Chapter Four

‘A Place to Write From’: The Child in the English Novel of the Indian Subcontinent

‘Children are the Devil...They only know the truth.’

Bapsi Sidhwa

The novelist Graham Greene once said that childhood is the bank-balance of the writer. Perhaps he meant by this that the novelist tends to draw upon the vividness of childhood experience for the rest of her or his writing life. But perhaps he also meant that infant fantasy is very much like the novelist’s material. If this is so, then it would be even more applicable in a country such as India, where often a child’s imagination works over and around the observations of everyday, through activities like eavesdropping in a large family and streetwatching in busy cities.

Lakshmi Hölmstrom

In this introduction to Mrinal Pande’s Daughter’s Daughter (1993), Lakshmi Hölmstrom perceptively points out why childhood

\[\text{Reference 1: Bapsi Sidhwa, Ice-Candy Man, New Delhi: Penguin, 1988, p.192. All references are to this edition of the text. Hereafter, ICM.}
\[\text{Reference 2: Lakshmi Hölmstrom, 1993 Foreword to Mrinal Pande’s Daughter’s Daughter, Penguin: New Delhi, 1993, first pub. 1990. All references are to this edition of the text. Hereafter, DD.} \]
is important for a novelist and why an Indian childhood was a special richness. The novel in English in the Indian subcontinent has made repeated use of the motif of the child and the theme of childhood. One of the first notable precursors of this was R.K. Narayan’s *Swami and Friends* (1930). Here, the focus is on the central character Swami, a child growing up in a small Indian town in the thirties. Torn between the divisive colonial tenets of education and his father’s nationalist stand, the child is unwittingly drawn into the freedom struggle. He is brought face to face with Gandhi and becomes part of the Swadeshi Movement without realising its full import. The impromptu burning of his cap and his unknowing and inadvertent participation in the protest and rioting, makes Swami a legitimate predecessor of the postcolonial literary child who plays the important function of being a historical witness. Salman Rushdie’s Saleem in *Midnight’s Children* (1980); Bapsi Sidhwa’s Lenny in *Ice-Candy Man* (1988); the unnamed boy narrators of Amitav Ghosh’s *The Shadow Lines* (1988) and of Neelum Saran Gour’s *Speaking of ’62* (1995); Tinu in *Daughter’s Daughter* by Mrinal Pande; the child consciousness of the ‘two-egg twins’, Rahel and Estha in Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things* (1997) all point to the importance of this strategy of using the child’s consciousness as the basic narrative vehicle.4

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'Half-devil, half child': The Colonial Precursor to the Postcolonial Use of the child

Swami was no accident. Neither are the many children who make their appearance in the English novel of the past five decades after independence in the Indian subcontinent. There are potent, logical historical reasons for the child coming to occupy this important position in this representation of decolonisation. The first significant reason was that the colonisers had made the child the locus of an ideological battle between himself and his subject. The frequent references to the subject as a child had the cumulative effect of strengthening the coloniser's position.

The establishment and consolidation of control over the subject population required the evolution of various strategies. One of the ways in which the rulers managed to achieve their ends was by constantly disparaging the native by allotting him stereotypically limiting roles. He was made out to be either effeminate, or an unknowing or recalcitrant child. Most often, he was seen as an inexperienced ignoramus sorely in need of the 'right' education. In any event, the coloniser was projected as an essential figure for India, as the powerful male, either father, or a teacher and conscience-keeper. The curbed native was seen as being dependent on him, needing him, always occupying the subordinate position. This disparaging colonialist appropriation percolated to later times. It is therefore not surprising that decolonisation too found an automatic, if inadvertent, site in the child and childhood.

As emphasised, one of the ways in which the ruler had sought intuitively, and perhaps later, purposefully, to contain and disempower the coloured natives was by equating them with
children. The foundation of the British colony in India rested on the idea of the 'White Man's Burden' which became a major colonialist crutch for self-legitimation. As a result, the white rulers took on the role of the disciplining parent who was 'compelled' to use force on the Indian who was seen as an errant, unreasonable and recalcitrant child. Kipling's poem, 'The White Man's Burden' (1899) absolutely highlights this British attitude to the Indian subject:

Take up the white man's burden
Send forth the best ye breed--
Go bind your sons to exile
To serve your captives' need:
To wait in heavy harness
On fluttered folk and wild--
Your new caught, sullen peoples,
Half devil half child.\(^5\)

The creative writer of the period had an important role in the colonial strategy. He was duty-bound to perpetuate the idea of the divine right of the British to rule and the idea of the necessary and cumbersome burden of ruling. Rudyard Kipling, the representative writer of the Raj, was the best example of the writer thus fulfilling his duty. He, as did other writers before and after him, like Alfred Ollivant in *Old For-Ever: An Epic of Beyond the Indus* (1923)\(^6\) and F. T. 

\(^5\) Rudyard Kipling, 'The White Man's Burden', (1899) Written in 1899 to celebrate the victory of the United States against Spain which had resulted in the acquisition of Cuba and the Phillipine Islands, the verses called on the United States to play its part in the imperialist task. The emphasis is mine and the last quoted line forms part of the heading of this section.

Jesse in *The Lacquer Lady* (1929), reinforced this reductive image of the Indian as a child. This is validated by Ashis Nandy’s observations about this aspect of the imperial ideology. He feels that European culture had marginalised childhood, old age, femininity and the coloured races in its socio-economic and ethical discourses. According to him, ‘it was this postulate which came to the fore in Europe’s new ideology of male adulthood, completing the picture of a world where only the adult male reflected a reasonable approximation of a perfect human being.’

Allen J Greenberger’s *The British Image of India* (1969) touches on this aspect briefly though quite conclusively:

The foremost character trait of the Indian people is that they are like little children. This is a statement which holds true for all British writers in this period who apply it to virtually all the Indians with whom they deal. Because they are children, they must be handled in certain ways. In an age when ‘sparing the rod’ was the equivalent of ‘spoiling the child’ it is obvious that relations with a people considered to be children would involve a large degree of force. The image of the Indian as a child fitted in very nicely with the British image of himself as a strong all-knowing leader. Among people who were looked on as his equal he might only

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be a leader because of superior development. Among people of a childlike ‘race’ he was the leader by race and he had an obligation to play the father to their child. The British obviously according to these authors, knew what was right for the Indians just as a father would for his children. Above all he knew that it was dangerous for the Indian child to be given authority over himself or, even worse, others, the child might try to ‘usurp’ his English father’s authority, but if punished immediately, he would recognise the error of his ways. By the ‘right of race’ the Briton was the leader and the Indian the follower and child. Any attempt to upset this was to go against the ‘rules of nature’.  

According to the white ruler, as children, the Indians were totally under the sway of wayward emotions. They were untrustworthy, unreasonable, and limited in their understanding.

The implied Occidental construction of the white man as the ‘manly’ controller of a difficult situation goes back to the norm of manliness expounded and fostered by Coleridge in his ‘Aids to Reflection’  

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leaves no room for ambivalence

Take up the white man's burden--
Have done with childish days--
The lightly proffered laurel,
The easy, ungrudged praise.
Comes now, to search you manhood
Through all the thankless years,
Cold-edged with dear-bought wisdom,
The judgement of your peers! ¹¹

For the British colonialist, this quality of adult manhood became a rigid yardstick for gauging the strength of character and isolating the distinguishing feature of his own kind. The reprehensible quality of childishness was the diametric opposite of all that could be commended in a 'man'. This was marked by a singular lack of order and self-discipline, the sore inability to withstand pressure and a predilection towards hysteria. Kipling passed an unswerving judgement against the subject race when he said that the Indian was 'incapable as a child of understanding what authority means, or where is the danger of disobeying it'. ¹²

Thus, on the whole the imperial construction of the Indian as a child and the ruler as a father had the single aim of stamping British superiority. The demeaning corollary was that the Indian was inferior, his race was inferior, and as such, he was totally unfit to rule or to be independent. In fact this policy must have made a

¹¹ Rudyard Kipling, 'The White Man's Burden, op. cit. My emphasis.
dent on the self-image of the Indian to some extent. In such an
eventuality, he came to see himself as a child and looked up to the
British as the *mai-baap* who could sort out all his problems like a
father. The British implied that the Indian could not hope to handle
any difficult situation on his own. In short, the British were
necessary and it was ‘right’ that they were here in the controlling
position. Thus the figure of the child became central to the process
of the self-legitimation of British presence on the subcontinent. In
this manner, the imperial ideology ensured a high position for the
ruler and a subordinate one for the Indian. Of course, this effect
was most likely in the case of the lower castes who were
economically dependent on the British for their livelihood. This
was noticeable with the transference of the appellation of *mai-baap*
from the erstwhile *zan:zindar* to the Britisher who had become the
new landlord.\(^{13}\)

The colonising missionaries too saw the importance of the
child in their enterprise. They were quick in realising that if the
Christian faith and Christian habits and attitudes, in effect, English
habits and attitudes, had to be firmly established in the
subcontinent, the children, the women and the lower classes of the
Indian society had to be brought under the wing of the Gospel.
Thus, the child became one of the direct foci of the colonialist
exercise of control even in this quarter. The teaching of the Bible
was an integral component of the curricula in missionary run
schools.

