

Magic realism and postmodernism in Midnight's
Children by Salman Rushdie
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The candidate has worked under my supervision.

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CERTIFICATE OF ORIGINALITY

I hereby declare that the dissertation entitled Magic Realism and postmodernism in Midnight's Children is my original work carried out under the supervision of Dr. Pratyush Chandra, department of English, V.S.S.D. College, Kanpur.

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(Nidhi Pandey)

MA 4th Semester

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PREFACE

The dissertation is an attempt which explore the themes of Magic Realism and postmodernism in Midnight's Children, a seminal work by Salman Rushdie. The novel mixes history with imagination and shows important events like the partition of India in a creative way.

Magic Realism blends magical elements with real life, while Postmodernism uses techniques like broken storytelling and personal narration to question truth and history. In this novel, both styles work together to present India's story through the life of Saleem Sinai.

The aim of this study is to understand how the writer connects personal life with national history and shows identity, memory and culture in a new way.

I chose this topic because it shows how literature can make history more interesting and meaningful. I am thankful to Dr. Pratyush Chandra, Department of English, V.S.S.D. college, Kanpur for his kind guidance.

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CHAPTER – 1

INTRODUCTION

Literature doesn't simply reflect reality it shape. Midnight's Children was published in 1981. It was very large contribution to modern English literature. Midnight's Children novel awarded the special booker of booker prize in 1993 and the best of the booker in 2008 to celebrate the booker prize 25th and 40th anniversaries.

Rather than presenting history as fixed, this study views it as something shaped through narrative interpretation. Through this novel Salman Rushdie presents a rich and imaginative portrayal, this novel offers us immense imaginative and bridging traditional india with colonial subjugation to freedom reflecting a highly complex social and political developments that follow in its aftermath.

In this novel the technique of magical Realism finds liberal expression throughout the novel Midnight's Children sold over one million copies in the UK alone and won the Booker Prize and James Tait Black Memorial Prize in 1981. Midnight's Children is a loose allegory events in 1947 British Raj India and after the Partition of India.

Therefore, the focus remains on how storytelling constructs meaning instead of simply reflecting reality. The style of preserving history with fictional accounts is self – reflexive.

Rather than offering a direct historical narrative, where Rushdie creates a story using personal memory and national history, and elements of fantasy to create a story that is both deeply personal and broadly political. This unique type of narrative approach. The text of this novel is quite ideal and highlights the relationship between Magical Realism and Postmodernism. The story moves in different parts of Indian subcontinent from Kashmir to Agra and then to Bombay, Lahore and Dhaka.

This novel, *Midnight's Children* tells the story of Saleem Sinai, a boy born at the exact moment of India's independence which is 15 August 1947. *Midnight's Children* sold over one million copies in the UK alone and won the Booker Prize and James Tait Black Memorial Prize in 1981.

Saleem's life is closely connected to the fate of the nation, and his experiences reflect the social, political, and cultural changes taking place in India. However, the novel is not told in a simple or linear manner. Instead, it moves back and forth in time, blending memories, historical events, and imaginative elements. This complex

storytelling style reflects the fragmented nature of both personal identity and national history, which is a key concern of postmodern writing.

One of the most striking features of the novel is its use of Magic Realism. In this narrative style, magical or extraordinary events are presented as part of everyday reality. In *Midnight's Children*, Saleem and the other children born at the moment of independence possess special powers. For example, Saleem has the ability to communicate telepathically with other "midnight's children." These magical elements are not treated as strange or unbelievable; instead, they are woven naturally into the story. Through this technique, Rushdie creates a world where the boundaries between reality and imagination are blurred. Magic Realism allows the author boundaries between reality and imagination are blurred. Magic Realism allows the author to express deeper truths about history, identity, and cultural experience that cannot always be captured through realistic description alone.

At the same time, the novel strongly reflects the features of Postmodernism. Postmodern literature often challenges traditional ideas about truth, history, and storytelling. It questions whether there is a single, objective version of reality and instead presents multiple perspectives. In *Midnight's Children*, the narrator himself admits that his memory may be unreliable. Saleem often corrects himself,

changes details, or becomes confused about the sequence of events. This creates a sense of uncertainty and invites the reader to question the accuracy of the narrative. Rather than presenting history as fixed and factual, Rushdie shows it as something that is shaped by memory, interpretation, and personal experience.

