



Nostalgia, Memory and Pastness in Amitav Ghosh's *The Glass Palace*

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Abstract

This paper views the diasporic occurrences namely, rootlessness, nostalgia, memory and alienation in *The Glass Palace* by Amitav Ghosh. It is commonly believed that detachment from the human bondage, sentiments and love is inevitable. The thread that ties the past and the present is memory whereas nostalgia rebuilds the pleasant memories of the former days. It is possible to say that nostalgia is the imagination of the pleasant days of old, celebration of life, an enjoyable and always inspiring form. Thus, nostalgia and memory are also linked together to find the root or belongingness to it. Ghosh establishes the characters, literally include the Royal family and commoners and what ties them all together is, all are the victims of diaspora, stand basically detached, yet strongly attached to the nostalgic past. Ghosh describes the history of three generations of two families in Burma, India, and Malaya and makes the people completely unconscious of their roots and makes them feel alienated in their own country. Characters experience an absence of existence and belonging which always craves identity and space which are dealt in this study.

KEYWORDS: Nostalgia, Memory, Displacement, Diaspora, Amitav Ghosh.

I. INTRODUCTION

The novels of Amitav Ghosh emphasise the reflective sense of a homeless, rootless identity; express protagonists' nostalgia for their current home, embracing their roots and their homeland's past. The journey from source culture to target culture, between homelands and diaspora, until the two overlap and blend, is one of the characters' key concerns. As they migrate from practically all familiar Indian ambiances to a completely different kind of locality in which they have to be a compulsive life, his characters embark on an endless quest for selfhood. The characters who upheld the concept of a distinct country became uneasy, lowering them to a state of insecurity—uncanny. The displaced people were caught between two polemics: either they could accelerate or they were confined in a hostile environment.

The novel "The Glass Palace" by Amitav Ghosh is a historical novel. His writing explores epic topics like: travel and diaspora, history and memory, political struggle and communal violence, love and sorrow, all while blurring the lines between anthropology and art. It begins with the British invasion of Burma in 1885 and takes the reader on a journey through history until the Second World War, when democracy and peace and order were restored. Ghosh recalls and examines them during the colonial turbulence in Burma, India, and Malaysia in the eighteenth and twentieth centuries.

"The Glass Palace" focuses on the historical facts like World War II, diasporic beginning during major events of exile by the Royal Family of Burma and resettling in Ratnagiri, India, and the wonderful 'Morningstar,' created by Mathew. Eventually, there's the plantation in faraway Malaysia; and, there are number of crisscrossing coincidences all through the novel to counterbalance between the present and the past. As their innate culture is missing, the immigrants feel lonely and alienated and it results in an imbalance mental state. Lack of adaptability, socialisation, and the inability to connect with the

unfamiliar environment are the main causes of alienation. Language, culture, food, religion, attire, and rituals are some of the primary elements connected with one's home-place. The bonding with these elements is always a part of the lives of the people. People's identity is derived from their home, which is conceived as an ancestral tree rooted in native soil. An individual's attachment to his or her home-place cannot be broken by mobilisation and settling in an alien nation. Great writers like Bharati Mukherjee and Salman Rushdie have written about the importance of home in one's livelihood.

Ghosh's characters, in the most extensive part of his novels, literally include the Royal family (Thebaw, Queen Supalayyat, Burmese princesses) and commoners (Dolly, Raj Kumar, Saya John, Uma), but what ties them all together is the crucial story of colonial displacement. Accompanied by historical episodes, these protagonists are propelled from Burma to India, Malaysia, Singapore and back again, each time repeating a pattern of action that Ghosh presents in the earlier pages. The Royal Family was being sent into exile. They were to go to India, to a location that had yet to be decided on. The British Government wished to provide them with an escort of attendants and advisors. The matter was to be settled by asking for volunteers. (TGP41)

