CHAPTER V

THE GLASS PALACE

The blending of history with fiction can at times be a heady combination; it could either give one a high or leave you high and dry It has its moments where it's able to quench the thirst of a history while there are literary bits and pieces, which are sheer delight for a fiction lover. In the words of the writer himself one can examine the truths of individuals in history definitely more completely in fiction than one can in history. History on the other hand is facts and one can't play with facts or can't twist them according to the whims and fancies of their own liking. Fiction gives the writer that extra bit of space where he can borrow liberally from facts and then use those facts to make up stories which are not hollow pieces of fact but are more firmly rooted to the surroundings, it has emotions, its own complexities of feelings and ambience, something which a dry chapter of factual history can never have.

The Glass Palace begins in Burma, literally in its last days of independence before the British finally completely subjugated it in 1885. Ghosh starts off nicely, contrasting the story of a young orphaned Indian boy, Rajkumar, with that of the imperious but doomed Burmese royal family. He also describes the court of the Queen Supayalat and King Thebew, where he finds particular interest in one court attendant Dolly. Ghosh charts the course of Burmese history along with the rising fortunes of Rajkumar and several other strands, which criss-cross all through the book. He also talks about the younger generations of Rajkumar and Dolly, the fall of King Thebew as the Japanese invade Burma, their flee to Ratnagiri amongst other things. More often then not one feels that Glass Palace is several books edited and seamed into one and more often then not they keep coming out like an over used cricket ball. He feels compelled to explain the

nuances of history and throws in information about things, which he feels his predominantly western audience would not be aware of. I am not sure if I want to further divulge the plot here as it robs the fun of reading.

Ghosh has his moments and one feels that if only he can put his mind to one thing and decide what he wants to write and which way he wants to take the story he will emerge as a far better writer then he already is. Consider the opening lines, which describe the Glass Palace, ''and right at the center there is a vast hall that is like a great shaft of light, with shining crystal walls and mirrored ceilings. People call it the Glass Palace.'' One of the most successful aspects of the book is that Ghosh has outsiders and foreigners -- Indians in Burma, for example -- taking advantage of the situation the British have created. The Indians themselves are victims of colonialism, but they also use it. Rajkumar and others are compromised, owing much of their success to the British, while the Burmese are presented entirely as victims. (Note that Ghosh himself was born to Burmese parents, in Calcutta. From the too-noble royal family up (or downward) he barely presents a Burmese who isn't near flawless, at least until he gets to U Ne Win.) Complicity with Empire also crops up in a different guise later specifically regarding Indians serving in the British armed forces.

Ghosh's political strand is an interesting one. He brings a welcome focus on Indians in the military service, doing the British Empire's dirty work. Two-thirds of the soldiers that routed the Burmese in 1885 were Indian sepoys, he reminds readers early on. The role of Indians in the British armed forces remains a significant one throughout the novel. As cries for Indian independence grow louder the role of Indians in the armed forces becomes more controversial. Here it culminates with Arjun and his fellow-soldiers and the issues they face in World War II. It

is worthy stuff, and Ghosh presents much of this well, painting the issue not merely black and white but in its whole (and often very human) complexity. He also talks about the fall of the Burmese nobility as it is forced to exile to a decrepit location in Ratnagiri. But his problems is that ideally one would have wanted the political setup and history to blend nicely with the story itself and follow a course with the story. In his case history seems to have been his undoing as it stands apart from the rest of the story and this leads to a sense of discomfort for the reader.

The Glass Palace (2000) is a historical novel narrating the history of the fall Of the Konbaung Dynasty of Mandalay in Burma, which was the last dynasty that ruled Burma from 1752 to 1885. The last King and Queen of Konbaung Dynasty were King Thibaw and Queen Supalayat, who were sent to exile in India. From there it moves through the Second World War (1939-1945): "There are indications that Japanese were about to enter the war"[103]. The novel depicts the British colonial conquest and India's independence movement with Uma Dey who after being widowed takes active part in the movement against British rule along with other Indians living in America: "Among Uma's contemporaries, in New York there were many who took their direction from a newsletter published from the University of California, in Berkeley, by Indian students.

This publication was called *Ghadar*, after the Hindustani word for the uprising of 1857, and the people who served the British Empire as soldiers now have "become dedicated enemies of the Empire"[105]. This novel also refers to the mutiny of the British soldiers, as the Indian army of British Empire revolt against them: "They mutinied shooting a couple of

officers"[106] and along with this Ghosh shows us the mental state of Arjun, an British army and Uma's nephew, with the words:

> "He was a military man and he knew that nothing – nothing important – was possible without loyalty, without faith. But who would claim his loyalty now? The old loyalties of India, the ancient ones – they'd been destroyed long ago; the British had built their Empire by effacing them. But the Empire was dead now – he knew this because he had felt it die within himself"(44).

Eventually the novel brings the reader to the present. So, the novel focuses on 20th century Burma, India, Bengal and Malaya, trading economic changes along with the change in the social structure. This chapter will focus on the global ties that Ghosh depicts in this novel.

The Empire Writes Back states that, "Theories of globalization have moved, over the last half century, from expressions of the process as 'cultural imperialism' or neo-imperialism to analyses of the 'hybridization', 'diffusion', 'relativization,' and interrelationship of global societies, 'the compression of the world and the intensification of the consciousness of the world as a whole'." These issues find their way into Amitav Ghosh's writings, as Ghosh focuses on travelling and crossing borders for trade and commerce. Trade and commerce control world markets and world economy which plays an important role in the process of globalization. According to Someshwar Sati, "The trans-nationalism of the

forces of production and the widening cosmopolitan scope of the market are rapidly pushing the world beyond national familiar dimensions".

The Glass Palace portrays the economic condition along with trade And commerce in South Asia spanning an area from India to Burma during the Colonial period. *The Glass Palace* shows a capitalist economy, mingling it with colonial power and thus relating economic and political aspects. According to Anshuman A. Mondal:

> "the novel demonstrates how the economic and political were two sides of the same colonial coin and it explicitly figures economic exploitation of land, resources and people as a counterpart of political oppression……The meticulous descriptions of the Burmese interior – its jungle, its villages, its lifestyles – that accompany the equally exhaustive accounts of the timber industry are paralleled by the fastidious descriptions of the Morningside estate in Malaya, and the logistics of the rubber plantation"(66).

The Glass Palace depicts different types of trades that were in practice during the British rule in the Eastern part of the South Asian region. The novel gives us a picture of the teak trade in Burma, where the British Government's conquerors of Burma are trying to capture its teak wood resource. This is clarified when Mathew, the son of Saya John who himself is involved in the teak trade, says to Rajkumar that, "There's going to be a war.

Father says they want all the teak in Burma. The King won't let them have it so they're going to do away with him". The British Empire will do anything to expand their market

and thus they had to remove the King from his position. On the other hand, Rajkumar an Indian boy, who by chance, has landed in Burma; now wants to be a successful businessman of teak wood, and he joins Saya John to help him in his business.

