



Transnationalism in the Novel *Gun Island* by Amitav Ghosh

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Abstract

Transnationalism is the concept that is closely related to the weak nationalism and the increasing connection between the people across different countries. It is a result of colonial expansion, which has broken down barriers and borders and bringing different groups of people together. After decolonization, many people feel a sense of displacement and began migrating to different parts of the world in search of employment. These migrants who have lost a strong connection to their own nation, language and culture become transnationals living in foreign lands with distant memories of their homeland. Transnationalism also deals with issues of identity crisis and alienation. This paper focuses on the transnationalism and its implications in the novel *Gun Island* written by Amitav Ghosh.

Keywords: Transnationalism, migration, global warming.

Introduction

Amitav Ghosh's *Gun Island* published in 2019, indicates the themes of refugee crisis, human trafficking, climate crisis and human-animal relation. *Gun Island* aims to highlight the serious consequences of global warming and the urgent need for its action. It follows current global issues of immigration and illegal border crossings. The concept of diaspora and globalization are closely linked to transnationalism. The process of transnationalism always create implication on the lives of people. Transnationalism simply refers to the economic, cultural and political relationships between people from different parts of the world, where national boundaries are no longer important due to larger interests. This is increased by the advancement in travel new technologies. Migration has a significant impact on human social and cultural history. Primitive migrations are mostly caused by the need for food, but they might be the result of environmental changes or natural disasters. In contrast to the huge migrations of the past, modern migrations involve individuals and families as opposed to nations or a large group of people. The primary driving force is economic pressure. The other causes include identity crisis, religious freedom and education. In the novel *Gun Island*, two young characters Tipu and his friend Rafi planned an illegal journey to the western nations due to unemployment as they long for chances to come up in their life. Along with numerous other illegal migrants, Tipu and Rafi become victims of smuggling. Rafi narrates their awful journey to Deen from the Sundarbans with Tipu, who

organized their travel with the help of a dalal in Bangladesh. They were initially taken to Dhaka, then brought to Kolkata, where they hidden and locked in an unhygienic 'connecting house'. Any complaint or inquisitiveness would result in the unfortunate victim being subjected to physical abuse and even being hit with pistol butts.

Most migrants are unaware of their destination and they unexpectedly have to pay an additional fee when they reach Pakistan border. Upon reaching the Turkish border, the migrants are instructed to run and hide from the gunfire of border guards. Tipu and Rafi have lost their sight and they are separated. Tipu contacted Rafi eventually and recommended to join a group of refugees intending to trek to Europe. Among these refugees are a small number of Bengalis, and others from Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan, Somalia, and Pakistan. Ultimately, Rafi arrives in Venice alongside numerous other undocumented immigrants who also suffer traumas during their illegal journey from their respective home countries. In this manner, the illegal migrants who are initially tricked by their hope of a better life abroad have become disillusioned while travelling. They directly witness the reputation for global politics and the unpleasant practices of the interconnected globe.

The novel reveals that illegal migration is a dangerous process and those who engage in it have to face the risks of torture, detention and becoming victims of transnational organized crime. It also highlights the various forms of exploitation that occur in human trafficking such as prostitution, forced labor,

slavery and organ removal. Amitav Ghosh effectively portrays the harsh reality and brutality that refugees endure in the present with the reminiscent of the atrocities committed during the slave trade in the past.

In Tipu's opinion, "the internet is the migrants' magic carpet; it's their conveyor belt" (Ghosh, p. 61). In the digital age, access to knowledge and information has become remarkably easy for these individuals. The internet provides migrants with valuable information to plan their journey. It also unveils the destructive impacts of technology misuse and learning from unreliable online sources. The foreign countries depicted in mesmerizing internet images entices underprivileged individuals to pursue illegal means, such as forging documents, to reach their desired destination. Tipu relies on internet sources to access information about irregular routes, while governments around the world impose stricter restrictions on illegal immigration. Nevertheless, it is important to note that ancient times did not witness such stringent barriers when people migrated between different places. Tipu and Rafi are depicted as individuals who have been exposed to technology from their young age. Consequently, they possess a high level of proficiency in utilizing contemporary gadgets such as smartphones and computers. Their exposure to the internet has also led them to yearn for a more prosperous life abroad, as they are captivated by the opportunities presented to them online. In an interview, Amitav Ghosh remarks,

A lot of this is happening because the systems exist, and these systems are not trivial systems. The human trafficking business is the biggest clandestine industry in the world, even bigger than the drug trade. It reaches very deep into society, especially poor societies. On top of that, you have the information system. If you are a poor kid in say Bangladesh or Pakistan—both of these countries have higher rates of internet penetration rates than the U.S.—you see these pictures on your cheap smartphone. You have social media and you are connected to people who can help you move. These technologies are absolutely at the heart of movement. (Ramakrishnan, 2019, para. 19)

The globalization of today's world is made possible by advancements in technology Ghosh is evident through its portrayal of global cities and the diverse lives of individuals from various nations united. Amitav Ghosh combines seventeenth century Bengali legend Bonduki Sagar and the theme of transnationalism in the *Gun Island*.

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