

Rethinking Cultural Imperialism Discourse in Amitav Ghosh's *The Glass Palace* and *The Circle of Reason*

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ABSTRACT:

Cultural imperialism is the imposition of certain features of one society's culture typically one that is politically or economically dominant on another community that is not dominant. It is the practice of promoting one culture within another. The former is typically a sizable, militarily or, economically powerful nation, whereas the latter is a more modest, less developed nation. A specific strategy or a broad way of thinking can both be examples of cultural imperialism. It's a vast concept that covers fiction, philosophy, architecture, art, literature, and art criticism. Amitav Ghosh is an acknowledged writer who has a specialisation in postcolonial literature. His life has been significantly impacted by the political and cultural climate of India after independence. The work, which portrays a thorough political and cultural transformation, sheds insight on early understanding of the social, psychological, and cultural inferiority imposed by colonizers and illustrates cultural conflict. People making an effort to achieve political, cultural, and ethnic independence. The idea of unity in diversity permeates all of the writings by Ghosh. The diverse social issue backgrounds of his characters are the main focus of his writings. In order to prevent the appropriation of voices by people from different socio-economic groups and cultural backgrounds, they also reflect the devolution of narratorial responsibility. Ghosh tells the story of colonialism from a post-colonial viewpoint in his critically acclaimed literary masterpiece. The colonization of Malaya, Burma, and India on the Asian continent gave rise to discontent, resistance, exile, and displacement, all of which are depicted in the fictionalized history of *The Glass Palace*. In the book *The Circle of Reason*, it is discussed how imperialism changes non-European peoples and how Western civilization's invasion of urban areas disrupts traditional rural life. To be more precise, the book investigates how colonialism-borne cultural imperialism affects people in Third World nations. Western reason from the post-Enlightenment is mentioned in the book through Reason. By examining the novel's overall structure through a postcolonial lens and

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license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>). concentrating on the use of postcolonial themes like cultural imperialism, this article aims to shed light on the postcolonial perspective.

Keywords: Culture, Imperialism, Civilization, History, Imposed, Western

Introduction

Amitav Ghosh is a prominent writer of Indian English writing. He expertly combines fact and fiction to create Cultural Imperialism. He has a fresh perspective on history and culture. Amitav Ghosh, an established author of post-colonialism was born in July 11, 1956. He is an Indian author renowned for historical fiction written in Indian writing in English. In 2018, he received India's top literary distinction, the 54th Jnanpith award. The authors who belong to post-colonial writings also write to understand their own cultures and personal identities and to chart their prospects on their own terms rather than those imposed on them by the ideological foundation of colonialism. Their histories, which were frequently erased or dismissed under imperialism, are also recaptured through their writing. Nationalism, imperialism, colonialism, the Diaspora, and the terrible experiences of exiles and dislocations all had a significant impact on Ghosh's essays on the cultural history of India. Ghosh has avoided this topic even though his writing is categorized as postcolonial and has instead concentrated on discussing its more fascinating elements. Examining globalization as a universal phenomenon and its effects on Europe and its former colonies from a variety of angles. The theme that appear in his books includes human migrations, the shifting position of nation-states, and in addition to the adoption of Western industrial practices, and cross-cultural interactions, all of which are common repercussions of globalization. The spread of, which colonized the native mind by reorienting existing East-West knowledge frameworks. Nearly all of Ghosh's works deal with cross-cultural interactions involving religion, mannerisms, national treatment, language, religious intolerance, bargaining, pain, humiliation, coming to terms with reality, and

identity and traditions. Burma, Myanmar, and India are the locations where *The Glass Palace's* story of half-breed Rajkumar takes place. He is free to move around and make money. When his kid is murdered in a Japanese bomb assault, his joy is short-lived. On the other side the novel *The Circle of Reason* is about Western civilization's urbanizing incursion, which destroys traditional rural life and imperialism's impact on non-European peoples. In this novel, Ghosh combines elements of Western culture with popular and classical Indian culture. "We use the term 'postcolonial, however, to cover all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day" (*Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, The Empire Writes Back* 2).

