

confined to the four walls being just a wife or mother. In *The Four Gated City* when Martha goes to London and is with people who are herself, the Coldridge, she manages to be very useful and mother Lynda and Mark. Lessing's explanation to this is "...I suppose she was older." (Bertelsen, 1986) In a way we can say that this sense of maturity came with age and by this time Lessing was introduced to Sufism by Idries Shah. Martha is not any more the central character of the novel. Her concern or her 'self' is seen in different characters in *The Four Gated City*. Her style of storytelling "and then" was gone which earlier seemed to be presented in a chronological order. Maturity was seen not just in her 'self' but also in her writing technique which was very obvious in *The Golden Notebook*. Her works now reflected her newly acquired inner strength that had made her to split herself in different 'shelves' and be one with them. It was like viewing the world from new spectrum where one gradually ceases to give importance to one self and the good of all becomes the purpose of the living soul. In *Four Gated City* Lynda is being treated for her madness, Martha too initially takes her illness from the prospects of the doctors and the rest of the family members. Later in the novel we see that she holds a different opinion and often goes to the basement to observe Lynda, Martha tries to relate to what she mutters. Martha thus realizes that her mutterings are not nonsensical. They in fact have got some deeper implication in relation to the world around her and beyond but they cannot be acquainted with or understand this ability which is inside Lynda. Martha in the novel says that in every age when people with different abilities are born they have to face resentment from the rest of the world but a century or so later the latent ability turns out to be some sort of stamina, a new wave of thought that was for the betterment of the human evolution.

Soon, probably in the next decade, the truth would have to be admitted with bad grace, be glossed over, softened. And just as we now say 'they burned and drowned witches for a couple of centuries out of primitive and ignorant terror', soon we will be saying: 'When they stopped torturing witches, they locked people with certain capacities into lunatic asylums and told them they were freaks, and forced them into conformity by varieties of torture which included electric shocks, solitary confinement, ice baths, and forcible feeding. They used every kind of degradation; moral and physical. As the methods of society for control and manipulation became more refined, it was discovered that extremities of physical violence were less effective than drugs which deprived the victims of their moral stamina and ability to fight back; and more ... By these means these members of the population with capacities above normal (those people now considered to be in the main line of evolution) were systematically destroyed, either by fear, so that their development was inhibited from the start (the majority) or by classing them with the congenitally defective.... (FGC, p. 547)

Lynda sits listening to the walls as if she had some communication channel connected to it. Martha in her effort to understand the behavior of Lynda apes her, to her surprise Martha too starts hearing the voices which are coming from unknown sources. "She understood that this was not herself, it was Mark. Making every kind of allowance for one's unconscious, it was past ordinary reason to take unto oneself attitudes

that after all, had been under nose as Marks's for years.” (FGC, p. 388) What Lynda says or mutter now seem to be some sort of prophecy or prediction to Martha now. All this have got a very spiritualistic implication in broader sense because all the Sufi Dervish about whom Lessing had read were people with heightened perception and this to the ordinaries is madness....Muge Galin in her book *Between East and West: Sufism in the Novels of Doris Lessing* has also discussed the developed senses of the generation surviving after the apocalypse. “Survivors escape to different island, around England, and many years later, a new race of special children comes into being in the aftermath of the apocalypse, who are trained as “gardener” as nurturers of the new society. They are gifted with powers of telepathy, foresight, benevolence, knowledge of history and the ability to transcend it. That is sixth, seventh and more senses, or new organs of perception, have manifested in them.” (1997, p. 53) Lessing fulfills an intricate role which coalesce the order of the novelist with the more ancient one of the message-bearer. This requires her to infuse her story-telling with a demand that both her fictional characters and her readers “surrender” to higher will then her own, in a process that entails uncompromising independence. Lessing always dreamt of a better world, free of all the wars, armies, prisoners and suffering, a world full of people having brotherly concern and love for humanity. A developed and evolved race that may have the sense to utilize their resources for the benefit and well being of their fellow beings instead of manufacturing deadly weapons to kill their own race. A world where there would be no boundaries, no discrimination. “We have no enemy. The human race is united at last. We used to joke a long time ago that we would not stop fighting till someone invented an enemy on one of the planets- oh, what a joke that has turned out to be. One that will keep us all busily looking into each other's face for marks of difference – I suppose it is a step forward. We are all brothers now,... (FGC, p. 664)

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History Retold in *The Circle of Reason*

- Somali Gupta

Abstract: The study of the varied complexities of history as portrayed in the novels of Amitav Ghosh throws up some interesting facts about the way he deals with the subject. The novels are set against momentous historical moments, but these serve only as background to the human stories that are the focus, and so in the foreground, of the narratives. Ghosh's novels are not studies of history per se. Rather, they are about the human stories lost or left undocumented in the writing of history. They are the stories of the marginalized subaltern, the one denied a voice in the telling of his history. The novels are, therefore, 'his stories' of the subalterns, which the anthropologist in Ghosh is interested in retrieving. The point of view is presented from the periphery and not the centre. *The Circle of Reason* is one such story.

