



History, Identity, and Nationhood in Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*: A Postmodern Perspective

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Abstract: Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* is a portending postcolonial novel that implicates personal narrative with national history to represent the complicated realities of modern India. This paper observes the novel from a postmodern consideration, emphasizing its illustration of history, identity, nationhood, and cultural plurality. Rushdie indistinctly draws the boundaries between fact and fiction through the life of Saleem Sinai, whose birth correlates with India's independence and whose personal experiences are a spitting image of the political and social reconstruction of the Indian coastline. The novel reimagines exceptional historical events, including Partition, the Indo-Pak wars, and the creation of Bangladesh, while accentuating the disconnected nature of memory and historical truth. Accomplished in magical realism, non-linear narration, and metafictional techniques, Rushdie challenges fashionable historical narratives and presents history as a contested and subjective fabrication. The study also analyses the novel's portrayal of India's multicultural and multi-religious society, affirming themes of hybridity, diversity, and ethnological cohabitation. By combining individual expectations with national elaborations, *Midnight's Children* contributes a powerful assessment of postcolonial politics and identity formation. The novel ensues as a rich wander through the relationship between self, history, and nation in the postcolonial world.

Keywords: Salman Rushdie, *Midnight's Children*, postcolonialism, postmodernism, magical realism, national identity, partition, cultural hybridity.

Introduction:

In his influential 1980 book *Midnight's Children*, Salman Rushdie makes an effort to depict several types of settings. In this book, he tells tales about the Indian subcontinent, which is a fusion of various realms. The projection of the globe at midnight when India gained independence more than satisfies the epic nature of the book. The universe of *Midnight's Children* is one where fact and fiction coexist. Combining history and fiction is hard because history is factual and fiction is made up. In *Midnight's Children*, the author blends the fictional universe with the historical world.

The world is extensively covered in the *Midnight's Children* narrative, particularly the Indian subcontinent. It is an example of his postmodernist dream. It is a novel that is simultaneously unreasonably subjective, experimental, interrogative, confessional, and polemical. On one level, it serves as a chronology of both India's independence and partition, but the novel's attraction resides in its poetic structure, which has received great praise from critics. It appears to be a political metaphor involving Pakistan and India. But this book's subject framework is extremely broad.

Due to his feeling of providing a broad perspective, he wants to make this work global. In one of his interviews, he discusses the ideology of *Midnight's Children*: Never do anything unless you do it to excess is the central tenet of *Midnight's Children*. Because it was genuinely attempting to find a style—not simply a language—that felt appropriate for the subject. One of the impressions it had of India was that it was tidy, restricted, exceedingly selective, and so forth. India is too crowded, extravagant, vulgar, overblown, and crowded for anyone to handle



all at once.

History, Nationhood, and the Construction of Political Reality:

Saleem's account of India and the many regimes occasionally succeeding is very amazing. All of his descriptions of India demonstrate that his meeting with the country's post-colonial political landscape only offers flimsy promises. Even the most perfect communities in the book are unable to maintain their environment. The critics are haunted by Saleem's insight that there is no escape from repetition: Yes, they will tread on me until the first thousand generations, until a thousand and one midnights have given their awful gifts and a thousand and one children have perished. They will also tread on my son, who is not my son, his son, who will not be his, and his son, who will not be his.

The core theme of *Midnight's Children* is completely preoccupied with the world of division and the effects of events that occurred after partition, making it clear that the book belongs to the tradition of partition novels. A novel about Indian freedom is being discussed. India fought against British domination for a very long time before finally winning its independence. Here is a quotation from Jawaharlal Nehru's speech: Long ago, we placed our trust in fate, and now is the time to honor that commitment. At the stroke of midnight, when the rest of the world is asleep, India will awaken to life and independence. It's a rare occasion when an era ends and we go from the old to the new that a nation's long-repressed essence can finally come to light. Today, we put an end to the negative karma, and India finds herself again.

Saleem's private world is intertwined with the worlds of two nations, or, to put it another way, his personal past is connected to the histories of two other countries. His combined experiences represent both the nation's history before and after division. The novel covers every significant historical event in 20th-century Indian history, including the Jallianwala Bagh Tragedy, the Quit India Movement, the Cabinet Mission, the Freedom Movement, the Muslim League and its role; the riots and bloodshed that followed the country's independence, the Five-Year Plans, the reorganization of Indian states and language rights, Chinese aggression, the theft of a priceless artifact from the Hazratbal Mosque, the Pakistan War, and the liberation of Bangladesh. In addition to the traditional values and modernization attempts, there are also typical Indian divides and dissents, turmoil and disillusionment, inter-communal tensions, and religious fanaticism. The book is not a tiny piece of ivory; rather, it is a narrative with a broader viewpoint that gathers all the different worlds into one small space.

