Growing up throughout Rush Hour in Amitav Ghosh’s Novel *The Circle of Reason*

The publication of *The Circle of Reason* in 1986 by Amitav Ghosh demands reiteration of promising grip of Indian writers in asserting their distinguished position in world literary landscapes. This novel is often considered as police fiction in picaresque tradition that endorses a huge number of elements of postmodern narrative genre set against the background of both colonial and postcolonial subjects of India and beyond. The knowledge/power dynamics, the impact of enlightenment, the changing perspective of cultural matrices and historical development are some of the significant features of this novel. The battle for supremacy between scientific temperament and tradition, rationality and illusions, frequently jostle in the narrative that forges the readers into light and dark vantages. Ghosh recurrently delves deeper into the issues of riots, refugees, immigration and breaks the image of discreteness of spaces. There is ever chase process to establish a utopia but again poses the question of its existence in reality. The rationality of the state though regarded as benevolent, it whimper against the subjects. *The Circle of Reason* alludes to maturation process of childhood and adolescence but avoids accommodating larger variations. The problem of growth is perennial and its configurations do vary at different times and locations. Accordingly, in *The Circle of Reason*, Ghosh charts the predicament of adolescents and youth who try to seek their identity against the rush hour of colonial and postcolonial positions.

There is no absolute mode of foregrounding the issues concerning adolescents, youth and growth because Ghosh circumvents his expressions according to time and space. *The Circle of Reason* is broadly divided into three parts: Rajas, Tamas and Satwa that efficiently brewes the classical music and Hinduistic philosophy as consistent undercurrent flow. These three parts span over three different timelines – the first one is spread over several decades, and the second part rolls just over a week, and the third that concludes the development of the novel in merely a day. Ghosh introduces polyphonic voices, self-reflexive narrators and the development is guided by the particular time to which the first narrator leads. He absorbs the second narrator without recoiling back to the point where he has left his narrative. *The Circle of Reason* displays the author’s
power of masterly skill to manipulate the narrative and ambitious conglomeration of ‘popular culture’ with institutionalized perceptions. There is admixture of science fiction, police fiction, thriller and socio-political ethos in this novel. It is a common site of Ghosh’s world where the readers come across the issues of historiography, ethnography, scientific temperament and the nation/state metaphor. However, the novel significantly ferments under the popular bildungsroman elements despite its huge mass of heterogeneity in subjects.

Though the novel nurtures along the motley of colourful characters of various nations, there is only a handful of adolescents and youth remarkable in the novel. These adolescent and youthful characters are not perceivable through dialogic construction in anyway. They are rather obliquely implied by the novelist through various situations, circumstances and activities. Their growth is always regressive as they are deprived of ample opportunities, environment, parental care and proper training to maturation. The growth of these characters is mandated under hostile socio-economic conditions, despondent state agencies, political injustice, historical upheavals and most importantly the rise of contemporary scientific temperament against the traditional stagnation. Shifting of locations is one of the special features of The Circle of Reason. The characters keep on rolling from one location to another – sometime voluntarily and sometime involuntarily due to different circumstances. The story is largely woven up through an adolescent character’s travels and voyages named Alu. Although there is nothing heroic feature in the character of Alu, his frequent movement across the border necessitates the integrity of the entire novel which is otherwise divided into three broader parts.

Alu, as the name suggests, is a simple boy with potato-shaped head of eight years age, newly brought to Lalpukur village by his aunt Toru-debi against her husband Balaram Bose’s opinion. It is a curious moment for the entire villagers to have a look at the new member in the village whose appearance is different from the normal people due to the shape of his head because it is “extraordinary head – huge, several times too large for an eight-year old and curiously uneven, bulging over with knots and bumps” (03). Many speculations of villagers try to define the physical appearance of Alu with extraordinary head. Some even compare it to “a rock covered fungus” (03). But the cycle
mechanic of Lalpukur, Bolaida’s definition seem to be more appropriate than anyone else’s for the villagers who rushes to Balaram’s house chasing the rickshaw that brings Toru-debi and Alu from Calcutta. He delivers the comparison of his head or appearance to a rock and immediately declares finally, “it’s an alu, a potato, a huge, freshly dug, lumpy potato” (4). Thus, the new boy who already has a beautiful name Nachiketa Bose becomes popularly known as Alu in the neighbourhood then onwards.

The early adolescence of Alu is very unfortunate for he loses his parents in a car accident. Toru-debi and Balaram, who bring him to Lalpukur, are unknown to him as his uncle Balaram left his paternal home and property after an uncompromising feud with Alu’s father. Although Alu’s father disconnects the relationship of all sorts with Balaram, Alu is brought to live with them because he is an orphan. Besides, Balaram and Toru-debi are childless even after long years of their marriage. He is brought to Lalpukur especially on Toru-debi’s insistence to adopt him as family child. The unfortunate demise of Alu’s parents is the beginning of his woes in the later life. The very first day of his arrival in Lalpukur makes him feel odd among the curious eyes surrounding the house for him. The psychological aspect of Alu is not important for those people. They don’t consider him as one among them only because his appearance is extraordinary than the majority. First of all, he is an orphan, secondly, an unwanted curiosity of the villagers, thirdly a stranger to the place, people and environment contribute to large extent in later maturation process. His new guardians are also not formerly acquainted though he has genuine family connections from his father. Although he finds an ever concerning motherly figure in his aunt Toru-debi, his own uncle Balaram is quite different. His first encounter with Balaram is very scary for he finds his uncle carrying an instrument “like gigantic eagle’s talons!” (4). It is a “simple instrument; merely a set of calipers, for measuring skulls” though, Alu develops an impression that it is something “especially designed for gouging out eyes” (5). It frightens Alu to such a point that he starts shaking as his uncle Balaram moves towards him with those terrible claw-like instruments.

Actually Balaram is an ardent believer in Reason. His study at Presidency College in Calcutta provides opportunity to delve into the scientific temperament of contemporary period. He develops taste for phrenology, a pseudo-science of studying human skulls to
understand character and traits when one day he absent-mindedly picks up a book titled *Practical Phrenology* from a second hand bookshop nearby the Presidency College gate. He expresses his feeling before his friend Gopal: “This is different . . . science the inside and the outside, the mind and the body, what people do and what they are, are one. Don’t you see how important it is?” (19). Moreover, his adolescent mind is stormed by the new invention of radium. Ever since he has read about the Curies in the age of thirteen, the radium and Madam Curie propel the “fantasies of his prudence” (16). The news of the Science Congress in Delhi where renowned scientists from different countries including the Nobel Laureate Madame Currie would participate, he is impatient to see her. For him, Madam Curries is “a legend come alive, a part of the secret world of boyhood” (16). His keen aspiration to meet her is not fulfilled of course in those days. But when she comes to Calcutta in 1950 after her second Nobel Prize, he goes there as a reporter to give coverage in *Amrita Bazar Patrika*. But all his excitments turn into unbearable humiliation as his silly questions to Professor Currie acknowledged with big laughter in return over the meaninglessness of it. It is more embarrassing the next day when most of the stories in the papers highlight his silly questions. As he returns from the Dum-Dum airport, he realizes that scientists value only the science not people or their sentiments. But the book *Practical Phrenology* becomes a source of excitement and a lifetime exploration into the subject. For Balaram, the other sciences or scientists of other branches fail to connect between the outside and the inside, between what people think and how they are. Balaram’s pseudo-scientific temperament is further augmented by another book – Rene Vallery-Radot’s *Life of Pasteur*. So, Balaram’s scientific tendencies spirited during college days in Presidency keeps influencing him continually. His obsession for human skull and disinfectants creates havoc and is mistaken by the villagers of Lalpukur in his later life. Even his own friend Bhudeb turns hostile to him who offered him shelter by appointing him as teacher in his school in the village. Balaram’s love for Phrenology, carbolic acid and Reason become instrumental to his self-destruction and cause of Alu’s plight in adolescence. It puts Alu at such a critical point that his entire growing process fall into the whirlpool of uncontestable situations and consequences.
Balaram is the son of a prosperous timber merchant born in Dhaka, the capital of East Bengal, and today’s Bangladesh. In describing the growth of Balaram, the novelist very astutely mentions such historical points through which the readers are falsified as to be the real characters of his time imbibing in the pages. The life of Balaram, which starts in a conservative family with rich connections then, has nothing to do with scientific temperament. The way Ghosh portrays the growth of his characters growing up is never in linear mode. At the very first sight in the novel, the readers hardly get the impression of any concerns relating to childhood, adolescence and youth available as his subject matter because he is never confined to a particular set of thoughts. The subjects rather become a site, where innumerable issues ranging from trivialities to mind-sparkling details, find space in every alternate page. In identifying the character of Balaram too, it is merely referred to in the greater design of the novel. However, one has to devote time enough to his novel where he/she can verify his distinguished concern about childhood, adolescence or maturing process.

