Chapter V

Impact of History: Migration and Displacement

Amitav Ghosh narrates stories not only of the past but also of migration and displacement. Migration as “the physical movement of people within and between social systems” (Johnson 177) makes its strong presence in Ghosh’s texts through numerous migrant characters. Interestingly, migration of these characters takes place under the aegis of events in history. His characters, both historical and unhistorical, experience a movement from their place of birth to a foreign or alien land. Thus a close association between history of a nation and migration and displacement of its people cannot be overlooked.

Ghosh’s novels sketch motley of migrant characters, which experience forced and voluntary migration. Forced migration becomes the foundation for their migration and displacement, while voluntary migration becomes the basis of their relocation for migrant characters from home country. His migrant characters are displaced from their land and are forced to migrate to another land, either through the influence of a ‘push’ factor in the form of an involuntary migration or a ‘pull’ factor that draws them to migrate to another land voluntarily. Ghosh sketches response of the migrant, who are on the verge of arrival at the new land.
At times the response is one of a comfortable gesticulation like in the case of Rajkumar Raha in *Palace* who builds his home in his adopted land. But that is not the common response. Most often, these migrants are ushered into a land that is hostile towards them. In *Tide*, the migrants are perceived of as trespassers; they face the wrath of the local people there and are subjected to torture, attacks and resentment. The experiences of the migrants are at times advantageous and at times detrimental to their lives. Therefore the reader experiences a two-way response to migration by the arriving migrants in Ghosh’s novels.

Amitav Ghosh addresses the impact of migration as it befalls on his migrants. In the new land migrants driven out of their country by force are befuddled of their position while undergoing a confused state of mind. They experience a sense of rootlessness that could only be made stable with a possible return back home. This further leads to a feeling of alienation as the migrants are in constant search of their identity. What they are and where they belong are questions that nag their minds. They are not able to let go of their old identity nor are they content with their new distinctiveness. What emerges is a sense of belonging that creeps into their minds creating further complications. They are clueless if they should either submerge themselves into the new place and its people or cling on hopelessly to their own nationality. While hankering for the land
of their birth they are also placed in a fixed position troubled by the new identity they are absorbed into. Thamma in *Lines* is an example of a character experiencing such rootlessness and alienation.

The greatest impacts of migration are the historical events that culminate in migration. Colonialism, communal riots, Partition of India, the Iran-Iraq war, British invasion of Burma and World War II are few historical events that feature in the novels of Amitav Ghosh. These events exemplify serious repercussions on people’s lives. His characters are made to go through immense transitions in their lives with the intrusion of historical events and these transitions are either forced or deliberate. These transitions could be linked to the ‘push’ and ‘pull factors, which are defined in sociological terms: “The ‘push’ factors are ‘negative’ factors tending to force migrants to leave origin areas, while the ‘pull’ factors are ‘positive’ factors attracting migrants to destination areas in the expectation of improving their lots” (Lobo, “Introduction” 9). Both the ‘push’ factor and the ‘pull’ factor of migration influence the lives of Ghosh’s characters greatly.

The push factor of migration is a form of migration that usually springs out of various facets of history like invasion, colonialism, war, riots, violence etc. In Ghosh’s texts too forced migration of his characters is the consequence of the working of political upheaval in the country.
Any political turmoil in the state has serious and far-fetching consequences on the country and its people. At times the impacts are of such magnitude that they result in the mass departure and expulsion of the citizens from their innate terra firma to a foreign country. These forceful evictions that are more than often carried out against the will of the people symbolises a forced movement imposed upon them by authority. Citizens of the country are made to leave their original habitat involuntarily. In his novel *Tide* an expulsion of a group of people as a result of the Partition is elaborated by Ghosh. The living conditions of the migrants as described in the novel bring out their sufferings in an alien land, Dandakaranya:

... surrounded by security forces and forbidden to leave.

Those who tried to leave were hunted down. The soil was rocky and the environment was nothing like they had ever known. They could not speak the languages of that area and the local people treated them as intruders, attacking them with bows, arrows and other weapons (*Tide* 118).

