

## **Facing the Other: Representations of Postcolonial Childhood Trauma in Arundhati Roy's *God of Small Things* and Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines***

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### **Abstract**

Recent developments in the fields of postcolonial and trauma studies have focused on how there can be a significant interrelationship in the frameworks deployed to investigate the formation of identities in postcolonial subjects. The emphasis on anxiety and fractured subjectivities that inform discussions of postcolonial identity can also be conceptualized in terms of traumatic interventions at crucial moments in the development of selfhood. This paper will contend that though childhood is one of the most crucial times when the formative influences for the development of personality are inscribed onto the psyche of the individual, very little attention has been paid to children as a separate group in theorizations of postcolonial identity. This paper will attempt to use notions such as 'insidious trauma' inflicted by entanglements with British culture and education as a critical lens for the study of the formation of identity in the lives of the protagonists of two novels by two Indian authors. It will also engage with the personal trauma inflicted on these children by political upheavals as well as by the trauma caused by adult figures in their Anglophile families. This paper will therefore show that the complex and multi-layered trauma suffered by postcolonial children has a profound impact on their adult lives, leaving them permanently scarred and that any attempts at resistance by the victims of such trauma are failures or at best only partially successful.

**Keywords:** Childhood, postcolonialism, trauma, cultural entanglements, hybridity

In recent years postcoloniality has become increasingly important as a critical lens through which the process of identity formation in erstwhile colonial subjects has been examined and discussed. From the earliest point in the development of postcolonial studies as an emerging discipline, there has been a focus on exploring how years of colonial rule and its lingering effects even after political independence have affected the identity of those caught in between languages and cultures. "All post-colonial societies are still subject in one way or another to overt or subtle forms of neo-colonial domination, and independence has not solved the problem" (Ashcroft, Griffith & Tiffin, 2004, p. 2). Thus, it is important to consider postcolonial practices as a continuing "process of resistance and reconstruction" which cannot deal with any part of the "postcolonial process without considering its antecedents and consequences" (Ashcroft et al., 2004, p. 2). Resistance to colonial rule existed even before political declarations of independence while, on the other hand, neo-colonial agendas and psychological feelings of inferiority persist long after that declaration.

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Postcolonialism, therefore, can be thought of as a set of practices associated with identifying the effects of colonial rule on the production and dissemination of knowledge in ways that overtly or subtly privileges the colonizer and leads to lasting effects on the identity of the colonized. One of the most influential theorists in charting out the terrain of postcolonial discourse and the formation of identities in postcolonial contexts has been Edward Said who, in his ground-breaking book *Orientalism* (1978), conceptualized the Orient not simply a physical territory that could be conquered and possessed but as the “ground where ‘European/Western images of Self and the Other have been constructed, the place where constructions of Superiority and Inferiority were produced” (Pennycook 2002, p. 19). Notions of European superiority cannot co-exist without the ‘Other’, the uncivilized Oriental to whom the enlightened Western intellectual was a complete contrast.

Such constructions were most deeply ingrained in the literature produced by the West which celebrates European civilization as a contrast to the primitive savagery or irrationality of native societies. In such English and other European literatures, the non-European was always disempowered, “the Other, whose voice could not be heard, always part of someone else’s story” (Walder, 1998, p. 7). More recently theorists such as Homi Bhabha have focused on the links between culture and identity. In his book *The Location of Culture* (1994), Bhabha popularized terms such as mimicry and hybridity to discuss the fractured identities of postcolonial subjects attempting to come to terms with the impact of complex cultural encounters.

The cultural and ideological underpinnings of empire have continued to have a profound impact on the formation of postcolonial subjecthood in India, long after India achieved political independence from the British Raj. The Anglicized babus created by the colonial infrastructure have transmitted the unspoken acknowledgement of the superiority of the English language and culture to the generations they have influenced through the systems of education and the parallel cultural bombardment from cultural artefacts such as films, books, and music. However, while special attention has been paid in recent postcolonial criticism to the formation of postcolonial identity, curiously little attention has been paid to the position of children as a separate group.

