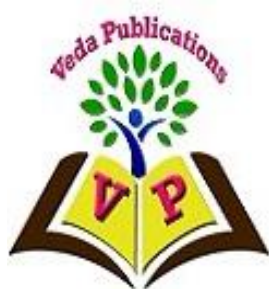


**BROTHERHOOD BEYOND BORDERS – ‘A REALITY’ IN
THE SHADOW LINES**Mrs.G. Youveniya^{1*} Dr.Sumathy K. Swamy²^{1*} (Ph.D Research Scholar, P.S.G.R Krishnammal College for Women Coimbatore.)²(Associate Professor, Dept. Of English, P.S.G.R Krishnammal College for Women Coimbatore)**ABSTRACT**

Advancement in technological development has made life easier and relationship complicated. The essence of humanity ‘humanism’ is lost in the name of partition, nation and borders. Ghosh attempts a revival for humanism in his *The Shadow Lines*. The novel portrays the futility of war, riots, violence and partition and also re-searches the lost humanism that has been thrown into the recesses of modern busy life. This paper attempts to prove that the concept of borders and boundaries are illusions. These illusionary lines blur human sight and shrouds humanism in the name of nation and patriotism. It concludes that these illusions will disappear with the bloom of brotherhood and humanism irrespective of boundaries and borders.

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In this era of globalization words like borders, frontiers and contours have lost its grip on humanity. People have started to traverse borders for numerous reasons and this has resulted in the birth of a new community called Diaspora community. Usha Hemmadi in her article “Amitav Ghosh: A Most Distinctive Voice” opines, “Borders are meant to be crossed. Borders, then are an illusion, cruel most of the times”(290). Amitav Ghosh a diasporic writer lays his emphasis in establishing universal brotherhood in his novel *The Shadow Lines*. Amitav Ghosh was born in Calcutta on 11th of July 1956. He grew up in Bangladesh (then East Pakistan), Sri Lanka, Iran, Egypt and India. After graduating from

the University of Delhi, he went to Oxford to study Social Anthropology and received a Master of Philosophy and Ph. D. in 1982. He began his career as an editor in Indian Express newspaper in New Delhi. Meanwhile he has also been a Fellow at the Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta. In 1999, he joined the faculty at Queens College, City University of New York as Distinguished Professor in Comparative Literature. He has also been a visiting professor to the English Department of Harvard University since 2005. He being an anthropologist has traversed borders to explore universal brotherhood despite the religious, cultural, traditional and linguistic differences. This paper aims to proclaim



Ghosh's concept of brotherhood beyond borders that could be attained by destroying the notion of nation and nationality.

Ghosh's second novel *The Shadow Lines* is set up on the scarlet canvas embellished by the blood of lives engulfed by partition, riot and violence in the name of religion and nationality. The story unfolds the lives of two families to three generations portraying vividly the social trauma that creates an indelible mark in the minds and memory of the characters. However the novel does not follow linear or chronological order, instead the narration shuttles to and fro between the past and the present. Ghosh's craftsmanship is revealed in presenting twin protagonists; one for the past and one for the present. The former protagonist though dead is emerged into the character of the latter and becomes his 'alter-ego'.

The novel is divided into two parts: "Going Away" and "Coming Home". The first part "Going Away" sums up the scattered conscience of psyche of people who suffer and endure partition, war and riots. The second part "Coming Home" emphasis the need for a 'home' that is permanent and is not endangered or influenced by the inevitable rule of life 'Change' – a change in politics, borders and nationality. The story is a narrated by the present protagonist the 'unnamed narrator' who lives in Calcutta during 1980's.

The story begins in the year 1939 thirteen years before the birth of the narrator, the narrator recollecting the departure of his grand aunt Mayadebi to England for getting medical assistance for her husband with her three sons Jatin, Tridib and Robi, his only rich relatives who afforded to cross borders without any difficulty. Mayadebi's husband Shri Himangshushekhar Datta – Chaudhuri was with the India Consul-General and had every opportunity to travel around as his job would demand. Her elder son Jatin became an economist with the UN, Tridib was pursuing his Ph.D. in Archaeology from the Calcutta University and Robi the youngest was in college in Dehra Dun and The narrator himself is a research scholar at the Indian Office Library for his Ph.D. thesis in the textile trade between India and England in the nineteenth century. The narrator being brought up by his grandmother under strict

disciplinarian lifestyle had developed a strong likeness towards his cousin Tridib – the second son of Mayadebi on his liberty to lead a carefree life. The narrator's likeness becomes so strong that Tridib becomes his alter-ego.

