

Portrayal of Nationalism in Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines*

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Abstract

Nationalism is drawing in admittedly both undesirable and constructive literary reflections. The idea of nationalism has the discernible consequence that is supplemented powerfully by the citizens. It could be understood as one's love for the country. Nationalism can also be acknowledged with patriotism. Both signify the love for one's nation. Nationalism is denoted in terms of Individualistic, collective, political or cultural likeability. Ghosh, the renowned Indian writer applying his reflection particularly in the Indian context recognizes the damaging effects around the cognitive content of nation and nationalism. The linking of culture, religion, gender discrimination and other social set up like caste, with nationalism and its poisonous effects on individual and society are some philosophical and realistic themes presented in some of his writings. Ghosh's steadfast view on freedom indulges in culture within the strata of nation at the same time draws out his disenchantment for violence.

Keywords: Ghosh, *The Shadow Lines*, nation, nationalism, humanity, culture

Introduction

Amitav Ghosh is a protuberant and promising Indian author whose works transfigured and transmuted the contemplations of the country and in some sense of the Universe. He is a celebrated Indian writer in English, proving his potential, presenting varied subjects in vivid styles and manners and thus accomplished connecting the common people in India. Ghosh differ in his style and language. His works throw light on the usual socio-political phenomena and conventional thought process of the Indian masses. Subjects and themes in his works are fused to the real life; hence hi is instrumental in mirroring society. Most of his works deal with the customary and grievous issues that threaten and are vulnerable to humanity at the larger context. Nationalism is one of those key issues that Ghosh has given artistic expression in his fictional works.

The fictional works of Ghosh reflect the milieu of nationalism and both the male and the female characters spin around it. The characters are strong enough to manifest constrains and imperfections of society. His works advocate a sense of humanity and explore and empower the ostracized sections and their rights in family and society. Similarly, they profoundly discuss the female characters and the aggressive ideas that portray women as modern and independent.

Amitav Ghosh is a foremost writer of India bringing novelty in content, approach and style. His contribution for designing the styles, refining the thoughts and proliferating Indian literature across the world is enormous. Ghosh explores the internal or individual or concealed emotions of women in the novel, in general, and the protagonist, in particular. He has been able to probe the mental, emotional and psychological conflict of the characters during their mutual encounters on the personal, social and other levels of consciousness.

Universal identity of Ghosh makes him to project ideas based on humanity. Ghosh, though, was born in Calcutta (now Kolkata), his socialization was taken place in various parts of the world. He grew up in places like India, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. He attained his higher education from Oxford and Alexandria. Ghosh has numerous writings in his name. *The Circle of Reason* was the first novel written by Ghosh in 1986. A few novels like *The Shadow Lines* won two prestigious Indian prizes, the Sahitya Akademi Award and the Ananda Puraskar in 1990.

The Shadow Lines, which was written in 1988, has been a great success for Ghosh that not only brought prestigious Sahitya Akademi Award but also introduced Ghosh to the International platform. In *An Antique Land*, *Dancing in Cambodia*, *The Calcutta Chromosome*, *The Glass Palace*, *The Hungry Tide* are few more novels written by Ghosh and is one of the highly read authors across the world. His works have been translated into more than twenty languages including German, English, Spanish, Dutch and some other European languages. Amitav Ghosh published his essays in *The New Yorker*, *The New Republic* and *The New York Times*. Teaching in various Universities of India and the USA, including Delhi University, Columbia, Queens College and Harvard have strengthened his academic profile. He was awarded the Padma Shri in January 2007 and is recipient of many honorary doctorates from universities like Queens College, New York, and the Sorbonne, Paris.

