

Pre-partition India and the Rise of Indian Nationalism in Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines*: A Postcolonial Analysis

Sheikh Zobaer* ✉

* Lecturer, Department of English and Modern Languages, North South University, Dhaka, Bangladesh.

Article Info

Article History:
Received
17 August 2020
Approved
13 October 2020
Published
30 October 2020

Keywords: Partition,
Nationalism,
Colonialism, Amitav
Ghosh

Abstract

The Shadow Lines is mostly celebrated for capturing the agony and trauma of the artificial segregation that divided the Indian subcontinent in 1947. However, the novel also provides a great insight into the undivided Indian subcontinent during the British colonial period. Moreover, the novel aptly captures the rise of Indian nationalism and the struggle against the British colonial rule through the revolutionary movements. Such image of pre-partition India is extremely important because the picture of an undivided India is what we need in order to compare the scenario of pre-partition India with that of a postcolonial India divided into two countries, and later into three with the independence of Bangladesh in 1971. This paper explores how *The Shadow Lines* captures colonial India and the rise of Indian nationalism through the lens of postcolonialism.

© 2020 Universitas Negeri Semarang

✉ Corresponding author:

Bashundhara, Dhaka-1229, Bangladesh
E-mail: zobaer.nsu@gmail.com

INTRODUCTION

The Shadow Lines is arguably the most famous novel written by Bengali Indian author Amitav Ghosh who is famous for his literary works in English fiction. Published in 1988, the novel lucidly captures the futility of the partition of India, earning Amitav Ghosh the Sahitya Akademi Award. The novel tells the story of a family victimized by the partition of India. But it is not just the story of some random family; this fictional family tells the story of all the families who were the victims of the tumultuous period of the great divide in 1947 that saw the Indian subcontinent divided into two countries who have always been hostile to each other. Partition can only separate the land by man-made fences,

but cannot separate the people who share the same history and legacy of sharing the same territory and living the same kind of life for centuries. There are so many factors that connect the people of a particular region together, and if there are socio-cultural similarities among the people living in that region, no artificial borders and boundaries can separate them in true sense; rather, animosity is all that the imposed separation spawns.

Many historians and critics have questioned the partition of India. Many believe that the partition is just an artificial segregation which should have been avoided, and many believe that India's partition was a result of the British rulers' divide and rule policy. Famous Indian politician and scholar Shashi Tharoor, in his much-acclaimed 2017 book *Inglorious Empire:*

What the British Did to India, argues that the partition of India was a result of the divide and rule policy adopted by the British who had a “particular talent for creating and exaggerating particularist identities” (Tharoor, 2017, p.102). Bimal Prasad is also in dialogue with Tharoor as Prasad argues that in order to create Hindu-Muslim tension, the British colonial rulers used the divide and rule policy as a strategy so that they could “easily play one community against the other” (Prasad, 2001, p.257). Jawaharlal Nehru, in his magnum opus *The Discovery of India*, aptly argues that “any division of India on a religious basis as between Hindus and Moslems” is bound to fail because “they are spread out all over the country,” and “even if the areas in which each group is in a majority are separated, huge minorities belonging to the other group remain in each area. Thus instead of solving the minority problem, we create several in place of one” (Nehru, 1994, p.528). Renowned Oxford historian Yasmin Khan is also in dialogue with Nehru as she, in her book *The Great Divide: The Making of India and Pakistan*, points out that Cyril Radcliffe “hurriedly marked on maps using censuses of ‘minority’ and ‘majority’ populations” to divide India on religious ground ignoring the devastating consequences such division might ensue (Khan, 2017, p.3).

The partition, indeed, came into effect with devastating consequences. Tharoor (2017) claims that “over a million people died” in communal riots and about seventeen million people were displaced (p.144), whereas Daiya (2008) believes that “at least sixteen million people” were forced to migrate and “at least two million were killed in ethnic violence” (p.6). According to Jeff Hay’s estimate, around ten million people were forced to migrate from Punjab only (Hay, 2006, p.84). The unprecedented communal violence caused by the partition forced the renowned Muslim leader of the Congress Abul Kalam Azad to compare the provinces of West Bengal and Punjab with “graveyard of destruction and death” in his autobiographical book *India Wins Freedom* (Azad, 1988, p.228). Famed Indologist Stanley Wolpert, in his book *Shameful Flight: The Last*

Years of the British Empire in India points out that “the tragedy of partition and its more than half century legacy of hatred, fear, and continued conflict” could have been avoided, but for the “arrogance and ignorance of a handful of British and Indian leaders” (Wolpert, 2006, p.4).

