

The New Historical Trend of Discursive Historicism- A Critical Perspective Of Shadow Lines.

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Introduction:

My ardent interest in English literature attracted me to explore and research in the midst of modern Indian English writers and the novel, *THE SHADOW LINES OF AMITAV GHOSH* caught my concentration about Amitav Ghosh emphasizing that border lines of nations are only shadow lines. Deep, hidden philosophical elements towards redefining the nation into broad viewpoint of human society, created and presented by Amitav Ghosh through the wings of literary writings, impelled me to study Amitav Ghosh and his novels from research perspective. Amitav Ghosh sets history as a background for his novel. He gives importance to the individuals but not to the background. History rumbles discreetly at the background throughout his novels. Take for instance, *The Glass Palace* which is an ambitious work of fiction which covers more than a century of history and four generations of characters spread across India and South East Asia. All the novels of Ghosh demonstrate the author's voice in balancing the sweep of history with the depth and complexity of the individual. Ghosh spins his tale with harrowing precision and insight, leaving the reader with a lingering disquiet about how the forces of history can irrevocably alter the lives of ordinary men and women. Human historian in Ghosh novels travels between cultures/lands and negotiates what has now come to be called the 'third space' in the way of anthropological studies. The extant criticism on Ghosh's work has exposed significant socio cultural representations. One of the concerns is the representation of history which interfaces fiction which has become the subject of much critical debate

on new historicism. The themes of all Ghosh's oeuvre are perceived for the individual characters at the expense of active historical characters. This article in all its satirical representation critiques on new historicism in a discursive manner. It reveals the complicit formulation of post national future within the framework of history interface fiction. Ghosh associates undesirable nationalism with historical background. However, for my article presentation I have chosen the title called "The New historical Trend of the Discursive Historicism in the fiction of Amitav Ghosh –A Critical Perspective" which makes an exploration of the aspects of history which interface fiction in the novels of Ghosh. However I tried to interpret the nature of this article by observing it from the various cultural aspects of contemporary Indian society.

Origin Of The Term: "New Historicism":

The term 'new historicism' was coined by the American critic Stephen Greenblatt, whose book *Renaissance Self – Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (1980) is usually regarded as its beginning. However similar tendencies can be identified in work by various critics published during the 1970s, a good example being J.W. Lever's *The Tragedy of State: A Study of Jacobean Drama* (published by Methuen in 1971, and re – issued in 1987 with an introduction by Jonathan Dollimore). This brief and epoch making book challenged conservative critical views about Jacobean theatre, and linked the plays much more closely with political events of their era than previous critics had done. The three most influential theoretical works on new historicism have undoubtedly been Clifford Greetz's *The Interpretation of Cultures* (1973), and Michel

Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish* (1977). New historicism can therefore be seen as a fusion of literary criticism, historical anthropology, postmodern historiography and power discourse analysis (following Foucault). All these works are multifaceted. I would like to extract important and pertinent aspects of New Historicists theory and practice into a set of proper sequence.

Substantial Explanation:

Clifford Greetz’s technique of endeavoring to comprehend a diverse culture, as much as possible, from its own standpoint. His example is an alien encountering a cheeky school boy who is winking. In order for the alien to understand the flash as a indication that the boy might be about to get up to some naughtiness, rather than as simply the tightening of some muscle and skin tissue, the alien must learn and concentrate of the boy’s culture from the “inside out”. We can see how new historicists used a similar come near to literary texts from the past.

Local Knowledge:

Clifford Greetz’s method of viewing cultures entirely in the context of their time and space. For example, “local knowledge” of a Christopher Marlowe: play would be located in London, in the late 1580s and early 1590s and specifically in the theater scene.

The Poetics Of History:

Hayden White’s acknowledgment that history is constructed by historians, and is therefore a form of storytelling with narrative conventions and not a ‘true’ or ‘objective’ account of past events. In this way, history is textual and can be read as one might read a poem (hence a poetic history). This idea became came to describe their work as “Cultural Poetics”.

