



Reflection of Multiculturalism in *The Shadow lines*

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Abstract

Culture is closely associated with people. It is the description and information of religion, cuisine, social habits, music, language, and arts of a particular group of people. Man is a social animal who bounds with his culture. The culture signifies our existence.

Amitav Ghosh, the Sahitya Academi Award winner is an anthropologist. An anthropologist is a person who specializes in anthropology. It is a scientific study of origins, physical and cultural development, social customs, and beliefs of humankind. As an anthropologist, he is a keen observer of society and culture. Ghosh reflected multiculturalism in *The Shadow lines*. Multiculturalism is the co-existence of diverse cultures. The novel focuses on three cities: Calcutta, Dhaka, and London, three great cities of different countries with diverse culture

Ghosh's central characters are generally displaced from their native land and then they closely come in contact with a different culture. The novel shows the idea of hybridity. It was cultivated by Ghosh, to intersected stories between the two families, one of which is Bengali and the other English. Thamma and Ila are physically and culturally displaced due to globalization and partition but they always remember their past through recollection, dream, narrative, and myth. The narrator of the novel has Indian nationality but has received an English education. The novel beautifully projects the two different cultures - the East and the west.

Key Words: Anthropology, Culture, Hybridity, Multiculturalism.

Amitav Ghosh is an eclectic author. His works are a complex amalgam of various cultures. The mingling of various traditions and cultures makes him an outstanding writer of multiculturalism. Ashok Chasker in his book, *Multiculturalism in Indian Fiction in English* (2010) writes:

Multiculturalism is not an intellectual discipline but a movement for social change. It is about respect, recognition, tolerance, and protection to all cultures and subcultures. Multiculturalism is not merely an issue of academic debate and discussion but an invitation to dialogue for social cooperation. Thus multiculturalism, as a principle to be acted upon, requires from us all receptivity to difference, an openness to change, a passion for equality, ability to recognize our familiar selves in the strangeness of others.

The Shadow Lines is a multifaceted novel. The novel introduces a family tree. The family tree of Mr. Lionel Tresawson and Dutta-Chaudhari. Both of the families belong to different cultures and nations. The story ventures three countries called India, Bangladesh, and England. Three metropolitan cities of respective countries: Calcutta, Dhaka, and London. The story spans up to three generations as a spectator of delight and victim of interaction with different regions.

According to Prof. A. N. Kaul *The Shadow Lines* is “Crossing of frontiers—especially those of nationality, culture and language—has increased the world over, including India. Of this tendency *The Shadow Lines* ‘is an extreme example”.

Mr. Lionel Tresawsen lived in India when the Britishers were in India. Lionel and Tridib’s grandfather Dutta-Chaudhari has been friends. Dutta-Chaudhari was a judge in Calcutta High Court. Later Lionel Tresawsen went back to England. His daughter married S.N.I. Prince, later she is known as Mrs. Prince. Mrs. Prince has two children a daughter called May and a son called Nick Prince.

Dutta-Chaudhari has two daughters, Tha’mma and Mayadebi. Tha’mma is the grandmother of eight years old boy who narrates the story. He is a nameless narrator who introduces the family. Tha’mma gets married and went to Burma. The narrator’s father was born in Mandaya. They visited Dhaka once a year. His grandmother early loses her husband in 1935. He died of Pneumonia. She became a school teacher in a school at Calcutta. She lives in a one-room apartment in Bhowanipore. She needs to live in Calcutta for the sake of his son’s education. Although she is settled in Calcutta she always dreams of his native land and ancestors’ house in Dhaka. Ghosh portrays her as the real heroine of the novel who strives hard to survive in harsh conditions without any external help.

Mayadebi’s husband is a high-ranking official and foreign service. She has three sons, Jatin, Robi, and Tridib. Jatin is an economist in the United States. Jatin has a daughter called Ila. Later she married Nick Prince. Robi is a civil servant. Tridib is pursuing his Ph.D. in Archaeology. Jethamoshi is the grandmother’s uncle.

