focused their attentions on the roots of trauma



theory in Freudian psychoanalysis, the Eurocentric nature of the theory, its inherent contradictions (such as the contradiction between deconstructionist aesthetics and recuperative narrativization), and the tendency to blur boundaries and thus perpetuate stasis and melancholia (Visser, 2011).

Scholars are still debating whether trauma theory, by foregrounding the crippling effects of trauma and post-traumatic melancholia, is able to tackle the themes of social activism, recuperation, and psychic resilience essential to the aftermath of colonial trauma (Decolonizing Trauma Studies: Trauma and Postcolonialism, 2016). Consequently, there is more demand for a more precise and comprehensive conceptualisation of trauma that responds more fully to postcolonial understandings of history, memory, and trauma (Visser, 2011; 2015).

One of the points of contention is the alleged "homogenisation of trauma" proposed by early trauma theorists - a critique that some postcolonial scholars have seen as strikingly similar to the "homogenisation of the postcolonial condition" noted by earlier postcolonial theoretical frameworks (Rothberg, 2008). These observations are familiar in wider criticisms of postcolonial theory, especially in terms of its interaction with poststructuralism and the charge that it undermines nationalist anti-colonial movements (Durrant & Topper, 2020).

Efforts to "decolonise trauma theory" aim to acknowledge a multiplicity of challenges, including an ethical and practical dimension, which are the result of current global power structures and cultural norms. These initiatives promote an openness to non-Western belief systems, rituals and ceremonies in the field of trauma work to create more inclusivity (Visser, 2015). The discourse also raises questions about how experiences are represented, warning of the tendency to reduce people to simple victim or perpetrator narratives, especially when the historical traumas intersect with colonialism and the Holocaust (Durrant & Topper, 2020).

It therefore follows that methodological approaches must avoid being homogenising universalism or nominalist particularism; Michael Rothberg's concept of multidirectional memory is one such approach (Rothberg, 2008). Ultimately, a postcolonial rereading of established ecologies of knowledge is necessary in order to disrupt the Western-centredness that is dominant in memory studies and an understanding of how all processes of remembering are laced with vestiges of empire (Keightley, 2022).



#### 4. Theoretical Framework

##### 4.1 Memory Studies: Assmann, Halbwachs and Hirsch

This section brings into the foreground some basic concepts postulated by prominent scholars in the field of memory studies, which are important for the understanding of the social construction and intergenerational transmission of memory. Jan Assmann makes a distinction between communicative memory and cultural memory (Assmann, 2008, 2011). Communicative memory works at the level of everyday interactions and usually occurs within a shorter period of time (around 80-100 years), therefore relating the present with the recent past. In contrast, cultural memory is a more institutionalised, long-term mode of collective memory, made up of a "canon" of normative knowledge as well as an "archive" of symbolic artefacts - texts, images, rituals - that extend across generations or sometimes millennia (Assmann, 2008, 2011a, 2011b). Assmann, drawing upon Halbwachs, emphasises on memory being knowledge with an "identity-index", closely bound to the self-image of a community (Assmann, 2008).

Maurice Halbwachs, who is widely considered to be the father of the sociology of memory, holds that collective memory is a social phenomenon. He argues that individual memories are always contextualized and facilitated by social contexts (Nicolosi, 2023; Orianne and Eustache, 2023; Rau and Thomas, 2019). For Halbwachs, "one never remembers alone," and individuals situate their thinking within "social frameworks of memory" (religious, familial, or professional institutions) in order to facilitate the recall of events (Halbwachs, 1992; Orianne & Eustache, 2023; Verovsek, 2016). His analysis emphasizes the fact that memory comes not from the past itself, but from the present, which selects, gives importance, and gives significance to what is remembered (Rau & Thomas, 2019).

