

Postcolonial India and the Politics of Identity in *Midnight's Children*

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Abstract

The *Midnight's Children* is a unique piece of post-colonial literature in the history of post-colonial literature as it follows a journey through concepts of identity, history and nationhood in post-Independent India. The novel, released in 1981, weaves through the personal history of its protagonist Saleem Sinai, and the political and cultural history of India following the end of British colonialism. The paper discusses the magical realism, polyvocal narration and symbolism that Rushdie employs in his work to illustrate the postcolonial identity and the dilemmas of nation construction. Saleem Sinai becomes an allegorical life of the Indian people, a people divided, conflicted, hybrid and changed over the course of history. The novel also brings the issues of Partition, migration, memory and cultural disorientation to the fore, thus highlighting the psychological and social impacts of colonialism. The *Midnight's Children* is an innovative novel, spoken by many voices and from various perspectives, which redefines Indian history in a postcolonial novel.

Keywords: post-colonialism, identity, history, magic realism, Partition, migration, memory, cultural disorientation, etc.

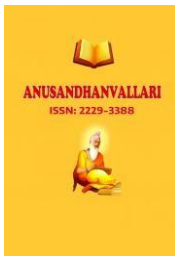
Introduction

Salman Rushdie has a somewhat unique place in post-colonial literature, as he has made it his writings to meld the elements of history, politics, mythology and fantasy into innovative narrative structure. His literary output goes beyond the geographical and cultural boundaries, and encompasses themes of Indian-British and Indian-Diasporic relationships. The vocabulary and tone of Rushdie's text are exuberant, ironic, satirical and experimental in its challenge to the hegemonic colonial history-making. Fragmented postcolonial societies form one of the themes of his stories and the restoration of the cultural histories of the margins is another. *Midnight's Children* is a classic of Rushdie's and a major expression of this thematic consideration.

Midnight's Children, which was published in 1981, is a multi-layered, enlarged and complex history of modern India, the narrative of which follows the transition of the country from British Colonialism to independent nationhood. The book begins with the birth of Saleem Sinai on 15th August 1947, the very day of Indian Independence. Saleem's birth is his personal destiny intertwined with the destiny of the nation. Then Saleem becomes aware of this unbreakable connection and says,

Now I have been mysteriously handcuffed to history, my destinies are indissolubly linked with those of my country (Rushdie 9).

Rushdie sets up one of the main themes of the novel through this comment, the intrinsic connection between individual identity and national history.



The book tells a story of one thousand children born in the first hour of India's independence, each with superpowers. With a gift of telepathy, Saleem forms the Midnight Children's Conference to speak with these children. The Midnight Children's Conference in *Midnight's Children* is a symbolic conference organized by the novel's creator, Saleem Sinai, in a manner that is based on his telepathic abilities. All the children born in India within the first hour following midnight of 15th August 1947, the day of Independence of India are beneficiaries of the conference. Each child is a symbolic representation of various aspects of the newly independent nation, and these children have exceptional supernatural powers, called "closeness", which they use to their advantage and disadvantage.

These children form the Midnight Children's Conference because Saleem can communicate telepathically to be able to bring them together in his mind. In this conference Rushdie gorges in a miniature version of India itself where children come together regardless of religion, region, language, class, cursor, or culture. The conference thus assumes a metaphorical status in the sense that it is an expression of the diversity and plurality of what it is now, namely, postcolonial India.

The children represent their superhuman capabilities which reflect the tremendous potential and expectations of a new country. Saleem's birth is widely covered in the media and even the Prime Minister of India has mentioned the relationship between Saleem and the country in a congratulatory letter. In the letter, Saleem is referred to as a symbol of India:

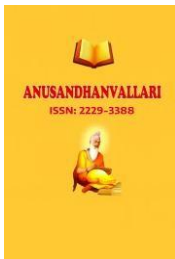
Dear Baby Saleem, Late congratulations on the happy accident of your moment of birth! We shall be watching over you with the closest attention; it will be in a sense the mirror of our own. You are the newest bearer of the ancient face of India which is eternally young (Rushdie 167).

