Chapter 3:

The Fantasizing of Democracy – 
Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children*
The previous chapters served as a background to the study. From this chapter onwards there is a concentration on the individual analysis of the selected novels. *Midnight’s Children* is selected for analysis as it shows the effects of Emergency on the lower classes and the middle classes of urban India.

Salman Rushdie is a novelist, essayist, travel writer, screenwriter and a recognised artist in his own lifetime. The success of his second novel, *Midnight’s Children*, allowed him to work as a full-time writer. The British government made him a ‘Knight Bachelor’ in June, 2007 and is now referred to as Sir Ahmed Salman Rushdie. *Midnight’s Children* was also awarded the Best of the Booker prize twice, in 1993 and 2008 to celebrate the 25th and 40th anniversary of the award. In 1984, Mrs. Indira Gandhi brought an action against the book in the British courts, claiming defamation by a single sentence in chapter 28, in which her son, Sanjay Gandhi was defamed. Rushdie said in the novel that Sanjay Gandhi’s early life was said to have a hold over his mother by accusing her of contributing to his father’s death through her neglect. The case was settled out of court when Rushdie agreed to remove the offending sentence.

Salman Rushdie had a special perspective in choosing children born at midnight in his novel. In an interview, Rushdie himself commented that the children born at midnight on August 15th, 1947, the day India was liberated by the British, were “a metaphor” and “that was exactly, the parallel that I wanted to make between the action of the book and what happened in history.”

The novel runs into three parts. Part first presents itself with the events that took place in India from 1915 to 1947. Part second deals with the childhood of Saleem Sinai, the protagonist. Part third is primarily on Emergency operations and brutalities in India during the seventies.

The novel portrays India through the eye of a youngman, Saleem born at the stroke of the hour of Indian independence, 15th August, 1947. The novel depicts India with its ups and downs, films, mythology, politics, terror of Emergency, religion, marriage ceremony, friendship and enemity. The novel portrays the life and experience of the three generations of Sinai family, living in Srinagar, Amritsar, Agra, Bombay and Karachi. It is an epic in the sense that “it tries to describe” or contain “an India whose stories are too innumerable to be contained.”
The pre-independence political events are witnessed and experienced by the first generation of Sinais, Aadam Sinai. The novel therefore has a wide canvas. The major political events narrated in the novel are - Quit India Movement, Cabinet Mission, Mulsim League activities, Partition and riots, five year plans, liberation of Bangladesh and the sacred relic of Hazratbal Mosque.

If we compare Chaman Nahal’s *Azadi* and *Midnight’s Children*, *Azadi* is praised for its realistic delineation of the tragedy of partition. One of the worst disasters of partition which Nahal portrays is the crushing of the will of man which is a common element of all the political turmoils. The tragedy of refugees was not that they were displaced and dispossessed but disowned by their own people in the respective nations. The sad state of the protagonist, Kanshi Ram and his family is a reminder of the destruction that politicians use individuals as pawns to impose their ideologies. The aspect of the brutalities and injustices of partition are not much focused in *Midnight’s Children* but its topsy-turvy world is reflected in both the novels. The novel does not entirely move around the political event of Emergency but it serves only as a backdrop to it.

If one reviews Indian history, one finds that Partition was the result of religion and communalism moving towards casteism and its seeds were sown by the Britishers in their policy of ‘divide and rule’. In an interview with *India Today*, Rushdie confesses that religion and fanaticism are his major themes:

“Actually, one of my major themes is religion and fanaticism. I have talked about the Islamic religion because that is what I knew the most about. But the idea about religious faith and the nature of religious experience and also the political implications of religious extremism are applicable with a few variations to just about any religion. In the beginning and the end of the novel, there are other kinds of fundamentalism.”

In the novel, Saleem is the narrator, the second generation of Sinais, working at a pickle factory and narrates various events and his experiences to his wife, Padma. He is endowed with a double vision. Through the device of interlocking the destinies of man and the nation, Saleem, becomes a historical witness to the emergence of a new postcolonial and modern era in the history of the country. He suffers from identity crisis throughout the novel. In this reference, Homi Bhabha in *The Location of Culture* believes that there are no fixed identities of the colonizer and the colonized. Identity is constantly moving between positions, displacing others and being displaced in turn. The identity of the
colonizer is dependent upon the relationship with the oppositional native.⁴ This is applicable in the case of Saleem who relates himself to the history and politics and keeps changing his identity as per the situation. Finally, he perishes without a fixed identity. He has identity like India which has constantly undergone changes like the rulers invading and ruling it. He is an integral part of history and becomes history as he perishes.

Saleem feels he is ‘handcuffed to history’ and it is highly impossible to discard history in any way. An individual encounters history in every walk of his life and most of the events of one’s life are an outcome of history in one form or the other. So one cannot escape from history. Rushdie in the novel compares his presentation of history to the pickling process which preserves eatables and makes them tastier. As Saleem observes, “To pickle is to give immortality.”⁵ Gayatri Spivak’s view is in contrast with that of Rushdie. She rejects the idea that there is a pre-colonial past or history that we can recover. All the past has been worked over and changed by colonialism. One cannot separate the pre-colonial and the colonial. What one can do is to understand the “worlding” of the “third world.” It is therefore impossible to recover the “authentic” voice of the subaltern.⁶ Whereas, Saleem considers himself to be an integral part of history.

