



The seed of this book was brought to India long before my own lifetime by my father and my uncle, the late Jagat Chandra Datta of Rangoon and Moulmein – 'The Prince' as he was known to his relatives. But neither my father nor my uncle would have recognised the crop that I have harvested. By the time I started work on this book, the memories they had handed on to me had lost their outlines, surviving often only as patterns of words, moods, textures. In attempting to write about places and times that I knew only at second- and third-hand, I found myself forced to create a parallel, wholly fictional world. *The Glass Palace* is thus unqualifiedly a novel and I can state without reservation that except for King Thebaw, Queen Supayalat and their daughters, none of its principal characters bear any resemblance to real people, living or deceased.

Perhaps it was the very elusiveness of what I was trying to remember that engendered in me a near-obsessive urge to render the backgrounds of my characters' lives as closely as I could. In the five years it took me to write *The Glass Palace* I read hundreds of books, memoirs, travelogues, gazetteers, articles and notebooks, published and unpublished; I travelled thousands of miles, visiting and re-visiting, so far as possible, all the settings and locations that figure in this novel; I sought out scores of people in India, Malaysia, Myanmar and Thailand. In the process I amassed vast arrears in debts of gratitude – the one kind of insolvency that one may justly consider a form of riches – a roster so large indeed that I can, at best, hope only to make a few gestures of acknowledgement towards the most pressing of these debts.

Of the people who took the time to speak to me during my travels in 1995, 1996, 1997 and 1999, I would particularly like to record my gratitude to the following. In Malaysia: Janaki Bai Devadasan, G. Anthony Samy, E. R. Samikannu, Anjali Suppiah, A. V. Pillai, A. Ponnusamy, R. Chinamma Rangaswamy, S. P. Velusamy; Lt. K. R. Das, Abraham Muttiah, F. R. Bhupalan, M. Y. B. Abbas, M. Gandhinathan, Eva Jenny Jothi, Nepal Mukherjee, N. G. Choudhury, V. Irulandy, S. P. Narayanswamy, S. Natarajan and Y. B. Tan Sri Dato K. R. Somasundaram of the National Land Finance Co-operative Society Ltd. I would also like to thank D. Narain Samy and other members of the staff of the Bukit Sidim Estate for their hospitality during my stay. But I am beholden most of all to the storied Puan Sri Janaki Athinagappan of Kuala Lumpur, who introduced me to many of the above, and who has, over the years, taken me and my family into her own. In Singapore, my thanks go to Elizabeth Choy, Ranjit Das, Baia Chandran, Dr. N. C. Sengupta and particularly my friend Dr. Shirley Chew who opened many doors for me in that city. In Thailand, for their kindness in taking the time to talk to me, I would like to record my gratitude to: Pippa Curwen, U Aye Saung, Khun Kya Oo, Khun Kya Noo, Lyndell Barry, Sam Kalyani, Nyi Nyi Lwin, Abel Tweed, Aung Than Lay, Ma Thet Thet Lwin, Than Kyaw Htay, Oo Reh, Tony Khoon, David Saw Wah, Raymond Htoo, David Abel, Teddy Buri, and particularly Ko Sunny (Mahinder Singh). U Tin Htun (E. C. Nanabawa) also went out of his way to help me during my travels and I owe him many thanks.

In India I would like to thank: Aruna Chatterjee, Col. Chatterjee, Dr. Sugato Bose, Capt. Lakshmi Sahgal, Lt-Gen N. S. Bhagat, Capt. Khazan Singh, Capt. Shobha Ram Tokas, Shiv Singh, Hari Ram, Major Devinder Nath Mohan, Capt. A. Yadav, Barin Das, Tarit Datta, Arabinda Datta and Derek Munro. Mrs Ahona Ghosh kindly allowed me to consult her father's handwritten notes of the 1942 trek; I owe her many thanks. I am also deeply grateful to Nellie Casyab, of Calcutta, a survivor of that great trek which the historian Hugh Tinker calls the 'Forgotten Long March' of 1941. It was she who introduced me to the Burmese and Anglo-Burmese worlds of Calcutta and put me in touch with the few other remaining survivors of that terrible ordeal. I

would also like to thank Albert Piperno, another survivor of the trek, for his efforts in recalling the bombing of Rangoon on December 23, 1941. I owe a very special debt to Lieutenant-Colonel Gurubakhsh Singh Dhillon, the last of the 'Red Fort Three', who met with me for several days and spent many hours recounting the events of December 1941.

