

## Diasporic Consciousness in Amitabh Ghose's *The Circle of Reason*

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Amitav Ghosh, the leading Indian English novelist has sought into fame with the publication of his novels like *The Circle of Reason*, *The Shadow Lines*, *Calcutta Chromosome* and *Hungry Tides*. He has been conferred several prestigious awards like Sahitya Academy, Padmashree and Gyan Pith. His novels centre around the themes like communal violence, political upheavals, nationalism, cultural crisis, identity crisis soon and so forth. He also deals with myth, diasporic and exiled sensibilities. Ghosh is a fertile genius adept in the latest trends and style of narrativity. He skilfully blends fact and fiction and displays mastery over the medium of writing. As he has been brought up in Calcutta, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Iran and educated in Delhi & Oxford he has first-hand experience of various places, people and life that helps him in dealing with the characters having various identities and perspectives. Ghosh is well acquainted with post-modernist trends in writing like non-linear narrative fragmentation in plot, disintegrated individuals (physically/psychologically) randomness, non-chronological order of events, magic realism and many-sided stylistic innovations. Broadly speaking Indian Writing in English comes under the umbrella of post-colonial writing which includes writers from all those countries which were colonised by imperial powers. The post-colonial writers work on the common agenda that is to reclaim their past to show reverence for their cultural speciality and to reply the colonial powers that everything related to their culture and tradition is having relevance in its own place. The idea of the Orient established by Occidental writers and thinkers according to Said is the main objective of the post-colonial writers. Said suggests that orient is not what the occidental writers project them to be but they are quite contrary.

Amitav Ghosh also qualifies the title of being diasporic writer. Diaspora is the result of displacement of a person from his native place. The reasons for displacement may be multiple but there is similarity in the experiences of all those people who have been dislocated, the cultural conflicts and identity crisis, are the main features of diaspora whether it is Jews, African or Indian diasporic people. Communalism and religious fanaticism are the root cause of displacement. Ghosh depicts the trauma of dislocation caused by multiple reasons like partition, employment and higher education. He writes

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about his own cultural practices and nostalgia for the homeland. Jasbir Jain writes in her *Dislocation and Multiculturalism*, "Individual respond in various way-through withdrawal and involvement, through submission/assimilation or through difference; through short-circuiting memory or through a hardening of identity constructs" (Introduction xii). Elbert Einstein once remarked that we owe a lot to the Indians, who taught us how to count without which no worthwhile scientific discovery could have been made.

Literature of diaspora results from migration, dislocation and deconstruction. Diaspora writings depict author's progress towards the fruition and self-discovery leading him to new aesthetics. The fulfilment of the author reconciles the opposites in him like strivings and apprehension, trial and cataclysm, wound and hopefulness. Alu Kulfi and Zindi are the migrated characters who suffer from multiple problems but are always hopeful about their future and wish to come back to their native place although their dream shatters reaching there:

For that was the day they reached her village and her brother's wife barred their doors on her and shrieked till the roof of the house she had built for them shook: the whore's back from al-Ghazira-Fattheyya, who's given herself some fancy whoring name. She's come to take our daughters for her brothel.... when she heard those voices at last, Zindi looked around her at the mud walls of the lane, glowing treacherously in the morning sun, and she knew that if she were to live in that narrow pathway, jostled with hate on every side, she would not live to see another year (*The Circle of Reason*, 393).

As a post-colonial writer Ghosh deals with multi-cultural and multi-ethnic issues as he had a practical knowledge of living in many countries that he has described in his narrations, novels after novels. Diasporic expatriation/journeys are the kernel part of his writing. *The Circle of Reason* by Ghosh consists of memories that fuse past with the present. The narrativity of Amitabh Ghosh co-joined with his treatment of history knits connection among various phenomena. The novel unfolds the story of Alu who is a pupil as well as a nephew of Balram, is suffering from false allegation of being a terrorist and he is chased across oceans, as the narrative shifts the story goes across the international space from the small Indian village space. The novel *The Circle of Reason* is built upon paradox. It appears to be unorganised and its movements fluctuate forward and backward despite that it has logical connection in its overall fabric. The novel is divided into three parts - Satva, Rajas and Tamas but it is not having a linear connection rather Ghosh has made the circle of the narrative structure. Ghosh has made use of Indian style of narrative to achieve his purpose. As it is evident in the Indian philosophical tradition Ghosh's *The Circle of Reason* has a circularity of structure. The title of the novel refers to the magic content in it, the irony runs through the paradoxes knit in the story, the novel becomes cyclic rather than linear. The description of a father's concern for the new born baby owing to unhappy prediction of his future is ironical:

Bhudeb Roy came to Balram's house because a sixth son had recently been born to him. The astrologers had already seen the boy, he confided to Balram swaying his gnarled head forward, but their prognostications were not good, and he was worried. The palmists would be no use until the boy's hands grew a bit. In the meantime, he said, drawing his rubbery lower lip back in a smile, I may as well have phrenology. After all its scientific; and I'm a man of the future. Let it not be said that Bhudeb Roy hung back when the opportunity to have the first phrenologized baby in Bengal, perhaps in Asia, was at hand (24).

Amitav Ghosh is a talented writer who is very conscious of the Indian literary tradition established by Rushdie and Tharoor among others. The structural pattern of magic realism and irony provides post-modernist turn to the novel. RK Dhanu aptly remarks about the novel, "The all-embracing structural principles of magic and irony eloquently weave the total pattern of the novel" (32).

*The Circle of Reason* contains incoherent story narrated by an omniscient narrator, magic realism is strewn in it adeptly by the author. The author bears witness to each and every detail of the story. It is about the fortunes of a young weaver, Alu who is brought in a small village of Bengal who undergoes the allegation of being involved in insurgency, consequently, he has to flee from his home through Bombay he reaches the Persian Gulf from where he reaches North Africa desperately being chased by the policemen. The novel traces the journey of Alu across two continents. There is depiction of the problems of the poor villagers migrated to other places. Thus, the novel can be termed as a Saga of flight and pursuit. Ghosh is a seasoned writer having brightness in the use of English language succeeds in creating a narrative mosaic of extraordinary excellence. Ghosh resembles Rushdie in many ways like fusing fact with fiction magic realism creating a world which can be called global village. Appadurai, a cultural theorist, regards it as movement of people, technologies, capital and cultures. The works of Ghosh bestows the lance through which one can see the social political and feminist concerns.

*The Circle of Reason* contradicts the straight forward application of ideas. It has history and myths woven together with reality. The village Lalpukur in East Bengal is depicted by Ghosh. The time period that is related is the time when writers were fascinated by the villages where there was strong community feeling, family ties were very firm. People had respect for joint family system. There was a bond between people which strengthened them. There was no sense of fear for being lost. Nevertheless, some writers were writing about the alienation of contemporary man. The nostalgia of a lost home and cultural shock. As far as *The Circle of Reason* is concerned there is hardly any place that can be regarded as a home. The novel is located in refugee village. It describes the fundamentals of human nature, being in Bangladesh and Calcutta or any part of the globe human nature resembles. The scene of action in the novel keeps on shifting to various places such as West Bengal to Kerala and to the Middle East. The entire narrative swings around the uncertain local and environment. The sequence of unavoidable alteration happen which never lead to mayhem but it is transferred to author deftly deals with subjects like science, religion, socialism, capitalism politics, tradition and modernity in the settings of Indian Refugee village and old market area, a modern oil town and a village in the Algerian Sahara. The author narrates the story of an Indian village badly disturbed by war in Bangladesh taking place in the technique of cotton production and weaving. The local would-be scientist, having fondness for phrenology is described and the impact of Louis Pasteur's scientific views on the traditional Indian knowledge of codified abstraction is described. The old traditions are being displaced by new scientific and technological developments and society is getting opened from its superstitious values to new ideas but at the same time progress is not without exploitation. The author describes Gandhian revolution against the British by weaving on charkha and trying to make people self-reliant. The small-scale industries and globalisations and industrialisations are brought together. The school of reason founded by Balram is an instance of scientific thinking and rational approach. Ghosh's

