

**The Element of Diaspora in Amitav Ghosh's *The Glass Palace* and the *Shadow Lines***

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**Abstract**

*This paper traces how Amitav Ghosh has used Diaspora in 'The Glass Palace' and 'The Shadow Lines'. Diaspora is derived from the Greek word, 'Diaspeirien', that means 'dia' is 'through' and 'speirien' is 'to scatter'. Diaspora is a dispersion of people from their original homeland. This dispersion of people expresses the emotional outbursts and psychological needs of the characters involved in the novels. The belongingness and the longing for the unique identity play a vital role in his novels.*

**Keywords:** diaspora, dispersion, emotional outburst, belongingness, original identity etc.

**Introduction:**

Amitav Ghosh is a prolific Indian writer in English whose perfect sense of history and place has won him much acclamation. He was born on 11th July 1956; he studied in Delhi, Oxford and Egypt. He is best known for his historical fictions. The usage of the element Diaspora in his writings becomes natural to him as he has been widely moving from one place to another for his studies, works and so on. His novels *The Shadow Lines* and *The Glass Palace* are the best examples of the use of Diaspora. He is a contemporary Indian English novelist, who binds his professional skills as a social historian with literary flair to create works of art, concerned with civilisation and history.

To quote in Hawley's words.

His fundamental interest is "in people, in individuals and their specific predicament. If history is of interest to him, it is because it provides instances and unusual predicament".

### **Diaspora in 'The Glass Palace'**

Diaspora elements reveal the characters personal feelings and longing. Almost all the Diaspora movements face the same problems. They all initially find it difficult to adapt to the new surroundings, culture and customs. At the same time, they also yearn for their identity and rootedness. It's a psychological pain and agony. The Glass Palace is a historical novel. It is the first book about European the greed and cruelty of colonisation. It is a complex novel that illustrates almost three generations, and it expresses the devastation done by colonialism. In this historical fiction, Ghosh brings out the effects of victim diaspora. The opening scene itself has the diasporic approach. The protagonist Rajkumar runs into an unknown land and struggles decisively to make his struggle a success. Although Rajkumar was thrown into an alien country, soon the boy develops his idea through his sense of belonging at the new place. The very first line itself shows us the alienated feelings of the boy who beholds the unique circumstances and the setups of the roads in admiration and at the same time insecurity. He is sent to the streets to find a job for himself in Ma Cho's shop to survive until his boat gets repaired. Ma Cho is Half Indian and Half Burmese and hires this boy on the condition that she would give three meals and a place to shelter. It is all that the boy wanted, and he continues his daily routine in the shop and develops a promising spirit.

King Thibaw (1885-1916) rules Burma before the invasion of British. He along with his queens lives in a Glass Palace. They order the riches and the nobles and lead a contented life. Burma was known for its teak wood industries, and thus it pays ways for the British invasion. The massive life of the king comes to an end with their aggression. The life and the beauty of The Glass Palace are well described by Macho, who was the first acquaintance in Mandalay to Rajkumar.

But soon the Royal life is disordered by the invasion of British and the royal family along with their servants is exiled to Ratnagiri where they live in residence called Outram. Amitav Ghosh has depicted the downfall and subsequent confusion that leads to the banishment of the Burmese in a vivid and realist manner. The below description shows the extent of deliberate cruelty and insult that was dealt with King of law and his Queen Supayalat:

"Just he was about to step in; the King noticed that is canopy had seven tires, the number allotted to a nobleman, not the nine due to the king. In his last encounter with his former subjects, he was to be publically demoted, like an errant school child. Sladen Had guessed right: This was of all the insults Thebaw could have imagined, the most hurtful, and the most egregious."

King Thebaw accepts his fate like a philosopher. Soon the following events conspire to weave Outram house. Many years pass by. Queen Supayalat sees the dehumanisation of the subject process. She brings out the novel a perspective.

After two decades Dolly Rajkumar's first love through Uma gets to meet Rajkumar, and they get married, and they beget Neeldhari and Dinanath. Rajkumar and Dolly live in Burma, Their children's life is also shown in the novel. Towards the end of the Japanese attack Burma

against the British. Alison and Saya John Dina tries to escape. Finally, Saya John is shot to death. Neel dies trapped amidst of panicky elephants, Neel's wife Manju after giving birth to a baby girl drowns in a river. Thus throughout the novel, people are chased and faced by many challenges that question their own identity and rootedness. Ghosh describes the aspirations, defeats and disappointment and also alienation of the dislocated people in India, Burma and Malaya throughout the novel.

