

THE ORGANICIST WORLD HYPOTHESIS: TRACING THE ALLEGORIES OF REPRESENTATION IN SELECT SOUTH-EAST ASIAN FICTIONS

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Abstract:

As the cliché goes on, “Literature is the mirror of the society”. Literature always takes into account the events happening around human beings and tries to project them on page through various mediums. Very often it is seen that writers in constructing their literary world takes a single event or character or setting as the metaphor to describe larger contexts or events. This paper takes into account Hayden White’s theory of the ‘Organicist World Hypothesis’ to deal with the idea of micro representations which in fact portray macro social conditions taking into account Khushwant Singh’s *Train to Pakistan* and Bapsi Sidhwa’s *Ice Candy Man*.

Keywords: allegory, chaos, literature, partition, society

Introduction:

Remember, because nothing is ended
But it is changed.

-Mamang Dai, *The Legends of Pensam*

From poetry to drama, from fairy tales to science fiction, literature in all forms captures the imagination and emotions of the readers. It is also a way to engage people’s minds in social issues and make them aware of the social norms in a way that reality often cannot. Cultural values, societal fears and current events are all ways fiction provides a mirror for real life. Thus, from this angle, though fiction projects imaginary characters but sometimes the events and experiences may be real. As the cliché goes on “Literature is the reflection of

society”, it provides the readers with a reflection of their own lives and experiences through which the readers can connect to the characters emotionally. Often a mirror to real life, fictional stories project the fears that plague the society. Thus, the stories may be termed ‘fictional’ but the fears they project, the problems of society they portray are ‘real’. Hence, these stories act as the microcosmic element to the macrocosmic society as a whole. The novels taken for study in this thesis too deal with the projection of societal fears during Partition and the uncertainties that plagued the society during the period. Through historical fiction, a writer brings history to life. It is a mirror for the readers to gaze upon history. The general historiography of a nation gives a universal notion of the events and happenings during a point of time but it is literature that gives us a more specific version of history. It is through literature that we come to know about the general lives of people through the author’s projection of characters. Fredric Jameson in his essay on *Third World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism* observes-

All third-world texts are necessarily, I want to argue, allegorical, and in a very specific way: they are to be read as what I will call national allegories, even when, or perhaps I should say, particularly when their forms develop out of predominantly western machineries of representation, such as the novel.

Taking this statement in focus, this paper looks into how the novels taken under consideration i.e. Khushwant Singh’s *Train to Pakistan* and Bapsi Sidhwa’s *Ice Candy Man* projects the society as a whole through its various characters, events and settings.

Discussion:

Hayden White in his *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth Century Europe* states how a particular individual or community can relate or depict the entire nation in general. According to White, the ‘individual entities’ are seen as the components of an ‘organic whole.’ This, according to White is the ‘Organicist world hypotheses.’ White borrows the term from Stephen C. Pepper’s *World Hypotheses*. As White notes, according to the Organicist hypotheses-

The Organicist world hypotheses and their corresponding theories of truth and argument are relatively more “integrative” and hence more reductive in their operations. The Organicist attempts to depict the particulars discerned in the historical field as components of synthetic process. (15)

According to White, at the heart of the Organicist approach lies the microcosmic-macrocosmic relationship, which shall be the basic underlying theory for this chapter. Here, the individual entity or entities are taken as the component which makes the entire whole. White terms the Organicist hypotheses is ‘reductive’ wherein instead of narrating about the

entire nation, the historian through certain characters or communities deals with the depiction of the nation as a whole.

