

**SALMAN RUSHDIE: NATIONALISM AS A DISCURSIVE FORMATION  
IN *MIDNIGHT'S CHILDREN***

If a house be divided against itself, that house cannot stand.

(*The Bible: St. Mark*)

In *Midnight's Children* (published in 1981), Salman Rushdie analyses Indian nationalism from its birth in the Quit India movement to its institutionalization in post- and neo-colonial government. According to his analysis, nationalism cannot be disengaged from its discursive function of projecting certain nationalist "truths" to the Indian people. Rushdie seems to locate the operation of these "truths" in both the context of the Indian government's ideologically interested use of political rhetoric and the context of the Indian media in post-independence India. Further, one specific nationalist "truth" that Rushdie examines in *Midnight's Children* involves the imagined homogeneity of Indians under the aegis of the national motto: unity in diversity. Rushdie demonstrates that this imagined homogeneity is both interested and fraudulent. In *Midnight's Children*, Indian heterogeneity threatens to splinter, and indeed ends up splintering, the monolithic manner in which nationalist discourses produce and reproduce their "truthful" representation of India. Rushdie's analysis of Indian nationalism is significant because he wrenches it from the tenacious grasp of essentialism and places it in the field of representation and discursive practice.

Not surprisingly, Indo-English critics have avoided studying Rushdie's work. For him, Indianness is not a matter of one's feeling Indian; it is a matter of one's entering the realm of difference where Indianness is constructed in terms of the specificity of religion and class, among other cultural and socio-economic categories. Further, Rushdie's experimentation with the English language leads him to a kind of translation that is different from both Narayan's and Rao's. He seems to suggest that translation is necessary to the extent that it can make

possible the representation of the Indian subjects who lie beyond the reach of English. The use of translation is further necessary because these Indian subjects have the ability at least to indicate the social stratifications of an India that nationalist discourses have either suppressed or failed to account for. Thus, unlike Narayan and Rao, for whom the political implications of translation went either silenced or unacknowledged, Rushdie allows a definition of translation to emerge which locates it as a practice, as a politically situated act aimed at unsettling the hegemony of standard English. And in Rushdie's writing, Indian languages themselves (in the form of Hindi and Urdu words and street dialects, racy Hindi film dialogue, etc.) form a considerable bulk of the text.

Salman Rushdie writes, if it is possible for his home-bound audience to imagine this, from a position continually displaced by the fact that he is not properly Indian, nor British, nor Pakistani. The son of liberal-minded Muslim parents, he was born in Bombay (Mumbai), India, in June 1947, and came to England at the young age of fourteen for his schooling. In subsequent years, he migrated to England and remained there for a successful career in journalism, while, in the aftermath of the partition of India into Muslim Pakistan and predominantly Hindu India, his parents had moved to Karachi, Pakistan. Some of the context in which one ought to read his radically displaced position may be found in his 1965 visit to his parents in Pakistan. During this year, India and Pakistan were engaged in military combat over the possession of the state of Kashmir. As an adolescent, Rushdie witnessed the Indian bombs landing on Pakistan with wandering and shocked feelings of confused betrayal, having thus far defined himself rebelliously as Indian, even though his parents had begun to think of themselves as Pakistani.

One might say that his sense of speaking from a displaced position leads Rushdie, in part, to the writing of fantasy, to a compulsion to fictionalize worlds (Q. in *Shame*, Ellowen Deewowen in *The Satanic Verses*) in order to then populate them with some measure of authority. For:

It is the fate of migrants to be stripped of history,  
to stand naked amidst the scorn of strangers upon  
whom they see the...brocades of continuity  
and the eyebrows of belonging.

(*Shame*, 64)

Hence, the formulation:

I, too, like all migrants, am a fantasist. I build  
imaginary countries and try to impose them on  
the ones that exist.

(*Shame*, 92)

Rushdie further asserts:

The country in this story is not Pakistan, or not  
quite. There are two countries, real and fictional,  
occupying the same space. My story, my fictional  
country exists, like myself, at a slight angle to reality.  
I have found this off-centering to be necessary; but  
its value is, of course, open to debate.

(*Shame*, 28)

In aligning himself with “a fictional country”, Rushdie implies a correspondence between his own displaced subjectivity and the need to fictionalize “real” countries. Elsewhere in *Shame*, he addresses this displaced, off-centered subjectivity by calling himself “a translated man”:

I, too, am a translated man. I have been *borne across*.  
It is generally believed that something is always lost  
in translation; I cling to the notion--and use, in evidence,  
the success of Fitzgerald-Khayyam--that something can  
also be gained.

In the voice of his narrators (always identified with Rushdie himself) and elsewhere, Rushdie has drawn attention to the fact that his “belonging” to three different countries is productive and should not mean that he suffers a negative absence of roots. In 1983 interview with Michael Kaufman of The New York Times, he underscores the idea that

...migration, the process of being uprooted [doesn't] necessarily lead to rootlessness. What it can lead to is a kind of multiple rooting. It's not the traditional identity-crisis of not knowing where you come from. The problem is that you come from too many places. The problems are of excess rather than absence.