The tone of Ghosh in underpinning the importance of adolescence period is not less important than any psychologist of adolescence. He describes how the adolescent boy of conventional family background can be psychologically enlightened by sudden newness in anything. Like G. Stanley Hall, he understands well that it is the impact of the age of storm and stress very pervasive among children and adolescents. Ghosh capitulates the response of an adolescent mind while introducing with the electric bulb for the first time to kerosene lamp that has been an inseparable part of Balaram’s childhood: “That was the turning point . . . those bulbs with their spiral filaments from his childhood, had they arrived a year before or after he reached the enchanted age of thirteen when the whole world comes alive for the first time, they would probably never have been touched with magic” (42). The novelist is conscious enough about how might be the reception of an adolescent mind to something new or something unimagined. His emphasis on the ‘age of thirteen’ implies his genuine power of perceiving the transformative phase so crucial for an early adolescent’s gradual shifting to more intense phase, i.e. middle adolescence. This phase is a vantage point that decides future course leading to the state of barbarism or asceticism depending on the mode of psychosocial environment. Hence, the mode of parenting becomes very critical and too responsible. In Balaram’s case, his
tendency towards science is ignored by his teachers and parents. He always imagines the city of Calcutta as the hot-spot of great scientists like Ronald Ross, Satyen Bose and Meghnad Saha. His mind is enchanted by reading Chinese writings, Benjamin Franklin and Edison and tempted to explore in those branch of studies. But his teachers had decided him to be the child gifted for studying history. According to them, he must go to the Presidency College to study history because it has the pride of producing philologist like Suniti Chatterjee, and philosopher Radhakrishnan. Despite his father’s disapproval to such insistence, he joins the Presidency College because sudden riots break out in Dhaka University.

The year Balaram joins Presidency College in Calcutta, C. V. Raman is declared as the winner of the Nobel Prize. So, his first mission is to see C. V. Raman in person. But he encounters couple of college bullies troubling him on the very first day itself. He is, however, rescued by Gopal, a student of literature. Both become friends then onwards. These two figures are complementary to each in the novel. It is Gopal who lends Balaram Mrs. Devonshire’s translation of Rene Vallery-Radot’s Life of Pasteur. Gopal announces before Balaram about the formation of the Society for the Dissemination of Science and Rationalism among the People of Hindoostan. Thus Balaram also become the part of self-proclaimed Rationalists’ Society in Calcutta. They have particular respect of Hinduistic myths and religious philosophy. So, they claim to establish “parallelism between the ideas of the ancient Hindu sages and modern sciences” (50). They are influenced by the movement for non-cooperation such as boycott to British-made and foreign goods. In a word, they are flag-bearers for indigenization of everything. For them “Brahma is nothing but the Atom” and it is already old-fashioned because Professor Satyen Bose has renamed them as Bosons in his statistics. So, their meetings usually begin with chants: “Hail to thee, O Cosmic Boson . . .” instead of the sacred syllable Om (51). Literature, philosophy, history, language, myth and pure science become one for so called Rationalists.

Balaram’s pseudo-science legacy is carried along to the village Lalpukur later on when he arrives there on Bhudeb Roy’s offer for teaching in his school. His strange calipers for studying live human skulls, applying carbolic acid to disinfect the village
from the epidemic and use of Reason in everything are the part of his everyday life in the village. The arrival of Alu, even after many years of his Rationalists’ practice in Presidency College, excites his mind. He takes time enough to understand the boy psychologically and apply phrenology on him. Although he is unable to comprehend the psychological reaction, his wife appears as rescuer. She drives him away as soon as she sees her husband dashing towards the new boy at home. Being childless herself, she too doesn’t know how to deal with a boy of eight years old. She is concerned with his common needs which are generally found among mothers. That a child or an emerging adolescent’s needs are very difficult to understand, is well expressed in Toru-debi’s concern for Alu: “What did he want? What do boys of eight do? What do they want? . . . Children inhabited another world. A world without sewing machines. They neither hemmed, nor chain-stitched, nor cross-stitched, nor quilted. What did they do?” (6).

Daily concerns for a child/adolescent’s eating, bathing or playing are common worries of every mother. But most importantly, it comments on the problem of parenting because a child, in new environment under new guardianship, is always unpredictable about his/her wants. So, the author through Toru-debi says: “How would a boy of eight, brought up in the clamour and excitement of Calcutta” basically might need in places like Lalpukur (6). Obviously, the boy is beyond Toru-debi or Balaram’s comprehension for he does not act, eat, or do as they feel he should. Frightened at the very first encounter with uncle Balaram, it takes long time enough to befriend him. Although he is sent to school, there is no better sign of doing justice to his mental needs. He always spends time exploring the house that consists of many rooms around. It takes months to Alu to get rid of his fear for Balaram and his room storing those horrible calipers. At the beginning, he stands by the door and watches Balaram reading in the armchair. When he completely overcomes his fear and Balaram himself is satisfied on this, he runs his fingers over his skull for the first time. It is quite baffling and also too exciting for he feels “like sitting down to a wedding feast after years of stewed rice” to find the extraordinary head full of bumps, knots and troughs around (9). The strange shape of Alu’s head is so stimulating to Balaram that it prompts him to incorporate his study in his paper on the “Indistinctness of the Organs of the Brain” (10). He sends the paper to the Bombay Natural History Society and to the Asiatic Society Calcutta but regrettfully it is never acknowledged. However, he always
discovers a new interpretation of those undulated protuberances of his head. He sometimes concludes associating each bump and knots to destructiveness, Amativeness, Combativeness, Acquisitiveness or sometime Self-Esteem, Vanity, Cautiousness, Language, Eventuality, Cause so and so forth. But ironically Alu hardly possess any such traits in his character as the readers proceed through his maturing process.

The physiognomy of Alu is quite distinct not only for his unusual potato-shaped head but also for his other features. He has a “compact face” with rounded jaw and chin – with large eyes and generous lips; “short nose . . . neither tall nor short nor dark nor fair . . . with his stocky build physical structure . . . ordinary boy with no particular expression” (11-12). There is no any resemblance between Balaram and Alu although they are blood relatives. Balram notices a strange kind of impassiveness in his behavior. He thinks that it is not “natural for a boy of ten to be quite so impassive” (28). Alu is regularly sent to school but there is always a note of disinterestedness for academic activities. According to Balaram, there is always “an impassive hatred. He never opened a school book, never wrote so much as a word in his hard bound exercise book. He went off to school obediently enough, but always hanging back, as though wanting for a miracle to strike the school off the fields of Lalpukur” (28). His attitude towards school or his study is great concern for Balaram for he fears that would bring disgrace to the family if he fails in his examinations. Since he is the teacher of that school, he always apprehends any embarrassment he might face due to his poor progress. When Bhudeb Roy questions on his potentiality and advises him to beat sometimes, he is answerless to him. Even though Alu does not pay much interest in his study, he is not a dull boy after all. He has some distinguished potentials hardly found in an ordinary boy of early adolescence. He finds pleasure in reading books of course but not from his school curriculum. He proves his intelligence and surprises Balaram because he is actually a voracious reader: “He would read anything he happened to come across in Balaram’s study: history, geography, geology, natural history, biology . . . Anything at all. And not just in Bengali. It has taken him amazingly little time to learn English” (28). Balram tries to teach him little French as well that he has learnt so far but Alu again surprises him when he finds Alu reading French Primer own self with the help of a dictionary. Apart from his magnificent reading skill of various languages, he has extraordinary ability to acquire a number of languages.
He acquires Hindi from the cycle mechanic Bolaida. He even acquires the villagers’ dialect of Noakhali district of East Bengal. It is a common dialect of those immigrants mixed up with the Burmese language and the language of east hills. Even his uncle Balaram can barely understand even six years in Lalpukur among those immigrants from Noakhali district. So, Balaram always wonders how a child having such incredible capacity should not get involved in his school or text books. The concern of Toru-debi or Balaram cannot meet the necessity of the child. It largely comments on the gap between the elders and the youngsters in terms of psychological needs. It is a failure on the part of his guardians to feed with the important emotional and psychological support.

