

Love as a major source of pain -The Shadow Lines

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Abstract: The Shadow lines by Amitabh Ghosh is a brilliant work conceived brilliantly, raising a plenitude of contemporary issues with veracity of themes. These themes put together and chained one by another in such a way that it often creates ambiguity as to which one is to be prioritised. It has structural intricacies and thematic profundity. Throughout the novel the reader experiences a number of historical events, interwoven meaningfully with the existing contemporary issues. At the forefront it bears meanings of political freedom, nationalism, post-colonialism, partition, multi-culturalism and so on. Furthermore, deep within the character's interpersonal relationship what can't be ignored, there lies the instinctive human love and consequent rejection which happens to be one of the major themes. This article is an attempt to bring out the theme of love and its deprivation that pervades all over the novel.

Key words: Borders, Themes, Love, Issues

1. INTRODUCTION:

Amitav Ghosh is unquestionably quite a familiar name among all contemporary Indian English writers. His writings deal with a wide range of themes such as Post-colonialism, Identity Crisis, Diaspora, Indian Politics, Multi-culturalism, International Borders, Freedom, Subaltern, Ecology, Alienation and so on. His novels expand vast areas of subjects. Ghosh's novels are the depiction of the realistic account of contemporary world. Though Salman Rushdie is the pioneer of postcolonial scene on the literary map, yet Amitav Ghosh occupies a distinct place of his own. Ghosh's uniqueness lies in the fact that he combines history with the very contemporary vision of a world. With the rapid advancement in all technological spheres of life, rampant use of T.V, mobile and cyberspace have enabled man to reconsider life from a different perspective. This changing perspective dissolves all kinds of boundaries and brings the world a lot closer.

Virginia Wolf once mentioned "A novel can't tell lies". It implies that a novel is a serious study of social ethos, skillfully presents the vital truths of life which can only be seen by the penetrating eyes of the novelist through minute observations. Hence deduced the definition –A novel, basically is the contemporary realities of the society. It is not a mere story but a true picture of the contemporary world on a large scale. In this article my focus of interest will be some of the major themes which considerably stand unique and also express with clarity what social point of views lie beneath them.

If we examine, The Shadow Lines, we find that the novelist has dealt with numerous problems concerning the society by travelling back to history. He has assembled many historical events, examined skillfully their impact on the society and then intermingling in them the sweet and sour sensation of emotions. There is no denying the fact that the book is written on an emotional plane, trying to unfold the immediate truths of life. Subha Tiwari in her critical study comments –

"To begin with, let us talk about the sweet, sad sensations the book arouses. You cannot keep back your smile as you go through the pages. The book is written on an emotional plane, underlying and explaining the small, universal truths of life. Fascinating true depiction of the mental condition of children is so remarkable."

Considering the adolescence age and the teenage love of the narrator it can be truly deduced that depiction of mental pictures is perfect and the book on a psychological plane emphasizes the characters 'personality and identity in childhood'. The experiences of the narrator's childhood during the formative years build up his persona in later period of his life. In other words; the narrator's fascination for Ila grows from his childhood.

“I don’t know what the matter with him is, my mother said,
Complaining loudly, to everyone. He’s been waiting for her
for days. He asks about her every night; where’s Ila? When
is she coming? He won’t go to sleep at night until I tell him,
she is coming soon, don’t worry…….”[Page-43(1)]

How does the narrator take cities like London, Calcutta or Dhaka or like his cousin Ila, or his familiarity with May Price, Nick Price, everything springs from his childhood perceptions. Again the narrator’s great admiration for Tridib, his older cousin roots in his childhood days. He frequently meets Tridib on his way back from school despite being warned by his authoritative grandmother Tha’mma.

2. THE SHALLOWNESS OF BORDERS LINES:

The opening lines of the novel ‘A tale of two Cities’ (1859) by Charles Dickens is worth mentioning “It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us.”

