CHAPTER II

SALMAN RUSHDIE’S MIDNIGHT’S CHILDREN

Introduction

Midnight’s Children was bestowed with the Booker of Bookers and Salman Rushdie was rated as a major novelist. Midnight’s Children spans over a period of 70 years from the time of India's Independence to the declaration of Emergency by the then Prime Minister Mrs. Indira Gandhi. Rushdie took four-five years to complete this novel. The 500-Page novel covers the major political events of modern India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. All is seen and told by a young man born at the stroke of midnight when India broke free from fetters of slavery and turned over to freedom. The novel appears to have overtones of autobiography as the narrator protagonist Saleem bears close identity to Salman Rushdie. The book is an attack on the rules of the three countries, India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. Rushdie has been able to present India's manifold diversity of life and language. Book-I and Book-II unfold the best of Bombay's culture and Book-III shows the disappointment and must of Indian contradictions. The narrator protagonist Saleem Sinai is associated with all important historical events and we find there an inter-link between the nation and the life of the protagonist.

Salman Rushdie adopts the old technique of the first person narrative. The characters are introduced long before they actually appear on the lines and pages of the novel. It creates suspense in the minds of the readers and pages of the novel. Rushdie makes personal comment here and there. Rushdie has become one of the outstanding Indian
English writers like Raja Rao, Mulk Raj Anand and others. Rushdie's fantasy is a mental tonic. The narratives in both Midnight’s Children and Shame move from victimizing history requires genius stands true in Rushdie's case. He uses a number of devices to link Saleem's autobiography to Indian history during the period 1947 to 1977. Another critic observes that like the migrant to colonized person loses both history and language, Rushdie challenge the imperialistic appropriation of language and history.

Salman Rushdie's novel *Midnights Children* was awarded the Booker Prize in 1981. This book was also adjudged Booker of the Bookers in 1993. This novel has been translated into twelve languages and deals with incidents of pre and post-independence era of Indian Sub-continent. It covers issues of politics religion and fanaticism. The intellectual, intercultural and intertextual richness of *Midnight’s Children* teases the readers and Challenges them to comprehend and come to grips with them. His works create tension and evoke conflicting emotions in the readers. With each new novel Rushdie initiates fresh discussion and debate and all this points to and endorses a creative genius which compels us to evaluate and re-evaluate his work.

Rushdie's *Midnight’s Children* is productive of such general eulogy

– one of the most important novels to come out of the English speaking world in this generation, India has found her Günter Grass. So it should so certainly involve itself with aspects of the most crucial critical / theoretical debates of its day.¹

Saleem, the principle narrator, the most gifted of 1001 *Midnight's children* has been endowed with a magical power and vision. His physical impotence and deformed shape may be read as caricature of the political map of India. All the midnight's children are born with special
power, with hundred and thousand possibilities but all these possibilities are simply wasted. Saleem and Shiva are born with contrasting qualities. They are leaders of the group but they have double, one in reality and another realm of myth. Saleem stands for the whole, abundance. He contains within him the mythical creator Brahma. Shiva is the god of destruction and hence is a rival to Saleem. The novel remains as allegory of Indian history and may be read as a literature of subversion of every form of convention and authority. The narrator patterns his own storytelling an oral narration and deploys fantasy in order to be faithful to the reality of India, a country and a nation where millions believe in ideological post-colonial critique of the linear, imperialist discourse of meta-history which represses rather distorts India's own account of history.

An in-depth of Midnight's Children reveals three major aspects of Rushdie's characteristic use of history and fantasy in his novel namely.

1. The interweaving of autobiography and narrative which clearly shows that the tales is meant to be a yarn spun out of imagination, a blend of truth and fiction;
2. The Conspicuous breach of chronology evident from the frequent forward or backward shift in time that makes it difficult to trace the paper sequence of events in the life of the protagonist; and
3. The search for identity and the meaning of life. It is to this search for identity and the desire to 'Connect' on the part of the protagonist.

Midnight's Children is clearly, then, a fusion of history, and fantasy. The novels presentation of a vast span on the recent history of India is marked not by a strict factual depiction but by an element of
fantasy that enables the writer to convey the aspects of reality that have been painfully experienced by him but are incommunicable in the realistic mode. The experimental truth in the novel characterizes it as a form of sincere self - depiction which, according to what Sidonie smith terms "The autobiographical contract" clearly determine the reminiscently and autobiographical nature of the work. Much of the power of the novel comes from the energy harnessed by the author to strike a harmonious balance between the contrary pulls of an autobiographical involvement and the distancing device of fantasy.

Midnight's Children is a literary response to a series of real life situations, disguised as well as not so recent past. The novel has an epic sweep covering about six decades in the history of the Indian subcontinent and Rushdie has cleverly framed his own 'literary aesthetic of truth telling.'

At the fictional level, Midnight's Children depicts the events and experiences in the lives of three generations of the Sinai family. The account begins with their day in Srinagar and follows their passage through Amritsar, Agra and Bombay to Karachi from where Saleem alone returns hidden in the basket of Paravati, the witch, only to experience the tremors of the emergency that had been clamped in India. At the semantic level the novel is far more complex and has intriguing social and political connotations.

In 'Midnight's Children', Saleem the powerful narrator is portrayed as a story teller of Ganesh like skill. He is born with elephantine nose while his alter ego Shiva is all knees. Saleem is a reporter of the events of history; he creates alternative history by creating things out of memory and imagines truth as opposed to the truth of history that preserves his materials in the chutney of fantasy and myth.
(Pickling process). In day time he works in the chutney factory and during night he writes his stories for the imagined listener Padma (Lotus). Lotus has an association with mud. Padma likes listening stories of sensation and thrill. She has no power of intellection and thought. She believes in stories and more stories. Indian Subaltern multitude is gullible and is swayed by the rhetoric of the politicians and vote catchers easily. Saleem has the potential of an omniscient and omnipotent narrator; chutnifies creator as well as preserver. He is modern Vishnu. Empowering himself in mythology, the all-knowing narrator chutnifies his own version of history and truth. It is “memory's truth, because memory has its own special kind. It selects, eliminate alters, exaggerates, minimizes, glorifies and vilifies also. But in the end it creates its own reality.”

In Midnight’s Children, Rushdie traces the history of Indian from the day of its independence to the day when Emergency was declared 26 June 1977. The years parallel the thirty one years of Saleem's life. Through the consciousness of Saleem, Rushdie also delineates the entire continuum of Indian history from the period of the Mughals to the present. The novel derives its title from all the children born on the midnight of 15 August 1947. Saleem Sinai, the narrator protagonist announces his emergence into this world in a moment of political reality.

...On the stroke of midnight, as a matter of fact. Clock hands joined palms in respectful greeting as I came... at the precise instant of India's arrival at independence I tumbled forth into the world. .... I had been mysteriously handcuffed to history, my destinies indissolubly chained to those of my country.
The historical recreation of the individual destiny is realized as part of an imaginative device in fulfilling the larger thematic purpose, namely the search for identity in Saleem Sinai's mind:

...My grandfather is saved by his nose and bruise appears on his chest, never for fade, so that he and I find in its ceaseless throbbing the answer to the question, Indian or kashmiri? stained by the bruise of a Heldelberg bag's clasp, we throw our lot in with India; but the alienness of blue eyes remains.  

The history of the Aziz and Sinai becomes the history of the notion. The link between personal events and historical happenings is painstakingly maintained and even as we lose ourselves in the whirlpool of narration we are made conscious of all the major events in the country. Even the dates of major historical events from independence to emergency are mentioned. At times the narrator takes liberties with the dates, again hurling us into doubt about the truth and validity of the recorded events.

On the day the world war ended Naseem developed a longed for headache. Such historical coincidences have littered, perhaps befouled, my family's existence in the world.  

On another occasion he claims to have provoked the language riots by offering a Gujarati rhyme to the language fanatics. The novel offers how he was linked to history both "active - literally as well as metaphorical."

In Midnight's Children the children born at the stroke of midnight at very moment when India won freedom, develop the capacity to communicate each other telepathically transcending barriers of genre, narrative, time, history and location.
Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight's Children* fits squarely into this mode of postmodernist fantasy. The narrator knows exactly, what he is doing in narrating his story, even admitting at one point to "destroying the unities and contentions of fine writing."  

