



The Politics of Partition as reflected in the Novel “The Shadow Lines” by Amitav Ghosh: An Analytical Study

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Abstract:

The Partition of India is considered as the most lethal event in humankind's history in India and the world. There is no doubt that the partition remains a memorable occurrence due to its historical importance in Indian subcontinent. Amitav Ghosh is one of the eminent and celebrated novelists of Indian English literature. He deals with this influential phenomenon of the political history of the subcontinent through his novels. *The Shadow Lines* by Amitav Ghosh takes up the theme of partition and regenerates the history of the subcontinent from the memory fragments of an anonymous middle-class Bengali narrator who introduces himself as the author of the novel. The novel exhibits the story of two families inhabited in Dhaka, Calcutta, and 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. The novelist tries to sketch out that politics very crucial cause for the creation of border which is created by men against men. Partition was politically motivated which caused lots of disturbances to the religious and cultural harmony among the people. Through this article attempt has been made to discuss the politics of partition in particular and other relevant issues in general as reflected in the novel *The Shadow Lines* by Amitav Ghosh.

Key Words: *Amitav Ghosh, Politics, Partition, Violence, Political Freedom, Nation.*

INTRODUCTION:

Amitav Ghosh occupies a very distinct place in the domain of Indian English Literature with his influential novels that deal with the most influential political phenomena of Indian Sub continent during the post colonial period that is the partition. The *Shadow Lines* published in 1988 is his second novel which is a

historical narrative that focuses mainly the geo-political boundaries and national borders that separate people. It is a highly innovative, complex and celebrated novel of by him. Through this novel he tries to expose the very nuances of contemporary political issues of post colonial India occurred because of the implementation of the “Two Nation Theory”, the byproduct of the imperialism. The very word “country”, both in Geography and Political Science has certain definitions but it bears different connotations to man. Even a man’s entity as well as identity is inextricably blended with his/her country or to the native land. Ghosh here efficiently tries to complicate issue of identity, more particularly national identity by impinging strains of diaspora as well as partition. We can see that it is a political novel that focuses mostly on nationalism, the meaninglessness of partition and the 1964 communal riots which occurred in Calcutta, Dhaka and Khulna. Throughout this novel, he tries to draw the attention to the futility of political freedom.

This particular novel can be divided into two parts. The first part is “Going Away’ and second one is “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. 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.” 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". The novel reaches its climax when Tha'mma and Mayadebi are returning from their ancestral home with Jethamoshoi 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 Jethamoshai 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. 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.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY:

The objective of the study is to focus on the perspective of Amitav Ghosh as depicted in his second novel *The Shadow Lines* on the hollowness of partition which is the most influential political phenomena of Indian Sub continent during the post colonial period. Through this novel he tries to draw the attention to the futility of political freedom and it is true that this novel can be discussed from the political perspective.

MATERIALS AND METHOD:

Research methodology is the most important aspect of research work and is a way to systematically solve research problems. It facilitates the research work and provides reliability and validity to it. The study will be based on both primary and secondary data sources. Primary data will be collected from the novel under study. Secondary data will be obtained from various other published sources like news paper articles, published memorial lectures, scholarly journal articles, related websites etc. It will be descriptive as well as analytical in nature.

DISCUSSION:

This particular novel can be discussed from various perspectives and many critics throughout the ages after the publication of the novel in 1988 have done this. There is no doubt that Amitav Ghosh is one of the celebrated authors from India who writes in English. He was born in Kolkata on 11 July, 1956. He has received appreciations for *The Shadow Lines* (1988). His other famous novels are *An Antique Land* (1992), *The Glass Palace* (2001) and *The Hungry Tide* (2005). His most recent book is *Rivers of Smoke* (2011). Ghosh is a master in art of characterization who brings in characters from all corners of the world and juxtaposes them remarkably well. *The Shadow Lines* is a fascinating political novel and critics are of the

opinion that it is also a very challenging novel to analyze. He portrays each character of this novel brilliantly and shows how war and other political incidents have changed their lives. He tries to depict the political turmoil of that period through his narrator. The novel depicts the story of three generations of the narrator's family and its action is spread over Dhaka, Calcutta and London. The novel was written against the backdrop of the Second World War, the partition of India, and communal strife in East Bengal and Kolkata during 1964.

