

“Narrative Techniques of Amitav Ghosh’s *The Circle of Reason*”

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Abstract

This article focuses on the narrative techniques of Amitav Ghosh with reference The Circle of Reason by analyzing new sensibilities, meanings and new dimensions in the Indian English novel. An attempt has been made in this article to make a study of the exciting experiments of Amitav Ghosh’s The Circle of Reason. It shows historical and political realities and trends, this clear headed erasure and re-drawing of cultural and political lines that divide and unite. Ghosh’s narrative skills and imaginative waves together a pluralistic and self-reflexive view of the world. Amitav Ghosh’s narrative technique the freshness of ideas and genius of stylistic concerns and unrestrained experimentation in narrative technique is an indication of development in Indo-Anglican fiction. Allegory, symbols, fantasy, magical realism, narrative fluctuating backwards and forward in time, the compelling use of narrator, fluency in story telling and the unveiling of layers and layers of meaning have all become a mode of writing. Experimentation with English language the use of parody and sheer invention has resulted in the formation of new language rhythms. All experimented with narrative techniques to present new sensibilities, meanings and themes. Slick craftsmanship with narrative technique has created new dimensions and possibilities for the Indian novel in English.

Introduction

The Circle of Reason is at once a detective story, a story of exile, a travelogue, a women’s rights’ tract a Marxist protest and a plea for humanistic camaraderie. A superficial reading of Ghosh’s the novel *The Circle of Reason* might give the impression that it is a picaresque novel set in the contemporary milieu. It does have an unheroic hero and records adventures befalling him and interaction with a host of other characters as he moves from one country to another. But the novel has a deeper allegorical level. What Ghosh has done with considerable skill is to weave together effortlessly your strands: the social the economic, the political and at a still deeper level, the metaphysical. The adventures that befall the protagonist stress at one level the struggle between capitalism and socialism; at another level, the novel depicts a struggle between the power of cold, heartless reason and the nurturing power of human qualities which follow no rules and bring a healing touch to all mankind. As Mrs. Verma points out at the end of novel: “ Tyranny of your despotic science for bade you tell them the one thing that was worth saying, the one thing that was true... all you have to do to cure yourself is to try to be a better human being” (1986:415).

The novel, *The Circle of Reason*, marked a break from the traditional themes of the Indian English novel and the form and structure of the well made novel. The novel basically tells three stories, the first story deals with the story of Balam. He is the rationalist and is influenced by the wife of Louis Pasteur. He is idealistic to the extent of being inhuman. Alu, the protagonist, is nephew of Balam. He is the only one to survive in the family.

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The second part of the novel tells another tale. An earthly, practical zestful trader tries to bring together the community of Indians in the Middle East. But again these efforts prove to be unrealistic. Third part is the story of Mrs. Verma who out rightly rejects traditional thinking. She tries her hand at creating an Indian model of community life in the desert. However Alu Zindu and Jyothi Das, a police officer leaves Mrs. Verma and her experiments in the desert. At the end of novel, these three are in search of newer horizons, unformed hopes and ideas.

The Circle of Reason is also a Picaresque novel that relates the adventures of Alu who descends suddenly on his uncle and aunt in Lalpukur, after his parents have died. It ends with Alu returning home after adventures that take him from his village on the borders of West Bengal to the Middle East hence Algiers and from their back home, but Alu is merely a thread that holds the narrative together, a narrative that is actually split down the centre and which can be divided into two entirely unrelated parts. Part I, dealing with Alu's uncle Balaram in Lalpukur and part two with Zindi in at Ghazira. Though Alu's adventures are diverse and entertaining, the novel is not informed of with coherence and so, Alu the protagonist emerges a contrary figure. Whose shadowy paleness acts as a foil much more vividly conceptualized vitality of Balaram and Zindi? Only the presence Alu binds the novel together, the plethora of events and characters that team in the novel. Novel considered concatenation of cause and effect bind the plot together. It follows only the logic of its momentum.

It is loose connection of events that happens haphazardly that draws in its wake dozens of characters; Bengali, Egyptian, Arabic and Gujarati who are governed by the own loss of existence and not by a thematic imperatives. It is curious to note that no false notice struck in Ghosh's delineation of Egyptian, Arabic characters and this is because their emotions and passions are related to their universal humanity rather than racial identity.

The novel has many characters, Ghosh's characterization triumphs over the limitations of caricature and lends authenticity to eccentricity. His comic method transcends the boundaries of the absurd to give credibility to the implausible.