The migratory resettlement in a foreign land leaves the migrants with a sense of oddity and a feeling of estrangement. In a new place amidst new people they live in fear and apprehension. These people are left in the lurch with no security to their lives and existence. They are
clueless about the future and hesitant of what lies ahead. Displaced people constantly live in trepidation and uncertainty, pessimism and gloom, at times placing the migrants in severe untoward positions in their lives.

Partition of the country is an aspect of migration that leads to an ultimate displacement of people. Partition created a great number of refugees, asylum seekers and displaced people who live their lives in constant dread and fear. People are not only located in a new and foreign land but they are also displaced because it is a land that brings them face to face with a new way of life, a different environment they are not accustomed to and are made to live with people different and unfamiliar to them. This is forced migration or conflict induced displacement. W. Petersen develops the idea of displaced people and displacement thus: “[people who] survived forced migrations have been termed “displaced persons,”” a designation that clearly implies their passive role. The forced movement itself is here called displacement” (“General Typology” 60). This form of migration, which often gives birth to a number of refugees and asylum seekers leads to a sense of displacement. “In the experience of an exodus there is an unspoken ambiguity: the sufferings of displacement are tinged with the hope of arrival and the opening of new vistas in the future” (Indian 312).
Ghosh fictionalises the pretense and disinterestedness of authority and governments towards the migrants’ plight. Duplicity and disinterestedness of the government towards the displaced peoples’ hardships and threat to their lives is also an issue of concern in his texts. Victims of Partition in his novel *Tide* become not only easy prey to political forces but are also subjected to the duplicity of the government. Sadly the displaced people in Morichjhapi also fall prey to the false hopes and promises given by the CPI (M) party, a political party that readily lost interest in the refugees’ predicament once their party won the elections. For no matter what, “. . . governments, armies and rebel movements attain their political and military objectives” (Patil & Trivedi v). Even today their plight reminds the same and they face oblivion.

Amitav Ghosh not only exposes the duplicity of the government but also questions the impartial and unfair treatment that is meted out to the weaker sections by those in power and authority. As if speaking for the marginalised subjects, Ghosh almost echoes the above point of view thus:

The people most seriously affected by the problem of forced displacement are often the most marginalised members of society: minority groups, stateless people, indigenous populations and others who are excluded from
their governments or by other members of their society, many find themselves living in a state of constant insecurity and uncertainty (Patil and Trivedi v).

The displaced people are made to go through worst kind of violence as they try to fight against their perpetrators only to seek for their right to exist. As migrants in a foreign land in Morichjhapi in the Sundarbans, in mid-May 1979 the refugees face even greater hostility: “Morichjhapi was a protected forest reserve [for tigers] and they [the authorities] had proved unbending in their determination to evict the settlers” (Tide 118). It is important to keep the land reserved for tigers while human beings should be simply eradicated. These helpless refugees are entangled in an even greater battle of life and death. All that they ask for is a small place of refuge yet “[T]hroughout the centuries, people have been obliged to flee from their own country or community as a result of persecution, armed conflict and violence” (Patil & Trivedi v).

The disquieting and shameful life that displaced migrants are subjected to, without their calling, only because they seek a place to live is a tragedy, which Ghosh does not allow to let it pass unnoticed. They are trampled upon and are smothered to silence. Reduced to the position of refugees these people lead lives defined by their new unseemly distinctiveness. Ghosh here exhibits a dispassionate account of mass
departure questioning the ignominy that human lives are reduced to while at the same time raising a voice against the predominance of such refugees thereby displaying a complete breakdown of political and administrative systems, a hypocritical democratic party and an absolute deterioration of humanitarian concerns and values of man towards man. The refugees in Tide bring back to life images of helpless disregarded victims of migration and displacement.

