

**Tribhuvan University**

**Use of Unreliable Narrator in Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children***

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Letter of Approval

This thesis titled “ The Use of Unreliable Narrator in Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children*” submitted to the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University, by Manahari Tamang has been approved by undersigned members of the Research Committee.

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## **Abstract**

*When we go through Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981) it seems simply the story of more than thousands of children born at the time of independence of India (midnight 15 August 1947) from British colony, but when we go deeply, the novel talks about many aspects of Indian society like social, cultural, political etc. It talks about the contemporary Indian society. The novel begins with the first person pronoun 'I' and the narrator of the novel is Saleem Sinai, who is the main protagonist of the novel. The novel is presented through his single perspective which creates many mistakes while narrating the novel. Information given in the novel are not all true. History has been fictionalised through Saleem's perspective. Throughout his narration, he is making many mistakes relating his family history to the events of Indian history. Many dubious claims and errors are found in his narration. His unreliable narration in the novel makes him unreliable narrator and this paper focuses on the reasons behind using unreliable narrator.*

**Key words:** *Narratology, point of view, first person narrator, unreliable narrator.*

### **Use of Unreliable Narrator in Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children***

In the novel Saleem seems conscious about his narrative. He is deliberately giving untruthful information about history that depart from the official history of India. His unreliable memory has been presented as the narrative of the novel. We find many ways to tell the story, from earlier stage to present time we find many changes in narrating the story. From oral storytelling to the writing of the narrative fiction many technique are used. Narrative technique is given much more importance by modern and post modern writers, still they are experimenting various technique to narrate the story. The narrative technique includes character, plot, style setting . So this paper analyzes the novel from narratological perspective especially from "point of view" theory and come to conclusion that Saleem Sinai is an unreliable narrator.

Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* talks about the various events of Indian history before and after its independence from British colony relating to Saleem's personal family background. While telling his family history to Padma Saleem creates his own story. He gives many incorrect information about historical events. The surface reading of the novel gives the accurate image of his family history but when we go through the novel very closely it presents many unnecessary claims about Indian history which depart from the official history of India. His narration of the novel does not give the accurate picture of Indian history. When we analyse the narrative of the novel, we find many mistakes.

It is considered that the term 'Narratology' is introduced by Tzvetan Todorov but later it is described by various literary critics .According to Todorov, narratology is the study of narrative and narrative structure and the ways that affect our perceptions. This concept is found much more developed in twentieth century. Narrative is simply a story either in verse or prose but in present condition it not only

talks about the fictional representation of life and world but a systematic and formal construction( Abrams 181) . When we look the development of narrative theory the traditional narratologists like Vladimir Propp, Claude Levi-Strauss , Tzvetan Todorov etc focus on the sequence of the novel narrated in the text. Later Gerard Genette , Mieke Bal , Seymour Chatman see narrative as a discourse which can be narrated from multiple perspective. Then after some other narratologists also discussed about the narrative technique of the text.

Narratological analysis is essential to look deeper into the text to create actual meaning of the text. Some narratologist who focus on the structure of the text. One of the structuralist theorist Peter Barry says that “ things cannot be understood in isolation – they have to be seen in the context of the layer structures as they are a part of” (Barry 39). It means we cannot reach to the actual meaning of the text if we do not go through the text deeply. The surface reading of the text does not give the proper meaning of the text. So narrative of the text should be analysed from multiple perspective. The text may have multiple meaning and readers should be able to find out those meaning by analysing its various elements. Narrative technique is one of the tool to analyse the text for its proper meaning.

Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's children* is simply a family history of Saleem, the main protagonist of the novel. While telling his family history to Padma , Saleem talks about various events related to Indian history and even world's history. When we deeply go through the novel , it talks many aspects of Indian society. The novel gives the picture of India during its independence from British colony and the situation after independence. The beginning portion of the novel talks about the family history as well as condition of India before independence but later part is related to situation of India after independence. But those political , social and cultural

aspects of India is presented from single perspective that is Saleem's perspective. Saleem who is born in 15 August 1947 midnight which is the exact time that India was declared as an independent nation from British colony. Because of his telepathic power he comes to know that he is going to die at the age of thirty-one and he is telling his story to Padma.

While telling his story Saleem's perspective is dominant. The novel is presented from single perspective. May be from his side information given in the novel are true but when we go deeply through the novel his description about history is far from reality. He is making unnecessary claims about Indian history. Even his story listener Padma doubts about his story and we find she has questioned in many places in the novel .

