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Nation and History: A Postcolonial Study of Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981)

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I had a sound colonial education, ...
and either I'm nobody or I'm a nation. ...
I had no nation now but the imagination.¹
- Dereck Walcott.

The glue of imagination is one of the basic ingredients which is required for the setting up of a nation. It goes without saying that the imagination too has a certain limitation as the nation so formed has its own restricted boundary. But to imagine a nation without any history cannot be dreamed of. Evidently we see that both imagination and history play a vital role to churn out a nation. It may not be out of place to have a look at a nation's definition before moving ahead. The definition of nation continues to proliferate day-in and day-out, thereby perplexing the concerned critics. The fact can be further substantiated by Hugh Seton- Watson's statement in which he utters: "Thus I am driven to the conclusion that no "scientific definition" of the nation can be devised, yet the phenomenon has existed and exists."² The phenomenon has been further magnified by postcolonial critics, ever since its rise in the nineteenth century in Europe. Since then nation has been the cause of many untold conflicts leading to two disastrous World Wars. Today the number of these nations has increased to 196, which again reflects that each nation is imagined in its own ways since they all have a different history. My statement finds legitimation in the following words of Wang Gungwar, an Australian who served as the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Hong Kong:

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What may emerge as the basis of Australian national identity is a consensus that Australia is not part of Asia, nor Europe, nor America, but a country with some of the best modern features of these three countries.³

On the one hand, as cited above, we have a case of migrants from various countries forming a nation. On the other hand, we have a unique example of the Soviet Union, where people dispersed from one country to another to form as many as fifteen countries in 1991. So what forms a nation is a bit perplexing to comment on. Sometimes nation comes out of nowhere, as in the case of disintegration of the Soviet Union, which fractured the European' communities' definition of a nation.

The first inevitable linking of nation with imagination was done by Benedict Anderson in his book *Imagined Communities* which defined the nation first and foremost as:

an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign. It is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them.⁴

Anderson goes on to say that the imagination of a nation is 'limited' because of its restricted boundary. But today his opinion has been fissured as even a migrant living in a foreign country successfully follows the rituals of his or her own country, which in turn points out that the idea of a nation is more often than not based on a naturalized myths of racial or cultural origin and focuses on issues of separate identities and cultural distinctiveness.

Talking about nation formation, Homi Bhabha in *Nation and Narration* makes a clarion call with razor precision that "The other is never outside or

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beyond us, it emerges within cultural discourse, when we think we speak most intimately and indigenously, “between ourselves”.⁵ Bhabha alludes to this prevailing contradiction witnessed in nation-formation and different regional cultures render a different colour to the Indian nation and thus we get a perceived ‘other’ from the same body of the Indian nation.

Defining nation-state, Ernest Renan states that “A nation is soul or spiritual principle. Two things , which in truth are but one, constitute this soul or spiritual principle. One lives in the past, one in the present. One is the possession in common of a rich legacy of memories, the other is present-day consent, the desire to live together, the will to perpetuate the value of the heritage that one has received in an unindividual form.”⁶ Seen from this angle, we witness that India has one soul but different spiritual forces since it has been invaded by many warriors and rulers in the past and the present-day variegated religion and culture have siphoned their way through these subsequent layers of previous conquests which are deposited over India’s soul.

Prior to Anderson’s concept of nation as ‘an imagined community’, Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India, too imagined about his nation *i.e.* India. Though he failed to link nation with imagination, but unconsciously, his imagined India as stated below meant the same:

As I grew up and became engaged in activities which promised to lead India’s freedom, I became obsessed with the thought of India. What is this India apart from her physical and geographical aspects? What did she represent in the past? What gave strength to her then? How did she lose that old strength? [...]
Does she represent anything vital now?⁷

Evidently, we see that Nehru imagined about ‘India’s freedom’ which in turn meant its political autonomy.

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India's vitality can be viewed from the fact that quickly after gaining much sought after independence, she has become a powerful nation.

The history of every country is replete with instances of multifarious struggles. It goes without saying that during war time regional, cultural and personal differences solidify into a national unity, as one feels an enhanced sense of belonging to one's nation. But at the same time, these variegated regional and cultural differences brought about the division of colonial India into two independent nations – India and Pakistan – in August 1947.

