



Transcultural Literature, Nationalism and its Adequacy in World Literatures: Pedagogical Requirements

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Abstract

This paper discusses that transcultural literary theories have been materialized through time, though its labeling and adequacy has been debatable. However, transcultural literature has now become significant with the issue of world literature. The present paper offers wide-ranging information of the collective worth of a transcultural perception in the genus of comparative literature and modern literary theories. This paper also analyzes the contemporary understanding of literatures across the globe and gives an indication on how transcultural kinds of literature can contribute to the development of societies.

Keywords

Transcultural literary studies, transcultural perception, modern interpretation, post-colonial theories, social prototypes

With the devolution of canon due to globalization, literatures created in country identified as National literature is facing innumerable experiments to construct their own style and themes to multidimensional cultural and social prototypes (Thomsen, Mapping). In a way, a transformation is happening within the universal ecumenism of literacies where new designs of relations, as well as characterizations of personality and individuality, are expressed through new ingenious inventive and fictional progressions.

In the last decade, scholars considered that political, social and economical factors immensely affected literature. These factors have rapidly been changing from time to time; therefore now literary parameters need deliberation in New Literatures in English, represented by the works of Amish Tripathi, Monika Ali, Maxine H Kingston, Hanif Qureshi, and J K Kogwa. Works produced by such writers demand from scholars to explore theoretical domains of subjects like anthropology, history, philosophy, and comparative literatures. Formation of these domains under one text has led to include trans-cultural and transnational approaches in literary studies (Helff, Totosy de Zepetnek).

Fernando Ortiz established the concept of *transculturation*, further, it was developed by several scholars and was named The Nordic Network for Literary Transculturation in Northern Europe. In Germany, various analogous concepts were developed by Frank Schulze-Engler, Sissy Helf and many more. Transcultural Literature has developed on the principles of universality where an author's space or his belongingness no longer remains his personal or local. Interpretation and various methods applied by readers decide the *connect* of the work. Schulze –Engler says on the subject,

Transcultural English Studies... stands for a genuinely transnational and transcultural perspective that is capable of encompassing both the literary practice of writers who can no longer be related to one particular 'national literary space' and the complex articulations that link individual works of literature not only to local or regional modernities with their specific social, linguistic and cultural constellations, but also to the worldwide field of English-language literatures and specific forms of communicative interaction and political conflict engendered by it. (Introduction, xvi)

Although both of networks developed in Europe and Germany focus on the Englishness of it. However, through these glasses, any literature can be judged written or produced with the spirit of 'transcultural' and 'transnational'.

Realizing the importance of cross-cultural awareness, for an understanding of the literature of new worlds various universities have established institutes where students

can learn ‘writing about cultures’. In such institutes, one is made skilled in interpretation through the magnifying glass of diaspora, historicism, sociology and cultural localities in the global world. Attending such centers enables one to interpret the world not only through *glocal* trans-cultural awareness but also for self-realities, migration and regional communities. The University of Heidelberg in its Cluster of Excellence, operating from 2007, is running a project, ‘Asia and Europe in a Global Context: The Dynamics of Transculturality’. This Centre is focused on cultural dialogues happening in Asia or between Asia. To understand transnational cultures and its impact on literatures Pennsylvania State University came with the Center of Transcultural Studies which aimed at ‘new forms of cultural understanding for a rapidly internationalizing world.’

Keefe opines that there is a need of revisiting multiculturalism through transcultural lenses. Keefe says that literature must be produced with new forms and contents which crosses the ‘boundaries of ethnic cultures and groups.’ Keefe’s findings ornate that local literatures are fixed and not unitary, such literature does not initiate universality. Modern new world literature is written without boundaries or new literature defy the concept of ‘locale’ and ‘genre’ because of this they bring universality in reading and interpretation. This is the reason when one reads Alice Munro, Doris Lessing or Jhumpa Lahiri’s work on condition of women through their novels or short stories, it is very easy to find out that portrayal or challenges faced by them seem universal for all women across the globe.

Fulvio Caccia supports Keefe’s point of view and says, it is a concept ‘to capture the hybrid realities of diaspora and globalization’. Trans-culturalism is the latest concept in continuation of a genre where multiculturalism comes from. *The Waste Land* by T S Eliot is such a text till date. Theme, imagery and cultural details included in *The Waste Land* by Eliot may not acquire universality by vision and interpretation of the text but it attains its universality by the use of language and portrayal of literary works in it.

