Chapter Two

The Complex Web

The Circle of Reason

There is nothing on earth, nothing in heaven that is not the product of the three gunas. — Krishna in *The Bhagavad-Gita*

We cannot overlook the extraordinary increase of the global gap between the rich and the poor in the era of free-market fundamentalism. — Eric Hobsbawm, *The New Century*

Truth that appeals to the testimony of the senses may satisfy reason, but it offers nothing that stirs our feelings and expresses them by giving a meaning to human life. Yet it is most often feeling that is decisive in matters of good and evil, and if feeling does not come to the aid of reason, the latter is usually powerless. — C.G. Jung, *Modern Man In Search Of A Soul*

Amitav Ghosh's debut novel *The Circle of Reason* (1986) won the Prix Medici Etranger, one of France's top literary awards; it was also hailed as a Notable Book of the Year (1987) by the *New York Times*. Nevertheless its critical reception ranges from total dismissal to near rapturous approval. Ranjita Basu, to begin with, locates the novel's deficiencies in "immaturity of vision and an uncertain control over form" (151). "*The Circle of Reason* is not merely circular", counterclaims G.J.V. Prasad, "but a finely patterned novel and when seen as a whole displays the intricate 'buti work' of a master weaver in the making" (59). R.K. Dhawan too discerns in the novel "the folk tale charm of Arabian Nights" (19).

Like its form, the novel's genre too has generated an intense debate. If for Shubha Tiwari the novel is "picaresque" (8), for Claire Chambers it is "ostensibly a bildungsroman" ("Historicizing Scientific Reason", 36). What for Pradip Dutta "is an epic of restlessness" (39), for Yumna Siddiqi is a specimen of "police fiction". No ready-made label fits the novel, thinks Stephanie Jones, for it evokes a "poignantly novel sense of a 'minor' cosmopolitan community, both constrained and liberated by the polylingualism of language" (441). Granted its

controversiality, the profundity of *The Circle of Reason* remains to be demonstrated.

The anthropocentric world of the European Enlightenment put a premium on human reason as a panacea for all existential problems. The Enlightenment project for example looked to reason to free mankind from the darkness of superstition, prejudice and slavish obedience to religious precepts and thus pave the way for progress. This blend of rationalism and scientism is what Habermas calls "modernity". Contemporary theorists have thoroughly debunked the Enlightenment's millenarianism. Postmodernist thinkers view Enlightenment's rationalism, universalism and foundationalism as dangerously "hegemonic", "logocentric", "totalizing" and "essentialist". They regard the Enlightenment's apotheosis of reason and progress as a mere shibboleth. Things have come to such a pass that these Enlightenment claims, serving as instances of "metanarratives", inspire Jean-Francois Lyotard's "incredulity". For Lyotard, Enlightenment's grand theories about the emancipation of humanity through reason and science are homogenizing and so illegitimate, and are foredoomed to failure. In a nutshell, Enlightenment monism ultimately results in oppressing, if not eliminating the other. *The Circle of Reason* is an elaborate exercise in puncturing the Janus-faced Enlightenment's worship of Reason and its concomitant racism.

Ghosh uses characters to orchestrate ideas and give his novels a solid thematic unity. Balaram is the most important character in the novel's opening section. The other characters ranged around him throw into wide relief his enigmatic personality. An eccentric idealist who has internalized the colonial ideology of Western science's altruistic mission, Balaram projects himself as its earnest devotee. A science enthusiast, his teachers at Presidency College force him to take up history. He thus continues to be a science aficionado without a scientific base. The two disciplines of science and history merge in him to extol the achievements of Western knowledge, the grand historical narrative of modernity's progress and the Enlightenment's notion of Reason's transnationality: "Science doesn't belong to countries. Reason doesn't belong to any nation. They belong to history – to the world" (*The Circle of Reason*, 54). Balaram's deification of Western scientific knowledge through phrases such as "Man's ascent to Reason" (*CR*, 39), "March of Reason" or "Reason Militant" (*CR*, 117) is strongly reminiscent of Hegelian *telos* or the linear narrative of history as the universal

unfolding of Reason. Balaram's analysis of the history of Western science and of the individual scientific geniuses makes him glorify Louis Pasteur as the archetypal, disinterested scientist, "the greatest of all the soldiers of Reason" (*CR*, 109). Inspired by Vallery-Radot's hagiographic *The Life of Pasteur*, his most prized possession, Balaram eulogizes Western science as an altruistic enterprise for the universal benefit of "mankind", as an "answer to the everyday problems of simple people" (*CR*, 49) and Pasteur as its most passionate priest: "a passion which sprang from the simple and the everyday. A passion for the future, not the past. It was that which made him the greatest man of his time, for it is that passion which makes men great" (*CR*, 50). Despite Balaram's celebration of Pasteur's scientific genius, he undercuts his own discourse when he associates Pasteur's transnational endeavours with specific social and economic projects, that of silk and beer, the two most luxurious commodities in 19th century France:

> It was because the brewers of France came to him and said: What makes our beer rot? [...] Who did the silk farmers of Europe go to when disease struck their silkworms and whole provinces lay devastated and groaning in misery? [...] Who but Pasteur? They went to him and they said: Save us". (*CR*, 49)

Balaram's idealization of Pasteur as a lone visionary receives a severe jolt when Bruno Latour in his book *The Pasteurization of France* presents Pasteur as a canny, unscrupulous scientist who converted scientific research into an instrument of wealth, power and dominance: "Has credibility often been converted into capital so quickly in the history of the sciences" (101)? Latour emphasizes that the emergence of modern scientific rationality and imperialism are the twins of the Enlightenment and "[w]ith each parasite concerned, the columns of soldiers, missionaries, and colonists became visible on the map of Africa, Asia, sailing up the rivers and invading the plains" (141). Latour's argument gains credence from MacLeod and Lewis's observation that from "the late 1870s, [...] tropical medicine – its ideology European, its instrument the microscope, its epistemology the germ theory of disease – served the interests of dominant economic groups" (7). Conceived to be an objective, disinterested and truth-seeking institution, Western science turned out to be a tool of colonization and of world domination. The rise of the discipline of "tropical medicine" enabled the imperialists to justify their occupation of non-western countries under the rubric of "civilizing mission". Vallery-Radot's mythologization of Pasteur's "scientific ardour and [...] generous

eagerness to lighten the burden of others" (120) ignores the darker side of the coin. Balaram's celebration of Pasteur's humanitarianism is severely indicted by his friend and persistent critic Gopal who contests the idea of science as a universal, transnational phenomenon and considers it to be a source of power rooted in a particular social, economic and political milieu: "Even Reason discovers itself through events and people" (*CR*, 38). The sinister equation between science and colonialism which Ghosh briefly touches on in his debut novel is explored in a broader dimension in *The Calcutta Chromosome* which is a scathing repudiation of the Enlightenment.

In college, Balaram and two of his friends Gopal and Dantu start an organization called the Society for the Dissemination of Science and Rationalism among the people of Hindoostan. Their motto for the Society "Reason rescues Man from Barbarity" is one of the major tenets of the European Enlightenment. The aim of the Rationalists, unlike that of their rival Science Association, is "the application of rational principles to everything around them – to their own lives, to society, to religion, to history" (*CR*, 46). Gopal, a student of English literature, postulates parallelisms between the past and the present, the East and the West, "between the ideas of the ancient Hindu sages and modern science" (*CR*, 46-47). He contends that the ancient rational ideas were manipulated by scheming priests and Brahmins for their self-interest. They distorted the Hindu idea of God, the Brahma, by transforming him into many deities. Gopal defines "the real Brahma" to be "without attributes, without form, nothing but an essence, in everything and in nothing" (*CR*,47). Gopal's charlatanism leads him to confuse Brahma with Brahman. Heinrich Zimmer neatly differentiates between Brahman (neuter) and Brahma (masculine). Whereas the "former refers to the transcendent and immanent Absolute; the latter is an anthropomorphic personification of the Creator-Demiurge. Brahman is properly a metaphysical term, Brahma mythological"(123). Continuing his pontification, Gopal further asserts that "the Brahma is nothing but the Atom"; "the Universal Egg of Hindu mythology is nothing but a kind of Cosmic Neutron" (*CR*, 47). The Egg is the first manifestation of the Unknowable before creation. The father and creator of all beings, the manifestation of the divine power inherent in the universe, Brahma developed the world from the cosmic Egg. Gopal first equates Brahma with the Atom and then the Universal Egg with the Neutron, one of the atomic

constituents. The muddle thus becomes all the more pervasive. Anyway, by blending ideas from Hindu religion and Western science, the Rationalists dismantle the Western ideology of the rigidity of binary constructions and champion pluralism.