From the opening lines of the novel onward *Midnight's Children* is a novel about the writing of a novel:

*I was born in the city of Bombay... once upon a time. No that won't do, there's no getting away from the date: I was born in Doctor Narlikar's Nursing Home on August 15th, 1947 and the time? The time matters, too well then at night. No it's important to be more.... on the stroke of midnights, as a matter of fact.*

There are several points of interest here. First the fairytale beginning, "Once upon a time" second, there is the curious tension, even contradiction, in these lines between willingness and an unwillingness to be explicit, which in turn illustrates the general manner of exploiting while undermining on established 'Confessional' mode of storytelling.

Saleem narrates the beginning of love story between Saleem's grandfather and grandmother. But the reason for the importance of this particular event is that Saleem claims to have inherited from his grandfather a propensity to see all things in piecemeal fashion, because of his grandfather's experience with the sheet. “Condemned by a perforated sheet to a life of fragments.....”

A sense of ambiguity and uncertainty, also connected with causal operations, is farther created by the startling claim Saleem makes about the inter relatedness of his own life with the history of modern India.

The parallel drawn between Saleem's growing up and the development of the newly independent India would normally be best
understood as metaphor, but his insistence on the literalness of the connection goes beyond hyperbole and transforms metaphor into metonymic identification of a sort which belong to dream rather than to any rational mode of perception.

In last part of the novel there is an episode in which Saleem is enlisted in the Pakistan army as a 'Man-dog' on account of his extraordinarily sensitive sense of smell. This metamorphosis is one of a string of transmutations throughout the novel as characters change names or even personalities (Parvati into Jamila Singer, Saleem's ego into the many egos of the Midnight's Children, etc.) Like the fantastic metamorphosis in Kafka's story, Saleem's transmogrification into a man-dog suggests some deep self-loathing; most of the novel's humor goes into self-parody which might have something to do with the narrator's confessional intention, that the "truth" is too dark to be directly revealed. (During this episode while Saleem is a man-dog the narrative slides almost completely into dream. Saleem gets lost in the Sunderbans of the Ganges delta: he enters a magic world where space and time disappear, and where he is reduced, like some character in a Patrick white novel, to a more elemental order of reality. Saleem records that he entered a realm possessing the quality of "absurd fantasy" and "surrendered… to the terrible phantasms of the dream-forest." This is also a dream tinged with religion and more especially with sexuality, since in the depths of the forest there is a temple and in this temple a band of hours. If laughter and humor serve to screen the self from full view, it is significant that in these passages jocularity is reduced to a minimum.

The novel is a picture of India with as ups and downs, Colton’s, films, mythology, politics, religion, marriage ceremony, friendship and
enmity. India from Kashmir to Bombay and (from Karachi to Dacca) with its variety to situation and moods is seen in the novel.

The very opening paragraph of the *Midnight’s Children* establishes Rushdie's narrative mode of writing and his interplay of history, autobiography and fantasy. He uses the expressions like India's arrival at independence to play history; I was born in the city of Bombay to relate autobiography and once upon a time for fantasy. Thirty chapters of the book correspond to the thirty years of Saleem's life and thirty years of India's run from independence (1947 to emergency). History and linearity of public events fuse to put the novel into prominence.

**Midnight's Children: History and Fictitious Truth:**

*Midnight’s Children* appears more productive of the novelist's imagination than of the historian’s search of truth. The novel blurs the distinctions between personal and public history. The public cannot transcend the personal capacity of the writer's voice to shape reality. It explores the ways in which history is given meaning through individual experience.

In the text of *Midnight’s Children* contains a crucial opposition. On the one hand, the novel continually demonstrates the excess and the multiplicity of history. Yet on the other hand it conveys equally clearly the sense of a focused historical argument running through all this cacophony. In the *Midnight's Children*, Rushdie takes liberties with chronometric exactitude; does not always accurately recount the events of Indian history. At times he deliberately commits mistakes on details or dates in order to comment on the unreliability of historical and
biographical accounts. For example, Saleem, the narrator informs the reader that an old lover of his shot him through the heart; however in the very next chapter he confesses to have fabricated the circumstances of his death. He says

*Although I have racked my brains, my memory refuses, stubbornly to alter the sequence of events.*

It emphasizes that memory reorders events. The certain other distortions in the novel are the wrong train routes mentioned in the book and Lata Mangeshkar singing as far back as 1946. Another blunder was that of God Ganesha taking down Valmiki’s narration. However, inspite of the errors that his memory commits during his act of narration and unreliability of his facts, Saleem is confident that Padma and the people will believe him. His writing imposes his view on others as he, says. "(i) n...... all literature, what actually happened is less important than what the author can manage to persuade his audience to believe." 

*Midnight’s Children* is full of incidents where the individual is locked with history. The relationship between history and the individual at the interaction and interdependence of character is an interesting study with reference to *Midnight's Children*. Saleem sets up neat casual relationship between events in his past to demonstrate his place at the Centre of things. He carefully mentions his tumble into the middle of a parade for the partition of Bombay and then remarks: "In this way I became directly responsible for triggering of the violence which ended with the partition of the State of Bombay." But there is a of skepticism in placing himself at the center of things and at one point Saleem asks himself "Am I so for gone, in my desperate need for meaning that 'I'm prepared to distort everything to re-write the whole history of my times purely in order to place myself in a central role?'" Saleem desires to

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reconstruct history or rather 'his-story, but intends to finish it before his life ends as he explains: 'time (having no further use for me) is running out. I will soon be thirty-one years old. Perhaps, if my crumbling, overused body permits.” This suggests his uncertainty with his own morality; he is uncertain about his position even after death. The ambiguity and uncertainty of the future compels him to realize the importance of the past. He desires meaning in his life. He realizes when young that it is impossible to control India's future and in the end also understands that he cannot have control over his own future either. He recognizes that "anything you want to be you kin be, you kin be just what—all you want" is the greatest lie of all. Instead he looks backward with the understanding that, "if everything is planned in advance, then we all have meaning." Saleem searches for form and hence he turns to that port of his life that he can control, rather than that he cannot. The construction of the story seems an effort to convince everyone that things really are planned, that the day of his birth really endowed him with meaning. Nevertheless, Saleem still believes that they are all handcuffed to the past rather than dragged into an uncertain future.

*Midnight’s Children* refers to the fact that history is a way of fictionalizing experience. For Saleem, reality and truth are constructing of imagination and experience. He rearranges events, misremembers dates and entirely fictionalizes the stories. He believes that the truth of the story reflects the idiosyncratic process of selecting events from memory:

> Memory’s truth because of a memory has its own special kind. It selects, eliminates, alters, exaggerates, minimizes, glorifies, and vilifies also, but in the end it creates its own reality. Its heterogeneous but usually coherent version of events; and no same human being ever trusts someone else’s version more than his own.”

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The statement exemplifies that history is fabricated; a fiction and everyone can create his own version of history.

The act of recalling is not an exact process; rather it is only through distorted fragments that one remembers and then recreates the past. Saleem compares memory or the act of recalling to pickling. Pickling makes things new again and this assumes significance as one dies without newness. It implies that we are alive because of our constant acts of reinventing the reality as we remember it and as we experience it. This act of reinvention or representation is an impure act; as history is "Chutnified", there are inevitable distortions that arise in the process. Rushdie celebrates this impure act of recalling and retelling history and Salman informs that he will provide the "unreal", the bloody version of his family's history. He thinks that his writing resembles pickling process; the thirty chapters are called pickle jars containing various delicacies. Chutnification involves “a certain alteration, a slight intensification of taste... The art is to change flavor in degree, but not in kind; and above all to give ‘authentic taste of truth.’”  Saleem's descriptions of the Chutnification process emphasize the necessity to make truths.

Saleem indicates that truth is not real, it is constructed. He constructs his own truth as he tears out portions of the newspaper headlines to inform commander Sabarmati about his wife's infidelities. He refers to this practice as 'cutting up of history. He attempts to construct infinite stories as he devised the novel way of it.

