

# Microminiature of Materiality in Salman Rushdie's 'Midnight's Children' and 'Shame'

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## Abstract

Salman Rushdie, a Bombay born London based novelist, may be regarded as 'a king of controversies'. He is among the best contemporary novelists of the world like V.S. Naipaul, Vikram Seth, Taslima Nasreen, Arundhati Roy and others. His novel *Midnight Children* has unleashed a torrent of praise when it won the 1981 'Bookers McConnell Prize.

Rushdie writes mostly on political issues of pre and post colonial period. His novels deal with almost all major political events of Indian sub-continent i.e. Quit India Movement, Cabinet Mission, Muslim League Activities, Freedom Movement, Five Year Plans, Communal Riots, Bangladesh Liberation, Pakistan War, Labour Strikes at Bombay and almost every political events of India and its sub-continent delineating its contemporary scenes.

For Rushdie, Pakistan is a 'looking glass' through which he can fly into the amusing world of fantasy. The 'looking glass' helps him in an exploration of the self and a recognition of the basically Indian thoughts and attitudes. The novelists' sensibility is basically Indian, democratic, secular and humanistic.

Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1980) is a stupendous evocation of the evolution of India since Independence. It predominates with Bangladesh Movement. The emergency in Bangladesh, liberation war and the period after emergency, politics of Zia, all events have been vividly picturised in the novel. The novel reveals three major aspects : (i) the inter meaning of autobiography and narrative, a blend of fact and fiction, (ii) the conspicuous breach of chronology evident from the frequent forward or backward shift in time in the life of the protagonist and (iii) the search for identity and the meaning of life.

The other novel *Shame* (1983) is about what happened to the other half of the sub-continent after 1947. The novelist expatiates upon the sins of Pakistan on the basis of spiritual bond with that country. The novel rests on the two poles of shame and shamelessness. It crystallizes a good deal of sound, sense and a sense of deep sensibility which is both Indian and universal.

Thus both the novels delineate the microminiature of materiality and socio-political situations.

**Keywords:** Unleashed, Liberation, Expatiates, Crystallizes, Microminiature.  
**Introduction**

Salman Rushdie, a Bombay born London based novelist, may be regarded as 'a king of controversies'. He is among the best contemporary novelists of the world like V.S. Naipaul, Vikram Seth, Taslima Nasreen, Arundhati Roy and others. Rushdie writes mostly on political issues of pre and post colonial period. His novels deal with almost all major political events of Indian sub-continent i.e. Quit India Movement, Cabinet Mission, Muslim League Activities, Freedom Movement, Communal Riots and almost every political events of India and its sub-continent delineating its contemporary scenes.

## Anthology : The Research

For Rushdie, Pakistan is a 'looking glass'<sup>1</sup> through which he can fly into the amusing world of fantasy. The 'looking glass' helps him in an exploration of the self and a recognition of the basically Indian thoughts and attitudes. The novelists' sensibility is basically Indian, democratic, secular and humanistic.

It is now a settled fact that with Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1980) there has begun a new era in the history of Indian English fiction. Rushdie's novel was the first Indian manifestation of the international trend post modernist novel writing. Later developments confirm that in the Indian context *Midnight's Children* was the major text to represent the spirit of the 'new novel' with regard to its form and contents. It embodied a new sensibility different in a radical sense from the earlier ones. *Midnight's children* projects a new perception and a vision of Indian social scene which is unmistakably post independence, post colonial and also new colonial in spirit and identity. The novel, therefore, represents a break through and has become a landmark not only in Indian English fiction but in English fiction as such.

The novel is about the struggle for independence, the partition of India and its repercussions and post independence days. The novel reveals three major aspects viz. (i) the interweaving of autobiography and narrative which clearly shows that the tale is meant to be a yarn spun out of imagination, a blend of truth and fiction (ii) the conspicuous breach of chronology evident from the frequent forward or backward shift in time that makes it difficult to trace the proper sequence of events in the life of the protagonist and (iii) the search of identity and the meaning of life.

*Midnight's Children* covers the experiences of three generations of Sinai family, living in Srinagar, Amritsar and Agra and then in Bombay to Karachi from where Saleem alone returns hidden in the basket of Parvatti the witch, only to experience the tremours of the emergency that had been clamped in India.

Saleem Sinai is the central character of the novel and highlights the connection between public affairs and private lines of Indian society. With the help of Saleem's collective personal experiences, the novel is virtually highlighting. There is a truthful picture of typical Indian divisions and dissents, chaos and illusion, communal tensions, religious fanaticism, besides traditional values and modernizing effects.

M.K. Naik comes to the conclusion that the novel illustrates :

the permanent plight of individual identity in the hostile modern world which makes it possible for anyone to remain an island but compels everyone to be a part of a continent,

with the result that the individual is inevitably handcuffed to history.<sup>2</sup>

Thus, the central theme of the novel, according to Naik, is the fate of individual identity in a hostile world, which causes it to suffer fragmentation and sterility.

Rushdie's another novel *Shame* (1983) is a pungent satire on the political situations in Pakistan. The novel was banned in Pakistan because it has created political controversies in the country due to satirical remarks on Zia. The novel is about what happened to the other half of the sub-continent after 1947. The novelist expatiates upon the sins of Pakistan on the basis of spiritual bond with that country. The novel rests on the two poles of shame and shamelessness. The novel crystallizes a good deal of sound, sense and a deep sensibility which is both Indian and universal.

*Shame* seems to contain with itself two stories which eventually mingle as one through the character, Omar Khayyam who is probable one of the most important characters in the novel. The part of the novel deals with the birth of Sakil and the three sisters and another part of the novel deals with the most important Padma's recent history as the central protagonist. Rushdie has used 'dream-within-a-dream' concept throughout the novel. Rushdie says, "Shame contains a number of sotries. I did not find that the second thought was an after thought was an after thought, nor did I find the first story too good to give up. It seems to me that the stories go together rather well and that is because I made the choices I did. But certainly fiction does not come about like this, you don't work in this linear or ad-hoc way, you spend quite a lot of time deciding what you will include and what you will exclude. So you certain don't keep things because they are interesting afterthoughts."<sup>3</sup>

Indian contemporary political history has also been taken into account to sketch the oncurrent political scenario of Pakistan. He represents the Pakistani society by and large a supressive "society which is authoritarian in its society and sexual codes, which cruses its women beneath the intolerable burdens of honour and propriety." (p. 173)

Rushdie brings out the predicament of muslim women. He, although ironically shows as to how a divorced lady Shahbana was deprived of her right of maintenance by her husband. The famous 'Shahbano Case' of Indian Supreme Courts prouncement has aroused widespread protest of Indian Muslims and has drawn the attention of people and media world over.

The problems of Bihari Muslims called Mahagiri<sup>4</sup> is one of the most serious socio-economic problems of Pakistan. The community is struggling hard to have their political rights in the country.

The novel of course, is a fine political satire on the socio political situations of Pakistan, well composed with the help of some incidents as well.

**Conclusion**

Despite all controversies, Rushdie, however cannot be regarded as a "communal rabble rouser nor a motivated politician but a person who deserves respect as a writer of uncommon talent."<sup>5</sup>

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