

RE-DEFINING SOCIO-POLITICAL IDENTITIES IN AMITAV GHOSH'S *THE SHADOW LINES*

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Abstract

Amitav Ghosh, a versatile writer, story teller of post-modern Indian literature in English. *The Shadow Lines* (1988) prove his abilities to gain an insight into the meaning and narrative technique of the novel. The present novel contains two parts to flourish the story, 'Going Away' and 'Coming Home' both parts presents contrasting them and raises various questions of socio-political changes in India-Bangladesh. The story of the novel exposes the psyche of new born nation against the parental country, on the basis of religion and politics. It's complex novel focus on the facts of history and post-partition era of India. Ghosh depicts the social psyche through the multiple characters. Thus the characters of the novel present the some vital issues for us to imagine a world without boundaries of socio-politics.

Key Words: Socio-Politics, Post-Independence, Identity Conflicts, Cross-Cultural.

Amitav Ghosh, an eminent writer of Indian literature in English. He has a vision to see reality and looks beyond. His masterpiece *The Shadow Lines* (1988) based on socio-political realities. He invades reality to judge the attitude of the characters that trapped between alienation of hearts with the partition of their homeland. The novel highlights the life of innocent people on the both sides of the border. The LOC differentiate the people on the basis of race, religion, and region but the memories of their past creates the shadow of lines in their mind. All the borders not only differentiate the people but give them new socio-political identity. The novel proves the ability of Ghosh to tell the details of place and things with the perfect action in speech and dialogue.

Ghosh's perception of reality in *The Shadow Lines* creates his own distinguish voice in order to wrote new history. He handles the same story in *The Imam and The Indian* to highlight the cross-cultural conflict and socio-political displacement. He is a cohesive writer to change artistic conception about structure and techniques. He interweaves the personal life of the characters with the public events to excavate the socio-political history. The multi-layered structure of novel exposes the painful memories of 1964 riots in West Bengal and Bangladesh which reminds the pathetic experience of 1947 partition of India and Pakistan. The narrative replicates the pattern of violence and experience about place and time as well as death, memories and pathos of characters.

The Shadow Lines, a celebrated novel creating past in present and focus on the themes of partition, religious disharmony, riots, cross-cultural conflicts, East-West encounter and familial relationships of the characters. The novel shows keenly interest of Ghosh in socio-political drama on the canvas of history. It makes reader to turn back pages of history to re-read past. It also refreshes the memories to reveal national identity on the basis of socio-politics. The boundaries not only divide nations but create shadow lines in the minds of people. The novel divides into two parts 'Going Away' and 'Coming Home' both consist memories of characters which makes it a novel of memories. 'Going Away' speaks about various aspects of characters and 'Coming Home' deals with theoretical perspective of socio-politics.

Nivedita Sen in her essay entitled 'Going Away and Coming Home: *The Shadow Lines* and The Travel Motif in Children Fiction' takes the aspects of 'going and coming' as a travel motif. She uses metaphorical events for the travel motif to deal the historical facts. She observes it is a kind of bildungsroman. 'Going Away and Coming Home' both raised question of identity before characters. Thamma, leading character born in Dhaka but after partition she leaves and resides in Calcutta. Her struggle for reunite family gives new definition of life and identity. Her motherland becomes foreign for her while her coming home to Dhaka gives her new political identity as Indian. Her coming home becomes going away because of nation as identity. Whereas Tridib's open minded attitude towards life and becomes a man without nation. His universal figure in cross-cultural nations made him mentor of humanity. Narrators' attraction for foreign land and affection for Ila and May shows cosmopolitan life style as well as East-West encounter in relationship. Whereas Ila born in London lives as cosmopolitan and always in form to become British but her blood and race becomes obstacle to get that identity. Though she born at there and considered as motherland but the race makes it as a foreign land because of her nation as a identity. While she visits India, her coming home becomes going away for her.

Ghosh exposes the complexity of the concept of nation and nationalism. It raises question on political freedom and identity. In 1947 British followed two nation theories on the basis of religion. They divide Hindus and Muslims by showing dream for freedom and homeland. They separated Muslim majority region from India and gives birth to Pakistan with adding East Bengal, Muslim populated region. Such act of separation causes insecurity for minority in the region of majority both for Hindus and Muslims. Hindus migrate to India from East Pakistan or East Bengal for their homeland and Muslim migrate to East Bengal for a Muslim nation. The migration causes riots, loots, rapes, killing and uncountable loss of property of both nations. Within a single night partition changed identity of people, their motherland becomes foreign land and forced to accept it on the basis of religion. They become a part of new born nation in the name of freedom and baptized with new identity.