This is exactly what *The Shadow Lines* explores: the tragedy of the partition by portraying the trauma of diaspora, and the legacy of fear and hatred by portraying the Hindu-Muslim riots in Dhaka in 1964 – almost two decades after the independence of India and Pakistan. In order to explore the trauma of partition and its legacy of animosity, *The Shadow Lines* paints a pellucid picture of pre-partition India which stands in stark contrast with the legacy of division and hatred that engulfed most of the subcontinent after the partition. The novel also captures how communal harmony in pre-partition India gave rise to the nationalist movement of India which eventually played a significant part in drawing an end to the oppressive British colonial rule in the subcontinent.

METHODS

Amitav Ghosh’s novel *The Shadow Lines* is the subject of study. This study examines the novel through the lens of history in order to evaluate how the Indian subcontinent prior to its partition in 1947 has been captured, and how the rise of Indian nationalism during the twilight of British colonial rule has been portrayed in this novel. Descriptive qualitative method of textual analysis has been applied in this research. One of the key aspects of this study is the use and analysis of historical information as secondary sources, and in order to ensure an objective and unbiased analysis of the secondary sources, information has been obtained from the most authentic and reliable sources which include encyclopedia, newspaper articles, journal articles, and books authored by some of the most acclaimed scholars, politicians, historians, and cultural critics. Such variety of sources also ensures the necessary diversity a study like this

requires in order to ensure the inclusion of a wide range of perspectives while examining a phenomenon, which in turn contributes to the objectivity of the study. This study has been divided into two parts. Through the lens of postcolonialism, the first part explores the extent to which the portrayal of the pre-partition Indian subcontinent is authentic. The second part focuses on the textual exploration of *The Shadow Lines* in order to evaluate how the rise of Indian nationalism has been captured in this novel. Works of some of the most prominent postcolonial critics and historians including Frantz Fanon, Shashi Tharoor, and Stanley Wolpert have been used to lay the theoretical foundation of the study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

India before Partition

Even though providing a comprehensive insight into the socio-political scenario of India in colonial period is too colossal a task for any novel, *The Shadow Lines*, nonetheless, achieves quite a remarkable feat in portraying how the Indian subcontinent was before the great divide in 1947. The absence of borders was one of the major aspects of the undivided Indian subcontinent under the British colonial rule. West Bengal, Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Myanmar – all were in the same map unrestricted by borders during the British colonial rule. There were eight administrative divisions in British India including Burma, Bengal, Madras, Bombay, United Provinces, Central Provinces, Punjab, and Assam (Meyer, 1931). The entire territory of Bangladesh was under the province of Bengal, and Pakistan was under the province of Punjab in British India. Myanmar was known as Burma, which was also one of the eight administrative provinces of British India. That means present-day India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Myanmar – all were inseparable parts of the same territory governed by the same monarch. Therefore, there were no borders between the cities like Delhi, Calcutta, Dhaka, Lahore, and Yangon; and people could move from one place to another without any kind

of restriction at all. This borderless Indian subcontinent was very much different from what it is now. People used to travel across the subcontinent in search of better life, job opportunities, education, and so on eventually resulting into an incredible cultural amalgamation of many different ethnic groups that lived in the Indian subcontinent with their unique language and culture which also created an environment that allowed their coexistence. India became a melting pot of different cultures and a nurturing ground for ethnic diversity. This incredible phenomenon set the Indian subcontinent apart from the rest of the world.