Marianne Hirsch's idea of postmemory refers to the way the unbelievable experiences of a previous generation, especially traumatic ones, are passed on to later generations who did not directly experience them (Aygan, 2022; Hirsch, 2008). Postmemory defines the relation of the second generation to powerful, often traumatic experiences that have preceded their births but yet so transmitted them in ways that they seem to be memories in their own right (Hirsch, 2008). These "haunting postmemories" are passed on not as direct recollections but as mediated through images, objects, stories, behaviours and affects that circulate within families and the wider culture (Hirsch, 2008). This framework is a must for understanding the role of ancestral trauma in the construction of identity across generations in postcolonial contexts.



## 4.2 Trauma Theory: Caruth and LaCapra

This subsection goes into the theoretical foundations of studies of trauma, providing tools for reading the representation of psychological and historical trauma. Cathy Caruth's influential work describes trauma as an "unclaimed" experience that is "not known" at the point of occurrence and has a "belated address" (Goddard & Goddard, 2022; Raj, 2024). For Caruth, trauma is characterised by its belatedness and its resistance to its direct assimilation into consciousness, engendering compulsive repetition (Ganteau, 2017; Pividori, 2021). She argues that literary language attempts "to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available" in traumatic experience, thus explaining the complex relationship of knowing and not knowing that defines trauma (Caruth, 1996; Raj, 2024).

Dominick LaCapra further develops the concept of historical trauma by distinguishing between "acting out" and "working through" (Schonfelder, 2013; Wagers, 2020). LaCapra is critical of approaches that focus narrowly on "symptomatic acting out and the repetition compulsion, for fear of perpetuating the trauma" (Schonfelder, 2013a). Instead, he argues for "working through" trauma, an endeavour to put affect and representation in words in a way that confronts the disabling dissociation of trauma and thus moves towards understanding without preemptively seeking closure or redemption (Schonfelder, 2013; Wagers, 2020). His work places emphasis on the continued struggle against trauma without reducing it to simplistic binary oppositions, whilst exploring its nexus with history, memory, and identity (LaCapra, 2016).

## 4.3 Postcolonial Theory: Bhabha, Spivak, and Said

This section touches on the contributions of some of the postcolonial theorists relevant to the analysis of power relations, cultural negotiations, and the reformulation of identity in postcolonial societies. Homi K. Bhabha's work analyses the complex dynamics of colonial discourse and its effects on the formation of identity, introducing concepts such as hybridity, mimicry, and the 'third space' (Malik et al, 2021; Neimneh & Shureteh, 2021). Bhabha deconstructs the notion of cultural purity and emphasises the "emergence of the interstices - the overlap and displacement of domains of difference - that the intersubjective and collective experiences" are negotiated (Neimneh & Shureteh, 2021). For Bhabha, hybridity is "the production of new transcultural forms within the contact zones that are the sites of colonisation," and the "third space" is a productive space where transcultural identities can be transformed, and newness is born into the world (Malik et al, 2021; Peimanfard & Amjad, 2018).



Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's seminal essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" asks the loaded question of how the marginalised are represented in postcolonial discourse (Louai, 2012; Spivak, 2003). Spivak explores the capacity of the subaltern to represent themselves, those disenfranchised and marginalised by dominant Western culture, and their capacity to have their voices heard (Louai, 2012). Her work brings into view the ethical dilemmas and power relations that accompany the efforts of intellectuals who try to "speak for" the subaltern, concluding that the subaltern is often unable to speak within extant representational frameworks (Helgesson, 2023; Nichols, 2010). Spivak's critique points to the ongoing difficulty in recovering and magnifying subaltern histories and experiences.

Edward Said's revolutionary work *Orientalism* defined the way Western scholarship and culture form a stereotyped and often demeaning image of the "Orient" (Seth, 2013; Zengin, 2016). Said argues that Orientalism is not just a description of the East but a "Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient", which is a discourse in the Foucauldian sense (Seth, 2013, 2018). This discourse is a system of meaning with relation to power that allows the West to "manage - indeed to produce the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively" (Mielniczuk, 2021; Zengin, 2016). Said's theory shows how representations are interlaced with power and determine identities and continue the colonial hierarchies.

