Various Influences on Salman Rushdie’s Writings

-- Midnight Children

Salman Rushdie’s masterpiece *Midnight Children* has three books.

**Book I:**

The novel *Midnight Children* sketches the life history of three generations of Sinai family and spans over seventy years beginning from 1915 to 1977. The family in the meanwhile stays in the five towns of Srinagar, Amritsar, Agra, Bombay and Karachi. The narrator-protagonist Saleem Sinai works in a pickle factory and narrates the events and his experiences to Padma whom he plans to marry. He describes his birth as an event that became historic. Because he was born at 12 midnight on 15th August 1947.

The book links individual history with the history of the nation in a magically realistic manner. Saleem Sinai’s narrative is the curious mix of his life history as well as the history of the nation. The two central episodes are interminably and inextricably blended. The historical events included are Quit India Movement, Cabinet Mission, Muslim League Activity, Riots, Five Years Plans, Pakistan War, Liberation of Bangladesh and Stealing of Sacred Relic of Hazratbal Mosque.

The novel *Midnight Children* paints a scene of National Movement at Amritsar. It is 7th April 1919, and in Amritsar the Mahatma’s grand design is being distorted. The shops have been shut. The railway station is closed, but now rioting mobs are breaking them up. Doctor Aziz, leather bag in hand, is out in the streets, giving help wherever possible. Trampled bodies have been left, where they fell. He is bandaging wounds, daubing them liberally with Mercurochrome. Mercurochrome is a curing medicine, and the next unit of narration is called by it.

The book opens with Saleem’s proclamation of his celebrated moment of his arrival, which coincides with the Independence of India on 15th August 1947. The opening paragraph with its fairy tale beginning establishes the reordination of time and character, history and individual and sets up the style. Right from the inception Saleem is tragically aware of his central historical role.

Saleem goes back 32 years with the story of his grandfather, Aadam Aziz. Aziz graduated in Medical Science in West Germany and was a progressive Kashmiri who rejected primitive and ancestral
ways in favour of modernity. He was a liberal minded Muslim who had set aside the old, orthodox ways of the Muslim world and set off on a progressive path resented by many characters especially boatman Tai and his own wife Naseem Aziz. Aziz’s stay in the West disturbed his Islamic and Indian beliefs. There was a void in his head because of the war of confrontations between his beliefs and what he learnt from his fellows abroad. This created a space for desire and he became vulnerable to women and history. He tried to reunite himself with the conventions and traditions of his birthplace but an accident while praying gave him a setback. His gigantic nose in which lay the dynasties hit against the ground while he bent down in supplication to God. The very accident resulted in the loss of his faith in Islam. Dr. Aziz resolved never to bend down to kiss for any god or man. Boatman Tai regarded this and his homecoming an evil intrusion into paradisiacal Kashmir. Boatman Tai was a peculiar, idiosyncratic but familiar spirit of the valley. Called a watery caliban in the novel, he is too fond of cheap Kashmiri brandy. Boatman Tai stood for changelessness. He had taken his unexplained decision to give up washing. Slowly Tai lost work; the Englishmen in particular were indisposed to be ferried by a living human cesspit.

Padma is introduced. She works in the same pickle factory as does Saleem, i.e., the pickle factory of Mrs. Braganza. She not only serves as an active listener but also caters to his daily requirements. Saleem continues the story of his grandfather Aadam Aziz who fell for his patient, Naseem the daughter of the rich but blind landowner who never allowed his daughter-patient to be seen by the eyes of her healer Dr. Aziz. She stood behind the perforated sheet for examination by Dr. Aziz every time she fell ill. In not a very long time Dr. Aziz saw most of her body parts except her face but he could never see her as a whole.

That was the time of World War I. Aziz’s parents died in 1919 when the Indian regiments returned home from the World War I. He got a job as a doctor at Agra University and married Naseem Ghani—the girl behind the perforated sheet which was incidentally a part of the dowry. It condemned his family to a life of fragments. Dr. Aziz and his newly married wife got stranded at Amritsar on their way to Agra due to a political agitation. The people were observing a hartal as a protest against the infamous Rowlett Act. Dr. Aziz did not know whether to participate in the Indian war of Independence or remain away as he belonged to Kashmir not a part of British India then. While he was swinging between two thoughts, his wife Naseem suffered the exhortations by her husband to come out of pardah and behave like a modern woman. Saleem states that this was a war his grandfather never won and in exasperation the progressive doctor collected all her veils and set fire to them in a tin box in the hotel at Amritsar and asked her to forget about being a good Kashmiri girl and think about being a modern
Indian woman. The hartal went violent after the rioting mobs ransacked shops and railway stations ultimately leading to the imposition of martial law. Dr. Aziz moved about in the streets with his doctory attache bandaging wounded people with Mercurochrome that looked like blood. Mercurochrome became a metaphor for the real bloodshed in that infamous Jalianwala Bagh’s brutal firing by General Dyer. Dr. Aziz was not only a witness to the fiendish massacre but also received a severe bruise on the chest that would not fade until after his death.

Thus Dr Aziz became an Indian. On the other hand, Tai died protesting against Indian-Pak army for encroaching Kashmire.

Saleem is an expert in pickle–factory. Padma is a colleague (companion) there. Saleem falls back two generations to tell his story and comes to 1942 when Mahatma Gandhi launched Quit India Movement. His family had settled at Agra and he narrates the tragedy of the nationalist Muslims who opposed the partition and placed their hopes on the concept of plurality and religious tolerance. The British policy of divide and rule and the communal politics of Muslim League however foiled their attempt for a unified India.

One Mian Abdullah unified the splinter groups into Free Islam Convocation of it was to be held in Agra in 1942, and Dr. Aziz wanted to take part in it. He told the Rani of Cooch Nahin, ‘I started off as a Kashmiri and not much of a Muslim, and then I got a bruise on the chest that turned me into an Indian. I am still much of Muslim but I am all for Abdullah. He is fighting my fight.’

Dr. Aziz’s marital life did not turn out to be as good as he expected. Naseem turned out to be a passive partner not responding to his sexual biddings and becoming fat. She became a premature old woman and is termed as a reverend mother. Still the couple had three girls – Alia, Mumtaz and Emerald and two sons Hanif and Mustafa. Aziz taught liberal, progressive ideas and tried to keep them free of the prejudices but Naseem interjected and got one Maulvi to give her children religious instruction. One day Dr. Aziz found him teaching bigotry to his children and he threw the Maulvi out. Naseem reacted in her own way and stopped giving food to her husband. Failing to change her mind he left Naseem on her own and turned to politics. He liked the company of Rani of Cooch Nahin and her brilliant circle of friends who were secular and cosmopolitan. Rani suffered from pigmentation disorder, which she humorously explained as the outward expression of the internationalism of her spirit and her cross-cultural concerns. The Hummingbird (Aziz’s wife) and his personal secretary Nadir Khan met Dr. Aziz
here. They discussed politics and poetry and played the game of hit the spittoon. Lot of information is given in terms of gossip and rumour.

Meanwhile the hard-core Muslims murdered Miyan Abdullah. The Rani of Cooch Nahin took to her bed and Dr. Aziz, shaken up, by the violent turn of events busied himself in treating the sick. Nadir Khan who managed to escape from the knives of the assassins took refuge in the basement of Aziz’s house. This created a flutter in the house of Dr. Aziz as Naseem was dead against the shelter to an outsider in a house, which was full of girls. In the words of Saleem: “Now comes the scent of a quarrel, because Reverend Mother Naseem is thinking about her daughters, twenty-one-year-old Alia, black Mumtaz who is nineteen, and pretty, flighty Emerald, who isn’t fifteen yet but has a look in her eyes that’s older than anything her sisters possess. In the town, among spittoon-hitters and rickshaw-wallahs, among film-poster-trolley pushers and college students alike, the three sisters are known as the ‘Teen Batti’, the three bright lights and how can Reverend Mother permit a strange man to dwell in the same house in Alia’s gravity, Mumtaz’s black, luminous skin and Emerald’s eyes? But when she could not win against Aadam Aziz’s wish she poured upon herself a veil of silence. Major Zulfikar who used to come to Aziz’s house to tie up a few ends of Miyan Abdulah’s murder took fancy of the youngest daughter, Mumtaz who understood the future of her wooer and agreed to marry him. Alia was courted by one leather merchant, Ahmed Sinai who had good business prospects and Mumtaz who was not so beautiful but endearing to her father went down to the basement to give the fugitive his food and clean his refuse and subsequently fell in love with him.

In 1943 Mumtaz married Nadir Khan in a secret ceremony in which Naseem did not participate. Mumtaz went to university as a single girl living with her parents and at night she went into the basement which was fancifully called Taj Mahal by him. In the underground basement the couple played the ancient game of hitting the spittoon, which was gifted to them by Rani of Kooch Nahin in their marriage. Rani of Kooch Nahin died in August 1945.

Saleem goes on to narrate that it was during this time Subhash Chandra Bose’s army was busy fighting a pitched battle with British soldiers in Burmese forest and Gandhian followers in India were holding demonstrations against the declining power of the Raj that Mumtaz fell seriously ill. A physical check up by Dr. Aziz revealed that his daughter’s marriage had remained unconsummated and Nadir Khan proved to be an impotent, who had failed to hit her spittoon. Naseem’s silence broke now and her long suppressed emotions burst in a storm over Dr. Aziz. On 9th August 1945 when America was dropping the atom bomb on Japan, Emerald used her secret plan, Zulfikar against the fountainhead of
her family's trouble. Nadir Khan however eluded Zulfikar leaving a message of divorce. In January 1946 Major Zulfikar married Emerald. In the meanwhile Ahmed Sinai found in Mumtaz a kindred spirit and in June that year Mumtaz married him who now became Amina for him. The couple now shifted to Delhi to make a fresh start leaving behind a sad and embittered Alia who now felt bruised even more badly than her father in Jalianwala Bagh in Amritsar.

Amina now the wife of Ahmed Sinai emerged as a wife and mother to be in the communally charged atmosphere of pre-partition Delhi to make a public announcement of her motherhood. Amina though married to Ahmed Sinai could not however shake off her memories with Nadir Khan.

