
THE THEMATIC CONCERNS IN THE WRITINGS OF AMITAV GHOSH WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO 'THE SHADOW LINES'

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Abstract: Indian Literature has earned widespread reputation both in India and abroad. By winning awards, prizes, titles and controversial criticism, the Indian train of Post modernists like Salman Rushdie, Arundhati Roy, Amitav Ghosh, Vikram Chandra, Vikram Sheth and others have made the Indian novel in English bestselling novels. The paper highlights Amitav Ghosh's concept of Nationalism, riots, racial discrimination, complex-mankind, the borders-shadow lines, insensitivity to religion, the universal brother hood and amity, political freedom etc. This paper is an attempt to draw the attention of the world to do away with borders that divide people with special reference to 'The Shadow Lines'.

Keywords: Amitav Ghosh, Nationalism, riots, racial discrimination, complex-mankind, borders-shadow lines, the universal brother hood and political freedom.

Amitav Ghosh, born in Calcutta in 1956, grew up in many countries like East Pakistan, Srilanka, Iran and India. He received a Master of Philosophy and Ph.D. in 1982 at Oxford. Ghosh also has been a journalist. Amitav Ghosh published his first novel *The Circle of Reason* in 1986 and his second, novel *The Shadow Lines* in 1988 while his *In an Antique Land* and *The Calcutta Chromosome* were published in 1992 and 1996 respectively. *The Calcutta Chromosome* is a kind of mystery - thriller. In it, Mr. Ghosh deals with the issue of a malarial fever. The reputed scientist Sir Ronald Ross, who has got the 'Nobel Prize' for his works, has Malarial fever. *The Shadow Lines* was written after the assassination of Mrs. Indira Gandhi in 1984. The riots and general massacre in Delhi and other cities provide a backdrop to this work. These shadow lines or demarking of lines are drawn which cannot divide a memory or experiences as Thamma and her old uncle believe. The whole novel comes to us through the narration but the narrator remains unnamed and nondescript. He plays a major role in the novel. We can suppose, he is Thamma's grandson and is greatly influenced by his uncle Tridib. The narrator is a chronicler of the people around him. He presents the events with amazing insight skipping from city to city in the same breath and recreating events that had happened before he was born. He tells about the lines and borders that are being drawn the world over to divide and isolate one man from the other. Both Tridib and the narrator are engaged in the creation of the world as it comes alive to them or to their powerful imagination. *The Shadow Lines* is the havoc and the terror created by the riots which find expression in the novel. Despite bloodshed and merciless killing, they have existence. The shadow Lines, thus, underlines the fact that humankind everywhere is the same. Characters intermingle not as members of distinct culture but as complex individuals in a world where geographic boundaries have truly become 'the shadow lines'. The theme of

The Shadow Lines questions the sanity and efficacy of the borders that divide. The lines on the maps are powerless. They cannot divide an experience or memory as experienced by Thamma, her 90 years old uncle, Roby or by the narrator. The lines and boundaries or borders are a handiwork of a few people who are mad after power or ruled by fanatic disposition. *The Shadow Lines* is, thus, a continuous struggle of the author to undo the demarcations to prevent the establishment of the borders. The protagonist Thamma has been ridiculed as fossilized specimen of nationalism. The novel also throws some light on the Hindu Muslim relationship in the past. The discrimination and differences between the two communities are predominantly illusory. *The Shadow Lines* is both Indian and global in perspective and treatment. The 'shadow lines' in this novel are to be examined both at a political level as well as at a personal level. Jethamshoi's remarks on boundary lines and the division of India as well as Thamma's confusion about the physical equivalents of the division of nations and her confused identity are some of the ways in which the metaphor of the 'shadow lines' are used politically. The Thematic Concerns in the Writings of Amitav Ghosh: Nationalism, riots, racial discrimination, complex-mankind, the borders-shadow lines, insensitivity to religion, the universal brother hood and amity, political freedom etc. are some of the major thematic concerns in *The Shadow Lines*. Among 'the post modernists and *Midnight's Children*' the name of Amitav Ghosh has been taken as chronicler and anthropologist. His novels like 'Circle of Reason', 'The Shadow Lines' and 'The Calcutta Chromosome' have earned great critical acclaim, for many reasons, at world level. In the year 1984 after Mrs. Indira Gandhi's assassination, the present novel was being written. The riots and the general atmosphere of violence and massacre in Delhi lead the readers to probe into history of Partition, Bangladesh, riots in Punjab, Indo