Gopal represents the confusion born out of the encounter between the East and the West. Accordingly he attempts to interpret Eastern philosophy and mythology in terms of Western rationalism. A self-styled rationalist, Gopal unsurprisingly suggests that all meetings should begin with prayers to the Cosmic Atom. The patriotic Balaram substitutes the Cosmic Boson for the Cosmic Atom. He adores Pasteur and his futuristic passion and induces his fellow Rationalists to follow Pasteur's idea of hygiene and wage war on individual uncleanliness. The socialist Dantu has, however, an altogether different idea of dirt: "It is the world, the world of people, which makes dirt possible. How can you hope to change people's bodies without changing the world" (*CR*, 104)? These two perspectives on "dirt" shape the Utopian vision of the resurrected Alu in the Second Section of the novel.

A measure of Balaram's capriciousness is that he can descend in a trice from the height of Cosmic Boson to the depth of undergarments. Anyway the point at issue here is the incongruous coupling in the Indian context of Enlightenment rationalism and parochial nationalism. Post-Enlightenment rationality, believes Partha Chatterjee, is a "framework of knowledge which proclaims its own universality: its validity, it pronounces, is independent of cultures". Nationalist thought also, claiming to be modern, "accepts the claim to universality of this 'modern' framework of knowledge". At the same time, it asserts "the autonomous identity of a national culture. It thus simultaneously rejects and accepts the dominance, both epistemic and moral, of an alien culture" (*Nationalist Thought*, 11).

Because scientists deal in lofty ideas, Balaram presumes that they are literally ethereal beings. Since the Curies do not live up to his image of scientists, Balaram performs a volte-face: "What's wrong with all those scientists and their sciences is that there's no connection between the outside and the inside, between what people think and how they are" (*CR*, 17). In reaction, he embraces a pseudo-science like phrenology in the belief that "in this science the inside and the outside, the mind and the body, what people do and what they are, are

one"(*CR*,17, italics original). The differentia of phrenology, presumes Balaram, is that it resolves the dualism between the mind and the body, an important issue in the novel which is resolved in the Third Section. Balaram's rejection of "research" science in favour of a discredited "practical" science like phrenology manifests how insidious is the permeation of Western ideology in preparing the colonial mindset. In the domain of knowledge formation, research in the sciences is exclusively reserved for the whites. The colonial periphery is a site of collection of raw data, which when analyzed and processed in the European laboratories, would be re-circulated as proven "empirical" truths to the colony. By way of exposing the "scientific" methodologies of the West, the present novel interrogates the pseudo-science of phrenology. Phrenology claims to judge an individual's personality by measuring the bumps on his skull. Premised on white supremacism, phrenology erects the white body into the norm, and anything else counts as a deviation. The anarchic Other, conceived as the negation of the progressive, rational Western Self, is consigned to the periphery, invisible to the Western gaze. This stereotyping of the other underpins colonialism in as much as it presumes "the colonized as a population of degenerate types on the basis of racial origin, in order to justify conquest and to establish systems of administration and instrument" (Bhabha, 70). By foisting upon the Orient the West's image of it, the former denies the non-European other any identity of its own. It is this perverted science which perpetrates racism that Balaram embraces and invites Gopal's sharp criticism for his fascination for books authored by "crazy Europeans" (*CR*, 54). The cranky Balaram who worships Pasteur can descend to the level of adopting the methods of pseudo-sciences, dismissed as false knowledges. The point at issue is that by straddling the dual zones of "what might be conveniently termed science and pseudo-science" (Chambers, "Historicizing Scientific Reason", 37) the institution of Western science implodes its own celebration of binaries.

The First Section of *The Circle of Reason* significantly titled "Satwa: Reason", is a systematic interrogation of what constitutes scientific methodology by exposing the limitations of Balaram's deviant science. From his phrenological study of his college friend Dantu's head and face, Balaram concludes that he has all the makings of a saint and has become a mendicant. The fact that Dantu is in reality a political agitator tears to shreds Balaram's fine-spun theory. The freakish

Balaram, without developing a theory from the evidence collected, tries to forcibly yoke his "rational" findings with people's behaviour. He presumes Bhudeb Roy, his employer at Lalpukur school, to be idealistic and benevolent on phrenological grounds. Bhudeb actually turns out to be an unscrupulous profiteer. The fact is that Balaram learns about Bhudeb's acquisitiveness and secretiveness not from sound empirical research but from locals' reports that Bhudeb is a cheat and a police informer. In an expose of Balaram's fundamental assumptions, the narrator remarks that "the trouble with people like Balaram was that theories came first and the truth afterwards" (*CR*, 13). The phrenology obsessed Balaram mistakes fancy for fact. In this he resembles Don Quixote, laughable but tragic. He finds in his nephew Alu's unusual head a rich field for his phrenological exploration. Presumed to be impassive, the apparently unemotional Alu is so passionately devoted to his uncle that he fights Bhudeb's sons, Balaram's "*alter ego*, his *doppelganger*" (CR, 99). When Bhudeb invites Balaram to read the future of his new born son about whom the astrologers advanced bleak prospects, Balarm deduces that the son has homicidal potentialities. Eventually proving both the astrologers and the "scientific" Balaram wrong, the baby dies of pneumonia. This series of ironic reversals that the crystal gazer Balaram faces in his "scientific" pursuits proves that reason and reality are too paradoxical to be straitjacketed into any straightforward categories which modern Western logic endorses.

Perhaps not satisfied with the denunciation of Reason through a phrenology freak, the narrator culls a few telling examples of unreason from the world at large, and thus universalizes Balaram's systematic perversion of reason. While the First World War which marked the death of reason was declared in Europe an American judge in San Francisco decided that high-caste Hindus were Aryans and therefore free and white. Reason is thus subverted to promote racism. It was also the year in which the colonial government in Canada barred the entry of eight thousand Indians. The American judge's sophistry has no place in Canada. The racist, colonial government tried to produce a sense of national identity through the exclusion and denigration of others. Relevant in this context is Balibur's observation on racism:

> racism always tends to operate in an inverted fashion [...] the racial-cultural identity of 'true nationals' remains invisible, but it can be inferred (and is ensured) *a contrario* by the alleged,

> quasi-hallucinatory visibility of 'false nationals': the Jews, 'wogs', immigrants, 'Pakis', natives, Blacks. (60)

The irony is that the imperial British recruited Indians to defend the "freedom of the Western world from itself" (*CR*, 39). Balaram saw them as "abysses tearing apart the path of Man's ascent to Reason" (*CR*, 39). Reason is thus certainly not altruistic and universal but is used by arbitrary power systems to construct identities and promote differences.

Balaram's phrenological calculations of Alu's skull correspond with the proportions of the loom quite perfectly. He thinks that Alu is destined to be a weaver. The cranky Balaram believes in fate and swears by phrenology; nevertheless he views man as "the seat of Reason" (*CR*, 55). Hence his deification of the Mechanical Man, "a creature who makes his own world as no other can, with his mind"(*CR*, 55). Accordingly, Balaram sends Alu as an apprentice to his own antithesis, the arboreal, instinctive, traditional weaver Shombhu Debnath. For him, Alu and Shombhu complete a pattern. Balaram, a believer in the universality of science and reason, hails the loom as the symbol of globalism:

> It has created not separate 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. [...] It has never permitted the division of reason.

