



Transition In 1885: Transmission of History to Geography and Culture in Amitav Ghosh's *The Glass Palace* 2000

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Abstract: Amitav Ghosh's *The Glass Palace* 2000 reveals how imperial conquests alter not only history but also geography and culture by skillfully linking the collapse of the Konbaung dynasty in Burma in the year 1885 with greater alterations in colonial Southeast Asia. This paper investigates 1885 as a turning point in history and cultural realignment, when Burma became a British territory and a series of events began to spread throughout Malaya and India. According to this point of view, the novel becomes a place where history appears through individual and societal cultural memory and transformed into witnessed geography, which is represented by exile, migration, and redrawn borders. This research reveals how Ghosh maps imperial history across geographical displacements and cultural hybridity by following the paths of Rajkumar, Dolly, and Uma throughout colonial areas and the dislocation of the Burmese royal family. The novel uses its chronological framework and diverse narrative to explain how history, which was shattered in 1885, still affects identity, memory, and belonging now. Furthermore, the alteration of social structures, labour economies, and social connections echoes the colonial reorganization of landscapes, highlighting how Ghosh used fiction to challenge imperial legacy. This paper uses a postcolonial historical-geographical framework, employing theorists such as Edward Said and Homi Bhabha, to argue that *The Glass Palace* is more than just a historical novel, but a narrative cartography of colonialism's long shadow. It adds to broader concerns about how literature can serve as an instrument for reconstructing histories that cross national borders and static timelines. Finally, the novel portrays 1885 as a transformative junction where history flows into territory and culture, altering the boundaries of Southeast Asian modernity rather than simply an imperial takeover.

Keywords: Imperial, Colonialism, Migration, Border, Cultural, History, Alteration.

I. INTRODUCTION

The Glass Palace 2000 by Amitav Ghosh is a vast, transnational narrative that explores the connections of empire, displacement, identity, and memory as it moves across colonial Burma, India, and Malaya over a century. The British conquest of Burma in 1885, which not only signals the end of the Konbaung Dynasty but also the beginning of a significant shift in the sociopolitical and cultural landscape of Southeast Asia, sets the scene for the novel, which is set against the backdrop of historical events. The year 1885 serves as a crucial axis in the novel, around which histories are passed down, geographies are redrawn, and civilizations are ripped apart and rebuilt. This turning point of King Thibaw's forcible dethronement and exile marks the entry of imperial modernity into established power and meaning structures and is the basis for the novel's examination of the interconnectedness of geography, history, and culture. The historical rupture of 1885 is not limited to political turmoil it sets off a multi-scalar reorientation of lives, spaces, and epistemologies. Ghosh weaves his story from a complex tapestry of human histories that are intricately tied to the larger geopolitical currents of colonial expansion. Rajkumar, Dolly, Uma, and other individuals serve as conduits for Ghosh's dramatic portrayal of the long-term consequences of imperial interference. His interest here is less in the lives of individual Englishmen than in the tortured and divided creatures they left behind them. All he is doing, he might say with justice, is rounding out a picture dominated by British accounts, history in this case having been written mainly by the departing losers. (Yadav 1) Their cross-border trips, both physical and psychological, demonstrate how colonialism redefined not just territorial boundaries, but also cultural identities and social hierarchy.

This transfer of history across place and generations emphasizes the novel's basic thesis: history is a lived, movable, and frequently contested reality rather than just a chronological archive. History migrates in *The Glass Palace*, passing through landscapes of displacement, exile, and labour migration before settling into geographies changed by colonial capitalism and conflict. Ghosh's depiction of colonial Burma and British India as interrelated sites of cultural encounter and economic exploitation undermines monolithic historical narratives by emphasizing the fluidity and hybridity that defined colonial modernity. The fall of Mandalay and the subsequent exile of the royal family to Ratnagiri in western India represent both a literal and symbolic dislocation in which cultural memory is transported across borders, reshaped by new contexts, and passed down through oral histories, letters, and intergenerational storytelling. Though the form of the novel is highly traditional, the one theme giving the huge saga a sense of shape and direction is its insistent, highly contemporary attack on empire and the lost souls left behind it. It's as if a revisionist wolf were dressed in imperialist clothing. (Yadav 2) This research paper examines the 1885 shift in *The Glass Palace* as a narrative approach for transmitting history into landscape and culture. It contends that Ghosh uses the colonial period not just as a historical setting, but also as a conceptual instrument for interrogating imperial legacies particularly how empire inscribed itself on the landscapes and awareness of its subjects. Drawing on postcolonial theory and cultural geography, the study will investigate how the novel reframes history through the lenses of location and identity, showing the long-term effects of colonial displacement and transnational mobility on cultural memory and belonging. In doing so, this paper places *The Glass Palace* within broader postcolonial debates about historiography, spatiality, and the politics of memory. It highlights how the novel