Cultural Imperialism Discourse

According to postcolonial theory, people who have been freed from colonial rule form a postcolonial identity through cultural interactions with identities based on gender, class, and nationality as well as those that are cultural, national, and ethnic and have varying degrees of social power in colonial society. Because of its emphasis on culture, post colonialism differs from literary criticism's use of imperialism, colonialism, and neocolonialism. It combines literary criticism with cultural studies and provides fresh viewpoints for reexamining literary works from a cultural perspective. Changing or substituting elements of the non-dominant community's culture promotes the dominance of the imposing community's way of life over the other group. This is known as cultural imperialism. As *The Empire Writes Back* 2 states that, "The semantic basis of the term 'postcolonial' might seem to suggest a concern only with the national culture after the departure of the imperial power." (*Ashcroft, Griffiths, Tiffin, 2002*) In his writings, Ghosh places a lot of

emphasis on social and cultural events that have had a profound impact on people around the world. His fiction and nonfiction writings generally tackle historical, geographical, political, and cultural topics.

As Ghosh concentrates on traveling and crossing borders for trade and commerce, these challenges find their ways into his writings. Amitav Ghosh, an Indian author, wrote *The Glass Palace* in 2000. Additionally, it was considered as one of the excellent novels of 2001 by the New York Times and won the 2001 Frankfurt e-Book Award. Over 25 Versions of *The Glass Palace* are available in different languages. The Third Anglo-Burmese War and the late 20th century are where the book starts and finishes. The story takes place over a century in India, Bengal, Burma, and Malaya, starting with the Second World War and ending with the fall of the Konbaung Dynasty in Mandalay. There are seven sections of *The Glass Palace* and it depicts the economic situation, trade, and commerce in South Asia during the Colonial period, encompassing territory from India to Burma. Numerous colonialism-related topics are represented in the first section, Mandalay. The focus of this section is on Rajkumar and Ma Cho's interaction. In Mandalay, Ma Cho always refers to the Indian Rajkumar as a "thick-headed Kalaa" (Ghosh, 10)

The Glass Palace depicts a capitalist economy while also including colonial elements. Similarly, economic and political issues are linked. This novel illustrates several forms of trade that existed in the Eastern section of the South Asian region during the British administration. The story depicts the teak trade in Burma, which the British Government's Burmese conquerors are attempting to regulate. By using hegemony to control their culture, minds, and economic resources. British imperialists sought to occupy any less powerful nation and through the Burmese army subversion, the British initially took control of Burma. "With the colonial desire, the British captured the Burmese Empire, humiliated them, and tried to enslave them. They had intended to discourage, deject, demoralize, and control them, by humiliating them." (Kanchana & Veeramani, 1745). After taking over

The Glass Palace, where Burma's final king of the Konbaung dynasty resided and governed, they made gradual changes to every aspect of the palace. Following the Burmese army's defeat in the conflict with the British army, it was a terrible act of imperialism to exile the royal family and relocate them to Ratnagiri as their permanent residence. For describing the effects of British imperialism, Saya John says: "The British occupation had changed everything: Burma had integrated into Empire, forcibly converted into a province of British India". (Solanki, M, & Ratad. P 756).

Rajkumar, an Indian boy who landed in Burma by coincidence, now aspires to be a successful teak wood dealer, and he joins Saya John to assist him. He gets thorough information on the harvesting and transportation of teak wood logs, as well as trade knowledge, to launch his own firm. He earns and gathers money by bringing laborers from India to the British-controlled Burmese oil fields to build his own business. After that, the plot changes from the heights of colonialism to the depths of World War II, with commerce shifting from timber to rubber. Seeing this shift, Rajkumar, who is already married to Dolly, begins a new rubber plantation business with Mathew, Saya John's son. Mathew had married an American woman named Elsa Hoffman in the United States. Near the island of Penang in northern Malaya, he and Mathew start a plantation. His father purchased a plantation on the northern Malaysian island of Penang. On the other side, Rajkumar is a Bengali peasant who makes his fortune through trading in Burma. He could be thought of as a hybrid character because hybridity is the development of novel transcultural formations inside the zone of contact. Here, Hybridity means an individual 'having access to two or more ethnic identities', "Somebody like Homi K. Bhabha who himself brought up as a Parsee in a predominantly Hindu culture and who then takes an identity within Western anglophone culture". (Easthope, 4). And from a political perspective, According to a theory of hybridity, this environment continually negotiates cross-cultural and international communication norms through encounters