His grandfather Adam Aziz is a doctor who falls in love with lady Naseem , the daughter of blind landlord. They have five children including Saleem's mother Mumtaz (who becomes Amina after she gets marriage with Ahmed Sinai), Alia , Hanif, Mustapha and Emerald. After their marriage Amina and Ahmed went to Delhi and run a factory but their factory was burnt by terrorist organization, then they went to Bombay. Amina and Vanita (wife of poor man –Wee Willie Winky) give the birth to baby. Each woman give a birth to baby boy but their name tag was switched by midwife –Mary Pereira. This truth comes to know when Saleem loses a portion of his finger. Saleem has telepathic power and he comes to know that children born at midnight have magical power. Shiva , the boy whom he was switched with Saleem, has a pair of enormous powerful knees and a gift for combat. The novel ends with the sense of Saleem's death.

Salman Rushdie uses unreliable narrator in the novel. The term "unreliable" or "fallible" narrator is used by literary critic Wayne C. Booth in his book *The*

*Rhetoric of Fiction* in early 1960s. According to him unreliable narrator does not speak with the norms of writer or text. So he says : "I have called narrator reliable when he speaks for or acts in accordance with the norms of work (which is to say the implied author's norms) , unreliable when he does not"(158).

From this extract we come to know that narrator becomes untruthful when he / she is unable to give the desired information of the text. In *Midnight's Children* Saleem is unable to give accurate information about history. His information depart from the official history of India. So he becomes unreliable to his readers.

Like Booth many other critics have expressed their view on the term "unreliable narrator". "The fallible or unreliable is one whose perception, interpretation and evaluation of the matters he or she narrates does not coincide with the reader to share" (Abrams 244).

Narration has long been experimented by modern and post modern writers. They created new modes of narrating and interpreting text. It is emerged in the mid-twentieth century and deals with narrative in the literary world.

"It talks especially with types of narrators, the identification of structural elements and their diverse mode of combination, recurrent narrative devices and the analysis of the kind of discourse by which narrative gets told, as well as with the narratee- that is , the explicit or implied persons or audience to whom the narrator addresses the narrative. (Abrams 181 )

It means narrative has many aspects because only surface reading is not enough to create actual meaning of the text but our concern is narrator. The term 'unreliable narrator' is heavily used by modern and postmodern writers who give readers variety of different forms of unreliable narration. Among them *Midnight's children* is one that is related to fake memory of Saleem. The fake memory alters the



so called "true account" of narration into an erratic one. The novel is narrated through first person point of view. " Point of view signifies the way a story gets told –the mode ( modes) established by an author by means of which the is presented with the characters, dialogue, actions, setting and events which constitute the narrative in a work of fiction" (Abrams 240).

It means stories can be told from different perspective. There may be single or multiple perspective along with characters, setting , plot etc. Generally there are three kinds of point of view – first person, second person and third person point of view. When we go through the history of narrative technique of the text it has been found that Plato is considered as the prominent to talk about this technique. He has talked about rewriting Homer in order to replace ‘ mimesis’ in his book *The Republic*. He focuses on ‘ diegesis’ mode of narration. According to him in diegesis mode of narration the narrator can told his story from his own vantage point. His narrative mode focuses on showing or dramatizing of the text. Then after Aristotle gives less importance on authorial voice rather he focuses on character. He has given more importance on narration of the text. He says that “The poet should speak as little as possible in his own person , for it is not this that makes him an imitator” (quoted in *Critical Theory since Plato 63*). Point of view is used as technique to narrate the text. Henry James focus on the vision centered narrative.

Many literary critics have expressed their views on "point of view" with their own words. Like ‘window’, ‘slant’, ‘filter’, ‘reflector’ etc. Gerard Genette one of the prominent narratologist says that "in my view every narrative is explicitly or not, "in the first person pronoun" since at any moment its narrator may use that pronoun to designate himself.( Genette 97) It means narrator is identified with "I" if he wants. But instead of using "first person" and "third person" , he uses "homodiegetic" and

"heterodiegetic" respectively. "Homodiegetic " is a narrative where the narrator is presented as a character in the story he tells (244), and "heterodiegetic " is a narrative where narrator is absent from the story he tells (245). So, the real question is not which pronoun is used in the narrative but which point of view is used and who narrates the story. Either narrator is homodiegetic or heterodiegetic there is chances of unreliability in the text if the text is presented through single perspective. He has used the word 'focalization' instead of point of view. Again from Genette:

Most of the theoretical works on this subject [ narrative perspective] (which are mainly Classifications) suffer from regrettable confusion between what I call here *mood* and *Voice* , a confusion between the question who is the character, whose point of view orients the narrative perspective? And the very different question who the narrator is? –or , more simply the question who sees? And the question who speaks? (186)

Genette focuses on the perspective of the text. According to him what type of narrator is used in the text is not a big deal but whose perspective is used is more important. In Rushdie's novel Saleem's single view is presented as a narrative of the text which creates fallibility in the novel.

