

## Borders and Boundaries in Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines*

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**Abstract:** Borders and Boundaries are important ideas belong to postcolonial world and express postcolonial theory. Amitav Ghosh's novels are in accordance with the idea of constant crossing and recrossing or with rejection of borders and boundaries; this paper aims to examine how they are treated in *The Shadow Lines*. Borders drawn out of some political interest affects the harmonious environment. This kind of division brings out nothing but wars, massacres, riots and unhappiness among the people. The partition is a vivid manifestation. Through the description of the partition and riots Ghosh drives home the idea of unreal borders. The rise of borders in the region has not only set people of the region apart, also borders have displaced people from their homeland, has led to a regimented identity which in turn makes the process of border crossing a painful experience and incidents are depicted in this article. *The Shadow Lines* is not the only novel of Ghosh's to deal with borders. The notion of a borderless universe is clearly something that preoccupied Amitav Ghosh's novels. His appeal for a borderless universe and his penchant for recovering lost histories come together in *The Shadow Lines*.

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### 1. Introduction - Border and Boundaries

The tragedy of partition provided the writers with the occasion to write about the plight of the people in the subcontinent in order to bring home mainly to the western world the impact of British rule, which had previously boasted of "civilizing mission". India got independence through bloodshed and migration. In fact, the partition theme in Indian novels in English set the dystopian tune, which would be later on carried on to the tone of the postcolonial theories. Post colonialism began as recognition of the dominant post-war economic and political conditions are prevalent all over the world.

The postcolonial writers all over the world assert that their countries possessed a prestigious history, culture and heritage; and they also valorise the past from which they have drawn the raw materials for their works. The traditional view and territorial entity are the unique character generated through their migration from one region to the other or from one settlement to another settlement are raw source of post colonial writers' work.

Amitav Ghosh is one among the postmodernists. He is immensely influenced by the political and cultural milieu of post independent India. Being a social anthropologist and having the opportunity of visiting alien lands, he comments on the present scenario, the world is passing through in his novels. Almost all the works of Amitav Ghosh reflected the theme of borders and boundaries. The ablest hand of Amitav Ghosh treated the idea of constant crossing, recrossing or with the rejection of

borders and boundaries. To show the idea of border crossing, he sometimes takes the help of characters, events and sometimes symbols also. The modern idea of borders and boundaries opted by Ghosh, including two differences, but interrelated spheres of meaning. Therefore Ghosh discusses both the political impact and the methodological dimension of borders and boundaries by exposing the systematic correlations. About these types of correlations one can easily find in *The Shadow Lines*. Borders drawn out of some political interest affects the harmonious environment. This kind of division brings out nothing but wars, massacres, riots and unhappiness among the people. *The Shadow Lines* caught my attention by Amitav Ghosh emphasizing that boundary lines of nations are only shadow lines. Deep, hidden philosophical elements towards redefining the nation into broad perspective of human society created and presented by Amitav Ghosh. He has incarnated in himself the greatness and a great writer among world literary writers as well as philosophers and anthropologists<sup>1</sup> through his sharp eye and sense of perceiving of the human being and their societies in right earnest.

### 2. Amitav Adroit Writer

Amitav Ghosh writing is a combination of postmodern vision and continuation of narrative techniques of Indian epic tradition. Ghosh uses English language deftly, covering a larger canvass of emotional, political, cultural, geographical and historical issues. There is an awareness of national and international developments reflected in themes

woven around the displaced, marginalized modern man and uninhibited modifications in the genre.

There is a gusto of creativity, vigour, hope and confidence surfacing through rich, mischievous language, sometimes light funny, comic and humorous approach that reigns his writing and also has set his premise of writings around various socio-political and cultural issues that emerged in post independent India and rapidly changing Indian life; the socio-political, cultural issues of a young multicultural democratic nation and their impact on communities and individual's life.

“By a curious paradox, the room for dissent has shrunk as the world has grown more free, and today, in this diminished space, every utterance begins to turn in on itself. This, I believe, is why we need to recreate, expand, and reimagine the space for articulate, humane and creative dissent.(Ghosh,2002: 285).

