DISLOCATION- A PSYCHOLOGICAL ILLNESS IN THE NOVELS OF AMITAV GOSH'S

Mrs.J.Sridevi

Assistant professor of English

Arignar Anna Govt. Arts College,

Villupuram.

Amitav Ghosh's novels echo his commitment with some of the serious issues by contemporary ex-colonies in Asia and Africa. The term dislocation is used to explain the experience of those who have eagerly moved from 'home' to the colonial margin, but it affects all those who, as a result of colonialism have been placed in a location that, because of colonial hegemonic practices, needs in a sense to be reinvented in language, in narrative and in myth.

The theme of dislocation is one of the major themes in The *Glass Palace*. Rukmini Bhaya Nair says, "*The Glass Palace* is a narrative of colonial displacement" (162). *The Glass Palace* brings together history, fiction, autobiographical account and memories and thereby dislocates the genres also. In this novel a historical event leads to a series of connected dislocations. Ghosh has stated that the issue of how the past is to be remembered lies at the heart of *The Glass Palace*. 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, and complex cultural diversities of a persistent political struggle for democraticand egalitarian system.

The colonial rule was not solely responsible for all the displacement and exploitation. The greedy native people like Baburao from Guntur and Rajkumar supplied work force to the British. These laborers were contracted for cheap rate. Many of them died on the way itself. On the voyage the women were sexually exploited. For instance, Ilongo's mother was sexually used by Rajakumar on the voyage from Madras to Rangoon. These indentured labours were living in the teak camps, oil camps and rubber plantation with all the hazards.

This estimation of people throws light on the cruel, exploitative nature of colonizers and neo-colonizers. It seems Ghosh questions here how can the colonizers represent themselves as civilized and rational. Another pervasive element that runs through the novel is how the colonized people and soldiers were used to colonize and exploit other free countries. Uma, an active political member fighting for the independence of India, knew this fact, therefore while returning to Calcutta from Rangoon, she tells Rajkumar:

> "it is people like you who are responsible for this tragedy. Did you ever think of the consequences when you were transporting people here? What you and your kind have done is far worse than the worst deeds of the Europeans" (*The Glass Palace* 247).

The dislocation which resulted from colonial living may help some people to migrate, toform their personality using their skills, and to prosper in their lives. Ghosh doesn't squarely say that dislocation causes only disadvantages. He vividly represents the other side of dislocation. For instance, Rajukumar, the protagonist, lands in Mandalay. He is from Chittagong. He develops the sense of belonging at the new place. He overcomes the challenging barriers. In fact, barriers cause progress in his case. When he views the fort of Mandalay, instinctively he knows that orphans like him cannot go there. Yet "no matter what Ma Cho said, he decided, he would cross the moat, before he left Mandalay, he would find a way in" (*The Glass Palace* 7). This is the spark that sets Rajkumar apart for a life of success, adventure and prosperity.

Dislocation has resulted in the cultural transformation. When the King The baw and his family were exiled to Ratnagiri, initially the family could retain Burmese culture. But because of long stay their culture changed:

> In their early years in India the Princesses usually dressed in Burmese clothes aingyis and htameins. But as the years passed their garments changed. One day, they appeared in saris- not expensive or sumptuous saris but the simple green and red cottons of the district. They began to wear their hair braided and oiled like Ratnagiri school girls (*The Glass Palace* 76-77).

Dislocation or displacement has also blurred racial borders. For instance, Rajkumar, an Indian married Dolly, a Burmese. So their sons Neel and Dinu are half Indians and half Burmese. Neel married Manju, an Indian, Uma's niece.Their child Jaya half Indian and half Burmese. So also, Saya John a Malaccan married Chinese woman. Their son Mathew is half-Malaccan and half-Chinese. Mathew married Elsa, an American. How their daughter Alison is to be identified in terms of race. Rajkumar's younger son Dinu married a Burmese writer, Ma Thin Thin Aye. Thus, the saga of these 45 families dislocates the concept of racial purity. The race is hybridized and the concept of pure race is deconstructed. Saya John is a fine illustration of this breed of hybridity which blurs the national and racial borders. His (Saya John's) clothes are Western. He speaks English, Hindustani and Burmese. His face looks like that of Chinese. Saya himself makes fun of his amalgamated identity.

