



IDENTIFICATION PARADES: AN INTERROGATION OF IDENTITY AND HISTORY IN THE POSTCOLONIAL NOVELS *ICE CANDY MAN* BY BAPSI SIDHWA AND *ANIL'S GHOST* BY MICHAEL ONDAATJE

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ABSTRACT

Postcolonial literature becomes a source through which dominant ideologies can be challenged and deconstructed. It is a potential site of resistance that reveals the way in which imperialist power structures strive to oppress, silence or erase the subjugated and the lingering effects of this process upon postcolonial nations. Ice Candy Man (1989) by Bapsi Sidhwa and Anil's Ghost (2000) by Michael Ondaatje are two postcolonial novels that examine the concepts of identity and history in terms of the marginalizing hierarchies and discourses constructed through different power structures. Ondaatje's Anil's Ghost examines the political turbulence in Sri Lanka during the 1988/89 Insurgency through the lens of the diaspora using the character of Anil, a forensic pathologist who returns to her native country to conduct a Human Rights investigation. Bapsi Sidhwa explores the violence of the Partition of the Indian subcontinent in Ice Candy Man through the trajectory of Lenny from being a susceptible young girl to a mature and experienced person. The main research problem addressed in this study is whether the concepts of identity and history are discursively constructed based on underlying hegemonic power structures that are marginalizing and oppressive. These two postcolonial narratives are analyzed by conducting a textual analysis in order to understand how the concepts of history and identity are multifaceted and fluid, thereby challenging hegemonic perspectives that construct a single story. The way in which identity and history are subjectively experienced and constructed will be analyzed from a postcolonial theoretical framework. This study will contribute towards the understanding of postcolonial literature as a point of resistance to hierarchical ideologies or colonial discourses by voicing marginalized narratives.

KEYWORDS: *Ice Candy Man, Bapsi Sidhwa, Anil's Ghost, Michael Ondaatje, Postcolonial Identity, History*

1. INTRODUCTION

Ice Candy Man (1989) by Bapsi Sidhwa and *Anil's Ghost* (2000) by Michael Ondaatje are postcolonial novels that examine the concepts of identity and history by discussing the marginalizing hierarchies and discourses constructed through different power structures. Nayar (2008) defines postcolonialism as any strategy that "opposes systems of domination by any power" (p. 17). It refers to a form of cultural resistance that contests any form of discrimination and exploitation by giving 'agency' to the colonial subject, thereby challenging imperialist power structures that seek to oppress the subjugated. Postcolonial theory explores how colonial discourses allow the expression of selected opinions and knowledge while silencing and erasing others. Thus, postcolonial theory analyses how hegemonic structures are embedded in texts and attempts to redefine and represent the marginalised, both within "Third World" and "First World" nations. This understanding is used as a framework within which the two postcolonial novels have been analysed in this research. Ondaatje's *Anil's Ghost* (2000) examines the political turbulence in Sri Lanka during the 1988/89 Insurgency through the lens of the diaspora using the character of Anil, a forensic pathologist who returns to her native country to conduct a Human Rights investigation. Sidhwa, a Pakistani-American novelist explores the violence of the Partition of the Indian subcontinent in *Ice Candy Man* (1989) through the trajectory of Lenny from being a susceptible young girl to a mature and experienced person. These narratives interrogate the hegemonic perspectives towards these historical contexts and attempt to unveil the multifaceted nature of what is considered to be the single story. History is examined by analysing how memory and truth are constantly constructed and reconstructed based on discursive power structures. The static nature associated with identity is also dismantled by showing how the postcolonial, diasporic, national and personal identities are subjected to continuous change.

2. METHODOLOGY

A textual analysis of the two novels *Anil's Ghost* by Michael Ondaatje and *Ice Candy Man* by Bapsi

Sidhwa was conducted based on a subjective ontological perspective. The main research problem addressed in this research is whether the concepts of identity and history are discursively constructed based on underlying hegemonic power structures that are marginalizing and oppressive. These two concepts are interrogated in light of how these two postcolonial texts are able to challenge dominant ideologies by proving how identity and history are fluid and multifaceted. This research is a non-positivist and qualitative study that is based on the assumption that a single truth or reality does not exist. A constructivist epistemological stance has been adopted to understand how identity and history are subjectively experienced and constructed. A postcolonial theoretical framework has been used to analyze the various nuances of identity and history that can be highlighted in *Anil's Ghost* and *Ice Candy Man*. The theories of Homi Bhabha, bell hooks, Stuart Hall and Edward Said are some of the central concepts referred to within the research. The setting, historical context, narrative style, character portrayals and the plotline of these two postcolonial texts were used to formulate interpretations and argue the multiplicity and fluidity of identity and history.

