



**ARUMUGAM PILLAI SEETHAI AMMAL COLLEGE**

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TIRUPPATTUR, SIVAGANGAI (DT), TAMILNADU.



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**TWO DAYS VIRTUAL NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON**

**Retracing the Narrative of  
Subalternity: Historical  
Evolutions and New  
Applications.  
(RNSHENA-2021)**

Organized by

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Research Department of English  
Arumugam Pillai Seethai Ammal College  
Tirupattur-630211, Sivagangai Dist.  
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# Arumugam Pillai Seethai Ammal College, Tiruppattur

## E-Seminar

Retracing the Narrative of Subalternity: Historical Evolutions and New Applications

28th of July 2021

## CONTENT

S.no	Title	Presenter	Page
1	<b>Toni Morrison's Sula; A Study of Feminist View on Radical Revisions of Race and male Centered Afro- American Literary Tradition</b>	<b>Dr.V.Guru DevRajan</b>	<b>1</b>
2	<b>The Voice Of Dalit Women In Bama's Karukku</b>	<b>Mr. K.Balamuruges</b>	<b>5</b>
3	<b>The Delineation of Memories in Afro American's Life: a Study</b>	<b>Dr. Subbiah Senthil Kumar</b>	<b>11</b>
4	<b>An appreciation on the Chronology of Indian writing in English</b>	<b>DR.J.Felcia Gnana Theebam</b>	<b>20</b>
5	<b>The Voice of the 'Have-nots' in the select novels of Mahasweta Devi</b>	<b>DR.C.KanagaSudha</b>	<b>25</b>
6	<b>Dehumanization of the African American in Beloved</b>	<b>DR.N.Aruna Devi</b>	<b>34</b>
7	<b>Self- determination and Women's experience in Anita Desai's Novels</b>	<b>DR.S.Hannah Evangeline</b>	<b>42</b>
8	<b>The Bond Of Love In Toni Morrison's Paradise</b>	<b>DR.Maria J Adalin Monika</b>	<b>49</b>
9	<b>Conflict Of Subaltern Literary Cultures InBapsiSidhwa's Ice Candy Man</b>	<b>DR.S.Mani Msghalai</b>	<b>57</b>
10	<b>Subdued Tone Of Dissents Among The Middle Classes In Mahasweta Devi's Rudali</b>	<b>T.Gayathri</b>	<b>61</b>
11	<b>The Role Of Cultural Studies In Reviving Endangered Cultures</b>	<b>Mr.V.Heymonth Kumar,</b>	<b>67</b>

<b>12</b>	<b>“With Hey, Ho, The Wind And The Rain<sup>1”</sup>- Cultural Appropriation And Postcolonial Subversion In Aime Cesaire’s <i>Une Tempete</i></b>	<b>Nilanjan Chakraborty</b>	<b>72</b>
<b>13</b>	<b>The Complexity of life in Anitha Desai’s Cry, The Peacock</b>	<b>D.Muneesvaran</b>	<b>81</b>
<b>14</b>	<b>Inferno – A Journey Of Robert Langdon</b>	<b>R. Rajasree</b>	<b>86</b>
<b>15</b>	<b>Retracing the narrative of subalternity: “History Evolution and New applications”</b>	<b>R. Renuga Devi</b>	<b>96</b>

## CONFLICT OF SUBALTERN LITERARY CULTURES IN BAPSI SIDHWA'S *ICE CANDY MAN*

*Dr.S.ManiMeghalai*

Assistant professor, Department of English

Arumugam pillai Seethai Ammal College

Tiruppattur

### Abstract

Literature is the source of the Carrefour of various socio-economic factors. Literature has the power to perform resistance and revolutionary functions. Literature also shaped by subaltern history which initiated from the school of history. In the contemporary literature subalternity became a superseding idea and literary writers turned their focus towards the voice of the voiceless society. If postcolonial criticism is taken as an offshoot of postmodernism, subaltern studies derives its force from Marxism, post structuralism and becomes a part of the postcolonial criticism. Ice-Candy- Man is the Parsi sensitivity through which partition is depicted as host of cataclysmic event. This novel is set in Pre-Independence India, excels in its representation of a combination of Indian and British characters.

**Keywords:** Subalternity; Resistance; Voiceless; structuralism; Sensitivity.

Literature has the power to perform resistance and revolutionary functions. Antonio Gramsci adopted the term to refer to those proletariat people in Soviet Union who are subject to the hegemony of the ruling classes. He claimed that the history of the subaltern classes was just as complex as the history of the dominant classes. A team of historian who aimed to promote systematic discussion of the subaltern themes in South Asian studies include Ranajit Guha, Shahid Amin, David Arnols, Partha Chatterjee, David Hardiman, Dipesh Charabarthi, Gyanendra Pandey ect. Subaltern studies defined itself as an attempt to allow the people to speak within the pages of elitist historiography, to speak for, it is the voice of the voiceless.

The subaltern group of Dalits is one of the most oppressed and discriminated group of people in Indian society. According to B.R. Ambedkar, the subaltern communities are those which are discriminated by the dominant castes. In general, the lower caste people are referred to Dalits as per the Varna system of Hindu society but in the common political understanding and discourse, the Schduled caste people are designated as the Dalits. The

term scheduled caste was first used by the British colonial government through the Government of India Act 1935. Gandhiji called the Harijans. The Dalits are some times referred to by such news as 'Exterior Castes', 'Outcastes', 'Depressed Classes', 'Scheduled Caste', 'Harijans', ' Ex- Untouchables' etc. One of the important concepts introduced by Ambedkar related to the caste system was the idea of "Graded Inequality".

