

Chapter IV

Decolonization in V. S. Naipaul and Amitav Ghosh

The success with which imperialism instills an unmitigated sense of inferiority among the colonized, thus justifying the protective presence of the superior imperial master in a colony, often renders the process of decolonization a complicated one. For the same reason, it also remains a debatable issue among the colonized whether putting an end to the civilizing presence of the Europeans is after all worth the violence and anarchy during and after the event. Also, as Fanon puts it, the colonized is conditioned to develop a world view that presents her/his desire for freedom as essentially a self-destructive whim and the imperial master's desire to enslave her/him to be essentially a protective and beneficial severity:

On the unconscious plane, colonialism therefore did not seek to be considered by the native as a gently loving mother who protects her child from a hostile environment, but rather as a mother who unceasingly restrains her fundamentally perverse offspring from managing to commit suicide and from giving free rein to its evil instincts. The colonial mother protects her child from itself, from its ego, and from its physiology, its biology, and its own unhappiness which is its very essence. (qtd. in Said *Culture* 286-7)

When it comes to describe the event of decolonization in his works, Naipaul in fact faithfully follows what Fanon presents as the imperial master's self-portrayal, thereby declaring the event to be a lamentable expression of ignorance and inherent primitiveness on the part of the colonized and that can never be regarded as an occasion for celebration. Moreover, the central characters in Naipaul, through whom we get a glimpse of the process of decolonization in the novels, often appear to side with the departing Europeans against the decolonizing natives in spite of their claims of being detached observers. As for example Salim, the migrant narrator of events in *Bend*, though claims himself to be 'neutral', proves otherwise when early in the novel he admits that the stamps provided by the British administration in his coastal hometown taught him in his very childhood how to look at his birthplace from a foreigner's viewpoint—"I developed the habit of looking, detaching myself from a familiar scene and trying to consider it from a distance" (17). Thus Salim always appears to speak for the Europeans, while being aware of his inferior status in regard

to the masters. He also repeatedly compares the peaceful Africa of the colonial days with the disintegrating post-colonial Africa: "the country during the miraculous peace of the colonial time, when men could, if they wished, pay little attention to tribal boundaries" (39).

At times Salim even identifies with the Europeans in regard to their relationship with the colonized. Thus, when talking about the African slaves in his coastal home, Salim sounds like the imperial masters whose supposed sense of responsibility prolonged the stay of the Europeans in a wretched country like Africa: "they weren't ordinary servants, and there was no question of getting rid of them. We were stuck with them" (16). This sentiment of a benevolent tolerance of the slaves is further confirmed in Raymond's words when he clarifies how decolonization was all but natural to him: "It takes an African to rule Africa – the colonial powers never truly understood that. However much the rest of us study Africa, however deep our sympathy, we will remain outsiders" (156). Moreover, as it appears to Salim, it is an ordeal and a life full of sacrifices for the civilized Europeans to live in as repulsive a country as Africa. As for example Salim finds the young Belgian at the lycée to be on the verge of a mental breakdown as a result of his stay in Africa. The Belgian tells Salim about his horror upon finding that African food meant "caterpillars in spinach and tomato sauce", while he also has to see the African boys chew the food; and has to live in a constant sewer smell. "I'm leaving. I've got to go. It's all right for Father Huismans. He's a priest. I'm not a priest. He goes into the bush. I don't want to go into the bush" (68).

Thus it seems that only a priest, a Father Huismans who has made Africa his lifework, could remain unaffected by this decolonization and survive the country that was and will remain a bush forever: he was not "resentful, as some of his countrymen were, of what had happened to the European town. He wasn't wounded by the insults that had been offered to the monuments and the statues. . . . For him the destruction of the town, the town that his countrymen had built, was only a temporary setback" (71-2). But as Salim found out with shock that even such a person, who had been trying to find and collect the last, retrievable riches of a dying Africa in the forms of masks and other items of religious value; a man who "saw himself at the end of it all, the last, lucky witness" (73), was also claimed by the madness of decolonization, being brutally killed by the rebel natives. For Salim it is a world of knowledge and a heart of rare purity that is lost with him forever, while with the death of this rare interpreter of

the land of bush, Africa remains doomed to nothingness: "The idea Father Huismans had of his civilization had made him live his particular kind of dedicated life. It had sent him looking, inquiring; it had made him find human richness where the rest of us saw bush or had stopped seeing anything at all." But then, it had also "made him read too much in that mingling of peoples by our river; and he had paid for it" (92-3).

