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> I shook my head violently . . .
> You're lying, I shouted at her. That can't be a staircase because it's flat, and staircases go up, they aren't flat. And that can't be upstairs because upstairs has to be above and that isn't above; that's right beside the drawing room.
> I dropped to my knees and began to scrabble around in the dust, rubbing out the lines, shouting: You're lying, you're mad, this can't be a house. . . .
> You're stupid, she said. Don't you understand? I've just rearranged things a little. If we pretend it's a house, it'll be a house. We can choose to build a house wherever we like.
> —*The Shadow Lines* (70)[1]

AMITAV GHOSH'S *THE SHADOW LINES* IS A MANIFESTATION of the desire to validate the postcolonial experience and to attempt a reconstruction of "public" history through a reconstruction of the "private" or personal history. It is an intricate examination of the process by

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which validity of a narrative is achieved within itself and in relation to the audience. In this essay, I look at the ways in which this validation of the postcolonial experience—both public and private—is attempted in and outside of a narrative; the role of time, space, and material objects or "materiality" in achieving this validation; the utility of narratives as sources for reconstructing history; and the final question of the validity of this methodology. This paper draws on a system of graphs in which the two axes (x, y) represent time and space, and the third (z) represents "materiality" or the position of material objects. I have used this system to examine the process of validation in a narrative and its relation to the reconstruction of history.

Let us take a quick look at the structure of the novel. The technique of oral narration is employed by the narrator in his re-telling of several stories—Tridib's, Ila's, May's, Robi's, Tha'mma's and his own. The written narrative, interspersed with numerous oral narratives, does not maintain a clear linear progression.[2] The "story" or the chief narrative line evolves sporadically and is constantly interrupted and diverted by other narratives. The only fixed center is that of the chief narrative voice through whom the other narratives are filtered.

The question of the validity of a narrative is raised in the epigraph above. Ila says, "I've just rearranged things a little. If we pretend it's a house, it'll be a house" (70), and, earlier, the narrator tells us of "Tridib who had said that we could not see without inventing what we saw. . . . [I]t only meant that if we didn't try ourselves, we would never be free of other people's inventions" (31). The question here is what is fiction/invention and truth/reality, and what makes a narrative valid or invalid? The instance of Tridib returning to Gole Park after his three month absence is a case in point. On being asked by the "conversation loving" crowd of "adda givers"[3] where he had been, he answers "I've been to London. . . . To visit my relatives" (11). In the course of events, the reader learns that this is a "lie": the chief narrator shouts out "Tridib-da, you've made a mistake! I met you last month, don't you remember? You were in your room, lying on your mat, smoking a cigarette. . . ." (12). The technique of oral narration allows active audience participation: "There was a howl of laughter and a chorus of exclamations: You fraud, you liar, you were just making it all up, you haven't been anywhere. . . ." (12). Again, Tridib makes a statement: "I've been to London, he said. To visit my relatives" (11); the audience responds: "What relatives?" (11), to which Tridib-da answers:

> I have English relatives through marriage, he said. A family called Price. I thought I'd go and visit them.

Ignoring their sceptical grunts, he told them that he had been to stay with old Mrs. Price, who was a widow. Her husband had died recently. She lived in north London, he said, on a street called Lymington Road; the number of their house was 44 and the tube station was West Hampstead. Mrs. Price had a daughter, who was called May. (11)

The validity of Tridib's narrative is dependent on audience reception. In this case, the validity of the "story" is being questioned: "What relatives?" "Away? Where?" the audience asks and gives "sceptical grunts" (11). The production of the story is hindered, interrupted and, finally, invalidated by the audience: "You fraud, you liar, you were just making it all up, you haven't been anywhere . . ." (12). For the oral narrative to be validated it must have a *semblance* of truth, for "utterance"[4] is personal history retold, and if it is a "lie," it is subject to the censure of the community.[5] Even though there is some partial truth to Tridib's story—he does know a family called Price who live on 44 Lymington Road whom he visited once—it is regarded as a "lie," an invention ("you made it all up") since the time and space coordinates of the narrative do not coincide. The event did take place, but the time frame for the incident is "wrong": Tridib did go to England, but not when he was 28. Further, the spatial organization of kinship relations is incorrect: Mrs. Price is not a relative. It is this non-coincidence of coordinates that leads to an invented location, since at the time at which Tridib claims to be in England (a point on the space axis) he was in fact in Ballygunge Place (another point on the space axis).[6] It is these incorrect coordinates that the chief narrative voice points out ("Tridib-da, you've made a mistake!" [12]) which invalidates Tridib's narrative. A "correct" rendering of temporal and spatial frames is crucial for validation not only within the narrative, but for its validation by an audience.