Ahmed Sinai had cousin major Zulfikar's help for his business. Mustafa Kamal and S. P. Butt were his friends. Rushdie provides comic touch here and there in the narrative. Here Lifafadas’ Duniya Dekho Marc Line is described. A strike broke out there. On 15th August 1947 Amina had gone there and when the fanatic Hindus hit Lifafadas she saved him. It is she who later gives birth to Saleem Sinai, the protagonist of the novel.

Amina Sinai’s visit to the fortune-teller Ram Ram Seth and Ahmed’s encounter with the forces of racial hatred took place on a cold January evening in 1947.

Amina received predictions about her child from the hysterical Ram Ram Seth who found history speaking through his lips. Ram Ram predicted: ‘A son who will never be older than his motherland /There will be knees and a nose, a nose and knees /Newspaper will praise him, two mothers raise him! /Washing will hide him—voices will guide him! Spittoons will brain him—doctors will drain him—/Soldiers will try him—tyrants will fry him /He will have sons without having sons! and he will die before he is dead.’ Ahmed Sinai when got home his godown had been gutted. He declared to his wife his decision to leave Delhi and move to Bombay to invest in real estate. The incident had hardened him to fanaticism and communal politics. On 4th June 1947 when Earl Mountbatten was holding a press conference to announce the partition of India, Saleem’s parent left for Bombay.

From Delhi the narrative shifts to Bombay, the city of Saleem’s birth. Almost half the book takes place there. Rushdie describes the history of Bombay and how the place of seven islands merged into one and the colies, the native fishermen were pushed away to make place for foreigners and others. How the city of Bombay received its name and its first invaders and owners the Portuguese gave it away in the dowry of Catherine Braganza to Prince Charles. Saleem identifies himself with the city of birth and
childhood. This hybrid and cosmopolitan city with its composite and secular culture becomes a metaphor of plurality of India for Saleem.

Saleem’s parents had come to strike a bargain with a departing colonial, William Methwold who had decided to leave India for good and sell his properties at a throw away prices.

This Methwold was a descendent of an officer of East India Company. He played his own imperialistic design by staging his own transfer of properties; everything absolutely in tiptop working order. His estate—four identical houses built in European style and named after the Royal Places of Europe was sold to select members of Indian elite on certain conditions.

Methwold’s estate symbolizes colonized India once possessed by the British who had superimposed European culture on Indian consciousness which was now transferred to the Indian rulers intact with colonizer’s political and economic systems. The transfer of assets is a caricature of the transfer of power.

Methwold says to Ahmed Sinai and suggests the perpetuation of the colonial system and psychology through the legacy handed over. It also suggests the transfer of power from the colonial British to their humble subjects who impertinently aped their arrogance and habits alike like Ahmed Sinai who changed his voice into a hideous mockery and Oxford pronunciation in the presence of an English man.

Methwold’s properties were sold to Ahmed Sinai, Dr Narlikar, Homi Catrack, the Ibrahims, Adi Dubash and Sabermati.

Times of India announced a prize to any Bombay mother who would give birth to a child at the precise instant of the birth of the new nation. Amina sure of the prophecy of Ram Ram Seth was certain that she would win the prize. She knew that she had another serious contender for the prize, Vanita the wife of a poor low caste Hindu clown and the street entertainer Wee Willie Winki. Vanita was seduced by the profligate Methwold. His seduction of Vanita is a metaphor for appropriating and exploiting what rightly belongs to another and this defines colonialism appropriately.

Mary Pereira, a virgin mid wife at Dr. Narlikar’s Nursing Home had like every Mary her Joseph. Joseph De Costa was a communist who hated the rich and loved Mary. He had concluded that the independence was for the rich only the poor were being made to kill each other like flies: in Punjab, in Bengal and in other places. Enraged by the partition riots Joseph turned his attention from plump
virginal Mary to the patriotic cause of awakening the people. The unfulfilled love of hysterical Mary enticed her to commit a crime on the night of August 15 and thus made the most vital contribution to the history of 20th century India by exchanging the babies of Amina and Vanita.

Saleem tries to establish the belief that the history of his life is the history of the country and that he is India and India is Saleem. On August 14, Vanita the wife of Willie Winki entered a prolonged unproductive labour in the charity ward of Dr. Narlikar Nursing Home. M.A. Zinna announced the midnight birth of a Muslim nation. Just six hours before the midnight on 15th August William Methwold finally transferred his assets to Indian buyers and departed. It was a crucial time in the history of India—partition riots, arson, police haunts interspersed with the mothers’ labour pains.

The two midnight children were born and Mary Pereira out of a wrong sense of revenge committed a private avant-garde. She changed the babies of Vanita and Amina giving the poor baby a life of privilege and condemning the rich born child to poverty thus Saleem who became the chosen child of midnight to win the *Times of India* prize and receive Prime Minister Nehru’s congratulatory letter was actually an Anglo Indian the illegitimate son of a departing colonizer and a poor Hindu woman.

One can see the (foreign) influences on Salman Rushdie here. The first influence as we see in Book I is that of Kashmir. Dr Aziz comes from Kashmir. Rushdie often speaks of Kashmiri diaspora.

Another prominent influence upon Aziz is that of Maulana Abdul Kalam Azad. The character Miyan Abdullah is that.

**Maulana Abdul Kalam Azam:**

Maulana Abdul Kalam Azam was a great moderate. He was a close friend of the Congress leaders. When Md Ali Jinnah proposed a separate state called Pakistan he said that that separate state does not solve Muslim problem as they are spread everywhere. He remained with Gandhi and Nehru. Our former president A. P. J. Abdul Kalam is like him. Rushdie’s character Miyan Abdullah is modeled on this Maulana Abdul Kalam Azam, the moderate Congress leader.
Another influence is that of the Portuguese influence of Bombay as we see Rushdie’s talking of Methwold and the Bombay’s original inhabitants.

**Bombay’s Origin:**

Today’s Mumbai, the second biggest city in the world, was originally the hubbub of seven islands of Colaba, Fort, Byculla, Parel, Worli, Matunga and Mahim. Now the Greater Mumbai extends up to Mulund and Dalhisar. Successive reclamations have linked up the islands into a single, urban landmass. Its early inhabitants were the *Kolis* or fisherfolk. Today it is a confluence of varied cultural currents which character has given Mumbai the unique position as the most cosmopolitan city in the world.

**Book II**

*Midnight Children* has what we can call modernist tendencies when it comes to narrative technique.

**Modern Narrative Technique:**

The so called modern narrative technique refers to modernism and stream of consciousness narrative technique of Virginia Woolf, James Joyce and William Faulkner.

There is a word called ‘model’, leading to our thinking of the term ‘modern.’ The stems with the prefix ‘mo’ modern, motion, motor, mobile, move, money – all interesting things motivate us. The concept of idealism such as the New England Idealists evoke us certainly. Then we speak of modernity, modernism, or more so literary modernism, modern art, and of course, the postmodern phenomenon are really enlightening. Modernism is “an outlook holding that modern scholarship and scientific advances compel us for the restatement of the traditional or the old” (*Encyclopedia Americana* Vol 3, 311). The Spanish ‘modernismo’ was a revitalizing literary movement.
M. H. Abrams and G.G. Harpham observe that “The term modernism is widely used to identify new and distinctive features in the subjects, forms, concepts and styles of literature and other arts in the early decades of the 20th century but especially after World War I (1914-18).” (Abrams and Harpham 226).

The concept of modernism varies in its meanings and applications from time to time and from place to place. But many critics agree that modernism involves a deliberate and radical break with some of the traditional bases not only of western art. Important modernists who questioned the certainties of the past are Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900), Karl Marks, Sigmund Freud and James Frazer and other.

Padma asks Saleem Sinai to speak of his – story in a linear way.

The mention of the word ‘love’ by the impotent Saleem triggers a violent reaction from her. She points fingers at Saleem’s dysfunctional organ and calls him a mad man. Padma’s accusing finger reminds Saleem of another more significant pointing finger that of a fisherman which is the focal point of a picture hung on the wall of Saleem’s bedroom in Buckingham Villa. The picture of an old, net mending fisherman pointing his finger to the Western horizon where the sun is setting while a young European is listening to his liquid tales is a prophetic image of Saleem’s future.

The infant Saleem was an ugly baby with a grotesque figure; his face disfigured by the birthmarks, bulbous temples and a colossal nose but was a child prodigy who gave proof of his magical powers from the cradle. He had a huge appetite and a fantastic growth and his unblinking eyes could receive incredibly large number of impressions a reference to India’s ambitious Five Years Plans and the large amount of national resources and foreign aids they devoured. He was raised by the twin mothers and became a popular child at Methwold estate.

Saleem’s birth had an adverse impact on Ahmed Sinai as Amina’s attention was now diverted to her child and Ahmed took to boozing and womanizing. At night he drank wine and during daytime he flirted with his Anglo Indian secretaries. Ahmed Sinai had a propensity for taking wrong turns. He invested large sums in fantastic project, which ultimately led to freezing of his assets. Amina however rose to the occasion and dedicated herself entirely to her husband and it was at this time that Saleem’s sister Brass Monkey was conceived.
Thus Ahmed Sinai lost his fortunes. On the other hand, Dr Aziz, then again, tried to console her. While his daughter Emerald (Major Zulfikar’s wife) and Alia who was teaching in Karachi joined Pakistan.

Hanif his elder son settled in Bombay and became a young director in Hindi cinema. He married, much against the wishes of his mother, a girl Pia who was the rising star in Bombay cinema. She is described as the one whose face was her fortune. The youngest son was in civil service.

Amina had imbibed a few traits of her father the adventurous nature being one. She has begun going to racecourse and betting on the horses without having any knowledge of them and she was miraculously winning one after the other races. This came as a great help to her to run her family in the absence of her husband’s business. She was fighting a case against the State for its discriminating attitude to some of the Muslims.

In the midst of her racecourse victory Amina went to see the premier of Hanif’s feature film: The Lovers of Kashmir in which he showed the revolutionary technique of indirect kiss. It could have helped him to climbing the ladder of success. During the middle of the show the manager had to stop the film and flash the shocking news of Mahatma Gandhi’s murder. The Sinais apprehended communal troubles and remained confined to their house until the radio announced the identity of the murderer—a Hindu: one Nathu Ram Godesay’s name was broadcast to the relief of the many. Meanwhile the quarrel between Mary and Musa, the Aya and the servant who were always fighting reached the zenith. Mary proud of her superior status in the Sinai household had insulted the aged and devout Muslim in a number of different ways to ensure his departure from the Methwold’s estate. Abused by his drunken master Ahmad and humiliated by a Christian Aya, Musa committed a threat in the house out of his injured sense of pride. Amina’s precious items were found in his possession. Musa left Buckingham Villa discovering the ambiguity the ladders could go down as well as up.