An element of fantasy weaves through the novel binding characters and incidents together and investing both with the lurid light of comedy. A gallery of memorable characters indulges in their idiosyncrasies to the detriment of probability but to the enhancement of enjoyment. The characters of the novel live in our memory because of their uncanny ability to rise above the mundane with their vivid reactions to life-reactions that are fixed in the framework of the plausible and yet merge in the region of the fantastical.

The Circle of Reason is a specifically contemporary in its concerns like Garcia Marquez and Mario Vargas Llosa, the facility for story telling is the hallmark of Amitav Ghosh' novel. The basic technique used in this novel is the well told story, a tradition as old as Homer's epics. Around the bare outline of the plot which moves over continents, are clustered an infinite number of stories ranging back and forth in time. Each story whether it moves backward or forward in the time continues and subtly explains any ambiguities in the previous story. Story-telling is Amitav Ghosh's main narrative technique, the stories interplay with time, enabling the author to achieve an original synthesis of different concepts of time. Ghosh does not use the conventional chronological narrative or dissolve time into a kind of duration, where past and present are indistinguishable. Instead the novel starts in the past with Balaram's excitement at exploring the shape of his nephew, Nachiketa Bose, popularly known as Alu's skull. The novel opens with the arrival of the eight year boy, Nachiketa in Balaram and Toru-Debi's life in Lalpukur village. The orphaned child of Balaram's brother's immediately nicknamed Alu since his head. "Was an extraordinary head-huge several times too large for eight year old, and curiously uneven, bulging all over with knots and bumps...it is not like a rock at all. It's an Alu, a potato, a huge freshly dug, lumpy potato".

And then moves further back in time exploring Balaram's relationships with his group of friends, all in their mid-thirties and returns again to Balaram's relationship with Alu. After Alu's parent's death, Balaram and Toru-Debi decide to take in Alu and raise him, since they had no children of their own. Balaram is a journalist basically, but later he decided to leave journalism altogether and to devote his full energies to phrenology. Later he accepts an offer of employment from Bhudeb Roy. He decides to start a school in remote Lalpukur, about one hundred miles north of Calcutta, Balaram becomes own of his principal teachers. Bhudeb Roy quickly becomes a political bully in the remote village, through, hiring thugs to enforce his policies at the school and else where. The two men become enemies competing for the minds and hearts of the villagers.

The next incident in their battle for influence occurs when a plane crashes into Roy's school and buns wholly of it to the ground, every one finds it remarkable that, Bhudeb Roy has had the foresight to insure the school just two weeks before the fire, which seems to demonstrate is wisdom, or at least his luck. In response, Balaram seizes upon the destruction to find his own school- much to Bhudeb Roy's chagrin, of course. The new school has a very successful first year, in second year a third division added it begins by spraying carbolic acid throughout the village, disinfecting everyone and everything. But in the process of this "Purification" Balaram completely disturbs Bhudeb Roy's latest political gathering. The next day Roy burns several of Balaram's possessions to the ground.

Then novel moves forward to the present with Inspector Das interviewing Gopal, a friend of Balaram and then narrates the early years of Balaram's life, including his years at Presidency College. Each story is a distinct episode and yet unfolds in linear time, creating an overall final experience. Connections are made subtly, episodes being linked by a certain vision of life and understanding process. The final experience is an extraordinary achievement in which past and present co-exist, while constantly asserting their difference.

After their possessions are burned by Bhudeb Roy, Toru-Debi, the wife of Balaram completely loses her mind. Still Bhudeb Roy is not done with his mischief. He incites Jyoti Das and the police to attack Balaram's compound, and the explosives in advertently set on fire the explosives that Rakhhal, the former revolutionary turned business manager had resumed making. In the result of conflagration, Balaram, Toru-Debi, Maya and Rakhhal are all killed. Shambhu Debanath, the father of Maya goes to Calcutta after Maya's death.

A recurring pattern in the novel is the "chance" destruction rained down upon many other by the actions of a few. But Ghosh uses narration as the thread that will weave the chance event into a pattern-across continents and across time. Then the novel moves to the present. Balaram's friend Gopal helps get Alu to Calcutta, where he is introduced to Rajan. But in Balaram's village people think that Alu is also dead. When Alu is freed after a few days he emerges a new man, almost a reincarnation of Gandhi of at least of Balaram: He was sitting behind the loom on the platform, weaving very fast, but without so much as looking at the loom, and talking all the while. And in a way that was the strongest thing of all; that he was talking. "For Alu way a very silent man" (278). Immediately Alu begins speaking about "cleanliness and dirt and the infinitely small" (235) and about Louis Pasteur. Perhaps, more disturbingly he speaks about the need for a war against money. He wins convert to his cause and the result reminds the readers of Balaram's earlier school: a communistic system in which all salaries are pooled and no one makes a profit from their enterprise beyond what they immediately need.