Power Of Knowledge:

Michel Foucault’s idea that there is no knowledge without power and no power without knowledge. Since discourse consists in knowledge, there can therefore be no discourse without power. In this way, individuals are constantly caught in a surrounding substance of power relations. In this way individuals are constantly caught in a context of

power relations. For some new historicists, especially Jonathan Goldberg and Leonard Tennenhouse, building on the inside made by Stephen Orgel (1975). This thought underpinned the claim that plays by written such as Shakespeare and Ben Jonson were little more than instruments of state power. The discourse of the playwright ascribed completely to the sovereign under whose watch the play is performed, and of which both players and audience are accurately aware.

Parallel Reading:

According to Peter Barry a very straightforward explanation of the New Historicism is that it is a method based on parallel reading of literary and non – literary texts, usually of the same historical period. That is to say, new historicism refuses to ‘privilege’ the literary texts; instead of a literary; ‘foreground’ and a historical ‘background’ it envisages and practices a mode of study in which literary and non literary texts are given equal weight and constantly inform or interrogate each other. This ‘equal weighting’ is suggested in the definition of New Historicism offered by the American critic Louis Montrose: he defines it as a combined interest in the ‘textuality of history, the historicist of texts’. It invites in Greenblatt’s words ‘an intensified willingness to read all of the textual traces of the past with the attention traditionally conferred only on literary texts’. So New Historicism embodies a paradox; it is an approach to literature in which there is no privileging of the literary texts.

Old Historicism Vs New Historicism:

NO	OLD HISTORICISM	NEW HISTORICISM
1	Explicates literary works in view of the "influence" of history upon the text.	Predicts and practices a method of study where the literary text and the non-literary context are given “equal weighting”.
2	History presented as background to literature.	All human activities are connected & interwoven with each other.
3	Constructs a historical construction in which	Engrossed in history as represented and recorded
4	Intended at reconstituting the past by referring to documents about the	Accepts Derrida’s view that there is nothing outside the text, in the special sense that

	past and, appropriating facts and details such that the disjointed elements are hidden, and create a seemingly amalgamated narrative of history.	everything about the past is only available to us in textualised form.
5	Be applying the historical context to the text the critic believes that we can formulate a more accurate interpretation of texts than if we did not know such historical context.	Viewing a text as culture in action, blurring the distinction between an artistic production and any other kind of social production or event.
6	History as written is an accurate view of what is really occurred.	Emphasizes “the interaction between historic context of the work and modern reader’s understanding and interpretation.”
7	History serves as a background to literature.	Historicists consider both the <i>cultural</i> and <i>social</i> forces that influenced the creation of a text and are
8	Historical textual background is secondarily important because the text	Views a text as “culture in action,” blurring the distinction between an artistic
9	By applying the historical context to the texts the critic believes that he or she	New Historicists believe that criticism should incorporate diverse discourses; new historicism is informed by
10	These earlier approaches made a hierarchical separation between the literary text, which was the object of the value, the jewel, as it were, and by definition of lesser worth.	New historicists assume that works of literature both influence and are influenced by historical reality, and they share a belief that literature both refers and is referred to by things outside it.

Culture: Gender, Power, Form appeared originally in the American Journal *Representations* the ‘house magazine’ of the New Historicism, and is reprinted in Wilson and Dutton. Montrose’s famous definition of New Historicism is that it centers upon the historicity of the text and textuality of history and the essay might be seen as an embodiment of that pronouncement. His overall thesis is that the play ‘creates the culture by which it is created shapes the fantasies by which it is shaped’. Thus, the cult of the Virgin Queen is both fostered by literature like Spenser’s *The Faerie Queen* and a whole range of court masks and pageants, and at the same time generates such literature: life and literature stimulate and play upon each other. Elizabeth can project herself as the Queen whose virginity has mystical and magical potency because such images are given currency in court mosques, in comedies, and in pastoral epic poetry. Conversely, the figure of Elizabeth stimulates the production and promotion of such work and imagery. Hence in this sense, history is textualised and texts are historicized. A simple modern parallel would be the way images of masculinity and femininity in film pervade our lives and offer us ways of representing ourselves: they give us ‘role models ‘which we can become trapped inside, so that real life mimics the filmic representation of life. Montrose’s essay also represents the eclecticism of new historicism, for it draws upon psychoanalysis, especially Freudian dream analysis, and feminism. It opens with an account of Simon Forman's dream, already mentioned, in which Forman describes an erotic encounter with the Queen, then an elderly woman: the dream turns on the pun of 'wait upon' the Queen and 'weight upon her'. Her dress is trailing in the mud and he offers to solve the problem by causing her belly to lift ('I mean to wait upon you not under you'). In the dream Forman has just saved the queen from being pestered by 'a weaver, a tall man with a reddish beard', and Montrose interprets this as an oedipal triangle. He links this to the queen's projection of herself as mother of the nation, but also as a virgin who is openly flirtatious and provocative - Montrose quotes the French ambassador's accounts of her extremely revealing style of dress ('She kept the front of her dress open, and one could see the whole of her bosom' ... p. 111). He then relates all