Ghosh and Nationalism

Ghosh discusses nationalism punctiliously and precisely. Nationalism is an idea that is generally attached to the muscular efforts of society. It is falsely believed that nationalism that is aggressive in nature would be found only among men. It has never been generally displayed through women characters in literature, if shown, it remains to be at low level. But the same idea is seen as a trait among male characters. Aggressive nationalism has never just been a character only of male characters, but also among women characters in the writings of Tagore and Ghosh. Female protagonists like Tha'mma and Bimala are the ardent national lovers who like to do anything and to get any extent for the sake of nation in the name of nationalism. Ghosh in his writings insistently express that the nationalism is perilous when a person is dominated by the same.

During Ghosh's time nationalism and the love for one's nation were at its peak. It was prevalent in the nation and across the world. The impact of hegemony of nationalism and nationalistic ideology was widespread and overpowering. The established practice of nationalism affected Ghosh intensely. The prevailing tendency compelled Ghosh to pen down the thoughts and spread out the message of

humanity over any other man made socio-political institutions through novels like *The Shadow Lines* and *Gora*.

The essence of universality is perceptible in one of Ghosh's instrumental novels, *The Shadow Lines*. It throws light upon the deleterious traits of nationalism and reveals the character and others are affected by it. It is a memory novel where the author, who sees world through the eyes of Tridib, narrates. Protagonist depicts life of a family and displacement caused by an ideology, Nationalism. The novel also had been remarkable for its quality of portraying the causes and wicked effects of nationalism.

Ghosh and *The Shadow Lines*

The Shadow Lines is a story that reveals through the memory of a character. It oscillates from present to past and then to the present. It travels through time and places and exhibits the experience of partition and its pain. The nation countersigned the saga of partition in its past. The effects of it had been distressing to the people of India. The novel discourses the relationship between nationalism and its association with sectarian brutality. It is understood that the novel is ensnared within the version of the partition. The events of 1947 are coupled with harrowing psychology of Indians, border issues, sectarian hostility and violence in the nation.

Kaustav Mukherjee in his writing *Chasing Ghosts and Making History: Ghosh, Tagore, and Postcolonial India* (2015) argues the impact of traumatic upshots on the psychology of people. He mentions Cathy Caruth and explains the link between the trauma and wound. Belated incidents in life can have prolonged intense effect on mind. It is believed that a person's trauma is linked with the trauma that of the other person. His argument is:

“during the Calcutta riots of 1964, a man manages to survive a brutal knife attack... as days go by, his mind starts showing a *delayed* response ...These symptoms are the result of a condition that Freud calls *traumatic neurosis*.” (Mukherjee: 2015: 11)

The psychological impact of the events caused by the partition of India devastated many people in the nation as it has reckoned the characters of the novel. In the novel, the nature of psychological trauma is well depicted. Human mind is a complex thing in the world to study; it is equally inquisitive and sensitive. The impact of traumatic incidents on the mind can have long lasting imprint. Sigmund Freud in his book *Beyond the Pleasure Principles*, (Freud: 1989) places before the argument that any unplanned incident in one's life results in traumatic neurosis. The characters in the novel also respond to the situations. But what matters is not just the reaction of the characters but their struggle to survive. Freud argues that it is not the physical damage that has impact on an individual but what matters is the consciousness to survive.

Ghosh had the post-colonial view about the concept of nationalism. Post-colonial writings focus on the opinions of the colonized nations who celebrated their world of experience. It also had connections with the economic and political aspects of the time. The writers in post-colonial writings attain and instil data from a country's past. Gosh had taken the fight for freedom and other consequences like

