

CEASELESS CULTURAL ERASING AND REWRITING IN AMITAV GHOSH'S *THE SHADOW LINES*

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Abstract

This article throws light on the Ethno-linguistic and cultural drift created by the fiery resurgence of national ideologies and the politics of the post-colonial era portrayed by the contemporary Indian novelist Amitav Ghosh in his novel *The Shadow Lines*. Interwoven against the backdrop of perilous days undergone during the partition of Bengal, Amitav Ghosh, in this particular novel, focuses on an attempt to give voice to the cultural erasing and rewriting of the human movements across time and space. This work is an amalgamation of variegated cultures; traditions and languages which play a vital role. Constant cultural harassment through the presence of the various characters forms the background of this novel. The geographical act of violence leaves a scar on the lives of its witnesses keep readers spellbound. The cultural dilemma further adds to the crisis leading the characters' quest for identity. Every bit of this novel connects the individual character to a certain culture he or she belongs to. Caught between two cultures, how the characters struggle to survive, forms the nucleus of the present research article.

Key words: Ethno linguistics, Cultural drift, Cultural dilemma, National ideology and Postcolonial era.

“It is by worrying about adversity that people survive;
Placidity brings catastrophe”

Introduction:

An Indian writer, essayist, journalist, anthropologist, best known for his English language historical fiction Amitav Ghosh has grown up in India, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. Dark thoughts stalked the corridors of his mind, paving way to such themes of travel, migration and Diaspora, history and memory, political struggle and communal violence, love and loss. He is a gem, gifted and blessed author of Indian writing in English. He is the trademark of the genius, he cast his hope from the end of his writing ability and waited for the readers to have a glance of it. He was born with a silver spoon. In the wilderness of his mind he believed there were many endangered ideas. He encased all the amenities and facilities at his disposal in manufacturing his literary career. A recipient of several awards, honors and recognition, his resolve put his walking boots on and soldiered to finish line despite the hurdles. The twinkle in his eyes merged with the stars in the heaven and lit up his small literary world. Exceptional and endowed in the field of fiction, non-fiction, travelogue, history, anthropology and journalism, has authored several books, most

of them turned out to be best sellers. His novels are postulated with pregnant pauses, personal nonconformist and extraordinarily contrived themes. Experience chipped away at the corner of his writings and gave them a well rounded outlook. He clothed his ideas to ensure their survival in an atmosphere of icy indifference. He fashioned his themes on the cries and aspects of subaltern, pre-colonialism, colonialism, post colonialism, modern and post modernism.

Ethos in *The Shadow Lines*:

“Calculation never made a hero but it did not stop him from proclaiming himself as one” (spicy side of speeches, p.no. 9, Anil purohit)

Ghosh’s novels are marked with journeys, visits and human movements across time and space. An attempt to give voice to the stony silences and exhume the unclaimed corpses is the catacombs of Amitav Ghosh’s ‘unhistorical historiography’. Homogeneous amalgamation of / blend of variegated cultures, tradition and languages played a vital role to exploring the ethos and cultural dimensions up to a great level. Ghosh not only presents the reader with a political vision that questions the ethno- linguistic and cultural divides created by a fiery resurgence of nationalist ideologies but also interweaves that vision with the human story he delineates in this novel. Apart from this, he has combined history, story and narrative with into the strings of shadows. He charted out very clearly by affirming the identities of ordinary people and their cultural anchors.

The author has been engaging their imagination in reliving the past through a number of narratives, but the best narrative remains the history itself. In this novel, Ghosh has found his distinctive voice-polished and profound. Both the continuity and dissimilarity among the stages of India’s history stem, not so much from a simple reexamination of “cultural heritage” but from its endless erasing and re-writing. The ability of Ghosh’s texts to draw on various cultural traditions, along with his own diasporic subjectivity as Indian of Burmese origin who spent time as a child in Bangladesh, Iran and Sri Lanka, has done his writings in Egypt, corresponds well with the subjects of emigration, exile and cultural displacement addressed in his work. Unfulfilled aspiration and careful demands have become the recurrent theme of Ghosh’s. Amitav Ghosh does not restrict himself from describing the perilous days undergone during the partition of Bengal. He has interwoven and scrutinized the impacts of colonialism on the culture and society of two main neighboring cities, namely Calcutta and Dhaka.

