Language and Style of Midnight's Children
The Language and Style

For an Indian settled abroad, it could be really a fear to write about the native customs and manners in an alien language i.e. English. Rushdie's success in using the English language as a medium for the expression of creative urge is in his device of using ironical style to expose the hypocrisy of a society. He uses pure and *limpid* English. It is easy and natural. The tone is always evolved and conscious. In structure and address, it is moderate, traditional and instrumental. It is obstructed in contextual purposes for which it is generated. The historical facts, social conditions and the weathers are presented in a different settings. His language beautifully communicates the Indian sense and sensibility.

With highly perceptive observations Rushdie neither condemns nor reacts. He simply gives a written document. His pungent satire on religious fundamentalism, caste and sects feelings are supreme examples of a detached observer. He uses straight-forward language to convey his own feelings. He never hesitates to use many suitable Hindi or Urdu words like Gunda, Chup Amma, Takht etc. to provide clarity and suitability and shows his skill in introducing modern narrative technique.
Rushdie's descriptions are authentic and marked with intense realism. The life of his protagonists often end into a realised life at the end of the novel. They are wonderfully innocent and show distinctive artistic presentation. His approach is always objective in the treatment of his subject. He can cause to work a miracle even through a modest language. His themes, characters, dialogues and straightforward statements are able to carry the feelings and atmosphere of the Indian sub-continent, because he uses common Indian English idioms without any change in structure.

His vocabulary is large and adequate enough to deal with the range of his subject. He often uses lengthy and complex sentences. His stylistic writing makes even simple incidents charming and interesting. His narrative gives an impression of his confidence in expression and power of story-telling. The gentle touch of humour makes it more touching. In his novels - appearance and reality, free will and determinism, individual and society virtue and vice, reason and passion beauty and ugliness, hopes and despairs, tears and smiles, all are inseparably interwoven. Though he is not a humorist but he often uses light humour wherever needed. He satirizes whenever he finds an angularity but his satire is so
biting that it sparks of controversies inside and outside the literary world. There is no imagery at all. The syntax is straightforward and diction lucid. Narrating historical and political events with the help of individual characters he helps to create his art of fiction.

Rushdie is a master manufacturer of felicitous phrases and they can be found diffused all over his works. Saleem Sinai's seminal description of himself is made of them: "child of an unknown union, I have had more mothers than most mothers have children; giving birth to parents has been one of my stranger talents - a form of reverse fertility beyond the control of contraception, and even of the widow herself" (p. 243). We can count here various catchy captions of chapters like 'The Perforated Sheet', 'Hit-the-spittoon', 'Snakes and Ladders', 'Accident in a Washing-chest', 'Love in Bombay' 'Movement Performed by Pepperpots', 'Jamila Singer' etc.

There is also inserting North Indian vernacular language habits like double usage of the same word for fluent effect. For example, "Chhi, Chhi" Padma covers her ears, "My God, such a dirty filthy man, I never knew!" (p. 319).

There are also cases of insertion of crisp, befitting
vernacular words/phrases into flawless English sentences such as:

(1) Tai Bibi leaning out of a window shouts, "Hey bhaenchud! little sister-sleeper, where you running? What's true is true! (p. 320)

(2) The Nawab had invited all of these to his daughter's hennaing ceremony. (p. 321)

(3) "...donkey from somewhere!" (p. 118)

(4) "... mad man from somewhere". (p. 122)

(5) "tea cup-kissery" (p. 264). It is used for communicating dislike for his mother's expression of Platonic love towards her impotent first husband. It indicates drinking tea from the same cup.

Overall *Midnight's Children* lays the foundation of Indian English to fulfil the need of globalisation of India although Rushdie is not the pioneer of doing so, prior to him R.K. Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand and Raja Rao have enshrined the Indian English on its right place.

The way, thus paved has been broadened in *Midnight's Children*. This use of a specific variety of English
has a more strictly textual and stylistic dimension.

"Rushdie's solution in *Midnight's Children* was to bring in India, not only as the grand theme but also as part of the medium. It could be argued that the single most remarkable novum that Rushdie introduced in his use of English here was his incorporation of some Indian: i.e. Hindi-Urdu/Hindustani, words, phrases and collocations. He did not subvert English from within, in the trendy radical catch-phrase of his youth; rather, he changed from without. Rushdie's style in *Midnight's Children* is that of Panchatantra in which a story generates a new one and the generation, sub-generation within the story goes on.