Transcultural literature unites and expresses the convergent nature of communities ignoring the various chasms between the *West* and *others*, the *colonizer* and the *colonized*, the *oppressor* and the *oppressed*, the *immigrant* and the *habitat*, *national* and *ethnic*. Transcultural literature reshapes factors of conventional boundaries of national spirit. It targets to remodel *national collective imaginaries* in an endeavor to the multinational vision of the new age of universal and supranational commercial, political and cultural processes.

It should be focused that in modern times popularity or existence of a book is determined by *controlling conversations* and networks of communications, namely: market guidelines and the decision behind publishing or not publishing it, translate it or not to translate it, circulate it for global readers or local readers. However, in spite of all these hurdles faced, writers of modern times are much aware and consistent about writing for *global mobility, transnational patterns, and lifestyles*. Their works are creative in depicting emerging trends of transcultural spirit. Literatures produced in modern times are creative enough to redesign the understanding of ethnic, financial and societal features in order to change the literary discourses related to immigrants, post-colonial diasporic and trans-national designs.

Held (1999) believes that 'state are institutions, nations are cross-class collectivities which share a sense of identity and collective political fate on the basis of real, imagined and constructed cultural, linguistic and linguistics commonalities.' Experts of literature have started to believe that the concept of national literatures has changed due to complex economic global patterns, multilevel agreement of trade, intellectual shares, and political sovereignty. Beck (2002) admits 'the nation-state is transforming into a type of political organization or apparatus involving more multiple and overlapping jurisdictions, set of identities, and social orders that border no longer really contain.

Transcultural literature has its own specificities. Transcultural literature enables one to see and understand the *transnational world scale* along with the local scale of the community. It brings awareness and expresses the interest of transcultural realities and sensibilities but it is different because of canon or cultural tradition.

Foner (2000) expresses the context of transnational migration, 'the focus of the family is important and analyzing families from point of view of national canon is not new. Migration leaves an indelible effect on family and familial relations. Past creates the effect of future-past on diasporic families.' Themes often expressed in transnational literatures have been of nostalgia, belonging to the homeland, adjustment with host countries, assimilating and integrating, exile, pain, and trauma and developing of connections. Hartley (1995) and Babacan (2006) have expressed that, younger generation of transnational and transcultural families are unaware of the impact of the migration and their elder members of the family. It has led to interconnectedness in contemporary family relations. This spirit reflects in the literature predicated by writers of such countries.

Writers of Indian Diaspora have often been including the culture of their *first country* whether it is Jhumpa Lahiri, Salman Rushdie or V S Naipaul. They include discourses on marriage, intimacy, mate selection and differences caused in relations. These writers quite often raise issues related to ‘diminishing parental authority, increasing the influence of fellow colleagues, difficulties with cultural and ethnic heritage including loss of language’ (Singh 2006).

Schulze-Engler (2009) writes:

The idea of ‘locating’ culture and literature exclusively in the context of ethnicities or notions is rapidly losing plausibility throughout an ‘English-speaking world’... New Literatures in English themselves have long since become a transcultural field with blurred boundaries.

Transcultural literature presents the notion of ethnic morality. Transcultural literature is based on specific mobility know-how ‘migration-expertise’; it portrays that the inhabitants of these places, so strongly marked by migration, have made it their essential activity. Transcultural literature links the global to the whole range of great different local networking places without hierarchy between these different hubs. The role of the border is very much curtailed by transcultural literature whose essential element of formation is to know how to cross the border itself. Foner (1997) has shown for immigrants in New York, both today and at the turn of the twentieth century, modern-day transnational literature is not altogether new but instead has a long history.

Trans-national literature may be seen by its supporters as a fairer system that allows people to truly express who they are within a society, that is more tolerant and that adapts better to social issues. Experts of this field argue that in societies where multiculturalism has been adopted and promoted their ethnic equality has risen up. They have got an equal ethnic identity and in such community differences of ethnicity are tolerated better. They also argue that studying transcultural text develops a better system because culture is always changing. For instance, the culture of the United Kingdom has not arisen from one ethnic group, but from the ‘immigration’ and influence of Anglo-Saxons, Vikings, Normans and so on. Therefore, it can be said that culture is not one definable thing based on one country, race or religion, but is the result of multiple factors that change as the world changes.

Issues of transcultural and transnational literature often debate whether the concept of *trans*, ideal of benignly co-existing cultures that interrelate and influence one another, and yet remain distinct, is sustainable, paradoxical or even desirable. Many

European nations, previously synonymous with a distinctive cultural identity of their own, lose out to enforced transnational identities and eventually get the host nation's distinct culture eroded gradually. The second opinion is that transnational literature leads directly to restrictions in the rights and freedoms for certain groups and such, it is bad for democracy, and against universal human rights.

