

**A Study on Cultural Estrangement and Amalgamation in Amitav Ghosh's  
*The Glass Palace* and *Sea of Poppies***

**Dr.K.Sathiya Priya, M.A., M.Phil., Ph.D.**

Assistant Professor in English  
Sri GVG Visalakshi College for Women  
Tirupur Dt, Tamilnadu  
[priyaksp86@gmail.com](mailto:priyaksp86@gmail.com)

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**Abstract**

Literature presents the life and culture of diverse people and acts as a mirror, revealing the dynamic interaction of identities, cultures, and society. Writers put in great efforts in portraying the culture, tradition and practice of the society they deal with. By reflecting and forming cultural identities, literature promotes cross-cultural understanding and provides insights into a range of experiences. Amitav Ghosh is a renowned writer who skilfully illustrates the intricacies of cultural representation in his works. In *The Glass Palace*, Ghosh represents culture through themes of hybridity, displacement, and the effects of colonialism on identity. Cultural crossings are also experienced by the main character, Rajkumar, a Bengali living in Burma, through his interactions and connections with Burmese people. Through his examination of the intricacies of national identity creation in the backdrop of colonialism and migration, Ghosh demonstrates how characters struggle with their sense of belonging and their origins. The limitations that society places on women, especially widows, and the impacts of customs such as sati are examined in *Sea of Poppies*. To depict the linguistic diversity of the time period and the relationships between characters, *Sea of Poppies* uses a variety of languages and dialects, such as Hindi, French, English, Pidgin, and Lascari. This language environment is a reflection of the intricate relationships between cultures as well as the effects of colonialism on intercultural dialogue.

**Keywords:** Hybridity, Displacement, Estrangement, Amalgamation

## Introduction

Amitav Ghosh, an acclaimed writer, proves himself remarkable in his skill in describing the society alive in his works. This study focuses on the differences among communities and how the circumstances provide opportunities to adopt themselves and evolve as citizens of the world. Novels by Amitav Ghosh like *The Glass Palace* and *Sea of Poppies*, delve deeply into the issues of cultural differences and assimilation. Complex cultural interchange and transformation processes and the resulting feelings of alienation are explored in these novels. The novels have significantly contributed to the study of cultural fusion and alienation. These stories are a timeless reminder that, in the complex dance of cultures, the lines between acculturation and estrangement are ever-evolving and changeable.

### Importance of Characters in *The Glass Palace*

*The Glass Palace* is a novel about places, spaces, separations, and times. It tells the story of several families, their relationships, and their lives. The protagonist, Rajkumar, is an Indian orphan who accidentally travels to Burma. Rajkumar stands out among his peers for his curiosity, acute awareness, and capacity for measured risk-taking. Rajkumar works in the tea shop owned by Ma Cho, a matronly woman. He enjoys lying about his age so that he may act older. Rajkumar is a worldly orphan who has travelled extensively. He starts his lifelong hunt for locations and people when he gets to Mandalay. The city takes him in, “Long straight roads radiated outwards from the walls, forming a neat geometrical grid. So intriguing was the ordered pattern of these streets that Rajkumar wandered far afield exploring” (Tiwari 89). He quickly feels at home in his new surroundings. Although he intuitively understands that orphans like him cannot enter the crystal-clear glass paradise that is the Mandalay Fort, “No matter what Ma Cho said, he decided, he would cross the moat-before he left Mandalay, he would find a way in” (Tiwari 90). This flame distinguishes Rajkumar for a life of achievement, excitement, and riches. His orphan status lends him a distinct sensibility. He can see each scenario objectively. Protecting oneself and caring for oneself is his only priority. He is an unrestrained growing youngster. His life experiences have made him pragmatic.