Meanwhile the attention of the reader is lead to Zindi and her circle of supporters. Alu's mystical renunciation of profit sends Zindi into paroxysm of concern, since she has hoarded money for years and years. She now sees her financial security threaded by the people; she has seeped for so many years, so she seeks another kind of protection. She angles to get Jeevan bhai Patel's shop from him by trying to get Forid Main to marry her, but Jeevan bhai commits suicide just before her plan is to come to fruition. Though it is not made explicit, it seems that for some time Jeevan bhai had been acting as a spy for the local magistrate.

Through the magistrate, Jeevan bhai has betrayed Alu to Jyoti Das. Jyoti Das is the vilain, who becomes the full-fledged migrant, now finding himself forever of the run. Ghosh had foreshadowed Jyoti Das fate much earlier in the book when he had him reflect as follows: Foreign places are alike in that they are not home. Nothing binds you there...he knew that his swimming. Head had no connection with that hints of sand in the distance. It would have made no difference whether that bit of land was al-Ghazira or Antaratica the journey was within and it was already over, for the most important thing was leaving (266).

On the other hand, Alu finds a new community with Zindi and seeks a new rootedness in a foreign land to be sure, but with a sense of new connection. In Algeria, Zindi has Alu and Kulfi pretend to be married, and they call themselves Mr. and Mrs. Bose. In this new setting, we are introduced to a small emigrant Indian community. Mr. and Mrs. Verma Dr. and Mrs. Mishra and Miss Krishna swamy, a nurse. The dichotomy between the chance of reason and the story of connection takes on a political edge when, in something of set piece, Ghosh portrays an exotic Indian community in this novel. Though a few in number, they are sharply drawn and displayed as being at each other's throats, vying for authenticity as the spokesperson for an authentic Indian culture. In this regard, Mrs. Verma decidedly gets the better of the argument, expressing a sincere appreciation of Hinduism, for example, while Dr. Mishra seems completely deracinated. The ironies mount up, as propose to put on tableau vivant of the tale of chitrangada and Aruna, with Kulfi, former prostitute, as the heroine. Dr. Mishra clearly knows the detailed rubrics involved in Hindu rituals, but he has not imbibed its true spirit. His hardened cynicism is countered by Mrs. Verma's humility and simple clinging to truth. Against the jaded Dr. Mishra's hypocritical insistence on rubric propriety, Mrs. Verma embraces syncretism, "He nodded weakly. The world has come full circle, he groaned. Carboic acid has become holy water....The times are like that, Mrs. Verma said sadly. Nothing's whole any more. If we wait for every thing to be right again, we'll wait forever while the world falls apart. The only hope is to make do with what we've got" (411-412, 416-17).

At last Alu, Zindi and the baby, Bose continue their migration to the west, at least as far as Tangier, where they bid Jyoti Das farewell as how heads to a new life in Europe. They then turn happily back toward al Ghazira. Like Rushdie, Amitav Ghosh displays a mature historical sense. *The Circle of Reason* presents history as a collective memory a link between past and present. The past, a reference point for understanding what is happening is equally dependent on the present to determine the future. For instance Dantu, one of Balaram's friends, a secondary character in the first part of the novel, emerges again as Hem Narin Mathur in the third section. An understanding of the history of Dantu, leads to a better grasp of the immediate concerns of his part in section three. The final posture that emerges is dependent on the way the novelist look at life.

History is fashioned by the way people collectively perceive their inheritance for example, Balaram, the idealist bharalok is representative of an important historical out look, just as Bhudeb the lumpen longress man represents another historical tendency. There is fluidity in time and history. Thus there are no absolutes for Amitav which enables him to break way fro the constraints of conventional realism. Hence *The Circle of Reason* does not craft any symmetrical patterns of designs or evolve any overall theory, Instead of organizes visions of life by exploring connections, distinctions and possibilities. This is a daring technique adopted by Amitav Ghosh, which helps the flow of the story.

However Ghosh with his fresh approach to story-telling is more concerned with intellectual curiosity than lyricism of style. The technique involves an overall curiosity created in the readers mind in deciphering the connections between the numerous stories. *The Circle of Reason* can be said to have the trilogy of Satva: Reason; Rajas: Passion; and Tamas: Death. What Ghosh tries to show is that ultimately Reason proves to be inadequate and celebrates the triumphs of human goodness.