Keywords: Marginalized, Subaltern, History

“Fiction, at its best, provides us with 'addresses' for the lost actors in the historical chronicle” (Nair 163). These words best define Amitav Ghosh's fiction. The historian's strict annals cannot dwell on small details and bestow attention on ordinary lives. This is where a writer like Ghosh steps in, and creates an interior history. The internalized records of emotions in his novels run parallel to explicit factual accounts. Major historical events are always placed in the background so as to study their impact on human life which is always in the foreground. It is at this juncture that history meets story in Ghosh's fiction. This union makes history more comprehensible. When history engages with fiction it involves the interpretation of history of lives and relationships- national, institutional, familial, gender related and personal. It implies acknowledging the presence of many voices in search of the hidden layers of meaning which, when put together, may yield a new meaning or meanings. In narrative patterns within history-fiction interface the most important matter is questing for inner dimensions of truth and celebrating human warmth and solidarity, which historians may not be able to capture. It is left to the fiction writers like Ghosh to address these. Southeast Asia is a crucial space to the history of Indian Diaspora and also to Ghosh's fictional landscape. Amitav Ghosh shared his notion of history in an interview with Merrily Weisbord. It was one in opposition to that held by historians' who just gathered hard facts and arranged them. He feels, “The telling of history belongs to the earliest expressions of mankind, it is the deepest kind of human need, a sort of self-location. And that need is only answered by narrative” (Weisbord 5). Ghosh's intrinsic need to tell History, a quality he shares with all of mankind, is through narrative. As a widely travelled person, as part of the South Asian diaspora and as one who feels at 'home' in Brooklyn, Calcutta and Goa, this need is an exercise in locating his self as he straddles diverse cultures and crosses various borders. One such border is between fiction and history. Ghosh is an anthropologist by training which gives him a keen interest in observing life around him, in listening to other people's

stories and in trying to imagine and understanding ways of looking at the world that differs from his own. His interests are not in the abstractions and generalizations of formal anthropology; fiction is his true métier. As he tells John C. Hawley, "My fundamental interest is in people in individuals and their specific predicaments. If history is of interest to me it is because it provides instances of unusual and extraordinary predicaments" (6). For him it is "so rewarding to look at history carefully" only because it creates a unique predicament for a character. (6) He is interested in the stories that history has to offer. History, per se, is of no interest to him. Thus, recent Indian English Fiction writers, like Ghosh, are treating history as a myriad representation of the inner history of human lives. They are providing an entry into the aesthetic, moral and spiritual perceptions and conceptions of the world, especially the world of cultural identities rather than national/nationalist identity. This is essential under the impact of colonization, globalization, migration and multiculturalism. A. S. Dasan views this phenomenon as a way of "questing for truth, truth free from hegemonic angularities and truth that foregrounds viewpoints, marginalized and ignored hitherto" (5). In their writings, world attention turned to those who, it was assumed, had no stories to tell and were thus voiceless. They were unable to speak for themselves. Years of submission and silence had robbed them of a language in which they could tell their stories. The histories of the rulers were already known. What was silenced or ignored was the history of the subject, the subaltern. It was their stories which needed to be told. Ghosh turned to these silent yet important players in the history of the world.

History in *The Circle of Reason*: *The Circle of Reason* (1986) is Amitav Ghosh's first novel in which certain historical events are in the background, yet the effect the lives of the characters whose stories are in the foreground. These are the Indian nationalist struggle of the 1930s, the Bangladesh war of 1971, and the international tide of migration to the Middle East of the 1970s onwards. Through the character of Balaram, Ghosh explores the impact of the education policies of the Raj on post-colonial India. Ghosh's concern is not with the Raj qua the Raj, but with what Claire Chambers terms the complex cultural imbrication, as a result of the Raj, of various elements - pre-colonial, colonial, postcolonial - in the creation of a certain kind of knowledge/discourse (36). The novel concerns itself in a debate about the relationship between science, technology and nationalism in India. Ghosh problematizes the Science- is West and Tradition-is-East dichotomy by breaking down myths by his interrogation of the status and worth of different branches of science in India. The novel also shows Ghosh's concern with the staging in India of what might be termed science and pseudo-science. The novelist's allusion to a vast range of scientific projects makes one think how western science drastically alters and in the process is also hybridized by its encounter with Indian society. Science, technology and medicine were not conveyed to India by the British in a one-way process of transfer. Ghosh shows that they were, in fact, involved in a complex series of cross-cultural exchanges, translations and mutations. As the

