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**TRANSNATIONAL TRADE AND TRANSCULTURAL IN AMITAV GHOSH'S *FLOOD OF FIRE***

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**Lerince Baby Angela,**  
Ph. D. Research Scholar,  
School of English & Foreign Languages,  
Gandhigram Rural Institute-Deemed University – 624302,  
Tamil Nadu.

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Abstract

The phenomenon of transnationalism and transculturalism is the outcome of globalization. Two schools of thought manipulate the discourse of transnationalism and globalization. In "Notes on Globalization as a Philosophical Issue," Jameson states that an optimistic "decentering and proliferation of differences" and a pessimistic "unification and standardization" are "indeed the two antithetical features of that elephant we are blindly attempting to characterize" (66). The term 'transnational capital' is the hegemonic part of capital ruling over the world, regulating the global economy and shaping the social and political life of the globe. The 'transnational' tends to impose the irregularity of power between nations and classes. In "*Toward a Global Ruling Class? Globalization and Transnational Capitalist Class*" William and Harris argue, "It controls the level of emergent transnational state apparatus and of global decision making. Ghosh's trilogy is sited on the unpredictable scenes of opium trade which brings many different nationalities, races, ethnicities, culture, and also languages together. While Opium trade provides not the only a sustainable sound economy but produces cultural interconnectedness that shapes multiculturalism or transculturalism and multiracialism. Bahram, a Bombay merchant, had a relationship with Chi-mei a Chinese lady and got a son Freddie during his trading in China. So Freddie is a half Chinese and half Indian, a representative of mixed race or hybridity.

Keywords: *antithetical, multiculturalism, proliferation, .etc*

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Introduction

The phenomenon of transnationalism and transculturalism is the outcome of globalization. Two schools of thought manipulate the discourse of transnationalism and

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globalization. In "Notes on Globalization as a Philosophical Issue," Jameson states that an optimistic "decentering and proliferation of differences" and a pessimistic "unification and standardization" are "indeed the two antithetical features of that elephant we are blindly attempting to characterize" (66). The optimistic and celebrity mode of globalization appreciates and encourages transnational trade, multiculturalism, cosmopolitanism, universalization and homogenization of culture whereas the pessimistic view criticizes 'transnational capitalism' or 'late capitalism', or 'transcultural imperialism' as debated by Frederic Jameson and Masao Miyoshi. This paper disputes 'transnational trade' in the discussion of Amitav Ghosh's *Flood of Fire*, the third novel in *Ibis* trilogy. Ghosh's anthropological observation offers a catastrophic view in the matter of transnational capitalism in the present era.

Transnationalism refers to multiple links and the interrelation between different nation-states, territories, and countries. "In the 1960s the word transnational was widely used by the students of economic processes to refer to the establishment of corporate structure with established organizational bases in more than one state"( Martinelli 1982). It is an economic process in which productive corporation operates globally with certain agreement among governments. Economic transnationalism is known as Globalization which is the new phase of capitalism in the world. Globalization promotes globally incorporated finance system and transnational phase of national economic structure. Transnational capitalism emerged because of the occurrence of centralization of capital and monopoly of production. In *A Theory of Global Capitalism: Production, class, and state in a Transnational world*, Robin William points out, "The rise of transnational capital is the basis for economic globalization. In turn, economic globalization brings with it the material basis for the emergence of a single global society marked by transnational political and cultural processes and the global integration of social life" (9).

The term 'transnational capital' is the hegemonic part of capital ruling over the world, regulating the global economy and shaping the social and political life of the globe. The 'transnational' tends to impose the irregularity of power between nations and classes. In "*Toward a Global Ruling Class? Globalization and Transnational Capitalist Class*" William and Harris argue, "It controls the level of emergent transnational state apparatus and of global decision making. This TCC is the process of constructing a new global capitalist historic bloc: a new hegemonic bloc, consisting of various economic and political forces that have become the dominant sector of the ruling class throughout the world, among the developed countries of the North as well as countries of the South" (12).