At birth, Saleem is greeted by fireworks displays, cheering crowds and Prime Minister, Nehru himself. His every act is mirrored and magnified in events of national affairs; his health and well-being is bound to the nation; his life is inseparable from the history of his country. Saleem explains how his life might be said to mirror the nation’s:

“Your life, which will be, in a sense, the mirror of your own,” “the Prime Minister wrote, obliging me scientifically to face the question. In what sense? How, in what terms, may the career of a single individual be said to impinge on the fate of a nation? I must answer in adverbs and hyphens: I was linked to history both literally and metaphorically, both actively and passively, in what our (admirably modern) scientists might term “modes of connection” composed of “dualistically – combined configurations” of the two pairs of opposed adverbs given above. So hyphens are necessary: actively – literally, passively – metaphorically, actively – metaphorically and passively – literally, I was inextricably entwined with my world.”⁷

Most extraordinary are the telepathic powers linking Saleem with India’s 1,000 other “Midnight’s Children,” all born in the initial hour, 12.00 am to 1 am and are endowed with magical gifts. Particularly, those children born closest to the stroke of
midnight wield more powerful gifts than the others. Shiva or “the Knees” and Parvati or “Parvati-the-witch,” have notable gifts and roles in Saleem’s story. The novel deals more specifically with Saleem and Shiva, both born in a Bombay nursing home and switched at birth. Shiva belongs to a wealthy Muslim family with roots in Kashmir, the Sinais, while Saleem belongs to a Hindu street singer and an Englishman, she happened to meet. Shiva grows up believing he is poor. The poor half Hindu, half English boy, Saleem, is taken home by the aristocratic Sinai family. He is given every luxury but even luxuries cannot prevent accidents and one day, he suffers a bump on the head, he discovers that he has a gift for telepathy. Through this gift, he learns the secret of his own parentage and of all the 1001 Midnight’s Children who possess special gifts that no ordinary person ever could hope to achieve. Some are gifted with the ability to travel through time while others can change their sex at will. Only Saleem is telepathic. He is the leader of “Midnight’s Children Conference” and they wait to meet Saleem and utilize their supernatural resources for the welfare of India. Saleem fears Shiva, whose life he has stolen and who grew up on the streets of Bombay.

Shiva scorns Saleem, his Midnight’s Children Conference, his optimism, western sympathies and democratic tendencies. Both portray the conflict of class, faith and religion. Saleem is diplomatic and impotent. Shiva is war-monger and fertile. They represent the two sides of India’s newly minted coins. Saleem starts out life in Lord Methwold’s British estate, with cocktail hour, while Shiva fights for his life in the slums. As India’s democracy falters and Mrs. Indira Gandhi desperately struggles to maintain her rule during Emergency, the fortunes of both turn reverse. Saleem slips into a destitute life in magician’s ghetto while Shiva rises in status, a gentleman soldier. Unlike Midnight’s Children, the novel, When Freedom Came by Sharf Mukaddam introduces two characters who stand analogous to Saleem and Shiva. The novel moves around Fakir and his friend, Shankar and they represent Muslims and Hindus respectively. The distrust and prejudice among Muslims was deep set against Hindus, Congress and its leaders. Infact the name Shiva suggests destruction and it is he in Midnight’s Children, who carries out the destruction of the Midnight’s Children and their Conference.

‘The Midnight’s Children Conference’ is in many ways reflective of the issues India faced in its early statehood concerning the cultural, linguistic, religious and political differences. Midnight’s Children are born out of darkness and are moving towards light. The nation was in a state of turmoil during their birth and so are the children. The nation was neither able to wield the political powers nor the Midnight’s Children are able to wield their supernatural powers. Saleem says:
“Infact, all over the new India, the dream we all shared, children were being born who were only partially the offspring of their parents - the children of midnight were also the children of the time: fathered, you understand, by history. It can happen. Especially in a country which is itself a sort of dream.”

Saleem acts as a telepathic conduit, bringing hundreds of geographically dissimilar children into contact while discovering the meaning of their gifts. In a way their disintegration by Mrs. Indira Gandhi goes together with the lack of the spirit of nationalism in India. In this context, one can compare the tragic life of Midnight’s Children to the children in *Waiting for the Mahatma* by R. K. Narayan. While the country was celebrating independence, Mahatma Gandhi was touring the riot hit areas in East Bengal. He noticed that during riots a large number of children had been orphaned and needed urgent help. He desired to bring them to Delhi and rear them as human beings than as Hindus or Muslims. He also wanted them to bear names without any religious affiliations and to be identified merely as Indians. If one compares the Gandhian ideology full of compassion to that of the political ideologies of Mrs. Indira Gandhi, one finds a wide disparity between them. It is she who destroys the Midnight’s Children whereas Mahatma Gandhi lovingly wants to bring up the orphan children who are victims in the game of politics. Thus common man suffers due to political events and policy makers.

The turmoils confronted by the family members of Saleem are similar to those of the brutalities and traumas faced by the post – independence Indian psyche. In the words of William Walsh,

“Astonishing staple is composed of the element of magic and fantasy, the grimmest realism.”

Saleem discovers that he is not the centre of India’s history but only an insignificant factor in the larger forces of history. As the novel progresses, he witnesses and participates in the major events of modern Indian history. The most significant of these is the Bangladesh war, where Saleem moves with his family. After most of his relatives are killed, he looses his memory. When Mrs. Indira Gandhi pronounces that due to Emergency all the Midnight’s Children must be sterilized, Saleem is castrated. She does so because no more children with special powers would be born and there will be no one to challenge her absolute authority. During Emergency, common man was denied even his
right to procreation. Saleem’s troubles dispirited him and depleted his physical strength. He ends up working at the pickle factory and waiting for death.

Though Saleem narrates the story and participates in the events, he becomes for some days invisible while being transported from Bangladesh to India. Touching India, he becomes visible. He is brought back into India by Paravti. He is alienated and vents his anger. He says of himself:

“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. I am everyone everything whose being – in – the world affected was affected by mine … I repeat for the last time: to understand me, you’ll have to swallow a world.”

This passage throws light on the fact that Saleem is “one of the many a man and monster participant and voice - rolled into one.”