Dislocation resulted from colonial occupation and administration has caused mental colonization of colonized. For instance, Saya does not see the English as usurpers. For him they are superior. From them he has learnt the art of using everything for his own benefit. The Europeans for him stand for efficient exploiters of natural resources. Before the European's arrival, Burmese people had the skills but they never thought of hijacking the natural resources.

Until the Europeans came none of them ever thought of using elephants for the purposes of logging. Their elephants were used only in pagodas and palaces, for wars and ceremonies. "It was the Europeans who saw that tame elephants could be made to workfor human profit. It was they who invented everything we see around us in this logging camp. This entire life is their creation" (*The Glass Palace* 74). This is what Saya tells Rajkumar about Europeans. As his master, Rajkumar, was also "convinced that in the absence of the Biritish Empire, Burma's economy would collapse" (*The Glass Palace* 306)

The theme of how the colonized army and persons were being used to colonize other free countries runs though this novel. These soldiers were psychologically dislocated. The colonial administration of colonies led to appointment of soldiers into the British army in large number. The irony is that the English lived in their own enclave sand followed their own pursuits: Most of the day to day tasks of ruling were performed by Indians. The Indian soldiers were the most trusted and seasoned. They stood by their masters even during the uprising of 1857

When the British army crossed the border to invade Burma it was found about two third of the soldiers were Indian sepoys. Fighting for family and country may instill strength and spirit of fighting; the Indian soldiers were fighting neither for their family nor for their country. Therefore, how they could fight for their masters was the question that puzzled many. When Saya John was in Singapore looking at the state of Indian soldiers he enquired "how do you fight an enemy who fights from neither enmity nor anger, but in submission to orders from superiors without protest and without conscience?" (*The Glass Palace* 30) Saya felt it was just for the meager amount that they would allow their masters to use them as they wished. And then he told Rajkumar that "they're just tools minds of their own. They count for nothing" (*The Glass Palace* 30).

When the colonizers entered the colony they promised that they would rule through laws, ensured freedom, equality and protection of individual rights. But they did as the Queen foretold. She told: "Within a few decades the wealth will be gone and they too will leave" (*The Glass Palace* 88). Consequently, golden Burma was left in destitution, ignorance, famine, despair and chaos. The country is under the control of neo-colonizers. This situation is represented at the end of the novel. Jaya, tracking the traces of her uncle Dinu, with the help of Ilongo, comes to Rangoon. She goes to her uncle's house cum photo studio. Dinu could not ask his niece to stay in his house because apologetically he says: "Don't forget that you are in Myanmar. Nothing is simple here…. Every household has a registered list of members…. Nobody else can spend the night there without permission" (*The Glass Palace* 511). The freedom of expression, so basic 50 to the development of society is also curtailed and every book and magazine has to be presented to the press security Board "for the perusal of a small army of captains and Majors" (*The Glass Palace* 535) Daw Thin Thin Aye, wife of Dinu, stops writing when she finds her articles are rejected and mocked at by barely literate people.

Dislocation has fueled communal animosity and clashes in the name of nation. Because of imperial rule the Indians moved to Burma in large number. The Indians became strong, powerful and prosperous. For instance Rajkumar, an orphan boy, becomes a successful businessman in teakwood and rubber plantation. Like Rajkumar many Indians run varied businesses and contributed to the economy of Burma. Dolly says, "Indian moneylenders have taken all 'farm land; Indians run most of the shops, people say the rich Indians live like colonialists, lording over the Burmese" (*The Glass Palace* 240).

Consequently the solidarity between Indians and Burmese turns to animosity and the Burmese felt displaced. Inter cultural marriages between the two communities are condemned and women like Dolly are, in her words, seen as "traitors to their own people" (*The Glass Palace,* 240). Burmese hostility against Indians is reinforced in the macabre image of the Indian who is chased by a mob of blood thirsty Burmese who beheaded him. Riots breakout all over Burma and the unquestioning harmony between Burmese and Indians turns to hatred and bloodshed. The riots last for several days and the causalities numbered in hundreds, "the toll would have been higher still, if it had not been for the many Burmese who had rescued Indians from the mob and sheltered them in their homes" (*The Glass Palace,* 245).

