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TRANSNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE OF AMITAV GHOSH'S MULTICULTURALISM IN CANTON – AN OVERVIEW

M.Suganthi and Dr. A. Nirmala

Research Scholar, Ethiraj College for Women, Chennai
HOD Department of English, Ethiraj College for women Chennai

ABSTRACT

The emergence of ethnic groups within a society is due to the vast movement of people, languages and translations which has resulted in transnational literary and cultural studies. Cultural exchange across various regions leads to Multiculturalism which frees the characters from cultural and political repression. The effect of historical, social, political, cultural and economic aspects of the opium war on people across nations extending from India to China involving the interests of western hegemony is portrayed in this novel. The relationship between multiculturalism and integration is followed through from the viewpoints of demography, language and religion. Transformation takes place due to interpolation of state with its focus of power on Canton city which is embedded in various cultural and geographic backgrounds whose common interest is to trade with China. Ghosh made an elaborate study on Chinese culture which portrays the trade of opium in this novel. Thus the different classes of people mix not only with particular breed instead with different characters, types and sources of origin who moves across borders paves a monumental tribute to the era of globalization adapting the contemporary artistic and social productions to present-day conditions of Multiculturalism and Transnationalism discovering the aesthetic principles of one literary culture in texts from different literary cultures.

KEYWORDS:

Cross Culture, Transformation, Transnationalism, Multiculturalism

INTRODUCTION

India is a vast country with numerous linguistic cultures. These linguistic cultures have their individual ways of viewing literary creativity. The custom and behaviour of particular people of the society ranges the literary transactions which defines the relationship of various cultures. Literature in the Indian languages has been a matter of revolt and heresy rather than that of imposition and

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authority. Basically, Indian literature has ingrained in it a spirit of multilingualism and multiculturalism. Transnational literature reflects the permanent flow, transfer or circulation of people, cultures and ideas. These border crossings also imply tensions and ambivalences resulting in constant negotiations, reinventions and remediation's of national traditions in new literary forms. As the term suggests, transnational literature usually is located in the era of the nation state. However, similar phenomena also took and take place on pre- and post national conditions. The increasing interaction and mutual exchange across the borders of national cultures and languages today means that contemporary literature to an ever lesser extent reflects the context of one single nation and culture, but operates in an open and transnational field.

The term transnational in which is appropriately considered as relation between states or across nation, as well as changing the nature of something which interconnects the culture across the boundaries and nation. Geoffrey Van Orden has taken a radically different viewpoint. He believes that any discussion of multiculturalism cannot be divorced from issues of nationhood and national identity. He says that the very openness of our democratic societies has led to the influx of a minority of newcomers who seek the destruction of democracy and a wider proportion that have little or no commitment to their new countries. This has resulted in a weakening of the core culture of the host society which is in danger of being relegated to the position of just one of many cultures.

"For those of us that have a sense of nationhood this is a real danger".

Van Orden contends that multiculturalism is a political concept that displaces the individual in favour of distinct ethnic or religious groups and that the nation-state "with its overriding common interest, identity and allegiance, is inevitably diluted". It is evidently proved that people who belong to various nationhood assimilate from different culture. Moreover, in recalling the term 'connectivity's' reveals that the transnational connections here produce groups, identities, nationalisms and also referred to the cultural specificities of global processes, tracing the multiplicity of the uses and conceptions of 'culture'. The aspect of integration and stability is portrayed by Ghosh from a number of different aspects. The first is the legal framework under which people who cross continents are admitted to their host countries and the conditions; they follow in order to stabilize their trade. The second aspect is that of social support especially in relation to learning the local language. Ghosh's writings deals with all time crossing the generic boundaries between anthropology and art in his fictional narrative *River of Smoke* which tend to be transnational in sweep, moving restlessly across countries, continents and ocean. However he never loses the sight of the intimate human dimension of things. It is no coincidence that his writings ritual returns to Calcutta (the author's birthplace), and for all its global ambition, is thickly accented by the registers and referents of Bengali and south Asian culture.

The term Transnationalism is much more than international or the transnational appropriately conceived of as a relation between states is not only universal but it is an embodiment of transformation where the characters are subjectivities to transnation and are not affected by loss of place, alienation but they create a system for themselves from their own community or mingle, adjust with new people, surrounding, culture. Fanon critically says or believes that "it is a veritable theatre of metamorphoses and permutations" (56). The above narration depicts that '*River of Smoke* 'has a rich influential characters embedded from various cultural and geographical background whose common interest is to trade opium in china and it is a best example of Multiculturalism as it encounters with

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Chinese Culture, Indian Culture and many other Cultures. Zadig Bey represents Armenian culture, Fitcher Penrose represents Scottish Culture, Paulette Lambert stands for French Culture and son George Chinnery, Ah Fatt a son of Bahram Modi, Chi-Mei are the representatives of mixed race. Smoky River explores the communication barriers across the linguistic and cultural background which illicit between Bahram Modi and the Chinese fisher Women Chi-Mei the love story asserts in order to sustain their individual life have crossed continents for stability in trade where racism, casteism is unseen.

