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Critiquing Nationalism: A Study of Amitav Ghosh's *The Glass Palace*

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Abstract – The force of nationalism has become one of the most potent forces of our movements all over the world. Nationalism is born of the notion of a common heritage of people that stretches over a long past and shared ethnic and religious root. To seek to give this idea a fixed contour and to invest it with certain dimensions and defining features is tantamount to limiting the conditions under which the idea of the nation may constantly find meaningful existence and identity. Peoples have moved in time and space and have become culturally and religiously commingled in ways that modern demarcations of nationality fail to consider. The question of identity, whether cultural or political, takes into account the collective natural allegiance of the people to their nation.

Key Words: Ideology, Consciousness, Nation-States, Ambivalent, Hybridity, Multi-Culturalism, Dialectical opposition, Deconstruction etc.

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INTRODUCTION

The idea of the nation has been largely a Western construct, a term appointed in the recent history of human civilization and international affairs to address diverse aspects of human communities, sometimes social but more often political. It is, however, almost historians feel, more than anything, a creation of ideology, liable to reinvention and engineering and therefore not on 'unchanging social entity.' The most famous definition to have emerged out of contemporary discussion on the nature of the nation and, by extension, nation-people, is perhaps Benedict Anderson's now widely used metaphor 'imagined communities', which corroborates the very nationality of the concept of nation and its assumed parameters. To seek to give this idea a fixed contour and to invest it with certain dimensions and defining features is tantamount to limiting the conditions under which the idea of the nation may constantly find meaningful existence and identity.

Emotional response of a particular community such as territory, languages, a shared history, race and religion gather in momentum to forge in the community a consciousness of nation, a conceptual center formation that allows them cohesion and homogeneity. Historian Eric Hobsbawm points to the readiness and ease with each communities of people "identify themselves emotionally with their nation" (143) and subsequently assume a nationalism. The idea of the nation thus acquires an imaginative value and is fed symbolically, though often more concretely, through the politics of race, its collective memory and desire. The psychological and emotional affiliation with the whole dynamics of nation-formation also underscores what the historian calls the unavailability of real human communities in the first place.

The force of nationalism has become one of the most potent forces of our movements all over the world. Nationalism is born of the notion of a common heritage of people that stretches over a long past and shared ethnic and religious root. This is particularly so in the post-colonial era where the issue of identity is an urgent quest for Third World countries attempting to assert their individuality as nations and shed the yoke of having been culturally oppressed for a significant period of their history. One does not have to delve very far into history, though, to find that most, if not all, nation-states today are farther from the notion of purity, unity and shared heritage than their official ideologies would like to think. Peoples have moved in time and space and have become culturally and religiously commingled in ways that modern demarcations of nationality fail to consider. Consequently they have become artificial, not only in the sense of being man-made but also in being inadequate: if they unite one group along a certain criterion, they inevitably divide along another. In all of Amitav Ghosh's texts, there is a conscious intention on the part of the author to construct a history.

The idea of Eric Hobsbawm of the nation is not very different from what Ernest Gellner proposes in his *Nation and Nationalism*: "Nations as a natural, God-given way of classifying men, as an inherent... political destiny, are a myth"(24) and further reinforces the view that the nation is the product of certain historical regional and psychological

conjunctions, and thus bound to vary across diverse communities of people.

The evolution of nation and 'nation-ness' in the Western world had much to do with the attempt by ruled communities, at whatever level, administrative linguistic or simply economic, to enter the official ruler group. At the bottom of the creation of every such nation and the spirit of nationalism lay the dichotomous experience of dispossession and privilege, a Janus-headed reality that faced the people of the nation-to-be. European history teems with instances of this but the most significant fact of the western tradition of nation formation is that in journeying from the amorphous national's state to that of conscious nationhood the new nation people are rendered fiercely possessive of their privileged status and new-found nationality thereby relegating their past to the realms of history. Ernest Gellner argues succinctly that it is "nationalism which endangers nations, and not the other way round" (49). He goes on to note that nationalism uses the pre-existing, historically inherited proliferation of cultures or cultural wealth, and turns them into nations, sometimes also obliterating those original constituent cultures in the process.