The borderless India is portrayed in *The Shadow Lines* quite distinctively. We see that Tha'mma and her sister Mayadebi live in Dhaka in their early life. They grow up in their Dhaka home, and through Tha'mma's reminiscence of her early life in Dhaka, we come to know how much she is actually attached to Dhaka despite living in Calcutta for the rest of her life. Tha'mma receives her early education in Dhaka, and graduates from Dhaka University. But ironically enough, despite being born in Dhaka, living there for a long time, and receiving education in Dhaka University, Tha'mma eventually moves to India with her family during 1947 when she could have easily been the citizen of East Pakistan and eventually of Bangladesh had she not left Dhaka during the partition. Since Burma (now Myanmar) was also a part of the British Raj, it was quite common for people from different regions of India to go to Burma for education, job, and other purposes. This novel also captures India's connection with Burma as the narrator tells that Tha'mma's husband (the narrator's grandfather) used to work in Burma as an "engineer with the railways" and that Tha'mma lived the "first twelve years of her married life in a succession of railway colonies in towns with fairy-tale names like Moulmein and Mandalay" (Ghosh, 1995, p.124). Even the narrator's father was born in Mandalay in 1925 which is now one of the most prominent cities in Myanmar. The narrator also reveals that Mayadebi went to live in Calcutta after she got married to Shaheb. So

here, even through the story of one single family, we get the flavor of how it was like to live in the undivided Indian subcontinent as Thamma and Mayadebi – the two sisters – despite being born in Dhaka, eventually go on to live in Burma and Calcutta respectively for years after their marriage before they finally settle in India after the partition in 1947 and live there for the rest of their lives.

The novel also sheds light on the socio-cultural and political scenario of India during the British colonial rule in the twentieth century. We see the family structure of the typical middle-class Bengalis at that time and the influence of British customs among them, part of which is the result of the colonized men's psychological subjugation to the ruling colonial power. We see the colonial dominance of the British rulers and the rise of revolutionary nationalist movement. The novel also shows us Hindu-Muslim coexistence in India during that period which was peaceful in most part. In fact, Hindu-Muslim peaceful coexistence in the Indian subcontinent is an established fact. Shashi Tharoor claims that the Hindus and the Muslims in the subcontinent "had long lived intertwined lives," and such communal harmony was one of the essential aspects of the Indian subcontinent prior to its partition (Tharoor, 2017, p.113). Jaswant Singh, in his book *Jinnah: India – Partition – Independence*, interrogates the two-nation theory, which was the very basis of the partition. Singh claims that the coexistence of Hinduism and Islam in India was possible because both religions evolved by influencing each other, and eventually transformed themselves over the course of "almost a millennium and a half" (Singh, 2009, p.4). *The Shadow Lines* paints a powerful picture of religious harmony in pre-partition India, and by doing so, the novel questions the justification of the partition that caused sufferings of millions of people, and gave rise to a long-lasting religious and political animosity among the people of India and Pakistan.

The joint family where Tha'mma and her sister live with their uncle's family is typical of middle class Bengali Hindu families during that

period. Their family dispute can also be considered as a symbolic representation of the Hindu-Muslim tension in the subcontinent that lasted for years and still continues to grow. Despite their animosity, Hindus and Muslims of India coexisted for centuries; and just like Tha'mma's aunt plays the role of a matchmaker in Mayadebi's marriage with Shaheb putting aside all the family squabbles, the Hindus and the Muslims of the Indian subcontinent came to each other's assistance on many occasions leaving behind their religious differences. They accepted each other's differences and learned to live together as a part of the same community sharing the same language, culture, and social values. This was perhaps the most important aspect of the Hindu-Muslim mutual coexistence in undivided India before the partition in 1947. The novel, however, does not explicitly focus on the stability and the harmony of Hindu-Muslim relationship in pre-partition India, and by doing so, the novel successfully highlights on the fact that the Hindu-Muslim relationship, in spite of all the religious tension, had a sustainable stability because of the century-long tradition of Hindus and Muslims living together side by side. Therefore, the coexistence of Hindus and Muslims was not quite an unexpected phenomenon in the Indian subcontinent to be worthy of a special mention.

