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**DISPLACEMENT IN AMITAV GHOSH'S THE GLASS PALACE**

**K.SARANYA**, Research Scholar, PRIST Deemed University, Thanjavur

**Prof. M. THAMIZHMANI**, Assistant Professor, PRIST Deemed University, Thanjavur

**ABSTRACT**

*Displacement is one of the main issues dealt in the realm of postcolonial literature. It is synonymous to the term 'dislocation'. It critically refers to the displacement occurring as a result of majestic occupation and the experiences related to it. Millions of immigrants have been forced to displace or separate themselves from the family, their people and place on which they have depended. The displacement may also be the result of transportation from one country to another by slavery or willing or unwilling shifting from one place to another. Although the postcolonial subjects are struggling to deal with this displacement in reality, it also provides advantages to elevate the position. Many contemporary Indian English writers like Khushwant Singh, V.S. Naipaul, Salman Rushdie, Rohinton Mistry, Jhumpa Lahiri, Shashi Tharoor, Kiran Desai and Amitav Ghosh represent and struggle to encounter this issue of displacement in their novels. Thus this paper aims at analyzing how the theme of displacement works in Amitav Ghosh's The Glass Palace in which his characters meet various problems due to British invasion. It also probes into the novel to know whether the postcolonial countries elevate or lower the people who migrate voluntarily or involuntarily.*

**Key words:** *displacement, postcolonial, immigrant, cultural identity.*

*The following abbreviations are used after quotations: TGP – The Glass Palace*

Displacement is one of the main issues dealt in the realm of postcolonial literature. Collins Dictionary defines "displacement" as 'the removal of something from its usual place or position by something which then occupies that place or position' or as 'the forcing of people away from the area or country where they live'. Here, the term is used as synonymous to the word 'dislocation' in literature. In its most literal sense, "displacement" refers to the act of moving or being put out of the usual or original place. Migration, desertion, exile, diaspora, exodus, eviction, banishment, travel, discovery, imprisonment, escape, among others, are all different forms of "displacement".

Displacement often forces people to confront a sense of loss, alienation, and disorientation, but it may also lead the displaced to experiment the newly gained power and freedom. Generally, the displaced undergoes a process of transformation and renewal that involves a collected or distraught re-fashioning of identity. Further, displacement definitely gives birth to a series of problems. On one hand, it is too hard for the dislocated person to forget the people, culture, landscapes, and language of the abandoned place. On the other, he finds it difficult to disassociate himself from the new place, country, and language that he has chosen to adopt or is forced to adopt. It is inevitable to him to compare and contrast his motherland and his newly settled land. This kind of juxtaposition results in uncertainty of the new community and leads him to identity crisis. Displacement puts an end to the possibilities of reclaiming a singular, solid, monolithic identity. All displaced writers have the constant desire to come back to their motherland, their paradise with a view to reclaiming their cultural identity.

For instance, Khushwant Singh, V.S. Naipaul, Salman Rushdie, Jhumpa Lahiri, Shashi Tharoor, Kiran Desai and Amitav Ghosh represent and struggle to encounter this issue of displacement in their novels. Khushwant Singh interplays with the place and displacement in *Train to Pakistan*. V.S. Naipaul has dealt with the problem of displacement in *A House for Mr. Biswas*. It also depicts Naipaul's own cultural dislocation and displacement. Sir Ahamad Salman Rushdie deals with the theme of place and displacement in the novel *Shame* and *The Satanic Verses*. Jhumpa Lahiri, the author of *The Namesake*, deals with the themes of immigrant experience, identities and displacement, and ties and clashes between the generations. As a diplomat and writer, Shashi Tharoor has explored the themes of India's past and their relevance to its future in *The Great Indian Novel* and *Show Business*. Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* as a migrated Indian novelist talks about the loss of home, making it fluid in her novel.

Amitav Ghosh has also dealt with the theme of displacement in his novels to probe into the cultural and their personal identity of India and Southeast Asia. His first novel, *The Circle of Reason*, has considerably evolved the magical-realist tradition. His works like *The Shadow Lines* and *The Glass Palace* deal powerfully with the displacement of post-imperial politics in Bengal and Burma. In *The Hungry Tide* he mixes up the story with the myth, background history and religion. It explores the topic between the human and the nature, and its conflicts.

