5.1 Introduction

Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* (1980), is explicitly postmodernist in its rewriting of the past from a given summit of reference; in this case, the 15th of August, 1947. In rewriting the if’s and but’s of Indian history in terms of flight of the imagination, magic, realism, and myth, Rushdie acknowledges the complication that seems to characterise the Indian subcontinent.

My thesis purports to scrutinize how, within the novel, history alone is incompetent of doing righteousness to a series of events, bizarre and romantic, which led to the birth of two nations out of the corpse of one colossal structure. Therefore the recourse to narratorial strategies like fantasy and myth. My research work will examine how the novel emphasizes, that, each individual is twisted by history, and, is however ironically creating history. Saleem Sinai is an allegory for India. The many siblings (selves), of Sinai and his various parents, mirror the innumerable complexities that is India itself. At every moment Saleem’s history is linked to the story of the nation. The account is nothing if not a *chutnification* of Indian history by a master pickler, who admits:

_I spend my time at the great work of preserving. Memory as well as fruit is being preserved by the corruption of the clocks._

\(^1\)
This study will also endeavor to comprehend the significance of the women characters within the novel. Particularly so, as India is compared to a woman, is defined as female, and, is unambiguously named *Bharat Mata* within the novel. This study, will investigate how Rushdie’s representation of woman, is a narratorial strategy in providing a subaltern, marginalized view of modern India, in terms of a marginalized discourse, namely the Indian English language. The women, in *Midnight’s Children*, are important and we are told that *Saleem*’s destiny, like his grandfather’s, bows to *woman and history*.

Saleem indicates the “connection” between “Mother India” and the women figures he encounters when he estimates:

…*women have made me; and also unmade me. It is perhaps a matter of connection, is not mother India, Bharat Mata commonly thought of as a female? And you know there is no escape from her.*

Considerably, then, India is compared to a women, and, we the readers, like *Saleem*’s grandfather *Adam Aziz*, have to discover and understand India bit by bit, just as *Saleem*’s grandfather “discovered” *Naseem* part by through the perforated sheet.

It would be fascinating to comprehend *Saleem*’s (Rushdie’s) reworking of history and the role of women in it. The women who are highlighted within the novel are seen in a state of constant fluctuation and in an ambivalent light. These women, inspite of being upheld as *Bharat Mata* within the novel are represented less as individuals in their own light and more as concepts. Significantly, it is women who create *Saleem*’s destiny at significant junctures in the nation’s
history. Mary Pereira is also Saleem’s role model as a creator - a creator of history. It is at her factory in Goa, where Saleem learns and refines the art of pickling, and, meets Padma, the woman to whom he narrates his tale.

In terms of genre, Rushdie’s Midnight’s Children is undoubtedly postmodernist. Given the extensive use of fantasy and myth within the novel, it would be worthwhile to examine, the kind of fantasy Rushdie employs. As also Rushdie’s position within the postmodernist canon. In the words of Stephen Pricket the term ‘postmodernist’ is given as under:

…itself a non-sequitur or oxymoron (how can a thing be postmodern?) It is used in practice to describe the art of the non-sequitur; such terms as ‘fragmentation’, ‘discontinuity’, ‘indeterminacy’, ‘plurality’, ‘metafictionality’, ‘heterogeneity’, ‘intertextuality’, ‘decentering’, and ‘dislocation’ are often mentioned in attempts to describe and define the genre. Postmodernism is characterised by rapid and apparently unrelated transitions of place, time and of tone; it specialises in juxtaposing detailed realism and wild fantasy; in many way it is less a mode of literary construction in a formal sense than a mode of disconcerting the reader, of challenging, even gratuitously, perspectives and habits of association.³

Not just as an innovation in literature, but also in the radical remaking of all the arts. The twentieth century saw the rise of modernism. Modernism spawned several literary movements- Imagism, Symbolism, Existentialism, etc.

Postmodernism find several features of modernism reactionary- e.g. externally imposed order, and instead recognise the multiplicity of variable realities. It accepts both “high” and
“low” literature. The postmodernist space is decentered and disjunctured. Hudh Grady has pointed out that:

*The abandonment of a centered, unified, modernist space has also led to the overthrow of a series of privileged, hierarchical oppositions.*

This is apparent in the disintegrate of the peculiarity between “art” and “popular culture”, and also in the championing of various “others” of the western ethos, like women, blacks and the peoples of postmodernism is that it recognises that a text is rooted in its context. The modernist contradiction of history is a disagreement of meaning. In fiction it is evident in a focus on literary form, conscious aestheticism, fragmentation of reality, alienation, recourse to myths in the midst of modern chaos. Nevertheless, any text is rooted in its context and is a product of prevailing history, ideology, and power relations. Though, postmodernist history is not merely an awareness of the past, it is a point of reference from where rewriting of the past is possible.

Third world writers like Rushdie, have jettisoned the rules of the bourgeois humanistic novel, because they wished to write about themes this form had been incapable of handing before, themes like nationalism, and, the painful process of decolonisation.

Published in 1961, *A House for Mr. Biswas*, was by no means the first, third world English novel, but it is perhaps, the first, to efficiently widen the scope of the English novel, by describing the linguistic and material chaos of third world life. Rushdie owes something of this expatriate sensibility - in quest-of-self-identity to Naipaul. Though, the source of his narrative techniques lies in the new developments in the novels of South America. The novels of *Mario Vargas Liosa*, *Carlos Fuentes* and *Gabriel Garcia Marquez* were loose and voluminous monsters on an altogether different scale. However they came from different social and literary
backgrounds, in their panoramic exploitation of history, their unexpected juxtapositions of fact and fantasy, they displayed startling new potentialities for the novel form.

Their native countries do not frequently have an adequate publishing infrastructure or a satisfactorily stylish readership. The economics of literacy and publishing means that third world writers, even when they are apparently writing of their own countries, are nevertheless primarily writing for western and metropolitan audiences. Such facts are an essential facet in understanding these fictional versions of history. They are postmodernist because they are written in a third world context. As Marquez and his fellow, Latin American writers made clear, the language of fantasy, of fragmentation, of discontinuity, of dislocation was, more than any other, the appropriate language for the societies in which they found themselves. It is a world where nature and culture are equally alien and arbitrary Naipaul’s Trinidad, Marquez’s Columbia and Rushdie’s India are, in fact, borrowed fragments of European culture.

Rushdie, Naipaul, and Marquez, are at the peripheries of European culture. An agent of social critique, the novel in recent years, particularly twentieth century English Postmodernist fantasy has tended to originate in these cultural margins. The centre and the margins are superficial as mismatched yet co-existent, even overlapping worlds. The centre defines the other in terms of its stable self, whereas the view from the outside underlines how extraordinary and fantastic the supposedly normal centre is.

Critics have noticed the similarities of Rushdie’s fiction with that of Gabriel Garcia Marquez. Rushdie himself evaluates Marquez’s ‘chronicle of a death foretold’ as:

*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... 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.\textsuperscript{5}

This is uniformly appropriate to Rushdie’s own fiction. In Rushdie’s fiction, as in all good writing, there are no ultimate answers. But what kind of fantasy does Rushdie employ in his novel? I will take alternative to an important essay by Ron Shepherd, in explicating postmodernist fantasy, of the kind employed by Rushdie in Midnight’s Children.

The nineteenth and early twentieth century novel was fundamentally a middle class art form shimmering middle class values, with mimetic pragmatism, and a firm sense of moral and social accountability. Though, in recent times there is a literature, which seems to stand in opposition to the more-established habitual forms of storytelling. In 1973, Gerald Graff, in an important essay, described the effect of this new ideology on literature as:

\textit{Numerous literary and cultural critics have spread the view that the postmodernist literary sensibility is part of a larger cultural revolution that is sweeping away the outmoded bourgeois consciousness with its legacy of egocentric individualism, its obsession with rationality and objectivity and its pattern of aggression and guilt.}\textsuperscript{6}

This new fiction has been considered as fantasy. In an important book by Rosemary Jackson, he puts:
Fantasy is related to Coleridge’s ‘fancy’ in that it is concerned with direct sensory experience rather than concepts.\(^7\)

Attention is drawn to a tradition of fantasy writing in English literature which goes back as far as the Gothic novelists and further into fairytale and folklore. Fantasy is seen to be rebellious because it seeks an alternative kind of reality to that of the humanist tradition. According to Rosemary Jackson, the fantastic is a literature of subversion. It traces the unsaid and the unseen of a culture, that which has been silenced, made invisible, covered over or made absent, by the prevalent political or sociological ideology.

