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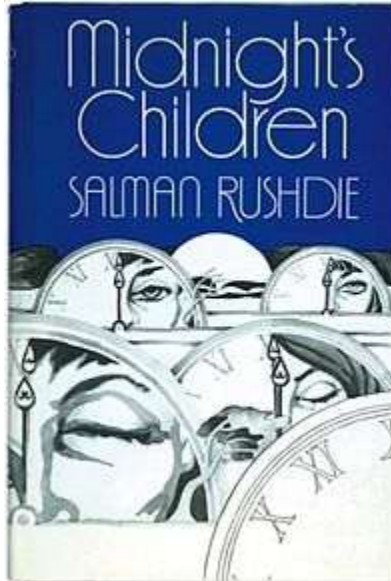
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The Indian Counter Narrative in *Midnight's Children*

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On Defining Post-colonialism

The decline of the British Empire in the 20th Century marks the rise of new nations and their era of post-colonialism. The term 'post-colonialism', at an extremely basic level,

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connotes the times of colonial nations after they attained their independence from the Western colonizers. “As originally used by historians after the Second World War in terms such as the post-colonial state, ‘post-colonial’ had a clearly chronological meaning, designating the post-independence period” (Ashcroft 186). Independence also marked a ‘power shift’ with the ‘power of representation’ going to the natives who stressed a change in the way they were ‘presented’ by and to the West: the ‘Orient’ was challenged by the East.

Literature included the term ‘post-colonialism’ and initially it was defined as one that represents the ‘Orient’ to the West and that too on its own terms. One of the first steps in the direction was to reflect on what colonization cost to the colonized. “Post-colonialism deals with the effects of colonization on cultures and societies” (Ashcroft 186). The most common idea in this framework is that the colonial power had a derogatory impact on the culture and life of the colony and this is not done through sheer force only. On the contrary, this impact is achieved by inculcating a belief in the superiority of the Western culture and the ‘otherness’ of the native culture. Antonio Gramsci used the term hegemony in this context when he reasoned why the ruling class was able to promote its own interests. Post-colonial Literature, it emerges from the discussion, questions the colonial presence in a colony and the discourse generated by the colonizers for their validation in the colony.

Indian Situation

India, post-independence, too shifted into the paradigm of Post-colonialism chronologically. However, it remained an issue of debate if Indian literature too shifted into the same paradigm. Critics are divided over the opinion but there is a consensus over the fact that each text’s features determine its status as a colonial or a post-colonial text rather than the year of composing. In other words, having been composed post-independence is not the criterion for a work to be post-colonial. There are certain qualities which, if present, mark a work as post-colonial.

Creating India – A Major Function of *Midnight’s Children*

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Midnight's Children, written by Salman Rushdie and published in 1981 is one text in Indian Literature that deals with the Indian political history of pre and post-independence times and hence, in spite of its style of Magic Realism, is steeped in India. It is the story of Saleem Sinai, one of the twins, the other being none other than the nation, India. He is born on 15 August, 1947, on the stroke of midnight, and as a result, his life is intricately and complexly intertwined with that of India. It is through and alongside Saleem that Rushdie creates India. He says in the Introduction to *Midnight's Children*, "If he and India were to be paired, I would need to tell the story of both twins. Then Saleem, ever a striver for meaning, suggested to me that the whole of modern Indian history happened as it did because of him; that history, the life of his nation-twin, was somehow *all his fault*" (Rushdie x).

The Story

The narrative begins in 1915 when Aadam, the grandfather of Saleem, returns from Germany, "Now, returning, he saw through travelled eyes. Instead of the beauty of the tiny valley circled by giant teeth, he noticed the narrowness, the proximity of the horizon; and felt sad, to be at home and feel so utterly enclosed. He also felt –inexplicably –as though the old place resented his educated, stethoscoped return...the years in Germany had returned him to a hostile environment" (*Midnight's Children* 5-6). The beginning assumes significance in the light of the fact that Rushdie himself is an expatriate. The beginning, hence, underlines the self-reflexive nature of the narrative. Aadam Aziz has been to Germany and when he returns to India, the things suddenly start looking different to him: the 'beauty' of the valley is transformed into 'narrowness'. Rushdie, thus, right in the beginning of the novel asserts an 'outsider's' perspective on the narrative rather than of an insider. The gap that emerges is 'the hole' in Aadam which stays throughout with such people. This confession, right at the beginning of the text, is a testimony of the author's acceptance of his status and has a significant impact on the narrative.

