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## THE EFFORT TO CREATE TRANSCULTURAL NATIONS-SOCIETIES AND ITS IMPLICATIONS

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### Abstract

This research aims at exploring the possibilities of establishing a transcultural nation and society. However, the researcher comes to awareness that there are tremendous challenges and hurdles in achieving it. Yet this effort of involving, encompassing or combining elements of more than one culture is not impossible. The current situations and past history prove that man/woman is basically selfish and power-hungry. It is a common phenomenon that the dominant cultures especially when in political power try to crush and subordinate the other cultures of ethnic groups despite the fact that they all sprang from the same nation. Many literary writings especially from South Asia aimed at bringing awareness on transcultural society with the view of eradicating dominance in terms of caste, language, religion, and culture while insisting to keep the separate identities which adds strength and beauty for any nation. However, the transformation of attitude from rigidity to flexibility where people embracing other cultures and their aspirations is taking place at a slow pace. Sri Lankan writings in English have never entertained the concept of trans-culturalism. Most of the Srilankan literary products are ethnocentric. English educated the population in Sri Lanka is keener in finding green-pastures outside the country. The political atmosphere is not conducive for the minorities even today. This is the situation prevailing from independence. Political leaders of Sinhalese and Tamils did not have the vision or a plan for good governance. Consequently, the result is a bloody civil war where Srilankans killed fellow Srilankans. The dead may be Tamils or Sinhalese but surely all of them are Srilankans. Therefore, the literature produced so far have dealt with the impact of civil war. Sri Lanka is a tourist destination for many Europeans. However, the country does not have diasporic communities speaking various languages. The struggle between Sinhalese and Tamils goes on even after the civil war is ended. The reason for it is that there is no political solution to enjoy the freedom and its benefits by the minority communities.

Keywords: *transcultural, political atmosphere, Srilankans, struggle, .etc*

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This research aims at exploring the possibilities of establishing a transcultural nation and society. However, the researcher comes to an awareness that there are tremendous challenges and hurdles in achieving it. Yet this effort of involving, encompassing or combining elements of more than one culture is not impossible. The current situations and past history prove that man/woman is basically selfish and power-hungry. It is a common phenomenon that the dominant cultures especially when in political power try to crush and subordinate the other cultures of ethnic groups despite the fact that they all sprang from the same nation. The basic question arises to ask whether a man is partly sadistic by nature. Hence, this research probes into the man-made disasters in human-history to estimate the damage done to the fellow nations, fellow communities, and fellow beings. Apparently, it has become a myth to create an ideal nation where beliefs, cultures, and languages of different societies are mutually respected and equal political powers are shared among the societies belonging to different cultures. The ownership of a nation through said to be shared by all who belong to that nation is very often going with the dominant, privileged and majority community which subordinates other cultures springing up from the same nation ensuring that the minority communities and their cultures never supersede the culture of the majority. The fact that the average human being feels proud of one's own culture and very often tries to claim that his/her culture is superior to all other cultures is evidence to take a second look at the human psyche. This arrogance and pride one has on his/her language/culture/religion or caste lead to various problems. The history has witnessed many calamities, riots and mass murders to get one group of ethnicity dominant over the other ethnical groups within and among the nations.

The other aim of this research is to bring the major occasions where (who)men become fanatic with regard to their culture/religion/caste and feel superior to that of others. Where does this feeling spring from? Is it innate? Or is it nurtured from generation to generation? Is there any benefit in feeling superior over the others? These are some of the questions which this paper tries to answer.

Many literary writings especially from South Asia aimed at bringing awareness on transcultural society with the view of eradicating dominance in terms of caste, language, religion, and culture while insisting to keep the separate identities which adds strength and beauty for any nation. However, the transformation of attitude from rigidity to flexibility where people embracing other cultures and their aspirations is taking place at a slow pace. For example, Sri Lanka claims itself to be a Sinhala Buddhist country while comprising Tamils, Indian Tamils, Moors and Burghers as its citizens. Minority ethnic groups survive anyhow though not fully integrated into the mainstream of the government. The thirty-year civil war is evidence for this struggle to gain self-determination of the minority communities. When the survival of an ethnic group becomes harder there is hardly any chance left for the minority culture to flourish.