Rajkumar, who has already established himself as a prosperous and well-respected businessman, is ready to hunt for Dolly in India after his installation. He believes tracking her won't be too difficult because Dolly was with the overthrown King and Queen of Burma. Here, Ghosh emphasizes the dismal state of orphans who rely on their luck, family, and

society via the persona of Rajkumar. Some instances of orphans are Rajkumar-Dolly from *The Glass Palace* and Paulette from *Sea of Poppies*. Rajkumar has made a home for himself in *The Glass Palace*, but Dolly is a doll made by Queen Supayalat. She is utterly dependent on the King's family. A girl who is an orphan in our culture is likewise a severe issue since she is vulnerable to the society's harsh treatment. Through the novel, Ghosh makes the case that providing these kids with a solid education and upbringing is also a significant responsibility of our society.

Uma is living a robotic, lonely existence while assuming the role of a classy hostess at all of the Collector's social events. Dolly, a friend, frees Uma from this cycle of monotony and dreary routine. She and Dolly get along well. Her hubby does not take up any of her mental space. Things will eventually come undone. The Collector notices Uma approaching him after Dolly has left and says to her. "You have come to tell me you want to go home" (TGP 99). Uma decides to quit the Collector after this occurrence. She has decided that she cannot continue in that way. The conversation that ensues is both heartbreaking and heartwarming. Nothing in this world is more depressing than hearing about unmet expectations. He tells Uma that the Collector acts in the same way.

I used to dream about the kind of marriage I wanted...Living with a woman as an equal, in spirit and intellect, seemed to me the most wonderful thing life could offer. To discover the world of literature and art together: what could be more affluent, more fulfilling? But what I dreamt is not yet possible here, in India, not for us. (TGP 99)

The Collector and Uma depart, rowing out into the distance and never returning. He believes returning home would be unnecessary since no one would be waiting for him, and he would have trouble falling asleep. And thus, a valuable life, a gifted, delicate human existence, ends. The Collector ends his life. He turns out to be much more flimsy than Uma. It is incomprehensible that Uma doesn't grieve for her husband after the tragedy of his passing.

In the past, males dominated power structures and understood the workings of the economy. Men establish moral standards and make judgments on property. They have divided women into good and evil categories and brainwashed both men and women to the point that, for the most part, they have learned to accept these divisions. Thus, the twin tactic of control and exclusion has developed in men. (Chakravarty 134)

The idea that marriage is the ultimate objective of an Indian woman's life and that her husband's house is her sole residence has long been instilled in her psyche. The contemporary, educated Indian lady discovers that marriage merely permits a superficial appearance of independence. Despite many inconsistencies, husband and wife attempt to maintain an outward appearance of balance and harmony in the Indian culture, which is still quite traditional in its attitude to marriage. In a man and woman's (a husband and wife's) career graph, the wife must always suppress her uniqueness to preserve her husband's opportunity for a swift ascent.

### **Importance of Language in *The Glass Palace***

Languages are used in a variety of ways. The main characters are bilingual or multilingual and have strong cultural links to other nations, even Burmese princesses living in exile study Indian languages. Indians born in Burma have Indian and Burmese names and use vocabulary from both languages. Maintaining the old vernacular is a method of keeping old links, especially for Rajkumar, despite the formal dominance of the English King, Thebaw, Queen Supayalat, Saya John, Rajkumar, Dolly, Uma, Alison, Dinu, Neel, Arjun, Hardayal, Kishan Singh, Jaya, and Ilongo are just a few of the displaced individuals Ghosh discusses in his novel.