violence and migration as the subjects for writing literary works. Ghosh indoctrinated the subjects that affect and influence at the local or regional and the international levels. The vivid characters that epitomize different groups and cultures of the country also are unique characters of the novel *The Shadow Lines*. Ghosh is credible, genuine and stands by his stance. Fusion of his opinions with other aspects of the writings like traditional practices, culture, religion, gender, violence is abundantly displayed in the works. As a writer, he enjoys and propagates his freedom of expression and uses the same to express his stance on varied subjects related to the society. He clubs various issues and presents them through his works taking interdisciplinary stance. He collects details from varied sources like history, politics, geology, social institutions that show transcending of the limitations and reaching the new horizon. *The Shadow Lines* projects different kinds of individuals being associated with the borders. It directly confronts the idea of nation and aspects related to it. As the characters and ideas are connected to each other, they expose relationship of individuals with different kinds of identity. The concept of homeland is well depicted in the novel. Misperception among the characters with regard to their identity and belonging are seen as debatable and thoughtful. In the name of homeland a few characters fight and become aggressive. Some characters like Ila remain unreceptive and hate others in order to project the self to associate with homeland. Opinion of a person is ever-changing, hence, the idea of nationalism. It is not permanent as the various factors prompt to get change over a period of time. These ideas alter as they are flexible and prone to varied experience. People's opinion on nation and their idea of nationality may be affected by the present conditions like the mood of people, language, religion and politics. Social set up is restored by these factors. They are rather continuous processes than fixed or finished items. Ghosh's writings generally question the negative aspects of society. The present novel throws light upon the upshots of the 1947 and later incidents. Partition, though has structured a few things, it also has disrupted many people, families and communities. The unpleasant effects of partition are well shown by Ghosh in his work. He presents characters that are either connected or alienated by the idea of nation. The narrator is such a character who unites the others like Tha'mma and Ila who show dissimilar definitions of Homeland and have different identities. They do not just show the relationships with each other, the construction and connections between the various places are witnessed with the help of these characters. Tha'mma, having lived in India, Dhaka and Ila's socialization in London connect people regionally. Dhaka, London, Calcutta are connected indifferent contexts. They have different identities and these claimed identities often are bewildering and colliding. The characters, places and incidents mirror each other in different situations. People on the other side of the border in Dhaka and in Calcutta have similar experiences and identities. The practices and mind-sets do not change in many cases. When there is violence in Dhaka, the same could be seen in India. Tha'mma's resilient view about the border is also interrogated. Her ideas about the borders and mapping those lines mentally are shocked when she realizes the absence of physical line between the countries.

May Price represents another side of humanity and the ethical sense a person has. She is gentle, understanding and caring. She is humane. When she goes to visit Diamond Harbour along with the narrator and Tridib, they find a twisted animal shape on the road. And they realize it is a dog that is being hurt and still alive. Though Tridib does not mind and keeps going, May Price insists him to stop the vehicle or she would open the door of moving car. May reaches to the wounded dog that is being

hit by car; she treats the stray dog with the help of Tridib. She is even considerate and has the presence of mind. A night where the narrator misbehaves with her by trying to remove her clothes forcefully. He was drunk and he falls asleep when he was thrown to the bed. The next day the narrator though was embarrassed to speak to her, she understood the situation by breaking the ice. She made him to feel comfortable and understood the fact that everything that has happened the previous night because the narrator was drunk.

May thinks she is the responsible for the death of Tridib. When they travel by car, a group of people attack them. Their security guard uses the gun to keep the mob away. But unfortunately, a rickshaw consisting the grandmother's uncle who were following them were targeted. Mob went to them. The grandmother perceiving the danger and to save the life of the people in the car insists the driver to start the vehicle. But May Price who gets down from the vehicle blaming Tha'mma for not giving any importance to save her uncle's life that is in danger. As she runs towards them to save, she falls. Tridib who has been following her rather lifting May Price, he runs towards the auto rickshaw to save them. Bu the mob kills three members. After the incident May regrets for the same and blames herself for Tridib's death and her inability to perceive the situation and judge. She says, 85

“I thought I'd killed him. I was safe you see- ... and they wouldn't have touched me, an English memsahib, but he must have known he was going to die.” (Ghosh, *The Shadow Lines*: 277)