The psychological subjugation of the educated middle-class mimic-men is an extremely important aspect of colonization in pre-partition India that is portrayed in this novel with ingenuous subtlety. For example, the narrator tells us that the reason why his grandmother always calls her sister's husband 'Shaheb' is because she once heard Shaheb's mother proudly saying that her son was "so Europeanized that his hat wouldn't come off his head" (Ghosh, 1995, p.34). The narrator also learns from his grandmother that Shaheb's wardrobe was divided into sets of hangers which had labels like "Calcutta zamindar, Indian diplomat, English gentleman, would-be Nehru, South Club tennis player, Non-Aligned Statesman, and so on" (Ghosh, 1995, p.34). This

shows that Shaheb desperately wants to Europeanize himself in terms of his getup and behavior. But it is not only the Shaheb who is psychologically subjugated to the British colonial force and becomes a mimic-man. Jethamoshai is also another striking example of how the life-long psychological domination can root deep into an individual's psyche. When Tha'mma along with others goes to Dhaka to bring Jethamoshai with her, he does not recognize her, but almost instantly identifies May as a foreigner through her appearance. Then he points at the king's picture and says "our King-Emperor. God save our gracious king" (Ghosh, 1995, p.213). Not only that, Jethamoshai even goes as far as to make an attempt to sing the British anthem "God save our gracious Queen..." but forgets the tune and manages "somehow to convert the words into a cheerful hum" (Ghosh, 1995, p.213). It is really incredible that an old man of his age, who cannot even faintly recall his family relationships, still vaguely remembers the British colonial legacy long after the colonial rulers have left. Both Shaheb and Jethamoshai are representatives of the class of educated middle class Indian men who are psychologically dominated by the ideas and the lifestyle of the colonial masters and try to mimic them. This, they think, would elevate their social status. Quite interestingly, famous Martinique-born Afro-Caribbean postcolonial theoretician Frantz Fanon discusses a similar phenomenon in his renowned book *Black Skin, White Masks* where he attempts to analyze the psychological subjugation of Black people. According to Fanon (2008), a black man, from his childhood, learns to view the White colonial rulers as superiors, and therefore "subjectively adopts a white man's attitude" in an attempt to conform to the code of conduct set by the colonial rulers and to live up to their expectations with a view to making himself more acceptable to the White colonial rulers (p.114). Fanon (2008) believes that this attempt to adopt an European way of life eventually leads to the "formation and crystallization of an attitude and a way of thinking and seeing that are essentially white" (p.114). When it comes to Jethamoshai and the

Shaheb, we find their psychological subjugation to be quite similar to that of Black men living in a French colony discussed by Fanon. Amitav Ghosh's effort, in this case, is definitely commendable by the way he subtly and realistically portrays the psyche of characters like Jethamoshai and Shaheb who represent the group of the educated, rising middle class Indian mimic-men in pre-partition era.

Another very interesting social phenomenon in British India which is worthy of note, and which is also one of the most thought-provoking aspects of this novel, is the friendship among the Indians and the British. In British India, friendship between the Indians and the British was not quite uncommon, and such cross-cultural connection, by its very nature, embodies the power of human beings to overcome the threshold of individual differences and connect with one another. The Datta Chaudhuri – Tresawsen friendship portrayed in this novel shows very clearly how the absence of border can bring people from two different continents of the world together and tie them in a bond of warm friendship that can even be carried through generations as Lionel Tresawsen's daughter Mrs. Price becomes friend of Tridib's father, and Tridib becomes friend of May Price – the daughter of Mrs. Price and the granddaughter of Lionel Tresawsen. In the case of Tridib and May, their relationship goes beyond friendship as the two become lovers later on. This generation-long relationship between these two Indian and British families serves a great purpose in this novel apart from showing a cross-border cross-cultural relationship. *The Shadow Lines* questions the idea of nationalism and nation states by showing how they became agents of division among people who share linguistic, cultural, and ethnic similarity. As an antithesis to such deliberately created division, Ghosh presents this Tresawsen-Datta-Chaudhuri relationship which overcomes linguistic, cultural, ethnic, and geographical differences eventually upholding the power of human companionship, compassion, and unity over all the differences.

