



Historicity in Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's children*

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Abstract:

Salman Rushdie established himself as a representative writer of postcolonial literature with his second novel, *Midnight's Children*, the best Booker Prize winner of all time. As with historical fiction, the work is set in the background of genuine historical events. The novel is generally interpreted via the lens of postcolonialism or postmodernism by most critics. Meanwhile, New Historicism offers a fresh perspective on this fabrication. As a result, the purpose of this article is to use the philosophy of New Historicism to show the relationship between national history and personal experience in *Midnight's Children*, which will be done in two sections. The first section examines the book's Historicity, while the second section looks at the book's Textuality of History.

Keywords: New Historicism, *Midnight's Children*, Salman Rushdie

Introduction

New Historicism is a theoretical and critical approach to literature as well as sociological theory. Stephen Greenblatt, a Harvard English professor who is also considered as a significant pioneer of New Historicism, invented the term. The theory emerged in the 1980s and grew in popularity in the 1990s. New Historicism, in opposition to traditional Historicism and Formalism, strives to reinstate the concept of history into literary studies by focusing on the historical context of literary works. It tries to understand literary works by looking at their cultural background and intellectual history by looking at literature. New Historicism values how the work is influenced by the time in which the author wrote it and how the work changes people's interpretation of history, as Louis A. Montrose argues in *Professing the Renaissance: The Poetics and Politics of Culture*: "New Historicism is new in its refusal of distinctions between 'literature' and 'history,' between 'text' and 'context,'" New Historicism values how the work is influenced by the time in which the author wrote. The major work of New Historicists is to interpret the work via its historical context and to examine intellectual and cultural history through literature. This presentation will attempt to evaluate *Midnight's Children*, a masterpiece by Indian-English writer Salman Rushdie, using the New Historicist technique of studying the historicity of literature and the textuality of history.

The Historicity of Text

New historicists think that historical materials like history books, novels, literary works, documents, and folklore are influenced by the time period in which they were written. As a result, a literary work should be viewed as a product of the time, location, and historical context in which it was written. Furthermore, historical events are interpreted by writers based on their personal experiences and perspectives during the writing process. As a result, it's important to look into the psychological backgrounds of writers, as well as the social realm and the books and theories that may have inspired them.

Birth

Salman Rushdie is a British Indian novelist and essayist who was born on June 19, 1947, the year India gained independence from the United Kingdom. India's independence from the British Empire was celebrated on August 15, 1947, almost precisely three months after Rushdie's birth, and is



considered the most momentous occasion in Indian history. This coincidence may have provided Rushdie with ideas and inspiration for *Midnight's Children*, as the narrator, who is also the novel's main protagonist, was born at the stroke of midnight on August 15, "at the precise time of India's arrival at independence." There are a thousand more children that were born on the same night as Saleem. They are known as the midnight children, and they are inextricably linked to one another as well as the nation's fate. The newly independent country, like a newly born life, had to face numerous hardships. One of the most important issues is that, as colonial authority in South Asia came to an end, the peninsula was partitioned into two independent dominions — India and Pakistan — and granted to two sovereign governments, generally based on district-by-district Hindu or Muslim majorities. Before the Partition, there were clashes between Muslims and Hindus, such as the one on August 19, which left 3000 people dead, and the street rioting between Muslims and Hindus in Bombay on September 4, 1946. As a result, the time immediately following independence was tumultuous. Following Partition, there have been political and social tensions between Hindus and Muslims, with two wars over Kashmir and one for the establishment of an independent Bangladesh. All of these incidents were detailed in the novel and had significant consequences for the plot. Other significant historical events occurred in 1947, including a fight between Hindus and Muslims in Punjab, the Indo-Pakistani War of 1947, and massacres and migrations in Punjab. As a result, the historical context had a significant impact on the writing of *Midnight's Children*. Because it is set in the background of genuine historical events, *Midnight's Children* is classified as historical fiction. Rushdie was born in 1947, a pivotal year in world history. He was born during a period of change and transformation in his country, which strongly influenced his philosophy and view of history. Some argue that Rushdie's work *Midnight's Children* is an autobiography because he wrote in the novel, "I had been inexplicably tethered to history, my destinies indissolubly linked to those of my country." Rushdie was born in Bombay, then British India, and now Mumbai; most of his fiction, especially *Midnight's Children*, is set on the Indian subcontinent. This novel is considered a work of postcolonial literature since it deals with India's transition from British colonialism to independence.