*Most of what matters in our lives take place in your absence; but I seem to have found from somewhere the trick of filling in the gaps in my knowledge, so that everything is in my head, down to the last detail....*²³

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The narrative starts in 1915 through Saleem; the narrator was born in 1947. Hence the gap of more than thirty years is to be filled. The gaps and mistakes creep into Saleem's narration during Padma's absence. Memory then uses imagination to fill in the gaps with his imagination. The reader becomes the link between history and fiction as Saleem answers himself; "I can't judge. I'll have to leave it to others."25 The retelling of history, or the past, fictionalizes it. Saleem has not been an eyewitness to all of the history he narrates and he is willing to provide his own imagined version of history: "Most of what matters in our lives takes place in our absence."26 But he has found "the trick of filling in the gaps"27 of his knowledge.

Saleem is a world in him and his connection with history is suggested by the fusion of the public and the private in his person:

.................: actively - literally passively metaphorically, actively metaphorically and passively-literally, I was inextricably entwined with my world.28

The different types of the active and passive connections between Saleem and history are both interesting and problematic. Saleem has been made into a repository of history, which makes him into a passive being, even a kind of victim. Being a centrifugal force, he gives history shape and meaning which makes him into an active agent. Saleem's personal life has been largely correlated to the path of India as a nation. As he says: "I had been mysteriously handcuffed to history, my destinies indissolubly chained to those of my country."29 Being born at a crucial time of history, Saleem claims a place at the center of things. Saleem Sinai is in India. The scene in which Saleem's geography teacher Mr. Email Zagallo rips out Saleem's hair is exemplary of Rushdie’s trick of drawing a parallel between individual and nation. Mr. Zagallo
compresses Saleem's visage with a map of India, pointing out the fetchers of Saleem's face and asking his students to pretend that they are various geographical landmarks in India. Saleem's "moon-face," represents the map of India whose vastness is reflected in the largeness of Saleem's face. The disfiguring "birhtmarks" on the face suggests the effect of the holocaust of the partition. The 'Byzantine domes' of the temples may be indicative of the Himalayas just as the "ice-like eccentricity" of his "sky-blue eyes" point out the skies of Kashmir. The "Dark-stains" spread down the "Western hairline" and the "dark patch" coloring the "eastern ear" clearly refers to the two wings of Pakistan Saleem's long nose appears to be symbolic of India's pride and self-glorification. At the time of Chinese aggression "while the nation puffed itself up," Saleem's Sinuses also puffed up and when Indians attacked the Chinese his nasal passages too were in "a state of acute crisis." Saleem's phenomenal growth also mirrors the development of free India. His initiation of "an heroic program of self-enlargement". Soon after his birth and his enormous appetite reflects India's ambitious five-year plans and the large amount of foreign aid, gobbled by the politicians.

The private and the public coincide at many places in the novel. For instance, the chapter "A Public Announcement" demonstrates the intimate link between personal lives and public history. Saleem, the narrator claims: "That was how .... From the moment of my conception, I have been public property." He argues that his life events not only have a correlation to crucial moments in Indian history, but in fact have directly caused them. The novel starts in 1915, thirty-two years before the birth of Saleem, and ends when he is about to be thirty-one. It spans about sixty-three years, with Saleem's and India's birth as the center. It coincides the era from the end of World War I to independence of India.
(Aug. 15, 1947) and from independence to the lifting of Emergency Rule in 1977. Just as the World War ended after four years, Dr. Aadam Aziz's three year courting of Naseem through examining different parts of her body ended with the direct confrontation and their subsequent marriage. The bleeding of Saleem's grandfather's (Dr. Aziz) nose and the cracking of Saleem's skin was the effect of Jallianwala Bagh Massacre of Indian's by British Army in Amritsar in the year 1919. The mention of “Cracks in the earth” refers to the change in stance of Mian Abdullah, the founder and Chairman of Free Islam convocation, who opposed partition and his subsequent murder in 1945. William Methwold's lost power and the freezing of his assets and the celebration among the local residents signifies the transition of power, the end of British imperialism. The birth of Midnight's Children exactly at midnight on 15th August 1947, Parallels the birth of new nation, the independence of a India. The confusion in Saleem's head after the bicycle incident refers to the Chaos that prevailed in the government in 1956; with the elections due, the government effected a change in the Five-year plan and announced that they will not accept the development loans until given more time to repay it. The washing chest incident parallels the linguistic reorganization of states in 1956. The circus ring accident and the violence that Saleem triggers points to the struggle between the Maharashtrian and Gujarat as separate states. The manslaughter of Homi Catarack by Commander Sabarmati and the elevation of Cyrus Dubash into a religious - Cult leader highlights the events that took place during the 1957 election, in which the communists party won a large number of seals Saleem's mother's affair at azthe cafe refer to the Sabarmati affair. The Midnight's Children attack on Saleem coincides with the Chinese aggression in 1962, further, Shiva's explosion into Saleem life in 1965 parallels the Indo-Pak war of

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1965 and India's subsequent arrival at a Nuclear age. Finally, Saleem's wife's son by Shiva is born at midnight' the day when Indira Gandhi proclaimed emergency Rule in India. Parvati's 13 day labor coincides with the 13 days of political turmoil in India when Indira refused to resign after being found guilty of malpractice during the election of 1971; followed by emergency in 1975. The mention of four hundred and twenty children held in captivity in 1976 refers to two of Sanjay's Gandhi's projects. Clearance of Delhi slums and pavement and mass vasectomy camps to reduce population growth.

The character of a historiographical metafiction, as a subject position is constituted by culture, society, history, and insists on his / her central role in the telling his/her own story. The readers are expected to accept their version of story as it is different from the original official one. It is impossible to believe Saleem when he tells: "I became directly responsible for triggering off the violence which ended with the partition of the state of Bombay". Saleem also says that the hidden purpose of the Indo-Pak War of 1965 was nothing more nor less than the elimination of his family, which is hard to believe. Historiographical metafiction recognizes the impossibility of imposing a single, determinate meaning on history and texts. Historiography is a construct as Saleem historiographically recognizes:

*Reality is a question of perspective; the further you get from the past, the more concrete and plausible it seems - but as you approach the present, it inevitably seems more and more incredible. Suppose yourself in a large cinema, sitting at first in the back row, and gradually moving up, row by row, until your nose is almost pressed against the screen. Gradually the star's faces dissolve into dancing grain, tiny details assume grotesque proportions; the illusion dissolves - or rather, it becomes clear that the illusion itself is reality.*

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He further ponders:

*Does one error invalidate the entire Fabric? Am I so far gone, in my desperate need for meaning, that I'm prepared to distort everything - to re-write the whole history of my times purely in order to place myself in a central role?*  

The colonialist's view of Indian history in a way, repressed the Indian's version of their own history and Saleem realizes its aftermath: "He was the child of a father who was not his father; but also the child of a time which damaged reality so badly that nobody ever managed to put it together again."  

In the process of writing the novel, Saleem tries "to avoid the confining selective process involved in chronological history telling, and instead to follow the Indian urge to "encapsulate the whole of reality," to understand lives and nations by "Swallow (ing)" them. The narrator's amnesia and the national amnesia together with the amnesia that Colonialism seeks to impose on the Colonized, is evoked in the novel.  

Thus, *Midnight's Children* exposes the functionality of the nation and its history, but the denial of the possibility of literal truth does not deny the nation. The impossibility of literal truth reaffirms the faith in fiction. It has been rightly pointed out that "Rushdie’s novel explodes the notion of a nation having a stable identity and a single history, and then invites a skeptical, provisional faith in the nation that it has exploded."  

Rushdie compares his presentation of history to the pickling process, the process which leads to change and transformation. He pickles the facts of history with the sole aim of preserving them forever as Saleem Says, to pickle is to give immortality. The spicy and pickled
version of *Midnight’s Children* can thus serve as an appetizer to the readers who are interested in the Indian history.

**Subversive Strategy:**

Salman Rushdie is now ranked among the best contemporary novelists of the world. The fiction of Salman Rushdie has now been examined and analyzed from a variety of perspectives. It contains “Many embedded layers.... and multiple plots.” Which render Rushdie as the most complicated writer. As William Walsh observes:

> Combining the element of magic and fantasy, the grimmest realism extravagant force, multi-mirrored analogy an a potent symbolic structure; Salman Rushdie has captured the astonishing energy of novel unprecedented in scope, manner and achievement in the hundred and fifty year old tradition of the Indian novel in English.  