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Today, social media through mobile-phones has occupied a central place in all culture throughout the globe. This is the latest trend and there is a mega possibility to bring all cultures and all ethnic groups closer to each other because humanness is still hanging with everyone. What literary writing failed to achieve could be achieved through social media because the reality is more powerful than the colorful ornamentation of language mingled with imagination which is the part and parcel of most of the literary products. Literature is a substance and mobile phones and social media is a medium. Since literature also flourishes through mobile phones and social media there is an immense possibility that mobile phone culture can expedite the process to get a nation transcultural fast. It is a fact that the embellished language adds beauty to literature, however, there is a possibility that the reality could be eclipsed and truth may be lost in the embellished language. The theoretical framework of this research provides an effective platform on which the selected literary writings would be analyzed. Jean Phinney's model of Ethnic Identity Development provides the gradual stages through which the path towards establishing a transcultural nations-society would be possible. The identification of these stages such as 'Unexamined Ethnic Identity', 'Ethnic Identity Search' and 'Ethnic Identity Achievement' in the literary texts through the method of Content Analysis would provide the primary source towards arriving at a conclusion.

In summation, it could be argued that if the good side of each human being is fully exploited above petty, narrow, parochial political interests all the people will start to feel the taste of oneness and solidarity caring for each other. Thus, all cultures will flourish and there will not be any need to crush the flourishing cultures that are the part of the same nation. Natural disasters bring people to the point of survival and thus bring them together irrespective of their caste and cultural barriers. Should we wait to lose many lives to learn a lesson!

Full paper:

Introduction:

When we are in a society which speaks more than one language and follows more than one culture and religion the situation will demand from us to be more sensitive towards the values cherished by other cultures. Today, traveling across the countries have given an opportunity to negotiate with other cultures beyond one's own. A large number of people throughout all levels of society are on the move across the globe, experiencing the effects of migration, dislocation, and cross-cultural acculturation. But, it does not mean that we have to diminish the vigor of our specific culture and lose the unique identity of our culture while attempting to create transcultural society. It is difficult for a person who has developed a thought that his culture is superior to all other cultures. Transculturalism does not demand to unify all the cultures into one. There are possibilities for Cultural transformations and interactions that may

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take place within the countries and across the countries especially in the case of diasporic communities. Even without traveling to other countries people experience the nature of other cultures through the internet. We are living in an age of increasing interconnectedness through mobile phone technology. As a result of it, the people who are fanatic about their cultures have begun to appreciate the beauty of other cultures. We have witnessed it in the literature of diasporic writers who have experienced the taste of trans-culturalism and its impact on the societies they live in. The people who have never had the chance of being in another country to experience the variant nature of other societies too have got the chance of experiencing various cultures through Facebook, or WhatsApp using their mobile phone. To that extent, the world has shrunk and thus we live in a global village. Alberto Manguel, born in Argentina and raised in Israel; become a Canadian citizen and then moving to live in France says that " Our identity, and the time and place in which we exist, are fluid and transient, like water" (Dagnino, Arianna. "Transcultural Literature and Contemporary World Literature(s)." CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture 15.5 (2013)

What is more important is the intentions and the cultural dispositions of transcultural authors while writing their works of fiction that mostly count and should be taken into consideration when dealing with transcultural literature. We can only better understand the nature and the content of transcultural literary outputs if we imagine ourselves living in their environment. Hence, it is the environment that is largely responsible for the convergence of many cultures. The expatriates who live in Australia, Canada, and London and in America are more attuned to current cosmopolitan and pluralistic sensibilities. It is not just a question of literary definitions and genres. It is instead a question of changing mindsets, different cultural approaches, heterogeneous identities, deteriorating dynamics and, subsequently, of emerging new imaginaries that are being created in the process, through the active interaction between transcultural writers and transcultural readers. As Dominic Sachsenmaier points out, 'In the near future, it will be a major intellectual, political and also an economic challenge to harmonize claims to diversity with global commonalities and responsibilities'. Hence, the significance of a transcultural 'transforming' approach and experience, enhanced by its literary expressions, that instead of heightening conflicts and culture clashes promotes the value of 'confluence' fruitful encounters and mutual respect; dismantling boundaries instead of erecting new barriers, encouraging a new sense of commonality. As Welsch prompts us: We can transcend the narrowness of traditional, monocultural ideas and constraints, we can develop an increasingly transcultural understanding of ourselves. But, when we consider South Asian context the situation is far from what is already happening in the countries like Canada or America. Diasporic communities outside South Asia appreciate the richness of other cultures. However, the situation in most of the South Asian countries is different. The literary products are

