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Meaning In-between: Borderless Cultural Representation in Sea of Poopies by Amitav Ghosh

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Abstract: The inter-cultural conflicts have contested the meaning production in postcolonial literature. This paper aims at studying the aesthetics of cultural pluralism in Ghosh's writings through translation, which is apparent in heterogeneity of the literary scene in India. The sense of magic bilingualism in Indian writing in English leads to the dissolution of the binary opposition between original and translation. The concept of 'translational transnational' is playing an important role in negotiating the sense of creativity. Postcolonial writing and literary translation are overlapping term to navigate native history. The process of transculturation has been emerging through cultural amalgamation. The cultural identity of Indian literary tradition occupies a dynamic role in cross-cultural connections. In particular, this paper explores Sea of Poppies of Amitav Ghosh to present a model of transcultural narrative inclusive to a bilingual writer, and examines it under the light of postcolonial theory, especially Homi Bhabha's concept of 'hybrid third space'.

Keywords: bilingualism, creativity, Indian English Writings, translation

Amitav Ghosh and his globalized Bengali identity have been glorifying Indian literary tradition through unsung historical narratives, which has been affected the lives of common people and depicted in such an imaginative framework where fiction writing intersects with ethnography and Anthropological study. He is a well established literary icon in Indian Writing in English, and his literary output has been representing multilingual Indian literary scenario with "English" as a link language by replacing the various regional language literatures since a long time. His translational identity has been experiencing home across the world through his memory. Jon Mee in his writing "The Burthen of the Mystery: Imaginationand Difference in *The Shadow* Lines", signifies the cultural hybridity in Ghosh where transculturaltion is a part of meta-narrative. Translation is the negotiating term for cultural differences. "He thinks *across* cultures rather than *beyond* them." (2005: 91)

His characters have been getting translated across languages and accruing along the social contexts while being displaced. The pluralism of cultural conflicts has been challenged through the characters and the temporality of narrative techniques, which has been negotiating the process of cultural differences. His characters are being temporally and spatially displaced. His characters are conglomerates, who are literally osmosis of Ghosh's imaginative framework. It is evident as the story unfolds the vision of Deeti, which motivates her to translate the differences across people. Her silent cognitive understanding of the peopleacross regions has been best expressed by the narrator by using the jargon of Ibis chrestomathy. Her continuous displacement from her birthplace to the way across the Indian Ocean to Mauritius seems to be a journey of encountering cultural differences with a sense of knowing and maturing her inner-self. As she gets married and has been living with her husband Hukum Singh and her eight years old daughter Kabutri on the outskirts of the town of Ghazipiur. She is not unaware of her unusual destiny at any time; as first, when she gets married to Hukum Singh- an affemkhora, she understands that her destiny is under the effect of Saturn. Secondly, as she has got the vision of sailing across the vast vessel all across the Ocean- "where the holy Ganga disappeared into the Kala-Pani, "the Black Water"" (2008: 5). This outgrown village women is ignorant and illiterate for such as reason that she is strongly guided by her sixth sense as the vision of sailing through the long mast ship has made her think about crossing her own limitations as she has never had the glimpse of Sea or has never spoken Bhojpuri than any other language. This puzzlement of her has been appropriated as the Ibis is approaching through the sacred water of holy Ganga.

The immense Ibis ship is the metonym for displacement. This has long been used for transporting slaves is now being used for Opium business by its new master, who is a Chinese trade man named Benjamin Brightwell Burnham living in Calcutta. The twenty years old Zachary Reid, who is the second mate of the ship, along with other crew members has been engaging this voyage with lascars and indentured labourers. His first encountering with the term lascar is fascinating as it is looking into Ibis chrestomathy. The Ibis chrestomathy describes the Persian word "lashker" is derivative for the term lascars which is specifically used as a nautical jargon. This term has European connotation to understand the sailor group.

This was Zachary"s first experience of this species of sailor. He had thought that lascars were a tribe or nation, like the Cherokee or Sioux; he discovered now that they came from places that were far apart, and had nothing in common, except the Indian Ocean; among them were Chinese and East Africans, Arabs and Malays, Bengali and Goans, Tamil and Arkanese. They came in groups of ten or fifteen, each with a leader who spoken on their behalf. (2008: 13)

The imagined community for which Ghosh has attested his characters signifies hybridity. The borderlessness of cultural communication is contesting the meaning production in postcolonial literature. James Clifford points out Ghosh"s writings signify ethnographical importance. In his article "The Transit Lounges of Culture" (1991), he further examines him from an anthropological point of view.

