



Child's consciousness as an innovative literary device: a fleeting look into Indian postcolonial fiction

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ABSTRACT

The present paper attempts to probe child's consciousness into the Indian postcolonial fiction in English where it is used as a key narrating consciousness. The perspective of child becomes an evaluating tool for these Indian postcolonial novelists by revisiting their childhood memories to reconstruct the experience they have felt in post empire condition. The current paper deals with a question: why are child characters indecisively a constructive narrative technique in Indian Fiction in English? In fact the device of 'child' enables postcolonial Indian writer to address the complex issues of postcolonial society which one could not express in adult's point of view. In Indian postcolonial fiction the use of use of child's point of view is entirely an alternate and innovative narrative trick. Within a vibes of disbelief and new emerging thoughts in postcolonial India literary artists saw child as a pictogram of imagination and emotional response, all the way through which they appear to articulate their frustration with the general public and social order at large.

Key words: Child, postcolonial fiction, point of view, etc.

I. INTRODUCTION

Child is the father of man and I could wish my days to be bound each by natural piety.
(William Words worth)

Words Worth has the reputation of making dumbfounding articulations, as the above expression of his puts child first and father later, this idealistic stimulation sets a sweeping assertion that '*child is close to wisdom*'. It is true, if adults can listen attentively to children, they surly will get revived their adult perspective which seems to be sometimes hopeless and tiresome. Romantics viewed childhood as a '*state of mind*' reasonably than that of a temporary period in one's lifespan.

This romantic keenness of childhood impacted the modern imagination and passed on over and done with different modes of writings in different times. Look back to the seventeen and eighteenth century where poets had expressed childhood as sweet as freedom, happiness and peace. The twin aspects of the child as a symbol and childhood as a theme



have been important features ever since Dickens, *the last man of letter* who started using them. Despite this, child psychology with all its intricacies has not primarily been the key narrating consciousness in the fiction where one could see child intervening into the surrounding realities. Thus, childhood is very significant stage in the building of personality and for the process of becoming a value structure in the life of human being. It makes obvious that child has remained a major figure in serious literature.

Indian writing in English is no exception where writers like Tagore, Raja Rao and R.k Narayan are the precursors who begin to establish the same urge of using childhood as a strong motif in their writings in pre-independence era. All of these writers by and large have drawn their inspirations for writing in child perspective from Romantics who considered childhood, '*freshness of sensation as norm for adult artistic experience*' (Abrams, 1973: 382). Thus, Indian fiction in English before the independence era has contributed a considerable number of literary works which has made repeated use of the childhood as motif.

However, the primary use of child in the Indian fiction might have to provide an unbiased and occasionally, ironic lookout to postcolonial condition but the purpose of using child as motif never nullified rather the straightforward feeling of child lastly develops as a narrative tool to explore the memories of home as John McLeod remarks about the leading writer, Salman Rushdie, he says,

Rushdie's remarks about the Indian writer in Britain inevitably speak of the migrant as an adult who has experienced enough of India as a child to have memories of home to explore in retrospection. (McLeod-212)

II. DISCUSSION

The perspective of child becomes an evaluating tool for the Indian postcolonial novelist. The novelist in India seems to revisit his childhood memories to recreate the experience he has felt in post empire condition. As Lakshmi Holmstrom states:

The novelist Graham Green once said that childhood is the bank-balance of the writer. Perhaps he meant by this that 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 street watching in busy cities.(DD-5)

Here, Lakshmi Holmstrom has more aptly attached childhood with artist. It may be because in childhood everyone is without any prejudices like a divine agent. Gradually when one grows childhood memories guides to enrich our unbiased judgment. This is why Indian post-colonial novelists preferred to use child as narrative stratagem for their narratives. Thus, the device of 'child' enables postcolonial Indian writer to address the complex issues of postcolonial society which one could not express in adult's point of view. Peter Coveney writes about the writer's choice of narrating through the view point of child:

In the world given increasingly to utilitarian values and the Machine, the child could become the symbol of imagination and sensibility, a symbol of Nature set against the forces abroad in society actively de-nurturing humanity. Through child the artist could express his awareness of the conflict between human innocence and the cumulative pressures of social Experience. (Coveney-31)

The art and technique of representing children in Indian postcolonial fiction is entirely a turn from the conventional way of writing. It is perhaps due to the socio-political changes which India witnesses after the end of British Empire. The Indian post-colonial fiction reflects a troubled and complex milieu of the nation with a general disappointment.

This innovative strategy of narrating through the child's point of view is evidently seen in the choice of many novelists in Indian fiction. A case in point is Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's children* (1995), Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* (1988), Amit Chaudhuri's *A Strange and Sublime Address* (1991) and Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997). All of these texts use the child's consciousness as a key narrating strategy. To reflect on these notable fictional works separately. *Midnight's child* is quite a fascinating masterpiece which employs an intricate scheme of magic realism with Saleem Sinai, the child narrator at its Centre. In the novel, Saleem emerges as an Indian at the intersections of the times gone by, he as child is gifted with magical powers, deep understanding, productive imagination, sincerity and having no misapprehensions and most significantly he maintains



patience amid in a spiritless and unsympathetic world. It is this device of child-narrator and the technique of magic realism which enables Rushdie to represent the children's view of historical and socio-political realities which may be termed as a kind of prismatic vision of reality. Though, this view of realities through the perspective of child seems to be fragmented, but it is highly fascinating and profoundly expressive. Saleem Sinai in the narrative introduces himself as a child born between *12.00 midnight* and *1.00 am in the night August 14-05-1947*, at the same time when India was declared free nation. At the outset of narrative he says, '*I was born in the city of Bombay...once upon a time*' (MC-1). This reveals the use of fantasy in the narrative making. It thus, declares that how the story is going to be told. The narrator debates with himself and moves between a magical way of telling, that is '*once upon a time*' and narrating based reasoning. Rushdie very skillfully deployed this device of child narrator in the novel, the narrator's way of telling fits to the Indian oral tradition of storytelling at large.

Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* installs the device of child narrator to give larger space to child's point of view. Though the thematic concern of the novel is wide and multiple but its narrative structure deals with child's perception at large. The use of flash back of memory to represent the past through the consciousness of child unfolds the Ghosh's remarkable art and technique of representing childhood and making '*child*' as narrative strategy to portray others characters in the narrative. Novy Kapadia while praising the mode of narration in *The Shadow Lines* says:

There is extraordinary destiny in the narrative texture of The Shadow Lines. The overall story emerges in layers and each layer is fusion of private lives and public events all linked into a thematic unity. Ghosh uses first person narrative from dual point, that of a child and the adult 'I'. This gives a sense of inhabiting both past and present simultaneously. (Kapadia-21)

The shadow Lines is undoubtedly a fabulous artistic creation which presents a distinctive image of Indian postcolonial childhood. The unique construction of childhood in the novel is intermingled with its style and art of telling the story which one can notice in the intercepts of its narrative making where child narrator is introduced to many twists: he faces complex situations all around and in his memory. Thus, all these things related this child narrator



offers a new rational world to people around him as, he believes in love, peace and harmony among the communities into continents and different nations.

Roy's *God of Small Things* also uses a kind of narrative strategy which works fit with the wide-ranging style of writing. It is by and large the narrative of two children twins *Rahel* and *Estha*. Thus, the story of the novel gets represented by the perspective of children *Ammu's* twins *Rahel* and *Estha*. Everything reader gets to be acquainted with about the novel is entirely filtered all the way through the eyes of children with an inimitable outlook of the world.

Roy with her inventive linguistic fashion and remarkable art of telling a story unfolds the secrets of unhappiness and miseries of characters in the novel. The child characters who are at the centre of narrative are fraternal twins who deal out a strong emotional bond. The sort of bonding we see linking them is scarcely to be creating between siblings. The link between the two siblings can be better understood by their claim of single identity. Roy put in practice the diverse imposing linguistic techniques to erect understanding about how children perceive the world around them. Despite the all seeing narrator of the GST, the integrate utterances of *Estha* and *Rahel* are used in the making of narrative. In like manner the novelist has been assured of risks while applying the diverse linguistic styles to represent the consciousness of children in the narrative. Next to probing these techniques the reader is able to distinguish how novelist exercises verbal communication to delineate her characters. The novelist's play of language is not just a means for message in the work of fiction; rather simultaneously it is an expression of each character's inner psyche. As Dirk Wieman states, "*the Rushdieque, 'magical use of language in the child's universe is correlated to the twin's perspective'*" (qtd. in Vogt-Williams-397). Here Wiemann exclusively causes a cautious endeavor to denominate the children's language by relating it to Rushdie's art of narration. In sum, Roy does not give the impression to reveal her story in a conventional narrative order. Rather her narrative jumps through time, constructing its way in the course of *Rahel's* reminiscences and attempts at comprehending hardships to deal with her family.

Amit Chaudhuri's *A strange and Sublime Address* prime example which uses the consciousness of child Sandeep, who approaches to the city from *Mumbai* to enjoy and use up his summer vacation in the family circle of his maternal uncle in *Calcutta*. Novel by using child consciousness in the novel endeavor to subject the sequential limits of modernity and its



exercise of 'slow language' which serves as a medium that brings into play a slower and an older style of living that holds up the present understanding in the novel. However, the novel develops the narrative to a coverage that expands the type dissimilarity flanked by the world of children and adult world, the novel mentions, "*As Chhotomamma explained, his voice emerging from behind the steady sound of water, Sandeep saw it in his mind like a film being shown from a projector*"(SSA-63). The ideas that novel conveys with the textual effect are visualized through the consciousness of child Sandeep. Thus, the ins and outs talked about in the novel are profoundly associated with the child's perception. Also the novel gives a realistic picture of Calcutta, depicts as, "*a city of joy*" or "*a city of dust. If one walks down the street, one sees mounds of dust like sand-dunes on the pavements, on which children and dogs sit doing nothing*"(SSA-13).

Within a vibes of disbelief and new emerging thoughts in postcolonial India literary artists use child as a pictogram of imagination and emotional response, all the way through which they appear to articulate their frustration with the general public and social order at large. Thus, any version of child's perception is primarily replicated. Brian McHale puts it as, "*The assumption would seem to be that children constitute a special difficulty of access and representation, because as objects of representation, they are always inevitably other than adult writer who undertake to represent them and their experience.* (McHale-219)"

III. CONCLUSION

The technique of using child's consciousness in the postcolonial novels is profoundly exaggerated by the theme of childhood. Certainly, the novelists had to formulate modifications in structure of the narratives and the usage of language to describe childhood. It is stylistic devices used by these novelists to represent this world of child, and to construct the peculiarity between the child and the adult. The novels give the impression of greater significance to the use of child's perspective as a technique to comment on chronological events of national importance. The child's perception is innermost to the receiving of general standpoint of Indian nationalism. Narrating the well-to-do province of childhood and the importance of child for fictional and artistic imagination, Rushdie, Roy, Ghosh, Amit, Desai have shaped the mechanism of painting childhood which in due course strive for new impression on the postcolonial condition and simultaneously leaves a fresh distinguishing



function for themselves to make an artistic appeal by deploying child consciousness as narrative medium.

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