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Indian Burmese Diaspora in Amitav Ghosh's The Glass Palace

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Abstract: *A Diaspora refers to a scattered population with a common origin in a smaller geographic area. It takes the place of doubt, homelessness and it typifies a historical condition as well as state of mind. Amitav Ghosh's The Glass Palace conveys both a sense of place and a sense of dislocation. Amitav Ghosh addresses the sensitive yet crucial dilemmas in the lives of immigrants. The subject matter deals mainly with immigrants' ability to adapt to the differences of living in Burma.*

The Glass Palace is a narrative that gravitates around the experiences of a variety of multigenerational, Diasporic Indian/ Burmese characters during a historical period filled with battles won and lost over Burma's territories. It is a novel that reflects obliquely upon the great shifts that took place in changes of rule and national policy that affect the everyday of its character's lives. The Glass Palace relates the tangled relations between first and second generation immigrants. It acts as a creative response and a reflection of experience in this world by the process of empathy with the characters and their circumstances and changing fortunes.

The enhanced processes of globalization and transculturation make diasporic literature important in India and elsewhere. A diaspora refers to a scattered population with a common origin in a smaller geographic area. Diasporic or expatriate writing occupies a place of great significance between countries and cultures. Diasporic writers translate reality and their personal experiences. The chief characteristic features of diasporic writings are the quest for identity, uprooting, re-rooting, insider and outsider syndrome, nostalgia and nagging sense of guilt. It takes the place of doubt, homelessness and it typifies a historical condition as well as state of mind. Amitav Ghosh's the glass palace conveys both a sense of place and a sense of dislocation.

Amitav Ghosh was born in India in 1956, but presently he is settled in America. He is best known for his work in English fiction. His novel The Glass Palace won the International e-Book award at the Frankfurt book fair in 2001. He writes about his homeland, India, and the countries surrounding it. He is focused on writing about diaspora, history and memory, political struggle and communal violence.

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Ghosh shows that all migrants care for their own roots in the course of time and it is not necessary that they want to settle in the countries of their origin. The central protagonist Rajkumar initially comes out by being a Kalaa, a foreigner in an alien territory, then by being subjected to 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 the Malayan forest resources. He passes

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through many emotional set backs because of his bicultural identity. He is a boundary crosser who goes beyond well defined lines of nations and family history to find a home for himself in an alien land. He confesses to Dolly "... my father was from Chittagong and he ended up in Arakan; I ended up in Rangoon; you went from Mandalay to Ratnagiri and now you are here too. There are people who have the luck to end their lives where they began them. But this is not something that is owed to us." (P. 310).

The royal maid dolly too shares her predicament with Rajkumar. She feels the same in incomprehensible loyalty to the royal family's deportment to India. She began to notice odd little changes around her, their refusal to Shiko and her own ambivalent position. She was free, she was told for she was a slave not a prisoner, but in heart she knew she was bound with the princesses, who she had been enslaved to look after. Dolly's most haunting concern is that Burma is the place her birth is lost to her forever. Her displacement from her roots and her discomfort with her changed identity is clear when she confides her predicament to Uma, the collector's wife

... if I went to Burma now I would be a foreigner – they would call me a kalaa like they do Indians – a trespasser, an outsider from across the sea. I'd find that very hard, I think. I'd never be able to rid myself of the idea that I would have to leave again one day, just as I had to before. You would understand if you knew what it was like when we left. (113)

The novel also depicts how lives in exile forcibly change people including the powerful Burmese royal family. For example, the king Thebaw, can do nothing in his isolation and only spends his time watching fishing boats, thus being referred to as "the town guardian spirit[of the boats], a king again." (P. 80)

The fates of the queen and the three princesses were no better as not a single one of the bridegrooms was a fit match for a true born Konbaung princess.

Saya John, rajkumar's mentor, is another transnational from china who speaks English, Hindusthani and Burmese. His clothes were western. Saya himself makes fun of his amalgamated identity

...the soldiers there were mainly Indians and they asked me this very question: how is that you, who look 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 Ghat Ka – you don't belong anywhere, either by the water or on land, and I'd say, yes, that is exactly what I am.(10)

Ghosh tries to focus on the reason of Indian involvement in Imperialism and also takes in the economic perspective. Many Indians were in the role of businessmen and soldiers were involved and victims who throughout helped the British to conquer and sustain their empire. Other characters of the novel struggle for the Indian independence and a few even revolted against the Britishers.

Immigrant condition is now a part of modern life which changes, damages, destroys and in a few cases also rebuilds lives as people adapting to new cultural environments. In Ghosh's work, migrants often experience the sense of place in their host countries and respond by constructing a positive identification with a cultural heritage.

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