



**CONCEPT OF MYTHICAL HISTORY IN SALMAN RUSHDIE'S
MIDNIGHT'S CHILDREN**

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ABSTRACT

Myth and History make the sense of greatness really real. Myth strengthens the functionality of the fiction. History justifies the claim of the text on actuality. Meanings and truths are influenced by their historical position. The literary text comes out of literary environment. The text reflects reality. This 'reality' is drawn from the perceiving collective. The Mythical History in Midnight's Children which will innovate the spiritual implications of humanity in existential and psychological aspects. The use of myth is so pervasive and so overt a technique in the latter part of the novel that it would be profitable to dwell on it at some length. The narrator's predilection for recording his narrative in mythical terms surfaces in his metafictional observations. Keeping in a view the factors such as aesthetic and mythological pleasure, a theoretical research framework, creative interpretative, expounding controversies and a value-judgment, the research has been devised. In a nutshell, the practical study is carried out chiefly in terms of artistic, thematic and critical categories to bring out the precise implications of the Rushdiean concept of Mythical History.

Introduction

Sir Ahmed Salman Rushdie, born on June 19, 1947, in Bombay, is an Indian-British novelist and essayist. He first achieved fame with his second novel, *Midnight's Children* (1981), which won the Booker Prize. Much of his early fiction is set at least partly on the Indian subcontinent. His style is often classified as Magical Realism & Mythical History while a dominant theme of his work is the story of the many connections, disruptions and migrations between the Eastern and Western world.

This paper concentrates on Salman Rushdie's concept of Mythical History for that we must understand Myth, History & Mythology. One theory claims that myths are distorted accounts of real historical events. One might argue that the myth of the wind-god Aeolus evolved from a historical account of a king who taught his people to use sails and interpret the winds Herodotus (5th century BC) and Prodicus made claims of this kind. This theory is named



"euhemerism" after the mythologist Euhemerus (c.320 BC), who suggested that the Greek gods developed from legends about human beings.

The term mythology can refer to either the study of myths, or to a body of myths. For example, comparative mythology is the study of connections between myths from different cultures, whereas Greek mythology is the body of myths from ancient Greece. In the study of folklore, a myth is a sacred narrative explaining how the world and humankind came to be in their present form. Many scholars in other fields use the term "myth" in somewhat different ways. In a very broad sense, the word can refer to any traditional story.

The main characters in myths are usually gods, supernatural heroes and humans. As sacred stories, myths are often endorsed by rulers and priests and closely linked to religion. In the society in which it is told, a myth is usually regarded as a true account of the remote past. In fact, many societies have two categories of traditional narrative, "true stories" or myths, and "false stories" or fables.

Midnight's Children is the second novel of Rushdie. It is an epic that spans six decades and almost three generations of India's pre- and postcolonial twentieth-century history. It is an epic in the sense that it tries to describe, or contain, an India whose stories are too innumerable to be contained. Throughout the book, the narrator hints at stories developing out of other stories in a never-ending cycle.

The novel is also an expression of the author's own childhood. This is the novel about his affection for the city of Bombay (now Mumbai) in those times. It is a novel about the tumultuous variety of the Indian subcontinent. It is recognised for its remarkably flexible and innovative use of the English language. This language is with a liberal mix of native Indian languages.

Midnight's Children chronologically entwines characters from India's cultural history with characters from Western culture. The devices that they signify - Indian culture, religion and storytelling, Western drama and cinema - are presented in Rushdie's text with postcolonial Indian history. This is presented in order to examine both the effect of these indigenous and non-indigenous cultures on the Indian mind and in the light of Indian independence.