What Balaram says of the loom is equally true of cloth, which transcends national boundaries and interweaves far-flung countries of the world:

> Indian cloth was found in the graves of the Pharaohs. Indian soil is strewn with cloth from China. The whole of the ancient world hummed with the cloth trade. The Silk Route from China, running through central Asia and Persia to the ports of the Mediterranean and from there to the markets of Africa and Europe, bound continents together for more centuries than we can count. It spawned empires and epics, cities and romances. [...] All through those centuries cloth, in its richness and variety, bound the Mediterranean to Asia, India to Africa, the Arab world to Europe, in equal, bountiful trade. (*CR*, 55-56)

Ancient international trade routes bind the world in a complex web. Ever on the move, the travellers escape the control of states and national borders. As people move, culture also moves, in a diffusing, outward spread. Culture has always been in a process of circulation that crosses national boundaries. The notion that multiculturalism is the exclusive product of contemporary globalization is thus confuted. The irony of the East-West encounter taking place in the East, and the

West's subsequent colonization of it has been quite aptly noted by Anthony King: "The first substantial encounter between Europe and non-Europe, [...] took place in what were to become the colonies, not the metropole; in the periphery, not the core; in non-Europe, not Europe" (8). What is more, the paths of Ibn Battuta and Marco Polo were smoothed by "unknown, unsung traders, armed with nothing more than bundles of cloth" (*CR*, 56). This overturns mainstream history. For the history of these traders is a subaltern history, a narrative missing from the official history. Dipesh Chakrabarty calls for a "history that deliberately makes visible [...] its own repressive strategies and practices" so that "the modern is inevitably contested" (*Provincializing Europe*, 45-46). By calling Marco Polo and Ibn Battuta "just journeymen", the narrator privileges over them these unrecorded traders, who made the routes "safe and tame over centuries"(*CR* , 56).

After the loom and cloth, it is now the turn of cotton. Cotton explains histories, the rise and fall of empires, the vicissitudes of peoples. The polylinguistic history of the word "cotton" spun its web around the world. While Balaram prizes the mechanical man, cotton and the loom, the narrator presents their potential for evil. In order to secure a world-wide market for the huge quantities of cloth produced by the Lancashire cotton mills, Britishers and other Europeans systematically liquidated the weavers in their colonies. What is more, cotton, once the symbol of freedom from all constraints, degenerates into the very symbol of inhumanity:

> The machine had driven men mad.[...] Lancashire poured out its waterfalls of cloth, and the once cloth-hungry and peaceful Englishmen and Dutchmen and Danes of Calcutta and Chandannagar, Madras and Bombay turned their trade into a garrote to make every continent safe for the cloth of Lancashire, strangling the very weavers and techniques they had crossed oceans to discover. Millions of Africans and half of America were enslaved by cotton. (*CR*, 57)

The Arabs "raised them (the Europeans) to civilization" (*CR*, 56). It is an irony of history that several centuries later the cotton mills of Lancashire tied thousands of Egyptians into bondage. The history of cotton thus is a history of imperial exploitation. The asymmetries of economic power thus overdetermine international trade. Yet, quite paradoxically, cotton was the inspiration behind the industrial revolution in the middle of the eighteenth century, weaving behind the technological innovations in the mid-twentieth century. The history of cotton is

thus "a gory history in parts; a story of greed and destruction. Every scrap of cloth is stained by a bloody past. But it is the only history we have and history is hope as well as despair" (*CR*, 57-58). The narrator equates weaving with hope because, as it did in the past, weaving can bind the world with all its diversity, in a web: "Weaving is hope because it has no country, no continent. Weaving *is* Reason, which makes the world mad and makes it human"(*CR*, 58, italics original). It is the novelist's dialectical life vision that informs his orchestrated presentation of the double nature of everything.

The crash of an aeroplane on Bhudeb's school building in Lalpukur further widens the cleavage between the rational and the irrational. An "exclamation mark"(*CR*, 87) from the sky, the incident of the crash can be called an instance of magic realism. Magic(al) Realism is inherently transgressive and subversive in nature. The oxymoronic term juxtaposes the categories of the magical and the real. Zamora and Faris very aptly explain its dual nature: "Magical realist texts are subversive: their in-betweenness, their all at onceness encourages resistance to monological political and cultural structures, a feature that has made the mode particularly useful to writers in postcolonial cultures and, increasingly to women" (6). The mode of magical realism explores and exceeds ontological, political, geographical or generic boundaries. Magic effects are used to "indict the follies of both empire and its aftermath" (Boehmer, 87). The transgressive power of magical realism is a means to dismantle the assumptions of the dominant culture in general, scientific and logical truth in particular. In this context, it questions the domination of Enlightenment Rationality. While Balaram reflects on the strange nature of the plane crash, the pragmatic Bhudeb trades on it. The fact that Bhudeb has had the foresight to insure the school just fifteen days before the crash puzzles all. Bolai-da concludes that it is certainly "more than mere coincidence" (*CR*, 94). Bhudeb receives a huge compensation from the insurance company. The villagers of Lalpukur pay Bhudeb for the scraps. But, ultimately, even these scraps are wrested from them by the "blue-uniforms" (*CR*, 96) of the state as they are government property. The once philanthropic Bhudeb now turns into a fascist. In a rabble-rousing address, he explains his theory of "straight lines": "The time has come [...] for straight lines. [...] Look at Europe, look at America, look at Tokyo: straight lines, that's the secret. [...] There's a time and an age for everything, and this is the age of the straight line" (*CR*, 99). If weaving, with its all-inclusive

quality, is a metaphor for art, "straight lines" could stand for modernity and capitalist enterprise. Against European and American prosperity, the village presents disordered beauty. With his straight lines, the battle lines between Bhudeb and Balaram are finally drawn. While Bhudeb strives for commercial gain, Balaram's reformist zeal urges him to disinfect the village with carbolic acid. Inspired by colonial ideologies of knowledge and culture and to initiate a "new history" (*CR*, 106), Balaram establishes the Pasteur School of Reason. His School comprises two departments, the Department of Pure Reason and the Department of Practical Reason, "abstract reason and concrete reason, a meeting of the two great forms of human thought" (*CR*, 107). Redolent as they are of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781) and *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788), there is nothing grandiose about them. Balaram simply invokes the discourses of the Enlightenment and strives for the creative use of the intellect in everyday practice. His blending of the simple and the beautiful, "knowledge coupled with labour" (*CR*, 109), is his way of countering Bhudeb's theory of "straight lines". Balaram's expansion of his School with the Department of the March of Reason couples with his irrational engagement of power struggle with Bhudeb by dousing him in carbolic acid. Balaram's obsession with his utopian dreams and Bhudeb's with his developmental projects reduces them to a pair of monomaniacs which establishes their complementarities which the recalcitrant Shombhu identifies to Balaram: "You're two halves of an apple if you only knew it, one raw, one rotten, but the same fruit" (*CR*, 141). The duo's sheer hatred for each other culminates in Balaram's destruction.

Contrapuntal as they are, Shombhu and Balaram are oppositely oriented. "The machine, like man", believes Shombhu, "is captive to language" (*CR*, 73). When he begins explaining the parts of the machine to Alu, he finds that the "loom has knotted his tongue": "So many names, so many words, words beaten together in the churning which created the world" (*CR*, 73). Balaram treats the loom as the symbol of globalism; the narrator traces the polylinguistic history of cotton. Shombhu insists that Alu learn each part of the loom in three languages: "*Kol-norod* in Noahkhali, *nata-norod* in Tangail, *cloth-beam* in English" (*CR*,73). In his discourse, Shombhu ranges from the local to the global. Noahkhali and Tangail are districts as well as dialects in Bangladesh, English provides a global resonance. The blending of the local and the transnational results in fusion.

Exploring the history of weaving the narrator creates a counter-narrative to the Eurocentric history of scientific advancement and modernity, industrialization and colonial expansion. Balaram's assertion that weaving is a "living belief" that "made the world one and blessed it with its diversity" (*CR*, 58) celebrates the bridging of transnational spaces, languages, discourses by dismantling boundaries and yet maintaining one's individuality. Shombhu insists on the necessity of more than one language to know the parts of the loom and also the inadequacy of language to describe the creative process:

> A loom is a dictionaryglossarythesarus. Why? Words serve no purpose; nothing mechanical. No, it is because the weaver, in making cloth, makes words, too, and trespassing on the territory of the poets gives names to things the eye can't see. That is why the loom has given language more words, more metaphor, more idiom than all the world's armies of pen-wielders. (*CR*, 74)

Weaving creates a new design to describe which a new word has to be coined. Balaram glorifies Mechanical Man, Shombhu the creative weaver. Weaving defies language and assumes a metaphysical dimension.

