

Shadows of Partition: A Study of Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines*

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Abstract:

Amitav Ghosh presents the hollowness of partition which plays a very crucial role in knitting the frame of *The Shadow Lines* (1988). Amitav Ghosh upholds the theme of partition to be the cause of human sufferings through the character of Tha'mma. Ghosh's primary argument in the novel is that the frontiers are constructed to separate one nation from another and these frontiers are not real but mere shadows. The aim of my paper is to present the harsh effect of partition of India in 1971 to declare East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) as an independent nation. In the novel, Tha'mma's personal loss intensifies through men made boundaries or partition which was created during the partition of India.

Keywords: Partition, Frontiers, Shadows, Nation, Boundaries.

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Amitav Ghosh challenges the idea of partition through his novel *The Shadow Lines*. Many historical events like the freedom movement in Bengal, The Second World war, the partition of India in 1947 and the communal riots in Bangladesh and India are alluded to in this novel to emphasize the theme of partition. The futility of the border lines is presented through these events. Borders or boundaries are always the cause of partition. As for example, the Radcliffe Line, which divided India and Pakistan. Sir Cyril Radcliffe architected The Radcliffe Line. The western side of The Radcliffe Line serves as the Indo-Pakistani border and the eastern side of this line as the India-Bangladesh border. This partition has affected the villages of Bengal and Punjab.

Ghosh's second novel *The Shadow Lines* is divided into two parts –1) Going Away 2) Coming Home. The novel exhibits the story of two families inhabited in Dhaka, Calcutta, London-three different places of three different countries of the world namely Bangladesh, India and England respectively. The narrator provides a sketch of the differences of the experience of culture, religion and nationality of the generation of the two families. The narrator examines the effect of the communal riots. Ghosh tries to sketch out that riot is a very crucial cause for the creation of border which is created by men against men.

There are many characters in this novel and they are connected to each other through the relationship or family or friend. The narrator has his grandmother who is known as Tha'mma and his parents. Mayadebi and her husband live in England. They have three sons- Jatin, Robi and Tridib. Tridib had experienced a greater span of his life in Calcutta. The narrator sketches the character of Ila who is the daughter of Jatin. The name of the first section of the novel is 'Going Away' in which the narrator presents the relationship of two families- The Datta-chaudhury of Bengal and The Price family of London. A.N. Kaul illustrates this relation in his essay "A Reading of *The Shadow Lines*":

"Towards the end of the story also cross the newly created frontier between India and East Pakistan (now Bangladesh), engaging or acknowledging along the way the proximate presence of the other foreign countries and continents through the Indian diplomatic and the UN postings of Datta-Chaudhuris." (300) (Kaul)

In this section, the narrator upholds the theme of love. The narrator presents Tridib's love with May Price and she also is in love with him. The narrator, himself also is in love with Ila, his cousin who lives in London, but he never tells her of his forbidden feelings. Actually, the narrator is attracted especially by the western culture of Ila. But Ila hopes that she can attract the narrator towards her through her exquisite physical beauty and charm. The narrator stops to hope when Ila says, "you were always the brother I never had, I'm sorry. If I'd known, I wouldn't have behaved like this. Really believe me." (111) (Ghosh) Ila marries Nick Price and with this incident the first section of the novel comes to an end.

The second section of the novel, 'Coming Home' begins with Tha'mma's retirement from the post of head mistress in 1962. She had worked twenty-seven years as a teacher and six years as a head mistress. After her retirement, she remembers her past nostalgically. The narrator becomes fascinated with the stories of Tha'mma's old days at her ancestral home. Actually, Tha'mma was born and grew up in Dhaka and then came to Calcutta. This second section also shows Tha'mma's visit to Dhaka to bring her uncle, Shri Goshtobihari Bose back to Calcutta. Her uncle, Shri Goshtobihari Bose is now known as ukilbabu. Mayadebi, Tridib, May Price and Robi accompanied Tha'mma in her Bangladesh tour. When they arrived in Dhaka, all surroundings strike Tha'mma's eyes and heart as changed form. However, he is unwillingly to come to India with them. Girish Karnad said: "The grandmother's visit to the ancestral home, is surely one of the most memorable scenes in Indian fiction. Past and future meet across religious, political and cultural barriers in a confusion of emotions, ideals, intentions and acts, leading to a shattering climax". (" Twentieth Century Indian Writing." Blog post.) The novel reaches its climax when Tha'mma and Mayadebi are returning from their ancestral home with Jethamshoi following them in Khalil's rickshaw. The violent incident occurs which recalled through Robi's narrative as well as May Price's recollections of that incident- when Tha'mma, Mayadebi, Robi, May Price, Tridib and Jethamshoi were moving toward the bazaar area, they find the shops closed the road deserted. There the mob attacked the car and injured the driver with a cut on his face. Then the security man shot his revolver to disperse that madding mob. Then aftertime the mob put to death Khalil, the old man and Tridib. This terrible and inhuman action of those madding mob strike Robi and also May Price in a negative way.

The Western people or the Colonizers designed maps according to their necessity of occupying the places to make colonies. The Colonizers constructed the idea of nation to get a grip politically over the world. This domination is successful in the purpose of placing partitions among different nations. The main concept of this novel focuses on the idea of shadowy border lines between nations:

“At the stroke of the midnight nor, when the world sleeps, India will awake to life and freedom. A moment comes which comes but rarely in history, when we step out from the old to the new, when an age ends, and when the soul at a nation, long suppressed, finds utterance”. (Nehru)

The concept of division or border leads the people to psychological sufferings of homelessness. As a result, the people are always in a dilemma of belongingness.

Through this paper my aim is to uphold various types of barriers like personal identity, border, partition etc. can't be a barrier in case of a person's freedom. The first section of the novel provides the concept that love has the ability to go beyond any kind of barriers or boundaries. Borders are meaningless and don't have the power to restrict human emotions. A border may separate the people of two countries geographically but it does not have any power at all to separate the people of two countries psychologically. Borders create struggle for people. The second section of the novel upholds the concept of national identity. When Tha'mma wants to visit Dhaka to bring back her uncle, Shri Ghostobihari Bose, she practically realizes the impact of partition. Though Tha'mma thinks that she can easily go to her ancestral home which is situated in Dhaka, but after partition it is not so easy to go Dhaka from Calcutta for Tha'mma because she has to follow the rules for going outside the country. Tha'mma understands this really when it is needed to mention the name of her birth place on the passport from which is required to be filled up properly in order to go to Dhaka and it is at this very moment that Tha'mma realizes the socio-political situation. Here borders challenge the individual identity of Tha'mma. There are many symbolic references like Houses old and new, maps and mirrors, borders and boundaries in this novel and these are associated with the concept of man's search

and quest for individual identity. The novel depicts not only the sufferings of Tha'mma but the sufferings of everyman and here the character of Tha'mma is representative of those men who are victims of partition. However, Ghosh does not provide any solution to come out from these sufferings. Here Ghosh through the character of Tha'mma shows that all borders and boundaries are nothing but only shadows and also puts an important question which is related to our individual identities.

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