

## Chapter VI

### Migration and Exile in V. S. Naipaul and Amitav Ghosh

In *The Empire Writes Back* Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin touch upon a significant and much talked about aspect of post-colonial literature when they note the element of the crisis of identity in it to be concerned with the “development or recovery of an effective identifying relationship between self and place”. But as they also observe, this post-colonial ‘self’ has become fragmentary because of displacements by migration, enslavement, transportation, or the much common imperial practice of indentured labour (8-9).

While contemporary theory and literature have never failed to address this essentially dispiriting aspect of the post-colonial world, critics like John Phillips, on the other hand, find that the rootless colonial/decolonized migrant is “nomadic in essence, begins in travel, or with a lost beginning, an essentially irreversible trajectory, and has nowhere to return.” Moreover, as imperialism has always justified itself as a civilizing or modernizing mission, Phillips also finds in this migrant a “challenge to the fundamental assumptions behind western notions of stable identity, and so to the future of modernity in the figure of the belated subject of colonialism” (65-66). In Naipaul and Ghosh, two richly contrasted writers, we can expect to find the reflections of both these sentiments to enable us to investigate the layers and varieties of meanings associated with the subjects of migration and exile.

Migration and exile that negates the notions of ‘home’ and fixed positionality in the post-colonial world has also situated the diasporic subject as a representative protagonist rather than a marginalized exile in Ghosh’s novels. In fact, in all four of his novels we find the central character/s to be migratory, with their ever-renewing constructions of a homeland or home throughout the course of migration/exile.

Naipaul’s protagonists, on the other hand, though as rootless as in Ghosh, are often led by the event of migration/exile to a bitter disappointment at being unable to find the idealized place they cherish in their mind as their home/homeland. Also, though both these novelists present their protagonists to be enforced migrants in a chaotic colonial and post-colonial world, in Naipaul we find Salim in *Bend*, Willie in *Half and Magic*, or the unnamed narrator of *Enigma* enter the role of a migrant to escape from a spiritual or social disorder that threatens their sense of identity and desire for self-

realization. In Ghosh however, the reasons for migration to Rajkumar or Dolly in *Palace* or Alu in *Reason* remain much more compelling that at times also follow a physical threat to include situations that are quite beyond their control or conscious choice. Thus, when Alu arrives at Lalpukur as an eight year old boy from Calcutta to live with his uncle it is because he had nowhere else to go to after the accidental death of his parents. Likewise, a relentless state persecution that wipes out his whole family and friends and labels him as a wanted terrorist is the sole reason for his subsequent migrations from Lalpukur to Calcutta, Mahé, al-Ghazira, and Algeria.

Similarly, in *Palace* it is an epidemic that leaves Rajkumar, the sole survivor of his family in India, at the port of Mandalay as a crew of a boat. The last words of his dying mother—“Stay alive . . . . *Beche thako*, Rajkumar. Live, my Prince; hold on to your life” (14)—are what appear to characterize a whole generation’s desperate struggle to survive displacement and the ensuing process of migration. Dolly’s migrations—as a child from a remote village in Burma to the Royal palace in Mandalay to serve the Queen as a slave, and from Mandalay to India with the exiled Royal family—also arise out of situations beyond her control and also from the fact that the concept of home always remains elusive to her. Even later, when Rajkumar and Dolly have to undergo a nightmarish Long March, that claims the life of Manju, it is because of a threatening decolonizing situation in Burma that had by then torn their family apart and had led to the pathetic death of their elder son, Neel. A number of migrant characters in the other two novels by Ghosh also seem to be similarly powerless and ill-fated as like Kusum in *Tide*, who has to migrate to Bihar from the Sundarbans to escape being sold into prostitution by a local man, Dilip. Even a deadly journey into the forests, that remain the only source of livelihood for the islanders in the Sundarbans, is regarded as a symbolic migration into the world of Dokkhin Rai from that of Bon Bibi in the local tales.

In *Antique* too Abraham Ben Yijû, the medieval Egyptian trader, is believed by Ghosh to have migrated to India to escape persecuting authorities. However, the act of migration appears to be as unavoidable in a modern Egypt as it was in Ben Yijû’s time: as we find how even on the face of death the migrants like Nabeel, desperately in search for a means of a decent livelihood, could not come back to a home that had by then also lost its associated note of welcome, as made clear in these words by Nabeel’s sister-in-law: “what would Nabeel do back here? Look at Isma’il—just sitting at home, no job, nothing to do . . .” (351). Quite like Nabeel, the migrants

traveling from India to al-Ghazira on *Mariam* in *Reason* too appear so desperate to leave their deprived lives at home that they remind one of the colonial practice of indentured labour. And while it was the British who had forcibly sent the Burmese Royal Family into exile in *Palace*, it is the neo-colonial state persecution that takes Nirmal and Nilima from Calcutta to the Sundarbans in *Tide*.

And as for the mass migrations in Ghosh—migrations of the war refugees from Bangladesh to Lalpukur in *Reason*, of the economic migrants from Iraq to their home in Egypt in *Antique*, of Indians from Burma in *Palace*, or of the refugees from the central India to Marichjhāpi in *Tide*—all are presented in the novels as not only the tales of lost home and hopes but also as testimonies of agonizing journeys that must be undertaken for the sole reason of survival in the most literal sense.

