

The portrayal of Multicultural voices in Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*

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Abstract

Multiculturalism is the essential feature of Indian literature. The long history of Indian Literature with numerous languages, cultures, traditions, religions and geographical variations it has its unique multicultural flavor attached to it naturally. *Midnight's Children* (1981) is one of the famous novels written by British-Indian Booker prize winner novelist Salman Rushdie. Salman Rushdie himself has led life of dual faith, language and culture. The Protagonists of his novels mainly deals with cultural ideologies and the questions of hybridity and cultural representation through characters that cross or

blur cultural boundaries. In *Midnight's children* the action is set in a vast span of time and space which gives scope for including elements of multiculturalism. The present study will analyze multicultural voices projected through various characters in the novel.

Keywords: Multiculturalism, Midnight's Children, Salman Rushdie, Hybridity, Cultural Representation

1.1 Introduction

The term "multiculturalism" is commonly used in post-colonial literary criticism. Since the true meaning of these terms has always been contested, it is challenging for any critic to come to a consensus on the meaning and implications of a term that is constantly used in contemporary literary criticism. The initial portion of the paper seeks to identify the experience and meaning that are ingrained in the term "*multiculturalism*." The term is made up of the words "multi" and "culture," and in order to understand its true meaning, it is necessary to have a thorough conversation about what multiculturalism and culture actually mean. Postcolonial literature in some way criticizes the contemporary post-colonial discourses that have been shape decent times. Postcolonial studies have given specific attention to the Third World nations including South America, the Caribbean, Asia, and Africa. As seen from a perspective that highlights the degree to which colonial exploitation implicitly supported the social and economic life depicted in the literature, it can also include elements of British literature from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Abrams, 1999: 236).

This indicates that writing by authors whose nation was formerly colonized by Europeans is relevant to postcolonial studies. Postcolonial literature can include works by authors from Africa, Australia, Bangladesh, Canada, the Caribbean, India, Malaysia, and other nations. Indian novelist Salman Rushdie wrote *Midnight's Children* in 1981. The partition of British India and India's journey from British colonialism to independence are issues addressed in the novel. It starts on the day of India's freedom with the birth of Saleem Sinai, the main character. Children born on this day are referred as the midnight children. The children of midnight have magical powers. The capacity to hear the voices of his fellow midnight's children is Saleem's gift.

1.2 Elements of Postmodernism

The Republic of India is a nation with incredible multiculturalism. With the second-largest population in the globe, it is the seventh-largest country in terms of area. In terms of purchasing power parity, the economy ranks fourth. After an extended struggle for independence, the nation won its independence from the British Empire in 1947, yet since then, its history has been shaped by four turbulent wars. Its climate system, topography, and population diversity place among the most complex in the world. There are 1,652 dialects and 23 official languages in India. 28 states and 8 union territories make up the federal union that is India which is Bharat, which consists of 36 separate entities. Districts and other administrative divisions are used to organize the states and union territories. India has the second-largest Muslim population in the world, despite the fact that 82% of the population is Hindu. All major religions are represented, and the country is home to more than a thousand different ethnic groups.¹ It appears despite stating that it is difficult to write a novel about India and attempt to capture the history and people of such a diverse nation. However, Salman Rushdie has accomplished precisely that in his book *Midnight's Children*. Saleem Sinai tells the story in the first person, having been handcuffed to history since his birth at the precise moment of India's independence claims. After a bicycle accident, Saleem discovers he has telepathic abilities. At first he uses his powers to look into other people's minds and thoughts, but after a while he manages to tune in other children whom he can communicate with. As it happens, the 1001 children who were born the hour at midnight when India gained independence have been blessed with supernatural talents; one can fly, one can see the future, another can change sex. Saleem's gift is telepathy and he can tune in the others who does not have telepathic powers and also broadcast, almost as a radio. There are many perspectives and research has been tangled around this novel, Salman Rushdie wrote this masterpiece in 588 pages and to this Michael Harris says.

“To understand just one life, you have to swallow the world,”

The novel uses the characters of *Midnight's Children* to blend old and new India, and qualitative research is used to describe and demonstrate how this hybridity undermines and isolates colonial power in India. The way Saleem responds to his powers as he states on the first page that he must tell his story before his body breaks down.

1.3 Cultural acclimatization and sense of community

The literature with a multicultural theme has grown significantly in the reader's domain, offering them with enough room to comprehend the various voices embedded in the work. The text is open to different interpretations when it permits a space and vision. This critical analysis highlights the significance of the word "culture." It helps people understand the true nature of society and their role within it. In light of the situation, the amalgamation of various regions, religions, and ethnicities creates an extremely painful and unanticipated state of immigration. There should be a range of reading behaviors while reading a text. The protagonist and the novel's new circumstances are presented to the reader at the start of the book. At this specific moment in time, the reader's journey and the figure start to move. A limited period of dystopia is created by the protagonist's challenges, particularly his struggles in a multicultural setting. The author gets nearer, showing resemblance and a sense of community with the minority group. One decodes the current details of events by drawing on prior knowledge. The reader's heart and mind perceive everything as unpleasant when they learn the state of being disconnected from their own country. In *Midnight's Children*, Salman Rushdie crafts events that could potentially be interpreted as metaphors for current political happenings in India. In addition to recounting his own life, *Midnight's Children* narrator Saleem Sinai also discusses the history of India. Saleem was born on the first day of India's independence in 1947, at exactly midnight.

The weight of history is on his shoulders. Saleem states, "I had been mysteriously handcuffed to my destinies indissolubly chained to those of my country" (p.3) at the opening of the book. The text encompasses the universal theme of multiculturalism, which frequently establishes a story arc that spans multiple episodes. One knows what reading a multicultural story is when they understand its true essence. One is exposed to the plethora of additional facets of cultural diversity that illustrate the marginalization of minority groups within majority society. Mrs. Islam and Razia's chapter also demonstrates the cultural resistance; the mother feels that mingling with other nationalities will force them to give up their own heritage. She mentions their clothes as a way of protecting their traditions from other people.

"...Mixing with all sorts: Turkish, English, Jewish. All sorts. I am not old fashioned, " said Mrs Islam. „I don't wear burkha. I keep purdah in my mind, which is the most important thing. Plus I have cardigans and anoraks and a scarf for my head. But if you mix with all these people, Even if they are good people, you have to give up your culture to accept theirs. That's how it is..... ' (Ali, 29)"

The daughter of Mrs. Islam, Razia, wears pants and a Union Jack sweater, following the British fashion trend. Her friends from Bangladesh are disappointed by this. With just the two words "thank you" and "sorry," Nazneen, the other female protagonist, feels cut off from the people around her. She consequently resorts to writing letters to her sister in order to communicate her feelings of loneliness. The manifestation of cultural diversity is deeply ingrained in racism, identity confusion, assimilation, and conflicts of values. The recognition of cultural tolerance in a multicultural community leads to the emergence of bias towards Caucasians and their fellow citizens. A character that's "caught" between two cultures is portrayed by Rushdie. His doubts never stop biting at him because he has lived a different life and are accustomed to different European customs, cultures, and ways of thinking. This scenario effectively demonstrates the primary issue faced by numerous Indians, which is the pursuit of self-

identity. After all of that searching, Adam is left with the difficult decision of whether to embrace new experiences or maintain a strong connection to his nation's traditions.

Since their sense of identity underwent a long-lasting historical progression, the search for their identity can therefore be understood as a result of historical development.

1.4 Multicultural clashes in midnight's children

The issue of immigration is discussed in the first multicultural conflict. Salman Rushdie introduces the story by describing Saleem's grandfather, Aadam Aziz. He studied for a medical degree in Germany for five years. "Now, coming back, he saw with eyes that had traveled."³⁰ Even though Adam Aziz is back at home, he doesn't feel comfortable in his place of origin. "The years spent in Germany had brought him to a resentful environment," he suddenly realizes.³¹

Influenced by his German friends; there were Heidelberg and Ingrid, scorning him for his Meccaturned parroting, Oskar and Ilse Lubin the anarchists, mocking his prayer with their anti-ideologies, Heidelberg, who learned that India – like radium – had been 'discovered' by the Europeans; even Oskar was filled with admiration for Vasco da Gama, and this was what finally separated Aadam Aziz from his friends.³²

It's apparent that Rushdie wants to draw attention to people's inner conflicts. Adam makes a life-changing decision based on his attitudes, opinions, and experiences from his time overseas. He hits his nose trying to pray. That persuades him not to worship a God he cannot possibly believe exists. The years he's spent away from home, and his friends' perception of him as "somehow the invention of their European ancestors," among many other factors, prevent him from being able to worship. "A sense of 'Indian-

ness' had begun to develop among Indians."³⁴ One way to conceptualize being Indian is to have a "common heritage or legacy."³⁵ It is evident that Rushdie is attempting to convey the essential inner conflict that Aadam and all Indian immigrants must overcome. According to that issue, "not every Indian immigrant will subscribe to what is considered Indian 'values' or Indian 'philosophy,' but they are aware that they are either upholding or discarding centuries-old traditions in the very act of rejecting certain options."³⁶

In sum up I would say the narrative gives greater prominence to multiculturalism components when Ahmad Sinai flees to Bombay, which serves as a cultural symbol for India. The protagonists' escape from Kashmir to Agra and finally Bombay steadily expands the novel's diversity possibilities. Alia's relationship with Nadir Khan is disregarded by Ahmad Sinai, who marries her. Ahmed urges Alia, *"It's time for a new beginning. Throw Mumtaz and Nadir Khan out the window. "Rushdie, Midnight Children."*⁷⁰ The father of the main character alludes to a *"fresh start"* that is the creation of a new universe that is best described as the fusion of numerous civilizations. The protagonist's birth is a clear example of multiculturalism in action. He is the son of Mr. Methwold, who is the real father of Wee Willie Winkie and his wife Vanita. Marry Pereira, a midwife, trades him for Ahmed and Amina Sinai's child in order to appease Joseph, her communist lover. Consequently, the protagonist's multicultural identity began with the protagonist's birth. The protagonist's identity issue, which he and the author both experience, is explained in a way that makes sense in connection to multiculturalism.

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