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Globalization in Travel Narratives: A Study of *Eat Pray Love*

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Abstract:

The article will look into the impact of globalization on the travel narratives of twenty-first century and discuss the emerging identity of the travelling subject. It will analyse the issue of postcolonial hybridity which is connected to the theory of globalization using Elizabeth Gilbert's memoir Eat Pray Love. Hybridity is seen in terms of individuals, place and culture. It will show how consumerism has co-modified the Other. The travelling self is a part of the consumer world which views the Other as products that are to be used for fulfilment of needs and pleasure. By utilizing the products presented by the world of the 'Other', the travelling subject is able to create an identity for itself. The travel writer's choice of destination and travel writing itself has become products of consumerism. The Other and the Self are no longer represented as binaries but in terms of hybrid individuals emerging from a hybrid culture.

The main keywords are globalization, hybridity and consumerism. Globalization is the process by which individual lives and the locality are affected by world culture and economic forces which work together to homogenize the world. Underneath the concept of globalization lies the term hybridity which is a postcolonial concept. The term comes from horticulture which refers to crossbreeding of two plant species by grafting. This is synonymous to its usage in the case of culture, language, individuals etc. Consumerism is a by-product of the capitalist economy which regards everything as a commodity that can be bought or sold. Even abstract things like pleasure, spirituality and the concept of a balanced life are seen as something that can be purchased.

1. Introduction

The main focus of travel narratives is the formation of identity. Women travel to transform the wilderness into a place more habitable and domestic. They have the same economic motives like men when emigrating. Although women travel for the same reasons as men, yet there are certain differences. This is visible in the way they travel, the companions they take with them, the experiences they share and the way they describe the places. Their experiences are carved according to the background they come from, geographic locations they visit and the type of journey they undertake. The accounts of their travel give us a glimpse of how these women position themselves in the world.

The travelogues written by women do not simply use the traditional narrative technique. They innovate and extend the medium they write. Travel experiences are brought to the readers through the use of letters, diaries and memoirs. Women travellers travel to earn money, to pursue careers as travel writers, assert political rights and challenge the prevailing status quo. Women have always been associated with stability rather than mobility. They transgress the notion of the public road as being strictly a male domain. Patriarchy reserves certain spaces in society as strictly feminine and some spaces as strictly masculine. Women travel writers cross geographical and cultural barriers and are seen as a threat to patriarchy. Hence, women travelled less before the twentieth century and were compelled to travel with a group.

Twentieth century women travel writers were not much interested in asserting themselves legally, politically, and economically. They travelled abroad to expose the devastations of wars. Twenty first century women travel writers want to distance themselves from their habitat and search for a new identity and home elsewhere. They are mostly troubled souls who travel to find inner peace. They no longer look at the Orient in derogatory terms. One finds an intermingling of cultures in the travel narratives of the twenty-first century. This shows the impact globalization on the travelling self and its narrative.

2. The Other as the Exotic and Erotic

It is still required of the travel writer to visit the places and write about the differences between the 'Self' and the 'Other'. The issue lies on how they project this difference. Identity in travel writing is created by this difference. The Other is shown as distinctly separate from the Self. The East is seen as exotic or seductive. When the writer visits Bali she mentions the effects that the locals have on travellers from the West. Bali has always been regarded as exotic by the Western world. "When an elite class of Western travellers discovered Bali, all this bloodiness was ignored as the newcomers agreed that this was truly 'The Island of the Gods.'" (*Eat Pray* 255). The way the writer describes the healing methods of her friend Wayan appears both exotic and erotic. Wayan helps a couple to conceive a child. If the problem is with the woman she treats her but if it's the husband who is infertile, she never mentions it. Bali is a patriarchal society and the man is always believed to be correct. To help the couple she pimps the married lady to the truck drivers. The word healer stands in sharp contrast to the Western word doctor. Wayan never calls herself a healer; it is mentioned by the

traveller. The West is always shown as the harbinger of civilization; the other is the part of the natural world. The Other is associated with primitivity and the West is associated with modernity.