between people who have different levels of authority. In his semiotic analysis of culture, Bhabha (1994) relocates hybridity from its racialized context. In the context of the postcolonial novel, he explores hybridity, praising it as the persistence of the underdog and as the invasion of imperial ideology, aesthetics, and identity by locals who are against imperial dominance. He underlines how hybridity may undermine and appropriate hegemonic narratives.

Rajkumar adopts Burmese culture and language in the process of becoming a Burmese businessman. He dresses up as an Englishman in order to become a great businessman. He is dressed appropriately simply in a black suit, and his tie is nicely fastened with the collar at the ideal angle, he says of his first business meeting. So, Rajkumar's dual identity is evident when he touches Saya John's feet and asks, "Give me your blessings, Saya," even though he is clothed as an English person. Saya John has been his greatest inspiration and guide during all of these processes. When Saya John, a teak trader went on business with Englishmen, he always changed into European attire, a white shirt, and duck trousers to conceal his identity. According to this statement In *The Location of Culture* Bhabha claims "There is a void "between the designations of identity" and "this interstitial passage between established identifications opens up the prospect of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy," (p. 4). Saya, in a village named Malacca, had been raised as an orphan by "Catholic priests." So, since he was a child, Saya has interacted with individuals from all cultures. When he tells his life, his hybridity becomes evident. So, at the military hospital where he used to work as an orderly. He introduced himself as a friend of Rajkumar, and said to him how he is thinking; he is going to deal with that offer, Rajkumar, when he is not able to read the English language. Said Saya John and Rajkumar said with smile. Yes, indeed, I am not able to read but I've learned to speak it. Next, he said that Why should he need it when Saya can complete it for him. He advises Rajkumar to learn the European style of life. Here, Saya John's son

Mathew is another example of cultural imperialism. He grew up in Singapore and went to America for college. Furthermore, as he told Rajkumar, "This is Uba Kyaw; He worked for an English landowner in Maymo as a valet. He can instruct you in a variety of subjects, including how to use a knife and fork at a European table. When John says that he believes that British mimicry has a brighter future, he has gotten integrated. As Ghosh put out about John that he is a clear picture of language's mimicking, where he adopted the American culture and desired to stay after marrying Elsa Hoffman. Even Ma Cho, a well-known figure in the industry, is half-Indian and half-Chinese and manages a little food stall where Rajkumar used to work. So, according to Bhabha, "From the standpoint of the minority, the social articulation of difference is a challenging, ongoing dialogue that aims to sanction the cultural fusions that take place during critical junctures in history".

Raj Kumar's unwavering support for the imperial system is supported by his quick ascent from an orphan youngster to a prosperous timber merchant and Saya John provides a description of British imperialism's after-effects by stating that "Everything had altered during the British occupation: Burma had assimilated into the Empire, compelled to become a province of British India. As a result, the narrative focuses on Burma, India, Bengal, and Malaya in the twentieth century, emphasizing economic and social developments. *The Glass Palace* represents Amitav Ghosh's sincere attempts to reflect on and reframe the colonial past, which may serve as a kind of prefigurative representation of the unsettling and harmful effects of neocolonialism. Edward Said stated in his book *Culture and Imperialism* that "The power to narrate, or to block other narratives from forming and emerging, is very important to culture and imperialism and constitutes one of the main connections between them. Most important, the grand narratives of emancipation and enlightenment mobilized people in the colonial world to rise up and throw off imperial subjection; in the process, many Europeans and Americans were also stirred by these stories and

their protagonists, and they too fought for new narratives of equality and shuman community.” (Said, E. *Culture and Imperialism*)

