

THE THEME OF PARTITION AND NATIONAL IDENTITY IN AMITAV GHOSH'S *THE SHADOW LINES*

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to describe partition and nationalism by studying Amitav Ghosh's novel *The Shadow Lines*. Amitav Ghosh is one of the most remarkable writers of the postmodernism era. *The Shadow Lines* separation/partition is never clear-cut, and separation turns out to be an extension, a continuation, something indivisible. Through lines that separate and connect, the novelist brings together family and nation, personal life and communal violence, memory and reality, India and England, India and Bangladesh. *The Shadow Lines* is told in a non-linear fashion, a ploy that discloses the novelist's attitude toward linearity uncritically observed. In this way it can also be read as a family journey, not only in search of the home lost, but also to the home found.

Keywords: partition, family, nationalism, borders and home.

Partition of the Indian subcontinent was the most traumatic experience in our recent history. The event has been the focal point in many Indian novels. Many writers like Bapsi Sidhwa, Attai Hosain and Amitav Ghosh have dealt with the partition novel. Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice-Candy-Man* presents the attitude of the Parsis towards partition which relentlessly divided friends, families, lovers and neighbors. Attai Hosain's *Sunlight On a Broken Column* reveals the trauma of partition through the protagonist Lalita's memories and insights. Both the novels depict the communal response to the horror of violence. Similar patterns of violence are depicted in Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines*.

Amitav Ghosh is one of the most well-known names in contemporary Indian Literature in English. He was born in Calcutta in 1956. He was in various places like Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Iran and India. He did his graduation from the University of Delhi and got his Ph.D. degree in 1982. At present he lives in New York. He has also written essays, political commentaries, book-reviews, and translations from Bengali and Literary anthropologies. Some of his novels are *The Circle of Reason* (1986) *The Shadow Lines* (1988), *Count Down* (1999), *The Glass Palace* (2000), *The Iman and The Indian* (2002).

The Shadow Lines tells the story of the three generations of the narrator's family which was spread over Dhaka, Calcutta, and London. The novel lines up characters from different nationalities, religions and cultures in a close-knit palpable fictive world. The novel follows a nameless narrator who works to discover the reason for his cousin Tridib's death by interesting and re-imagining the past. The past of these Characters are separated geographically.

The Shadow Lines posits that maps create borderlines that define and enforce geographical and ideological limits on humanity. The novel addresses the national issues in the contact of India, but these issues stretch beyond India. Ghosh demonstrates how national identity is created in an international context that demands that we confirm to our nationality. India, Pakistan and Bangladesh are new found nationalities that were once united. Ghosh dramatically demonstrates how soon people are separated by the creation of borderline.

It is a complex novel intervening memory and contemporary life. It converges on the life of a family. Ghosh depicts the urban middle class in India to whom education and professional jobs are important. Living and partly living they drift from one day to another and so for a whole lifetime. The reward, if one is lucky may be one's own house. The environment of school and office encourage the cultivation of hard work to the norms of society. But when misfortune strikes their lives in an unforeseen manner, they are left baffled. If it is death or disease they may try to comprehend it. But when violence erupts like a volcano it cracks the mirror of life .

The Grandmother is the central character in the novel *The Shadow Lines*. Dhaka was the Grandmother's homeland before partition and Dhaka was a different city before partition. Her house was quiet large and was crowded with the family members who were living and eating together. Due to the partition she crossed over to India at her sixties. All the time she

lived in Calcutta she remembers with great clarity every minute detail about Dhaka. Most of the Grandmothers vision is nostalgic. There is no rancor about partition and Muslim neighbours occupying her ancestral home. The communal riots in 1964, in both India and Pakistan lead to the untimely death of Tridib, by an impassioned mob in old Dhaka. The death of Tridib changed her perception. She talks now of fighting for freedom. “We have to kill them before they kill us; we have to wipe them out” (237).

In remarking about Indian Partition, Gayendra Pandey describes Ghosh’s novel:

[W]hat is involved here is more than the drawing of new lines on a map, the unfurling of new national flags and the installation of new national governments. What we are dealing with families, homes, villages and linguistics have been called nation abilities; and the gradual realization that – this tearing apart was permanent and that is necessitated new borders, communities, identities and histories. (43)

The Shadow Lines highlights the suffering and destruction caused by Partition than the political independence of the new nation. Ghosh addresses the issues of nationality. He further describes how we feel nationalized and describes the effects of our allegiances to nationality. The novel allegorizes map making as the natural extension of Partition which leads to the conceptualization of individual identity.

Amitav Ghosh explores the mysterious pull between Thidib and May and the intimacy between the two families, when the countries were pitted against each other. He questions the validity of geographical boundaries and celebrates the union of aliens pulled together by self-propelling empathy and attachment.

Throughout the novel *The Shadow Lines* there are no words to describe India .According to the narrator, India is a polyphone of echoes and identities.it is converging and diverging, tearing and mending the boundaries of memory and imagination. Indias’s distinctive identity is mosaic of otherness, memory and history .Instances of national allegory in *The Shadow Lines* demonstrate how Indian identity is shaped by the 1971 partitions and the ensuing creation of borderlines. Characters like the grandmother and Jethamoshai are created with the understanding of national spaces .These are spaces which they are unable to transgress. But for their grandchildren, the power of the borderlines continuous to provide a shaping

influence, which for most of the characters is an accepted part of life. In this sense, the novel balances discourses of personal identity struggle with national and political issues exploring both the creation of nation, nationality while also probing national identity constructions.

Ghosh's works succeeds in exploring the creation of identity by investigating the shadowy black line on the map, a line that conceptualizes where one branch of humanity begins and another ends. The novel goes beyond mere presenting the problem by posing challenges to this phenomena, namely in the imaginative power to deconstruct these shaping influences and transgress them.

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