That this primitive land is not only unworthy of a compassionate and gracious soul like Father Huismans but also of his collection of African masks that he rescued from the obscurity of the land is demonstrated later in the way a decolonizing Africa loses this treasure of collection. As Salim notes, with the death of Father Huismans, his collection is plundered by the Americans who know its value: "people who behaved like discoverers of Africa, were happy with everything they found. . . . The collection began to be pillaged." However, "it was discovered afterwards that the bulk of the collection in the gun room had been crated and shipped back . . . to the United States, no doubt to be the nucleus of the gallery of primitive art. . . . The richest products of the forest" (95). It is as if a mindless decolonization has not only extinguished every hope of a meaningful existence for the land, but has also made the country an easy prey for the other outside forces as Africa now appears all the more vulnerable without its European masters.

But, as Salim notes, Africa, engulfed into its primordial impulses, is in no state of realizing the consequence of its self-destructive madness for decolonization: "The wish had only been to get rid of the old, to wipe out the memory of the intruder. It was unnerving, the depth of that African rage, the wish to destroy, regardless of the consequences" (30). Although the Europeans were beyond the reach of the frenzied Africans, Salim observes that along with the Africans it is the outsiders like him who are to pay for this madness. "Because they could assess themselves, the Europeans were better equipped to cope with changes than we were" (19). Thus Ferdinand remembers how just after the Europeans left a group of soldiers, let loose in the absence of their white officers, came to his village "looking for white people to kill" (88), but instead frightened and harassed the hapless villagers while taking away some women with them before they left the village. It is thus all very natural for even a few Africans like Metty and Ferdinand to become apprehensive of the process and the effect of a decolonization that seems to send the country back to the anarchy and barbarism of its pre-colonial days.

However, that the process of decolonization is guided more by a primeval destructive urge in the Africans and less by a sane socio-political awareness is once more indicated by Salim as he notes how only after the President brings in the ruthless white soldiers to control the rioters, the situation becomes normal: "The President had sent terror to our town and region . . . I began to feel – that for the first time since independence there was some guiding intelligence in the capital, and that the free-for-all of independence had come to an end" (87). The European soldiers seem to have such a unique effect upon the frenzied Africans that Mahesh too notes it: "'It's a good thing Africans have short memories. Go and have a look at the people who've come to save them from suicide'" (83-4). Mahesh is right to use the word 'suicide' as Salim also recounts how the primitive Africans tried to defeat the mighty Europeans with their blind belief that they have a "fetish powerful enough to cause the guns of their enemies to bend and to turn bullets to water" (91).

However, as the catastrophe is temporarily avoided; the country being saved from self-destruction by the Europeans who tame the rabid Africans in the way only they could; the people of the country "recognized the new intelligence that ran the country from afar, and they returned to their old habit of obedience" (91). Even the hotel boys at the van der Weyden, who "had been telling one another stories about the invincibility of their people in the forest . . . who, given an uprising in the town, would have done terrible things . . . so quickly, they had become abject" (86). Salim is thus once again caustic in his observation of the effect of decolonization upon the Africans as he finds that these people are eternally trapped between the two roles fitting in a primeval society – either the role of a menacing, self-destructive character, or a shameful, servile one: "This was how the place worked on you: you never knew what to think or feel. Fear or shame – there seemed to be nothing in between" (86).

For Salim, such a country can never be decolonized, as it is unable to realize both the essence of and the obligations related to the concept of freedom. And it is as if to prove his point, the decolonized land gets itself a President who in his efforts to mimic the former colonizers makes the whole situation yet more grotesque. The President, for example, presents his hotel maid mother as an African Madonna and builds her statues in towns and shrines in her memory in remote villages where he and his officials make pilgrimages. Besides, he appoints a white man to write his opinions and speeches; he places huge pictures of himself everywhere in the country; he makes it mandatory for every building in the country to have his portrait; while he also

leaves instructions so that in the “pictures in the newspapers only visiting foreigners were given equal space with the President. With local people the President was always presented as a towering figure” (262). Only the Europeans and the outsiders like Salim could perceive the disgrace the decolonized county was thus bringing onto itself and while “in the bars in the town the foreign builders and artisans drank and made easy jokes about the country”, for Salim “It was painful and it was sad” (117).

