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ETHOS AND TRANSNATIONALISM IN AMITAV GHOSH'S THE CIRCLE OF REASON

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ABSTRACT

Postcolonialism is the central speculative investigation of the cultural heritage of colonialism and its consequent hegemony. It converges on the human impacts of the enslaved person's imperialism. The neoliberal diaspora of the middle – to the late 1900s is an essential facet of the postcolonial perseverance to global integration. Diasporic literature negotiates with hot button issues like alienation, ethnocentrism, societal abductions, racism, colonialism, etc. These studies tackle compliance with its specified requirements from the trans-national void occupied neither at home nor abroad by a fluid culture. The immigrants wage a heated psychosomatic confrontation between the amenities of home and those from the modern paradigm. One of Amitav Ghosh's novels, *The Circle of Reason*, holds a novel position in postcolonial diasporic life by drawing characters uprooted from their hometown and becoming immigrants elsewhere searching for their subsistence. The novel's characters are prone to travel in general, advance back and ahead from Bangladesh to Calcutta, then from the Middle East to Kerala. The plot progresses somewhat vaguely, and the mysterious circumstances do not concede the characters to probe into their life with endurance. The novel can be denominated as an immortal annal of anxiety, ambivalence, and transition.

Keywords: Postcolonialism, diaspora, immigrants, ambivalence

The postcolonial phase is unique in the progression of postmodern treatises of cross-cultural perceptions in the present scenario. The postcolonial literary paradigm seeks to endorse “cultural appropriation” rather than “annulment” and “multi-ethnic inclusiveness” over ‘cultural essentialism.’ The approaches primarily aim for internal solidarity and deal with hybridity and diaspora that have scored various globalised communities. Culture is a hypernym that embraces the convivial habits, grades, and erudition unearthed in human societies. As Tanner in his work points out:

Culture is often defined by elites as related to survivable features of their societies such as architecture, art, literature and generally state objects capable of being analysed but at the lower levels of popular living, very little of what has been defined as culturally important is likely to be accepted as more than marginally part of their social understandings. (Tanner, 55)

Human beings acquire culture through the learning cycles of embodiment and socialisation, showing society's ethnic diversity. Cultural studies have blossomed as an up-to-date segment of world literature in moulding transversely diverse socio-political affairs. It is an arena that operates on the estrangements between countries and races and evaluates cultures' heterogeneity on a global forum. The infinite cultural domain of the entire globe has influenced cultural studies. This genre can never be claimed as an inclusive, diversified coverage. Cultural conflict is the aversion, resentment or conflict between the cultures, which follows incongruous aspirations and reactions of separate conceptions and forms to life. The presumption stems from sociological conceptions of intercultural alliances' speculations and anthropological principles.

In the literary scenario, a nation's culture has become a thriving entity that sedates actively and manipulates as a propagator of civilization. People from the past decades witnessed diaspora in the mode of colossal deracination and proliferation worldwide; dislodgement is not relatively a

topical phenomenon and is not delimited to modern amenities. It transcends time-space and shapes humanity in the form of an individual as well as mass. When redeemed the selfhood, the indigenous cultures through which they came through intermingled consciously or unconsciously. Such cultural transfusion draws the postcolonial writer's creative ability to improve unexpected artistic trends and recreate imaginary homelands. In precise, diasporic culture is momentarily a prevailing sensation worldwide and is inevitable because of the contiguous circumstances in society or the family. The phenomenon of relocation applies to the material inclination, which may be the outgrowth of transference to the foreign culture from one's homeland. The cerebral detachment from ones' own culture can be the upshot of diverse conditions. Both the customs of cerebral and unconscious displacement dominantly transpire in the personas of the particular novels of Amitav Ghosh.

