

# **AMITAV GHOSH : A POST COLONIAL WRITER**

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## **Chapter 1**

### **Amitav Ghosh & Colonial India**

In Post Colonial world, among the post colonial writers Amitav Ghosh is very prominent. His books contain either post colonial scenario or the pre-colonial and colonial scenario. He is an Indian writer and India was ruled by the British for two hundred years. Amitav Ghosh creates vivid images in his books where readers can easily enter into that world of exquisite imagery. Before moving further let us check a short biography of this writer:

"I always dreamt of becoming a writer"

Amitav Ghosh

Amitav Ghosh was born in Calcutta, a city which he regards as a constant that runs through all his work. His father was a Lieutenant-Colonel in the army, whose assignments meant that during his youth Ghosh spent time in Sri Lanka, Iran and East Pakistan (later Bangladesh), while being based at boarding school in India. Much of his writing focuses on families. One branch of his own family lived in Burma (Myanmar), a connection which he has traced, in fictional form, in *The Glass Palace* (2000), particularly drawing on the experience of his uncle, the timber-merchant Jagat Chandra Dutta.

Ghosh attended Doon School in Dehra Dun and one of New Delhi's most illustrious educational institutions, St. Stephen's College, during a period which he has seen as characterized by a nationalist self-confidence that evaporated just a few years later. Several of his fellow-students later achieved prominence as novelists or as figures in the Subaltern Studies movement. After leaving St. Stephen's with a B.A. in History in 1976, he obtained an M.A. in Sociology from the University of Delhi in 1978. He went to St. Edmund Hall, Oxford to do postgraduate work and in 1979 obtained a diploma in social anthropology, while also spending



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time in Tunis learning Arabic. In 1980 he went to Egypt to do fieldwork for his doctoral research under the auspices of the Faculty of Arts, University of Alexandria. He was awarded his Oxford D. Phil. in Social Anthropology for his thesis on "Kinship in Relation to the Economic and Social Organization of an Egyptian Village Community" in 1981. His later ethnographical traveller's tale, *In An Antique Land* (1992), in which the central figure is a researcher who has obvious affinities with Ghosh, can be read as a companion-piece to the thesis.

Ghosh has lived in Delhi, done fieldwork in Cambodia and Burma and written for a wide range of publications. He has held academic positions at a number of universities, including Delhi University, Columbia University and Queens College of the City University of New York, where he is Distinguished Professor. His writing has received numerous awards. These include a Prix Medicis Etranger for *The Circle of Reason* (1986), the Sahitya Akademi Award for *The Shadow Lines* (1988), the Arthur C. Clarke Prize for science fiction for *The Calcutta Chromosome* (1996), the Pushcart Prize (an award given for stories, poems and essays published in a literary magazine in the U.S) for his essay, "The March of the Novel through History: My Father's Bookcase" and the Grand Prize for Fiction at the Frankfurt International e-Book Awards for *The Glass Palace*. Controversially, he declined the best book award for the Eurasian region of the Commonwealth Writers Prize for *The Glass Palace*, on the grounds that he was unaware that his publishers had entered the book for this Prize and objected to the classification of "Commonwealth Literature". Ghosh lives in New York with his wife, Deborah Baker, author of *In Extremis: The Life of Laura Riding* (1993) and a senior editor at Little Brown and Co., and his children Leela and Nayan.

There is a moment in *In An Antique Land* when the narrator-persona, a figure who bears an obvious resemblance to Ghosh himself, is struck by an untypical remark made by one of the

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Egyptian villagers because it represents an attempt to penetrate his imagination, which he sees as analogous to his own method of analysing the lives of the villagers. Such an attempt at imaginative empathy characterizes all Ghosh's writing to date and seems to be the product of a humanist concern to transcend culturally constructed differences. Nevertheless, there are common connections between several of his major interests and the concerns of postcolonial theorists who take a constructive view of culture. Like Edward Said, Ghosh draws attention to the artificiality of the East-West binaries of Orientalism.