In Naipaul, however, migration and exile appear to be much more a result of a conscious and deliberate choice of the migrants to avoid remaining in or returning to a home that they consider discreditable and pitiful to the extent of stifling their desire for self-actualization. Salim or Indar in *Bend*, for example, migrate to other places to escape what they think an unavoidable disintegration in every sphere of life. As in the words of Salim: “I had to break away from our family compound and our community to stay with my community, to pretend that I had simply to travel along with them, was to be taken with them to destruction, I could be master of my fate only if I stood alone” (22).

Willie and Saro in *Half and Magic* and the narrator of *Enigma* too choose to migrate leaving the ties of their homeland behind to search for or arrive at a place that can sustain their ambition for self-realization that their respective homes cannot offer. But alongside the migrant’s desire to search for the Promised Land in Naipaul is also present the migrant’s hatred for a home that he desperately tries to disown. As for example, in *Half* we find Willie becoming depressed even at the slightest contact with home, like getting a letter from his family while living abroad: “Willie could easily imagine himself back there, without hope. For that reason the first sight of these letters from home was depressing, and the depression could stay with him, its cause forgotten, after he had read the letter” (111-12).

The narrator of *Enigma* too shows the same desperation to disown his past when on the ship to England he finds himself surrounded by other migrants traveling to the West, sharing a journey similar to that of his: “in each there were aspects of myself. But with my Asiatic background, I resisted the comparison: and I was travelling to be

a writer. It was too frightening to accept the other thing, to face the other thing" (137-38).

However, perhaps because of the idealized nature of the adopted country that the traveler in Naipaul presupposes while completely rejecting his homeland, the first moment of contact between the eager migrant and the new country never confirms his preconceptions about the new land and almost verges on disappointment. As the narrator of *Enigma* remarks after his first view of London and its grandness: "I grew to feel that the grandeur belonged to the past: that I had come to England at the wrong time: that I had come too late to find the England, the heart of empire, which (like a provincial, from a far corner of the empire) I had created in my fantasy" (141). In *Hull* Willie's first reaction after arriving at his cherished "fairylane of splendour and dazzle", England once again, is also of disappointment: "he felt let down. He didn't know what he was looking at. . . . He was disappointed by Buckingham Palace. He thought the maharaja's palace in his own state was far grander, more like a palace. His disappointment turned to something like shame – at himself, for his gullibility" (52).

Nonetheless, it is also these first moments of contact that introduce to us the persona of the migrant that is constructed completely by a eurocentric system of education. Thus as the narrator of *Enigma* realizes: "But in spite of my education, I was under-read. What did I know of England? The London I knew or imaginatively possessed was the London I got from Dickens. It was Dickens – and his illustrators who gave me the illusion of knowing the city" (144). But naturally, as Ghosh's migrants are pursued by altogether different concerns, they not only embrace their adopted land as their alternative home without prejudging it: they are also often as reluctant to leave the foreign land turned home – though never a European one in Ghosh – when and if such a time comes.

But as the adopted country—though only if it is the West—gradually grows on the migrant in Naipaul: it is suggested that the first note of disappointment was actually triggered by the untrained and raw, thus inherently flawed, perception of the newly arrived migrant. But later, as the traveler begins to experience a new sense of liberation in his adopted country, he also comes to admit the infinite and universal greatness of the foreign land that not only makes him a better and wiser person but at times also heals the old wounds –spiritual, emotional or intellectual—inflicted on his psyche by his deplorable homeland. Thus, although Salim, coming from "the bush" in

*Bend* finds England as “something shrunken and mean and forbidding” (269) immediately after setting foot on it, cannot but admire the great city before leaving it “There you really did have an idea of the city as something made by man, and not as something that had just grown by itself and was simply there. . . . It was so easy for people like us to think of great cities as natural growths. It reconciled us to our own shanty cities” (272).

A migration to a non-Western place, on the other hand, can disintegrate a person in Naipaul. Thus Salim realizes that his passionate, but immoral, affair with Yvette was possible only because he was in the central Africa and away from home where his life in his family and community was ‘full of rules’ and where “Adultery was horrible to me. I continued to think of it in the setting of family and community on the coast, and saw it as sly and dishonourable and weak-willed” (224). What thus initially appeared to Salim as liberation from rules, soon leads both him and Yvette to a disgraceful separation thus reflecting his anxiety accompanying his initial sense of freedom. “I had stripped myself of the support the rules gave. To think of it was to feel myself floating and lost” (224).

In the case of Ali/Metty too the same paradoxical effects of migration are to be observed as Salim finds that in a strange event of reverse migration, Ali, once he travels back to the heart of Africa from where his ancestors were taken away as slaves once, becomes a new man. He rechristens himself Metty and acquires not only a lot of friends, but also a family of his own: “the Metty who enjoyed that freedom was a different person from the boy who had arrived bawling and screaming, with the manners of the servant house. He had quickly shed those manners; he had developed a new idea of his worth” (37).

Anyway, Metty too has to pay a price for this sudden freedom that appears to change his life, at times for the worse, as Salim observes: “Freedom has its price. Once he had had the slave’s security. Here he had . . . to be measured against other men. . . . now it seemed to have brought him a little bitterness” (120). While migration helps Metty gain a new self-worth but makes him lose his secure and stable former identity, it makes Salim lose a part of his world too—a part that was constructed by the imperialistic powers - as he lost a slave: “If we had been living in our compound . . . he would have lived his own life, but there would have been no secrets. . . . I had lost Metty to this part of Africa. He had come to the place that was partly his home, and I had lost him” (121-2).

