

“The Intimate Enemy”: Schizoids in Amitav Ghosh’s *The Glass Palace*

Binayak Roy¹
K.G.T. Mahavidyalaya, Bagdogra, India

Abstract

Amitav Ghosh opposes the “agonistic” or “reconciliatory” strand in postcolonial studies espoused amongst others by Bhabha. By fusing postcolonialism with postmodernism, this school of postcolonial thought rejects resistance. It reconfigures the historical project of invasion, expropriation and exploitation as a symbiotic encounter. As a staunch anticolonialist, what Ghosh presents in his writing is the ubiquity of the Eurocentrism of the colonised. *The Glass Palace* represents how colonial discourses (primarily the military discourse) have moulded native identity and resulted in severe alienation. Self-alienation is apparent in the characters of the soldier, Arjun, who has been transformed into a war-machine in the hands of British military discourse and in the character of the Collector, a Britain-trained colonial administrator. Both these characters are destroyed: they end up in a dead end in their existential moorings and kill themselves. Ghosh genuinely attempts to revisit and reframe the colonial past by questioning the ideological, epistemological and ontological assumptions of the imperial powers, the masks of conquest. Resistance in itself has always been an integral component of literature. Protest is simultaneously a dialogue, a deconstruction and an assertion. Literary resistance in *The Glass Palace* that interweaves historical-political events with individual stories thus explicates Benita Parry’s critique of postcolonial discourse for its unwillingness to articulate a more oppositional politics.

Keywords

Amitav Ghosh, colonialism, hegemony, ideology, anticolonialism, split-self

The Natives must either be kept down by a sense of our power, or they must willingly submit from a conviction that we are more wise, more just, more humane, and more anxious to improve their condition than any other rulers they could possibly have. (J. Farish, ctd. in Gauri Viswanathan, *Masks of Conquest* 2)

¹ Binayak Roy teaches English at K.G.T. Mahavidyalaya, Bagdogra, West Bengal, India. His research interests include Indian English Novel, postcolonial literature, literary theory and the cinema of Satyajit Ray. He has done his PhD on the novels of Amitav Ghosh. His papers have been published in journals such as *Postcolonial Text*, *South Asian Review*, *ANQ: A Quarterly Journal of Short Articles, Notes, and Reviews*, *Journal of Postcolonial Cultures and Societies*, *Asian Cinema Journal*, *Film International* and *Crossroads*.

It (modern oppression) is a battle between dehumanized self and the objectified enemy, the technological bureaucrat and his reified victim, pseudo-rulers and their fearsome other selves projected on to their ‘subjects.’ (Ashis Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy*16)

Postcolonialism and the Disavowal of Resistance

The institutionalisation of postcolonial studies occurred at a time when the linguistic turn dominated both philosophy and literary theory. This set the stage for theoretical tendencies which Said has deplored for permitting intellectuals “an astonishing sense of weightlessness with regard to the gravity of history” (*Culture and Imperialism* 366-67). This postcolonialist shift away from the historical processes disrupts the “customary epistemological and ideological divisions between colonizer and colonized” (Parry, “The Institutionalization of Postcolonial Studies” 75). As a result, colonialism appears as “a mode of authority that is agonistic (rather than antagonistic)” (Bhabha 173, 108). “Significantly, ‘agonistic’ relates to ancient Greek athletic contests, ‘agon’ being derived from the word for ‘a gathering’ and denoting ‘(a) public celebration of games, a contest for the prize at games’, whereas ‘antagonistic’ specifies ‘(t)he mutual resistance of two opposing forces, physical or mental; active opposition to a force’” (Parry 75-76). The conflict within the colonial encounter is thus occluded. In this re-reading of the colonial archive, the historical project of invasion, expropriation and exploitation is reconfigured as a symbiotic encounter. Simon During suggests that postcolonial thought, which fused postcolonialism with postmodernism in its rejection of resistance along with any form of binarism, hierarchy or telos signified something remote from self-determination and autonomy. By deploying categories such as hybridity, mimicry and ambivalence, “all of which laced colonized into colonising cultures, postcolonialism effectively became a reconciliatory rather than a critical anticolonialist category” (31-32). This is what Benita Parry says about the Bhabha-Spivak variety of postcolonialism:

It is an irony that the story of mutuality now being composed by some postcolonial critics makes an inadvertent return to the narrative of benign colonialism once disseminated by British imperial historiography and which in the metropolis continues to have a purchase on the official and popular memory of empire, especially of the Indian Raj. (77)