### **Trauma in postcolonial childhoods**

At the most crucial time when a sense of selfhood is in the process of being developed, children are subjected to simultaneous traumatic encounters with the authority of the adult world as well as two separate cultures yoked together in an unequal position of power. This paper will contend that the combination of these complex forces acting on the lives of children, create in their lives a sense of overwhelming trauma and anxiety that continues to have a profound impact on their adult lives. It will attempt to show through the lives of the child protagonists in *The God of Small Things* (1997) and *The Shadow Lines* (1988/1995) how their incomplete personalities as adults are the result of the lasting effect of childhood trauma inflicted upon them by two different groups who form the ‘Others’ in comparison to whom they feel a lasting sense of inferiority. These ‘Others’ are comprised of the coercive authority of the adult world and the cultural

representations of the norms of white childhood against which the childhood of postcolonial children is contrasted and found to be inadequate and inferior.

Considering the position of postcolonial children caught in the complex web of familial and social transactions is particularly important because the consciousness of the child is a fertile breeding ground for the varied strands of political and cultural thought that combine in the creation of identity in the postcolonial subject. In her book on children in postcolonial fiction, Meenakshi Bharat highlights the fact that children have remained a “comparatively neglected entity” in the field of postcolonial theorization and concludes that it is the “need of the hour is to redefine the subject within social and historical contexts and reinsert it into frameworks of significant critical thinking” (2003, p. 3). Niewhenhuys (2013) also points out the need to arrive at a “conceptualization of childhood(s) as the unstable and contingent result of a situated encounter.” She stresses the “normative dominance” of representations of white bourgeois childhood against which other childhoods are “measured and found wanting” (pp. 3-8).

Parallel to these developments, there has been in recent times, an increasing interest in the intersection of postcolonialism and trauma studies as definitions of trauma have widened from the traditional psychoanalytic paradigm focusing on individual trauma to include notions of cultural and postcolonial trauma. Visser (2015) points out that the origins of cultural trauma theory are Eurocentric and that traditional “event-based models of trauma” did not account for “the sustained and long process of the trauma of colonialism” (p. 256). Using Fanon’s work as the foundation for his exploration of postcolonial trauma, Dalley (2015) states that “few intellectual fields seem to have as much to offer each other as trauma and postcolonial studies. From its origins in Freud, the language of trauma theory relies on an imagery of invasion that brings it close to postcolonial studies’ concern with empire” (p. 375). Postcolonial theorists have lately suggested theorizing colonization “in terms of the infliction a collective trauma and re-conceptualizing postcolonialism as a post-traumatic cultural formation” (Craps & Buelens, 2008, p. 2). While postcolonial experiences are not always physically abusive or threatening, there is “insidious trauma” which may be considered as the ‘traumatogenic effects of oppressions, not necessarily violent but that do violence to the soul and spirit’ (Brown, 1995, p. 107). Thus, the scope of trauma studies needs to be expanded by examining its impact on postcolonial identities, and exploring the childhood trauma of postcolonial subjects seems to be a potent framework for such integration. Theorists working in the field of trauma studies have emphasized the continuing impact of childhood trauma on the adult lives of those who experienced it (Visser, 2011, pp. 270-282), but there seems to have been very little attempt made to focus on children as a separate group when interrelating trauma and formations of postcolonial subjecthood.

This paper will, therefore, explore the childhood experiences of the protagonists of *The God of Small Things* and *The Shadow Lines* to bring together the criss-crossing trajectories of trauma, childhood, and postcolonial experiences. Both the novels trace the growth of the protagonists from childhood to adulthood and emphasize the complex forms of trauma affecting their development in postcolonial contexts.

### **Cultural encounters and postcolonial childhood trauma in *The God of Small Things***

In *The God of Small Things* by Arundathi Roy, all of Estha and Rahel's actions and thoughts as adults can be viewed in terms of their struggle to come to terms with the traumatic experiences of childhood. In Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* the nameless child narrator, growing up in the shadow of his cosmopolitan uncle Tridib, also obsessively returns to own memories of childhood with his cousin Ila in an effort to understand the traumatic death of Tridib when he was a nine-year old child. The entire novel can be viewed as fragments of memories strung together as a form of therapeutic revisiting and perhaps resistance against the cultural and social influences that formed his identity in childhood. Thus, this paper will trace how all of these children are deeply affected by the coercive authority of the adult world as well as the exposure to English culture through the education they receive and the cultural milieu of their Anglophile families.