The fictional village of Mano Majra as portrayed in *Train to Pakistan* is not only a mere village on the border of India and Pakistan but it represents and captures the Indian society as a whole. Mano Majra encapsulates Indian society in miniature and deals with the changes that came in the Indian sub-continent as a whole during partition of the country. Thus, in doing so, Singh captures the village, life and complexities that came in the village on the wake of partition. The village in Mano Majra consisted only of seventy families and the only Hindu household in Mano Majra was that of Ram Lal's who was a local money lender. The other people in the village were Sikhs and Muslims who were greater in number. One August night, Malli, the village dacoit entered Ram Lal's house with his gang and demanded Ram Lal's wealth. When he refused to give it that moment, the Hindu was murdered and the gang left the house of Ram Lal, dropping a few bangles in the house of Jugga. Jugga was another dacoit in the village who had an ill repute and he had been to jail several times because of many charges levied against him. Jugga was at that time out in the fields with his beloved Nooran- a Muslim weaver's daughter. Hearing the sounds of the gunshots, Jugga and Nooran returned to the village.

Events gain momentum when the ghost train arrived from Pakistan to Mano Majra depicting the catastrophic events of Partition that had already started taking away lives of innocent men and women across borders.

One morning, a train from Pakistan halted at Mano Majra railway station. At first glance, it had the look of the trains in the days of peace. No one sat on the roof. But somehow it was different. There was something uneasy about it. It had a ghostly quality. (82)

The arrival of the ghost train at Mano Majra, filled with dead bodies all around created a commotion amongst general public. Thus, there arose a sense of suspicion in the minds of the Sikhs and the Muslims alike. Yet the feeling of brotherliness was unaffected for a while. People of the village gathered in the Gurudwara- their original meeting place, for consultation. As events gained momentum, the Muslims are evacuated to Chundunnugger for safety to be sent to Pakistan later.

Khushwant Singh weaves a narrative around the village life in *Train to Pakistan*. The village acts as the microcosmic unit of India as a whole. The entire action of the novel centers around a tiny village on the border of India and Pakistan during Partition but the village is the representation of the severe consequence of Partition on the entire Indian sub-continent. Singh, through the image of Mano Majra deals with how the village was divided on the basis of religious fanaticism and how the entire India was divided as a whole on the basis of it.

Thus, in one sense, the village in the novel becomes a character in itself that faces a breakdown. Singh portrays the change in the world of Mano Majra from static to dynamic.

The village Mano Majra represents by and large the Punjabi and Muslim society on the wake of Partition. While violations started to grow on various parts of the country, Mano Majra, being a remote village was unaware of the existence of the struggle for independence. Yet, at the end, it could not escape the pangs of partition. *Train to Pakistan* thus chronicles the reactions of people who were dragged to the onslaught of partition- towards a destiny, not of their own creation. The initial focus of Mano Majra slowly takes a turn and changes to suggest that it have crossed its limited geographical boundary and have become a metaphor of Punjabi rural life. Thus the distinct outline merges out of its specificity as a village on the border of the country and merges with the overall atmosphere of the nation, hence losing its specificity.

The aridity of the atmosphere in the opening of the novel suggests the general trait, the wasteland that the sub continent has become during Partition. Thus, at the very outset, Singh deals with the events that narrate the overall atmosphere of the country through the prism of Mano Majra, "For weeks, the sparse clouds cast only shadows. There was no rain. People began to say that God was punishing them for their sins." (1) It is the village of Mano Majra which alternates hate with love, anger with affection and the desire of revenge with the impulse to sacrifice. Mano Majra is seen as the microcosm of rural India with its rural divisions of religion and caste which in the long term affects their friendship, union and affection by bringing in hostility and leading to the division of the country as a whole. At the beginning of the novel, Singh tries to project the homogeneity through the various religious groups that operates within the novel as a single entity.

Rather than being mere Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs, the people in Mano Majra are a united whole. The Sikh temple and the Mosque stand next to each other and there is also a small temple of local deity. Singh also portrays the character of Imam Baksh who is the care taker of the Mosque and Meet Singh who is the caretaker of the Gurudwara. Singh projects the unity of these people when through Meet Singh's words-

Everyone is welcome to his religion. Here next door is a Muslim mosque. When I pray to my Guru, Uncle Imam Baksh calls Allah. (39)

This projects the Sikh fellow's trust towards the Muslim beings in the village. The village is the representation of a microcosmic India in the sense that it portrays different groups of people residing together.