Alternatively, the story of the four youngsters of Brick Lane is a narrative whose validity is achieved by matching time and space coordinates. We are told in reference to the Brick Lane group that "nobody can ever know what it was like to be young and intelligent in the summer of 1939 in London or Berlin" (68).[7] The event—the composition of the Brick Lane group with a German Jewess in their midst—is placed at a point located by fixed coordinates on the time-space axes: 1939, England.[8] The narrative of the Brick Lane group is a "production" of the material relations present at a certain time in a certain place. This coincidence of time and space coordinates validates this particular narrative.

Narrative validity in Ghosh is based on the coincidence of temporal, spatial, and material coordinates. Tridib's story of the Solent and Sumatra Roads, filtered through the chief narrative voice, is pertinent. The chief narrator identifies the Solent and Sumatra Roads:

When we came out of the tube station I stopped them and pointed down the road. Since this is West End Lane, I said, that must be Sumatra Road over there. So that corner must be where the air raid shelter was, the same one that Robi's mother and your mother and your uncle Alan ducked into on their way back from Mill Lane, when one of those huge high-calibre bombs exploded on Solent Road, around the corner, blowing up most of the houses there. And that house . . . an incendiary bomb fell on it. . . . That was on the 1st of October 1940, two days before your uncle died. (55-56)

Audience reaction to this narrative is sceptical: "O.K., Robi said. Since you're so sure, let's go and take a look at that road of yours and see what it's like now" (56). The final "discovery" of the road does not agree with the narrator's account of Tridib's story:

Here we are, said Robi, when we got there That's your bombed-out road.

It was a short road, lined with trees and hedges . . . a pale honey-green . . . red brick houses . . . with sharply pointed tiled roofs and white window frames and doorways, each with its own patch of garden. . . . [R]ows of small cars parked on either side of the road. (56)

The audience response is one of invalidation: "Not exactly what you had expected, Robi said" (57). This invalidation of Tridib's narrative occurs because Robi expects to see a "bombed-out road" (56), that is a space—"Solent Road"—with a coordinate on the time axis dating 1940. It is Robi's confusion over time coordinates that causes an invalidation of Tridib's narrative.[9] What Robi expects in this case is a transference of the material conditions of the bombed out Solent Road to the 1980s. This confusion of temporal coordinates leads to a confusion of spatial coordinates.

Further, Robi's overvaluing of the material coordinate ("bombed-out road") leads to a nullification of the spatial and temporal co-ordinates and, thus, an invalidation of Tridib's narrative. Robi's conclusion is that Solent Road was never bombed; Tridib's narrative is, therefore, false. The chief narrator's observation is one that takes the three coordinates into account: "I had not expected to see what Tridib had seen. . . . I had expected nothing of all that, knowing it to be lost in a forty-year old past" (57). Tridib's oral narrative is minimized by the audience:

> But that's what happened, I said.
> How do you know? Robi said.
> Because Tridib told me.
> How was *he* to know? He was just a kid, nine years old. (56)

Confusion of coordinates and an overstressing of material coordinates converts Tridib's "reality" into an "invention." The chief narrator's mentioning of "high calibre bombs" causes Robi's initial disbelief at Tridib's narrative—"Robi . . . told me not to bullshit;

didn't I know that the Germans hadn't developed high-calibre bombs till much later in the war?" (56). The problem in this instance is that the temporal coordinate does not coincide with the material object coordinate, and this non-coincidence leads to an invalidation of Tridib's narrative.

In Ghosh's reconstruction of personal and public history, and in order to achieve narrative validity, a coincidence of temporal, spatial and material coordinates is essential. If a high-calibre bomb did explode on Solent Road, it follows that the date of the event was later than 1940, and later in Tridib's personal history. However, if the time and space coordinates are accurate, then the material object could not be a high-calibre bomb. It is this non-coincidence of coordinates that enables alternative readings of the narrative and the need for a final validation of one and invalidation of another narrative. The non-coincidence or coincidence of coordinates leads to a reconstruction of the past—of individual, national and world histories—that aspires to validation. Material objects serve as an essential tool for this validation. Thus, the photographs of the Brick Lane group are important not in themselves, but as validators of Tridib's narrative.

