Chapter Six

Not at Home in Empire

The Glass Palace

Imperialism is a depraved choice of national life, imposed by self-seeking interests which appeal to the lusts of quantitative acquisitiveness and of forceful domination surviving in a nation from early centuries of animal struggle for existence. — J. A. Hobson, *Imperialism: A Study*

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

Each of Amitav Ghosh's novels is distinct from the other. While *The Calcutta Chromosome* subverts official medical historiography by unearthing an erased Oriental occult tradition, *The Glass Palace* (2000), his next novel, is a family chronicle centred in Burma, India and the Malay Archipelago across several generations and historical epochs. Ghosh's "most commercially successful" (Mondal, 14) novel has had a diverse critical reception. While Rakhee Moral straitjackets the novel as a "postcolonial narrative" (139), Anshuman A. Mondal categorizes it as a "grand historical romance" (15). For Rukmini Bhaya Nair the novel is "condemned to record the exit-ential dilemma — wherein the subject is necessarily partitioned, a bewildered immigrant never quite in focus nor contained within the frame" (162). In a similar vein, Rakhi Nara and G.A. Ghanashyam interpret the novel as "an elegy for the diasporic condition" (96). In stark contrast to all these views, N.K. Rajalakshmi believes that the novel "disclose(s) the undercurrents of power discourse in everyday existence of human life" (115). Given the substantial nature of the work it comes as no surprise that *The Glass Palace* should receive such a wide range of critical interpretations.

Like the other novels of Amitav Ghosh, *The Glass Palace* too has received international recognition. It won the Grand Prize for Fiction at the Frankfurt International e-Book Awards. The novel also won the best book award for the

Eurasian region of the Commonwealth Writers Prize in 2001. Interestingly, Ghosh spurned the award on ideological grounds:

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

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

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

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

Like *In An Antique Land*, *The Glass Palace* explores the effects of history on individual lives. "Historiography", contends Kundera, "writes the history of society, not of man" (37). Reflecting on the relationship between novel and history, he observes that "[n]ot only must historical circumstance create a new existential situation for a character in a novel, but history *itself* must be understood and analyzed as an existential situation" (38). For Ghosh, what is "interesting" about "history in terms of a novel is that history gives us particular predicaments which are unique predicaments, not repeatable in time and place" (Vijay Kumar, 101). In a text which straddles the boundaries of fiction and history, Ghosh concentrates on the family as the central unit because it is a surrogate for the nation. For Ghosh, the family, however, is not static but continuously on the move. It cuts across rigid national boundaries, thereby subverting the fixity of the modernist concept of the "nation". This perfectly accords with his observation that "families can actually span nations" (Aldama, 89). By creating a generic amalgam Ghosh delineates his philosophy of Indian history:

> For me, at some point it became very important that this book encapsulates in it the ways in which people cope with defeat,

> because this has really been our history for a long, long time: the absolute fact of defeat and the absolute fact trying to articulate defeat to yourself and trying to build a culture around the centrality of defeat. (Aldama, 89)

This experience is not a unique one because it is also felt by the indigenous peoples in Australia, the Americas and other parts of the world. "But around defeat", avers Ghosh, "there's love, there's laughter, there's happiness. [...] There are children. There are relationships. There's betrayal. There's faithfulness. This is what life is, and I want my book to be true to that" (Aldama, 89). Evidently what Ghosh tries to reconcile are the "analytical" histories utilizing the rational categories of modern historical thought and the "affective" histories which account for the plural ways of being-in-the-world. After all, history and fiction, as modes of narrative, mediate "the world for the purpose of introducing meaning" (E.L. Doctorow, cited. in Hutcheon, 112).

In *The Glass Palace*, Amitav Ghosh engages directly with colonialism and its aftermath. The narrative begins with the British invasion of Burma and the expansion of the Empire. Britain and Burma are locked into a power relationship and a discourse of race in which each objectifies the other. This empire of domination is consolidated by an organized military network which has an extensive reach. What smoothes the path of Britain's annexation is the disintegration of the Burmese army and the betrayal of a couple of the Burmese King Thebaw's ministers. Britain's colonial rule over Burma is established by the British Indian Army. The people of a colonized nation thus help their colonial masters to protect and expand their territory: "There were some ten thousand soldiers in the British invasion force and of these the great majority — about two-thirds — were Indian sepoys" (*The Glass Palace*, 26). The narrative explores the effects of colonial hegemony as the sagacious Saya John reads the minds of these psychologically demented soldiers, the tools of Empire:

> For a few coins they would allow their masters to use them as they wished, to destroy every trace of resistance to the power of the English. It always amazed me: Chinese peasants would never do this — allow themselves to be used to fight other people's wars with so little profit for themselves. [...] How do you fight an enemy who fights from neither enmity nor anger, but in submission to orders from superiors, without protest and without conscience? (*GP*, 29-30)

The British annex Burma to strengthen their economic network. Colonialism is a lucrative politico-commercial enterprise inextricably tied with capitalism. Denis

Judd argues in his book *Empire: The British Imperial Experience from 1765 to the Present* that "[n]o one can doubt that the desire for profitable trade, plunder and enrichment was the primary force that led to the establishment of the imperial structure" (3). The British take control of the political power in Rangoon to strengthen their economic position. They are primarily concerned with the exploitation of the source of capital. Saya John's son Matthew makes this explicit to Rajkumar: "'There's going to be a war. Father says they want all the teak in Burma. The King won't let them have it so they're going to do away with him'" (*GP*, 15). The narrative thus begins with the shift of power from the Burmese monarch to its British counterpart as the people languish under colonial domination.

The Burmese Royal family has had a gory history. A man of scholarly inclination, King Thebaw is completely disinterested in the political affairs of the state. He owes his succession to the throne to the fatal intervention of his step-mother as well as mother-in-law, the Alenandaw Queen, an expert at palace intrigue. The real power behind the throne is Thebaw's haughty chief consort Queen Supayalat. The Queen is an enigma, lovable as well as detestable. Disregarding the protocols of palace intrigue Supayalat "fell headlong in love" with Thebaw. What is more, his "ineffectual good nature seemed to inspire a maternal ferocity in her" (*GP*, 38). To secure the throne for her husband, the same Queen, stripping her ruthless mother of all her powers, ordered the killing of all potential rivals in the Royal Family: "Seventy-nine princes were slaughtered on her orders, some of them new-born infants, and some too old to walk. To prevent the spillage of royal blood she had them wrapped in carpets and bludgeoned to death" (*GP*, 39). Demonic cruelty paradoxically coexists with feminine tenderness in Supayalat. Her wickedness stems from a typically feminine attribute — her love of and ambition for her husband. It is true that personally she is ambitious, but her ambition lies more in seeing great things for her husband than in acquiring rank and possession for herself. It is Supayalat's uncompromising attitude that results in hostility with the British; Thebaw was all for appeasement. The spirit of defiance of the colonial authority is evident in the publicly announced "Royal Proclamation" which rings with the rhetoric of resistance and counter-racism:

> To all Royal subjects and inhabitants of the Royal Empire: those heretics, the barbarian English Kalaas having most harshly made demands calculated to bring about the

> impairment and destruction of our religion, the violation of our national traditions and customs, and the degradation of our race, are making a show and preparation as if about to wage war with our state. (*GP*, 15)

