

A Postcolonial Analysis of The Relationship between Colonizer and the Colonized in The Shadow Lines

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Abstract

Amitav Ghosh's postcolonial novel *The Shadow Lines* highlights the divisional lives demarcated by colonialism among nations, cultures, societies, and human relationships that create a politic of prejudice and bigotry among these elements. The novel reflects these dividing lines' superficiality and their discursive influence on the interrelationship between the colonizer and the colonized. The racial and political prejudice and the imbalance of power between the colonizer and the colonized was a part of the process of colonization that was reliant on the hegemony of the colonizer. Given that colonialism was essentially a defective project, the after-effects of colonialism, including the problematic dichotomy of colonizer/colonized, invited fatal complexities and disturbances for the postcolonial situations. The different characters of The novel *The Shadow Lines*, despite their familial linkage, are irreconcilably divided by this colonial problem. This paper attempts to offer a postcolonial analysis of the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized, as portrayed by Amitav Ghosh in his novel *The Shadow Lines*.

Keywords: postcolonial, discursive influence, colonizer, colonized, hegemony

Introduction

Postcolonial theory invites a critique of the discursive operations of colonialism and its after-effects that resonate even today in the formerly colonized countries. The fatal complications of the framework of colonialism have besmirched the indigenous people's religious, cultural, and epistemological formulations and dismantled the very perspective through which human relationships are seen and conceptualized. The repressive and ideological apparatuses of the colonization process have created hierarchies and dichotomies on purely racist, sexist, and class-based lines. The colonizer/colonized problem was one such business that the colonization process engendered. Amitav Ghosh is a novelist whose works incorporate a subtle critique of colonialism and its consequences in a postcolonial culture. The power dichotomy between the colonizer and the colonized is an essential issue of postcolonial literature. Post colonialism is not a one-way street because it invariably involves an interaction

between the colonizer and the colonized, and the colonizer is as much affected as the colonized. Amitav Ghosh's postcolonial novel *The Shadow Lines* tells the story of three families from different cities: Dhaka, London, and Calcutta. The novel is set in the milieu of historical events like the Swadeshi movement, the Second World War, the Partition of India, and the Communal riots of 1963-64 in Dhaka and Calcutta. The novel reflects on the formation of socio-cultural and geographical distances as a by-product of colonization, disturbs human relationships, and creates binaries like colonizers and the colonized. Ghosh uses different characters to question the significance of the colonizer/colonized dichotomy. For example, characters like Tridib and the unnamed narrator deflate the notion of geographical borders and blur the lines between the colonizer's and colonized people's cultures.

In contrast, characters like Thamma represent the strong nationalist ethos and dislike towards the colonizer's culture. The characters that Ghosh sketches together are people alienated by boundaries but integrated by love and care. The novel analyzes human relationships by placing them on different spatial and cultural planes and addressing the colonial problem that demarcated dividing lines among them.

Discussion

The novel *The Shadow Lines* opens in the 1960s Calcutta when the unnamed eight-year-old narrator is seen examining the complex interrelationship of the novel's various characters. As the novel begins, the eight-year-old narrator starts talking about his experiences as a schoolboy living in the Golepark neighbourhood in Calcutta. The novel has a wide range of characters picked up from diverse cultures and nationalities put beside each other in a unified setting. The character of the unnamed narrator is one of the most exciting figures of the novel, and his obscurity throughout the narrative is reminiscent of a colonized native whose place is unimportant in the Eurocentric worldview. We never get to know the narrator's name, nor can we visualize what he looks like. The narrator symbolizes the voiceless and subordinated native who is cognizant of colonial machinations but is prohibited from entering the power echelons.

The novel's title indicates the illusionary lines dividing individuals and nations, creating dichotomies like the East versus the West and colonizer versus the colonized. Throughout the novel, Amitabh Ghosh dismantles the corporeal concreteness of borders. The novel sheds light on the fact that although politically decolonized, third-world countries are still psychologically colonized by Eurocentric discourses. In the novel, the character Ila's attitude towards the narrator and the Indian culture shows the colonial prejudice against the colonized people. Ila boasts about her friends' beautiful talent and intelligence and points out that Nick is more robust, taller, and beautiful than the narrator. She mocks the narrator by saying she and Nick will purchase him proper clothes from a cheap Indian shop. Ila believes in European ideas and follows their culture. For instance, when Robi stops her from dancing with two unknown businesspeople, she gets infuriated and expresses her hatred toward Indian culture.