Trains in the novel become an important symbol that sets the village into action and the subsequent violence in the novel. Though not many trains stop at Mano Majra, life in the

village is regulated by the passing of the trains near the village. This, in one sense, controls the life of the Mano Majrans.

In *Train to Pakistan*, Khushwant Singh also comments on the nature of the role of bureaucracy and administration of the country through the character of Hukum Chand. As Frantz Fanon observes in his book *The Wretched of the Earth*, the role of the 'nationalistic bourgeoisie' after the independence of the country. According to Fanon, as soon as the colonial powers left the country, the power of authority went into the hands of these nationalistic bourgeoisies for the smooth administration of the country. But things did not run in a proper manner. These nationalistic bourgeoisies took advantage of the situation and instead of looking for development of the country; they feathered their own pockets and started to live a lavish life full of comforts and grandiose.

But as soon as independence is declared, far from embodying in concrete form the needs of the people in what touches the bread, land and the restoration of the country to the sacred hands of the people, the leader will reveal his inner purpose: to become the general president of that company of profiteers impatient for their returns which constitutes the national bourgeoisie. (133)

Singh presents the character of Hukum Chand as one of the most arresting characters in the novel. He represents the typical bureaucracy in British India. Singh in the novel projects Hukum Chand as the clever and efficient bureaucrat who manages his role as the administrator in the village of Mano Majra. Though he is a man of conscience, but he is also a typical leader who indulges in certain immoral acts such as the engagement with the prostitute Haseena. Even though Hukum Chand sees that during Partition the law has broken down to pieces, yet he tries to safeguard the life and property of the villagers and maintain the peace in Mano Majra. From this point of view, we can say that he is a balanced bureaucrat who does not lose his balance at the time of crisis. He comments-

We must maintain law and order...If possible, get the Muslims to go out peacefully. Nobody really benefits by bloodshed. Bad characters will get all the loot and the government will blame us for the killing. (23)

Singh presents the character of Hukum Chand who is a true representative of the bureaucracy of his times. He is a character who faces the drawbacks of life with a great equanimity. Faced with calamities in personal life- loss of daughter, illiterate and uneducated, unattractive wife, he has no complain from life. For him, "the absolute truth was death" (76). And the rest of the thing, love, ambition, pride, values of all kind was to be set on the other side. The truth is that the havoc caused by the horrors of partition was too much for a man like Hukum Chand. All the brutalities and killings across the border bring back to his mind the

witness of the horrifying death of his aunt. Thus Hukum Chand represents a loose heart, the incapacity of the bureaucratic system to control the mob of violence.

Bapsi Sidhwa in her novel *Ice Candy Man* deals with the situation of Partition from an altogether new angle. The novel clearly speaks of the Pakistani point of view while dealing with the events and happenings in Lahore, Pakistan, during the partition of the sub-continent during 1947. Thus, we have Lenny, the chief narrator of the story around whom the world revolves and she pictures the event of Partition and the brutal riots in the name of Partition. As India is partitioned, Lenny observes the changes around her. Thus, a fear lurks in her mind when she thinks of the Partition of the country. Lenny ponders about the earth in general

And the vision of a torn Punjab. Will the earth bleed? And what about the sundered rivers? Won't their water drain into jagged cracks? Not satisfied by breaking India, they now want to tear Punjab. (116)

She observes the transition of Ice Candy Man, the Muslim street vendor. The novel is thus a microcosm of the macrocosm in the sense that it portrays the horrors and trauma of Partition poignantly as we see in *Train to Pakistan*, but here it represents the horrors on the other side of the border i.e. from the Pakistani point of view and how there forms a 'crack' eventually amongst different members of the community, representing different beliefs and faiths. As Partition in the Indian sub-continent became prominent, there were violent uprisings, acts of communal violence, arson, looting and murder that happened in the city of Lahore. This is captured artistically by Bapsi Sidhwa in her novel. The novel, through the character of Lenny, her Ayah, masseur, Ice Candy Man and other members of the community shows how the evils of Partition destroyed the unity of the entire nation and fragmented it into halves.