Migration that leads to a final displacement of people is even more astounding when it befalls on sovereignty that stands for authority and power. It becomes even more glaring when kings and queens are made to surrender their dominion and are bundled to a foreign land under exile. Amidst pessimism and gloom Mathew tells Rajkumar “Father says they [British] want all the teak in Burma. The King won’t let them have it so they’re going to do away with him” (Palace 15). The point of emphasis is not so much on colonialism as it is on the weakness of the king to retaliate and contain his kingship and country and finally leads to his permanent exile. The British do away with King Thebaw in 1885 when they colonise Burma transferring power from the king to their imperial regime. “The Royal Family was being sent into exile . . . . They were to go to India, to a location that is yet to be decided” (Palace 41). Later, the British inform the King that “. . . the matter of permanent residence for
you and your family has finally been resolved” (*Palace* 60). For the King and Queen of Burma it is even sadder as they are now no less than prisoners deprived of all the honour due to royalty. The answer to the King’s query of a return to his country meets with this response: “Your Highness, you must prepare yourself to be in Ratnagiri for sometime, a considerable time I fear. Perhaps . . .” (*Palace* 60). King Thebaw dies a migrant in Ratnagiri. Therefore “[E]ven if they [migrants] have managed to find a safe refuge, they may never know if or when it will be possible for them to go back to their homes” (Patil & Trivedi v).

The Royal Family is reduced to the stature of prisoners in Outram House, a residence far from the city, very much unlike their glass palace in Burma. The Burmese maids of the Queen also decline to maintain their duties towards their queen. “Their shikoes became perfunctory; they began to complain about sore knees and refused to stay on all fours while waiting on the Queen” (*Palace* 52). The family of kings and queens are left with no other alternative but to live with and amongst commoners. With the outbreak of a plague and less money to maintain servants there was no other alternative but to allow the villagers to build a village around the compound of Outram House. Thus the deported Royal Family is forced to mingle with the commoners. It is a way of life that is not only disagreeable to Queen Supayalat but a life that she has to live on with no
other choice left before her. In the far away land no more marriages of kings and queens are witnessed but marriages of a princess to a man as ordinary as their gatekeeper. This new way of life for the Royal Family may be summed up as follows: “The sense of exile results in a deep feeling of loss, ache, separation, yearning for recuperation and restoration” (Shukla & Shukla, “Migrant Voices” 7). Ghosh is more sympathetic towards the sinking status of the royal family from rulers to displaced migrants sentenced to live in a foreign land with no hope to return home. The fact of the matter lies in the real picture of the iron hands of colonialism that appears to be far stronger than monarchy.

Ghosh creates the possibility of both ‘push’ and ‘pull’ factors of migration in a single character to perceive migration in its entirety. If the historic entrance of colonialism into Burma pushes the Royal Family into exile, colonialism proves to be a boon to Rajkumar. He abandons his native land and readies himself to settle in a new and foreign land. “But now, thinking of his life on the boat, he knew he would not go back. He had seen too much in Mandalay and acquired too many new ambitions” (Palace 58). It is usually these “many new ambitions” that exert a pull on people. Rajkumar readies himself to see what more Burma can offer him.

The ‘pull’ factor is seen in Palace when Burma seems to have opened its arms to this orphan boy. Colonialism only affirms his stay
there. He finds a friend and mentor in Saya John, a Japanese migrant in Burma and they together establish themselves as rich timber businessmen:

Mr. Rajkumar Raha, a name then unknown in the world of teak, had succeeded in underbidding all the major companies. . . . Since that time he had several other successes and had risen to eminence within the business community (*Palace* 134).

True to Rajkumar’s conviction Burma creates a profitable mark for him. He goes to India to bring back his bride, Dolly the Burmese girl he had fallen in love with at first sight. They together build a home and a family that completes the happy conjugal life of Rajkumar and Dolly with the birth of their two sons, Neel and Dinu. His adopted country gives him all that his land of birth has only taken away from Rajkumar. Thus Rajkumar’s migration to Burma elevates his position from a poor orphan ‘kaala’ to a prosperous businessman in pre-war Rangoon.