*Ice-Candy- Man* is the prism of Parsi sensitivity through which partition is depicted as a host of cataclysmic event. This novel is set in Pre-Independence India, excels in its representation of a combination of Indian and British characters. Sidhwa never leaves her community in the air. Khushwanth Singh's *Train to Paksitan*, Chaman Nahal's *Azadi*, Bhisam Sahni's *Tamas*, Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice- Candy- Man* are some of the Partition novels. The novelists reveals that barbarous incidents have a redeeming and humanising effect on the deprived people. She establishes her Parsi identity in the opening pages of the novel:

Sidhwa has told a sweet and amusing tale filled with the worst atrocities imaginable; she has concoted a girlishly romantic love story which is driven by the most militant feminism; above all, she has turned her gaze upon the domestic comedy of a Pakistani family in the 1940's and some how managed to evoke the great political upheavals of the age.

Ice- Candy- Man p.1

*Ice- Candy-Man*, the novel which marked Sidhwa into international fame. This novel was published in several other countries under the name of *Cracking India*. The novel is considered by many critics to be the most moving and essential book on the Indian Partition, for instance:

The originality and power of Sidhwa's splendid novel on the partition of India and the subsequent communal violence derived from her choice of protagonist: Lenny, an eight year old Parsee girl from Lahore, a spectator living in the midst of, but apart from, the rising tensions among Hindu, Muslim,

and Sikh..... throughout, the novel sustains the vitality of Lenny's world with a series of wonderfully comic scenes.

#### The New Yorker Library Journal

*Ice-Candy-Man* is a tale of the bloody Partition that led to the creation of Independent Pakistan and India as the British left the subcontinent in the year of 1947. This book is both uplifting and heart wrenching, filled with Hindu, Muslim, Parsee and Sikh characters.

Women are considered as dolls in the hands of men and men women in their puppet show. Women are like a mere thing in the hands of men. Men misuse their power in order to show that are more superior women. On the other hand, women always want to show their presence and work for the welfare of their country, family, etc. Even though, women are empowered and emerging as a powerhouse of strength, there is always a web to entrap them and make them suppressed.

The main themes of the novel are identity, love and concept of power. People should have their own identity in this world otherwise they are not able to enjoy their own freedom. Our identity is more and more through religion. Under religion we have an identity as a Hindu, Muslim, Christian, Sikh, etc. Love is considered a main theme in all work of art. There are different forms of love in this novel. Love for land, love for religion, love for power. *Ice- Candy- Man's* love constantly changes its shape. But the love between Godmother and Lenny is an unconditional and pure love. Another major theme is the concept of power: sexual power and political power.

Through the movement of the story, Sidhwa draws out the most damaging effect of the Partition. The portrayal of violence in Partition novels is inevitable, because partition itself is a metaphor for violence and for its victims the bitter truth of the partition lay in the violence. "Hindus, Muslims and even the Sikhs are going to jockey for Power: and if you (Parsi) jokers jump into the middle you'll mingled into chutney" *Ice-Candy- Man*. P.36.

Cursing a female child is common in the period of pre-independence Indian as well as now. In *Ice-Candy-Man*, Sidhwa in the voice of Lenny, says that Papoo is a daughter of Muccho and Moti who belongs to low caste working in Lenny's house. Moti is a Hindu at the beginning of the novel. But later during the Partition periods converts into Christianity. Papoo has been treated badly by her mother reason is she is a girl child. Muccho shouts: "she a curse- of a – daughter..... Disobedient, bone lazy, she'll shame us. She'll be a death of me, the whore" (ICM.p.46.)

Lenny recalls her childhood nightmare and says that children who are in warehouse suffered, "the atmosphere is business like and relaxed" the men in uniform quietly "slice

off a child's arm here, a leg there..... only an abysmal sense of loss”( ICM. p.22.) In the name of religion men are violating the laws of peace, when Hindus and Sikhs are planned to celebrate Holi festival by splatters every body with coloured water and coloured powders that time Muslims are shouting: “ So? We'll play Holi- with – their blood! Hi-o-o-o-li with their blood!” (ICM. P.134.)

As soon as they shout , the riot has started and the people start to set fire in Hindu's bidding. The Hindus panic and they rush from one end of street to other. Many disappear down 'the smoking lanes.' People are yelling and calling their Gods to save them from the violation. Thus Holi festival would become a 'blood soaked festival'. “ We've all produced a baby, we've give birth to a new nation (Pakistan)” (ICM.p. 142).

Lenny's mother , her aunt and her Godmother help the victims during the days of communal riots. Lenny's mother and her aunt help the Hindus and Sikhs to escape from Lahore. Ayah is dragged away by the mob and raped. After her degradation, Ice-Candy-Man sets her up in Hira Mandi the prostitute in Lahore, and he renames Ayah Mumtaz.

Only women know other women's problems. Here Hamida keeps on praying that the fallen women's husbands and families would take them back. “ We are khut- putli , puppets in the hands of fate” (ICM.p. 222). Thus Bapsi Sidhwa portrays the features of subalternity of women who suffers in the hands of hegemony of the dominants in her novel *Ice Candy Man*.

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