

TRANSNATIONALISM IN SALMAN RUSHDIE'S *THE ENCHANTRESS OF FLORENCE*: A VICTIM'S PERSPECTIVE

Dr. J. Elizabeth Lucy

Associate professor
Department of English
Holy Cross College (Autonomous),
Nagercoil -629004
Tamilnadu, India

Abstract

An attempt has been made in this critical article to articulate the tragic circumstances faced by the victim captives of war in Salman Rushdie's *The Enchantress of Florence* (2008) and the author's attempt to reverse the traditional way of treating the marginalized who are at the periphery. Rushdie proves himself to be a voice of the voiceless migrants and in this novel, he highlights the strategies of subversion of the West. QaraKoz and the yellow-haired traveller remain social and cultural exiles in the transnational context as they cross the boundaries of cultural ethics and values..

Keywords:- Cultural ethics and values, voiceless migrant, traditional.

The term "transnationalism" was popularized in the early 20th century by writer Randolph Bourne to describe "a new way of thinking about relationships between cultures" (Wikipedia). Salman Rushdie's *The Enchantress of Florence* is a postcolonial novel depicting the transnational migrants and the cultural alienation felt and experienced by almost all the characters belonging to the two worlds- the East and the West. The novelist reveals the migrants' belonging to two cultures and the pathetic situation in which both the cultures are alien to them. Rushdie depicts a society which consists of people with different cultural backgrounds as they belong to the worlds of the East and the West. He portrays the cultural pluralism that the characters encounter in the land of settlement but they do not enjoy rightful status. Transnationalism leads to cultural pluralism. " 'Cultural pluralism' is a term used when smaller groups within a larger society maintain their unique cultural identities, and their values and practices are accepted by the wider culture provided they are consistent with the laws and values of the wider society" (Wikipedia). Cultural pluralism may lead to multiculturalism. Multiculturalism is an ideology that includes ethnic and cultural diversity and cosmopolitanism. The migrants, the marginalized expatriate community, can only exercise intermediary position which migrants occupy between the culture of the host country, and their own mother

country..Thus,cross cultural crisis is an inevitable scenario in the postmodern world literature. Migrancy has become a globalized phenomenon and thus increasingly important.

This has directly influenced the literary culture of the Diaspora as migration deals with the crossing of frontiers which are geographical as well as linguistic. The writers share a diasporic consciousness and historical connections because as migrants they place themselves in a critical position of bearing two cultures, one to which they belong and the other to which they are aliens. Migrancy assembles the East and the West together and enables cosmopolitanism, which gives a state of in-betweenness for the immigrants. The immigrant writer Rushdie and the migrant characters created by him in his fiction cross the borders of their homelands for a better living standard but they experience cultural crisis as they confront different cultures in the lands of aliens who subjugate and ill-treat them as subalterns. Hence the displaced, rootless and disintegrated migrants find it difficult to exist in an alien land and long for the homeland searching for their roots.

The migrants in *The Enchantress of Florence* face the mixing of cultural norms. Their expectations in the country of their settlement perfectly lead to hybridity and hybridization. The representative post-colonial author Rushdie's delineation of the cross cultural crisis due to migration or exile is an inevitable scenario in the postmodern world literature as it has directly influenced the literary culture of the Diaspora. Rushdie shares a diasporic consciousness and historical connections because as migrants they place themselves in a critical position of bearing two cultures, one to which they belong and the other to which they do not belong. The enchantress crosses frontiers which are geographical as well as linguistic due to a state of in-betweenness for her. She experiences cultural crisis as she confronts different cultures in the lands of aliens who subjugate and ill treat them as subalterns. Hence the displaced, rootless and disintegrated migrants find it difficult to exist in an alien land and long for the homeland searching for their roots.

With the dawn of colonialism and imperialism, foreign forces shake the deep rooted culture of the colonised nations. The intrusion of the Western culture either by force or by situation naturally becomes a threat to the native culture of the East. The cross cultures reduce the affected individuals to the state of a subaltern as marginalised individuals remain inactive to alien cultures. The subaltern position of migrant workers, immigrant labourers and powerless women remain marginalized and undergo cultural conflict in a multi-cultural pluralistic society. And it is this cultural alienation that the author Rushdie deals with in his novels. This study examines the precariousness and vulnerability of Indian migrants due to fear and trauma faced by them as they are treated as subalterns in alien lands where strong dominant culture with elements of nationalism, a sporting culture and an artistic culture (inclusive in a pluralist culture) practised "by unique groups not only co-exist side by side, but also consider qualities of other groups as traits worth having in the dominant culture. A successful pluralistic society will place strong expectations of integration on its members rather than expectations of assimilation. A society that lacks a strong dominant culture can easily pass practising cultural pluralism to multiculturalism without any intentional steps being taken by that society" (Wikipedia). The author draws the marginalized to the centre by voicing their problems in literature.