But now with the battle fought and lost, the sovereign Royal Family is stripped off all its powers and sent on exile to India. The stoical Thebaw ponders about how this sudden shift of power dismantles all existing edifices:

> This is how power is eclipsed: in a moment of vivid realism, between the waning of one fantasy of governance and its replacement by the next; in an instant when the world springs free of its moorings of dreams and reveals itself to be girdled in the pathways of survival and self-preservation. (*GP*, 41-42)

The dethroning of the King erases the difference between the ruler and his subjects which is evident in the common people's looting the royal palace. With the arrival of the victorious British troops, the common people enter the palace compound, an erstwhile forbidden zone, and ransack it: "the guards and sentries were all gone. The palace was unguarded [...]. People began to tumble through, like water over the lip of a spout" (*GP*, 31-32). Their loot is paradoxically accompanied by their ceremonious sheiko before the Queen. Supayalat, universally detested for her cruelty and ruthlessness, is suddenly transformed in the people's eyes "through the alchemy of defeat" (*GP*, 34). Her resistance to the colonial army has aroused the patriotic spirit of her subjects which elicits their spontaneous respect:

> For the first time in her reign she had become what a sovereign should be, the proxy of her people [....] Were she meekly to accept her defeat none would be so deeply ashamed as they. It was as though they were entrusting her with the burden of their own immediate defiance. (*GP*, 34)

Thebaw is, however, provided an inglorious exit by the British. His ceremonious canopy is given seven tiers which is the number allotted to a nobleman, not the nine due to a king. Not content with the crushing defeat over the Royal army, the British pile on their revenge: "In his last encounter with his erstwhile subjects he was to be publicly demoted, like an errant schoolchild" (*GP*, 43-44). For Thebaw, of all the "affronts" that he could imagine, this is "the most hurtful, the most egregious" (*GP*, 44). On his way to India, the King reflects on the fate of empires and of exiles. In Rangoon itself, the British transported more Indians than there were Burmese to do menial jobs. The Burmese have been a static community, but colonialism has displaced them from their roots. Thebaw ponders about "[w]hat

vast, what incomprehensible power, to move people in such huge numbers from one place to another — emperors, kings, farmers, dockworkers, soldiers, coolies, policemen. Why? Why this furious movement — people taken from one place to another, to pull rickshaws, to sit blind in exile?" (*GP*, 50). The British deposed Bahadur Shah Zafar, the last Mughal emperor to Rangoon. In a neat reversal, Thebaw, the last Burmese King, is sent on exile to India.

The Royal Family is imprisoned in Outram House in Ratnagiri, their confinement sustained by the political logic of imperialism. Their authority in Burma is usurped by the British. In spite of their lost power and glory, Thebaw and Supayalat hold on to their manners and customs as a mark of resistance against colonial authority. Although Thebaw learnt some English from Anglican missionaries, his spiritual outlook towards life is moulded by his training as a Buddhist monk. Not surprisingly he clings on to his indigenous lifestyle. Resolute as she is, Supayalat refuses to succumb to her transformed exilic circumstances and insists on the maintenance of the old Mandalay protocols, "the shikoes, the crawling [...] she wouldn't hear of any changes. She was the Queen of Burma, she said, and if she didn't insist on being treated properly how could she expect anyone else to give her her due" (*GP*,55)? An incarnation of obduracy and pride, Supayalat demonstrates her defiance of the British authority at her cold reception of the new District Collector B.P. Dey and his wife Uma:

> This was the Queen's way of preserving the spirit of Mandalay protocol: since the representatives of the British were adamant in their refusal to perform the shiko, she in turn made a point of not acknowledging their entry into her presence. (*GP*, 106)

Smarting at humiliation, Thebaw and Supayalat are staunch critics of the colonizing structure. While the King extols the victory of Japan, "an Eastern country" over Russia, "a European power" (GP, 107), the Queen scoffs at the imminent defilement of her native country. An anticolonial nationalist, she unfavourably contrasts the present destitute condition of Burma with its haloed past:

> In a few decades the wealth will be gone — all the gems, the timber and the oil — and then they (the British) too will leave. In our golden Burma where no one ever went hungry and no one was too poor to write and read, all that will remain is destitution and ignorance, famine and despair. We were the first to be imprisoned in the name of their progress; millions more will follow. (*GP*, 88)

Colonialism is inseparable from expansionist capitalism. Moreover, the concept of the Western nations as representing the best of human civilization legitimates colonial expansion. It degenerates into an ideology of racial hatred in the colonies. European nationalism, explains Partha Chatterjee, is "part of the same historical process which saw the rise of industrialism and democracy". It represents "the attempt to actualize in political terms the universal urge for liberty and progress" (*Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World*, 2). There is, however, a conflict right at the heart of nationalism which Chatterjee terms the "liberal dilemma": nationalism may promise liberty and universal suffrage to the colonizers but undemocratic forms of government and domination to the colonized. Supayalat unravels to the Collector this ambiguity in Western thought which is used quite deliberately to dupe the colonial subject:

> We have heard so many lectures from you and your colleagues on the subject of the barbarity of the Kings of Burma and the humanity of the Angrez; we were tyrants you said, enemies of freedom, murderers. The English alone understand liberty, we were told; they do not put Kings and princes to death; they rule through laws. If that is so, why has King Thebaw never been brought to trial? Where are these laws that we hear of? Is it a crime to defend your country against an invader? Would the English not do the same? (*GP*, 150)

Truly, racism as Stuart Hall conceives it, works more like Freud's dreamwork than anything else. It "expresses itself through displacement, through denial, through the capacity to say [...] two contradictory things at the same time, the surface imagery speaking of an unspeakable content, the repressed content of a culture" ("Race, culture and communications", 15). With her seething rhetorical-political gestures, the Queen challenges the silencing propensities of the colonialist representations and writes back against the empire.

Resistance at the political level contrasts with reconciliation at the cultural level. The recluse Thebaw's surveillance of the town with his binoculars from the vantage point of his balcony evokes keen interest among the people. It initiates "the legend of Ratnagiri's watchful king" (*GP*, 78) and Thebaw becomes Ratnagiri's "guardian spirit" (*GP*, 80). Certainly not gregarious, Supayalat generously stands by the townsfolk when Ratnagiri is devastated by an outbreak of plague. She allows them to temporarily reside around the walls of the compound to be safe from the contagion. She has her vested self-interest in her action, but the scourge of Rangoon is deified at Ratnagiri: "overnight she became

a guardian goddess, a protector of the unfortunate, an incarnate *devi* who had rescued hundreds from the ravages of the plague" (*GP*, 83). While the King and the Queen remain confined within Outram House, their daughters peregrinate around Ratnagiri and try to develop an Indo-Burmese hybrid identity. In their early years in colonial India, the Princesses usually dressed in Burmese clothes, but with the passage of time they foster a cultural assimilation:

> One day, no one quite remembered when, they appeared in saris — not expensive or sumptuous saris, but the simple green and red cottons of the district. They began to wear their hair braided and oiled like Ratnagiri schoolgirls; they learned to speak Marathi and Hindustani as fluently as any of the townsfolk — it was only with their parents that they now speak Burmese. (*GP*, 77)

The concept of culture as primeval, separate and distinct melts in the context of migration. Thus cosmopolitanism or multiculturalism militates against narrow, rigid, nationalism and supremacism.

