



## Post Modern Mental Challenges in Rushdie's Novel *Midnight's Children*

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### ABSTRACT

This article undertakes an investigation of the postmodern mental challenges in Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* through the experiences of Saleem Sinai, the protagonist of the novel. It addresses the multifaceted nature of Saleem's psyche and the various challenges he faces by detailing the elements of identity, hybridity, fragmentation of history and memory. In addition, his experiences are analysed through the concepts of postmodern intertextuality and reality distortion in the rapidly changing world. By drawing upon the ideas of postmodern theorists Bhabha and Lyotard, this study delves into the fragmented consciousness of Saleem. Also it delves into the complex interplay of postmodern themes and postcolonial realities in *Midnight's Children*, while also examining the profound impact of globalization on societies influenced by the West. By separating the various strands of these connections, the study sheds light on the complexities of contemporary life and briefs critical reflection on broader societal implications.

### Key Words

Saleem Sinai, postmodern, hybridity, fragmentation, intertextuality, globalization

### I. INTRODUCTION

A captivating novel by Rushdie that tells us the story of Saleem Sinai, born at the exact moment when India gained independence where it is mixed with the historical events of the nation that includes the showcasing of the element of magical realism which was first included by Gabriel Garcia Marquez in his novel titled *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and the sudden disturbance in the history of India. When looked over across the Indian context, postmodernism's social, political, and cultural fragmentation component comes into the picture. While initiatives were made in the post-independence era to create a unified national

identity and shared experience, India has recently seen the breakdown and decentralization of these narratives. Therefore, the post-modern Indian subject lives among conflicting fragments of language, religion, location, caste, class, and culture but lacks a comprehensive, unified sense of identity.

Salman Rushdie also explores the disintegration of identity in the face of modernity, a theme deeply rooted in postcolonial discourse. The novel portrays the complex relationship between modernity and identity through the protagonist Saleem Sinai and other characters, reflecting the fragmentation and reshaping of individual and national identities in postcolonial India. As he deals with the complexities of cultural hybridity, linguistic diversity, and instability in politics, the legacy of colonialism hinders his mental state. His problems with mental health are made worse by the tension between tradition and modernity and the difficulty of making sense of the past and present. In an era of swift globalization and cross-cultural interchange, Saleem's identity problem perfectly reflects the wider postmodern challenge among individuals split between two or more worlds.

As Saleem struggles with the consequences of oppression and cultural displacement, his experiences serve to illustrate the adverse effects of colonialism on mental health. His mental health issues highlight the deeper psychological effects of colonialism and the construction of postcolonial identities, demonstrating the close relationship between traumatic experiences on an individual and a social level.

### THE CONCEPT OF HYBRIDITY IN *MIDNIGHT'S CHILDREN*

Hybridity and fragmentation are key terms in the postmodernist theory that provide insight on the complex character of modern identity and culture. Blending several cultural components to



create new, complex identities is known as hybridity. This process, which often takes place at the intersection of many cultures, languages, and traditions, yields identities that can be constantly shifting and hard to narrow down. On the other hand, fragmentation signifies the breakdown of broad themes and the rise of multiple, frequently conflicting perspectives and experiences. In a postmodern world defined by rapid technology advances, globalization, and exchange between cultures, fragmentation appears as a breakdown of established frameworks and boundaries, leaving a social landscape that is both complex and diverse.

According to Homi K. Bhabha's study of colonizer/colonized relations, which emphasizes their interdependence and output of their subjectivity, the term hybridity has most recently come to be connected with his work. In the post-colonial discussion, the concept of hybridity is often used to refer to simple cross-cultural exchange. Since the word often implies ignoring or rejecting the imbalance and discrimination of the power ties it refers to, this use of the term has drawn a lot of controversy. It has been stated that by emphasizing the historic cultural, linguistic, and political effects on both the colonized and the colonizer, it is imitating assimilationist strategies by whitewashing or hiding cultural differences.