The Rise of Indian Nationalism

The rise of Indian nationalism is undoubtedly one of the most significant events during the British colonial rule in India that paved the way for freedom for the millions of people in the subcontinent who had been living their lives in perpetual misery for centuries under colonial rule. The anti-colonial sentiment resulting from the century-long subjugation and suffering eventually fueled the anti-colonial movements in India which finally saw the end of the British rule in the Indian subcontinent; and after centuries of untold suffering, the long-subjugated people of the Indian subcontinent finally got the chance to know how it feels like to break free from the shackle of colonization. It is because of the outburst of the long-suppressed anti-colonial sentiment, which culminated into a mass-awareness among the people of India urging them to unite together against the British colonial rule, that Indian nationalism, with all its uniqueness and unforeseen consequences, eventually developed into an indomitable anti-colonial force surging through all the obstacles, and reignited the passion of freedom among the Indian populace which helped them achieve their glorious independence overcoming the overwhelming resistance of the mighty British colonial power (Nehru, 1994, pp. 327-330). This was perhaps for the first time in history that the entire Indian subcontinent, the whole of India, came together under one umbrella with the unified goal of achieving freedom, manifesting the surging rise of Indian nationalism in the most emphatic way. Hence, the discussion on pre-partition India would not be complete without shedding light on the rise of Indian nationalism, and also on the resulting anti-colonial movements that eventually propelled the Indian independence movement towards its ultimate success by drawing an end to the British colonial rule in India for good.

However, the path towards freedom was never easy, and the rise of Indian nationalism did not occur overnight or over just one particular

significant incident. People all over India resisted the colonial rulers for centuries and there were some notable anti-colonial movements including the Vellore Sepoy mutiny in 1806 and the Indian rebellion of 1857, but none was as effective as to drive the colonial rulers out of India. After century-long anti-colonial struggle, India eventually became united under the charismatic leadership of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, and finally the nationwide anti-colonial movement became an implacable force overpowering the colonial resistance. Mahatma Gandhi and his followers took the path of nonviolent noncooperation movement – a form of peaceful civil resistance famously known as Satyagraha – while some others opted for violent revolution believing that exerting force was the most effective way to shake the British colonial enterprise off its ground. Even though Satyagraha gained worldwide acclamation, the revolutionary movements also played a vital role in accelerating the Indian independence movement towards its ultimate success. There were many such secret revolutionary groups active all over India during the first half of the twentieth century, and Bengal played an exceptional role as a breeding-ground of revolutionaries. In this novel, two such secret revolutionary groups who were at the forefront of all the revolutionary groups in Bengal – the Jugantar Party and the Anushilan Samiti – are mentioned. The narrator learns from Tridib that “terrorist societies like Anushilan and Jugantar and all their offshoots, their clandestine networks” attempted to “assassinate British officials and policemen” forcing the British to react with “arrests, deportations and executions” (Ghosh, 1995, p.37).

The novel gives us authentic information about the activities of the secret revolutionary groups in Bengal during the colonial period. Historical record confirms that Secret revolutionary groups like Jugantar Party and Anushilan Samiti were active in Bengal and had profound impact on the independence movement of India by destabilizing the British colonial stronghold in Bengal with their clandestine attacks. According to Banglapedia (n.d.),

“Anushilan Samiti was one of the secret revolutionary organizations operating in Bengal in the first quarter of the 20th century” which was “bent on overthrowing the British colonial rule” in India. Muzaffarpur action was one of the most notable revolutionary clandestine operations by this group which is famous for the sacrifice Khudiram Bose and Prafulla Chaki who gained the stature of national heroes. One of the most heroic clandestine operations by the Dhaka Anushilan Samiti was the Chittagong armory raid on April 18, 1930 led by Masterda Surya Sen, for which he was tried and hanged to death on 12 January 1934. Jugantar party, another “leading revolutionary terrorist group in colonial Bengal,” was named after the revolutionary newspaper Weekly Jugantar which was started by “an inner circle within the Calcutta Anushilan Samiti under Barindrakumar Ghosh and Bhupendranath Datta” and was the “mouthpiece of the advocates of militant nationalism” (Banglapedia, n.d). In 1930, the leaders of Calcutta Jugantar Party launched an extensive program of terrorism and focused on manufacturing explosives. Jugantar Party bravely contributed in the Chittagong Armory Raid in 1930 which caused massive government backlash against the revolutionaries all over Bengal (Bangladeddia, n.d).