While British colonial expansionism seizes the political powers of Burma and annexes it into its Indian empire, it also opens up wonderful private opportunities for native entrepreneurs. The narrative traces the dynamics of collaboration and complicity of these local capitalists and their meticulous rise. It is their ability to absorb the colonial worldview and internalize the logic of capitalism that shapes the lives of Saya John and Rajkumar and explains their success. Saya John Martins, a Christian Chinese contractor who penitently visits the church after every night that he spends at Ma Cho's bedroom, prefigures Rajkumar. An orphan and a foundling like Rajkumar, Saya John the world traveller knows many languages but doesn't "'belong anywhere'". The Indian soldiers in Singapore emphasize the rootlessness of Saya John by pejoratively calling him "'a *dhobi ka kutta* — a washerman's dog — *na ghar ka na ghat ka* — you don't belong anywhere, either by the water or on land'" (*GP*, 10). Exposure to various cultures since his childhood enables Saya John to develop a hybrid, cross-fertilized identity. On his visit to a European company official Saya John would don a European costume in a manner of role-playing. The English official would scoff at the performance of this colonialised mimic man and try to dismiss "Johnny Chinaman" trying to acquire English culture "in his ill-fitting European clothes, his portliness accentuated by the patched dark trousers that hung in thick folds around his ankles, with his scuffed sola topee perched precariously on his

head" (*GP*, 72). Invariably, Saya John begins his business trips in the interiors of Burmese teak forests dressed as a colonial adventurer "in European clothes: a sola topee, leather boots, khaki trousers" (*GP*, 67). After this ritual, he is forced to "shed an article of clothing" (*GP*, 68) and switch to his indigenous garments because of leeches and insect bites. Sagacious and practical, Saya John realizes that his success depends on understanding the rules of the colonial structure and playing the role of a colonial lackey. He never loses his patience even when snubbed by a European officer. He appreciatively comprehends how the British capital-intensive economy transforms the forest wealth into a commodity:

> [...] until the Europeans came none of them had ever thought of using elephants for the purposes of logging. Their elephants were used only in pagodas and palaces, for wars and ceremonies. It was the Europeans who saw that tame elephants could be made to work for human profit. It was they who invented everything we see around us in the logging camp. This entire way of life is their creation. (*GP*, 74)

The vital lesson that Saya John learns from his colonial masters and which he passes on to Rajkumar is to "bend the work of nature to your will; to make the trees of the earth useful to human beings" (*GP*, 75). Intensive development of timber industry couples with exhaustion of natural resources, as if nature itself is colonized. The narrative evocatively personifies trees which are "killed", "assassinated", "dead" (*GP*, 69) in the name of development. The paradoxical nature of teak trade is emphasized by the narrator when he wonders that "a tree that had felled dynasties, caused inventions, created fortunes, brought a new way of life into being" (*GP*, 71). This Janus-faced nature of teak parallels the dialectical nature of the history of cotton as enunciated in *The Circle of Reason*: "It is a gory history in parts; a story of greed and destruction. Every scrap of cloth is stained by a bloody past. But it is the only history we have and history is hope as well as despair" (57-58). Moulded by Saya John and utilizing his business acumen to the fullest, the tenacious Rajkumar tries to make wonderful use of the opportunities in front of him and embarks on his journey to the pinnacle of prosperity.

Rootless from his infancy, Rajkumar learns his lessons the hard way. Hailing from Chittagong, his father settles in the principal port of the Arakan, Akyab, a site of intercultural discord "where Burma and Bengal collide in a whirlpool of unease" (*GP*, 13). An outbreak of fever tragically disperses the

family. En route to Chittagong, Rajkumar's mother succumbs to this epidemic whispering in his ears "'[l]ive, my Prince; hold on to your life'" (*GP*, 14) which he does successfully throughout his career. After a brief stint as an apprentice in a boat, Rajkumar joins Ma Cho's food-stall in Mandalay as an errand boy. Resolute as he is, Rajkumar withstands racial abuse from his employer nonchalantly — "'you fool of an Indian, you coal-black Kalaa'" (*GP*, 7). Interestingly, Ma Cho also initiates Rajkumar's sexuality and arouses his physical sensibility.

When the royal family is dethroned and the common people loot the palace, a completely different world opens up for Rajkumar. As he enters the forbidden palace compound, he beholds Dolly, one of Queen Supayalat's maids, "the most beautiful creature he had ever beheld, of a loveliness beyond imagining" (*GP*, 34). Most certainly, Rajkumar falls in love at first sight with Dolly elucidating Schopenhauer's observations on the matter: "The spirit of the species alone is able to see at a glance what value she has for *it*, for its ends. As a rule, great passions arise at the first glance" (551). The spellbound Rajkumar next meets Dollly when she is accompanying the Royal Family to India in a procession on foot. It is the last time that he would see her in many years. Paradoxically, the very people who ransacked the Royal palace the night before now mourn the exile of the King. That there exist disinterested invisible bonds between individuals completely unrelated to one another puzzle him:

> He was, in a way, a feral creature, unaware that in certain places there exist invisible bonds linking people to one another through personifications of their commonality. [...] That there should exist a universe of loyalties that was unrelated to himself and his own immediate needs — this was very nearly incomprehensible. (*GP*, 47)

The ties that bind human beings transcend all segregating boundaries.

Unfortunately, however, Rajkumar faces just the obverse. The enormous presence of Indian soldiers in the victorious British army enrages the Burmese people. Their wrath falls on the innocent Rajkumar as they single him out to answer for the soldiers' presence. Saya John's timely intervention saves Rajkumar's plight. The worldly-wise Saya discerns "something unusual", "a kind of watchful determination" in the boy: "No excess of gratitude here, no gifts or offerings, no talk of honour, with murder in the heart. There was no simplicity in his face, no innocence: his eyes were filled with worldliness, curiosity, hunger. That was as it should be" (*GP*, 30). The "curious and predatory" (*GP*, 58)

Rajkumar joins Saya John's company and embarks on a new phase in his life. Industrious and skilful, Rajkumar quickly learns the tricks of teak trade. What is more, by being able to slip into his own Chittagong dialect with the raftsmen gives him immense pleasure. Fuelled by his profound ambition, Rajkumar, who equates nature with capital, now begins human trade by transporting indentured labourers from South India to Burma. For the economically powerful Rajkumar these labourers are nothing more than commodities. With his accumulated savings and a bit of financial assistance from Saya John, Rajkumar establishes a profitable teak plantation. A crafty negotiator, Rajkumar secures a lucrative contract with a railway company. He is now a transformed man as he methodically prepares for his crucial business meeting. His graduation from "green longyi and scuffed pinni vest" into a "suit [...] appropriately plain and black, and his tie neatly tied, the collar turned to just the right angle" (*GP*, 131) signifies his evolution from a boat-apprentice to a well-to-do timber merchant. In his meticulous disposition Saya John does not recognize him as an orphan, "an abandoned kalaa, a rags-clad Indian who had strayed too far from home" but as "a reinvented being, formidably imposing and of commanding presence" (*GP*, 132). Now it is Rajkumar's turn to assert to his mentor that if "'I'm ever going to make this business grow, I'll have to take a few risks'" (*GP*, 130). The confident Rajkumar is an epitome of economic individualism.