Amitav Ghosh and the Rejection of the Symbiotic Encounter

Amitav Ghosh rejects the suggestion that he is part of the postcolonial writing movement: “I think that’s a term critics use, but it’s certainly not a term I would use for myself. I think of myself as an Indian Writer” (Branagan 5). His objection stems from his conviction that “‘Postcolonial’ is a term that describes you as a negative. “I mean, when I think of the world that I grew up to inhabit,

my dominant memory of it is not that it was trying to be a successor state to a colony; it was trying to create its own reality, which today is the reality that we do inhabit” (Kumar 105). The “postcolonial” that Ghosh has in mind is the one conceptualised by Homi Bhabha. He emphatically declares that, “I have no truck with this term at all.” He contends that the term has gained immense popularity in the last five or six years, but he does not know a single Indian writer of his acquaintance who does not detest it. More importantly, it completely misrepresents the focus of his work: “What is postcolonial? When I look at the works of critics, such as Homi Bhabha, I think they have somehow invented this world which is just a set of representations of representations. They’ve retreated into a world of magic mirrors and I don’t think anyone can write from that sort of position” (Silva and Tickell 214-15). He makes his repudiation of the “agonistic” or “reconciliatory” strand in postcolonial studies quite explicit in his letter to Dipesh Chakraborty: “the unintended effect of concentrating solely on the ‘persuasive’ and discursive aspects of the Raj is that it sometimes makes colonialism itself invisible, as though all that had happened was a consensual exchange of ideas between equals”(11). Ghosh’s stand against this dominance of textuality and its disengagement from materiality is quite close to Said’s reiteration that the “realities of power and authority – as well as the resistances offered by men, women, and social movements to institutions, authorities, and orthodoxies – are the realities that make texts possible” (5).

Despite all his disavowal, Janet de Neefe clubs Ghosh together with the postcolonial writers: “A winner of numerous literary awards, it is no wonder that he has been described as ‘one of the most sympathetic postcolonial voices’ to be heard today” (1). Likewise, Rama Kundu believes that Ghosh’s novels “represent a fresh trend in today’s postcolonial literature” (175). Shubha Tiwari throws to the winds all linguistic and critical precision when she observes in the same breath that “[c]olonisation, recolonisation, neo colonisation and decolonisation are recurring thoughts in Ghosh’s work” (3). On the contrary, John C. Hawley holds that “Ghosh seeks to approach the topic [postcoloniality] from a new perspective that does not privilege the colonizer by accepting the manichean definitions of West and East” (17). Widening the perspective further John Skinner thinks that Ghosh’s concern is “not only with colonizer and colonized, but with both historical and contemporary relations between different colonized groups. Not so much ‘the empire writes back’, then, as ‘the empire writes home’” (ctd. in Hawley 17). All in all, perhaps Ghosh would like to be called an anticolonial rather than a postcolonial.

The Masks of Conquest

Colonialism wins its great victories not only because of its military and technological prowess but also because of its cultural appropriation. It creates secular hierarchies incompatible with the traditional order. By passing

colonialism off as a civilising mission, the colonisers dupe the colonised. Carrying a certain cultural baggage, the colonial system perpetuates itself by inducing the colonised to accept new social norms and cognitive categories. Unnoticed and hence unchallenged, these are instruments of oppression and dominance. Under the cloak of a civilising mission, the colonial system persuades the colonised to internalise its logic and absorb its values. By responding to the fresh opportunities provided by the coloniser, the colonised actively participates in his own oppression, thereby, corroding his own self. The colonised is thus a participant in a “moral and cognitive venture against oppression” (Nandy xiv). By making choices, he becomes a self-destructive co-victim. This is “the intimate enemy” position which moulds one’s interiority and also corrodes one from within, resulting in the loss of one’s self. “This colonialism colonizes minds in addition to bodies” argues Nandy “and it releases forces within the colonized societies to alter their cultural priorities once for all” (xi).

The inevitable result is the thorough Westernisation and modernisation of the colonised. Complete surrender to the technological superiority of Western modernity and wholesale rejection of local cultures pain the anthropologist Ghosh in the story “The Imam and the Indian.” The Imam, one of the last repositories of traditional medical lore, is now convinced that his own healing powers are worthless in the face of modern Western knowledge. Such is the unquestioning acceptance of his own inferiority that his medicines are “as discredited in his own eyes as they were in his clients’... he bitterly regretted his inherited association with the relics of the past” (*The Imam and the Indian* 4). He is now learning “the art of mixing and giving injections” (*The Imam and the Indian* 4). The self-abased Imam locates the West’s superiority in its destructive power: “They’re not an ignorant people. They’re advanced, they’re educated, they have science, they have guns and tanks and bombs” (*The Imam and the Indian* 10). The provoked Ghosh retorts: “We have guns and tanks and bombs... we’ve even had a nuclear explosion. You won’t be able to match that in a hundred years” (*The Imam and the Indian* 10-11). Recognising the irony of the situation, he sees himself and the Imam as “delegates from two superseded civilizations vying with each other to lay claim to the violence of the West” (*The Imam and the Indian* 11). The two between them show in action the ubiquity of the Eurocentrism of the colonised. Such is the universality of the language of power “that even for him, a man of God, and for me, a student of the ‘humane’ sciences” continues Ghosh, “they had usurped the place of all other languages of argument” (*The Imam and the Indian*, 11). Ethics and divine sanction have nothing to do with power. While “non-Western” and sometimes “anti-Western” views “involve an emphatic seeking of independence from colonial dominance,” explains Amartya Sen, “they are, in fact, thoroughly foreign-dependent – in a negative and contrary form. The dialectics of the captivated

mind can lead to a deeply biased and parasitically reactive self-perception” (91). Thus the colonial masters of yesterday continue to exert an enormous influence on the postcolonial mind today.

