

The Need for Roots: Post-Apartheid and Post-Partition Uprootedness in Selected Texts of J. M. Coetzee and Bapsi Sidhwa

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Abstract

The colonial rule in the former colonies and apartheid rule in South Africa have been formally abolished through the enactment of relevant laws but the psyche of the colonized is still in chains due to the notions of superiority and inferiority of class, creed, colour and religion. On the verge of the feeling of instability, dissociation and dissatisfaction in the post-modern era Simone Well's *The Need for Roots* (1952) came on the literary scene. It is written in three parts that discusses uprootedness of the citizens of the Globe due to destruction of ties with the past and a feeling of 'nowhere' in the present. The paper tries to connect Well's thrust for peace through spirituality as a positive outcome to the problem of uprootedness, dissociation and discrimination. The present paper is an attempt to study post-colonial, post-apartheid and post-partition experiences of the acclaimed author of South Africa namely J. M. Coetzee and renowned author of Pakistan Bapsi Sidhwa. J. M. Coetzee feels that South Africa proved to be a bad start for him. He cannot separate himself from his mother land and cannot associate anywhere else in the world. His fictional autobiographies *Boyhood* (2002), *Youth* (2003) and *Summertime* (2009) clearly express his dilemma of rootlessness and placelessness. Bapsi Sidhwa, born and brought up as a Parsi girl in pre-partition Indian town Lahore later on handed over to Pakistan after partition writes about post partition violence between the Hindus and the Muslims. Her *Ice Candy Man* (1988) is a fictional autobiography that depicts a Parsi girl Lenny who tries to describe the happenings during partition and its aftermaths in post partition period. Both the authors depict psycho-social upheavals of their society and try to find out their place in it. The paper tries to find out a positive solution to the problem of dissociation and discrimination. Desmond Tutu's vision of 'rainbow colour nation' for South Africa consists of a multiracial contented family whereas concept of a 'new man' in the era of Globalization for Indian subcontinent leads the nation to peace and harmony.

Key Words: J. M. Coetzee, Bapsi Sidhwa, post-colonial, post-apartheid, post-partition, alienation and isolation, South Africa, Indian Subcontinent etc.

The world's history is a history of the clash between the good and the evil. The devil is always dominant within us but one can control the demon by nurturing virtues of a saint. The major event in the history of mankind 'French Revolution' ended with a

guiding principle of liberty, equality and fraternity in eighteenth century. The entire world celebrated it as their motto for happiness and brotherhood. The Second World War once again led the universe to the horror and bloodshed of war. It was an

attack on people's safety, security, property and freedom. Feeling of rootlessness and placelessness was experienced by mankind. On the verge of the feeling of instability, dissociation and dissatisfaction in the post-modern era Simone Well's *The Need for Roots*(1952) came on the literary scene. It is written in three parts that discusses uprootedness of the citizens of the Globe due to destruction of ties with the past and a feeling of 'nowhere' in the present. The three parts namely 1. The needs of the soul, 2. Uprootedness and 3. The growing of roots discusses unhappiness of modern man and probable solutions for retaining happiness. The book is celebrated as the solution to all materialistic worries through spiritualism. The book has been written after the Second World War. Most of the Europeans were going through a bad phase of uprootedness. Well's book has helped the entire world to nurture cultural and spiritual sense. The first part *the Needs of the Soul* discusses about fundamental rights like societal order, liberty, obedience, responsibility, equality, hierarchism, honour, punishment, freedom of opinion, security, risk, private property, collective property, and truth. The second part *Uprootedness* discusses about the problem of capitalism, the clash between the employer and employee and the clash between the oppressor and the oppressed. The last part *The growing of Roots* is a concluding part in which she has guided us to connect ourselves with the spirit of the nation. The present paper tries to analyze the selected post- apartheid South African fictional autobiography by J. M. Coetzee and post-partition Indian subcontinent semi-autobiographical novel *The Ice Candy Man*

by Bapsi Sidhwa in the light of Well's spiritual roots.