A creative artist that he is, Shombhu privileges the mind over the body. Combining weaving with Bruce Lee kung fu, his son Rakhal attaches equal importance to the mind and the body. Rakhal is a creator and a destroyer rolled into one and hence a paradox. He starts preparing bombs for material gain: "There's a war in the towns too. They need bombs. You watch; I'll be rich" (*CR*, 78). The "war" that Rakhal speaks of is the Naxalite Movement in West Bengal. The Indian national space is intersected both by external threats (the war with Pakistan and the emergence of Bangladesh) and micro-national extremist politics. By mixing tradition with modern technological innovations, nativism with Bruce Lee movies, Lalpukur does not present a stable, authentic culture, but a site for hybridization. In fact, Lalpukur is "churning like cement in a grinder" (*CR*, 76).

Disillusioned with the world around him, Shombhu mourns the degrading effects of capitalism on art and beauty: "Beauty doesn't exist; it is *made* like words or forts, by speakers and listeners, warriors and defenders, weavers and wearers. That world has washed away. Jamdani is only a toy for the wives of contractors and mahajans now"(*CR*, 81, italics original). Beauty is jointly created by the artist and the appreciator, the weaver and the wearer. The ethos congenial to the creation of such beauty, Shombhu believes, does not exixt any more.

Shombhu forcefully raises the issue of subjectivity in perception. Perception is intrinsically mind-dependent because "Whilst part of what we perceive comes through our senses from the object before us, another part always comes [...] out of our own head" (James, 103). With their materialist and unimaginative mind-set, the new rich cannot respond to the ethereal beauty of jamdani.

Within the novel's thematic pattern, Gopal acts as the norm from which Balaram and Bhudeb deviate into opposite directions. Sagacity personified, Gopal acts as the idealist, unpractical Balaram's voice of wisdom. Balaram and Bhudeb seem to work out the dialectic between mind and matter, idealism and materialism. Through ecstasy, Balaram transcends the self at a privileged moment. Denied any such outlet, Bhudeb always remains imprisoned within the confines of the self. The enigmatic, instinctive Shombhu complements Balaram and counterpoints Bhudeb. An artist turned lover, Shombhu is a fearless adventurer. Resisting Bhudeb's authority, he elopes with his wife Parboti. The maverick Shombhu is an eternal pilgrim, ever engaged in the quest for a progressively more perfect life value. With his boisterous gaiety and irrepressible spirit, he is a whole man and a mystic at that. A truly free man, he is above class consciousness, social snobbery, and affectation of all kinds. What he has in abundance is the holiness of the heart's affections. He is the ultimate manifestation of primal energy. Maya's pragmatism contrasts with Rakhal's extremism. Parboti's child feels "better already now that she's with her father" (*CR*, 134). The joy is short-lived because the vengeful Bhudeb prepares for his final assault on Balaram's household. The sensitive Shombhu realizes that his exit will end all the trouble. Having tricked his enemy Bhudeb, he has no other scores to settle. As he came to Lalpukur, so he goes, completing a circle: "This is how I came here – with a woman and a child and a bundle of clothes – and this is how I'll go" (141). He has a bum's non-attachment and spiritual resilience.

For the title of the seventh or penultimate chapter of the novel's First Part named "Satwa: Reason", Ghosh lifts the philosophically pregnant phrase "The Ghost in the Machine" from Gilbert Ryle's highly controversial book *The Concept of Mind* (1949). The seventeenth century French philosopher Rene Descartes posits mind and body as two independent, incompatible substances. In his view, a human body is a machine which nevertheless houses the non-physical mind. Intent on debunking Descartes's mind-body dualism, Ryle reduces the mind to a ghost.

In Ghosh's hand, particularly in this chapter, the human mind is no ineffectual ghost but a potent force. More to the point in the present context are the philosophical implications of the rationalist Descartes's mind-body dualism, succinctly encapsulated by Bertrand Russell:

> 'I think, therefore I am', makes mind more certain than matter, and my mind (for me) more certain than the minds of others. There is thus, in all philosophy derived from Descartes, a tendency to subjectivism and to regarding matter as something only knowable, if at all, by inference from what is known of mind.(548)

Balaram and his wife Toru-debi demonstrate the disastrous consequences of privileging the mind over the body and its concomitants: self-imprisonment and alienation from the physical, public world.

Shombhu Debnath's elopement with Bhudeb Roy's wife and daughter and the fugitive's shelter in Balaram's house without the owners' knowledge adds a new twist to the standing enmity between Bhudeb and Balaram. By branding Balaram's family as "extremists" who smuggle "foreign weapons" (*CR*, 129) from "across the border" (*CR*, 131), Bhudeb demonstrates reason's malleability which can accommodate any logic to serve the interests of the men in power. It allows the narrative the opportunity to explore the coercive practices of the bureaucratic apparatus in a post-colonial nation state and its rational pretensions. Although he is forced to obey the dictates of an administrative machinery that operates through excess, the bird-watching, visionary police inspector Jyoti Das doubts that Balaram received financial assistance from across the border: "There appeared to be no rational grounds to substantiate the principal source's belief that a retired schoolmaster in his village was being used by a foreign-trained agent of some kind, disguised as a weaver, to run a network of extremists" (*CR*, 126). What a representative of a government machinery interprets to be "some kind of petty village rivalry" (*CR*, 127) and a "thoroughly trivial matter" (*CR*, 126), the state apparatus, confounding all logic, considers it to be a threat to the nation. Hence, the local police besiege Balaram's compound. In another irony, the self-withdrawn Toru-debi and Balaram are totally impervious to the external world mistaking their respective fancies for facts. While Toru-debi clings to her idea that the confrontation is all about the incomplete blouses, Balaram looks forward to squaring accounts with Bhudeb. Evidently Balaram is as much a victim of

paranoia as his wife is of *idée fixe*. Knowing full well that he and not Balaram is Bhudeb's immediate target, Shombhu feels that Balaram's belligerence towards Bhudeb is absolutely gratuitous. Balaram's enemy at the moment is not Bhudeb but his own crazy mind imagining things for which there is not the slightest justification. Hence Shombhu's tearful attempt to disabuse Balaram and to save him from self-destruction: "You must stop this: this is madness. There's no reason to go on like this. No reason. [...] You're the best sadhu I've ever known, [...], but no mortal man can cope with the fierceness of your gods" (*CR*, 142). While the clear-eyed Shombhu tries to drag Balaram out of his subjectivity and to open his blinkered eyes to the reality as it is, Balaram plunges all the deeper into the recesses of his self. In the inevitable carnage that follows, the police open fire which decimates Balaram's house and several innocent people. In their mode of repression, the military-bureaucratic apparatus in a post-colonial state is an extension of the colonial machinery's subordination of indigenous social classes as Alavi explains:

> The colonial state is therefore equipped with a powerful bureaucratic military apparatus and mechanisms of government which enable it through its routine operations to subordinate the native social classes. The post-colonial society inherits that overdeveloped apparatus of state and its institutionalized practices through which the operations of the indigenous social classes are regulated and controlled. (74)

In the scheme of things where reason is phantasmatic, the innocent orphan Alu is absurdly branded as a terrorist thus invoking Bourdieu's warning that "the social force of representation is not necessarily proportional to [its] truth-value" (*Language and Symbolic Power*, 227). The fugitive Alu escapes from the clutches of the police and flees to South India where the Chalias, weavers from Kerala, help the runaway "Suspect" (*CR*, 154) leave the Indian shores for al-Ghazira on the rickety boat *Mariamma*.

