

## MAGIC REALISM: A TECHNIQUE CONSCIOUSLY USED TO TRANSCEND THE REALITY IN *MIDNIGHT'S CHILDREN* A SELECT NOVEL OF SALMAN RUSHDIE

**Abhibunnisha Begum**

Assistant Professor,  
Department of English & Humanities,  
Anil Neerukonda Institute of Technology and Sciences,  
Sangivalasa, Bheemili Mandal,  
Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh, INDIA.

### Abstract

The narrative in Indian languages has had a very widespread and altered history. There are many human groups who are writing, freckled athwart the world level, but as far as Indian perspective and art of narrative discourse is anxious, the little has been written on rhetoric and literary criticism. Sir Ahmed Salman Rushdie, a contentious modern writer, is tremendously recognized for with several path breaking attempts in literature. Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao and R.K. Narayan drew the first models of character and elaborated the strange sagacity of the Indian novel. Rushdie's Novel *Midnight's Children* (1981), was awarded both the Booker McConnell Prize and the James Tait Black Memorial Prize. The narrator discusses with himself and shifts between a fairytale ways of telling, that is "*once upon a time*", and a telling based on facts. Rushdie is trying to set up an apprehension in the text by creating an inconsistent variance between the form and the content of the story. *Midnight's Children* is a typical example of a postcolonial novel that integrates the elements of magic realism into it. Rushdie's use of magic realism makes *Midnight's Children* the more alluring. It gives a fantastical component to the text. It seems to me magic realism could be used by an author writing from any kind of fringe in order to undermine the foremost force they are writing against. It would be revelatory of how infinite magic realism truly is, if and how the genre would work when employed by a nomad or minority writer, or, for example, by an author who is marginalized because they do not be conventional to society's standards because of sexuality or ability. This would answer the question whether magic realism could justly accomplish a state of equivalence.

**Keywords:** contentious, equivalence, inconsistent, tremendously, variance.

The narrative in Indian languages has had a very widespread and altered history. There are many human groups who are writing, freckled athwart the world level, but as far as Indian perspective and art of narrative discourse is anxious, the little has been written on rhetoric and literary criticism. Sir Ahmed Salman Rushdie, a contentious modern writer, is tremendously recognized for with several path breaking attempts in literature. Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao and R.K. Narayan drew the first models of character and elaborated the strange sagacity of the Indian novel.

They played incredibly decisive role in the narratology. Rushdie, through his works has explored new ideas in Narratology. Thus the intended study will dissect the ideas. Rushdie tries his pen in the literary world of lurid simplicity of thought and sleight of syntax. His innovative narrative techniques are full of swaying expression and dazzled whimsical ideas. This made him to be a writer of predictable of World Literature.

Rushdie's Novel *Midnight's Children* (1981), was awarded both the Booker McConnell Prize and the James Tait Black Memorial Prize. *Midnight's Children* chronicles the history of India, beginning in 1947 when India became independent from British rule. The protagonist, Saleem Sinai, one of a thousand and one babies born all through the first hour of India's independence is easily reached as a man in his untimely thirties who has aged impulsively and become powerless. The novel has been comprehensively read as an allegory, with Saleem and the other thousand babies, many of whom died at birth, representing the hopes and aspirations as well as the infuriating realities of independent India.

The novel starts with a prologue where the protagonist, Saleem Sinai says:

I was born in the city of Bombay [...] once upon a time. No, that won't do, there's no getting away from the date: I was born in Doctor Narlikar's Nursing Home on August 15th, 1947. And the time? The time matters, too. Well then: at night. No, it's important to be more [...] On the stroke of midnight, as a matter of fact. Clock-hands joined palms in respectful greeting as I came. Oh, spell it out, spell it out: at the precise instant of India's arrival at independence, I tumbled forth into the world. There were gasps. And, outside the window, fireworks and crowds. A Few seconds later, my father broke his big toe; but his accident was a mere trifle when set beside what had befallen me in that benighted moment, because thanks to the occult tyrannies of those blandly saluting clocks I had been mysteriously handcuffed to history, my destinies indissolubly chained to those of my country. (MC. 9)

The first sentences show how the story is going to be told. The narrator discusses with himself and shifts between a fairytale ways of telling, that is "once upon a time", and a telling based on facts. Rushdie is trying to set up an apprehension in the text by creating an inconsistent variance between the form and the content of the story.

