CHAPTER-V
RUSHDIE'S MIDNIGHT'S CHILDREN

I. Introduction: *Midnight's Children* has been acclaimed as an experimental novel in terms of both its themes and form. It is the story of modern India embedded in the story of Saleem Sinai's family. Saleem narrates his family history from the life of his grandfather Aadam Aziz to his son Aadam Sinai which corresponds to the history of India from the time of Jawaharlal Nehru to his grand son Sanjay Gandhi. The main focus of the narrative is on the freedom struggle and the misuse of freedom by the politicians in free India. The decline of patriotic spirit in Indian history and the ruin of Saleem's family are the prime concerns of the novel.

While Aziz represents the nationalists, like Gandhi whose only ambition is freedom, Ahmed Sinai represents the selfish beneficiaries of the freedom, Saleem represents the common people who are disillusioned by the unhappy turns of events in Indian politics. In fact, Saleem and Shiva, who are the two prominent figures in *Midnight's Children*, are the symbols of the nations that were freed from the colonial rule. Their misadventures are the misadventures of the two countries -- India and Pakistan. Aadam Sinai also, who represents the breed born at the time of Emergency, is expected to grow with better maturity of mind in respect of political sagacity which is nothing but hypocrisy.

In its endeavour to depict the stark reality of the bitter disillusionment following the attainment of freedom at midnight, the narrative grapples with the notion of nationalism as conceived by the freedom fighters and as depicted by the novelists of the preceding era. In addition, the notion of history has been redefined in the post-modernist fashion by replacing the objective account with personal history. The author has also adopted new devices to retell history. These devices distort not only the notion of nationalism and history but also the notion of form of the novel. To prove this assumption, a detailed study of the novel is undertaken here.
II. Subversive Themes: Two subversive themes are discernable in the narrative of Midnight's Children. They are: (i) subversion of the notion of Nationalism and (ii) subversion of the notion of History.

(i) Subversion of the traditional notion of Nationalism. The emergence of G.V.Desani's All About H. Hatterr marks a period of transition in the Indian Novel in English. Whereas All About H. Hatterr exhibits its mistrust towards the Upanishadic tradition, Rushdie's Midnight's Children shows its mistrust towards the notion of nationalism. It suggests that the spirit of nationalism expired on the very day of Indian Independence, though, of course, in the typical post-modernist devastating fashion. Before exploring this aspect of the novel, it is worthwhile to note what Terasa Hefferman comments in this regard: "In Salman Rushdie's Midnight's Children, Saleem Sinai also draws on the revolutionary legacy of apocalyptic nationalism as an obvious frame of his account of India's struggle of liberation".¹

Nationalism is defined as 1 "extreme pride in the history, culture and successes, etc of one's nation; loyalty to one's nation; patriotism. 2 extreme or fanatical patriotism. 3 a policy or movement aiming at national unity or independence".² In this section, a detailed examination of the text is undertaken to prove that Midnight's Children defies the above definition after a brief recollection of the Indian National Movement and its rendering in the novels written prior to Midnight's Children. Though the consciousness of nationalism was sown during the 'Mutiny of 1857' and nourished under the able leadership of Tilak until his death in 1920, it became all pervasive as a result of Gandhi's leadership in the Freedom Movement. It was strengthened further when India won freedom on the 15th of August, 1947. Whatever lapses existed in the country were corrected by Vallabhabai Patel who unified the princely states with the Nation, and by the constituent Assembly which assured 'equality' through its constitution. In other words, India emerged as a nation with the selfless sacrifice of the nationalists.

This phase of the political history of India has received greater attention than any other from the creative writers of the Indian Writing in English. It has, indeed, made an epoch in the history of Indian writing in English in general and
in that of the Indian Novel in English in particular, and thus it may be regarded as a literature of Indian nationalism. At this point what Joyce Wexler observes regarding the treatment of nationalism in Indian Novels in English is noteworthy: “Contemporary Indian fiction reflects the issues at stake in overcoming the divisions of religion, language and region that were suppressed during the struggle against British rule”.3

Even the renowned author of the History of Indian Literature in English, K.R. Srinivas Iyengar, seems to have found the contribution of Gandhi and Gandhism to be so immense and great to the literatures both in the vernacular and in the English language that he has discussed them at length allocating two chapters in his literary history Indian Writing in English. Indian nationalism has been represented by almost all novelists, including Venkatramani, Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao, R. K. Narayan etc.,. Iyengar notes this as: “Although Venkatramani’s Kandan the Patriot is a picture-sharp and suggestive rather than complicated and comprehensive of the Gandhian Age, fusing certain individual and the total national perspectives in terms of creative art, it achieves all this without actually introducing the Mahatma himself as a character. Kamala Markandaya’s Some Inner Fury achieves a similar feat with regard to a later phase of the Gandhian Age covered by the ‘Quit India’ movement of the early forties. R.K. Narayan, however, makes Gandhi himself a character in Waiting for the Mahatma and so does Mulk Raj Anand in Untouchable and the later The Sword and the Sickle”.4

But a close examination of the novels mentioned above will reveal that they are romanticizing the concept of nationalism to the extent that it amounts to what Edward Said calls as cited by Timothy Brennan, “nationalism’s heroic narratives”.5 In other words, these novels are assertive in glorifying the national movement which was led by Tilak, Gandhi, Nehru and the version of the pristine nationhood which was visualized by those national leaders. But the depiction of the same in the contemporary works does not reflect the idealistic nationalism. To claim the image of nationalism, a country has to fulfill what Joyce Wexler prescribes: “a nation needs some common ground, however difficult finding it may be, newly independent states must bind their population
to a national identity, and identity - for nations and individuals-requires stability". But “Indians are different people living in the same place”. Midnight’s Children exactly addresses these issues and shows how nationalism is disintegrated and how to regain it. As Josna Rege suggests despite its conceptual freshness and vitality, Midnight’s Children remains very emotionally committed to the narrative of the nation.

Though Midnight’s Children is a narrative of the nation, it does not espouse the traditional notion of nationalism. In fact, it is a parody of the same. The present study aims at examining the subversive tendency of the narrative. Before reading the novel, it is worthwhile to note the view of Salman Rushdie on the notion of nationalism with regard to India which he himself expresses as follows: “After all, in all the thousands of years of Indian History, there never was such a creature as a united India. Nobody ever managed to rule the whole place, not the Mughals, not the British. And then, that midnight, the thing that had never existed was suddenly free. But what on earth was it? On what common ground (if any) did it, does it, stand.”

This serves as a foreground to examine his novel Midnight’s Children as a parody of the notion Indian nationalism.

To begin with, Midnight’s Children does not endorse the very concept of free India as perceived by the nationalists. Though India has become free from the British rule politically, it is not considered so in the true spirit of it. Midnight’s Children treats freedom as a myth as it does India: “fourteen hours to go, thirteen, 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, although it had invented the game of chess and trading 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 - except in a dream we all agreed to dream; it was a mass fantasy shared in varying degrees by Bengali and Punjabi, Madrasi and Jat, and would periodically need the sanctification and renewal which can only be provided by rituals of blood. India, the new myth-a collective fiction in
which anything was possible, a fable rivalled only by the two other mighty fantasies: money and God.\textsuperscript{10}

The novel has employed irony which is the major tool of subversion, so effectively to defy the notion of freedom, which is the mother of nation and the chief goal of nationalism consequently. The whole claim of India as a nation during the ancient time is subsided as imaginary. Both the concepts freedom and nation - are reduced to dreams and the author best exhibits the stroke of irony in stating that people have to sanctify and to renew the Independence Day without which, there is every likelihood of forgetting independence itself. While these moments are supposed to uphold solidarity among the people, the text implies that they cause bloodshed. Nationalism is shown as being at stake for Indian nationalism has failed to succeed in freeing itself from tyranny, for it has, as Timothy Brennan describes, degenerated into "embodiment of tyranny".\textsuperscript{11}

The novel depicts the notion of freedom and the birth of the nation as a fantasy which can be rivalled by only two other fantasies - money and God. Real nation does not exist when the freedom it has got is not reality exists, exists for rich only: "This independence is for the rich only; the poor are being made to kill each other like flies. In Punjab, in Bengal. Riots, riots, poor against poor. It's in the wind".\textsuperscript{12}

In depicting India like this, the novel displays its subversion of the traditional notion of freedom. The subversion of the notion of freedom obviously amounts to that of nationalism on the ground, as it is explained earlier, that freedom is regarded as the destination of the Indian National Movement and the seed-bed of nation building. Nationalism is realized in unity or unification of states and the subjects irrespective of religion, language, caste, class etc. It is needless to say that the objective of the Freedom Movement was to drive the British away from India and to form a free subcontinent called India. But what actually happened was the partition of the country in the guise of freedom. The country was not only divided but subdivided further into India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. The novel touches upon this point subtly as in: "Earl
Mountbatten, the last viceroy; would be with us any day, with his inexorable ticktock, his soldier's knife that could cut subcontinents in three”.13

Though the novel indicates that there is the scheme of the British in bifurcating the country into three, the failure of nationalism to prevent such fractions and to protect the unity of the country, which should be the primary function of nationalism, can not be overlooked also. Thus the identity of the country is split. Vinita Dhondiyal Bhatnagar’s view is noteworthy in this regard: “What Rushdie seems to acknowledge through his narratorial choices is the inevitability of that filtration. So that he locates their stories in India and simultaneously questions any notion of ‘India’ that does not recognize its constructed nature”.14

The seed of wickedness grows into a demon which causes irreparable loss to Pakistan. The first person who is disillusioned by the partition is Aadam Aziz because Partition represents the weakness of nationalism. Aziz, indeed, embodies the ideal of nationalism. He belongs to the breed of liberal humanists with the shades of Marxism. Though Muslims by religion, he does not approve the political theory of two-nations and is not a votary of partition. Thus he shares the vision of Indian nationalism and wants to preserve India as one country in tact. But he is disillusioned on the same day of India’s independence and becomes a helpless witness to India that cracks vertically. Neerja Mattoo points his experience of Aziz: Bitterly opposed to the two-nation theory, he espouses a losing cause and here again his modern values and optimistic beliefs suffer a defeat at the hands of fanaticism.15

Though both India and Pakistan indulge in self eulogy that they have achieved the goal of nationhood each, in the form of freedom in 1947, one can not deny the element of the governments’ betrayal of the subjects (people) through misuse of their authority over the government’s machineries. Betrayal operates at various levels, resulting in the disintegration of nationalism. The novel reveals the betrayal of nationalism both in Pakistan and in India.