The people in the independent Africa also became greedier and more corrupt, looking for a quick and easy profit for themselves while their country went to ruins. With the town filled up with refugees from the villages, “The growth of the population could be gauged by the growth of the rubbish heaps in the *cités*. They did not burn their rubbish in oil drums, as we did; they just threw it out on the broken streets – that sifted, ashy African rubbish” (101). The only flicker of hope that Salim finds amidst all these disorder and debasement is in the life in the Domain—that the President had introduced as a modern university cum residence complex. Salim discovers another Africa in the Domain: “In the town ‘African’ could be a word of abuse or disregard; in the Domain it was a bigger word. An ‘African’ there was a new man whom everybody was busy making”. The new ‘African’ was different from the ones that Salim knew—the “little tricksters, pertinacious but foolish, with only a kind of village cunning” and for whom “studying meant only cramming.” But these young Africans in the Domain “had sharp minds and spoke wonderfully – and in French, not in patois. They had developed fast” (139).

But it is only a matter of time before Salim realizes that the Domain has bypassed the real Africa of bushes: and also that it worked only with words, words that were meaningless to the Africans who were not yet ready to leave their village ways to adopt the light of civilization. Indar too agrees with Salim as he too finds the land of the bush to be so instinctively primitive as to resist any attempt to civilize it. The Domain thus remains only a futile attempt from the part of the Europeans to bring the light of civilization into the darkness of Africa, a land where decolonization to the uncivilized residents meant a vulgar and pathetic display of their treasure of gold, as they “wore gold, as much as possible – gold-rimmed glasses, gold rings, gold pen and pencil sets, gold watches with solid gold wristlets. . . . Gold – how could it alter the man, who was only an African?” (138).

Thus as Salim finds, decolonization for the Africans was a curse they inflicted upon themselves as the event gradually led to a total disintegration of their nation as

well as their psyche. This disintegration finds a symbolic representation in Metty, as “He lost the brightness and gaiety of the servant who knows that he will be looked after, that others will decide for him. . . . He seemed to go a little sour inside.

Responsibility was new to him” (125). The President worsens the situation further by introducing radicalization, a move to take over every business owned by the outsiders and handing it over to the Africans as if in a bid to finish what the decolonization had started in the first place--to destroy the achievements of the Europeans. And what could not be destroyed was intended to be usurped, thus leading to a mad scramble and fight among the Africans over the acquisition of trusteeship of shops owned by non-Africans, by at times “just making marks on doors or dropping pieces of cloth on the floor, as though they were claiming a piece of meat in the market” (302).

Thus Salim’s shop is given away to an African trustee called Théotime, who acquired a few more women after his sudden fortune; arranged for Salim to pick him up for the shop in the morning in Salim’s car; treated Metty as his slave; and came to the shop as drunk and with comic books or photo-novels to pass time as he neither knew anything about the business nor did he want to know. As Salim observes, the effect of the decolonization had been essentially the same on Metty and Théotime.

“He wanted me to acknowledge him as the boss. At the same time he wanted me to make allowances for him as an uneducated man and an African. He wanted both my respect and my tolerance, even my compassion” (308).

It also seems to Salim that the Africans have been offered the achievements of the Europeans on a silver platter by the event of decolonization. Whether it is Théotime, or Ferdinand, their lives appear to Salim as to be enviably easy: “if you came late to the world and found ready-made those things that other countries and peoples had taken so long to arrive at -- writing, printing, universities, books, knowledge. . . . Ferdinand, starting from nothing, had with one step made himself free, and was ready to race ahead of us” (119). Furthermore, Salim also believes that the decolonization in Africa has almost been transformed into a mockery of a revolution with the formation of The Liberation Army. The Army, formed by the President’s Youth Guard army that he humiliated and disbanded later on the charges of tyranny and corruption, was found to distribute badly printed leaflets among the Africans urging them to come up against the forces of imperialism and thus avenge the horrors inflicted upon the ancestors of the land:

The ancestors are shrieking. If we are not deaf we can hear them. By ENEMY we mean the powers of imperialism, the multi-nationals and the puppet powers that be, the false gods, the capitalists, the priests and teachers who give false interpretations. . . . The schools teach ignorance and people practice ignorance in preference to their true culture. Our soldiers and guardians have been given false desires and false greeds and the foreigners now qualify us everywhere as thieves. . . . OUR PEOPLE must understand the struggle. They must learn to die with us. (248)

But this nice rhetoric of revolt against the imperialist enemies soon turns to a nightmare even for those who were swayed by these words and supported the revolutionaries. As it appears, even the beneficiaries of the great historical event of decolonization like Ferdinand whom Salim had envied once, quite soon become disillusioned with the event to find themselves doomed in a country stuck in madness. To their utter dismay the Liberation army unleashes a terror of reign to ‘decolonize’ the country from the clutches of imperialist enemies—intending to kill not only the government officials, but “everybody who can read and write, everybody who ever put a jacket and tie. . . . They’re going to kill all the masters and all the servants.” And after the killings are over, “nobody will know there was a place like this here. They’re going to kill and kill. They say it is the only way, to go back to the beginning before it’s too late. . . . They say it is better to kill for days than to die forever” (322).