While the nature of utterance is questionable—it can be an "invention" or the "truth"—material objects in Ghosh's novel are unquestionably "real."[10] Thus, houses, road names, photographs, newspapers, maps, advertisements are points on the third (z) axis of materiality which, along with the space-time axes, fixes an event and validates it. Ila's yearbooks, then, are an important case in point:

> All through her childhood . . . her family . . . brought back souvenirs. . . . But there was only one kind of souvenir that Ila ever thought of bringing back. . . . [T]hey were the Yearbooks of the International Schools of whatever city she happened to be living in. . . .
>
> They were always full of photographs. (21-22)

The yearbooks, like the souvenirs, work as a material representation of defined intersections between time and space. The yearbook photographs, with their fixed space-time coordinates, validate or invalidate Ila's narratives of Jamshed Tabrizi, Teresa Cassano and Mercedes Aguilar. More significantly, they validate the chief narrator's concept of places. As Ila says, "I probably did you no end of good; at least you learnt that those cities you saw on maps were real places . . ." (24).

Material objects not only validate narratives, but also reinforce each other. Thus, the cities and places that the chief narrator sees in Tridib's tattered *Bartholomew's Atlas* are concretized by Ila's yearbooks and photographs. While the places exist, it is the material coordinate that converts a certain space into a "place," that is, it

fixes a point in definite time-space coordinate relations. Thus, without the material coordinates (*Atlas*, photographs), the existence of the particular "space" and "time" are in question. Related to this, Ila's absence from the photographs or her positioning within them is highly problematic for her narrative.[11] While the photographs serve as validators for the existence of a certain space, Ila's absence within them makes her narrative specious. If Ila is not in the photos, how can we know that she actually lived in a certain place? Her narrative about her boyfriend is further thrown into question by the class picture.[12] Ila and Jamshed Tabrizi are both in the class picture—the temporal, spatial, and material coordinates are given—but it is the spatial positioning of the two which subverts her narrative:

> But a few pages later, in their class photograph, there he was, right in the foreground, in the centre of the front row, grinning, broad-shouldered, a head taller than anyone else, with his arms thrown around the shoulders of two laughing blonde girls. And . . . I caught a glimpse of Ila herself, on the edge of the back row, standing a little apart, unsmiling, in a plain grey skirt, with a book under her right arm. (23)

While the temporal-material coordinates coincide, the spatial coordinate is erroneous and causes invalidation of her narrative. Thus, within the material object of the photographs itself, another set of relations is at work, with the material object in this case being the person in the photograph. It is Ila's inability to find a "space" for herself as material object at a certain time which invalidates her narrative.[13]

In *The Shadow Lines*, the very materiality of objects plays a vital role in validating the narrative. Tridib, we are told, is an archaeologist, and the chief narrator is a history research fellow. The importance of material objects to the archaeologist-historian for validation of oral narratives, for dating and establishing chronology in the reconstruction of history, cannot be overstated. The photographs of the Brick Lane group serve not only as indicators of England on the brink of the War, but also as proof of the existence of that era. The Brick Lane group could have only come into existence at that specific time in history—summer 1939—and at a specific place—England. The pictures in which Mayadebi and Tridib appear validate Tridib's narrative of his visit to England. The presence of Francesca Halevy and Dan (the *Daily Worker* sticking out of his pocket) in the photographs validates, to a certain extent, Tridib's narrative about them. The pictures serve as a record of Tridib's personal history and of world history—of England on the brink of a war, of a colonial past which has now enabled Mayadebi's visit to Mrs. Price, of a Nazi Germany from which Francesca Halevy as a German Jew must escape to find refuge in England, and of a time when socialist ideas are in the air

which creates an opportunity for Dan to work at the *Daily Worker.* While the photograph validates Tridib's narrative, filtered through the chief narrative voice, the newspaper in the photo gives occasion to another narrative. The printed word and the subjects it deals with are different from that of the *News Chronicle, Sphere,* and *Picture Post.* The *Daily Worker* gives us the narrative of the trade unions and of the workers in the England of Summer, 1939. It functions as an invaluable source for a reconstruction of the past as *another* version of events at that time and place.[14]

