

A Neocolonialist Take on Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* & E.M. Forster's *A Passage to India*

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Abstract: The article discusses the zealous idea of nationalism in *A Passage to India* and *The Shadow Lines* that can rewrite colonialism in a new mask. Thorough study has been done to analyze the ambivalent situations on the characters from the novels that have been through colonialism and partition. The researcher discusses the struggles of crossing the arbitrariness of borders and influence of cultural diversity in the light of the aforementioned novels from a neocolonialist view. Both of the novels depict the same aftermath of colonialism and struggle to identify themselves in the hazy idea of 'nation' which often ended up in homogenizing a heterogeneous community. Although, both of the novel is set in separate time zones- colonialism and after independence, the effect can be summed up from a neocolonialist perspective. That is why, infusing the idea of Edward Said's orientalism, Fanon's pitfalls of colonialism and Bhabha's third space, the paper discusses how people carry the hegemonic idea of nationalism especially about the minorities in the society. The article is conducted using a qualitative research with textual analysis to support the argument of the study. It's been found that the idea of nationalism- exclusion, othering and aggression, might create the spirit of independence but also lessens the tolerance. As a result, a neocolonial hybrid state emerges that often dehumanizes the minorities just how as some countries of the West treated the nonwhite people.

Keywords: nationalism, identity, orientalism, postcolonialism, neocolonialism

Introduction.

In *Critical Theory Today*, Lois Tyson defines nationalism as "the emphasis on indigenous culture, especially when accompanied by the attempt to eliminate Western influences" (Tyson 278). While this may initially seem like a liberating act of resistance, such nationalism often inherits the very tools of domination it seeks to escape. Meaning, in the process, the attempt to regain freedom got contaminated with colonial hangovers and natives started imitating the proponents of power politics among themselves and the rests. Edward Morgan Forster and Amitav Gosh, two prominent writers explore the idea of nationalism in their respective works: *A Passage to India* and *The Shadow Lines*. The main focus of the study is to explore the negative

impact of nationalism on the individual through these two different novels from a neocolonialist eye.

Originally coined by Kwame Nkrumah, neocolonialism refers to the continued economic, cultural, and ideological domination of former colonies by their colonizers, often through indirect means. In literary terms, it also manifests in how postcolonial societies reproduce colonial structures of power, especially through state-sponsored nationalism that marginalizes internal “others.” This paper uses the term “neocolonial othering” to describe how characters like Tha'mma and Aziz, while rejecting foreign domination, inadvertently perpetuate colonial hierarchies within their own societies.

Background of the study

Nationalism tends to take several terms according to different scholars. Many scholars point it out as a negative aspect- “exclusionary hegemonic orientation of nationalism” (Hobsbawm). According to him, resistance towards colonial rules of the ‘third world country’ influenced the idea of nationalism. Frantz Fanon (1961) agrees with the statement adding that the idea of the ‘nation’ as the imagined basis of this post-independence construction of culture and identity became an extricable part of the rhetoric of nationalism. In the postcolonial world, after the independence from colonial rule, with the emergence of nationalism came communal riots, partition, diaspora, and finally the ambivalence in claiming one’s national identity.

In *Passage to India*, two different cultures were living side by side with a superior-inferior relationship due to colonial period. There were internal problems from the beginning but not getting enough attention. Everything went out of hands when Dr. Aziz was blamed for the rape of another British woman, Adela. The place was flooded with communal riots between Hindu-Muslims. Aziz lost reputation and interest in making friends with the colonizers. In the end, he expresses that unless the relationship of colonizer-colonized is mitigated, no transcultural friendship can be made.

In *The Shadow Lines*, the identity crisis after the partition of India is highlighted through many memories and communal riots. Ghosh criticizes the drawing of imaginary borders in the name of religion and nation and promotes the idea of a borderless universe.

