

Tribhuvan University

History Revisited in Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Department of
English Ratna Rajya Laxmi Campus, for the Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement for
the Degree of Master of Arts in English

By

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February 2007

Tribhuvan University

Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences

This thesis titled "History Revisited in Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*" submitted to the Department of English, Ratna Rajya Laxmi Campus, Tribhuvan University, by Mr. Subandha Raj Regmi has been approved by the undersigned members of the Research Committee.

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Acknowledgements

I would like to express my gratitude to my teacher and supervisor Mr. Bijay Kumar Rauniyar, Lecturer, Central Department of English for his scholarly guidance while writing this thesis.

I feel very happy to express my sincere gratitude to Mr. Hriseekesh Upadhyay, Head, Department of English, for granting me an opportunity to carry out this research work. I am also indebted to Dr. Binaya Jha, Dr. Anand Sharma, Mr. Rajendra Giri and others for their valuable suggestions.

I would like to express my deep sense of gratitude to my parents who always encouraged me in my higher studies. I would also like to extend my gratitude to my dear wife, Sanju and uncle, Mr. Mahendra Panta, for their help and support. Similarly, I am thankful to my friends, Gehendra, Gokul, Ram and Ratna for their help. Lastly, I extend my thanks to M. M. Communication, Kirtipur for neatly typing the dissertation in present form.

February 2007

Subandha Raj Regmi

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History and Retrospective Writing

History, an important document of personal, national as well as cultural significance, has always shaped literary works in different ages. Many writers from the ancient period to the present have taken their materials from different historical events and many critics have tended to interpret a literary work from historical perspective. These writers and critics do not pay much attention to the imaginative aspect of literature; rather they focus on the history and historical context of the text. They think that past is important as it connects the text to the actual time and situation of its production.

In ancient time, Plato, who was a thinker, critic and writer, was against the imaginative literature. He saw poetry as a product of high form of imagination. He thought that the poet is restricted to the imitating realm of appearance, so he only makes copies of copies. The poet, according to Plato, "is an imitator, and therefore, like all other imitators, is twice removed from [. . .] the truths"(qtd. in Daiches 15). Poetry, therefore, according to Plato gives false knowledge. Since it is the production of imagination, it is an inferior part of the soul. It harms by nourishing the passions which ought to be controlled and disciplined. All this implies that Plato was in favor of real and true things rather than imaginative thing. As history is the record of real events happened in the past, Plato preferred historical writing to imaginative writing.

Aristotle was the first great figure to make a discussion about the relation between history and literature. He created the hierarchy between

them, however. Defending Plato's attack on poetry as imitation of imitation, Aristotle argues that a poet brings out the universal character through his artistic handling. He says that the function of the poet is not only "to relate what has happened in the past, but also what may happen, what is possible according to the law of probability or necessity"(55). Aristotle thinks that a poet goes one step ahead of a historian and creates an independent and beautiful world. But while arguing in this way, he does not underrate the role of history in literature.

Shakespeare and other Elizabethan dramatists wrote several historical plays. Shakespeare largely drew on from history for the great tragedies. Iago's plot against Othello is described as "typical of Elizabethan attempts to deny the otherness of subject people"(Gallagher 235). Louis Montrose interprets *A Midsummer Night's Dream* as "an ideological attempt to comprehend the power of Queen Elizabeth to make sense of it and place it safely within bounds while simultaneously upholding the authority of males within Elizabethan culture"(139). By citing a variety of contemporary writing (in order to reinstate the "discursive practices" of the age), Montrose demonstrates the Elizabethan ambivalence towards their queen: a binding respect mixed with a dark desire to master her sexuality. In this context, *Midsummer* is reread as a fable of the restoration of male governance.

In the nineteenth century, Sir Walter Scott began fiction writing and therewith historical novel. This novel not only takes its subject matter and some character, and events from history, but makes the historical events

and issues crucial for the central characters and narrative. Some of the greatest historical novels also use the protagonist and action to reveal what the author regards as the deep forces that impel the historical process. Examples of historical novels are Scott's *Ivanhoe* (1819), set in the period of Norman domination of the Saxons at the time of Richard I; Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* (1953), which treats the Salem witch trials of 1692, and Robert Bolt's *A Man for All Seasons* (1962), about the sixteenth century Judge, Dicken's *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859) in Paris and London during French Revolution; George Eliot's *Romola* (1863) in Florence during Renaissance; the Tolstoy's *War and Peace* (1864) during Napoleon's invasion of Russia etc. are the recent examples of historical works. However, Historical and Cultural Critics take any literary text as having been committed to a particular version of history, and embodied by social reality.

The notion of historical study of literature has a long history. John Dryden and Dr. Samuel Johnson accordingly drew on history in order to explain the faults of the writers. Bishop Hurd, on the contrary, referred to history in order to establish the nature of the tradition with which the poet worded. By doing so, he tried to show how the writer was fully successful in doing what his age expected of him and his tradition provided him. Hurd argues that "Spencer's method was based on waits of thought and action in Gothic time, and secondly, that this method produces its own unity of design"(qtd. in Daiches 264). So he says that we should read any literary work in relation to its historical background.

Similarly, Thomas Warton also points out the necessity to read "works of the author who lived in a remote age" by looking "back upon the customs and manners which prevailed in his age" (qtd. in Wimsatt and Brooks 526). Warton thus argues for the study of whole poetry mainly on the ground that it records features of the past time.

The historical critics in the nineteenth century viewed literature and history as related to each other. They treated the literature in terms of the period it was produced. These critics had a conviction that literature is also a recreation of the past. So their function was to interpret the work in the light of the past:

For the Historical Critics, then the interpretation of a literary work from the past as if it were a work of the present necessarily constitutes a violation of the integrity of the work. For his focus is at once on what he sees to be the chief value of the work the formulation of a presentation in the literary mode, not simply of some aspect of man's experience but of man's experience in the past. (Handy 304)

Thus, for historical critics, literary work belonged to the time it was created. The history becomes important to them because it was essential for the interpretation of literary work. For them, the criticism was "not simply the elucidation of the work but the elucidation of the work in the light of what he regards as its most essential characteristic, its unique quality of pastness" (Handy 304). That is, the literary work for them was the product of the history literature, and therefore, is related with history.

In the middle of the nineteenth century, Hippolyte Taine, recognized as the father of the historical method, published *History of English Literature*, in which he treated literature as documents for the analysis of an age and people. For Taine the job of the Historical Critics was to "retrace, from the monuments of literature, the style of man's feelings and thoughts for century's back"(609). He views literature as a product of social and natural factors race environment, and epoch.

Thomas Carlyle, in the early nineteenth century, said that the political, religious and social history of a country is expressed through literature. To him, "the history of a nation's poetry is the essence of its history, political, scientific, religious"(qtd. in Wimsatt and Brooks 531). E.M.W. Tillyard, a prominent 20th century Historicist critic studied Elizabethan literature to find a set of conservative mental attitudes typifying the Elizabethan outlook and reflected in Shakespeare's plays. He saw literature determined by the then history. Tillyard saw Elizabethan culture as a unified system of meanings. He found that literary figures such as Shakespeare, Marlow never seriously challenged the settled world-view of the age. His books *The Elizabethan World Picture* and *Shakespeare's History Plays* are generally considered as the representative of Old Historicists, in which, he argued that the "literature of the period expressed the spirit of the age, which centered on ideas of divine order, the chain of being and the correspondences between earthly and heavenly existences"(Selden 104).

