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## **History and Narrative: A Postmodern Scrutiny of Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children***

**Sahabuddin Ahamed**

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### **Abstract**

This paper critically analyzes the fictional representation of historical events and individual experiences in the pre-and post-independence India in Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981) in the light of postmodernist theory. It examines how the novel demonstrates an intricate relationship between history and individual and question and subvert the underpinnings of Indian history in order to provide a more complex, multiethnic, multilingual, pluralistic, and heterogeneous image of the nation's history, culture, identity, and tradition. With its self-referential, self-reflexive, subversive, transgressive, and meta-historical narrative, the novel destabilizes the absolute, authentic, and holistic historical real, truth, knowledge or identity which are represented by dominant power and knowledge systems i.e. 'metanarrative.' In problematizing the traditionally received and unquestionable version of historical truth preoccupied with a single and dominant perspective with universal meaning or truth, Rushdie's postmodern novel redefines history, providing an alternative historical truth by fusing historical with the individual. The prime focus of the paper is to unravel the problematic relations between history and fiction and the fusion of them which are represented from a diverse and multiple experiences or perspectives. By critiquing liberal humanistic approach and deconstructing, Rushdie's postmodern novel offers a fictionalized version of Indian history from the perspective of the marginal with its emphasis on cross-cultural *mélange*, liberal democratic values, diversity, plurality, multiethnicity, hybridity, and fluidity. The protagonist Saleem situates himself in a contemporary globalized world and opens himself to the possibility of the cross-cultural, mongrelized, and different versions of history of the country. His unreliable narrative dismantles the claims of pure, monolithic and authentic version of historical reality and emphasizes the paradigms of the decentred, fragmented, and pluralized notions of Indian culture, custom, language, religion, identity, and ethics. His postmodern narrative tends to historicize fiction and individualize history. It questions history and simultaneously makes a sense of historical events or reality. The history of the nation is individualized and fictionalized in which the interplay between individual self and collective self, history and fiction, private and public life and past and present are intertwined and integrated and dynamic and fluid in ironical, ambiguous, and ludicrous ways. The postmodern theoretical approach is used in the paper.

**Keywords:** Postmodernism, Metafiction, Indian History, Individual, Chutnification, Self-Reflexivity.

### **Introduction**

"History is not made obsolete: it is, however, being rethought—as a human construct. And in arguing that history does not exist except as text, it does not stupidly and "gleefully" deny that

the past existed, but only that its accessibility to us is entirely conditioned by textuality.”— (Hutcheon, 1988, 16)

“I was linked to history both literally and metaphorically, both actively and passively, . . . , I was inextricably entwined with my world”—(Rushdie, 2013, p. 330-1)

Postmodernism is a critical theory and an aesthetic practice since the 1970s. It records changes in structure, form, and effects of a literary work. It is contrasted to modernism's rationalism, elitism, and metanarrative. It is characterized in terms of intertextual connection, metafiction, magic realism, parody, pastiche, allegory, eclecticism, simulacrum, plurality, fluidity, anti-hierarchy, anti-rationality, anti-essentialism, anti-metanarrative, anti-elitism, multiplicity, and deconstructive play. The postmodern novel seeks to contest and subvert the malleability of history and historical truth as the 'master narrative.' As Jean-Francois Lyotard (1979) defines the term postmodernism as “incredulity towards metanarratives” (xxiv). Postmodern narrative dismantles the so-called 'metanarrative' in order to situate the historical truth and reality in an individual's social and political life. Terry Eagleton (1996) marks the typical characteristic features of a postmodernist work of art:

. . . arbitrary, eclectic, hybrid, decentred, fluid, discontinuous, pastiche-like. . . , it spurns metaphysical profundity for a kind of contrived depthlessness, playfulness and lack of affect, an art of pleasures, surfaces and passing intensities. Suspecting all assumed truths and certainties, its form is ironic and its epistemology relativist and sceptical. . . , it exists self-consciously at the level of forms or language. (p. 201)

The postmodern novelist uses allegory, self-parody, pastiche, and anti-narrative in a better way to represent decentred and fluid historicity.

