

Identity Crisis transformed into Revolutionized Ideas: A Re-reading of Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines*

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Abstract: The colourful character of Tha'mma is really a unique creation of Amitav Ghosh in his epoch-making work *The Shadow Lines*. Her dislocation from Dhaka generates in her, a feeling of identity crisis, when often she is reminded of her birthplace, residing in India. But this feeling of identity crisis revolutionized her thought-process and taught her to view things differently with broader perspective. This evolution of her own thinking process and intellectual pattern, depicted in the novel presents her as an exceptional woman in comparison with the average. The present paper attempts to discharge spotlight on the different tenets of Tha'mma's character to prove her a 'New Woman'.

Keywords: New Woman, Feminist, Movement, Displacement, Revolution, Character, View, Idea

The 'New Woman' as Feminist ideal emerged in the latter half of the 19th century in Europe and North America, seeking equal rights and opportunities for women in their economic activities, personal lives, politics and so on. The movement sought to broaden women's self-awareness and challenge traditional stereotypes of women as passive, dependent or irrational. As a movement, these women produced the deepest transformation in American society and enlisted a large number of participants. Many of the contemporary novelists, playwrights, journalists, pamphleteers, political thinkers hailed the emergence and supported the movement to encourage women to liberate themselves from male domination, manage their own lives, and live behind anything that might restrict their pursuit of happiness and their self-realization. Although the movement had its origin in Europe and North America, gradually it had been spreaded in many countries of the world including India. The movement of the 'New Women' impacted literature and literatures as well. The image of 'New Woman' is pertinent in a large number of Indian writings as the movement influenced our Indian writers.

The novel, *The Shadow Lines* is an epoch-making creation of Amitabh Ghosh. The novel launches a sharp attack against the post modern autocratic attitudes of the nation states which is responsible for the separation and isolation of the people and their miseries. The false sense of nationalism of people gives birth to imperialist forces and further results in the creation of borders. The novel also exposes the futility of partition or division of countries and establishes the view that borders can divide lands, but not the human minds as human mind is indivisible

irrespective of time and place. In this novel, Tha'mma is a unique as well as a colourful character. She was born in a joint family in Dhaka and grew up at a time when the battle against the British was jointly being led by Mahatma Gandhi and the militant nationalists together as the Indian National Movement at that time was gaining a militant note. At her very early age, she was touched by a deep sense of freedom. However, Tha'mma's character can be viewed in the light of a 'New Woman' because of the evolution of her view, outlook and thinking process, which are really stunning and present her as an exceptional woman in the novel. Infact, our avowed aim in this paper is to discharge spotlight on the different tenets of Tha'mma's character to prove her a 'New Woman'.

Tha'mma had been dislocated from Dhaka. So she was unable to forget her place of birth and in great love with it. She also could not adjust in India as she was reminded always to her native land. But this feeling of identity crisis revolutionized her ideas and taught her to view things differently with broader perspective. Gradually, she realized that 'nostalgia is weakness' and said, "It's everyone's duty to forget the past and look ahead and get on with building the future". In the earlier phase of Tha'mma's life, she was reminded to her birthplace, but when she went to visit Dhaka once upon a time, after her dislocation, she understood the harsh reality of the border and contemplated that dislocated people like her have no home but in memory. Her historical separation from the homeland caused the losses of her linguistic precision in terms of her home. She failed to make out how her birthplace had come to be so messily at odds with her nationality. She found herself as if stranger at her home. Infact, this transition of Tha'mma's character as depicted by the novelist is really stunning and exceptional at the same time, which has made her different from the average women.

Tha'mma is out and out a nationalist and tempered with a deep sense of freedom. The partitioned India and the line of control drawn between Dhaka and Calcutta- her present place of stay, does not make any sense to her. She realizes that borders have a weak existence and not the history of bloodshed can make them truly impregnable. She is straightforward and undiplomatic in view and outlook, who believes that the things are either this way or that but no in between. Subhash Bisaria has said, "Tha'mma was a woman with conviction and views of her own which she did not want to be flouted or over-ruled". Tha'mma has her own views and concepts, regarding nationalism, nationhood and formation of Indian state, which are clear enough, pithy and at the same time forceful. It is observed in the perception of her early days when she saw, felt and experienced the tremors of British imperialism. Her strong sense of freedom and nationhood is beautifully depicted in the novel by Amitabh Ghosh. She thinks that it takes hundreds of years to build a country and it's the right of the citizens to live there with their near and dear ones. Irrespective of their religious identity, people like to live together in their motherland, because at a point of time, they forget that in which family they have born- Muslim, Hindu, Bengali, Punjabi etc. and think they are a family born of the same pool of blood. So when the greatest burden of

historical dislocation fell on him, she had been grief stricken and at loss of words. She questioned, when people are peace loving and like to live together in their place of birth, then why is this partition and where's the need of this bloodshed and violence? Hence, she strongly condemns the politics of partition, violence and bloodshed.

Thus, the above discussion conveys that the views, ideas and revolutionized mindsets, Tha'mma possesses brings her at par with a 'New Woman' in the novel, *The Shadow Lines*. The depth and intensity of her thought process differentiates her from the traditional women, having the general thought pattern. Apparently, she looks like a simple lady, who has been displaced like others from her homeland, but when spotlight is discharged into the deep recesses of her mind and her views and concepts about displacement, nationalism, nationhood etc. are brought under scanner, it becomes abundantly clear that Tha'mma is really a character of a very high stature. Very few displaced women of her age could think about the things on her line. There's a tone of universality in her line of thinking, which is appealing and at the same time thought-provoking. Her philosophic views that 'nostalgia is weakness', therefore everybody should forget the past and look ahead and get on with building the future, strike us to a great extent. Her deep realization that 'dislocated people like her have no home but in memory' really touches one's heart. Simultaneously with this, there's a strong condemnation against the politics of division or partition of countries, murder, bloodshed and violence, which Tha'mma herself experienced in her life and there's also an appeal to stop all these for the sake of humanity, on behalf of her. So, the novel *The Shadow Lines* is proof enough that Tha'mma's basic concerns are deeper and thought process is intellectual. But what is noteworthy in the novel is that such revolution in her views, outlook and mindset came in the wake of her historical displacement from her beloved motherland.

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