#### Transnationalism and Literary Studies

In literary studies, contemporary postcolonial criticism has focused on transnational culture, multiculturalism, and hybridity. The postcolonial critique's argument projects the

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mystifying relationship between power and transnational culture or global culture shaped by globalization that is the emergence of new imperial power. Arif Dirlik in "The Postcolonial Aura: Third World Criticism in the Age of Global Capitalism" starts his discussion with "when exactly . . . does the "post-colonial" begin?" and explores the notion of postcolonial in the context of contemporary transformations in a global relationship and describes the combating cultural hegemony and domination as well as the critical practice of cultural homogenization in transnationalisation. Dirlik states that

the transnationalization of production where, through subcontracting, the process of production is globalized. . . . seeking maximum advantage for capital against labor as well as freedom from social and political interference, the production seems to be constantly changing its location- hence flexible production. For these reasons, analysts perceive in global capitalism a qualitative difference from past, similar practices indeed, a new phase of capitalism. (309)

Postcolonial studies analyze transnational immigration and immigrants who are in a multicultural situation in the host country. It deals the higher level of multiculturalism and illustrates the predicaments of migrants.

Amitav Ghosh

It is in this globalized world situation that Amitav Ghosh, an anthropologist, historian, and novelist, enters into the fragmented world with trivial and unheroic characters crushed by the capitalist world. Ghosh's historical novels are allegorical in that history is known as objective documentation of the past. By evaluating historical events, Ghosh attempts to interrelate them to contemporary realities that subjugate humanity and lead the society a neo-colonial status. Ghosh is considered a postmodern writer because he points out the imperialistic and colonial attitude vehemently and raises his voice against the oppressive nature of the socially powerful establishment with his literary art. His main concern is for the underprivileged, oppressed, marginalized and subalterns who are the victims of the dominant power system. He prefers historic narration to talk about the contemporary economic imperialism that leads to neo-colonialism. Exposing the untold histories of the migration of indentured laborers, transnational trade, the transnational cultural flaw and the opium trade war in the ninetieth century, Ghosh' *Ibis* trilogy reveals the modern imperialism in the guise of globalization and transnational capitalism.

Ghosh' *Ibis* trilogy deals with the impact of globalization or transnational capitalism on a person, a community, society, and the whole humanity, and portrays the factors of cross-cultural social relations and political power. In the first book of the *Ibis* trilogy, *Sea of Poppies*, Ghosh's

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main focus is the British venture of launching opium in India and the establishment of the transnational mode of the British East India Company, which was the forerunner of transnational companies. Grazia Ietto-Gillies in *Transnational Corporations and International Production: Concepts, Theories, and Effects* writes, " More recently established companies such as the East India Company, the Royal African Company, and the Hudson Bay Company and others dating back to the seventeenth and eighteen centuries are sometimes considered to the forerunner of the modern TNC" (7). In this book, Ghosh records the manufacturing of opium balls and the British monopoly on opium cultivation and trade. The second book, *River of Smoke*, highlights the trade expedition of various companies heading to Canton, the illegal trade of the West, the Canton Chamber of Commerce, several enclave meetings of foreign opium merchants and the principles of free trade. Ghosh exposes the capitalist power of the Chamber of Commerce which controls not only trade and economy but also regulates the social life of Canton.

Transnational capitalism is a 'new empire'

*Flood of Fire*, the third book of *Ibis* trilogy, depicts how the Committee of traders which consists of the British, other Western private firms and some of the South Asian traders protested against the protocol of the ban of opium in China and fought against China to establish a transnational trading center in Hong Kong in 1836. In this novel, Ghosh argues that modern transnational capitalism is a 'new empire' in which free trade and liberalization are practiced. The governments, private companies, entrepreneurs and divisions of employees and laborers are agents who extend their opportunities for businesses by resorting to any means for their profitable trade.