Amitav Ghosh, a writer to reckon with in postcolonial Indian literature, relentlessly moved around his immigrant characters who have tried to fix their genesis in a foreign environment and to liberate themselves of the persuasive obligations of one's lives. Most of his storylines prevail in diverse ages and nourish a sense of estrangement due to the disarray and deceptions triggered by numerous historical fatalities like the Civil War, the Global Depression, Bengal Partition, etc. His novels studied the chaos of the exodus and migration and talked of the loathsome Third World's imperialist calamity. The creativity of Ghosh is inherently diasporic, and both his fictitious and non-fictitious storylines are transnational in the surge and are perpetually flowing through territories, cultures, and coastlines. In his novels, Ghosh traces the agony of the Indian refugees in alien lands and also unfurls a space to facilitate the culturally displaced margins of Postcolonial society. Through the diasporic entity that continually tries to compromise between time and space, Ghosh seems to be trying to develop a way to be 'Universal'. Several novels open up the cognitive realm of characters as they explore the notion of multi-layered psychological effects that influences feelings. His novels introduce

a sequence of improbable shifts that do not lead to chaos yet moves towards revitalization.

Amitav Ghosh's debut novel, *The Circle of Reason*, is an ingeniously incredible narrative, hatched partially in Colonial India and the rest in North Africa and the Middle East. It has been transposed into multiple languages, and the ethical dilemma etched in the novel is man's concern with estrangement, acclimatisation, and mundane aspects. It is the preeminent tale of its kind; a transition from the traditional literary themes and schema. *The Circle of Reason* highlights the moral conundrum and the societal status of those affected and become the victims of the segregation when they are obligated to cross borders. As a diasporic entity, this novel perpetually revolves around the history and certain annals that accentuates in the novel during the 1940s and early '70s: Indian political strife, the Bangladesh Uprising, and the global emigration to the middle-east, etc. The novel is about the catastrophic consequences of revamping and westernisation on conventional rural life and how non-Europeans are uprooted by fascism. In *The Greatest Sorrow: Times of Joy Recalled in Wretchedness*, Ghosh himself has stated thus:

This novel, *The Circle of Reason*, was the story of a journey, and its central section told the story of a group of immigrants- South Asian and Middle Eastern - living in a fictitious oil-rich sheikhdom in the Gulf. Looking back today, it strikes me that *The Circle of Reason* could, within the parameters that I have used here, be identified as an exodus novel, a story of migration in the classical sense of having its gaze turned firmly towards the future. The book ended with the words: 'Hope is the beginning.' (314)

In a sense, the novel embodies Alu's relentless spirit of love and persistence, an adolescent weaver from a remote hamlet near Calcutta who deserts his place to move transversely the Indian Ocean to the industrial city in Al-Ghazira. This boy earned the title of an orphan when his mother and father died, and he was given up for adoption to his uncle, a primary school teacher in Laipukur. Following a fabricated allegation that he is a member of a terrorist network, he runs to a fictional gulf state, later to

Algeria. Moreover, a young and dynamic Indian policeman, Jyoti Das, kept on observing him all here. He experienced a near fatal-crash and has a revelation that inhabitants of the Indian quarter will rise in revolt over sanitation and economics. His experimental social project was successful until the local government forced him to discontinue the study. Alu runs away once again with his new friends Zindi and others to save himself from Das. After roaming through what is now North Africa, they inadvertently converge in a small Saharan village. There, they are confronted with pathetic and traumatic experience, which has a detrimental effect on their destiny.

As the title indicates, Alu's journey is symbolic of the inner quest that he experiences as he searches for peace and a soothing destination, which will bring him to the point of enlightenment and eventually, like the legendary hero Nachiketa, he too returns home pacified. By exploring three gunas from the Bhagavad-Gita, the author splits the novel into three parts: Satwa, Rajas, and Tamas, the symbolic representation of Reason, Passion and Death. What Ghosh seeks to prove here is that human existence by itself is discontented, that goes through these gunas. As GJV Prasad states:

The Circle of Reason is not merely circular but a finely patterned novel and when seen as a whole displays the intricate buti work (work with a detailed description) of a master weaver in the making. The journey from Satwa of the novel is not a straight forward narrative but one full of resonance sharpening back and forth like an unfolding Raga circling and repeating notes and sequences of notes, each contextually different. And like a singer, Amitav Ghosh points to and expects appreciation of the subtle variations, the nuances, the resonances, the patterns in the rendition, and hence the whole narrative structure" (59)