Studying of *transnational literature* is an essential part of understanding literary works. Although such studies may become controversial, many teachers teach *transcultural* and *transnational* texts in class, as a way of opening minds to diverse cultures from around the world. There are many criteria that can be used to evaluate transnational literature. Some of the more important include whether the culture is portrayed correctly, whether the setting for the past is accurate, whether proper language is depicted, and whether the author is using offensive language or prejudiced tone. It is important that students of all backgrounds be exposed to a variety of trans-cultural literature. Allowing this will allow students to gain a better understanding of all types of cultures and to develop respect for their peers who have different backgrounds.

Novels and stories by today's author provide a wealth of cultural diversity. By using these texts in the classroom teachers can promote both understanding and pride among their students. These texts are terrific tools for helping students explore geography, history, literature, science, and art but most of all, it helps bring students of all background together. Books like *Anne Frank: Beyond the Diary, By Secret Railway*, *Julie of the Wolves*, *Maniac Magee*, *Number the Stars*, *Slave Dancer* and *Souder* deal many issues of transcultural texts.

Twenty-first century Indian English novelists reveal a wide variety of transnational representations of modern Indian lives. Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* (2008), the Man Booker Prize winner, is the story of an overambitious chauffeur who killed his own master and goes up the ladder. V. S. Naipaul's *Magic Seeds* (2003), the story of a listless wanderer in search of meaning in life, suggest that there are no magic seeds or short-cuts in life to success. Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake* (2003) reveals the Ganguli couple's immigrant experience contrasted with the acculturation of their American born children. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *One Amazing Thing* describes the plight of nine persons of different nationalities trapped under a building due to an earthquake.

In a similar pattern, one may find stray references to the use of Indian myths and traditions in writers like Salman Rushdie, Shashi Tharoor, and Gita Mehta. *Midnight's*

Children follows the technique of *Panchatantra*; First Indian book of allegory and fables, telling the story within the story and looking at the reality from different perspectives. It also adopts the techniques of *Humsanama* of Mughal Empire, a painting done by seven to eight painters from various parts of India and yet providing the necessary unity in diversity without tending to be a hotchpotch. Shashi Tharoor's dexterous fusing of Indian epic *The Mahabharata* and its characters with the modern Indian polity, Gita Mehta's use of Indian myth appears to be nativistic.

Fortunately, teachers today by discussing such texts in class are much more interested in promoting transnational literature and understanding in classrooms. By using books that are culturally aware and by educating their students about differences, teachers are helping their students to celebrate trans nationalities not to fear them. Books such as *Chato's Kitchen*, *Hawk, I'm Your Brother*, *Lon Po Po*, *Mufaro's Beautiful Daughters*, *Sweet Clara*, and the *Freedom Quilt* may be useful for teachers who are interested in promoting cultural diversity in their classrooms. For each book, there is a brief summary of the contents, followed by ideas for activities teacher might use to expand on the material. These storybooks contain tales about children from all sorts of different backgrounds.

It is high time that transnational and transcultural literature of different languages with a view to relating them to the matters of culture, ideologically, nationally, ethnicity, social class and/or gender as part of the Indian ethos. It will enable us to explore the deep structures of meaning, values systems, beliefs underlying art and literature. Transnationalism questions the dominant ways of seeing things and presents alternative views of the world. An insurrectionary imagination driven by its hunger for new processes of art and protest is at the heart of multiculturalism or cultural activism.

The experts in different Indian languages should identify major poets, novelists, short-stories writers and playwrights who with their transnational and transcultural have contributed to the social and cultural change of the world. The focus should be on gender studies in different languages of the world and their contribution to *transnationality*, their attitudes, and beliefs questioning the male authority and existing cultural practices to bring about women's emancipation.

The focus on transcultural literature studies should deal with social injustice, class, caste, gender discrimination vis-s-vis cultural practices and beliefs. The studies should examine how multiculturalism of the trans-national literature has questioned the

dominant cultural, religious practices and beliefs. Interviews with Dalit creative writers of India by foreign academicians are a good example for such studies.

We have to focus on the ideological issues of gender, religion and social movements which affect trans-cultural literature with a view to bring the cultural diversity to our country. It is hoped that such study will enlighten the students and scholars about the notion of world literature, the ideological and cultural deep structures lying behind them, and the way the transnational and trans-cultural literature have questioned the established beliefs and systems to uphold humanism based on the values of liberty, equality, and fraternity.

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