An orphan like Rajkumar, Dolly's is the story of an exile the trajectory of which is determined by the logic of broader historical events. One of Queen Supayalat's personal attendants, Dolly looked after the Second Princess. Without any family and other means of support, Dolly has no option but to accompany the Royal Family in their exile to India. She arouses Rajkumar's indignation by offering the sweets that he has given her to the foreign soldier marching beside her. But, as Rajkumar gradually realizes, that is precisely what she should do to survive as a rootless migrant in an alien land:

> "Dolly was doing exactly what had to be done. What purpose would it serve for these girls to make a futile show of resentment? How could they succeed in defiance when the very army of the realm had succumbed? No, better by far to wait, and in the meanwhile to smile. This way Dolly would live." (*GP*, 46)

In India, while the other maids begin resisting the authority of the Queen, Dolly's integrity is unquestionable. Gradually, while all the other Burmese attendants

slowly desert the Royal Family, Dolly, "as beautiful as a fairytale princess" (*GP*, 77) stays with them. Intertwining her life with the Royal Family, Dolly becomes the pivot on which their life moves. Compassionate and of greater understanding, she controls the domestic chores with astute managerial skills. Enduring the pains of exile within the palace compound of Ratnagiri, Dolly's biological relationship with the coachman, Mohan Sawant, comes as a bliss subverting all national and racial demarcations. Unfortunately for Dolly, the First Princess herself falls in love with the coachmen and their blooming passion is thwarted.

Uma Dey, the Collector's wife, is the kindred spirit with whom Dolly shares a sympathetic relationship. It is to this sensitive woman that Dolly reveals the pangs of her rootless existence which belongs nowhere: "'If I went to Burma now I would be a foreigner — they would call me a kalaa like they do to Indians — a trespasser, an outsider from across the sea'" (*GP*, 113). Migration alters Dolly's conception of her homeland which exists primarily in the mind. Although Burma retains an emotional influence over her life, it exists in a fractured, discontinuous relationship with her present: "'I don't remember much, which is a kind of mercy, I suppose. I see it in patches sometimes. It's like a scribble on a wall — no matter how many times you paint over it, a bit of it always comes through, but not enough to put together the whole'" (*GP*, 113). Dolly's fragmentary and fissured mental reconstruction echoes Rushdie's recollections of home in "broken mirrors, some of whose fragments have been irretrievably lost" (*Imaginary Homelands*, 11). Nowhere to go, Dolly equates home with her present physical location: "'This is the only place I know. This is home'" (*GP*, 119). What she vividly remembers about her past in Mandalay is the Glass Palace where "'[e]verything [...] was of crystal and gold. You could see yourself everywhere if you lay on the floor'" (*GP*, 112). In spite of her displacement, her commitment to the Royal Family remains as firm as ever. When, fuelled by the colonial ideas of liberty and progress, Uma questions Dolly about the bloodthirsty past of Queen Supayalat, Dolly calmly but patriotically retorts: "'don't you sometimes wonder how many people have been killed in queen Victoria's name? It must be millions, wouldn't you say? I think I'd be frightened to live with one of those pictures'" (*GP*, 114). Celebrating human emotions that connect people, Dolly rubbishes Uma's skepticism about the differences in caste as an obstacle in Mohan Sawant's marriage with the First Princess: "'Oh, you Indians [...]. You're all the same, all obsessed with your

castes and your arranged marriages. In Burma when a woman likes a man, she is free to do what she wants'" (*GP*, 118). As for the coachman and the Princess, "'they're just a man and a woman who've spent years together, living behind the same walls'" (*GP*, 118). Going a step further, she humanistically dissolves all boundaries between the self and the other and feels that the child in the First Princess's womb is her own: "'all I can think of now is the birth of my child'" (*GP*, 162). Having led a life of confinement, both in Mandalay and in Ratnagiri, Dolly reposes her reality exclusively in her mind. Her self-identification with the child is one way of compensating for her thwarted love life with Mohan Sawant. Her vicarism sharpens her capacity for empathy.

An odd mixture of a capitalist and a romantic lover, Rajkumar, now an established man of the world, sets sail for Ratnagiri in Dolly's pursuit. While Dolly has assimilated herself into Indian culture and can speak Konkani language very fluently, the same is true for Rajkumar. Uma's uncle in Burma, D.P. Roy, writes to her about "Rajkumar-babu" who "he has lived in Burma so long that he is more Burmese than Indian and may well be counted as a foreigner" (*GP*, 135). Interestingly, while Rajkumar relates at ease with Burmese lifestyle, he resists Westernization. In stark contrast to the Anglicized Collector, his table manners reveal his profound sense of unease: "Even now, after two years of dinners and parties, he found it hard to cope with this atmosphere of constrained enactment" (*GP*, 141). Anyway, Rajkumar recounts his first meeting with Dolly in unambiguous terms. For the nonplussed young boy, she was "'beautiful beyond belief, beyond comprehension. She was like the palace itself, a thing of glass, inside which you could see everything of which your imagination was capable'" (*GP*, 144). The introspective Dolly, however, refuses Rajkumar's proposal because she views her past to be discontinuous with her present: "'It wasn't me you saw. It was someone else [...] I have no memory of what you describe. [...] I don't know. It wasn't me. I was not there'" (*GP*, 147). The unrelenting Dolly considers Rajkumar's love for her unreal and believes that he is seduced by his memory: "'He's in love with what he remembers. That isn't me'" (*GP*, 161). Moreover, she has so intimately tied herself up with the Royal Family that "'this is my home and I have no other'" (*GP*, 148). It is Uma who sees in Rajkumar Dolly's rescuer from her gaol at Outram House. Trusting the genuineness of his affections, she presses Dolly to concede to him. Convinced by her unconscious

dream of Rajkumar, Dolly accepts him as her man. They garland each other "smiling like children" (*GP*, 169) and recognize the bliss of their mutual love.

The loving pair of Rajkumar and Dolly is counter pointed by the loveless couple of the Collector B.P. Dey and Uma. An intermediary between the British Empire and the Burmese Royal Family, the Collector is the typical educated colonial subject that Macaulay envisaged: "Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect" (430). Colonialism wins its great victories not only because of its military and technological prowess but also because of its cultural appropriation. It creates secular hierarchies incompatible with the traditional order. By passing colonialism off as a civilizing mission, the colonizers dupe the colonized. Carrying a certain cultural baggage, the colonial system perpetuates itself by inducing the colonized to accept new social norms and cognitive categories. Unnoticed and hence unchallenged, these are instruments of oppression and dominance. Under the cloak of a civilizing mission, the colonial system persuades the colonized to internalize its logic and absorb its values. By responding to the fresh opportunities provided by the colonizer, the colonized actively participates in his own oppression, thereby, corroding his own self. The colonized is thus a participant in a "moral and cognitive venture against oppression" (Nandy, xiv). By making choices, he becomes a self-destructive co-victim. This is "the intimate enemy" position — that which moulds one's interiority also corrodes him from within, resulting in the loss of his self. "This colonialism colonizes minds in addition to bodies and it releases forces within the colonized societies to alter their cultural priorities once for all"(Nandy, xi). The inevitable result is the thorough Westernization and modernization of the colonized. The Collector's complete absorption of the civilizing mission of the colonialist ideology is epitomized by his "finely-cut Saville Row suits" (*GP*, 104) and his nostalgic recollections of the "cobbled streets and stone bridges, [...] concerts he'd attended" (*GP*, 159) at Cambridge. An Anglophile, he minutely scrutinizes that everything is in order at the dinner table. The ideology of the British Raj percolates deep into his private life as well. To get along well with his European colleagues he "needed a girl who would be willing to step out into society; someone young, who wouldn't be resistant to learning modern ways"(*GP*, 158). The relationship between the husband and the wife is not based on an overmastering emotion but on egoism and role-playing. It

is the Collector's personal anxiety to emerge as an "authentic" British through mimicry. Furthermore, the domineering husband tries to mould his wife in terms of himself. As the widowed Uma ponders:

> He had wielded immense power as a District Collector, yet paradoxically, the position had brought him nothing but unease and uncertainty; she recalled the nervous, ironic way in which he had played the part of Collector; she remembered how he'd watched over her at table, the intolerable minuteness of his supervision, the effort he had invested in moulding her into a reflection of what he himself aspired to be. There seemed never to be a moment when he was not haunted by the fear of being thought lacking by his British colleagues. (*GP*, 186)

Uma's proximity with Dolly further widens this cleavage. The knowledge of the First Princess's pregnancy coupled with his realization that Uma kept it as a closely-guarded secret from him creates in the Collector a profound sense of betrayal. The Collector's dream of an ideal, modern conjugal life is shattered: "'To live with a woman as an equal, in spirit and intellect: this seemed to me the most wonderful thing life could offer. To discover together the world of literature, art: what could be richer, more fulfilling? But what I dreamt of is not yet possible, not here, in India, not for us'" (*GP*, 172). A champion of feminine autonomy, the spirited Uma is unable to accept the Collector's Cambridge philosophy "to bargain for a woman's soul with the coin of kindness and patience" (*GP*, 153). For her this extinction of self is "beyond decency, beyond her imagining. [...] Anything would be better than to submit" (*GP*, 153). Hence, although B.P. Dey has been "nothing but kind and patient" and Uma has "nothing to complain of" (*GP*, 172), she decides to part her ways with her husband to realize her own individual identity. "To be left for a mere idea is an unpardonable humiliation"(Mander and Mitchenson, 261). Uma's decision to leave comes precisely at the moment when the Collector's tenure at Ratnagiri is suddenly terminated by the colonial government. Unable to accept this double blow the Collector tragically drowns himself in the sea. The nonchalant Queen who bitterly rams home to him his fragile and tenuous identity — "'Collector-sahib, Sawant is less a servant than you. At least he has no delusions about his place in the world'" (*GP*, 150) — commemorates her gaoler's death by spitting into the garden. Holding a contradictory "in-between" position, the Collector has been completely mesmerized by the empty rhetoric of the European high ideals of Progress and

Liberty to the point of no return. A split-self, the Collector's ambivalence leads to his ruin.

Liberated from the bond of marriage, the self-possessed Uma's brief sojourn to Rangoon opens up an entirely new world for her. In a neat reversal of the situation, she unfavourably contrasts her own circumstances with Dolly's "ebullient happiness" (*GP*, 185) in marriage. She vitally realizes that while her relationship with her late husband was dictated by decorum, "by clearly defined rules and meanings" (*GP*, 186), Dolly's pliability strengthened her ties with Rajkumar in spite of their unequal preferences and habits. It is after his death that Uma recognizes that the talented Collector was born at the wrong place in the wrong time: "he indeed had been a good man, an honest man — a man of great intelligence and ability who happened to have been born into a circumstance that could not offer him an appropriate avenue for the fulfillment of his talents" (*GP*, 186). Showing strong disregard for her husband's conformity to the "incomprehensible rules" (*GP*, 187) of the Empire, Uma appreciates the unassuming outlook of Dolly "a woman who had no illusions about the nature of her condition; a prisoner who knew the exact dimensions of her cage and could look for contentment within those confines" (*GP*, 187). Uma revels in transcending the imposed boundaries on women. Strangely, although she had opposed her husband's Anglophilia, "some part of her was irretrievably the Collector's creation, and if nothing was to be served by mourning this disfigurement, then it was her duty to turn her abilities to the task of seeking a remedy" (*GP*, 187). Hence, she sets sail for Europe for the fullest possible self-realization. Although the Collector has been a collaborator with the colonial government, he was not unaware of the racist ideology of the British: "the smell of miscegenation has alarmed them as nothing else could have: they are tolerant in many things, but not this. They like to keep their races tidily separate" (*GP*, 173). It is Uma who braces herself up to raise her voice against the colonial government by joining nationalist politics overseas. The strong influence of Dolly in Uma's life has much to do with the widowed Uma's decision. She acknowledges to Dolly in Ratnagiri that she "'was just a girl before I met you. You've shown me what courage is, what human beings can endure'" (*GP*, 163). Her experience of racism and exploitation abroad turns her into a revolutionary. Like Lala Hardayal, one of her most brilliant nationalists for whom India was a "a vast garrison" (*GP*, 221),

Uma recognizes that "the conditions being created in their homeland were such as to ensure that their descendants would enter the new epoch as cripples, lacking the most fundamental means of survival" (*GP*, 222). The end result, as she foresees, would be that "they would truly become in the future what they had never been in the past, a burden upon the world" (*GP*, 222). She therefore endeavours to "change the angle of their country's entry into the future" (*GP*, 222). The xenophobia of the Americans and the Canadians converted numerous Sikh immigrants, the "former loyalists" into "revolutionaries" and "dedicated enemies of the Empire they had once served" (*GP*, 222). Inspired by the Irish model of resistance these disillusioned victims gradually formed the Indian Independence League which Uma joins. Uma and the League disregard the political views of Mahatma Gandhi because he "heads the loyal opposition" and has "chosen to deal with the Empire's velvet glove instead of striking at its iron fist" (*GP*, 223). Moulded by the ideological network of the colonial masters, instead of striking against it, the Indian army has further consolidated the Empire. What is more by recruiting a few selected castes of men the empire has perpetrated divisions even within the ranks of the army. Uma's primary goal is to enlighten the soldiers about duplicitous colonialism. An influential leader of the League, Giani Amreek Singh, confesses to Uma how they as soldiers were duped by the false consciousness, how they lived as victims of the ruler's ideology:

> We never thought that we were being used to conquer people. Not at all: we thought the opposite. We were told that we were freeing those people. That is what they said — that we were going to set those people free from their bad kings or their evil customs or some such thing. We believed it because they believed it too. It took us a long time to understand that in their eyes freedom exists wherever *they* rule. (*GP*, 224)

Thus by gaining an insight into the Indian national identity Uma begins her emancipatory project of anticolonial nationalism.

