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### Dear Readers and Contributors,

### IJELLS is teething. I apologise for the comparison. But this young journal is growing and you are the reason for it. You, the readers and contributors have nurtured it with knowledge. It has been a learning experience for us editors too. The mere act of reading, editing and formatting has taught us a lot. We deeply appreciate the support towards the growth of this journal.

### This issue is a profusion of titles from all major areas of English. We are happy to note that our readers and contributors have instilled their trust in us.

### Editors.

**The Glass Palace- An Augmented Narrative**

Prof. A. Hariprasanna

T. Gayathri

Amitav Ghosh throws down the gauntlet with his The Glass Palace, challenging such postcolonial critics to confuse narrative fiction with reality of nation by writing a historical novel, a narrative whose fictional edges bleed more readily into the empirically verifiable facts of the "real" historical record. The Glass Palace unfolds over a hundred years of pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial Burmese history as families are formed and individual characters experience loss and joy. Social organizations such as feudalism are destroyed and new ones formed in the guise of the colonial and postcolonial nation-state. Obviously, The Glass Palace is not generally of postcolonial literature, a "national allegory".

The Glass Palace's characters, plot, and events can open its reader's eyes to acts of forced displacement of people that took place historically; it can re-visit grand historical events from different perspectives, such as that of Ghandi's attempt at a social revolution seen from the angle of vision of the female character, Uma. But, of course, The Glass Palace is not a symbolic representation of nation nor is it an expression of the "real" experiences of real people during such a stormy historical period in Burma. It is a work of fiction, a novel whose complex organization deftly balances the referential characters described in detail with the imaginary to open its doors for readers to enter into and engage with their possible worlds.

The Glass Palace is chock full of (Burmese-Indian, Anglo-Indian) characters who seek a sense of place and belonging--a home--within homelands torn apart by colonialist and imperialist invasions and civil wars. It is a novel whose story stretches out from and around the experiences of South Asian hybrid characters as grand historical events of nation unfold. Eric Hobsbawm upholds the idea that people should "identify themselves emotionally with 'their nation"**1** and then only nationalism gets validity.

Ghosh's technique is simply to borrow the war-journalist's tripod, lenses and so forth and then swivel his viewfinder so that it alights on families living out their lives in tumultuous times. Indeed, he has used the strategy with success in several previous works—dealing, for example, with the enigma of a divided Bengal in The Shadow Lines or establishing homely connections with a conventionally 'exotic' Egypt in In an Antique Land. Thus The Glass Palace is considered traveller's tale, the anthropologist's notes, the historian's books, consisting almost unavoidable element of the postcolonial events. The militaristic imperial strategy of "aggression, capture and colonization"**2** is employed to colonise Burma.

In The Glass Palace Raj Kumar‘s granddaughter Jaya‘s son is the main narrator of the story and he interlinks many sub-narratives with different characters to make it a complete whole. The childhood memory of the fascinating, perplexing and the most tender sight that he has ever witnessed in his life, of the interlocked dentures of his great aunt Uma and his great grandfather Rajkumar in Uma‘s bed persisted in his memory for a long time. While he grew up into maturity, his intense longing to know more about the nature of the relationship between Uma, ‗a benevolent benefactress‘ (TGP: 545) and his great grandfather Rajkumar ‗a near destitute refugee‘ (TGP: 545) augmented in him. Hence he takes the decision to trace out the history of their family and write down their chronicle in the form of a novel.

The novel thus written encompasses the great historical events beginning with the British annexation of Burma to the British India in November 1885 till the Burmese struggle for democracy under the leadership of their pro-democracy icon Aung San Suu Kyi and the attempts of the Military Junta to suppress the struggle by 163 keeping Aung San Suu Kyi under house arrest in 1996. The records of these historical events are intertwined with struggle for survival of human beings caught up in the vortex of these great events. The family chronicle of the Rahas with Rajkumar at its head and the history of three generations of his family are fore grounded in The Glass Palace.

However Contrary to what many poststructuralist postcolonialists venture to say, even at the most basic understanding, the biographically verifiable author Amitav Ghosh does not correspond among the fictional characters, but he invents the narrator to shape the narrative. Characters are not free subjects who can potentially escape their graphic prison and make fictional subjects of--or even talk back to--their author or narrator. They are equally inhabitants of the same conflicted fictional world. And those disciplinary spaces--colonialism, capitalism and otherwise--in The Glass Palace are only representations and not the real disciplinary spaces where the powerful rule over the powerless in the real world.