These two were at the forefront of the secret revolutionary groups in Bengal, and through the reminiscence of Thamma, we get a vivid glimpse of the revolutionary activities of these secret groups. The author shows an extraordinary awareness of history which is expressed through Thamma, Tridib, the narrator, and their remembrance of past. From Tridib, the narrator learns about the “terrorist movement among the nationalists in Bengal in the first few decades” of the twentieth century, about the “clandestine networks” of Anushilan Samiti and Jugantar Party, about the “home-made bombs with which they tried to assassinate British officials and policemen” and about the government repercussions that followed (Ghosh, 1995, p.37). Since the revolutionary groups used to recruit their members mostly from educational

institutions, there used to be regular police raids in suspected educational institutions, as Thamma mentions, “there were raids all the time in the colleges and the university. We’d grown up with it” (Ghosh, 1995, p.37). Thamma’s account of how “a party of policemen led by an English officer” suddenly enter into the classroom in the middle of a lecture to arrest her friend, brings back the memories of those turbulent days in vivid details leaving the readers amazed at the wonderful reflection of historical awareness in fiction. Through Thamma’s account, the activities of her revolutionary friend are also revealed. The narrator learns from Thamma that her revolutionary friend was “learning to use pistols and make bombs, smuggling messages and running errands” and before he had been “deported to the infamous Cellular Gaol in the Andaman Islands,” he was on a mission to “assassinate an English magistrate in Khulna district” (Ghosh, 1995, p.38). The portrayal of his revolutionary character is so close to reality as to make him a mirror image of the revolutionaries in Bengal who, at that time, were the flag-bearers of Indian nationalism as a violent response to colonization in contrast with the peaceful noncooperation movement opted by MK Gandhi and his followers.

It is through Thamma’s memory of the revolutionary movement and her attitude towards it that the rise of Indian nationalism as an anti-colonial reaction is best revealed. It is quite evident that Thamma’s idea of nationalism as an anti-colonial struggle is very much similar to that of the revolutionaries. Just like the revolutionary freedom fighters who opted for violence as a way of drawing an end to the British colonial rule, Thamma, too, seems to hold the same belief. The narrator reveals that Thamma was fascinated “by the stories she had heard about the terrorists: about the heroism of Khudiram Bose and the sad death of Bagha Jatin” (Ghosh, 1995, p.38). History informs that both Khudiram Bose and Bagha Jatin took part in armed insurrection against the British colonial force and eventually sacrificed their lives. Khudiram Bose, who was “better known as the

youngest freedom fighter, was hanged on August 11, 1908” under the accusation of “bombing the carriage of Kingsford” when he was “only 18 years old” (“Remembering Khudiram,” 2016). Khudiram, along with Prafulla Chaki, planned to assassinate Mr. Kingsford, then district judge of Muzaffarpur and Chief Presidency Magistrate of Calcutta, because he passed “heavy sentences on young Bengalee [Bengali] political workers” and inflicted brutal punishment on such politically active workers (Bakshi & Ritu, 2007, p.339). Bagha Jatin, whose real name is Jatindranath Mukherjee, is another revolutionary freedom fighter whose heroic death, according to the narrator, moved Tha'mma throughout her youth. “Jatindranath Mukherjee was one of the most valiant revolutionary philosophers and freedom fighters against the British rule in India” who was nicknamed as “Bagha Jatin (Tiger Jatin)” because of his “heroic struggle against the colonial rulers” (Chandan, n.d.). British officer Sir Charles Tegart once said, “If Jatin were an Englishman, the English people would have built his statue next to Nelson’s at Trafalgar Square” (qtd. in Chandan). “Jatin was made the Commander-in-Chief of the entire revolutionary forces,” and when one of his compatriots “went to Batavia to negotiate a deal with German authorities there for the shipment of arms and financial help” leaving him “in hiding in Baleswar (Orissa),” police eventually found out his hideout in a paddy field, and “On 9 September 1915, after heavy exchange of fire,” Jatin was found dead (“Banglapedia, n.d.).