Another side with the viewpoints on cultural imperialism *The Circle of Reason*, his debut book, was published in 1986 and is set in India and Africa. It was awarded with the 1990 Prix Médicis Étranger. *The Circle of Reason* is a parable about the modernizing influx of western culture destroying traditional village life and imperialism consequent people from outside of Europe being displaced. As written by Robert Dixon in his essay 'Travelling in the West: The writing of Amitav Ghosh' in the book Amitav Ghosh; A Critical Companion that *The Circle of Reason* undoubtedly addresses that imperialism and culture in relation to each other.' This work focuses on Alu and Nachiketa Bose, the protagonist, who, after being falsely accused of being a terrorist, travels from Lalpukur, close to Calcutta (now Kolkata), to Goa, then to Al-Ghazira, a fictional state in the gulf and last to Algeria. When Alu, who works as a sewer comes from a little village adjacent to Calcutta and travels from his home to the Persian Gul oil port of Al-Ghazira by way of the Indian Ocean. In the village of Lalpukur, where his uncle Balaram is the local schoolmaster. Alu is an apprentice weaver in the long opening chapter while Balaram is obsessed with Western ideas. He was a symbol because of his interest in phrenology and Pasteur's publications. Balaram establishes the Pasteur School of Reason in order to indoctrinates the populace with his scientific theories, bores and terrorizes them, and finally sterilizes the town with carbolic acid to kill it. According to *Anthony Burgess*, the incident served as a parody of Western imperialism, with Alu standing in for tradition. In his warped way, Balaram represents development. When Balaram decides to teach Alu how to weave, he tells him about the history of the craft which evokes cross-cultural borrowings and instability of cultures. Alu has not traveled since he became an orphan but he is compelled to move by forces beyond his control such as from Lalpukar in Calcutta to Al-Ghazira in Egypt, and finally to a little settlement on the Algerian Sahara's northern edge. Balaram, Alu's foster father, is preoccupied with the

science of phrenology, as evidenced by the fact that he uses Alu's head as a case study to match the 'outside' of a person with his 'inner.' Balaram makes an enemy of Bhudev Roy, the unscrupulous profiteer by founding the Pasteur School of Reason. Balaram conducts a campaign to use carbolic acid to wipe out the germs in the village, which is a cover for a campaign to kill Bhudev Roy and his lieutenants.

The main plot of *The Circle of Reason* is about characters that are compelled to live in exile in the fictitious Al-Ghazira is a city-state in the Middle Eastern African region that thinks about artificial boundaries and passports that restrict unrestricted human mobility. The Diaspora is one of the aftereffects of British colonization that confused the native people throughout India's imperial expansion. The cruelty of imperialism is demonstrated through the forced or voluntary relocation of local people from one location to another. "This imperialist policy of Western colonialists was just meant for cultural domination." (Sultana, 2013)

The exile of Alu depicts his journey from one country to the next as well as his attempt to find an identity. This also makes up a human's epistemological textures, which is a subject of critical study. In such instances, some drifters protest while others assimilate into the host land, culture, and ambiance and if dissatisfied. They seek temporal power at another 'place of culture. The novel, which is Bildungsroman in style and presentation, touches on the idea of "traveling" cultures, geopolitical boundaries, and linguistic hybridization as put forth by James Clifford. . The protagonist, Alu, was compelled to flee the 'motherland for the 'other' realm. How his diasporic awareness was framed during his immigration not only to one country but too many countries in the desire to protect his own life from dangerous conditions. The plot of the novel, which revolves around Alu because of his potato-shaped scalp and his crisscross flight from India to the Middle East and finally to Africa, takes on a transnational and cultural shape as he moves from one nation to the next and encounters local culture. The tensions, incoherence, and contradictions that exist in the