Saleem is aware of his historical importance because his personal and national spheres are so nicely intertwined. His thoughts and emotions are dominated by history, and the novel's opening pages make it clear that he feels paradoxically like he belongs in two different worlds. He claims there are too many stories to be told, too many interwoven lives, events, miracles, locations, rumours, and a complex blending of the fantastical and the everyday. I've been known to swallow entire lives, so if you want to know me, you'll have to do the same. Inside of me, a consuming multitude is tussling and pushing.

Saleem declares his sensitive temperament and the impact of the division on him at the very beginning of the book. In his own way, he seeks to preserve both his life and the world. He goes on: It must start the process of reinventing my existence 32 years before something as evident as present as my clock-ridden, crime-stained birth, which is when it actually began.

Saleem is acutely aware of his place in the universe. He is constantly reminded that history can have a significant impact on his life. He had a historical perspective on his life, especially in India, where tradition and history are more important. Because the present is entirely dependent on the effects of the past, we cannot here separate the two. Saleem shares the same opinion. My family's existence in the world has been tainted by historical coincidences, possibly for the worse.

Saleem is so powerfully resisted by the historical reality that he feels buffeted by it and starts to exhibit signs of



disintegration. His family's past and the conventional environment he lives in have had a significant impact on him. His nose and career have a clear resemblance to those of his grandfather, Adam Aziz. He claims to be able to influence national history at pivotal moments, yet there is one thing he can never get rid of. His arrival in the world as he perceives it was absolutely necessary for historical reasons.

As a young child, Saleem began to have a noticeable impact on events that included the individuals in his vicinity. Despite his best efforts, he is unable to escape the impact of the historical universe that occupies his life. He is unable to roam freely because of his historical sense. He ponders: my simple presence is changing history already; baby Saleem is already causing changes in those around him. Even though his entrance into India's public life is completely unknown, his connection with the great events and public lives of the world was to last virtually his entire life.

Saleem feels that he is to blame for the establishment of important national events. He does not appear to be able to freely let go of his historical sense of living in the present. Although they have different thoughts and emotions, he believes that Pakistan and India are the fruits of the same tree. He described the world in which India and Pakistan are at war: It is my sincere belief that the covert goal of the Indo-Pakistani war of 1965 was nothing short of wiping out my unfortunate family from the face of the planet. It simply takes a careful, objective examination of the bombing pattern from that conflict to comprehend the recent history of our day.

Saleem Sinai is very aware of his place in the cultural and historical context of India. He is fascinated with his birthplace and has a great deal of regard for his magnificent Indian traditions. He is constantly searching for himself through living in duality.

Saleem Sinai's globe includes Bangladesh-related news in addition to developments in India and Pakistan. The narrative of Saleem Sinai, the book's narrator, and the history of Bangladesh are expertly intertwined. The creation of Bangladesh revealed the true nature of the politics that rule Indian and Pakistani society. Politicians are always willing to take advantage of the innocence and emotions of unassuming and innocent people, placing political interests above social and moral norms. Sometimes they lead them incorrectly in an effort to address their issue, and other times they lead them incorrectly for their own purposes.

The Construction of Identity through Saleem Sinai:

The huge scope of *Midnight's Children* lends it an epic feel. This book explores the human journey from ordinary existence to intellectual and spiritual achievement, in addition to history. In this way, Quint's epic counter-tradition that he traces from Lucan to Milton is reminiscent of *Midnight's Children*. To counter the triumphalist history of the Virgilian epic, these epics of the defeated, as Quint calls them, reject linear, teleological narrative. Instead, these pieces cast doubt on the whole idea of an end, implying that the victor cannot control history any more than the victim can. These terms can be used to interpret *Midnight's Children's* ending.

Midnight's Children, despite its fantastic, disorganized, nonlinear, and digressive appearance, reveals an intricate storyline to readers who are willing to pay attention to the various patterns Rushdie uses to create a complex totality. The novel's division into three books might be used as a starting point for rewriting the plot. The first book conjures the past and transports the reader to a time in Indian history when individuals like Saleem's grandfather mixed Western and Indian principles. The second book is about Saleem's childhood in India, which he enjoys before being forced into the adult world. The topics of book three include Saleem's loss of innocence, the growth of disorder, and the admission into a more sinister world.

In *Midnight's Children*, a changeling must figure out who he is in a world in which everything is falling apart. The story of a changeling who must figure out who he is and come to grips with a fragmenting world is another way to view the plot of *Midnight Children*. Saleem is known as the Changeling because, at birth, a politically radical nurse substituted the baby of a wealthy Muslim couple for the true kid of a common street singer who had



been pregnant by a fleeing Englishman. Saleem is the Changeling.