The Glass Palace is the stuff of fiction that can open eyes to the brutalities of (neo) colonialism and not a text that can resist, intervene, fundamentally transform anything, much less the everyday reality of millions of people living within a national space shaped by history and governed by laws. Like Benedict Anderson's now widely used metaphor of the ' imagined communities', imagines the nation an imagined political community not uniquely produced by the constellation of certain objective social facts; rather the notion is thought out."**3** He has discussed the idea of the 'nation' and the problematic of assigning a fixed historical space and character lo nationhood, emphasizing the artificiality of national identity.

Amitav Ghosh narrates the tones of the people's reactions to these momentous historical events and changes, he presents the discontent, disapproval of the masses and how they began to see image of themselves reflected in the 'other'. The servility and surrender of the Indians to the British—the Burmese felt was a warning to them to prevent them from going to such extents of surrender to the power of the British colonial masters.

Ghosh invents a third-person narrator that relates a story in a fashion that simultaneously fictionalizes and makes real historical subject and event. By making real, the narrator represents the characters (whether factually based, like the Burmese King Thebaw, or fictionally based like the protagonist, Rajkumar as "real" according to the terms of the fictional narration) as such, the narrative often slips into free indirect discourse to open up free-flow of information between the reader and the character's interiority.

The narrator of the historical novel can see and enter into all characters' minds; the author of a factual, historical narrative cannot. So although Ghosh employs a third-person omniscient narrator that exists at a remove from the storyworld, it is not bound by the conventions of the work of history. Such work also uses a "third person narrator", but it does so announcing explicitly that it is the point of view of the trained historian with a scholarly interest in historical document and ethnographic material.

Rashmee Z. Ahmed supports the argument against the imperial attitude in these words, "The Glass Palace is nothing if not an indictment of imperial due process." It is a story of people, a fortune, and a family and its fate', in which Ghosh portrayed "a parallel, wholly fictional world". Ghosh's narrator is not bound by chronological convention; he even makes huge leaps in history from 1919 to 1929 with the turn of a page. When historically bound narrator does not know something, the scientific aims are not abandoned; on the contrary, it announces to the reader its lack of knowledge.

The presentation of the story is unique in the words of Ghosh. When the Japanese invade Burma, it cuts short the deeply moving romance between sympathetic characters Dinu and Alice, causing the reader's emotions to surge. While the real British invasion of Burma was the violent act of imposing a brutally oppressive colonial regime through much shedding of innocent blood, in the world of the novel it can be this and also the seed-event that later leads to the love story that follows the Burmese princesses and their love affairs with those of a lower caste: The First Princess falls in love with the Royal family's former coachman, Sawant, and the second Princesses elopes with " a Burmese commoner" (TGP:204).

In describing the unparalleled beauty of Dolly, Ghosh resorts to polyphony. Her beauty, when reflected through ‗multiple voices‘ becomes all the more enchanting. In Rajkumar‘s version, she appeared

to be beautiful beyond belief, beyond comprehension. ―She was like the palace itself, a thing of glass, inside which you could see everything your imagination was capable‖ (TGP: 144). The Collector‘s wife, when she saw Dolly for the first time felt that ―Miss Sein was perhaps the loveliest woman she‘d ever set her eyes on‖ (TGP: 108).

The same view has been reiterated when the working class woman with whom Rajkumar had an illicit relationship saw the photograph. She said to Rajkumar, ―She‘s so beautiful, like a princess-what do you want to do with a woman like me?‖ (TGP: 236). Enforcement of an idea through multiple voices is a strategy that Ghosh successfully makes use of in Travelogues written by Amitav Ghosh are no excep tions in using the polyphonic mode of narration.

Unlike the monologic mode of narration followed in conventional travelogues of well-known travel writers like Marcopolo, Ibn Bhttuta, Fa-hien, and Hieuen-t-Sang, Ghosh adopts polyphony and non-linear form of narration in his travelogues. By journeying into the country concerned, he imbibes its history, culture and tradition and studies the problems that the people of the country have encountered by conducting interviews and friendly chats with them. These dialogues are presented in the travelogues through the mouth of those who have originally experienced the situation.

Thus multiple experiences are projected through multiple voices. Dialogic rather than monologic grand narratives enable the achievements of all communities, societies and civilizations of the world to be appreciated. Generic hybridity is signalled in the novel by means inserted genres like letters, manuscripts in the form of journals and diaries and excerpts from poems, which is one of the characteristic features of polyphonic novels. Inclusion of these genres shows that ―the boundaries between fiction and nonfiction, between literature and non-literature are constantly changing as the novel is a developing genre.

The Glass Palace‗s thematic material is carefully organized according to the principles that govern the crafting of fiction: language, narrative technique, and genre. Contrary to what many poststructuralist and postcolonialist venture to say, even at the most basic understanding, the biographically verifiable author Amitav Ghosh does not correspond one-to-one with the fictional characters he invents nor the narrator he employs to shape the narrative.