Rajkumar and Dolly experience a happy homecoming. Since timber is a thing of the past, Saya John and Rajkumar establish a rubber plantation on Penang Island. Rajkumar's return coincides with the return of Saya's son Matthew and his wife Elsa. A New York based Protestant, Elsa Christens the rubber plantation as Morningside Rubber Estate. Rajkumar and Dolly's first son Neel resembles his father, their second Dinu is akin to Dolly temperamentally. Coincidentally, Matthew and Elsa have their first child, a daughter named

Alison. Later, a boy named Timmy is born to them. Years later when Uma sees these four siblings grow up together and laments her own childlessness, she reflects on how "the canvas of a lifetime's connections [...] acquired the patina of another generation": "she could see inscribed the history of her friendships and the lives of her friends — the stories and trajectories that had brought Elsa's life into conjunction with Matthew's, Dolly's with Rajkumar's, Malacca with New York, Burma with India" (*GP*, 225). Truly, these intertwining family histories transcend the rigidity of national boundaries. While Uma plunges herself into mainstream politics and Rajkumar and Matthew immerse themselves in war time profiteering, Dolly gradually withdraws herself from the external world. Thebaw appeared to Dolly in a strange dream and instructed her to rush the feverish Dinu to the hospital. It is diagnosed that Dinu has polio and any further delay would have spelt disaster for him. It is in the hospital that Dolly learns about Thebaw's death in India. It seems that he died just a few hours before Dolly's dream. Colin Wilson terms this type of prophetic dream in which the subconscious mind wells up "controlled hallucination"(476). The days in the tranquil hospital atmosphere transform her psyche. Lying in bed with her convalescing son, the introspective Dolly sympathetically listens to other mothers crying over their dead children:

> [...] the murmurs of anxious relatives; distant screams of pain; women keening in bereavement. It was as though the walls turned porous in the stillness of the night, flooding her room with an unseen tide of defeat and suffering. The more she listened to those voices, the more directly they spoke to her, sometimes in tones that seemed to recall the past, sometimes in notes of warning. (*GP*, 210)

With her compassion, Dolly transcends the principle of individuation, the creator and sustainer of selfhood, and pierces through the veil of phenomenality. It is to realize one's identity first with the absolute and then through the absolute with the others. The result is the renunciation of the self-centred ego and identification with the entire world with all its weal and woe. Inspired by Thebaw, Dolly yearns for self-transcendence:

> She remembered a word he'd often used, *karuna* — one of the Buddha's words, Pali for compassion, for the immanence of all living things in each other, for the attraction of life for its likeness. A time will come, he had said to the girls, when you too will discover what this word karuna means, and from that moment on, your lives will never again be the same. (*GP*, 211)

This precisely is the conviction of Schopenhauer as well: "Envy more firmly builds up the wall between You and I", and so breeds egoism. 'Sympathy' can so completely demolish that wall that "the distinction between I and not-I vanishes" (240). Having gained this profound insight, the quiet Dolly turns into a recluse.

While Dolly is a lonely denizen of a self-enclosed world — "shut behind a glass wall" (*GP*, 209), her soul-mate Uma tries to grapple with the variety of new experiences that fall on her way. Rajkumar and Matthew are pseudo-colonizers in themselves, commodifying and transforming the natural wealth of Burma and Malaya. They defend their transportation of indentured Tamil labourers by promoting a false ideology that true progress lies in improving the economic status of these people. Rajkumar's greed for money couples with his lust. He ruthlessly exploits these helpless women labourers and even fathers a son named Ilongo. As a token of atonement he financially supports his illegitimate son and his mother but never displays any feeling of guilt. But already seeds of discontent have crept in and interestingly it is nature itself which is leading the resistance. Matthew flaunts his "little empire" to Uma but also documents the resistance of the apparently serene plantation itself:

> There's law, there's order, everything is well run. Looking at it, you think everything here is tame, domesticated, that all the parts have been filled carefully together. But it's when you try to make the whole machine work that you discover that every bit of it is fighting back. It has nothing to do with me or with rights and wrongs: I could make this the best-run little kingdom in the world and it would still fight back. (*GP*, 233)

Interestingly, disregarding the advice of scientific experts, Matthew endorses the plantation coolies' firm conviction that some trees do not produce rubber because they are fighting back on their own behalf since "'every rubber tree in Malaya was paid for with an Indian life'" (*GP*, 233). Not surprisingly, this huge expropriation of Burmese wealth by Indian businessmen and moneylenders who "live like colonialists, lording it over the Burmese" (*GP*, 240) infuriates the Burmese and precipitates a riot between these two nationals. The celebration of ego-ideal in the formation of national identities creates a rupture and the Burmese Self targets the Indian Other. Amidst this tension, Uma is placed in a similar situation as May in *The Shadow Lines* — an Indian rickshaw-puller is slaughtered by an enraged Burmese mob. When she instinctively tries to descend from her car to protect the helpless victim, Dolly, anticipating danger for Uma, restrains her to be involved in

the situation. The Burmese rebellion is steered by a leader named Saya San who aims to avenge the capture of King Thebaw. For Uma the Burmese struggle for independence is a mirror-image of the Indian uprising of 1857. As anticipated, a company of Indian troops is sent to Burma to decimate the insurgents: "once again, Indian soldiers were being used to fortify the Empire" (*GP*, 247). Ironically, "[n]obody in India seemed to know of these events; no one seemed to care" (*GP*, 247). To make matters worse for Uma and her nationalist movements, Rajkumar supports the colonial government's crushing of the Burmese insurgency because "'it's not just the Empire those soldiers are protecting, it's also Dolly and me'" (*GP*, 247). The late Collector's judicious observation that "'if it were not for the British, the Burmese would probably have risen up against these Indian businessmen and driven them out like sheep'" (*GP*, 136) ultimately comes true. But Uma is dead against any complicity in the colonizing mission and attacks Rajkumar as a neo-colonialist collaborator before leaving Burma: "'It's people like you who're responsible for this tragedy. Did you ever think of the consequences when you were transporting people here? What you and your kind have done is far worse than the worst deeds of the Europeans'" (*GP*, 247). Back in India trying to wake from the "terrible dream" (*GP*, 252) of her Burmese experiences, Uma realizes that the unorganized, technologically inferior anti-colonial uprisings are no match for the overwhelming power of a well-organized and thoroughly modernized British army. Gandhian philosophy is decades ahead of the romantic, rebellious ideas that she cherished. In a complete switch of mind, she embraces the ideals that she has always disregarded: "the movement against colonialism was an uprising of unarmed Indians against those who bore arms — both Indians and British — and that its chosen instruments were the weapons of the weaponless, its very weakness its source of strength" (*GP*, 254).

While Uma veers from her rebellious ways of politics to the Gandhian method of passive resistance, her nephew Arjun evolves from a loyal colonial subject to a rebel soldier. Like the Collector B.P. Dey who prefigures him, Arjun idealises the coveted position he holds in colonial service and is proud pf the honours that his regiment — *The Royal Battalion* — has been conferred with in the past. For him, soldiering is a profession associated with power without any social and ethical compulsions. Since the all-encompassing Indian army dissolves all regional and religious differences between the soldiers, the self-aggrandizing

Arjun boasts to the unassuming Dinu that they are the "'First True Indians'" (*GP*, 278). He takes immense pride in the fact that he lives with the Europeans on equal terms and is an elite:

> [...] we're the first modern Indians; the first Indians to be truly free. We eat what we like, we drink what we like, we're the first Indians who're not weighed down by the past. [...] We're the ones who actually live with Westerners [...] We know how the minds of Westerners work. Only when every Indian is like us will the country become truly modern. (*GP*, 279-280)

Arjun, like the Collector before him, is a colonial mimic man occupying a hybrid cultural space. For the psychologically colonized Arjun, the British stand for the epitome of civilization, but the perceptive Dinu pierces through the façade of Arjun and his colleagues in the "fantastic bestiary of their table-talk": "their assessments were so exaggerated that they seemed to be inventing versions of themselves for collective consumption" (*GP*, 278). Like the Collector, Arjun too is not unaware of the racism that pervades the colonial Indian army. The British Indian army stands on the edifice that "'there was to be a separation between Indians and Britishers'": "'On the surface everything in the army appears to be ruled by manuals, regulations, procedures: it seems very cut and dried. But actually, underneath there are all these murky shadows that you can never quite see: prejudice, distrust, suspicion'" (*GP*, 284-285). But in spite of this vital realization, Arjun's loyalty to the institution remains unshaken and he unquestioningly admires the superiority of the British.