idea regarding history is also noticeable. He believes in the concept of change and is of the opinion that events of history cannot change but the way of looking at it can be changed. He exhibits this change in the form of deconstruction of history and traditionalism. *The Circle of Reason* is a story of destruction of traditional village life owing to the impact of modern western culture. Balram endeavours to clean the surroundings of the village Lalpukur. His aim of opening the school of reason is to facilitate the villagers with practical education. He is instrumental in Alu's learning of the weaving. Ghosh brings to light the practical approach of the migrants who left their native places in the hunt of better prospects. There are some political exiles described by Ghosh, hostile circumstances compelled them to migrate from their native places. The trauma of homelessness, alienation and discrimination is described by the author. Double marginalization of such migrants is really harrowing. In Ghosh's fictions, we come across the conflict arising due to dislocation it generates a conflict between spirituality and materiality. As we find in Salman Rushdi and Tharoor, Ghosh time and again returns to history and mythology of India. Circle of Reason can be termed as displacement of spirituality towards modernity, the confrontation between the rationality of the west and Indian myth. This is the real human struggle according to Ghosh. The novel deals with the unprecedented change in the life of the village boy Alu who has plethora of uncertainty. However, Alu presents the problem of a villager as well as gives a true account of the struggle and triumphs that they undertake. Indira Bhatt's comment reflects this in her book *The fiction of Amitav Ghosh*, "Unlike Nachiketa of the Mahabharata who had returned from Yama, The Lord of Death, after acquiring knowledge about life and death Alu thinks of only purity and dirt. Nachiketa had gained the philosophy of life. This Nachiketai.e, Alu, returns from Death's door but his knowledge only brings destruction. He talks about Louis Pasteur and his failure as Balram had done earlier. But Alu thinks that he has acquired real/ true knowledge (21)."

Ghosh in his novels depicts those who migrate from their native places and cultures to identify their individuality. Ghosh deals with pre-colonial and postcolonial movements in his novels. Mainly he depicts the pre-colonial migration of labour to the Middle East. Ghosh represents the specific Indian culture its specialities, having conflict with the cultures of dislocated settings. He deals with the migration of village rural society. Through Alu's migration from Kolkata to al-Ghazira and his risk and struggle in the migration, the author deftly knits the story of risk and struggle of the entire Indian villagers who undergo multiple risk having left their native land in search of better prospects. Ghosh depicts the dreams of these people and their will power for rising above their wretched states. He depicts how people promise regarding the future of a migrant.

Someone brought her onto the boat by making all kind of promises-your child will be this, it'll be that, it'll have houses and cars and multi-storied buildings if you only you can get across to al-Ghazira. Sign a few forms and the child will be a Ghazri. In her state the poor woman believed what she was told (190-191).

The character of Zindi is the portrayal of a village girl turning into a prostitute. She is a representative character. How girls belonging to smaller places are trapped in this profession, "Zindi set about the business of clearing the house with energetic enthusiasm. Her insult soon emptied the courtyard and the lane outside" (260). The narrative deals with personal displacements of an individual's traditions, culture and even of relationship.

The diaspora writers are anxious of the dislocation of cultures and nostalgic about the reminiscence of the land. It is continuously reflected in their writings. The idea of time and displacement are co-joined together with the thread of memory past, present and future are linked. As it is remarked by Gilles Deleuze in his essay, "Memory as Virtual Coexistence", "the present and distinctly contains the ever-growing image of the past" (51). People living far away from the native places are haunted by the memory of their home land, they make attempts to conserve their cultural practices in the imagined home land and suffer from the social dispersal and undergo deep anguish. These experiences, *The Circle of Reason*, exhibits quite distinctly. After the death of Kulfi in Algeria there is a conflict between Dr. Mrs Verma and Dr. Mishra over her cremation and putting holy water on her lips, "She went into the kitchen and returned with a brass bowl and spoon. Kneeling beside the body she said. Go on, Mr. Bose. Even though it's too late now you should wet her lips.... that's a strange thing you're doing Mrs. Verma.... I was just asking, he snapped whether you have managed to connect your kitchen tap to the Ganges? Or do you keep your own private stock of holy water for these occasions" (434). After that there is a heated argument between the two over the cremation of her dead body. Eventually, Dr. Verma decides that she will be cremated in a park with the help of abandoned furniture and as far as the sandal wood is concerned it will be managed through the books having sandal wood cover, and ghee will be managed through butter. She tries her best to follow the cultural practice within limited means.

