

**AMITAV GHOSH'S *THE SHADOW LINES*, A QUEST FOR LIBERTY**P.Pradeep<sup>1\*</sup>, Dr.R.Poli Reddy<sup>2</sup>*(Asst.Professor of English, Sreenidhi Institute of Science & Technology, Ghatkesar and Research Scholar, Acharya Nagarjuna University, Guntur.)*Email: [pradeepilli@gmail.com](mailto:pradeepilli@gmail.com)*(Research Supervisor and Principal, S.V Arts & Science College, Giddaluru, Prakasam Dt.Andhra Pradesh.)*Email: [rpreddy9@rediffmail.com](mailto:rpreddy9@rediffmail.com)**ABSTRACT**

Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines*, is a highly innovative, complex novel which explores man's eternal quest for liberty. This is a quest for liberty which is sprouted from the inside of the human heart. It deals with partition, border issues and immigration. The novel also focuses on various aspects of independence and liberty. Having won the prestigious Sahitya Academy Award, *The Shadow Lines* is a critical perspective on time, liberty and history, which are closely connected to the postmodern thought.

**Keywords:** *Liberty, Immigration, Partition, Issues, Expedition And Challenges.***Citation:****APA** Pradeep,P. & Reddy,R.P.(2017) Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines*, A Quest For Liberty. *Veda's Journal of English Language and Literature-JOELL*, 4(4), 284-286.**MLA** Pradeep,P. and R.Poli Reddy. "Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines*, A Quest For Liberty" *Veda's Journal of English Language and Literature JOELL*, Vol.4, no.4, 2017, pp. 284-286.



Amitav Ghosh portrays the liberty which is preoccupied with most of his characters in *The Shadow Lines*, particularly the three major women characters, namely, the grandmother; Thamma, Ila and May. All the three characters thought to be free from their troubled clutches of past.

The narrator, unnamed character in the novel, is very closely attached to his grandmother and Ila. And this leads him to investigate their inner struggles and conflicts. His close kinship to Tridib establishes him beyond his age making him competent enough to comprehend the complications of his grandmother's character. His 'Thamma' is critical in the sense that she wants to free herself from her traumatic past, but she is unable to disentangle herself totally from her troubled past. She hates to be nostalgic. The narrator remembers this hatredness and says:

"She hates nostalgia, my grandmother, she has spent years telling me that nostalgia is a weakness, a waste of time, that it is everyone's duty to forget the past and look ahead and get on with building the future."<sup>1</sup>

She throws her past behind, gets hold of the wheels of her family and moves forward towards her life. In the progression of continued existence she hardens herself and becomes so self reliant and autonomous that she creates an intuition of "too formidable a women for people to trust their help upon without being asked."<sup>2</sup>

At the outset she has detached her connections with her past, but deep inside there is hidden desire to go back to Dhaka. There is still a strong sense of brotherhood hidden beneath the strong surface. She tries to a great extent to get in touch with her cousin who lives in Calcutta. She says:

"We're the same flesh, the same blood and now at last, after all these years, perhaps, we'll be able to make amends for all that bitterness and hatred."<sup>3</sup>

The partition of her inherited home had left a profound injury to her soul. This disturbance in their small private life had left Thamma's acquisitiveness for security. And it is this feeling of uncertainty which binds her to her past. She seeks liberty from this painful reality which had caused to be her rootless. She wants to make some

amendments for whatever happened in Dhaka between two families, by convincing her Jethomoshai to come with her to Calcutta, her invented home:

"And her eyes grew misty at the thought of rescuing her uncle from his enemies and bringing him back where he belonged, to her invented country"<sup>4</sup>

The narrator comes to terms that if his grandmother wishes to free herself from her past, she had to go back Dhaka, and acknowledges the certainty of the partition not only two families but also two countries. All her life she has tried to escape from these painful realities of life, but now it was time to reconcile with whatever had taken place in the past. The first realization comes to her when she comes to know that there is no noticeable demarcation line between two countries. There was a wall constructed to divide the house, where she lived as a child, and it is this wall which she attempts to break down. But there was no such perceptible wall which she could demolish in order to shatter the hostility between people of the two countries, and in the process of incorporation she loses her nephew, Tridib. Therefore, she realizes the liberty struggle, the war which was raging in the country to defend its liberty. She achieves her liberty by donating her most precious piece of jewellery to the fund being raised for the war. She tells the narrator:

"I gave it away.....I gave it to the fund for the war . I had to, don't you see?