If the ‘pull’ factor entices Rajkumar to abandon his home country to migrate to Burma, it is the ‘push’ factor that forces his repatriation to his home country. If history helped him stabilise his existence as an Indian migrant in Burma again it is the same history later on that reverses his condition and status. A historical event in the face of a war between
the British and the Japanese in World War II in 1942 interferes into the life of Rajkumar leading to the collapse of his business empire and the loss of his son, Neel. If the ‘pull’ factor leads to Rajkumar’s prosperity in Burma, the ‘push’ factor helps his downfall in Burma and his subsequent return to India. A migrant forced to return home to his native country Rajkumar takes along with him a baggage of only melancholy and poverty.

It is ironical that Rajkumar returns a displaced man in his own nation; unlike his adopted country that gives him a home and family, his home country takes away everyone from him. He returns to a life of uncertainty, insecurity and instability and is left with a sense of loss and hurt. A man with no home, no relatives to turn to. In India, Rajkumar gives up his principles and way of life. He is left with no other choice but to appear before the house of Uma to seek shelter passing the rest of his days in her house:

Uma had been home a couple of months when, one afternoon, her elderly gatekeeper came to tell her that there were some destitutes outside, asking for her. . . .

Rajkumar was kneeling on the pavement (Palace 477-8).

In presenting a binary conflict of voluntary migration and forced migration, Ghosh leaves it to his readers to judge which life of Rajkumar
is more significant - as a migrant or as a repatriate in his country. Rajkumar’s life as a migrant has given him wealth, prosperity, family and security, while back to his country, as a native, India has given him insecurity, uncertainty, starvation and poverty and an ultimate loss of the essence of his existence. Rajkumar may not have any claims on his native country but it is India that he has to ultimately return to, though memory of his adopted country Burma is perpetual in his mind. In Rajkumar’s situations as a displaced migrant in his own country, Ghosh draws our attention to a new kind of diaspora where the migrant is an alien in his own land. The sense of displacement which a migrant experience, where the foreign land seems dear to the migrant and the homeland appears strange is a consequent development of the ‘pull’ factor. The attractions of alien land distances the migrant from his own home country to which if he/she returns but unhappily. This is the experience of displacement felt by Ila and Rajkumar.

Like Rajkumar, Ila in Lines chooses to live in a foreign land only with the hope to be accepted and to be absorbed into the life pattern, morality and ethics of that land. At the same time she is different from Rajkumar, whose ‘pull’ factor is only his will to make money, unlike Ila, whose ‘pull’ factor is freedom from social constrictions. She is so charmed by British ideologies and values that she aspires for an
attachment and anxiously craves for a union with the colonisers. What matters to her is the union with the English people even if she has to sever ties with all her Indian brethrens and family members. The freedom that she sees in the British way of life appeals to her while she rejects her own Indian culture that she perceives as hypocritical and deceitful. She is very clear about her alliance with the English people that makes her scream out loud before her uncle Robi and the narrator the reason for having chosen to live in London. For her London symbolises freedom, emancipation and a free spirit. She says: “Do you see why I’ve chosen to live in London? Do you? It’s only because I want to be free ... Free of you! She shouted back. Free of your bloody culture and free of all of you” (*Lines* 88-9).

Ghosh eloquently sketches the migrants’ desperate urge to migrate to foreign lands, where their dream to be accepted only leads to futility. This is exactly what Ila goes through but a situation that she brushes aside and ignores. First of all she is attracted to all that is alien. Her wish to become one with the English people will never materialise. Even as a young girl in school her much sought after acceptance by the British family, the Prices, fails to give her the recognition that she has been anxiously waiting and expecting for. “Ila didn’t have any friends in school. . . . Nick Price was ashamed to be seen by his friends, walking
home with an Indian” (Lines 76). He prefers to run away than rescue her while she is being bullied by her classmates in school. In spite of this rejection Ila is still very much attracted by the place and people that she continues to pursue her desire desperately seeking acceptance until she gets herself deeply entangled in an illusionary relationship with Nick. Her marriage to Nick is the second example of her futile attraction for the alien. For it is a marriage of convenience where the jobless Nick gets support from ila’s father and Ila migrates to London. Consequently it leads to futility. “He wanted to make a point; to let me (Ila) know that I shouldn’t take anything for granted just because we’re living in a flat my father’s bought for me. And because I have a job and he doesn’t” (Lines 188). Nick exerts his control by having affairs with other women. Ila “dialed the number . . . a female voice answered - breathless, as though they’d had a playful tussle” (Lines 187).