This is all about Amitav Ghosh and lets move to Colonial India. I have brought the colonial part of India because during colonization Indian people were become a hybrid product and later they became habituated by the western culture. Amitav Ghosh also a product of hybridization. Now let us see what post colonialism is--

“Post colonialism – postcolonial literature and theory – is concerned with the situation of former subject nations and cultures whose histories have been irremediably altered by the experience of colonialism. Post colonialism looks critically an imperialism and its legacy and seeks to undo the ideologies that underpin and justify imperialists practices. Post colonial writers also works to reclaim the past, because their own histories were often erased or discredited under imperialism, and to understand their own culture and personal identities and chart their own futures, on their own terms rather than the terms superimposed on them by imperialist ideology and practice”.

*(The Empire Writes Back)*



So, postcolonial literature reflects the effects of colonialism. Through the word *post* we can see that it means the end of the formal colonial rule. If we articulate the word colonization, our mind will first remember the word British and by uttering the word the post colonization we readily look at the world created after the British colonization. Sometimes postcolonial literature questions the importance and relevance of Britishness and Englishness. Perhaps the prominence of post-colonial literature reflects the changing aspects of the British nature itself, which is now called in many cases, transnational literature.

The situation started when British conquered different continents by using different colonial tools. British colonization is a grand process because it took a long time to establish. The British Empire was, at one time, referred to as "the empire on which the sun never sets". Among the British colonies, India was of tremendous importance. British colonizers started to execute the process of colonization in India initially through trade and commerce. But the British colonization got its motion when Robert Clive won the *Battle of Plassey* by defeating the Nawab of Bengal, Siraj Ud Daulah, on 23 June 1757. This victory established East India Company as a military, administrative and commercial power in Bengal for the first time.

With the decline of the Mughal Empire and for the conflict among the local states of India, the British colonizers got the opportunities to gain the control of India as a colony. This victory, which resulted in the conquest of Bengal, established the British East India Company as both a military and commercial power. This event is widely regarded as the beginning of British rule in India. The wealth acquired from the Bengal treasury allowed the Company to strengthen its military might significantly. This army (comprised mostly of Indian soldiers, called *sepoys*, and led by British officers) conquered most of India's territorial and political domains by the mid 19th century and thus the Company's territories were substantially argued.



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The Company fought many wars with local Indian rulers during its conquest of India, the most difficult being the four Anglo-Mysore Wars (between 1766 and 1799) against the South Indian Kingdom of Mysore ruled by Hyder Ali, and later his son Tipu Sultan (The Tiger of Mysore) who developed the use of rockets in warfare. Mysore was only defeated in the Fourth Anglo-Mysore War by the combined forces of Britain and of Mysore's neighbours, for which Hyder Ali and especially Tipu Sultan are remembered in India as legendary rulers. There were, however, a number of other states which the Company could not conquer through military might. Most of these states were in the North. Here the Company intervened through threats and diplomacy and prevented the local rulers from putting up a united struggle against the British rule. By the 1850's the Company ruled over most of the Indian subcontinent and as a result, then it began to function more as a nation and less as a trading institution.

The Company's rule effectively came to an end exactly a century after its victory at Plassey. The Indian Mutiny of 1857 occurred when the Company's Indian *sepoys* rebelled against their British commanders, likely because of political unrest that was triggered by several political events. One such event that surely seemed trivial to the Company at the time, but it turned out to have dire consequences, was the Company's introduction of the *Pattern 1853 Enfield* rifle. Its gunpowder containing paper cartridges were claimed to be lubricated with animal fat and had to be bitten open before the powder was poured into the muzzle. Eating cow or pig fat was forbidden for religious reasons for the vast majority of the soldiers. Beef products were forbidden for the Hindu majority, and likewise, pork for the large Muslim minority.

In the past, Indians had feuded as much with other Indians as they did with the British. This has greatly aided the British in their conquest, for example, during The Battle of Plassey in which they benefitted from the defection of the opposing army commander. But in 1857, the natives of India actually turned against the East India Company in a body, and this "Mutiny" eventually brought about the end of the Company's rule in India. And although the Indians had

achieved a great victory through common purpose in spite of sectional differences, their immediate situation turned for worse.

Although Company and Enfield representatives insisted that neither cow nor pig fat was being used, the rumour persisted and many sepoy refused to follow orders involving the use of the weapons using those particular cartridges. Indian sepoy *Mangal Pandey* was hanged as a punishment for having attacked and injured British superiors at the introduction of the rifle. All these happened at a time when Indians had come to resent decades of British rule under which they felt like second class citizens; exploited and seen as incapable of Home Rule.

