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THE PORTRAYAL OF CHILDHOOD IN THE POST-INDEPENDENCE INDIAN WRITING IN  
ENGLISH FROM SALEEM TO CYRUS:  
THE SAGA OF MAKING AND UNMAKING OF A NATION

Dr. SUJATA

Assistant Professor, Department of English, Faculty of Media Studies & Humanities, Manav Rachna  
International University, Faridabad (Haryana), India



Dr. SUJATA

ABSTRACT

The Paper establishes childhood images as vehicle to trace the socio-political development of post-independence India. The image of childhood in the novels of the post independence era reflect troubled, yet complex milieu of the country. The child characters face persons, institutions and relationship of a decayed and degenerated social-order. Child is the worst victim of breaking up of family, weakening of social order and corrupting of polity. Ardashir Vakil's Cyrus in *Beach Boy* faces the painful consequences of breaking of familial ties. Arundhati Roy's Rahel and Esthappan, in *The God of Small Things*, face the cruelty inherent in familial and social norms; whereas, Salman Rushdie's Saleem in *The Midnight's Children* crumbles under the burden of social and political corruption. All these children have to make adjustment in various fields. They have to bear the burden of the past, to struggle to survive in the present and to carry on their fight to the future. The image of child, in the novels, indicates the real condition of a child in changed scenario and also the symbolic implications thereon. The portrayal of child is not now an isolated phenomenon. It has rather closely integrated with the overall process of life of men and the nation. The helplessness and alienation, the key ingredients of the age, finds its apt portrayal in the image of childhood. All this is at the cost of the vitality and charm of innocent childhood that seems to be lost in the din and hubbub of worldly affairs.

Keywords: childhood image, familial-ties, social-norms, political corruption, symbolic-implication, integrated

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INTRODUCTION

Creation of the images of childhood has been as old as literature itself. In the same way seeing events and situations through the eyes of child characters is part of literary creations. The novelists constituting this study, viz. Salman Rushdie, Arundhati Roy and Ardashir Vakil do use child images in abundance in their novels. But they do not do so in hackneyed or worn-out ways. What is new in their novels is that child characters are

not of peripheral interest, but basic part of their fictional world. Be it Saleem in *The Midnight's Children* (1980) or Rahel and Esthappan in *The God of Small Things* (1995) or rather Cyrus in *The Beach Boy* (1997)- all these child figures are the novelists extended metaphors for conveying their vision of men and the society.

The Indian childhood, as presented in the of pre- independence novels of Mulk Raj Anand and R.K. Narayan, is an objective and sympathetic account. As these writers are concerned with "large public issues and national and social problems" (Mukherjee 204), the image of childhood in these novels too is general and operative. Here there is a natural growing up of children with romantic optimistic colouring. Both the writers have put their unflinching faith in children and are hopeful of their great potentialities. Children are taken as the agents of making of a better world. This is why Mulk Raj Anand calls the untouchable boy Bakha, "the modern child of India".

The novels of post- independence, however, reflect a general disillusionment. The euphoria and optimism born of the Indian Freedom Movement is being replaced by a sense of disillusionment. Many complications arose due to (mis) functioning of the system itself. Free India failed to become a 'noble mansion' for her children and 'rediscovering' India became a very painful experience for the artists. The fact that Indian independence is achieved at the cost of partition, preceded with and followed by a lot of violence and butchery- has much to say in making of this sceptic life- vision of the artists. Such fissure of the mind and soul of the artists gets mingled with chaos, confusion and disintegration of the society, resulting in a grim and complex portrayal of men and situations of the age. It is the time of weakening of all the organic and natural bonding and ties- whether familial or social. The institutions like marriage are losing their sheen fast and social and familial bond among the various members are getting weakened. There is moral and spiritual bankruptcy and the solace that man used to get from religion and family in bygone ages is nowhere to be found. The forces of aggressive individualism are looming large. At the same time the different institutions of society are getting sterner and are thrusting their dictates on the individual. The hierarchy of society and harmony among its members seem to have broken. (Sujata 57) Child, as a part and product of the society, is witnessing this upheaval, both affecting and being affected by it. He also, like other members, appears to be isolated and feels the tension and confusion of the age. The isolation, alienation, doubts and intellectual conflict, felt by the novelist, get reflected in the images of childhood that abound the novels of post-independence. In the childhood image the novelists find one of the most suitable medium to depict the novelist's sense of alienation and disillusionment. It is taken to be an apt aesthetic machinery to portray the sense of insecurity, chaos and confusion inherent in the situation. "In childhood lay the perfect image of insecurity and isolation of fear, and bewilderment, of vulnerability and potential violation." (Coveney 32). This explains why the evocation of childhood image becomes an important and continuous theme in the novels of Post-Independence India.