It is an open secret that the leaders of the Muslim League fought tooth and nail and got a separate nation ‘Pakistan’ for the Muslim community to lead uninterrupted religious and cultural life. But the post-partition scenario of
Pakistan proves to be a dismal failure of their ideology, for the interests of common people are utterly neglected in the independent Pakistan as in the Independent India. The political leaders appear to be preoccupied with the sole objective of eliminating their rivals in their political rung and Pakistan is subjected to political and military coup and usurpation from the time of Ayub Khan to that of Bhutto at the cost of public welfare. There was divorce between news and reality: "the newspapers quoted foreign economists – PAKISTAN. A MODEL FOR EMERGING NATIONS -while peasants (unreported) cursed the so-called ‘green revolution' claiming that most of the newly – drilled water-wells had been useless, poisoned, and in the wrong places any way; while editorials praised the probity of the nation’s leadership, rumours, thick as flies, mentioned Swiss bank accounts and the new American motor-cars of the President’s son.16

The victory of acquiring a nation for the community is not shared among the people of Pakistan. The leaders who made promises sky high towards welfare of the people, seem to have eaten their own words and converted the government for their own elevation. This feature of decadence of nationalism in Pakistan is highlighted by Teresa Heffernan as follows: "This scenario repeats itself in the examples of the Pakistani nationalists. The Muslim League [land owners with invested interests to protect; agitates for partition of India, all the while claiming to represent all Muslims but serving no one’s interests but their own”.17

Besides betraying the internal instability of Pakistan, Midnight's Children highlights its external instability which is because of its strained relation with the neighbourhood. Ever since the partition, the relationship between Pakistan and India deteriorated to such an extent that the disputes remain unsolved: "Ever since partition the Ran had been ‘disputed territory’.18 The irony of partition is that while it was hailed as a source of solution to the disputes, it has in fact, bred more disputes. This assumption is endorsed by Kathleen Flanagan: "A country is divided into parts, India and Pakistan, and these parts war over yet another part, Kashmir”.19 The irony of partition reaches its peak, when Pakistan faces the civil war between the East and the
West Pakistan for the formation of yet another nation ‘Bangladesh’. The novel criticizes the misuse of the Government machinery to curb the rise of Mujibur Rahman and distort the electorate. Saleem who is on the side of the West Pakistan wants to trace Mujibur. After this, the event that takes place does not only defy the notion of nationalism but also the notion of humanism: “at a maidan in which lady doctors were being bayonetted before they were raped, and raped again before they were shot. Above them and behind them a cool white minaret of a mosque stared blindly down upon the scene”.

The novel strikes a severe blow at the notion of nationalism by showing that the country, which is born out of Muslim ideology, has disintegrated to such a level that the soldiers of holy country indulge in the shameless act of raping the womankind of the same religion and that too in the places surrounded by the mosques.

Even the sense of religious fanaticism which was the force behind the victory of Pakistan to attain partition from India and which is the nucleus of Pakistani nationalism is corrupted by the act of the West Pakistan soldiers. Hence *Midnight’s Children* is an open dig at nationalism.

One more event the novel chooses to use for the subversion of the notion of nationalism, is the civil war between the East Pakistan and the West Pakistan. In this, Shiva is nominated to fight on the side of the East Pakistan against the West Pakistan. Shiva, who is endowed with the powerful knees symbolising ‘might’ is capable of destroying six persons in a single stroke. Though Shiva’s act appears to be heroic, a close reading of the text will reveal that the act of Shiva amounts to subvert the notion of nationalism for it means the betrayal of fraternity. The episode is to read as Uma Parameswaran reads it: “Shiva is actually the son of Ahmed and Amina Sinai, and Amina has always been a Pakistani at heart and she is at this time an immigrant in Pakistan. The Bangladesh episode in history was a civil war, the eastern arm of Pakistan rising against the west-based government and the western arm trying to put down; it was a civil war of Muslims killing fellow Muslims. Thus Shiva, born of Muslim parents and fighting for East Pakistan, is a Muslim killing his fellow Muslims.”
In other words, Shiva’s act amounts to fratricide. When the novel is examined in its full depth, one can decipher that this fratricide is caused by the lack of stability in both the individual and the national identity. Saleem’s real parents are not Muslims, but he aligns himself with Pakistan and fights against Bangladesh. Shiva, whose parents are Muslims but aligns himself with Bangladesh and ruins the West Pakistan. Nationalism has become suicidal in this regard whereby the text’s subversion of nationalism becomes explicit.

*Midnight’s Children* highlights the crisis of nationalism in India too. In addition to the optimism disease, *Midnight’s Children* hints at the partition disease also. In India, the disease has infected the socio, religious and political aspects of life which have caused deterioration of nationalism. One instance of this is the bifurcation of Gujarat State on the linguistic line.

The Government, which has the responsibility to safeguard the solidarity of the country by paying proper attention to the sensitive issues like language, runs with the hare and hunts with the hounds. It is a mockery of the sacrifice of the nationalists, like Patel who struggled hard to unify the states lest the country should be subjected to further bifurcation on the linguistic basis. India, being a multilingual country faces a threat. If the same method is applied to all the language groups, the country would be broken into numerous fragments, as there are hundreds of language variations within the languages leading to the formation of thousands of dialectic states, as on the Linguistic states model. This ultimately causes a set back to nationalism. In this regard Kathaleen Flangan’s comment is worthy of... parts of society factions like the language marchers who in 1956 demanded the partition of Bombay along linguistic boundaries do as much, in Rushdie’s novel to make the state of India unviable”.

*Midnight’s Children* enacts its subversion of the notion of nationalism by displaying how freedom has lost is original meaning. It has been subjected to misappropriation and disintegration consequently. The text parodies freedom at the very outset by showing the protagonist as being tied to freedom through the
metaphor of ‘handcuff’ as in: “I had been mysteriously handcuffed to history, my destinies indissolutely chained to those of my country”.  

Here the text employs irony very skillfully to suggest the contradiction of freedom in showing Saleem, who is the personification of free India, as handcuffed. This symbol of ‘handcuff’ is used throughout the novel, which suggests that freedom is not a reality in free India.

An instance of mischief on the very day of freedom can be found in the act of the hospital nurse, Mary who causes the identity crisis by changing the babies. So no less significant is her contribution to the subversion: “. . . now Miss Mary Pereira made her contribution: ‘Go, go, she said to poor Flory, ‘see if you can help. I can do all right here’ And when she was alone - two babies in her hands-two lives in her power - she did it for Joseph, her own private revolutionary act, thinking. He will certainly love me for this, as she changed name-tags on the two huge infants, giving the poor baby a life of privilege and condemning the rich-born child to accordions and poverty”,

The change of destiny of the children - the child of Wee Willie Winkie with Sinai as Saleem and the child of Sinai with Winkie as Shiva - has to be read as the change of the identity and destiny of the nation not only, for the children - Saleem and Shiva - but also for the nation because they are symbols of their respective countries.

Saleem, who is regarded as the life of the nation, is deprived of the privilege of enjoying stability and hygiene, but begins to crack bit by bit. This concept of the loss of identity is masterly brought out through the metaphor of ‘children giving birth to parents’. Instead of his being given birth by his parents, the text ironically shows that Saleem gives birth to many parents. This list includes Wee Willie Winkie the husband of his mother Vanita, William Methold who seduced his mother before his birth, Sinai who bring him up by mistaking him as their own son, Mary Perira who is the ayah of Saleem, Hanif, Saleem’s uncle who looks after him, General Zulfikar who provides him shelter in Pakistan, Sharpsticker who cures him from his death sickness through his poison therapy, Parvathi, who transports him from Pakistan to India by her magic of vanishing, and Picture Singh who escorts and arranges his marriage
with Parvati. Saleem also admits that: "all my life, consciously or unconsciously, I have sought out fathers. Ahmed Sinai, Hanif Aziz, Sharpsticker Sahib, General Zulfikar have all been pressed into service in the absence of William Methold; Picture Singh was the last of this noble line".  

Midnight's Children laments the loss of the stable identity of the nation through the character of Saleem whose life-story is regarded as an allegory of the nation's history. This is only the beginning of the disintegration of Saleem. Mustafa and Sonia throw him away when he becomes an orphan by having lost all members of his family in the Indo-Pak war except his sister. Saleem is treated as an embodiment of all the 1001 children of the momentous midnight. He is captured and kept in the prison during the Emergency period. It denotes symbolically that India as a nation is made captive. In highlighting the misuse of political power and its consequent impact upon the country, the attitude of the novel to subvert the notion of nationalism is evident: "Statistics may set my arrest in context; although there is considerable disagreement about the number of 'political' prisoners taken during the Emergency either thirty thousand or a quarter of a million persons certainly lost their freedom".  

Timothy Brennan is right in identifying this feature as a postmodern subversion of the notion of nationalism when he says: "Concern with the ideology of nationalism as an expression of state violence brings us to a quality of the present condition that is submerged in most accounts of post-modernism—namely, the technologising of repression. Here the fragmented individual is quite literally the product of an active repressive apparatus".  