One of most renowned narratologist , Mieke Bal focuses on the thorough reading of the text to find out accurate meaning of the text. She says that:

Focalization is the relationship between the vision, the agent that sees, And that which is seen [ . . . ] . as the definition of focalization refers to a relationship, each pole of the relationship, the subject and the object of focalization, must be studied separately. The subject of focalization, the focalizer is the point from which the elements are viewed. That

point lies with the character [ . . . ] or [ with narrator ]. If the focalizer coincides with the character, he/she will have an advantage over the other characters. The reader watches with his/ her eyes. (*Narratology* 146)

From these lines we come to know that focalizer and focalised should be studied separately to find out the actual meaning. Here focalizer refers to who perceives, may be narrator of the text and focalized means he/she perceived by the the focalizer possibly subject matter of the text or other parts of the novel. The focalizer can give either true or false image of the focalised according to his/her understanding of knowledge, gender, race etc but in Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* we cannot find Saleem is biased towards race, gender, cast etc. he is simply giving unreliable narration of the novel may be because of his understanding of past events related to his family history. He is interpreting history in his own way that departs of the official history of India which makes him unreliable narrator in the novel.

Seymour Chatman defines the term "point of view" with different words. He insists that we should use different terms for them "slant" for narrators point of view and "filter" for character. He further says that "I propose 'slant' to name the narrator's attitudes and other mental nuances appropriate to the report function of discourse, and 'filter' to name the much wider range mental activity experienced by characters in the story world – perceptions, cognitions, attitudes, emotions, memories, fantasies and the like. (143)

He clearly distinguishes narrator and perspective from heterodiegetic narrative. According to him "the narrator is a reporter, not an observer of the story world" (144). But in Rushdie's novel *Midnight's Children* Saleem is within the story world. He is the observer as well as reporter of the novel. He further says that 'story'

talks about ‘what is told’ and ‘discourse’ talks about ‘how’ is the story told. In Rushdie’s novel history of India is presenting through Saleem’s perspective. His single perspective is dominant in the novel.

Many critics have expressed their views on *Midnight's Children* that it is a postcolonial novel. They argue that Rushdie, through the novel redefines national history by restoring and reinventing myths and his own cultural roots. Elleke Boehmer says that:

Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* comprises a medley of Images and stories drawn from Indian myth, legend, film, history, bazaar culture and conventions of pickle-making images which separately and together are made to correlate with national self –perception . . . . Indian itself develops into a complex figure for the plenitude of India. (198 -99)

Likewise Timothy Brennan views *Midnight's Children* as a national longing for form. Moreover he observes that the novel reverses the direction of Indian nationalist fiction. He says that :

For all its patches politics in the storyline, *Midnight's Children* filters day to day controversy through the medium of Indian mythology, there by reversing the direction of most Indian nationalist fiction, which relies on a history with an appropriate solemn attachment to folklore. (110)

Some critics argue that the novel embodies various postmodern features – confusion and the violation of the boaderline adaption of self – conscious narrator and discussion about the act of literary creation itself. Juliet Myres says that “ Rushdie exploits the ability of postmodern fiction to draw on innumerable fictional and factual sources as a means of representing the world” (67). Similar response comes from

Malcolm Bradbury. He observes that the novel contains various postmodern experimental features. He says that : “ It was a fictional marvellously and perfectly familiar with the modern and postmodern experiment of the novel a book self – conscious about its being a novel, a work of an author exploring the role of author and storyteller with absolute narrative command of master” (360).

Similarly, Linda Hutcheon views *Midnight's Children* as a postmodern novel , for it questions the totalizing impulses in any writing of the past. She claims the novel interrogates the historians’ objectivity and their effort to present the past in totality. She argues that it is a postmodern novel in which , “ the stress is in the act of de – naturalizing documents in both historical and fictional writing” (83). She further says that “ the novel talks about how the documents can do longer pretend a transparent means to reveal past events. The historians never seize events directly and entirely but rather incompletely and only through the texts like novel itself” (23).

The series of criticism shows the richness of the novel but our concern is about narrator of the novel. When we go through the novel, Saleem, narrator of the novel seems conscious about his narration. He says that" . . . there are so many stories to tell , too many ,such an excess of intertwined lives events miracles places rumours, so dense and improbable and mundane! I have been swallower of lives" (*Midnight's Children* 4). He is deliberately making mistakes while telling the story. Throughout the novel he has given some accurate date related to Indian history and the history of the world relating to his family history. For example 15<sup>th</sup> August 1947-the date of independence of India from British colony, ending date of world war etc but dubious claims and uncanny things are presented as fact. He is revealing his mistakes by telling that "I had been mysteriously handcuffed to history, my destinies indissolubly

chained to those of my country"(3). This shows that he knows about his situation and about the condition of his nation.