In the first part entitled *Satva*: Reason has its certainty as apotheosized by Balaram Bose? Reason gives Balaram courage, courage to fight germs like Bhudeb Roy and his power of money with carbolic acid for Reason has nothing to fear. “As Balaram points out: Bhudeb Roy lives in mortal fear, there’s nothing in the world he fears as much as carbolic acid... He fears it as he fears everything that is true and clean and a child of Reason” (100). But ultimately this Reason proves to be self destructive. Shambhu Debnath’s warning to Balaram comes too late.

“Balaram – babu, you’ll destroy everyone without even stopping to think about it you are the best Sadhu I have ever known, Balaram – babu, but no mortal can cope with the fierceness of your gods” (142). His words prove prophetic and Balaram is destroyed along with his family. Only Alu survives. This fact of Reason (*Satva*) which manifests itself as a crusade for clean lines and fight against dirt has its sway over Alu at Ghazira sometimes, especially in his attempts to experiment with socialism. But lay the end on part – II degenerates into passion (*Rajas*) and in a chapter appropriately called *Dances* socialism crumbles as lust for money (dirt) asserts itself. In part - III Ghosh shows the death of Reason (Thamas) and through Mrs. Verma makes a passionate plea for re- affirmation of the basic qualities of the heart, As Mrs. Verma points out “What does it matter whether it is Gangajal to be used for cleaning the place where kuli’s dead body is to be placed of carbolic acid? It is just a question of cleaning the place, isn’t it? People thought something else is clean what difference does it make to the dead?” (411).

But the death of Reason is not pessimistic view of life. Through Mrs. Verma Ghosh points out, “If there’s one thing people learn from the past, it is that every consummated death is another beginning” (414). The world of Reason has come full circle. It is born, grows and dies and its death heralds the birth of a new world, where the heart will come into its own. Ghosh give us a glimpse into the world in the figure of Jyoti Das as he walks jauntily away to a new life and a new beginning, “Jyoti Das’s face was radiant luminous, as though a light were shining through him ... Hope is the beginning” (423).

Amitav Ghosh is interested in unraveling existing narratives and understanding, in which they trap us into roles the narrative have devised for us, and thus in rejecting such roles and such narratives which constructing one’s own narrative and role and significance. Thus, recuperating history, reading recording one’s personal experiences and creating fiction, studying various phenomena are all seen as activities that blend into each other, as attempts at achieving some measure of personal dignity and some degree of personal and collective significance.

Amitav Ghosh is a story-teller almost equal in Indian English to R. K. Narayan. Ghosh is one who sympathies with the attempts of his characters, however they may seem to be ridiculous. It is due to Ghosh’s involvement in the same enterprise as his characters, and hence he is bound to be less distant than other master story-tellers, more anxious to ensure that the point gets across, eager to make clear that there is a point to the stories of his characters. After all, his stories are but the stories that come out of his life and experiences even as they chronicled those of others. There are stories that emanate from and deal with stuff of humanity, “humanity, yearning emotions, all spiritual yearning that creates humanity as we know it” (2004:14).

Ghosh explores historical moments and constructs in order to give form and thus content, to his own narrative impulses and gives us complex pictures of interpenetrating lives of individuals, the interaction between their individual narratives. In this novel Ghosh shows his involvement with the idea of the border and crossing of the border. In Ghosh’s world-view all such borders that us in and attempt to define us should be challenged – be they political, cultural, linguistic, racial, communal, spatial or even temporal. All these borders are constructs and meant for crossing.

The quest that is narrated in *The Circle of Reason* is present in all subsequent works of Ghosh the narrative techniques employed here sometimes share the characteristics of magical realism but they are more generally straight forward and realistic. He does tend though, to juggle a lot of characters time zones, and locales in the telling of his tale.

A recurring pattern in the novel is the chance destruction rained down upon many others by the actions of a few, but Ghosh uses narration as the thread that will weave these chance events into a patterns, across continents and across time, as if the weird logic that guides Balaram akin to that of a story-teller, the philosopher who will find a meaningful pattern in the world. Alu his protégé, eventually learns to weave the world in the complex patterns that some how express metaphysical meaning. Next Ghosh throws light on the ideology of rationalism. The two circles of Balaram and Zindi are interconnected, on the one hand by the presence of Alu and the other hand by sewing machine, carbolic acid and Alu's weaving skill. Balaram is passionately influenced by the book, *Life of Pasteur* and develops a sense of cleanliness with the use of carbolic acid whereas Toru-debi is amorous of the sewing machine and her skill of tailoring blouses, Alu is taken up with weaving and learning new patterns from shobhu Debnath.