The Prime Minister Nehru referred to Saleem as 'mirror of India' and this indicates the close connection between character and the India. Saleem is the symbol of the post-colonial India, the sign of its diversity, its paradoxes, its strengths and its fragmentation. The nation is simultaneously a political and a collective imaginative journey, as it were, for Rushdie. The repeated descriptions of the country as a "mass fantasy", a "myth" and a "collective fiction" link "nations" to the concept of "stories" and the wrought forms of "construction of story". Islamist, Hindu, and European influence, dreams and aspirations all come together to create India, writes Rushdie. Hence, the concept of the formation of postcolonial identity of India, being a multiple, pluralistic and collaborative phenomenon, is mediated through various cultural, verging multiple languages and religious groups. It includes incidents such as colonialism, partition, Indo-Pakistan war and the Emergency period under Indira Gandhi in the story of Rushdie's life. Such events have a significant impact on the character's lives and help define their identities. The Partition of India is a rupture in particular that questions the family, culture and community. For both the magical and the political allegorical forms, Rushdie represents anxieties and paradoxes of a newly independent country seeking to establish itself after its colonial past. The *Midnight's Children* is an allegory of India's pluralistic character, and their eventual disintegration corresponds to the socio-political fault-lines that threaten the unity of the nation.

This novel also clearly points to the idea of 'hybridity' that most people have in postcolonial discourse. The concept of "hybridity of Saleem" is an echo of the postcolonial India. As opposed to uniform and straight, religious and ethnic (or national) identity, Rushdie argues for its malleableness, dynamism and cultural pluralism. This is quite evident in Saleem's thoughts on memory and history. He observes:

History trickles in on me like things, even people, trickle in, into cracks in my body (Rushdie 38).

The idea of "leaking" is robust and powerful reminder of interconnectedness of people, past and culture. The body has been broken apart and Saleem's body represents the Partitioned Indian subcontinent. This metaphor



emphasizes the “conformability” and plurality that characterizes postcolonial identity, which constantly undergoes re-making, re-mediated, and transformative processes of migration and displacement, memory and history.

Collective history and personal memory are the two unique features of *Midnight's Children*. R. S. Pathak (1993) mentions that the most important feature of *Midnight's Children* is that it is about “the interaction of personal and national history” (118-34). Indeed, Rushdie mocked at the mythology with fantasy and history throughout, challenging the idea of the ‘truth’ in history. It is a rambling, self-reflecting and even unreliable narrative, and the very concept of history is one that is constructed and reconstructed through deeds of memory, interpretation and story. This strategy is a prime example of the rewriting of history from the point of view of the people that were once colonized whose voice were overlooked in the colonial discourse which dominated the literature of that time.

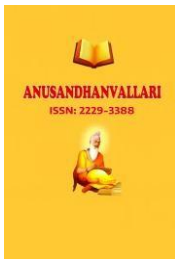
Rushdie's magical realism also helps to enhance the postcolonial perspective of the novel. He merges fantasy and history, defying Western realist conventions, while championing native house style, oral history and the narrative technique. By using the magic of the mariachi, he can reveal the nonsensical and often mystifying especially du jour India after colonialism, and also enlist the potentialities of cultural renewal. The novel's disoriented, digressive and disjunctive style is reflective of the destruction of the post-colonial society and the problem of the traditional historical narrative.

Midnight's Children : A Postcolonial Study

Midnight's Children is a significant postcolonial novel of the twentieth century that probes into issues of identity, hybridity, and nationhood in India. The political and cultural history of India is an interwoven story in Salman Rushdie's literary epic, Saleem Sinai. The aspirations and dreams, the paradoxes and the conflicts of a new nation coming out of colonial rule are depicted throughout the novel and the struggle to articulate a sense of identity in a culturally pluralistic society explored. The book, a blend of history, fantasy, mythology and memory, reinvents the possibilities of the postcolonial novel and is a fascinating tale of the budding nationhood of India. It's like a parent begging a child to be a good citizen, and it demonstrates the expectations of the generation born with the Independence of the nation. Rushdie has metaphorically tied the fate of Saleem to that of modern India, which is a post-colonial state. In a way Saleem turns into not only a character but a symbolization of the country itself, diversity, contradiction, aspirations, fragmentation.

Rushdie views the building of India as a process tightly bound up with the imagination and the power of story. Nationhood of India is a “mass fantasy”, a “myth”, a “collective fiction” and “a fable” all throughout the novel and therefore it is a “historical and narrative fable”. Nations, in Rushdie's view, are not just political constructs, but also are devised through what he calls “collective beliefs, memories, and cultural interaction. Demonstration of the efforts of people with different religions, languages, castes and cultures coming together as part of the Indian Independence movement. This plurality turns into a key component of the Indian postcolonialism. So, the novel is emphasising the people of the nation as a whole were the dream-makers of India and the aspirations of the nation's citizens were kept alive.

It is the history of Rushdie, which unfolds during the history of the colonial India, the Partition, the issues of Indian nation building and the formation of Pakistani identity. The impact of Partition is felt by characters' lives, and the ideas of belonging and identity are disturbed. The accounts of Indonesia's struggle to become independent have illusions, fear, and paradoxes which are explored in magical realism, political allegory, and a complexly nuanced character. Every one of the children of the midnight is an extraordinary child; a symbol of hopes and dilemmas for a new nation. The diversity of them answers to their postcolonial India and their eventual disintegration will lead to political, cultural and communal differences that will occur within the country.



