

## *CHAPTER-III*

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### Chapter III

#### Psychological Displacement

*The Glass Palace* is loosely based on the military career of Ghosh's father and his uncle's life as a trader in Burma; both of which inspired him to set a novel in various British possessions in Asia. Set in Burma, India and Malaya, the novel spans a century from the fall of kingdom in Mandalay through the World War II to modern times. Focusing mainly on the early twentieth century, it explores a broad range of issues, ranging from the changing economic landscape of Burma and India to show how a society is changed to modernity. Jamie Engle in his review of this novel says, "Starting in Mandalay at the time of the exile of King Thebaw and Queen Supayalat, *The Glass Palace* is compelling historical fiction that tells the story of the three families during a time of transition for India and its people. Politics, business, love, and war intertwine with unforgettable characters to immerse the readers in the story of a land and its people" (1).

The novel portrays the political and cultural complexities of the countries through the concepts of nationalism, imperialism, and the subjugation of gender, class and caste. The dominant theme of the novel is post-colonialism which leads to develop the story by the other themes like imperialism and its effects, dislocation, displacement, loss of identity, cultural transition and subjugation of human values and concerns.

Ghosh depicts the calamitous effects of imperialism on the three nations – India, Burma and Malaya. The novel opens with the setting of imperialism and it gives a clear picture of the British imperial rule in Burma. Imperialism means the policy of extending a country's power and influence through colonization, either by the use of military force, or by other means. It is a policy followed by European powers like Britain, France, Germany

and others, by which they ruthlessly conquered the nations of Asia and Africa. It was done mainly in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries when the European powers physically conquered all these countries and they exploited these nations mercilessly. It colonises the native mind by reframing the existing structures of human mind into East and West tradition. This novel narrates the colonising process of discontent, resistance, displacement and exile in India, Burma and Malaya.

*The Glass Palace* is an intricate novel where the narrative spans over three generations and it is a saga of three families and their inter-connections. The three stories run concurrently in the novel. They are first, the story about the first generation namely Rajkumar and Dolly, and Benny Prasad Dey and Uma. The story of the second generation revolves around Neel and Manju. The novel is divided into seven parts and each part highlights the important aspects of the novel. The first part is called “Mandalay”. The second section is entitled “Ratnagiri” where the calamitous effects of imperialism are shown. The third section, “The Money Tree” shows how Rajkumar prospers through timber business. The fourth section of the novel “The Wedding” deals with the second generation. The protagonist’s son, Neel marries Manju and characters like Arjun and Dinu, show their fascination for the British. The fifth section “Morningside” depicts the consequences of the World War in Malaya. The sixth section “The Front” depicts how the characters suffer due to the outbreak of the World War II. The last section of the novel entitled “The Glass Palace” deals with the peak of Indian National Movement and its final achievement of Independence.

Amitav Ghosh boasts of one of the most arresting openings in the marketplace of Mandalay, when only the eleven-year-old Indian boy Rajkumar recognizes the booming

sounds beyond the curve of the river as ‘English cannon’ fire. He says “‘English cannon,’ in his fluent but heavily accented Burmese”(3). The boy’s words presage the momentous downfall of the Burmese sovereign King Thebaw and the start of an epic tale. Such jarring noise was unfamiliar and bewildering to the people of the royal capital in the interior of Burma in the 1880s. The reader through young Rajkumar’s comprehension and absorption of the historical moment perceives the subject. Not long after the explosions, British soldiers – mostly Indian sepoy – force the surrender of the Burmese army and march up to the Glass Palace at the centre of the King’s complex, “. . . a vast hall that is like a great shaft of light, with shining crystal walls and mirrored ceilings” (7).

In the words of Ghosh:

. . . English soldiers were marching towards the city.

Panic struck the market. People began to run and jostle. Rajkumar managed to push his way through the crowd . . . He could not see far: a cloud of dust hung over the road, drummed up by thousands of racing feet. . .

Rajkumar was swept along in the direction of the river. As he ran, he became aware of a ripple in the ground beneath him, a kind of drumbeat in the earth, a rhythmic tremor that travelled up his spine through the soles of his feet.

