

The Nostalgic Pull: The Immigrant Scenario In The Select Novels Of Amitav Ghosh

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Abstract: *This paper focus on the Immigrants who suffer due to nostalgia, identity crisis, memory and alienation. I have chosen the select novels of Amitav Ghosh, a celebrated writer whose novels are conditioned by events which embark on a back and forth journey towards the search of identity.*

The Novels which are taken for discussion in his Paper are The Circle of Reason, The Shadow Lines, The Glass Palace and The Hungry Tide. These novels suggest the need for co-existence and strong humanitarian ties across cultures, overlooking personal, regional and political considerations which center around Diaspora.

Keywords: *Nostalgia, identity crisis, memory, alienation diaspora, culture*

The Literature in the field of Diaspora, of the twenty-first century has been enriched by the issues of transnationalism, hybridity and identity crisis and they serve as vital issues in today's era of globalization. The diasporic phenomenon that are interlinked are: the concept of home, rootlessness, nostalgia, memory and alienation. These diasporic elements form recurrent themes in writers like Salman Rushdie, Amitav Ghosh, V.S. Naipaul, Bharati Mukherjee, Jhumpa Lahiri and Kiran Desai.

Before attempting to record the nostalgic moments generated out of the home thoughts from abroad, the following quotation might very well foreground the situation.

'Yes. But it's hard, Dolly – it's hard to think of leaving: Burma has given me everything I have. The boys have grown up here: they've never known any home. When I first came to Mandalay the nakhoda of my boat said: This is a golden land – no one ever starves here. That proved true for me, and despite everything that's happened recently. I don't think I could ever love another place in the same way. (GP 309-10)

In the novel, *The Glass Palace*, Dolly is able to change herself according to the situations. She accepts and accommodates successfully in her new place and calls it her own home-place. She asserts, "This is my home" (119). In the same way Piya in *The Hungry Tide*, even though she has lived in foreign countries, when she comes to Sundarbans for her

research on dolphins creates an attachment to the place where she continues to stay.

Ghosh's novels suggest the need for co-existence and strong humanitarian ties across cultures, overlooking personal, regional and political considerations. He tries to imaginatively reconstruct the past throughout his novels with the central concern of devising the invisible threads that link humanity. The characters in Ghosh's novels are conditioned by events which embark on a back and forth journey towards the search of identity. *The Circle of Reason* is a collective memory of incidents presented in a symbolic fashion. There is a continual narration of events woven in a very delicate manner. Thus there is a flow of history from past to present which creates a fluid pattern of time.

Thus, Ghosh's novels occupy a unique place in the arena of post-colonial literature. They are critique of both globalization and postcolonial nationalism, depicting the experiences of those in transition, those in-between nation-states, those going back and forth as travellers and migrants in search of lost homes and better lives. Ultimately, Ghosh suggests three things. Community, like memory, is transnational. The of international migrants can also be testimonies to the material abjection and psychic violence of globalization that is elided in celebratory discourses. The transitional and transnational one too: not globalized, not

between nation-states, but outside them, linking communities across borders through its desires and discourses of material and emotional belonging.

The themes that overlay throughout the novel are migration, diasporic feeling, and rootlessness. Even though migration existed since the beginning of human race, the reasons behind it are different. Previously the Aryans left Central Asia and spread across Asia and Europe and it was not a solitary act but it was a huge movement of mass. When this migration is narrowed down to an individual, there arises loneliness, a sense of vacuum and despair. Thus a question of belongingness becomes a universal one. This question remains unanswered till the very end of the novel. Because there is nothing to hold on with attachment or to be called a home. There exist only movement from one place to another in search for security and love.

In *The Shadow Lines* the glorious memories of Calcutta and Dhaka are beautifully pictured by the characters longing for their homelands. The partition of Bengal and the resultant trauma are widely depicted. This separation has created vast dislocation of people in Pakistan and India. This dislocation of people as refugees is one of the major concerns of the novel. Even though they are separated by partition by lines, these lines remain only as shadow lines erased by past memory, longing and nostalgia.

