

Re-Reading of Ghosh's "The Circle of Reason"

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Amitav Ghosh, an author of Indian origin who at present he separates his time between New York, Calcutta and Goa, focuses on the Indian diaspora of the 19th century. As he travelled in many countries along with lived in different places; his imagination becomes purely diasporic. He remains an Indian even though he lived in foreign. R. S. Pathak rightly remarks: "Though a gifted craftsman, the novelist never ceases to be an Indian even in his superb flights of fantasy, which impart to his novels the folktale charm of the Arabian Nights and make him a Don Quixote of another era." ¹ Amitav Ghosh explains in his essay "The Diaspora in Indian Culture" that diasporic Indians takes with them not so much things but they carry processes: "India exported with her population....not a language, as other civilizations have done, but a linguistic process....the process of adaptation to heteroglossia." ²

Amitav Ghosh finds importance in the diaspora as it catches the attention towards the edges of culture and which is nothing but an eminent mark of Indian culture. He involves the idea of a perfect cultural identity which heteroglossia rejects. His diasporic associations are not clear as of the Rohinton Mistry's because his hold of the diasporic visual is proofed in his basic rejection of the clarity of cultural identities as well as the notion of the consistency of home. His life possesses different colours of movements not only across geographic but also cultural boundaries where diaspora gives a precious transnational viewpoint in order to undermine harmonized commencements of national identity. He got a unique insight for the processes of cultural presentation from his rigorous travelling in different countries; he also understands the culture of many countries such as Middle East.

His first novel, "The Circle of Reason" (1986) gets a prominent place in the galaxy of postcolonial diasporic existence by showing the condition of people who lost their home and become migrant in search of their livelihood. The novel reflects the transcultural nature of human experience. Actually there are three stories in the novel which move around the three important characters-the first part of the novel tells the story of Balaram Bose who is highly inspired by the book 'Life of Pasteur' and the devoted follower of Louis Pasteur. Balaram Bose, the village school master, works with his target to eradicate germs from public life which makes him self-destructive as he gets engaged with his revise ego, Bhudeb Roy, a crooked landlord and a congress man, who establishes his control over the school management. Balaram gets dismiss from his job of teacher from the school as he stands against the Bhudeb Roy and the conflict between Bhudeb Roy and Balaram Bose ends at the point when Balaram's house was burnt in which Balaram and his wife were killed excluding Alu, the orphan boy whose parents had died in a car accident and due to this he left Calcutta and lived with his childless uncle, Balaram Bose and aunty, Torudebi at Lalpukar, a small village. Bhudeb Roy denounces Alu as a terrorist. And Alu's diasporic journey starts; he runs away from Lalpukur in order to escape from Jyoti Das, the policeman who is in search of Alu, and takes refuge in Gopal's house (his uncle's friend) at Calcutta. And from Calcutta he flees to Kerala; then he begins his journey to al-Ghazira in the company of the Calcutta whores Zindi, Kulfi and Karthamma.

The second part of the novel moves around Zindi-at-Tiffaha who handles to collect a community of Indians in the Middle East. Alu sets sail for al-Ghazira with Zindi. All the passengers on the steamer, Mariamma, have been dislocated from their inhabitant place; most of them not having valid passport or other legal document which is required to get entry in any country and they all are labourers. They migrate to other countries in order to secure better life because in most of the overpopulated countries in Asia, the labour is very cheap. Zindi-at-Tiffaha leads this group and she works for trafficking women to al-Ghazira. Karthamma, a tall back lady, finds herself in difficult situation on the steamer as she is on her last stage of her pregnancy. She is deceived by someone who made her pregnant. She is not in favour to give birth to her baby who is in her womb but is convinced that if she may get to al-Ghazira her child will get, "houses and cars and

multi-storeyed buildings” (CR-177). She also does not have the visa or passport and she is totally unaware about difficulties and problems regarding her migration as well as her migrant life in other country along with she does not know the procedure which is required for migration. She herself requested to Zindi to take her away from India. This shows that she herself chooses to migrate. Most of the passengers take the journey to al-Ghazira in order to flee from police or court of law in India. Kulfi, another passenger on the board of the ship, is willingly migrating to al-Ghazira as her marriage life was not sound. Kulfi’s husband’s insufficient income created terrible situation for her as her husband enforced her to whoring. In order to get honest work she came to Zindi in Bangalore and like Karthamma, Kulfi too requested to Zindi to take her away from India. On arrival they find accommodation in Zindi’s house that affords shelter for a group of migrants from the Indian subcontinent as well as from Egypt along with North Africa. Amitav Ghosh skillfully represents the diasporic life of the migrants in the apartment of Zindi. Here all the migrants try their luck in different fields such as business, weaving and tailoring by facing various problems like rootlessness and alienation. They all get refuge under the roof of Zindi’s apartment.