Although Gellner's theory is useful insofar as it assumes the centrality of cultural homogeneity as the founding principle of the modern nation-state, his is a construct completely, and oneself-consciously Eurocentric. Besides, it ignores what Hobsbawm terms "the hopes, assumptions, needs, longings and interests of the ordinary people" which are not always nationalist. (10) Like Anderson's construct of an imagined community the small and diverse local cultures constituting the larger opposite national sentiments are left out of consideration by Gellner. The multicultural nature of Indian subjects, for instance, is thus not entirely addressed by such generalization. To be sure, in reading the Indian context, there has been a marked tendency to lump the cultures so as to enable their inevitable domination by western imperialism. For the colonialist the desired homogeneity of the colonized community is the 'other' culture, the materials of which it can readily master. Consequently, a nationalism of a totalizing kind is seen as the dialectical opposite of imperialism, a nationalism that often admits no middle-ways or alternatives.

Homi Bhabha in his sensitive reading of postcolonial culture posits that the modern nation "fills the void left in the uprooting of communities and kin, and turns that loss into the language of metaphor" (139). Bhabha while pointing this out of course has in mind the complex process of nation formation where nations are born of anti-imperialist struggles, and are thus different from the typical Western nation-state, and whose identities are necessarily "ambivalent", spawned as they are in the dichotomous condition of the loss of self and the possible recovery of meaning and uniqueness in the altered history of the community.

Unlike, Salman Rushdie, Ghosh refuses to celebrate the hybridity born of migration and the heterogeneity that fails to be contained by national communities. Instead, he offers a compelling critique of nationalism and the failures of migration through the experiences of women as citizens and subjects; he thus makes visible the violence that both engender, and that is often constitutive of them. In this, he also proffers an important critique of current celebrated global flow of human bodies and its associated tropes of empowerment can disempowering by stripping away the realization of equal citizenship for those marked other by their race, ethnicity, gender, and class belonging. Thus, Ghosh's novels occupy a unique place in the arena of post-colonial literature. They deconstruct both globalization and postcolonial nationalism, by depicting the experiences of those in transition, those in-between nation-states, those going back and forth as travelers and migrants in search of lost homes and better lives. Ultimately, Ghosh suggests three things: first community, like memory, is transnational. Secondly, the liminality of inter-national migrants can also be testimonies to the material abjection and psychic violence of globalization that is elided in celebratory discourses and thirdly the transitional and translational space occupied by migrants is a transnational one too: not globalized, not in- between nation-states, but outside them, linking communities across borders through its desires and discourses of material and emotional belonging.

Memory then, historical memory is the force that transcends boundaries of the nation-states and unites people even in acts of corporal communal violence; ethno religious violence in the city space reveals the continuity of community. By affirming the power of memory as the basis of a community, the characters of Amitav Ghosh challenges the politics and rhetoric's of freedom of regional and religious nationalisms. He shows how national history annihilates memory in the name of myths of freedom and newness. Amitav Ghosh's novels thus claim a unique position in the post-colonial literature that explores and sometimes uncritically celebrates the hybridity of post-colonial nationality and migration. Ghosh instead points to the transnationality of community and memory through the critique of the gendered violence affected on minor bodies and minor lives by the structures and politics of both nationalism and globalization. Ghosh's novels reverberate the forms of violence that nationality and globalization manifest in the home, in domestic spaces and in private lives in order to put forward in the public sphere the questions about gender, memory and belonging that South Asian nationalist history cannot answer.

The Glass Palace is an attempt to locate in the history of time and nations such a people, a

beleaguered group of races inhabiting British occupied territories in South East Asia. Amitav Ghosh weaves into the life of his central protagonist, Rajkumar, the bewildered and often poignant accounts of a family scattered through post-imperialist dislocation in various parts of the Asian continent, as he charts the complex sociological and political repercussions of such disbanding through the experience of loss, exile and the search of a homeland.