The situation is however quite opposite in the event of a migration to a Western country, where the traveler finds that s/he has to pay a very small price to be allowed into a land of infinite wonder. Willie in *Half*, for example, has to accommodate himself to an altogether new way of living once he migrates to London that at first seems hugely unsettling to him: “He had to learn how to eat in public. He had to learn how to greet people . . . . He had to learn to close doors behind him. He had to learn how to ask for things without being peremptory” (59). But the price seems to be too insignificant once Willie becomes overwhelmed by the benefits his new life showers on him, when he discovers that the old rules of his home were in reality “a kind of make-believe, self-imposed”, and finally observes “with great clarity that the old rules no longer bound him. . . . The possibilities were dizzying. He could, within reason, re-make himself and his past and his ancestry” (60).

Migration liberates not only Willie, even his otherwise unremarkable and conservative sister Sarojini also becomes a new woman—more confident, authoritative and attractive—once she is married to a German and leaves India to settle down in Germany. As Willie is surprised to find this new woman in his sister in *Half*, he also realizes that “None of this would have come out if the German hadn’t come and taken her away. If he hadn’t come, would she and all her soul have just rotted to nothing? She was attractive now—something impossible to think of in the ashram days . . .” (138).

Willie however appears to be quite oblivious to the price Sarojini has to pay for this new woman in her. Wolf, Sarojini’s German husband, becomes such a towering person in her life that she remains nothing but an intellectual slave to him—while he, as she admiringly admits throughout *Half* and *Magic*, fashioned the ignorant Sarojini into her present attractive form by his own world view. Even later, when Willie and Sarojini miserably fail in their attempts to revolutionize Indian society while following Wolf’s visions, it is the irreversible disintegration of the Indian society that they blame, not Wolf’s unrealistic, eurocentric notions. Unwilling to acknowledge the fact that their eurocentric world view has left no other place but the West for them to live in, Willie leaves for England while Saro goes back to her intellectual master and husband Wolf: “the dear old man” who as she writes to Willie “without one word of rebuke has promised to do what he can for me in Berlin. It will be nice to make a few documentaries again” (*Magic* 237).

But it is in *Enigma* where Naipaul not only carefully elaborates on the price the migrant has to pay to arrive at and stay in the land of his life-long fantasy—England; but also on how the migrant's adopted country, in spite of his raw nerves and hesitant apprehensions, time and again heals the wounds of his colonial past and present. As the narrator feels, he could never stop carrying within himself the anxieties and apprehensions of a colonial migrant into an imperial centre: "I still had that nervousness in a new place, that rawness of response, still felt myself to be in the other man's country, felt my strangeness, my solitude" (5-6). That the narrator, even after a long time of arrival at England still experiences the apprehensions of a rootless, colonial migrant is again apparent in his constant anxiety about his stay in the country: "What accidents had given me my life in the cottage! What accidents protected it! How little it would have taken to alter the whole feel of the place, and to drive me away!" (72). To relieve himself from these apprehensions and constant anxiety the narrator finally decides to combine his spatial migration with a temporal one—so as to feel himself as part of the great empire's history and achievements by evading his colonial connection with England.

Another price that the narrator has to pay at arrival is however an inevitable one: "I lost a faculty that had been part of me and precious to me for years. I lost the gift of fantasy, the dream of the future, the far-off place where I was going. . . . Now in the place that for all those years had been the 'elsewhere', no further dream was possible" (146). The narrator, however, prefers to live as a migrant in England even at such a cost, as the slightest possibility of going back to Trinidad makes the narrator realize in utter panic that "the only thing I could do, the only way I could look after myself, was to be in England—no longer now a country of fantasy, but simply a place where as a writer I might make a living" (163). Likewise, when the time to leave his manor cottage arrives, it remains one of the most tender moments he shares with his adopted country as he mourns the end of his "second childhood of seeing and learning, my second life, so far away from my first" (93); while in another moment of poignant admission the narrator reasserts the nature of his relationship with his adopted country where "I felt protected, isolated, far from every wounding thing I had known" (184).

In Ghosh, however, all these aspects of the migrant's relationship with the adopted country vary from those in Naipaul as Ghosh looks at the issue of migration and exile from quite a different perspective. As in Ghosh very few migrations/exile are voluntary or predetermined, the migrant/exile does not dwell upon the price,

disappointments, merits and demerits of migration and exile to such an extent as in Naipaul. They are rather inclined to struggle for their lives/livelihood at the most basic level while at times the price they are to pay—willingly or unwillingly—to migrate to another land appears astounding. Karthamma in *Reason*, who undergoes the excruciating pain when she obstructs the birth of her child mistakenly believing that she should sign some forms first to enable her child to be a valid citizen of the land she is migrating to, is one such example. Another moving example is the group of the migrant refugees in Marichjhāpi in *Tide* who refuse to leave the island even at the face of death.