The character of Alu is always a source of puzzlement for Balaram. He hardly shows any reaction to harsh situations as if he is an ardent follower of stoicism. The adolescents are comparatively believed to be adventurous, mischievous, frolicking and who prefer running errands. But Alu is different than many other boys of his age. He is badly assaulted in his school by Bhudeb’s notorious kids and their team mates. They tie him down to an upturned bench and beats to bleed till Balaram rescues him from a room he has been searching to establish the source of the noise. The boys vanish from the room at his arrival but leave a harsh comment: “Balaram’s dog – follow him home” (30). Alu is still indifferent to what has happened just before a while because “the strange thing . . . that even then he didn’t say a word . . . didn’t cry or even complain . . . seemed to have no effect on him at all” (30). According to Gopal, the indifference of Alu may possibly be the impact of the shock of his parents’ untimely death. Balaram often tries to arouse excitement and passion of Alu by urging him to think for the future because future is more important than the past and one can even change by thinking about the future. But strangely enough Alu never admits nor reacts on such occasions. He simply remains silent with wide-opened eyes gazing at him. Being helpless, one day, he picks up the copy of Vallery Radot’s *Life of Pasteur* and reads the chapter on turning point in the history of the world and Pasteur’s use of untested vaccine on a ten-year old boy. He is surprised to discover for as he stops and looks at Alu he discovers his eyes with full of tears. Balaram’s concern for Alu that he lacks some common human traits of passion, emotions or excitement thus breaks down.
That Alu’s inner feelings are not expressive, does not mean its complete absence in his being. It is exclusively reflected during the incident of poisoning entire fish pond by the Bhudeb’s scandalous sons. When Alu hears the noise behind the bamboo forest near the pond, he runs towards the noise and finds Maya Debnath, his neighbouring girl, roughly of his own age, battling with the five sons of Bhudeb. His courage fails to separate them or get involved in the dwell. He rather runs towards her house nearby and calls her elder brother Rakhal, the tallest and strongest boy of sixteen of Lalpukur. Rakhal rescues his sister and drives away the boys while Alu simply runs behind accompanying Rakhal. When Rakhal is gone leaving Alu and Maya alone behind, he is really embarrassed to face her and digs “his hands into his shorts” and moves “walking quickly towards their home” (35). Maya understanding his situation at that moment, laughs at him, and asks: “Why did you have to call him? Were you afraid? . . .Why don’t you say little babu?” (35). He is so embarrassed at her inquiries that he immediately disappears from the house having no proper answer to her. On the other hand, Toru-debi, who has been furious since morning over the discovery of dead fish in the pond, knows well that it is the part of revenge by Bhudeb against the previous day stupidity of her husband’s obsession with phrenology. During the celebration of Saraswati Puja, Bhudeb invited the School Inspector to earn good impression from him. The Saraswati Puja organized with colourful arrangement with sparkling lights and pandit’s chanting mantras turned into a real farce. Balaram ran across the tent and climbed to the platform dashing against the pandit. He left everyone in blank amazement at his sudden incomprehensible behaviour while he removed the dyed cotton hair off the statue and displayed the bare skull. He shouted before the gathering that it was not real Saraswati and the head also didn’t “represent Learning. This is vanity” (33). It flares up Bhudeb’s anger. He immediately called off the programme as he had noticed the Inspector of Schools dashing out silently in resentment. When Toru-debi finds the poisoned fish pond early morning, she has no more doubts about Bhudeb’s revengeful consequence. So, without any consent she piles up all those books of Balaram’s study room and sets them on fire. Alu, who happens to watch the entire development standing by the door, suddenly runs to the blazing pile of books nearby and picks up the copy of Vallery Radot’s *Life of Pasteur* away unnoticed by Toru-debi. Though she tries to find out, he successfully transfers the book to Maya.
with her co-operation. He later on, surprises his grieving uncle in the study room when he puts the book on his lap. It makes Balaram too emotional with tears in his eyes and extra admiration for Alu.

It is very late on the part of uncle Balaram to identify the true direction and tendencies of Alu. Balaram and Toru-debi hold the pre-occupied notion that nothing is better for Alu than the academic pursuit. Given at this response, they always have the risk of facing extreme embarrassment sometime in future because they belong to the educated family in the village. If their adopted sibling doesn’t take similar path, then it would be a matter of disgrace for the family in the village. Balaram observes that Alu is gradually losing interest in going to school. But he observes Alu still read when he finds any book out of curriculum and his growing talent to learn English and other languages. He seems to determine not to go to school anymore. Everyone tries to argue against his determination but it has no effect neither has he spoken a word in response as if he has made up his mind “…a determination unusual in a fourteen-year-old” (55). While discussing with Gopal, Balaram says that he has noticed the boy spending most of his time in Sombhu Debnath’s hut carefully observing him weave through his shuttles in the loom. Though there is certain amount of stupidity in Balaram’s activities and behaviour, there is also a reasonable amount of understanding of a child’s psychology. He desires his nephew to study whole-heartedly but the boy’s recent attitude compels him to think some alternative arrangement for his life. Gopal suggests him to warn the boy about jobless future if he doesn’t study. But Balaram as a responsible and also as a judicious parent he argues: “What? … How could I say that? It would be wrong; it would be immoral. Children go to school for their first glimpse into the life of the mind. Not for jobs. If I thought that my teaching is nothing but a means of finding jobs, I’d stop teaching tomorrow” (56). Balaram here sounds sensible remarkably showing his particular perspective on the mode of parenting. Considering Alu’s regular visits to Shombhu’s hut and watching him weave ultimately makes Balaram that Alu would be a better weaver than something else by studying. He himself then observes Shombhu’s weaving skill and compares the stocky and large hands of Alu with his, and finally decides to make Alu a weaver. He pays Shombhu Debnath and requests him to make his apprentice. There are some other reasons for Balaram to arrive at this decision. First of all, he discovers
mechanical sense out of Alu’s lumps on head, and secondly, Balaram believes that “Man at the loom is the finest example of mechanical man; a creature who makes his own world as no other can with his salvation . . . Weaving is Reason . . .” (59-62). His ideas on phrenology give impetus to his decision and finds sufficient reason by citing the example of Pharaohs, Chinese merchants who traded in clothes. Everyone in Lalpukur village disapproves his decision and criticizes behind him. They wonder what has caused a school teacher like Balaram to withdraw his nephew from the school where he doesn’t need to pay and apprentice him to a weaver. Many speculations grow up surrounding his arbitrary decision. There is even some rumour that Balaram might be starting “a cloth factory in Calcutta with Alu as foreman” (65). On the other hand, weeks roll by when Toru-debi comes to know about this and she is disappointed at the decision. She regrets that even after she has destroyed his books, his mind is still caught up with strange ideas of phrenology and rationalism.

The learning of Alu ultimately shifts from the school to the weaving shed at Shombhu’s hut. His initial days are simply wasted without learning although his new master Shombhu is well paid by his uncle Balaram. Rakhal, the only son of Shombhu urges Alu to abandon the place and go back while there is still time. He warns him not to waste his youth in the loom like him. Anyway, Maya, the daughter of Shombhu becomes his first teacher out of her sympathy finding Alu stand idly by the loom and watching them doing different works of weaving everyday. She teaches him to starch yarn, spinning the wheel and wind the starched yarn on bobbins. But he is messed up with all the yarns into knots. So, Maya insults him and provokes: “You’ll never be able to do it. Go back to your school and your books . . . Why don’t you get off your shorts and back into your cradle?” (77). Alu is however successful to disentangle the yarn with his patience and struggles to put them into the wheel. His inability to do the task faster makes Maya disapprove again. Rakhal who has been watching for long comments too: “You’re really in trouble. You are caught between two madmen . . . You should get of this . . .?” (77). It is one of the most important statements made in the novel. It suggests about the lack of proper guidance and process of preparing the future course of children and adolescents in the society. The gap between the learner and the learned or between children and parents though apparent is hardly addressed in India institutions and
societies. Alu as a learner and aspirant neither receives proper training at school nor at the looms. The teacher cum guardian Balaram is hardly capable to perceive his essential and genuine orientations, and the later one, does not even admit his apprenticeship no matter how eagerly his new apprentice is waiting for his move. But within a very short time, he acquires excellent skill in all preliminary tasks of weaving assigned by Maya. She frequently reminds her father to teach Alu weaving for which he is paid on monthly basis. He is not really keen to teach him the weaving method until she threatens to tear the amount of fees given to him. The next day onwards he starts teaching Alu for fear of losing his money. He starts with warping simple way of weaving plain clothes. However, it takes long time enough to let Alu sit by the loom. He is introduced to all the paraphernalia associated with weaving. When he finds that Alu is a voracious learner, he has no choice, and finally, he agrees to teach him the complicated floral designs. But his craftsmanship is so improved so faster that Maya and Rakhal always run out of necessary bobbins. Alu learns quicker than Shombhu would teach. His loom pours out “rainbow of cloth with magical ease . . . still faster . . . Alu . . . peacock proud . . . long[ed] to preen, to spread the feathers of his skill” (81). The quantity of clothes become so huge that everyone starts worrying about what to do with all those piles of cloth. It is more than the town’s shopkeepers can consume. Of course, Rakhal provides suitable solution by offering to sell the cloth at Naboganj on commission basis that would create source of income for his karate classes.

*The Circle of Reason* is quite extraordinary due to representation of peculiar adolescents and youth. A large number of novels delineating adolescent and youthful characters dwell upon some of the prime issues of such growing characters. Most other novels of this genre incorporate love, sex, infatuation, fantasy, dream, pubescence, drugs, alcohol, alienation, musterbation etc. But *The Circle of Reason* stands apart though the protagonist of the novel undergoes maturation process of childhood, adolescence and youth. This uncommon amalgamation of young adults and microscopic epistemological exploration complicates the contention in recognizing particular motif in the novel.