#### **4.4 Justification for Framework Selection**

The deliberate choice of these particular theorists - Assmann, Halbwachs, Hirsch for memory; Caruth and LaCapra for trauma; and Bhabha, Spivak, and Said for postcolonial theory - offers a broad and complex framework for the analysis of the disruption of identity by memory and trauma in Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* and *The Glass Palace*. Their collective insights provide a multidisciplinary lens to view:

- The social and cultural construction of memory and its transgenerational transmission.
- The complexity and, often belated, nature of traumatic experience and its representation.
- The power dynamics of colonial discourse, the development of hybrid identities, and the problems of representation in postcolonial societies.

This integrated theoretical framework is essential in filling the research gap by allowing us to examine in detail Ghosh's narrative strategies and to understand how they interact in order to form a dynamic, rather than static, understanding of the concept of identity within the postcolonial condition.



## 5. Methodology

This study uses a qualitative research design in which mainly the method of comparative textual analysis is used to examine how narrative destabilization of identity is represented through the theme of memory, trauma, and postcoloniality in *The Shadow Lines*, Amitav Ghosh's novel, and *The Glass Palace*.

### 5.1 Comparative Literary Analysis

The core of this methodology is a close reading and detailed comparison of the two selected novels. This involves a systematic investigation of the elements of literature, including:

**Narrative Structure:** Analysing the non-linear storytelling, fragmented timelines, shifts in perspective, and the utilisation of focalizers to represent memory and historical events. This will highlight how Ghosh creates and uncreates chronological and causal relationships in ways that reflect the fragmented postcolonial identities.

**Character Development:** Exploring how characters' identities are formed, challenged, and altered by their encounter with personal and collective memories and experiences of trauma, displacement, and colonial legacies. Emphasis will be given to characters that represent hybridity and cross boundaries.

**Thematic Analysis:** Examining recurring themes such as borders, physical and psychological; home; exile; nostalgia; violence; silence; the relationship between individual lives and grand historical stories.

**Linguistic and Stylistic Devices:** Exploring Ghosh's use of language, metaphors, symbolism, and intertextuality to explore the complexities of memory, trauma, and identity. This includes analysing how the different voices and perspectives are integrated into the narrative.

The comparative aspect will point to the similarities and differences in the ways in which Ghosh deals with these themes in *The Shadow Lines* and *The Glass Palace*. This approach enables a nuanced reading of his wider literary project in defining the destabilising impact of postcolonial conditions on the self.

### 5.2 Narrative and Ethical Memory Operations

This part of the methodology is concerned with the role of memory in the narratives and the ethical issues of how memory is represented. Based upon the theoretical insights:

**Communicative and Cultural Memory:** This analysis examines the interplay between individual memory and the social and cultural memory as reflected in the novels. This involves exploring the relationship between remembering as a private act on one side and history as a common narrative, in



national, collective, and family versions, and the tension between the official history and the lived experience and oral history. The research points out cases where the identity of characters is established or questioned through their participation in dominant cultural memory or their participation in alternative communicative memory systems.

**Postmemory:** The methodology will explore the intergenerational transfer of trauma and memory in particularly in characters who struggle with the great experiences of a past generation they did not directly witness. This will include analysing how characters inherit and react to ancestral traumas, displacements, and the legacies of colonialism, and how that influences their own identities and sense of belonging.

**Trauma Theory:** The study focuses on the representation of trauma in the novels, with attention given to the belatedness of trauma, its resistance to direct articulation, and the significance of trauma on the psychological states and narrative gesticulation of characters. Drawing on LaCapra's distinction, the analysis will distinguish between "acting out" (repetition of traumatic patterns) and "working through" (confronting and integrating trauma) as characters work through processes. The ethics of representing trauma will also be considered, specifically related to the possibility of re-traumatisation or easy resolution.

**Postcolonial Theoretical Lens:** The analysis will be constantly engaged with Bhabha's notions of hybridity, mimicry, and the "third space" to comprehend the formation of identities of characters in interstitial zones of cultures. Spivak's critique of subaltern representation will be used to guide the analysis of whose memory of whom is privileged and whose voice is marginalised in the narratives. Said's insights on Orientalism will be used to inform the analysis of how colonial discourses and power structures still have an impact on perceptions of self and other, even in the post-independence context.