Newspapers and the printed word play a crucial role in the validation of narratives.[15] Just as the *Daily Worker* validates the narratives of the trade unions, so too it validates Tridib's story about Dan and Alan. It is in the chief narrator's unfolding of the riots in Calcutta that the written word takes on a significant role. The riot of 1964, an event from the narrator's personal history, is only validated on seeing a report of it in a Calcutta daily for January 11, 1964. The narration of the incident on the previous day results in an invalidation of the narrative, since the audience cannot remember it. A quick perusal of the newspapers of that day shows no report of this incident. This absence of a written report not only invalidates the incident, but, more significantly, invalidates the narrator and his narrative. It is the presence of such a report in the next day's paper which validates the narrator's personal history and narrative.

With Jethamoshai's postcard, the materiality of the written word takes on a larger dimension. At a time when everyone thinks Jethamoshai is dead, the appearance of his postcard invalidates that assumption and validates his existence. It places Jethamoshai in a certain temporal-spatial context, the result being that he is still alive at 1/31 Jindabahar Lane, Dacca. Again, the written word not only validates, but is almost responsible for existence itself: the legal notes that go to and from Jethamoshai and Tha'mma's father are a case in point. Theirs is not simply a vocal, verbal battle, but a written one, and that gives the battle authority: the quarrel exists and will continue to exist. The nature of the written word has a validating quality that an utterance does not. Tridib's oral narratives and Ila's stories can all be dismissed as "lies," while the written word cannot be dismissed in a similar way: the written word has a self-validating effect. Thus, the postcard validates Jethamoshai's existence, the legal notes make the family quarrel lifelong, the *Daily Worker* validates the lifestyle of the Brick Lane group and is a source of history, and finally the Calcutta daily validates the narrator's personal history and national history.

Material objects as validating tools in the reconstruction of personal and public histories are utilized by Ghosh in his written reconstruction of oral narratives. While he uses the techniques of oral narration—repetition, multiple narrators, digressions, interruptions, lack

of clear linear progression—he finally codifies them in the written word. The written word of the narrative validates the novel itself and lends to the oral narratives a certain authority. The book *The Shadow Lines* becomes the "material object" used for validating history.

The hair of the prophet in the mosque in Kashmir certifies the existence of Muslims in a Hindu majority state, and the loss of this material object leads to a confusion of coordinates. The temporal-spatial coordinates are still stable—1964 Kashmir—but the third coordinate is missing. This leads to an inability to locate a point where the three coordinates coincide, and the result of this non-coincidence is the riots. The riots then replace the hair of the prophet on the material-object axis, for they help to validate the existence of the Muslims in 1964, Kashmir. In Ghosh's novel, then, it seems the three coordinates of time-space-materiality must coincide for the maintenance of order and the avoidance of violence;[16] moreover, one can draw the conclusion that violence becomes the substitute for the lost or missing material object. Looking at the Victoria Memorial, May says: "It shouldn't be here. . . . It's an act of violence. It's obscene" (170). The problem is, once again, one of coordination. The memorial validates India's colonial history; it stresses the fact that colonization did take place. May, however, looks at the Memorial and cannot make the three coordinates coincide. For her, this material object is in a different temporal and spatial frame; its presence at this time and places causes it to be viewed as disjointed, violent.[17] For May the only time-space frame possible for the Memorial is nineteenth-century England. She considers the spatial coordinate (India) for the material object (Memorial) with the temporal coordinates of 1906 and 1964 an obscenity.[18] This non-coincidence of coordinates as perceived by May invalidates the British Raj and its reasons for being in India.

For Tridib, however, the time-space-material object coordinates coincide. The Memorial (material object) could only have the coordinates of India, 1906, since it validates the presence of the British in India at a time when Indians were attempting to validate themselves through the Indian National Congress and the struggle for freedom. The Memorial is, thus, a last desperate attempt to validate the Raj. The time-space-material coordinates of 1964, India, Victoria Memorial make sense for Tridib, since the material object certifies India's hard won independence from colonial domination.

