Chapter One

Introduction: 'The Richness of Childhood'

I played with my heart. It was a three-year-old Oskar who picked up the drumsticks. I drummed up the world as a three-year-old sees it.

_The Tin Drum_¹

A chance re-reading of Günter Grass’s _The Tin Drum_ (1959) a few years ago triggered off certain thoughts in my mind which have finally culminated in this dissertation. In this encounter, the Tin Drummer had the effect of drumming me into hitherto untrodden avenues of inquiry. The repeated references to Oskar Mazareth, the protagonist’s ‘three-year-old’ status, and the fact that he wilfully chooses not to grow beyond this age of three, raised questions about the strategic possibilities of childhood in narrative literature. What was it that made this ‘clairaudient infant’ take the vow of remaining an ‘eternal three-year-old’? The audacity of the self-comparisons with the ‘preposterous naked kid’², Jesus Christ, and then, with the ‘child’, St. John

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2 ibid. p. 136.
the Baptist had a spell-binding effect:

Oskar [ventured]...into the company of these two boys with that precocious look in their eyes which bore a terrifying resemblance to his own.³

In taking on the mantle of a Christ-figure, he seemed to me, taking on a presumptuous responsibility towards mankind. When I started speculating on the reasons for Grass's choice of a 'child' protagonist-narrator, it became an engrossing exercise trying to figure out the motive behind Grass's attribution of super-powers to Oskar. His considered option of childhood as a desired vantage point led me to think of other texts I had read where a child's consciousness is used centrally.

The travails of the two children, Jem and Scout in Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960) may have returned to my mind more readily and more vividly than others because of the Hollywood movie starring Gregory Peck. Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn* was another novel that needed to be thought about again for its unforgettable use of a boy's perception. Among more recent books, it was not difficult to see the affinity between Saleem in *Midnight's Children* (1980) and the Tin Drummer. Very soon, I found myself actively looking for the child figure in fiction, the interest being fuelled by random reading of texts from different parts of the world like Maxim Gorky's *Childhood* (1954; Russian), Isabel Allende's *Eva Luna* (1983; Spanish), Krishna Baldev Vaid's *Uska Bachpan* (1957;

Hindi), Bibhutibhushan Bandopadhyaya's *Pather Panchali* (1929; Bangla) and Christa Wolf's *Childhood* (1980; German).

Gradually, the possibility of a topic for research seemed to evolve, and its viability was soon established by the large number of novels with the child at their centre which were unearthed by this persistent digging and delving. Turning my eye backward, I discovered that starting early with oral literature, the use of the figure of the child, and the theme and *topos* of childhood, has continued to wend its way into written literature in different languages. In order to give coherence to my study, I then limited myself to novels written only in English. It was interesting to see the manner in which the child had come to be treated in many of these novels at the end of the twentieth century. There is a distinct difference in the approach of novelists today from the earlier literary treatment in the hands of nineteenth century British novelists like Charles Dickens (1812-70) and George Eliot (1819-80). As such, the child becomes an important vehicle for the post-modern, de-centred consciousness. The limitations imposed by the comparatively cohesive, integrated human personality of the adult are surmounted by the use of the child who can have a fluid, protean and a chimerical relationship with the world. Nothing has congealed; therefore, the possibilities are infinite.

This study will make an effort to understand these possibilities, and to scrutinise the varied use of the child and childhood in fiction today. In historical and sociological studies of human society, the child has been a comparatively neglected entity as woman had been until recently. An overwhelming male
tradition of history had 'consistently and perhaps deliberately' neglected woman who constitute one half of the world’s population. ‘Children too have a very marginal place in the historians’ reconstruction of past time, despite the fact that they must have formed a substantial proportion of any society we care to examine’ says James Walvin in the introduction to his book *A Child’s World* (1982). One reason for this neglect could be the fact that childhood is a transitory stage in life. Therefore, the child’s role in history, and his part in the making of it, seems marginal. However, for the creative writer the child has never been marginal. Children have figured in literature for a long time, but in critical discourse their role has not been sufficiently recognised. It is this marginalisation of the child that requires to be looked at and thought about. There is the need of redefining the subject within social, and historical contexts, and of reinserting it into the framework of significant critical thinking.

In this dissertation I am going to look at children in fiction, and childhood as theme, but it is too large a topic to be taken up in its totality. Hence I have delimited myself historically and geographically to focus on certain kinds of texts. It is essential to spell out why the focus is on postcolonial writers to the exclusion

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5 There has been much debate about how the word ‘postcolonial’ ought to be written: with or without a hyphen after ‘post’. I prefer to use it without the hyphen because I feel that it unnecessarily privileges colonialism. Without the hyphen, the experience of colonialism is neither forgotten nor given undue importance. For a discussion on the issue refer to T. Vijay Kumar’s, ‘Post-colonialism or Postcolonialism?: Re-locating the Hyphen,’ in Harish Trivedi and Meenakshi Mukherjee, eds., *Interrogating Post-colonialism: Theory, Text and Context*, Shimla: Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 1996, pp.195-202.
of writers from Britain and America. Although some of the postcolonial writers have settled in the West now, the novelists selected for this study originally belonged to countries outside Britain and America. The emphasis here will be on novelists who hail from countries like the West Indies, India, Pakistan, Kenya and Nigeria which have gone through colonial experience under the British Empire. Moreover, much critical work has already been done on how childhood is represented in English and American literature. Further work in this area will run the risk of repetition and redundancy and did not seem to me an enterprise exciting enough to undertake all over again.

Nevertheless, the study of the postcolonial novel too must begin with a glance backwards to the novels in Britain because a novel written in English in any part of the world has some relationship with these progenitors, though the links may not be always easy or direct. As Nadine Gordimer points out, the impact of the ‘English’ tradition is inevitable even though today, the postcolonial novelist may seem independent of the British model. He now uses the English language as effortlessly as if it were a first language with as much ease as the ‘native’ speaker of English and without being in the least swamped by the sense of being overpowered. A resume of the history of the use of the child in English literature is nevertheless useful.

The Child in English Literature prior to the Postcolonial

While history has neglected childhood as an area of research, creative literature has been fascinated with the child and childhood for almost three centuries. Perhaps, the
uncontaminated, non-judgmental, relatively open ideological space of the child’s mind makes it fertile ground for literary creativity. Many a literary artist, from Jean Jacques Rousseau (Emile, 1762) to Arundhati Roy (The God of Small Things, 1997) has fruitfully tapped this resource.