He collects detailed information regarding the collection and transportation of logs of teak wood and gathers knowledge about trade so that he himself can start a new business. In order to start a business of his own he earns and collects money by manpower import from India or more accurately he brings workers from India for the Burmese oil fields which are controlled by the British. With this he starts his own teak wood business and establishes a profitable plantation, and ultimately becomes a tycoon in the timber industry. The story then shifts from the heights of colonialism to the depths of the Second World War and the trade shifts from timber to rubber. Seeing this change Rajkumar, who is already married to Dolly, starts a new business of rubber plantation in association with Mathew, the son of Saya John, his first employer. Mathew had been in the USA where he had married an American named Elsa Hoffman. The plantation he and Mathew establish is near the island of Penang in northern Malaya. The plantation that his father has bought is near the island of Penang in northern Malaya. This shows that even during the colonial period, the people of different areas were involved in business, often in partnership with British traders.

The Glass Palace shows people travelling around the world for different reasons, such as, for trade or just tourism; Migration is also shown as people of one country settle in another country. *The Glass Palace* "focuses on the familial, commercial and cultural links that connect the Indian diaspora in South-East Asia"[112]. The plot of this novel portrays the

family ties of three families – the royal family of Burma with King, Queen, their three daughters and their retinue of servants, one of whom marries Rajkumar who is a Bengali orphan brought up in Mandalay and thus forming a family with their children; and the family of Saya John, who is also an orphan brought up by Christian missionaries, who acts as Rajkumar's mentor. All these families are not only depicted separately but the family ties that exist between them, somewhere in the form of friendship, somewhere because of marriage or some other reason. Rajkumar is a Bengali-born peasant, who finds his fortune in Burma through trade. Rajkumar can be seen as a hybrid character as "hybridity refers to the creation of new transcultural forms within the contact zone".113

"Hybridity has frequently been used in postcolonial discourse to mean simply cross- cultural 'exchange'" and "It is the 'in-between' space that carries the burden and the meaning of culture"(134). Rajkumar in the course of becoming a Burmese businessman adopts the culture and language of Burma. Rajkumar's urge to become a successful businessman leads him to dress like an Englishman. For his first business meeting he dresses like an Englishman: "his suit is appropriately plain and black, and his tie neatly tied, the collar turned to just the right angle". Rajkumar's hybrid identity is clearly observed when he, even after being dressed as an English man touches Saya John's feet and says "Give me your blessings, Saya". Rajkumar is an Indian boy, who settles in Burma, adopting Burmese culture, and tries to learn the manners of the Englishmen. In all these processes, Saya John is his biggest inspiration and mentor. The teak trader, Saya John "would always change into European clothes, a white shirt, duck trousers" to hide his own identity whenever he would go on business with Englishmen. He becomes a world traveler because of his work. Saya John had

been brought up as an orphan by the "Catholic priests, in a town called Malacca. These men were from everywhere – Portugal, Macao, Goa". So, Saya has been in touch with people from different cultures since his childhood. His hybridity becomes clear to us when he narrates his conversation with the soldiers at the military hospital, where he used to work as an orderly: "The soldiers there were mainly Indians and they asked me this question: how is that you, who look like Chinese and carry a Christian name, can speak our language? When I told them how this had come about, they would laugh and say, you are a *dhobi ka kutta* – a washerman's dog – *na ghar ka na hat ka* – you don't belong anywhere, either by the water or on land, and I'd say, yes, that is what exactly I am"[119]. Saya John's son Mathew also portrays hybridity, growing up in Singapore and he goes to America for studies, where Mathew adopts American culture and wishes to stay there after marrying Elsa Hoffman. Even Ma Cho, who runs a small food stall where Rajumar works in the beginning, is half-Indian and half-Chinese.

The royal family of Burma of the Konbaung Dynasty includes King Thibaw, Queen Supayalat and their daughters. The fall of the Konbaung Dynasty is the result of British colonial expansion; after their defeat at the hands of the British, the King, Queen and their daughters are sent to exile in India in a place called Ratnagiri, where they, especially the daughters, adopt Indian culture including clothing, food habits and language. The eldest princess, Ashin Hteik Su Myat Phaya Gyi, marries an Indian coachman Mohan Sawant and settles in India. Dolly, the servant of the royal family suffers exile with the royal family. Growing up in India from her childhood Dolly feels more at home in India, so she says "If I went to Burma now I would be a foreigner – they would call me kalaa like they do Indians"[120]. She meets Rajkumar in Mandalay for the

first time during the time when the soldiers of the royal family lost the battle with the British soldiers and Mandalay was ransacked. Here, Rajkumar catches a glimpse of her and falls in love with Dolly. Rajkumar and Dolly are different people with completely different temperaments, Rajkumar being born in India and brought up in Burma and Dolly being born in Burma and brought up in India. These two people, with mixed culture and hybrid identities, marry and lead a family life together.

In Ratnagiri, the Royal family of Burma meets the Collector Beni Prasad Dey and his wife, Uma Dey. Beni Prasad Dey is an Indian-Bengali and an employee of the British Government of which he is a dedicated huge supporter. He tells King Thibaw about the Japanese victory over Russia:

> Japan's victory has resulted in widespread rejoicing among nationalists In India and no doubt in Burma too... The Empire is today stronger than it has ever been. You have only to glance at a map of the world to see the truth of this…… Britain's Empire is…already more than a century old, and you may be certain, Your Highness, that its influence will persist for centuries more to come. The Empire's power is such as to be the proof against all challenges and will remain so into the foreseeable future(72).

This dialogue reminds us of 'hegemony' which means ruling or dominating by consent; "Hegemony is important because the capacity to influence the thought of the colonized is by far the most sustained and potent operation of imperial power in colonized

regions"[122]. Hegemony refers to the domination which is "exerted not by force, nor even necessarily by active persuasion, but by a more subtle and inclusive power over the economy, and over state apparatuses such as education and the media, by which the ruling class's interest is presented as the common interest and thus comes to be taken for granted".

This was reflected among the soldiers of the British army where "about two-thirds – were Indian sepoys…The Indians were seasoned, battle-hardened troops"[124]. Arjun, an important character in the next generation of characters in the British army, is an Indian officer. He calls his group "'First True Indians'… Punjabs, Marathas, Bengalis, Sikhs, Hindus, Muslims. Where else in India would you come across a group such as ours – where region and religion don't matter – where we can all drink together and eat beef and pork and think nothing of it?" He feels proud of being in the British army: "'Look at us!'Arjun would say, after a whisky or two 'we're the first modern Indians; the first Indians to be truly free. We eat what we like, we drink what we like, we're the first Indians who're not weighed down by the past". This however is part of the hegemony, techniques used by the British Empire to rule Indian people. As the narrator says, "though they might know themselves to be ruled by England…most of the day-to-day tasks of ruling were performed by Indians". This reminds us of Macaulay's concept of mimic men. To quote Homi Bhabha: "Macaulay can conceive of nothing other than 'a class of interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern – a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect'."[128]

Homi Bhabha goes on to say that "colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, *as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite*"[129].