For your sake; for your liberty."<sup>5</sup>

Ila's pursuit for liberty has its root in her rootlessness. Ila is not displaced from her family, she doesn't have the fundamental intellect of belongingness. Ila has never seen permanence in her life, she was always travelling from one country to another and from one school to another. These countries are entirely different from one another. But the people who dwell in them are the same all over the place. The separation and embarrassment she encounters on her being a brown-skinned, dark-haired Indian is the same everywhere. The ladies at Airports are the only places where she feels rooted, she is shown to be:

"Running around the airport to look for the ladies not because she wanted to go, but



because those were the only fixed points in the shifting landscapes of her childhood.”<sup>6</sup>

Ila, in order to stay alive in these dissimilar environments, gets away into an imaginary world. She creates her own home, where her doll named Magda, becomes her daughter.

May Price is also one of those characters in the novel who is trying to seek liberty. May is a free woman, free in the sense that she lives on her own, takes her own decisions. May is totally binded by her love for Tridib in a very extraordinary way. She feels guilty of being answerable for his death. She even instigates to question her love for Tridib because of that occurrence:

“I don't know whether everthing else that happened was my fault, whether I'd have behaved otherwise if I'd really loved him.”<sup>7</sup>

She is too afraid to gigest the facts of Tridib's death. She is incapable to divulge the activities of that day in Dhaka to anybody because, she feels that nobody would have been able to comprehend her pain. But she discloses the fact to the narrator, who she knows loves Tridib as much as she does.

The narrator had observed may's trying to set free a stray dog from accident, so it was probable for him to comprehend that it was probable for May to see the old Jethomoshai and Khalil die on the streets of Dhaka. May is able to accomplish her liberty because she accepts the reality. Her hunt for liberty ends in this revelation. She confesses that:

“For year I was arrogant enough to think I owed him his life. But I know now I didn't kill him; I couldn't have, if I'd wanted. He gave himself up; it was sacrifice. I know I can't understand it, I know I mustan't try, for any real sacrifice is a mystery.”<sup>8</sup>

Both these girls Pecola and ila have been personalized into believing that they can be happy and beautiful only if they are light skinned, blonde haired and only if they posses a pair of blue eyes, this habituation makes Ila move away from her motherland. She begins to hate India, because it is these physical traits of an Indian, which separate her from the other students at her different schools.

Ila also loathes the hydrocracy of the so called Indian culture, which permits her to do

whatever she wants to in England, but which confines her movements in India. She hates these double standards which presents her no security. And it is accurately these motives that she offers to the narrator as her explanation for residing in London. She says:

“Do you see now why I've chosen to live in London? Do you? Its only because I want to be free..... Free of you. She shouted back. Free of your bloody culture and free of all of you.”<sup>9</sup>

In her exploration of liberty, Ila gets profoundly entangled in an illusionary relationship with Nick Price. Illusionary because, just like Ila, Nick also lives in a world of illusion. Everything about about him is illusionary. Ila puts up with his extra-marital affairs because she discovers: “That the squalor of the genteel little lives she had so much despised, was a part too of the free world she had tried to build for herself.”<sup>10</sup>

Ila is incompetent to free herself from the different intertwines of life because instead of accommodating the reality, she is running away. Tha'mma was running away from her past, whereas Ila is running from the present itself, which leads her deep into the entrapement of illusion.

In short, in Amitav Ghosh *The Shadow Lines* the three characters struggle to free themselves from their own dreaded past and present. To some extent they may succeed but yet there is something which still binds them all together.

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