

Vol 7 Issue 1 Oct. 2017

ISSN No : 2249-894X

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*Monthly Multidisciplinary  
Research Journal*

*Review Of  
Research Journal*

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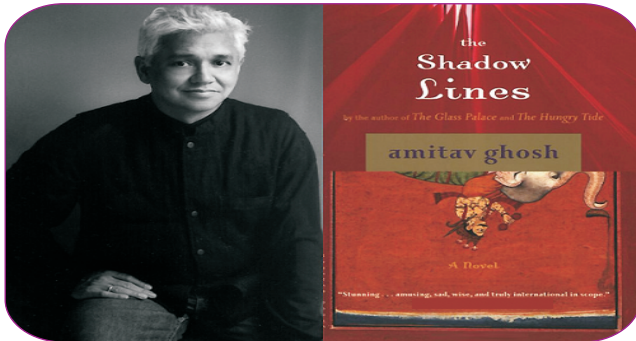
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## HUMAN PREDICAMENT IN THE SHADOW LINES OF AMITAV GHOSH

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### ABSTRACT :

**A**mitav Ghosh. *The shadow lines* is a complex novel interweaving memory and contemporary life. It converges on the traumatic life a family Calcutta and Dhaka in 1964 when a member of the family, Ghosh employs the technique of the narrator an educated young man who travels between Calcutta and London in 1981, to tell the truth which contains multiple stories of his grandmother and her sister, of his uncles Tridib and Robi, of his cousin Ila, who marries an English man and of may price, a family friend in London. Many stories that belong the oral sphere in the extended family memory get their validation by being written in the novel a feature of most post colonial writing. Ghosh depicts the urban middle class in India to whom education and professional jobs are important. Living and partly living they drift from one day to another, and so far a whole lifetime. The reward, if one is lucky may be one's own house and a pension to lean upon. Amitav Ghosh's characters inhabit this realm of life.

*But when misfortune strikes their lives in an unforeseen manner, they are left baffled. If it is, at least death or disease, they may try to understand in. But when violence erupts like a volcano in the public sphere, they are totally disoriented. Life seems to lose significance. The present paper examines how violence cracks the mirror of life in the fictional world of the shadow lines.*

**KEYWORDS :** Contemporary, Depicts, Validation, Realm, Disoriented, Erupted.

### NARRATION

The narrative of the shadow lines is in two parts: "going away" and "coming home". The words "going" and "coming" are used in relation to home, a place one's birth and upbringing, a place to which a person is deeply attached, especially if one lives in another place. Though in the growth of a human being, it would be ideal to feel that all places are one's place and the entire people one's people, and he/she is "a citizen of the world". They either "go away" or "come home". Ghosh's characters go as far as Delhi or London on work or travel, and come home to Calcutta or Dhaka only to learn that peace is as elusive as ever. One disturbing feature of life in Calcutta/Dhaka and such cities is the increasing tension between the Hindu and Muslim communities and the eruption of violence which takes its toll of innocent lives and destruction of public as well as private property. As long as one learns and other media, one is not touched by them. But when someone in the family is caught in the carnage, then one realizes what it is. In fact, this exactly is what happens to the characters of Amitav Ghosh.

The narrative structure of the *Shadow lines* is fragmentary. There are sixteen sections in the first part, and fifteen in the second part, but the sections do not add up to an organic whole with a proper beginning, middle and ending. Ghosh's narrator shuttles not only from Calcutta to London to collect material for his p.hd thesis, but across the loom of time from 1981 to the 1960's onto the 1940's and earlier. Especially his mind is drawn on the troubled time or the 1960's when Tridib, his uncle, was killed in a Hindu-

Muslim riot in Dhaka. At the time this tragedy took place, the narrator, a twelve-year old boy, had been told that Tridib had died in an accident. It is only 1981 that learns from Robi, another uncles and eye witness, how Tridib had been killed, also from May Price, an English family friend, also an eyewitness to the tragedy