Talking of history as being another constructive source of nation, one cannot but agree that history does provide with a sense of belonging to the denizens of a nation. To imagine a nation without history, would be to imagine history without wars. James Joyce says, with flawless precision, that 'History is a nightmare from which I am trying to awake.' Bankim Chandra Chaterjee stated long time back: "We must have history", and found its resonance in Partha Chaterjee's statement, who stated that "the materials of Hindu nationalist rhetoric current in postcolonial India were fashioned from the very birth of nationalist historiography."⁸ Nevertheless, the fact cannot be denied that the same history has mostly been fabricated to please the mighty. Concurrently, we witness that history has been a source of great narrative in post colonial literature, for its concerned nations. Even John McLeod, a postcolonial critic, approves that the narration of history is central to the narration of nation, oblivious of the fact that there are more than one national history.

The above discussion would be my point of departure which I should like to develop in relation to Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981). This paper also endeavours to highlight the various historical details mentioned in this novel.

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Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* marked the beginning of a new era for Indian English novels both in India and abroad and went on to win 'the Booker of Bookers', the best novel to have won the Booker Prize for Fiction in the award's 25 years of history. *Midnight's Children* is being regarded as a foundational text of postcolonialism. The reason for this immeasurable popularity of Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* is to be found in its unique style. Finally there appeared an Indian writer who told the story, the way it should be told, and who did not write about village life and social ills. The days of R.K. Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand and their peer group witnessed a sunset. Rushdie 'chutnified' both the Indian history and language with his acute sense of humour and invented new metaphors of nationhood.

The genesis of *Midnight's Children* is to be found in a familiar joke: two months after Rushdie was born, the British ran away from India. As Rushdie revived his fainted memory:

This joke was almost told to embarrass me at awkward moments, which gave me the idea to take a child and a country, and to join them comically. From that there was a short step to having the idea of a child that was born exactly at the moment of independence, and who believed himself to be connected to the country. Then there was the story of the child growing up and the country growing up, so to say, in parallel, it began with that.⁹

This joke churned out the birth of Saleem Sinai, the protagonist of the novel, at the stroke of midnight on August 15, 1947, at the precise moment of India's independence. With him are born the other one thousand "midnight's children" – all born in the early hours of India's independence. Saleem's birth is celebrated by Pandit Nehru, newspapers, and many others. At the very beginning of the novel, hints are

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offered that historical events would be important in the novel and that Saleem was inextricably linked to his nation, i.e. India. Saleem said :

I was born in the city of Bombay... once upon a time. No, that won't do, there's no getting away from the date : I was born in Doctor Narlikar's Nursing Home on August 15th, 1947. And the time? The time matters, too. Well then : at night No, it's important to be more ... On the stroke of midnight, as a matter of fact. Clock hands joined palms in respectful greeting as I came. Oh, spell it out, spell it out: at the precise instant of India's arrival at independence, I tumbled forth into the world I had been mysteriously handcuffed to history, my destinies indissolubly chained to those of my country. For the next three decades, there was to be no escape And there are so many stories to tell, too many, such an excess of intertwined lives events miracles places rumours, so dense a commingling of the improbable and the mundane.¹⁰

Clearly we see that Saleem is 'handcuffed' to India's history. The date is mentioned for this very purpose. He also gives a clear account of his birth place i.e. Doctor Narlikar' Nursing Home in Bombay. The time of birth is also taken up by Saleem precisely in order to begin the game of India's history. The novel starts about 30 years before India's Independence and runs chronologically till 30 years after. Metaphorically, Saleem's face represents the map of India and the events that take place in India are connected to his life.

The fact that *Midnight's Children* is a historical novel can be further substantiated in one of Rushdie's own interviews, wherein, while commenting upon *Midnight's Children* and also *Shame* (his other novel), he said that :

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It seems to me that everything in both books has had to do with politics and with the relationship of the individuals and the history.¹¹

Consequently the various historical references in the novel become a commentary on the ways in which Rushdie reconstructs an impeccable historical record.

In his *Imaginary Homelands*, a collection of essays, Rushdie states that he is constantly reminded of the fact that his present is 'foreign' and the past is 'home', even though a home effaced with the passage of time. In such a situation, he is forced to look, back at India, although fully aware of its that "if we do look back, we must also do so in the knowledge which gives rise to profound uncertainties that our physical alienation from India almost inevitably means that we will not be capable of reclaiming precisely the thing that was lost: that will in short, create fictions, not actual cities or villages but invisible ones, imaginary homelands, Indias of the mind."¹² Thus he comes out with a plan to project the 'Indias of his mind' in his novel *Midnight's Children*.