The people in front of him scattered and parted, . . . Suddenly he was in the front rank of the crowd, looking directly at two English soldiers mounted on horses. (27)

As Ghosh tells ‘a cloud of dust’ only to say that people are on the run and it is often impossible to ‘see far,’ given the panicky conditions. Booming sounds break into the lives of people at a food stall in Mandalay. The year is 1885, and the British have used a trade

dispute to justify the invasion and seizure of Burma's capital. Ghosh strips the veils of human nature to reveal the brutal greed by narrating the behaviour of the crowd of looters who pour into the palace to loot the belongings of the king as well as the British soldiers who try to steal while shifting the king's possessions. Such is the astute moves by the conquering Britain. This is acknowledged by T. Vinoda who in her article "A Tale of Three Countries: *The Glass Palace* as a Post-Colonial Text" accepts that "This desire to grab and to possess is shown to be equally common to ordinary Asiatic individuals and the British soldiers, even as it forms the leitmotif of the big empire builders" (12). Having forced the rulers into a life of obscurity, they freely plundered the Burmese natural resource – the teak, ivory and petroleum.

The royal family is embroiled in scandal and hence King Thebaw, Burma's last king; Queen Supayalat; their three daughters and Dolly travel into exile to India and is severed from their ancestral roots. The long years in exile have devastated the Royal family, leaving Dolly as their only servant. Ghosh vividly brings to life the history of Burma over a century of momentous change in this teeming, multigenerational saga. The administrator commits suicide, and Uma, grieving more over the absence of her dear friend Dolly than over her husband's death; eschews the traditional life of an Indian widow and goes abroad, where she becomes a revered leader of India's burgeoning independence movement. And this is only the beginning. The story of Uma, Dolly, Rajkumar and their children, nieces, and nephews – takes the readers from the rubber boom of the industrial age to the front lines of World War II, from India's struggle for independence to Burma's fall and its transformation into Myanmar under a military dictatorship.

Ghosh through the rampage scene mentions how the soldiers marching past with their shouldered rifles looked to the Burmese crowds: “There was no rancour on the soldiers’ faces, no emotion at all. None of them so much glanced at the crowd” (27). Realization dawns on them that the British army consisted not of British but Indians mostly. Now the hostility of the Burmese crowd turns towards the Indians and Rajkumar becomes an easy prey to their wrath. Ghosh proves a real novelist by dealing with so much of violence. Here Saya John throws some more light on the phenomenon of Indian soldiers constituting the British army.

When Saya John was working in a hospital in Singapore, he came across several wounded Indian soldiers who were mostly peasants from villages. He learns that it is money that draw them to this profession. Indians serving under the British rule in the British Indian army are weapons in the ruler’s hands. Yet what they earn is a few annas a day, not much more than a dockyard coolie. Ghosh writes “...Chinese peasants would never allow themselves to be used to fight other people’s wars with so little profit for themselves”(29-30). He wonders how “For a few coins they would allow their masters to use them as they wished, to destroy every trace of resistance to the power of the English” (29). These men are ‘innocent evil’(30).

Ghosh explores the plight of the British Indian Army fighting against the Japanese in Malaysia during the Second World War. They are weapons in the ruler’s hands; mere tools without a head or heart. T. Vinoda reiterates the words of Amitav Ghosh in her article “A Tale of Three Countries: *The Glass Palace* as a Post-Colonial Text” who refers to the phrase ‘banality of evil’ in the context of soldiers fighting for the British masters from neither enmity nor anger, but in submission to orders from superiors, without protest and without

conscience” (14). The novel reveals how tactfully the British have conquered countries and subjugated whole population, exiling kings to erase them completely from public memory at home.

The British do away with King Thebaw in 1885 when they colonise Burma transferring power from the King to their imperial regime. Ghosh narrates that “The Royal Family was being sent into exile . . . . They were to go to India, to a location that is yet to be decided on” (41). Later, the British inform the King that “. . . the matter of permanent residence for you and your family has finally been resolved” (60). The point of emphasis is on the weakness of the king to retaliate and contain his kingship and country and finally leads to his permanent exile. For the King and Queen of Burma it is even sadder as they are now no less than prisoners deprived of all the honour due to royalty.

Though the migrants manage to find a safe refuge they may never know if they will get back to their homes. The answer to the King’s query of a return to his country meets with this response: “‘Your Highness,’ . . . ‘you must prepare yourself to be in Ratnagiri for some time, a considerable time I fear. . . Perhaps for ever?’” (60). King Thebaw dies as migrant in Ratnagiri.

