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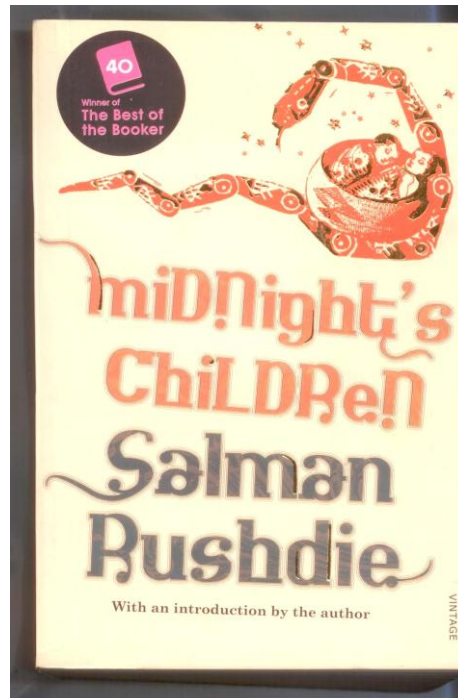
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We do not like to climb a stair, and find that it takes us down.

We do not like to walk out of a door, and find ourselves back in the same room.

We do not like the maze in the garden, because it too closely resembles the maze in our brain.

We do not like what happens when we are awake, because it closely resembles what happens when we are asleep. (Eliot 171-172)

The Responsibility of the Writer

It is one of the trends of postmodernism to present facts that cannot be easily conceptualized, either because it is out of our experience or because of our tunnel vision. Postmodernism has been described as a period of mankind's deepest self-criticism. The novels of Rushdie, *Midnight's Children* in particular, along with Adiga's *The White Tiger* can be considered as enquiries that extend and embrace the world they live in. Rushdie has always maintained that it is the responsibility of the writer to tackle issues that sculpt our society, in an era of growing indifference. He writes:

It seems to me that literature enter such arguments, because what is being disputed is nothing less than what is the case, what is truth and untruth, and the battle ground is our imagination. If writers leave the business of making pictures of the world to politicians, it will be one of history's great and most abject abdication. (2)

Every Act is a Political Act

Rushdie believes that describing anything is a political act. And re-describing the world is the necessary first step towards changing it. It is every writers dream that his works have a lasting impact on society. When a writer writes about the world around him he is unquestionably contributing towards sculpting it. In situations where the state takes reality into its own hands and contorts it to fit its own agendas, it is the writer's responsibility to present an alternate reality, apart from the officially sanctioned one. Rushdie observes, in *Imaginary Homelands* "the novel is one way of denying the official, politician's version of truth" (14).

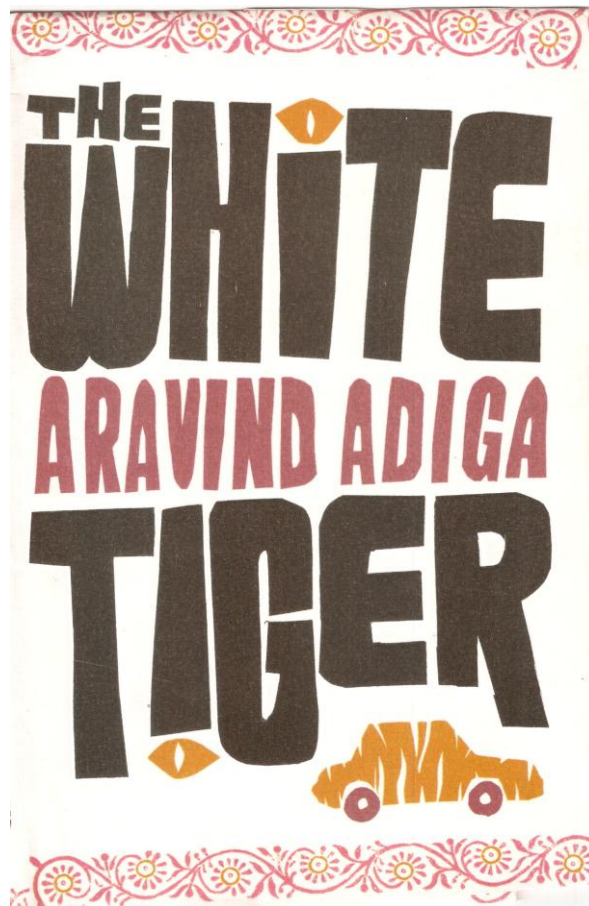
Political Fiction

There is great controversy over the relevance and importance of political criticism in civilizations, particularly democratic societies. Those who contend that it is of vast importance assert that political discussion creates and promotes the variety of opinions

necessary for a true democracy. Political fiction has been Rushdie's way of tackling the larger issues of the day. He thus draws new and better maps of reality through his novels.

