



AMITAV GHOSH'S *THE GLASS PALACE*: A RECOLLECTION OF DESOLATED ANTIQUITIES

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ABSTRACT

By examining the colonial history of Burma, the Europeans settlements had made a lot of changes in the country. Both their minds as well as the lands where reconstructed according to the favor of the colonizers plan. This gives additional turmoil and confusion to the inhabitations of the native land. People are not aware to take any decisions to support to their present new rulers. As they are going to be workers, helpers and slaves whoever rule them. They never worry about Konbaung Dynasty or British or Japan empires. What they want is they want to survey, and this *self- survival* attitude inside peoples mind tempts them to loot along with the colonizers on their own countries. Thus this research paper acts as a recollection of antiquities condition in own land.

Key Words: History, Colonization, Invasion, War, Survival, Looting, Reconstruction and Plantation.

Ghosh's novel *The Glass Palace* (2000) acts as an indelible reminiscence in his readers mind. He presents the Indian history in the modern context by the way of weaving chronicles with fictions. By arranging it in sequences, Ghosh handles flashback and foreshadowing techniques. He points out the consequence of war as overshadow of evil, which shortens the growth of a nation in all aspects of living. This paper titles "*Amitav Ghosh's The Glass Palace: A Recollection of Desolated Antiquities*" brings out the way of peoples livelihood in Burma during the colonization time. Ghosh comments this invading ruling power as:

This is how power is eclipsed: in a moment of vivid realism between, the waning of one fantasy of governance and its replacement by the next, in an instance the world springs free from its moorings of dreams

and reveals itself to be girdled in the pathways of survival and self-preservation. (124)

In common, the power and strength of the kingdom not only depends on its ruler but also its soldiers and subjects. Architecture plays a vital role in it, the palaces and castles which were erected for their habitation, speaks a lot about the strength of its kingdom. Especially, every top of the architectural building was based on that empires belief and religion. The style of the doom varies according to the empires religious conviction. Burma is the land entirely occupied with Buddhist relics and disciplinarians. And it is well-known for its religious symbol umbrellas, in Burmese language it is so called *hti*. Every Buddhist relics in Burma is furnished with this ornamental grand style, and the people considered it as an auspicious cultural symbol.

Ghosh points out that the palace's nine-roofed spires reflects its golden glitters all over its surroundings. Thus the text pictorially represent the majestic structure of the palace as:

It's very large, much larger than it looks. It's a city in itself, with long roads and canals and gardens. First you come to the houses of officials and noblemen. And then you find yourself in front of a stockade made of huge teakwood posts. Beyond lie the apartments of the Royal Family and their servants—hundreds and hundreds of rooms, with gilded pillars and polished floors. And right at the center there is a vast hall that is like a great shaft of light, with shining crystal walls and mirrored ceilings. People call it the Glass Palace. 7

Ancient Burma became a place for trade and commerce. Slowly people from surrounding countries migrated towards Burma. Particularly people of India at some point chosen to seek freedom and to live a better life. As a chance Burmese empire restricts them and use them as slaves for household and plantation works. Burmese's tropical forest is enriched with plenty of valuable trees and herbs and some of them are Acacia, Bamboo, teak, MicheliaChampaca, Rosemary, lavender and holy basil. But only teakwood is targeted for money purpose. And this settled people from different parts of the world later got power over that nation. Thus the settlers of foreigners in Burma for business purpose is quoted obviously in the text as:

The number of foreigners living in Mandalay was no insubstantial—there were envoys and missionaries from Europe; traders and merchants of Greek, Armenian, Chinese and Indian origin; laborers and boatmen from Bengal, Malaya and the Coromandel coast; white-clothed astrologers from Manipur; businessmen from Gujarat—an assortment of people such as Rajkumar had never seen before he came here. 16

The key objectives of the British forces intrusion into Burma is only for trading and not for military conquest. They had some

contacts with local kings and made some agreements for free trade. Unaware of knowing the popularity of this treasured goods, local clan of the natives gave permission for trading first, but afterward they realized and gave objection to the foreigners. This augmented their furiousness of the British to colonize the native lands with more power like a tidal wave. The text highlights the river Irrawaddy in Burma, where the British fleets set ready for wagging war against the local aborigines thus: "The English are preparing to send a fleet up the Irrawaddy. There's going to be a war. Father says they want all the teak in Burma. The King won't let them have it, so they're going to do away with him."¹⁵

Before the British invasion the king and the queen of Burma, were considered to a supreme monarch. They waged many war with their peers and finally conquered and annexed their enemies land under their territories. In power, Burmese rulers were not lesser to the power of the kings of Siam and Cambodia and of the emperors of China and Japan. The king Thebaws's father king Mindon is considered to be the Significant and prudent ruler of Burma. Similarly the power of the queen is also a challenging one to their enemies and to their own clans. As Ghosh points out in this novel that the queen Supayalat murdered seventy-nine princes, who were considered to be threat for the King Thebaws throne. But aftermath of the royal lines imprisonments inside the palace the valuable belongings were looted. Among the worst terrible thing is the subjects of Burmese kingdom: servants, men and women indulge in the act of stealing the palace's properties. Thus the text discovers the ruin of the palace by its own subjects as:

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 inlays from lacquered sadaik chests. Armed with a rock, a girl was knocking the ornamental frets

out of a crocodile-shaped zither; a man was using a meat cleaver to scrape the gilt from the neck of a saung-gak harp; and a woman was chiselling furiously at the ruby eyes of a bronze chinthe lion. They came to a door that led to a candlelit anteroom. There was a woman inside, standing by the latticed window in the far corner. 33

After the imprisonment of the rulers of Konbaung Dynasty, the British started to rearrange certain things according to their comforts. The rooms in the palace were changed, they are: the west wing changed to club, Queens hall as billiard room, the mirrored wall for storing old newspapers, garden as polo and tennis ground and finally the kings monastery as Anglican chapel. Furthermore they started the act of integrating Mandalay the capital of Burma with the province of British India. And they deployed their military at the confluence of the Irrawaddy and Chindwin rivers. Thus the text says the reconstruction of Burma as: Mandalay, it was confidently predicted, would soon become the Chicago of Asia; prosperity was the natural destiny of a city that guarded the confluence of two of the world's mightiest waterways, the Irrawaddy and the Chindwin. (66)

In this novel *The Glass Palace* Ghosh undoubtedly points out the bloodshed and massacre which practiced by the British is partial one. Because they took *fear* as a new technique to threaten the inhabitants who lived in Burmese land. Punishments and slaughtering are executed at the extreme level for those who oppose and rebel against the British Empire. Thus Chinese popular general and philosopher Sun Tzu says: The supreme art of war is to subdue the enemy without fighting.

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