



Political and Historical Overview in Rushdie's Midnight's Children

DR. Rakesh Kumar Pandey

Associate Professor- Department of English, National P. G. College, Barahalganj Gorakhpur (U.P.), India

Received- 04.11.2018, Revised- 13.11.2018, Accepted- 17.11.2018 E-mail: rakeshpandey1110@gmail.com

Abstract: *The significance of the midnight should be asserted not only as a moment of long - awaited pleasure but also as a bridge between the pre - independence conditions of British suppression and post - independence conditions of internal political crisis in India. Salman Rushdie, one of the pillars of modern Indian fiction writers, was born in June, 1947, the year of Indian independence. This present paper deals with the political and historical presentations of Indian continent in "Midnight's Children" during partition period. The story of the novel revolves around the life of a midnight children, Saleem Sinai, who himself is the narrator of the novel. The theme of the novel is political secularism. The balanced mingling of historical and political truth is the cause of arousing interest of readers.ation of oarganic to inorganic nutrients to available NPK build up in soil.*

Key Words: partition, secularism, agitation, history, political, historical, presentations, partition period.

The Booker Award winning masterpiece of Salman Rushdie has been translated into twelve languages. The novel portays the life and experience of three generations of Sinai family, living in Srinagar, Amritsar, Agra, Bombay and Karachi. Saleem, who is born on the midnight of Indian independence, is a short - structured man with widening cracks and fissures. The physical structure and cracks also have some symbolic significance. The short tiny structure of Saleem symbolizes the history of India and Pakistan and the cracks in his body visualizes the disintegration in culture and civilization of the joint form of Indian Continent having Pakistan in it before Aug. 15,1947. Salman Rushdie's autobiographical tone is scattered all over the novel. As M. K. Naik puts it.

"Midnight's Children is a many faceted novel which invites scrutiny at once as an autobiographical bildungsroman, a picaresque narrative, a political allegory, a topical satire, a comic extravaganza, a surrealist fantasy and an experiment in form and style withdrawn form Sterne, Joyce and Gunter Grass".¹

The novel delineates the story of Dr. Adam Aziz who is living in the colonized India. One day

while offering prayer to 'Allah' he hurts himself on the nose. Consequently, he resolves never to be showy in paying religious reverence to the creator of the universe. Thus a bitter satire has been used for the showy-natured religious traditions. Not only political and religious but historical truths are also presented with a mingling of fantasy. The novelist paints a scene of national movement at Amritsar with the following description -

"It is April 7th, 1919 and in Amritsar the Mahatma's is grand design is being distorted. The shops have shut. The railway station is closed, but now rioting mobs are breaking them up. Doctor Aziz, leather bag in hand, is out in the streets, giving help wherever possible".²

In the next phase of the novel the family shifts from Kashmir to Agra. There Aziz's daughter Mumtaj is married to Ahmed and changes her name to Amina. Now Amina and Ahmed become Saleem's putative parents. The fury of partition becomes responsible for destruction of Sinai's godown. Thus the whole development of the story has a deep impact of national movements and protests.

Among there ups and downs, Saleem who is one of the "Midnight's Children", is born between



12 midnight and 1 A.M. in the night of August 14-15, 1947. Out of a total of such 1001 children 420 die and 581 survive upto 1967. Saleem wants to collect all of them at one place and therefore decides to organize a conference of these children. He describes their condition as follows -

"I found children from Maharashtra loathing Gujratis and fair skinned northerners reviling Dravidian Blackies, there were religious rivalries and caste enter our councils".³

In the same description Saleem evidences a wide gap between the upper and the lower class of Indian society -

"The rich children turned up their noses at being in such lowly company, the Brahmins began to feel uneasy at permitting even their thoughts to touch the thoughts of untouchables, while among the low-born, and the pressures of poverty and communism were becoming evident".⁴

Dramatically, Saleem, really the son of a poor man, is sent to a rich family and Shiva takes his place. By doing that the author has an intention to merge the various identities into an Indian whole.

"In face all over the new India, the dream we all shared, children were being born who were only partially the offspring of their parents-the children of midnight were also the, children of the time, fathered you understand by history. It can happen especially in a country which is itself a sort of dream".⁵

The novel covers agitation against Rowlatt Bill, the Jallianwala Bagh massacre, the formation of the Indian National Army, the dropping of atom bombs on Japan, communal riots, the dawn of independence, the murder of Mahatma Gandhi, the Hindu Succession Act, the closing of the Suez Canal, Reorganization of states, language riots, elections of 1957 & 1962, Chinese war, the Nanvati case, Hazrat Bal theft, Nehru's death, Indo-Pakistan war of 1965, the Bangladesh war and imposition and lifting of emergency.