The fact that reality has the ability to continually overtake the imagination of man is a predicament that has long troubled writers like Salman Rushdie and has indelibly shaped the character of his work. Writers throughout the twentieth century have struggled to render a truth that has seemed extremely unreal. World War I fostered the fragmentation of modernism; World War II raised new questions about the limits of language and perception. With growing political unrest, military tensions, economic instability, falling traditions and irreligiosity. Rushdie observes that what every writer attempts to do is "to describe our world in the way in which all of us...perceive it from day to day" (13).

A Socially Conscious Writer



Aravind Adiga is also a socially conscious writer who recognizes a writer's duty towards society. He is deeply committed to speaking about the less spoken and to reminding people of the ugly facts that they generally prefer to willfully forget. Adiga has said the tone of his book was meant to be provocative, to get people thinking. It is a story of the poor people who don't get represented in Indian films or books. He comments:

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There is a lot of triumphalist noise in India today. There is a sense of profound economic achievement and much of it is justified, but it is also important to listen to other noises. A large number of people are not benefiting from the economic boom. It is a fact that for most of the poor people in India there are only two ways to go up -- either through crime or through politics, which can be a variant of crime. (earthtime.org 2)

The White Tiger

Aravind Adiga's Man Booker-Prize winning novel, *The White Tiger* is the fruit of the writer's labours as a reporter in India. Adiga has stated that his job as a reporter usually took him to those parts of the country that are generally ignored, either because of tunnel vision or desensitization. The backwardness of the places he visited shocked the writer and compelled him to write a novel in which he rebukes the much hyped notion of a new and shining India. Into the novel is woven an excellent analysis of the Indian social fabric.

The novel is about the journey of Balram Halwai, a representative of the subaltern, from the darkness of his oppressive village life to the light of entrepreneurial success. Adiga embarks on writing the novel with the belief that the world we inhabit is not described enough and to speak of the less spoken is not exploitation; but the silence is.

Enquiry into Modern India

The White Tiger is an enquiry into the phenomenon of modern India, shorn of all its glitz and glamour. It is the story of a man's quest for freedom and about the disparities between those who have made it and those who haven't. Adiga's novel has met with sharp criticism from some quarters for portraying India in bad light. To this charge he replies that his book was fiction, "built on a substratum of Indian reality. Here's one example: Balram's father, in the novel, dies of tuberculosis. Now, this is a make-believe figure, but underlying it is a piece of appalling reality -- the fact that nearly a thousand Indians, most of them poor, die every day of tuberculosis" (earthtime.org 2).

The novel, set in modern India has two distinct groups of characters - the affluent and westernized cultural expatriates like Mr. Ashok and Pinky Madam, and the self-made syncretised entrepreneur like Balram. Balram writes, in his first letter to the Chinese Premier, "And our nation, though it has no drinking water, electricity, sewage system, public transportation, sense of hygiene, discipline, courtesy, or punctuality, does have entrepreneurs. Thousands and thousands of them" (WT 4).

Comedy of Modern Life – Two Countries in One

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Adiga demonstrates great aptitude in describing the comedy of modern life. He is fine tuned to the various quirks of modern life and is alive to the eccentricities of the globalized world. It deals not just with the mad chaos of modern life but also with the gaping absurdities of disparate distribution of wealth. In India there are clearly very rich people in the cities living lavish, extravagant, and showy lifestyles; and they live side by side with slum-dwellers and those who sleep on pavements. There are also urban and suburban developments that boast of sky scrapers and shopping malls. However, it is mandatory to remember that 1.8 per cent of Indian society is holding 80 per cent of India's wealth and the rich-poor divide is only widening every day. But this growth is of a sort that can induce vertigo. Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* is ostensibly about this India, which "is two countries in one: an India of Light and an India of Darkness" (WT 14).