Enigma also presents a symbolic decolonization for the people long eclipsed by the grandeur of imperialism, and similar scenes of disintegration once a great power is on wane, but this time it happens in a manor in England. Although the narrator, a resident of the manor, had stated quite clearly that “It was my policy not to interfere with people I saw in the ground: not to act as a watchman”, he cannot but notice the strange people entering the grounds of the manor once Mr Phillips dies. With the landlord withdrawn in his room, the narrator is worried for the safety of the riches of the once magnificent manor reminding of the imperial heydays of England when it was built. The strangers—Germans with strange names and strange faces—cannot convince the narrator once he confronts them while the narrator feels “that other things—garden statues, urns, stone pots, even greenhouse door—were at risk; that those two men were scavengers rather than serious thieves” (354). This tragic fate that the narrator finds awaiting the manor at the hands of ‘scavengers’, rob it of a chance to die with dignity; and this once again reminds us of the crumbling of empire in

Africa in *Bend* at the hands of the barbarous and frenzied Africans who were unworthy of inheriting the treasures of the empire that they plundered not knowing its true worth. Thus it is another kind of decolonization here in England, at the hands of the scavenging Germans and outsiders, people who, as the narrator notes, would have served these mansions in the past with the best of their capabilities as carpenters, masons, bricklayers: who “might have had ideas of beauty and workmanship and looked for acknowledgement of their skill and craft and pains, people of this very sort now, sensing an absence of authority, an organization in decay, seemed to be animated by an opposite instinct: to hasten decay, to loot, to reduce to junk” (355).

Half again brings up the event of decolonization, this time in an African region once colonized by the Portuguese, while here too the same urge for destruction out of a primordial rage and a regressive instinct to revert back to the primitive stage of the country is apparent. As the first part of the novel briefly covers Willie’s life in India, the independence movements and decolonization in India too is fleetingly mentioned in here. But the decolonized India that Willie left—a land ridden by the evils of caste system: where the ‘firebrand’ leaders are rather motivated to take up the issues of personal interest and humiliation instead of national relevance; where the society still sees what the white man wants it to see; and a country full of half-lives asking the West for favors of every kind like a beggar—was found by him as a country for which decolonization was nothing but a retrograde step.

Anyway, when Willie goes to a decolonizing Africa with Ana to live as a half-master in her estate established by her grandfather—a Portuguese settler in Africa who like other representatives of a greater civilization had given a new face and identity to the primitive land—he meets other half-masters, second-rank Portuguese who have lost their purity by intermingling with African people and are facing a similar threat from the Africans that Salim had felt in *Bend*.

Besides, as Willie finds it, the decolonization of this once colonized town seems to have varied effects on its inhabitants—Gouveia, the Portuguese architect, side with the African guerrillas against the former rulers, and marries an African village woman as if as an insurance against the African guerrillas and Graça extends her warm welcome to the poor Africans to come and stay in her house. And while most of the half-Portuguese estate owners leave for Portugal, the ‘pure’ Portuguese like the Noronhas no more appear to enjoy their respected standing among the other estate owners in Africa: “It might have been that, with the half-news and rumours that kept

on coming from the besieged frontiers, the racial and social heights that the Noronhas represented no longer mattered as much as they had" (198).

The effect of the decolonization on the Africans is, on the other hand, quite similar to that in the town in *Bend*. As for example, Willie learns of a number of rumours on Gouveia's African wife, such as when she had visited Portugal "she had refused to do any housework because she didn't want people in Portugal to think she was a servant"; or that in the African town her "servants were always quarrelling with her because she was an African and they had no regard for her"; or that she was so very strict with her servants because "she was an African and knew how to deal with Africans" (218-9).

However, with the rage of decolonization engulfing the whole town, it is another spectacle of destruction and ruin: blocked drains and gutters choked with sand in the absence of a functional municipality; overgrown gardens giving an appearance of ruin; the prominent shops are closed down as their owners leave for their own countries; a great many grand houses in the town also appear abandoned bearing signs of African fury and plunder; while Africans gradually start to occupy the bungalows left behind by the estate owners. Altogether, to Willie it appears as if Africa was struggling to return to its primitive stage following the fatal effects of decolonization: "It didn't take long for things to break down, to become again as they had been in the days of Ana's grandfather, who had had to live close to the ground, close to the climate and insects and illnesses, and close to his African neighbours and workers, before comfort had been squeezed out of the hard land, like blood out of stone" (225).