Statement of the problem

Though nationalism is a key element for the colonized countries to gain independence, it has its darkness. It limits the worldview of a person to a certain boundary called ‘nation’ and as a result, he or she rejects any interference of the ‘other’. The main focus of the study is to explore this issue through two different novels: *The Shadow Lines* by Amitav Ghosh and *A Passage to India* by EM Forster. The study also explores the impact of diaspora and ambivalence in the light of these two novels on a neocolonial perspective.

Theoretical Framework

Palestinian-American scholar, Edward Said in his book, *Orientalism* (1978) talked about the dark relationship between the Orient and Occident. He said, “The relationship between Occident and Orient is a relationship of power, of domination, of varying degrees of a complex hegemony...” (Said, 5). At first, a few westerners saw the East as a career but later it was veiled by the idea that they (non-Europeans) are the savage, uncivilized person and it was the ‘white men’s burden’ to educate them both culturally and religiously. And, that is how a settlement sprouts into violent colonial rule- it starts small.

Also, they preached that these heathens cannot represent themselves, they must be represented. In the process of this ‘generous attempt’ many scholars and historians have committed epistemological violence and generalized everyone in one scale. For example, Flaubert once met an Egyptian courtesan during his travels in Egypt between 1849 and 1851 and later described all oriental women are exactly like that in *Flaubert in Egypt: A Sensibility on Tour*. That is how they dehumanized the humans of half of the world and treated them as concept in books rather than really getting to know them, their culture and religion. “Anwar Malek Abdel (1963) calls the ‘hegemonism of possessing minorities’ and anthropocentrism allied with Europocentrism: a white middle-class Westerner believes it his human prerogative not only to manage the nonwhite world but also to own it, just because by definition ‘it’ is not quite as human as ‘we’ are.” In his *Orientalism in Crisis*, we see these kinds of direct portrayal in *A Passage to India* between the communities of Anglo-Indians and natives regardless of the class. Now, the paper’s different take is on the society of *Shadow Lines* where people from different religion or even different country are seen as the non-human other, the inferior, and the burden. Under the veil of nationalism, Tha’mma from SL and the conservatives are practicing neocolonial ideas; can be called ‘neocolonial othering’.

Another very promising psycho-analyst, Franz Fanon described the influence of colonial manipulation on the minds of both colonizers and colonized parties. His research says that both parties go through psychological turmoil while one thinks himself as the superior and the other inferior. Then after the decolonization process, when there is no visible ‘oppressor’ present, the oppressed people starts out casting their own people with the intention of promoting a homogenous culture and often the process includes bloodshed and injustice. “The national bourgeoisie steps into the shoes of the former European rulers... and turns its back on the people” (Fanon 97). Even Fanon himself warned of the outcome of the zealous nationalism when it turns to xenophobia and militarism. Symbolically, Tha’mma could be a microcosm of the disadvantages of nationalism- bloodshed, militarism, nihilism and the intolerance towards heterogeneous identity. We can see the same in Dr. Aziz while he actively denounces the friendship of Mr. Fielding indirectly pointing out the power structure and race as the obstacle between them.

With the superior-inferior complex between the oppressed and oppressors, comes the idea of imitating the supposed superior race which according to Bhabha is called mimicry. "Mimicry is at once resemblance and menace" (Bhabha 86). The reason behind calling it a 'menace' could be discussed as the disadvantages of blindly following the adopted culture with the sense of erasing one's root for the sake of shame and social mobility. Because research shows in this postcolonial era, heterogeneous cultural identity is quite common but it issues a threat when one tends to erase another culture. That is why Bhabha suggested a place where this hybrid culture can exist in a safe place and called it the 'third space'. "The 'Third Space' is a mode of articulation... which opens up a space of translation" (Bhabha 37). This was the space that Ila from the SL and the Muslim and Anglo- Indian community were searching for to co-exist with dual yet fluid cultural identity.