(Author from Three Countries, 23)

Likewise, his decision to invent fictional countries that he only very tenuously identifies with “real” countries is productive as well. By neither owing allegiance to one “real” country nor paying homage to it under the aegis of nationalism, Rushdie gains the wilful prerogative to analyze the accompanying problematics of nationalism in the context of his fantasy literature. Indeed, his novels overtly maintain the liberating, enabling value of a sort of phantasmagoric writing. They are post-modern insofar as they signify a break from the kind of bourgeois classical realism of a chronological narrative that comforted with its semblance to a consensual reality. Referring obliquely to the mode of realism that had, in some senses, determined the localized and limited writing of an entire generation of older Indian writers, and marking his own difference from those writers and that mode, Rushdie states:

...it seemed amazing to me that when you looked at the literature that had been produced about India, it seemed dated and delicate, and I wondered why these dainty, delicate books were being written about this

(*Author from Three Countries*, 22)

The departure from realism may be attributed to Rushdie's willingness to view reality as if it is itself a mere construct that offers people an allusion of rationality. As such, any general notion of reality becomes a deprived zone of specific, multiple, and relatively defined realities. In his novels, then, excursions in the realm of fantasy are not only as tenable and valid as reality itself, but reality itself exists only in relation to how one sees it. Reality is, Rushdie says in *Midnight's Children*,

...a question of perspective; the further you get from the past, the more concrete it seems—but as you approach the present, it inevitably seems more and more incredible. Suppose yourself in a large cinema, sitting at first in the back row, and gradually moving up, row by row, until your nose is almost pressed against the screen. Gradually the stars' faces dissolve into dancing grain; tiny details assume grotesque proportions; the illusion dissolves—or rather, it becomes clear that the illusion itself is reality.

(*Midnight's Children*, 165-166)

This is not to say, however, that the writing of fantasy fosters and promotes illusion as political ignorance. On the contrary, what becomes most "real" in Rushdie's break from nationalism and its concomitant expression in realism is his articulation of the First and Third World politics.

While Rushdie eschews realism as a mode of writing which (wrongly) relies on a consensual reality, he aligns his own fantasy writing to a subgenre of fiction termed "magical realism". (See Amaryll Beatrice Chanady, *Magical Realism and the Fantastic: Resolved and Unresolved Antinomy*). One of its notable practitioners, the Columbian writer, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, had a far-reaching influence on Rushdie. Like Garcia Marquez, Rushdie treats the fantastic as a part

of everyday life in his novels: "the unreal happens as part of reality". (Angel Flores, 191). According to Rosemary Jackson, fantasy is "a literature of desire":

...fantastic literature points to or suggests the basis upon which cultural order rests, for it opens up, for a brief moment, on to that which lies outside the law, that which is outside dominant value systems. The fantastic traces the unsaid and the unseen of culture: that which has been silenced...and made absent.... What could be termed as a bourgeois category of the real is under attack.

*(Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion, 29)*

While Rushdie's use of fantasy is subversive in a manner that is close to Jacobson's description, it is also specific to the use of magical realism by writers in the context of the Third World. The writing of magical realism seems to be especially appropriate in the context of the Third World, where a political, social, and economic reality that is too grim for realism constantly unfolds itself. In this sense, the enabling value of magical realism is that it offers Rushdie a method for examining post- and neo-colonial ideological structures of control.

According to Louis Althusser, repressive state apparatuses (such as the police, the army, or prison) operate "by violence", and ideological apparatuses (such as churches, trade unions, or schools) function "by ideology". Althusser's functional definition of ideology locates it as "the 'representation' of the Imaginary relationship of individuals to their Real conditions of existence" (Althusser, 181). When hailed ("Hey, You"), the individual will turn and experience an imaginary recognition of the truth and appropriateness of the recruiting ideology. In this moment of recognition, the individual becomes a "subject". This subject has represented itself as being in the place required by ideology's representations, and hence it can live its relation with the real condition of existence as if it were autonomous in that relation. This ideological interpellation of the individual

maintains social formations or the reproduction of the “prospective conditions for continuous production”. (Althusser, 145).