Memory also plays a vital role in the construction of a nation's history. Rushdie too acknowledges this fact in an interview given to B.B.C. He says :

Memory has its own special kind. It selects, eliminates, alters, exaggerates, minimizes, glorifies, and mollifies also, but in the end it creates its own reality, its heterogeneous but usually coherent version of events; and no same human being ever trusts someone else's version more than his own."¹³

Memory thus activates the narrative in *Midnight's Children*, the purpose of which is to "relate private lives to public events and to explore the limits of

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individuality in a country as big, as populous, and as culturally variegated as India”¹⁴. Evidently, we see that the revival of Rushdie’s memories, in bits and pieces, was edited to produce his novel, *Midnight’s Children*. No need to say that this memory revival also rendered the novel a historical touch with a shadow line of realism.

Midnight’s Children is the story of an emerging nation i.e. India, though it also relates to the birth and growth of Pakistan and Bangladesh and even offers details about Great Britain. Rushdie successfully draws a parallel between the private destiny of Saleem and the public destiny of India. Saleem sometimes thinks that : “From the moment of my conception, it seems, I have been public property” (p. 77) . *Midnight’s Children* can also be looked as a sequel o Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru’s *An Autobiography*, though the latter was written in a colonial period, whereas Saleem’s account in *Midnight’s Children* covers both the colonial and post-colonial periods in Indian history. The dream that Nehru had about India’s freedom turns into a reality only with the birth of Saleem Sinai. Rushdie, ironically uses Nehru to say:

Dear Baby Saleem, My belated congratulations on the happy accident of your birth We shall be watching over your life with the closest attention, it will be in a sense, the mirror of our own....”(p. 122)

Saleem thus becomes a representative figure of his generation, and to be more precise, of all the Indians. He says:

I am everyone everything whose being in the world was affected by mine.... Nor am I particularly exceptional in this matter; each “ I”, everyone of the now six-hundred-million plus of us contains a similar multitude. (p. 383).

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This inevitable connection of Saleem with India and the Indians certainly makes *Midnight's Children* a historical novel containing a compendium of data, of dates, important names of political figures – all inextricably linked to India's freedom.

The reading of *Midnight's Children* as a national allegory deepens the belief of Fredrick James – on that “All Third World texts are necessarily... allegorical and in a very specific way they are to be read as ... national allegories.”¹⁵ This is due to the fact that postcolonial writers want to glorify their nation and provide their readers a sense of nationalism. But this concept of nationalism is a bit perplexing especially in the case of India, which is a symbol of variegated colours, diverse regions and cultures. The theories of nation and nationalism fail to some extent when applied to India. The condition further deteriorates with the increase in the number of regional and communal clashes. The question then arises as to what type of nation is India, when its basic constituents are relentlessly struggling against each other. India has no concept to unite its denizens. Every region has a different history and so are their cultures. The same disparity can be witnessed in case of language, and crossing a region can ironically lead to problems of miscommunication. The failure to efface the past on the parts of the Indians is still at best demonstrated in its political affairs where “present politics are shaped by conceptions of the past”¹⁶ and these fabricated ideas divide its denizens on the basis of caste, creed and language. Thanks to the rotten reservation system where the denial of one's right means the gain of another just on the basis of caste.

One of the key moments in the building up of Indian nation is to be witnessed in the form of Swadeshi Movement which initiated in 1905, in the revolutionary state of Bengal. This movement, though severely suppressed, succeeded in evoking a newly discovered sense of nationalism to the Indians. All of a sudden Swadeshi (Indian) products turned

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into a nationalistic symbol, and due to this the Britishers registered a sharp decline in their business. This statement of mine can be substantiated by Eric Hobsbaun's interview which is given below:

Entirely new symbols and devices came into existence as part of nationalist movements and states, such as the national anthem (of which the British in 1740 seems to be the earliest), the national flag (still largely a variation on the French revolutionary tricolour, evolved (1790-04), or the personification of 'the nation' in symbol or image, either official, as with Marianne and German, or unofficial, as in the cartoon stereotypes of John Bull, the lean Yankee Uncle Sam or the 'German Michel.'¹⁷

The above-mentioned nationalist icons and symbols can then be looked upon as the fundamental elements of a new nation. These nationalist symbols owe their existence to the imagination of indigeneous people. According to Merveyn Morris, nothing is "more important in nationalism than the feeling of ownership."¹⁸

For the purpose of making the novel a national allegory, Rushdie had provided Saleem and the other midnight's children with a magical faculty:

What made the events noteworthy ... was the nature of those children every one of whom was, through some freak of biology or perhaps owing to some prenatal power of the moment or just conceivably by sheer coincidence..., endowed with features, talents and faculties which can only be described as miraculous (p. 195).