Like the other novels of Amitav Ghosh, *The Glass Palace* too has received international recognition. It won the Grand Prize for Fiction at the Frankfurt International e-Book Awards. The novel also won the best book award for the Eurasian region of the Commonwealth Writers Prize in 2001. Interestingly, Ghosh spurned the award on ideological grounds:

I have on many occasions publicly stated my objections to the classification of books such as mine under the term ‘Commonwealth Literature’. Principal among these is that this phrase anchors an area of contemporary writing not within the realities of the present day, nor within the possibilities of the future, but rather within a disputed aspect of the past.... (“Letter to the Commonwealth Foundation” 1)

His repudiation of the Commonwealth Writers Prize springs from his anticolonial spirit which he states in unambiguous terms:

That the past engenders the present is of course undeniable; it is equally undeniable that the reasons why I write in English are ultimately rooted in my country’s history.... The issue of how the past is to be remembered lies at the heart of *The Glass Palace* and I feel that I would be betraying the spirit of my book if I were to allow it to be incorporated within that particular memorialization of Empire that passes under the rubric of ‘the Commonwealth’. (1)

No wonder he rejects the post-colonial writing movement which reconfigures the historical project of invasion and exploitation as a symbiotic encounter. More importantly, Ghosh explores the split-self of an individual under the impact of colonialism.

Reading *The Glass Palace*

Ghosh’s “most commercially successful” (Mondal 14) novel has had a diverse critical reception. While Rakhee Moral straitjackets the novel as a “postcolonial narrative” (139), Anshuman A. Mondal categorises it as a “grand historical romance” (15). For Rukmini Bhaya Nair the novel is “condemned to record the exit-ential dilemma – wherein the subject is necessarily partitioned, a bewildered immigrant never quite in focus nor contained within the frame” (162). In a similar vein, Rakhi Nara and G.A. Ghanashyam interpret the novel as “an elegy for the diasporic condition” (96). In stark contrast to all these views, N.K. Rajalakshmi believes that the novel “disclose(s) the undercurrents of power discourse in everyday existence of human life” (115). In a comprehensive

analysis of the “histories of migration and transnational flows that began several centuries ago” (39) in Ghosh’s rich oeuvre, Anjali Gera Roy concentrates on the movements of the marginalised like Rajkumar “who have figured as an absence in histories of nations or diasporas” (42). Given the substantial nature of the work it comes as no surprise that *The Glass Palace* should receive such a wide range of critical interpretations.

The transformation of literature from its ambivalent “original” state into an instrument of ideology is well enunciated by Terry Eagleton in his contention that literature degenerates into “a vital instrument for the insertion of individuals into the perceptual and symbolic forms of the dominant ideological formation.” “What is finally at stake is not literary texts,” continues Eagleton “but Literature – the ideological significance of that process whereby certain historical texts are severed from their social formations, defined as ‘literature,’ and bound and ranked together to constitute a series of ‘literary traditions’ and interrogated to yield a set of ideological presupposed responses” (ctd. in Viswanathan, *Masks of Conquest* 4-5). A vital if subtle connection exists between a discourse in which those who are to be educated are represented as morally and intellectually deficient, and the attribution of moral and intellectual values to the literary works they are assigned to read. *The Glass Palace* represents how colonial discourses (primarily the military discourse) have moulded native identity and resulted in severe alienation. Self-alienation is apparent in the characters of the Collector, a Britain-trained colonial administrator and the soldier, Arjun, who has been transformed into a war-machine in the hands of British military discourse. Both these characters are destroyed; they end up in a dead end in their existential moorings and kill themselves. Arjun, the more prominent of these figures, can initially express himself only within the discourse of the military culture. As he finally realises his condition as a puppet of this colonial discourse and manages to create some distance from it, he is left with nothing. He has nowhere to place his allegiances, so to speak, no language that would help him build a new self with other affiliations. In the colonial context, the subjectivity problematic is both urgent and morbid: people have to adopt an alien epistemology to develop a self-understanding. Further, the discursively colonised people are alienated from their prerogative to make truth claims: their truth claims inevitably come from the Self of the dominant West.

“It’s all a lie”: A Fable for Switched Identities

Gauri Viswanathan, in her essay “The Beginnings of English Literary study in British India,” contends that the English literary text functioned as a surrogate Englishman in his highest and most perfect state. She cites from C.E. Trevelyan’s book, *On the Education of the people of India*, published in 1838, that “[the Indians] daily converse with the best and wisest Englishmen through the medium of their works and form ideas, perhaps higher ideas of our nation than

if their intercourse with it were of more personal kind” (437). Thus English studies became instrumental in confirming the “hegemony” or “rule by consent” of imperialist forces as the natives came to internalise the ideological procedures of the colonial civilising mission. The affirmation of an ideal self and an ideal political state through English literature is in essence an affirmation of English identity. But that identity is equally split along the lines of actual and ideal selves, and the Englishman actively participating in the cruder realities of conquest, commercial aggrandisement and disciplinary management of natives blends into the rarefied, more exalted image of the Englishman as producer of the knowledge that empowers him to conquer, appropriate and manage in the first place. Hence “[t]he self-presentation of the Englishman to native Indians through the products of his mental labor,” argues Viswanathan, “removes him from the place of ongoing colonialist activity – of commercial operations, military expansion and administration of territories – and de-actualizes and diffuses his material reality in the process” (*Masks of Conquest* 20). The ideology of western modernity with its inherent scientific and colonialist discourses seems to be a far more complex construction to resist or overcome.