The one thing that is extraordinary about *Midnight's Children* is that historical realities interlace themselves with mythology and folklore, with the personal memories. Rushdie combines public history and personal stories, thus blurring the line between reality and imagination. Personal and political are intertwined in postcolonial literature, which seeks to recover cultural histories on the margins or excluded from the dominant colonial narrative. Its Indigenous use of storytelling traditions and myths and its use of oral storytelling, not only reclaims but also emphasizes the cultural diversity of India and how it resisted the colonial attempt to represent its history.

Interplay of personal and national histories is the most remarkable aspect of *Midnight's Children*. But, Rushdie continually illustrates how the larger historical forces shape individual identity. But this is not the only meeting between history and individual that makes the novel significant, the novel's complexity is also in its combination of memory, myth, fantasy and reality. The line between reality and fantasy continually blurs in Saleem's story, echoing the fluidity and fissures of postcolonial identity.

Acknowledging this interdependency, Saleem says:

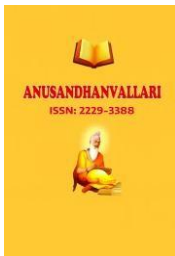
Things, even people, have a way of pouring out into one another . . . We can't shut our eyes to history; it has dripped into me . . . As history pours out of my fissured body (*Midnight's Children* 38).

The image of "leaking" is a powerful one, that implies the fluidity of identity and the impossibility to separate personal experiences from collective history. The "fissured body" is a metaphor for the divided body of the Indian subcontinent after Partition in Saleem's work. His body is marked with the marks of historical trauma, migration, displacement and cultural change. This "leaking of things and people" is Saleem's recurring motif throughout the novel, and serves as a way of visualizing the intersections and the ways histories, cultures, and identities intersect and transform in postcolonial societies.

Further brightening the novel is magical realism, attention-grabbing the theme of the post-colonial identity in Rushdie's fantasy. He is using to juxtapose pieces of fantasy with that of fact, hence his subversion of reality in the western story line. He mixes the fantastical and the historic, this makes the western narrative questionable. Adopting the magical realism trope allows Rushdie to create a rich mental image of the bizarre, outrageous and disturbed course of post-Independent India and dramatize the creative power of cultural revival. This disorganized, unstable, and subjective view of history is depicted in both the character of Saleem's rapport with the supernatural nature of the midnight's children, and the non-linear narrative of the novel.

Midnight's Children is an intriguing postcolonial epic whose focus is post-independence Indian national history in memory, myth and lived experiences. For Rushdie, identity is a process that 'is always hybrid and always changing', shaped by the human stories of colonialism, Partition, migration and nation building. This novel is about how Saleem Sinai is trying to figure out what he's supposed to do with his life, in a place that's seeking to define itself from an era of colonization. While Rushdie demonstrates the multiple, distinct and contradictory nature of the story of India with a historical and a fictional lens, it has to be read that way and told in many voices, multiple-historical and multiple-fictional, rather than in one.

In this magical-realist work, personal history and national history converge and merge with the myth, fantasy, and memory, all of which is one of the most important elements in *Midnight's Children*. By using a multiple personae narrator, Salman Rushdie is able to give readers a factual history as well as imagined histories. The novel is not meant to be a conventional or factual account of what happened, but rather a recollection, interpretation, and narration of history. Rushdie's mode of narration makes official history and history in general increasingly suspect, and provides a layered, subjective, and personal history. So, the history becomes a space of perpetual change, and *Midnight's Children* a moving space of meeting reality and imagination.



Rushdie isn't really interested in the 'history of the world', a multiplicity and hybridity of cultures exists, it's India. The novel makes repetition of the multilingualism, multiculturalism and pluralist social system in India. Rushdie metaphorically likens India to a “chutney” (a type of Indian dish made with a blend of ingredients) of Indian ingredients, Indian cultures, Indian languages, Indian religions, and Indian traditions. Chutney is a very real, yet symbolic character in the novel. Chutney is literally a mixture of ingredients and symbolically the composite and the syncretic nature of Indian civilisation. The identity of India is shaped by the coming together of different communities and cultures, while chutney is flavoured by the melding of various elements.

This metaphor must be significant to appreciate the post-colonial perception of India of Rushdie. He does not feel that culture can be pure and instead celebrates that Indian culture is the result of assimilation of two cultures. In one of his interviews Rushdie says:

My view is that the Indian tradition has always been, and still is, a mixed tradition. The idea that there is such a thing as a pure Indian tradition is a kind of fallacy . . . Indian tradition has always been multiplicity and plurality . . . and the idea of a pure culture is something which in India is particularly absurd (Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands* 50).

