

Home Thoughts from Abroad in Ghosh's *The Glass Palace*

D. Saraswathi ^[1], Dr. P. Vedamuthan ^[2]

Department of English
Assistant Professor

Sri S. Ramasamy Naidu Memorial College ^[1], Sattur
M.S University ^[2], Tirunelveli
Tamil Nadu – India

ABSTRACT

Amitav Ghosh was born on 11 July, 1956 in Calcutta to Shailendra Ghosh, a diplomat and Ansali Ghosh. He spent early years of his life travelling with his parents as father's Foreign Service took him. He thus grew up in Dhaka, Calcutta, Baghdad and other places. His family had roots in East Bengal and had spent many years in Burma. Ghosh is well aware of the ever changing scenario of the Indian pluralism and the cultural multiplicity. His fiction reflects his vision. His fiction brings into focus a diasporic community which is varied and complex. His novels center on familiar and the human minds homeward bound. They are well aware of the culture rooted in a single place at the same time oscillating to a space that has transcended political and national boundaries. His characters experience the absence of being and belonging which always have a longing for identity and space. At the same time, without enacting a radical strategy, they express a sense of reconciliation and passivity.

Keywords:- *Glass Palace*

I. INTRODUCTION

Ghosh is recognized as a celebrated writer. He fulfils the reflections of thoughts of the writer and the merging impact of the readers' heart in an excellent manner. Some of Ghosh's characters attempt to cling to their national identity and they differ from others who willingly submit themselves to the immigrant experiences. Ghosh delineates an array of victims of diaspora who stand basically detached, yet strongly attached to the nostalgic past. Consequently, they develop a sense of insecurity and as they encounter a counter culture, they attempt to resurrect their nostalgic homes. This is their identity crisis. Basically, they are the immigrants on quest for an identity in their new site. Though they attempt to adapt to the new culture, their nostalgic past shakes them and they become victims of tension and anxieties.

Another element which is associated with this attachment to home-place is 'Memory'. An immigrant never forgets one's home-place. The thread which links the past and the present is the recollection. This reduces the distance between the alien country and homeland. Through flash-back technique, the past incidents of the native land are reflected. Such fragmented bits are recaptured through memory which also acts as a lens to view the past. Nostalgia entwines the notion of Home and

Memory. The term 'nostalgia' is derived from the Greek 'nostos' return home and 'algos' pain and it refers to the homesickness and a yearning for home. It ties the immigrants with their home-place. Through nostalgia one is able to construct an 'imagined world', a new cultural third space where the cultural distinctness is blurred.

The Glass Palace deals with this literary compulsion, incorporating three 'ideal types' within its text, which counterbalance and redeem those brute facts of history that Ghosh is clearly committed to depicting in relentless detail. These are, very simply, the image of perfect but very human beauty in the figures of Dolly and the queen; the theme of new diasporic beginnings after great upheavals such as the one symbolized by the Burmese Royal family's resettlement in Ratnagiri in India or Saya John's son Mathew's creation of the wondrous 'Morningstar' plantation in faraway Malaysia; and finally, the enhancement of criss-crossing coincidences throughout the novel. Sayagyi's observation essentially counter balances the present with the past. He knows he has been dumped here by force and circumstance and hence they attempt to salvage comfort as he draws his home thoughts.

These home thoughts converge in Sayagyi's psyche which helps in the deconstruction of an

identity. Sayagi further empowers himself to actively work out those moments of nostalgia in order to gain the cultural possession from the past. Migration could be viewed only as an intermediating force that helps one to reallocate the displaced fragments of the psyche before clinching an innovation potential of identity. The novel raises the question about human will and the inevitability of the circumstances. The stories are split between India and Burma as the narrative traces the compulsive adaptation of the royal family to the Indian ways in Madras and Rajkumar's gradual raising to power as a teak merchant with the help of his mentor, Saya John in Burma. In between is squeezed the story of Uma, the collector's wife. The stories jostle and mingle to shape new stories with the intersection of class/race/religion.

Ghosh, while writing about the past, perhaps wishes to place two worlds against each other, the one left behind and the one that stands before. This is the central focus in the novel which addresses the issue of dilemma as to how migrants capitalise the past memories of home before actually negotiating the present or the future residence. Ghosh quite typically belongs to the category of novelists endowed with an exclusive manipulation of emigrants. In other words, those who reach the new lands and are naturally haunted by some sense of desperation and loss, eventually develop an urge to walk down the memory lane. The homes where they once lived have become their imaginary homelands which provide succor and respite.

