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Idea of Nation in The Shadow Lines

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Abstract: The Shadow Lines portrays how division split nations based on religion, causing thousands of individuals to migrate from one side to another. The Shadow Lines represents the confrontation with nationhood, and it is a conflict of an individual's inner psyche. Amitav Ghosh addresses the matter of geographical restraints, deterritorialization, and the problematization of citizenship as a result of the formation of new ethnic and territorial boundaries, as well as the defiance of these frontiers by migratory movements. The year 1947 augmented India's understanding of the notion of a nation. The paper is an attempt to elucidate on the Idea of Nation in The Shadow Lines. Ghosh is contemplating the futility of a country's bifurcation to establish two different nations, one in the east and the other in the west of the subcontinent.

Keywords: Partition, Nation, Personal, Religion, Border

Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* (1988) is a post-colonial novel which demonstrates the blurring of boundaries between East and West, castes and religious views, it is an effort to show the colonised moving from and to the land of the colonisers to their own nations. The book basically blends public affairs with people's personal lives – predominantly middle-class families. Ghosh reflects on the topic of partition of India and its consequent devastating consequences on people's minds and emotions. Ghosh is contemplating the futility of a nation's bifurcation to establish two different nations, one in the east and the other in the west of the subcontinent. The result of these attempts to draw a line through the country is not a comfortable state of affairs for those who do not fall into the glimpse of the wealthy class of society. It neither fixes the fundamental issues nor soothes the pain and suffering of displaced people. On the other hand, partitioned individuals are faced with psychological issues. The novel focuses around two families – the Datta-Chaudhuries of Bengal and the Prices in London. And in the cross-transactional characteristic amongst these two families and their generations, the book tries to apprehend the nation and national borders. The pain of separation persists for three generations. The agonies of migration, the feeling of loss in the land of resettlement and the recurring vision of returning to one's own nation are the themes of the book.

A nation is a sustained group of people who share specific attributes. It can be established as a result of a shared language, tradition, race, or history. Nationalism simply implies loyalty or the idea of honouring and respecting one's nation. Nationalism is defined primarily by a sense of solidarity among a people based on similar

ancestry, geography, and beliefs. Nationalism may be characterised at its most basic level as complete commitment to one's nation, righteous sentiments and actions, brotherhood. Ernest Renan in his book *What is a Nation* mentions,

A nation is a soul, a spiritual principle. Two things... constitute this soul, this spiritual principle. One is the past, the other is the present. One is the possession in common of a rich legacy of memories; the other is present consent, the desire to live together, the desire to continue to invest in the heritage that we have jointly received...The nation, like the individual, is the outcome of a long past of efforts, sacrifices, and devotion. (10)

Ghosh's characters migrate around the world, navigating not just political and geographical borders, but also psychological barriers. The novel, which is divided into two parts, 'Going Away' and 'Coming Home,' dismisses identities of nation. Amitav Ghosh's characters venture in so many directions that, in the end, identifying a distinct and private homeland becomes blurry, and the world, where no classifications of race or caste are appreciated, is one huge home. The true home lies in one's imagination and consciousness ahead from all corners. The novel depicts the changes that occur at the personal, national, and international levels. The novel's characters are depicted as being involved in the evolution of Calcutta as a city and India as a nation over the course of three decades. The author uses the character of Thamma, the narrator's grandmother, to analyse the topic of Bengal Partition, the idea of Nation, and Nationalism.

The Shadow Lines portrays how division split nations based on religion, causing thousands of individuals to migrate from one side to another. Hundreds of people were killed and millions were homeless as a result of this activity. However, the memories could not be erased. These displaced citizens suffered from nostalgia, remembering their birthplace and teenage years. The demarcation line drawn for political reasons could not divide one nation into two for the citizens. For them, the newly established two nations were still one country, their own nation. Despite the fact that Calcutta and Dhaka are in different countries and are divided by borders, the two cities are inextricably linked in the novel. The influence of a political incident in Dhaka was visible in Calcutta. Ghosh puts into question the core foundations of modern nation states. It bears no significance how many nations there are in a territory or subcontinent. It has no overall impact on the well-being of its citizens. National identity is an illusion since it is not established on logic. It is true to life when nature renders contours in the shape of mountain ranges, seas, and valleys. However, man-made borders are arbitrary and baseless. Thus, Ghosh investigates the issue of modern nation-state partitioning and asserts the futility of the political machinery in control.

The narrator of Ghosh's novel is a little child who grew up in post-partition India in Calcutta and Delhi. *The Shadow Lines* represents the confrontation with nationhood, and it is a conflict of an individual's inner psyche. The question of Bengal Partition and Nation is raised by the narrator's grandmother Thamma, who "had not been able to understand how her place of birth had become so messily at odds with her nationality" (112). She pays little attention to the tragedy of Partition, which is partly to blame for the household's relocation and unhappiness. Only when she decides to visit her sister in Dhaka, and has to go through the customary procedure of acquiring her immigration papers, is she forced to consider the reality of her nation's separation. Thamma

depicts an ordinary man's awareness of the existence of demarcation lines between two countries. Nations are endeavouring to enact various regulations, such as passports and authorizations, in order to promote a feeling of national identity and isolation from outsiders. Such prohibitions are generally political in character, and they usually represent deeply rooted animosities toward the other. The grandmother flies over the border to Dhaka but is unable to discern any separating lines, like fences, that would particularly identify the two territories belonging to two countries. Therefore she looks for the external divisionary lines: "If there aren't any trenches or anything how are people to know? I mean what is the difference then? And if there's no difference both sides will be the same; it will just be like it used to be before"(120).