The third part of the novel revolves around Mrs. Verma, the microbiologist who develops an oasis in the desert for Indian community life. The refugees come across the Dr. Uma Verma, an Indian lady doctor, who becomes hospitable on seeing Indian travellers. Amitav Ghosh rightly remarks:

“It is impossible to be imperfectly Indian....If there is any one pattern in Indian culture in the broadest sense it is simply this: that the culture seems to be constructed around the proliferation of differences (albeit within certain parameters). To be different in a world of differences is irrevocably to belong. Thus anybody anywhere who has even the most tenuous links with India; potentially a player within the culture. The mother country simply does not have the cultural means to cut them off.”³

As this new place required a new identity, Kulfi on the suggestion of Zindi acts as a wife of Alu and the mother of Boss along with she tells Dr. Verma that she is here with her family as a tourists whereas Zindi plays the role of Ayah of Boss.

The novel begins with the incidental annotations on Indian migrations. For instance, the birth of Balaram in the year 1924 recalls the narrator of critical moments in the history of Indian emigration to the West. In this section Amitav Ghosh supplies many examples of Diaspora. As the people of Lalpukur threw up from their native place in the bloodshed attached with the partition of India and again they faced the same due to the civil war which gave birth to Bangladesh. The focal point of the novel perfectly reflects the Amitav Ghosh’s diasporic awareness when Alu wanders throughout the India as well as Middle East. Alu starts his journey to Calcutta at first then moves to the South in order to escape from the clutches police and at last he arrives to Kerala, with Jyoti Das in pursuit. But he never stops his journey; he migrates to al-Ghazira in the Persian Gulf port, he continues his diasporic move on a boat to al-Ghazira.

Through the diasporic journey of Alu, Amitav Ghosh very competently represents the menaces which are faced by the thousands of Indian who abscond their native place in order to secure a peaceful life. But these unlawful expatriates create a danger for them which totally disturb their lives. Kavita Daiya rightly writes:

“Focusing on a motley group of illegal migrants drawn from various parts of India who travel to the imaginary Gulf state al- Ghazira and then Algeria, the novel depicts the struggle for survival of those displaced by dispossession in globalization: people whose very bodies bear the violent marks of this historical passage.”⁴

Amitav Ghosh shows the variety of passengers on a mechanized boat on which Alu is crossing the Indian Ocean such as there is a travelling salesman, a professor, etc. “The illegal migrant laborers heading for al-Ghazira, an imaginary seaport of trade, include the child-protagonist Alu who is evading Indian police who are after him because of an absurd charge made by the corrupt village landlord Bhudeb Roy and the Egyptian Zindi, who runs a lodging and boarding house for illegal migrant workers in al-Ghazira after she was banished from her matrimonial home.”⁵ Amitav Ghosh also depicts the reasons for their emigration, for instance a woman who is pregnant migrates to al-Ghazira as she has been promised by someone that he will provide everything to her future’s child in al-Ghazira. This al-Ghazira’s part of the novel represents the Amitav Ghosh’s enthrallment with a diasporic awareness as well as the unstable existences of the migrant workers.

This section depicts the trap and burial of Alu in “The Star”, the multi-storeyed building which collapses due to false workmanship. Fortunately Alu is saved by an old solid sewing machine on which the falling slab takes to rest. Amitav Ghosh here in this novel shows the terrible suffering of the displaced people. He actually wants to focus on the problems which are faced by the immigrants such as language problem, food along with social problem including economic also. The novel very perfectly represents:

“if there is a home then it is to be found in the way we perceive and relate to our world.”⁶

Reference

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