A Christian Joseph De (Perhaps Mary’s lover) had taken refuge in the Methwold tower having kept bombs there. Meanwhile, Dr Aziz failed to cure the boy Saleem. Then the snake man Dr Schaapstekar cured the boy with snake poison.

It was during this time that Brass Monkey was born and Amina won the case in the Court. When Padma is not there as a necessary ear to Saleem’s narration his narrative will have the propensity to go wayward. It’s only Padma who keeps him on the track. Saleem acknowledges: ‘But today, I feel confused. Padma has not returned—should I alert the police? Is she a missing person?—and in her
absence, my certainties are falling apart.’ He feels the void in him in her absence. She is the necessary ear and keeps his narrative linear.

In 1956 at that time he was nine and Brass Monkey seven. Brass Monkey had turned out to be a beautiful but mischievous girl because of the overpowering presence of her brother. She was desperate for love but would become furious if anybody spoke to her loving words. She inherited her grandfather’s gift of talking to birds and beasts; from birds she learnt how to sing and from cats she learnt a dangerous form of independence.

One day Saleem had an accident and Father Ahmed beat him. Often Saleem’s narrative is grotesque. He had a phobia that his life will turn out to be purposeless. It was from these that he wanted to escape from. He found other people possessing a clear sense of purpose and his friends having absolute certainty about their future.

Saleem says reality is a question of perspective— the further you get from the past the more concrete and plausible it seems but as you approach the present, it inevitably seems more and more incredible. Saleem uses the device of cinema screen to bring home his point. ‘Suppose yourself in a large cinema hall, sitting at first in the back row, and gradually moving up, row by row, until your nose is almost pressed against the screen. Gradually the stars’ faces dissolve into dancing grain; tiny details assume grotesque proportions; the illusion dissolves—or rather, it becomes clear that the illusion itself is reality.’

Saleem is not an objective historian but distorts the history of the country to press upon the need of preserving his life in accordance with the history of his country and to create the illusion of himself as a protagonist who is at the helm of affairs.

By doing so Saleem quite skillfully weaves the multilingual texture of Indian life and the country’s language problem. The voices babbled in everything from Malyalam to Naga from purity of Lucknow Urdu to the Southern slurring of Tamil. He found on deeper examining that beneath the polyglot frenzy of the voices language was replaced by universally intelligible thought forms which signaled the existence of midnight’s children. Telepathy, then; the inner monologues of all the so-called teeming millions, of masses and classes alike, jostled for space within his head. In the beginning, there was a language problem. He understood only a fraction of the things being said. Gradually he could decipher their language and identify them.
Here is a mention of telepathy.

**Telepathy:**

Salman Rushdie makes use of telepathy in the novel. This comes straightway from the mystics and sufis in Asia. The following is an example of telepathy as described in Basavaraj Naikar’s novel on Shisunal Sharif.

When Sharif was going home, near a mosque, two mullahs asked him for prayer. Sharif asked them why he should pray in a mosque. His idea was that the body itself was a mosque. Like Basavanna he said body itself was a temple. Then the mullahs decided to excommunicate him from the Muslim community. The next event was his being charmed by the beauty of a lady at the waterfront. He liked her. So his mind became ignoble. He felt bad about it. So he decided to repent for it. He went to the belle’s house. He begged her father–in-law Shankarappa for punishment. Accordingly the belle Ganga beat him much. So he felt happy about his repentance. Interestingly Govindabhatta felt the fangs of pain when Sharif was beaten there. This was the exercise of telepathy or the divine powers in the life of saints.

Soleem Sinai studies in a school and learns about the ways of the world. He like a tourist discovered the country’s geography and then politics, exploitation, corruption and electoral malpractices. The close of 1956 witnessed the revival of Ahmed’s dream of land reclamation.

Saleem has a brief but disastrous love affair. His love with Evelyn Burns in Bombay happens at a time when language marchers were agitating for statehood. It led to the partition of the state and discovery of the midnight children. India received huge amount of American aid during the 1950s and it corresponded to Saleem’s brief infatuation with the American girl. Evie came to Bombay on a short stay with her father in an apartment exclusively for foreigners near Methwold’s estate. She was a tough, bold girl with an ugly figure. On her first appearance the girl served a kind of notice to her Indian neighbors that she was the boss. She arrived on a bicycle and armed with an air pistol she displayed besides her cycling skill sharp shooting and confirmed her position of the boss. Saleem fell in love with the girl at the
first sight but could not express his feelings as he was too awestruck. He approached his best friend Sonny Ibrahim to present his case on his behalf. Sonny himself, a handsome boy was in love with Saleem’s sister Brass Monkey and had been badly assaulted in his courtship. Brass Monkey had publicly disgraced him with the help of her European school friends. They had all attacked Sonny on his way to school and stripped him naked before Saleem who did not know whether to side with his sister or his friend. However, Sonny forgave Saleem for his passive role and agreed to entreat Evie on his behalf. Evie however turned down Saleem’s offer. Scornfully she said, ‘that sniffer, he cannot even ride a bike.’ Evie Burns taught the children her bicycle arts and Saleem was drawn to her group.

The narrative returns to Bombay to give a straightforward generic account of the language riots of 1957. The boundaries of the new states were defined not by mountain and rivers but by wall of words. The problem lay in the Bombay province and the supporters of Gujarati and Marathi organized huge processions to press the demand for a linguistic division of the state. In February 1957 Methwold estate was cut off from the city by the two long protest march of Marathi supporters.

The violent incident resulted in the partition of Bombay and ironically cured him of Evie Burns. He states: Evelyn Lilith Burns didn’t want much to do with me after that day; but, strangely enough, I was cured of her. Women have always been the ones to change my life; Mary Pereira, Evie Burns, Jamila singer, Parvati-the-witch must answer for who I am; and the widow, who I’m keeping for the end; and after the end, Padma, my goddess of dung. Women have fixed me all right, but perhaps they were never central—perhaps the place which they should have filled, the hole in the center of me which was my inheritance from my grandfather Aadam Aziz, was occupied for too long by my voices. Or perhaps—one must consider all possibilities—they always made me little afraid.

Padma returns to Saleem’s narrative. She had left Saleem to find a cure for his impotence and resuscitate Saleem’s manhood with herbs of virility that she collected on the advice of a holy man.

Saleem introduces the Indian concept of Time and place, myth of cosmic creation referring to Padma—the lotus goddess as one of the guardians of life. Padma with all her superstition and earthiness of spirit, her preoccupation with love and marriage, brings Saleem back into the straight narrative.

There much of Indian Folklore is used.

India and Pakistan and Folklore
India officially known as the Republic of India lies in South Asia. It is a major country as that of China and Japan. It fronts the Bay of Bengal on the southeast and the Arabian Sea on the southwest. Its area is 1,222,559 sq m and the population 120 crores now. The peoples of India comprise widely varying mixtures of ethnic strains drawn from peoples settled in the subcontinent before the dawn of history or from the invaders. Its Languages are Hindi, English (both official); many other languages, including Bengali, Kashmiri, Marathi, Urdu and others; Dravidian languages too; hundreds from several other language families. It many religions are Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism, Islam, Christianity. India has three major geographic regions: the Himalayas which forms its northern border; the Indo-Gangetic Plain, formed by the alluvial deposits of three great river systems, including the Ganges (Ganga); and the southern region, noted for the Deccan plateau. Agricultural products include rice, wheat, cotton, sugarcane, coconut, spices, jute, tobacco, tea, coffee, and rubber. The manufacturing sector is highly diversified and includes both heavy and high-technology industries. India is a republic with two legislative houses; its chief of state is the president, and the head of government is the prime minister. India has been inhabited for thousands of years. Agriculture in India dates back to the 7th millennium BC, and an urban civilization, that of the Indus valley, was established by 2600 BC. Buddhism and Jainism arose in the 6th century BC in reaction to the caste-based society created by the Vedic religion and its successor, Hinduism. The so called Parsees came to India in the 8th century AD. Muslim invasions began c.AD 1000, establishing the long-lived Delhi sultanate in 1206 and the Mughal dynasty in 1526. Vasco da Gama’s voyage to India in 1498 initiated several centuries of commercial rivalry among the Portuguese, Dutch, English, and French. British conquests in the 18th and 19th centuries led to the rule of the British East India Company, and direct administration by the British Empire began in 1858. After Mahatma Gandhi helped end British rule in 1947, Jawaharlal Nehru became India’s first prime minister, and then his daughter Indira Gandhi, and grandson Rajiv Gandhi guided the nation’s destiny. The subcontinent was partitioned into two countries—India, with a Hindu majority, and Pakistan, with a Muslim majority—in 1947. A later clash with Pakistan resulted in the creation of Bangladesh in 1971. In the 1980s and ‘90s, Sikhs sought to establish an independent state in Punjab, and ethnic and religious conflicts took place in other parts of the country. The Kashmir region in the northwest has been a source of constant tension.