In recent years, many postcolonial writers from Africa and India have written novels that dramatize their respective historical past. The writers like Toni Morrison, James Baldwin, Alice Walker, Octavia Butler, R K Narayan, Michael Ondaatje and Salman Rushdie are ever mindful that master narratives of history have not always truthfully represented their past experiences. As an important postcolonial writer Toni Morrison displays in her craft a keen sense of and preoccupation with history in writing about the neglected people. As an artist to write history, Morrison has to take the road not taken before so as to bring fact in an artistically imaginative way to the real front. For Morrison a historian is different from an artist in writing about history, because:

Historians must necessarily speak in generalities and must examine recorded resources [. . .]. They habitually leave out life lived by everyday people. History for them is what great men have done. But artists do not have any limitation, and as the truest of historians they are obliged not to. (qtd. in Mitchell 40)

The history that Morrison represents does not appear merely as something to be read, nor does it appear to be a reference to past events. On the contrary history for her is a great force which comes, as James Baldwin posits, "from the fact that we carry it within us, are unconsciously controlled and shaped by it in many ways"(qtd. in Issacs 275). This inescapability, inevitability and all-controlled force of history must be the point in discussing on Morrison's *Jazz*.

Their text for them is not only a literary fact, but a social one, i.e., the text is engaged with the context both in its production and narration with social, political, historical and religious factors. It is an immediate part of the literary environment. It is equally true that the historical context of any text is infinite and hence that the historical or sociological explanation is necessary. Thus the text of the present post modern, multicultural society is less likely to make a distinction between history and fiction. This is that Hayden white, the historian, observes:

The distinction between fiction and history, in which fiction is conceived as the representation of the imaginable and history as the representation of the actual, must give place to the recognition that we can know the actual by contrasting it with or likening it to the imaginable. (99)

For Rushdie, history is no longer set of fixed, objective facts. The facts do not exist unless they are interpreted. So, history, like literature, needs to be interpreted. The historians interpret the events of history, present them coherently and make the history intelligible to us. Historians are the ones who give pattern to history using their imagination. Thus, the historians play a vital role in the making of history, and, in this sense, history is, like fiction, a subjective phenomena. Since history is a subjective phenomenon, there can be many versions of history. For Rushdie, history is no longer a homogeneous and final version. It is rather heterogeneous and multiple. By history, we generally understand the official version of history because it is the only version of history that is

available to us. However, Rushdie interrogates the validity of the official history by providing an alternative version of Indian history, through the novel *Midnight's children*. He views the official historical discourse as one of the many versions of history. It is not necessarily absolute and final version of history. It is rather an artifact which is affected by a vast web of economic, social and political factors of that era. Moreover, he views it as an ideological product and which, in turn, always supports that ideology. Thus, the approach of the present study is to show how Rushdie reconstructs Indian history through the story of Saleem Sinai in *Midnight's Children* in the form of literature, and how he interrogates the validity of official historical discourse of India.

The present research work has been divided into four chapters. The first chapter presents an introduction to historical writing and critical perspective on *Midnight's Children*. Moreover, it gives a bird's eye view of the entire work. The second chapter discusses 'New Historicism' as a theoretical framework that is applied in the third chapter.

On the basis of theoretical modality outlined in the second chapter, the third chapter will analyze the text at a considerable length. It will sort out some of the extracts from the text as an evidence to prove the hypothesis of the study – history is revisited in *Midnight's Children*. This part serves as the core of this work.

The fourth chapter is the conclusion of the entire study. On the basis of the analysis of the text done in chapter three, it will conclude the explanations and arguments put forward in the preceding chapters.

Critical Perspective on *Midnight's Children*

Salman Rushdie's novel *Midnight's Children* has been read and interpreted from various perspectives. It has elicited host of criticism since its publication. Critics have tried to analyze the novel from different perspectives. However, the major trends of Rushdie study in terms of *Midnight's Children* comprise of stylistic, postcolonial and postmodern. Since it is impossible to include almost all responses to the novel in such a small research, an attempt will be made to present some representative responses selected from the huge pile of criticism.

Many critics express the view that *Midnight's Children* is a postcolonial novel, for it tries to reassert the epistemological value of non-European world. They argue that Rushdie, through the novel redefines national history by restoring and reinventing myths and his own cultural roots. Elleke Boehmer expresses similar view:

Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981) 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, as the novel makes clear, is an excess. [. . .] *Midnight's Children* itself develops into a complex figure for the plenitude of India. (198-99)

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:

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

Similarly, Leela Gandhi argues that Rushdie, in *Midnight's Children*, does not show any affection toward 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, *Midnight's Children* endeavors 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).

On the other, Shirley Chew comments that the novel celebrates hybridity and "cultural polyvalence"—the situation whereby individuals and groups belong simultaneously to more than one culture. She writes:

Midnight's Children (1981) is an amazing display of the multiplicity of which Saleem is at once the victim and the celebrant [. . .]. No sooner has a narrative genre or convention been fixed upon that it is subverted, and the impressions given of Saleem manipulating his multicultural

resources with gusto even as they continually threaten to overwhelm him. (72)

Likewise, Chew argues that the novel foregrounds the idea of plurality and multiplicity. The novel, according to Chew, foregrounds the idea of multiplicity on various levels in order to resist "the imperialist view of history according to which the west 'discovered' India"(1184).

Richard Cronin, on the other hand, compares *Midnight's Children* with Rudyard Kipling's *Kim*. He finds a crucial difference between *Kim* and *Midnight's Children* in terms of the relation between power and knowledge. In *Kim* knowledge and power support each other whereas in *Midnight's Children* knowledge and power forever opposed. By separating the two, he contends, "Rushdie transforms Kipling's version of Imperialist Indian as a pastoral comedy into a vision of India since its independence in which history becomes a savage force"(13). He, then, concludes that *Midnight's Children* is a post-independent version of *Kim*

The next series of criticism label *Midnight's Children* as a postmodern novel. These critics argue that the novel embodies various postmodern features- confusion and violation of the borderline, adaptation of a self-conscious narrator, questioning of the totalizing impulse, and discussion about that act of literary creation itself etc. Juliet Myers comments: "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 elements:

It was a fiction marvelously 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 Hutchinson views *Midnight's Children* as a postmodern novel, for it questions the totalizing impulse in any writing of the past. She claims that *Midnight's Children* interrogates the historians' objectivity and their efforts to present the past in totality. She argues that it is a postmodern novel in which "the stress is on the act of de-naturalizing documents is both historical and fictional writing"(83). Hutcheon says that the novel talks about how the documents can no longer pretend to be a transparent means to reveal past events. The novel states that historians never seize events directly and entirely but rather incompletely and only through the texts like the novel itself.

However, for Rushdie, *Midnight's Children* is merely his version of Indian modern history in *Imaginary Homelands*; he discusses the writing of *Midnight's Children*. He writes, "What I was actually doing was a novel of memory, so that my India was just that: 'my' India, a version and so more than one version of all the hundreds of millions of possible versions"(10).

These diverse responses from various critics display the richness of the novel. A novel can have multiple interpretations. However, the present

study aims at analyzing how Rushdie revisits the Indian history through the novel.

Chapter II

New Historicism in Fiction

The 1980s witnessed the emergence of a new movement in Anglo-American literary scholarship which, in methodological sophistication, theoretical all-inclusiveness, and classroom appeal, bid fair to rival anything from Germany and France. The moment was ripe for such a homegrown movement to appear. For several years, many scholars in English and American universities—ranging from Frederick Crews, George Watson, and E. D. Hirsch, Jr., on one end of the scale to Fredric Jameson, Terry Eagleton, and Frank Lentricchia on the other—had been raising a clamor for a return to historical scholarship in the academic study of literature. The historical nature of literary works, it was said, had been badly neglected over the past half century of Anglo-American criticism. The time had come to move beyond the narrowly "formalistic" or "text-centered" approach to literature. A new historical approach was needed and, in the course of events, a new movement arose to meet the demand.

