

The Politics of Implication: The Descendant of Perpetrators in Santanu Bhattacharya's One Small Voice: An Observer

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Abstract

The interest in historical injustice has introduced the issue of the 'Implicated Subject,' which breaks the binary of Perpetrator and the Victim. The implicated subject neither causes harm nor is a sufferer of violence; however, this subject fails to call out the perpetrator and thus becomes a beneficiary of violent history. The concept of 'Implicated subject' has received considerable attention in postcolonial studies, and their focus is primarily on structural and cultural violence. However, there are no comprehensive readings of 'implicated subject' in literary texts. This paper focuses on how the image of Secular India is challenged after the demolition of Babri Masjid, explores the implication of a child in the subsequent riots and critically examines the 'self-reflexivity' of the protagonist Shubhankar which exposes his narcissism in Santanu Bhattacharya's *One Small Voice: An Observer* by using Michael Rothberg's conceptualization of 'Implicated subject' and Michael Mann's notion of 'Ethnic cleansing'. This paper employs the method of textual analysis to examine the selected text. This research is relevant to social and cultural studies like human security, socio-environmental issues and management of change in a country.

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Introduction

The progression of secularism in India has been neither linear nor uncontested. Rather, it has evolved through successive political, religious, and constitutional transformations that have continuously reshaped the relationship between the state, religion, and society. Unlike the Western conception of secularism, which emerged primarily through the separation of church and state following the Reformation and Enlightenment, Indian secularism developed within a historically pluralistic civilization characterized by the coexistence of multiple religious traditions. The Indian model did not seek the exclusion of religion from public life; instead, it aimed to accommodate religious diversity while preserving political authority above sectarian interests. Yet this accommodative tradition has undergone profound transformations, culminating in the demolition of the Babri Masjid in December 1992: a watershed event that fundamentally altered the ideological foundations of the Indian state and the practice of constitutional secularism.

A polity organized exclusively around theological principles was largely absent from ancient India. Although rulers often derived legitimacy from religious traditions, political authority generally remained distinct (distant) from ecclesiastical institutions. Ancient Indian empires

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governed culturally and religiously diverse populations, allowing considerable autonomy to different philosophical and religious schools, including Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, and later various heterodox traditions. Max Weber observed that pre-modern India possessed no institutional equivalent of the Western church-state relationship, making the European understanding of secularism largely inapplicable to the Indian historical experience (Adcock, 2014). Instead, religious plurality was managed through coexistence rather than through formal separation between religion and the state. Similarly, Amartya Sen argues that traditions of public reasoning and religious tolerance existed in India long before the emergence of modern constitutional secularism, creating a distinctive civilizational foundation for pluralism (Sen, 2005).

The arrival of Muslim rule from the thirteenth century introduced a different political framework while preserving significant elements of India's plural social order. The Delhi Sultanate and later the Mughal Empire governed overwhelmingly non-Muslim populations through varying combinations of Islamic legal principles and political pragmatism. Consequently, the relationship between religion and governance differed considerably across successive rulers. During the reign of Emperor Akbar (1556–1605), policies such as *Sulh-i-Kul* (universal peace), the abolition of the *jizya* tax, and the inclusion of Hindus in high administrative offices reflected an attempt to construct an inclusive imperial order that transcended religious divisions (Habib, 1997). By contrast, later rulers such as Aurangzeb pursued comparatively orthodox religious policies, including the reimposition of *jizya* and greater reliance on Islamic jurisprudence, although historians continue to debate the extent to which these policies were motivated by religious conviction or political considerations (Richards, 1993). Thus, medieval India experienced alternating phases of accommodation and religious exclusivism rather than a uniform model of governance.

The British colonial period fundamentally transformed India's religious landscape by institutionalizing communal identities through modern administrative practices. Colonial censuses categorized populations primarily by religion, separate electorates reinforced communal political representation, and legal codification increasingly defined citizens according to religious affiliation (Adcock, 2014). While colonial rule formally professed neutrality toward religion, its policies often deepened communal divisions by embedding religious identity within representative institutions. The British model of governance differed significantly from earlier empires by introducing legal equality before the law while simultaneously creating political structures that encouraged religious competition. Consequently, many scholars argue that colonial constitutional engineering laid the institutional foundations for the communal politics that would eventually culminate in Partition.