Pakistan officially Islamic Republic of Pakistan lies in the southern Asia. Its area is 307,374 sq m and the population 20 crores now. Capital is Islamabad. The population is a complex mix of indigenous peoples who have been affected by successive waves of migrations of Aryans, Persians, Greeks, Pashtuns, Mughals, and Arabs. Languages are: Urdu (official), Punjabi, Pashto, Sindhi, Balochi and its religions are Islam (official), Hinduism, and Christianity. Pakistan may be divided into four regions: the great highlands, the
Balochistan Plateau, the Indus Plain, and the desert areas. The Himalayan and Trans-Himalayan ranges from the great highlands, in the northernmost part of the country; some of the highest peaks are K2 and Nanga Parbat. The country has a developing mixed economy based largely on agriculture, light industries, and services. Unemployment is widespread, and emigration has depleted the workforce; remittances from Pakistanis working abroad are a major source of foreign exchange. Pakistan is an Islamic republic with two legislative houses; its chief of state is the president, and the head of government is the prime minister. The area has been inhabited since c. 3500 BC. From the 3rd century BC to the 2nd century AD, it was part of the Mauryan and Kushan kingdoms. The first Muslim conquests were in the 8th century AD – the time when the Parsees came. The British East India Company subdued the reigning Mughal dynasty in 1757. During the period of British colonial rule, what is now (Muslim) Pakistan was part of Hindu India. The new state of Pakistan came into existence in 1947 by act of the British Parliament. The Kashmir region remained a disputed territory between Pakistan and India, with tensions resulting in military clashes and full-scale war in 1965. Civil war between East and West Pakistan in 1971 resulted in independence for Bangladesh (formerly East Pakistan) in 1972. Many Afghan refugees migrated to Pakistan during the Soviet-Afghan war in the 1980s and remained there during the Taliban and post-Taliban periods. Pakistan elected Benazir Bhutto, the first woman to head a modern Islamic state, in 1988. There are many descriptions about Mr Bhutto’s beheading in Bapsi Sidhwa’s novels. Conditions subsequently became volatile. Border flare-ups with India continued, and Pakistan conducted tests of nuclear weapons. Political conditions worsened, and the army carried out a coup in 1999. Now Navaj Sharif’s party is in power.

Many of the postcolonial writers from India and Pakistan are Khuswant Singh, Salman Rushdie, Amitav Ghose, Aravind Adig, Arundhati Roy, Kamala Markandaya, Ruth Prawer Jhabvala, Anita Desai, Shahsi Deshpande and others. One prominent Pakistani writer is Bapsi Sidhwa, actually born and brought up in Bombay.

S. S. Prasad in his article “Communalism and Formation of Nations: Indin English Novels and Partition,” observes that “The novelists of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh even if they choose to write in English have become very sensitive to the historical and devastating role of violence and partition.”(Prasad 26)

Saleem says that during the first hour of 15th August 1947 that is between midnight and 1.00 a.m about one thousand and one children were born. The remarkable thing was not about the number
but about the gifts that these children were endorsed with like features, talents, faculties which were simply marvelous. Malnutrition, disease and the misfortunes of everyday life had bowelled up four hundred and twenty of them. By 1957 five hundred and eighty-one children survived and they were all near their tenth birthday.

Many of these born at Midnight had peculiarities of birth and upbringing. Some of them were circus tricks, bearded girls, Siames twins – the unfortunate ones. A witch girl who lived in Gir forest had uncanny powers of healing touch and another boy in Shillong who had this blessing of not forgetting anything he ever saw or heard. As the births neared the midnight hour the exceptions became more acute. Parvati the witch was born in old Delhi in a slum who was a great conjurer. She had been bestowed this power of conjuration and sorcery, the art which required no artifice.

Saleem’s tenth birthday in 1957 unfolds the loss. He withdrew from the family life and entered a profound solitude. He took refuge in a world of fiction and make-believe. Marry Pereira, Saleem’s Ayaa too entered a world of unreality that blurred the margins between waking and dreaming. She had this long suppressed guilt which made her see and get haunted by the phantom of Joseph De Costa and she realized that until she revealed to the world her dreams she could not be free from the ghost of her conscience.

Saleem’s tenth birthday coincided with the tenth Independence Day and was marked by the disasters viz. drought, storms, floods and the failure of the Five Year Plan. Saleem took refuge in the clock tower.

At the Pioneer Café begins with Saleem’s feverish dream of a witch like woman sitting on a perch and killing a group of screaming children with her long serpentine nails. Amidst hateful laughter Saleem equates the murderous woman with the goddess Kali in her destructive role. Saleem describes the midnight children and his hideous dreams about them under the influence of the drug given to him by Padma.

Saleem unfolds the discovery of maternal adultery with the touches of a fairy tale: ‘Once upon a time there was a mother who in order to become a mother had agreed to change her name’. Saleem discovers that his mother had started disappearing, after receiving the anonymous calls into shopping spree. Saleem becomes suspicious and follows his mother in the boot of the family car to the cafe and discovers that she is meeting quite regularly her ex-husband Nadir Khan who had from rhymeless poet
turned into a political leader. He had changed his name, in fact acquired a new name Kasim Khan, like his ex-wife and was an official candidate of the Communist Party of India in the general election.

Having been expelled from Evie’s group and not being able to come to terms with mother’s infidelity he begins to commune in his mind with the children of the midnight. Saleem encounters Shiva during one such meeting. Shiva was the biological son of Ahmed and Amina Sinai who had to bear the brunt of this unjust world for the doing of Marry Pereira. Shiva had become the leader of a notorious gang in the Bombay’s underworld. He did not accept the leadership of Saleem Sinai as he too was born on the stroke of midnight. He wanted the joint leadership of the conference by the virtue of his birth. This was turned down by Saleem.

Shiva was used by the ruling Congress Party to rig the elections of 1957 in Bombay which resulted in Kasim Khan’s defeat but the Communist Party emerged as the single largest opposition party in the Parliament.

Chapter ‘Alfa and Omega’ begins with Evie Burns’ power and command over the children of Methwold estate. There were riots going on between the supporters of Gujarati and Marathi language and trouble was seething in Bombay soon after the general elections of 1957 were over.

The children’s quarrels are described too. Eve Burns, Saleem Sinai’s American lover killed many cats in cat invasion time. Saleem’s sister Brass Monkey beat her. So Eve Burns went back to America after killing a woman to have objected her to her killing of cats. Then, she was sent to a madhouse.

Saleem Sinai, the leader of MLC dreamt of the 1947 midnight children – 581 of them. Emile Zagallo the Geography teacher and an Anglo Indian and a living terror to his students had been notorious for his brutality especially to Indians. In Geography class Saleem became a victim for his objection to the harassment of students at his hands. Zagallo dragged him by his hair and heaped upon him insult after insult. He pointed to the students of the class the strange face of Saleem, ‘In the face of the ugly ape you don’t see the whole map of India? ’-Saleem’s chin stood for the southern peninsula ‘ and the disfiguring birthmarks on his face represented the two wings of Pakistan because Pakistan was ‘a stain on the face of India!’

Saleem needed treatment. In the hospital where he was admitted following the accident he needed the blood transfusion and it was there that he came to know that his blood group was neither
Alfa nor Omega that is neither A nor O of his parents. That is he was not the biological child of Ahmed and Amina Sinai.

After the discovery of his parents Saleem is taken home by uncle Hanif and his Aaya Mary. The world for him has shattered. Hanif and his wife Pia took him at their cottage near Marine drive. Childless Hanif and Pia took care of Saleem and regarded him as their adopted son. The fortunes were low at Hanif’s house as their careers were on a decline. Pia, ‘whose face was her fortune’ had taken up smaller roles though she could not bring herself to accept and adjust and complained. Hanif fought against the unreality and fantastic preoccupations of the film world. He was scripting a realistic film on a pickle factory managed entirely by women. Hanif contacted Homi Catrack and lived on the charity of Homi Catrack but he was soon to be murdered by a navy colonel.

Mary Pereira in the meanwhile could not hide and accept her crime for she kept proclaiming that the ghost of Joseph De costa troubled her. Saleem was half convinced about the confession of her Aaya Mary. Though Hanif was out of job lately, his house remained a popular spot visited by artistes, politicians and journalists of Bombay.

The note revealed that the film producer Homi Catract had been carrying on the illicit relationship with her for quite some time and he was now tired of her. Saleem hated him for his seduction of his aunt.

After the return of Saleem, Mary found it very difficult to not to reveal her crime anymore and the decaying ghost of Joseph De costa aggravated her fear and sense of guilt all the more. But whenever she thought of the fate of the boy Saleem, she would give up the confession. Saleem on his return found that the situation had changed at his place and his primacy had been taken away by his sister, Brass Monkey. There had been some drastic changes in the basic temperament of Brass Monkey and her flirtation with Christianity under the influence of Mary and European school friends was too obvious.

Physically Saleem found the midnight’s children’s conference had begun to disintegrate. The midnight children psyche was influenced by their parents’ prejudices and he found that the children from Maharashtra hated Gujaratis and the fair skin northerners were hateful of Dravidian blackies. There were religious and class rivalries that entered their conferences. In a way his MCC reflected Nehru’s prophecy and became a sort of mirror of the nation. It fell a victim to the English duality of masses and classes, capital and labour, them and us.
There was a direct rivalry between idealistic Saleem and practical Shiva and it all led to the disintegration of the conference.

Saleem now began to use his intuitive and telepathic powers to collect information upon his enemy and his new fancy woman Leela Sabarmati, the pretty wife of the heir apparent to the title of admiral of the field. Having collected the information of their meetings in a Colaba Apartment, Saleem sent a letter to Commander Sabarmati. He used the newspaper cuttings for his letters and the words and drafted them into a note revealing about their clandestine meetings. He did all this to teach a lesson to Homi and his consort but his first attempt in this direction caused great scandal of the time. Commander Sabarmati reached the place with a gun and shot dead his wife. After crossing her he found Mr. Homi Catrack rising from the toilet who had not yet wiped his bottom, pulling frantically at his trousers. Commander Vinoo Sabarmati shot him once in the genitals, once in the heart and once through the right eye. There was an eerie silence in the apartment. Mr. Catrack sat down on the toilet after he was shot and seemed to be smiling.

Mr Catrack was put in prison later.

Revelation deals with the transformation of Cyrus, son of a great nuclear physicist and a religious fanatic mother who after the sudden and accidental death of her husband transformed the child into a child guru.

The child guru began by lecturing on woman’s anatomy to a crowd thrown about him and his mother allowed the millions of devotees to kiss his little finger.

Mrs. Dubash worked marvelously well on those comics and reworked and reinvented her young son into the legend of the coming superman. Padma however keeps a check and guides Saleem to his narrative.

It was the time Saleem goes on, when revelations in his life were flowing faster than blood. The Methwold estate was being pulled down and the apartments were being raised to the ground one after the other. Everybody had left except for Ahmed Sinai who refused to budge.

The Aziz’s family gathers at Buckingham villa. Aadam Aziz and reverend mother came from Agra, his uncle Mustafa the civil servant came from Delhi and from Pakistan came Alia, General Zulfikar and Aunt Emerald. The dust was troubling everyone and settling down on everybody’s body.
Saleem at this moment interferes and claims to save a life. He climbs up to aunt Pia in her room to apologize for his indiscretions in the Marine Drive apartment. Aunt Pia replied after a long drawn out silence that there was melodrama in every one’s actions.