At times the migrants—unlike Karthamma or the Marichjhāpi settlers who all die later—in Ghosh are also well-aware of the hefty price they have to pay to migrate to the adopted country. The plight of the Egyptian migrants in Iraq, who often have to face the violent antagonism from Iraqi people because of ‘stealing their jobs’, is voiced by Isma’il: “They’re wild . . . they come back from the army for a few days at a time, and they go wild . . . Egyptians never go out on the streets there at night: if some drunken Iraqis came across you they would kill you. . . and nobody would even know, for they’d throw away your papers. It’s happened, happens all the time” (*Intique* 352). The effect of living in such anguish is certain to be serious in nature, as Isma’il tells Ghosh about his cousin Nabeel: “it’s aged him. . . . He looks much older. Life’s not easy there” (352). Thus when Ghosh observes regarding the effects of the large-scale migrations of Egyptians to Iraq, Libya, or to the Gulfs to note how the poorest families in Nashawy “were now the very people who had new houses, bank accounts, gadgetry . . . it looked as though the village had been drawn on to the fringes of a revolution—except that this one had happened in another country, far away” (321), he also makes us take note of the price paid for this ‘revolution’.

However, the effects of the migration and exile upon the characters in Ghosh are as varied as can be imagined. While Rajkumar’s first migration—from Bangladesh to Burma—leads him to the status of a successful businessman, his second migration—from Burma to India—leaves him a destitute. In case of Dolly, while her first migration from Burma to India leads to an awakening of her womanhood through her first love; her second migration from India to Burma allows her into a fulfillment of that womanhood with Rajkumar and their two sons; though her third migration leads her to the path of renunciation of the worldly life by choosing the life of a nun.

The effect of a migration to Europe, as in *Palace*, too is contradictory at times on the migrants like Beni Prasad Dey and his wife Uma. While Beni, after his stay in England, transforms himself into an embittered mimic man—trying to learn the exact European ways of living and repeatedly failing in it; Uma, on the other hand, becomes more and more sceptical of the supposedly liberating and civilizing tenets of the British Empire. During her stay in Europe, especially America, while Uma becomes highly impressed by the freedom the Western women enjoy; she however refuses the notion that that empowerment of Indian women has been one of the great benefits of British rule in India: “How was it possible to imagine that one could grant freedom by imposing subjugation? That one could open a cage by pushing it inside a bigger cage? How could any section of a people hope to achieve freedom where the entirety of a populace was held in subjection? (189). And thus the migration that blinds Beni’s vision to turn him into a eurocentric mimic man, makes Uma a perceptive traveler and later an inspiring leader of the independence movement in India.

Migration also appears to affect the British Indian soldiers in *Palace*. Thus although Rajkumar reflects a general notion about these soldiers when he describes them as mere “tools” to be used by the British, without “minds of their own”, once these soldiers went to live abroad “The experience of living in America and Canada served to turn many of these former loyalists into revolutionaries. Perceiving a link between their treatment abroad and India’s subject status, they had become dedicated enemies of the Empire they had once served” (222).

Not only in the cases of these former, semi-literate soldiers, even the highly trained and educated Army officers like Arjun or Hardy too face the same prospect as they are informed that “Going overseas has disturbing effects on the troops . . . On officers too” (319). Though they thought these “disturbing effects” “unlikely and far-fetched” in New Delhi, once they come to Singapore “nothing seemed improbable any more—everything appeared to be turned on its head. It was as though they no longer knew who they were, no longer understood their place in the order of things” (344-5). And finally it is these soldiers, arriving at a new-found self-awareness when away from home, who throw the most crucial challenge to the British Empire by waging independence war against it, even at the cost of their lives.

Anyway, as it appears, both Ghosh and Naipaul, as if to present a balanced view on migration and exile compensates for every character lost in migration with one that thrives in it. Thus in Naipaul we find a number of characters who thrive in migration

such as Metty—who regains his self-worth in migration; Nazruddin—the prosperous migrant trader; and Raymond—worshipped as a scholar in Africa in *Bend*; Sarojini—who magically transforms for better in migration; and Marcus—who finally achieves what he dreamt of in England in *Half and Magic*. As about those characters who undergo a disintegrating experience in migration we have Salim—whose migration nearly destroys him; Yvette—whose migration to Africa disfigures her soul; Indar—whose migration transforms him from a confident, aspiring young man into a plaything in the hands of the West; and Shoba—who is in a perpetual terror once she marries Mahesh and migrates to the unnamed town in *Bend*; Willie—who faces the same disorder in Africa and in India he had tried to escape his whole life; and Graça—becoming insane in migration in *Half and Magic*.

Thus in Ghosh too while Beni in *Palace* loses his self-worth in his migration, Uma recovers it in hers; while King Thebaw—shadowed by the Queen in Burma—finds himself to be considered as the guardian presence in Ratnagiri, Queen Supayalat loses her aura of royal power in exile; and while Kanai, Nilima, or Moyna in *Tide* find themselves entering an all new world of opportunities and enterprises through migration; Kusum, Nirmal or Fokir seem to be completely crushed by migration. Even Piya, whose father seemed to prosper as a migrant in America, lost her mother to the agonies of exile in that foreign land, whom she remembered as talking of Assam, talking of her childhood and telling “stories of another, happier life, of playing in sunlit gardens, of cruises on the river” (95).