The Royal Family is reduced to the stature of prisoners in Outram House, a residence far from the city, very much unlike their Glass Palace in Burma. The Burmese maids of the Queen also decline to maintain their duties towards their queen. Ghosh makes a note of the changes, “Their shikoes became perfunctory; they began to complain about sore knees and refused to stay on all fours while waiting on the Queen”(52). The family of kings and queens are left with no other alternative but to live with and amongst commoners. With the outbreak of a plague and less money to maintain servants there was no other alternative but to allow

the villagers to build a village around the compound of Outram House. Thus the deported Royal Family is forced to mingle with the commoners. It is a way of life that is not only disagreeable to Queen Supayalat but also a life that she has to live on with no other choice left before her. In the far away land no more marriages of kings and queens are witnessed but marriages of a princess to a man as ordinary as their gatekeeper. This new way of life for the Royal Family results in a deep feeling of loss, ache, separation, yearning for recuperation and restoration. Ghosh is more sympathetic towards the sinking status of the royal family from rulers to displaced migrants sentenced to live in a foreign land with no hope to return home. The fact of the matter lies in the real picture of the iron hands of colonialism that appears to be far stronger than monarchy.

The novelist traces the compulsive adaptation and transformation of the royal family to the Indian ways in Madras. After their initial resistance to the alien culture there is a tendency in the members to accept and adapt to the circumstances. Queen Supayalat and King Thebaw master themselves in 'Hindustani' (109) than the Parsis and Bengalis. King Thebaw's virtue of previsualising the impending incidents, like warning the boats men of the disaster close at hand makes him a myth in the imagination of the local people of the town. With his death the history of the Burmese king is transformed into a mythical imagination and then gradually lost and forgotten with the passage of time. Ghosh condenses the fate of other members of the Royal Family informing of Supayalat's death, the second Princess's marriage and the family's gradual dissipation into the Indian culture. The customs are invented and absorbed to create new cultures. Cultural hierarchies too overlap and there is an entwining of the high and low classes to create new societies.

Ghosh in his novel traces the gradual rise of the subaltern rubber plantation worker, Rajkumar. He as an Indian native wins his fortune as a labour contractor in the Burmese rubber industry. Jayita Sengupta in “Ghosh’s *The Glass Palace* through Post- colonial Lens” states “Rajkumar is a vagrant even before the British colonization that had messed up the roots and ancestries of people by its ruthless transportation of men and women from their native soils of Burma and India to other parts of the colonial world”(27). His family name is ‘Raha’ which he had learnt from his father and they are Hindus from Chittagong. His father had quarrelled with his relatives and drifted away from his ancestral ties and settled in Akyab, the principal port of Arakan. Rajkumar spent most of his time in a boat as his father was employed as a “translator and a clerk – working for a succession of merchants along the eastern shore of the Bay of Bengal” (12).

From his humble beginnings, Rajkumar, through fortitude rides the crest of the ensuing economic expansion to achieve the heights of success as a timber merchant, simultaneously playing his part in the building of colonial Burma. Though Rajkumar’s story is a story of struggle, survival, and success in the midst of the colonial turmoil his transformation is from ‘idiot kalaa’ (11) to ‘Rajkumar-babu’ (134) and referred to by the collector and his wife Uma as ‘Mr. Raha’(137).

It is through family networks that the novel is able to achieve its ambitious span in time and space and in which people are shaped by larger forces, without ever abandoning the thread of personal ambition, struggle, love, and death that ties the times and places together. Individual effort, material progress, and grand historical transformations move the plot from its Burmese beginnings through cities and sites in India and Malaya. With a remarkable eye for detail, Ghosh describes the material conditions – from the curious

ingredients of meals to cutting-edge technologies – that also tie lives together. Mansing G. Kadam, quotes Rohini Mokashi Punekar in the article “Amitav Ghosh’s *The Glass Palace: A Postcolonial novel*” who comments on repositioning borders, stating “The puzzling nature of power between people and communities and nations, the constant flux in the positions of power seems to be the underlying thrust of the novel symbolized by the beautiful title *The Glass Palace* which suggests an unattainable shimmering beauty, fragility and exclusion all together” (42). The colonial history entwines with personal histories to destroy and recreate new histories and cultures.

The close relationship between Rajkumar and Saya John is further cemented by the next generation. Rajkumar has two sons – Neel and Dinu; Saya John’s Mathew, who comes back to Burma and starts a rubber plantation with his American wife Elsa. They have two children – Alison and Timmy. Alison marries Ma Thin Thin Aye, a Burmese research scholar who writes a dissertation on “*The Glass Palace Chronicles*”(532).

In Ratnagiri, Uma the collector’s wife has one nephew, Arjun, and nieces, Manju and Bela. Manju marries Neel, lives in Rangoon and gives birth to Jaya. After their death during the Japanese occupation, Uma’s family brings up Jaya in India. These family ties come to full circle and the cultural differences are forgotten and the artificial borders are no more.