Alongside Edward Said's notion of Orientalism, this paper employs Frantz Fanon's critique of post-independence nationalism and Homi Bhabha's theories of hybridity and mimicry. Fanon, in *The Wretched of the Earth*, warns that nationalist movements often reproduce colonial hierarchies, as seen in the way Tha'mma and Aziz enact exclusionary politics mirroring their former oppressors. Homi Bhabha's concept of ambivalence and the Third Space adds further depth: characters like Tridib and Fielding navigate between identities, destabilizing fixed notions of nation and culture. Together, these frameworks reveal how colonial ideologies persist in neocolonial forms—both externally imposed and internally perpetuated.

Literature review

Nandan (1994) focuses on the development of political and nationalist consciousness in Aziz. She states, "The development of political consciousness in Aziz and within India, in general, is displayed in the fact that their tolerance of the English, even their desire for their presence, later hardens into a political awareness and a desire for their departure." According to Nandan, although Aziz wants Fielding to leave India, he still feels some affection for him, which characterizes the triumph of liberal humanism.

Baker (2006) highlights the problematic relationship between the colonizer and the colonized in a colonial context. He observes that the English and Indians can attempt friendship, but cultural differences, stereotyping, and colonization obstruct true solidarity. "No native can escape his nativity and no white man can escape his white blood" (Baker 73).

Homi Bhabha (1994) adds nuance through his concepts of ambivalence and mimicry, noting that mimicry is "at once resemblance and menace," revealing how colonial authority is both imitated and destabilized by the colonized subject (86). This is visible

in *A Passage to India*, where Aziz's oscillation between loyalty and rejection reflects colonial ambivalence. Bhabha also defines postcolonial identity as hybrid, stating that in the "Third Space," identity is "not pre-given, progressive or whole, but divided by otherness within itself, and always in a state of ambivalence" (37). Tridib and Ila from *The Shadow Lines* embody this hybridity, belonging nowhere yet navigating everywhere.

Rituparna Roy (2010) writes that Tridib's death "indicates that the aftermath of the Partition did not die down even after seventeen years... it highlights the destructive energies of the religious fundamentalism" (Roy 131). The implication is that nationalist trauma continues across generations, even in the postcolonial period, as communal violence emerges not from colonizers but from within.

Kasikhan and Kasikhan (2015) argue that Ghosh emphasizes nationalism to reveal that "the shadow lines we draw among ourselves, people and nations, is not only an absurd illusion, but also can be a source of bloody violence." These boundaries manipulate both private and political spaces and illustrate the struggle to overcome artificial borders (Kasikhan and Kasikhan 249).

Edward Said (1984) reflects on the trauma of homeland reconstruction: "Their roots, their past, home becomes the traumatic site of cultural reconstruction which involves a conflict with many inherited assumptions, including the overriding premise that the home always-already exists" (Said 53). This is evident in Tha'mma's deep disillusionment when she returns to Dhaka, finding her childhood home transformed beyond recognition.

Gabriel (1999) contends that Ghosh "uses the fractures and dislocations of partition to destabilize a continuist narrative of nationalist history and to uncover the silences and omissions upon which the nations of India and Bangladesh have been created" (Gabriel 210). Her insights align with how *The Shadow Lines* challenges the sanctity of state borders and histories.

Jebun Ara Geeti (2024) provides a comparative approach to Ghosh's reception, noting how the novel's nationalist themes are interpreted differently across India, the UK, the US, and Australia. She writes, "Partition, traumatic memories of dislocation, and a profound longing for the past are assessed differently... depending on the critic's national context" (Geeti 8600). This global reception enriches the novel's significance and reinforces how nationalism is not a fixed idea but shaped by lived, cultural memories.

Sheikh Zobaer (2020) reinforces this with a historical lens, stating that *The Shadow Lines* not only portrays partition trauma but also “captures the rise of Indian nationalism and the struggle against the British colonial rule through revolutionary movements” (Zobaer 157). Thamma’s fascination with violent nationalism reflects this historical spirit.