An intermediary between the British empire and the Burmese Royal Family, the Collector B.P. Dey is the typical educated colonial subject that Macaulay envisaged: “Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect” (430). The Collector’s complete absorption of the civilising mission of the colonialist ideology is epitomised by his “finely-cut Saville Row suits” (*The Glass Palace* 104) and his nostalgic recollections of the “cobble streets and stone bridges... concerts he’d attended” (*The Glass Palace* 159) at Cambridge. An Anglophile, he minutely scrutinises that everything is in order at the dinner table. The ideology of the British Raj percolates deep into his private life as well. To get along well with his European colleagues he “needed a girl who would be willing to step out into society; someone young, who wouldn’t be resistant to learning modern ways” (*The Glass Palace* 158). The relationship between the husband and the wife is not based on an overmastering emotion but on egoism and role-playing. It is the Collector’s personal anxiety to emerge as an “authentic” British person through mimicry. Furthermore, the domineering husband tries to mould his wife in his own terms. As the widowed Uma ponders:

He had wielded immense power as a District Collector, yet paradoxically, the position had brought him nothing but unease and uncertainty; she recalled the nervous, ironic way in which he had played the part of Collector; she remembered how he’d watched over her at table, the intolerable minuteness of his supervision, the effort he had invested in moulding her into a reflection of what he himself aspired to be. (*The Glass Palace* 186)

Uma’s proximity with Dolly further widens this cleavage. The knowledge of the First Princess’s pregnancy coupled with his realisation that Uma kept it as a closely-guarded secret from him creates in the Collector a profound sense of betrayal. The Collector’s dream of an ideal, modern conjugal life is shattered: “To live with a woman as an equal, in spirit and intellect: this seemed to me the most wonderful thing life could offer. To discover together the world of literature, art: what could be richer, more fulfilling? But what I dreamt of is not yet possible, not here, in India, not for us” (*The Glass Palace* 172). A champion of feminine autonomy, the spirited Uma is unable to accept the Collector’s Cambridge philosophy “to bargain for a woman’s soul with the coin of kindness and patience” (*The Glass Palace* 153). For her this extinction of self is “beyond decency, beyond her imagining.... Anything would be better than to submit” (*The Glass Palace* 153). Hence, although B.P. Dey has been “nothing but kind and patient” and Uma has “nothing to complain of” (*The Glass Palace* 172), she decides to part ways with her husband to realise her own individual identity. To be left for a mere idea is an unpardonable humiliation. Uma’s decision to leave comes precisely at the moment when the Collector’s tenure at Ratnagiri is suddenly terminated by the colonial government. Unable to brace for this double blow, the Collector tragically drowns himself in the sea. The nonchalant Queen who bitterly rams home to him his fragile and tenuous identity – “Collector-sahib, Sawant is less a servant than you. At least he has no delusions about his place in the world” – commemorates her gaoler’s death by spitting into the garden. Holding a contradictory “in-between” position, the Collector has been completely mesmerised by the empty rhetoric of the European high ideals of Progress and Liberty to the point of no return. A split-self, the Collector’s ambivalence leads to his ruin. He has never been quite at ease with the demands of colonial mimicry. His identity has always been fragile and tenuous, “the position had brought him nothing but unease and uncertainty.... There seemed never to be a moment when he was not haunted by the fear of being thought lacking by his British colleagues” (*The Glass Palace* 186). The Collector’s disintegration exposes the gap between what he had been taught to desire, and the reality of his hybrid position “in-between” conflictual cultural systems.

The impact of western academic disciplines is easily discernible in Arjun in whom the hierarchical constructions of inferiority and superiority, native and “angrez” are so deeply ingrained that all his effort is to be like an Englishman. As a young army officer in the colonial army, he is puffed with pride that he belongs to an honoured battalion. His obtrusive acknowledgement of the superiority of the colonial masters, and his awe and respect for them, orient him to internalise European morals, manners, dress code and eating habits by aping them. He boasts that “[e]very meal at an officers mess... was an adventure... bacon, ham and sausages at breakfast; roast beef and pork chops for dinner.