I greatly regret that, for fear of reprisals against those concerned, I am unable to thank either my friends in Myanmar or those of their compatriots who went out of their way to speak to me, often at no little risk to themselves. I trust that, should any of them ever happen to read this, they will know who they are and understand the depth of my gratitude to each of them.

Sadly, circumstances permit me to acknowledge only one of my most salient debts in Yangon: to the late writer Mya Than Tint, who has been removed by his untimely death from the reach of the regime whose oppressions he had so long and so heroically endured. Mya Than Tint was, for me, a living symbol of the inextinguishable fortitude of the human spirit: although I knew him only briefly, I felt myself to be profoundly changed and deeply instructed by his vision of literature. Everyone who knew him will recognise at once the pervasiveness of his influence on this book.

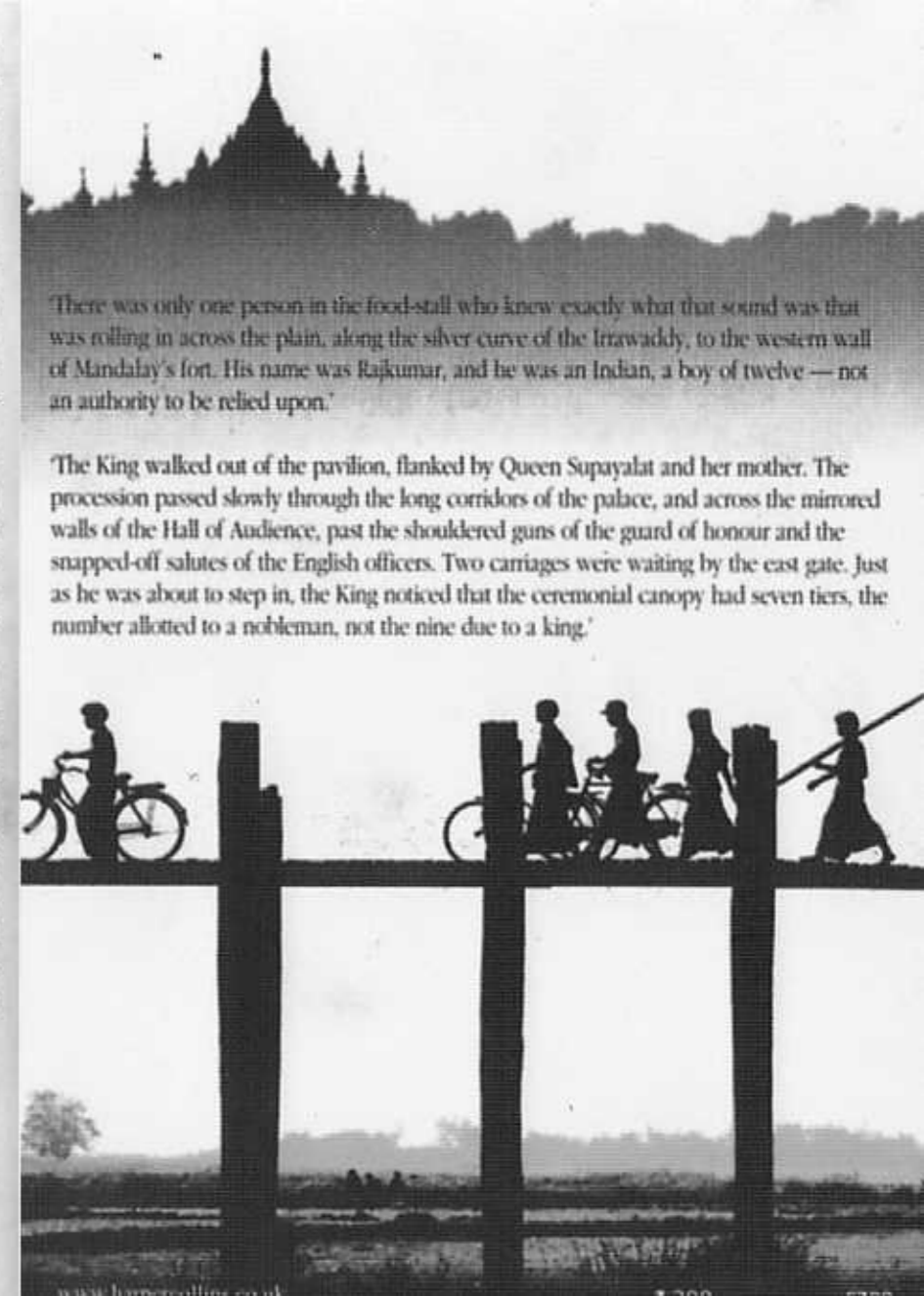
In the course of writing this book I lost a close friend: Raghubir Singh, the photographer, who was my mentor and teacher in all things relating to photography. It is my great regret that I was unable to acknowledge the depth of my gratitude to him in his lifetime: if I do so now, it is not in the hope of making amends, but rather, in order to record an unrepayable debt. Naturally, neither he nor anyone else named above bears any responsibility for any aspect of the contents of this book, the onus of which rests on me alone.