The character of Alu displays his least admiration for the opposite sex in the novel. There is no remarkable passion or the object of desire centring the feminine
allurement. Alu doesn’t show any intensity in his feelings. While teaching the toughest jamdani weaving, the drunken Shombhu cites a range of work variations in the design – tara-buti, pan-buti, paddo-buti, ghor-buti, lokhkhohira-buti, bomb-buti, refugee-buti, war-buti, antiseptic-buti, politics-buti etc. All these designs, as instructed by Shombu, are the mere expression of his frustration and irritation for teaching the apprentice Alu. Here, we can watch Ghosh’s power to intermingle his complicated thoughts and insinuating illusion in ideas along the trivial pores of the novel. The character of the novel tries to complicate his methods but Ghosh wants to exploit the both simultaneously. When Shombhu is furious and tells this unprecedented method of weaving, then it becomes a matter of impossibility for Alu as these are merely baseless imposition to the learner Alu. His response to Maya’s query on the design he is busy with is an accidental utterance. He simply says that that was “Maya-buti” (88). But it implies about the prolonged unexpressed thoughts for Maya buried deep inside his mind. Similarly, Alu’s unexpected response associating her name with the design intrigues her. She covers her face with the palms of her hands in order to hide her expression of shyness with admiration, the usual behaviour commonly associated with rural girls in India. There is no preliminary courtship or exchange of internal emotions between Alu and Maya. Alu is not romantic, neither is he seductive nor flirtive in his attitude. He discloses whatever props up in his utterance. He is neither a hypocrite to conceal what he has in his innermost corner of the heart. So, he doesn’t spend time to convey his thoughts for marriage proposal to Maya. He is unconcerned about the caste, creed, age, social hierarchy or profession prominent in Indian society as a whole and Bengali society in particular. Without any circumlocution as generally expected in mundane social interactions between would-be couples, he asks her right: “Do you think if I talked to Balaram we could get married” (88). But Maya is doubtful about the proposal at such an early age because Alu is “only sixteen; barely out of shorts” (88). Alu argues that half the boys of his age in the village are already married. He seems determined to what he conceives in his mind. In comparison to Alu, Maya appears more sensible for she is conscious that he belongs to respectable family of the village. She is also responsible about her duties towards the family. She is the symbol of conventional girl as she cares for its observance. The elders generally get married first in an Indian society. As she is younger than her brother Rakhal, she slams the idea of Alu
and reminds him about the marriage of her brother Rakhal who actually deserves the right to get married before her turn. The conversation between Alu and Maya is a glimpse into the larger chunk of rural society that comprises the class difference, hierarchical positions and also the practice of child marriage still persistent in rural India.

The feel of physical sensuality with the opposite sex is accidental in Alu’s case. It is neither governed by morbid desire or adolescence fantasy. In a foggy twilight while her father is fast asleep and her brother Rakhal is out to Naboganj, the fall of Kerosene lamp from her hands due to the freight of a crushing sound of an aeroplane crash scares Maya. She runs towards the loom in search of company where Alu is busy weaving. She sits beside Alu and gradually she seeks his closer body contact in order to overcome her fear. But it engulfs the both to mutual ecstatic moment. Maya unknowingly advances too close for physical saturation, while Alu, busy in weaving, enjoys the moment without any pre-determined internal urges. But there is sharp distinction between their respective emotions surcharged at the moment of closer physical contact. The intimate moment hastens up both towards their respective modes of gratification: Maya towards the achievement of physical sensuality and Alu towards his obsessive task of weaving. Ghosh, however, does not imply any absolute accomplishment of the either because he prefers to blur the entire intense moments under his shrewd tapestry. Alu’s character doesn’t conform to an ordinary adolescent-raging, agitative or delinquent in true sense of these terms. His mind particularly hankers after one objective – i.e. weaving. But the momentary touch of Maya’s body kindles a kind of new hope and desire: a desire straightway seeking its completion through marriage and social recognition without sexual orientations. He is unlike any other common Indian adolescents loitering in dreamy or fantastic speculations. The momentary touch of a female gives him an idea of accomplishment only through institutionalization of marriage. He displays the typical Indian conventions where pre-marital sexual relationship or flirtive conduct is not acceptable to the society. He represents the group of conventional members too honest towards the tradition of the family and the society even though the social differences between the families are apparent. So, he doesn’t hesitate to announce or demand his uncle for marriage with Maya. Though Alu is “tearful with embarrassment”, he overcomes it, and dares to announce his decision before him: “I want to get married . . . I
already have a wife . . . What I mean is I already know someone . . . I want to marry Maya” (121 – 122). There is no any pre-manipulation of language but the absolute meaning to his intentions. At first, Balaram takes it casually and tries to console him that it’s not the right time for marriage. But when he observes a firm determination in his voice, he is compelled to concede that he is very gald and advises him to consult with his aunt Toru-debi. He reminds the difference between the families based on social status but assures that it is mere prejudice and Toru-debi may be persuaded for her consent to the marriage. He tells him to postpone the idea for few months due to his long unsettled feud with Bhudeb who might slip someone in the marriage ceremony and destroy the carbolic acid preserved at home.

The indignation between Balaram and Bhudeb consequently develops into ghastly plotting, vengeance and endless feuds that sabotage the life of Alu gradually. Bhudeb is a cunning, greedy and heinous plotter. On the other hand, Balaram is a stupid of higher order. He comes to his own conclusion without considering the cause, effect and perception. There is always a prejudice against Bhudeb’s character and his actions. The fall of an aeroplane on Bhudeb’s school gives birth to number of nuances and implications. The incident opens up avenues of opportunities to Bhudeb to grow financially. He sells out every bit of the crashed aeroplane to the villagers. After a couple of weeks, he mysteriously gets a fat amount of insured money for his dilapidated school too. But the villagers are badly deceived when a group of men in blue uniform search out the entire village and seize back everything they purchased from Bhudeb Roy. When they demand their money back led by Bolai-da, they are herd out of his house by his domesticated twenty rogues guarding his campus. Bhudeb decides to quit his head mastership and close down the school to become a politician. Few months later, he invites villagers for his last speech to announce his decision in tear-soaked cheeks. But Balaram, who has been non-committal for long time enough observing all these rubbish development in the villages for months, disapproves every actions of Bhudeb. He believes that such a grim decision is nothing else but a part of drama. So, he decides to “put an end” to his work with disinfectants (108). According to Balaram, “Bhudeb Roy lives in mortal fear; there is nothing in the world that he fears as much as carbolic acid . . . he’d do anything, go to any lengths to destroy my carbolic acid. He fears it as he fears
everything that is true and clean and a child of Reason” (108). Thus Bhudeb’s transformation from headmaster to diabolic plotter and politician, and Balaram’s transformation from a teacher to motivator in Pasteur’s School of Reason bring casualties, deadly feuds, plots and destruction to the Bose family putting that ordinary orphan adolescent Alu’s life into the wheel of fire.

Balaram as a self-declared follower of reason plans to start a school in front of his house namely ‘Pasteur’s School of Reason’. He convinces Shombhu, the weaver of his neighbourhood, to become a teacher of the school. He divides the role of Rakhal, Maya, Alu, Toru-debi and himself. He divides the school in two departments – Pure Reason and Practical Reason. He decides Shombhu to be the head of the Department of Practical Reason where “students would be taught weaving and tailoring” and he himself would be the head of the Pure Reason where the students “would be taught elementary, writing and arithmetic . . . lectures in the history of science and technology” (116). Again Maya and Alu would “teach Elementary weaving – the techniques of starching, winding and basic coarse weaving” and the head Shombhu would teach advanced weaving (116). Besides, Rakhal would be the in-charge of sales department and Toru-debi would look after the tailoring section. The motif of Balaram behind starting the school is to give vent to his pseudo-scientific knowledge. In due course, he constructs a thatched up school adjoining the veranda of his house with the help of Rakhal and Alu. Bhudeb observing some new construction underway, he, out of curiosity, asks the matter to Balaram seeking information if he has obtained permission from the government. But Balaram, as always, tries to avoid him and mentions that he doesn’t care about any government intervention. The rude behaviour of Balaram and his suspicious move enrages Bhudeb further. Despite the ever increasing indignation between Balaram and Bhudeb, the school starts functioning well with the limited personal investment of balaram with reasonable number of students culled from the village. On successful completion of the first year, the school makes profit of a sum of rupees three thousand. Balaram instead of sharing the amount among the workers, he proposes to purchase carbolic acid to disinfect the entire village. The workers are displeased yet they agree to the proposal expecting some kind of fun and excitement. Accordingly, at least twenty young men come forward to volunteer, and truck loads of carbolic acid, water-pistols, squirt-guns, mugs etc. are purchased from
Naboganj. The day they decide to carry out the task, there is another big event announced by Bhudeb. He arranges a meeting for laying the foundation stone of straight road leading to his house, and a big poster almost of his size is erected nearby the centre of the village. The morning of the day on which Balaram’s young boys are supposed to assist, do not turn up except those six boys from his own school. As Balaram and his team march towards the banyan tree across the rice fields, Balaram starts fainting gradually. But Shombhu comes forward and ignites the mission. Bhudeb standing on the newly erected platform under the banyan tree with his cardboard picture beside, observes Balaram and Alu approaching while he is about to deliver his speech. He senses out something irrational in their gradual move. But as he starts delivering speech, Shombhu tumbles down bucket full of carbolic acid on him. The sudden striking incident creates a very dramatic moment and Bhudeb under his fussy movement unknowingly wears his own poster around his neck like a garland in the process. When every person including Bhudeb’s twenty strong men with his sons still in amazement, Balaram and Alu also splash out their amount of carbolic acid on the faces of Bhudeb’s men. This incident is a turning point for both Balaram’s and Shombhu’s family. The next day, Shombhu’s huts are completely burnt down to ashes and everyone of his family seeks shelter in Balaram’s house. Maya and her father are worried for temperamental Rakhal for there is the chance of some dreadful course of reactions from his side. But surprisingly, he doesn’t react as has been expected. But Alu discovers later that he is once again busy in making bombs.