Following independence in 1947, India's founding leadership consciously rejected the idea of a religious state despite the traumatic partition of the subcontinent. Under the leadership of Jawaharlal Nehru and the Constituent Assembly, India adopted a constitutional framework committed to democracy, equal citizenship, and religious freedom. Although the word "secular" was formally inserted into the Constitution by the Forty-Second Amendment in 1976, secular principles had already been embedded in constitutional provisions guaranteeing equality before law (Article 14), prohibition of religious discrimination (Article 15), freedom of religion (Articles 25–28), and minority educational rights (Articles 29–30), (Bilgrami, 2016). Unlike the Western doctrine of strict separation, Indian secularism evolved as a model of principled state neutrality, permitting state engagement with religion while ensuring equal respect for all faiths. Rajeev Bhargava characterizes this approach as one of "principled distance," whereby the state may intervene in religious affairs to uphold constitutional values without privileging any single religion.

Despite this constitutional vision, secularism remained politically contested from the very inception of the Republic. The persistence of personal laws based on religious communities reflected the state's attempt to accommodate India's diversity but also generated accusations of unequal

treatment. Simultaneously, organizations associated with Hindu nationalism, particularly the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and later the Bharatiya Jana Sangh, challenged the Nehruvian interpretation of secularism, arguing that it disproportionately accommodated minority interests while neglecting India's Hindu civilizational heritage (Sherman, 2022). These ideological disagreements remained largely confined to political debate during the first two decades after independence but gradually intensified from the late 1970s onward.

The 1980s represented a decisive turning point in the evolution of Indian secularism. Political developments, including the Shah Bano judgment of 1985 and the subsequent enactment of the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Act in 1986, generated widespread criticism that successive governments were engaging in "vote-bank politics" by selectively accommodating minority religious demands (Bacchetta, 2000). Against this backdrop, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), established in 1980, increasingly embraced the Ram Janmabhoomi movement, which sought the construction of a temple at the disputed site in Ayodhya believed by many Hindus to be the birthplace of Lord Rama. Through religious mobilization, symbolic politics, and mass campaigns such as L. K. Advani's Rath Yatra in 1990, the movement transformed a localized property dispute into a nationwide political movement that redefined electoral competition around questions of religious identity (Bacchetta, 2000).

The demolition of the Babri Masjid on 6 December 1992 marked the most significant rupture in the constitutional trajectory of Indian secularism since independence. The destruction of a centuries-old mosque by organized political and religious activists represented not merely the failure of law and order but also a profound challenge to the constitutional principle of equal citizenship irrespective of religion. The event symbolized the transition from an officially secular state seeking to balance competing religious identities toward a political environment in which majoritarian nationalism increasingly influenced state institutions, public discourse, and electoral politics. In the decades that followed, debates over secularism shifted from questions of religious accommodation to broader concerns regarding constitutionalism, minority rights, and the relationship between democracy and majoritarianism. Understanding this historical transition is therefore essential for explaining how India's distinctive model of secularism evolved from an inclusive constitutional ideal into one of the most contested features of its contemporary political order.

There are two important narratives that need to be discussed here: 'Hindutva', which is a Hindu Nationalist Ideology and was codified by V.D Savarkar in his book *Hindutva: Who is Hindu?* He asserts that India belongs to Hindus, framing it as a Hindu Nation-State. He claims that Hindus are the "True Sons" of India, whereas non-Hindus are the invaders or descendants of Invaders. The second narrative is regarding the disputed place where Babri Masjid used to stand. The followers of Hindutva believe this place to be Ram's birthplace and thus claim it to be a holy site of the Hindus. Thus, this belief of Hindutva led to the demolition of Babri Masjid and ignited riots in Bombay in 1992 and 1993. Though not connected directly to the Babri Masjid event, the Gujarat Massacre in 2002 resulted in killings of Hindus and Muslims. However, the murders of the Muslims were sanctioned by the government of the state of Gujarat. These events, alongside the emergence of the BJP as the political hegemony in India, reveal the prevailing consensus among the majority favoring Hindu nation and erasing the image of Secular India.