Tariz Rahman (1992) views *Midnight's Children* as having some of the features of impressionistic plays.

The language of the novel is fragmentary in that it copes with the fallible memory compounded by quirks of the protagonist. It is attested by Saleem's verdict......

"I have begun to crack all over like an old Jug.... in short I am literally disintegrating, slowing for the moment, although there are signs of an acceleration." (37) Again, he himself confides his irreversible catastrophe:

167
"I am tearing myself apart, can't even agree with myself talking, arguing like a wild fellow, cracking up, memory going, yes memory plunging into charms and being swallowed by the dark, only fragments remain, none of it makes sense any more." (503)

Right from the beginning of the novel, we come across the fragmentary variety of language.

"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 15, 1947. And the time? the time matters, too. Well then: at night - no, its 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, I fumbled form into the world." (3)

Thus the language of Midnight's Children is like a perforated sheet through which something is hidden and something is revealed. The dots, dashes, pauses speak more and better as Saleem himself declared - "but I must not reveal all my secrets at once." (14) What happened next is the core style
of language use in the novel i.e. the language is used to create curiosity, just as found in the old story telling habits.

On every page, there are Indian words, used in their transliterated form. These words have their own colour and taste as well as effect. Because their English rendering may or may not be that expressive as desired. Rushdie has employed the particular variety of English to give it an Indian feel, "Since language mediates the way in which we see the past and the traditions that inform the present...... the extent to which we are able to see history as language, as discourse, as a way of seeing, or as a code of recognition is also the extent to which we are able to destabilise history's fixity, its giveness, and open it up to the transformative power of imaginative revision." (Slemon, "post-colonial Allegory" p. 159)

To fabricate the novel **Salman Rushdie** has conceived that variety of English language which depicts Indian features of English akin to Hindustani i.e. the colloquial variety of Hindi advocated by Gandhiji and Premchand. This is solely the merit of **Rushdie** in writing this debut novel to make it reach everyman whosoever has access to simple grammar of English. Thus it includes different styles and different devices
to accord with each style, such as -

1. Indian words transliterated.

2. Indian words transliterated and translated.

3. Repetition of words.

4. Splitting of words.

5. New compounding of words.

6. Rhyming words and sentences.

7. Punctuations.

8. Onomatapoea.

9. References to mythological characters and events, historical personages and annotated authors.

11. Accentuated English words.

11. Use of parenthesis, capitalisation and italicisation.

1. Indian words have been frequently used in the novel to create and maintain the feel of Indian culture and way of behaviours of people because if they are translated, they lose the connotations i.e. their effect is gone after translation. Such words used in the novel are as follows :-
Shikara (4), Nakkoo (6), dhoti (7), aap (9), tu (11), babaji (12), takht (13), Shikarawallah (22), Chugha-coats (5), Kachcha (30), Chaprasi (31), hartal (32), yak-thoo (35), doctri-attache' (35), takht-e-Suleman (35), Shankaracharya Pann (37), Dahi (42), Korma (42), Dupatta (44), Arre-baap (47), teetar (48), Gaiwallah (51), Nach-girl (51), laddoo (60), pajamas (61), Satyagraha (65), talaq (68), Hey-maharaj (74), dugdugee (77), muhalla, khichri, loafers (77), Begum-sahiba (80), chavanni (82), duniya-dekho, Dilli dekho (83), sisterji (85), badmash (86), Maulavi (87), fantoosh (91), bhai (94), pell-mell (97), cousini (98), wah-wah (98), yaara (98), peepshow-wallah (99), Ram-Ram (99), Ah! (101), tick-tock (104), sakkuch tick-tock hai (111), tickety-boo, cho-chwect (113), ladeed ans ladas (113), Junglee (119), oh-hio (119), chand-ka-tukra (125), Sadhuji (131), baba (143), dhobi (150), dzinn (153), Janum (154), Sachivalaya (157), channa (158), Hai Raim (169), Sahib (171), badmash (173), vakeel (174), chump (179), Rajah (181), fishwala (182), rasagulla (185), gulabjamun (185), Arre (190), Amma, Abba (191), Pakora (203), soo che' ? saru che' ? Danda leke maru che' (228), ayah (244), samosa, parathas (242), bulbul (242) haddi phaelwan (256), Lassi, faluda, bhel-puri
(258), Biris, gaddamn (265), Parhansa (271), yah (272), chutney (287), Mumavi, manu (urdu, 290), Satyagrah (311), Mahaguru (324), Ma (328), Shafaaz Qualandar (352), chhi-chhi, naans, tanduri, chapattis (377), fauj (402), soo-soo (403), Pathan, Panjabi (405), baboos (408), CUTIA (417).