Ghosh matures gradually in a distinctive style of his own with the growth of his works. <sup>2</sup> He continues to be a strong voice among contemporary literary artists and thinkers for both his fictional and non-fictional writings. He has carved out a unique niche for himself by embracing new genres, styles and subjects. He cannot be categorized or confined within the boundaries of any typical genre and he belongs to the world of novels and non-fictional prose.

He has emerged as a prominent writer with the force of sheer verisimilitude and versatility. Besides this, a vast range of characters lend a quality of cosmopolitanism to his subject. His issues are local and global at the same time making the themes universal. His opus is marked with the traits of interdisciplinary and post modernity; continuous innovation and occupation with a variety of subjects. Ghosh is conscious of the role of an author and his own stand on his role as an author. His views on society, language, culture, human relationship, nation and geographical boundaries are all painted with his beliefs. These ideologies also determine his choices as a craftsman of storytelling. In an interview he expressed the same in the following words:

“For me the value of the novel, as a form, is that, it is able to incorporate element of every aspect of life- history, natural history, rhetoric, politics beliefs, region, family, love, sexuality. As I see, it is the novel is a meta form that transcends the boundaries that circumscribe other kinds of writing rendering meaningless the usual workday distinctions between historian, journalist, anthropologist etc.” (Ghosh in an interview with Michelle Casewell.)

His method of narration which keeps on shifting from first person narration to the third person narration is amalgamated with magic realism, linguistic innovations, play with the concept of time, history and digressions that all make his writings postmodern and reveal his awareness of Indian tradition of narrative techniques. Embellished with high seriousness and experiments, his works are not esoteric. An ability to build up poignancy of a tragedy without succumbing to sentimental descriptions is a unique feature of all his writings. He succeeds in adhering to the form while expressing ideologies and building up snowball like stories. All his works remain a study of ideological debates on the issues of past and present; penetrating through a complex web of historical, political, economical and the cultural nuances. The oeuvre penned down by him stands for assiduous craftsmanship manifesting his creative contribution to the contemporary world and the humanity in general.

As a trained anthropologist and researcher, Ghosh has a long association with subaltern studies group, and with an experience of journalism and academics in both the West and in India. Ghosh overcomes the issues raised against the categories of migrant and native writers of India. The issues of subaltern world and the contemporary issues in South Asian countries, imperialism, and subtle reflection of political, economical and cultural materialism are interlaced with his ideological opinions. Interdisciplinary, plurality of individual's existence is continuously play of centre and margin; all these qualities mark his writing as writing in the Derridean tradition.

The revealed style and technique of Ghosh is embossed in his second novel *The Shadow Line*. With this outlook here is an analysis on writer's view on Border and Boundaries in *The Shadow Lines*.

### 3. Hidden History Through Character

*The Shadow Lines* is the novel deal exclusively with the aftermath of the Partition, and also with the Partition on the Bengal border. It is important to note that Ghosh happens to be the only major Indian-English novelist who is preoccupied with the Bengal Partition, relating to the exilic movements that it led to. Three of his novels (*The Circle of Reason*, *The Shadow Lines* and *The Hungry Tide*) address, in varying degree, the aftermath of the 1947 Partition in Bengal, and look at the continual refugee problem that it led to, thus highlighting one of the most irritated and long-standing unresolved issues of post partition sub continental political affairs. In pursuing its inquiry in the logic of boundaries in the postcolonial context, *The Shadow Lines* takes up the challenge of representing the

complexity of national identity.

*The Shadow Lines* are the mirror image, which runs throughout the novel as a sign of those relations that paradoxically connect nation and individuals even as they divide them. The mirror image in the novel foregrounds the idea of mutual contractedness not only between the narrators and the other characters that surround him but also between the cities of London, Dhaka and Calcutta. As he discovers new meaning and imagines new connection between his and the other characters perception and experiences of space, the adult narrator comes to understand that “Muslim Dhaka” and “Hindu Calcutta” are essentially mirror image of each other separated by a “looking Glass border”. The cause of the riots that killed Tridib in Dhaka also causes the Calcutta riots in which he was trapped as a child. As Tha'mma believes “across the border there existed another reality”. Thus in the novel Tha'mma supremely confident in her belief that real borders separate nations is taken aback when told that she would not be able to see any borderline between India and east Pakistan from the plane. “where's the difference then? She asks, and if there's no difference both sides will be the same. Tha'mma's conceptual mapping of the nation, which mirrors that of nationalism, is based upon the unifying effects of “Tradition” —represented in her mind under the guise of warfare that constitutes the main ingredient of a country's territorial integrity.<sup>3</sup>