Is This India for Select Audience Only?

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Traditionally critics have asserted that the India created by Rushdie in *Midnight's Children* is meant for a select audience only. In other words, there are voices labeling it as a narrow narrative of India catering to the parameters of the colonials and his status as an expatriate, an outsider, gives more weight to this perspective. Such critics hold strongly that *Midnight's Children* creates a discourse that is hegemonic in nature and hence reasserts the colonial picture of India. The text, then, emerges like Tharoor's *The Great Indian Novel*, where the decline of Indian civilization begins after the era of *The Mahabharata*. In doing so, the narrative validates the colonial presence and hegemony because the 'decay', then, does not emerge as a British legacy but something that they came to erase.

Does It Truly Represent India

Neil Ten Kortenaar opines, "Not everyone is as taken by the novel, however. In particular, its status as a representation of India has been challenged. Some, like Harish Trivedi, have resented that Western critics and academics treat Rushdie as if he invented India or gave the continent a voice. Trivedi points out that *Midnight's Children* "is written for unilingual English-language readers for whom translations of Hindi-Urdu words are always embedded in the text...Richard Cronin argues that Rushdie's hubristic project of encapsulating India proves that he is an outsider who thinks in English, inevitably closer in spirit to Kipling than to writers living in India..." (Kortenaar 4). Critics like Aparna Mahanta assert that Rushdie toes the long English tradition of the 'exotic fantasia', as they call it, that started with Jonathan Swift and Daniel Defoe and established itself firmly in English literature. This 'exotic fantasia', believes Aparna Mahanta, Rushdie "has been able to emulate very successfully...Rushdie now steps into...the trappings of wit, humour and satire, that were the hallmarks of British fiction in the grand old days which, again, only goes to prove that the Raj isn't dead after all" (Mahanta 244).

Magical Realism to Bring Out the Reality

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Saleem, 'the midnight born', vested with the special power of entering into the minds of other people and later to be able to smell and identify everything, including people and feelings, generates a narrative that is highly unrealistic, romantic and fantastical but it is critical to the India 'of' the author. In fact, this superhuman 'power' places Saleem alongside the heroes of the traditional Epic genre, a mythical narrative but central to a civilization. Rushdie says in the Introduction to *Midnight's Children*, "...my debt...to...Dickens for his great, rotting, Bombay-like city, and his ability to root his larger-than-life characters and surrealist imagery in a sharply observed, almost hyper-realistic background, out of which the comic and fantastic elements of his work seemed to grow organically, becoming intensifications of, and not escapes from, the real world" (Rushdie xii).

Discussing and Depicting Hegemony

At this level, the text emerges as one that stresses the colonial discourse and hegemony by reflecting the colonizer's ideology. Moreover, it emerges that Rushdie does that by following the generic principles of the West, the novel and the Epic. However, the narrative does not toe the traditional Epic genre propagated by the West. On the contrary, it modifies the Epic genre to suit his own purpose by narrating it through Saleem. It then becomes a subjective portrayal wherein Saleem places himself at the helm of affairs, rather than having the objective narrative of a traditional Epic. It suggests that Rushdie has not, as alleged, toed the colonial parameters but has moulded them to serve his end of creating an India in his narrative. He, then, addresses the Indian issue through 'adaptation' rather than 'adopting', thereby reflecting the post-coloniality of the text.