In the Nationalist Movement, Thamma signifies India's national identity. She is a Dhaka immigrant, yet her deep love for India cannot be overlooked. She is astounded to observe the changes in her birthplace in Dhaka. She has the impression that she is a foreigner. Thamma writes her nationality as 'Indian' without concern when filling out a document in Dhaka, but she soon becomes confused. She believes that because her birthplace is Dhaka, she is from Bangladesh (then East Pakistan), or because she is now residing in Calcutta, she is Indian. She doesn't actually understand how the partition has affected her nationality, or how a nation's nationality changes when it is partitioned. Thamma's vision of the nation was distinct. The freedom she envisioned or dreamed of was far different from the one she experienced. Thus, the novel questions the fundamental concept of national boundaries, and Thamma finds herself an intruder in a geographical territory that was once her 'home'. She could not have predicted that her vision of a single nation would be disrupted and that her concept of a nation would include seeds of fracturing as she advocated for a country free of all colonial influence.

The Shadow Lines describes how the state machinery creates tremendous gaps in order to sustain the notion of the nation. Thamma's uncle, Jethamoshai, is the only one who continues to remain in the Dhaka upside down home because he is entirely disconnected from reality and refuses to acknowledge that the nation has been divided. Jethamoshai speaks, "I don't believe in this India-Shindia. Suppose when you get there they decide to draw another line somewhere. What will you do then? Where will you move to?" (106). Here, the speaker echoes the notion of collective insanity and sanity. The uncle who fails to believe in the division of the nation is branded insane by the so-called rational citizens. Saadat Hasan Manto addresses the similar theme of torment of displacement from one's nation-home in his classic work, 'Toba Tek Singh,' via an allegory that involves the transfer of lunatics to their respective nations after independence. Toba Tek Singh is a victory of indifference and a wonderful tale as Manto proclaims the in-betweenness of his narrator and his victory over others who attempt to fix his identity or nation. The lunatic dies in a no man's land where no nation's laws reigns absolute. At the moment of independence, people underwent the terrifying experience of being removed from their homes and then placed in an unknown nation. They were stripped of their nation, which was linked to the concept of property and resources. Manto emphasises the relationship between the nation-home and the identity of the person by mixing the identification of the man and the place, the personal and the land.

Ghosh's book, *The Shadow Lines*, questions the concept of limits and argues that man-made boundaries are ultimately permeable. Amitav Ghosh addresses the matter of geographical restraints, deterritorialization, and the problematization of citizenship as a result of the formation of new ethnic and territorial boundaries, as well

as the defiance of these frontiers by migratory movements. The year 1947 augmented India's understanding of the notion of a nation. Not only was independence from colonial control enforced, and the long-desired goal of a free nation made attainable to Indians, but the arrival of democracy also signalled a virtual displacement for a substantial portion of the population: The birth of a free country was followed by the awful labour pains of the Partition crisis. The lines in the novel have broader implications: they are national borders that divide territories in an atlas, lines that separate societies, and lines that separate actuality from illusion. The Shadow Lines are a mirror reflection that runs all through text as a metaphor of certain interactions that both unite and divide nations and individuals.

The novel is about India's division and the consequent instability in East Bengal's psyche. As a result, Amitav Ghosh aims to question the basic essence of man-made boundaries, or more particularly, the separations in every aspect of human existence, including territory, civilization, faith, or connections, as revealed in several scenes throughout the novel. The narrative of *The Shadow Lines* constantly divides and links individuals and nations, attempting to highlight the ambiguity of the presence of these barriers. The death of the leading characters at the frontier is a realistic picture of the misery of those who must face the stirrings of displacement and the consequences of it as they move between their homeland's boundaries. This book, which spans three decades and three countries, India, England, and Bangladesh strives to combine reminiscences, personal life and historical events. *The Shadow Lines* by Amitav Ghosh is a partition novel with historical and literary ties, depicting nationalism via colonisation and post-colonialism and forming diverse concepts in post-colonial literary theories. Because the novelist has little belief in national frontiers and the geographical cartography that separates and divides people, he considers they are all but fictitious lines drawn by dishonest politicians with little genuine care in the well-being of the people.

As a result, *The Shadow Lines* demonstrates how the partitions of 1947 and 1971 shaped Indian history and the subsequent formation of borderlines. Gyanendra Pandey in *Remembering Partition: Violence, Nationalism, and History in India* writes about the novel:

What is involved here is more than the drawing of new lines on a map, the unfurling of new national flags and the installation of a new national government. What we are dealing with is the tearing apart of individuals, families, home, villages and linguistic and cultural communities that would have been called nationalities; and the gradual realisation that this tearing apart was permanent and that it necessitated new borders, communities, identities and histories.

Undoubtedly, *The Shadow Lines* addresses the impactful power of borders by examining the creation of Bangladesh in 1971, a split that strengthened East-political Pakistan's hegemony and resulted in the country's irreversible separation from Pakistan and India. The novel continues to depict the sorrow and destruction that separation has caused rather than the new country's independence. Ghosh questions the justification of man-made national borders that are used to categorise regional or physical gaps among nations. As a result, *The Shadow Lines* accurately depicts the border as a theoretical framework imposed on human civilization over time. The nations' boundaries are like shadow lines, with hatred and enmity flowing across national sentiments.

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