A critic like Marcel Schneider, views the fantastic as a dramatization of,

*the anxiety of existence.*\(^8\)

Fantasy, he feels, subverts not only events, but the language of a particular socio-historical order. Rushdie, in *Midnight’s Children*, for example, refuses to write “correct” English like R. K. Narayan and Raja Rao, thus breaking away from the preventive limits obligatory by his colonial legacy. Rushdie’s novel, then, fits into this mode of postmodernist fantasy.

Having characterized *Midnight’s children*, as a postmodernist, post-colonial novel, which is intermingle of history, its lack of ideological conclusion, as also its all imperative depiction of characters, so critical to the “making and unmaking” of the novel’s protoganist *Saleem Sinai*, and the history of the Indian subcontinent.

### 5.2 The Role of Women
Rushdie’s narrative of Inda’s freedom, displays ambivalence in constructing the conflicting nature of feminity, within the text. What kind of cultural space does the Indian nation inhabit in Rushdie’s fiction? Perhaps India itself becomes the Dark Continent suggestive of the image of Africa in 19th century Europe, and Freud’s metaphor for feminine sexuality.

Surrounded by the novel, the protagonist Saleem Sinai’s destiny, like that of his grandfather, has to succumb to the interaction of the pressures of “women and history”. Saleem indicates the “connection between Mother India” and the mother figures he encounters when he concludes that:

Women have made me, and also unmade. It is, perhaps, a matter of connection is not Mother India, Bharat Mata, commonly thought of as female? And you know there’s no escape from her.  

Significantly, then, India is compared to a woman. Simon During, has commented on the, … feminisation of society.  

New techniques in the narrative mode find their echoes in the content of the narrative. It is the twentieth century that we have begun to explore new places, and to construct theories of narration. Rushdie’s reader has to “discover” and understand India bit by bit, just as Saleem’s grandfather, discovered Naseem.

In custody with the verbal ritual, the whole story is related to Saleem’s future wife Padma. This tradition enables each age to reinvent the tale in the light of its own widespread
ideology and cultural experience. Fran’tz Fanon in a landmark essay entitled, ‘On National Culture’ writes:

Culture abhors simplication and refers to “the fluctuating movements that people are just giving shape to.” He talks of ‘the zone of occult instability where the people dwell.’

It is from this insecurity of cultural implication that the national culture comes to be uttered as a dialectic of various temporalities -- Modern, Colonial, Post-colonial, and Native. It is not a knowledge that is stable, and is instead, inhabiting the space between the “I have heard” and the “You will hear”. This is typical of post-colonial writing which subverts and critiques the fixed and stable forms of western narrative.

Julia Kristeva in her book Women’s Time explores political time and feminist history. She represents the woman as symbolic of fragmentation and drive arousing dissidence and de-mystifying language which normally acts as a universal and totalising principle. According to Kristeva, woman as a minority does not simply confront the powerful master discourse (of Patriarchy/Imperialism) with a negating referent. Instead she interrogates the master communication by ingenious herself in to the terms, of reference of the prevailing discourse, and antagonising the inclination to generalise and produce sociological sturdiness.

In Midnight’s Children, Saleem recounts versions of history to Padma, taking recourse to language appropriated from her subaltern, feminine experience, like filmy parlance and “Hindinglish”, as Padma cannot read. The fact that Padma cannot read, importantly raises her above being ideologically fixed, or being subjected to predictable patriarchal power associations intrinsic in the master dissertation.
I would like to squabble, that Rushdie’s representation of woman, like his representation of history, is hesitant and defies ideological closure. On the one hand, though, woman within the novel are linked with *Bharat Mata* herself. Yet, representing as they do, the fount of fertility and creativity, they occupy less the role of individuals in their own right, and more that of concepts in the writer’s mind. And yet, the role of woman characters within the novel remains central to *Saleem’s* (Rushdie’s) reworking of history. If *Saleem’s* rewriting of history is from a marginalised, feminine vantage point, (Rushdie in real life being the marginalised exile himself), then it attempts to invert the balance of power within the order of western discourse. In Rushdie’s novel, history is being shaped, so that post-colonial time questions and subverts the teleological norms and traditions of past and present operating in western historical narrative. In *Midnight’s Children*, time is both linear and circular – the concurrent circulation of time in the same cultural space emerges in the narrative ambivalence of disjunctive times and meanings.

Cultural identifications is then poised on the brink, of what Kristeva calls, the “loss of identity” or what Fanon describes as a profound cultural “undecidability”. The woman character within the novel, lack identity as they are not ideologically fixed. Thus, Mumtaz conveniently changes into Amina, and Padma will convert to Islam in order to marry Saleem. It is from this space of cultural undecidability that the minority discourse opens up. Saleem asking himself what the distinction between the “real” and the “true” indicates that truth is an indefinable something beyond reality; it is not tantamount with contributory social authenticity.

*True, for me, was from my earliest days something hidden inside the stories Mary Pereira told me: Mary my ayah who was both more and less than a Mother, Mary who knew everything about all of us. True was a thing concealed just overt the horizon towards which the fisherman’s finger pointed in my picture on my wall, while the young Raleigh listened to his tales.*

12
Disintegration is developed into the dualism between genuineness represented by memory and the validity of the present, symbolized by Padma. Saleem claims to be at:

…the apex of an isosceles triangle, supported equally by twin deities, the wild god of memory and the lotus – goddess of the present.\textsuperscript{13}

The Janus-faced ambiguity of the narrative is underlined by the fact that the number “two” has special significance within the novel. As a critic Sudha Rai has noted:

…it has been prophesied that Amina will get a son with two heads. Saleem speak of a “two headed mother” (Amina and Mary). Snakes and ladders represent “the unchanging twoness of things”. Saleem observes too, ‘the mind’s division between “fantasy and reality” and his life are conditioned by these two aspects. Shiva and Saleem both are born at the stroke of midnight. The window has “schizophrenic hair”, and her centre parting decides the “Black and white” of the Emergency.\textsuperscript{14}

Like the truth of the novel’s reality which contains both the “snake” and “leader’ dimension, Saleem’s women subject him to events which are foreshadowed by both good and bad. For example, Mary his childhood ayah, who performs the baby switch, brings him into an affluent family and into the national limelight, but this also exposes him to the “knees” or vengeance of his alter ego, Shiva. Saleem’s double awareness and his exposure to dual experiences is an essential part of his marginalized expatriate “cross-cultural concerns”, within
the novel western cognitive norms are subverted, thus, we are informed that, “ in India we have always been vulnerable to Europeans, Europe repeats itself, in India, as farce”.

India has to be understood as his, …

‘too many women’ which in turn are “the dynamic aspect of Maya, as cosmic energy, which is represented as the female organ”. Saleem seeks to relate them to the multiple faces of Bharat-Mata.\textsuperscript{15}

It is imperative to comprehend the symbol of Motherhood within the novel. As the narrative makes clear, “there are other mothers to be waiting in and through the silence”.