But beside these characters who prosper or wither because of migration are also a host of other characters who suffer because of their having been left behind, of not being able to join the group of migrants. Thus Ghosh in *Antique* finds that a spirited boy like Jabir becomes distraught once he realizes that his migrant younger brother might marry before him on the ground of a better livelihood: “If Mohammad were to be the first to marry, it would be a public announcement of his own failure. I had only to look at Jabir’s face to know that if that happened he would be utterly crushed, destroyed.” The desperation of a person to leave his home, even after being aware of the hostile situation waiting for him in the outside world thus becomes yet more poignant in its engagement with the failed migrant’s social, political, cultural, and emotional life: “Turning his back on me, Jabir busied himself with his suitcase, repacking it yet again, as though to satisfy a craving. ‘I’ll be going back to Iraq soon.’”

he said, in a voice that was barely audible. I couldn't see his face but I knew he was near tears" (313).

In *Bend* too we have a similar situation where Salim finds himself weighed down with his incapacity to leave his coastal hometown while Indar was migrating to England: "when Indar went on to ask, 'What are you going to do?' I said, as though I didn't see any problem, 'I'll stay' . . . I found that I was unwilling – as soon as the question had been put to me – to acknowledge my helplessness" (21). However, the impossibility of leaving acquires the most ominous character to Ferdinand, who even while helping Salim to escape from the chaotic town knows he himself cannot leave: "Nobody's going anywhere. We're all going to hell. . . . We're being killed. . . . Everyone wants to make his money and run away. But where? That is what is driving people mad. They feel they're losing the place they can run back to" (319).

The unavoidable query that such a desperation to migrate in both these novelists gives rise to is about how the migrant is looked at by people in his adopted country or by those at home or by other migrants around him. Nazruddin in *Bend* for example is viewed by the people in his hometown as an embodiment of both the allure of and the success in migration, as in Salim's words: "Nazruddin was an exotic in our community . . . reappearing among us from time to time, brought back his exotic manners and tastes and his tales of commercial success. . . . I liked Nazruddin . . . his very alienness . . . his talks . . . the excitements of his far-off world" (23).

Indar, on the other hand, arouses no such awe in Salim in spite of his apparent success as a migrant intellectual. Rather, under the aura of confidence in Indar Salim discovers a certain vulnerability: "In his clothes then I had seen London and privilege. I had seen that he was fighting to keep up his style, but I hadn't thought of his style as something he had created for himself . . . I saw it as his only asset. I felt protective towards him" (181). And Salim may be correct when he senses that Indar's ability to arouse the protective instinct in others might have endeared him to the Europeans and that also "perhaps was the secret of his social success" (182).

Besides, at times there are also some symbolic migrants in the novel awaiting an analysis of their role, as for example, the newspapers from Europe and the United States acquire the status of a migrant in the decolonizing Africa to Salim as he wonders how these "could have found good words for the butchery on the coast. But people are like that about places in which they aren't really interested and where they don't have to live" (33). And as regards the migrants looking at each other critically,

we can note how Nazruddin, himself a migrant in England, is acerbic on the Arab migrants in London: "What were they doing in London? What were they expecting to do? How are they going to survive? What place is there in the world for people like that? . . . coming to the centre because it is all they know about and because they think it's smart" (279).

In Ghosh too the migrant is mostly viewed suspiciously by the local populace as can be seen with the Egyptian immigrants in Iraq in *Antique*, with the Bangladeshi settlers in Marichjhāpi in *Tide*, or with the migrants in al-Ghazira in *Reason*. But it is a completely different emotion when it comes to the migrant British people in the Asian countries, as reflected by Saya John in *Palace*: "these young Europeans . . . thousands of miles from home . . . It was they who invented everything we see around us in this logging camp. This entire way of life is their creation . . . That is someone you can learn from" (74-5). As compared to these 'real' Europeans, when the 'manufactured' Europeans like Arjun— who take pride in being Westernized and are confident about their ability to lead India to modernity—leave their country behind to travel to unknown territory, their pride and joy of being pioneers of the 'truly modern' India is shattered.

When the Indian soldiers come to Singapore to fight the Japanese soldiers, Arjun and Hardy find themselves to be the first Indian officers in a battalion famous for its efficiency and loyalty to the British, and their pride is well reflected in Arjun's letter to Bela: "such a huge responsibility— as though we're representing the whole of the country!" (262). But quite ironically, it is as if to prove Arjun's words to be literally true that in Singapore the Indian soldiers find a most humiliating racial discrimination against them by the Europeans that they had never noticed at home. In Malay they appear not as elite soldiers but simply as a bunch of colonized people, as Kumar tells a shocked Arjun, "It's like this everywhere in Malaya. In smaller towns, the clubs actually put up signs on their doors saying, "No Asiatics allowed" . . . you may as well get used to it because you'll come across it all the time—in restaurants, clubs, beaches, trains . . . We're meant to die for this colony – but we can't use the pools" (345).

However, even when there is no such power equation involved in the scene of migration, the migrant can be unsettled by the way he is received in the adopted country as in the case of Ghosh in *Antique* where the rural Egyptians look at him with shock and disbelief when they learn that the people in India burn their dead, worship

cows, have no military service or that it rains there all the time: "Everything is upside down in that country. Tell us ya doctór: in your country do you at least have crops and fields and canals like we do? . . . do you have night and day like we do?" (171). At times these cultural differences also arouse an antagonism that the migrant finds hard to fight, as during an altercation between the Imam and Ghosh on burning the dead the Imam bursts out, "'Can't you see that it's a primitive and backward custom? Are you savages that you permit something like that?' . . . A small crowd had gathered around us . . . under the pressure of their collective gaze, I found myself becoming increasingly tongue-tied" (235). Nevertheless, the reception of a migrant can also lead to other uneasy questions: such as in *Tide* when Piya, a non-resident Indian from Seattle, wonders after the forest guard's crude behavior with her in the Sundarbans. "Would these men have adopted the same attitude if she had been say, a white European, or Japanese? She doubted it" (34).