Bengal divided in to two nations same language, culture, history and heritage divided only for the religious supremacy. The land not only separated by border line but the shadow of their past memories still alive in their mind. The shadow of lines creates barriers between two communities and communal violence spread in two nations. The absurdity of partition causes meaningless violence and carnage of innocent people. Such freedom brought hatred and anxiety among displaced people. The people migrated for their homeland becomes victim of depression because their coming home is going away from mother land. The native rejects to welcome the migrated class by calling them as outsider. The peoples of Bengal lost their identity as Bengali at a single

stroke of partition and become Indian and Pakistani. The people lost their identity in search of new identity in new nation. Suvir Kaul rightly points out the concept of nation:

A growing sense that the logic of the nation state is necessarily at odds with various forms of sub-continental community- that to be Indian is to be perversely and perhaps unsuccessfully define oneself against one's mirror image from across the border.¹

The central theme of the novel is find identity and differences hidden in the national identity. Thamma's coming home shows her nostalgic longing for roots but her national identity makes her foreigner in her homeland. Her attitude changed over the period of time to define nation formation. Religion holds over community of nation and forms structure of nation. Religion or communal frenzy controls all the things gives national identity. Her effort to vanish the boundaries through reunites her family. Thamma and Mayadebi come to Dhaka to rescue Jethamoshai, her uncle but the bloodshed gives a sense of insecurity in homeland being an Indian citizen. The death of Tridib and uncle by rioting mob changes her mind set for homeland and her nostalgia converted into hatred. The incident creates a feeling of otherness because of the boundary existed in reality. She thinks about uncle's death by militants in a country of not his own.

It does not matter whether we recognize each other or not. We are the same flesh, the same blood, the same bone and not at last, after all these years, perhaps we'll be able to make amends for all that bitterness and hatred; she tells her son.²

Religion is another boundary which is not shown on map but everyone can feel its shadow of line in another's mind. The narrator analyzes the boundary made by religion in the world structure to divide nations. The novel exposes the notions of boundary that are rooted in history, culture, society and many kinds of lines divides nation and gives different identities to their citizens. The narrator and Thamma treat the concept of nation identity on the basis of religion, language, socio-politics, geographical location, ideology. These factor works in nation-building, nationalism, nationality to change the shift to rearrange and redefine perspective of identity. The younger generations of the novel witnessed the riots in Calcutta and Dhaka with deadly and ghastly reality in their inherited nation. Because of this entire subcontinent experienced loneliness with discussion and disunity. The various sections of the novel connected with political realities such as riots, loots, killings of foreigners and most importantly communalism, the ugly face of dirty politics causing violence and bloodshed. Benedict Anderson puts about nation:

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 lives the image of their communion.³

The novel witnessed the gaps of history to differentiate stories and reality. The Bengal, historically, culturally and geographically alike but political events like communal riots changes their live and became enemies over night. The partition and trauma of separation are always a part of agony for Bengalis. Thamma's Bengal cannot be separated from her memories but the shadow of line remains in the mind. The narrator has right to perceive reality through this novel. The narrator cannot escape from the question of nationalism and freedom. He observe communal riot which caused deaths of his closed ones. He narrates cultural conflicts, trauma and anxieties

with his Bengali background to explore metaphor of political realities. . The novel is the masterpiece in the Indian English socio-political fiction, gives pleasure to the literary critic and researcher.

Through *The Shadow Lines*, Amitav Ghosh not writing history and not to probe and prove the problems of history. He attempts to gather the fragments of suppressed history to concrete nation, nationalism and nation-identity. His appeals through the narrator are the current ideology and politics cannot reunite history but the true history is the part of long term process. The text is full of gaps for reader to reinvent history and interrogate the alternative narrative to redefine identities of nation and citizen. He deals the issue of identity, freedom, cross-cultural interactions through the characters both Indian and British. The formation of modern nation and nationalism makes fascinating study of his novels. His writing focuses on:

The search for identity, the need of independence and the difficult relationship with colonial culture the rewriting of colonial past, and attempt at creating a new language and a new narrative form and the use of personal memory to understand communal past.⁴

This article is an attempt to deal the problem of socio-political identities. The novel warns about the most important problems of India such as communalism, corruption, violence, illiteracy, poverty, marginality of women in Indian society, ethnic nationalism and fundamentalism are biggest challenges before Indian democracy. In recent years the concept of nation is under the threat of power politics and struggle for personal identity. The present novel examines the boundaries of socio-politics and concept of nationhood. The trauma of social life trapped in the world where new nation formed and past identities replaced with new notions of national identity. Ghosh emphasizes the identity conflict to search for reality with the role of memories of past to confront the present. He writes with socio-political perspective in a way to approach the Indian psyche. He shows the futility of boundaries drawn on the basis of religion such imagined lines are as equal to life and death. He believes that connect people with the help of development of society and culture will give one identity to mankind that is HUMAN.

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