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Elements of Postmodernism in Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* S Priscilla¹

Abstract

This paper analyses the inmate happenings in the life of Saleem, who was born at the midnight of Indian independence. Salman Rushdie, renowned Indian writer brings in the elements of postmodernism in this work. He examines the historical and personal issues faced by Saleem, a boy who was born at the midnight of August 15, 1947 the time when India got its Independence. Rushdie, a pivotal figure in Indian literature brought out the tensions before and during our Independence from the British. He describes the violence that was followed in every protest under the camouflage of religion in a detailed manner. He is well known for his political writings and this work is one of the best of him portraying the political tension between the government and the citizens of India. Saleem's life story takes a roller coaster of actions in each phase of his life even before his birth. This books not only speaks about Saleem but also about every character he meets during his lifetime. He faces a pressure because of a prophecy and of being born as an Independence child. He struggles and faces fantasy in his real life by hearing voices of the other children who were born during the first hour of Independence. The struggle of finding who he is and what is his name shows that he has the identity crisis in him. He travels from India to Pakistan and once again back to India with his parents without knowing that he is not their son. His constant listener Padma plays a major role in his who is going to get married with Saleem.

Keywords: Postmodernism, Magic realism, Identity crisis, Non-linear narrative, Fragmentation, Migration and metafiction

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Elements of Postmodernism in Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*

Literature is one of the vast fields combined of both reality and fantasy according to the one who authors it. It is a combination of prose, poetry, drama and fiction. Virginia Woolf quotes on Literature as, "*Literature is strewn with the wreckage of those who have minded beyond reason the opinion of others.*" Likewise, this work *Midnight's Children* by Salman Rushdie is a wreckage of the life of Saleem, the protagonist of this work. He is not an ordinary child. He was born with special features like hearing voices and his nose is like a long cucumber because he was born on the midnight of Indian Independence. His life is also not a bed of roses but as the thorns in it. He travelled from India to Pakistan and back to India as in his days it was of war and the period of emergency ordered by the government of the then Prime Minister Mrs. Indira Gandhi.

Jean-Francois Lyotard, one of the eminent postmodernists defines postmodernism as, "*Simplyfying to the extreme, I define postmodernism as incredulity towards metanarratives*". The usage of metanarrative is in a grand in this novel by Salman Rushdie. Rushdie, Indian-born British writer is the Booker prize winner for this work. This work *Midnight's Children* is Rushdie's second novel won the Booker Prize in the year 1981. It not only stopped here but won both the 25th and 40th anniversary prizes too. Rushdie was born in Bombay, India but late he settled down in United Kingdom. He got many awards and prizes for his literary work and also for his contribution in literature. At the same time, he also gained people against him after the publication of his work, *Satanic Verses* which triggered the emotions of the people of particular community. In the following years he was named as a controversial writer for his writings which consists of transparent political attack towards the government and this transparency led him to be the target of many assassination attempts. For his contribution in literature he was elected as the fellow of the Royal Society of Literature in 1983. In 2007, he was Knighted and was in the top 50 greatest British writers after 1945. Rushdie was named one of the 100 most influential people in the world by Time magazine in April 2023. Currently, he is living in the United States.

This novel, *Midnight's Children* begins with the narrative of Saleem, who is in the death bed with his body cracking begins to tell his story. This book is divided into three parts. The first book, *The Perforated Sheet* brings out the story of his grandfather. He begins from the days of his grandfather Aadam Aziz, a doctor in the 1915 who is treating Naseem for three years with the exposure of the wound that is to be treated and in 1918 they get married by falling in love in the meantime. He has two sons and three daughters. Aadam has lost his faith in his religion because of the protest and the violence that is happening in the name of the religion. He is shifted to Agra overtime. He befriends a Muslim politician and his secretary Nadir. The Muslim politician is known as the Hummingbird is killed in the protest and Nadir takes refuge being hidden in Aadam's house. Mumtaz, daughter of Aadam falls in love with Nadir and they are secretly married without consummating. It is revealed that Nadir is impotent and sent off after a forceful divorce. Later, Mumtaz is married to Ahmed Sinai by changing her name as Amina and they both move to Bombay when she is pregnant.