Displacement and migration, dislocation and inter-cultural crossings are a recurrent motif in Ghosh's oeuvre which is introduced quite intriguingly in *The Circle of Reason*. The people of Lalpukur were hounded out of their homeland by events beyond their control. The narrator feels deeply about these history's victims: "Vomitted out of their native soil years ago in another carnage, and dumped hundreds of miles away, they had no anger left. Their only passion was memory"(*CR*, 59). In the context of the history of the Indian sub-continent,

particularly Bengal, the "carnage" refers to the Partition of India in 1947. Here private experience is pitted against public experience. The anguished memory of the displaced glorifies the past. "Memory", believes Dipesh Chakrabarty, "is a complex phenomenon that reaches out to far beyond what normally constitutes an historian's archives"("Remembered Villages", 318). Years later when "a war was brewing across the border"(*CR*, 59), the lives of the people of Lalpukur were also affected: "their relatives on the other side never let them forget it. Often they were drummed to bed by the rattle of distant gunfire"(*CR*, 59). What is worse, Lalpukur becomes a dumping-ground for the refugees from across the border: "Long before the world had sniffed genocide in Bangladesh, Lalpukur began to swell. It grew and grew. [...] borders dissolved under the weight of millions of people in panic-stricken flight from an army of animals (*CR*, 59-60). Through the idea of the borderline, nationalist discourse espouses the construction and consolidation of difference. The notion of binary oppositions is implicit in the conception of the border. Every cultural system divides the world into "its own" internal space and "their" external space. The fact that the turmoil in Bangladesh affects Lalpukur in the neighbouring country points to the ineffectuality of borders.

There are two Bengali words for "refugee", *sharanarthi*, meaning someone who seeks refuge and protection, and *udvastu*, someone who is homeless. As Dipesh Chakrabarty explains: "An *udvastu* then – the prefix 'ut' signifying 'off' or 'outside'– was someone who had been placed outside of where his foundations were. And since this was not a desirable state, it could have only come about through some application of force and/or a grave misfortune"("Remembered Villages",323). The displaced after the Partition were originally refugees in the second sense. They then settle in Lalpukur but keep on commemorating their native village as sacred and beautiful. The Bangladesh war victims, however, are to return home on the restoration of peace. When Bangladesh actually materializes, some of them return; others stay back in the host country and disperse all over it. This results in a composite of indigens and immigrants, undermining the myth of a homogeneous nation.

While political compulsion is the cause of demographic dislocation, the lure of economic opportunities in the New World of al-Ghazira in the Middle East compels the working class South Asians to become desperate immigrants. The compelling attraction for technologically advanced commodities like watches and

electronic products destroys local businesses based on indigenous traditions. What eggs Rakesh on to al-Ghazira is a "gigantic, pulsating cassette recorder" (*CR*, 183) beneath a small earthen figurine of the Devi Lakshmi in a sweetshop, symbolic of the hybridity of modern India, mixing modern technology and ancient religion. Ayurvedic laxatives, symbolizing tradition, have lost out in the competition to Western consumer products like "sparkling, bubbling salts which dissolved in water or milky syrups in bottles with bright labels" (*CR*, 182). The narrator underlines capitalism's long-standing lure of money, its nexus with neocolonialism and its capacity to turn people into commodities when the migrants on board the *Mariamma* have their first glimpse of the lights of the Middle East:

> through a century and a half the same lights have shone in one part of the globe or another, wherever money and its attendant arms have chosen to descend on peoples unprepared for its onslaughts, and for all of those hundred and fifty years *Mariamma*'s avatars have left that coast for those lights carrying with them an immense cargo of wanderers seeking their own destruction in giving flesh to the whims of capital. (*CR*, 189)

The novel's second section "*Rajas*: Passion" shatters the dreams of third world immigrants about the utopian possibilities in the Gulf and delineates the dehumanizing labour conditions in the region.

In this context, Karthamma's painful pregnancy on the *Mariamma* raises many questions. Her labour has started but she tries to kill the baby in the womb. Karthamma believes that her child would not have any material possessions if she doesn't sign the proper forms. To make matters worse, her child might even be sent back to India. For Karthamma the "forms" are a source of legitimacy for her illegitimate child. A migrant that she is, al-Ghazira holds for her the possibilities of a bright future and material prosperity. She has been convinced that by going to al-Ghazira she and her unborn child will possess "houses and cars and multi-storeyed buildings" (*CR*, 177). To return to India, and so to her past, would be a regression. By all indications, Karthamma has been sexually exploited. She has also experienced the utter destitution typical of a citizen of a Third-World post-colonial nation by doing "eight-anna jobs in ricefields and things like that" (*CR*, 177). No wonder she would prefer killing her child to returning to India. The gullible Karthamma rests her dreams of modern material comforts on a piece of deception.

By providing shelter to the diverse illegal immigrants from the Indian subcontinent and North Africa, Zindi establishes a community in miniature. She relates to the inmates on the basis of both affection and money. She helps them to find jobs and charges them rent. She tells stories to her neighbours and sells them tea. A victim of patriarchy, Zindi establishes a matriarchal community. Her house is for its inmates both "the home" and "the world":

> The world is the external, the domain of the material; the home represents one's inner spiritual self, one's true identity. The world is a treacherous terrain of the pursuit of material interests, where practical considerations reign supreme. It is also typically the domain of the male. The home in its essence must remain unaffected by the profane activities of the material world – and woman is its representation. (Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments*, 120)

This matriarch contends that the relation between herself and the women is not that between an entrepreneur and his commodities but between a householder and his "family". They are not forced diasporas but voluntary exiles: "When I go to India I don't have to do anything. These women find me and come running: Take me, Zindi – no, me, Zindi-didi" (*CR*, 181). These girls have a wonderful reputation in al-Ghazira for being both "reliable" and "hard-working". Zindi finds them jobs, and they pay her a little in return. But this is not a business, "it's my family, my aila, my own house, and I look after them, [...] and no one's unhappy and they all love me"(*CR*, 181). By calling prostitution "work" and the women as "hard-working", Zindi seeks to legitimize both her wards' sex-work and her own entrepreneurship. Moreover, she elevates prostitution to the status of productive labour. By presenting the women as both commodities/labourers and family members, enslaved as well as free, the narrative problematizes the situation of the migrant females.

It does not take long for the migrants to realize the delusive nature of the dazzling lights of al-Ghazira. Mast Ram becomes the victim of injustice at the hands of a labour contractor; Kulfi of anti-Indian feelings. Samuel loses his job for a moment of absent-mindedness. Several immigrants are crushed on construction sites by faulty equipment. A massive building called "The Star" collapses and traps Alu almost exactly in its centre beneath the wreckage of concrete. Pressed to explain the sequence of these terrible misfortunes, Zindi intones her "terrible litany of calamities" (*CR*, 201) which is an accurate summing up of the migrant experience. Zindi's family of assorted illegal immigrants gets a sense of their

identity through the power of her story-telling. Her narrative creates reality and meaning:

> They had lived through everything Zindi spoke of and had heard her talk of it time and time again; yet it was only in her telling that it took shape; changed fro mere incidents to a palpable thing, a block of time which was not hours or minutes or days, but something corporeal, with its own malevolent willfulness. That was Zindi's power: she could bring together empty air and give it a body just by talking of it." (*CR*, 213)

The variations which she introduces in her narrative are "like the pressure of a potter's thumb on clay – changing the thing itself and their knowledge of it" (*CR*, 213). Alu's entrapment beneath the pyramid of televisions, refrigerators, radios and other consumer products triggers a multiple of mutually exclusive interpretations about the catastrophe. Abu Fahl draws upon all his knowledge of construction to explain the crash but Hajj Fahmy would have none of it. The latter's quizzical question puzzles Abu Fahl: "If it was strong only in parts, why did the whole of it fall" (244)? He thus brings in the issue of the organic relationship between the whole and its component parts. He claims to know "the real story; the true story" (244). The point in question needs elaboration. "Truth" is provisional and contingent. A proliferation of stories exists to narrate this "truth". The stories lack veracity as the products of imagination. But each tale individualizes the teller by situating him in a particular social and economic background. Moreover, by celebrating the egalitarian spirit of oral tradition and storytelling, the narrative dismantles the notion of a single, determinate authoritative meaning. The possibility of plural interpretations rules out authoritative value-judgements and closures of meaning. By reviving the ancient tradition of storytelling, the narrative exhibits self-reflexivity. It projects the vision of "an exhausted centre" and "a vital margin" (Rushdie, "In Defence", 48). The valorization of the personal elements of oral storytelling debunks the impersonal narrative of realistic Eurocentric novels by giving each teller a distinctive voice which resists appropriation by a master narrative.