As the story moves the old generation eventually disappear. The Indian Collector Beni Prasad, who was deserted by his wife Uma, commits suicide. Allison kills herself while trying to escape from the Japanese forces. The only survivors are Dinu and Jaya. The novel ends with the countries becoming independent, which were once part of the British Empire and great changes occur in their economic setup.

However on the economic front after Matthew's death, a joint venture to resist the capitalist structures and colonisation is undertaken by Elsa; and on the political front Dinu and his comrades in Rangoon have strange ideas of democracy. Ghosh refers to the imprisonment of the Burmese political leader Aung San Suu Kyi. He also depicts Suu Kyi's struggle for democracy in Burma. Dinu regards Suu Kyi much greater than a politician as she succeeded in resisting in the imperialist onslaught, the misrule and tyranny in Burma. He tells Jaya, daughter Neel and Manju about the imperialists in Burma. Ghosh writes

They have no defence against her but to call her an imperialist ... when in fact, it is they who invoke the old imperial laws and statutes to keep themselves in power. The truth is that they've lost and they know this. . . this is what makes them so desperate. . . that it is just a matter of time before they are made to answer for all that they have done. (543)

Ghosh pinpoints the resistance to the dictatorial military rule in the post-colonial Burma through some student activists' arguments about the atrocities of dictators like Hitler and Mussolini in Dinu's '*The Glass Palace: Photo Studio*' (504) in Rangoon.

The supremacy and superiority of the colonizer get so much ingrained in the native's psyche that one becomes thoroughly subservient to the master and the valorization of constructions like nation, national identity and nationalism becomes a tangential concern. As a part of the colonial system, the British exercised their power over the natives. Rajkumar, Beni Prasad Dey and Arjun firmly believe in the supremacy of the British. They accept the ruler's supremacy.

Arjun as an officer in the British Indian Army is subservient to his British officers. He cannot differentiate between serving India and serving the British. His inability leads

him to fight for the British in their usurpation of Burma. He fails to recognize that he is used as an instrument by the colonizers to kill his enemy. Ghosh highlights such views about the British rule which took root in India and the novel abounds in instances that illustrate the subtle processes of colonialist indoctrination in the colonies.

In the case of Rajkumar, he staunchly believes that the colonizer not only helps him to promote his life, but also protects his life from the natives. He believes that the Burmese economy would collapse without the patronage of the British. During the process of exploitation of the natural resources of the colony by the colonisers, Rajkumar along with some sectors of the colony has benefited, whereas the rest of the colony follows its path of underdevelopment and poverty. He along with Saya John is engaged in the task of colonizing land and people for the sake of wealth. Rajkumar Raha as a colonized subject from Bengal, becomes a colonizer in Burma transporting indentured labourers from South India to other parts of the colonial world. Mansing G. Kadam quotes Rohini Mokashi Punekar in the article "Amitav Ghosh's *The Glass Palace*: A Postcolonial novel" who rightly says "the line between the colonizers and the colonized is blurred, even erased; colonization is seen as a continuous, ongoing process, and often reversible" (43).

Uma criticises Rajkumar for providing indentured labourers to the British rulers. According to Ghosh "The anger that Uma had held contained since Morningside came welling up. 'Rajkumar, you're in no position to offer opinions. It's people like you who're responsible for this tragedy. Did you ever think of the consequences when you were transporting people here? What you and your kind have done is far worse than the worst deeds of the Europeans'" (247). The purchasing power of the diasporic Indian exceeds that of the average upper class person; they maintain a power relationship with the home country

and belong to the category of the oppressors. In terms of social involvement there is the very minimal they contribute to either of the two societies.

There were agitations against the Indian community in Burma, yet Rajkumar refuses to go to India. He challenges Uma saying:

For weeks now I've heard you criticising everything you see: the state of Burma, the treatment of women, the condition of India, the atrocities of the Empire. But what have you yourself ever done that qualifies you to hold these opinions? Have you ever built anything? Given a single person a job? Improved anyone's life in any way? No. All you ever do is stand back, as though you were above all of us, and you criticise and criticise. (248)

People like Uma are quick to see the vile nature of the British rule; she knows that they use the Indians against the Burmese in order to safeguard their interests and to fortify the Empire. Uma, the wife of an Indian officer serving the Empire considered the strategies employed by the Empire as something humane and a result of their concern for bringing light of civilization to the people suffering under the darkness of the cruelty unleashed by the native rulers. But at a later stage, when a popular insurgent movement is ruthlessly crushed by the British rulers she realizes the hollow claims of their humanism and realises that the Empire was "so skilful and ruthless in its deployment of its overwhelming power; so expert in the management of opinion" (254).