Rushdie may not, of course, subscribe to this understanding of ideology. Nor do the workings of ideology as outlined by Althusser translate perfectly into his novels. But certainly much of Rushdie’s writing explores relations between political structures and the individual, and the individual is hardly autonomous in these determining relations. Further, the “real” conditions of life described by Rushdie are so horrifying as to seem unbelievable. Hence, magical realism is particularly amenable to Rushdie’s project of demystifying ideological operations in the context of the Third World. It provides Rushdie with a way to cut through the façade of order and reason to reveal that “the illusion itself is reality”. Fantasy works not just as a world-view but also as a stance from which radical positions on First and Third World governments are being formulated; it provides the fictitious space into which are drawn the enormous historical and hallucinatory issues of our time: the terrible failure of post-colonial India to constitute itself as a viable democratic republic; the partitions of India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, which unleashed the kind of insane violence that can only stem from the physical uprooting of an already divided people from here to there; the autocratic regime of Indira Gandhi, culminating in the vicious years of formal Emergency; the military dictatorship of Zia-ul-Haq in Pakistan; the status of Third World immigrants in racist Britain.

Referring to his criticisms of Pakistan, Rushdie articulates this operation of fantasy in *Shame*:

The book would have been banned, dumped in the rubbish bin, burned. All that effort for nothing! Realism can break a writer’s heart! Fortunately, however, I am only telling a sort of modern fairytale, so that’s all right; nobody need get upset, or take anything I say too seriously. No drastic action need

be taken either. What a relief!

(*Shame*, 72)

The passage suggests a retreat from political engagement, when, in fact, it comes at the end of a relentless description of corrupt Pakistani politics:

But suppose this were a realistic novel! Just think what else I might have to put in. The business, for instance, of the illegal installation, by the richest members of "Defence", of covert, subterranean water from their neighbours' mains... And would I also have to describe the Sind Club in Karachi, where there is still a sign reading, "Women and Dogs Not Allowed Beyond This Point"? Or to analyze the subtle logic of an industrial programme that builds nuclear reactors but cannot develop a refrigerator?

(*Shame*, 71)

The license that Rushdie gives to himself—that of a fairytale teller, a fantasist—allows him to articulate what would otherwise be non-permissible commentary. Indeed, decoding the obvious allegory that Rushdie employed in *Shame*, the Pakistani government banned the book.

In this sense, fantasy ceases to be, in fact never was, a formal literary device; it is a genre put to work, a method deployed for Rushdie's examination of ideological structures. His analysis of ideological nationalist discourses that are disseminated in various forms in Indian culture suggests that he seems to view nationalism not as an essentialist notion but as a discursive formation that is interested in producing "truth". He then goes on to subvert nationalism by the parody of its dominant discourses. This subversion is not of a simple nature. Aware that his own work operates in the ideological framework of the production of "Third World" literature, Rushdie does not set up a simple equation between ethically "right" and "wrong" positions on nationalism. Instead, within this ideological

framework, he shows how Indian nationalist discourses are ideologically interested and suggests how they may be subverted. If an earlier generation of Indian writers left unacknowledged their contradictory nationalist identifications, then Rushdie, having accepted (from the migrant's point of view) the necessity for those contradictions, makes of his text a critique of nationalism itself.

Rushdie's criticism of the nationalist "truths" produced by dominant ideological discourses takes several directions. One of these is suggested by his parody of political rhetoric—which he relates to governmental propaganda—and his parody of the ideological apparatus of the Indian media-newspaper and radios in particular. Brennan highlights the post-war context in which the Indian media operates:

Rushdie's implicit reflection on the responsibility of the media's various 'broadcasters' in the postwar era... is a reflection on the specific type of nation he is analyzing. The nexus of fiction and nationalism in this period occurs within the borders of the nation-state--that is, in the apparatuses of ideological control.

(*Salman Rushdie and the Third World: Myths of the Nation*, 97)

As a text about the Indian media's ideological function in the post-war period and the ideological political rhetoric which fuels it, *Midnight's Children* parodies dominant nationalist discourses in order to demonstrate that the post- and neo-colonial government's assurance—that it is for the people, by the people, and of the people—is a tactical ploy aimed at disguising actual Indian heterogeneity and difference.

*Midnight's Children* represents a mammoth enterprise. Its writing may have been prefigured in the somewhat grandiose mission that Rushdie outlined six years earlier in his first book, *Grimus* (pub. 1975):

I became engrossed in the notion of race memory; the sediment of highly-concentrated knowledge that passes down the ages, constantly being added to and subtracted from... I have achieved the ultimate harmony: the combination of the most profound thoughts of the race, tested by time, and the cadences that give those thoughts coherence and, even more important, popularity. I am taking the intellect back to the people.

(*Grimus*, 160)

*Midnight's Children* is a narrative about miraculously endowed children, all born in the Indian subcontinent at midnight in August 1947, the hour of India's independence, and it is recounted by their leader, Saleem Sinai (unevenly but obviously identified with Rushdie himself). *Midnight's Children* most literally allegorizes the dynamic and myriad possibilities open to a country which has survived and overcome British colonialism; but the children of midnight lose their extraordinary gifts—India succumbs to political, economic, and social deterioration—because the world they live in cannot tolerate any vision of human perfection. "Midnight's children", says Rushdie,

can be made to represent many things, according to your point of view: they can be seen as the last throw of everything antiquated and retrogressive in our myth-ridden nation, whose defeat was entirely desirable in the context of a modernizing, twentieth century economy; or as the true hope of freedom, which is now forever extinguished.

