CHAPTER IV

COLONIAL REPERCUSSIONS

Pankaj Mishra describes Amitav Ghosh as one of the few postcolonial writers “to have developed in his work a developing awareness of the aspirations, defeats and disappointments of the colonized people as they try to figure out their place in the world” (New York Times Review). “His fiction abounds in postcolonial themes of cultural translation, of braided temporality and of marginality” (Boehmur and Chaudhuri 3). Ghosh’s *The Glass Palace* and *Sea of Poppies* expose colonial reality with intensity and candour. As a postcolonial novel, *The Glass Palace* presents the poignant accounts of people scattered through colonial dislocation in various parts of the Asian Continent. The novel unfolds the sordid reality of imperialism and its destructive effect on the physical, social, psychological and ecological aspects of human life. It communicates the disillusioned spirit of the natives who are presented as victims rather than foes of the colonizers.

Ann Loomba defines colonialism “as the conquest and control of other people’s land and goods” that resulted in “a wide range of practices including trade, plunder, negotiation, warfare, genocide, enslavement and rebellion” (*Colonialism / Post Colonialism* 2). Colonial greed is presented as the animating force behind the Anglo-Burmese war which marked the end of monarchy and the beginning of Imperialism in Burma. Bounded on three sides by India, China and Siam, Burma occupies a remarkable Geographical position with an unbroken coastline of 800 miles, stretching to the Malay Peninsula. Running for over a thousand miles throughout the country, the great river Irrawaddy formed natural harbours of great commercial value. The country itself was rich in wealth with its large production of rice and vast natural resources of teak, oil, iron, coal,
rubies and precious stones. The British wanted to gain control of Burma and its natural resources mainly teak. “They want all the teak in Burma. The king won’t let them have it so they are going to do away with him” *(TGP 15)*.

Once the king was defeated and the city conquered, the palace was looted by British soldiers and people saw them marching out of the fort with sacks of loot. The king was sent to a place of obscurity; Burma was integrated into the empire and forcibly converted into a province of British India which gave them the freedom to freely plunder its natural resources. The queen points out, “We were the first to be imprisoned in the name of their progress, millions will follow . . . . A hundred years hence you will read the indictment of Europe’s greed in the difference between the kingdom of Siam and the state of our own enslaved realm” *(TGP 88)*. When Uma returned from America, “the city of Rangoon seemed transformed beyond recognition to her. There were stately hotels, enormous banks, fashionable restaurants, arcaded department stores and even nightclubs” *(TGP 241)*. As Said observes:

Imperialism was the theory, colonialism the practice of changing the uselessly unoccupied territories of the world into useful new versions of the European metropolitan society. Everything in those territories that suggested waste, disorder, uncounted resources was to be converted into productivity, order, taxable potentially developed wealth. You get rid of most of the offending human and animal blight . . . and build a new society on the vacated space. Thus was Europe reconstituted abroad, its multiplication in space successfully projected and managed. *(The Question of Palestine 78)*
The novel projects not only the greed of the colonizer but also that of the colonized. As a colonized subject from Bengal, Rajkumar became a colonizer in Burma. He made quick money by transporting indentured labourers from India to the teak forests and oil wells in Burma. Many foreign companies were busy digging for oil in Yenangyaung and they were desperate for labour. It was hard to find workers in Burma as the working condition in the oil wells was very dangerous. Men were lowered into deep oil wells, a hundred feet deep or even more sometimes. A man would be sent down the shaft on a rope and the rope would be attached to his wife, family and livestock by way of a pulley. They would lower him by walking up the slope of the hill and pull him out by walking down. The lips of the wells were slippery and when unwary workers or young children tumbled, it went unnoticed as there were no splashes. Few Burmese were so poor to put up with such dangerous conditions.

These oil-soaked spectres taunted Rajkumar on his visits to the Yenangyaung and he shuddered at the thought of men drowning in the ooze, the sludge closing over their heads and trickling into their ears and nostrils. But his lure for money overcame this nostalgic feeling and he allured poor Indian peasants to the land of Burma, projecting it as the golden land. Some came forward eagerly while others were sent forcibly by their fathers and brothers. In three years time Rajkumar had made nine trips to India to bring labourers and accumulated savings which amounted to two-thirds of the asking price of a timber yard in Rangoon.

Moreover as a partner in the rubber plantation in Malaya he had been responsible for ensuring a steady supply of workers from India. While he made a lot of money in transporting people to the rubber plantation, the plantation workers were forced to live in squalid conditions. The workers shacks were tiny hovels with roofs made of branches and
leaves, the squalor in the mud-walled hut where they went to be treated when they fell ill was unimaginable and the floor was covered with filth. Driving along rural roads the Indian officers from the British army discovered that the plantation labourers most of them of Indian origin were the only people who lived in abject, grinding poverty in Malaya. Mathew rightly points out: “every rubber tree in Malaya was paid for with an Indian life” (TGP 233)

Uma was infuriated by the avarice of Rajkumar that she confronts him with the question, “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” (TGP 247). These are two sides of the same coin. On one side Indian labourers were made to work in docks and mills, to pull rickshaws and empty the latrines. On the other some of the richest people in the city were Indians and most of them began with nothing more than a bundle of clothes and tin box. “Indian money lenders have taken over all the farmland; Indians run most of the shops; people say that the rich Indians live like colonialists, lording it over the Burmese” (TGP 240). A lot of anger and resentment was aimed at these Indians.

Colonialism resulted in the scattering and displacement of the colonised to various colonies. “The most extreme consequences of imperial dominance can be seen in the radical displacement of peoples through slavery, indenture and settlement” (Ashcroft et al. 217). Young Indian men were dislocated to Burma, Singapore and Malaya as soldiers. Narrating his experience as an orderly in a hospital at Singapore, Saya John talks about the plight of these Indian soldiers. They were mainly peasants from small countryside villages, fighting wars for their English masters. He could still remember the smell of gangrenous bandages on amputated limbs; the night screams of twenty-year-old boys. For
a few coins, not much more than a dockyard coolie they allowed their masters to use them as they wished, “to destroy every trace of resistance to the power of English”. Saya John remarks, “Chinese peasants would never allow themselves to be used to fight other people’s war with so little profit for themselves” (*TGP* 29). They were fighting neither due to enmity nor anger, but in submission to orders from superiors, without protest and without conscience. Years of enslavement has made them just tools in the hands of the British without minds of their own.

The royalty was no exception to this colonial displacement. Spotting several Indian faces in the Rangoon waterfront the king was awe struck by the incomprehensible power of the British “to move people in huge numbers from one place to another” and wonders “why this furious movement – people taken from one place to another, to pull rickshaws, to sit blind in exile?” (*TGP* 50). He was also worried where his own people, now a part of British Empire, would go as all this moving about would not suit them. But there was no way out. “They were not a portable people, the Burmese; he knew this very well for himself. He had never wanted to go anywhere. Yet here he was on his way to India” (*TGP* 50). The conversation between the king and the British official reveals his sense of displacement and the agony of his heart. When Mr. Cox informed the king that the royal entourage was to be moved to Ratnagiri from Madras, the king asked naively, “How long are we to remain there? When will we be allowed to return to Burma?” When he came to know that he would have to stay in Ratnagiri forever, “the king rose to his feet abruptly and went to his room. He did not step out again for several days” (*TGP* 60).

