

**POST COLONIALISM REAFFIRMED IN THE SHADOW LINES**

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This paper is an attempt to examine the post colonial impact on identity, culture, history and society with reference to the novel *The Shadow Lines* written by Amitav Ghosh one of the luminaries of Indian Writing in English. He has many prestigious awards to his credit including Sahitya Academy Award in 1988 for *The Shadow Lines*, Padmashri in 2007 and many more.

Edward Said's book *Orientalism* in 1978 is considered as the primary work on which Post Colonial theory has been developed, the other notable post colonial theorists are Homi Bhaba and Gayatri Spivak together called the 'holy trinity' of post colonial theory by Robert Young. Post colonialism is a wide term which includes many aspects of life at large such as historical, cultural, political, societal at the global level, and their textual consequences. It has its Origin from the European colonization of African and Asian Countries. This theory brings to light the effects that colonization, imperialism and oppression have on people and the colonized nation as a whole.

Michael Ryan states that "post colonial studies examine cultures of colonialism as well as the vexed cultural situation that arose after colonialism ended".

In the *Shadow Lines* Ghosh deals with the issues of identity crisis, cultural deviations, migration and its after effects, political turbulence, clashes based on religion, representation of history and ultimately concludes that boundaries of nations are imaginary constraints. The novelist endeavours to reconstruct history logically based on individual memory and interpretation. The novel is set amidst the historical events like the Swadeshi movement, second world war, partition of India and communal riots of 1963-64 in Dhaka and Calcutta.

The story is narrated in the first person by a young unnamed boy who is the powerful central voice having complete control over the meaning and comprehension of the novel. The story is of a Bengali family having roots in Dhaka but living in Calcutta. The novel reflects the suffering, devastation and death caused by the shadow line of partition. The past and the present are brought together to portray the sentiments of the people and the ensuing turbulence of the times. The novel refers to the blurred lines between countries, their people and their self identity. Characters suffer because of the blurring of lines and they make efforts to come to terms with reality though without success as their simple, happy and peaceful past weighs heavily on their present and is the cause of their agony. Tridib, the narrator's favourite uncle and Ila his cousin contribute to his journey and their English family friends, the Prices, spread over Calcutta, Dhaka and London. It depicts riots between two religious communities within the country religious clashes between different communities and the government and religious riots in two neighbouring countries. Thus the riots and the ensuing violence in India and East Pakistan. Tridib's boyhood experiences during war time in London and his violent and tragic death many years later in Dhaka constitute the concluding point of the novel.

The events in the novel revolve around Mayadebi's family, their friendship, relationship and intermingling with their English friends, the Prices. On the other hand Mayadebi's sister Tha'maa who is the narrator's grandmother lives in Calcutta and has links across the border in Dhaka. She shared with him her memories and is nostalgic about Dhaka her birth place where she had spent her childhood. Ila one of the major characters in the novel is grand daughter of Mayadebi. Ila's father was a diplomat thus she travelled to various countries with her parents. They occasionally visited Calcutta and Ila shared her experiences with the wonder struck boy, the narrator. Her globetrotting experiences ignite his imagination and he travels in his mind to all those places through his imagination. Ila's experiences are real but the narrator creates his own secret map of the world, something which he has learnt from his uncle Tridib. Their memories,

says the narrator, "Form a part of my secret map of the world, a map of which only I know the Keys and co-ordinates" (pg 196).

Amitav Ghosh has no belief in National borders and geographical boundaries that separate both country and its people from their friends and relatives, their roots in the name of division, religion and community. He looks at history as a course of events that cause dislocation and migration eventually replacing the physical marker with shadow lines. Ghosh portrays the sadness, suffering, disappointment, search for identity and unfulfilled love. The theme of the novel i.e. the boundaries and geographical lines occupy a prominent place thereby reflecting the post colonial era. The legacies of colonization which are more painful than happy ones find glaring examples in the novel. The tragic death of Tridib in the neighbouring region across the border portrays realistically the pain and suffering of the people due to separation from their homelands as a result of the new boundaries and how the people in frenzy mindlessly kill each other on the basis of nationality, religion and community.

Mondal observes "the publication of *The Shadow Lines* coincided with academic interest in the interrogation of nationalism and national identity, which were fast developing into a major concern within post colonial criticism and post colonial approach.

Thus the novel *The Shadow Lines* presents the life history of the colonized people written by one from among them in the language of the colonizers. The point of view of the colonized people reflects the era of oppression, suffering and death as after effects of colonization. The post colonial impact on identity, culture and society has truly been reflected in the novel.

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