In a postcolonial context, identities are flexible and always changing as a result of encounters with other cultures and ideas. Saleem's complex identity challenges rooted conceptions of recognition and is an excellent illustration of Bhabha's idea of cultural hybridity. It is shaped by his ethnic background and telepathic connections with other children of midnight.

Saleem's hybrid identity blends not just Hinduism and Islam, but also India and England. The novel implicitly makes the claim that English is now an Indian language. India does not, however, include England in the same way it includes Islam. Saleem is at once Muslim and Indian; he is not and cannot be English. Even to say India combines India and England is to raise the question of how India can be both part and whole. The way that Saleem's India includes England is more akin to imitation and contamination than to containment. (Kortenaar.Tan.167).

In truth, Saleem's hybrid identity in "Midnight's Children" combines aspects of India and England in along with merging Islam and Hinduism. Salman Rushdie challenges traditional notions about cultural ownership and linguistic hegemony by gently suggesting that English, long

the language of the colonizer, has become a crucial part of India's linguistic landscape.

Even though Saleem's identity is shaped by a variety of linguistic and cultural factors, the book emphasizes the intricacies of these intersections. Saleem can move between his Muslim and Indian identities with ease, but his links to England are weaker. Saleem is essentially Muslim and Indian, unable to fully embody or claim an English identity despite the linguistic and cultural influence of English on India.

Saleem's incorporation of England into her idea of India poses interesting issues concerning the nature of national identity and belonging. India is portrayed in the book as a complex and diverse country with many different languages, religions, and cultural traditions. England's utilization into this arrangement is not simple, though; imitation and contaminate rule over true inclusion. The legacy of colonialism and the persistent power relationships between colonizer and colonized are reflected in Rushdie's depiction of India's relationship with England. English is a reminder of past supremacy rather than an effortless merging of cultures, despite the fact that it is widely spoken and widely accepted in India.

Saleem's telepathy allows him to bind together the perspectives of different postcolonial perspectives in *Midnight's Children*. It illustrates how blended Indian history and culture are. The *Midnight Children's Conference* discussion legitimizes this insight. Saleem is the conference organizer. In her opening remarks, Saleem reveals the origin of *Midnight's Children*:

"Understand what I'm saying: during the first hour of August 15th, 1947-between midnight and one a.m.— no less than one thousand and one children were born within the frontiers of the infant sovereign state of India. In itself, that is not an unusual fact although the resonances of the number are strangely literary ... as though history, arriving at a point of the highest significance and promise, had chosen to sow, in that instant, the seeds of a future which would genuinely differ from anything the world had seen up to that time" (Rushdie, 1981:352).

This excerpt from Salman Rushdie's "Midnight's Children" underlines the special circumstances surrounding Saleem Sinai's and the other children of midnight's birth, setting the tone for the main idea of the book. Also highlights how significant the birth of these children—each symbolizing a new era for the country—coincides with the historic event of India's independence.



Rushdie's choice of the number "one thousand and one" has deep symbolic meaning, calling to mind the fantastical and magical stories found in the Arabian Nights. This literary allusion gives these children's birth a legendary air, implying that they are destined for greatness and have a unique significance in the history of India that is gradually being revealed.

It also emphasizes the concept that these children are not just ordinary individuals; rather, they are prophets of a new era, representing the dreams and ambitions of a recently established country. The story presents their births as an important event that predicts a future full of opportunity for change and renewal. In implying that the circumstances surrounding the birth of the children of Midnight are not merely untimely but rather filled with a sense of determination and inevitability, Rushdie highlights the thematic significance of time and history in the book through this paragraph. This crucial moment sows the seeds of the future, laying the groundwork for the epic tale that develops as Saleem and his classmates negotiate the difficulties of the *Midnight's Children*.

### FRAGMENTATION OF HISTORY

The concept of fragmentation has been shown by the dynamic connection between a nation and its people, as well as by the colonial Indians who suffered from varying losses of national identity brought on by cultural hybridity while living under British control. A country's past can have a significant and lasting impact on its citizens.