Dolly, Queen Supayalat’s hand maid too suffered from a sense of loss and dislocation. As a young girl she was forced to move from home with the royal entourage. She was one among a little procession of eighteen brightly dressed orphan girls who
followed the royal entourage on foot. When Rajkumar spotted her, “she was walking beside a tall soldier with a small bundle balanced on her head” (TGP 45). Her displacement from her native roots and her discomfort over it is clear when she declares to Uma that she could never think of going back to her country. “I’d never be able to rid myself of the idea that I would have to leave again one day just I had to before. You would understand if you knew what it was like when we left” (TGP 113). She said with a shiver that she tried not to even think about it.

When she felt at home in India, her marriage with Rajkumar required her to leave the country. The parting scene is poignantly presented by the novelist. From a window upstairs the four princesses waved her good bye. Dolly tried to wave back but her legs buckled under her and she fell to her knees sobbing. When they were trotting past the police barracks she waved back to the constables’ wives and children who had come out to send her off, wiping the trees fiercely from her eyes. “This was home, this narrow lane with its mossy walls of laetrite. She knew she would never see it again” (TGP 171). She sat bent over in her seat with a cloth bundle once again. After setting up a family in Burma, she is compelled to leave the country during the Second World War. With Neel’s baby wrapped in a shawl she comes back to India with her husband as a refugee. Finally she ends up in a Burmese monastery. “To be rooted is the most important and least recognised need of human soul” (Weil 183).

The same sense of loss and displacement is expressed in the following words of Rajkumar when he was forced to leave Burma after the Japanese air raid.

Yes. But it’s hard, Dolly – it’s hard to think of leaving: Burma has given me everything I have. The boys have grown up here; they’ve never known any other
home . . . despite everything that’s happened recently, I don’t think I could ever love another place in the same way. But if there’s one thing I’ve learned in my life Dolly, it is that there is no certainty about these things. My father was from Chittagong and he ended up in the Arakan; I ended up in Rangoon; you went from Mandalay to Ratnagiri and now you’re here too. (TGP 269)

“Our age with its modern warfare, imperialism and the quasi theological ambition of totalitarian rulers is indeed the age of the refugees, the displaced person, mass migration” (Said, Reflection on Exile and other Literary and Cultural essays 175). Simone Weil distinguishes this displaced lot into four categories: exiles, refugees, expatriates and émigrés. “Exile is the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home: its essential sadness can never be surmounted” (ibid 173). In 1857, after the suppression of the mutiny, the British exiled the deposed Mughal Emperor Bahadur Shah Zafar to Rangoon where he lived in a small house old and blind. In 1885, when Burma was besieged by Britain, the royal entourage was exiled to India and forced into an anomalous and miserable life. Even after twenty years of exile Dolly had a vivid memory of the Mandalay palace, especially their walls. “Many of them were lined with mirrors. There was a great hall called the Glass Palace. Everything there was of crystal and gold” (TGP 112). As exiles they were made to live in a worn out bungalow in Ratnagiri. “With the passing of years Outram House, had grown ever more to resemble the surrounding slums. Tiles were blown away. . . . Plasters had crumbled from the walls . . . . Branches of peepul had taken root into the cracks . . . mildew had crept upwards from the floor until the walls looked as though they had been draped in black velvet” (TGP 87).
Expatriates voluntarily live in an alien country for social reasons. When Britain was expanding its commercial interests in its colonies, India became “... a source of raw labour and military muscle that bolstered British dominance worldwide and kept the imperial machine humming. Thousands of poor, willing workers were recruited for work in Burma, Fiji, Caribbean and African plantations, in docks, mills and railroads while others were conscripted to the British army” (Auradkar 96). In Mathew’s rubber plantation in Malaya, Uma was surprised to see that all the tappers were Indians, mainly Tamils. Out of the ten thousand soldiers in the British invasion force of Burma, “about two thirds were Indian sepoys. The Indians were seasoned, battle hardened troops . . . had proved their worth to the British over decades of warfare, in India and abroad” (TGP 26). These Expatriate soldiers were engaged not only in British conquests, but also for the fortification of the empire. When the Saya Sen rebellion broke out in Burma, the colonial authorities sent more Indian reinforcement to root out the rebellion.

While Refugee suggests large herds of innocent and bewildered people forced to move from a place, Emigrant is anyone who immigrates to a new country. During the bombings of Japan over Rangoon in 1942, 30,000 Indians returned to India as refugees. They had to cover a distance of more than a thousand miles on foot with their possessions on their heads, children on their backs, elderly people in carts and barrows. Rajkumar, the Indian emigrant to Burma, the business tycoon who amassed wealth in teak trading and transporting people to rubber plantation was reduced to nothing. He along with his wife Dolly, daughter-in-law Manju and her baby in a shawl that was slung hammock-like over their shoulders was a part of this group. As Alastair points out, “Colonialism has produced and reduced nations, massacred populations, dispossessed people of their land, culture,
language and history and shifted vast number of people from one place to another” (English and the Discourses of Colonialism 19).

Grimityas and Convicts were another set of people who were subjected to displacement by the colonial government. Grimityas were labourers whose names were entered in ‘grimits’ - agreements written on pieces of paper in exchange for money. “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 netherworld” (SOP 79). On the way to the Ghazipur opium factory, Deeti saw hundred or more people trudging in the direction of the river. Their dhotis and vests were stained with the dust of the road and their very sight evoked pity and fear in the local people. There were a few women and children among them.

These grimityas were mostly from the Gangetic plains of Eastern Uttar Pradesh and Northern Bihar. Rai and Pinkey have pointed out how Ghosh draws out the irony, for “farmers in the Bhojpuri-speaking regions nourished by the Ganges River were among the least likely members of the rural Indian populace to embrace migration” (68). The British compulsion to cultivate poppies in their lands left them impoverished and they had no other choice but to move away to distant lands. The words that Ghosh uses to express the fate of these people depict their mental agony. It was like being rooted out and torn away from their native soil:

How it happened that when choosing the men and women who were to be torn from this subjugated plain, the hand of destiny had strayed so far inland, away from the busy coastlines, to alight on the people who were, of all, the most stubbornly rooted in the silt of the Ganga, in a soil that had to
be sown with suffering to yield its story and song? It was as if fate had
thrust its fist through the living flesh of the land in order to tear away a
piece of its stricken heart. (SOP 399)

The migrants negotiating their fate between home and exile sang a heart-wrenching song
of exile - “How will it pass/ This night of parting.” (SOP 398)

Deeti cringed with fear when she learnt that they were to be transported to
Mareech, a far away island like Lanka. Ghosh uses words like ‘taken away’, ‘never to be
seen again’ and ‘vanished’ to show that it was a place of no return. The sad plight of these
people is presented through the thought process that goes on in Deeti’s mind.

She tried to imagine what it would be like to be in their place . . . to know that you
would never again enter your father’s house; that you would never throw your arm
around your mother; that you would never eat a meal with your sisters and
brothers; never feel the cleansing touch of Ganga. And to know that for the rest of
your days you would eke out a living on some wild, demon-plagued island? (SOP
72)

As a punishment Indian prisoners were shipped to the British Empire’s network of
island prisons - Penang, Bencoolen, Port Blair and Mauritius. Thousands of dacoits, rebels
and hooligans were transported to these island jails where British incarcerated their
enemies. Neel Rattan, the Raja of Rashkali was sentenced to seven years of punishment
in the penal settlement on the Mauritius Islands and he was transported with the grimityas
to Mauritius in Ibis. Neel was apprehensive at the thought of being extradited as a convict
to an unknown island. He had a nightmare “in which he saw himself as a castaway on the
dark void of the ocean, utterly alone, severed from every human mooring” (SOP 342).
Through a small air duct in the chokey were Neel was put up with Ah Fatt, Paulette could see one of the convicts weeping while the other one had his arm around his shoulder as if to console him.