The novel opens in Mandalay in 1885; with the introduction of the protagonist, Rajkumar, running through the city in search of a lady called Ma Cho. He is an orphaned boy who faces penury at his young age. He was an Indian *kalaa* from across the sea, a foreigner in an alien country. Due to shipwreck Rajkumar landed in Burma. He is the final surviving part of his family and comes to Burma from India with a shinning entrepreneurial soul and a starvation for victory. He was one among the uprooted ones from its roots. Initially from Chittagong, his father moved his family to Akyab, a vital harbour in Burma. "Their family name was Raha" (TGP13) However, both of Rajkumar's parents die enroute and the mother's dying words to him are: "stay alive, she whispered. Beche thako, Rajkumar live, my prince: hold on to your life" (TGP14)

The Royal family tries to hold to their national identity and that they range from others who willingly put up themselves to the immigrant experiences. Ghosh portrays an array of sufferers of diaspora who stand essentially detached, but strongly attached to the nostalgic past. Consequently, they increase an experience of lack of confidence and as they come across a counter lifestyle, they try and resurrect their nostalgic homes. This is their identification disaster. Basically, they may be the immigrants on quest for an identity of their new place and they attempt to adapt to the new lifestyle, but their nostalgic memories shake them and they grow to be sufferers of tension and anxieties.

Rajkumar is a self-made man who is absolutely in control of his life (like a prince, he is the monarch of everything he oversees). Soon he secured a position in Burma and turned this place of exile into an auspicious land of happiness. From a mere crew member on a boat, he is transformed into a rich and powerful member of the Indian community in Burma through the spoils of the teak, rubber and slave trade. But his persistent preoccupation with business doesn't stop him from his romantic pursuits. This leads him to track down Dolly and marry her through Uma's good offices. So, there are clearly two components in Rajkumar's success story. As John C. Hawley writes: ". . . but first and foremost, and overriding all the main ideas that inform his work are the stories, the Dickensian proliferation of characters whose lives engage us and who take us to some richly imagined places and times" (1).

In that instant there flashed before Saya John's eyes a clear vision of that Mandalay morning when he had gone racing down an alley to rescue Rajkumar –he saw him again as a boy, an abandoned *kalaa*, a rags-clad Indian who had strayed too far from home. Already then, the boy had lived a lifetime, and from look of him now it was clear that he was embarking on several more. (TGP132)

Dolly has no family other than the royal family because she was also an orphan, and Outram House is her only home. She has a very strong attitude toward the exiled location. She asks Uma, "Where would I go, this is home?" (TGP, p.119). Dolly initially refuses to marry RajKumar because she is worried of another change in her future. At Ratnagiri she confesses to Uma, "I've lived here nearly twenty years, and this is home to me now." (GP 112) She doesn't want to go back. She says, "If I went to Burma now, I would be a foreigner – they would call me a "kalaa" like they do to Indians – a trespasser, an outsider from across the sea." (GP 113) Though Dolly was hesitated to go back to

Rangoon, but once she reached there after her marriage with Raj Kumar, she was at ease with her new home in the form of Kemedine House. Raj Kumar's adopted or migrated country is everything that brings him joy. Thebaw and Supalayay, on the other hand, linger on in the collective memory of their country. An immigrant never forgets his place of origin.

Rajkumar, the protagonist, emphasises the importance of home as an original stable establishment that will support in the reconfiguration of new homes when one moves across cultures. He derives continuity and a sense of readiness to negotiate new cultures from his nostalgic memories. This sensation of nostalgia aids in the formation of a new community among the other characters. While some of them find comfort there, others do not. Migrants' psyches are not permanent, and they face a conflict while residing in the migrated country. Even though they are a well-established foreign nation, their longings for their homeland remained unfulfilled. The idea of diaspora is unwavering in its belief in the inevitability of nostalgia. Nostalgia is defined as an inability to reconcile with the cultural and social mores of the migrated country and a desire to return to one's home country. When they commit themselves to business, education, and other endeavours, some migrants do not miss their home country. However, the migrants' objective is to rush over their native land. Rajkumar stated his desire to return home in *The Glass Palace*. He craved for one or the other thing all of his life. And when he was forced to reside in India, he aspired to return to Burma, which he considered his homeland. When Jaya reminds, she noted as, 'I remembered how he'd always said that for him, the Ganges could never be the same as Irrawaddy.' (TGP- 544)