\(^{13}\) It must be noted that the British use of the comparison of the native
with the child was not always reductive or condescending. It could
sometimes hint at a latent fondness for him.
Quite often, the very act of writing becomes an act of resistance especially in the early stages. Though this may not be a conscious response of the author, it is nonetheless interesting to see the two side by side. As already stated, one intuitive tool is the strategy of using a child’s consciousness as the basic narrative mode. The reader can see this as a counter discourse without feeling the necessity of labelling it as a conscious application of the author. The colonial attitude to the native adult which demoted him to the level of a ‘half devil half child’, seems to find a rejoinder in the postcolonial writer’s use of an actual child as the central consciousness, showing that the child’s sensibility need not be seen in the colonialist’s pejorative light. Rather, the child becomes the effective vehicle of comment on the postcolonial situation. When the postcolonial writer places the child at the working centre of his creative endeavour, it appears as an effective, if unpremeditated, rejoinder to the constant comparison of the colonised subject with a child. Unconsciously, programmed to the psychic disempowerment that the earlier trope of ‘half-devil and half-child’ implied, the postcolonial writer manages a reversal of the situation and consequently succeeds in empowering himself. So, notwithstanding the conscious intent of the writer, the child becomes a conscious critiquing tool in the hands of some novelists who use the child as central to the novel.
'Widening World of Childhood'\textsuperscript{14}: The Child in the Indian Subcontinent

Literary children in the various Indian languages did feature as in Bibhuti Bhushan Bandopadhyaya's \textit{Pather Panchali} (1929), Krishna Baldev Vaid's \textit{Uska Bachpan} (1957) and the short stories of Munshi Premchand ('Idgah', c. 1905). These works show that the agenda of the Indian language novels was different from that of the English novels and had nothing to do with a specific 'postcolonial' critique. Instead, they simply treated life as it appeared to the child without any adult categorisation.\textsuperscript{15} It is with the weapon that the English rulers unwittingly gave to the subject Indian populace that this new, charged, conscious use of the child came into existence. The moment 'English' education came to be applied on Indians, whether by force or consent, by the sweeping 1835 'Minute of Macaulay', the self-reflexive thrust of this double-edged weapon became palpable. English was not only an effective weapon for the consolidation and perpetuation of control, but it also became one in anti-colonialist reaction. Postcolonial issues become especially marked by the choice of this language of the erstwhile masters for it bought a unique entry into the area of oppositionality so crucial to them. Matters which had already come to a head, as pointed out, by the colonial stratagem of using the child/father polarity to keep the native in place, now found a remedial impetus within the purview of the English language novel.


\textsuperscript{15} There is no value judgement implied with reference to the Indian language novel or the English novel from India. This is a simple statement of the fact of differing agendas and perspectives.
When Nayantara Sahgal says: 'All Indians are not Hindus but all Indians must reckon with the Hinduism since it is the dominant setting, the social and psychological atmosphere,' she is pointing out a basic, salient aspect of the Indian social set-up. Consequently, it becomes necessary to recognise that the child occupies a central position in the 'Indian' view of life. One of the earliest Hindu social treatises, the _Manusmriti_, had seemed to decree a low position for the child in the pyramid of social organisation, at par with low caste slaves though ultimately, his laws accorded him a central role. Manu had a special purpose in doing this because the unhidden implication was that everybody was born a _sudra_ and had to prove himself otherwise by his actions as he grew up. Basically, a person moved up the ladder as he became socialised and culturised. Hence, Manu insisted that special interest be taken to see that the child was well nurtured. Even minor details of day to day dealing with children are important enough to be mentioned. For instance, they were to be the first ones to be fed thus being given priority over the adult. Guidelines and edicts for disciplining the child involved many dicta for parents, the chief being that though the rod was not to be spared, there was to be no physical excess. The fact that so much attention was paid to the child is indicative of the significant place that the child occupied in the social set-up.

Consequently and significantly, the Hindu social structure emerges as a predominantly child-centred one. The social endeavour is characterised by parents living for their children,

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making personal sacrifices in order that the future of the child can be secured. In fact, personal success is measured by the extent to which this can be achieved. The future is wholly vested in the male child. In this social scenario, the birth of a son is essential for the well-being and continuity of the family, which is the smallest constituent social unit. Even in death, at the end of the journey of life, a male child is necessary for performing the requisite last rites so that the soul can be at peace. It is, in this context that this centring of the child in subcontinental fiction becomes understandable. Thus, though the child would be expected to render absolute obedience to the adult, the centrality of the child in this organisation cannot be ignored. Though this awareness may not be consciously applied by the novelists deploying the child, the unconscious underlying tenets would figure in the choice of the protagonist consciousness. P. V. Kane too emphasises the special position of the child in his History of Dharmashastra (1933) when he says, 'Till a boy is eight years old he is like one newly born, and only indicates the caste in which he is born. As long as his upanayana ceremony is not performed the boy incurs no blame as to what is allowed or forbidden.'

It is also worth noting that postcolonial English novels are not at variance with indigenous literary tradition. It seems to be a natural successor of the importance accorded to the child as early as in the Indian epics. The child Krishna, the Balgopal, in the


*Mahabharata* is the redeemer around whose exploits a whole battery of episodes revolve as the killing of the evil Kansa, the battle with the seven-hooded snake, the lifting of a whole mountain on a finger tip. In fact, the future of the whole civilisation rests on the child-god. Many verses are dedicated to the portrayal of the childhood of the god, his innocent pranks, his relationship with his foster mother, Yashoda and with his other cowherd friends. Similarly, much footage is given to the child Rama in the recounting of the heroic exploits of the Raghuvanshi ruler in the Ramayana. Stories of Prahlada, another child redeemer who battles against his tyrannical and evil father, Hiranyakshipu, and of Dhruva, the archetypal father-saviour, consolidate the position of the child. The critiquing strategy of the postcolonial writer which focused on the child, took strength from this tradition and in the process managed to turn the tables on the early colonialist strategy of British control.

Sudhir Kakar in his book *The Inner World* (1981) corroborates this fact of a pivotal position for the child in the context of this social and cultural location. He says

> different cultures shape the development of their members in different ways, 'choosing' whether childhood, youth or adulthood is to be a period of maximum or minimum stress. In India... it is early childhood rather than adulthood which is the 'golden age' of individual life history.19

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For a writer coming from this background where childhood is privileged, the choice of the child as the central consciousness is understandable. It is thus that novels like Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* (1980), Bapsi Sidhwa’s *Ice-Candy Man* (1988), Amitav Ghosh’s *The Shadow Lines* (1988), Mrinal Pande’s *Daughter’s Daughter* (1990), Amit Chaudhuri’s *A Strange and Sublime Address*, and Neelum Saran Gour’s *Speaking of ’62* (1995) and Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things* ((1997), focus on the protagonist as a child or on the consciousness of the child as the narrative medium.

*‘Children know many things without being told’*\(^{20}\): *The Perspective of the Child*

As with the African and the Caribbean novels, quite often the novelists from the Indian subcontinent who choose the child as the mediating consciousness for their narratives, have some specific and formulated reasons for such deployment. Bapsi Sidhwa’s story ‘Defend Yourself Against Me’ included in *Orphans of the Storm*, functions as a pertinent introduction to *Ice-Candy Man* since both use the same basic material about the Partition and both have a child’s perspective to narrate the story. In the story, her childhood memories of the Partition are jogged by a chance meeting with a childhood mate at a social gathering at Houston. The distance in time and space implies that one can neither escape history nor emerge emotionally unscarred, unscathed. She furnishes a special

reason for writing the story from the point of view of the child:

Since childhood memories can only be accurately exhumed by the child, I will inhabit my childhood. As a writer, I am already practised in inhabiting different bodies: dwelling in rooms, gardens, bungalows and spaces from the past; zapping time.21

For her, the child becomes the most natural and correct perspective because 'children know many things without being told'22. Though they are 'too young to understand the underlying combustibility of the events preceding partition'23 they are yet the most faithful, immediate and clear in their documentation and portrayal of the events. Recalling Trinidadian Michael Anthony's The Year in San Fernando, Ice-Candy Man becomes the best example using the consciousness of the child in the postcolonial novel because from the beginning to the end, it is the nine-year old Lenny who holds the exclusive reins of the narration. Whereas in other novels the child might 'grow up' physically into an adult or the adult might go back to childhood experiences and visions by means of memory 'zaps', this novel becomes exclusive in its singleness of point of view. Rushdie too emphasises this importance when he quips that 'childhood is a place to write from'24 because he too has very solid reasons for opting for a 'child persona'.

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22 Ibid., p. 312.
23 Ibid., p. 317.
The agenda of the novelist dictates the choice of the children entrusted the task of bearing the burden of narration. Almost all have strong autobiographical strains and concerns. Autobiography is very important in the context of child-narration where the writer will definitely dig into the reservoir of his own childhood. In the case of a postcolonial writer, the context of a personally experienced colonial history and postcolonial present will colour his narrative. As David Malouf avers, in agreement with what Hölmstrom has to say above, most significant experiences that a novelist can draw upon have taken place while he/she is a child. But wary of too facile an identification of the child persona as a mouthpiece, Rushdie minces no words about the presence and limitations of autobiography. He says

When I began the book it was autobiographical, and it only began to work when I started making it fictional....One of the discoveries of the book was the importance of escaping from autobiography.

In fact, seen against the highly weighted historical events, it could also be seen as an admission of the need for 'escaping' autobiography, the need for a cathartic purge which dictates the necessity of first traversing it by its reconstruction in fiction.

The generally preferred first-person narration immediately seems to hint at autobiographical sources for the novels. The choice

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25 David Malouf at the Jawaharlal Nehru University in Dec 1996 while reading from his work and responding to a question from the audience.
of the first person narrative in the majority of the novels selected for study is often validated on technical grounds. Rushdie hopes that it would organise and hold together the material. Bapsi Sidhwa finds the use important enough to draw the reader’s attention to it. She stresses the difference between fiction and autobiography when she tells Feroza Jussawalla and Reed Way Dasenbrook:

...The trouble with the first person point of view is that it is easy to mistake it for autobiography. The child, Lenny, in the book is very distinct from myself. The incidents in her life are often taken from my life, but Lenny is a much more astute child than I was. Even if it’s a child’s point of view, the narrator’s voice is sophisticated, and the reader knows there’s an informed adult behind it. ...every incident taken from my life, or perhaps from the lives of people I knew intimately, has been embroidered to create the larger reality of fiction.  