However, here these images have not been used as a nostalgic idealization of the past bliss or an escape from the present turmoil. The much discussed concept of innocence verses experience has also changed its perspectives. Now the image of child has become more pragmatic as well as more problematic. In keeping with the complexity of situations it tends to become more complex and inclusive. It has acquired a symbolic and emblematic dimension, reflecting this or that aspect of society.

Child is the worst victim of breaking up of family, weakening of social order and corrupting of polity. Hence there is the symbol of child as victim. Ardashir Vakil's Cyrus in *Beach Boy* faces the painful consequences of breaking of familial ties. Arundhati Roy's Rahel and Esthappan, in *The God of Small Things*, face the cruelty inherent in familial and social norms; whereas, Salman Rushdie's Saleem in *The Midnight's Children* crumbles under the burden of social and political corruption. All these children have to make adjustment in various fields. They have to bear the burden of the past, to struggle to survive in the present and to carry on their fight to the future.

#### Discussion

Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* is an obvious example. It moves at quite grandiose levels. The grand destiny of the great Nation is reflected in the fate of Midnight children- the children born at the midnight hour of August 15th, 1947. The chief protagonist Saleem Sinai finds himself "mysteriously

handcuffed” to history. The texture of the novel is allusive, complex and inclusive- dense with symbolic, even emblematic overtones. Multiple identities and shifting shapes of people, things and institutions are vividly depicted. It is epitomized at the stage where the two most important characters Saleem and Shiva become indistinguishable. Even national frontiers and nationalities get blurred. It is the composite picture of India where all distinctions of races, communities, classes, regions and religions become non-existent- one qualifying and affecting the other. There are missed and mixed identities. It is a cobweb of so many contradictory and complementary forces at work, bringing out the dual fate of man. (Sujata 59)

Saleem is born in Bombay on August 15th, 1947 “on the stroke of midnight [...] clock hands joined palms in respectful greeting, as I came” (*Midnight’s Children* 3). It is the time of celebrations and fanfare. Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru in his famous ‘Tryst with Destiny’ speech is assuring a modern and safe dwelling place for all children of India. However, on the other side, an unprecedented medieval butchery- of arson and bloodshed, of maiming and killing- is going on and the millions of children of India are forced to flee their birthplace to save their lives and honour.

This contradictory fate of India is reverberated in the fate of Saleem as for the very beginning his life seems to have become a “public property” (*Midnight’s Children* 86). In keeping with his great historical role, the “political or even politico- cultural and other themes of India’s national development are artistically and emotionally integrated” (Rao 14). Thus his unconscious utterance of a Gujrati rhyme instigates “the partition of the State of Bombay”. And by curious altercation of things he made commander Sabarmati kill his wife’s lover (A parallel to captain Nanawati’s case and his trial who like Commander Sabarmati of the fiction, was “the most popular murderer in the history of Indian Jurisprudence” (*Midnight’s Children* 314).

Saleem’s heart of childhood is spent in the magnificent Buckingham Villa of the erstwhile Methwold’s Estate. He becomes an integral part of the culture and climate of the city, of the “fishermen and Catherine of Braganza, and Mumba Devi, coconut rice, Shivaji’s statue and Methwold Estate” (126) gets mingled with the life of Saleem. Here he, together with his friends, and younger sister is engrossed in normal childhood activities of cheating in school, roaming along streets and chattering nonsense “as we played kabaddi and French cricket and seven tiles” (205).