Ghosh imagines and creates those situations from history and see what happens to an individual life when he/she is part of historical events. History also records the changes and chronology of events. Literature need not necessarily record the changes in chronological manner but represents such changes. Ghosh represents the changes that take place at individual level and at national and international levels. Thus, his representation encompasses both micro and macro levels. He uses the mirror of time to reflect images of changing times.

*The Shadow Lines* (1988) can be viewed at one level as a story of a Bengali family through which the author presents analyses and problematises of many issues that are being debated in contemporary India. The story cleverly engages in its main body characters spanning three generations of this family. The story of these characters is not told in a contextual vacuum, it instead corresponds to the growth of Calcutta as a city and India as a nation over a period of three decades or more. Significantly, private events in the author's life and other important characters take place in the shadow of events of immense political significance. So there is Tha'mma, the grandmother of the unnamed narrator through whom the issue of the Bengal Partition and the whole

idea of Nation, Nationalism and Nationhood gets discussed.

All his characters and events, though imaginary, are created around some facts from the past or present. For him, the characters and stories have to be rooted in the solid soil of reality of human life. His writings penetrate through various forms and institutions of power in society and seek to comprehend human existence in totality. Power structures have always prevailed and controlled an individual's life. One interesting fact about the organization of the characters within novels is that each character is an individual and integral to the flow of the story. He also interweaves the story in a manner that ruptures any hierarchy of importance amongst characters. So if Tridib is an outstanding character in *The Shadow Lines*, the roles of narrator, May and grandmother are equally vital. Tridib, the eccentric historian cousin through whom the idea of history being challenging gets highlighted. Then there is the third generation Ila, the narrator's second cousin through whom the author brings to fore the issues of diasporas and racism. The role of the narrator is also central to the extent that it is he who articulates the ideas held by these characters and also integrates these subjective viewpoints and experiences to highlight that both public discourses like history and personal discourse like anecdotes are incomplete till they are integrated. The role of the narrator is also crucial to the structure of the novel, which is one of story within story told in a non-linear way.

The novel has also been analysed by the critic Suvir Kaul in the essay “Separation Anxiety: Growing Up Inter/National in *The Shadow Lines*” as embodying elements from the *bildungsroman* (coming of age) tradition of the novel. M.H. Abrams describes the term *bildungsroman* as a ‘novel of formation’... ‘the subject of these novels is the development of the protagonist's mind and character, as he passes from childhood through varied experiences —and usually through a spiritual crisis — into maturity and recognition of his identity and role in the world.’ (Kaul . 268-286)

The neighbouring countries, like India and Pakistan have the same culture, the same food habits, the same language, yet they are enemies because the political lines on the map have separated them from each other and they are inspired with national feeling. In fact the maps are beguiling. Culture identities, religion and conflict that partition violence is commonly agreed to have been the most momentous event in the shaping of Hindu Muslim relation in independent India the division of the country in two states of India and Pakistan.