In *The God of Small Things*, Estha and Rahel receive an early education from their uncle Chacko on how they are a family of Anglophiles. He actually makes them look the word up in the dictionary and fascinates them with stories of the History House. While the children literally take this to mean the house of Kari Saipu, The Indianized Englishman who goes mad and is said to have committed unspeakable crimes, they are also made aware of the metaphoric meaning. History is considered to be a house from which they are locked out and they are unable to hear their ancestors' voices. History is a menacing force that bears down on their own small lives and they are told that they are victims of the worst sort of war –“a war that captures dreams and re-dreams them. A war that has made us adore our conquerors and despise ourselves” (Roy, 1997, p. 53) – a perfect example of postcolonial trauma as a form of humiliation inscribed into the consciousness of a nation as a result of collective reinforcements of notions of inferiority.

In addition to this early introduction to cultural indoctrination, another way in which ideas of inferiority are assimilated by Estha and Rahel is through music, films and so on which constantly privilege one culture over the other. The novel makes constant references to the Estha's desire to copy the hairstyle of the popular rock and roll singer Elvis Presley, the comics and English children's stories they read and even the most intimate moments with their mother at bedtime is when Ammu reads them stories from the *Jungle Book* by Kipling – a writer who is in many ways the standard bearer of cultural imperialism. Perhaps one of the powerful depictions of this phenomenon occurs through Estha's encounter in Abhilash Talkies with the iconic movie *The Sound of Music* which leads to his conscious realization of his own inferiority in comparison to the idealized Von Trapp children who are in every way the 'Other' against whom he measures his own insignificance.

Immediately after the traumatic experience of sexual abuse at the hands of the “Orangedrink Lemondrink Man” Estha returns to the movie theatre to confront on screen, the Von Trapp family of the Captain and his seven children who were “clean children like a packet of peppermint”:

He pretended not to love them, but he did. He loved them. He loved her (Julie Andrews), she loved him, they loved the children, the children loved them. They all loved each other. They were clean, white children and their beds were soft with Ei. Der. Downs.

The house they lived in had a lake and gardens, a wide staircase, white doors and windows and curtains with flowers.

The clean white children, even the big ones, were scared of the thunder...(Roy, 1997, p. 105)

What is remarkable in the passage quoted above is how it brings together the notions of cleanliness and whiteness as concepts which are inextricably associated with each other, thus forever excluding the brown, dirty children who can only gaze in awe from afar at the idealized picture of love and family life being presented.

In Said's profoundly influential work *Orientalism* he discusses at length how the Orient and its races function as the 'Other' in relation to whom Western notions of self and superiority are constructed and that "the relationship between the Occident and the Orient is a relationship of power, of domination, of varying degrees of a complex hegemony" (1978, p. 36). What is interesting about this passage is that it foregrounds this hegemony by showing how the Western world represented through its cultural artefacts, become the 'Other' against which notions of Non-European selves and inferiority are constructed. In his book *Culture and Imperialism*, Said (1993) traces at length how culture can be used as a tool for imperial domination as literature has "the power to narrate, or to block other narratives from forming and emerging" (p. 9).

Thus, encounters with such narratives from Western culture, whether they are constructed through novels or music or films, (however innocent they seem to be) can be traumatic, inflicting upon the postcolonial subject a sense of deprivation, a feeling of worthlessness which cannot be overcome by any effort of their own. When such cultural encounters take place during childhood which is the crucial time when the child's familial and sociocultural environment have a profound impact on the development of the 'self-concept' in young children (Deal, 2007; Mascall, 2000), it can create a lasting impact on how a child internalizes this sense of inadequacy. This is made explicit in the way the novel takes us into Estha's mind to allow us to witness the conclusions he draws from witnessing the scene described above which continues with Julie Andrews singing a song about their favourite things to comfort the clean white children:

And then in the minds of certain two-egged twin members of the audience in Abhilash Talkies, some questions arose, that needed answers, i.e:

- a) *Did Captain von Clapp-Trapp shiver his legs?*  
He did not.
- b) *Did Captain von Clapp-Trapp blow spit bubbles? Did he?*  
He most certainly did not.
- c) *Did he gobble?*  
He did not.

Oh Captain von Trapp, Captain von Trapp, could you love the little fellow with the orange in the smelly auditorium?