defies sequential historical narratives by providing a physically and culturally scattered image of history, in which the echoes of 1885 continue to echo across the lives and landscapes resulting from empire. subsequently this paper aims to demonstrate how Ghosh's literary cartography creates an alternative archive one in which history, geography, and culture come together to define a complex, multi-vocal narrative of colonial modernity and its consequences. The real heart of the book and its dramatic centerpiece, lies in the classic imperial setting of World War II, in Burma and Malaya here everything that is powerful in Ghosh's somewhat aerial perspective, and everything that is shaky, comes to the fore. (Yadav 2) This paper investigates the year 1885 as a symbolic and historical transition period for *The Glass Palace*, a time when identity, space, and sovereignty all altered. It explores the ways in which Ghosh uses cultural rearticulations and geographical descriptions to illustrate historical events.

II.HISTORICAL BACKDROP: 1885 AND COLONIAL INTERVENTION

One pertinent historical event that the story addresses on is the downfall of the Konbaung dynasty in the year 1885 as an outcome of the Third Anglo-Burmese War. The British invasion of Upper Burma was a cultural and geographic redefinition in addition to a military conquest. It signaled the end of Burma's independence and the start of Southeast Asia's imperial navigation. Ghosh conveys the larger picture with particular vividness. We see Christmas trees in the department stores of Rangoon whose branches are “whitened with a frosting of Cuticura talcum powder,” and as the Japanese move through Malaya, we follow great crowds of people running for evacuation trains only to find that all the cars are reserved for Europeans. “The road's embankment was dotted with parked vehicles. Families could be seen to be sleeping in their cars, snatching a little rest before daylight. At intervals one-and-a-half-ton military trucks came barreling down the highway, heading south.” (Yadav 3) With historical resonances resulting that span the length of the narrative, Ghosh portrays this point as the beginning of a cultural departure. Ghosh portrays the invasion as a living history that disintegrates people and reorients their identities, rather than just a background, through characters like Rajkumar, Dolly, and King Thebaw. A classic instance of the geographical restructuring brought about by colonialism is the exile of the Burmese royal family to Ratnagiri, India. We may observe how history is integrated into geography and culture as the novel transforms this historical trauma into a story of transformation and relocation.

III.GEOGRAPHY AS HISTORICAL PALIMPSEST

The novel's representation of geography as its historical palimpsest is among its notable highlights. Mandalay, Ratnagiri, Rangoon, and Malaya are all reimagined by Ghosh as places where history is written and rewritten. Shifting becomes an important motif in colonial and postcolonial times and Amitav Ghosh's *The Glass Palace* is a saga of movement spanning three generations. Ghosh being a contributor to travel writing gives a detailed picture of travelling across geography and travelling inside the recesses of mind. The novel straddles the space of countries like India, Burma, Malay and the characters emerging and growing out of this movement. *The Glass Palace* can be read as contextualizing history of Burma, problematizing the generations of two families, a travelogue and a forgotten Buddhist territory. It encompasses the colonial rule