The dislocation from the land of her birth brought sorrow and agony to Paulette though it was her adopted homeland. As the *Ibis* moved deep into the watery labyrinth of the Sunderbans, she watched the river’s mangrove-cloaked shores. The sight of the familiar foliage slipping by brought tears to her eyes for these plants “were the companions of her earliest childhood . . . no matter where she went or how long, she knew that nothing would tie her to a place as did these childhood roots” (*SOP* 381). The trauma of separation from one’s homeland and the sense of longing it brought are vividly captured by Ghosh in the displacement of the grimityas. Nob Kissin envisaged “the migrants standing at (the temple’s) threshold, gathering together to say their last prayers on their native soil; it would be their parting memory of sacred Jambudwipa before they were cast upon the Black Water” (*SOP* 197).

Ashcroft et al. have pointed out that “Diaspora does not simply refer to geographical dispersal but also to the vexed questions of identity, memory and home which such displacement produces” (*Empire Writes Back* 218). *The Glass Palace* presents orphan girls brought to the palace from small villages along the northern frontiers of the Burmese kingdom. Some of them were from Christian families, some from Buddhist but once they came to Mandalay they lost their identities and were just the queen’s servants. The Indians who lived in Burma too suffered from this identity crisis. Though they had lived all their life in Burma, they were not accepted by the Burmese populace. Burma’s national movement formed after the Second World War, turned the Indians into outsiders – hated for their greed and exploitation of raw materials and people. Rajkumar was
shocked when he realized that he must leave Burma in the 1940’s. Neither his long stay in Burma nor his marriage to Dolly, a Burmese does not give him a Burmese identity. When he returned to Calcutta, he remained an outsider there too- reliving the days in Burma.

Jaya remembered the particular tone of voice in which Rajkumar would say several times each day, “Ah, Burma - now Burma was a golden land . . . .” (TGP 494). She also remembered the Burmese temple in North Calcutta where people of Indian origin – Gujaratis, Tamils, Sikhs, Bengalis- people who had left Burma just like Rajkumar in 1942, would gather and talk in Burmese about their golden land. They thirsted for news of Burma and longed to hear about people they had left behind. Memories about Burma could not be erased from Rajkumar’s mind but India was home for him though it had nothing good to offer him. When Jaya told Dinu about his father’s last days, his death and his ashes scattered in Ganges, Dinu remembered how Rajkumar had always said that for him Ganges could never be the same as Irrawaddy.

The reminiscences of their native land, their simple life style and the things they had lost forever haunted the womenfolk in the Ibis too as they started their journey to an unknown world:

Among the women, the talk was of the past, and the little things they would never see, nor hear, nor smell again: the colour of poppies, spilling across the fields like the abir on a rain-drenched Holi; the haunting smell of cooking-fires drifting across the river, bearing news of a wedding in a distant village; the sunset sounds of temple bells and the evening azan; late nights in the courtyard, listening to the tales of the elderly. No matter how hard the times at home may have been, in the ashes of every past there
were a few cinders of memory that glowed with warmth - and now, those embers of recollection took on a new life, in the light of which their presence here, in the belly of a ship that was about to be cast in the abyss. (SOP 397)

“Exiles or emigrants or expatriates are haunted by some sense of loss, some urge to reclaim, to look back, even at the risk of being mutated into pillars of salt” (Rushdie 10). Memories of the land they had left behind linger in the minds of these people even after years of displacement. Living in the teak camp, Saya John and Rajkumar would sit in the huts’ balconies talk for long hours in the night. Saya John would reminisce about his life in Malaya and Singapore and his dead wife. Dolly too could not forget her home though she was forced to live as a refugee in India. In January 1948 as soon as Burma got independence, she decided to return to Rangoon and live there for a while. When she found that Rajkumar was not interested to accompany her, she left her husband and granddaughter and booked a single, one-way passage to Rangoon.

It was not just the colonised, but the coloniser too suffered from a sense of displacement. Ghosh gives a picturesque description of the teak camps and the life of the English forest assistants. There was a tai at the centre of each campsite occupied by the forest assistant who was the company officer in charge of the teak camp. They were built on wooden platforms six feet above ground level on teakwood posts. It had several large rooms which ended in a veranda, sheltered by a canopy of flowering vines, which had the best possible view of the camp. The assistant would sit there with a glass of whisky in one hand, a pipe in another dreaming of his far away home. Saya John pitied these young Europeans who were made to work in the jungles at the prime of their youth so that the company can derive such profit from them as it can. But in two or three years, they
became sick affected by Dengue or Malaria and were left alone, thousands of miles away from home, surrounded by people whom they have never known.

The novel also reveals the psychological dilemmas posed by colonialism. Arjun considered himself to be lucky when he was selected as an officer cadet in The Indian Military Academy in Dehra Dun. He meticulously internalized the teachings of the British and did not identify himself with his culture but aped western manners and embraced western habits. Of all the Indians in the battalion, he was the most English that his fellow officers call him the Angrez. The sense of excitement in which he reveled was shattered when he came to attend his sister’s marriage. The congressmen who came as Uma’s guests berated Arjun for serving in an army of occupation. When Arjun retorted that they were not occupying the country but were there to defend the people, they sneered at him telling, “It’s your masters from whom the country needs to be defended” (TGP 288). But Arjun took cover under the belief that soldiering was a job like any other job and he was trying to do it as best as he could.

When Arjun and Hardayal Singh were posted abroad, Hardayal reminded him of the inscription in the military academy at Dehra Dun which said that the safety, honour and welfare of your country come first always and every time and questioned if it be so why they were sent abroad. His fascination for the army was so great that he silenced Hardy saying that staying in India would not do much for their career. He did not realize the truth that he was not serving his people or defending his country; but actually serving the colonialists and protecting their Empire. With the passage of time he understood his actual position. An incident in Singapore changed his perception about himself and his career as a soldier in the British army.
When Arjun and Hardy were selected as officers in 1/1 Jats, Arjun was so proud that he belonged to a battalion that was honored with the special title - “The Royal Battalion”. Moreover they were the first Indian officers in 1/1 Jats and he felt that they were shouldering a huge responsibility for they were representing the whole of the country. Ironically 1/1 Jats was a battalion which remained loyal to the empire during the First War of Independence in 1857 and played a leading role in capturing the last Mughal Emperor Bahadur Shah Zafar. It also had a major role to play in the British conquest of Burma in 1885. When the members of the Indian Independence League told Kishan Singh that the 1/1 Jats weren’t real soldiers but hired killers, mercenaries, Arjun explained to him that every soldier was paid for and so a mercenary. Troubled with the answer he gave Kishan Singh he took his doubts to Lieutenant-Colonel Buckland but came away even more disturbed. In the colonel’s voice there had been an undertone of surprise that someone as intelligent as Arjun had taken it an offence to be called a mercenary. Arjun had always thought himself to be a class apart from the poor of his country; they were the privileged, the elite. The discovery that they too were poor, that they too were impoverished by the circumstances of their country came as a shocking revelation.