3. Cultural Multiplicity and Identity of the Traveller

There is also the attempt by the travel narrator to look for common ground with the locals. The Other shows the writer the way of living. She is forced to reflect on her actions, purpose. Marie Louise Pratt uses the word "contact zone" to refer to the space where colonial encounter takes place. It is the social space "where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination." (*Imperial Eyes* 6). It means that even though there is an assimilation of cultures the Western values appear superior and fundamental than the values of the Other.

The writer in the travelogue realizes the existence of cultural multiplicity. The travel writers of the twenty first century have moved beyond the imperial binary structures like that of the Self or the Other and the Centre or Periphery. The writer in the discussed travelogue travels to three different nations and comes in close contact with the natives. Her narrative describes the existence of a cross cultural world. The world is not described as static. It is continuously changing as a result of globalization. The twenty first century travel writer acknowledges the fact that no place is culturally insular.

For instance, the character Yudhi is not much accepted among the Balinese people because he is of Javanese descent. He is more American in his manners than an Indonesian. He speaks the typical American English using words like "dude". These individuals do not have one fixed identity. Bhaba in "Sign Taken for Wonders", mentions that language is a tool used by the colonizers to teach the colonized their religion and culture. The colonized therefore, imitate the culture and speak the language of the colonizer which is seen as the norm. Bhaba finds that this makes the colonizer powerful. (*Location* 206). Yudhi is influenced by dominant culture of the world.

It is not only the colonized subject that attains a hybrid identity. The Western traveller is also a hybrid individual. She figures the word "ANTEVASIN" describes her. She is a traveller of the twenty first century who is rootless. Identity is never complete. It is a process and is never static. Hybridity is a form of the West to maintain a hegemonic control over the Other. It is an extended form of Colonialism. Bhaba in "Signs Taken for Wonders" mentions this. "Hybridity is the sign of the productivity of strategic reversal of the process of domination through the disavowal." (Bhaba 112).

The identity of the travel writer in this travelogue is formed by the impact of personal, cultural and national conditions. The writer is recently divorced from her husband of eight years. She travels in order to emerge from her estranged relationship. One of the main motivations of her travel is self-improvement which plays an important role in the formation of identity.

She assesses the destinations based on the nuances of American culture. In Italy, she comments that Italians know the art of remaining idle. She describes her friend who is a banker but he wears a smile in his face rather than a serious look. Coming from a family of Puritan descendent she has always been occupied by the importance of work in her life. She says, "pure pleasure is not my cultural paradigm. I come from a long line of super conscientious people." (*Eat Pray* 74). She has an experience of self-revelation in India. Balinese culture is all about organization and balance. She is a world traveller and it is difficult for her to stay rooted to a place. Balinese culture is what she believes will help organize her disoriented life.

4. Globalization and the Traveller

The impact of globalization has taught the travel writer that she lives in a culturally diverse world which is interconnected. The travelled spaces are therapeutic for the suffering travelling subject. She learns a lot from other cultures. The women travel writers of the twenty first century are solitary figures. Loneliness provides a better scope for the writer to examine and assess the destination and the people. Rapid globalization has made travelling to easy. She knows her destination clearly and has prior arrangements of her stay. Prior to visiting Italy, she takes lessons in Italian back at home in order to prepare herself for the travel. She is an ardent practitioner of yoga and is a follower of a Guru from India. She visits Bali to meet a medicine man who she met before during her visit to the island two years ago.

The world of travel narrative has changed by the twenty first century. She travels not only for pleasure. She is prompted by the motivation to write a book and is financed by her publisher. It is the capital which motivates the travel writer and not just the quest for identity. Her divorce has left her homeless and bankrupt and in order to earn her livelihood she is forced to travel and write her experiences.

