



A STUDY IN DEETI'S TRANSGRESSION IN AMITAV GHOSH'S "SEA OF POPPIES"

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Abstract:

Sometimes a man has no choice but to transgress the moral or legal barriers to survive. Only when he takes a bend in his course of fulfilling his goal can he be termed by society as transgressing. Transgression both perpetuates and undermines ideology in a constantly evolving dynamic relationship. In this paper I like to present that transgressions reform or redefine the self of Deeti in Amitav Ghosh's novels – 'Sea of Poppies' and Ma Cho in 'The Glass Palace'. A close study of Ghosh's novels seems to bring to our notice that exuberance of the lives of the marginalized classes of people are expressed in transgression. The present paper will show that transgression brings about a significant transformation in their identity and cultural orientation.

Keywords: transgression, self, alter, experience

Introduction:

As such, transgression connotes going across limits/ boundaries/ fences erected by society. *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English* describes transgression as going "beyond the limit of what is morally or legally acceptable." No fixed cause can be attributed to transgressing one's so-called socially determined moral periphery. The will to transgress encapsulates the limitless capacity of the subject in crossing boundaries and still retaining the self or allow reformation of the self. According to Jung, the Self is one of several archetypes. It signifying the coherent whole, unifying both the conscious and unconscious mind of a person. It is the product of individuation, which is defined as the process of integrating one's personality.

Transgression both perpetuates and undermines ideology in a constantly evolving dynamic relationship. Notion of transgression is not a fixed one. It is coloured by the changing attributes of persons or society. What is normal to one society can be immoral to other. The behavior considered socio-culturally transgressive in one age, may not be so in another, as the culture is ever on the flow. For instance, homosexuality which was once regarded as perverted against God's law, certain groups of people now- a-a - days rather than condemning it are quite liberal and humane to regard it an alternative sexual choice. Similarly in India extra-marital affair which was previously considered a great crime has been legalized.

Ngugi WaThiong'o states, "Culture carries, particularly through orature and literature, the entire body of values by which we come to perceive ourselves and our place in the world. How people perceive themselves affects how they look at their culture, at their politics and at their social production of wealth, at their entire relationship to nature and to other beings." With proper perception or knowledge of Self, one's relationship

with other may undergo mixed transformations. Bakhtin propounds the same when he states that the other is necessary to accomplish a perception of the self because the other is necessary to accomplish a perception of the self. Thus, the mixture of cultures and identities on a global scale implies that there are innumerable ways of being in the world. It can only be enriched by the fact that, “*No one today is purely one thing*” (Said). The present study encodes a modest attempt of critical study of how transgressions reform or redefine the self of Deeti in Amitav Ghosh’s novels – ‘*Sea of Poppies*’ and Ma Cho in ‘*The Glass Palace*’. It foregrounds the social and psychological conditions behind transgressions.

One of the most significant writers of his generation, Amitav Ghosh has earned international accolades for his novels of immense significance. Published in 2008, *Sea of Poppies* evolves at the background of the opium war between Britain and China from 1839 to 1842 and is the first volume of Ibis trilogy on opium trade and its effect on the lives of a group of ordinary people. Ibis the schooner has been used for the deportation of opium and *girmityas*. Deeti and other indentured laourers have been transported to Mauritius. Before the launch of large scale opium trade, Deeti’s villagers used to spend an idyllic life on the outskirts of Gazipur. Cultivation of Poppy has not been a compulsion, but a luxury then. The scenario soon changes with the British East India Company signing *asami* contracts with the farmers forcing them to cultivate poppy seeds in place of other crops. Fertile banks of the river Ganges have been made to convert into poppy fields.

The Predicament of Deeti’s Transgression in *Sea of Poppies*:

Ghosh introduces the character of Deeti as a victim of opium. Drugged with opium at her wedding night by her mother-in-law, she has been raped by her brother-in-law and consummated in place of her impotent husband. Deeti is left with the option of either to immolate herself as *Sati* or subject herself to more blatant rapes by the brother-in-law. Her resentment for her brother in law is so intense tht she tells that she will burn herself on the pyre of her husband than give herself to his carnal desires. It is Kalua, the untouchable, who rescues Deeti from her miserable predicament. Ghosh narrates, “*Kalua, the driver of the ox-cart, was a giant of a man but he made no move to help his passenger and was careful to keep his face hidden from him: he was of the leather- workers' cast and Hukum Singh, as a high cast Rajput believed that the site of his face would bode ill for the day ahead.*” Deeti too like a typical higher caste woman used to shun his sight. But now by irony of fate Deeti and Kalua are compelled to escape from the fury of the villagers since they cannot accept Deeti’s relation to an outcaste. To avoid being discovered by Deeti's in-laws, she and Kalua turn into indentured servants, travelling on the Ibis. At Ibis Deeti used to identify herself with “*Kabutri ki ma*”, Kabutri's mother. This sort of identification is understandably very dangerous since it is infected with the possibility of her revelation by her brother in-law. With little alteration she adopts her new name as Aditi. The important factor of transformation of identity is caused not by her self-will but by circumstances. The change of her identity puts her at transitional phase and liminal character. However the way she renames herself is remarkable. In mythology Aditi is the mother of many gods including Lord Vishnu in his dwarf form. Aditi meaning unbound as well as unfettered, Deeti's adoption of her new name is a befitting one, considering that she has released herself from the rigours of social constraints. Her presence of mind makes her utter her new name Aditi in a raised voice that kalua becomes acquainted with her new name. She identifies herself as wife of Madhu, Kalua's altered name. Deeti adds new story to her relation with Kalua that this man of mighty power has been his husband since her teenage.