The novel begins with the storm in the river with three different vessels caught up in it; the *Anahita*, carrying the biggest ever shipment of raw opium west to canton; and the *Redruth*, a Cornish brig with a crew of plant-hunters and cargo of rare flora. The stories of these ships run first parallel before intertwining in unexpected and intriguing ways. Ghosh in his genre shifts his complete focus to canton, the floating and ephemeral city in which the covert opium market fuelled British colonialism and brought China reluctantly into the emerging politics of the world he draws the conflicts of various characters who are indirectly involved in smuggling opium. A detailed route of smuggling is displayed by Ah Fatt who wants Neel Rattan Halder to be a clerk under his father Bahram Modi. Drawing the sketch in his own way Ah Fatt shows Neel the mouth of the Pearl River leading to Canton and small islands like teeth rising from the sea. As the foreign are forbidden inside canton the foreign ships go to Lintin Island and sell opium. On the other hand the network of canton harbours was brought to life by Bahram Modi, an opium merchant, with his zeal of success, his indomitable courage, his passionate love and moral scruples, who comes in the centre of the story, from Bombay who cross the borders and use the illegal Opium Trade as escapism from the overbearing family burden and wants to live in the floating city, i.e. In Canton Fanqui town Bahram establishes a Water Front House considers it as a home of adventure in trade in order to reinvent for better trade purposes. He advises his father in law to diversify into new commercial opportunities. At this juncture it is very clear that Opium trade is a soul giver for all the trading communities. The Chinese trade started as a network of selling opium for medicinal purposes but later the drug turned out to be a demon for every individual lives but many traders considered Opium Selling as a jack-pot for improving their social status. All the claims of self are transcended and liberated from the entrapment of nation, race and ethnicity. The novel begins with the storm in the river where three different vessels have been caught up in it; the *Anahita*, carrying the biggest ever shipment of raw opium west to canton; and the *Redruth*, a Cornish brig with a crew of plant-hunters and cargo of rare flora.

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establishes a Water Front House considers it as a home of adventure in trade in order to reinvent for better trade purposes. He advises his father in law to diversify into new commercial opportunities. At this juncture it is very clear that Opium trade is a soul giver for all the trading communities. The ethnicity culminates in a world without any identity of their origin instead as a group of people follow the same culture. The following characters are the examples of this group who have proved that they are Transnational by nature: Bahram Modi, Neel Rattan, and Ah Fatt are all these three wanted to establish their individuality and share a common space of world beyond the closure of identity. Hogan has named Ghosh's narration as "Simultaneous universalism and particularism". It evidently proves that Ghosh connects people with a 'Eurocentric mode of Narration' i.e. connects the characters from world to nation. Bahram frequently travels from Bombay to Canton utilizing this opportunity to explore trade from India to Canton and also wanted to prove his individuality in order to stabilize his business in Opium Trade. Transnationalism plays a pivotal role in an individual's ability in the cultural aspect it works in two ways as the ties across the boundaries are considered as human collectives where individuals engage in activities and in that process individuals are linked to multiple localities across the boundaries.

Bahram Modi a pivotal character in '*River of Smoke*' transcends boundaries between India and China which lies between ethnicity and transnationality: as a Parsi his religious identity forsakes as a nationalist and wider transnational identities. Chatterjee says "Compromises and adjustments are necessary to adapt...to the requirements of the modern world" (120). It states that Bahram is for the change always as he wanted to establish a firm business in the Canton city. Ghosh endeavors to create connection between socio-cultural and historical discourses which smoothen diversity and various particularities, as a narrator he stands apart from the constructionist discursive epistemology. Neel Rattan and Ah Fatt who sailed together from the ship Ibis to Canton are considered as convicts who were brought to Mauritius. From Mauritius they started their living by selling a rare species of Bird's nest which was at the highest demand in Singapore and China market for a better remuneration. This transnational perspective of Ghosh states that the movement of people, language and cultural exchanges across various regions lead to integration and travel of these two can be considered as more than international which is appropriately conceived as relation between states. Transnation is not only universal or simply between across nations, but it is an embodiment of transformation.

As China is blessed in its botanical riches, being endowed not only with some of the most beautiful and medicinally useful plants in existence, but also with many that were commercial value. (River of Smoke 101)

'*River of Smoke*' presents Penrose's ship the '*Redruth*' which had revolutionized the business of transporting plants across the seas, and Penrose's money making ambition to extract rare third world flora, fauna wanted to sell them in the west. He travelled all the way from Mauritius to China. It is vehemently understood that Transnationalism established through trade opportunities in China which have connected different cultures and boundaries of language, caste have replaced the notion of authentic discrete national cultures with a shared openness to the world. Ghosh's transnational perspective exchange of trade and culture shows that espousing a utopian belief in a trans-racial human collectivity. Religion does not separate these people, as they forget their past life. It is a rich hybrid world of carnivalesque mix of languages. Canton in a nuanced world where Arabs, Persians Africans have lived together with trust and goodwill, the absorption capacity of individuals from the

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society for a rapid change is inevitable. The 'River of Smoke' explores various alternative ways constructing the world based on connections that dismantle the rigid binaries and settle across international borders by forming ethnic groups within their transformed societies.

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