They drank whisky, beer and wine, smoked cigars, cigarettes and cigarillos” (*The Glass Palace* 278). Arjun believes that only from this evolves a new and more complete kind of man who is fit to enter the class of officers. He is not only not ashamed but is also proud to announce that as officers they had to prove to themselves as well as to their superiors that they were eligible to be rulers, to qualify as members of an elite. In the early stages of his fascination for military life, he feels nothing but pride in the new life he has embraced. Like the Collector who prefigures him, Arjun idealises the coveted position he holds in colonial service and is proud of the honours that his regiment – *The Royal Battalion* – has been conferred in the past. For him, soldiering is a profession associated with power without any social and ethical compulsions. Since the all-encompassing Indian army dissolves all regional and religious differences between the soldiers, the self-aggrandising Arjun boasts to the unassuming Dinu that they are the “First True Indians” (*The Glass Palace* 278). He takes immense pride in the fact that he lives with the Europeans on equal terms and is elite:

... we’re the first modern Indians; the first Indians to be truly free. We eat what we like, we drink what we like, we’re the first Indians who’re not weighed down by the past... We’re the ones who actually live with Westerners.... We know how the minds of Westerners work. Only when every Indian is like us will the country become truly modern. (*The Glass Palace* 279-80)

Arjun is a colonial mimic man occupying a hybrid cultural space.

For the psychologically colonised Arjun, the British stand for the epitome of civilisation, but the perceptive Dinu pierces through the façade of Arjun and his colleagues in the “fantastic bestiary of their table-talk”: “their assessments were so exaggerated that they seemed to be inventing versions of themselves for collective consumption” (*The Glass Palace* 278). Like the Collector, Arjun too is not unaware of the racism that pervades the colonial Indian army. The British Indian army stands on the edifice that “there was to be a separation between Indians and Britishers”: “On the surface everything in the army appears to be ruled by manuals, regulations, procedures: it seems very cut and dried. But actually, underneath there are all these murky shadows that you can never quite see: prejudice, distrust, suspicion” (*The Glass Palace* 284-85). But in spite of this vital realisation, Arjun’s loyalty to the institution remains unshaken and he unquestioningly admires the superiority of the British. To Arjun “modern” and “western” are synonymous. To be a “modern Indian” he is prepared to erase all traces of being Indian: discard his past and embrace western habits of thought in its totality. At this stage, he does not realise the cost he would be paying to be accepted as a member of the elitist class, the ruling class. When Bela, his sister,

wants to know people’s perceptions of him, Kishan Singh, an NCO says, “He’s a good officer.... Of all the Indians in our battalion, he’s the one who’s the most English. We call him the ‘Angrez’” (*The Glass Palace* 297).

Arjun receives the first shock of his life when he attends his sister’s wedding. Some Burmese student activists and Congress party workers berate him for serving in an occupying army. On this auspicious occasion he manages to keep his temper and replies, “We aren’t occupying the country.... We are here to defend you” (*The Glass Palace* 287). The rejoinder of the activists is quick: “From whom are you defending us? From ourselves? From other Indians? It’s your masters from whom the country needs to be defended” (*The Glass Palace* 288). Arjun, however, is not shaken by these arguments. One of the demonstrators in an anti-war march drops a pamphlet through his car window. Arjun reads some quotations from Mahatma Gandhi and a passage that says, “Why should India, in the name of freedom, come to the defence of this Satanic Empire which is itself the greatest menace to liberty that the world had ever known?” Arjun is extremely irritated by this time, and cannot control his anger: “Idiots.... I wish I could stuff this down their throats. You’d think they’d have better things to do than march about in the hot sun” (292). Obviously, Arjun has become totally servile at this point. He does not question even once why the British Empire should hold India. As Gauri Viswanathan points out, “[w]ithout submission of the individual to moral law or the authority of God, the control they were able to secure over the lower classes in their own country would elude them in India”(437). The education machinery was geared up to make the people of India believe that the British were their “rightful” masters; by following them, they would elevate and uplift their manner, morals and behaviour. This would ensure eternal maintenance of the colonial hegemony. Arjun’s behaviour shows success achieved in this direction.

Unlike the self-alienated Arjun, his colleague Hardayal alias Hardy has no illusions whatsoever about the duplicitous nature of the colonial institution. Thoroughly aware of an Indian soldier’s subordinate position in an army functioning on racism, he interrogates the divisions which have remained unquestioned. Reminding Arjun about the inscription at the Military Academy in Dehra Dun – “*The safety, honour and welfare of your country come first, always and every time. The honour, welfare and comfort of the men you command come next....*” (italics original) – he unravels their unenviable double allegiance and the schizophrenic division within:

‘... this country whose safety, honour and welfare are to come first, always and every time – what is it? Where is this country? The fact is that you and I don’t have a country – so where is this place whose safety, honour and welfare are to come first, always and every time? And why was it that when we took our oath it wasn’t to a country but to the King Emperor – to defend the Empire?’ (*The Glass Palace* 330)

