



ISSN 2455-7544
www.daathvoyagejournal.com

Daath Voyage : An International Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies in English

A UGC Refereed Open Access Journal

Vol. 3 No.3, September, 2018

Editor : Saikat Banerjee

Editor: Dr. Saikat Banerjee
Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences
St. Theresa International College, Thailand.



Daath Voyage

: An International Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies in English
A UGC Refereed e- Journal no 45349

ISSN 2455-7544

www.daathvoyagejournal.com

Vol.3, No.3, September, 2018

Parenting, Crime and Geopolitics at a Crossroads: Negotiating Shahnaz Bashir's *The Half Mother: A Novel*

Abhisek Ghosal

M.Phil. Research Scholar

Department of English and Culture Studies

The University of Burdwan

Burdwan, West Bengal

Received 29 July 2018

Revised 2 August 2018

Accepted 31 August 2018

Abstract: Parenting is, perhaps, one of the engaging activities in the world, for it requires relentless efforts— both physical and psychological. It is supposed that parenting is quite contingent upon a number of polyvalent factors including social, cultural, geopolitical, domestic, economic, religious, to name only a few. While parenting children in the context of socio-political and cultural uprising, parents have to take into cognizance the latest geopolitical developments in their vicinity so as to keep children immune from threats. They need to make a series of adjustments to the dynamic socio-cultural and political fabric to carry on parenting uninterruptedly. Rupture in parenting can be ruinous to the upbringing of children in tumultuous geopolitical scenario. Alterations in geopolitical configurations conditioned by the surge in criminal offence leave impact upon parenting thereby forcing parents to negotiate with other relevant factors so as to insulate parenting from potential harms. In other words, precisely speaking, incidents of crime induce geopolitical unrest in an unexpected way, which drives parents to take extra cautions to preclude children from being affected by it. Interplay among parenting, crime and geopolitics is at times intriguing, for parents have to negotiate with the interactions between crime and geopolitics to improve the standard of parenting and, at once, problematic, for parents, sometimes, cannot come to terms with the interactions between the two. Shahnaz Bashir is one particular kashmiri novelist who has written *The Half Mother: A Novel* to underscore the injurious and vicious impact of the problematic interface between crime and geopolitics on parenting. This novel turns out to be a detailed



documentation of how parenting practices are severely affected by political unrest. This article is thus intended to examine Bashir's interventions into the problematic intersections among the trio, taking recourse to relevant theoretical insights and to interrogate some stereotypical assumptions reading parenting as reflected in the novel.

Key Words: Parenting; Geopolitics; Crime; 'State of Exception'.

I

Parenting is, perhaps, one of the engaging activities in the world, for it requires relentless efforts— both physical and psychological. It is supposed that parenting is quite contingent upon a number of polyvalent factors including social, cultural, geopolitical, domestic, economic, religious, to name only a few. While parenting children in the context of socio-political and cultural uprising, parents have to take into cognizance the latest geopolitical developments in their vicinity so as to keep children immune from threats. They need to make a series of adjustments to the dynamic socio-cultural and political fabric to carry on parenting uninterruptedly. Rupture in parenting can be ruinous to the upbringing of children in tumultuous geopolitical scenario. Alterations in geopolitical configurations conditioned by the surge in criminal offence leave impact upon parenting thereby forcing parents to negotiate with other relevant factors so as to insulate parenting from potential harms. In other words, precisely speaking, incidents of crime induce geopolitical unrest in an unexpected way, which drives parents to take extra cautions to preclude children from being affected by it. Interplay among parenting, crime and geopolitics is at times intriguing, for parents have to negotiate with the interactions between crime and geopolitics to improve the standard of parenting and, at once, problematic, for parents, sometimes, cannot come to terms with the interactions between the two. Shahnaz Bashir is one particular kashmiri novelist who has written *The Half Mother: A Novel* to underscore the injurious and vicious impact of the problematic interface between crime and geopolitics on parenting. This novel turns out to be a detailed documentation of how parenting practices are severely affected by political unrest. This article is thus intended to examine Bashir's interventions into the problematic intersections among the trio,



taking recourse to relevant theoretical insights and to interrogate some stereotypical assumptions reading parenting as reflected in the novel.