In English literature, till the appearance of Blake, the child and childhood as subjects were hardly discernible as an important continuous theme. The shift from the world of unequivocal adult concerns of the literature of the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, to this fresh perspective, was momentous. Undeniably, the child did appear in many Elizabethan lyrics and in many minor encomiastic verses addressed to ‘children of quality’ by poets like Dryden, Pope and Prior, but Elizabethan drama, the significant portion of Augustan poetry, and the major eighteenth century novels are all marked by the absence of the child. If present at all, he was only referred to in passing, as a subordinate constituent of a predominantly adult world. Children could only find their way into literature if they were suitably backgrounded. They were definitely not worth being given a subject position.

It was with Rousseau’s ‘cult of sensibility’ and his idea of the ‘noble savage’, l’homme nouveau⁶, that the stage was set for the Romantic discovery and deployment of the child as a symbol. In the Preface to Emile (1762), he asserted:

Nature wants children to be children before they are men. If we deliberately pervert this

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⁶ In Jean Jacques Rousseau’s Emile (1762). L’homme nouveau, literally the new man, was a reference to the ‘noble savage.’
order, we shall get premature fruits which are neither ripe nor well-flavoured, and which soon decay.... childhood has ways of seeing, thinking, and feeling peculiar to itself; nothing can be more foolish than to substitute our ways for them.7

He was the first philosopher and man of letters to demand a fresh approach to the child insisting that the child was important as an individual and not as a Lilliputian adult. Until the end of the eighteenth century, even the books meant for children were severely moralistic, the emphasis being on the need to discipline the chaotic energy of childhood into adult channels of restrained behaviour.

There came a dramatic change in thought and sensibility at the end of the eighteenth century with a movement which later came to be called the 'romantic revival'. Now, the child becomes the centre of unprecedented literary interest. Through the image of the child the poet begins to express something of paramount importance to him. As Coveney says, 'with Blake we have the first co-ordinated utterance of the Romantic Imaginative and spiritually sensitive child.'8 For him, the child became a poetic symbol of innocence which was integral to his art. As a religious artist, he learnt from Christ 'Except ye become as a little child:

8 Coveney, The Image of Childhood, op.cit., p. 51.
except ye be born again.' With his *Songs of Innocence and Experience* and Wordsworth's 'Ode on the Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood' and 'The Prelude', the child became the focal figure in serious literature. The importance that Wordsworth gave to the child has no precedent:

The child is the father of the man,
And I could wish my days to be
Bound each to each by natural piety.

He also recognises

...our simple childhood sits,
Our simple childhood, sits upon a throne
That hath more power than all the elements...
That twilight when we first begin to see
This dawning earth.....

The origins of the child in modern literature are to be closely associated with this revolution in sensibility.

The increasing use of the theme of childhood in nineteenth and twentieth century literature is closely linked with the sociological developments of the time. The intellectual and spiritual crisis of the end of the eighteenth century had a lasting impact on literature. Social and political unrest was aggravated by the French and the Industrial revolutions. Industrialisation in

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9 Reference to the Bible, Mark 10:14 and 15. The New International Version says, 'Let the children come to me, do not hinder them; for to such belongs the kingdom of God. I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the Kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.' This idea is repeated in Matthew 19:14 and in Luke 18:16.
the late eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries led to some apathy and hostility towards art and literature. Buffeted by these circumstances, many readers were alienated from works of imagination. Thus, the audience to whom the serious artist could expect to address himself dwindled, and to a large extent, this resulted in the minimisation of the impact of literature on public affairs. Many a creative writer found himself edged into the realm of irrelevance. Unable to handle the irreversible sense of alienation and unmitigated artistic loneliness, these artists groped for ways in which they could understand and portray this malaise in literature.

To this estranged artist, the child's traumatic experience of adjusting to the inimical, bewildering surroundings, mirrored his own uneasiness in this changing world. 'In the context of isolation, alienation, doubt and intellectual conflict,' observes Peter Coveney in his seminal work, *The Image of Childhood* (1957), 'it is not difficult to see the attraction of the child as a literary theme.'10 Apparently, reeling under the impact of Utilitarianism and ever increasing mechanisation, the writer made the child become the symbol of imagination and sensibility; of Nature and everything associated with it. The symbol of the child seemed to give word to the struggle between the corrosive aspect of human experience and original innocence. Further, according to Coveney, 'in childhood lay the perfect image of insecurity and isolation, of fear and bewilderment, of vulnerability and potential violation.'11

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11 Coveney, ibid., p. 7.
Though such a symbol could well invite morbidity, escapism and nostalgia, as it did later with some writers, many literary stalwarts managed to convert it to their strength by making the child the means of investigation and discovery of the self, and the instrument of protesting against the unhappy changes that society was undergoing. In their hands, the child became the basis of, and a part of, serious adult literature. The child was the fount of Wordsworth's philosophy of human nature, and in Dickens, he became the dramatised embodiment of a moral outlook and comment.

The twin aspects of the child as symbol and childhood as theme have been important features ever since Dickens, the last man of letters who was also a public man of great influence, started using them. Earlier, in the arena of fictional writing, the Austen world was curiously limited in the number of children portrayed, Fanny Price being a rare exception. The Musgrave children in *Persuasion* (1818) are seen as a collectivity, and the children of Emma's sister are never individualised. Dickens was the first novelist to make them the major focus of his creative attention. As the true inheritor of the Romantic tradition, he pitched the innocence of the child against dehumanising experience, typified in the maddening race for material progress. The victimised child, Oliver sobs

'...no, no, sir; I will be good indeed; indeed, indeed I will, sir! I am a very little boy, sir; and it is so--so--'

'So what?' enquired Bumble in amazement.
'So lonely, sir! So very lonely!' cried the child.\textsuperscript{12}

The Poor Law Amendment Act 1834 came in for a scathing attack through the agency of the child protagonist, Oliver, who became representative of all the good that was being repressed by the inhuman adult world of harsh, self-seeking laws. As in \textit{Oliver Twist} (1838), Dickens offered a fundamental critique of life in all his novels, through the symbol of the child. Backed by a highly moral outlook, his voice finally gained maturity in \textit{Dombey and Son} (1848) and \textit{Hard Times} (1854), after the initial sentimentalisations in \textit{Oliver Twist}, \textit{The Old Curiosity Shop} (1840-41) and \textit{Nicholas Nickleby} (1839). In this reformist zeal can be seen the first consistent novelistic foray into the use of the child as a literary strategy.