Amitav Ghosh himself declares, “all the boundaries are artificial: there is no such thing as a ‘natural’ nation, which has journeyed through history with its boundaries and ethnic composition intact” (*The Shadow Lines* 1988). This assertion frames both novels’ critique of nationalist absolutism.

The themes of nationalism, colonial ambivalence, and identity are extensively explored in *A Passage to India* and *The Shadow Lines* by existing studies. But these analyses are basically done separately. Either by looking at Ghosh's reflection on postcolonial and partition trauma or Forster's critique of British imperialism. While Roy (2010), Kasikhan and Kasikhan (2015), and Gabriel (1999) concentrate on Ghosh's examination of postcolonial nationalism and border politics, Nandan (1994), Baker (2006), and Bhabha (1994) draw attention to the colonial dynamics and ideological divisions within Forster's work. The way that both texts, when compared, show a cyclical pattern in which the newly independents internalize the hang of colonialism and uphold the same exclusionary traits they opposed during colonial rule. Additionally, although hybridity and the instability of identity are frequently highlighted in postcolonial criticism, both the text closes the gap in their timelines and explain how colonial resistance turns into inbred power dynamics and hierarchy after decolonization opening up scopes for neocolonial ideologies.

Indeed, the literature reviewed so far has independently explored nationalism in *A Passage to India* and *The Shadow Lines*, but rarely through a comparative lens. This study intends to bridge that gap, showing how extreme forms of nationalism, once used to resist imperial rule, is later adopted by natives to oppress others. Literature, echoing life, reveals that the oppressive ideologies once resisted may be internalized and re-performed by the formerly oppressed.

Methodology

Research Design, This study follows a qualitative research method, using literary analysis as its main approach. By combining close textual analysis, the research involves close reading of the texts, focusing on language, characters, and narrative structure to understand how the authors represent historical and cultural issues.

Primary Data Source, It examines two novels—*A Passage to India* (1924) by E.M. Forster and *The Shadow Lines* (1988) by Amitav Ghosh—arranged in chronological

order. These texts serve as the primary sources of data and will be analyzed to explore themes such as identity, nationalism, and colonial/postcolonial relationships.

Secondary Data Source, to support the analysis, secondary data will be collected from books, academic journal articles, theses, documents, and reliable websites. These sources will help provide context and strengthen the interpretations made from the primary texts.

Theoretical Framework, works of some of the most prominent postcolonial thinkers and critics, including Edward Said, Frantz Fanon, and Homi K. Bhabha, have been used to lay the theoretical foundation of the study.

Objectives

The objectives of the paper is to-

1. analyze the nationalistic stand of the characters from *A Passage to India* and *The Shadow Lines* who faced partition and diaspora from a neocolonialist perspective
2. discuss how the idea western idea of 'orient' has corrupted the decolonized countries as well.

Influence of nationalism, diaspora and ambivalence in *The Shadow Lines*

Before colonization, there were both fluidity and complexity among different communities and cultures. Still, the people of India lived contently with heterogeneous history and culture with the extraordinary capacity to live with differences. But after the independence from British colonizers, they tend to draw borders based on religious fundamentalism. Hence, the communal riots, migration, variation in national identity and belongings, ambivalence in identity, and relationships created.

Characters' nationalistic frenzy, from the very beginning, Tha'mma's character- an eccentric literate strong widowed woman who is also the narrator's grandmother, was a little bit strict and eccentric. She needed everything under [her] control and sorted. Her eccentricity is influenced more for her trauma, insecurity, and financial problems after her husband's death. The arbitrariness of identity and borders was never clear to her. She asks whether she would be able to see the trenches from the plane. But she was startled when learned that there is no big hint of the border between two countries.

