

Revisiting and Reimagining History in Amitav Ghosh's The Shadow Lines

Shumaiya Haque Mim

Research assistant, Research Hub Bangladesh, Dhaka, Bangladesh. Email: srabontyshumiya65@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT : This study analyzed the process of constructing the historical identities in Amitav Ghosh's novel, "The Shadow Line". The study was, thus, intended to critically identify and describe how the novel untangled history from the perspective of memory, identity and nation-state borders. Primary data were collected through the textual analysis of the novels under consideration with reference to the main topic: 'partition', and other significant topics such as 'riots' and 'individual collective memories'. Further secondary data were collected from peer-reviewed journals and analysis of critics on Ghosh's work. Data collection technique used in the study includes thematic analysis whereby recurring patterns of representation in history were considered and grouped. Examining the narrative strategies, the analysis process applied textual study and hermeneutic approaches to examine how Ghosh criticized historical objectivism and insisted on individual subjectivity. As can be inferred from the outcome, it seems that the narrative challenges the borderline between history and memory while providing a commentary on nationalist history. Findings of the study suggest that the historical narratives presented in the post-colonial literature should be revisited especially from the view point of the recovery of the role of fiction in the formation of collective memory and identity. For this reason, this study finds itself in the wider body of literature that explores the capability of literature to function as a tool of challenging and re-constructing history with specific connection to the Indian sub-continent.

Keywords- Post colonialism, Hybridity, Historical Narratives, Identity, Memory

I. INTRODUCTION

Many critics have noted the treatment of the theme in Amitav Ghosh's The Shadow Lines (1988), which entwines family history with cultural history to explore the subjects of identity construction in relation to history writing (Bose, 2003). In the context of the series of crucial occurrences such as the Partition of India and the civil unrest in Calcutta and Dhaka which operate as post-colonial markers of geographical borders in Ghosh's novel the inscribed legitimacy of borders is marked. This interferes with the traditional way of presenting histories of people and societies reveals that national borders are not static (Chaudhuri, 2007). Regarding post-colonialism, the novel demonstrates how the colonial masters sowed division over divisions; geographical and other alike still felt in the Indian subcontinent (Chakrabarty, 2005). Ghosh, by virtue of the research outcomes, questions regarding histories and specifically the implications of One History, demanding many a Histories which approximates the excluded mostly irresonating experience. The novel's connection to time and space is not chronological and spatial and here the events taking place in different time space are describe simultaneously. Such structure conveys the relativity and subjectivity of

memory and history as marked by Hawley (2005). Thus, going through the process of remembering and re-writing of certain historical events, *The Shadow Lines* unmasks dominant histories and histories within posing questions on the epistemologies of authoritative history, and, simultaneously emphasizing the historiographies personal as crucial in comprehending large political histories (Hawley, 2005). It might also be said that *The Shadow Lines* is a post-colonial novel because it shows the effect of colonization in the present day countries of South Asia. This is in consonant with postcolonial writing that rewrites European history and has elements of exile, self and boundary as affirmed by Chaudhuri (2007). Application of personal and fragmented type of narrative in understanding history set out by Ghosh's novel invites readers to embrace constant subjectivities of nations and histories (Chakrabarty, 2005).

The novel has giving rise to numerous discourses on the concept of nation, history, memory and partition of India. It relates a historical story, but not in a standard historical way, but in a story way following the main characters and gives a social- political question on nationality and its bounding ground (Chakrabarty, 2005). However, a significant issue arises when examining *The Shadow Lines* and the multiple layers of individual and collective memory in which the events and characters are frequently as blurred as in fiction (Banerjee, 2010). This further muddies the water in terms of the way that personal stories and collective memories are woven together with more conventional historical documentation (Banerjee, 2010). In addition, Ghosh provides defectors employing fiction to elucidate historical phenomena such as Partition, riots, violence thereby challenging and raising skepticism over the facts reported. This poses it difficult to attempt to understand history through fiction and effectively teach real history (Mukherjee, 2009). One other complication exists in how borders, both physical and metaphorical, are represented as symbolizing shifts in national boundaries and in the human subjectivity of personalities' interior states. This raises the issues if Ghosh is merely a historiographical revisionist or if he only critiques dogmatic social history historiography (Chatterjee, 2011). The problem is not in treating *The Shadow Lines* as historical fiction but in comprehending what the novel does when analyzed historically, its function of querying the parameters of historical imagination even as it assists in the construction of the national and historical (Bose, 2003). This study is designed to examine such complexities and address the following questions: In what ways does Ghosh historicize the past through the novel? What has this reconstruction suggest concerning the open-ended of history writing? How such 'reconstructions' are impacting specifically to the understanding and construction of national identity and memory?

II. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This work on *The Shadow Lines* has implications as it shows how Amitav Ghosh subverts normal historical thinking and that of nationalism. Thus, through re-visiting the most significant historical events such as the partition and the riots, the novel raises the problem of the contractedness of history and the role of memory within history in constructing people's and thus, broader collective, identities. The analysis of how Ghosh writes history is useful to understand the element of Official History, which raises possibility of the history beyond the binaries and the insecurities of cultural boundaries. Furthermore, the analysis of the novel reveals that it also brings something fresh and interesting to the postcolonial literary discussion by presenting its critique to the notions of nationalism and history. So, readers and scholars will be able to see the multilayered and complex look at the history proposed by Ghosh and the attempts to provide the different perspective that can help to explain the past and its implications for today's post-colonial societies and politics. This study thus extends debates about history, memory and identity in literature.

III. OBJECTIVE OF THIS STUDY

The objective of this study was to analyze Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines*, focusing on how he reimagines and disrupts historical narratives through the lens of postcolonial theory, particularly Homi Bhabha's concept of "hybridity."

IV. LITERATURE REVIEW OF THIS STUDY

The *Shadow Lines* has attracted considerable interest from different scholars, who have focused on different aspects of representing history and people's information. Roy (2010) points out that, unlike the cultural nationalist narrative, Ghosh rewrote memory for patterning nation and self together, when he had noticed the 'architectonics of the non-chiming of time,' this/not-this in the novel in this way, and making it quite clear how the social splitting of India becomes inscribed into people narratives. Such syntheses relate identity, culture and their past experiences in their respective societies. Nationalism and colonialism are described by Mohan (2007) about *The Shadow Lines*; According to Mohan (2007) the book has effectively erased borders and Subject-Object positions inherent in post-colonial societies.

According to Misrahi-Barak (2008), using primary characters' experiences, Ghosh erases history at the expense of biography. She therefore argues that Ghosh wants to give another history, human history, especially in situations like riots. This nicely dovetails with Ghosh's larger project of crafting history from a personal perspective. Likewise, in his article analyzed earlier, Kumar (2014) argues about how the novel challenges nationalism and heteronormative discourses of the nation-state, by depicting characters who exist perhaps only beyond such reductions. In so doing, Kumar notes that through his post-colonial ethnographic representation and interpretation, borders as well as migration are ways of asserting independence.

Mukherjee (2012) analyses the depiction of partition violence by Ghosh and pointed out that the novel challenges the official forgetting about the traumatic years. Mukherjee would also wish to suggest that the novel serves to highlight the fact that such experiences remain part of the communal past. Sen (2008) notes that in her view, Ghosh shows how the Second World War can be linked to the individual experience. He further added that this kind of narrative forms the relationship between the world history and individual country histories, there is no history of how countries got separated. Raja has studied in her 2009's reading of the novel that it deals with the aspects of trauma and the question, when is the post-colonial subject allowed to mourn his/her trauma? Raja concludes that those reminiscences in *Amity* and *The Shadow Lines* blend the memories and the damage produced by colonialist and Partition thus, systematically addressing historical erasing (Raja 2009 p.48). In her timeline of the novel's events Bhatt (2006) points out the notion of gendered history as represented by women figures of Ila the 'Jewish' female protagonist or the narrator's grandmother. According to Bhatt the above characters are illustrates how women experience/p partake in shaping the cultural memory wheel.

Roy (2010) in *The Morning News* also acknowledges that displacement and diaspora embody the novels topic in *The Shadow Lines* in more than mere geographical terms. Roy supports her notion that the novel offers a shattered image of homes for people who are alienated by geography and history and main thematic propositions of the loss and dislocation. Studying these elements, Stanford Friedman (2015) makes a conclusion that the novel is a genuine multinational cosmopolitan work. According to Friedman global subjects, which move between cultures and places, disrupts both identity and borders. However, critical aspects concerning *The Shadow Lines* and the ways it appropriates or critiques historiographical discourse have critically study whereas novel gaps still exist. Prior research has enrolled mainly explored the novella in terms of substance: partition, nationalist narratives, and

beyond borders self-belonging. Nonetheless, previous scholarship has paid scant attention to how, and with what effects, Ghosh's narrative strategies work on those who read his novel. Future research could analyze the peculiarities of the novels' narration to consider its presence in contemporary cultural and historical perspectives and the function in creating the historical memory. In turn, one has to continue the discussion on how gender and diaspora in the representation by Ghosh relate to history.