Magic takes up the theme of decolonization in India from where it had been left in *Half* to confirm the validity of the observations offered in the earlier book on the success of decolonization in a country like India to where Willie comes back, after eighteen years, to participate in what he thinks is a sweeping social revolution in a decolonized country. But starting from the moment of his arrival in the airport he only finds an India that is still too retrogressive and self-pitying to achieve the sense of nationhood and socio-political awareness that is needed to make the process of decolonization successful. But as Willie discovers, the supposedly decolonized country is still aping the West, even in simple daily affairs, as like the hotel that follows a European style in its menu—"from our baker's basket" or "from the butcher's block" (32)—or as in the guerrillas' occasional changing into trousers

leaving their village clothes “to be seen as trousers-people, to give themselves a little more authority with their fellows during the discussions” (77).

When Joseph, a representative intellectual of the decolonized India gives Willie a fiery speech on the past defeats of India, he also attributes the absolute defeat of the country to its servile inhabitants who were spared by the invading foreigners after they killed off the warrior races. Thus, as Joseph points out to Willie, the present India is a country of half-men, the descendants of the pathetic slaves who were too submissive to even think of rebelling against the authority while they accepted their wretchedness to be natural and therefore unchangeable. Joseph cites the example of his maid servant as one of these dead souls — “Her village is full of people like her, very small, very thin, Cricket people, matchstick people. Their minds have gone after the centuries of malnourishment. Do you think you can make a revolution with her?” (41). Nevertheless, Willie cannot but also notice that Joseph’s educated but low-caste son-in-law, embittered and self-pitying over his acceptance in the society, is also one of those carrying the burden of past defeat. Quite ironically thus Joseph, as the ‘cheerleader for the guerrillas’, betrays the distrust of these ‘revolutionaries’ of the oppressed people as he justifies his assigning a degrading role to the maid servant by saying that it was chosen by history for people like her. Moreover, he also represents their attempts to release their personal disappointments in life in the violence of a grand movement: “I would love nothing better than to see a revolution sweeping everything away. The very thought of that makes my heart light” (39).

And thus Willie, having come to India to participate in a second decolonization, finds himself trapped into a team of guerrillas who seem to have joined the movement to avenge personal defeats and insults: who lack the basic training to face as strong an opposition as the state police and thus behave like a pathetic bunch of cowards when the possibility of a confrontation arises; and for whom violence against the powerless comes more easily than the feeling of compassion and empathy for the poor and oppressed: “the peasants have to be disciplined before they can become foot-soldiers of the revolution. You have to rough them up a little bit . . . the peasants ought to be kept in pens” (105). Consequently, the freedom of the country means an altogether new kind of colonization for the oppressed section of the society for whom the British were a better master: while the society is thrown into a greater chaos and disintegration by the revolutionaries like the guerrillas who try to fill up the vacuum left by the imperial masters by donning their guise but miserably fail in that. Thus

Willie finds a new face of the decolonized India in a model guerrilla leader whom he is supposed to admire:

He was in his mid or late forties, and no other style of life was possible for him. He liked tramping through villages in his uniform, browbeating villagers, and talking of revolution; he liked living off the land, and this to some extent meant living off village people; he liked being important. He was completely uneducated, and he was a killer. He sang dreadful revolutionary songs whenever he could; they contained the sum of his political and historical wisdom. (101)

The revolution thus seems to go horribly wrong to Willie—as it appears hostile to the very people whom it wants to ‘liberate’: is joined by the people either because they are bored and want some blood and action like Raja the Scooter Man, or because they want to reap the benefits of the fear for the guerrillas among the villagers like the corrupt Shivdas. As to Willie, the revolution that plans to replace a colonial past with a ‘liberated present’ as mindlessly is not destined to be fruitful in the long run: “The past was terrible: it had to be done away with. But the past also had a kind of wholeness that people like Ramachandra couldn’t begin to care about and couldn’t replace” (118)

Willie also recounts in detail how the guerrillas ‘liberate’ a village, how the ‘nervous, passive villagers and tribal people’ are prepared by a “tough ‘warm-up’ group” to make them speak of their ‘problems’ or to clap and sing their village songs; how the team leader of the guerrillas would offer solutions to their problems, set down a few rules for the villagers to obey and tell them how their loyalties lie with the guerrillas now; and how after all this is over, “the squad marched on, with a promise to return in some months, to see how people were getting on with their new gift of freedom” (108). The comic absurdity and pretentiousness of such a decolonizing revolution very soon disillusion Willie who writes to Sarojini on this realization of his, “*you would be moved by the workings of the human soul, so complete within those frail bodies. Those wild and hungry eyes haunt me. They... carry a distillation of the country’s unhappiness. I don’t think there is one simple action which can help. You can’t take a gun and kill that unhappiness. All you can do is to kill people*” (167).

