



Magic Realism an endeavor to exceed the restraint of Realism: A study of *Midnight's Children* a select novel by Salman Rushdie

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Abstract: Languages in order to find his own voice to tell his unrooted and fusion stories. Hybridity and unrootedness are indispensable aspects of his writing. This study traces Rushdie's experiments with languages from *Midnight's Children*, the novel where he felt he found a voice of his own. From one novel to the next, Rushdie found new inflections of his voice in his narrators and characters, which "chutnified" English, "translated" their languages into their idioms, aestheticized and palimpsested their world, "perplexed" it, turned it into a "hypertext", or seduced the readers with their stories. *The Midnight's Children* is a magic realist device emphasizing the sustained struggle to come to terms with identity within the polarities of the post-colonial. Rushdie through his novels has brought a revisionist stance to history in re-positioning the postcolonial subject in the vista of the world. He has thus proved unique in emancipation of the colonial subject from the colonizer's control and dominion of history and politics. Magic Realism has been variously defined as an endeavor to exceed the restraint of Realism a free concoction of fantasy and reality a method that holds the mirror at a trivial angle to reality. However, what is appealing to note is that it was Rushdie himself who first claimed for his fiction, the mode of magic realism. Salman Rushdie used magic realism as an apparatus of determined political and religious allegory. As is apparent, in *Midnight's Children*, Rushdie attempts to chronicle concurrently the histories of an individual and a nation. It's quite a unique nature of national history that emerges from *Midnight's Children*. And it gives the by and large picture of post independent India.

Keywords: Aestheticized, concoction, emancipation, endeavor, hybridity, palimpsested, polarities, uprooted,

Narration

Salman Rushdie, one of the most well-known writers of Indian Diaspora, settled in England, shot into fame through his magnum opus, *Midnight's Children*. After the publication of *Midnight's Children*, Salman Rushdie was hailed as a trend setter in Indian Writing in English. There are many more reasons for the magnificent success of his novel. One of them was the inimitable style and

narrative technique. *Midnight's Children* won for him Booker of Bookers prize in 1993. In 2008 it was selected as The Best of Bookers. *Midnight's Children* is also the only Indian novel on **Time** \$ list of the hundred best English-language novels since its beginning in 1923. Rushdie has applied many exceptional and innovative techniques in his novel which are appreciable doubtlessly. He has applied



fantasy, magic realism, history and individuals and several others in his works.

In general it is experiential that a novelist uses substitute methods of "screening" and "telling" - of presentation how the characters speak or act of for themselves and of intrusively telling how they do these things. Rushdie believes that art of fiction does not begin until the novelist thinks of his story as a substance to be shown, to be so exhibited that it will tell itself. Rushdie's aims are as assorted as his achievement. And so, he has applied varied techniques in *Midnight's Children* which can be considered a "Non-fiction Novel" of political allegory. It just seems a political allegory only as Rushdie's religious allegory is engrossed rapidly into the political because religious one has always been a heady weapon for the milers of India.

At a quick look *Midnight's Children* gives the intuition of a vast determined vague work in which some of the author's intentions and devices are at cross-purposes. The protagonist narrator strikes one as not only preternaturally clever, but also as playful, omniscient and wholly implausible as a human being. Until one begins to see that Saleem Sinai is, in fact intended to be simultaneously Rushdie's alter ego and an allegorical depiction of India's Independence and the life of Saleem is in reality the history of that independence Saleem, like Rushdie, having been born at the defined hour of the end of the British rule.

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a trivial angle to reality. However, what is appealing to note is that it was Rushdie himself who first claimed for his fiction, the mode of magic realism. Salman Rushdie used magic realism as an apparatus of determined political and religious allegory. As is apparent, in *Midnight's Children*, Rushdie attempts to chronicle concurrently the histories of an individual and a nation. It's quite a unique nature of national history that emerges from *Midnight's Children*. And it gives the by and large picture of post independent India.

Finally coming to Rushdie's use of English it is thought to be born out of a artistic consciousness, and a insurrection of English language. But what one essentially finds in him is a superfluous mix of English, Hindi and Urdu words, ensuing in what he himself calls *Chutnification* is criticized by many authors. They call it a genus of Pidgin English, or what used to be called Butler English. In spite of this type of criticism, Rushdie has made a momentous place for him in the Global English setting. Because, it was Rushdie himself, not any other Indian writer that gets invited by the New York Times to write concerning India and Indian literature.