Critics called Rushdie's novel, *Midnight’s Children* as 'Phantasmagorical narrative'. Similarly Ron Shepherd entitles his critical essay on *Midnight’s Children* as *Midnight’s Children* - Fantasy. Elaborating the title he says, *Midnight’s Children* marks quite a radical departure from what has been written by Indian novelists in English to date.

With the exception of writers like G.V. Desani, Raja Rao and Sudhir Ghosh, Indian writing in English has not been overly concerned with experimentation in the narrative, fluctuating uncertainly between first and third person; ordinary notions of fictional realism are subverted, natural law becomes unnatural or supernatural, even though the novel is not in any straightforward sense religious or metaphysical, the novel is full of cryptic clues, archaic utterances, and seems always on the point of offering some important explanation, of arriving at some
goal or conclusion, but what this conclusion is we can never be quite sure. "It is a novel of sings gestures and sleight of hand, narrated with a passion for narrating rather than for clarifying meaning."  

Shepherd distinguishes between the conventional novel, like 'Robinson Crusoe' and 'Sons and Lovers' from the novels of Thomas Puncheon, Russell Hohan, Luis Borges; Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Ilalo, Calvino, etc. which are 'antithetical opposition to the more established customary forms of storytelling' He further says: 'one way of describing this new highly subjective fiction is to consider it as fantasy.' Shepherd says that Salman Rushdie's Midnight's Children fits squarely into this mode of post-modernist fantasy; it is a case of destroying unities and conventions of fine writing. A desultory style of respective frequent eruption into the narrative of marginally related incidents, symbols and anecdotes, and to ubiquitous drift of the narrative into dream and nightmare etc. tend to blur the realities of time and place. Shepherd observes rather a starting point in the very word 'Midnight' as he says: 'the concept of 'midnight' in the novel stands in diametrical opposition to the light of middy. 'Midnight' is the province of fantasy which is a dreamlike recreation of the actual world. And fantasy is an escape from the pressure of an outside 'Middy' public world threatens the quality of individual sensibility."  

Freedom from the tyranny of order and exactness in Saleem's forte, which is provided by 'ambiguity' Ambiguity also frees Saleem from the tyranny of cause and effect.

Shepherd finds another benefit of sense of ambiguity as he points out:

A sense of ambiguity and uncertainty..... Is further created by the starting claim Saleem makes about the inter-relatedness of his own life with the history of modern India. Saleem (again

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typically and teasingly) insists on the literal rather than metaphorical connection which he feels gives his own birth at the midnight hour on the eve of India's independence a Special importance....

Shepherd calls the method of the book, 'typical' rather a method in madness to repeat the Shakespearean cliché uttered by Hamlet in the eponymous play.

Rushdie’s magic realist’s technique becomes evident in the beginning of the novel itself as Saleem, the first person narrator says: "I was born in the city of Bombay .... Once upon a time." The first statement echoes realistic mode of narration but the second highlights the narrative as a fairy tale, a fantasy. In a truly postmodern fashion, Saleem, the narrator abolishes the distinction between reality and fantasy as he intends to encapsulate the whole reality; thereby reflecting Rushdie's vision of the unchanging duality.

The narrative undergoes a series of temporal and spatial displacement and this is demonstrated in the first chapter "the perforated sheet" as Saleem says:

*I was born in the city of Bombay... once upon a time. No, that won't do, there's no getting away from the date: I was born in Doctor Narlikar's Nursing Home on August 15th 1947. And the time? The time matters, too. Well then: at night. No, it's important to be more... on the stroke of midnight, as a matter of fact. Clock - hands joined palms in respectful greeting as I came. Oh, spell it out, spell it out: at the precise instant of India’s arrival at independence.*

This also proves Saleem to be the unreliable narrator. Saleem actually captures events across temporal distance through his memory.

The novel begins with an account of Saleem's birth but soon it moves thirty - two years to 1915 with the story of Saleem's grandfather

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Aadam Aziz's marriage. Later on, as the family shifts to Karachi from Bombay, Saleem is exiled from his place and finds it difficult to adjust to a new environment.

Rushdie plays with the notions of time throughout the novel. Tai Bibi, the five hundred and twelve year old prostitute claims to have lived for an inconceivable number of years. *Midnight's Children* seek to locate the Time and there is a backward and forward movement of time in the novel. Time and history constantly plays tricks on Saleem, and both become subject to interpretation and confusion. Time for Saleem is circular:

> time, in any experience, has been as variable and inconstant... no people whose word for 'yesterday' is the same as their word for 'tomorrow' can be said to have a firm grip on the time.\(^55\)

Saleem gets lost in the Sunderbans, a magic world where space and time disappear. His draft into Sunderbans points to his being lost in Timelessness:

> Infected by the Soul-chewing maggots of pessimism futility, shame, he deserted, into the historyless anonymity or rainforest, dragging three children in his wake. What I hope to immortalise in Pickles as well as words: that condition of the spirit in which the consequences of acceptance could not be denied, in which an overdose of reality gave birth to a miasmic longing for flight into the safety of dreams.\(^56\)

Saleem's realization into reality from fantasy is done by the 'tantriks' of snake poison which retrieves him into memory from amnesia.

Saleem uses sheet, spittoon and the pickle - jars as metaphors for the narrative art. The metaphors unify his narration through time; the perforated sheet through which his Grandmother before their marriage
represents the time before his birth that is the past, Hit-the-Spittoon is the game representing the sex act during his life in Lucknow that is present; the pickle-jars appear to indicate his legacy for the future. Thus he metaphorically links his narrative to past, present and future. Thus "the narrativization and metaphorization of his life is therefore an attempt at imposing upon it the imagined homogeneity of the unified self, that may change over time (sheet/past, spittoon / present, pickle-jars/ future) but that remains in some ungraspable manner, the same." 

In Midnight’s Children, Rushdie also frequently addresses the confluence of dreams and reality and illusion and truth. In one particular incident, dreams enter reality. The day after Saleem dreams of Jimmy Kapadia’s death, he learns that he has in fact died during the night. This confluence of dreams and reality causes significant confusion for Saleem and other characters in the novel as it becomes difficult for them to differentiate between real and unreal. Rushdie explores the different ways that dreams and reality connect without influencing one another. The illusions of the jungle make time an element on which one must not depend and the jungle environment symbolizes the dreams world and this sense of faulty time. Saleem’s hallucinatory journey into the jungle yields an understanding of his identity rather than a sense of safety. The thick of the jungle represents the physical manifestations of Saleem’s feelings of confusion and of a loss of direction.

Saleem contrasts the scientific empiricism of his grandfather, Adam Aziz, with the religiosity and mysticism of his grandmother, Naseem is reputed to have entered her daughter's dreams to know the state of her mind. True to the magic realistic mode, Saleem's desire for his sister is also elaborated in the novel. When child, he had seen her
mother in him an incestuous desire for his mother, which later on gets transferred to his sister, Jamila.

Saleem records that he entered a realm possessing the quality of “absurd fantasy and surrendered... to the terrible Phantoms of the dream forest. Interestingly enough what Rushdie wrote as a comment an Gabriel Garcia Marquez's novel, 'Chronicle of a Death Foretold' is applicable almost verbatim to his own creation Midnight's Children. Rushdie says, 'The book and its narrator probe slowly, painfully, through the mists of half accurate memories, equivocations, contradictory versions, trying to establish what happened and why; and achieve only provisional answers. The effect of this retrospective method is to make the Chronicle Strangely elegiac in tone as if Garcia Marquez feels that he has drifted away from his roots and can only write about them now through veils of formal difficulty. Where all his previous books exude an air of absolute authority over the material, this one reeks of doubt. And the triumph of the book is that this new hesitancy, this abdication of Olympus, is turned to such excellent account and becomes a source of strength.”