Rushdie's *The Moor's Last Sigh*, *The Enchantress of Florence*, *Midnight's Children*, and his collection of short stories *East West* in one way or the other exhibit the immense emotions of displacement. *The Enchantress of Florence* is analysed under a subaltern perspective so as to voice the pain of alienation. The Western civilizations consider themselves superior over the native civilization and they make it a principle to impose their power not only on the basis of

economic and military superiority, but focusing mainly on their moral superiority over the natives. These concepts are given a deep study to analyse the cultural subjugation of Indian victims in alien countries and in native homelands where the cultural subjugation is deeply rooted by the colonial and imperial powers.

The novel *The Enchantress of Florence* begins with a yellow haired foreigner who comes to India to the court of Akbar the Great, and he claims himself to be the child of the lost Mughal Princess QaraKoz or Lady Black Eyes. The exiles of QaraKoz to the West force her to face dual cultures which reiterate her pathetic position as a homeless wanderer. QaraKoz puts on a new self as a shield to her inner self which yearns to join the Mughal Empire. This is a sign of bi-cultural living in an alien country and Rushdie succeeds in his attempt of bringing the two worlds- the East and the West together. The important themes analysed in the novel are migration and the resulting cultural crisis due to frequent displacements. Such themes highlight the difficulty to live amidst different cultures. Migration infers the crossing of geographical, linguistic and cultural frontiers as well as almost any kind of frontiers of the mind. Rushdie, in his novel, *The Enchantress of Florence* reveals the migrants' belonging to two cultures and the pathetic situation in which both the cultures discard them. Rushdie proves himself worthy of presenting both the worlds of the East and the West in a most interesting manner.

The story actually deals with a yellow haired foreigner who comes to India to the court of Akbar the Great, claiming himself to be the child of the lost Mughal Princess QaraKoz or Lady Black Eyes. He calls himself to be "Mogordell' Amore" or in other words, the Mughal of Love. His other name is Niccolo Vespucci and he narrates the story of his birth and that of the life of the lost princess of the Mughal Empire. His narration reveals the painful stories of lost cultural heritage, home and roots in numerous migrations of his mother who as a little girl became a pawn in her brother's political defeat. QaraKoz's first exile, along with her servant Mirror and her elder sister Khanzada, is inevitable and forced one as they are taken as the prisoners of Shaibani Khan as a result of Babar's defeat in the battle. Though Shaibani Khan claims Khanzada alone, Khanzada, forces QaraKoz to accompany her. QaraKoz, therefore, becomes a "sacrificial offering, a human booty, a living pawn like the slave girls" (155). She is grasped by the clutches of power. She could not escape, but only cry lamenting her misery. So after the fall of Herat, "The Florence of the East" (157), Shaibani Khan displaced the prisoners, "the three lost creatures..." (156) to Samarkhand. Khanzada marries Shaibani Khan and bears his child.

Shah Ismail of Persia defeats Shaibani Khan and announces the freedom of the prisoners after killing Shaibani Khan and his son borne by Khanzada. Khanzada returns to the Kingdom of Babar, whereas QaraKoz refuses to return to the native land and stays there as the wife of the Shah Ismail of Persia, "who believed himself to be a God" (273). The sense of displacement and the need for a sense of belonging make her rootless and hence homeless. Edward Said argues in *Culture and Imperialism* (1994), that the idea of home is inherent in the experience of exile: "Exile is predicted on the existence of, love for, and a real bond with one's native place" (Said 407).

Argalia, the Turk, the Italian commanding officer defeats Shah Ismail of Persia and QaraKoz's second exile begins. Then pressurized by circumstances, she surrenders herself and the Mirror to Argalia and soon she is no more QaraKoz, and her identity changes as Argalia names her as to be Angelica, "the seraphic name by which her new worlds would know her." (283). The unknown world of the West is quite new to QaraKoz.