The flow of Ibis, along with indentured labourers in its way across the Indian Ocean, signifies a temporal and spatial shift in the ocean of cultural assimilation. The interconnectedness and mixedness of cultural pluralism identify Indian Ocean. The history of Opium trade in colonial India and its under effect navigates the Ibis trilogy.

This concept of hybridity in the littoral zone brings the idea of "translational transnational". Itbrings the idea of cultural translation, which encodes cultural pluralism through resisting force of translation. His narrative technique captures characters and their way of communication across cultures while appropriating the context of the situation. The cultural identities oversimplify the usage of languages. The cultural syncretism has been providing a transcultural flow of the narrative of the text. Ghosh's Bengali identity does prevail while translating his characters for his textual model. He ventures down the memory lane of colonial India and its intertwined history by eracting out the lives of his fascinating characters like Deeti, Kalua, Paulette and others. The intensity of transcultural inflow via the Indian Ocean region has interlocked the characters in its grip.

The issue of language and deconstruction of meaning under the influence of Western hegemonic demand presents the reality of colonial history. The story of Paulette, who is the daughter of French Botanist of the Botanical Garden, has a nice Bengali upbringing, captures the story of indentured labourers intertwined in the history of Opium trade. The firstlanguage she learned was Bengali. In the course of her upbringing she discovers French and English from her father as a part of an inheritance. The conglomeration of her identity is the cross- cultural and linguistic processing the story-telling. "Putli—,,doll"—which was her wayof domesticating the girl"s name. As for Paulette, in the confusion of tongues that was to characterize her upbringing, her nurse became Tantima—,,aunt-mother". ( 2008: 65)

She, along with others, has been transformed into one among the migrants who are sailing through the Indian Ocean region. Those migrants become the part world language cosmopolitanism by retaining their own cultural essense. Their individual identities have been displaced and shifted into migrants or indentured labourers, which has been resonating through the word girmitiyas.

They are girmitiyas, said Ramsaran-ji, and at the sound of that word Deeti uttered an audible gasp—for suddenly she understood. It was a few years now since the rumours had begun to circulate in the villages around Ghazipur: although she had never seen a girmitiya before, she had heard them being spoken of. They were so called because, in exchange for money, their names were entered on "girmits"—agreement written on pieces of paper. The silver that was paid for them went to their families, and they were taken away, never to be seen again: they vanished, as if into the netherworld. (2008: 71)

The cosmopolitan set up of Ibis has been motivating for translation enterprises for each of the character. The Indianness of their translating process is underlined in the remarkable use of Ghosh's language. In her paper, "Translation of Themselves: The Contours of Postcolonial Fiction" (2000), Maria Tymoczko defines language as a tool of intercultural transfer of indigenous language, cultural patterns, beliefs and literary traditions. She describes the idea of Michael Thelwell about creative writing, resonating the idea of translation:

The novel is a cultural hybrid, the child of the clash of cultures... the stories in it are translations—more accurately, transliterations—of conventional folktales into idiomatic "young English". It is clear from the reading, and even more so when one listens to the authortelling a story, exactly how difficult the translation process really is. This is not simply "young English" but new English—an English whose vocabulary is bent and twisted into the service of a different language"s nuances, syntax, and interior logic. The result is often original and startling. 1984:188 (Qut in Mariya 2000: 147)

Translation as a metaphor for post-colonial writing. It is a process of transportation of Indian and Persian words in the relms of English language and culture in such a manner where it reflects local roots and its distinct linguistic heritage. The cultural specific terms in their transliterated forms retain its Indianness while appropriating its native context. The politics of transformation of his characters anlong with their regional languages have been displaced and dislocated in such a manner that they are being recreated in Ibis Chrestomathy. It is the process of literary osmosis that each character brings linguistic distinctiveness while unfolding his or her own regional and local identity. Raja Neel Ratan Halder, who belongs to the famous Halders of Raskhali family of the 18<sup>th</sup> century Bengal compels to think of words have their destinies as does the people have when he is being deported to Mauritius along with other indentured labourers. He has been sailing across the Indian Ocean to reinvent his transcultural identity. The navigation of Ibis Chrestomathy brings out the linguistic expression of Neel, where Ghosh justifies:

Words! Neel was of the view that words, no less than people, are endowed with lives and destinies of their own. Why then were there no astrologers to calculate their kismet and make prediction about their fate? The thought that he might be the one to take on this task probably came to him at about the time when he was first beginning to earn his livelihood as a linkister—that is to say, during his years in southern China. (Ghosh 2008: 501)