*Midnight's Children* is rich in allusions to Indian history, literature, and mythology. For this and other reasons, the novel is comprehensively viewed as a stylistic tour de force. Rushdie introduces fantastic and ludicrously incongruous events in socially realistic settings, a technique known as "magic realism". Rushdie's use of magic realism and his fervent prose, which features general use of symbolism and exaggeration, led numerous critics to consider his style with that

of Gabriel Garcia Marquez. Critics also impressed with the diverse description perspectives employed by Rushdie to broaden the scope of *Midnight's Children*. Several critics have located Rushdie amid the immense chronicles of India's political, social, and cultural history.

The narrative in Indian languages has had a dreadfully long and varied history. It can be compared with that of any other country during the ancient or medieval period. Narrative, whether it is in written or in the oral form, survives in the one structure or another. No qualm, it has been affected by the absolutism of historical forces. It shows a widespread variety of themes and techniques. Some of such narratives may still be seen in the period practices of dissimilar tribes and groups in the country. What is outlined here curtly is only a working model for the rationale of discerning major components of the history of Indian narrative.

There are several human groups who are writing, spotted across the world level, but as far as Indian condition and art of narrative discourse is fretful, the little has been written on speechifying and literary criticism. There are many texts available today on poetics in Sanskrit like *Natya Sastra* but they talk more about drama and poetry, and have not steadfastly said much about illusory narration as such. It may be considered that whatsoever is told about poetry and drama is relatable to narrative art also in its significance on the readers or in its representation of human emotions.

In the Indian narrative, the techniques are used for the facet of time in day and night, the disparate phases of moon, the cycle of reasons, the ages or stars. The telescoping of time is frequently resorted to even in the sensible novel of nineteenth century Europe. The fiction of Salman Rushdie has been studied and analyzed from a assortment of perspectives. He has been considered a Post-Modernist writer, when the critics applied the theories of Post Structuralism and Post Modernism.

According to Linda Hutcheon,

“Post modern fiction is an ‘uneasy mix’ of parody, history, metafiction and politics and that combination is probably historically determined by post modernist's confliction response to literary modernism”. (P. 4).

Salman Rushdie introduces an innovative narrative technique in Indian writings in English. It is Rushdie who sets the trend for experimentation with narrative technique and usage of English language. In this way, he gave a new direction to Indian English writings. Rushdie's works are remarkable for their technical maturity. In his more than forty years literary carrier he has chiselled sharpened and improvised his literary tools to convey his world vision. The effort in the present work is to point out the narrative technique that is generally used in fictional world of Rushdie predominantly in *Shame* (1983) and *Grimus* (1975).

It is understandable that Salman Rushdie uses narrative technique in *Midnight's Children* in order to consign his story outside the euro-centric tradition of literature, narrative and history. The theory of history obtainable in *Midnight's Children* attempts not to reinstate the centre in this traditional twofold of centre and periphery, but rather to deconstruct this binary in order to gain admittance to history and literature.

Salman Rushdie tries to sever the binary by using a extremely altered kind of narrative, a fusion of an oral narrative style with all the colloquialisms typical of that style, on the one hand, and a very ceremonial style typical of written language on the other. In addition to this ‘Englishes’ like Pidgin English are used. These elements provide to place the novel outside the

Western tradition, even though it uses a language, English, and a design, the novel, which are central to Western literary canon.