There is an increase in the pace of events in the novel as Britain declares war on Germany. Raj Kumar takes the opportunity to reassess his business and sells his properties before things in Burma become dangerous. As a businessman, he sells all his assets to finance the purchase of large quantities of timber. In the meantime, Alison receives news that her parents, Mathew and Elsa, are dead after a car accident in the Cameron Highlands. Dinu, an amateur photographer, arrives at Morning side House and forms a bond with Alison. The business venture that Neel has taken over from his father has been successful. He has sold the business and bought timber. All of Rajkumar's funds have been invested in a plantation, and when the Japanese bomb is nearby, the elephants panic: Neel is crushed to death and the trees are destroyed in hand-to-hand combat. Rajkumar lost everything - Neel and the money. After waiting too long, Manju, Dolly, Rajkumar and the baby are now trying to escape. They join about thirty thousand refugees trying to cross the river. In her own desperation over the loss of Neel, Manju slips quietly under the surface and drowns herself. She had realized that Dolly and Rajkumar were a different kind of life-hungry people, and she knew that her baby would learn from their aging hands to see life much better.

There is a nostalgic pattern in Ghosh's works that is elegantly related to the mentality of those characters that either stay abroad or travel for a while. Using imagery of a ship or a river, he creates a sense of displacement and disillusionment. The thought patterns of displaced characters are seemed to be carried around a lot like the ship, and especially during those moments when they drift off into nostalgic memories. These memories originate from their childhood houses and the places in which they grew up. As a result, these immigrant characters are inextricably attached to their nostalgic memories, which provide them with some relief. Ghosh may be attempting to establish the fact that when characters come into contact with a hybrid culture, they find it extremely difficult to acculturate or relieve. In his works, this pattern of home memories is fundamental. Home memories from the past virtually nurture and support a hopeful, if not successful life.

In terms of home, it is concluded that Ghosh's characters preserve a longing for their homeland, wanting to return there one day. Ghosh's characters, like those of other diasporic writers, are sensitive to their homeland. Even in a distant land, homelessness has no effect on links to one's native culture. The root culture helps people imagine themselves as successful immigrants. Rajkumar's memories of Burma could not be wiped, but India remained his home, despite the fact that it had nothing to serve him. Ghosh came to the conclusion that not only the colonised, but also the coloniser, felt a sense of displacement and alienation. If migrants travel with a positive attitude, they will attempt to psychologically adapt to the country, society, and language. The migrants' development improves as a result of the diaspora, and they

succeed in their new nation. They live a shared life in a diverse environment. It is related to the psychological power of the person who can balance the culture. They construct an abundant settlement on their own and are unconcerned about negative thoughts. Some of them are disconnected from society and are hesitant to accept the culture and other aspects of the migrated land.

Ghosh depicts the trauma of postcolonial cultural dislocation, uncertainty, and displacement experienced by millions of people. His excursion beyond the limits aids him in exposing his experiences in his novel's characters. The novel explains how the success and pain of the refugees in the displacement are distributed in the novel. Both the positive and negative experiences of migrants lead to a better understanding of real-life events and the author's personal experiences. The Glass Palace is a major scandal that is also a family epic and an adventure novel. It is so beautifully and tenderly depicted that we are both surprised by its breadth and feel a member of its enormous extended family, whose story opens with two orphans, Rajkumar and Dolly, who are wrenched from their roots twice by life, but both times persevere and heroically survive.

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