As the novel has been divided in three parts - Satva, Rajas and Tamas derived from the *Bhagavad Gita* in which the order is reversed as Tamas, Rajas and Satva. By reversal of the concepts Ghosh has endeavoured to show the degenerate state of affairs in the modern time. In each part the Gunas are the indicators. Girish Karnad, one of the Indian English playwrights, has done the same thing in his play significantly. It reflects Ghosh's modernised aspect of traditional culture. *The Circle of Reason* exhibits various villages and cities of India and Africa featuring cultural human encounters in which multiple customs and traditions are brought to light. In the first part of the novel, we come across an astrologer revealing religious nature of Bhudeb Roy whose son dies of pneumonia but he thinks the death has occurred due to some other reason. He traces the reason in superstition, it is a case of backwardness found in the then society. In the third part of the novel which has been set in the Algerian Sahara, Ghosh mocks the Hindu after death rituals and expresses that such rituals are unscientific and part of superstitious beliefs. In another instance, Tagore's play is performed in which Kulfi plays the role of Chitrangada against Jyoti Dasa's Arjun. She dies and people put carbolic acid in her mouth taking it to be a substitute of Ganga Jal. Amitav Ghosh presents *The Circle of Reason* as an allegory of the destruction of the traditional values. It is reason that makes self-realisation complete whereas in traditional Indian episteme the intuition and faith helped the self-realisation possible.

How relocations can be brought is the main thesis extended in the novel. According to Ghosh it can be brought through faith in beliefs and traditions. Postcolonial writings conform with the modernist writing that is to break away from the tradition and adopt a different attitude towards life and its understanding. The story of the novel makes a distinction between profane and profound, sacrilegious and sacrosanct, mortal and immortal, time and timeless. *The Circle of Reason* recommends to relocate ethnicity and recreation of ethnic identity. The bottom line of the novel is science versus religion. Ghosh has had a very strong influence of Tagore and Satyajit Ray on his writings that he

himself has stated. In one of the interviews, Ghosh remarks, "science does not belong to countries. Reason does not belong to any nation. They belong to the history of the world" (57). Balram in this novel is representative of tragic comic tendencies. Ghosh is of the opinion that social change is the subject to the aggregate attempts made by the entire social group. It is possible only when the masses realise and are ready to draw the maximum benefit from the science and scientific method. It can be applied to the rural society. The science and scientific method can help making Indian village culture more advantageous. It can change the Indian tradition and way of living. But the desired change will take time we will have to make attempts in the right direction patiently. Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*, deals with the problem of expatriates at home and abroad. Salman Rushdie's *The Moor's Last Night* recounts the disruptions in the self and Society. *The Circle of Reason* can be set to express the encounter between rural spirituality and the urban modernity. The encounter between spirituality of the West and Indian myth.

*The Circle of Reason* portrays the middle class and poor women. They are variously exploited on the name of class, gender, and race. The novel comprises of a variety of female characters want to break the bondages of all kind. They also had ardent wish for home and Homeland. Kulfi presents the wretched condition of a woman. She loses her temper when she faces the cook of Ghazi's house who spits in the pot of food thinking that the mistress has asked the cook to do it. Through the character of Toru Devi, the novelist depicts the life of a woman whose central duty is to take care of her home but she has to leave that place out of circumstances. However, she gets an identity in the new place and is now independent, skilled woman and secures her real place in the tradition-based society. Ghosh is radical in his portrayal of women and appears to be an advocate to this class. He feels the stereo- typed image of women tied down with the family and husband should be broken and they should be given freedom and independence not only in physical terms but also in terms of thinking and realising their self. Zindi is a character who loses her identity due to displacement and search of an unknown identity. She has become a part of global economy while doing disgraceful act and she desperately searches for identity that leads her to disappointment and frustration. She is representative of the victim of the class of girls belonging to smaller places dispersed and dislocated into big city and lose their dignity and are lost into oblivion.

Amitav Ghosh portrays that the notion of identity that is static and normative which are fixed are in governing role of individual's life. As a post-colonial writer, he possesses a very sharp ability for the exploration of cultural heritage and identity. He is adept in supervising the history that is visual in *The Circle of Reason*, *The Shadow Lines* and *The Calcutta Chromosome*. Ghose examines history from the subaltern perspective, the one who is at the last of margin, compelled by his situation to adapt to the surroundings. Individuals' dislocations expose her/him to new nations providing elasticity of theme and plurality of forms to the narrative.

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