Haffenden refers to an earlier comment by Rushdie which said that the book was written from point of view of the child who feels responsible for all that happens in the country. But even before the obvious tropological use of the child as representative of the postcolonial nation can be accented, the author’s reading of

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Saleem’s character becomes important. He says

...Saleem’s whole persona is a childlike one, because children believe themselves to be the centre of the universe, and they stop as they grow up; but he never stops, he believes- at the point where he begins the novel- that he is the prime mover of these great events.28

Thus, even when the protagonist narrator is not physically a child, his emotional and intellectual makeup is that of one. Much like Oskar Mazareth, ‘the eternal three-year old’ in The Tin Drum29, Saleem’s ‘childlike’ persona also represents a reluctance to grow up because as a child, he has the clearest eye and is therefore the best witness to events. Like Abhimanyu, Arjuna’s son, who learns while still in his mother’s womb, special powers are given to Saleem, putting him in the same category of gifted children as Oskar, Askar and Azaro. The Abhimanyu comparison is specifically potent because not only does it comment on the astuteness and the wisdom of the protagonist but also implies the distress of the pre-knowledge of death and pain.

The innocent, clean slate that the child presents for corruption and exploitation under the pressure of this terrible historical fragmentation is played up by Rushdie, Sidhwa and Ghosh. In a brief paean to his uncluttered mind, Saleem will break

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28 Rushdie in the Interview with John Haffenden. My emphasis.
out, "O blind innocence of childhood! For my honesty...I was set upon from all sides" (MC, 194) and he will clarify the dangers that life is fraught with when he says, '...I tell you when a boy gets inside grownup thoughts they can really mess him up completely.' (MC, 203) This is a telling testimony to the authenticity of the narrator who is a participant in the events of the novel. As an innocent, he is most open in his observations and unlikely to tamper with details that are narrated. Even Lenny Seth's credentials as an honest narrator are established time and again in *Ice-Candy Man*. The attestation to the truth, honesty, and authenticity of the narrator is given by Lenny's Godmother:

'Don't lie. It doesn't suit you.'

There it is again! Lying doesn't become me. I can't get away with littlest thing.

'Why not?' I howl. 'Why doesn't it suit me? No one says that to Adi, Ayah, Cousin, Imam Din, Mother, Father or Rosy-Peter!'

'Some people can lie and some people can't. Your voice and face give you away,' says Godmother.

*(ICM, 84)*

This offers an insight into the function of this technique of using the child, and also shows what it involves in the very clear implication that none of the other characters listed by Lenny in her woebegone protest, are fit to take on the mantle of narration. Her transparency wins her the desired faith of the reader.
These children are not romantic idealisations of perfect ‘innocent’ children. They are all individualised, different, highly aware, informed by the hindsight of the adult creator of the child narrator. The paradox implied in the use of the child’s consciousness by an adult underlies and informs all the novels. A reference is made to the poetry of Iqbal, Pakistan’s national poet. This extensive quotation which begins Ice-Candy Man highlights the basic problematic of this point of view. The narrator is, as already stated, supposedly a seven year old, yet it is very clear that no child could make such an erudite poetic reference. Right at the outset, it is apparent that it is an adult consciously opting for the point of view of the child. So, on the one hand the child is the vulnerable victim whose very susceptibility offsets the horror of the contemporary historical situation. On the other, the ‘artfulness’ of the narration is obvious. The reader is then prepared to accept the tandem presence of ‘childlike’ ingenuousness and ‘adult’ sophistication and the implied critique. The two points of view will collude, collide and the interplay between them will become the seed-bed for the postcolonial critique.

As already marked in the African and the Caribbean novel, this is also true of all the novels from the subcontinent that make use of this perspective. The inventiveness of the child in The Shadow Lines, Midnight’s Children and The God of Small Things finds articulation in the grown-up finesse of the adult creator. Further, there is no gainsaying the fact that this deployment imparts an added immediacy, countering any distancing that could occur by the use of an adult narrator. The first person narrative naturally augments this propinquity.
The novels will insistently stress the age of the protagonist at regular, spaced intervals. Lenny is seven; Tinu is nine at the outset and the action of the novels spans less than, or about a couple of years. Saleem is pursued from his ‘amniotic’ existence in his mother’s womb through several stages. First his birth, then his early childhood experiences are detailed. In The Shadow Lines, the child narrator will clearly state his age at different stages of the narrative emphasising the importance of years. He is eight when he plays house with Ila in Raibajar. He is ten in 1962 when the Indo-China War breaks out, twelve when Tridib dies in Hindu-Muslim riots in 1964. The effect of this close adherence to time divisions coupled with the alibi of the sharp memory of the narrator is to offer a dependable comment on the central concerns of the book. The experiential limitations that accrue to age are also stressed for me ‘dead’ was just a word, associated vaguely with films and comic books. That was all. I had no means of attaching that word to a real presence, like Tridib’s. I felt nothing - no shock, no grief. I did not understand that I would never see him again, my mind was not large enough to accommodate so complete an absence.

(TSL, 239)

Thus the novelist exercises tremendous artistic freedom in his treatment of the child narrator. He can, according to the exigencies of the narrative, either allow him to see and know beyond his years as in the case of Saleem, or show his shortcomings as an inexperienced child as above, in The Shadow Lines. Either way, this paradox enriches the narrative and ultimately gains credence
because there is a signal purpose made amply clear to the reader. The narrator’s limited, childlike apprehension of death in the past is specifically accented by the adult that he has become. This serves to reveal the heightened present impact of that distant past event, and the narrator’s deep emotional involvement in it. The loss to the child is fully grasped only when he reaches adulthood, the moment gaining in texture by the constant intersection of the dual points of view, that of the child and of the adult. This narrative technique thus makes for a potent concurrence of the past and the present.

Further, in some of the novels there is an ingenious interplay of more than one child’s consciousness. This multi-layered scheme makes it possible for the novelist to weave an intricate pattern which will contain the flow of his narrative while allowing for a great degree of freedom. The vehicle for the narrative in *The Shadow Lines* is the unnamed narrator who is yet an emotional and sensitive participant in the central concerns of the novel. He will move backwards into his childhood as a response to immediate adult stimuli. Imaginatively, he will gain access into other childhoods that are in turn conjured for him by these other adults. With Tridib, he will go back in years to the latter’s childhood in England when he was nine. With Th’amma, his grandmother, he will return to the partitioned Dhaka house where she used to live. He will share her joyous anticipation of the visit to Dhaka after many years of Partition, watching her become like a ‘giggly schoolgirl’ once again. He will yearn, with her, to see the ‘upside-down house’, (*TSL*, 125) Jethamoshai’s section of the split house. This partitioned house plays out the larger drama of national partition and emphasises the differences that the boundaries engender. When his grandmother recognises that she has become more of an outsider with the
creation of new differences and boundaries, the narrator will sensitively respond to her hurt. The bond between Jethamoshai and the Muslim family which takes care of him has the effect of enhancing the differences between blood relations, and robs Th'amma of resuscitating the warm remembrance of her childhood. All these various strands coalesce in his consciousness and find expression in a coherent narrative.

The most productive of his imaginative forays is into Tridib's childhood. Tridib's is the central, informing consciousness. This forms the core of the narrative and is also responsible for shaping the sensibility of the child narrator. 'Through Tridib's eyes, its past seemed concurrent with the present'. *(TSL, 31)* It is Tridib who recognises the special sensitivity and responsiveness of the narrator. It is he who nurtures and tutors this attribute. The precision and concreteness of the imagination and the ability to locate the singular in the most ordinary is communicated to the narrator. This imagination enables him 'to go beyond the limits of [his] mind to other times and other places, and even, if [he] was lucky, to a place where there was no border between [himself] and [his] image in the mirror. Tridib had also said that one 'could not see without inventing what [one] saw'. *(TSL, 29)* It is Tridib who broadens the boundaries of the universe of his boyhood, giving him worlds to travel and eyes to see them with. Adult relationships, especially that between May and Tridib is revealed from the child's point of view. This location of the child at the fulcrum of the narrative with past events being interpreted later, engenders the same growth of perception in the reader as in the narrator. Moreover, the novel moves to, and dwells on times when Tridib himself was a nine year old child in England during the World War II. Thus, the impact of
another major event in world history is highlighted through the 'child' Tridib’s testimony and point of view. It is through these recollecting, vivid descriptions that the child-narrator lives and grows vicariously.

Another childhood that the narrator conjures up is that of Ila, his cousin and his secret love. Ila’s imagination has limited recall and recreative power which only documents the external. The only world that matters to Ila is that of the self and the only person who is important is herself. This lack of sensitivity vibrantly offsets the inclusive imagination of the narrator whose self can absorb many other experiences. This difference between the two children comes across very clearly in their divergent attitude to the inclusion of the verandah in their make-believe house. Wrapped up within herself, Ila does not need this space whereas for the narrator it becomes the liminal link between enclosed space and the external world and therefore important. Her imagination only perks up when she is at its centre, as in the illusory game of ‘Houses’ she plays with the narrator under the table. Here, her memory becomes sharp and defined furnished with a great deal of detail. Rooms are planned out with great precision and the narrator is pushed into a querulous participation in the game. ‘You’re lying, you’re mad, this can’t be a house...It can’t be a real house...because it doesn’t have a veranda.’ (TSL, 70) Ila even has a make-believe daughter, her doll, Magda. She attributes her personal experiences at school to this ‘daughter’, implying her unconscious effort to come to terms with its horrors by re-living them vicariously and altering details to salvage her ego.

The children in Magda’s new school had never seen anyone like her. It was terrible for her on
her first day at school. They stared and stared until Mrs Tholand had to tell them not to...they were still staring at her now, after she’d been there two whole weeks.

The reason they stared like that, all of them, girls, boys, even the teachers, was that they’d never seen anyone as beautiful as Magda.

(TSL, 73)

The narration of the subsequent quarrel between Magda and her ugly classmate, Denise from which she is rescued by her hero Nick Price, holds a mirror to the hurt she herself has received and also voices her unfulfilled wishes. As May will tell the narrator many years later:

I happened to be at home that day, she said.
And I know that Nick didn’t stop to help Ila.
He ran all the way back [because] ...Nick didn’t want to be seen with Ila. Ila didn’t have any friends in school you see.