Cultural Expatriation

Cultural expatriation is now regarded as intrinsic to all postmodern experience. With globalization a sense of cosmopolitan rootlessness has developed in urban pockets of India. Adiga's novel too describes people like Pinky Madam and Mr. Ashok who are caught between two cultures, though they live in India they are cultural expatriates as they cannot relate to their own culture and are always trying to integrate with an alien culture. Having been educated abroad both Pinky and Mr. Ashok lack any cultural affiliations and communal solidarity. They feel divided, displaced, and uncertain about their relationship with their country. India to them is the posh suburbs and plush shopping malls. They are ignorant or refuse to see the typical Indian village paradise, described by Balram as follows:

Electricity poles – defunct.
Water tap – broken.
Children – too lean and short for their age, and with over-sized heads
from which vivid eyes shine, like the guilty conscience of the government
of India.
Yes, a typical Indian village paradise, Mr. Jaibao. (WT 20)

Adiga describes the world of the bourgeois, who imitate a foreign culture in order to establish their social standing:

'Ashok,' she said. 'Now hear this. Balram, what is it we're eating?'
I knew it was a trap, but what could I do? – I answered. The two of them
burst into giggles.
'Say it again, Balram.'
They laughed again.
'It's not piJJA. It's piZZa. Say it properly.'
'Wait – you're mispronouncing it too. There's a T in the middle. *Peet.*
Zah.'

‘Don’t correct *my* English, Ashok. There’s no *T* in pizza. Look at the box’
(WT 154)

The Story in *The White Tiger*

The book purports to tell the story of a murder committed by its narrator, Balram Halwai (also known as ‘White Tiger’), from the eastern Indian state of Bihar, who moves first to the prosperous suburb of Gurgaon near Delhi to work for Mr Ashok and his wife, Pinky Madam, and then to the booming city of Bangalore in South India, which together with Hyderabad is associated in clichés with the country’s recent economic transformation.

Adiga’s Writing

Adiga writes with empathy about the underclass and its life - begging for food, sleeping under concrete flyovers, defecating on the roadside, shivering in the cold, struggling, in the twentieth century for its freedom.

Adiga left Mangalore in 1991, where his father worked as a doctor, when his father moved to Australia. Returning to the city fifteen years later as a journalist with *Times*, he found it vastly changed. Looking around the transformed city with its sky scrapers and malls, he also noticed a group of drifters and homeless men, some carrying rolled-up mattress, part of the underclass who seemed to have been left out of the story of India’s growth.

Adiga was curious and troubled by the sight, and during his travels in India as a journalist, he wanted to find out more. Adiga’s Man Booker Prize-winning debut novel, is the story of this underclass and its life- begging for food, sleeping under concrete flyovers, defecating on the roadside, shivering in the cold, struggling, in the twentieth century for its freedom. *The White Tiger* gives this underclass its voice.

Balram is also part of this voiceless underclass but he decides to break free from this ‘chicken coop’ of poverty and despair, and writing his own destiny. Balram is a syncretised entrepreneur, who draws inspiration from poets, prays to the 36,000,004 gods of India and combines this with his own philosophy and logic. Balram observes, “my country is the kind where it pays to play it both ways: the Indian entrepreneur has to be straight and crooked, mocking and believing, sly and sincere, at the same time” (WT 9).

Half-baked Indian

Balram calls his life story, “The Autobiography of a Half-Baked Indian”. Mr. Ashok derisively calls Balram a ‘half-baked Indian’, when he is unable to answer some general knowledge questions. But it is ironical that Mr. Ashok should say this, being a cultural expatriate himself and a ‘half-baked Indian’ in his own way. It is Balram who has a better understanding of India and his home state. Through the eyes of Balram Adiga presents an

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insider's view of Bihar, a state that has some of the lowest economic and developmental indicators in modern India, and is also part of a large swath of territory where Naxalite (or Maoist) groups operate with impunity.