As stated above, the novel *Shadow Lines* deals with the politics of partition and this is apparent from description of the situation, incidents and facts in the novel. Dr. Sapna Sharma from Amity School of Liberal Arts very aptly discusses about the core concept of the novel in one of her writing that the theme of partition in the novel *The Shadow Lines* can be easily demonstrated by the characters, situations, incidents, and facts etc. In this novel, there is continuation of the trauma of partition through three generations. Narrator's biggest influence, the grandmother, Tha'mma epitomizes the ideals of the Nationalist Movement and values of India's national identity. Her attitude towards nationalism is worth telling. Through Tha'mma Partition can be seen because she is a migrant from Dhaka and stays in India. As her nationality, an Indian but her place of birth in East Pakistan, it causes her to question her national identity and how it formed. This theme of Partition and Nationalism certainly arises the theme of Post Colonialism as well i.e, concept of 'Home' and also 'Imagined communities'. Tridib, The protagonist is a middle class boy who grows up in a middle class family; he is the narrator's uncle He died because of an attack in Dhaka, at the time of coming back to India with his family. That attack is the result of Partition, an after-effect of it. It shows the violence through riots and attacking nature, bombing etc. Tridib has surrendered his life to God, for the sake of his family members. The story is told by a nameless narrator in recollection. It's "a non linear tale told as if putting together the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle in the memory of the narrator". The novel "it traverses through the almost seventy years through the memories of people, which the narrator recollects and narrates, giving their viewpoint along with his own." This has the greatest touch of Partition theme "because Partition means Division, Separation, Things are not chronological, unorganized, messed up." (Banerjee) Though the novel is based largely in Kolkata, Dhaka & London, it seems to echo the sentiments of whole South-east Asia, with coherent overtones of Independence & the pangs of Partition. It's Concept of Nationalism with wound not only, theme of Partition. In fact, all the other characters possesses the characteristics of Nationalism but "not the least, very one of a kind is the Tha'mma's relative Jethamosai, The old man in Dhaka, he also shows the Nationalism so fervently. How till the end he fights for his place in anyway. Isn't it the concept of Nationalism with wound of Partition?" (Soukaï) She also opines that it is an undeniable fact that the partition of the India was the most distressing experience in our recent history. The brutality it unleashed by the ruffian actions of some people ,the retribution that the ordinary common people wreaked on each other, destroyed our social sense, changed our political judgments and destroyed our understanding of morality. Change of nationality is not something that can be obtained in some seamless form. The undercurrents keep flowing from one side to the other side. Violence does not only involves drawing of new lines on a map or unfurling of new national flags but also comprises the tearing apart of individuals, families, homes, villages and linguistic, cultural communities that would once have been called

nationalities.. These shadow lines are hated by everybody. But to reverse it “we need to erase the binary division between East and West, Tradition and Modernity, Us and Them, Fracturing the rigidity and the perverted value attached to borders perhaps.” (Banerjee) *The Shadow Lines* is the novel that deals wholly with the effects of the Partition, mainly with Partition on the Bengal border.

While depicting the most influential political issues of Indian Subcontinent of that period Ghosh has not mentioned any name of the political figures of that time. He draws his characters from the common human being. Still his novel has the universal appeal because of the commonness of the theme and characters fabricated by him through his imagination. He very aptly focuses that the Indian subcontinent was divided into two sovereign nations on the basis of two-nation theory. It was the most political and Machiavellian trickery played by the British imperialistic rulers. As this event was politically motivated, it caused religious and cultural disturbances among the Indians. Throughout the whole novel he tries to reflect that fact with the discussion of the other relevant issues. The portrayal of the characters and description of the incidents reminds the readers the cultural chaos and disharmony perpetrated by the divisive politics during the time of Partition. Besides the political sphere he tries to evaluate the impact of the tragedy of Partition on man's psychology – emotion, fear, and tension. He very tactfully criticizes the political scenario of that time which was responsible for the partition of India on the basis of ‘two nation theory’. Through his characters in the novel Ghosh tries to reflect people's reaction towards the nature of political situation and the role of politics in their lives, forcing them to accept the unacceptable. It is clearly noticeable that the presentation of broad and extensive socio-political situations is the essence of the novel's narrative design.

CONCLUSION:

In conclusion it can be mentioned that through this celebrated novel Amitav Ghosh very perfectly discusses the politics of partition with the relevant aspects of the geographical boundaries and national borders that separate people. He challenges the idea of partition. 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 emphasis the theme of partition. Partition talks about division of a nation or territory into two or more nations or territories. In political context, partition is a change of political borders cutting through at least one territory, considered a homeland by some community. Partition of India has been one of those turning points in the history of the subcontinent which has not ended yet. He has portrayed partition of India in a vivid manner. Through this novel he deals in the epic themes of travel and diaspora, history and memory, political struggle and communal violence, love and loss. Critics are of the opinion that *The Shadow Lines* has gained enormous significance in postcolonial studies as it touches upon some of the major issues in the fields of boundaries, national identities, and borders. He tries to attract the attention to the socio – political history of the period which has been missed by most of the historians.

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