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The Story of Alu's Exile and Displacement in *The Circle of Reason*

Dr. Neeta Lalwani
Associate Professor
Department of English
MATS University
Raipur (C.G.)

Santosh Sahu
Research Scholar
MATS University
Raipur (C.G.)

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Abstract

Amitav Ghosh's debut novel *The Circle of Reason* stands out as a true portrayal of the fast changing society of India in particular. Published in 1986 and set on the platform of post colonialism, post independence and rife between religion and rationalist opinions, the *The Circle of Reason* showcases the saga of exile and displacement due to various forces emerging in post-colonial India. The present paper is an attempt to deal with a major question of how it looks to be an immigrant, an exile or being dislocated with reference to the lead character Alu. In the novel Amitav Ghosh *The Circle of Reason* also emphasises on other significant issues associated with struggles setting up for self identity, looking for human bond.

Introduction

Honoured with various national awards, such as Jnanpith Award (2018), Sahitya Akademi Award (1990), and India's fourth-highest civilian award Padma Shri (2007), along with the French literary award Prix Médicis étranger (1990) for the best foreign novel for *The Circle of Reason*, Amitav Ghosh is an Indian author known for his complex narratives and detailed historical research. Born in Calcutta (now Kolkata) in 1956, Ghosh pursued his education in Delhi, Oxford, and Alexandria. He began his career as a novelist with the book *The Circle of Reason* (1986), which garnered widespread acclaim and established him as a significant literary figure. His novels often explore themes of migration, colonialism, globalisation, and the environment. Some of his most renowned works include: The Ibis Trilogy— Sea of Poppies,, River of Smoke, Flood of Fire. This trilogy focuses on the opium trade in the 19th century and its impact on India, China, and the British Empire. The Shadow Lines (1988) examines the blurred

boundaries between nations, cultures, and personal identities. *The Glass Palace* (2000) deals with the fall of the Burmese royal family and its broader consequences. *Gun Island* (2019) is a contemporary work exploring themes of climate change, displacement, and myth.

Theme of Exile and Displacement in Alu's Journey

The novel *The Circle of Reason* explores a number of significant issues associated with human dislocation, including identity formation, memory, artistic creativity, and intergenerational transmission of trauma. The story revolves around Nachiketa Bose aka Alu, the main character. At age eight Alu lost his parents. He is brought to a village of Lalpukur and is looked after by his uncle Balaram Bose and aunt Tori Debi. Alu takes this name owing to his unusual oversized and lumpy head similar to a potato. Alu's unusual head sets him apart physically, making him an object of curiosity and sometimes ridicule. This physical distinctiveness reflects his unique identity and the unconventional path he follows throughout the novel.

Balaram admits Alu in the same school where he is a teacher. Since the story revolves on finding out the reason for small things existing, Alu becomes the case study for Balaram who is a rationalist and obsessed with phrenology. He keenly examines Alu's knobby and too big head and attributes it to a sign of intellectual potential.

His head abounded with a profusion of bumps and knots and troughs, each more aggressively pronounced than the next and scattered about with an absolute disregard for the discoveries of phrenology. The array of bumps and protuberances grew cheerfully all over his head and showed no signs at all of dividing into distinct and recognizable organs. It was all very and exciting – a wealth of new stimulating material (*The Circle of Reason*; 9)

Balaram associates his hereditary line and Alu's upbringing with him. Alu's head thus becomes a focal point for Balaram's rationalist beliefs, representing the tension between imposed intellectual ideals and individual identity. He finds "distinct depressions over the organs of Self-Esteem, Vanity and Cautiousness."(11)

Alu is deeply influenced by his uncle's obsession with the rationalist ideas of Louis Pasteur which shapes much of his early life and education. He turns introspective and thoughtful, often pondering the nature of knowledge, reason and science.

How much he read! Far too much, in fact, for a boy of ten. He would read almost anything he happened to come across in Balaram's study: history, geography, geology, natural history, biology. . . Anything at all. (28).

Over the course of the novel, Alu grows from a passive recipient of his uncle's teachings to an individual who questions and challenges the world around him. His quest and curiosity ends him up on the land of Middle East and Africa.

The story is set in the period of the 1970s and the writer marks the suffering and effect of colonisation on the minds of intellectuals and the common people. The post colonialism period sees the changes in the political and social frame in India and immigration from east Bangladesh where we see several thousand people including Bhudev Roy running to the village of Lalpukur in India's border of West Bengal. The conflict between Bhudev and Balaram led to riots and the entire families of both were destroyed but Alu survived. But Alu is taken as a suspect of riots and also accused of being a terrorist. He is forced to flee Lalpukur. Thus the journey of Alu starts to move from different regions, constantly on the run, exiled from a sense of belonging. After losing his foster father Balaram, Alu is looked after by Balaram's friend, Gopal. Gopal brings him new clothes and gifts him his own copy of the book *Life of Pasteur* and an amount of 8,000 rupees. His bad times triggered, the reticent turned boy would hardly take care of what's happening around and hardly talk much. He walked aimlessly in the streets of Calcutta and "spent wandering blindly through the city, without stopping to eat, without even wondering how it came to be that he had lost the sensation of hunger. Or of the bench in the Maidan where his straying feet led him every night, to sit and wonder whether a match would still burn his skin, whether that at least was still left to him." (166). Unfortunately Alu who is taken as suspect of terrorism, is compelled to leave. "Gopal hugged him once, blindly, and then he was gone, back to the flat in Hazra Road, to send his wife and wait for the police alone." (169)