V. THEORY APPLIED IN THIS STUDY

In reading *The Shadow Lines* by Amitav Ghosh, It is possible to apply postcolonial theory of history and historicity. The novel can be analyzed through Homi Bhabha's theory of "hybridity" (1994) because it looks into the manner in which people obtain or negotiate historical and cultural identities. Analyzing this approach allows to describe how Ghosh deconstructs historical binaries and writes history as the site of struggle. The representation of the interrelation between the individual and collective memory in *The Master and Margarita* is quite reminiscent of Bhabha's accent on the colonial past that produces a hybrid subject.

VI. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY OF THIS STUDY

This paper looks at how history was reconstructed in Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* as a qualitative study. The study relied on a text analytic approach to analyzing the novel to discuss how Ghosh uses history through personal experience and identity and especially in terms of the partition and communal violence. Secondary data were obtained through quantitative textual analysis in which themes and historiographical resonance of the motifs and narratives collected were examined. Secondary sources focused on the critical reception of Ghosh and critical studies of his work which enabled a deeper and broader understanding of his works. A qualitative approach of thematic analysis was used to code and analyze the novel with focus on Ghosh's questioning of the historical genre. Thus, this approach disclosed the novel's portrayal of nationalist historiography and the transformation of the historical and self-borders.

VII. FINDINGS OF THIS STUDY

The lines "The borders had bled people; the people had bled borders, redrawing them as they crossed" (line 5) underlines mobility (and the continually shifting) borders in *The Shadow Lines*. In postcolonial world these boundary are not fixed but are dynamic and get reconfigured with the movement of the people cultures and memories. This speaks of Homi Bhabha's idea of 'in-between,' where people's identities are constantly transcending the borders and being reconstructed. When these lines disintegrate, they provide avenue for the construction of the negotiation of the new hybrid identities and formations, which undermine strictly drawn cultural and historical binaries. But what transverses into the material world and with which 'reality' is challenged is the linear colonial representation of history; as the speaker says, "What you see is not the one-way street of imperial history but the crossroads of many histories." In this regard, Amitav Ghosh depict history as more complex and nuanced, and hence refuses to succumb to the imperial linear historical model. Here, Homi Bhabha's mixture plays a major role since he stresses that historical stories are a result of insertion and combining various cultural approaches. Ghosh's work presents not just one static view of history – a complicated construction of many experiences and voices and so dismissing the singularity and authority of the master narrative.

Playful, the line "The past is a foreign country; they do things differently there" (line 135) thus underlines how narrorized history, history always reinvents itself and is never fixed. This is in consonance with Homi Bhabha's theory on hybridity where history can be seen as an open territory, an ongoing process, and an interaction of culture from diverse perspectives.

Ghosh problematizes the 'history' as a historical discourse, which is not static, but instead is a record of multiple voices with multiple truths, multiple memory. This is most evident in the line which reads, 'There is no single moment of loss because no single moment of possession exists' (line 163) hence erasing history as a single moment and putting it up for construction like identity. This follows the emerging themes of colonialism where notions of possession, whether of property of a territory, culture or memory are never clear cut. Homi Bhabha deals with this aspect of hybridity pointing to the fact that colonialism confuses boundaries thus making it difficult to distinguish between possession and loss. Ghosh then paints history and identity as constant, and they are not fixed, but rather constantly in the process of construction and reconstruction.

The line "He tried to explain that there were no distinctions between 'us' and 'them'; the lines had been drawn and redrawn so many times." frees the colonized from the belief that certain borders should be drawn of divide people. Ghosh illustrates the how over and over again such borders – geopolitical and epistemological – have been redrawn, effacing the boundaries that colonialism seeks to draw. This is in concord with Homi Bhabha's meta-terrorist hypothesis of hybridity where identity is dynamic hence constantly in the process of negotiation such that a clear line cannot be drawn between the civilizers and the civilized. In such a way, Ghosh destabilizes colonialism's binaries of 'us' and 'them' by demonstrating how history complicates their differentiation. The statement where it is posed, 'In a country divided by the same sky, how do one make sense of the lines that divide the earth?' (line 216) points at the absurdity of nation divides. In the postcolonial existence of the borders people view it as an artificial creation of colonial masters with little accordance with the daily realities of the inhabitants on the frontier line. According to Homi Bhabha's ideas of hybridity, the above divisions are only imaginary because identity is not strictly policed. Furthermore, it is constructed in the margins of these lines, where cultures, memories and histories are/location that exposes and negotiates identity as fluid and constructed.