In *The Glass Palace*, "Indian officers were a band of elect; they lived in proximity with Westerners…They shared the same quarters, ate the same food, did the same work"[130]; and Arjun agrees that "When we joined up we didn't have India on our minds: we wanted to be sahibs and that's what we have become"[131]. Later Arjun understands that this is last of the process to rule Indians, which is clearly visible in Hardy's speech when he talks about "duty, country, freedom"[132]. This realization leads them to join Mohun Singh to fight against British rule.

Uma Dey, wife of Beni Prasad Dey, is an aunt of Arjun. She is an Indian-Bengali, who wears her sari in a modern way. The process of her modernization is a part of her marriage with the collector of Ratnagiri, Beni Prasad Dey. She understands the irony and the limit of her modernity when she tries to discuss the awful things that she heard about Queen Supayalat with Dolly who replies that, "Don't you sometimes wonder how many people have been killed in Queen Victoria's name? It must be millions, wouldn't you say? I think I'd be frightened to live with one of those pictures"[133]. She wonders "How was it possible to imagine that one could grant freedom by imposing subjugation? That one could open a cage by pushing it inside a bigger cage? How could any section of a people hope to achieve freedom where the entirety of a populace was held in subjection?" After her husband's death, Uma visits Europe and America. In London and New York she joins the movement against

colonial rule in India and ultimately becomes a leader of the movement to free India. She can be seen as placed within the theory of 'mimicry' which says that "When colonial discourse encourages the colonized subjects to 'mimic' the colonizer, by adopting the colonizer's cultural habits, assumptions, institutions and values, the result is never a simple reproduction of those traits. Rather, the result is 'blurred copy' of the colonizer that can be quite threatening"(135).In the course of this revolt against the British to make India free, she comes across Giani Amreek Singh, an old soldier, who himself inspires Indian soldiers rebel against the British Empire. When Uma asks him "why did it take you so long to understand that you were being used to conquer others like yourself?"; he replies that,

> "You don't understand. We never thought that we were being used to conquer people. Not at all: we thought the opposite. We were told that we were freeing those people. That is what they said – that we were going to set those people free from their bad kings or their evil customs or some such thing. We believed it because they believed it too. It took us long time that in their eyes freedom exists wherever *they* rule(89)."

Uma Dey becomes a part of the revolution against British rule. In Singapore She is received by "A group called the Indian Independence League". She even shows her anger as "she considers Rajkumar as a neo-colonialist"[139], so she says "It's people like you who're responsible for this tragedy. Did you ever think of the consequences when you are transporting people here? What you and your kind have done is far worse than the worst deeds of the Europeans"[140]. Later, she joins Mahatma Gandhi's movement "In

the past, she had been dismissive of Mahatma Gandhi's political thinking: non-violence, she had thought, was a philosophy of wish-fulfillment. She saw now that the Mahatma had been decades ahead of her in his thinking. It was the rather the romantic ideas of rebellion that she had nurtured in New York that were pipe dreams". Thus, being widow of a distant collector and a modern woman, she becomes a political figure working for Indian independence.

Rukmini Bhaya Nair comments about Rajkumar that he "is a boundary–crosser, who make several transitions across national frontiers during his life-time" in the essay "The Road from Mandalay: Reflections on Amitav Ghosh's *The Glass Palace*". Being an Indian-Bengali boy Rajkumar feels more at home in Mandalay and later in Rangoon. Here, Mandalay appears to be a multicultural place as, "The number of foreigners living in Mandalay was not insubstantial – there were envoys and missionaries from Europe; traders and merchants of Greek, Armenian, Chinese and Indian origin; labourers and boatmen from Bengal, Malaya and the Coromandel coast; white-clothed astrologers from Manipur; businessmen from Gujrat – an assortment of people such as Rajkumar had never seen before he came here"[143]. Mandalaya is a cosmopolitan world in itself.

'Cosmopolitanism' can in this context be defined as "the idea that all human beings, regardless of their political affiliation, do (or at least can) belong to a single community, and that this community should be cultivated"[144]. Rangoon is a similar type of place where the Thonzai Prince finds the whole world encapsulated: "the Chinese junks and Arab dhows and Chittagong Sampans and American clippers and British ships-of-the-

line…the Strand and its great pillared mansions and buildings, its banks and hotels; about Godwin's wharf and the warehouses and timber mills that lined Pazundaung Creek; the wide streets and the milling crowds and the foreigners who thronged the public places: Englishmen, Cooringhees, Tamils, Americans, Malays, Bengalis, Chinese".

Cosmopolitanism is not only limited to these places, people like Rajkumar and Saya John display cosmopolitanism and multiculturalism as they cannot be limited to being seen a citizen of any particular nation or region. The same can be said for Uma Dey as she is the character with maximum variety in this novel. Uma, before marriage, was a simple girl, who after marriage moves toward modernity for her husband, who wanted a modern wife. Uma's tour towards modernity is reflected through her modern way of wearing her sari. But her view began to change when she realizes the cruelty of the British Empire or the British Queen. After her husband's death, she inherits huge wealth that her husbandz had left for her and she decides to visit European countries. There she joins the revolt against British rule in India which she continues even after coming back to India and ultimately joins with Mahatma Gandhi to make India free from British rule. Thus a simple Indian-Bengali woman becomes a revolutionary.

As far as use of language is concerned Amitav Ghosh embraces the newness of Salman Rushdie's language. "As a linguistic experimentalist, Rushdie attempts to destroy 'the natural rhythms of the English language' and to dislocate 'the English and let other things into it'." Ghosh follows these traits of language while writing his English- language fiction. He mixes English with the language of the Indian subcontinent along with its style and form as if

introducing Indian English to his audience to give the essence of the place he writes about. In *The Glass Palace*, Ghosh depicts a scenario from India to Burma and the intrusion of the British into it; and the mixture of their languages. Rajkumar, an Indian boy, settles in Burma and come across the Burmese language and words like, 'Ba le','longyi', 'baya-gyaw', 'aingyi', 'Mebya', 'wungyis', 'wundauks', 'myowuns' and many others. Ghosh shows Indian society as King Thebaw and Queen Supayalat of Burma along with the whole family are exiled in Ratnagiri of India. Indian expressions like, 'ande-ka-bhujia', 'Chalao goli', 'Sabar karo', 'jhanda', 'chalo', 'jaldi', 'bhangra' and many others are used. Here, the Indian language has become a part of English: "Kanhoji would issue scoldings from his bench, telling the villagers to clear the way for the Collector's gaari". Here 'gaari' is used with such ease that it seems like part of the English language. English is often said in Indian style, such as, Arjun says to Hardy, "Go, yaar, it's your birthday isn't it? Jaa"[148]; though this dialogue is said in English but with an Indian tone or accent. The English language seems to be contaminated with the Indian language as even the English people are sometimes found to speak in Indian language. Lieutenant-Colonel Buckland, while talking to the soldiers, says that "There was a ceremony and a *burra khana* for the men"[149]. So, in this novel we find mixture of languages which is not only true for the Indians and Burmese but the English people. Through the mixture of different languages Ghosh depicts different societies. Amitav Ghosh, like Salman Rushdie, changes, breaks and blends different words to make his own words or phrases or his own language, and thus shows his way of experimenting with language.