Thus the colonial occupation led to the physical, political, psychological, racial and cultural dislocations. Yet the novel ends with a desire to reestablish a culture of ease and love, comfort and compassion, forgoing the hatred and violence. The real hope among the people is awakened by the figure of Aung San Suu Kyi who has torn the masks from the face of cruel regime and inspires people with her charisma. She holds no political institutional post but she has become an institution in herself. Ghosh shows her popularity, her openness in facing the public and her ability to laugh. Thus the novel which begins with invasion and plunder end.

Another dislocation highlighted in this novel is the dislocation caused by the government. *The Hungry Tide* also throws light on the lives and predicament of dislocated refugees. It raises the serious issue of choice between the protection of environment and human beings. In Morichjapi, one of the islands of the tide country, a large number of refugees had taken shelter. They were originally from East Pakistan. They had come to India after the partition of India and Bangladesh war in 1971. These refugees were the poorest of rural people, Dalits, oppressed and exploited both by Muslim communalists and by Hindus of the upper castes. They were forcibly kept in a refugee camp called Dandakaranya in Madhya Pradesh.

The refugees called this resettlement camp as concentration camp or prison. They faced a lot of difficulties there. They could not speak the languages of that area, local people treated them as intruders, the police surrounded them and they were forbidden to leave that place. In 1978 these refugees organized themselves, broke out of the camp and came to Morichjhapi. These refugees did an amazing work in this island. They constituted organizations; institutions, set up their own government, did the census of the refugees and divided the island into zones. Their achievement is really astonishing.

The voice of these marginalized was not heard by the government. It finally evicted the refugees forcibly. In the final encounter between the government and the refugees thousands of refugees were massacred. The voice of these subalterns goes unheard. What is underscored here is the casual way in which the refugees' lives are dealt with by the government, because it links 'development' with foreign ideology and aid. The same fact is underlined again when Piya sees a tiger being killed by the villagers for having harmed humans and livestock. Greatly upset by the killing, in a shocking show of insensitivity to human life Piya condemns the killing of the tiger, "Everywhere in the world dozens of people are killed everyday- on roads, in cars, in traffic, why is this any 62 worse" (*The Hungry Tide* 301). This is what prompts Kanai to give the most telling statement in the whole novel. "It was people like you who made a push to protect the wild life here, without regard for the human costs. And I'm complicit because people like me-Indians of my class, curry, favour with their Western patrons" (*The Hungry Tide* 301). Piya speaks so, because she does not know that no day passed in tide country without news of someone being killed by a tiger, a snake or a crocodile.

The displaced marginals encounter several authorities which have rendered them homeless refugees. First the newly carved up nations, second the West Bengal State government and third one the Western ideologies. The newly carved up nation Bangladesh, led by the elite pushed millions of refugees towards marginalization and homeless in the context of partition of the sub-continent. Second the West Bengal government which went ahead in implementing the direction of the central government. Third the westernized perceptions, polices and strategies of the environmentalists and climatologists who try to impose their vision in far off natural sanctuaries like Sundarban without taking into consideration the local situations.

Colonialism which was prevalent in most parts of the country in the past and in some of the parts of the world at the present situation created lot of confusion and became the topic of many people of literature. Ghosh clearly points out the problems of subalterns, refugees and the colonized people. Their knowledge was suppressed, their talent was compressed into mud, their creativity was buried, and subsequently they became slaves, they became depressed, they became dejected. The moving of the characters to other distant lands was so heartbreaking that homesickness became the topic of these novels.

Ghosh clearly expose the suppressed peoples are being away from their dear ones has never been easy at any point of time in the history of humanity and truly the suffering that people face as a result of exile melts stones. But the colonizers did not feel any such emotions while harassing the colonized as immigrants.

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