title suggests, the novel closely examines philosophies of reason, and the science and technology that is associated with these philosophies. In the context of colonialism, western discourse surrounding science and technology were seen as touchstones of rationality and progress. Colonial discourse had a tendency to hinge upon one particular version of reason and this manifested itself in material advances.

Ghosh began his writing career with the story of a young orphan. The novel opens with the arrival of orphaned Nachiketa at the village of Lalpukur where he comes to stay with his paternal uncle Balaram. That he is an orphan is significant because it makes him rootless and without a history. The moment Balaram sets eyes on his nephew he nicknames him Alu, a name that becomes his and remains his because of the peculiar protrusions on his head. Balaram is presented as the spokesperson of Western science. It is not just science that he validates, but Western science. He is a product of western education and despite his fervent Indian nationalism, he has internalized the notion that Western science transcends national boundaries in its search for truth. He feels Western scientific reason has a universal validity because, "Science doesn't belong to countries. Reason doesn't belong to any nation. They belong to history - to the world" (Ghosh, Circle 54). Balaram's friend, Gopal, on the contrary, historicizes the practice of reason and views it as a source of power. His culturally relativist stance suggests that scientific reason is a product of history and society. This notion that science is a product of history and society is affirmed in the novel's examination of two contrasting groups of scientific practitioners that Balaram admires. First is the portrayal of the mainstream science of Louis Pasteur and others, which suggests that a perception of science as consisting of a series of groundbreaking discoveries made by great men is misleading. Second, Ghosh also questions the equally false assumptions that surround the so-called 'pseudo-scientists', whose theories are judged by history to have failed. The novel considers many such pseudo-scientific processes, such as Lambroso's criminology, phrenology, and the plant physiology of Jagadish Chandra Bose. Balaram is part of that generation which grew up on the notion that western science is superior, and was thus used as "tools of empire" for its "civilizing mission." His mind is full of that branch of pseudo-science called phrenology, using the paradigms of which he comes to the conclusion that his nephew's physical dimensions and the shape of his head are indicative of the fact that he is best suited to be a weaver. Alu is therefore apprenticed with Shombhu Debnath, the weaver. Dantu is aghast at this decision of an educated man to push his own nephew towards manual labour. But for Balaram the most important thing in life is reason, which he equates to weaving. Weaving has never permitted the division of the world, he tells us; "it has never permitted the division of reason" either (Ghosh, Circle 55). And because "Weaving is Reason, which makes the world mad and makes it human" it shall be the chosen profession of Alu (Ghosh, Circle 58). Thus begins the journey of Alu into the realms of reason, the one practiced by his uncle. Balaram and his obsession with Reason can be read as a satire on those Indian intellectuals who embrace the theories of the West, and like him,

make their minds “a dumping ground for the west” (Ghosh Circle 53). This novel, however, deconstructs any simple opposition between tradition and modernity, or discrete oriental and occidental cultures. For Ghosh, nothing is singular or isolated but “enmeshed with its neighbours in an intricate network of differences” (Ghosh, Slave 175-6). The history of weaving and the international cloth trade is a synecdoche for this. Balaram shares with Alu the history of the technology of weaving that evokes cultural instability and borrowings across borders. Weaving is the central symbol of the novel. The reader gets the first glimpse of Ghosh's humanism which henceforth will always be looking for objects to unify the world:

Man at loom is the finest example of Mechanical man; a creature who makes his own world as no other can, with his mind. The machine is man's curse and his salvation, and no machine has created man as much as the loom. It has created not separated worlds but one, for it has never permitted the division of the world. The loom recognizes no continents and no countries. It has tied the world together with its bloody ironies from the beginning of human time. (Ghosh, Circle 55)