Other material objects such as houses, signboards, and street maps act as important validators. Forty-four Lymington Road authenticates Ila's narrative in the cellar at Raibajar; the Victor Gollancz window sign validates Tridib's story about the Brick Lane Group[19]; the signboard for the Royal Stationery store in old Dacca establishes the veracity of Tha'mma's narrative[20]; the advertisements in the tube

validate the point of location as being that of London.[21] Material objects placed at a certain juncture of time-space coordinates effect a semblance of truth in a narrative. This, then, is the narratorial task of Ghosh's novel—to examine every narrative, establish its credibility on the basis of time-space-material coordinates, and, finally, suggest the veracity of one narrative over other narratives.[22] It is this close examination of narratives that the narrator attempts in his reconstruction of the past. This attempt to locate and fix coordinates, however, fails in Tha'mma's inability to distinguish between "coming" and "going"[23]:

> But of course, the fault wasn't hers at all: it lay in language. 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 which was not a coming or going at all; a journey that was a search for precisely that fixed point which permits the proper use of verbs of movement. (153)

The nature of the Bengali language does not allow for a point of origin; therefore, the location of temporal and spatial points in relation to an origin becomes impossible. The narrator's final word concerning the attempt to reconstruct the past is that it is not possible to constitute an exact history of Bengal's past, for it has no point of origin.[24] Colonialism and its effects, like those of Partition, have so displaced this "other" world that no ordered, chronological, authentic history can be created, as we are unable to locate points of temporal, spatial, and material coincidence in relation to a point of origin.[25] Thus, the history that we create as members of such a dispersed society is one that is fragmented in newspapers, oral narratives, "stories," street names, buildings, and postcards.[26] Any attempt to order this is necessarily subjective, which only results in a personal reconstruction of the past. As the chief narrator comments on what he creates, "[I have made] a part of my own secret map of the world, a map of which only I knew the keys and coordinates."(194).

The final conclusion of the chief narrator, like Tridib, is that "everyone lives in a story. . . . [I]t is just a question of which one you chose" (182), and the validity of this choice is based on accurately locating points of time-space-material coordinates in a "world" without a point of origin. The methodology used to reconstruct the past is one that establishes a *semblance* of truth about a world where this methodology does not apply: the methodology is not applicable to the "subject" of this discourse. Perhaps the narrator's attempts to reconstruct and rewrite Indian history is a manifestation of the desire to validate our experience in terms of western disciplines.[27] The narrator leaves us with the question of

the possibility/impossibility of reconstructing our history along western (shadow) lines. He develops an intricate methodology to establish narrative validity and reconstruct history, only to finally undermine the West's craving for validity, chronology, and order by taking recourse in a language that undermines the concept of chronology itself.

NOTES

[1]All quotations from *The Shadow Lines* are referenced, henceforth, by page number only. In the novel, the author does not use quotation marks or any other punctuation to differentiate between dialogue and text; I have maintained this in citations from the novel. Many of my notes include references to African literature, as I have used them as methods to better understand the postcolonial situation in India.

[2]Postcolonial fiction is marked by this use of oral narrative techniques in written narratives. See Sackey for a record of such instances.

[3]Throughout the book the author uses words from Bengali which are central to the culture. "Adda" is a term used to describe long, leisurely conversations within a group of people which characterizes the Bengali day. The topic for an adda may range from Heidegger to scandalous gossip. This selective use of Bengali terms by the author is, perhaps, an attempt to identify the primary audience of the book as being Bengali. This acknowledgement of the Bengali community within the narrative is another feature of oral narratives where the narrative is the secret of the community.

[4]See Soyinka for a discussion of the magical significance of "utterance" in his analysis of myths.

[5]See Chinweizu, et al. for documentation and analysis of the role of the community in oral traditions. Ngugi wa Thiongo's *Devil on the Cross* works on this principle of communal censorship and sanction of oral narratives. Also Ngugi's *Decolonisation of the Mind* refers to the importance of utterance and its relation to the community in the production and presentation of oral narratives.

[6]See Graph Number One.

[7]This coordination of locations by the author is seen again in the pairing of Calcutta and Dacca. He writes of the

> yet-undiscovered irony . . . that there had never been a moment in the four-thousand-year-old history of that map, when the places we know as Dhaka and Calcutta were more closely bound to each other than after they had drawn their lines—so closely that I, in Calcutta, had only to look into the mirror to be in Dhaka; a moment when each city was the inverted image of the other, locked into an irreversible symmetry by the line that was to set us free—our looking-glass border. (233)

This repeated use of the mirror image focuses on the interconnected, almost interchangeable, histories of peoples. Ghosh's use of geometric constructions is evident in this instance of linear reflections, his use of the geometric circle to identify the nature of relations of nations, and the use of the graph to locate narratives in time, space, and materiality.