At about the same time, in \textit{Wuthering Heights} (1847), Emily Brontë created her tempestuous children, always recalled in the volatile adults that they ultimately become. Charlotte Brontë's \textit{Jane Eyre} (1847) was one of the earliest fictional accounts from within the consciousness of the child, the first person narrative technique lending it vivid authenticity. The child heroine's development into the adult governess is also the first instance of a psychologically 'integrated' realisation of a character. The victimised orphan girl's unhappy responses to her early childhood experiences are dramatically portrayed.

...I saw him lift and poise the book and stand

in act to hurl it...the volume was flung, it hit me, and I fell, striking my head against the door and cutting it. The cut bled, the pain was sharp...

What a consternation of soul was mine that dreary afternoon! How all my brain was in tumult, and all my heart was in insurrection. Yet in what darkness, what dense ignorance, was the mental battle fought! I could not answer the ceaseless question—why I thus suffered...

Indeed this 'recollection of childhood’s terrors and sorrows' is 'strangely impressive' for its 'half-comprehended notions that float dim through children’s brains.' Later, on similar lines, George Eliot presented her Maggie Tulliver in The Mill on the Floss (1860), who too, was a vivid portrait of a psychologically realised young girl. The portrayal gained intensity because of her personal responses to her own childhood which weave themselves into her creation.

Thereafter, there was a marked decline in the standard of novels in England dealing with the child. In the hands of lesser Victorians like Marie Corelli, the potential of the Romantic image of childhood was absolutely negated by the superimposition of

14 ibid., p. 10.
15 ibid, p. 4.
the writer's personal psychological aberrations. These writers transferred their own unhappiness, withdrawals, death-wishes to the image, so that the image that could have stood for birth, growth and life, degenerated to represent the 'death' of life itself. *East Lynne* (1861) by Mrs. Henry Wood displays all the degeneration of the use in William Carlyle, the most notorious of the Victorian 'dying' children. Perpetuating the tradition set into motion by Little Nell and Paul Dombey, this child pays for the carnal sins of his sinful, lascivious mother in a highly melodramatic moralising piece of fictional writing. Heavily cliché-ridden, this morbid, sadistic tearjerker finally laid to waste the whole Romantic tradition. Continuing the ignoble propagandist moralising, Marie Corelli's *The Mighty Atom* (1896) and *Boy* (1900) are replete with watered down versions of Dickens' characters, the children being sickeningly 'heavenly-sweet' like Jessamine held tight in the grip of an unhealthy and morbid desire for death. Maybe these dying children, with their prolonged illnesses were partly a reflection of the reality of the times. The health conditions and medical facilities were so poor that child mortality was particularly very high.

There seems to be an underlying concurrence in the beliefs and attitudes of the reader and writer here. For instance, the Victorian middle class morality informs both the reader's and the writer's attitude, and laces the world of the novel. 'Adult' children comment on an 'adult' world, the preoccupation with social comment voicing the 'adult' concerns of the author. This 'unchildlike' child is therefore deviant from the lifelike 'real' child. In this mode, the child would emerge, more often than not,
as a representative, stereotypical, moribund figure like the victimised child and the innocent paragon of virtue.

With time then, the symbol of the child and the theme of childhood in literature started showing signs of fatigue. Overworked, the symbol and theme found a fresh lease of life in psychoanalysis. Though psychoanalysis had inadvertently, and inescapably, been a part of the treatment of the child since the beginning, it was now consciously applied to study the effect of the child’s consciousness in the making of the adult. Now, the artist was studying the effects of external influences on the child’s consciousness and vice-versa. One fact becomes abundantly clear that the phenomenon of the child as subject and symbol, and childhood as a theme, has become a significant part of English literature worthy of independent attention.

Across the Atlantic, the symbol was revitalised with Mark Twain’s *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876) and *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1885), which dramatise the rebellion of ‘natural’ childhood instincts against the stifling ‘morality’ of society. The novel, *Huckleberry Finn*, gains in complexity when the comparison and contrast between Tom and Huck becomes symptomatic of a socio-political statement. The appearance of the Southern gentry and the children’s obsession with death takes the novel beyond a mere idealised picture of paradigmatic innocence. The intimacy of the first person narrator meant that there was going to be no super-imposition of the adult viewpoint. Consequently, there is no overt philosophising. Peter
Coveney calls its rendition of childhood a 'literary rarity.'\(^{16}\) In expanding beyond the merely personal, and in transcending the pull of a nostalgic boyhood desire to escape, it becomes a 'commentary on American society, and finally on civilisation itself.'\(^{17}\) Some years later, Henry James made the child the basis of a confrontational analysis of innocence faced with the complexities of life. Masie in *What Masie Knew* (1897), Nanda Brookenham in *The Awkward Age* (1899) and Miles and Flora in *The Turn of the Screw* (1898) become important foci in his novels in his attempt to question and destabilise the values of the adult world.

Moreover, with Freud and his theory of infantile sexuality came an end to the Victorian cult of the innocent, passive child. With Henry James' child centred works as the first post-Freudian precursors, in the works of Joyce, *Dubliners* (1914) and *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916), Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* (1927) and *Waves* (1931) and D. H. Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers* (1913), the inward sensibilities of the child were dramatically analysed as part of a developing consciousness. It was the establishment of psychology as an acceptable science at the turn of the century that shifted the focus to the mind of the child. Literary children became more individualistic, more 'real' in the psychologically developed sense, more important both in themselves and as the basis of the grown adults. The treatment of the adult was set against the background of an alienation which underlay the attitude of the author whose beliefs were at variance with those of society. So, the child often became the


\(^{17}\) ibid., p. 232.

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take-off point and the means by which the author voiced this alienation and resultant dissatisfaction. The growing children, Paul and William Morel in *Sons and Lovers*, take their frustrations and inhibitions into adulthood. Critical scrutiny also comes to rely heavily on psychoanalysis going so far as to detect the childhood experiences of Lawrence's own life as revealed in the text. Thus, each author deals with the child from his specific historical perspective, and from his particularly personal point of view.