The reason for Uma's serious encounter with the past in which she captures those glorious moments with her husband is that she comes as one individual who is terribly affected by migration. Nevertheless, she takes on the present cultures with the sense of vision that has been enshrined in her nostalgic past. As she moves to various places she continues to recollect her home thoughts. This is one strategic manipulation of present cultures and one of the reasons why she derives a great fascination in her past. This is how Ghosh makes of the situation. As the days passed, she became conscious of a gathering grief, an emotion more powerful than any she had never known. In the light of hindsight, she realized that those words that people had always used of the

Collector " *he's a good man* - were true; that he indeed had been a good man, an honest man a man of great intelligence and ability who happened to have been born into a circumstance that could not offer him as appropriate avenue for the fulfilment of his talents"(186).

In order to concretise these abstract notions of identity, Ghosh uses a wood imagery while Rajkumar and Saya John converse which establishes the credit worthiness of home thoughts. "Timber is a thing of the past, Rajkumar: you have to look in the future . . ." (184). In *The Glass Palace*, he feels that the re inscription of the past history of the colonial era is valorizable because the ways in which the readers remember the past are not determined solely by the brute facts of time: they are open to choice, reflection and judgment. Consequently, the unobtrusive articulation of the so-called civilizing mission and the ideological, epistemological and ontological assumptions of the binary constructions of the imperial powers informed by the psychological domination and subjectification of the colonized in *The Glass Palace* embodies a genuine attempt by Ghosh to visit and reframe the colonial past which may be, in a way, discomfiting and deleterious ramifications of neocolonialism

In *The Glass Palace*, home thoughts are not something to be merely remembered as an abstract construct but represented as a cultural tool of negotiation for new cultural encounters. Hence, home thoughts generate as a dynamic arrangement which comes among people, and even cultures, so that a meaning is forged. Thus, a new space is created through home thoughts which help in the construction of a new identity. Ghosh seeks an understanding of the past to have a bearing upon the present. The past is remembered not as a dead, remote period, but as flowing on, into the present postcolonial situations of multi-ethnic, pluralist societies, of boundaries and mutations of nations imposed by the colonial rulers and complex cultural diversities of a persistent political struggle for democratic and egalitarian system.

The research for a new link in the society calls for the invisible links and indivisible sanity that existed in the reality of the home thoughts. There are

reasons as to why Ghosh designates an individual with a first person narrator status whose home thoughts strengthen the structure of the novel and accelerate the narratorial perspectives. These home thoughts are a collective memory, the memory of every individual measured against the intensity of individuality in the present context. With regard to the home thoughts, one thing must be noted that the characters develop an intimate closeness with history. Through the journey motif, Ghosh addresses the nostalgia. For instance, in the novel *The Glass Palace*, though Ila fits in successfully in the beginning, subsequently she finds herself like a fish out of water. Her severed affair with Nick Prince comes as an example of failure and vexation. Just because Ila refuses to draw in her home thoughts, she is not able to effectively manipulate the new Western culture. She is dislocated because she has not manipulated a new culture foregrounding her own culture

The Glass Palace is totally different in compassion to Ghosh's other novels but one common thing is present here as in his other novels -struggle, finding and a sense of loss which is very well expressed by his characters. *The Glass Palace* is an attempt to locate in the history of time and nations such a people, a beleaguered group of races inhabiting British occupied territories in South East Asia. Ghosh weaves into the life of his central protagonist. Rajkumar, the bewildering and alien poignant accounts of a tamely scattered through post imperialist dislocation in various parts of the Asian continent as he charts the complex sociological and political repercussions of such disbanding through the experiences of loss, exile and the search for a homeland.

Ghosh does not make any pretense about the nature of the narrative in *that The Glass Palace* is nothing if not the discourse of postcolonial subjects, the easy sliding of imagination at once into and away from historical reality and the author's attempt to remap the history of three crucial South Asian

Countries, Myanmar (Burma), India and Malaysia, all sites of the Empire through the late nineteenth and mid - twentieth centuries, resulted, by his own admission, in a novel in which the writing of places and times necessarily forced him to "create a wholly fictional world". (*The Glass Palace* Author's Note).

II. CONCLUSION

The idea of the nation as metaphor of loss and as being more symbolic of a unitariness than the physical entity which is society, finds elaborate figuration in the turbulence of cultural cross -over and conflicting histories that makes up the central concern of Ghosh.

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