Amitav Ghosh weaves intricately the different and varied stories linking them through Alu and his childhood passions. Though Ghosh calls Balaram a rationalist and a believer in science and reason, Balaram acts in a very irrational way. His favorite hobby is studying heads, phrenology which is no longer considered a science. His interest in the *Life of Pasteur* and the rationalist's society is what Ghosh terms "a Pasteurized Cosmos". It is this passion that makes Balaram attempt to clean the surrounding area in his village Lalpukur that brings about his doom, destruction and death. He starts school called "the school of reason" but fails in his attempt to educate the village youth to think rationally. They are interested more in learning tailoring and weaving, the practical training of learning the skills for survival. He also fails in educating Alu since he refuses to attend the village school, though he loves to read books from Balaram's library. Balaram's knowledge of science and his faith in reason have no base in real life situations. He is the abstract knowledge and knowledge without worldly wisdom is likely to bring about disaster.

Balaram's behavior at the time of Saraswati Poja, his passionate handling of the cleanliness movement with carbolic acid and his love for the study of heads are ironically described. Ghosh seems to juxtapose the East against the West with the practical learning of weaving and tailoring against the abstract ideology of rationalism. Toru-debi's practical sense and belief in the sewing machine, was created by Balaram's ideologies. When the machine stops working Toru-Debi thrusts it into Alu's hands and asks him to throw it away into the pond and get a new one for her " Nothing of any use now, she muttered. It's the end.... She ran her hand over the machine's shining wheel and pulled, with all her strength. The wheel was absolutely rigid". She smiled at them "You see, he's haunted. There is something in him ... she lifted the black, sinuously carved machine off its wooden base and settled it on her lap, clucking to herself .. She stood up and put the machine in his (Alu's) arms. Throw it into the pond, she said. It's dead... get me another Alu, my bit of gold, won't you?" (147-148)

Ghosh has painted the picture of Balaram's ecstasy showing how ironical the situation is. Instead of the discovery and Bhudeb Roy's humiliation, what Balaram finds is the engulfing fire that breaks out. It is through Alu's eyes that we glimpse, "brilliant sunburst of light arced into the sky and the whole glow. He (Alu) saw it reach its zenith and curve downwards and fall out of his sight, behind the bamboo... And then the earth shook and the air seemed to come alive and hit him with walls of force, and when he opened his eyes again exactly where the house ought to have been there were orange flames shooting into the sky". (148).

Balaram and everything and everybody around him are engulfed by the fire. It is this rationalist and scientific mind of Balaram that brings about his destruction and death.

Pasteur has discovered a life-saving drug but Balaram's knowledge brings death. In fact Ghosh presents the folly of obsession by this limited knowledge of scientific inventions of the western science. The same carbolic acid creates trouble in al-Ghazira when the displaced persons living with and around Zindi decide to clean every house and shop. Zindi is the only person who does not believe in this cleanliness movement when they take out a sort of procession and try to clean shops and stores in this foreign place, the police shoot them and most of them die. Only Alu, Zindi kulfi and the child Boss are saved. Here it is Alu who talks about Carbolic acid, cleanliness and money saved from the rubble of the collapsed building stores Alu lectures them about money, buried under, the two sewing machines he is happily thinking about life and death unlike Nachiketa of the Mahabharata who had returned from Yama, the Lord of Death, after acquiring knowledge about life and death, Alu thinks of only purity and dirt. Nachiketa had gained the philosophy of life. This Nachiketa i.e. Alu returns from death's door but his knowledge only brings destruction. He talks about Louis Pasteur and his failure (280) as Balaram had done earlier. But Alu believes that he has acquired real or true knowledge:

There, in the ruins, he (Alu) had discovered what it was the Pasteur had really wanted all his life-an intangible thing, something he had not understood himself, yet a thing the whole world had conspired to deny him "purity, purity was what he had wanted, purity and cleanliness not just his home, or in a laboratory or a university, but in the whole world of living men. It was that which spurred him on his greatest hunt, the chase in which she drove the enemy of purity, the quintessence of dirt, the demon which keeps the world from cleanliness...the Infinitely Small, the Germ" (280).

He tells the spell bound crowd that this Germ is Money. "No money no dirt" (280). These people who are illegally in al-Ghazira to earn money and send it back home to their family, are carried away by the eloquence of Alu. (Since he has returned from death's door) and are already to form a sort of co-operative and thereby save something more than they individually could do. It is Zindi who is down to earth and has practical knowledge of the value of money in a foreign country and who refuses to join this mad movement of the mob. Ghosh once again appears to ridicule the mob psychology of the people mesmerized by Alu's speech. The common Indian belief that money is the root cause of all evils is paradoxically presented.

