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POSTMODERN ELEMENTS IN SALMAN RUSHDIE'S "MIDNIGHT'S CHILDREN"

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ABSTRACT

This article attempts to analyze the elements of post modernism with reference to Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*. In the 1970s in Architecture the term post modernism was used. Jean Francois Lytard brought fame to it by adding 'incredulity towards metanarratives' either specialized or fragmented without a united voice. It also refers to metadiscourse like 'the dialectics of spirit' 'the hermeneutics of meaning' and 'the shared rationality' of minds. It is radically eclectic in which he treats a past and acquires old functionless things. Undoubtedly, it adds the antiquity and the great monuments of the past for small present purposes.

According to Jean Baudrillard the 'traditionally valued qualities of depth, coherence, meaning, originality and authenticity' are evacuated and are filled by the 'random swirl of empty signals', the culture of 'fragmentary sensations, eclectic nostalgia, disposable simulacra and promiscuous superficiality'. Though post modernism can be considered as a continuation of modernism, it aims to bring out the 'alienated mood' and 'disorienting techniques'. In literature the post modernist writer incorporates absurd or meaningless ways of contemporary existence. It also favors consciously 'depthless works of fables, pastiche or aleatory disconnection' (Baldick, Chris, 266). It tries to interrupt the dispersed intellectual centre, the quick supersession of the day to day life and the vast inclusion of the electronic images. Here the language of deconstruction, relativism, pluralism and existentialism are used to some extent.

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INTRODUCTION

In the postmodern literary tradition the universal truth is replaced by the historical notions of identity. It dismantles the concept of absolute truth. The parodic genre of *Midnight's Children* unmasks the dead conventions by narcissistic narration. It also challenges by mirroring the narratorial awareness that invites the reader to participate in stripping conventions and traditions. Salman Rushdie writes about new theories of history as the individual's sole tie to history. The new way of looking at older historical forms makes *Midnight's Children* a significant narrative.

Ultimately Saleem Sinai, the narrator becomes the narcissistic narrator inviting the reader to participate in creating and discovering an alternative historical tradition of historical truth. The process of recalling produces individual history. It also overlaps some of the aspects of recorded history. Rushdie successfully employs this narrative as the 'textual self awareness' (Hutcheon) which pervades the metafiction. It includes the commentary on its own narrative or linguistic identity. The author is unmindful of the conventional ideas of history. He writes about the multiplicity of histories and chutinified mixture of memory and recorded fact. In the opening lines of novel, Saleem Sinai, the narrator of *Midnight's Children*, narrates by explaining that he was born on midnight, August 15, 1947, at the exact moment India gained its independence from British rule. Now nearing his thirty-first birthday, Rushdie uses Saleem to implore the reader that his body is beginning to crack and fall apart. Fearing that his death is imminent, he grows anxious to tell his life story. He was born at the time of Indian independence. He is also destined to die. He would break into many pieces as there are innumerable citizens. He represents the entire India within his individual self. This is the main fundamental concern of the novel. It embodies the diverse and multitudinous complex country like India within the self of Saleem. Padma, his loyal and loving companion, serves as his patient, often skeptical audience.

Postmodern Elements in Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*

The novelist creates Saleem's story beginning in Kashmir, thirty-two years before his birth, in 1915. His grandfather, a doctor named Aadam Aziz, begins treating Naseem, the woman who becomes Saleem's grandmother. The known devil is better than an angel. It comes true. For the first three years Aadam Aziz treats her, Naseem is always covered by a sheet with a small hole in it that is moved to expose the part of her that is sick. Aadam Aziz sees his future wife's face for the first time on the same day when World War I ends, in 1918. Aadam Aziz and Naseem marry, and the couple moves to Agra, where Aadam—the doctor whose loss of religious faith has affected him deeply. The birth of the nation, the end of the World War I and the loss of faith in one's own religion are the highlights of historical events coinciding with the birth of season, the marriage of the grand father and his religious belief. Aadam and Naseem have three daughters, Alia, Mumtaz, and Emerald, and two sons, Mustapha and Hanif. Aadam becomes a follower of the optimistic activist Mian Abdullah, whose anti-Partition stance eventually leads to his assassination. There are the faithful Muslims like Mian Abdullah and Nadirkhan who were against India's partition. But they are nipped in the bud. Following Abdullah's death, Aadam hides Abdullah's frightened assistant, Nadir Khan, despite his wife's opposition. While living in the basement, Nadir Khan falls in love with Mumtaz, and the two are secretly married. After two years of marriage, Aadam finds out that his daughter is still a virgin. Nadir could not have marital relations with Mumtaz. Nadir Khan left the place running for his life; Mumtaz's sister, Emerald, tells Major Zulfikar—an officer in the Pakistani army, about the hiding place of Nadir Khan in the house. Within the family there is the betrayer and the betrayed. This reminds the fact that united we stand, divided we fall. Mumtaz marries Major Zulfikar only to be deserted. Again abandoned by her husband, Mumtaz agrees to marry Ahmed Sinai, a young merchant who until then had been courting her sister, Alia. Saleem re-imagines his past to compile a new reality from fragments of memory. The dynamic relationship between his self and the collective life of the nation suggests that the private and public episodes influence one another. The influencing factors of the nation on the individual are known as ironic pastiches or unknown incidents going above the head causing other troubles. Sometimes he is affected directly or laughs at them or never bothers to take notice of such events. The ironical treatment is ignoble in the post modern world. Even after again the major. Saleem is self is disintegrating into millions. The wreckage of the self goads him to quicken the narration.