(*Midnight's Children*, 200)

Rushdie's subversion of Indian nationalism through a parodic examination of its dominant discursive representations surfaces in many instances throughout the text. At precisely the time that India and Pakistan were divided into two separate countries—the birth of India as a free country coincided with the traumatic

Partition of 1947; the Pakistan itself was meant to ally Muslim fears about free India's being predominantly Hindu—at a time when schisms between Hindus and the Muslims ran the deepest, India's first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, is quoted as saying:

This is no time for petty or destructive criticism  
...No time for ill will. We have to build the noble  
mansion of free India, where all her children may  
dwell.

(*Midnight's Children*, 118)

The undercutting of Nehru's celebratory political rhetoric here is as clear as the undercutting of the tone of his congratulatory letter addressed to the baby Saleem:

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.

(*Midnight's Children*, 122)

Elsewhere in *Midnight's Children*, Rushdie parodies the sloganeering, jingoistic, journalistic style of newspaper articles which celebrated Indian independence. Referring to the birth of his narrator, Saleem, at exactly the hour of midnight, a newspaper cutting comments on his photograph:

A charming pose of Baby Saleem Sinai, who was born  
last night at the exact moment of our Nation's independence  
—the happy child of that glorious hour!

(*Midnight's Children*, 119)

(To the adult Saleem's indignation, his mother was paid a mere one hundred rupees for having won the newspaper contest for the first baby to be born at India's hour of freedom.)

Further, Rushdie's depiction of the 1965 war between India and Pakistan similarly parodies and juxtaposes the contradictory newspaper and radio accounts coming from either side of the border. The effect of this parody is to show how every nationalist account is rhetorically and ideologically constructed, interested in the formulation of its own position of "truth":

One week before my eighteenth birthday, on August 8<sup>th</sup> did Pakistani troops in civilian clothing cross the cease-fire line in Kashmir and infiltrate the Indian sector, or did they not? In Delhi, Prime Minister Shastri announced "massive infiltration...to subvert the state"; but here is Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, Pakistan's Foreign Minister with his riposte: "We categorically deny any involvement in the rising against tyranny by the indigenous people of Kashmir.

*(Midnight's Children, 338)*

As these contradictory governmental reports abound, questions regarding their validity (which account is right?) impinge relentlessly and rigorously upon Saleem's consciousness:

But who attacked? Who defended? On my eighteenth birthday, reality took another beating. From the ramparts of the Red Fort in Delhi, an Indian Prime Minister (not the same one who wrote me a long-ago letter) sent me this birthday greeting: "We promise that force will be met with force, and aggression against us will never be allowed to succeed!" While jeeps with loud-hailers saluted me in Guru Mandir, reassuring me: "The Indian aggressors will be utterly overthrown! We are a race of warriors! One Pathan one Punjabi Muslim is worth ten of those babus-in-arms."

...And on the radio, what destruction, what mayhem! In the first five days of the war Voice of Pakistan announced the destruction of more aircraft than India had ever possessed; in eight days, All India Radio massacred the Pakistan army down to, and considerably beyond, the last man. (339)

...and did great sacrifices take place or not? Was it true that the city was virtually defenceless, because the Pak army and Air Force were all in the Kashmir sector? Voice of Pakistan said: O memorable day! O unarguable lesson in the fatality of delay! The Indians, confident of capturing the city, *stopped for breakfast*. All-India Radio announced the fall of Lahore; meanwhile, a private aircraft spotted the breakfasting invaders. While the B.B.C. picked up the A.I.R. story, the Lahore militia was mobilized. Hear the Voice of Pakistan!—old men, young boys, irate grandmothers fought the Indian army; bridge by bridge they battled, with any available weapons! Lame men loaded their pockets with grenades, pulled out the pins, flung themselves beneath advancing Indian tanks; toothless old ladies disemboweled Indian babus with pitchforks... Was that how it happened? Or was All-India-Radio—*great tank battle, huge Pak losses, 450 tanks destroyed*—telling the truth? (340)

The quotation is made at length here in order to demonstrate the emergence of the thematics of a politicized position that ironically, even humorously, records the effects of an ideological nationalist “truth”. Itself inaccessible, this nationalist “truth” is discernible only in terms of its effects. Indeed, the fact that two discourses—Indian and Pakistani—compete with each other accents the fact that neither possesses the “truth”; but either discourse is dangerously believable, depending on which side of the border it occurs. Hence, Rushdie subverts the dominant status of both discourses by presenting them at the ironic point of their inter-competition.

