

Sways of Post-Colonialism on Amitav Ghosh's Novel: The Glass Palace

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ABSTRACT

Colonialism provides the critical backdrop for the emergence of post-colonialism as a literary and theoretical discourse. Post-colonialism, shaped by the political and social ideologies of colonial and imperial domination, has become a potent framework for understanding the impact of colonization and decolonization. Since the 1980s, many authors, playwrights, and poets have been recognized as postcolonial writers, producing works that interrogate the oppressive structures of imperialism and colonial expansion. Postcolonial literature, which largely emerged in the post-World War II period, reflects the decolonization struggles of various regions, including the Indian subcontinent.

Amitav Ghosh, one of the most prominent figures in postcolonial literature, critically examines the lingering effects of colonialism in his works. His novel engages with the historical, cultural, and ethical complexities of the Sundarbans region, challenging rigid boundaries between cultures, nations, and individual identities. Through the lens of new historicism, Ghosh portrays literary activity as the creation of imaginative representations of reality, reflecting on the intersections of history, environment, and human identity. His work transcends colonial and postcolonial periods, exploring issues of cross-cultural encounters, identity formation, and the legacy of colonialism. It offers a nuanced exploration of these themes, positioning Ghosh's work as a significant contribution to Indian writing in English and the broader field of postcolonial studies. By weaving together historical fiction with reflections on climate change and human displacement, Ghosh invites readers to reconsider the narratives surrounding imperialism, neocolonialism, and the ongoing challenges of postcolonial societies.

The present paper aims to analyze how *The Glass Palace* analyzes the legacies of colonialism and neocolonialism through the lens of postcolonial theory and cross-cultural encounters in both colonial and postcolonial contexts.

Keywords: Post-colonialism, Colonialism, Cultural Identity, cross-cultural, Imperialism

INTRODUCTION

The 20th century witnessed the emergence of post-colonialism as a significant literary movement. Postcolonial literature, born from the historical and sociocultural shifts that followed decolonization, offers a potent lens for understanding the complexities of life and identity in formerly colonized societies. It often addresses social, cultural, ethnic, and sexual identity crises while illustrating how individuals strive to carve out a sense of belonging within structures still fraught with colonial legacies. In Indian English literature, works produced after India's independence in 1947, especially those emerging post-1980, are frequently categorized as postcolonial. These works weave modernity with tradition, capturing the lingering effects of colonialism on the nation's psyche and cultural landscape. Indian English literature, which initially thrived through oral storytelling, evolved into a sophisticated written tradition that now deeply resonates with global audiences.

The novels written in India during the postcolonial period reveal that many of those who attempted to assert themselves on the global literary arena are determined to rewrite the incomplete history by delving into the consciousness of people whose worlds are destroyed by the violence focused by historical events like World Wars and Partition. The distinct and confident voice of Amitav Ghosh expresses his postcolonial concern and historical imagination through the Indian literary scene during such a crucial period.

1. Background of the study

In the post-independence period, Indian literature underwent a significant evolution, particularly following World War II, which spurred movements toward decolonization worldwide. While early Indian English novels often celebrated India's

rich cultural heritage, the rise of postcolonial literature brought forth new themes and styles that questioned colonial history and its impact. Playwrights like Amitav Ghosh have been instrumental in shaping this movement, providing nuanced critiques of identity, history, and politics in a postcolonial context.

Amitav Ghosh, especially, stands out for his unique portrayal of the postcolonial experience, shaped by his background as a social anthropologist and his extensive travels, which imbue his Ghosh's novels, exemplify postcolonial characteristics, such as the deconstruction of colonial narratives, the examination of neocolonial influences, and the interplay between history and personal stories. His works delve into themes of displacement and migration, transforming journeys and dislocations into symbols of resistance and identity formation. The major concerns of post-colonial literature are reclaiming spaces and places, asserting culture integrity and revising history.