Life is a paradox; sometimes it is not what it appears and some other time it is what it does appear. Similarly, The Shadow Lines are non-existent but still exists. The Shadow Lines, Ghosh’s masterpiece is an attempt to show the blurring lines of borders between East and West, black and white, the ruler and the ruled, and the caste and religion. The Shadow Lines emphasizes the problem of crossing borders, the disputes over nationality, cultures and language. The borders conflicts have considerably increased over the world including India. Amitav categorically mentions that the frontiers don’t exist and hence whether it needs to be crossed or even abolished is another domain of discussion. The shadow lines we draw between people and nations is “both absurd illusion and source of terrifying violence” (1). Not only that, it also creates several other illusions restricting human understanding and causing greater pain to mankind as a whole. The Shadow Lines is a powerful novel of art which depicts human sufferings, death and devastation created by a shadow line division (2). The obvious reasoning of Thamma further intensifies the meaningful message of the novelist. “What was it all for then-partition and all the killings and everything-if there is not something in between” (Page-151 TSL). Amitav believes that borders are created artificially and are more in peoples mind. “Border is not on the frontiers: it is right inside the airport” (Page-151 TSL). Humanity after all is the same everywhere. The subject of crossing national cultural frontiers is not new but an old one. E.M Froster in “A Passage To India” rules out the possibilities of establishing brotherhood between east and west in a surrounding of imperialist hegemony. Nevertheless Amitav explores that the east and the west have met and the fading relationship as a colonizer and colonized is under the way.

“Amitav Ghosh makes the east and west meet on a pedestal of friendship especially through the characters like Tridib, May, the narrator, Ila, Nick Price and Mrs Price.”

3. LOVE AS A SOURCE OF PAIN:

The journey of life never deprives anybody from the soothing exhilaration of love and at the same time the pangs of love. Love is that indispensable emotion which governs the characteristic essence of everybody’s life. Human relationship is built on the cement of love. So unquestionably there couldn’t be any piece of literature, art or artistic exuberance without the mentioning of love. Though the novel The Shadow Lines appears to be more about historical events and violent happenings, partition and border-lines, dividing the nations, in fact it is more about human relationship and interaction. Love happens to be

the major source of pain in *The Shadow Lines*. Unlike the romantic elusive love usually displayed in the silver screen or T.V screen, it is that love which constitutes the force of life, the enthusiasm and the desire to let the life go. Love is an emotion that centres around one single individual because source of love springs from any individual, that individual may be - mother, father, wife, beloved, brother and friend (3). Love denotes suspension of logic. Love and logic are antagonistic to each other. But love may be helpful to develop an instrumental form of rationality that suggests in determining the best means to achieve the object of love. On the other hand it drives us away from certain type of rationality such as justice, equality etc. By being irrational, love implies an uncertain, confused state of mind. The much discussed belief that love is only suitable for a mating partner of the opposite sex is outright wrong. If it is, then we can deduce the fact that we are limiting the scope of love. When one individual becomes the focus of attention then, everything else turns secondary. If we go by the above definition of love, it is quite evident that the unnamed narrator is in love with Tridib, Tha'mma, and his cousin Ila. The nameless narrator's constant chasing after Ila [being infatuated] but gets rejected by her on the ground that she loves Nick Price instead, happens to be the third person of his love relationship. Ila comes in the life of the narrator at the third stage. Much before that in his childhood he was in love with Tridib (3).

Tridib is the narrator's friend, philosopher and guiding spirit. He is the centrality or the inspiration in his life. Tridib apparently reciprocates his love and admiration which is a matter of huge satisfaction for both. Then May Price comes and takes all importance. His unique privilege to understand Tridib is snatched away by May. He was jealous, achingly jealous.

"I would never understand I was jealous, achingly jealous, as a child can be, because it has always been my unique privilege to understand Tridib, and that day at the Victoria Memorial I knew I had lost that privilege; somehow May had stolen it" [Page-170(1)].

Tridib is in love with May Price. They knew each other through letters and photographs they had exchanged. They attracted each other. May had a curious impression about him what she assessed from Tridib's pornographic letter. When she comes to India in order to meet on his invitation, she finds him loveable. To her Tridib looked absurdly young, and somehow very reassuring – she couldn't resist the temptation of throwing her arms around him. May doesn't feel uncomfortable with him during her first meet at the Railway Station.