Mayabedi's family was closely connected to Mrs. Price family who live in London. Their bond of friendship had bloomed with Mrs.Price's father Mr. Lionel Tresawsen and Maya's father Mr. Justice Chandrashekhar Datta Chaudhri. Mr. Lionel Tresawsen had been to India during British rule to set up a homeopathic hospital in a village near Calcutta. His daughter Elisabeth married her teacher S.N.I. Price who taught her in college and was called as Mrs. Price after her marriage and his son Alan settled well. Mrs.Price's daughter May was a student at the Royal College of Music and was in love with Tridib. Jatin's daughter Ila was in love with her son Nick Price and the unnamed narrator was also in love with Ila there by forming a love triangle. The narrator's love for Ila in his childhood is his only identity where Tridib's influence is absent. The narrator by unravelling the past and his memories brings out the trauma of partition on the lives of the characters, events of Tridib's death and historic events of Second World War. The roots of friendship between the two families have spread even to the third generation of uniting May and Tridib and latter sealed by May and the unnamed narrator.

The narrator's grandmother fondly known as Thamma is one of the dominant character in narrator's life. The narrator grew up viewing life from his grandmother point of view and this has become the cause for his likeness towards Tridib. The story unfolds as a reminiscent of the narrator who lucidly imagines places that are far away. The narrator who is confined to strict disciplinarian life imposed by his grandmother develops a liking towards Tridib on being attracted to his carefree lifestyle that has no routine or regular timetable to use his time and all the more was free to his will, yet his time didn't stink. He is so absorbed into him that he becomes his alter-ego, "I have come to believe that I was eight too when Tridib first talked to me about that journey"(TSL 3). Tridib's impact is such that he has given him worlds to travel and invent places in his mind, in narrator's words, "I could not forget because



Tridib had given me worlds to travel in and he had given me eyes to see them with..." (TSL 22). Tridib had made it clear for him that imagination is the key for happy living,

"He said to me that one could never know anything except through desire, real desire, which was not the same thing as greed or lust; a pure, painful primitive desire, a longing for everything that was not in oneself, a torment of the flesh, that carried one beyond the limits of one's mind to other times and other places, and even, if one was lucky, to a place where there was no border between oneself and one's image in the mirror." (TSL 32)

The narrator was shocked to understand that Ila could hardly imagine anything in her mind though she has travelled to many places. The faculty of imagination has set him apart from Ila. The narrator who has never travelled could invent and imagine places that are far away. He achieves real freedom through his faculty of imagination. He also explains to Ila that imagination facilitates the freedom of free thinking and unbound from the bondage of other's imposed thoughts, "...we had to try (imagine) because the alternative wasn't blankness – it only meant that if we didn't try ourselves, we would never be free of other people's inventions." (TSL 35). Thus the former protagonist (Tridib) becomes the alter-ego of the latter- the unnamed Narrator.

Ghosh has portrayed Thamma as the catalyst of change. Thamma, being widowed at a young age of 32, like a warrior fought with life to bring up her only son. Her greatest possession was her education that enabled her to take a giant stride in her life. She was a history graduate from Dhaka University and this has fetched her job as a school teacher where she served for 27 yrs and retired as the school headmistress. She as a student was a revolutionist who aspired to help the terrorist who was in her class just in order to get freedom, "...I would have killed him. It was for our freedom: I would have done anything to be free" (TSL 43). She is full of nationalistic spirit and her rights towards her nation is revealed when she opposes Ila's decision of staying in England,

"Ila has no right to live there,...She doesn't belong there. It took those people a

long time to build that country; hundreds of years, years and years of war and bloodshed. Everyone one who lives there has earned his right to be there with blood: with their brother's blood and their father's blood and their son's blood. They know they're a nation because they've drawn their borders with blood" (TSL 85).

This exhibits the conventional way of thinking of Thamma that sets her apart in this unconventional world.

Ghosh has portrayed Ila as a representative of westernized women who leave their roots and finds uprooted in an alien country. She represents typical western style woman as post colonial female perspective. Unlike the narrator Ila had the opportunity to travel around and visit different places but she never had the ability to understand people and invent places, "Tridib often said of her, the inventions she lived in moved with her, so that although she had lived in many places, she had never travelled at all" (TSL 23). The narrator's love for Ila is his only identity. He had a liking towards Ila right from his childhood. Whereas Ila preferred the unconventional way of living where she could be free from the shackles of culture and tradition, "Do you see now why I've chosen to live in London? Do you see? It's only because I want to be free...Free of your bloody culture and free of all of you" (TSL 98). Her obsession on the western culture blindfolded her to reality. She was madly in love with Nick Price, May's brother, but her marriage life proved to be a failure. She took to plight from her roots of morals, ethics and culture only to understand that she has lost everything in her life- her love, friendship, husband and home. Here Ghosh has portrayed two contrasting characters, Thamma – the older generation, glorifying her nation for its heritage and Ila – the younger generation, despises her nation for its culture.