While Ghosh does not make any pretence about the nature of the narrative in that *The Glass Palace* is nothing if not the discourse of post-colonial subjects, the easy sliding of imagination at once into and away from historical reality and the author's attempt to remap the history of three crucial South Asian Countries, Myanmar (Burma), India and Malaysia, all cities of the Empire through the late nineteenth and mid-twentieth centuries, resulted by his own admission, in a novel in which the writing of places and times necessarily forced him to " create a wholly fictional world"(549). The idea of the nation as a metaphor of loss, and as being more symbolic of a unitariness than the physical entity which is society, finds elaborate figuration in the turbulence of cultural cross-over and conflicting histories that makes up the central concern of Ghosh.

The clash of cultures or what in another sense may be viewed as the ironic conflation of nationalities is dramatically, if a trifle too, obviously introduced in the opening pages of the novel. The moment of Rajkumar, the eleven year old Indian's ' chance' presence in Mandalay, the ancient walled city by the Irrawaddy river and seat of Burmese royalty, amidst the booming of English guns and the imminent imperialist threat is the first of many indicators of the transfer of power and the transition in cultural positions. The unambivalent language in which the "Royal Proclamation" (15) of the Burmese King is publicly announced is not however, without the irony of what comes soon after:

To all Royal subjects and inhabitants of the Royal Empire: those heretics, the barbarian English Kalaas having most harshly made demands calculated to bring about the impairment and destruction of religion... the degradation of our race, are making a show and preparation as if about to wage war with our state. They have been replied to in conformity with the usages of great nations and in words which are just and regular. (15)

The post-colonial space that Rajkumar inhabits first by virtue of being a Kalaa, a foreigner in alien territory, then by being subjected to colonization of another more veracious kind in participating in the great national upheaval that the British occupation of Burma entails, followed by yet another turbulent experience in imperial India and his forays into the Malayan forest resources, makes him a true transnational. Out of the interstices of race, class and nation in which his life is enmeshed emerges the 'in-between' space that his culture and identity circumambulate. There is an inherent need here to relate to the reference point of which he is constituted as an 'other'. Rajkumar's graduation from a petty immigrant lad through his apprenticeship as a luga-lei under Saya John to a businessman who is revered in the timber trading circles of Burma suggests the hybrid nature of the colonized whose otherness or alterity from the colonizer subject is, at a certain moment in their intertwined histories, hardly distinguishable. Saya John, the Chinese teak trader who decides to take Rajkumar under his wing instructs the latter in the life of the young Europeans who he believes taught them how "to bend the work of nature to your will" (75). The whole enterprise of logging timber from the forests could not have been possible without the Europeans ingenuity. Saya's knowledge of this and his imitation of the white Sahib's life style involve a compromise between complete separation from the empire and complete dependence upon the empire for his existence.

If the language of the postcolonial is assumed to be one of resistance then it must necessarily engage in mimicry, which is both ambivalent and multilayered. Bhabha's explanation of this complex process underscores the element of compromise, a diachronic response in which 'mimic man' Saya John is engaged, for he is like so many other colonial subjects "the effect of a flawed colonial mimesis, in which to be Anglicized is emphatically not to be English." This is echoed by the author's brief but telling description of Beni Prasad Dey, the ICS officer appointed in Ratnagiri where the Burmese Royals are held captive "Collector Dey was slim and aquiline, with a nose that ended in sharp beak- like point. He dressed in finely cut Savile Row suits and wore gold-rimmed eyeglasses" (104). A deliberate parody of the white colonialist, Dey's equanimity is nearly threatening to both his wife and to his English superiors. His easy defense of imperial power before the King and his endorsement of its capacity to "persist" and "influence" is an act in which he is at once, and perhaps unwittingly, mimic man and comprador. Ghosh's ready understanding of Dey's behaviour and his tongue-in-cheek reference to the British as amader gurujon (our teachers) smacks of the same ambivalence and sense of compromises with which such acts of complicity and mimicry are attended in the colonized space.