Fighting for the British army in World War II, Arjun for the first time had doubts about their place in the world. “What are we? We’ve learned to dance the tango and we know how to eat roast beef with a knife and fork. The truth is that except for the colour of the skin, most people in India wouldn’t even recognise us as Indians” (TGP 439). This quest for personal identity figures prominently in the novel. If it was recognition of personal identity for Arjun, it was a question of national identity for Dolly. She confessed to Uma, “If I went to Burma now I would be a foreigner - they would call me a Kalaa like they do Indians – a trespasser” (TGP 113). She was afraid that in her own country she
would be considered an outsider from across the sea. As Ashcroft et al. remark, “A valid and active sense of self may have been eroded by dislocation, the experience of enslavement, transportation or ‘voluntary’ removal for indentured labour. Or it may have been destroyed by cultural denigration, the conscious and unconscious oppression of the indigenous personality and culture by a supposedly superior racial or cultural model” (9).

The incursion of the Europeans affected not only the lives of the native people but their environment as well. Some of the negative effects of colonialism are destruction of environment, loss of natural habitat, natural vegetation and wild life, excessive exploitation of resources, spread of diseases and deforestation. The exploitation of natural resources and the destruction of the flora and fauna by the colonizers for their profit affected the ecology of the colonized world. Ashcroft et al. point out, “The material and global issue of environmentalism is an important and growing aspect of post-colonial theory. The destruction of the environment has been one of the damaging effects of industrialization” (The Empire Writes Back 213). The Glass Palace creates awareness about the environment and draws our attention to crucial environmental issues.

The motivation for colonization of India, Burma and Malaya was an increased access to the natural resources of these countries. As Auradkar points out, “The initial impulse for a colonial enterprise is often commercial, leading to the establishment of a trading outpost. Thus it is the Burmese teak and the Malayan rubber that spured the British colonial drive” (97). Colonialism resulted in an unscrupulous exploitation of nature. The colonization of Burma turned Mandalay into a commercial hub and there was a plunder of its natural resources. “Resources were being exploited with an energy and efficiency hitherto undreamt of” (TGP 66). The Mandalay palace was refurbished to serve
the conquerors’ pleasure and the gardens were dug up to make rooms for tennis courts and polo grounds.

The callous cutting of jungles through systematized, mechanical ways feels so cruel. Teak trees were killed during the dry season and left to dry sometimes for three years or even more for the density of teak is so high that it would not remain afloat when the heartwood is moist. The killing was achieved with a girdle of incisions, thin slits carved into the wood. When they were judged dry enough to float that they were marked for felling. Ghosh uses words like dead, killing and assassinated to show the ruthless exploitation of the environment. The trees themselves seemed to protest against this devastation. “Dead though they were, the trees would sound great tocsins of protest as they fell, unloosening thunderclap explosions that could be heard miles away” (TGP 69). When a tree was cut it brought down everything in its path; rafts of saplings and thick stands of bamboo were flattened in moments thus destroying the entire surrounding. Such was the colonial greed for teak that Ghosh points it out as “a tree that had felleddynasties, caused invasions, created fortunes, brought a new way of life into being” (TGP 71).

Colonized areas suffered severe environmental consequences as cash cropping dominated the agriculture of the region. Human greed is the cause for this devastation of environment. In Malacca many spice gardens where pepper plants grew were replaced by rubber plantations as they found out that huge profits could be made out of rubber trees—“if there’s any tree on which money could be said to grow then this is it – rubber” (TGP 184). Elsa told Dolly that when she first visited Gunung Jerai, it was a jungle, a beautiful place beyond imagining. But the dense, towering, tangled, impassable jungle with the tops of trees meeting far above, forming an endless, fan-vaulted ceiling was laid bare, made inhabitable. The clearing of the jungle was very hard, dangerous almost impossible like a
battle-field with the jungle fighting back every inch of the way. When Elsa visited the same place after several months, “the hillside looked as though it had been racked by a series of disasters: huge stretches of land were covered with ashes and blackened stumps” (TGP 200).

Dolly who loved the stillness of the jungle, felt there was something eerie about the orderly rows of rubber trees and its uniformity; about the fact that such sameness could be imposed upon a land of such natural exuberance. She was startled as the car moved from the heady profusion of the jungle into the ordered geometry of the rubber plantation for it looked like a labyrinth. Uma too had the same feeling when she visited the rubber plantation. Seeing the trees ranged in lines as far as the eye could follow, thousands upon thousands of them, Uma felt herself dizzy. “It was life staring at stripes on a fast moving screen” (TGP 228).

Though the plantation looked green and beautiful, it was actually a vast machine, made of wood and flesh with every piece of it resisting, fighting and waiting for one to give up, explained Mathew to Uma. He showed her the coconut-shell cup that was fastened in one of the tree’s trunk. While almost all the cups were half full, that cup was almost empty. Though a lot of human effort had gone into making it the same as the rest, the truth was that it was fighting back. He also admitted that he moulded the jungle into what he wanted it to be, taken good care of it and though it seemed all the parts had been fitted carefully together, when he tried to make the whole machine work every bit of it was fighting back. Uma says it with a laugh that some of the trees were rebels by instinct.

In India food crops were replaced with poppies for it was opium that sustained the British rule in the country. Making a visit to her village in an attempt to see her daughter, Deeti finds that the landscape on the shores of the river had changed a great deal since her
childhood. The countryside was blanketed with the parched remnants of opium plants. “Except for the foliage of a few mango and jackfruit trees, nowhere was there anything green to relieve the eye . . . . Where were the vegetables, the grains?” (SOP 192) Looking around she realised that here too the situation was the same as in the village she had left behind. “Everyone’s land was in hock to the agents of the opium factory: every farmer had been served with a contract the fulfilling of which left them with no option but to strew their land with poppies” (SOP 193).

Gradually the opium culture percolated into the lifestyle of the people of Ghaziapur making them drowsy and numb. The novel draws our attention to the health hazards that the local people were subjected to. The odour of opium fused with the atmosphere causing lung infections. The poor people working in the opium factory developed a habit for opium intake resulting in inertia and “a miasma of lethargy seemed always to hang over the factory’s surroundings. The monkeys that lived around it . . . unlike others of their kind they never chattered or fought or stole from passers-by; when they came from the trees it was to lap at the open sewers . . . .” (SOP 91).

Imperialism resulted in not just the colonization of human and material resources but also the colonization of mind. Ngugi asserts,

> The real aim of colonialism was to control people’s wealth and this was imposed through military conquest and subsequent political dictatorship. But its most important area of domination was the mental universe of the colonized, the control through culture of how people perceived themselves and their relationship to the world. Economic and political control can never be complete or effective without mental control. (16)
Saya John felt the English were superior to the natives, “... someone you can learn from. To bend the work of nature to your will ...” (TGP 75). The exploitation of natural resources was interpreted by him as an enterprise that made the trees of the earth useful to human beings. “Left to ourselves none of us would have been here harvesting the bounty of nature” (TGP 74). Until Europeans came the elephants were used only in pagodas and palaces, for wars and ceremonies. Saya strongly believed it was the British who found that tame elephants could be made to work for human profit, they who thought of methods of girdling trees and the system of floating them downriver and even such details as the structure and placement of the huts in the teak camps. He was indebted to them for the entire way of life which he believed was their creation. M. S. Nagarajan in his book Literary Criticism and Theory remarks that the “colonial ideology created colonial subjects who behaved in the way the colonized had programmed. They willingly accepted the superiority of the British and their own inferiority. It produced a ‘cultural cringe’ so to speak”(187). Rajkumar was also convinced that in the absence of the British Empire, Burmese economy would collapse.