The Company's failure to demonstrate effective control over its conquered Indian territories caused British financial and political entities to become uneasy about the security of their interests in India as well as for the future of the Empire. By 1857, India was a tremendously large part of the Empire's economy. The disaster of the Mutiny in particular had a huge influence on the Crown's policy regarding the most effective way to govern India. As a result, the Crown and British government assumed direct rule over the Indian sub-continent for 90 years following the dissolution of the Company. This period of direct rule in India is referred to as the *The Raj* during which the nations now known as *India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Myanmar* were collectively known as *British India*.

During colonization there were writers who had observed very closely the British domination. Among these writers we can name, *Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao, and R.K. Narayan*. They are the pre-independent Indian writers of British India. They expressed their opinion about the British domination from different perspectives. There was a concept established by the British, which basically suggested that the West is Superior and East is Inferior. When a western writer writes about India he writes from a colonizer's point of view but a writer from the East



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doesn't do this. So the Western attitude towards India can be summarized in Macaulay's writing in the book *Post-Colonial Literature* by Christopher O'Reilly:

"Indian in blood and color but English in taste, in opinion and in intellect"

This is what the British wanted from India, a willing slave, who would understand the master's viewpoint and follow without question. However, many of the Indian English writings portray both colonizer and colonized cultures, most prominently their two common religions, Hinduism and Islam. When they write from broader perspectives, they give deep emphasize on their cultural tradition.

Indian English in today's world is truly different from the English of the native English speakers. Indian English is interesting and also complex because it is influenced by the thoughts, philosophy and even the dialects of the sub-continent. English has been first adopted and then adapted by the Indian writers for their own purposes. Now it has become their medium of presenting their own culture and tradition.

The British dominated India and apart from domination they had infiltrated the Indian culture with their own. In India the British established the English education system. Their literary materials were taken to be the hallmark of culture. They taught their own history and culture. Christopher O'Reilly mentions the writer Mulk Raj Anand in his book *Post-Colonial Literature*, who asked,

"Renaissance is the cue for all human passion, the freedom to grow, ever to higher consciousness, 'How would you express this in your words? How might those sentiments reflect the broader developments of the time?'"



The same book records Raja Rao saying,

“The telling has not been easy. One has to convey in a language that is not one's own the spirit that is one's own. One has to convey the various shades and omissions of a certain thought – movement that looks maltreated in an alien language...we cannot write like the English. We should not. ...Our method of expression has to therefore be a dialect which will sometimes prove to be as a distinctive or colorful as the Irish or American ... the tempo of Indian life must be infused into our English expression.”

Today's Indian English is truly Indian English. The writers of India do not follow the ways of the British English writing.

Then there are writers who emerged after the colonial situation. They are basically called the post-colonial writers. Notable among them are Salman Rusdie, Anita Desai, Arundhuti Roy and Amitav Ghosh. Their writings do not directly discuss postcolonial issues. For example, Amitav Ghosh writes in the style of travel writing. His novels attempt to present the colonial, pre colonial and postcolonial worlds through the eyes of an objective narrator.

I have chosen his two novels for my paper and these two books are *In an Antique Land* (1993) and *The Glass Palace* (2000). Discovering continuities between the past and the present, *In an Antique Land* is a traveller's insightful narration of understanding multicultural relations beyond time and social structures set by Western theorists. The writer's experiences in the distant villages and towns in the Nile Delta and his reconstruction of the lives of a Jewish trader and his Indian slave in the eleventh century from documents from the Cairo Geniza lie at the center of this novel in the shape of a traveller's book. It deals with a lot of history and shows

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how like most of the colonized nations, the people of Egypt too have lost much of their cultural inheritance. The writer too, feels guilty because he has learnt to use Western theories and equipment to uncover a history that is part of his own heritage. *The Glass Palace*, Amitav Ghosh's recent novel, is set primarily in Burma and India and presents the evolving history of those regions before and during the fraught years of the Second World War and India's struggle for independence. It follows the sad demise of the Burmese Royal family at the advent of the British Empire, and shows how the lives of ordinary people rolled on under the circumstances. Ghosh also skillfully depicts the foreigners, especially the Indians, taking advantage of the situation with the teak industry created by the British. The most curious aspect of both of these novels is that even though the author makes good use of Western methods of uncovering history, not one of his principal characters is a European. His perspective is always the viewpoint of a subaltern that tries to understand, react and arrange the situation according to his understanding.