But the most radical critique of nationalism that Rushdie offers may be located in his attack on an imagined Indian homogeneity. He maps out an unevenly interdependent relationship between the sites of the Indian body politic and the individual. When Jawaharlal Nehru tells Saleem, “[Your life], will be, in a sense, the mirror of our own”, he does not specify, “*in what sense*”. Rushdie continues,

How, in what terms, may the career of a single individual be said to impinge upon the fate of a nation? (238)

Rushdie begins to specify the sense in which the individual interacts with the nation-state. First, by virtue of his blood and upbringing, Saleem is made to represent practically all Indians. Rushdie’s most emphatic attack upon the discourses of Indian nationalism takes the form of a cheeky joke in *Midnight’s Children*: the fate of the nation is made to rest upon the all-inclusive individual. At the heart of this joke is the clever epistemological inversion of the collective/individual ethos. That is, if individuals are to be commonly understood as *determined by the larger world around them* (in terms of a “one-in-all” formulation), then Rushdie places at the center of his study one individual subjectivity and physical body that itself contains the larger world (in terms of the formulation, “all-in-one”). Saleem embodies every Indian; his personal actions move the Indian nation nationally and globally. The 1965 Indo-Pak war, in fact,

happened because I dreamed Kashmir into the fantasies of our rulers. (339)

I was the puppet-master and the nation performed my play (262)

To dismiss this one-in-all inversion on the grounds that it is obsessively egocentric is to ignore the amazingly rich ways in which it opens up multiple relationships to nationalism. For, arguably, nothing is more overdetermined and finally indeterminate than the site of the individual psyche and body. To make

that psyche and body the very ground upon which nationalism plays out its various discursive battles is to render nationalism as itself heterogeneous and problematic, constituted as it is by a subject's shifting, fluid identifications with the nation. In Rushdie's formulation, eventually, nationalism is and should be about these multiple identifications to it.

Rushdie deliberately renders Saleem's family tree as heterogeneous in his attempt to portray the all-in-oneness coalesced in Saleem that will problematize at least one nationalist "truth": unity in diversity. This heterogeneity is marked by the characters' complex shifting between positions of alienation and identification (from and with dominant and minority groups, which can themselves be further divided and subdivided). Saleem's grandfather, Dr. Aadam Aziz, is a Kashmiri Muslim who is alienated not only from pre-partition Punjab, India, because of his aversion to the city, Amritsar, to which he moves from Kashmir—"We are not like Indians, always making battles". Aziz...does not feel Indian. [33]—but also from Kashmir itself because of his progressive and liberal Western education in Germany. Timothy Brennan links this Dr. Aziz with E.M. Forster's Dr. Aziz in *A Passage to India* and makes the point that Rushdie is parodying the English novel of Empire. Brennan also traces the genealogy of "Aadam" and "Sinai" to the western biblical patriarchal tradition of Christianity (Brennan, 110). Saleem's father, Ahmed Sinai, is an Indian Muslim businessman, but the connection to Kashmir persists when his Hindu business colleagues attribute a racist stereotype of Kashmiri uncleanness to him:

These Kashmiri types, old boy: well-known fact they never  
wash. (73)

The Muslim identity pits itself not only against hegemonic Kashmiri, Hindu, and Western ideologies; it is itself splintered by its two institutional manifestations, the Muslim League and the Free Islam Convocation. During the nineteen-thirties, the decade of the Quit India program launched against the British, these two Muslim organizations were fighting for very different objects: the Muslim League desired a severing from India and a separate country (Pakistan) in the event that a predominantly Hindu India gained independence; Free Islam desired continued presence for Muslims in free India. Saleem's grandfather was closely associated with the latter group.

When Ahmed and Naseem Sinai move to Bombay, they retain their Kashmiri alienness:

...we were inflected with the alienness of Kashmiri  
blood, with the icy reserve of Kashmiri sky, and  
remained meateaters to a man. (92)

*The birth of Saleem Sinai is to be read simultaneously as the birth of free India. It also marks the culmination of a colonial socio-cultural and political history, incorporating as it does different religious and regional identities (Kashmiri, Indian, Muslim, Hindu and British) and key events of the freedom struggle against British occupation. Rushdie provides a mock-list of these on 106-109: Gandhi's Hartal movement, the Jallianwallah Bagh massacre in which the British General, Dyer, commanded Indian troops to fire and kill over one thousand peaceful protestors, the disintegration of the Free Islam convocation, and so on.*

But Saleem is an illegitimate child, conceived on the wrong side of the bed. This allows Rushdie to include in Saleem's ancestry the blood of a British—William Methwold, whose ancestor apparently founded the city of Bombay—and a Hindu working-class woman—Vanita, wife of the street entertainer, Wee Willie Winkie. What Methwold's impetus to Saleem's conception obviously signifies is the end

of the Raj: Saleem is both a product of colonialism and a hope for free India's future. Entertainers, too, will "orchestrate [Saleem's] life" (101); towards the end of the novel, Saleem is befriended by the performing magician, Picture Singh, in the Magician's Ghetto, a place that becomes, for Rushdie, a metaphor for the underground workings of Indian Marxists, Socialists and Communists.