This paper examines the aftermath of the Babri Masjid event, and It explores the characters in *One Small Voice: An Observer*. The study centers on the protagonist, Shubhankar, and raises questions about his observations of the events unfolding in India. Santanu Bhattacharya, author of this novel, lives in India and is an Oxford graduate. In *One Small Voice*, protagonist Shubhankar Trivedi grows up in the city of Lucknow. He belongs to a Brahman middle-class family. His nickname is Shabby, which also highlights the colonial mindset of his parents, who are desperate to

send him and his brother to an English-medium convent school. The narrative of the novel follows two timelines; one begins in the future, which explores the life of adult Shabby living in Mumbai. However, the second timeline narrates the story of his childhood, in which he describes the event of Babri Masjid, and the readers witness the killing of a Muslim man by the guards of a Hindu man in front of Shabby. This traumatic event leaves a psychic imprint on his mind. The demolition of Babri Masjid by the Far-Right Wing questions the notion of 'Secular India' and implicates Shubhankar in the subsequent violent riots due to the benefits he experiences as a child as well as an adult from the historical injustice. His 'Self-Reflexivity' exposes his position as a 'descendant of perpetrators'. The concept of 'implicated subject' can be effectively used in the study of a broader range of socio-political, economic, and security issues in a polity. The questions that can be raised by this study are: How does the erasure of Babri Masjid challenge the image of secular India in the selected text? How does communal violence implicate child Shubhankar? In what ways does the self-reflexivity of Shubhankar expose his position as a privileged Hindu man and make him a beneficiary of the violent history?

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework is an amalgamation of Michael Rothberg's works on 'Implicated Subject' and Michael Mann's idea of 'Ethnic Cleansing'. We use these concepts as a theoretical lens to examine the intricate sociopolitical context of the demolition of the Babri Masjid, the ensuing riots, and how these events are portrayed in the selected work. We study the character of Shubhankar as an implicated subject.

In the field of Humanities, 'Perpetrator Studies' has emerged as another approach aimed at moving beyond the idea of the victim. The reasons behind this new form of investigation are studies that are being conducted on the genocides and mass killings across the globe since the events of 9/11. It focuses on the psyche of the perpetrator. Perpetrator Studies challenges the established categories of Bystander, Victim and Perpetrator. It puts forward certain questions like: "who is the perpetrator, who decides, how such a label is applied..." (Knittel & Goldberg, 2019, p.5). In their chapter "From Perpetrators to Perpetration: Definitions, Typologies, and Processes" in *The Routledge International Handbook of Perpetrator Studies*, Üngör & Anderson (2019) have changed the approach to viewing the Perpetrator. They focus on the act of perpetration. According to them, the act of perpetration is a collective one, and there are various actors involved. There are three levels involved in this act of collective violence. First are the architects, then are organizers and the bottom level is occupied by the killers. Üngör & Anderson (2019) have listed the various types of killers: "Ideological Killers, Bigoted Killers, Violent Killers and Disciplined Killers" (p.10). This study uses the idea of "perpetration" to examine the Babri Masjid incident and the riots that followed in several Indian cities. This research seeks to strengthen awareness of these tumultuous events by shedding light on the communal aspects of brutality, the roles of people, and the root causes through an exploration of perpetration dynamics.

In his book *The Implicated Subject: Beyond Victims and Perpetrators*, Michael Rothberg (2019) introduces a new notion of 'Implicated Subject'. He breaks the binary of victims and perpetrators and focuses on the subjects that are often ignored. According to him, 'Implicated Subjects' are privileged people. They are not directly involved in the act of perpetration, but they inhabit the place where an act of violence has taken place, or they have "inherited the benefits from the regimes of domination" (Rothberg, 2019, p.1). They are neither the victims nor are they perpetrators, but they are also not the 'innocent bystanders'. They are part of 'violent regimes' and 'violent histories.' Rothberg believes that justice for the past crime cannot be achieved without considering the implicated subjects. He puts forward an idea of 'collective responsibilities' which helps in rethinking violent histories. For this, he discusses the concepts of genealogical implication and structural implication. Both help in understanding how "we are implicated in the past"

(Rothberg, 2019, p.5). He terms this a “burden of history” (Rothberg, 2019, p.6). Rothberg believes that even the people who were not born at the time of the violent act but are taking advantage of the perpetration are equally responsible for the act. Another important notion that he introduces is self-reflexivity, which exposes the sense of entitlement that children of perpetrators or beneficiaries have who consider themselves to be unbiased but still enjoy the position of appanage. The research studies various characters, especially the protagonist, using the concept of the implicated subject as a diachronic figure and its self-reflexivity.