## Chapter 2

### In an Antique Land

*In An Antique Land* is the story of Amitav Ghosh's decade of intimacy with the village community. Mixing conversation and research, imagination and scholarship, it is also a charged, eccentric history of the special relationship between two countries, Egypt and India, through nearly ten centuries of parochialism and sympathy, narrow-mindedness and affection.

In an interview about *In an Antique Land* Amitav Ghosh said,

"No this time I am not writing a novel. Not even sociology, history or bells-letters based on historical research. My new book cannot be described as any one of these. It's a strange sort of work. Within the parameters of history, I have tried to capture a story, a narrative, without attempting to write a historical novel. You may say, as a writer, I have ventured on a technical innovation." (from the book *The Novels of Amitav Ghosh* by R.K. Dhawan)

It is the technical novelty as well as the unique art construction that makes the book a distinctive work. This book has been divided into four sections, "*Lataifa*", "*Nashawy*", "*Mangalore*" and "*Going Back*". It begins with "*Prologue*" and ends with "*Epilogue*". In "*Lataifa*" there is an introduction of historical facts about the "*Egyptian Babilon*" and a description of Ben Azra's Synagogue and its Geniza in Cairo. In "*Nashawy*" we find the historical documentation of the authors childhood in post-partition Dhaka. In "*Mangalore*" we see that the story of Ibn Batuta, the folk life of Tulundua, the history of Tulu language and culture.



There are three parallel stories in *In An Antique Land*. First, the story of Jewish Merchant Abraham Ben Yiju who came from Aden to Mangalore, for trade eight hundred years ago with his Indian slave Bomma. Secondly, the story of modern Egypt that Amitav Ghosh relates from first hand experience in two Egyptian villages. Thirdly, search of Amitav Ghosh's story: his search for the Antique world of Ben Yiju and his slave. The three stories are interrelated and from an intricate texture makes the conscious reader alert. One has to pause and ponder which level of the narrative cut as the functional devise.

The major source of the book's distinction lies, perhaps in its inherent theme, and the origin of the theme can be traced to the deeper layers of history and civilization. The author's perception of the basic character of man and his elemental feelings and emotion has added an extra dimension to the book. We see on one side there is an antique civilization of the twelfth century and on the other, there is an account of the fast changing twentieth century world, and also there is a bridgeable gulf between these two. But the accounts of these two completely different worlds reflect some attitudes and behavioral patterns which are identical. They reveal some human relationships that wear away the distance between the middle age and the modern age, between antiquity and modernity and that remain unchanged in the eternal tension between the old and the new.

The historical narrative of "*In An Antique Land*" centres round *Abraham Ben Yiju* and his Indian slave named *Bomma*. It is not easy to present the facts of history in a narrative vein. But, like a master craftsman Amitav Ghosh has intermingled history and narrative with a rare craftsmanship in the story of Ben Yiju. The task was simply exquisite like arranging the world materials in historical sequence and building up the complete account of twelfth century out of

the fragmentary documents. Characters and events are viewed from the perspective of the historical research and that makes the narratives appear a truthful account.

Although at few places Amitav Ghosh had to have resources for imagination to fill in certain gaps, he remains more or less faithful to the available materials. He did not sacrifice historical authenticity to the claim of fiction. The most intriguing part of the Ben Yiju's story is the relationship with his slave of MS.H 6. The slave Bomma gradually appears in the letters written to and by Ben Yiju. Amitav Ghosh's search for the origin of the slave provides the readers with a wonderful study in social anthropology and a valuable "insight into the uses of history". The story will take back to an antiquated world in the middle age when religious, social and geographical divisions had spread over a wide area in the middle east and the Indian subcontinent and it made the crossing of the paths of the Jewish merchant and his hindu slave possible. It is a strange and a colorful world presented in the style of a traveller's tale. "CAIRO IS EGYPT'S own metaphor for itself"(32).

It is in the Egyptian remote place that Amitav Ghosh sought to retrieve the antique civilization. His guides in the village were his neighbors Abu Ali, his fat and gargantuan landlord, and Sheikh Musa, the gentle and good humored village elder, Jabir, the son of Ali's cousin, Amm Taha, Amitav Ghosh's caretaker in Nashawy who had a rare skill, the self-reliant Zaghloul, the superstitious weaver who is very fond of stories.