Violence of any kind has proved that there is no gain but only pain received by both the ends. The partition of India on religious line into Muslim majority Pakistan and Secular but Hindu majority India in 1947 was the greatest manmade calamity in the history of mankind. The colonizers' policy of 'divide and rule' led Indian subcontinent into violence. Political ambition of the national leaders was one of the reasons for the partition. The stories written on the world's largest massacre due to partition of the Indian subcontinent won the heartthrobs of billions and the most prestigious awards due pains and anguish depicted in it. Sidhwa Bapsi, an Indian by birth but turned up a Pakistani after partition with Parsi roots, later on emigrated to USA and currently known as a diaspora writer with different sensibility that amalgamates the east and the west with its merits and demerits. Her *Ice-Candy-Man* is an authentic presentation of colonial and post-colonial, pre-independence and post-independence and pre-partition and post-partition violence, horror and blood shade through the eyes of an eight year old polio affected girl child-narrator Lenny Sethi who sees the changing world around her through her family and a team of servants and puts it without any prejudices. The innocent world of the child suddenly turns into burdens and tensions and ends with a permanent 'void' of losing her inmates.

Khushwant Singh, one of the authors who penned pathos of partition in his novel *Train to Pakistan* appreciates Bapsi's portrayal of Lenny,

“Few novels have caught the turmoil of the Indian subcontinent during partition with such immediacy, such wit and tragic power. Bapsi’s *Ice-Candy-Man* is an intimate glimpse into events as they tear apart the world of Lenny, a young Parsee girl growing up in the pungent, busy bodying city of Lahore.” (Back Page Comment)

The novel is written in present tense with the description of Lenny’s house. Her religious initiation takes place in a group of servants from Hindu, Muslim and Sikh communities that expose her to the world of love, hatred, crime and punishment. Let us turn to her upbringing and the impact of her family members through which she learns to paddle her own canoe. Mrs. Sethi is a very well-mannered soft spoken Parsi house wife and mother of Lenny who plays a role of a mediator during Hindu-Muslim quarrels. She treats her polio affected child very kindly without restricting her to get mixed with common class people. Lenny breaks plate but her mother doesn’t blame her. Breaking of a plate is symbolically connected to the breaking of the nation. Lenny tries to understand that if it is very easy to break a nation like a plate. She says, ‘Mammy, can one break a country ... how will I get to the park then?’ Mom tries to convince a small girl by telling that no one will break the country. She takes every care to keep her daughter away from the violence. She stands for the robbed Hindu women in Lahore and keeps the valuable belongings of migrants in her backyard. It is she who manages to send Ayah back to India.

Lenny notices her mother’s sensitivity towards political happenings when she asks her father about being ‘neutral’ during partition and keeping mum during the violence. Colonel Bharucha once declares to Parsee’s neutrality to his community “Let whoever wishes rule! Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Christian! We will abide by the rules of their land!”(p. 39). It is she who tries to patch up an argument between a British officer and a Sikh neighbor by diverting them to silly jokes. She clarifies her daughter about the Parsi’s neutral approach towards the happenings that the Parsis remain less in numbers in the world so they don’t want to take the risk of reducing their population by taking side of a particular religion anymore. Shanta/Mumtaz/the Ayah, a care-taker of Lenny, originally from Amrutsar, is a ‘brown’ beauty in the eyes of men of her rank. She resides with a Parsi family in Lahore by becoming care-taker Lenny, a polio-affected girl. Lenny’s Godmother supports her emotionally after her Ayah’s abduction. Considering Lenny’s age she is deliberately kept away from the news related to horror. She comes to know that Ayah has become a whore who gets married to Dil Nawaz and is singing and dancing for the rich males in Hiramandi. Once she tells her Godmother that she has seen Ayah. Godmother tells her the unrevealed story of Ayah. She tells Lenny that her mother helps her to rescue and flee to Amrutsar, India. Both of them are living in India due her mother’s help. She tells the truth tactfully due to which Lenny gets convinced and forgives her mother for hiding stories from her. Lenny, in her