vicinity of the overlap displayed on the map of cultural imperialism are articulated by the existence of these people in the region between the previous empire and the present one. The protagonists in Ghosh's works roam through cultural regions that cross borders rather than live in isolated societies. His cultural transit lounges are used by people who are enmeshed in a supposedly global postmodern situation that is unaffected by personal economic factors. The story of economic forces is one of colonial exploitation, and it has a disproportionate impact on global trade routes. In order to ensure that Lancashire cloth is secure on every continent. In an endeavour to make every continent safe for Lancashire fabric, The hitherto polite Englishmen of Calcutta made their line of work into a garotte and suppressed the same weavers and knowledge they had journeyed across the oceans to acquire. Both Lancashire and Calcutta's formerly poured out cascades of fabric. Gentlemanly Englishmen converted their line of work into a garotte. Despite the fact that trade routes cross national boundaries, they are corrupted by blood and ruled by inequalities in both military and economic might, as the image of the garotte demonstrates. After Balaram destroys the town of Lalpukur in his attempt to impose European concepts on Indian society, a surge of diasporic Indians flood the booming oil sector in the Middle East, including Alu.

Claire Chambers observes that The author's story of *The Circle of Reason* is greatly influenced by a representation of India in transition, both from a social and political perspective climate during and after British colonization, like the movement against cooperation (Non-cooperation) in the 1920s and the nationalist war for India's independence in the 1930s, and later India's independence and division in 1947, as well as Bangladesh's battle for independence in 1971, this provides the author with a vital basis for his narrative: the global wave of migration to the Middle East from the 1970s onward. Alu continues weaving in the second section of the book in Al-Ghazira, which is on the Persian Gulf. However, when a brand-new structure made of concrete collapsed where he was laboring as a

worker. Alu was accidentally buried alive. One could see the collapse of this structure as a metaphor for how post-modernity has affected the traditional societies of the Middle East. Traditional architecture is in sharp contrast to The Star, a destroyed skyscraper. On the other hand, in the bazaar known as The Souq, there is no specific culture represented by this. That is founded in a single nation. Instead, it is a part of an interconnected system of commercial routes. Confirming Balaram's claim that weaving creates multiple worlds as rather than just one, the loom used by his Egyptian neighbor Hajj Fahmy, who had given up weaving in favor of the more lucrative construction industry, Alu has started weaving again. In the same way that Alu had to learn English as part of his weaving rebirth, he now needs to learn Arabic.

Other characters like Patel, he is a Durban-based South African Hindu Gujarati, who relocated to Al-Ghazira as his parents objected to his marriage. His movements cause the Indian Ocean's trade flow to respond. Migrant workers are overcrowded in Zindi's home, which she intends to use to lure them away from the construction industry and into the struggling Al-Ghazira fabric industry. The Souq of Al-Ghazira, like the town of Lalpukur, is a centuries-old network of trade that stretches out like cloth across a broad, borderless region rather than expressing a true culture that is securely rooted. Ghosh compares the oil economy of today with this culture of mobile commerce, which threatens to take over when Alu is buried in the Star. Two of Alu's friends search the ruins for him: Rakesh and Isma'il. The Bonaventura Hotel, a glass and concrete dome that has collapsed and created a modernist area is where they become lost. The Indian weaver, Alu, is discovered by the rescuers where two old sewing machines are keeping him from being crushed while he is resting beneath a concrete slab. Similar to how Jonah was imprisoned inside the whale, Alu is stuck in post modernity. The story serves as an allegory of global capitalism's cultural logic eroding the Middle East's ancient trading cultures. In Al-Ghazira, Ghosh portrays undocumented laborers, a migrant underclass within a dominant

culture. "The main battle in imperialism is over land, of course; but when it comes who owned the land, which had the right to settle and work on it, who kept it going, who won it back, and who now plans its future-these issues were reflected, contested and even for a time decided in the narrative. As one critic has suggested, nations themselves are narrations." (*Said. E. Culture and Imperialism*)

