



AMITAV GHOSH'S *THE SHADOW LINES* AND THE VOYAGE METAPHOR

VIVEK DINKAR KHABDE

Asst. Professor

S. S. Dhamdhere Arts and Commerce College,

Talegaon Dhamdhere, Tal- Shirur, Dist- Pune.

(MS) INDIA

ABSTRACT

The word 'journey' or 'voyage' has basic sense of 'moving away' i.e. transportation. It can be either 'bodily' or 'metaphorically'. Journey involves both the physical as well as psychological notions. The bodily movement has the elements of adventures, exploration and roaming. Human beings have instinct for adventure and an urge for innovation and discovery to go beyond in the realm of less known territory. There are instances in the human history about the forced exile, for some the journey was forced. The exile of Jews is a well known example of the large scale dispersion. The term 'diaspora' has been initially used in association with ancient Jewish diaspora i.e the exile of Jews outside of Palestine from 6th century B.C. There was large scale of dispersion, and with it brought the feeling of loss, memories of the past, the angst as the umbrella term diaspora involves concepts like loss of identity, angst, nostalgia etc. The psychological journey is of more subtle in nature which probes deep into the psyche. It deals with introspection, which essentially makes available the opportunity to change the whole being. Inner journeys involves exploration of the individual- its own self. A person can see through a inner journey, the changes and development taking place. Inner journeys gives new perceptions, matures the self and vision. Journey is the conscious endeavor to make changes within. Journeys helps in breaking the cocoons created by our own selves and venture in to the new world beyond ourselves. The experiences which we encounter as away from home are unfamiliar in nature. Journeys allow us to find the common culture, the universal perception of life, where we can associate with them though unfamiliar.

INTRODUCTION

The word diaspora has the idea of dispersion that is scattering of seeds. The term diaspora hence used for the people who are displaced due to various reasons to different places. Displacement has become inevitable phenomena in the 20th century.

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There is long standing tradition in India and to some extent in the world of journeying out for religious reasons. The word 'pilgrimage' has been derived from the Latin word 'peregrinus'. This word has sense of wandering. Pilgrimage is to move to a different place in search of spiritual solace, peace to a holy place usually, towards the birthplace of God. The reasons of pilgrimage are varied.

The metaphor of voyage or journey in literature represents the diaspora, the migration and displacement which also represent the psychological effects and the altered behavioral patterns in the diasporic community. The diasporic writings records the psychological implications related to 'home'. The displacement causes movement away from home. The movement causes feeling of homelessness as there is often confrontation of assimilation with the culture of the host country. The theme of journey motif is most coveted in literature as it contains adventure and the consequential behavioral change in the character. The most celebrated work in English literature is Homer's Odyssey. The Odysseys' journey to Ithaca is the most apt example of journey motif. The inner journey is related to psychological change. The inner journey in India has been associated to spirituality to a large extent. We find that the characters in the Indian novels which has the motif of journey is often associated with spirituality. India is rich in terms of spirituality. Various religions and their varied ideologies have flourished over the time in India. This has attracted the Westerners to India. The motif of journey is significantly relates to mythology. Spirituality and mythology are inter-connected. Hence journey again is related to mythology. A journey often discovers and nourishes the self with the experiences.

The Indian diasporic novelists have made a significant place in diasporic writing. The *Shadow Lines* represents the issues of diaspora like the loss of identity, displacement, homelessness which is blended with the saddening past of the partition. The partition has affected the Bengali people who have nostalgia for their lost home.

The Shadow Lines

Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* published in the year 1988 deals with varied issues related to diaspora and history. The novel is has the background of the second world war, the partition of India (of Bangladesh), the communal conflict in Bangal and Calcutta in 1964. The novel focuses on the political decision taken by then government in India and the aftermath of it. The novel also has nationalistic concerns. Various stories in the novel are representative of the theme of diaspora, nationalism and partition. The novel spans over three decade and have three generations of characters. So the novelist has lot of scope for the free movement in terms of time and space. The three generation is of the grandparents, the father and the mother of the kids including the narrator. Various critical issues have been dealt by the author



with utmost simplicity and ease. The female character called Thamma who has firm nationalistic values in her and shuns the idea of partition and the forced separation of the people so suddenly by drawing lines in between them. It is the story about the two families – the Datta Chaudhari and the family of Price. The family is associated for three generations. The story begins in a united country called India and ends in the creation of new nation of East Pakistan. Thus we can say that it is the forced diaspora as after the partition the family is separated forcefully. The issues raised here have significance to the modern contemporary India. It is a novel has a story of three generations of a family and their movement which is affected by history of partition. The journey motif in the novel is related to the diasporic movement in the life of the characters. Both the physical and psychological journey is incorporated by the author to bring out the desired effect of the diaspora.

The memory plays a significant role in the making of the novel and the incidents in the novel have relevance to the history. It is the psychological journey back in time which makes possible to relive the moment at present. The memories in the novel are not linear and sequential in manner among which some are reliable with the evidences of history and some seem to be unreliable. Memory and imagination plays a significant part for Tridib and he advises to the narrator to imagine with precision. The memories for Ila is the truth as she memorizes her past experiences. The memories of the character are scattered in between of the main narrative which emphasizes the psychological journey of the characters and offers a passage into the psyche of the characters to explore them closely and analyze the diasporic effect on them. The memories of the past have significance in the sense that it relates to the present in this novel.