He's just held the Orangedrink Lemondrink Man's soo-soo in his hand, but could you love him still?

And his twin sister? Tilting upwards with her fountain in a Love-in-Tokyo? Could you love her too?

Captain von Trapp had some questions of his own.

a) *Are they clean white children?*

No. (*But Sphoie Mol is.*)

b) *Do they blow spit bubbles?*

Yes. (*But Sophie Mol doesn't.*)

c) *Do they shiver their legs? Like clerks?*

Yes (*But Sophie Mol doesn't.*)

d) *Have they, either or both, ever held strangers' soo-soos?*

N... Nyes. (*But Sophie Mol hasn't.*)

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

Captain Von Clapp-Trapp couldn't. (Roy, 1997, p. 106-107)

Estha's feelings of traumatic violence to his sense of selfhood depicted here can be related in many ways to Fanon's discussion in 'The Fact of Blackness' of how his sense of selfhood is annihilated by his racial trauma in seeing himself reflected as a black man, an object of fear in the eyes of the white child. Fanon describes how his own perception of himself as an educated, civilized man dissipates in the face of the "galaxy of erosive cultural stereotypes" (1967, p.17) that bind and constrain the manner in which he is perceived.

Similarly, this passage is important in the way it depicts how all of Estha's (and by extension Rahel's) inchoate feelings of inferiority, created by the background of awe and admiration of English culture inherited from their grandfather Pappachi and Chacko's strictures about Anglophilia, crystallize in this defining moment into Estha's perception of his own inferiority. What makes this account different from Fanon's however is that while Fanon's trauma is perpetuated by actual encounters with white people and their reactions to him, Estha's encounter with Captain Von Trapp takes place entirely in his own mind –suggesting how deeply this feeling of inferiority has been inscribed into his own way of viewing himself. Also, while Fanon as an adult is capable of analyzing and thus, to an extent, resisting the traumatic experiences, Estha's position as a young child leaves him doubly deprived of the ability to protest in any way against the way that cultural transactions have left him robbed of his own self-esteem.

What Estha's thoughts, however, also make clear that it is not only the fictional Von Trapp children who are the 'Other' against whom his sense of inferiority has been articulated—their tangible representative in the immediate sphere of their own childhood is their white cousin Sophie Mol. It is the arrival of Sophie Mol that sets in motion the series of events that leave Estha permanently traumatized and unable to live a normal life. As Roy states in the beginning of the novel, "In a purely practical sense it would probably be correct to say that it all began when Sophie Mol came to Ayemenem. Perhaps it is true that things can change in a day. That a few dozen hours can affect the outcome of whole lifetimes" (p. 32).

Even before Sophie Mol actually arrives Estha and Rahel's fragile sense of selfhood is threatened by the fact that they are robbed of the right to speak in their own language by Baby Kochamma who "eavesdrops relentlessly on the twins" private conversations and punishes any lapses by making them write lines "*I will always speak in English, I will always speak in English*" (p. 36) over and over again. When Sophie Mol actually does arrive, she is welcomed in a grand ceremony where the entire family and servants are lined up to greet her and a special cake is baked in her honour. This welcoming ceremony becomes in Rahel's imagination a play in which "she had only a small part" (p. 172). She is "only a face in the crowd" –as the brown child of a divorced mother, she has no lines to speak in this grand narrative that exalts white people as the superior race. It is interesting to note, however, that Sophie Mol herself is remarkably free of the prejudices that is perpetuated by the adult interactions surrounding her. She attempts to make friends with Estha and Rahel, bartering small gifts and nuggets of interesting information in exchange for acceptance. This fragile friendship is doomed to failure against the hostile adult forces ranged against it and Sophie Mol's death by drowning seems to suggest (like the parting of Aziz and Fielding in *The Passage to India*) that even the Indian landscape is unwilling to accept this interracial friendship.

The sense of awe that the presence of the English girl inspires, against which Estha and Rahel measure their own unimportance is, thus, instilled in them through their immediate family members. In the traumatic encounter in the police station, it is also Baby Kochamma who coerces Estha into falsely identifying Velutha as the kidnapper, of Sophie Mol turning Estha's trauma into a full-fledged emotional breakdown.