Such is the extent of the corrosive nature of colonial ideology that they – the mere pawns in the hands of an ever-expanding Empire – have been robbed of their convictions and are mere mercenaries whose “hands obey someone else’s head; those two parts of his body have no connection with each other” (*The Glass Palace* 347). This is the “intimate enemy” position which reduces a colonised subject to a mere automaton. Gradually awakening to a new reality, the pride Arjun felt as a well-placed officer in the Indian army begins to evaporate. The “stories” of Colonel Buckland about “the mutual loyalties of Indian soldier and English officer... that... could be understood only as a kind of love” (*The Glass Palace* 332) seems to Arjun an Orientalist representation which he contests: “It seemed that in these stories ‘the men’ figured only as abstractions, a faceless collectivity imprisoned in a permanent childhood – moody, unpredictable, fantastically brave, desperately loyal, prone to extraordinary excesses of emotion” (*The Glass Palace* 332). The “powerful and... inexplicable” love which the European Colonel speaks of seems to be epitomised in a lowly placed Indian batman intimately associated with Arjun. What Kishan Singh is to Arjun, Arjun is to the British Officer, accepting subjugation unquestioningly: “Kishan Singh, in his very individuality, had become more than himself – a village, a country, a history, a mirror for Arjun to see refractions of himself” (*The Glass Palace* 332).

Hardy is right in pointing out that Indians demeaned themselves to the extent of being imprisoned by the idea of having masters to govern them. The British have, as Hardy rightly points out, made sheep out of their “pet dogs,” which would always be ready to be led, not lead themselves. Indians constantly looked towards their masters and thus demeaned themselves. Hardayal, who is referred to as Hardy by his British colleagues, does not mind being addressed thus in the beginning. He considers being addressed as “Hardy” a great privilege. But later, it occurs to him that the distortion of his name is a way of robbing his identity and he is hurt by it. Arjun also witnesses an incident of racial discrimination when, during wartime, he along with his Indian friends jumps into a swimming pool in Singapore where many Europeans are taking a dip. They leave as soon as they see the Indians entering the pool. Arjun’s friend Kumar cannot restrain himself from commenting, “We’re meant to die for this colony – but we can’t use the pools” (*The Glass Palace* 345). While in Malaya, Arjun is shocked to see the rubber plantation workers, mostly Indians, living in abject, grinding poverty. In civilian clothes, he is mistaken for a coolie and is called “Kling” (*The Glass Palace* 346). “Mercenary” was another tag used for Indian soldiers when they reached Malaya because the local Indians believed that they were “not real soldiers, they were just hired killers, mercenaries” (*The Glass Palace* 347).

While taking position in the trenches at Jitra in Malaya, Hardy recognises that they, the Indian soldiers, are risking their lives for a cause which is not theirs. He acknowledges to Arjun that so thorough is the penetration of the ideological network of the colonial masters into his psyche that he is “just a tool, an instrument” in their hands with the connection between the mind and the body severed:

‘... knowing that you had to fight and knowing at the same time that it wasn’t really your fight – knowing that whether you won or lost, neither the blame nor the credit would be yours. Knowing that you’re risking everything to defend a way of life that pushes you to the sidelines. It’s almost as if you’re fighting against yourself.’ (*The Glass Palace* 406)

It is Alison who enlightens Arjun about his fragility: “... you’re not in charge of what you do; you’re a toy, a manufactured thing, a weapon in someone else’s hands. Your mind doesn’t inhabit your body” (*The Glass Palace* 376). Kishan Singh’s selfless service to Arjun makes him introspective about their subordination. Kishan Singh’s family has served the British army for generations unquestioningly because of the fear injected into their minds during the Mutiny by the brutal killing of the rebel soldiers: “a terror that made you remould yourself, that made you change your idea of your place in the world – to the point where you lost your awareness of the fear that had formed you” (*The Glass Palace* 430). Confronted with his “formlessness,” Arjun realises that he has never acted on his own volition. Ironically, the uneducated Kishan Singh is more aware of the past than Arjun himself. Under Hardy’s tutelage – “This is the first time in our lives that we’re trying to make up our own minds – not taking orders” (*The Glass Palace* 438) – Arjun, awakening to his true consciousness, shrugs off his misplaced loyalties to the Empire:

The old loyalties of India, the ancient ones – they’d been destroyed long ago; the British had built their Empire by effacing them. But the Empire was dead now – he knew this because he had felt it die within himself, where it had held its strongest dominion – and with whom was he now to keep faith? (*The Glass Palace* 441)

This disillusionment of the Indian soldiers with the racist policies in the British Indian Army, promising liberty but practicing oppression, is well enunciated by Amitav Ghosh in his essay “India’s Untold War of Independence”:

The discovery of invisible barriers and ceilings disillusioned them with their immediate superiors, but it did not make them hostile to Western institutions. Rather, these encounters with racism served to convince them – as they had an entire generation of Westernized Indians – that the British

colonial regime was not Western *enough*, not progressive *enough*. (*The New Yorker* 108)