The Magic Realism involves the interspersion of myth, history and the supernatural with reality. Mythological references abound in the novel; the main characters Parvati and Shiva in the novel bear resemblance to the Hindu gods. The goddess Parvati obtained her husband through great perseverance and provoked him into creating their child, being essential for the conservation of the world. Rushdie's Parvati also behaves similarly:

[Parvati] ---- oiled his moustache, caressed his knees and after all that produced a dinner of biryani so exquisite that (Shiva) ----

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devoted his undivided attentions to her for four whole months --

According to myth, Parvati gave birth to a son named Ganesh, after four months of uninterrupted coitus with Shiva and later on this son takes the head of an elephant. In *Midnight’s Children* Parvati’s son Aadam Sinai is born with enormous ears: "ears so colossally huge (that people believed) ---- that it was the head of tiny elephant --- he was the true son of Shiva and Parvati; he was elephant - headed Ganesh" just as in Hindu mythology, in *Midnight’s Children* also, Parvati tames and subjugates Saleem, even though temporarily. Shiva is a God of excess, of ascetic excess as well as erotic Saleem informs of General Shiva's sexual activity "at the height of his philandering’s there were no less than ten thousand women in love with him." Moreover, Saleem and Shiva's intense rivalry alludes to that between the Hindu deities, Brahma and Shiva. According to the Hindu legend, Brahma created the world when Shiva, who had been assigned the task, went into a thousand year abstinence. Angered by Brahma's preemptive creation, Shiva returns to destroy the world with fire and apparently castrates him and plants his "linga" there. This myth plays a vital role in *Midnight's children* as it suggests an aesthetic competition between Saleem and Shiva, as well as imagining the competition between Shiva and Saleem to be one between the two valid forms of creation. Brahma dreams the world, while Shiva allows it to exist by declining to use his immeasurable power towards its destruction. *Midnight’s Children* Shiva shares the deity’s characteristics and displays fighting abilities after getting enlisted in the Indian army.

The myth of Ganesh, Characters of Ravana; goddess Laxmi, Lord Narayana also find vivid expression in the novel. The allusion to Islam highlights the fact that the foundations of religious authority are
blatantly subverted in the novel. Islam's authority lies in scripture and rests on the notion that its words God (Allah). It seems that Saleem Sinai, the novel's narrator intend to appropriate some of the Islamic traditions while questioning its legitimacy at the same time. Comparing himself to Muhammad, the person through whom the Quran is dictated by Allah. Saleem claims to have heard divine voices, and, though he was initially flabbergasted and struggled to understand what had happened, he later saw the shawl of genius fluttering down upon his shoulders. After mentioning Muhammad, Saleem remarks, parenthetically, "(on whose name be peace, let me add; I don't want to offend anyone)"62 Saleem's use and abuse of scriptural authority, being playful and obviously blasphemous is symptomatic of Rushdie’s desire to subvert some easy dichotomies that individuals as well as entire cultures use to make sense of themselves.

The novel is also littered with magical and supernatural occurrences. It can be that "The 'real' pain of history then, can only be dealt with in mythical, magical fashion. Realism must be diluted by myth. But myth itself is ultimately no 'solution' and can never replace history. Therefore it too, must be 'defused', debunked."63 Saleem based his narrative on the tales that his ayah, Mary Pereira, told of supernatural events in the streets of Bombay and the tales from the Bibi as well as the 'magical talk' of old Tai, the boatman, a blend of history and folktale. The character of Tai the boatman is conceived in mythic realistic modes. In reality, he is "a simple ferryman, despite all the rumors of wealth, taking hay and goats and vegetables and wood across the lakes for cash; people too."64 At the same time, he is mythical in that "nobody could remember when Tai had been young. He had been playing this same
boat, standing in the same hunched position, across the Dal and Nageen Lakes..... Forever.65 The Narrator tells us that:

_The Boy Aadam, my grandfather-to-be; fell in love with the_ boatman Tai _precisely because of the endless verbiage which made others think him cracked. It was magical talk...._66

The 'magical' talk, however, foretells events that turn out to be historically "real". Dr. Aziz when he was a young boy asked Taiji about her age and received the mythical response: "I have watched the mountains being born; I have seen Emperors die.... I saw that Isa, that Christ, when he came to Kashmir."67

The narrator then interpolates: "In the brandy bottle of the boatman Tai I see, foretold, my own father's possession by djinns .... and there will be another bald foreigner...."68 The 'another bald foreigner' is Methwold, the colonizer and the 'real' father of the narrator Saleem.

Saleem's gain of magical powers in a washing chest symbolizes his mythic retreat from reality and history:

_A washing-chest is a hole in the world, a place which civilization has put outside itself, beyond the pale; this makes it the finest of hiding-places. In the washing chest, I was --- safe from all pressures, concealed from the demands of parents and history._69

Even their magical powers prove inadequate to the 'children' from getting sterilized, thus facilitating their “magical 'romantic' retreat from history”70 Rushdie breaks the magic resonance, when he suddenly announces Gandhi's assassination in the cinema hall; the audience being transfixed by the lovers on the screen.

Saleem also creates a new myth, a myth of the nation, which becomes a collective fiction. A "collective fiction" sanctified and
renewed by blood is a combination of spirit and thing, in magic realist
terms.

Saleem proposes to withdraw into the world ‘Abracadabra’; Saleem exclaims: "Finally my son, who will have to be a magician to
cope with the world I'm leaving him." Another instance of magic can
be recounted in Saleem's mother's visit in a fortune-teller. Saleem
invokes a traditional Indian myth to emphasize the symbolic function of
the magic. However, although Jamila realizes that she has been fooled,
she still accepts his prophecy of her son's birth which later on turns to be
true.

Janet Wilson has rightly pointed out that: "The whole novel has a
dream quality where nightmares intrude upon a floating mass of cross -
culture and events." In a supernatural occurrence, Tai Bibi produces
Jamila’s bodily smell and witness Saleem's consequent arousal. Another
incident occurs in the chapter entitled "In the Sunderbans", where the
jungle punishes Saleem and his companion by sending ghosts; which
makes them nostalgic. Later on, they relive the past with new insights.

In a magic realist novel, "a battle between two oppositional
systems takes place, each working towards the creation of a fictional
world from the other." The two opposite worlds of fantasy and reality
are present in Midnight’s Children and vie for reader's attention. In one
of his interview, Rushdie himself admits that:

The fantastic is easily discerned in Midnight's Children. Through it, the realistic makes its voice heard. The thousand
and one children point not only towards the fantasy of the
similarly numbered, Arabian Nights, but also Rushdie's
calculations of the Indian birth rate. He estimated that ‘a
thousand and one children an hour is roughly accurate.'
Fantasy pervades in most of the major events in Saleem's life; first, just after his birth, the baby begins to grow mysteriously. This phenomenon is checked by the typhoid cured by Dr. Schaapsteker's eccentric medicine. Then narration leaves the realistic plane and enters into the fantastic mold when young Saleem, hidden in the washing-chest discovers his mother's naked body which developed strange power in him. He began to hear mysterious voices and now can manage to perceive people's secret thoughts. He possessed a special power which enables him to know how his father mentally undresses his secretaries. His mother's secret dreams about her former husband and also he can hear the answers to all the difficult questions set by his teacher. This miraculous process ends after a bicycle collision with Sonny; but Saleem acquires new powers then which facilitates him to hear the voices of abilities of the midnight's children. The telepathic abilities of the thousand and one children born at the stroke of midnight's on August 15th 1947 (the date of Indian Independence), enables them to communicate with each other; in Saleem's case it helps him to read the minds of those around him. The miraculous power allows Saleem to probe and even change the course of history. Thus, the telepathic power can be considered "as a magical signifier of the objective reality of contemporary Indian Society which makes its impression on the individual psyche."\(^{75}\)

However, the visit to the ENT specialist to treat the sinus problem strips Saleem of his telepathic power and leads to the acquisition of the olfactory power which enables him to smell emotions and make him aware of his incestuous desire for his mother as well as invoke the same desire for his sister Jamila, the 'Brass Monkey'. Saleem uses his olfactory power and leads the Pakistani army to East Pakistan which
was to become Bangladesh Saleem, being their tracker, smell the terrain, track the enemies and leads unit safely. On March 25th, 1971, Saleem sniffs out Sheikh Mujibur-Rehman, who is then arrested and taken to West Pakistan. Then Saleem becomes ‘The Buddha’, an amnesic human being who becomes immune to pain and can bear even the electric shock resulting from his urine falling into toilets after his rival attempted to electrocute him in the latrine. This bizarre incident is inserted by Rushdie to portray the reality that Saleem was actually anaesthetized against feeling as well as memories, which signifies that he has become insensitive to the events that happen around him. Thus, Saleem Sinai acts like a transmitter, receiving and sending signals all over the world. He becomes an 'All India Radio' and acts as a magical as well as a realistic device signifying the 'polyglot frenzy' consisting of 'the inner monologues of all the so-called teeming millions. The various abilities that Saleem possess compels him to think he can control everything in the world.