And further, the rendering of the various magical faculties to the peer group of Saleem's other thousand children could be found below:

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So among the Midnight's Children were infants with powers of transmutation, flight, prophecy and wizardry ... but two of us were born on the stroke of midnight. Saleem and Shiva ... to Shiva the hour had given the gifts of war (of Ram who could draw the undrawable bow; of Arjuna and Bhima, the ancient prowess of Kurus and Pandavas united unstoppably in him!) (p. 200).

All these mythological names revives in the readers a sense of their past history, and thus Rushdie succeeds in connecting the past with the present.

Along with the thousand Midnight's Children, Saleem is also provided with a magical faculty of telepathy which plays a vital role in connecting the Midnight's Children on a common stage and thus helping the narrative to move forward.

Saleem starts his autobiography focusing on his grand father Aadam Aziz, before giving us details of his birth. In an early morning in Kashmir, Aadam Aziz receives an injury on his nose while hitting the ground during his prayers, which results in the fall of three drops of blood from his nose. Probably these three drops of blood symbolically represent the setting up of three free nations – India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. As a consequence of this injury, Aadam Aziz vows never to pray again, and never to bow before man or God, and this in turn, creates a “hold” inside him. Further Aadam's nose is symbolic of his role as a patriarch of a dynasty, and all his descendants bear this mark. “Doctor Aziz's nose ... established incontrovertibly his right to be a patriarch.... a nose to start a family on... there'd be no mistaking whose brood they were” (pp. 13-14). Rushdie adopts the idiosyncrasies of a child in describing Aziz's nose : “You could cross a river on that nose (its bridge was wide)” (p. 13). This injury of ‘perforated sheet’ finds mention time and again in the novel so often that it fades its literal meaning

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and becomes a natural symbol. Disturbances in India tend to create fresh holes in this 'bed-sheet' with the passage of time. It is also attended to Pakistan "that moth-nibbled land of God". It also represents a part of Ahmad Sinai, to whom Amina Sinai, mother of Saleem Sinai is married. Although Amina is married to Ahmed, she continues to have a warm heart for Nadir, her ex-husband. The 'bed-sheet' teaches to Amina the act of loving Ahmed:

To do this she divided him, mentally into every single one of his component parts. Each day she selected one fragment of Ahmed Sinai, and concentrated her entire being upon it... until she felt fondness rising up with her and becoming affection, and finally, love (p. 68).

Thus, the 'perforated sheet' acts as a love teaching device for Ahmed, Amina, Aadam and Naseem. It also acts as a device to activate the flow of sexual desire.

In the very next chapter of the novel, we are told about Padma, an illiterate girl, named after the 'lotus goddess' (p. 24) and who works in a Pickle factory managed by Saleem. "She is", writes Uma Parameshwaran "the collective consciousness, the spirit of the country.... Padma is Saleem's contact with the earth"¹⁹ Padma is deeply attached to Saleem and performs her duty of a nurse cautiously Saleem calls her "a plump Padma... sulking magnificently ... Padma. Strong, jolly, a consolation for my last days. But definitively a bitch-in-the-manger" (p. 24). She provides the necessary ear to Saleem's autobiography, but does not succeed in attracting him. Saleem constantly ridicules her for her illiteracy and tells us that he has attempted to educate her. Padma's lust and emotions are not satisfied by Saleem, who thinks that she craves only for sex. Ironically we find Saleem's infertility very soon. Padmini is a testimonial of the 'double-colonization' of women, both at home and outside, since times

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immemorial. Freedom for the nation has brought only limited liberties for them. All the existing rules and codes of conduct are meant only for them. Daughterhood signifies difficulty in India's male-biased society – difficulty both at home and outside. The woman (Padma) in this novel does not find any assurance of self, nor she can create 'a room of her own.' This fact finds support in the following lines of Freedom Nyamubaya, a Zimbabwe based poet:

Once upon a time
There was a boy and a girl
Forced to leave their home
by armed robbers.
The boy was Independence
The girl was Freedom
...
Independence came
But Freedom was not there.²⁰

Another example of male chauvinism is Rushdie's deliberation with which he focalizes only Saleem's story, while neglecting Padma's.