Man, however, lost his reason when they let themselves be ruled by a thing as simple as cloth. Ghosh tells us, “When the history of the world broke, cotton and cloth were behind it; mechanical man in pursuit of his own destruction” (Ghosh, Circle 57). The history of cloth is as old as civilized living. The cloth trade “bound continents together for more centuries than we can count” (Ghosh, Circle 56). Ibn Battuta and Marco Polo followed the trails made by the cloth traders. The search for “Indian chintzes and calicos, brocades and muslins” (Ghosh, Circle 56) laid the foundations of the first European settlements in India. Cotton came next, the new gift of India. Over a period of time, this cotton became a tool of colonization when the very people who came in search of it, used it instead to colonize and rule the natives. Ghosh is of the opinion that the routes of international trade are over-determined by economic forces. Such routes have a history of imperial exploitation, and more recently capitalistic exploitations. Balaram continues his lecture on the history of the loom by placing it in the context of British imperial trade. He remarks, “Lancashire poured out its waterfalls of cloth, and [the] once...peaceful Englishmen...of Calcutta...turned their trade into a garotte to make every continent safe for the cloth of Lancashire, strangling the very weavers and techniques they had crossed oceans to discover” (Ghosh, Circle 57). The image of the garotte suggests that the trade routes may cut across national borders, but they are actually “infected by blood and overdetermined by the asymmetries of economic and military power” (Dixon 15). Trade and monetary benefits were thus their motive and not the professed “civilizing mission”. Weaving changed man again with the computer which drew inspiration and technology from it. The history of weaving is, thus, gory, “a story of greed and destruction” (Ghosh, Circle 57). But as Ghosh tells us, it is the only history we have and “history is hope as well as despair” (Ghosh, Circle 58). He finds hope in the future of weaving wishing it would once again make the world one and blessed with its diversity as “Weaving is hope because it has no country, no continent” (Ghosh, Circle 58). We get a

glimpse of Ghosh's humanism; hope will be restored at the end of the novel with the use of Alu's atrophied thumb being miraculously restored to him. The novel is set in two places, each with their unique history. Lalpukur, a village in Bengal, is the location of the first section. This is an archetypal Indian village complete with its village square and inquisitive neighbours. Yet, it has a violent history. It saw settlements by refugees from East Pakistan after the Partition. The people, we are told, were "vomited out of their native soil years ago in another carnage, and dumped hundreds of miles away..." (Ghosh, Circle 59-60). These people had no anger left in them; "their only passion was memory." (Ghosh, Circle 59). Ghosh writes: "Lalpukur could fight no war because it was damned to a hell of longing." (Ghosh, Circle 59). The village is therefore "the product of diaspora", a site for hybridization, damned to an existence of longing for the world left behind (Dixon 15). The village witnesses an exodus of refugees again after the 1971 Bangladesh War. Nationalism, and not colonial rule, is the cause of these dislocations, a point that Ghosh will use in his subsequent novels too. Carbollic acid, which functions as a metaphor, runs through the novel like a cleansing mechanism. Balaram, completely indoctrinated in the ways of western science chooses carbollic acid over other brands because it was the "masterly brain-child of Lister's, Pasteur' friend and Great Disciple" (Ghosh, Circle 61), and not created by the "Great Adversary, Robert Koch, who had so tenaciously and falsely opposed Pasteur" (Ghosh, Circle 61). Balaram's obsessive use of carbollic acid as an effective disinfectant to keep the 77 settlements of the refugees from Bangladesh clean and free from dirt, disease and death is taken as an act of sedition and extremist activity and the police raid his house. In the battle that ensues, Balaram and his wife Toru-debi are killed; their house is gutted, but Alu escapes unhurt. He is, however, the prime suspect and is on the run with the police close on his heels, taking the reader to the next section of the novel which explores the exodus of migration to the Middle East in the 1970s.

The second part of the novel is set in a fictitious Gulf country al-Ghazira. The setting of al-Ghazira has a long history of welcoming all who wished to make it their home. The British, however, broke with the past by using military force to persuade the elderly Malik to sign a treaty after oil was discovered in that area as "al-Ghazira was just a speck of sand floating on a sea of oil" and hence extremely lucrative for the business propositions it offered (Ghosh, Circle 248-9). The Resident that the British sent arrived in a battleship. Their intentions were thus clear. When oil was discovered in al-Ghazira it was ruled by Malik. When the Malik refused to give them exclusive digging rights, the "Oilmen" first spread rumours about the mental health of the ruler and then set his half-brother Amin against him. A similar pattern had been followed by the colonial rulers in the past to conquer other lands too. In order to show "the things the world could do for the forgotten land of al-Ghazira" (Ghosh, Circle 257) they planted special date palms and made them bloom on a barren land. Ghosh, here, brings to our notice how scientific and technological advancements are brought to use in the neocolonial era to mask colonial ambitions. The Oilmen prevail and all protests are put down by "the newest and best