This tendency to repeat and also to mock is apparent in the reversal of roles witnessed in the palace during the mad scramble for possessions as the British troops raid the Royal wealth. Ma Cho, the food stall owner for whom the young Rajkumar works in Mandalay demonstrates through her defiance of Queen Supalayat this exchange of positions most vehemently in *The Glass Palace* as the booty is plundered by the same people who earlier venerated the royals as their sovereign. Still more revealing is

Rajkumar's empathy with the general mourning at the loss of the King and the sudden occupation of Burma:

Rajkumar recognized several people from the looting of the night before. He recalled how they had hacked at the furniture and dug up the floors. Now those very men and women were lying prostrate with grief, mourning the loss of their king and sobbing in what looked like inconsolable sorrow. Rajkumar was at a loss to understand this grief. He was, in a way, a feral creature, unaware that in certain places there exist invisible bonds linking people to one another through personifications of their commonality. In the Bengal of his birth those ties had been sundered by a century of conquest and no longer existed even as a memory beyond the ties of blood, friendship and immediate reciprocity, Rajkumar recognized no loyalties, no obligations and no limits on the compass of his right to provide for himself. He reserved his trust and affection for those who earned it by concrete example and proven goodwill. Once earned, his loyalty was given wholeheartedly, with none of those unspoken provisions with which people usually guard against betrayal. In this too he was not unlike a creature that had returned to the wild. But that there should exist a universe of loyalties that was unrelated to him and his own immediate needs- this was very nearly incomprehensible. (47)

The reaction of royal maid Dolly is also of similar nature to the deportment of the royal family to India and her growing awareness of the now divided house as she began to notice odd little changes around her, of the maid's impudence, and their unwillingness to Shiko, and the ambivalence of her own position. She was 'free' she was told, for she was a slave in the erstwhile kingdom and not a 'prisoner' of the British King Thebaw and his Queen, but in her heart she knew her life was bound with that of the princesses who she had been enslaved to look after.

In the mazes of history new associations are forged, the past is recast in transformed patterns and unspoken allegiances and 'loyalties' are born where there were only hierarchies of power and position. The curious turn of history resulting in the making of a community constituted of what Ben Anderson calls "... characters, author and readers, moving onward through calendrical time" thus turns the pages of the novel into agency for the imagined community which is the nation. (27) Dolly in this case and by her peculiar new position of being twice enslaved in the breaking of a nation is the unconscious reminder of the national idea which flourishes, as Bhabha points out, "in the soil of foreign conquest" (59). She more than anyone else, embodies the sanctity of the Burmese Royal family, their regal authority that seems increasingly threatened in the wake of exile and, most intensely, the quiet and subliminal aggression of dislocated subjects.

The question of identity, whether cultural or political, takes into account the collective natural allegiance of the people to their nation. While, for postcolonial, Gayatri Spivak explains, the idea of nationhood is a metaphor constantly being 'reclaimed' as the postcolonial space cannot advance referents that are 'historically adequate', in the case of the colonial subject nationhood is perhaps the only real and historically immediate concern.(277) It is Dolly's most haunting obsession that the Burma she has left behind is lost to her forever. Her displacement for her native roots and her discomfort with her own changed, identity is clear when she vehemently declares to Uma, the collector's wife that she could now never return home:

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 leave before. You would understand if you knew what it was like when we left. (113)

The phenomenon of such displaced location triggers off what seems like a self-inflicted act of dispossession in Dolly, reiterating the thesis that colonized subjects suffer from a sense of unreal and imaginary homeland. This is a valid in the case of the Dolly and Rajkumar, both of whom seek to re-ascertain their rights over Indian and Burmese territories, appropriated as 'home' by turns. For Dolly her life in Outram House at Ratnagiri is the only life she knows: her moment in exile is also ironically her moment of greatest assertion. "Where would I go," she asks, "... this is home" (119). She also does not hesitate to voice her instinctive resistance to the idea of the portrait of Victoria hanging by the front door at the Residency, where Uma lives with her husband. Uma herself a native, though privileged, promptly takes the picture off the wall. Her liberal education in Calcutta and the fact of her being the collector's wife have little to do with the spontaneity of her response. She can empathize with Dolly's situation bound as they both are in the sites of colonial oppression, and displaced by the same, single stroke of imperial authority. Yet Dolly's contradictory love for the place of exile, her real/imaginary Indian home of twenty years, is a curious case of mis-recognition, as it were as she takes a "last glimpse of the lane: the leaning coconut palms, the Union Jack, flapping above the gaol on its crooked pole...," clutching her cloth bundle to her and wiping away her tears, even as she embarks on a new life of freedom with Rajkumar away from slavery within the projected walls of Outram House on Ratnagiri hill (171).

