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# Narrative Technique in Salman Rushdie's Midnight's Children

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**Abstract – Salman Rushdie is undoubtedly one of the most famous novelists in present time. His second novel *Midnight's Children* received greater critical acclaim and made Rushdie a famous literary figure in English speaking world. The novel won for him Booker of Bookers prize in 1993. In the novel Rushdie introduces an innovator narrative technique which is different from the contemporary writers. He uses the first person narrative through Saleem Sinai, the protagonist of the novel. Rushdie also makes good use of the device of Magic Realism in *Midnight's Children*. Further Rushdie's use of cinematic elements can clearly be seen in the novel. All this shows Bombay Cinema's influence on Rushdie and Rushdie's use of Indianized English is his biggest achievement. His use of Indian world like *ekdum*, *angrez*, *firangee* etc. give Indian flavor to the novel. Above all, Rushdie can be considered the master of narrative techniques at present time.**

**Keywords: Magic Realism, Bombay Cinema, Indianized English, Chutnification of English**

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Salman Rushdie has been perhaps one of the most controversial figures of Indian diaspora in recent years. He shot into fame with the publication of his magnum opus, *Midnight's Children*, which won for him Booker of Bookers in 1993. In 2008, the novel was selected as the best of Bookers in past 40 years. The novel is notable for many things and one of them is the innovative narrative technique used by Rushdie.

Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* introduces a new narrative technique which is totally different from the traditional narrative techniques. Also Rushdie sets the trend for experimentation with narrative technique and usage of English language. In this way, he gave a new direction to Indian writing in English. William Walsh Rightly praised the technique by saying that, "combining the elements of magic and Fantasy, the grimmest realism, extravagant force, multi-mirrored analogy, and a potent symbolic structure, Salman Rushdie has captured the astonishing energy of the novel unprecedented in scope, manner and achievement in the hundred and fifty-years-old tradition of the India novel in English".

## 2. THE TECHNIQUE OF FIRST PERSON NARRATION

Rushdie employees the technique of the first person narrative in *Midnight's Children*. The characters are introduced long before they actually appear in the novel. It creates suspense in the mind of the readers.

The novel covers a period of seventy five years of the history of the Indian subcontinent. The protagonist, Saleem Sinai, narrates the story of his birth and the birth of Indian subcontinent. The narrative blurs the chronological boundaries. As, Rushdie's counterpart, Saleem Sinai narrates his story from a distance of time, and place. Like the narrator of Mahabharata, Sanjay who is endowed with special power to see things from a distance, and narrates the events of the Kurukshetra war, Saleem is endowed with magic power so that he can see from a distance and read the mind of readers.

## 3. THE USE ORIENTAL AND WESTERN TEXTS

Rushdie has cleverly used both oriental and Western text in the novel. He remains indebted to a few writers and their works, chief of which are Laurence stern's *Tristram Shandy* Gunter Grass *The Tin Drum* Gabriel Garcia Marquez's *One Hundred years of Solitude* and Rudyard Kipling's *Kim*. Saleem, in the novel, himself is truly cosmopolitan. He is partly Hindu, partly Muslim and partly Christian intermixing of various religious and cultures that make of India. *Midnight's Children* do not agree with the Hindu world view of Indian society as homogenous one. Rushdie also owes his narrative device to Punch Tantra and Kathasarit Sagar.

#### 4. MAGIC REALISM

Rushdie adopts the device of Magic realism in *Midnight's children*. Magic Realism is a term originally coined by German out Critic Frantz Roh in 1925 to describe the tendencies in the work of certain German painters in the early twenties. But the term was first applied to literature by Cuban novelist Alejo Carpentier in the late 1940's. Basically magic realism was a Latin American phenomenon characterized by the incorporation of supernatural elements into realistic fiction. Some well-known writers who used this new device were Jorge Amada, Jorge Luis Borges, Gabriel Garcia Marques etc. Some characteristics of this new style were identified as the mingling of the realistic and fantastic, natural and supernatural, skillful time shifts, use of dreams, myths, fantasy and fairy tales. Salman Rushdie has written critically acclaimed magical realist novels. His *Midnight's Children*, *Shame*, and *The Satanic Verses* incorporate the technique of magic realism. While reading the *Midnight's Children* we find that the whole novel is a perfect combination of reality and imaginary between the real and the unreal.