(TSL, 76)

Manipulating the evidence of yearbooks and photographs, Ila’s false tales of her popularity show the child’s propensity to tell lies which can take transformed shape in fabricated stories.

As in the novels above, childhood joys and experiences are vibrantly conjured up in The God of Small Things. The simple bond of love that the twins, Estha and Rahel share with their mother forms the core of the narrative. The major fear that assails them is
that their she might die or love them a little less. When she has apparently misbehaved (her only crime is that she has been blowing spit bubbles), Rahel 'was keen to exchange punishments. No dinner, in exchange for Ammu loving her the same as before.' (GST, 114) From Ammu's point of view the essential quality of childhood actions and emotions is unveiled:

Ammu wondered at the transparence of that kiss. It was a clear-as-glass kiss. Unclouded by passion or desire-- that pair of dogs that sleeps so soundly inside children, waiting for them to grow up. It was a kiss that demanded no kiss-back.

(GST, 221. My emphasis)

The passion, violence and inhumanity which colours the adult world is hinted in the implied polarity between the child and the adult even though the states of childhood and adulthood are continuous. In fact this function of comment and critique of the adult world is an important reason for the choice of the child's consciousness as the narrative medium.

The children yearn for the love of a father who has spared no caring thought for them. They are constantly on the lookout for a father-substitute: Chacko, their uncle, the paravan, Velutha and even the actor, Christopher Plummer are considered as possible fathers. They invariably draw blanks. Chacko is much too engrossed in the feelings for his own daughter ' the one he never gets to know' (GST, 117) and anyway, a dependent divorced sister's offspring do not make them rightful recipients of his filial attention. The relationship with Velutha is rudely brought to an end by a
cruel adult world which cannot brook a union between a low-caste worker and the high-caste masters. Velutha is brutally tortured to death by the local police at the behest of Ammachi and Chacko. Christopher Plummer who plays the perfect father in the film, *The Sound of Music*, rejects them outright even in their dreams wherein they are looking for wish-fulfilment

‘Then I'm sorry,’ Captain von Clapp-Trapp said. ‘It's out of the question. I cannot love them. I cannot be their father. Oh no.’

Captain von Clapp-Trapp couldn’t.

*(GST, 107)*

It is clear from the remembrances tapped for the forays into the child's mind that this point of view of the child necessitates an extensive reliance on memory. Rushdie iterates that ‘most of what matters in your life takes place in your absence’.\(^{30}\) The child's perspective fits naturally with this belief since childhood memory is imperfect in that one can never remember anything in totality. One can never recreate an experience as it was originally felt. The distance in time creates a kind of absence from the original scene. Only that which memory reports, can be presented. Moreover, not only is the author’s memory tapped for the construction of the narrative, but memory is the most obvious ploy in the reconstruction of events which have already taken place. The ‘baggage of historical memory’\(^{31}\) comes to have the importance of a

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\(^{30}\) Rushdie in the interview with Haffenden, op. cit., p. 249.

veritable character which moulds, shapes and at times even controls events. This function can, and at times does, imply regression and even erasure simply by virtue of the selectiveness of this memory. At other times it could function as a retrieval of the past. The relationship between memory and politics becomes amply clear in this selective function. As Rushdie says of the connection between memory and politics 'when your version differs from the official version, then remembering becomes a political act'. The complexity of the narrative in Ghosh and Rushdie is inherent in the manner that memory is deployed. *Ice-Candy Man* is a comparatively straightforward recollection of a particular historical event. But even here the fact is that the child records the event as narrated or as it occurred. The understanding and comment implied in the selection of the events is a much later development chronologically, but finds a simultaneous statement in terms of the narration.

The reference to children in the title, *Midnight’s Children* is symptomatic of the importance of the child in this framework and yet, to an extent, misleading, because the novel opens with the adult Saleem Sinai, beset with adult maladies such as impotence and psychological aridity. He dwells on the past of his family in the course of which he gives us glimpses of even his grandfather’s childhood dreams and companions specifically the Teiresias-figure of Tai, the boatman. He builds up to the moment that he was conceived through many wilful indirections. In a self-conscious construction of the narrative structure, possible mothers and fathers are paraded before the reader. Finally he goes through a

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32 Rushdie talking to Haffenden, op. cit., p. 251.
tremendously dramatic recollection and revelation of his birth. Abhimanyu-like, he displays a heightened awareness floating in the amniotic fluid of his mother's womb. It is only on page twenty-nine and thirty that the nine year old Saleem Sinai makes his entry. Even now, the entry is parenthetical. He makes it clear that the motive of this move to the past is to preserve it. In his pickling factory, '..by night within these sheets, [he spends his] time at the great work of preserving. Memory, as well as fruit, is being saved from the corruption of the clocks.' (MC, 38)

As is apparent in Rushdie's comments and the sophisticated techniques that the novelists employ, the postcolonial novelist is highly self-conscious of the writer's craft and the techniques that he chooses. With the novel, *The God of Small Things* firmly set in Kerala, even the concept of narration undergoes a change. For Arundhati Roy, the paradigmatic narrative is that of the Kathakali 'Great Stories' with their 'mystery and magic' (GST, 229). The master story-teller is the Kathakali man for whom these stories are his children and his childhood. He has grown up with them. They are the house he was raised in, the meadows he played in. they are his windows and his way of seeing. So when he tells a story, he handles it as he would a child of his own. He teases it he punishes it. He sends it up like a bubble. He wrestles it to the ground and lets it go again. He laughs at it because he loves it.

(GST, 229-30)
Apart from the pointed likening of the relationship between the story-teller and his stories to that between a parent and a child, an interesting comparison in itself, it offers an insight into the implied creative process. For the story-teller, whether he is the Kathakali Man or Rahel or even Roy herself, stories are born and nurtured in childhood. Here, in the context of this study, Roy seems to agree with all the novelists whether from Africa, the Caribbean or others from the Indian subcontinent who use the child as protagonist-narrator. Stories also 'join' and establish kinship, just as memories of a shared childhood do in the case of Estha and Rahel, twins separated by circumstance. Now they are 'joined by a story. And the memory of another mother.' (GST, 234) Indeed, in her belief in the richness of childhood as the source of creative activity, she is one with all those novelists of the world like David Malouf from Australia, who use the child centrally in their fiction.

Once again the enigmatic coupling of the adult and the childish attracts attention. The clear indication is that an adult vision is ultimately organising childhood experience into a narrative. 'It is only now, these years later, that Rahel with adult hindsight, recognised the sweetness of that gesture.' (GST, 190) It is this grown-up apprehension which can locate the undercurrents of class, caste and sex distinctions. The give and take between childhood memories and adult narration so amply symbolised by the Kathakali Man, is again verbalised in Rahel's reaction to another childhood experience of watching Sound of Music. It evokes:

A magical, Sound of Music smell that Rahel remembered and treasured. Smells like music,
hold memories. She breathed deep, and bottled it up for posterity.

(GST, 99)

There is an obvious, heavy reliance on the memories of the impressionable and sensitive mind of the child. All she has to do as an adult is to uncork the bottle and to let loose the secret droves of stories. In this process is implied the process of growing up. This is a *bildungsroman* in which reality hit her like a 'small stone... and her childhood fled, flailing its arms.' (GST, 127) As an adult, Rahel tries to reason out a way to absolve herself and her twin of the guilt of having been the cause of Velutha's death:

You're not the sinners. You're the Sinned Against. You were only children. You had no control. You are the victims not the perpetrators.

(GST, 191)

*The Child as Historical Witness: The Partition of the Indian Subcontinent*

So, literary decolonisation, with the particular tool of the narrative perspective of a child started making its appearance. Things came to a head with the ignominious experience of the
aftermath, and the unwarranted rigours of decolonisation. The child is once again placed at the pivot of postcolonial literary strategy by some writers. The number of fiction writers who deploy the figure of the child and childhood as the central literary theme and strategy is large enough to merit focused attention. Novels like Bapsi Sidhwa’s *Ice-Candy Man*, Amitav Ghosh’s *The Shadow Lines*, and Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children*, while concentrating on the childhood of the narrator-protagonist, all revolve around the historical event of the 1947 when the Indian subcontinent was segmented.

Ernest Renan’s stipulation that ‘where national memories are concerned, griefs are of more value than triumphs, for they impose duties, and require a common effort’[^33], is proved true at least in the literary response to the traumatic event of partition. The fact that so many Partition stories and novels deal with the impact of the historical event on children and women merits analysis. As in a war, the ultimate brutality perpetrated during this period is driven home through the experience of the most vulnerable members of society. Those who are the most easily exploited become facile targets of those who are the perpetrators in this arena of mindless violence. This battered child emerges as a political site of confrontation and his portrayal in fiction functions as a critique of this situation with the total vulnerability of the child serving to highlight the ruthlessness of the situation. Mushirul Hasan’s feelings about the Partition reveal the deep-seated effect of the

event on the people of the subcontinent

...the Partition affected millions, uprooted from home and field by sheer fear of death to seek safety across a line they had neither drawn nor desired.34

The deployment of the potentially exploitable child ensures that the enormity and the magnitude of the issues involved is unveiled in all its starkness.

Very obviously, as a political site this embattled child cannot be a dehistoricised, universal, Romantic one. The child comes to incorporate the specificity of the historical and national context. Hence, the endangered child in the womb of Nathu’s wife in Bhisham Sahni’s Tamas (Darkness)35 becomes a metaphor for all that is at stake in this bloody war of separation. It is significant that the nine year old narrator of Mrinal Pande’s Daughter’s Daughter harks back to the backdrop of the Partition and Independence. Memories go back to the time when she, along with the other children in the family would ‘slip between the open spaces and drop among the scary refugees who passed below all day and all night. It was the August of 1947. The place, New Delhi.’(DD, 117) The ominous reference to Mohan, ‘the one-eyed bully who had lost one eye in the Partition’ is a reminder of the horrors committed during this period.