In addition to this, the research also uses Michael Mann’s notion of ‘Organic Nationalism’ and ‘Urban Riots’ to study violent episodes in the text. According to Mann (2005), Organic Nationalism is one of the elements which makes nationalism undemocratic and fascist. Urban riots are a form of collective violence:

Some riots contain a ritualized repertoire of collective action, with processions, music, chants, flags, holy men or film or rock stars, speeches transmitted at ear-splitting level, caps and T-shirts bearing incendiary logos and slogans, and audio- and videocassettes denouncing supposed atrocities. These make participation enjoyable. Morality is dulled by the collective nature of the action. It cages the participants (Mann, 2005, p.480).

This research refers to this while analyzing the riots that take place in the selected text. In addition to this, the researcher utilizes the concept of ‘Social Amnesia’ to study the attitudes of the characters and how they react to the event of Babri Masjid and the riots. In his work *Social Amnesia: A Critique of Contemporary Psychology*, Russell Jacoby (2018) says that society often represses its own past and it gaslights the truth that otherwise should have been acknowledged. This theoretical concept helps in critically examining the reactions of the characters toward the violent events that took place around them. The current research paper explores the selected text from a new angle. It focuses on the ‘perpetrators’, the act of perpetration itself and the ‘implicated subject’.

Literature Review

The researcher critically engages with the existing literature and finds gaps that exist and how this research fills them. The literature review is divided into two parts. The first deals with main theoretical concepts, and the second discusses the scholarly work available on the primary text. In the field of literary studies, various critics and research scholars have explored the issue of ‘perpetrators’, ‘perpetration’ and ‘Implicated Subject’. However, it is still a relatively new and unexplored field. In his chapter “What is Holocaust Perpetrator Fiction?” in *The Routledge Handbook to Auschwitz Birkenau*, Jonathan Pettitt (2020) says that fictional works which focus on the perpetrators should also be part of the ‘Holocaust Canon’. In this article, he discusses the various types of perpetrators. He also explores the various versions of Hitler in the imagination of the West and focuses on the essential definition of the perpetrator. In addition to this, in their research article “Operationalizing Perpetrator Studies: Focusing Reader’s Reaction to the Kindly Ones by Jonathan Littell”, De Jonge, J., Demichelis, S., Rebora, S., & Salgaro, M. (2022) refer to the turn in ‘Holocaust Studies’ and ‘Perpetrator’ which is the nucleus of the research. They introduce the concept of negative empathy in their paper, which indicates the empathetic feelings of readers toward the perpetrator due to ‘moral disengagement’ (Jonge et al. al, 2022, p.15). Apart from this, Sue Vice (2014), in her article “Exploring the Fictions of Perpetrator Suffering”, addresses the suffering and guilt of the perpetrator. However, this paper devotes its attention to historical injustice.

Regarding the concept of the ‘Implicated Subject’, Lena Englund (2019) examines its role in South African autobiographical texts, exploring how the “oppressive past” (England 8) grants certain people advantages over others. Besides her work, Kaddah & Alqahtani (2023) in “Beyond

Victims and Perpetrators of September 11: The Implicated Subject in Inaam Kachachi's *The American Granddaughter*" take an Iraqi American woman as an implicated subject, working as an interpreter in an American Embassy. Both articles take implicated subjects as beneficiaries, which this paper discusses and explores in the novel, but with reference to the Indian political climate. These works overlook the notion of self-reflexivity in the implicated subject.

My primary text, *One Small Voice: An Observer*, was published in January 2023. Various newspapers, journals, and blogs have reviewed it. The literature which is available on this novel shares a common theme of trauma and guilt of the protagonist. Rahul Raina (2023), in "One Small Voice by Santanu Bhattacharya: A Review-Meltdown in Mumbai", sees young characters as "grandchildren of Midnight children". He writes that these characters, including the protagonist, live in a fractured and polarized society. According to him, Bhattacharya has presented "21st-century Indian society". Apart from him, Percy Bharucha (2023), in his article titled "Curious conundrums: Review of 'One Small Voice' by Santanu Bhattacharya which has been published in *The Hindu*", writes that Bhattacharya presents the typical life of an Indian Middle-Class family. He observes a comparison between Mumbai and Lucknow. In addition to this, Saurabh Sharma (2023) says in her article "One Small Voice: This Lyrical and Poignant debut is the reminder of the consequence of polarization", that the novel explores religious issues rather than gender issues. According to her, the writer wants to show how Muslims have no place in the 'Hindutva India'. Annie Zaidi (2023), in her review of the novel, says that Bhattacharya "maps the millennial life on a broader national canvas".