There are many places in *Midnight's Children* where Rushdie used the device of magic realism for the framework of the novel. When we go through the novel, we find that Saleem Sinai, the protagonist, has the gift of having an incredible sense of smell which allows him to determine other's thoughts and emotions. This gift of Saleem is same to that of his grandfather Adam Ajiz who also had the same large nose and magical gift. In the novel we see that how Adam's incredible sense of smell and his magical nose saved him from being killed in the Jallianwala Bagh Massacre :

"As the fifty-one men March down the alleyway a tickle replaces the itch in my grandfather's nose... Adam Aziz Ceases to concentrate on the events around him as the tickle mount to unbearable intensities. As Brigadier Dyre issues a command the sneeze hits my grandfather full in the face "Yaaaakh-thoooo!" he sneezes and falls forward, losing his balance, following his nose and thereby saving his life" (41).

Thus Adams' sneeze provides a sense of humors as well as a kind of pity and fear in the heart of readers. In this way, the author plays beautifully with magic realism in such realistic and serious incidents of history of India.

#### 5. THE CINEMATIC ELEMENTS

The influence of Bombay film industry can also be seen in the narrative of *Midnight's Children*. Rushdie adopts the structure of Bombay film industry on a large extent, which provides him a perfect model for the novel. In this way the novel is very close to Hindi film. Stock narrative situations like mistaken exchange and stock cinema actors like good 'ayah' Mary Pereira recall Bombay film. The exchange of Shiva and Saleem at the very time of birth is the most frequently

discussed cinematic element of *Midnight Children*. Rushdie himself in his essay "Midnight Children and Shame" makes a significant comment on this particular cinematic operation, "...this melodramatic device.. was a genuine kind of Bombay Talkies, B-movie notion and I thought that grew out of the movie city ought to contain such notions. These cities ought to contain such notions. These are children not so much of their parents but children of time, children of time, and children of history". Some other cinematic elements are that of natural mothers who are good by nature and stepmothers who are evil. Virtuous male protagonists are contrasted with evil counterparts and so on. In the novel, Shiva, Saleem's alter-ego, combines the role of rebel hero with the villain of Bombay film. In the 1970's and 1980's the reach of Bombay cinema and its influence on Indian mind can easily be imagined.

#### 6. CORNIFICATION OF VARIOUS LANGUAGES

Another interesting feature of Rusdie's narrative is the Bounteous sprinkling of English with Hindi and Urdu words which provides an oriental flavor to the novel. This combination of words can be termed as Chutnification of various languages. He makes use of number of Hindi and Urdu words in the text. Such words include 'ekdum', 'angrez', 'nasbandi', 'dhoban', 'firangee', 'rakshasas', 'garam masala', 'baba', 'badmash', 'goondas', 'sarpanch', 'paan', 'khichari', 'gur' etc. are used in flawless English. He also employes some expressions and phrases in the novel such as 'baap-re-baap', 'hai-hai', 'sab kuch', 'chi-chi', pyar kiya darna kya', 'ooper-niche', 'bhai-bhai', 'nimbu-pani' etc. Sometimes Rusdie combines words and phrases to make compounds such as 'overandover', 'suchandsuch', 'birthanddeath', 'updownup', 'blackasnight' etc. Such compounds shows Rushdie's innovation and mastery over English Language. These experiments with language make *Midnight's Children* an interesting text to read.

Sometimes, in the novel, Rusdie misspellings of words such as 'unquestionabel', 'staaange', 'ees', 'existance', etc. He also makes use of some incorrect words, from grammatical view point, like 'mens', 'informations', 'lifeliness'. All these delebrate misspellings point to the use of English by Indians in their day-to-day life.

#### 7. CONCLUSION

To conclude one can say that Rushdie's use of innovative narrative technique has made *Midnight's Children* a complex and highly challenging work of fiction. Along with the content and its marvelous treatment, this new and innovative narrative technique enabled Rushdie to capture the topmost position among the winners of the Booker Prize over the past twenty five years.

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