The mythical past and the democratic norms collide with each other lending a touch of great tension in the novel. The metaphorical vein makes explicit the moral and ethical stand proffered by the novelist. There are allusions from the epic Mahabharata as well. Most important one is that of Lord Brahma. He uses the myth of Brahma in connection with the conference of Midnight's Children in Saleem Sinai's mind, which he terms as the 'dream-web' of Brahma. Saleem is prompted to query. This serves as a clue to the improbable world



created by the narrator turned protagonist. Saleem Sinai's statement has an exegetic quality. Rushdie's text seeks to place beginning and middle in the end. It acquires the characteristic of 'open endedness'. It sets store on the ontological priority of becoming over being relegating becoming to the realm of apparent. Ironic reversal forms the fundamental basis of this mode of presentation.

The reference to 'pickles' is also important here. This is because Rushdie constantly refers to the 'pickling,' or 'chutnification,' of history. This is one of the processes whereby the painfulness of history can be transmuted into something else. Thus he makes it bearable. The 'pickling' becomes a metaphor for the act of writing itself. The narrator waits out the end of his days in a pickle factory. This signifies that he has at least learned to face up to the imperfection of his own art. The acknowledgment of the imperfection of art is itself a refutation of all those Orientalist texts that seek to contain other peoples and cultures.

Rushdie use the epic in mythic form. Rushdie use of this form ironically becomes a "strategy of liberation." This also becomes a "comic" one. This is because the tragedy it masks is too painful to be otherwise expressed. It is though a mythical and surreal one. This is because, as Rushdie later on in *Shame*, realism "would break a writer's heart." This would also be "an exercise in complete and contained mimesis" because of its emphasis on wholeness. This would be ultimately worthless. *Midnight's Children* is an allegory of the history of modern India. This the novel chronicles through the magical lives of 1,001 children born within the country's first hour of independence from Great Britain on 17 August 1947. Saleem Sinai is the narrator. He is one of two males born at the precise hour of India's independence - midnight - in a nursing home in Bombay.

Saleem Sinai marries Parvathi. Parvathi is the witch, one of the midnight's children. She is carrying the child of Shiva another midnight child. Saleem Sinai is left alone with the orphaned child of Parvathi after her death. Saleem is now a broken man. He takes to writing autobiography. He dictates it to Padin. Padin is the semi literate young woman who assists him in the remaining part of his life. Rushdie is adept at making a dexterous synchronisation of personal and national history. He does it for making many a sportive flight consciously enough to develop his construct. This intended to debunk post-Independence Indian history.

The protagonist Saleem Sinai's flair for achieving an order and in fictional verisimilitude lands him in a welter of events with far reaching results. It reflects the inclusive consciousness of the protagonist. Through this, he views the world around him. Rushdie takes strange 'detours into history'. He recreates the fictional reality which is an essential element. This is 'a necessary illusion' in the popular genre of novel. He approximates his techniques to achieve this end. He resorts a post-modern stance which is doing rounds in the literary circles these days.



The myth of Shakthi is a major one in the novel. Rushdie uses it as a symbol and as well as a metaphor to absolute perfection. This is used in the context of 'too much women' right from the reverend mother to the Prime Minister [p.406] The myth of Shakthi occupies a larger space in the chapter entitled "Myth and History : Feminist perspective." Rushdie conceives of post-Independence India as 'Kaliyuga'. This accounts for the extensive use of Hindu myths in the text. The cause of existing evils in Indian society comes from the concept of Kaliyuga.

The myth of Shiva operates as an extended metaphor in the novel. Shiva's character is depicted on the lines of Lord Shiva in its reminiscences as myth. But he is a perverted young soldier in its subversions. Shiva is also the greatest of all dancers going in the sacred name of Nataraja in the popular Hindu belief Lord Shiva is the symbolic of the sacred act of procreation. He is reinterpreted in a different way to comment upon the stray sexual acts of Shiva of Midnight's Children.