"But if there aren't any trenches or anything, how are people to know? I mean, where's the difference then? And if there's no difference both sides will be the same; it'll be just like it used to be before, when we used to catch a train in

Dhaka and get off in Calcutta the next day without anybody stopping us.”
(Ghosh, 1988, P, 149)

She unintentionally describes the meaningless of the India-Pakistan border. But she always supported the idea of ‘cultural homogeneity’ in her own way incorporating herself as Indians and othering the refugees. Her idea of exclusionary nationalism got more frenzy after the death of Tridib. It attacked more personally for the death of the nearest ones. She sold the last souvenir of her dead husband, a gold chain in the hope to revenge for the Tridib’s death. She says that whatever it takes, they need to kill all of them (the Pakistanis) in the border, or else they’ll come to kill her and her family (Ghosh, 1988, P, 237).

In this way thousand separate trauma[s] build into one, thousand tha’mmas personal plea for revenge took part in communal riots in the name of nationalism.

On the contrary, Ila’s journey of cosmopolitanism got disrupted with her thoughts on Eurocentric superiority. She says, “nothing really important ever happens...in Nigeria, India, Malaysia, whatever.” (Ghosh, 1988, P, 104) By this, she rejected her native land and cultural values. In this way, both Tha’mma and Ila are the same. They rejected every other views and culture that seemed unrelated to them.

Ambivalence in the sense of identity and belonging, in Tha’mma’s childhood, she used to make stories to pacify her little sister telling that in the separate portion of their house, everything is upside-down. It is the microcosm of what the people who are divided by borders think. They think there are ‘separate realities’ on the other side even if they were the same before division. That Tha’mma who was brought up in Dhaka, criticize the refugees came from East Pakistan.

“Tha’mma: look at it (Calcutta) now- as filthy as Babui’s nest. It’s all because of the refugees, flooding in like that.

Narrator’s father: Just like we did.

Tha’mma: we’re not refugees. We came long before the partition.” (Ghosh, 1988, p. 145)

The difference between national identity and homeland strikes again when Tha’mma was about to visit Dhaka. The binary logic of coming and going seemed so ambivalent that she couldn’t fix whether to say- going to Dhaka or coming to Dhaka.

Diaspora and partition and idea of home, “I don’t believe in this India-Shindia . . . Suppose when you get there, they decide to draw another line somewhere? What will you do then? No one will have you anywhere. As for me, I was born here, and I’ll die here.” (Ghosh, 1988, p. 237). Coincidentally, Jethamoshai’s statement proved prophetically later. Another country, Bangladesh emerged from that border. He, in his frenzy, could understand border can be drawn but there is no stability or wholeness in

this man-made problem. Upon the sense of freedom, partition, diaspora, nationalism was born in the postcolonial world. That's why nationalism is different in India than the West.

To Tha'mma idea of home is Calcutta but something dawns on her when she cannot say her homeland is her identity. To Ila, it is the Europe she claims her homeland rejecting her root. But Tridib wanted to be a cosmopolitan and that thought of universality, he supplied to the narrator's worldview.

Diaspora and the idea of Nationalism in *A Passage to India*

"We'er not here for the purpose of behaving pleasantly!

What do you mean?

We'er out here to do justice and keep the peace. Them's my sentiment.

India isn't a drawing room." (Forster, 1924, p. 49).

Ronny's speech with his mother clearly reveals that Anglo-Indians are the part of British nationality. They came here to serve their British Government, not to sympathize with the natives. The Anthem of the Army of Occupation from chapter 3 reminded them of their national identity. Such nationalistic attitude of Anglo-Indians broadens the gap between the natives and themselves.

On the other hand, Mrs. Moore is against this attitude. She thinks that India is a part of the earth. So Anglo-Indians and the natives should be pleasant to each other. This liberal attitude of Mrs. Moore makes her criticize her fellow country woman in front of Aziz. Nationalism did not blur her sense of judgment. She becomes a good friend of Aziz.

