
**Postcolonial Identity and Cultural Displacement in
Amitav Ghosh's *The Circle of Reason***

Dr. Adi Ramesh Babu

Associate Professor, Dept. of English, Govt. City College (A), Hyderabad

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Abstract:

This research paper examines the themes of cultural displacement and postcolonial identity in Amitav Ghosh's *The Circle of Reason*. The novel shows how people struggle to find their identity after the impact of colonial rule. Ghosh examines the consequences of migration, exile, and travel across several nations and cultures via the journey of the main character, Alu. The difficulties that people who live between two worlds, local and global cultures, tradition and modernity, and home and foreign lands, face are highlighted in the novel. The study looks at how the characters' sense of identity, self, and belonging are affected by cultural relocation. Ghosh's depiction of hybrid identities that result from migration and cultural contacts is also examined. The study examines how *The Circle of Reason* challenges conventional notions of nation, culture, and identity from a postcolonial standpoint.

Keywords: History, politics, thematic concern, trilogy**Introduction:**

Amitav Ghosh is a prominent modern Indian novelist writing in English and one of the most significant writers in postcolonial literature. His novels are well known for fiction, anthropology, history, and sociology. His writings address significant issues including migration, colonialism, cultural interchange, identity, displacement, and globalisation and demonstrate a thorough understanding of both history and society. Ghosh explores the social, political, and cultural factors that influence postcolonial societies through his stories. *The Circle of Reason*, one of his early novels, is about migration, exile, and the quest for identity in a postcolonial society. The story depicts the lives of individuals who relocate between nations and cultures and find it difficult to maintain their identity while adjusting to new social settings. Ghosh examines the fragmented character of postcolonial identity and the difficulties encountered by those who are cut off from their own culture and nation via the experiences of the protagonist, Alu.

One of the most well-known writers of modern Indian English literature is Amitav Ghosh. Many people acknowledge his significant contribution to Indian writing in English. Ghosh is “the finest writer among those who were born out of the post Midnight’s Children revolution in Indo-Anglian fiction,” according to Pathak (1997:14). This remark highlights Ghosh’s significant role in the new generation of Indian writers who revolutionised Indian English fiction following the enormous popularity of Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children*. Bengal’s rich intellectual and cultural traditions are intimately linked to Amitav Ghosh’s literary heritage. Ghosh is a member of the “Bengali tradition of novel writing,” according to Ajay Sica (1997:48). Despite having strong roots in Indian society and culture, his works transcend national and cultural borders. His novels help readers gain a deeper understanding of interpersonal connections and cross-cultural interactions by examining the connection between local histories and global realities.

Ghosh “evokes things Indian with an inwardness that is lit and darkened by an intimacy with Elsewhere,” according to Sica (49). Understanding the recurrent themes of migration, displacement, and identity in his works requires the capacity to make connections between the local and the global. Ghosh is also referred to as “one of the most sympathetic post-colonial voices to be heard today” by Soueif Ahdaf (2000:5). Ahdaf said that Ghosh examines significant topics like love and commitment, empire and duty, and tradition and modernisation. He explores the tensions and paradoxes of postcolonial societies through his characters and stories, demonstrating how people attempt to reconcile cultural identities while dealing with the consequences of history and the difficulties of the contemporary world.

Amitav Ghosh’s emphasis on marginalised communities and displaced people whose lives are impacted by more significant political and historical events is one of the key characteristics of his work. His writings frequently address history and the experiences of those who have been marginalised, oppressed, or overlooked. Ghosh provides a voice to people whose stories are frequently omitted from popular history through his works. Bose (2003:18) highlights the depth of Ghosh’s literary vision by characterising his work as a “fictional embracing of historical/political subtexts, and an intellectual exploration of both the major, as well as the marginalised, contexts of modern history.” His novels explore important themes such as nationalism and internationalism, migration, memory and nostalgia, violence, and communalism. Ghosh offers a more comprehensive view of society and the human condition by looking into both popular and underappreciated history. Bose goes on to say that Ghosh is well-versed in the political, historical, social, and cultural facets of the topics he writes on. He stands apart from many other modern Indian novelists who write in English because of this trait. These findings are especially pertinent to an analysis of *The Circle of Reason*, which addresses issues like migration, cultural displacement, cross-border travel, and the quest for identity. Iyer (2001:31) also observes that “all Ghosh is doing, he might say with justice, is rounding out a picture dominated by British accounts, history in

this case having been written mainly by the departing losers.” This remark implies that Ghosh attempts to give a more impartial account of colonial history. Through his novels, he presents the experiences and viewpoints of those whose voices were frequently overlooked in conventional historical narratives and opposes Eurocentric views of the past.