"History is always ambiguous. Facts are hard to establish. And capable of being given many meanings. Reality is built on our prejudices, misconceptions and ignorance as well as on our perceptiveness and knowledge. The reading of Saleem's unreliable narration might be, I believed, a useful analogy for the way in which we all, every day, attempt to read the world."

Throughout India's history, both the nation and its people have been divided. Partition was the means by which India gained its independence, causing suffering to its people and inciting conflicts between Muslims and Hindus. The relationship between India and its people demonstrates the tight relationship between a nation's and an individual's fragmentation. The history of the nation in which a person lives can be reflected in that person, and vice versa. In this way, Saleem's disintegration in *Midnight's Children* reflects the broken reality of the newly formed India.

In "*Midnight's Children*," Salman Rushdie uses historical fragmentation as a storytelling device to reflect the fractious and nuanced character of postcolonial India. The book is organized around a number of disconnected scenes, which represent the rifts and discontinuities present in India's historical development. Rushdie mostly achieves this fragmentation through the life of Saleem Sinai, whose chaotic circumstances are mirrored in Indian history. Saleem's story is not linear; it jumps around in time and frequently incorporates mythological allusions and supernatural themes. The fragmented history of India, which is marked by colonialism, partition, and civil unrest, is reflected in this nonlinear pattern.

Rushdie additionally incorporates a wide range of narrative voices and different points of view, which further confuses the historical narrative. Rushdie emphasizes the subjective nature of historical fact by providing conflicting versions of events via the mouths of other people, including Saleem. The diversity and heterogeneity of Indian society, where opposing narratives coexist and connect, is reflected in the plurality of voices.

The text additionally applies a lot of intertextuality, citing a broad variety of historical, literary, and cultural sources. These references often challenge traditional notions of time and history by being unexpectedly broken up and contrasted. Rushdie creates a story that is both fragmented and unified by fusing together parts of mythology, folklore, and popular culture. This blurs the lines between the past and present, tradition and modernity.

Rushdie employs a linguistic blend that reflects the diverse cultural and linguistic landscape of postcolonial India. The use of English, regional languages, and inventive language play deconstructs linguistic norms and challenges the idea of a singular, standardized historical discourse. Language becomes a tool for dismantling fixed categories, inviting readers to engage with the multiplicity of voices and perspectives that shape history.

Moreover, Rushdie's narrative engages with the idea of 'chutnification,' a term that Saleem uses to describe the blending and mixing of identities. This theme reinforces the fluidity of identity in the postcolonial context, challenging fixed categories based on nationality, religion, and ethnicity. The fragmentation of identity, mirrored in the characters' complex backgrounds and experiences, contributes to a postmodern



understanding of history as a tapestry woven from diverse threads.

### FRAGMENTED MEMORY OF SALEEM

Fragmented memory is a key element for the fragmented character of modern experience in the postmodernist sphere. History and identity get shattered as a result of postmodernism's rejection of big narratives and acceptance of diversity. Memories get confused and patched together from fragments of cultural allusions, mediated representations, and personal memories. This fragmentation is an illustration of how quickly traditional systems are breaking down and how numerous perspectives exist in the aftermath of the postmodern era. Fragmented memory is a method used in art, film, and literature to explore the elusiveness of reality and the intricacies of subjectivity. By adopting fragmented narratives and incomplete visuals, postmodern artists challenge traditional ideas of coherence and chronological progression by forcing viewers to confront the changing nature and instability of memory.

The shattered memory of Saleem Sinai in "Midnight's Children" also contributes to the novel's broader issues of identity, history, and postcolonialism by reflecting both individual and group experiences. The violence and chaos corresponding India's 1947 partition is one of the most important incidents that adds to Saleem's fragmented memory. When Saleem was a small child, he saw terrible acts of cruelty and violence, such as the Amritsar train station slaughter. Due to the lasting psychological consequences of these traumatic encounters, Saleem has fractured and jumbled memories of the occurrences. For instance, Saleem's memory of seeing the violence may be vague or lacking, with certain memories lost to time and the psychological anguish of the encounter distorting or blurring others.