Related to the way the migrant is looked at by the world around her/him is the way the migrant looks at the world around her/him. Thus the squalor of the town Salim migrates to in *Bend* is pointed out to him by another migrant, Indar: "looking at the place with his eyes, I was amazed at the little I had been living with. And I had stopped seeing so much . . . I had thought of the town as a real town; I saw it now as an agglomeration of shack settlements" (134). It is Indar once again who looks at the India – his ancestral homeland – through the India House in London and finds a different world altogether than the one that has been handed down to him by his family: "I studied the large framed photographs of Gandhi and Nehru and wondered how, out of squalor like this, those men had managed to get themselves considered as men. It was strange, in that building in the heart of London, seeing those great men in this new way, from the inside, as it were" (171).

Nazruddin too finds a different London than the one he had expected to find once he migrates to it: "London is destroying itself for its tourist trade—you can see that here. Hundreds of houses, thousands of flats, have been emptied to provide hotels, hostels and restaurants for the tourists" (277). Quite in the same vein the narrator of *Enigma* too finds himself as part of a dereliction process at the heart of the formerly imperial England: "the process of contraction, though begun twenty or twenty-five years before, had recently accelerated: and that my own presence there was a part of that accelerating process" (240). Willie in *Magic* too finds himself among strangers when he joins the guerrilla movement to fight for social justice, but finds half-lives

instead of revolutionaries who make him wonder "what weakness or failure had caused them . . . to leave the outer world and to enter this strange chamber . . . some kind of sexual perversion . . . hard or abused childhoods and tormented adult lives . . ." (52). That migration can also reveal a hitherto unseen aspect of the old country to the migrant is shown in *Palace* where the Indian soldiers serving the British Empire have to travel to Malay to really know their country:

Driving along rural roads, the officers discovered that in Malaya the only people who lived in abject, grinding poverty were plantation labourers—almost all of whom were Indian in origin. They were astonished at the difference between the plantations' ordered greenery and the squalor of their coolie lines. Hardy once remarked on the starkness of the contrast and Arjun responded by pointing out that in India, they would have taken such poverty for granted: that the only reason they happened to notice it now was because of its juxtaposition with Malaya's prosperous towns. This thought made them both cringe in shame. It was as though they were examining their own circumstances for the first time, in retrospect: as though the shock of travel had displaced an indifference that had been inculcated in them since their earliest childhood.

(346)

It is the same with the narrator of *Enigma* too, although in the opposite way, who discovers beauty for the first time in his colonial birthplace at the moment of departure from the wretched island when he looks down on it from his aeroplane on air:

This had given me my first revelation: the landscape of my childhood seen from the air. . . . At ground level so poor to me, so messy, so full of huts and gutters. . . . From the air, though, a landscape of logic and larger pattern . . . so extensive from up there . . . a landscape of clear pattern and contours, absorbing all the roadside messiness . . . like a landscape in a book, like the landscape of a real country. So that at the moment of take-off almost, the moment of departure, the landscape of my childhood was like something which I had missed, something I had never seen. (113)

The subject of im/possibility of return as it relates to the issues of migration and exile in both their intentional and involuntary expressions have also been discussed from various perspectives by Naipaul and Ghosh. In Ghosh for example, the impossibility of return to the old country usually renders the migrant/exile a prisoner

of his memories, thus inclined to live in the past rather than trying to create a new world for oneself, such as with the war refugees from Bangladesh in *Reason*, who are “too melancholy. Vomited out of their native soil years ago . . . and dumped hundreds of miles away, they had no anger left. Their only passion was memory; a longing for a land where the green was greener, the rice whiter, the fish bigger than boats . . .

Lalpukur could fight no war because it was damned to a hell of a longing” (59).

It is the same in *Palace* with the “Gujaratis, Bengalis, Tamils, Sikhs, Eurasians” who had to flee Burma during the Second World War. These migrants, as they tried to settle in India, however, could never come out of their memories of Burma, as they always “thirsted for news of Burma - longed to hear word of those who had been left behind.” These migrants regularly met in the Burmese temple in north Calcutta where “they would all speak Burmese. . . . They came because this was the one place where they could be sure of meeting others like themselves; people to whom they could say, ‘Burma is a golden land’ knowing that their listeners would be able to filter these words through the sieves of exile, sifting through their very specific nuances” (495).

Anyway, at times it also appears that the impossibility of a return to the old country is more imaginary than a reality that the migrant/exile conceives because of the scars left by the previous dislocations that might as well erase the concept of home from the psyche of the migrant/exile. As Dolly in *Palace* confesses to Uma that she never wants to go back to Burma because “If I went to Burma now I would be a foreigner . . . an outsider from across the sea. I’d find that very hard . . . I’d never be able to rid myself of the idea that I would have to leave again one day, just as I had to before” (113). Rajkumar goes further and negates not only the possibility of returning to the Burma he loved dearly but also the concept of home in a world in perpetual motion:

I don’t think I could ever love another place in the same way. But if there’s one thing I’ve learnt in my life, Dolly, it is that there is no certainty about these things. My father was from Chittagong and he ended up in the Arakan; I ended up in Rangoon; you went from Mandalay to Ratnagiri and now you’re here too. Why should we expect that we’re going to spend the rest of our lives here? . . . we have to expect that a time will come when we’ll have to move on again.