The significance of the current research paper is that it explores the link between the perpetrators and their descendants or indirect descendants. This study interrogates the self-reflexivity of individuals who are connected to historical injustice and a violent past. The position of an implicated subject as a privileged person has been underexplored. This research explores this gap. Hence, it provides a nuanced angle to scrutinize characters in political and historical fiction.

Analysis:

Agni, so holy, so horrific.

Bhattacharya's novel, *One Small Voice: An Observer*, opens its narrative in the house of a Middle-Class Indian family the Trivedis, who are preparing their son Shubhankar for an admission interview with the principal of a convent school. On the other hand, the 'children of Midnight' are telling their offspring about the struggles of their parents in achieving the independence of India. The text opens with a focus on pre-demolition Indian society, which exists in a liminal state: recovering from the colonial wounds and witnessing the restoration of Indian identity as a nation.

However, the 'Event of Babri Masjid' changes the whole future of the Trivedi family and the whole of the Indian population. Ganjeri says: "Before demolition we were clueless in our perfect childhood" (Bhattacharya, 2023, p.263). This line reflects the emotions of Indians who have suffered due to the rise of Hindu nationalism. The young Shubhankar watches the news about the tearing of the Masjid as mentioned in the following lines: "6th December 1992-A Black Day for India Secularism" (Bhattacharya, 2023,35). Through this act, Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh and other parties associated with the 'Sangh Parivar' aimed to portray India as a Hindu State rather than a Secular one. In the novel, the Masjid stands as a symbol of secularism and tolerance. This incident creates an atmosphere of fear which exists in the collective memory of Indians.

The Hindutva philosophy promotes hate against non-Hindus, particularly the Muslims. The followers of Hindutva believe that India is the home of Hindus as they are: 'True Sons' of the land.

Additionally, the ideology's founder, Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, emphasizes "Hinduizing all politics and militarizing Hindudom" (Gould). The characters in the novel *One Small Voice: An Observer* share this dominant discourse. The erasure of Babri Masjid questions the image of secular India and exposes the bigotry of the extremist Hindu population. The followers of Hindutva consider Muslims as their enemies. For instance, Malti, who works in the house of Trivedis, says that "This is our land, but these Muslims have built mosques at every place holy to us" (Bhattacharya, 2023, 42). Even the grandmother of Shubhankar is scared that it is not safe to go outside the house, as Muslims will retaliate. In addition to this, Suresh, who supports Hindu nationalism, says:

I saw how our Hindu men rushed to the dome and brought the mosque down. I cried seeing the love for their country... Enough of this Hindu-Muslim Bhai Brotherhood nonsense. We will build temples at every place they've usurped. Even the Taj Mahal will fall for a Shiva Temple (Bhattacharya, 2023,54).

The demolition of the Babri Masjid revealed the animosity towards the Muslims, and the attitudes and behaviors of the characters reflect this hate. According to Michael Mann, 'organic nationalism' leads to riots and violence. This is evident in the novel when a Muslim assistant of a tailor is killed during a Hindu wedding, which is held amidst turbulent times. The perpetrators of this violence fall into two categories. The Mid-level organizer is Suresh Mause, who is a 'Bara aadmi' (Bhattacharya, 2023, 43). The guards are the bottom-level killers who can be termed as 'Disciplined Killers' (Üngör and Anderson, 2019, 5). They are trained to kill anyone on command, as it is witnessed in the novel that they set the assistant on fire: "The face of the man on it... flames licking the body like a mythical creature.... overpowering the sounds of the shehnai and dholak from the wedding" (Bhattacharya, 2023, 50). This paradoxically contradicts the symbolic purity of Agni (fire) in Hinduism, which traditionally burns away people's sins. However, here the assistant is being punished for being a Muslim by burning him alive.