The feud between Balaram and Bhudeb gradually influences the life of Alu. Bhudeb motivates the police DIG “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” (137). He firmly tries to persuade the police department to take severe actions against Alu and Balaram. Jyoti Das, the Assistant Superintendent of Police whom the DIG assigns to probe into the case, however, doesn’t find strong ground to believe the story. But Bhudeb’s recurrent trials successfully convince the DIG over the fabricated story. On the other hand, Balaram over conscious and furtive by nature constructs a bunker-like canvas shelter, a platform to keep a vigil on Bhudeb and his men. He deputes Rakhal and Alu for special combat of any apprehension. Balaram spends sleepless nights
watching Bhudeb’s house and his movement. Amidst such tension-ridden atmosphere, another very serious offence by Shombhu, lashes up Balaram. Shombhu brings Parboti-debi, the wife of Bhudeb and the illegitimate daughter begotten by him to Balaram’s house for shelter. Balaram is, however, unaware about this recent development as he is intensely engaged in keeping vigil to Bhudeb and his companions. The next morning, he really detects Bhudeb followed by his men and sons advancing towards his canvas shelter. Bhudeb tries to talk to him sensibly and discuss about the kidnap of his wife Parboti-debi. But the scrupulous Balaram, who has kept Rakhal and Alu alert on possible attack, misunderstands Bhudeb’s advancement. Meanwhile, Rakhal throws a petrol bomb targeting Bhudeb and his men. The massive blast terrifies and drives them away immediately. But this development offers another suitable opportunity for Bhudeb to pressurize the DIG to take rigorous actions against Alu and Balaram. Sensing the grim situation, Shombhu leaves the place with his illegitimate wife Parboti-debi and the daughter. Before taking farewell, he suggests Balaram to stop his disputes and plans set against Bhudeb: “Balaram-babu, you’ll destroy everyone without even stopping to think . . . You are the best sadhu . . . Balaram-babu, stop” (153). But Balaram is in no mood anyway to stop his insane plots. Again, Bhudeb mysteriously doesn’t return on that day. Even the entire village is under eerie silence. Alu, Rakhal and Balaram are quite sure of something very grim the very night. So, Rakhal and Alu shift everything back to Balaram’s house. Rakhal carries in all the explosives made by him in the dark and instructs him to fetch more from his hut where he has kept another sack full of mysterious things inside the ground. By that time Toru-debi suffers from sudden spurt of madness, tears her clothes off her body. As Maya takes care of Toru-debi, he abandons her and rushes towards the house. But their plans are worthless when the policeman put the entire house along with all the people inside on fire. Alu is somehow finds safe passage with the help of Bolai-da. Alu tries to go back to the house after the explosion but Bolai-da deftly handles him understanding the serious consequences. He tries to console Alu: “They’ll be all around it now looking for you. But they aren’t going to get you. I named you and I’ll see you safe somewhere . . .” (160). This is exactly the moment when Alu’s life starts racing against endless debacles trying to save his life as he is a declared fugitive then onwards by the Police on the charges of terrorism.
Once he escapes death or the clutches of the police, he is continually chased by Jyoti Das, the assistant superintendent of police to trace out Alu. He takes shelter in Gopal’s house, one of the college friends of Balram in Calcutta. During his stay at Gopal’s residence, a number of boils all around his body sprout out. In order to forget the pain of boils as he walks on, he arrives at a tea-shop where he meets Rajan. His acquaintance with Rajan offers him the opportunity to see the giant textile mills with modern technology, completely unknown to him so far. His fate, is of course, unsupportive in due course. As he comes out of the factory, he discovers his uncle’s friend waiting outside with a bundle of clothes and a sum of rupees eight thousands so that he may leave the place before the policemen trace him out. His new acquaintance with Rajan helps him to keep on changing his place of refuge with a chain of Rajan’s Chalia kinsmen scattered over every factory “along the South-Eastern Railway . . . down, down steadily southwards, stopping to catch his breath in the great mills of Madurai and Coimbatore . . .” (169). But his life continues to be restless, ever changing spots against the rush hour imposed upon him without any faults in past. Unfortunately, his former rescuer Rajan is also arrested by the police and the arrest warrant is also already issued against him. Finding his mere shifting locations as insecure, he changes his run towards the forests of the Nilgiris led by Rajan’s “great – grandmother’s cousin, great – grandson . . . then over the watershed in Kerala” spending “the nights secreted away in the Chalia quarters of scattered villages . . .” (169). But Jyoti Das also doesn’t abandon his chase. He traces out the last spot of Alu’s movement in South India following the message of an arrest in connection with the case. The local police abduct the relative of Rajan who has been helping throughout till Alu arrives at Mahe. Das is assisted by Dubey, another police officer of the local police. The prisoner doesn’t disclose about his whereabouts till he is threatened dire consequences. It is a disappointing moment for Jyoti Das as the prisoner informs him that Alu has already left Mahe to al-Ghazira on a ship called Mariamma.

The character of Alu undergoes a number of adventurous rides although he remains aloof from the majority. His life continues to subsume novel experiences throughout his escapes and voyages to al-Ghazira. He finds shelter with Zindi-at-Taffaha, a former prostitute of al-Ghazira. He stumbles upon her on the deck of the Mariamma
that smuggles him to al-Ghazira. She is a strange lady with disfigured appearance and awkward behaviour. Alu’s stay in al-Ghazira introduces him to a new culture, society, people and environment. But he is ever nonchalant to anything around him. During the sea voyage, the engine of the Mariamma becomes dysfunctional for a few days. It terrifies all the passengers – Zindi, Kulfi, Professor Samuel and even the sailor Haji Musa. But there is hardly any expression of anxiety in Alu’s appearance. He is an aimless voyager with no distinct choice and particular objective of his own. So, when Zindi asks him where he would stay in al-Ghazira, he is not able to reply specifically arousing Zindi’s irritated temper. Since she is one of the most convenient hosts of al-Ghazira, she offers Alu to be a newcomer to her house. But Alu is indecisive to respond her as always. He just says: “I don’t know yet” every time she asks him about this. (195) He is on his run, his escape, in his mission to a new habitat but it is abstract. He never determines anything. Given the situation before Alu, anybody will grab the opportunity that promises for a shelter and a means of livelihood in a foreign land among the strangers. But these worldly anxieties seem to be unimportant for him. When Zindi asks, “What are you going there for?” he expresses his only objective: “I’m going to buy sewing machines” (193). The profession chosen by him since his schooling days in Lalpukur village finds permanent impression in his mind. Food, shelter or any other basic needs appear secondary to his passion for sewing machines and weaving. Rests of his necessities are pointless and abstract.

However, he finally finds shelter at Zindi’s house because there is no other option better than hers in al-Ghazira. She is the ultimate destination for any Indian or South-Asian illegal migrants who have to overcome their destitute condition in al-Ghazira. In fact, Zindi is rescuer to any immigrant Indian and she has no objection to any criminal or fugitive to accommodate in her house because it is a source of income for her. She herself usually visits the coastal areas of India and selects people desirous to find a new home in al-Ghazira. She is capable to predict the condition of new immigrants. People are ready to do anything for such benevolent offer but Alu unexpectedly indecisive note at every point disappoints her. She furiously asks: “Why so shy? . . . Where can you run to?” She is so annoyed that out of her rage she “in one quick movement” she puts “a hand in his crotch” (202). Unexpected move of Zindi startles Alu but he has to tolerate her physical
molestation. She pulls him very close to her and flung her skirts over her back. She is so close to Alu that he is able to “feel her breath hot on his cheek” and says: “Let’s see if you know about anything at all . . . Good” she whispers in his ear, “so there is something you know” (202). Zindi’s sexual move is a challenge to Alu’s masculinity. She wants to gauge if Alu is completely nonchalant to anything or whether he has no reaction at all to any sensual action. A normal human being always reacts on the sensuality no matter what he might have yogic power to repress it.

