



CULTURAL DIVERSITY IN AMITAV GHOSH'S *THE SHADOW LINES*

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ABSTRACT

Cultural diversity represents a society in which several cultures co-exist. It is the composition of different cultures, races, religions, etc. It influences all the cultures to adapt together irrespective of their cultural differences. The present paper depicts the combination of various ethnicities, cultures, and generations collaborating and creating a different culture of their own. The Shadow Lines creates a platform for the fusing of cultures and ethnicity across borders. Amitav Ghosh shows the possibility of a multicultural-oriented society where every individual has a recognized identity. The borders remain as a subsidiary concern of a specific person. Tridib, in the novel is represented as a philosophical person who is captivated by the love of a person across borders. Ila also characterizes a cross-cultural relationship with Nick Price irrespective of their culture which justifies the multiculturalism in the novel. This paper searches the different national cultures across borders in the postcolonial period. The existence of different cultural identities in the contemporary period produces a space of its own.

Keywords: Tribal, Rituals, Customs, Multicultural, Identity, Culture, Ethnicity, Postcolonial.

INTRODUCTION

Amitav Ghosh's 'The Shadow Lines' shows how diasporic displacement becomes a source of enlightenment towards the path of a cosmopolitan culture. The unnamed narrator captures the

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different cultural identity through the main characters in *The Shadow Lines* - his grandmother-Tha'mma, his cousin, Ila and his uncles Tridib and Robi. Growing up in a middleclass family in Calcutta, the narrator possesses the acceptability of a metropolitan culture. His contact with his cousin and uncles who live across the sea, his stay in London for research work made his attitude to issues of nation and culture more cosmopolitan. One of the most powerful influences in his life as a child is his grandmother, a sternly independent new woman. Tha'mma is an embodiment of the ethnic identity. While, Tha'mma has a displaced identity but still she has adapted to the present culture. In this way, she is jumbled with her identity because her birth identity is different from her present identity.

The Shadow Lines is the mixture of various cultures. It is a novel where both west and east meet and slowly the continuation of the family ties remains the same. Here, we have ultra-modern attitude with Indian manners, Bengali culture in three forms - one takes place in Dhaka, another in Calcutta and abroad. Against the backdrop of post partition and violent situations of Hindu-Muslim unrests, Amitav Ghosh seems to express his own views through Tridib. Tridib considers himself to be a person who believes in no borders. He considers the world as a home to various cultural multiplicities. It is a home to both men and women living together irrespective of their culture, ethnicity, race and religion. Amitav Ghosh narrates:

“Tridib’s father was a diplomat, an officer in the Foreign Service. He and Mayadebi were always away, abroad or in Delhi; after interval of two or three years they would sometimes spend a couple of months in Calcutta, but that was all. Of Tridib’s two brothers, Jatin-kaku, the elder who was two years elder than Tridib, was an economist with the U.N. He was always too somewhere in Africa or South-East Asia, with his wife and his daughter Ila, who was my age” (Ghosh, 6).

Thus, we can say that the understanding of cultural multiplicities develops from the globetrotting background of his family.

Tridib at a very young age developed the understanding of multicultural society. He has links to the west through his grandfather. Tridib continued to be part of the family by falling in love with May Price as she stated: “I remember ... is him saying – you’re my love, my own true love, my love-across-the-seas” (Ghosh 175). Tridib propagates the missile of cultural multiplicity as he falls in love with a woman, who lives across the sea. Here Suvir Kaul also commented that:

“In The Shadow Lines, the questing romance of Tridib-Tristan finds in May its object across the seas, but it also finds in her a figure for the deluded



idealism, the cultural dislocation or in comprehension that sets the stage for personal or public tragedy” (Kaul, 276).

Tridib is compared to Manto’s “Toba Tek Singh” as both their views regarding nation coincides with each other. The reflection of Toba Tek Singh is partially re-captured into Tridib as he is “...a man without a country...” (Ghosh 186) who is against the borders and barriers of the other side. Tridib imagines himself to be a person who is fascinated by the love and affection of a woman, living in different country. He believes that one needs no permanent place to live as the borders are illusionary lines which defines one’s culture to the other.

Ila characterizes multi-cultured identity. Her father Jatin works as an Economist with United Nations, for which he is transferred from one country to the other. Ila travels with her parents across the globe and later stays for a long time in London, where most of her childhood years are spent. She also joins college in London for her higher education. Ila obtains a fragmented identity that is some part Indian and some part British. Her dual identity makes her abnormal in Indian as well as British cultural background. It is observed that Ila suffers from the crisis of identity. She has a shifting identity as she travels from one place to another. It is Ila’s foreignness that attracts the narrator towards her since his very childhood. Ila’s identity is trapped in –between as she belongs to neither of the places. Her varied culture makes her different from others.

Ila and Tridib show different conceptions regarding culture. Tridib spreads the idea of multicultural society as he himself falls in love with a woman, who lives across the sea. “It was a German Story...it was a story of a hero called Tristan, a very sad story, about a man without a country, who fell in love with a woman-across-the-seas...” (Ghosh 186). Tridib-May relationship is compared to the love story of Tristan and Isolde who fell in the romantic spell of each other. This romantic encounter of Tridib and May shows the acceptance of love and likeness to a different culture, race, ethnicity and religion. It shows the devotion of love towards a woman of a foreign country. Tridib is a philosophical person who believes that imagination can take you to various places. There is no limited boundary to a person and therefore the mind of a person should not be kept intact. Tridib is a different person who plays a vital role in the narrator’s life. The narrator is the heir of Tridib’s thoughts. Tridib is the guide of the narrator. Tridib has given him eyes and mind to imagine place.

The Shadow Lines gives us an expression of multicultural imagination. Ghosh depicts cultural diversity through his central characters. He has given a proper and realistic picture of combination of various cultures in India. The novel presents people’s love for several cultures at the same time. His imagination and love across the sea made him a citizen of global village. Tridib attachments to his roots kept his imagination alive through the narrator’s



vision. It is a novel where family friendship creates an ambiance of cultural diversity. The Datta-Chaudhuris, the Prices' families play a vital role in the novel. The marriage that took place between Nick and Ila in the family proved it to be an example of multi diversity in the novel. *The Shadow Lines* sets to uncover a plenty of mingling of cultures reflecting the unprejudiced contemplation of homogenous society. Amitav Ghosh encourages us to develop a cosmopolitan culture in the society. Amitav Ghosh reveals a multicultural society through family generations. *The Shadow Lines* outlines different figures of human, of various cultures and ethnicities creating a space of their own.

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