This novel has originated from the opium trade in a transnational setting that created a revolution. In the novel, William Jardine, the representative of the chamber of commerce, had influenced Lord Palmerston, the foreign secretary in London, for the planning of war expedition in China. The main intention of the expedition was to extract compensation for the opium that was confiscated by Commissioner Lin. Mr. Burnham, the shipping company owner, has stirred the spirit of enterprise in Zachary, his sailor, "A new age is dawning, you know- the age of Free Trade- and it's men like you and me, self-made Free –Traders, who will be in heroes" (281). Transnational form of commerce would occupy the globe as Mr. Burnham predicted that, "One of the chief expedition's chief aims was to force the Chinese to cede an island off the China coast: a new port, embodying all the ideals of Free Trade, would be created there" (283).

Exploring the development of new imperialist condition of the world, William in "Global Capitalism Theory and the Emergence of Transnational Elites," affirms; "Globalization as a qualitatively new epoch in the ongoing evolution of world capitalism, characterized above all by the rise of truly transnational capital and the integration (or re-articulation) of most

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countries in the world into a new global production and financial system" (2). Recognizing the functional elements of transnational practice that concentrate on maximizing the profit, Nagesh Rao, in "Neocolonialism" or "Globalization"? : Postcolonial Theory and the Demands of Political Economy", observes, "Transnational capitalism understood as a new phase in the development of capitalist accumulation, emerges as a post-war boom in the Western economies" (173).

Transnational trade proposes new avenues of opportunities to those who invest the capitals for business and people who are bold and brave can claim the prize. Transnationalization of capital would lead to the formation of transnational class and corporations which become the hegemonic forces that rule over the world. Therefore, transnational capitalism is the new realm of imperialism.

Impact of Transnational capitalism

New Pattern of war

The transnational processes promote economic and political turmoil and cause environmental damages such as climate changes and pollution. The developed countries believe that the transnationalization of commerce and the innovative economic policies of free trade and liberalization, partnership and shareholding across the borders would make all nations wealthy. But the Chinese administration realized that opium trade brought a negative impact in China, destroying millions of people by opium addiction and encouraging smuggling. Commissioner Lin propagates a protocol to ban opium in China. The British and other trading companies from various countries joined together and decided to send an expeditionary force for installing a trading center in Canton. Not surprisingly, transnational activities led a new methodological trade war and violence with the support of business people. Burnham remarks, "Not only vast profits be created when the markets of China were opened in the world, but the expedition would also establish a new pattern of war-making, in which men of business would be involved in the entirety of the enterprise, from the drafting of strategy to dealing with Parliament, informing public, and providing logistical support" (282).

Ghosh who analyses the opium trade with anthropological perceptiveness portrays the scenery of war within a detailed manner. He describes powerfully the cruel and devastating nature of the opium war and critiques the installation of the transnational market in China with his skillful historical narration. They were lying in piles, two or three deep in some places. Many had rolled into the water; the channel seemed to be full of them, floating like logs. On some, the clothes were still burning" (469). He submits an account of death and wounded ones, "On the Chinese side the toll was estimated to be about six hundred killed and many more wounded. Thirty-eight heavy guns had been seized and spiked in Chuenpee; twenty-five on Aycock" (477). On

perceiving the pathetic situation of war, Ghosh raises the voices against the victimization of marginal due to the of trade capitalism.

In Ghosh's own words, 'Opium was the fundamental undergirding of our economy for centuries. It is strange that [even] for someone like me who studied history and knew a fair amount about Indian history, I was completely unaware of it' (BBC News interview with Amitav Ghosh, 23 June 2008). Reacting against the policies of globalization, Katherine and Rafael, "Economic Globalization and Civil War" presents the rhetorical explanations, "Globalization is said to raise the likelihood of civil war through several channels. According to dependency theory, trade and foreign investment harm low developed countries" (1231). At last, the British won the battle and captured the island of Hong Kong and established the transnational trade center. Global capitalism celebrates success.