Velutha is the closest thing to a father figure that the children have ever known but Baby Kochamma cleverly portrays Estha's betrayal of Velutha in the guise of 'Saving Ammu' by telling him that Ammu will go to prison if he refuses (p. 317). Forced into making an impossible choice, Estha identifies Velutha in the police lockup but unable to bear the terrifying sight of the bruised and battered Velutha, he goes into denial, and fantasizes that the man he saw is Velutha's twin brother. Yet, it is that single word 'Yes' that he uttered that lies at the root of the adult Estha's silence which can be described as a form of neurosis induced by trauma. Cherry (2019) draws on Karen Horney's theory of neurotic needs to describe various forms of neurotic behaviour triggered by a hostile family environment. Among them is the "neurotic need to restrict one's lives within narrow borders in order to remain inconspicuous" (p. 1). This is precisely how Roy describes Estha's "ability to blend into the background" so that he "occupies very little space in the world" (p. 11). The silence sweeps over "the knolls and dells of his memory" so that slowly Estha grows "accustomed to the uneasy octopus that lives inside him and squirted its inky tranquilizers on his past" (p. 12). Baby Kochamma also has Estha 'Returned' to his father, only to be 'Re-Returned' years later as if he is an inanimate object, thus ensuring that no avenue of recovery from childhood trauma is ever left open to him.

The corollary to Estha's silence is Rahel's emptiness which ultimately makes her, too, unable to live a normal life: "the emptiness in one twin was only a version of the quietness in the other" (p. 20). The novel leaves unspoken most of what happens in the years between their separation as children and their reunification as adults but it is not

hard to imagine the unspeakable trauma of being forcibly torn away for twins who share such a strong bond that the memories of one seeps into the consciousness of the other. It is the blankness in her eyes that causes the breakdown of Rahel's marriage to Larry. Her emptiness culminates in the final trauma of the incestuous coming together with Estha, which can be viewed as a form of tragic resistance against the societal norms that have led to their tragic fates.

Yet, the ultimate tragedy that Rahel faces is that she is unable to grieve. She cannot come to terms with the terrible things that have happened in her life because they are always dwarfed by the greater trauma inflicted upon the country as a result of violent partition—the legacy of colonialism which made it impossible for the nation as a whole to heal as 'various kinds of despair competed for primacy'. The 'Small God' of personal loss is always inconsequential beside the Big God' of the "vast, violent, circling, driving, ridiculous, insane, unfeasible, public turmoil of a nation." In such a situation "nothing mattered much...Because Worse Things had happened. In the country she came from, poised forever between the terror of war and the horror of peace, Worse Things kept happening" (p. 19). This can be considered as a classic description of postcolonial trauma where the collective horror of what has been inflicted upon a nation is indelibly imprinted upon the consciousness of an individual. Thus, postcolonial trauma combines with individual trauma caused by deeply hurtful family behaviour to render Estha and Rahel triply marginalized by the menacing alliance of political violence, cultural imperialism and adult authority.

### **Anglophilia, childhood trauma and resistance in *The Shadow Lines***

This same combination of traumas, exerting pressure on the development of identity in childhood, can also be traced in *The Shadow Lines* by Amitav Ghosh. The nameless narrator of the novel grows up in the shadow of his uncle Tridib whose claim to be such an influential figure affecting his development, rests at least partly on the fact that he visits England when he was eight years old. The narrator believes that he was also eight years old when Tridib actually tells him about the journey, thus subconsciously superimposing Tridib's life and experiences onto his own. He even assumes without much factual evidence that Tridib even looked like him. Tridib, thus, becomes one of the most significant adult influences on the narrator's life and in fact the entire novel can be viewed as an attempt by the narrator to come to terms with the trauma of his death.