Saleem's struggle for understanding the traumatic partition-era events, which severely harmed his memory. Saleem's mind is unable to fully grasp the extent of the damage, resulting in fragmentary memories of the past, despite the chaos and destruction surrounding him.

"And even in those days of destruction, my mind was like a still pool, incapable of remembering the full extent of its losses." (Chapter 2)

Saleem's comparison of his mind to a "still pool" suggests a sense of calm or stagnation, perhaps masking deeper turmoil beneath the surface. This imagery reflects the idea of

fragmented memory, wherein certain aspects of the past are obscured or repressed, while others remain vivid or accessible. The inability to remember the "full extent of its losses" underscores the selective nature of memory, where certain traumatic events may be consciously or unconsciously suppressed as a coping mechanism. Despite the chaos and destruction surrounding him, Saleem's mind remains strangely detached, unable to fully engage with the enormity of the losses incurred. This emotional distance contributes to the fragmentation of his memory, as traumatic events are processed and remembered through a lens of detachment or numbness.

His fragmented memory also reflects more general historical traumas that have shaped postcolonial India's social consciousness. The fractured character of India's history—one characterized by social unrest, partition, and colonialism—through Saleem's memories in being portrayed. Saleem's recollections of historical events could be disjointed or bent, which illustrates the complicated connection that shapes an individual's identity and understanding of the past between societal and personal memory.

### POSTMODERN INTEXTUALITY AND REALITY DISTORTION

Rushdie weaves a complex web of intertextual references, drawing from various cultural, historical, and literary sources. By integrating elements from Indian mythology, folklore, and history, he creates a rich tapestry of interconnected narratives. This intertextuality challenges traditional notions of authorship and originality, inviting readers to engage with a multitude of texts and perspectives. The novel becomes a collage of voices and stories, illustrating the diverse cultural influences that shape postcolonial identities.

Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* looks quite similar to Sashi Tharoor's *The Great Indian Novel* because the two writers create characters from myth and use history as their art piece. Rushdie does not ridicule or make fun of the history, while Tharoor gives a comical portrayal of history to readers by parodying it. Also, Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* is inspired by the German novelist Gunter Grass and this can be clearly in comparison with his novel *The Tin Drum*.

Rushdie's use of intertextuality and reality distortion allows him to engage in a form of historical revisionism. By reinterpreting historical events and figures, he critiques dominant narratives



and offers alternative perspectives on India's past. This revisionist approach challenges the authoritative accounts of history, emphasizing the fluidity and multiplicity of historical truths. The intertextual references in "Midnight's Children" reflect the cultural hybridity inherent in postcolonial societies. Rushdie explores the intersections of different cultures, languages, and traditions, highlighting the complexity of identity formation. The distortion of reality underscores the fragmented nature of postcolonial identities, shaped by a fusion of diverse influences.

Through these metaphors, Rushdie critiques the disruptive influence of modernity on individuals and society. He explores the psychological toll of rapid social change, emphasizing the interconnectedness of mental health, societal stability, and the evolving cultural and political landscape of postcolonial India.

Salman Rushdie, the Indian writer who marked his name in the postmodern literature and gained a massive fame especially after the publication of his masterpiece *Midnight's Children* in 1980 which considers as the shift point in his career and he becomes a major postmodern figure whether in his motherland Indian or among westerns writers. Rushdie breaks the rules and the unusual boundaries through the application of several narrative techniques that were discussed in postmodern perspective. He blends history and fantasy together inside reality and this was achieved through his use of magical realism and meta-fiction and other techniques to represent and describe new India and the events happened there over mysterious characters and ordinary events that reflect the life in India.