Padma performs the role of a passive audience, but concurrently she distracts and comments on Saleem, thus also acting as his critic. Through Padma, Rushdie anticipates and acknowledges the reader's frustrations. She is only a tool to lengthen the narrative. Through Saleem's eyes, Padma perceives the various communal violences in India. It is only at the end of the novel that the reader comes to know about Padma and Saleem's relationship, that they are just partners and not married. This happens when Saleem decides to marry her on India's Independence day, on his thirty-first birthday, "I shall reach my birthday, thirty-one today, and no-doubt a marriage will take place, and Padma will have her – tracery on her palms and

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soles...” (p. 462). Again we have an instance of chemical bonding between Saleem’s personal history with India’s national history. But this proposed marriage is celebrated only in the imagination of the readers, as Rushdie does not mention about the occasion in the novel.

At the end of this chapter, we discover a crack in Saleem’s wrist which signifies the death of Tai, the boatman, in 1947, as a result of his protest over India’s and Pakistan’s dispute on Kashmir. Earlier in this same chapter, we witness the brutalities of Brigadier R.E. Dyer who along with his troops opens fire at the crowd resulting in the death of 4516 persons. Here again, Aadam’s nose plays a vital role, as the firing of R.K. Dyer and his troops collides with Aadam’s sneeze which affirms that his nose will play an important role in the future generation of Saleem’s family.

Having mentioned Padma’s connection to Saleem and India’s history, we now move forward to the other important events in the novel colliding with India’s important historical dates. In the chapter entitled “A Public Announcement,” the reader is told about various incidents – the Cabinet Mission – old Pathick Lawrence, clever Cripps, military A.V. Alexander saw their scheme for the transfer of power fail (p. 64). This chapter contains details of Hindu – Muslim riots. It is in this chapter that we see Lifafa Das blessing Amina Sinai, Saleem’s mother and his unborn child, and asks her to see Ramram Seth, a palmist and an astrologer, who can tell about Saleem’s future. Interestingly the place being fixed to meet Das in order to see Ramram Seth, is none other than the historical monument of Delhi – the Red Fort. Rushdie inevitably links the Red Fort with Saleem Sinai even before his birth, just as it is in the case of the Red Fort, being attached to India’s freedom, even before the actual freedom came. “As a consequence of the incidence of the birth and the consistency of this synchrony between his life and nation’s Saleem becomes ‘heavily imbroded in

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history' (p. 69), his destines "indissolubly chained" (p. 9) to those of his country."²¹ Such strong is the bond between the two that one cannot even think of separating Saleem from India.

In the chapter entitled "All India Radio", we have descriptions of India's First Five Year Plans – during which the fortunes of Saleem's father decline, the communal riots in Bombay break out with the nearing of the elections, and also Saleem's discovery of his telepathic powers accompanies with "The voices bubbled in everything from Malayalam to Naga districts, from the purity of Lucknow to the Southern slurring of Tamil" (p. 168). We see Saleem in a state of confusion because he is 'Padma-less' and in such a state he commits an error in recalling the date of Mahatma Gandhi's association. This again signifies the importance of Padma's role as a listener to Saleem's story and the fact that without the audience, Saleem's story of nation- building shakes gravely. Just as an artist needs audience to applaud his work of art, so also Saleem needs Padma's presence. He even exaggerates to say that he might "turn out to be utterly useless" (p. 52) like the new found freedom of India. Commenting on the same, Tapan Ghosh states that Padma's "exit has disturbed the balance between the past and the present and between digressiveness and linearity. No longer able to traverse the entire continuum of time, Saleem has to be reconciled to the 'narrow one dimensionality of a straight line which cannot project a multi-dimensional reality."²² This proves correct the prophecy of Ramram Seth's – that "voices will guide him (p. 165).