Family Background

Rushdie, like the protagonist and narrator of the story, Saleem Sinai, was born into an affluent Kashmiri family as the family's only son. Rushdie's father is a rich businessman who graduated from Cambridge University, ensuring Salman the greatest education possible. He had a joyful childhood and was often surrounded by literature. When he was five years old, he decided he wanted to be a writer and was sent to Rugby, an elite school in England, to pursue his dream. Later, he obtained his master's degree in history from King's College, University of Cambridge. Rushdie grew interested in and sensitive to history as a result of his scholastic background. Salman Rushdie's novels, such as *Midnight Children* and *Shame*, generally centered on historical outrages. Rushdie, like the protagonist Saleem and his family in the novel, graduated from the University of Cambridge in 1968 and lived with his family, who had moved to Pakistan in 1964 after the Partition. Pakistan, formally the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, was established in 1947 as an independent state for Muslims in India. Because Rushdie was born into a Muslim household, he and his family should return to Muslim Pakistan, where Hindu-Muslim riots occur on both the western and eastern borders. Because Saleem was moved at birth, it was revealed that his parents were not his biological parents, according



to the novel. Saleem was transferred to his uncle in Parkistan by his father, who was furious, and when war broke out between India and Pakistan, they all moved to Parkistan. After his father, Ahmed Sinai, suffered a heart attack four years later, they returned to Bombay, where the Sino-Indian War erupted. They left Bombay after the war and returned to Parkistan in Karachi. Rushdie spent his early years travelling between his hometown and England, which explains his continuous shifts of location and time. Rushdie returned to England and worked for an advertising agency as a copywriter. This time at the agency prompted him to write *Midnights Children*, which propelled him to literary prominence. Rushdie's grandparents were born and bred in Kashmir, hence he comes from a Kashmiri background. He grew up in the neighborhood and has spent many summers there. As a result, he is acutely aware of his Kashmiri diaspora, or people who have migrated out of Kashmir and their descendants. *Shalimar the Clown*, his 2005 novel, is set mostly in Kashmir, with the goal of raising global awareness of this lost paradise being torn apart by the military might of two warring states. Rushdie expressed significant anxiety for his ancestral home in *Midnights Children*. "There is the future to think of," he writes in the novel, "there is no doubt that he treasures this place." The honeymoon is scheduled to take place in Kashmir." "I began to have recurring dreams about Kashmir. "I floated in shikaras and climbed Sankara Acharya's hill like my grandfather did; I saw lotus-roots and mountains like angry jaws," Rushdie said about Kashmir. In Kashmir, he fantasized about a tranquil life and peaceful coexistence between Hindus and Muslims. He thought it was his duty to present his hometown Kashmir to the rest of the world, as well as to explain the story of Kashmir's history and hardships. "Kashmiris are distinct," the boatman Tai once said. Cowards, for example. If you put a gun in the hands of a Kashmiri, it will have to go off on its own since he will never dare to pull the trigger. We're not like the Indians, who are continually fighting.' In both India and Pakistan, Kashmir signifies a long-lost peace. Kashmiris are opposed to war because they desire a peaceful existence. They were all, however, victims of war. There are still disputes in this area today. In *Midnights Children*, Rushdie expresses his disdain for conflicts and wars by contrasting Kashmir before and after the war.

Religious beliefs

Rushdie was born into a liberal Muslim household, and in a 1989 interview, he stated that "Muslim culture affected me more than any other." He was, however, schooled in England, which is known for providing the best Western education. He saw himself as a lapsed Muslim, in a way, because of the connectivity and interdependence of his family and educational backgrounds, as well as the melding of Muslim and British Christian cultures "My viewpoint is that of a nonreligious human being. Whether Christian, Jewish, Muslim, or Hindu, I do not believe in supernatural creatures." And now, like the boatman Tai in the novel, he referred to himself as a "hardline atheist." "I saw that Isa, that Christ, when he arrived to Kashmir," Tai claims. I'm saving your past in my head, so grin, smile. It was once written down in long-lost books. He is a witness of history, from early times when Kashmir was a place of purity to its colonial current. Tai, while being a Muslim, is aware of the presence of other religions and cultures. This is what Rushdie saw and felt in his life, and it is represented in his novel *Midnight Children*. "Soon the English sahibs would arrive, chattering and pointed and stooping, and Tai would take them to the Shalimar Gardens and the King's Spring." The mysterious boatman Tai transports Westerners/colonizers to local India/colonies, just as Salman transports Indian subcontinent culture, religion, and philosophy to the West/world through his novel