Balram refers to Bihar as the world of 'Darkness', a term that appears repeatedly in the book in opposition to 'Light' – the sophisticated urban destinations to which the narrator is headed. Bihar, where Gautama Buddha attained his Nirvana, the Light of Knowledge, is seen as the world of Darkness. People like Balram doesn't speak the increasingly standard Hindi of northern India, but rather its eastern Indian versions, such as Maithili and Bhojpuri, the dialects spoken by 19th-century working-class migrants to Calcutta, Fiji, Mauritius and Guyana.

Balram hates Bihar and hates his ancestral village of Laxmangarh, which is apparently only a few miles from Bodh Gaya, the pilgrimage site where the Buddha is said to have attained enlightenment: “wonder if the Buddha walked through Laxmangarh – some people say he did. My own feeling is that he ran through it – as fast as he could – and got to the other side – and never looked back!” (WT 18).

Balram is cynical about the Hindu religion, which he views in an entirely instrumental manner. He despises the holy river Ganges, which for him is no more than a large open drain. His village is a place 'split into two' by 'a bright strip of sewage', and where there are “three more or less identical shops selling more or less identically adulterated and stale items of rice, cooking oil, kerosene, biscuits, cigarettes and jaggery” (WT 19). It is this background, the anything but bucolic world of Laxmangarh, which propels him to seek employment in the provincial city and mining centre of Dhanbad. This intrinsic hatred for his village fires up his dream of becoming an entrepreneur.

Balram finds employment as the driver of a rich zamindar's son in Gurgaon. While driving in a drunken fit, Pinky Madam, his employer, runs over a poor street dweller's child. Balram is forced to sign a letter taking responsibility for the brutal accident. He realizes the extent of the heartlessness of his employers and decides to get out the vicious circle of dumb servitude. Balram finally realizes his dream of becoming an entrepreneur after killing his master and stealing the money he was carrying. After revealing this in his letter to Mr. Jiabao, Balram justifies himself- “You ask, ‘Are you a man or a demon?’ Neither, I say. I have woken up, and the rest of you are still sleeping, and that is the only difference between us” (WT 315). He further explains:

But isn't it likely that everyone who counts in this world, including our prime minister (including *you*, Mr Jiabo), has killed someone or the other on his way to the top? Kill enough people and they will put up bronze statues to you next to the Parliament House in Delhi - but that is glory, and not what I am after. All I wanted was the chance to be a man – and for that, one murder was enough. (WT 318)

The Globalized India

The globalized India is a bricolage of cultural expatriates and sycratised entrepreneurs. *The White Tiger* traces the effects of globalization on modern India with stereoscopic vision. Globalization says Ania Loomba “seems to have transformed the world so radically...[it] has provided fresh grounds for examining the relevance of postcolonial perspectives to the world which we now inhabit” (213). The critic Simon Gikandi observes that the radical newness of globalization is in fact asserted by appropriating the key terms of postmodernist studies such as ‘hybridity’ and ‘difference’. Globalization has established a relationship between cultural forms, economic moorings, and geopolitics.

The novel is incandescent with anger at the injustice, the futility and the sheer wrongness of a life such as the one from where a bright little boy called Munna, who was later called Balram Halwai in his school records and later called the ‘White Tiger’ of the jungle because of his good performance during a school inspection, was pulled out of school and told to smash coal for a tea shop, where men and women live sad stunted lives, and dreams are cut short even before they are fully formed. But novel is also a tale of resilience, hope in the midst of despair and self-regeneration as is evident by Balram’s declaration, “I am in the Light now” (WT 313).

Rushdie’s World

In his collection of literary essays, *Stranger Shores* (2001), J. M. Coetzee talks about the obsessions of Salman Rushdie; which he says are – India, India’s place in the world, fundamentalism, notions of history, and identity. In spite of being an Indian born British citizen of Muslim ancestry, India is where Rushdie’s imagination lives.

Salman Rushdie tacitly agrees that the life of Saleem Sinai, the protagonist of his much acclaimed book *Midnight’s Children* corresponds not just with the turbulent history of India but also with that of his creator. He writes in *Imaginary Homelands*, “my novel *Midnight’s Children* was really born; when I realized how much I wanted to restore the past to myself, not in the faded greys of old family-album snapshots, but whole, in CinemaScope and glorious Technicolor” (10).