Mumtaz changes her name to Amina and moves to Delhi with her new husband. Pregnant, she goes to a fortune-teller who delivers a prophecy about her unborn son, declaring that the boy will never be older or younger than his country and claiming that he sees two heads, knees and a nose. Just the terrorist organization burns down Ahmed's factory, Ahmed and Amina move to Bombay. They buy a house from a departing Englishman, William Methwold, who owns an estate at the top of a hill. There Wee Willie Winky, a poor man who entertains the families of Methwold's Estate, says that his wife, Vanita, is also expecting a child soon. Without the knowledge of Wee Willie Winky, Vanita had an affair with William Methwold, and he is the true father of her unborn child. Amina Mumtaz and Vanita both go into labor, and, at exactly midnight, each woman delivers a son. Meanwhile, a midwife at the nursing home, Mary Pereira, is preoccupied with thoughts of her radical socialist lover, Joseph D'Costa. Wanting to make him proud, she switches the nametags of the two newborn babies, thereby giving the poor baby Shiva a life of privilege and the rich baby Saleem, a life of poverty. The secret moves, the hiding episodes, the burning of the house by terrorists, Vanita's secret affair with the English man without the knowledge of the husband, and the exchange of the rich to be the poor and the poor to be the rich—all these are highly ridiculous in the post modern world. Such events are inevitable: prophecies and attacks by terrorists are very common. Driven by a sense of guilt the nurse becomes an ayah, or nanny, to Saleem. Throughout the novel, changing the names, changing the places, beliefs in prophecies, attacks of the terrorists, the departure of the English men, the prevailing immoral activities, the changes of the life style and the partition of India and Pakistan all these fill in the life of the Saleem and the nation. These bring out the dis integration and collapse of the both the individual and the country. As a child, Saleem watches the rebels who attempts to divide the city of Bombay on linguistic basis. This is to categorize and cordon off the growth and multiplicity.

Both the children are born at the exact moment India gains its independence, the press heralds Saleem's birth as hugely significant. Young Saleem has an enormous cucumber like nose and blue eyes like those of his grandfather, Aadam Aziz. His mischievous sister, nicknamed the Brass Monkey, is born a few years later. Parvathi, the witch, Picture Singh, Aunt Pia and the Brass Money Sister are names to the laughed at. Overwhelmed by the expectations laid on him by the prophecy, and ridiculed by other children for his huge nose, Saleem takes to hiding in a washing chest. While hiding one day, he sees his mother sitting down on the toilet; when Amina discovers him, she punishes Saleem to one day of silence. Unable to speak, he hears, for the first time, a babble of voices in his head. He realizes he has the power of telepathy and can enter anyone's thoughts. Eventually, Saleem begins to hear the thoughts of other children born during the first hour of independence. The 1,001 midnight's children are reduced to 581 by their tenth birthday—all have magical powers, which vary according to how close to midnight they were born. Saleem discovers that Shiva, the boy with whom he was switched at birth, was born with a pair of enormous, powerful knees and a gift for combat. The novelist shows the history has many meanings. History is individualized and history's meaning is determined by the present. Here the story proves that the history of their lives is not logical, it is not scientific or objective, but it has meaning.