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

> '[...] this country whose safety, honour and welfare are to come first, always and every time — what is it? Where is this country? The fact is that you and I don't have a country — so where is this place whose safety, honour and welfare are to come first, always and every time? And why was it that when

> we took our oath it wasn't to a country but to the King Emperor — to defend the Empire?' (*GP*, 330)

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

The narrative charts the impact of broad historical events, especially the upheavals engineered by the Second World War, on individual lives. While the great European nations are engaged in a global war, Rajkumar, suffering from pneumonia, is admitted in the same hospital room which coincidentally Dolly and Dinu occupied decades back. Interestingly, "[t]wenty-four years before, at the time of Dolly's stay in that room, Europe had been convulsed by another war" (*GP*, 308). In a rare tranquil moment in a life full of peregrinations, Rajkumar slowly comes to terms with his dislocated identity and declining fortunes. Assessing the situation he asserts to Dolly that another displacement is imminent:

> '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? [...] Rather

> than be swept along by events, we should make plans anfd take control of our own fate.' (*GP*, 310)

An astute calculator that he is, Rajkumar, to revive his sagging finances, sells all his assets to build a stockpile of timber in a single plantation. He anticipates that the British and the Dutch will need timber to reinforce their armaments in the East. But tragedy strikes twice to ruin him. Matthew and Elsa get killed in a car crash in the Cameron Highlands. A Japaneese bomb in Rangoon scatters the elephants in Rajkumar's plantation in panic. In the resulting melee, the trees are destroyed, Neel is crushed to death, Rajkumar is distraught personally and financially. Having no other option the family decides to join the thirty thousand refugees in the Long March from Burma to India. Despair forces Manju, Neel's widow, to drown herself in the river en route to India. Rajkumar and Dolly stay in Uma's flat for a few years. Finally, Dolly travels to Rangoon in quest for the missing Dinu from where she never returns. Successful in her mission, she spends her last days in the nunnery at Sagaing. While Dolly led a cloistered life in her "homeland", Rajkumar was very much attached to his orphaned grand-daughter Jaya. He recounts to her the stories of his past, personal reminiscences occluded from historical records: "And then Rajkumar would start at the beginning, going back to that day more than sixty years before, when he had heard the sound of English cannon rolling in across the plain to the walls of Mandalay's fort" (*GP*, 485). The rootless Rajkumar tries to gather the memories "of other worlds lived retroactively; gathering the past in a ritual of revival; gathering the present" (Bhabha, 139).

While Rajkumar comes to terms with his diasporic self, Arjun grapples with his false consciousness. It is Hardy who acknowledges to Arjun that so thorough is the penetration of the ideological network of the colonial masters into his psyche that he is "just a tool, an instrument" in their hands with the connection between the mind and the body severed:

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

It is Alison who enlightens Arjun about his fragility: "'you're not in charge of what you do; you're a toy, a manufactured thing, a weapon in someone else's

hands. Your mind doesn't inhabit your body'" (*GP*, 376). Kishan Singh's self-less service to Arjun makes him introspective about their subordination. Kishan Singh's family has served the British army for generations unquestioningly because of the fear injected into their minds during the Mutiny by the brutal killing of the rebel soldiers: "a terror that made you remould yourself, that made you change your idea of your place in the world — to the point where you lost your awareness of the fear that had formed you" (*GP*, 430). Confronted with his "formlessness", Arjun realizes that he has never acted on his own volition. Ironically, it is the uneducated Kishan Singh who is more aware of the past than Arjun himself. Under Hardy's tutelage — "'This is the first time in our lives that we're trying to make up our own minds — not taking orders'" (*GP*, 438) — Arjun, awakening to his true consciousness, shrugs off his misplaced loyalties to the Empire:

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

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

> The discovery of invisible barriers and ceilings disillusioned them with their immediate superiors, but it did not make them hostile to Western institutions. Rather, these encounters with racism served to convince them — as they had an entire generation of Westernized Indians — that the British colonial regime was not Western *enough*, not progressive *enough*. (108)

As a colonized subject, Arjun saw himself through the lens of the white European. His decolonized mind liberates him from his vacillations and calls for direct action. It is with this spirit of resistance that he asserts to Dinu: "'We rebelled against an Empire that has shaped everything in our lives; coloured everything in the world as we know it. It is a huge, indelible stain which has tainted all of us. We cannot destroy it without destroying ourselves'" (*GP*, 518). Arjun's disillusionment with the ethos of the British Indian Army couples with his awakening to "the racial mythologies of the old mercenary army"(*GP*, 520). Recruitment to the army was ruled by the old imperial notions of racism which

excluded the Tamils on the ground that "they were racially unfit for soldiering" (*GP*, 520). The Tamil plantation workers in Malaya who voluntarily join the Indian National Army turn out to be stronger and more dedicated than the professional soldiers. These plantation workers have been so ruthlessly exploited by the capital intensive economy of the Britishers to that they are reduced to machines: "having your mind taken away and replaced by a clockwork mechanism" (*GP*, 522). Mechanization of man is a form of dehumanizing slavery. The liberation struggle of the Indian National Army serves as an instrument of cultural resistance for these automata against a racist colonial discourse. Their native country India exists for them not as a reality but as an idea: "India was the shining mountain beyond the horizon, a sacrament of redemption — a metaphor for freedom in the same way that slavery was a metaphor for the plantation" (*GP*, 522). Popular or insurgent nationalism thus reclaims or imagines forms of community and challenges colonial rule giving shape to a collective political identity. Waging a desperate battle for nationalist liberation and also for self-realization, Arjun dies a heroic death in central Burma in the final days of the Second World War. An affirmed nationalist and completely free from self-contradictions, Hardy becomes "a national figure", an "ambassador and high-ranking official of the Indian Government" (*GP*, 480). An embodiment of switched identities, Arjun finds redemption in his glorious death.

