

The inter play of reality and illusion in the shadow lines

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Abstract

Amitav Ghosh is an Indian author and novelist. Her novel portrays the political and historical consciousness along with known for his works in English language. His writings are unique and contributed a lot to Indian writing in English. Amitav Ghosh second novel *The Shadow Lines* (1988) presents the theme on nationalism, freedom, violence, memory and conflict between reality and illusion. In this novel refers to the blurred lines between nations, land and families as well as within one's own self-identity. This paper examines, the shadow lines is not a history of events, nor is it a lesson in geography, yet the places and people are presented in coordination with subtle interplay of reality and illusion. Tridib is an protagonist of the novel and also he was an Archaeologist who has to stretch his imagination with the help of what is discovered in excavations to rebuild not only the decayed structures of the past but also the extinct civilizations, though he has Bartholomew's Atlas to keep his feet of the hard ground of reality.

Keywords: illusion Amitav Ghosh historical consciousness

1. Introduction

The Shadow Lines (1988) by Amitav Ghosh it describes on the social ethos and presenting vital truths of life. It is a complex plot, since the narrator, travels into the past and future simultaneously to describe events which highlight particular aspects of character. Tridib is a scholar, living mainly in the world of imagination of the narrator also. He has a

"vast reservoir of abstruse information on all kinds of subjects, including Mesopotamian Stallae, East European Jazzo, and the habits of arboreal apes, the plays of Garcia Lorca,"

About which he has read in books, but he talks about them with great confidence as if he had personal knowledge of these facts. He makes love with a girl whom he has not met through letters. He is nothing but intellect, devoid of carnal aspect of life. He has not taken interest in such of real life as earning his livelihood or raising a family of his own. When he goes to Dhaka to participate in real life, he loses his life. He rushes like a nincompoop to rescue the old man from the rioters, unmindful of his own safety. May Price is right to say,

"I heard him running after me. He caught up with me and pushed me from behind. I stumbled and fell. I thought he'd stop to take me back to the car. But he ran on towards the rickshaw. I was safe you see- I could have gone right into that mob, and they wouldn't have touched me, an English Memsahib, but him, he must have known he was going to die".

It was really brave of him to rush to rescue the old man, but he failed to take the cue from all others who wanted to run away from the scene. He could not realise that death was imminent in such a venture. The idealist scholar lost his life because life was too complex for him to understand.

The narrator's grandmother, on the other hand, never loses contact with the hard ground. She had to earn her livelihood by the sweat of her brow. Life never allowed her to take flights of imagination, to live in a fairy land of dreams. After retirement, she became more realistic. She came to know from Minadi that one of the sons of Jethamoshai was living in Calcutta. She announced,

"It doesn't matter whether we recognise each other or not. We're the same flesh, the same blood, the same bone, and now at last, after all these years, perhaps well be able to make amends for all that bitterness and hatred".

Ila lives in the present and does not want to invent the places she has visited like Tridib. She lives in full measure, without caring about the Indian mores of traditions. If she is in a mood to dance, she does not feel any compunction in dancing with a stranger. She does not even care how her uncle Robi will feel. She has all the comforts available at home, yet she lives fugally, called save children fund. She loves her husband though she knows that he has affairs with other women. Ila has learnt to live with hard realities of life and has never taken flights of imagination. But May price takes shelter in imagination. She started friendship with Tridib when

“She was trying to get over an adolescent crush on school-boy Trombonist, who had no time for her at all”.

She got comfort from Tridib’s letters though she had practically not met Tridib at all. They knew each other through letters and photographs they had exchanged. Like Tridib she didn’t have carnal desires, and continued to enjoy the feeling of love without being sure that Tridib had feelings of love for her. She told the narrator,

“All I remember is him saying you’re my love my own, true love, my love- across-the seas; what do I have to do to keep you with me? But it’s just a whisper”.

It was in the end that she became a realist, when she decided to transfer her love to the narrator and forget the past. The narrator had been under the influence of his mentor, Tridib, who taught him to invent the places, had the people with the help of imagination. Tridib’s example had convinced him that reality was different from what one saw with one’s eyes and heard with one’s ears. Apparently Tridib was a wastrel, but in reality he was devoted to his studies. The narrator in the beginning had faith in Tridib’s ways of exploring the truth, but after finding Tridib’s version about Solent Road incorrect, he made changes in his approach and attitude. With the help of Tridib’s Atlas, he learnt certain hard truths about people and places. He drew circles on the maps to find to his amazement that

“Khulna is about as far from Srinagar as Tokyo is from Beijing, or Moscow from Venice, or Washington from Havana, or Cairo from Naples”. And he further discovered that *“Dhaka and Calcutta are more closely bound to each other they had drawn their lines- so closely that I, in Calcutta, had only to look into the mirror to be in Dhaka”.*

Thus the narrator who began as a disciple of Tridib, ended as a realistic person. Tridib had taught him to use his imagination to go beyond the limits of the time and distance. The novelist is all the time trying to coalesce time and space, through memory and imagination. Tridib went to England when he was eight years old, but he preserved the memory of the places he had visited and also imagined how war must have ravaged the places like Solent Road. The narrator has must heard about the places that Ila and her parents have visited, heard about mosque of Ibn Tulun at Cairo and Great Pyramid of Cheops. He has *“imagined her bighting on these day-dream names-Addis Ababa, Algiers, and Brisbane”.* When he went to London, he jumped to his feet when he went to London; he jumped to his feet when Ila proposed to go to a film in Brixton or to a Vietnamese Restaurant in Maida Vale. These names he recounts give fillip to his imagination. As the Geographical names arouse curiosity and activate imagination, references to the historical events also re-create the past; enable the readers to see the actual wants in their imagination. The events related with Mu-I-Mubarak, for example, present the scenario of the communal of the communal harmony among Hindus,

Sikhs, and Muslims- People are said to have marched in their thousands from every part of Kashmir- even from such distant and remote eyeries as the Banihal Pass- in order to get a glimpse of the relic. Later, the relic was installed at the picturesque Hazratbal mosque, near Srinagar. The mosque became a center of pilgrimage and every year multitudes of people, Kashmiris of every kind, Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, would flock to Hazratbal on these occasions when the relic was displayed to the public”. These pageants of history equally activate the imagination.

The Shadow Lines presents interplay of reality and illusion and coalescence of time and space to present the truth that there is an undercurrent of emotions and feelings which untie the whole human race despite the man made discriminations on the grounds of race, religion, region, colour, et nal.

2. References

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