II

In order to initiate theoretical discussion, one may be reminded of the insightful intervention of Marsha Weinraub *et al.* in “Single Parenthood”:

To unravel the multiple factors that may be related to our understanding of whether or not children of single-parent families are at risk, it is necessary to identify the many similar and divergent characteristics of single-parent families. One of the most important characteristics of single-parent families and their children is their heterogeneity. Although about half of all children growing up in single-parent families live in poverty, many do not. . . . The phenomenological experience of growing up in a single-parent family varies depending on the nature of the family, the experiences of the parent, and the family context. . . . The commonality across these varied types of single parents is that the parent does not have a legally married partner in the home. How these individuals came to be parents, the choices they made, and the experiences that were thrust on them, all have differential implications for their family’s life circumstances. (110-111).

What this excerpt implies is that single parenting is of different types—each of which has distinctive characteristic traits which need to be understood in association with surrounding geopolitical developments inasmuch as the practice of parenting is not restricted within home; rather is exercised everywhere. The nexus between a child and a single parent is conditioned by the mutual affection for each other. Most importantly, heterogeneities in the practice of single parenting are predicated upon the negotiations of single parents with their surrounding ambience. It means that whereas single parents have to make adjustments within their respective families, they have to try to come to terms with dynamic geopolitical developments inasmuch as the influence of geopolitics on single parenting practices is unavoidable. For instance, penury is one such important geopolitical factor which has bearing on transformative alterations in single parenting practices. At this point, it needs to be made very clear that there is a subtle dichotomy between mothering and



single parenting a child in the sense that while mothering is to take care of a child with all human emotions, physical contacts, holding a congenial ambience for unproblematic upbringing, intense monitoring and surveillance, to name only a few,; single parenting is to parent the child through catering basic necessities that a child requires to grow up. In other words, whereas the role of a father is implicitly embedded in the act of mothering, single parenting cannot be an exact replacement of mothering, for single parents are either legally unmarried or divorced beings. One may here refer to Kathryn E. Barnard and JoAnne E. Solchany, who in an important article entitled as “Mothering” has brilliantly have commented:

Cultural factors, family patterns and traditions, personal beliefs, the presence or absence of risk factors, and the context of the environment all contribute to changes in the mothering role over the child’s development. Additionally, the distinctions between mothering and parenting blur as the child ages. Does this mean that mothering ceases and parenting replaces it? Does it mean that actual mothering surfaces only as the child’s needs demand it? What are the defining factors for mothering as opposed to parenting? Based on child development factors, mothering should see decreases in the amount of care giving required and increases in the amount of strategies for enhancing the child’s independence and autonomy. (18)

Unlike, mothering a child in usual familial condition, single parenting is consequent upon the psychological trepidations of a single parent in that single parents have to encounter a number of socio-cultural constraints. Marsha Weinraub *et al.* in “Single Parenthood” have rightly observed:

Differences in how the parents came to be single parents affect individuals’ employment, their financial circumstances, their relationships with other adults, their involvement with their child, and their competence as parents. The etiology of the parent’s single parenthood also may have implications for the child’s perceptions and experiences growing up. (111)

Apart from it, single parenting negotiates with cultural alterations leading to the consideration of geopolitical developments which, in a way, leaves impact on the physical representation of single parenting at praxis. Marc H. Bornstein is one particular critic who has insisted in “Cultural



Approaches to Parenting” that parenting is shaped up by cultural developments which invariably incorporates geopolitical alterations:

Parenting thus embeds cultural models and meanings into basic psychological processes which maintain or transform the culture (Bornstein, 2009). Reciprocally, culture expresses and perpetuates itself through parenting. Parents bring certain cultural proclivities to interactions with their children, and parents interpret even similar characteristics in children within their culture’s frame of reference; parents then encourage or discourage characteristics as appropriate or detrimental to adequate functioning within the group. . . . A proper understanding of the function of parenting cognitions and practices requires situating them in their cultural context. (213-217)