D.K. Fieldhouse affirms that the basis of imperial authority was the mental attitude of the colonist. “His acceptance of subordination - whether through a positive sense of common interest with the parent state, or through inability to conceive of any alternative - made empire durable” (qtd. Said, Culture and Imperialism 11). Beni Prasad Dey, the District Collector who was given charge of the upkeep of the royal family arrived in Ratnagiri at a time when politics was much on people’s minds. There were meetings, marches and protests everywhere; people were asked to boycott foreign goods and women were setting fire to foreign clothes. It was at the same time that the Japanese had defeated the Russians and the newspapers were full of news about the war. When the collector
called on the king at Outram House, the king wondered if they would be witnessing the victory of an Eastern country over a European power. The collector was quick to respond that the century old British Empire was stronger than it had ever been and “its influence will persist for centuries to come” (*TGP* 107).

Rakhee Moral observes, “His easy defiance of imperial power before the king and his endorsement of its capacity to “persist” and “influence” is an act in which he is at once, and perhaps unwittingly, mimic man and comprador. Ghosh’s ready understanding of Dey’s behaviour and his tongue-in-cheek reference to the British as *amader gurujon* (our teachers) smacks of the same ambivalence and sense of compromise with which such acts of complicity and mimicry are attended in the colonized space” (145).

The minds of people like Beni Prasad Dey and Arjun were so deeply colonized that they became submissive agents of the empire who wanted to please the rulers by all means. Arjun thought British life was better and hence tried to internalize the European manners and eating habits by imitating them. He resorted to European food to qualify himself as a member of an elite class of officers. Every meal in the officers’ mess with ham, bacon, beef and pork was an infringement of taboo and though he had to struggle to chew on a piece of beef or pork and keep the morsels down, he persisted considering it as small battles that tested their manhood and their fitness to enter the class of officers. Through their associations with the Europeans, Arjun and his fellow officers saw themselves as pioneers. They considered it a privilege to live in proximity with westerners sharing the same quarters and eating the same food. Arjun proudly announced, “we’re the first Indians who’re not weighed down by the past . . . we’re the ones who actually live with the westerners” and professed “only when every Indian is like us will the country become truly modern” (*TGP* 279).
Fanon asserts, “Colonialism is not satisfied with holding a people in its grip and emptying the native’s brain of all forms and content . . . it turns to the past of the oppressed people, distorts, disfigures and destroys it” (169). Arjun’s mind was completely shut to the reality that when Kishan Singh read the pamphlet signed by Amreek Singh of the Indian Independence League, questioning the Indian soldiers to think what they were fighting for and why they had to sacrifice their lives for an Empire that has kept them in slavery for two hundred years, he warned them that anyone found with the pamphlets will be up for court martial. Alison was right when she told Arjun, “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” (TGP 376).

When Dinu was sent by Doh Say to intercede with the soldiers from the Indian National Army he did not expect to see Arjun. But the condition of Arjun and Kishan Singh moved him to pity. Seated on a tree stump in front of the Tai, Dinu watched the soldier approaching him. His uniform was in tatters and his shoes so badly worn that his toes were visible. From his carriage and built, Dinu guessed he must be in his early twenties. But his face was so gaunt and he looked almost wizened. The whites of his eyes had a jaundiced tinge and he looked malnourished with discolouration on his skin and blisters in the corners of his mouth. Dinu recognised him as Kishan Singh and after a while came Arjun followed by a group of thirty men.

Arjun’s condition was even worse. “A part of his scalp had been eaten by a sore; the wound extended from above his right ear almost as far as his eye. His face was covered in lacerations and insect bites. His cap was gone and so were the buttons of his tunic” (TGP 516). He was no more the handsome Arjun who had made an impression on his sister’s friends; no more the Arjun, Dinu had met at Morningside. “There was something magnetic about him – a self-confidence, a habit of command” (TGP 369). It
was as though he was looking not at Arjun but at his pounded remains, the husk of the man that he had once been. This meeting with Arjun left Dinu profoundly shaken. Fighting for the Empire, these soldiers were reduced to nothing.

It is this colonized mind that compelled the Indian soldiers fight for a cause that was not theirs. Saya John was astounded by the willingness of the Indian sepoys in Singapore to follow any command of their masters. There was a kind of innocence and simplicity in their eyes but their minds were conditioned in such a way that they would be prepared to set fire to whole villages if their officers ordered. Saya felt such innocent evil was more dangerous than anything he could think of. Uma was disturbed to see the Burmese rebellion being rooted out with the help of the Indian soldiers. She could not stand the sight of her countrymen fighting against people who should be their friends. Giani Amreek Singh who had served the British army before joining the Indian Independence League talked about the necessity of opening the eyes of Indian soldiers for they did not understand that they were being used to conquer people. On the other hand they were made to believe that they were going to set people free from bad kings, evil customs and some such thing. “It took a long time to understand that in their eyes freedom exists wherever they rule” (TGP 224).

Another feature of imperial oppression was the control they wielded over the language of the natives. The colonized supposed their native tongue to be the speech of those who bore the yoke and English to be the language of power. Neel’s father believed that their fortunes were built on their ability to communicate with those who held the reins of power. The colonising power on the mind was so intense that Neel was not allowed to use Bhojpuri in which he was accustomed to speak to his servant Parimal in his infancy and childhood for his father feared that it would ruin his accent when it came time for him
to learn the language of power. “Historically this has always been how European imperialism made itself palatable to itself, for what could be better for its self-image than native subjects who express assent to the outsider’s knowledge and power, implicitly accepting European judgement on the undeveloped, backward or degenerate nature of their own society” (Said, *Culture Imperialism* 180).

The acceptance of the western culture as superior and their own as inferior forced the colonial subject to imitate the language, behaviour, attitude, language and culture of the colonial master. Homi Bhaba refers to this phenomenon of imitating the west as ‘mimicry’. Mimicry seems to be an opportunistic method of copying the person in power. Carrying cargos to the teak camps, Saya John always wore European clothes: a sola topee, leather boots and khaki trousers. He would change into European clothes whenever he went to meet the English forest assistants in the camp. As Bhaba remarks Saya John is like many other colonial subjects “the effect of a flawed colonial mimesis in which to be anglicised is emphatically not to be English” (87).

Arjun in *The Glass Palace* is another example of this colonial mimicry. His vocabulary consisted mainly of jargon intermixed with English slang. He, along with the other Indian officers in the British army ate English food: bacon, ham and sausages for breakfast; roast beef and pork chops for dinner, drank whisky, beer and wine smoked cigarettes to prove that they were eligible to be rulers. But this process of imitation suppressed his own cultural identity and left him in a disillusioned and confused state at the end.

Colonial education had a role to play in assimilating the native elite to its way of thinking. Beni Prasad Dey, a member of Indian Civil Service had been educated abroad and did not fit into the Indian scheme of things. He is a typical representative of
Macaulay’s model of a class of people that the British rulers wanted to create – “people who would be Indian in blood and colour but English in taste, in opinions, in morals and in intellect” (430) He did not want a “conservative, housebound wife but a girl who would be willing to step out into society; someone young who wouldn’t be resistant to learning modern ways” (TGP 158) as he would be working with Europeans. He wanted a flexible girl who was not too settled in her ideas and behaviour and selected Uma after seeing her at a puja when she was sixteen. But “the wifely virtues she could offer him he had no use for: Cambridge had taught him to want more, to make sure nothing was held in abeyance. . . .” (TGP 153).