Rushdie makes use of the myth of Shiva Lingam to explain away the moral turpitude reaching the maniac levels in the higher echelons of society blinded by their opulence. The character of Shiva represents this class of degenerated values in certain aspects of social life. His character is conceived as a 'notorious seducer.' His character is also conceived as 'a ladies man', 'a cuckold of the rich' 'in short a stud.' The god image is thoroughly, distorted in its mythical pre-figuration. Shiva is shown as the clownish Shiva of grotesque proportions, the terrifying image of a sort. He is a 'rat faced youth with filed down teeth and two of the biggest knees world has seen'. The character image of Shiva, the Major Sahib blurs with the deterioration of the values of Shiva -the-character to low ebb of a clown. The mythical image of Shiva is subjected to subversions in socio-cultural terms. Lord Shiva is known for his unlimited generous nature. He has noble qualities and godly demeanor. Shiva of Midnight's Children is totally different from mythical Shiva. The metaphysical abstraction of his metaphorical image is exposed to the core, making the character earthy.

Rushdie refers to both Reverend mother and the former Prime Minister Mrs. Indira Gandhi as embodying Shakthi image. On the mundane plane he says, "they are multiple faces of Bharathmatha." [p.406] on the higher plane, they are the 'dynamic aspects of 'maya' which is but cosmic energy. They are representational of female organ. It connects earthly women to goddesses. The treatment of Shakthi myth elevates the power and position of women. This myth reinforces her image in respect of her status in society. The perforated sheet is both the metaphor and message. This sheet has all the ingredients of feminist over tones. It reminds traditional practice of purdah system prevalent in medieval Indian conditions and continued even now as observed in Islamic world. Rushdie presents the farcical nature of such practice, whose spirit is violated in actual observance. The perforated sheet symbolises the veil held aloft between the bride and bride groom at the time of nikha in Islamic societies. Removal of



veil after performing the requisite religious rites indicates their readiness for physical and spiritual union.

The spiritual implications of humanity are in existential and psychological aspects. In short, this chapter traces out how Beckett stages man's impotence and spiritual sterility. The use of myth is so pervasive and so overt a technique in the latter part of the novel that it would be profitable to dwell on it at some length. The narrator's predilection for recording his narrative in mythical terms surfaces in his metafictional observations. For example, after Padma deserts him, he observes: When Valmiki, the author of Ramayana, dictated his masterpiece to the elephant-headed Ganesh, did the god walk out on him halfway? He certainly did not (note that, despite my Muslim background, I'm enough of a Bombayite to be well up in Hindu stories, actually I'm very fond of the image of trunk-nosed flap-eared Ganesh solemnly taking dictation).

The idea that myth is being played off against history becomes clear in the names of the three important characters: Saleem Sinai, Shiva and Parvati. The name Saleem Sinai lends itself to a variety of interpretations, one of them being the association with Mount Sinai and Moses. Shiva, according to the narrator, was named after 'the god of destruction and procreation.' Parvati is the wife of Lord Shiva. Extended further, Saleem's sister is called the Brass Monkey which brings in the idea of Hanuman. Hanuman's feat of setting fire to Ceylon finds a comic parallel in the Brass Monkey's compulsive habit of setting fire to shoes. If one were to extend the parallel further, one would find that for a long time Saleem's sister is loyal to Saleem as Hanuman was to Rama. Then there is an inversion because the brother and sister tread different paths. The Brass Monkey sings for the benefit of the Pakistani army while Saleem returns to India.

The ends are contained in beginnings. The beginnings are contained in ends. It is because each end is the beginning of a new story. So the narrative must be circular, never-ending. The narrative must be an epic that must ultimately fail because no epic is large enough to contain all of the stories which are waiting to be told. Rushdie intends for the same. After all, he is critical of the dainty, delicate, dated books written by countless Orientalists about a land.

The Conclusion will experiment the broader implications of Mythical History by new techniques of perceptions. Keeping in a view the factors such as aesthetic and mythological pleasure, a theoretical research framework, creative interpretative, expounding controversies and a value-judgment, the research has been devised. In a nutshell, the practical study is carried out chiefly in terms of artistic, thematic and critical categories to bring out the precise implications of the Rushdiean concepts of Mythical History.



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