As a colonised subject, Arjun saw himself through the lens of the white European. His decolonised mind liberates him from his vacillations and calls for direct action. It is with this spirit of resistance that he asserts to Dinu: “[W]e rebelled against an Empire that has shaped everything in our lives; coloured everything in the world as we know it. It is a huge, indelible stain which has tainted all of us. We cannot destroy it without destroying ourselves” (*The Glass Palace* 518). Arjun’s anti-colonial resistance and rebellion emerged out of his first hand experiences of these ideological contradictions, an ideology that spoke in dual registers, promising freedom on the one hand while denying it on the other. The outcome of this antagonistic exchange, in which those addressed challenge their interlocutors, is that the dominant discourse is ultimately abandoned as scorched earth when a different discourse, forged in the process of disobedience and combat, and prefiguring other relationships, values and aspirations, is enunciated. At a time when dialectical thinking is not the rage amongst colonial discourse theorists, it is instructive to recall how Fanon’s interrogation of European power and native insurrection reconstructs a process of cultural resistance *and* cultural disruption, participates in writing a text that *can* answer colonialism back, *and* anticipates a condition beyond imperialism: “Face to face with the white man, the Negro has a past to legitimate, a vengeance to extract.... In no way should I dedicate myself to the revival of an unjustly unrecognized Negro civilization. I will not make myself a man of the past.... I am not a prisoner of history... it is only by going beyond the historical, instrumental hypothesis that I will initiate the cycle of my freedom” (*Black Skin, White Masks* 225-26, 229, 231).

Hardayal joins the Indian National Army and fights for the Japanese. Arjun also joins the Indian National Army and becomes the voice of resistance against the British Empire. For him, the feeling of patriotism and loyalty to the Empire become antithetical to one another. Arjun feels for a while that hope lies with the British but finally protests against the Empire to guard the interests of the natives. Towards the end, the loyalty conflict in Arjun is over; he dies and seeks his own identity in the signifying process of history. In Arjun the novel shows how the Indian consciousness and psyche struggled into awakening from the euphoric adoption of English attitudes and came into the authentic Indian selves. The true crisis in the novel is when the old self breaks open giving birth to the new. For Hardy, who is always drawn to Indian food in the army mess and makes no bones about his preference, the decision making becomes relatively easy and he is the first one to quit the British army. But it is hard on Arjun. Hardy says he is a simple soldier and for him it is a question of right and wrong – what is worth fighting for and what is not. A spectator to the shifting

allegiance from the British to the Japanese by the Indian soldiers as a result of Hardy’s impassioned speech, Arjun wonders: “Was this how a mutiny was sparked? In a moment of heedlessness, so that one became a stranger to the person one had been a moment before? Or was it the other way round? That this was when one recognised the stranger that one had always been to oneself; that all one’s loyalties and beliefs had been misplaced?” (*The Glass Palace* 440). This is the crucial question for Arjun. The colonialist use of the Indian army produces in him a negation and self-alienation which gradually results in remonstrance, protest and finally defiance. Colonel Buckland is shocked by Arjun’s decision to desert the army: “You, I never took for a turncoat” and “you don’t have the look of a traitor” (*The Glass Palace* 448). Arjun reminds him of General Munro’s observation which he quoted during the teaching sessions at the academy: “The spirit of independence will spring up in this army long before it is even thought of among the people” (*The Glass Palace* 449). Arjun’s disidentification with the British discursive strategies is thus an illustration of Michel Pecheux’s “discourse-against” in which the subject of enunciation takes up a position of separation with respect to what “the universal subject” gives him to think, “distantiation, doubt, interrogation, challenge, revolt... a struggle against ideological evidentness on the terrain of that evidentness, an evidentness with a negative sign, reversed on its own terrain” (157).

Arjun’s disillusionment with the ethos of the British Indian Army couples with his awakening to “the racial mythologies of the old mercenary army” (*The Glass Palace* 520). Recruitment to the army was ruled by the old imperial notions of racism which excluded the Tamils on the ground that “they were racially unfit for soldiering” (*The Glass Palace* 520). The Tamil plantation workers in Malaya who voluntarily join the Indian National Army turn out to be stronger and more dedicated than the professional soldiers. These plantation workers have been so ruthlessly exploited by the capital-intensive economy of the British to the extent that they are reduced to a machine: “having your mind taken away and replaced by a clockwork mechanism” (*The Glass Palace* 522). Mechanisation of man is a form of dehumanising slavery. The liberation struggle of the Indian National Army serves as an instrument of cultural resistance for these automata against a racist colonial discourse. Their native country India exists for them not as a reality but as an idea: “India was the shining mountain beyond the horizon, a sacrament of redemption – a metaphor for freedom in the same way that slavery was a metaphor for the plantation” (*The Glass Palace* 522). Popular or insurgent nationalism thus reclaims or imagines forms of community and challenges colonial rule giving shape to a collective political identity. Waging a desperate battle for nationalist liberation and also for self-realisation, Arjun dies a heroic death in central Burma in the final days of the Second World War. An affirmed nationalist and completely free from self-contradictions, Hardy becomes “a national figure,” an “ambassador and high-ranking official of the

Indian Government” (*The Glass Palace* 480). An embodiment of switched identities, Arjun finds redemption in his glorious death. The novel thus reveals Ghosh’s sympathies with anti-colonial nationalism as an emancipatory force in the decolonisation of the mind.