Language is central to these conflicts, and languages are deployed in several ways in this novel. All of the major characters are bi or multi-lingual with strong cultural ties to more than one country. Indians born in Burma have both Indian and Burmese names and use words from both languages and even the Burmese princesses, in exile, learn Indian languages. Despite the official dominance of English, retaining the old dialect is a way of maintaining old ties, especially for Rajkumar (TGP:66&122). There also are terms peculiar to work situations, for example, from the teak camps (TGP:73) and rubber plantations (TGP:230), reflecting the high percentage of minorities working in such places (TGP:89).

Language is overtly used as a weapon as well as to bind people together. The Burmese queen in exile, for example, speaks Hindustani fluently and uses that to emabarrass and intimidates Indian officials who are Parsi or Bengali (TGP:109). Politically, Dinu declares the need to communicate in 'secret languages'**5** in Myanmar under military dictatorship. Ghosh describes the aspirations, defeats and disappointments of dislocated people in India, Burma, China, Malaysia and America such as King Thebaw, Queen Supayalat, Saya John, Rajkumar, Dolly, Uma, Elison, Dinu, Neel, Arjun, Hardayal, Kishan Singh, Jaya and Ilongo.

For Rajkumar and Jaya, there is the impulse towards family--biologically and culturally--to find a sense of belonging. It is their lack of family that both generates this desire to create a new traditional constraint of the institution. On one occasion, Rajkumar tells his loved-one, Dolly: "I have no family, no parents, no brothers, no sisters, no fabric of small memories from which to cut a large cloth. People think

this sad and so it is. But it means also that I have no option but to choose my own attachments" (TGP:147). He reads this lack of attachment as "a freedom of a kind" (TGP:147) that allows him to remake family not according to racial, caste, or national dictates. Both sons Neel and Dinu affirm the forming of a new family populated by racially and culturally mixed subjects. Finally, the novel charts the positive effect of crumbling family structures that allows for the making of new communities based on common social understanding.

Family is central to The Glass Palace not just in terms of content, but also form. The narrator uses the realist storytelling mode to give texture to the characters' experiences in the story world and uses even historical event to fill out this telling, but it is the romance genre that functions as its narrative container. The novel's over reliance on the sides of sexual love as redemption from history and is critical of the characters because, king and peasant alike in The Glass Palace lack a complex inner life. This has nothing to do with representing the characters as child-like or undeveloped and everything to do with generic convention.

The writer‘s device which is central to the artistic deployment of his material in the novel is the metaphor of the camera. Leitmotifs of mirrors, lenses and binoculars are scattered throughout the text. The artist‘s eye reflects, bears witness to the historical events as a kind of photo montage, a series of snapshots over time whose details are filled in. As the title indicates, the novel opens with the distant roar of the British canons and the consequent plundering of the fabled hall called the ―Glass Palace‖.

Throughout the narrative of The Glass Palace, Ghosh expresses the agonies and turmoils of the expatriates. "The expatriate being, expresses itself truest in an oscillatory pendulum momentum‖**6.** In an Antique Land, Ghosh expresses the manner in which imperialism and commercial consideration result in ruthless exploitation of the people from the developing nations, like the poor Egyptian diaspora, exploited by the Iraqis as cheap labour. In all the works of Ghosh, we find a continuous struggle to return to roots, on the part of the diasporic people, trying to overcome the exploitation and misery associated with their life. It is shown in the illegal relation of Rajkumar with Ilongo‘s mother. Ghosh's novels are in fact elegiac reminiscences of their sad plight.

The Glass Palace is filled with love and passionate consummation of desire; it is a narrative of dramatic adventure, great migrations, and unbelievable chance encounters. It is also announces dates in chapter headings to remind of the plot's imbrications with historical chronology. As said by Meenakshi Mukherjee, "The story spans more than a century in the history of the subcontinent, people involved in unexpected relationships across countries and culture, wars are fought, rebellions quelled, political and ethical issues are debated, fortunes are made and lost. The writer reports everything accurately, thoughtfully his precision backed up by meticulous research‖**7**.

The Glass Palace not as a document of nation but as a narrative fiction, employs a complex historical narrative structure to richly texture its many characters' identities and experiences, allows us to see how this novel is able to revitalize the power of the romance genre and of the historical novel as told from a new, postcolonial point of view. To read The Glass Palace thus is to enlarge the narrative contact zones between those genres and to shatter the interpretive lens that systematically confuses aesthetics with ontological facts to shatter the wish fulfillment fantasies of certain critics who choose to c onflate narration with nation and nation with narration.

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