It is through the microcosm of Saleem’s life that Rushdie paints a macroscopic picture of the Indian sub-continent. Early in his literary career Rushdie decided to “write something which is much closer to [his] knowledge of the world” (*Imaginary Homelands* 15). The result was *Midnight’s Children*, an epic novel about India’s past and present.

Midnight’s Children

The novel was written after embarking on an extensive tour through India. Rushdie draws his image of the multi-lingual, multi-cultural India from Bombay which he describes as the most cosmopolitan, most hybrid, and most hotchpotch of cities. In *Midnight’s*

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Children Rushdie sets out to assiduously recall as much of the Bombay of the 1950s and the 1960s as he could. *Midnight's Children* is considered by critics as one of the greatest postcolonial novels ever written.

Parallels

Parallels can be drawn between Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* and *The White Tiger*. Adiga and Rushdie approach their novels with the belief that the world we inhabit is not described enough and to speak of the less spoken is not exploitation; but the silence is.

The White Tiger is an enquiry into the phenomenon of modern India, shorn of all its glitz and glamour. It tells the story of Balram who is tossed on the turbulent seas of modern India as Spivak comments "whatever our view of what we do, we are made by the forces of people moving around the world" (214).

Fiction can be True

A milestone in postmodernist studies is the realization that fiction can also be true because there is no absolute truth but only cognitive constructions. It deals not just with the mad chaos of modern life but also with the age old problem of our caste system. Social scientists reflecting on India tend to discuss class in its rural version, or in its classic urban incarnation of the factory and shop floor, or in terms of what has been termed 'footloose labour'. The caste system in India has been castigated as a system of inhuman hierarchy, which guaranteed differential access to the basic amenities of life. It is a system of exploitation which leads to great economic disparities in society.

The ubiquitousness of class consciousness in Indian society and its persistence in different guises through generations, defying and denying the logic of social transformation on the lines of class are facts. Balram is condemned to live the life of an underdog because of his caste. He and his family face great inhumanity and exploitation by the hands of the landlord and his family. Balram observes, "To sum up – in the old days there were one thousand castes and destinies in India. These days, there are just two castes: Men with Big Bellies, and Men with Small Bellies. And only two destinies: eat – or get eaten up" (WT 64). Balram even mocks the democratic juggernaut in India. He writes about elections in his village:

Now that the date for the elections had been set, and declared on radio, election fever had started spreading again. These are the three main diseases of the country, sir: typhoid, cholera, and election fever. The last one is the worst; it makes people talk and talk about things that they have no say in. (WT 98)

Balram's father who has seen twelve elections and casted his vote in every one of them is yet to see the inside of a voting booth.

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The Modern, Pre- and Post-colonial in *Midnight's Children*

While Adiga's *The White Tiger* is a social critique on modern Indian, Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* chronicles the pre-colonial, colonial and postcolonial history of India through the life of Saleem Sinai, who was born on the stroke of midnight during the birth of India's formal independence from Britain. Thus Saleem is in a way 'handcuffed' to the nation and its life, identity, and destiny.

Jawaharlal Nehru's letter to Saleem says, "Dear Baby Saleem, ... We shall be watching over your life with the closest attention; it will be in a sense, the mirror of our own" (MC 122). Indeed Saleem is in many ways an embodiment of the amazing Indian post-colonial bricolage that was India, a construction made of whatever materials that were at hand, a makeshift arrangement. The postcolonial India was, indeed, a bricolage (makeshift arrangement, see below for a description of this word) during his birth. He is a product of various representative classes of India. His father was a British man, William Methwold who had a liaison with a lower-class woman, Vanita, whose husband is a Christian and a street entertainer; switched at birth by the befuddled nurse Mary Pereira with Amina Sinai's real son, he grows up in a privileged and protected atmosphere of a wealthy Muslim family in cosmopolitan Bombay.

Saleem grows up to be a versatile story teller adopting various registers and genres re-telling the history of postcolonial India. His narrative slips easily between the past and the present, all the time carrying on a stereoscopic examination of the events that followed the independence of India. The Jallianwala Bagh massacre, the two Pakistan wars and even national scandals like the Nanavati case all form part of the narrative rendering variety and at the same capturing the spirit of postcolonial India.