(310)

However, Ghosh also keeps alive the question whether it is at all possible to sever the ties with ‘home’ as completely as at times attempted by the migrant/exile such as

in the case of Piya's father in *Tide* whom she remembers as "the least sentimental of men, especially where it concerned 'home'. Where others sought to preserve their memories of the 'old country', he had always tried to expunge them. His feet were in the present, he had liked to say" (87). Nevertheless, Piya also remembers how he could never throw away a piece of 'old and tattered' 'gamcha', a fabric from India exiled with him to his house in Seattle.

The im/possibility to return home for the migrant/exile however receives a completely different treatment in Naipaul who is less concerned with the deferred possibilities or impossibility of return to a homeland and more with the enigma of arrival. This enigma of arrival in Naipaul, on the other hand, negates the possibility of an absolute separation of the traveler from his past to enable him to arrive at the first place, and thereby leaves the traveler suspended in the process of migration/exile itself.

Thus Willie, who could not make Africa his home even after living in there for eighteen years, reflects his inability to arrive at the very first moment of reaching the country in *Half*: "I don't know where I am. I don't think I can pick my way back. I don't ever want this view to become familiar. I must not unpack. I must never behave as though I am staying" (135). In fact Willie, in both *Half* and *Magic*, tries to retain his status of a migrant unchanged—except when he eventually finds his home in England—as symbolized by his habit of counting all the beds he had slept in during his migrations: "and the counting would give him a strange satisfaction, would show him that for all his passivity his life was amounting to something; something had grown around him" (*Magic* 155).

The migrant, caught between a home he had disowned and a destination that eludes him, finally tries to reconcile himself with his role as an eternal migrant, as Salim realizes in *Bend*: "There could be no going back; there was nothing to go back to. We had become what the world outside had made us: we had to live in the world as it existed" (286). But the way this 'world' existed to the characters in Naipaul was always the one where the 'home' was lost even before the traveler could conceive the possibility of a journey, thus complicating the concept of arrival in its turn. Thus the narrator of *Enigma* also exemplifies the bewildered traveler who does not know what to feel after reaching a destination: "I passionately wanted, though hardly arrived in London, to be free of London. I didn't want to go back home, though; I knew there was nothing there. I just wanted that day . . . to feel that England was temporary for

me" (190). Nonetheless, this failure to arrive at any place is pointed out by the narrator as something inherited. It was something his family in Trinidad, brought as indentured labourers from India "that became more and more golden in their memory". passed on to him:

They were living in Trinidad and were going to die there; but for them it was a wrong place. Something of that feeling was passed down to me. I didn't look back to India, couldn't do so; my ambition caused me to look ahead and outwards, to England; but it led to a similar feeling of wrongness. . . . I was ready to imagine that the world in which I found myself in London was something less than the perfect world I had striven towards. As a child in Trinidad I had put this world at a far distance, in London perhaps. In London now I was able to put this perfect world at another time, an earlier time. The mental or emotional processes were the same. (141-3)

Thus the narrator in the novel finds out to his dismay that the loss of a home even before the journey is undertaken renders that journey incomplete. Besides, as the narrator also realizes, this self-inflicted loss, triggered by his desire to erase his colonial and thus shameful past, would follow him to every corner in the world, especially to the one where the smallness of his colonial life was at starkest contrast the grand, imperial England. The narrator puts it beautifully in the ancient Mediterranean story he plans to base on the copy of the Chirico painting he found in his cottage in Waldenshaw, while the narrator, being followed by his colonial debris, becomes one with the bewildered passenger in the story.

*On the third day the captain pointed to the city. "There. You are there. Your journey's over." But the passenger, looking at the city in the morning haze, seeing the unremarkable city debris floating out on the sea unremarkable though the city was so famous - rotten fruit, fresh branches, bits of timber, driftwood - the passenger had a spasm of fear. . . he didn't want to leave the ship. (188)*

But later, when the narrator wants to undo this deliberate loss of his homeland and wants to return to Trinidad--as if to try to leave it properly this time to have a proper arrival at his never-never land--he finds it changed so beyond recognition as to make his return impossible. This is the realization that eventually characterizes the migrant/exile in Naipaul:

We had made ourselves anew. The world we had found ourselves in . . . was one we had partly made ourselves, and had longed for, when we had longed for money and the end of distress; we couldn't go back. There was no ship of antique shape now to take us back. We had come out of the nightmare; and there was nowhere else to go. (385)

However, it is on the issue of mass immigration that Naipaul and Ghosh offer us the most contrasted responses. In each of the four novels by Ghosh the mass immigrants are constitutive of the narrative to lead us to reflect on the causes that might take a whole nation to the border. But the sole positive example of a mass migration encouraged by a peaceful and thriving trading culture shared by various eastern nations—before it was violently disrupted by western greed—is presented by Ghosh in *Antique*. While tracing the footsteps of Ben Yijû from medieval Egypt to Malabar in India, Ghosh also finds a whole diaspora of various nations forming a culturally rich and exciting hybridity in the coastal towns in India. The scene, however, drastically changes in the post-colonial Egypt when Ghosh again finds the nation on the move, but this time as helplessly entangled into the web of global capitalism in a way that makes the medieval migration of their ancestors to be thought of as an improbable fairytale.