2. The technique of transliteration and translation of Indian words adds a new flavour to the language as well as the expression in that the common phrases and sentences popular among Indian people as political slogans have been used and followed by their translations for those who are non-native. There are many-many examples to this category in Midnight's Children. Some of them are as follows :-

Sabkuch - thicktock hai (111)
(Everything is just fine)

Junglee (wild) (125)

Chand - ka - Tukra (125)
(her piece of the Moon....)

The Mubarak (He who is blessed) (131)

Bulbul-e-din (night-ingale of the faith) (375)
Ek kkhh - thoo (he Spits)  (417)
Garibi-hatao (Get rid of poverty)  (424)
Amar Sonar Bangle (our golden Bengal)  (424)

and many others.

3. Repetition of words as such is to emphasise that what is already said before. This is sometimes within the convention of the language and sometimes it is in accordance with the Indian circumstances. This variety of style has its manifestation in 3 ways, namely :-

(a) Pure as Pure  (100)
    black as black  (249)

(b) On me - on me, listen - listen, high - high (49),
    Politics-Politics (120), Hai Ram - Hai Ram, humming - humming, well - well (42), ju - ju (73), come see - come see (84), ra-pist ! ra-pist ! (85), decide - decide (111), Joke-Joke (120), hi - hi (274), hoo - hoo (280), heh - heh (281), crying-crying, rotting-rotting, boring-boring (290), child-child (291), chai - chai (357), khrik-khrik (454), children-children (520), what-what (16), good-good (17).
(c) talaq, talaq, talaq (68), poor, poor (94), Hindu Hindu Hindu (84), Ra-ray-ray-pist (85), baap-re-baap (293), Aaahha, oh God - oh God - oh God (299), Hai ! Hai ! ap Ai - hai hai (299), No No No (381), deeper deeper deeper round and round and round and round (222), faster faster (99), down down down (264), crying-crying-crying (277).

4. **Spliting of words** has come to be used for creating sarcasm or irony such as com-for-table (116), com-for-tea (116) and some others like

- yelling howling screaming (297),
- ka-dang ! ka-blam !, ka-pero !!! (444),
- Ra-pist, Ra-ray-ray-pist (85).

5. **A new way of compounding** - In Midnight's Children there are instances of new compounds made up of two or more words and two or more phrases and sometimes the whole sentence. what is revealed from this type of compounding is to make the utterance congruent and thereby effective as a one word utérance. They are of two types - hyphenated and unhyphenated. Some examples are given below:

- bedchamber (18), Europe-returned (19), Cowwebbed (23),
foreign-educated (23), fishwines (26), roundandround (31),
God knows whats (39), Newspaperman (40), fifty-two-year
old (40), Whats-itsname (42), good-for-nothing (61), last-
viceroy-table (71), ill-at-eare (74), newlyweds (77),
don'tyauthink (77), khichri-in-hand (78), As-yet-unsuited (78),
not-always-pleasant (84), What youoing (85), thumband forc
finger (87), fasterfaster (95), talldarkhandsome (116), lock-
stockandbarrel (117), chicken-breast-eater (126), film-mag
nate-and-racchorese-owner (151), Times of India readers
(157), Coca-cola girls (157), black-tongue (162), carrot-
and-stick-affair (167), Rikshaw-boy (167), lotus-godders
(177), dung-lotus (177), song-as-an-axe (194), good-two-
shoes (201), not-very tidy (202), Got To GET AWAY (202),
scholtsachers, nine-year-old-boy (204), Cyrus - the - geat
(205), 'Wrong inna head' (219), grand parantal (225),
duperdeeper deeper (222), round and round and round and
round (222), by-the-hairs-of-my-mothers-head (240), down
down down down (264) look it (277) fittle - lattle (293) soon-
to-be-revealed (292), such-so-bad (293), three-of-a-kind (295)
damnit (297), fiftyelepostman (307), hail-mary-full-of-grace
(305), Me-against-the world (307), chikren-sticking-together-
through-thick-and-twin (317), what-chews-at-bones-beneath-

