



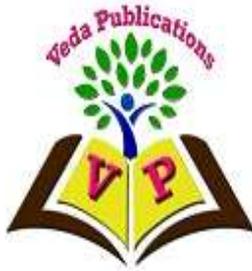
## AMITAV GHOSH'S *THE SHADOW LINES*: COMBAT AMONG DELUSION AND REALITY

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### ABSTRACT



The present study is an effort to survey the Delusion and Reality in the novel, *The Shadow Lines*. It deals with Ghosh's earlier memories of riots he has witnessed in his childhood. Amitav Ghosh utilizes memory and imagination as the narrative mechanism to examine time, space and persona. The novel, *The Shadow Lines* is presented with a number of place names across the world map and it will be helpful for the readers to understand the vast spatial context. In many of his novels, he tries to bring out the diasporic reference and representation and through that he voices for the thousands of uprooted individual human being in the world. It examines how places and people are presented in coordination with subtle interplay of reality and imagination. Each and every character in this novel has their own stories and past memories related to illusion and reality. The characters get relief, when their stories and memories are retold in certain situation. It reveals the interplay of illusion and reality and also it insists the time and space to reveal the truth that there is an undercurrent of emotions and feelings which finally unite the whole human race despite the discriminations like, region, religion and race.

**Keywords:** *Illusion, Reality, Imagination, Colonialism, Border, Nationality.*



In the field of Indian Writing in English, Amitav Ghosh is one of the popular Indian English Writers. Most of the novels of Amitav Ghosh, entirely focusses on Colonialism and post modernism. Amitav Ghosh's *The Circle of Reason* is the first novel and it won the Prix Medicis Estranger award, and his novel *The Shadow Lines* won the Sahitya Academy Award. His other novels like, *In an Antique Land*, *The Calcutta Chromosome*, *Dancing in Cambodia and Other Essays*, *Count Down*, *The Glass Palace* received Grand Prize for fiction at the Frankfurt International e-book awards and *The Imam and the Indian*, *The Hungry Tide* won the Best Work in English Fiction.

Actually, the novel, *The Shadow Lines* deals with Ghosh's earlier memories of riots and also, he witnessed some events in his childhood. Significant themes in the novels of Amitav Ghosh are Diaspora, politics, Hindu-Muslim relationship, challenges, caste, homeland and Industrialism. The center point of the novel is that, it discusses about three generations of a very big family who were leading their life as a joint family in Dhaka. The title, *The Shadow Lines* itself portrays the battle between illusion and reality. Here, the word 'shadow' stands for illusion and 'Lines' means reality. So, the novel is considered as the contemplation of reality and its nature. And also, it proves that, its significant aspect lies in the interpretation of the link between the real world and imaginary world. Amitav Ghosh utilizes memory and imagination as the narrative mechanism to examine time, space and persona. Also, he tries to overcome the separations of characters as well as the gap between spaces and times which seems both fluid and concrete.

The novel, *The Shadow Lines* presented with number of place names across the world map and it will be helpful for the readers to understand the vast spatial context. In many of his novels, he tries to bring out the diasporic reference and representation and through that he voices for the thousands of uprooted individual human being in the world. The narrative style of the novel is very simple and smoothy and highly innovative and complex. Ghosh does not give much importance to the description and also the decorated use of language. R.K.Dhawan describes the novel, *The Shadow Lines* as,

It is basically a memory novel that weaves together past and present, childhood and adulthood, India and Bangladesh and Britain, Hindu and Muslim. It is a social document and a political novel, a bildungsroman and a post-modernist work of fiction [Hawley, 82].

The novel mainly talks about two significant family such as, The Datta Chaudhari family and the another one is Price Family. It also reveals that how these two families lead their life together at the beginning and how they separate from each other. The eight-year-old narrator only introduces the two different family. The novel observes the growing of the narrator from the susceptible eight-year-old boy who led his life in the Gole Park flat in Calcutta into a matured young man. The narrator not only growing physically but also, he developed his knowledge and creative thinking and his ideas on nation, politics and nationalism. Overall, the novel, *The Shadow Lines* gives center of attention to the connotation and shades of political implication in the modern and contemporary life. The two dominant techniques,



which makes this novel as a compact one, are memory technique and imagination.