Uma Dey is desperate to find her recognition as an independent woman, manages to assert herself and starts to re-assess the entire meaning of her life. With a desire for mental freedom she becomes an active member of the Indian Independence Party to achieve personal independence and identity. Whereas Rajkumar is blinded by their pursuit of wealth

indulge in self-serving rationalizations. He has only seen the superficial development and changes brought out by the British. He is selfish enough to think only for his own progress. He is so naïve that he does not realize that such developments brought out by the British would finally be beneficial only to them. This attitude of Rajkumar shows the immature attitude of the anglophiles.

Ghosh exposes the hollow nature of the humanistic concerns of the colonialists embodied in the protection of rights of women and their education. Uma brings out the novelist's perspective regarding the deceptive nature of humanism presented by colonialists: "How was it possible to imagine that one could grant freedom by imposing subjugation? that one could open a cage by pushing it inside a bigger cage? How could any section of a people hope to achieve freedom where the entirety of a populace was held in subjection?"(189). This reveals the false sense of humanism propagated by the British authorities.

The institutionalisation of the English education plays a vital role in the politics of the colonial rule. English studies became instrumental in confirming their rule on the natives. Beni Prasad Dey who is educated at Cambridge is a typical representative of the class of people that the British rulers wanted to create in their colonies. The minds of the people like Beni Prasad Dey are so deeply colonized by western knowledge that they become the willing and submissive agents of the Empire, believing in the white man's power and progressive policies of the British. Beni leads a comfortable life under the apparently benevolent British masters and seemingly wielded a lot of power. He was merely a puppet in their hands. He has no personality or power, which his post should have fetched him.

Dinu is another product of western education, which comes in support of Arjun. The emergence of English as an academic discipline proved to be an ally for the British colonialist. His obtrusive acknowledgement of the superiority of the colonial masters and his awe and respect for them, orient him to internalize the European morals, manners, dress code and eating habits by aping them. Thus people like Beni Dey, Arjun, Dinu under the impact of western education, become the easy pawns in the hands of the imperialists to implement their expansionist strategies guised as reforms. Ghosh has clearly established how power works through language, literature, culture and the institutions which regulate our daily lives. Ghosh as a writer explores the anti-colonial consciousness and eventual revolt in Arjun.

Arjun receives a letter from the Indian Military Academy announcing his selection as an officer cadet. His father is happy because there is status and prestige associated with it. Moreover he will have “ ‘ . . . a ready-made career: whether he does well or not he’ll be pushed up the ladder. At the end, there’ll be an excellent pension. So long as he makes it through the academy, he’s taken care of for the rest of his life’ ” (258). Arjun’s aunt Uma, who had been into Indian Independence League while in New York and now working with Gandhi in India in the freedom movement, tells Arjun that “ ‘ . . . Mahatma thinks that the country can only benefit from having men of conscience in the army. India needs soldiers who won’t blindly obey their superiors. . . ’ ” (258).

Arjun’s English educational system and his training in the army channelized his energy and vigour for the selfish interests of the British. Ghosh explores the anti-colonial consciousness and eventual revolt through Arjun who joins the army as a gentleman Cadet and then goes on to become a Second Lieutenant in the 1<sup>st</sup> Jat Light Infantry. He was proud

of it because it was honoured with a special title ‘The Royal Battalion’ for the battle honours it won for the British government, such as quelling the mutinies and capturing kings in India, in Burma, in Mesopotamia, in Somme and in China. Arjun’s thoughts at this stage are worth nothing. In his words “It makes one so proud, but also humble, to think that one has all this to live up to. What makes me prouder still is the thought that Hardy and I are going to be the first Indian officers in the 1/1 Jats: it seems like such a huge responsibility – as though we’re representing the whole of the country!” (262). This was how most Indians in this position felt at the time – ‘a huge responsibility’ to prove to the British bosses that Indians could make as good army officers as the British.