Though 'Satwa' is generally interpreted as a light of sentience, Ghosh prefers to name it as the reason. For him, it is a social concept of the power to think rationally. Sense binds people all around the globe, and it identifies nations. Balram states in the novel, "Science doesn't belong to any nation. They belong to the history, to the world" (TCR, 57). In the

segment of “Rajas”, Ghosh features al-Ghazira on the Gulf of Persia. Though Alu recommences his career as a weaver at al-Ghazira, fortuitously buried alive when a new-fangled building named the Star collapses, which can be read as an allegory about the implication of post-modernity on the conservative cultures of the Middle East, exposes the cultural logic of global capitalism that is jeopardising the old imperial ethnicities of the Middle East. The next segment is “Tamas”, the symbolic representation of death, darkness, inertia etc. Since Ghosh incorporates archaic Hindu holy books as the source material, the cultural elements are integrated into the novel’s background. When the researcher tries to figure out all the cultural traits shown in the novel, there is a heap of events that denotes that there is cultural heritage in this novel.

In *The Circle of Reason*, Ghosh deals with several nations and persons from different nationalities. The novel highlights the plight and societal condition of the affected people and victims of the separation when they are enforced to cross the border. The human race represented in the novel is fugitive, and for them, nothing is called home here. The initial hurly-burly takes place at Lalpukur, which goes back and forth from Bangladesh to India. The village is established by refugees from East Pakistan after the creation of Bangladesh in 1971. Balram narrated about the dwellers of Lalpukur as “Most of the villagers were refugees from the east.” (TCR, 20). Thus, the village, deceptively a representation of traditional India, is a diasporic product, a perfect embodiment of heterogeneous language, race, nation and culture. The inhabitants of Lalpukur were:

“vomited out of their native soil years ago and dumped hundreds of miles away.... borders dissolved under the weight of millions of people in panic-stricken flight from an army of animals” (TCR, 59-60).

So, the canvas on which the story is depicted and plotted has no essence. It totters in its existence. The action then moves to the Middle East, al-Ghazira in the Persian Gulf, an oil-rich state. But it also does not have a distinct culture entrenched in one nation as the state is a blend of

Persians, Zanzibaris, Arabs, Omanis and Indians. Scrutiny of the characters living there divulges Ghosh's denial of margins in terms of ethos, nation, language and even profession. Like the village of Lalpukur, al-Ghazira does not signify a constant authentic culture but a network of a vast rootless region. The last location, the Algerian desert, is again noteworthy as a desert is all but a shifting sand dune. One has to cope with this pace and uncertainty of the narrative as the atmosphere and location are ever-changing. Even the most essential element of coherence, time, is not accurate to mirror restlessness and fickleness.

Amitav Ghosh attempts to understand the ramifications of home by using three different approaches in his novel *The Circle of Reason*. The first approach speaks to the distinct waves of migration and the second approach is about the characters who return to the places they lived in before. The third phase entails people standing in solidarity with their deficit and anguish. Ghosh convincingly mentions the adverse influence of adapting oneself into a foreign language where one is not inured to it. He beautifully crafts such problems of immigrants through the characters like Kulfi and Prof Samuel. Both of them lost their employment in an alien environment because they had no command over the language. The use of hybridization, which comes back to the point of 'dislocation' creates a linguistic impact. For example, the diasporic inhabitants of Lalpukur, from beyond the national boundaries form a new vernacular of their own. Regarding these events, the facets of diaspora encounters that assert their fringe and impervious status in a modified social structure are well indicated. The language of an area is relevant, as it can be difficult for the immigrants to adapt when they are not familiar with the language.

Amitav Ghosh draws up a fictional world in *The Circle of Reason* where cultures from all around the globe come together and eliminate all of the divergences, respectively. Mrs Verma and Dr Mishra, the representatives of the subaltern society at al-Ghazira, abandon their homeland for their livelihood. Their dislocation taught them to cope up with confronting situations. "Not all diaspora sustains an ideology of return. Displacement has taught them to re-orientate, to modify social

customs. They learn to negotiate with new economic and cultural realities," observes Ghosh. The novel concludes with Alu's return to his root, and it may be noted that *The Circle of Reason* indeed portrays the modern transnational society in its real sense. Ghosh says: "Weaving is hope because it has no country, no continent. Weaving is Reason, which makes the world mad and makes it human" (62). Amitav Ghosh seems to imply that the people here adhere to India's various states, but while they live in other countries or continents, they are absorbed into their cultures.

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