At the age of nine Saleem discovers his extraordinary telepathic powers enabling him to read the minds of people around him. At ten he begins communicating with 581 children who are survivors from 1001 children born at the Great Midnight. The fact that 420 midnight children have died so early is another anti-idealistic thrust (Sujata 59). Most such depictions have allegorical or slighting effects. Authentic Indian flavour is given to the story by esoteric ironic details. It is “through some freak of biology or perhaps owing to some preternatural power of the movement” (*Midnight’s Children* 234), each of the midnight children born during “the first hour of August 15<sup>th</sup> 1947 between midnight and one a.m.” (234), is endowed with special talents.

The most prominent among these midnight children is Parvati-the-witch, Shiva, Saleem’s Changeling brother and Saleem himself. Parvati, a slum girl from Delhi, has the power of “illuminates, the genuine gift of conjuration and sorcery, the art which requires no artifice” (239). Shiva, on the other hand, has been given the “gift of war”. Saleem has been endowed with the power to look into “the hearts and minds of men” and empowered by this he organizes midnight telepathic conferences with midnight children night after night (239). However, in the turbulent times like ours, having talent is one thing and utilizing them is quite another. “but it is kali yuga; the children of the age of darkness were born, [...] so that although we found it easy to be brilliant, we are always confused about being good” (239). There is rivalry and downright hostility between midnight children especially between Saleem and Shiva. Saleem, on his part, is apprehensive of Shiva discovering “the secrets of our birth....(and) would certainly insist on claiming his birth-right” (339). Shiva, on the other hand, is jealous of Saleem. The other midnight children charge Saleem with big-brotherly attitude and accuse him of “Secrecy, prevarication, high-handedness, egoism” (357). This leads to loss of their special powers save Saleem’s new power of smelling things and events. This power he got during the operation of his nasal deformity (Sujata 60).

This is the end of one phase of his life. The days of illusions and ignorance are over. Saleem, like India herself, casts away the shreds of lofty idealism and rosy dreams. It is reflected in the ending of the sweet illusion of 'Hindi Chini Bhai Bhai'. Thus Saleem has to go on exile- sometimes to the 'land of pure' (Pakistan), another time to the erstwhile East Bengal- to have better experience and better knowledge of the world. As he muses on: "Midnight had many children; the offspring of independence were not all humans. Violences, corruption, poverty, generals, chaos, greed and peppercorns [...] I had to go on exile to learn that the children of midnight were more varied than- even I had dreamed" (350).

Saleem is "witness to most of crucial events that took place in the subcontinent from the birth of Independent India to Military Rule in Pakistan, the birth of Bangladesh and Emergency in India. Above all, he is the witness to the degeneration of the Nation" (Sujata 60). He has been in pain and anguish at the degeneration of the Nation through the doings and un-doings of power-hungry, corrupt and inept politicians. The high hopes spelt out at the Great Midnight have been belied. "Like Saleem himself Independent India has prematurely become aged, impotent mutilated with ominous cracks all through her body. The potentiality of the magical midnight's children has been systematically cut out and the land is reeling under darkness with only a faint hope of regeneration" (Sujata 60).

...until the thousand and one midnight's have bestowed their terrible gifts and a thousand and one children have died, because it is the privilege and the curse of midnight's children to be both masters and victims of their time, to forsake privacy and be sucked into annihilating whirlpool of the multitudes and to be unable to live or die in peace. (*Midnight's Children* 552)

In *The God of Small Things* tells about the inconsistencies of familial, social and political norms, using strong childhood image in the background. The novel is about the antithesis between the individual freedom and rules and restrictions imposed on it by various man-made institutions. Children, here, are the major players of the action without being the major manipulators of situations. Innocent as they are, they are ignorant of the implication of their own actions and the situations around. They become the victim of personal and collective whims and freaks of persons and organizations. Thus they have to bear the burden of their childhood even when they grow up and their self takes vengeance on them. They fail to be normal persons and so have no capacity to form and sustain normal relationships. The dehumanizing process is very well seen in Estha who from being sullen and tense comes to a stage when he 'stopped talking altogether' and in a viable age of thirty-one becomes totally quiet man with sea-secrets in the eyes. The inner turmoil and meaninglessness of Rahel's life is reflected in the emptiness of her eyes that offends her American husband and eventually they are divorced.