Amitav Ghosh represents the movements of people to different countries in such a way that it seems he is trying to unfold the history of movements, travels and inter-cultural crossing. In the course of this he puts forward the culture and tradition of different places, countries and societies along with their mixture. This chapter focuses on the global ties that *The Glass Palace* represents through movement, travelling and crossing of borders. It illustrates Ghosh's representation of how people move to different places as a result of which they come in contact with different cultures and thus become a multicultural persona. This multiculturalism can also be found in *Sea of Poppies* and *River of Smoke*, which is discussed in the next chapter. In the next chapter, I am going to show how a cosmopolitan world arises as a result of the contact of different types of people in a particular place.

The Glass Palace is a historical novel which, mainly, tells the (hi)story of the fall of Mandalay in 1885, the subjugation of Burma under British colonization, and the political developments up to the situation in Myambar in 1996. The problem of Indian identity appears with the second world war and especially with the Japanese invasion in "Burma, which the British Sarkar had declared to be a part of India" 31), when Indian and Burmese soldiers had to ask themselves whether they should fight in the British army. Dinu is the son of Rajkumar, originally from Chittagong who under most adventurous conditions has succeeded in the teak business and married a Burmese princess being exiled to Radnagiri on the Indian west coast, Dinu's mother. Arjun comes from what seems to be a middle class family in Calcutta. He becomes Dinu's brother in law when his sister Manju marries Dinu's elder brother Neel.

Dinu is an introverted type and a photographer, Arjun develops from a “boy of whom teachers complain that their performance is incorrigibly below their potential” (223) to an energetic soldier in the British army. Differently from his friend Hardy, whose family, as other Bengal families, has supplied the British army with soldiers since generations, Arjun is the first of his family to enter the army. On occasion of Manju’s marriage Arjun and Dinu meet in Calcutta and on that occasion run into a demonstration of the freedom movement. A pamphlet is thrown into their car: “There were quotations from Mahatma Gandhi and a passage that said: “Why should India, in the name of freedom, come to the defense of this Satanic Empire which is itself the greatest menace to liberty that the world has ever known?” ” (.254). Arjun, who has identified himself completely with the British army, even on condition that “ “...the British Indian army has always functioned on the understanding that Colonialism, Literature and identity (Jorissen） there was to be a separation between Indians and Britishers...” ” (.246), calls the demonstrators “ “Idiots” ” (254). At this time Dinuaccepts Arjun’s opinion, but for other reasons than his. He argues that at that moment the most important is to fight fascism. He calls Hitler and Mussolini ““...the most tyrannical and destructive leaders in all of human history...” ”, he mentions the massacre of the Jews, and adds ““...The Germans’ plan is simply to take over the Empire and rule in their [i.e. the British] place...” ”. What will become more important, he further makes comments about the situation in Asia, that is about the Japanese. He mentions the Nanking massacre: “ “...Last year, in Nanking, they murdered hundreds of thousands of innocent people...” ”, and adds: ““…Do you think that if the Japanese army reached India they wouldn’t do the same thing here?…”” (.255).

At this time for people like Arjun the identification with the culture and spirit of the British army means, too, to be modern. Eating all kind of foods, including beef etc., drinking alcohol means for him to be free: ""…we're the first modern Indians; the first Indians to be truly free. We eat what we like, we drink what we like, we're the first Indians who're not weighed down by the past"" (.242-243). Dinu is offended by such an argumentation and he declares ""It's not what you eat and drink that makes you modern: it's a way of looking at things ..."" (.243). Saying so, Dinu makes Arjun to look at some professional photography.

Into his age, Dinu, who by now is "seventy-four at the time" (463) "had ever been directly involved in politics" (461). Only at the end of the novel, that is in 1996, "the sixth [year] of Aung San Suu Kyi's house arrest" (.465) he is made to confess: ""It's strange ... I knew her father ... I knew many others who were in politics ... many men who are regarded as heroes now ... But she is the only leader I've ever been able to believe in"" (467). While Dinu's life becomes shaped by the dramatic events in his sur-rounding world, Arjun's life itself takes a dramatical development. For quite a time he continues to hold his view that he must be loyal to the British rule. When his friend Hardy reports to him about Captain Mohun Singh's decision ""…to break with the Britishers"" and that he was " "…going to form an ndependent unit — the Indian National Army…" " (377) that would fight on the Japanese side, it is now Arjun who, like Dinu before, argues: ""…What do the Japanese want with us? Do they care about us and our independence? All they want is to push the Britishers out so they can step in and take their place.

They just want to use us: don't you see that?"" (.378). However this does not mean that he has changed his opinion. He still feels himself more British than Indian: ""Just look at us, Hardy — just look at us. What are we? We've learnt to dance the tango and we know how to eat

roast beef with knife and fork. The truth is that except for the color of our skin, most people in India wouldn't even recognize us as Indians…"" (379). This is a 'confession' which shows Arjun as a 'per- fect' product of the education aimed at by Macaulay in his Minute on Indian Education 32). By adding: ""…When we joined up, we didn't have India on our minds: we wanted to be the sahibs and that's what we've become..."" (379), he points at the problem that the colonizer is divid- ing the colonized society for its own purposes.

However, Arjun's way of thinking has changed. He too begins to doubt about the correctness of his standpoint. In front of a superior he remembers the words, cited by this same superior, of the English gen- eral Munro ""…The spirit of independence will spring up in this army long before it is even thought of among the people ..."" (. 387, between what is called here "the people" and the Gandhian move- ment). But finally he himself joins the National Indian Army which in Burma was let by Aung San Suu Kyi's father Aung San. Shortly before his death he is confronted one more time with Dinu. He is fighting now desperately against the British army, still there remain doubts about his convictions when he says: " "Did we ever have a hope? ... We rebelled against an Empire that has shaped everything in our lives; colored everything in the world as we know it. It is a huge, indelible Colonialism, Literature and Identity（Jorissen）stain which has tainted all of us. We cannot destroy it without destroying ourselves. And that, I suppose, is where I am ..."" (446).

When Dinu tells him that Rajkumar and his granddaughter have been killed by Japanese soldiers, and when he asks him why he continues to fight even after the defeat of the Japanese army he argues: ""…You think I joined them. I didn't. I joined an Indian army that was fighting for an Indian cause. The war may be over for the Japanese — it isn't for us""(p.446) 33). At this

time even Dinu has his doubts about "his own absolute condemnation of them" (p. 447) [that is of men like Aung San who decided to fight against the British army]. Finally Arjun almost provokes his death which comes close to a kind of suicide. By an eye- witness it is reported: ""It was clear ... that he did not want to live"" (454).

In *The Glass Palace*, Amitav Ghosh specifically attempts to claim the history of certain individuals, and thereby of a group, that was dislocated in the wake of Burmese exodus in the last part of 19th century as a result of British imperialism. It presents a perplexing yet heartrending accounts of a family uprooted due to the complex sociological, political and historical factors beyond their comprehension and control, resulting in a distressing sense of loss, exile and the quest for identity and homeland. The novelist has tried to re-map the history of three nations in turmoil—Burma, India and Malaya—serving under the colonial regime, by interweaving various strands of narration into a unifying whole. In a way, the novel foregrounds the silenced and marginalized postcolonial subjects (the subalterns, in terms of victims of both time and history).