The novel emphasizes the fact that common beings cannot live unaffected by the historical and political influences around. The novel explores the 'self' of the protagonist who is affected by the history of India and Bangladesh. The family in the novel is affected by the partition and the protagonist tries to dig up the roots of the family. The characters in the novel are scattered to different places after the partition and the protagonist Tridib tries to bring the different threads of the family together by undertaking journeys to various places. The novel underlines the fact that the individual's personal life and experiences are coloured by the history of the nation and the political power of the time. It stresses that history of the place where you live and the political power has an impact over your personal life. The memories of individual have the effect of the past on its memories and the memories are related to history. The novel travels across time, place and reality. Through the search of the family past the novel stresses the need of the exploration of the self. A diasporic individual is built by various factors like culture, history and the society. A diasporic being cannot escape from these factors, and has to find his true identity. The protagonist in this novel moves across different places, nations without any restrictions crossing the 'shadow lines' of the



separating two nations, states and men. The novel does not only focus on the diasporic issues of the individuals but also remarks the impact of history on the individual. It stresses the fact that history is not just about incidents in the past but they have their far-reaching effects even in the contemporary present time.

The diasporic novel *The Shadow Lines* has various journeys performed by the characters in it. In fact the central motif of the novel is of journey. The major characters in the novel undertake journey to search for their identity. The novel begins with an eight-year-old narrator talking about his memories of his past life. He tells the memories of childhood in Calcutta. The development of the Calcutta city is also noted by the author in the novel. The narrator is unnamed. He tells about the two families.

The two sisters in the novel are Thamma and the other is Mayadebi. Thamma's character is a typical diasporic character which suffers alienation from her former country. In her early years she was living in Dhaka (a place separated after India-Bangladesh partition and is now in Bangladesh). She is a simple woman with moral values and she is honest, who believes in nationalism. She doesn't believe in the partition of the nations which according to her is a political decision. She marries a railway engineer. Unfortunately, she loses her husband and has a son to look after. She works as a teacher in Bengal. Her college life is of a revolutionary kind. She was interested in the matters of national interest. In her college days, she was interested in the extremist organization called Anushilan and Jugantar. She was taken over by the young people engaged in the extremist organization and their nationalistic endeavors towards freedom. She had an impact of the Western education on her. She leads a simple life and is a hardworking lady. She is of the view that partition of India and Bangladesh is responsible for her dislocation and migration and hence gives it no importance. She feels even bad about partition when she has to produce documents to meet her sister in Dhaka, as the place which she wants to go to is in another country called Bangladesh. There is reference to the separation of house in Dhaka, the other half of the house is occupied by the uncle and his family. Thamma doesn't like the 'us' and 'they' to be used among the countries which was recently a united one nation. This is similar to the partition of the nation and the assumed 'otherness'. The differences are made and not created by anyone. Immediately after partition the otherness begins and the people are separated with a line which tells them apart. But the memories and life on the other side remains the same which cannot be separated by drawing a line in between them.

The narrative begins with Tridib who goes with the family to London in 1939, later in the story Tridib is killed in a partition riot in Dhaka in 1968. The narrator gets the details of the condition of post-war London through Tridib while they were with the family of Price in London. The sad tale of Tridib's death in a partition riot is told to the narrator by Robi and



May Price. The narrator is influenced by Tridib and Tridib gives him various advices The narrator enhances his experiences and vision by listening to stories told by Tridib and also by reading and imagining before undertaking actual journey in his life.

The Metaphor Of Journey -

The novelist have strong urge for journey and moving out to varied distant places. Through the character of Tridib the novelists speaks out his mind. The characters in the novel travel to various places physically and imaginatively. There are descriptions of real as well as imagined places, various cultures likewise communities in the novel. The old, pale photographs, maps, newspapers are the instruments which evoke the memories. Tridib encourages the narrator to undertake journeys around the globe to see, imagine, experience and understand the world. The map evokes both the narrator and Tridib to move out and experience the unknown world. The imagination of Tridib arouses interest in the narrator to undertake journey.

The novelist delineates the character of Ila differently to both Tridib and the narrator. Though being a child born to Indian parents she hates Indian ways of living and totally took over the anglicized ways of living. She fails to understand the essence of journeys which she undertakes. She moves everywhere with her preoccupied thoughts about living life.

Instead of ever making an effort to understand him, Ila despises the narrator for having a dreamy view of distant places; for she could never believe in space as a human construction but looks upon it as a given reality. She dismisses the narrator's practice of imaginary space construction as a mere indulgence in fancy. Ila doesn't understand the narrator and despises him thinking him as a dreamer and doesn't believe in fantasizing about places. The narrator and Ila were childhood friends. The parents of Ila were in foreign service so could not come to Calcutta often. In 1960, her father lived with Mrs. Price in London when he was on leave. Ila came to Calcutta in Durga puja season.

The novel is divided into two sections – 'Going Away' and 'Coming Home'. The characters in the novel move out and return home at the end. These parts of the novel clearly indicate the movement – journey which the characters undertake. It is the journey which makes the characters move and have different experiences of the world. It's about the sad memories of the characters that were united before the partition of the India, suddenly after the partition the situation changes and the family gets divided into two parts. The situation disturbs the elderly persons in the family as they do not understand as to how suddenly we need to take the permission from the government to visit their own home. Ghosh successfully brings out the ills of partition and the effect on the citizens of the nation. The novel begins with the



journey to London of the Tridib's family in 1939. The journey told by the narrator is of memorizing of it. He memories various events related to the journey of the time as – the second world war, the partition of India, the massacre of innocent people. It is like moving out and returning back to the place from where you have started. The novel also stresses the importance of the concept of 'home' as it decisive in the making of diasporic identity. In a way it is a center where you have to return or you always look for. The novel has memories which are not presented in sequential manner. The narrator tells us the story of each character.

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