The disintegration of the 'children of the midnight' reaches its climax when they are subjected to sterilization. The sterilization under the Family Planning Programme in 1976 and the Emergency together affected the nation reducing its condition to that of an impotent. Though one tends to feel that the narrative is against the regime of the Congress in general and against Mrs. Indira Gandhi in particular, a close reading of the novel will help one to decipher that the novel does not spare other political leaders also who were also responsible for the disintegration of the nation, since the Janata Party too failed
to stop the process of disintegration. One such instance of attack on the Janata Party is worth noting: it was only later that I learned how the tattered hopes of the nation had been placed in the custody of ancient dotard who ate pistachios and cashews and daily took a glass of 'his own water'. Urine drinkers had come to power. The Janata Party, with one of its leaders trapped in a kidney-machine, did not seem to me (when I heard about it) to represent a new dawn.\(^{28}\)

Though Saleem proclaims that it is his duty to safeguard the nation against deterioration on more occasions than one, as for instance: "my historic mission to rescue the nation from her fate,"\(^{29}\) he is also aware of the limitation of his strength. So he moans helplessly: "I had neither funds nor a change of clothes, nor qualification-having neither completed my education nor distinguished myself in that part of it which I had undergone; how was I to embark on my ambitious project of nation-saving without a roof over my head or a family to protect support assist"\(^{30}\)

Saleem fails not only in his mission to save the nation utterly, but also fails in protecting himself from cracking. He has lost his parents, his wife Parvati, his colleagues, his history and his reproductive power and all his possessions which is suggestive of the fact that the more he tries to unify the nation, the speedier is the process of the nation's fragmentation, because what remains is his fractured person: "Of my last miserable contact with the brutal intimacies of family life only fragments remain".\(^{31}\) Saleem claims that he is the sum total of all India and all that India constitutes India when he says: "I am the sum total of everything that went before me, of all I have been seen done, of everything done to me. I am everyone everything whose being-in-the-world affected was affected by mine. I am anything that happens after I've gone which would not have happened if I had not come".\(^{34}\) Saleem is not the only person with fractured identity. Like Saleem all others -- all millions of Indians -- are fragmented into millions of parts. So Saleem says: " Nor am I particularly exceptional in this matter; each 'I' every one of the now-six-hundred-million-plus of us a similar multitude"\(^{32}\)
Further, he loses all and falls prey to the government's vengeance by being subjected to castration. His fall has to be seen as the fall of the nation. Hence the novel could be viewed as a subversion of the notion of nationalism.

Another level at which the disintegration of the nation takes place is the administrative level, i.e. in the misuse of Government machinery in the election. Shiva is hired by the government for the booth capturing in the election by which the very institution of the electorates (the election commission) which is regarded as the very soul of democracy betrayed.

There is a sly comment on the function of the judiciary and the ethics of medical profession also. The social evils such as poverty, unemployment, casteism are not eradicated in free India. On the other hand, they are shown as multiplying. The height of irony is found in portraying the scarcity of the basic amenity, like water, as the novel sarcastically states: “the water shortage had reached the point where milkmen could no longer find clean water with which to adulterate the milk”.

The novel contains a number of references to the backwardness of the country in many states without being attended to adequately by the authorities and the ensuing political rivalry. In the form of reportage, the failures of the nationalist’s mission are highlighted in the novel as follows: “Dark clouds were gathering in political skies as well; in Bihar, where corruption, inflation hunger illiteracy landlessness ruled the roost, Jaya Prakash Narayan led a coalition of students and workers against the governing Indira Congress; in Gujarat, there were riots, railway trains were burned and Morarji Desai went on a fast- unto-death to bring down the corrupt government of the Congress(under Chimanbhai Patel) in that drought-ridden state... it goes without saying that he succeeded without being obliged to die.”

In the above reference, there is an element of parody of Gandhism which is a common strategy of post-modernists. Gandhiji’s one of the political weapons ‘fast unto death’ which was employed by him to get rid of the British and to protect India from getting fragmented on the line of community and religion is shown to be misused by the contemporary politicians for their vested interests.
Midnight's Children, as a typical post-modernist novel, reveals that there are multiple nationalisms in free India. To mention only a couple of them, they are 'business nationalism and chamcha nationalism' which are meant to scoff at the traditional notion of nationalism.

The notion of business nationalism may be defined as the tendency of people towards the country's freedom as an occasion to grab as many business opportunities as possible for personal prosperity without feeling any pricks of conscience of sacrificing national interests. Saleem hints at this aspect when he recalls the environment of his birth and growth: "I, who had been raised in India's other true faith which we may term Businessism, and who had abandoned-been abandoned-by its practitioners, felt instantly and comfortingly at home".35

Saleem's father and Dr. Narlikar are the ones in whose characterization the concept of business nationalism is introduced. When India is declared free and the people are celebrating it in their own ways Dr. Narlikar writes a letter to Ahmed to move to Bombay where lands are made available for the throw away price and Ahmed Sinai at once decides to manipulate the situation without any trace of passion to celebrate the occasion of Independence. "I decided to go to Bombay, and enter the property business. Property is dirt cheap there now".36

Even Amina goes to the horse race and indulges in gambling. Not contented with the property business, Dr. Narlikar suggests that they should also venture into tetrapods business. He entices Ahmed into the new business by saying: "Your capital and my contracts, Ahmed bhai, what problem can there be? Every great man in this city has a son brought into the world by me; no doors will close. You manufacture; I will get the contract! Fifty-fifty; fair is fair"! 37

The irony in which the character of Dr. Narlikar is embedded is that he, who opposes the birth rate as it is a danger to the nation, also has another face of a wicked business minded person without any concern for the cause of nation building.

Ahmed makes a lot of fortune and on one day the Government orders to freeze his assets. When the said order is enforced, he abuses the government as
anti-Muslim. Ahmed wins the case in the court and recovers his assets finally. When he emigrates to Pakistan, his motif is business rather than patriotism. Naseem Aziz and Pia also start a petrol pump business in Pakistan. In other words, 'nationalism is reduced by the opportunists to 'businessism'.

The evil of businessism is shown to have permeated the field of spiritualism also. The text installs the traditional character of India in believing the prophesy of the sadhus in the characters, like Ramram seth, who predicts the birth of Amina's child and relies on another sadhu who stays in the Methold estate garden to observe the growth of Saleem. "He will have sons without having sons! He will be old before he is old! And he will die .... before he is dead". The fake Sadhus like Khusro, convert the nation into a "viable domestic market".

Thus *Midnight's Children* shows how the Indian freedom has been let down by the business opportunists without any feeling of patriotism and without any prick of conscience. The freedom the nation is converted into a commercial enterprise.

The elements of this business nationalism can be identified in the acts of Shiva's gang, of the Ravan gang which blackmails Ahmed Sinai, of the sadhus and of Khusro who mint money without ethics. This point is highlighted by Brennan who says as: "The combination of phony populism and religious mission in the service of a swindle mirrors that found in an earlier scene featuring the 'Ravana gang', which had posed as a 'fanatical anti-Muslim movement' during the riots for the purpose of running a protection racket among the Punjabi shopkeepers: 'behind this façade of racial hatred, the Ravana gang was a brilliantly-conceived commercial enterprise. So Rushdie elaborates in these microcosms the forces at work in the larger historical actors behind independence and partition - the Jinnahs (muslims), Desais (hindu), Boses (secular) and others of all creed and shade of skin. The nation is a commercial enterprise."

Nationalism has also been ruined by another unpatriotic development in free India, which may be termed 'Chamcha nationalism'. Chamcha, though literally means 'spoon', refers to the people who act as, according to Rushdie, "
collaborators under independence who have propped up the post-colonial status quo; even after the departure of the Raj... the Empire continues to grow fat by being "spoon-fed"."40

The concept includes the people who indulge in ‘hero worship’ for personal motives in politics also. Methwold Estate symbolizes the nature of chamcha nationalism. When William Methold has to leave India on the account of freedom, many people spring there to buy the portions of his palace. It is piteous that they stoop down to secure the lands only because they are sold at cheaper price at the cost of their national pride by yielding to and accepting the condition laid down by the colonizer that the furniture and materials that belong to him should not be replaced. What is to be noted in this event is that the postcolonial status quo is propped up and the Empire is spoon fed to grow fat by none other than the one time victims of colonialism.

The chamcha culture has permeated the life of civil servants too. Though Mustapha Aziz is a well-to-do person and holds a high profile job in the civil service, he fails to overcome the temptation to become a chamcha. When Saleem becomes disillusioned by the rule of the Congress under the Primeministership of Mrs. Indira Gandhi and decides to react, Mustapha’s eulogizing in favour of the Prime Minister is an act of chamcha nationalism. A few lines to this effect from the novel may be cited: “...his blind lap-dog devotion to every one of the Prime Minister’s acts. If Indira Gandhi had asked him to commit suicide, Mustapha Aziz would have ascribed it not only to anti-Muslim bigotry but also defended the statesmanship of the request, and naturally performed the task without daring (or even wishing) to demur”.41

Mustapha is so wicked and cowardice that besides being himself a chamcha, he also tries to inculcate that culture in Saleem too. Saleem is one for whom the nation’s interest is above the interests of the individuals. So he indulges in the severe criticism of the family regime of the Nehru for it is against the ideology of nationalism. But Mustafa’s chamcha character is exhibited in his act of taming Saleem: “You want a clerkship or so, may be it can be fixed; but leave these dreams of God-knows-what. Our country is in safe
hands. Already Indiraji is making radical reforms—land reforms, tax structures, 
education, birth control—you can leave it to her and her sarkar".42

Another instance of chamcha nationalism is found in the politicians’ 
glorifying their leader in superlative terms. They have lost the sense of 
proportion in evaluating the performance of the leadership and indulge in 
blind hero worship.

When Emergency is declared by Mrs. Indira Gandhi, it was severely 
criticized and condemned all over the world, but the members of chamcha 
nationalism are shown as being busy in the eulogy of the Prime Minister ... She had run a jewellery boutique before she took up social work ... during the Emergency she was, semi-officially, in charge of sterilization. But I have my own name for her: she was the Widow’s Hand ... The people of India, the Widow’s Hand explained, ‘worship our Lady like a god. Indians are only capable of worshiping one god’.43

It clearly suggests that the nation has become a hand-maid of its leaders 
during the post-independence period. The very notion of nationalism is 
fragmented beyond imagination. The whole argument aims at showing the 
decadence of nationalism and how the hypocrisy of the leaders (political, 
religious and social) has bred numerous contaminated nationalisms. Hence 
*Midnight's Children* is a parody of the traditional notion of nationalism. The 
justification that *Midnight's Children* subverts the notion of nationalism can be 
summed up in the words of Timothy Brennan: “The disease of nationalism is 
thus not an impassive Judgement or a simple assessment of one of many 
possible historical strategies, but is for Rushdie a question above all of human 
rights of torture, military campaigns, smashed printing presses and phony referenda”.44

To read the novel as a work of anti-nationalism amounts to misreading the novel for the novel’s purpose is to show the failure, disillusionment, disintegration of the traditional version of nationalism based on the over all betrayal of responsibility in various ways of life only. As a novel of post-modernism, it indents to promote the concept of nationalism as a stable identity for the nation and individuals through magic realism which alone can render
such identity as Wexler puts: "When traditional determinants of identity divide rather than unify imaginary desire may be the most stable determinant available".45

Wexler also demonstrates that the wish fulfillment requires a special mode, which is a blend of realism and symbolism, which is, in other words, called magic realism. It is manifested through the combination of the general and the particular. This organic blending the general and the particular is very skillfully carried out in *Midnight's Children*. The history of India and the history of Saleem's family, the end of three years courtship of Aadem with Naseem and the end of the world War I, the birth of India and the birth of Saleem, the death of Aadem Aziz as individual and the death of Jawaharlal Nehru as the Prime Minister, the birth of Aadem Sinai and the declaration of the Emergency etc are bound with each other in the novel.