Saleem's and Shiva's fortunes were reversed; Saleem is raised in wealth, whereas Shiva, the son of a wealthy Kashmiri family, grows up to be a street tough. Later, while Shiva uses force and cunning to rise to the top, Saleem enters Shiva's environment in an effort to reclaim his lost identity. Saleem eventually finds himself in a slum where; despite being declared sterile by overzealous family planning activists, he is able to restore memory access. After being seduced and then abandoned by Shiva, Parvati, Saleem's wife and another of *Midnight's Children*, gives birth to Shiva's child at the book's conclusion. In this way, a kid is born who will have the name Sinai as well as the blood, redressing one wrong, albeit in an odd fashion. Because of this, there is reason for optimism that a new generation will succeed the *Midnight's Children* and inherit the Indian earth honestly.

Magical Realism and Postmodern Narrative Strategies:

One of the main themes of *Midnight's Children* is the plight of the contemporary Indian: The dilemma of the modern Indian, struggling with his unique past, torn between the tendency to identify with Indian cultural traditions and his affinity for Western values, is a prominent theme in *Midnight's Children*. Rushdie also wants to demonstrate how the political circumstances that followed the campaign for independence destroyed the aspirations of a secular, egalitarian India and how, by the 1970s, the dream had turned into a nightmare. In other words, Rushdie satirizes Indian politics and politicians in *Midnight's Children* as well as the zealotry, tyranny, corruption, and war-mongering he sees throughout modern-day India.

Another issue that Rushdie explores is the breakdown of traditional political, cultural, and family systems in contemporary India. Rushdie is also adamant about portraying India as a place where anything is conceivable, where the serious and the ludicrous, the strange and the real, the tragic and the humorous, and so on, all work well together. Giving his readers the impression of a disjointed, fragmented universe is an important aspect of Rushdie's novelistic strategy.

In India, the advancement of the individual and the nation's history are inextricably linked. According to Rushdie, India is a nation where individual progress and national history are so linked that every national event is reflected in people's daily lives. This is highlighted in his book *Midnight's Children*, in which Saleem Sinai's tale and India's history are entwined like the Siamese twins. India, and India is Saleem Sinai. The ups and downs of country life, as well as the ups and downs in his own family, are represented by Saleem Sinai for Saleem. He is both the cause and the mover of history, as well as one of its victims.

Midnight's Children by Salman Rushdie and Forster's *A Passage to India* have suddenly become the most discussed and incisive depictions of the Indian subcontinent in English fiction. Additionally, he has given the academic community what nearly appears to be textbook illustrations of everything that postmodernist criticism claims we should look for in any self-respecting contemporary novel. Rushdie provides illustrations for each topic that requires them, whether it be reader response theory, meta-fiction, or the propensity of language to deconstruct. These characteristics, however, are insufficient to explain why his writings are so well-liked among readers in general. And it does appear as though the more classic aspects of fiction, which he also manages to include, run the risk of being disregarded by his academic defenders. We will generally infer that the zeal with which he sharpens his political axes needs no more explanation of such qualities. What will most catch my eye is the inventiveness with which Rushdie manages to forge structure, cohesion, and unity out of content that is amorphous due to its size, quality, and postmodernist presentation.

Multiple personalities exist in Saleem Sinai. But the novel's most astounding attempt at unification is undoubtedly made possible by his various personalities and the frequently asserted metaphoric analogy of his life narrative to that of India. First and foremost, he is the biological son of William Methwold and Vanita, the unintentional adoptive son of Ahmed and Amina, and the later assumed son of Wee Willie Winkie and Vanita as is India, of Hindu, Muslim, and English elements. In addition, he is Shiva in the most literal sense possible. Further father



figures include General Zumkar, who disowns his own son in favor of Saleem; Nadir Khan, a potential father; Dr. Schaapsteker, who revives him from death; and Picture Singh, who adopts a resurrected Saleem after Parvati destroys him into invisibility. According to Saleem, he was given the ability to create new parents for him whenever necessary as part of his birthright.

The participants in midnight children's conferences represent newfound promise in a developing nation. Even more stunningly, he transforms into the living embodiment of this emblem of young hope, an optimism that is too soon to be dashed in a new nation, after he learns his uniting function in relation to the 581 Midnight Children survivors. The collective of the Midnight Children can only be through him, the channel through which they can communicate.

Cultural Hybridity and the Construction of Indian Identity:

In *Midnight's Children*, science fiction, fantasy, and fable are all mixed together. This emphasis on Saleem's numerous personalities may be a development of or be related to a theme from Rushdie's first book, *Grimus*. A blend of science fiction, fantasy, and fable, the story's guiding idea is that a single person has the capacity to exist concurrently in a number of distinct dimensions, while he is unaware of his other selves in none of them.