During Partition, there followed an exodus across borders. During Partition, as it is evident, there was strife amongst the community people of different caste and religion. This is portrayed in the group of Lenny and Ayah's friends. There was a significant disruption in the community of friendship of Ayah's circle too. Sidhwa portrays Masseur as the lover of Ayah, whom she chooses as the suitor, was murdered and his body was found near the street under a lamp-post inside a sack. Later enquiries show that it was the act of Ice Candy Man behind the murder. Bapsi Sidhwa draws the murder scene from her own experience. In an interview with David Montenegro she points out-

And I saw a few dead bodies on my Warris Road...I was actually walking to my private tutor, and there was this gunnysack lying by the roadside. The gardener, who was with me, just kicked the gunnysack, and a body spilled out, a dead body of a very good looking man. (Sidhwa, 1989)

As the Partition drew more and more close, violence accelerated in Lahore. The Muslims in Pakistan were more agitated towards the Hindus in Lahore. Sidhwa shows how there came a day when a mob of Muslim men gathered near the doorstep of Lenny's house thinking that it was a Hindu family. The angry mob demanded for the Hindus in the house. However, they were aware that Ayah was a Hindu member in the family. Imam Din, the Muslim cook tried to persuade the mob that Ayah had left Pakistan forever. But Ice Candy Man with his friendly manner approached Lenny and asked about her whereabouts. From Lenny he came to know that Ayah was still inside the house, taking refuge from the mob. Thus, the frenzied mob entered the house and dragged Ayah out of the house. She was eventually gang raped and abducted. Ice Candy Man later, puts her in a brothel and Ayah becomes a prostitute. Ayah eventually converts into a Muslim and Ice Candy Man marries her. Finally with the help of Lenny's Godmother, Ayah's whereabouts are identified and she is rescued and rehabilitated. This shows the severe trauma the Hindus had to face on the other side of the border. *Train to Pakistan* shows how this violence continued in India but the other side of the picture is portrayed by Sidhwa in *Ice Candy Man*. We also come across women refugees who took shelter near Lenny's home. Sidhwa presents a pathetic picture of women who cried and wailed whole day for the loss of their family. They are projected as 'fallen women' in the novel.

Ice Candy Man therefore represents the alternative version of Partition from the other side of the sub-continent. In the interview with David Montenegro, 24th March, 1989, Sidhwa states the reason of presenting the other side of Partition. She states-

The main motivation grew out of my reading of a good deal of literature on the Partition of India and Pakistan...what has been written by the British and Indians. Naturally they reflect their bias. And they have, I felt after I'd researched the book, been unfair to the Pakistanis. As a writer, as a human being, one just does not tolerate justice. I felt whatever little I could do to correct injustice I would like to do. I have just let facts speak for themselves and through my research I found out what the facts were.

Being a Parsi, Sidhwa was able to view history and the Partition of the Indian sub-continent from a neutral point of view and thus she feels she could do some amount of justice to history and historiography of the Partition by not being biased to any side of history during the Partition. Thus, as a Parsi, she was able to see things objectively. This is what Lenny does. Partition was not only between the Hindus and Muslims but there were other members of the community too who had to deal with the ill effects of Partition. This is reflected by the Parsi community that Sidhwa through her novel offers to the readers. Her narrative is thus very different from the Indian counter parts and is radical enough to portray the leaders in their own uniqueness. In most of the Indian narratives, we have the image of Gandhi and Nehru as the 'heroes' of the nation, giving shape to the nation and presenting or playing a vital role

during Independence of the country. We thus have Jinnah as the main apple of discord- the man who is seen almost as a villain in tearing the country apart.