Saleem’s grandmother, Naseem, is called “Reverend Mother” within the novel, and clearly represents orthodox India. We are told that, “She lived within an invisible fortress of her own making an iron-clad citadel of traditions and uncertainties”. It is a measure of Saleem’s legency of “Internationalism” that Adam Aziz tells his wife to “forget about being a good Kashmiri girl. Start thinking about being a Modern Indian Woman”. Pre-independence India then like the Indian women portrayed, is depicted as being in a state of transition. The Reverend Mother’s repeated use of the phrase, …‘what – its-name’ is symptomatic of her ideological confusion, indicative of the fact that “she was adrift in the universe.\textsuperscript{16}

Women are seen in an ambivalent context. Padma is his Muse and the “Mother of time”, yet she engenders barrenness and impotence in Saleem. Padma herself is mythicised as:
The Lotus Goddess; the one who possesses dung; who is Honey-like and made of Gold; whose sons are moisture and mud … Padma who along with the Yaksii Genii, who represents the sacred treasure of the earth, and the sacred rivers, Ganga, Yamuna and Saraswati, and the tree goddess is one of the guardians of Life, beguilding and comforting mortal men while they pass through the dream-web of Maya…Padma the Lotus Caylx which grew out of Vishnu’s navel, and from which Brahma himself was born; Padma the source, the mother of time”. And time itself is seen in the context of the Indian myth of Kaliyuga:

*Think of this history, in my version, entered a new Phase on August 15th 1947 – but in another version, that unescapable date is no more than one fleeting instant in the age of Darkness Kaliyuga …*¹⁷

As Homi Bhabha in his seminal work *Nation and Narration*, has pointed out, “Nations like narratives lose their origins in the myths of time”. Benedict Anderson in his, *Imagined Communities* expresses the ambivalent emergence of nationhood with great clarity:

*Nationalism has to be understood by aligning it not with self-consciously held political ideologies, but with large Cultural Systems that preceded it out of which – as well as against which – it came into being.*¹⁸

In Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children*, the nation is seen as a myth, just as the Americans mythicised America as embodying the American Dream. Saleem tells us about the myth of independent India: “In fact, allover the new India, the dream we all shared, children were being born who were only partially the offspring of their parents – the children of midnight,
were also the children of the time: fathered, you understand, by history. It can happen, especially in a country which is itself a sort of dream”. In an important chapter titled “Tick Tock” we are informed that “This year – Fourteen hours to go, thirteen, and twelve – there was an extra festival on the calendar. A new myth to celebrate, because a nation which had never previously existed was about to win its freedom, catapulting us into a world which, although it had five thousand years of history... was nevertheless quite imaginary into a mythical land, a country which would never exist except by the efforts of a phenomenal collective will – except in a dream we all agreed to dream … India the new myth - a collective fiction where anything was possible, a fable rivalled only by two other might fantasies: “Money and God”.

If Saleem Sinai is a metaphor for India, the many parents of Saleem mirror the multidinous complexity and ambiguity of India herself. His mother, Muntaz/Alia harbours a secret love for Nadir khan, and conducts an adulterous relationship with him, at Pioneer café. Vanita, his biologically true mother, has betrayed her husband Wee-Willie-Winkle by succumbing to William Methwold. Even Padma is lost to him. ‘The Widow’ (representing Indira Gandhi within a novel), is the destructive mother who had conspired to destroy his fertility. The window generates images of Kali performing the dance of death. Further Sanjay Gandhi, her son is described as the “labia lipped man”. The negative shades given to female characters and derogatory connotations attached to the female anatomy, has prompted critics like Arun P. Mukherjee to accuse Rushdie of patriarchal bias. It is worth quoting Mukherjee’s feminist objections:

“Although I enjoyed and agreed with much on Rushdie’s presentation and assessment, the narrative despite its subversive intent, remains mired in patriarchy. Why for example, use female genitalia to describe Sanjay? I didn’t find it funny. Neither did I find Saleem’s inability to have sexual intercourse with Padma funny because of the derogatory terms that are used to describe the female genatalia, “I cannot hit hit spittoon”. It led me to think that although the narrative is ostensibly being told to a woman, Rushdie’s implied reader is ale. Padma, we are told, is only interested in,
what happened – nextism ... How come then, that Padma is not allowed any questioning of Saleem’s rendering of history? How come that most of the women in the text are only cooks or gigantic sucklers? How come those only male heirs can symbolise the future hope? I believe that these are reflective of Rushdie’s patriarchal attitudes. ¹⁹

Ahead of one agrees with Mukherjee and indicts Rushdie with patriarchy, it would be cautious to remember that Rushdie, in taking alternative to the oral tradition tries to avoid western cognitive norms of philosophy and power relations. Additional he vigorously upholds “the dynamic aspect of Maya as cosmic energy which is represented as the female organ”. Conceivably, we as readers ought to remember that the reading of any text is socialised and our reading habits can become fixed around the normative (and therefore male) assumptions and conventions of society. Surely it is Rushdie’s intention to subvert these very cognitive norms? Like Rushdie’s narratives of history, his representation of women characters too is ambivalent and denies ideological closure. Saleem’s delineation of his mother Mumtaz/Alia is a case in point. She is depicted as a source of life and strength. She uses her pregnancy as a means of saving Lifafa Das life from a Muslim mob. “I am a mother who will have a child, and I am giving this man my shelter”. Further it is Mumtaz/Alia who moulds and reinvents her husband Ahmed Sinai according to her own preferences, instead of the other way round:

And Ahmed, without knowing or suspecting, found himself and his life worked upon by his wife until little by little, he came to resemble – and live in a place that resembled – a man he had never seen. ²⁰

In the chapter entitled ‘Accident in a washing chest’, Saleem salutes Padma. “For two days, her place at the vat of mango kasaundy has been taken by another woman… in my eyes no
replacement at all!... I feel cracks widening down the length of my body, because suddenly I am alone, without my necessary ear, and it isn’t, enough... other men were not so impetuously deserted, when Valmiki, the author of the Ramayana, dictated his masterpiece to elephant-headed Ganesh did the God walk out of him half way? He certainly did not... How to dispense with Padma?... How to do without her contradictory coarseness of spirit, which keeps - kept? My feet on the ground?... Must I now become reconciled to the narrow one- dimensionality of a straight line?”. Padma then is not deprived of the ideological alternative of not listening to Saleem’s story. And considerably in Saleem’s eyes she is an individual who cannot be compared to any other.

I do not concur with Mukherjee that “the text remains mired in patriarchy.” This seems to me to be a rather sweeping generalisation on the text. I would rather align myself with French feminist thinking which asserts not the sexuality of the text but the textuality of sex.

*Gender difference, ‘produced’ (emphasis mine), not innate, becomes a matter of the structuring of a genderless libido in and through patriarchal discourse, which the French talk of ‘I’ ecriture feminine. They do not mean the tradition of women’s writing that woolf and showalter have laboured to uncover, but a certain mode of writing which unsettles fixed meanings.*

French curiosity converges not on women but on “woman” who as Alice Jardine points out, is not a person but a ‘writing effect’. Alice Jardine has posited the term “gynesis” to counter the Anglo-American feminist theoretical term “gynocriticism” coined by Elaine Showalter.

The gynocritic of the Anglo-American Feminist School of though dedicates herself to the female author and character and methodologies based on female experience, as the touchstone of
authenticity. The gynocritic discovers in her authors and character an understanding of female identity, the essential struggle towards a coherent identity. Mary Eagleton explicates the fact that:

"the most popular sequence in a gynocritial reading is form reality, to author, to reader, to reality: there is an objective reality which the author apprehends and describes truthfully in her text, the reader appreciates the validity of the text and relates it to her understanding of her own life. In this paradigm, author, character and reader can unite in an exploration of what it means to be female - they can even assert a collective identity as ‘we women’ – and the reader is gratified by sharing her anger, experience or hopes confirmed by the author and narrative."  

If this description approximates Mukherjee’s expectations as a reader then her feminist objections make *Midnight’s Children* inadequate.

But it would be sensible to ask ourselves at this moment a question involving to positionality. How is this, feminist protestation, applicable to India - Born expatriate Rushdie, his novel *Midnight’s Children* and its protagonist *Saleem Sinai*? The notation of the all powerful “white”, “first world” and “male” as well as eastern patriarchal discourse is problematised at the very outset itself, keeping in view *Saleem Sinai’s* own lack of fixed uniqueness. And with the fact that the myths and legends of ancient India acclaimed women. Also the reader cannot get by the fact that it is women who are intentionally and instinctively helping to shape a nation’s history. Both authorial and narratorial viewpoints are marginalised, unfixed and subaltern.
In the chapter entitled ‘Love in Bombay’ Saleem underlines the positional importance of the women in his life:

Women have always been the ones to change my life: Mary Pereira, Even Burns, Jamila singer, Parvati – the witch must answer for who I am; and the widow, who I’m keeping for the end; and after the end, Padma, My goddess of dung. Women have fixed me all right, but perhaps they were never central - perhaps the place they should have filled, the hole in the centre of me which was my inheritance from my grandfather Adam Aziz. was occupied for too long by my voices.\(^{23}\)

It is conspicuous that social authenticity within the novel is deprived of a stable centre. Saleem himself is not ideologically fixed. And not one “voice” of historical narrative is given preponderance. It is clear that the perception from the margins is all important. The text thus interrogates bourgeois humanism’s obsession with the individual, widening the scope of cultural identity. Julia Kristeva uses the phrase subject in process to convey how:

our identities in life are constantly called into question, brought to trial, over-ruled. \(^{24}\)