The interplay between experience and expression is a dynamic one. Experience gives rise to narratives; it acquires form and meaning in the telling. Marita Eastmond, following E.M. Bruner, distinguishes between "*life as lived*, the flow of events that touch on a person's life; *life as experienced*, how the person perceives and ascribes meaning to what happens, drawing on previous experience

and cultural repertoires" and "*life as told*, how experience is framed and articulated in a particular context and to a particular audience" (250). Zindi's narration of the stories of each immigrant can be accorded a fourth level, *life as text*. Experience is never directly represented. It is edited and interpreted at different stages of the process from life to text.

A narrative is a form in which events are described as having a meaningful and coherent order. It imposes on reality a unity which it does not inherently possess. It should be accepted, nevertheless, that in its vitality and richness, experience far exceeds the expression. Hence, "stories cannot be seen as simply reflecting life as lived, but should be seen as creative constructions or interpretations of the past, generated in specific contexts of the present" (Eastmond, 250). Thus conceptualized, stories negotiate the past and its meaning and also seek ways of going forward. Zindi's story-telling is thus reconstitutive as it organizes the experiences of the individuals and the community and restores continuity and identity.

The immigrants' contention that the Star disintegrated because of the whims of capital throws into wide relief the nexus between neocolonialism and globalization. Al-Ghazira is an old cosmopolitan mercantile centre, "a merchant's paradise, right in the centre of the world, conceived and nourished by the flow of the centuries of trade" (*CR*, 221). The solidarity between the various merchants from Persia, Iraq, Zanzibar, Oman and India rests on mutual understanding and respect. The advent of the "British gunboats" (*CR*, 221) destroys the peaceful ambience of this prosperous city. The first seeds of colonization are sown when the British resident tries to impose an oil-treaty on the Malik to secure exclusive digging rights for oil. Inspired by the "histories of the great Baghdadi and Cairene dynasties" (*CR*, 246), the Malik devises an intriguing plan for resistance which unfortunately backfires. Disengaging from strong-arm tactics, the British follows the policy of divide and rule, spreads rumours about the Malik's madness and projects his much-hated half-brother the Amir as the alternative ruler. The shrewd British presses into service its superior technological powers as a smokescreen for its appropriating intentions. With the help of its flying machines, the British plant "specially grown date palms; unique palms, which could thrive on any soil" to dazzle the Ghaziris with "the near-miracle" spectacle (*CR*, 257). Despite partial resistance from the natives which is quickly subdued, the New City emerges

overnight "like a mushroom" (*CR*, 263); the entire country is transformed into an Oiltown. So complete and successful is the domination of the colonial machinery that there "was no feud: no tyrants died; there was no fratricide, no regicide, no love, no hate. It was just practice for the princes of the future and their computers – an exercise in good husbandry" (*CR*, 262). The result is the widening gulf between the poverty of the illegal migrants and the wealth of the oil-sharks. Ghosh reflects on the devastating political fallout of the nefarious activities of the oil moguls in his essay "Petrofiction: The Oil Encounter and the Novel": "oil and the developments it has bought in its wake have been directly responsible for the suppression of whatever democratic aspirations and tendencies there were within the region" (*II*, 87).

The Oiltown's "uniformed hirelings from every corner of the world" (*CR*, 260) segregate it spatially from al-Ghazira transforming it into a threatening ghetto. Brought as "weapons" to "divide the Ghaziris from themselves and the world of sanity", the migrant labourers who work at the Oiltown are reduced to mere instruments at the hands of the capitalists: "those ghosts behind the fence were not men, they were the tools – helpless, picked for their poverty" (*CR*, 261). To commemorate their triumph the Oilmen decide to erect an opulent shopping complex called "an-Najma, the Star" on a marshy, unused land to celebrate "the Starry future" (*CR*, 263). The intrusion of multinational companies has already destroyed local capitalists. Jeevanbhai Patel's proximity with the old Malik of al-Ghazira causes his undoing. The enigmatic Nury the Damanhouri, who created his own unconventional brand of capitalism and revolutionized the craft of selling eggs, loses his life rebelling against the Oilmen. This entire sequence of events about capitalist domination is filtered through folk imagination with the omniscient narrator skillfully eschewing his presence. Hajj Fahmy who narrates it concludes with a fabulistic touch: "No one wanted the Star. That was why the Star fell: a house which nobody wants cannot stand" (*CR*, 264). If the Star stood for the triumph of capitalism and neo-colonization, its collapse signals their potential demise.

This optimistic note notwithstanding, the global flow of capital has converted al-Ghazira into a divided house. Cheap migrant labour, skilled in modern construction technology, has outnumbered the Ghaziris which breeds xenophobia. This explains "the entrails of unfinished buildings festooned across

the skyline, and the flow of people with their inexplicable nationalities" (*CR*, 321). The illegal immigrants populate a sequestered narrow inlet called "the Ras-al-Maqṭṭr, the Severed Head, a sandbar garotted by the road on the embankment" (*CR*, 196). People "from all the corners of the world" (*CR*, 226) create a vibrant microcosmic cosmopolitan world which outshines the "solid concrete-and-glass cliff of hotels and offices" of the Old City:

> On one side of the road, jostling for space, were tiled Iranian chelo-kebab shops, Malayali dosa stalls, long, narrow Lebanese restaurants, fruit-juice stalls run by Egyptians from the Sa'id, Yemeni cafés with aprons of brass-studded tables spread out on the pavement, vendors frying ta'ameyya on push-carts — as though half the world's haunts had been painted in miniature along the side of a single street. (*CR*, 344)

Although the Ras is considered to be a wretched place with terrifying people and a dark, labyrinthine marketplace, the Souq, appears to be "almost another country" (*CR*, 194), the heterogeneous immigrants are tied by a "close link" (*CR*, 226) which fosters solidarity. A united band, they are alert to any external threats. Their ability to transcend all divisions stems from "an orientation, a willingness to engage with the Other" (239) and are concerned with "achieving competence in cultures which are initially alien" (Hannerz, 240). This precipitates "a world culture" created "through the increasing interconnectedness of varied local cultures, as well as through the development of cultures without a clear anchorage in any one territory" (Hannerz, 237).

Despite the marked differences between the Ghaziris and the migrants, what unites them is the penetration of the curses of globalization and consumerism in their lives. The huge supermarket in Hurreyya is wrapped in air-conditioning machines and bristles in "freshly frozen Australian lamb and Danish mutton, French cauliflowers and Egyptian cabbages", "Thai rice and Canadian wheat, English cod and Japanese sardines, prawns and shrimps and lobster from the world over" (*CR*, 208). The migrant labourers are allured by the Japanese cassette-recorders, watches, calculators and portable television sets, the latest brand of American jeans and Korean shirts (*CR*, 341). The disastrous effects of multiplexes and shopping malls on indigenous trade and local business are replete throughout the novel. This unrestrained market logic, freed from governmental constraints is a "strong discourse", asserts Bourdieu, "which is so strong and so hard to fight

because it has behind it all the powers of a world of power relations" (*Acts of Resistance*, 95).