Esthappan Yako and Rahel, had a troubled childhood. Unlike the midnight children of destiny, they are not born amidst the fanfare and exultation of much awaited independence of India. Rather they are born "amidst rumors of Chinese occupation and India's impending defeat .....By candle light in a hospital with the windows blacked out" (*The God of Small Things* 40). Still they are integral part of the overflowing current of their nation's history. They are very much the "Ambassadors of India" from whose behaviour the "first impression of your country" (139) is formed. Their mother is from a reputed Syrian Christian family of Kerala, while their father hails from the family of "once wealthy *zamindars* who migrated to Calcutta from east Bengal after partition" (70).

The very cosmopolitanism of Estha and Rahel prove to be their misfortune. They are the children of changing times. The virus of change has overtaken the nation. Still the people are not ready to accept these changes. As Comrade Pillai once stated, "Change is one thing acceptance quite another" (279). Ammu, their mother had defied her parents to marry a Bengali Hindu. But this relationship turns out to be the most incompatible one and she has to return to her parents' home in Ayemenem with the hope of getting a safe and honourable shelter for her children. However, this was only "their maternal grandmother's house, where they really had no right to be" (45). They are always neglected and even despised. They are taken as "Half-Hindu Hybrids" as also are "doomed fatherless waifs" (45).

Such and similar humiliation and adversities shatter Rahel and Estha's fragile childhood illusions. Their exalted horizon of innocence, that tended to see the whole cosmos as an extension of their own being, gets narrowed down. The long cumulated discontent in them gets exploded, forcing them in unflinching rebellion. The coming of Sophie Mol, their exalted cousin (the daughter of their maternal uncle Chacko and his ex-wife the English lady Margaret) is the instigator. This is how they come to know the pomp and snobbery of the world. They refuse to be the participant in the "play" that is being performed to welcome "Our Sophie Mol" to home. Rather they are pleased to find solace in the company of Velutha, the untouchable carpenter. They are attracted by his instinctive disposition and are won over by his unadulterated love and care. The rebellion of children throws the mother to the path of rebellion too. She bypasses the hypocritical code of social interaction and enters the "forbidden territory" to love and being loved by the untouchable Velutha. She breaks the laws of so-called social decency- the "Love Laws. That lay down who should be loved. And how. And how much." (328)

What happens next is not beyond imagination, only that its speed and magnitude is alarming. The actions move in a breath taking speed and nobody seems to have any control over them. Ammu's detention by her family members, her frenzied outburst against her own children, the twins' leaving of their home in a boat (accompanied by Sophie Mol), the capsizing of the boat in the middle of river Meenachal and drowning of Sophie in that- are all terrifying.

Now begins the face saving and save- honour exercises by the snobs of sophisticated society. The families, police, politicians- all join hands for maintaining status- quo. They are satisfied to find a scapegoat in Velutha, the "Usubmissive Parvan" whose actions and dispositions have all along seemed to challenge their authority and privilege. He is charged with attempt of raping Ammu, kidnapping the three children and murdering Sophie Mol. The twins are tricked to testify against him. In one of the most moving scenes of the novel, Estha is face to face with bruised and tortured Velutha in the police custody. "The swollen eyes opened. Wandered, then focused through a film of blood on a beloved child. Estha imagined that something in him smiled. Not his mouth, but some other unhurt part of him" (320).