What is peculiar about the experiences of these people caught in the moment of the breaking of nations is their relatively easy sliding into alien cultures even as their fissured identities trigger off simultaneously the spirit of alienation, national longing and transnationalism. Rajkumar is an important name in the Burmese timber trading circuit

and comes to be regarded with respect in the South Asian market. If Rajkumar's contact with the Indian raftsmen, who travel downstream to Rangoon from the upcountry Burmese forests, evokes in him nostalgia for Chittagong and his boyhood days, he is only momentarily in the grip of such emotions that he is just as easily able to control. Saya John's impression of Rajkumar when the latter lands the British timber contract is perhaps most telling. He looks at Rajkumar as "someone he had never seen before, a reinvented being, formidably imposing and of commanding presence" (132). Rajkumar is then, a ture multicultural, a reinvented migrant, who, left to himself, and by dint of his enterprise, has been able to find a place in the new society, under the assumption that he will soon be absorbed into and by the established cultural order and thus escapes ending up in underclass or ethnic ghettos. Ghosh's characterization of this petty luga-lei turned timber tycoon is another way of addressing the vital problematic of the settling and resettling of communities and individuals amid the confluence of nations and nationalities.

Uma Dey's sojourn abroad after her husband's sudden and tragic death is not unlike that necessary stage in enlightened Western education: the Grand European Tour, which opens her to another bigger and perhaps more fascinating world. Though Uma is later caught up in the Indian Nationalist cause and is part of the intelligentsia of the subcontinent in a peculiarly displaced way in that she is imbued in a culture that gives her what Said terms an almost "aggressive sense of nation, home, community and belonging", she is like the most of Ghosh's other protagonists, a citizen of the world" (12). They hardly require the kind of representation that most colonized subjects seek and thus, the postcolonial imperative is here, mediated and robbed of agency and thus only a derivative reaction. Further, the hybridity of these colonized subjects makes it impossible for them to meet the notion of exile head on, for their hybrid nature depletes the term 'exile' of its older paradigm of oppression and introduces to the experience of postcoloniality a dimension whereby the colonizer /colonized binary is sufficiently diluted.

In response to these complex forces acting upon the postcolonial arena, Ghosh's narrative consciously seeks to 'find its voice': his work is constantly subject to the anxiety that he must fulfill the obligations of the postcolonial writer. This he achieves, for instance, by spreading onto his fictional canvas the contingencies and the immediacy of contemporary history and thus reiterates the many ways in which the lives of displaced people are stranger than fiction.

The backlash on Indian foreigners in Burma in the wake of sweeping nationalist agitations to separate Burma's administration from that of British India is hardly imagined. Ghosh's account of it through the dramatized traumatic experiences of Dolly and Uma in riot hit Rangoon where the two narrowly escape being killed is only of the many horrifying and devastating incidents that littered the history of the Empire in South Asia. If the author deliberately chooses to use Uma as conscience of the Indian nation, her anger at what she calls Rajkumar's "betrayal" of his country is suitably avenged by her return to India from where she plunges into the cause of non-violent movement against colonialism.