One ancestor specially pertinent to the postcolonial child is the child in the colonial novel of which Kipling's Mowgli in the two *Jungle Books* (1894, 1895) and Kim in the eponymous *Kim* (1901) would be the best examples. Here, the changing critical responses to the children in these novels over the years, show the complexity that underlies their construction. Earlier critical readings of Kim as being thoroughly tainted with the colonialist constructions of the 'oriental', made the portrayal of this child fall in line with the well-laid colonialist strategies for absolute rol. From this viewpoint, the 'native' child could be nothing a savage, literally a 'man-cub', who sadly lacked both the se and the substance of the white man. Kim could climb thearious colonial social ladder only after white blood had been ed and established in his veins, and only after all direct relationship with India, as represented by his relationship with the lama, was totally repudiated. The dynamics of a subjugating imperial sympathy with the native, apparent in the total identification of Kim with the sights, sounds and the ethos of the *bazaar*, complicated the task. Placed in Greenberger's 'Era of Confidence' (1880-1910), from this standpoint Kipling was
supposedly nurtured in the supercilious belief that the British were 'the mere fraction of white faces responsible for the safety of those millions of dark ones.' The dark-skinned native was incapable of standing on his own and had no identity other than that worked out in relation to the white master. It falls to the postcolonial writer to create a child who would dismantle and subvert this reductionist construction by reworking an independent identity for himself. Later nuanced readings like Ashis Nandy's psychoanalytic approach to Kipling's creation, excites attention to the fact that this task is neither easy nor straightforward. The loaded complex colonial position of the writer wherein he labours under the opposing pulls of love and hate for the colonised land and the colonised subject, demands a deeply thought out strategy to counter its impact.

The Child in the Postcolonial Novel Today

Just as critical response to colonialist writings has altered, the emphasis on the child in the postcolonial novel in English today too shows a decided development and change. From the predominant representation of the unrealistic 'adult' child of Victorian fiction, more often than not mired in stereotypes, through the 'realistic' modern child who is psychologically interesting, and thus capable of being subjected to the scrutiny of the literary artist, the child moves into the strobic spotlight of a renewed, vigorous attention by the postcolonial novelist. It is

well known that the children Saleem Sinai in Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* and Azaro in Ben Okri's *The Famished Road* are integral to the innovative novelistic modes and the intent of the writers. In concomitance with a whole new set of associations and changed ramifications, the child emerges as an important subject and childhood a significant theme, in fiction. It would be my concern to locate the areas of change and development, and to identify how metamorphosed conditions make the child an integral part of the narrative strategy in the novels which use them.

Before going into the connotations of the term 'postcolonial', let me first clarify that the novels to be discussed in this dissertation are postcolonial novels written in English. The novel in English, it is well known, is no longer the sole domain of the 'native' speaker of English. Increasingly, people who have received education through the medium of English, but who have memories of other cultures, and hence, owe instinctive and emotional allegiance to these memories and to another native language, are chalking out newer spaces on the world map of the novel in English. With some exceptions these writers belong to the former colonies of the British Empire. Though allied with cultures other than British, Timothy Mo and Kazuo Ishiguro writing in English do not partake of a colonial history. The contemporary novel in English then, is essentially 'of the world' with writers from Asia, Africa and the West Indies (Salman Rushdie, Amitav Ghosh, Vikram Seth, Amit Chaudhry, Bapsi Sidhwa, Ngugi wa Thiongo, Ben Okri, George Lamming and V.S. Naipaul, to name just a few) carving undeniable niches for themselves.
Though the choice of English as the medium of their novels ensures automatic placement in the historical perspective of the English novel as traced above, the personal and historical experience of these new novelists becomes extremely important. The heterogeneity of the experience of the novelist in English today needs to be examined because it has an impact on the representation of the child and the use of his consciousness in the novel. In the context of a violent fractious world of political ferment and struggle, the child comes to stand for what Walvin calls 'a force which cannot be ignored.'\textsuperscript{19} It is this enlightened recognition of the child's consciousness which makes postcolonial novelists in English, like V.S. Naipaul, George Lamming, Salman Rushdie and Ben Okri, recognise the child as an important participant in, and commentator on the political scene.

This is not to suggest that the child as fictional raw material is used only by the novelist who write in English from ex-British colonies. Novels in other languages, in French, Spanish and Portuguese, with other colonial histories, may also evince a conscious interest in using the child’s point of view. A noteworthy example is Isabel Allende’s \textit{Eva Luna}(1987), where a growing girl child’s consciousness is followed through to maturity. Bibhutibhushan Bandhopadhyaya’s \textit{Pather Panchali} (1929) in Bengali and Krishna Baldev Vaid’s \textit{Uska Bachpan}(1957) in Hindi too work entirely through the consciousness of the children Opu and Biru respectively. The Irish writer Roddy

Doyle's *Paddy Clarke Ha-Ha-Ha* (1993) written from the narrative perspective of a ten-year old, shows that the tradition set into motion by the Romantic poets, Blake, Wordsworth and Coleridge, and given continued life in the Victorian novel, still persists in writing in England. In America too the tradition lives on in novels like Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960) and *The Bluest Eye* (1970) by Toni Morrison. But all research projects have to limit themselves to a well defined and manageable area. My focus in this dissertation is on some novels written in English by writers who have gone through the experience of colonisation by the British because this is an area that has not yet been critically explored, and because I hope to trace certain common features in these novels even though their points of origin and cultural ethos happen to be different.

In the last half century, many novels in various languages, including English, are being written around the figure of a child. This study will explore the reasons for the frequent use of the child figure and the child's consciousness in the English novel of the past fifty years in at least three different regions of the world, Africa, the Caribbean and the Indian subcontinent with special focus on postcolonial writers like George Lamming, Jamaica Kincaid, Salman Rushdie, Amitav Ghosh, Bapsi Sidhwa, Nuruddin Farah, Tsitsi Dangarembga and Ben Okri. Most of these writers who have opted to write in English, originally belong to the erstwhile colonies of the British Empire and may be called bicultural in their literary heritage and emotional affiliation.
So, chronologically the scope of the research spans the last five decades, the period when most of the colonised lands became free, or were engaged in the struggle for freedom, soon to culminate in shaking off the shackles of alien control. This has been the age of anti-colonial, postcolonial thinking, questioning, and of persistent, directed efforts at decolonisation. India and Pakistan became separate national entities in 1947. The next three decades saw most of the African nations and the West Indies becoming sovereign states.