Historicists who saw a pattern in history and viewed history as a set of fixed objective facts are regarded as Old Historicists. Literature, for them, was a part of a larger cultural history. They studied literature "in the context of social, political and cultural history" (Seldon 104). Texts, therefore, became the production of certain historical operations. Historical forces shape literary texts and they reflect the historical forces. This helps to show how literary texts and history are interrelated. However, Old Historicism views the history as superior to literature because history shapes and produces literature.

The "New Historicism," as by general agreement, the movement has come to be called, is unified by its disdain for literary formalism. Specifically, leaders of the movement describe themselves as unhappy with the exclusion of social and political circumstances (commonly known as the "context") from the interpretation of literary works; they are impatient with the settled view that a poem is a self-contained object, a verbal icon, a logical core surrounded by a texture of irrelevance. In this they are setting their jaws against the New Criticism, albeit rather late in the day. But their hostility can never (to use one of their own favored terms) be unmediated. The French *nouvelle critique* and German philosophical hermeneutics have intervened, at least in the history of fashions within the university; and the new movement has arisen at least as much in response to these later developments as to a critical establishment which has made a formalistic view of literary works its official doctrine. Thus the New Historicism in literary study has emerged in this decade not so much in the spirit of counter-insurgency as after the manner of a corporate reorganization. It has been a response not to literature but to literary studies. It has been called forth not by the subject matter under study—not by actual poems, novels, plays—but by the institutional situation in which young scholars now find themselves.

The situation in English as the century entered its final two decades was one that placed a greater premium on method than ideas. In addition, there was a rising sense that literary study had reached something of an impasse. On one side were the students of the New Critics, still doing

readings of long-accepted texts; on the other, the deconstructionists, showing how texts undo themselves. Both seemed remote from the true interests of the new professoriate, which had cut its teeth on the political slogans of the sixties. As Jean E. Howard frankly says in a defense of the new movement, by the early eighties professors had grown weary of teaching literary texts as "ethereal entities" floating above the strife of history (15). For a spell, perhaps, feminism seemed close to solving the dilemma; it appeared to hold out the hope of transforming literary criticism into an agent for social change. But gradually many within the discipline began to awaken to the fact that feminism had no distinctive method of its own; the feminist critic knew what she wanted to say about a text, but she had to adopt other interpretive "strategies," as the saying went, to make her themes appear. This began more and more to be the case. Younger critics were having to resort to a tandem operation, using deconstruction or some other variant of poststructuralist method to clear the ground on which an assortment of radical political notions were carted into raise a new interpretation. But such a procedure left critics anxious lest their interpretations fail to go beyond the already familiar readings of the text. It was in this situation that the New Historicism emerged. It appeared to offer a distinctive approach, a rigorous method, along "with the opportunity to salvage one's political commitments. Indeed, at times the New Historicism seemed almost designed to methodize the political interpretation of literature.

The movement has gained rapid acceptance in English departments. It already has its classical texts (e.g., Stephen Greenblatt's *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, Louis Adrian Montrose's uncollected essays on Shakespeare, especially the one entitled "Shaping Fantasies." It has its own journal (*Representations*, published by the University of California Press). Its special methods of interpretation are practiced by a large number of critics in England and America Jonathan Dollimore, Jane Tompkins, Don E. Wayne, Walter Benn Michaels, Catherine Gallagher, Arthur F. Marotti, Jean E. Howard, Stephen Orgel, Annabel Patterson, and Peter Stallybrass, to name only a few. It has set off an enthusiasm of historical research. Younger critics have begun to comb through parliamentary reports, religious tracts, labor statistics, and dusty stacks of ephemera published by contemporaries of the great English and American writers. Slightly older critics have begun, as it were, to retool themselves—to "rehistoricize" their scholarship for the new market conditions. Last year the English Institute devoted a large share of its program to the new approach. Graduate students have begun to catch on, and they had better. The year before, Wesleyan University's English department became the first in the country to advertise a job opening for a New Historicist.

There have been other "new historicisms" before this. Fredric Jameson's style of neo-Marxist historicism as practiced in *The Political Unconscious* (Cornell University Press, 1981) has been described as "new," but Jameson locates the grounds of his argument not in historical research but in recent theory; he is "historicist" only in respecting the past

as past while seeking to make it serve the present. Similarly, Wesley Morris's *Toward a New Historicism* (Princeton University Press, 1972) is unrelated to the movement which has usurped that name. A student of Roy Harvey Pearce, Morris sought an approach that would somehow balance the recognition that a literary work belongs to its own time with the confidence that literary works can nevertheless transcend their time. Perhaps needless to say, Morris' effort was not followed up by younger critics. The winds of doctrine in university English departments in the last quarter of this century have not been favorable to anyone who suggested the possibility of transcendence.

But the movement that now goes by the name of New Historicism differs from both of these. Perhaps the central statement of its themes is the introduction to Stephen Greenblatt's *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*. Even the title suggests the main focus of the movement. Within the ranks of the New Historicism, literature is considered to be one of the social forces that contribute to the making of individuals; it acts as a form of social control. Although most New Historicists are scrupulous to distinguish themselves from Marxist critics, the fact remains that the central task of the New Historicism is the same as that of Marxist criticism: first to call into question the traditional view of literature as an autonomous realm of discourse with its own problems, forms, principles, activities, and then to dissolve the literary text into the social and political context from which it issued. In fact, the New Historicism tries explicitly to solve the theoretical difficulty in Marxist criticism of relating the

cultural superstructure to the material base. Its claim to newness might be put in terms of its claim to having solved that problem.

New Historicists and their critics acknowledge the importance of literary text but they also analyze the text with an eye to history. Literature and history are inseparable. There are no primary and secondary characteristics between history and literature because literature is to be embedded within history. In this respect, New Historicism is not totally new because majority of critics between 1920s and 1950s focused on the work's historical content and base their interpretations on the interplay between the text and historical contexts. The historical criticism of 1980s was not the same. In this connection, M.H. Abrams writes:

In place of dealing with a text in isolation from its historical context, new historicists attend primarily to the historical and cultural interpretations and evolutions. This is not to an earlier kind of literary scholarship for the views and practices of the new historicists differ markedly from those of former and intellectual history as a "background" to account for the characteristics subject matter of literature at a particular time and place. (182-83)

New Historicists differ from Older Historicists. They based their historical research on experience and were confident to excavate and define the events of the past whereas New Historicism accepted history only as a contemporary activity of narrating or representing the past. It has the conception of 'histories', an ongoing series of human constructions. It

is difficult to understand the text without some sense of time and place in which it is composed, and it is difficult to understand the context without trying to understand historical development. Because historical criticism considers how military, social, culture, economic, scientific, intellectual, literary and every other kind of history might help us to understand the text, author as well as the literary environment. New historicism views history as a social science and the social science are being treated as properly historical distinct from the history that is relevant to it because literature is part of history that is relevant to it and cannot be separated from without loss. New historicists regard text in materialist terms, as object and event in the world. Again Abrams emphasizes:

History is not a homogeneous and stable pattern of facts and events which can be used as the "background" to explain the literature of an era or which literature can be said simply to reflect or which can be adverted to (as in an earlier Marxist Criticism) as the "material" conditions that, in a simple and unilateral way, particularities of a literacy text. In contrast to such views, a literary text by new historicists is to be "embedded" in its context, as an interactive component within the network of institutions. Beliefs, and cultural power relations, practices and products that in their ensemble constitute what we call history. (184)

The New Historicists, like Old Historicists, are interested to establish the relationship between literature and history. Moreover, that

focuses on examining how literary text reflects, shapes and represents history. Literature, according to New Historicists, does not "reflect history as a mirror." Literature, therefore, does not behave passively towards history. It rather shapes and constitutes historical change. Literary texts can have effects on history on the social and political ideas and beliefs of their time"(Brannigan 170). This is to say that literature and history are inseparable. Literature is a constitutive part of history in the making of history itself.