Amitav Ghosh emphasises the experiences of marginalised groups, particularly women, whose voices have frequently been overlooked in both colonial and nationalist narratives, when recounting history. His writings examine the social, cultural, and political constraints that women in colonial and postwar nations had to deal with. Ghosh demonstrates how historical events continue to impact people’s lives throughout generations and mould contemporary reality through this narrative technique. He challenges simplistic and biased readings of the past by combining various narratives, voices, and viewpoints to produce a deep and nuanced picture of history. “The colonialist discourse we have heard so far is a discourse about women; women do not speak here” notes Chatterjee (633). She claims that women have frequently been portrayed in historical narratives as objects rather than as unique people with their own voices, ideas, and experiences. She contends that in order for women to have a voice in Indian history, new questions must be posed. This insight helps in our understanding of Ghosh’s effort to grant agency and a voice to individuals who have been marginalised in prevailing historical narratives. These critical viewpoints demonstrate Ghosh’s dedication to using the experiences of oppressed, marginalised, and silent people to rewrite history so that their narratives play a significant role in our knowledge of the past.

Ghosh does more than just honour the diversity and cultural hybridity brought about by migration. Rather, he analyses nationalism and the challenges and shortcomings of migration. He exposes the hardships, injustices, and violent acts that are frequently associated with both nationalism and migration through the experiences of his female characters. Ghosh emphasises how these pressures impact people’s life as citizens and social subjects, particularly women, as noted by Daiya Kavita (37). Novy Kapadia commends Ghosh for handling intercommunal disputes with caution. “Amitav Ghosh’s greatest triumph is that the depiction of communal strife in Calcutta and erstwhile East Pakistan, and its continuation in contemporary India, is very controlled” (122).

The protagonist of the book is Alu, a teenage orphan whose life is drastically altered after he is falsely charged with terrorism. Alu embarks on a protracted journey that crosses several nations and cultures after being forced to flee from the Indian authorities. The hunt for Alu by intelligence officer Jyoti Das, who is committed to apprehending him, is another significant aspect of the narrative. *The Life of Pasteur* by René Vallery-Radot is a significant philosophical and thematic allusion throughout the book. Alu and Jyoti Das, two seemingly antagonistic characters, are symbolically connected in the book. Ghosh’s concern in reason, scientific reasoning, and the pursuit of order in a frequently perplexing, unexpected, and chaotic environment is reflected in Louis Pasteur’s thoughts. Alu resides in the village of

Lalpukur with his uncle Balam. Louis Pasteur's scientific theories and thoughts had a big impact on Balam, a teacher. Alu learns the principles of scientific thinking under his tutelage, in addition to the craft of weaving. However, mistrust, aggression, and miscommunication interrupt the tranquil life in Lalpukur. Due to a number of issues brought on by these incidents, Alu is forced to flee his country and live in exile. Many of the novel's core themes, including the struggle between reason and irrational behaviour, the brittleness of identity, and the feeling of displacement that influences Alu's journey throughout the narrative, are introduced in this opening part.

Balam is interested in a wide range of topics, from strange and occasionally pseudoscientific concepts to popular science. While some of his theories make sense, others are unclear and challenging to comprehend. His opinions frequently cause him and his neighbour, Bhudeb Roy, to argue. Bhudeb, in contrast to Balam, does not think that reason is capable of returning to or challenging itself. He adheres to a more conventional Western interpretation of logic, according to which every cause clearly and directly results in a certain effect. Alu is the lone survivor of the ensuing bloody battle. The cops call him a "political radical" despite the fact that he has done nothing wrong. Long before the violence stopped, the authorities believed that the situation had turned political. Alu thus becomes a target and is compelled to escape, starting his odyssey of displacement and exile.