youthful maturity carries a void in her heart that she is responsible for Ayah's tragedy whose dreamy world of twenty turns into an endless story of suffering. Lenny comes under the false innocence and duplicity of the Ice-Candy-Man and tells the whereabouts of her Ayah that she has hidden herself in her Mom's bedroom. The angry mob draws her out and rapes her mercilessly. She never forgives herself for being so naïve. Lenny learns a lesson that love, affection and humanitarianism gets defeated due to extreme religious hatred that spoils life of an innocent woman. Most of the characters get uprooted due to partition. India becomes a nation for Hindus and Pakistan is a land for Muslims. Hindus in Pakistan and Muslims in India never feel at home due to religious extremism.

Turning to J. M. Coetzee's trilogy, a fictional autobiography, one needs to understand apartheid unjust rule and anti-apartheid struggle of the natives. South Africa was ruled by the whites till the last decade of the 20th century. The unjust laws of 'apartheid' made the white colonizers the supreme authority. On the other hand the native blacks were marginalized and almost dehumanized due to denial of their independence. Daniel E. Malan's National Party introduced the policy of apartheid in 1948. The policy was designed to ensure racial discrimination. The 'Population Registration Act' was introduced to remove the blacks from the white area and to send them to their 'homeland', decided by white rulers. Extension of 'University Education Act' in 1959 was

formed to bring segregation policies in the field of education. 'The Publications and Entertainment Act' in 1963 introduced 'Censorship' to the creative writers. The policy was opposed not only by the native parties like African National Congress (ANC) or the Pan African Congress (PAC) but also by the other world organizations.

The anti-apartheid movement carried out by the native organizations, received great support from the entire world. The Commonwealth of Nations banned South Africa from the Union. The opposition to the policy within the country was shown by the Sharpeville massacre near Vereeniging in 1960. The students' organizations like 'South African students Organization' (SASO) and Black Peoples Contention (BPC) worked actively against it. In 1976, riots broke out in Soweto and other townships that were popular due to students' involvement. 'United Democratic Front', started a mass movement that brought out positive results of withdrawing the policy. The thirty-year ban on the ANC was removed on February 2nd* and Nelson Mandela was released on February 11 1994. South Africa thus got freedom in 1994 with Nelson Mandela as its first president. Though the policy was given a former closure, it did not get abolished from the minds of the former colonizers and the colonized. The literature of the nation reflects the wounds of racism in the minds of its people. As Nadine Gordimer, white by race, expresses her views about destabilized society like South Africa:

"For myself, I have created black

characters in my fiction: - whether I have done so successfully or not is for the readers to decide. What's certain is that there is no representation of our social reality without that strange area of our lives in which we have knowledge of one-another." (Clingman (ed.) 1989:279)

South African government's policy of apartheid and its tragic consequences revealed in Coetzee's *Boyhood* and *Youth* are part of the cultural experience of a South African. His encounters with his own people in South Africa and on the land of the colonizers are discussed further. John goes through the experience of rejection of the political policy, which is designed to strengthen the imposition of whites. He is tutoring the first year students in Mathematics department of the University in the afternoon, he and the class is warned not to leave the campus due to a worker's march that is taking place along the road De Waal Drive. The mob is just like a thick serpent, which can create fear in the mind of the police. The mob screams the slogan, 'Africa for Africans! Drive the whites into the sea'. John has eye-witnessed the intensity of the opposition to the policy. He has gone through the partial treatment given by the British Ladies who neglect and avoid his company, though he is white by race but is labeled as Afrikaner. He is a second rate colonial in the view of colonizers:

"In England girls pay no attention to him, perhaps because there still lingers about his person an air of colonial gaucherie, perhaps simply because his clothes are not right". (Coetzee 2003:71)

The colonial politics haunts him in England. He blames that South Africa is a bad start for him.