New Historicism: An Example.

As an example of New Historicism in precise let us take a closer look at an essay, not by Greenblatt, but by Louis Montrose. His Elizabethan

this to the tensions generated by the peculiar situation that a highly patriarchal society in which all power was vested in men was nevertheless ruled by a woman who therefore had absolute powers of life over all her subjects, men and women, and the power to advance or end the careers of her male courtiers. In Shakespeare's play, there are several instances of a queen who is 'mastered', and thereby feminized - Hippolyta, the Amazonian queen, has been defeated by Theseus, whom she must now submit to and marry: Titania, queen of the fairies, has defied her husband Oberon in her attachment to the changeling boy and hence is humiliated by him in having Puck administer the magic potion which makes her fall in love with the first being she sees on waking. Throughout the play, there is much about the rights of fathers over daughters and husbands over wives, and the precondition of male desire is female subjection. The 'happy' ending depends upon the reinforcement of patriarchy:

The festive conclusion of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, its celebration of romantic and generative heterosexual union, depends upon the success of a process whereby the female pride and power manifested in misanthropic warriors, possessive mothers, unruly wives, and willful daughters are brought under the control of husbands and lords. (P. 120)

Hence, it is suggested, the play might be seen as implicitly treasonous, since: when a virgin ruler is ostensibly the virgin mother of her subjects, then the themes of male procreative power, autogeny, and mastery of women acquire a seditious resonance. In royal pageantry, the queen is always the cynosure; her virginity is the source of magical potency. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, however, such magical powers are invested in the king. (p. 127)

Hence, 'Shakespeare's comedy symbolically neutralizes the royal power to which it ostensibly pays homage' (p. 127). In practice, patriarchy is maintained in spite of the presence of a woman at the pinnacle of power, by constantly insisting on Elizabeth's difference from other women. This is a familiar strategy even today, for having a female leader did not lead the Tory Party to revise its ideas about the role of women in society - on the contrary, under the rule of the 'iron lady' (an interesting

locution in this context) reactionary ideas were reinforced and strengthened. Thus, 'Elizabeth's rule was not intended to undermine the male hegemony of her culture. Indeed, the emphasis upon her difference from other women may have helped to reinforce it' (p. 124). If the pageants and the encomiums constantly proclaimed her simultaneously 'Maiden, Matron and Mother' then she becomes, not a real woman, but a religious mystery. Throughout the essay, then, the account of the play entwines it with male attempts to come to terms with the simultaneous existence of a female monarch and a rigorous patriarchal structure. For male courtiers, there might seem to be a certain 'unmanning' invited in being chased servants of the Virgin Queen, while those who sought advancement from her seemed like children seeking the favours of the nation's mother. (Montrose describes an extravagant and protracted entertainment in which Raleigh and Greville acted out this metaphor.) All this demonstrates what is meant in practice by insisting upon the historicity of the text and the textuality of history.