Ghosh believes in collection of details and always proves himself being more reliable and presents the minute details as real as they are. At least, he strains in all of his writings being close to the facts and figures. *The Shadow Lines* too is not an exception like his other works. The events have been taken from India's past. History plays a major role wherein he tries to connect the individual and the incidents that have taken place in the country's past. History associates itself with the depiction of the past events with details and its consequences. Ghosh's ability to assemble facts and figures and style of correlating the same with characters is incredible. Though some of the incidents might not have taken place and they are not real, his realistic depiction brings these incidents close to reality. Freedom movement and the other various aspects like partition, social set up, political opinion, physical representation of various countries, and the mood and opinion of the people has remained the same as that of India's past. Ghosh keeps wider cause for freedom and its real consequences the same. But he adds certain events like riots in various places of Calcutta and Dhaka, uprising of students in college, domestic examples of nationalistic views and actions, murder of characters like Tridib have been fitted skilfully. It would be difficult to read the novel keeping these incidents outside. They are connected and woven skilfully by the novelist. They appear real and make the reader connect them with the depicted incidents. Ghosh also endeavours to reveal the changes that take place at different phases right from individual to international level. The opinions of characters keep changing as they experience different circumstances. Some become mature and some more aggressive.

The novel, though, takes place within a family in Bengal; it confers various issues of the national level. They are unveiled through different situations and by various characters. Each character of the novel is attached with certain ideas. As story gyrates around Bengali family and of three generation, it also exceptionally presents the changes at the individual level and in both the nations

over a period of three decades. Ila is a sign of displacement, Tha'mma an epitome of aggressive nationalistic views, Tridib, a bundle of knowledge, the narrator, known for his imagination and memory and May Price, emblem of humanity. Ghosh' exemplification of both Ila and Tha'mma are the reflections of two binary opinions. Ila, who generally is seen as the representation of confused identity as her socialization does not allow and give her single stable recognition. She also blindly criticizes other practices and cultures as she is exposed to various cultures being a regular traveller. Similarly, Tha'mma also has been pictured in the novel by the author to confirm huge number of citizens who had blind belligerent love for the nation. She unbolts the debate over the concept of nation and nationalism.

Ghosh employs the technique of writing a novel in a unique way. The time and place of the novel oscillates from present to past and then the past to the present. This structure of the novel helps to keep the story fascinating and intriguing. The connection between the individual experiences and the social institution attaches specific meaning to the story. It makes the story complete and attributes totality. Different characters play a major role to draw and complete the circle. Tridib becomes a sign of accumulated knowledge about the past and Ila represents the various people who are displaced and have lost identity. The narrator is a cousin of both Tridib and Ila, completes the story by conveying these experiences and connecting them with the structure of the story. With the movements of the story, Ghosh also attempted successfully to link history and characters. Though the setup during the India's freedom movements and its aftermath effects of partition, it subtly bonds the experiences of individual characters with the wider establishment of partition. Tha'mma's description of arresting her college mate and the activities of terrorist groups are linked to the stories. Apart from that, the riots that had taken place in Dhaka and Calcutta are again the output of the author's imagination. There are no incidents of the same in the said places in history, but the clever depiction and connection of the same to the story makes it more real. Violence had been habitual during freedom movements especially during partition. The fights between two major religions in India were common in many parts of the divided India. Though there had never been any mention of real incidents of violence, the riots depicted in Dhaka are the sign of violence and the aggressive actions of the society. They also show the differences of opinions existing among the people of different communities and the wrong, senseless actions by people. The incident of stolen relics in Kashmir and people of two communities help each other. The history has witnessed several instances where many Muslims helped the Hindus and similarly Hindus also helped the Muslims by sheltering them. This is also seen in the novel where the Muslims and the Hindus help each. These incidents though are not real but signify the same actions that illustrate and uphold humanity.