So, the child becomes a trope for the precarious vulnerability of human values in those troubled times and after. A volume titled *Orphans of the Storm : Stories on the Partition of India* (1995)\(^{36}\) containing stories from different Indian languages translated into English, catalogue the atrocities heaped on the children in those months of chaos. Children are conceived as a result of the mass scale rape which took place ('Xuda ki Kasam', Manto; 'Ya Khuda', Qudrat Ullah Shahab). They are rendered 'orphans in the storm' with forced separation from parents ('Pali' Bhisham Sahni; 'Aadab', Samaresh Babu). Children are raped ('The Reunion', Manto; Revenge, K.A. Abbas) and are cruelly forced to grow up ('After the Storm', Attia Hussain). Numberless die while many live to be tormented by a 'partition of sensibility' ('Pali', Bhisham Sahni). Within the confines of one single volume, these stories encapsulate the far-reaching effects of this historical event.

Bastardisation, a trope used so extensively in West Indian fiction recurs here too as a corollary of mass violence. The sexual horrors perpetrated during the Partition resulted in much illegitimacy in the Indian subcontinent, a fact which was responsible for an aggravation of the national uncertainty endemic to the postcolonial situation. This called for urgent negotiation. In the context of rigid social mores in the Indian subcontinent it is a shame which is slapped both on the woman and the child. In reality, it is the collective shame of the nations, particularly of the menfolk who directly perpetrated the dastardly crimes of rape, murder and plunder. In this context, Rushdie's metaphor of 'shame' for the postcolonial scene in *Shame* (1984), is not accidental. But as

Qudrat Ullah Shahab’s short story ‘Ya Khuda’ demonstrates, for the child, the necessity of giving a name to the father is of paramount importance for self-legitimation. This social requirement informs the narratives which concentrate on the forced humiliating loss of identity of the child. Saleem’s parade of fathers is one such exercise in legitimising the self and part of his effort at appropriating a distinctive identity for himself. The dilemma of deprivation of the bastard becomes particularly pertinent in the context of the postcolonial quest for identity. As with Karna, the prototypical bastard from the Mahabharata, this results in a permanent scar which cannot be erased from adult memory. The personal hell of Karna becomes symptomatic of the shame which afflicts the postcolonial child.

Sidhwa is, as are all the other writers under focus, at pains to establish the age and later, the sex of the narrator. The ‘child’s mind interacts with this world by ‘imagining’ and by having the sensitivity to react and to comment on contemporary happenings. ‘Immersed in dreams’, living in her ‘private world’, Lenny Seth will have ‘troublesome reveries’ which characterise the forced and painful process of becoming an adult. Ultimately, this novel is about a brutal growing up. The bewildered anaesthetic world in which she finds herself after being operated for the correction of polio, when she is forced to ask ‘Where am I?’ is similar to the dislocation which results from Partition. Growing sexual awareness under the awkward tutelage of her cousin functions as a parallel to the knowledge which is foisted on her by the weight of the circumstances of Partition. Again the enormity of these visitations is driven home more forcefully because of the fact that it is a child whose consciousness is, so to speak, being assaulted. Her mind
reacts spontaneously to the riots in childish apprehension. She sees charred bodies as 'spread-eagled stick dolls.' While the rioters are either exhilarated or violated, Lenny stares at the 'tamasha, mesmerised by the spectacle' and starts 'screaming: hysterically sobbing.' (ICM, 137) Her effort to make sense of the violence by tearing apart her doll, throws her into a spasm of sobs and serves to impress its 'pointless brutality' upon her.

'Pull, damn it!' I scream, so close to hysteria that Adi blanches and hastily grabs the proferred leg...Adi and I pull the doll's legs, stretching it in a fierce tug-of-war, until making a wrenching sound it suddenly splits. We stagger off balance. The cloth skin is ripped up to its armpits spilling chunks of greyish cotton and coiled brown coir and the innards that make its eyes blink and make it squawk 'Ma-ma.' I examine the doll's spilled insides and, holding them in my hand, collapse on the bed sobbing.

Adi crouches close to me. I can't bear the disillusioned and contemptuous look in his eyes.

'Why were you so cruel if you couldn't stand it?' he asks at last, infuriated by the pointless brutality.

(ICM, 138-39)
Clearly, the agency of the child narrator is central to the comment on the meaningless savageness of this episode in history. Sidhwa will constantly remind the reader that these events are being reported by a seven-year old child in Lenny's repeated references to the effect of the Partition on '[her] child's mind'. (ICM, 1)

So, the effect of Partition on children and childhood as seen in the lives of Lenny, Ranna, and Papoo, the little sweeper girl becomes the central focus of the novelist. In the loss of her Ayah, Lenny is emotionally robbed of a 'mother'. As a result, her world undergoes dramatic irreversible changes. These can be directly pinned on the historical process of achieving independence through the painful experience of partition. The woman is kidnapped, raped and sold by the very person who had once professed to love her. On the other hand, with Ranna, the whole loss is compounded by severe physical and emotional trauma. His family is murdered after a brutal rape of the womenfolk in front of his young eyes. It is also significant that the first riots that erupt have 'a naked child, twitching on a spear struck between her shoulders [being] waved like a flag.' (ICM, 134-135)

Through Lame Lenny, the growth of nationalist feelings is recorded. 'If anyone is to blame, blame the British! There was no polio in India till they brought it here!' (ICM, 16), it is urged. The first political enunciation of the Parsis who have traditionally been regarded as one of the most 'westernised' ethnic groups of India, comes thus through the agency of the seven year old. Much like the effect of polio on her little body, the presence of the white rulers is like a disease which has warped the very shape and structure of the colonised. The malady has to be rooted out but the task is not an
easy one. The Partition proves this by afflicting the people physically and mentally. Aijaz Ahmed, brings out the exact nature of the Partition in his summation:

...our Independence too was peculiar: it came together with the Partition of our country, the biggest and possibly the most miserable migration in human history, the worst bloodbath in the memory of the subcontinent: the gigantic fratricide conducted by Hindu, Muslim and Sikh communalists. Our 'nationalism' at this juncture was a nationalism of mourning, a form of valediction, for what we witnessed was not just the British policy of divide and rule, which surely was there, but our own willingness to break up our civilisational unity, to kill our neighbours, to forgo that civic ethos, that moral bond with each other, without which human community is impossible. A critique of others (anti-colonial nationalism) receded even further into the background, entirely overtaken now by an even harsher critique of ourselves.37

It is this dreadful recognition of the failing in the self which constitutes the growth to maturity and awareness, and the harshness and enormity of the knowledge is captured in all its bitterness through the point of view of the child.

Even when a picture of the paradigmatic innocence of childhood is portrayed, it is only as a foil for all that is being lost. A 'heavy heart and a guilty conscience' assail the child Lenny when she leaves Pir Pindo after the first stories of the Partition are aired and confirmed. The childish pranks and quarrels between Lenny and Adi, sister and brother, are possible only before the loss of innocence. Innocent jokes turn into barbed innuendoes after the event. If there is abuse in the pre-Partition world, as in the case of Papoo, the sweeper's daughter who is physically maltreated by her mother, there is every possibility of springing back to her 'sprightly, devilish and delightful self'. But the emotional and psychological scars inflicted by Partition will probably never heal just as Ranna will have to live with the deeply gouged scar on his skull for the rest of his life.

So, the child Lenny is witness to the outbreak of the Partition riots and the underlying politics as played out within the walls of her house. The ruler/subject tension between Mr. Singh and Mr. Rogers, are recorded by her observantly. She reports what she hears verbatim. The clichéd discussions of this relationship between the master and subject reveal most of the tension. The imperialist viewpoint is 'If we quit India today, you'll bloody fall at each other's throats' which is countered by a dig at the 'divide-and-rule monkey tricks.' (ICM, 62-63) She also assumes the painful task of documenting the pain and sorrow that have come with the event. She will affirm with a new maturity that through this and her sensitive response to it, she has established a 'nightmare connection with the children of the world', the kind of connection that Azaro sees in The Famished Road. (ICM, 21) With this, she links these problems with those suffered during the second World War where
children were dismembered by Nazi soldiers. In this new-grown awareness, she will realise that the original harmony between different groups of people, Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Christian, is shattered by the Partition. The acknowledgement of the Hindu/Muslim/Sikh divide makes her increasingly aware of her 'separate' Parsi heritage. Significantly, *Cracking India*, the title under which *Ice-Candy Man* was published in the United States, draws attention to the Partition as the informing historical experience.

In *The Shadow Lines*, the grandmother's childhood memories of pre-Partition Dhaka are an effort of the old woman to relate to her past and to work out a connection with her border-distanced origins. She is fiercely nationalistic: she will donate her jewellery for the national cause during the 1962 Indo-China conflict. Yet she finds herself caught in the conundrum of an ambiguous, contested nationality resulting in a bafflement about how her 'place of birth had come to be so messily at odds with her nationality' (*TSL*,152) It is during this reconaissance trip to Dacca that the drama of the 1964 riots which take Tridib's life, is enacted.

In *Midnight's Children* the postcolonial exercise of trying to take stock of history takes precedence over all other concerns. As in the previous novels memory becomes the means of the understanding of events which otherwise seem unfathomable. Constant shifts backwards and forwards in time through the agency of a fecund imagination and an over-active memory, ensure a searing comment on the political imbroglio in which Saleem finds himself. Therein lies the awareness of the self and the answer to the preying problematic of national identity. In the context of the fragmentation forced by Partition, the self undergoes the most
severe test and emerges beaten and lost like the new nations that have been created. Partition tears the being of Saleem who, as a consequence, can lay claim to neither India or Pakistan as his own country. As a changeling, even his claims to 'amniotic' memories are false since he never actually swam in the womb of Amina Sinai. He is torn between parents who either accept or reject him at whim. His partitioned sensibility while owing emotional allegiance to Aadam and Amina Sinai, the parents who brought him up, cannot ultimately claim them as his own because of a falling away of affection on their part on the revelation of his true parentage. Carrying the obvious analogy further, Saleem Sinai can never stake rightful claims on his nationality either of India or of Pakistan though emotionally and instinctively India seems to be his home.