Historical events and imaginative fiction are

subtly interwoven into the narrative fabric of Amitav Ghosh's fiction. The fictionalised history that he presents through his novels is an allegorical representation of subverted history in which an attempt is made to fill in 'gaps' and 'absences'. The plot of *The Shadow Lines* is woven around actual historical events like the Second World War and the post-Partition communal riots which broke out in certain parts of India and Pakistan. The novel also focuses on the events that happened in the far end of 1963 and in 1964. Mu-I -Mubarak, believed to be the sacred relic of Prophet's hair, disappeared from its place in the Hazarathbal mosque in December 1963. There was a collective expression of grief, a demonstration of all religions in which Muslims, Sikhs and Hindus alike to took part in. In January 1964 Mu-I-Mubarak was recovered and the city of Srinagar erupted with joy. But soon after the recovery, riots broke out in Khulna and a few people were killed. Riots spread to Dhaka and Calcutta. The toll increased to thousands. Despite the presence of two armies of Pakistan and India, stray incidents of arson and looting continued for a few days. There were innumerable cases of the Muslims in East Pakistan giving shelter to the Hindus, often at the cost of their own lives and equally of the Hindus protecting the Muslims. "But they were ordinary people, soon forgotten ... not for them any Martyr's memorials or Eternal Flames" (SL: 230). The situation depicted is similar to the anti-Sikh riots that Ghosh witnessed in Delhi, following the assassination of Mrs.Indira Gandhi. Though Calcutta and Dhaka belong to two different nations , separated from each other by the borders etched upon the map, the two places are closely bound to each other that the narrator had only to look into the mirror to be in Dhaka; a moment when each city was the inverted image of the other (SL: 233). Hence what happens in Dhaka will be certainly reflected in Calcutta even when concerned authorities keep quiet about the event. The narrator comes to the conclusion that the lines separating the two nations are only *shadow lines*.

*The Shadow Lines* can be read as destabilizing the fixed, binary logic imposed on nation of otherness, identity, history and memory in the construction of nationalist boundaries. Thus in *The Shadow Lines* Ghosh represents national identity in a way which forces us to acknowledge the ambivalence of boundaries, even as we accept that partition was necessary. On a metaphoric level is what Tridib tries to do by jumping out of the sure safety of his car during the riots and running towards the Muslim old man he barely knows. The force and appeal of nationalism cannot be wished away, just as death by a communal mob in the bye-lanes of old Dhaka'. Dhaka has been Tha'mma's birth place but

her nationality is Indian. As a young girl, she had thought of fighting for freedom in east Bengal. But those very same people for whom she had been willing to lay down her life are enemies in 1964. Feelings of nationalism had after all motivated the fight against the British. The violence it unleashed by the action of a few fanatics the vengeance that the ordinary Hindu, Muslim and Sikhs wreaked on each other worsened our social sense, distorted our political judgments and deranged our understanding of moral righteousness.

*The Shadow Lines* written in 1988 was the author's response to another unprecedented event in Post-Colonial Indian scene: the 1984 Anti-Sikh riots that swept the nation after then Prime minister Mrs.Indira Gandhi was assassinated by her Sikh bodyguards. To begin with purportedly State sponsored, these riots in their magnitude were comparable to the earlier communal agitation of 1947 partition. The novel situates the 1964 communal riots in Calcutta experienced by the narrator as a young school going boy centrally in the boy's psyche as well as in his analysis of the difference of perception that pervades the recording of such incidents. In the book these riots and the riots at Dhaka become the occasion for the acid test of our recording systems whether of our history or of our newspapers

The author creates a brilliant job by the use of excessive and mundane journalese that drowns the powerful dominance that it exerts in the author's consciousness. The author finds an inadequate portrayal of such historical events in these sources and then goes on to analyze the reasons behind such silences:

*By the end of January 1964 the riots had faded away from the pages of the newspapers, disappeared from the collective imagination of 'responsible opinion', vanished without leaving a trace in the histories and bookshelves. They had dropped out of memory into the crater of a volcano of silence. The theatre of war where the Generals meet is the stage on which the states disport themselves: they have no use for the memory of riots. (SL:230)*

Through an extensive description of a day during the 1964 Calcutta riots, the narrator tells us his experiences of the day as a school student. Through the day he is along with the other children and caught in a fear psychosis while going to school. He describes the empty bus rides home where the driver falters, drives into wrong lanes and makes all the unexpected detours into unknown, deserted lanes of Calcutta to escape the mad mob. Years later while talking of the incident to his College friends in Delhi he is surprised to find that none of them seems to