It would be appealing to read the quotation from the text as designating the women in the text to a place which is constrained and confined. And yet the ambivalence of the text ensures that the marginal is a position from which an unstable centre can be redefined, and further it is a position from which the feminine sensibility can revolt, redefine and discover its own ideological potential. This very fluidity of feminine identity within the novel means that it constantly questions and subverts that which is fixed.
Critics like Gillian Beer and Rachel Bowlby have tried to define the cultural space of a nation as “feminine”. French feminist critics like Alice Jardine have argued that the feminine is a space, an absence. In explicating the Term ‘gynesis’, she tells us that it is a reincorporation and recoceptualisation of that which has been the master narrative’s own ‘non knowledge’, what has excluded them, what has engulfed them. This other-than-themselves is almost always a ‘Space’ of some kind (over which the narrative has lost control), and this space has been coded as ‘feminine as women’,

… gynesis – the putting into discourse of ‘woman’ as that process diagnosed in France as intrinsic to the condition of modernity; indeed, the valorization of the feminine, woman and her obligatory; (sic) that is historical connotations, as somehow intrinsic to new and necessary modes of thinking, writing, speaking.  

Prominently, within the novel this new thinking, the subaltern vision and rewriting of histories is possible only in the context of provision with old ways of relating unfolding and illumination. Saleem has to take recourse to hindingslish, filmi parlance, myth and religion to come to terms with the nation’s unique emergent historical reality.

In the chapter entitled ‘A Wedding’ Saleem asks the all important question “How are we to understand my too – many woman?” Within the novel, Naseem Aziz, the Brass monkey/Jamila singer, the widow, Vanita Alia and Mary Pereira can clearly be compared to the multiple faces of Bharat Mata. Prominently, they are also to be regarded as “the dynamic aspect of maya”. The narrative emphasizes the ambivalent stance toward womanhood: “Maya, in its dynamic aspect, is called Shakti; perhaps it is no accident that, in the Hindu pantheon, the active power of a deity is contained within his queen! Mayashakti mothers, but also muffles consciousness in its dream web”. The narratives and myths of history are thus feminine in that they marginalised discourses throw up by the text in its unsettled meanings. This subverts and
questions western teleological cognitive norms of history. It is women who influence Saleem’s destiny at critical junctures of the nation’s history. Thus, Parvati - which ‘took her own destiny into her own hands’ and influences her marriage to Saleem by getting pregnant with Shiva’s child. The child is the Emergency.

Supplementary it is a woman who teaches Saleem the fine art of “pickling”. We are informed that “to pickle is to give immortality, after all: fish, vegetables, fruit hang embalmed in spice – and – vinegar; a certain alteration, a slight strengthening of taste, is a small matter, surely. The art is to change the flavour in degree, but not in kind and above all … to give it shape and form – that is to say, meaning.”

Narrative strategies and the mythicisation of history, the language of marginalised communication, result in “the feasibility of the chutnification of history; the grand hope of picking time.” Women within the novel then are represented both as concepts, as the catalysts, in the reworking of the myths and the reality that goes into making the complex history of India herself. They represent the cultural ambivalence of modern India.

5.3 The Recreation or ‘Chutnification’ of Indian History

Salman Rushdie’s *Midnights Children*, more than any other novel in recent times, is a fascinating saga of a nation’s journey from infancy to adulthood as well as an attempt to define
selfhood. The broad historical scope of the novel’s concerns has impartially honoured its author with the coveted Booker of Bookers.

Like Gabriel Marquez in One Hundred Years of Solitude he weaves needlepoint of hereditary myths of a whole nation and new ones that it goes on generating. Homi K. Bhabha, in his seminal work Nation and Narration, underlines how nations and narrative lose their origins in the myths of time and how third world writers explore the ambivalence of language itself to construct the discourse of a nation. The recourse to myth, fantasy and ambiguity investigates the nation space in the process of being shaped. Thus,

...meaning may be partial because they are in medias res and history may half - made because it is in the process of being made. 26

However,

‘Midnight’s Children’ is not an historical novel as critics like R.K.Dhawan have tried to categorise it.27

That would be limiting its postmodernist scope and relevance.

Further it is not as critics like Ralph Crane Assert, about just any individual in history. It is rather of a society coming to terms with its colonial legacy in the post colonial present.28
Viney Kirpal has emphasized the fact that the third world writer is a “teacher”. Unlike the western writer he is not in revolt against his society. She quotes Chinua Achebe’s views from his, The Novelist as Teacher:

I however disagree with her when she states that the third world writer does not exist on the fringes of society.29

It is a central premise of this thesis that he does. But firstly it would be prudent to explicate what we mean by the term,

… ‘third world’. According to Trevor James in his ‘English Literature from Third world’, 30

Third World, the term has been principally coined by political and economic users. It denotes the developing impartial nations of the world. The non-European commonwealth is included within this wide grouping. According to James, although much of the third world does not use English and has never been part of the British colonial system, it appears that whatever the colonial power, the colonial experience seems to have shaped the conscience of the most third world nations. The common economic, social and political and problems of the third world form part of the context shared by writers as diverse in experience, content and style as V. S. Naipaul and Wole Soyinka.

In countries which have the British colonial inheritance what is shared includes the experience of English traditions, culture and literature, and historical parallels in the process of colonisation and decolonisation. English became the lingua franca of the Empire the way Latin was for the Romans. It was not merely an ideological contrivance in the execution of imperial power but also granted the colonised an access to western intellectual resources. Further it helped
the colonised to create new national identities. Speaking of the Indian context, Nirad C. Chaudhuri states that:

*In the capital of India, as things stand, English is the only language for the Pan-Indian Mind.*

This is only part of the truth, as the colonised have appropriated the language to suit their own meticulous cultural and social concerns. Third world writers have infused legends, myths and folklore from local culture. By reshaping the English language to reflect their specific cultural situation, these writers have been better able to correspond with their own societies while concurrently aiming at an international distribution.

In his book ‘Morning yet on Creation Day’. Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe has expressed this linguistic challenge Thus: “He should aim at fashioning out English which is at once universal and able to carry his particular experiences”. A writer like Kofi Awooner of Ghana sees the political interventionism inherent in third world writing when he states that:

*An African writer must be a person who has some kind of perception of the society he is living in and the way he wants the society to do.*

Salman Rushdie’s novel *Midnight’s Children* covers thirty two years of *Saleem Sinai’s* continuation as well as straddling three generations of *Sinai’s* family from 1915 to 1978. The post independence period of India’s history, which is reworked in the light of *Sinai’s* experiences, is important as it delineates the author’s vision of modern India.
The novel is explicitly postmodernist in its rewriting of the post from a given point of orientation; in this case, 15th August, 1947. In rewriting the if’s and buts of Indian history in terms of fantasy, magic realism and myth, Rushdie acknowledges the complication that is the Asian subcontinent. Accurate history alone is incapable of doing justice to a series of events as bizarre and romantic as those which led to the birth of two nations.

The novel emphasizes that each individual is created by history and is yet inconsistently creating history. Saleem Sinai is a, metaphor for India. The many selves and many parents of Saleem mirror the multidinous intricacy that is India herself. At every juncture Saleem’s story/history is linked to the story of the nation. The very first lines of the novel emphasize the importance of historical time and setting: “I was born in the city of Bombay … on August 15, 1947 … On the stroke of midnight … Oh, spell it out, spell it out at the precise instant of India’s arrival at independence, I tumbled forth into the world”. Saleem Sinai, the protagonist of the novel is unavoidably linked to Indian history in deference to the post-modernist belief that each individual is created by history, and however, in contradiction, is creating it. Saleem constructs his private space when he reworks his fictional history of India.