Aunt Pia surrendered to reverend mother and informed her tearfully that she would do like a dutiful daughter-in-law what she is asked to do and reverend mother parted her lips to reveal her plan of shifting to Pakistan in the vicinity of her daughter Emerald and open a petrol pump. Dust was playing its part in everyone’s life at Buckingham Villa. On 22nd day of the mourning period Aadam Aziz saw God. He was sixty-six years of age but the death of optimism—the demise of the Hummingbird had dealt a severe blow. He was broken down by the depression and the old age but reverend mother continued to grow in size and once scared of the Mercurochrome appeared to thrive on his weakness. Reverend mother dutifully proclaims that the old Aadam Aziz has become a child again and sees the things, which are not simply here.

Here old Aziz feels that he saw God. Mary Pereira who was standing beside him knew exactly whom Aadam Aziz had seen. It was the ghost of Joseph De costa who died in a clock tower. He had created aversion for God and therefore would not go to Pakistan, the land of the pure and God.

Dr Aziz died in 1964. She came to know that Doctor Shahib had gone to the Railway Station and had left for Kashmir. He was spotted near the Hazratbal Mosque and the next day the theft of prophet Mohammed’s hair was noticed from the mosque. There was unrest throughout the Indian subcontinent.

The same time Nehru, the Prime Minister of India died too.

Back home Mary Pereira was still haunted by the ghost of Joseph De costa and she finally succumbed to her mental illness and confessed to Amina what she did eleven years ago. She had changed the nametags of Saleem and Shiva. She had done it just after the midnight when there were fireworks in the streets and she had done it for her Joseph. She cried bitterly and requested not to be sent to jail. Musa, the old servant of the household had contacted leprosy and had returned after the silence of the years to beg forgiveness for the theft he had committed. It was he whom Aadam Aziz had seen and taken for God. Mary Pereira left the household and went to Goa to live with her mother but her sister Alice Pereira stayed who acted as Ahmed’s secretary and continued to serve him.

Saleem was now mortally scared of Shiva who could no longer be admitted into the forum of his mind. He was always afraid that he would discover the secret of their births. Saleem refused to accept
that the prophecy of Ram Ram Seth could have been for Willi Winki’s boy and it was to Shiva that Prime Minister had written and for Shiva it was again that fisherman pointed out to see. Saleem was scared of the most ferocious and powerful of the children.

Though Amina Sinai and others behaved normally with Saleem and tried to pamper him, he would feel a distance behind her gentleness. It was there that a coup d’etat was designed and there was a party, a grand party at that and a fleet of army cars stopped at Zulfikar’s residence. Emerald wore the best of jewelry and Ayub Khan discussed the plan of acquiring the power by displacing the Prime Minister. While the plan was being discussed Zafar invariably passed urine at the dinner table and Saleem was accepted as a better choice to Zaffar. Zulfikar made him his ally and a part of the group and actually took him along when he displaced the Prime Minister. Saleem was taken as a little boy with more courage and boldness than Zafar. On first September 1962, the fourteenth birthday of Brass Monkey was celebrated and Major Zulfikar asked her to sing a song. Monkey sang in a faultless voice and had the purity of wings and pain of exile. It was a voice most extra ordinaire and later compared to the voice of the most eminent singers. This was the beginning of the making of Zamila the singer.

One fine afternoon a telegram arrived from India that Ahmed Sinai had suffered a stroke. The telegram was sent by Alice Pereira which sent Amina into a tizzy and packing began for the family to move to India.

This is a flashback scene.

The children of midnight launched an attack on Saleem the day Indian forces were defeated by the Chinese at Thag La Ridge. The children accused him of secrecy, prevarication, high-handedness and egotism. Saleem could still not tell them Mary’s secret. Parvati-the-witch who had been his fondest supporters retracted.

The family finally left Bombay in February 1963 and Saleem buried an old tin globe with the Prime Minister’s letter, the big front-page photograph titled Midnight’s Children in the garden.

The Sinai family reached Pakistan and stayed with Alia. She stayed in a big house and was the principal of a college. Karachi lacked the exuberance and plurality of Bombay. The Karachi people were too conformists and depended upon their political and spiritual leaders for guidance. Moreover, Karachi was built on the dessert land and therefore they had only slipperiest hold on reality. The Sinais decided
to finally settle down in the city and accept the country as their own. They decided to build a house as a permanent dwelling place therefore they bought a piece of land in a posh locality.

The Sinai family thus made a new beginning. Ahmad Sinai after adopting the country now purchased a towel factory and began to produce a brand of towels named after his wife Amina.

Saleem did not accept Pakistan as his home country though he finished his graduation at Aunt Alia’s College. The career of Jamila took off about the same time. One Alauddin Latif a retired major played the pivotal role in the meteoric rise of Jamila. He came to know about her singing talents from General Zulfikar whose friend he was. Alauddin used his contacts and his power of convincing to get Ahmed and Amina’s assent into allowing Jamila to go on stage. Very soon Jamila, the singer’s fame had reached far and wide. He however gave protection and anonymity of the face to her by devising a veil. She sang behind a chadar held up by the two ladies into which a hole was cut. Thus Jamila too fell a victim to her grandfather’s legacy.

The growing corruption, self-aggrandizements and tyranny of the dictatorship had turned Pakistan into a theatre of the absurd. President Ayub Khan in 1964 announced elections when people got fed up with the military rule. The opposition united under the leadership of Fatima Zinna and posed a grave challenge to President Ayub. It was about the same time that Zafar, the son of General Zulfikar was engaged to the daughter of Nawab of Kif. Jamila sang at the ceremony and Saleem stealing the moment, tiptoed to Jamila’s room in the lady’s quarters of the palace and confessed his love to her. He explained to her that they were not truly brother and sister and that the blood in his veins was different from hers. But his efforts failed as the ties had been sanctified by time.

By the year 1964 a struggle for power had begun after the demise of Pandit Nehru, the First Prime Minister of India. Seeing no hope of a safe existence, Aziz migrated to Pakistan. Jagjeewan Ram and Morarji Desai had formed a front to prevent the lineage of Pandit Nehru to come to power. Lai Bahadur Shashtri became the next Prime Minister with the support of these leaders. Mrs. Indira Gandhi was denied the chair. Ironically Naseem shows no sign of grief over the death of her husband, Aadam Aziz who had always showed his abhorrence for Pakistan, the land of the pure and a God-ridden country. She and her daughter-in-law Pia who had just lost her husband who jumped from the building to end his life had opened a petrol pump and both were managing it very well. Pia attracted customers with her beauty while Naseem offered them cups of Kashmiri tea and gave them her patient ear.
Once in Karachi, the Sinais lost their rooting. Alia was just a nuisance. Amina conceived in 1965 and the fear and shame of bearing the child at advancing age was too much for her. She began graying and getting old prematurely. Superstition and other beliefs came to stay. She began to get the visit from the specters of her past. This took a toll on Ahmed as well and in his concern for his wife he began to neglect his towel factory and it met its death before his eyes. He began to lose and suffered a stroke of paralysis which got him back to the dribbles and giggles of his infancy.

Meanwhile Ayub Khan lost his popularity. India-Pak war of 1965 started. Pakistan licked the dust. In the Indian air attack on 22nd September Saleem’s members of the family—Naseem Pia, Emeral Zaffar, Ahmed, Amina all died. Saleem escaped unhurt as he was not in the house at that precise moment but the silver spittoon flew by the impact of the blast and hit him. This accident as prophesized by Ram Ram Seth years ago set him free from his historical role, his past and present, shame and love. His soul was cleansed and restored to the purity and innocence of childhood but he had lost his memory. Mustapha Aziz and Zamila also escaped death.

**Book III:**

Part III begins with a chapter called The Buddha. Saleem escaped obliteration from the war of 1965 but suffered the loss of memory however. The war had left him purified but orphaned. He was drained of human emotions, family and history.

No memory, not interested in people either but living like a dog. Saleem’s story had resumed after a gap of five years and this time interlude is conveyed to us in a Bombay-talkies style close-up—a calendar ruffled by a breeze, its pages flying in rapid succession to denote the passing of years: the street riots, burning vehicles. The fall of Ayub Khan, acquisition of presidency by General Yahya Khan and the promise of elections and so on. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and Sheikh Mujib-ur Rahman were the two contestants for power.

Saleem joined army. He was enlisted in a CUTIA Unit. It was an intelligence collecting unit of the Pakistani Army. Saleem was an important member with his exceptionally strong sense of smell and he could follow any trail on earth. He had forgotten his name and had grown prematurely old; he was called the Buddha an old man.
Saleem’s acceptance of Pakistani citizenship and his joining of Pakistani Army as a tracker dog led to a split in him that reflected Pakistan’s split into Bangladesh. Three other boy soldiers recruited in the camp formed his company. They were Ayooba Baloch, Farook Rashid and Shaheed Dar.

Yahya Khan after resuming the post of the President promised a free and fair election. The elections were held in 1970 and Mujib-ur Rahman’s party won a thumping majority over Zulfikar Ali Bhutto of the West Pakistan. However, Mujib-ur Rahman was restrained from forming the government by the West leaders. This was soon followed by a civil strife when Mujib-ur Rahman declared the east wing of Pakistan as an independent state and named it as Bangladesh.

Saleem’s team called ‘the quartet’ entered the Sundarbans into the thick forest and no sooner had they covered a little distance into the forest it closed behind them; they were lost into it and the more they tried to get out the deeper they moved into it. Saleem the man-dog and boy soldiers saw too much of the nightmarish reality of East Pakistan and the dense forest covered them up in historyless anonymity.

The Sundarbans has influenced Rushdie, it seems. The mystery of the evening was compounding the unreality of the trees and Sundarbans had begun to grow in rain. They did not notice at first that the water level was rising. The jungle was growing in size, power and ferocity. The huge roots of the mangrove trees could be spotted snaking around and drawing water and growing as thick as the elephant’s trunk. Sundari trees were growing so tall that the birds at the top could have sung to God. The nipa fruits were falling and they were certainly bigger than any coconut on earth and when they fell they exploded like bombs in the water. A fruit fell almost into the boat they were rowing and it created such turbulence in the water that they fell into the water and somehow swam to the bank. Their bodies were covered with leeches which were also exploding with blood after too much of sucking. The tall Sundari trees had blocked even the faintest ray of sun. When beset with hunger they prepared their first meal, a combination of nipa fruits and mashed earthworms. This unusual food gave to them a diarrhea so violent that they felt that their intestines had come out with their experiment. The four of them had resigned themselves to the terrible phantasms of the dream forests but somehow they stayed alive drinking the red milk of nipa fruits and doing some primeval hunting.