Saleem's memory is presented as key factor for narration of the novel. David Gallo in "Association and Errors Through History" defines "memory is not simply recording of the past but is deliberate "piecing together" of retrieved information and other relevant information in effort to make sense of the past" (13).

Memory is recollection of past and it can be seen in the form of diaries, autobiographies, testimonies etc. According to Gallo memory means not only recollection of past it also includes other extra additional information depending on narrators. In the novel Saleem creates his own reality. He has included many unnecessary things as a part of the Indian history which departs from the official history. Because of this reason may be in the novel Saleem is making mistakes while telling his story. His errors makes him unreliable narrator in the novel.

While commenting on unreliable narrator one of the literary critic in *Art of fiction* discusses that:

Unreliable narrators are invariably invented characters who are Part of the story they tell. . . .There must be some possibilities of discriminating between truth and falsehood within the imagined world of the novel, as there in the real world for the story to engage in our interest. The point of using an unreliable narrator indeed to reveal in an interesting way the gap between appearance and reality, and to show how human beings distort or conceal the latter. (154 -55)

From this extract we come to know that unreliable narrator is creation of the author. It depends on the imagination of the writer and he uses such type of narrator to make the story more interesting and he deliberately makes or creates the gap between reality

and appearance and it is human nature to hide reality to present or make his claim strong. In *Midnight's children* Rushdie has fictionalised history through Saleem and makes many mistakes which makes Saleem unreliable narrator in the novel. He has included and excluded many events as his desire.

Similarly Leela Gandhi argues that *Midnight's Children* does not show any affection towards nationalism. He rather offers a complaint against the national culture or he tries to disseminate the force of national culture. Far from producing the nation out of its fictional plenitude, according to Gandhi, the novel endeavours to betray the functionality of nationhood. "In Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, the nation is narrated by an imposter whose unreliable narration systematically distorts the chronology and significance of national history"(163- 64).

It is true that the writer has somehow tried to bring light to national history of India but his narration cannot be easily believed because many factual events are misinterpreted by Saleem. Even Saleem himself has accepted his mistakes while narrating the novel He says that "Am I so far gone, in my desperate need for meaning, that I'm prepared to distort everything – to re – write the whole history of my times purely in order to place myself in a central role?"(230)

From this statement we can make sense that Saleem is hiding the reality to place him in the centre of the novel or in other words as it is human nature to conceal reality for making him strong in his argument. Saleem knows his mistakes but deliberately giving incorrect and incomplete information about history. Even, Padma, one of the main characters and listener of the Saleem's story doubts about his story, otherwise she would not asks the question "Was it true?"(70). Padma arises question while Saleem is talking about his grandparents.

In the novel, the issue of unreliability is foregrounded as the basis for accurate representation of the history. Narrators become unreliable with various reasons. Some narrations are presented from a child's perspective and the narrator can be innocent from the events included in the story and he/she can misinterpret the text. Some are abnormal and some are unreliable by nature. Reality differs from one's perspective. So Saleem is also presented as an unreliable narrator but he is conscious about his claims. By revealing his mistake, he says that:

Reality is a question of perspective; more concrete and plausible it seems – but as you approach the present, it inevitably seems more and more incredible. Suppose yourself in a large cinema, sitting at first in the back row, until your nose is almost pressed against the screen. Gradually the stars' faces dissolve into dancing grain; tiny details assume grotesque proportions; the illusion dissolves or rather, it becomes clear that illusion itself is reality . . . .(229)

From this extract we come to know that Saleem is clearly telling his thought towards the history that reality depends upon one's perspective towards the subject matter. In Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* Saleem's unreliable memory is presented as the subjectivity of the novel. History is fictionalised through Saleem's perspective. From the above extract we can say that reality is not common to all, it depends upon one's attitude towards subject matter. Saleem elaborated factual events by creating his own reality. When we go through deeply on any subject matter we find out its many things and finally made a conclusion about that. On surface level Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* is simply a life story of Saleem but when we go through deeply it talks more about history through Saleem's perspective. cursory reading of the novel does not



give the real meaning but deep study of the novel forced to reveal the truthfulness of the novel.

Emile Benveniste , one of the literary critic clearly distinguishes between history and discourse . According to him "In" history” events that happened in the past are reported "objectively" as facts . The job of the narrator is to record them as objectively as he can. In "discourse" however, events are reported as if they are happening here and now, and the narrator's job is to persuade the reader to share his view of the events with him (206 -07).