This study will also attempt to analyse and chart the different ways in which the novelists have deployed this point of view of the child to highlight psychological, political, economic, social, and moral concerns in individuals, families, and societies that are quite different in their cultural configurations and historical contexts. It is also essential not to forget how the child is constructed in literary imagination, and social practice depends on the specific cultural contexts of the country. In each case, distinct cultural paradigms apply. For instance, while the father-son bonding is of crucial importance in western culture, the mother-son relationship seems to be sentimentalised more in Indian films and fiction. In Caribbean novels, fathers are sometimes absent figures. In many parts of Africa mothering seems to be the basis of social organisation and social bonding. Such differences in emphasis in social and family relationships are likely to result in diverse ways of representation.
The Child and Postcolonialism

While agreeing with Aijaz Ahmad's belief that the 'colonial' and 'postcolonial' are 'key analytic categories which are used for periodisation of history'\(^{20}\), it is yet wise to be wary of the homogenising effect of the postcolonial umbrella. To arrive at some understanding of the postcolonial scene, it becomes incumbent to come to grips with this latest 'post' word, postcolonialism, and all its multifarious connotations. Much debated, much maligned, at the same time much promoted, the controversy of 'postcolonialism' has been riddling critical circles for some time now making it clear that it is more than a chronological marker. In literary studies too, its 'essential nature' has neither been satisfactorily or finally pinpointed, nor is there any need for it to be neatly summed up. Yet the assessment of the postcolonial novel has been based on how it negotiates the numinous 'issue of postcoloniality.' If Arun Prabha Mukherjee explains postcolonial literature as that body of writing which partakes of certain qualities of resistance, propelled by the ultimate aim of the subversion of the imperial centre, she will also immediately qualify the definition by her belief that no postcolonial theory could hope to cover the complete heterogeneous gamut of writing in India.\(^{21}\) In his traditional innocence, the non-judgmental child seems best equipped to

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mirror the complexity of the postcolonial in its totality without any censorship.

Postcolonialism can definitely be seen as a response to colonialism because it occupies a tacit critiquing position. The reaction to the clamps of colonialist control began the day colonialism began. In this sense there is a chronological overlap between the colonial and the postcolonial. Generally, this reaction is a politically informed one, though it is not essential that the postcolonial writer make this awareness the only, or even the main concern of his novel. The term embraces all those parts of the world which have gone through the experience of colonial rule, be it English, Portuguese, Spanish, Dutch or French. Whether it is seen as a chronological term, or whether the accent is on the response to colonialism, writings in both the indigenous languages and the coloniser's language, can be termed postcolonial. Of course, there is a greater possibility of some writing in a native language of ignoring the advent of colonialism because it has a long genealogy of literary development in which the colonial rule is perceived only as a brief and passing interlude. Yet, if colonisation is either directly or indirectly experienced by the writer, it is hardly likely that the experience will not inform the text of his work.

Therefore, in most cases there is not much scope for an obliviousness with regard to, or elision of, any moment of experience in political history. Nonetheless, there are several possible responses to colonialism and neo-colonialism from the postcolonial writer. Firstly, and this is a category that cannot concern us, he can do so by forgetting it, by indulging in the
safety valve of an amnesiac erasure. Next, and this is the most current and popular response, he could adopt an oppositional stand which suggests a critical negotiation of whatever colonialism did and implied in the first place. Here, the doubtful legacy of colonialism is dissected and attacked in the manner it is manifested in the postcolonial present. With a definite agenda of resistance and subversion of the imperial centre this is one response that can be called postcolonial. This is a valid response to quite an extent. Elleke Boehmer in the Introduction to her book *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature: Migrant Metaphors* (1995) gives a succinct though extended definition of postcolonial literature and postcoloniality in this light.

Postcolonial literature is that which critically scrutinises the colonial relationship. It is writing that sets out in one way or another to resist colonialist perspectives subordination. Postcolonial literature, therefore, is deeply marked by the experiences of cultural exclusion and division under empire Building on this, postcoloniality is defined as that condition in which colonised peoples seek to take their place, forcibly or otherwise, as historical subjects.22

The aim of this study will be to figure out the strategy of attaining the rightful place and to study the role of the child in

forging this approach to the 'postcolonial'. Steering clear of the homogenising impulse that could toll the death-knell for an 'ism', the postcolonial umbrella ought to cover fresh directions without generalising and without hardening into an unyielding monolith.

Nationalism, Decolonisation and National Identity

Linked closely to the issue of postcolonialism, are the problems of nationalism, decolonisation and national identity. In this study, the effort will be to gauge the relative importance of these issues in the novels that use the child as a central consciousness and how the question of identity, national as well as individual, is explored through this perspective. The self-consciousness that comes with the search for identity, as well as the idea of growth, informs the work of the postcolonial novel. In the context of the denudation of identity that colonialism brings in its wake, Erikson's observation that 'we begin to conceptualise matters of identity at the very time in history when they become a problem'\(^{23}\) becomes apposite. This issue builds up to the problem of addressing the question of the 'superidentity of nations', the final identifying factor for nations in their formative stages.\(^{24}\)

As such then, the problematic of nationalism is a fundamental interest of the postcolonial novelist. The child plays a crucial role in the unfolding of national history in the context of


\(^{24}\) Ibid., p. 282.
both colonisation and postcolonialism. As Erik H. Erikson clearly points out the study of the child and childhood patterns is seminal to the scrutiny of national histories. Detecting that there are basic 'configurational analogies between family life and national mores,' he feels that there is a marked 'ease with which comparisons between childhood patterns and national attitudes can be drawn.' The child becomes the image of disempowerment, as also the means of seeking restitution of power in conjunction with the idea of the nation.

Since 1945, the colonial legacy of fragmentation has resulted in a desire (as voiced by these novelists) to rework a sense of cultural and national identity. The forced deprivation of patrimony makes this search more pointed. All the countries with colonial histories, from which the English novels using child protagonists and child narrators are chosen for study, became independent in the past fifty years. This primary recognisable characteristic of the national outlook then, has an effect on the subject, themes and techniques in which the novels are written. The endeavour of this study would be to locate and to understand these effects.

Most of the writing of the postcolonial novelist is, what Richard Allen calls, 'de-imperialising literature.' As the nomenclature hints, the agenda of decolonisation would definitely feature as an integral element of the postcolonial

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25 Erik Erikson, *Childhood and Society*, ibid., p. 316.
26 ibid. p. 344.
27 Richard Allen at the Annual IACLALS Conference held in January, 1995 at Dhwanyaloka, Mysore.
novel. Concurrence with Aijaz Ahmad's premise that 'cultural domination is doubtless a major aspect of imperialist domination', and the knowledge that 'culture' is always, therefore, a 'major site of resistance'\(^\text{28}\), brings the realisation that fiction is one important aspect of this resistance. The writer has to recognise his status as a postcolonial and has then to work away from the 'empire' by shifting to newer epistemic questions. Hence, ultimately, his work is not only anti-imperialist but also directed against the dislocating forces of decolonisation. He would thus be writing a political novel as he would have to take into account the politics of empire. He would have to recognise that the political act of colonisation invites a response in the same vein. As Judie Newman clearly states,