An India for the West

Through this modified narrative regarding Saleem's life, he is constructing an India for the West, the English educated audience, "...the fusion of an individual body with the subcontinent and a personal biography with its political history" (Kane 95). It emerges as an epic whose 'superhuman' hero counters the objections of a rational and scientific modern Western world. Saleem's own story, quite fantastic, along with the story of India Language in India www.languageinindia.com

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also authenticates the nation that emerges in the narrative. Saleem and the narrative, hence, counter the European literary hegemony and thought through Indian mythologies and thought. "...Ayurvedic philosophy interprets the person as a microcosm. Saleem Sinai exemplifies this collective, revisionary, and somatic subject" (Kane 96). Saleem's 'superhuman' status authenticates the vastness of the nation and provides a focal point around which the story of the country can be narrated. In using the Indian mythologies Rushdie is creating India from the 'adept' phase in post-colonialism.

Political Overtones

The text, then, has political overtones structurally as well, but is not a colonially motivated text. It becomes a post-colonial Third-world 'strike' back at the colonial masters with its own weapons and devices moulded accordingly. The creation of India by Rushdie is done through the ancient Indian style rather than the modern western literary style of empiricism and reason. As Kane opines, "Rushdie exploits Saleem's status as the godlike author at play in unmoored language, while simultaneously governing this artifice in accordance with a Vedic logic" (Kane 104).

What is being narrated in the text is an oral picture in Saleem's mind that is being written by him himself. In other words, the text assumes the stature of a modified Primary Epic, a 'lost' literary form. "...Rushdie himself composes a work that self-consciously asserts its own epic status" (Su 546). The story however, unlike the Primary Epic, does not travel to Saleem by the word of mouth, which in this case could be his ancestors, but he knows the 'story' due to his innate 'superpower'.

Reason versus Mythology

This solves a twofold purpose for Rushdie: The Standard Western Literary style of Reason is rejected in favour of an Indian style of mythologies, oral tradition and folklore. "European literature has chronological priority over Indian (English) mythmaking. But India, like most independent entities, wishes to create its own identity" (Karamcheti 82) and Rushdie's text achieves the same. Secondly, the extinct western literary genre of

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Primary Epics is not only revived but also modified and Samir Dayal asserts the same when he says in his article “Talking Dirty: Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children*”, “In *Midnight’s Children*, hybridity and impurity are intentionally foregrounded...” (Dayal 434). Rushdie, then, creates a parallel post-colonial narrative structure of India against the West’s empirical way of looking at the nation. This political subversion of the West by Rushdie is asserted by Indira Karamcheti as well, “He subverts in order to legitimize his own, specifically Indian mythologies” (Karamcheti 83).

Strike-back Opportunity?

Another element that supports the idea of a political ‘strike back’ is the use of ‘Indianized’ English in the narrative rather than the Standard English. “Rushdie’s own attempt is to achieve a self-reflexive and organic ‘english’. Much of the novel is in standard English, although most of the characters speak in an indigenized, Indian ‘english’ (spiked liberally with transliterated native words). Saleem’s peculiar language entails a postcolonial gesture of reappropriation of the former colonizer’s language” (Dayal 433).

Steps toward Post-colonialism

Fanon stressed on the importance of the colonized finding and representing their past and that is the first step towards post-colonialism. “Fanon argued that the first step for ‘colonised’ people in finding a voice and an identity is to reclaim their own past” (Barry 193). Rushdie reclaims the colonial past of India through the use of ‘Indianized’ English. The mediator between the narrative and the viewer, English, performs an important role: it questions the ‘standard’ English of the West by countering it with its Indian version. The use of Indian English also carries the ‘Indian voice’ across to the West that has largely interpreted the East in its own language and from its own viewpoint.

Which is the Fit Vehicle? Indian Language Or English?

It is opined by some that an Indian language could have been a better choice if the Western hegemony had to be challenged. However, English emerges as a more potent Language in India www.languageinindia.com

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weapon in the creation of a political history of India as English is the language that the West 'knows'. Hindi or any vernacular would have restricted the text to India only but by using English Rushdie has reached the West and his use of 'Indianized English' has made the text enter the 'adapt phase' thereby countering the Western hegemony. Also, Rushdie in *Imaginary Homelands* opines that people once colonized by the colonizer's language successfully remake and domesticate it thereby carving out territories for themselves within its frontiers. Rushdie has varied the linguistic code rather than the standard code of English thereby creating a 'domesticated' English to counter the Standard English of the West.