Uma was bored with the mechanical life, playing the part of an elegant hostess in social gatherings and so decided to leave him for good. In the ensuing dialogue the collector talks about his broken dreams: “I used to dream about the kind of marriage I wanted . . . To live with a woman as an equal, in spirit and intellect: this seemed to be 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 is not possible, not here in India, not for us” (TGP 173).

Dinu is another product of western education, who along with Arjun called the Indian nationalists as idiots. He believed in the white man’s mission of civilising the world and criticized Uma for always talking about the evils of the Empire. He listed out a range of social evils like the caste system, untouchability and widow burning that were prevalent in Indian even before the inception of imperialism. Young people like Arjun, Beni Prasad and Dinu, under the impact of western education, became pawns in the hands of colonialists to implement their expansionist strategies putting on the pretence of reform.
The novels also project various kinds of colonial subjectivities. Colonialism led to suppression and resulted in the subjugation of people at different levels. In postcolonial theory Subalternity is the term used to express the condition of these oppressed and ‘subaltern’ to define a marginalized group rendered voiceless by oppression. The first and foremost victims of colonisation were the kings and princes. In 1857, when the mob that had gathered to see the last Mughal Emperor Shah Zafar and his two sons being escorted to the city became unruly and threatening, the major ordered the princes’ execution to keep the mob under control. They were brought before the crowd and their brains were blown out in full public view. After the suppression of the uprising the blind emperor was deposed to Rangoon, where he lived in a small house.

Twenty eight years later Sovereign king Thebaw and his proud queen Supayalat were mute spectators to the happenings in Burma- the conquest of their country by the British army, the looting of the palace and the pilfering of their valuables by the British soldiers. They had internalised their subjugation and their voices were silenced even when they were exiled to India and forced to live in shabby surroundings. Even the funeral of King Thebaw, as the first princess wrote to Dolly, was such a miserable affair that the queen refused to attend. The government was represented not by any higher official but by a Deputy Collector. “You would have wept to see it. No one could believe that this was the funeral of Burma’s last king” (TGP 205). The royal family wanted the coffin to be stored and transported to Burma some day, but the British authorities forcibly removed the coffin from them and built a monument on his grave almost overnight. Fearing that the king’s body might become a rallying point in Burma they made it impossible for them to take him back to the place of his ancestors. The novelist repeatedly uses the phrase
‘Burma’s last king’ to emphasise how the imperialists knelt a death blow to centuries of sovereignty in Burma and were also careful to erase even the traces of kingdom.

Next in rank came the Indian officers in the British Empire. Beni Prasad Dey, the district collector of Ratnagiri, the administrative head was supposed to have achieved the ultimate status of an Indian as an esteemed civil servant in the bureaucratic Raj. But the fear of being thought lacking by his British colleagues haunted him. He was responsible for dealing with the Burmese royal family and the Bombay secretariat had made it clear that he would also be held responsible if there were to be a scandal or accident at Outram House, the residence of the Burmese royalty. When the news of the princess’ pregnancy reached the secretariat in Bombay, his fear became true. He was made the scapegoat for twenty years of neglect and his tenure in Ratnagiri was terminated. In a depressed state of mind he went to the boat club, took a boat and ventured into the open sea never to return. He had been a good man, an honest man, a man of great intelligence and wielded immense power as a district collector. Though considered to be one of the successful Indians of his generation and a model for his countrymen “his position had brought him nothing but unease and uncertainty” (TGP 186). Uma wondered if one day all of India would become a shadow of the likes of Beni Prasad - people trying to live their lives in conformity to incomprehensible rules.

If the likes of Prasad Dey had to undergo mental subjectivity, the subjugation that the plantation workers faced in Malaya was both physical and mental. Every morning the tappers had to assemble for muster and the estate manager would “pour out obscenities in Tamil and English, singling out the object of his wrath with the tip of his pointing cane: You dog of a coolie, keep your black face up . . . .” (TGP 231). Uma was disturbed by this spectacle and she felt that she was watching a manner of life that she believed to be
extinct, like watching something that no longer existed. Mathew justified this act saying that they were well fed and well looked after. But Uma was quick to respond that this is what masters always say about their slaves for she could sense terror in their faces. Rajan explained to Arjun the kind of work they were made to do in the plantation. They were constantly watched, supervised and policed and had to exactly do the work they were asked to do. It was not even like being made into an animal for they had their instincts; worse than that, it was like being made into a machine- “having your mind taken away and replaced by a clockwise mechanism. Anything was better than that” (TGP 522).

In *Sea of Poppies* we come across a range of subjugation being enforced on the natives. The natives were compelled to cultivate cash crops in the place of food crops and when the people refused to accept the cash advances forced on them by the British agents, they would leave the silver hidden in the house. It was no use telling the magistrate that they had not accepted the money but their thumb prints were forged. The magistrate too earned commission on opium that he would not let them off. Consequently people were pushed to dire poverty that they indentured themselves. Their living condition was so dismal that they had no money even to repair the roofs of their houses. In the old days the straw from the wheat harvest would be used to repair the damaged roofs, “but with the sahibs forcing everyone to grow poppy, no one had thatch to spare” (SOP 29). Even if it had to be bought from people who lived in faraway villages the expense was such that they had no money to spare. Kalua and Deeti came across hundreds of impoverished people who were “driven from their villages by the flood of flowers that had washed over the country side: lands that had once provided sustenance were now swamped by poppies” (SOP 202).
Ghosh draws upon an array of physical pain and torture the colonised were subjected to. The smell and working conditions in the opium factory were so appalling that Deeti who went to fetch her sick husband felt like fainting. She was startled to see bare-bodied men who looked more like ghouls, sunk waist deep in tanks of opium tramping round to soften the sludge. Their eyes were vacant, glazed and when they were not able to move, they sat on the edges stirring the dark ooze with their feet. They were constantly monitored by white overseers who were armed with fearsome instruments like metal scoops, glass ladles and long-handled rakes. Young boys were also engaged in the factory. When one of the boys dropped a ball of opium he was beaten by the overseers that his howls and shrieks were echoing through the chamber.

The migrants in Ibis were subjected to various forms of physical and mental assaults. They were treated brutally by the English officers. Not familiar with the rationing of drinking water in the ship, the grimityas began to scramble up the ladder, demanding for water but they were cruelly beaten by the maiirstries. “Their lathis came crashing down on the grimityas’ skulls and shoulders, knocking them back inside, one after another” (SOP 402). With a whip in hand, the captain warned them that any disorder on board would be met with severe consequences. The realization that their time on board would be ruled by noose and the whip put them in a spell of fear.

The living conditions in the ship were very appaling; at nights the fana was so crowded with the lascars sleeping in the jhulis and to walk through it was like “trying to negotiate a thicket of low-hanging beehives” (SOP 454). The officer did not leave any opportunity to harass the lascars. Paulette’s childhood friend Jodu, signed as a lascar in Ibis was beaten up so fiercely that she could not stand the sight of his bruised body –“ his eyes were swollen and blackened, the whites barely visible, his wounds were still oozing
blood and the fabric of his borrowed banyan was striped with stains” (SOP 483). He even made lascar Jodu saw his jharu into half. The shorter the broom, he said, “cleaner the work... you will know what the tatti was made of when it went in the mouth” (SOP 184).