In Amitav Ghosh's *The Circle of Reason* there is a fine blend of fantasy and realism. The extraordinary head of Alu, like the titanicly overstuffed nose of Saleem is Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* is a matter of wonder for the villagers of Lalpukur. This head was "huge, several times too large for an eight-years-old and curiously uneven bulging all over with knots and bumps" (1986:83). Alu's real name is revealed almost as an aside as Nachiketa Bose.

In Upanishads Nachiketa is the name of the boy who obeying his father waits at Yama's door. When Yama grants him boons Nachiketa goes for the ultimate knowledge the secret of life and death. The name's significance becomes apparent in the second part of the novel. When Alu is buried alive and given up for dead in a building collapse. He is at death's door for days refusing food and water but thing. The element of fantasy in Alu is backed by legend of Nachiketa, two vital connecting points of magic realism. Ghosh describes the element of fantasy in Alu's head; his head had that "big spectacle-shacked lump which covered a large part off the back and sides" (9), His head was large enough to contain a multitude of organs and yet its boundaries were too shadowy to say which and the worst part was that it was right on the trickiest part of the skull, for the founders of the science of Phrenology were all agreed that the organs which govern the lowest and least desirable propensities all, grow on the back and sides of the head, "For all Balaram knew, a witch's brew could be bubbling in that lump-destructiveness perhaps, mixed with a amativeness or secrecy and preferred with combativeness or acquisitiveness" (9).

The attribution of moral qualities to different parts of Alu's head and their workability in the miraculous happening in the novel are like the magicians ghetto in *Midnight's Children* where ventriloquists could make stones tell and contortionists...could swallow their own legs (1980:237) like Macondo's guppies and *Midnight's Children's* a sharp tongue girl whose words already had the power of inflicting physical wounds,. But there is a difference between Gracia Marques and Rushdie and Ghosh. The grotesque boils in Alu start appearing some time after the death of Balaram " for one night Alu shoed him (Gopal) two boils, the size of duck's eggs, one on his leg and the other his armpit not ordinary boils but suppurating craters of puns, as though his flesh has gathered itself together and tried to burst form his body. Gopal embraced Alu that night and laughed. Let them be, he said. They have nothing to do with you; it's only Balaram trying to come back to the world" (155).

These boils multiply till the whole of Alu's body is covered with them. The boils represent and symbolize not only the spirit of Balaram but also of the cry for justice of the oppressed masses. These boils miraculously disappear at the end of the four days of meditation, when Alu lies under the debris of the star. Ghosh uses the plain migrancy of Alu to criticize national politics of socialism and scientism Magic realism is employed in this critique when an ordinary incident of Alu's burial in the star is hyperbolized to create a sense of the extraordinary in his survival for four days in the debris, saved by two sewing machines.

Like Fielding's, Ghosh's humour in the novel is earth and sometimes crude. This is now Jeevanbhai describes his tribulations of peering under Zindi's arms to get a look at the crowd collected around Alu: But last night peering into the courtyard under Zindi's arm-which as fastidious men you may well appreciate wasn't easy, or greatly facile, if one may put it as such for as you may know, when Virat Singh, the famous wrestler, the great marble biceped pehalwan of Bareilly, was living here, he once attempted to press his suit a little forcefully with her, but since he was not greatly to her taste, she over powered him, merely by baring an armpit and blowing gently upon it "but anyway, as I was saying, last night peering under Zindi's arm in not altogether salubrious conditions" (279).

Underlying the humour is often a satire of satire. A fine example of this kind of satire can be found in the incident where Bhudeb Roy plunges into politics. He goes put on a caparisoned elephant with a whole procession of people following him, which he feels is an indication of his popularity.

It is only in the last sentence in the paragraph that we are told of the motive of the people in following the elephant on which Bhudeb Roy sat "Elephant droppings make good manure" (81).

This satire becomes a bitter invective when it comes to denouncing the hypocritical Muralicharan Mishra. Mrs. Verma vents her anger against all pseudo-socialists as she says who fell over themselves in their hurry to join the congress in 1947 so that they wouldn't have to waste any time in getting their fingers into all that newly independent money? "Who broke the praja socialist party when the real socialists were away, struggling in the villages? Who sabotaged Lohia? Don't think we've forgotten.... We know your kind inside and outside, through and through we've heard your sugary speeches and we've seen the snakes hidden up your spouting about the misery of the masses while your fingers dig into their pockets" (380). Here Alu is a un heroic hero, his adventures in different lands and his interaction with different people, wit, humour, and satire – the novel has all elements of the elements of the picaresque. What sustains the novel is not so much the plot – structure as the allegorical depth. With infinite care Ghosh weaves economical, social and political allegory into the fabric of the novel.