of British in Anglo-Burmese wars of 1885. It is a reconstruction of the recent history. We encounter the political, social and cultural turmoil of the natives of India and Burma. (Deb 2) The characters' movements throughout these regions clearly demonstrate how borders and cultural identities were determined by colonial control. For example, Burma's teak woods are cultural landscapes that contain indigenous knowledge and imperial aspirations in addition to having been economic resources. These landscapes serve to demonstrate how geography becomes interconnected with economic history through Rajkumar's journey from a labourer to a timber mogul. at the same time, the palace at Ratnagiri transformed into an embodiment of cultural displacement and as an archive of memories. The turbulent cultural crossovers, conflicts, histories and nations as a metaphor for loss make up the central concern of Ghosh. Rajkumar, the protagonist of the novel, epitomizes the lost, exiled and homeless native whose family is further scattered in the course of the novel through the post imperialist dislocation in various parts of the Asian continent. Ghosh illustrates historical processes with geographic descriptions. (Nithyasekar and Rajesh 1) The novel's cartographic imagination correlates with a dynamic, lived perspective on space in lieu of the static depictions found on colonial maps. Bertrand Westphal's idea of geocriticism, which views geography as a narrative construct influenced by historical and cultural factors, aligns with this.

In *The Glass Palace*, history is transmitted on through cultural memory and identity in addition to actual occurrences. The characters cultural practices and self-perceptions are shaped by their histories, which they carry with them throughout places. The story emphasizes how memory helps maintain cultural continuity in the face of geographic displacement. Dolly is a symbol of maintaining cultural identity in the face of political turmoil because she looks after the exiled royal family. Her journey from palace maid to Rajkumar's spouse highlights how political and personal histories merge together. Uma Dey is a reformer and nationalist who acts as a bridge between Burmese history and Indian anti-colonialism. Her record of entries and letters are abstract narratives that highlight alternate forms of recollection and challenge colonial historiography. The Royal Family and the provinces of Burma are seized upon by the British. Many Indians lived there: the prince had claimed that there were more Indians than Burmese in Rangoon. The British had brought them there, to work in the dock and mills, to pull rickshaws, and empty the latrines. Apparently, they couldn't find local people to do these jobs. And indeed, why would the Burmese do that kind of work? In Burma no one ever starved, everyone knew how to read and write, and land was to be had for the asking: why should they pull rickshaws and carry nightsoil? (Ghosh 49-50) As a result, Ghosh constructs a multilayered story in which personal recollections function as opposing histories to the imperial archives. These memories offer a more complex view of identity as historically and geographically constructed, challenging the simplistic depictions of colonial past.

IV. HISTORIOGRAPHIC METAFICTION AND NARRATIVE STRATEGIES

Ghosh undermines the integrity and authenticity of historical accounts by using historiographic narrative. He blurs the line between history and fiction by amalgamating fictitious characters with actual historical people and events. True to an Amitav Ghosh novel, *The Glass Palace* contains a proliferation of characters which includes the privileged as well as the subaltern. The royal family includes Thebaw, Queen Supayalat, Burmese princesses and commoners like Dolly, Rajkumar, Saya John and Uma are united ironically by the gales of colonial displacement. (Nithyasekar and Rajesh 2) Ghosh is able to offer alternate historiographies and challenge the colonial creation of history through the use of this storytelling technique. This metafictional strategy is strengthened by the use of time shifts and different narrative perspectives. Readers are urged to consider history as a patchwork of experiences, interpretations, and memories rather than as a straight line of events. The fractured character of postcolonial identity and history, where the past and present are constantly negotiated, is apparent in the novel's structure. Another theme which forms an inseparable part of a post-colonial narrative is the resistance to and struggle against imperialism. Apart from the depiction of nationalism through the character of Uma, is the evocative presentation of another more difficult and more consequential struggle of the Indian officers and soldiers serving in the British army. (Nithyasekhar and Rajesh 4) In justification to the above citation here are few lines from the novel itself. "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?" (Ghosh 330) The internalized racism toward the Indian soldier creates a dynamic where the meaning of colonial life destroys the soldier's character. Hardy begins to see his "job" working as a soldier as internally conflicting and psychologically suicidal. (Gandhi 26) Ghosh constructs a multi-layered story which conveys the complexity of historical fact through the use of intertextual references, archival records, and oral narratives. Linda Hutcheon's idea of historiographic metafiction, which emphasizes the narrative and ideological production of history, is consistent with this method.