Saleem was bit by a snake. Yet he gained his memory. The other three lost some of their hearing power. At last the voices stopped. Now they came across a monumental Hindu temple, which provided them some respite from the endless rains. It had a torn statue of a black dancing goddess
namely Kali. The four travelers lay down at her feet and fell into a deep sleep. In their dreams they were visited by the four girls who made love with them night after night. Finally, they ran away.

When they got out of it, it was October 1971. Mukti Bahini adopted the guerilla tactics and terrorized Pakistani military. They still suffered from the punishment inflicted upon them in the forest. In the meanwhile Saleem tried his best to remember his name but he failed miserably. He remembered his nick names like snot nose, stain face, baldly, sniffer, piece of the moon et al. He remembered how Zamila had tricked him into the army to save her skin from him. Ayuba Balooch was shot by a sniper. Some time in December the three of them rode on the student bicycles and arrived at a field from which the city of Dhaka could be seen.

On 15th December 1971 Tiger Niazi of Pakistan surrendered to Sam Manekshaw of India in a newly created State of Bangladesh and in this while Saleem surrendered to Parvati-the-witch who gave his name back and transported him back to India from Bangladesh. Parvati-the-witch was born in Old Delhi in a slum which clustered around the steps of the Friday mosque. No ordinary slum, although the huts built out of old packing-cases and pieces of corrugated tin and shreds of jute sacking. This was the ghetto of the magicians.

Saleem Sinai recounts how he escaped from the Bangladesh military with the help of magicians Picture Singh and Parvati-witch. Even he regained his name Saleem Sinai, otherwise he was the Buddha.

Perhaps, if ten million had not walked across the frontiers into India, obliging the Delhi government to spend $ 200,000,000 a month on refugee camps—the entire war of 1965, whose secret purpose had been the annihilation of Saleem’s family, had cost them only $ 70,000,000!

A third reason for Indian intervention was the fear that the disturbances in Bangladesh would, if they were not quickly curtailed, spread across the frontiers into West Bengal; so Sam and the Tiger, and also Parvati and Saleem, owed their meeting at least in part to the more turbulent elements in West Bengal politics.

Behind an army barrack where the magicians were awaiting their transport back to Delhi, Picture Singh, the Most Charming Man In the World, stood guard when Saleem climbed into the basket of invisibility. Saleem loitered casually, smoking biris, waiting until there were no soldiers in sight, while Picture Singh told him about his name. Some twenty years ago, an Eastman-Kodak photographer had taken his picture—which, covered in smiles and shakes appeared on half the Kodak advertisements and
in-stores displays in India; ever since the snake-charmer had adopted his present cognomen. Suddenly his voice lost its casual, sleepy good-nature; he whispered into Saleem’s ears to enter in double-quick time. Parvati whipped lid away from wicker; he dived into her basket.

This chapter 26 called “Sam and the Tiger” is full of magic realism.

Magic Realism:

The term magic realism, originally applied in the 1920s to a school of surrealist German painters, was later used to describe the prose fiction of Jorge Luis Borges in Argentina, as well as the work of writers such as Gabriel Garcia Marquez in Colombia, Isabel Allende in Chile, Giinter Grass in Germany, Italo Calvino in Italy, and John Fowles and Salman Rushdie in England. These writers weave, in an ever-shifting pattern, a sharply etched realism representing ordinary events and details together with fantastic and dreamlike elements, as well as with materials derived from myth and fairy tales. see example, Gabriel Garcia Marquez's One Hundred Years of Solitude (1967)-Robert Scholes popularized metafiction (an alternative is surfiction) as an overall term for the growing class of novels which depart from realism a foreground the roles of the author in inventing the fiction and of the rea in receiving the fiction. Scholes has also popularized the term fabulationa current mode of freewheeling narrative invention. Fabulative novels viola in various ways, standard novelistic expectations by drastic—and sometimeshighly effective—experiments with subject matter, form, style, temporal sequence, and fusions of the everyday, the fantastic, the mythical, and the nightmarish, in renderings that blur traditional distinctions between what is serious or trivial, horrible or ludicrous, tragic or comic. Fabulators active in the second half of the twentieth century include Thomas Pynchon, John Barth, Donald Barthelme, William Gass, Robert Coover, and Ishmael Reed.

Saleem in the chapter “The Shadow of the Mosque” begins with the twenty-six pickle jars which he has already described and which are perched gravely on a shelf. He has labelled them by the familiar phrases: movements performed by pepper pots, Alpha and Omega or Commander Sabermati’s Baton etc. They begin to vibrate eloquently when any local train passes by. On his desk five empty jars attract his attention for they have to be filled too of course with his pickled history. Padma as usual is by his side exhorting and consoling like a true Indian wife.
Saleem continues his tale and reveals that on 16th December 1971 when he tumbled out of a basket into India, Mrs. Gandhi’s Congress Party had a thumping majority of two-third in the Parliament.

Resham Bibi one of the slum dwellers came running to them to express her suspicion of bad luck which would befall them if Saleem was not turned out of their place as he was born twice and the second time not even off a woman. She was sure that desolation, pestilence and death would lie on them. Saleem could hear whispers in approval of Resham Bibi but Picture Singh became very angry. He intervened to say that Saleem would stay for as long as he wished long or short whether they approved it or not. He told them clearly that he did not believe in fables.

Though Saleem wanted to fulfill his aim of helping his motherland and ridding it out the clutches of the widow for betterment, there were many minuses with him. He did not have either a passport or any valid papers to stay in the country. P.O.W. camps were waiting for him everywhere. He did not have funds nor clothes, nor qualification. He did not complete his education. How would he go about his ambition of saving the nation without a roof over his head? Immediately then it struck to him that his uncle Mustafa Aziz was very much in the city and to a very senior post in administration.

Saleem leaves for his uncle Mustafa Aziz who lived in a comparatively anonymous civil service bungalow just off Rajpath in the heart of the capital city. He pressed the doorbell and was greeted by his aunt Sonia whose opening sentence was how badly he stank.

Sonia did not want him because he was not his sister’s real son; and because he fought on the wrong side of the war. Here Saleem learnt that his family was all gone. Reverend mother, his parents, aunt Alia and Pia and Emerald and cousins of her and his Kifi princess all had died in the war. Saleem decided to spend next four hundred days in mourning—ten mourning periods, of forty days each. Zamila had however mysteriously disappeared though there was a talk of her speaking against the Government and its policies and being removed by them but then Saleem dreamed that she had escaped in a burka to another place and was living.

Uncle Mustafa came down heavily on Saleem and said that he was born of Bhangies and would remain a dirty type all his life. On the 420th day after his arrival he left his uncle’s house and came back to Parvati’s slum. Saleem married Parvati on 23rd February 1975. Padma hears and stiffens, tight as a washing line. She enquires that Saleem told her that he would not marry then he tells Padma about the death of his poor Parvati which was not a natural death and the tension is released from Padma’s body. He goes on to add that women have made him and also unmade him.
While India was experimenting its nuclear explosion in Rajashthan Shiva stormed into his life. He came to the magician slum as a major with his pair of bulging lethal knees. He buzzed off with Parvati who stayed with him for three months.

On the political front dark clouds were emerging. Jai Prakash Narayana led the students and workers against the Congress Party in Gujarat. There were demonstrations and riots. In 1974 Jai Prakash Narayana and Morarji Desai formed Janta Morcha. Picture Singh too was busy giving out the messages of socialism through his snakes who enacted the gross inequalities of wealth distribution—refusal of alms to a beggar by two cobras. Hunger, disease, poverty and harassment of police were all dramatized by the snakes to the tune of Picture Singh’s flute and huge crowd gathered. At times there were lathi charge and firing from the police. Picture Singh was concerned about the burgeoning belly of Parvati and her shame in the eyes of the world. He entreated Saleem to tie the knot with her so that he would no longer be a man without a child—a son. He knew Saleem as impotent and therefore by suggesting marriage with Parvati he would get a wife and a son and Parvati her honour. On 26th January he was married to Parvati who was christened as Laila. On 12th June Prime Minister Indira Ghandhi was found guilty by the Allahabad High Court of mal-practices during the elections of 1971 and coincidentally Parvati entered her labour which lasted for thirteen days. After prolong labour Parvati delivered Adam Sinai on 25th June 1975 the day Mrs. Gandhi imposed emergency. The interlude of 13 days speak about the political upheavals which finally culminated into imposition of emergency.

Saleem’s son, Adam Sinai suffered from Tuberculosis in his early days. - Parvati alias Laylah tried to find a cure in the herbs which were constantly given to the child in boiled water still tuberculosis refused to relent. Saleem Sinai had understood by now that the disease will not go while the emergency continues. Saleem compares himself with his son Adam and finds that in many respects. Adam was his opposite.

Saleem Sinai came to know through the wind blown newspapers and sheets that came to his shack that his uncle Mustafa Aziz had been killed by some unknown assassins and that the Prime Minister Indira Gandhi always took her personal astrologer along wherever she went. Saleem sniffed personal danger. Since soothsayers had prophesized him he thought they might have been a party to his end. From the astrologers, the widow must have learnt the potential of any of the midnight’s children.
At the day break while Picture Singh was busy urinating against the walls of the Friday Mosque with his umbrella under his left armpit and the children playing seven tiles, the vans and the bulldozers appeared and they stopped opposite the magicians slums.

Sanjay Gandhi’s project castrating people worked. Saleem was castrated. They had caught hold of a key person capable of locating all the midnight children. Saleem was sent to the widow’s hostel on the source of the Ganges in the city of Benaras. He remained there for some time. Saleem begged forgiveness from the midnight’s children. By whispering to the wall he narrated his brief history and felt sorry for betraying them. There were four hundred and twenty children in the lock ups and Major Shiva was supervising their captivity. Castrated Saleem however found a wonderful irony in Indira Gandhi’s attempt to break them. She had brought them together in fact. Saleem came to know that Major Shiva, the traitor, had undergone voluntary castration but he had already fathered armies of bastards.