Alu travels to the imaginary Gulf state of Al-Ghazira in the second section of the book. The area is packed with individuals from all over the world, including Bangladeshis, Indians, Africans, and Arabs. People in this multicultural society speak many languages and carry their own difficulties, hopes, and experiences with them. Alu lives with Zindi, a former courtesan, and works there illegally. The authorities see Alu's actions with mistrust, and they take official action against the local community. Alu and Zindi barely avoid being pursued by intelligence officer Jyoti Das and proceed to another place. The third section of the novel is set in Algeria's Sahara Desert. At this point, Jyoti Das still follows Alu and Zindi primarily out of obligation rather than because he still firmly believes in the pursuit. Mrs. Verma, an Indian physician, travels with Alu, Zindi, and Das. At the book's conclusion, Alu and Zindi return to India, concluding their arduous journey, while Das quits his job and departs for Europe. Furthermore, the novel paints a vivid picture of how colonial and postcolonial power structures function. It explains how knowledge and authority are established and upheld as well as how they are challenged and changed in various communities. Ghosh shows how colonial regimes' techniques for categorising, observing, and controlling individuals still have an impact on daily life in postcolonial societies.

The voices of marginalised and frequently disregarded people are also given significance in the novel. It demonstrates the intricate ways in which these people engage with and react to current power structures. Ghosh depicts people as active participants who oppose, adjust to, and occasionally even absorb the ideals and regulations imposed by the

contemporary state rather than as helpless victims. Through these characters, the novel highlights the agency and resilience of people living under social and political pressures.

Migration and diasporic movements that transcend national borders and rigid political boundaries are also highly valued in the book. Ghosh demonstrates that human relationships frequently transcend boundaries set by organisations, governments, and political ideologies through the travels of its protagonists across several nations and cultures. People develop new kinds of support, community, and belonging as a result of these cross-cultural and cross-border relationships. The novel makes the argument that identity is continuously formed by movement, experience, and social interaction rather than being set in stone. Migration challenges dogmatic notions of citizenship, nationhood, and cultural purity by demonstrating that identities are frequently created through links that transcend geographic and cultural bounds.

Even though the novel takes place in a variety of locations from villages in India to places in Africa, the locales aren't necessarily the most significant part of the narrative. The story itself, rather than the setting, is frequently the main emphasis of works that are based on oral storytelling traditions. Ghosh contrasts Eastern epics like *The Thousand and One Nights* with the Western novel tradition in one of his works. He contends that whereas Eastern storytelling traditions place more value on the tale itself, Western novels frequently have significant ties to specific locations. "In these ways of storytelling, it is the story that gives places their meaning," according to Ghosh (1997: 12). He draws a comparison between this method and the works of authors like Joyce and Faulkner, whose tales are intricately linked to particular locales and would be challenging to comprehend without them.

The realities of globalisation, migration, and fast movement have altered the significance of place in storytelling, despite the fact that books have historically been strongly associated with particular locations. Because narratives transcend national, cultural, and geographic barriers, stories frequently take precedence over specific geographic locales in Amitav Ghosh's works. Ghosh demonstrates how locations are interconnected. Rather, they are linked by cultural, economic, and historical ties. His books emphasise the connections between many parts of the world, individuals, and society. As a result, rather than being permanent, distinct, and self-contained, space is portrayed in Ghosh's literature as fluid, interconnected, and ever-changing. Ghosh blends the Western novel's framework with several storytelling traditions, including oral histories, folklore, travel writing, and collective memory. He opposes the Eurocentric perspective that views locations as distinct, self-contained entities by doing this.

Ghosh emphasises the links between various areas rather than just the distinctiveness of particular locations. He demonstrates how distant parts of the world have been connected by migration, trade, colonial encounters, and cultural exchanges. In his novels, local histories

and world events converge in certain locations. Ghosh explains the intricate web of links that moulds people's lives and experiences through these ties. Instead of focusing only on the uniqueness of certain places, Ghosh highlights the connections between different localities. He explains how migration, trade, colonial encounters, and cultural exchanges have linked disparate regions of the world.

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