During categorize to ascertain the form of Midnight’s Children, Rushdie takes leaf out of the Indian oral tradition e.g. the Panchatantra and the Arabic tradition of the 1001 tales recounted by Sheherazade. It is significant that Saleem Sinai is one of the total of 1001 Midnight’s Children who are born between 12 midnight and 1 a.m. of these 420 die. The rest are embodied as voices in the parliament of Saleem’s mind that form a Midnight’s Children’s conference. The children, a sort of multi-headed monster speaking in the myriad tongues of babel, are a metaphor for Indian society, the very essence of multiplicity, one thousand and one ways of looking at things, and represent the nation’s psyche:
Midnight’s Children can be made to represent many things, according to your point of view; they can be seen as the last throw of everything antiquated and retrogressive in our myth-ridden nation, whose defeat was entirely desirable in the context of modernising, twentieth century economy; or as the true hope of freedom, which is now forever extinguished, but what they must not become is the bizarre creation of a rambling, diseased mind.33

In fact Saleem calls himself a historian and links his own life to the times, and the past is continuously juxtaposed with the present. Rushdie authenticates his narrative by accurate historical signposts sprinkled through the novel. Though in the reworking of Indian history, the recourse to myth and disarming narrative interventions emphasizes that the account is nothing if not a “Chutnification” of Indian history by a master pickle who admits I spend my time at the great work of preserving. Memory as well as fruit is being preserved by the corruption of the clocks. In an essay in the Indian Express dated March 11th 1984, Salman Rushdie himself comments on this nostalgic obsession of an expatriate:

And one such suspicious generalisation may be that writers in my position, exiles or immigrants or expatriates, are haunted by some sense of loss, some urge to reclaim, to look back, even at the risk of being mutated into pillars of salt, but if we do look back, we must also do so in the knowledge – which gives rise to profound uncertainties – that our physical alienation from India almost inevitable ones, imaginary home lands, Indias of the mind.34

Therefore, like other third world and postcolonial novelists, Rushdie too is apprehensive with the themes of banish, the reclamation of history, whether personal or national, the negative inheritance of colonialism and the clash between the old and new.
Critics like O.P. Mathur have commented on the novel’s “prismatic vision of reality” and the novel itself informs us that *Midnight’s Children* are a metaphor for Indian society, “the very essence of multiplicity”. Edward said in his ‘After the Last Sky’ (1986) prescribes:

*Analytic pluralism “as a narrative strategy. He sees narrative national fictions as a form of cultural elaboration, as an agency of ambivalent narration that holds culture at its most productive position, as a force for “Subordinating fracturing, diffusing, reproducing as much as producing, creating, forcing, guiding.”*  

Throughout the novel, *Saleem* the narrator interjects the present into the past to underline the fact that his is only an elucidation of history: “Re-reading my work, I have discovered an error in chronology. The assassination of Mahatma Gandhi occurs, in these pages, on the wrong date”. Considerably *Saleem* (Rushdie) has not given us a date, but this whole fascination with actual dates in time points to a narrative strategy: 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 rewrite the whole history of my times in order to place myself in a central role?” The novel is not about any individual in history as Ralph Crane asserts, but of a nation coming to terms with its mixed parentage – eastern and western, learning to cope with its colonial legacy.

Because *Saleem’s* story continues upto the very moment of writing, the historical estrangement in the novel varies significantly, and the value of retrospection is tapering as the story progresses. The more persuasive sections of the novel are earlier sections. *Saleem* tells the reader *Padma* that “Reality is a question of perspective: the further you get from the past, the more concrete and conceivable it seems … Suppose yourself in a large cinema … until your nose
is almost pressed against the screen… it becomes clear that the illusion itself is reality …. We have come from 1915 to 1956 so we’re a good deal closer to the screen …” What kind of vision of India does Saleem portray? Critics like Michael Harris find that the narrative renders a surprisingly modern, energetic view of India. And yet others like Viney Kripal read a cynical tone in the novel, of hope dimmed. Compared to Saleem’s brief portrayal of Pakistan, the portrayal of India is indeed energetic. Even when Saleem is in Pakistan his personality and perspective of reality is governed by the parameters of stable India. Of Pakistan vis a vis India he writes thus, “in a country where the truth is what it is instructed to be, reality quite literally ceases to exist so that everything becomes possible except what we are told is the case; and may be this was the difference between my Indian Childhood and Pakistan adolescence - that in the first I was beset by an infinity of alternative realities, while in the second I was adrift, disoriented, amid an equally infinite number of falsenesses, unrealities and lies”.

And yet in the latter half of the novel the cynicism which Kripal has noticed, certainly there. In Saleem’s Disillusionment with the Emergency:

*I can smell other, more tarnished perfumes: disillusion, venality, cynicism ... the nearly thirty-one year-old myth of freedom is no longer what it was. New myths are needed; but that’s none of my business.*

Importantly then Saleem distinguishes himself from the historian whose business it is to be judgemental and analytical with a defined political stance. Instead Saleem’s narrative is deliberately ambiguous and lacks ideological closure. Ambiguity frees Saleem from a reality which is “One dimensional, flattened by certitude”. The causal conventions of historical writing are deliberately flouted. Saleem the narrator interjects the present into the past to underline the fact that his is only one of myriad interpretations of history:
“Re-reading my work, I have discovered an error in chronology. The assassination of Mahatma Gandhi occurs, in these pages, on the wrong date”. This self-effacement and lack of critical pretentiousness of Saleem is important. Saleem himself is not ideologically fixed within the novel. And his story is relevant only in the context of Indian history, not the other way round. The novel does not lend itself to facile moral messages or a trite East - West clash. Rushdie’s fiction is much too sophisticated for that. Therefore judgments like those of Arun P. Mukherjee stating that, “In Rushdie’s fiction, the characters are entirely at the mercy of Saleem’s judgment. Saleem selects, rearranges, and attitudines. The reader, thus, is at a mercy of Saleem’s perforated sheet as it were”, are simplistic and miss the point of the novel.

Although, fascinatingly, Saleem himself is at the mercy of different narratorial voices. He tells us that “the Hole in centre of me which was my inheritance from my grandfather Adam Aziz, was occupied for too long by my voices”. The opening lines of the novel itself tell us that the novel is written in the mode of fairy tale and fantasy: “I was born in the city of Bombay … once upon a time”. Further as critics like Ron Shepherd have emphasized:

Saleem’s attempts at openness are somewhat misleanding, since the revelation he promise never occurs.\(^{37}\)

Saleem’s account remains wrapped in the filmy curtain of ambiguities, his subjective reality at variance with actuality. Supplementary the concept of midnight within the novel is in contrast to the light of rationality and factuality. Midnight is the province of fantasy which is a dream – like escape from the actual world. Saleem is unable to view events and life wholly. He is condemned by a perforated sheet to a life of fragments. This fractured vision is shared within the novel by Adam Aziz and also Saleem’s mother Mumtaz/Alia. “And above all the ghostly essence of that perforated sheet, which doomed my mother to learn to love a man is segments, and which condemned me too see my own life - its meanings, its structures – in fragments”. The symbol of
the whole represents the breakdown between work and object, signifier and signified. Thus Saleem’s relationship with India remains ambiguous as given below:

*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 (admiringly modern) scientists might term “modes of connection” composed of “dualistically - combined configurations” of the two pairs of opposed advers given above. This is why hyphens are necessary: actively – literally, passively-metaphorically, actively-metaphorically and passive-literally, I was inextricably entwined with my world.*

The emphasis on the word “metaphor” is appropriate as it is an important feature of postmodernist writing. Saleem’s narrative in exploring possible meanings is itself a search for meaning. Saleem’s reworking on Indian history is an attempt to define his own selfhood. He laments, “Am I so far gone in my desperate need for meaning that I’m prepared to distort everything – to rewrite the whole history of my times in order to place myself in a central role?”.