The novel is divided into two sections “Going Away” and “Coming Home”. The first section is filled with the description of Tridib. He plays the role of mentor for the narrator. He provides him the door to the world of imagination. He said, “Tridib had given me worlds to travel in and he had given me eyes to see them with...” (22). He gives him the concept of globalization. The narrator wants to be like him. Tridib is not liked by Tha’mma. She said, “He is a loafer and wastrel” (4). She would acknowledge sometimes that he is doing nothing, but she was wrong. He is pursuing a Ph.D. in Archaeology. His work is associated with the Sena Dynasty of Bengal.

Tridib’s family visited London for his father’s operation which couldn’t be done in India. They have to go there even it was 1939, everyone knows that war maybe starts any time. Jatin had been left behind in Calcutta. In West Hemisphere, a family lives called Prince. They were not English relatives as Tridib said but “they were very, very old friends of Tridib’s family” (14). Tridib’s family stays with the Prince family.

Tridib went to England on a year research grant. He went there to collect material from the Indian Office Library. The library has a very large collection of documents related to the administration of India from 1600 to 1947. The library contains “all the old colonial records were kept, for a Ph. D. thesis on the textile trade between India and England in the nineteenth century” (15).

One day the grandmother lying on her bed argues with the narrator that why Ila lives in London. She doesn’t have the right to live there. It belongs to those people who took a long time to build that country. She said:

“...hundreds of years, years and years of war and bloodshed, everyone who lives there has earned his right to be there with blood: with their brother’s blood and their father’s blood and their son’s blood. They know they’re a nation because they’ve drawn their borders with blood”.(85)

All their churches are marked with memorials to men who died in the war, not only of that particular country but all around the world. Their religion is a war through which they make a country. “Once that happens people forget they were born this or that, Muslim or Hindu, Bengali or Punjabi: they become a family born of the same pool of blood”. (86) Narrator’s heart is filled with love for grandmother for her beautiful thought about multiculturalism.

Tha’mma reveals the secret of “why Ila lives there?”(86) She is gone there only for sake of money she is very greedy. The narrator feels surprise that Ila’s family is very rich and she is the only grandchild of the family. Thamma further added, “If she stayed here she would have more money than she could count in a lifetime”.(87) She lives in a small room in London which is shared by five other students. She has to do everything that dozens of servants would do for her here. Grandma concluded, “She is greedy little slut...why does she live there if it’s not for money and comforts”. (87)

During summer vacation Ila visited Calcutta. Ila reached Calcutta. She wants to go to a party at the nightclub. She wants to go to The Grand Hotel which has a nightclub. Robi said “what we are going to do in nightclub?” (90)Ila replied “we can drink a few beers...and watch the cabaret...” (90) Robi, Ila, and the narrator went to the Night club.

In the Night club, Ila wants to dance with Robi. He refuses to dance in a place like this. Ila wants to know the reason behind it. He replied, “Because I won’t let you”. (95) She kicked her chair back and rose her feed. The narrator tries to tug her skirt. He politely requested Ila to sit down and go home. But she pushed him aside. She decides to dance with a thin businessman who was sitting next to them. She walks away and gracefully talks to him. The businessman smiles, with a leering greedy suspicion. Suddenly he stepped out to hold her hand. Robi reached there and caught hold of the neck of Ila’s blouse and wrenched her away from the businessman. “Then he opened the palm

of his hand and planted it squarely in the middle of the man's chest". (96) All of a sudden there was complete silence. Robi said, "Don't touch me. We'll leave right now". (97) Then they came out of the club. Ila couldn't utter a single word. Ila shouts at Robi for his ill behavior in the club. Robi said, "Listen, Ila ... shaking his head. You shouldn't have done what you did. You ought to know that; girls don't behave like this here". (97) Ila spat at him "what do you mean 'girls'?" (97) Robi replied no she won't "Girls don't behave like that here" (97) Robi cleared her that she can do what she like to do in England. But here "there are certain things you cannot do. That's our culture; that's how we live". (97) She pushed them and waved at a taxi. She rolled down the window and shouted "I have chosen to live in London... It is only because I want to be free". (98) Free of you and free of your bloody culture and free of all of you.