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It taxes the author's abilities greatly to sustain Saleem Sinai's integrity as a human being while at the same time capturing within his person all the elation, the tensions and the ordeal of



independence his difficulties are compounded assorted by the fact that Saleem is also the narrator-protagonist of the novel. The best of us would at the outlook of having to continue so many instantaneous identities. Saleem Sinai and his creator come out of the tribulation battered but with their honors somewhat unbolted.

Saleem Sinai is, above all a highly self-conscious narrator. He is by turns aggressive, coy, strident, subtle, fatalistic, defiant, coarse, frivolous and grave. The dominant mood of the novel seems to swing between the apocalyptic and the expansive. Now Saleem is infuriating, keeping his interlocutrix, Padma, on the tenterhooks, being negligent. In illuminating his parent-age. And again he is hammering a long narrative out all at one go in gasping haste in large paragraphs without any full-stops.

Padma, described by Saleem as

"The lotus goddess, whose most common appellation amongst village fold is 'The One Who Possessed Dung', is also his artistic conscience. She pulls him up whenever he appears to be Straying." But here is Padma at my elbow, bullying me back into the world of linear narrative, the universe of what-happened: "At tills rate", Padma complains, "You'll be two hundred years old before you manage to tell about your birth." (MC. 38)

A breathless passage without any full-stops, but with capitals to show where these should have been is Rushdie's method of signifying haste and perplexity,

"But imagine the confession in my head Where, behind the hideous face, above the tongue tasting of soap, hard by the perforated eardrum, lurked a not-very-

tidy mind, as full of bric-a-brac as nine-year-old pockets.. Imagine yourself inside me somehow, looking out through my eyes, hearing the noise, the voices, and now the obligation of not letting people know, the hardest part was acting surprised, such as when my mother said; Hey Saleem guess what we're going for a picnic to the Aarey Milk Colony and I had to go Ooo, exciting!, when I had known all along because I had her unspoken inner voice [...]." And so on for two pages. (MC. 202-203)

Long before this, however, Padma has been made to concede,

"At last [...] you've learned how to tell things really fast." (MC. 126) Rushdie is grateful to devote his narrator-protagonist with superhuman vision and astonishing powers of thought analysis in order to make his omniscient accounts of a dozen dissimilar lives as well as the life of the nation probable as coming from a single witness. Saleem is extremely conscious about the collision of his narrative on listeners: "[...] these events, which have tumbled from my lips any old how, garbled by haste and emotion, are for others to judge." (MC. 28) But he can diminish the diversity of strands that he weaves into his narrative of which he is the centre: "If I seem a little bizarre, remember the wild profusion of my inheritance [...] perhaps, if one wishes to remain an individual in the midst of the teeming multitudes, one must make oneself grotesque." (MC. 126)

The clear cogent analysis of the interface between the personal and the national can be detected under the pretense of a whimsical exhibition of grammatical learning. As opposed to these knowingly demonstrated parallelisms between national and personal life, there are,



during the novel passages of uncomplicated journalistic account of national events. Thus in Book Two the chapter entitled "Love in Bombay" contains a description of the Bombay Language riots of 1957 beginning,

"It is a matter of record that the States Reorganization Committee had submitted its report to Mr. Nehru as long ago as October 1955; a year later, its recommendations had been implemented. India had been divided anew into fourteen states and six centrally administered 'territories'. But the boundaries of these states were not formed by rivers, or mountains, or any natural features of the terrain; they were, instead, walls of words [...] "(MC. 225)

The interface between fiction and the film would seem to justify a volume to it. But it may not be long before some endowed director, taking the clue from Rushdie, discovers the filmic possibilities of *Midnight's Children* and sets about filming it. Thus Rushdie's mode of narration is unique and exceptionally outstanding.

