

Revisiting the partition through the lens of child narrators: An examine of

The Shadow Lines and Ice-Candy Man



Manzoor Ahmad Najjar

Research Scholar (Ph.D. English literature)
DAVV, Indore.

Dr. Aparna Banik

Head at the department of English
Shri Cloth Market Girls Commerce College
Indore.

Abstract

The existing paper sightsees the custom of a specific narrative trick, that of, by means of the aiding of child's point of view in Ghosh's *The Shadow lines* and Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice-Candy Man* to study how the child- narrators see the partition of Indian Sub-continent and its aftermath. Both Amitav Ghosh and Bapsi Sidhwa have deployed child-narrators in the narratives to revisit the partition through the lens of child. The focus is on the child's view point in the narratives that child's perception is used to convey the binaries that both the narratives set up the national and personal.

Key words: child-narrator, partition, perspective of child, history, childhood

Revisiting the partition through the lens of child narrators: An examine of***The Shadow Lines and Ice-Candy Man***

Manzoor Ahmad Najar

Research Scholar (Ph.D. English literature)
DAVV, Indore.

Dr. Aparna Banik

Head at the department of English
Shri Cloth Market Girls Commerce College
Indore.

Introduction

In Indian fiction in English children rarely exist as a significant and progressive theme. Childhood as a considerable theme came with the generation of R.K Narayan and Raja Rao, in whose writings the children as an individual don't do anything on their own wish, even don't act in response to the social realities around them. Thus, children commonly give the impression in their writings as a parental happiness and father's longing for offspring. But the complex milieu of our country during the partition crisis pressed many writers to place 'child' at Centre. Conceivably they put in use the child as narrative medium in their writings to give the fare and genuine image of pitiless violence of post partition crisis. As is stated by Peter Coveney about the stratagem of child as a narrative medium:

The child could serve as symbol of the artist's dissatisfaction with the society which was in process of such harsh development about him. In the world given increasingly to utilitarian values and the Machine, the child could become the symbol of imagination and sensibility, a symbol of Nature set against the forces abroad in society actively de-

naturing humanity. Through child the artist could express his awareness of the conflict between human innocence and the cumulative pressures of social Experience. (Coveney-31)

Perhaps due to this reason we have a considerable number of works written during the post partition catastrophe in which child functions as narrator. In the context of uncertainty and intellectual conflict child can assist as mediator to convert the binaries between the writer's individual and general feelings. The children become apparently universal peacekeeping troops who in their own innocent ways unite the world around them. Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* and *Ice-Candy Man* is a leading case in point where the post-partition scenario is represented through the child's point of view. In both of these works, the novelists revisit their own childhood and narrate the anxiety of violence and intricacy of individual experiences of those cruel performances which *Mushirul Hassan* Puts: "...the partition affected millions, uprooted from home and field by sheer fear of death to seek safety across a line they neither drawn nor desired". Both *The Shadow Lines* and *Ice-Candy Man* uses child's point of view to represent the cruelty of partition and its unveiled scale of issues untouched. Examining the partition of Indian sub-continent from a child's perception in the fiction, offers a transcendent understanding into undefined individual involvements and national histories. This paper will unfold all its intricacies and subtleties of post-partition scenario shown through child's eye in the select novels that will stand as a heavenly surveillance, uninterrupted from the adult intervention.

Discussion

To begin with Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow lines* published in 1988. In this novel each character and circumstances is painted from the child's viewpoint. The novel represents the politics of maps in subtle conducts. For instance, the child narrator compares the drawing lines of boundaries with the game of houses which Ila guidelines her young cousin to play through a willing 'suspension of disbelief'. Ila says, 'Don't you understand? I've just rearranged things a little. If we pretend it's a house, it'll be a house' (*The Shadow lines*-77). In the same way, 'rearrangement' and 'pretension' are key confrontations for the birth of nations. Maximum nations are formed beyond rearrangement, illusion and disillusion. The birth of nations hinge on the setting lines which Amitav Ghosh termed *The Shadow lines* as the name for his novel itself. Thus, the title of the novel specifies that new nations are born out of the destruction and reconstruction of old lines. The narrator as child is influenced by Tridib about whom narrator says, 'Tridib had given me worlds to travel in and he had given me eyes to see them with (22)'. Narrator with his child curiosity make known the truth of partition through three generations from his point of view. His conception of partition is branded by realism and deep godlike understanding which he claims to have drawn from the 'renaissance Man' Tridib. The impression of borders between nations that wake up Grandmother and Jethamoshi immensely, is very normal for the narrator who is the child of 'independent' India. He with his child imagination perceives it as:

I believed in the reality of space; I believed that distance separates, that it is a corporeal substance, I believed in the reality of nations and borders. I believed that across the border there existed another reality. The only relationship my vocabulary permitted

between those separate realities was war or friendship. There was no room for this other thing. And things which did not fit my vocabulary were merely pushed over the edge into the chasm of that silence. (The Shadow Lines-241)

This simple understanding of child unfolds the subtle facts about the suffering of post-partition scenario which no mature has been able to notice in the novel. Ghosh's insight addicted to politics of maps and explicitly his understanding of delicate facts for which he has chosen to put child at Centre of his narrative is creditable. The narrator, on one occasion incapable to understand what Tridib's death meant? This incidents seemed to him like an intricate phenomenon. As he observes that each time riots occur, journalist and historians put them precisely but once they are over, they soon fail to recall. For his child understanding it all occurs for dirty reasons as he says, *'for the madness of riots is a pathological inversion'* (TSL-254). Even the narrator with his childish capacity does not cease to comment on the governments whose work is to stop every kind of occurrences he says, *'for it is in the logic of states that to exist at all they must claim the monopoly of all relationships between people'* (TSL-254).