The consequence of such a futile migration that Ila has been fighting for has instead only displaced and distanced her from her country, her people and her identity. Behind such a migration is Ila’s belief that by uprooting herself from her native country she will be absorbed into the English land. Unfortunately her migration only takes away her sense of belonging. She becomes an outsider in the land of her birth and the land of her adoption as well. Painfully Ila finds herself at
crossroads where she leads a life of mental trauma and hurt and never return home to comfort and happiness.

Other than the two aforesaid experiences of migration Ghosh describes a third experience caused by the ‘push’ factor. Migration particularly in the case of forced migrations, leads to displacement, because the migrants experience on the one hand reluctance to return to one’s country and on the other hand a yearning to return to one’s native country. The sense of displacement that they experience is expressed in two ways – through memories of home, and a yearning to visit their home. Memories of their home are treasured in the coffer of their hearts and minds. These are memories that unfold in the form of an attachment that people have towards their once cherished but now estranged land. Amitav Ghosh presents a dual conflict of migration due to Partition that creates a sense of displacement, dilemma and perplexity in the hearts of individuals, as seen in Lines. Originally from Dhaka, Thamma journeys from her native land to Kolkata in search of a job for subsistence and to educate her son as she now has to fend for her family after the death of her husband. Once there “she had no time to go back to Dhaka in the next few years. And then in 1947, came Partition, and Dhaka became the capital of East Pakistan. There was no question of going back after that” (Lines 125). But Thamma clings on to her life in Dhaka and remembers
places like Shadow-Bazar, the Royal Stationery and the jewellery shop with great clarity. Thamma is unable to sever her bonds with the past. She may be carrying an exterior of toughness and self-reliance, yet she goes through nostalgia and pain in her heart. Beneath that outer surface is a heart that bleeds and longs for a return to the land of her birth.

When she returns to Dhaka temporarily Thamma experiences a sense of alienation. The conflict arises the moment Thamma steps into Dhaka. The Dhaka she witnesses now is absolutely different from the Dhaka of her birth. She is unable to recognise places and is shocked that the place that she has always considered home is no longer identifiable: “Yes, I really am a foreigner here . . . . But whatever you may say, this isn’t Dhaka. . . . this is for foreigners; where’s Dhaka?” (Lines 195). Dhaka is no longer familiar to her and nor does she become familiar to her uncle. “She’s a foreigner Ukil-babu. She’s come from Calcutta with your relatives” (Lines 213). The present speaks of the harsh and cruel reality of an estrangement and a drift that has dislodged her from her native soil when the shadow lines were drawn as indicating the maps of nations of India and Bangladesh. These were lines invisible to the naked eyes yet they perfectly create a divide among fellow human beings.

There are also migrants that experience purely a ‘pull’ factor towards migration. Here voluntary migration is a sincere choice made by
the migrants with hopes of improving their lots through better job opportunities, better living conditions, higher education prospect, a fascination towards a different and new way of life and also an absolute urge to associate themselves with the land of adoption. At such times when a political event opens up the borders that voluntary migration takes place. Even the U.N. Convention on the Rights of Migrants defines voluntary migration:

The term 'migrant' in article 1.1 (a) should be understood as covering all cases where the decision to migrate is taken freely by the individual concerned, for reasons of 'personal convenience’ and without intervention of an external compelling factor (‘International Migration’)

The above description of voluntary migrants fits Ghosh’s novel, *Land*. Nabeel and Ismail are individuals who reallocate themselves from their native country to another country entirely out of an individual personal choice. Nabeel and Ismail shift to Iraq in search of employment since the home government fails to provide them with jobs.