### **Tradition and Colonization in *The Glass Palace***

Through the novel, Amitav Ghosh demonstrates the traditional practices of Bengali women. Dolly informed Uma: “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” (TGP117-118). The story makes evident the effects of Western civilization and education. In Arjun's comment to his buddy, the ideas of Indian people mingled with Western culture are amply visible: “Just look at us, Hardy – just look at us. What are we? We’ve learnt to dance the tango and how to eat roast beef with a knife and fork. The truth is that except for the colour of our skin, most people in India wouldn’t even recognize us as Indians” (TGP 439). The following is another instance of Arjun's pride:

Europeans were comments on Indians that looked at Punjabis, Marathas, Bengalis, Sikhs, Hindus, and Muslims. Where else in India would you come across a group such as ours – where region and religion don’t matter – where we can all drink together, eat beef and pork, and think nothing of it? Arjun said every meal at an officers’ mess was an adventure, a glorious infringement of

taboos. They ate foods none had ever touched at home: bacon, ham and sausages for breakfast; roast beef and pork chops for dinner. They drank whisky, beer and wine, smoked cigars, cigarettes and cigarillos...After taking some whisky, Arjun said that we're the first modern Indians, the first Indians to be genuinely free. We eat and drink what we like, and we're the first Indians who're not weighed down by the past. (TGP 278-279)

Like Salman Rushdie, Amitav Ghosh is an insider rather than an outsider who discusses cultural dislocation via distorted optics. In the age of globalization, he gets us to consider how culture interacts with governmental and economic processes. Ghosh seeks to document the rich history and significance of the Indian diaspora as a writer. Thus, Ghosh has focused on the universal problem of racial and cultural hybridity through the characters in his novel. The novel addresses gender relations, man-woman relationships, the impact of the English language and culture on the Indians, the caste system as it is understood in India, and arranged marriages.

### ***Sea of Poppies***

The British colonial rulers who groomed people to be migrants and hybrids for their colonial desires are shown by Amitav Ghosh in *Sea of Poppies*. Ibis represents the uncertainty of their lives and the regularity of their homes, and Ghosh depicts the dark web of the empire's past as a varied cast of individuals. The novel has a variety of characters from other cultures, castes, faiths, nationalities, etc., which serves as a metaphor for hybridity. The novel's main hybrid character is named Deeti. Deeti, a low-caste Hindu widow in poverty, is saved from her husband's funeral pyre by Kalua, an untouchable man from a lower social level. They defy all social conventions to elope and get married since society will not let them live happily ever after. To avoid being recognized, they alter their names to Aditi and Madhu and their caste to blend in with bonded labourers and embrace the Chamar caste. Ibis is a diverse source of cultural backgrounds, a new race created due to specific cultural interactions. A sign of hybridity may be seen in the blend of characters from many civilizations, castes, faiths, nationalities, etc. In his paper "Deconstruction Human Society: An Appreciation of Amitav Ghosh's *Sea of Poppies*", Dr. B. K. Nagarjun says,

*Sea of Poppies* tells how, on the ship Ibis, headed to Caribbean sugar plantations, small new worlds are forged, bringing together north Indian women, Bengali Zamindars, black men, rural labourers and Chinese seamen. It is a story of people

whose fate is written by poppy flower, the British who forced opium cultivation on farmers, the ruined lives of farmers, the people who were addicted and poor factory workers, the deceit of the British, the ship that transported the opium and which carried Indians to life of slavery. (103)

Poppies indicate cross-cultural interactions because they grow in areas where individuals have acquired a substantial position in the global economy. The novel focuses on characters who speak pidgin, Bhojpuri, and even the hilariously mixed English of a Bengali Babu and a young Frenchman. Jodu's father's boat was where Miss Paulette was born, and the baby girl's mother passed soon after. Because she becomes Jodu's father's daughter, she serves as an illustration of a hybrid society. She eats rice and dal khichri prepared by Jodu's mother and learns Bengali. She embraces a hybrid culture as time passes and attempts to co-exist with Jodu. She shares a home with her foster brother Jodu and is born a French lady. She is a French botanist's daughter. She is raised by an Indian nanny and is given up for adoption by Mr. Benjamin Burnham, a wealthy, despicable, and corrupt Calcutta merchant. On the merchant ship Ibis, she becomes interested in the culture of the refugees. Her character combines elements of French and Indian culture. She is a beautiful example of someone who is open-minded and treats other cultures with respect. Her French, English, and Bengali usage convey different traces of specific cultural settings; thus, the instant she is heard, she is categorized into particular social groupings. (Chaudhary 171). To go to Mauritius, she poses as the niece of Baboo Nob Kissin and becomes a *girmitiyas* on Ibis.

