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HISTORY IN SALMAN RUSHDIE'S *MIDNIGHT'S CHILDREN*

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Abstract:

*There is fundamental relationship between literature and society. In fact, literature does not exist without society. Many times text needs to be put into its historical context. History justifies the claim of the text on actuality. Meanings and truths are influenced by their historical position. However, the fictitious element, if not a dominant one plays equally an important role to present actuality. The text embodies the concept of new-historicism which defines the literary work as produced representations of real into an imaginary object. Rushdie's present novel is based on the partition of India. This history of partition has been handled very skillfully in this novel. History justifies the claim of the text on actuality. Meanings and truths are influenced by their historical position. *Midnight's Children* is a loose allegory for events in India both before and, primarily, after the Independence and partition of India, which took place at midnight on 14 August 1947. The protagonist and narrator of the story is Saleem Sinai, a telepath with a nasal defect, who is born at the exact moment that India, becomes independent. Saleem Sinai's life then parallels the changing fortunes of the country after independence. Rushdie deals with a series of historical events before Independence, the JallianWallah Bagh tragedy; the quit Indian Movement; the formation of Muslim League and its role in national politics leading to partition and the riots and bloodshed on the aftermath of partition, etc. After Independence he dwells upon the Five year Plans, the re-organization of the states on linguistic basis; Chinese Aggression and Pakistan war; liberation of Bangladesh and above all the proclamation of emergency etc.*

Keywords:History, Actuality, Partition, Diaspora, JallianWallah Bagh, National Politics.

There is fundamental relationship between literature and society. In fact, literature does not exist without society. Many times text needs to be put into its historical context. History justifies the claim of the text on actuality. Meanings and truths are influenced by their historical position. However, the fictitious element, if not a dominant one plays equally an important role to present actuality. The text embodies the concept of new-historicism which defines the literary work as produced representations of real into an imaginary object. According to this concept the text is over determining in nature and it is a product of certain signifying practices, whose source and referent is history itself.

The literary work is the product of certain producedrepresentation of real into an imaginary object... The textual real' is related to the historical real, not an imaginary transposition of it. But as the production of certain signifying practices, whose source and referent is, in the last instance history itself....(Eagleton, 67)

Indian writing in English has travelled a long journey and is now fully matured. The writers of the Indian Diasporas have been center stage in the last decades. The critique of their works generated theoretical formulations. It increased the interest in cultural studies. Languages and cultures are transformed as they come into contact with other languages and cultures. Post-colonial writing raises questions regarding the definitions of home and nation. The present paper aims to present the treatment of history in Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*.

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

Rushdie's present novel is based on the partition of India. This history of partition has been handled very skillfully in this novel. History justifies the claim of the text on actuality. Meanings and truths are influenced by their historical position. They cannot in principle be set apart from history. The reality of a literary text lies within the reader's imagination. It must have a far greater chance of transcending its historical position. The structure of the texts ensures the place of the reader in the fictional world. Therefore, the need for rewriting the epics in terms of contemporary history arises. Myth, history and politics lend a novel dimension to the over determining nature of the literary text. These lend both in modernist and post modernist trends. The literary text of this mould exploits a variety of literary devices such as irony, satire, farce and parody in heightened manners as never before, to enrich its own literariness.

Midnight's Children is a loose allegory for events in India both before and, primarily, after the Independence and partition of India, which took place at midnight on 14 August 1947. The protagonist and narrator of the story is Saleem Sinai, a telepath with a nasal defect, who is born at the exact moment that India, becomes independent. Saleem Sinai's life then parallels the changing fortunes of the country after independence.

The novel begins at a point more than thirty years after the simultaneous births of Saleem and independent India. Saleem was awaiting a premature death in a pickle factory where he is employed. Saleem is prematurely aged, impotent, and mutilated by a personal history that parallels that of his country. So he tells his life story to Padma, an illiterate working girl who loves and looks after him. Saleem begins by relating thirty two years of family history preceding his own arrival into the world.

