

From Rationality to Transnationality in Amitav Ghosh's The Circle of Reason

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ABSTRACT

At present, Ghosh lives in Brooklyn, New York with his wife Deborah Baker. Apart from it, he has published number of articles. It is a brief account of his fictional as well as non-fictional work, along with the different awards and prizes, received by Amitav Ghosh. He was influenced by many persons and events in his childhood days. During his childhood days, young Amitav was greatly influenced by the stories of partition, independence and the Second World War. Ghosh is known for his mastery over the historical past, from where he excavates events that turn out to be the raw ingredients for his fiction. Also, his sense of history delivers a different message. It is to a greater degree posing his patriotic fervour and subjective understanding of the Indian mind. Ghosh expresses his concern in a psycho-social perspective, that is, he deliberates his issues as standing in steadfast relationship of the man, his inner-man and his community. As John C. Hawley writes: “. . . but first and foremost, and overriding all the main ideas that inform his work are the stories, the Dickensian proliferation of characters whose lives engage us and who take us to some richly imagined places and times” (1).

Keywords:- InterText

I. INTRODUCTION

Ghosh's fictional world has a unique narrative motion. His central figures are travellers and diasporic exiles. Migration occupies an important aspect in his novels. By tracing the problems of displaced migrants, the author points out the emotional trauma which focuses settlement to a place with varied perceptions. The concept of diaspora stands steadfast in its claims towards the inevitability of nostalgia. Ghosh stands supreme in that he handles the poetics of expatriate status as something which every man would like to experience at first and then reject. His concept of exile has similarities with that of Said's idea of an exile. Said writes, “The person who finds his homeland sweet it still a tender beginner, he to whom every soil is as his native one is already strong, but he is perfect to whom entire world is a foreign place” (407).

Ghosh makes a paradigm shift in that he moves from the traditional claims of the Indian English fiction to the post-modernist transformation. There is the movement back and forth which is a

signification of the individual's condition in the society. The present stands steadfastly fixed to the nostalgic past. The novel consequently sways between history and mythology As Shubha Tiwari writes, “Mythical references have been moulded to reflect contemporary conditions in a true new historicist fashion” (9). Significantly, there is then the dilemma of the expatriate artist who is precariously fixed on the borderline between the past and the present. And here, Ragul Bhargava's observation warrants mention. He writes, “The expatriate writer occupies a marginal or a border line position, he sits on the periphery of the past, causing the future to take shape” (92).

Thus Ghosh is a determined writer and he has concrete reasons to the arrival of the seven fictions and a non-fiction. *The Circle of Reason* is projective of the community of people which can survive only by rationalizing life. The rural and the urban landscapes in the novel establish a contradictory structure, while the village landscape is coming together of people, the urban landscape is

indicative of the unexpected scattering of individuals. Through the house structure shaded by nature, he indicates this oneness and through the aeroplane metaphor, Ghosh proclaims the urban complexity while the village is indicative of potency, the urban landscapes lack this power. It is a contracting device used by Ghosh to shoot his characters perpetuated by sadness.

The Circle of Reason is a collective memory of incidents presented in a symbolic fashion. There is a continual narration of events woven in a very delicate manner. Thus there is a flow of history from past to present which creates a fluid pattern of time. *The Circle of Reason* (1986) is populated with many characters. According to K. Damodar Rao, Ghosh's first novel, *The Circle of Reason* marked a break from the traditional themes of the Indian English novel and the form and structure of the well-made novel. In fact, the novel could be taken as the starting point of a whole generation of new writers often called Ghosh Generation or Stephanine School who have left a lasting imprint on the novel of the eighties setting the tenor for a new thrust in Indian fiction in English (279). The novel opens with the arrival of an eight-year-old boy, Alu. It is thus about an orphan, who lives in Lalpukur in West Bengal and from where he is on the run. And Pradip Dutta's quote warrants mention here. He writes: Amitav Ghosh's *The Circle of Reason* presents a much more challenging appreciation. It combines within itself an uncompromising restlessness with a poise and control that suggests peace rather than longing. This is remarkable, for really the circle offers nothing which we would normally call home (qtd. in Pradip 70-71).

The novel is divided into three sections: "Satwa: Reason", "Rajas: Passion", and "Tamas: Death". The novel opens up with Alu and it ends with the same Alu who hopes that he would be carried home to India so soon. Alu, an introvert, is detached from his friend's circle. The novel also inter-connects the two circles of Balaram and Zindi. Basically, man has essentially a single purpose, i.e., to hold on himself to his inner man in order to clinch an eternal self. Alu, in the beginning, has been stunted in his psychic development and hence he is alienated and ultimately displaced from other individuals. Ghosh's encounter with a lot of migrants

at various places is a signification of his own migrant status. His ego does not allow him to submit himself to an awareness of his own strength and so he begins to depend upon Zindi who promises him to provide a sense of place. Alu, in his dependence upon another individual, is consequently alienated from his own self.