The Glass Palace interrogates the institutionalised perspectives of colonial history – the perspectives that subtly forbid any other ideology if it goes against the received, canonised opinion of the colonial rule. The commitment to counter Eurocentric discourse can clearly be seen in Ghosh’s reasons for forfeiting the Commonwealth Literature Prize for his novel in 2001. In his letter to Sandra Vince, Manager of the Commonwealth Literature Prize Committee, Ghosh said the past may not be changed, but the “ways in which we remember the past are not determined solely by the brute facts of time, they are also open to choice, reflection and enjoyment” (1). Ghosh genuinely attempts to revisit and reframe the colonial past by questioning the ideological, epistemological, and ontological assumptions of the imperial powers, the masks of conquest. Resistance in itself has always been an integral component of literature. Protest is simultaneously a dialogue, a deconstruction and an assertion. Literary resistance in *The Glass Palace* that interweaves historical-political events with individual stories thus explicates Benita Parry’s critique of postcolonial discourse for its unwillingness to “articulate a more oppositional politics” (*Postcolonial Studies* 138).

Works Cited

- Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture*. London and New York: Routledge, 1994.
- Branagan, Lesley. “Tale of Outsiders on the Edge.” *Book News*. University of Technology Sydney (2004-2005): 5.
- Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin, White Masks*. Trans. Charles Lam Markmann. London: Pluto Press, 1956.
- Ghosh, Amitav. “India’s Untold War of Independence.” *The New Yorker* 73 (23 and 30 June, 1997): 104-21.
- . *The Glass Palace*. New Delhi: Ravi Dayal Publisher, 2000.
- . “The Anglophone Empire.” 2 September 2006. www.amitavghosh.com. 2 November 2015.
- . “Correspondence with Dipesh Chakrabarty.” 2 September 2006. www.amitavghosh.com. The official website of Amitav Ghosh. 12 November 2015.
- Hawley, John C. *Amitav Ghosh*. New Delhi: Foundation Books, 2005.
- Kumar, Vijay, T. “‘Postcolonial’ Describes You as A Negative.” An Interview with Amitav Ghosh. *Interventions* 9.1 (2007): 99-105.

- Kundu, Rama. “Like Stepping into a Mirror: *The Shadow Lines*.” *Amitav Ghosh’s The Shadow Lines*. Ed. Novy Kapadia. New Delhi: Asia Book Club, 2001. 174-87.
- Macaulay, Thomas. “Minute on Indian Education.” *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*. Ed. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin. London and New York: Routledge, 1995. 428-30.
- Mondal, Anshuman A. *Amitav Ghosh*. Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2007.
- Moral, Rakhee. “‘In Time of the Breaking of Nations’: *The Glass Palace* as Postcolonial Narrative.” *Amitav Ghosh: Critical Perspectives*. Ed. Brinda Bose. Delhi: Pencraft International, 2003. 139-54.
- Nandy, Ashis. *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self under Colonialism*. New Delhi: Oxford UP, 1983.
- Nair, Rukmini Bhaya. “The Road from Mandalay: Reflections on Amitav Ghosh’s *The Glass Palace*.” *Amitav Ghosh: A Critical Companion*. Ed. Tabish Khair. Delhi: Permanent Black, 2003. 162-74.
- Nara, Rakhi and G.A. Ghanshyam. “Amitav Ghosh’s *The Glass Palace*: An Elegy for the Diasporic Condition.” *The Atlantic Critical Review* 8.1 (January-March 2009): 96-101.
- Neefe, Janet de. “Lunch with Amitav Ghosh.” *Bali Advertiser*. Online Edition. www.travelandleisure.com/articles/janet-de-neefe-bali-ubud-food-festival. 5 June 2015.
- Parry, Benita. “The Institutionalization of Postcolonial Studies.” *The Cambridge Companion to Postcolonial Literary Studies*. Ed. Neil Lazarus. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004. 66-80.
- . *Postcolonial Studies: A Materialist Critique*. London: Routledge, 2004.
- Pecheux, Michel. *Language, Semantics and Ideology*. London: Macmillan, 1982.
- Rajalakshmi, N.K. “Mapping the Power Discourse in *The Glass Palace*.” *Amitav Ghosh: Critical Essays*. Ed. Bibhash Choudhury. New Delhi; Prentice Hall India, 2009. 115-25.
- Roy, Anjali Gera. “Ordinary People on the Move: Subaltern Cosmopolitanisms in Amitav Ghosh’s Writings.” *Asiatic: IIUM Journal of English Language and Literature* 6.1 (June 2012): 32-46. Web.
- Said, Edward W. *Culture and Imperialism*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993.
- . *The World, the Text, and the Critic*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1983.
- Sen, Amartya. *Identity and Violence: The Illusion of Destiny*. London: Allen Lane, 2006.
- Silva, Neluka and Tickell, Alex. “An Interview with Amitav Ghosh.” *Amitav Ghosh: Critical Perspectives*. Ed. Brinda Bose. Delhi: Pencraft International, 2003. 214-21.
- Tiwari, Shubha. *Amitav Ghosh: A Critical Study*. New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers, 2003.

- Viswanathan, Gauri. *Masks of Conquest: Literary Study and British Rule in India*. New York: Columbia UP, 1989.
- . "The Beginnings of English Literary Study in British India." *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*. Ed. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin. London: Routledge, 1995. 431-37.