3. RESULTS

The way in which history and identity are discursively constructed through power structures that aim to marginalize and oppress is made evident by highlighting how postcolonial texts act as "sites of resistance" (hooks, 1990, p. 341). Gender, sexuality, social class, ethnicity and race become factors that influence the way in which identities are perceived and constructed. Therefore, the concept of identity is an amalgamation of such markers of identity and cannot be understood as something fixed or singular. The existence of hegemonic power structures that influence these constituents of identity makes it a fluid and complex element that is subjected to constant change. Similarly, particular memories, experiences and people that constitute history are erased or eclipsed by dominant representations of the past. Dominant ideologies or discourses manipulate the way in which the past is remembered and constructed. History changes according to shifts in these power

hierarchies. Thus, both identity and history are multifaceted, fluid and fragmentary.

4. DISCUSSION

4.1 Identity

Identity, especially in relation to a postcolonial nation or community is a complex aspect that is directly affected by their colonial past and experiences. As stated by Ashcroft, Griffith and Tiffin (2004), the postcolonial identity crisis is “the concern with the development or recovery of an effective identifying relationship between self and place” (p. 8). It is a process in which postcolonial identities are constantly shifting and are dependent upon social, cultural, physical, linguistic and political factors. This “development or recovery” (Ashcroft, et al. 2004, p. 8) of identity and its intricacies can be analyzed through postcolonial literature. The concept of identity as fixed or static is dismantled in both *Anil's Ghost* and *Ice Candy Man* by drawing on its multiplicity and changeability. *Anil's Ghost* is written using different voices or protagonists such as Anil, Sarath, Gamini, Ananda, Sirissa and Palipana. The interwoven nature of these different stories makes the narrative dense and confusing. This becomes a tool through which the multiplicity of voices and the rejection of a single story or perspective are highlighted. Therefore, the fluidity of identity and the way in which it is constantly reconstructed can be explained through the different sections of the novel that contain various voices. The first section of the novel is titled Sarath but Anil's voice seems to dominate. This elucidates how Anil is exploring the character of Sarath and his different layers just as she is exploring Sailor and constructing his identity. Moreover, Ondaatje (2000) shifts between the different voices abruptly and provides glimpses into the past of the different characters as seen through the italicized sections in the novel. However, each of these stories are linked together which reflects how identity is not fixed or singular, but is constructed through different strands that makes a whole. The seamless connection between these perspectives also shows the interchangeability of identity where these characters can be linked to each other through their experiences and perceptions. Thus,

hegemonic understandings of identity, both national and personal are dismantled. Similarly, Sidhwa (1989) uses the perspective of the child protagonist Lenny, a polio-ridden young girl to examine hegemonic ideologies of identity that exist within the text. Belonging to the ethnic minority of the Parsee community in Lahore, Lenny's experiences of the pre-Partition, the Partition riots and the period immediately after the Partition provides an important lens through which this particular historical context can be examined. Lenny is an outsider to the larger Indian caste based hierarchies that existed at the time. Lenny's Parsee background frees her from the pressures of having to fit into or respect caste hierarchies. This allows her to adopt an unprejudiced view of her surroundings. Lenny's interactions with people belonging to different ethnic, religious, caste and class backgrounds such as Hari, Imam Din, Ranna, Papoo, Ayah and her many admirers enriches the plot with different perspectives. The voices of the Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Parsee communities and even that of the colonizer is blended into the narrative to provide a kaleidoscopic view of the Partition riots that led to the ‘cracking’ of India. Hence, the use of multiple voices dismantles the formation of a single, dominant perspective that marginalizes individuals or communities.