John Thieme has rightly described *The Glass Palace* as a 'family saga'. It is quite protracted and demanding in terms of involvement. The novel commences in the year 1885 in Mandalay with the introduction of a skilled eleven-year old orphan Rajkumar, one of the major characters of the novel. He has reached Mandalay accidentally as the sampan on which he works as a serving-boy has to be repaired in the port. His whole family has died of fever on their way to Burma. The last words of his dying mother were, 'Stay

alive,' she whispered. '*Beche Thako*, Rajkumar. Live, my Prince; hold on to your life'[1]. And this is what he precisely tries to do throughout the novel by devising out various strategies of survival.

Rajkumar's first acquaintance in Mandalay is Ma Chao, who is half-Indian and half-Chinese, in her mid-thirties, and runs a small food-stall. Rajkumar works as an errand boy in her stall. Rajkumar's second most important acquaintance in an alien land is Saya John Martins, the teacher and lover of Ma Chao, who is also a Christian and a Chinese contractor. He is a thoroughly experienced man in terms of travelling. Though he has mastered a good number of languages in the process, he lacks the sense of 'belongingness'. Rajkumar is further introduced to Matthew, the seven-year old son of Saya John, who is attending a reputed missionary school in Singapore. Saya John decides to take Rajkumar as an employee and both of them start trading in teak.

However, the arrival of Rajkumar in Mandalay is followed by the arrival of the British in no time. The British has overpowered the royal army of Burma and are in possession of most of the Burmese territories. In the thirty-year old 'Glass Palace', lives the twenty-seven year old Thebaw (1885-1916), King of Burma and Queen Supayalat. She is his supercilious and hardnosed chief companion. She has assassinated altogether seventy-nine contenders including the family members, who might protest against her husband's right to the throne, thereby ensuring her husband's Kingship. She is attended upon by maids who are orphans, and Dolly is the youngest and the most beautiful of them.

So, it is Supayalat who wields the real power and not the King, who is ignorant about the state affairs. In fact, he has not even stepped out of the palace in seven years and has never left Mandalay. Thebaw, the King of Burma and his royal army has to surrender to the British just in fourteen days. As the troops enter the city, Ma Chao and other ordinary subjects take this as an opportunity to enter the former non-trespassable palace compound, to loot the valuables and to rummage through it. In the chaos, Rajkumar encounters Dolly, the maid for the first time, and is so much enthralled by her dazzling beauty that he hands over the jewelled ivory box to her, which he intended to steal for himself. Colonel Sladen shoulders the duty of escorting the royal family into exile. They arrive first to Madras (now Chennai), and then eventually to Ratnagiri, as their permanent abode, which is hundred and twenty miles south of Bombay (now Mumbai). The allotted house is named "Outram House", which is situated on a hill overlooking the town. A local man named Sawant is at their service. With the passage of time, Dolly loses her virginity to Sawant.

In 1905, an Indian named Beni Prasad-Dey arrives in Ratnagiri as its new District Collector. By that time, the Burmese Royal family and a few of their attendants have somehow completed their twenty years of stay at the "Outram House". Beni Prasad-Dey holds a higher position in the British Civil Service, one of the rarest Indians to have been conferred with such a distinction. His wife Uma is fifteen years younger than him. They live in a house named the Residency. From here onwards, Uma becomes a life-long friend of Dolly, who by now has become a beautiful and a gracious young woman. Uma is profoundly worried about the future prospects of Dolly and the

royal family, particularly the princess, who are in the charge of Dolly. However, the first princess is discovered to bear the child of Sawant, and is to be married to him, and the second princess elopes with a commoner, and never to return.

In the meantime, Rajkumar makes friends with Doh Say in the inland Burmese town of Huay Zedi, situated on the Sittang River. Doh Say works as an elephant herder in the teak forests. Rajkumar is ambitious and determined enough to become wealthy. He devises a strategic plan to buy a teak forest from the assistance offered by Doh Say and money procured by importing workers from India for the British oil fields. After long years of dedication, resourcefulness and perseverance, Rajkumar establishes a profitable plantation. He masters the art of negotiation and is successful in signing a contract with the company that is building a new railroad into the various teak forests. He has also received financial assistance from Uma's uncle, D.P. Roy, who is a banker in Rangoon. This unanticipated association leads Rajkumar, a man at the age of thirty and rich, to decide to visit Ratnagiri in search of Dolly, his childhood love. He has never been able to forget Dolly and his brief childhood titillating encounter with her throughout these many years. The impressions of her beauty are etched in his mind forever. Now, we know that he is a curious combination of romantic feelings and hard-headed business skills. After a prolonged hesitation, Dolly is convinced of Rajkumar's genuine feelings of love for her. Their wedding ceremony is presided over by Uma's husband. This development, however, exasperate Queen Supayalat tremendously, as she expected Dolly to serve her forever, and she is now determined not to see Dolly's face ever again.

Amitav Ghosh has probably found it difficult to develop the character of Beni Prasad-Dey, perhaps due to the sheer number of characters in the novel. He is portrayed as somewhat unimpressive, incompetent and a weak officer of the British, as he is placed in an awkward situation by the pregnancy of the princess and the prospect of her marriage to the Indian Sawant. His tragic downfall is accelerated both by his demotion and departure of Uma from his life. Beni Prasad-Dey seems incapable to face this double reversal of fortunes, and consequently drowns himself in the sea. The sad demise of her husband is followed by the receipt of a compensatory substantial pension. Uma has now both freedom and money. She moves to Europe, and becomes a leader of the movement to free India. She visits the United States and collects funds for the cause and settles in New York, where Saya John's son, Matthew, is living. Matthew, meanwhile, has married an American girl named Elsa Hoffman. Uma later tries to persuade Matthew to visit his needy estranged father.

Dolly and Rajkumar lands at Saya Johns' house initially, and this is Dolly's first encounter with Burma after twenty-five long years of exile. Saya John and Rajkumar have also ventured into rubber plantation on Penang Island. Soon, they are visited by Matthew and Elsa, who christens / baptizes the rubber plantation as 'Morningside Rubber Estate'. Soon Dolly gives birth to her first son Neeladhari (nicknamed Neel), who has inherited some of the typical characteristics of Rajkumar, his father. Four years later, Dolly gives birth to her second son Dinanath (nicknamed Dinu), who resembles Dolly more in terms of mood and temperament. Dinu, unfortunately becomes a victim of polio, but is saved from its hazardous effects due to proper medical treatment. Dolly attends to Dinu

more as compared to Neel due to his frailty. However, in an unusual happening, dolly dreamt of the old King Thebaw, warning her to take the illness of Dinu seriously, resulting in his on-time medical treatment. Soon after Dinu's episode, Dolly learns about the death of the old King that very night when he appeared in her dream.