One day, Saleem loses a portion of his finger in an accident and is rushed to the hospital, where his parents learn that according to Saleem's blood type, he couldn't possibly be their biological son. After he leaves the hospital, Saleem is sent to live with his Uncle Hanif and Aunt Pia for a while. Shortly after Saleem returns home to his parents, Hanif commits suicide. While the family mourns Hanif's death, Mary confesses to having switched Saleem and Shiva at birth. Rushdie focuses his narration on his memory throughout the novel. He deposits a multiplicity of histories that are comprised of a mixture of ur-history and memory. Ahmed, the husband of Mumtaz or Amina—now an alcoholic—grows violent with her, prompting her to take Saleem and the Brass Monkey to Pakistan where she moves in with Emerald another sister. In Pakistan by this time, Saleem watches as Emerald's husband, General Zulfikar, stages a coup against the Pakistani government and ushers in a period of martial law. History necessarily lacks objectivity and thus embraces subjectivity. Here is the military coup, so that the people are under control. The uncontrolled turn out to be terrorists. Subjective facts are ambiguous. The novelist attacks the idea of the existence of objective facts. History is ambiguous

because reality is ambiguous. The search for a single unified historical truth is unreliable; Saleem's narration is also unreliable; he himself acknowledges them at several instances.

Four years later, after Ahmed suffers a heart failure, Amina and the children move back to Bombay. India goes to war with China, while Saleem's perpetually congested nose undergoes a medical operation. As a result, he loses his telepathic powers but, in return, gains an incredible sense of smell, with which he can detect emotions. Again these facts are highly ridiculous and incredible. Saleem's entire family moves to Pakistan after India's military loss to China. His younger sister, now known as Jamila Singer, becomes the most famous singer in Pakistan. Already on the brink of ruin, Saleem's entire family—save Jamila and himself—dies in the span of a single day during the war between India and Pakistan. During the air raids, Saleem gets hit in the head by his grandfather's silver spittoon, which erases his memory entirely.

No memory, now Saleem is reduced to an animalistic state. He finds himself conscripted into military service, as his keen sense of smell makes him an excellent tracker. Though he doesn't know exactly how he came to join the army, he suspects that Jamila sent him there as a punishment for having fallen in love with her. While in the army, Saleem helps to bring about the independence movement in Bangladesh. After witnessing a number of atrocities, however, he flees into the jungle with three of his fellow soldiers. In the jungle of the Sundarbans, he regains all of his memory except the knowledge of his name. After leaving the jungle, Saleem finds Parvati-the-witch, one of midnight's children, who reminds him of his name and helps him escape back to India. He lives with her in the magician's ghetto, along with a snake charmer named Picture Singh. Saleem's rearrangement of history serves a greater truth as he creates a new pattern through which to interpret both his own history and that of India itself.

Saleem is disappointed that he could not marry Parvati. But Parvati-the-witch has an affair with Shiva, now a famous war hero. Things between Parvati and Shiva quickly turn down and she returns to the magicians' ghetto, pregnant and still unmarried. There, the ghetto residents shun Parvati until Saleem agrees to marry her. Meanwhile, Indira Gandhi, the prime minister of India, begins a sterilization campaign. Shortly after the birth of Parvati's son, the government destroys the magician's ghetto. Parvati dies while Shiva captures Saleem and brings him to a forced sterilization camp. There, Saleem divulges the names of the other midnight's children. One by one, the midnight's children are rounded up and sterilized, effectively destroying the powers which threaten the prime minister. Later, however, Indira Gandhi loses the first election she holds. Now India is fast growing country. If sterilized, the political stand is that the nation would become small. During the operation Saleem is one of the many who gets operated. He helps in getting all the mid-night children sterilized. He is not only caught but he also betrays or rather helps in building the nation with the authorities. he has betrayed his friends for the sake of the nation.

The midnight's children, including Saleem, are all set free. Saleem goes in search of Parvati's son, Aadam, who has been living with Picture Singh. The three take a trip to Bombay, so Picture Singh can challenge a man who claims to be the world's greatest snake charmer. While in Bombay, Saleem eats some chutney that tastes exactly like the ones his ayah, Mary, used to make. He finds the chutney factory that Mary now owns, at which Padma stands guarding the gate. With this meeting, Saleem's story comes to full circle. His historical account finally complete, Saleem decides to marry Padma, his steadfast lover and listener, on his thirty-first birthday, which falls on the thirty-first anniversary of India's independence. Saleem prophesies that he will die on that day, disintegrating into millions of specks of dust. In India many languages are practiced and recognized; many religions are practiced and followed. Many individuals facts are changed and marred; the disintegrated Saleem into millions crossing hundred crores. The individual's life and account are farcial and the nation's growth in the terms of sociological and political dimensions is highly ironical and ridiculous. The peace of nation is thus shattered by its mixture of huge communities, petty politics, divisions of nations, the minority and majority and dominant forces of the politicians with the help of forces, pushing power and money.