Ambivalence in the attitude of Fielding, like Mrs. Moore, Fielding is also a good friend of Aziz. To defend his friend, Fielding goes against his fellow countrymen. It is certain that Fielding cares for Aziz but he did not think Aziz as his equal. He thinks that India cannot be a nation. British government need to patronize India: "Away from us, Indians go to sand at once" (Forster, 1924, p. 349) it proves that Fielding has a superior feeling regarding his British nationality. Friendship should be based on equality. But in Fielding's case, he tries to patronize Aziz. His nationalistic pride creates a barrier between him and Aziz.

Extreme Nationalism of Aziz, it is not only Fielding but also Aziz whose nationalistic pride prevents the possibility of friendship between him and Fielding. Due to some bitter experiences like the mistreatment of Major Callender, negligence of English ladies and finally the false accusation from Adela's part make him despise the Anglo-Indians. He comes to the conclusion that "two nations cannot be friends." The spirit of nationalism lessens his tolerance towards the Anglo-Indians. He wants a nation state which will exclude all the foreigners. His harsh remark towards Fielding proves

nationalistic frenzy: “We shall get rid of you, yes, we shall drive every blasted English man into the sea and then...you and I shall be friends.” (Forster, 1924, p. 289)

Findings

It can be said that not inferiority complex or identity crisis- but the emergence of a cosmopolitan self where one's identity cannot be specified by a separate name; rather it promotes the polarization of different cultures in one is the ultimate answer in both of the novels.

Seeing Tamil and Telegu as one, antagonizing Islamic cultures and Islamic Orientals are racist and dehumanizing. The white men's ideology was not appropriate as they dehumanized and marked the 'other' slightly different than them. That is why colonialism and their rule is remembered as corrupted. So, repetition of the same idea in a new mask is also not a humane thing to do.

One of the central findings of this study is that both Tha'mma in *The Shadow Lines* and Aziz in *A Passage to India*, while resisting colonial oppression, gradually begin to embody the very ideologies they oppose. Their nationalism, initially rooted in the desire for freedom, slowly adopts a rigid and exclusionary form—mirroring the colonial mindset of division and dominance. Aziz's vision of a nation for “Indians only” and Tha'mma's obsession with boundaries reveal how colonial binaries are internalized and repurposed in postcolonial struggles. Forster, through characters like Aziz, foreshadows how early nationalist sentiments can evolve into systems of neocolonial control, where exclusion is practiced by the formerly excluded. Moreover, the continued presence of hierarchical institutions—represented by characters like Ronny and Callendar—suggests that even after the colonizers depart, the structures of power remain, often managed by the native elite. This raises a deeply human question: can the pursuit of liberation itself become a new form of control when it forgets the humanity it once sought to reclaim?

Scopes and Limitations

Now that the paper proved that othering is not a concept followed by some white foreigners and their administrations, natives from the same country can 'other' anybody based on Cultural diversity, race, class, gender, there's scope to create and research several branches of neocolonial othering. Also, the new studies can transcend from post-colonial to marxism, feminism etc.

As the research talks about people and experiences, a quantitative research could've been done to justify the concept, 'neocolonial othering'. But due to time proper funding constraints, the researcher could fulfill these demands.

Conclusion

The goal should be humanizing the idea of nationalism rather than taking political advantages from it. Otherwise, national will promote negativity and the current world is the witness of it. That is why communal riots, wars, etc., are happening. To serve its political agenda, common people are losing their lives, dearest ones, friendships, kinships, childhood houses. Ghosh rejects the homogeneous cultural identity and promotes fluidity by disrupting the so-called nationalist ideas. He also influences the idea that after colonialism, the world has moved on and “home and the world as collaborative rather than competing” (Geeti, 2024, p. 5); whereas, Forster indicates that intermingling of cultures will never happen if oppression and superiority is present. Both texts talk about the feelings of common people but the context is different. Ultimately, these two novels remind us that the battle against colonialism does not end with the departure of the colonizer—it continues within, in how we imagine borders, define belonging, and choose between domination and empathy in shaping our nations.

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