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Historiographic Meta-Writing In Amitav Ghosh's The Shadow Lines

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Abstract

Many writers have endeavored to write or create historical novels since the events of history and ultimately succeeded on this effort. Amitav Ghosh also one among them in producing historical meta-writing, because most of his novels drag this theme with his novels and strongly portray the historical themes directly which amalgamated with stories. Writing historiographic meta fiction is a task of re-visiting history once again to bring out the events in front of the eyes of readers in a proper manner. Specially, Ghosh has buried the entire historical event which he has seen, heard or studied in the everyday life. The fortunate thing is that Ghosh able to remember and recollect the events which perfectly fixed with story is successful. The utmost aim is to entrust the theme of historiographic meta-writing in Amitav Ghosh's The Shadow Lines. The novel widely deals with its theme that dividing nations and states, particularly the Partition, the impact of imperialism which is persisted in the history. Particularly, the unavoidable historical record of the Partition, how far it has mutilated and annihilated the livelihoods of millions people around the subcontinent is clearly expressed. Ghosh has vividly pictured the incident of partition with his characters face the sufferings and fatalities. The shadow lines which is drawn between the two nations is the symbolic one, at the same time, it is not a symbiotic one that divided the lives of people. Imperialism is the cause route for white people to capture Indian subcontinent is the momentous history in the novel. Hence, there is no doubt that Amitav Ghosh is the writer of historiographic meta-fiction.

Keywords: History, Meta- Writing, Partition and Identity.

1. Introduction

Indeed, literature is only for just reading and immensely enjoying and somewhat a moral or messages can be received to follow to live consistency. The feelings of a writer float on the pages of books, where the emotions speak directly with the readers. Thus one can come to the conclusion that a writer presents himself to the world of readers. To strength this point Shubha Tiwari points out that: "A writer gives herself/himself to the world. A secretive person cannot be a writer. The innermost processes of an individual's psyche fill the pages and the only writing? The attraction comes exactly in proportion as to how much the author has unrivalled herself/himself." (Tiwari 1)

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According to me, a writer is a secret breaker, who, in fact, could not hide his collected experiences which are entrusted in writings. Shubha Tiwari clearly points out about literature as:

Literature and its analysis perform many tasks. It preserves human consciousness. It refines sensibilities. It provides entertainment and relaxation. It reflects ethos of a people and a period of time. This can be an endless list. But the remarkable rise of Indian Writing in English reflects, above everything else, the desire of the reader to find herself/himself in a text. (Tiwari 2)

The writer of literature abducts his themes to the world of upcoming generation is a great contribution. So far, Francis Bacon has said in one of his essays *Of Studies* that: "Writing an exact man." (Bacon) In this connection, I consider Amitav Ghosh as an exact man who has presented his exact writings as fictions, novels and essays to the current post-modern world. Shubha Tiwari points out about Amitav Ghosh as:

Amitav Ghosh is talented. He is innovative. He is an experimentalist. He experiments extensively with the form of his books. But basically ideas run his books. Ideas are the driving force of his books. Each book of Ghosh is born out of a conviction. This is great. He may be writing a travelogue, a novel or a book of essays but certain heartfelt ideas prod him on. (Tiwari 2)

2. Historical Writings

In the post-modern world, many writers selected the path of writing historical fiction which is the trend newly appeared in the literary careers. Re-visiting the past is collected memories have been reflected in the writings of Indian writers. They took the events from history to emotionally blend with tale has been giving certain kind of interests to the post modern readers. Particularly, the history of India and Pakistan is revealed vividly in the novels of Amitav Ghosh and Kushwant Singh, specifically in *The Shadow Lines* and *Train to Pakistan*. R. K. Dhawan points out thus:

In the recent times, a great boy of historical fiction has emerged on the literary scene, many Indian English novelists have turned to the past as much to trace the deepening mood of nationalism as to cherish and the memories of the bygone days. A close study of the contemporary novel reveals writer's preoccupation with our historic past and unabated depict the past or that treat some event of national import that had wide repercussions. (Dhawan 14)

There are some writers who have touched and travelled in the route of presenting historical incidents in their novels, they are Khuswant Singh, Manohar Malgonkar, Chaman Nahal, Shashi Tharoor, Salman Rushdie and Amitav Ghosh. One has to confront the problems and tangles when blending the historical incidents with the tale of the novel in a perfect manner.