Cultural Materialism

The British critic Graham Holderness describes cultural materialism as 'a politicized form of historiography'. We can explain this as meaning the study of historical material (which includes literary texts) within a politicized framework, this framework including the present which those literary texts have in some way helped to shape. The term 'cultural materialism' was made current in 1985 when it was used by Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield (the best-known of the cultural materialists) as the subtitle of their edited collection of essays *Political Shakespeare*. They define the term in a foreword as designating a critical method which has four characteristics: it combines an attention to:

1. Historical context,
2. Theoretical method,
3. Political commitment, and
4. Textual analysis.

To comment briefly on each of these: firstly, the emphasis on historical context 'undermines the transcendent significance traditionally accorded to the literary text'. Here the word 'transcendent' roughly means 'timeless'. The position taken, of course, needs to face the obvious objection that if we

are today still studying and reading Shakespeare then his plays have indeed proved themselves 'time-less' in the simple sense that they are clearly not limited by the historical circumstances in which they were produced. But this is a matter of degree: the aim of this aspect of cultural materialism is to allow the literary text to 'recover its histories' which previous kinds of study have often ignored. The kind of history recovered would invite relating the plays to such phenomena as 'enclosures and the oppression of the rural poor, state power and resistance to it ... witchcraft, the challenge and containment of the carnivalesque' (Dollimore and Sinfield, p. 3). Secondly, the emphasis on *theoretical method* signifies a break with liberal humanism and absorbing the lessons of structuralism, post-structuralism, and other approaches which have become prominent since the 1970s. Thirdly, the emphasis on *political commitment* signifies the influence of Marxist and feminist perspectives and break from the conservative-Christian framework which hitherto dominated Shakespeare criticism. Finally, the stress on *textual analysis* 'locates the critique of traditional approaches where it cannot be ignored'. In other words, there is a commitment not just to making theory of an abstract kind, but to practicing it on (mainly) canonical texts which continue to be the focus of massive amounts of academic and professional attention, and which are prominent national and cultural icons. The two words in the term 'cultural materialism' are further defined: 'culture' will include *all* forms of culture ('forms like television and popular music and fiction'). That is, this approach does not limit itself to 'high' cultural forms like the Shakespeare play. 'Materialism' signifies the opposite of 'idealism': an 'idealist' belief would be that high culture represents the free and independent play of the talented individual mind; the contrary 'materialist' belief is that culture cannot 'transcend the material forces and relations of production. Culture is not simply a reflection of the economic and political system, but nor can it be independent of it'. These comments on materialism represent the standard beliefs of Marxist criticism, and they do perhaps point to the difficulty of making a useful distinction between a 'straight' Marxist criticism and cultural materialism. However, it is added that the relevant history is not just that of four

hundred years ago, but that of the times (including our own) in which Shakespeare is produced and reproduced. Thus, in cultural materialism there is an emphasis on the functioning of the institutions through which Shakespeare is now brought to us - the Royal Shakespeare Company, the film industry, the publishers who produce textbooks for school and college, and the National Curriculum, which lays down the requirement that specific Shakespeare plays be studied by all school pupils. Cultural materialism takes a good deal of its outlook (and its name) from the British left-wing critic Raymond Williams. Instead of Foucault's notion of 'discourse' Williams invented the term 'structures of feeling': these are concerned with 'meanings and values as they are lived and felt'. Structures of feeling are often antagonistic both to explicit systems of values and beliefs, and to the dominant ideologies within a society. They are characteristically found in literature, and they *oppose* the status quo (as the values in Dickens, the Brontes, etc., represent human structures of feeling which are at variance with Victorian commercial and materialist values). The result is that cultural materialism is much more optimistic about the possibility of change and is willing at times to see literature as a source of oppositional values. Cultural materialism particularly of feeling': these are concerned with 'meanings and values as they are lived and felt'. Structures of feeling are often antagonistic both to explicit systems of values and beliefs, and to the dominant ideologies within a society. They are characteristically found in literature, and they *oppose* the status quo (as the values in Dickens, the Brontes, etc., represent human structures of feeling which are at variance with Victorian commercial and materialist values). The result is that cultural materialism is much more optimistic about the possibility of change and is willing at times to see literature as a source of oppositional values. Cultural materialism particularly using the past to 'read' the present, revealing the politics of our own society by what we choose to emphasize or suppress of the past. A great deal of the British work has been about under-mining what it sees as the fetishistic role of Shakespeare as a conservative icon within British culture. This form of cultural materialism can be conveniently sampled in three 'New Accents' books: *The Shakespeare*

Myth, Graham Holderness: *Alternative Shakespeares*, ed. John Drakakis, and *That Shakespearian Rag*, Terence Hawkes. (This quaint title is derived from an allusion by T. S. Eliot in *The Waste Land*.) A correspondence in response to a review of the first of these ran for over a year in the *London Review of Books*, under the heading 'Bardolatry'.