The wish fulfillment of the stable identity is suggested in the character of Aadam Sinai. Though born as sick, he is a foil to Saleem Sinai. He recovers his health after he is breast-fed by Durga, a dhobi woman. Though Saleem also sucks the milk from her, he cannot sustain his cracks and fragmentation. But Aadam, the child of Emergency, possesses greater perspective of politics and nation. Thus he can gain a stable identity both as an individual and as a personification of the nation. Saleem is not the son of his father, Ahmed, and not the grand son of his grandfather of Aadam Aziz, and not the father of his son, Aadam Sinai but Aadam Sinai is the grandson of Ahmed Sinai and great grand son of Dr Aadam Aziz, though his father is not Saleem Sinai. It fits the definition of nation as given by Wexler: "... something has to be the same. Something also has to be different, because a nation must distinguish itself from other nations".46

(ii) Subversion of the notion of History:
Post-modernists subvert the notion of history because according to them "historiography is a human construction not a transparent rendering of incontroversial retrievable 'facts'."47 *Midnight's Children* provides sufficient scope to read it as a subversion of the notion of official history of modern India. The notion of historicism has undergone a rapid change in the last few decades
of the twentieth century. It is worthwhile to note, at the outset, the views of Clement Hawes on the treatment of history in *Midnight’s Children* which may serve as a platform to examine the novel in the proposed direction. He states that: “SALMAN RUSHDIE’S MIDNIGHT’S CHILDREN has been widely seen as typifying both post-modernism and postcoloniality. As such, it has been taken to represent a new, “de-totalizing” way of writing history’ specially’ the history of India as a modern nation-state. The novel figures prominently, for instance, in Linda Hutcheon’s *The Politics of Post-modernism*, whether it exemplifies a structure that both installs and subverts “the teleology, closure, and causality of narrative, both historical and fictive.”

Like philosophy, the notion of history as an authentic record of facts also has reached the stage of extinction. So the notion of single version of history seems naïve today. The versions of history rendered through ‘fictions’ which is no longer a pack of stories but a field of culture studies, are treated as more tenable than the official version. There is a categorical shift of priority from what, where, when ‘something occurred, to whether it occurred at all.

Salman Rushdie, a typical post-modernist, has expressed his view about history elsewhere and it is worthwhile to note it here for it serves as a foreground to read *Midnight’s Children* as a subversion of the notion of history. Simon Sawhney quotes Rushdie’s words from *The Satanic Verse*: “History is a deviation from the Path, knowledge is a delusion, because the sum of the knowledge was complete on the day Al-Lah finished his revelation to Mahound”.

Rushdie is also very suspicious and critical about the ways in which histories have been written so far. His dissatisfaction with the versions of history is pointed out by K.R.Rao who says: “Rushdie maintains that ‘the history of the twentieth century has been written by shop makers, and that Indian history has been ruthlessly ‘Sawed’by the Britishers, attempts to provide the corrective view of history not through the factcities, but through the subversive reality aided by the combinative modes of the parodic and fantastic”.

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Rushdie firmly believes that the novel may be adopted as a medium of historiography and that the fictional version can be more tenable than the traditional versions. M.L. Pandit points out this as: "As a serious student of history, Rushdie believes that when history re-shapes itself through the imagination of creative writer, it becomes a kind of fiction that can be as interesting and rewarding as any other form of the novel". 51

Salman Rushdie tries to render in Midnight's Children the history of India which is different from the version of the historians. Midnight's Children offers itself as a discourse on history through its new method and becomes a critique of both the notion of the history of modern India and historification. Thus it results in the subversion of the notion of the official history of India which can be seen at two levels as stated below: 1. The Elements of Unreliability and 2. Violation of the norms of traditional historiography.

1. The Elements of Unreliability in narrating the History: Midnight's Children creates an impression upon its readers that the novel is a narrative of the history of Modern India by its strategy of intertwining the public events and characters with the (fictional) life of the protagonist all through the novel. The synthesis is so strong that the reader is obliged to feel that the novel is nothing but the history of Modern India. The opening page of the novel itself draws the attention of the readers to history: "I was born in Doctor Narlikar's Nursing Home on August 15th, 1947". 52

It is needless to elaborate on the date that occurs as shown above for it is known universally as the date of Independence of India. Indeed, the reader is constantly drawn to a number of historical events like the Jallian Walla Bagh massacre, Indo-Pak War, Indo-China conflict etc. While reading the novel, every one is bound to think as S. Suresh Chandra does that: "Rushdie's Midnight's Children is primarily about Indian Independence, the partition holocaust, and its traumatic effect on the Indian people. The novel deals with seventy years of Indian's modern history, emphasizing the partition tragedy and similar historical events". 53

Similar comments have been made by a large number of critics on Midnight's Children. It indicates clearly that the novel is a history of Modern
India. The fact that certain facts and figures also are proved to be right in the light of documental evidence of history strengthens the impression that it is a modern history of India. But if a close examination of the text is conducted to know 'by whom and how the history is narrated', the intention of the novel to subvert the notion of traditional history becomes explicit. Saleem Sinai is the narrator of the historical events in the novel. He claims that he knows the past, the present and the future. The height of his claim is that he himself is history. T.N. Dhar remarks that: "Saleem is a world in himself-history encapsulated into a tiny physical frame". Saleem himself claims more than once that history is born out of him: "Who what am I? My answer: I am the sum total of everything that went before me, of All I have been seen done, of everything done-to-me".

A superficial reading of the novel does create the impression that Saleem Sinai is the embodiment of history, for he is the storehouse of the history of more than three generations of not only his family but also of the country. One has but to endorse the view of O.P.Mathur who says: "Saleem stands in manifold relationship to history-as its own-companion, its creator, and its victim, in addition to being a chronicler, a participant, an ironic over viewer and an inspired visionary".

But a deep study of the novel reveals that Saleem is not all that he claims himself to be. Ironically enough, he who claims to know about all, does not know about his parentage for a very long time. Saleem, who is depicted as a grandson and son of Aadam Aziz and Ahmed Sinai respectively, has to depend upon the revelation made by Mary to discover that he was born not to the Sinais but to the Wee Willie Winkie couple. Because Mary Pereira has begun to talk, gabbling out a secret which has been hidden for over eleven years pulling us all out of the dream-world she invented when she changed name-tags, forcing us into the horror of the truth "... a third person discovered that although his name was Saleem Sinai, he was not his parents' son ...".

Saleem's claim as a historian is further ridiculed on one more occasion as well. Saleem has to learn about the extinction of his whole family except his sister in the Indo-Pak war from his uncle Mustapha as Saleem has been totally
drained of his memory—Saleem has used memory as the source to narrate the history—during his stay in Pakistan. The irony is that: “it was at Uncle Mustapha’s that I learned, for certain, about the deaths of my family in the war of ’65”.\textsuperscript{58}

Saleem has been taking the readers for a ride as he does Padma all through his narration that he has witnessed the history of India ever since 1919 through the trick of hiding the truth that he has in fact learnt the same from one person or the other. What is revealed in the examination is that Saleem is not a reliable narrator, because he himself does not know many things about his life wherein the validity of his claim for his hold over history and his account of the history of India tends to be questionable and remains untenable. Therefore, one cannot rely on his narration of history as he does not even know who his real parents are. Urmil Talwar’s comment in this regard is worthwhile to note: “Saleem is not even sure of his parents, whether he is the son of Amina and Ahmed or of Vanita and Wee Willie Winkie”.\textsuperscript{59}

The riddle remains unresolved for a long time. His identity is not consistent. Though his physical features are identical with that of his grand father Aadam Aziz, he is not grand son in reality, for he is a bastard son of Wee Willie Winkie and William Method. Though he bears the second name Sinai from Ahmed Sinai, he is not the son of Ahmed couple. He develops a sort of incessant love for Brass Monkey who, though not his own sister in reality, grows with him as his sister. He is the father of Aadam Sinai who is actually born to Shiva. He himself admits that he has given birth to many fathers. He also has a number of names—“I, Saleem Sinai, later variously called Snotnose, Stainface, Baldy, Sniffer, Buddha and even Piece-of-the Moon”.\textsuperscript{60}

The strange nature of his identity rather misleads the readers to get confused. To believe that he, who cannot establish his identity, identifies the historical events amounts to agree with what O.P.Mathur observes: “The novel is full of fantastic ironies and ironical fantasies”.\textsuperscript{61} Hence the clarity of identity, which is an important norm in traditional history, remains a riddle. By distorting the notion of identity, the novel undoubtedly subverts the notion of history.
Under such circumstances, one cannot help concluding that the narrator, who is inconsistent regarding his own identity and dependent on others to know about his own life, is bound to become unreliable. Hence his narration too amounts to unreliability, as Neerja Mattoo puts forth: "Things are and yet they are not. A son is a son and yet not a son. Sometimes the time sequence is lost. All this seems appropriate while describing Indians in their confused search for identity and unreliable grasp of history".62

2) Defying the traditional notion of Historiography: Another ground on which the subversion of history is tenable is in the overlooking of the principles of historiography. Dhar is right in his observation about the treatment of history in *Midnight's Children* when he says that: "History moves before our eyes like a newsreel,".63 and it does so by violating some of the basic norms of historiography in its conventional sense.