Saleem contains a multitude of experiences and sensitivities, stands in stark contrast to the protestors who demand their own language-based region, the strict monotheism of Pakistan, and Indira Gandhi's declaration of emergency or the craft of retaining power. Chauvinism, Parochialism, narrow-mindedness and selfishness, are the hallmarks of post modernism.

The *Midnight's Children's* Conference is, in its initial phase, a model for pluralism and a testimony to the potential power inherent within coexisting diversity, which is a natural and definitive element of Indian culture. In *Midnight's Children*, the desire for singularity or purity—whether of religion or culture—breeds not only intolerance but also violence and repression. These elements are the outcome of post modernism.

Factual errors and dubious claims are essential aspects of Saleem's fantastic narrative. He willfully acknowledges that he misplaced Gandhi's death, an obviously seminal moment in India's history, as well as willfully misremembers the date of an election. He frets over the accuracy of his story and worries about future errors. Saleem notes that memory creates its own truth, and so do narratives. The version of history Saleem offers comes filtered through his perspective, just as every other version of history comes filtered through some alternate perspective. The major incidents coincide with the minor ones; they cause disruption, valuelessness, and erroneous living. This kind of mixing is the result of post modernism.

The battle between Saleem and Shiva reflects the ancient, mythological battle between the creative and destructive forces in the world. The enmity and tension between the two begin at the moment of their simultaneous births. The reference to Shiva, the Hindu god of both destruction and procreation, reflects not only the tension between destruction and creation but also the inextricably bound nature of these two forces. Saleem, as the narrator of *Midnight's Children*, is responsible for creating the world. He represents Brahma, the god of creation. What Saleem creates, however, is not life, but a withered story. By delivering Saleem into the hands of the Widow, Shiva is responsible for the destruction of the midnight's children, and yet, by fathering Adam and hundreds of other children, he ensures the continuation of their legacy.

Beginning with the snake venom that saves Saleem's young life, snakes play an ambiguous and complicated role in the novel. Saleem often refers to his favorite childhood board game, Snakes and Ladders. In the game's simple formula of good and evil, Saleem learns an important lesson: for every up, there is a down, and for every down, there is an up. Missing from the board game, however, is the ambiguity between good and evil that he later detects as a natural part of life. Generally considered to represent evil, snakes are, in fact, much more complicated than that simple generalization might imply. While venom has the power to kill, it also has the ability to bring life, and it does so not once but twice in the novel. Snake venom represents the power of Shiva, who is both destroyer and procreator in the Hindu pantheon. In *Midnight's Children*, snakes are also associated with Picture Singh, Saleem's closest friend, whose career is both dependent upon and destroyed by snakes.

CONCLUSION

Throughout the novel, the past finds ways to mysteriously insinuate itself into the present, just as Saleem's personal compulsions and concerns find themselves inexplicably replicated in national, political events. Perhaps inspired by his own constantly running nose, Saleem uses the term *leaking* to describe this phenomenon. The lines separating past, present, and future—as well as the lines separating the personal and the political, the individual and the state—are incredibly porous. When Saleem begins having dreams about Kashmir, for example, the stirring images of his dreams seem to seep into the national consciousness, and India and Pakistan begin to battle over possession of the beautiful region. In *Midnight's Children*, the interplay between personal and public, past and present, remains fluid and dynamic, like leaking liquid.

Saleem claims that, much like his narrative, he is physically falling apart. His body is riddled with cracks, and, as a result, the past is spilling out of him. His story, spread out over sixty-three years, is a fragmented narrative, oscillating back and forth between past and present and frequently broken up further by Saleem's interjections.

Thus the major incidents and the personal slices of life are brought together as historical facts. Behind historical facts, powerful imagination is used to bring out the post modern features. Allegorical novel, it is a chronicle of modern India centering on the inextricably linked fates of the two children. The entire novel is based on the post modern elements.

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