

Communication beyond Boundaries: An Analysis of Partition As Depicted in *The Shadow Lines*

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Abstract: 'Partition' talks about division of a nation or territory into two or more nations or territories. In political context, partition is a change of political borders cutting through at least one territory, considered a homeland by some community. Partition of India has been one of those turning points in the history of the subcontinent which has not ended yet. Through media or literature, through symbols or rituals, it still lives. Amitav Ghosh deals in the epic themes of travel and diaspora, history and memory, political struggle and communal violence, love and loss. *The Shadow Lines* has gained enormous significance in postcolonial studies as it touches upon some of the major issues in the fields of boundaries, national identities, and borders. The novel has been influential in the definition and discussion of a postcolonial geography that challenges current mapping order. He has portrayed partition of India in a vivid manner. The present paper tries to attempt the theme of partition as discussed by Ghosh in his novel through its characters and incidents. There is the constant continuation of the trauma of partition through three generations. Change of nationality is not something that can be obtained once and for all. Liberation by partitioning not only involves drawing of new lines on a map, unfurling of new national flags and formation of new government but also comprises the tearing apart of individuals, families, homes, villages and linguistic, cultural communities that would once have been called nationalities.

Key Words: Boundaries, nationalities, diaspora.

1. INTRODUCTION:

Partition talks of division and separation and partition of India has been a turning point in the history of the subcontinent. Indians can still feel the pain of partition present either in songs, stories, in memories or in monuments. Several Indian novels in English also evoked partition and these novels mainly focused on the immediate experience of violence, sometimes described with harsh realism. Partition novels described the distressing experience of victims confronted with the horrors of partition, forced migration and their psychological wounds. The 1980s became a landmark in the history of the Indian novel in English when Salman Rushdie published *Midnight's Children* that propelled the genre on the international scene. *The Shadow Lines* by Amitav Ghosh takes up the theme of partition and reinvents the history of the subcontinent from the memory fragments of an anonymous middle-class Bengali narrator who introduces himself as the author of the novel. He retraces his family history to make sense of a private drama which still haunts him after two decades. He recalls the murder of his uncle Tridib, assassinated by a mob of angry Muslims during the 1964 Dhaka riots. The narrator's family migrated from Dhaka, the city which became Pakistani in 1947 and then the Bangladeshi capital city in 1971, to Calcutta before partition. The narrator appears to be Ghosh's spokesperson on the sensitive issues of nationalism and national history which are central to the novel. Like Ghosh, the narrator was born in the 1950s, after the partition of India. In his narrative, we find individual and family memories relating to Partition which shook the subcontinent to reshape the past of India. Through the narrator's experience, *The Shadow Lines* offers a precise method to rewrite the past. According to Sandrine Soukaïin "The Hybridity of Partition Novels in English: Reshaping National Identities in Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* and Kamila Shamsie's *Burnt Shadows*" :

"The first step requires using one's "imagination" to picture places and times one has never travelled to. Thus the narrator repeatedly claims his uncle Tridib taught him to use his "imagination with precision" so as to devise the world in which he would live since everyone lived in a story and "the alternative wasn't blankness – it only meant if we didn't try ourselves, we would never be free of other people's inventions". The second step consists in examining archival documents such as contemporary press articles. Using both the imaginative power of fiction and his knowledge as a scholar – Ghosh completed a PhD in history and anthropology – the novelist elaborates a narrative that reads as an imaginary memory map crossing over time and space, connecting past private memories to more recent collective histories, and also linking different world traumas together – namely the 1947 Partition and the Second World War Blitz in London". (Soukaï, p. 73)

2. METHODOLOGY:

Various parameters have been formulated to understand the diasporic studies. The concept of diaspora which was originally referred to the historic experience of particular groups has undergone dramatic changes. Various movements and changes have changed the interpretations of the term. Few characteristics like Causes of migrations, Cross Border Experiences of Homeland with Destination, and Incorporation of Migrants into the countries of

settlement are helpful to analyze any piece of diasporic writings. The first characteristic migration refers to forced migration associated with “the dispersal of Jews in the ancient times and with Palestinians in the recent times”. Modern characteristic of diaspora refer to any kind of dispersal relating to, refugees minorities, expatriates, guest workers etc. The second characteristic, Cross Border Experiences of Homeland with Destination is linked with the experience of foreign lands with that migrated destination. Older notions mean a return to homeland while newer concept does not believe in remaining bound to the origin. The diasporic experience of all mobile persons seems as ‘trans-nation’. The third characteristic of diaspora, Incorporation of Migrants into the countries of settlement, is associated with “the incorporation or integration of migrants in to the countries of settlement. In the older notion of Diaspora”. This belief of diaspora is connected with boundary maintained by a dominant majority through favouritism against the diaspora groups.

3. DISCUSSION:

The theme of partition in the Novel *The Shadow Lines* can be easily demonstrated by the characters, situations, incidents, and facts etc. In this novel, there is continuation of the trauma of partition through three generations. Narrator’s biggest influence, the grandmother, Tha’mma epitomizes the ideals of the Nationalist Movement and values of India’s national identity. Her attitude towards nationalism is worth telling. Through Tha’mma Partition can be seen because she is a migrant from Dhaka and stays in India. As her nationality, an Indian but her place of birth in East Pakistan, it causes her to question her national identity and how it formed. This theme of Partition and Nationalism certainly arises the theme of Post Colonialism as well i.e, concept of ‘Home’ and also ‘Imagined communities’. Tridib, The protagonist is a middle class boy who grows up in a middle class family; he is the narrator’s uncle He died because of an attack in Dhaka, at the time of coming back to India with his family. That attack is the result of Partition, an after-effect of it. It shows the violence through riots and attacking nature, bombing etc. Tridib has surrendered his life to God, for the sake of his family members. The story itself told by a nameless narrator in recollection. It’s “a non linear tale told as if putting together the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle in the memory of the narrator”. The novel “it traverses through the almost seventy years through the memories of people, which the narrator recollects and narrates, giving their viewpoint along with his own.” This has the greatest touch of Partition theme “because Partition means Division, Separation, Things are not chronological, unorganized, messed up.” (Banerjee) Though the novel is based largely in Kolkata, Dhaka & London, It seems to echo the sentiments of whole South-east Asia, with coherent overtones of Independence & the pangs of Partition. It’s Concept of Nationalism with wound not only, theme of Partition. In fact, all the other characters possesses the characteristics of Nationalism but “not the least, very one of a kind is the Tha’mma’s relative Jethamosai, The old man in Dhaka, he also shows the Nationalism so fervently. How till the end he fights for his place in anyway. Isn’t it the concept of Nationalism with wound of Partition?” (Soukaï)

4. CONCLUSION:

It is an undeniable fact that the partition of the India was the most distressing experience in our recent history. The brutality it unleashed by the ruffian actions of some people ,the retribution that the ordinary Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs wreaked on each other destroyed our social sense, changed our political judgments and destroyed our understanding of morality. Change of nationality is not something that can be obtained in some seamless form. The undercurrents keep flowing from one side to the other side. Violence does not only involves drawing of new lines on a map or unfurling of new national flags but also comprises the tearing apart of individuals, families, homes, villages and linguistic, cultural communities that would once have been called nationalities.. These shadow lines are hated by everybody. But to reverse it “we need to erase the binary division between East and West, Tradition and Modernity, Us and Them, Fracturing the rigidity and the perverted value attached to borders perhaps.” (Banerjee) *The Shadow Lines* is the novel that deals wholly with the effects of the Partition, mainly with Partition on the Bengal border.

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