The oblique manner of the revelation of Tridib's death is more effective than a direct presentation. It is a timeless moment in the tortured consciousness of the family. The narrator's grandmother, Thamma is the central character in the novel. In fact the shadow lines is very much her story. The narrator remembers how Tridib had called her "a modern middle class woman". All she wanted was a middle class life in which, like the middle classes the world over, she would thrive believing in the unity of nationhood and territory of self-respect and national power that was all she wanted - a modern middle-class life, a small thing that history had denied her in its fullness and for which she could never forgive it. She has lived quite life for a whole lifetime in Calcutta, but when she goes to Dhaka (her native city) on a visit, she is the unwitting witness to the most horrendous act in her life when a rioting mob kills her aged uncle and her young nephew. She is left totally disoriented as she cannot comprehend the meaning of what happens. Amitav Ghosh present the grandmother's early life as a story told by her to the narrator. Born in 1902 in Dhaka, she grew up as a member of a "big joint family, with everyone living and eating together". But when her grandfather died, the ancestral house hard to be portioned because of the strife that broke out between her father and uncle. While at college for her B.A. history in Dhaka, she had known the terrorist movement amongst nationalists in Bengal: about secret terrorist societies like Anushilay and Jugantar and all their offshoots, their clandestine networks, and the home-made bombs with which they tried to assassinate British officials and policemen; and a little about the arrests, deportations and executions with which the British had retaliated".

In her own class there was a shy young man who was a member of terrorist organization. One day as the lecture was going on, the Police entered the class and arrested the young man as they had learnt that he planned to kill an English Magistrate in Knulna district. He was tried and later deported to the cellular jail in the Andaman Islands. In her youthful enthusiasm she had dreamt of terrorists like Kudiram Bose and Bhargav Jatin who been betrayed by treacherous villagers who in turn had been bought with English money. She had been expecting a huge man with burning eyes and lion's mane of a beard, and there he was, all the while, at the back of her class, sitting shyly by himself". She had wanted to work for the terrorists, to run errands for them, to cook their food, to wash their clothes and to render some help. After all, the terrorists were work freedom. When the narrator asks her whether she would have killed the English Magistrate, she replies, "I would have been frightened. But I would have prayed for strength, and God willing, Yes, I would have killed him, it was for freedom: I would have done anything to be free". But her romantic notion of terrorism and freedom went like bubble with her marriage. Her short married life, mostly lived in Burma, was punctuated by the birth of a son in 1925, and the unfortunate death of her husband in 1935 when she was just thirty-two.

A new phase of life began in 1936 when she took up the job of a school teacher in Calcutta. Amitav Ghosh omits this part of the grandmother's life except dropping hints from which the reader may construct the story. Starting life in Calcutta in a one-room tenement in Bhowanipore, she would dream of "the old house, her parents, Jethamoshav (her uncle), her child hood" in Dhaka, but she could never go there. The big political events, the partition in 1947 and Dhaka becoming the capital of East Pakistan, divided her from her native city. But there public events did not have a direct impact on her so much as the demands of her personal life. As a school teacher she educated her son on her own, declining he help of her rich sister. The son's employment in a private company, his marriage, the birth of a grandson in 1952, her own retirement in 1962 as the headmistress of the school, she had joined in 1936 are abbreviated and revealed in an oblique manner. The focus of the novel is on the grandmother from her retirement in 1962 to her death in 1965.

One feature that may be noted is the kind of the house in which the grandmother lives; from the large house in Dhaka to a succession of houses in Burma with her husband on to the one-room tenement in Calcutta after her husband's death, then to a cramped little flat in Gole park where she spent most of her life. She had grown up with the school where she was a teacher and became the headmistress in the last six years of her service. But the school disappeared from her life with her retirement, and around the same time, her son was promoted as the General manager of his firm. The family moved a large new house on Southern Avenue,

opposite the lake with rooms upstairs, rooms down stairs, verandahs, a garden as well as the roof big enough to play cricket on. She was given the best room in the house, but dreamt of her old house in Dhaka where she was born and had grown up to adult hood.

The grandmother's young sister Mayadebi, is the fortunate girl in the family. Born in 1910, she grown up into a beauty and married Datta Chaudari, the son of the wealthy judge, who became a diplomat in the Indian Foreign Service. She lived most abroad, moving from one country to another, where ever her husband had his posting. Mayadebi had three sons. The eldest was Jatin, born in 1929, who had a job as an economist with the U.N working most of the time in Africa or South East Asia. He lived with his wife and his daughter, Ila who was of the age of the narrator. Tridib was the second son, born in 1931, who lived in the 1960's in the family's large ancestral house in Ballygunge place in Calcutta with his ageing grandmother. He was supposed to be working work his p.hd in Archaelogy. The youngest son was Robi, born after a long break, almost the age of the narrator. By 1981 Robi is in the Indian Administrative Service nd he stops in London to be with the narrator and Ila for a few a days. On leave from his job, he is on his way to Harvard, where he has a fellowship to study administration and public affairs for six months.