Despite their differences, different literary critics and schools of criticism assumed that the categories of literature and history are intrinsically separate. They viewed one of the two poles—history or literature—as superior to the other. New Historicism emerged as a reaction against such assumptions. So the object of study, for New Historicists is "not the text and its context, not literature and its history, but rather literature in history "(Brannigan 170). They view literary history as inseparable. Louis Montrose, a prominent New Historicist critic, views literature and history as fully interdependent. He argues that the key concern of New Historicist critic is "the historicity of texts," he means that all texts are embedded in specific historical, social and material context. Literary texts too are the material product of specific historical conditions. Literary text, therefore, must be treated along with its historical context. Likewise, by "the textuality of histories," he means that, "access to a full authentic past" is never possible (Montrose 410). This is to say that all of our knowledge and understanding of past exists only in the realm

narratives. The past is mediated by the texts. Literary texts too have vital role in mediating history. Literary text, in this sense works as a vehicle for the representation of history. It reveals the processes and tensions by which historical change comes about.

The New Historicism, according to Peter Barry, is influenced by Derrida's view that "is nothing outside the text, in the special sense that everything about the past is available to us in a textualised form . . ." (175). This is to say that every facet of reality is textualised. New Historicists, therefore, are interested in history as represented and recorded in written documents. In other words, history-as-text is the key concern of New Historicists. "History," for the New Historicists, writes John Brannigan "is only that which is written." He further writes that New Historicists are interested in "the manner in which is it recorded, whether this is by means of a Shakespearean drama or a merchant's diary . . ." (158). This is to view history as dependent upon a number of texts including literary texts, so they read historical context, anthropological narratives and literary texts. Since the events and attitude of the past exist solely as writing, New Historicists pay equal attention to all the written documents. They make a parallel reading of literary and non-literary texts, usually of the same historical period. Stephen Greenblatt, the guiding force of New Historicism, says that New Historicists are involved in "an intensified willingness to read all of the textual traces of the past with the attention traditionally conferred only on literary text" (qtd. in Hawthorne 197). This is to say that they see literary text and the historical document as

expressions of the same historical moment. In this sense, they give equal weight to literary and non- literary texts.

For the New Historicists, the production of literary text is a culture practice. We cannot make an absolute distinction between literary text and other cultural practice. According to Greenblatt, art "does not simply exist in all cultures; it is made up along with other products, practice, discourse of a given culture"(504). Greenblatt, thus, states that all types of art, including literature, are embedded within the social and economic circumstances in which they are produced and consumed. But these circumstances are not stable in themselves. So, literary texts are considered as a larger part of circulation of social energies. In the words of Greenblatt, there can be "no art without social energy"(503). Literary works, for them, are products of a particular culture and at the same time they influence that culture. Culture, for the New Historicist, is:

A hermetic system of signs, complete in itself, and that any notion of reality to history was an effect of this system and determined by representation. Representations (whether called literary, cultural or textual) are the agencies of power (Brannigan 172)

Written texts, therefore, are the products of social, cultural and political forces, not solely the creation of an individual author. So, texts reflect and engage with the prevailing values and ideologies of their own time. The texts form a discourse which regularly shapes and determines the views, values and action of the society and culture in which it is fostered. In this

sense, all forms of power and control, for New Historicist, operate through the medium of textual representations. Louis Montrose, in his study of Elizabethan drama, focuses on how Elizabethan culture involves bringing oppositions and otherness in to visibility so as to reinforce the norms of the dominant Elizabethan power. This type of culture structure is dispersed across a whole range of texts, from literature to travel writing. Montrose, thus, sees the impossibility of subverting the dominant culture when he says that " a text creates the culture by which it is created, saves the fantasies by which it is shaped, begets that by which it is begotten"(qtd. in Brannigan "Power"169). Montrose emphasizes that literary texts act out concerns of ruling class by reproducing and renewing the power discourses which sustain the system. Furthermore, literary texts police those dominant ideas of a particular time by representing alternatives or deviations a threatening. The new historicists tend to examine widely different texts in order to show that those texts play a key role in mediating power relation within the state. Literature, along with other written sources, raises the possibility of subversion against the state only to contain, and make safe that subversion. According to Stephen Greenblatt, each play of Shakespeare thought its representation means., " carries charges of social energy on to the stage; in its turn revises that energy and returns it to the audience"(505). Greenblatt views that text of all kinds offer us glimpses of subversion, but only in order to contain subversive elements effectively. So, all texts are discourses which are involved in power relations. These representations are, therefore, used "to

produce subversion only in order to contain that subversion"(Brannigan 172). These representation according to New Historicists, serve to ratify the existing social order. Literature, therefore, plays a part in constructing a society's sense of itself. Literary texts circulate with other text in a particular period to construct and shape the power relations of society. Literature participates in forming the dominant ideological assumption of particular time. Literature, in this, sense has a deep relationship with the mission of colonialism, gender oppressions, slavery, criminality or insanity. This kind of view of literature challenges the "humanist idea that literature could teach human being valuable lesson in moral and civic behavior"(Brannigan 172). Literature was not a benevolent teacher. It was rather a loyal watchdog, patrolling the fences of a conservative social order. New Historicists critics have examined the ways in which Shakespeare's plays performed vital roles in support of state and church ideologies. Since his work was involved in the business of power and state ideology, New Historicists have tried to politicize Shakespeare (Brannigan 172-73). Greenblatt argues that Shakespeare in *Henry IV, Part I*, creates "a carnivalesque subversiveness only to contain it and so confirm the power of monarchy, a process simultaneously identifiable in the colonialist narrative of Thomas Hariot written after his encounter with natives of Virginia in the New world"(Salkeld 63). Greenblatt thus sees the literary works as construed by differing social discourses. Shakespeare, through this play, helped to maintain the stability and power

of the state. Shakespeare, in this sense, was the guardian of state rather than the teacher of the morals.

New Historicists argue that any knowledge of the past is necessarily mediated by the text. To put it differently, history is in many respects textual. This view of history means to suggest that there can be "no knowledge of the past without interpretation. Just as literary texts need to be read; so do the facts of history"(Bennett and Royle133). The New Historicists contend that history is only knowable in the sense that literature is thought interpretation, argument and speculation. It follows then, that both literature and history must be viewed subjectively. The traditional historicists posited one or another master narrative. New historicism, according to Don E. Wayne, "is the apparent absence of such a narrative"(794). The Old Historicists saw unity, homogeneity and totality in history. The New Historicists on the contrary, found contradiction, heterogeneity and fragmentation in history. There is no single history; rather multiplicity of histories. New Historicists claimed that there is no single Elizabethan world-view as seen by Tillyard. According to New Historicists, "the idea of a uniform and harmonious culture is a myth imposed on history and propagated by ruling classes in their own interests" (Selden 105). So the New Historicists focus not in "history" but in histories. "New Historicists, thus, is characterized by, as Louis Montrose says, "a shift from history to histories"(411). This is to say that history is not a homogeneous and stable pattern of facts and events. New Historicists assert that the historians, like the authors of

literary texts, possess a subjective view. They too are informed by the circumstances and discourses specific to their era. So they can no longer claim that their study of the past is detached and objective. According to New Historicists, we can not transcend our own historical situation. We are shaped by conditions and ideological formations of our own era.

Greenblatt says that in all of this text and documents, he never found a free and pure subjectivity. For Greenblatt, "the human subject itself began to seem remarkably unfree, the ideological product of the relations of power in a particular society"(qtd. in Selden 170). Hence, human beings can never "escape history even if this history is regarded as multiple and in a process of unceasing transformation"(Bennett and Royal 144). We, therefore, cannot avoid the history that is made manifest in our subjective thoughts and actions, in our beliefs and desires"(Montrose 394). Our knowledge and understanding is part of history. So our "own voice," claims Stephen Greenblatt, is the "voice of the dead." The voices of the dead are "heard in the voices of living" through the "textual traces"(496). Hence, we can never have a disinterested and objective interpretation, evaluation or creation of a text.

