

POST COLONIAL CONCERNS IN AMITAV GHOSH'S THE GLASS PALACE

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The previous century has witnessed an amazing blossoming of literary genres from the formerly colonized countries. Post-colonial writing originated from Britain's former provinces like the Caribbean, Africa, and India. Several Post-colonial writers lay emphasis on common themes such as the struggle for independence, migration, displacement, diaspora, hybridity, emigration, national identity, and colonization. Amitav Ghosh, a widely acknowledged among Indian authors who writes with a Post-colonial perception. He belongs to the nation that was once incarcerated and governed by the imperialist. This has influenced his writing a lot. This paper is based on post-colonial theory which investigates the conquests, dissatisfaction of dislocated and subjugated people and about their exiled King in a Post-colonial world through the analysis of Amitav Ghosh's novel *The Glass Palace*. The story pirouettes three eras of two families in Burma, India, and Malaya. It is a historical novel about the British colonization of Burma. In this novel, Ghosh exposes the suffering of the folks at different levels. Colonization makes the people completely unconscious of their roots and makes them feel alienated in their own country. His novel "The Glass Palace" serves as a paradigm of Postcolonial text.

Key Words: Post colonialism; migration; displacement; alienation

INTRODUCTION

Great historians like R.W. Emerson and Thomas Carlye considered history as a subject that traces the essence of the past and numerous records of great men. History not only means a reading of only the lives and actions of Kings and Queens, but it also a record of historical events like Communal riots, Partition, Colonialism and Post colonialism etc. According to Johnson "Historians tend to be more interested in events and issues that are limited in time and space, and trust on historical records that take various forms"(131). A historian then symbolizes and moulds these facts and chronicles as per their methodology.

History is only one possible interpretation of the past. The present and the past events give way for literature to study and observe these recorded events of history in a different way and from a different perspective. Literature, reflect the writer's personal observation of life. Many writers are persuaded to write about history with particular emphasis and accents, especially focus on Post-colonial literature. Post-colonial literature comes from Britain's former colonies like the Caribbean, Africa, and India. Several Post-colonial writers write in English and focus on

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common themes such as the struggle for independence, migration, displacement, diaspora, hybridity, national identity, and colonization.

COLONIALISM

The word 'Colonialism' comes from the Roman word *colonia* which meant 'farm' or 'Settlement' and referred to Romans who settled in other lands but still retained their citizenship. These people formed a new community in another land and deeply involved in practices like trade, plunder, compromise, warfare, killing, enslavement, and rebellions. This process of colonization has broken down the colonized society. As a result, colonialism has given birth to Post coloniality, Postcolonial studies, Postcolonial theory and Post colonialism.

POST COLONIALISM

Post colonialism is an academic movement that occurred around the middle of 20th century. It mainly refers to the time after colonialism. According to Makarand Paranjape, "real Post-coloniality is not contained in the discourse of Post-colonialism" (37). But later on, he considered the Post-colonialism as one of the most important and required term in hypothetical discourse. Bill Ashcraft, Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin use the term "to cover all the cultures affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day. This is because there is a continuity of preoccupations throughout the historical process initiated by European aggression" (2). Some of the famous literary critics like Edward Said and Gayathri Spivak considered Post-colonial writing as the struggle to colonial control. At the same time, other critics like Homi. K. Bhaba Arun P. Mukherjee and Benita parry exposes that there is nothing equal to Post-colonial writing. The term Post-colonial writing is used to refer to the body of writing known as commonwealth literature or third world literature.