Pak war of 71 and even to the backward past the British imperialism and rule in India. With the documentary accuracy, the novel presents some real pictures of places situations and happenings, which have been described corresponding not only to geographical or to topographical but also to historical facts. The novelist, Ghosh makes history alive or written through the narrator and Tridib. It starts from early 1920 to the Second World War, and then it goes back to 1699 and again to 1947 partition, 1962 war to war of 1971 and the birth of Bangladesh. The story is narrated or told through political, violent events that go against humanity, love, and nationalism. The character's witness the events, suffer from the vents, or are victimized too. Through the magic realism and imaginative recreated history of events, the novelist tries to expose the basic human condition and attitude regarding boundaries, humanity, violence, war and nationalism. 'The Shadow Lines' has multiplicity of themes. The first and the foremost being that, it is an attempt to draw the attention of the world to do away with borders that divide the people. It comes from the wrong of fake concept of the nationalism. Nationalism is a sentiment of unity among a set of people occupying a particular territory. It is born out of common factors such as language, religion, economy and administrative system. Nationalism, when turns into pure patriotism, will prove a unique blessing to the humanity and world. But at the same time it can also be terrifying and a hurdle to the universal civilization as it glorifies its own nation. Nationalism stands for unity and solidarity of its own nation but it also leads to hatred of other countries. Thamma during her days of study hates British rule in India. After partition of India Thamma stayed in East Bengal, now Bangladesh. The partition has been described as a major tragic event in history. It engulfed the lives of millions. The plunder, loot, arson and rape shook the two nations; all is narrated and witnessed by Thamma and Tridib. The narrator remembers an incident in Jammu and Kashmir about a sacred relic known as the 'Mui Mubarak'-a hair of Prophet Mohammed purchased by a Kashmiri merchant in 1699. When it was installed in 'Hazarat Bal Mosque' it became a great place of Pilgrimage. This shrine became a symbol of unique and distinctive culture and people of Kashmir. But it disappeared in its face in 1963 and life came to standstill in the valley of Kashmir. The Pakistan gave continuous provocations and tried to fish in troubled water by instigating Indian Muslims. The over nationalism of Pakistani and insensitivity to their religion targets the Indian Muslims. Muslims and their houses were burnt down, property looted and some were killed. It was in one such retaliation that Tridib, the Old Uncle and Khalil

were killed in Dhaka. Once, the two communities living together under one umbrella, without riots, were led to killing in inhuman ways due to the demarcation and boundaries were made. The new communities and their nationalism soured the good past relationships. Thus, the nationalism earlier united the people of India and brought an awakening for their rights and feeling of nationhood to expel the British, itself divided the two communities. Thamma is criticized as "a still surviving specimen of fossilized nationalism" but it brings about a tragedy in the lives of Tridib and May at personal level and for the family in general. Thus, the theme is the concept of nationalism that has gained a big ground in the mind and hearts of people. The novelist Ghosh has held it in "its extreme form of nationalism" that is responsible for many a problem these days. Because of extreme nationalism, the two tendencies rise, they are separatist and secessionist. Through Thamma and people of Punjab, the novelist hints that sometimes, lover for country, passion inspired nationalism and intoxication of patriotism leads man to chaotic beastly behaviour and indiscipline. Thus, the nationalism, which has great uses, can become the great obstacle to world unity and world peace. Nationalism is a defunct force. "The Shadow Lines" also presents grim pictures of riots, their nature and brutalities. The theme of human unity and brotherhood is hinted through communal riots in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. The riots erupt due to the impulsive and rash action caused by provocation of politicians and narrow-minded religious leaders. The riots take place more easily in those superfluous religious enthusiasts and self-appointed champions who spread hatred in the society. In Amitav Ghosh's sight, even state rulers are not free from the blame because it does nothing to restrict or discourage them. Very often, the existence of the Government depends upon them. History speaks with present as we find in the case of the prevailing government. Speaking or taking a stand against them means losing votes, because a large section or mass can turn their wrath in form of tide against them in elections. Elaborately, the present novel, discusses about the havoc and terror created by the riots. Despite the pictures of violence, bloodshed and merciless killing since partition, the people of both the countries, have an imperishable existence. The riots, its violence and results are easily forgotten by the insensitive minds of the people. The narrator feels shock at heart when he finds that his friend Malik at Delhi does not remember anything about the riots that took place in Calcutta and Dhaka. The themes of violence and hatred are also woven in this novel. The riots in Dhaka and Calcutta in the novel are the belated example of the partition of

India. It was a stinking slaughter of men, women and children alike where they were not only attacked and ripped open by the knives but, also battered to death by stones, bricks and hockey sticks. The train comes loaded with mutilated bodies. About five hundred thousand people were sacrificed on the altar of partition. Indeed, it was the 'greatest divorce' ever written in the books of nation's history. The themes of dividing lines and borders remain in the focus of the novelist. There is nothing on the earth that can divide a memory. Many lines and borders may be drawn but it can never set people free from their memories, sweet remembrance free of their associations, free of the love and sense of belonging for their birthplace. In other words, all these lines are mirage.

Conclusion: The world cannot be divided into innumerable small states to satisfy the urge of the people to give their frantic sense of nationalism and political entity and a name Partition is no solution. Thus the novel is a continuous struggle of the author to undo the demarcations to prevent the establishments of the borders. Borders roused a narrow nationalism, it harms the humanity and gives birth to hatred and Nationalism has been under the attack of the novelist. He considers nationalism and borders 'shadow lines' as a great hurdle in the unification of mankind. Thus, this paper is an attempt to draw the attention of the world to do away with borders that divide people.

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