And what has Estha done on his part? He just said "Yes", implying it was Velutha who had kidnapped them and killed Sophie Mol. And this "Yes" takes a heavy toll on not only Estha but Rahel as well, leaving them pricked with their conscience and tormented by their self for whole of their lives " In the years to come they would reply this scene in their heads, as Children. As teenagers, as adults....." (32)

*The God of Small Things* is the story of revolt and its consequences- what man aspires and what he gets. Tormented by their own self and repudiated by the world, the twins once again find their way to Ayamenem. There they linger aimlessly without any plan of future, shorn of all vitality and desires. "No plans..... No Locus stand I" (188). What happens next is the normal course of abnormal circumstances. While trying to share the 'quietness' and 'emptiness' they come to such a road where all the rules and laws become non- existent. In trying to give solace to each other they break the codes of so called social decorum. "Only that they held each other close, long after it was over. Only that what they shared that night was not happiness, but hideous grief." (328)

Taken from the worldly point of view, this is immoral. But a more sympathetic assessment will assert it neither moral nor immoral. Rather it is tragic. The fate of Rahel and Estha is as tragic as that of Oedipus in the classical Greek tragedy. Like Oedipus they are victims of society, those betrayed by circumstances (Sujata 58). Their tragedy is not just the outcome of their own action, but the culmination of various forces at work. "That something happened, when personal turmoil dropped by at the wayside shrine on the vast, violent, circling, driving ridiculous, insane, unfeasible public turmoil of a nation" (*The God of Small Things* 19).

Ardashir Vakil's *Beach Boy* presents a still gloomy, yet more pragmatic account. 'The changes' in the society have now taken the more alarming and threatening shape. All cohesion, social or otherwise, has gone in the midst of aggressive self-seeking and frightening antagonism at each step. Family and other social and other institutions have lost their luster and are in the process of worst possible degeneration and even dissolution. Children loose innocence and get soaked in ways of the devalued adult world. The hero Cyrus

Readymoney tends to lose his Childhood Innocence, prematurely and indulges in excessive sexual activities as such "even boys of eighteen and nineteen don't know" (*Beach Boy*, 173).

*Beach Boy* is a fascinating description of an exceptional, yet 'funny' childhood of an eight years' old Parsi boy Cyrus. In its portrayal of sheer childhood exploits, it may be taken to be in the line of R.K. Narayan's *Swami and Friends*. Like Swaminathan in *Swami and Friends*, the hero Cyrus is lost in himself and his dream world. However, with the passage of time the priority of childhood dreams seems to have been shifted. Time, as an agent of causing corruption as well as instilling experience, has cast its shadow over the childhood of Cyrus. Thus in comparison with Swaminathan, he seems to be more experienced and less innocent.

Unlike Swaminathan who belongs to the second decade of the twentieth century, Cyrus belongs to the eighth decade of the century. In this sense his time has been advanced more than a half century. Whatever progress- whether material and social- India has made during these years are materialized herein. Cyrus is witnessing these changes. He is also a witness of advancement and complications in human behaviour and relationships. There are busy parents, too much preoccupied in themselves. For them it is their own freedom and individuality that counts much. They find their own professional careers, business trips, friends' circles, Swimming pools and Tennis Courts more important than the affairs of their children. Their high sexuality gives them very less time to have care, concern and tender feelings for their children. Their extramarital relationships as well as their strained mutual relationships results in daily squabbling, abusing, yelling and finally separation, taking heavy tolls on the psyche of the child. Amidst the hubbub of such affairs much of the organic childhood seems to have lost.

No doubt Cyrus retaliated. But his is not an optimistic rebellion for betterment of situations, as in the case with Krishna's rebellion in Mulk Raj Anand *Seven Summers*. Nor is it a self destructive rebellion born of frustration as is the case of Rahel and Estha in *The God of Small Things*. Rather it is an un-heroic rebellion for survival, for keeping his individuality intact. Thus most often he behaves as if his parents did not exist at all. He hankers after his neighbours, eats their food, plays their games, shares their dreams, dodges his school, steals money from his mother's purse, goes to worn-out theatres to watch Hindi movies, talks about sex and masturbates. "I have been bunking off schools to go to the movies. I have stolen money, I have sold things, I have double-crossed my friends and- I can't bear to think the thought- I have been into the bathroom with my brother's friend, Darab" (10).