Thus it may be said that *Midnight's Children* is a significantly a postmodern text in that it attempts to self-consciously reconstruct its relationship to the past.

Rushdie's Style

Rushdie's style mixes illusion and reality, myth and legend with everyday life, Indian history with a fictional tale, and does so through the eyes of the narrator, Saleem, who Scheherezade-like tells his story every night spinning it against a background of personal and national disaster. This overlapping of genres is a distinct postmodern trait. The novel also presents the political and social climate of India during the emergency. Rushdie paints a realistic picture of the life of the poor during those turbulent times with unflinching strokes. The destruction of the slums in the name of city beautification and the forced sterilization camps are also vividly described.

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In the 'temporal' sense, *Midnight's Children* is postcolonial, as the main body of the narrative occurs after India became independent. However when we consider in the ideological sense: India's culture is moulded by indigenous fiction and those of the West.

Most of the characters in Salman Rushdie's novels occupy two conflicting world's or spaces, referred to by Linda Hutcheon as a duality identity and history. The examination of the position and role of man in society is characteristic of postmodernist literature. Colonization has effectively created a duality of worlds for the indigenous population. In his book *India: A Wounded Civilization* (1977), Naipaul observes:

India is old, and India continues. But all the disciplines and skills that India now seeks to exercise are now borrowed. Even the ideas Indians have of the achievements of their civilization are essentially the ideas given them by European scholars...India blindly swallows its past. (129)

In *Midnight's Children*, Methwold asserts his supremacy through his constant retelling of his ancestors who helped to build Bombay, Sinai learns the discourse and uses it to empower himself. "Actually, old chap, ours is a pretty distinguished family, too," (MC 122) Sinai says to Methwold. The word "actually" indicates the slippage, the difference, and the correction of Methwold's original conception of Sinai. The mimic "old chap" softens the challenge as Ahmed Sinai identifies himself with the Englishman through this very English term of endearment. Through imitation, Sinai attempts to seize the power for himself. Though the lineage that Ahmed Sinai attributes to himself is purely fictional, it nevertheless shows the mimic effect of colonization.

Adiga's novel too describes people like Pinky madam and Ashok who are caught between two cultures, though they live in India they are cultural expatriates as they cannot relate to their own culture.

Rushdie's Narrative

In *Midnight's Children*, the narrative comprises and compresses Indian cultural history "Once upon a time", Saleem muses, "there was Radha and Krishna, and Rama and Sita, and Laila and Majnu, also (because we are affected by the west) Romeo and Juliet, and Spencer Tracy and Katherine Hepburn" (259). Characters from Indian mythological and cultural history are chronologically intertwined with characters from western Culture, and the devices which they signify. Indian culture, religion and storytelling, Western drama and cinema – are presented in Rushdie's text with postcolonial Indian history to examine both the effect of these indigenous and non-indigenous cultures on the Indian mind and in the light of Indian independence. *Midnight's Children* is a presentation and examination of the temporal and cultural status of India as an independent nation. This, as Edward Said writes, has been initiated in the text to portray:

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[the] conscious effort to enter into the discourse of Europe and the West, to mix with it, transform it, to make it acknowledge marginalized or suppressed or forgotten histories. (This) is of particular interest in Rushdie's work. (206)

In *Midnight's Children*, Rushdie uses hyperbolic narrative and a cast of improbable characters starting with Saleem Sinai the telepathic narrator, to create a parable of modern Indian history. A distinguishing feature of this remarkable novel is the treatment of contemporary history in the manner of its overlap with the history of an individual, thus combining the historical and the autobiographical. The framework of Indian post-independence history provides, like myth, a parallel structure that makes it easier for readers to orient themselves to the bizarre events that happen.

The use of the historical parallels becomes a stylistic device that enables the unfolding of meanings at a paradigmatic level. At each point where a historical event is mentioned and narrated; parallels are drawn between it and fictional events, connecting and developing the significance of both. The strangeness of history gives Rushdie the justification for his own magical inventions. Rushdie has created the real sub-continent condition in *Midnight's Children*.