The narrator told the above story to the grandmother to show that Ila lived in London only because she wanted to be free. Grandmother disagreed and replied it is not freedom she wants to be left alone to do what she pleases. The grandmother was very upset she wants to know why the narrator always defends her does she means for him. Grandmother shouted with anger: "Why don't you answer me? Tell me what does that English whore mean to you?" (100) Narrator hesitates to confess that he loves Ila from the depth of his heart but the dilemma is that she is his cousin.

Ghosh portrays Indian culture with the role of a housewife who showers great care and attention to his husband. The narrator's description of his mother waits for her husband, brings the dress for him, all these things touched his heart. According to Coomaraswamy, "A single generation of English education suffices to break the threads of tradition and to create a nondescript supercritical being deprived of all roots".

The second section is "Coming Home". In this section, the narrator was again in nostalgia. Partition of 1947 created a new country East Pakistan and Dhaka became its capital. The native land of grandmother suddenly became a foreign country. Even the grandmother didn't understand how and when it happened.

Grandmother met a widow relative. Her late husband had gone back to Dhaka a few years ago. He went to persuade his father to leave East Pakistan and move to India. They thought that they might even make a little money by selling the house if their father could be ready to move to Calcutta. He went there and found that the whole house was occupied by Muslim Refugee from India. Her husband tried hard to reclaim the house but no Pakistani Court help him to evict those refugees. A family living there was locked after him. Grandmother gasped in shock. She felt sad for her uncle Jethamoshai. "Poor old man ... imagine what it must be like to die in another country, abandoned and alone in ... old age". (149) Jethamoshai still alive it gives satisfaction. The relative showed a postcard written by Jethamoshai last month. Grandmother stared at it and mumble to herself "... 1/31 Jindabhar lane - it's still the same". (150)

The second section concludes with the narrator's memory of the 1964 riots. The sacred relic known as the Mu-I-Mubarak which is believed to be a hair of the prophet Mohammad was purchased by a Kashmiri Merchant called Khwaja Nur-ud-din in Bijapur near Hyderabad. In 1699 this relic is shifted to the valley of Kashmir at the picturesque Hazratbal Mosque near Srinagar.

"This mosque became a great center of pilgrimage ... Kashmiri of every kind, Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs and Buddhists would flock to Hazratbal on those occasions when the relic was displayed to the public". (247-248)

On 27th December 1963, the relic was disappeared from its place. Thousands of people took out black flag demonstrations from Srinagar to Hazratbal Mosque. The demonstration is equally participated by Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs, and Buddhists. Riots took place. The riots were not with Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs, and Buddhists but with the Government and police. The government blamed these attacks as anti-national.

Khulna a small town of Pakistan demonstrating a march against the theft of the relic and it suddenly turned violent. The mob burnt some shops and a few people were killed. Slowly tension was running high between India, East Pakistan, and Pakistan.

Thamma was in her ancestor's house when riots broke out. Mayadebi's driver informed them that they have to leave the place as early as possible. They left the house. Mayadebi's car is followed by Khalid on his rickshaw on the pretext of taking him to the court where he had once practiced. On their way their official Mercedes was accosted by a mob; failing to stop the car the irate mob attacked the rickshaw behind. The hapless sight of Ukilbabu and Khalil being engulfed by people brought May out of the car, running towards the crowd. Thamma warned her that this act may be killing everyone. Tridib shouted her name but she rushed towards the rickshaw. Tridib runs after her. He caught May and pushed her behind. The mob had surrounded the rickshaw. They had pulled the old man. Tridib ran into the mob. The mob dragged him in. The mob began to scatter. May run towers them. She saw three bodies. "They were all dead. They would cut Khalid's stomach open. The old man's head had been hacked off. And they'd cut Tridib's throat, from ear to ear". (276) the riots and partition are some of the worst and dreadful experiences for the

people. It compels them to leave their native land and settle abroad. They however maintain their cultural and civilizing identity.

Ghosh said: “Every word I write about those events of 1964 is the product of a struggle with silence. It is a struggle I am destined to lose - have already lost - for even after all these years, I do not know where within me, in which corner of my world, this silence lies”.(218) Ultimately, Ghosh renames these boundaries as ‘the shadow lines’. These lines do not, or cannot demarcate or divide clearly. It means nothing to the common people. The characters cross their social, cultural, and national boundaries which have allowed them to witness multi-culturally and diversity.

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