
**Self-Identity And Struggle for Existence in Amitav Ghosh's
'The Shadow Lines': A Study**

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Abstract

Amitav Ghosh is one of the prominent Indian English writers. His novels claim a unique position in the postcolonial literature. He is a witness to some of the momentous events of contemporary history that profoundly impacted his imagination. His writings are a true reflection of the present society. He has a great interest in humanity and civilization. Most of his novels deal with theories of postmodern concerns like politics, culture and partitions, and human existence. His novels' notions of self-identity and struggle for existence have been central preoccupations. His present novel 'The Shadow Lines' has shown an acute post-structure awareness of self-identity and existence as always unstable, constantly shifting with discursive changes that occur with alterations in the spatial and temporal orders in this logo-centric world. My paper explores the issue of self-identity and the struggle for existence as deeply involved in the question of freedom, which forms an important thematic strain in the novel 'The Shadow Lines.'

Keywords: postcolonial, contemporary, postmodern, existence, self-identity, and thematic

Introduction

Amitav Ghosh has become an exceptionally prevalent and incredible Indian English author of the new age. He was born in Calcutta on July 11, 1956. He finished his studies at Dehradun, Delhi, Alexandria and Oxford. He went to Oxford to think about Social Anthropology and got a Master of Philosophy and PhD in 1982. For some time, he worked as a writer for the Indian Express. He functioned as a visiting

individual in the middle of Social Sciences at Trivandrum, Kerala, from 1982 to 83. From 1983 to 1987, he worked in the Department of Sociology at Delhi University. He got his D.Phil. in Social Anthropology from Oxford University. He is a recognized teacher of Comparative Literature at Queens College of the City University of New York. He has been incredibly affected by the political and social conditions in India. The tales and extraordinary occasions of history, which his folks described to him, additionally awed him. Much of the time, Amitav visited Egypt and numerous other nations for his investigative work. His academic life and voyages contributed much to his vocation as an imaginative author. The colossal The identity that enlivened and impacted Amitav the most was Satyajit Ray, a considerable Bengali storyteller and producer. Ghosh concedes that Satyajit Ray's impact on his adolescence and youth was deep to the point that it had an imperative influence on molding his creative energy.

Amitav Ghosh's novel "The Shadow Lines" (1988) is set in Calcutta in the 1960s and moves quickly between Calcutta and Dhaka and London. A young unnamed narrator, his hero Tridib, and the narrator's grandmother provide the basic framework for the novel moving forward. The novel extends from 1939 to 1974, with 1964 being a very important year for the characters. Memory links the past to the present, and many characters live more in the past than in the present. The novel seems to mock even the concept of exclusive national identity and pride because riots break out simultaneously in Dhaka and Calcutta due to the same incident. The snapping of cultural bonds becomes a recurring image in this novel. Lines and boundaries are drawn across continents and countries, but what purpose is served by them is an unsolved puzzle. Even ideals nurtured by the freedom struggle suddenly seem meaningless because the disrupted sub-continent today refuses to accept the importance of religious tolerance and brotherhood. The novel suggests the mindlessness of the Violence unleashed in both countries as the fallout of the prophet's hair. This is corroborated by the killing of Tridib when he is on an innocent visit to Dhaka along with Thamma and May. Political independence is analyzed and scrutinized in new perspectives. We get a picture of the period through the characters' minds, their painful and nostalgic recalling and recollections.

The focal point, however, remains the narrator's eye - an eight-year-old boy who lives with his parents and grandmother in the genteel suburb of Calcutta. From here, the novel moves freely either forward or backward, encompassing his grandmother's life, the family of his grandmother's sister Mayadebi, her husband,

and their children, especially Tridib, who had an indelible influence on the narrator as a child and the narrator's second cousin Ila. Another English family - the Price - has a close link for three generations with the narrator's family. By interweaving the lives and experiences of these three families, the author allows the narrator to reach adulthood.

This paper traces how the narrator comes to terms with identifying the character's contention with reality. This has been one of the predominant themes of modern novelists. The novel's protagonist is one such name-less person - the narrator, who could be any of us. The author traces his development from childhood to maturity, and in doing so, he shows how divergent forces influence his growing up and how, as an adult, he comes to terms with them. Premindha Bannerjee says: "The narrator's identity takes shape in and through his responses to the characters he engages with and the responses he elicits. Otherwise, the narrator remains unnamed; there are no.

References to any distinguishing characteristics or physical traits in his case, yet it is through his reconstruction of events that the reader can infer meaning and significance" (2008:42,43).