Territory, History and National Identity

Territory and history are the two most important signifiers of postcolonial identity. Therefore, the postcolonial writer's primary task is to evolve a technique by which he can map and demarcate territory and rescribe history. The consciousness of the child is one site that the postcolonial novelist has located. Though the problematic of national identity as posited in Frederic Jameson's claim of every 'third world novel' being a national allegory has been much flogged in 'postcolonial' studies, in these novels which use the child's perspective, it becomes impossible to side-step this issue. The term 'nation' is specifically to be understood as the modern nation-state though the hoary and hazy unifying 'spiritual
principle'\textsuperscript{38} cannot be forgotten. Therefore, it is to be seen as being both historically and geographically determined. The close intertwining of the narrative with the history of nations in all the three novels is the main concern of the novelists. Actually, the choice of the nation-breaking and nation-making event of Partition, automatically makes this a central issue. The common coupling of this problematic with the perspective of the child is not only interesting but also crucial to the understanding of the attitude of the writers to this question. Inescapably, the connection becomes more pointed in the repeated equation of the new nations with children. Sidhwa calls Pakistan a 'toddler nation' and Rushdie refers to India as a 'child-nation'. Slavesister, Lenny's aunt says:

'...don't forget, we have to celebrate the new arrival yet!'

Godmother and I look at her blankly.

'Somebody has a baby I don't know of?' asks Godmother suspiciously.

'Have you forgotten already?' says Slavesister with reproof. 'We've all produced a baby...

We've given birth to a new nation. Pakistan!'

\textit{(ICM, 141-42)}

\textsuperscript{38} Renan in Homi K. Bhabha, op. cit., p. 19. 'A nation is a soul a spiritual principle. Two things, which in truth are but one, constitute this soul or spiritual principle. One lies in the past, one in the present. One is the possession in common of a rich legacy of memories; the other is present-consent, the desire to live together, the will to perpetuate the value of the heritage that one has received in an undivided form.'
These probes into the postcolonial situation mark the effort of the novelist to come to grips with his current geographical and historical location.

As already stated, the deployment of the child and childhood becomes interesting for the paradox inherent in the consciously adult recognition of their importance. It is in this context that fantasy becomes one natural choice for the postcolonial novelist as in *Midnight’s Children*. The elements of dream and unreality, of nightmare and magic, become important in reflecting the postcolonial sense of uncertainty. If in the African novel, raving, ranting ghosts, witches, spirits inhabit Okri’s *The Famished Road* more than comfortably, Rushdie’s clairvoyant Saleem and his band of Midnight’s Children with miraculous gifts, too find facile accommodation without exciting much question. As in the case of their fictional predecessor, Grass’s protagonist Oskar Mazareth in *The Tin Drum*, the “Tin Dummer” who ‘elects’ to remain a three year old all his life, all sense of normalcy is overturned. Piaget, the psychologist who specialised in the study of the child corroborates this choice by his analysis. He affirms that ‘the young child’s attitude is different; for him there are no laws with general applications yet every event is explicable... the impossible can be imagined as a reality.’ The abnormal is accepted and espoused as the truth.

The preoccupation with demarcated space manifests itself in a curious lack of demarcations. Territorial space is essential but since it belongs to a world of make-believe, is curiously without

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limits. So also with history. Covventional 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 is to mock this dependence on history and territory for the formulation of identity.

The specificities of the compulsive cartography of the physical and political location of the narrators define them and establish the plank from which they will respond and comment on the historical situation. When Lenny, the child narrator, in the opening paragraph of *Ice-Candy Man* says ‘my world is compressed,’ she is given a very precise location.

> My world is compressed. Warris Road, lined with rain gutters, lies between Queens Road and Jail Road: both wide, clean, orderly streets at the affluent fringes of Lahore.

(*ICM, 1*)

As soon as the exact peripheries of her world are outlined, it becomes clear that this is an integrated, wholesome sensibility sheltered in the knowledge of a comforting sense of belonging. Talking of Godmother’s house, Lenny says, ‘This is my haven. My refuge from the perplexing unrealities of my home on Warris road.’ (*ICM, 1*) From the vantage point of the ensconcing warmth of this ‘haven’, the acute effects of the ‘cracking’ of India become ominously heightened. In fact, it is these comforting certainties of belonging to a definite space and location, which come under attack.
Seen against these fixed pre-independence realities, at a time when the new nations ought to be finding independent identities, the loss of selfhood becomes ironical. This postcolonial irony will come through only later when the situation becomes untenable and more complicated under the impact of the violent partition of the Indian subcontinent. The child’s mind is beset with a major fear that Partition might mean a dividing line through her house tearing it asunder.

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)

Transparency, what results is a partition of sensibility, a rending of the self. With Partition, reality will become even more perplexing. She will feel even more dislocated than she felt after being administered anaesthesia, and she will be left pondering over her ‘uncertain future.’ Lenny’s fear is paralleled by Th’amma’s sense of loss and bewilderment at the early division of her ancestral house in The Shadow Lines by which the dividing line insensitively ran through a door and bifurcated a commode. This serves as an analogy for the partition of the country.

A similar emphasis on the territorial specifics is unmistakable in Ghosh and Rushdie. The Calcutta streets, roads
and even corners are mapped in great detail in *The Shadow Lines*. Even the loss of Dhaka in the mental atlas of the partitioned mind of the generation which has been immediately touched by the bifurcation of the country, is enunciated through the mapping of the 'lost' city. The forced division of the already divided family due to Partition is heartrendingly iterated in Th’amma’s repeated “But where’s Dhaka?” The psychological loss cannot be more clearly stated. The Hindu-Muslim riots which become the historical setting for Tridib’s death recalls the agonising experience of partition which Tridib’s mother and the narrator’s grandmother have gone through. In the course of Hindu-Muslim riots in Calcutta in 1964 which are an amazing parallel to that earlier bloodbath, the child-narrator records bewilderedly ‘The streets had turned themselves inside out: our city had turned against us’. (TSL, 203) This had catapulted them into a lasting feeling of ‘loneliness’, that distinctive quality that assails the people of the Indian subcontinent which is born of the ‘fear of the war between oneself and one’s image in the mirror’. (TSL, 204) The meaningless death of Tridib is the ultimate comment on the utter senselessness of the partition.

The solidity of the detailed maps of Bombay, and Delhi, created within the pages of *Midnight’s Children* once again serves to simultaneously establish an identity. Yet, at the same time, it also presents the idea of the demolition of any signifying concept of selfhood. Wending its way through Nariman Point, Peddar Road Mahalakshmi, Breach Candy, Tardeo, the loss of identity is brought home in the haziness of the magical enchantment of the Sunderbans. That these specifics and the clarity of this cartography come from the consciousness of a child is significant in these novels. It cannot escape attention that in *Midnight’s Children*, when the
'adult' sensibilities come into the picture, the mapping of locale loses its sharpness, as for example in the above-mentioned nebulosity surrounding the Sunderbans. Thus the use of the child consciousness as the site for mapping out territories and rescribing histories becomes a recognisable feature in these novels.

The extended territorial details like those above and the historical reference to the Partition are matched by numerous references to allied historical personages and historical events. Rushdie's much-publicised 'chutneyfication' of history works not so much to voice his distrust of history as to affirm its presence through its indirections. Also, while commenting on the 'childlike' persona of Saleem, Rushdie decrees how it is particularly apt for the view of history that he wants to project:

It seems to me that it was quite possible to read the entire book as [Saleem's] distortion of history, written to prove that he was in the middle of it. But the moment at which reality starts to face him it destroys him: he can't cope with it, and he retreats into a kind of catatonic state or he becomes acquiescent and complacent.40

The fact is that an event like the Partition of the Indian subcontinent into India and Pakistan in 1947 and its effects, as recorded by the child Saleem form the core of the book. The other historical events which follow, the formation of Bangladesh in 1971; the Emergency of 1975 and leaders like the Widow, Indira Gandhi, General Ayub,

40 Rushdie's interview with Haffenden, op.cit., p. 244.
Bhutto and Zia, all find their way into the book. The narrator's involvement in this mesh of events devolves from the childhood experience of the partition as is clear from his self-identification as a 'midnight's child'. Lenny Seth's meeting with and comment on the Mahatma in Ice-Candy Man, and the 1964 riots in The Shadow Lines fall into the same category of historical events and personages that the child protagonist-narrator witnesses.

**Daughters' Daughters**

The consciousness of the need to negotiate with gender colours the critique in novels like Ice-Candy Man, Daughter's Daughter and The God of Small Things. These issues, when seen along with postcolonial concerns, offer a rich complexity. Tinu's recognition of her second-grade status as a daughter's daughter opens up another area of negotiation. Daughter's Daughter has, amongst other concerns, the first feminist intimations of the injustice of patriarchal social norms in the girl-narrator's recognition that 'she' was less important than her maternal uncle's children when she was in her grandmother's house. In Ice-Candy Man, Lenny's increasing sexual awareness, her attitude to Ayah who becomes the representative of the rape of a nation, also can be seen from this perspective. In Speaking of '62, Neelum Saran Gour valiantly tries to overcome the unfair inadequacies of the system by choosing a 'male' child-narrator. As a woman opting for the perspective of a boy rather than a girl seems to be her compensatory gesture. In fact the supreme ease and lack of consciousness of this choice is a masterly coup.

Even in the midst of immediate political tension, the gender question is never completely forgotten. The emphasis on the
tentative explorations of budding sexuality in the lessons that her 'knowing and instructive cousin' (ICM, 20) tries to give to little Lenny, and the vicariously experienced sexuality of the relationship between Ayah and her admirers, the Masseur and the Ice-Candy Man, draw attention to this aspect. Though there may be quite a degree of equality in the status of Lenny and Adi in this enlightened Parsi family, yet certain latent problems of difference are evident. When Lenny’s parents are worriedly questioning the doctor about her prospects in life, saddled as she is with polio, they ask the doctor, ‘What about her schooling?’ This is met with a stock patriarchal response from the doctor:

‘She’ll marry—have children—lead a carefree, happy, life. No need to strain her with studies and exams,’ he advises: thereby sealing my fate.