"I want to be free...free of your bloody culture and free of all of you" (*Shadow Lines* 98)

Ila's attitude towards the narrator and her uncle Robi indicates the derogatory attitude of a colonizer towards the subservient colonized people. However, it is ironic that she later in the novel herself becomes the victim of Eurocentric discourse because of racial discrimination. She is not treated like an English woman in London, and even after her marriage to Nick, he continues his premarital promiscuity. Nick was not ready to help her, mainly because she was an Indian. The character of Ila's mother, called 'Queen Victoria' by her husband Jatin, also reflects colonial mentality. Her name indicates her westernized belief and scornful attitude towards the Indian culture. In Colombo, her behavior towards her servant Ramdayal reminds us of the hegemonic relationship between an English lady and her Indian servant during British rule.

"Shut up Ram Dayal, Queen Victoria snapped. Stop buk- bulking like a chakra – boy" (Shadow Lines 28)

On the other hand, Thamma's attitude towards Ila represents the colonized people's hatred towards the colonizers and their culture. Both characters are completely different from each other in terms of their idea regarding culture, nationalism, and freedom. The narrator's grandmother carries contemptuous thoughts about foreign places that depict nothing but materialism at the expense of socio-cultural values. She considers Ila immoral for living in London even after being an Indian. Thamma believes that a country is created only through violence and killing and as none of Ila's ancestral blood has been shed in London, she does not belong to that country.

Through the character Tridib, the novelist rejects the binaries between the colonizer and the colonized. Tridib's stories are far from the Eurocentric belief that the West is superior and the East is inferior. His stories are postcolonial narratives that put emphasis on the freedom of the colonized people to create their own stories distinct from the others and not inspired by the Eurocentric construction of reality. His belief that all places of the world are parts of each other without the slightest degree of superiority and inferiority profoundly influences the narrator. It gives him a new outlook on the world. For the narrator, Tridib represents openness towards space and place and makes him capable of using his memory from the past to connect with the present. The narrator symbolizes a colonized nation in quest of triumph, openness, and freedom.

The portrayal of Mrs. Price's family throws a different light on the colonizer- colonized issue in the novel. The harmonious relationship between Mrs. Price and Maya Devi and their respective families, which began during British rule in India, serves as a hidden voice of history despite the violent historical relationship between their countries. In the portrayal of the friendly relationship between these two families, Ghosh not only deconstructs the concept of racial hegemony of colonial historians but also asserts India's civilizational value of multiculturalism. Similarly, the character May's interpretation of Indian people, places, and events are free from colonial discriminative mentality. In her character, we do not see the exploitative attitude of a colonizer towards the colonized. Through the portrayal of May Price and her family, the author shows that colonialism is not a geographical but a psychological

issue. It is a way of differentiating and segregating people. The love affair between Tridib and May further rejects the western notion of culture as separate and stable and blurs the notion about the colonizer and the colonized.

Conclusion

Indian Writing in English focuses predominantly on India's cultural heritage, ethnicity, culture, and customs. In the early twentieth century, the focus of Indian Writing in English expanded to include the exploitation, the voice of the colonized, and the various other consequences of colonialism. The *Shadow Lines* is one of the essential postcolonial narratives of Indian Writing in English, absorbing almost all the significant apprehensions of the genre. The idea of geographical borders has been shattered in the narrative. The novel is remarkable for its many postcolonial characteristics. It tells the story of the natives of the colonized country going to the country of the colonizers and telling their story. The narrative is presented through the perspective of a colonized. In terms of Identity, the narrative vacillates between Bengali and English. The whole story moves back and forth between India and England. Ghosh's use of the colonizers' language can be considered his attempt to find and define his own voice within it and express his hybrid Identity. Ghosh, in the novel, depicts the postcolonial anxiety about the quest for Identity. Colonization transforms subaltern people into victims and makes them forget their natural locations and identities. In the novel, the character of Thamma highlights the dislocation, displacement, and identity crisis faced by colonized people. Ila is also a victim of an identity crisis. She wants to live in a society where she can behave according to her own way, but betrayed by Nick she fails to find a place to call her own.

The author persistently emphasizes that there are no subaltern people or colonized states as long as they are independent of others' inventions. Tridib and the narrator develop alternative ways to tell stories and reject Eurocentric metanarratives. Places such as Mrs. Price's house in West Hamstead and Khalil's home in Dhaka are spaces that are free from stubborn binaries and constantly create new possibilities by welcoming both native and non-native people. These places are places of social justice irrespective of any historical and political extremities. Amitav Ghosh tries in the novel to describe places and spaces in a non-hegemonic sense. He stresses that colonial mentality is not just a spatial problem but a discriminative mental attitude. The novel critiques the artificial nature of cultural, philosophical, geographical, and psychological borders in favor of broader humanism.

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