India's history collides again with Saleem's personal life in the important chapter "Love in Bombay" . At a time, when demands are constantly being raised for division of Bombay, on linguistic basis, Saleem discovers the other thousand *Midnight's Children* and his infatuation for an American girl, Evelyn Lilith Burns. This love-affair can be seen America's generosity in providing India

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with a large aid in 1950. Saleem first gets a glimpse of her in his neighbourhood at Methwold's Estate in 1957, and like a typical Indian gets mesmerised by the white skin and her cycling skills. Unable to propose, Saleem decides to take help of his friend Sonny Ibrahim – the same boy who has been at a receiving end due to his infatuation towards Saleem's sister Jamila, who with the help of some of her friends strips Sonny. But Sonny subdues it and decides to act as an advocate for Saleem's case, at a time *i.e.* 1957 when the general election is round the corner and consequently all the parties like the Congress, D.M.K. and Hindu Jan Sangh pace up their electoral campaigns. Evic (EvelyN) rejects this proposal of love scornfully, Linking it to Saleem's inability to ride a bike. The bike then becomes a symbol of modern love affair, and later also results in Saleem's and Sommy's injury when Evic jerks Saleem's bi-cycle (not bike which he can't possess). Ironically, this incident establishes Saleem's connection with the other midnight's children : 'they were there In my head, in the front row... sending there here –I-am signals, from north south east west... the other children born during that midnight hour" (p 187) about whom he comes to know at the approach of his tenth birthday in January 1957. He becomes aware that out of the total one thousand and one children, only five hundred and eighty one survive and the remaining have died due to various unknown diseases. Of the surviving midnight's children, two hundred and sixty one are boys and three hundred fifteen are girls.

Shortly after this, began another important historical event in India. The State Reorganisation Committee had submitted the final report to Pandit Nehru, the then Prime Minister of India, and acting upon its recommendations 'India had been divided anew, into fourteen states and six centrally administrated 'territories' (p. 189). The Commission was being held responsible for the communal violence in Bombay which overlooked the demands of

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its citizens to divide Bombay into two parts based on languages – Gujarati and Marathi.

This linguistic war does not spare even Saleem, who while cycling down runs into a procession of Marathi mobs, and failing to understand Marathi language; he is asked to speak Gujarati, in which he is not good either. In order to escape from them Saleem recites a Gujarati rhyme, which he had learnt at school for bullying Gujarati boys:

So ch'e? Saro che' !

Danda le' ke' maro che' ! (p. 191).

It means “How are you? – I am well! – I'll take a stick and thrash you to hell?” Soon after this, we have another instance of the Samyukta Maharashtra Samiti collecting with the ‘head of a Male Gujarati Parishad’ and the rhyme of Saleem’ – So che’? Saru che' ! being raised by the Marathis, leading to an inevitable clash in which ‘fifteen killed, over three hundred! (pg. 192). Saleem holds himself responsible for this violence which results in the partition of Bombay into two states. As a result of this division, Bombay becomes the capital of Maharashtra.

History again takes Saleem in its train on his tenth birthday, which also marks the tenth Independence Day. Interestingly, it is also the year which witnesses various natural calamities of storms, drought and floods. None of Saleem's friends give him company on that day *i.e.* his birthday, due to Evie's ban on festivities. This is an example of neocolonialism, wherein despite of attaining much sought after independence, Indians have a special liking for the whites and their products. The way the citizens of Methwold's Estate follow Evie's instructions is a substantiation of this fact. Freedom has to take place in the minds, but that is not the case, as mentally they are still being governed by the Whites, and blindly buying their products. The fact finds support in the following lines of Ashis Nandy:

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The West is now everywhere, within the West and outside, in structure's and in minds.²³.

Seen from this angle, we find that Colonialism has given way to colonial modernity and this colonial modernity *i.e.*, the initiated dressing service, manners and acts of speaking on the parts of the Indians is the base of neo-colonialism, where foreign brands, like 'Levis', 'Pepe-Jeans', 'Wrangler; Cars like B.M.W., Jaguar and many other white things are being willingly accepted by Indians.

The Methwold Estate where Sinai used to live is also a symbol of neocolonialism. The estate named after William Methwold who was forced to leave India after the transfer of power to India. His entire property consisted of four large, well built houses in European style and were named after the royal palaces of Europe. Methwold was a symbol of British brutalities in India which continued to haunt the Indians even after the British departure. Later on, the Methwold Estate became a witness to many important historical events which beleaguered it. It was here on 14th August, 1947, that Vanita, wife of Wee Willie Winkie entered into a labour pain at a time when 'M.A. Jinnah announced the midnight birth of a Muslim Nation" (p. 111).