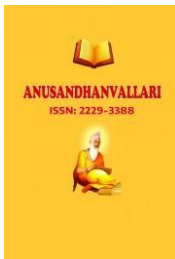
This is in addition to Rushdie's increased liberalism towards ideals and literature as part of cultural diversity. A denial of the 'pure' culture, Rushdie poses questions to the nationalist perspectives that aim to march Indian culture in the confines of the national, exclusivist religious landscape, language and ethnicities. Rather, he portrays India as a multicultural and hybrid nation whose strength is in its diversity. Notably, the novel is predicated on the premise that chutney will be the focal point for the novel, an idea which is significant because it becomes a cultural space for 'interactions, adaptations and transformations' of cultures, a post-colonial India cultural space.

In fact, some of the histories contained in the novel remind us of the postcolonial societies as being multicultural. The private/public dichotomy of Saleem's voice, the autobiography/national history dichotomy are ever-shifting and the fluctuations occur at every turn. How the Partition of India, Indo-Pakistani wars, or the Emergency are viewed through Saleem's personal memory shows elements of fragility of memory and absence of any historical truths. Another aspect through Rushdie's telling of history is that it has many voices, interpretations, viewpoints.

Another aspect is that, the magical-realistic part, that really accentuates it as well. Along with the other abilities of children of the midnight, Saleem's supernatural gift is also symbolic of the aspirations and potentialities of Indian freedom movement. Until then, these imaginaries reveal the illogic and shortcomings of the postcolonial nation-state. The fact that Rushdie can practice magical realism is a testament to the extreme, surreal and unparalleled complexity of postcolonial India outside of the encompassing sphere of the Western realistic tradition. Rushdie's incorporation of myth, folklore, fantasy and oral tradition into his narrative is an effort to regain indigenous ways of representing. Myth, folklore, fantasy and oral traditions are woven into Rushdie's story as a gesture towards the recovery of indigenous modes of representation that have been lost under colonialism.

Additionally, the narration of the novel is strange and its overall disorganized, Saleem is constantly referring to “leakage”, an identity, a history. The hybrid identity, the unstable identity, the ever-changing identity is the theme presented in identity in *Midnight's Children* through historical meetings and cultural exchanges. This fluidness becomes significant particularly after Partition that had shattered geographical, religious, and cultural lines on the Indian subcontinent. Saleem's body and story are, in this way, a metaphor for the many, but interrelated, realities of postcolonial India.

As a post-colonial and post-modern writer, Rushdie challenges conventional ideas of history as simply to say facts. He displays a range of histories: Individual histories with chutnified mixture in memory; Recorded



facts common to individuals is unique and individual. In *Midnight's Children*, he represents the truth of memory, which chooses, cuts out, distorts, magnifies, minimizes, extols and condescends, ultimately making it real.

I told you the truth, I say yet again, Memory's truth, because memory has its special kind. It chooses, discards, changes, emphasizes, downplays, and/or idealizes, nullifies also; but in the end it creates its own reality, its heterogeneous but usually a clear and consistent account of events; no reasonable person ever believes in someone else's account. more than his own. (*Midnight's Children* 292)

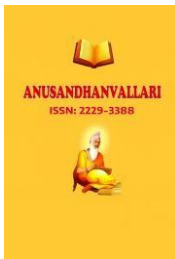
Saleem's identity is complex and complicated. At the time of his birth his biological mother is Vanita. Vanita is not married to Hindu but to a biological father of his named Methwold who is British. Raised by a Muslim businessman and a black-skinned Muslim woman, Saleem represents a variety of cultural influences. He's lost in a multitude of selves and exposes the dizzying diversity characterizing post-colonial India. His life is a representation of the country's hybridity, Abandoning the doctrine of singularity/purity and accepting a mixture of different backgrounds. Thus, Saleem has no distinct identity. Rushdie celebrates the diversity of India by presenting Saleem with many identities, taking an attempt to prove that a post-colonial nation like India can never be single or pure, but always multiple and plural, hybrid.

The concept of cultural hybridity is clearly reflected in the character of Saleem Sinai in *Midnight's Children*. In his portrayal of Saleem, Salman Rushdie depicts a character who is shaped by the political, cultural and historical complexities of postcolonial India. The identity of Saleem is multidimensional and is defined by various religious, class, language, cultural and national affiliations that do not give him any sense of stability and unity. Rushdie highlights the difficulty of forming a combined "pure" or "single" cultural identity in a postcolonial society by focusing on Saleem's split identity. By highlighting Saleem's dual identity, Rushdie calls attention to the inability to form a single "pure" or "one" cultural identity in a post-colonial society. In contrast, in the novel identity is fluid, hybrid, and continually being remade as a result of cultural interaction and historical flux.