Furthermore, the bystanders are not innocent; rather, they acknowledge the killing of the Muslim man and exhibit 'social amnesia'. Mr Trivedi knows about the slaughter as mentioned in these lines: "What's done is done. Suresh Ji has already handled the police. He's explained to Master Ji, who will take care of the rest" (Bhattacharya, 2023, 52). Hence, he is not a naïve eyewitness; rather, he is involved in the act of perpetration. This shows how one singular event of Babri Masjid changes the entire conduct of the Hindu characters in the novel. In addition to this, at the end of the novel, Shubhankar comes to know that his mother is also complicit in the act of covering up the murder: "I don't know why I even told Mrs Trivedi about it when I ran into her. She dismisses it" (Bhattacharya, 2023,354). It can be argued that all Hindu characters are involved in the perpetration against the Muslim. According to Russell Jacoby, society often forces itself to forget certain events which harms their reputation and image. In this case, the image of being a secular state is challenged. Hence, the Hindus are gaslighting their fellow Muslims, as witnessed in these lines: "School had finally reopened in late January 1993. In the week since then everyone had behaved as nothing happened" (Bhattacharya, 2023, 67). Apart from this collective amnesia that the readers witness in the novel, the interaction between the Tailor (master ji) and Shubhankar also exposes another act of psychological manipulation. Master Ji calls his dead assistant "Kaamchor" (90) and claims that people like him leave the job in cities and go back to their villages. So here double gaslighting takes place. On one hand, Master Ji represses the death of Mudassir, and on the other hand, he tries to manipulate the sense of reality of Shubhankar, who witnesses the murder of the assistant.

After the demolition of Babri Masjid, the sense of hatred towards Muslim reached its apex in India. The echoes of which can be heard in the years following the event, and the prejudices are inculcated in the minds of the children by their Hindu parents. Shruti, who considers herself a modern Indian woman, feels irritated when her Muslim friend finds his peace in his religion, as

mentioned in these lines: “All this righteousness is too much for me” (Bhattacharya, 2023, 218). In Mumbai, Mangesh, who is the student of Shubhankar, claims that “Muslims pray in Moscow” because that is what teachers are saying in school. The parents of Shubhankar are horrified that their son is “living with a Muslim” (Bhattacharya, 2023, 144).

“We are the masters of three Vedas”

The understanding of a violent event is always limited to the perpetrator and the victim; for instance, in the novel it is Hindus versus Muslims. However, there are ‘Implicated Subjects’ who play a role in developing violent history. Though they are not direct contributors to the act of violence, the positions that are occupied by them are problematic. They are not just ‘passive bystanders’; rather, they are ones who are taking the benefits of the outcome of the violent event. In addition to this, they also “inherit... from the regime of domination” (Rothberg 5). In the novel *One Small Voice: An Observer*, Shubhankar is not just an innocent child; rather, he is privileged: ‘Hindu Brahmin. He carries the family name of Trivedi. We are the masters of three Vedas’ (Bhattacharya, 2023, 15). He is conscious of his place in society and of his religious identity, as it is reminded by his mother in the following lines: “Are those men going to attack us? Not at all! she finally said ‘We are Hindus. Those men are also Hindus’” (Bhattacharya, 2023, 40). ‘These men’ are the people who have demolished the Babri Masjid and were behind the riots. They are not going to harm their Hindu brothers and sisters. In addition to this, when the family attends the wedding, Shubhankar fears going outside their house. However, his father says: “You can relax. We’re in a VIP car with a siren and laal Batti” (Bhattacharya, 2023, 4). Here again the entitlement of Shubhankar is exposed. The perpetrators who have killed the assistant ran away when they see Shubhankar instead of causing any harm to him: “with narrow eyes and knitted brows, they scrutinized the ten years’ boy in a wedding sherwani...ran” (Bhattacharya, 2023, 48). Here again, it is witnessed that the participants in the violent act are “caged” (Mann, 2005: 485), and their focus is on their target, which is the Muslim assistant. Besides this, Shubhankar is untouchable because he is Hindu as well as under the protection of the perpetrators. Mr Trivedi also reminds us that: “Keep my boy out of this” (Bhattacharya, 2023, 54). Therefore, Shubhankar can be termed as ‘Descendant of Perpetrators’ because of the benefits that he is enjoying in an unequal structure.

Here, a comparison can be made between the experiences of Shubhankar and his Muslim friend Ganjeri. The demolition of Babri Masjid puts the secular system in India in crisis, and the rise of Hindutva increases hate crime against Muslims. This includes the ‘Gujarat Massacre’ in 2002. In the novel, Ganjeri mentions: “Not all refugees live in camps” (Bhattacharya, 2023, 233). Here he refers to his parents, who are moving from one house to another after the “mob looted” (Bhattacharya, 2023, 233) everything they had. He also describes the fear he experiences after the event of Babri Masjid. He says that his mother and other women used to sleep in the kitchen while the men guarded the house.