If Kalua’s sub-human treatment by the landlords reveals the state of an untouchable in a caste-ridden society, the menial treatment that Neel is subjected to in Ibis exposes the state of the colonized in the colonial empire. When Neel and Ah Fatt were led around the decks on their daily Rogues’ March in the afternoons, Mr. Crowle had fun by slashing at the convicts’ ankles with a rope that made them skip and jump to the tune of his rhyme:

Handy-spandy, Jack o’dandy
Loved plum cake and sugar candy
Bought some at a grocer’s shop
And off he went with a hop-hop-hop. (SOP 453)

Having fun at their expense did not end up there. When Neel and Ah Fatt were summoned to the deck by the first mate and the Subedar, Neel was asked to urinate on Ah Fatt and when he refused, Ah Fatt was allured with a ball of opium and was asked to perform the feat on Neel. Closing his eyes Ah Fatt did as he was asked to, to the great amusement of the officers. Later when he begged for the drug, the mate flicked a ball of gum straight into his mouth from the paper which was actually a ‘gobful of goatshit’ (SOP 459).

The novel gives a graphic picture of the treatment meted to Jodu when he was found with Munia in the deck. He was thrown down from the deck house to the main deck
by a silahdar, a drop of a little more than five feet which hit his shoulders. The subedar pulled him upright, suspended him in the air and drove his clenched fist into his face that his vision was blurred and a spurt of blood gushed from his mouth. The subedar knocked the other side of his face with the back of his hand that wrenched him from the subedar’s grip and sent him sprawling on the ground. He was whipped, his banyan was torn down, his trowsers were ripped and the rope slammed down on the bare skin of his buttocks which forced a cry from his lips. He was made to crawl like a dog and locked in a chokey. When they were done with him, he was no better than a corpse to be hauled away. Such inhuman treatment is beyond imagination but that was the lot of the lascars and grimityas in the ship.

The natives were subjected to racial discrimination too. In Burma the Indians were considered to be a race inferior to them. Working as an errand boy Rajkumar was always addressed to as Kalaa, a derogatory term used for Indians which refers to the colour of their skin – you fool of an Indian, you coal-black Kalaa, half-wit Kalaa are some of the terms he is addressed to by Ma Cho. Dinu is called Zerbadi, a swear word for people who are half-Indian, half-Burmese. “Race continues to be relevant to post-colonial theory for two reasons: first, because it is so central to the growing power of imperial discourse during the nineteenth century, and second, because it remains a central and unavoidable fact of modern society that race is used as the dominant category of daily discrimination and prejudice” (The Empire Writes Back 207).

Racial policies prevailed in the recruitment of Indian soldiers for the army. When Arjun announced that he had got into The Indian Military Academy in Dehra Dun, the whole household was astonished because for years recruitment into the British Indian army was ruled by racial policies that excluded most men including those from Bengal.
Most of the soldiers were from the northern part of India and in Calcutta joining the army was almost unheard of. Tamils were also considered to be one of the Indian groups racially unfit for soldiering and so most of them were recruited as indentured labourers and plantation workers.

In the army everything appeared to be ruled by regulations and procedures, but underneath there was prejudice, distrust and suspicion. Arjun was the only Bengali officer in the army and he felt that his own men found it hard to accept him as an officer. There was a separation between the Indians and British too. The Indian army officers were paid less than their English counterparts though they ate the same food and did the same kind of work. The British talked about freedom and equality but the officers found that this equality was just a carrot on a stick - something that was suspended in front of them to keep them going but was always kept out of their reach.

The Indian soldiers in the British army were not allowed to carry umbrellas because in the East, umbrellas were a sign of sovereignty. The British did not want their soldiers to be over-ambitious and though there was no written rule about it, umbrellas were not found in the cantonment. One day Arjun went into town with Hardy and a group of other friends when it began to rain. They stepped into a shop and the shopkeeper offered to lend them umbrellas. Arjun accepts the offer but Hardy tells him that they cannot be seen with an umbrella. When Arjun asked Captain Pearson about this he looked at Arjun as if he were a worm and said the soldiers did not carry umbrellas because they were not women.

In the clubs in the smaller towns of Malaya signs were put up in the door saying, ‘No Asiatics allowed’. One hot afternoon in Singapore, Arjun and Hardy jumped into a crowded swimming pool filled with European expatriates and their families. In a few
minutes they found themselves alone: the pool had emptied as soon as they entered the water. “We’re meant to die for this colony - but we can’t use the pools” (TGP 345) laughed Arjun. Once he found himself being called Klang which is a derogatory reference to the chains worn by the earliest Indian workers brought to Malaya. Out of uniform Arjun and his friends were mistaken for coolies, in bazaars and market places, they were treated offhandedly as if of no account and worse they were looked upon with something akin to pity. The Indian troops at Sungei Pattani were treated badly by their English CO. He had a low opinion about the Indian officers, “he’d been known to call them coolies and to threaten them with his swagger stick. On one infamous occasion he had even kicked an officer” (TGP 353).

Fleeing from the Japanese attacks, Saya John and Alison were not allowed to board the train at Butterworth because it was meant only for Europeans. When Dinu asked for an explanation pointing out that it was war time and moreover it was an evacuation train, the guard quoted an instance that happened in Pening. Mr.Lim, the magistrate was turned back even though he had an evacuation letter and he was not allowed to board the ferries because he was Chinese. When Dinu tried to make them understand that it was not just the Europeans who were in danger, the station master shrugged him dismissively saying they were the rulers.

The racial hierarchies that Zachary experienced in the land made him sign as a crew in the Ibis. Through Zachary’s reminiscence of the happenings in the Gardiner’s shipyard at Baltimore, Ghosh reveals something of the oppressive life the Black people were subjected to.

He saw a face and a burst eyeball, the scalp torn open where a handspike had landed, the dark skin slick with blood. He remembered . . . the
encirclement of Freddy Douglas, set upon by four white carpenters; he remembered the howls, ‘Kill him, kill the damned nigger, knock his brains out’; he remembered how he and the other men of colour, all free, unlike Freddy, had held back, their hands stayed by fear’. (*SOP* 51)

It was Freddy’s voice not reproaching them for their failure to defend him, but urging them to leave, “It’s all about jobs; the whites won’t work with you, freeman or slave: keeping you out is their way of saving their bread” (*SOP* 52) that had made him quit the shipyard.

Colonial subjectivity is reflected not only in the racial discrimination but also in the hybrid races that was produced by the dislocation of people. “Ambivalence and hybridity have continued to be useful among post-colonial critics because they provide a subtler and more nuanced view of colonial subjectivity and colonial relationships” (*The Empire Writes Back* 206). The custom of the ruling dynasties of Burma was to marry within their houses and only a man descended of Konbaung blood in both lines was eligible to marry into the Royal Family. Several Collectors from Ratnagiri tried to find suitable grooms, eligible Burmese bachelors for the Burmese princesses who were in the prime of their womanhood, but the queen felt that not a single one of them was a fit match for a true-born Konbaung princess. “She would not allow her daughters to defile their blood by marrying beneath themselves” (*TGP* 115).

