

## Chapter 1

### Amitav Ghosh's *The Circle of Reason*

#### Issues and Concerns

*The Circle of Reason* is the first novel of Amitav Ghosh, a winner of Prix Medici Estranger Award which is France top literary award. Amitav Ghosh is a postcolonial novelist born in Calcutta on July 11, 1956. The novel has the themes of migration, exile, cultural, displacement, search for home and post-colonial rationality. It concerns a conscience of resistance against the hegemonic power structure and its detrimental consequences spreading over the post-colonial Indian world. It also tries to show how the more powerful victimize the deprived and the powerless.

This novel has been viewed either simply as a novel of social realism or merely as a replica of the post colonial transgression and as an anecdote of the social, cultural and political scenario but not as a work which tends to challenge the hegemonic power structure of the colonial impression and its roots

Ghosh has written many novels. His second novel *The Shadow Line* wins the Sahitya Academi Award, which is India's most prestigious literary award. *The Calcutta Chromosome* wins the Arthur C Award for 1997. Another novel *The Hungry Tide* wins the Hutch Crossword Book Prize in 2006. In 2007 Amitav Ghosh was awarded the Grinzane Cavour Prize in Turin, Italy. His *Sea of Poppies* is short listed for the Booker Prize. Ghosh is awarded the Padhma Shri in 2007. He is also awarded the Dan David Prize along with Margaret Atwood which finds him in the midst of huge controversy.

His writings concern the postcolonial issues and technique such as polylingualism, magical realism, migration, exile, cultural displacement, nostalgia, postcolonial melancholy, search for national identity and so on. In *The Circle of*

*Reason* Ghosh includes polylingualism, magical realism and postcolonial issues such as migration, rootlessness, search for home, suppressions, hybridity, sense of loss and national identity. These elements of his writing can prove him as a postcolonial writer. Stephanie Jones referring to Deluze and Guattri in his essay says; “As Deluze and Guattri celebrate the ‘revolutionary’ potential of writing that makes use of the polylingualism of one’s own language, Ghosh also uses the technique of polylingualism for this purpose” (431). Ghosh’s text reveals a more sober challenge and contains wary sense of consolation. His etymological diversions privilege an oral mode of storytelling that distends and subverts the ideologies of empire and nation arguably inherent in the traditional novel genre. Ghosh’s narrative for all its patterns and circularities more stubbornly refuses to be brought full circle to authorize a marvelous sense of magical realism polishing the continuation of colonial patterns of exploitation and oppression.

This thesis is to search the answers of various questions which Ghosh in *The Circle of Reason* raises replies and implies. Is there necessary complicity between Enlightenment discourse of reason and the apparatuses of police in postcolonial context? Does the advance of reason authorize and rest upon a greater rationalization of police? Are the discourses and apparatuses of police inherited from the colonial state restrained by the postcolonial nation? The second set of questions has to do with the ambiguous status of Enlightenment reason in postcolonial India. Ghosh suggests that reason in its postcolonial appearance is both coercive and emancipatory. Are there multiple forms of reason? And can these be disentangled from the logic of police? Can an alternative, no repressive rule of reason be imagined in a postcolonial world?

When Alu flees to a Gulf Kingdom, Assistant Superintendent of Police Jyoti

Das, the police detective is assigned to pursue him. Jyoti Das eventually joins him and his companions in flights. Flawlessly interweaving description of character and events, the three parts of *The Circle of Reason* chronicle Alu's idealistic misadventure in India, Al-Ghazira and, finally, Algeria. The reader's sympathy lies largely with Alu, who is an entirely innocent fugitive from the police, but they also extend to Das, who has been inducted into the police force only reluctantly. He is far more interested in observing and drawing rare birds than in tracking him quarry. By the end of the novel Das abandons his pursuit, and indeed his job, altogether.

Not giving dates, names of events and places can be analyzed as universalizing their displacement in their imagination which is the characteristic of postcolonial writers. Stephanie continues:

On the first page and throughout this section, the great banyan tree under which people talk, rallies are held and rickshaws wait for custom, seems to be offered as a metaphor for the village. This encourages a reading of the community as being equally old, organic and self-contained-as timelessly and generationally moving around the tree in similar patterns, arguing politics, gossiping, chasing children. It is disconcerting, then, to discover later that the village is not even a generation old, but was created post-1947, after the partition of the subcontinent into India and Pakistan. The people of the village are Bengali, but from East of the border, now another nation. (434)

This description from the novel shows the difference between the village and the town where village is portrayed as the carrier of customs. There is also the description of issue of partition of India and Pakistan.

Stephanie further shows the issue of migration and Ghosh's use of

polylingualism in *The Circle of Reason* which is a feature of postcolonial writer.

Stephanie writes:

Like Rushdie, this collapsing of a clear sense of the indigenous into histories of migration is more fully and overtly worked through a heightened sense of language and the tracing of the migrant origins of words themselves. However, this does not so much lead Ghosh to ever-expanding stories of the migrant roots and re-routing of all peoples; rather it concentrates him into ever-stranger stories of forced journeys, illegal border crossings and permanently impermanent settlements. Unlike Rushdie's precipitate implosion of the binary structures of the language into a universalizing conundrum, Ghosh's text enacts a crucially slower and more obscure devolution of the language into its own history of polylingualism. (434-35)

Amitav Ghosh's novel *The Circle of Reason* begins with the arrival of an orphan, Alu, who has potato shaped extraordinary lumpy head. And the novel describes other extraordinary and strange characters. Characters employed in the novel are unique and strange such as, one-eyed Arab strong men, tongue less Chinamen, wack-eyed visionary egg-sellers, the outrageously fat, the unbelievably skinny, the emphatic physicality of loss, the outcast, the unrecognized people without visas etc.

These unique characters in Ghosh's novel are helping tools to prove the technique of magic realism, a necessary technique that postcolonial writers use. As Anthony Burgees writes in his book review, "A deformed protagonist is to be expected in some brands of magic realism" (6). Moving from local, ancestral-now traveling obscurely diasporic languages- to the more overtly global resonance of English Shombhu elides the languages in-between and words loaded with more

explicit of national belonging.

He indicates that to strive for an understanding of cloth-and thereby, in the logic of the text, of the largest and most intense knowledge of history and people. Novel's setting in Algerian town and attempt to caste Rabindranath Tagore's *Chitrangada* and attempt of proper funeral of Kulfi who was one of Alu's traveling companion in the third part celebrate the resourcefulness, creativity and willing hybridity of the migrant, wanting to make themselves and their culture present and understood in diaspora. This is also another point to enrich Amitav Ghosh as a postcolonial writer.

### **Review of Literature**

*The Circle of Reason* has the theme of migration, exile, cultural displacement and examination of postcolonial rationality. This novel gets so many criticisms from various postcolonial critics from India, America and many other countries. Jones compares Rushdie and Ghosh as to their style of expressing Indianess. In the beginning of *The Satanic Verses*, Gibreel Farista, falling towards Britain from the height of an exploded airplane sings the Indianness; "Oh my shoes are Japanese these trousers English, if you please. On my head, red Russian hat; my heart's Indian for all that" (5). Unlike Rushdie, Ghosh sings Indianness in smooth way. Making slight difference between Rushdie and Ghosh, Stephanie Jones describes Ghosh's expression of Indianess.

Yammuna Siddiqi writes Nation state form is energetically vested in newly decolonized countries with the promises of liberation from oppressive rule. It holds out the assurance of true equality and true fraternity. Yet the newly liberated nation inherits the repressive apparatus that are freshly deployed against a free citizen (179-80). Reason cannot be assumed to be identical for the west and European colonies in

Europe and America. It's enabling condition and ultimate goal was purportedly freedom where even in the view of enlightened.

Gayatri Spivak in *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* says: "The colonial other is not assailable to the meaning making process of the West is both excluded as well as recuperated as that which is to be reconstitute in the image of west" (79). The western has made adverse effect to the eastern. Eastern are compelled to lead the painful life. In the same way Keya Ganguli in brief discussion of this novel writes, "Surveillance and regulation the character is not only legacy of Enlightenment rationality. Interwoven with the narrative of Alu's run from the police in the story of his recruitment in various utopian scheme" (7). The administration does not play an effective role. They become cause of suffering to innocent people.

As Stephen Slemon highlights the deconstructive impetus of magic realism as a technique for undermining the fixity of borders of binaries imposed by the totalizing systems of imperialism and more broadly the imperialism of totalizing system, Ghosh writes using this mode of expression to write back to imperialism.

Positive and negative senses of police cannot be distinguished in any clear way in the novel. As Ranjit Guha writes, "Dominance was exercised without hegemony" (255). Even the police administration does not have the clear vision on poor people. Poor people were suppressed by the brutal force. All the people in the country were not treated equally:

Ghosh's novel in comparison with Rushdie's work may be read as a refusal to inscribe too smooth a transition from the forced migration into a more clearly and cleverly shaped universal fable. First section of *The Circle of Reason* tells the life of a village in West Bengal, India, near the border with what in the opening present of the text is East

Pakistan. Ghosh gives no dates, and does not name large historical events. The creation of Bangladesh is signified by the slow swelling of the village as starving refugees trickle and then flow across the border, settles around the village, then move on. The descriptions of these people are stark, they are also strangely peripheral to the village community, and to the relationships, intrigues and battles of will that give it life. (434)

Above description of the people and places shows Indianness the universalization of the displacement.

