

The Conflict Of Nation And Partition In Amitav Ghosh's

The Shadow Lines

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Abstract:

Amitav Ghosh is a postmodernist writer. He is immensely influenced by the political and cultural milieu of post-independent India. Being a social anthropologist and having the opportunity of visiting alien lands, he comments on the present scenario, the world is passing through in his novels. Almost all the works of Amitav Ghosh reflected the theme of borders and boundaries among nations. *The Shadow Lines* is a highly innovative, complex and celebrated novel of Amitav Ghosh, published in 1988. *The Shadow Lines* is the novel deal exclusively with the consequences of the Partition and mainly concerned with the Partition on the Bengal border. It is important to note that Ghosh happens to be the only major Indian-English novelist who is preoccupied with the Bengal Partition. There was a collective expression of grief, a demonstration of all religions in which Muslims, Sikhs and Hindus alike to took part. In January 1964 Mu-I-Mubarak was recovered and the city of Srinagar erupted with joy. But soon after the recovery, riots broke out in Khulna and a few people were killed.

Keywords: Postcolonial, Nationalism, Violence, Political Freedom

Introduction:

The tragedy of partition provided the writers with the occasion to write about the plight of the people in the subcontinent in order to bring home mainly to the western world the impact of British rule, which had previously boasted of the civilizing mission. India got independence through bloodshed and migration. In fact, the partition theme in Indian novels in English set the dystopian tune, which would be later on carried on to the tone of the postcolonial theories. Post-colonialism began a recognition of the dominant post-war economic and political conditions are prevalent all over the world.

Ghosh is conscious of the role of an author and his own stand on his role as an author. His views on society, language, culture, human relationship, nation and geographical boundaries are all painted with his beliefs. These ideologies also determine his choices as a craftsman of storytelling. *The Shadow Lines* probably represents Ghosh's most direct confrontation with nationalism and national identity and it is simultaneously about each character's personal identity. Both in Political Science and Geography there is a specific definition of a country or a state.

The word Country, however, bears a specific meaning to a man. A man's entire entity of present, past as well as future is associated with his own country or native land or homeland. In the face of such development, against the backdrop of a series of divergent factors mentioned above that continuously change the social milieu, it becomes increasingly difficult to think of the nation in fixed ways. The critique of the nation then, of necessity, must move along the working through the process of revisions and redefinitions. However, it is helpful to look at the issue from

a cultural perspective, for the novel clearly shows that cultural formations are the sites within which one's nationality or individual identity may be constructed.

The Shadow Lines are the mirror image, which runs throughout the novel as a sign of those relations that paradoxically connect nation and individuals even as they divide them. The mirror image in the novel foregrounds the idea of mutual contractedness not only between the narrators and the other characters that surround him but also between the cities of London, Dhaka and Calcutta. As he discovers new meaning and imagines the new connection between his and the other characters perception and experiences of space, the adult narrator comes to understand that Muslim Dhaka and Hindu Calcutta are essentially the mirror image of each other separated by a looking Glass border. The cause of the riots that killed Tridib in Dhaka also causes the Calcutta riots in which he was trapped as a child. Thamma believes across the border there existed another reality.

The story cleverly engages in its main body characters spanning three generations of this family. The story of these characters is not told in a contextual vacuum, it instead corresponds to the growth of Calcutta as a city and India as a nation over a period of three decades or more. Significantly, private events in the author's life and other important characters take place in the shadow of events of immense political significance. Thamma, through the grandmother of the unnamed narrator, came to know the issue of the Bengal Partition and the whole idea of Nation, Nationalism, and Nationhood gets discussed in this novel.

All his characters and events, though imaginary, are created around some facts from the past or present. One interesting fact about the organization of the characters within novels is that each character is an individual and integral to the flow of the story. He also interweaves the story

in a manner that ruptures any hierarchy of importance amongst characters. So if Tridib is an outstanding character in *The Shadow Lines*, the roles of narrator, May and grandmother are equally vital.

Tridib, the eccentric historian cousin through whom the idea of history being challenging gets highlighted. The plot of *The Shadow Lines* is woven around actual historical events like the Second World War and the post-Partition communal riots which broke out in certain parts of India and Pakistan. The novel also focuses on the events that happened at the far end of 1963 and in 1964. Mu-I -Mubarak, believed to be the sacred relic of Prophets hair, disappeared from its place in the Hazarathbal mosque in December 1963. There was a collective expression of anguish, a demonstration of all religions in which Muslims, Sikhs and Hindus alike to take part in. In January 1964 Mu-I-Mubarak was recovered and the city of Srinagar exploded with joy. But soon after the recovery, riots broke out in Khulna and a few people were killed. Riots spread to Dhaka and Calcutta. The toll increased to thousands. Despite the presence of two armies of Pakistan and India, stray incidents of arson and looting continued for a few days.