The line "Freedom, when it comes, will not be a thing of boundaries but of journeys" (line 274) reflects Ghosh's idea of reimagining of the concept of nation and freedom. Ghosh does not associate freedom with territory and state boundaries or stasis but stress that freedom is in motion and travel, literally and figuratively. This idea is closely related to Homi Bhabha's theory of cultural as a form of cultural liminality, in other words, cultural identity is not fixed by the national culture but is constructed through the process of cultural mapping. There for Ghosh paints freedom as more than a process of emancipation through a political frontier and this makes his conception of freedom dynamic than that given by Appiah. This notion comes into a culmination in the line, "The only freedom I can think of is the freedom to be free of the shadows of the past" (line 300) whereby Ezekiel is fighting to escape the hold of the colonial past and the overpowering history. Here GHosh gives the problem of getting out from these influences, which still persists. Thus, Homi Bhabha's concept of hybridity could be used to find the way out from this struggle meaning that true freedom is in some sense achieved only when one gets free from the imposed historical narrative. History and the past being presented in a constant and dynamic way opens up new opportunities for new identity, which gives freedom when approaching history and ourselves.

The same way the line "These borders are merely shadows; they do not exist in the eyes of those who have crossed them" (line 325) challenges colonialism real and perceived political borders. Read in connection with the novels, Amitav Ghosh accentuates on how those borders, which are in effect, may hold no relevance to the people who cross them. Englishman Homi Bhabha offers a theoretical framework of hybridity to such claims,

claiming that the border is as well bogus. These lines draw cultural and historical boundaries which are not fixed but rather are connotations which are far more creatively linked to global cultural definition rather than imposed geographical structures.

VIII. DISCUSSION ON THE FINDINGS

The aim of this paper was to examine Amitav Ghosh's *Shadow Lines* in the light of Amitav Ghosh's approach of interchanging history in light of postcolonial theory especially Homi Bhabha's Hybridity. In asking the questions of identity and representation for instance, his own life narrative raises a magnificent historical enunciation of culture and history that the possibility of people and histories are not singular and fixed into uniphonic, uniform melodies but a polyphonic people of diverse experiences. From this analysis a clear deconstruction of historical binaries by Ghosh can be evidenced and history is depicted as a Political/Fantasy realm of contentious struggle that is not only marked by geographical frontiers but also by symbolic ones embodied in tent. As Bose (2003) and Chaudhuri (2007) have noted with respect to Ghosh, family histories unfold as cultural memories and are refracted through the prisms of continually changing historical contexts through which individuals come to define themselves. With this in mind, the study brings out the same perception about the construction of borders because Ghosh goes against historical convention by proving that borders are made from movement and experience. The dynamics of memory at both personal and communal levels show that there are no sharp boundaries between and within the past, present, and future and identity, as suggested by Bhabha, hybridity erases fixed identities at the juncture of two cultures. In addition, Ghosh undermines nationalist discourse by outlining such qualitative liminal personal journeys that propose a world beyond categorization. Such opinion is shared with scholars like Mukherjee (2012) and Kumar (2014) who noted that Ghosh deconstructs binaries belonging to nationalist historiography and pushes for a more complex notion of identity. Furthermore, there are strong historical stigmata when regarding the Partition, which is also reflected in the themes of memory, as well as the analysis of collective memory by Ghosh. The present discussion is important given that critics such as Raja (2009) have posited that in the works by Ghosh memory symbolizes history, therefore ensuring that the reader is encouraged to rethink history and its consequence for the nation. In doing so, Ghosh does more than contribute valuable insights into memory; he also provides a brilliant example of how the traumas of history impact persons and groups alike and in the process constructs their selves. Finally, this research enhances a debate on postcolonial tales; thus identifying identity as an ongoing process influenced by history and memory. In this respect, by using Bhabha's notion of the hybrid, Ghosh provides a thought-provoking analysis of the unreflective concepts of identity and history that set readers questioning postcolonial culture and nationalist historiography.

IX. CONCLUSION

The young Indian writer Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* extremely revolutionary refers and subverts mainstream historiographic meta-discourses within addressing the intricate temporal and spatial entanglements of personal memory and collective history. Due to the choice of the plot structure and utilization of the concept of memory in the novel, it questions the representations of states and nationality and stresses the concept of the fluidity of memory and history. Therefore, rejecting a monolithic view of each of them and presenting a hybrid view of both Partition and other forms of communal violence in Ghosh's novels creates a powerful image of how personal and collective histories are in the process of constant construction. Thus, the novel encourages a pluralized and dynamic approach to history and, by challenging conventional historiographical representations and the 'naturalness' of colonial borders, opens up historiographical possibilities. In this respect, this research also

helps to broaden the discussion on postcolonial studies as it demonstrates how the fiction can change the ways people approach history and even identity.

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