

SUBALTERN PREDICAMENT IN MICHAEL ONDAATIE'S ANI GHOST

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Strife has essentially become a recurrent event in almost every nation irrespective of the development status, and naturally enough, strife has become the theme of the creative artists, who all the time strive for the development of humanity. Put it differently, facts and fiction expose the degrading and bloody part of the Subaltern, in the global socio-political and cultural scenario.

Subalternity is in other words the study of the whole concept of 'otherness', hiding in its depths, stories of pain and depression. The focus of the Subaltern studies is on the consciousness of the subaltern classes. The subaltern conscious is the one that borders on the realms of neurotic and psychotic behaviour, revolt of a result of years of repression, pain, loss and denial.

Colonialism has led to several changes in the political culture of many countries around the world. In 1940's when the South-Asian nations got independence, there entered Industrialisation and western education, gradually leading to Modernization Egalitarian society with fundamental rights was framed in the countries like Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and India.

The history of Sri Lanka in the Post-Imperial era has gone through myriad changes. When the ethnic diversity in Sri Lanka emerged, it led to the downfall of democratic government with different political institutions. The two great ethnic groups of Sri Lanka such as Sinhalese and Tamils started to fight for their way of government which led to the Civil war in the country. This civil war riots broke out in 1983, which shattered the concept of modernization and the social culture of the country. To add intensity to the problem ethnicity, language too played an important role in the conflict. 'The Sinhala only Act', recognized Sinhala as the official language of the country, and hence language become an important reason for the civil war apart from the ethnic problem

As a result of war in Sri Lanka, people moved from their homeland and settled in Foreign countries for peace. When Canada revised its immigration laws in 1967, most of the South-Asians moved from their country and settled in Canada. Hence Canada acquired multi-culturalism in the later part of the twentieth century. Prominent Sri Lankan Canadians include Christopher Ondaatje, Nirmana Basnayoke, Sanjayan Thuraisingham and Michael Ondaatje. After the two world wars, war has become central theme of many Canadian writers. Among them Michael Ondaatje has become a notable Sri Lankan Canadian war novelist.

Ondaatje's 'Anil's Ghost' represents the position of trauma after war. He has weaved the past and the present and has fictionalized the historical figures and events. In the novels of Ondaatje's, war has become a central concept and he globalises war. In Anil's Ghost, the author reflects the society of Sri Lanka which was battered by war.

Anil Tissera who is the protagonist of the novel is a young forensic anthropologist who left Sri Lanka before 15 years and now returns on behalf of the International Human Rights group to investigate the changes of counter-terrorism against the government. She left the country as a swimmer and returned as a researcher who gives voice to many victims of the war. Ondaatje has set Anil in Sri Lanka in a diasporic concept whereas Heike Harting is critical and places her with a nomad to negate the effectiveness as a political agent. Anil's transnational mobility and her sense of absolute cultural and social displacement mark her as a nomadic character while projecting a critique of the potentially disempowering effects of diasporic identity concepts(Heike, 50). Anil's experience of cultural and social displacement presents a cultural impediment that keeps her suspended in a state of perpetual foreignness and transition rather than allowing her to inhabit multiple cultural and historical spaces at once(51). She is accompanied by Sarath Diyasena, a local archeologist, who is the second most important character of the novel. From the beginning Sarath had doubtful eye on Anil and Anil too on Sarath. When Anil was fighting to bring justice to the victims, Sarath disregards and discourages her. Finding out the truth is like bringing back life for him:

Sarath know that for her the journey was in getting t the truth but what would the truth bring them into? It was a flame against a sleeping lake of petrol. Sarath has seen truth broken into suitable pieces and used by the foreign press alongside irrelevant photographs(152).

In many places of the novel, Ondaatje speaks through Sarath's character. According to Sarath, discovering and analyzing the truth is a very difficult task and he believes that Anil cannot succeed in her objectivity as a forensic researcher. The faith and confidence which Anil possesses does not seem to be in Sarath. He underestimates Anil not because she is a women in a historically male profession but she has been away from Sri Lanka for a longtime. Sarath says: " I'd believe your arguments more if you lived here"(40). Sarath's idea towards Anil is that she is new to the country and she cannot find out the truth against the government. The novel flattens the history while narrating the civil war consequences. Anil brings to light the political murder that happened in the country and brings out the voice of the voiceless victims of the war.