It is needless to say that a historian is a registrar of facts and the facts he records are expected to have a direct bearing on the norm such as the corroboration of objective truth. In this regard, he should have dwelt upon the authentic documents so as to achieve a higher degree of objective truth. Saleem's source, on the other hand, is nothing but his mind - memories and dreams. Saleem provides the historical events right from the Jallian Walla Bagh Massacre to the Emergency period during the regime of Mrs. Indira Gandhi based on the material drawn from his memories: "Memory's truth, because memory has its own special kind. It selects, eliminates, alters, exaggerates, minimizes, glorifies, and vivifies also".64 He also admits that such a procedure as this does not offer the objective truth and like a typical post-modernist, he welcomes the lapses by saying that: "if you are a little uncertain of reliability, well, a little uncertainty is no bad thing".65

Indeed, the novel does provide certain authentic facts such as the Jallian Walla Bagh Massacre, Nehru's speech, Five Year Plan, Congress symbol of the cow and the suckling calf, war with Pakistan, the birth of Bangladesh, Jayaparakash Narayan, Morarjee forming Janata Govt, Allahabad Judgement against Indira, Morarjee asking the President Ahmed to sack Indira, etc, but there are also flaws of facts in their reference to certain historical events. One
such example pointed out by Uma Parameshwaran with regard to the elections of 1957 that: “The elections of 1957 took place in the spring of the year but Saleem has his mother campaigning in the summer of 91”. Though he realizes this discrepancy later, it does undermine the principle of validity of facts of historiography by not correcting it. There is a failure of seeing past with what is called the hindsight of Saleem which shows nothing but the text’s subversive attitude.

In addition, the novel has also failed to abide by the very important norms of the traditional historiography such as cartography, identification, chronology and corroboration etc.

With regard to cartography, Saleem’s accounts of the weather report about Kashmir are doubted. He states that the lake in Kashmir freezes every year and the female devotees visit the temple of Shankaracharya on the hill during the winter. M.L.Pandit, who is a native of Kashmir, not only denies this but also indicates the subversive attitude of the novel as follows: “Here the author and narrator fall back upon some of the traditional ways of building history. It is in this part of the novel that perspectives of the past mix with the truths of memory borrowed from other minds. Expectedly, it becomes the reason for many discrepancies far more than in the later part of book. For instance, as a Kashmiri, I can vouch for the fact that the Dal Lake in Srinagar does not freeze over every winter, may be on an average once in twenty years. But Saleem gives us a wrong impression in the opening pages of the novel that the freezing and thawing of the lake is a yearly phenomenon. Similarly, no Hindu woman go up the Shankaracharya Hill in the cold severity of January to perform the rite of Puja at the Shiva-lingam inside the hilltop temple”.

There is one more element that amounts to the distortion of the principle of cartography. It is expressed in the form of irony. Saleem’s face is read by his teacher as a map. Yet another well-known fact with which Saleem takes liberty is with regard to the reference to the role of Ganesh in Indian epics. It is needless to mention that it is Vyasa who recited the Mahabharata to Lord Ganesh but this fact is tampered with as: “When “Valmiki, the author of the Ramayana, dictated his masterpiece to elephant-headed Ganesh”.

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One can easily make out the flaw in the identification in the above reference. Though Valmiki is the author of the Ramayana, it is stated that he dictated the *Mahabharata* to Ganesh.

The identification of Saleem with the birth of free India, his grand father Aadam Aziz with Jawaharlal Nehru has already been mentioned. Saleem's religious identity is also mixed up with Hinduism, Islam, Christianity and Buddhism. Saleem is born to Wee Willie couple due to which he gets his identity as a Hindu. Since he grows as the son of Ahmed couple because of Mary's changing the nametag, he gets the identity as a Muslim. As Vanita is seduced by William Methold, he gets the identity of a Christian and his transformation into the Buddha is due to his experience of having undergone the process of purification. Saleem is a parody of the notion of identity in general and a parody of the Buddha in particular for his character is contrary to Lord Buddha's. While the Buddha has renounced all his desires and become a sage, Saleem is guilty of incest for he has passion for his sister Brass Monkey and is never able to free himself from that sense of lust forever.

The identity of Tai, the boatman, is yet another ambiguity in the novel. It is so because he claims to have seen Isa, Christ, and to have been associated with Emperor Jehangir. He has lived such a long life that his character transcends not only time, place but identity also. This, in fact, is a new technique of recreating history by making the protagonist participate in the process of history shaping itself wherein the concept of New Historicism is hinted. Uma states that: "Rushdie also seems to spoof at the traditional histories for often being no more than biographies of kings and generals. The novel seems to say that the autobiography of a common man contains and participates in the making of history. Tai's claim that he was at Jehangir's death-bed is an extension of this participation".69

One important feature that continues throughout the novel is the connection of the history of the individual with the history of the country. This causes ambiguity to the characters as to whether they are fictional individuals or historical persons.
If we go by the definition of historiographer as given by S.R. Tikekar, "a historiographer has to have sympathy and understanding as his cardinal virtues even the high regard for truth and impartiality"; the novel seems to run and counter this definition for the narrator shows no sympathy for the political leaders. They are represented with utmost bitterness. Morarji Desai is described as the urine drinking Finance Minister, Feroze Gandhi as the nation's son-in-law, and Mrs. Indira too receives the bitterest treatment and is identified as the widow.

Though *Midnight's Children* is not a text book of history, the extensive historical references to the events, men, and places do give the novel the semblance of a historical novel. Besides the references to the facts of international import, the novel contains a large number of references to Indian history about which Subramanya Sharma observes that: "there are 55 references to Indian history".

But the order in which they are presented defies chronology which, according to S.R. Tikekar, is "the backbone of history". If these fifty-five references to the Indian history are to be presented in the chronological order, the national movement led by Gandhi under the strategy called 'hartal' should have been the first event followed by the passing of Rowlat Act, the Jallian Walla Bagh Massacre led by R.E. Dyer, the Quit Indian Movement, Viceroy Wavell, Atlee Govt, the transfer of power etc. But the first event that occurs in the novel is the Indian Independence on 15 August 1947. By ignoring the chronological order in presenting the historical events, the novel seems to employ the epic form to render the history of India. The most striking example is the death of Mahatma Gandhi which is reported at the wrong part of the narrative rather purposely: "Re-reading my work, I have discovered an error in chronology. The assassination of Mahatma Gandhi occurs, in these pages, on the wrong date. But I can not say, now, what the actual sequence of events might have been; in my India, Gandhi will continue to die at the wrong time".

The error in reporting the death of Gandhi which is a prominent event in the history of India shows the typical irreverence to the notion of reality which is a distinct mark of the post-modernist attitude. As a novel of post-modernism,
it defies the traditional notion of history by its deliberate attempt to tamper with the norms of historiography. Meenakshi Mukherjee's observation on the novel hints at the "author's playful use and abuse of historical data". She has admired for its tendency to challenge the notion of official history. For example, "Unlike the abstract setting and temporal indeterminacy of the first novel, space and time were sharply focused here—the Indian subcontinent between 1915 and 1977—although official history was challenged by alternative mode of remembering of history".

A number of references have already been cited to show how the feature of corroboration is paid no heed. The text employs a number of parodies whereby the authenticity is put to question. The connections between Dr. Aadem A. vaharlal Nehru, Sinai and the independence of India also installs a paradox of the declaration of Emergency by Mrs. Indira Gandhi. Parvati, the witch, is portrayed as giving birth to her son Aadem Sinai at the same time when the Emergency is declared by Mrs. Indira Gandhi. The text ironically narrates this event as follows: "Yes yes she has begun to push, come on Parvati, push push push, and while pushed in the ghetto J.P. Narayan and Morarji Desai were also goading Indira Gandhi...He was born in old Delhi..... once upon a time. No that won't do, there's no getting away from the date: Aadem Sinai arrived at a night-shadowed slum on June 25th, 1975. And the time? The time matters, too. As I said: at night. No, it is important to be more .... On the stroke of midnight, as a matter of fact. Clock-hands joined palms. Oh, spell it out, spell it out at the precise instant of India's arrival at Emergency, he emerged."

Though the date of the Emergency is authentic, the text still meddles with facts. The problem of corroboration arises here in the use of Aadem Sinai both as a historical event by being a metaphor and a character as well. The deployment of Aadem as a metaphor of Emergency defies the notion of official history of India.

Another potential instance in this regard is the portrayal of Saleem's participation in nabbing Mujib-ur-Rahman of Bangladesh. (Sheikh Mujibur-Rahma). The novel narrates the conflicts between the leaders of Pakistan and
those of Bangladesh. When the talks fail, Bhutto and Yahya decide to arrest Mujibur Rehman. Until this the authenticity of history is maintained, and the same is satirized. In this drama, Saleem becomes a Pakistani and joins the troop to trace and catch Mujib-ur-Rehman. Saleem is admitted into the troop for his extraordinary sense of smell. And novel states that: “when Mujib was arrested, it was I who sniffed him out. (They had provided me with one of his old shirts; it’s easy when you’ve got the smell)”.77

What is clear from the above analysis of the text is that the notion of official history has undergone a major change. There is a shift from authenticity to perspectivisation. One is led into a sort of dilemma whether to dismiss it as unauthentic or to accept it. In other words, Midnight’s Children is authentic as an experiment to fictionalize history. The observation of Neil Ten Korterrar is worthwhile to note: “Rushdie’s alternative genealogy, a debunking of the standard narrative of Indian history, draws attention to its own functionality as well”.78

Another post modernistic characteristic of Midnight’s Children is the device of incorporation of multiple perspectives of history. Though Saleem appears as the major narrator of the ‘histories’, the characters like Tai, Sri Ram Ram Seth, Tai Bibi are also entitled to the same claim.