Furthermore, the subject positions of the two authors as members of the diaspora also become important in the discussion of marginalizing power structures. The way in which margins can be converted into sites of resistance can be discussed through how both Ondaatje (2000) and Sidhwa (1989) use the central characters of Anil and Lenny respectively to bring in different perspectives that redefine the histories and experiences of postcolonial nations. The concept of the empire writing back is prominent in postcolonial writing. It has become elemental in interrogating myths and stereotypes created by the West or the ‘centre’ about the ‘Orient’ or the ‘Other’ that “relegate them to marginal and subordinate positions”. (Ashcroft, et al. 2004, p. 7). As a member of the diaspora, Anil is unable to understand and connect with the experiences and opinions of locals such as Sarath and Ananda. Moreover, her inability to secure a

sense of belonging in her native country locates Anil's character within a "liminal" space that "transfers the meaning of home and belonging, across a 'middle passage' ... that span the imagined community of the nation-people" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 200). Thus, her diasporic identity situates her within a space that transgresses boundaries and challenges power hierarchies. As Piciucco (2018) argues, 'she possesses a "transnational nature" ... representative of the "in-between" location of postcolonial consciousness, with insight into both East and West, and yet fully exemplary of neither' (p. 165). This marginal position invites interrogation of the concept of identities and nation by highlighting its multiplicity and fluidity. Thus, as Cook (2004, p. 3) also states, the notion of multiculturalism incorporated through the transnational identity of Anil helps to dismantle the dichotomy of the Orient and the Occident constructed by hegemonic power structures. Furthermore, Anil's diasporic identity becomes a source through which the different facets of the other characters are revealed and negotiated. Her journey provides insight into individual lives such as that of Sarath, Gamini and Ananda who were unwillingly drawn into the political turmoil of the country by various political, ethnic or racial forces. These individual perspectives that appear to be marginal become "a site of radical possibility, a space of resistance" (hooks, 1990, p. 341) that helps to dismantle Eurocentric perspectives of the civil wars that occurred during the 1988/89 Insurgency period. Moreover, as argued by Pillainayagam (2012, p. 3), the roots of these conflicts can be traced to the effects of colonization where the divisions between the Sinhala and Tamil communities were aggravated. Issues of race and ethnicity emerged and resulted in the disruption of the national, social and religious identities of Sri Lanka. Thus, the direct influence of the imperialist project on postcolonial nations and the way in which postcolonial literature reconstructs postcolonial identity in a way that dismantles the stereotypical images is made evident. Hall (1992) also discusses the origins of the formation of the 'West and the Rest' by highlighting how the West is an ideological, discursive and historical construct rather than a geographical division. It is a system of representation that organizes global power relations by

locating the 'West' in the center and the 'Rest' in the margins, while producing a 'regime of truth' that maintains these hegemonic power structures (Hall, 1992). In the novel *Ice Candy Man*, Lenny's physical ailment and her identity as a Parsee locate her in the margins. She also represents postcolonial identities that are constantly pushed to the periphery by hegemonic discourses that locate the Western identity in the center. These factors destabilize the narrative identity of Lenny by making her a character that interrogates the 'center' while remaining in the fringes. This exemplifies how postcolonial literature analyses and deconstructs these hierarchies by redefining the ways in which the 'West and the Rest' are represented. Hence, Sidhwa (1989) is able to provide a relatively unbiased view of the Partition politics through the character of Lenny and provides a more nuanced view of the struggles faced by the Indian subcontinent that ultimately led to the Partition. Additionally, the way in which identities are formed by individuals based on personal motives and larger political propaganda can be explained through the swift identity changes that the two protagonists in *Ice Candy Man* and *Anil's Ghost* undergo. The revelation of how Anil's name "was her brother's unused second name. She had tried to buy it from him when she was twelve years old" (Ondaatje, 2000, p. 67) highlights the artificiality and fluidity of identity that is constantly subjected to the process of change and reconstruction. The word 'buy' ironically heightens the sense of impermanence or the fluctuating nature of the self. Therefore, as Cook (2004) states, "Ondaatje problematizes notions of either individual or national identity as being fixed and immutable, adopting instead a perspective that considers such boundaries as both flexible and permeable" (p. 7). Furthermore, Anil's desire to embrace this new identity can also be seen as an attempt to resist marginalization based on gender and sexuality. The fact that she is treated as the outsider by locals such as Sarath and Ananda due to her diasporic identity is further intensified due to her identity as a woman. Thus she is in constant conflict with social forces that threaten to discriminate her. The way in which she adopts a name that implies an androgynous quality as it is considered a masculine name, yet has a "feminine air" (Ondaatje, 2000, p. 67)