[8]The presence of Francesca Halevy draws attention to the widespread migrations of peoples, and the physical and psychic displacement caused. Francesca is the mirror image of Ila and Tha'mma as displaced persons. The displacement in each case is a result of an act of violence, that is, colonization. Aime Cesaire identifies fascism in Europe during the war period as colonialism turning itself inward on Europe itself. Francesca, Tha'mma, and even Ila are victims of this displacement.

[9]See Graph Number Two.

[10]At least, this is what the book seems to suggest. Further, the dependence of the historian on material objects to reconstruct the past is an acknowledged fact. Both Patrick J. Munson's "Africa's Prehistoric Past" and James McCan's lectures for "Reconstructing the African Past" at Boston University stressed the importance of objects for the historian-archaeologist.

[11]"But somehow, though Ila could tell me everything about those parties and dances, what she said and what she did and what she wore, she herself was always unaccountably absent in the pictures." (22)

[12]". . . she once pointed to the picture of a boy. . . . [S]he added: He's my boyfriend" (22-23).

[13]Kristeva in "Motherhood According to Giovanni Bellini" analyzes the representation of the woman in art in relation to its spatial location in painting. Gilbert and Gubar in *The Madwoman in the Attic* also refer to the fact that women were allowed space only as objects. What I wish to point out is that in this case the *inability* to be an object leads to complete negation.

[14]See Tompkins for an analysis of various versions of the history of the "discovery" and conquest of the "New World;" she emphasizes the difficulty of establishing one history. The *Daily Worker* gives us not only a different version of the history of a certain period in England, but it also gives us a version which belongs to the "others," that is to the unprivileged working class.

[15]See Gates' introductory essay, "Writing 'Race'" for a discussion of the overvaluing of writing in the West, especially pages 7-15. Also see Chinweizu.

[16]This desire for everything to be in its place is impossible when the three coordinates of time-space-materiality do not coincide. Thus, in reference to his Tha'mma the narrator says that "it had suddenly occurred to her then that she would have to fill in 'Dhaka' as her place of birth on that form. . . . [A]t that moment she had not been able to quite understand how her place of birth had come to be so messily at odds with her nationality" (152).

[17]See Graph Number Three.

[18]The Victoria Memorial at 1, Queensway, designed after Lord Curzon's home in England, was built in 1906 after Curzon's declaration of the Partition of Bengal. It was a tribute to George V on the occasion of his visit to India in 1911. It was built during a period of strong anti-British sentiment, and George V, on his visit, revoked the proposed partition, while transferring the capital of India to Delhi. It was renovated in the twenties at a time when the freedom struggle was gathering rapid momentum after the Defense of India Act of 1915, the Jallianwallah Bagh massacre of 1919, the dissatisfying nature of the Morley-Minto and Montague-Chelmsford reforms, and the visit of the Simon Commission in 1925. The Indian National Congress under Motilal Nehru changed its demand from that of "dominion status" to that of "Purna Swaraj" (complete independence). Interestingly, the transfer of the capital in 1911 led to the construction of more British style buildings, since the planning of New Delhi was commissioned to Sir Edward Lutyens and Sir Herbert Baker. See Gopal, Phillips and Wainwright, and Nyrom for historical details.

[19]See page 30 of the novel. Alan Tresawsen worked in the Left Book Club which was a part of Victor Gollancz.

[20]"Look, Shador-bajar, there's the Royal Stationary. . . . [I]t's the same signboard, I remember. . . . [S]uddenly the sights were falling into place like a stack of old photographs" (206). These store signs have the same validating effect that the Brick Lane group photographs have.

[21]". . . [S]he would watch me as I turned to look at the advertisements flashing past us on the walls . . . [S]he would snap at me impatiently: . . . [I]t's just the bloody Underground" (21). The advertisments, signboards and store signs create a specific mythology of place, time and culture. While Roland Barthes in *Mythologies* discusses myth today as projected in and created by such popular practices as wrestling, or

the popularity of the face of Garbo, I believe that the mythology of the signboards that we see in the novel is different from Barthes' in that it is rooted in a culture in which material objects are vital. This is apparent in the significant position of *Ghats* (holy urns), mango leaves, *alpana* (floor designs made of rice paste) etc., in the culture.

