

**EASTERN IDEOLOGY AND HYBRID EMPATHY IN MICHAEL ONDAATJE'S
NOVEL *ANIL'S GHOST***

P. Dhanagopalan

Assistant Professor of English,

PG Department of English,

NallamuthuGounderMahalingam College, Pollachi.

Abstract

This research paper entitled EASTERN IDEOLOGY AND HYBRID EMPATHY IN MICHAEL ONDAATJE'S NOVEL *ANIL'S GHOST* attempts to trace the eastern values through the character of Palipana, the epigraphist and it examines the hybrid empathy in Anil Tissera, a forensic pathologist and a Sri Lankan born resident of United States who is sent to Sri Lanka for human rights investigation by united nations to unfold the crime, brutality, and politics of Sri Lankan civil war in Michael Ondaatje's novel *Anil's Ghost*. Amid destruction and devastation caused by civil war, the novelist presents his diasporic sensibility through the words of Palipana in which he sounds that eastern culture is older than the west. He also uncovers the eastern ideology of leading a spiritual and civilized life. Anil Tissera is a hybrid figure who ties to both Tamil and Sinhalese cultures and she is also connected to the west and her Sri Lankan familial and traumatic past. Her life in Britain and America westernizes her and the narration often shifts back to her wrecked relationship with a married man in America and her present life in a decimated country during the civil war. Homi K Bhabha, the Indian literary theorist's concept of hybrid is applied to explore the cross-cultural empathy in Anil Tissera.

UNDERSTANDING LITERATURE IN THE CONTEXT OF CONTEMPORARY THEORIES- INDIAN AND WESTERN PERSPECTIVES

Keywords: Ideology, hybrid, Theravada Buddhism

Eastern ideology is a widely acclaimed concept for leading a spiritual and enlightened life to overcome the obstacles and sufferings that the people face to make their lives meaningful. It encompasses a variety of meanings which include traditional, religious, spiritual, and philosophical beliefs that the people who lived in eastern Asia followed to create enlightened society. Michael Hunt defined the term 'ideology' in his book *Ideology and Foreign Policy* as "an interrelated set of connections or assumption that reduces the complexities of a particular slice of reality to easily comprehensible terms and suggests appropriate ways of dealing with that reality" (). The moral and ethical values of the East enable the human community to abolish ignorance and uplift humanity by imparting enlightened thinking. The philosophy of Buddhism has a very long connection to literature. The teaching of Buddha is depicted in the literary works of the 20th and 21st centuries. American writers like Jack Kerouac and Tom Robbins used the philosophy and ideas of Buddhism in their writings. Theravada Buddhism is the largest state religion of Sri Lanka, a country that has been the center of Buddhism since its origin in the 3rd century BC. The Kings of Sri Lanka played a key role in maintaining Buddhism and preserving Pali Canon, the standard collection of scripture on the Theravada Buddhist tradition written in the Pali language. It preserved the philosophy of Buddhism to impart enlightened thinking to lead a spiritual life.

Michael Ondaatje, a Sri Lankan born Canadian writer uses the concept of Pali Canon in his novel *Anil's Ghost*. His novels are generally known as war fiction since they focus on the destruction of war and its impacts. Besides, he also unfolds the moral, cultural, ethical, and philosophical values of the East. He is firm in depicting the value of his country in his novels though he makes an explicit description of the destruction caused by civil war in Sri Lanka. In a

UNDERSTANDING LITERATURE IN THE CONTEXT OF CONTEMPORARY THEORIES- INDIAN AND WESTERN PERSPECTIVES

recent interview he states, “I didn’t want the dark violence to be the only portrait of the country. It’s not just a culture of death, it’s an intricate, subtle and artistic culture”. His novel *Anil’s Ghost* penetrates the horror of war and imprints the values of eastern ideology.

Ondaatje’s desire is to embrace eastern ideology deliberately in the character of Palipana, “He had made his name translating Pali scripts and recording and translating the rock graffiti of Sigiriya” (75). The author’s deep sense of diaspora is felt in his words which state that the East had a better culture and tradition than the West,

The main force of a pragmatic Sinhala movement, Palipana wrote lucidly, basing his work on exhaustive research, deeply knowledgeable about the context of the ancient cultures. While the West saw Asian history as a faint horizon where Europe joined the East, Palipana saw his country in fathoms and color and Europe simply as a landmass on the end of the peninsula of Asia. (75)

West does not understand the significance of Eastern values. East has its historical significance which includes *Culavamsa*, a historical record written in the Pali language. It entails the history of Sri Lanka from the 4th century to 1815. “Bell and other archaeologists thought this place the location of a secular summer palace when he came upon it in the nineteenth century. But the *Culavamsa* describes the establishment of forest-dwelling fraternities – by monks who opposed rituals and luxuries (82).

Principles of Theravada Buddhism pave the way to overcome the hurdles of life. The horror of the civil war causes an appalling agony to Lakma, a twelve-year-old girl whose parents were killed in the civil war. “The shock of the murder of the girl’s parents, however, had touched everything within her, driving both her verbal and her motor ability into infancy” (99). The grief-

stricken girl goes mad due to the horror of the civil war that offends her. "Any sudden sound was a danger to her. She would finger through every meal looking for insects of glass, would not sleep in the safety of her bed but hidden underneath it" (99).

