

# LANGUAGE IN INDIA

Strength for Today and Bright Hope for Tomorrow

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## A Study of Strong Women in Amitav Ghosh's *The Glass Palace*

Sridevi, G., M.A., M.Phil. Scholar

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### Women in *The Glass Palace*

Amitav Ghosh in *The Glass Palace* explains how the three generations of women show their uniqueness among the men. The first generation women are Ma Cho, Dolly and Uma Dey. These women characters in the beginning are dependent upon men. But later they realized the type of life they are leading. Then these three characters began to depend upon their own strength. At last they prove that they are not inferior to men. These women show progress in both the family and the society. Through their achievement, subsequent two generations are able to rely on their own strength.

The women in the novel seek their liberation in several ways.

### As Life Givers

Amitav Ghosh's fictions portray women as a life-giver. Both Dolly and Uma Dey contributed to the welfare of others in their lives.

An important incident that occurs early in the novel sets the tone of the women characters. The first female character introduced in the novel is Ma Cho. She stands as a preserver of cultural

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and spiritual essence. Her character gives the woman strength of leading life alone without a family.

### **Struggle Faced by Single Women**

The character of Ma Cho reveals the struggle of a single woman who suffers to maintain a status in life. Amitav Ghosh mentions the details of Ma Cho only in the first part of *The Glass Palace* novel. Moreover, Ma Cho being a woman shows that her strength is superior to men in the novel. Ma Cho is a half-Indian. She has no family, so she leads her life alone. She has her own small food-stall. The power of woman is depicted by her character in the novel. She was in her mid-thirties, more Burmese than Indian in appearance. Ma Cho leads her life very independently without depending on others. Even though she suffers from society's manacles, she never underestimates herself and leads an independent life.

Ma Cho's stall consisted of a couple of benches, sheltered beneath the stilts of a bamboo-walled hut. She did her cooking sitting by an open fire, perched on a small stool (6).

This explains her gratitude towards her customers who visit her stall regularly. It mentions that she is very sincere towards her work. Here her strength is revealed. Even though she is alone, she is very strong in her attitude. In such conditions also she gives a job to Rajkumar. Rajkumar is an orphaned eleven-year-old boy. Here the feminism in her is shown towards Rajkumar as a caretaker.

### **Dolly in *The Glass Palace***

The central character in *The Glass Palace* novel is Dolly. She is the only one character whose entire generation is mentioned in the novel. She strives hard to live up to her family to maintain the good name the family has earned in the community.

Dolly is the heroine of the novel. In this novel she is introduced from childhood. Dolly, a nine-year-old girl, looks after the younger princess. Gradually from a child she grows into an attractive young girl. A local man named Sawant takes charge of the servants. Dolly loses her virginity to Sawant. Then she attains mental and physical maturity. Her friend coaxes her to marry Rajkumar.

Dolly gives birth to Neel and Dinu. Dolly nurses Dinu, perceiving her role as a mother more important than that of a wife. But the suffering changed her attitude and she feels, "I couldn't go back to the life I'd led before" (239). A feeling of emptiness spreads. When her elder son Neel dies, she gracefully accepts the pain and suffering. A visit to the Buddhist nunnery reveals her strong desire for renunciation. She proves her indomitable spirit and strength of convictions in entering the monastery and withdrawing from the world. Her weakness is her source of strength. She stands for courage, honour, hope, compassion, and sacrifice. Her spirit lifts other characters.

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Dolly, as a daughter, as a wife and as a mother shows that women can fulfill herself in a loving relationship with others. Her way of life reveals her affection towards her family.

### **Uma Dey – A Truly Modern Individual**

Then, there is the case of Uma Dey, wife of Beni Prasad Dey. She is a woman with the courage to break free from the chains of limiting beliefs, patterns and religious conditions that have traditionally kept women suppressed and unable to realize their true beauty and power. After her husband's death, she becomes a leader of the movement to free India.

Uma Dey is the first truly modern individual in Ghosh's narrative. Uma Dey's character can be interpreted by socialist feminism. She seeks to change social structures by redefining how women's work is rewarded and valued. She attempts to transform relationships between women and men and among workers.

Amitav Ghosh introduced Uma Dey from the second part of the novel. She plays a vital role in giving shape to the novel. Her original name was Uma Debi but after her marriage it changed to Uma Dey. Uma's family home is in Calcutta. Her house was named as Lankasuka. One of her aunts introduces Beni Prasad Dey to her family. Uma's marriage to him was as unlike as any other. The Governor and many English civil servants and army officers attended her marriage. In 1905, the nineteenth year of the King's exile, a new District Collector arrived in Ratnagiri. The Collector's name was Beni Prasad Dey. His wife was Uma Dey. She was fifteen years junior to him. She is very attractive and charming. She was a tall and vigorous looking woman with thick, curly hair. Uma Dey wears sari in a new way with odds and ends borrowed from European costume. Here it clearly depicts how Uma Dey differs from other women in Ratnagiri. Because of this she got comments from Queen Supalayat:

The Queen had seen many Collectors come and go, Indian and English; she thought of them as her enemies and gaolers, upstarts to be held in scant regard. But in this instance she was intrigued. 'I hope 'll bring his wife when he comes to call. It'll be interesting to see how this kind of sari is worn' (105).

### **Queen Supalayat and Uma Dey**

Queen Supalayat was attracted by Uma Dey's way of dressing. The Queen had seen many Collectors in Ratnagiri. But she was never disturbed like this before. She was very eager to invite Beni Prasad Dey to her Outram House. So that she can once again see the way of dressing of Uma Dey. Here importance is given more to Uma Dey than her husband. This depicts the power of woman in the novel.

### **Women and Self-realization**

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Amitav Ghosh's *The Glass Palace* from the beginning to the end revolves around the role played by women characters. Throughout this novel women continued their journey of self-realization. Hence Amitav Ghosh successfully populates strong women in *The Glass Palace*.

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