Rushdie refuses to accept that the post-colonial states can form a united and unified identity against the colonial power. Saleem's life is a metaphor for this state of being in between. He is not only heir to a large nose that serves as his family's "dynastic mark" but also a very divided identity which goes back to his grandfather Aadam Aziz. While studying scientific and rational traditions in Europe during his time in Germany, Aadam Aziz has become estranged from the certainties and the traditional worldview of his homeland of India. He is deeply affected by the disorienting experience of Western education. He is caught between eastern customs and western modernity and cannot fit in with either one or the other group. This psychological and cultural disconnect is passed on to Saleem.

Aadam Aziz' is a character who suffers from a post-colonial identity crisis, which is a larger issue faced by the post-colonial condition. Rushdie sees colonialism as a force that can throw into disarray the preexisting cultural structures, and create hybrid identities, which are formed through the native and European influence. This is the legacy of fragmentation that Saleem inherits and tries to establish coherence between his individual life and the mainstream narrative of the country, India. For Saleem, the country is a substitute for certainty and faith; a collective myth that can give him a way to make sense of his fragmented life. In trying to tie his sense of self to the historic fate of India, Saleem tries to give substance to his precarious sense of self. His personal history inevitably and consistently connects with the national affairs, implying that fragmentation at the personal level is not different from the fragmentation of the postcolonial nation.

Thus, the sense of hybridity and cultural crossing is a significant one in the depiction of the nation in *Midnight's Children*. The condition of in-betweenness that Saleem received from Aadam Aziz is also passed on to India as a newly emerging country from the colonial condition. Rushdie proposes that postcolonial India can neither ignore nor forget the cultural intersections brought about by colonialism. Instead, a country must carve out



an identity in the face of more than one history, language, religion and tradition. This multiplicity turns into power and provocation to the postcolonial nation-state.

The concept of inheritance and continuity through generations is also a reinforcement of hybridity. Aadam Aziz passes on the legacy of the colonizers to Saleem, as he does with his shaggy cultural memory to India. Through displacement, uncertainty and cultural intersections, this is transmitted across generations and affects the individual, and national, identity. *Midnight's Children* is thus a tale of the passing on of trauma and continuity of cultural diversity. Aadam Aziz's journey into modernity in Europe is a descent of traditional certainties and the advent of a "hybrid post colonial consciousness".

Rushdie's view of hybridity may closely be linked with post-colonial theories which refer to fluid rather than fixed ideas on cultural identity. East vs West, tradition vs modernity, self vs other are continually left upended and challenged throughout the novel. It is important to note in this respect that, although the singular lack of cohesion of Saleem's identity does not show the lack of identity, or the absence of identity in postcolonial India; it does signify that identities are negotiated and adapted through cultural exchanges and are not pure and uniform. Rushdie characterizes India as 'a fractured nation of the past and the present, of variety and difference' and his adoration of plurality is balanced by his consideration of the ambiguity and issues of plurality. *Midnight's Children* provides a thought of hybridity, one which is not exactly a burden, but rather one which is a vital and defining part of the postcolonial condition. Aadam Aziz's and Saleem Sinai's lives intertwine, as do the lives of India and its identity, composed of the eastern and the western worlds, memory and history, tradition and modernity. The novel as such therefore, serves as a strong statement about negotiation, and a process of making meaning and belonging for the individual as well as the national sphere, dealing with divided inheritances.

Language as an Important Aspect for Identity

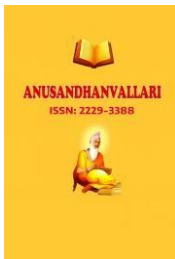
In *Midnight's Children*, language is an important factor in the negotiation of both individual and national identity. Throughout Salman Rushdie's writing, the connection of identity, naming and narration evolves as a theme. The naming of things in the novel mean power, changeling and self-definition. Names are not labels; they denote identity and represent cultural/historical change. Rushdie shows how identities are to be reassessed individually and collectively - in regard to Language and Story.

Renaming is an important aspect of the novel as it emphasizes the fragility and fluidity of identity in postcolonial India. After marrying Ahmed Sinai, Saleem's mother, Mumtaz, is changed to Amina Sinai. Rushdie's literary gift plays with this metamorph as a "reinterpretation of identity through language. But, Aadam Aziz's daughter' had been renamed by her second husband, too, Saleem recounts (*Midnight's Children* 71), and her own child had been renamed as well. The renaming is a symptom of social and patriarchal norms of building individual identity. It's also a reflection of the wider postcolonial process whereby identities are negotiated, negotiated and negotiated, in the changing political and cultural climate. The identity is not static, but is continually constructed through language and culture, and the continual renaming throughout the novel emphasizes this.