Saleem's telepathic power brought him many liberties as well as problems. He took full advantage and whored all over Karachi, toured India, and improved his marks by cheating. Concurrently it was with this magical faculty that Saleem spied on his mother and aunt and created a horrifying time for himself. His telepathy was also responsible for depriving him, to some extent, from the readers' sympathy, as he betrayed Sheikh Mujibur Rehman of Bangladesh to the Pakistani enemy and also the remaining Midnight's Children to their murderers. By projecting Amina Sinai, Saleem's mother, as a 'breeder of sinner', Rushdie converted his hero into a Shakespearean Hamlet. He started spying on his

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mother due to her regular disappearance after a so called wrong number telephone call, and finally managed to scratch her dating with his ex-husband Nadir Khan, 'a notorious Communist Party handout (p. 216) in the 'Pioneer Café' in an objectionable position with 'hands longing for touch, hands outstretching tensing quivering demanding to be but always at last jerking back' (p. 217). Like Hamlet, Saleem did not act quickly and suffered from the same 'To be or not to be' question. In order to overcome from this deplorable state, he started communicating with the midnight's children, through his magical powers of telepathy. It was in this telepathic meeting that Saleem encountered Shiva, the real son of Ahmad and Amina Sinai. The case of Saleem's multiple parents could be seen in the way that India possessed multifarious cultures. Saleem represented the 'nose' and Shiva the 'knees':

So there were knees and a nose, a nose and knees. In fact, 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. (p. 118).

Shiva was a leader of a criminal gang of Bombay and wanted to stake a claim on Saleem's gang on the basis of his birth time "at exactly midnight", but Saleem rejected it with contempt and ignited his temper. Shiva was a dictator who used to say : "Everybody does what I say or I squeeze the shit outa them with my knees" (p. 220).

The different Midnight's Children represented the variegated religions and culture prevalent in India. They were 'a sort of many headed monster, speaking in myriad tongues of Babel... the very essence of multiplicity" (p. 229). In the course of events, Saleem witnessed two acts of humiliation. The first mutilation was the result of his Geography-

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cum-Gymnastic teacher Emil Zagallo, who was a threat for his students. He hated the Indians and called them 'savages' and 'bead-lovers' in return, the students called him 'Pagal-Zagal, Crazy Zagallo' (p. 230). He used to cite examples of Indian map with reference to Saleem's face. "In the face of the ugly ape you don't see the whole map of India"? He referred to Saleem's chin as 'Deccan peninsula hanging down!' He exaggerated to say that the various birth marks on "the right ear is East Wing; and the horrible stained left cheek, the West! Remember, stupid boys: Pakistan is a stain on the face of India" (pp.232-233). He then pulled out a bunch of hair from his head and for this he was terminated from his service.

Thereafter we witnessed a crack in the Midnight's Children's forum, as no one listened to Saleem and everyone was engaged in his or her own affair. This disintegration occurred "on the day the Chinese came down over the Himalayas to humiliate the Indians *fauj*." (p. 254). This undermining created various divisions – linguistic, economic and regional – these divisions again fell in line with the various regional and cultural divisions to be found in India. Thus the conference of Midnight's Children turned into a hotch-potch. Saleem's pleading for unity fell on deaf ears. This loss of Saleem was the gain of Shiva. This rivalry between the two is done by Rushdie in to highlight the proliferating tension between the two neighbouring countries – India and Pakistan *Midnight's Children* has succeeded in its attempt to provide its readers with a possible alternative hermeneutics of history.

In the meantime, Saleem activated his telepathic power in order to spy on Lila Sabarmati's affair with Catrack, in order to teach his mother the outcome of adultery. Saleem decided to plot the murder of Catrack by cutting the news of India's past historical events from various newspapers which appeared like this

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COMMANDER SABARMATI (My note
read)

WHY DOES YOUR WIFE GO-TO COLABA
CAUSEWAY ON SUNDAY MORNING?(p.
260)

He did this in order to create fresh news which would go into the making of another historical incident. He passed on this piece of note to Commander Sabarmati, who in a bit of rage shot his wife and her illicit lover.