R. K. Dhawan mentions: "The novelist concerned with history is beyond the traditional way of assessing events; he has to blend history with his vision and philosophy." (Dhawan 14) He says further about historical themes to mix with novels as: "The novel deals with history though a camouflage." (Dhawan 14) Historical novel is nearly an evaluation of realities of history where the novelists focus the history in their own perspectives. Amitav Ghosh never shows himself as real historian, but history is somewhat reflected here and there and some novels directly deal with this predominant ideologies. He projects history for his readers where the readers re-visit the incidents mentally. The novels' historical writings are mature and more interesting; it runs with live focus of history, where the writer emerges to interfere with the events along with his readers. The prime attempt of Amitav Ghosh is his constant attachment with research on the history before writing the novels. In fact, Ghosh maintains a new

perspective of writing historiographic events and slowly injects the themes of history with his subject what he aimed to bring as the tale. As a veteran figure of research in history, he has handled novels to the: “needs of history” (Dhawan 14) and finally constructs it as good novel. Anyway, R. K. Dhawan points out: “The setting of most novels is in the context of some historical framework unless the novelist willfully places his action in an imaginary locale hoping to highlight a special metaphysical or political point on view... (Dhawan 14) Ghosh has followed the conscious use of history and sub-conscious presentation of it. Sanjay Mukerjee says: “The novel, in its relatively short generic history, has become the most important document claiming a near independent epistemological space of its own.” (Mukherjee VII).

3. The Writings of Historiographic Meta-Fiction

Amitav Ghosh is a writer of historiographic meta-fiction and he has depicted historical incidents in his fictions and novels. The reason behind that Ghosh has mingled history incidents with his novels, because he has gathered these historical events from his own personal life and many entrusted by his father through telling historical facts as stories to him since his childhood age. Then, Ghosh incarnates as the most lucid and captivating writer in the post-modern age. He has seemed as a historiographic meta-writer on fictions, novels and becomes even a journalist, professor, essayist and anthropologist. Ghosh is influenced by the political and social milieu of the nation India and Burma. The amalgamation of history derived from parents that all the stories and events were researched by him; it further gave him an imposed influence and made an impact in his mind. Several years later, Ghosh was born in India after independence. The mother of Ghosh has grown up in Calcutta, where Ghosh also grew up, so the memories of Mahatma Gandhi and his non-violence and disobedience, then the horrors of Partition of 1947 were carried by her into the mind of Ghosh, those historical events later reflected in his novels. Ghosh is admired of history which truly occupied everywhere in his works. His father has served in the British colonial army for India, his memories of war transferred by word of mouth to Ghosh substantially in his life. Hence, R. K. Dhawan says regard it as: “The image of the changing India, politically and socially, cast a deep shadow on Ghosh’s mind.” (Dhawan 19) One knows that Ghosh has spent his childhood life in Calcutta, Dhaka and Colombo. After completing his education still post graduation, next he jumped into Doctor of Philosophy in Social Anthropology at Oxford University England; this life quest let him to pursue his research work in Egypt, particularly in Alexandria University and ensued his research in the villages of Egypt which is vividly expressed as historical past-facts in his works. Anjan Kumar points out thus:

Mr. Ghosh novels reflect a historicity, as history is often present in novels. Even his first novel is an extraordinarily accomplished work of fiction as he innovatively and successfully explores new possibilities for the Indian novel in English. His novels reflect the tendencies and concerns of the age. (Kumar 8)

4. Historical Partition

The decolonization and freedom of one individual needs a specific nation since the rule of British Empire. Owning a personal land is momentous for either a Hindu or a Muslim. Hence, parting two separate nations, Pakistan and India that is overwhelmed by the act of decolonization. The Partition provided number of fatalities since migration, re-migration and communal riots. One might be living as a minority, supposed a Hindu lives in Muslim country or if a Muslim lives in a Hindu nation. It is considered as a historical moment, the partition held for ruling the nation, the individual community or religion, but it brought millions fatalities since their real sacrifice.