It appears that Tha'mma was fascinated by the revolutionary freedom fighters, and it is from them and their revolutionary philosophies and activities that Tha'mma develops her idea of nationalism as an anti-colonial response. We learn from the narrator that, for Tha'mma, working for the revolutionary fighters would have been like stealing “a little bit of their glory for herself” (Ghosh, 1995, p.39). As a result, it is not surprising that instead of prioritizing Gandhian way of noncooperation and nonviolence, Tha'mma, in her youth, had inclination towards revolutionary ideas which, if necessary, could

have driven her towards the path of violence as the narrator reveals that Tha'mma would have gone to Khulna with her rebel friend and “stood at his side, with a pistol in her hands, waiting for the English magistrate ...” (Ghosh, 1995, p.39). When the flabbergasted narrator asks Tha'mma if she really would have killed the magistrate, Tha'mma replays calmly, “yes, I would have killed him. It was for our freedom: I would have done anything to be free” (Ghosh, 1995, p.39). At this point, any careful reader can easily notice that Tha'mma’s calm but resolute utterances bespeak her undying passion for freedom and the indomitable spirit to achieve it even in the face of the greatest danger, much like her revolutionary friend who, when faced with the English officer, “seemed absolutely unmoved” with his “face impassive, his back erect his gazed fixed on the policeman, clear, direct and challenging” (Ghosh, 1995, p.38).

In this novel, Tha'mma’s unnamed rebel friend personifies the real-life revolutionary freedom fighters like Masterda Surya Sen, Bagha Jatin and so on; and Tha'mma, on the other hand, embodies the group of Indian youth of that time whose idea of Indian nationalism as a reaction against colonial rule was inspired by such revolutionaries: by their philosophies, activities, and sacrifice. In fact, it was not just these Indian revolutionary freedom fighters who responded with violence to overthrow colonial rulers. If we look at history, many nations across the globe fiercely resisted the colonial rulers and had no other option but to opt for violence in order to decolonize themselves. Because of the fact that colonialism itself was one of the most violent forms of oppressions humanity has ever known, the reactions against the colonial enterprises – either to resist the colonial settlers or to overthrow them – had to be violent more often than not. According to Fanon, since colonization itself was an extremely violent process and the colonizers themselves used force to begin with, in order for decolonization to be successful enough to overthrow the colonizers, it too, has to be violent. In his famous book *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon (1963) argues that colonization and

decolonization are essentially two different forces which are “opposed to each other by their very nature,” and whose “first encounter was marked by violence” (p.36). Fanon also brings up the point that “the exploitation of the native by the settler” was a violent process which was “carried on by dint of a great array of bayonets and cannons” (p.36). As a result, a colonized person is forced to live in a “narrow world, strewn with prohibitions,” and such state “can only be called in question by absolute violence” (Fanon, 1963, p.37). According to Fanon (1963), the battle between colonization and decolonization is like a “murderous and decisive struggle between the two protagonists” where decolonization can only be triumphant if the natives are prepared to “use all means to turn the scale, including, of course, that of violence” (p.37). It is quite clear that the Bengali revolutionary freedom fighters like Khudiram, Bagha Jatin, Suryasen and all other revolutionary activists were on the same side as Fanon’s regarding their common philosophy of considering violence as the strongest means of achieving freedom. In *The Shadow Lines*, Tha'mma and her anonymous rebel friend perfectly represent the group of young generation Indians of the first quarter of the twentieth century, who, inspired by the revolutionary spirit of the rise of Indian nationalism, reacted violently against the British colonial rule either by physically carrying out armed insurrections, or by morally supporting such use of force.

Ironically, Tha'mma becomes a different person later on in this novel following the death of Tridib in Dhaka in a Hindu-Muslim riot. In her youth, Tha'mma, like many other young Indians at that time, is full of youthful spirit bent on resisting the oppressive colonial rulers at all cost. That was the time when the people of the entire subcontinent were united in their collective effort to achieve freedom. But the partition of 1947 changed it all, and after the traumatic experience of the riots in 1964, Tha'mma advocates waging war against Pakistan considering Pakistan as an enemy to her nation. This is how by portraying how Tha'mma’s view of nationalism changes, Ghosh shows how the partition of India created a

permanent rift among millions of people, and questions the achievement of the partition.