Michael Ondaatje's novel *Anil's Ghost* traces the investigation by a forensic detective of human remains in Srilanka driven by war between the government insurgent in the south and Tamil separatist in north.

In surveying the works of most successful Indian novelist in English of past two decades, Jon Mee writes, "The domestic drama, family romance, Indian myths and mock epic have all been deployed to re- imagine India and Indian-ness in terms of an open-ended heterogeneity" (318-19). Mee recognizes Ghosh who has variously used and subverted all these genres and more as offering perhaps the most sustained response created by Rushdie's precedent.

In a book review comparing Ghosh with the works and technique of Salman Rushdie, Anthony Burgess writes, "Even against the wild exuberance of Rushdie's Writing, Ghosh's book is generally perceived as being overburdened with strange characters and events too full of exotic digression" (6). This highlights the iconic status of Rushdie's work as the standard of the recent genealogy of Indian writing in English, commonly if loosely drawn together with a notion of magical realism. This is also can be taken as an evident to prove Amitav Ghosh as a postcolonial writer.

This study is divided into four chapters. The first chapter gives general outline of this study or the whole direction of this study going to take. It concerns raising a conscience of resistance against the hegemonic power structure and its detrimental consequences spreading out the post colonial Indian world. The second chapter outlines the concept of post colonialism and rationality. This study shows the concept of Westerners and European colonizers and their way of thinking. Likewise, the third chapter explores the post colonial concerns as depicted in the novel such as notion of Diaspora, migration, rootlessness, search for identity, suppression and efforts for formation of new connections. Similarly, the fourth chapter shows how the novel presents the failure of postcolonial nation and the harsher condition of the subaltern migrants and libratory dimension of migrants.



## Chapter 2

### Postcolonialism and Rationality

Scott Lash in his book *Another Modernity: A Different Rationality* identifies the two main modes of scholarly characterization of rationality via its involvement with the production of modernity. The first mode of treating modernity/rationality is that of the social scientist, the positivist, whose concept of modernity is inscribed in and is a culmination of the process of the Enlightenment. He says that “sociology and social science more generally have consistently understood modernity in terms of rationality, in terms of rationality of Cartesian space and Newtonian time handed down from the Enlightenment: From the nineteenth-century sociology” (1). This entrenchment in nineteenth century thought is most especially an attachment to the work of Max Webber, whose thought on rationality still forms the most comprehensive and authoritative sociological works on the subject. This mode of thought attempts to apply the concepts and method born in the Enlightenment to the study of human society; literally to create a science of society. With the help of science, it has made the adverse effect on the development and implementation of rationality. The society becomes modern and civilized.

The postcolonial argument is one form of this critique of the sociological concept of rationality. Using this argument, postcolonial theory has attempted to deconstruct the systems and assumption that formed the foundational assumptions of colonialism by showing that its concept of modernity excluded and dehumanized those who did not fit within its own limits. Therefore, we can see an important intersection between British colonialism, western rationality, and the concept of modernity.

Swidler interprets Weber saying that “The distinctive feature of rationality in

whole societies, cultures, and institution is the degree of control of life by conscious ideas” (39). The individual’s ability to act rationally is judged by the degree to which he is personally empowered with these conscious social ideas one of the most important aspects of the process of rationalization of action is the substitution for the unthinking acceptance of ancient custom, of deliberate adaptation to situation in terms of self-interest.

### **Western Rationality**

Postcolonial theory makes an attempt to understand the problem created by European colonization and its aftermath. And this is a thesis based on reason rather than emotion. So it is called post-colonial rationality. Post-colonial rationality is a type of cultural study that includes the cultural groups, practices and discourses in the literary form in the formerly colonized world. It tends to raise the omnipotent voice against colonialism and imitates or explores the marginalization, suffocation, alienation and identity crisis of the people. This research tries to explore the plight, sensitivity and power of resistance of the post-colonial people mainly on the basis of the terms or the theories of orientalism, mimicry, consciousness, nationality, native land and revolt against the colonial mentality.

Western rationality means the concepts of Westerners and European colonizers and their way of thinking. In comparison to colonized culture westerners think their culture to be superior and apply them as universal rationality. Their culture, their education system, their system of governance, their religion and every aspects they think superior and try to apply it as having universal reasoning .claiming universal rationality everywhere they try to apply their so-called superior culture to every other culture. Western way of thinking holds any nation or culture as rational if the nations follow their model as universal model and it excludes other nations

leveling them as irrational cultures if they do not follow their model.

In colonial period there was the invasion of colonized culture, religion, educational system, system of governance and so on. Westerners invaded the cultures of the colonized in the name of civilizing mission or in pretention of any kind which became the matter of atrocity for the colonizers. Colonizers made binaries of educated / uneducated, civilized/barbaric, rational/irrational and many more to dominate the colonized people and applied their culture forcefully.

The discussion of western rationality is necessary to raise the discussion about the postcolonial rationality. It is necessary to trace out the western rationality and its manifestation in the British colonial practices of nineteenth and early twentieth century. In the colonial period Britain and India gave different names to the rationality. The British history refers to the event of 1857 against the British rules in India it as the Indian mutiny of 1857 and Indian history calls it the first war of independence. The British colonial presence in India begins with the British East India Company's establishment of trading outpost in India in the early seventeenth century.

This capitalist enterprise actually controls regions of India with its military presence. By the time of mutiny/war of independence, the company had 34000 European troops in that country commanding a quarter of a million native soldiers. Rudrangshu Mukhargee describes the unpopular administration of the company:

The British had not only conquered India but had also, in the process of consolidating their power in the first half of the nineteenth century, violated all that was held sacred and dear by the people of India. Social reforms based on the principles of reason, land-revenue administration based on Recardian theories of rent, a legal system imported from

England.... the dispassion of kings, their successors and landed magnates, had together brought a major upheaval in north India. (128)

This quotation is significant to point out the invasion of Indian culture by western practices and institutions, founded in western rationality. Reason-based social reforms sought to change entrenched Indian practices such as the ritual suicide of widows, which the British banned, and the caste system, which the Indian continually feared would be undermined by the British administration.

The British legal system is an institution is a system founded in Enlightenment rationality. This legal system has the intuitive with doctrines of Enlightenment rationality. This doctrine which is intuitive for British native is foreign to Indians. British ways are not compatible to native Indians. British way of thinking is foreign, its policies are foreign, and its technology is foreign. Indians see many of the modernizing effort of East India Company with suspect. For example, they fear the railway, which begins running out of Bombay in 1850 as a demon (12). This historical event presents the cultural grounding of western rationality in the context of British colonialism. It will support to examine colonialism through the lens of rationality-inscribed British modernity, a condition which the British, with the rest of the western world, felt entitled or required them to undertake a “civilizing mission [to non-western societies], which suggested that a temporary period of political dependence or tutelage was necessary in order for ‘uncivilized’ societies to advance to the point where they were capable of sustaining liberal institution and self-government” (Kohn 232). This is an attempt to critique modernist/colonialist view if rationality as monolithic and universal entity.

This view sees rationality on the high end of a linear scale of progress and relegates anything beneath it on that to the realm of the pre-modern and irrational.

Post-colonial theory has critiqued this view of rationality, arguing for a pluralist rather than monolithic model of rationality. This approach sees rationality not as a universal epistemology that privileges western thinking and is constituted by its separation from the realm of irrational, which is everything non-western, but instead argues that rationality is a production of culture and calls for a relative valuing for each culture's true claims.

The second mode of treating modernity/rationality is that of cultural theory. This mode can be seen mainly as a critique of the sociological one just described. Scott Lash says:

Cultural theory has shown how the modernity of dominant social and human science is inscribed in a rationality of 'the same.' This rationality of the same is logic of a constitutive and constituting inside, a constitutive constituting 'subject' which excludes, indeed extrudes, all otherness to the outside, where it is to be grasped and studied controlled as an object. (1)

This mode of thought sees as an exclusive category, one that imposes its own exclusionary boundaries, welcoming everything without those boundaries to the categories of pre-modern, irrational, and other (and worthy of being colonized). This theoretical mode stance is an inherently deconstructive one in that it attempts to take apart this paradigm, which it treats as arbitrary at best and evil at worst.

Ann Swindler interprets Max Weber's work which explores and attempts to systematically categorize the presence of rationality in culture. He identifies religion as a major component of the process by which the peculiarity developed, most especially Protestantism. Weber's work is overall treatment of rationality. In his seminal work *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* Weber recognizes the

presence of certain kinds of rationality in every culture, but makes the claim that western rationality is peculiar. To arrive at this thesis he starts with the immediately problematic question of “in western civilization only, cultural phenomena have appeared which (as we like to think) lie in a line of development having *universal* significance and value” (13). Although Weber does qualify himself by noting that this question will be asked by a “product of modern European civilization” (18) and inserting the parenthetical “as we like to think,” his demarcation of the “peculiar” (26) rationality of the West from the rationality of all other culture in history does group him in Lash’s first category of scholarly characterization of “high modernity” model, one that sees Western rationality as the impetus of movement upward on linear, hierarchical scale of progress.

