

Thematic Analysis of Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*

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1. Introduction

Sir Ahmed Salman Rushdie was born on 19th June, 1947. He is British Indian novelist and essayist. His novels are complex, many layered with episodic causality, bearing strong influence of post modernist novels as well as principles of the Indian art forms. His exalted diction, elevated word usage and felicitous word phrases leave strong impinge on the readers. We see the use of daring literary innovations and disorderliness, such the unconventional word play. He gives the heightened picture of reality through a realization of true self and thus rejects the partial realities. However while doing so, he renders this reality with a touch of fantasy.

Rushdie's technique of novel writing deserves the highest place in Indo-Anglian literature. About his technique Rusdhie told in an interview: "for instance there is a technique that Dickens used a kind of background or setting for his works which is completely naturalistic back ground, he imposes totally surrealistic image." What I tried to do thought not to quite in the Dickensian, way was to make sure that the background, the bedrock of the book was eight-that Bombay like Bombay, the cities were recognizably correct so that fantasy could be rooted in that kind of reality.¹

Rushdie is a master manufacturer of felicitous phrases. He gives them aromatic ingredients. They are diffused all over his works. His oeuvre is resplendent with them. Saleem Sinal's seminal description of himself gives a glance of that:

Child of an unknown union, I have had more mothers than most mothers have children, giving birth to parents has been one of my stranger talents-a room of revise fertility, beg and the control of contraception, and even of the widow herself.²

Salman Rushdie uses the device of one of the oldest narrative techniques i.e. of the first person narrator recounting his life story to a sympathetic listener. He pours a long narrative at one go in breathless haste in large paragraphs without any full stops. Padma named after the lotus goddess pulls him up when he falters. Rushdie openly expresses his contempt for linear narration. The novel does not have a continuous forward narration rather it is complex and interrelated, based on structure repetitions and episodic casualties, which is in fact one of the strong points of the novel, as it is the perfect hitching of the content to the form. Rushdie disappears the linear narration as Saleern says:

But have is Padma at my elbow, bullying me back into the world of linear narrative, the universe of what-happened-next. At this rate, Padma complains, you'll be two hundred years old before you manage to fell

about your birth. She is affecting non-chalance but does not fool me. I know how that she is despite all her protestations, hooked. No doubt about it: my story has her by the throat...fighting down the proper privet of the successful story teller, I attempt to educate her.... Padma-pressures of what happened next and remembering the finite quantity of time at my deposal, I leap forwards.³

Padma prefers the option always open to audiences and deceits him when the narrative tale as up on the traditional independent power of the story teller to do what he likes with a dependent and slotted audience "she is captivated, helpless as a mongoose frozen to immobility by the swaying, blinkers eyes of a hooded snake, parlay said yeast by love". The narrator is deprived of a narrate and loses it's meaning the pursues of which he has given at the novel's inaction as his main impetus:

How to dispense with Padma? How give up her ignorance and superstition, necessary counter weights to my miracle-laden omniscience? How to do without her paradoxical earthiness of spirit, which keepers-kept? My feet on the ground? I have become, it seems to me, the apex of an isosceles triangle, supported equally by twin deities, the wild god of memory and lotus goddess of the present but must I now become reconciled to the narrow one-diversionary of a straight line?⁴

The presence of Padma is essential for Saleem's narration of the story. Her continuous absence has disastrous consequences for Saleem's confidence and control of his materiel of the past: "But today, I feel confused, Padma has not returned and in her absence my certainties are falling apart. Even my nose has been playing tricks on me-by day, as I stroll between the picklevats tended by our army of strong, hairy armed, formidably competent women, I have found myself to distinguish lamer-odors form lime.... Re-reading my work, I have discovered an error in chronology. The assassination of Mahatma Gandhi occurs, in these pages, on the wrong date: But I cannot say, now, what the actual sequence of events might have been, in Indira Gandhi will continue to die at the wrong time."⁵

We have been attributed to Saleem's fallible memory but this is in fact a device of the novelist to keep the reader alert and the same time it also hints at the unrelisheity of the writer, as well as of history geography. As we see in the date of Gandhi's death or General Sam Manekshaw's acceptance of the surrender of Pakistani army at the end of Bangladesh war. The narrator says:

Does one error invalidate the entire fabric? Am I so far gone, in my desperate need for meaning, that I'm prepared to restart every thing-to re-write the whole history of my times purely in order to place myself in a central role? Today, in my confusion, I can't judge. I'll have to leave it to others. For me there can be no going back, I must finish what I've started, even it, initially what I finish turns out not to be what I began6

At the very beginning Rushdie maintains a continuous effort at synchronizing nation and domestic life, so that the odyssey of his grandfather's and parents become the odyssey of the nation from the year 1915 up to about the year 1977. The convergence of the national and the domestic life is underscored repeatedly in the novel. Saleem subsumes most matter of public record within himself so the inheritable subjectivity of any chronicling process if incarnated in his appropriation of responsibility for major events within the historical brands of his narrative. The narrator links himself with the contemporary events.