In *In An Antique Land*, Ghosh describes his historical research. This book contains lively narrative of his travels between Egypt and India. The significance of these two countries here, is that both can be considered *postcolonial*, and although they might be considered 'Third World' today, they are both 'antique lands'. So they have been home to very advanced civilizations in their long histories. In this journey, Ghosh retraces ancient trade routes between India and the



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Middle East, and calls to mind travels that occurred outside the European history of travel. In an interview with BBC Ghosh said,

“Indian merchants and traders have always been travelling, but the difference between that sort of globalisation and the globalisation that we see today, is that today's is a globalisation of capital. This is a sort of managed travel that we see, it is basically white westerners who get to travel. If you were to experience travel from my perspective you would know that it is a constant bother going to airports because I am Indian.”

Unlike much of the English travel writing we have studied, this is not an account of the world through European eyes. Ghosh does not occupy a privileged position. As an Indian, both Egyptians and Indians respond to him as one who might share a similar cultural background, and whose countries have built up historical allegiances. Ghosh is introduced by his Egyptian host as a

“student from India...a guest who had come to Egypt to do research. It was their duty to welcome me into their midst and make me feel at home because of the long traditions of friendship between India and Egypt. Our countries were very similar, for India like Egypt, was largely an agricultural nation and the majority of its people lived in villages, like the Egyptian fellaheen, and ploughed their land with cattle. Our countries were poor, for they had been ransacked by imperialists, and now they were both trying in very similar ways to cope with poverty and all the other problems that had been bequeathed to them by their troubled histories”. (135)

A further example of Ghosh not occupying the privileged position of the Western traveller is in his defensive responses to the Imam's (Muslim priest or chief) charges of backwardness in



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Ghosh's Hindu culture. The Imam attacks Ghosh for being one of those people who burn their dead and worship cows. When Ghosh admits that he is a hindu, Ustaz Mustafa says, "What is this 'Hinduki' thing?....If it is not Christianity nor Judaeism no Islam what can it be? Who are it's prophets?" (47)

Ghosh and the Imam end up arguing about whether India or Egypt is more advanced using the measure of what destructive power each side's military could muster. Here are these two postcolonial characters caught in an old colonialist vying for power through violence –

"... the Imam and I: delegates from two superseded civilizations, vying with each other to establish a prior claim to the technology of modern violence." ( 236 )

Here we were then, Ghosh goes on, in the East and of the East, and yet both still travelling in the West. Furthermore, Ghosh then pulls the 'Westerner' card on the Imam. He (Ghosh) had actually been to the West and knows more about it than the Imam - like the colonial writer, in the end, he claims prior knowledge of the West and, by implication, of the world. Throughout, Ghosh writes with enormous lucidity and flashes of gentle humor, conveying in small and telling details the underlying suspiciousness and insecurity that pervade Egyptian society.

Pre-Colonized Egypt

Ben Yiju  
Slave Bomma and his wife Ashu  
Synagogue in Geniza  
Khalaf  
Conservatism  
Tradition  
Immobile Structure  
Judio Arabic

Post Colonized Egypt

Ustaz with Ghosh about India  
Liberal society  
Technological  
People are educated  
Arabic

We have already discussed before about Ben Yiju and his slave Bomma. If we look at the old Egypt we see that there were no interference and people were independent. They had tradition and hierarchy. They were sometime conservative and their social structure was so immobile. Their language was Arabic through which they could communicate with others. There was a Synagogue in Geniza where the letters were stored.

The image of modern Egypt that Amitav Ghosh's has portrayed in his travelers tale *In An Antique Land* is truly insightful. When Amitav Ghosh revisits the villages after seven years he is astonished by the changes that had overtaken them. There was no electricity at Lataifa in 1980. Someone had brought the diesel water pump from a nearby town. The whole village had gathered on the courtyard of the owner, waiting specially for Amitav Ghosh who had been invited to give his expert opinion, examined the machine. In 1988, he finds refrigerator in every others house, new brick building in place of adobe houses, calculators, TV sets, casset players and even food processor. The people have prospered on gulf money. Most of the young man of the villages have left Egypt by that time to find job in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf countries. The

gleaning from the distant war had worked a silent economic revolution in rural Egypt and changed the life of fellaheen. People have been sending their children to schools and colleges and often they talk about their development.