Arjun’s induction into the army initiates him to adopt the British way of life and he becomes intoxicated in it. He takes pride in being assimilated with the British culture, principles and food habits. He proudly says,

Every meal at an officers’ mess, Arjun said, was an adventure, a glorious infringement of taboos. They ate foods that none of them had ever touched at home: bacon, ham and sausages at breakfast; roast beef and pork chops for dinner. They drank whisky, beer and wine, smoked cigars, cigarettes and cigarillos. Nor was this just a matter of satisfying appetites: every mouthful had a meaning – each represented an advance towards the evolution of a new, more complete kind of Indian. (278-79)

He is not ashamed but proud to announce that as officers they had to prove to themselves as well as to their superiors that they were eligible to be rulers, to qualify as members of an elite. For this they had to have vision enough to rise above the ties of their soil, to overcome the responses instilled in them by their upbringing. His enthusiasm deludes him into

thinking that 'true freedom' consists in breaking the taboos of earlier life, eating and drinking what they like. He says ". . . 'we're the first modern Indians; the first Indians to be truly free. We eat what we like, we drink what we like, we're the first Indians who're not weighed down by the past'"(279).

To Arjun 'modern' and 'western' are synonymous. Ghosh tries to convey that to become a 'modern Indian' he was prepared to erase all traces of being an Indian, discard his past and embrace Western habits of thought in its totality. He does not realise the cost he would be paying to be accepted as a member of the elitist class, the ruler's class.

The sense of euphoria he revels in is partially shattered when he comes to attend his sister's marriage. The motley crowd of politicians, Congressmen, Buddhist monks, Burmese student activists and all invitees had nothing but sneer for these men in uniform. The Congressmen, who had bitter memories of their confrontation with Indian soldiers and police berate Arjun for serving in an 'army of occupation'. Arjun retorts: " ' We aren't occupying the country,' . . . 'We are here to defend you'" (287). Spontaneously comes a question "From whom are you defending us ? From ourselves? From other Indians It's your masters from who the country needs to be defended' (288).

A shopkeeper in Malay calls Arjun 'Klang' because earlier Indians were forcibly brought to Malaya in chains as slaves to work on plantations, to clean toilets and to do such menial jobs for their masters. This triggers introspection in Arjun but he tries to suppress it by explaining the word as 'paid soldier'. True crisis is when the old self breaks open giving birth to the new.

Ghosh movingly portrays his struggle within himself. He says

He was a military man and he knew that nothing – nothing important – was possible without loyalty, without faith. But who would claim his loyalty now? The old loyalties of India, the ancient ones – they'd been destroyed long ago; the British had built their Empire by effacing them. But the Empire was dead now – he knew this because he had felt it die within himself, where it had held its strongest dominion – and with whom was he now to keep faith? Loyalty, commonalty, faith – these things were as essential and as fragile as the muscles of the human heart; easy to destroy, impossible to rebuild. (440-41)

Arjun fails to realise that he is not actually representing his country but serving for the interest of another country. He is being exploited to maintain the interest of the Empire. When he realizes his mistake, he decides to challenge the British and plans to join the INA. There he fights against the British and lays down his life heroically. The colonialist use of the Indian army produced in him a negation and self-alienation. It results in repentance, protest and finally defiance.

New psychological awareness comes to him from his relationship with Alison. This brings him a change in his attitude towards British rule. His painful self-discovery is caught in the history of the Japanese invasion of Burma, their defeat and the British army's threat against the deserters of the British army. When a sense of shame, betraying the nation and his ability to recover his identity come to his thought, he hides in the jungle. The novelist shows how Arjun's Indian consciousness and psyche struggled for the awakening from the adoption of the English attitudes to become an authentic Indian.

T. Vinoda in the article “Nation, Identity and Belonging: Amitav Ghosh’s *The Glass Palace* as postcolonialist Historiography” writes

The novel, in fact, presents a range of colonized individuals, vis-à-vis the degree of their assimilation to the colonialist British culture. At one extreme, we have individuals like the Collector Beni Prasad Dey and at the other extreme people like Uma, the antipodal couple who quite predictably parted ways not long after their marriage. Inbetween there are individuals anglicized to different degrees. The problem of these individuals is to come out of the shell of the British influence and to see through the hypocrisy of their master’s much flaunted and good intentions towards the colonized peoples.

(75)

Ghosh in his novel *The Glass Palace* portrays the theme of displacement in the post-colonial country. He describes the aspirations, defeats and disappointment of dislocated people in China, Burma and Malaysia such as King Thebaw, Queen Suplayat, Saya John, Rajkumar, Dolly, Uma, and Arjun etc. He writes about families and nations to highlight the sense of dislocation.