Furthermore, Rushdie addresses his personal experiences as a migrant and marginalized individual, the diversity of his background identity that led him to experiment identity crisis, and also another dark side of the broken India when he utilizes themes of fragmentation, and fragmented identity that mirror not only the life of Rushdie as an Indian minor writer, but the life of many pointless individuals. And by his character Saleem, Rushdie wanted to reconstruct the history of India through the memory of his narrator. Overall, *Midnight's Children* and its main character Saleem Sinai were a remarkable example of postmodern literature that make Rushdie become an idol and a symbol and have a great impact and influence on many other writers in the field of postmodernism who take him as an example to follow his path. And this dissertation succeeded on proving that

Salman Rushdie has a prominent position among postmodernist authors on that era despite all the critics and debates he faces during his journey as writer from Indian nationality.

To conclude, in a world marked by globalization, technological advancements, and cultural intersections, the fragmentation of identity has become a prevalent phenomenon. Salman Rushdie's "*Midnight's Children*" serves as a literary exploration of identity fragmentation, reflecting the complexities that individuals face in the contemporary world. It also serves as a powerful literary exploration of the challenges associated with cultural hybridity and the resulting identity crisis. Similarly, real-life individuals, especially immigrants, often experience a profound struggle as they navigate the fusion of diverse cultural influences, which can lead to a fragmented sense of identity.

Saleem who is born at the exact moment of India's independence, imbuing him with a unique identity and extraordinary abilities. His heritage is a blend of diverse cultural and religious backgrounds—his mother being Kashmiri Muslim and his father a Kashmiri Hindu. This cultural hybridity becomes a central theme in Saleem's life, shaping his experiences, perceptions, and struggles with identity. Immigrants in the real world often find themselves caught between the heritage of their origin and the pressures of assimilation into a new cultural milieu. The collision of these cultural worlds can result in a complex interplay of identities. For instance, first-generation immigrants may cling to traditional values, language, and customs from their home country, while simultaneously navigating the expectations and norms of the adopted culture.

Saleem's struggles with cultural hybridity parallel the challenges faced by immigrants in adapting to a new cultural environment. The pressure to assimilate can lead to a fragmentation of identity, as individuals may grapple with questions of authenticity, belonging, and the preservation of their cultural roots. Saleem's journey can be seen as a quest for authenticity amid the chaos of cultural influences. Immigrants, too, often grapple with the search for authenticity, attempting to maintain a connection to their roots while adapting to the evolving dynamics of their new cultural context.

## II. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, "*Midnight's Children*" stands as a testament to the enduring legacy of postmodern thought in literature, offering a



profound exploration of the human condition in an era characterized by uncertainty and flux. Rushdie's masterful blending of narrative techniques mirrors the fragmented nature of our contemporary world, inviting readers to confront the kaleidoscope of perspectives that shape our understanding of reality. Through Saleem's tumultuous journey, we are reminded that the past is not a fixed entity but a fluid and contested terrain, subject to reinterpretation and reimagining. In embracing the hybridity of identities and the multiplicity of truths, "Midnight's Children" challenges us to embrace complexity and ambiguity, urging us to engage critically with the narratives that shape our lives. In this way, Rushdie's novel transcends its literary significance to become a profound meditation on the profound challenges and opportunities of the postmodern age.

In delving deeper into Saleem Sinai's fragmented memories and postmodern intertextuality, we are confronted with the unsettling realization that the boundaries between fiction and reality blur, echoing the disorienting experience of navigating a world saturated with media and mediated representations. Rushdie's intricate layering of historical events and cultural references further underscores the interconnectedness of past and present, challenging us to interrogate the narratives that shape our understanding of the world. Through Saleem's narrative voice, which oscillates between nostalgia and irony, sincerity and deceit, Rushdie highlights the inherently subjective nature of storytelling and the impossibility of capturing the totality of human experience in a single narrative.

Saleem's fragmented memories mirror the fractured histories of nations and peoples, revealing the lingering scars of colonization and the struggle to reconcile conflicting narratives of the past. Through the lens of postmodern intertextuality, Rushdie skillfully integrates elements of mythology, literature, and popular culture, blurring the boundaries between high and low culture and challenging hierarchical distinctions. In doing so, he highlights the richness and diversity of human experience, while also exposing the arbitrary nature of cultural hierarchies and the power dynamics that underpin them.

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