2. Rational of the study

Amitav Ghosh is one of the Indian diasporic writers who write from a Postcolonial consciousness. He was born in the post – independence era in Calcutta on 11th July, 1956. He grew up in East Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Iran and India. In his childhood days, he grew up by listening to the stories of the Second World War, the struggle for independence, partition and communal riots. Thus, history has become Amitav Ghosh's prime passion and has a great influence on his writings. His fictional methods deal with political and historical consciousness. He is also an eminent essayist. His novel is based on different themes such as history about the Egyptian culture and his novels deal with the theme of migration, displacement, hybridity, diaspora, quest for identity, and rootlessness. These are also major issues of Post colonialism.

Amitav Ghosh's *The Glass Palace* deftly encompasses these major concerns. His novel *The Glass Palace* has won very prestigious Frankfurt e-book Award and selected for commonwealth literature, which explores the history of his own country.

3. Thematic analysis of *The Glass Palace*

The novel *The Glass Palace* is a story about three generation of two families in Burma, India, and Malaya. It is a historical novel of British colonization of Burma. The novel is divided into seven parts revealing numerous shades of human character of several ethnic groups. Amitav Ghosh vividly portrays personalities like King Thebaw and Queen Supayalat, Rajkumar and Dolly, Beni Prasad Dey and Uma, Saya John, Arun, and Dinu.

The Glass Palace is intact with several themes like migration, displacement or dislocation, borders or boundaries, colonization, conflict of cultures, rootlessness, diaspora, and hybridity. In this novel, Ghosh reveals the various situations of people and accounts distinct families and nations to highlight the sense of dislocation.

The novel begins with the Anglo-Burmese conflict. The two senior parsons of Burma refused to do their duties, who were allotted to keep a vigil on the royal family and as a result, they anticipated to get incredible prizes from the imperialist for taking care of the Royal family, which consists of King Thebaw, Queen Supayala and also their family. After colonization, British warriors have planned to plunder the royal family of their riches. Here, Ghosh reveals the cold-bloodedness of the Britishers. The royals are taken as prisoners and are exiled to Ratnagiri, India. The palace itself is on the border of downfall after the announcement of King Thebaw's "Royal declaration": After reading this announcement all the people in Burma became depressed.

"His majesty, who is watchful that the interest of our religion and our state shall not suffer, will himself March forth...will destroy these heretics and conquer and annex their country. To uphold the religion, to uphold the national honour, to uphold the country's interests will bring about three-fold good- good of our religion, good of our master and good of ourselves and will gain for us the important result of placing us on the path to the celestial regions and to Nirvana".

(*The Glass Palace*, P-17)

The war started between Burma and Britain on 14th November 1885 in which Burmese army was defeated and followed by the imprisonment of the King. The Burmese king, Thebaw with his Royal family taken as prisoners and exiled to Outram house in Ratnagiri. The pitiable condition of the captives in their own motherland dramatically expressed.

"The trouble was that there was never enough money to pay their salaries. The King and Queen had sold almost everything they had brought over Mandalay; their treasure was gone, all except for a few keepsakes and mementos."

(*The Glass Palace*, P- 81)

Displacement is one of the main concepts in post-colonialism. *The Glass Palace* is a story about a coal-black Kaala Rajkumar, who is protagonist in this novel. He was transported to Burma by accident. Once he lands in Mandalay, his life

totally has been changed after British colonization. He starts searching for the places and people. He is completely poor in an alien city with absolutely no acquaintances and started struggling for survival in the colonial disorder. Later he was colonized by the imperialist and started transporting indentured workers from south India to other parts of the colonial world.

His Postcolonial perception signifies a struggle. After colonization, the protagonist Rajkumar and his friends Saya John and Mathew are involved in the task of inhabiting land and folks for the sake of treasure. Later, he becomes prosperous young businessperson who travels to India to search for his beloved Dolly, and persuaded her to marry him. With the help of Uma, they got married and moved to Burma. The novel beautifully describes the lives of their family as they struggle to define themselves and their place in the world. The novel's structure reflects Ghosh's ability to blend historical fact with fictional storytelling, creating a narrative that serves both postcolonial and eco-critical purposes.