Those existing inside these categories see themselves as the thinking subject, while those outside are objectified and made eligible to be dominated by the inner subject. This model played a role in colonial practice in that it created a hierarchy wherein the West was positioned to exploit non-western, pre-modern peoples sometimes justifying itself as conducting a “civilizing mission” (Kohn 232) and sometimes without attempt at justification. In what is ostensibly supposed to be an objective, descriptive study, Weber has created a model which cultural theory critiques as objective and ideological in the highest degree.

Classical humanism may be seen as a product of Enlightenment, a pre-cursor to the “high modernity” of sociological positivism. Part of the project of humanism was to rationally delineate a system of ethical/moral behavior in which the human being derived certain inalienable rights from a rationally-derived set of universal truths. Immanuel Kant, argued that moral requirements are based on a standard of rationality he named the ‘Categorical Imperative’. Immorality thus involves a

violation of the CI and thereby irrational.

To understand the hubris of the British colonizers in their subjugation of their colonial subjects,” it is useful to explore the assumptions behind the Enlightenment. One Justification of the colonial administration was the premise that the colonial subjects were inferior to their Western colonizers” (Brooker 135). The way they define the nature of that inferiority ranged from race, to religion, to rationality, and often was a construct in which all three of those characteristics were linked. The premise of inferiority as a function of race and religion are familiar enough.

The premise of inferiority as a function of rationality was couched in rhetoric which used words such as backward to describe the cultural and mental condition of the colonial subjects, a term that survived in unofficial political usage into mid-nineteenth century. The primitive condition of the colonized existed in the minds of the colonizers, as a binary opposite to their own condition of modern progress, a condition founded on scientific progress, which was in turn founded upon the principles of the Enlightenment and the Age of Reason, which had established a logical vehicle that facilitated the West’s departure from its own primitive condition on Dark Ages.

The western view of its own Enlightenment- based progress was of a movement upward on a linear, hierarchical scale. The irony in these two categories of colonial disapproval however is evident in the replacement of “humanist episteme with the ‘mechanic episteme’ in the West that occurred when humanism was replaced by modernism” (Lash 7). In essence the British object to their colonial subjects on the grounds of the subjects lack in two incompatible areas. Max Weber’s work creates the categories which of course, include west and exclude all other cultures.

Weber’s differentiation between rationalism and true rationality is relevant.

All societies have developed forms of rational behavior, behavior designed to accomplish a certain end. Such behavior is what Weber calls rationalism. Weber argues that this type of behavior is different from the peculiar type of rationality found in western culture. Weber's categorization and systemization of rationality toward larger conscious system of meanings ideas and values, denies the validity of non-western cultures and relegates to the realm of irrational and pre-modern which the post-colonial theorists reject. The rise of modernist episteme contributes to both the paradoxical role of humanism in colonialism and to the justification of colonialism on the ground of the lack existing in the colonized. According to Eurocentric model of history only the west has true rationality and progress that is universally desirable.

Dipesh Chakrabarty, whose project was to provincialize Europe notes the recent passing of the construction of European history as "Universal human history" that sees the history and progress of humanity and the history of Europe, or the West as equivalent.

Martin Jay describes Adorno and Horkheimer who see two foundational problems in modernity: number one, that "instrumental reason was closely related to the [capitalist] exchange principle in which everything was reduced to an abstract equivalent of everything else in service of exchange", and number two "Instrumental reason's link with the domination of nature" (Jay 37). Their introduction seeks to identify "a positive notion enlightenment which will release it from entanglement in blind domination. Jean- Francois Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* examines rational concepts in the modern world and argues against the view of rationality as an unimpeachable epistemology.

### **Postcolonial Rationality**

The concept of postcolonialism begins from 1970's especially after the



publication of *Orientalism* by Edward Said. It is consolidated by appearance of *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literature* in 1989 by Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin. Postcolonialism seeks to intervene or force its alternative knowledge into the power structures of the west as well as the non-west. It seeks to change the way people think, the way they behave, to produce a more just and equitable relation between the different peoples of the world. So, it is about changing world, a world that has been changed by struggle and which its practitioners intend to change further.

As to the concept and the project of postcolonialism Leela Gandhi in *Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction* says:

Postcolonialism can be seen as a theoretical resistance to the mystifying amnesia of the colonial aftermath. It is a disciplinary project devoted to academic task of revisiting, remembering and crucially interrogating the colonial past. The process of returning to the colonial scene discloses a relationship of reciprocal antagonism and desire between colonizers and colonized. (4)

This view interprets and unfolds troublesome relationship between colonizers and colonized and it focuses on ambivalent postcolonial condition. It urges reader to recollect the invasion and seduction of colonial power.

Postcolonialism narrates multiple stories of uncomfortable condition to participate with colonizer's culture. It is not only the reservoir of raw political experience that can be theorized from the enlightened perspectives of present. It is also the scene of intense discursive and conceptual activity described by the large amount of thought and writing about the cultural and political identities of colonized subjects. Postcolonialism defines itself as an area of study that is willing not only to

make, but also to gain theoretical sense of the past.

At this intersection, postcolonial theory interrogates Western culture's assumption about the universality of its own rationality. Postcolonial theory deconstructs the model of Western rationality as the culmination of a unilateral progress towards the modernity and sets up what Scott Lash calls "anti-rationality of the other" (1). Postcolonial theory deconstructs this assumption of anti-rationality of other and claim of universality of rationality by Westerners. In reality all cultures, whether they are dominant or subservient, modern or pre-modern, have developed their own unique rationality. Insofar as this is true, anti-rationality is not a rejection of rationality, but a rejection of monolithic universal rationality of western modernity.

Swindler describes Weber who employs several different terms to describe different types of rational processes. Rationalism which he defines as "an attitude of pragmatic orientation to the attainment of goals" (35) is not the same as rationality. Weber grants that his more primitive thought process exists in all cultures, but maintains that rationalism is not equal to true rationality, which exists only in the west. Swindler further writes:

What distinguish this attitude from that associated with rationality is not its purposive or goal-oriented character, but the larger, contexts of meaning in which meanings are embedded. What distinguishes rationality from rationalism is that rationalism is oriented to immediate goals, while rationality involves goals which are ordered, arranged, and even chosen in relation to some larger, conscious system of meanings, ideas, and values. (35-36)

What characterizes true rationality for Weber is its connection to a larger system in which the individual operates.

Other philosophers, such as Locke and Hobbes, had also argued that moral requirement is based on standard of rationality. Humanism was thus a major cultural product of the Enlightenment's rationality. Its place in colonial practice is extremely problematic, for the simple reason that, as Dipesh Chakrabarty says, "The European colonizer of the nineteenth century both preached this Enlightenment humanism at the colonized and at the same time denied its practice" (4). This paradox is one of the reasons postcolonial thought has attacked western rationality for the role it played in colonialism. This inconsistency can easily be seen as rationality's self-refutation of its claim to universal human rights, gave way to modernism and its positivistic approach, which conflicted with humanism by constituting the modern, rational inside and objectifying everything on the outside. Western rationality produced both models.

Starting with the premise that rational tools such as science and learning exists as hierarchical subsets to knowledge, Lyotard argues that knowledge itself is circumscribed in social and cultural processes. Science is such a process that produces a certain limited type of denotative knowledge. However, knowledge was not invented in the Enlightenment with the birth of science. Knowledge has been produced in other broader and less exclusive forms throughout the history of civilization. The broader type of knowledge is circumscribed in cultural values, such as efficiency, justice, happiness, or beauty and it is transmitted through narrative.

Lyotard describes this process of transmission like this:

Another characteristic meriting special attention is the relation between this kind of knowledge and custom. What is a 'good' performance in denotative or technical matters? They are all judged to be 'good' because they conform to the relevant criteria accepted in the social circle of the knower's interlocutors. The early philosophers called this

mode of legitimating statement opinion. The consensus that permits such knowledge to be circumscribed and makes it possible to distinguish one who knows from one who does not (the foreigner, the child) is what constitutes the culture of a people. (19)

Lyotard makes the case for an impassible distinction between scientific, rational knowledge and traditional, narrative knowledge, but also notes the similarities between the way both types of knowledge are developed and transmitted (note the way the quote above can be seen define either a scientific circle or a traditional one). The distinction between rational knowledge and the traditional form of knowledge and the privileging of the scientific over the traditional is the condition that created the concept of unimpeachable rational epistemology.

Rationality is an invisible undergirding of every person's and every culture's value system, morality, economy, material practice, pragmatic habits. It is a process and a practice that informs almost everything any culture or member thereof thinks or does, although the rational system itself is not often reflected upon, because of its invisibility. The intersection of two cultures, however, does make the rational structure of each culture visible; these structures are exposed by contrast. Chinua Achebe's *Array of God* concerns the workings of rationality in the colonial structure. He portrays it more visibly. The specific element in Achebe's book constitutes the position of the conflicting rationalities such as the native court, the road the British build, and the context of indirect rule in which those two institutions are administered.