By adopting this integrated methodological framework, the study aims to produce a sound analysis of the ways through which Amitav Ghosh's narrative strategies destabilise the fixed notions of identity through the complex operations of memory and trauma in a postcolonial world.

## 6. Analysis

Ghosh's novels are deeply committed to the representation of the lasting impact of trauma, in this case that of postcolonial childhood trauma, on individual and collective psyches (Sarwar, 2022). Trauma, which is often described by its belatedness and its resistance to direct articulation, is told through broken and disjointed narratives and the repetition of haunting memories (Pipic, 2013; Visser, 2011). Characters



in both *The Shadow Lines* and *The Glass Palace* struggle with experiences they were not able to process at the time, which leads to psychological distress and broken subjectivity (Sarwar, 2022; Ward, 2015).

A large part of Ghosh's engagement with trauma involves the unspoken histories and silence. The novels expose how official histories frequently repress or omit painful realities of colonial violence and displacement, as well as communal conflict. For example, in *The Shadow Lines*, the silence around the partition and its aftermath, and more specifically, Tridib's death, results in gaps, which the characters try to fill by narrating personal stories and scattered recollections (Gautam, 2021). These silences are active, not passive absences that create identities and reproduce unresolved trauma (Zachariah, 2016). Ghosh uses different literary devices to show what is left unsaid to convey how authorial silence can indirectly convey great truths about a character's experience of shame, secrecy, or trauma (Huttunen, 2000; Zachariah, 2016). This challenge to the mainstream, official history amounts to a "novelistic revisionist history" that fills up the gaps left by it (Gautam, 2021).

Nostalgia also plays a complex part, which often emerges as a longing for a lost past that is at once idealised and problematic (Desai, 2004; Pattanayak, 2021). While it can give a sense of belonging amongst a state of displacement, Ghosh is critical of nostalgia, showing us that it can sometimes be a way to cover up the brutality of the past and prevent a critical engagement with historical processes (Desai, 2004). This critical approach is in line with the more general postcolonial critique of nostalgia as an uncritical desire for a lost home, rather than as an active critique revealing a desire for equality and empowerment (Akhter, 2020).

The novels also explore the difficulties of ethical remembering in greater ways. By challenging readers with several perspectives and fragmented memories, Ghosh urges readers to grapple with the complexities of historical truth and the responsibility of bearing witness to past injustices. This includes recognizing the shortcomings of Western trauma theory when it comes to capturing non-Western experiences and calls for "decolonial narrative ethics." (Finck, 2006; Haker, 2019) The narratives tend to portray characters who become entrapped in the "third space" of hybridity, where colonial and indigenous elements blend together, leaving fixed concepts of identity and belonging blurred, as theorised by Bhabha (Ameen, 2022; Nash et al., 2019). Ghosh's works, therefore, seek a constant dialogue between the past and present, when it comes to challenging reified histories and fostering a responsible and nuanced attitude towards the remembering of colonial legacies and their continued influence on identity (Boehmer and Mondal 2012; Maxey 2015; Ojwang 2013).



## 7. Discussion

### 7.1 Locating Findings in Present-day Postcolonial and Memory Studies

The analysis of Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* and *The Glass Palace* has a deep resonance with the works of contemporary scholarship in postcolonial and memory studies, especially in the way fragmented narratives, silence, and nuanced forms of nostalgia play a crucial role in destabilising identity. Ghosh's skillful use of fragmented narratives is part of a wider postcolonial literary approach to depicting traumatic historical experiences that oppose linear, coherent narrating (Ansari, 2012). By interlacing the personal memory with collective histories, Ghosh illustrates the fact that personal memories connect the present to the past, be it reflection or a contestation of societal beliefs (Singh, 2020). This is in line with the way Jan Assmann and Maurice Halbwachs perceive memory as both communicative and cultural in that individual experiences are constellated in a social context and a larger historical narrative (Assmann, 2008; Oriane & Eustache, 2023). Ghosh's attention to non- and alternative narratives is an active resistance against the hegemonic powers of official histories and represents a 'novelistic revisionist history' that fills in the gaps and gives voice to the repressed experiences (Gautam, 2021; Singh, 2020).