> Post-colonial writers frequently embark upon writing with a self-conscious project to revise the ideological assumptions created by Eurocentric domination of their culture, and to undermine and delegitimise the centrality of that of the West. Political and literary rewritings therefore go hand in hand, as the post-colonial novelist revises the fictions of influential predecessors in order to deconstruct conventional images of the colonial situation.\(^\text{29}\)


How the writer approaches the problem is dependent on his personal experience and the historical moment. He would also have to wage a battle against totalising labels such as ‘third world’, ‘commonwealth’, and at times, even ‘postcolonial’, all reflecting, in Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s words, the colonial rulers’ continued ‘desire to have a manageable other.’ 30 This the novelist sometimes does by using the child as a site of the colonial war which persists beyond the moment of ‘decolonisation’ in neo-colonialism and other perpetuations of colonialist strategies. The intention of this research will be to show up the details of this usage while trying to answer certain basic questions like: how are children used in the novel; what are the special attributes of the child chosen to be at the centre of the narrative; and finally, how do these children fit into the postcolonial scheme of things?

‘School, a precious world’31: Education

Since education was such an important tool of the coloniser by which he could ensure an ideological control over the mind of the child, and by which he could finally take over the psyche of his colonised subject, this aspect needs to be carefully studied. The weapon of education had a far-reaching effect on the malleable mind of the child. For instance, the sweeping effect of the 1835 Minute of Macaulay spells the postcolonial continuation of colonisation in the Indian sub-


continent. It is, in part, because of colonial education that neo-colonialism rules even years after independence in Africa, the West Indies and the Indian subcontinent. Particular attention will have to be paid to the analysis of this persistence of colonial education in the context of the fact that the child, in his vulnerability is still the special focus of the authoritarian personality.

But postcolonial nations have an ambivalent relationship with Western education which is much more than just the study of the English language. Education is also the agency through which different cultures meet or cross paths giving birth to a multi-cultural, fragmented society. This has an inevitable effect on narrative strategies. When the native tradition is forced into a colloquy with the English tradition, the result is the introduction of new narrative patterns and structures. One will have to be specially alert for the instances when the child becomes the pivot of these new patterns. This study aims to concentrate on this enigmatic intersection of the two elements. The fact that many writers opt for the narrative consciousness of a child, calls for a re-conceptualisation of the role of the child in a fragmented society. As Erikson says

Having learned in clinical work that the individual is apt to develop an amnesia concerning his most formative experiences in childhood, we are also forced to recognise a universal blind spot in the makers and the interpreters of history: they ignore the fateful
function of childhood in the fabric of society.\textsuperscript{32}

Since there is no single historical trajectory, and since history is no longer seen as an irrefutable and fixed text, the child’s role in commenting on society, morality, ethics, politics, history has to be scrutinised.

The ‘inherent feeling of inferiority’\textsuperscript{33} that Adler says the child is saddled with, finds no alleviation in the uncertainty of the postcolonial times. Negotiation with problems of postcolonial identity requires an integration of personality and purpose. His concept of the ‘unity of personality’\textsuperscript{34} emphasises the role of education in achieving this perspective. To rise above this bogging reality the child needs guidance. Hence, the importance of education, the study of which, reveals the persistence of colonialism in the ‘neo’-colonial era.

\textit{‘The Unswerving wisdom of the child’}\textsuperscript{35}: Why the Child?

It would be particularly interesting to see how far the Romantic concentration on the child as a metaphor for a lost paradisal state of innocence is valid in postcolonial fiction. The fiction writer who deploys childhood, is enlisting the agency of the

\textsuperscript{32} Erikson, \textit{Childhood and Society}, op cit., p. 47.


\textsuperscript{34} ibid., p. 4.

child in making an untainted, unbiased inquiry into the contemporary situation. His natural sensitivity to the experience of life, augmented by his non-judgmental comment, becomes the most effective critique because his innocence offsets the murkiness around. William Walsh while talking about Coleridge's vision of childhood, stresses just this legitimising quality and thereby reveals the impetus to its usage as a central *topos*.

Innocence...belongs to disposition, to judgement and to action; it is both a quality of sensibility and a mode of insight. It includes candour which has not yet come to be acquiescence in the routine corruption of the adult world, single-mindedness untainted by the hypocrisy of conventional valuation of spontaneity undrilled into the stock response, and a virtue of intense, of the fiercest honesty.  

Jerry Phillips' analysis of the Romantic Age hints at the probable progress of the trope of the child in postcolonial times by offering a comparison:

In romantic ideology, childhood and the natural world stand as paradigms of "paradise lost". Indeed, in one sense, romanticism is precisely the attempt to synthesise the "child" in all of us—the imagination—with the only

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Utopia available to us on earth, nature unspoiled.\textsuperscript{37}

How far the basic idea of Edenic innocence sullied by experience is retained, and how far these novelists leave behind Wordsworthian romanticism would definitely form a significant part of the study. It is apparent that 'nature' is no longer a central actor in the drama of life. The representation of the child would now incorporate the more current discourses of child psychology and postcolonial critiquing. The child would answer the requirement of the probing postcolonial novelist of constructing a plank from which the multifarious aspects of postcolonialism can be interpreted. This study will analyse the utilisation of the figure of the child from this perspective.

The emphasis will also be not only on the retention of the 'innocence' paradigm of the Romantics but also on how it is paradoxically counterpointed with a knowledge that does not seem 'child-like'. The extent to which postcolonial narratives incorporate Romantic or Victorian notions of the child would naturally become a focus. Jane Eyre's comment on the agency of the child would probably apply to quite an extent:

Children can feel, but they cannot analyse their feelings; and if the analysis is partially effected

in thought, they know not how to express the result of the process in words.\textsuperscript{38}

But if a critique of the postcolonial predicament is called for, the child also needs to be a highly conscious witness, sometimes being forced into the role of a circumspect voyeur and eavesdropper. This study aims to analyse this awareness of the child protagonists and will try an assess the extent to which the viewpoint succeeds.

The Childhood imposes its own standards and, in the last analysis, judges and frequently condemns the world in terms of the self.\textsuperscript{39}

Almost always, the child created by a fiction writer relies heavily on the latter’s personal experience of childhood. Consequently, another issue that comes up for negotiation is the function of autobiography in these novels. The use of the child demands an intrinsically different approach from both the novelist and his reader.