It is the most significant novel, concerned with the modern man's problems of alienation, migration and the existential crises of life. The novel has been translated into many European languages. The fact that Ghosh has been able to move freely in his writing between anthropology, history and fiction is symptomatic of the extent to which traditional boundaries between those disciplines have themselves broken down. The first novel of Ghosh, in a way, is concerned with the picaresque adventures of Alu, a weaver from a small village near Calcutta who leaves home to travel across the Indian Ocean to the oil town of al-Ghazira in the Persian Gulf. The novel is an allegory about the destruction of traditional village life by the modernizing influx of Western culture and the subsequent displacement of Non-European peoples by imperialism.

Balaram, the central character is interested in Western ideas regarding his passion for phrenology and the writing of Pasteur. He establishes the Pasteur School of Reason. Certain historical events, such as the Indian nationalist struggle of the 1930s, the Bangladesh War of 1971, and the international tide of migration to the middle-east of the 1970s onwards are foregrounded in the novel, *The Circle of Reason*. As the title of the novel suggests, it closely examines philosophies of reason and its association with science and technology. One could discover a definite pattern in the novel. Alu is totally aware of his dynamic self which could take on the challenges coming from the outside multi-cultural force. He has lost the good rapport of his ego with the self. This is what Aldous Huxley makes of it when he holds the view that man's organic wholeness could be clinched at the psychic depth when the ego, at one point, submits itself to the true self. This is but one quintessential imperative in a man's quest for identity. He writes thus: ". . . man's life on earth has only one end and purpose to identify himself with his

eternal self and so to come to punitive knowledge of the Divine Ground” (13).

Alu attempts to fit himself into a world through a different process. He takes on his weaving profession and begins his search for identity. K. Damodar Rao identifies his search for identity through a new technique on the weaving instrument. He writes Alu’s search for a new technique on the loom is reflective of his own search for his moorings. The ironic mode of description employed in this context with peculiar intones of different categories drawn from the objective world serves to underline the delicate ‘buti work’ Alu, of late, has mastered. Initially, the patterns were sought to be made in the mould of different experiential realities – Bomb-butis, Refugees-butis and anti-septic butis – but are found wanting and hence rejected. Ultimately, Alu settles for ‘Maya-butis’(124-25).

Alu, the main character travels into the Arab countries for a job, work of weaving, cotton business. In *al-Ghazira* number of Indian immigrants gathered together at Zindi’s Tea house. These people live there according to their religious, cultural, and traditional life. The characters like Balaram are influenced by the Western ideas, thoughts of science and technology. In *The Circle of Reason* Ghosh illustrates that the acts like weaving are based on rational thinking. It follows the principles of science. Its principles are adopted in the development of modern computer. It does not divide the nations but unites them. This revelation interrogates the branding or categorizing of India or non-Western countries as irrational. He provides the examples of other sciences like criminology and phrenology which have lost their worth. No more they are considered as reliable science. If it is so, the same may be true with many present sciences.

The history of science reveals that science is in the process of evolution. In such case no scientific theories are true for ever and the West cannot impose them on the Orient. So, the superiority of the west is questionable. The scientists proclaim that science brings progress and the life of people would improve. *The Circle of Reason* Ghosh shows that it has brought disaster and death to Balaram and his family. This epitomizes the consequences of obsession with the

Western idea of science. Through this episode Ghosh interrogates the claims of science. He uses science and its implications to abuse the West. This novel reiterates that the West had exploited, colonized and constructed the Other to such an extent that it has become difficult to decolonize the minds of the colonized. In *The Circle of Reason* the major actions of the novel revolve around the family of Balaram and his nephew, Alu. In *al-Ghazira*, the events center on Zindi and her family. Zindi looks after people of different regions, castes and religion. Here even the concept of family and its scope is extended. This is the clear subversion of conventional device of plot. Alu, a Hindu, while he is in *al-Ghazira* he spends time in Hajj Fahmy’s house, its members treat him as their family member and Hajj Fahmy resumes learning weaving from Alu. Muslim persons like Abu Fahl, Abu Sa and Zaghoul live in Zindi’s living together house.

Ghosh does not believe in the most complex construction of life’s materials, since he believes that it will wear away the readers’ excitedness and vision. It is true; fiction in the hands of the readers becomes the toughest test of readability. Though a post-modern text, it avoids jerkiness since a post-modern text moves back and forth. He involves himself in smooth verbal transitions from one narrative while he deals with history to another, while he deals with the present. And he successfully makes these verbal transitions. These things constitute the immense popularity of his fiction. Specifically, in the recent postmodern literary scenario, the psycho-cultural analysis supplemented by a scrutiny of the historical perspectives available on literature has gained relevance. Post-modern literature is the product of techno-terrorist-scientific structure.

II. CONCLUSION

Hence, a text becomes *text* in the sense that it is layered by inter-textuality to multi-disciplines. Hence, one is aware of historicity and sometimes the multi-national epistemology and quite often a *pastiche* of narratives. One of the reasons why a text while emitting a multitude of interpretations, demands at the same time, a wide knowledge of various disciplines like science, astronomy and even

geography. Hence, it is appropriate that researchers might go in the right direction if one were to analyse a text in a psycho-socio cultural space and time, fixed on the theoretical base. And interpretation of a text demands a lot of theoretical knowledge now-a-days. Psychological, sociological and cultural theories are aplenty today and hence the researcher could fruitfully endure to interpret the text if he/she were to anatomize the text on a theoretical plane.

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