Hawthorn, referring to Chakrabarty, writes:

In so far as the academic discourse of history is concerned 'Europe' remains the sovereign theoretical subject of all histories, including the ones we call 'Indian', 'Chinese', 'Kenyan', and so on. There is a

peculiar way in which all these other histories tend to become variations on a master narrative that could be called 'the history of Europe. (108)

This tendency for Europeans/Westerners to place themselves at the center is a practice linked to the humanist definition of human as the settler colonial white man.

Western rationality is the subject of rejection for postcolonial writers.

Western rationality in postcolonial era became the matter of failure and postcolonial rationality became the theory to write back to the notion and thinking of westerners that they think their rationality was universally desirable. Postcolonial writers treat the rationality of colonial era which is now consciously or unconsciously there in postcolonial age. It is the disturbing obstacle on the way to progress of non-western people. Western rational structure of colonial era is also disturbing and confusing the non-western people is the issue postcolonial writers raise. Postcolonial writers like Amitav Ghosh claim that blame lies not in the non-western's inability to adopt foreign institution but rather on the assumption that those so called institutions of rationality belong to non-western countries.

Amitav Ghosh as a postcolonial writer deals with the rationality in postcolonial India. This rationality and rational structure in postcolonial India is not the pure structure of post-independent India but it is mixed and hybrid with colonial rationality which was very deeply grounded on the period of colonialism. This deeply rooted rationality which westerners called universal rationality is Amitav Ghosh's subject of rejection. He rejects and shows the failure of western model of rationality. There are so many aspects in the novel which keep post-independence people in confusing and ambivalent position while applying rationality.

He shows the relation between Enlightenment rationality and state power. He

also shows that the postcolonial state is recipient to the anxieties about order and controls that are characteristic of colonial regime. He shows the rationalities of the state being unsuccessful in maintaining peace and order and to promote happiness and public good. His novel *The Circle of Reason* which will be explored in next chapter raises questions about the character of modernity in India; India having shared history and culture. Next chapter will explore how in postcolonial nation the so called 'Universally desirable rationality' functions. It will explore whether rationality theory in postcolonial nation is favorable to the progress of people or it is disturbing obstacle on the way of maintaining order and people's happiness.

Postcolonial theory portrays western rationality as negative legacy of colonialism. The universal rationality of westerners in most of the writings of postcolonial writers seems to be a barrier in the people's progress and their projects. Amitav Ghosh shows the failure of rationalities of state because the base of rationality in postcolonial India is the structure of colonial rationality.

This inheritory rationality consciously or unconsciously made post independent Indian confused. Their utopian projects became failure because of hybrid rationality in postcolonial India. Therefore postcolonial rationality as a theory is used by postcolonial writer treating the postcolonial Indians and other civilians in confused mode or showing failure of their utopian project. They use this theory also by showing the failure of state rationalities to maintain order and the negative effect of their exercise of power. What follows is the exploration of the postcolonial experiences and state rationalities as depicted in *The Circle of Reason* by Amitav Ghosh. The following chapter explores rationality and diasporic practices in the novel *The Circle of Reason*.

## Chapter 3

### **Rationality and Diasporic Practices in *The Circle of Reason***

*The Circle of Reason* is a postcolonial novel published in 1986. To pave a way for the analysis of the given text the previous chapter discusses the rationality of colonial period and its effect and functioning in postcolonial era. This chapter will explore the postcolonial rationality. It will discuss, analyse and explore the conflict between colonial and postcolonial or western or non western rationality. It will depict the ambivalence of postcolonial modernity in *The Circle of Reason*. This study focuses on how appraising the character of modernity in India, Ghosh emphasizes the relation between Enlightenment rationality and police. It will also explore the post colonial concerns as depicted in the novel such as notion of diaspora, migration, rootlessness, search for identity, suppression and efforts for formation of new connections.

### **State Rationality and Postcolonial Practices**

In this novel, Ghosh questions the assumption of West as universal reasoning through the mouth of various characters and rejection of it through other various characters to define rationalities of the non-west. Through the character of Balaram in this novel, Ghosh says, "Be quite, Gopal. Don't say anymore. You don't know what you are saying. Science doesn't belong to countries. Reason doesn't belong to any nation. They belong to the history-to the world.... You're wrong; I will show you" (57). What Ghosh wants to show is Western rationality is not the only universal reasoning. Rationalities of other countries have also reasoning.

Progress and science as West claims do not belong only to them. It belongs to history and to the world. It means that it belongs to other countries as well as it belongs to the western countries. Ghosh underscores the repressive aspect of colonial

rationality that hangs around in the structure of postcolonial government. He suggests that postcolonial state is heir to the anxieties about order and control that are characteristics of colonial regimes, and full force of postcolonial rationality is seen in the state's response to insurgency and subaltern migrancy. At the same time Ghosh's novel stages a succession of utopian projects that bear the imprint of Enlightenment reason. It points to the liberatory dimension of reason and valorizes the character's pursuit of these Enlightenment projects.

Balaram who is obsessed with science seems to bear out the accusation of his friend Gopal "Dumping ground for the West" (Ghosh 97) though the novel seems sympathetic to Balaram's attraction to science that apparent reason out the relationship between the inner life and external world. Balaram's careful measurement and calculation of Alu's skull and the proportions of loom exactly correspond with the boy's phenomenal talent as weaver. Lending this pseudo-science the reason of mathematics, the narrative resists any easy distinction between notions of traditions of Western reason and mystic Eastern tradition.

*The Circle of Reason* which is enormously popular in India is less enthusiastically received in the west, where it soon went out of print for a time. *The* novel points to the state rationalities that shape postcolonial experience. Its conceptual focus on reason makes it a particularly suitable text through which to explore the ambiguous legacy of Enlightenment rationality in postcolonial India.

The novel covers the middle decades of the twentieth century, the period of decolonization, and it concludes in the 1980s. Much of *The Circle of Reason* is set against the backdrop of Bangladeshi war of independence in 1971. Its roundabout narrative tracks the misadventure of Alu, an orphan, who becomes entangled in a feud between his foster father and the village strong man, also a police informant.



Consequently, the police falsely identify him a dangerous insurgent and set a special agent on his trail.

### **Conflict between Religious Faith and Secular Reason**

In *The Circle of Reason*, Ghosh rejects the British claim that reason only lies in their religion through the mouth of various characters. He shows the blemish of western religion and valorizes the Hindu religion and claims that reason lies in Hindu religion or in the religion of Hindustan. When Alu goes to Balaram's house and in Toru-devi's room he sees "Ma Kali, Ma Durga and Ma Saraswoti piled high on the trunks (you had to be an athlete to pray in that room, Balaram used to say)" (8). It shows how much emphasis Ghosh has given to Hindu religion to reject and shadow the western claim of universality of their religion.

There are several evidences in the novel that Ghosh is trying to prove that Hindu religion has reason and defies the western claim that only their religion and culture have reason. The emphasis is given to Hindu religion. In the time of school festival which Bhudeb Roy organizes Balaram does not believe in spirituality of Bhudeb. He organizes the Saraswati Puja. In this way Ghosh emphasizes the reason of Hindu religion. He further describes:

A six-foot image of Ma Saraswati, with spinning electric lights behind the eyes and a silver-foil halo, was commissioned in Naboganj, the nearest town .... Two goats and a pondful of fish were fattened for the feast. A large multi colored tent, with a low platform for the image was erected in the schoolyard, and the most learned pandit in Naboganj was hired to preside over ceremony. (32)

This passage shows the practiced faith in their native religion. The Indian religion, or the Hindu religion or the non-western religion is excluded by the West from their

universal religion which they claim has universal reasoning and universal rationality.

Ghosh by the conflict and discussion among various characters tries to emphasize the rationality of Hindu religion and its importance to them which the west is not ready to accept. He further describes the occasion: “Ma Saraswati, usually so serenely beautiful, seated on her white swan, with her eight-stringed veena in one hand and a book in other .... But no one dared say anything” (32). From this we can clearly see his highlights in the power of Hindu religion and rejection of claim of universal rationality in religion by West. He shows the power in the “Mantra” (33) of “pandit” (33) and their preaching. Ghosh has shown the tussle between Bhudev Roy and Balaram in this novel. In doing so he shows the tussle between British claimed rationality and Indian rationality in every matter.

When Balaram, Gopal and other friends were studying in the presidency college, they organized a group of rationalists. Balaram and Gopal often debate about science religion and reason. Their aim through this society is application of rational principles to everything around them, “to their own lives, to religion to history” (49). It is for the turning of society. Through their society they begin to search the proof in every ancient rational ideas misrepresented by priests and Brahmins. Their motto is to “make known to the masses of Hindustan how they were daily deceived and cheated by the self-styled purveyors of religion” (50). They define the distortion of Hindu idea of god by pandits and Brahmins into thousands of deities and idols as quicker money making medium. Gopal interprets Brahma applying science. He says it is nothing but an “Atom” (50). He further interprets, “universal egg of Hindu mythology is nothing but a kind of cosmic neutron” (50). He purposes to pray for the cosmic Atom which is renamed by the name of Cosmic Boson.