History, for the new historicists is "less a determinate pattern of cause and effect than a random contingent of force, in which causes and effects were to be constructed by the observer rather than taken as given"(Eagleton 197). History, in this sense, is not a coherent body of objective knowledge. It does not follow the cause-and-effect pattern. The historian, through his imaginative mind, constructs the causes and effects

of history. History, in this regard, is an interpretation of fact using our subjectivity. Any reading of history, for the New Historicists, "depends upon the translatability of the past into the present"(Salkeld 60). The past is interpreted and made intelligible. But different people interpret the past in different ways. The translation is never a straightforward process. It remains relative to the conditions in which interpretations are made. Hence, there can be many versions of the same event of the past. New Historicists, contends Eagleton, treat the history as

a form of narration conditioned by the narrator's own prejudices and preoccupation, and so itself a kind of rhetoric of fiction. There was no single determinable truth to any particular narrative or event, just conflict of interpretations whose outcome was finally determined by power rather than truth. (197)

History, therefore, does not occupy a status of a set of fixed, objective facts. The history can never avoid human fabrication. It is, like literature, a product of subjective mind. The narrator can be a trans-historical figure. So his own historicity affects his narrative. The prejudices and preoccupations of the narrator get involved in any writing of history. History, in this sense, is a kind of fiction. There can be many interpretations of the same event, or many versions of history. The existing power structure determines which version true and which one is false. The history, thus, can never be written in pure form. It always gets

molded with human fabrication. In this regard, there is no such distinction as history and literature; or to put it in Eagleton's words, there is no "hard-and-fast opposition between fact and fiction"(197).

Chapter III

History Revisited in *Midnight's Children*

Different facets of histories feature in post-colonial writing in general and in Salman Rushdie's remarkable novel, *Midnight's Children* (1981) in particular. In the novel, Rushdie revisits the history of modern India along with the infighting of its various social and religious factions in an almost allegorical manner. Thus, Rushdie foregrounds the hitherto unheard voices and flashes the light on those aspects which were under the shadow of the powerful empirical history.

Midnight's Children traces India's development from independence and partition in 1947, through the succession of Bangladesh to the state of emergency under Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. The history of India is given phantasmagorical form by the novel's protagonist and narrator Saleem Sinai, a Hindu child raised by wealthy Muslims, who comes to believe his own life, is a metaphor for the state of his country. Saleem decides to tell his life story and the story of India as he is, quite literally, falling apart, "I mean quite simply that "I have begun to crack all over like an old jug" (11). The children of the book's title are all born at mid-night on the day India's independence is declared. There are 1,001 of them and all have a special ability. Saleem's telepathy and it is this gift which allows him to discover the truth about his own identity and those of the other children who are connected to the India's glorious history.

The novel embodies the history of the subcontinent in Saleem, Aziz's (Putative) grandson, Saleem, who begins his chronicle with the

injury to the doctor's nose, relates two generations of family history before he reaches the events of his own life. Saleem meticulously draws modern history of India in a parallel relation to the history of his own family. He discovers that the most important events that took place in India coincide with equally most significant moments in the history of his family. In the novel, the history is given meaning through the narration of individual experience. For Saleem Sinai, born at the moment of India's independence from British rule, his life becomes inextricably linked with the political, national and religious events of his time. It can be seen that Saleem's personal history is integrated with the national history from the very beginning of the novel:

I was born in the city of Bombay [. . .] once upon a time. [. . .] I was born in Doctor Narlikar's Nursing Home on August 15th, 1947 [. . .]. On the stroke of midnight, as a matter of fact [. . .] at the precise instant of India's arrival at independence, I tumbled forth into the world. (9)

By linking his time of birth to the time of independence, Saleem wants to emphasize on the fact that his own personal history is momentous because of its association with the nation's history. Saleem, thus, has a strong and powerful reason to claim that he is responsible for rewriting or re-interpreting some important events which have taken place in his life. Besides, the time of his birth has connected him to the nation's history. Saleem says, "I had been mysteriously handcuffed to history, my destinies indissoluble chained to those of my country" (9). In this sense, Saleem is

taken to be a historicist who is destined to witness each and every event of his country.

The history which Saleem narrates is, in a sense, his own story. He is trying to "cover all moments at which national events had a direct bearing upon the lives of me and my family" (138). He recapitulates the major political events of India from 1919 to the Emergency of 1975 which parallel to or affect his family history. In 1918, "on the day the World War I ended, Naseem [Saleem's grandmother] developed the longed-for headache" (27). Likewise, they got married in 1919. This year also matters in Indian history, for it was when the massacre of Jallianwala Bagh took place in India. According to Saleem's version of history, Brigadier R.E. Dyer, with his fifty troops, fired upon the crowd that had gathered on the compound called Jallianwala Bagh to protest against the British government. Likewise, on 9 August 1945, the day when the atom bomb was dropped in Nagasaki- Mumtaz (Saleem's mother) was discovered to be virgin (60).

Saleem not only narrates the historical events in a parallel relation to his own story, but also believes in being involved in them. He believes that he became a public property from the moment of his conception. During the Hindu-Muslim riot in India in 1946, his mother, in order to save a peepshow man from Muslim's attack, publicly announced that she was pregnant for some months. The public announcement of his arrival helped to save his mother and a peepshow man. Saleem, then, believes that "from the moment of my conception, it seems, I have been a public

property" (77). Furthermore, the birth of new nation, the independence of India parallels his own birth. Jawaharlal Nehru delivered a speech to the Assembly at the midnight on 15 August 1947: "[. . .] at the stroke of midnight hour, while the world sleeps, India awakens to life and freedom [. . .]" (116). And at the same moment "there are two more yells, cries, bellows, the howls of children arriving at the world" (116). These were the cries of Saleem and Shiva who were born at the stroke of midnight. India's birth as an independent nation is, thus, accompanied by Saleem's birth. Newspapers celebrated his birth and even prime minister wrote a letter to him:

Newspapers celebrated me; politicians ratified my position. Jawaharlal Nehru wrote: 'Dear Baby Saleem, my belated congratulations on the happy accident of your moment of birth! You are newest bearer of that ancient face of India which is also eternally young. We shall be watching over your life with the closest attention; it will be, in a sense, the mirror of your own'. (122)

Therefore Saleem was a child of public interest and, in a sense, a public property. A genuine historical sense was underlying on his birth and life. Besides Saleem, there were other one thousand children born in India during the first hour of 15 August 1947. For Saleem, the midnight's children were "only partially the offspring of their parents – the children of midnight were also the children of the time: fathered: "[. . .] by history" (118). Saleem, thus, sees history intertwined to the lives of mid- night's

children. Saleem, in this sense, has a strong reason to believe himself as a responsible person to write the history of this nation. He believes that he brought changes in his house, community and on the history of his country:

Already my every presence is having an effect on history; already Baby Seleem is working changes on the people around him; and, in the case of my father, I am convinced that I was who pushed him into the excesses which led, perhaps inevitable, to the terrifying time of the freeze. (130-31)

Saleem, thus, has a belief that he has contributed to forward the Indian history. He has a feeling that contains all within him. He is the "swallower of lives" (9). So he believes that no crime was committed without his complicity:

Because the feeling had come upon me that I was somehow creating a world; that the thoughts I jumped inside were mine, that the bodies I occupied acted at my command [. . .] was somehow making them happen [. . .] which is to say, I had entered into the illusion of the artist, and thought of the multitudinous realities of the land as raw unshaped material of my gift. (174)

Saleem, thus, has the illusion of responsibility. It is significant that this illusion of responsibility here is one of power rather than one of guilt. In other words, just as he is not innocent, neither is the only guilty one:

"Why should I assure that I alone have had the power of secret knowledge?" (193). The key moments of Indian history occurred because Saleem was their agent. Saleem mentions his tumble into the middle of a parade for the portion of Bombay, and proceeds to propose that in this way I became directly responsible for "triggering off the violence which ended with the partition of the state of Bombay" (192). The partition of Bombay coincides with the discovery of the mid- night's children where as the death of Saleem's grandmother runs parallel to Jawaharalal Nehru's death. Saleem also thinks himself responsible for the death of Nehru: "Can I avoid the conclusion that, that too, was all; my fault?" (279). Furthermore, he thinks himself chiefly responsible for the Indo-Pak war of 1965 over the issue of Kashmir. He thinks, "The war happened because I dreamed Kashmir into the fantasies of our rules" (339). In the coup of Ayub Khan in Pakistan, Saleem helps plot troop movements by shuffling pepper pots around a banquet table in a demonstration for Ayub's General: " What began, active metaphorically, with pepper pots, ended them; not only did I overthrow a government—I also consigned a president to exile" (291). Similarly, in the secession of Bangladesh, "I remained responsible through the workings of the metaphorical modes of connection, for the belligerent events of 1971" (351). Saleem, therefore, was a historical figure who was helping to forward the history— "literally," or may be "metaphorically" (238).

In his attempt to relate national history with personal history, Saleem compares the election campaign of early 1957 with his own love

campaign to get favor of Evie Burns a neighboring girl "everybody was busy pleading his own causes; I, however, found myself tongue-tied in the face of Evie Burns, and approached Sonny Ibrahim to ask him to plead on my behalf" (185). Furthermore, all-India congress won the election of 1957. The year 1957 also matters in Saleem's life for it was when he formed a gang of 'midnight's children' —Midnight's Children's Conference—using his telepathic powers. Midnight's Children's Conference (MCC) comprised the ethnic, religious and regional diversities of India. Its members, though children, were exposed to the beliefs of the adult society:

Children, however magical, are not immune to their parents; and as the prejudices and world-views of adults began to take over their minds, I found children fair-skinned northerners reviling Dravidian 'blackies'; there were religious rivalries; and class entered our councils. (254)

The socio-economic status and religious belief of each child, therefore, represented the diverse ideas and prejudices spreading throughout India. *Midnight's Children*, in a way reflected "a mirror of nation" (255). By virtue of Saleem's telepathic powers, all the magical children of midnight are assembled together in a Midnight's Children's Conference. They (the members of MCC) never actually meet but communicate with one another through Saleem's mental transmission. The "581 surviving children" (229) refer to the political climate of India. When the transition of political power takes place in 1947, the newly established

Indian parliament in New Delhi has 581 seats. His brain, in a way, resembled the Lok Sabha (Lower House) of India: 'So, in the early days of 1958, the five hundred and eighty one children would assemble, four one hour between midnight and one a.m., in the Lok Sabha or parliament of my brain" (227).

While Saleem's brain resembled the parliament of India, his face resembles the man of India after partition. His face resembles distinct areas of India and its neighbors. In other words, he was a human map of India. He describes himself stating "fair skin curved across my features- but birthmarks disfigured it; a dark stain spread down my western hairline, a dark path colored my eastern ear" (124). The dark stain down his western hairline represented eastern Pakistan while the dark patch of his eastern ear represented Eastern Pakistan which split in Bangladesh later.

The scene in which Saleem's "geography teacher Mr. Emil Zagallo rips out Saleem's hair provides yet another example of the way in which Rushdie draws parallels between an individual and the nation" (230). Mr. Zagallo compares Saleem's visage with a map of India, pointing out the features of Saleem's face and asking his students to pretend they are various geographic landmarks in India. In addition to his face corresponding to the political map of India, Saleem's face also demonstrates the physical features of the country:

Baby snaps reveal that my large moon face was too large; too perfectly round. Something lacking in there region of the chin [. . .]. And my temples: too prominent; bulbous Byzantine

domes [. . .]. Baby Saleem's nose:" it was monstrous; and it ran. (124)

The shape of this face including his narrow chin resembles the peninsula of India. His temple describes the Himalayan Mountains to the north while his nose is associated with the Deccan Plateau, a centrally located elevated area on the peninsula. Likewise, Saleem's experience of hair-loss in 1985 is coincided with the beginning of the problems about Kashmir:

I [. . .] felt the patch on my head where Mr. Zagallo had created a monkish tonsure, a circle where hair would never grow again, and realized the curse of my birth, which connected me to my country, had managed to find yet one more unexpected expression to itself. (232)

The hair-loss of Saleem symbolizes the ongoing struggle over the issue of whether Kashmir should be a part of India or an independent state. Saleem was, thus, linked to the nation in various levels. He was inextricably connected to India from the moment of his birth; or even more from the moment of his conception.

In the course of Indian history, 1962 represents the year when China attacked India. In Saleem's life it is the time when the midnight's children attacked him accusing him of secrecy, high-handedness and egotism. Saleem compares his mind with the battleground on which they annihilated him. The midnight's Children's Conference finally disintegrates on 20 November 1962, the day when the Indian force was

finally ruined. In Indian history, there was Indo-Pak war in 1965. In Saleem's life this war matters much for it exterminates his family and destines him to join Pakistani Army. Saleem comes back to India on 16 December 1971, the day in which Indira Gandhi's new Congress Party held more than two-third seats in the National Assembly. Likewise Shiva, a midnight child, intrudes into Saleem's life on the same day in which India arrives at a nuclear age. Similarly Saleem's wife entered labour on 12 June 1974, the day when Prime Minister Indira Gandhi was found guilty, by the Allahabad High Court, of malpractices during the election campaign of 1971. On 25 June 1975, Indira Gandhi imposed emergency in India, and at this precise moment of the birth of the new India, Saleem's son was born. His son, Adam thus represents the second generation of midnight's children and the second phase of post independent Indian history: "He was mysteriously handcuffed to history, his destinies indissolubly chained to those of his country" (420). Emergency-born child Adam suffered from tuberculosis. The treatment could not recover him for the simple reason that the emergency itself was kind of tuberculosis in India. Since the child was linked with the nation by birth, Saleem believes," while the emergency lasts, he will never become well" (423). The captivity of Indian parallels the captivity and castration of all the midnight's children during emergency. The midnight's children who once represented independent India, at last, came to represent the "Broken Promises" (439) of Indian independence. In Saleem's version of Indian history, the fall of Indira

Gandhi after the election of 1977 parallels the complete recovery of Adam Sinai.

By means of this chance narration—private history paralleling the national history—Rushdie shows how not only the individual is unavoidably linked to history but also history as an autobiography is a way of connecting the individual component of society with the collective stream of history. Saleem had realized this long ago when he carries out a plan to teach his mother a lesson. He cuts pieces out of newspapers, glues them and prepares a note. By cutting the pieces of newspapers to prepare a note, he was "cutting up history to suit my nefarious purposes" (259). By gluing his note, Saleem glues, in an almost unnoticed way, the historical—whether it is politics, sports, advertising, or gossiping— with the particular, his own private scheme. Thus, by gluing his note together, he carries out his "first attempt at rearranging history" (260).

In presenting the events of Indian history in such a peculiar way, Saleem carries out a radical subversion as to their order of importance. He displaces official history altogether, for he attempts to make the official events an appendix to his own story. In this way, he subverts the traditional order of history, and shows that the hierarchy which rules is an artificial construction, which answers to clear ideological and political motivations, however internalized they may be.

While narrating the history, Rushdie does not follow the linearity. He follows the New Historicist method of interpreting history. His narrator Saleem says that Padma, the narratee of the novel is "at my elbow,

bullying me back into the world of linear narrative, the Universe of what-happened-next" (38). Saleem rejects linear narrative both of Padma's 'what-happened-next' and his own orderly historical chronology of events. Saleem believes that the historical events have rather a tendency of leaking into each other. He believes that "things—even people—have a way of leaking into each other [. . .] like flavors when you cook" (38). Thus, Saleem asserts that if we "want to understand just one life you have to swallow the world" (109). The things are interrelated with one another.