reflects how she strays from rigid constructions of gender identities and sexuality. Similarly, Lenny's gradual awakening to the atrocities committed by people against each other on the basis of ethno-religious biases paves way for an identity conflict through which Sidhwa (1989) discusses the way in which identity is constructed based on hegemonic discourses. The concept of identity as fixed or stable is dismantled through the way in which Lenny shows how her identity changed instantly based on her geographical location; "I am Pakistani. In a snap. Just like that" (Sidhwa, 1989, p. 108). The politics of the nation enters the personal life of Lenny thereby, forcing her to grapple with the power dynamics associated with ethnicity, religion and caste. With the Partition of the Indian subcontinent that led to the creation of Pakistan, millions of people were forced to migrate and embrace a completely different identity. This reflects the politics associated with the way people construct and reconstruct their own cultural or individual identities. Furthermore, the incident where Hari, the gardener becomes a Muslim and Moti announces that they are "becoming Christians" (Sidhwa, 1989, p. 120) are examples that reinforce the artificiality and fluidity of identity. Therefore, this novel uses the identity conflict experienced by Lenny and her increasing understanding of the society she lives in to provide an intimate exploration of the political violence of the Partition. The way in which identities are constructed based on personal interests is also made evident through the character of Ayah who becomes central to the exploration of how existing power structures are interrogated. Her character can be read as an allegory of the Indian subcontinent. At the beginning of the novel, Lenny records the unity of her community by observing how "the Fallettis Hotel cook, the Government House gardener, and an elegant, compactly muscled head-and body masseur" (Sidhwa, 1989, p. 25) along with Ice-candy-man sit together with Ayah at the park. The way in which Ayah's admirers belonging to different ethnicities, religions and castes were able to co-exist by respecting the differences of each other is symbolic of the possibility of multi-ethnic communities to live in harmony. However, as the Partition riots begin it is made evident that these admirers of Ayah gradually drift

apart. These changes of the everyday activities that Lenny is accustomed to mirrors the shifting power structures that ultimately lead to massive destruction. The need to secure the affections of Ayah is metaphorical of the conflicts that arose over the ownership of land. Hence, "her body becomes the symbol of the broken land, desired by all and ravished by those who courted and loved her" (Dhal, 2018, p. 22). Just as the Ayah is destroyed by the violence perpetrated upon her by Ice-candy-man and other men, India was destroyed due to extremist beliefs and political propaganda. Thus, the hegemonic constructions of identity, both national and personal are interrogated in both *Ice Candy Man* and *Anil's Ghost*.

4.2 History

As defined by Jensen (2021), "history is the study of the past in all its forms" (p. 1). It is a source through which an individual can derive a sense of understanding of human nature and the world one inhabits. However, what is recognized as 'history' is affected by processes of construction and reconstruction that function upon hierarchical discourses and dominant ideologies. Similar to how the fluidity and multiplicity of identities dismantle marginalizing power structures, history can also be discussed based on its multifaceted nature. The concepts of memory and truth addressed by Sidhwa (1989) and Ondaatje (2000) in the two novels are interrogated in order to highlight how history is discursively constructed. Ondaatje (2000) constantly stresses the importance of understanding history, memory, truth and its nuances by looking at the fragments of a single story or perspective. The reference to the 73 versions of the National Atlas elucidate how there cannot be a single story and that each version reveals "only one aspect, one obsession" (Ondaatje, 2000, p. 39). This is reflective of how what is presented in history is only a part of a much larger and multifaceted narrative. This can also be linked to the multiple narrative voices employed within the text and the non-linearity of the plot that give insight into these different versions. The shifting nature of the

plotline creates certain gaps in the narrative through which the reader is able to question the different versions, the validity and relevance of what is presented in the novel. The beauty of the narrative lies in its complex structure that remains a puzzle and it is through this ambiguity that meaning is derived. The confusion created as to when history ends and the present begins is used to highlight the flexibility or the multifaceted nature of hierarchical ideologies that construct power structures. Therefore, Ondaatje (2000) brings both history and the present seamlessly together in his discussion of the political violence in Sri Lanka during the 88/89 Insurgency period. The non-linearity of the text demonstrates how meaning is not linear or coherent, rather a collection of fragments that are pieced together in different ways to construct meaning. This multiplicity of voices and the lack of a logical development of the narrative support the theme of the multifaceted, fluid nature of concepts such as history, truth and memory that helps to dismantle the notion of a single story. It is on this premise that the political and ethnic violence that Ondaatje (2000) expounds on can be understood. The inability to distinguish between the perpetrators and the victims due to the wide-spread violence is evident when Sarath says that "there's no hope of affixing blame. And no one can tell who the victims are" (Ondaatje, 2000, p. 17). The writer provides an unbiased, intricate representation of the 88/89 Insurgency period in Sri Lanka through the interrogation of power structures that exist in society. Accordingly, the fixity of 'truth' and 'history' is challenged by showing how it is exploited and controlled by the larger discursive powers of society. The text encourages the reader to think about the duplicity or the different versions of history by showing how depending on the location, context and experiences, history becomes different to each individual. History and its multiplicity are unearthed and questioned through the bones of Sailor, the skeleton exhumed from a government protected prehistoric burial ground. Bones become the central motif of the novel and are a repository of memory, history and ancestry. The act of unearthing the bones is in itself a direct interrogation of 'truth'. The archaeological process investigates, constructs and reconstructs the 'truth' based on evidence which