Alu's miraculous survival beneath the ruins of the Star initiates an anti-capitalist drive against dehumanizing machinery. Desperately searching for Alu, his migrant friends get lost in the collapsed glass and concrete dome. It "was like the handiwork of a madman – immense steel girders leaning crazily, whole sections of the glass dome scattered about like eggshells" (*CR*, 232). The "voice" they hear is a radio accidentally switched on during the collapse of the building. Reading the episode as an "allegory about the cultural logic of global capitalism destroying the ancient trading cultures of the Middle East", Robert Dixon contends that the "'voice' concisely evokes the aesthetics of postmodernism: the loss of affect, the decentering of the bourgeois subject, the loss of interiority and the relentless commodification of culture"(17). Spiritually transfigured and carrying Balaram's spiritual legacy as he does, Alu thinks of Louis Pasteur, "about dirt and cleanliness. I'm thinking and I'm making plans. [...] I'm thinking about cleanliness and dirt and the Infinitely Small" (*CR*, 235). Buried alive in the ruins of capitalism, Alu has found the elusive breeding ground of germs – "Money. The answer is money"(*CR*, 281). Balaram believed that carbolic acid would realize Pasteur's dream of cleaning the world. Going a step further, Alu identifies money as the prime pollutant and so makes it his exclusive target: "We will drive money from the Ras, and without it we shall be happier, richer, more prosperous than ever before"(*CR*, 281). Evoking a Gandhian vision of an anti-materialist, collective society the zealous Alu prepares to establish a commune in which the inhabitants of the Ras are to pool their earnings and jointly buy goods and services from the Souq through an agent. Since no one makes a profit beyond what is immediately needed, the profit-making commerce in the Ras will come to an end. Inspired by a socialist vision, Alu's micro-economy seeks to remove the curses of capitalism. A very silent man before his brush with death, Alu speaks to his spellbound audience with an extraordinary passion. And he speaks in a multitude of languages:

> Not in one language but in three, four, God knows how many, a khichri of words; couscous, rice, dal and onions, all stirred together, stamped and boiled, Arabic with Hindi, Hindi swallowing Bengali, English doing a dance; tongues unravelled and woven together. [...] They understood him, for

> his voice was only the question; the answers were their own.
> (*CR*, 279)

Alu's discourse weaves a pattern which dissolves all linguistic heterogeneities and creates a communicative relationship in which the self searches for the other in the form of a question. His audience, the other, answers enigmatically through a strange silence illustrating its communicative potential which "assigns speech to its exact position, designating its domain": "By speech, silence becomes the centre and principle of expression, its vanishing point. Speech eventually has nothing more to tell us: we investigate the silence, for it is the silence that is doing the speaking" (Macherey, 96).

Alu lives up to his real name, Nachiketa. In Hindu mythology Nachiketa incurs his father's rage by his persistent questions about Brahman. In exasperation, Uddalaka curses him to go to the nether world – Yamaloka, the world of Yama, the god of death. Nachiketa pleads with the righteous Yama for divine knowledge. Moved at his devotion and ardour, Yama grants his prayer for the knowledge of Brahman. The entrapped Alu, lying at death's door and meditating on purity is a modern avatar of the mythological Nachiketa. The informed reader would appreciate the significance of Alu's name as Nachiketa.

Like Balaram's, Alu's emancipatory drive ends in disaster. His earnest efforts to create a money-free commune and develop a postcolonial utopia degenerate into mutual suspicion and greed. With all the money going to Alu's socialist fund, Zindi's authority over her household declines which prompts her to take possession over Forid Mian's small tailoring shop. The machinating Jeevanbhai stipulates that the police officials Jyoti Das and Jai Lal be allowed into the Ras as part of the deal for the shop. By presenting Jyoti Das and Jai Lal as "ordinary people" and "friends" from India, the tenacious Jeevanbhai persuades Zindi to identify Alu to them. Thus the two Indian police officers who started hunting for Alu in Part One catch up with their quarry in Part Two. Zindi is more of a dupe than a traitor and her beloved family is well on its way to disintegration. When Alu and his associates wage war on germs – both money and the "infinitely Small" (microbes) with buckets of carbolic acid, Zindi's own household turns against her. The "bewildered" (*CR*, 315) Alu's clarion call for purity and cleanliness has been completely misinterpreted by the Ras volunteers. He has initiated a process over which he loses all control: "He could no longer understand

what he'd started (*CR*,316). In an ironic reversal, scared by the bizarre happenings in front of him, Das himself runs away from the fugitive: "it was as though the world had suddenly started moving backwards" (*CR*,316). The immigrants' strong desire for material possessions explodes the utopian project. When they embark on a shopping trip, the new regime of al-Ghazira interprets it to be a demonstration by immigrant workers. The composite, diasporic community of the Ras is decimated by the forces of capital and police. From the perspective of the police, the community of migrant labourers are protesters against the new rulers of al-Ghazira. The neocolonial regime resists the attempts of the subaltern people to become part of civil society. Reminiscent of Balaram's fate, Alu's socialist efforts are crushed by the state power. In the resulting ambush, many of Alu's friends are killed, as were the members of Balaram's household. Alu escapes, as before, in another migratory flight. Zindi leads Alu, Kulfi, the baby Boss, Zaghloul and Abu Fahl to her native village in Egypt. Far from providing the homeless with shelter, the wives of Zindi's brothers hound her out, accusing her as a "whore" and a brothel keeper. Ironically, Zindi's brothers built their home with her own dirhams. Snapping of family ties is nothing new for Zindi. Her husband abandoned her long ago in Alexandria on discovering her barrenness. Zindi realizes then the vital importance of the family and identity after all her ties have been severed. Rootless once again because of Jyoti Das's relentless pursuit, she leads her entourage to the west "where the sewing-machines are"(*CR*, 365). With "chance beginning to play at puppetry with them", their only hope is the border: "The border it had to be; safety lay on the other side, in the vast welcoming emptiness of the Sahara"(*CR*, 367). Normally a difficult terrain to cross, the vast Sahara holds for the desperate Zindi a promise of deliverance. Crossing over to Algeria, Zindi passes Alu and Kulfi off as a married couple and herself as the nanny to their child.

The novel's Second Part explores passion at various levels – Mast Ram's sexual passion, Jeevanbhai's passion for intrigue, the oil-men's passion for money, Zindi's passion for corporate life, Alu's passion for communitarianism. All of these passionate pursuits, except the oil-men's, end in failures. In contrast to the First Part's presentation of reason-propelled personal egoism in the figure of Bhudeb Roy, the Second Part presents the oil-men's pursuit of Reason on a larger, collective level in the form of capitalism. But the collapse of the Star and Alu's miraculous survival undermines the validity of Reason. Thus the attack on Reason

is explicit in the First Part and implicit in the Second. The First Part presents migrants who were uprooted from their homelands because of political upheaval. The Second Part presents a vast gallery of people who migrate because of economic pressure. Ghosh thus constructs an unrecorded, and so marginalized, subaltern history of the people displaced by artisan guilds, marriage brokers and labour racketeers. They create stories and personalised myths which are on the borders of reason. In this fluid world of unstable identities and multiculturality, the migrants from Noahkhali in Lalpukur and the Mawali in al-Ghazira hold on to their language and culture as their last anchorage. So do the colonizers in al-Ghazira.

While the first two parts of the novel explored the limitations of the dogmatic ideals of the Enlightenment and their incommensurability with the demands of practical life, the third part "Tamas: Death" aims at a negotiation between science, humanism and religion in post-colonial Algeria. The Algerian nation is a paradox. The legacy of colonialism and racism still persists as the French doctors in Algeria are paid more, "simply for being French" (*CR*, 375). Yet alone among the oil producing nations, the Algerian government is sympathetic to the common people with an "energetic purposiveness, a belief in the future" (*CR*, 375). The country has risen from the ashes, surviving the horrors of concentration camps and organized genocide by the French. In a small Algerian town, Ghosh presents an expatriate Indian community whose members are sharply contrasted. The microbiologist Dr. Uma Verma is very eager to present a toast of Indian culture to a foreign audience and decides to stage Tagore's *Chitrangada* with the refugees in the main cast. The surgeon Dr.Mishra is skeptical about the success of the project before a "rational" and "scientifically trained" (*CR*, 381) Algerian audience. Dr. Mishra resists Dr. Verma's plans not simply on rational grounds. He intends to repeat his rabble-rousing speech on social justice and equality delivered on the same occasion the year before. Dr.Verma questions Dr.Mishra's and his father's Murali Charan Mishra's socialist credentials, and dismisses Dr.Mishra's rhetoric as hollow sham. The "real" socialist Hem Narain Mathur, she claims, died in "unsung obscurity" (*CR*, 377). He held steadfast to his vision and suffered for it. On the contrary, the self-serving Murali Charan rubbed shoulders with the political parties in power. Although unsuccessful, Alu has

practiced socialism with his companions in al-Ghazira. The narrative thus counterpoints the bourgeois and subaltern versions of the same ideology.