Unlike the rest of the adult figures who function as the 'Other' against whom the children define their identity, Tridib's influence on the narrator is not a hostile one. Tridib can be considered a truly hybrid figure who can be said to occupy the 'third space' which Bhabha talks of in *The Location of Culture* (1994) "where cultural hybridity gives rise to something...new and unrecognizable, a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation" (p. 211). In spite of Tridib's own fascination with England, he gives the narrator the gift of imagination as form of protest by constructing narratives of resistance: "Tridib had given me world to travel in and he had given me eyes to see them with..." (Walder, 1998, p. 20). Tridib is the one who teaches him the importance of creating ones' own story so as not to be part of other peoples' stories:



It is Tridib who had said that we could not see without inventing what we saw, so at least we could try to do it properly...because the alternative wasn't blankness—it only meant that if we didn't try ourselves, we could never be free of other people's inventions. (Walder, p. 31)

Yet, Tridib's or the narrator's resistance can never be totally successful against the greater power of the cultural constructions of the colonizer, emphasizing the cultural trauma that can be inflicted by the inequality of the position of the colonized vis a vis their one-time masters. The centrality of England and its culture on the twin narratives of their lives can be gauged from the fact that this is the statement with which the novel actually begins:

In 1939, thirteen years before I was born, my father's aunt Mayadebi, went to England with her husband and her son Tridib. (p. 3)

It is during this visit that Tridib's family forms a lasting friendship with the Prices whose lives become inextricably intertwined with his and vicariously with the narrator's. His fascination with the English family is so intense that he remembers each street, each date and each incident related to their lives, to the extent that when he finally visits England as an adult, he is able to find his way around their house from memory. He is also capable of navigating the streets of London with their lives as a point of orientation, much to the astonishment of Ila and Nick Price, the 'Other' from England whose superiority accentuates the narrator's feelings of inferiority as a child. The narrator's cousin Ila is the other character, apart from Tridib, with whom the narrator as a child feels such a sense of closeness that she is almost considered to be his twin and as an adult she becomes the woman whom he desires and who baffles him with "the mystery of difference" (p. 31). Ila travels extensively and is one of the narrator's window to the outside world as well as the means of complicating his relationship with the Price family. Even as a child, Ila finds Nick Price desirable and tells the narrator of her feelings so that without actually meeting him, Nick becomes the narrator's competitor, his rival in love and his double:

After that day, Nick Price, whom I had never seen, and as far as I knew would never see, became a spectral presence beside me in my looking glass; growing with me, *but always bigger and better, and in some way more desirable...* (p. 50, author's italics)

Just as Estha and Rahels' encounter with the clean white children in *The Sound of Music* inscribes a feeling of worthlessness onto their personalities as children, so too does the 'insidious trauma' of this encounter create a lifelong feeling of inferiority in the narrator which is reflected in his obsession with England as an adult. The lines quoted above seem to suggest a Lacanian sense of *méconnaissance*, refracted through the prism of postcolonial trauma.

Yet, the greater burden of postcolonial trauma is borne by Ila who, unlike Tridib and the narrator, (and it would be interesting to speculate elsewhere to what extent gender is the deciding factor) is unable to frame even a partial resistance to the dominating influence of cultural constructions that privilege white skin and blue eyes as the ultimate embodiment of desirability. Though Ila is apparently the one who is more privileged as a child through the wealth and position of her family, she is trapped in other people's narratives:

...the inventions she lived in moved with her, so that although she had lived in many places, she had never travelled at all. (p. 19)

The extent to which she is traumatized is revealed by the stories she makes up to hide her feelings of inadequacy. She shows the narrator pictures of school yearbooks with smart, fashionable white children, always claiming the handsomest boys to be her boyfriend, even though she herself is never present in the photographs. It is only accidentally that the narrator catches sight of her in one of the photos as a thin unsmiling child relegated to the back rows but when the narrator next looks at the magazine, that page has been torn out.

Though the novel does not relate the incidents in great detail, we are given enough evidence that Ila's trauma at the way she is bullied because of her appearance during the time she goes to school in England is so great that she is actually unable to speak of it directly. She uses play as a means of sublimating the trauma created by feelings of racial inferiority in the game called Houses she plays with the narrator. In this game, they draw lines in the dust to recreate the house in England (in which Ila lived with the Price family) which is in their world of imagination, inhabited by their adult selves.

It is during this re-enactment that Ila creates her white alter-ego Magda (based on Ila's white-skinned, blue-eyed doll of the same name) who, in their fantasy world, becomes their child. Magda is the crystallization of Ila's repressed longing for white skin and blue eyes in order to fit in with the people who mock her. During the game, she enacts a scene where Magda is teased by an ugly dark girl for her beauty and intelligence and is then rescued by the knight in shining armour, Nick Price – an incident which she tells the narrator is based on an actual incident in her own life. It is left to May Price, when they meet much later, to burst the bubble of fantasy and tell the narrator the truth – that it was actually Ila who was unmercifully bullied and that, far from saving her, Nick Price had actually refused to even speak to her and had run home early to avoid the humiliation of being seen with Ila.