Midnights Children. The mixing of one's family and educational backgrounds has a significant impact on one's identity, culture, and religion. Rushdie is an Indian-born British writer who comes from a Muslim family, but the protagonist's grandpa, Aziz, is an Indian-born doctor with a German education. After returning from Germany, Aziz accidentally hurt his nose while praying, and "he resolved never to kiss the earth for any god or man ever again." This decision, however, "left a hole in him, a void in a critical inner chamber, vulnerable to women and history." The hole represents the loss of identity and culture, as well as the blurring and dissolving of religion. Rushdie, who went from being a liberal Muslim to an atheist, feels the same way. Salman Rushdie, an author who resides in Bombay, Karachi, London, and New York, demonstrates a composite personality in his work.

The Textuality of History

Midnights personal experiences of the protagonists are intimately linked to Indian and Pakistan national history. It is presented as historic fiction in the backdrop of real historical events. The protagonist represents the Indian nation, since they were both born at the same time, and in his work the writer made it extremely apparent. Something happens in India every time, his nose feels it and he's not comfortable. He experiences not just historical events, but also participates in them. For example, he helps his uncle General Zulfikar in the revolt against the Pakistani government that turned General Ayub Khan as Pakistan's second President. The Indo-Pakistan War of 1947, the Indo-Pakistan War of 1965, the Indo-Pakistan War of 1971, the Sino-Indian War of 1962 have all been historical occurrences. Rushdie portrayed these events and judged by expressing the views of characters. For example Rushdie opposed the Sino-Indian War and felt it wasn't a good moment for war since people still suffer. As a new-born nation, India has a long way to go before prosperity is achieved. However, the President was quite enthusiastic about the war at the time, as Rushdie wrote "The optimistic illness" "War optimism has grown like fat" He also claimed that "this nation is over. Bankrupt. Funtoosh." In addition, almost all the members in Saleem's family may be viewed as historical incarnations. Grandfather Aadam Aziz of Saleem has a large nose. Because of the nose, he is extremely sensitive to historical occurrences. Aadam Sinai, Saleem's son, born during the time of the emergency, which is also a very significant day in the history of India, is a further Saleem Sinai with a history that continues in history. As Riemenschneider argues, "There is practically nothing in Rushdie's work that is not given both an individual and a historical significance." Therefore human experience and existence are intimately connected to history, and they are the incarnations of history. As for the grandfather of Saleem, Aadam Aziz, he may also be seen as an incarnation of history. First and foremost, he has a highly unusual nose that can feel history. He is in Amritsar when the Jallianwallah Bagh massacre takes place on 13 April 1919. He not only witnesses it, he experiences it and even feels it. On that day, while he's on the street, he knows something awful will happen since he feels "extremely afraid, his nose is kidding more than before." We may argue that he is the precise incarnation of this public event because he can feel all the details of it. "Aziz enters the center of the throng as Brigadier R. E. Dyer reaches the entrance of the alley, then fifty crack soldiers.... As the 51 men march down the street, a tickling replaces the itch in the nostrils of my grandpa. Each action reflects on him and every little alteration in his physique suggests the stages of the occurrence. The fifty-one guys "enter the complex and take places... the tickles go up to unsustainable intensity." As the incident deepens, Aadam reacts harder. In