London figures in a prominent way in the life of Mayadebi's family. She and her husband with their eight-year old son, Tridib had stayed with Mrs. Price, a family friend in London in 1939 for a whole year when the war started. Tridib had told the narrator about their life at 44, Lymington road and other places. People in London had started living with the terror of German air raids and the prices suffered when Mrs. Price's brother, Alan Tresawsen, and his three friends were killed in an attack. They were young intellectuals whose life had been snuffed out all of a sudden. Though they were in the photograph that Tridib had shown, "nobody can ever know what it was like to be young and intelligent in the summer 1939 in London or Berlin". After more than forty years, the narrator explores these places as "I wanted to know England not as I saw her, but in her finest hour every place chooses its own and to me it did not seem an accident that England had chosen hers in a war".

But England comes through in a different light in the life of Ila, the narrator's cousin. After roving round many places with her parents, she had come to London to School. There was so much racism that one day she was beaten up while returning from school and she had never gone to school again. Later she did B.A., History at the university college in London, took up a job in an office and married Mick Price, whom she had known over the years. Of course, the narrator is in love with his beautiful cousin. On the occasion the narrator grandmother is angry that Ila was living in London.

### CONCLUSION:-

The narrator disagrees with his grandmother when she says that I\*la lives in London for the money and the comforts of British life. He had known Ila to live a simple life and spend her spare time going on demonstrations and acting in radical plays for Indian immigrants in East London. It is a mystery why Ila who can live like a princess in Calcutta should live in London like a martyr. Probably it is the romance of freedom in an alien land. Also she seems to be the kind of person who is not attached to any particular place.

The heart of the Shadow lines in the death of Trudib and it is only towards the end of the novel the narrator approaches this experience. It is a struggle with silence as he has no words to communicate what happened; "It lies outside the reach of my intelligence, beyond words it is simply a gap, a hole, an emptiness in which there are no words". The narrator loved and admired Tridib s a hero, so he finds it difficult to accept the fact of Tridib's death. "So complete is this silence", the narrator declares that "it actually took me fifteen years to discover that there was connection between my nightmare bus ride back from school, and the events that befell Tridib and the others in Dhaka". The narrator's struggle with the presentation of Tridib's death makes it all the more agonizing.

The "climax" occurs as the grandmother and her sister are returning in their Mercedes from their ancestral home and their uncle is following them in the rickshaw. When they come to the bazaar area, they find that the shops are closed and the street is deserted, but for stray people. It was s if they were waiting for the car. In no time a lot of men surround the car, bread the windscreen and the driver suffers a cut across his face. The car lurches and comes to a halt with its front wheel in a gutter. Then the security guard jumps out and fires a shot

from his revolver and the crowd begins to withdraw from the car. At the same time the eerie of the crowd turns to the sound of a rickshaw-Khalil's rickshaw- with their uncle in it, and the people surround the rickshaw. Though the sisters could have driven away, May Price and Tridib leave the car to save the old man and they get lost in the whirligig of the crowd. The mischief takes less than a moment and the crowd begins to melt away. The dead bodies of Khalil, the old man Tridib lie on the road. The horror of the act is branded with fire on the memory of May Price and Robi who see the whole thing.

Amitav Ghosh dramatizes the violence that is at the heart of the Shadow Lines. Characters in the novel Robi, May and the narrator (Ghosh's alter-ego) tremble "like a leaf" to recollect the scene of Tridib's death, "fifteen years later, thousands of miles away, at the other end of another continent".

As in Greek tragedies, the violence comes through in a terrible manner because it is conveyed through choric characters. Robi, May and the narrator perform such a role of mediation-True, the violent bear away. But for what? People kill for freedom. But do they achieve it? It seems to be mirage, as the shadow lines that divide one people from another keep ever - Changing.

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