insignificant in output and impact because of the ethnocentric and xenophobic attitude. Most of the literature is occupied with the petty and personal intentions marked by a narrowness of vision and very often they do not reflect the aspirations and anxieties of the common people who do not know how to express their views in English. The rich experiences and reality are with the common people. However, those experiences are not reflected as the literature are produced by a handful of elite writers who come from English educated background.

The general trend in Sri Lankan literature:

The country has moved on through independence and seen much divide and the present and recent times have witnessed a diversion from the dream vision of a nation where there would be large scale acceptance and trust. There is no mutual respect among the three major ethnic communities namely Sinhalese, Tamils and Muslims. For most of the Muslim, Tamil is the mother tongue yet they prefer to identify themselves as Muslims. Language and cultural policy is a very sensitive area because when governments with their national views and insights may enter into contradiction with the concept of pluralism of culture. The governments may not accept multiethnic diversity as part of its national policy resulting in tensions. The tensions are a result of the exclusion of multiethnic communities and perpetual isolation and distrust of ethnic minorities. Thus a section of the country – the ethnic minorities-Tamils and Muslims of Srilanka ends up feeling like perpetual foreigners and total misfits.

In trans-culturalism primary importance is given to the concept of hybrid culture that is placed at the center of building a nation. The narrow mentality to oust minority cultures and their language from the mainstream government policies is never going to be a promising sign for Srilanka.

I would like to bring some Srilankan writers in English and analyze the main content of their literature. In that exercise, my main focus would be on how their literature reflects the notion of acculturation. Most of the Srilankan writers never bothered about trans-culturalism. Instead, their main aim is to be critical of the major issues and the patterns of society. I am sure that no Srilankan writer has ever ventured to produce a literature that can induce the relevant authorities and the general public to think of a political model to create a space for everyone in the country to live in harmony in Srilanka. All the responsible people, religious personalities, politicians and almost everybody speak about peace and unity but no one takes a positive step to resolve the ethnic problem through a constitutional process.

When we look at the Srilankan context, the concept of transcultural society is far from reality. The examination on some of the famous literature will assess the possibilities of establishing a transcultural society in that region.

While it explores the author's admiration for nature and love, it also focuses on some of the ethnic issues underlying the 30-year conflict and misunderstanding between Sinhalese and

Tamils in Sri Lanka. The novel begins at Palali-(Jaffna district) checkpoint, North of Elephant Pass where an Army Captain was assigned on a mission to bring an LTTE cadre safely to Jaffna. She is supposed to have vital information that can change the war in the country's favor. While the main plot of the story moves with Wasantha Rathnayake the Captain and Kamala Ve Lathan the LTTE operative, other characters also play an important role in bringing out the attitudes of the two ethnic groups. The main focus is on the civil war. This literature has not given any idea to bring peace between the fighting ethnic groups. Hence, my conclusion is that this novel is not going to move the readers towards any dawn in the future. This literature stands as "Art for art sake"

Jean Arasanayagam is another prolific Srilankan writer and she has left her indelible marks in her poems on the subjects of costly ethnic enmity and civil war, nationhood, ethnicity, caste, class, religion, and gender. She is a burgher of Dutch ancestry married to a Tamil-Arasanayagam. Her English colonial education places her among the English speaking elite of the nation. It is her English education and English speaking family background enabled her to write in English. However, her experiences do not reflect the actual experiences undergone by many in the country who could not opt to write in English due to their inability to express in English. Hence, the vast experiences of the common people are not in Srilankan English literature.

The poems Jean Arasanayagam produced are the clear plead for ethnic identity when it was crushed under periodical riots unleashed in the country. The following is her poetic lines expressing the scenes after the civil war was ended. "My mind unwinds reel after reel of images, landscapes that are now embedded in each vast unending scape with its recurrent visions, unwind those reels in my dreams and waking hours, reflecting my passage through the convoluted passages of history, merging into the up-to-date routs of the contemporary times I take, thronged with repetitiousness of everyday life, of birth, of death with familiar landmarks and signposts, the totems of ravaged civilizations, bombed churches, roofless abodes, mined wastelands, jagged crests of withering palm friends".