This time, Amina hears a prophecy about her unborn child from Shri Ramram Seth. He prophecies, "There will be two heads—but you shall see only one... He will have sons without having sons! He will be old before he is old! And he will die... before he is dead." This makes her frightened about her labour. Amina and Ahmed buy a mansion from Englishmen, William Methwold. Amina meets Vanita, another woman who is pregnant lives in the mansion by entertaining the residents. Both the women go into labour at the first strike of the clock at midnight of Indian Independence, August 15, 1947. Both the woman gives birth to a boy and Vanita dies after naming her son as Shiva. Mary, the midwife switches the name tags of the child by switching the poor into rich and vice versa. Because of her guilt she volunteers into

being the nanny of Saleem and Amina welcomes her heartily. The labour of Amina and the struggles he went through is compared to the tensions in the country during the time of partition. The midnight of Indian Independence was not a peaceful one but the once with more chaos.

The second book, *Midnight's Children* depicts the childhood and adolescent period of Saleem and his discoveries of his rare features like blinking very rarely and hearing voices of the other children who were born during the first hour of the midnight of Independence. Due to the rise in the conflict of Indo-Pakistan war, Saleem and his family moves to Pakistan. As he grows the voices in his head also grows. These voices are the voices of the nations people. Saleem using his telepathic powers tries to gather all the children who were born along with him but he couldn't gather them all into one forum because Shiva was very clever in diving them all and succeeds in it. The intensity of the war and the airborne kills Saleem's family and he is left helpless with his memory loss of who he is and what is his name after being hit in his head.

In the midst of this chaos, Saleem is arrested by the Pakistani army and he witness many uneventful things. He runs away from that place to a jungle and meets Parvati, the witch who is also born at the same time as Saleem. Parvati makes him to remember his name and who he is. They both fall in love but Saleem was not able to impregnate and she puts a spell on Shiva and he does it. But, Shiva loses interest in her and now Saleem and Parvati gets married where Saleem volunteers to father her unborn child. They move to India knowing that India has won in the war. Now, as Parvati is in labour India is also in the state of unrest. Parvati gives birth to a son and is killed whereas, Saleem is kidnapped by Shiva to the sterilization camp made by the then PM of India, Mrs. Gandhi. Along with Saleem there were also other children who were born during the midnight and later after the sterilization they all were released from there.

Saleem comes in search of his son and eventually find him and moves back to Bombay. He also finds Mary, his nanny who runs a pickle store after tasting it in one of the restaurants. Here, after recollecting all his past events he now tells his future story of marrying Padma in Kashmir. Finally, at the age of 31, Saleem did not die as a normal man but he crumbled into six hundred million pieces of dust.

The element of *Magic realism* can be seen when Saleem find his extraordinariness of hearing other children. Rushdie brings out this when the prophet prophecies about Saleem's birth to his mother, Amina. The prophecy goes like this, "*There will be two heads—but you shall see only one... He will have sons without having sons! He will be old before he is old! And he will die... before he is dead*". After reading the whole novel, the reader can relate the life of Saleem to this prophecy and how it was true.

The element of *non-linear narrative* in this novel is present from the first till it ends. As the novel begins the reader's does not know anything about Saleem except he is of 31 years old. Here, he begins to recollect the events not of his life but he moves a bit back from the days of his grandfather, Aadam. He then narrates the whole story and come back to the present and once again he speaks about the future. This shift from past to present to future shows how Rushdie has written the whole storyline in a non-linear narrative.

Saleem who has been travelling from India to Pakistan and back to India losing his memories without knowing who he is depicts the identity crisis he had. The identity of who he is is not clear to him. The partition had made a very great impact in the life of Saleem. The tumultuous and chaotic nation is a shadowy description of the lives of the citizens who struggles as individuals as the nation struggles as one.

Each of the children born along with Saleem leads a separate life with their own struggles. But they were are united as one as the Midnight's Children. This *fragmentation* of each individual shows how they are divided but also united in one way. In the whole novel we are led in a way that each of the individual is not connected with one another but at the end

Rushdie brings in a junction point where all the characters are united in a circle of being a *Midnight's Children*. The pain of labour went through by the women characters is also compared with the pain and struggle of the nation.

On the whole, Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* brings out the chaotic partition period of the nation and the post-colonial India. It also paints the picture of the emergency period in the Independent India. It brings out the elements of postmodernism with a touch of magic realism, a dominant theme in all the works of Rushdie. Thus, this work is a bowl of salad of postmodernism.

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