The pervasive silence in Ghosh's novels, whether it is that surrounding partition in *The Shadow Lines* or the marginalised histories in *The Glass Palace*, is not simply an absence but an active element in the creation of identities and the communication of unspoken truths about shame, secrecy, and trauma (Huttunen, 2000; Zachariah, 2016). This emphasis on silence as a representational strategy is recognised in contemporary postcolonial texts as central to issues of migration, displacement, and multiculturalism (Zachariah, 2016). It highlights the idea that what is not expressed tends to be just as powerful, and forces the reader to consider the ethics of remembering and witnessing.

Furthermore, the way that Ghosh presents nostalgia is not merely a longing for a bygone past. While some readings of nostalgia may point to an uncritical nostalgia, Ghosh uses the term to challenge the ideas of purity and authenticity, but rather focuses on the idea of cultural hybridity and economic exchange (Desai, 2004). This critical approach is consistent with scholarship that understands nostalgia in postcolonial contexts as a potential site for "restorative and reflective forms" of engagement with the past, not as escapist idealisation (Parui, 2024). It forces a critical analysis of historical processes that changes nostalgia to be a mechanism to reveal not only desires for equality and empowerment (Akhter, 2020). The novels thus form a good example of Marianne Hirsch's concept of post-memory, as characters



struggle to cope with inherited, often traumatic, experiences of past generations and to translate them into their own identities and narratives (Hirsch, 2008).

## 7.2 Countering the Counterarguments of Recent Scholarship

While the theoretical framework draws from some of the leading postcolonial theorists (including Bhabha, Spivak, and Said), it is important to recognise newer critiques and debates in the field.

Homi Bhabha's ideas of hybridity and the "third space" have been critiqued despite being fundamental to understanding fluid identities in postcolonial contexts. Some scholars have commented that the conceptualisation of hybridity by Bhabha does not come with explicit delineation that results in incoherence and disconnection (Malik et al., 2021). Critics suggest that his psychoanalytic approach might limit the agency of the colonised and that his "hybrid subject" can be generalised or universalised, which might emphasise the "end product" rather than the dynamic process and ongoing process of hyphenisation (Oiyama, 2013). This critique calls for a more nuanced use of hybridity, one that considers specific socio-historical contexts and imbalances of power at work, with the celebration of hybridity not inadvertently drawing attention away from ongoing struggles for agency and self-determination.

Similarly, the applicability of Western trauma theory in non-Western contexts, as discussed in the literature review, remains a significant point of contention. Recent scholarship has been drawing attention to the inadequacy of Western psychiatric and cultural theories of trauma, including post-traumatic stress disorder, to fully account for postcolonial experiences, arguing that they can be a "barrier rather than a fruitful epistemological tool" ("Decolonising Trauma Studies: Trauma and Postcolonialism," 2016). These critiques highlight the Eurocentricity of many trauma paradigms, which may ignore or misconstrue the diversity of psychological states and coping mechanisms in non-Western cultures (Patel & Hall, 2021; Rasmussen et al., 2014). The concept of "psychiatric colonialism" further highlights concerns of implementing Western diagnostic systems, which may be inappropriate and potentially harmful, compromising local cultural understandings of distress and healing (Deahl & Andreassen, 2023). This study is aware of these limitations and in accordance with calls to decolonise trauma theory, seeks to interpret Ghosh's representations of trauma with sensitivity to non-Western belief systems and ethical considerations so as to dodge the universalisation of one trauma experience ("Decolonising Trauma Studies: Trauma and Postcolonialism," 2016; Visser, 2015).

By interacting with these counter arguments and scholarly debates in this discussion, not undermining the building theoretical insights from the study, but rather enhancing the analysis and situating the discussion



within a dynamic and self-reflective academic landscape. It allows for a more critical and context-sensitive interpretation of Ghosh's novels, acknowledging the complexities and challenges inherent in the study of memory, trauma, and identity in postcolonial literature.