Amitav Ghosh has handled the partition of history, the historical moments in his work. His characters are confronted this circumstances of dividing two nations. British government hesitated to entrust the ruling power to the hands of Indians to rule them individually. The constant fear of the government is expressed directly by them because both the two religions people shall have to kill each other in the name of religion-riot. Certainly, the British government believed that the communal riot may arise soon

in the subcontinent. But the ultimate assault-decision was taken and the power changed to Indians that let into the human tragedy is strongly recorded in the history which is reflected in Amitav Ghosh's works. Through this partition, millions of Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs turned as victims, so the social unrest and ethnic developed political chaos inside the nations-state. Particularly, the state Bengal encountered this riot communally and exposed un-seeable bloodshed. The violence spread out speedily particularly at Calcutta, the capital of Bengal which was later recorded it in history as the events of the horror days as „Great Calcutta Killing.“ Bengal and Punjab were the highly populated provinces, so the two states were divided among religion groups. The partition let people to own a land of their communities, economic systems and the institutions of state administration and army.

5. Historiographic Meta-Writing in *The Shadow Lines*

The novel *The Shadow Lines* examines the problems of nation and the violence which from partition, the communal riots, historical events in history. The partition of India, especially at 1947 that split the subcontinent into India and Pakistan along with the arbitrary lines that were to separate Hindu and Muslim communities. Hence, Ghosh writes it as:

“Story incidents” of arson and looting continued for a few days, in Dhaka as well as Calcutta, despite the presence of the two armies. It took about a week before the papers could declare that “normalcy” had been “restored”.

There are no reliable estimates of how many people were killed in the riots of 1964. The number could stretch from several hundred to several thousand; at any rate not very many less than were killed in the war of 1962. (TSL 253)

The writer Bhakthi Vaishnav states: “*The Shadow Lines* also covers two major historical events, one the World War II in distant past from the time the novel is situated and second is the communal riots in 1984. The backdrop of the bombings in world war is not so much explored as the event of communal riots in 1984.” (Vaishnav 28) The novel *The Shadow Lines* is an apt work has vividly exposed how far communal riot induced and surrounded people through rumours that covered many to burn a meaningless angry and burst as violence. The newspaper reports that Ghosh handled a memory technique and excavates the impact of time. At the time, history events are recorded in the history about a war, by which a group of people met fatalities, under the euphemism of casualties, which never allows to the memories of people, their life is annihilated by violence on an international scale. Hence, Ghosh points out about the hidden history in his novel as:

The theatre of war, where generals meet, is the stage on which states disport themselves; they have no use for memories of riots.

By the end of January 1964 the riots had faded away from the pages of the newspapers, disappeared from the collective imaginations of “responsible opinion”, vanished, without learning a trace in the histories and bookshelves. They had dropped out of memory into the crater of a volcano of silence. (TSL 254)

The narrator of the novel maintains no name till the end but narrates the whole story. The narrator's inadequacy, which is the result of his trauma, epitomizes the shock of violence that has cost to spell on the history of our times; so much that history has become: “enigmatic, broken, and in a certain sense, resistant to being imagined.” (TSL 199) The narrator encounters this enigma every time; he endeavours to build the history in his memory. The narrator depicts the suffering of identity and self-recognition. The historical events from the reflection of history amalgamated with the landscape of geography. The novelist Amitav Ghosh changes past events and present events to place the self in history which unfolds the complete meaning of the current and an insight into future. According to the story, the narrator was ten years old in 1962 but his grandmother Thamma was sixty years old. Though being an important character in this novel, she seems a strong middle class Indian woman. Hence, Ghosh writes as:

All she wanted was a middle class the world over she would thrive believing in the unity of nationhood and territory, of self-respect and national power; that was all she wanted, a modern middle class life, a small thing that history had denied her in its fullness and for which she could never forgive it. (TSL 151-152)