By and large all other characters in the novel *The Shadow Lines* are introduced in relation to the main child protagonist whose consciousness shapes the whole narrative. Thus, by using the child as narrator and childhood as motif novelist skillfully represented the silent opinions of major historical violence of post-partition scenario.

The second text reserved for examination is *Ice-Candy Man* by Pakistani novelist Bapsi Sidwa. *Ice-Candy Man* make public the whole unseen agony of separating wall of Indian sub-

continent and its result through the polio-ridden girl child-narrator namely Lenny who at the outset declares, *'my world is compressed'* which she points out about her limitations of personal world. It is in fact this stratagem of child-narrator which facilitates Bapsi Sidhwa to treat the misery of partition short of morbidity and censure. The novel mentions, *'she is child gifted with faculty of intuition. I intuit the meaning and purpose of things'* (ICM-28). The Sidhwa's turn of preparing Lenny with all kinds of tools is highly significant as it authorized the child-narrator to witness as well as to narrate the hurtful violence of partition event. Bapsi Sidhwa very skillfully displays the brutalization and the fear of partition through the lens of child narrator:

There is much disturbing talk. India is going to be broken. Can one break a country? And what happens if they break it where our house is? Or crack it further up on Warris Road? How will I ever get to Godmother's house? (ICM, 92)

This makes known the impact of partition on the children which we notice from the expressions of child-narrator who give the impression of being fearful about the division of India and its result. These are the realities which we see through the neutral eyes of Lenny who is child free from the religious prejudices. As has been stated by Rousseau "...childhood has ways of seeing, thinking and feeling particular to itself; nothing can be more foolish than to substitute our ways to them". She even doesn't make a distinction between a people who are fighting against each other. Despite of all this emotional trauma, the narrator with her child capacity expresses the growing of collective nationalism she says, *'if anyone is to blame, blame the British! There was no polio in India till they brought it here'* (ICM-16). This is the way novelist has recorded

the growing feelings of nationalism which makes known everything with the consciousness of innocent child. But in due course she at one point with her close observation and deep child contemplation learns from the world around her---the political issues of the day--*Swaraj*, the demand of Pakistan. She says, “*Now I know surly. One man’s religion is another man’s poison*” (ICM-116). It strikes her mind to think on the things which she as child does not want to ponder over. Gradually she learned that the different religions all around her are not themselves. She says, “*It is sudden. One day everybody is themselves and the next day they are Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, and Christian*”. (ICM-93). Thus, Sidhwa artistically unfolds the private and public affairs to Lenny. The intricacy and ambiguity of partition and its result is juxtaposed with the delicacy of growing up of the child’s mind. Alamgir Hashmi about the use of child-narrator by Bapsi Sidhwa writes: “*Ice-Candy Man concerns the partition events of 1947, and is more interesting for characterization, developing narrative techniques and child’s point of view than what it actually has to tell about the events*”. Thus, Sidhwa succeeds to rewrite the history by revisiting the historical partition through the ‘*consciousness of child*’ which she uses as narrative stratagem for her novel.

Conclusion

As a child both Lenny and the unnamed child-narrator in *The Shadow Lines* and *Ice-Candy Man* sees the dreadful occurrences of post-partition scenario and survived with their remembrance which they express like child wonder. The child’s deep understanding of political issues is understood through Lenny’s reaction to the imperialist view point ‘*if we quit India*

today, you will bloody fall at each other's throats' which she countered by dig at the 'Divide and rule monkey tricks.' (ICM, 62, 63). Thus the repeated reference to the effect of the partition on 'her mind' give a new lens to perceive the partition crisis. Same we see in *The Shadow Lines*, in revisiting the partition Gosh through child lens succeeds to record all possibilities of together the child's view point and the use of child wonder.

Apparently the horrors of the partition event in these novels which Lenny in *Ice-Candy Man* and unnamed boy in *The Shadow Lines* has engaged within themselves for their expanded prospect and imaginative understanding of the world around them which was trapped up in the whirlpool of violence and fatal riot stresses on the earnestness to preserve the memories of coherent and human dealings for cultural autonomy and intra-personal communication. In sum, the effect of partition on children is understood in the appearances and expressions of Lenny in *Ice-candy Man* and the unnamed child-narrator in *The Shadow lines*.

Works cited

Primary source

Gosh, Amitav. *The Shadow Lines*. New Delhi: Ravi Dayal, 1988.

Sidhwa, Bapsi. *Ice-Candy man*. New Delhi: penguin books, 1989. First pub. 1988.

Secondary source

Alamgir Hashmi, *The year that was: Pakistan 1988*, p.135

Coveney, Peter. *Image of childhood, the individual and society of the theme in English Literature*: Penguin Books, 1957, 1967.

Jean Jacques Rousseau, Emile (1762). Quoted in Peter Coveney, *the Image of Childhood*, and Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967, p.44. First pub. 1957.

Mushirul Hassan, 'Imaginary Homelands, *Special issue on the partition 1947-1997*, outlook, May 28, 1997, p.29.