The economic allegory has settled into the heart of the novel and Ghosh shows that money is at the root of all evil. Early in the novel the power of money is as represented by Bhudeb Roy is constructed against the freedom from capitalistic oppression. Ghosh uses two felicitous symbols to show this freedom: the sewing machine and weaving the sewing machine is a part of Balaram's household "which had so long and so secured colonized her (Toru-debi's) heart (6).

And when the rivalry between Balaram Bose and Bhudeb Roy is at its peak, when the power of money is about to destroy all that is rational and honest, Toru Debi in her jejune manner proclaims: only the sewing machine can save us now” (136).

Although the machine does not save her, for the power of money is triumphant, she knows the everlasting value of the sewing machine significantly when Alu gets trapped under the debris of the star it is the sewing machine that saves him “Beside him, on the other side, were two sewing machines of the old kind, of black and sold steel. That must be the only ones of their kind in al-Ghazira now, real antiques, probably kept for display. But if it weren’t for them our friend Alu would have been flattered days ago” (240).

Alu had not accounted for the in born avarice in human nature. The crisis comes in chapter entitled Dances where under the influence of the liquor the basic human drives assert themselves and the dance becomes a dance of destructions. Alu realize that money still holds its intoxicating sway over his followers. After that (the dance) it was all confusion, “Everyone was worrying about what they were going to buy now and they milled around they courtyard, the newly arrived begging advice from the experienced , gathering information on the relative prices of the various makes of calculator they were the thinking of buying for college – going brothers at home; of the portable television sets they were planning to take their village bound parents and sisters; and of the clothes they were going to buy for themselves” (341).

Alu’s much beloved socialism is in shambles and he sits “at his loom with his head in his hands” as he realizes that both the sewing machine and the loom become subservient to money. Ismail, the Christ-figure sees that the genres are out again “They’re all over the floor. They are just waiting to bite” (339). Symbolically after this Alu’s thumbs without which it is not possible to operate the loom, get atrophied. His economic plan had failed. *The Circle of Reason* is not only an allegory on the power of money – the vicious circle of capitalism-socialism and capitalism again- it is also to some extent a political allegory. In this novel we could consider the economic and the political allegory as the outers; what really hits the bull’s eye in the novel is the role of Reason. It is significant that the book is divided into three sections: Satva: Reason; Rajas: passion and Tamas: Death, what Ghosh tries to show is that ultimately Reason proves to be inadequate and he celebrates the triumph of human goodness. Pasteur, the epitome of science and reason, reigns supreme in the first section. Balaram, his ardent devotee, believes that just as Pasteur had destroyed the germ with the help of science, he would bring relief to the society around him buy using carbolic acid. Ironically it is through the lips of a microbiologist, Mrs. Verma, the Pasteur stands discredited:

“And when you do find something in a specimen can you really help wondering sometimes where all those microbes and bacteria and viruses come from? Whether they are really, all of them, wholly external to our minds? And just as you let yourself wonder whether sometimes they are anything other than a bodily metaphor for human pain and unhappiness and perhaps joy as well you cut your self short, for it dawns on you yet again that ever since Pasteur that is the one question you can never ask” (142). Through Mrs. Verma the author celebrates love that endures and nurtures humanity.

She comes as a fresh shower of rain in the arid world of reason. By the end of the novel Ghosh makes us realize that there is a terrible one-sidedness to the technocratic world man has fashioned for himself out of a cold scientific rationalism. Modern Science built for man a cage of reason in which he now finds himself trapped. Mankind’s salvation now depends on a change in direction. It is time to stop seeing every thing through the cold haze of scientific logic. There is a need to restore to man the qualities of the heart. The way out of the cold prison may even be a funeral lovingly conducted which even the backward Algerians would understand. It is the only way to be come whole again in the wasteland of modern civilization.

In this novel the attempts of the novelist are obviously oriented to floating the events and characters through a medley of metaphors and selects ideas. The all-embracing structural principles of magic and irony eloquently weave the total pattern of the novel and ideas.

Characters and metaphors are explicated through attendant motifs. In fact the characters themselves are converted into possible metaphors.

Their quest is for a specific structuring of their unity in the totality of experience however trivial and absurd it may be. The characters achieve this appropriation of their significance through their creative capabilities while the novelist himself realizes this through magic and irony and diverting some of his story-telling abilities to the characters as the novel progresses from “Satva: Reason” through Rajas: Passion” to Tamas: Death.