6. **Rhyming** - There are few rhyming words and sentences in the novel which are presented very beautifully and adds a unique style. One can come across the rhyming effect of words and phrases in *Midnight Children* as follows:

```
Come all you greats - o 77
eat a few dates - o 77
Prima in India 107
Gateway to India
Star of the East
With her face to the west
Kuru - the - Guru (147)
dir ? Bir ? Dil ? (190)
So che' ? Saru che ?
Danda le' ke' maru che' (228)
How are yor ? - I am well ! - I'll take a stick and theash you to hell ! (228)
```

* * * Now ! * * *

176
For 1st Time, such powers may be used (321-323) in your service! Lord Khuro is

* * * HERE ! * * *

Lord (322)

KHUSRO (322) KHUSRO KHUSRO KHUSRO
KHsUROVANI KHUSRO KHUSRO KHUSRO

* BHAGWAN *

BLESSINGS ! BEAUTY !! TRUTH !!! (323)

Om Hare Khuro Hare Khurovand Om

Cyrus - the - guat, Boon on a plate, In nineteen hundred and fourty eight - (323)

Anything you want to be, you kin be,
you kin be just what - all you want. 457

India is Indira ans Indira is India (501) etc.

7. **Punctuations** - Usual way of punctuation does not go a long way to unravel the intricacy of expression and so the author has utilised punctuation marks according to the situation in an usual way. thus we have the use of punctuation marks of this sort can be seen in the following
examples :-

........ Big shot ! (15) Good........ good (15)

Dogs ? Assassins ? ............... (50)

And................ And.................. And................... (69)

For the love of .................. (85)

".................. But the birds ? .......... " 95

".................. Hullo ................." (158)

"I." "I." 'And I." (200)

"shh ............... " (294)

"??????????????????????" (315)

"O, mister, mister !" (341)

"Back - to - Bom !" (356)

thai !! thai !!! (441)

"Ai - o- ai - o! Ai - o - o! (462)

For......... for her ............ the widwo (471)

"Ab........ " Arre, O my God, listen,

baba, the boy is saying something ! (547)
8. **Onomatopoea** are actually exclamations for instance -

ai....... O....... ai ........ ooo ! (121)

Shhh ! (290) Chhi - Chhi ! (377)

Soo - Soo ! (403) Hoo - Hoo ! (282)

Hai ! Hai - hai ! (299)

Hai Ram ! Hai - Ram ! (169)

Yaaaakh - thooooo ! (35)

YAAAAAAAAAAA ! (52)

Mumbo - Jumbo ! (74)

Thaiii ! Thaiii ! (444)

Ai - o - ai - o ! Ai - o - o ! (462)

9. **References to mythological characters and events and historical personages and authors** -

This type of referencing in creative writing is meant for authenticating the chronology of work and relating different spaces and times and making them contemporarily relevant. Some examples in this category are given bellow-
(a) Myghological Characters and places -

Kuru, Pandavas, Ram, bhima, Arjuna, Shiva, Laxmi, Parvati, Ganesha, Mumba Devi, Maya, Kurukshetra, Kali, Durga, Chandi, Shakti, Chamunda Devi, Bharatmata, Mahishasur, Vishnu, Om, Paramhansa etc.

