



DISPLACEMENT AND IDENTITY CRISIS IN AMITAV GHOSH'S THE SHADOW LINES

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Abstract

*Identity is the subject of a theoretical debate that focuses on its fundamental characteristics, formation process, and existential issues. Postmodernists forbid having any such identity, in contrast to essentialists who think that each person's identity is unique. It has been stated numerous times how identity is constructed, but it is important to remember that a person's social location, which includes their ethnicity, class, gender, etc., plays a significant role in shaping who they are. Characters in Amitav Ghosh's books are on the lookout for their identities as well as for reason, truth, and rationality. They are true dialogues on the search for meaning in life in this regard. In *The Shadow Lines* Ghosh problematizes the nation. Additionally, the text challenges ideas of reality that are grounded in cultural, social, and historical realities while exposing the arbitrary nature of numerous types of lines and borders, both personal and political. Although the personal and political are interwoven, "identification" shows itself as a key thread on the reader's sensitivities. The paper deals the identity conflicts showed by Ghosh.*

Key Words: *Identity, Crisis*

Introduction

The novel *The Shadow Lines* is portrayed as a political consciousness born in the crucible of racial tensions. This novel's formal experimentation in sequence and place resonates thematically with a remarkable amount of force. It is also less whimsical in its politics and gloomier overall. *The Shadow Lines* follows three generations of two families, one Indian and one British, over the course of nearly 50 years, providing possibly the best fictional illustration of Benedict Anderson's claim that countries are "imagined communities." The novel *The Shadow Lines* caricature the political influences of the West over colonial India. The *Shadow Lines* voices the pathos of partition which divides Dhaka from India. This division further divides the migrants' self to witness a duality of culture. He claims that geographical divisions can never divide a memory

It is the family and friend's story of the unnamed narrator, and it has roots in more extensive national and worldwide experience. The past, present, and future in the book merge and blur together, obliterating all lines of distinction. The desire for identity, the need for independence, and the challenging connection with colonial culture are all the ideas discussed in the text. *The Shadow Lines* mixes memories, fact, and fantasy together. This novel is a direct statement on nationalism and the characters' search for their own identity. A country is defined differently in political science and geography, but it refers to something specific to a person. A man's entire conscious of past, present and future is directly linked to his native land or country. This country is referred to his homeland. Keeping this as the basis of his novel, Ghosh comes up with this novel which sets out to contextualize "nationalism".

Then a person's identity acquires its meaning and intentions according to priorities. Hence, one's identity is multi-faceted and a subject of constant change. A human's habitation is not constant; they change their places, hence adopting the identity of the culture in which they presently live. They can adopt a certain image and also live with multiple cultural identities. From the opening of the novel itself, the blurred concept of identity can be visualized. This concept is extended to the places and locations mentioned in the novel as well. Characters are not the only ones struggling with their identity. According to Ghosh, a location's identity is established by the stories and beliefs associated with the place. These stories can be developed by one's power of imagination. All the characters experience Shadow Lines as real lines.

In this novel, the narrator's grandmother has to bear the effects of partition in an extreme sense. This event of partition makes up her identity and this has an influence on her for a lifetime. She finally concludes that borders define and control everyone's life and this border has been controlling her as well. She considers that countries are separated by bold lines, these bold lines then demarcate the boundary of each country. She thinks if there are no demarcations, then how are the people to know the difference. She believes that both the sides of the border are the same and her travel would just be like before when they travelled from Dhaka to Calcutta via train. She's amazed to see that there's no line in between the two countries which separates them. The question of partition and the mass killing arises in the mind of the grandmother. She imagines some vivid lines to be visible on the ground just like it was on the map. These borders are imaginary lines for people but that is visible only politically. This partition had a negative impact and created a tension on grandmother because it made her position unstable. The conflict in her mind grew to be eternal and her home place which loves to her became a strange unwelcoming place for her. She then realizes that "borders have a tenuous existence and no amount of bloodshed in history can either make them real or imperishable." [1] Grandmother's nationalist notion survives in her. The grandmother Thamma, until her retirement, felt everyone should not keep holding on to the past and should also focus on their future for career building. She also doesn't like to be sentimental and nostalgic and considers it a weakness. But after her retirement, she feels the longing for her old home in Dhaka. This later comes to her realization that "displaced people" do not have any home to go back to [2]. On arriving at Dhaka, she feels that this place is no longer the same as she knew it to be. Dhaka is not confined to her home place, and she has no place to call "home" because she doesn't belong to this place anymore. The price she has to pay for visiting Dhaka is Tridib and the uncle, she loses them. Now she understands, Borders are drawn in people's mind

and conscience, and the concept of a home only exists in one's memory. The psychological conflict of her own home and nationality causes her mental trauma. This trauma leads to her not being able to distinguish between "coming home" and "going away". Her memories of partition are avoided and repressed as suggested by Kaul.

Despite their differences in age, place, ideology, and worldviews, the narrator in *The Shadow Lines*, Tridib, and the grandmother share an innate Indianness and even a conceptualization of nationalism that Ila, the Indian living in the West, cannot imagine thus cannot participate. Here, Benedict Anderson's commentary about the identity is very insightful that the nation is an imagined political community; it is imagined because the 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 person lives the image of their communion. This makes it possible for emotional affinities to transcend some disruptive dissonances, thereby making space for a sense of nationalism. One such character who abides by this way of thinking and for whom the country is a blatant indicator of identity is the narrator's grandmother. In contrast to the other characters, she is a votary of the nation. In actuality, she symbolizes a legitimate perspective on the country that may be used to evaluate the opinions of other people, including Tridib, Ila, and the narrator. Though she inhabits the past that has been frozen, in her situation, nationalism is generally stable. She fears that her elderly uncle will pass away in a foreign country, nearly forgotten and by himself. She identifies as a strong and militant nationalist. She explains to 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 we'll be able to make amends for all that bitterness and hatred (*The Shadow Lines* 129).

Grandmother is willing to let go of the painful memories of past family conflicts and clearly cares about the bonds of blood and nationhood. It's noteworthy to note that she found the terrorists fascinating and yearned to behave like them in order to be free. If given the chance, would she have killed the English magistrate?, the narrator asks. She replies:

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 (*The Shadow Lines* 39).

Achieve it. Tha'mma, however, believes that Ila has no business living in England because she lacks an understanding of the country's actual character.

Everyone who lives there has earned his right to be there with blood: with their brothers' blood and their fathers' blood and their sons' blood. They know they're a nation because they've drawn their borders with blood (*The Shadow Lines* 78)

Conclusion

In a globalized world, solidarity exists beyond territorial and nation-state boundaries. Even in transnational forms of identity, territorial identities remain important. The novel *The Shadow Lines* gives an account of the national adventure of anti-imperialism. The personal history of anti-imperialism has created a notion of identity in the novel. The unnamed narrator, Tha'mma, Jethamoshai and Ila are creating a space of

their own for an identity in the novel. The plight of Tha'mma , as a victim of partition is recognized to deal with her dislocated life in Calcutta. Her disgust towards political ideologies that separate people from their roots is given ample insight. The identical elements found through the images and later realization of the difference is playing a very vital role in understanding human psychology. National identity based on the loyalty to the respective countries to be found in the characters this is an illusory freedom without an inner voice from heart. Unnamed narrator and other characters are creating their own identity within the sphere of their own world of spaces and concept. Ghosh in *The Shadow Lines* attempts to create the image of the global umbrella which includes and encompasses various cultures and create a single unified global picture.

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