Ironically, Saleem is Rushdie’s perforated sheet. We see the author and his genius in glimpses and parts. We also see India in bits and pieces so that the novel, in turn, becomes India’s perforated sheet, complete with thousands of bloodstains. Prof. O. P. Mathur maintains:

“Saleem Sinai who is the embodiment of a supreme moment of history, a crystallization of an evolving mood, a distillation of a vision nostalgic, critical and philosophical, is a camera eye, which is itself cracked and fragmented, with, as the novelist remarks, some of its fragments missing. But in spite of it, or perhaps because of it, he is able to project what may be called a sort of prismatic vision of reality, partial, fissured and fragmented, but highly absorbing and deeply meaningful.”

The Indo - Pak wars in 1965 and 1971 and the imposition of the infamous Emergency in 1975 degraded the Indian politics further. Shiva becomes the chief character in the Sanjay brigade. The Indian political scenario, with the arrival of Sanjay brigade, has become a stage where the Shivas rule the people. They rouse casteist and communal feelings, defy all norms of rule and decency and give themselves the power to dispense with human lives and government funds.
Saleem’s powers of telepathy allow transcending the barriers of language, while his English blood, poor background, wealthy upbringing and eclectic religious influences - reflects India’s diversity and range. Saleem claims that like his narrative, he is physically falling apart. His body is riddled with cracks and as a result, the past is spilling out of him. In addition to the narrative and physical fragmentation, India itself is fragmented. Torn apart by Partition, it is divided into two separate countries with the east and west sections of Pakistan on either side of India. This division is taken further when East and West Pakistan are reclassified as two separate countries, Pakistan and Bangladesh. New nationalities were created and with them some new forms of cultural identity that reflected the constant divisions.

In *Culture and Imperialism*, Edward Said argues that the power to narrate or to block other narratives from forming is important to culture and imperialism and constitutes one of the main connections between them. Nations themselves are narrations. Culture soon comes to be associated with the nation or state, it becomes a source of identity. Resistance has two phases, according to him: actual fighting against outside invasion and ideological resistance to save or restore the sense and fact of the community against the colonial system. Edward Said uses *Midnight’s Children* as an example here and this may be the return of once “subjugated knowledges.” We find Salman Rushdie rewriting history of India in *Midnight’s Children*. He gives an account of the freedom struggle, partition, reorganization of states on linguistic basis, wars with Pakistan and Emergency since he wants the world to know Indian history from the perspective of an Indian and not what was merely put forth by historians. Saleem’s “literally disintegrated” and “fissured” body which pours out history is an allusion to the underlying political fragmentation of Indian politics, past and present that have contributed to the making of its history. Infact, fragmentation of Indian society and politics, is the theme and technique of the novel. Rushdie has portrayed the feel of those times through fragmented vision of Saleem who has multiple identities.

As Saleem is a close observer and a witness of the national growth, for nearly three decades, he is constantly disillusioned with it. He feels that his identity is not safe in Pakistan where words and actions are quite contrary to each other. His re-entry into India, after the 1965 war, is again realized in a world of fantasy. His quest for national identity with India is both a historical and personal necessity. He feels himself alienated by the psyche of India and Pakistan. His disintegrated mind and self are terribly lost in utter
timelessness. He shows a universal longing. However, the world of Emergency is fused with the world of fantasy thus Saleem is again able to discriminate time and timelessness.

Saleem’s journey acquires a spiral pattern: from Bombay to Delhi and back; then from Bombay to Karachi to Dhaka to Benares to Delhi and finally back to Bombay. While the circular journey symbolizes death, the spiral journey indicates the enlarging field of consciousness. Saleem’s creative recreation of his varied experiences is an essential part of this journey.

As Saleem’s thirty-first birthday approaches, he packs up his story into thirty chutney jars. He preserves the story of the Midnight’s Children like pickles, preparing to step aside, to hand over history – making to the next generation. He is wise enough to leave one empty jar – the future chutney – because he knows that tomorrow’s story is one he cannot tell. Subsequent generations of Midnight’s Children will determine how it all turns out. The chutney jars represent the history of India affected by the politics whereas; the empty jar signifies the future politics of the nation.

Saleem is the archetype of the common man in India. This relation signifies the strong relation between politics and the common man’s destiny. The nation’s subsequent losses and blood baths are Saleem’s losses – hair, finger-tip and blood lettings. It is significant that during the years spent in Pakistan, he is unable to communicate with the other Midnight’s Children. He longs for a return to the confusion, the chaos, the disorderliness, the teemingness, the richness of his life in India.

The links between world or national events and personal events give Saleem a personal point of entry and concern in the narrative. On 13th April 1919, the day of butchery at the Jallianwala Bagh, Aadam Aziz was present on the site but a sudden sneeze made him drop to his knees and so spared him from Dyer’s men’s bullets. Saleem’s birth, on August 15th, 1947, made him one of the 1001 (a mythical figure implying infinity) midnight’s children. When 420 (again a mythical figure implying “fraud, deception and trickery”), 16 of them died, 581 remained as a Parliament in Saleem’s brain. It so happens that there is precisely 581 seats in India’s lower House of Parliament, the Lok Sabha. So the Midnight’s Children’s Conference takes on a symbolic importance of representing the Lok Sabha. Again, the events of the year 1956, such as the Suez crisis, the launching of the five year plans in Nehru’s India and the language riots that led to a redrawing of the
provincial borders within India, are accompanied in the novel by Saleem’s ninth birthday and his discovery of the “voices” in his head.\textsuperscript{18}

Further in 1962, the war between India and China is mirrored in Ahmed Sinai’s cardiac problems, causing his departed family to return to his bedside in Bombay from Pakistan.\textsuperscript{19} India’s defeat in the Indo-Chinese War is marked by the draining of Saleem’s nasal fluids, leaving him feeling like a grounded Parahamsa.\textsuperscript{20} The Indo-Pak War of 1965 results in the death of most of the members of Aziz-Sinai family in Karachi due to some particularly unfortunate bombs.\textsuperscript{21} The 1971 Bangladesh war is recalled in the fantastic mode, with Saleem as the Buddha, a Man - Dog in a dog - sniffing intelligence unit of the Pakistan army. Saleem keeps moving to different nations against his wishes due to political will thereby signifying that the common man has no right to article 19 which states that the citizens of India have the right to move freely throughout the territory of India and to reside and settle in any part of the territory. This is the result of the abolition of fundamental rights during Emergency and even during non emergency times, common man is shrewdly denied of his rights. There is a wide disparity in theory and practice of the Constitutional provisions.