The first historical event begins with effort of Dr. Adam Aziz to get a full view of the body of Nazeem Ghani and her face. The removal of the veil between the couple leads to the consummation of marriage. This entrenches the very social institution for that matter Hindu custom comes close to this kind of practice in similar circumstances. The practice lays a strong sociological base for the formation of family. This is a well knit social unit on which the society in it's entirely subsists till today. Adam Aziz aspires to have a full view of Nazeem Ghani. His long cherished wish is fulfilled. Their love finds fruition in the form of bridal knot. The first link is suggested through his life story of any of his friends. The second is the happening of significant events in Saleem's life. Both coincide with the historical events of national significance.

In another important development, Mr. Nadeer Khan finds refuge in Adam Aziz house and marries Aziz's daughter Amina. Her father, being a doctor could easily sense that Amina is not enjoying conjugal bliss with her husband. His perception is proved to be true. He readily arranges a divorce for her. What appears a situation of explosive potentiality is skillfully woven into the structure and texture of the novel in an artistic manner. The incident is linked to the mass annihilation of Hiroshima and Nagasaki during the 2nd world war on 6th of August 1945. Amina, a divorcee daughter of Adam Aziz marries Ahmed Sinai in June 1946.

Rushdie deals with a series of historical events before Independence, the JallianWallah Bagh tragedy; the quit Indian Movement; the formation of Muslim League and its role in national politics leading to partition and the riots and bloodshed on the aftermath of partition, etc. After Independence he dwells upon the Five year Plans, the re-organization of the states on linguistic basis; Chinese Aggression and Pakistan war; liberation of Bangladesh and above all the proclamation of emergency etc. One of the major events which individual as it is, turns out to be national in significance is that of JallianWalla Bagh massacre. The Rowlatt Act of 1919 proved to be total for the Indian Sikhs residing in the province of Punjab. The impugned Act debars the people from seeking legal redressal from a court of law. Imprisonment without trail is a repressive measure unheard of at any given time in the past.

Another significant historical fact is the rise and fall of Shere Kashmir Sheik Abdullah. The lion of Kashmir founded his own political outfit named national conference pitted against the fanatic nature of Muslim league formed by Mohammed Ali Jinnha. Rushdie makes passing reference to Gandhijis death at the hands of Godse. It reflects the progressive degeneration of values culminating in the casteist politics with communal tinge, prevailing in India at the juncture and continuing with increasing vigour now. The call for a second freedom by certain regional satraps is of immense significance here.

Dr. Narlekar's death is linked to the linguistic divisions of the country, which the author feels strongly as one of the worst decisions ever taken. Its tendency to develop disintegrating trends due to regional imbalances is not anything new in the post independence Indian political situation. This trend started in nineteen sixties. The incompatibility of people belonging to the same language in parts of A. P. and the state of Maharashtra because of different climatic conditions and distinct sociological conditions led to a proxy war, taking a heavy toll of human life and properties. This is a sad commentary on the very concepts of National and emotional integration which politicians parrot day in and day out.

The language issue is so very sensitive that the antagonism between Gujarathi and Marathi speaking people knows no bounds. A strange co-incidence of a bicycle accident triggers of a large scale mass agitation shaking the very foundations of the nation. Saleem Sinai by this accident is thrown in the midst of Marathi demonstrators on being taunted by them, he repeats three lines picked from a Goanese school mate Keith Colaco.

In 1962 Saleem and his family return back to India. Saleem and his crop of midnight children continue to hold their conference regularly as in 1957 and in 1958. He tries to pull on this convention with the same gusto but only to see their disintegration, none the less he does not lose his heart. In 1963 again Sinais move to Pakistan and settle there for quite some time. He records the historical event of sino-Indian border dispute in an efficacious manner as he is a personal witness to the incident.

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