According to the *Mahabharata*, Chitrangada, the princess of Manipur, is spurned by Arjuna when she declares her love for him. Being a warrior princess, she is brought up like a man. Granted by the gods the boon of physical beauty for a year to attract Arjuna, Chitrangada succeeds. Arjuna, learning more about the warrior princess from hearsay, is drawn to Chitrangada's other self. At the end of the year, Arjuna realizes the act of transformation, and both of them find the truth through illusion. In the dramatic re-enactment of the legend, Kulfi will impersonate Chitrangada, and the footloose Jyoti Das, whom chance brings to Dr.Verma's bungalow, Arjuna. The display of native culture in a diasporic community is one way of reclaiming national identity. Evidently cultural practices are deterritorialized.

Kulfi empathizes deeply with her part. The relation of her self with her stage role, her other, is one of identity and difference. Realizing that Kulfi's Arjuna is none other than the bird-man, Zindi has a premonition that "one of us isn't going to leave this house alive"(393). Tagore's *Chitrangada* privileges spiritual over physical love. It also underlines the illusiveness of beauty. Kulfi, a prostitute at Zindi's brothel, never has a grasp of the essence of her role. She lures Jyoti Das, impersonating Arjuna, with her erotic charm. Das, on his part, feels a strong carnal desire for Kulfi. He pleads for a night's liaison. Kulfi cannot withstand the intensity of the moment and dies of heart attack. The cultural show thus aborts. Like the other utopian projects in the novel, this one too ends in failure.

Not content with his vehement opposition to the staging of *Chitrangada*, Dr. Mishra questions Dr.Verma's compliance with rules and rituals. For him, the following of the religious rites in a makeshift manner by substituting the tap water for the holy water of the Ganges is absurd. It is simply contrary to a rational, secular outlook. Dr.Mishra has a literalist's understanding of the Hindu rituals, but he has failed to imbibe their true spirit. In stark contrast, Dr.Verma views religion as a source of truth and values, a cultural practice expressing deep sentiments. She challenges Mishra's doctrinaire rationalism that militates against basic human feelings:

> Rules, rules, [...]. All you ever talk about is rules. That's how you and your kind have destroyed everything – science, religion, socialism – with your rules and your orthodoxies. That's the difference between us: you worry about rules and I worry about being human. (*CR*, 409)

Dr.Verma has a kindred soul in Balaram, who too revolted against science on realizing its divorce from human emotions. Carbolic acid reappears in the novel as Dr.Verma cleans the place for Kulfi's dead body. She rebels against the tyranny of the "despotic science" of microbiology and wonders whether the microbes can be "wholly external to our minds"(*CR*,412)? Despite the injunction of science, Dr.Verma has realized the vital truth that "[t]here's nothing wrong with your body – all you have to do to cure yourself is try to be a better human being"(*CR*,413). Opposed to rigorism of any kind, she acts against the police diktat that there could be no cremation for a "passing Indian tourist"(*CR*,413). She believes that the lessons the Algerians have learned from the brutalizing French colonizers is that "every consummated death is another beginning"(*CR*,414). As the book is of no more use as a source of inspiration, Alu places the *Life of Pasteur* on Kulfi's funeral pyre. Refusing to accept either science or religion too literally, Dr.Verma blurs the boundaries of the two, and opts for syncretism: "Nothing's whole any more. If we wait for everything 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"(*CR*,416-417). Not a rational but an ethical humanist and a pragmatist at that, Dr.Verma articulates the novel's positive values.

Alu chances upon a copy of the *Life of Pasteur* in Hem Narain Mathur's bookcase at his daughter Dr.Verma's residence. It was presented to Mathur by Balaram in Calcutta. The book is so dear to Alu that on finding it miles away from Lalpukur his eyes fill with tears. He hails the book as his "only real brother"(*CR*,395). The same book brought tears to his adolescent eyes during his stay with Balaram. The book has an equal importance in Dr.Verma's life. It is because of the *Life of Pasteur* that she has become a microbiologist. Balaram tried to act out his scientific and pseudo-scientific ideas and came a cropper. His friend Mathur, a dedicated socialist, wanted to realize in society the kind of order symbolized by science. As a failed socialist, he had to remain content with the unactualized vision of order. Science and the bookcase offered him a vicarious satisfaction for his unrealized dream. Handing over the book to Alu, Dr.Verma

completes a pattern. Precisely at that moment, the book falls open, and makes a mystical pronouncement: "It's about death, Alu said. It says that without the germ 'life would become impossible because death would be complete'"(*CR* 396). Dr.Verma succeeds in establishing a synthesis between reason and emotion, science and religion. Hence she dispenses with the book. As the two terms of a dialectic, life and death are complementary opposites and so inseparable. Similarly mind and body, heart and head, East and West, religion and science, and good and evil always permeate each other. They are correlates. The idea of rigidity, of pure essentialist boundaries is a mere shibboleth as R. Radhakrishnan explains:

> there is no pure way back to the indigenous or the precolonial except through double consciousness. We have all been touched by the West. The important question is not about ontological purity, but about strategies of using the West against itself in conjunction with finding one's own "voice." [...] Spivak's position is that "we are both where we are and what we think," and if in a sense, as a result of colonialism, "where we think" is the West as well, it is quixotic to deny it. The way out is bricolage, transactional readings based on bilateralism, and multiple non-totalizable interruptions. (157-158)

The first section, Reason, is dominated by the male principle represented by Balaram, the second, Passion, by the female principle, represented by Zindi, the third, Darkness, attempts a synthesis between the opposites of Reason and Passion, Male and Female. Dr.Verma's interrogating the dogmas of science and religion and yet attempting a synthesis between the two is the dominant thesis of the novel.

The novel's third section is up to a point preoccupied with death. An old man falls overboard the *Zeynab*. Kulfi dies during the rehearsal of *Chitrangada*. For Zindi, Dr.Verma's house is an abode of death. Zindi and Alu meet metamorphic deaths as the former is without her characteristic dynamism and the latter's stiff thumbs forbid him to weave. S. Radhakrishnan describes "Tamas" as "darkness and inertia" (317). "Tamas" also indicates a tendency to decay, to die. However, the novel ends on a positive note of sorts. Alu's stiff thumbs start moving. Zindi fervently hopes that Boss will build for her a house some day.

Through Jyoti Das, the novelist explores the theme of migration. Journeying by plane to al-Ghazira, Das reflects on his diasporic condition: "foreign places are all alike in that they are not home. Nothing binds you

there"(*CR*,266). His journey from his home to al-Ghazira is a journey from the known to the unknown. There is a feeling of disjunction between his present and his past. The journey abroad entails separation from home and so causes anguish. Since by now Das has got over all painful emotion, his foreign travel has no more significance for him: "The journey was within and it was already over, for the most important part was leaving"(*CR*,266). For Das, al-Ghazira is not a place "but a question: are foreign countries merely not-home, or are they all that home is not"(*CR*,269)? This is a typical migrant's experience. He never feels "at home" in a new place. Alu, on the contrary, has found a new community in the Ras and has identified with its members completely.

Throwing up his job, Jyoti Das exults in his new-found freedom, and revels in the prospects of a new life at Dusseldorf. The school of dolphins "racing along the ferry, leaping, dancing, standing on their tails" and the "soaring birds" replicate his own euphoria. His past is like a "mocking grey smudge hanging on the horizon". Rejecting the "continents of defeat – defeat at home, defeat in the world", Jyoti plunges into his future: "And so he turned to face the land before him, now grown so real, and dizzy with exultation he prepared to step into a new world" (*CR*,423). Jyoti Das is a bourgeois migrant. Financially secure, he has every reason to look forward to a prosperous future. Alu and Zindi are subaltern migrants, who resign themselves to their fate. They wait, "drowsily warmed by the clear sunlight", for the ship that will carry them to an unspecified "home". The novel's final sentence "Hope is the beginning"(*CR*,423) is pregnant of a new vision, of unactualized possibilities. Putting behind their unhappy past, these subalterns venture out to affront their destiny once more. Hope can only motivate a start, but whether it will lead to fulfillment or frustration is always a toss-up.