There were innumerable cases of the Muslims in East Pakistan giving shelter to the Hindus, often at the cost of their own lives and equally of the Hindus protecting the Muslims. But they were ordinary people, soon forgotten not for them any Martyr's memorials or Eternal Flame the situation depicted is similar to the anti-Sikh riots that Ghosh witnessed in Delhi, following the assassination of Mrs.Indira Gandhi. Though Calcutta and Dhaka belong to two different nations , separated from each other by the borders etched upon the map, the two places are closely bound to each other that the narrator had only to look into the mirror to be in Dhaka; a moment when each city was the reversed image of the other. Hence what happens in Dhaka will be certainly reflected in Calcutta even when unease authorities keep quiet about the event.

The narrator comes to the end that the lines separating the two nations are only shadow lines. *The Shadow Lines* can be read as destabilizing the fixed, binary logic vigor on the nation of otherness, identity, history and memory in the construction of nationalist boundaries. The force and demand of nationalism cannot be wished away, just as death by a communal mob in the byelanes of old Dhaka. Dhaka has been Thamma's birthplace but her nationality is Indian. As a young girl, she had thought of fighting for freedom in east Bengal. *The Shadow Lines* written in 1988 was the author's reply to another unprecedented event in Post-Colonial Indian scene: Ghosh projects the ineffectuality of bifurcation of a nation to create two nations, one east and another west.

Thamma in *The Shadow Lines* queries whether she would be able to see the boundary between India and East Pakistan. Partition and all the killing and everything if there is not something in between Common discretion of Thamma fails to comprehend the explanation of creating two nations. In *The Shadow Lines*, the development and growth of Thamma character encapsulate the futility and meaninglessness of political freedom which was otherwise supposed to usher in an era of peace and prosperity for all Ghosh has raised a question that whether the partition is a solution to the problems of social unrest on religious grounds or political motivation.

The partition creates the feeling of humiliation and agony for the dear and near ones who are compelled to migrate from their home or birth-place merely for the reasons based on whims of political solution of the problem faced by the nation. Three perspectives of borders are provided by three characters belonging to three contiguous generations as figured in *The Shadow Lines*. The first is spoken by Thamma, the protagonist's grandmother; the second by her uncle,

Jethamoshai and the third by Robi, Thamma's nephew, who is roughly the same age as the protagonist and is his friend.

Jethamoshai had lived in a world where borders were not of paramount importance, and what was regarded as important was one's sense of belonging to the place one was born and brought up in. He does not believe in arbitrary lines and is shrewd enough to realize that once a man started to move, there would be no end to it. His words also appear to be prophetic, for within less than a decade of their utterance, in 1971, East Pakistan became Bangladesh. Rather differently, Grandma, the second character to muse on borders, grew up in the momentous opening decades of the twentieth century, i.e. in the heyday of the anti-colonial struggle against the British rule in India.

The struggle was the most formative of her experiences, something that defined her worldview, and Ghosh's narrative makes it clear that though she had not literally participated in the nationalist movement, the spirit of the times had entered her soul and contributed to the creation of her own perception of self. Difference, again, is the third speaker on borders, Robi, who as an individual belonging to a post-Partition generation, and having an intimate knowledge of the communally coloured disturbances that rent the national fabric of India, notes how freedom seemed to lie at the very root of all the subcontinent's problems. *The Shadow Lines* is the Partition novel examined in this book that really questions the concept of the border, questions very seriously whether the shadow line that we inscribe to separate people into different nations has any validity, or whether it is an absurd illusion.

The Shadow Lines is that it gives us a representation of the nation in both colonial and post-colonial times through characters who belong to three contiguous generations (Jethamoshai,

Thamma and Robi); and it shows how the narrator, with the gift of vision bequeathed by Tridib, not only uncovers but also bridges all the earlier perspectives towards nationhood. The partition creates the feeling of humiliation and agony for the dear and near ones who are compelled to migrate from their home or birth-place merely for the reasons based on whims of political solution of the problem faced by the nation. Nationhood itself is a mirage because it is not based on any logic. When nature draws line in the form of mountains, oceans, rivers, it is real. But manmade borders are shallow and unjustifiable.

Conclusion

Thus Ghosh explores the theme of partition of a modern nation and has asserted futile action of the political machinery in power. *The Shadow Lines* thus puts such ideological themes before the reader for evaluation of such political motives based the illogical axis. Culture is a process of circulation that has nothing to do with national borders. The partition is a vivid manifestation of the claim that post colonial nation are founded in a bloody in a severance of the umbilical cord, one that fortified border between nation states with irrational and remorseless violence.

The discourse of nationalism, however, affects to make sense of the absurd loss of lives that occurs the novel made the reader to discover that world is not a simple place that can see in an atlas but there are so many inexorable facts, hidden in that solid lines as it lead to political aggression and violent bloodshed. The boundaries between nation are like shadow lines, of hatred and hostility out of national sentiments. The narrator also shows how ordinary people try their best to seek mutual sympathy among various ethnic groups of the subcontinent. There are some people like Thamma believe in not only drawing lines as part of faith but respecting them

with blood. The border that carved at the time of partition has led to further brutality in the form of those riots, pogroms and organized historical distortions and cultural depletions with which the history of independent India replete.

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