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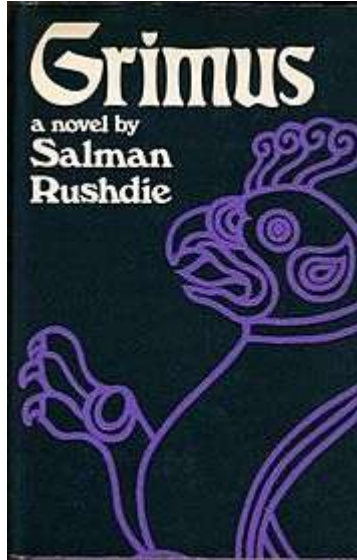
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Salman Rushdie's Art

R. Abeetha, M.A., M.Phil. in English



Rushdie's First Novel – A Fantasy

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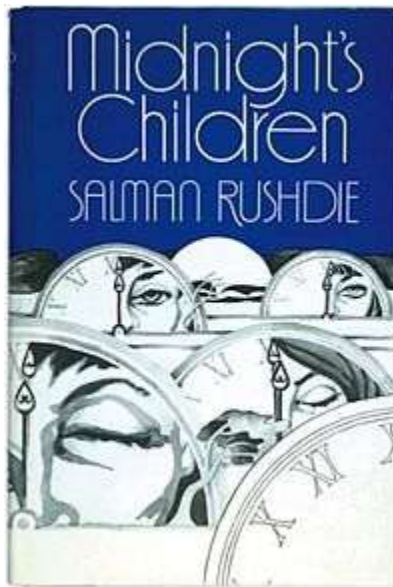
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R. Abeetha, M.A., M.Phil. in English

Salman Rushdie's Art

Salman Rushdie is well known as a leading novelist among the writers of Indian English literature. He is also known as an effective but controversial writer in modern English fiction across the globe. Rushdie's first novel *Grimus* (1975) was a fantasy which received unfavorable reviews. This novel was written for Victor Gollancz Science Fiction Competition. This book is, in fact, a quest novel with an imaginary setting that uses certain key ideas of Sufi poetry in the context of Western fantasy genre. This novel is rather difficult for a common reader and differs from his later novels in content.

***Midnight's Children* – From Fantasy to Politics**



Salman Rushdie shot into international fame with the publication of his second novel, *Midnight's Children* in 1980. The book won the prestigious Booker McConnell prize for fiction in 1981 and was hailed as a literary masterpiece. The award gave it enormous publicity and media coverage, reviews and articles, radio features and interviews. This book mixes fact and fantasy.

Midnight's Children is fairly a political novel and presents a realistic picture of Indian politics. He presents the events in a manner that it appears as if the political and historical scenario of the Indian sub-continent has been redrawn. Salman Rushdie uses effectively to serve

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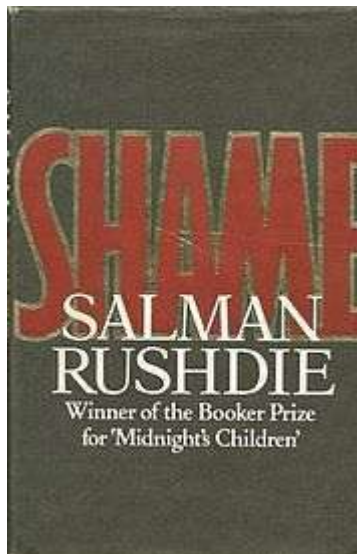
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his purpose. *Midnight Children* marked a turning point not only in Indian English novel but also in the history of twentieth century literature and ideas.

Place among the Writers of Indian Writing in English

The whole generation of largely male authors, like Amitav Ghosh, Allan Sealy, Shashi Tharoor, Mukul Kesavan, Rohinton Mistry, Vikram Seth and Vikram Chandra, etc., followed in Rushdie's footsteps. The thematic and stylistic concerns called for a new experimental strategy which is mirrored in its mode of narration, complex mixture of different narrative genres, novelty of metaphors and inventiveness of idioms. Rushdie's novels bring together public and private events, history, myth and legends, realism and fantasy comedy and scathing satire – within an imaginative and linguistic frame work which is always under control.

Shame



If *Midnight's Children* is about India, *Shame* (1983), his next novel is about Pakistan and her situation since 1947. As Rushdie claims, “The Country in the story is not Pakistan or not quite. There are two countries, real and fictional, occupying, the same space or almost the same space” (*Shame*, page: 29). Rushdie selects material from Pakistani history, fantasizes it and

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imposes it, like a palimpsest, on the existing country. Geography, history and persons are imaginatively re-created in the book to form part of a modern fairytale with the theme of Shame and shamelessness. The book was banned in Pakistan but it won much critical acclaim.

Centrality of Family

Rushdie's point about the centrality of family in politics and in culture is well-taken. The narrative structure should have to stand on its own, but in *Shame* it does not. However, the fracture in *Shame* is not one of the message alone, but of method as well. Shakil's characterization is only one of the factors. Shakil's story moves off base. "If you hold down one thing, you hold down the adjoining," the narrator says. (*Shame*, p.173). . The novel contains a very vivid political scenario of Pakistan involving two characters Raza Hyder and Iskander Harappa. Raza Hyder represents the character of General Zia and the Iskander Harappa represents Zulfikar Ali Bhutto.

This novel deals with these facts about careerism, cops , politics, revenge , assassinations, execution, blood and guts and keeps on discovering more and more about female characters, who dominate the novel. He represents the Pakistan society, by and large as a repressive society, which is authoritarian in its society and sexual codes which crushes its women beneath the intolerable burdens of honor and propriety.

A Disaster - *The Satanic Verse*

The Satanic Verses (1988) is an allegory in which Rushdie has used dream concept throughout the novel. The novel arouses the feeling of disgust and anger among the readers because of offensive remarks against the Prophet of Islam and Holy Qur'an. The novel also contains unpleasant satirical remarks against the Hindu god "Hanuman". The novel has landed in controversies due to many sex scenes, apparently irrelevant to the plot, interlinked with the elements of religion. Rushdie did not hesitate to name his characters quite identified to the real names of religious figures. The novel is condemned widely.

In 1990, Rushdie published an essay “**In God Faith**” to appease his critics and issued an apology in which he reaffirmed his respect for Islam.

Rushdie’s Art

Rushdie has dealt with many controversial matters and has employed impressive narrative techniques in his novels. So, he is a controversial writer and also a major writer. In some sense, Rushdie’s early interest in fantasy still continues in his later novels. It is difficult to say whether Rushdie is an angry novelist or a novelist who loves controversy for controversy’s sake. Certainly his controversial writing has brought him more recognition in many directions, even as it landed him in great many troubles. Is his writing constructive or simply a commentary on life around him as understood and interpreted in his own way?

Rushdie’s language is not hard to follow but his metaphors and symbols demand a better grounding in literature and global and regional politics. This extra demand is a stumbling block to understand his purpose and enjoy his fiction. The voluminous size of some of his novels is another drawback to fully enjoy some of his novels. Rushdie could really reduce the size and still make his stories effective and interesting.

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