(b) Historical personages and annotated authors, famous magazines & places -


10. Over accentuated words - There are English words with vowel lengthening to create the mood of the speakers as well as the reader. Some words in this section are as follows :-

180
Please (215)
yaaaaakh - thoooo ! (35)
yAAAAAAAA ! (52)
yaaaaauuuuuuu (291)

11. Capitalisation & Italics - This practice has been adopted to eye-catch the situation. This is a pervasive characteristic of Rushdie's novels. Both the devices are abundantly used in the novel in which the motif of the author is nothing more than highlighting and emphasising the matter. In addition, it also has the quality of the spoken words in which stress, pitch and intonation are usually the accompanying features. Thus, Rushdie has made the use of language lively and livelier by applying this technique. Examples of italicised and capitalised words and phrases are as follows :-

(a) Italicisation -

1. Recite, in the name of the Lord thy creator, who created Man from clots of Hood. (words from Quran) (p.4)

2. Pronto 0 (used for Dr. Aziz ) p. 19

181
3. Tannenbaum (German Tune)

4. Talaaq ! Talaaq ! Talaaq (68)

5. Cho Chweet (77)

6. Made no difference ! (136)

7. This !, There ! (156)

   What can't be cured must be endured (224)

   arrive ! when ! (189) love (197)

   damn good show ! 208

   more land to stand on ? 208

   Quentin Durward, Scaramouche (215)

   teronia (240), Woman orvera cruz (274)

   thank God it's him not us - 276

   India (277) Lord Khusro's Astral plane (323)

   Ear Nose Throat clinic (362)

   From the wrong direction (370)

   Mr. Mustafa Aziz and fly (466)

   Thank god (527) I like it (544)
(b) **Capitalisation**

GOD WILLING, THANK GOD (26)

FRESH FROM FIFTY FIERCE WEEKS IN DELHI!

STRAIGHT FROM SIXTY-THREE SHARPSHOOTER WEEKS IN BOMBAY! SECOND RIP - ROARIOUS YEAR!

SINGLE-HANDED! DOUBLE - BARRELLED! (51)

PELL-MEL (93) FULL TILT (125)

GOVERNMENT PLOUTS LAW! SABARMATI SCANDAL NOW A PUBLIC DISGRACE!... 316

SABARMATI FOR CIVIL JAIL AT LAST (316)

PLEASE COME QUICK SINAISAHIB SUFFERED HEARTBOOT GRAVELY ILL SALAAMS ACICE 355 PEREIRA

UNPROVOKED ATTACK ON INDIA (357)

INDIANS ATTACK UNDER COVER OF ARTILLERY (360)

ULTIMATE PANIC IN NEW DELHI! INDIAN FORCES
IN TATTERS (361)

NO PORTITION OR ELSE PERDITION ! MUSLEMS ARE THE JEWS OF ASIA ! (80) etc.

Ultimately the language and style and so the linguistic style of Midnight's Children reveals the hybridisation of two or more cultures bred in Saleem Sinai as the disguise of the author. Furthermore, the language and style of a person is the mirror of the whole nation as can be gleaned from the following passages in which Saleem explicitly admits;

How, in what terms, may the career of a single individual be said to impinge on the fate of a nation ? I must answer in adverbs and hyphens : I was linked to history both literally and metaphorically, both actively and passively, in what our admirable modern scientists might term "modes of connection" composed of "dualistically - combined configurations" of the two pairs of opposed adverbs given above : This is why hyphens are necessary : actively - literally, passively - metaphorically, actively - metaphorically and passively - literally, I was inextricably entwined with my word. (238)

This is why Meenakshi Mukherjee, an eminent critic, has the following appraisal for Rushdie's Midnight's Children.
Rushdie handled the amorphous and messy reality of the subcontinent with a casual assurance and took linguistic risks with such abandon—getting away with the use of the mongrel street language of cities, daring to translate idioms and metaphors with audacious literatures and perpetrating bilingual puns mediated by no apology, no footware, no glossary— that the old debate about the ability of English to convey the nuances of Indian academy busy for a couple of decades, seemed irrelevant for the time being. Midnight’s Children demonstrated how epic, fable, national events, family saga, advertisements, films, popular songs, newspaper clippings, parody, pastiche and gossip could all be gathered up in one comprehensive sweep that is comic, historic and mythic at the same time. Rushdie’s energy was infections, and his example seemed to galvanise in the next few years the Indian English literary scene which has been stagnant for a while, unleashing a flood of new novels that has not yet adated.