Though Saleem resolves to organize a conference but his family's emigration to Pakistan

banishes him from the conference. At the same time Mary Pereira, who was responsible for interchanging Shiva and Saleem, confesses her crime. The family is now in Karachi. The war of 1965 between India and Pakistan, brings complete destruction to his family. Saleem is left alone in this world. Though he is alive, he has completely lost his memory. As he delineates -

"Indo-Pakistan relation deteriorated, the borders were closed, so that - we could not go to Agra to mourn my grandfather I could smell the perfumes of emotions love, death, greed and humility".⁶

Thus in a situation of great confusion Saleem loses his identity. The fast moving story of his own life makes him irritate and he, being sick of his personal life once utters -

"I have had more mothers than most mothers have children".⁷

Now the third book of the novel covers the Bangladesh crisis. The Bangladesh war takes place. Saleem, at this stage, is calm and quiet and is thus called 'Buddha'. He is working as a leader of Canine unit. Though he is doing his job with full sincerity, but one day he misses his way to Sunderban Delta. Here in a dramatic episode a snake bites him and he instead of dying gets back his memory. Then he comes back to India. In India we find there's a emergency been declared by Indira Gandhi. It is the same time when Saleem's son Aziz is born. When he falls ill, Saleem declares that Aziz will be cured of his illness after the Emergency is over. This disease is cured with the lifting of the Emergency - "to cure myself of the optimism virus at last I had, that Marchday - enough, more than enough of politics".⁸

In the last part of the novel there is an episode in which Saleem is enlisted in the Pakistani Army as a "man - dog" on account of his extraordinary sense of smell. This episode is also important due to its sense of political rivalry, which is always there between the countries of India and Pakistan. Thus Saleem appears to be a victim to a social and political world.

While we talked about the story of the novel



in a discussion, to prove that novel has been highly admired for its deep understanding of political, social & cultural scenario of the pre - independence and post - independence period, we have to admit that Rushdie is also playing with the facts which are attached to his personal life. Thus the importance of the midnight has been emphasized in these lines:-

"Midnight has many children; the offspring of Independence were not all human. Violence, corruption, poverty, generals, chaos, greed and peeper pots ... I had to go, into exile to learn that the children of midnight were more varied than even I had dreamed".⁹

His own experience got an expression with a perfect blend of fancy. The importance of the novel has been demonstrated in the following comment -

"While *Midnight's Children* is an important event in Indo - English Literature and in expression of radical democratic humanism is important as an attack on South Asian ruling claps, it could go further ideologically and other issues of South Asian politics are not included".¹⁰

"*Midnight's Children*' covers about seventy years of Indian history. Two types of world are created by the author- the old world and the new. The dividing line between these two worlds lies in the birth of Saleem. He himself describes his historical birth -

"It's twenty-nine minutes to midnight. Dr. Narlikar's Nursing Home is running on Skelton staff, there are many absentees, many employees, who have preferred to celebrate the imminent birth of the nation, and will not assist tonight at the birth of children".¹¹

As far as the time duration covered in this novel, can be proved from the following statement of Saleem:-

"There have been thirty two years, in this story during which I remained unborn on I may complete one year of my own. For sixty three years before and after midnight, women have done their best".¹²

Rushdie is at his best while talking

about the political history of the pre and post independence time. Each major political event has been scrutinized with a sharp efficiency. Major political personalities get their presence in this masterpiece of Indian literature. Each frail and mighty characteristic of Indians and Pakistanese are vividly depicted. Thus the last phase of the novel is almost climbing up to the height of the climax but at the same time the protagonist feels cut-off from the history -

"And Saleem I no longer connected to history drained above and below. I made my way back to the capital, conscious that an age, which had began on that long ago midnight, had come to a sort of end I knew how it felt to clutch on for dear life".¹³

The perfect form and treatment of the novel won Booker Prize for Rushdie along with so many glorious remarks of reputed critic. Ashutosh Banerjee remarks -

"*Midnight's Children* synthesizes political allegory and the non - fictional novel, tying national events and domestic life: Capote, Mailer and Wolfe and appropriate authors for comparison".¹⁴

The place of '*Midnight's Children*' is almost untrodden by any other piece of art, as for as the creation of a non -fictional novel is concerned.

India Today remarks - "There is n't another piece of Indo - Anglian writing quite like that a sort of Bombay based world. According to Garp It is in fictional terms one of the most ferocious indictment of India's evolution since independence".¹⁵

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