The novel opens with the Anglo-Burmese War in 1865. Kinwun Mingyi and Taingda Mingyi, the two Burmese ministers are very keen to keep the Royal family under their custody with a view to getting rich rewards from the English for handing over the royal couple King Thebaw and Queen Supayalat, along with their family. Whereas the royal family ready the looters to surrender. So, the Burmese publics who earlier stood in fear now quickly move into the palace. Similarly, a ship waits to displace the royal family. The British soldiers in charge of shifting the King's precious jewels and ornaments from the palace to the ship also poach these things. Ghosh here strips the veils off human nature to reveal the crude and brutal greed that drives people at various levels.

Dishonest greed is depicted as an animating force cutting across the financial status, racial differences, caste, creed individuals, groups and nations. The plunder of the opening scene reveals how tactfully the British has conquered countries, subjugated whole population and exiled Kings to erase them completely from public memory at home. For example, a generation ago, the last of the Mughal King named Bahadur Shah Zafar was displaced to Rangoon, after killing the two princesses in front of the public. Now, the Burmese King Thebaw and Queen Supayalat are displaced to Ratnagiri in India by Britain. It is apparent that the British has tactfully and cunningly forced the rulers into a life of obscurity and freely looted the Burmese natural resources like the teak, ivory and petroleum. At this juncture, it is indispensable to say that not even a single episode in the whole text represents the British directly. Instead, they are always at the background and brought into the story not as characters. This is one of the remarkable aspects of this novel.

Coming back to the displaced King and Queen of Burma, they are the humans mostly exploited by the British. Their family is at first hit to Madras and then to Ratnagiri. The King is compelled to move in bullock carts, *yethas*, and the commonest vehicles on Mandalay's streets. When the king is about to step in, he comes across that the canopy set to the carriage which seven tiers, the number allotted to a nobleman, not the nine due to a king" (TGP 43). While they are in Outram House, on a hilltop, they undergo another kind of ill-treatment. "The bungalow had no sewerage and no water supply. The toilets had to be emptied daily of night soil, by sweepers; water had to be carried up in buckets from a nearby stream" (TGP 81). Because of so-called Black Death, there is a shortage for sweepers there. Even if someone is found, it is too hard to persuade him or her to stay. Dolly experiences this situation when she finds a sweeper. "The trouble was that there was never enough money to pay their salaries. The King and Queen had sold almost everything they had brought over from Mandalay; their treasure was gone, all except for a few keep sakes and mementos. (TGP 81)

The King recollects how his ancestors were feared and respected and laments over the present scenario. The Queen is horrified to see this colonization and mourns, “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 of Burma” (TGP 88). The Queen says that the imperial powers had not only displaced them but the entire Burma. The Queen expresses her anger, “they took our kingdom, promising roads and railways and ports, this is how it will end. In a few decades the wealth will be gone – all the gems, the timber and oil and then they too will leave” (TGP 88). Further, she foresees that the colonization. In other words, their dethronement and displacement will result only in famine and despair in the rich Burma. Besides, their daughters elope with ordinary men – the first Princess with Sawant, a coachman and the second with a Burmese commoner. The former falls in love with Sawant, becomes pregnant and marries him. She gives to a child and permanently settles in India. The King wants her second daughter to be brought back. When she refuses to do so, “he fell to the floor, clutching his left arm” (TGP 205). As a result, he suffers from heart attack and dies in 1916 in India. The British does not allow to take his body to Burma fearing that it might result in riot in Burma. The saddest part is that even Her Majesty is deliberately refused to attend the King’s funeral. The First Princess in a letter written to Dolly writes that “no one could believe that this was the funeral of Burma’s last King!” (TGP 205). After the death of the King, the Queen returns to Rangoon. She spends last years of her life spending money on charities and feeding monks. The Queen died in 1925 six years after her return from Ratnagiri. Thus the displaced Royal Family from political power is never retrieved again.