Magic seems to affect not only Saleem but the various characters in the novel. Tai Bibi, the three hundred and ninety-five-year old prostitute can emit any smell she likes. The second string of characters like the acrobats, clowns or conjurers, who revolve around Saleem, are more prone to magic. Their powers are simply incredible: the fire-eater spits flames out of his anus, a girl from Calcutta can inflict physical injuries on people with her sharp tongue, the Kerala boy goes though mirrors, the vindhya boy like Alice, can grow taller or smaller at will, the Gown girl multiplies fish; the girl from Madras can fly, and so forth. It seems that the entire novel is as what Brain McHale says

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The Indian of Midnight’s Children is a world thoroughly prevailed by miracles ---- so thoroughly, indeed that the miraculous comes to appear routine. 77

Magic Realism and Fantasy:

The narrator is a poseur, but he is equally a magician and entertainer, manipulating the reader into a degree of acceptance for what in the main is absurd.... ‘The parallel drawn between Saleem's growing up and the development of the newly independent India would normally be best understood as metaphor.’ 78

The novel is highly political which Saleem justifies “that for the individual living in a certain kind of society there must be a relatedness of some kind between one's private world and the public world into which one has been socialized. But the political figures that appear - Indira Gandhi, her son Sanjay, Moraraji Desai, etc. are monsters straight out of a nightmare....” 79

As the country is disintegrating with corruption and communal feuds and flare - ups so is the individual. For throughout the novel Saleem has been on a slide towards disintegration; he loses finger, hair, sense of smell, memory, and becomes important as a result of the forced sterilisation programmes during the emergency. 'Saleem is enlisted in the Pakistan army as a mad-dog for his olfactory sense. Like the fantastic metamorphosis in Kafka story, Saleem's transmogrification into a man - dog suggests some deep self-loathing.

Thus, if 'Fantasy' is a sin Salman Rushdie sins in good company. Magic realism is the technique akin to fantasy, as Black Morrison points out in 'contemporary literary criticism'. Rushdie introduces fantastic and
comically absurd events into socially realistic settings, a technique known as 'magic realism'. Rushdie’s use of magic realism and his exuberant prose, which features extensive symbolism and hyperbole, led many critics to compare his style with that of Gabriel Garcia Marquez. What is Magic Realism? Rushdie in his interview to Rani Dharkan elaborates as follows:

What Garcia Marquez always said about magic realism was that it is realism and not magic. It is a way of noticing certain kinds of reality which the traditional naturalistic novel can't notice because of its rules. That's also true of many of the fabulist novels. It seems to me that what's happened is that as the 20th Century has altered reality the traditional form of the novel has become less and less able to notice it." In the same interview Rushdie further sheds light on the need of fantasy on the analogy of the edge: ‘Necessity is the mother of invention.' Rushdie reacting to Dharkan's question, 'How do you react to Philip Roth’s statement that surreal forms of modern fiction reflect the surreal nature of reality? Is this a simple question of mimesis i.e. a deranged world? Rushdie said: Well I don't think it so much deranged. I think with Roth I can see what he is saying because New York is a city which feels slightly deranged. And Garcia Marquez and other Latin American writers also say that actually it's more natural to write this way than any other way because that's what happens on our streets. I think it has a great deal of truth but I don't think it's to do with derangement of freakishness. I think it's again to do with the inability of classical writing to encompass the nature of contemporary experience. I didn't really get into writing to write fantasy. I wanted to tell stories and I suppose that's to do with fantasy. The thing that I disliked about my first novel.... but the thing I disliked about it was that it's a complete fantasy.... That
fantasy is not interesting when you separate it from actuality and it’s only interesting as a mode of dealing with actuality."^{81}

Rushdie is allergic to the term post-modernism, especially if it is ascribed to his novel *Midnight's Children*. He said to Rani Dharkar, ‘A person who came yesterday said that *Midnight's Children* is the first post-modernist Indian novel. What the hell does it mean? H. Hatterr is the first post-modernist Indian novel if you like it. It's much more self-conscious and reflexive than *Midnight's Children*.^{82}

In an interview to Chandrabhanu Pattanayak, Rushdie, referring to Dickens novel says ‘.... rooted in a recognizable real world the fantasy works.’^{83} But he was different way from that of Dickens in that to make sure that the background, the bedrock of the book was right that Bombay was like Bombay, the cities were like the cities, the different dates were recognizably correct so that the fantasy could be rooted in that kind of reality.

Rushdie, in comparison with the novel of Garcia Marquez says: “Well in Marquez, it seems to me the basic vision is the village.... He is taking literally a village view of the world, which seems fantastic. One thing that he and I, I think, do have in common is that in India people don't really treat my story as fantasy. The fantasy elements in it are relatively minor, and are only enabling devices to talk about actuality.”^{84}

**Fable and Myth:**

In the words of Catherine Cundy, *Midnight’s Children* achieves a successful fusion of east and west in term of both form and content.^{85} Referring to a Rushdie's lecture in Denmark in 1983, she (Catherine Cundy) says
Rushdie reflected on the power of Indian oral story tellers to draw huge crowds and hold the individual attention of this largely illiterate audience.86

He indicated his desire to capture some of the feel of such an oral performance within the textual confines of Midnight’s Children. This represented a significant acknowledgement of the influence of eastern exponents and intertexts on his particular brand of narrative up to this point, "the names most often on Rushdie's lips in the roles of acknowledged influences on his work stretch no further east in origin than Russia: Rabelais, Joyce, Dickens, Gogol, Boccaccio, Kafka. Rushdie cites this influence in numerous places, among them."87

T.N. Dhar aptly points out the influence of the eternal story-teller, Scheherazade. The narrator of the one thousand and one Nights, popularly known as The Arabian Night's.88 Clues to the formal aspects of the book are offered to the reader in the very opening paragraph. With Scheherazade lurking in his mind the narrator promises a story, but in the garb of a modern day confession, with an autobiographical form and a strong intellectual element; however the story goes beyond the confession, because it transcends the boundaries of a purely personal account; it acquire the proportions of an epic, with Valmiki deep in the consciousness of the narrator and embraces the story of a whole country. Saleem Sinai the protagonist, states that his birth, Schchronized with the arrival of India's independence.... "I had been mysteriously handcuffed to history, my country."89 The narrative and thematic progression is characterized throughout by a continuous oscillation from personal story of Saleem to the strong of his country.

Cundy further poses the question, 'does an understanding of the technique of an oral storyteller contribute to our understanding of the
form of Midnight's *Children*?

Using Walter J. Ong's study of the relation between oral print cultures, morality and literacy, it is possible to trace some suggestive correspondences. For example, one explains how oral narratives, such as the ancient Greek form of epic, the producers of a primary oral culture, never proceeded to develop linear plots, and that Horace's injunction to begin in medias res (literally in the middle of things) had more to do with necessity rather than a deliberate diversification from an established norm.

Cundy further elaborates, 'Ong's assessment of the skill of the epic poet lend some weight to Rushdie's claim of affinities between Midnights Children and earlier oral narrative structure....'

*According to Ong, the good epic poet displays the : tacit acceptance of the fact that the episodic structure was the only way and the totally natural way of imagining and handling lengthy narrative, and second possession of supreme skill in managing flash back and others episodic techniques.*

*Midnight's Children* drawn on the models of the seemingly endless and digressive Indian epics the Mahabharata and Ramayana, those 'interminable tales' already referred to by Raja Rao in the introduction to this study. With its thirty Chapters or 'Jars' of pickled personal and national history, it means during digression and metronomic swings through time and space *Midnight's Children* illustrates a link between Rushdie's chosen style of communication in the text and the forms of oral narrative that he seeks to reproduce.