Following a plot that Rushdie deliberately takes out of any given Indian B movie, the baby Saleem is switched from Vanita's crib to Amina Sinai's in the hospital. Amina's own son, Shiva, goes to the unprivileged couple, Winkie and Vanita. Shiva, Rushdie's ironic inversion of the Hindu mythological god of procreation and destruction of the same name, goes on, because he has been cheated out of his rightful parentage, to become Saleem's fiercest rival in the Midnight's Children Conference.

The character who switches the two babies is Mary Pereira, a Bombay Christian nurse who wishes to appease her lover, Joseph D' Costa. Rushdie momentarily plays with the Third World perversions of the biblical Joseph-and-Mary couple, but his purpose seems to be to show the inexorable presence of economic inequalities. For Joseph is upset at the immediate results of Indian independence:

This independence is for the rich only; the poor are  
being made to kill each other like flies. In Punjab  
in Bengal. Riots, riots, poor against poor. It's in the  
wind. (104)

Performing "her own private revolutionary act" (117) that she imagines will please Joseph, Mary switches the two babies, so that Shiva falls' into the poor Hindu working class, and Saleem goes to the bourgeois Muslim Sinai family.

Hence, the different ethnic and religious strains that are woven into Saleem by virtue of his blood and upbringing—British, Kashmiri, Bombayite, Christian, Muslim and Hindu—render him heterogeneously Indian. Since the newly

independent Indian nationalist motto was “unity in diversity”, and since the site of the physical body axiomatically refers to organic unity, Rushdie subverts that organic unity in order to subvert that nationalist motto. He writes of the disintegration of the human body:

...a human being, inside himself, is anything but a whole, anything but homogeneous; all kinds of everywhichting are jumbled up inside him and he is one person one minute and another the next. The body, on the other hand, is homogeneous as anything. Indivisible, a one-piece suit, a sacred temple, if you will. It is important to preserve this wholeness. But the loss of my finger...not to mention the removal of certain hairs from my head, has undone all that. Thus we enter a state of affairs which is nothing short of revolutionary; and its effect on history is bound to be pretty damn startling. Uncork the body, and God knows what you permit to come tumbling out. (237)

Consequently, the next stage of Rushdie’s analysis of nationalism hinges upon the operations of the physical body, which is both site and symptom of the political body. The all-inclusive individual grotesquely and absurdly mirrors the workings of the political body to such an extent that it becomes unclear whether Saleem is causing political events to occur or whether he is merely registering their effects on the level of the physical.

As the leader of the Midnight Children’s Conference, Saleem’s special talent is the ability to be a sort of “All-India Radio” which can tune into the minds of other characters at will. But this ability is taken away from him through a series of personal and national mishaps. His facial features (replete with a Ganesh-like elephantine nose and a set of birthmark stains) are a sort of “human geography” (231), which resemble the map of India. His schoolteacher points out jeeringly:

See here—the Deccan peninsula hanging down!  
...These stains...are Pakistan! These birthmark  
on the right ear is the East Wing; and these horrible  
stained left cheek, the West. (231-232)

Through a steady deterioration of the human body (linked consistently with such historical events as the Language Marches in Bombay, the Indo-China war of 1962, the Indo-Pakistan war of 1965, the traumatic creation of Bangladesh in 1971, the state of Indian Emergency in 1975, and so on), Saleem is finally unable to contain this heterogeneity of population, this excess of difference. His body splinters into the six hundred and thirty million pieces that represent India's population. By this, Rushdie means to signify the breakdown of the post-independence Indian nationalist ethos through Indira Gandhi's corrupt autocracy. And Saleem's physical decline, like the decline of the other preternaturally endowed children born at the midnight hour of India's formal independence in August 1947, mirrors the moral and sociopolitical decline of India.

The final straw, Saleem's forced sterilization under the family planning program led by Indira Gandhi's son, Sanjay Gandhi, renders Saleem politically infertile. Under Sanjay Gandhi's Youth Central Committee, such forced sterilizations were, for a while, almost common occurrences; typically, their victims were working-class people. Rushdie returns to this image of men being mysteriously carted off to portable tents by Sanjay Gandhi's Youth volunteers in the short story, "The Free Radio", The Atlantic Monthly (June 1983, 75-76). Both Indira Gandhi and Saleem have been "competitors for centrality" (420), by virtue of being the manipulators of Indian history:

...did Saleem's dream of saving the nation leak,  
through the osmotic tissues of history, into the  
thoughts of the Prime minister herself? Was my  
lifelong belief in the equation between the State  
and myself transmuted, in "the Madam's" mind,  
into that in-those-days-famous phrase: "India is