POSTCOLONIAL DEVELOPMENT IN INDIA

There were writers who had observed very closely the British domination. Among these writers, we can name, Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao, and R.K. Narayan. They are the pre-independent Indian writers of British India. They are also known as trinity in Indian writing in English. They expressed their opinion and thought about the British domination from different Perspectives. Anitha Desai, Kiran Desai, Arundhati Roy, Rohinton Mistry, Jhumba Lahari, and Amitav Ghosh are the well-known contemporary Indian Post-colonial writers. One of the best examples of a post-colonial writer, who wrote about this struggle, is Saddat Hasan Manto (1912–1955). He was enforced to move from Bombay to Lahore, Pakistan. He has published numerous short stories and novels, such as *Mottled Dawn* that deal with this dark era of Indian history and its enormous social consequences and numerous tragedies. Salman Rushdie is one of the prominent postcolonial writer and his

works always deal with social, cultural and postcolonial issues. He was born in India and settled in England. Later he started writing about the conflict between India and British. His brave writing gives nourishment to Post-colonial studies and it was also reflected in his work “Midnight’s Children”. “Heat and Dust” is another important Post-colonial novel which was published in 1975 by Ruth Praver Jhabvala that book contains two plots which was established in different periods and also explores the Post-colonial issues.

POSTCOLONIAL THEORY

Postcolonial theory is a literary theory or critical approach that deals with literature produced in the countries that were once colonized. Postcolonial theory became part of the critical writing in the 1970s. It seeks to destroy the imperialist mode of conceptualization and more importantly their representation. Post-colonial theory deals with the reading and writing of literature written in previously or presently colonized nations, or literature transcribed in colonizing countries that deal with colonization or colonized people. Post colonialism is considered one of the significant, widely engaged and critical theories of today. It has related ideas of Marxism, Post structuralism and Postmodernism and has drawn the attention of more and more readers and researchers throughout the world. It is a response to the struggle against imperialism and re- examination of colonial discourses and decolonization. The issues of racial, class, caste and regional domination, cultural, literary and linguistic authority, diaspora, feminism and globalization also come under the umbrella term of Post colonialism.

In Post-colonial theory, the term subaltern denotes lower class or colonized people and many works have been published based on this concept. Edward Said’s book ‘Orientalism’ which was published in 1978 is considered to be the foundational work in Post-colonial theory. He was considered as a ‘father’ of Post-colonialism. His work ‘Orientalism’, focused on exposing and enquiring about the artificial boundaries that were drawn between the East and West. The term *Orientalism* is used to describe a structured set of concepts, traditions, and conversational practices that were used to produce, interpret, and estimate knowledge about non– European people. Followed by the Edward Said, numerous works were produced based on the Post-colonial theory such as, Gayatri Spivak’s *In other worlds* (1987), *The Empire Writes Back* (1989) by Bill Ashcroft and others, *Nation and Narration* (1990) by Homi Bhaba, *Culture and Imperialism* (1993) by Edward Said.

The *Wretched of the Earth* (1961) is an important work by Frantz Fanon, published in French. This book explores the need for reclaiming one’s own past which is one of the significant concepts in Post-colonialism. Gayathri Spivak also introduced the two terms essentialism and strategic essentialism to describe the social functions of Post colonialism. Homi K. Bhabha is one of the most essential writers in contemporary Post-colonial studies who have developed a number of

concepts, such as hybridity, mimicry, difference, and ambivalence. These terms clearly explore the difference between colonizers and colonized and how colonizers suffer in the hand of the imperialist.

Amitav Ghosh is one of the Indian diasporic writers who write from a Post-colonial 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. Therefore, history has become Amitav Ghosh’s prime passion and has a great influence on his writings. His fictional ways deals with political and historical consciousness. He is also an eminent essayist. His essays are 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. He is one among the few who “have expressed in his work a developing awareness of the aspirations, defeats and disappointments of colonized people as they figure out their place in the world.”(Mishra)

Ghosh used all his historical remembrances to construct the concept in his novel. Mondal in his book *Amitav Ghosh* says, “Whose innovative textual experiments offered new insights and openings into the collection of imaginary and theoretical concepts that had been developed to describe, analyze and interpret the complex of colonial and Post-colonial relations.” (164)

The major concerns of Post-colonial literature are reclaiming spaces and places, asserting culture integrity and revising history. 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 past history of his own country. According to the Brinda Bose, Ghosh “is one who sees,” “history as that course of events that causes dislocation, disjunction, movements and migration, eventually replacing solid markers with shadow lines, destabilizing our notions of the past in the impacts of the present”.(15)