However, Shubhankar lives in psychic denial (Rothberg 10) as he is not aware of his position as an ‘implicated subject’. He feels the guilt of not exposing the perpetrators of the crime, but he is still part of their world. He ignores the fact that his parents and grandmother are also as responsible as Master Ji and his uncle. In his work, Michael Rothberg (2019) says that: “Implicated Subject is not an ontological subject and does not always or necessarily correspond to our stereotypical images of privilege” (Rothberg, 2019, 15). Keeping in mind this definition, it can be said here that Shubhankar is an ‘Implicated Subject’ even though he is a child. The reason behind this is the advantages he enjoys in comparison to his friend Ganjeri.

“I step back and see what I’ve done”

In the novel, the readers witness the guilt of Shubhankar that he is unable to tell anyone about the murder of the Muslim assistant. This haunts him throughout his life. However, his thoughts and self-consciousness are also problematic in the sense that it makes him believe that he is repenting and suffering. However, self-reflexivity exposes his position as a 'privileged Hindu Brahmin' in the novel. According to Michael Rothberg (2019), "recognizing ourselves as implicated subjects will not automatically make us better people" (20). This can be witnessed in the character of Shubhankar, who constantly criticizes his parents and his relatives for ignoring the murder of the assistant, as it can be seen in these lines: "They were cowards. They sided with the killers" (Bhattacharya, 2023, 55). However, then he shows sympathy for himself as he claims that his traumatic experience and suffering are forms of punishment for his parents. Even though he knows that the murderer is his Suresh Mause, he remains indecisive and does not tell the police: "And hadn't it been five years already" (Bhattacharya, 2023, 88). He avoids political events because they remind him of his guilt. However, this can be termed an 'evasive act' as he is running away from his responsibility.

Furthermore, he portrays the Mumbai Bombings in 1993 as a punishment for the murder of the assistant and the riots as mentioned in these lines: "The place seems to have no sign of rupture, ready to open for business on Monday morning. The underworld don was still in exile and had never returned to India. Shabby wondered what M would have made of this truce" (Bhattacharya, 2023, 133). His act of calling the Mumbai Bombing 'as a truce' is problematic. Here, his self-reflexivity can be questioned. He is unconsciously dividing the Hindus and Muslims. A divide which he is trying to overcome in the first place. The perpetrator of the Mumbai Bombing is a Muslim, whereas the perpetrators of the riots are Hindus, and both have harmed each other. Hence, his sense of historical justice makes him an implicated subject

This self-consciousness reminds the readers that he has a saviour-complex. This is what Rothberg (2019) terms as narcissism that exists in an implicated subject. This is witnessed in Shubhankar when he helps Ganjeri because he feels sympathy for him. However, the confidence makes him jealous, as it can be seen in these lines: "Ganjeri definitely wasn't what Shabby's original perception of him-helpless Muslim" (Bhattacharya, 2023, 158). This idea of helping the weak to feel better is an act of narcissism, which is also seen when he fights for Mangesh in the shopping mall. Hence, the interplay between his narcissism and his empathy brings a darker side of Shubhankar. Through his thoughts, the readers notice the bigotry of Shubhankar as he alienates Ganjeri, as mentioned in this line: "he wanted his day to be pure, unadulterated...left Ganjeri" (Bhattacharya, 2023, 193). He enters the stage where he becomes the descendant of the perpetrator.

Before proceeding to the conclusion, it's crucial to revisit the main argument. This research focuses on the Babri Masjid event and how it changes the image of 'Secular India'. The reactions of the characters after this event were investigated. It exposes the sense of hatred, stereotypical images, and collective amnesia of the riots and deaths. The Perpetrators and their actions are examined. In the second part of the analysis, the current study explores how child Shubhankar is implicated in communal violence. The current research studies the text against the grain to highlight how a child or an innocent observer can also be an 'Implicated subject' because he enjoys certain advantages.

We have examined the ways in which he is enjoying his position as a Brahman Hindu man. The research unmasks the narcissist personality of Shubhankar and his position as a 'diachronic figure' as well as 'descendant of Perpetrators' by using the Michael Rothberg concept of 'implicated subject'. This research has also taken help from certain theoretical concepts from the field of Perpetrator Studies. The current research introduces a nuanced approach which helps in examining 'Self-Reflexivity' as a form of privilege.

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