More an Allegory

The text, hence, emerges as a political allegory of India in that it reveals the story of Saleem and the nation simultaneously and at the same time reverts back to the West, questioning and challenging its colonization of the Orient for a long time: *Midnight's Children* counters the West's notions of its inherent superiority over India and the East. Moreover, by virtue of this structural allegory, the text validates itself as the narrative 'of' a nation. While Dr Aziz in *A Passage to India* is mocked at by Fielding when he raises his patriotic fervor, Saleem and his story create an Indianized political history of India. Indira Karamcheti asserts, "Rushdie's Indian genesis successfully challenges the European subtexts it subverts" (Karamcheti 84).

The Goal – To Subvert Western Ideology?

Post-colonial criticism acclaims that the 'Orient' sees the East as the 'other' as Peter Barry asserts that "the first characteristic of postcolonial criticism [is] an awareness of representations of the non-European as exotic or immoral 'Other'" (Barry 194). Rushdie's text, too, is aware of this and clearly attempts a subversion of the Western ideology of seeing India as the 'other' but the India he creates and his Indian myth does not go unchallenged. In other words, in the creation of an Indianized political scenario, i.e. the Indian version of its political history, Rushdie does not obliterate the 'negatives' of a nation. His India receives a setback through several incidents pertaining to pre-Language in India www.languageinindia.com

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independence as well as the post-independence times that even the superhero Saleem is not able to avert. In the structural 'strike back of the Empire', these incidents appear to take it back to the colonial mire.

Painful and Tragic Recollections

One such incident in the narrative is Jallianwalla Bagh. Dr Aadam is in Amritsar then and bears witness to the bloodshed on the day. The incident leaves a scar on the alternative 'Indian myth' as Saleem is unable to emerge a savior like the superhero of an epic. The fact that he is not born yet justifies his 'inability' to cope with the incident. But at the same time, Rushdie's 'mythology' does not emerge as a complete failure because the time period under consideration is pre-independence. More than a failure of the 'Indian myth', it reflects the Indian political history through the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized. Rushdie, in fact, structurally presents two disparate viewpoints, the Indian and the colonial, through the event. While Dr Aadam Aziz's replies to his wife about his whereabouts are, "Nowhere on earth,' he said, and began to shake in her arms" (*Midnight's Children* 42), for General Dyer it is a job well done. "Good shooting,' Dyer tells his men, 'we have done a jolly good thing'" (*Midnight's Children* 42).

While Dr Aadam 'trembles', General Dyer 'rejoices' at the success. The oxymoron highlights the chasm in the evaluation of the political situation by the ruler and the ruled. Norbert Schurer says, "Rushdie...uses the massacre to point out how different individuals and traditions interpret history differently: While Aadam is horrified by the slaughter, Dyer is quoted as saying, 'We have done a jolly good thing'" (Schurer 25). The text poses a direct question at the validity of the colonial presence in India by juxtaposing the Indian and the colonizer's response to an incident of massacre. Rukmini Bhaya Nair opines in "Text and Pre-Text: History as Gossip in Rushdie's Novels", "*Midnight's Children*...seems to be about competing interpretations of Historical texts" (Nair 994).

The ugliness behind the Red Fort is another aspect that appears to distort the author's 'Indian myth'. "...here is Amina Sinai beneath the high walls of the Red Fort, where

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Mughals ruled, from whose heights the new nation will be proclaimed...she enters these causeways where poverty eats away at the tarmac like a draught, where people lead their invisible lives, [and] something new begins to assail her..." (*Midnight's Children* 104-105). The narrative, here, not only reveals a dark facet of India and Indian politics but also the deliberate indifference of Indian politics towards it. For Amina, this is one dimension of India she never thought existed, and she experiences it for the first time traveling with Lifafa Das. As a result, she is visibly uncomfortable with this new revelation and expresses, "How terrible, truly!" (*Midnight's Children* 105).