When it was found that the Burmese princess was pregnant with the coachman’s child, Dey the collector of Ratnagiri was disgusted. “Was this love then: this coupling in the darkness, a princess of Burma and a Marathi coachman” (*TGP* 152), but the queen introduced him as a fine young man and asked the Collector to convey the good news to his superiors in the Government of India. The Collector was amazed that that the Queen
should “choose to make light of such a scandal” the queen retaliates “there is no scandal in what my daughter has done. The scandal lies in what you have done to us; in the circumstances to which you have reduced us; in our very presence here” (TGP 150). The English did not take the scandal lightly for as Beni Prasad tells his wife the princess’s pregnancy awoke them to the enormity of what they had done to the royal family. “. . . they are tolerant in many things but not this. They like to keep their races tidily separate” (TGP 173).

Mixing of races and castes became inevitable as people moved from place to place and from one country to another. The new world created by the Imperialists comprised of a mélange of nationalities: Indians in Burma and Malacca, Burmese in India, Malaccans in India and Burma, French, Irish and Americans in India, British in the whole of South-East Asia and Indians in America. “Hybridity occurs in the post-colonial societies because of the dispossession of indigenous people and their forced assimilation through racism into new social order” (Sharma 155).

Saya John is a fine example of this breed of hybridity. He was an orphan, brought up by catholic priests from Portugal, Macao and Goa. He looked Chinese, carried a Christian name, wore British clothes and spoke English, Hindustani and Burmese. Saya John’s wife was from Singapore and his son Mathew was married to an American. So Alison’s lineage can be traced to China, Singapore and America. Ma Cho for whom Rajkumar worked as an errand boy was half Indian and half Burmese. Rajkumar too identified himself with Saya John as a ‘washer man’s dog’ (TGP 10). He did not belong to any place. He landed in Burma as a Bengali orphan, married Dolly, the hand maid of the Burmese Queen and had two sons Neel and Dinu. He also fathered the son of an Indian
woman working in the rubber plantation in Malaya. Dolly’s son Neel who was half Indian and half Burmese married Uma’s niece Jaya, a Hindu from Bengal.

Young points out “The forms of sexual exchange brought about by colonialism were themselves both mirrors and consequences of the mode of economic exchange that constituted the basis of colonial relations” (161). *Sea of Poppies* presents an array of exiles from the four corners of the world, men and women brought together by the globalization of nineteenth century. Captain Chillingworth and his wife were from England, but his wife left him to marry his first mate Texeira, a Portuguese from Macao. Zachary Reid the second mate was allegedly white, but he was actually a Mulatto. Deeti a high-caste Rajput widow married Kalua, an untouchable from the leather workers family while Munia, a Hindu is in love with Jodu, a Muslim boatman. Paulette’s father was French and her mother was from Mauritius- “it is like her native place” (*SOP* 137). Ah Fatt was half Indian and half Chinese. “Since the nineteenth century consolidated the world system, all cultures and societies today are intermixed. No country on earth is made up of homogenous natives, each has its immigrants, its internal ‘others’ and each society, very much like the world we live in is hybrid” (Said, *Reflection on Exile and other Literary and Cultural Essays* 196).

Uma exposes the reality of colonialism when she tells Dinu that “we must not be deceived by the idea that imperialism is an enterprise of reform though the colonialists would want us to believe this. They do not ponder over the rights and wrongs of societies they want to conquer. They are guilty of evils like racialism, aggression and conquest. Tens of millions of people have been killed in the process of this empire’s conquest of the world” (*TGP* 294). The hypocrisy of the colonialists is exposed in the questions that the queen poses to the collector,
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 tyrants you said, enemies of freedom, murderers. English alone understood liberty, we are told; they do not put kings and princes to death; they run through laws. If that is so, why has King Thebaw never brought to trial? Is it a crime to defend your country against an invader? Would the English not do the same? (TGP 150)

The colonial hypocrisy is also brought out in their pretence that the war over China will not be for opium but for the freedom of trade and that of Chinese people. Mr. Burnham who amassed wealth by exporting opium to China tells Raja Neel Rattan “Free trade is a right conferred on man by God and its principles apply as much to opium as to any other article of trade” (SOP 115). He further justified that opium had medicinal properties and if not for opium it would be impossible to practise modern medicine or surgery without such chemicals as morphine, codeine and narcotine and without it, “the streets of London would be thronged with coughing, sleepless, incontinent multitudes.” But the truth behind the war was that opium sustained British rule in India and “if not for opium, the drain of silver from Britain and her colonies would be too great to sustain” (SOP 112).

The questionable ideals of the Imperialists are explicit from the conversation that takes place between the representatives of Colonial rule Mr. Burnham, Mr. Doughty and Justice Kendalbushe. Mr. Burnham proclaims, “No one dislikes war more than I do—indeed I abhor it. But it cannot be denied that there are there are times when is not merely just and necessary, but also humane. In China that time has come: nothing else will do” (SOP 260). Concealing the fact that it was the British who compelled the Indian peasants
to cultivate opium to sustain their rule Mr. Doughty affirms emphatically that there is no other alternative. “We need only think of the poor Indian peasant - what will become of him if his opium can’t be sold in China? . . . they’ll perish by the crore.” Kendalbushe adds in a spiritual tone, “a war is necessary if China is to be opened up to God’s word” (SOP 260). Amidst all these facade of doing good Captain Chillingworth comes out with the truth, “We are no different from the Pharaohs or the Mongols: the difference is only that when we kill people we feel compelled to pretend that it is for some higher cause. It is this pretence of virtue, I promise you that will never be forgiven by History” (SOP 262).

The result of a colonial enterprise is summed up in the following words of Queen Supayalat. “In a few decades the wealth will be gone - all the gems, the timber and the oil—and then they 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” (TGP 88). The same can be attributed to the Indian subcontinent as well. “Before the British came, India was one of the world’s biggest economies. For 200 years India dwindled and dwindled into almost nothing. . . . Before the British came 25% of the world trade originated in India. By the time they left, it was less than 1%.” (Interview, Soutik Biswas, 2008)

Uma’s compatriots who gather in her New York apartment express anguish over the future of their country – “the conditions being created in their homeland were such as to ensure that their descendants would enter the new epoch as cripples, lacking the fundamental means of survival: that they would truly become in the future what they had never been in the past, a burden upon the world. Their homeland’s trajectory was being set on an unbudgeable path that would thrust it inexorably in the direction of future catastrophe” (TGP 222).
But as Arjun puts it, we do not have a hope. “The Empire has shaped everything in our lives and coloured everything in the world. It is a huge indelible stain which has tainted all of us. We cannot destroy it without destroying ourselves” (TGP 518). Errington Joseph in his book *Linguistics in a Colonial World* remarks “The colonial era ended two generations ago, but colonialism has not really gone away. Its after life has been all too clear in global north-south inequalities, in bloody politics from Timor to Iraq to Rowanda, in critical identity politics where former colonial powers are now homes to former colonial subjects and their children” (1).

Said claims though direct colonialism has largely ended; imperialism, which he describes as “the practice, the theory and the attitudes of a dominating metropolitan centre ruling a distant territory”, still lingers “in a kind of general cultural sphere as well as in specific political, ideological, economic and social practices” (*Culture and Imperialism* 8). As Uma points out, following the model of the British, the Belgians killed ten to eleven million people to seize the Congo. Japan and Germany too are aspiring for empires of their own. “The Empire has become the ideal of national success- a model for all nations to aspire to”’ (TGP 294). T.S. Eliot rightly observes that the meaning of the imperial past “has entered the reality of hundreds of millions of people, where its existence as shared memory and as a highly conflictual texture of culture, ideology and policy still exercises tremendous force” (qtd. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* 11).