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The Idea of Nation as Heterogeneous: *Midnight's Children* and *The Shadow Lines*

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Abstract:

The present paper is a humble attempt to describe the motives and fall out, both over and tactical that surrounds the materiality of post colonial novels and critical text. It incorporate an interpretation of the repressed ideology-heterogeneity that recalls the idea of otherness among nations, which will be reflected by the novels of Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* and Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines*. The paper will highlight the way of socio-political awareness which works in the reading of a text and the production of ideologies, the ideological in the text in turn transforming our understanding of time. The beautiful conjunction of the concepts of nation and otherness emanate most urgently from the political reality of this region.

Keywords: Heterogeneity, Ideology, Biculturalism

Methodology:

The complete paper is based on the secondary source. Thus, most of the secondary data have been collected through library works in the different universities of India, like Assam University, Guwahati University, Tejpur University of Assam and Sam Higginbotom Institute of Agriculture Science and Technology: Deemed University, Allahabad.

Introduction:

“To study the nation through its narrative address does not merely draw attention to its language and rhetoric; it also attempts to alter the conceptual object itself. If the problematic ‘closure’ of textuality questions the ‘totalization’ of national culture, the its positive value lines in displaying the wide dissemination through which all construct the field of meanings and symbols associated with national life” (Homi Bhabha,1990). National identity is essentiality defined by its heterogeneity from what is perceived as other, outside the national boundaries Heteroglossia the different discourses and tongues contained within the normative framework of the novelistic language - is shown to be emblematic of civilization system of social, religious, linguistic heterogeneity that contributes the idea of nation in Amitav Ghosh's *The Shodow Lines* and Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*.

Idea of nation as Heterogeneous:

Midnight's Children is an example of an attempt to re-figure an alternative history for India by plurality over national heterogeneity, and a text in which the historian and the narrator are complementary figures. The narrator protagonist Saleem-Sinai is the embodiment of a nation. Saleem Sinai is one of the “Midnight's Children” born between 12 midnight and I A.M. in the night of August 14-15, 1947, the time when India coming into existence. The birth of Saleem Sinai at midnight signified the birth of modern India. The Novel contains three births, three

national formations – India’s, Pakistan’s and then in 1971, Bangladesh- kept in the reader’s sights by Salman’s movement from India to Pakistan to Bangladesh and then back to India. At the same time, the novel contains a perfectly surreal break-down of borders and divisions, and its chaotic, frenzied pace offers a dramatic and sassy comeback to the staid contours of nation. Both *Midnight’s Children* and *The Shadow Lines* have been weighted by the responsibility of narrating the idea of nation. But unlike Salman Rushdie, Ghosh refuses to celebrate the hybridity born of migration and the heterogeneity that fails to be contained by national communities. Instead he offers a compelling critique of nationalism and failures of migration through the experiences of women as citizens and subjects, he thus makes visible the violence that both engender, and that is often constitutive of them. If Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* makes national fragmentation intelligible through its allegorization in the violence inflicted upon the masculine citizen’s body, in *The Shadow Lines*, nationalism is challenged not only through the subjectivity of Thamma whose unrealized ideals of national citizenship and belonging are belied, but also through the testimony of riot violence. Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* is about the birth of a nation. Like Rushdie, Saleem is a product of biculturalism. The two diametrically heterogeneous cultures have identified his identity. His hybrid identity leads anyone to search the split identity of India which can be best exemplified in the words of Rushdie. “My India has always been based on ideas of multiplicity, pluralism, hybridity: ideas to which the ideologies of the communalists are diametrically opposed. To my mind the defining image of India is the crowd, and a crowd by its very nature is superabundant, heterogeneous, many things at once”. Thus Rushdie celebrates heterogeneity and multiplicity as the source of Indian nation.

Amitav Ghosh’s *The Shadow Lines* reveals the fragility of partitions’ borders between nations as etched out in maps and of the frontiers policed by nation states that separate people, communities and families. The Shadow lines present the universal truth that human society is divided into several sections and sub-sections though human beings are the same in nature and emotions all over the world. Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs have shown exemplary unity time and again, but the fanatics have turned them into enemies. So is the case of nationalism. The home planet, in which, there existed most diverse and heterogeneous population before British colonization has been divided by national boundaries drawn on a map, but the cultural unity cannot be divided by these Shadowy lines. The Shadow lines make visible the violence of nationalism and globalization through the representations of their material and psychological objection on women’s bodies and women’s lives. In Ghosh’s *Shadow Lines*, two generations of migrant women-the grandmother and Ila-become the figures through which different kinds of promises of nationality and migration rendered common by globalization are belied. The opposition between Ila and grandmother is not simple. The grandmother is fervently convinced that the nation has a clearly determined point of origin, represented by the nationalist wars of liberation. She associates images of flesh and blood with the nation, perceiving it as a living body. For Ila, the grandmother’s nationalist ideal is tantamount to fascism. Ila and grandmother are at the opposite ends of the chain that ties together the nationalist linear narrative to the postcolonial fragmented one. The relationship between the narrators grandmother, and her animosity to words her sister’s son’s daughter Ila emblemizes the conflict between nationalism and a migrant cosmopolitanism, even as it makes visible the limits and failures of both for these middle class women. The narrator’s grandmother is called Thamma in the novel. Thamma is an embodiment of the national and cultural identity constructed by the dominant state ideology. Functioning antithetically to Thamma’s ideology of linking religion and nationality to nationhood is her uncle who refuses to be “rescued” from the Muslim East Pakistan in order to live in India with his

Hindu relatives. “I do not believe in this India- Shindia,” he says to his sons when they migrate to India during partition. “It’s all very well, you’re going away now, but suppose when you get there they decide to draw another line somewhere? What will you do then? I was born here, and I’ll die here (216). Thamma finally loses her grasp on reality when Tridip is killed in post-colonial Dhaka by a violent Muslim Mob. In contrast to Thamma’s nationalist militant fervor hysteria, Ghosh presents the quiet strength and sanity of the narrator’s uncle, Robi unlike Thamma’s concept of nation which is rejected is as inadequate through the narrative of the text, Robi’s formulation of nationhood as one that should be able to perceive the fragility of borders in the construction of identity is supported elsewhere by the narrator and this can be interpreted by the words of Robi: “you know, if you look at the pictures on the front pages of the newspapers at home now, all those pictures of dead people- in Assam, the North East, Punjab, Srilanka, Tripura people shot by terrorists and separatists and the army and the police, you’ll find somewhere behind it all that single word; everyone’s doing it to be free.....Why don’t they draw thousands of little lines through the whole subcontinent and give every little places a new name? What would it change? It’s a mirage; the whole thing is a mirage. How can anyone divide a memory?” Amitav Ghosh’s novel *The Shadow Line* thus became a unique position in the post colonial literature that explores and celebrates the heterogeneity of post-colonial nationality and migration.

Conclusion:

It is acknowledged from the above that both *The Shadow Lines* and *Midnight Children* undertake the nation as a modernist tropic against the darkness of colonialism. Therefore Rushdie’s *Midnight Children* and Ghosh’s *The Shadow Lines* should be considered the quintessential fictional novel for illustrating the near insurmountable difficulties inherent in creating a national identity amongst a hugely heterogeneous postcolonial society. But in *Midnight Children* the ideology of nation is based on heterogeneity: while the ideology on in *Shadow lines* is based on Memory. Therefore, by affirming the power of memory as the basis of nation Ghosh answers Rushdie’s accounts of nation through the remarks of Robi: “How can anyone divide a memory?”

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