How Is Cultural Materialism Different From New Historicism?

Cultural materialism is often linked in discussion with new historicism, its American counterpart. Though the two movements belong to the same family, there is an ongoing family quarrel between them. *Political Shakespeare* includes new historicist essays, and the introduction explains some of the differences between the two movements.

Firstly, in a neat distinction Dollimore and Sinfield quote Marx to the effect that 'men and women make their own history but not in conditions of their own choosing' (p. 3): cultural materialists, they say, tend to concentrate on the interventions whereby men and women make their own history, whereas new historicists tend to focus on the less than ideal circumstances in which they do so, that is, on the 'power of social and ideological structures' which restrain them. The result is a contrast between political optimism and political pessimism. Secondly, cultural materialists see new historicists as cutting themselves off from effective political positions by their acceptance of a particular version of post-structuralism, with its radical skepticism about the possibility of attaining secure knowledge. The rise of post-structuralism problematical knowledge, language, truth, etc., and this perspective is absorbed into new historicism and becomes an important part of it. The new historicist defense against this charge would be that being aware of the in-built uncertainty of all knowledge doesn't mean that we give up trying to establish truths, it simply means that we do so conscious of the dangers and limitations involved, thus giving their own intellectual enquiries a special authority. This is rather like sailing into dangerous waters knowingly, with all sensible precautions taken, rather than blithely unaware of the dangers and with all lights blazing. Thus, when new historicists claim (in Peter Widdowson's words) that Foucault gives them entry

into 'a non-truth-oriented form of historicist study of texts' (p. 161) this doesn't mean that they do not believe that what they say is true, but rather that they know the risks and dangers involved in claiming to establish truths. A third important difference between new historicism and cultural materialism is that where the former's co-texts are documents contemporary with Shakespeare, the latter's may be programme notes for a current Royal Shakespeare Company production, quotations of Shakespeare by a Gulf War pilot, or pronouncements on education by a government minister. To put this in another way: the new historicist situates the literary text in the political situation of its own day, while the cultural materialist situates it within that of ours. This is really to restate the difference in political emphasis between the two approaches. Indeed, it could be said that all three of the differences just described have this political difference as their common denominator.

Elements Of New Historicism In The Shadow Lines By Amitav Ghosh.:

New historicist approach concerns itself not only with the dominant national issues of past and present, like partition and communal frenzy but also with current political matters and international events of the past. The enigmatic and transcendental issues like the indivisible sanity, religion and alienation, themes of detachment and isolation become part of it. The search for freedom, passion for social justice and deep concern for the individual liberty in an increasingly collectivized society are very well represented in such works. New Historicism is a literary theory based on the principle that literature should be studied and interpreted within the context of both the history of the author and the history of the critic. Based on the literary criticism of Stephen Greenblatt and influenced by the philosophy of Michel Foucault, New Historicism acknowledges not only that a work of literature is influenced by its author's times and circumstances, but that the critic's response to that work is also influenced by his environment, beliefs, and prejudices. A New Historicist looks at literature in a wider historical context, examining both how the writer's times affected the work and how the work reflects the writer's times, in turn recognizing that current cultural contexts color that critic's conclusions. The