During Emergency, on the local level, there is a violent encounter between Shiva and Saleem, between “knees and a nose.” Under the pretext of civic beautification and slum clearance, Saleem sees “the joints of my nemesis thundering towards me.”\textsuperscript{22} This is followed by his imprisonment and forced sterilization in Benares, while Shiva disappears from the text. Just as Saleem and Shiva are mistaken for fixed identities, India and Pakistan are constructed by naming geographical regions, political figures and the nations are created. Pakistan does not interest Saleem as a land of the pure. He lives at General Zulfikar’s residence and is close to the historical events that overtake Pakistan. He witnesses the preparations of the coup as a guest of General Zulfikar, who married his aunt Emerald. He describes India’s aggressive posture towards China in 1962. The antihuman prejudice which spreads before a war is also described from the neutral point of view of an outsider:

“Burning with optimism, the government even interned Indian citizens of Chinese descent – now ‘enemy aliens’ - in camps of Rajastan. Birla Industries donated a miniature rifle range to the nation; schoolgirls began to go on military parade. But I, Saleem, felt as if I was about to die of asphyxiation. The air, thickened by optimism, refused to enter my lungs.”\textsuperscript{23}
Saleem becomes the consciousness of free India and experiences the life of the multitudes of Indians. In this regard, he transcends nationality, race, creed and even cultural upbringing and we get a truthful view of political events. He establishes himself as an unprejudiced observer of the politics of India and Pakistan. He evaluates from a humanitarian view - as opposed to nationalistic, religious or cultural point of view. Saleem, like Hatterr in G. V. Desani’s *All About H. Hatterr* (1948) is linked to the western – educated in all the British colonies. “Biologically I am fifty fifty,” says Hatterr, a statement echoed in Saleem’s view of himself as a “half and halfer”, “neither this nor that.” The trope of Anglepoise light, which Saleem uses to write his story, suggests the divided sensibility in Saleem, a child born in post – colonial India. Hatterr writes of his “father European Christian – by – faith merchant merman (seaman), mother an Oriental (…) steady non – voyaging, non – Christian human (no mermaid).” Saleem, born of the Indo – British tradition or Western civilization but is a product of colonial and post – colonial values. Vasant A. Shahane explicates it:

“The desire for identity is bound to be a middle – class burden since the very poor (and often the very rich) are not affected by it because it is primarily the heart of the middle class person that burns over these issues and predicaments.”

Saleem reveals his humanist bias without reservations. He does not allow nationalism to ignore the rights of humanity and is sympathetic to the Chinese known as ‘enemy aliens’ in India. He is concerned with the pain caused to people in the 1965 and 1971 wars between India and Pakistan. The descriptions of these wars are supreme examples of his non-partisan attitude. The claims of the then governments of India and Pakistan are exposed as lies. Saleem says:

“Importance to concentrate on hard facts. But which facts? …on August 8th, did Pakistani troops in civilian clothing cross the cease-fire line in Kashmir and infiltrate the Indian sector, or did they not? In Delhi, Prime Minister Shastri announced ‘massive infiltration … to subvert the state;’ but here is Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, Pakistan’s Foreign Minister with his repose: “We categorically deny any involvement in the rising against tyranny by the indigenous people of Kashmir.”

The war’s first victim is truth. Saleem quotes the claim of the Pakistanis about being militarily superior; points out their arrogance, the chauvinism in both countries, the communal arrogance and snobbery in Pakistan are condemned. The 1971 war saw the
ultimate degradation of man. When the army of West Pakistan fought against the indigenous army of East Pakistan (the Mukti Bahini), it had an additional dimension of cruelty and horror. Due to orders, Saleem, the man-dog helps in getting Mujibur Rahman, the popular leader of Bangladesh 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).”

The soldiers have been fed on lies by the Army and have been conditioned to hate Bengalis and regard them as traitors. When the war is over, Saleem finds himself in India; he finds the deeds of the politicians just as contrary of humanity as the war had been. Emergency is declared and people are forcibly castrated. When all the Midnight’s Children are also caught and tortured, he gave way to his grief in the following address to the ‘Midnight’s Children,’ he gives his verdict on politics:

“Politics, children: at the best of times a bad dirty business. We should have avoided it; I should never have dreamed of purpose, I am coming to the conclusion that privacy, the small individual lives of men, is preferable to all this inflated macrocosmic activity. But too late. Can’t be helped.”