(ICM, 15)

It has already been argued with reference to the stories included in *Orphans of the Storm*, the worst hit sections of society by the violence were the children and the women. Of these the girl child becomes a double victim because of the immaturity of her age and experience on the one hand, and her sex on the other. Girl children are raped, made pregnant, abandoned or killed. The feminist awareness of this unpalatable social truth seeps into the narrative all throughout in the questions that Lenny keeps asking even though she cannot really effect anything being a mere female child. She sees the unfairness in the deal meted out to her helpless Ayah where a man who has been pursuing her so committedly and who professes to love her becomes her pimp. She will dwell on Ranna’s
eleven year old sister, Khatija who was last seen running naked, crying in the riots. It is not difficult to guess what the little girl has gone through and what is in store for her.

Lenny is also particularly sensitive to her position as a girl-child. In the meeting with Gandhijee, she makes an observation which shows her acute sensitivity to her gender position:

The pure shaft of humour, compassion he directs at me fuses me to everything that is feminine, funny, gentle, loving. He is a man who loves women—so he will love the untouchable sweeper’s constipated girl-child best.

(ICM, 87)

Other people’s gendered attitude is recognised by young Lenny in her immediate environment, in their response to what she does:

‘Drinking tea, I am told, makes one darker. I’m dark enough. Everyone says “It’s a pity Adi’s fair and Lenny is dark. He’s a boy: Anyone will marry him.’

(ICM, 81)

Lenny will also make note of the many beatings that Papoo the sweeper’s daughter is subjected to, and finally how she is married off to an ugly middle-aged dwarf. In this child marriage, the girl is the one who ultimately has to pay. The use of the present tense in
Lenny's observation at the time of the wedding, 'I am seven, so Papoo must be eleven.' (ICM, 94) reveals the helplessness of the girl-child who is either playing monkey tricks or sleeping in her bridal finery, entirely oblivious of what is in store for her as only a child can be. Lenny sees Papoo as going through an alienating, cheating ceremony like a 'punished child'.

As the title of Mrinal Pande's novel makes amply clear, the gender issue is of central importance in Daughter's Daughter. In a society where girl children are not only secondary in importance but are often looked upon as a millstone around the necks of the parents, a daughter's daughter has almost no status. The son's son comes first, and then the son's girl children. The daughter's daughters were constantly expected to give in to the overriding demands by the male, even the female children of the male heir to the family, in this case the maternal uncle. Relegated to the fringes, immense psychological pressure is exerted on the young female's mind by these hostile social reverberations and practices. This is demonstrated at the beginning of the novel, in the war of control over the hidden 'treasure' of trifles which becomes a bone of contention between the narrator and sister on the one hand, and the Mama's children on the other.

I'm beginning to find this war tiring --- the weight of sins holding back, or hiding, or not wishing to share, brings tears to my eyes. Can't we ever hold on to our things?

(DD,32)
This early quarrel ends with the girls being pressurised into relinquishing the treasure to Mama’s son just because they are daughter’s daughters. The grandmother is manifestly sympathetic with her son’s progeny even when he is at fault. In this initial confrontation, the females begotten by females are forced to buckle in, but towards the end of the short novel, the female protagonist has decided that she has ‘to fight and act up.’ She is also grown up enough to realise that ‘sometimes [you] manage to get attention, sometimes [you] don’t.’ (DD, 45)

Arundhati Roy’s The God of Small Things too emphasises the hostility to girl children in the Syrian Christian society of the backwaters of Kerala because of the hefty dowries that are expected to be culled out at the time of marriage. Chacko and Ammu, brother and sister, are the children of a well placed government official. Both get married to ‘outsiders’: Chacko to an Englishwoman, and Ammu to a Bengali. Both have children, and both are forced to go in for a divorce. Both have sexual relationships subsequent to the break-up of their marriages. Yet Ammu, the twins’ mother, has no status in her father’s house after her divorce and certainly, neither she, nor her children have any material or legal rights. Sophie Mol, Chacko’s daughter has a higher status even though her parents are divorced. Ammu is punished for her sexual vagrancy by being banished from the house, condemned to die a lonely, uncared for death, distanced from the children she loves. On the other hand, giving proof of the blatant duplicity of the social system, Ammachi, Chacko and Ammu’s mother, constructs a special entrance for the entry of all the women that Chacko beds to fulfil his ‘men’s needs’. She even presses home money into their hands thereby giving open
thus makes gender a basic concern of the novel. The child, in his vulnerability is still the special focus of the authoritarian personality. This can be seen in the change and control sought through the education of children, especially through unseeing and unfeeling patriarchal control over children and women as in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997).

The central consciousness of the novel is Rahel, ill-fated Ammu's daughter and one of two-egg unidentical twins. She is sensitive to the injustice meted out to her mother and can sympathise with her. She notices the slightest difference in the manner in which people react to her and her brother, both an errant daughter's children, especially when the son Chacko's daughter Sophie Mol is in the picture. Dead Sophie Mol is more important than Estha and Rahel alive. Social mores even dictate where a girl should be vaccinated because she has to be maintained as a beautiful sex object being fattened for the final kill in marriage. She looks at the vaccination marks on her twin Estha's arms and responds immediately:

> Like school satchels, they evoke in an instant memories of childhood. Two vaccination marks on his arm gleamed like coins. Hers were on her thigh. Girls always have them on their thighs, Ammu used to say.

*(GST, 93)*

Addressing the gender issue, either overtly or silently, these novels take postcolonial fiction from the Indian subcontinent beyond the initial negotiation of colonialism and its accompanying effects,
inviting a fresh approach to the contemporary usage of the child in the fiction of the nineties.

**Writing in the Nineties**

Fiction in the nineties in the Indian subcontinent carries forward some of the threads of earlier writing while yet marking noticeable developments. Like Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice-Candy Man*, Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines*, and Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, Neelam Saran Gour's *Speaking of '62* also cashes in on history and latches on to an important event in Indian history. The novel has at its centre the 1962 Indo-China conflict, a historical event which had a tremendous impact on the mind of the Indian. The novel covers the close response of the common man to this event of national stature. The war ferreted out the latent nationalism nestling in the recesses of his breast, and unified the common populace with the acknowledgement of a shared national experience.

These concerns are emphasised by the reportage of the 1962 Sino-India conflict through the sensibilities of a child who is one of a group of six. Dedicating this book to her children who had complained: 'Why don't you write a book about kids?', Gour arrives at the perfect technique of chronicling a national event which is obviously an important part of her own growing up. As in the novels dealing with Partition, she uses the consciousness of children (all the six children have contributions to make in terms of responses to the particular historical event even though the carrier and the primary consciousness of the tale is one) to catalogue and comment on the build-up preceding the conflict and then on the
war itself. The reiteration of this technique in the treatment of history in all these novels covering the events from 1947 (partition), 1962 (the Sino-Indian war) to 1975 (the emergency) only stresses its importance in postcolonial fiction writing.

In Neelum Saran Gour's novel the light, humorous beginning of the novel leads to child-ish involvement in the war. The six children hidden on the kitchen roof listen to comments and analyses of the war by the adults. They collect money for the country. This money becomes a kind of loot which they appropriate for their own pleasures. They remain awake on night-long vigils with their parents. While their parents listen to the All India Radio reports seriously, the children pass their time playing games and singing songs. Thus, Gour succeeds in painting an authentic picture of childhood desires and concerns in the context of the war. For the children, war is an exciting game which is unlike any they have played before. The money that they steal from the funds that they have collected for the war starts preying on their minds until it burgeons into a child-ish interpretation of the whole event.

'Ba,' urged Lichi, 'shall we lose the war now...now that we have stolen?'

'We may,' he answered severely. And our humiliation was complete.

We understood now that if we lost the war it would have a lot to do with our own shameful and infamous treachery.

(S62, 173)
Reactions to momentous war developments continue to be documented in connection with the children's responses. When, in silence, the children listen to news of disasters on the borders, they feel that 'it was worse than listening in to a cricket match when your team's taking a bashing.' (S62, 174)

Having been given early lessons in the history and geography of the Indo-China border and tension by their schoolmaster father, the children become closely involved in the war. The lengthy discussions about day-to-day developments before and during the war take place under their roof. In these kitchen councils, strategies are uncovered, dissected, and new alternatives weighed and suggested by the teacher and his friends. Tension grips them all, and tempers wear thin. The women take to knitting for their brothers fighting on the front. The children pitch in by collecting money for the cause. The important fact is that everyone seems to be concerned with this national event. Like much else for the children even 'the nights of curfew and blackout were lovely.' (S62, 150) In keeping with the picture of childish pranks, secrecies, sorrows and play which make up a large part of the first half of the book, these nights become occasions for the community to get together under a single roof. Everyone would endeavour to stay awake all through the night, and the children would revel at the idea of not having to go to bed while the adults were still awake. But soon, the reality grips the children and they become party to the tension, initial playful involvement giving way to horrifying visitations and fears.

'Dada,' whispered a small voice in the dark,

'what --- what's going to happen?' A clammy
hand laid hold of my heart. Suddenly my thoughts were flooded with confused panic.

'Are they going to kill Mother and Ba and sell us all as slaves?'

'Rubbish,' I answered in a shaky, strangely unconvinced voice. 'That sort of thing doesn't happen anymore. Only in books and things.'