This paper will scrutinize the style and language, description, metaphor, magic realism genre of the novel to show how Rushdie accomplishes all this. It is proposed to instigate with a linguistic and stylistic analysis of the first paragraph of the book in order to illustrate how Rushdie mixes different kinds of style and language to generate a narrative exceedingly different from traditional Western books. From the beginning Rushdie places the narrative within the oral tradition by persistently disagreeing with himself about how to tell the story. He uses typical colloquialisms e.g. “No, that won’t do”, “Well then”, ending a sentence with ‘as a matter of fact’ and beginning another with ‘and’; one sentence is never completed, again typical of the colloquial style: ‘it’s important to be more [...]’ (*MC. 9*). He also, in the very first line, uses the all well-known ‘once upon a time’, which epitomises the oral tradition of folk-tales, yet he instantaneously opposes this tradition by giving us the accurate date and time of the action.

Rushdie even draws a lot of concentration to this by persistently elaborating on the details, again in a colloquial mode e.g. ‘Oh, spell it out, spell it out, spell it out’ (*MC. 9*). This ostensibly colloquial style, like the folk-tale insinuation, is forsaken without any warning; he swiftly starts to use a very formal style typical of written language, e.g. ‘mere trifle’, ‘befallen’, ‘benighted moment’ (*MC. 9*). The language sometimes becomes almost formal, e.g. ‘embroiled in Fate’; (*MC. 9*) his talk about prophecies and providence help to accentuate this solemn style. The formal style is seen in the syntax as well, e.g. in the use of a reflexive edifice, ‘had befallen’, which is typical of formal written language. He also uses a unrelenting symbol where the time of his birth becomes the ‘occult tyrannies of those blandly saluting clocks’ (*MC. 9*) which have ‘handcuffed’ and ‘chained’ him to history and his country; this persistent metaphor is, of course, not typical of everyday language, but rather of an approximately lyrical written language; i.e. a absolutely different in style from the first part of the paragraph.

But the style, too, is abandoned in the very last sentence of the paragraph, stating in a very down-to-earth mode and devoid of any of the formal stylistic and syntactic features: ‘And I couldn’t even wipe my own nose at the time’ (*MC. 9*). This last sentence cements the fact that in this book there is no preset style or type of syntax; it changes continuously.

Even the language changes, sometimes moving into Pidgin English. All this supports the point that Rushdie is recurrently trying to place himself outside the master discourse of the West. It could be said, and has been said, by some post-colonial authors and critics, that English, as the language of the colonizer, cannot be used to exemplify the problems of the colonized. However, for Rushdie there essentially is no substitute; India has around 15 major languages and writing in any of these would instantaneously give the narrator as a metaphor for India, which is a foremost point in the novel. Instead of using a language of the colonized Rushdie appropriates the English language to his own intention by using the stylistic and linguistic effects mentioned above.

Again inveterate to the first lines of the novel, another point to be made about them is that they are repeated at quite a few times throughout the book, though they are used in different contexts (*MC. 294*). This is a way to break up the usual linear structure of narrative of the Western standard and it is a technique which is used throughout the book; events are persistently being foreshadowed, and preceding (in the temporal sense) events and characters affect present events and characters without any perceptible sign of causality. Examples of the first permeate

the book, though one of the first is when the brandy bottle of the boatman Tai becomes a foreshadowing of Saleem's father's drinking (*MC*. 17).

A good example of the latter is that 'the perforated sheet through which Saleem's grandfather Aadam Aziz is forced to love his wife 'dooms' Mumtaz to her attempt to learn to love her husband, Ahmed, part by part and forces Saleem to see his wife in fragments' (*MC*. 107). The element of linearity, which is, after all, the main temporal feature of the narrative is credited to Saleem's wife, Padma, 'bullying me (Saleem) back into the world of linear narrative, the universe of what-happened-next' (*MC*. 38); she stops him his 'attempts to put the cart before the bullock' (*MC*. 338).

Thus the linearity of the narrative is not the ordinary mode of narrative for Saleem; it must be forced upon him by his wife. All of these generate a sagacity of a spherical or spiral time which runs along with the conventional linear time, persistently crossing and affecting the latter. Thus, the language, narrative style and technique all place the novel outside almost anything written in Europe before the post-modern period and thus creates a space for a very different say-so in literature, evidently divergent from the Western canon. This in spite of the fact that it uses elements from the Western tradition, e. g. the first person narrator, and the form of a chronicle or a diary.