This criss-cross of history with narrative fuelled by the author's own remembered images and fabulations of people trapped in the machinations of time serves to bridge the widening psychological gap between nations and geographies. Ghosh's account of colonial conflict and his rendering of time past allow sufficient distance, as it were, in which to reconsider some of the issues that racked South Asian history more objectively. Arjun's entry into the Military Academy at Dehradun prompted by the notion of passionate service to his country receives a rude jolt in his colleague's ironic reduction of it: "where is this country? The fact is that you and I don't have a country … " (330). In the face of such growing insecurity about Indians fighting under the imperial army, the author seems to find the ineffably close and intimate ties between Arjun, an officer and his subordinate, Kishan Singh, the only lasting bond of love in the otherwise emotionless 'mercenary' exercise of war. The denunciations made by several characters in the novel about the cruelty of the Raj and the excesses it perpetrated seem to suddenly fall flat against the sublime forging of human relationship in another strife less condition. The guilt of serving in the war seems to be overridden by other more compelling truths that face these men at every stage of their encounters with nations and themselves.

In Dinu's intense love for Alison defies the equations that history makes out of divergent geographies and races. General Aung San, his Rangoon acquaintace and leader of the large student movement, is able to drive the Japanese out of Burmese territory but leaves Dinu, himself a democrat, a disillusioned man. For his theory of resistance springs from the author's belief, of which he is spokesman, that "in resisting the powers that form us we allow them to gain control of all meaning, this is there moment of victory" (518) resistance, thus, is an indirect act of complicity with the colonizer. The different positions that Arjun and Dinu assume on the subject however, also derive in part from its ambivalent treatment by the author. Dinu's compassionate concern for his Burmese fellowmen is not fired by rebellion and he leads a subdued life in post-coup Rangoon under the stern shadow of the Junta. The once jealous Arjun turns cynical as the awesome reality of fighting an unreal enemy, his own country under the imperialists hits him. Ghosh is able to appreciate the emotional despair of people like Arjun caught between two worlds, belonging to neither. If India seemed to him the metaphor for freedom, "the shining mountain beyond the horizon" he is in the end uncertain of what

he would find when the horizon itself had been crossed.

The fates of nearly all the protagonists are caught in a similar quest for their origin. Rajkumar lives the life of a "near-destitute refugee" in Uma's Calcutta home and for all his wonderings dies with the conviction that the "Ganges could never be the same as the Irrawaddy" (544). Dolly's final mission in Burma, brings her life full circle from her beginnings as a slave girl behind the palace walls of Mandalay to her voluntary submission to the cloistered life in the nunery at Sagaing, where she quietly passes away.

The reigning mood of *The Glass Palace* seems to be one of acceptance of the psycho-historical and geo-political contingencies that led to the emergence of the national idea in India or for that matter the liberation of Burma from British occupation. Some of the lives these events touched and whose stories Ghosh choose to retell assert in a small but telling way the changing conditions of production of academic and intellectual knowledge and their reception in a less divided world.

While barriers and boundaries seem to define the psyches that attend the making of nations and nationalities in *The Glass Palace*, Amitav Ghosh seems to collapse these margins and is, metaphorically, at home everywhere. For Ghosh, words like 'marginality' and 'hybridity' seem quite irrelevant, and segmenting the words into Third and First regions a rather absurd activity. His success comes from being an individual who is not conditioned by the pressures of the global market and who remains "unfettered by the burden of otherness". Amitav Ghosh's outburst is against the modern dictatorial attitudes of the modern states and the people's chauvinism, which is responsible for the separation and isolation of the people world over and its perpetration of untold miseries. The nationalism has undergone tremendous change and is responsible for the birth of imperialist forces. All in all, the author had held out against both the nationalism and the borders that are the results of it. In both of his novels *The Shadow Lines* and *The Glass Palace*, Ghosh presents a compelling critique of nationalism. These novels deconstruct the discourse of globalization and post-colonial nationalism, by depicting the experiences of those in transition, those in-between nation-states, those going back and forth as travelers and migrants in search of lost homes and better lives.