Most of the young men . . . were gone now . . . it was as though half the working population had taken leave of the land [Egypt] and surged into Iraq. The flow had started in the early 1980s, a couple of years after the beginning of
the war between Iraq and Iran. . . . People had left in truckloads: it was said at one time that there were maybe two or three million Egyptian workers in Iraq, as much as a sixth of that country’s population (*Land* 298).

Young people who hate their poverty share Nabeel’s desire: “he was determined to escape his poverty and improve his family’s condition” (*Land* 150).

Employment in a far away land has no doubt helped financially. Ismail and Nabeel contribute significantly towards up lifting their families. “Nabeel had sent money for a television set and a washing-machine . . . . [t]hree or four rooms had been completed on the ground floor, including a kitchen, a bathroom and a veranda” (*Land* 319-20). However with the flux in politics the nature of migration changes from voluntary to a forced one. For these Egyptian migrants live in fear and trepidation once the Iran-Iraq war comes to an end. Now the migrants are intruders who have taken away the jobs of the Iraqi men while they are fighting a war to save their country. It is here at this point that the novelist questions the pliability of a deliberate migration to a foreign land; after all it is still a foreign land with a foreign form of government amidst new and foreign people. The migrants face mistreatments by their employers and at times face attacks by strangers for no reasons. Ismail says:
Life’s not easy out there. . . . Thousands and thousands of men, some in trousers and some in jallabeyyas, some carrying their TV sets on their backs, some crying out for a drink of water, stretching all the way from the horizon to the Red Sea, standing on the beach as though waiting for the water to part (Land 353).

Hence like Rajkumar, Ismail is forced to return. Thus in projecting history that creates employment opportunities for migration Ghosh is keen to display untoward effects that befall on these migrants who either face torture, expulsion and at times even death.

Ghosh also discusses migration as a colonized agency funded operation for facilitating cheap labour. He sketches in *Sea of Poppies*, the predicament of such migrant labourers. Torture, death and human devastation may be the ultimate destiny of such migrants subjected to atrocities in the hands of British imperialism. The novel attempts a picture of migration blessed by the British, who enforce opium cultivation in Indian villages leaving the labourers to lead lives of utter starvation and poverty. These labourers were also encouraged to work in their plantations in British colonies like Mauritius. “They (girmityas) were so called because, in exchange for money, their names were entered on ‘girmits’ – agreements written on pieces of paper. The silver that was
paid for them went to their families, and they were taken away, never to be seen again: they vanished, as if into the netherworlds” (*Poppies* 72). On the Ibis are present an ensemble of characters from a bankrupt king, convicts, low caste chamar, Englishmen, a French woman, a gomusta to the lascars. All gather on the Ibis amidst fear and apprehension ready to be transported to a land of the unknown.

Ghosh’s depiction of migration and displacement has a colourful dimension. Despite the fear and apprehension that the migrants face in their journey, the relationship they establish among the fellow migrants offers them respite. The camaraderie, oneness and the bond of friendship amongst fellow migrants is also a subject of migration that Ghosh brings to attention. The bond established among the migrants in the foreign land is of greater worth to the novel’s narration than what the future holds for the migrants once they reach their destinations. “When you step on that ship, to go across the Black Waters (Indian Ocean), you and your fellow transportees will become a brotherhood of your own: will be your own village, your own family, your own caste” (*Poppies* 314). There is left no more social distinctions and religious discriminations on the basis of their caste. Literally the migrants become one. “From now on, and forever afterwards, we will be ship-siblings – jahaj-bhais and jahaj-behens – to
each other. There’ll be no difference” (Poppies 356). Literally Ghosh paints a picture of solidarity of the migrants.

The moment of departure was a time of loss and displacement, but the indentured ‘girmitiyas’ found the means to endure it - their greatest resource was their capacity to take pleasure in the little things of life. They carried their songs and rituals, which provided solace in their time of suffering and dislocation (Shubha Singh).