Rushdie goes even further in making the importance of language carry over from the personal to the national sphere. Language, in post-Independent India, is one of the significant factors that influences political and regional identities. The nation's unity is endangered by linguistic divisions, as Saleem explains:

The country was no longer bound by rivers or mountains or by the terrain itself but by walls of words; language divided us (*Midnight's Children* 216).

Here the significance of language in the postcolonial context of India is highlighted because of the increasing salience of linguistic identity over geographical/national identity. Language has the power to unite



people and transform social consciousness and political movements, as Rushdie sees it, but it can also function as a divisive force.

Political conflicts between the languages of India after Independence, the historical truth of which is illustrated in the novel, are also portrayed. Political agitations and movements sprouted throughout the country calling for linguistic states and the recognition of regions. According to Saleem, the language marches grew in length, volume and finally became political parties in the city of Bombay (*Midnight's Children* 216). This perception is what allows Rushdie to demonstrate the close connection between language and the imagination of national/regional identity. The novel's linguistic identity is one of the many competing visions of India, and is a reflection of the nation-state's diversity and complexity.

The concept of a 'nation' is tied to the concept of a 'nation in narration' as Saleem connects his own story with the story of India, where language plays a central role. The country turns into the country of plurality and diversity. It is the country of plurality and diversity slowly becoming the country's writing. Play with words, oral history and hybrid linguistic forms is a reflection of the multi-culturalism of Indian society in Rushdie's multilingual narrative style. The very creation of the novel is a linguistic representation of the cultural multiplicity of India. Rushdie transforms the English language by using a mix of English and Indian idioms, expressions and the rhythms of the narrative to help it capture the realities of postcolonial India.

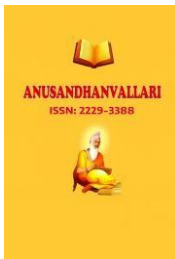
emphasis on the communicative, the linguistic and the collective is further highlighted by the fact that Saleem is able to communicate with the other via telepathy. As Saleem's telepathic abilities escalate more and more, metaphorically, he becomes a "radio", and extends his influence to reach out to all the children of the night in India in the late hours of the night. This supernatural method of communication allows Rushdie to symbolically bring together several voices, cultures, religions and points of view in one story. From a point of being a "product" of history, Saleem becomes a "producer" of history as he interprets and relates to a variety of experiences. The Midnight Children's Conference is a formalisation of this collective consciousness and a chance for unity in diversity. Welcome to the conference, Saleem says:

"No child was born in the first hour of August 15th 1947, between midnight and one a.m. More than one thousand and one children were born within the boundaries of the infant sovereign of India . . . that, in itself, is not an unusual fact . . . as though history, at a point of the highest promise and significance, chose to sow the seed of a future that would actually differ from that which it had seen up to that time: the seeds of a future that was truly new, truly unique" (*Midnight's Children* 352).

The "midnight's children" are a symbol for the children of the new nation. They are varied and of a pluralistic nature and their birth is the culmination of the collective aspirations of independence. Saleem's telepathic network brings together the connections of India's history and people, multiple regional, linguistic, religious and cultural identities are woven together.

Thus, the *Midnight's Children* is a book about the role of the language in the constitution of the subject of the individual and the nation. Naming, storytelling, multilingualism and communication are essential resources which people and the nations use to handle their life. In his novel, Rushdie demonstrates that postcolonial India is heteroglot, heterocultural and heterodramatic. The nation is formed by numerous voices and nation stories, collision and interaction of which create a complex cultural pattern. It is a novel so innovative in its language use and a celebration of the difference in India, yet revealing the tensions and the 'contradictions' of the postcolonial nation state.

The viewpoints, voices and experiences of postcolonial India abound at the Midnight Children's Conference. The conference takes on the role of an important symbolic space where the diversity and multiplicity of the nation are clearly expressed. Children belonging to different backgrounds converge in India, Rushdie says



that it's not a country of one religion, one culture, one ideology, one identification. Instead, a pluralistic and hybrid country are the ones that exist. Saleem demonstrates in this book how India's unique identity lay in its hybridity and how acceptance of this hybridity is necessary to understand the postcolonial Indian identity.

The Midnight Children's Conference can also be interpreted as a symbolic contestation of the hegemonic and authoritative discourse. In a collective, the children oppose the systems of domination imposed by the colonial power and by the rigid nationalism which ensnared India singularly. For Rushdie, the possibility of the voices of the marginalized living together and communicating without violence is a less violent setting that is unique to the conference. This is very much like the postcolonial concept of 'hybridity' of Homi K. Bhabha. Transformation of location involves an explanation, as Bhabha (1994) puts it, that Bhabha provides in *The Location of Culture*.