Gopal begins exhorting “*Hail Cosmic Boson*” (51) instead of the sacred

syllable *Om*. In their meetings they begin rational explanation of various magical events, objects and creatures in Hindu mythology. They interpreted “Sudarshan Chakra” (51) as an ancient fireworks and “Jatayu” (51) of *Ramayana* as last surviving pterodactyls. Balaram is not satisfied with the rational interpretation of rationalists.

He argues that nothing matters to the life of normal citizen only through rational interpretation of religion and other ideas. He means to say that one should apply practical reasoning to everything that can improve the life of citizen. Balaram says:

I mean what does it matter what the Brahmins and the rishis say and the myth say? What does it have to do with science or reason or the masses of Hindoostan? What good will it do anyone if the masses start saying *Hail, Cosmic Boson* instead of *The Bhagoban*? Will it cure them of disease? Will it fill their stomachs? Will it get the British out of here? (48)

Balaram enforces practical reasoning and passion which can move the life of people to prosperity. Ghosh here emphasizes more on passion and practical reasoning than on talk of reason and universal atom.

There can be so many difficulties while doing beneficial things to the people. Scientific invention can prosper the life of people, and impoverished society can improve. For the cause of practical reasoning one should not be guided by reason and universal atom but by passion which can make people great: a passion for the future, not for the past. It was that which made him the greatest man of his time, for it is that passion which makes men great.

When Dr. Verma proposes to erect a pyre and perform last Brahmaical rites at the abrupt death of Kulfi, Dr. Mishra scoffs at her religiosity. He does not take

seriously the process of last rites. He argues that the religious last rite is inappropriate with modern, secular outlook and that it becomes absurd when tap water is substituted for Ganges water and broken furniture suffices for funeral pyre. Dr. Verma comments on the place of religion in modern India. She insists that it is the spirit rather than the letter of religious doctrine that matters. She focuses on funeral procession according to religious tradition. She says that such traditions are directly linked with people's deeply felt sentiments. She comments on Dr. Mishra's idea that it is narrowly doctrinal understanding of religion and excessive valorization of irrationalism that allows no room for such deeply felt sentiments of people. Ghosh here focuses on the importance of the religious consciousness in postcolonial India.

### **Balaram's Obsession with Reason**

As mentioned in chapter two, intellectual culture of postcolonial India is the culture furthered by British hegemony. In spite of the emphasis on reason and useful knowledge, there is lack in the university curriculum of scientific experimentation. The emphasis is on the humanities and social philosophy, subjects that molded attitudes about society. Education system is in favour of values, opinions and tastes of rulers. This system limits the critical application of reason. Colonial exploitation is greater than the caste oppression. Colonial regime emphasized English and humanistic learning in the curricular changes.

They did not give emphasis on science and technology. In the view of Dipesh Chakrabarty, the promise of Enlightenment, with its utopian rhythm, is seductive. He states, "This promise is freedom from material hardship, from political tyranny, and from superstition and ignorance through knowledge of man and nature" (751). He adds, "while critiques of Enlightenment rationality may be valid, Enlightenment rationality so powerfully informs modern India's desires that it cannot be dismissed as

an external colonizing force” (751). The power of the discourse of Enlightenment rationality has permanently marked Indians own imagination of their nation.

The first part of *The Circle of Reason* concerns Balaram’s effort to introduce a rational program of hygiene in his village to support his motto:” I should have stood my ground. I know that now, and next time. I shall stand my ground, for reason has nothing to fear” (97). This means his view is that “Reason rescues Man from Barbarity” (49). He induces his classmates to follow Pasteur’s principles of hygiene and wage a campaign against dirty underwear. Balaram almost succeeds in his campaign but his campaign is brought to an abrupt close at the college proposed at the meeting to inspect his underwear, he jumped off a railing and broke his leg which is one of several occasions in the novel that brutish might overcome the forces of reason. Many Indians of late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries embraced the ideals put forward by Enlightenment thinkers. It shows the influence of the European Enlightenment in India and it is the influence which was mediated by colonialism. During this time, writers and social reformers urged their compatriots to order their lives along rational lines.

Balaram’s obsession with both phrenology and hygiene points to hybrid legacy. Recruited to teach at a village school close to the border of East Bengal, Balaram had channeled his quest for order and intelligibility into phrenology, which he alighted upon as the key to the scientific interpretation of character. When Alu, the protagonist comes to live with him, he immediately subjects the boy to a phrenological examination and charts the peculiar bumps on Alu’s head. Balaram’s enthusiasm for phrenology suggests not only the hegemonic appeal of the Enlightenment rationality but also its colonial belatedness. Balaram is unable to recognize that phrenology has long since been debunked as has the criminal

anthropology of Lombroso that he also champions.

The path of reason is not only skewed by a belated temporality, it is also delayed by the operation of base interest. Balaram's pseudoscientific line of investigation brings him into conflict with the school's headmaster, Bhudeb Roy, a dishonest profiteer. At a school festival put on by Bhudeb Roy, to which public officials and a priest have been invited, Balaram notices a growing cranial lump on a displayed figurine of Saraswati, the Goddess of Learning, and loudly declares it to signify not learning but vanity.

Balaram's promotion of science and its offshoots in the novel echoes the vision of postcolonial development set forth by Nehru. Ghosh clearly patterns Balaram's character upon historical figure Bhudeb Roy closes the school where Balaram teaches, Balaram decides to set up the Pasteur School of Reason in which students can learn practical skills as well as more conventional subjects. The money for it comes from the sale of the material that Alu has learned to weave. This endeavor is peak of Balaram's ambition as a rationalist:

The school would have two departments. After much careful thought Balaram had decided to name one Department of Pure Reason and other the Department of Practical Reason: abstract reason and concrete reason, a meeting of the two great forms of human thought. Every student would have to attend classes in both departments. In the Department of Pure Reason they would be taught elementary reading, writing and arithmetic, and they would be given lectures in the history of science and technology.... In the Department of Practical Reason the students would be taught weaving or tailoring. (116)

This passage shows that through Balaram, Ghosh is parodying the Enlightenment

rationality. That is his reinterpretation of Enlightenment rationality to serve the need of impoverished postcolonial society.

From the profit Balaram inaugurates the Department of March of Reason which symbolizes “Reason Militant” (127), which is for the purpose of disinfecting the village from germs: Balaram says:

A School, like Reason itself, must have a purpose. Without a purpose Reason decays into a mere trick, forever reflecting itself like mirror at a fair. It is that sense of purpose which third department will restore to our school. It will help us to remember that we cannot limit the benefits of our education and our learning to ourselves-that is our duty to use it for the benefit of everybody around us. That is why I have decided to name the new department the Department of the March of Reason. It will remind us that our school has another aspect: Reason Militant. (126-27)

Here we see Balaram saying that reason can undergo infinite regression, “forever reflecting itself like mirrors at a fair” (126). Balaram proposes to fashion the educational system of Pasteur School of Reason in such a way that reason advances material well-being. Ultimately the text is equivocal about the potential of reason. It playfully mocks the more bizarre manifestation of doctrines of reason in its treatment of Balaram’s obsession with phrenology and with hygiene and his use of carbolic acid to free the entire village of germs.

### **Colonial Legacy in Postcolonial Regime**

Postcolonial government is portrayed in Ghosh’s novel unconcerned with the well-being of the populace. The government’s interventions are by and large represented unfavorably. Balaram’s both attempts to introduce a suitably reformulated

program of reason, one that has practically beneficial applications, fail both when he is at presidency college and years later in the village of Lalpukur. In both instances, the strong armed forces of unreason overpower him. Reason, it turns out, cannot be protected from the base operation of interest.

Bhudeb Roy, Balaram's opponent in Lalpukur, interprets to the police about Balaram's activities as insurgent plots. Balaram barricades himself against Bhudeb Roy and the police behind barrels of carbolic acid, the medium through which he has crusaded to introduce hygiene. Balaram's weapon is ineffectual. But without his knowledge another member of the household, Rakhal has homemade bombs, in which he traffics, do the job. When tensions rise, the police aim a warning flare at the house; unwittingly send it up in flames. Only Alu, who is away, survives. This episode brings home the point that an interest in profit, backed by force, easily overpowers individual effort to bring about enlightenment and social improvement. Moreover through this episode the novel depicts the state and its forces of police as an obstruction to the efficient exercise of reason.

It is not the first instance in the novel in which an ameliorative venture is defeated by the intervention of police, a pessimistic view of the state- both as an embodiment of rationality and as an institution-is strikingly evident in the chapter on "signs of new times" (94). The villagers of Lalpukur experience a windfall of war – a plane literally drops down out of the sky.

This incident makes more of an impression upon the people of the village than the events of the war, the creation of a new nation, or the dispersal of refugees. They speculate about the significance of the crash: The narrator describes:

After crash things took a new turn. The numerologist assumed the leadership of the end of the world signaled camp and heaped scorn on



palmist and their theory of Signs of New Times. Whose palm do you read an air crash on? The astrologers warily neutral for once took the conservative view that meant nothing at all: crashes and tempests and earthquakes were normal in Kallyug. What else could you expect in the age of evil? ...it has a meaning, but the meaning must be read rationally-not with the hocus pocus of these Stone Age magicians. (94-95)

The plane becomes the source of profit for Bhudeb Roy, who is quick to take possession of it. He proceeds to sell parts of the plane to the villagers, the metal sheets of the fuselage to convert into a roof, the wings to make bridges; and glass rubber, and nuts and bolts.

