

# BLEND OF HISTORY AND MEMORY IN AMITAV GHOSH “THE GLASS PALACE”

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Abstract:

Amitav Ghosh is one of the best Indians writing in English with post-colonial perception. This paper highlights the history and memory of the plight of the migrants and their rootlessness in Amitav Ghosh's *The Glass Palace*. In this historical novel, he depicts a lot about the colonizer aggression as well as colonized repression of people through the character Rajkumar the protagonist. It deals with the Colonization of Burma and the migration of young men as soldiers and laborers and explores the impact of migration on the political social, psychological and cultural lives of colonized subaltern and royal family. Ghosh portrays the conquest and the aspirations, defeats and disappointments of the migrated people in India, Burma, China, Malaysia and America through the characters such as King Thebaw, Queen Supayalat, Saya John, Rajkumar, Dolly and Jaya. Ghosh narrates the history of three generations of two families in Burma, India, and Malaya and makes the people completely unconscious of their roots and makes them feel alienated in their own country.

Key words: colonization, Culture, History, Migration, political, Social and Psychology.

Amitav Ghosh's Novel "The Glass Palace" is a Historical novel. The Glass Palace poignantly depicts the horror of the Second World War and its disastrous and tragic effect on the lives of colonized people. His writing deals in the epic themes of travel and diaspora, history and memory, political struggle and communal violence, love and loss, while all the time crossing the generic boundaries between anthropology and art work. It begins with the British invasion of Burma in 1885 and takes one on a journey through the archive of history till the Second World War and restoration of democracy and resurgence of peace and order. Ghosh remembers and reviews them in eighteenth and twentieth century colonial turmoil in Burma, India and Malaysia.

Two senior ministers of Burma, Kinwun Mingyi and Taingda Mingyi expect to receive rich rewards from the English for handing over the royal couple King Thebaw and Queen Supayalat along with their family. As the royal family is ready to surrender themselves to the looters, the Burmese public now quickly moves into the palace. There are British soldiers in charge of shifting the king's precious jewels and ornaments from the palace to the ship that is waiting to take the royal family into exile also pillaging their things. Ghosh here strips the veils

off human nature to expose the cruel and violent greedy nature shown to be the animating force cutting across the financial status, racial differences, caste, creed individuals, groups and nations that drives them various levels. The novel presents how the British tactfully conquered countries and subjugated whole population, exiling kings to erase them completely from public memory at home. The last of the Mughal the public, and the Burmese King, King Bahadur Shah Zafar, deportation to Rangoon, a generation ago, after killing the two princes right in front of Thebaw and Queen Supayalat's exile to Ratnagiri in India were such astute moves by the conquering Britain. Having forced the rulers into a life of obscurity, they freely plundered the Burmese natural resource, like the teak, ivory and petroleum. In the opening scene of rampage, he mentions how the British soldiers marching past with their shouldered rifles looked to the Burmese crowds:

“There was no rancour on the soldier's faces, no emotion at all none of them so much glanced at the crowd.” (TGP.26)

And the realization dawns on them that the British army consisted of Indian soldiers mostly. Now the hostility of the Burmese crowd turns towards the Indians and the eleven year old Indian boy, Rajkumar, the protagonist becomes an easy prey to their wrath. He describes the pathetic conditions of Indians who serves under the British Indian army are weapons in the British hands. They are mere instrument without a head or heart. The Indians are themselves are victims of colonialism, but they also use it. Rajkumar and others are compromised, owing much of their success to the British, while the Burmese are presented entirely as victims. Indians in the. Saya Johns throws more light on the phenomenon of Indian soldiers constituting the British army. When he was working as an orderly in a hospital in Singapore., Saya John came across several wounded Indian soldiers who were mostly peasants from villages in their twenties. It was the money that drew them to this profession. Yet what they earned was a few annas a day, not much more than a dockyard coolie. Ghosh explores the plight of the British Indian Army fighting against the Japanese in Malaysia during the Second World War. Some students and the congress leader ask Arjun,

“ From whom are you defending us? From ourselves? From other Indians? It's your masters from whom the country needs to be defended.” (TGP. 288)

These remarks reveal the writer's accusation against the position of a colonized subject. Ghosh portrays how Rajkumar struggled for survival in the colonial turmoil. As a colonized subject from Bengal, he becomes a colonizer in Burma transporting apprenticed as laborers from South India to other parts of the colonial world. He has even sexually exploited a woman worker on his plantations. His post-colonial consciousness represents a conflict of cultures. Rajkumar and Saya John are engaged in the task of colonizing land and people for the sake of wealth.

Amitv Ghose describes many places and also gives an account of war and migration, alienation and rootlessness, depicting human helplessness. The novel presents Amitav Ghosh's concern with nationalism. Ghosh presents multiple points of view of the dispersed people of different nationalities and makes a plea for internationalism. He intends to show how the context of imperialism has changed in globalization. Ghosh believes that empires imprison their rulers as well as their subjects. In his hands, the novel becomes a cultural

instrument for hopes of social betterment. “The Glass Palace “describes the historic events of three countries; Burma, Malaya, and Indian. The novel may earn the distinction of being called an epic, given its scope and sweep of events. A whole century of rule of these centuries is portrayed; from Anglo- Burmese was of 1885, to the world wars, to the age of cyber revolution, and thus bringing together history, fiction, and autobiographical records along with memories. For compilation of this mammoth work, Ghosh used material derived from a variety of sources recollection and remembered accounts of his father, uncle, and several other living persons whom he met; the diaries, notes and official records; history books etc. Amitav Ghosh’s novels reflect his engagement with some of the serious issues by contemporary ex-colonies is Asia and Africa. His novels the Glass Palace have several ideas such as displacement or dislocation, blurring of boundaries, colonization, migration, unhousedness, conflict of cultures and rootlessness. The phenomenon of migration may be the result of transportation from one country to another by slavery or imprisonment, by invasion and settlement or a consequence of wiling or unwilling movement from a known to unknown location. Migration results in hybridity. The impact of migration on political, social, religious and cultural life of the individual’s families and nation.

He portrays the poignant picture of young Indian men being migrated to Burma, Singapore and Malaya as soldiers. Narrating his experience as an orderly in a hospital at Singapore, Saya John talks about the plight of these Indian soldiers. They were mainly peasants from small countryside villages, fighting wars for their English masters. They were fighting neither due to enmity nor anger, but in submission to orders from superiors, without protest and without conscience. Years of enslavement has made them just tools in the hands of the British without minds of their own. Pankaj Mishra describes that the novels of Ghosh address the experience of post-colonial migration, alienation and rootlessness and delve deep into the psyche of people caught up in the vortex of migration. The royalty was no exception to this colonial migration. Spotting several Indian faces in the Rangoon waterfront the king was awe struck by the incomprehensible power of the British.

They thirsted for news of Burma and longed to hear about people they had left behind. Memories about Burma could not be erased from Rajkumar’s mind but India was home for him though it had nothing good to offer him. Ghosh finally concluded that it was not only the colonized, but also the colonizer suffered from a sense of migration and alienation.

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