THE GLASS PALACE: AN INVESTIGATION

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".(TGP17)

The war started between Burma and Britain on 14 November, 1885 in which Burmese army was defeated and followed by the imprisonment of the King. The Burmese king, Thebaw with his Royal family was taken as prisoners and exiled to Outram house in Ratnagiri. The pitiable condition of the captives in their own mother land is 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 keep sakes and mementos." (TGP 81)

The melancholic Queen says that the imperial powers had not only dislocated them but dislocated the entire Burma. Also, the queen says in anger "They took our kingdom, promising roads and railways and ports, but mark my words, this is how it will end. In a few decades the wealth will be gone – all the gems, the timber and the oil-and then they too will leave" (TGP 94).The novel beautifully exposes how diplomatically the British captured the countries and defeated almost the entire population and removed their kings from public memory.

On the other hand, the collector Beni Prasad Dey and his wife Uma were assigned to look after the Royal family. The problem of the collector is that he was very much influenced by the British people and obeys the order of the imperialist and their intentions towards the colonized people. The Royal family lived in the Outram house as a commoner and had less money to maintain the servants, there was no other substitute and the villagers started to build houses around the compound of Outram House. Thus, the exiled Royal Family is forced to mingle with the ordinary people in Ratnagiri. It is a way of life that is not only unpleasant to Queen Supayalat but a life that she has to live in which Ghosh is more concerned towards the falling status of the Royal family from rulers to exiled as a migrants who were

punished to live in a foreign land with no hope to return home. The difficulty lies in the real picture of the strong influences of colonialism that appears to be stronger than the kingdom. The Royal family becomes dislocated and this dislocation has resulted in cultural transformation and hybridity. It literally means an amalgamation of two or more cultures. 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 Post-colonial 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 businessman and 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.

Arjun, Uma's nephew who is serving under the British Army and typically adopted the British culture, started dressing in Western style, and speaks the British slang. He considered himself like the English man. His blind faith in the British Territory unfortunately melts during the Japanese invasion of Malaya. Later, Arjun discovered that, as an Indian, he has become a slave to be used by the imperialist, and he ultimately realizes the beauty in the Indian ideology and culture. In *The Glass Palace*, Rajkumar's voyage to search of Dolly becomes a symbol in his search for himself and his identity. In this novel various kind of displaced people are well portrayed. John Skinner says, Ghosh's concern is "not only with colonizer and colonized, but with both historical and contemporary relations between different colonized groups" (Hawley 17).

When people move from one place to other place they naturally become hybrid and the same happens to their culture too. People desired to have their own identity have struggled for independence. For example Rajkumar in the novel *The Glass Palace* and he is a poor orphan who migrates to Burma by accident. At the beginning he was very poor but later his life has been totally changed due to British colonization, changes into a financier and business magnet but finally due to the war his life gets shattered and ends up as a poor person and then returns to India. Dolly, his wife, though accompanied Rajkumar to India, returns to Burma and join in the Buddhist religious shelter which is located in Burma where she breathes her last but in the case of the King, Thebaw exiled as a colonizer from Burma to India

and later he died as a migrates. All the character in the novel overcomes different situation and their roots and routes changes due to British colonization. Therefore, the consequential issues such as immigration, imitation, hybridity, insecurity, separation, rootlessness, unsettlement, loss of identities and identity crisis are the significant problems in his fiction.

CONCLUSION

Amitav Ghosh uses the term Post-colonial to reconstruct Indian history through his novels. Post-colonial literature develops an extraordinarily multiple nationalistic situation. With the emergence of great writers like Ghosh, we tend to enter a new part of Post-colonial perplexity, like diaspora, rootlessness, Post-colonial depression and cultural clash. The novel *The Glass Palace* explores Amitav Ghosh's concern with history and lives of people. Ghosh presents various view points of isolated people of different ethnic groups and their longing for their nationalities. Because of these national concerns, we may proclaim that Ghosh is the first Indian essayist who precisely represents the anguish of the aliens through Post-colonial perspectives.

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