The Glass Palace, however, seems to question this impression as the author's close family affiliations with the Indian freedom struggle and his father's connection with the Second World War and his participation in General Slims Burmese expeditions easily find their way into the pages of his work, informing it with a deep compassion and understanding rare in literature that is meant to be written only for the margins, and intended simply as representation. The problem of the writer's acculturation is clearly visible here for Ghosh is acutely conscious of the claims of history and genealogy even upon his imagined characters. If *The Glass Palace* is a rather loose, sprawling bildungsroman constructed around the life of Rajkumar Raha in Barma, Malaysia and India, it is also on a more subterranean level the acknowledgement of those changing parameters from the history of colonial India through its post independent nationhood that determine the personal and psychological identities of the authors himself.

Rajkumar's momentous confession to Dolly, when he seems to be losing his grip on the plantation he owns and becomes aware of his sleeping identity in foreign shores, is as difficult as perhaps the author's own circumlocuted and cautious awareness of his divided location:

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 are here too ... .There are people who have the luck to end their lives where they began them. But this is not something that is owned to us... .(310)

The vacillations and often contradictory positions assumed by Ghosh's protagonists register in the novel a theory of resistance which refutes the notion that the idea of representation always connotes further subjection in the colonial exercise. Further, these subjects, enlightened as they are in the ways of the world often slip out of the imperial gaze and escape the agency which is expected of them in the postcolonial space. Besides, Amitav Ghosh's awareness that any form of counter-discourse is ultimately marginal prevents his novel form simply reducing itself to an act of "writing back". Ghosh is, therefore, at once postcolonial, whose sense of native history and time is inseparable from the long years of domination, and the multinational hybrid whose acculturation allows effortless identification with the world of the colonizer. His writing reiterates Rushdie's feeling that the Indo- Anglian writer is now increasingly "confident", more equal and an "indispensable participant" in the kind of conversation that writers of literature the world over engage in (54-56). Further, such a position of "doubleness" helps pare away some of the more obvious dichotomies of the Third World and the First, looks away from the discourse of colonialism / anticolonialism and succeeds in establishing a dialectic relationship between the East and the West.

However, the alternative of globalism the novels of Amitav Ghosh seemingly suggest is not to be interpreted as a genuine attempt at furnishing a solution, for the novel refuses to deal with the complexities of globalism. Globalism is as fluid and as protean a term as nationalism. If nation as invention then so is the idea of globalization. The

current trend of globalization, from one point of view, is nothing but American culture sold by the media as global culture. Thus even though the novel is successful in demystifying the ideology of nationalism, it takes a simplistic view of the actual problems related to nationalism and at the same time by ignoring to deal with the complexities of globalism it fails in suggesting any alternative.

Both novels show that Amitav Ghosh's aim in recreating the given history is not to make a new set of truth claims. The narrative of Ghosh is presented as a version of truth, because history in the form of fiction is itself subversive in nature, since it gives a new vision to the existing past and historicizes it. The two novels refer to displacement of human beings, their psyches as well as their identities in riots and communal violence. It is history which defines, creates and eliminates boundaries. Both the novels show how geographical boundaries at times lead to cultural differences which in turn create hatred among people of the two states. If History has created and named nations, it has also conditioned them into viewing each other differently and with feelings of antagonism. This feelings of fear and hatred of the 'other' is very similar to what Said might call the occident's fear of the orient and therefore a desire to appropriate it. History which is monolithic does not recognize the local or individual. It defines nations, cultures and people only in terms of totalities; creating homogenous modes of 'nationalism' or 'freedom' as in *The Glass Palace*.

In his novels Ghosh uses first person narratives, in which the narrator is used as a lens through which one sees various paradigms of ideology and their constructs. Each narrator is therefore a historian and a character at the same time, therefore subject as well as object simultaneously. The ultimate irony is that the narrators speak 'objectively' about their situations; they have no power to either control or alter them. Their history remains a version which the writer re appropriates through the use of allegory. Ghosh thus recreates the past by creating subjective/individual history in his fiction. Post-colonial writers would say fictionalizing of history is total subversion since as they contend; truth is not to be found in recorded statements but statements in the making, because anything which is codified becomes institutionalized. To understand what the past was about, it is necessary to impose a narrative upon it. There is an element of fiction in all historical accounts and the neglect of this fact by all historians abuses it by explaining away notions of history-writing as 'scientific'.