In *Midnight's Children*, a postmodern novel, Salman Rushdie's treatment of history is not factual but fictive. Rushdie seems not to redeem the historical past nor to destroy it. He presents history with its non-objective and inauthentic nature as it is problematic with its illusion of truth. For him the notion of history is a postmodernist metafiction what Linda Hutcheon (1998) calls “historiographic metafiction.” She argues that it is not free of its “inherent contradictions” as “it always works within conventions in order to subvert them” (5). It represents historical realities and has the limitations of such representations at the same time. Rushdie revises, rewrite, and reinterpret India's history as a concept for exposing its absurdity and for representing individual experiences through different versions of history of the country. In this novel, history takes a major role with the help of the postmodernist narrative technique. On the whole, the novel explores a connection between history and the individual. It provides a personal version of history and privileges the subjective self-formation through the traumatic historical events. In so doing, it subverts the liberal humanist assumption of a coherent self and of absolute historical knowledge through the strategies of parody, irony, and self-reflexivity.

In a postmodernist poetics, history is itself a text not to tell the historical singularity but historical plurality. History involves multiplicity of meaning and fragmentation of subjective self and identity. In Rushdie's novel, it is rendered through the unreliable narrator, Saleem Sinai to become an act of narration, filtered through his memory. Saleem creates a kind of history through his subjective perspective. For him illusion is reality, represented through his fragmented and discontinuous narrative, and the present seems to be incredible, revealing his strategy of untruth history, as he uses subjective perspective to tell the facts. He cuts up history and tells it to the reader to coax his desire to be its omniscience. However, this is done not without distorting the desperate search for fixed identity, meaning or truth. As he states: “Am I so far gone, in my desperate need for meaning, that I'm prepared to distort everything—to rewrite the whole history of my times purely in order to place myself in a central role?” (Rushdie, 2013, p. 230).

*Midnight's Children* by Salman Rushdie is a criticism of India. This novel like *A Tale of Two Cities* by Charles Dickens in theme to some extent is told from historical point of view. It is an epic, full of history of the Indian subcontinent-India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh through wide range of events – starting from 1915 to 1980 – pre-partition, partition, and post-partition – Jallianwala Bag massacre, quit India movement, Indian independence, partition, Kashmir

issue, power conflict, Hindu-Muslim issue, corruption, violence, communal riot, language riot, the Emergency, Indo-Pak war, Indo-China war, and nuclear tests. Saleem, an unreliable narrator and protagonist, is a voice of the Indian subcontinent who depicts the events of brutality, power mania, conflicts, corruption, riot, partition, and disorder happening in the Indian subcontinent (later three independent nations) – from the past to the present. His narrative uncovers issues of pure and impure, secular and religious, contemporary changing socio-cultural, political, and economic scenarios, chutnification of history and time, imperfection, individual freedom, and humanity. The novel is above all about Saleem's sufferings and hardships in his life since his childhood. His personal account of his family, relatives, and friends replete with history of the eras of those with whom he has blood connections. His self-conscious narration portrays an individual's displacement, isolation, alienation, fear, tragic condition, and belief in impurity, mixity, and democracy. It stresses how partition and war are responsible for the separation, alienation, and destruction of Saleem's family members and his life and career – they are the direct victims of the clash between India and Pakistan, destabilizing the authentic version of history through his attempt to represent or rewrite the past familial history anew from his subjective experiences. His presentation of historical events authentically is questioned as historical reality is seen in the process of chutnification which implies “the complexity and multiplicity of actual history” (Eagleton, 1996, p. 200).