[22]"Tridib laughs. . . . Everyone lives in a story, he says, my grandmother, my father, *his* father, Lenin, Einstein. . . . [T]hey all lived in stories, because stories are all there are to live in, it was just a question of which one you chose" (182). The multiplicity of narratives is a given which the West destroys in its obsession with truth and sequence (see footnote 27). The Bengali world is one of stories—of myths which are undifferentiated from history. The stories of Rama and Krishna, of Durga, the Bratas etc., are neither pure history nor pure myth since such differentiation is non-existent in this world. See Ray and Purana for an understanding of the ways in which myth is integrated to secular living, and its relation to history. An extremely popular collection of stories is called *"Thakumaar Jhuli"* (Grandmother's bag). It is the paternal grandmother *(Tha'mma),* as contrasted to the maternal grandmother *(Dida),* who is responsible for the telling of "stories."

[23]"Tha'mma, Tha'mma! I cried. How could you have 'come' home to Dhaka? You don't know the difference between coming and going!" (152) refers to the issue of the Bengali language. Tha'mma's not knowing the difference between "coming" and "going" is again a reference that only Bengalis understand. It refers to a peculiar construction in the language which allows the Bengali speaker to say "Aashchi" (coming) instead of "Jachchhi" (going). This is especially used as an equivalent to "good-bye." Thus, the Bengali speaker while leaving a place is apt to say "I am coming" *(Aashchi),* instead of "I am going" *(Jachchhi).* See MacLeod.

[24]In trying to reconstruct the history of Bengal, we are faced with the problem of origin. Where do we start from? Do we write the history of modern day West Bengal, modern day Bangladesh, East Pakistan, or of a Bengal which was comprised of Bangladesh, West Bengal, Bihar and Orissa?

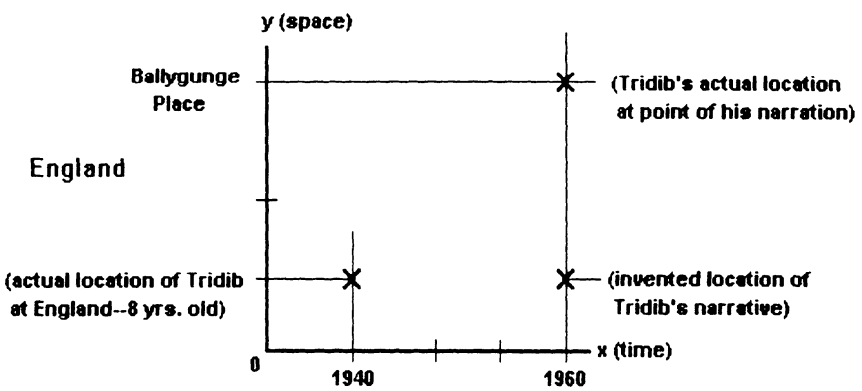
[25]See Spivak's *In Other Worlds*, especially "A Literary Representation of the Subaltern: A Woman's Text from the Third World," for a discussion of the literary and historical reconstruction of other worlds.

[26]Street names serve as effective records of history. Street names connected to India's colonization are rampant. Calcuttan streets named Elgin Road, Middleton Row, and locations named Dalhousie Square, Minto Park, Outram Ghat, and the Esplanade record India's history of being colonized. In an attempt at decolonization the names have been changed to Benoy, Badal, Dinesh Bag and Shahid Bhagat Singh Udyayan. The names that replace those of English generals, governors and administrators are those of the "martyrs" of the Freedom Movement. Interestingly, certain streets have been renamed Lenin Sarani, and Ho Chi Minh Sarani, again registering a certain movement in India's, or at least in Bengal's, political history. In other instances the original English names are appropriated by the local language. Thus, "esplanade" is transformed verbally to "splanit," the English origin of which is often forgotten. The word "splanit" becomes a "nonsense" word, a word outside the Western desire to establish meaning. Irigaray in "The Looking Glass from the Other Side" discusses the obsession of the dominant force (masculine) with meaning and sequence. She analyses this obsession with sequence and truth in *Speculum of the Other Woman.* Kristeva discusses the Western patriarchy's obsession with linear time, chronology, origin, and meaning in "On Chinese Women" and "Women's Time" in *The Kristeva Reader.* I have utilized Kristeva's and Irigaray's analysis of the masculine-feminine to further my understanding of the colonizer-colonized/West-Third World, majority-minority relations.