The historical events that form the backdrop of *The Glass Palace* are the freedom movement in Bengal, the Second World War, the partition of India and the feelings of communal hatred that erupted in East Pakistan following the Hazratbal incident in Srinagar in 1964. Amitav Ghosh's novels are not a recapitulation of those historical events in the sub-continent. In fact to call Ghosh's novels as mere political allegory would be facile. Instead what Ghosh shows is the impact of politics on the lives of ordinary people and on human relationships. Historical events have provided Ghosh with raw material against which he studies the historical truths like the meaning of nationalism and political freedom in the modern world. There is a nexus between the historical moments and the world of fiction. The past is reconstructed through references to houses, photographs, maps, road names, newspapers, advertisements and other such concretizations.

Amitav Ghosh continues to explore different story-telling forms and to complicate the picture of pre- and postcolonial South Asian identity in his *The Glass Palace*. Amitav Ghosh's ambitious epic tells the stories of a cost of characters- royal, working- class, and bourgeois Indians, Bengalis, and Burmese- as they grapple with their sense of place and while violent historical events reshape twentieth century Burma and India. History more than whispers in the background in *The Glass Palace*. When the Japanese invade Burma, for example, the characters lives crumble. Not, of course, before characters like Arjun and Dolly experience moments of life- changing awareness. Dolly finds deep spirituality as an unguent to Rajkumar's inhumane, exploitative business ways. Everything Arjun had ever assumed about himself was a lie, an illusion. Refusing to fight for the British against his own people- his own nation's struggle for sovereignty- Arjun turns his coat and joins other soldier renegades to fight to derive the British out.

Amitav Ghosh treats the very subject like World War II, communal riot, etc. from a distant position and chooses to depict their histories ironically and humorously. In *The Glass Palace*, Amitav Ghosh weaves the characters of Queen Supayalat and Arjun with a tinge of irony. Queen Supayalat, even after being captured by the British forces, does not lose her pomp throughout the novel. Arjun basically an Indian is completely influenced by the Western Ideology. He imitates the West in his dressing sense and food habit. He is not aware of the fact that he is used as instrumental to inflict pain on his own people. In *The Glass Palace*, Amitav Ghosh uses nonlinear timeline. The memory links the past to the present and many of the characters. It helps to recreate a magical world. Ghosh is a novelist given to generic inventiveness and champion of post-modern cultural weightlessness, but his writing is as interested in the ties that bind as in the transitory nature of global culture. In fact Amitav Ghosh has, over the last two decades, brought substance and range to Indian English fiction and indeed, added richly to the literature of the subcontinent as a whole.

Amitav Ghosh has engaged himself incessantly in the task of putting the marginalized/otherised individual back in the centre of the narrative, and saving him

from getting lost in the hegemonic narrative of the nation. Particularly concerned with the South Asian Diaspora in the different regions of the world, his novels are attempted narrations of anti-Hegelian history of the world, incorporating the hitherto left-out narratives of the common individual- the predicament of individual against the historical backdrop, his attempt to resist the hegemony of the nation through his own story and search for his own identity. It is in this connection that the familial space, with all its complexities, assumes a crucial position in all his narratives.

CONCLUSION

The boundary between literary study and political praxis has dissolved for the post-structuralist postcolonial theorist. For this to happen, both the subject and its products and the material and social world must be theorized as texts or discourses. Literature and political and historical discourse must be held to be equal. For most poststructuralist postcolonial theorists and cultural studies practitioners, to act against, say colonialism, or to unseat, say western ontology, it would suffice simply to decode their signifying systems: to decode the discourses that naturalize hierarchies of difference. Consequently, if both text and world are nothing but a signifying system, then *The Glass Palace* is as real as the reality outside the text, so the mere act of interpreting the novel not only destabilizes exoticist narratives of difference but generates a counter-narrative with the power to disrupt those master signifying systems that make colonialism mean in the real world.

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