Ghosh, here, as if wants to explore on the new terrain where libidinal power relations are considered inferior to some other powerful obsessions one individual may possess. All the arguments in psychoanalysis are always viewed through ‘libido’ and its other power relations. In adolescence psychology also, the other associates like fantasy, desire, infatuation influences one’s growth and experience to a larger level. But in Alu’s case, it is surprisingly absent. Ghosh seems to decenter the libidinal power relations of Freud and others from its focal point to some other psychological orientations so impulsive in an adolescent like Alu. There is no any exclusive deliberation since his early adolescence. His relationship with Maya has simply nurtured with a motive of marriage that he demands its recognition from his uncle Balaram. His first physical intimacy with her is merely an accident rather than motivated by desire. But in his simple idea, it is the ground to seek Maya as the person for institutionalization of marriage. When Zindi titillates him with her sexual moves, he is already an adolescent with physically matured person. But there is no sign of adolescent frolics, sexual overtures, fantasy, infatuation or explication of desire despite Zindi’s daring challenge to his masculinity.

Nevertheless, Mariamma takes Alu to al-Ghazira finally, and his life of an immigrant in a foreign land starts. His past profession as a weaver does not get full throttle due to delimitation of his work scope. He, like any other immigrant, takes up any ordinary job he is suggested by his acquaintances like Zindi, Abu Fahl or Rakesh. But there is perennial expression of inaction in his countenance. His stay at Zindi’s house along with Abu Fahl, Rakesh, Karthamma, Chunni, Kulfi and others has no particular objection or choice for vocation at hand. Hence, he is open to anything his companions choose for him. Consequently, he is engaged in a construction task of a very huge-
building called Najma or the Star. But unfortunately the building collapses upon him. Everyone working at the construction site runs for safe passage but he is trapped inside the huge pile of concrete slabs. The collapse is so massive that it “shook the whole of al-Ghazira, like an emptying wave shakes a boat . . . and for a few moments the whole city . . . wrapped in darkness, despite the full mid-afternoon brilliance of the desert sun” (207). Many probabilities encircling the cause of the Star’s fall are buzzed around. According to Haji Fahmy, the building collapses because nobody wants it – contractor, the proprietor, thieves, smugglers, and even lovers. When the building falls Alu is inside the building “almost exactly in its centre” (207). But miraculously, Alu survives against such all conception of impossibilities. The story of collapsing the largest building of al-Ghazira is less important than the story of Alu’s survival under those thousands of tons of concrete. Nobody believes the news of his survival but Abu Fahl risks going to check Alu’s survival breaching the security deployed at the site. Almost all the neighbours offer to accompany him for the probable rescue. Finally, Abu Fahl takes only a few of them to the site and rescues Alu on the fourth day of the fall. In between however, they establish the means of communication so that they are able at least to offer water and food. It is a mystery for anyone that a boy is found alive under the debris of the mountain like heaps of concrete. According to Abu Fahl, Alu survives because “on either side, were two sewing machines, of the old kind, of black solid steel” to protect him from the huge slabs of concrete (259). Alu has been a new worker in construction task so his ignorance about any possible hazards is obvious. When Rakesh and Abu Fahl discuss about why the huge building has fallen down and how Alu miraculously has escaped death, Abu Fahl explains with simple answer: “There is no mystery to it. Alu had no experience of building, so he reached too slowly and got himself caught in the wreckage while everyone else managed to get away. Finished. Some things are simple” (284). But Rakesh argues against such simple description. The argument of Rakesh highlights on some critical points that the character of Alu remains unattended. Rakesh argues that Alu has been all aware about the impending doom but his reaction at that moment is quite baffling. He says:

You say Alu didn’t run out with us because he didn’t realize that the building was going to collapse? The truth is that Alu was the first among us to hear the rumbles
and the noise of the falling bricks and plaster. At that time he has just discovered two sewing machines meant for display under a tarpaulin sheet. When he heard the noise; he left the machines uncovered and pushed us out of the basement . . . I’m certain I saw him certainly covering those two machines. I shouted to him: Run, Alu. He turned and waved me on . . . I would swear I saw him smiling . . . I ran up the stairs, while Alu stayed behind, perhaps still smiling. (285)

Alu’s awareness about the collapse of the Star and the sudden discovery of two sewing machines has some important implications about his real being. It virtually reconnects him with his adolescent passion for weaving that he has abandoned for the last couple of months. The discovery of the sewing machines matters much than the fall of the huge building upon him. It reminds the readers about the episode of aeroplane crash upon Bhudeb’s school building. He then had two impetuses – one his passion for weaving at a heightened level and another motivated by desire under the novel experience of physical contact with Maya who had run towards Alu for security. In al-Ghazira, he has been so desperate with his longing for the past experiences but he is helpless and keeps his inner demands concealed within. The discovery of those two sewing machines functions as the sole motif, an excitement, a dream come true and also a sense of accomplishment even at the cost of his life. Rest of the things appears too diminished or secondary to him.

The strangest part of Alu’s mishap is his response to his own condition. When Abu Fahl and his rescue team visit Alu trapped under the debris on the third day, his conversation with him is one of the most important points to understand the transforming effect of the fall on Alu’s being. The mental and physical conditions of Alu are easily predictable to any layman. It is the experience near death. Jeevanbhai, the owner of Durban Tailoring House and a spy in disguise, truly admits the experience later: “It is no exaggeration to say that many people in that situation would have died of shock” (295). But when Abu Fahl discovers him under the debris of mountain, he is as normal as any human being. He finds him relaxed, smiling and confident. The conversation between Abu Fahl and Alu is worth extraction:
“I could hardly speak . . .” I said to Alu, “Do you need food or water?” – and he said simply, “No, I’m all right”.

I tried to think of something else, but nothing would come to me, so I asked, Alu, “How are your boils?” – And he answered, “They’re gone”. So then, trying to laugh again, I said: “Alu, do you want to come out now, or do you still want to lie there and think about dirt and cleanliness and your infinitely small?”

He said: “Take me out of here, Abu Fahl. I have been here long enough, I have thought enough, and now I know what we must do . . .”

. . .

I asked him: “Alu, what must we do?”

And he said: “we must have a war”.

Abu Fahl beat down the stifled gasps and murmurs that rose all around him: I said to him, “what kind of war?”

And Alu said: “We shall war on money, where it all begins.” (259-260)

Alu’s response to Abu Fahl under that particular condition can be expected from only a veteran yogic meditation practitioner. It is impossible for an ordinary human being to remain alive against such terrible disaster where death is inevitable at every alternate second – without food, rest or natural movement. The disaster rather provides an opportunity to Alu to venture into self-discovering inward journey. His statement ‘I know what we must do . . .’ is a mode of authentication that he has already discovered his inner self. He is now a person with purpose and goal he must dedicate his life into. The phrenological speculation of his foster father about the absence of Love, Purpose, Combat, Reason, Integrity or Desire whatever, appear all non-sensical. When he is rescued after the fourth day of the disaster, he is a different person: “. . . it wasn’t as though he was barely alive, like a survivor from a disaster of that kind . . . well, hearty, smiling, and as healthy as any of us” (295). He returns completely a changed man. Everyone otherwise knows him as “quiet morose man, tormented by boils” and a very
mild man who actually doesn’t “care much about anything” (300). But now he seems to be a person with definite objective, very confident and well determined. The former identity of Alu as silent and introvert is replaced by more expressive, open and argumentative with reason. It is a common curiosity for everyone to witness a person who has conquered death and has returned sometime ago to this living world. So, a huge crowd gathers in front of Haji Fahmy’s house to see the man’s miraculous escape from death. There is curiosity to hear the terrible account of his last battle with death and also to verify if this is the man perhaps with the miraculous power to defeat death. Jeevanbhai, another immigrant and the owner of Durban Tailoring House, relates the entire description in his long conversation with Jyoti Das who happens to arrive there in search of his Suspect Alu from India. According to him, when Alu addressed the huge crowd after the escape: “He was talking softly, but there was a force in his voice which carried it over the clicking of the shuttle, so that nobody missed a word; an extraordinary force, perhaps you could call it a passion” (300). There is mystery how an introvert person who hardly speaks to a person, may become so powerful speaker. The reaction of the huge audience to Alu’s address is further elaborated by Jeevanbhai:

I saw that every crowd absolutely silent listening to a man, hardly more than a boy, talk and that too, not in one language but in three, four. God knows how many, a Khichri of words; couscous, rice, dal and onions, all stirred together . . . Arabic with Hindi swallowing Bengali, English doing a dance . . . nonsense you say . . .but there again you have mystery, for everyone understood him, perfectly, like their mother’s lullaby. They understood him, for his voice was only the question; the answers were their own. (300-301)

The speech of Alu seems to be the reproduced version of his foster father Balaram whose passion for Louis Pasteur and cleanliness missions at Lalpukur had caused disaster. He not only closely saw him speaking and doing tasks on cleanliness but also was a part of its mission there. In fact, his participation in the last mission of cleanliness with carbolic acid during Bhudeb’s public programme was the turning point of his life. The aftermath development of the incident compels him to run out of the place, homeless and alone across the continents. Now once again, his mind recoils back to that past event
and declares himself as Pasteur’s heir by spontaneously occupying the self-declared position of his foster father Balaram: “. . . I am his heir, for in the ruins of the Star I found the answer” (302). He tells the crowd about Louis Pasteur’s discovery of ‘the Infinitely Small, the Germ’, and his successive failure to authenticate publicly. Hence, it is his duty to carry forward his great task of his foster father on purity and cleanliness, to free the world from the germ. As if a person has risen suddenly from his meditation with new enlightenment, he says: “Money. The answer is money . . . We will wage war on money. Are you with me? . . . No money, no dirt will ever again flow freely in the Ras. Are you with me? (302). The whole crowd seems to be hypnotized because they have submissions to any kind of urges he makes before them. But he almost falters on the question of how they are going to war against money when Professor Samuel, the assistant of Jeevanbhai, assumes the role of prompter and puts forward a plan before the audience. According to his plan, all men and women of the Ras will deposit their earning to a common pool whose account will be properly kept in the Account Book. They will be provided with all the necessities of daily life on weekly basis to be purchased by Professor Samuel and whoever wishes to go along with him. And the expense done so will be deducted from their respective accounts. The remaining amount will be sent back to their respective home addresses. The crowd is overwhelmed to hear the plan and Abu Fahl among all becomes the first person to upturn his entire money on the table. Thereafter, hundreds of men and women follow him making Professor Samuel difficult to record the accounts. Besides, Alu says that every person whoever is the member “must tie a piece of cloth above his right elbow . . . and use that bit of cloth to dust the threshold, so that they” leave “no dirt behind” (304). The meeting’s resolutions are followed by Zindi’s fight with Karthamma and some others protest to participate in the system. While Alu starts staying with Haji Fahmy then onwards once again initiating his passion for weaving there.

The announcement of Alu and Professor Samuel’s addition with the new plan ensures a new range of development in the Ras. People go for their daily work and deposit the cash with Professor Samuel. They bring truckload of goods and distribute among the people. Professor Samuel maintains the account books and deposits the residual amount in the bank. He also sends the money to their respective addresses on weekly basis. Having nowhere to spend the money, it is said that they are gradually
becoming richer everyday. Some of the shopkeepers, traders or laymen, who do not join at the beginning, ultimately surrender and join the group because they have no customers at all. The activity of Alu and his cohorts now repeat the task of cleaning with new enthusiasm. At Lalpukur, there was only Balaram and his ardent handful of followers like Alu, Rakhal and few young boys of the village. But it is different here because all the followers of Alu venture into massive cleaning drives with carbolic acid. First “they go to the shops and wash every inch of it with carbolic acid . . . flood of carbolic acid started. Everyday they send out groups with buckets of carbolic acid . . . all over the Ras . . . there’s not a note or a coin left anywhere in the Ras” (324-325). The impact of new development initiated by Alu and Professor Samuel is so rampant that people from outside Ras also start flowing in. This gradually makes Jeevanbhai and Zindi worried because Jeevanbhai’s Durban Tailoring House is on the verge of closing down due to Professor Samuel’s resignation and Zindi’s source of income is reduced to empty as all her boarders like Abu Fahl, Alu, Professor Samuel, Karthamma and Chunni have already joined the group. Zindi has only hope of persuading some of them and re-start her business by purchasing Jeevanbhai’s Durban Tailoring House.

However, the anxiety of Zindi, Jeevanbhai or the movement of Alu and his party face unprecedented setback. There is confusion everywhere and people of al-Ghazira seem to suffer from unknown spell-bound effect. People become skeptic and concerned for future. In between, Haji Fahmy, Abu Fahl, Professor Samuel and others decide to go for shopping trip marching together. They also plan to stop by devastated building, the Star, for a few minutes so that they can bring those two sewing machines lying under the debris for Alu. But the previous night another very strange incident takes place. Jeevanbhai is arrested while on his way to the Old Fort, and later on, he is recovered dead. Despite Zindi’s warning of probable threat to their lives, they move forward that evening. Unfortunately, they come under indiscriminate gunshots and explosions and tear gas by the black uniformed Ghaziri security personnel dropping down the helicopter. There is a sudden upsurge of chaotic atmosphere all around. People scream, run, fall, cry, shiver and pray for help. Suddenly the entire crowd is put into a bloody ambush. Everyone runs for his/her life. Rakesh, Professor Samuel, Haji Fahmy, Karthamma and Chunni die terribly during the attack. Abu Fahl and Zaghloul are seriously injured but
Zindi all-blood-smeared hiding by the embankment takes care of them. She is also capable to rescue Alu. Thus the second part of *The Circle of Reason* ends up with another horrible experience of Alu.

Having experienced another narrow escape from the ambush, Alu still has to run away as fugitive from al-Ghazira once again. He is accompanied by Zindi, Kulfi, Karthamma’s son Boss, Abu Fahl and Zaghloul across the seas and lands. However, Zaghloul and Abu Fahl later on stay back at Alexandria and the rest move further. Finally, they come across the borders to Algerian Sahara. Here, he encounters the deadly heat, hunger, disease and issues concerning shelter and medication. His experience and struggle for survival is dexterously manipulated in the part three entitled *Tamas: Death*. This part moves faster only for a day concluding the entire *Circles of Reason* (my italics) as posed at the beginning of the novel. The utterly terrified group of Alu that includes Zindi as the pathfinder with Karthamma’s son, Boss in her arms suffering from severe fever, and Kulfi somehow reach to this part of the land. All the while, Jyoti Das, the Bird-Man’s hallucination and repeated encounter during their voyages ultimately bring them to Algerian Sahara. While they are in very grim position as to the treatment of the ailing child, food and shelter, they find Mrs Verma, the Indian microbiologist and physician working in Algeria with her doctor husband for the last two years. She is the only rescuer from all their woes. The unexpected Indian at such a foreign land extends hope. She comes forward readily to help them by offering them food, shelter and requisite treatment to the baby. However, her expressions of benevolence is, of course, a reciprocal need; for she has been seriously looking some Indians in order to win her bet against her fellow physician Dr Mishra whom she has proposed to present a dance-drama on translated Hindi version of Tagore’s *Chitrangada*. For Dr Mishra, it is impossible to find suitable Indian woman who can play the role of Chitrangada. So, the discovery of Kulfi, Zindi, Boss and Alu is a new ray of hope for Mrs Verma otherwise she has been almost accepting defeat to give in her proposed venture. The most intriguing part is the presence of Jyoti Das at Mrs Verma’s house whose hallucination has been driving Alu, Zindi and Kulfi through seas and lands to this Algerian Sahara. He is Mrs Verma’s guest whom she has picked up from her hospital admitted for a while following sunburn due to rigorous
task of months of chasing Alu across the continents. He is there to rest for sometime and also to play the part of Arjuna of the *Chitrangada* dance-drama on Mrs Verma’s request.

The entire episode runs through faster in very dramatic tempo, exertions and couple of surprises in due course. Kulfi, the former whore tries to seduce young and handsome Das at the first sight itself with her beauty and shrewdness. Accordingly, Das is also carried away along the line of reciprocal spark of sensuality. He is astonished to discover Kulfi whose companion Alu has been the prime suspect of his chase that has put his policing job at stake. He tries to make Kulfi understand about his intention but Kulfi is completely driven out of her wit. Meanwhile, Zindi and Alu also come to know about him. Zindi emphasizes on running away but she fails to convince Kulfi. On the other hand, Alu discovers the copy of *The Life of Pasteur* in the book shelf of Mrs Verma’s father’s study room. Everytime she finds Alu gazing fixedly on those book-shelves, particularly on *The Life of Pasteur*. It is the same copy gifted by his foster father Balram to his friend Dantu or Hem Narain Mathur, the deceased father of Mrs. Verma. He reads handwritten note by his uncle and he emotionally breaks down with full of tears in his eyes. She offers him the copy as she doesn’t feel it much important to her.