By 1929, Dinu is fourteen, Neel is eighteen, and Uma is fifty, who informs Dolly through a letter that she is leaving America and returning to Calcutta. Matthew and Elsa have become parents of a daughter named Alison and a son named Timmy. Dolly decides to take her two sons to Malaya and invites Uma to meet them at the rubber plantation at Morningside House. They departed from each other before twenty-three years in Rangoon. In the meantime, Uma has transformed herself into a significant political activist. Though Uma feels happy to visit her long-lost friend, she rather angrily deprecates Rajkumar as an accomplice in perpetrating Britain-engineered cruelty. She soon leaves for Calcutta (now Kolkata) after this tussle. She is received at the airport by her brother and his children named Arjun, Manju and Bela. To our greatest surprise, Uma's radical and non-conformist political thinking changes drastically in the new milieu. As the Burmese rebellion fails, Uma's thoughts turn to Gandhi's non-violent methods, and she voluntarily renders her services to the cause.

However, Uma's new mode of passive resistance is definitely contrasted by her nephew Arjun, who joins the Indian Military Academy in Dehra Dun and holds a significant identity there. Arjun's sister Manju desires to be an actress. As a matter of coincidence, she has to give her first audition in front of a producer, who is none other than

Neel, Dolly and Rajkumar's son. They immediately fall in love and are happily married soon. Meanwhile, Arjun is delighted to perceive the democratic spirit in the army. He is one of the very few Indians at the Academy. He is also tremendously influenced by another Indian named Hardayal, whose family can boast of a long tradition of military career in the British army. Despite this ancient connection with the British army, Hardayal has increasingly developed a sense of futility and restlessness in playing this role, and condemns the British for treating Indian soldiers as a mere plaything in their hands.

Meanwhile, the eruption of Second World War and the developing pneumonia of Rajkumar, forces him to make a fresh assessment of the situation, to take a renewed stock of situation regarding his business in Burma. He decides to sell his properties before the situation gets worsened. As a shrewd businessman, he decides to sell all his assets to finance the purchase of great quantities of timber: he is anticipating that the British and the Dutch will need to reinforce their defenses throughout the East. Dolly accuses him of war-profiteering. Alison receives the news of the sad demise of her parents, Matthew and Elsa, in a car accident in the Cameron Highlands. Meanwhile, Arjun's battalion is sent to Afghanistan, and it is there they learn about the mutinied Sikh unit of Bombay. Rebellion and doubt start to plague the minds of both Arjun and Hardayal, who are now full lieutenants.

Dinu, at the age of twenty-seven, is now interested in photography and arrives at Morningside House, where he makes friends with Alison. She is extremely grieved by the untimely death of her parents. However, love blossoms between Alison and Dinu. Simultaneously, Dinu comes to know that the servant Ilongo is his half-brother.

Arjun's battalion marches forward, and reaches Malay Peninsula via Singapore. Arjun is wounded, and is also deserted by most of his units. He is only aided by his batman Kishan Singh. However, in the atmosphere of Japanese attack and storm-drain, both of them have to hide themselves for a while. The next morning, they are safely out of the storm-drain and are happy to find Hardayal. But he has now joined hands or collaborated with Indian National Movement, whose members are now assisting Japanese for the time being against the mighty British. Even Arjun finally decides to join hands with Hardayal unit.

With the impending doom in the form Japanese attack, Alison, Dinu, Saya John, and Ilongo plan to escape Burma. On reaching the railway station, they are jolted to learn that only Europeans will be allowed to board the trains. This intense experience is enough to arouse the national political consciousness of Dinu, and he fights with the Indian officials on the meted injustice. In desperation, they return to the plantation. Dinu is successful in convincing Alison to leave by car with the elderly Saya John and promises to join them later in Singapore. After travelling some distance, they decide to sleep for a while. After waking up in morning, Alison doesn't find Saya John. She is surprised to see Saya John being questioned up ahead by Japanese soldiers. She fires in their direction. Consequently, they shoot Saya John immediately, and head towards her. But she commits suicide before they could catch her.

Meanwhile, Manju gives birth to a baby girl named Jaya in the time of extreme turmoil. They are soon informed by an Indian representative regarding the

approaching trouble, and they are asked to leave Burma that very evening. Neel has proved to be successful in handling the business transaction of his father, that is to say, he successfully sells his father's properties. This moment of celebration during the times of war is marked by the tragic death of Neel, when the elephants in the plantation get panicky due to the bombing nearby by the Japanese soldiers. The trees also get destroyed in the process. Thus, the pace with which Rajkumar has established his business and earned money, he looses it in no time. At the same time, he looses Neel. Manju, Dolly and Rajkumar join some thirty thousand refugees trying to cross the river in order to escape Burma. In the utter state of despair due to the loss of Neel, Manju drowns herself while crossing the river, leaving Dolly and Rajkumar all alone in this exodus. She had probably realized that Dolly and Rajkumar are individuals belonging to a distant era, and probably her little baby would learn better lessons of life from their ageing hands.

Dolly and Rajkumar settle down at Uma's flat for six years to come, whereas, Uma decides to locate Dinu in Rangoon. She, however, succeeds in locating Dinu, lives with him for a while, and decides to spend her remaining life in a nunnery. With the passage of time, Jaya, at the age of seventeen, marries a doctor ten years older to her. In 1996, she as a college professor is sent by her college to an art history conference at the University of Goa. Here she happens to meet a "pioneering photographer from the early years of the century", who is none other than her uncle Dinu. At the age of eighty-two, Dinu owns a photo studio named "The Glass Palace". Dinu conducts his classes much like those of Aung San Suu Kyi. Like her, he suffered confinement for three years by the Burmese dictatorial military authorities. His classes focus on aesthetics, but they also imply a philosophy with political ramifications.

Jaya learns that Dinu had left Malay soon after Alison's death and had escaped to Rangoon in June of 1942. He has gone in search of Arjun, but found him wounded and lying on his death-bed. Dinu married a girl named Ma Thin Thin Aye, who provided him with a shelter in 1942. Both of them were greatly inspired by listening to the lectures of Aung San Suu Kyi and developed a political consciousness. Jaya informs Dinu that both Dolly and Rajkumar had died within a few days of each other at the age of almost ninety.