Memory and past home thoughts act as a recurring background throughout the novel. In this novel one could see two kinds of dislocations namely forced migration and professional migration. The first one was due to the partition of Bengal and the latter happened due to the high skilled work force of India. Ghosh beautifully highlights how these 'shadows' of imaginary and remembered spaces haunt all the characters in the novel as they narrate their collective histories to each other. The shadow lines point at the grey realms of imagination and memory.

The Shadow Lines also beautifully pictures how the narrator stands out as an adult who is deep rooted in his childhood experiences. The way he faces his present has its reflections from his past. His experiences and his reactions stem out.

Of his childhood past. Tridib narrates about his childhood experiences at London and it automatically makes one imagine his own memories. Because of the deep rooted attachment and longing, one could see the depth of his past always peeping in the present. The central motif that intertwines in *The Shadow Lines* is memory. This is because of one's longing and nostalgic attachment to the past. Memory of every individual is measured against the intensity of how much one shares his past experiences with other persons. The memories of Tridib far exceed those of Ila in the novel in quality and intensity.

The old family house stands as a wholesome framework of attachment of deeprootedness. It remains a home for the grandmother, even after partition and she always longs to see it again. Her visit to her ancestral house in Dhaka symbolizes her longing and her past memorable experiences in that house.

The novel captures the trauma of emotional ruptures in a beautiful manner. The past is reconstructed through houses, photographs, maps, road names and newspapers. There are two encounters which the narrator recalls. The first one when

he accompanied Thamma, Mayadebi and Tridib to bring the narrator's grandmother's uncle, Jethamoshai from Dhaka to Calcutta was a witness to Tridib's killing which was an episode of communal violence. Secondly, he recalls when the narrator visited London where he met May. There is a jumbled way of recollections of events right from 1939-40, 1960-63, and 1978-79. These blurred temporal and spatial fragments manipulate in a coherent stretch so as to stage the post-colonial situations and cultural dislocations.

In *The Shadow Lines*, one could trace the longing of 'home' from the character Thamma, the grandmother of the narrator. She had left Dhaka long before Partition in 1947. She settles in Calcutta as a young widow in 1936, at the age of 32. She barely looks back to those days of her childhood home at Dhaka. Even though it was divided, her ancestral house, remained her home, a world she could identify with or relate to with people or events. Calcutta remained an alien place where she lived after her husband's death. She was far from the dialect spoken there. To add more sorrow, when India became partitioned in 1947, her home in Dhaka was lost forever. As it was in Pakistan, an alien country, it remained only as a memory. She had nostalgic attachment to her youth in Dhaka.

The narrative organizes itself through a self-conscious juxtaposition of various spaces, the most significant of which are Calcutta, London and Dhaka. For the narrator and his middle-class family, travel to London is far easier than the one beyond the 'looking-glass border' between Dhaka and Calcutta. As the text focuses on the painful consequences of these 'shadow lines' in the second section of the novel labelled 'Coming Home', the implications of possible and impossible border-crossings in the novel have to be studied. The question of belonging and identity gets curiously displaced.

Ghosh explains how as an exile when turns to what was once her home, she gets confronted with the fact that reality is different from nostalgia that had sustained her. For instance, when Thamma goes back to Dhaka to rescue her uncle, she realizes that so much has changed and none of her past friends remained. She asks, "Where is Dhaka?" (207). Even though she makes conscious effort to accept Calcutta as her home, her heart remains in the land of her birth.

There are people like the story-teller's grandmother who was born and brought up in Dhaka but came to Calcutta long before partition. Unlike so many of their brethren they did not have to feel the pang of being uprooted and to face the daunting task of rebuilding lives from the debris of history. To them 'refugee' was a term of abuse. But even if they did not suffer materially, their emotional wound took a long time to heal and left a deep scar.

Ghosh has established himself as one of the finest prose writers of his generation of Indian writing in English. He weaves indo-nostalgic elements with unique and heavier themes. His works are branded with post-colonialism and Indo-nostalgic elements.

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