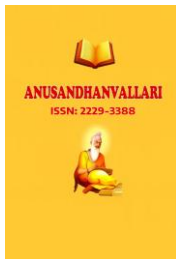
In *Midnight Children*, the diversity and richness of Indian culture are depicted truthfully. Indian culture has always been multifaceted, diverse, and cosmopolitan. Indians have a history of being skilled robbers of newcomers. They accept the intriguing components while rejecting the rest. Therefore, Indian culture is not purist; those who speak most fiercely about purism in Indian culture are typically extremists of the Hindu religion, while in Pakistan, those who speak about a pure culture are mostly extremists of the Muslim religion.

However, this plurality of Indian culture is largely the result of Hinduism's plurality, whose multitude of deities and avatars gives testament to the number of different religions it has been able to embrace and reincorporate, in contrast to Islam and other monotheisms, which are exclusive. According to Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, it is this syncretic understanding of Indian philosophy that has enabled the intellectual and religious tolerance that has grown so prominent throughout the years in Indian thought and the Indian mentality. Recent disputes between religious groups, which are the result of modern political factionalism, are not a product of the Indian mind but, rather, run counter to that nation's special talent for adaptability and tolerance, which embraces all groups and communities in its idea of one truth and one life.

Up until Saleem loses his memory, *Midnight's Children* is a book that seeks to include everything that is Hindu in spirit. As a book that seeks to cover everything, *Midnight's Children* is largely Hindu in spirit up until the point where Saleem loses his memory. After that, the book starts to resemble *Shame* more and more. In fact, even before that setback, Saleem's crossing the border into Pakistan rendered the Midnight Children's tragic but ultimately heart-warming idealism useless.

The book's tone quickly shifts to one that is more political and satirical. According to Saleem, he was surrounded by an unlimited number of alternate realities throughout my youth in India, yet during my adolescence in Pakistan, he was lost and confused among an equally infinite number of falsehoods, unrealities, and lies. Even more terrible than anything in *Shame* is the description of the conflict in Pakistan. And when Saleem goes back to India, nothing changes. It was the widow, Out-Swim Swift, who decided his fate. We are already living in a world of shame on both sides of the border.

Rushdie's works in general, and *Midnight's Children* in particular, are frequently linked to postmodern literature. Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* is associated with various subgenres of literary fiction. Rushdie's fiction shows a considerable amount of influence from both traditional and modern Indian culture. The story has elements from traditional Indian mythology and religion, as well as from contemporary Bollywood, the burgeoning, populist film industry centered in Bombay. *Midnight's Children* is the most comprehensive representation of life and



character on the subcontinent that any single book is capable of offering. This is due to its sheer exuberance, wide range of cultural sources, and attempt to include as much of India's vast cultural identity and contemporary history as possible.

The ancient city of Bombay (now Mumbai) has been divided into the states of Gujarat and Maharashtra as a result of linguistic intolerance. Rushdie reveals the connections by taking a humorous approach. Rushdie uses humor as a smokescreen to draw attention to the tragic decay and weakness of a once-powerful subcontinent. Rushdie abhors any form of political, religious, or social aggression or self-promotion. But uses the loveliest language to tell us a narrative about Saleem Sinai and India.

The events and knowledge in the lives of three generations of the Sinai family following the fictional level are depicted in *Midnight's Children*. The day starts in Srinagar and continues as they go via Amritsar, Agra, and Bombay before arriving in Karachi, where Saleem is the only one to return, sneaking back in the witch Parvati's basket and experiencing the horrors of the catastrophe that was inflicted upon India. The novel does a good job of portraying the intertwining of autobiography and narrative, the startling break in chronology, and the search for identity and the meaning of life for the readers' tastes.

Conclusion:

Different novelists in the work take issue with the frequent forward or backward movement in time that makes it challenging to track the appropriate sequence of events in the protagonist's life. The narrator jumps to his thirty-first birthday at the beginning after stating his birthdate. He then delves far into the past before emerging in the present and setting out into the future. His works expertly depict the problem of dual identities and the tensions of immigration. His writing, both fictional and nonfictional, has always been primarily concerned with the concept of the nation.

Many other individuals also appear to be moving through historical events and accidentally running across crucial moments in India's growth. Thus, Saleem's grandfather is on his knees after a powerful sneeze when Brigadier Dyer's fifty machine gunners start shooting in the 1919 Amritsar massacre; Saleem's father purchases one of Meth World's villas; Saleem is born at the same time as India; and nearly all of his major life events, which ultimately result in the destruction of *Midnight's Children* and also India at the time of the announcement of the Emergency, are unintentional. As they move furiously to create their identities, Saleem and India must deal with the confusion of their ancestry.

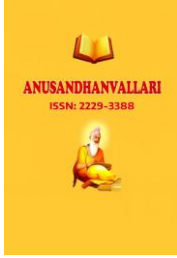
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