The manner in which Saleem uses the past historical news to reconstruct a new melodramatic history is highly imaginative and Rushdie needs to be congratulated for this “cutting up” of history . This incident shocked the entire nation and Sabarmati became the “most popular murder in the history of Indian jurisprudence” (p 262) as public sympathy started pouring in for this betrayed husband. Comparisons were made and Catrack was compared to Ravana whom Rama (Commander Sabarmati) brutally murdered for abducting his wife. But the matter came to a close as he was framed guilty by the Supreme Court and then the President of India, as he was immured. The whole affair was projected in one of the newspapers which read like this:

It is a theatre in which India will discover who she was, what she is, and what she might become. (p. 262).

We have some more intertwining of national stories with Saleem’s personal story in the chapter entitled “Revelations”. The reader is told of the metamorphoses of Saleem’s friend Cyrush Dabush, from a ‘school prodigy’ into “the most successful holy child in history” (p. 269). Saleem links this sudden transformation of his friend to Lord Khusro Khurovand Bhagwan, a saint or a so called ‘mahaguru,’ who possessed everything – an aeroplane, a luxury car, and a big fan following .

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Here, the narrative again moves in the vicinity of the Methwold estate. The Narlikar woman decided to convert the Methwold estate into a mansion and to pressurize Saleem to depart from there. Passing through this trauma, the Sinais received another slap of chagrin on their face, when they heard the news of Hanif's suicide which led to a mourning period of forty five days. This period never allowed the Sinais to recover as things "were said and seen and done from which none of [them] ever recovered" (p.272). The person held responsible for their further dilapidation was none other than Hanif's wife Pia, who did not think it proper to shed even a drop of tear over her husband's unnatural death. Instead she appeared to be cool and calm. In order to bring her senses alive, Aadam and Pia's mother-in-law decided to fast until she shed some tears. Here Rushdie highlights the importance of paramount grief to be expressed by a wife over his husband's death in this traditional, male-biased Indian society. Aadam and Pia's mother-in-law succeeded in their attempt on the twentieth day of the mourning period. Here again, Rushdie displays his sense of humour by bringing an uncalled for sneeze into Pia's nose, which consequently resulted in her flow of tears, and some solace to her family members. Pia's mother-in-law then broke her fast and her plans of migrating to Pakistan with her husband.

Interestingly after the death of Hanif, Aadam saw a God in his dreams, though he had stopped believing in His existence. Nobody except Mary Parura believed in this sudden revelation of Aadam Aziz, blaming it to his old age. Consequently, he refused to migrate to Pakistan. We are also told about the unhappy state of affairs encompassing India and Pakistan.

These Nehrus will not be happy until they have made themselves hereditary kings!.... Ah unhappy Pakistan! How ill-served by her rulers. (p. 275)

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However, all this finally resulted in Aadam's shifting to Srinagar from Agra in 1963, His arrival at Srinagar spelt doom not only to him but to the entire nation owing to the theft of the Prophet's hair on 28th December, 1963. The agitation was muted with the recovery of the holy hair, five days after its theft. But before it could be recovered, Aadam Aziz died on 1 January, 1964 as a result of his severe weakness just near the sanction of Acharya. After the incidence of 'three drops of blood' falling from his nose, he had become an atheist. Ironically, his final moment came at a holy place and soon after of Jawaharlal Nehru:

After the death of grandfather, Prime Minister Jawahar Lal Nehru fell ill and never recovered his health. This fatal sickness killed him on May 27th, 1964 (p. 278).

This fictionalization of history or historification of fiction has been done impeccably by Rushdie. Using too much history could make a fiction a bit boring, but in Rushdie's case that is not so. Writing on this blend of history and fiction, R.C. Collingwood states:

For history, the object to be discovered is not the mere event, but the thought expressed in it. To discover that thought is already to understand it.²⁴

In case of Rushdie the object to be discovered is none else than his childhood and his lost idea of nation *i.e.* India – a nation which made Rushdie a bit nostalgic and it was in this nostalgia that Rushdie drove the train of India's past hauling them at important historical stations at a punctual time. Regarding such a historification of his fiction, D.C.R.A. Goonetilleke writes : "Saleem's – and Rushdie's – version of history is different from the traditional, which is logical, imposes patterns, a chain of cause and effect, is seemingly objective, definitive, unitary, repressive and closed. History in *Midnight's Children* is, in a postmodern way fragmented, provisional, openly subjective, plural,

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unrepressive, a construct, a reading.²⁵ Seen from this angle, the history so constructed might be either helpful in clearing the prejudices of an outside reader or it might turn out to be a falsifying history. The latter was not to be found in Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*.

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