Anyway, once Willie goes back to London he discovers the inner strength and durability of the formerly imperial civilization too coming under the unfortunate

effects of the decolonization in its former colonies. England is thus found by Willie to be exposed to the barbarians of the former colonial countries like Willie's colleagues in his architecture class—the Pakistani or the Malaysian Chinese, who now, armed with decolonization, have brought their primitiveness and ignorance to the very heart of the world civilization and causing a debasement of the once formidable country. The economic migrants are too found by Willie to choke the life of the great city like parasites—as like the mass immigrants from Bangladesh, Pakistan or India. The far-reaching consequences of decolonization, thus to Willie, remain fatal and lamentable for its effect on both the colonized and the colonizer.

Decolonization, however, is depicted from an altogether different perspective and with a whole new range of complex interplay of forces at work in the four novels by Ghosh. In Ghosh the demand for freedom from the foreign rulers always arises out of as much a socio-political awareness as much as from a desperate need to salvage the self-esteem lost in the degradation of colonialism. According to Mondal, Ghosh's taking into account the colonial experience of his characters that gives them a fractured and fluid identity also involves his analysis of decolonization in the former colonies: "Addressing the psychological and affective effects of colonial 'defeat' as much as its political or economic dimensions, this constitutes a more humanist attempt to recuperate some measure of subjectivity and agency as a viable basis for a future decolonization of the mind and body" (30). Thus the "subjectivity and agency that is almost denied in Naipaul, finds an expression in Ghosh and in his characters that witness the grand historical process of decolonization.

While the inevitable turbulence that involves the process of decolonization is described by Ghosh as vividly, he also presents the aftermath of the event with all its diverse impacts upon the people and the places in these novels. Thus while on the one hand the corruption and infightings among the national leaders immediately following the decolonization in India is brought up into the conversation between Mrs Verma and Dr Mishra; the spectacular success of the Algerian decolonization, that in spite of a staggering loss of human lives during the event had led to the country being reborn in all its splendour like the mythological phoenix, also comes up once in one of Dr Mishra's speeches in *Reason*.

Antique too presents Egypt to be still celebrating the event of decolonization that had released its people from tyranny and reinstated the country to its former autonomy. Ghosh however makes it clear that for the rural Egyptians, decolonization

never indicated “the whole range of classical liberal freedoms”, rather it always meant “the deliverance from forced labour . . . to the fellaheen their most cherished liberty was that which had been most cruelly abused by the regimes of the past—their right to dispose freely of their worktime. It was a simple enough dispensation . . . for which every fellah of an age to remember the past was deeply and unreservedly grateful” (194).

Tide also presents an India that is struggling to get back on its feet and at times successfully too, such as Nilima’s modern hospital and Badabon trust that appear as the beacon of hope to the marginalized people of Lusibari. They also offer education and employment to the local women like Moyna, who otherwise are destined to become widowed at an early age and perish in poverty or being sold to prostitution by hunger. This India is also different from what Piya’s father had lived in before he left the country “where there were only two makes of car and where middle-class life was ruled by a hankering for all things foreign.” But this country is different to Kanai now: “there’s a lot going on in India right now and it’s exciting to be a part of it” (200).

In *Palace* too there is a success story in Ilongo, the illegitimate son of Rajkumar bearing the legacy of colonialism in his birth, but who is now a respected politician in Malaya. He is also shown as to have transformed the Morningside plantation—that once appeared to Uma as a small replica of a European colony—into a symbol of freedom and hope, into “one of the flagship enterprises of the co-operative movement. The plantation workers’ unions had grown into an extraordinary success story: there were health-care systems, pensions, educational programme, worker-retraining projects” (498).