The impact that this childhood trauma has on Ila can be judged by the fact that this thirst for validation by the English remains the driving force of her adult life. Even her desire to find 'freedom' from the constricting roles that patriarchy imposes on women in India, can be seen as part of the discourses of colonialism (which remains impossible to disrupt even after political independence) that posits British culture as 'liberating' the natives from the shackles of the 'uncivilized' indigenous culture. Ila feels that freedom cannot be found for a woman in India and settles in London where she attempts to live the life of a fashionable progressive intellectual, flirting with socialism as part of the popular movements of the time.

Yet, she is presented as almost a childlike figure, parroting the cliched phrases used by the English without totally understanding them. She remains, in spite of everything, an outsider who is tolerated by the others as the token Indian to be displayed as a condescending nod to notions of inclusivity and cultural diversity. Her marriage to Nick Price who is unfaithful to her and lives off her money is the tragic fulfilment of her childhood longing for acceptance. Ila is aware of his infidelity but though, in a rare moment of truth, she tells the narrator of the empty sham that her life is, she later retreats once more into the shells of the illusion that she has constructed to ward off the tenacious clutches of childhood trauma.

On the other hand, the narrator is, at least partially, successful in exorcising the 'spectral presence' of Nick Price from his life through his absorption in another tragic manifestation of postcolonial trauma—the death of Tridib in the Hindu Muslim riots in Dhaka. In spite of his need to resist the manner in which colonial narratives represent Indians, Tridib (like Chacko in *The God of Small Things* who marries Margaret) is irresistibly drawn to May Price who as a white woman holds infinite sexual desirability. It is May Price's action in getting out of the car to save Jethamoshai that leads to Tridib's final chivalric gesture of going to defend her in spite of his total awareness of the fatal consequences of his action.

The narrator finds it impossible to articulate directly the extreme trauma he experiences at the news of Tridib's death. As a child, he is told that it is an accident and never given the chance to grieve or speak about him but all his adult life seems to be an effort to piece together the events leading up to his death. All the strands of memories that he weaves together are an attempt to challenge the impersonality of the grand narratives of history and politics (where Tridib would have been a nameless and forgotten statistic), with the intimate narrative of personal voices celebrating the particularity of an individual. These memories allow the individual to live on in them because, unlike nations which can be divided by shadow lines drawn on the map, it is impossible to "divide a memory" (p. 247). It is through this therapeutic revisiting of the past that he comes to realize that Tridib's death was not one of a helpless victim – it was his personal choice that allowed him to take control of his own destiny. It is this knowledge that Tridib's death was a sacrifice which gives him "a glimpse of the final redemptive mystery" (p. 252) that may provide a way out for the narrator from the traumas inflicted upon him as a child. This is the note on which the novel ends, leaving it unclear the extent to which the narrator succeeds in emerging from the trauma of his childhood.

### Conclusion

Thus, the lives of the protagonists of *The God of Small Things* and *The Shadow Lines* give us manifold insights on the impact of childhood trauma in the lives of children enmeshed in the cultural and political milieu of postcolonial nationhood. It shows how trauma in postcolonial contexts can be complex and multi-layered resulting "from the larger trauma stemming from colonization and neo-colonialism" (Kennedy & Tikka, 2003, p. 102). Such trauma can be inflicted in various ways from children being dominated and manipulated by the adults in their family to their being made to feel insignificant and inferior through entanglements with European cultural artefacts as well as with political upheavals which are the lingering after effects of colonial rule. The journey of postcolonial children from childhood to adulthood can be viewed, to a great extent, as an attempt to recover from the childhood trauma inflicted upon the development of their identities by the groups which form the 'Other' with whom they are bound in an oppositional relationship. Recognizing how postcolonial trauma has a profound influence on childhood identity is important in formulating strategies of resistance. The insights gained from making transparent the subtle ways in which childhood identities are constructed and manipulated can have far-reaching impacts on shaping our pedagogical practices and educational policies in a manner that empowers children and helps them to deal with the effects of post-colonial trauma.

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