## 8. Conclusion

This research has examined the narrative destabilisation of identity through the interconnected operations of memory, trauma and postcoloniality in the novels *The Shadow Lines* and *The Glass Palace* by Amitav Ghosh. The analysis shows how Ghosh uses complex narrative strategies to embody the profound and often broken impact of colonial legacies on individual and collective identities.

Firstly, the use of fragmented narratives by Ghosh to convey the complex and non-linearity of memory and history in postcolonial settings. By weaving together personal memories and the shared history of partition, displacement, and violence, Ghosh complicates one-dimensional historical narratives and brings the subjective nature of the past into the foreground. This is in line with the theories of Jan Assmann and Maurice Halbwachs and demonstrates how individual memory is shaped by, and shapes, cultural and communicative memory frameworks (Assmann, 2008; Orianne & Eustache, 2023).

Secondly, the study highlights the importance of silence and unspoken history in the novels of Ghosh. These silences are not empty spaces but active presences that perpetuate unresolved trauma and construct identities, especially in narratives in which official histories serve to suppress painful realities. Ghosh's portrayal of these silences produces "novelistic revisionist history" that gives voice to marginalised experiences and challenges hegemonic histories of the past (Gautam, 2021).

Thirdly, the analysis uncovers Ghosh's subtle treatment of the theme of nostalgia, which transcends the ordinary desire for a lost past and becomes an instrument to interrogate the historical processes and hybridization of cultures. This complex nostalgia, often intertwined with post memory, allows characters to deal with inherited traumas and incorporate them into their evolving identities, and this aligns with Marianne Hirsch's idea of post memory (Hirsch, 2008).

Lastly, the research draws a conclusion of treating the destabilisation of identity using the knowledge gained through the trauma theory and the postcolonial theory. Such analogy tools as Cathy Caruth and Dominick LaCapra introduce the ideas of belated trauma and the distinction between acting out and working through can be applied to understand how characters are psychologically troubled by the negative past and operate with it (Raj, 2024; Schonfelder, 2013). At the same time, it can be explained by the use of the ideas of hybridity and the third space by Homi K. Bhabha, in addition to the critique of the



subaltern representation by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and the conceptualisation of Orientalism by Edward Said (Malik et al., 2021; Seth, 2013; Spivak, 2003).

## 9. Contribution to Memory and Identity Studies

The study provides a unique addition to the current body of study on memory and identity by providing a thorough and comparative study that clearly traces out the dynamic destabilisation of identity by Amitav Ghosh by synergising the functions of memory and trauma in the postcolonial setting. Although much of the existing literature has explored memory or traumatization on a personal level or on a standalone theoretical basis, this paper has attempted to incorporate these two distant concepts to help show how the two have compounded each other to create and destroy identity in a postcolonial position.

By focusing on the narrative techniques that create this destabilisation, including fragmented narration, the strategic deployment of silence, and a self-reflective approach to nostalgia, this study goes beyond the acknowledgement of the fact of memory and trauma. It provides a detailed discussion of their dynamic activities in undermining essentialised identities and shows how the works of Ghosh help to create a more fluid, multi-faceted and ethically responsible understanding of selfhood in the aftermath of colonial experiences. This is a rich method to the discourse as it:

**Theorising gaps in the literature:** integrating the results of the literature on memory, trauma theory and postcolonial theory to build a sound interdisciplinary approach to the study of postcolonial literature.

**Focusing on the narrative agency:** it is important to stress that Ghosh can use narrative so skillfully to not just reflect on but also actively dismantle and reconstruct identity, thus making the readers reconsider their own historical and self-perception.

**Paradigm critique:** accepting and responding to objections to universalising the theories of Western trauma and Bhabha's conceptualisation of hybridity, thus promoting a more contextual and decolonised approach to identity formation in global literature.

**Finally,** this study adds to our understanding of the great role played by Ghosh in world literature by demonstrating how his novels can be viewed as powerful literary questions concerning the broken and yet strong human soul in the ever-present presence of colonialism.



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