The boatman claims that he knows Kashmir from the time of Isha to the time of Christ and he has seen both of them, – this suggests that he is a store house of past. He also appears as a saviour of Kashmir by resisting the foreign culture to prevail in Kashmir. He has lived so long that he can tell every thing about the lake, the culture etc. His antagonism to the foreign culture is explicit in the narration of two events. The first is with regard to the death of Iles Lubin. Tai, who claims that he knows every thing that happened in the lake, refuses to comment on her death in the lake: “You said: certain foreign woman come here to drown! ‘I, sahib? Tai shocked, malodorous, innocent. But grief is making your head play trick! How can I know these things?”79

The second is that the boatman Tai represents the conservatives who opposed any sort progressive change in the society. He refuses to take treatment from Dr Aziz when he falls sick because for Tai Dr. Aziz is a symbol of the
West. Through the character of Tai, the novel tries to provide the cultural history of Kashmir. In the method of revealing this aspect, folk tradition of historicism is employed. Terasa Heffernan’s comment on this character is very relevant to the supposition that Tai can be regarded as a historian: “the ancient boatman Tai, a historian who scorns the very idea of progress”.80

Sri.Ramram Seth represents the prophet as historian. A historian is not only the chronicler of the past but also a visionary of prophetic Judgement on the basis of the wisdom gained from the past. In this sense, Sri Ramram Seth is a prophetic historian because he only predicts the birth of Saleem and its aftermath.

If Saleem is treated as a metaphor for India and a narrator of history of India Sri. Ramram can be regarded as historian of historians because Ramram predicts the life of Saleem from the conception to the disintegration of Saleem. If Saleem narrates history, Ramram narrates the life history of Saleem in advance. In Indian context prophecy as history is very relevant because it is believed that the seers reveal the history of India.

Tai Bibi, who is endowed with the smell which is described as: “some air of historic majesty” 81 is also a storehouse of the past for she claims to be five hundred and twelve years old. Saleem’s sense of history is aroused in her company. Her body is described as an antique leather bag. It is she who reveals to Salem whom he holds as his ladylove in his mind. Saleem is stunned to know that Tai Bibi has rightly discovered that Saleem is in love with his own sister.

If these three persons do not narrate any major events of history and provide the personal characteristics of the characters like Aadam Aziz and Saleem Sinai, and themselves, it is what the purpose of the post-modernist is to do in the novel. At this juncture, it is worthwhile to note what Kathleen Flanagan comments: “Throughout the novel Saleem’s inner life is a function of the historical forces affecting his state, though in a parody of the great man theory of history, for Saleem is, in his own mind, the hidden, delusional center of India’s history”.82

These characters fill up the gaps of personal elements which are not heeded to by the traditional history in general. Above all, it also suggests the
denial of single version of history and advocates multiple histories which amount to post-modernist attitude towards the notion of history. Bhaya Nair looks at *Midnight's Children*: "*Midnight's Children*, on Rushdie's own account, is about competing interpretations of historical texts. The elaborate constructions of interlocking metaphors in this novel are built upon a single principle - the provision of an alternative view of history".83

In this alternative view of history, the author has employed as many devices as possible, like metaphor, anecdotes, mythological lore, detective comedy, linguistic exuberance, symbolism, magic realism, dream realism, fantasy, folklore etc. The process of mixing these modes to present the history is symbolically shown as a process of pickle making. Though the novel does not rise to the objective truth, it certainly rises to the poetic truth which is nearer to the palates as cited by Urmil Talwar: “One day, perhaps, the world may taste the pickles of history. They may be too strong for some palates, their smell may be overpowering tears may rise to eyes; I have never the less that it will be possible to say of them that they possess the authentic taste of truth ... that they are, despite everything, acts of love".84

III. Subversive Technique: Catherine Cundy commenting on the form of *Midnight's Children* says: Rushdie's later work demonstrates a growing awareness that the introduction of new content must be accompanied by a change in form".85 It is needless to say that post-modernism is essentially a technique in literature. The core of post-modernism is to be traced in the techniques that are employed in the form of the novel. Indeed, in literature there is no watertight compartmentalisation as subject and form. These concepts are fluid in their nature so that there are several overlappings. The employment of various devices in Structure, Characterisation and Diction are examined with a view to finding out how they subvert the themes and the form.

(i) Structure: *Midnight's Children* has a non-descript type of form as it has incorporated numerous genres. This is called picklization. The novel has overlooked the conventional norms of plot. Critics have described the structure of the narrative as Hotch-Potch. As Urmil Talwar noticed: “He (Saleem) also
admits that endowed with hindsight he is “destroying the unities and conventions of fine writing”. 86

The structure of the novel is like the perforated sheet through which Aadam Aziz conducts physical examinations of various parts of Naseem. As mentioned above, the novel contains not a single story but multiple stories for Saleem says that he has to tell many stories as quickly as possible lest he may collapse at any time. To put it in the words of Uma; “There are dozens of potential short stories in the novel and one might speculate that Rushdie might well develop or has already developed several of them: the episodes of the perforated sheet, the magician’s ghetto, Padma’s misguided efforts at reviving Saleem’s potency... seem to be some of the other author’s favourites”. 87

The structure does not have a linear narrative just because Saleem has to tell several stories quickly before he collapses for his body has already started showing cracks. More over, Saleem narrates the stories with the help of his memories which flows like a stream obviously. Rushdie means to offer a critique on the traditional notion of plot. Therefore he attempts to provide a plot modelled on the art of collage and cartoon which suits his purpose of bouncing, leaping, diving up and down, to and fro, in and out, halt and start, and vice versa whenever, wherever, to whatever he wishes. Rushdie has hinted it in the act of Saleem’s to conspiring to murder Homi Catrack by producing statements to indicate the liaison between Mr.Homi Catrack and Mrs.Sabarmati. He does it in the collection of words gathered from various newspaper cuttings. Saleem says that he did not battle Homi on horseback, with fiery eyes and flaming sword; instead, imitating the action of the snake he began to cut pieces out of news papers. Then he assembles them as: COMMANDER SABARMATI(my note read) WHY DOES YOUR WIFE GO TO COLABA CAUSEWAY ON SUNDAY MORNING? 88

The novel encompasses the story of four generations i.e., Aadam Aziz, Ahmed Sinai, Saleem Sinai and Aadam Sinai. Chronologically, the story of Aadam Aziz should be the first followed by that of Ahmed Sinai and in the order of the generations mentioned as above. But the narrative begins with the description of Saleem’s birth which should have actually been proceeded by the
story of his parents and grandparents. After creating the impression that the story of Saleem would be told first by such an opening, the narrative becomes deceptive because the story jumps over to Aadam Aziz without developing the story of Saleem meaningfully. The narrative continues in the similar manner till the end without providing the story of any generation consistently at a stretch. The reason for such a fragmented pattern is that Rushdie wants not only to write a novel but also a novel about the art of the novel.

The author incorporates several devices within the narrative structure simultaneously, which also distorts the chronology of the narrative. It is so because whenever such devices are inducted into the narrative the straightforward flow of the narrative gets deviated. The devices that are used in the novel are mixed genre, Magic Realism, metafiction, self-reflexivity and intertextuality.

**Intertextuality:** An echo of other texts is present in the narrative pattern, which amounts to intertextuality. The names of Valmiki, Rama, Sita and Ravana, occur frequently which reminds us of *The Ramayana*. Similarly the name of Karna recurs in the narrative which recalls the epic *The Mahabharata* to the reader’s mind.

In total, the novel is a critique of the genre of novel itself by subsuming multiple forms of literature so as to suit its post-modernist character. T. N. Dhar’s note in this regard is worthwhile to consider

*Midnight’s Children* exploits the formal features of the fairy tale, the romance, the confession, the anatomy, the novel, the epic, and some other forms like the journalistic and the purely fantastic. Through a judicious combination of these features, Rushdie evolves a form suited to putting together his experimental content by weaving the personal story of Saleem Sinai with the larger story of his country, thus forging the micro-macro symbiosis. The style of his narration, the personality of the narrator, and the various scenes and episodes which constitute the book governed by this principle.

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There are several descriptions which are akin to the fairy tale. But the instance in the episode entitled 'In the Sunderbans' is most suitable for *Midnight's Children* as a fairy tale. Salem along with his soldier companions lose the rout in a river. They are thrown a bank which is thick forest. In this forest, they have forgotten who they are. They are also visited by some strange and angel like women. They indulge in copulation. On the recovery from the spell, they realized that they have had contacts with not womankind but some supernatural beings. Thus this episode adds the flavour of fairy tale to the novel.

**Mixed Genre:** *Midnight's Children* has subsumed many forms of literature, like autobiography, biography, history, epic, fable, and still it transcends all of them. It does possess the characteristics of biography—the life history of Saleem's family—by providing a full length life sketch of the three generations of Saleem. A very detailed life history of Saleem's grandfather Dr. Aadam Aziz—such as his return from Germany, his three years courtship with Naseem, their marriage, their children's marriage, and the death of Aziz. The novel offers a full scale history of Ahmed Sinai—his first engagement with Alia, his marriage with Amina Aziz, his business failure in Delhi, his shift to Bombay, his business prosperity, freezing of his assets, becoming white, migration to Pakistan and death in the Indo-Pak War. Saleem Sinai's life history is provided comprehensively.

The novel fails to attain the stature of biography because it lacks accountability of these characters and their connections with history. Saleem's grandfather is connected with Jawaharlal Nehru, Saleem is connected with India from its independence, Aadem Sinai is connected with India from the Emergency onwards. This sort of intertwining is achieved through the technique called fantasy. Therefore *Midnight's Children*, despite of the characteristics of biography, is not qualified to be regarded as a pure biography.

The form of *Midnight's Children* resembles the form of the epic to great extent. If an epic is the mouth piece of history, or tradition or religion, of a nation, certain features of this are incorporated in *Midnight's Children*. There are a number of items that can be identified with the Indian history, tradition,
culture and religion etc. To some extent they are marked by fidelity to truth. On the level of structure also, *Midnight’s Children* appears to be identical with epic. Fawaz Afzal-Khan comments on this aspect as:

*Midnight’s Children* is an Epic that spans over six decades and almost three generations of India’s Pre and post-colonial 20th century history. It is an ‘Epic’ in the sense that it tries to describe or “contain” an India whose stories are too innumerable to be “contained”. Throughout the book, the narrator hints at stories developing out of other stories in a never ending cycle. ...Thus ends are contained in the beginnings, beginnings in the ends. But because each end is the beginning of a new story, so the narrative must be circular, never ending, an Epic that must ultimately fail because no epic is large enough to “contain” all of the stories that are waiting to be told.90

What is striking is that the novel’s aim to function not only as a parody of history, tradition, culture, religion, but also parody of the epic. The novel does not abide by the linear narration. Like the epic, the novel opens with the birth of Saleem which should have actually preceded by the life history of his father and grandfather. Though the structure resembles that of the Mahabharata and the Ramayana, *Midnight’s Children* seems have employed its structure only to subvert it. The evidence for this is in the fallacy in stating that Valmiki narrated the Ramayana to Ganesh.

