



Identity and its Representation in Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*

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Abstract

Salman Rushdie is a cosmopolitan writer at home in the East and the West, and it is impossible to deny the influence of these two very divergent civilizations on his personality and work. But the matter remains that he is an outsider, which is more clearly understood by Rushdie's background. This problematic question of identity has

come up in many places in his novel, *Midnight's Children*. Rushdie has invariably stressed the positive and optimistic aspects of his cosmopolitan footing, enabling him to broaden and differentiate his worldview, intensify his awareness of Indian reality and how, from this stand, unfold and depict the social, historical, and political problems of his countries- India and Pakistan. Through this paper, I shall try to explore the human and the existential dilemmas of the individual from these two lands. Imbibing literary traditions from both Western and Eastern cultures should not be seen as an act of defiance of one's own cultural history but rather as a method of widening one's perspective or, as Rushdie puts it, "bridging gaps."

Keywords: Identity, location, *Midnight's Children*, Saleem Sinai, partition, unification.

Introduction

The novel, *Midnight's Children* was created out of a desire to remember and recreate the author's childhood in an environment where familiar and intimately connected details constantly intersected with the unfamiliar, if not utterly alien, universes of language, habits and conduct. The work offers an antidote to the 'Raj revival,' depicting India from an Indian perspective, putting Indians front and center, and openly criticizing rather than celebrating British colonial efforts in India. Salman Rushdie's work is known for its self-consciousness and willingness to integrate an understanding of the cultural contexts in which it is created. Rushdie occupies a privileged position as a migrant intellectual, commenting in a number of his works upon political situations that are viewed from a geographical distance; we might as well add emotional and ideological distance. Rushdie also foregrounds the fact that he is writing from this perspective and sets out in his fiction to explore the implications of this location. Rushdie, in this sense, does not claim to speak from the perspective of Indians- a diverse body in itself, as Rushdie claims that it would be impossible to speak about

from any singular perspective anyway. Rather, he speaks from the perspective of the privileged migrant Indian. Salman Rushdie writes as an 'outsider' from several cultures and an 'insider' of none, and it means that his writing emerges out of an experience of disjuncture and discontinuity. It has always been Rushdie's insistence; however, this position may also have advantages, and on these advantages, his works should be judged.

Rushdie's political activity, on the other hand, is not limited to the topics he prefers to cover; his political arguments are inextricably linked to his understanding of the nature and purpose of the arts. From his early bile-spewing satires on South Asian political figures in *Midnight's Children* to his later works, Rushdie's writing demonstrates a rejection of perceived political withdrawal. "Bombay is a metropolis established by foreigners on reclaimed territory," Rushdie states in his well-known article "*Imaginary Homelands*." In sentiment and spirit, it is authentically Indian. In his novel, *Midnight's Children*, Saleem and Shiva embody Rushdie's idea of Bombay: Equally impure in origin, Saleem is wise, idealist, and fragile, and Shiva is violent, amoral and robust. They combine the high and the low, the elegant western side of the city, the teeming slums and vast industrial areas and chawls in its central and eastern sectors. This duality and the celebration of the city's openness, cosmopolitanism, and intense mix of people, languages, pedigrees, and prejudices are at the heart of Saleem's childhood in Bombay.

The novel begins with the brilliant trope of the intimacy engendered through a perforated sheet that continues its conflation of genre and gender as its language perforates the veil. *Midnight's Children* in its energies fated to repetition: the partition of 1947 that engendered independent India and Pakistan is replicated in the brutal war of 1971 that resulted in Bangladesh. For Rushdie, his heritage is derived from the polyglot turmoil and tumult of multi-ethnic, postcolonial India and with this novel, he brought a larger world- a teeming, myth-infused, many-hued and restless world. For Rushdie, interchanging and intermixing, displacement and transfiguration,

migration and rebirth have been significant themes in his personal and professional life. India serves as the junction for Rushdie's many philosophical threads, the nest of his creativity. We observe that members of the Diaspora communities share several characteristics like a common sense of homelessness, nostalgia for homelands and similar experiences of anxiety and turmoil in a new land. There is a sense of solidarity amongst themselves despite varied cultures. Individuals, as well as groups of people belonging to a particular nation in diasporic situations, oscillate between two identities, two cultures, value systems and even two mindsets- one belonging to the nation they are migrating from and the other where they are migrating into.

The diasporic person lives in two cultures at the same time. Dilemmas, nostalgia, a feeling of dislocation, and loss are all symptoms of psychological transition from one state of mind to another. It's impossible to go back home after it has become a mystic haven of longing. If this is the case, then the actual geographic area of 'origin' may have numerous versions as the imagination and the actual lived experience of the present-day reality, with its local noises and other aspects, refigured and rebuilt. This formation is paradoxical if we assume that the writer's identity is crucially shaping the text. As identity formation is determined by concrete and tangible everyday realities, like one's allegiances to a nation, culture and family, in this case, the writer's emotional rooting is distanced and imaginary. The conditions of leaving home, the circumstances of arriving in a new nation, and how these new settings connect with other social ties defined by race, class, racism, ethnicity, sexuality, and gender are all key variables that shape a diaspora and its literature.

It is clear from the beginning that Saleem has an identity issue. He was born at midnight in August 1947, when the fiction of the British Raj was coming to an end, and the reality of the country's independence began to emerge. As a result, he is inextricably bound to history and must accept that his fate is inextricably linked to his

nation. As a midnight kid, he is born with an ambiguous personality. As a result, Saleem Sinai has been caught in the middle of a problem from birth. Saleem Sinai's several personas are continually woven into his storytelling tale. His selves are intertwined, coexisting peacefully inside his whole self and in continual transition. The stability that links his multiple selves together is paradoxically the consciousness and awareness of that change. Saleem's name exemplifies a purposeful fusion of Eastern and Western ideas through its cross-cultural mythical and symbolic connections.

The many social, cultural, and spiritual connotations used to explain his name suggest that he has numerous identities inside his fundamental 'I.' His name has several meanings, implying communication and integration of various social, cultural, and spiritual traditions. Saleem's completeness as a character is shown by his intentional integration, acceptance, and recognition of his identities. He uses each personality to try to comprehend current issues, both nationally and individually. The 1001 identities of *Midnight's Children*, each representing a distinct cultural, linguistic, and socio-political background, define Saleem's character. Unfortunately, the 1001 children's racial and religious disputes show that, unlike Saleem, they cannot see beyond old preconceptions and national biases.

Conclusion

Inside Saleem's existence, he has been "so many, too many persons," each personality coexisting peacefully within his core self. He's a person who's completely aware of the complexity of his own identity and of the diversity of selves that exist inside his greater 'I.' Saleem Sinai's several identities enable him to comprehend this "the self has no boundaries except those it accepts out of ignorance." Lastly, Rushdie's free, unrestricted migration of his imagination can help heal the tragic damage done to the reality of Indianness- an Indianness that his writing so remarkably celebrates.

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