It is undeniable that *The Glass Palace* portrays three families which are subtly interlinked by the novelists. They are the families of Dolly and Raj Kumar in Burma, of Uma and her brother in India and of Saya John, Raj Kumar’s mentor and his son Mathew in Malaysia. Raj Kumar is the protagonist of the novel who is an eleven year orphan. Having no family of his own, he is pushed to seek out relations to claim his own. In other words, he finds a father in Saya John, a brother in Matthew and his soul mate in Dolly. He is an Indian by birth. Raj Kumar after losing his mother, he looks after himself from an early age. He works in a tea stall of a matronly lady Ma Cho. He begins his search for places and people in Mandalay. As he is completely alienated, he uses his skill to come up in his life and gradually succeeds with the help of his loyal friends like Doh Say and Saya John, the rich and powerful members of the Indian community in Burma. Thus he becomes a powerful man and builds his fortune in Burma. Thereafter, he returns to India and finds Dolly, the devoted maid of Queen Supalayay. Raj Kumar falls in love with Dolly at first. Dolly, as a devoted maid, lives in the distant Indian city of Ratnagiri with the exiled royal family.

Uma, the wife of an Indian District Commissioner, is a lifelong friend of Dolly. With the help of Uma, Raj Kumar marries Dolly. He goes back to Burma where he raises his family. Then again he returns to India in his twilight years, after losing his fortune, his elder son and daughter-in-law in war. As he is not a Burmese, he escapes from there. Yet, he thinks that it should be his home forever. This is called the concept of ‘homelessness’ in terms of dislocation and displacement. Once he was a volunteer in displacing himself but now his search of cultural identity begins.

It is indispensable to overview the pathetic lives of Raj Kumar’s children. Although he gets succeeded in his married life, he loses his children because of the same displacement. Neeladhri, Raj Kumar’s elder son is married to Manju, Uma’s niece. Raj Kumar’s younger son is Dinanth who marries a Burmese writer, Ma Thin Thin Aye. Neel is killed during elephant trampling and Manju becomes a widow. She has a daughter named Jaya. Because of their facing extreme hardships, they displace themselves to Bengal. Losing her will power due to her insane condition, she commits suicide on their way by jumping into river. Having lost his hope, Raj Kumar switches over to Calcutta. Dolly seeks nunnery in Rangoon and her life ends there. Dinu lives with his wife depriving of his father’s fortune.

Many of the colonized people in Burma, India or Malaysia behave not as colonized but as colonizers. In the opening scene of rampage, the novelist for the first time mentions how the British

soldiers marching past with their shouldered rifles looked to the Burmese crowds. This can be crystal clear from the citation of the novel. "There was no rancor on the soldier's faces, no emotion at all. None of them so much glanced at the crowd." (TGP 26) Consequently, the Mandalay fort with long roads, canals, gardens, rooms with gilded pillars, polished floors, illuminating vast hall, and mirrored ceilings and with all the richness in Burma is being looted by the soldiers as well as the public. It is proven in the following lines: "Everywhere people were intently at work, men and women, armed with axes and das; they were hacking at gem-studded Ook offering boxes; digging patterned gemstones from the marble floor; using fish hooks to pry the ivory in lays from lacquered Sadaik chests." (TGP 33). The characters including Raj Kumar, Saya John and Maththew are engaged in the task of colonizing land and people for the sake of wealth. As a result, it can be witnessed that the British army later consists not of British but of Indians mostly.

Having peer reviewed Amitav Ghosh's *The Glass Palace* it is crystal clear that the displacement has created more problems rather than finding solutions to them. The King and the Queen are the people who have been forced to live in the new land(s). They have no elevation but they are lowered and colonized. On the other hand, the characters like Raj Kumar voluntarily displace himself. He is an example for his elevation in his life but he is far from flawless character. He is one of the colonizers in the novel as he loots people's wealth. But at last he himself becomes victimized in the whirlpool of displacement. What he has gained through displacement is lost at the end. It will not be an exaggeration to conclude that the King and the Queen are the flat characters and Raj Kumar is a round character. It is because the two noble character fall due to British invasion and never rise thereafter in their lives. Whereas Raj Kumar who was an orphan rises in his life with what he wanted but loses one by one at the end. Thus, Amitav Ghosh has excellently brings out the theme of displacement in this novel which is the one of the main issues in the realm of postcolonial literature.

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