It can be seen that the destinations that the writer visits are global crossroads. These places are thronged by people from different parts of the world. The locality of the destinations is penetrated by the globalized world whose effect can be seen in the economy, culture or even individuals. The encounters with different locale that the travelling subject has shown that tourism is a global industry. A major part of the economy of the developing countries depends on this sector. Therefore, it is not only the traveller who labels the Other as exotic but also the locals linked with tourism activities ensure that they present an exotic picture of their land. The motive is to present something that is sellable. This is how consumerism is brought into the travelling sector. Travel writing is part of the capitalist phenomena. All the popular culture of this world is designed to satisfy the needs of the capitalist society. Co-modification of culture has resulted in the co modification of the travelling experience. What the travelling subject experiences in the travelling destination is created and not original.

Most of the travel writers from the West present their weariness of the consumerist society. Elizabeth Gilbert is tired of the inauthenticity of the West. It is the monotony of the consumerist society that ends her marriage. The American consumerist society has lost the knowledge of pleasure. "Alarming statistics back this observation up, showing that many Americans feel happier and fulfilled in their offices than they do in their own homes. This is the cause of that great sad American stereotype." (*Eat Pray* 74).

A travel writer is always motivated by quests. The object of their quest may be very material or immaterial in nature. Elizabeth Gilbert's quest is to overcome the material by immersing herself in the world of spirituality. She yearns for enlightenment in all the areas that she visits. She wants to gain a perspective of the Other, their society and their culture but not as an outsider. In Italy, she tries to learn the language. She has acquired a "Tandem Exchange Partner" whose name is Giovanni. She learns Italian from him and he learns English from her. In India she settles in the Ashram of her Guru and shares a close proximity with both the foreign and indigenous disciples. In Bali, she bonds with an old medicine man who promises to teach her the knowledge of ancient Balinese healing in lieu of being taught English in return. She becomes friendly with a divorced Balinese woman and helps build her home. The incidents that the travel writer encounters with the natives appear very innocent but one cannot ignore the politics of globalization in each case. The word "Tandem Exchange Partner" show how exchange of language and culture take place. The Italian language itself is a hybrid which heightens its charm. Spirituality in the Ashram has less to do with the attainment of god. It has become a commodity that can be exported or imported. The Ashram is more a tourist place than a place of spirituality. In Bali, there is the exchange of cultural knowledge. The medicine man Ketut wishes to learn the English language from the writer. In return he gives her access to his home and his medicinal practices. The medicinal practices of the healers are a family secret and no outsider is allowed access to the knowledge. The passing of ancient knowledge from the native to the Western woman can be seen as the effect of the penetration of the global world. Ketut has to earn a living and the travel writer is a source to earn his living. The divorcee Wayan is helped by the writer and her friends on the humanitarian grounds. The help can be seen as an act of supremacy of the West. The feelings of the Other in this case are also not innocent. Wayan is not a docile native. She is an experienced woman who tries to dupe the writer by asking for more time to buy the plot.

5. Conclusion

International issues like terrorism bring changes to the economic conditions of the tourist destination and also the lives of the local people. The Balinese community depend on tourism to earn profit. Tourism is a major source of income for the people. Ketut is seen complaining about the recent decline in the number of tourists who visit the place. This is due to the bombings in the island after the 9/11. "If you have any Western friend come to Bali, send them to me for palm-reading—I am very empty now in my bank since the bomb." (*Eat Pray* 249). It can be concluded that travel writing deals with encounters in a distant place and transmits cultural biases under the cloak of individual impressions. It examines the motives behind globalization and consumerism. There is nothing new to be discovered in the travel destination but still travel writing exist because it has changed its form and content for the global public. A growing element of fictionalization of the travelogue is done to bring it closer to the form of the novel. However, one cannot ignore the authenticity presented by the writer of a travelogue as everything that is written is a part of the writer's felt experience.

6. References

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