According to Sidhwa, in *Ice Candy Man*, the image of Jinnah is resurrected, rescued by the hands of Sidhwa and celebrated as champion whereas the image of Gandhi and Nehru faces a drawback. Gandhi for Sidhwa is an image- not very sublime. She feels that it is the British and the Indians who celebrated the image of Gandhi as the 'Mahatma'. Sidhwa presents the alternative view. She feels that the image of Gandhi is not very sublime. We have masseur, who calls Gandhi a politician, not Mahatma or Bapu. He states, "Its his business to shoot his tongue to the moment." (91) Sidhwa not only reverses the image of Mahatma but also presents the alternate view of Nehru. For her, Nehru is nothing but a cunning politician who enjoys the cake walk because of the hardships of Jinnah, thus getting his "lion's share" (131) *Ice Candy Man* calls Nehru a sly person. He ridicules Nehru of his affair with Lady Mountbatten. He states "he's got Mountbatten eating out of his one hand and the English' wife out of his other, what not...he is the one to watch" (131) From these instances, it is clearly portrayed how Sidhwa was opposed to her Indian counterparts. She provides the version of history from the other side. Thus being a Parsi Pakistani, she is unbiased towards the course of history.

Lenny is able to understand, she is able to perceive the problems going on in Lahore as a whole but there are also problems elsewhere that are projected in the narrative by the story of Ranna towards the end of the novel which presents the riots happening on the other side of the border. Thus Sidhwa not only deals with the events of Partition of Pakistan but also projects, through the story of Ranna, the events happening on the other side of the border which also symbolize horror of Partition. Ranna's story gives the description of the grotesque view of violence prevalent elsewhere in places such as small villages, in the novel the village is named Pir Pindo. The Sikh attack on the Muslim village in Punjab is portrayed through Ranna's story. Sidhwa projects the atrocities committed by the Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs in both sides of the border. Thus, Sidhwa not only captures the events and happenings at Lahore that was completely messed up during Partition but also on villages that were adversely affected such as the village of Pir Pindo.

Lenny's Ayah, whose name is Shanta, is the one who took care of Lenny during her childhood. Sidhwa projects Ayah as the symbol to be desired by men, who draws the attention of many males all across her, men who wants to possess her. Ayah herself becomes the projection of India who is wanted by men of all race and religion. She is the exotic figure in the novel whose charm draws various visitors and suitors. We have a girl with a beautiful body which becomes the discerning factor of her abduction, like the Indian sub-continent desired, wanted and torn apart by men. People from various religious identities gather around Ayah. Their meeting place is the park garden where these people discuss various matters.

Thus, the garden becomes symbolic of Paradise and Ayah herself may be seen as the projection of 'Mother Earth' who brings in various people together under her shade. But the tumultuous riots break apart this bond and their meeting place shifts from the garden to another restaurant signifying the 'loss of Paradise'. Early in the novel, she is shown as the object of male desire. Lenny remarks-

The covetous glances Ayah draws educate me. Up and down, they look at her. Stub-handed twisted beggars and dusty old beggars on crutches drop their poses and stare at her with hard, alert eyes. Holy men, masked in piety, shove aside their pretences to ogle her with lust. Hawkers, cart-drivers, cooks, coolies and cyclists turn their heads as she passes, pushing my pram with the unconcern of the Hindu goddess she worships. (3)

When there was a change in the overall atmosphere of Lahore during Partition, there also came in a change in the group of Ayah's circle of friend from friendly intermingling to that of contempt, disdain, disgust and hatred towards one another. Ayah maintains a calm relationship with these men and avoids misunderstandings on her part in the name of religion. Both Masseur and Ice Candy Man who are her favorite, represent the Muslim community.