*Midnight's Children* is definitely related to history but it is not presented as real rather it is fictionalised through Saleem's point of view. In the novel Saleem shares his memory as unreliable narration of history. Memory is always fragmented and there is inclusion and exclusion of the events. Nothing can be interpreted as real. Saleem is narrating the text as his desire. Such as he has misinterpreted the date of election (557) and misplaced of Gandhi's death. He has also misconstruct the image of Bombay. He says that

I can see: the city, basking like a bloodsucker lizard in the summer heat. Our Bombay : it looks like a hand but it's really a mouth, always open, always hungry, swallowing food and talents from everywhere else in India .A glamorous leech, producing nothing except films bush –shirts Fish . . . in the aftermath of Partition. ( 172)

According to Saleem Bombay is just the place for entertainment or for glamour but it is more than that ,he thought. His perspective is dominant in the novel. Many critics argue that in first person narrative there is possibility of fallibility. Riggan William says that:

First person narration is, then, always at least potentially Unreliable, in that the narrator with these human limitations of perception and memory and assessment, may easily have missed, forgotten, or misconstrued certain incidents, words or motives . . . . Much of what he / she [the I – narrator] tells us also gives an idea of what he himself is like and has 'a certain characterizing' significance over and above its data value, by virtue of the fact that he is telling it to us. His narrative cannot be accepted purely in absolute terms of true or false, probable or improbable reliable or unreliable, convincing or unconvincing. (19 -20)

From the above extract we come to know that first person narrative has much more chances of unreliability because of his view towards the subject matter. That is his nature that inclusion and exclusion are natural in memory but his narrative cannot be purely considered as either absolutely true or false. There is possibility of either falsehood or truthfulness. Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* is also narrated from first person point of view. May be because of this reason we find faults in Saleem's narration. Many unnecessary claims are made by Saleem. He is in conscious state. He further says that ". . . little confusion is surely permissible in these circumstances. Re-reading my work, I have discovered an error in chronology. [. . .] But I cannot say, now, what the actual sequence of events might have been;"(229 -30). He is revealing mistakes.

Hayden White, one of the historians comments that the narrative written by historians are not simple representation of a sequence of facts, nor the revelation of a design inherent in events themselves instead it is shaped by the imposition of events (qtd in Abrams 181- 82). It means historical writings are affected by writer's

imagination. He may add other events which are not the real events of history which creates misinterpretation of the text. One's imposed idea makes a text unreliable.

*Midnight's Children* is also related to history of India and the writer has described it in his own way. Certainly he has done many mistakes while narrating the text. We do not find the real picture of an official history of India though the novel is related to history.

Many critics argued that *Midnight's Children* is self reflexive novel and Saleem is self-conscious narrator. While narrating the novel in many places he has revealed his mistakes. He says that " . . . the feeling had come upon me that I was somehow creating a world; [ . . . ] I had entered into the illusion of the artist,"(241). It means he is narrating his history as his desire. He is making his own world. This shows that he is conscious about his work but deliberately making unnecessary claim that he is the especial to nation and is given much more importance by social media. So he says that:

Newspaper celebrated me; politicians ratified my position. Jawaharlal Nehru wrote : 'Dear Baby Saleem My belated congratulation on the happy accident of your moment of birth! You are the bearer of the new face of ancient India which is also eternally young. We shall be watching over your life with the closet attention; it will be , in a sense, the mirror of our own.' (167)

While commenting on narrating the text Gerard Genette says that :

Most of the theoretical works on this subject [narrative perspective] (which are mainly classifications) suffers from regrettable confusion Between what I call here *mood* and *voice*, a confusion between the question who is the character whose point of view orients the narrative

perspective? And the very different question who is the narrator? – or more simply , the question who sees? And the question who speaks?

(186)

From this extract we come to know that Genette gives emphasis on point of view of the text , narrator can be either first person or some other. We should be able to distinguish between the narrator and whose perspective is dominant in the text. When one's perspective is dominant in the text there will be chances of misinterpreting of the text from others perspective. In the novel *Midnight's Children*, Saleem is narrating the novel from his own way. Though he is conscious about his narration he is giving misinformation. Such as he says that he has exaggerated many events in the novel for example " I exaggerate d Picture Singh; the horrifying possibility exist that I distorted [ . . . ] into a dream – figment of my own imagination . . . "( 595).

There are many reasons behind unreliable narration. It happens because of one's inability, biasness or limited knowledge towards subject matter. Jonathan Culler argues that "Unreliable [narrative] can result from limitation of point of view-when we gain a sense that consciousness through which focalization occurs is unable or unwilling to understand the events"(Literary Theory 90).

From this lines we come to know that one sided view or concrete narration of the text creates fallibility in the text. In *Midnight's Children* Saleem's single view towards the subjectivity of the novel makes his narration unreliable. Saleem becomes unreliable because of his concrete view on the narration of the novel but we find some other reasons that creates unreliability in the novel. For example some novels are narrated from child's perspective who may be innocent about the events that occurred in the novel . Like Saleem Lockwood one of the narrator of *Wuthering Heights* by Emily Bronte is also making mistakes while narrating the text because he has learned

about the Earnshaw and Linton families from Nelly. He is not involved in the family history of those two families but narrating the story as if he is the eyewitness of the events.

