



International Journal of Languages and Culture

Publisher's Home Page: <https://www.svedbergopen.com/>



Research Paper

Open Access

Subjective nature of history in Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*

D. Venkateswar Rao^{1*}

¹Associate Professor of English, K.G. Reddy College of Engineering & Technology, Moinabad, Hyderabad, India.
E-mail: dvradsams@gmail.com

Article Info

Volume 1, Issue 1, March 2021

Received : 14 November 2020

Accepted : 10 February 2021

Published : 05 March 2021

doi: [10.51483/IJLC.1.1.202138-41](https://doi.org/10.51483/IJLC.1.1.202138-41)

Abstract

The Indo-Anglican Fiction writer Salman Rushdie's subjective nature of historical novel *Midnight's Children* reflects the lives of common people pre- and post-colonial Literature of India. The novel is about India and its sub-continent with deep insights of the people and their sufferings. For centuries India was ruled by Kings, Invaders so Indians lived like not as physical slaves but also mental slaves. They hadn't their own ideology. British colonialism made Indians more miserable. There was no freedom of expression and basic rights to the people. The post-colonialism is a new concept came out of elite intelligentsia, the free independent India where to provide freedom to everybody. The term magic-realism appeared in 1955 by the German critic Franz Rob. Gabriel Gracia, Colombian novelist, in his novel *One Hundred years of Solitude* used a new concept Magic Realism or Magical Realism. Rushdie preferred the concept, used the term occasionally to narrate fiction. Magic realism is a concept blend History with Myth. Rushdie, through this novel he brought out real history of India through Saleem Sinai who is the protagonist of *Midnight's Children*.

Keywords: *Indo-anglican, Colonialism, Magic realism, Protagonist, Historical influence*

© 2021 International Journal of Languages and Culture. This is an open access article under the CC BY license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license, and indicate if changes were made.

1. Introduction

Salman Rushdie was born on 19 June 1947 in Bombay now Mumbai, then British Dynasty. He migrated to Kashmir because his father was a medical doctor so Rushdie lived his initial life in Bombay, Kashmir both the cities were diversified in culture, religion, political differences. *Midnight's children* is his semi autobiography where he projected true spirit of India and its subcontinent. The present Rushdie's rendering of past events is quite often read as cleaving tightly to the historical record, while at the same time treating such events cavalierly, as if they are merely stories, on an ontological level no different from his own novels. *Midnight's Children* presents theorization and provide an account of actual historical events in the years before, during, and following Indian Independence and Partition of India and Pakistan.

2. Literature Review

Literature can be expressed through history. Fiction has a different orientation of explanations which directly touches the heart of the reader. The ability of the writer lies in the effective description of the situation. One can witness how different sociocultural relations, modes of treatment, cognitive variations combined with inner tension to produce a silent revolution in India. How this revolution gets a new aesthetics of literary genre can be understood only when one

* Corresponding author: D. Venkateswar Rao, Associate Professor of English, K.G. Reddy College of Engineering & Technology, Moinabad, Hyderabad, India. E-mail: dvradsams@gmail.com; ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4594-0701>

pays one's attention at Salman Rushdie's novels. The researcher wants to focus on representation of the struggle of poor in Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981). At the same time the technique and style how, the novelist adopted to express strongly the feelings of the suppressed. '*Midnight's Children*' is Rushdie's interpretation of a period of about 70 years of India's modern history dealing with the events leading to the partition and beyond. The identification between the public and private strands is complete in this novel and that gives unity to the novel. It is important political documents that draw material from history, sociology and politics.