Eventually, Rushdie seems to suggest by his examination of nationalism that midnight’s children might have presented a viable alternative government. But nationalism’s “regime of truth”, when mirrored collectively by midnight’s children, effects such devastation that they cannot escape internal differences and the strifes fuelled by Saleem’s rival, Shiva. Shiva becomes the Indian government’s military arm; he forces Saleem to betray the already split-up midnight’s children, all of whom are systematically sterilized to prevent a new generation from being born. Saleem does have a son, but, like Saleem himself, Aadam Sinai is illegitimate. He is a product of the union of Shiva and Parvati-the-Witch. A denizen of the Magician’s Ghetto and a member of the MCC, Parvati-the-Witch is also a perversion of Parvati, the god Shiva’s consort in Indian mythology (just as Shiva is a perversion of the god Shiva). According to legend she spent generations trying to seduce Shiva in various disguises, when Shiva refused to sire any offspring in his desire to break from the chain of rebirth. Parvati tricks him into sexual intercourse and the product of their union is Ganesh, a sort of monster, a half-human, half-elephant god. Aadam Sinai too is unmistakably linked to Ganesh in his elephantine scope to all the previous generations that had spawned him. He signifies both a beginning and an end of the Aziz and Sinai line for he is the only child of the generation of independence.

The practice of translation and its concomitant implications, which an older generation of Indian writers had not brought themselves to the point of addressing, forms a significant subject for Rushdie. Two exceptions come immediately to mind: Mulk Raj Anand and G.V. Desani. In novels such as *Across the Black Waters* and *The Sword and the Sickle*, Anand bravely undertook a re-invention of English by including Indian dialect and slang; G.V. Desani, in *All About H. Hatterr*, chose to sprinkle his writing with a bold pigeon English. One may argue that Raja Rao engaged in a similar project of revising the English language by Indianizing it; but the actual status of translation and its implications

are not fully addressed by him. In one sense, translation itself is one determining condition of such migrants as Rushdie and Bharati Mukherjee. Rushdie calls himself “a translated man” because he is an immigrant in a foreign country. There is, then, a sense in which translation implies a metaphoric displacement.

In the figure of Saladin Chamcha in *The Satanic Verses*, Rushdie crystallizes the dilemma of the Indian immigrant to Britain. Saladin migrates to England for his education and remains there with a career in television (in much the same way as Rushdie himself did). In his anxiety to “fit” into the dominant culture, Saladin deliberately gets rid of his Bombay accent and models himself after his image of the British. But this accent cannot be erased; it crops up when he visits India and during his unconscious and subconscious moments. And in London, he devolves to a Satanic demon with horns and hooves because the “host culture” owns the “power of description and [immigrants] succumb to the picture [it] creates”. (*The Satanic Verses*, 168). Rushdie explains some of his conception of Saladin in his Newsweek interview. There he speaks of Saladin Chamcha as a type of demonized immigrant. Immigrants like Saladin, who are seen as “devils” by the native English population in England, respond to this grotesque demonization by saying:

You call us devils? ...Very well then, here is the devils  
version of the world...the version written from the  
*experience of those who have been demonized by virtue*  
of their otherness.

(Newsweek, 54)

The extent of this demonization has to be read in the context of British's neo-imperialism, its new colonizing force represented by the British civilian police force which brutalizes Saladin in London. Elsewhere, Rushdie has pointed out that in Britain's “new Empire”, immigrants are stereotyped as black, even though forty percent of the black community in Britain is not constituted of immigrants. Roughly fifty percent of all telephone calls made by employers to employment

agencies specify 'no blacks'. The chairman of a building society "rejected a jingle on the grounds that the off-screen singer sounded as if he had a black voice. The irony was that the singer was actually white, but the previous year's jingle had been sung by a black man who obviously had the good fortune not to sound like one." (*The New Empire Within Britain*, 418). A British judge claimed in court that "the word 'nigger' cannot be considered an epithet of racial abuse because he was nicknamed 'Nigger' at the public school". (*The New Empire Within Britain*, 420).

We get here a picture of the conditions under which a "translated man" cannot escape being positioned as the Other in a dominant culture and cannot help forming attachments to his home country. In Rushdie's case, one form that these attachments take is a certain fascination with Indian languages. He proliferates his texts with chunks of colloquial Hindi and Urdu words for which he refuses to provide translations. His incorporation of Indian street languages in literary discourse is reminiscent of Bakhtin's insistence on the "living discourse" of the novel. According to Bakhtin, discourse in the novel is "living" because it is a "social phenomenon". (Bakhtin, 259) There is, he says, a "social life of discourse outside the artist's study, discourse in the open spaces of public squares, streets, cities and villages". (259), and Rushdie's inclusion of this "social life" suggests that, for him, the novel participates in a life that exists beyond the hegemony of standard or unitary English.