Similarly Jago Morrison argues that Rushdie's novels are overwhelmed by fictional reconstruction (Morrison 133). This shows that Rushdie's novel *Midnight's Children* is also suffered from his own construction. He further says that "Certainly' Rushdie's fictional work has consistently sought to demonstrate the slipperiness and multiformity of history. And in practice too, his control over the ways in which he himself has come to be portrayed 'historically' has been shown to be radically limited" (136). In this way Morrison also doubts about the factual representation of historical events in Rushdie's novel. 'Limited' and 'constructed' events create fallibility in the novel.

*Midnight's Children* is based on the memory of Saleem and he is creating his own story through his memory and memory is always fragmented and there is possibilities of inclusion and exclusion. Even Rushdie has accepted that he has preferred remembered version while writing the novel. He says that

. . . and whenever a conflict arose between literal and remembered truth ' I would favour the remembered version . This is why even though Saleem admits that no tidal passed through the Sundarbans in the year of Bangladesh war , he continues to be borne out of the jungle on the crest of that fictional . His truth is too important to him to allow it to be unseated by a mere weather report. It is memory's truth.(qtd in *Contemporary Fiction* 147)

From this extract we come to know that Saleem's memory is the truth for readers but we are not able to know about the pathetic condition of the suffered people during the

period of war. According to Saleem he and his friends were lost in magical forest of Sundarban and come out easily from that place. Here question arises is it possible to move freely from one country to another during the period of war? So Rushdie himself has accepted it as memory's truth not factual truth . This situation also creates the doubts in the novel or narration of the novel.

Mieke Bal one of the renowned narratologist also talks about the narrative technique of the text. According to her if there will be multiple perspective in the text , there will be less chances of fallibility in the text because “ this technique can result in neutrality towards all the characters ” ( Bal 148). But in Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* Saleem's perspective is dominant and may be because of this reason Saleem cannot be believed fully. Saleem himself reveals his mistakes while narrating the novel. He says that . . . I'm tearing- myself apart, can't even agree with myself, talking arguing like a wild fellow , cracking up, memory , yes , memory plunging into chasms and being swallowed by the dark , only fragments remain ,none of it make sense anymore!(589)

From these lines we come to know that Saleem is conscious about his condition and know that he is not remembering the past accurately. There will be chances of inclusion and exclusion of the events in the novel. Such situation creates that information given by him cannot be believed fully. He is also telling that he has described the history from his own way. He says that “ think of this, history, in my version, entered a new phase” (269).This line proves that Saleem is narrating the history from his own way. He is not giving real picture of his narration.

Through Saleem's perspective Rushdie is able to fictionalised history rather giving factual information . Morrison further discusses that his novel is not talking about the reality but talking about the fantasy of history. So he says that

Unlike the traditional academic history ,Rushdie’s notion  
 Of the imaginary map is far from final or definitive. Unlike  
 the closed conventions of historical narration , moreover ,  
 it has the power to fictionalise and mythologise in pursuit of truth  
 beyond the banality of ‘ what happened’ . It is a mind drawing.  
 (Morrison 147)

It means Rushdie’s novel is far from reality. He is making unnecessary claims about  
 history. History has been fictionalised by bringing references from myth. He is  
 making his own world by leaving reality far from the official history of India.  
 Throughout the text we find many mistake done by Saleem while narrating the novel.  
 Even the writer – Rushdie , has acknowledged his mistake . He says that

Concrete tetrapods have never been used in Bombay as a part of any  
 land reclamation scheme ,but only to shore up and protect the sea wall  
 along the Marine Drive promenade. Nor could the train that brings  
 Picture Singh and Saleem from Delhi to Bombay possibly have passed  
 through Kurla, which is on different line . . . [ And ] let me confess that  
 the novel does contain some mistakes that are mine as well as  
 Saleem’s. One is to be found in the description of the Amritsar  
 massacre , during which I have Saleem say that Dyer entered the  
 Jallianwala Bagh compound followed by ‘fifty white troops’ . The  
 truth is that there were fifty troops but they weren’t White. (qtd in  
*Contemporary Fiction* 146)

From this extract we come to know that Rushdie has presented particular image of  
 India but his imaginary image is not found in official history of India. His narration

are based on untruthful memory of Saleem. It is memory's truth. Rushdie is may be deliberately making mistakes through Saleem.

There are many types of unreliable narrators that they produce fallibility in the text. For example child narrator, Scout, in *To Kill a Mocking Bird*. The story is presented through child's perspective. But in some novels narrators may committing mistakes unknowingly. Some narrators are bias according to their race , gender , class etc.