Zachary is a mulatto freedman from Baltimore; Mr. Benjamin Burnham, a dishonest British businessman; Baboo Nob Kissim is a superstitious person; and Serang Ali. They claimed to be ship brothers and sisters to form the Ibis family and state they descended the Wooghly River into the sea. They speak distinct dialects due to their language, caste, and faith differences. Migrant workers form a bond to go to Mauritius in Ghosh's colonial India. Cross-cultural encounters have been experienced. Migrants interact with individuals from all over the world, regardless of caste, creed, or religion, and they share their experiences and issues in various languages. The novel tells the stories of several hybrid personalities from different social classes, creeds, religions, races, cultures, and nationalities. Ghosh has shown the essence of immigrant hybrid culture in how they interact, coexist, and create a new hybrid identity known as "*girmitiyas*."

### **Language in *Sea of Poppies***

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Language is also present in *Sea of Poppies*. The novel focuses on characters who speak pidgin, Bhojpuri, and even the hilariously mixed English of a Bengali babu and a young Frenchwoman. In addition to political history, the author also explains culture, religion, variety, the opium trade, legacy, and much more. The work has a very Indian feel with the use of vocabulary like “thug,” “pukka,” “sahib,” “serrang,” “mali,” “lathi,” “dekko,” and “punkah-wallah,” as well as “dhoti,” “kurta,” “jooties,” “nayansukh,” “dasturi,” “sirdar,” “maharir” and “serishtas”.

Zachary Reid, a charming twenty-year-old from Maryland with curly black hair, is the second mate aboard the Ibis. His father, who enslaved people, liberated his mother so that Zachary might be born a free man. By the time the Ibis arrives in India, Zachary has been given the position of a second mate and becomes the ship's carpenter. The lascars have their unique tongues. He talks about his maiden voyage as a member of the sailing species. They must be from a different tribe and country, he reasons:

They came in groups of ten or fifteen, each with a leader who spoke on their behalf. To break up these groups was impossible; they had to be taken together or not at all, and although they came cheap, they had their ideas of how many men would share each job-which seemed to mean that three or four lascars had to be hired for jobs that a single able seaman could well do. (SOP 13)

The Ibis' commander, Arakanese Serang Ali, delivers a straightforward, cunning speech in colloquial Yankee Chinese. He is an Arakan-Rohingya from the Blongi tribe. Serang Ali takes up the responsibility of navigating while Zachary struggles: “What for Malum Zikri make big dam bobberies so muchee buk-buk and big hookuming? Malum Zikri still learns-pigging. No sabbi ship-pijjin. No, can you see Serang Ali too much smart-bugger inside? Take ship Por'Lwee-side Three days, look-see” (SOP 12).

Ghosh suggests “a collection of exiles from the four corners of the globe, men swept together by the nineteenth century's version of globalization. Zachary hears another vernacular in the Hooghly River: “Damn my eyes if I ever saw such a coffle of barn shooting badmashes! A chowder of your chutes is what you budzats need. What are you doing, toying with your tatters and luffing your laurels while I stand in the sun?” (SOP 17). Because various characters talk in their native tongues Ghosh employs a variety of languages. Multiple people use these many tongues and cultures to unite them and establish new languages for



communication. The national language of India during the colonial times, Hindi, was impacted by English and became Hinglish.

### **Hybridity in *Sea of Poppies***

Ghosh also discusses how hybridity occurs aboard the warships, where caste is irrelevant. Men of many backgrounds, including Brahmins, Ahirs, Chamars, and Telis, are keen to join. He explains how immigrants become hybrid in the current period and are forced to adopt Christianity. He also explains how the character's name comes to stand for hybridity. According to Paulette, he uses Zachary Reid to show how his name has changed through time.