New Historicist also admits that his assessment of literature is "tainted" by his own culture and environment. Focusing upon New Historicism as an element of text and history in literary writings, the paper elaborates on the historicist approach to literature as used by the contemporary Indian English writer, Amitav Ghosh, who has won many accolades for his fiction which is intertwined with history. The *Shadow Lines* pictures the narrator's search for connections, for the recovery of lost information or repressed experience, or the details of great trauma or joy that have receded into the archives of public or private memory. The narrator in *The Shadow Lines* summons up an array of recollections in a web of connections. The differences of time and place blur as the process of recollection transforms the past events into a throbbing sense of what has been lost. Amitav Ghosh by retelling personal histories of Tha'mma's dispersed family in *The Shadow Lines* reveals this process of a 'collective will' obtained to invent a new nation. Ghosh metaphorically presents the common consensus through Tridib as he says, "every one lives in a story, stories are all there to live in". People like Tha'mma agreed to 'dream' a new nation, believing in the reality of borders beyond which existed another reality, permitting only relationship of 'war and friendship' (TSL: 219). Partition, in the words of Indo-Pak poet Faiz wreaked havoc at an unprecedented level, as he sang in pain – "The blood of how many do you need, o my motherland/ so that you're lusterless cheek may turn crimson? / How many sighs will soothe your heart/ and how many tears make your deserts bloom? The historical events carried by the novel includes the freedom movement in Bengal, the Second World War, the Partition of India in 1947, and the spontaneous communal combustion in the form of riots in East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) and India following the '64 Hazratbal incident in Srinagar. The novel is not a bare and bland recapitulation of those tense historical moments; it captures the trauma of emotional rupture and estrangement as also the damaging potential of the siege within people sundered by bigoted politics. The reconstruction of the past through houses, photographs, maps, road names, newspapers, advertisements and other concretizations allows us to collate the text with concurrent co-texts and validate

the author's perception of the time and milieu covered by the novel. *The Shadow Lines* is written on an emotional plane, underlying and explaining the small, universal truths of life. Fascinatingly true depiction of the mental condition of children is so remarkable. Amitav Ghosh seems has relived his childhood in this book. On a psychological plane, the novel roots personality and identity in childhood. The narrator stands out as an adult rooted in his childhood experiences. Whenever he experiences life, his reaction to it stems out of his childhood impressions. How does he take cities like London, Calcutta or Dhaka or people like his cousin Ila, or acquaintances like May and Nick. The novel is set against the backdrop of historical events like the Swadeshi movement, Second World War, Partition of India and Communal riots of 1963-64 in Dhaka and Calcutta. The novel earned Ghosh the 1989 Sahitya Akademi Award for English, by the Sahitya Akademi, India's National Academy of Letters. *The Shadow Lines* (1988) is a Sahitya Akademi Award-winning novel by Indian writer Amitav Ghosh. It is a book that captures perspective of time and events, of lines that bring people together and hold them apart; lines that are clearly visible from one perspective and nonexistent from another; lines that exist in the memory of one, and therefore in another's imagination. A narrative built out of an intricate, constantly crisscrossing web of memories of many people, it never pretends to tell a story. Instead, it invites the reader to invent one, out of the memories of those involved, memories that hold mirrors of differing shades to the same experience. The novel is set against the backdrop of historical events like the Swadeshi movement, Second World War, Partition of India and Communal riots of 1963-64 in Dhaka and Calcutta. The novel earned Ghosh the 1989 Sahitya Akademi Award for English, by the Sahitya Akademi, India's National Academy of Letters. The novel was translated by Shalini Topiwala into Gujarati in 1998.

Conclusion:

The novel *Shadow Lines*, is Split into two parts ('Going Away' and 'Coming Home'), the novel follows the life of a young boy growing up in Calcutta, who is educated in Delhi and then follows with the experiences he has in London. His family –

the Datta Chaudhuris - and the Price family in London are linked by the friendship between their respective patriarchs – Justice Datta Chaudhuri and Lionel Tresawsen. The narrator adores Tridib, his uncle, because of his tremendous knowledge and his perspective of the incidents and places. Tha'mma thinks that Tridib is the type of person who seems 'determined to waste his life in idle self-indulgence', one who refuses to use his family connections to establish a career. Unlike his grandmother, the narrator loves listening to Tridib. For the narrator, Tridib's lore is very different from the collection of facts and figures. The narrator is sexually attracted to Ila but his feelings are passive. He never expresses his feelings to her afraid to lose the relationship that exists between them. However, one day he involuntarily shows his feelings when she, unaware of his feelings for her, undresses in front of him. She feels sorry for him but immediately abandons him to visit Nick's (the Price family's son, and the man who she later marries) bedroom. Tha'mma does not like Ila; she continually asks the narrator "Why do you always speak for that whore?" Tha'mma has a dreadful past and wants to reunite her family and goes to Dhaka to bring back her uncle. Tridib is in love with May and sacrificed his life to rescue her from mobs in the communal riots of 1963-64 in Dhaka.

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