Not only the illiterate acquaintances of Ghosh in Egypt, but also the educated and culturally sensitive ones like Nabeel and Isma'il also leave Egypt knowing fully well the implications of migration—of the physical or intellectual/spiritual threat waiting for them in the land they are going to in search for a better livelihood. Ghosh presents a radically different picture when he begins *Antique* with a diaspora that created a grand history of mutual love and respect, but ends the narrative with another diaspora on the verge of annihilation: as he describes the "epic exodus" of the Egyptians trying to return home: "thousands and thousands of men, some in trousers, some in jallabeyyas, some carrying their IV sets on their backs, some crying out for a drink of water, stretching all the way from the horizon to the Red Sea, standing on the beach as though waiting for the water to part" (353).

In Ghosh this image of the powerless migrant, lured by the capitalist pull of the globalized world, appears again and again, as like the passengers on board the *Mariamamma*, in *Reason*, whose arrival in al-Ghazira is depicted by Ghosh with a note of despair:

the lights grew, and it did not matter whether they burnt in al-Ghazira or the moon, any more than it matters to an insect whether a fire burns in a lamp or a furnace, for through a century and a half the same lights have shone in one part of the globe or another, wherever money and its attendant arms have chosen to descend on peoples unprepared for its onslaughts, and for all of those hundred and fifty years *Mariam*'s avatars have left that coast for those lights carrying with them an immense cargo of wanderers seeking their own destruction in giving flesh to the whims of capital. (189)

But it is not always as a workforce in the globalized market that mass migration in Ghosh takes place: it, as noted earlier, can also result from a socio-political reason, as for example in the case of the war refugees in Lalpukur in *Reason*, the exodus of Indians from a Burma caught in the violence of the Second World War in *Palace*, or the refugees fleeing the horrible settlement camps in central India to Marichjhāpi in *Tide*. But in every case, the exodus bears the same horror while Ghosh tries to pull it out of the ‘anonymity of History’ that otherwise threatens to engulf these testimonies to human plight, as depicted by Ghosh in this ‘stupefying spectacle: some thirty thousand refugees were squatting along the river-bank, waiting to move on towards the densely forested mountain ranges that lay ahead. Ahead there were no roads, only tracks, rivers of mud, flowing through green tunnels of jungle’ (*Palace* 468).

Besides these disheartening spectacles of the economic migrants rushing blindly into the globalized market and the political refugees crossing the border to save their lives is another kind of mass immigrants that Ghosh presents in *Reason* and *Palace* the indentured labourers brought from one colony to another that needed massive workforce. While in *Palace* we are offered a glimpse at the inhuman condition in which they are transported, covered in their own vomit and urine – ‘By the third day of the voyage the number of people in the hold had dwindled by a few dozen. The corpses of those who had died on board were . . . dropped into the ship’s churning wake’ (127)—in *Reason* Ghosh shows us the degrading situation where these prisoners are thrown into, as ‘ghosts behind the fences’ who ‘were not men, they were tools – helpless, picked for their poverty’ (261).

The attitude towards the mass immigrants is however, completely different in Naipaul. As compared to the description of the transportation of labourers in Ghosh, Salim’s views on the slaves being transported from the heart of Africa to the

European countries in *Bend* is surprisingly different and rather focuses on the element of travel than on the defenceless traveler:

The further away they got from the centre and their tribal area, the less liable they were to cut loose from the caravans and run back home, the more nervous they became of the strange Africans they saw about them, until at the end, on the coast, they were no trouble at all, and were positively anxious to step into the boats and be taken to safe homes across the sea. . . . The greater the discouragements of the journey, the keener . . . to press on and embrace . . . new life. (4)

Naipaul not only erases the imperial presence in the background of the middle passage in the days of Empire: even in the post-colonial England too the mass migration to him acquires an altogether different meaning—something that throws the spotlight on the grand centre and not on the immigrants:

Cities like London were to change. They were to cease being more or less national cities: they were to become cities of the world, modern-day Romes, establishing the pattern of what great cities should be, in the eyes of islanders like myself and people even more remote in language and culture. They were to be cities visited for learning and elegant goods and manners and freedom by all the barbarian peoples of the globe, people of forest and desert, Arabs, Africans, Malays. (154)

And even when the mass migration does not follow the cultural route but rather an economic one to search for livelihood in the former centre of imperialism, Naipaul is quite cynical as far as the outcome of such a mass migration on both the migrant and the great cities—of ‘great stores, great buildings, great universities’—are concerned. Consequently we find in *Bend* Salim pondering on the issue of economic migrants in England: “where hundreds of thousands of people like myself, from parts of the world like mine, had forced themselves in, to work and live. . . . They were cut off from the life of the great city where they had come to live, and I wondered about the pointlessness of their own hard life, the pointlessness of their difficult journey. (269)

At times in the novels of Naipaul these immigrants are also reduced to the level of parasites that threaten the great life force of the city that they live on: as Nazruddin expresses his apprehensions to Salim on Arabs and how their leaving Arabia only spells doom for the world at large:

Persia, India, Africa. . . . Now Europe. They’re pumping the oil in and sucking

the money out. . . . They want the goods and the properties and at the same time they need a safe place for their money. Their own countries are so dreadful. But they're destroying money. They're killing the goose that lays the golden egg.

(274)