CONCLUSION

The portrayal of pre-partition India in *The Shadow Lines* enables the readers to explore how the partition changed the socio-political atmosphere in the India subcontinent. The novel reveals that the experience of partition was traumatic beyond measure. The novel also makes it abundantly clear that the partition could not actually separate the people who share the same cultural and historical background; rather, such an artificial segregation worked as a catalyst for provoking cross-border unrest among the people of India and Pakistan because of their misguided religious zeal. A postcolonial analysis of *The Shadow Lines* reveals that even though the partition was based on the religious differences among the people in India, the separation could not ensure long-lasting peace as it was the very religious sentiment that turned out to be the cause of such a long-lasting feud between India and Pakistan, and also among the Hindus and Muslims of both countries. Postcolonial critics and historians like Shashi Tharoor and Jaswant Singh have also drawn their conclusions along the same line, and as a work of fiction, *The Shadow Lines* is authentic in how it captures the history of trauma and division as a result of the partition.

This is exactly the reason why the discussion of the partition of India is never complete without the discussion of how India was before the partition. In this regard, Amitav Ghosh’s effort to portray different aspects of India before the partition of 1947 in his novel *The Shadow Lines* is undoubtedly commendable. The experience of living in a borderless India, the experience of living under the colonial oppression, the psychological subjugation of the mimic-men, Hindu-Muslim peaceful coexistence, the rise of Indian nationalism, and the revolutionary movements against the British colonial rulers – all are portrayed realistically in *The Shadow Lines*. Such authentic portrayal of the

most significant aspects of pre-partition India also sets a strong platform for an honest literary exploration of post-partition India, making the discussion of the partition in this novel more comprehensive and effective.

REFERENCES

- Azad, A. K. (1988). *India Wins Freedom*. Orient Longman Limited.
- Bakshi, S. R., & Ritu C. Eds. (2007). *Bihar Through the Ages*. Sarup & Sons.
- Banglapedia. (n.d.). Anushilan Samiti. In Banglapedia.org. Retrieved August 10, 2020, from http://en.banglapedia.org/index.php?title=Anushilan_Samiti
- Banglapedia. (n.d.). Bagha Jatin. In Banglapedia.org. Retrieved August 10, 2020, from http://en.banglapedia.org/index.php?title=Bagha_Jatin
- Banglapedia. (n.d.). Jugantar Party. In Banglapedia.org. Retrieved August 10, 2020, from http://en.banglapedia.org/index.php?title=Jugantar_Party
- Chandan, Shahnawaz Khan. "The Man behind the Myth." *The Daily Star*, 7 Mar. 2015, www.thedailystar.net/the-man-behind-the-myth-41075. Accessed 10 August 2020
- Daiya, K. (2008). *Violent Belongings: Partition, Gender, and National Culture in Postcolonial India*. Temple University Press.
- Fanon, F. (1963). *The Wretched of the Earth*. (C. Farrington, Trans.). Grove.
- Fanon, F. (2008). *Black Skin, White Masks*. (C. L. Markmann, Trans.). Pluto.
- Ghosh, A. (1995). *The Shadow Lines*. Oxford UP.
- Hay, J. (2006). *The Partition of British India*. Chelsea House Publishers.
- Khan, Y. (2017). *The Great Partition: The Making of India and Pakistan*. Yale University Press.
- "Remembering Khudiram Boses, the Youngest Revolutionary Who Was Hanged at the Age of 18." (2016, December 3). *India Today*. <https://www.indiatoday.in/education-today/gk-current-affairs/story/khudiram-bose-355435-2016-12-03>
- Meyer, W. S. (1931). *The Imperial Gazetteer of India*. Oxford University Press.
- Nehru, J. (1994). *The Discovery of India*. Oxford University Press.
- Prasad, B. (2001). *Pathway to India's Freedom: A Nation within a Nation 1877-1937*. The University Press Limited.
- Singh, J. (2009). *Jinnah: India – Partition – Independence*. Rupa & Co.
- Tharoor, S. (2017). *Inglorious empire: What the British did to India*. C. Hurst.
- Wolpert, S. (2006). *Shameful Flight: The Last Years of the British Empire in India*. Oxford University Press.