### **Diaspora in 'The Shadow Lines'**

The shadow lines, a Sahitya Academy winning novel. The novel is divided into two parts Going Away and Coming Home. It portrays incidents, experiences, conflicts of two Diaspora families The Datta Chaudharis in Calcutta and The Price family in London that belong to three countries India, Bangladesh and England. This novel reflects colonial as well as post-colonial society, the meaning of freedom, the issues of crossing borders and the dynamics of displacement. The characters in the novel exhibit the pains of getting dislocated. Ghosh has used a perfect characterisation to express different perspectives and shades of characters. Tridip is the pivotal character, and he wishes to stay back in his country though he has got chances to live a western life. On contrary Ila, cousin of the narrator always dreams to live a western life without any bonding to her own culture and nation. And after she meets her dream life, she is faced by racism and loses her identity.

The novel is narrated through an unnamed narrator, and throughout the novel, Ghosh has used 'I' person to portray the incidents. His uncle, Tridip profoundly influences the narrator. Thamma never approved of Tridip and kept talking ill about his idleness however the narrator liked him for he found something unique in his ways of narrating stories and incidents. Tridip plays the central role, and he develops a close connection towards his nation. His parents along with himself went to London thirteen years before the narrator was born. But Tridip returns to Calcutta, and he lives in his old family house in Ballygunge place with his ageing grandmother, in Thamma opinions that he has wasted his time.

Thamma is a strict school, and she has always been a disciplined, hard-working, mentally strong and a patient lady. She had moved to Calcutta when India and Pakistan were partitioned. But her uncle Jethamoshal continued to live in Dhaka, and he says after she gets settled in Calcutta she works hard and lives a decent life. She also demands the same discipline from her children and grandchildren. The narrator gets a little upset with the monotonous life and his only relief his uncle Tridip, and he always looks forward to meeting him. In the meantime, the life of the price family also gets focused, and the narrator falls in love with Ila and Ila loves Nick and Tridip loves May. All the characters go through the pains of dislocation and alienation throughout the novel.

Thamma has her ideas about border lines. She strongly feels and wonders how her motherland has become alienated. Ila is inclined to live a western life, and she wants to get rid of her culture. The narrator falls for Ila but Ila eventually marries Nick the Grandson of

Prince family, and she moves to London where she faces many problems and loses her identity. She is not defended by her Philandering Husband; she bursts out furiously. When she is forced by Robi to follow appropriate female behaviour in a nightclub in London, she gets disgusted and tells the narrator that she chose to live in London to be free to the open culture and free of all of you. However, her attempts to free herself from the social burden of Indian womanhood meet with failure as even while staying aboard she is caught in other people's inventions.

Tridip loves May, the Price families daughter. Throughout the novel, all the character moves from one place to another, from one country to another continuously. Trip's father was a diplomat and an officer in the Foreign Services. He and Mayadebi are always abroad or in Delhi. After intervals of three years sometimes they would spend a couple of months in Calcutta. Trip's two brothers Jatin and Kaker who is the elder and two years older than Tridip was an economist at the UN. He was always away too, somewhere in Africa, South East Asia, with his wife and his daughter Ila, who was of my age. The third brother, Robi, who was much younger, lived with his parents where ever they happened to be posted."

Thus throughout the novel, the characters move from one place to another. Thamma finally decides to bring her uncle to Calcutta from Dhaka, on her way she wants to know from her son if she will be able to see the border between India and East Pakistan from the plane." She reasons that there perhaps trenches or soldiers or guns pointed at each other or barrel stripes of land at the borders of two nations. But her son tells her that she won't be able to see anything except clouds and perhaps, if you are lucky, some green fields. She is disappointed. A significant realisation of her mistake dawns on her. So for Thamma, the borders are absolute physical and tangible. Finally in the process of bringing her uncle back has failed and Tridip dies in a riot. He sacrificed his life in the act of rescuing his uncle from Muslim Mobs in the communal riots which happened in Dhaka. In general, it can be said that this novel marks a notable shift to a more realistic examination of the protagonist's search through his memories, eventually provoking recognition in him and the reader that he too was fleeting and pursuing something: namely, the relation between past and present by his own identity.

**Conclusion:**

Thus the element of Diaspora is commonly found in both the novels. If the movement is out of interest, the people will get adapted easily and will make use of the opportunity in its fullest possibility. But if it's forced like in the cases of these two novels, the characters find it hard to develop the connection, and they always face the problems of alienation. In conclusion, it can be said that both the novels' characterisation and the handling of the history blended with fictional qualities has precisely expressed identity crisis and loneliness and homelessness.

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