The novel begins with a statement of the narrator, regarding journey. The narrator's aunt, her husband and son are moving from India to England in 1939. The characters in the novel are both physically and in imagination, they are travelling from England to India. At once, the narrator's grandmother, named Tha'mma plans to fly to Dhaka in the year 1964. While they are travelling towards Dhaka, Tha'mma asks her son that, if she could see the border between India and East Pakistan from the flight. She confesses that at least there might be some trenches and states that,

But if there aren't trenches or anything, how are people to know? I mean, where's the difference then? And if there's no difference both slides 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? [Ghosh, 151].

It examines how places and people are presented in coordination with subtle interplay of reality and imagination. Tridib simultaneously travels into the past and future to explain certain events which highlight unique aspects of character. The narrator is a scholar, and he mainly living in the world of imagination. His grandmother is born and brought up in Dhaka, but she has to agree the reality that, Dhaka is no longer her own home or land. Only in her memory, the place, Dhaka would remain a memory.

Now the present situation is that Dhaka become a foreign land to her. As young girl, she has been inspired and admired many freedom fighters to take part in the terrorist movement. Even at that time, she was ready to kill the terrorist for the sake of her country. Nandhini Sahu comments that, "Border does not stand as a barrier and on the other side of the historical shadow line they visualize greater promises for life [Ghosh, 170]".

The narrator's cousin Illa always thinks that, India is a place where she can't lead her life independently. So, she decided to move to England and his grand mother claims that, Illa move to England for the sake of money and her loneliness. She mentions that, Illa's decision of moving from India to England is wrong as freedom cannot be "for the price of an air ticket", for it is much more than being "she wants to be left alone to do what she pleases" [Ghosh, 89]. But the narrator's opinion is differed from his grandmother. He thinks and believes that Illa does not use her imagination to search for the original meaning of freedom. According to the narrator, to find real happiness in the ideal world is in neutral places.

After the grandmother arrived in Dhaka, she tries to convince her old uncle to take partition seriously. But the old man refused to go to India, to take partition. When the old man agrees to move that will be an end for his life. If he stays at home, he can survive, because the old man's illusion always keeps him alive; and reality can kill. Each and all characters in this novel are struggling between illusion and reality. The grandmother's description of her personal memories regarding the terrorist movement explores her desire to take part in the



partition and her understanding of the nation is also revealed in terms of baptism through bloodshed. She states that,

They know they're a nation because they've drawn their borders with blood... War is her religion. That's what it takes to make a country. Once that happens people forget they were born this or that, Muslim or Hindu, Bengali or Punjabi; they become a family born of the same pool of blood [Ghosh, 78].

The narrator in this novel goes to Dhaka to lead a life in real world but he loses his life. He plans to visit many places in India, where he spent his sweet memories. On the other side, Illa, lives in the present, she never tries to find the places she has visited like Tridib. She never cares for the Indian tradition and culture. She does not even have the strange feeling, when she dances with a strange person. Illa loves her husband and though her husband has affair with other women. Even she learns how to lead a life with hard realities of life. Illa has never taken flights of imagination. In this novel, May Price is a character one who takes shelter in the world of imagination.

In the novel, *The Shadow Lines* Illa is a puzzling character. Throughout the novel, she tries to get freedom India and to lead a life in India is a strange to her. Illa, wholeheartedly tries her best to be accepted by the people of England. But the experience which she faced in England teach her that she will never be accepted by them. On another side, the reality is that, Illa is a victim under racism. Because, she has suffered physically and emotionally

in the international school in England. She was completely isolated by her classmates. Illa is totally miserable and isolated because of Racism. She wishes to enjoy the present moment of her life. Actually, she marries Nick, an English man, because she wants to establish her roots in the west. Even she knows that her husband is disloyal to her, but Illa determines to continue to stay in England.

Illa's disillusionment brings into attention the limitations and the strengths of the two cultures. She feels that, India and the tradition and culture are too conservative. Unfortunately, Illa fails to identity that the old form of restraint is being replaced by a new form of restraint, which cultivates one's personality. Each and every character in this novel has their own stories and past memories related on illusion and reality. The characters get relief, when their stories and memories are retold in certain situation. They would be able to interlink each and every situation and memories with each other.

So, finally, the combat between illusion and reality become part of an illusionary perceived experience of real life. The novel, *The Shadow Lines* highlights the borders, and it shows how this border divide people into native and foreign. When the characters decide to break these borders, they get united and become part of the world. Thus, the novel, *The Shadow Lines* reveals the interplay of illusion and reality and also it insists the time and space to reveal the truth that there is an under current of emotions and feelings which finally unite the whole human race despite the discriminations like, region, religion and race.

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