The novel demonstrates a strong connection between the birth of independent India and the birth of Saleem Sinai – Indian history and Saleem's life as Saleem, one of the 1001 children, is born at the stroke of midnight, 15<sup>th</sup> August 1947. Opening famously with Saleem's declaration that right from the moment of his birth, he is being “mysteriously handcuffed to history, my destinies indissolubly chained to those of my country. For the next three decades, there was to be no escape” (Rushdie, 2013, p. 3). By establishing strong connections between the individual and the new nation and the real and the fictional, the novel not only tell the story of Saleem, his identity, his destiny and his family of three generations, but also the complicated and intertwined history of post-independent India.

The novel as a *bildungsroman* unfolds Saleem's self-formation within a complex familial and historical context. Saleem resists the notion of an exclusive and rigid identity for both of them and instead maps a potential of multifaceted and disjointed nation where he belongs and which he embraces for his fragmented and hybridized existence. As a narrator, his metaphor swallowing implies a food of narrative to encounter the nation's history and its culture literally rather than revealing its coherence, stability, homogeneity, authenticity and fixity. For this he insists that he has been “a swallower of lives; and to know me, just the one of me, you'll have to swallow the lot as well. Consumed multitudes are jostling and shoving inside me” (Rushdie, 2013, p. 4). Here the connections are made between the personal events in his life and his family, and the political and historical events in the post-independence India. Even as Saleem crumbles under the burden of history, he narrates his personal and familial events against the backdrop of the newly independent nation. He says, “I must work fast, faster than Scheherazade, if I am to end up meaning –yes, meaning something. I admit it: above all things, I fear absurdity” (Rushdie, 2013, p. 4).

In Rushdie's novel, the epistemological and the ontological and the historical and the experiential are fused together through its self-referential, self-conscious narrative, for instance, the story of Saleem's grandparents, Aadam Aziz and Naseem Aziz in Kashmir and their coming to Agra at the time of the Jallianwallah Bagh massacre, the story of his parents, Ahmed Sinai and Amina Sinai and their coming first to Delhi and then to Bombay during the years of India's freedom movement, the birth of Saleem at the very moment India's independence, his parents' acquisition of the house of the departing Englishman, Mr. Methwold, his grandparents and parents killed during India's airstrike in Rawalpindi in 1965, the state of Emergency in 1975, his involvement in language riots in the 1950s, migration of his entire family to Pakistan, and his participation in the Indo-Pak war of 1971. Such instances demonstrate a parallel between the individual self and the history of the independent nation in

a literal, metaphorical way. Despite his attempt to rewrite and redefine the multilayered Indian history from his personal or subjective perspective, his representation of history is not without mistakes as it lacks linearity and exact dates. For instance, he confesses how he has mistakenly put the wrong date of the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi, and his self-conscious narrative is mostly cyclical and rests on his fragmented memory. In this way, the novel seems to represent history as a sort of autobiography as it affects the protagonist's life, career, destiny, and his family.

Pre-and post-independence life of India is narrated by Saleem, whose birth at the moment of India's formal independence from British colonial rule handcuffs him (his life, identity, and fate) to the newly independent nation—much as the life and time of the nation are handcuffed to Saleem's. Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru's letter to Saleem praises him and predicts his life in the time of the new nation, implying a strong connection between his destiny and the newly independent nation. As he says, "Dear Baby Saleem, My belated congratulations on the happy accident of your moment of birth! You are the newest bearer of that ancient face of India which is also eternally young. We shall be watching over your life with the closest attention; it will be, in a sense, the mirror of our own" (Rushdie, 2013, p. 167). Nehru's words seem to underscore the close similarity between the life and destiny of Saleem and that of the nation. Saleem's representation of history of the colonial and postcolonial Indian life exerts some of the competing visions for the newly independent nation mapped by the great nationalists like Gandhi and Nehru. Saleem's narrative links the history of the new nation with the life of an ordinary individual and family.

Over the course of the narrative, his true identity is revealed to the readers that he is the illegitimate son of Mr. Methwold and Vanita, switched at birth by his aya Mary Pereira with Ahmed and Amina Sinai's real son Shiva. Like him, the other children of midnight hour, especially Shiva, Padma, and Parvati-the-Witch tell the history of the nation through their lived experiences amidst the major historical events which shape the nation's destiny marked by impotence, despair, and powerlessness in the face of a totalitarian state especially during the years of Emergency. As partition and Emergency turn to repression, oppressive, censorship, and violence, the initial promises of new nationalism and independence appear to be fragile, false, helplessness, and short-lived. In this context, history is personalized through Saleem's life story. His life from his birth to his near demise-like-condition is meant to parallel the birth of independent India from a nation of the promise of optimism to a nation of hopeless and powerlessness. His identity crisis, lack of freedom, and helplessness appear due to the emerging narrow nationalism and the resultant failure of the postcolonial vision of the new nation at the hands of the government i.e. ruling elite that reinforce or repeat the same colonial past through legislative attempts. In spite of his helplessness and near-death, Saleem seems not to yield to the state of disillusionment and determinism. As he says in the final lines of the novel, "it is the privilege and the curse of midnight's children to be both masters and victims of their times, to forsake privacy and be sucked into the annihilating whirlpool of the multitudes, and to be unable to live or die in peace" (Rushdie, 2013, p. 647).

In Saleem's postmodern narrative, linguistic creativity is metaphorically connected to political freedom, self-formation, and self-expression. In this context, the novel seems to be labelled as a political novel rather than a historical one as it presents an individual's life story through major events of Indian history – individual version of history, and at the same time, it is sceptical of authentic and received version of history and cultural memory. In an absurd and fragmented way as he himself is a part of them, Saleem narrates his life story that is fused with that of the new nation—his own tragic life (from his dignified, earlier position) parallels with the nation's destiny of being impotent and anarchical (from its optimism that new nationalism promises to offer). However, his version of history with regard to his own life is seen as both consistent and untruthful at the same time. As he himself becomes aware of his postmodern insight into the representational strategy that somewhat contests united or authentic version of self and ideology by writing them from a particular ideological assumption to provide the historical and individual knowledge in an odd or self-parodic way:



Sometimes, in the pickles' version of history, Saleem appears to have known too little; at other times, too much. . . yes, I should revise and revise, improve and improve; but there is neither the time nor the energy. I am obliged to offer no more than this stubborn sentence: It happened that way because that's how it happened. (Rushdie, 2013, p. 644)

Saleem offers the reader an individual version of history:

Think of this: history, in my version, entered a new phase on August 15<sup>th</sup>, 1947—but in another version, that inescapable date is no more than one fleeting instant in the Age of Darkness, Kali-Yuga, in which the cow of morality has been reduced to standing, teeteringly, on a single leg! . . . the age when property gives a man rank, when wealth is equated with virtue, when passion becomes the sole bond between men and women, when falsehood brings success. (Rushdie, 2013, p. 269)

Even though Saleem reflects on his subjective version of history, it is not free from inconsistency and inauthenticity. Through the acts of imagination, creativity, and reflexivity which are revealed through the processes of linguistic, cultural, and historical 'chutnification,' his narrative constructs historical real, acquiescing and destabilizing authentic historicity. Before succumbing to his tragic fate at the backdrop of numerous historical events, he tells his life's story in a satirical and self-parodying way.

Rushdie's novel employs the elements of non-linear narrative, anti-realism, anti-rationality, fluidity and flexibility, impurity, self-parody, self-defeating mode, alteration of the past, denial of meaning, juxtaposition of genres, defamiliarization, Indian oral tradition, and Bildungsroman. It challenges the notions of universal, essential, singular, and authentic viewpoints. Its narrative acts both as an ideology and a response to that particular ideology. By interrogating authoritative and dominant historiography, the novel's non-linear narrative is told from the subordinate position of subjects. The novel reconstructs a relationship with a previous historical reality by proving a complex, non-linear story with a more challenging, multi-layered, discontinuous, even rhizomatic narrative from a varying or unreliable narratorial point of view in more political way. The rhetorical purpose of such representation is not universal and objective but partial, flawed, and incomplete. The first-person narrative of the novel controls the narrative. The representation of historical reality is viewed as a human construct. The novel's complex structure discloses how diverse historical events impact directly on the lives of individuals. Saleem is born at the stroke of midnight on 15<sup>th</sup> August, 1947 that is the precise moment of "India's arrival at independence" (Rushdie, 2013, p. 3). Even though history records India's independence, it offers no authentic, no single truth about modern India, but multiple and plural one. Though Saleem details the history of Indian independence colourfully, his historical representation is questionable because of his unreliability, amnesia, and self-parody.

Rushdie's novel is full of trans-textual and intertextual references exemplified by the influence of Western traditions like Lawrence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*, E.M. Forster's *A Passage to India*, Gabriel Garcia Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, Milan Kundera's *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, and Gunther Grass's *The Tin Drum*, and non-Western ones- *Arabian Nights*, Indian folk tale collections such as *Panchatantra* and *Kathasaritsagar*, and Indian epis like *The Ramayana* and *The Mahabharata*. Its narrative techniques are marked by multiple digression, magic realism, nonlinearity, shift, complexity, multi-layered, defamiliarization, episodic, repetition, and Indian oral literary tradition. At the beginning of the novel, the narrator, Saleem creates an ambience of story-telling of Scheherazade in *Arabian Nights*. He insists that he has many stories to tell. Like Lawrence Sterne's novel *Tristram Shandy*, Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* begins with the birth of the hero-narrator, parodying the convention of a defined beginning popular in the nineteenth-century realist fiction. The novel provides a famous intertextual account of E.M. Forster's *A Passage to India*, for instance, Saleem's grandfather, Aadam Aziz, echoes Forster's Doctor Aziz – showing their similar religious and ideological attitudes.

The quality of the novel's magic realism narrative is captured by Saleem's "miracle-laden omniscience" (Rushdie, 2013, p. 206). Metaphorically, the midnight's children who are

born on 15<sup>th</sup> August, 1947 with the “powers of transmutation, flight, prophecy and wizardry” represent post-independence India as the birth of the new nation (Rushdie, 2013, p. 277). They symbolize the country’s potentiality to build her fortune for each of its citizen. The midnight children’s conference is initially seen as an attempt to promote peace, freedom, equality, plurality, and diversity in the new nation which are fundamental elements of Indian history, culture, religion, race, and language:

They can’t stop us, man! We can bewitch, and fly, and read minds, and turn them into frogs, and make gold and fishes, and they will fail in love with us, and we can vanish through mirrors and change our sex . . . how will they be able to fight? (Rushdie, 2013, p. 316-7)

The notions of authentic, single, and pure culture, identity, and religion generate intolerance, regionalism, violence, oppression, repression, communalism, hostility, and narrow mindedness leading to the disintegration of the midnight’s children’s conference. The diminishing of their magical powers and the disintegration of their conference are symbolic of the nation’s potential weakening as “the Chinese armies came down over the Himalayas to humiliate the Indian fauj” (Rushdie, 2013, p. 352). The term magic realism refers to “a commingling of the improbable and the mundane” (Rushdie, 2013, p. 4). According to *Britannica*, it is a narrative mode characterized by “the matter-of-fact inclusion of fantastic or mythical elements into seemingly realistic fiction” (n.p.). Rushdie blends facts and fantasy and real and improbable elements to form a magic realistic atmosphere in his text. The assassination of Mian Abdullah is described in magic realistic manner which unveils the actuality of the ugly and heightened politics: “six new moons came into the room, six crescent knives held by men dressed in all black; with covered faces. The two men held Nadir Khan while the other moved toward the humming bird” (Rushdie, 2013, p. 57). Factual and fantastic elements are being mingled in the novel in order to present the actual or realistic view of the characters, events in relation to mythical phenomena. The character of Shiva, Saleem’s foe, is preoccupied with the qualities (war, destruction) of the mythical god Shiva. Shiva reflects the destructive force while Saleem the creative force. Saleem has a large cucumber-like nose, and Doctor Aziz’s nose is comparable to god Ganesh’s. Adam, son of Shiva and Parvati-the-witch, attacked by the extremists, has wide ears like god Ganesh. Saleem’s transformation into a she dog is seen as a sense of his fragmented self or identity. He uses a brilliant conceit to reinforce the themes of anti-metanarrative and resistance to dualism that is revealed in the snake and ladder game:

All games have morals; and the game of Snakes and Ladders captures, . . . But it’s more than that; no mere carrot-and-stick affair; because implicit in the game is the is the unchanging twoness of things, the duality of up against down, good against evil; the solid rationality of ladders balances the occult sinuosities of the serpent. (Rushdie, 2013, p. 194)

This profoundly anti-metanarrative represents multitude of human experience and offers a possibility of postcolonial and postmodern life of multiplicity, fluidity, and plurality.

The novel’s metafictional quality highlights the strange and uncanny events in its autotelic form. Unlike mimetic realism, it destroys the illusion of reality or truth and makes the real unreal. At the opening of the novel, readers are supposed to know that Saleem shares with them the problematic nature of beginnings, middles and endings of the novel and tells them the stories that are the combination of the probable and the improbable. As he says, “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!” (Rushdie, 2013, p. 4). For Rushdie, reality is a construct, the true reality is the story though which we live.

Though Saleem takes a role of being a self-turned historian, he interrogates the reliability of his historical representation. Nevertheless, his ontological, personal, fictionalized, and alternative story have historical sense and historical validity to some extent. He represents India though his tragic life story as his broken and fragmented life is seen a symbol of old and new India and the fragmentation of the country as into two separate nations-India and Pakistan. His life’s story implies a relation to the real nation and its history. His memory and personal

narrative though seem to be flawed but are valid and legitimate for the narration of India's history:

Re-reading my work, I have discovered an error in chronology. The assassination of Mahatma Gandhi occurs, in these pages, on the wrong date. But I cannot say, now, what the actual sequence of events might have been; in my India, Gandhi will continue to die at the wrong time. (Rushdie, 2013, p. 230)

Memory plays an important part in Saleem's unreliable and disrupted narration of the individual and the past. Catherine Cundy (1996) notes that "memory as the key to constructing narrative is fragile, and unwilling to obey external demands made upon it" (p. 32). Rushdie's novel is not a mere retelling of history but an interconnection of characters and historical events through memory. The act of recollection has been a way of recognizing one's search for self-identity and fate and the larger human nature. The mingling of personal and historical is coincidental and fragmented due to the acts of hesitation, inconsistency, disruption, and disorientation in retelling them through memory. Saleem's claims that like narrative, memory has its own function, own self-awareness, and own truth that is from his own perspective that is not fixed or reliable but probable.

Throughout the novel there is an emphasis on the inseparability of the individual experience and the historical events and on the impact of history on the lives of individuals. Though Saleem, for instance, aims at shaping his identity around his childhood version of Bombay, he remains a victim to the myth of the past. Having gone through the different historical, personal, and familial topsy-turvy, he comes to interpret how the angelic children of midnight turn out to be "as profane, and as multitudinous, as dust" (Rushdie, 2013, p. 232). His subjective version of history exposes complexity, multiplicity, and impurity, as history is a plural and hybrid entity through the ages. Like Saleem Sinai, Adam Aziz and Mian Abdullah are the great believers in maintaining multiethnic, pluralized, diversified, secular, democratic, and united values of India. They do not approve the partition of the country. Mia Abdullah, the humming bird is assassinated for his opposition to the partition of the country. The "perforated sheet" which helps develop the love relationship between doctor Adam Aziz and Naseem Ghani symbolizes a sort of fragmented love. To inspect his patient Naseem Ghani through a hole in a sheet, Aziz shapes a picture of the patient as "a portioned woman" after in "a badly-fitting collage of her severally-inspected parts" (Rushdie, 2013, p. 26). Rather than trying to see the woman as one, the woman is seen as a partitioned woman which symbolizes the idea of the partition of the country in an absurd and parodic way. The disintegrating of the midnight's children's conference signifies the weakening of the nation as China attacks India in 1962 resulting in India's loss to China. Saleem's parents move to Bombay where he is born in 1947. They finally migrate to Rawalpindi, Pakistan where they die in the 1965 Indo-Pak war. His grandfather returns to Kashmir in 1963 when the Prophet Mohammad's hair is stolen from the Hazratbal mosque in Jammu and Kashmir, leading to riots across the country. The 1947 partition of India breeds enforced migration of millions from their homes, and peoples undergo violence, riot, and death. Shiva, Saleem's arch rival, moves in with Parvati-the-witch on the day in May 1974 when India explores its first nuclear test bombs in Rajasthan. The post-independence India goes through the Emergency of 1975 which imprisons and emasculates the midnight's children so that they could not have the magical powers of opposing and contesting the monolithic and static discursive ideology. Amidst this oppressive reign in the post-independence India, Parvati and Shiva's son, Adam is born. The disintegration of the nation is metaphorically represented through Saleem's poor body and Rani of Cooch Naheen's deceased body. After undergoing the medical operation of his large nose, consequently losing his telepathic powers, joining the army, getting hit by silver spittoons, and losing entire his family during the Indo-Pak war, Saleem thinks of his existence to be "buffeted by too much history," and he is "falling apart" and "literally disintegrating" (Rushdie, 2013, p. 43). Rani of Cooch Naheen opposes the formation of the Muslim League. She sponsors Mian Abdullah's political campaign for the anti-partition of India. She is later terrified by the ugly partition politics on the basis of religion and the idea of the partition of the country. Being an ill-fated victim of her

democratic, secular, multiethnic and cross-cultural concerns, her body begins to grow increasingly white because of a disease. Her disease signifies the malady of the times: “. . . a disease which leaked into history and erupted on an enormous scale shortly after Independence” (Rushdie, 2013, p. 53). Therefore, throughout the novel, there is a close link between characters and events. Saleem's identity and tragic life is related to the past which he wants to preserve by writing his book. His comment on the past, the present, and on the act of writing are all intricately interlinked.

Rhetorically, the novel employs the metaphor of pickling to emphasize the disrupted, distorted, impure, complex, heterogeneous, and altered sense of Indian history – like the pickling process – made from the blending of different ingredients. This process also resembles the creative aspect of the novel in its structure and form due to its use of pastiche, parody, non-linearity, fragmentation, and unreliability. It challenges the authentic and deterministic version of Indian history as Indian history is like Indian chutney. Indian history is therefore preoccupied with alteration of the past and discontinuity from the past and with the multiplicity and heterogeneity. Rushdie here seems to take an eclectic approach to fit his novel and his vision into the world of cultural metissage, generated by colonialism and globalization. Significantly, the novel celebrates the idea of cultural mixity and historical fluidity, combatting grand narrative about Indian culture and its history and pointing to the multiplicity of India: “the feasibility of the chutnification of history; the grand hope of the pickling of time! I, however, have pickled chapters” (Rushdie, 2013, p. 642). Therefore, chutnification process is related metaphorically to the writing of history and time that is not monolithic and stable.

Though Saleem's narrative deals with historical representations or realities, it seems to question rather than to accept the authentic version of history as the nation contains no single tradition, language and religion. There is no accurate history and no alternative history to official history written by the colonizers as they construct history from the dominant Eurocentric assumptions which lacks the absence of reliable histories of an oppressed or colonized people. Saleem is suspicious of reality, cultural authenticity and homogeneity, historical truth, and religious purity because of their nature of fluidity, performativity, multiplicity, diversity, disorientation, re-orientation, and illusion:

reality quite literally ceases to exist, so that everything becomes possible except what we are told is the case; and may be this was the difference between my Indian childhood and Pakistani adolescence – that in the first I was beset by an infinity of alternative realities, while in the second I was adrift, disoriented, amid an equally infinite number of falseness, unrealities and lies. (Rushdie, 2013, p. 453)

It challenges commonplace historicity and metanarrative that aim at providing a monolithic and universal tradition to be contained in the nation. Indeed, it embraces self-conscious, playful, and self-deferral historical sensibility. Saleem's body begins to somatize the schisms of the new independent nation. For instance, the new nation is torn apart by political incompatibility between Mahatma Gandhi's localism and Jawaharlal Nehru's globalism, by partition, Emergency, poverty, violence, and war. Saleem's narrative tells us how the integrity of his identity is endangered by his telepathic gift which connects him to the thoughts of the other children born at the stroke of midnight on 15<sup>th</sup> August, 1947. His transistor radio “All India Radio” provides communication for the children of the midnight hour of Indian independence.

In the course of the novel, Saleem gradually becomes aware of the multitudinous, diversified, and changeable nature of Indian history and culture. He reflects a vision of cultural *mélange* that resists purism, Manichaeism and exclusivism that are barriers to cultural plurality and mixity. Through his imaginative “Anglepoised pool of light,” he becomes a writer and situates himself in the new postcolonial and postmodern worlds in which he discovers the possibility of mixing, mingling, and reconfiguring different cultures and histories—a complex sense of the different versions of histories (Rushdie, 2013, p. 103). As he says, “I reach the end of my long-winged autobiography; in words and pickles, I have immortalized my memories, although distortions are inevitable in both methods. We must live, I'm afraid, with the shadows

of imperfection” (Rushdie, 2013, p. 642). In this way, he writes “the pickles’ version of history,” emphasizing the mobile, decentralized, fragmented, pluralized, and hybridized version of actual history of the nation (Rushdie, 2013, p. 644).

### Conclusion

To sum up, Rushdie’s historiographic metafiction through its multiple and fragmented narrative structure represents the image of multiethnic and pluralized India. It has blurred the distinction between real and improbable and fact and fantasy to mock the absolutist and foundationalist assumptions and to disclose a paranoid view of society, culture, and history as they are complex, diverse, dynamic, and fluid in nature. Being a self-conscious and political writer, Rushdie speaks from a fixed ideological point of view. This novel is no exception to speak of his ideology, vision, and narrative technique. His writing and the way of presentation are truly brilliant and leave an impression of his faultless artistry. His novel describes a sort of self-conscious and deconstructive historical sensibility. With its nature of self-reflexivity, the novel demonstrates the disoriented, fabricated, and decentred history of India. There is no single version of Indian history but many. Throughout the novel, Saleem’s metafictional narrative shows the juxtaposition of the Indian history and the individuals where historical events and subjective experiences are probable but not true. Historical facts and personal trajectories are interwoven to reveal the intertwined and multitudinous lives, events, places, beliefs, cultures, customs, creeds, rumours, and perspectives.

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### Bio-note

**Sahabuddin Ahamed** is Assistant Professor (Guest) of English, at Pandit Sundarlal Sharma (Open) University Chhattisgarh, Bilaspur, India. He has recently submitted his PhD thesis in the area of postcolonial literature. He has obtained his MA in English from Guru Ghasidas Vishwavidyalaya (Central University), Chhattisgarh, India. He has served as a Guest Lecturer of English at Dumkal College Basantapur, West Bengal. His area of research is concerned with postcolonial studies, contemporary fiction, modern Indian literature in English, dalit studies and gender studies. He has published more than dozen research articles in national and international journals and edited books. Besides academic writing, he has published several poems in journals, anthologies, and magazines.

**Email Id:** ahamedggu@gmail.com