Multiple meanings of modernity are implied in this episode –a war machine, emblem of modern technological development, is transformed into modern technological materials for the village. The villagers of Lalpukur pay for even scraps of the modern machine that fall upon them out of sky and which they incorporate bricoleur fashion into their everyday life. ASP Jyoti Das is introduced in the novel at this point as a police detective. He is reluctantly induced in police because he is naturally interested in drawing and painting birds. His reluctance does distance reader from the enterprise of policing. The police do not stop with the destruction of school of reason but he is mobilized in pursuit of Alu a falsely accused insurgent. The state's power and self-serving paronia is evident in the way its agent attempts to track down Alu. They draw on informants, produce intelligence reports and ultimately authorize an international search.

The second part of novel concerns the flight of Alu to Gulf state Al-Ghazira where he becomes part of a community of migrants. Jyoti Das pursues him. In boat

Alu meets Zindi Karthamma and her new born baby Boss, Kulfi, Chunni, the Professor Samuel, and Rakesh. In Al-Ghazira, all these migrants join Zindi's household, paying a moderate rent and finding work with her assistant. Alu once again narrowly escapes from a catastrophe; he is presumed dead when a building in which he is working collapses but his voice is heard in the rubble and he is pulled out two days later alive and unhurt.

Zindi meanwhile is trying to buy a tailoring shop run by Forid Mia and owned by Jeevanbhai Patel, who also lives in Zindi's house. Forid Mia betrays his employer Jeevanbhai's meeting with the malik; police seizes Jeevanbhai then he hangs himself. The rest of Zindi's household proceeds on a planned shopping expedition, but they are abused by uniformed men. Zindi who has anticipated something of the sort, shepherds the survivors, including Alu, onto a boat and they flee.

In this novel, Zindi's household contravenes the ideology of domesticity that prevailed in modern Europe and was recast nationalist ends in India in a separation of "home" and "the World" (457). In the latter view the chaste middle class Indian woman was the guardian of national authenticity. This representation of woman as at once bearing the standard of cultural authenticity and being at home in the modern world is equally pronounced in diasporic immigrant communities in the twentieth century. The figure of Zindi, A large-bodied, rough-tongued, tough Egyptian migrant, could not be further removed from this ideal of the demure, respectable, chaste homemaker. Zindi, whose name is alive in Urdu, is the heart of the household –not as the modest, unblemished bearer of tradition but as the big-hearted den mother, who bellies, cajoles wheels and deals to keep her family intact and afloat.

In *The Circle of Reason* the public business of contractual relationship and economic transaction is brought into the loosely familial private domain of Zindi's

household, where there are continual references to labor and money. For example when neighbors gather, Zindi is quick to make a profit from the sale of tea. Zindi cannot sustain her family from within, however, and faced with their gnawing economic insecurity, she tries to buy a tailoring shop to run as a family business. Zindi refuses to betray the familial ties that the communal sharing of bread has created. When Jeevanbhai asks Zindi to provide information about Alu, she responds, “Police, I Suppose? No I can’t You Know that’s one thing I couldn’t do them. Whatever happens in the future, in the past they all ate my bread and salt. They’ve become part of my flesh” (328). Even as Zindi negotiates for the tailoring shop, the subaltern migrants who make up her household, attempt to establish a utopian community that is far more transgressive than Zindi’s ultimately compromises if reconstructed family.

Trapped in the ruins of a shopping complex built of contaminated cement that has crumbled –an event that symbolizes the collapse of capital because of its rotten foundation, Alu has an epiphany. As he later explains to his companions Pasteur’s struggle against germs was spurred by a quest for purity. But this quest was frustrated because Pasteur was failed to discover the breeding ground of germs- Which according to Alu, is money, Alu then proposes, “We will drive money from the Ras, and without it we shall be happier, richer, more prosperous than ever before” (303). Inspired like Balaram by Pasteur, Alu is as zealous as his foster father had been in his mission to rid his community of germs. Inhabitants of Ras are to pool their earnings and jointly buy goods and services from the Souq through a designated agent and put an end to profit-making commerce in the Ras.

However, police put the forcible end to a revolutionary project. When Alu and his companions leave the Ras and enter the town to spend their pooled earnings,

uniformed men with guns and ambush them. The composite, diasporic community that migrants have forged beyond the repressive structures of postcolonial nations proves to be helpless to forces of capital and of police, forces that are global in scope.

The presence of these forces is felt at this point as the narrative attention shifts to the police, from whose perspective the reader learns Alu's inspiration and the planned shopping trip. The men who ambush Alu and his companions are employed by new regime that is now exploiting Al- Ghazira. With its newly discovered reserves of oil, Al Ghazira is exemplary of the workings of neocolonialism: We learn in one of the many peripheral stories that oil men from abroad have imprisoned the malik and have installed his American-educated brother as oil minister of public works.

When Alu and his friends challenge even in a mild way these economic terms of this arrangement by binding together as workers and consumers, the regime responds with a show of force. The fact that a crisis is precipitated by their shopping trip is itself telling –the residents of the Ras want to enter the market on their own terms, and that of course is not acceptable to the neocolonial ruler of Al-Ghazira. In their encounter with the police Alu's friends are killed and the survivors are rounded up and deported. Alu himself escapes with Zindi, Kulfi and Boss. He is forced once again into migratory flight.

Dr. Mishra opposes Dr. Verma's plan to stage *Chitrangada* not only on rationalist grounds, but also because he wishes to repeat the rousing socialist speech he has delivered on a similar occasion the year before, on the subjects of justice and equality. When he proposes to do the same once again, Dr. Verma challenges his political commitment and recalls past left political battles. She recalls Mishra's Father's comfortably self-serving left positions and suggests that Mishra's rhetoric is hollow. Her own father has lived by and suffered for his socialism. Ghosh here

quarries the political stances of a comfortably well-off leftist bourgeoisie. Mishra's socialist bombast contrasts with practical, loved socialism that Alu and his companions have adopted.

### **Weaving and Circle: Symbolic Representation**

In *The Circle of Reason* weaving is more than a vocation and more than a metaphor for storytelling. Narrator in the novel states that "Weaving is Reason" (62) by this he means that the mechanics of weaving are the oldest and most fundamental manifestation of the reasoning mind. But he also means that cloth is the reason. It explains histories the making and breaking of empires, the movements of people why people are, where they are and how they are. If the novel is about any one thing, it is about cloth-and more particularly the language of cloth and cloth as a language, the narrator explains:

Everywhere it went people had trouble thinking of it. Only the oldest of the Indo-Europeans language could think of it as a thing in itself and even then the thought was so difficult that across continents people hardly dared differ. In Sanskrit it was *Karpasia* in Persian its *Kirpas*. In Greek it was *Carbasos* and in Latin *Carbassus*. They gave Hebrew its *Kirpas* ... even the English were handed down their word, like so much else that raised them to civilization, by the Arabs, from their kutn ... But the Arabs took their own word from the Akkadin *Kittinu*. And there they had lost the battle already, for that word came from *Kitu*, in the same language which meant nothing but dreary flax. (60)

The three languages Alu speaks while explaining the parts of machine are languages of Bangladesh, now the language of diasporic village Lalpukur.

Balaram had earlier discovered Alu's natural propensity for weaving and,

when Alu has refused to go to school, has apprenticed him to a local weaver who has a stolen knowledge of mysteries of Jamdani technique. Alu's extraordinary ability epitomizes the potentialities of reason:

Man at the loom is the finest example of Mechanical man: a creature that makes his world as no other can, with his mind. The machine is man's curse and his salvation, and no machine has created man as much as the loom. It has created not separate worlds but one, for it has never permitted the division of the world. The loom recognizes no continents and no countries. It has tied with its bloody ironies from the beginning of human time ... it has never permitted the division of reason. (59)

Weaving is presented here as a complex figure of human experience. The passage emphasizes the ambiguities of human agency working in the loom. It is presented as transformative power for the world for better and the worse. Human figure denies a number of divisions: those of body and mind, of continents and countries, of history, of reason itself.

The narrator propounding a vision of praxis through this figure of weaving is fully aware of the history of imperial exploitation that inheres in its form as is clear from the brief excursus in the novel on slavery, colonialism and weaving. "It is a gory history in parts; a story of greed and destruction. Every scrap of cloth is stained by a bloody past" (61). However the novel imagines the possibility of reconstituting these forms for liberator ends- hence the repeated valorization of weaving. "But it is the only history we have and history is hope as well as despair.

And so weaving, too is hope; a living belief that having once made the world one and blessed it with its diversity it must do again .... Weaving is Reason, which

makes the world mad and makes it human” (61-62). In positing human experience, equated here with both weaving and reason, as universal, heterogeneous, and interwoven, the narrator rejects the Euro centrism of Enlightenment discourse of reason. In this view, weaving/reason can be rescued from the determinations of colonial domination and take new, emancipatory forms.