conclusion, "the sneeze strikes my grandpa in full face...when Brigadier Dyer commands it." Aziz "snows and falls, loses his equilibrium, follows his nose and thus saves his life." That reflects what Tai previously remarked to him, "A nose like that is a wonderful gift... little fool. I say: trust it. Trust it. When you're warned, watch out or you're going to be over. Follow your nose and you're going to go far." However, Saleem himself has not only some sort of connection with the history of India and represents significant events in India, but his family is intimately linked to it. Nearly all the members of his family embody various types of historical occurrences. Aadam Aziz was Naseem Ghani's doctor for a long time, yet he never saw her, he never saw her face. Naseem's dad does not let Aadam do it, since her daughter is a respectable and unmarried lady. So Dr. Aadam is allowed to examine Naseem in a "perforated sheet." As Naseem never stops being sick and travels about her body every time, the "perforated sheet" allows Aadam to very well know her body. There is, however, one exception. He never has an opportunity to view her face since she never gets sick in her head or face. But when it is 11 November 1918, "Naseem got longed-for headache on the day the World War ended." So they eventually meet one other and Saleem's kid, Aadam Sinai, for the first time, may be regarded as a further incarnation of history. "Though Parvati pushed into a ghetto, the police and the Army were called upon by J.P. Narayan and Morarji Desai to defy the unlawful commands of the disqualified Prime Minister, so they forced Ms. Gandhi to push" Even when Aadam is heading towards the globe, he's connected with historic events. Aadam's birth seems to be the birth of a historic event. As he gradually comes out of his mother's body, the event continues on step by step. "(Aadam's) head is out, three-fold screamed as the Central Reserve Police detained Janata Morcha's heads, including Morarji Desai's impossibly old and nearly mythical figures, and J.P. Narayan's." And eventually, Aadam comes up, it's the period when "police arrested individuals all across India... When the three contortionists had cleansed the baby and wrapped it in an old sari at the same time, they carried it out to their father. For the first time, the term emergency was heard." This is no coincidence. Rushdie does this intentionally. He tries to connect personal experience and historical occurrences and he even changes history in order to suit his own existence. This is an act that "creates personal meaning from history, giving importance to historical events in connection to itself as a person." Saleem recounts the birth of his son almost as he describes the birth of his son. "I was born in Bombay City... once in a while. No, that's not going to do, there's no getting away from the date: I was born at the nursing home of Doctor Narlikar on 15th August 1947. And time? And time? Time is important, too. So then: at midnight. No, it's more essential to be... On the midnight stroke, really. Clockhands linked palms as I approached to meet them with reverence. Oh, spell it out, spell it out: I fell into the world at the same moment India became independent." He uses nearly the same phrases and sentences when describing the birth of his kid. "He was born... once upon a time in Old Delhi. No, that's not going to do, the date doesn't go away: On 25 June 1975, Aadam Sinai arrived in a night-shadowed slum. And time? And time? Time is important, too. As I mentioned, in the evening. No, it's more essential to be... On the midnight stroke, really. Palms linked by clockhands. Oh, spell it out, just spell it out: he appeared at the exact moment of India's entrance in emergency." By the same words and phrases that describe the birth of both characters, Rushdie highlights the similarities between Saleem Sinai and Aadam Sinai. Not only have they been born important, but also "mysteriously shackled to history," and their "destinies bound indissolubly to" their nation. To some degree, Aadam Sinai performs the same function as Saleem Sinai. He will also be the incarnation of



the country. The parallels of Aadam suggest that Saleem is continuing with his family, even continuing the history of India, exactly as Saleem says: "Just the same thing that my period of connection was approaching its conclusion, it started." However, Aadam Sinai is not his father's identical copy. At the same time, there are distinctions between them. At the time of the birth of Saleem, "outside the window are fireworks and people;" when his son was born, "they were silent and afraid all across the nation." Because they belong to various generations, throughout the history of India they have diverse roles. Saleem was born when India became independence and the British control was removed. "India and the generation of Indians who grew up in the new country called India have their own identity crises." The colonialism is gone and people are the ruler of their own country in India. It is thus a fresh beginning for everyone and for the country, a period full of hope and future. People have dreams and also love their dreams. It seems utopian and impractical, though. After colonialism, things change, so do people in India. "We, children of Independence, have raced into our future too quickly and recklessly." While Aadam is "born amid an emergency," he is "already careful, bidding his time" Although he will be unable to withstand his actions, Saleem still recognizes his son's optimism. "He's already stronger, tougher, more firm than me: his eyes behind their lids are still while he sleeps. As far as I can tell, Aadam Sinai, child of the knees and nose, does not give up to dreams." Time changes, generations change, and the tasks of history change. We need to symbolize or embody the country via various people. And Saleem and Aadam are the incarnation of the country at various periods. All of them are intimately connected to human experiences and historical events and to personal experiences. Moreover, human experiences may occasionally influence history and evolve in a manner that shapes history, as the book indicates. The connection between personal experiences and history is thus extremely complex and dynamic and may affect one another.

Conclusion

Midnights Children's interpretation by examining the history of the text by investigating the period of the author's birth, the family background, the educational background and religion and analyzing the texts of the history by concentrating on historical events. The Muslim and pluralistic identity of Rushdie strongly influences Midnights children's literature. Personal experience and historical events are intimately interrelated in a such that historical events have an effect on the personal experience of the writer and on the personal experience of the characters in the book.

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