The news of blacks' protest and strikes, the news of prisoners' suicide and merciless killing of blacks leads to the misunderstanding about South Africa for Europeans. John comes to know about the recent developments in his country through the letters of his mother. She expresses her disagreement for the injustice done to farmers and their children in Transvaal. Due to his basic humane attitude John does not like that Afrikaners are bullied and condemned by the media. The notorious impression of his race compels him to cut off himself from his motherland. South Africa is like an albatross around his neck which he wants to be removed; he does not care how, so that he can begin to breathe. His anguish reflects his rootlessness as a South African in his own country as well in England. He is not a refugee as per the records but he feels that the oppressors oppress him as a colonial, which gives him the experience of a refugee. He criticizes that being a South African he carries a wound which becomes an obstacle in his creativity. He cannot write poetry and is finding it difficult to become an artist due to his South African identity. John represents the feeling of alienated youth from the colony in the land of colonizers. Dominic Head in his article on J. M. Coetzee writes about his ethnic identity:

"Coetzee's won ethnic identity is intriguing since his background distances him partly from both Afrikaner and English affiliations. English is Coetzee's first language, and he is thoroughly estranged from contemporary Afrikaner culture, with

its connotations of anti-black nationalism. Both on the basis of his historical roots Coetzee (as he has acknowledged) cannot avoid association with an Afrikaner heritage and the sense of guilt this involves. Yet, paradoxically, this complicity gives him a vantage point which validates his revisionary approach to South African identity. Coetzee affiliates himself with a utopian drive towards cultural and biological hybridity; but he recognizes that the process of decolonization also depends upon the acceptance of historical guilt. (<http://www.litencyc.com>:1)

Stephen Watson, on the other hand, in his essay 'Colonialism and the Novels of J. M. Coetzee writes about the colonial scenario present in his fiction:

"The novels not only allude to an actual historical reality, but they also give us, in fictional form, the type of psyche, the psychology that this reality dictates. If colonialism, at its very simplest, equals the conquest and subjugation of a territory by an alien people, then the human relationship that is basic to it is likewise one of power and powerlessness: the relationship between master and servant, overlord and slave. It is this respect of colonialism that receives the most extensive treatment in Coetzee's fiction". (Watson 1986:370)

Multi-cultural mixed marriages give birth to the hybrid culture within the family and leave a different message of integrity for the

society. John's uncle Roland has married a Polish girl named Rosa Rakosta. Uncle Norman found out her original name Sophie Pretorius. Now he is totally controlled and guided by his wife so he is criticized as 'henpecked' husband. John visits their boarding house in Cape Town. He describes the complexity of their relation:

"Sophie turned out to be a large, fat blonde woman who wore a satin dressing gown at four in the afternoon and smoked cigarettes in a cigarettes-holder, Roland a quiet, sad-faced man with a bulbous red nose from the radium treatment that had cured him of cancer". (Coetzee 2003:43)

The disparity in the colonizers and colonized relationship is picturized through the incident in which John is interrogated for his decision of leaving his job in IBM, London. John does not like the self-centred mentality of the employees. John gets confused and does not find better excuses. But he sticks to his resignation. Mr. McIver, at last, compels him to take his blame of 'unfriendly atmosphere' back and to accept that he is not blaming anyone but himself.

To conclude, post-colonial Indian subcontinent and post-apartheid South Africa, both are sailing in the same boat. The natives of both the nations are in search of peace and prosperity. Moving back to the third part of Well's argument in *The Growing of Roots* one can re-establish one's roots with his/her nation by raising hopes and diminishing all kinds of fears. The authority of the nation must be inspirational, judicious and people of character. People should be inspired for

genuine goodness. In short, spirituality leads us to go beyond 'I', 'me' and 'myself'. Spiritual instinct of 'live and let live', 'not me but you', 'the world in a single nest' and 'love thy neighbour' would

make world a better place to live. Uprootedness can be looked up as a temporary mental state that can be erased into positive bonding with the soil by forgetting all kinds of differences.

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