For the narrator, Tridib's lore differs significantly from the collection of facts and figures. This is reflected in the grandmother's attempt to save her people to bring 'Jethamoshai' home and not let him die in another country. She would remain a mute witness to the massacre of Jethamoshai and her nephew Tridib at the hands of the unruly mob in the riot-torn city of Dhaka. It was because she attempted to save him that she lost him forever. In trying to impose her idea of a 'home' and 'country,' she would pay a heavy price. The older man, who was quite happy living alone in the ancestral home with Khalil and his family, had refused to take the Partition seriously. He firmly believed that if he started moving, he would never stop. He had once told his son, "I don't believe in the India - Shindig. It's all very well; you are going away now, but suppose when you get there, they decide to draw another line somewhere?"

Amitav Ghosh shows that even characters like the grandmother and Ilawo do not indulge in Violence but are on the fringe of it. The grandmother, even though afraid, was willing to run errands for the Bengal terrorists and kill the English magistrate at Khulna during her student days."(2001:88). The Partition had suddenly changed the meaning of "home" which she had associated with Dhaka. She was no longer 'coming home' to Dhaka as a native but as a 'foreigner.' As Tridib teases her, "You're as foreign here as May, much more than May, for a look at her; she doesn't even need a visa to come here." Again, the city has acquired such a changed exterior that Tha'mma can only cry out again and again: "Where is Dhaka? I can't see Dhaka".

"Ila and Tha'mma represent different worldviews. The grandmother's idea of freedom is one brought from British India of the past before Partition when the people living in India (Hindu or Muslim) dreamt of fighting for their freedom. It is freedom from the rule of a foreign culture and people. She believes that by fighting its way to independence, India would now be one united whole and not divided by religion or ethnicity."(212)

However, it is only when they see their old house that reality stares at them in the face. It is no longer the same house, for when the sisters reach there, they discover that their house is crumbling, that in what was once a garden in their house, there is now an automobile workshop and many families are living there. Their old, decrepit uncle was being looked after by Khalil, a rickshaw driver, and his family. The idyllic vision of the house that Tha'mma had cherished over the years had vanished. Ian Almon Examines: "Ila finds this world constrictive. She wants freedom from its middle-class orthodoxy. She, therefore, decides to move out in search of a free world which she finds in London."(2008:52).

The whole study regards the novel's main characters, Tha'mma, Tridib, and Mayadebi, the narrator. Tha'mma is the narrator's older woman and grandmother; she refuses the voices because he has more insightful knowledge than her grandson. However, the narrator admires his knowledge. "In 1939... my father's aunt, Mayadebi, went to England with her husband and her son, Tridib" (S.Lp.1). It implies that the narrator relies heavily on secondary sources, i.e., his grandmother, Ila, May, Robi and above all Tridib, his uncle who is twenty-one years older than him. Tridib is the mentor who provides him with a 'world to travel in' and 'eyes to see them with' long before he moves out of Calcutta, and he expands his world with his encyclopedic knowledge of places and precision and invents places in his imagination with the help of Bartholomew's Atlas. "Tridib was an archaeologist; he was not interested in fairyland: the one thing he wanted to teach me, he used to say, was to use my imagination with precision" (S.L p24).

Tridib shares all his knowledge with the narrator without hesitation, which makes him aware of all places and can guide his family and friends. For Tha'mma, freedom became the ultimate signifier of selfhood and identity; for Tridib, it is only a mirage, an illusion. Unlike Tha'mma's concept of the nation, which is rejected as inadequate through the text's narrative, Tridib's formulation of nationhood as one that should be able to perceive the fragility of borders in constructing self-identity and existence is supported elsewhere by the narrator. Reflecting on Ila's rage at forcibly being stopped from dancing at a nightclub and her assertion that she lived in London to be "free of your bloody culture," the narrator says. One of the limitations of Ghosh's

narrator's perspective in the novel is his class position, which provides him with the luxury of contemplating freedom in the abstract. Ghosh emphasizes the precariousness of the narrator's class status as it is dependent solely on his access to an education. On a trip to visit poor relatives in a lower-class section of Calcutta. Vinita Chandra writes: "It was that landscape that lent the note of hysteria to my mother's voice when she drilled me for my examinations; it was to those slopes she pointed when she told me that if I did not study hard, I would end up over there, that the only weapon people like us had was our brains and if we did not use them like claws to cling to what we had got, that was where we would end up, marooned in that landscape."(2003:73)

The central protagonists of the novel "The Shadow Lines" are portrayed to show how these characters experience the search for self-identity and struggle of existence and feel their past discursively separate and opposed to the present. These innocent victims of the social and political unrest created by the whirlwinds of colonialism and its aftermath share almost the same emotional phenomenon despite changes in their times and milieu. As a result, alienation remains a constant factor throughout their life stories and experiences, incessantly driving them to quest for their real

Identity. The novels' subversive quests celebrate the ultimate triumph of the native spirit, proclaiming centrality to the subaltern. Finally, Amitav Ghosh describes the aspirations, defeats, and disappointments of the dislocated people in India.

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