Palipana, the elder brother of Lakma's mother comes to rescue the twelve-year-old girl from the clutches of civil war's horror. Palipana is deeply attracted to the spiritual life after making meticulous research on the ancient culture, tradition and philosophical values of Sri Lanka. He takes Lakma from the world of destruction to the world of primitive and spiritual enlightenment.

He supposed he had always trusted her, despite her fury and rejection of the world. He weaved into her presence his conversations about wars and medieval *slokas* and Pali texts and language, and he spoke of how history faded too, as much as battle did, and how it could exist only with the remembrance – for even the *slokason* papyrus and bound *olaleaves* would be eaten by moths and silverfish, dissolved by rainstorms – how only stone and rock could hold one person's loss and another's beauty forever (100).

The colonial impacts on the eastern countries blend with cultural changes in the country. The tradition, culture, and moral values of the East have given the least contemplation after colonization. Consequently, it paves the way to destroy not only the ethnicity but also humanity.

Every historical pillar he came to in a field he stood beside and embraced as if it were a person he had known in the past. Most of his life he had found history in stones and carvings. In the last few years, he had found the hidden histories,

intentionally lost, that altered the perspective and knowledge of earlier times. It was how one hid or wrote the truth when it was necessary to lie. (101)

Ondaatje explores the assortment of East and West nature in Anil Tissera, a lady who is born in Sri Lanka and studies in western countries. Through the utilization of Homi K Bhaba's theory of hybridity, this research paper extends its focus on hybrid empathy. Homi K Bhaba, in his essays, "Signs of four wonders: Questions of Ambivalence and Authority under a tree outside Delhi May 1817" () has described the concept of hybridity as a cross-cultural attitude in an individual. The character of Palipana stands to raise the eastern value to enrich human nature with the idea of leading a spiritual life whereas another major character of the novel, Anil Tissera comes as an investigator to her own country during the civil war after having completed her studies in UK and USA. Both Palipana and Anil are the natives of Sri Lanka but their perspectives on neutralizing the effects of civil war vary. The destruction of the civil war causes great pain to both Palipana and Anil but their notions to overcome the struggles of war are different. Palipana voices to rebuild the eastern culture, spiritual ideas, and moral values that once united Sinhalese and Tamilians in Sri Lanka.

Anil Tissera comes to Sri Lanka to investigate the causes of horror, crime, and genocide behind the civil war. Eastern ideology is not deeply rooted in her since she has a cross-cultural attitude in her though she worries about the destruction, bloodshed, and horror that the people of her native country witness. Unlike Palipana, Anil is deeply attached to western manners.

What surprised Anil as the teacher delineated the curriculum and the field of study was the quietness of the English classroom. In Colombo, there was always a racket. Birds, lorries, fighting dogs, a kindergarten's lessons of rote, street

salesmen – all their sounds entered through the open windows. There was no chance of an ivory tower existing in tropics. Anil wrote Dr. Endicott's sentence down and a few minutes later underlined it with her ballpoint in the hushed quite. For the rest of the hour she just listened and watched the lecturer's mannerisms. (136)

Her presence in a country that is on her ancestral land does not make her feel the sense of alienation. "She had expected to feel alien in England only for a few weeks. Uncles who had made the same journey a generation earlier had spoken romantically of their time abroad. They suggested that the right remarks or gesture would open all doors."(137)

Anil is unable to tolerate the injustice which mars humanity due to the politics of war. Violation of human rights has taken the lives of countless innocent people and has left many poor people helpless in the face of war. People become the victims of limitless atrocities and obliterations caused by the politics of war.

*WHO WERE YOU CRYING*for? Ananda and his wife?

'Yes,' she said. 'Ananda, Sailor, their lovers. Your brother working himself to death. There's only a mad logic here, no resolving. Your brother said something, he said, "You've got to have a sense of humor about all this – otherwise it makes no sense. You must be in hell if you seriously say things like that.... Your brother was there in a black coat and he was covered in blood, covered in blood reading a paperback. (182)

Conclusion

The conflict that has prolonged throughout various generations in Sri Lanka severely affected the lives of people and their health. It has taken the lives of thousands of people, displaced innumerable people, and caused massive mental stress to the Sri Lankans. Michael Ondaatje pictures war and its effects and he did not fail to make an explicit portrayal of forgotten history, moral values, and ideologies of East. Further, he extended his focus on balancing the eastern and western attributes in his novel *Anil's Ghost*.

Works Cited

Bhabha, Homi. *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge, New York, 2004.

Heble, Ajay. "Micael Ondaatje and the problem of History," *Clio*. No 19. Winter, 1990.

Ondaatje, Michael *Anil's Ghost*, Vintage: London, 2000.

Sing, Amardeep, "Mimicry and Hybridity in Plain English", May 08, 2009. Web.

<<https://www.lehigh.edu>>

<<https://en.m.wikipedia.org>>