The Dark Facet is Closer Home

This dark facet of India, ironically, is at the backside of the Red Fort, symbol of India's democracy, the place from where the national leaders will subsequently address the masses and talk about joining the elite group of developed nations. But, this 'other' reality of India is something that Indian politics cannot find time for. The reason, too is offered, "When you have city eyes you cannot see the invisible people, the men with elephantiasis of the balls and the beggars in boxcars don't impinge on you..." (*Midnight's Children* 105).

Rushdie's India and Indian political history does not evade this 'other' side of life. Also, the scenario remains more or less the same in the post-independence period. "...by the Plan's end in 1961, and although, during those five years, the number of landless and unemployed masses actually increased, so that it was greater than it had ever been under the British Raj, there were also substantial gains. The production of iron ore was almost doubled; power capacity did double; coal production leaped from thirty-eight million to fifty-four million tons. Five billion yards of cotton textiles were produced each year...But I can't help ending on a downbeat: illiteracy survived unscathed; the population continued to mushroom" (*Midnight's Children* 285).

Affluence and Poverty

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The narrative, through the juxtaposition of the affluence of Amina and the teething poverty of the Delhi slums, and the continuity of the apathy even after independence, questions the very tenets of a modern nation based on equality. It actually highlights the veil of public concern over the real motive of personal profit. Teresa Heffernan opines that “*Midnight’s Children* invokes the myth of public communities while all the while ensuring...private interests” (Heffernan 478). The Delhi slums appear to distort the alternative ‘Indian myth’ because Saleem, the protagonist of the adapted epic, has no ‘solution’ to these issues. But in doing so Rushdie reflects the continuing apathy of the political brass towards the common man, and in the process, revealing the limitations of his India. Through his India, he highlights the continuation of ‘babuism’, by the ‘brown babus’ instead of the white ones.

One Cannot Escape Partition

Another incident that apparently severely compromises the structural ‘Indian myth’ of Rushdie is partition. “...the clocks in Pakistan would run half an hour ahead of their Indian counterparts...Mr Kemal, who wanted nothing to do with Partition, was fond of saying, “‘Here’s proof of the folly of the scheme! Those Leaguers plan to abscond with a whole thirty minutes! Time Without Partitions,’...And S. P. Butt said, “‘If they can change the time just like that, what’s real any more? I ask you? What’s true?’”” (*Midnight’s Children* 102-103). The issue, however, raked up in Rushdie’s ‘Indian myth’ is one that normally goes unnoticed in the face of ‘bigger’ ones like riots and abandoning one’s land and roots for a different one. Rushdie, by catering to an alternative point-of-view regarding Partition asserts the importance of the hitherto unacknowledged aspects of politics and history and the presence of disparate voices regarding a particular incident. His Indian myth, then, rather than catering to the traditional norm, deviates from it to present a different perspective.

Moreover, Rushdie’s questioning the colonial competence to enforce an event of such magnitude on a colony, especially when they are about to wind up augurs well with his Indian myth. Rushdie’s India questions the colonizer’s hegemony and approach as their

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action alludes to the adoption of the Georgian Calendar by the British leading to a big clamor over the ‘stolen time’ of 11 days as 3rd September of Julian Calendar became 14th September, 1752. The same people, who raised an outcry when the new calendar was adopted for them, didn’t even consider the thirty ‘absconded’ minutes when it came to dividing India and Pakistan. Rushdie’s Indian myth, as a result, successfully showcases the apathy of the colonizer towards its subjects.

Our Own Making – National Emergency

The Emergency imposed on an independent India also seems a blot in Rushdie’s India, “...although there is considerable disagreement about the number of ‘political’ prisoners taken during the Emergency ...All sorts of things happen during an Emergency: trains run on time, black money hoarders are frightened into paying taxes, even the weather is brought to heel, and bumper harvests are reaped; there is, I repeat, a white part as well as a black...” (*Midnight’s Children* 606). The irony implicit in the narrative is easily visible: ‘Trains run on time’, but the peril involved in traveling is far more intense than delay in traveling under normal circumstances. People ‘forced’ to pay taxes hints at tax evasion as a regular feature among Indians. The paradox of the ‘black and the white’ reflects the prevailing situation in the country.