remember the fateful day. Eager to prove his memory right he leads some of them to the archives where he digs out old papers to support his memory. To his dismay, the newspapers paint the incident in regular *journalese*. While reading retrospectively about his own experience of communal riots in Calcutta as a child, he stumbles upon other events of the fateful day, one of which is a description of a similar riot in Dhaka. It is at this time that he is able to link up the two seemingly unrelated events and the fact strikes him that it was indeed the same riot in Dhaka that had claimed its victim in Tridib. What the others in his college cannot even seem to remember owing to their location in places that are far from Calcutta, is ironically a mirror experience of people in another country (Khulna, Bangladesh, then in Pakistan), ‘the two cities face each other at a watchful equidistance across the border.’ What follows is the author’s meditation on the idea of distance as a physical reality and as a political and psychological construct. The insignificant physical distance between the two cities (earlier one community) is stretched to an unfathomable, unconquerable political and psychological distance, often making them as different as two civilisations. Returning to civil strife and its portrayal, why are there these silences in History? Probably because, the author says, these do not cohere well with constructs like a nation that the state has so painfully nurtured earlier:

The madness of a riot is a pathological inversion, but also therefore, a reminder of that indivisible sanity that binds people independently of their governments. And that prior, independent relationship is the natural enemy of the government, for it is the logic of states that to exist at all they must claim the monopoly of all relation between people...

#### 4. Meaninglessness of Borders and Piercing Partition

Ghosh deals borders with the concept of a borderless universe also preoccupied in *The Shadow Lines*. Ghosh is an essentially idealistic vision of a world without borders – the emblems of which in *The Shadow Lines* happen to be the atlas and the story of Tristan, which are what Tridib bequeaths to his nephew. The narrator as a historian and Tridib as an archaeologist seem to complement each other in the novel as a narrative of memory. Fifteen years after Tribibs death the narrator flips through the pages of an old Bartholomew’s Atlas, trying to learn the meaning of distance. “to learn the meaning of distance. His atlas showed me, for example, that within the tidy ordering of Euclidean space, Chiang Mai in Thailand was much nearer Calcutta than

Delhi” ( 227).

The meaninglessness of Border and its terrible effects and the futility of drawing boundary lines are fore grounded in *The Shadow Lines*. Independence and Partition brought only tragedy in its trail and once again Ghosh’s dream of national reconstruction gets traumatized. The division of India into two nations based on religion created an ever-widening division among all the Indians. Twentieth century was a century of colonial demise and many colonies were given freedom to govern their own land. But confusion and chaos existed especially in the case of those who lived nearer to the border. The agony of the grandmother when she knew that her birth place after the Partition belonged to another nation was very acute. The characterisation of grandmother is done in such a manner as to highlight the dislocation, displacement and homelessness of the postcolonial period.

One of the biggest influences on the narrator, his grandmother, Tha’mma epitomizes the ideals of the Nationalist movement and values of India’s national identity. The novel basically combines public events and personal lives of the people – mostly middle class families. Apart from the thematic occupation, Ghosh focuses on the theme of partition of India and its consequent tragic effects on the minds and emotions of the people. Ghosh projects the futility of bifurcation of a nation to create two nations, one east and another west. The outcome of such moves to draw a line across the nation is not happy state of affairs for the people not coming under preview of privileged class of the society. Neither it solves the basic problems nor does it soothe the agony and anguish of displaced persons. On the contrary the partitioned people face existential problems. Tha’mma in *The Shadow Lines* inquires whether she would be able to see the boundary between India and East Pakistan. Ghosh writes through this character:

“And if there is no difference both side will be the same, it will be just like it used to catch a train in Dhaka and get off in Calcutta next day without anybody stopping us. What was it all for them? Partition and all the killing and everything – if there is not something in between.” (SL:151)

Common prudence of Tha’mma fails to understand the justification of creating two nations. D. K. Pabby, while presenting comparative study of themes in his article viz. theme of partition and freedom in Khushwant Singh’s *Train to Pakistan* and Amitav Ghosh’s *The Shadow Lines* comments:

“In *The Shadow Lines*, the development and growth of Tha’mma character encapsulate the futility and meaninglessness

of political freedom which was otherwise supposed to usher in an era of peace and prosperity for all.” (SL: 156)

Here Ghosh has raised a question that whether the partition is a solution to the problems of social unrest whether on religious grounds or political motivation. The partition creates the feeling of humiliation and agony for the dear and near ones who are compelled to migrate from their home or birth-place merely for the reasons based on whims of political solution of the problem faced by the nation.