Still the fact should be acknowledged that Cyrus never turns a rude or a rebellious child. Rather he adjusts himself with the affairs of his family as also with the affairs around. The artificial atmosphere prevalent in his family makes him a master tactician. Thus at times he sides himself with his mother and at times with his father. But most often his partiality lies with his mother. He is even ready to accept his mother's lover Naresh as his father, as long as he has the solace of living in a still bigger house, in more luxurious conditions.

True his father's heart attack and his subsequent death is a big blow to him. But he does not blame anyone for this. His father's illness has reconciled his mother with his father. She has shown considerable courage and even high-handedness in dealing with the situation. Cyrus is particularly peeved at not being able to see his father's dead body. "It is very expensive to fly the body back, Cyrus" (203), that is all his mother had said. And again he couldn't blame anyone. He gets reconciled to the situation after knowing that his father's urn is coming back next week. To console him further, he takes the gun his father had bought him just before his death. He aims at a bird but accidentally the pallet pierces his toe. His mother takes away the gun and locks it up, "until I am satisfied that you are responsible enough to use it" (210). But responsibility comes when the challenges come. Cyrus is a fast learner and a survivor. "Never mind Cyrus, you will survive. These things happen" (211), as the Maharani of Bharatnagar sums it up.

Cyrus survives all the adverse situations and hardship of life and even finds charm and fun in it. His city Bombay, its sea-shore, its inhabitants provide him with solace. His neighbours and companions give him stamina to live and enjoy life. Film, sports and sex are there to give his troubled mind solace and requisite impetus to live. Sex has become a major preoccupation. Unlike Krishna of *Seven Summer* and *Morning Face*, for whom sex is a kind of "sensual pleasure", for Cyrus it has become both carnal and concrete. "I know what

sex is. I have watched people do it on the beach. I frig but nothing comes out. I have read a porno magazine. I have seen a girl naked..... (75), says he.

Such expressions appear to be those of some grown-up person. Cyrus appears more mature to his age. His way of thinking, his actions his reactions even his language and idioms appear to be those of a grown-up person. "My fingers edged down her neck towards her breasts.....'If your arms are so soft, I whispered 'I don't know what your breasts must be like', he tells Meera the adopted teenage daughter of the Maharani of Bharatnagar "(173).

All such descriptions imply the loss of the vitality and charm of innocent childhood in the novels of the post independence. In the din and hubbub of worldly affairs, the priorities of children have changed and much of their eternal childhood seems to be lost. Now they are no longer lost in pangs and frenzy of childhood. Never do they become oblivious among their peers. The corruption of the adult world is reflected in the actions and behaviours of the children also. Even their language has lost the naiveté of poetry and has become prosaic and matter to fact.

Family the greatest base of Indian social life is breaking up as much by its inherent weakness as by the burden of aggressive self-assertion plus the wind of permissiveness blowing everywhere. People, especially the exploited ones are fast becoming commodities and are used as merchandise for profit. Persons with full and rounded personality are making room for split and undeveloped personalities full of aberrations and complexes. The root of such is there from the very early childhood. The inadequate childhood leads to inadequate adulthood. The children of broken families face similar dilemma. The parents, out of their whims, fight for the custody of their children, who are "borrowed and returned like library books" (*The God of Small Things* 156). Rahel and Estha in *The God of Small Things*, are not allowed "to blow spit bubbles" or sieve their legs, as it reminds their mother of the habit of their ex-husband. Her children are only hers. They do not need father as she is both "our ammu and baba and you love us double" (84). It may satisfy the ego of the parent. But the feeling of child gets bruised as he/ she may not share one parent's grudge against another. Rahel wants to believe that their father "may have lost our address". And Estha, torn between the dominance of his mother and memory of his father, is confronting the severe identity crisis. "On the front of the book, Estha has rubbed out his surname with spit..... Over the whole mess, he had written in pencil unknown. Esthappan Unknown" (156-157).