After his flight from Gopal's home, the novelist Amitav Ghosh takes the reader to another level of migration. Due to acute circumstances Alu is seen landed up in Mahé on the west coast near Kerala. As being constantly on chase by the secret police officer, Jyoti Das. Alu gives up traveling by bus or local conveyance. Eventually he moves through the forest of Nilgiri and enables him to deal with various adventures. With growing age Alu learns to handle various threats, dangers alongside developing his emotional built-up. It's the same Alu whom we apprehend when we begin the novel. In the beginning we are intrigued by Alu owing to unusual head and his too slow response. But Alu seems to be an extension of uncle's courageous deed. Balaram was engaged with project of cleansing the city and fighting the germ and Alu is seen fighting his very own existence. Amitav Ghosh skillfully presents this dilemma and turmoil through the saga of Alu's constant run. Alu's flight doesn't stop in the hills of Kerala. To keep away from Jyoti Das who shows up in Kerala too, Alu joins a group with a woman named Zindi and flees with them across the Arabian Sea and arrives at the small oil-rich state called Al-Ghazira in the middle east.

Alu's exile in Al-Ghazira in *The Circle of Reason* is a core aspect of his journey. His tougher days are yet to come. In the time to come his experiences are marked by alienation, adaptation, and a sense of displacement as he navigates a foreign environment filled with economic struggles, migrant communities, and oppressive political structures.

On the alien land, Alu's life is shaped by his interactions with other exiles such as Rakesh, Professor Samuel, Kulfi Mast Ram, Abu Fahl and others, Zindi being the leader in the group. Alu becomes part of even the other migrant workers. Reaching overseas, Alu adapts in the unfamiliar environment and his deepening involvement in a world of labour, community, and ideological struggles. Al-Ghazira, a fictional town in the Gulf, represents a cosmopolitan space populated by migrant workers from different backgrounds. Alu, who initially flees India after being wrongfully accused of terrorism, finds himself in this foreign land. His journey to Al-Ghazira adds up another level of exile and displacement. In Al-Ghazira, he interacts with diverse characters, each representing different diasporic experiences and worldviews. In this town, Alu becomes part of a community of workers who are largely from South Asia and the Middle East. His engagement with the people around him, including migrant labourers and

shopkeepers, highlights his growing awareness of the socio-economic realities faced by migrants. "In Al-Ghazira, surrounded by men without countries, without futures, he was merely one more migrant lost in the dust, chasing a wage, a home."

The town becomes a microcosm of displacement, where people from different backgrounds are united by their shared struggle for survival, yet are separated by cultural and linguistic differences.

Alu's experience in Al-Ghazira also exposes him to different ideologies, especially as he becomes entangled in conflicts arising from his association with Professor Samuel, who is deeply committed to rationalist principles. Alu's work with machines and his involvement in building activities in Al-Ghazira are symbolic of the novel's exploration of reason, progress, and human effort. However, despite his dedication, the suspicion and surveillance from local authorities remain, reflecting the broader issues of control and power dynamics of the region.

Overall, Alu's experiences in Al-Ghazira illustrate his struggle to find stability and meaning in a world defined by transnational flows of people and ideas. His journey in this part of the novel emphasises the dislocation and cultural encounters that characterise the life of a migrant while also deepening the novel's exploration of themes like reason, identity, and resilience in the face of adversity.

Thus, the political circumstances, impact of colonialism and the interconnectedness of human lives, and other challenges entangle Alu into a series of adventures and misadventures, often driven by the clash between traditional beliefs and modern science. He faces a series of migrations, symbolising the broader theme of displacement and the search for identity. His journey takes him from Bengal to the Middle East and then to Africa, each place adding layers to his understanding of the world. Despite his rationalist upbringing, Alu's experiences reveal the limitations of reason and the necessity of balancing it with human compassion and emotion.

Conclusion

Thus the novel's protagonist, Alu away from his own people and native land, circles his journey spanning continents, pursued by law enforcement due to false accusations of terrorism. After

going through pains of separation from his dear ones, suffering and being dislocated from native land Alu came to terms of adjustment on emotional, personal ,cultural and geographically separated grounds. Through the novel *The Circle of Reason* Ghosh has shown how humans from across the globe get interconnected and share experiences across cultural and geographical boundaries which he believes are blurred lines and acute dividing lines when human bond is concerned.

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