Through the character of Thamma novelist brings the reader to the fatal outcome of people arising out of partition of India and Pakistan as well as creation of Bangladesh. The protagonist Thamma has been criticized as fossilized specimen of nationalism. Ghosh projects that though the demarcating boundary lines are drawn by the political machineries in power, they cannot divide the memory and experiences as Thamma believes. The novelist questions the effectiveness of borders that divide people into two different groups but they cannot delete the experiences and memories of Thamma and uncle Roby and Ghosh, it depicts that such lines of division are illusory and they are lines of the Shadows. In such an atmosphere, Thamma is projected as enthusiast of the concepts of the nation and nationalism.

Thamma feels utterly bewildered when she is further told that ‘the border isn’t on the frontier: it’s right inside the air port. You’ll see. You’ll cross it when you have to fill in all those disembarkation cards and things.’ and to her chagrin, she realizes that ‘her place of birth had come to be messily at odds with her nationality’. She is painted to know that she is much more a foreigner in her place of birth than May, as the latter does not need a visa to come Dhaka. As for her Dhaka, it had long since disappeared into past and she can visit and revisit it only in memory! Her poor consolation is that the memory cannot be divided. And what about the nation she belongs? it seems it has failed her, as it aptly summed up by Tridib:

[...] she was not a fascist, she was only a modern middle class women.... all she wanted was a middle-class life in which, like the middle classes the world over, she would thrive believing in the unity of nationhood and territory, of self respect and national power: that was all she wanted\_ a modern middle class life, a small thing that history has denied her in its fullness and for which she could never forgive it. (SL: 78)

Years later, after her death, her grandson revises her idea of lines, maps and borders, coming to

the conclusion that you cannot separate two countries so simply as by drawing a line on a map:

sensible people, of good intention, had thought that all maps were the same, that there was a special enchantment in lines [...] They had drawn their borders, believing in that pattern, in the enchantment of lines, hoping perhaps that once they had etched their borders upon the map, the two bits of land would sail away from each other like the shifting tectonic plates of the prehistoric Gondwanaland. What had they felt, I wondered, when they discovered that they had created not a separation, but a yet-undiscovered irony [...] a moment when each city was the inverted image of the other, locked into an irreversible symmetry by the line that was to set us free - our looking-glass border. (SL: 233)

The reflection on borders is provided by Thamma’s senile old Jethamoshai, who was the chief reason behind her Dhaka visit, and who quite surprisingly, provides a very refreshingly different perspective on the Partition. When people insist that he must leave Dhaka and accompany, his extended family who have come to fetch him all the way from Calcutta. He simply refuses to leave and says:

I know everything, I understand everything. Once you start moving you never stop. That’s what I told my sons when they took the trains. I said: I don’t believe in this India-Shindia. It is all very well, you are going away now, but suppose when you get here 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. (SL: 215)

Something of Jethamoshai’s sentiment is echoed by Robi fifteen years after he heard it spoken out. He had been a mere slip of a boy then; fifteen years later, while he relates his version of Tridib’s death to the protagonist in London, he is an Indian Administrative Service officer, with first-hand knowledge of many riots and communal disturbances on the subcontinent. He muses on the word ‘freedom’, since the root of all problems seemed to lie there.

Free, he said laughing. You know, if you look at the pictures on the front pages of the newspapers at home now, all those pictures of dead people – in Assam, the north east, Punjab, Sri Lanka, Tripura – people shot by terrorists and separatists and the army and the police, you will find somewhere behind it all, that single word; everyone’s doing it to be free (...). I think to myself why don’t

they draw thousands of little lines through the whole sub-continent and give every little place a new name? What would it change? It's a mirage; the whole thing is a mirage. How can anyone divide a memory? (SL: 246-247)

Three perspectives of borders are provided by three characters belonging to three contiguous generations as figured in *The Shadow Lines*. The first is spoken by Thamma, the protagonist's grandmother; the second by her uncle, Jethamoshai (i.e. the protagonist's granduncle); and the third by Robi, Thamma's nephew, who is roughly the same age as the protagonist and is his friend.

