

‘CULTURAL CLASHES IN “MIDNIGHT’S CHILDREN” BY SALMAN RUSHDIE’

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ABSTRACT:-

Sir Ahmad Salman Rushdie born 19 June 1947 is a British Indian novelist and essayist. His second novel, *Midnight's Children* (1981), won the Booker Prize in 1981. Much of his fiction is set on the Indian subcontinent. He combines magical realism with historical fiction; his work is concerned with the many connections, disruptions, and migrations between Eastern and Western civilizations. It was while he was at Ogilvy that he wrote *Midnight's Children*, before becoming a full-time writer. Rushdie's first novel, *Grimus* (1975), a part-science fiction tale, was generally ignored by the public and literary critics. His next novel, *Midnight's Children* (1981), catapulted him to literary notability. This work won the 1981 Booker Prize and, in 1993 and 2008, was awarded the Best of the Bookers as the best novel to have received the prize during its first 25 and 40 years. *Midnight's Children* follows the life of a child, born at the stroke of midnight as India gained its independence, who is endowed with special powers and a connection to other children born at the dawn of a new and tumultuous age in the history of the Indian sub-continent and the birth of the modern nation of India. The character of Saleem Sinai has been compared to Rushdie.

Keywords: multicultural Cultural, modernization, identity, Ideology, migrant, Colonial, Culture, acculturation, Xenophobia, Other.

The first Multicultural conflict discusses a problem of immigration. At the beginning of the story Salman Rushdie describes Aadam Aziz Saleem's grandfather. He spent five years in Germany where he was studying to be a doctor. Now returning he saw through travelled eyes. Aadam Aziz is back at home but he doesn't feel comfortable at his birthplace. He suddenly realizes that the years in Germany had returned him to a hostile environment. Influenced by his German friends there were Heidelberg and Ingrid scorning him for his Mecca-turned parroting Oskar and Ilse Lubin the anarchists, mocking his prayer with their ant ideologies Heidelberg who

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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. It is apparent that Rushdie's intention is to point out the internal conflict of individual. Based on his attitudes, opinions and experiences gained abroad Aadam makes a decision influencing him for the rest of his life. While trying to pray he hits his nose. That convinces him to not worship a God in whose existence he is not able to believe. These years spent away from home belief of his friends who considered him to be somehow the invention of their European ancestors and many other aspects makes him unable to worship.

Rushdie portrays a character that is caught between the two cultures. Having experienced different life different European manners culture and thinking, his doubts keep nibbling at his mind. This situation clearly illustrates the main problem of many Indians and that is a searching of individual for his identity. That searching confronts Aadam with a dilemma whether to accept newly acquired experiences on the one hand or whether to stay deeply connected with the traditions of his country on the other hand. Therefore the searching for his identity can be seen as a consequence of historical development since their sense of identity went through a long-lasting historical progress and Indians had begun to develop a sense of Indianans can be understood as sharing common heritage or legacy. One can notice that Rushdie is trying to describe the crucial internal problem which Aadam and an Indian immigrant in general has to resolve. That problem indicates that not every Indian immigrant will subscribe to what is considered Indian values or Indian

“Philosophy but in the very act of rejecting certain options they are aware that they are either discarding centuries-old traditions or upholding them”¹.

It is far more important for immigrant to strengthen the sense of identity while living abroad. In an alien environment Indianans is not only inherited but also created in conscious opposition to what is non-Indian. In Germany Aadam becomes an object of derision for his origin and rituals. He realizes that he is tightly connected with history. For some emigrants the process of identifying one's Indianans and reinventing it may be too subtle or complex or even inexplicable. Indeed they resent having to explain it or identify it at all. They may not be able to explain why they value or enjoy what they do but they do know that they can share it with other Indians from any other part of the world. Whereas in the first conflict Aadam Aziz faces the identity crisis alone the following situation demonstrates the reaction of an old boatman called Tai. They used to be friends but now not seeing each other for 5 years Aadam notices an antipathy to him and obvious change in his behavior. Tai looks at his bag with Heidelberg sign on it and Aadam suddenly realizes what makes the old man so angry.

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“To the ferryman, the bag represents Abroad; it is the alien thing, the invader, progress. Aadam is later on branded as an alien, person who is not trustful. People start to ignore him. One can see the effort of Salman Rushdie to describe the attitude of society to Aadam’s return He is regarded as somebody, who just came back from Abroad, from a different culture and this fact is unacceptable for them”².