3. Narration

History and historical representation are constructed from myth, from language, and from ideology, it also installs a version of events it offers as more truthful than that of traditional accounts. In doing so, it offers that narrative is a necessary and vital part of historical representation, but that it also must be supplemented by something else. The central purpose of *Midnight's Children* is accomplishing both a critique of history and a resituation of historical fiction. Rushdie's implication is that if history is composed of fictions, then fiction can be composed of history. It is perhaps the most potent message of *Midnight's Children*". Woolf's novel portrays the traditional plotting of history as one of the tools of patriarchal domination and Swift's novel offers narrative as a strategy of comfort and relief to cover up or mitigate traumatic events whose wounds might be better left exposed, *Midnight's Children* seems to offer narrative as a tool of political, social and religious domination, in particular through the narrative of dynastic succession and Hindu religious dominance advanced by the Nehru/Indira Gandhi/Sanjay Gandhi dynasty in post-Independence India. Likewise, Pakistan's narrative of religious mission and the founding of a truly Islamic state are exposed in Shame as merely another story, constructed for the purposes of hegemony, but with very real effects on those forced to live within its plot. That these competing Indian and Pakistani narratives have continued in various forms into the present-day subcontinent makes Rushdie's confrontation of these issues remarkably relevant still, some 35 years after *Midnight's Children* was first published. It would be disingenuous to observe that Rushdie's attack on narratives of dominance takes the form of an attack on the use of narrative itself in the representation of reality and history. Rather, the distaste exhibited towards certain types of dominant narrative in *Midnight's Children* is not countered with a lack of narrative, but rather through an abundance of narratives, both traditional and alternative, often incorporating the monumental events and "great actions" of "great men" but examined with different interpretations or different accounts of their causation. Indeed, much of Rushdie's most acclaimed novel seems devoted to the countering of the famous political slogan "Indira is India and India is Indira" with the claim that the fictional middle-class Bombay youth Saleem is India, and that India is Saleem through an ironic examination of the very same events that most often figure in classical accounts of India's history. While Rushdie's fanciful and abundant narratives in *Midnight's Children* do attempt to "swallow the world" and all of its players and events, these narratives are supplemented by a shadowy series of events that are obliquely referred to but never explicitly narrated as part of the novel's multitude of stories. The present absence (or absent presence) of these events, centered around the figure of Mahatma Gandhi, illustrate the novel's non-narrative undercurrent and the insistence on the representation and inclusion of events that do not fit into a particular narrative but whose truth and reality cannot be erased. Through a succession of strategically placed "errata," Rushdie hints at the impossibility of any narrative containing all of the events necessary for a true fidelity to a past that is necessary to define the national and international present. The incapacity of Saleem's narrative to include these important events reveals the shortcomings of narration while insisting on fidelity. Rushdie's alternation of unifying and coherent narrative and excessive and fragmentary non-narrative suggests some different possibilities for how the historical real can be, and should be, represented.

India is a land of diversities, its cultural, religious, linguistic and intellectual variations are a plenty in India but the country was divided based upon only on political parameters. That is the cause of this kind of agony and Restlessness. Smt. Indira Gandhi, the then prime minister of India, the successor of Pundit Jawaharlal Nehru who was the back bone of Indian freedom struggle for independence and the first Prime Minister of India. Indira Gandhi as a politician took a wrong decision to impose emergency throughout the Country without democratic concern. All the powers were given to authorities and people were treated like materials than humans. It roused a deep impression upon Salman Rushdie to raise his voice through his "*Midnight's children*". The book is a true satire on the congress government and its leader Mrs. Gandhi. Rushdie directly criticized with his sharp and powerful voice through his writing. The book "*Midnight's Children*" is simply not a book to read, but to read the history and the real-life situation after the independent Indian.

The Oxford educated Salman Rushdie's deep impressions are in India and its subcontinent. The *Midnight's Children* are an allegory of events of India before and after the independence India. *Midnight's children* are long narrative historical and political novel. The entire story is narrated in the form of first person. It indicates that the story is about