Jethamoshai had lived in a world where borders were not of paramount importance, and what was regarded as important was one's sense of belonging to the place one was born and brought up in. Hence, the tone of finality in his concluding remark, 'As for me, I was born here, and I will die here.' He does not believe in arbitrary lines and is shrewd enough to realize that once a man started to move, there would be no end to it. His words also appear to be prophetic, for within less than a decade of their utterance, in 1971, East Pakistan became Bangladesh. Rather differently, Grandma, the second character to muse on borders, grew up in the momentous opening decades of the twentieth century, i.e. in the heyday of the anticolonial struggle against the British rule in India. Struggle was the most formative of her experiences, something that defined her worldview, and Ghosh's narrative makes it clear that though she had not literally participated in the nationalist movement, the spirit of the times had entered her soul and contributed to the creation of her own perception of self. Difference, again, is the third speaker on borders, Robi, who as an individual belonging to a post-Partition generation, and having an intimate knowledge of the communally coloured disturbances that rent the national fabric of India, notes how freedom seemed to lie at the very root of all the subcontinent's problems. As Ghosh narrativizes it, Robi's response is much more philosophical than his elders' to the whole issue of borders and nationhood.

*"At the origin of India and Pakistan lies the national trauma of Partition, a trauma that freezes fear into silence, and for which The Shadow Lines seeks to find a language, a process of mourning, and perhaps even a memorial."*(Suvir Kaul in the essay "Separation Anxiety.")

*The Shadow Lines* is the Partition novel examined in this book that really questions the concept of the border, questions very seriously whether the shadow line that we inscribe to separate

people into different nations has any validity, or whether it is an absurd illusion. It is Ghosh's contention in this novel that borders themselves are fictive and illusive, that they defeat and negate the very reason behind their ostensible existence. What Tridib's atlas demonstrates to the narrator, the lesson he learns after a harrowing seventeen year-long search for the truth of Tridib's death, is that in the ultimate analysis, borderlines do not mean anything at all. But beyond this, yet another interesting aspect of the *The Shadow Lines* is that it gives us a representation of the nation in both colonial and post-colonial times through characters who belong to three contiguous generations (Jethamoshai, Thamma and Robi); and it shows how the narrator, with the gift of vision bequeathed by Tridib, not only uncovers but also bridges all the earlier perspectives towards nationhood.

Ghosh has raised a question that whether the partition is a solution to the problems of social unrest on religious grounds or political motivation. The partition creates the feeling of humiliation and agony for the dear and near ones who are compelled to migrate from their home or birth-place merely for the reasons based on whims of political solution of the problem faced by the nation. Shobha Tiwari in her book *Amitav Ghosh: A Critical Study* comments:

"Ghosh questions the very basis of modern nation states. It does not matter how many states exist in a continent or sub continent. It does not change the well being of its people. Nationhood itself is a mirage because it is not based on any logic. When nature draws line in the form of mountains, oceans, rivers, it is real. But manmade borders are shallow and unjustifiable." (Ibid., P.48.)

Ghosh texts carry a multiplicity of meaning or polysemy specially due to the representative nature of narrative- Amitav Ghosh narration is the representation of the world with a purpose, close and comprehensive a fashion as possible, using mimetic modes in a controlled, authorial way which survives to be read and reread, without ever finally being closed or exhausted.

All three types of narration (Hall in 1997 has identified three approaches in representation: Reflective, Intentional and Constructionist)<sup>4</sup> can be traced in the works of Amitav Ghosh. His narrative technique is a combination of synchronic and diachronic structure. The premise of the discussion on Ghosh's writing, to study his craftsmanship, is based on the definition of narrative by Paul Cobley in his book *Narrative*. He sees narrative as "*a particular form of representation in implementing signs...necessarily bound up with sequence, space and time.*" (Cobley 3)

Thus Ghosh explores the theme of partition of a modern nation and has asserted futile action of the political machinery in power. *The Shadow Lines* thus puts such ideological themes before the reader for evaluation of such political motives based on illogical axis.