As a nascent artist, as a type of the artist figure, and as a redeemer, the child offers himself as a natural protagonist. This is the underlying psychological necessity behind the recurrence of the first person child narrator. Studying an author’s attitude to childhood means ‘considering his attitude to something closely synonymous with life’ declares Peter Coveney in the introduction to

\textsuperscript{38} Charlotte Brontë, \textit{Jane Eyre}, op.cit., p. 18.

The Image of Childhood. The first person narrative technique seems to give itself readily to the task and makes it a keen choice of these novelists in these novels.

Richard Coe in his seminal book on childhood and autobiography declares:

in...childhood there is no common ground of automatically shared preconceptions and presuppositions. The former self-as-child is an alien to the adult writer as to the adult reader. The child sees differently, reasons differently, reacts differently. An alternative world has to be created and made convincing. The experience of childhood... is something vastly, qualitatively different from adult experience, and therefore cannot be reconstituted simply by accurate narration.\textsuperscript{40}

When studying the postcolonial novel, attention will automatically have to turn to several related issues viz, the extent of the autobiographical element; the ‘authenticity’ of the picture of childhood created; the effect of this use on the narrative technique with special emphasis on the frequency of first-person narrative; the psychological impulse behind its use and its links with the previous literature about the child, especially, of the Romantic age.

\textsuperscript{40} Richard N. Coe, \textit{When the Grass was Taller}, ibid., p. 1.
'Ever-Shifting Kaleidoscope Of The Imagination'\textsuperscript{41}: The Element Of Fantasy

The preliminary connection made between \textit{The Tin Drum} and a novel like \textit{Midnight's Children} is an indication of the importance of the element of 'fantasy' in the postcolonial novel. The clear, unclouded eye of the imagination which discerns all that is right and whole, riding on the crest of the genre of fantasy, also enables entry into the world of adult corruptions. It is the intent of this study to first establish the presence of, and then to follow the popularity and mode of deployment of this element in postcolonial literature. Postcolonial critics are already making much of the element of fantasy, especially in its new avatar of 'magic realism.' Bhabha's claim that after the Latin American boom, 'Magical Realism', becomes the literary language of the emergent post-colonial world\textsuperscript{42} might be too sweeping a statement, but it does serve to draw our attention to an issue requiring scrutiny.

The memory of childhood and its 'fantastic reality' goes a long way in the construction of a novel. The massacre, the mutilation, the warping to which the young child's mind is subjected, becomes the albatross around his neck in the shape of this memory. The hallucinatory unreality that the child has to go through and which is reflective of the ontological insecurity of the postcolonial, suggests another area of enquiry. Consequently, Rosemary Jackson's observation about fantasy becomes applicable

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{41} Charlotte Bronte, \textit{Jane Eyre}, op.cit., p. 205.
\end{itemize}
to the postcolonial scene:

Fantasy has always articulated a longing for imaginary unity, for unity in the realm of the imaginary. In this sense, it is inherently idealistic. It expresses a desire for an absolute, for an absolute signified, an absolute meaning.43

This is just the kind of meaning that the floundering postcolonial novelist is trying to salvage from an impossible reality. This is marked by the child's effort to create what Adorno would term, 'psychological peace'44 through the fabrication of a fantastic world wherein a new identity, subservient to none else, can be constructed.

Though fantasy, by its very nature, may seem to be functioning at cross purposes with a delimiting social context, like any other narrative mode it originates within this matrix and is largely determined by it. Hence, it cannot be understood apart from it. Rosemary Jackson stresses this observation when she says that 'the fantastic traces the unsaid and the unseen of culture: that which has been silenced, made invisible, covered over and made absent.' 45 The portrayal of deviant psychological states posited as normal, erases the rigid demarcations of fact and fantasy and the proverbial fluidity of the child's mind mirrors this remarkably. For a child, his


45 Rosemary Jackson, op.cit., p. 4.
dreams and nightmares, his fears are more real than reality itself. In Rosemary Jackson's words, 'the fantastic can be seen as corresponding to the first stage and animistic thought mode when primitive man and the young child have no sense of difference between self and other, subject and object worlds.' The study of the postcolonial novel with the central figure of a child, will thus entail an investigation of this crucial relationship between the subject matter and the enshrining social matrix.

Indeed, even where the use of fantasy is concerned, the child seems particularly suited to carry the mantle of narration because his thought has little systematisation, little coherence, is not in general deductive, is for the most part untroubled by the need of avoiding contradiction, juxtaposes statements rather than synthesises them and accepts syncretic schemes without, feeling the need to analyse. In other words, the child's thought more nearly resembles a sum total of inclinations resulting from both action and reverie...than it resembles the self-conscious and systematic thought of the adult.

It would be the task of the postcolonial critic, and of this project, to problematise the pattern concealed in the fantasy and to try to

46 Rosemary Jackson, *Fantasy*, ibid., p. 72. The emphasis is mine.

decode the intent and achievement of the writer. In Rosemary Jackson's words, fantasy seems to be one, if not the only mode which affirms by its very composition 'the possibility of radical transformation through attempting to dissolve or shatter the boundary lines between the imaginary and the symbolic.' Obviously, it would 'refuse the latter's categories of the 'real' and its unities'\(^{48}\). Keeping in mind the agenda of postcolonial writing and postcolonial criticism, it is not difficult to see that irrealism has an integral role to play in the postcolonial novel. The elements that generally accompany fantasy, comedy, dream, the grotesque, the carnivalesque all find some foothold or the other in the postcolonial novel.

**History and Territory in Postcolonial Literatures**

The element of fantasy becomes a fitting mode for the postcolonial novelist even when negotiating with the elements of space and time. Colonialist strategies of subversion of the subject races were aimed at the ultimate erosion of their sense of history and territory, both of which are the prime signifiers of a people's identity as a nation. The preoccupation with demarcated space manifests itself in a curious blurring of particular demarcations. Territorial space is essential but since it belongs to a world of make-believe, it is curiously without limits. It is and is not. So also with history. Historical time is measurable but time in this kind of novel, though purporting to be a chronological sequence, becomes fluid and tenuous. Events are arranged in a mock-historical fashion. Indeed one of the prime motives of this novel

\(^{48}\) Rosemary Jackson, *Fantasy*, op.cit., p. 72. The emphasis is mine.
is to mock this dependence on history and territory for giving identity.