Amongst published sources my greatest debt is to the monograph *Deposed King Thebaw of Burma in India, 1885-1916* (Bharatiya Vidya Series, Vol. 25, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay 1967) by Walter A. Desai. In his memoir, *The Changing of Kings* (Peter Owen, London, 1985), Phillip Glass describes Desai as "a quiet old Indian historian from (Rangoon) University". I like to think of the 'quiet old Indian' living in India in his retirement, sifting through the

archives of New Delhi and Bombay as an act of homage and restitution to the country he had lost. Desai's attempt to recover traces of this erased life is to me, in its slow careful unemphatic accumulation of detail, a deeply moving work; an affirmation that every life leaves behind an echo that is audible to those who take the trouble to listen.

Much of the travel and research for this book was supported by *The New Yorker*. I am grateful to many members of the staff of that magazine for their consistent support, and would like to thank, in particular, Tina Brown, Bill Buford, Alice Quinn, Peter Canby and Liesl Schillinger. Thanks also to Laura McPhee, for her help and advice, and to my old friend James Simpson, who has enriched this book immensely by his reading of the manuscript. I am deeply grateful to my editors Susan Watt, Ravi Dayal, Kate Medina and Rukun Advani. To Barney Karpfinger, my agent, who found me the time I needed to write this book and was a pillar of strength through its most difficult moments, my gratitude is beyond measure. To Debbie, my wife, for her unfailing support, and my children, Lila and Nayan, for their forbearance, I am, as ever, deeply beholden.

In the end my greatest debt is to my father, Lieutenant-Colonel Shailendra Chandra Ghosh. He fought in the Second World War as an officer of the 12th Frontier Force Regiment, a unit of the then British-Indian Army. He was in General Slim's Fourteenth Army during the Burma campaign of 1945 and was twice mentioned in dispatches: he was thus among those 'loyal' Indians who found themselves across the lines from the 'traitors' of the Indian National Army. He died in February 1998 and never saw any part of my manuscript. Only in his absence did I come to understand how deeply my book was rooted in his experience, his reflections on the war and his self-questioning: it is to his memory that I dedicate *The Glass Palace*.



There was only one person in the food-stall who knew exactly what that sound was that was rolling in across the plain, along the silver curve of the Irrawaddy, to the western wall of Mandalay's fort. His name was Rajkumar, and he was an Indian, a boy of twelve — not an authority to be relied upon.

The King walked out of the pavilion, flanked by Queen Supayalat and her mother. The procession passed slowly through the long corridors of the palace, and across the mirrored walls of the Hall of Audience, past the shouldered guns of the guard of honour and the snapped-off salutes of the English officers. Two carriages were waiting by the east gate. Just as he was about to step in, the King noticed that the ceremonial canopy had seven tiers, the number allotted to a nobleman, not the nine due to a king.