Hybridity is a problem of representation and individuation of the colonial that is designed to undo, and consequently to interrogate, the work of the colonialist disavowal which is to say, to bring in to the dominant discourse other 'denied' knowledges that displace the foundations of its authority its rules of recognition (114).

Bhabha's theory is useful to discuss how the Midnight Children's Conference operates as a counter hegemonic space, a space where the dominant cultural and political discourses are challenged. During the conference the voices of the non-hegemonic narratives get space, they get to hear each other talk as well as to question the notion of identity and power. Rushdie's magic is accomplished by Saleem's power, which he uses to bring together myriad experiential worlds within the same consciousness, while at the same time and quite cleverly, preserving the diversity and distinctiveness of the worlds.

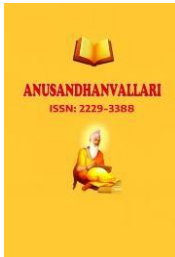
Saleem can hear the voices of people in India, but is able to feel their emotions and problems and their lives. His "qualities" metaphorically transform him into a "radio" which receives and transmits the voices of the nation. S. in this mystical connection makes Saleem symbolic of India. When I experienced it, Saleem tells us:

Once I was a landlord in Uttar Pradesh, my stomach rolling over my pajama-cord, and I gave orders to my serfs to till my fields; another time, I was starving to death in Orissa . . . (*Midnight's Children* 198).

Saleem can portray the experience of various social classes and places of India in this piece. He lives on the side of others, and he is the rich and he is the poor, he is the privileged and he is the oppressed, he is the high and he is the low, he has lived a more diverse social and economic life in the country. Rushdie suggests that the process of creating India's past is a progressive process, a work that has been done by the millions of people belonging to different communities. In this sense, India's past and its identity are produced through Saleem's mediation, by the cumulative experiences of millions of people of different communities.

The telepathic experiences that Saleem has are also transcultural. India is a land of languages, conflicts but not Saleem who crosses all these, using the language of thought. From the purity of Lucknow Urdu to southern blurs of Malayalam (*Midnight's Children* 112), he hears the voices of all classes alike, in many Indian languages and dialects. But in his telepathic communication, words begin to fade, and merge into "universally intelligible thought-forms which far transcended words" (*Midnight's Children* 192). The imagery conveys the notion of communication and unity, even transcendence, across language and region. Despite the nation's linguistic violence and political divisions, Saleem is able to move past the differences and connect with a greater sense of unity among the people of India.

But Saleem's miraculous abilities also hint that total national unity in reality may be hard, if not impossible to achieve. The problem of fragmentation and conflict of the postcolonial nation is not solved by Saleem, who is able to imagine India's multiplicities within himself. He has been a unity of mind, but one that is symbolic rather than actual. Thus, Rushdie celebrates the ideals of national integration, and yet reminds us of the continued division in the postcolonial nation of India.



Saleem's mixedness is a symptom of mixedness of the postcolonial identity. He lives in a number of cultural and social spheres, and cannot be easily classified into the colonial or the nationalist discourse. The condition can be said to be the sign of a hybrid space of destabilisation of the colonial authority and disruption of the rigidity of cultural boundaries as it has been said by Bhabha. "In Postcolonial Theory, Leela Gandhi (1998) writes about Bhabha's theory:

The presence of the colonised subject is, for Bhabha, more ontologically problematic than the one of the colonial subject, since their reaction to the colonial invader is 'half acquiescent, half oppositional, always untrustworthy' and thus creates an unsolvable issue of cultural difference in their very address of colonial cultural authority" (135).

This observation points out Saleem's complex character in the novel. He's not all conformist; he also isn't all rebel. Rather, he is uncertain, constantly changing, and fluctuating his identity. Saleem's hybridity marks the place of the post-colonial subject in ambivalent cultural spaces which are not easily marked out or controllable by systems of power, as Rushdie demonstrates.

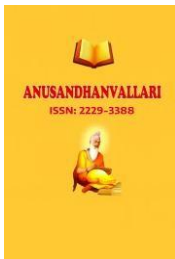
Thus, the *Midnight Children's* Conference is a work of imagination in itself, an allegory of the many dream-god-like features of Indian imagination. India is a multivocal nation, one with multiple intersecting voices, culture, language and history, through Saleem's telepathies, Rushdie portrays. It is the novel that celebrates the diversity and rejects tensions and contradictions. *Midnight's Children* focuses on multiplicity and hybridity, and the opposition to nationhood with its singular narrative is a more complex, changing and renegotiated cultural space for postcolonial India.