Those same forms also provide Saleem Sinai with a way of organizing his own complex autobiography. He is literally 'handcuffed to history' the circumstances of his own birth making him analogous to the newly emergent independent nation of India. His narrative is
therefore simultaneously the story of his own life and a mirror of the life of India itself. Saleem significantly eschews a purely linear chronological mode of narration in favor of one which veers between past, present and future, presenting not only the arrival of events and characters which will later be revealed, but also his own annihilation.\textsuperscript{94}

Like Lawrence Stern's Tristram Shandy, an influence acknowledged by Rushdie, Saleem relates a substantial part of his personal history before he finally gets round to describing his own birth. He leads us backwards and forwards in time between his present standpoints of 1978, back to the events of his father Adam's Childhood, down through the intervening years to the simultaneous birth of himself and of free India. The model for this pendulum movement in the narrative is what Saleem calls, 'the metronome music of Mountbatten's Countdown Calendar' to independence.\textsuperscript{95}

Reference to Mountbatten's Countdown Calendar\textsuperscript{96} and his wife's secret consumption in a locked lavatory\textsuperscript{97} demonstrate how the reality of history in the making bears its own resemblances to the absurdities and incongruities of the fictionalized process. Larry Collins and Dominique Lapierre in 'Freedom at Midnight' give accounts of the actual events that gave rise to these two images. "Edwin Mountbatten, on arriving at Viceroy's House and asking for food for her dogs was amazed when roasted Chicken breasts were brought for them. Appalled at this decadence, she took the chicken herself and ate it locked in her bathroom."\textsuperscript{98} Her husband's desire for efficiency in the hasty arrangement for independence led him to construct a rip off day to day calendar which he ordered displayed in offices everywhere in Delhi. Like a countdown to an explosion, a large red square in the middle of

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each page of the Calendar registered the number of days left to 15th August. 99

The complexity of oral narrative, with its swoops, spirals, digression and reiteration can therefore be seen as the perfect correlative of Rushdie's technique in Midnight's Children. Both of the novel and its Indian oral models set out to give the impression of random construction, but it is a pretense belied by the eventual pattern of this narrative.... Just as the seconds tick down to midnights for India, so Saleem pursued and compelled by the demands of his critic within the text Padma and the cracks that threaten his disintegration, is forced like Scheherazade to preserve his very existence through the continuation of his narrative. 100

Nancy E. Batty provides an illuminating discussion of the art of suspense as practiced in Midnight's Children, and Rushdie's deliberations invocation of Scheherazade plight in the thousand and one Nights, whom she must keep continuously entertained by her stories if she has to save her own life. 101

Salman Rushdie, in an interview published in Kunapipi, expressed his wish of what type of literature he would like to write. He said : 'In almost every country and in almost every literature there has been every so often, an outburst of this large - scale fantasized, satire, anti-epic tradition, and whether it was Rabelais or Gogol or Baccocio.... That simply was the literature I liked to read. So it seemed to me that it was also the literature that I would like to write’ 102

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In one way, 'he allied himself to the non-realist, alternative tradition in Western fiction - Cervantes, Rabelais, Sterne, Swift, Melville, Gogol, Joyce, Gunter Grass, Borges Garcia Marquez.'

One thousand and one children were born between midnight and 1 a.m. on the night of August 14-15, 1947, that is during the first hour of India's freedom from British rule.

'Owing to some preternatural power of the moment, or just conceivably by sheer coincidence (although synchronicity on such a scale would stagger even C.G. Jung), endowed with features, talent or faculties which can only be described as miraculous.'

They were born in various parts of the country and each had a different kind of talent. Rushdie writes one remarkable fact in *Midnight's Children*... the closer to midnight our birth-times were, the greater were our gifts. Those children born in the last seconds of the hour were (to be Frank) little more than circus freaks: bearded girls, a boy with the fully-operative gills of a freshwater Mahaseer trout, Siamese twins with two bodies dangling off a single head and neck the head could speak in two voices, one male, one female, and every language and dialect spoken in the subcontinent; but for all their marvelousness, these were the unfortunates, the living causalities of that numinous hour.

Shiva has the attributes of his divine namesake, 'the god of destruction, whom no force could resist." Saleem also born on the stroke of midnight got "the greatest talent of all the ability to look into the hearts and mind of men." Later he developed the sharpest olfactory
power and smelling out persons, their clothes, their secretions, the different foods they had eaten that day.

When Ahmad Sinai, Mr. Kemal and S.P. Butt's godowns are burnt, Ahmad decides to move to Bombay to enter the property business, lured by his friends, there, Dr. Narlikar, the Gynecologist. Rushdie dwells upon the history of Bombay. Goodnettleke finds in it a parallel with Gdansk by Grass in *The Tin Drum*. ¹⁰⁷

A conscientious and careful reader discerns parallels between the individual and the national life. As Ashutosh Bannerji has pointed out:

From the Beginning Rushdie maintains a continuous effort at synchronizing national and domestic life, so that the Odyssey of the Azizes and the Sinai’s also becomes the Odyssey of the nation from the year 1915 up to about the year 1977; this convergence of the national and the domestic is underscored repeatedly in the course of the novel. “On the day the world was ended, Naseem developed the longed for headache. Such historical coincidences have littered, and perhaps befoul, my family's existence in the world. And again on a more personal level thanks to the occult tyrannies of those blandly saluting clocks, I had been mysteriously handcuffed to history, my destinies indissolubly chained to those of my country.”¹⁰⁸ Many years later Saleem is to father that imperiled child who cannot speak - the sick emergency with its claustrophobic lack of the freedom of speech. This convergence is often artificially imposed upon the narrative.

*One last fact: after the death of my grandfather, Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru fell ill and never recovered his health. This fatal sickness finally killed him on May 27th, 1964.*¹⁰⁹

This connection seems rather gratuitous.

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Half way through the novel Saleem indulges in a playfully learned explication of the sense in which his life might be said to mirror the nations....

...I was linked to history both, literally and metaphorically....2110

Superficially, the non-fiction novel is based on contemporary political events, the genre having originated in some American novelist's feeling that in the sixties real events in that country had acquired a quality of Fantasy John Hollowell has discussed this form of the novel in Fact and Fiction (University of North Caroline Press, 1977) with special reference to Truman Capotes, In Cold Blood, Norman Mailer's The Armies of the Night's and Tom Wolfe's The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test. Rushdie's narrative technique has a great deal in common with the technique of these works. Hollowell quotes Phillip Roth who wrote: "The American writer in the middle of the 20th Century has his hands full in trying to understand, then describe, and then make credible much of the American reality. It stupefies, it sickens; it infuriates and finally it is even a kind of embarrassment to one's own meager imagination. The actuality is continually outgoing our talent's: and the culture tosses up figures almost daily that are the envy of any novelist.111 The dominant mood of much of Midnight's Children is comparable to this, the political leaders of the three countries of the Sub-continent as well as their military leaders have acquired the quality of figures of fantasy in Rushdie's hands.112

Klaus Borner, in his article, the Reception of Midnight's Children in West Germany writes:

Sibyls Cramer equates Saleem Sinai with India herself. This beautifully filling metaphoric, where an individual

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conscience and the body politics are conceived as one individual whole, is basically the way of thinking of a mythologist. India's history between 1947 and 1975 is literally written on Saleem Sinai's body. He carries like canvas the colossal painting of India's history between dream and nightmare. And within this mode of thinking, Saleem Sinai's creative act of writing under the aegis of his Muse Padma is at the same time the genesis of a continent. (The genesis of the book has been a success; whether the genesis of India after the midnight of August 15, 1947 was similarly successful is a question which Salman Rushdie answers less definitely in the affirmative)\textsuperscript{113}

According to Lea Sarkar\textsuperscript{114} ' 'The novel is a modernist work of art. In the European sense of the word and at the same time a very Indian one. The modernist concept takes into consideration the revolutionary changes in the history of the European novel since the early 20th century.... The modern European novel is sufficient proof for a new ambiguous awareness of the world and the self... In Mitternachtsskinder (Midnight's Children) Lea Sarkar finds this modernist awareness realized to perfection.'\textsuperscript{115}

Klaus Borner detects a parallel in the narrative technique between Saleem Sinai, the protagonist in Midnight's Children and Oskar Mazerath, the hero of Gunter Grass's 'The Tin Drum', 'a Peeping Tom who is all the time and everywhere present as an eyewitness to political and private events; but is at the sometime a basically human experience which is global... The dried up gnome (Saleem Sinai) who in the end spends his days preserving Chutneys and his stories on history is symbolic of India's dried up hopes. But Saleem Sinai is basically much more of a compassionate moralist than Oskar Mazerath. The bitterness, however, remains in both.'\textsuperscript{116} It is above all the narrator's - Saleem Sinai's perspective that immediately reminds German readers of the gnome Oskar Mazerath in Gunter Grass's 'The Tin Drum'. Both these

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fictional characters and narrators, because of their abnormal outsider position, provide the author with the only possibility to create a fictional world which is highly symbolic of historical reality. The central theme with Grass and Rushdie is not social criticism but the presentation of certain phases of history in the curse of which the world and human nature have undergone radical and irrevocable changes.