This final assertion of individual action is the ultimate defeat of the human spirit by the cruel and dehumanizing forces of the politics of India and Pakistan. In the novel, ‘children’ stand for humanity. They are exposed to strong political (and other) forces which strip them of their illusions, alienate them from others for a short time and finally exterminate them. Saleem, the symbol of the human spirit, retires to the privacy of a retired life. Politics now leaves him alone because like others, he complies to its demands. His individuality has been eliminated and the moral courage which is imperative for opposing tyrannical government is no longer there. He is in fact, no longer an integrated personality. This end is a bleak vision of the future defeat of the human spirit at the hands of social and political situations. The positive aspect of his personality is that his spirit is not crushed. Like a phoenix, he has rose back to life to narrate his experiences to the reader. Similarly the other Midnight’s Children are living their lives to find a new meaning out of it. For example, Padma now is the companion to Saleem and assists him in his narration. Life has returned to normalcy after Emergency.
Along with Saleem at its centre, we find the elements of fascism operating in the novel through tyrannical political forces. The authoritarian personality, a real historical figure, Mrs. Indira Gandhi and her son, Sanjay and Major Shiva, display dominance and control. Rushdie refers to Mrs. Indira Gandhi as “the Widow” in the novel. Sanjay Gandhi, whom she was grooming as her heir, finds a mention in the novel as a goon squad leader. The Widow chooses the Cow and the Calf symbol as her election symbol and unleashes a reign of terror with her forced sterilisation programme. She evades the democratic process, issuing what will be a two-year state of Emergency, granting herself the absolute powers and the right to rule. What begins as an anxiety about a bad mother turns to horror, as the Widow moves to forced sterilisation programmes and imposition of the infamous Emergency,

“And suspension of civil rigths and censorship of the press and armoured units as special alert and arrest of subversive elements.”

Partha Chatterjee says that combining the ominous figure of the widow and the threatening mother who resembles fantastic figures like “dayans, jinns and bhoot,” Shiva and Sanjay’s dictatorial policies, is one of the many Rushdie’s marginal men trying to make sense of rootlessness and poverty by supporting a fascist rule. The recurrence of fascists is also a reminder of the havoc, pain and human suffering that can be wrecked in the name of nation, religion, ethnic group or region. To heighten the effect of fascism, there is a realistic portrayal of Emergency. If we review the Constitutional provisions of Emergency, they were moulded to impart absolute powers to Mrs. Indira Gandhi to let loose her powers for exploitation of the common man.

The Emergency provisions in Part XVIII of the Constitution have been amended by the 42nd amendment (1976) and the 44th amendment (1978) Acts. It should be noted that after 1978, it is impossible to issue proclamation of Emergency on the grounds of ‘internal disturbance’ for the words ‘internal disturbance’ have been substituted by the words ‘armed rebellion’ by the Constitution Act, 1978 (44th amendment). For the analysis of this novel, the parameters of Constitutional provisions of Emergency (article 356) and right to freedom and equality (articles 14 to 22) are used. When one reviews these provisions and basics related to the Emergency, one finds that Mrs. Indira Gandhi had not only misused the provisions of Emergency but had also taken care that nobody uses these provisions in the future. Infact it was no Emergency at all but dictatorship and she was the only priviledged one to use absolute powers. We find that neither Saleem nor the other characters in the
novel retain any right to freedom or equality during the Emergency. In many ways independence only meant a change of colonial, economic and political arrangements rather than a true liberation. India’s history since 1947 has been an experiment in democracy that underwent new changes in the twenty-two month disaster of Emergency. This resulted in a sense of displacement which was experienced by the characters of the novel and the average Indians.

Mrs. Indira Gandhi is a symbol of the destructive forces rampant in the Indian politics especially in the mid 1970s: the India of the Emergency. Saleem distinguishes between the personal and the public to make the widow a nightmarish symbol of his own destruction. Mrs. Gandhi tended to identify herself with the nation completely and therefore looked upon personal threats to her as constituting threats to the nation. Faced with opposition within her own ranks and a political threat from the movement of Jayaparakash Narayan in the 1970s, she declared the country to be in danger from external and internal enemies and therefore imposed a state of Internal Emergency and press censorship.

Mrs. Indira Gandhi’s actual presence in the story is brief but of great significance. Throughout the novel, Saleem’s personal life constantly reflects India’s political turmoil. Finally, with the arrival of Mrs. Gandhi and the state of Emergency, Rushdie fuses the two narratives with a single predicament. The reforms of the Emergency which included a widespread campaign of forced sterilization were seen as massive abuses of the government power and human rights. By making Mrs. Gandhi’s campaign responsible for the destruction of the fictional Midnight’s Children, Rushdie holds her accountable for destroying the promise and a hope of a new future for India.

Emergency ended up all the values of the freedom movement in India. The Midnight’s Children were a threat to the dictatorial forces. They dared to revolt and attempted to find a purpose of their one thousand and one talents, possibilities and magical gifts and tried desperately to prevent themselves from running into a dead end. Hence the machinery of the state is let loose upon them. The violence of Emergency through sterilization makes them victims of their dreams. Saleem imagines the Midnight’s Children being “test and hysterectomized,” denied the possibility of reproducing themselves. With this, the hope that was generated at the moment of Independence was also drained. The narrator has a word for it – “Sperectomy: the draining out of hope.”
He describes how Mrs. Indira Gandhi was in charge of the sterilisation programme and came to visit him in his cell; along with all the Midnight’s Children he had been incarcerated and was about to be sterilised. Saleem explains:

“The people of India” explained, “worship our Lady like a God. Indians are only capable of worshipping one God. But I was brought up in Bombay, where Shiva Vishnu Ganesh Ahura Mazda Allah and countless others had their flocks... What about the pantheon,” I argued, “the three hundred and thirty million gods of Hinduism alone.” And Islam, and Bodhisattvas ...” And now the answer. “Oh yes! My God, millions of gods, you are right! But all are manifestations of the same OM. You are Muslim: you know what is OM? Very well. For the masses, our Lady is a manifestation of the OM.***35

Mrs. Gandhi is glorified as a goddess:

“Indira is India. Her supporters and some newspapers allegorize her as ‘Bharat Mata’. She “aspired to be Devi, the Mother-goddess in her most terrible aspect, possessor of the ‘Shakti’ of gods.” 36