Argalia, was put in the children's prison camp at Uskib by Sultan of Ottoman. Young boys were put into slavery into the "instruments of the Sultan's will" (225). These children are

stripped from their native religion Christianity and “obliged to put on Islam like a new pair of pyjamas” (225). Their original names were taken from them and their names turned to “Abdullas or Abdulmomins or other names beginning with *abd* , which meant slave and indicated their status in the world” (229). Argalia’s Orient masters have difficulty in pronouncing his name, and so he decides his change of name. Argalia became the Sultan’s favourite. He came to be recognized as a “superhuman being” (234) and honoured to be the “*the rank of Wielder of the Enchanted Lance*”. And this further leads him to be free man once again and came to be known as “*Pasha Arcalia, the Turk*” (235). The cultural differences transformed Nino Argalia into the “Oriental Pasha”, “praying in the Janissaries’ mosque” (235). The Eastern culture converts Argalia of the West into an Oriental personality, “the new Italian Pasha” (239), which are beyond imagination. Rushdie very efficiently elevates a bi-cultural living order experienced by almost all the characters in their frequent displacements.

On his arrival in Akbar’s court, Argalia is not accepted and he is driven away as a stranger. Again he is no more a welcome guest of the East, as the new Sultan Selim the Grim condemns Argalia to take the Mughal princess as “a spoil of war” (286). He is declared to be a traitor by the Ottoman Empire because of his unbelongingness. A death sentence is pronounced against him if he fails to overtake Selim’s “fleet-footed head gardener” (288) in a great running race. There is no question of escape and in the words of Argalia, “‘If I run away with you’, he said, ‘Selim will hunt us down and murder us like dogs. Instead, I must stand trial, and after I am condemned I must win the Gardener’s Race’ ” (287). QaraKoz attempts to deceive the gardener. Argalia escapes the death sentence but lack of a sense of belonging haunts him. Once again he undergoes exile with QaraKoz towards the West to his home town Florence. On his return to the native land Florence in Italy, he is no one, but a foreign traveller who had no trace of Western resemblance. The natives look at him and his two beauties of the East with at most amazement as the aliens entered the city surrounded by their well-armed Janissaries. “A traveler coming this way at sunset- this traveler, coming this way now, along the road from the sea, his narrow eyes, white skin and long black hair giving him the look not of a returning native but of an exotic creature out of some Far Eastern legend, a *samourai*.” (297). QaraKoz’s unbelongingness due to the compulsion to exist with dual cultures makes her an alien in Florence.

QaraKoz is admired by the people as a charming princess in the beginning as they believed her to be a possessor of enchantments. But however, dual cultures reiterate her pathetic position of a “homeless” (324) wanderer. As she laments her fate, “May be this was what it was to be a Mughal, to roam, to scavenge, to depend on others, to fight without success, to be lost” (324). This verbal resistance reveals her powerless position in a powerful dominant political and social structure of the West. In the “alien world” (324), QaraKoz puts on a new self as a shield to her inner self which yearns to join the Mughal Empire. She is caught up in a pathetic situation because she wishes to recite the verses of Ali-ShirNava’i in her mother tongue Chaghatai “Quietly, to herself” (324) but she is not free to do it. The only remaining trace of her past life is her mother tongue, which is the only “link to her true, abandoned self” (324). The subversive system subjugates the victims. As she prefers to live with her captor, the enraged brother Babar takes steps to erase any trace of her from India. Hence she is unknown in her native land.

QaraKoz’s wishes to regain her past identity as she becomes aware of her denied rights and self-dignity. She dreams thus:

One day her brother would rule an empire and she would return as a queen in triumph. Or her brother’s children would greet her own. The blood ties could not be broken. She had made herself anew but what she had seen ,

she would remain, and her heritage would be hers and her children's to reclaim. (325)

QaraKoz, born of a royal family is forced by historical events to live the life of an exile in the ordinary accommodation extended by Il Machia, the friend of Argalia. Later she is given a "new home" (340) in the Palace of Cocchi del Nero. By the time she is considered to be a supernatural being and welcomed everywhere in the city for her lovely presence. "*Mongol! Mogor!* The glamorous, alien words ran round the crowd engendering an almost erotic combination of excitement and terror" (348). Her enchantments proved positive as everything flourished at her very sight. It is undeniable that she has immigrated to the East "in the hope of forging a union between the great cultures of Europe and the East" (349). And to keep to these words of Argalia, QaraKoz proves that she is "*a princess not only of faraway Indy or Cathay, but of our own Florence too*" (351). Her proactive and reactive actions show her bi-cultural living in an alien country. Beneath her "Eastern Wisdom" (360), she strives to balance the culture "beyond the borders of her known world" (362). James C. Scott, commenting on the subaltern resistance, observes: "They are the stubborn bedrock upon which other forms of resistance may grow." (273)