The panwala said that there was a better snake-charmer in Bombay than Picture Singh. This hurt the latter. So he and Saleem went to Bombay to know whether it is true. Saleem found a foster mother for his son Adam Sinai. It is in a washerwoman named Durga whom he suckles and she has enough of milk. Picture Singh has fallen victim to her serpentine charms at this age.

On their way to Bombay during journey Saleem noticed that a pall of pessimism had fallen over Picture Singh. In one point of time on the train he even suggested to Saleem that it was no good going there.

Saleem found that Bombay had undergone a sea change. Highrise buildings and cris-cross of bridges were dotting the city landscape everywhere. On land reclaimed by Narlikar consortium from the sea, huge monsters soared upwards to the sky wearing strange names like Oberoi Shereton. Finally they reached Midnight Children Confidential Club whose clients were the cream of the Bombay society and it was managed by one businessman playboy.

One day Saleem visited his old factory and Marry there unto. It was here that he met Padma for the first time who asked him his business at the company. The meeting with Miss Mary Pereira, his old Aaya was a sentimental one. Though it was a company owned and managed by a woman Saleem was employed as a manager. Before that he went to the Narlikar women’s consortium and dug out the long buried world: a tin globe containing a big size baby snap and the Prime Minister’s letter.
In her house Saleem’s son pronounced the first word Abracadabra. His son’s first incursion into language baffled Saleem for Abracadabra is not an Indian word. It is a cabalistic formula derived from the name of the supreme god of Basilidan Gnostics which contains number 365 a number of the days of the year and of the heavens and of the spirits emanating from the god Abraxas. Saleem wonders as to what does his child believe himself to be. Saleem wonders at pickling the spermatozoa and the eggs of the entire population of India into a jar. That way the chutnification of history might be feasible. It would be a grand hope of pickling of time. This is the end of the novel and Saleem has already pickled chapters.

All this is Saleem’s autobiography, indeed. Thus lives Soleem. The clock strikes twelve. Saleem expects the same fate for his son who is not his and his son who would not be his.

*Midnight’s Children* is ambitious, fantastical, satirical, comic, terrifying, a scion of Rushdie’s literary ‘family’—Cervantes, Sterne, Gogol, Dickens, Grass, Melvile, Garcia Marquez, Beckett, Joyce plus American movies, and Hindu epics. Rushdie was displaced geographically and culturally, and by not writing in his mother tongue, which is Urdu. The energy generated by these tensions produced *Midnight’s Children*, written about his own country from far away, as Joyce wrote *Ulysses*. In both cases, what came out was a new thing.

**Midnight’s Children as Fantasy:**

Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children*, it will not be out of the way to say, fits evenly into the bill of postmodernist fantasy. It is a novel, which is at once experimental, historical, autobiographical, interrogative and confessional. At one level the book does maintain in the autobiographical and socio-historical aspects the chronology but on the whole, the book’s narrative technique does away with the chronology. Saleem does it deliberately and he acknowledges at one point of time to destroying the unities and conventions of fine writing. A random style which leaps from one matter to another, shifting of perspective, symbols and anecdotes, and the glide of the narrative into dream and nightmare etc. make the realities of time and place hazy. The characters within the novel constantly emerge or split into doubles and multiples like Saleem’s multiple mothers and fathers, his alter-ego Shiva, Parvati-the-Witch turning into Jamila, Saleem often sees himself in both the first and third person, in reality of character and as a separate distinct personality also, all this is called into question besides unities of time and place.
The *Midnight Children* as History:

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

Right from the inception Saleem is tragically aware of his central historical role, ‘I had been mysteriously handcuffed to history, my destinies indissolubly chained to my country.’ Right from here his destiny has been chained to the history of the country. Saleem’s narrative is at once an account of his own life and a mirror of the life of India. This provides the form and also the structural base to the novel and to the protagonist it affords facts, fancy as well as history. The narrative is not let loose by Saleem’s search for meaning and form. Saleem while narrating realizes that his life as protagonist consists in an excess of knotted lives, events, miracles, places and rumors.

Rushdie has skillfully and wonderfully mixed different story-modes—Arabian Nights, 18th-century English, futurist—has, for Rushdie, a political meaning. The very technique sets up the intentions of the novelist—the hotchpotch—the cosmopolitanism. He has mixed the different techniques because India is a giant, a sleeping giant at that too much for any one to take at one go. His hotchpotch is a counter-measure against ideas of purity—pure race, pure culture, pure religion which have proved to be the bedrock for hatred and acts of violence.

Rushdie has made use of both oriental and Western text in the novel. He is indebted to a few works chief of which are, *A Thousand and One Nights* Laurence Sterne’s *Tristram Shandy*, Gunter Grass’s *The Tin Drum*, Gabriel Garcia Marquez’s *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and Rudyard Kipling’s *Kim*. Saleem himself is truly cosmopolitan. He is partly Hindu, partly Muslim and partly Christian intermixing of various religious and cultures that make up India. *Midnight’s Children* does not agree with the Hindu worldview of Indian society as homogenous one. Rushdie owes his narrative device to *Punchatantra* and *Kathasaritsagar*. 
Rushdie was picked from the list of Booker winners including such heavyweights as Kingsley Amis, Iris Murdoch, William Golding and Nadine Gardimer. The narratives in *Midnight’s Children* differ from buoyant fantasy to biting social tirade, combination of radical aesthetic experiment and its energy of lighting up the English language with metaphors and myths. A literary critic Gillian Boughton on enquiring about his message comes to the conclusion that according to Rushdie every individual life is, in one sense a microcosm of all lives. And this is wonderfully true of *Midnight’s Children*.

Anita Desai in Washington Post writes: “*Midnight’s Children* burgeons with life, with exuberance and fantasy. It has the same effect on the eyes and the ears as a magnificent circus performance—a scene that is filled with color, zest, daredevilry and loud bravado. The language is as full and copious as a flood or fire of tremendous proportions.”

Given such sentiments it is perhaps unsurprising that we find Rushdie’s narrator, at the very outset of his second novel, *Midnight’s Children*, unambiguously turning his back on fantastical, unplaced, atemporal registers, in favour of a text that is carefully located in an identifiable geographical place and rooted in a moment in time so specific that it can be pinpointed to the second:

“I was born in the city of Bombay ... once upon a time. No, that won’t do, there’s no getting away from the date: I was born in Doctor Narlikar’s Nursing Home on August 15th, 1947. And the time? The time matters, too. Well then: at night. No, it’s important to be more ... On the stroke of midnight, as a matter of fact. Clock-hands joined palms in respectful greeting as I came (MC 11).

The significance of this second is, of course, paramount — both in the recent history of the Indian sub-continent with which *Midnight’s Children* concerns itself and in the story of Saleem Sinai’s life, which the novel proposes to use to trace a path through this history. For India, it is the moment at which it won independence from Britain; for Saleem it is the moment of his birth, a fact that ensures that he, the narrative that he tells, and the novel that Rushdie writes, are all, unlike *Grimus*, ‘handcuffed to history’. From the very outset, then, this is a novel that, though it draws frequently on fantastical registers, announces its locality, its resistance to the abstracted illusions of ‘once upon a time’, and its difference from Rushdie’s first novel, which sold only a few hundred copies and which, mortifyingly for such an ambitious writer, disappeared without trace.

The narrative of *Midnight’s Children* is told retrospectively, as Saleem reconstructs the events of his biography for the benefit of a single auditor, Padma, his occasional lover and a worker in the pickle
factory to which he has come to end his days. The novel’s setting thus alternates between a fictional present, in which Saleem intervenes authorially to reflect upon the process of writing, and a fictional past, in which Saleem’s family saga unfolds against (or within) the backdrop of Indian national life. This mock-epic saga, as mock-epic epic sagas will be, is diverse, both in the scope of the events it fictionalises (intertwined lives, events, miracles, places and rumours) and in the forms of narration it draws upon (reportage, fairy tale, satire, realism). At the ‘fantastic heart’ of the narrative, however, is the tale of the Midnight’s Children themselves - those who, like Saleem, were born at the hour of Independence, and whose fates, like his, are indissolubly linked to those of their country. Each of these children, Saleem reveals, has, by virtue of their fortuitous (or perhaps, given the course the novel follows, unfortuitous) time of birth, a mysterious magical gift. Some are so beautiful they cause blindness, some can transform themselves into wolves, some can change sex at will. The two most powerful of the Midnight’s Children, however, are those born at the exact moment of midnight: Saleem himself, whose telepathic abilities enable him to provide a mental forum with which the group can ‘meet’ (Saleem describes himself as a ‘radio’ receiver, but these days he seems more like an Internet ‘chat room’); and Shiva, Saleem’s double, with whom he was swapped at birth, and whom Saleem struggles to exclude from the group, thus denying him his rightful inheritance for a second time.

If Saleem’s magical abilities suggest empathy and an ability to bring people together through communication and mutual agreement, Shiva, his opposite, is possessed of phenomenal physical strength and believes in rule by force. Hence when he and Saleem are engaged in an extended philosophical conflict over the form that the Midnight’s Children Conference should take (also, implicitly, a debate concerning the form of post-Independence India) they come to radically different conclusions. Saleem takes up the familiar liberal position that the group should be ‘something more like, you know, sort of loose federation of equals, all points of view given free expression.’ Shiva, predictably contrary, argues that ‘gangs gotta hawe bosses’, and that the only rule that should apply to the Midnight’s Children - as with all collectivities — is militaristic and authoritarian: ‘Everybody does what I say or I squeeze the shit outa them with my knees.’ If the novel has any one argument to make, it is that Saleem’s hopes for the Midnight’s Children Conference and for India, expounded so optimistically in 1957, have been, by 1977, comprehensively disappointed.