Mieke Bal gives emphasis on active participation on interpretation of the text. According to her readers should able to identify the narrator that how he/ she is presented in the text. So she says that "It is the reader who 'makes' the meaning . [ But ] the point is not that meaning can be pinpointed in any simple way . But it is only once we know how a text is structured that the reader's share- and responsibility can be clearly assessed. (Bal 11 ).

Here the concern of this research is not the active participation of the readers but readers should go deeply through the text to find out 'what type of narrator' is used in the text. The narrative technique or in other words narrator's attitude towards the subjectivity of the text affects the meaning of the text. So text should be analysed closely. Sometimes narrator can give wrong information because of his / her biasness towards class , gender , race, sexuality. But in Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* we do not find such qualities in the narrator. He is not discriminating other characters but he is simply giving untruthful information about the Indian history. There is no doubt that he is telling his family history relating to the history of India but his information is far from the official history of India. He is describing the history from his own way. He says that " I glued my complete note-my first attempt at rearranging history"



(361). He knows that he is interpreting the history from his own perspective by living whole or in other words he is making mistakes while telling the history. He says that

Understand what I'm saying: during the first hour of August 15<sup>th</sup> 1947 -between midnight and one am – no less than one thousand and one children were born within the frontiers of the infant sovereign state of India . . . It was as though – if you will permit me one moment of fancy In what will otherwise will be , I promise, the most sober account I can manage – as though history, arriving at a point of 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. (195)

From the above mentioned lines we come to know that particular image of new born India is presented in the novel but that image departs from the official history of India. Through the allegorical presentation of India Rushdie has somehow tried to draw the image of India but we find many mistakes throughout his interpretation of the novel. Saleem himself has revealed his mistake in many parts of the novel.

The narrative of *Midnight's Children* is presented through Saleem's perspective who is conscious about his work and deliberately making mistakes. Here in the novel Saleem is considered as the mouthpiece of Rushdie because in ' Introduction ' part of the novel Rushdie has partially accepted it as his life story and he is remembering the events while and after migrating from India. His memory is main aspects of the novel. Rushdie is presenting his memory in the novel through Saleem.

Saleem is making mistakes knowingly while narrating the text . he knows about his condition so he says that

But today , I feel confused , Padma has not returned and in his absence my certainties are falling apart. Even my nose has been playing tricks on me by day as I stroll between the picklevats tended by our army of strong , hairy armed, formidably competent women. I have found myself to distinguish lamer – odors from lime . . . Re-reading my work, I have discovered my error in chronology. The assassination of Mahatma Gandhi occurs in this pages, on the wrong date: But I cannot say , now What actual sequence of events might have been in Indira Gandhi will Continue to die at the wrong time. (229 )

From these lines we can say that Saleem is knowingly making mistakes. He is aware about his situation but giving untruthful information about history. As Riggan William says about first person narrator “ . . . potentially unreliable . . . with these human limitations of perceptions and memory” (19) . Because of Saleem’s perspective towards subject matter he is making errors. His limitation towards subject matter makes him unreliable. His distorted memory is presented as the narration of the novel. There is possibilities of inclusion and exclusion while memorising the past events.

When we go further into the text history is not presented as its original form rather it is shifting according to Saleem’s memory. In the novel he clearly says that :

One is suppose to swallow and digest only the permitted parts of it , the halal portion of the past , drained of their redness , their , blood.

Unfortunately ,this makes the story less juicy; so I am about to become the first and only member of my family to flout the laws of halal.

Letting no blood escape from the body of the tale, ( 74)

It means Saleem is deliberately making errors while narrating the text. His fragmented memory creates his own reality. May be he is making unnecessary claims to impress his readers or to make the story more interesting. He has included and exclude the events as his desired which creates unreliability in the novel.

“Certainly , Rushdie’s fictional work has consistently sought to demonstrate the slipperiness and multiformity of history: ( Morrison 136). It means Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* has not portrayed the real picture of Indian history. We can find many mistakes. Throughout the novel the narrator, Saleem , is revealing his mistakes. He says that “that much is fact ; but everything else lies concealed beneath the doubly hazy air of ureality and make-believe . . .” (465). By giving untruthful information about truth Saleem makes the unreliable narration of the novel.

Saleem is narrating the history as his own way and his fragmented memory has created many errors in the novel. His information depart from the official history of India. He consciously makes errors to create his own reality. He says that “ Today ,in my confusion , I can’t judge. I’ll have to leave it to others. For me , there can be no going back; I must finish what I’ve started” (230). It means he knows his situation and he does not want to correct his mistakes. He has to finish his story before his death. Using Saleem’s memory as a tool to narrate the novel Rushdie has fictionalised history. So Morrison says that “ Its central allegory can clearly be interpreted, in these terms ,as an analysis of post-Independence India. [ . . . ] it’s subject is therefore India’s failure to sustain the at collective imaginative effort” (Comtemporary fiction 143). The novel has created particular feature of India which could not find in official history of India. Saleem’s fake information about Indian history gives unreal picture of India which makes Saleem unreliable to his work.