the memories, ideas, feelings and deep impressions of the author before and after the formation of the Independent India. It is a semi-auto biography of Salman Rushdie. The entire story is presented to Padma who is his care taker and future wife. The protagonist and the narrator of the story is Saleem Sinai, born at the exact moment when India got independence, August 15 1947. He is born with telepathic powers and magical powers. His grandfather, Dr. Aziz who was a doctor by profession, lived in Kashmir. Aziz was Indian by birth but educated by the west. He was escaped from Amritsar, Punjab massacre in 1919 (in Jallian Walla Bagh massacre) It was a historical mistake where hundreds of people lost their lives and several thousands were wounded physically as well as psychologically. The family moved from one place to another place for their survival. Rushdie selected the scene because of its historical and religious diversifications in the Indian subcontinent. He himself was born and brought of sometime in the Kashmir area. He got deep impressions which were happened at the time of Independence. Rushdie's family moved from Kashmir to Bombay as like Dr. Aziz's family moved from place to place. It is not the voice of Aziz but the voice of Rushdie. It would be disingenuous to observe that Rushdie's attack on narratives of dominance takes the form of an attack on the use of narrative itself in the representation of reality and history. Rather, the distaste exhibited towards certain types of dominant narrative in *Midnight's Children* is not countered with a lack of narrative, but rather through an abundance of narratives, both traditional and alternative, often incorporating the monumental events and "great actions" of "great men" but examined with different interpretations or different accounts of their causation. Indeed, much of Rushdie's most acclaimed novel seems devoted to the countering of the famous political slogan "Indira is India and India is Indira" with the claim that the fictional middle-class Bombay youth Saleem is India, and that India is Saleem through an ironic examination of the very same events that most often figure in classical accounts of India's history. While Rushdie's fanciful and abundant narratives in *Midnight's Children* do attempt to "swallow the world" and all of its players and events, these narratives are supplemented by a shadowy series of events that are obliquely referred to but never explicitly narrated as part of the novel's multitude of stories. The present absence (or absent presence) of these events, centered around the figure of Mahatma Gandhi, illustrate the novel's non-narrative undercurrent and the insistence on the representation and inclusion of events that do not fit into a particular narrative but whose truth and reality cannot be erased. Through a succession of strategically placed "errata," Rushdie hints at the impossibility of any narrative containing all of the events necessary for a true fidelity to a past that is necessary to define the national and international present. The incapacity of Saleem's narrative to include these important events reveals the shortcomings of narration while insisting on fidelity. Rushdie's alternation of unifying and coherent narrative and excessive and fragmentary non-narrative suggests some different possibilities for how the historical real can be, and should be, represented.

The novel started with first person and slowly moved to third person narrative. In the very beginning chapter Rushdie introduced himself as the protagonist Salim Sinai. The character experiences are his own life experiences in Bombay as well as in Kashmir. The whole book is divided in to three separate books. The first of the book is titled as "*The Perforated Sheet*" in which the writer explains his memories and agonies in the democratic India. He narrates individual persons as well as events but the reflections are about India and Indians. The second part of the book is "*The Fisherman's Pointing Finger*" In this particular chapter the writer describes the situations some of them which were happened in his own personal life. His wife Padma became the main character and through the character Rushdie recollected his own memories. The third of the book is "*The Buddha*". This chapter deals with humanism and the value of peace. In this particular scene, Rushdie stressed on political commotion which was happened in Bangladesh. The Pakistani military attacked the border areas of Bangladesh, killed thousands of people and disrupted their lives. Saleem himself involved to save the innocent lives through the Sundarbans covering of Bangladesh and Indian. Sundarbans is the largest forested area which is located in west Bengal. The migration of the people from Bangladesh to India is the biggest migration in the history of the world.

4. Conclusion

The entire story is narrated memories of the past histories, cultures, religions and their identities. *Midnight's Children* are not a simple book to read and understand the content. It is a book about human feelings, memories, and ideas of an individual as well as the whole nation. The characters and the situations in this novel are universal. It is an epitome of India and its subcontinent situations. Rushdie is a great reader of ancient, medieval and modern literature through historical, cultural and political perspective. In this particular novel, Rushdie used Magic Realism and Prime Narrative concepts excessively. It is the reason; *Midnight's Children* stood the best modern fiction among all 20th century novels. The novel achieved Booker prize award as well as the best of the Booker Prize award.

Bibliography

Salman, Rushdie (1981). *Mid Night's Children*. Vintage Books.

- Satya Brat Singh, *et al.* (1992). *Historians Distanced from History, the Novels of Salman Rushdie*, G R Taneja and R K Dhavan Ed. New Delhi: ISCS and Prestige.
- Pathak, R.S. (1990). *Salman Rushdie's Treatment of Alienation Indian Fiction in English: Problems and Promises*, eds., R S Pathak (New Delhi, Northern Book Centre, 1990).
- Shekhar, Sudhanshu (2004). *History and Fiction*: New Delhi: Prestige Books.
- Roberts, Geoffrey (2001). *The History of Narrative Debate 1960-2001*. Routledge, London, 2001.
- Reder, Michael (ed.) (2000). *Conversations with Salman Rushdie*, Jackson: University Press of Mississippi.