On this level, the message offered by Midnight’s Children is a pessimistic one. The Midnight’s Children Conference, like India, fails to find a form that will allow all its members to co-exist harmoniously, and avoid civil strife. The pessimism is offset, however, by the fact that the three most
potent of the Midnight’s Children, Parvati the Witch, Saleem and Shiva, have produced between them a son symbolically named Aadam (Shiva being the biological parent, Saleem the adoptive). At the start of the novel another Aadam, Saleem’s grandfather, had suffered a fall from grace in the idyllic garden state of Kashmir. The mythic logic of the narrative suggests that this second Aadam embodies the hope for future redemption and regeneration; of a new and better start for the children of independent India. ‘We, the children of Independence’, notes Saleem in the penultimate episode:

...rushed wildly and too fast into our future; he [Aadam], Emergency-born, will be is already, more cautious, biding his time; but when he acts, he will be impossible to resist. Already, he is stronger, harder, more resolute than I (MC 410).

The function of the first generation of Midnight’s Children, Saleem thus realises, was to be destroyed, but out of its destruction, the hope for a better future springs. Midnight’s Children, in this sense, can be seen as an attempt to provide a mythologisation of post-Independence India not dissimilar to the mythologisation of postwar Europe provided by T S. Eliot in The Waste Land; a poem in which, broadly speaking, a realisation of the barrenness of hope for the present generation gives way to the possibility of future regeneration. Like Eliot’s ‘hooded man’, Saleem might be construed as a modern Indian Fisher King — a figure who has received a sexual wound (his castration) that has rendered him incapable of regenerating his lands. Unlike the Fisher King of The Waste Land, however, it is clear that Saleem (and indeed Saleem’s successors) will never manage to forge a new totality out of the multitudinous fragments that constitute his history and the history of the nation. At the start of the novel Saleem may believe that he can assemble the confused mass of stories ‘jostling and shoving’ inside of him into a narrative that has ‘meaning’. By the novel’s conclusion, however, it has become apparent that the fragments cannot be assembled into a meaningful whole, and that Saleem, like Lifafa Das, will end up defeated by the ‘hyperbolic formula.’.

In one sense, this means that Midnight’s Children is much less hopeful than The Waste Land: Saleem will never become the ‘saviour’ of the nation by shoring fragments up against his ruin to make some sense of ‘the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history’. In another sense, however, Saleem’s failure, whilst a tragedy for him, represents, for Rushdie, a successful overstepping of the Eliotian nostalgia for totality, and the tyrant’s need to impose form and order upon that which has no inherent order. Whilst Saleem is unsuccessful in his attempt to provide a form both for his life and for the life of post-Independence India, therefore, Midnight’s Children itself presents the possibility of narrating the nation in all its complexity, without the need to ‘beautify’; to eliminate
variety, difference, perplexity in the interests of a totalising vision. It is for this reason that Rushdie argues that, though ‘the story of Saleem does indeed lead him to despair’, the novel itself is not a despairing one.

Rushdie’s concern, in *Midnight’s Children*, to fictionalise an experience of recent Indian history suggests that his novel might potentially be considered as a form of historical fiction. Certainly, *Midnight’s Children* has elements in it that identify it as a historical text. It brings within its compass a selection of the major events in modern Indian history, including the Amritsar massacre (1919), the ‘Quit India’ resolution (1942), Indian Independence and partition (1947), the Bombay language marches (1956), the Indo-Chinese war (1962), the death of Nehru (1964), the brief Prime Ministership of Lai Bahadur Shastri (1964-65), the Indo-Pakistani wars of 1965 and 1971, the first Prime Ministership of Indira Gandhi (1966-77), Indira Gandhi’s ‘emergency’ suspension of normal democratic processes (1975-77), and the defeat of Indira Gandhi’s Congress Party by the newly formed Janata Morcha party in 1977.

Perhaps more importantly, *Midnight’s Children* is a novel that is preoccupied at the level of ideas by history and historicity, by the ways in which history is recorded, by the techniques with which a period is conjured and contained (or not contained), and by the ways in which the individual ‘historiographer’ understands his relationship with his material. In all these respects *Midnight’s Children* seems to conform to the broad definition of the historical novel offered by Avrom Fleishman in his influential study of the genre *The English Historical Novel: Walter Scott to Virginia Woolf*. ‘What makes a historical novel historical’, according to Fleishman, ‘is the active presence of a concept of history as a shaping force’, and *Midnight’s Children* reflects an awareness throughout that individual lives and national experiences are the products of material processes, and, as such, are shaped by history.

Harry Shaw’s contention in *The Forms of Historical Fiction* that historical novels foreground history by representing historical milieux with a significant degree of probability also seems to allow for a definition of *Midnight’s Children* as a historical fiction, since Rushdie’s novel not only foregrounds a sense of history but gives its locations (Bombay, Kashmir, Delhi, for instance) sufficient probability to allow readers to believe that historically real times and places are being described. Of course it may be objected that the probability of Rushdie’s locations is compromised by his simultaneous use of fabulism, anachronism and historical error. Importantly, however, Shaw also insists that the criterion of probability does not mean straightforward fidelity to the external world that a work represents, but can also depend upon how consistently a work follows its own rules and patterns. *Midnight’s Children* may incorporate purposeful mistakes of historical facts, but it does so in order to vera-ciously represent how
an individual might have understood and misunderstood a viable historical moment. Likewise, *Midnight’s Children* may incorporate elements of fantasy, but the fantasy is always designed to make comment upon historically real situations, periods or places. In these senses *Midnight’s Children* remains historical because it is consistent to the criteria of historical veracity that it sets up within itself.

Andrew Tererson thinks that Rushdie’s novel *Midnight Children* bears a comparison with Sir Walter Scott’s historical novels. He writes,

> The identification of *Midnight’s Children* as a historical narrative is, to some extent, supported by parallels between Rushdie’s novel and established works of historical fiction such as Walter Scott’s genre-defining historical novel *Waverley* (1814). Not only does Scott, like Rushdie, make free use of fantasy and wilful anachronism, there are also revealing structural similarities between the two fictions. Both are, to borrow Rushdie’s own phrase, books about one person’s passage through history, both use a youthful and unreliable protagonist to gain a unique perspective on historical events and both are *Bildung-roman* or ‘coming of age’ novels, in which historical material is transformed into biography, or in which biography is used in an attempt to control and order history. In both cases, moreover, the novels set out to thematise the relationship between the individual hero and the broader national and collective experiences through which he lives; a quality that, for a number of commentators, is at the very core of the definition of the historical novel (Teverson 127).

The similarity between the two writers, strikingly, extends not just to structural and formal definitions of the novel but also to subject matter and political significance. Sir Walter Scott, in his day, was, like Rushdie, exploring periods of cultural transition that resulted from colonial (particularly English colonial) activities. Scott’s *Waverley*, notably, concerns the shifting power relations between Jacobite supporters of the Stuart line and the forces of modernity represented by the English Hanoverians, in his later novel *Ivanhoe* (1819), likewise, Scott makes dramatic capital out of the clash between indigenous Saxon culture in medieval England and the culture of the occupying Normans. Rushdie’s fiction, comparably, locates itself in the period of transition between the colonial occupation of India by the British and India’s and Pakistan’s emergence as post-colonial states. Different though the periods that Scott and Rushdie treat inevitably are, and different though the kinds of political negotiations involved must be, both writers are interested in how competing.
Rushdie’s is a postcolonial novelist.

Postcolonialism:

Postcolonialism is the critical analysis of the history, culture, literature, and modes of discourse that are specific to the former colonies of England, Spain, France, and other European imperial powers. These studies have focused especially on the Third World countries in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean islands, and South America. Some scholars, however, extend the scope of such analysis to the discourse and cultural productions of countries such as Australia, Canada, and New Zealand, which achieved independence much earlier than the Third World countries. Postcolonial studies sometimes also encompass aspects of British literature in the 18th and 19th centuries, viewed through a perspective that reveals the ways in which the social and economic life represented in that literature was tacitly underwritten by colonial exploitation.

Once the term and discipline of Commonwealth Literature, - a study related to the analysis of life of the former British colonies – India, Pakistan and others and that of Canada, Australia and New Zealand. These countries though independent, had a tie with the Government of Britain, and hence, the Commonwealth Studies. This was a paper for Master degree in most of the countries cited above. Indian English students had this invariable paper. In fact, much research has been done in this regard. Pioneers like William Walsh, C.D. Narasimiah, annaiah Goda, M.K. Naik, Shiv K. Kumar, P. Lal, R.K. Dhawan, Basavaraj Naikar and others have been specialized in Commonwealth literature.

Perhaps the term ‘Commonwealth Literature’ seemed inadequate for the study of the newly-founded or freed nations. Because, it was not only the British who had colonized lower countries, but also the French and Spanish. The French ruled several regions including Pondicherry in India. The Spanish ruled the entire stretch of South America calling it Latin America. Even Italy, Germany, Belgium and the Netherlands ruled. As well as the Portuguese ruled. Goa in India was under their utmost control. The Europeans Imperialism was too powerful, having colonized South America, Africa, Asia and the Pacific. America colonized several countries. The academic studies of the newly-freed and found nations came to be called as Postcolonial studies.

The tussle between the West and the East is time immemorial. The West is described as Euro-centric, Christian while, the East is described as Asianic non-Christian brown /black, and backward. The conflict between the occidental and the oriental is quite old. Great western philosophers-thinkers from Socrates – Plato – Aristotle triad to the modern Marx, and Freud has believed that the East is inferior.

The term ‘orientalism’ is now sometimes applied to cultural imperialism by means of the control of discourse not only in the orient but anywhere in the world.

Since the 1980s, such analysis has been supplemented by other theoretical principles and procedures, including Althusser’s redefinition of the Marxist theory of ideology and the deconstructive theory of Derrida.

M. H. Abrams and G.G. Hurpham provide the following issues of Postcolonial Studies:

1. The rejection of the “master narrative” of Western imperialism—in which the colonial “other” is not only subordinated and marginalized but in effect deleted as a cultural agency.

2. An abiding concern with the construction, within Western discursive practices, of the colonial and postcolonial “subject,” as well as of the categories by means of which this subject conceives itself and perceives the world within which it lives and acts.

3. A major element in the postcolonial agenda is to disestablish Eurocentric norms of literary and artistic values and to expand the literary canon to include colonial and postcolonial writers. (Abrams 306)

The postcolonial studies cover such concepts as hybridity, subaltern, imperialism as a timeless concept, identity crisis, culture, feminism, deconstruction, diaspora, and the like.

Postcolonial studies include a scholarly body of researches made in the West as well as in the East.
Work-cited:


