



'SUFFERING' IS THE EMPOWERING SWAY IN THE SHADOW LINES BY AMITAV GHOSH

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ABSTRACT



A number of novels have been inspired by and written on the theme of partition which follow the common pattern of violence, communal hatred and alienation. Hindu- Muslim riots have been a major social problem particularly after the ideological clash between the Congress Party and the Muslim League before the Partition. Partition has also divided communities which had been living together for centuries. Amitav Ghosh in his novel *The Shadow Lines* (1988) depicts the same pattern of communal violence in a realistic manner. In *The Shadow Lines*, Ghosh presents a realistic but shocking picture of communal riots in Calcutta in 1964 and these riots were spread upto East Pakistan which is known as Bangladesh now.

The paper will present instances of realistic and shocking communal riots in Calcutta in 1964 in Ghosh's novel and its effect on the vulnerability of people and the impact of rumors.

Keywords: *Pathos, alienation, ideological clash.*



INTRODUCTION

Amitav Ghosh was born in Calcutta in 1956 and he spent his childhood days in its streets. He graduated from Delhi University and took his D.Phil. degree in Social Anthropology at Oxford. He has been a teacher in Delhi School of Economics and has also been visiting professor at Columbia and Virginia University in the United States of America. He has been a winner of Sahitya Akademi Award in 1989 and a prestigious Prix Medicis Etrangere award. His famous works include *The Shadow Lines*, *The Circle of Reason*, *In an Antique Land*, *The Calcutta Chromosome*, *The Count Down* and *The Glass Palace*.

A number of novels have been inspired by and written on the theme of partition which follow the common pattern of violence, communal hatred and alienation. In these novels the novelists have paid special attention to the use of structural devices like irony, plot, tone, proper atmosphere and thematic concerns in their narratives to heighten the tragic effect of sad tales of woe and strife. Novels like *Train to Pakistan*, *Tmas*, *The Dark Dancer*, *A bend in the Ganges*, *Azadi*, *Ice- Candy-Man*, *Midnight's Children*, *Sunlight on a Broken Column*, *Twice Born*, *Twice Dead*, *The Rape*, *Ashes and Petals*, *Blood Brothers* and *what the Body Remembers* depict the same sad and tragic tale of woe and strife from different angles.

In 'The Shadow Lines', Amitav Ghosh presents a realistic but shocking picture of communal riots in Calcutta in 1964. These riots spread upto East Pakistan (now Bangladesh). A number of Hindus and Muslims were killed on both the sides. The novel also shows the vulnerability of people and the impact of rumours. In his narrative, Amitav Ghosh uses the old newspaper reports as supplements. 'The Shadow Lines' is a very recent novel on the problem of communal violence. The novel starts with the boy's perceptive and eccentric cousin Tridib, who gives the boy worlds to travel in and eyes to see with long before he ever leaves Calcutta. As the boy grows he finds himself sucked into history. He discovers that his grandmother was stuck in an age old family feud. The boy learns about Tridib and his family's stay in England in 1939. He also gathers information about Tridib's English friends whose daughter's love for Tridib can end in tragedy.

The title of the novel is highly suggestive and symbolic. It shows a division between people and nations, illusion and reality. The novelist invokes the idea of non-existent shadow lines between two nations and communities. The story of 'The Shadow Lines' begins in colonial times. It is about two families, the Prices of London and the Datta – Chaudhuris of Bengal. These two families have long years of friendship which spans three generations. In the last part of the novel Ghosh crosses the newly created frontiers between India and Bangladesh. Amitav Ghosh rejects artificial division of land and people by politicians. He is against separate cultural and national identities. These artificially created boundaries and mere shadow lines, according to Amitav Ghosh. He finds humanity the same around him. People living near the Hougali river or far from the river are the same. But the bitter reality presents a different picture of a world as a victim of forces like racism, fascism, imperialism and exploitation of the poor.

The narratives of 'The Shadow Lines' begins in the year 1939, just before the outbreak of the second World –War. In 1939 Tridib, the narrator's father's cousin, then aged 8, is taken to England. His boyhood experiences in war-time London serve as food for thought for the narrator. Tridib's mother's home had been in Dhaka. He returns to Calcutta after twenty five years later in 1964. The eruption of communal clashes between Hindus and Muslims in East Bengal triggers violence even in Pakistan. Tridib is murdered by a street mob near his mother's original family home in Dhaka.

On the structural plane, the novel *The Shadow Lines* does not narrate all the events in a sequence with a regular scheme of chronology. The experience of the narrator-hero is not limited to his private world of dreams and reflections. Tridib, his father's cousin has provided him (the narrator) with material in the form of memories and letters which fire the imagination of the narrator. Later when the narrator grows up, he visits the place where Tridib did live. While reading about the experiences of Tridib are provided to the narrator by Tridib's girlfriend May Price who had been a witness to the violence in Bengal and Dhaka. Tridib has been a powerful symbolic figure for the narrator. These



details also trace the narrator- hero's growth and development from childhood maturity. The novel belongs to the tradition of 'bildungsroman' novel as it presents the 'weltanschauung'(worldview) of its hero as it is and an acceptance of reality. 'The Shadow Lines' also reverses the process of finding a place for one- self in the world.

Amitav Ghosh aims at making people aware about the man-made barriers and prejudices which have divided mankind. Ghosh avers that society is divided into several sections. Emotions and thoughts are same in nature throughout the world but national boundaries have been drawn by which Ghosh calls 'the shadow lines'. But the truth is that cultural bonds and emotionalities can not be divided by these shadowy lines. For example in Bengal and Bangladesh, people have equal regard for Rabindra Nath Tagore and other souls. Amitav Ghosh shows that bonds of hearts are stronger than forces aimed at dividing homes and lands. Mutual love does not know any barriers which is shown in the friendship between the Chowdharies and the Prices who get united in bonds of marriage. At another point, when the hair of Prophet Mohammad was reinstalled in the Hazratbal mosque, people in Kashmir of all faiths were overjoyed. On every special occasion, people from all faiths would visit the shrine to have a glimpse of the holy relic. In fact, this shrine has become a cultural and religious icon that speaks of the strong culturalities amongst Kashmiri's. People at large are against violence and bloodshed. Amitav Ghosh emerges as a visionary in this novel. He visualizes a world without any division and barrier. The narrator of 'The Shadow Lines' draws a circle with Khulna as the centre and Srinagar on the circumference. The narrator realizes that within the circles(man made), only citizens lived, to sue a constitutional term, not people of flesh and blood. We must realize that this planet belongs to human beings, not to fragments units alone. Ghosh advises the architects of states with boundaries to rise above narrow outlook, parochialism and fanaticism. This is what exactly seers and prophets have been proclaiming since long. Ghosh also puts a question mark on the issue of nationalism because patriotism in the narrow sense can be harmful to the nation.

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