The figure of the circle also works against the linear logic of modernity and of Enlightenment rationality. Circling is invoked in three ways: In the title, in the forms of the narrative and in terms of travel. It is contrasted with the straight lines that have the quality of a fetish for Bhudeb Roy:

The time has come, he said, his tears drying on his cheeks, for straight lines. The trouble with this village is that there aren't enough straight lines. Look at Europe, Look at America, Look at Tokyo: Straight lines that are the secret. Everything is in the straight lines. The roads are straight, the houses are straight, the cars are straight (Except for the wheels). They even walk straight. That's what we need: straight lines. There is a time and an age for everything, and is the age of the straight line. (107)

Linearity here is linked with the modern and the prosperous Europe, America, Tokyo. Development is concerned in the image of the straight line. The village, by contrast is a place with unprepared cycles resting against a banyan tree, “the rickety shed of the pharmacy ... ponds mildewed with water- hyacinth and darkened by leaning coconut palms” (6) a place of disorderedly rural beauty.

This sense of disorderliness is enhanced by the circling, perambulatory quality of the narrative, which moves between past and present, the city and the country and from character to character in a highly associative way. As the story develops, Alu,

himself moves, again without any clear purpose or sense of direction. The novel's format and thematic disruptions of linearity are another way of refuting the neat closure of the narrative and the corresponding logics of domination.

The novel circles around the concept of reason, exploring its various meanings through philosophical categories and metaphorical figures: pure reason, practical reason, reason militant, the circle of reason and reason as weaving. We find rejection of reason as an unworldly abstraction. Rather reason is prescribed a secular role, a role that involves the creative use of the intellect in the practices of everyday life.

### **Concerns of Migration, Diaspora and the Subalterns**

The divergence between bourgeois and subaltern articulation of the same projects or phenomenon is seen finally in the representation of migration. With reference to Jyoti Das, who is an amateur ornithologist and is preoccupied with the migration of birds we can see the theme of migration explicitly raised. Alu has been forced to migrate to Al-Ghazira to get away from the police. Although Jyoti Das becomes increasingly alienated from his colleagues and ultimately abandons his pursuit and for a time travels with Alu and Zindi, his experience of migration is clearly represented as different from theirs. When the failed policeman runs out of funds in Al-Ghazira, he is able to obtain money by wire from an uncle in Dusseldorf. In the last pages of the novel, Jyoti Das buys a ticket with the intention of migrating to Germany. As he waves good-bye to Zindi and Alu, he exults in his freedom and prospect before him.

The pleasure of migration is conveyed in Das's perception of the landscape "dolphin racing along with the ferry, leaping, dancing, and standing on their tails...tranquil sky, the soaring birds, the sunlight, the sharpness of the clean sea, breeze and the sight of the huge rock growing in the distance" (457). This passage



describes the possibilities open to the bourgeois migrant in euphoric terms. This sense of euphoria is contrasted to his feeling for his past “home” signified as “Mockingly gray smudge hanging on the horizon” (457). He is able to turn back on the continents of defeat that he has left behind.

The subaltern migrants are much more defenseless and desperate. When they arrive in EI Oued, for example, Boss has a fever that has been untreated for ten days. On the way, they have passed through Egypt and have returned to Zindi’s village, but she has been taunted and driven away. In the last passage of the novel, Alu, Zindi, and Boss, who comprise an unlikely holy family of surviving subaltern migrants, experience a sense of resignation rather than exultation. They turn away from the Mediterranean panorama toward which Das faces:

But Boss was looking the other way, toward the Atlantic, and soon they were looking there, too, scanning the water. They saw nothing except sleepy, crawling oil-tankers. So, drowsily, warmed by the clear sunlight, they settled down to wait for Virat Singh and the ship that was to carry them home. (457)

This description shows a sense of lethargy and immobility that is the very opposite of the ebullience of Das’s vision. Although the novel ends with “Hope is the beginning” (457) the reader is left with the strong sense that the bulk of hope lies with bourgeois migrants.

*The Circle of Reason* has both historical as well as mythological elements. Mythical references have been molded to reflect contemporary conditions in a true new historicist fashion. Girish Karnad is another man to have done so successfully in his plays. Here, Ghosh weaves ideas, characters and metaphors through magic and irony and develops his fictional motifs. Characters are not far from metaphors; they

become metaphors. The characters as well as different situations of the novel stand for rootlessness, migration, diasporic feelings and a new kind of sensibility born out of these factors-these things are unique to our age.

There used to be times when people used to be solidly rooted. Identities were clear. Everyone knew everyone else in the village or in the locality. Families used to be super strong. Human beings fought with elements; not with each other. There was no fear of 'being lost'. Everyone was cared for. Alas! this is not our present day world. All genuine artists are in one way or the other trying to depict the loneliness of the contemporary human. Everyone understands as to what it means to be alone in a crowd. The human species has found itself in this new situation and it wants to express this sentiment. Immigrant communities have caught the imagination of the artist. In fact, often the artist is the immigrant. 'Home' as a metaphor has been lost. The native village is home; mother's lap is home; father's angry brows are home; elder brother's slap is home. One does not know as to where is home. Things have gone far off. Things that used to matter have been lost.

There is nothing in this novel that can ordinarily be called a home. Significantly, it is initially located in a refugee village. It only settles the human race temporarily as a refugee on this planet. It goes back and forth to Bangladesh and Calcutta. Then it reaches the Middle East via Kerala. The last location again significantly is that of a desert with shifting sand dunes. The story moves in an uncertain atmosphere. One is never sure whether it is a city or a village. Even the ideas are not stable; they keep us shaking. Even the most basic element of coherence, time, is not arranged normally. *The Circle of Reason* can only be called an endless saga of restlessness, uncertainty and change.

Ghosh's diasporic consciousness comes out most clearly in the central section

of the novel where Alu has to roam all over India and the Middle East. Within India, Alu moves first to Calcutta and then to the south, always just managing to elude the police and Das till he finally reaches Mahe, the southernmost part of India's west coast. Having reached land's end, Alu, still trying to evade arrest by the Indian police, takes the ultimate diasporic move .He leaves the country behind and sails over the Indian ocean to AlGhazira. Alu's journey across the Indian Ocean on a mechanized boat allows Ghosh to depict the risks endured by thousands of Indians who leave their native land in search of a prosperous future. Illegal emigrants hazard their lives voyaging on frail vessels.

It is a Story of Alu, the Wanderer, Seeking a Home. Ghosh's diasporic consciousness comes out most clearly in the central section of the novel where Alu has to roam all over the India and the Middle East. Within India, Alu moves first to Calcutta and then to the south, always just managing to elude the police and Das till he finally reaches Mahe, the southernmost part of India's west coast. Having reached land's end, Alu, still trying to evade arrest by the Indian police, takes the ultimate diasporic move – he leaves the country behind and sails over the Indian Ocean to AlGhazira.

Alu's journey across the Indian Ocean on a mechanized boat allows Ghosh to depict the risks endured by thousands of Indians who leave their native land in search of a prosperous future. Illegal emigrants hazard their lives voyaging on frail vessels. Alu's particular boat also bears witness to the wide range of social types who make the dangerous crossing in pursuit of economic security: among the passengers are a professor, a travelling salesman, and a madam and her girls, one of whom is even pregnant.

Ghosh takes time to emphasize the desperation and the dreams that move these

people. A pregnant woman, for instance, had been lured to al-Ghazira by someone who has made her innumerable promises. Zindi, the madam on the boat, also describes her success in attracting people to her establishment in Al-Ghazira. She expresses that she would find any man a good a job. The novel depicts the archetypal nature of the journey. As the boat bearing this batch of hopeful approaches the quintessential Middle Eastern boom city of Al-Ghazira, Ghosh emphasizes the archetypal nature of its journey. It is doing what hundreds of other boats have been doing for a century and a half carrying an immense cargo of wanderers seeking their own destruction in giving flesh to the whims of capital.

The study focuses on search of an alternative and viable future or formative of new family. Al-Ghazira, in fact, is a phenomenon of which Ghosh is one of the first chronicler: the exodus of thousands of men and women of the Third World to the Middle East in search of an alternative, and viable, future. A cross-eyed egg-seller is said to be able to see Cairo and Bombay simultaneously. Disabled persons, Filipino faces, Indian faces, Egyptian faces, Pakistani faces, even a few Ghazira's faces, a whole world of faces.

Indeed, certain parts of Al-Ghazira have the cosmopolitan hustle and bustle of a contemporary vanity fair. It is almost as "though half the world's haunts had been painted in miniature along the side of the single street of the city". Although these faces and the places have filled the desert spaces of the Middle East, they have not been able to make Al-Ghazira into a home, because there were problems everywhere, no matter what you were paid, and because foreign places are all alike in that they are not home. Nothing binds you there.