Another important aspect of Postmodernism in the novel is its fragmented structure. The narrative does not follow a clear chronological order. Instead, it shifts between past and present, mixing different time periods and events. This reflects the idea that both identity and history are not stable or unified, but constantly changing and open to reinterpretation. The use of humor, irony, and exaggeration further adds to the postmodern tone of the novel, making it both engaging and thought-provoking.

The combination of Magic Realism and Postmodernism in *Midnight's Children* is not just a stylistic choice; it also serves a deeper purpose. Through these techniques, Rushdie reimagines Indian history from a personal and creative perspective. He moves away from official historical records and instead focuses on individual experiences, emotions, and memories. This approach gives voice to stories that are often ignored or overlooked in traditional historical narratives. It also reflects the diversity and complexity of Indian society, where multiple cultures, languages, and identities coexist.

Furthermore, the novel explores the idea of identity in a postcolonial context. Saleem's identity is closely linked to the nation, but it is also unstable and constantly changing. Just as India is trying to define itself after independence, Saleem struggles to understand who he is. This parallel between personal and national identity highlights the challenges of forming a unified sense of self in a diverse and rapidly changing society.

Chapter – 2

Magic Realism as narrative of History in Midnight's Theory

Magic realism in *Midnight's Children* is not simply a stylistic choice or a decorative literary device-it is the very foundation upon which the narrative is constructed. Salman Rushdie uses magic realism as a powerful storytelling strategy to reinterpret history, question truth, and represent the complexity of postcolonial India. In this novel, the magical and the real exist side by side, without any clear boundary separating them. This blending is so natural that the reader begins to accept extraordinary events as part of everyday.

At the center of the novel is Saleem Sinai, whose birth is deeply symbolic. He is born at the exact moment when India gains independence on August 15, 1947. This is not just a coincidence-it establishes a direct link between his life and the fate of the nation. Saleem's body and experiences become a metaphor for India itself.

His magical ability-telepathy-allows him to connect with all the other children born in that same hour. These children, known as the "Midnight's Children," each possess unique powers. Some can travel through time, others can change shape, and some have extraordinary physical or mental

abilities. Together, they represent the diversity, complexity, and potential of the newly independent nation.

Through this idea, magic realism becomes a narrative tool that transforms historical reality into something imaginative yet meaningful. Instead of presenting history as a series of fixed events, Rushdie shows it as something alive, unstable, and open to interpretation.

One of the most important features of magic realism in the novel is the way it removes the boundary between the real and the magical. The characters do not question the presence of magic-it is treated as a normal part of life.

For example, Saleem's telepathic powers are not explained scientifically, nor are they treated as strange. They simply exist.

This narrative technique forces the reader to rethink what is considered "real." It suggests that reality itself is not fixed or objective but shaped by perception, memory, and storytelling. In a country like India, with its rich traditions of mythology, folklore, and spirituality, the blending of magic and reality reflects cultural experience.

Moreover, this blurred boundary mirrors the confusion and unpredictability of historical events. The period after independence, including the Partition and political changes, often felt chaotic and surreal. By presenting history through magical elements, Rushdie captures this emotional truth more effectively than a purely realistic narrative could.

Traditional historical narratives often present events in a linear, factual manner. However, *Midnight's Children* challenges this approach. Saleem, as the narrator, tells his story in a fragmented and sometimes unreliable way. His memories are not always accurate, and he often admits confusion or uncertainty.

Magic realism supports this narrative style by allowing history to be told in a more flexible and imaginative way. Events are not just recorded—they are reimagined. For instance, Saleem's personal experiences are often directly connected to major national events, suggesting that individual lives and national history are deeply intertwined.

This approach highlights the idea that history is not just about facts—it is also about interpretation. Different people experience the same event in different ways, and their memories shape how history is understood. Magic realism makes space for these multiple perspectives.

The magical aspects of the novel are rich in symbolic meaning. Saleem's telepathic connection to the Midnight's Children can be seen as a symbol of unity and communication within a diverse nation. However, as the story progresses, this connection weakens and eventually breaks. This reflects the fragmentation and division that India experiences over time.

