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## Freedom In Amitav Ghosh's 'The Shadow Lines'

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### Abstract

Amitav Ghosh is one of the most celebrated Indian writers best known for his work in English Fiction. Historical Fiction is his main genre. Freedom from political colonialism came as an innovative blow to the Indian authors who were now excited to portray their indigenous beliefs and ethos with a fresh angle. Post-colonial Indian English authors like Salman Rushdie, Vikram Seth and Amitav Ghosh etc. expressing with great vividness enthusiasm and a level of self-reliance have liberated Indian English Literature from the colonial nexus: These conscious honest writers have touched Historical Nationalist issues such as diaspora, refugees, colonial hegemony; cultural and socioeconomic panoramas. Consequently they through such depiction touched the heart of real as well as true Indians. The present paper aims to bring out as how Amitav Ghosh portrayal of partition of India in 1947, the communal riots in Bangladesh and India, characters' quest for self-identity and of-course of Nationality have awakened the numb souls of Indians.

**Key words:** - celebrated, genre, colonialism, ethos, hegemony etc.

### Introduction

"The Shadow Lines" of Amitav Ghosh is undoubtedly a complex, highly innovative and realistic novel. Amitav Ghosh has drawn a very real picture as how the patriots of a nation breaks the heart of a patriot. These patriots leave to live and start existing with only such kind of partition The theme of partition in the novel. The Shadow Lines can be easily demonstrated by the characters, situations, incidents facts etc. The Novel presents the trauma of partition/partition riots. The novel traces nearly half century of interlocking relations among three generations of two families, one Indian and one British, giving perhaps the definitive fictional demonstration of Benedict Anderson's dictum that nations are "imagined Communities." Identity crisis both theoretically and practically is a very debatable issue. An individual's identity is to as large extent formed by his/her social location which include his/her race, gender, class etc. Search for self identity has been applied/noticed in the national context in Ghosh's novel "The shadow Lines". The title of the novel portrays conflict between illusion and reality. In the novel 'shadow' stands for illusion and 'Lines' stands reality. The hollowness of the border line puts a question mark to the geographic boundary line between counties/nations and of-course its identity. To him 'a place does not merely exist..... It has to be inverted in one's imaginations.' Same is very beautifully dug out by the writer through character of Tridib whose mind strove to a place where there was no border between oneself and one's reflection in the mirror itself.

The novel "Shadow Lines" picturizes that cultural formations are the sites within which one's nationality or individual identity may be constructed. The narrator, Tridid and the grandmother – despite their differences in age, location, and perception share an innat. Indian ness, which Ila, the Indian located in the west can not envisage, and perhaps because of this she can not be a part of. Here what Benedict Anderson states, "The nation is an imagined political community. It is imagined because members of

even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members meet them or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their co communion. This makes it possible for emotional affinities to transcend some disruptive dissonances, thereby making space for a sense of nation ness and nationalism.”

The narrator’s grandmother is one such character to whom the nation is a clear marker of identity. She is real devotee of the nation. After arriving in Dhaka, the grandmother tries to persuade her old uncle to move to India, where she thinks he belongs. The old man refuses to go and state:

I don’t believe in this India-Shindia. It’s all very well, you’re going away now, but suppose when you get there they decide to draw another line somewhere? What will you do then? Where will you move to? No one will have you anywhere. As for me, I was born here, and I will die here.

The grandmother who lives in the frozen past the reality of nationhood is largely stable in her case. She tells her son:

It doesn’t matter whether we recognize each other or not. We are the same flesh the same blood the same bone and now at last after all these years, perhaps will be able to make amends for all that bitterness and hatred.

She is really sensitive of the bonds of blood and nationhood. It is remarkable to note that the terrorists fascinated her and she wanted to act like them for her freedom. In response to narrator’s question, if given a chance would she have killed the English magistrate, she says:

I would have been frightened [...]. But I would have prayed for strength, and God willing, yes, I would have killed him. It was for our freedom: I would have done anything to be free.

Her intense desire for freedom indirectly is her quest for attaining nationhood. She is mentally prepared to pay even a heavy price for it. But Tha’mma thinks that Ila does not consider the real spirit of England and so does not deserve to live there.

“Everyone who lives there has earned his might to be there with blood’ with their brother’s blood and their father’s blood and their sons blood. They know they’re a nation because they’ve drawn their borders with blood.”

The grandmother’s militant nationalism is visible when she narrates the creed of British and co-relates it to the Indian context. Mark the lines: “War is their religion. That’s what it takes to 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. That is what you have to achieve of India, don’t you see?”

Love for nations resides in the soul of narrator’s grandmother. A very incident in which for donating in war fund of 1965, she gives away her cherished necklace, the first immemorable gift presented to her by her husband after marriage. She very beautifully justifies her dead to her grandson-

“I gave it away [...] I gave it to the fund for the war. I had to, don’t you see? For yours sake; for your freedom. We have to kill them before they kill us, we have to wipe them out. And she continues, ‘this is the only chance [...]. The only one. We’re fighting them properly at last, with tanks and guns and bombs.”

Moreover Thamma's Nationalism find expression when at the time of planning to fly to Dhaka in 1964, she asks her son if, "she would be able to see the border between India and East Pakistan from the plane." Her son laughs at her and asks if she thought that "the border was a long blank line with green on one side and scarlet on the other, like it was in a school atlas." The grandmother says that at least, there must be some trenches. When she hears that she might see green fields, she said:

But if there aren't any trenches or anything, how are people to know? I mean, where's the difference then? And if there's no difference both sides will be the same; it'll be just like it used to be before, when we used to catch a train in Dhaka and get off in Calcutta the next day without anybody stopping us. What was it all for then-partition and all the killing and everything –if there isn't something in between?

Other characters in the novel have different views. Grandmother thinks that Illa is wrong in thinking that she is free in England. To narrator, Illa does not use her imagination to find out the real meaning of freedom. Tridib believes in a world of idealism and finds pleasure in neutral places. He is caught up with the world of story, the world of creative illusion. Illa is a puzzling character. She tries to get freedom from Indianness. She tries her best to be accepted by the people of England but her experiences show that she will never be completely accepted by them. In her efforts to establish her roots in the west, she marries Nick, an Englishman who becomes disloyal to her. She finds Indian culture too conservative. But in India, marriages are considered stable. Illa rejects everything Indian but she finds herself clinging to her uncle Robi and the narrator the members of her family from India who have shared a common loss the death of Tridib. Freedom is a 'mirage'. The different sections of the novel show that freedom for some people is achieved at the cost of others and thus the very notions of freedom are both vague and shadowy. The borders or the shadow lines cannot be perceived from the window of a plane.

To sum up, every character in the novel has his or her stories, memories and own universe, partly based on illusion and partly on reality. The shadow lines between people and between the countries they inhabit and call their own, too, merge and become one. The shadow lines that mark borders that make a division of people into native and foreign and insiders and outsiders reveal the physical as well as psychic reality, more powerful and more pungent. When characters break these borders, they become the part of entire horizon. So these borders must be broken because these are created artificially. Reality is something else which must be welcomed and applauded.

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