Magic Realism is a phenomenon of postcolonial practice. The novel is rich in it. Alu is indisputably the main protagonist, the glue that holds a nomadic novel

together, but, for much of the action, he is the silent centre around which an abundance of other stories are told. Many of these include fabulous elements and, although Ghosh never departs from the bounds of what is strictly possible, the use of fantasy suggests a world-view that has affinities with both contemporary magic realism and a range of South Asian narrative traditions.

Ghosh is adept at twisting and turning his narrative line. Eventually the story climaxes in the Al-Ghazira section with a confrontation that will see Alu, an idealist like his uncle, being routed by the forces of the capital. Alu's campaign to destroy the power of money which Alu has identified the root of all evil, is crushed. However Zindi manages to extricate Alu, herself and Kulfi and Boss, two other members of the household, from the mess created by Alu's quixotic scheme, and eventually they all end up in the little town of El-Qued at the northeastern tip of the Algerian Sahara. It also exposes the return to realism of a world full of suffering and injustice. In El-Qued, the fugitives come across the Vermas, two Indian doctors who have taken up jobs in the Algerian desert. Mrs. Verma is delighted to see the fugitives, because Kulfi appears to be just the woman she wanted to cast as the heroine of her production of a Bengali dance drama.

In the desert town of El-Qued *The Circle of Reason* is completed. Mrs. Verma, brisk and nonsensical, manages to disabuse Alu of the dream of a world purified by rational methods. The most important thing is to try to be a better human being. The only hope is to make a better life. Not surprisingly, at the end of Ghosh's first novel, his major characters resume their travel again, disburdened of false dreams. Zindi and Alu head for "home" via Tangiers. Das joins them as he moves forward for a migrant's life in Germany. He will accompany Alu and Zindi till Tangiers, where migrating birds fill the sky as they make their annual flights.

The story abounds in bizarre moments but is basically a serious attempt to deal with man's delusive quest for reason within the context of contemporary Diaspora that has taken countless Third World workers and professionals across continents in quest of a better life. The journey as a motif runs throughout the novel and unites the three parts of the novel. Characters cross borders with almost the biological necessity.

This rationality wages a war against germs, which are the root of all diseases. The analogy can easily be taken further where carbolic acid as a tool of scientific temper tries to finish diseases, and rationality as the thought offshoot of scientific temper tries to end the ills of society. The cleansing mechanisms in different forms run as a metaphor throughout the novel. In *Al-Ghazira* Hajji Fahmy makes Adil and his cousin bathe in antiseptic. Carbolic acid is very much part and parcel of Alu's cleaning program. Towards the end of the novel, Mrs. Verma is shown using carbolic acid instead of Ganga Jal. Dr. Mishra remarks, 'Carbolic acid has become holy water' (411). To this Mrs. Verma retorts, 'What does it matter whether it is Ganga Jal or Carbolic acid? It is just a question of cleaning the place, isn't it? People thought something was clean once, now they think something else is clean. What difference does it make to the dead, Dr. Mishra?' (411). Ghosh is of course pointing out to the blind faith of millions of Indians in Ganga Jal even though the water of the life giving river is so badly polluted.

In fact, the book, *Life of Pasteur* is related to Mrs. Verma's life also. Her father introduced her to the book and it was because of it only she became a microbiologist. The story of the book comes to an end only when Kulfi, defying all efforts by Balram and Alu, dies. It is a defeat of reason because the course of action does not go on rational lines. The book is itself about without the germ, life would become impossible because death would be incomplete.

Alu's real name is Nachiketa. As with everything else of Amitav Ghosh, the choice of this mythological name has a meaning. Nachiketa, in mythology is the boy who waits at Yama's doors in obedience to his father. Waiting at Yama's doors naturally means waiting at the door of death. Nachiketa is sage Uddalaka's son. Nachiketa is known for his perseverance. In his pursuit of true knowledge, Nachiketa incurs his father's displeasure. In a fit of rage, Uddalaka curses Nachiketa to go and suffer in the neither world i.e. Yamaloka (the world of the death god, Yama). Yama, on his part, is also the embodiment of righteousness. His work is such that he just cannot afford to be unjust. Nachiketa sincerely pleads to Yama to give him divine knowledge. He wins Yama's heart by his commitment to the chosen cause. He receives the knowledge about the true nature of Brahman (Bramhagyan) from Yama. Nachiketa's single-mindedness is coupled with disinterested action. He is not working for getting something.

As the myth goes the young sage is lured by Yama into the pleasures of heaven. Nachiketa refuses to go to heaven. As he has learnt the true nature of being, he knows Brahman is all pervading. Moreover Agni (fire) is a purifying agent. Fire, even in hell, does-the work of cleansing. Here the myth begins to connect with our story. Carbolic acid is also a purifying agent. At Kulfi's death, paste for puja is made of carbolic acid instead of ghee. At times, I feel, *The Circle of Reason* is simply a response of Amitav Ghosh to the unhygienic conditions of India. It is a complex response of the author to appalling dirt and filth in a land whose people have always talked of purity of soul as well as surroundings. The contradiction is fascinating. People insist on taking morning baths, purifying their homes with havans (fire) and keep fasts for internal cleansing. And still, they turn a blind eye to all the garbage and dirt in their holy rivers and holy places. The mythical Nachiketa might have been

interested in big things. Alu's concern is simply how to overcome germ and disease.

Ghosh focuses on the disruption of the idea of purity. The novel presents hybrid practice/hybridity, scientific versus religious or superstitious, universal versus cultural difference, traditional versus modernity. It also has the theme of formation of new connections, transcending the barriers between the two poles of rationalities. Zindi's effort shows the formation of the new community. It exposes the use of carbolic acid to kill germs (purity of science) versus germs necessary to decay corps. It emphasizes on the use of carbolic acid in place of holy water at Kulfi's death. Likewise, it concerns the subalterns. It focuses on the creation of third space between two rationalities or the traditional - dichotomies, colonizer- colonized, civilized- barbaric, fact -history fiction- myth, assertion of identity through silence as well as action. It shows that subalterns can try to speak or act/make effort to defy by plants of travelling although it is fatal or uncertain. It implies that history is not unchangeable.



## Chapter 4

### **Failure of Postcolonial Nation and Harsher Condition of the Subalterns**

Amitav Ghosh in *The Circle of Reason* presents the alternative transformative/utopian projects through characters and highlights the obstacles on the way of their projects. He explores the adverse effects of postcolonial rationality. Ghosh raises questions on the legacy of Enlightenment rationality in a postcolonial context. This novel critiques the repressive aspect of postcolonial government with a hopefulness of possibilities of postcolonial modernity. It critiques at both philosophical and social levels being together with emancipatory aspect of Enlightenment reason. Ghosh imagines the way of overruling repressive postcolonial modernity by the alternative transformative projects that can really change impoverished society. This possibility is conveyed by figure of weaving. Weaving figure which emphasizes the imbricatedness of people is presented as pragmatic and practical reason. This novel also explores the forceful migration. It presents the experience of an escapee as to the repressive element of modern postcolonial rationalities and social forms.

This study shows how the novel presents the harsher condition of subaltern migrants such as Alu, Zindi, Baby boss, and liberatory dimension of bourgeois migrants such as ASP Jyoti Das. Ghosh, presenting complicity between discourse of reason and the apparatus of police in postcolonial India, proves repressive aspect of postcolonial rationality which has no principled and pragmatic value. This rationality gives suffering to the people. Ghosh depicts the unsuccessful attempts made by subaltern people to attain the domain of civil-society. The victims of state's rationalities are unwillingly stimulated, who have no interest in maintaining order in the society. Through ASP Jyoti Das whom Ghosh presents as bourgeoisie migrant, the

reader can know the unwillingness. The transformative projects of people are destroyed by the repressive force of police.

Balaram's attempt to transform impoverished village with the establishment of a school having department of pure reason and abstract reason is destroyed by the brutal force. Innocent people, like Alu suffer being falsely accused of terrorists and are compelled to be a fugitive. Ghosh in this novel presents the hybrid and confused status of postcolonial people in post-independent India in which colonial regimes are deeply rooted in culture, religion education and other state rationalities. Ghosh emphasizes that it takes long time for the remedy of cultural invasion. Postcolonial people in post-independent India want to do things for the improvement of society but the previous British furthered culture and structure, and structures in their mind come as barrier and confusing forces on their projects. From the various characters of the novel Ghosh shows that post-independent people think themselves powerful and independent but power is somewhere in the other place which they are unable to know. Although apparently they look independent, they are not free. They are unable to know their status and their ability is not clear.

The novel circles around the concept of reason, exploring its various meanings through philosophical categories and metaphorical figures. Pure Reason, Practical Reason, Reason Militant, the Circle of Reason and reason as weaving. We find rejection of reason as an unworldly abstraction. Rather reason is prescribed a secular role, a role that involves the creative use of the intellect in the practices of everyday life.

Thus the novel demonstrates that Indian society has not been improved along with postcolonial rationalities. People are suffering more. Their transformative projects do not get any assistance from state apparatus but obstructions. Innocent

people are falsely accused of being a terrorist and compelled to be fugitive. Thus postcolonial rationality has no sense, no reason, no principled and pragmatic value and what takes postcolonial rationalities of India into this condition is British furthered structures and rationalities of colonial period.

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