

Narrative Technique in Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*

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Abstract

This research paper is whole-heartedly focused on the narrative technique of Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, one of his major novels. The study is supposed to be very significant simply because it exposes post modern narrative technique that Rushdie exploits in it. The research method exploited in this research paper are numerous, but at the same time it gives focus on magic realism, admixture of fantasy and reality. Rushdie, in *Midnight's Children*, uses political allegory during the narration and he exposes Saleem as an allegorical figure., who is made to move through time with an ease for his narration. One can notice it when he calls himself as having "a metaphorical" relation to the nation. Rushdie's narrative technique which fills the readers with wonder makes them believe what his narrator says. Similarly, through its first person and fallible narrator, Rushdie's novel falls within the category of metafiction. Rushdie has presented how post modern writers build meaning on the use of old and new forms along with genres, such as allusions, other intertexts, kitsch, fabricated or invented quotations from other literary and non-literary texts. After reading the novel, it enables the reader to comprehend how Rushdie has made impact on the Indian English writers with his innovative way of writing novel.

Key words: Post modern narrative, magic realism, metaphorical relation, political allegory

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Introduction

Midnight's Children (1980) by Salman Rushdie (1947) is an epitome of culmination like myth, epic proportion, multiple narrative strands, subversion of history , hybrid language ,and original thought, .It gives multiple patterns of artistry and offers various perspective to analyze. The fertility and maturity of this novel is further attested by the Booker Prize to the novel and then Booker of Bookers in 1994. The novel had phenomenal and stunning impact because of its sheer energy, innovation in language and its wide sweeping range. A phenomenon in itself, it marks a watershed in Indian English Novel. Not only it has influenced successive novelists, rather it has transformed the way fiction is being attempted, intended, aspired and received now. Besides, the aspect of defamiliarisation is also another remarkable feature of the novel.

As a loose allegory, *Midnight Children* holds the readers of the Indian sub-continent in a sway. Its narrative technique using history, humor, oral narrative tradition and hybrid language have innovative literary significance .When Rushdie set out to write this novel, he had intended it to be a novel of memory, but somewhere he got interested in the process of filtration of ancient narrative structures the post-modern, technique. Meenakshi Mukherjee in her analysis has stated that :

The very first opening paragraph of *Midnight's Children* sets up three levels of narration – fairy tales (one upon a time) autobiography (I was born in Doctor Narlikar's Nursing Home) and History (India's arrival at independence" .(19)

The interplay of these three levels is sustained throughout the three parts of thirty chapters of the novel . Saleem Sinai is the narrator of *Midnight's Children* and often indulges in abstract and fantasies .Unlike past, when it befit only children, fantasy has been accorded new status in the novel because of the present crisis of the nature of reality. The crisis is set off by new discoveries that show that reality cannot exist independent of the observer. In *Midnight's Children*, the numeral 1001 used to enumerate the number of children born at the stroke of independence of India. The use of reality and magic realism is intended to question the place of reality in art. . Reality and fantasy are juxtaposed in *Midnight's Children* and it presents two perspectives which are interdependent yet independent. The narrative technique in the novel hinges upon Saleem, who was born at the dawn of independence and whose life holds the significance of Indian history and Indian people.

Research Methods

This article is based on qualitative research and the researcher has mainly used the available resources of research materials like library, internet and documents. Narrated in first person in the voice of Saleem Sinai, *Midnight's Children* continuously alternates between the past and the present. Rushdie has employed this narrative technique to enable the narrator to move through time with ease. Another technique which makes the narration rich is how the narrator creates suspense. Saleem , during narration, takes through the real historical events of India making the novel admixture of fictitious and non fictitious accounts and at the same time placing the narration in the genre of magic realism.

Research Problem

Midnight's Children gives rise to new method of narration through it. The novel, which won Booker Prize, depicts the narration from the perspective of main character, Saleem Sinai, a man born at the exact moment when India became independent of British imperial rule . Rushdie upsets the conventions of typical memoirs by presenting readers with a distinctly unreliable narrator and incorporating elements of magic realism throughout it. The objectives of the study are:

- i. To find out the use of narrative technique in the novel.
- ii. To find out the narrative technique and its overall development of the thematic aspects of the novel.

Significance of the Study

This study will help to find out narrative technique in the key novel of Salman Rushdie, *Midnight's Children*. Critics and researchers will be more benefitted by this research. It will provide a new outlook regarding the narrative technique which the researcher can exploit during research work. It enriches the knowledge of the readers of literature particularly to those trying to explore text through narrative technique and hence it will equip them with new sight to look in the text.