Humanity and love triumphs over caste prejudices in the case of Deeti and Kalua. Undergoing harrowing ordeal of her loveless life with her impotent husband and being sexually exploited by her in-law Chandan Singh, Deeti drops of the fetters of caste and finds redemption from her deathlike situation in life by the very untouchable man Kalua, who has been that sort of man who have been feared be coupled even by Hirabai, a well known baiji, in a sexual game as organized by three young landlords of Beneras.

Thus *Sea of Poppies* becomes a saga of a typical suffering Indian woman who has to endure sexually insinuating jibes from her in law. Bhyro Sing, the Ibis captain wounds Deeti with the poisonous sharp arrows of words of debauchery when her licentious craving is left unattended - “*And bring shame on myself. Acknowledge a tie with a woman like you who's run away with a filth sweeper. An overheated bitch who's brought same on her family, her village her, in laws? What does anyone want from a whore?...*” We can notice an undue encroachment on Deeti’s personal life and properties by others such as her brother-in-law and the Seth. Deeti has been entrapped by the Seth into impending bankruptcy through debt where “*his rates were such that her debt would double every six months; in a few years, all the land would be forfeit.*” Deeti

fighters against social oppression and sexual exploitations by her brother-in-law. Taking advantage of his brother's illness, Chandan Singh sneaks into her house and starts sexually abusing her.

Deeti becomes subject to social and sexual exploitation. It is Kalua's heroic feat that saves her from the funeral pyre of her husband. Deeti regards her escape with Kalua through the river as rebirth. Here we get two sides of Deeti, Deeti transgressed and Deeti transgressing. Deeti's daughter Kabutri is an offspring of transgression.

The succession of events in Deeti's life finds expression through the archetypes. They help Deeti get a deeper insight into life. Primordial images mediate Deeti's psyche and the world outside resulting in her inner growth through the process of individuation. She gradually becomes harmonious, mature, responsible. At the expense of her earlier harrowing ordeal, she is educated and feels reborn. She realizes that destiny plays a crucial part in a greater social system. She regards her previous life as star written. It has been demanded of her. She has no option of altering it. She is now elated at the prospect of living a free life with Kalua. Yet her new life is tinged with the cares memories of her past one. It is always contaminated by shadows and fears of her previous life. While her good and freer nature is set on the necessity to disrupt the restrictive norms of society for her survival, Deeti's lack of prudence and circumspection is evident in her signing Seth's agreement.

Deeti and Kalua live in continual hiding lest they be discovered and killed. They exchange garlands and marry. They enjoy a life of warm love and mutual trust. Once uprooted from her home, stars and constellations of the night sky recalled the faces and likeness of the people she remembered. Her rootlessness makes her romantic and nostalgic. Faced with a series of crisis, Deeti's circumstances question social constructs and allow Deeti to act to progress or retract; as a result a liminal narrative is created.

Conclusion:

Anshuman A Mondal comments that Ghosh writes from "*the ambivalent relationship to modernity of the so-called 'developing' or 'Third' World; the formation and reformation of identities in colonial and postcolonial societies*" Ghosh is sanguine about the concept of the individual. He is set to exploring the labyrinthine ways of self puzzlement and emerging out of a secular self. Ghosh derives his interest in self formation to VS Naipaul.

Faced with a series of crisis, Deeti's circumstances question social constructs and allow Deeti to act to progress or retract; as a result a dynamic narrative of structure and liminality is created. Deeti and indentured laborers are liminal. Deeti's journey is a journey towards individuation. She gradually becomes harmonious, mature, responsible. The reformation of Deeti's old self is subject to modification. We notice her change of viewpoints and making sense of chaos of her life's epiphany. While Deeti remains the same person her identity is unstable. She successfully comes out of impending danger of being a concubine of Chandan Singh and her escape with Kalua opens up bright possibilities in her life.

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