Concepts of Otherness and Memory

The novel deals with the concepts of otherness, memory and national identity. The author tries to exhibit the idea of nation and nationalism that results in confusion, displacements and uncertainty of borders. This is shown as it results from the partition of nations. There are many examples in which the author deliberates how relationships could be developed only because of humanity. Tridib has also been presented as an example for the same instance. He jumps out of the car in order to save people in rickshaw and tries to save people who belong to other community. Though he does not know the

Muslim persons in auto-rickshaw, still he pledges his life to save their life. To contradict the same, the author also presents Tha'mma as a revolutionary student in the college days who was born in Dhaka and fights for the people of Dhaka. But the ironic and pitiful part is that people for whom she fought for become her enemies after post-partition incidents and kill Tridib. The author questions many issues with such specific examples like the political shrewdness to take decisions and the sense of values and morality among people. Lack of these had led to widen the gap among various communities and countries in the world. Ghosh's effort to weave incidents happening at the different levels gives an insight to the novel. He attempts to unite and portray various happenings at the individual and the societal level. Some incidents are personal and public which are closely connected to illustrate the destructive consequences of nationalism. These ideas of nationalism are generally seen among the middle-class families where people are usually driven by aggressive thoughts for their motherland. He draws attention to display the psychological connection between people and their emotions for the nation. Ghosh does not believe in dividing nations in the name of any criterion that segregates people. These divisions ostracize people and lead to unhappy life for common people of the society. Ghosh sees no solutions by the partition formula. He believes that it gives no satisfied results but leads to further segregations. It neither offers solutions nor mollifies the suffering.

National Identity in *The Shadow Lines*

The incident of 1947 rather offering some relaxation, created the problems of identity crisis, violence, and displacements. Partition is seen as the solution to various religious and political issues. But it proves as futile, purposeless and meaningless. It generates more anomalies to the people like Tha'mma who had to make a choice of living alone leading her family members. The claiming of nationality had also adversely effected people to opt the country over family and thus had to live far from their family members as they had to migrate on the religious and political issues. The opinion of Ghosh summarizes that these boundaries or partition merely result in formation and addition of a new country. It fails to bring any other results including welfare of people. People or countries are divided not by nature but by people themselves. The boundaries by these natural aspects like hills and mountains that would add a sense of reality to it. But the men-drawn lines are merely the shadow lines.

The novel offers different perceptions and analysis of the border. Various characters attempt to define boundary lines in their own way based on their experiences. Tha'mma becomes aggressive propagator of freedom movements against the British and she also holds the same aggressive views against other community. Her friendship with current occasions of the time including freedom movements make her to custom an opinion. Though there is hardly any example of Tha'mma being involved in the freedom struggle, she apprehends the opinion as against the British. She envisages the lines or the borders between two countries after partition and she considers those lines as real and just. On the contrary, the narrator's grand uncle Jethamoshai who lives in Dhaka has different perception about love for nations. Unlike Tha'mma, he does not rest his arguments on existence of borders. His beliefs in border lines are unique and he feels that he would like to die in Dhaka as he was born there. He resists to Tha'mma's request visit and stay in India with the family. He considers that the place where a person is born and lives is something important. Similarly, other characters like Ila believe in absolute freedom, not confining to affixed, particular place. Tridib is a man who propagates

universalism and his love for humanity. Robi perceives about nation and nationalism and looks at it differently. His opinion is that the partition event of 1947 is the sole reason for gaps among the nations and division among different communities. The novel questions validity of borders. Rather solving the issues these lines create problems. These illusive lines refute the reason for existence, and they become barriers to the existence. Futility and validity of the concept of nationalism and propagation of it by different characters are cleverly dealt by Ghosh. He succeeds in exemplifying invalidity of drawing the lines that has no reason and serves no good purpose for common people. There are many people affected by nationalism and there are a few in various religious groups who try to get sympathy mutually in the name of nationalism.

Conclusion

Ghosh being a great literary author who deals with the issue of nationalistic fervour through their fictional works. The writings deal with nationalism through various perspectives. The use of the idea of nationalism in these novels is for the display of havoc created by partition which created two nations out of one and led people to go against each other. Nationalism, in the novels selected for study, establishes the self of women to be independent and self-reliant.

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