Destruction and Deconstruction of Rushdie’s Myth

Does it emerge, then, on account of the above aberrations, that the Indian myth of Rushdie fails to emerge as an allegory against the West’s creation of India? The answer is ambiguous with critics siding with both. One group asserts that the allegory is a failure and an alternative ‘Indian myth’ fails to emerge as the incidents like the Jallianwallah Bagh massacre, the slums behind the Red Fort and partition reduce its status as one.

However, asserts the other group of critics, that looking structurally, incidents like Jalliawalla Bagh and Partition question the colonial legitimacy and the apathy of the colonial power thereby countering the colonial perspectives of the Western genres. The Delhi slums, on the other hand, are a continuous presence, with the text unable to cope

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with them, indicating the necessity to get rid of the colonial legacy prevalent in independent India and that the 'modern Indian nation', the one dreamed of by Nehru, needs to go back to the times prior to the arrival of the colonials. "You are the newest bearer of that ancient face of India which is so eternally young" (*Midnight's Children* 167). Teresa Heffernan opines, "As an Indian nationalist, Nehru invokes a 'spiritual' India as distinct from the rational, secular state, both to distinguish the new nation from its colonial heritage and to suggest that liberation from colonial rule involves a return to a national identity that has been interrupted by colonialism" (Heffernan 473). The Emergency, years later, by the Widow, reflects that India is still some distance from the 'ideal modern nation' dreamed of by the likes of Nehru.

The Colony Is Still With Us

Rushdie, in spite of being acutely aware of the importance of 'voicing' the 'self' does not lose sight of the 'negative' and 'unwanted' side of the former colony that is still a part of it. Hence, his India, reclaims the colonial past but not through an overturning of the colonial 'reality' but by reflecting the point-of-views of both the colonials and the former colony. The aberrations, as a result, showcase the presence of 'multiple voices' reflecting the strengths and weaknesses in Rushdie's India. The 'India' of Rushdie, even though a counter force to the West, is not a utopia. As a result perfection is elusive and still a long way, hence the presence of the 'teething poverty' behind the Red Fort and the Emergency.

The India of Rushdie also explores, like Plato's *Republic*, the path to India's future. This is done through the political choice between Nehru and Gandhi. Nehru is present through the letter he writes to Saleem while Gandhi through the news of his assassination and failures. Gandhi emerges as a figure who does not command the obedience of the masses, even in his 'heyday'. He calls for a *hartal* and "It is April 7th, 1919, and in Amritsar the Mahatma's grand design is being distorted...rioting mobs are breaking them [shops and railway station] up" (*Midnight's Children* 39).

Paradox of Life

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The narrative creates a paradox of life and death with Nehru and Gandhi and this reflects the choice of Rushdie in his India. Patrick Colm Hogan opines, “No doubt there is complexity and ambivalence in Rushdie’s attitude towards Gandhi” (Hogan 522). Gandhi’s absence and reference through death, opine critics like James Harrison, reflect that Gandhi’s Hinduism did not suit Rushdie’s Indian myth. Several critics do opine that Gandhi could have been a hero in Rushdie’s Indian myth but as he did not have space for one, he is ignored. D.C.R.A. Goonetilleke says, “The text has it that heroes are a rarity; only Gandhi measures up to one” (Goonetilleke 32). However, Gandhi’s dying in the India of Rushdie at the wrong time indicates that he should have lived to change the destiny of India. Patrick Colm Hogan further says, “...Gandhi should have lived to lead the new nation-presumably in a different direction from the one it ultimately took” (Hogan 523).

On the other hand, Gandhi’s assassination revealed during the screening of a movie as his only ‘presence’ in the Indian myth suggests the relegated status of religion in modern Indian politics as it was his mixing of religion with the political agenda of independence and partition that cost him his life: his desire to achieve political freedom on ‘his’ saintly terms is problematized. Kortenaar says, “It is as though the assassination revealed the truth about Gandhi: as Collins and Lapierre suggest, by making, ‘the freedom struggle a religious crusade’ Gandhi aroused instinctive and irrational forces that the nationalist intellectual elite was unable to control” (Kortenaar 46).

