

Identity and Representation of Postcolonial Women in Amitav Ghosh's novel *The Shadow Lines*

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Abstract – This paper focuses on the postcolonial women and their identity in Amitav Ghosh's novel *The Shadow Lines*. This notion is focused through the character of grandmother, Tha'mma and Ila; they are both strong and active by representing their identity of their own and propagate in any situation possible. The grandmother is an anti-imperialist, who is a refugee and yet an extreme patriot. While Ila is mentioned as rootless because of her diasporic nature and cocksure colonialist ascendancy.

Keywords – identity, postcolonial, anti-imperialist, patriot, diasporic.

Amitav Ghosh, the postmodern novelist major works focuses on the postcolonial and postmodern world. This novel *The Shadow Lines* depicts about Indian's as their own and about short love relationship. According to the words of Bill Ashcroft,

The spatial significance and the frequent paradox of colonial nationalism becomes obvious when we consider the amount of emotional and political energy expended, in the name of such artificial, detached and culturally erroneous boundaries. The question of how postcolonial people are to inhabit the space defined by these boundaries, how they are to retrieve the 'placeness' of such a space, lies at the heart of the political realities of the post-colonial state. (177)

By separating from their birth place, the characters in this novel *The Shadow Lines* depicts the transformation of their lives by narrating the colonial history of their past. The grandmother has been displaced by the communal tension through the crux of the "Partition of Bengal." The artificiality of national frontiers and the inter-connectedness of the separate places and experiences have been notified in this novel.

The representation of post-colonial women in this novel has been analyzed through anti-imperialism, national and international experience and cultural choice. Comparing to the male characters in this novel,

female characters are very active and prominent. The experience of a single family and their personal history is the focal point of this novel. At the time of Independence, due to the Bengal's partition between India and Pakistan, the lives of the narrator's family has been changed drastically. The people in the country have the mindset that the borders between the countries are represented as "shadow lines." The narrator's grandmother Tha'mma and his cousin Ila are representing the post-colonial women characters in this novel. The grandmother longs to go back to her own country which has been ironically expressed when she tries to get back with anger, when she knows that her birthplace was responsible for killing her nephew Tridib. In the name of rescuing her old uncle 'Jethamoshai' she fulfills her desire to go back. Tha'mma yet does not want to be identified as a refugee in a different nation. She hates being nostalgic because she considers it as a weakness and waste of time. In the words of Tha'mma in this novel, "it is everyone's duty to forget the past and look ahead and get on with building the future." (*The Shadow Lines* 240)

Tha'mma is used to travel a lot before India's Independence, travelling has been easy then. She has been used to travel from Burma to Calcutta and Dhaka. Along with her life, everything has been changed after Independence. She has to fill the form to go to her birthplace Dhaka, which seems to be a shocking experience to her. By the post-colonial situation she has experienced thrust when the feeling of rootlessness is a paroxysm to her.

Being ridiculed as a fossilized nationalist, yet she presents herself to be strong. Her patriotism for her country can be seen through these lines, "It was for our freedom; I would have done anything to be free." (43) The idea of the grandmother about the creation of Britain which she finds as an inappropriateness of Indian migration and Ila's living here is reflected through the words spoken to her grandson,

It took those people a long time to build that country; hundreds of years, years, years and years of war and bloodshed. Everyone lives there has earned his right to be there with blood: with their brother's blood and their father's blood and their son's blood. They know they are nation because they have drawn their bordered with blood. Hasn't Maya told you how regimental flags hang in all their cathedrals and how their churches are lined with memorials to men who died in wars, all around the world? War is their 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. That is what you have to achieve for India, don't you see. (85)

With an anti-imperialistic view she has dreamt of an Indian-state by the antagonistic logic. She wants her nation-state to be modern and national necessity of good citizenship. The history has denied her search for an identity which is derived from her faith on a national good and territory. She has wondered to know about the border between India and East Pakistan while she flies via plane to visit Dhaka. It is an illusion of

seeing a border-line in between India and Pakistan because it has only been created by the cartographical demarcation. The lines which are invisible except on paper divides people.

An ‘unrooted’ post-colonial woman of the twentieth century diaspora was the narrator’s cousin Ila. Unlike the narrator’s grandmother, Ila is a cosmopolitan living a settled life in England willingly. In contrast to the narrator and other characters in the novel, she has lived through her senses. She lives in her present intensely, yet the narrator and his uncle Tridib, has their memories and imagination procreate in a permanent and concrete world. Ila created her own place in this world. She marries an Englishman, gets a job and a house of her own in London because “she wanted to be free.” In this freedom there is no inner voice but mere rootlessness. With the asymmetrical emotional relationships of the cultural dislocations and of maladjustments, Ila represents the post-colonial woman with the possessed conflicted idiom and desire to live in a foreign country.

In situational nature both Ila and the grandmother are asymmetrical, but in many ways they are mirror images of each other in their concept of freedom. They are easily influenced by the larger movements like Fourth International and Anti-Nazi League and wants to join in these movements. As a representative of modern middle-class woman, the grandmother tells her story being the reflection of her morality and duty to family and to nation-state. Oscillating between her ‘Indian’ and ‘London’ selves, Ila who wanted freedom in a foreign country across the border betrays her dilemma, “I wish it were like that... You see, you’ve never understood, you’ve always been taken in by the way I used to talk, when we were in college, I only talked like that to shock you, and because you seemed to expect it of me somehow. I never did any of those things: I’m about as chaste, in my own way, as any woman you’ll ever meet.” (10)

In this postcolonial and post-modern world, the wandering cosmopolitan in this novel *The Shadow Lines* are the characters representing their post-colonial women identity. The partition of the country and the rootlessness has been the key concepts in this novel, because of which the women characters in this novel has suffered in their lives and they were not able to make the choice of their own to live in their place wherever they wish to. Both Ila and the grandmother are homeless and unrooted, active women in their lives in their own way of choice of Independence. In the world of artificial, detached and cultural boundaries, the post-colonial situations urge them to find their own identity. The grandmother’s identity is based on her morality and faith for her nation and family, while Ila’s identity is focused on rootlessness.

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