According to the colonialist representation of Indian history, irrationality and bigotry created people to communal violence which led to be realized the momentous of British rule to make a consistency in the law and order in this subcontinent. The British government had seen so many riots happened in this country since seventeenth century to nineteenth century. All the communal violence and riots had risen from the actions of irrationality among the people. In the novel *The Shadow Lines* the grandmother Thamma discloses the conflict between her uncle's family and her own, where her uncle and she both shared a house in Dhaka. It made them to bring out a conclusion to part or divide the house with a wall. At the time, the wall was erected, it not only went through them, but also through a lavatory, bisecting a commode. However, the name plate of their father was parted into two, so their names had to be written on the two halves very small and unable to read it clearly. The divide of the house is the symbol of the absurdity of the Partition of the subcontinent is the historiographic meta-writing of the author. As per the history, the Partition was successful that Pakistan was parted as two separate nation-states that is Pakistan in the West and another is East-Pakistan now Bangladesh. Ghosh has illuminated these events in his novel.

Homogenization and purification are the matters of origin of a nation-state created Partition an importance of sacrifice. For making a nation-state, there should develop an ideology making citizens feel that they belong together by origin, particularly in language and religion. They have to fight against the enemy from outside. Through the sacrifice only the Partition happened for building a new nation. Anyway, there to make two nations on the basis of religions purity, but many people had to suffer because the people's life was in struggle. Henceforth, people were in dilemma that many did not know where they really belonged. In *The Shadow Lines* the grandmother discusses regard the bloodshed of British which was a compulsory act of them to erect a new nation. She talks further about the necessity of sacrifice made by nationalists. When Ila engaging with the narrator at London, at the time, he says that he is unable to cognize the different between events that swayed the Europeans and become part of world history and those that happened in lands like India and remained without any great ensues for the rest of the world. Thus Ghosh has explored the historical incidents and about the historical meta-writings in the novel *The Shadow Line*, so Rama Kundu defines it as:

This is one of the many apparently innocuous but very evocative and touching scenes in Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines*, which is bound to come back to the reader's mind with oppressive intensity after s/he has finished reading the book; because by then one comes to realize that this is a story about blurred lines across time-space-consciousness, that the writer here interrogates the very basis of such demarcating or dividing „lines“ as may have been drawn up by the metanarratives of historical-cultural continuums. (Kundu 239)

Ghosh has handled the signs that display dates and periods on the calendar, borders on the map drawn in a reality way. They, the events constantly revealing the past what happened in the history really. Ghosh is consistently has concentrated on months, years and dates. For an instance, 1959 appears by 1940: "Later, when were eating our dinner, I discovered that in 1959, when he was twenty-seven and she nineteen...ever since they left London in 1940." (TSL 19) March 1963 in Calcutta, then 25 September 1940 in London appears into a December night of 1980 in the cellar of house of Price. Consequently, 1979 in Delhi joints with past to October 1962, the time of war of Chinese, 2 January 1964 states the time of the Calcutta- Khulna riots that drags back to 27 December 1963, at the time the "Hajrat Bal" concealed from Kashmir.

Visiting or re-visiting the past which requires a special aptitude. The narrator and Tridib go back to the past continuously. In fact, Tridib works as an archaeologist, but narrator is a student of history, hence they are supposed to be preoccupied with the past events. *The Shadow Lines* presents a new historicist approach to past, thus the new historicism tends to expose the history as a heap of events. The perspectives on time, past and history is portrayed in the narrative mode.

6. Conclusion

Hence, *The Shadow Lines* delivers the readers with the indication that history and memory of past is supreme in the historiographic meta-writing of the novelist. Ghosh has captured the historical moments where one lives through with its perplex and unsure, smotherment and plurality according to the postmodernist context of lured line and chimera shadows. Finally, Ghosh has never written a novel for his readers, instead of that he has researched the past in the history, so far he has handled the technique of historiographic meta- writing in his novel *The Shadow Lines* is vividly expressed.

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