Objectivity Amidst Multiplicity of Voices

In addition to the ‘multiplicity of voices’, Rushdie, in his creation of India and the Indian myth, retains an objectivity. The ransacking and pillaging in partition times gives way to the objective issue of time ‘loss’ while the Jalliwallah Bagh massacre highlights the ideological gap between the Indians and the Westerners. Stanley Aronowitz wrote in “Literature as Social Knowledge: Mikhail Bakhtin and the Reemergence of the Human Sciences” that Bakhtin emphasizes on a character carrying a “voice” and several such “voices” interact with each other to create a dialogue from which the reader deduces “his

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reality”. Rushdie, through his Indian myth, juxtaposes the religious and communal East with the intellectual and class oriented West, thereby questioning the colonial legacy and its continuing presence in India. Stanley Aronowitz quotes Bakhtin as: “Dostoevsky has created a ‘plurality of equally authoritative ideological positions and an extreme heterogeneity of material’” (Aronowitz 156) and then says that “this achievement Bakhtin calls polyphony” (Aronowitz 156). Rushdie’s India, created through his Indian myth in *Midnight’s Children*, clearly reflects this heterogeneity through an open dialogue between different issues and perspectives. In the process, Rushdie always remains keenly aware of his limitations and accepts the deviations made from ‘actual chronology’, showing his desire to be faithful in his portrayal. His is never a chronicle but an actual Indian myth, one that is central to India and heterogeneous as well. By stating his work so, he offers an authenticity of purpose and intent, so critical to a piece of fiction. Moreover, Rushdie’s description of *Midnight’s Children* as a work of fiction also indicates his acceptance of his status as an ‘outsider’ who has access only to the broadly visible aspects open to disagreement.

The political history and events in the novel, hence, are narrated from a point-of-view different from that of most writers and comes in the backdrop of his confession of being an ‘outsider’ producing a work of ‘fiction’. The only place in the Indian myth where his subjectivity takes full wings is the Parliament of the mind that acts as a symbol of romantic nationalism. Rushdie avoids statements that tend to become a mouthpiece of the author. The ‘Indian myth’ of Rushdie, as a result, questions the colonial viewpoint but does not emerge as the perfect alternative ‘Indian myth’. As a result, “...it is the privilege and the curse of midnight’s children to be both masters and victims of their times, to forsake privacy and be sucked into the annihilating whirlpool of the multitudes, and to be unable to live or die in peace” (*Midnight’s Children* 47). But, as is clear, he never intended his India and Indian myth to be perfect. His post-coloniality is not an escape from the colonial mindset but a modification that offers space to the positives and negatives of a former colony and in doing so looks forward to a utopian political set-up.

John J. Su says, "...I will argue that the moments of failure in Rushdie's novel establish a utopian political vision for postindependence India" (Su 547).

Cannot Be Based on Monism

One thing that asserts itself in all this is the impossibility of an India based on monism. India remains a heterogeneous entity, just as Rushdie's Indian myth reflects and this why it is so central to India. K. Raghavendra Rao in "The Novel as History as 'Chutney': Unriddling Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*" asserts the same: "The main thematic leitmotifs of the novel are pieced together with great skill and subtlety to give us a sense of history as a specially concocted 'chutney'" (Rao 154). And it is Saleem, the protagonist, the hero of the Indian myth of Rushdie, who validates this alternative construct of 'India' and the myth itself. The structural political overtones, the political incidents from 1915 to the Emergency, the Hindu-Muslim duality, the minor Christian characters, all order themselves around Saleem Sinai, the focal point of the narrative, who holds the centre firm.

Literary Subversion – The Ultimate Effect

Midnight's Children, then, emerges as a subversion of the Western Literary genres and their representation of India. The alternative 'Indian myth' of Rushdie reflects a restricted attempt at the 'native's voice' through a modification, not rejection, of the colonial perspective, limited by his 'outsider' status. As a result, there are several limitations to his alternative 'Indian myth' but it has its own validity and perspective that is certainly distinct from that of the West. His India, as it emerges, is one of 'multiple voices' and an amalgamation of positives and negatives that exist simultaneously.

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