*Saleem Sinai’s fate is tied to the fate of India, as Nehru forecasts in his congratulatory letter which defines Saleem’s own tryst with destiny, he says:*

*Dear baby Saleem, my belated congratulations on happy accident of your moment of birth! You are the newest bearer of that ancient face of India which is also eternally young. We shall be watching over your life with the closest attention; it will be, in a sense, the mirror of our own.*
As Ralph Crane has noticed. *Saleem* is part of the map that is India which is continually being reivented and redrawn, (*Inventing India, 1992*). Mr. Zagallo, the geography teacher, tells his students of *Saleem*:

_In the case of thees ugly ape you don’t see the whole map of India?...thees stains”, he cries “are Pakistann! Thees birthmark on the right ear is the East Wing and thees horrible stained left cheek the West! Remember, stupid boys: Pakistaniess a stain on the face of India._**40**

Considerably almost a whole chapter is dedicated to the geographical history of Bombay, entitled *Methwold*. We are told that “the Portuguese were the first invaders, using the harbour to shelter merchant ships and their men - of - war; but then one day in 1633, an East India Company officer named Methwold had a vision. This vision – a dream of a British Bombay, Fortified, Defending India’s West Against all comers”. As Michael Foucault in his seminal work says,

*Power/Knowledge***41**

It makes clear, geography as a concept grew up in the shadow of the military. For Foucault spatial metaphors become an issue of political practices,

…it is indeed war, administration, the implantation or managment of some form of power which are in question in such expressions ... the organisation of domains meant the throwing into relief of processes – historical ones, needless to say – of power,**42**
Foucault further emphasizes that geography is, together with history constitutive of national discourse ... The individual with his identity and characteristic is the product of a relation of power... There is much that could be said on the problems of regional identity and its conflicts with national identity.\(^\text{43}\)

The inheritance of the Raj is an indelible mark on the psyche of modern India fascinatingly, Pakistan remains well-established in the legacy of subjugation and military administration.

Bombay the so called Gateway to India is described by Salim to Padma thus:

*Prima in India,*

*Gateway to India,*

*Star of the East*

*with her face to the west.*\(^\text{44}\)

He further goes on to describe the Methwold estate. It is significant that in Rushdie’s scheme of things, Saleem’s real father should be William Methwold, the Englishman who sells the Sinais and several other Indian families their houses at ridiculously low prices, but with two important, if unusual, conditions:
that the entire contents be retained by the new owners; and that the actual transfer should not take place until midnight on August 15th.45

The dichotomy of the East-West convergence within the Indian mind is noticed by Methwold himself when he comments thus on Ahemd Sinai “beneath this still English exterior lurks a mind with a very Indian zest for allegory”.

The British legacy was inherited forever by the newly creation of nation. The English furniture at Methwold’s estate is irrelevant to the Indian ways of life and becomes Metaphorical in representing the British culture and habits forced upon India, gradually absorbed by Indians.

The painting the Boyhood of Raleigh is referred to on abundant occasions in the novel. It is an important representation in terms of prespective and the theme of political expansion and ideology. Saleem describes:

The memory of my blue bedroom wall: on which next to the P.M. letter, the Boy Raleigh hung for many years, gazing rapturously at an old fisherman in what looked like a red Dhoti, who sat on – What? – a driftwood? – and pointed out to sea as he told his fishy tales ...46

This painting is apart of the writing on the wall, both accurately, lynching next to visionary letter from Nehru, and in its subject. The subject of the painting is the young Walter Raleigh, listening to stories of isolated places indicated by the hand of the fisherman-narrator pointing out to sea. The painting is thus reminder of the British part, of the sixteenth century voyages of exploration, and the early years of British expansion which led to the Empire. In the chapter entitled ‘The
Fisherman’s pointing finger’ the connection between the boy Raleigh within the picture and Saleem is made explicit:

The fisherman’s pointing finger: unforgettable focal point of the picture which hung ... directly above the sky-blue crib in which, as Baby Saleem, Midnight’s Child, I spent my earliest days ... The young Raleigh – and who else? – sat framed in teak... Because there was certainly another boy in the picture, sitting cross-legged in frilly collar and button-down tunic... and now a memory comes back to me; of a birthday party in which a proud mother and an equally proud ayah dressed a child ... in just such a tunic” and Lila Sabarmati exclaimed, “It’s like he’s just stepped out of the picture.47

Thus, Saleem’s story is inextricably associated to that of the newly-emergent democracy that is India. Emblematically the fisherman’s pointing finger becomes a symbol for the finger of fate guiding Saleem’s history throughout the novel. Saleem is compared to Major Zulfikar thus: “the energetic Zafar Zulfikar who became ... the archetype of all the many disappointing sons in the land; history, working through him, was also pointing its finger at Gauhar, at future – Sanjay and Kanti-Lal – to – come; and, naturally, at me”. And finally it is the Widow’s hand which is responsible for the fate of the children of midnight – their mass sterilization and the draining out of hope.

The emphasis on geographical location and direction is emphasized again in the chapter entitled Jamila Singer, we are given a brief history of the conquest of India by its various foreign invaders. The narrative tells us that:
Saleem invaded Pakistan armed only with a hypersensitive nose; but worse of all, he invaded from ‘the wrong direction’! All successful conquest of that aprt of the world has begun in the north; all conquerers have come by land, sailing ignorantly against the winds of history, I reached Karachi from the south east, and by sea, what followed should not, I suppose, have surprised me.48

What is inherent in the narrative voice is the sense and warning that those who do not learn from history are condemned to repeat it. Further, more than India it was Pakistan who perhaps has failed to break free of political and military ideology of its British colonial heritage. Within the context of India itself the children of midnight are shown hurtle themselves too fast and too undiplomatically through life, to appreciate better the fruits of Independence. We are informed that:

Midnight has many children; the offspring of Independence were not all human. Violence, corruption, poverty, generals, chaos, greed and pepperpots..... I had to go into exile to learn that the children of Midnight were more varied than I – had dreamed. 49

Within the novel itself, Saleem represents Rushdie’s own position of marginality. Saleem is enlisted in the Pakistan army as a man dog on account of his powers of smell. He then gets lost in the Sunderbans of the Ganges delta and enters a world where space and time disappear. Saleem enters, the realm of “absurb fantasy” and “Surrendered ... to the terrible phantasms of the dream forest.”50
He along with army colleagues, Ayooba Baloch, Farooq Rashid, and Shaheed Dar, is forced to redefine personal reality and selfhood,

...in the heart of the Sunderbans, Ayooba Baloch understood his mother for the first time, and stopped sucking his thumb ... Farooq, who had also started regressing alarmingly, found in the knowled of his father’s death and the flight of his brother, the strength to give up the childish habits which the jungle had at first re – created in him. The jungle also restores in Shamed Dar, the sense of responsibility which the post – following – orders requirements of war had sapped, so it seemed that the magical jungle ... leading them by the hand towards a new adulthood.  

All through English literature, the forest has conventionally been a place of retreat, refuge and renewal. In the plays of Shakespeare, the forest and its world view are in distinction to that of the town /city. Thus in King Lear the language of subversion comes from the forest and is dubbed as madness because it refuses to be signified in terms of the ideological discourse prevalent in the town/city. Similarly in novels like Hawthorne’s The Scarlet Letter, Hester Prynne lives in the forest on the margins of the Puritan settlement and looks to the laws of nature to combat the man – made repressive puritan ideology of her society. The jungle in Midnight’s Children also emphasizes the fact that linear time cannot do full justice to historical events. As Saleem and his three companions approach the jungle, Ayooba kills Father Time and we are told that Time lies dead in the rice – paddy. The narrative further tells us that in this jungle:

...history has hardly ever found the way in The Sunderbans: it swallows them up
Saleem’s life covers the period from the Independence of India to the Emergency. And of all the children born between midnight and 1.00 a.m. on the night August 15th, 1947, two are born exactly at the stroke of midnight and have harmonizing gifts relating to the nose and knees. The constructive Shiva (the alter ego of Saleem) is blessed with powerful knees, the gift of war” while Saleem has “the greatest talent of all – the ability to look into the hearts and minds of men.\textsuperscript{53}

The power of smell reality and the state of the nation. This power, …the science of nasal ethics,\textsuperscript{54}

is inherited by Saleem from his grandfather Adam Aziz. It is Adam’s nose which saves him from Brigadier Dyer’s troops. Luckily the doctor, …sneezes and falls forward, losing his balance, following his nose and thereby saving his life.\textsuperscript{55}

It is fascinating how Rushdie interpolates an epigrammatic vignette of Kashmiri history in the story. Personal and regional histories are microcosms within the larger macrocosmic Indian history. Tai the boatman representative of the Kashmiri identity within the novel significantly refuses to bathe. The narrative wonders whether this was “a gesture of unchangingness in defiance of the invasion of the doctor attack from Heildelberg? … Tai has branded him an alien, and therefore not completely to be trusted”. Adam Aziz we are told:
...understood what Tai was upto: the man trying to chase him out of the Valley. 