The multicultural conflict taking place in Amritsar captures an important historical event in Indian history. This incident foreshadowed decreasing and slowly, but inevitably coming to an end, influence of the British Raj. 1919 was a turning point in the history of India and Amritsar was the pivot. Rushdie’s character Aadam is situated in the novel as a witness and direct participant of Amritsar massacre. He soaks up the atmosphere of Hurtle the day of mourning, of stillness, of silence. It was a form of public protest when public services and schools were not open since. Gandhi has decreed that the whole of India shall, on that day, come to a halt to mourn, in peace, the continuing presence of the British.

Knowing Rushdie’s style of writing, magic realism, one can notice that Aadam is meant to be a witness of significant historical turnout and thereby placed into a centre of the massacre. Rushdie depicts it metaphorically when describing Aadam’s wound received in Amritsar. The clasp of his bag is digging into his chest, inflicting upon it a bruise so severe and mysterious that it will not fade until after his death. One can have a feeling that the author wants to say that this event remains indelibly imprinted in Indian’s minds. Aadam’s contemplation and his internal thoughts before the massacre indicates that he realizes that the British rule is over but bequeath it legacy in India. Doctor Aziz notices a soldierly young man in the street, and thinks the Indians have fought for the British; so many of them have seen the world by now, and been tainted by Abroad. They will not easily go back to the old world. The British are wrong to try and turn back the clock. ‘It was a mistake to pass the Rowlett Act. The main point of this conflict is to highlight an increasing dissatisfaction with British dominion. India’s aspiration to rule its own country gained its strength. That simultaneously increased the impatience of nationalists and frightened conservatives in India and Britain. To meet the requirements of Indians, the British condescended to set India along the road to responsible government within the empire. Indians were not satisfied and the conflicts between the Raj and Congress were gradually raised when reforms called Rowlatt Acts were introduced. Along with Gandhi’s politics of non-violence, although not suitably realized by Gandhi’s followers, demonstrations turned into riots.

“It is April 7th, 1919, and in Amritsar the Mahatma’s grand design is being distorted”³.

The shops have shut; the railway station is closed; but now rioting mobs are breaking them up. These struggles ultimately resulted in massacre in Amritsar. During the peaceful demonstration

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in Amritsar, Indian troops led by Brigadier-General Dyer started to fire into the demonstrators. As a result, 379 Indians were killed and hundreds of them were wounded. The following multicultural conflict describes the events connected with the Muslim league. Basically, the main causes of the conflict were struggles between Muslims and Hindus. The Muslim league was created as an opposition to the Indian National Congress. Despite Congress being an organization standing up for the interests of India as a whole, Muslims felt both lack of proper education and representation in government.

Muslim leaders saw that their community had fallen behind the Hindus. That strengthened up their feeling of being minority and need of taking certain measures. The leader of the Muslim league, Mohammed Ali Jinnah, managed to unify various Islamic organizations in majority Muslim's provinces "under the umbrella of the Muslim League. Whereas the idea of separate state, emerged in 1930's, did not meet with a large response, the voices calling for creation of Pakistan became topical in early 1940s. The Muslim League insisted on its separateness from the Hindu-dominated Congress, as the voice of a 'nation within a nation. These struggles finally resulted in partition of the British Indian Empire into the nations of India and Pakistan. Partition seemed preferable to civil war."⁴

The events taking place in this multicultural conflict places Aadam in the notable position of somebody who represents the interests of another group that is not mentioned above. In 1942, Aadam contracted a highly dangerous form of optimism. He was by no means alone, because, despite strenuous efforts by the authorities to stamp it out, this virulent disease had been breaking out all over India that year, and drastic steps were to be taken before it was brought under control. One could say that Rushdie's expression 'optimism' can be metaphorically understood as a belief of those Indian Muslims who were against partition. Like Aadam, like Rani of Cooch Naheen, like Mian Abdullah loathed the Muslim League. They did not agree with Muslim League and its demand for a partitioned India. The character of Mian Abdullah, known as Hummingbird, is described as the founder, chairman, unifier and moving spirit of the Free Islam Convocation. Rushdie portrays him as somebody who appeared to become the hope of India's hundred million Muslims. The Free Islam Convocation is established as an opposition to the dogmatic and selfish interests of the League. Aadam tells his friend Rani of Cooch Naheen, that in the beginning he was Kashmiri and not a much of a Muslim. However, having the bruise on his chest as a symbol of Amritsar massacre, that turned him into an Indian.