Today the Egyptians have become modern but the main thing that made a transition from old to modern is the western culture. Once people from different universities came and took away the letters from Synagogue. Then after a research the history of the old Egypt came out. The present people of Egypt have discovered about their past through this history.

Though not as engaging as the contemporary story, the historical one offers a look at a time when global trade brought different cultures and religions together in India and the Middle East. Interestingly, the letter which sparked Ghosh's initial interest turned out to have been part of the most important single collection of medieval documents ever discovered. And what is striking about the era Ghosh researches is that harmony existed among Muslims, Jews and Hindus. Through the historical story, Ghosh demonstrates that the cultural and religious mixing prompted by globalization does not have to result in the hatred and mistrust we see too often today.

By the close of Ghosh's time in Egypt, the Iran-Iraq war has ended, forcing Egyptians to give up their jobs to decommissioned Iraqi soldiers and return home. Accustomed to the lifestyles high wages abroad have brought, the Egyptian men find few prospects at home. Here, the reader becomes aware of the hopelessness that can result when globalization's promises are not met.

An understanding of the culture and day-to-day lives of the poor in other countries is crucial to an assessment of whether they are benefiting from globalization. By taking us into the



lives of these Egyptian villagers, Ghosh provides insights into the human consequences of globalization and modernization in the Middle East. While Ghosh shows that prosperity brought about by globalization can improve peoples' lives, conversely, he makes it clear that if globalization's benefits are temporary or only available to a few, it can also lead to hopelessness and despair.

The antique world is not entirely lost. The Bhuta-cult, itself a subversion of the categories of Sanskrit Hinduism, still exist in the fisher folk of Mangalore and despite the sincere efforts of enlightened people like Ustaz Sabri beliefs in ghosts and miracles, and the practice of visiting the graves which constitute the revolutionary counter image of orthodox religions of the Middle East, like Judaism and Islam, are not removed from the people of Nashawy and Lataifa. The partitioning of the past and of the intertwined histories of the two countries notwithstanding, these superstitions which had given rise to the unique culture of accommodation and co-existence, still linger in the psyche of the people. Development and all-consuming influence of politics and religion could not totally efface them. In defiance of the enforcers of history small remnants of Bomma's world have survived in both Egypt and India.

**Chapter 3**  
**On *The Glass Palace***

Published in 2000 *The glass Palace* is Amitav Ghosh's latest expedition in understanding the ravages done by colonialism. It begins in 1885 Burma when the British finally subjugated it and sent the Burmese Royal family into exile. "The glass palace" refers to the Burmese royal palace at Mandalay — to be exact, it is the magnificent hall of mirrors which forms the center-piece of the royal residence. It is the traditional hall where the Burmese monarchs held audience. But it is also the name of a small photo studio in the late twentieth century where the novel *The Glass Palace* ends, the studio which derived its name from its original, as a reminder of the old days when Burma was free, both of the colonial powers and the junta which controls it now.

The book traces the life of Rajkumar, an orphan boy of Indian origin, who after lots of struggles becomes a rich teak merchant. The most notable aspect of the novel is, however, that there is not a single episode in the entire book directly representing the British. They are in the background all right, but they are not brought into the story as characters. Ghosh has treated them almost in the same way 18<sup>th</sup> or 19<sup>th</sup> century British writers used the colonized countries — as backgrounds or as references that may affect the life style or the story line, but do not have direct association with the characters. It is actually a short history of a nation seen through the eyes of the subaltern.