The problem of essential selfhood, of knowledge to reconcile what is Indian with that which is Western is delineated in the character of Adam Aziz himself. The many ways of knowing (ideologies) and the many selves of Adam Aziz anticipate the moral and ideologocal dilemma faced by his grandson Saleem Sinai. If Aziz was guided by colonial considerations in perceiving his political and social reality, along with medicine and politics, he learned that India – like radium – had been ‘discovered’ by the Europeans. 

Saleem Sinai tries to rupture free of his majestic inheritance, in essential his selfhood he is in a way redefining his cultural reality which is in the process of being shaped. He emphasizes this fact thus:

the feeling has come upon me that I was somehow creating a world; that the thoughts I jumped inside were ‘mine’, that the bodies I occupied acted at my command; that as current affairs, arts, sports, the whole rich variety of a current affairs, arts sports, the whole rich variety of a first class radio station poured into me, I was somehow ‘making’ them happen ... which is to say, I had entered into the illusion of the artist, and though of the multitudinous realities of the land as the raw unshaped material of my gift.

Midnight’s Children is a metaphor for a nation and a critic like Homi Babha emphasizes that a nation’s coming in to being is a system of cultural signification as the representation of social life
which emphasizes the instability of knowledge. Saleem Sinai reinvents his identity in the process of reinventing Indian history.

Rushdie authenticates his description by precise historical signposts sprinkled all through *Midnight’s Children*. The birth of the movement for Indian Independence, the Jallianwala Bagh Massacre at Amritsar, the language marches in Bombay, the creation of Bangladesh and the Emergency are described in details. Indian history is also seen in the comfortable of world history through reference to significant world events like the plummeting of the first atomic bomb on Hiroshima or the first successful ascent of Mr. Everest.

The moment of Indian’s birth as a nation is recorded authentically, by quoting Jawaharlal Nehru’s famous address to the nation, which is interjected by references to Saleem Sinai’s own birth:

*At the stroke of the Midnight hours, while the world sleeps, India awakens to life and freedom yells cries, bellos, and the howls of children arriving in the world ...*  

And *Saleem*’s son, who is not his son, but is the grandson of the man who is allegedly *Saleem*’s father is born on 25th June, 1975, the very day the Emergency is declared. References to many important historical figures, from Mountbatten, to Nehru, to Yahya Khan and Z.A. Bhutto and to places and dates are given to add a sense of historic authenticity to *Saleem*’s story. Unlike novels like J.G. Farell’s *The siege of Krishnapur* and Raja Rao’s *Kanthapura*, the places and date references in *Midnight’s Children* are real and accurate. And yet *Saleem* slips up disarmingly in his chronology of Mahatma Gandhi’s death;
Re-reading my work, I have discovered an error in chronology ... in my India, Gandhi will continue to die at the wrong time.\textsuperscript{60}

The fact that Saleem reworks Indian History to come to terms with his self is emphasized in this context:

\textit{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 rewrite and whole history of my times purely in order to place myself in a central role? }\textsuperscript{61}

Indian history is thus supplementary to Saleem’s important journey towards self-knowledge. Additional, the narrative itself makes clear that is aspires for a frictional truth or reality, not an historical one. Saleem’s historical account is more mythical than factual. The narrative emphasizes this fact and makes its narratorial strategy clear:

\ldots sometimes legends make reality, and become more.\textsuperscript{62}

Independent India itself is seen as a myth. We are informed that the birth of this new nation was nothing more than,

\ldots an extra festival on the calender, a new myth to celebrate, because a nation which had never previously existed was about to win its freedom, catapulting us into a world which is
although it had five thousand years of history, although has invented the game of chess and traded with middle Kingdom Egypt, was nevertheless quite imaginary; into a mythical land, a country which would never exist except by the efforts of a phenomenal collective will --- expect in a dream we all agreed to dream ... India, the new myth - a collective fiction in which anything was possible. 

Various mythologies go into making Saleem’s history. Saleem’s opposite and counterpart Shiva, is clearly linked to his namesake, Shiva the destroyer, the most powerful of the Hindu patheon. And Shiva also represents Shivalingam the creator, who is in this book the father of many illegitimate children. Saleem’s son Adam is actually the son of Shiva and Parvati and bears a remarkable resemblance to Ganesh the mythical son of the Hindu gods Shiva and Parvati. And as Ralph Crane has observed, other mythologies enter the story in the naming of characters. Eve Burns carries the names of both the Biblical Adam’s wives, Eve and the lesser – known Lilith, who, according to Jewish tradition is the most sensual of the pair, the earth mother figure. Lilith is also a female demon who lies in wait for children, and slaughters them. This too fits in with the character of Eve Lilith Burns who provides the push that sends Saleem hurtling down the hills into the language marches. And if course, allegorical identity is also implied in the names of Mary Pereira, one of Saleem’s many mothers, and Joseph D’costa. Saleem himself compares the Sabarmati case to the myth of Ram and Sita:

If Rama himself were alive, would we send him to prison for slaying the abductor of Sita? 

Rushidie in an essay entitled, Midnight’s Children and Shame himself drawn attention to the similarities between history and myth:
And then I had this awful and blasphemous notion which I became convinced was true, which is that the Nanavati case was like a kind of re-staging in the 20th century of the Ramayan Story. \(^\text{65}\)

History he seems to be suggesting as well as myth, can have its origins in myth.

The narratorial strategy of seeing history from a assortment of perspectives and in wreckage is imphasized in the very first chapter of the novel entitled, *The Perforated sheet*. This is Rushdie’s postmodernist view of history as well:

> And there are so many stories to tell, too many, such an access of interwined lives events miracles places rumours, so dense a commingling of the improbable and the mundane! ... consumed multitudes are jostling and showing inside me; and guided only by the memory of a large white bedsheet with a roughly circular hole... which is my talisman, my open sesame ... \(^\text{66}\)

India is too large, too multifarious to be compartmentalised. Thus Lifafa Das the peepshow man fails in his attempts to put the whole world into his peepshow box. And importantly Amina Sinai has to discover her husband *Ahmed Sinai* bit by bit. There are as many India’s as there are Indians and as many histories as there are historians. *Saleem* emphasizes this point when he tells us:

> I ask you to accept (as I have accepted) that I shall eventually crumble into (approximately) six hundred and thirty Million particles of anonymous dust. \(^\text{67}\)
In *Midnight’s Children* Rushdie emphasizes the fact that identity is not simply a matter of religion or place but also of language. We are told:

*India had been divided a new, into fourteen states and six centrally-administered 'territories’. But the boundaries of these state were not formed by.... natural features of the terrain; they were, instead, walls of words. Language divided us...*  

*Saleem’s definition of Amina’s pregnancy, his foetus as a linguistic object points to the postmodernist view that identity is signified by language.*

*What has been (at the beginning) no bigger than a full stop had expanded into a comma, a word. A sentence, a paragraph, a chapter; now it was bursting into more complex developments, becoming, one might say, a book – perhaps an encyclopaedia – even a whole language.*

This is emphasized in the 1957 language marches in Bombay which highlight the division within Bombay between the supporters of the Marathi and Gujarati tongues respectively. The question of identity allows no simplistic choices in India. The theme of Multiplicit of identity makes it fitting that *Saleem* should be the child of so many parents. It is in keeping with the postmodernist context of the novel that there are many realities and truths. Thus it makes no difference that *Saleem* is not the son of his parents or that there is an,

*…eternal opposition of inside and outside.*
because there is also,

*Memory’s truth, because memory has its own special kind. Its selects, eliminates, 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.*

In addition the pragmatic with the unbelievable in *Midnight’s Children* Rushdie adopts the form known as magic realism. For Rushdie, as for Marquez and Grass, the subject demanded it. The recent history of South American politics is so incredible, the holocaust years in Germany so bizarre, that a realist novel cannot do them justice. The same is true with the period of Indian history Rushdie deals with. Rushdie himself says of *Midnight’s Children*, “Many people, especially in the west, who read *Midnight’s Children*, talked about it as a fantasy novel; they talk about it as a novel of history and politics”.