The narrative style resembles oral expression rather than written expression. This style challenges the fixed objective truth of a nation. The first chapter of the novel also initiates the shifting back and forth in time that becomes such a dominant element in the telling of Saleem's life story. The narrator frequently refers to events or feelings that take place much later in his life. As a result of these shifts in time, Rushdie refers, however obscurely, to almost every life event far before its occurrence and full description in the novel. This method not only speaks to the tricks time plays, and to the unreliability of measures of time and the telling of history, but also to the theme of fragmentation. Much as Saleem must piece together the numerous elements and phases of his life and his heritage, the narrator calls upon the reader to solve the puzzle of Saleem's narration, which does not follow chronological or linear logic, but rather rides the wave of his emotions.

These shifts back and forth in time relate to the interconnectedness of events and the cyclical nature of family and national history of India.

For example, the three drops of blood which fall from Aadam's nose relate to the three drops of blood which later appear on the white perforated sheet on which Aadam and Naseem consummate their love. The sheet itself also symbolizes continuity within the family. Of this interconnectedness, Rushdie writes, in the very beginning of the novel:

And there are so many stories to tell, too many, such an excess of intertwined lives events miracles places rumors, so dense a commingling of the improbable and the mundane! I have been a swallower of lives; and to know me, just the one of me, you'll have to swallow the lot as well. (9)

In *Midnight's Children*, Rushdie uses character's names to explore the formation of national and personal identity. Virtually all characters adopt multiple names throughout their lives, in order to reflect emotional, political, or religious transformations. Mumtaz Aziz's transformation into Amina Sinai represents one such incident. When Mumtaz marries Ahmed Sinai and moves out of her parents' house, her changed name reflects her new life with her husband as well as her break from her parents and the authority they had previously represented. Although women around the world often take their husband's name, Rushdie seem to be making a more focused statement about India's treatment of women in his description of Mumtaz's unquestioning acceptance of her new name. This question of maiden and married names also recurs later in the book, and relates as well to the conversion of wives to Islam upon marriage.

The chapter "A Public Announcement" demonstrates the intimate link between personal lives and public history. Rushdie writes:

That was how it came about that my arrival—the coming of Saleem Sinai—was announced to the assembled masses of the people before my father had heard about it. From the moment of my conception, it seems, I have been public property. (77)

Saleem Sinai argues that his life events not only have a correlation to crucial moments in Indian history, but in fact have directly caused them.

Numbers in *Midnight's Children* are endowed with mystical significance. The 1,001 children born in the hour between midnight and one a.m. on August 15th allude to the 1001 stories of *The Arabian Nights*, a centuries-old collection of Persian, Arabian, and Indian folk tales. By giving such factual information, Rushdie revisits and recreates the political history of India.

Saleem and Shiva can be seen as embodiments of the Hindu deities Brahma and Shiva. According to Hindu legend, Brahma created the world when Shiva, who had been assigned the task, went into thousand-year abstinence. Angered by Brahma's preemptive creation, Shiva returns to destroy the world with fire. At last appeased, he castrates himself and plants his "linga" there (198). This myth plays a central role in *Midnight's Children* because it suggests an aesthetic competition between Saleem and Shiva, as well as imagining the competition between Shiva and Saleem to be one between "the two valid forms of creation" (199). Brahma dreams the world, while Shiva allows it to exist by declining to use his

immeasurable power toward its destruction. By mentioning and reviewing the religious allusions subjectively, Rushdie revisits the ancient religious history of India.

Rushdie's narrator, Saleem, interprets the history subjectively. He never claims that he has presented an objective and absolute history. As history is the record of past events, it requires memory to remember it. So, he states that he is presenting history using "the scraps of memory" (420). So, Rushdie makes the point that the distortions are inevitable because a person remembers those events which are most meaningful to him. It is impossible to avoid the errors and gaps in the writings of history because "a person must choose what he will see and what he will not" (375). Thus it can be gathered that each individual can reconstruct the past in their own version, based on memory and that becomes the truth for him. This is against the idea of grand narrative which is subverted by New Historicist reading.

While revisiting the past, Rushdie deliberately commits errors in the factual events. His narrator Saleem frequently pauses to comment on the book he is writing and one such instance, he realizes that he has given us the wrong date for the assassination of Gandhi: "But I cannot say now what the actual sequence of events might have been; in my India, Gandhi will continue to die at the wrong time" (190). The intentional errors in the text help to see how a person's memory creates a reality that may or may not conform to the recorded facts, yet can be valid for that person. Rushdie brings the error to foreground and urges the readers to take the errors in

the realm of reality created by human memory. Thus, Saleem invokes his own memory of events and Gandhi's death in this instance as true and valid. He is aware of the mistakes he has made about the chronology of events in his writings. This is the New Historicist method of reviewing history.

Saleem divides his experiences into "passive-metaphorical," "passive-literal," "active-metaphorical," and "active-literal," claiming that the *Midnight Children's* Conference has yet to experience the "active-literal" (238). Saleem defines the active-literal as those of his actions that directly and literally affect seminal historical events. Although Saleem has experienced the other three types of interaction, in this passage he begins to come to terms with the limits of his abilities to change the external world.

In *Midnight's Children*, Rushdie frequently addresses the confluence of dreams and reality and illusion and truth. In one particular incident, dreams enter reality. The day after Saleem dreams of Jimmy Kapadia's death, he learns that he has in fact died during the night. This confluence of dream and reality causes significant confusion for Saleem and for other characters in the novel, as they become less able to differentiate between real and unreal.

When the authorities attempt to convince Ahmed to sell his residence to make room for new development, Rushdie uses his attitudes as well as those of the developers to clearly juxtapose traditionalism and modernity. The developers "explained their dream—a dream of razing the

buildings to the ground and erecting on the two-storey hillock a mansion which would soar thirty stories into the skies, a triumphant pink obelisk, a signpost of their future" (242). This passage shows the growing influence of Western architecture and modernity in general, in yet another manifestation of the clashing of East and West, old and new.

The theme of interconnectedness in this novel appears in the actions resulting from Saleem's feelings of vengeance. Saleem uses his mind reading powers to discover the truth behind the relationship between "Homi Catrack and Lila Sabarmati" (259). His motive for this act is his feeling of betrayal as a result of his mother's infidelity. Ultimately, Amina terminates her affair with Nadir as a result of the untimely fate of Lila Sabarmati. Therefore these separate events and individuals are bound by a common thread, as are countless others in the novel.

The title of Chapter, "Alpha and Omega," refers to the incident in which Saleem visits the hospital after he loses part of his finger and consequently learns his parents are in fact not biologically related to him. In the beginning of this chapter, Rushdie presents a series of dualities that includes the two blood types "alpha and omega" (227). However, Saleem soon learns that his blood type is neither alpha nor omega. This discovery reiterates one of the novel's recurring ideas; that is, that many events, philosophies, and individuals defy categorization and complicate simple dualities. It also once again demonstrates Saleem's sense of homelessness, exile, and alienation, especially given his parents' subsequent treatment of him.

Rushdie separates Saleem's relationship to national and political events into the four categories of "passive-metaphorical," "passive-literal," "active-metaphorical" and "active-literal" (238). In so doing, he emphasizes the idea that while Saleem's personal life has largely correlated to the path of India as a nation, he has the unfortunate position of remaining powerless to alter the course of events. His powerlessness causes him frustration and ultimately profound disillusionment.