He says:

In this way I became directly responsible for triggering off violence which ended with the partition of the state of Bombay, as a result of which the city became the capital of Maharashtra ... about Indo-Pak war of 1965.7

He expresses:

Let me state this quite unequivocally, it is my first conviction that the hidden purpose of the Indo-Pak war of 1965 was nothing more not less than the crimination of my benighted family from the face of the earth. In order to understand the recent history of our times, it is only necessary to examine the bobbing-pattern of that war with an analytical, unprejudiced eye.8

Saleem's character represents the consciousness of the country-'experiencing its life and the time. At the same, time Saleem works as Rushdie's alter-ego can also an allegorical representation of Indian independence. Saleem like Rushdie, (born two months before) is born on the exact hour of the Indian independence, representing Rushdie's own observation in comic vein or in fantastic modes at the political state of the country. Rushdie with his English father, Indian mother, mission schooling and cared by a catholic 'ayah' give symbols to link the autobiography of an individual to the history of a nation.

Saleem represents the history of India as an album; a family album he is at the center draws correspondences between national event and his personal life. His reference of self is dissolved in fantasy, forging connections in order to confer meaning on chaos. He is aware that he is bound by his egotistical frame of reference so that his interpretation of history is always to some degree based upon his imagination, he still can not do anything else but trust his own memory. This Rushdie calls:

Memory truth, because memory has its own special kind. It selects, eliminates, alters, exaggerates,

minimizes, glorifies and verifies also; but in the end it creates its own reality.9

This vast narrative spanning over sixty three years of India's history, also including some glimpses of Pakistan and Bangladesh, achieves its compactness through some special devices. The use of repetitive imagery and summary of previous happenings revive the reader's memory. He deliberately uses the same language to highlight the great differences for instance, Saleem himself is born at Dr. Narlikar's Nursing Home, "at the precise instant of India's arrival at Independence"¹⁰ while his son Aadam Sinai, is born in a "night shadowed slum" of emergency. The narrator thinks of himself as preserving both vegetables and events. He says:

Every pickle-jar (you will forgive me if I become florid for a moment) contains, therefore the most exalted of possibilities: the feasibility of the classification of history; the grandiose of the pickling of time, I however have pickled chapter. Tonight, by serving the lid finally on a jar bearing the legend special formula 'No 30 Abracadaba' I reach the end of my long-winded autobiography, inwards, and pickles, I have immutable in both methods. We must live, I'm afraid with the shadows of imperfection.¹¹

He makes clear the sense of his narrative:

At Braganza pickles, I supervise the production of Mary's legendary recipes; but these are also my special blends, in which, thanks to the powers of my drained nasal passages, I am able to include memories, dreams ideas.¹²

The events are intermingled in the story of Saleem as vegetable acquires the special flavor of the spices in which they are pickle. The events of different time echo each other this idea is suggested again and again that people and events are leaking in to other events. The novelist is very good at descriptions; his hero can smell even emotions, and so one finds even emotions, and so one finds even inanimate things impregnated with emotions and smelling of them.

Another important part of Rushdie's narrative technique is his building up a sense of suspense. He casually mentions a person before that person is appeared in actuality. The identity of Mrs. Branganza is not revealed until the end of the story when we find that she is no one else but Saleem's own nurse Mary Pereira whose chutneys he remembers. Thus Indira Gandhi is portrayed quite early in the novel as widow when Saleem is approaching at his tenth birthday. Later by incidents we move to know that widow is no one else but i.e. Indira Gandhi.

2. Conclusion:

In conclusion, we may say that Rushdie's *Midnight children* share the novelist narrative techniques and vision of life. It deals with India's transition from British colonialism to independence and the partition of India. The novel ends with many questions vis-à-vis history, memory identity, truth, culture and nation.

References:

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4. *Ibid.*, p. 39.
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6. *Ibid.*, p. 240.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 342.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 245.
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