Not at all, the girl replied in a tone of unalloyed certainty. No one can lose caste on a boat of pilgrims, and everyone is the same: it's like taking a boat to the temple of Jagannath in Puri. From now on, and forever afterwards, we will all be ship-siblings --- jahajbhais and jahajbaahens to each other. There'll be no differences between us. (SOP 156)

The migrants share an apartment complex. Women are touching one another and using gestures to express themselves and share their stories. They say that they do not have any differences. The “children of the ship,” also known as jahaj-bhai and jahaj-bahen, were their collective names. They were immigrants from various countries, including Malay, Black-Hat Arabs, Javanese, and Malaysia. These people seemed to be living onboard ships like the Fanqui while dressing differently since it was advantageous for their business. For example, Ghosh writes:

But of these many kinds of creature, the most easily recognizable, without a doubt, was the small but flourishing tribe of White - hatted Aliens-Parsis from Bombay...the White-hats' garments were in no whit the same as those of the Fankuis: they wore robes and turbans not unlike those of Black-hatted Arabs. (SOP 177)

Migrants communicate with one another and attempt to interact with everyone. All of them are cut off from their homes, and nothing can stop them from secretly getting together as monsters, demons, or mischances. These migrants are all fellow travelers on the same ship:

With no parents or elders to decide on these matters, who knew what the right way to make a marriage was? And wasn't it she who had said, at the start, that



they were all kin now, that their rebirth in the ship's womb had made them into a single family? (SOP 432)

In the novel, Ghosh depicts a hybrid connection between Kalua, Deeti, and other characters. We discover some problems with the caste system, gender dynamics, man-woman relationships, the impact of the English language and culture on Indians, and arranged marriages. Many people develop new languages to communicate in their language and unite with one another. Ghosh describes how immigrants today become hybrids. The multicultural communion in the narrative is created by the language drawn from many cultural sources. Thus, the work focuses on the worldwide problem of racial and cultural hybridity.

### Conclusion

In the intricate tapestry of Amitav Ghosh's literary creations, the themes of cultural alienation and amalgamation emerge as deeply resonant threads that bind together the diverse narratives of *The Glass Palace* and *Sea of Poppies*. Through these works, Ghosh skilfully navigates the complex terrain of human experiences, unveiling the tension between identity and displacement, tradition and change, and the insatiable human desire for connection.

As the characters in these novels traverse physical landscapes and historical epochs, they constantly negotiate between the known and the unknown. However, Ghosh's narratives also celebrate the resilience of human connections that transcend borders. *The Glass Palace* exemplifies the dynamics of cultural amalgamation as it follows the intersecting fates of characters from India, Burma, and beyond. Their lives intermingle, reflecting the intricate ways in which cultures intertwine, merge, and evolve. The diverse cast of the characters in *Sea of Poppies* further amplify this theme as they navigate the complexities of their mixed heritage and encounter individuals from varied backgrounds.

In essence, Amitav Ghosh's literary tapestry serves as a vivid portrait of the intricate interplay between cultural alienation and amalgamation. Through the lives of his characters, he showcases the complexities of human existence as it unfolds against the backdrop of shifting political landscapes, historical upheavals, and the ever-expanding horizons of an interconnected world. The ultimate revelation lies in recognising that, despite the challenges of cultural alienation, the yearning for amalgamation and unity among diversity remains an enduring and powerful force.

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**Dr.K.Sathiya Priya M.A., M.Phil., Ph.D.**

**Assistant Professor**

**Department of English**

**Sri GVG Visalakshi College for Women, Udumalpet,**

**Affiliated to Bharathiar University, Coimbatore**

**E mail id: priyaksp86@gmail.com**

**Mobile: 9865764451**

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