Although the aftermath of decolonization in a country might appear optimistic in Ghosh, the course of events during decolonization remains as grievous and appalling—for both the colonizer and the colonized—in Ghosh as it was in Naipaul. Nevertheless, unlike Naipaul, Ghosh is careful to present decolonization with the proper context in his analysis of the social, political, economic and existential perspectives of the colonized that eventually lead the subjugated person to a struggle for decolonization of his mind and body. As for example, in *Palace*, after Uma visits other European countries to find a true progress, a wave of new thoughts and new national concerns like education in there as compared to India, used by the British as a “vast garrison” where “it was the impoverished Indian peasant who paid both for the

upkeep of the conquering army and for Britain's eastern campaigns", she decides to fight for her country's freedom. This decision of hers thus follows both her realization of the deprivation in India and also her apprehension about the future of such a country where the bulk of public money was spent on the military, and concern for education was nowhere to be seen. But Uma also realizes that the deprivation of her country has already reached such a level "that it would soon become impossible to change the angle of their country's entry into the future; that a time was at hand, when even the fall of the Empire and the departure of their rulers would make little difference" (221-2).

However, Uma is not the only one to doubt the possibility of a successful decolonization in the novel, as Arjun also wonders whether he, as one of the mimic men in British India could gain credibility as a freedom fighter among his countrymen: "'What are we? . . . The truth is that except for the colour of our skin, most people in India wouldn't even recognise us as Indians. When we joined up we didn't have India on our minds: we wanted to be sahibs and that's what we've become. Do you think we can undo all of that just by putting up a new flag?'" (439) But later, when Arjun realizes that this identity of his that resists a decolonization of mind and body in such a way was not created by his own self—as he had always believed—but was manufactured by the Empire, he finds himself coming face to face with a life spent in self-delusion while the shocking discovery leaves him as a non-existent being

He had never thought of his life as different from any other: he had never experienced the slightest doubt about his personal sovereignty: never imagined himself to be dealing with anything other than the full range of human choice. But if it were true that his life had somehow been moulded by acts of power of which he was unaware—then it would follow that he had never acted of his own volition: never had a moment of true self-consciousness. Everything he had ever assumed about himself was a lie, an illusion. And if this were so, how was he to find himself now? (431)

Eventually this is the desperate need to reclaim himself as an autonomous soul from the realm of identities being manufactured by a ruthless Empire that turns Arjun violent. But the rage that follows his discovery of his servile 'sovereignty' also leads Arjun to the path of self-destruction in his struggle for decolonization against the Empire. In fact the rebels who take up arms against the colonizers are often shown

here to be turning against themselves—as if the impossibility of defeating an enemy that is beyond their capacity turns them mad with despair. This violent expression of the event of decolonization is something that Uma finds most self-destructive and futile in the long run; as she realizes that “a popular insurrection, inspired by legend and myth, stood no chance of prevailing against a force such as the Empire—so skillful and ruthless in its deployment of its overwhelming power: so expert and ruthless in the management of opinion”. Moreover, she also realizes that a successful fight against colonialism is possible only in the way the Mahatma has suggested and thus the philosophy of non-violence is the unarmed Indians’ only way of fighting an enemy that could boast of a “thoroughly modern military power”. Nevertheless, as Uma also knows, even if a violent decolonizing “effort were to succeed it would be at the cost of unimaginable bloodshed . . . that it would pit Indians against one another in such a way as to make victory just as undesirable as defeat” (254).

However, as it appears, once the explosive event is put into motion it acquires a life of its own, it cannot be controlled and its paths cannot be predicted while the extensive damage and destruction caused by it leave a permanent scar on the country and its people. An attempt for decolonization in Burma thus not only leaves the country with an absent civil administration that results in the houses and shops being looted by both soldiers and locals; but also with a destruction of a far greater magnitude as the one that Dinu finds in the countryside: “He was stupefied by the devastation . . . territories that had been scorched not once but twice by retreating armies. River channels were blocked and railway lines lay mangled on their sleepers. From village to village a different group or party was in charge.” The picturesque country was now completely different: “Farmers ploughed round bomb-craters; children pointed out the places where mines lay unexploded” (530)

As Ghosh also notes, it is not only a violent decolonization that leaves the once beautiful country of Burma devastated; but the post-decolonization socio-political anarchy also leads the country into civil warfare and pushes it towards the oppressive rule of local despots. Arjun too foresees the huge challenges that lay ahead for a decolonized India—the poverty, the hunger, the evils of caste system—that the rebels striving towards a decolonized country were oblivious to, as for them “India was the shining mountain beyond the horizon. . . . What would they find, Arjun wondered, when they crossed the horizon?” (522). This and other such queries, with their elusive answers make it evident to Arjun that destruction does not necessarily always lead to

creation, while a successful decolonization is something a whole nation has to strive for, and that too may be for centuries:

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? Loyalty, commonalty, faith—these things were as essential and as fragile as the muscles of the human heart: easy to destroy, impossible to rebuild. How would one begin the work of re-creating the tissues that bound people to each other? This was beyond the abilities of someone such as himself: someone trained to destroy. It was a labour that would last not one year, not ten, not fifty—it was the work of centuries. (441)

That decolonization is never in itself the ultimate solution to an oppressive and exploitative order of imperialism is apparent in the gradual disintegration of the post-colonial Burma. After General Aung San— the only leader thought to be capable of guiding the country towards unity and prosperity—is assassinated, the country goes through much turbulence. The "protracted civil conflicts", a "large-scale Communist uprising" and finally a coup by General Ne Win subjected the country to "the bizarre, maniacal whimsies of its dictator: Burma, 'the golden', became synonymous with poverty, tyranny and misgovernment" (486).

The disastrous whims of the new dictator showed in everything—in the mindless way he declared certain denominations valueless; appointed half-literate officers to judge the merit of writers of literature; in his introduction of the law that termed it a punishable offence to spend a night even at a friend's or relative's house without prior official permission and in many such other similar absurd and oppressive laws that were introduced at regular intervals. The new military junta also imposed a strict censorship of the media to make the newspapers shut down with their editors imprisoned and at times killed. Books and magazines also came to be censored by the Press Scrutiny Board, constituted "of a small army of captains and majors". As Ghosh notes, this new censorship regime that was developed by the new dictator in fact grew "out of the foundations of the system that had been left behind by the old Imperial Government" (535). Thus while Ghosh does not fail to note the continuation of the colonial oppression and exploitation in the new administration that had replaced the European imperialism; he also records the various forces at work in that continuation.

Likewise, in *Tide* too we find the high-handedness of a post-colonial state authority in its attempts to evict the powerless refugees from Marichjhāpi actually follows the very terrorizing techniques that were once used by the imperial government. Besides, the reason the state government cites for this attempted eviction is also quite significant—the island has to be kept free of settlers as otherwise it would lose the goodwill and funding from foreign countries that want the island to be used as a tiger preservation centre.

In *Reason* too one finds such instances of a continuation of colonialism in various guises. Even the post-colonial Algeria that Dr Mishra praises so very much for having implemented a successful decolonization is found to pay less to the Indian doctors as compared with the French doctors working at various hospitals in the country. Besides this socio-political continuation of the European imperialism of the previous era, Ghosh also presents the neo-colonizing effects of a capitalist market in his novels where the lure of easy money and a better life entices the mass of poor people into migrating to the foreign countries where they find themselves to be turned into slaves. *Antique* thus presents an ironic picture of a decolonized country becoming trapped into the same nightmare of forced labour that it believed to have escaped: while the economic immigrants from the country are presented as not only parting ways with their motherland but also from a chance to live with dignity.

Anyway, in spite of the disheartening revelation that colonialism cannot be rooted out by the sole event of decolonization and that it may come back in various guises to the former colonies, Ghosh is not ready to admit complete hopelessness. He attempts to show that like colonialism, neo-imperialism is also resisted in various ways by the oppressed, and that although it may take time but imperialism in its new models is also destined to withdraw its clutches like its former self. As for example, when the Star fell in *Reason*, Hajj Fahmy tells his audience that this symbol of neo-colonialism, built with the money of the people who sold the country to the European colonizers and built on the land where the last battle against the invaders was lost, had to fall because “no one wanted it”. And, may be this why the newer forms of neo-colonialism also cannot survive in the long run as in every guise it will remain as despised and as resisted by its victims as it has been always.

In *Palace* this resistance towards the neo-imperial despot has a potent voice in the person of Aung San Suu Kyi, the daughter of the assassinated leader General Aung San. Suu Kyi is presented by Ghosh as to be perceptive enough to understand that

politics “cannot be allowed to cannibalise all of life, all of existence”; and that politics is just another form of tyranny as it too can invade everything – “religion, art, family”. She thus shows the limitations of politics that is used by the military rulers of the country to justify their tyranny in every sphere of life of a citizen. As Dinu feels, her thoughts and beliefs have “torn the masks from the generals’ faces . . . [. . .] She has robbed them of words, of discourse” and in fear they now call her an imperialist although they are the ones who are using the old imperial policies to be in power:

“The truth is that they’ve lost and they know this . . . this is what makes them so desperate – the knowledge that soon they will have nowhere to hide . . . that it is just a matter of time before they are made to answer for all that they have done” (542-3)