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## PORTRAYAL OF FAMILY AND SOCIETY IN AMITAVGHOSH'S *THE GLASS PALACE*

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### ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on Amitav Ghosh's *The Glass Palace*. Ghosh has brought the lives of a few individuals linked in family and society and their experiences. This historical novel portrays the struggles faced by the people during the fall of Konbaung Dynasty in Mandalay. The Glass palace says about three generations, two families in Burmese, India and Malaya. It is the historical novel about British colonization. He describes the defeats and disappointments of people in various places.

### INTRODUCTION

Amitav Ghosh is Indian by birth. Ghosh believes that "history is never more compelling than when it gives us insight into oneself and the ways in which one's own experiences". He was born in Calcutta (Kolkata) on 11 July 1956. His father Shailendra Chandra Ghosh was an officer in the British Indian Army. Ghosh's mother was Anjali, a homemaker. Ghosh obtained B.A. with honors in history from St. Stephen's College, University of Delhi, in 1976, and M.A. in Sociology from University of Delhi. His fourth novel, *The Glass Palace* (2000) wins the grand prize for fiction at the Frankfurt International Book Awards and Myanmar National Literature Award by U Nay Win Myint 2012. In *The Glass Palace*, there are many stories and characters. It is a saga of three generations of three families, tied together by friendship, marriage, and business. This novel is also about many places, war and displacement, exile and rootlessness. It also says about human helplessness in such a situation.

### PORTRAYAL OF FAMILY AND SOCIETY

Amitav Ghosh, *The Glass Palace* displaces himself from writing about the society and rather he deals with the family ties of his characters that run through three generations. This historical novel starts with the fall of the Konbaung Dynasty in

Mandalay, through the Second World War to the modern times. It deals with three families and their different settings like India, Burma and Malaya. Ghosh brings in his imaginary characters that are more family bound rather than historical. These characters try to find a space for themselves that naturally move them away from the society. The novel starts with British cannons against people of their invasion; this creates problems. This is the reason for the fall of the Burmese king. Rajkumar, an eleven-year-old Indian orphan, immigrated in Burma, the central character of the novel. It has always been the Burmese Queen Supayalat who clears the paths of her beloved King to rule their country without rivals. She earns hatred from her people for her behavior to kill whoever comes in her King's way to grab his throne. All the people had hated her for her cruelty, feared her for ruthlessness and courage. The Burmese King and Queen change their lives after reaching Ratnagiri, India. Though the people of Ratnagiri are aliens to them, a change of attitude in The Baw Min and Supayalat makes them live again as the King and Queen to the people of Ratnagiri and act more importantly as the guardian spirits of those people in many aspects like warning them of crucial storms and providing place for them to survive when a plague occurs. This becomes clear when the narrator says, "In Ratnagiri there were many who

believes that King was the first to know when the sea claims a victim" (Ghosh, 76). Though these Royal people appear strong, they are denied the role of protagonists. Common people like Rajkumar, Dolly, a servant of Queen, Uma, District collector, Saya John they were trying to fill on their family. They were searching their own identity.

Among them, Rajkumar is an immigrant characteristic, craving to become a notable person in an alien land which he achieves with the help of his mentor Saya John. Rajkumar finally finds his lover, who is a servant of Supayalat. After several years of hard work he learns business from Saya John. builds his own kingdom in Burma and comes to India in search of his dream girl, Dolly who hardly remembers him since she came out from Burma with the King and Queen. She could not find the traces of her days in Burma and struggles a lot to accept his proposal of marriage and her new life in Burma. It is Uma, a mutual friend of Dolly, who refers her to accept the new life that has come in her way as an escape from her barriers of living a peaceful life. But it is not the life that either Dolly or Uma has imagined to be. Despite her comfort in her home and with her two children, Dolly feels dissatisfied and keeps longing for something that would give her contentment. In the later part of the novel, Dolly leaves Rajkumar under the protection of Uma in India and goes in search of her missing son finally finds him. She writes a letter to Rajkumar:

Rajkumar – in my heart I know that Dinu is still alive and that I shall find him. After that I shall go to Sagaing as I have so long wanted to do. Know that nothing in this world will be harder to renounce than you and the memory of our loves. (Ghosh, 482)

Rajkumar has always been independent in his way as he is an orphan he dissatisfies Dolly in several aspects like having an illegitimate child named Ilango, developing misunderstanding with Uma. He has an illegal affair with a woman working in his land when Dolly was busy in taking care of their second son Dinu. All these characters revolve around the life of Rajkumar who knowingly or unknowingly creates a bond among the families of

his, Uma's and Saya John's. Thus, a family creates that bonds, Bond brings them together looking at themselves as individuals rather than representing their nations. The characters in the novel are not representatives of a particular nation, but as individuals. Their identities are seen not with their nationalistic but as individuals who are in search of their own identities, locating themselves in a space where they feel contented by displacing themselves away from the nationalistic myths. The concept of nation separates from that of family ties. Amitav Ghosh is such a writer who finds himself comfortable in displacing his novel from the conceptions of nation. This nation of Ghosh gets reflected in the novel where the character distances away from the imagined communities. In this novel the characters attempt to move further in search of their space in this world.

## CONCLUSION

Thus, *The Glass Palace* has multicultural aspects through character. They find themselves beyond their society and focus on their cultural identities that gradually lead to their inner self. Through these imaginary characters, Ghosh displaces the notion and has given prominence to the family ties that revolve around their own inner conflicts which have a different imaginary concreteness from that of other countries like Europe and America.

## References

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