Tragedy begins with the World War II when the Japanese bombing devastates the country and the exodus of Indians and Nepalis begins. The Japanese Imperial Army’s swift takeover of British Malaya and advance on Burma are evocatively rendered through the protagonists’ disrupted lives in Rangoon, Calcutta, and the environs of Sungei Pattani, Kedah. The war breaks the empire into parts, sundering connections that depend on sea, road, and rail transportation and ending the lives of several key characters.

The novel seems to be an elegy for the diasporic condition. Rajkumar's expanding economy collapsed. His dream of Burma as a 'golden land' shows his lack of refined human values. Despite several cultures, the Indian immigrants and diasporic workers experience and yearn for global identities. All the characters confront the riddle of human existence.

The post-colonial consciousness represents a conflict within his own self, a conflict through which he tries to step outside his colonial self. Rajkumar and Dolly decide to leave Burma. Rajkumar had been reluctant to leave, despite the rise of anti-Indian politics and the nearing war:

‘Yes. But it’s hard, Dolly – it’s hard to think of leaving: Burma has given me everything I have. The boys have grown up here: they’ve never known any other home... despite everything that’s happened recently, I don’t think I could ever love another place in the same way. But if there’s one thing I’ve learned in my life Dolly, it is that there is no certainty about these things. My father was from Chittagong and he ended up in the Arakan; I ended up in Rangoon; you went from Mandalay to Ratnagiri and now you’re here too.  
(309-10)

Rajkumar loses his elder son and daughter-in-law and his property, forcing his return to Calcutta and seeking the help of Uma. Political upheavals plays a major role in the life of Rajkumar who had begun his life as a destitute orphan, rose to heights of eminence and power, then lost it all again. His blind pursuit for wealth, trading in indentured labour and sexual exploitation of a woman labourer shows his dehumanisation. He has no sense of rootedness in any context and once the Burmese economy collapses in the wake of the World War II, he rendered destitute, takes refuge in India, where “. . .the Ganges could

never be the same as the Irrawaddy” (544). Jafroop S. Biring quotes Kadam in the article “Colonising the Mind: Civilisational Imperialism in Amitav Ghosh’s *The Glass Palace*” who claims that “He can no longer see himself “as an Indian or Burmese as his is a fractured or fragmented consciousness”” (99).

War and violence wipe out histories and once again make people strangers. The novel locates within the discourse of nation-formation and goes on to depict the isolation of the well-settled characters like Rajkumar who is alienated from the rest of their community as well as the mainstream majority. Frustration after frustration, setback after setback, impossibility of emotional relationship across various barriers, and refusal to recognise them as co-partners in nation-building ends up by denying them a sense of belonging and the right to dream. An individual’s right to dream and its content goes a long way in shaping countries and cultures.

For Dolly the past is recast in transformed patterns in Ratnagiri. After spending twenty years of exile in India, she leaves with Rajkumar for Burma. It is her most haunting obsession that the Burma she has left behind is lost to her forever. Her displacement from her native roots and her discomfort with her own changed identity is clear when she vehemently declares to Uma, that she could never return home. She confesses to Uma Dey saying, “If I went to Burma now I would be a foreigner – they would call me a Kalaa like they do Indians- a trespasser, an outsider from across the sea, I’d find that very hard, I think. I’d never be able to rid myself of the idea that I would have to leave again one day, just as I had to before” (113). As a colonized subject, like Rajkumar, Dolly also suffers from a sense of imaginary homeland in India. The same condition remains in the case with the Indian diaspora in Burma. The Indian indentured labourers were highly underprivileged.

Ghosh in the novel reminds about how inseparable colonialism and imperialism forced the first wave of diaspora through the words of the exiled King Thebaw. He while observing the mass movements of Indians says “ What vast, what incomprehensible power, to move people in such huge numbers from one place to another – emperors, kings, farmers, dockworkers, soldiers, coolies, policemen. Why? Why this furious movement – people taken from one place to another, to pull rickshaws, to sit blind in exile?” (50).

The novel is set against the background of political turmoil resulting from the cruelty and oppression exercised by the British imperialists, in order to suppress the democratic rights of the people in Burma after its decolonization from the British rule. The British Empire in the name of self-assertion and order, subjugates the human values. There is specific concern for human freedom and dignity in this novel.

In the novel dehumanizing behaviour of the rulers have been presented through the treatment of their subjects by them. Queen Supayalat has several maids to attend her. They are ““Young girls, orphans, many of them just children. They say that the girls are brought to the palace from the far mountains. The Queen adopts them and brings them up and they serve as her handmaids. They say that she will not trust anyone but them to wait on her and her children”” (7). The worst thing is that these girls have not come willingly to work there, ““They’d been purchased by the Queen’s agents in small Kachin, Wa and Shan villages along the kingdom’s northern frontiers”” (20). This brings out the inhuman attitude and behaviour of the Queen of Burma. She does not bother to give a thought to the human status of these girls.