#### Maximum Profit

Free trade doctrines and transnational markets are supported by developed countries, multinational and transnational companies, industries and working class. Ghosh in *Flood of Fire* explains that opium was the primary and essential resource of the economy in the past. "Opium was pouring into the market like monsoon flood" (270). It was produced by East Indian Company in Calcutta and sold in the auction center. Mrs. Burnham and John Slade were the dominant figures among the bidders. "Being as the day's biggest buyer Mr. Burnham had bought three thousand chests of opium at a price of thirty lakh rupees, equal to almost one and a half million Spanish dollars" (275). The monopoly of opium in India was under the British government.

The British forced to start on the transnational market to export their opium products and earned good proceeds. Freddie took Zachary to show all the places in Singapore. "Look at ships in the harbor. Because this is "free port"- they pay no duties or taxes. So where does the city get the money?'. . . 'Opium of course-is a monopoly of the British government. Opium pays for everything- hotel, church, governor's mansion, all are built on opium'" (325).

Accumulating wealth and maximizing profit is the main intention of free traders. Three dozen chests of opium were transferred within an hour in the lantern fast-crab with the quick agreement. Each had earned fourteen hundred Spanish dollars in this shipment. Zachary had collected his share of his proceeds. "He realized that he was now in possession of fortune large enough to buy a ship like the *Ibis*"(374).

#### Encouraging often semi-legal or illegal or smuggling

Transnational commercial action encourages illegal practices of exporting and importing goods and provides opportunities for smuggling in selling products. Mr. James Innes, a British

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merchant, and ship-owner transported a shipment of opium to China. His lascar narrated the incident like this:

‘One day . . . We loaded the chest into two of the ship’s boats and rowed them to the foreign enclave. When we arrived at Mr. Innes’s house, there was a raid by customs officials: they opened the chest and found that they contained opium. We were immediately arrested and taken before a magistrate. Then we were

#### Transnational Migration and Culture

Transnational division of trade and labor leads relocation, deterritorialization, migration and cultural homelessness. Transnational trade activities compel the people to leave their home and country and lead them for incorporating into an unfamiliar culture and social practices. Thus uprootedness, migration and settlement, the new transculturalism and hybridity is emerged and creates a new sense of identity. In a transnational setting, migrants face multiple challenges in their social interactions. Their identity is in crisis as it is marked by various loyalties and the multiple identifications. Transnational culture or global culture develop transnational shared discourses and shared structure though it is categorical differences and plurality of culture through interconnectedness. This kind of cultural globalization creates hegemony in the modern era. Melvin Elteren, in "Cultural Globalization and Transnational Flows of Things American", states that "the term cultural globalization refers to a new global hegemony, that is a hegemony of structure, not of content.

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#### Conclusion

Ghosh' historical research grounded in the protracted opium war in transnational settings in China replicates the contemporary power structure of transnational trade capitalism. The opium war between the British and China reveals not only the conflict over the territory to build a trade market center but also the capitalist ideology of transnational trade. Simultaneously *Flood of Fire* signifies the way transnational capitalism promotes war and violence which affects the society radically and leaves people homeless, the experience of displacement, indentured laborers leading to marginalization. Since people are migrated and settled in unfamiliar places without any security for economic purposes or for rehabilitation due to war, they undergo another suffering of an identity crisis.

Ghosh's critical research with historical evidence symbolizes the modern way of transnational capitalism which is propelled by globalization. Today's Globalised economic system relates the developed central or core with the underdeveloped periphery. The developed countries have intense capital whereas underdeveloped countries export intense goods and labors to the core. In Globalization or transnational system, the underdeveloped periphery is controlled by the foreign interest and local elite. Therefore, the transnational mode harms the periphery. The economic development of the periphery is distorted. Periphery always remains poor by the new strategy of globalization or transnational trade. As the transnational activities encourage inhabiting in metropolitan areas, it creates higher level multiculturalism.

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