This multicultural conflict takes place around the time of early independence of India and it points out the clash between Indian people and British culture. Aadam's daughter Amina and her husband Ahmed are deciding whether to move from Delhi to Bombay. One can see that

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Rushdie's aim is to capture the atmosphere before Partition. The British were leaving and selling their properties. Ahmed gets messages from his old friend living in Bombay. The British are leaving in droves, Sinai bhai. Property is dirt cheap! Sell up; come here; buy; live the rest of your life in luxury! On June 4th they decide to move to Bombay.

On the same day Earl Mountbatten of Burma held a press conference at which he announced the Partition of India, and hung his countdown calendar on the wall: seventy days to go to the transfer of power. After their arrival to Bombay, they make a bargain with leaving Englishman, William Methwold. However, he sells the house having two strange conditions. First, they must buy the house with all the stuff in it and retain everything as it is. Second, the actual transfer of property will not be realized until midnight on August 15th. Rushdie's major point permeating through this conflict is to demonstrate contempt and superiority of Methwold.⁵ One might say that Methwold's requirements and insisting on delay are Rushdie's means of expression of the fact, that this behavior of individual called Methwold can be metaphorically transferred from him to the way of rule applied by the British in India. Rushdie intentionally places character of Amina in opposition to Ahmed as an alternative solution of situation. Amina is angry and dissatisfied with those conditions. She is not allowed to get rid of one single piece of stuff in the house.

All is well Methwold's requirements were fulfilled since he achieved ascendance over them. "By and large, the British have handled the end of Empire well, bowing to the inevitable, running down the flag and packing their bags with relatively little fuss. To understand Methwold's behavior it is worth to look back in history and get straight to the core of British thinking as these were real reasons to colonialism. As Jeremy Packman explains, But what gave the British Empire its belief in itself was the delusion that it was driven by a moral purpose, that there was a God-ordained duty to go out and colonize those places unfortunate enough not to have been born under the flag. The assumption of superiority became an article of faith. Another sign demonstrating majesty and dominance of the British are Methwold's houses. The Empire was created by initiative, greed, courage, mass production, powerful armed forces, political scheming and self-confidence. A technologically advanced country with few natural resources needed a big trading area. And the technology made the subjugation of primitive peoples inevitable. The Empire gave the English the chance to feel blessed. And the greater its success, the more blessed they felt. It is just that the history of imperialism is the alliance of self-interest and technology. One can see that Rushdie fully exploited his characters to express the thorniest issues of Indian history. From this point, Rushdie introduces new narrator in his novel, Saleem Sinai, who is born on August 15th 1947. That mysterious date and hour he was born, had the impact on his entire life as he considers himself to be indelibly connected with the history of his

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country. Since Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* is considered to be his autobiographical novel, one can realize that Saleem's profound thoughts, opinions and concerns are in fact Rushdie's. Along with his country, being under the British rule for such a long time, he is trying to find himself, to discover new way of living.

The moment of the independent India and Saleem's birth is approaching. On 14 August, Saleem is being born and M. A. Jinnah announces the independence and birth of a new Muslim state – Pakistan. The independent India is formed on 15 August 1947. Jawaharlal Nehru gives a famous speech, *Tryst with destiny*; the dispute between Muslims and Hindus was result of series of long-standing struggles persisting from the time before independence. From 1940 on, reconciliation between Congress and the Muslim League became increasingly difficult, if not impossible. By creating the land of Pakistan, the spiritually pure and clean Muslim state, the main problems to resolve after the Partition were territorial and religious disagreements. Was Pakistan to be a secular state serving as a homeland for Muslims of the subcontinent, or was it to be an Islamic state governed by the Shari, in which non-Muslims would be second-class citizens? These questions emerged and above all other concerns were the violence and the refugee problem. The approach of Independence Day precipitated the mass migration of millions of Indians, Hindus moving from provinces designated to Pakistan, and Muslims leaving Indian Territory. The conflict between Muslims and Hindus described in the novel appears shortly after the formation of the new states.