In Saleem's description of his grandfather immediately before his death, Rushdie densely packs several of the main themes of the novel. He writes:

What leaked into me from Aadam Aziz: a certain vulnerability to women, but also its cause, the hole at the center 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 also noticed. My grandfather had begun to crack. (275)

First, Saleem acknowledges his inheritance of some of his grandfather's personality traits and tendencies, despite the fact that he has no biological relation to him. Second, he addresses both of the men's uncertainty regarding their faith, or lack thereof. Third, the theme of fragmentation manifests itself in this description of Aadam Aziz's "cracks" (278). These cracks represent the failure of an effort to formulate identity or meaning. Rushdie writes:

Midnight has many children; the offspring of Independence were not all human. Violence, corruption, poverty, generals, chaos, greed and pepper pots [. . .] I had to go into exile to learn that the children of midnight were more varied than I—even I—had dreamed. (279)

Although Saleem may be an idealist, he only grows increasingly skeptical with time regarding the Indian government and the hope for the future of India as a nation.

Ahmed Sinai's heart condition is representative of a connection between physical and emotional states of being. After Sinai's family and his previously devoted personal secretary disappear from his life, Rushdie writes: "Ahmed Sinai's heart began to bulge. Overfull of hate resentment self-pity grief, it became swollen like a balloon, it beat too hard, skipped beats, and finally felled him like an ox" (296). Unaware of any medical reasoning for such a condition, the reader nonetheless comprehends Rushdie's use of magic realism in the novel, and the consequent conception of the inextricable link between mind and body. Saleem's search for his identity is carried out through his attempt to identify surrogate father figures. The focus of his search for a father does not address his biological lineage but rather reflects his need for a source of emotional support and for a sense of belonging. Many individuals play this role for Saleem throughout the novel; during this time in his life, his uncle General Zulfikar becomes yet another in a long line of Saleem's "fathers." Having been struck by his own biological son's failures to act manly, he

adopts Saleem for the role of his son during several pivotal political moments. However, much as Saleem's other "fathers," General Zulfikar ultimately disappears from his life when Saleem returns to Bombay.

The similarity in style and tone between the "Drainage and the Desert" chapter and the first chapter creates a cyclical quality that enables us to move more comfortably back and forth in time and alludes to the cyclical content of the novel. Another instance in which the reader can trace events to earlier points in the work appears in the scene in which Saleem's family tricks him into a trip to the ENT specialist for an operation on his nasal passages. Much as he had proven difficult to anesthetize in the chapter entitled "Alpha and Omega," following the mutilation of his middle finger, he again provides the nurses with a similar challenge in the chapter "Drainage and the Desert."

In articulating what Saleem views as the relationship between his personal life and the events of the formation of India's nationhood, he narrates, "It is my firm conviction that the hidden purpose of the Indo-Pakistani war of 1965 was nothing more or less than the elimination of my benighted family from the face of the earth" (338). In this passage Saleem places more importance on his own family history than upon the entire nation's formative events. In addition, on the duality inherent in Pakistani citizenship as a result of partition, Rushdie writes, "I suggest that at the deep foundations of their unease lay the fear of schizophrenia, or splitting, which was buried like an umbilical cord in every Pakistani heart" (328).

This sense of "schizophrenia" results in what Rushdie emphasizes as the fragmentation of identity.

In these last chapters, several events show the cyclical nature of the novel. For example, multiple parentages recur with baby Aadam Sinai, who is biologically the child of Parvati-the-witch and Saleem's fierce rival Shiva, but is, in emotional terms, Saleem's son. Also, Parvati, in accordance with the traditions of the women in Saleem's family, changes the name to Laylah and converts to Islam. In addition, when Saleem undergoes a vasectomy at the Widow's Hostel, the nurses, for the third time in his life, find his resistance to the anesthetic impressive. At the end of *Midnight's Children*, Saleem adopts a particularly pessimistic outlook on the future. Saleem says, "My dream of saving the country was a thing of mirrors and smoke; insubstantial, the maunderings of a fool" (447). Inextricably linked to this sense of hopelessness are both the loss of his silver spittoon and his knowledge that all of midnight's children have been sterilized.

Salman Rushdie does not always accurately recount the events in recent Indian history during the course of *Midnight's Children*. At times, he makes mistakes on details or dates, but he makes them intentionally, in order to comment on the unreliability of historical and biographical accounts. For example, Saleem informs the reader that an old lover of his shot him through the heart; however, in the very next chapter he confesses to having fabricated the circumstances of his death. Rushdie has cleverly designed the chapters of *Midnight's Children*. He refers to each of the

thirty chapters as a jar of chutney. The process of "chutnification" refers to the process of "pickling," or writing about, historical and life events (458). Rushdie compares Saleem's reading of history with pickling process. In both processes, he acknowledges inevitable distortions, raw materials and transformations give "shape and form that is to say meaning" (461). This is New Historicist method of reviewing history. Similarly, the thirty chapters also correspond to the number of years Saleem has lived, although the narration does not progress linearly.

Chapter IV

Conclusion

Different historical events of a country shape a literary text and thus a text cannot be autonomous and objective. Salman Rushdie's novel *Midnight's Children* excavates the glorious socio-political history of India. While doing so, the novelist meticulously examines every nuance of post-independence India. He recreates history by recounting past memories, and significant socio-political and cultural events through subjective perspective of the narrator, Saleem Sinai. While revisiting history, Rushdie undermines the traditional notion of viewing history as a set of fixed, objective facts for he believes in the subjectivity.

The novel opens with the narrator Saleem Sinai's description of his birth at midnight on August 15, 1947, which coincided with the precise moment of India's independence. As the novel is written in the first-person narrative, it conveys the innermost thoughts and emotions of Saleem. At times, he directly speaks to the readers. He conveys the message that history gives meaning if it is reviewed and reinterpreted. What Rushdie does in the novel is that he makes the characters aware of their own story and history.

Thus the first thing we learn about Saleem is that his birth coincides precisely with that of modern India—midnight on August 15, 1947. What follows is the intertwined stories of both Saleem and his country, as well as a meditation on the intersection of individual and public life, of personal history and the historical records. But *Midnight's Children* also

attempts to undermine our assumptions about what constitutes a life story or a nation's history. Rushdie makes the point that a nation's history is nothing more—but also nothing less—than the shared personal history of its individual citizens.

Saleem, who draws modern history of India in a parallel relation to the history of himself and of his family, does not present the history in a linear fashion. He believes that the historical events do not move on linearity, which the new-historicism holds. The events have rather a way of leading into one another. So, as he narrates the story, Saleem constantly digresses. Moreover, as he interprets the history subjectively, he does not care about the factual data of the historical events. Sometimes he gives the wrong dates of the events. In this way, Rushdie, through Saleem, subverts the traditional order of history.

While rewriting history, Saleem connects his personal history to that of the nation's history. He considers himself responsible for reviewing the history so as to refute the ideology that history always serves the interest of powerful and great persons who try to create one single objective truth. He talks about his life in Bombay, relationship with his friends 'born at midnight' his ability to discover truth and relates all these things to the nation's history. For instance, he relates his birth to the birth of independent India after 1947. He compares the election campaign of 1957 with that of love for his beloved, Evie Burns. He also represents socio-economic status, religious beliefs and clashes in the novel. While relating his personal history to the history of India, Saleem compares his

physical features to the physical feature of India and its socio-political structure. His different physical parts of the body resemble different States and parts of India.

Rushdie narrates events so as to draw focus on the diverse perspective from which this historical account is being told. He gives a voice to those who were kept in silence by the authority in order to rectify their absence from current historical readings. By writing the novel from the first-person narrative and presenting the deeds of characters as if it were the first-hand experiences of his own, he confirms his belongingness to the nation. He highlights those events and issues which were under the shadow in the daylight of so-called official history. Presenting the fragments of history of the characters and their relation to the nation's history, he revisits India's glorious history. In this way, through different characters' observations of the past events, Rushdie historicizes them giving new meaning.

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