

## **Metaphors We Perform: A Cognitive Linguistic Study of Masculinity in Amitav Ghosh's The Hungry Tide and The Shadow Lines**

**Mr. Nandkumar Bhandari,**

**Arts, Commerce and Science College, Satral,**

[nandkumar3438@gmail.com](mailto:nandkumar3438@gmail.com)

### **Abstract**

This paper studies how masculinity is represented through metaphors in Amitav Ghosh's novels *The Hungry Tide* and *The Shadow Lines*. It uses Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) from Cognitive Linguistics to examine how language and metaphors reflect the emotional, social and psychological experiences of male characters. The paper argues that Ghosh does not present masculinity in terms of dominance or heroism, but as something fragile, shifting and emotionally complex. Male characters such as Fokir, Kanai, Tridib and Robi embody different forms of masculinity, which are best understood through metaphorical expressions such as silence, nature, space and trauma. Ghosh uses metaphors not merely to describe masculinity but also to perform and interrogate its meaning in a postcolonial context.

**Key Words:** Masculinity, Metaphor, Cognitive Linguistics, Identity, Gender, Trauma

## Introduction

Masculinity in literature is often associated with strength, power, and domination. However, in contemporary postcolonial literature, many writers have begun to question fixed notions of masculinity. Amitav Ghosh, a well-known Indian author, depicts male characters who are quiet, emotional, and reflective. This paper examines how Ghosh employs metaphors to depict masculinity in *The Hungry Tide* and *The Shadow Lines*. Metaphors play a significant role in revealing emotional suppression, social expectations, and personal pain. The study is guided by Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) as formulated by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson. CMT demonstrates how metaphors shape human thought and experience. In Ghosh's novels, metaphors such as tides, silence, space, maps and violence offer powerful insights into what it means to be a man in modern India. Ghosh shows the emotional struggles of male characters who cannot express their feelings openly due to social pressures. Indian society often associates masculinity with bravery, strength and control, expecting men to conceal their emotions and maintain silence. The selected texts were read multiple times to identify metaphors related to masculinity. These metaphors were then grouped into themes such as nature, silence, space, trauma and emotional repression, and analysed to understand how masculinity is expressed or performed.

### Research Question:

How do metaphors in *The Hungry Tide* and *The Shadow Lines* help us to understand men's feelings and identities in a postcolonial world?

### Objectives:

1. To find important metaphors about masculinity in *The Hungry Tide* and *The Shadow Lines*.
2. To understand how these metaphors show men's emotions and mental conditions.
3. To see how Amitav Ghosh shows different ways of being masculine.

4. To use Conceptual Metaphor Theory to study masculinity in these novels.

### **Research Methodology:**

This study adopts a qualitative research approach, relying on close reading and textual analysis of the novels. The theoretical framework is based on Cognitive Linguistics, specifically Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT). CMT demonstrates that metaphors are not merely stylistic but central to human thought and understanding. The study also employs gender theory, particularly R. W. Connell's concept of hegemonic and subordinate masculinities. This framework illuminates how different types of masculinity coexist and interact within hierarchies of power. By combining metaphor theory and gender theory, the analysis provides a comprehensive account of how masculinity is shaped and represented in the novels.

### **The Tide as a Metaphor**

The tide and the river symbolise fear and uncertainty for male characters in *The Hungry Tide*. Fokir, a fisherman, is deeply connected to nature and communicates more through action and presence than words. His silence is emotionally rich rather than empty: "He had a way of communicating with the world that did not depend on words" (*The Hungry Tide* 138). His masculinity is tender and emotionally expressive.

Kanai, a city-dweller and translator, represents a more dominant and rational masculinity, yet he is emotionally detached. The tide, as a metaphor, illustrates the fluid and uncontrollable aspects of masculinity. Fokir performs masculinity through emotion, while Kanai embodies hegemonic masculinity through language and logic. As Connell observes, hegemonic masculinity often entails the suppression of vulnerability (77), a quality Kanai exhibits in his interactions with both Fokir and Piya.

### **Silence as Masculine Repression**

In *The Shadow Lines*, Tridib's silence symbolises how men often conceal their emotions. Thoughtful and sensitive, he gives the narrator imaginative worlds yet withholds emotional openness: "He gave me worlds to travel in but never showed me the way" (*The Shadow Lines*

20). Tridib's inability to express his love for May and his guilt over the Partition violence define his masculinity through repression. In contrast, Robi, an army officer, experiences masculinity through trauma. Witnessing violence during the Dhaka riot but failing to intervene leaves him with deep guilt: "Do you know what it's like to watch someone you love being violated and not being able to do anything?" (The Shadow Lines 247). His sense of failure challenges the notion of men as natural protectors. As Bharati Ray explains, Partition left many men feeling powerless to protect loved ones, a condition that may be read as "traumatized masculinity" (62).

## Maps and Borders as Masculine Control

Maps and borders in *The Shadow Lines* symbolise authority, order and masculine control. Yet the violence of Partition and Tridib's death reveal the fragility of these symbols. They remain as emblems of promises unfulfilled, exposing the breakdown of the traditional belief in "man as protector." Historical trauma erodes the protective and authoritative dimensions of masculinity.

## Nature and Emotion: Fluid Masculinities

Nature plays a central role in both novels. The tide, river, and storm represent fluid, unstable masculinities. In *The Hungry Tide*, Fokir's deep bond with nature emphasises emotional strength, though his death during a storm while protecting Piya highlights the fragility of this form of masculinity. Kanai's educated, rational masculinity collapses in the same storm, leaving him emotionally unfulfilled. In *The Shadow Lines*, Tridib's imaginative use of space makes him morally strong but emotionally vulnerable, ultimately leading to his tragic death. Both novels depict men caught between duty and emotion, suggesting that masculinity is fluid, shaped as much by vulnerability as by strength.

## Conclusion

Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* and *The Shadow Lines* provide a nuanced exploration of masculinity through metaphor. These narratives move beyond surface-level events to reveal how masculinity is constructed through emotions, identity, and cultural history. Conceptual Metaphor Theory allows us to see metaphors like the tide, silence, space, and trauma not only as literary devices but as tools for performing masculinity. The tide and river in *The Hungry Tide* symbolise

the uncertainty and emotional depth of male identity, while in *The Shadow Lines*, maps, borders and silence highlight masculinity's fragility in the face of historical trauma. Ghosh's metaphors reveal masculinity as a human experience shaped by history, culture and emotion rather than by rigid gender norms.

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