The Glass Palace contemplates about the effects of history on the lives of individuals from a subordinated perspective. It also foregrounds the lives of socially, politically, economically and historically insignificant characters. Like Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines*, it does challenge the notion of boundaries, euro-centrism and the ill-effects of Western expansionism. This novel is partially based on the personal experiences of Amitav Ghosh's uncle, Jagat Chandra Dutta, who had been a timber merchant in Burma. In his 17 July 2000 interview with *Outlook*, Ghosh mentioned that his father's family had lived in Burma for several generations. Therefore, writing this novel is a way of re-claiming the personal history of his family for Amitav Ghosh. Amitav Ghosh has profoundly been interested in the history of Burma not only due to a personal urge to re-locate the history of his family but thereby to record a portion of history that might otherwise simply pass out of public record or won't remain accessible and audible to the world. Regarding the Long March (it was a massive military retreat undertaken by the Red Army of the Chinese Communist Party, the forerunner of the People's Liberation Army, to evade the pursuit of the Kuomintang KMT or

Chinese Nationalist Party) army, when Indians fled Burma fearing Japanese occupation, Ghosh told a reporter that:

> "…it's not been written about at all….It's strange – there were over half a million people on the Long March, over 400,000 of them Indian, and there is such a silence about it….There was no need for the Indian in Burma to flee when the Japanese approached – many Indians did stay back. It makes you realize the degree to which Indian felt themselves to be the sheep of the British; the delusions that governed their lives."[2]

In the beginning of the novel, we come across a universal statement by the narrator-author as a post-colonial critic:

> "This is how power is eclipsed: in a moment of vivid realism, between the waning of one fantasy of governance and its replacement by the next; in an instant when the world springs free of its mooring of dreams and reveal itself to be girdled in the pathways of survival and self-preservation."[3]

In the constant flux of larger historical events, it is the individual histories of the postcolonial subjects that endure massive shifts in their fate. Ultimately, some of them survive, while most of them succumb to anonymity. *The Glass Palace* is a 'virtuoso demonstration' of Amitav Ghosh's method of remembering the past, that is to say, not as an imperial chess game, but as biographies of otherwise unknown people. The application of

Subaltern Studies, and particularly, its approach of reading 'history from below' to this novel is significant in the sense that it reveals the survival strategies adopted by ordinary individuals, families and collective groups at times of violent historical movements. The question that lies at the heart of this novel is, 'Whose life should be counted as significant and whose not?' In this context, Subaltern Studies may be of great help in the sense that its primary focus has always been on the masses rather than on the elites.

As a victim of larger historical forces, the exiled King broods over his own fate and of his empire as a postcolonial critic. He ruminates:

> "The King raised his glasses and spotted several Indian faces, along the waterfront. What vast, what incomprehensible power, to move people in such huge numbers from one place to another—emperors, kings, farmers, dockworkers, soldiers, coolies, policemen. Why? Why this furious movement—people taken from one place to another, to pull rickshaws, to sit blind in exile?"

> And where would his own people go, now that they were a part of this empire? It wouldn't suit them, all this moving about. They were not a portable people, the Burmese; he knew this, very well, for himself. He had ever wanted to go anywhere. Yet here he was, on his way to India."[4]

Amitav Ghosh ponders over the issue of exile, not as a commonplace experience triggered in the wake of some larger historical event, but as an ultimate fate of powerless people, as an enigmatic and unfathomable problem in history. Though treacherous and wicked herself, Queen Supayalat hurls severe indictment as a colonial subject, when the British officials visit Outram House to investigate the princess' marriage to a commoner. She grumbles:

> "Yes, we who ruled the richest land in Asia are now reduced to this. This is what they have done to us, this is what they will do to all Burma. They took our kingdom, promising roads and railways and ports, but take 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. In our golden Burma where no one ever went hungry and no one was too poor to write and read, all that will remain is destitution and ignorance, famine and despair. We were the first to be imprisoned in the name of their progress; millions more will follow. This is what awaits us all: this is how we will all end—as prisoners, in shanty towns born of the plague. A hundred years hence you will read the indictment of Europe's greed in the difference between the Kingdom of Siam and the state of our own enslaved realm."[5]

Though Beni Prasad-Dey, the collector and husband of Uma, works for the British, he has a complete realization of the disparaging British policies based on the deprecating racial framework of exploitation, being implemented in the colonies. If Beni Prasad-Dey is reticent in his protest, Uma is under no onus to subdue her protest. After her husband's death, Uma registers her protest outspokenly. Though her mind is more or less conditioned by her husband's thoughts, Uma ultimately proves to be an independent, assertive thinker and leader. She not only questions the role of British, but also her husband's role in the British Empire. As a post-colonial critic, she concludes that her husband was more or less a mimic man, a messenger of the colonizer. She remembers:

> "There seemed never to be a moment when he was not haunted by the fear of being thought lacking by his British colleagues. And yet it seemed to be universally agreed that he was one of the most successful Indians of his generation; a model for his countrymen. Did this mean that one day all of India would become a shadow of what he had been? Millions of people trying to live their lives in conformity with incomprehensible rules? Better to be what Dolly had been: a woman who had no illusions about the nature of her condition; a prisoner who knew the exact dimensions of her cage and could look for contentment within those confines.(222)

Amitav Ghosh is not only challenging the disgusting polices of Britain through the character of Uma, but also the special affiliation of certain Indians to their colonial masters through the character of Beni Prasad-Dey. Uma, as a colonial subject and as a subaltern, envisions for herself a new and a meaningful role of a revolutionary. She would not like to see her descendants entering the new epoch as crippled and aping colonial subjects. Uma even goes to the extent of accusing and condemning Rajkumar of being neo-colonialist, an accomplice in the exploitative policies of the British. She shouts at him:

> "It's people like you who're responsible for this tragedy. Did you ever think of the consequences when you were transporting people here? What you and your kind have done is far worse than the worst deeds of the Europeans."(233)

Amitav Ghosh questions the arbitrariness of borders as well as debates the issue of loyalty to one's "true" identity mainly through the characters of Hardayal and most prominently Arjun. Hardayal asks Arjun:

> "'Well, didn't you ever think: this country whose safety, honour and welfare are to come first, always and every time—what is it? Where is this country? The fact is that you and I don't have a country—so where is this place whose safety, honour and welfare are to come first, always and every time? And why was it that when we took our oath it wasn't to a country but to the King Emperor—to defend the Empire?(123)

In the pre-colonial Burma, the military joins hands with the British, overpower King Thebaw, resulting in the loss of his political power. The military power of Burma withdraws its support and loyalty from the local master, and attaches it to the foreign one. Thus, the British Indian Army assists the British colonial rule in Burma to exercise their coercive power over Burma. In other words, the people of one colonized country functioning as accomplice in perpetrating gruesome violence over the other colonized country, and thereby favouring the colonial masters. It is ironical that soldiers like Arjun as subalterns (subordinate officer) in the British Indian Army were fighting neither to defend nor to extend the territory of India. They were simply facilitating the British policy of colonial expansion. It is through the character of Arjun that Amitav Ghosh raises the issue of identity, subalternity, colonialism and belongingness, most vocally. Arjun introspects about his position as an officer. Though he feels great pride in being accepted as an officer in the British army, he thinks for a moment about his own subordinated military assistant, his "batman" named Kishan Singh, and concludes that he has more in common with his lowly assistant than his colonial masters. For the first time, he feels that his comradeship with the British officers is superficial and hollow. There is a sudden realization in Arjun of his subordination and rupture from his colonial masters. He now listens more attentively to Hardayal when he complains to him:

> "It was strange to be sitting on one side of a battle line, knowing that you had to fight and knowing at the same time that it wasn't really your fight—knowing that whether you won or lost, neither the blame nor the credit