Similarly, Saleem's physical body undergoes constant changes and deterioration. His body becomes a metaphor for the nation-fragile, damaged, and struggling to hold itself together. The magical elements are not random; they are carefully used to represent deeper social and political realities.

Another example is the idea that each Midnight's Child has a different power. This symbolizes the idea that India's strength lies in its diversity. However, the inability of these children to work together also points to the challenges of maintaining unity in such a diverse country.

Magic realism in the novel is deeply connected to Indian cultural traditions. India has a long history of storytelling that includes myths, legends, and supernatural elements. By incorporating these elements into a modern novel, Rushdie creates a narrative that feels both contemporary and rooted in tradition.

This blending of myth and reality also challenges Western ideas of realism. In Western literature, realism often excludes the supernatural. However, in many non-Western cultures, the magical is an accepted part of reality.

Rushdie's use of magic realism reflects this cultural perspective and offers an alternative way of understanding the world.

Another important function of magic realism in *Midnight's Children* is that it expresses emotional and psychological truths. Sometimes, real-life events are too complex or overwhelming to describe in purely realistic terms. Magic allows the writer to capture feelings that might otherwise be difficult to express.

For example, the trauma of Partition is not described in a straightforward historical manner. Instead, it is reflected through fragmented memories, symbolic events, and magical imagery. This approach helps the reader feel the emotional impact of these events rather than just understand them intellectually.

Magic realism also allows Rushdie to question official versions of history. Governments and institutions often present history in a controlled and simplified way. However,

Saleem's narrative is messy, contradictory, and deeply personal.

By using magic realism, Rushdie shows that history is not a single, fixed story. It is made up of many voices, many perspectives, and many interpretations. The presence of magical elements further destabilizes the idea of a single truth, encouraging readers to think critically about what they are told.

The structure of the novel itself reflects the principles of magic realism. The story does not follow a straight timeline. Instead, it moves back and forth, mixing past and present. Saleem often interrupts his own narrative, adds new details, or corrects himself.

This fragmented structure mirrors the fragmented nature of memory and identity. It also reflects the idea that history is not a smooth, continuous process but a series of disruptions and changes. Magic realism supports this structure by allowing time and space to be flexible.

Finally, magic realism makes *Midnight's Children* a unique and engaging reading experience. The combination of reality and fantasy creates a sense of wonder and curiosity.

Readers are drawn into a world that feels both familiar and strange.

This narrative strategy also requires active participation from the reader. Since the story is not always straightforward, readers must interpret and make sense of it themselves. This makes the reading process more interactive and meaningful.

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Chapter – 3

Postmodern native and the Crisis of Truth

Unreliable Narration: Saleem as Storyteller :

An important element is the use of an unreliable narrator. Saleem Sinai openly admits that his memory is flawed and that his storytelling is not always accurate. He exaggerates, contradicts himself, and sometimes confesses that he may have made mistakes.

This unreliability raises important questions about truth and authenticity. Can we trust Saleem's version of events? Is he intentionally distorting reality, or is he simply unable to recall things clearly? These uncertainties force readers to question not only the narrator but also the nature of storytelling itself.

Saleem's tendency to mix personal experiences with national events further complicates matters. He often presents himself as being directly connected to major historical moments, suggesting that his life and India's history are intertwined. While this creates a powerful symbolic connection, it also blurs the line between fact and fiction.

His unreliability can also be understood as a reflection of trauma. The events he describes -partition, war, political

instability-are overwhelming, and his fragmented recollections may indicate the psychological impact of these experiences. Thus, his narration is not simply inaccurate; it is shaped by emotion, memory, and personal interpretation.

In postmodern literature, unreliable narration is not a flaw but a deliberate technique. It challenges the idea that there is a single, objective truth and instead suggests that reality is subjective and constructed.

Metafiction and Self-reflexivity :

Midnight's Children is also a metafictional work, meaning that it draws attention to its own status as a constructed narrative. Saleem frequently comments on the act of storytelling, reminding readers that what they are reading is a version of events shaped by his perspective.

He often addresses the reader directly and reflects on how he is telling the story. For example, he worries about whether he is including too many details or whether he is moving too quickly. These moments break the illusion of a seamless narrative and make the reader aware of the storytelling process.