In this regard, one may point out that single parenting is often carried out in marginalized position in that single parents are not sometimes culturally accepted as mothers and fathers are and therefore, single parents have to negotiate with problematic situations triggered by marginalization. In other words, society does not often cater opportunities to single parents to avail necessary requirements to take care of children out of sheer cultural prejudices. The problematics of single parenting thus cannot be comprehended without taking contextual specificities into account. Kelly E. McShane and Nicole Schaefer-McDaniel in “Parenting in the Context of Marginalization: Moving towards a Comprehensive Framework” have cogently put forward: “To advance work on parenting and child aggression among marginalized populations, we need to integrate individual, family, and contextual models to examine structural, physical, and social effects of each context as well as their moderating and mediating associations” (42). It shows that alterations in geopolitical configuration leave impact on parenting practices including single parenting. When the *status quo* in geopolitical situation gets disrupted due to the sporadic eruption of violence, it affects parenting at large. Precisely speaking, geopolitical turbulence generates fright among parents who are forced to take extra care of their children. So far single parenting is concerned; single parents find it more difficult to come to terms with geopolitical changes because individual agonies often pull single parents down from living up to the expectations. The socio-cultural identity of single parents



sometimes gets intertwined with larger political issues when single parenting is stretched off domestic boundary.

Crime is, as Paul Tappan has understood, “an intentional act or omission in violation of criminal law committed without defence or justification and sanctioned by the state for punishment . . .” (80). It is implicative of that crime is an illicit act which is committed to serve various intentions. Donald Taft is another influential critic who has argued that crime “is a social injury and an expression of subjective opinions varying in time and place” (qtd. in Paranjape 9). Thus, it is clear that crime is a socio-cultural phenomenon which is capable of unsettling law and order situation in any nation-state. Usually, miscreants and unlawful persons exploit crime to fulfill individual intentions. Here, one may ask a couple of pertinent questions: if crime is resorted to quell mob by the ruling authority of a nation-state, should the nation-state be subject to legal proceedings? Even if the ruling authority of a nation-state is legally convicted, who is going to take legal action against that nation-state? One may argue that the ruling authority of a nation-state can use harsh machineries to bring the mob under control; otherwise, citizens will blame the ruling authority. On the contrary, it can be put forward that in the name of taking stricter steps, ruling authority of a nation-state cannot go the extent of being criminal in order to subdue mob. At this point, one may refer to Giorgio Agamben’s conception of “state of exception” which is often brought into play by ruling authority to suppress insurrection. According to Agamben, “State of exception” is so:

. . . difficult to define is certainly its close relationship to civil war, insurrection, and resistance. Because civil war is the opposite of normal conditions, it lies in a zone of undecidability with respect to the state of exception, which is state power’s immediate response to the most extreme internal conflicts. . . . One of the essential characteristics of the state of exception—the provisional abolition of the distinction among legislative, executive, and judicial powers—here shows its tendency to become a lasting practice of government. (2-7)



It is suggestive of that ruling authority of a nation-state can assume “state of exception” by virtue of being in power and executes state power to control insurrection. This “state of exception” is often posited as a “state of necessity” which the ruling authority assumes to bring normalcy back to the geopolitical situation. In this regard, it can be argued that “state of exception” is not legally ratified position and therefore assuming this position on the part of authority is a breach of law. Even if the authority is found guilty, authority gets exonerated on the ground that assuming “state of exception” on necessity is a part of catering good governance to the common people. Agamben said: “. . . the theory of the state of exception is wholly reduced to the theory of the *status necessitatis*, so that a judgment concerning the existence of the latter resolves the question concerning the legitimacy of the former” (24). Agamben has further problematized “state of exception” and has finally arrived at certain aporias:

If the state of exception’s characteristic property is a (total or partial) suspension of the juridical order, how can such a suspension still be contained within it? How can an anomie be inscribed within the juridical order? And if the state of exception is instead only a de facto situation, and is as such unrelated or contrary to law, how is it possible for the order to contain a lacuna precisely where the decisive situation is concerned? And what is the meaning of this lacuna? In truth, the state of exception is neither external nor internal to the juridical order, and the problem of defining it concerns precisely a threshold, or a zone of indifference, where inside and outside do not exclude each other but rather blur with each other. The suspension of the norm does not mean its abolition (23)

III

Shahnaz Bashir’s *The Half Mother: A Novel* turns out to be an intriguing *tour de force*, for it brilliantly depicts the problematic intersections and interactions among parenting, crime and geopolitics. Bashir is a Kashmiri novelist who has painstakingly brought out the enormous impact of geopolitical turmoil on the practice of parenting. This novel is a poignant tale of Haleema who is, at the inception of the novel, introduced as a daughter to Ab Jaan, her father; gradually becomes a mother of a son named Imran and is ultimately turned into a half mother following the perpetual



missing of her son after an army raid. Pitted against the backdrop of Kashmir Exodus in 1990s, this novel projects how tense political situations induced by the clashes between militants and army, massive army raids across the valley, the growing insurgency against the government, curfew, to name only a few, leave pejorative impact upon parenting, which virtually makes Haleema teeter at the edge of insanity. Haleema, being a single mother, has to take on various challenges to bring up her son and gradually proves to be a stoic figure towards the end of the novel. Incidents of crime including kidnapping, brutal torture and torment in army detention camps, genocide of rebels, sheer insensitivity of army to basic human needs for survival, among others, often put Haleema under tremendous trepidations and push her to compromise with the necessary requirements for parenting. Haleema exhibits sheer desperation in finding out her own son but all her efforts go in vain when she succumbs to intense trauma and dies.

One may initiate textual interpretation of *The Half Mother: A Novel* by raising a couple of questions: is it difficult to parent a child for a single parent in geopolitical turmoil? Does a single parent negotiate with geopolitical alterations while taking care of a child? In order to respond to these queries, the incidents that happen to the life of Haleema can be brought up. Haleema herself was brought up by her father alone and when her father died, Shafiqa informally assumed the role of her mother. It suggests that Haleema has had the experience of being taken care of by a caregiver and thus decides to get bound in wedlock with a medical assistant living in Srinagar: “Haleema married a medical assistant from a Srinagar nursing home, who began having an affair with a nurse at the hospital within two months of the wedding” (Bashir 13). Unfortunately, her amorous affair with that medical assistant ends in a whisper entailing a divorce between them. Meanwhile, Haleema gives birth to a baby boy named Imran who, too, is nurtured by Haleema alone. It becomes difficult for Haleema to take care of Imran because Imran has been a capricious child from his childhood:

Imran’s childhood had as many as the other children: he broke his bones jumping from high walls and trees branches; gashed his arms running through bushes. . . . The wounds



eventually twisted into scars of different shapes, a perpetual reminder of his childhood.
(Bashir 17)

What it implies is that Haleema feels the need of a father to Imran, for she cannot alone bring him under control. Apart from it, the financial condition of Haleema's family deteriorates inasmuch as neither Haleema's father is able to earn because of his aged-related illness nor her husband live there to support her. When she has been striving to eke out livings for Imran and herself by spinning wools and selling it to nearby market in Natipora, Kashmir valley gets perturbed by the eruption of fresh violence:

'The war has begun,' Ab Jaan said with tired eyes, quietly, almost to himself. *Valley Times*, the newspaper he carried under his arm, had a report about a gun battle in Srinagar: two masked men had shot a police constable at point-blank range and run away on their scooter. The long tussle between political rivals had finally culminated into war. Young boys had begun sneaking into Pakistan to fetch arms and rebel against the government. (Bashir 23)

In addition to this excerpt, one may be reminded of the telling observation of Ab Jaan who is critical of the intrusion of geopolitics into the household of Haleema:

Confused and shivering with both rage and fear, Ab Jann thundered at them, 'The bunker will be a nuisance—you will always be intruding into our homes. Our women cannot come out of their houses. Please take the bunker a little away from here.' The trooper with the rifle turned and pushed him back with the butt of his rifle. Ab Jaan fell on the snow and his black karakul hat tilted over his eyes. Imran ran over and helped him stand up. (Bashir 27)

Being a child of a single parent, Imran, too, unlike other children, has to perform household chores to assist his ailing mother and cannot get mixed up with school friends possible because Imran learns to bear familial responsibilities right from his childhood to replenish the absence of his own father:

Imran assisted Haleema with the chores too. Sometimes he washed all the clothes, and ironed and scented them with ittar; sewed patches onto cotton-leaking holes in pillows, cushions, mattresses and quilts; stitched up the toes and heels of Ab Jaan's and Haleema's



winter socks and mended zippers by rubbing candle wax onto them. . . . He grew laconic and wouldn't laugh at the jokes his classmates made during class anymore. He no longer participated in their pranks. He had no desires or complaints. (Bashir 31)

Thus, it is quite obvious that single parent like Haleema finds it difficult to parent Imran because of the geopolitical disturbances.

Haleema has to negotiate with geopolitical alterations since she cannot stay indifferent to violence. Bashir depicts in *The Half Mother: A Novel* how the trajectories of geopolitics get intertwined with the practice of parenting thereby making it harder for single parents to negotiate:

The year 1990. As the insurgency in the valley intensified the government resigned, paving the way for governor's rule. Tears, blood, death and war followed, as this curfew, crackdowns, raids, encounters, killings, bunkers, an exodus of people, burning markets, schools and buildings. . . . Then Shafiqa's daughter Rukhsana became the first woman from the neighbor to be beaten, in her own compound. Her parents were tied with ropes and made to see their daughter being stripped by a trooper. . . . Hundreds of thousands began to march on every street and road in an endless stream of procession. Men, women, children, old young—all. . . . The government announced shoot-at-sight order for anyone who defied the curfew. . . . What will happen if the curfew prolongs and my stock runs out? he [Ab Jaan] thought. . . . 'This curfew doesn't seem to end. The governor wants us to starve and die in our homes,' Haleema said. (32-39)

This excerpt points to that geopolitical disturbances coupled with sheer violence in Kashmir Valley lead single parent like Haleema to keep herself locked up at home. It impacts upon her family income in that she can neither go to market to sell wools nor to buy necessary requirements to run a family because government has announced curfew for an indefinite period of time and carries out massive crackdowns to nab insurgents. Needless to say that due to the geopolitical uprisings, Haleema is worried about the safety and security of her son Imran who, one night, goes missing when Army carries out raids to apprehend insurgents:



There was a power cut in the neighbourhood. After the incident, most people abandoned their houses and ran off to other neighbourhoods. Those trapped in their homes or those we couldn't flee would face the consequences of staying behind. The angry troops began to indiscriminately beat those trapped inside their homes. (Bashir 44)

Here, one may argue that in the name of taking stricter steps, government cannot assume "state of exception" and cannot make innocent dwellers of the Valley subject to the wrath of government. Geopolitical situation across the border is aggravated due to the implementation of curfew for indefinite period of time. Tense geopolitical situation in the Valley leaves impact on domestic life in that Army randomly picks up youths on suspicion of spreading violence across the Valley. On the other hand, there is nobody to question the intrusion of Army into the household. It is as if Army assumes "state of exception" in the time of curfew and by virtue of being in that state, Army exploits military machineries to inflict torture and torment upon innocent dwellers. Even if it were a necessity to carry out raids to nab runaway insurgents, Army cannot, on any ground, bring state machineries into play. The moment it is revealed that Army has taken Imran away to some unknown place, the intersection among geopolitics, crime and parenting gets once more problematized:

The troops brought out a tall boy from one of their jeeps. He wore an oversized khaki trench coat. . . . 'Here he is then,' Kushwaha said. 'Formalities over'. . . . 'What is his crime? What has he done? You are mistaken! You know you are mistaken! Why do you do this to me? Haleema pleaded. . . . 'He is a small child! Don't you see?' she wailed. (Bashir 56)

It clearly shows that parenting practice of Haleema is terribly affected and afflicted by geopolitical unrest which has made the Valley a veritable hell, as it were. Later on, Haleema begins to search for her lost son but unfortunately, she fails to track him down and ultimately, succumbs to her intense trauma. It, too, exposes that the overlapping among the trajectories of parenting, crime and geopolitics remains a contentious issue even at the end of the novel possibly because the standpoint of Army turns out to be an ontologically deferred position which shares intricate proximity to parenting conditioned by geopolitical disorder.



IV

Thus, at the end of the discussion, it has become quite clear that interactions and intersections among the trio are certainly complex and contingent upon the geopolitical dynamics of Kashmir Valley. Here, one may be critical of Bashir's intervention into the interface in this way that

although Bashir has depicted the poignant lamentation of a bereaved mother; he has failed to arrive at any way out to undo the problematic crossover among the trajectories of parenting, crime and geopolitics. In other words, the submission of Haleema to intense trauma is suggestive of a deadlock where the trajectories of parenting, crime and geopolitics remain stuck for indefinite time.

End Note

1 . Constantin Hlihor has commented on conceptual heterogeneities associated with geopolitics in *Geopolitics: From Classical to a Postmodern Approach*:

On the other hand, geopolitics implies a correct distinction between the geopolitics – objective reality resulted from the players' behavior in an international context from different regions of the planet and geopolitics – the socially constructed reality employing a language of the more or less competent observers of the stakeholders' behaviors at international level at a certain point. . . .
democratic research and the political practice, geopolitics must be approached and analyzed from three viewpoints at least. The first is the geopolitical action/geopolitics reality, a result of the decisions made by heads of states and governments in their foreign policy that operates as interactions between the international and regional or global players. That is a palpable reality of a historic nature, nonrecurring in the evolution of international relations; it determines the physiognomy of the international order at a certain time and it influences the security structure of the international environment, of the international affairs and the links among different areas of culture and civilization. A second perspective of analyzing geopolitics is the academic and university research, the political and diplomatic discourse but also the analyzes, scenario and strategies that constitute, at a given moment, the useful expertise and documentation that politicians need in order to make decisions at international level.



Daath Voyage

: An International Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies in English
A UGC Refereed e- Journal no 45349

ISSN 2455-7544

www.daathvoyagejournal.com

Vol.3, No.3, September, 2018

Works Cited

- Agamben, Giorgio. *State of Exception*. Translated by Kevin Attell, The University of Chicago Press, 2005.
- Barbard, Kathryn E. and JoAnne E. Solchany. "Mothering." *Handbook of Parenting: Being and Becoming a Parent*. Vol. 3, edited by Marc H. Bornstein, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers, 2002, pp. 3-25.
- Bashir, Shahnaz. *The Half Mother: A Novel*. Hachette, 2014.
- Bornstein, Marc H. "Cultural Approaches to Parenting." *Parenting: Science and Practice*, vol. 12, 2012, pp. 212-221.
- McShane, Kelly E. and Nicole Schaefer-McDaniel. "Parenting in the Context of Marginalization: Moving towards a Comprehensive Framework." *Handbook of Parenting: Styles, Stresses and Strategies*, edited by Pacey H. Krause and Tahlia M. Dailey, Nova Science Publishers, Inc., 2009, pp. 37-51.
- Paranjape, Makarand. *Criminology, Penology and Victimology*. 17th ed., Central Law Publications, 2017.
- Tappan, Paul W. *Crime, Justice and Correction*. Mc-Graw-Hill, 1960.
- Weinraub, Marsha et al. "Single Parenthood." *Handbook of Parenting: Being and Becoming a Parent*. Vol. 3, edited by Marc H. Bornstein, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers, 2002, pp. 109-140.