The issue of legitimacy is directly associated with the desire for identity. The alien white masters had slapped a sense of guilt on the minds of the subjects in colonies like the West Indies by seeking to make them believe in the illegitimacy of their identities, by emphasising that it was the white man who was the rightful owner of the land, whose ways were right. Quite often, the original denizen of the country had had to forfeit all rights to the land sinking to the level of an 'illegitimate' subject-class. The tender mind of the child proved the best prey for such unsettling visitations because not only was the effect more immediate and excruciating, but it also ensured the psychological subservience of the entire race.

The postcolonial child's territorial and historical inheritance has become heavily suspect due to the erstwhile colonising efforts of erasure in these quarters. Through the open, uncircumscribed mind of the child traditional closures which mark uncharted territories and historical experience can be addressed. The child, with the powers attributed to him by the choice as narrator protagonist, mediating consciousness, has to start on a reconnaissance trip on behalf of his people, in finding and establishing a home, a nation with a specific territorial and historical identity.
The Child and Postmodernism

The existential insecurity inherent in the fantastic establishes a link with the elusive element of postmodernism. The postcolonial situation apparently shares some qualities with the 'post-modern' with its plurality of versions and constructions. The existential doubt and instability which overwhelm the postcolonial, reveal themselves in the ontological perspectivism of the dream and nightmare quality of the postmodern. The indeterminacy in both makes for a fallback on a bizarre set of norms of verisimilitude. This cannot but lead to a confusion which becomes the common locus of attention of the postcolonial and the post-modern. This congruent, sometimes symbiotic arrangement of the three elements needs exploration. Visitors from other worlds, angels, ghosts, extra-terrestrials walk in and out of the novelistic world of the postcolonial writers who opt for this technique, shattering the ontological homogeneity of this world.

Yet, though postcolonial literature may mirror indeterminacy and ontological uncertainty in some anti-narratives, unlike postmodernist texts, it is ultimately engaged in the task of constructing a world-model. It has definite historical and geographical roots in that the writers write from a definite Indian, Pakistani, Nigerian, Kenyan or Caribbean background. On the other hand, McHale declares that there 'is no such thing as 'as postmodernism...postmodernism exists discursively, in the discourse we produce about it, and using it.'

This insubstantiality of the post-modern is a signal difference from the postcolonial. Following this, the postcolonial has a definite end towards which the text works. It is, all in all, more specifically rooted.

In keeping with the common feature of a 'disintegrative post-modern subjectivity,' the decentred child protagonist helps in maintaining the characteristic of fluidity and apparent incoherence. The mobility implied in the unevolved character of the child, mirrors the mobility of the postcolonial and the postmodern, and throws into relief any residual, persisting inflexibility on the part of the regime, colonial or otherwise. That may be one reason for the resurgence of the child hero. Mirroring the immediate, fragmented world in his unformed character and vision, he becomes more visible than before. Just as a child has to grow up into an integrated personality through many dithering moves, so do these writers need to construct some meaning in the uncertain postcolonial period. The study will essay to site the child at the converging points of both the posts, postcolonialism and postmodernism, in an effort to discover where the differences lie, in order to legitimise separate appellations.

This complex, tension-ridden, heterogeneous category of novels, with all its in-built attendant problems, would be the focus of this research study. The novels located for study problematise the role of the child within the postcolonial text with equal emphasis not only on the actions of the child but also

on what he 'does not do'. Identifying and questioning not only the acts but also the silences would become a major exercise. It is these postcolonial narratives which, according to Martina Michel

resist closure, problematise culturally and nationally defined modes of identity, and foreground processes of subject formation located in the field of tension between and within dominant cultural, political, and economic world zones.\textsuperscript{51}

These would be highlighted for the purpose of study. The point to ponder over is the reason for the postcolonial privileging of the child in some novels.

Existing research on the subject of children in fiction deals specifically with the image of the child and the theme of childhood in individual texts from England evaluating them in historical and social perspectives, for example, Peter Coveney's \textit{The Image of Childhood} (1957) and James Walvin's \textit{A Child's World} (1982) two books to which reference has already been made in this chapter. No comprehensive study of the child in the novel in the English language has been attempted in the last fifty years. Neither has cognisance been taken of the multicultural nature of the language. English is no longer only the language of England and it spans different cultures and different postcolonial histories which demand that the issue be looked at in a cross-cultural perspective.

\textsuperscript{51} Martina Michel, 'Postcolonial Literatures: Use and Abuse of the latest Post-Word', \textit{Gulliver} 33, 1/93, p. 19.
Finally, I feel the need to embark on this research because of my own postcolonial identity. The shared historical background of British imperial domination in different regions of the world and the commonality of the historical location in the postcolonial present were the final impetus. This sense of kinship with these writers who are not from Britain or America, and who have yet chosen English as the medium of their literary creativity, opens up a fascinating area of research where the tension between the language (English) and the material (local) create new patterns in fiction. The objective would be not only to discover the common features, tendencies and reasons for using this theme and technique, but also to speculate on the differences in the handling of the motif of the child and the theme of childhood.

This study will assess how each postcolonial culture constructs the child, both male and female since a fair number of postcolonial women writers like Zee Edgell, Merle Hodge, and Jamaica Kincaid from the Caribbean; Bapsi Sidhwa, Mrinal Pande, Neelum Saran Gour and Arundhati Roy from the Indian subcontinent and Buchi Emecheta and Tsitsi Dangarembga from Africa, have chosen a female child’s consciousness as the point of view in their novels. The intersection of postcoloniality and their awareness of the position of women in their socio-political setup, opens up another rich area for investigation.

The reason for the use of the child then, in these postcolonial texts, would thus be related to the problem of how the postcolonial novelist subverts or dismantles the so-called
master narratives of the former colonial rulers. How the child is situated at the crucial junctures of these colonial and postcolonial histories; why (if at all) and how the child is foregrounded in antagonistic postures to the master-race; whether he becomes a vehicle for critiquing his own time, are all part of the problematic of the location of the child in the postcolonial site. Erikson has made this important observation:

Every adult, whether he is a follower or a leader, a member of a mass or of an elite, was once a child. A sense of smallness forms a substratum in his mind, ineradicably. His triumphs will be measured against this smallness, his defeats will substantiate it.\(^{52}\)

Hence, Janus-faced, the child emerges as both a political and a social construct, the analysis of which will unavoidably raise and negotiate with questions regarding colour, race and gender. He is both a product of, and a tool for criticism. In attempting to inquire into the child in postcolonial literary discourse, especially in the genre of the novel, I intend to relocate and redefine the use of the child as primary consciousness and literary strategy wherein he is both a catalyst and an actor in the larger political agenda of the nation.

\(^{52}\) Erikson, *Childhood and Society*, op.cit., p. 404.