This multicultural conflict captures the atmosphere in independent India. Its efforts to gain freedom were fulfilled but his euphoria of independence was short-lived as partition brought disastrous consequences for India in the wake of communal conflict. India was confronted both with the stupendous task of national integration and economic development. Rushdie portrays Saleem as he celebrates his tenth birthday and recapitulates the progress and development of India after ten years. Although all the inhabitants in the Methwold's Villas pretend to be happy, they are in fact agonized; Ten years, my God! Where have they gone? What have we done? In spite of the industrial prosperity, illiteracy survived unscathed; the population continued to mushroom. One can see that Rushdie's intention focuses on the fact that gaining the independence did not necessarily mean achieving progress and prosperity. Rushdie also suggests a solution in metaphorical description of Saleem. Saleem has the ability to read people's thoughts and sets up the *Midnight Children's Conference* consisting of the children gifted with various supernatural abilities. He wants the Conference to be a sort of loose federation of equals, all points of view given free expression. However, he gets into conflicts with them. Saleem encourages them to find the reason of their being here. Nevertheless, their ideas are different

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than Saleem expected.

Saleem is disappointed. He looks for a sense of being but it seems that the others don't. As ten years old children they are confused, it is obvious that these things are far too complicated to be resolved by them. One can see that Rushdie's description of children's thoughts is a parallel to India. India after ten years found itself in uncertain position and diversity of ways, that India might have followed, was very rich. The same parallel is also between Saleem and his country. One can notice the unavoidable connection between the infant state's attempts at rushing towards full-sized adulthood and my own early, explosive efforts at growth. By using the magic realism, another allegory describing the reality is a symbolic disintegration of Midnight's Children Conference which "fall apart on the day the Chinese armies came down over the Himalayas to humiliate the Indian fauj. However, multicultural and religious conflicts were significant factors of decline too. Children, however magical, are not immune to their parents; and as the prejudices and world-views of adults began to take over their minds, I found children from Maharashtra loathing Gujarati's, and fair-skinned northerners reviling Dravidian blackish; there were religious rivalries; and class entered our councils. The rich children turned up their noses at being in such lowly company; Brahmins began to feel uneasy at permitting even their thoughts to touch the thoughts of untouchables; while, among the low-born, the pressures of poverty and Communism were becoming evident.

Saleem tries to convince them. Do not let this happen; Do not permit the endless duality of masses-and-classes, capital-and-labor, them-and-us to come between us! We must be a third principle. Shiva, his main rival, represents the opposite side of Saleem. He says; No, little rich boy; there is no third principle; there is only money-and-poverty, and have-and-lack, and right-and-left; there is only me-against-the-world! For things, the country is run. Not for people. For things, America and Russia send aid; but five hundred million stay hungry. Saleem argues with Shiva and says that people are not things and if they stick together, in good and bad, that might be the third principle. However Shiva goes on; little rich boy, that's all just wind. All that importance-of-the-individual. All that possibility-of-humanity. Today what people are is just another kind of thing. Saleem evolves the thought if it isn't strange that such young children discuss the role of the individual in society, and the rivalry of capital and labor, and the conflicts in socio-cultural heritages? Was collectivity opposed to singularity? Was God killed by children? He draws a conclusion that children are the vessels into which adults pour their poison, and it was the poison of grown-ups which did for us. If there is a third principle, its name is childhood. But it dies; or rather, it is murdered. One can see that Rushdie's last sentence clearly highlights the whole point of this conflict.

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Historically, Pakistan was at that time under the control of Ayub Khan and relationships with its neighbors were unstable. Pakistan carried on in maintaining its cooperation with the United States but the relations with China and India worsened. India severed friendly relationship with China after its occupation of Tibet. An entente between Pakistan and China evolved in inverse ratio to Sino-Indian hostility, which climaxed in a border war in 1962. Nehru was shocked as the war revealed the truth about Indian army which was poorly prepared to protect its northern borders. At the conclusion of the conflict, the Chinese forces were partially withdrawn and an unofficial demilitarized zone was established, but India's prestige and self-esteem had suffered. Rushdie places Saleem in a position of direct witness of historical events. After their arrival, they are accommodated in General Zulfikar's house. General Zulfikar's intention is to place mines all over the Indo-Pak border. He says; let's give those Hindus something to worry! We'll blow their invaders into so many pieces; there'll be no damn thing left to reincarnate. The antipathy against Indian is obvious. Saleem listens to General Ayub Khan as he says; Martial Law is now imposed. Saleem finds out that Midnight has many children; the offspring of Independence were not all human Violence, corruption, poverty, generals, chaos and greed. I had to go into exile to learn the children of midnight. The last multicultural situation describes permanently continuing conflicts between India and Pakistan. Nehru died in 1964 and the situation in India after his death was difficult. His contribution was huge as he possessed a rare combination of intellect, breadth of vision, and personal charisma that attracted support throughout India. I

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