Culture is a process of circulation that has nothing to do with national borders. As Robert Dixon in a critique of Ghosh argues:

The characters in Ghosh's novels do not occupy discrete cultures, but 'dwell in travel' in the cultural spaces that flow across borders- the 'shadow lines' drawn around modern nation states. (Dixon: 10).

The partition is a vivid manifestation of the claim that post colonial nation are founded in a bloody in a severance of the umbilical cord, one that fortified border between nation states with irrational and remorseless violence. The discourse of nationalism, however, affects to make sense of the absurd loss of lives that occurs

The novel made the reader to discover that world is not a simple place that can see in atlas but there are so many inexorable facts, hidden in that solid lines as it lead to political aggression and violent bloodshed. The boundaries between nation are like shadow lines, of hatred and hostility out of national sentiments. The narrator also shows how ordinary people try their best to seek mutual sympathy among various ethnic groups of the subcontinent. There are some people like Tha'mma believe in not only drawing lines as part of faith but respecting them with blood. The border that carved at the time of partition has led to further brutality in the form of those riots, pogroms and organized historical distortions and cultural depletions with which the history of independent India replete.

#### NOTES:

1. Anthropology defines itself by its fieldwork methodology. Just as the historian points to time spent in the archives analysing documentary evidence as the sine qua non of the historical discipline, so the anthropologist views time spent 'in the field' as integral to any serious attempt to write about another culture. As Bernard S. Cohn writes, '[w]hat a document is to historians, field work is to anthropologists' (1982: 232)

2 . Amitav Ghosh made his literary debut with the *Circle of Reason* in 1986. The very first novel was hailed by the critics as a remarkable technical achievement. He was awarded with Sahitya Akademi Award for his second novel *The Shadow Lines* (1988). He also received Anand Purskar for the same novel. He has also received many other prestigious awards like Pushcart Prize, Grand Prize

for fiction and Arthur C. Clark Award, presented to the best science fiction in 1997 for *The Calcutta Chromosome* (1996). His non-fiction writings have also received no less appreciation. *In An Antique Land* (1992) was named as one of the notable books of 1993 by the New York Times. He was also nominated for the American Society of Magazine Editor's Award for reporting for *Countdown* (1999). *Dancing in Cambodia and At Large in Burma* (1998) brought travel, history, cultural commentary and political reportage gelling into one seamless essay. *The Imam and The Indian* (2002) is a collection of 18 essays addressing different issues like fundamentalism, history of novel, Egyptian culture, literary awards in Third World was written over a span of 16 years from 1986 to 2002. These essays were written during the gaps between his novels, thus, providing a track record of the evolution of the author's interest and ideas for fiction. A recipient of Padma Shree, Ghosh received the esteemed Grinzane Cavour Prize for his contribution to the world of literature recently. *Glass Palace* (2000) and *Hungry Tide* (2002) were received with accolades carving a more respectful niche for Ghosh. He has launched his ambitious Ibis trilogy with *Sea of Poppies* in the year 2008. The second part of the trilogy *River of Smoke* has also been published in June 2011.

3. Tha'mma's aspirations for Indian national unity—which rely on the homogenizing effect of a "Tradition" of warfare—prove to be hopelessly sterile, for they are based upon the Western British model which is not easily transposable to so culturally variegated a society as India's. As Mondal points out, "in the case of large nations such as India which have substantial minority cultures this has led to increasing problems as the totalizing figure of the 'nation' seeks to subsume all of its heterogeneous identities into one" (2003: 26).

4. Hall (1997) has identified three approaches in representation: Reflective, Intentional and Constructionist. The reflective approach sees meaning in the person, object or event in the world as it is and reflects the same meaning. The intentional approach is the one in which the person who is representing exercise the control. Here the representation is made to mean what the producer wants it to mean. The constructionist approach allows the meaning to occur: here the meaning takes shape through the representational system. Neither the producer nor the thing being represented has control over meaning in this approach of representation. All three types can be traced in the works of Amitav Ghosh.

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