She had come for her love. She tells the narrator "All I remember is him saying – you're my love, my own, true love, my love-across-the-seas". Tridib's death shatters her, drives her to a state of restlessness. May holds herself responsible for Tridib's death. Her guilt consciousness troubles her, she undergoes penance. She sleeps on the floor; she fasts and works for the earthquake relief. She collects money from passers-by in crowded streets and stations for philanthropic motifs. She had a hellish and traumatic state of mind until the narrator convinces that Tridib's death was a sacrifice against the spreading of illogical hatred in the mankind.

The narrator's bonding with his grandmother Tha'mma is portrayed by Amitav Ghosh in a seemingly meaningful manner. As a child, he is soothingly wrapped in her warm protective presence. Once, he gets perturbed emotionally when Tha'mma is hurt. She exerts tremendous influence and control on all family members. Tha'mma is a unique, stubborn but workaholic, disciplinarian kind of character whose main concern is to get things in order in accordance with her own perception. Her hegemony in family matters is nothing but an attempt to establish harmony and stability in the family. But as he grows older, Tha'mma's unchangeable principles threaten the narrator's identity. In fact, he doesn't want to be engulfed by her. So it will not be least unwise to say that his visits to cheap women are rebellious efforts to unchain himself from Tha'mma. Likewise, Tha'mma observes that her grandson is gradually getting loosen from her and more inclined towards Ila, whom she considers no more than a cheap whore. Tha'mma's condition becomes critical still she keeps her mind engaged thinking over the narrator's

relationship with Ila. “Why do you always speak for that whore? She said. Why have you let that whore trap you? She whispered” [Page-90(1)]. He tries to release his body as well as mind from the powerful grip. “I jerked my head out of her hands, she met my gaze and smiled. I couldn’t believe that this withered, wasted, powerless woman was the same person that I had so much loved and feared” [Page-91(1)].

The narrator’s fascination for the silly yet irresistibly beautiful cousin Ila is an affair that commands a hypnotising spell over the readers. His constant chasing after her, being infatuated and finally gets rejected on the ground that she loves Nick Price immensely, apparently shows it has been an unequal love. As a matter of fact Ila never reciprocates it. The narrator also comes to understand this fact lately. “When the narrator is going through an acute sensation of love for Ila, he is haunted by an old Hindi film song-bequraar karke hame yun na jayen” [Page-94(1)]. He is simply unable to free himself from the recurring tune in his mind.

“In London many times the narrator walks miles and miles to get to Ila’s place, to see her, her laughter, her eyes to feel her him, but nothing comes from her side”(1).

The narrator throws all that he has, his education, appearance, humility, right temperament at Ila’s disposal but everything goes in vain. She doesn’t pay heed to one who loves her madly. On the contrary, she loves one [Nick] who is never sincere to her (3). The narrator has so much affinity towards her that he shouts painfully through the window revealing his inner feelings towards her honestly.

“If I were to die tomorrow you wouldn’t be free of me. You cannot be free of me because I am within you-just as you are within me” [Page-89(1)]. The pangs of unfulfilled love are found expression in following paragraph in the novel.

“And when she did not come back to the cellar that night, I know she had taken my life hostage yet again; I knew that a part of my life as a human being had ceased; that I no longer existed, but as a chronicle” [Page-112(1)].

Ila is also not complacent and happiness is a distant object, a far reality to achieve. She fails to see the truth which is beyond physical appearance. She loves Nick Price without realising that he is something of a libertine. It is a different matter that she continues to love Nick but hers is a one-sided love. The most unfortunate is that she gets married to him though she knows that he has had affairs with several women. “Don’t you see, I wouldn’t leave [him] if he moved the whole bloody massage parlour from Bangkok in to the house”.

Dante’s “Inferno” is created out of primal love and the Modern world is created out of, pride, hatred, jealousy, violence and cruelty (4). Love is the only precious gift, bliss of God which manifests itself in the acts of human being, giving solace only for a temporary period because each act of love is followed by its imminent pangs.

4. CONCLUSION:

The novel is a complex one. It allegorises many issues. It talks about political freedom, nationalism, familial relationship and love and its deprivation. The novelist has thrown light on a number of contemporary problems which exist in the complex social fabric woven around each one of us that can lead to a distressful situation if not properly cope with. Some serious question raised by the novelist are- why partition, why riots, why war, why deprivation and why the shadow lines.

5. REFERENCES

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