When Giuliano de' Medici, the ruler of Florence dies, Lorenzo II comes to the throne. He addresses QaraKoz "in the harshest language possible" (291). He tells her "Peoplewonder about your own barrenness. Physician, heal thyself" (291). She is being treated as a witch. Lorenzo's closeness or intimacy with QaraKoz in his private quarters in the absence of Argalia, leads to his death and soon the people hold her witchcraft responsible for their ruler's death and they plan to kill her. "*Witch. She bewitched him. He lay with the witch and sickened and died. He was not sick before. Witchcraft. She gave him the Devil's disease. Witch, witch, witch.*" (296). Once she was their enchantress, and now she has been viewed as a witch.

Her short journey from "enchantress to witch" (297) and "unofficial patron saint" (297) makes Argalia die to save QaraKoz. She immigrates to Spain along with Ago Vespucci and "when the people of Florence discovered their flight their anger seemed to vanish" (301). Thus the enchantress could claim no country as her own and she has to battle for space in spite of being "*a princess not only of faraway Indy or Cathay, but of our own Florence too*" (278). Angelica borne of the mirror fathered by Ago also bears a boy child fathered by her own father Ago and this child is the yellow haired foreigner who claims to be the heir of the Mughal Empire. Akbar, is "a great force that moved history" (307) and "No single faith could contain him, nor any geographical territory" (307). He is distracted by the thoughts of imaginary Queen Jodha, "her sharp tongue, her beauty, her sexual expertise" (308). QaraKoz's "nostalgic gravity" (308) lures him as she is "a woman like a king" (309). "Mughal of Love" (321) has become Akbar's adviser and confidant.

Niccolo Vespucci comes to the court of Akbar to claim his ancestry. He is equally alienated in his own mother's land as the Indian nation disowns him and he is considered to be a foreigner. At the very beginning, he comes to tell the tale of the Enchantress of Florence but he is suspected because of his foreignness. To be an alien in another nation is awful and it is true in the case of Niccolo Vespucci. He is put for a trial of murder in the court of Akbar and though he overcomes the situation, it is terrible. "As if he were a corpse being readied for burial, he thought, a dumb corpse who could not tell his tale. There were no coffins in this unchristian land. He would be sewn into a shroud and flung without a name into a hole in the ground" (114). But it is amazing that as "months lengthened into years" (396), Niccolo Vespucci, the tall yellow-haired foreigner calls himself to be the Mughal of Love is no more a foreigner in the Eastern province. He has

completely gained the confidence of the Emperor Akbar and so he is no more alienated. So Niccolo Vespucci's gradual transformation into a Mughal can be considered as "a further step in the creation of a culture of inclusion" (400). And the very words, "If one foreigner could become a Mughal then so, in time, could all foreigners" (400) echoes the cosmopolitan adherence of the author.

QaraKoz's nostalgic thoughts about her 'home' is repeated several times in the novel and her words about the death of Argalia, "Atleast he died in his home town, defending what he loved" (421) reveal her alienation. Her constant belief of "the possibility of a homecoming" (425) finally comes to reality only after her death. Her arrival is nothing but "the return of a real woman from the dead" (409). She comes to the Empire where she belongs in the form of an imaginary woman and it is "the final proof that the hidden princess had really existed" (409). Thus she becomes a transnational woman. The West refuses to value the subaltern captives of the East and goes to any extent to marginalize them. An attempt has been made in this critical article to articulate the tragic circumstances faced by the victim captives of war and the author's attempt to reverse the traditional way of treating the marginalized who are at the periphery. So Rushdie proves himself to be a voice of the voiceless migrants and in this novel, he highlights the strategies of subversion of the West which "turn the gaze of the discriminated, back upon the eye of power" (Bhabha 159). QaraKoz and the yellow-haired traveller remain social and cultural exiles in the transnational context as they cross the boundaries of cultural ethics and values..

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