Mondal has accurately said-

“Yes, Ghosh embodies the crucial ambivalent tension between postmodern post-colonialism and humanist post-colonialism in *The Glass Palace*, the appealing event of the modern Post-colonial Indian state that deals with refugee settlement.”

(Mondal, 2012)

The invaders mostly succeed not because their motive is straightforward but because of overwhelming power, manipulative skill, and weaponry. Ghosh cautiously illustrates the advance of British assault and wryly points out that it proceeds with a precision to astound even its organizers; the war lasting only fourteen days. The British receive substantial support from the incompetence of the local rulers, who, detached from reality, have daydreams of glory, and the unfairness of collaborators among their people, who, in Mandalay, compete with each other to surrender the defeated lord to the British.

Rajkumar, the hero of this novel, is a postmodern creation of the author who can be portrayed as a combination of various philosophies. The personality of Rajkumar assists the author with exploring numerous postcolonial topical concerns. The writer's aim was to address Rajkumar as an inferior, a person from the uprooted diaspora, a truly transnational figure who cuts the lines and limits and a despicable money-obsessed one who in league with the colonizers exploits the natural resources in his teak business in Burma and rubber plantation in Malaysia. He appears in Burma as a destitute after losing his mother in a long journey from Arakan to Bengal and finds shelter in the slowdown of Ma Cho, who is half-Burmese half Indian. The depiction of his actual appearance shows nothing phenomenal

“His name meant Prince, but he was anything but princely in appearance, with his oil-splashed vest, his untidily knotted longyi and his bare feet with their thick slippers of callused skin”

(*The Glass Palace*, P- 121)

In this novel, the writer picked a teleological straight account to retell the history of Burma weaving it with the life of Rajkumar and many lower-class characters' perspective, which is truly an extreme one and might be interpreted as an attempt to evade the official story of history and an action to see the "history from below".

CONCLUSION

The present study is based on the assumption that the fictional works of Amitav Ghosh reflect a confluence of history and postcolonial insights. The unrecorded histories of ordinary people and the chronologically ordered histories of historical characters merge throughout his fictional works. Remaking history deals imagination, intuition and insight. Ghosh has gathered some information from history, which is supplemented by his insights, and the details concerned with facts that he has collected through careful research and observation. As a representative of the common people, Ghosh exposes the sufferings and ecstasy, the pain and pleasure that they have encountered by giving voice to fictional characters and thus tries to depict the impact of great historical events upon their lives.

The postcolonial resettlement of the post-partition period and the subsequent increase in the diaspora, alienation, and displacement are also analyzed. Reconstruction of the histories of the South-East Asian countries like, Burma, India, and Malaya and the consequences of the British invasion of Burma in 1895. The First and Second World Wars, the Japanese invasion of Burma, the sense of rootlessness experienced by the people, migration and the identity crisis and hybridity in language, religion and culture in their colonial and postcolonial period find elaboration in his novels.

The novels of Amitav Ghosh reveal that the author is operating on two levels simultaneously. His works are postcolonial and historical at the same time. He acknowledges that there are multiple ways of writing in the world. These structures in writing can always be deconstructed from a point of otherness that lies inside them. It seems that Ghosh has made an

attempt to create narrative representations that establish connections across culturally constructed totalities through ethical relationships ensuring agency and voice to all while avoiding the appropriation of this voice to any one discourse. He performs this task so well by connecting multiple representations and dismantling the hegemonic position of certain versions. This travelling beyond the limits of borders inevitably requires a certain emphasis on difference, as well as an awareness of realities as discursive constructions. Ghosh has played the postmodern language games of textually to avoid discursive appropriation and abstract homogenizing of heterogeneous groups. But this recognition of difference is effected on the basis of ethically conceived relationships that transcend the discursive totalities created by representations.

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