Conclusion

The way the construction of the story is amalgamated of traditional and modern architecture is described in the *Midnight's Children*. This multi-layered Salman Rushdie post-colonial vision of India can be seen influenced by myth, the folklore, oral narration, postmodern storytelling techniques and history. The novel is full of examples where Saleem Sinai actively participates in building his own identity as well as Indian national identity (a fusion of the older with the newer tradition). Saleem's story is a symbolic re-construction of this nation, its complexities, its contradictions and its fragmentations, a replica of life within the postcolonial frame.

Rushdie's depiction of India is very similar to the postcolonial theories of Homi K. Bhabha, especially his idea of the "hybridity. Bhabha recognizes that "the history of modernity's antique dreams is to be discovered in the writing out of the colonial/post-colonial moment, against the attempts to normalize the time-lagged colonial moment" (250). This concept is a strong one for Rushdie to make in *Midnight's Children*. Rushdie tries to re-write the history from a "post-colonial" point of view, undermining the colonial view of history and revealing the fractured and hybrid nature of Indian identity. The novel is not a monological or a single history, but one with many voices and contradictions, one that is both multiple and diverse, as the characteristics of the postcolonial nation.

Midnight's Children is a combination of many post-colonial viewpoints and voices. Many of the primary characters in the novel have more than one cultural, linguistic, religious, and social identity. Those stories provide a picture of the postcolonial Indian context, one where identities are not easily categorised into discrete and fixed categories. Rushdie's characters inhabit overlapping cultural terrains, and are illustrative of conceptions of homogeneity and purity in India which are unassailable. Rushdie uses these 'hybrid' identities to contest the idea of an 'original' or 'pure' India, and promote the 'pluralist culture', 'cultural pluralism' that he speaks of.



The theme of hybridity which is an anti-authoritarian critique of nation, as well as an anti-colonial critique of power formations. The novel reflects a highly critical attitude to the politics of national identity, an attitude that aims to establish one national identity for a culturally diverse population. The emphasis of Rushdie in his specialty, the threat of central authority ideology to establish a framework for Indian reality which is singular by excluding plurality. *Midnight's Children* making multiplicity and diversity prominent foregrounding a resistance to colonial domination and limited nationalist histories. In this novel, hybridity is consequently a potent post-colonial strategy with the potency to change cultural hierarchies and authoritative statements. Furthermore, Rushdie's imaginative tale provides other definitions of nation, ones that are cosmopolitan, pluralist and intermingled. He has created his mapping of mixed identities and interwoven histories as a more worldly approach than the simplistic notion of national identity. The novel delves previous to the period, into the issues and anxieties of post colonialization and uproot; house- leaving, second-homecoming, cultural disaffirmation. *Midnight* is a multiple story, a multiple perspective, suggesting that the postcolonial is neither a static and pure nor a single identity but one to be negotiated, adapted and always changed.

One of the pivotal characters of this postcolonial identity work is Saleem Sinai. This conflict of culture and history that Saleem suffers within himself is a conflict right throughout the novel. He knows about the relation of his identity to the composite nature of the nation's identity. He had always focused his interest upon finding overall meaning, unity and coherence in the midst of fragmentation and in this process, he immediately brought his life into the history of India. One can sense the compulsion shared by Saleem when he is shown that his country is one of differences and conflicts and he is asked to represent it, for world or even for his friends. It is the body of Saleem that gets fractured, and the fractured postcolonial India throughout the novel. His physical disintegration is a reflection of the political divisions, cultural conflicts and historical traumas of the nation since Independence and Partition. In For Saleem one of his "fissures" morphs into an emblem of the fragility of the post-colonial self and of the potential for maintaining national cohesion in the midst of a multicultural society. That is not to say that the novel is a wholly tragic work, however. Aadam Sinai, Saleem's son brings a sense of hope and continuity. Aadam comes from a new cast and one that can overcome old ideologies and traumas. His character is capable of regaining the land to help the country rebuild, and move towards a future with greater pragmatism.

To conclude, *Midnight's Children* is a massive post-colonial epic that renders history, identity and nation non-semantic. The fragmented narration and hybrid characters characterize India as a culture pluralistic and contextualized, with multifaceted histories and identities, suggesting an arrangement of magical realism. The novel is a rejection of fixed conceptions of self and nation, and suggests rather the potential of diversity and hybridity in postcolonial societies. The fusion of the individual and the collective also involves a story about the postcolonial state of India and it raises the question for the reader to change their perspective of what 'identity,' 'history,' 'belonging' are or how they are perceived in the modern world.

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