Having been identified postcolonial writing as a form of translation, it mediates a sense of "translation as transfer". The village of Deeti in one of the towns of Benares where holy Ganga flows in all its glory, which marks the start of her journey as the destiny sets her freeto elopes with Kalua. The place of Ganga Sagar where the holy water is intermingling into the Black water in its way across Indian Ocean signifies the way of transcultural flow. The connection between land and river and then river to Sea reveal a dialectic space which has been further internalized in his characters" linguistic identity and cultural behaviours. This global connectivity brings a major conceptual shift in the narrative of translation, which is, ofcourse, not only about bearing reflection in relation to many works emanating from former colonies, but is suggestive to certain perils faced by writers of these emerging circumstances. In his novels, Ghosh has experimented with a range of indigenous and foreign languages. While presenting the idea of linguistic difference, he is of the view that representing the society in a single language, no matter what the language is somehow distorting the reality of the society. While answering a question on, as a writer who thinks and writes in English to T.Vijay Kumar in the paper "Postcolonial! Describes you as a negative" (2007), he accepts that "When you are dealing with the whole enterprise of translating out of a language into alanguage, especially for a Bengali, it's a very challenging thing... for many reasons, one of which is [that] Bengal as a culture is itself in some way a culture of translation" (2007: 104). The use of translation or transliteration of laskari language into English for global reader is accomplished with the migrants inhabitant of the immense ship Ibis denotes transcultural and translingual significance. The stories of the forced displacement of the migrants in contrastwith the stories of those migrants who have choice of being displaced marks the difference. The use of the term "vernacular cosmopolitanism", which Pinana Werbner describes as an "oxymoron that joins contradictory notions of local specificity and universal enlightenment" (2006: 496). The migrants of the *Ibis* specially the indentured labourers have become the part of cosmopolitanism narrative for a greater common good. It symbolizes as a trope for linguistic and political hybridity. In Sea of *Poppies*, the translation of nautical and hinterland jargons into English language connects the unstatic nature of cultural flow to the mankind. The conflict between the first mate Jack Crowle and the second mate Zachary Reid, which resolves over the unintentional killing of Mr Crowle. Mr. Crowle brings up a different pidgin language while negotiating with Zachary, ""Don"t change nothing, Reid." Mr Crowle"s handreached up and he brushed a Knuckle against Zachary"s unshaven cheek. "Metif or m"latter, itdon"t change the colour o"this…"" (2008: 492) . he again brings a good deal for Zachary."

"Don"t y"see, Mannikin?" The first mate put his hand on Zachary"s shoulder. "We could be ateam, the two o"us." He tapped the paper and took it out of Zachary"s hand. "This thing—nobbut needs be in the know of it. Not the Captain nor anyone else. It"ll stay here."" (*Ibid*) Unlike other postcolonial writer Ghosh"s works are unique in its linguistic representation. The translational aspect of different linguistic signs are performative nature of cultural communication. The narrative skill of Ghosh offers a chance to get into the various linguistic cultural engagement and etymologies. Each character has a distinct linguistic identity which ultimately turns Ghosh to experient with various language across the globe. At the same time it is even a challenge to the reader to get into the mystic nature of his narrative technique. Shameem Black in her article brings out the fact, "In these patterns of heteroglossia, everyonespeaks many languages at once" (2009:173). The amalgamation of various socio-cultural contexts through the process of "vernacular cosmopolitanism" marks the idea of Bhabha where he points out,

I want to take my stand on the shifting margins of cultural displacement—that confounds any profound or "authentic" sense of a "national" culture or an "organic" intellectual—and ask what the function of a committed theoretical perspective might be, once the cultural and historical hybridity of the postcolonial world is taken as the paradigmatic place of departure. (1994: 31)

The place of in-betweeness is the priveling space of conflict. The pragmatic approach of cultural translation has been privileging the space of the "in-between", which for Bhabha is "an intervening space-- a space of translation as transformation particularly apposite to the difficult, transnational world" (1996:198). The characters of Ghosh"s novels transform to newidentities—as the locals come in contact with global, blended into a formation of glocal. He analyses both globalization and postcolonial nationalism by depicting the experiences of those in transition, those in-between nation-states, those going back and forth as travelers and migrants in search of lost homes and better lives. The depiction of the historical reality of Opium war in his *Ibis* trilogy gives the poignant moment of thought of displacement in community. The structure of the narrative is translational, which leads to a subversion of authority. Being very thankful to Homi Bhbaha, for alerting her to the transnational, and its imbrication with memory, Kavita Daiya points out in her writing "No Home But in Memory: Migrant Bodies and Belongings, Globalization and Nationalism in *The Circle of Reason* and *The shadow Lines*", while narrating the cross-cultural historical events, Ghosh suggested three things:

(1) Community, like memory, is transnational. (2) The liminality of inter-national migrants can also be testimonies to the material abjection and psychic violence of globalization that is elided in celebratory discourses. (3) The transitional and translational space occupied by migrants is a transnational one too: not globalized, not between nation-states, but outside them, linking communities across borders through desires and discourses of material and emotional belonging. (Daiya 2017:37)

Cultural translation provides a space for enunciation of cultural communication. It is confronting with a challenging role in meaning production. The transmission of cultural knowledge in the space of cultural confluence brings out the specific creativity of the author.