Review of literature

This section has been constructed in order to see the critical views of different critics regarding *Midnight's Children*. Similarly this section also takes into the consideration of what has

been done so far in relation to the noble. Critics are found to be very much interested to analyze the novel from the point of view of the fusion between fantasy and reality which is termed as magic realism. The term magic realism that was first used in 1925 by Franz Roh for style of painting was considered a part of the genre of fiction. Later, it was frequently used by many writers like Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Jorge Amado, Jorge Luis Borges and so on. According to Anis Manzoor, Dr. Walnir (2015), "Rushdie's principal use of magic realism in the text involves telepathic abilities of Saleem and other thousand children born at the same stroke of midnight on August 13, 1947, abilities that enable them with each other and in case of Saleem's case to read the mind of those around him"(P.1). Similarly, according to Md. Amir Hossain, (2018) "Salman Rushdie's writing in particular *Midnight's children* provides us with perfectly illustrative example of how magic realism can work with historical post modernism"(P.2).

One critic, Marc C. Corner (1997) describes *Midnight Children* as one of "confrontation of languages, literary forms, nation and ultimately history" (P.1). He believes that Rushdie plays out the confrontation at multiple levels which include characters, plot, theme and even narrative forms. For Gillian Gane (2006) "the main difficulty in the novel lies in the impossibility of determining what language the characters in the novel are actually speaking. She claims that "the English language is the magic ratio by means of which meaning becomes accessible in *Midnight's Children*" (P.3).

As it is evident from the above remarks stated above, a lot of critics have either pointed out the novel either in term of magic realism or the extension of English language. But the critics have not dealt with the novel in term of narrative technique within it. Thus, this study deals with this gap and tries to show the technique of narration in it.

Discussion: Narrative Techniques in Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*

There are many reasons behind the rapid success and popularity of Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*. One of them was the unique style and narrative technique. Rushdie has applied many rare and innovative techniques in his novel which are appreciable doubtlessly. He has applied fantasy, magic realism, history and individuals and many others in his works.

In general it is observed that a novelist uses alternative methods of "showing" and "telling" - of showing how the characters speak or act for themselves and of intrusively telling how they do these things. Rushdie believes that art of fiction does not begin until the novelist thinks of his story as a matter to be shown, to be so exhibited that it will tell itself. Rushdie's aims are as varied as his achievement. And so, he has applied varied techniques in *Midnight's Children* which can be considered a "Non-fiction Novel" of political allegory. It just seems a political allegory as Rushdie's religious allegory is absorbed quickly into the political because religion has always been a potent weapon for the matters of India.

At a glance *Midnight's Children* gives the impression of a vast ambitious amorphous work in which some of the author's intentions and devices are at cross-purposes. The protagonist narrator strikes one as not only preternaturally clever, but also as impish, omniscient and wholly incredible as a human being. One begins to see that Saleem Sinai is, in fact intended to be simultaneously Rushdie's alter ego and an allegorical representation of India's Independence. The life of Saleem is really the history of that independence and like Saleem, Rushdie, was born at the precise hour of the end of the British rule. In order to defend the accuracy of history, Saleem interrupts the narrative:

“I told you the truth. I say yet again. Memory is truth, because memory has its own special kind . It selects, eliminates, alters , exaggerates, minimizes, glorifies and vilifies also; but in the end it creates its own reality, its heterogeneous but usually coherent version of events... (253)..

On the whole, the critical consensus, seems to be that:

- a) Rushdie's mode of narration is magic realism.
- b) He is postcolonial and postmodernist and
- c) His use of English is "innovative" and "decolonizing" .
- a) Magic Realism has been variously defined as an attempt to transcend the limitation of Realism, a free mixture of fantasy and reality, a mode that holds the mirror at a slight angle to reality. However, what is interesting to note is that it was Rushdie himself who first claimed for his fiction, the mode of magic realism. Salman Rushdie used magic Realism as an instrument of ambitious political and religious allegory.
- b) On theoretical plane, all the views are unimpeachable, for they can be seen in practice also. Like early in the novel *Midnight's Children*, the narrator talks about his grandfather getting caught in Jallianwala Bagh Massacre.
- c) It is quite sure that even an identical historian wouldn't be so objective as to treat the massacre and an old man's nose with equal seriousness. The movement for a Marathi State and its clashes with the Gujrati agitation-all these are "old dead struggles between the baron angularity of marathi.... and Gujrati's boggy Kathiawari softness."Clearly the narrator here is one who has no idea of languages, and its speakers and their culture. No wonder then a little later, he records that an innocent rhyme in Gujrati sparked off a riot in which many people were killed.

Soo che ? Saru che ?

Danda leke maru che !

(How are you ? i am well - I will take a stick and thrash you to hell) (191).

As is obvious, in *Midnight's Children*, Rushdie attempts to chronicle simultaneously the histories of an individual and a nation. It's quite a unique nature of national history that emerges from *Midnight's Children*. Finally coming to Rushdie's use of English, it is supposed to be born out of a creative consciousness, and a subversion of English language.