Self-reflexivity is closely linked to this technique. The novel constantly reflects on its own structure and meaning. Saleem compares his life to a narrative that is falling apart, suggesting that both his story and the nation's history are unstable and incomplete.

This self-awareness is a hallmark of postmodern writing. Instead of presenting a polished, authoritative narrative, the text exposes its own limitations and uncertainties. It invites readers to question how stories are created and how meaning is shaped.

Metafiction also allows Rushdie to explore the relationship between history and narrative. By showing how Saleem constructs his story, the novel suggests that history itself is not a fixed record but a narrative shaped by perspective, bias, and interpretation.

Playfulness of Language and Storytelling :

Another defining feature of the novel is its playful use of language. Rushdie blends English with Indian words, idioms, and rhythms, creating a unique linguistic style that reflects the diversity of Indian culture.

The language is often exaggerated, humorous, and imaginative. Saleem uses vivid metaphors, dramatic expressions, and sometimes absurd descriptions to convey

his experiences. This playfulness adds energy to the narrative and makes it engaging, even when dealing with serious themes.

Wordplay and linguistic experimentation are central to the storytelling. The novel includes puns, repetitions, and inventive phrases that challenge conventional language use. This creativity reflects a postmodern rejection of rigid structures and rules.

At the same time, the playful language serves a deeper purpose. It captures the complexity of postcolonial identity, where multiple languages and cultures intersect. By mixing different linguistic elements, the novel reflects the hybrid nature of Indian society.

Storytelling itself is presented as a dynamic and evolving process. Saleem does not simply recount events; he performs them, embellishes them, and reshapes them. This approach emphasizes that stories are not static but constantly changing.

Perhaps the most significant postmodern element in *Midnight's Children* is its questioning of history and truth. The novel does not present history as a clear, objective

account of events. Instead, it shows how history is shaped by personal experiences, biases, and interpretations.

Saleem's narrative blends historical facts with fictional elements, making it difficult to distinguish between the two. This blending challenges the authority of official histories, which often claim to present a single, definitive version of events.

By presenting history through a subjective lens, the novel suggests that there are multiple truths rather than one absolute truth. Different perspectives can lead to different interpretations of the same events.

The novel also highlights how power influences history. Political leaders, governments, and institutions often control how history is recorded and remembered. By contrast, Saleem's personal narrative offers an alternative perspective that is more intimate and human.

This questioning of truth is central to postmodern thought. It rejects the idea of universal truths and instead emphasizes diversity, multiplicity, and uncertainty.

Interconnection of Personal and National Narratives :

A unique aspect of the novel is the merging of personal and national histories. Saleem's life is closely tied to the history of India, particularly its independence and subsequent developments.

This connection is not presented in a straightforward way. Instead, it is symbolic and often exaggerated, reinforcing the idea that personal identity is shaped by larger historical forces.

The blending of personal and national narratives reflects a postmodern concern with identity. Saleem's sense of self is not fixed; it is constantly changing and influenced by external events. Similarly, the nation's identity is shown as fragmented and evolving.

This interplay between the individual and the collective adds depth to the narrative. It shows how history is experienced not just on a national level but also on a personal level.

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CHAPTER – 4

RECONSTRUCTION REALITY : THE CONVERGENCE OF MAGIC REALISM AND POSTMODERNISM

A central concern of the novel is the reconstruction of history. Rather than presenting history as a fixed sequence of events, Rushdie reimagines it through a personal and fragmented narrative.

Saleem positions his life as deeply intertwined with the history of India. His birth at the exact moment of independence symbolizes this connection, suggesting that individual lives and national history are inseparable. However, the narrative he provides is not a reliable historical account. It is filled with exaggerations, omissions, and contradictions.

This deliberate unreliability serves an important purpose. It challenges the authority of official historical narratives, which often claim objectivity but are shaped by power and ideology. By presenting history as a subjective and constructed narrative, Rushdie exposes its limitations.

The novel also highlights the role of storytelling in shaping historical understanding. Saleem frequently revises his own narrative, acknowledging errors and inconsistencies. This self-awareness emphasizes that history is not a stable

record of facts but an ongoing process of interpretation and reinterpretation.

Through this reconstruction, *Midnight's Children* offers an alternative history—one that includes marginalized voices, personal memories, and imaginative reinterpretations.