The management of time within the novel is appropriate in the context of history. The narrative itself emphasizes the ambivalence of disjunctive times and meanings. There is a concurrent circulation of linear, cursive and circular time in the same culture is a warning against “the intellectual appropriation of the culture of the people (Whatever they may be) within a representationalist discourse that may be fixed and reified in the annals of History”. Fanon locates people in a performative time: “the fluctuating movement that the people are just giving shape to “The present of the people’s history, then is a practice that destroys the constant principles of the national culture that attempt to hark back to a “true” national past, which is often represented in the reified forms of realism and stereotype. Such paenalogue knowledge and narratives, miss the zone of accult instability where the people dwell (Fanon’s phrase). It is
from this “instability of cultural signification that the national culture comes to be articulated as a
 dialectic of various temporalities – Modern, colonial, postcolonial, native – that cannot be
 knowledge that is stabilised in its enunciation.” (Nation and Narration, 303). Homi Babha
 emphasizes the fact that pocolonial writers attempt to critique fixed forms of nationalist
 narratives and try to question Western theories of horizontal, homogeneous, empty time.

Saleem Sinai, the protoganist of Midnight’s Children, admits to “cutting up history” to
 suit his own purpose in the following words:

Think of this: history in my version, entered a new phase on August 15th, 1974, but in
 another version, that inescapable date is no more than one fleeting instant in the Age of
 Darkness, Kaliyuga... 72

Sabiha Kamaluddin rightly observes, the reader, like Rushdie and likewise Saleem Sinai, is free
to link any event with any symbol and not worry about disrupting the text. History ...

Remains the objective spectator 73

Saleem’s life covers the period of Independence to the lifting of Emergency. The numerous
 fathers and mothers of Saleems are investigative of the multifarious history and politics of the
 Indian subcontinent. As O.P. Mathur has observed, Saleem acquires

Multiple representative role. 74
There seems to be a merger of identities in a shared Indian dream:

_In fact, all over the new India, the dream we all shared, children were being born ... the children of Midnight were also, the children of the time: fathered you understand by history._  

_Saleem’s_ physical growth also mirrors the development of free India. His launching upon,

_...an heroic program of self-enlargement._

throughout his life and that above all he gropes to make sense of it,

_...to end up meaning – yes, meaning – something._

I would agree with Viney Kirpal when she states that Rushdie’s / _Saleem’s_ view of the latter half of Indian political history is one of disenchantment. The political figures that appear in the novel – _Indira Gandhi_, her son _Sanjay_, _Morarji Desai_, etc have negative shades. There is a social critique inherent in the references to bribery, corruption, brutality and insensitivity mentioned with regard to both India and Pakistan. And as a Critic like Ron Shepherd noted; throughout the novel, _Saleem_ has been on a descending slide towards physical disintegration; he loses finger, hair, sense of smell, memory and ends up powerless as a result of the forced sterilisation programme during the Emergency. The events leading to the Emergency find a mirror in _Saleem’s_ life. The labour pains of his wife, _Parvati – Laylah_, begin on June 12th, 1975, when Justice Jagmohan Lal Sinha delivers his famous judgement against Indira Gandhi, who also is in the process of,
Saleem’s son personifies the Emergency. He has large,

...ears but is dumb and does not even whimper

and his face is,

...serious as the grave

– reflective of the censorship ridden sad mood of the Emergency. In contrasting the children of Independence with that of the Emergency, Saleem states:

We, the Children of Independence, rushed wildly and too fast into our future: he, Emergency – born, will be, is already more cautious, binding his time .... Already, he is stronger, harder, more resolute than I ...” Saleem imagines that the children of the Emergency will also, like the children of Midnight, be denied the possibility of reproducing themselves. The narrator has a word for it, “Sperectomy: the draining out of hope.

Saleem’s son Aadam, with his large flapping ears is like the elephant-headed god Ganesha. Though he presumably gathers much information, he refuses to utter a sound. This disease vanishes with the lifting of the Emergency. Saleem himself feels that,

The Janta Party ... did not seem to me (When I heard about it) to represent a new dawn
From the midnight of India’s Independence to the lifting of Emergency has been a Journey towards Disillusionment. Hope lies in the fact that his son is maturer and hardier than he, and that India is a democracy and contrasted with Pakistan. Even when Saleem was in Pakistan his personality was attuned to stable India. The conditions in Pakistan force him to pronounce a value judgement as:

*In a country where the truth is what it is instructed to be, reality write literally ceases to exist ... the difference between my Indian childhood and Pakistani adolescence – that is the first I was beset by an infinity of alternative realities, while in the second I was adrift, disorientated. Amid an equally infinite number of falseness, unrealities and lies.*

Thus *Saleem’s* mind is a parliament of various viewpoints in India.

If India is envisioned as a legend then it is for each Indian to reinterpret that myth in the light of his/her own experiences and potential. The novel refuses any expedient ideological closure. In the final chapter of *Abracadabra*, *Saleem* inform us that,

...the nearly thirty-one – year- old myth of freedom is no longer what it was. New myths are needed; but that’s none of my business.

Timothy Brennan has written an eloquent essay entitled “Myth of the nations”. He defines myth as literature per-se; myth as shibboleth all of these meanings are present at different times in the writing of the political culture. Brennan quotes Malinowski’s sense of the term:
...myth acts as a charter for the present-day social order; it supplies a retrospective pattern of moral values, sociological order, and magical belief, the function of which is to strengthen tradition and endow it with greater value and prestige by tracing it back to higher, better, more supernatural reality of initial events. (Nation and Narration, p.45).  

The premise here is a profitable one for understanding the narratives of political histories the postcolonial world. My own endeavour is this thesis has been to highlight how sophisticated third world writers like Rushdie, ostensibly, offer a privilege view of the colonised, to the reading public in the West, through novels that comply with metropolitan literary tastes. Rushdie satirises and questions recent history in order to expose the dogma surrounding and choking it.

For Salman Rushdie, the example of India and Pakistan are above all an opportunity to explore postcolonial responsibility. The central irony of his novel is that Independent India can act as abominably as the British did. The Children of Midnight of Independent India, 

...were always confused about being good.  

Rushdie, thus, demythicises the euphoria of Independence and so called self-reliance. Yet, it is never too important to accentuate the overarching perspective which is democratic and human in spirit, with no final judgement or moralising because the future cannot be preserved in a Jar. The universal appeal of the text lies in its demystification of historical process and its refusal to allow the convenience of ideological closure. Midnight’s Children is thus to be read in a neocolonical context with the reader having the responsible onus of interpreting the narrative of history – how to place them, how to give them perspective in the images and context of today, with a firm grasp of political history.
Salman Rushdie’s novel, *Midnight’s Children*, is an attempt to demythicise the myth of Independent India through its rewriting of history. The search for self knowledge by *Saleem Sinai*, the protagonist of the novel, and the representation of women characters within the novel is a narratorial strategy. Both seek to redefine the cultural space that signifies the Indian nation.

It is especially in Third World fiction after the Second World War, that the fiction uses of nation and nationalism are most pronounced. It is what Michel Foucault has termed as a *discursive formation* which the Third World artist is consciously building or suffering the lack of.

In the period following the Second World War, there was a wave of postwar immigration to the imperial *Centres*. Thus it was type of colonialism in reverse. The wave of successful anticolonial struggles culminating in the independence of South Africa, recently, has contributed to attention now being in the west an the point of view of the colonised. And yet it is a point of view that must increasingly be seen as a part of English speaking culture. It is a situation, as Rushdie himself points out, in which English,

...no longer an English language, now grows from many roots: and those whom it once colonised are carving out large territories within the language for themselves (Nation and Narration, p.48).87

The earlier novels of empire in its classic modernist versions like ‘The Heart of Darkness’ and ‘A Passage to India’ largely ignored the political realities of the colonised. For post-colonial writers, the grounds of classic realism are lost, the project of image goes on. Importantly, nations too are imaginary constructs that depend on their existence on a network of cultural myths and
fictions on which imaginative literature draws. A novel like ‘Midnight’s Children’ becomes a metaphor for a nation. Rushdie himself has stated that:

\[\text{Writers in my position, exiles or emigrants or expatriates are haunted by some sense of loss... that we will, in short, create fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands, Indias of the mind.} \]  
\[\text{('Image of India in the Indian Novel in English', p.113).}^{88}\]

Michel Foucault’s seminal work *Discipline and Punish* emphasizes that the most individuated are those subjects who are placed on the margins of society. *Midnight’s Children* is written by an India-born expatriate, and is about a lesson to be learnt from peoples whose histories of marginality have most profoundly influenced the issue of cultural identity and political solidarity – the colonised and women.

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