But what one actually finds in him is a gratuitous mix of English, Hindi and Urdu words, resulting in what he himself calls "Chutnification" which is criticized by many authors. They call it a sort of Pidgin English. In spite of this type of criticism, Rushdie has made a significant place for him in the Global English scenario. Because, it was Rushdie himself, not any other Indian writer that gets invited by the New York Times to write about India and Indian literature. Rushdie, in his article, made the preposterous claim that creative writing in Indian was only in English and not in any regional languages , reassuring the British and American readers that after all colonization was riot that happened to India.

Rushdie is obliged to invest his narrator-protagonist with superhuman vision and extraordinary powers of thorough reading in order to make his omniscient accounts of a dozen

different lives as well as the life of the nation credible as coming from a single witness. Saleem is intensely conscious about the impact of his narrative on listeners: "... these events, which have tumbled from my lips any old how, garbled by haste and emotion, are for others to judge" (28). But he can rationalize the multiplicity of strands that he weaves into his narrative of which he is the centre: "If I seem a little bizarre, remember the wild profusion of my inheritance.... perhaps, if one wishes to remain an individual in the midst of the teeming multitudes, one must make oneself grotesque(126)." Saleem gives earnest of his prodigious powers from his cradle. From the beginning Rushdie maintains a continuous effort at synchronizing national and domestic life, so that the odyssey of the nation from the year 1915 up to about the year 1977; this convergence of the national and the domestic is underscored repeatedly in the course of the novel. In Saleem's narrative, the reader is told about real events that are imaginable, "...saw things that weren't-couldn't-have-been-true: soldiers entering women's hostels without knocking; women dragged into the street, were also entered, and again nobody troubled to knock." (497). On the other hand, when the war had been won and Indian troops enter Dacca, Saleem is discovered in the streets by his friend Parvati the Witch from the midnight children conference and he becomes "the willing captive of the Indian magicians," (530). She helps him to go back to India, in a way that is not realistically imaginable "Then Parvati whispered some other words, and, inside the basket of invisibility, I, Saleem Sinai, complete with my loose anonymous garment, vanished instantly into thin air" (531).

The novel is related to the modern phenomenon of the Non-fiction Novel. The Non-fiction Novel is a novel based on contemporary political events, the genre having originated in some American novelists' feeling that in the sixties real events in that country had acquired a quality of fantasy.

Another playful aspect of Rushdie's technique is his deliberate presentation of scenes in terms of the film :

"Close-up of my grandfather's right hand nails, *knuckles*, fingers all somehow bigger than you'd expect. Clumps of red hair on the outside edges, thumb and forefinger pressed together, separated only by a thickness of paper. In short, my grandfather was holding a pamphlet. It had been inserted into his hand (we cut to a long-shot-nobody form Bombay should be without a basic film vocabulary) as he entered the hotel..." (31) .

The interaction between fiction and the film would seem to deserve a volume to it. But it may not be long before some talented director, taking the clue from Rushdie, discovers the filmic possibilities of *Midnight's Children* and sets about filming it. Thus it can be concluded that Rushdie's mode of narration is unique and excellently- outstanding.

Conclusion

My goal has been to see how the postmodern narrative techniques manifest themselves in the novel. The novel is both post-colonial and postmodern. It is post-colonial due to the simple fact that they are written during India's first fifty years of independence by Indian novelist. Moreover, postmodernism may be defined as a specific style of thought. Rushdie has employed the continuous alternate between past and present to enable the narrator to move through time with ease. While we find Sinai grandfather Adam Aziz performing Namaz in the valley of Kashmir at one point, the next page brings us to the present in which Sinai is seated at his writing desk with Padma by his side.

Another technique of creating suspense makes the readers fill with awe and wonder. The revelation Mumtaz's sexless married life with Nadir Sah is very wonderful in the novel. Similarly, the strong hold of narrator on his narration that leaves no room for disbelief or question on the part of the readers which is equally notable aspect of the research paper in term of Rushdie's narrative technique. The readers have to believe everything that the narrator says even if it is false. Such is the conviction in Rushdie's narrative technique.

The narration of all events, significant or not, revolves around Saleem. Hence, *Midnight's Children* is a narrative by a writer sitting at his writing desk, penning down all that he recollects or recounts coating facts with magical words and spells "abracadabra". While narrating the magical history of his birth, Saleem takes us through the real history of India. Thus, this novel is fictitious accounts of many non-fictitious events, placing this narration in the genre of magic realism. Hence, Saleem is brilliant narrator and a master of the art of storytelling. It can be concluded that employing so many techniques and styles, Rushdie attempts to write a novel as large and grand as its subject matter, India. Rushdie's art and technique of narration in *Midnight's Children* has gathered national events, family saga, epic, fable, newspaper clipping, parody and gossip in all in comprehensive sweep of art and cogent technique of narration.

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