The theme of migration and displacement is incomplete without a discussion on Ghosh’s reflection of diaspora. Patrick Iroegbu considers diaspora as a “term applied to a minority ethnic group of migrant origin which maintains not only sentiments but equally material links with its land of origin” (“Migration and Diaspora”). Diaspora is any dispersion of people from their homeland that is usually permanent in nature. There may be present in these people a hope or a desire to return to their homeland at some point provided that the nostalgia still lingers in their hearts and an attachment with their home is still closely planted in their souls. Thamma in Lines has been permanently displaced from Dhaka and is re-rooted in India. She has a constant and strong yearning to return to her country. Kolkata is never her home. She rather feels alienated and
distanced in her adopted country. Thamma may have crossed borders in search of means of subsistence to support herself and her family yet this shift leaves her heart and mind empty of any attachment towards the strange land. Far away from home, family, friends and country she lives in perpetual craving for her native land.

In the case of Rajkumar and Ila they do not wish to return their native land, India. Iroegbu’s definition of diaspora excludes Rajkumar and Ila from the idea of diaspora.

In 1996, John Hutchinson and Anthony Smith wrote in *Ethnicity* that a ‘diaspora’ excludes groups, having settled, severed their relationship with their root society. . . . ‘life in diaspora’ is advocated by circumstance and by rationalization of related issues for security and better life away from home. People mostly move to seek better opportunities for existence, reunion, safety, education and advancement. Those, according to Hutchinson and Smith, who break off connections with their homeland, will not qualify to be referred to as people in diaspora. You need to maintain constant and strong linkage with your homeland to claim the benefits and challenges of being in diaspora (“Migration and Diaspora”)
Neither Rajkumar nor Ila once express a longing to return home. Incidentally even when Rajkumar is forced to return to India “Rajkumar’s favourite haunt was a small Buddhist temple in the centre of the city . . . . This was where Calcutta’s Burmese community forgathered” (Palace 483-4). His visit to the Buddhist temple is a way of reliving Burma. Gathered in the temple are many Indians,

… people who’d left Burma in 1942, just like Rajkumar . . .
. . . Not all the people who came to the temple were Buddhists, by birth or conviction. They came because this was the one place where they could be sure of meeting others like themselves; people to whom they could say, ‘Burma is a golden land’ knowing that their listeners would be able to filter these words through the sieves of exile, sifting through their very specific nuances (Palace 495).

Thus, in truth Rajkumar’s diasporic situation lies in his longing for a return back to Burma.

It may be stated here that Amitav Ghosh has remarkably focussed on the seriousness of impacts and effects of history on people who lived amidst various historical events. Migration and displacement as impacts of history play a very significant role in the works of Amitav Ghosh.
With migration and displacement as a subject Ghosh has very consciously unraveled the historical situations and conditions responsible for the movement of people from their place of origin to a foreign land. The Partition of the country results in the crossover of people from Pakistan to India and vice versa as well as from India to Bangladesh likewise. This brings in the emergence of refugees, the dispossessed and displaced people whose lives and lots are defined by their fate and destiny. Ghosh’s novels display in abundance these displaced people’s distress and agony despite the fact that they have no share in bringing about a separation of their country and families. Therefore the partition of the country cannot be merely viewed as a territorial and administrative division of the country. It carries with it an even greater tragedy: the division and partition of lives and hearts. They have no choice over their condition but are pushed out of their country into a new, foreign and unknown land. He traces his characters’ plight as they are received into a new environment amidst unfamiliar people. At times they are reduced to even the stature of animals as in Tide. Yet at the same time he also presents constructive gains of migration as in the character of Rajkumar Raha in Palace. Above all Amitav Ghosh fictionalises migration as a factor that unites all migrants wiping out all social and religious barriers.
To conclude Amitav Ghosh has adequately handled the theme of migration and displacement. He has woven a lucid picture of migration of people exhibiting their experiences of these migrants alongside addressing concerns of history that have caused the exodus.