Introspective and self-possessed, the stoical and sagacious Dinu has a leftist leaning from his youth. Antipathetic to colonialism unlike Rajkumar, Dinu has absolutely no interest in his father's business. The sudden death of Alison's parents brings Dinu to Morningside to stand by her during her crisis. His sojourn in Morningside not only gives wings to his passion for photography but also kindles his love for Alison. He also comes to know the vital truth that Ilongo is his half-brother. Arjun's exuberance lures Alison temporarily, but she collects herself up to realize that "Dinu was much stronger and resourceful, and she understood that that was why she'd been tempted to be cruel to him; that that was why she had had to take the risk of losing him" (*GP*, 376-377). Enjoying their self-fulfilling love for each other, Dinu and Alison are denizens of a realm miles away from the world torn apart by a global war:

> Nothing else was of any account, not the planes, not the bombs, nothing but this. This was what happiness was — he'd never known it before; this melting away, this exaltation, your

> guts spilling into your head, filling your eyes — your mind transformed into your body, your body instinct with the joy in your mind; this sensation of reality having met its end. (*GP*, 401)

Alison's rejection of Arjun for Dinu manifests her preference for love over instinctive desire. With Arjun "it was as though they were both absent, two strangers, whose bodies were discharging a function" (*GP*, 374). On the contrary, with Dinu "she could apprehend the meaning of what it meant to be fully present — eye, mind and touch united in absolute oneness, each beheld by the other, each beholding" (*GP*, 374). Theodor Reik develops the implied difference in terms of "sex" and "love". "Sex", he contends, "is an instant, a biological need, originating in the organism, bound to the body. It is one of the great desires, like hunger and thirst, conditioned by chemical changes within the organism"(19). Physiological in its origin, sex is undiscriminating and easily satiable. With the body and mind as the double provenance, love is on the contrary highly discriminating and not easily satiable. Thus Reik differentiates between sex and love:

> Sex is a passionate interest in another body; love a passionate interest in another personality, or in his life. Sex does not feel pain if its object is injured, nor joy when it is happy. It is possible to possess another person, in sex, but not in love. In love you cannot possess another person. You can force another person to sexual activity, but not to love. (21)

This culmination of the self-sustaining love between Dinu and Alison in the midst of wartime despair and disillusionment is a bridging together of peripatetic families across national boundaries. Interestingly both of them are of mixed genealogies. The delighted Saya John wonderfully expresses this point: "'Rajkumar's son and Matthew's daughter [...].What could be better? The two of you have joined the families'" (*GP*, 446). In fact, Uma had anticipated their marriage years ago and reflected its prospects as she tried to comprehend "why people arranged marriages for their children: it was a way of shaping the future to the past, of cementing one's ties to one's memories and to one's friends. Dinu and Alison — if only they were better suited to each other; how wonderful it might be, the bringing together of so many stories" (*GP*, 230). For Dinu, the bliss of love combines with his bitter experiences of the grimness of colonial rule which arouses his political consciousness. When the Japanese intrusion seems imminent, Alison, Dinu, Saya John and Ilongo prepare to leave for Singapore. However, they are debarred from boarding the evacuation train on racial grounds as the train is

meant only for Europeans. Ironically, it is the Indian railway officials who enforce the rules of the colonial government and keep the non-Europeans off the train: "'They are the rulers; they are the ones who stand to lose'" (*GP*, 425). In despair, Alison sets off by car with Saya John with Dinu to follow later. Unfortunately, they brush with a group of Japanese soldiers. While the old man is shot immediately, Alison shoots herself after a spirited exchange of fire. Once again the life of an individual is entangled in the mesh of uncontrollable broad historical events. Dinu is one "among the many millions who had vanished into the darkness"(*GP*, 486).

Researching on the history of photography in India and possessing a keen interest in the history of her family, Jaya, Rajkumar's granddaughter, travels to Ratnagiri "the place where her own, very particular, history had its origins" (*GP*, 490). Interestingly, memory keeps the long deceased King Thebaw "vibrantly alive" (*GP*, 491). Back in Calcutta as she goes through her compiled documents on Burma, she chances upon a photograph of Aung San Suu Kyi credited to one U Tun Pe. A discussion with her aunt Bela reveals to her that he is none other than Dinu. It is Bela again who provides Jaya with her next lead, Ilongo Alagappan. Soon Jaya contacts him and travels to Morningside to retrieve Dinu's lost traces. Once again the recurrent motif of academic research as a quest for a fugitive identity in Ghosh's novels comes to the forefront.

While Rajkumar engaged in wartime profiteering, his illegitimate son Ilongo initiates a transformation from capitalism to collectivism after the war is over. Mobilising the plantation workers into a co-operative movement, Ilongo rechristens "Morningside Rubber Estate" as "Morningside Co-operative". His enterprise of economic collectivism propels him into mainstream politics. It is Ilongo who provides the vital information to Jaya that Dinu lived in Rangoon and had created a small photo studio "The Glass Palace".

Dinu's discourse articulates the failures of Burmese nationalism after the assassination of Aung San. A series of insurrections on ethnic grounds have belied the aspirations of the post-colonial nation state. Before long, the old imperial British government finds its legacy in the regressive post-colonial order of the Burmese military regime which "'use the past to justify the present. And they themselves are much worse than the colonialists'" (*GP*, 537). Despite its show of military power and extreme control over both the public and the personal sectors,

the regime does not have the ideological and epistemological depth and power of the British colonial machinery. A new censorship was enforced which restricted the freedom of writers as a result of which Dinu's Burmese wife Ma Thin Thin Aye finds herself languishing in prison. Quuen Supayalat's prophecy about the destitute condition of Burma comes true as Dinu reveals "'you know how poor we are in our Myanmar'" (*GP*, 507). The Burmese junta decides to shut Burma off exclusively from the world outside: "It was because of the imperialists that Burma had to be shut off from the world; the country had to be defended against neo-colonialism and foreign aggression" (*GP*, 537). In his collection of prose pieces *Dancing in Cambodia; At Large in Burma*, Ghosh dismantles the exclusivist ideology of the nation-state "In a region as heterogeneous as South-East Asia, any boundary is sure to be arbitrary. On balance, Burma's best hopes for peace lie in maintaining intact the larger and more inclusive entity that history, albeit absent-mindedly, bequeathed to its population almost half a century ago"(100). It is this notion of compositeness and inclusiveness that Dinu thrusts on his writer wife: "'We are a universe on our own [...]. Look at all our people [...] Karen, Kayah, Kachin, Shan, Rakhine, Wa, Pa-O, Chin, Mon [...]. Wouldn't it be wonderful if your stories could contain each language, each dialect?'" (GP,533). It is this concept of syncretism, of a national reconciliation of all opposing ethnic insurrections that is the liberating idea in a crumbling nation. This ideal is expressed both by Dinu and by the democratic voice of Aung San Suu Kyi who realizes that although "politics has invaded everything, spared nothing [...] religion, art, family", "it cannot be allowed to cannibalize all of life, all of existence" (*GP*, 542). It is this voice of repose that symbolizes the democratic aspirations of the Burmese people against the oppressing menace of the military junta.

After some serious reflections on the anxieties of post-colonial nation formation, the novel has a surprise ending with the rather bizarre union of the two aged pair — Rajkumar and Uma — in bed. It is an unexpected twist given their topsy-turvy relationship. What is more, it introduces to the readers the "author", Jaya's son, as the narrative suddenly changes from a conventional third-person omniscient narrative to a first-person one: "What I saw that morning in my great-great-aunt Uma's bed-room remains to this day the most tender, the most moving sight I have ever seen, and from the day when I sat down to write this book — the

book my mother never wrote — I knew that it was here that it would end" (*GP*, 547). This self-reflexive stance reveals that the novel is an intimate family memoir, a rather subjective recollection of the past and certainly not an official historical document. Judging from Ghosh's literary credo, one can be sure that that is what the novelist meant it to be.