As it has been stated earlier, at the center of the novel, there is Rajkumar, and his being an orphan kind of identifies him with the postcolonial identity of a writer. In her essay, "The Road

from Mandalay: Reflections on Amitav Ghosh's *The glass Palace*", Rukmini B. Nair very appropriately observes:

Rajkumar's symbolic as well as real orphan-hood implies that he has to invent a family where none exists; . . . . Rajkumar has in effect to solve the same dilemma that confronts the postcolonial author . . . . he has to make sense of the 'exit-tential' conrundum that plagues all individual who cross . . . . the well defined lines of 'national identity' and 'family genealogy.' (166)

Not having a family of his own, this remarkable person has to seek out people to claim as his. In Saya John he finds a father, in Matthew a brother, and in Dolly, his soul mate. He is an Indian by birth, has to start looking after himself at an early age, builds his fortune in Burma, comes to India to seek out his bride of whom he had glimpses when he was only 11, goes back to Burma and raises his family, and then again returns to India in old age, after his fortune has been devastated by war, and his elder son and daughter-in-law killed. He has to run away from Burma because he is not a Burmese, and yet, that has been his home all his life. And it is not only Rajkumar, or for his family members or other characters of *The glass Palace*, the cultural space for most of the characters in Ghosh's other novels is huge. As Robert Dixon comments in " 'Travelling in the West' : The Writing of Amitav Ghosh", "This cultural space is a vast, borderless region with its own hybrid languages and practices which circulate without national or religious boundaries." (10)

So, in *The Glass Palace* the positions of the colonizer and the colonized are presented with all the dual complexities and ambiguities associated with the terms. The storyline begins in



Mandalay, the capital city of Burma, and the downfall and the subsequent confusion and banishment of the Burmese Royal family are depicted very vividly and realistically. The psychological drama taking place in the minds of the King Thebaw and his Queen Supalayath show the extent of deliberate cruelty and insult that was dealt out to them:

Just as he was about to step in, the King noticed that his canopy had seven tiers, the number allotted to a nobleman, not the nine due to a King . . . . In his last encounter with his erstwhile subjects he was to be publicly demoted, like an errant schoolchild. Sladen had guessed right: this was, of all the affronts Thebaw could have imagined, the most hurtful, the most egregious. (43-44)

The King Thebaw, however, accepts his fate more or less like a philosopher. As a result of his early trainings of a monk he reigns over the fishermen of Ratnagiri, foretelling when there would be a storm, or how many boats returned from the sea. But it is in Queen Supalayath that one sees the dehumanization of colonial process. She lives in the dilapidated Outram house allowing slums to grow in the surrounding area, and welcomes the few guests she occasionally has in defiance. Her attitude is clear in the proud, thin lipped smile she has for all of them:

We were the first to be imprisoned in the name of progress; millions more will follow. This is what awaits us all: this is how we will all end – as prisoners, in shantytowns 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. (88)

Ghosh clearly shows that the British may pride themselves in keeping the royal families of India and Burma alive, but the way these princes and princesses are kept, it questions the basic ideology of the Western civilization which the ruling power boasts of.

While looking at this situation one is reminded of Edward Said's record of the dehumanizing process that the Occidentals practiced on the Orient. The Western mind never looked at the Orient or the Orientals as complete human beings. They were "seen through, analyzed not as citizens, or even people, but as problems to be solved or confined— as the colonial powers openly coveted their territory—taken over"(207, *Orientalism*).

A remarkable conversation between Dolly and her friend Uma also gives occasion to question established beliefs and historical facts. On one occasion, Uma, the wife of the Indian Collector, asks Dolly about the cruelty of Queen Supalayati. And in reply Dolly makes Uma look at the situation from her end:

"You know, Uma," she said in her softest voice. "Every time I come to your house, I notice that picture you have hanging by your front door. . . ."

"Of Queen Victoria, you mean?"

.....

"Don't you sometimes wonder how many people have been killed in Queen Victoria's name? It must be millions wouldn't you say? . . ."

(113-14)