In the manner of Rushdie and Marquez there is a fine blend of fantasy and realism in the novel helped by myths and symbols. Indian Myth and European Myth meet and mingle in the character of Shombhu Debnath. The way he learns the secrets of jamdani weaving from the Boshaks has echoes both of the legend of Karna and the Promethean legend. Dissatisfied with the crude weaving of the men around him the twelve-year old Shombhu Debnath decides to run away to Tangail and learn the jamdani in lay work. Knowing that a Boshak would never pass on his knowledge to an outsider, Debnath introduces himself as an orphan, finds a place in a Boshak master weaver’s family and learns the jamdani art of weaving “But it had to end. One day the master weaver met a man from Noakhali that day tears pouring down his cheek, he confronted Shombhu with his secret. Shombhu fled that night back to Noakhali” (68).

He returns home but like Karna he carries the curse of his guru on his head. Just as Karna’s knowledge of weapons deserts him at the most crucial point of his life, Debnath’s knowledge is refused by his people when he tries to teach them his newly-acquired art. As we examine the fantasy and realism, the myths and symbols we realize that *The Circle of Reason* is something more than just a picaresque novel. It is an allegorical commentary on the contemporary situation which makes us sit up and ponder deeply over the message the book contains. As Prasannarajan says, “It was an exuberant tour de force with the folk-tale charm of the Arabian Nights, a Don Quixote of another era. While narrating the evolution of Alu, the boy “with an extraordinary head-huge, several times too large for an eight year old curiously uneven, bulging all over with knots and bumps”, Ghosh was at the same time engaged in a celebration of idea and concepts” (1992:13).

Out of the multiple layers of narrative in this novel, one layer seems committed to the cause of education. How should our children be educated? What should they be taught? Education is one big question that haunts the author education is memorization of facts at one end, at another, it is a tool to get a livelihood. At another it is sharpen the human sensitivities. It kindles social consciousness in children. Can education uplift living standards of Indian masses and save them from the nightmarish depth of poverty, ignorance and disease? Balaram a school teacher acts as Ghosh’s mouth piece when he says “It would be wrong, it would be immoral.

Children go to school for their first glimpse into the life of the mind not for jobs. If I thought that my teaching is nothing but a means of finding jobs. I’d stop teaching is nothing but a means of finding jobs; I’d stop teaching tomorrow (52) so I glimpse into the life of mind is all that education should do. Where is pleasure in education? Ghosh seems to suggest a pattern where children are trained on rational patterns. They may enjoy their training. Their curiosity is not suffocated by authority. Their natural impulse to ask questions is encouraged. They are trained to find their own answers. Ghosh’s idea of education becomes clearer when he deals with Louis Pasteur’s life and education. In Pasteur’s view life is the best teacher of experience and exposures to real life situations are more crucial than classroom instructions. Education is for life but better education is from life.

As Shombhu Debnath says, “Skill is not enough; you have all that you ever will. Technique is just the beginning. The world is your challenges now, look around you and see if your loom can encompass” (88). The novel seems to suggest that every thing is actually a matter of how we look at it. Attitudes matter, History is no unchangeable it, very much get molded by the way we look at it. Time in this novel is characterized by remarkable fluidity. The lives that this novel depicts are all lived on the brink of abnormality. These are dangerously lived lives driven by focused passions. The characters are uncompromising. And this is something quite common. We have noticed among worthy writers. Their characters do not compromise. They are mostly talented people given to their specific causes. They fire within them may not be visible at times, but it is always there. Ghosh builds his extraordinary tale with the help of extraordinary characters. This novel places Amitav Ghosh as a master craftsman in the art of fiction. Shyam Ashani Describes the novel: “It is also an interesting tale of myriad colourful people, of man’s relation with the machine, his curse and salvation with science and reason” (141).

Conclusion

Amitav Ghosh’s narrative technique the freshness of ideas and genius of stylistic concerns and unrestrained experimentation in narrative technique is an indication of development in Indo-Anglican fiction. The new Indian novel in English is a phenomenon of the 1980s. The trend setter was Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight Children*. The narratology has altered. Realistic fiction and chronological narrative have been discarded, as being insufficient to convey the vastness and complexities of experience and life. Allegory, symbols, fantasy, magical realism, narrative fluctuating backwards and forward in time, the compelling use of narrator, fluency in story telling and the unveiling of layers and layers of meaning have all become a mode of writing. Experimentation with English language the use of parody and sheer invention has resulted in the formation of new language rhythms. Which increase the humour and multitudinousness of the new Indian novels in English? Rushdie, Amitav Ghosh and even new novelist’s Nina Sibal, Vikram Seth, Pratap Sharma and Alan Sealy, have all experimented with narrative techniques to present new sensibilities, meanings and themes. Slick craftsmanship with narrative technique has created new dimensions and possibilities for the Indian novel in English.

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