We see how Ayah's circle gathers around the Queen's Park and discusses various political issues of the day. The atmosphere at Queen's Park also changes gradually when there are communal tensions all over, which becomes predominant in the city of Lahore. We see how people stop coming to the park and they start to cluster in communal group. This first of all brings the idea of polarization on a mass structure. This is how, from the public attitude, Lenny comes to know about the havocs of Partition. There is always a fear in her mind. She fears that with Partition and the geographical division of the country, the earth itself is going to crack. But Ayah's circle, for a long time, remains unaffected by communal and religious polarizations. She had people from all walks of life, all religious groups surrounding her- Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs and Parsis surrounding her- a symbol of unity. But this healthy friendship was not rooted in the ground for a larger period.

Soon, communal violence started to take its roots amongst the group too. The jokes were no longer funny but sounded cruel to one another. There was also a shift in the meeting place of Ayah's group from Queen's Park to a restaurant- Wrestler's Restaurant. Sidhwa portrays the chaos in the mind of Ayah's circle. Like *Train to Pakistan*, Sidhwa too portrays an incident- the Gurdaspur train incident where many dead bodies came to Lahore and this shook Ice Candy Man who was waiting for his relatives to appear by the train. The train appears but only with dead bodies and chopped women's breasts. "A train from Gurdaspur has just come in...Everyone is dead. Butchered. They are all Muslim. There are no young women among the dead! Only two gunny-bags full of women's breasts!" (149)

Thus, Ice Candy Man cultivated the thought of vengeance and felt like chopping the Hindus. The Hindu gardener thus decides to leave Lahore and go to Delhi because of the fear of losing his family in the riot. Soon after we also see how Hari converted to Muslim and became Himmat Ali to save himself. "Hari has adapted his name to his new faith: Himmat Ali" (162). The Hindus and Sikhs are unable to face Ice Candy Man after the massacre and thus the group gets gradually distorted. Ice Candy Man becomes too engrossed and pre-occupied to take revenge on his enemies- the Hindus. He says-

I lose my senses when I think of the mutilated bodies on that train ... that night I went mad, I tell you: I lobbed grenades through the windows of Hindus and Sikhs I'd known all my life! ... I want to kill someone for each of the breasts they cut off the Muslim women. (157)

Revenge becomes the only motivation and thus he turns into a communal fanatic who takes the step of killing his rival masseur for supporting the Hindu Muslim unity. This shows the state of the Hindus in Lahore and how one viewed Partition and the fear of losing oneself, one's family led to the movement of men across borders. It also portrays the amount of hatred that was sown in the hearts of men during the riots that overtook the healthy relationship which prevailed amongst men. Lenny, being an active presence in these hot debates with the group could sense the mounting tension in the city. Ayah's group indulged in acrimonious debates on the political scenario abusing the chief players of Partition such as Gandhi, Nehru, Jinnah and Mountbatten. Lenny slowly becomes aware of the religious and communal strife across the nation. Her increasing perception starts on religious differences and social hierarchy. She remarks-

And I become aware of religious differences. It is sudden. One day everybody is themselves – and the next day they are Hindus, Sikh, and Christian. People shrink, dwindling into symbols. Ayah no longer my all encompassing Ayah – she is also a token. A Hindu. Carried away by a renewed devotional fervor she expands a small fortune in joss sticks, flowers and sweets on the Gods and Goddesses in the temple. (170)

Subsequently, Ice Candy Man abducts Ayah. This becomes obvious because she was a Hindu. Ayah was gang raped and was forced to adopt prostitution in Hira Mandi. When Ice Candy Man gets a hint that efforts are being made to save Ayah, he promptly marries her. Ayah is converted into a Muslim. Ice Candy Man desired Ayah but she loved Masseur. Thus Ayah herself becomes the symbol of India- wanted by many, broke by many and destroyed by division.

Conclusion:

Thus the study proves Frederic Jameson's statement of literature being the allegory of real life as projected by both Khushwant Singh and Bapsi Sidhwa in their texts.

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