shows how it is fluid and changes according to the social context and location. The ambiguity associated with the skeleton can be paralleled with the ambiguity of the concept of truth. The notion of how 'truth' has to be disassembled and reconstructed while focusing on fragments can be explained through the instance where Sarath separates Sailor's bones. He creates fragments out of the larger piece which shows how fragments give a better picture of the central concept. Each fragment brings in a different story which reiterates the idea of how there is no single version of truth, history or memory. It is through these individual stories and memories that the ethnic wars and the political conflicts that occurred in Sri Lanka are revealed.

Furthermore, the multiplicity of memory can be discussed through how it is not fixed, but consists of different fragments that are pieced together to create meaning. The various nuances of trauma and grief are interrogated to redefine power structures that homogenize the concept of memory. The uncertainty and the void one carries as a result of not getting definitive closure addressed in the novel *Anil's Ghost* brings in a different aspect of violence and its effects on the human psyche. The way in which "death, loss, was 'unfinished'" (Ondaatje, 2000, p.56) is highlighted and this understanding of trauma is established from the beginning of the novel itself through Anil's experiences at the archaeological site in Guatemala. It provides a lens through which the life of Gamini who buries himself in work to find order in his chaotic life filled with death and violence, Sarath who is struggling to understand the suicide of his wife and Ananda's inability to come to terms with his wife's disappearance can be understood. Each character has suffered different traumatic experiences and they deal with these memories in their unique ways. The grief one encounters in fragments and how it is intertwined with fear, uncertainty, anxiety, empathy and love provides a nuanced understanding that re-examines the monolithic understanding of trauma and memory. The novel discusses the trauma that one may attempt to disassociate from but is unable to due to the irreversible damage inflicted by war and violence. Similarly, the character of Ice-candy-man in Bapsi Sidhwa's (1989) novel provides

an intricate understanding of memory, trauma, grief, anger and violence. The inhumane rape, slaughter and mutilation of the women travelling on a train from Gurdaspur to Lahore is a traumatic incident that alters the character of Ice-candy-man and drives him to commit atrocities on his loved ones due to his inability to understand his own grief (Gagiano, 2010, p. 26). Thus, the way in which people were driven to violence due to the trauma they had to suffer as a result of larger political propaganda is made evident. His acts of violence cannot be understood in isolation as his trauma becomes an important part of his brutal actions. This is best captured when Lenny says that beneath the violence and misery of Ice-candy-man lays the "pitiless face of love" (Sidhwa, 1989, p. 183). The writer interrogates the homogeneous and generalizing views of ethno-religious violence by providing an intricate exploration of the Partition period. Thus, Ondaatje (2000) and Sidhwa (1989) highlight how history, memory, actions and experiences should be seen in their fragmentary elements to make meaning of the whole. The haunting nature of trauma and the extent of the violence that was generated from ethnic, racial and political turmoil are made evident in both novels as seen through these examples.

5. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it can be stated that the novel *Ice Candy Man* (1989) by Bapsi Sidhwa and *Anil's Ghost* (2000) by Michael Ondaatje are postcolonial texts that interrogate power structures which construct monolithic ideologies that oppress and discriminate. The existence of a single notion of truth or reality is rejected by showing how identity and history are discursive constructions that operate based on hierarchical ideologies. Postcolonial texts become a source that challenges these dominant perspectives and dismantles marginalizing narratives. The way in which identities are constructed is determined by factors such as gender, sexuality, social class, ethnicity and race. The fluid nature of these aspects deconstructs the fixity associated with the concept of identity. Moreover, the multifaceted and fragmented nature of history is emphasized through the way in

which the past is continuously constructed and reconstructed depending on the different forces of power that operate within society. Therefore, both Sidhwa (1989) and Ondaatje (2000) urge the reader to re-evaluate identity and history by analyzing the fragmentary elements that construct dominant representations. Thus, these two postcolonial novels critically interrogate existing power structures by providing a nuanced discussion of the concepts of identity and history.

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