In literary practice, translation may best be given the term "acculturation", or Angel Rama's "transculturation", which is an oscillation between "the adoption of a European model and the valorization of a national difference." (Rama, 29). In this sense, every Indian writer coming out of British colonialism "transculturates" to some degree, consciously or unconsciously. For immigrant writers, however, "transculturation" is an inexorable necessity. Quite self-consciously aware that his work is part of the ideological and material production of what is called "Third World" literature, Rushdie's "transculturation" entails a shifting between a

sophisticated mode of writing (satire, parody, fantasy) and a clinging to Hindi and Urdu words that he calls "untranslatable". He writes in *Shame* :

The word "Shame". No, I must write it in its original form, not in this peculiar language tainted by wrong concepts and the accumulated detritus of its owner's unrepented past, this Angrezi in which I am forced to write, and so forever alter what is written...Sharam, that's the word. For which this paltry "Shame" is a wholly inadequate translation. (34)

Here, Rushdie's narrator (who, as always, corresponds closely to Rushdie himself) is engaged in the split compulsion to not exclude but to not altogether include the English language. The conflict produced here may be identified as the conflict between his compulsion to translate from the Urdu and his refusal to translate into the English language. As a result, Rushdie almost always seems to include the Urdu and Hindi word, to eschew translation, even if the word signifies an inaccessible referent for a Western audience.

One could assume that this inclusion indicates nothing more than a writer's localized, rhetorical choice of language or even a token gesture towards preserving a semblance to India, were it not for the fact that Indian languages seem to occupy, in Rushdie's writing, the status which Foucault describes as amounting to "an insurrection of subjugated knowledges". (*Power/Knowledge*, 81). At least one kind of "subjugated knowledge" explicated by Foucault in *Power/Knowledge* is:

a whole set of knowledges that have been disqualified as inadequate to their task or insufficiently elaborated: naïve knowledges, located low down on the hierarchy, beneath the required level of cognition or scientificity.

This description recalls Macaulay's dismissal of Sanscrit, in his minute on education, in the face of the imperialist status of English; it also recalls the eighteenth-century Orientalist project to make scientific, by codifying, Sanscrit, Indian religion and history. (Said, 75).

In the character of Padma in *Midnight's Children* may be found an instance of Rushdie's (partial) refusal to translate and so further reinstate what is already a "subjugated knowledge" in a world dominated by power relations. A working-class female character who cannot read, Padma is the one to whom Saleem reads his narrative, even as he is in the act of writing it. As such, she determines to some extent the conditions of reading of *Midnight's Children*. Even though, at some level, Rushdie translates for us what she has to say, her broken English is structurally marked and set apart from Saleem's and Rushdie's polished English, in a way that may signify the chasms that separate their local status.

Padma, whose ahistorical folklore and earthy immediacy function as a counter to Saleem's sophisticated, historical knowledge, is the practical critic who comments on his writing. Immensely erotic (in stark contrast to Saleem), she does her utmost to arouse his sexual attention. In her impatience, Padma wants the story to move quickly and lineally, and she especially relishes sensationalistic detail: "At last", Padma says with satisfaction, "you've learned how to tell things really fast" (109). She is both contemptuous and in awe of what she terms his "writing-shiting":

(She can't read and, like all fish-lovers,  
'dislikes other people knowing anything  
she doesn't...') She attempts to cajole me  
from my desk: "eat, na, food is spoiling".  
I remain stubbornly hunched over my paper.  
"But what is so precious", Padma demands,  
her right hand slicing the air updownup in

Not able to read, she situates Saleem as a privileged, even lazy past-time. This gives Rushdie the occasion to metacritically imply that the writing of novels is an activity that is bourgeois because it is denied to the working class.

Rushdie's construction of Padma seems to indicate the pitfalls of a working class which too fantastically and passively accepts its lot in the context of a modernizing economy which has been hurtled into an industrial future at the expense of the lower class. Saleem, on the other hand, bears more affinity with this modern world, but he is impotent and cannot redirect the course of modern history. Their relationship shifts between mutual dependence and distrust, reflecting, at the cutting edge, the line that separates the working class and the bourgeoisie. Saleem consistently distances himself from her editorial corrections, as if to suggest, quite honestly, this gap that lies between them.

In *Midnight's Children*, Rushdie makes possible a methodology for our examination of Indian nationalism. According to the terms of this methodology, one cannot disengage Indian nationalism from its ideological and representational discourses because it is within these discourses that nationalism actually functions. Through a parody of political rhetoric and the news media, Rushdie forefronts the contradictions accompanying this representational and ideological functioning of nationalism. At least one nationalist discourse that Rushdie subverts is that which promotes an imagined Indian homogeneity. In *Midnight's Children*, Saleem's heterogeneity explodes the monolithic, unified nationalist "truth" of "unity in diversity". Further, in the figure of Padma, Rushdie seems to suggest that the translation of Indian subjects who lie beyond the grasp of English is necessary. Such a translation, which structurally re-writes standard English, has the power to indicate the socio-economic stratifications of a more "real" India that nationalist discourses have not accounted for, even while it radically revises standard English in the context of the "Third World".