That *Midnight’s Children* is a collection of short stories has already been stated. The novel is built upon the life sketches of many characters – the stories of Tai, Aadam and Naseem Ghani’s courtship, Mumtaz and Nadir Khan underground life, Amina’s visit Sri.Ramram Seth, the birth and exchange of Saleem and Shiva, Amina’s horse race, Saleem’s stay with Pia, Saleem’s stay in and love for his sister, Saleem’s experience in Sundar forest etc. They can be read independently as short stories. Since the message of *Midnight’s Children* is on the notion of nation, identity, history which form the core of the novel reading *Midnight’s Children* as an anthology of short stories is not a healthy
The point the analysis tries to make is that *Midnight’s Children* cuts across any label that is meant to define its form.

The poetical pieces are built in the structure. For example, there is a quatrain about the city of ancient Bombay:

Prima in Indis,
Gateway to India,
Star of the East
With her face to the West.91

Besides the occasional poetical utterances of characters, the novel has a character who, lives exclusively by singing. Wee Willie Winkie is that character. He is obviously modelled on the legendary figure Wee Willie Winkie who is popularly known as a merrymaking singer.

The Mass Media has been extensively used in the novel. The press is used in the episode of Saleem’s birth. The Times of India and The Illustrated Weekly are repeatedly quoted. Next to news paper, the medium of Radio occurs in the narrative. Two radio stations are mentioned in the novel. They are ‘All India Radio’ and ‘Radio Ceylon’. The medium of film is an integral part of the narrative. The film has been used not only as a popular form of entertainment but also as a device of intertextuality. The news of Mahatma Gandhi’s death is announced through an amplified voice in the cinema theatre while the film *The Lovers of Kashmir* is being screened. The names of film stars like as Vyjayatimala, Lata Mangeshkar also find place in the novel. Above all, one of the uncles of Saleem-Hanif, a screen play writer who marries Pia who is a popular film heroine. She plays the role of the heroine in *The Lovers of Kashmir*.

**Magic Realism:** Salman Rushdie has been hailed one of the famous practitioners of magic realism in the novel. He is called Indian Marques in this regard. All the novels of Rushdie resort to the device of magic realism. In *Midnight’s Children*, this device is best deployed in the creation of characters. Tai the ferryman and Tai Bibi, the whore, are the best examples of this device.

Saleem’s grandmother Naseem has the power of intruding the thoughts of others: Saleem describes one occasion on which Naseem enters into the mind of her daughter and travels a long distance in that psychic region: “...asleep in
her bed at night, Reverend Mother visited Emerald’s dreams, and found another dream within them”.

Several versions of the story about the personality of Dr Schaapsteker are available. One available version makes use of magic realism: “Others whispered that he was half-snake himself, the child of an unnatural union between a woman and a cobra”.

All the children born at the midnight of 14 August, 1947 are endowed with one or the other magic power. Saleem has been blessed with phenomenal memory power, the power of telepathy and extraordinary nasal power i.e., the sense of smell. Shiva has got mighty knees with which he can knock anybody down. Parvati, the witch, has got the magic power with which she can transform anybody into any form and even make others vanish and reappear. With this power only she makes Saleem vanish into her basket and makes him reappear after crossing the border of Pakistan. Thus the novel abounds in the instances of magic realism. The remaining part of magic realism is undertaken in the analysis of characterization.

The device of magic realism plays a significant role in subverting the notion of nationalism and history. These are the children born exactly at the time of the birth of this nation as free Indian. The special gifts with which they are born are channelized to strengthen the nation. The Prime Ministers have tried to curb these children and thereby they remain underdeveloped as the nation. With all these gifts they are not provided with a good standard of life. Saleem develops cracks and castrated, Shiva is misused by the political authority only to destroy his brethren. He goes on cuckolding the men of affluent families and seduces Parvati. Parvati lives in a slum and dies at the time of delivery of her son. This is a reflection of fall of the spirit of nationalism and the history of the nation. Thus the author has used this device not only for subverting the form of the novel but also for supporting the narrative to subvert the received notions of nationalism and history.

Metafiction: Midnight's Children is a metafiction because it is a novel about the novel in many respects. There are numerous commentaries on the narrative modes in the novel. Rushdie projects Saleem as a narrator and Padma as an
interlocutor. Their interaction serves as a commentary on the art of novel writing. The entire body of the narrative is brought out in the discussion between Saleem and Padma who represents the collective audience. They seem to suggest new a form of novel which is similar to pickle making: "... And now, I, Saleem, intend briefly to endow myself then with benefits of hindsight; destroying the unities and conventions of fine writing". The making of *Midnight's Children* is like that of picklization because the author has incorporated several forms of literature which are already known to us in order to make a novel like a clever cook who mixes the readily available recipes to prepare the meal. But this form lacks original creativity and thereby ceases to be an art. On the contrary, it emerges as an artifact. The author does not tell a story but only retells.

Besides, the novel endorses the idea of multiple narrators in the creation of Tai-the ferryman, Tai Bibi-an old whore, Dr Schaapsteker and Purushottam the sadhu. Each of them narrates some sort of story from their experiences. The novel emerges as a historiographic metafiction too. It is so because *Midnight's Children* is akin to "the novels which are both intensely self reflexive and yet paradoxically also lay claim to historical events and personages".

**ii. Characterization:** There are 1001 persons all children of the midnight of independence. They are endowed with one or the other supernatural power:

*Midnight's Children* !..... From Kerala, a boy who had the ability of stepping into mirrors and re-emerging through any reflective surface in the land-through lakes and (with greater difficulty) the polished metal bodies of automobiles and a Goanese girl with the gift of multiplying fish.... and children with powers of transformation; a werewolf from the Nilgiris Hills, and from the great watershed of the Vindhyas, a boy who could increase or reduce his size at will, and had already(mischievously) been the cause of wild panic and rumours of the return of Giants... from
Kashmir, there was a blue eyed child of whose original sex I was never certain, since by immersing herself in water he (or she) could alter it as she (or he) pleased.  

Salman Rushdie handles characterization skillfully. There is a vast galaxy of characters with varied characteristics which is suggestive of multitudinous nature of India. To present his characters he has used various devices such as fantasy, hybridity, magical realism etc.

The ferry man ‘Tai’ is a character who is built upon Indian orthodoxy and conservatism. Fantasy is used to portray this character for he claims to have seen Isa, Christ and stayed with the Emperor Jahangir. Like Santiago in Old Man and the Sea, who has exceptional wisdom about the sea, Tai claims that he knows everything about the lake in Kashmir. His wisdom is best exhibited in his triumph over driving Dr. Aadam Aziz from Kashmir lest his western fashion should defile Kashmir. His stance to resist the foreign influence represents Indian conservatism that resisted the foreign invasion.

Dr. Aadam Aziz is shaped with western liberalism. Though a Muslim by birth, he does not hesitate to welcome changes in the Islamic way of life. His act of asking his wife to move a little on the second day of their marriage in their honey moon bed suggests that Muslim women should come out of certain religious restrictions which are too rigid. He also states that he is not a party to the idea of partition of Pakistan in which he is against the political ideology of Mohmed Ali Jinna. The hole in his chest, his last journey in the Kashmir hill and the connection of his death with Jawarhalal Nehru are skillfully manipulated through the technique of fantasy. It may not be wrong to say that Aadam Aziz is an alter ego of Rushdie as Rushdie is also against the Islamic restriction on its womanhood and the idea of partition.

Many characters and many devices are employed to create the character of Saleem Sinai, the protagonist who symbolizes India. The method used to portray Saleem is collage. The evidence to this can be found in Saleem’s conspiracy to avenge Homi Catrack by selecting the words from different items and assembling them in such a form that on seeing this commander Sabarmati is made to discover the liaison between Homi Catrack
and Mrs. Sabarmati. Consequently, he shoots them to death when he finds them together in a hotel room.

One outstanding characteristic feature of Saleem's identity is hybridity and this is evident in his fragmented identity. This device has supported the attempt to subvert the notion of nationalism and history. His state of being fragmented is symbolic of the nation which has been subjected to fragmentation by the pseudo patriots and selfish people. The unreliable identity is used to dislodge the history as a record of verifiable facts. Saleem's parentage is shrouded in mystery. This distorts the notion of India as a single and unified country symbolically. Saleem is actually born to the Hindu couple Wee Willie Winkie and Vanita but the element of hybridity is cleverly incorporated by showing that Vanita is also seduced by a European William Methold which may also have caused her to conceive. In addition, he is changed to the Muslim parents and thereby he gets a Muslim identity. In Pakistan, he undergoes the process of purification and comes to be known as the Buddha. He is subsuming all the four major religions that are involved in shaping India. In creating the character of Saleem, the novel has done justice to the identity of India.

Fantasy is another device which is employed to depict Saleem's character. Saleem narrates the history of three generations spanning over several years covering the life histories of his grandfather and his father which precede his story. The justification for such an act lies in the fact that Saleem has done so with the help of his phenomenal memory, which is nothing short of fantasy. But the accountability for his memory as from where, from whom and how he gained his memory is left unexplained. This aspect amounts to fantasy.