> would be yours. Knowing that you're risking everything to defend a way of life that pushes you to the sidelines. It's almost as if you're fighting against yourself. It's strange to be sitting in a trench, holding a gun and asking yourself: Who is this weapon really aimed at? Am I being tricked into pointing it at myself?... But when I was sitting in that trench, it was as if my heart and my hand had no connection—each seemed to belong to a different person. It was as if I wasn't really a human being—just a tool, an instrument. This is what I ask myself, Arjun: In what way do I become human again? How do I connect what I do with what I want, in my heart?(123)

Arjun is simply overwhelmed by the clear-headedness of Hardayal and his military subordinate Kishan Singh. They appear to have perceived a thorough understanding of their own insignificance, subordination, and marginalization in the face of larger historical forces. When Arjun decides to join Hardayal's "mutiny", he wonders:

> "Was this how a mutiny was sparked? In a moment of heedlessness, so that one became a stranger to the person one had been a moment before? Or was it the other way round? That this was when one recognized the stranger that one had always been to oneself; that all one's loyalties and beliefs had been misplaced?(122)

However, Arjun has a clear understanding of the imminent presence of Colonialism as being its conscious victim, though a former accomplice. He fully

comprehends the implications of the indelible marks etched on the psyche of the colonized due to the ruthless process of colonization. He says:

> "We rebelled against an Empire that has shaped everything in our lives; coloured everything in the world as we know it. It is a huge, indelible stain, which has tainted all of us. We cannot destroy it without destroying ourselves. And that, I suppose, is where I am…(213)

Colonialism, as a strategic exploitative policy, brought in its wake a systematic oppression of everything that was "native", and conform it to its expansionist movement. The major economic network of the British in the novel includes two significant resources—timber export in Burma and rubber plantation in Malay as well as human labourers. Colonization made both the resources an integral part of the trading culture in Burma and Malay. Thus, the process of commodification, transformation and haulage started in both the countries, which subsequently strengthened the economic basis or power of the imperial rulers. This was done with the false ideology that consumption of nature and the inhuman exploitation of labourers to any extent will lead to the amelioration of the economic standards of people, to a progressive life. However, this turned out to be a grossly fallacious ideology. The operation of economic power ultimately destroys the place where it operates, and also its social fabric, cultural and historical legacy, traditions and language. Burma is a supreme example of this outcome, as it has suffered the exploitative policies of ruthless dictators twice.

Simultaneously, it led to cultural crisis like uprootedness, fragmentation of identity, dislocation, large-scale migration, drastic changes in administration, and reconfigurations of political boundaries. In the process, the native becomes the 'lost soul', and faces the existential dilemma of being a partitioned subject. *The Glass Palace*, as a historical novel records this existential dilemma of the 'lost souls', who suffered an imposed exile, and whose voice got lost underneath the burden of larger historical forces with the passage of time. Amitav Ghosh has attempted to excavate either this deliberately subdued or lost or forgotten history, and thereby to foreground the voice of the bewildered immigrants, the subalterns to present their version of history.

Despite of the disintegration of families, women of this novel, unlike, the women of Rahi Masoom Reza's *A Village Divided* asserts themselves. Though they are forced to live a life of subordination due to the ruthless colonial rule, they gradually emerge as women of some substance. Though uprooted, dislocated, and marginalized, the women characters of this novel, especially Uma and Queen Supayalat, criticizes their colonial masters with a Caliban-like spirit. They are extremely critical of the monstrous expansionist policies of their colonial masters. However, all the characters of this novel suffer a common fate; that is to say, all of them are the victims of the inevitable discourse of colonial displacement. They are forced by the whirlpool of history to be driven from Burma to India, Malaya, Singapore, and back again. Almost all of them makes several transitions across national frontiers during their life-time, yet are their won destiny-makers; the creators of their own history. Though the novel is structured around the personal history of Rajkumar and the histories of three nations in turmoil, it also chronicles the histories of all the characters associated with either of the two.

The novel begins and ends with the two most important historical events that took place in the eventful history of Burma, namely, the smooth invasion of the British army on 14 November, 1885 and the sixth year of the house arrest of Aung San Suu Kyi (the opposition politician and general secretary of the National League for Democracy in Myanmar) under the generals in 1996. Within the framework of these two great historical events, Amitav Ghosh situates the imaginative histories of individuals based on the memories of an embittered history of disgrace. *The Glass Palace* is a profoundly researched presentation of the ill-effects and ruthlessness of colonialism, but from an anti-colonial perspective. Amitav Ghosh confesses in his 'Author's Notes':

> "I read hundreds of books, memoirs, travelogues, gazetteers, articles and notebooks, published and unpublished; I travelled thousands of miles, visiting and revisiting, so far as possible, all the settings and locations that figure in this novel; [and] I sought out scores of people in India, Malaysia, Myanmar and Thailand.(154)

What is so fascinating about *The Glass Palace* as a novel with its sweeping historical canvas is that, the 'Orient' or the 'colonized' or the 'subaltern' is given a voice of its 'own'. Its polyphonic narrative makes it a space of contesting historical realities, claiming equivalent legitimacy and authenticity as 'counter-narratives'. Such a novel becomes a mode of emancipation or redemption from the alluring realm of colonial language and history. Postcolonial narratives usually consist of the 'others'—those lives that are eradicated by wars or missed out in the 'grand narratives' of history. *The*

Glass Palace, as a novel stands out as a distinct achievement not in terms of representing new stylistic or thematic avenues, but because it superbly represents 'a historically genuine idyllic Burma' as it was once—the Burma of elephants, teak, pagodas; its metamorphosis coupled with the possibility of attaining the same ideal once again, despite of the present chaotic state of affairs in Myanmar.

As a masterpiece, this novel represents the recurrent themes that are found in almost all postcolonial novels—absurdity of wars, boundaries as 'shadow lines', colonization and its ill-effects, quest, dislocation, fragmentation or disintegration of identity, amalgamation, divided loyalties, the process of growing, exile, temporary settlements, etc. Looked at from the Subaltern perspective, this novel deals with the specific history of individuals, and thereby the collective histories of communities and nations in turmoil, rather than historiographic generalizations. Amitav Ghosh nevertheless succeeds in telling this forgotten history from below or from an alternative point of view. Such a novel as *The Glass Palace* can be categorized on the borderline territory between history and fiction. This novel deals with the history of losers and survivors, yet with the champions of humanity. It is a provisional world of constant meeting or gathering and separation. It is as Homi Bhabha puts:

> "Gathering of exiles and émigrés and refugees; "gathering" on the edge of 'foreign' cultures; gathering at the frontiers; gatherings in the ghettos or cafes of city centres; gathering in the half-life; half-light of foreign tongues, or in the uncanny fluency of another's

> language, gathering the signs of approval and acceptance, degrees, discourses, disciplines; gathering the memories of underdevelopment, of other worlds lived retroactively; gathering the past in a ritual of revival; gathering the present.(167)

Thus Amitav Ghosh's *The Glass Palace*, despite its confliciting inspirations, is able to amplify. It does so more through the vigor of the debates it conducts than the elegance of a literary art the Ghosh tries only halfheartedly to create and this novel spans vast temporal and spatial dimensions in which people shape and are shaped by larger forces without abandoning the threads of personal ambition.