Amitav Ghsoh, like most other postcolonial writers, chooses to write in Englishlanguage with a sense of cross-cultural fusion. For him, translation is an inescapable condition of writing. His act of translation is not simply a condition of linguistic representation as such, but it comes through the more specific demands of linguistic difference (Supriya Chaudhuri 2009: 269).

His novels contain a unique position in the postcolonial literature that explores and sometimes uncritically celebrates the hybridity of postcolonial nationality and migration. He points to the transnationality of community and memory, which is inescapably-inextricably, ineluctably—a part of one another. Regional though they are, they are, adapting in nature. Coexistence of different regional

expressions, providing the image of cultural investment in India and living within it, provides the actual experience, as it inevitably involves compromises in a quest of living together. Ghosh's novels inform the local Bengali vernacular tongue along with Anglo-Indian words and phrases. Brinda Bose's volume on the works of Amitav Ghosh is useful here in reading the hybridity of language in the postcolonialcontext. In a bilingual or multilingual situation, where people of different caste, class, region, and race come in contact with one another—it becomes important to examine the choices of the standard and non-standard dialect, according to the social situation. Along with this, his novels deal with historical realities experienced and experiencing through the question about gender, memory, and are not answered by those belonging to South Asian histories. These strategies of languages have poignant role to embrace the spirit of the characters at the local level that most progress can be made on ensuring an inclusive approach to translating their emotions. The novel begins with Deeti's marriage with Hukum Singh, who is an *afeemkhor* drug addict. As Deeti, a wise but illiterate woman wants for him on the wedding night, she sings the following song:

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Ag mor lagal ba
Are sagro
badaniya
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Tas-mas choli karai,

Barhala jabanawa (Ghosh 2008: 32)

Ghosh provides the translation for clarity of readers:

I"m on fire

My body burns..

My choli

strains

Against my walking breasts... (Ghosh 2008: 32)

By providing a word for word translation for the marriage song, sung by Deeti which is not only the translation of one language to another, but also the form of the content, as well as interpretation of its meaning- is all the mingling of text, context and languages. It is obvious that Deeti, although a wise but illiterate woman, cannot speak English. Her emotions would be best expressed in her language and so the translation is provided by Ghosh to make us aware of what feelings are going on in her mind. Though, Deeti's expressions of her feelings are very logically presented in the original language.

Ghosh has translated himself to by translating his characters for the wide readership. Mary Tymoczko in her seminal paper, "Postcolonial Writing and Literary Translation" (1999), poses the question, "Who is a writer writing for? Is the audience primarily an audience withinthe post-colonial culture? Is the work addressed primarily to the former colony or the former colonizer?" (31). The use of translational language is playing a crucial role in national development and social change. It contributes in the development of literary and cultural resources of multilingual social strata of India. Writing strategies has been developing cross- cultural meanings which involves the socio-political relationships of power. The epistemological language of cultural transmission interrogates post-colonial writers for international audience and internationalization of literature. "It becomes increasingly hard to define national traditions of the modern novel, for example, for more and more the novel has become an international genre with writers influenced by and influencing other writers from different linguistic traditions."

Ghosh has presented the historical realities of indentured laboureres in his fictional narrative as such they are the part of the meta-narrative. He has experimented with the etymology of the word; "They are girmitiyas, said Ramsaran-ji,..." (Ghosh 2008:70). The use of the term "lascar" and laskari language illuminates oceanic culture shoring up in the cost of Indian Ocean. It is an Anglo-Indian adaptation of the Persian word Lashkar/Lashkari. The colonial administration has kept the term "lascar" for "soldier" or "army", which is "applied to all indigenous sailors of the Indian Ocean region", Ghosh"s Ibis Chrestomathy illuminates many of those words which symbolizes the life on

the ship for the lascars. Henceforth, the journey of Ibis symbolizes the intermingling of people of different group, class, caste and races thus repletes with various sociolinguistics and psycholinguisitcs variables. The writer has depicted the issue of caste discrimination in the story of Deeti and Kalua and with the same intensity the class hierarchy is profound between the relationship of master and servent; Raja Neel Ratan Halder and and his loyal servent Parimal. Similarly Jodu and Paulette bring two different poles in the nature of their existence. Shao-Pin Luo in her article, "The way of words: Vernacular Cosmopolitanism in Amitav Ghosh"s *Sea of Poppies* (2013)", has commented on Ghosh"s scholary knowledge of various socio-cultural inhabitants of the globeoften amazed the critics as well as the group of readers. His skillfull narrative technique unfolding the voice of the migrants lives and their vernacular expressions in its subtlety.