Sushila Singh writes, "His investigation of led him to the investigation of the true circumstances in India and Pakistan" (111). Rushdie realized that the individual human personality is meaningless in the present troubled global situation. Thus, he personified India and Pakistan in the novels. George Lukacs has said that "True great realism depicts man and society as complete entities, instead of showing merely one or the other of their aspects" (6).

Thus in *Midnight's Children* Rushdie paints a picture of post-independence India. He penetrates the very moral, cultural, social, economical and political heart of India. Saleem uses his magic telepathic powers to learn the truth behind politics. At one time he was a land lord in Uttar Pradesh, ordering his serfs to burn the surplus grain, at another moment he was starving to death in Orissa, where there was food shortage as usual. He occupied the mind of a congress party worker, bribing a school teacher to put his weight behind the party of Gandhi and Nehru in coming election campaign, also the thoughts of a Keralan peasant who had decided to vote communist.

The Narrative in Adiga's *The White Tiger*

Adiga's novel *The White Tiger* traces the effects of globalization on modern India with stereoscopic vision. Globalization says Ania Loomba "seems to have transformed the world so radically...[it] has provided fresh grounds for examining the relevance of postcolonial perspectives to the world which we now inhabit" (213).

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Though it is generally thought that globalization has made postcolonialism redundant, the critic Simon Gikandi observes that the radical newness of globalization is in fact asserted by appropriating the key terms of postcolonial studies such as ‘hybridity’ and ‘difference’.

Globalization has established a relationship between cultural forms, economic moorings, and geopolitics. It is important to remember that of all critical practices it is postmodernism which has been increasingly preoccupied with the confluence of geopolitics and various cultural forms. Thus the phenomenon of globalization and postmodernist studies can be yoked together.

Adiga like Rushdie attempts to throw light on the lesser known and lesser seen India. The light that they shed on the less appetizing facts of life in the sub-continent like the brutality of the government during the emergency, in the case of Rushdie, and the perpetual issue of casteism, in the case of Adiga, is harsh and accurately incisive like the scalpel of a surgeon. In their unflinching depiction of the realities of postcolonial India Adiga and Rushdie are of one spirit.

As Balram says, in his usual wry sense of humour, “take almost anything you hear from the Prime Minister and turn it upside down and then you will have the truth about that thing” (WT 15).

Both Adiga’s Balram Halwai and Rushdie’s Saleem Sinai are enchanting story tellers who efficiently juggle tales from their personal life and tales of a young and quickly growing nation. The innovation in Balram’s narrative can be sought in the novel’s narrative voice. But there is also a framing device that deserves to be mentioned: each chapter consists of a message sent by Balram to Wen Jiabao, the prime minister of the People’s Republic of China, who is about to visit Bangalore. He says, “I offer to tell you, free of charge, the truth about Bangalore. By telling you my life’s story” (WT 6). This epistle form permits Balram to present himself as a Third World voice and not just that of an individual.

Born in Chennai, brought up in Mangalore, writing about Delhi and living in Mumbai, Adiga loves Tamil, speaks Kannada and writes in English. And in this language of the “erstwhile master”, without sentimentality, he has written a profoundly Indian story. Adiga’s prose is not quite so elegant in comparison to Rushdie.

While Rushdie is a very erudite writer whose works are peppered with allegories, literary allusions, puns and by the use of magical realism; Adiga’s straight forward mode of writing often appears bland in comparison. But the force of his writing comes from his savage humour and from its strength of feeling. The novel is incandescent with anger at the injustice, the futility and the sheer wrongness of a life such as the one from where a bright little boy called Munna, who was later called Balram Halwai in his school records and later called the ‘White Tiger’ of the jungle because of his good performance during a

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school inspection, was pulled out of school and told to smash coal for a tea shop, where private armies roam about the fields, men and women live sad stunted lives, and dreams are cut short even before they are fully formed. Balram's father desires a better life for his son. He cries in despair: "My whole life, I have been treated like donkey. All I want is that one son of mine – at least one – should live like a man" (WT 30). Towards the end of his life Balram's father is not even fortunate enough to get treatment for his tuberculosis at the government hospital. He dies on the corridor of the government waiting in vain for the doctors to turn up.