His first and greatly beloved book *Funny Boy* was a semi-autobiographical novel that introduced us to a young boy named Arjie.

The family is forced to flee their home, which is later torched, the flames illuminating the night sky as they take refuge with a Sinhalese neighbor. Selvadurai, who drew on both his personal recollections and reports published after the event to write the scene, says about bloody 1983: "It was a watershed. After that, the war began. After that, we lost our innocence. I was never the same person after that and neither was the country ever the same." "It forces us to think of these people as people and not just numbers.

Her debut, it was long-listed for the Man Asia Prize and won the Commonwealth Regional Prize for Asia. Munaweera's book is dense, lyrical and madly ambitious in its determination to have characters speak not from this side or that but to explore the many faces of the conflict.

"My paternal aunt, much like the character of Mala in *Island of a Thousand Mirrors* was pregnant and went into labor during the riots," she says.

Conclusion: Sri Lankan writings in English have never entertained the concept of trans-culturalism. Most of the Srilankan literary products are ethnocentric. English educated the population in Sri Lanka is keener in finding green-pastures outside the country. The political atmosphere is not conducive for the minorities even today. This is the situation prevailing from independence. Political leaders of Sinhalese and Tamils did not have the vision or a plan for good governance. Consequently, the result is a bloody civil war where Srilankans killed fellow Srilankans. The dead may be Tamils or Sinhalese but surely all of them are Srilankans. Therefore, the literature produced so far have dealt with the impact of civil war. Sri Lanka is a tourist destination for many Europeans. However, the country does not have diasporic communities speaking various languages. The struggle between Sinhalese and Tamils goes on even after the civil war is ended. The reason for it is that there is no political solution to enjoy the freedom and its benefits by the minority communities.

One notable point of contemplation is to fill and utilize effectively the unattained gap between those who receive exposures in a transnational setting and with those who bring out experiences in writing which never read by the South Asian local crowd who do not have the access to the English language. An efficient attempt to fill this wide gap would result in enabling the experiential expressions to become part of the South Asian literature. The present booming Information Technology in the region of South Asia has in it a growing category of the diaspora which can be termed as the 'Executive Diaspora.' This category of the diaspora has the necessary exposure and experiences in South Asian cities where the IT industry is mushrooming in a broad way. The South Asian experiences of this Executive Diaspora stem from the experiences they receive as executives in the various multinational companies of the IT industry.

There is a gap between those who hear and see this Executive Diaspora experiencing and expressing but the same received expressions do not get into the mainstream of publication of literary writings. This need of capturing their experiences and bringing them into the mainstream literary writings would enable a spectrum of literature that would provide the Occident's exposure of the Oriental and thus trying to establish a category of literature that would offer the western view of transnationalism in South Asia. The possibilities of this literature becoming examples of transcultural living that is possible amongst the cultures of the South Asian region.

This diaspora would be able to offer what the South Asia literature needs as an example of the transcultural experience in South Asia. And this mainstream publication would be accessible to an extent the elite of the countries in this region. However, effective channels have to be established to ensure that the publications and their themes reach the masses.

This particular process demands that the views expressed are put into action. In the midst of the problematic and saturated context where the transcultural mobility is to be discussed, also provides few productive initiatives that could be taken from the side of those who are involved in the production and critique of the literature. Paving a way for the masses to gain access towards the mainstream English publications lies as the biggest challenge. Even though the South Asian literature would produce writings that directly address the needs of the masses, especially in terms of a transcultural demand in the region.

The English language literacy on one side becomes a challenge, while the need to express becomes the other. Balancing the two sides of the spectrum, which includes further challenges, is the part that could be played by academics in the region. As the demand to fill the gap increases with time, the entire paradigm of harvesting the results of the already produced literature in South Asian and its critical approaches become essential. The academics can play a vital role in enabling a swift movement of South Asian literature amongst the region and the areas that need to be cultivated further. Addressing the filling of this gap would also enable a transcultural understanding which would play the role of catalyst in putting the literary views into action and thus creating a transcultural understanding among the various ethnicities and cultures of South Asia.

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