India’s prominent newspaper ‘The Times of India’ criticized Mrs. Indira Gandhi’s rule. On the pretext of beautifying Delhi, bulldozing of slum houses was executed. The Sanjay brigade sterilized “magicians and old beggars.” 37 For them “a modern nation state could have neither time nor compassion - twenty-nine years old now... were brought to the Widow’s hostel ... their whispers began to fill the walls.” 38 Saleem, who betrayed them, cannot count an exact number of Indians who lost their freedom, “either thirty thousand or a quarter of a million persons.” 39 The Widow said, “It is only a small percentage of the population of India.” 40 Saleem, in his autobiographical and sarcastic vein says:

“All sorts of things happen during an Emergency: trains run on time, black money hoarders are frightened into paying taxes even the weather is brought to heel and bumper harvests are reaped; there is I repeat a white part as well as a black.” 41

But of his own son, Adam, the offspring of his sibling, Shiva and his real wife, Parvati, says:
“He was the child of a father who was not his father, but also the child of a time which damaged reality so badly that nobody ever managed to put it together again.”

When Mrs. Indira Gandhi gets round the democratic process, issues Emergency, grants herself sweeping powers and the right to absolute dictatorship, Adam, the third generation of Sinais, is born and Saleem, his guardian realizes that the era of the India’s Midnight’s Children is over. He is Emergency - born, already more cautious and impossible to resist. Already he is harder, stronger and more resolute than Midnight’s Children. When he sleeps, his eyeballs are immobile beneath their lids. Adam Sinai does not surrender to dreams. Adam allegorizes the strictly censored era of Emergency in the nation.

Rushdie subtly fuses the birth of the bastard child, Adam with extremes of Emergency:

“Dark clouds were gathering in political skies as well: in Bihar, where corruption inflating hunger illiteracy landlessness ruled the roost, Jaya Prakash Narayan led a coalition of students and workers against the governing Indian Congress, in Gujarat, there were riots ... and what was being born while something grew in Parvati’s belly?”

The passage is a vigorous summary of the brutalities and excesses during the Emergency in India.

Adam’s personal appearance exemplifies an element of conflict:

“On either side of his head flapped ausdent protuberances like sails, ears, so colossally huge that … when his head popped out they had thought, for one bad moment, that it was the head of a tiny elephant.”

The child refuses to cry or whimper or talk so that for a long time it was thought to be dumb. Another abnormality is that “he was the possessor of a navel which chose to stick out instead of in.” He suffers from tuberculosis and when he recovers and starts speaking, the first word he utters is the mysterious “Abracadabra.”

Saleem’s son also shares another unfortunate trait with his father. He too is “mysteriously handcuffed to history, his destinies indissolubly chained to those of his
This is because he is born at the precise instant when the Emergency is declared on the night of 25th June, 1975. His ears are so big because he has “heard the shootings in Bihar and the screams of lathi – charged dock – workers in Bombay” and he refuses to speak because he is “a child who heard too much and as a result never spoke, rendered dumb of excess sound.” Equally symbolic is the episode when the baby is given a powerful medicine to induce it to cry, under the belief that he “must weep” or he “will die.” The patient’s reaction is:

“… the child’s cheeks began to bulge, as though his mouth were full of food; the long- suppressed sounds of his babyhood flooded up behind his lips and he jammed his mouth shut in fury. It became clear that the infant was close to choking as he tried to swallow back the torrential vomit of pent up sound which the green powder had stirred up; and this was when we realized that we were in the presence of one of the earth’s most implacable wills.”

The entire episode is evidently symptomatic of the suppression of the public opinion during Emergency and the reaction of the intellectuals to this phenomenon. The child is always “unsmiling grave” and prefers “to keep his eyes firmly closed” and that his disease vanishes completely with the end of the Emergency and the fall of the government which declared it. However, Saleem is hopeful about his son’s Emergency generation and knows that it does not tolerate atrocities because right from birth his child, Adam was reacting to the happenings of Emergency. He hopes for a better future for his child. Salman Rushdie is however optimistic about democracy and India’s political future that finally democracy will survive. Inspite of the sufferings Saleem is optimistic about future even when democracy had turned to almost monarchy. In monarchy, a single individual has all the powers and is most of the times selected through hereditary factors. It was Mrs. Indira Gandhi ruling single handedly and a new era of dynastical rule had begun as she had declared her son, Sanjay Gandhi to be her political heir.

As the midnight descends upon India, reality begins to resemble a nightmare:

“Yes perhaps a nightmare; green and black the Widow’s hair and clutching hand and children muff and little balls go flying green and black her hand is green her nails are black as black.”
As the Emergency reaches its darkest midnight, Shiva, who leads the Midnight’s Children to the operating table, is the only one who escapes sterilisation and fathers on the rich and poor alike another one thousand and one children, among them is Adam Sinai, a tougher breed ensures the continuation of reality despite all Emergencies. While the Children of Midnight regress to the nameless masses - Saleem laughs at the realisation that “Shiva, destroyer of the Midnight’s Children, had also fulfilled the other role lurking in his name, the function of ... Shiva - the – procreator. Every widow”, he comments, “manages to forget something important.”

Salman Rushdie creates a realistic portrayal of Emergency in his novel. He focuses on the middle class and the lower middle class sufferings during Emergency. He also maintains a continous effort at synchronizing national and domestic life so that the story of the Azizes and Sinais becomes the story of the nation from pre - independence until around 1977. At the personal level, the novel starts 32 years before the birth of Saleem and ends when he is around 31 years old. At the national level, it deals right from the end of World War I to the Independence of India to the lifting of Emergency. It reflects multiple heritages - Saleem has many fathers (Methwold, Wee Willie Winkie, and Ahmed Sinai) and mothers (Amina, Mary, and all the nannies). He does not neglect the influence of the colonizers: Methwold (the actual father of Saleem); E. Burns etc. It is similar to Indian heritage full of multitudes.