V. TRANSNATIONALISM AND THE CULTURAL GEOGRAPHY OF EMPIRE

Transnational by nature, *The Glass Palace* presents the colonial empire as a web of interconnected regions and civilizations. Characters travels through Burma, India, and Malaya show the cultural geography of empire, where identities are moulded by imperial circuits rather than being limited to nation states. Ghosh draws attention to the colonial subject's hybridity and the elasticity of cultural boundaries. Different aspects of transnational identity are represented by Uma's political activism, Arjun's military career, and Rajkumar's business endeavours in Malaya. Rajkumar, initially a subaltern comes out as a true transnational post-colonial subject firstly by being a Kalaa, a foreigner in alien territory, then by being subjected to the colonization of a more severe kind in participating in the great national upheaval that the British occupation of Burma entails, followed by another turbulent experience in imperial India and his foray into Malayan Forest resources. He inhabits a truly borderless postcolonial space beyond the interstices of race, class and nation in which his life is enmeshed. The hybrid nature of the colonized subaltern who evolves himself into an affluent businessman and comes to resemble the colonizers is revealed through the character of Rajkumar, who graduates from a petty immigrant lad, through his apprenticeship as luga lei under Saya John, to a merchant who is revealed in

the timber trading circles of Burma. (Nithyasekar and Rajesh 2) These pathways show how colonial subjects mixed numerous cultural attachments and ties. The dramatic conflation of cultures and nationalities is evident at the very outset when the eleven years old Rajkumar witnesses the booming of English cannons and the British invasion of the Burmese Royal Palace in Mandalay. (Nithyasekar and Rajesh 1) with reference to the above statement I would like to quote few lines from the novel *The Glass Palace* “English soldiers were marching towards the city ... Panic struck the market. People began to run and jostle. Rajkumar managed to push his way through the crowd... He could not see far: a cloud of dust hung over the road, drummed up by thousands of racing feet... Rajkumar was swept along in the direction of river. As he ran, he became aware of a ripple in the ground beneath him, a kind of drumbeat in the earth, a rhythmic tremor that travelled up his spine through the soles of his feet. The people in front of him scattered and parted ... Suddenly he was in the front of rank of the crowd, looking directly at two English soldiers mounted on the horses.” (Ghosh 4) Thus, by highlighting intercultural relationships and common histories, the novel challenges nationalist historiographies. The study of *The Glass Palace* focuses on notions such as cultural Integration and hybridity. It is a historical fiction that expresses hybridity through characters who adapt to a mixture of cultures. The novel deals with hybridity due to colonialism and its effects on human lives. Due to colonialism the characters, the events, and the countries involved are affected (Nayana and Manjula 7) It acknowledges the interdependence of colonial experiences and offers a cosmopolitan concept of identity that cuts across national borders.

VI.CONCLUSION

The Glass Palace by Amitav Ghosh transforms the real-life catastrophe of the year 1885 into a story about a shift in geography and culture. Ghosh offers a more dynamic and inclusive view of the past by redefining history as a geographical and cultural experience, challenging traditional historiographies. The book shows that history is a lived experience that both shapes and is shaped by geography and culture, rather than just a series of occurrences. *The Glass Palace* is a literary palimpsest that communicates and retains cultural memory across time and space because of its rich geographic information, complex narrative structure, and diverse characters. While doing this, it reinterprets historical fiction's place in postcolonial literature and establishes it as an essential tool for redefining geography, history, and identity. This research finds out the transition and transmission of characters in the novel be it the cultural mixing or the identity crises which in broader sense implies to the then contemporary in totality. Through memories of each individual, Amitav Ghosh illuminates a dynamic, yet actively cannibalistic and self-destructive, Burmese-Indian identity. (Gandhi 29) As in result the event of 1885 become history which altered the way of characters in culture and geography by a great transition. Ghosh uses rich narrative detail and complex character arcs to show how the British invasion of Burma triggered alterations in geographical boundaries, cultural identities, and personal destinies. This shift emphasizes the interconnectedness of imperial history, spatial displacement, and cultural reconfiguration, underscoring Ghosh's broader remark on colonial legacy. By incorporating history into his characters' daily lives, Ghosh not only memorializes a pivotal historical moment, but also redefines how such transitions are portrayed and experienced.

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