It serves as an illustration of how modernizing western civilization destroys traditional village life and how imperialism subsequently drives non-European peoples from their homes. According to *Anthony Burgess*, Alu's apprenticeship as a weaver represents tradition, whereas Balaram, in his deranged way, represents advancement. Balaram is the village's head teacher. His obsession with western concepts is exemplified by his love of Pasteur's writings and phrenology. But by dispersing carbolic acid across the community in the guise of purification, his building is based on the Pasteur School of Reason instead tedium and terrorizes the inhabitants. Balaram was outspoken in his opposition to Indian customs and ways of life, which he considered being ill, gloomy, and savage. It could only heal with the aid of Western scientific medicine. When Lalpukur turned into a haven for all victims and fleeing refugees from East Pakistan, Balaram recognized their rickety shanties to be unhygienic and unhealthy. In the midst of this flurry of germs and diseases, Balaram could only think of one solution: carbolic acid. He saw himself as a rescuer of humanity, following in the footsteps of Pasteur and his follower Lister. A new viewpoint on the events taking place in the Indian context that goes over and above spiritual purity and impureness led Balaram to develop his obsession with carbolic acid. He saw it as a lesson in Western cleanliness. As a result, Amitav Ghosh portrays Balaram as a rebel who worships "Reason" and Western Science against the trend and he portrays Balaram as a rebel who worships Western Science against the trend. Ghosh is making reference to the false dichotomy that has been put up and promoted around the world since the Renaissance: the West for science and the East

for tradition. Ghosh, on the other hand, does not interpret this fictitious categorization. Instead, he questions this distinction which has been successfully employed as a cultural Imperialist's secret weapon. Thus, *The Circle of Reason* is Ghosh's attempt to draw attention to the effective discreetness on European soil that persuaded so many different countries and cultures to permit the exploitation of their countries resources.

Additionally, Amitav Ghosh deftly reveals some of the imperialist undertones in this debut book. Balaram is thus a representative of New Historicism who works to delegitimize phrenology as a separate field of study. He resists the coercion inherent within side the formal, scientific, and unitary theoretical discourse. Nowadays, no one is just one thing that, if followed into the genuine experience for even a brief period of time, is swiftly left behind. The diversity of cultures and identities was globalized by imperialism. The poorest and most contradictory gift it gave was to let people think that they were primarily, solely, and only white, black, western, or oriental. But just as people create their histories, so too do they create their unique ethnic backgrounds and customs. But this also means that we shouldn't try to govern others, categories them, or put them in hierarchies, and most importantly, we shouldn't keep repeating how our culture or country is the best. The novelist explores two distinct aspects of revealing one's identity concerning culture and nation. Amitav Ghosh always tries to give new directions through his works. As stated "Imperialism now is not the same as it was thirty years ago; it has changed, and while the shift has been significant in certain areas, it has not evolved into its antithesis." (*Gatscheni, 2018*).

Conclusion

The term Cultural Imperialism typically refers to a worldwide condition in which strong cultural industries and players predominate over local, national, and regional cultures. In *The Glass Palace* Ghosh illustrates how obedient individuals can be to foreign rulers in their own country through the characters of Rajkumar, Saya John and many

of other characters, including Arjun and Patel. These characters make an effort to sound English yet are unable to shed their cultural heritage. As envisioned by Homi K. Bhabha that colonial mimic men opposing both Englishness and Indianness therefore, they give rise to a hybrid identity. As a result, the writer contends that their reality is a result of the Cultural domination. In *The Circle of Reason*, Ghosh discusses a variety of people from various nationalities and various nations. In this novel, Ghosh examines Western modernity's dualities in order to map how people interact with the colonial heritage on a personal level. He has concentrated on how some people are affected by cultural imperialism. His novels are focused on issues of multiculturalism and multilingualism, which he portrays as a meandering process and weaves into descriptive

beauty. Ghosh presents a convincing argument in favor of the detrimental impacts of language adaptation. According to Amitav Ghosh's apparent implication, the people in this place appear to have absorbed into the cultures of the countries or continents where they are residents. The effects of learning a foreign language to where one is not accustomed to it are effectively discussed by Ghosh. The quick advancement of post-colonial studies has a new orientation so thanks to Ghosh's search for the Postcolonial roots and cultural perspectives. Writings about post-colonialism are thought to be mostly concerned with the spectral effect of losing one's own identity and culture. The characters' displacement explains why there is such a strong sense of cultural misery.

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