Again, the ripples of attraction grown between Das and Kulfi bring another final twist in the story line and Alu’s unwanted troublesome involvement with it. During the rehearsal of *Chitrangada*, Kulfi becomes so intensely involved in her emotions towards Das that she is incapable to distinguish between her present reality and the character she is supposed to play. She behaves as if she is truly Chitrangada in her attire and Das to be her real suitor and husband Arjuna. The background music continues; dialogue from the recorder is on in translated Hindi version by Mrs Verma’s father. Das tries to talk to her under the louder noise of dance-drama but it has no real effect on the heaving emotion of Kulfi. Consequently, she is caught up with another round of heart attack and dies there itself. Everyone is taken aback and stands pointless. Zindi is frenzied, Alu is indecisive and the hosts are confused for the next course of actions or responsibilities. Out of this chaotic and critical situation, Das relates his story of chasing and successfully convinces Alu and Zindi that he is actually not a threat to any of them. Rather, he expresses his grievances and concedes that some way or the other, he is also responsible for Kulfi’s
untimely death. Mrs Verma and Dr Mishra, once again, indulge into the arguments for Kulfi’s crematorial rites to be performed in compliance to Hindu religion. Dr Mishra tries to pose difficult viewpoints always scaring Mrs Verma to proceed with her tasks of preparing for the cremation. However, they are capable to overcome the paraphernalia of Algerian police proceedings and obtain permission to cremate her somewhere under the dunes silently. Mrs Verma tries to be rational in her views but somersaults within her own ideas when it is countered logically by Dr Mishra. According to Dr Mishra, the corpse of a Hindu must be sanctified by sprinkling holy water of the Ganga. Since there is no possibility of it, Mrs Verma brings the modern liquid of disinfectant, i.e. carbolic acid. Dr Mishra’s statement on Mrs Verma’s new method of making the corpse sacred with carbolic acid is one of the most important concluding articulations of the entire novel: “The world has come full circle . . . carbolic acid has become holy circle” (444). Mrs Verma’s response to this effect emphasizes its significance further: “What does it matter whether it’s Gangajal or carbolic acid? It’s just a question of cleaning the place, isn’t it?” (445). Similarly, the ritual of the cremation is completed by replacing sandalwood to – two battered sandalwood bookends, ghee to the butter, wood to the broken windows, tables and boxes etc. Another remarkable part of the story is that Alu, whom she always detested, despised and hated, is persuaded to lit Kulfi’s pyre as her husband for he is introduced to Mrs Verma formerly as Kulfi’s husband. He is frightened and shows battered and motionless thumbs to express his inability to hold the stick to lit the fire. But suddenly Mrs Verma recognizes its movement and encourages Alu to perform the final rite. Her words of inspiration, provides new hope to Alu and completes the rites of cremation. And he also puts the book *The Life of Pasteur* that has been so closely associated to his life since the initiation of his adolescence at Lalpukur, on the pyre. The novel ends with Alu and Zindi’s home return and Das’s migration to Dusseldorf to his uncle respectively.

The growth of Alu is thus ever encountered through all topsy-turvy situations, hostile environment and imminent rush hours since his childhood when he lost his father in Calcutta. There is no sign of resilience and vivacity of adolescence period. Deprived of true hands of parenting, peer intimacy, and inadequate motivation, he keeps on rushing against big confusions, misunderstanding, and irresoluteness. The self-deprecating effect
as destined to him due to his abnormal physical appearance becomes a tragic wound he must tolerate across the transformative phase of adolescence. The only passion of weaving he has developed and he proved to be expertise on is the motive that keeps on reminding his value of existence for himself and the cause of concern for others. Weaving earns him the favour of Maya, the only woman making him feel important before any person of the opposite sex. His uncle is motivated to establish the ‘School of Reason’ where weaving has been the centre of all activities. Although he is compelled to run away as fugitive from Lalpukur, his next destination and escapes are also made possible by the people involved in the same profession till he arrives in al-Ghazira. His beginning days in al-Ghazira is spent as wage labourer but he survives the most disastrous incident of his life due to the two sewing machines protecting him against the mountain of concrete debris of the Star. The incident and his miraculous win gifted by the sewing machines enlighten his life. He finds new meaning and motive for future prospective. Once again, he returns to weaving and carbolic acid. Meanwhile, his exhaustive weaving sessions make his thumbs rigid and saggered. But his life of fugitive continues at the sudden ambush of Ghaziri armed forces.

There is none except Zindi to guide him. Even his companion Kulfi, the whore in her past life, hates and insults him at times. He has to face the insults of Kulfi while travelling in the ship called Zeynab when an old tottering passenger nick-named Japanese Miracle falls down in the sea. Alu tries a vain attempt to save the man with the help of a rope. But he is unable to do so as he has already lost the grip of his thumbs. Kulfi, furious at him, puts Alu to a very embarrassing point by shouting before everyone in the ship: “Look! . . . You’re looking at the most useless thing in the world – a weaver without thumbs . . .” (404). Again she continues holding up his hands in front of all: “They’ll remind you that you can never do anything again. All you’ve got left now are your eyes” (404). Zindi, on the other hand, has been planning to convince Kulfi to get married with Alu so that both of them can stay together with her as support to her ageing days. Coincidentally, Kulfi and Alu are introduced as husband and wife and Boss as their biological child to Mrs Verma. This necessitates Kulfi to behave respectfully according to her relationship with Alu. But her first seductive encounter with Jyoti Das subverts her assuming role as Alu’s wife. When she faces Alu at Mrs Verma’s guest room during
arguments with Zindi, she redirects her anger against Alu once more: “Listen, you . . . if you go anywhere near that bed I’ll tear your rotten thumbs off . . . You can make your nest here . . .” (423). It is a common happening to Alu when somebody one day or the other put him in embarrassment. He is exploited wherever he goes. But fortunately, he also finds people like Toru-debi, Balaram, Maya, Zindi (to a certain considerable extent), and finally, Mrs. Verma who extend sympathetic affection to Alu though in quite incomprehensive mode of expression or sometime motivated by their personal gain. Once they run away from al-Ghazira, Zindi makes Alu’s passion and goal as her own, and gradually turns into an unfathomable motif. Zindi’s friend in Muharram who helps to get her visas stamped, asks where she is going. She replies: “We’re going west, where the sewing machines are” (395). Again at Lisbon, Alu out of travel exhaustion asks: “What after Lisbon, Zindi?” She repeats her answer: “Westwards still; where the sewing machine sets” (395). Virat Singh who helps to smuggle them off to the port of the Place d’Afrique also puts her similar question as to her next journey. She again replies sobbing: “Westwards, where else?” (396). Zindi tries to keep his hope living through her participation in the mission whereas Alu is as confused as ever. There is no elaboration on emotional and psychological and cognitive development of Alu in the novel. We re-discover Alu standing at the same plane from where his journey started. It is merely a course of completing a full circle without much addition to what and how it has been anchored.

Ghosh although explores mainly through the maturation process of Alu, there are also some other characters like Das, Rakhal, Maya, and Bhudeb’s sons. But there is no explicit detail as to the maturation process of these characters except a few implications. Das is the adolescent recently recruited as police officer following his father’s pressing expectations rather than his own. So, his choice of vocation is never given importance anyway. Perhaps this major cause makes him a defeated police officer at the end. Even though he tries his best to trace out the suspect, finally, his job and life compensates badly. So, he feels better comfortable to quit his profession and go to Dusseldorf although he is successful to find the suspect at the end. Similarly, Rakhal is a weaver under compulsion as well. For, he has been a very stout, energetic and brave adolescent who wants to be in some exciting and adventurous task like Karate, bullying and physical
contest or dangerous activities such as making explosives. But his adolescence period doesn’t get opportunity to foster properly as his life comes to an end in the ambush at Balaram’s house. On the other hand, Maya is the only female adolescent character Ghosh delineates in the novel. But she occupies a very little space. Yet she is the true nourisher to Alu’s genius as weaver. She is an ordinary girl of the working class immigrant Indians. She has the ability to do something significant but she is denied the due approval and training.

The novel is unquestionably a very important text to represent the postcolonial Indian adolescents and youth. The novel appears to contest a larger number of issues pertaining to the maturation process of these characters. But it is quite different from generic adolescent literature as it deals with the epistemological development in postcolonial independent India that remarkably fails to accommodate the generation of young Indians to guide to the right direction. The elder generation is itself in confused position. They are indecisive and suffer from ideological deformity. The clash between scientific temperament and traditional practices, beliefs and rituals is rampant, hence, there effaces all-round misconceptions. There is clash between socialism and rationalism that puts them in a position of endless dualities especially to the educated class of people like Balaram, Bhudeb, Hem Narain Mathur, Mrs Verma, and Dr Mishra. Therefore, the following generation of young Indians in the growth period is bound to tolerate the imperceptible jerks in their multi-dimensional developmental process. Naturally, the condition of Alu, Rakhal, Maya, Das, kulfi or the sons of Bhudeb take the route of pointlessness, indetermination and hyphenated.