## **Bhattacharjee**

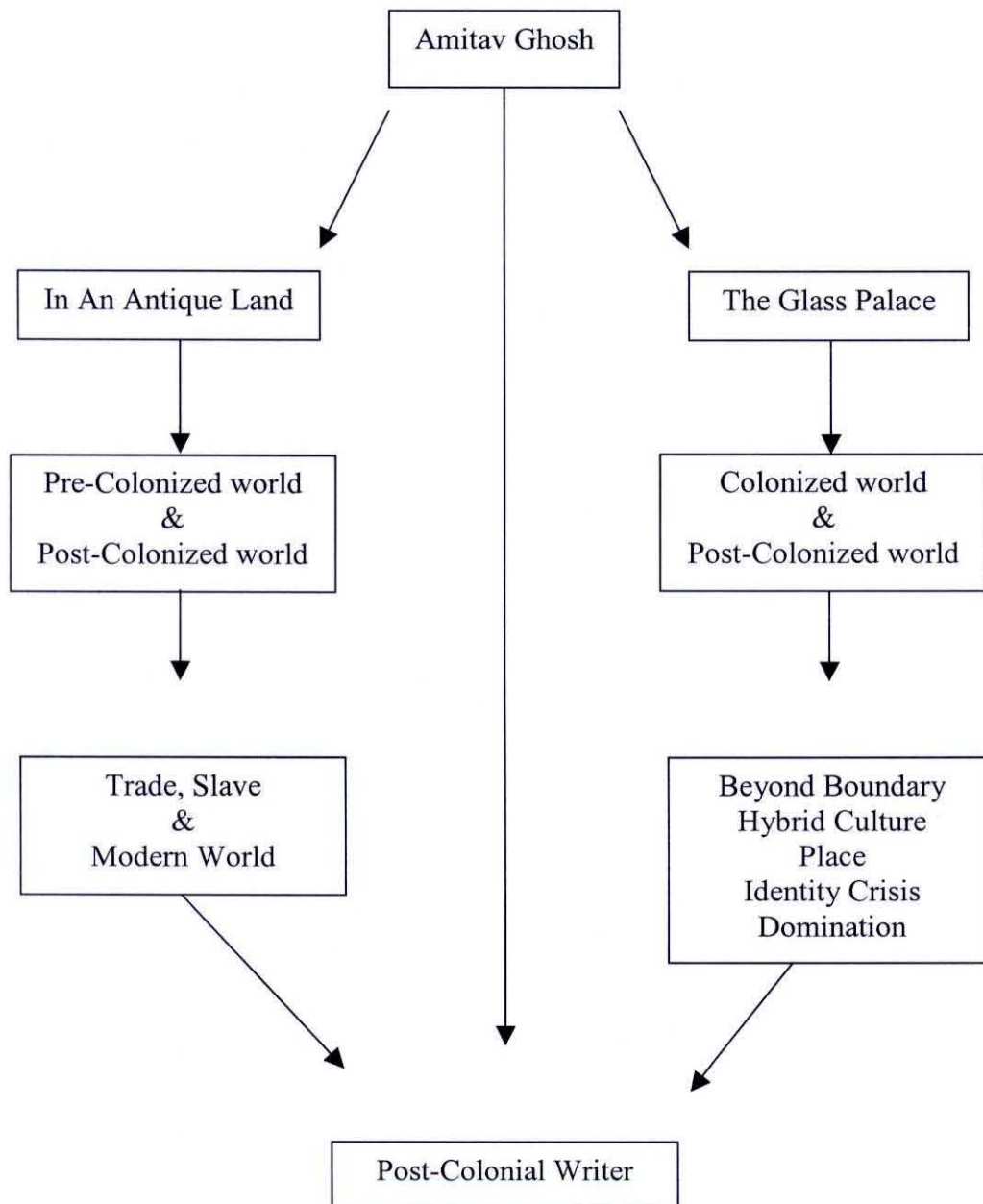
This section allows us to see clearly Ghosh's view about the representational dice in pictures or literature. We also observe that Uma accepts her friend's explanation and a few days later removes the picture herself. In this episode Ghosh has demonstrated how prejudiced the norms of civilized behaviours can be under historical and political conditions.

However, it is interesting to note that while showing the subjugated Burma, Ghosh's attitude towards India and the Indians is starkly different from his treatment of the Burmese people. Even though at the center of the novel we have Rajkumar, an Indian born, he is far from being a flawless character. He represents the Indians who benefited through the British colonization. It is true that the British colonized both India and Burma, but in Burma the Burmese are the ones oppressed whereas the Indians as well as people from other countries were given much opportunities to flourish. The rise of Rajkumar is only one of many stories of such success. Through him and the world revolving around him Ghosh shows how colonialism is a process where people and values are compromised.



### Conclusion

There was a question at the beginning of this discussion, and that is, why shall we consider Amitav Ghosh as a Post Colonial Writer? From the analysis of these two books, *In An Antique Land* and *The Glass Palace*, we can definitely consider him a postcolonial writer. In these two books he deals with not only postcolonial issues but also the pre colonial and the colonial ones. So we can call him a post colonial writer .



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