Saleem has made many unnecessary claims throughout his narration as well as he is revealing his mistakes in many parts of the novel. He says that:

. . . in a country , where the truth is what it is instructed to be, reality quite literally ceases to exist, so that everything becomes possible, what we are told is the case; and may be this was the difference between my Indian childhood and Pakistani adolescence –that in the first I was beset by an infinity of alternative realities while in the second I was adrift, disoriented, amid and equally infinite number of falsenesses unrealities and lies. (453 )

From this extract we come to know that Saleem is constructing his own reality. Even in history truth is constructed. May be because of this reason he is narrating history from his own way by leaving holes in many parts of his narration.

Saleem badly informs the readers of his self – conscious story. He re-imagines his individual history or in other words Saleem describes history through his fragmented memory. He creates his own reality. He says that “ It occurs to me that I have said nothing, in this entire piece, about the Midnight’s Children’s Conference; but then, to tell the truth, they did not seem very important to me in those days. I had other things on my mind” (349 ). From these lines we come to know that Saleem is aware about his narration. He is consciously making mistake while narrating the text. He is hiding reality to make his story more believable. Incomplete and incorrect information are given as the real part of history.

He has given the dark picture of India in the after independence of India from British colony but we do not find such description of Indian society in the official history of India. He says that

that inescapable date is no more than one fleeting instance in the Age of Darkness, Kali – Yuga, in which the cow of morality has been

reduced to standing, teeteringly, on a single leg ! Kali-Yuga – the  
 the losing throw in our national dice-game ; the worst of everything;  
 the age when property gives a man rank, when wealth is equated  
 with virtue , when passion becomes the sole bond between men and  
 women , when falsehood brings success . . . (269)

This extract gives very dark image of India after its partition from British colony. According to these lines morality and other good sides of India have been replaced by various other bad things and the situation of India becomes worse but we do not find such description in the official history of India rather it (official history) is glorifying the situation of India after its independence. These lines talk about dark sides of India but the official history of India glorifies the situation of India. Saleem has made many unnecessary claims about Indian history. He says that “ even a symbolic gander must come down [ . . . ] to confine my story to its miraculous aspects” (318). This line indicates about Saleem’s mistakes while narrating the text. It makes us sense that he is hiding reality to make his story interesting to his readers. He is twisting and turning factual events as his desired to attract the readers.

In this way Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* seems simply a family history but when we go through the novel deeply it is not only his family history rather it is history of India before and after of its independence from British colony. Through Saleem’s telepathic power he comes to know about his death and thinks it is important to tell his story before his death. While telling his story to Padma, he (Saleem) makes many mistakes. He describes history through his own perspective. Throughout his narration we find many mistakes. Unnecessary claims are made throughout his narration. Though he seems conscious about his narration he is making many mistakes.

He has given many false information about history. History has been fictionalised through his single perspective by leaving many factual events and highlighting dubious

and unreal things as real. Even the listener, Padma, doubts about his narration. In many parts of his narrative she questions or suspects him, otherwise she would not suspect him. She asks “ Really truly? [ . . . ]You were truly there ? Really truly?” ( 405). His unverifiable claims makes him unreliable.

Saleem has included and excluded historical events as his desire. He has presented his story with his suitable way. His fragmented memory as a tool to describe history, Saleem is making many mistakes. Throughout the novel he has given many fake information by distorting real history which makes him unreliable narrator in the novel.

Thus, by using unreliable narrator the writer is trying to challenge the truthfulness of official history because history is written with one’s memory either the writer is involved in that incident or not. It is always related with memory and memory does not come as real as it happens, it is always fragmented. So there is possibility of inclusion and exclusion of events. In Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* Saleem is conscious about his narration and deliberately giving untruthful information about history. He is narrating the historical events as his desire.

*Midnight's children* is post-modern novel and it is related to the memory of Salman Rushdie during the period when he left Bombay. It is also self reflexive novel related to Rushdie's personal history. While remembering his past he has made many mistakes or he has not given exact picture of his past life. So using unreliable narrator, the writer is trying to say that even official history is not presented in real form. It is affected from one’s perspective and it differs from each other. Though Saleem does not seem biased towards cast, race, gender, religion, sex in the novel, the historians may more or less bias towards those things which affects the truthfulness of history. To throw the light on bad aspects of official history, Salman Rushdie is using unreliable narrator in his novel *Midnight’s Children*.

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