This novel throws light on the suppression faced by the people in the hands of oppressors, the riots, cultural deviations, migration and its consequences, political turbulence, religious clashes, identity crisis, lack of belongingness. The story is narrated by the unnamed narrator. The narrator’s grandmother, Thamma is an important character in the novel. She is a bold middle class- Indian woman. In Dhaka, she was growing like a honey comb. Her home was inhibited by so many branches of the family that they had become confused about their relationships. A radically new situation has emerged in Post Independence culture in India.

Cultural Drift in *The Shadow Lines*:

The story branches out to discuss other characters and their relationships along with the social changes happening in India. The story moves forward with elaborating on the cross-cultural relationship between tridib may price, the narrator, Nick and Ilay his desire for her, but she rejects it. The cultural trauma has been resolved history once again began anew. This novel can also be marked as a story of such demarcation which is vainness because he is in the view that demarcation separates man from man, nation from nation. What the question rises in the mind of

the readers is the real meaning of the political liberty and borders which almost seem both institution and division. The title is a good example for showing us the symbolist and the realist elements. And further deals with the insecurities in the survival of human race. The narrator's researches are made by his indigenous effort to transform his private story into public history. The novel seems reverberating the feelings of whole south-east Asia with coherent suggestion of independence and pangs of division. It is all about personal relationship. Three generations were covered in the novel. The story starts about thirteen years before the birth of the narrator and ends on the night preceding his departure from London back to delhi.

The mesh of life in *The Shadow Lines* which takes in lot of countries, religions, is a collection of recollections, the narrators own and others, dusty photographs, staining newspaper trimming but cared for above all by thought while nations, religions, war, violence and division separate people, reminiscence does not. Thoughts generate a world that cannot be divided any more than nations break and drift away when ecological boundaries are randomly recreated. A look at the title- 'Going Away' and 'Coming Away' reveals about the spatial quality of the vector field, cultural and spatial travels that make up this novel. The story traces the narrator's journey across vast and varied urban and cultural landscapes. His recollection regarding three generation of his relatives also consist of vast expanses of landscapes tranversed in acts of migrations. While speaking of London in this novel, the narrator says, "I wanted to know England not as I saw her, but in her finest hour- every place chooses its own and to me it did not seem as accident that England has chosen hers in war" (57) one of the many appealing facets of *The Shadow Lines* is the way it looks at the accident that descended on the pages of history; the creation of two nations on the basis of incompatibility of two religious groups and their mutual hatred. Boundaries were created and people were forced to alter their lives and selves to accommodate them to the conceptual nations that the powerful persons have created.

Hindus and Muslims, unlike the white and black people, have no phenotypical inherent traits to tell them from each other. They shared land, culture and more than a thousand years of history. They had lived together, happily or unhappily, peacefully or struggling for survival, based on the same resource.

Conclusion

The Shadow Lines shows violence and cultural harassment through their presence in the background and its pervading the atmosphere, also through its turning into silence, through its conversion, and finally, through the narration of the one graphical act of violence that left a permanent scar on the lives of its witnesses (Robi, Mary and Thamme) with the human story he delineates in this novel. Apart from this, he has combined history, story and narrative into strings of shadows. He charted out very clearly by affirming the identities of ordinary people and their cultural anchors. The author has been engaging their imagination in reliving the past through a number of narratives, but the best narrative remains the history itself. In this novel, Ghosh has found his distinctive voice-polished and profound. Both the continuity and dissimilarity among the stages of India's history stem, not so much from a simple reexamination of "cultural heritage" but from its endless erasing and re-writing. The ability of Ghosh's texts draws on various cultural traditions, along with his own diasporic subjectivity as an Indian ofBurmese.

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