Dolly too was a slave in the erstwhile kingdom, loyal to the Burmese king Thebaw and Queen Supayalat and the princess. She was looking after the younger princess from a

child till she grew into an attractive young girl. Dolly sacrifices her personal happiness for the first Princess in her loyalty to the royal family and in order to maintain her job and security. She is hurt and emotionally confused. When she realizes that she is alienated from her own land, a feeling of emptiness spreads in her mind but she gracefully accepts the inevitability of pain and suffering. Dolly sees marriage as a security for her orphan life; marriage being a sacrament in the Hindu context is the only suitable career open to a woman. She marries Rajkumar.

There are power structures operating within power structures in the novel. The repeated depiction of the inhuman conditions under which the maids work and the way they are asked to show their respect and regard to the Queen show the novelist's criticism of the forces hostile to human dignity. Apart from employing small girls, there was another practice of 'shika'. The attendants have to prostrate before the Queen to show their respect. This shows the lack of concern for human values among the rulers.

Ghosh gives a glimpse of violence in his novel *The Glass Palace* at that time. Queen Supayalat who carried out a massive massacre of her family members including small children to eliminate all claims of throne. Power dehumanised her. The sovereign rights are accepted as 'natural rights'. Subjects give up their liberties to establish social order. The British imperialism is barbaric and anti-human not only towards its subjects but also towards its propagators and the one who works for it. In order to strengthen its power, it uses even the young English men in an exploitative way. To explore and exploit the forest wealth under inhuman and hostile surroundings, they employ their young men to work there as long as they can endure the dangerous atmosphere and unhealthy climate.

Saya John exposes this aspect of imperialism that “. . . these Europeans. They have at best two or three years in the jungle before malaria or dengue fever weaken them to the point where they cannot afford to be far from doctors and hospitals” (74). He further adds that the purpose of the company to use these men as mere tools and this exposes its inhuman attitude, “It is only when they are freshly arrived, seventeen or eighteen, that they can lead this life, and during those few years the company must derive such profit from them as it can” (74). N.K. Neb “Humanistic Concerns in Amitav Ghosh’s *The Glass Palace*” comments: “In Ghosh’s understanding, the major element threatening the humanistic values is power of politics. The intrusion of politics, in different fields of life tends to marginalize the humanistic concerns” (29-30). The novelist’s concern for complete freedom of man, their sovereignty and dignity is clearly seen in the novel *The Glass Palace*.

Through his exposure of complicity of the colonized with the colonizer, Ghosh seems to say that violence is related to power rather than modernity of colonization. N. K. Neb in the article “Humanistic Concerns in Amitav Ghosh’s *The Glass Palace*” writes

In *The Glass Palace* the ‘glass palace’ functions as a metaphor. Glass is brittle and implies transparency. Palace is the symbol of power. Glass Palace is an illusion that is created around power. The people in the glass palace do not have the liberty to throw stones at others. The colonized people are always imprisoned in the glass palace and they have lost the capacity to throw stones at the colonial masters. The more the colonized attempt to describe the coloniser’s exploitation and violence, the more they reflect on the colonised’s complicity with the coloniser’s ideology. The colonized have lost the capacity to speak on their own. (54)

Migrations will continue to take place as they always have, diasporas have the capacity to exert political pressure on host nations, and have the resources to feed into economic development but the major tasks which are incomplete are the attainment of equality, the inability to do away with ghettoisation and to ensure the presence of a dynamic culture of origin.

*The Glass Palace* is a novel brimming over with ideas, exploring the ways people co-operate with their own oppression, the nature of exploitation, the dehumanizing effects of racism and dispossession, and the miraculous way in which a change of consciousness especially in the case of Uma and Arjun can eventually alter the course of history. Ghosh's vision and perception of the modern world viewed from *The Glass Palace* presents a possibility of 'human world' irrespective of the presence of continuous power flow and says that the strength of this community is when members are naturally bound to one another through shared and common human values. The novelist grasps the rise and fall of empires across the twentieth century and raises the questions of national identity – cultural and political. He maintains a balance between the memory of the past and the desire for a future by coming back to the present. He serves as the conscience of humanity. The notion of unified identity implies 'unity in diversity.'