Rushdie’s novel is a national allegory. The idea that a nation has “many parents” and the “heritage” of India are composed of various religions (as Saleem has many parents). It is necessary that Mahatma Gandhi’s absolute faith in a unified India be contextualized with Rushdie’s. David W. Price’s claim that “Mahatma Gandhi hardly appears at all” and that “primary emphasis on the great figures” is avoided. Whereas, Saleem informs the readers that he has discovered an error in chronology. By telling so he appears to be telling that there is a correct date, thus a historical fact. Rushdie says that Mahatma Gandhi dies at a wrong time and by saying so he expresses a sense of loss and regret. Adam’s comments on ‘hartal’ and Mahatma Gandhi are:

“But this is India in the heyday of the Mahatma, when even language obeys the instructions of Gandhi.”

We find some characters in the novel thinking out of the way, who are influenced by Gandhian ideology and by the western liberal idealism. Saleem and Aadam
Aziz represent ideas of secularism and nationalist spirit in them. Aadam has problems with his wife’s orthodoxy. Asking her to give up purdah, he tells her,

“Forget about being a good Kashmiri girl. Think about being a modern Indian woman.”

Again, when he throws out the Maulvi because he tells his wife,

“He was teaching them to hate wife. He tells them to hate Hindus and Buddhists and Jains and Sikhs and who knows what other vegetarians. Will you have hateful children, woman?”

To this she retorts, “Will you have godless ones?”

Aadam is fighting a losing battle in defending his ideas and liberalism and like Saleem; he also cracks up and collapses. Witnessing the Jallianwala Bagh massacre in 1919, he identifies himself with the broader nationalist movement instead of a communal one. He bitterly opposed the two-nation theory and here again his modern values and optimistic beliefs suffer a defeat at the hands of fanaticism. It is remarkable that he does not cherish the fanatical values but supports secularism though fights a loosing battle, never compromises with his principles and beliefs. Hanif Aziz, the film maker, cries out, “This damn country has been dreaming for five thousand years. It’s about time it started waking up.”

Salman Rushdie infuses common objects with lots of symbolic significance. The reader is shuffled between the future, present and the past in unchronological manner. For instance, pickled chutney is one of the images for India’s cultural and social diversity. It raises disturbing questions regarding our society, values and institutions, cultural patterns, hierarchies of power that have raised and now threatened the very survival of the nation.

The narrative technique of the novel carries forward the themes of the novel. Three nuclear events may be said to embody the entire story of the novel; the birth of Saleem, his migration to Pakistan and his death. He is born strange who goes on adding to his deformities and is constantly changing. This is symbolic of the chaotic condition during independence and post – independence period.
The motifs in the novel work at several levels. Shiva’s knees indicate his love for brute power while Saleem’s huge nose points to his sensitivity. The two of them demonstrate the post-independence Indian intellectual’s love for ideas and ideals in contrast to the attraction for wealth and power.

Rushdie comments upon Indian society’s respect for money, position and power. Major Zulfikar, the ambitious army officer, decides to migrate to Pakistan while Ahmed Sinai chooses Bombay. At a time when new fortunes were being built on the ruins of old ones on both sides of the Partition line, the choice of respective countries is determined, not by any religious or political convictions but purely by the shameless quest for money and the power that goes with it. Major Zulfikar tells Ahmed,

“You must decide for Pakistan when it comes as it surely will. It’s certain to be a gold mine for men like us.”

But Ahmed is lured to Bombay instead because his friend Narlikar had written,

“The British are leaving in droves, Sinai Bhai. Property is dirty cheap. Live the rest of your life in luxury.”

The novel portrays the motif of politics played by the various characters and contemporary politicians with an impact in various adverse forms like the Emergency. It is worth remembering that Rushdie has called himself “a fairly political animal.” Midnight’s Children and Shame are overtly political in their themes:

“It seems to me,” Rushdie told his interviewer Gordon Wise, “that everything in both the books has to do with politics and with the relationship of the individuals and history.”

Rushdie has a lot to say about India. He dismisses the role of the Nehru-Gandhi ‘dynasty’ as a collective dream and reminds us of the immense damage done to India by the Emergency imposed by Mrs. Indira Gandhi. It was during this period, he says, that “the lid flew off the Pandora’s box of communal discord.” The greatest threat to democracy in India has come, according to him, from the dynastic aspirations of the Nehru family and
the monarchist governance by Mrs. Indira Gandhi. He calls Rajiv Gandhi “a political novice.”

Saleem is depicted as enslaved to the national events and doomed to bear the burden of history. He is a symbol of the universal little man who became, becomes and will always become the victim of great events like war, violence, riot and the partition of a country in favour of the sweet will of the privileged politicians. Midnight’s Children in the novel are pawns in the game of politics. The entire generation of Midnight’s Children had begun life with lots of aspirations and optimism but they suffer with the nation due to the various political events like wars, the emancipation of Bangladesh, Emergency etc.

Since Saleem represents the average Indian, he suffers and happens to be a pawn at the hands of every political event and finally perishes like the common man. His life is ruled by history which is his destiny and there is a limited choice for an average little man. He says,

“No choice? – None, when was there ever?”

The novel symbolizes India’s potentiality to build her future for each of its citizens as the founding fathers had declared at the dawn find themselves differing on many issues such as religion, language, caste, regionalism etc divisive forces which have been plaguing the nation. Partition has been associated with the memory of nightmare, torture, violence, rape and violent outrages that have since been erupting at regular intervals across the parts of the divided subcontinent. Besides the deterioration of relations between India and Pakistan, one notices terrifying excesses during Emergency. In a way the disintegration of the Midnight’s Children’s Conference goes together with the lack of the spirit of nationalism in India. The toils faced by the family of Saleem are similar to those of the brutalities and traumas faced by the post - independence Indian psyche.