The locality or setting of Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* is urban, to be specific, cosmopolitan Bombay. As the German critic Renate Schostack rightly observed,\(^{117}\) as quoted by Kluas Borner in his brilliant study of *Midnight's Children* 'A New Phenomenon in Indian Writing: Rushdie's world, his fictional setting is the big city, on environment where cosmopolitanism is unavoidable. It makes for modernity, for topicality and highlights a fact of India and which in Indo-Anglian writing has certainly not been neglected but not very often been associated with "the eternal rural, immutable, the real India" (Compare Premchand's Godan) This setting in Mitternachtskinder should not be underestimated as a factor which facilitates the approach for Western reader, because environment and fictional character interpenetrates and constitute a hybrid cosmopolitan atmosphere.\(^{118}\)

Rushdie, a master story teller, owes his feat of skill-tour de force - to another born story - teller, the daughter of a vizier, Scheherazade, who to save her own life by postponing her husband the king's decision to kill her, said one thousand and one tales - that great oral fiction of the East called in Arabic Alf Laila-o-Laila i.e. one thousand and one nights. So critic after critic has pointed out the Arabian Night's not only as a source of Rushdie's stories to within stories in *Midnight’s Children* but also the basic technique on which lies the edifice of his marvelous book which had taken Europe with storm and fascination. As Malisa Ruthven

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in *The Satanic Affair* observe. "Given his Indian Muslim background and his fondness for fabulous phantasmagorical narratives, his choice of book was not surprising. *The Thousand and One Nights*, a great collection of tales, which as he contains all other stories."\(^{119}\)

Ruthven, the Englishman’s observation Corroborates with that of German critic Hans-Egon, *The Grand Old Man* of letters as another German Klaus Borner has dug it out. Borner writes: ‘Yet there, are a few reviewers whose sensitive approach does justice to the literary achievement of the novel as well as to its relative non-western qualities. Hans-Egon Holthusen, *The Grand Old Man* of letters his ‘Reference to Salman Rushdies’,\(^ {120}\) stresses the narrative principle of Scheherazade - physical self - preservation and justification by story-telling-he links it with the classical example of European non-linear narration, the 'life' and 'opinion' of Tristram Shandy and he draws intelligent parallels between Rushdie and Gunter Grass. With both the presentation of "Matter abundance" is also "manner", the excessive fullness of their world is a constitutive condition of creativity."\(^ {121}\)

One equates Saleem Sinai with India herself. This beautifully fitting metaphor when an individual consciousness and the body politic are conceived as one indivisible whole, is basically the way of thinking of a mythologist.\(^ {122}\)

Padma is a very intriguing device and a marvelous character in her own right. She is also a symbol of India of contact with the earth that an artist needs to be an artist, of that anchor of sanity that keeps Saleem sane. She is many things within novel.... Padma doesn't speak in English.... Her hallmark interjection 'Mister' is easily explained for that is commonly used all over India, no matter what the language. Even her

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imperatives and inversion of statement to question (for example, 'why you're waiting? begin all over again) are explainable as translation that retains the flavor of the vernacular. But what happens to words like the much-quoted 'writery' of 'looker-after' or even the more difficult 'writing-shiting' whose word-play depends on the specifics of the English language?123

Catherine Cundy justifies the introduction of Tai and Padma to enhance 'The appeal of story-telling to Indian audiences.'124 Thus, 'the figure of illiterate producers and consumers of stories are into the body of Midnight's Children in the forms of Tai and Padma. Tai the boatman is also a story-teller, spinner of yarns and inhibiter of fantasies, mirrors in his own 'technique' the formal construction of Saleem's narrative and the novel as a whole with his magical who talk, words pouring from him like fools' money... soaring up to the most remote Himalayas of the past, then swooping shrewdly on some present detail... To vivisect it's meaning like a mouse.

While Tai is able to spellbind the young Aadam Aziz with his tales, Padma is a vital spur and judge of Saleem's autobiography' his 'necessary ear.' In many ways, Padma's role in Midnight's Children is representative of the separate technical and even cultural demands that writing the novel made on Rushdie.... She provides a link back to the culture which Rushdie insists informs his work most strongly. Padma becomes a vocal and individualized member of the multitude which sits at the feet of the story-teller hanging on his every word.125

Tariq Rahman suggests to refer to Keith Wilson on the role of Padma, while describing the horrors of the 1971 war Saleem Sinai, the protagonists, tells Padma, the woman who acts symbolically as the
average, unsophisticated listener or reader on the role of Padma and that of the reader in the construction of meaning in the novels of Rushdie.  

Padma's role within the text is clearly a symbolic one. She becomes critical of the processes of construction and reconstruction of personal and national history in which the text is engaged. She is not merely a symbol of the Indian story - teller's audience - its capacity or credulity crystallized into a single identity but a symbol also of a wider critical position in relation to the narrative mode itself. As with Rushdie's treatment of factual error in the relating of historical incident, Padma serves to embody a critical skepticism about the narrative and to suggest a relationship of contestation between the texts form and context. As Keith Wilson puts it in his essay *Midnight’s Children and Reader Responsibility*: ‘Out of the distance between his readers and Padma, Rushdie makes the 'Meaning' that Saleem can only, frenetically, hope to find’. It is through Padma's eyes that we are made aware of our own difficulties in dealing with the demands of the text.

It at all there was any moralistic purpose of *Midnight’s Children* in the view of Rushdie, it was an attempt to say that the thirty two years between independence and the end of the book didn't add up to very much, that a kind of betrayal had taken place, and that the book was dealing with the nature of that betrayal. To that extent there was a kind of public purpose.

Moreover, the various episodes in the novel are deeply soaked in the magic realist mode. "Perforated sheet" incident appears to be fantastic event which later on surfaces on a realistic level. "Hit - the - spittoon' weaves a fantasy around the common Indian habit of betel - leaf chewing. The "Accident in a washing-chest" episode in which
Saleem watches his mother naked gives him the gift of telepathy. The entire incident parodies Tantric magic, which supposedly lend such powers as telepathy through the release of sexual energy. "Movements performed by Pepper pots" transports Saleem to General Ayube Khan's dinner table where he demonstrates difficult man over which shapes the fortune of the 1965 was between India and Pakistan. "In the Sunderbans" unravels the nightmarish world, where every animals and human being is mysteriously affected by a force that renders living organisms transparent. Similarly, the chapter entitled "Sam and the Tiger" is a fantasy involving the 1971 war which resulted in the creation of Bangladesh as a Separate nation. It shows Parvati's magical power which she uses to rescue Saleem from the invading forces and takes him in an invisible basket back to Delhi.

Entire narrative is clothed in fantasy. Myth and reality overlap boundaries. Fantasy may see as seriously narrating political reality when the readers are the author share certain views. In this novel, numerical exactitude is a feature which relates fact to fantasy. In his 1983 interview, Rushdie states his fascination for figures when he said, "It seemed to me that the period between 1947 and 1977 the period from independence to emergency had a kind of shape to it. It represented a sort of close period of the history and the country. That shape became part of the architecture of the work."

Thus Rushdie present metafiction asides to the reader, there by breaking the illusion of reality.
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