Then there are children of other lesser Gods also. These underprivileged children have to live in abject poverty shorn of all decency of living. "Malnutrition, disease and misfortune of everyday life" (*Midnight's children* 236) are taking heavy toll on lives and childhood of these children. The fact that only 581 out of 1000 children born during the midnight hour, survive in *Midnight's children*, tells the telling story of talents and powers being wasted. Many of such children, who manage to survive, are forced to live in subhuman conditions. Nobody cares for their education and well-being. For them life can only be explained as the "continuing struggle of oneself against the crowd" (339). They are exploited by the world, even by their own parents, for whom their children are means of earning livelihood for them, even by begging or indulging in anti-social means. Many times such children are even mutilated so that they can arouse pity in people and get good alms. "They do it to kids, so they can always earn money begging- you get more if you are all broken-up" (264).

Caste issues, still "deep-rooted" in society, are other reasons of victimization. The stigma of being untouchable takes heavy toll on the psyche of untouchable children. Their talents are either neglected or exploited. The "little magician" Velutha in *The God of Small Things* can make "intricate toys- tiny wind mills, rattles, minute jewel boxes" out of dried palm leaves. He brings the gifts to Ammu, "the little mistress", holding "the little gifts, he had made for her, flat on the palm of his hand so that she could take them without touching them" (*The God of Small Things* 74).

The society is nothing but a stage of tussle between those having power and those without it. The strong are lurking everywhere in search of their prey. Children, being the most vulnerable, often fall prey to such maniac. A telling incident is of Estha being seduced by the "Orange drink Lemon drink Man" in the

Abhilas Talkies. "He got a cold bottle and straw. So he held a bottle in one hand and a penis in the other. Hard, hot, veiny [...] The orangedrink lemondrink Man's hand closed over Estha's [...] He moved Estha's hand up and down. First Slowly. Then fastly" ( 103).

Such portrayal of children explains why the persons like Saleem, Estha, Rahel and Cyrus are what they are. It all tells how they are made to pass through travails and trauma and thus lose all strength and will-power. They drift aimlessly falling victim to the sinister forces let loose all rungs of society. Lapses of such persons can't be called to be product of their will as society has not allowed them to form a will or personality. If they are amoral their society is more so. Greater crimes under cover go undetected. Yet society gets more and more morality conscious

### Conclusion

The image of childhood in the novels of the post independence era reflect troubled, yet complex milieu of the country. Now the child image, in the novels, indicates the real condition of a child in changed scenario and also the symbolic implications thereon. The portrayal of child is not now an isolated phenomenon. It has rather closely integrated with the overall process of life of men and the nation. The child characters face persons, institutions and relationship of a decayed and degenerated social-order. It is a futile scenario in which all lines separating good from evil, right from wrong and live from spurious relationships have been blotted out. Fluidity is all-encompassing. Here fortuitous and fruitful interactions between various segments of society are impossible. The interactions are of the type where opposing sides fights a war to be the victor. The positions of people including the situation of the society, the nation or the world at large are ad-interim waiting to be changed and re-changed indefinitely. The childhood images of the post-modernist literature are to be seen in this context. They are apt machinery to reflect the blurring identities of people, their relationships and their institutions in a world full of grotesque incongruities.

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### The Author's Biography

**Dr. Sujata** is an M.A. and Ph.D. in English from Patna University, India. After completing her Ph.D. degree in the broad area of the 'Treatment of Childhood in Indian and African Writing in English' in the year 2006, she started her regular teaching career. She has a substantial teaching career and has taught in some well known engineering and management institutes in the Northern India. Presently she is working as Assistant Professor in English in Manav Rachana International University, Faridabad and is teaching various discipline of English literature to B.A. English Honours and M.A. English students. Equally proficient in the area of English language as well as literature, Dr. Sujata is also active in research area. She has attended National and International seminars and has presented research papers on various topics of literary and humanistic concerns.