There is yet another fantastic device employed in the depiction of Saleem i.e., magic realism. Magic realism differs slightly from fantasy, though both of them aim at providing the reality which is not represented by the traditional modes. Fantasy shares the characteristics of fancy whereas magic realism shares the characteristics of magic and are essentially subversive though both of them are essentially romantic. Saleem is portrayed as possessing the power of using his mind itself as the venue of the conference of Midnight's Children. This indicates a very important fact about the children of the midnight. All of them
are too poor to hire a building for their conference. Saleem transforms his mind itself into a venue for the midnight's children to assemble. This reflects the nation's condition in the post independence India. This power of Saleem plays the same trick as magic does. His spying of the act of his mother's meeting Nadirkhan is also portrayed as following her accommodating himself into the car boot without being noticed by any one. When his mother parks the car in one place and goes to meet her former husband in Pioneer Café, Saleem, like a Jack in the box, appears from the car boot: "She was disappearing down the street; the would-be polisher and watchman gave up eventually; there was a moment when all eyes turned to watch the passing of a second car, just in case it, too, stopped to disgorge a lady who gave away coins as if they were nuts; and in that instant (I had been looking through several pairs of eyes to help me choose my moment) I performed my trick with the pink plastic and was out in the street beside a closed car-boot in a flash." 97 He performs such feats throughout the novel.

Tai Bibi is another character who is endowed with supernatural power. The first mystery which strikes the reader is about her age. She claims that she is five hundred and twelve years old. The second mystery, which is no less mysterious than magic, is that she is endowed with the gift of special smell from which no man can resist the temptation towards her. She is also gifted with the power to change her body odour at her will: "my ancient prostitute possessed a mastery over her glands so total that she could alter her bodily odours to match those of anyone on earth. Eccrines and apocrines obeyed the instructions of her antiquated will".98

And finally, it is she who discovers that Saleem is in love with his own sister. Even Saleem could not realize it. All these characteristics cannot but be ascribed only to magic. The act of revealing the fact that Saleem being in love with his own sister becomes a strong reason to suspend all the disbeliefs about her age, smell etc. It indicates the blend of magic and reality amounting to magic realism.
Magic realism is employed in the depiction of the character of Naseem too. She has a special gift of entering into the thoughts of others. Her entering into the thoughts of her daughter Amina Sinai looks like magical trick.

Indeed, all the children born at the midnight of 14 August 1947 are endowed with one or the other power which is similar to magic. The degree of their birth gifts depends on how close to the stroke of the midnight on 14 August 1947 their birth takes place.

The twin sisters, in the town of Baud, are gifted with the ability of making everyman who sees them fall in love with them. A girl called Sundari was endowed with the so dazzling beauty that all those who were present at the time of her birth lost their sights, including her mother.

The strong kneed Shiva is an alter ego of Saleem Sinai. Both of them are born at the same time. Shiva is deprived of his legacy of the parentage of rich family of Sinai by the wicked act of Mary. Though he becomes an orphan, he rises to the high status with his physical prowess. He knocks down everybody with his strong knees and becomes the confidant of Mrs. Indira Gandhi, the Prime Minister. Shiva is portrayed as a seducer who cuckolds a large number of husbands. There is severe attack on the morality of the upper class womanhood because many upper class women are said to have become pregnant through Shiva. Shiva sows the seed of bastardization in the society. Making use of the character of Shiva the author ironically highlights the disintegration of morality.

By gifting a vast galaxy of characters with magic qualities, Rushdie has succeeded in depicting the history of India in the post-modernist fashion. Urmil Talwar’s observation is to this point: “the portrayal of history in Midnight's Children, The Tin Drum and One Hundred Years of Solitude. He places it between the two giants Grass and Marquez, and writers that the voices of his precursors are heard too loudly as Rushdie employed the same mode of magic realism to describe 60 years of Indian history with landmark events of the subcontinent: Jallian walla bagh massacre, partition, and its aftermath, upto the declaration of Emergency in 1977”.
iii) Diction: If the structure resembles ‘pickle making’, the diction resembles ‘chutnification’. In both, the mixture of several ingredients is the basis. It is the clever use of language that is regarded as a distinct feature of the novels of Rushdie, and has been appreciated worldwide. He is placed next only to Desani in this regard. *Midnight’s Children* can be called a word play in which the author handles ‘English’ in such a manner that the novel can be considered to belong to the genre of ‘literature of language’. Uma says that “Rushdie’s experimentation with language is one of his remarkable achievements”.

One of the important factors of Rushdie’s experimentation with Indianizing English is its relationship with nationalism. Feroz Jussawalla’s comments in this regard are very pertinent: “Nationalism in Indian criticism came to mean not only the assertion that Indians could write in English but that Indians should somehow vary English to reflect Indians or show how they could vary English in keeping with literary trends. This effort, however, did not seem to include the interpolation of Indian words or Indianisms, that characterized the style of a Mulk Raj Anand or a Narayan”.

*Midnight’s Children* achieves what is missing because the vocabulary is used so naturally that the words reflect the cultural backgrounds of respective characters. Diction is treated as a means of characterization. They are complementary to each other. Thus the idiom of Tai differs from Aadam Aziz’s and his diction differs from his wife’s and her diction differs from Pia’s and Pia’s from Parvati’s, and Parvati’s from Sonia’s and Sonia’s from Tai Bibi’s and so on so forth depending upon their culture.

In *Midnight’s Children* the characters use three major languages, i.e., English, Hindi and Urdu. Rushdie seems to have paid utmost attention to allocate speech varieties to each character on the basis of his or her background. In this effort Rushdie had to face two challenges: the first is in conveying the flavour of the diction which seems to have been achieved by most of the Indian novelists like Rao, Mulk Raj Anand and Narayan. The second is in making clear what language is spoken by the character at a given time. Rushdie successfully met both these challenges.
Naseem Sinai, who has not been exposed to the outside world and confined to her Muslim culture, is given the Urdu version of English. The boatman uses ‘nakkoo, very often. What Uma Parameshwaran observes in this regard is very apt: "In Midnight’s Children, the vocabulary given to each character rings true: the mission-school students; Hey, What are up to, man? You running away from home secretly and all? Major Latif’s Sandhurst jargon and club-superficiality, I just rub my jolly old lamp, and out pops the game bringing fame and fortune. Your girl will be in darn good hands. Dorn good; and Tai Bibi’s vernacular idoms, “Hey, bhaenchud! Hey, little sister- sleeper, where you running?: Mrs. Braganza’s ‘there is nothing but dirt in the heads of the mens’.102

Care has been taken by the author to see that the vocabulary used by the characters suits their cultural background. Naseem, Lafafa Das, Parvati the witch Padma are made to speak in the mannerism which befits them. The close relationship between the diction and nationalism, is represented through the multi dimensional vocabulary. Care has been taken to maintain the Indian mannerisms in its spoken rhythm in such expressions like Godknowswhats (39) Godknowswhatelse (65) come see everything, come see everything, come see! Come see Delhi, come see India, come see! Come see, come see! (73) Nadirnadirnadirnadirnadirnadirnadir,(161) Don’t don’t do it don’t do! (161 fasterfasterfaster (190), like a typical post-modernist, the author has taken liberty in using certain words which defy the notion of language such as: Writerly, and looker after, and writing shittig and Today I went to visit tomorrow(227) etc. The latter should be treated as the author’s post modernist tendency not to abide by the norms of diction. The author has used phrases like ladies and ‘ladahs’, and ladies and gents are which are against the standard usage ‘Ladies and gentlemen’. It echoes G.V. Desani’s. In the process of chuthification following the line of Desani, Rushdie has incorporated the jargon of film-industry and cricket and journalism. One more potential example of the word play is the use of the abbreviation, M.C.C. Though the novel gives the impression that the abbreviation stands for Midnight’s Children Conference in the beginning, the novel has a few more hidden meanings to be revealed in the
later part of the novel. M.C.C. also stands for Midnight Confidential Club and Metro Cub Club. This linguistic verisimilitude is symbolic of the author's treatment of content of *Midnight's Children*. M. L. Raina's observation is worthwhile to note: “No Indian novelist has the courage to handle English language with the gaiety and joyousness of Rushdie”.

The author has deployed various devices in the structure, the characterization and the diction to distort the conventional notion of form in the novel. Thus the author replaces the linear narrative structure with a non-linear one in the novel. With diverse devices such as mixed genre, metafiction, magic realism and intertextuality, the narrative is constantly prevented from emerging in the linear pattern at all. He pays no heed to the principle of plot construction – that a plot should have a beginning, a middle and end and the unities. The characters are fragmented in their identities. They are hybrid mixtures of human and supernatural. Hence the characterization is not in conformity with the conventional norm. The language differs from the notion of standard English in many respects, since it is multilingual. The norms of word formation in general and of compound words in particular are not adhered to. Registers of various kind, speech acts and gesture are used to distort the idea of pure English. Therefore, *Midnight's Children* makes a departure from the prevailing conventional novel form from the point of view of technique as well.

**Conclusion:** The foregone analysis of the novel has brought out the 'constructedness' of the notion of Nationalism and history. There is disintegration of the spirit of nationalism and the nation has been subjected to various types of fragmentation, segmentation and division. As a result, the nation does not hold its people together. The people fall out and fall apart on the basis of caste, language and religion. This makes the citizens wonder whether they live in one nation at all. It is high time that the creative writing stopped the glorification of notion of India as one nation. It does not mean that these ideas must be destroyed at once. On the contrary, the author suggests an objective introspection of these notions before forming such notions. He believes that our introspection may help us to mend our notions of our nation and help to build a better nation.

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The writers of Indian history have turned a deaf ear to the common man's perspective. As a novelist, Rushdie has replaced the conventional historiography with the feelings and aspirations of the common lot to write the history of modern India. The collective psyche of the nation is unfolded in the depiction of the four generations of Saleem Sinai. In this version, the actual facts are overlooked and the consciousness of the ruler and the ruled has been cleverly highlighted. In opposing the notion of history as verifiable and objective facts, the novel emerges as a votary of perspectivisation of history by accommodating the views of as many diverse persons as possible.

Subversive themes require a subversive form also. The subversive form is hybrid in its nature and it includes such devices as mixed-genre, intertextuality, elements of metafiction, self reflexivity, magic realism and others in its structure. This form is defined as pickle-making. Characters are also products of magic realism and hybridity. The diction which is permeated with multilingual and non British English violates the norms of the grammar of the English language. This is defined as chutnification. The combination of pickle-making in form and chutnification in diction makes Midnight’s Children a postmodernist fiction proper.
NOTES


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