[27]See Fanon's, *Black Skin White Masks* and *The Wretched of the Earth* for a study of the desire of the colonized to validate itself in the terms of the colonizer, especially the West. In *Wretched* Fanon discusses the role that the national bourgeoisie takes on after independence, stating that they identify with the "decadence of the bourgeoisie of the West" (124-125). In *Black Skin,* he refers to the desire of and attempts at "denegrification" (111). In his analysis of Mayotte Capecia's *Je suis Martiniquaise*, he discusses the attempts at self-validation through a whitening of the race (47). Chinweizu and Fanon discuss issues of self-validation. Chinweizu refers to the problems of attempting self-validation in African literature. He discusses the attitudes of critics like Larson, Palmer and Post. Larson acclaims Lenrie Peters' novel *The Second Round* for its "universality, its very limited concern with Africa itself" (99), while Achebe and Sembene are denigrated by Post and Palmer (126-127). Chinweizu states that "African novels need not meet eurocentric standards of any sort, for standards are culture-bound, and the imposition of eurocentric standards on Africa is nothing but cultural imperialism" (123). Also, *The Nature and Context of Minority Discourse* discusses the problematics of the self-validation of minorities and its possibility of escaping the Western paradigm (see Abdul R. JanMohamed and David Lloyd's "Introduction" and Nancy Harstock's "Rethinking Modernism").

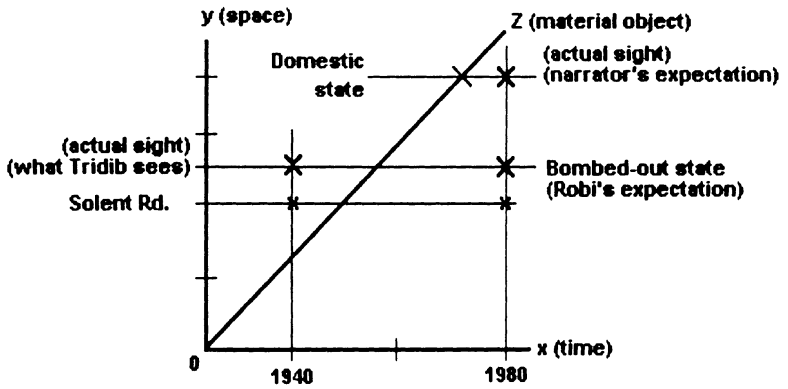
Graph Number One

Y denotes the space axis, X denotes the time axis. All following graphs have the third Z axis denoting materality.



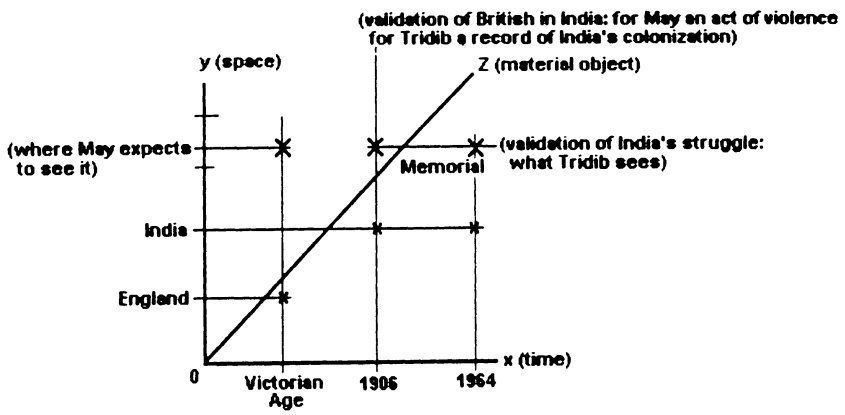
Graph Number Two

The small x's denote the coincidence of time-space coordinates and the large X's denote the time-space-material object/materiality coordinate coincidence.



Graph Number Three

The small x's denote the coincidence of time-space coordinates and the large X's denote the time-space-material object/materiality coordinate coincidence.



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