Ghosh brilliantly displays in *Sea of Poppies* and the ways in which Ghosh delves into the extraordinary complexity and heterogeneity of the resistance that is lodged in the many languages—not only the many languages of the world but the many idiomaticities of those languages (Spivak 2008:254) (Qut in Luo 2013: 381).

In Sea of Poppies, the Ibis is a place for ambivalence. It provides a space of social antagonism for cultural performance and its discursive practices. As Bhabha points out,

The production of meaning requires that these two places be mobilized in the passage through a Third Space, which represents both the general conditions of language and the specific implication of the utterance in a performative and institutional strategy of which it cannot initself be conscious.(1994:53)

Ghosh in his writing narrates the experiences of indentured labourers who are unknown to each other on the Ibis ship has been now connected with a sense of equality of brotherhood, which further transcend the nature of humankind.

When you step on that ship, to go across the Black Water, you and your fellow transportees will become a brotherhood of your own: you will be your own village, your own family, your own caste. (Ghosh 2008: 308)

Conceptualizing translation as a means to transfer is visualized, when one of the characters Deeti has transferred her pantheon from land to sea in her Ibis voyage. The process of transformation "signifies as a "transfer", a "carrying over", or a "bearing across", as it were, the abyss of difference and death, both physical and cultural, as well as linguistic." (Luo 2013: 382)

At the point of merging of cultures brings intercultural tension, which further examined by Bhabha, who argues in favour of double vision that individuals such as migrants and social minorities are becoming accustomed to. This concept of "in-between" leads to seeking of a Third Space which can neither be located to the First nor the Third World. This imaginative space appears to be shaping relative competence via expressing through different languages. And, as Bhabha states, the Third Space is also the potential location and starting point for postcolonial translation strategies:

It is that Thrid Space, though unrepresentable in itself, which constitutes the discursive conditions of enunciation that ensures that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized and read anew. (Bhabha 1994: 55)

The idea of cultural translation, with reference to the enterprises of translation as a whole, would show that its own role has constantly evolved in the light of the socio-political context. It has been constantly expanded the scope "writing as translation" by innovatively interpreting creative writing to address the different social issues. Homi Bhabha, in the last chapter of his book *The Location of Culture* (1994), titled "How newness enters the world: Postmodern space, postcolonial times and the trials of cultural translation" brings out the point that the literary texts are pre-eminent examples of cultural translation. While defying the idea of inclusiveness about the idea of cultural translation Harish Trivedi in his insightful article, "Translating Culture vs.Cultural Translation (1998), explains the idea of Bhabha as a more elusive manner of translation;

firstly, that he does not at all by this term mean literary translation involving two texts from two different languages and cultures, and secondly, that what he means by translation instead is the process and condition of human migrancy, by evoking an irresistibly alliterative and beguiling, mantra-like phrase that Bhabha elsewhere uses more than once, what he is talking about is the "translational transnational". (5)

#### **CONCLUSION**

In the writings of Ghosh the use of different languages shape the characters and their identities with various levels of linguistic distinctiveness. Being as a first installment of Ibis trilogy and an instrument of transformation, the place of Ibis in the great Indian Ocean becomes a place of contestation of re-imagining. The transformation of their new identities indicates the displacement of local to global—instead of losing family, their presence makes an extended family not bound by caste but by shared experiences and the creation of new rituals. Thus Indian English literatures contain the national identity and linguistic distinctiveness. Such nativization of thought brings the concept of acculturation. The creativity in these writers are not the formal combination of two or more underlying language designs, but also as a creation of cultural, aesthetic, societal and literary norms. The sense of creativity in their writings contains different contexts of situations. These different contexts of situations refer to different kind of nativization of the thought process. The range of saying and the levels of meaning are distinct, and one has to establish renewal of connection with the context of situation. The reader has also a creative role in interpreting the text. These creative expressions demand identification with the literary sensibility of the bilingual in tune with the ways of saying and the levels of new meaning. These situations create the context-free international varieties.

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