For the Sri Lankans war has become like a common disease and murder like the meal of the day. The fear of the war worried every individual of the country. By digging the place which was allowed only for the government officials, Anil feels that she does not want to dig up anywhere in the country and says "I've been digging and I am tired and do not want to do anymore, I think how it could be me in the grave I'm working on. I wouldn't want someone to stop digging for me....."(30). It brings out the fear of Anil in digging and it shows her Idea of the war to the end. Anil and Sarath have dugged up four skeletons at Bandarawala District which was one of the most important places where political murder took place. They give different identity to the skeletons by naming them as Sailor, Tinker, Tailor and Soldier. A new identity is given to the skeletons when they where given name. Naming is a ceremony which takes place after a birth of the child but this ceremony took place in Sri Lanka after the death when life remains in the forms of bones. The idea of naming is questioned in this context. Is it only the name which decides the identity of an individual? Are all nameless voiceless? The novel raises these questions and Anil gives voice to these voiceless when the dead bodies remain muted till the end. The dead bodies were buried and reburied in order to bring justice to them.

There is no one to translate the private woes of affected people into words. Anil believes that sailor was "The representative of all those lost voices. To give name would name the rest"(52). Her quest to unlock the hidden past, made her to name the skeletons. Through one victim, Anil and Sarath hope to reconstruct the stories of hundreds of others who were in the misery of same fate. Anil treats the skeleton as the voiceless victims of the war for whom she tries to bring justice towards the end. The scene of trauma is fictionalized by Ondaatje which could be a real incident of Sri Lankan civil war. There are many scenes of murder and disappearances in the novel which pasteurizes the reality of Sri Lankan war.

With the help of Ananda, a painter, Anil tries to draw the picture of sailor. Ananda takes the appearance of the sailor to his wife Sirissa, who wants peace in her country. Every character in the novel tries to bring justice to the voiceless victims of the war. Palipana, an epigraphist and a teacher of Sarath aids Anil in the process of investigation. Palipana is another survivor of war who lives in the deep forest of Anuradhapura. He was accused for providing false history in the book Culavamsa. Though Palipana failed as senior archeologist, he wants to help Sarath and Anil in finding out the history of the Skeletons. He considers Sri Lanka the Troy of Europe and reframes the history of Sri Lanka.

Gamini, the brother of Sarath is another victim of the war, who has lost his wife in war. Gamini is a Doctor who works in the emergency services and gives treatment to the victims of war. Gamini's trauma of war and personal life was expressed as:

....And those arm chair rebels living abroad with their ideas of justice- nothing against their principles but I wish they were here. They should come and visit me in surgery (129).

Gamini in the novel is the representative of all the victims of war and was concerned about it. He secretly takes notes about the pictures of war victims including himself for Amnesty International in order to bring justice for them.

Both Gamini's and Anil's search for their life is answered in the death of Sarath. It has marked a scar in the minds of Gamini and Anil. Sarath has paid his life as cost in

order to safeguard Anil's. Till the death of Sarath, they considered him only as a government agent but after his death Sarath was treated like a saint. He has saved the life of Anil by sacrificing his life. Sarath is also another Victim of war and the force of counter-terrorism on the side of government. Sarath too need a voice to speak about his death but everything ends in peril. Anil tries to give voice to the skeletons and Sarath but she was forced to leave the country in order to safeguard her life. Sarath became an other skeleton after his death. He has left a permanent ghost in the eyes of Anil and Gamini. situation of being voiceless is not only for the common people in Sri Lanka, but it also happens to the President of the country, who was murdered in a public meeting . The people who seeks voice to voiceless in Sri Lanka becomes voiceless towards the end.

Ondaatje's ends the novel with an eye-painter, Ananda, who undertakes the Netra Mangala ceremony by painting the eye of Buddha's statue. Ananda completed the statue of Buddha with the satisfaction that he has vision for the entire country. But the demolition of the statue by the treasure hunters proves that even God becomes voiceless and visionless in any war torn country . The skeleton represents the situation of War and Trauma in Sri Lanka. History is witnessed by Ondaatje in the novel.

At the end of the fiction Anil flees from the country in order to safeguard her own life. The ghost is the fear of war which lives forever in the country. The ghost is ever living in the country, in the families of lost peoples. They never let it die- those who go against the war, becomes the victims of war. The novel reframes history through truth in order to bring voice to the voiceless victims of the war. The subaltern position focus them into a life of unnatural silence - deadly silence_which always makes their life each trying in their own way to find a voice. There are some who do find a voice to break the silence, but some who try to make their voice audible are silenced, like Sarath and Anil.

The subaltern status generally leads to displacement, looking for equality and dignity. But most of the time displacement changes the face of the displaced into misplaced. This misplaced position causes frustration and depression leading to two perceived kinds of subalternity. Being a subaltern in one's own country atleast provides the possibility of striving for unattained ambitions. The continues search might end up in success or failure but still he has his root and the strive continuous but being subaltern in an alien country is

disastrous, because it amounts to being twice subaltern which leads to alienation and rootlessness and when one is rootless, drifting becomes a natural consequence physically, mentally and displaced and sure to become neurotic with no hope of redemption to live in dignity. Humanity if it has to be called by that name has to conceive ways of amalgamating peoples irrespective of their colour, roots, wealth, position and especially ethnicity.

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