Rushdie's prose style alone shows both the attempt implicated and the strains intrinsic in such a task. The penultimate paragraph of the book, for illustration, from 'I will have train tickets to the end, foresees the remainder of Padma and Saleem's marriage day, recapitulates for the last time the preceding events of the story, and closes with the 'fission of Saleem [...] bones splitting breaking [...] bag of bones falling down down down' as Shiva and the window close in on him from either side, all forty-five lines of print without a period (*MC*. 462-3). Earlier and comparable passages capture 'the confusion inside (Saleem's) head' when the first discovers his telepathic powers (*MC*. Pp.170-1), the conflicting points of view expressed at a typical session of the Midnight's Children's Conference (MCC) in the 'parliament of Saleem's brain' (*MC*. 228), and the tension-filled thirteen days of Parvati's labour and the Widow's refusal to resign (*MC*. Pp.417-9). But much the most intricate is the paragraph dedicated to the bomb explosion that kills Saleem's family (*MC*. Pp.342-3).

A transform from past to present tense, the more conspicuous for occurring equidistant through a single sentence, marks the decisive turning point of Saleem's amnesia. And no other passage in the book incorporates so much significant ongoing action, so comprehensive a recital of past events, and such a wealth of inference for the future, all interwoven within a single syntactic unit. All such instances of recapitulation and foreshadowing, moreover, measured singly and jointly, are among Rushdie's most recurrently used and effective devices for creating unity out of a diversity that often verges on turmoil.

In effect, hence, Rushdie is creating, stylistically, the consistency which he is concurrently acknowledging, stylistically, may be inaccessible. Purely syntactic or typographical experiments can be seen as performing similar functions. More amusingly, there is his use of the colon to call concentration to a consortium of items requiring emphasis. 'What leaked in to me from Aadam Aziz: a certain vulnerability to women, but also its cause, the hole at the centre of himself caused by his (which is also my) failure to believe or disbelieve in God. And something else as well – something which, at the age of eleven, I saw before anyone else noticed. My grandfather had begun to crack' (*MC*. 275).

Thus all syntactic efforts to hold things together also imply, by their very presence and nature, the centrifugal force of the diversity that makes them necessary, as do the equally frequent foreshadowing and recapitulations. And the same applies to imagery and events implying fragmentation and reassembly. Aadam Aziz must put together his bride-to-be from successive circular instalments glimpsed through a hole seven inches in diameter. Amina sets about loving her husband by concentrating her affection separately and successively on 'every single one of his component parts, physical as well as behavioural' (MC. 68). Ahmed dreams of reassembling 'the Quran in accurately chronological order' (MC. 82). And *Lifafa* Das strives badly to accomplish universality by adding more and more detached pictures to his peep-show. (MC. Pp. 75-6).

More essential than any of the factors previously considered, however, is Saleem Sinai himself. His role as a narrator will be measured later. But his manifold persona and the recurrently asserted metaphoric similarity of his life story to that of India comprise, indubitably, the novel's most astonishing bid for accord. He is, in the first place, the biological son of William Methwold and Vanita, the inadvertently adopted son of Ahmed and Amina, and the consequently presumed son of Wee Willie Winkie and Vanita - - i.e. the joint product (as in India) of Hindu, Muslim and English influences.

Magic Realism has been variously defined as an endeavour to surpass the constraint of Realism a free assortment 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 apparatus of determined political and religious allegory.

*Midnight's Children* is a typical example of a postcolonial novel that integrates the elements of magic realism into it. The author's intended use of magic realism helps in bringing out the surreal and unreal dimensions of the Indian subcontinent and by this means making it a postcolonial work. By synchronizing the national history and the personal history, Rushdie narrates India's colonial past and postcolonial present. His narration of the nation is slanted and therefore history in the text is fragmented and, at times, flawed.