3. Memory, Myth, and Metafiction

Memory plays a crucial role in the reconstruction of reality in the novel. Saleem's narrative is deeply rooted in his recollections, which are often fragmented and unreliable. His memory does not simply record events; it reshapes and reinterprets them.

This emphasis on memory highlights its creative and subjective nature. Memories are influenced by emotions, biases, and later experiences, making them inherently unstable. As a result, the reality presented in the novel is constantly shifting.

In addition to memory, myth is another important element in the narrative. The novel incorporates various cultural and historical myths, blending them with personal experiences. This creates a layered narrative where the boundaries between history and mythology are blurred.

Metafictional elements further complicate this relationship. Saleem is not just a character but also the narrator who is aware of the act of storytelling. He frequently addresses the reader, comments on his narrative, and reflects on the process of writing his story.

This self-reflexivity is a key feature of postmodernism. It draws attention to the constructed nature of the narrative and reminds the reader that what they are reading is not an objective truth but a version of reality shaped by the narrator.

Together, memory, myth, and metafiction create a narrative that is rich, complex, and deeply self-aware. They reinforce the idea that reality is not fixed but constantly being constructed and reconstructed.

The true strength of *Midnight's Children* lies in its fusion of magical realism and postmodernism. These two modes do not operate separately, instead, they complement and enhance each other.

Magic realism introduces elements that challenge the boundaries of reality, while postmodernism provides the narrative framework that questions truth and authority.

Together, they create a unique storytelling style that is both imaginative and critical.

For example, the magical abilities of the midnight's children symbolize the diversity and potential of the nation. At the same time, the fragmented narrative structure reflects the fractured nature of post-independence India.

Similarly, the use of humor, irony, and playful language adds another layer to the narrative.

These elements prevent the novel from becoming overly serious or didactic, allowing it to engage with complex themes in an accessible way.

The fusion of these techniques also reflects the hybridity of Indian identity. Just as the narrative blends different styles and perspectives, it also represents a culture that is shaped by multiple influences and experiences.

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CONCLUSION

In the present chapter has attempted to explore how the convergence of magic realism and postmodernism reshapes the understanding of reality in *Midnight's Children*. Through a close reading of the text, it becomes evident that reality in the novel is not presented as fixed or singular, but as fluid, layered, and constantly reconstructed through narrative strategies. By blending imaginative elements with historical events, Salman Rushdie challenges the conventional boundaries between fact and fiction, thereby offering a more complex representation of truth.

The analysis of the blurred boundaries between reality and imagination reveals that the magical elements in the novel are not merely decorative but deeply meaningful. They function as tools to express cultural, political, and psychological realities that cannot be fully captured through realism alone. The presence of the supernatural within ordinary life reflects the uncertainties and contradictions of post-independence India, where reality itself often appears fragmented and unstable.

Similarly, the narrative reconstruction of history plays a significant role in redefining reality within the text. Rather than presenting history as an objective and linear record, the novel reimagines it through personal memory and subjective

experience. Saleem's narration, though unreliable at times, highlights the idea that history is shaped by interpretation, emotion, and perspective. This approach questions the authority of official historical narratives and opens space for alternative voices and experiences.

The interplay of memory, myth, and metafiction further strengthens this reconstructed vision of reality. Memory in the novel is selective and evolving, often blending with myth and imagination. At the same time, metafictional elements draw attention to the act of storytelling itself, reminding the reader that the narrative is consciously constructed. These techniques emphasize that reality is not simply discovered but actively created through language and narrative form.

The comparative fusion of magical realism and postmodernism, therefore, emerges as the central strength of the novel. While magic realism allows the inclusion of the extraordinary within the ordinary, postmodernism disrupts narrative certainty and challenges the idea of absolute truth. Together, they create a narrative structure that reflects the complexities of identity, history, and nationhood in a postcolonial context.

In conclusion, *Midnight's Children* presents reality as multiple, shifting, and open to reinterpretation. The novel suggests that truth is not singular but exists in many forms,

shaped by memory, imagination, and storytelling. Through its innovative narrative techniques, it not only reconstructs reality but also encourages readers to question accepted versions of history and identity. Thus, the convergence of magic realism and postmodernism in the novel offers a powerful and meaningful way of understanding the complexities of both individual and collective experience.

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