It is no coincidence that magical realism that Rushdie uses to write his novels and which combines heightened language with the elements of the surreal, has tended to flourish in troubled areas of the world, or its practitioners have sought to describe calamitous events that exceed the grasp of normal description. The critic Michiko Kakutani observes, "In the case of Mr. Rushdie, he has used the hallucinatory devices of magic realism to try to capture, metaphorically the sweep and chaos contemporary reality, into resemblance to a dream or nightmare".

Political fiction has been Rushdie's way of tackling the larger issues of the day. He believes that there is a genuine need for political fiction, "for books that draw new and better maps of reality and make new language with which to understand the new world" (I H 3).

In *Midnight's Children*, Rushdie uses hyperbolic narrative and a cast of improbable characters starting with Saleem Sinai the telepathic narrator, to create a parable of modern Indian history. A distinguishing feature of this remarkable novel is the treatment of contemporary history in the manner of its overlap with the history of an individual, thus combining the historical and the autobiographical. The framework of Indian post-independence history provides, like myth, a parallel structure that makes it easier for readers to orient themselves to the bizarre events that happen. The use of the historical parallels becomes a stylistic device that enables the unfolding of meanings at a paradigmatic level. At each point where a historical event is mentioned and narrated; parallels are drawn between it and fictional events, connecting and developing the significance of both. The strangeness of history gives Rushdie the justification for his own magical inventions.

Rushdie has created the real sub-continent condition in *Midnight's Children* and *Shame*. George Lukacs has said that "True great realism depicts man and society as complete entities, instead of showing merely one or the other of their aspects" (6). In his endeavour to present the complete human condition adequately, Rushdie has adopted non-linear and non-naturalistic forms to meet the challenge. Sushila Singh observes that in Rushdie's novels,

Every action, thought and emotion of human beings is inseparably bound up with the community, i.e., with politics, whether human themselves are conscious of this, unconscious of it or even trying to escape from it,

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objectively their actions thoughts and emotions nevertheless spring from and run into politics. (9)

Thus in *Midnight's Children* Rushdie paints a picture of post-independence India. He penetrates the very moral, cultural, social, economic and political heart of India. Saleem uses his magic telepathic powers to learn the truth behind politics. At one time he was a land lord in Uttar Pradesh, ordering his serfs to burn the surplus grain, at another moment he was starving to death in Orissa, where there was food shortage as usual. He occupied the mind of a congress party worker, bribing a school teacher to put his weight behind the party of Gandhi and Nehru in coming election campaign, also the thoughts of a Kerala peasant who had decided to vote communist.

Inducing Cognitive Dissonance

The present age is as such that people are forced to accept the thinly veiled slants of the news channels, the politics masquerading as reporting in newspapers and magazines etc. Children are discouraged to think differently from their peers and their teachers. Thinking as a function is allowed to atrophy. Magical realism attacks this mental apathy with shock therapy. In a magical realist text the readers are presented with a reality which contradicts what they are generally familiar or comfortable with. The readers will have to exercise a certain amount of cognitive effort to try and understand the discrepancy in the reality presented in the magical realist text. By inducing cognitive dissonance the writer can elicit cognitive activity.

While Adiga prefers to shock his readers with the stark reality of life, writers like Salman Rushdie believe in isolating the readers from the reality and the environment they take for granted and placing them in a totally alien situation. The readers are thus forced to think about the events happening around them. Separated from their realities the reader sees at once the social and political marriage the writer is trying to impart. Gabriel Garcia Marquez in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* relates through magical realism the tale of his homeland Columbia similarly Rushdie narrates the history of India and Pakistan in *Midnight's Children* and *Shame* by the use of symbols, metaphors and magical realism. By demonstrating the absurdities of the political and social set up, Rushdie allows the readers to think and reconstruct their perception of the world.

The most outstanding feature of *Midnight's Children* and *The White Tiger* is its representation of India's resilience, its survival in spite of everything. What Rushdie writes regarding *Midnight's Children* holds true for *The White Tiger* too, "the story is told in a manner designed to echo, as closely as my abilities allowed, the Indian talent of non-stop self-regeneration" (*Imaginary Homelands* 16).

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