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## REMINISCENCES AND NARRATION: A STUDY ON THE NOTION OF NATION IN AMITAV GHOSH'S "THE SHADOW LINES"

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### ABSTRACT

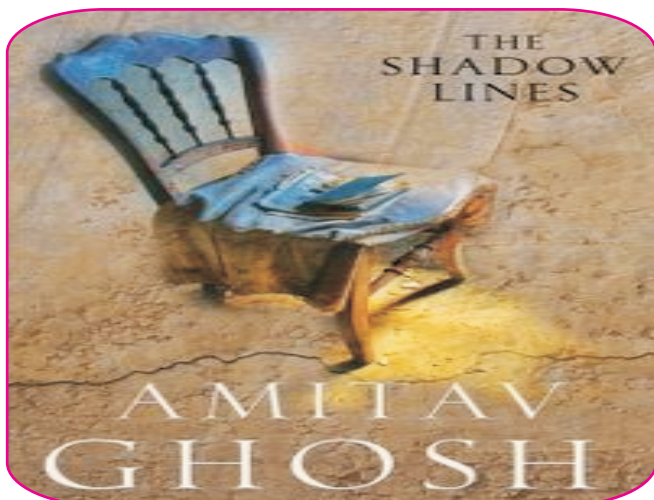
Whatever the impressions that the individual is impressed at the earlier stages that will go with him till the last breathe of his life. It is true in the life of Amitav Ghosh. Early impressions of Indian Independence, bitter experiences of partition of India, world war impression at the global level, crisis in and out of the life, all these definitely influence a creative writer like Amitav Ghosh. This paper, titled "Reminiscences and Narration: a Study on the notion of Nation in Amitav Ghosh's "the Shadow Lines" and "The Glass Palace", examines Ghosh's experiences in real life and his early memories which were told him by his grandmother and mother during the critical times. It also focuses memory and reality in connection with Indian history after independence. It also tries to throw light on

the Chinese war on India, Indo-Pak war, Naxalite movement in Bengal, communal riots during the partition of Bangladesh.

**KEYWORDS:** Impressions, Experiences, Influence, Mother, Grandmother, Reality.

### INTRODUCTION :

Amitav Ghosh is very much influence by his mother who used to explain him many experiences at the beginning of life i.e. childhood days. His father's experiences in British-Indian army, partition of India after a long struggle for freedom, critical situations in the struggle were told by her to Amitav in an interesting manner. Those are clearly reflected in the novels like "the Shodow Lines" and "The Glass Palace". The characters in the novels renovate the past to deal the present. So the stories move to and fro because of this element in his novels. There is a narrator in the novels who reveals critical issues at a stretch and moves the story fast. At the same time the story moves to past and resembles the situations at the prevailing. At the end, the novelist exhorts the universal fraternity and manhood which are interwoven with love and memory. The ideas of humanism and brotherhood are only the resources of continued existence of man in this aggressive world. The memories of Thamma's in "the Shadow Lines" and Arjun's impressions in "the Glass Palace" are reflected from childhood experiences of Amitav Ghosh. Surprising this is journey in these novels highlights the personality of the traveler. The Shadow Lines explores the partition struggle and the life of his grandmother at Dacca. Communal riots during the period play central role in the novel. This novel focuses light on the family, friends and journey. Here the novelist shows a narrator reflecting the events dominated in his life. The narrator explains the critical moments of Ghosh's life which influenced his family. At the beginning of the novel, the reader is introduced to Tridib as the son of Mayadebi who is narrator's grand aunt. "for years he had lived in their vast old family house in



Ballygunge Place with his  
aging grandmother” (The Shadow Lines: 06)

Conversation with Tridib is always about travel and strange places. This reveals his travel from a village in Southern Cornwall to Fiji, Bolivia, the Guinea Coast, Ceylon and Calcutta. The novel involves the story of generation. All the characters he depicted belong to different cultures and religions. All the relations are tied up with familial backdrop. The first generation stands in before independence situations; the second generation mirrors the national movements through the character Thamma. She is the central character of the novel. There are two other characters i.e. Tridib and the Narrator. She symbolizes as a link between colonial India and her memories of Indian freedom struggle. Her life is mixed with different experiences which are frequently inspired Amitav Ghosh in reflecting in his novels. She always recollects her memories with children. She grew up during the Bengal Naxalite Movement during British period. She said,:

“He always sat as far back as possible in the lecture room and since he never said anything, nobody took much notice of him. Then one morning, when they are halfway through a lecture, a party of policemen arrived led by an English officer and surrounded the lecture room” (SL 36-37)

She shows the necklace which symbolizes the Ind-Pak war. Her life is filled with full of Colonial and Post Colonial experiences. Due to family ties, she went to Burma along with her husband on professional works. She spent 12 years there by visiting places like Moulmein and Mandalay. These places took a prominent place during the freedom struggle. The experiences of these places reflected in the two above mentioned novels. Usually every year Thamma used to come to Dhaka to see her parents. But unfortunately her widowhood forced her to Calcutta where she spent her rest of the life. The partition of the country after independence made her life never to see birth place. She describes partition as the partition of the ancestral home. She is an eyewitness how a house had been partitioned. Actually the partition started in the minds of people and they sacrificed their native place. This leads to a new beginning. Beginning is always a struggle so various riots are happened after partition.

Ghosh characters reminded the past to deal with present. He narrates the preparation of her journey to Dhaka in such a way that she longs to come home as a foreigner.

“The driver pointed out the sights to my grandmother as they went by; the Plaza Picture Palace with a fifteen-foot hoarding of Ben –her hanging outside, the Gulshan Palace Hotel, Ramna Race course, and so on, it is all wonderful, she said. But where’s is Dhaka?” (SL-206)

The past has an obstinate grip on the present and can even refute the future. Thamma’s experiences during the time of Communal violence in India and East Pakistan after the Hazrat Bal incident in Srinagar. Common people were brutally killed. When a communal group reached to kill Khalil, they rushed to save Ukil babu and Khalil. She was actually untouched woman. Tridib and Khalil died unfortunately while they were tried to save Jethamoshai. Ghosh says that their sacrifice exhorts;

“that invisible sanity that binds people to each other independently of their Government” (SL-236)

Thus Ghosh makes difficult that the notion of family and of the nation. Thamma experienced the bitterness of the two families. It is the malice that claims innocent sufferers. Ghosh provides us with a replaced history with reality which he heard and experienced in his life. His description of anatomy of a riot portrays how the situation prevailed at the time. While Srinagar and East Pakistan in chaos there was only just any situation to any problem in Calcutta newspaper. The life and death of people did not concern in fourth estate. Therefore Ghosh moves away from documented history to the world of stories. These situations of recapturing are possible only through reminiscence.

World War II brings an awareness on disaster. The war precedes the separation of the subcontinent but it will guarantee the defeat of Britain. The love between Tribidid and May Price flourshed was cut short by Tridib's unfortunate death in Dhaka. May is an ideal halt for Ila. Ila's uncle and Ila falls in love with Nick, May's brother. While May is contented with her individuality, Ila is not. Dissimilar to Tridib, Ila does not travel with her imagination. The narrator knows that Tridib watns to teach him limited imagination. It means to identity the existing past connecting to the present of his own time.

The novel, *The Shadow Lines*, exhibits that there is no concrete breathing space. It knows the subsistence of a range of spaces only as abstractions. The novel shows a pure concept build up by intuitive, political and cultural constructs. Breathing space along with moment has no complete existing differentiation and can shift to and fro freely without restraint. Meenakshi Mukherjee says:

"Time in this novel can be illusory and concrete at the same time and likewise space can be fluid even when held solidly within the concrete scaffolding of a house or confirmed within the firm outlines etched national boundaries on a map." (1998-12)

Thus Ghosh's "*The Shadow Lines*" reflects all his childhood impressions that were listened from the elders are mixed with his life time realities. Those are reflected in his novels particularly in the *Shadow Lines* perfectly.

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