At the very end of *Midnight's Children*, Saleem speaks about a way which he playfully calls "*chutnification*". From this novel on, the contentment one takes in reading Rushdie's fiction and non-fiction books cannot miss the appealing ring Saleem gives to writing here. Although he designedly gives the impression that he speaks about cooking, Saleem uses this equivalence with Indian cuisine to refer to the new language Rushdie himself has fictitious in this novel. The best way to get to the real meaning of his books and enjoy them, Rushdie implies, is by tasting their delicate merge of spices and flavors, which has an Indian name, "*chutney*".

What Rushdie tried to attain in the first place as a writer was finding a voice of his own so that he could tell his stories that are nobody else's stories in words that are nobody else's words. Once that voice found with Saleem Sinai, the narrator of *Midnight's Children*, the novel which sanctified him as an exceptional writer, Rushdie had Saleem experiment with the several languages with which he himself had grown up, containing them in a '*chutnified*' English. Allegorically, that is both cooking and magic.

Rushdie uses the narrative style of magical realism in which myth and fantasy are blended with real life. *Midnight's Children* and *Shame* are examples of magical realism. Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary define magic realism as, "a literary genre or style associated especially with Latin America that incorporates fantastic or mythical elements into otherwise realistic fiction—called also *magical realism*" ("magic realism"). It is a narrative technique that blurs the difference between fantasy and reality. Magic realism is characterized by an equal recognition of the ordinary and the extraordinary. It fuses lyrical and, at times, fantastic writing with an examination of the character of human subsistence and an implied criticism of society, mainly the privileged.

When one analyses the novel one finds three major aspects of Rushdie's use of history in the book: (1) the commingling of autobiography and narrative, (2) the outstanding contravene of chronology and (3) the quest for identity and the meaning of life. In the novel, there is a recurrent forward or rearward shift in time that makes it complicated to mark out the proper series of events in the life of the protagonist. At the very onset,



after having given the date of his birth, the narrator somersaults to his thirty-first birthday. He then dives deep into the past only to come again to the present, and then to get on upon the future.

In the words of Reena Mitra:

This marked-break in chronology in the novel reveals the author's intention of giving not a record of events in order of their occurrence but of projecting the basic historical truth as interacting with and affecting the life of the individual, that is chiefly, the author himself as represented by the protagonist. On the one side, we have Saleem's personal life, and, on the other, corresponding to this is the life and history of the nation. The story traces the various events in the life of the central character that synchronize with major happening in the recent history of India. The parallel that is worked out, though strained at times, is designed to allow an understanding of the individual's life in terms of historical forces. (4)

Regarding the sever in chronology in the novel, it is clear from the very opening that the author never had in mind a persistent biological account of the life of the hero or a documentation of historical events in order of time. In the novel, on the one side we have Saleem's personal life, and on the other, consequent to this is the life of the nation. Mitra writes:

The story traces the various crises in the life of the protagonist that synchronize with the major events and movements in the history of modern India. The Jallianwala Bagh tragedy, the Quit India Movement, the role of Muslim League, the post-Independence riots, the Five Year Plans, the re-organization of the states in India, the language agitation,

the Chinese aggregation, the theft of the sacred relic from Hazrathbal mosque, the war with Pakistan, the independence of Bangladesh, the Emergency and other historical landmarks. (12)

The *Midnight's Children* is a magic realist device emphasizing the sustained struggle to come to terms with identity within the polarities of the post-colonial. They are, by virtue of their midnight birth, 'children of the times,' as Rushdie has asserted, as much as magical creations. Fantasy is deliberately used as a device or a technique by many postmodernist novelists. Rushdie has used fantasy naively and marvelously in *Midnight's Children*. He understood that fantasy could be used as a method for producing intensified images of reality. In the words of Madan M. Sarma:

"In *Midnight's Children* Rushdie, in fact, presents intensified images of reality as he sees it in the Indian sub-continent in the decades preceding and following India's independence. The disparate materials pertaining to those times of political upheaval, popular upsurge, growing optimism, and chaotic developments that often bordered on the fantastic could not have been woven together by any other method but that of fantasy." (54)

Conclusion:

The colonizer had encroached the colonizer's history and underprivileged him of his political situation in that history. Rushdie through his novels has brought a revisionist stance to history in re-positioning the postcolonial subject in the vista of the world. He has thus proved unique in emancipation of the colonial subject from the colonizer's control and dominion of history and politics. This study traces Rushdie's experiments with



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