The novel is not just a record of the contemporary historical and political events; it is an artistic recreation of these events. Naturally one observes the novelist dealing with not merely the story of Saleem but particularly a human story. Thus, transcending the confines of the particular, the novel acquires universality of appeal. Like a historian, Salman Rushdie records major historical events and like an artist, he recreates history. The
narrative and the theme go together presenting the personal as well as the untold story of the Indian subcontinent.

The title symbolically represents the post – independence born Indians questioning their fate in free India. Each of us carries in us the traits of Saleem who is full of aspirations and dreams of living in an independent welfare state, India where its citizens wish to live a life of security and satisfaction. The title has also helped the novelist in catching up with the political events of Indian pre – independence to the post – independence. The novel presents a chronicle of history in the form of allegory.

Methwold’s palace is an allegorical pearl. There are “four identical houses built in a style befitting their original residents ... William Methwold, had named (them) majestically after the palaces of Europe.”66 The allegory of this passage suggests the passing on of the political mantle to the Indians which inherited political power from the colonial masters and many of its peculiar colonial institutions after independence. Buckingham palace alias Buckingham villa is our ‘Rashtrapati Bhavan.’ Versailles Villa is our Parliament. Escorial Villa is allegorized for our educational modes and exclusive clubs.

Along with allegory, the novel makes use of rich innovative phrases thereby enriching the language used in the novel. The liberal sprinkling of English with Hindi and Urdu words is perhaps to situate the novel in its geographical location in the various cities of the Indian subcontinent, Pakistan and Bangladesh resulting in what he himself calls “Chutnification of English.” Salman Rushdie’s use of English is supposed to be born out of a creative consciousness.

*The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Postcolonial Literatures* by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin claimed that writers were creating new ‘englishes’ (the lack of capital ‘E’ is deliberate) through various strategies: inserting untranslatable words into their texts; by use of obscure terms; by refusing to follow standard English syntax and using structures derived from other languages; of incorporating many different creolized versions of English into their texts and so on. Rushdie’s use of language in *Midnight’s Children* is a kind of creation and blending. Strategies like, the yoking together of Hindi, Marathi, Urdu or Gujarati words with English ones such as ‘doctri-attache, dugduee-drum, chik-blind, dia-lamp, defiant use of vernacular words without glossary, ‘ekdum, angrez, nasbandi, dhojan, zenana, ooper neechay, sarpanch, crorepati, ayah, nibu – pani, khichri etc. Arbitrary joining of words to

Though Salman Rushdie uses language innovatively, he faces problems with the proper substitutes for specifically Indian words conveying culture and emotions. The following passage from Rushdie’s *Shame* (1983), reflects his struggle with this issue:

“This word: shame, number one must write it in its original form, not in this peculiar language tainted by wrong concepts and the accumulated detritus of its owners’ unrepented past, this Angrezi in which I am forced to write, and so for ever alter what is written… Sharam, that’s the word. For which this paltry ‘shame’ is a wholly inadequate translation.”

He is remarkable in his experiments with language to capture the milieu of the contemporary events of the day in *Midnight's Children*. In the words of M. L. Raina,

“No Indian novelist has had the courage to handle English language with gaiety and joyousness of Rushdie.”

Salman Rushdie’s mastery of language is total and more effective than most of the Indian novelists in English. In his own words,

“English, no longer an English language, grows from many roots and those whom it once colonized are carrying out large territories within the language for themselves.”

The novel uses various symbolic allusions to show the political element in his novel. The silver spittoon given to Amina as a part of her dowry by the Rani of Cooch Naheen is responsible for Saleem’s loss of memory. The spittoon is the symbol of a vanishing era. The perforated sheet through which Aadam Aziz falls in love with his future wife performs several different symbolic functions. Unable to see his future wife, Aadam falls in love with her in pieces. As a result, their love never has a cohesive unity. Their love
is fragmented like their daughter; Amina’s attempts to fall in love with her husband are also fragmented. The hole of the perforated sheet represents an entry for vision but also an empty space that goes unfilled. It makes one final appearance with Jamila Singer: in an attempt to preserve her purity, she shrouds herself completely. The perforated sheet also symbolizes the fragments of narrative by Saleem where the history and politics of India is represented in fragments of the perforated sheet. Saleem’s life is a perforated sheet and he feels a hole in the centre of his body. He never sees himself as a complete being but as a fragmented bit of his fractured self.

Rushdie’s conclusions on contemporary India are inescapable. Aren’t we the midnight’s children in all their variations and dead possibilities? Are not the Narlikar women with their greed for money present in the commercial world of big cities? The violent brutality of the Emergency is too real. We all share in the strength and the weakness of our country. Saleem represents the intellectual and imaginative Indian who can think, feel and communicate with others. He is a keen observer. He is deeply interested in life and in the men and women around him. He loves life and freedom and ridicules whatever is outdated and narrow. Though a Muslim, he mocks at prayer and sympathizes with his grandfather’s decision not to pray. He makes fun of the institution of ‘purdah’ and has an appreciation for the courage of his grandmother’s unorthodox decision to take up the gemstone business. The protagonist has no illusions and cherishing truth, sincerity, love and tolerance in a barren and hostile world. He can laugh at himself as well as others.

The novel’s narrative and theme go together presenting the personal as well as the story of the Indian subcontinent. “The purpose of Rushdie’s novel is to provide a new genealogy for India, beginnings are ‘fore grounded’ by the way the novel starts and the continuing obsession with beginnings throughout.”

Thus Salman Rushdie has intermingled the story of Saleem and India and has portrayed Indian politics in its true colours in his novel.

The next chapter deals with Nayantara Sahgal’s Rick Like Us which portrays the effects of Emergency on the upper classes with a feminist view in urban India.
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