

Dislocation of Characters in Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines*

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Abstract

Diaspora may be defined as a group or groups of people dislocated from their homeland and then re-rooted in numerous homes on unfamiliar soil. Amitav Ghosh is one of the best-known postmodern writers. His topics are more unique and personal than others. His writings cover a variety of topics, including migration and diaspora, memory and history, political conflict and intergroup violence, love and grief, interpersonal interactions, and historical events. This paper analyses the displacement of characters like Tridib, the unnamed narrator, Thamma, Mayadebi, Ila, and May in the novel *The Shadow Lines*. This displacement creates a traumatic sense of dislocation, and migrants fail to integrate themselves into the alien land. War and partition are the primary causes of dislocation.

Key words: displacement, traumatic, migrant, partition, interpersonal

The novel *The Shadow Lines* begins at the beginning of the 1939–1945 war period in London and ends in the same city in 1979. All the characters are always on the move, travelling all over the world, but they acquire real understanding and knowledge through their own experiences. The whole story is narrated by the unnamed narrator, who lives in Calcutta. He hears all the stories from his mentor and philosopher, Tridib. The narrator beautifully narrates wartime, which is described in detail by Tridib. The novel begins with the displacement of Mayadebi, the mother of Tridib, who moves from India to England with her family. She was born and studied in Dhaka, which is her hometown. After her marriage with Sahib, she travels to different parts of the world. Her husband is a diplomat, an officer in the Foreign Service. Amitav Ghosh narrates:

Tridib's father was a diplomat and an officer in the Foreign Service. He and Mayadebi were always away, abroad or in Delhi; after an 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 older than Tridib, was an economist with the U.N. He was always somewhere in Africa or South-East Asia with his wife and his daughter, Ila, who was my age. (TSL6).

His job leads him to displace himself. He and Mayadebi are always away, whether abroad or in India. This displacement changes her culture and attitude. Her relatives have seen her appearance and have called her Queen Victoria.

The man was in a state, she snorted. Never seen anything like it. But now, being the woman she was, she folded her tiny hands in her lap, pushed her knot of hair

back to the top of her head and sat up in her chair in the way the family had come to know so well, that characteristic pose that had earned her nickname of Queen Victoria. (TSL 27-28)

Sahib entirely changes himself because of his environment. He changes his speech and actions; this is an evident sign of his displacement. Mayadebi was shy and not ready to mingle with others during her college days, but in an alien land, she is ready to face anything. The whole family is displaced from one place to another. Mayadebi's elder son is Jatin. His family has been displaced from India to London. This displacement is the main reason his daughter Ila can lead her life as she wishes. She doesn't like to follow cultures and traditions. Parents who fail to nurture the values of their children Kaushlesh Biyani makes this point in an online essay. In *The Shadow Lines*, the author embodies the ideas of western nationalism and the denial of history to the Third World through the narrator's 'white -washed' cousin Ila (4).''

Thamma is the grandmother of the narrator, whose birthplace is Dhaka. She was born and brought up in Dhaka. After her marriage, she moves to Burma with her husband, who is a railway employee. During his service, her husband was transferred to different places. After her husband's death, she moves to Calcutta and works as a headmistress at a school. She is displaced geographically, emotionally, and spiritually because of the partition and historical accident. As the narrator says, "all worked hard at whatever we did: my grandmother at her schoolmistressing; I at my homework; my mother at her housekeeping; my father at his job as a junior executive in a company." (TSL 4)

After twenty years, she decides to go back to Dhaka to bring her uncle Jeshtamoshi to Calcutta. When she visits her native land, she behaves like a child. Shawkat Hussain points out in his essay, ' Post- Colonial Angst in Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines*', "perhaps the greatest irony of India's independence for characters like Tha'mma is that while it gave them freedom and a new nation-state, the Partition took away their "homes" and the dialects that gave them their special identity'" (127). She asks her uncle to move from Dhaka to Calcutta because of the communal riots. On their way back, the whole group is attacked by rioters. Tridib tries to save the old man's life, but he is killed by the rioters. Individuals lives are affected because of displacement.

Tridib moves to London to develop his love for May Price. His displacement from India to England is for the sake of cultural, emotional, and intellectual freedom. He is mentally displaced because of his zeal for May Price. The narrator is physically displaced to Delhi for the purpose of education. He wants to be free from the bonds of culture. He has spent most of his life in London, Delhi, and various other places, even though he discovers that his life is meaningless. The narrator is the only person to feel uncomfortable in London. He feels at ease after returning to his birthplace. Brinda Veerappa says, "Home is not a geographical entity but an emotional, moral, and intellectual entity, which can be identified in the shadows of one's own inner being." (172)

Ila travels from one place to another, so she has a variable identity. The narrator has been attracted to Ila since childhood. She is unique among others because of her varied culture. She wants to lead a free life, so she adopts western culture. "Ila's quest for a space of her own can be seen from the time she is a young girl: schools are that mattered to the young Ila – probably because they are close to real space in her every shifting childhood" (164). She changes her boy friend like a toothbrush. First, she loves the narrator, but she marries Nick Price. Nick Price has displaced

himself from London to Kuwait in the material world. He has been employed by the company, but later on he is thrown out of the company for money laundering. He marries Ila later because he doesn't want to continue his life with her. He has a relationship with a girl. At first, May Price loved Tridib. After the death of Tridib, May wants to live her life with the narrator. All the characters in this novel have been displaced from their homes because of their circumstances. The narrator is displaced for education; Mayadebi is displaced for marriage; Tridib is displaced for his career and romance; and Thamma is displaced for her future. Every character is moving from one place to another for their own benefit.

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