(S62, 177)

But the pressures of a national engagement like a war, also bring real fears, magnified by the fact that they are, after all, children. Little minds are going to wonder whether their parents will be killed and they themselves, taken slaves. Then occurs the event which will leave the narrator shocked into a harsh, grown-up recognition. The mob fury unleashed on a lone Chinaman which leaves his little daughter dazed in shock, whispering forlornly for her father, has an immense impact on the minds of the children. This is manifested in the immediacy with which the child narrator experiences the physical assault:

My pulse raced and my blood froze. There was an odd rushing in my chest in my ears. ...There wasn't enough air in my chest. Something caught in my throat and strained to give; a bitter ache erupted; my mouth wouldn't hold back that stifling mouthful of pain. I pushed back, I stumbled and fell. I broke into boiling tears and clenched the seat to force my frenzy into the hard wood....
I don't know where the mob took him, but I shuddered at the many incoherent possibilities. That was my first vision of one of those who have to swallow dishonour. Even to my nine years of life, it came through shockingly that this was an old fate. For me the nauseous air was suddenly too thick to breathe. The air was saturated with shame. The ground sown with shame. The guilty sky was clouded with wrong. An anonymous, long-reserved pain spoke up and asserted its claim. My stomach began churning and my throat went tight. I turned to see Lichi's appalled face, white as a sheet, and Bona, all doubled up, vomiting down his tie and shirt and belt.

(562, 181-182)

That the scar of this event will remain is highlighted by the last short paragraph of the novel which brings to the fore the 'now', the present situation of the narrator who is now an adult. This very clearly puts the significance of the whole event into perspective especially when he says 'For me these guns never fell silent.' (562, 196)

In the context of an immediate experience like this, where is the scope of thinking about wearying notions of colonialism and what it did to us? The 'leaden dread' which lies in the throats of the little children is a vast weight which they have to learn to
manage. The narrator's 'nine years of life' are shocked into an awakening which has nothing to do with the British. 'It was my first war and it carried the immense weight of a childhood revelation.'(S62, 196)

A novel like this, once again reinforces the importance of the technique of using the child's point of view as a comment on a historical and political national event. Some anti-colonial postures are voiced in innocuously phrased comments on the British rulers yet significantly, the reference to the erstwhile colonisers is minimal. Apart from the fact that the novel is written in English, and maybe the children in the novel receive their education through the medium of English (even of this there is no textual evidence), the allusions appear in pejorative references like the rickshawallah introducing the disfigured statue of the great empress Queen Victoria: 'she was a queen of the rakshasis.'(S62, 143) But the most important communication is about the disfigurement. Even the children are most interested in finding out who did it because the entity of Queen Victoria carries no meaning for them, as is amply borne out by the text. The spontaneous obviousness of the answer is significant: 'some freedom fighter, most likely.' (S62, 143) Postcolonial questioning of the neo-colonial fallout like the frenzied reactions of Indians to visits by foreign leaders like the Kennedys and the begging bowl passed around in front of the new superpowers, USA and the USSR for economic aid and arms, laces the novel throughout. But the predominant agenda is the advent of a people coming together in the face of a 'national' calamity and the subsequent knowledge of shared shame and guilt. The child's consciousness is central to the acceptance of this national-ist stance, as has already been pointed out earlier.
Tapping the rich pasture of childhood and the figure of the child for literary creativity, Pande, Gour and Roy have created works of art which ultimately vie for a fresh look at 'postcoloniality' and succeed in carving a new distinctive niche for themselves in their appeal to readers both young and old. They open the gates to a newly laid road in postcolonial literatures, with this strategy of deploying the child as the narrative consciousness playing a crucial role in the performance of this task.

This new attitude is made clear in the conscious decision of the two novelists of choosing child-protagonist-narrators. For a child, the moment is everything; a critical assessment in terms of the past and future is not within his ken. So, in Mrinal Pande's Daughter's Daughter, the Partition will appear, but only fleetingly as it impinged on the life and mind of the nine-year old narrator when she thinks of 'the scary refugees who passed below all day and all night' on the August of 1947 in New Delhi.' (DD, 15) Or even more obliquely, in the reference quoted earlier to 'Mohan, the one-eyed class bully who had lost one eye in the Partition.'

In the course of the novel, there will be some more scattered references to the after-effects of colonisation as in the mirroring of social aberrations:

The town had two kinds of people. The Sahib-types and the Desi-types. Being a Sahib demanded high seriousness, accented English, clipped and formal conversation and three-piece suits. How did Westernisation of this
order reach this remote hill-town? For a short spell, a group of missionaries had tried its best to change the traditional Hindus of Almora into English protestant Sahibs but most inhabitants, being pigheaded like us, they finally left the town with one church, one Christian school and one Isai mohalla full of converted Christian families.

(DD, 24)

The antipathies that are left behind between the ‘desi’ part of the town and the new converts to Christianity are part of the colonial hangover but never blown out of proportion by the narrator so as to make it the sole or even the main interest of the novel. The humour which laces the description ensures the appropriate attention.

The children’s closest brush with this element is in the association with Maami’s family, the family of that aunt who is least popular with them because of her uppishness. ‘Maami’s family home, which to us symbolised Sahibiat in its totality, seemed an empire of order, when we went visiting them, we were armed with a long list of instructions for good behaviour.’(DD, 25) But beyond this, the questioning of colonialism stops. As already pointed out, this does not reveal a limitation in the critiquing faculty. Rather, it highlights the fact that there are other issues, like those of gender or the concentration on post-independence political and historical events, which are equally important for the child and which now need to be addressed. Even in The God of Small Things, contemporary problems like the effect of a broken home on the minds of children, of the continued tyranny of class and caste
divisions in modern day Kerala; of the winds of political change in the state with communism in the ascendant, are far more important. The spill of colonialism is incidental and by now has become absorbed in life. Baby Kochamma’s unrequited love for a white missionary; the awe that Chacko inspires with his Oxford sojourn, the whiteness of Sophie Mol’s skin and her ‘first world panache’ (GST, 135.) all fall under this head. For a child every event is an issue for the moment, to be forgotten, or at least, relegated to the background when the next one takes its place. It is only later, with the hindsight of the adult, that they really become issues to be ‘recognised,’ ‘negotiated’ and ‘critiqued.’

Buttressing these concerns in *Daughter’s Daughter*, is a supreme ease of the narration which moves from one childhood experience to another as each one comes: the birth of a younger brother, close moments with the mother or father, childhood play, school, journeys. The narration moves on as nimbly as a mountain goat on the hills of Almora, with no ponderous ‘postcolonial’ issues to bog it down. The issues are addressed because they happen to be there, not because they are being intellectually sought out. This is the hallmark of the novels written in the nineties: acceptance of these situations at face value, and the desire to move on. Negotiation lies in not getting caught up and becoming embroiled in these problems. No erasure is implied; neither is the colonial past condoned. The maturity in attitude now reveals itself in an agreement to confront the issues when necessary but otherwise to move beyond these to handle other concerns of more immediate import.
As is now apparent, these two novels have achieved to a great extent what the postcolonial questioning has long been trying to arrive at. The sense of 'location' which had tantalisingly evaded the early probes, has been found. The peripheral darting hither and thither in search of an inroad, has given way to a sure hold on the centre. 'We are the centre,' they seem to proclaim, shrugging free of the shackling load of 'postcoloniality.' The ping-pong movement of memory in the multiple perspectives of The Shadow Lines the haziness of the Sunderbans episode in Midnight's Children, serve to highlight the quest for this location. The nebulosity and uncertainty related to space in these earlier novels is replaced by a comparative certainty of historical, geographical and national location. The narrators revel in their identities as Indians, one caught in the specific historical scenario of the Sino-Indian conflict and the other located in the identifiable patriarchal society of post-Partition Almora. Arundhati Roy’s locale is contemporary patriarchal Kerala: the narrative homes to Ayemenem in Kerala after winging to England and America for rare, brief spells. The God of Small Things also marks a development from the earlier direct questioning of the problem of territory and history. Rahel’s narrative keeps referring to the role they have to play in ‘History’, and significantly, this is a history of a luckless family buffeted by circumstances, trying to keep themselves intact.

So, it is clear, as the preoccupation with historical, national and geographical issues shows, that in these novels, the child is at the heart of the commitment to self-definition in the uncertainty of the postcolonial scene. Helping to steer clear of any despair or nihilism that the apparent hopelessness of the times suggests, this motif coupled with the theme of childhood works towards the
construction of fresh spaces. Talking about *Midnight's Children* Rushdie makes this agenda absolutely clear.

It never occurred to me that people would read the book as showing the end of all hope. It's the end of a particular hope, but the book implies that there is another, tougher generation on the way.  

Therefore, the 'book does not end all possibility'. The child represents the future and the hope that things will be rectified. The optimistic note is struck with the positive hint of a forward movement.

Years ago R.K. Narayan wrote *Swami and Friends* which continues to appeal to both adult and child readers. Later novels, even if they had children at the centre did not always have a target audience of children—especially *Ice-Candy Man, The Shadow Lines* and *Midnight's Children*. Fictional writing in recent times has the reappearance, after *Swami*, of another phenomenon, the rise of novels which have a dual reader-appeal, addressed to both the child and the adult. Novels such as *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* by Salman Rushdie and *A Strange and Sublime Address* by Amit Chaudhuri, Mrinal Pande's *Daughter's Daughter* and Neelum Saran Gour's *Speaking of '62* may be taken as examples. This duality enables a direct access into the child's world much as Michael Anthony's

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41 Rushdie in Haffenden, op.cit., p. 244.
42 All the four novels, *Swami and Friends, Haroun and the Sea of Stories, A Strange and Sublime Address and Daughter's Daughter* have been read by my twelve year old son almost at the same time as I was reading them. As a child, he enjoyed the first three and the fourth not as much because it was about 'girls'. I reacted by making them the subject of this study.
novels in the West Indies do. There is no apparent colouring of adult interference, recollections or nostalgic yearnings. The critical innocence of the child which is lost for the adult, rules the day. Childhood experiences and feelings are given full play in all their immediacy.

Yet, as the analysis of *Daughter's Daughter*, *Speaking of '62* and *The God of Small Things* has shown, the novels ultimately negotiate problems of both individual and national identity, political and cultural freedom, gender inequality, social inequality and so on. The whole gamut of the child-childhood interplay in postcolonial English fiction finally accents the fact that any representation of children whether in fiction or in life, takes its significance beyond mere social relations. Almost always, it indicates a greater involvement and a much more complex political grid. The use of the child then, is at the heart of the attempt at re-scribing histories while resisting ideological demogogy both in colonial and postcolonial contexts.