Thamma survived the trauma of partition who by force became an immigrant of India from Dhaka. She spent her first few days in Dhaka and the next in India. After her retirement she took up the mission of rescuing her uncle Jethamoshai who lives in Dhaka under the care of unknown refugees from Bihar and U.P., "There's only one worthwhile thing



left for me to do in my life now, she said. And that is to bring the old man home..." (TSL 151). Thamma was shocked to learn that her old uncle is bedridden and is being taken care of by Khalil a Muslim rickshaw driver from Murshidabad in Bengal. She informs Robi that her uncle was an orthodox man who adheres to rules based on religion and community, "There was a time when that old man was so orthodox that he wouldn't let a Muslim's shadow pass within ten feet of his food? And look at him now, paying the price of his sins" (TSL 231). She was excited to go to Dhaka the place of her birth and was determined to bring her uncle back to India.

Thamma's coming home to Dhaka proved to be more painful than her going away. Her coming home experience has made her a total stranger to herself. Thamma was curious to fly high and get the eagle's view of both her nations and especially the borders that divide the nations. Her son made her understand that there wouldn't be any such visible separations,

"...she wanted to know whether she would be able to see the border between India and East Pakistan from the plane.... did she really think the borders was a long black line with green on one side and scarlet on the other, like it was in a school atlas..." but still she retorted in expectation of some kind of difference, "No that wasn't what I meant, she said. Of course not. But surely there's something – trenches perhaps, or soldiers, or guns pointing at each other, or even just barren strips of land. Don't they call it no-man's-land? (TSL 167).

her expectation to have something build or dug to separate nations was completely shattered. The absence of such demarcations filled her with disappointment and also created a vacuum in her mind. She wondered if there weren't anything concrete or visible borders then what for were those multitude of harmless lives were paid off in the name of partition? This has made her understand the vanity and futility of war, partition and riots,

"...But if there aren't any trenches or anything, how are people to know? I mean, where's the difference then? And if there's no difference both sides will be the same; it'll be just like it used to be before, when we used to catch a

train in Dhaka and get off in Calcutta the next day without anybody stopping us. What was it all for then – partition and all the killing and everything – if there isn't something in between?" (TSL 167).

Then again landing on Dhaka she asked Mayadebi, "Where's Dhaka? I can't see Dhaka" (TSL 213). All her expectations were futile she only had disappointments to embrace and says, "I've never seen any of this. Where's Dhaka?" (TSL 214). Her homecoming is only for her revelation that there is no concrete place where and which you call it 'home', she confesses to May, "Yes, I really am a foreigner here – as foreign as May in India or Tagore in Argentina... this isn't Dhaka" (TSL 215). Thus her concept of life undergoes a transformation in understanding and accepting the reality.

Thamma's concept of life took to a different turn. Her faith in nation and her revolutionary feelings were now proved deceptive when there isn't anything new except people living on both the sides. After her landing in Dhaka though she being born there she could no longer feel the sense of belongingness to her native home. All the more she is drowned in the sludge of shock where she could no longer understand the real meaning of 'home' when her old uncle refused her invitation to India – Thamma's new Home. To her "Home" is a place where safety and security is ensured, but now her uncle presents her a new perspective towards life who accepted change which is the gift of time. He 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's all very well, you're going away now, but suppose when you get there 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'll die here." (TSL 237)

Jethamoshai's refusal to leave his birth place was like a thunderbolt for Thamma, who never expected such a strong reply, although Thamma persuades her uncle to return with her to her home in India. It was on their way to the airport they were surrounded by



the angry mob of rioters who devoured the lives of Tridib, Jethamoshai and Khalil in the name of religion. From then on Thamma was under the constant pressure of guilt that pressed her till death for being responsible of the death of the three innocent lives. Thamma who survived the partition was now haunted with the doubt of what 'Home' really means.

Ghosh depicts the non-permanency of borders that separates people from people, relationships, home and memory. He emphasises the truth that "Home" is a place where love and affection delves and it is not confined or restricted to borders in the terms of nation. For Thamma her native Dhaka existed only in her memory. The Dhaka or East Pakistan as it is called after partition is a new land. Though her favourite places remained the same she could no longer feel at home as the people who inhabited the place are strangers. As to her she understands that "home" lies in hearts and not on borders. For Thamma, India was her home because she had spent much of her time there building up her own family and name and as for Jethamoshai, Dhaka was his place where he spent all his life time. Thus borders lose its grip on humanity before love and affection.

Thus, Ghosh concludes that "Home" is a place, where humanity flourishes and differences disappear. Humanism and Brotherhood exists and extends beyond limits, borders and frontiers. They break the shackles the nation and nationality. It was with the bloom of this selfless humanism that the friendship between Mrs. Price family and Mayadebi family flourished and it is this humanism in the form of love bloomed between Tridib and May Price and then between May Price and unnamed narrator. Ghosh opines that humanism and brotherhood could be spread beyond borders and every place is a 'home' where this humanism and brotherhood exists.

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