Rushdie's use of magic realism makes *Midnight's Children* the more alluring. It gives a fantastical component to the text. Fantasy is consciously used so as to transcend the reality. Magic realism helped the author to speak the unspeakable. Various themes and elements of magic realism like the themes of multiplicity, displacement, migration, fragmentation and disintegration are symbolically used in assorted incidents in the text. The elements of pity and fear, time and space, bawdy puns and funny anecdotes, eroticism, recurrence, all give a supreme beauty to this novel. The use of poetic language too is worth noticing in this regard.

Rushdie assumes magic realism as an effective apparatus to solve the problems of post colonialism. So, by connecting and combining historical events, mythological stories and fictional narratives, Rushdie tries to create and convey a true picture of Indian post colonialism. While the colonizers categorized India and Indians as a monolithic place and people, the novel illustrates India's multiplicity and miscellany, in an endeavour to overturn the colonial image of India. *Midnight's Children* is therefore an effort to recapture India. All these attempts would have been impossible without the insertion of magic realism.

It seems to me magic realism could be used by an author writing from any kind of fringe in order to undermine the foremost force they are writing against. It would be revelatory of how infinite magic realism truly is, if and how the genre would work when employed by a nomad or minority writer, or, for example, by an author who is marginalized because they do not be conventional to society's standards because of sexuality or ability. This would answer the question whether magic realism could justly accomplish a state of equivalence.

### Works Cited

1. Hutcheon, Linda. *The Politics of Modernism*. London: Routledge. 1989. (P. 4).
2. Rushdie, Salman. *Midnight's Children*. London: Vintage Books. 1981. Print.

### References

1. Beach, Joseph Warren. The Twentieth Century Novel: Studies in Technique. New Delhi: Kalyani Publishers, 1988, (P. 3).
2. Cobley, Poul. Narrative: The New Critical Idioms. London: Routledge, 2001, 155.
3. Collar, Jonathan. Structuralist Poetics: Structuralism, Linguistics, and the Study of Literature. New York: Cornell University Press, 1975, (P.146)
4. *Express Magazine*, March 4th 1984, (P.5).
5. *Interview with Salman Rushdie*, Kunapipi, 1982; (2.9): (P.19).
6. James, Henry. The Future of the Novel. New Delhi: Anmol Publishers, rpt. 1990, (P.22).
7. Lodge, David. The Art of Fiction. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1992, (P.122).
8. Lubbock, Percy. The Craft of Fiction. New Delhi: B.I. Publications, 1979, (P.251).
9. Panikar, K. Ayyapa. Indian Narratology. New Delhi: Sterling Publishers Pvt. Ltd, 2012. Print
10. Salman Rushdie before Booker, *Interview* by Alok Bhalla and Meenakshi Mukherjee, *Eve's Weekly*, 1983.
11. Salman Rushdie, Introduction: Gunter Grass, On Writing and Politics, 1967-1983. A Helen and Kurt Wolff Book, Harcourt, Inc. London. (P.149).
12. Schorer, Mark. Techniques as Discovery. Perspective on Fiction. Eds James L. Calderwood and Harold E. Toliver. New Delhi: OUP, 1988, (P.201).
13. Shlomith, Rimmon- Kenan. Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics. London: Routledge, 2003. (P. 36)
14. Walse, William. India and the Novel, Ed. by Boris Ford, Penguin Books, 1989, (P.4).

Indian government scholarships for studying abroad. Complete list of Indian scholarships, Financial Aid, Bursaries, Undergraduate, Master's, Grants and PhD Programs for foreign students are available here. Students from around the world especially from developing countries may benefit from these available scholarships. Wellcome Trust's India Alliance Intermediate Research Fellowships for International Students in India, 2018. Indian Scholar is an International peer-reviewed, open access, online... See more of Indian Scholar An International Multidisciplinary Research Journal on Facebook. Log In. or. Create New Account. See more of Indian Scholar An International Multidisciplinary Research Journal on Facebook. Log In. Forgotten account? India Scholar. 674 likes. Just for fun. See more of India Scholar on Facebook. Log In. or. Create New Account. See more of India Scholar on Facebook. Log In. Forgotten account?