

Chapter V

Midnight's Children

In her edition of a collection of essays on Rushdie's Midnight's Children Meenakshi Mukherjee lauds the publication of the novel as a supreme instance of a post-colonial text, which weaves several discourses about nation, history and society, thus affirming its hybrid character in global terms.

Initially seen as merely a comic, irrelevant and high-spirited novel about a fantastic protagonist whose birth coincided with the independence of India, Midnight's Children was gradually appropriated into a theoretical discourse about nation, history and their narrativity. The novel has been claimed as the paradigmatic postcolonial text subverting the notions of received historiography and indigenising both the language and the narrative mode of colonising culture. It has also been seen as the quintessential fictional embodiment of the post-modern celebration of de-centring and hybridity. The novel's insistence that realism was no longer an adequate mode for describing today's world in which there was no broad

consensus about the nature of reality, also fits in with post-modernist impulses. While the first reading makes it a major Third World text of our time, the second confers on it a central status globally (1999, 9).

The hybrid nature of Rushdie's novel ought to be assessed in the changing scenario of fiction writing in India, following 1947. Earlier, the novel in English in India was removed dynamic from the myriad and vibrant discourses of nationality, race and religion, which formed the staple of other novels in Indian languages. Compared to such novels, the English novel gained its sustenance in the strictly academic and formal but diastrophic atmosphere of the English departments, thus echoing its derivative diameter. Rushdie's novel experiments with the hybrid nature of Indian English language was its creativity to the amorphous mixing of the discourses of popular culture like that of the film, the media, the young generation of the college campuses, coffee houses, the lowest strata of society like the ghettos and so on. Indeed, the essence of Rushdie's hybrid novel lies in its effective liquidity of the erstwhile and serious imagined polarity between "an essentialised East and a similarly constructed West (Mukherjee, 11). Midnight's Children chooses to anchor itself to the mosaic of Indian culture, thus obviating the changes of elitism and estrangement, leveled against other Indian English novels.

Just like Goethe's Sorrows of Young Werther in late eighteenth century Europe and Bankim Chandra's Anandamath in late nineteenth century India, it would not be too much to claim that Midnight's Children occupies such a position in the domain of English fiction in India. This book reflects the circumstances of Rushdie's spatial dislocation and consequent cultural hybridity which are shared by other diasporic writers of the world.

Most of the events of the book are centred around the circumstances surrounding Rushdie's spatial dislocation in the post-independence era, when he left India for good and was stationed in England for seventeen years, after which his parents moved to Karachi in 1964. Having been born in Bombay, he inevitably yearns for his lost childhood in India and it is this loss of homeland, which gives to his fiction a sense of nostalgia. As a migrant artist he feels displaced in a foreign land and hence he fondly recollects and fictionally recreates the events between 1915 and 1977. The very process of recollection is stamped with a fragmentary character and the history of the subcontinent has been recreated through a technique of montage, piecing together past events from random shards of memory. In one sense, therefore, Saleem's mnemonic enterprise lacks the profession historian's claim of objectivity because he knows his fallibility and the fragmentary nature of his vision. Like his grandfather Aadam Aziz, he is condemned to look at the work

through perforated sheet. This is not only harmonious with the hybrid character of Indian culture but it also reaches out to the fragmentary nature of the migrant artist's vision. It is of importance to bear in mind that in this novel, important historical events cannot be known in any case, far less recorded. Both national as well as family history have been preserved in Saleem's memory. At the same time they have been subjected to distortion. The pickle metaphor and the pickling process metaphorically illustrates the act of preservation and its consequent distortion in the inevitable alterations during the pickling process. Saleem's chutneyfication of history mingles the disparate entities of the chronicle and stories. For example, the history of Bombay is made alive as much through the fact of the city being part of the dowry when Charles II of England married Catherine of Portugal in 1660, as through the "sthala-purana" of Mumbadevi and a galloping statue of Shivaji, because often legends create a realistic effect and become more useful than facts.

Remembering is not a simple act because there is an ample choice of alternatives. According to Neil Ten Kortenaar, Midnight's Children, has exposed the fictionality, the constructedness of all metaphors and narrative conventions implied in national history by opening out a range of possibilities. In his essay "Midnight's Children and The Allegory of History", Kortenaar has argued that one of Rushdie's most effective devices is to turn metaphor into literal truth and thereby make visible its

figurative status. Examples may be found in such central metaphors like the "birth" of a nation, where the screams, forceps and midwives have been brought in to emphasise the process of partition. Again, the "body" of the nation has been presented as something which may crack or be mutilated, along with other minor tropes like "freezing" of assets, sweeping something "below the carpet". From example, the entire fourth chapter actually takes place under the drawing room carpet. Kortenaar has very astutely observed that

The novel does expose the fictionality of the nation and of its history, but the denial of the possibility of literal truth does not deny the nation. Where there is no literal truth we must put our faith in fictions. All we have are fictions, but some fictions deserve our assent and others do not. This is Linda Hutcheon's point about postmodern representation: it affirms only in order to subvert, but subverts in order to affirm. Rushdie's novel explodes the notion of the nation having a stable identity and a single history, then invites a sceptical, provisional faith in the nation that it has exploded (1999, 28-29).

Rushdie's sense of history does not include the sense of a past recoverable by radical historians looking for the traces and the empty spaces left in the archives by classes other than the middle classes and by

groups (other than intellectuals). It remains a project by subaltern studies historians. Rushdie's novel is a commentary on the textuality of history and especially of that official history which constitutes the nation. In effect, Rushdie's enterprise is to consider and accept the nation as already mediated by the "pretext" of national history, and which may be found in its canonical form in encyclopedias and textbooks. Kortenaar points out that David Lipscomb has already shown that Rushdie had Stanley Wolpert's A New History of India beside him when he came to write Midnight's Children (1999, 29).

The organic metaphor of the body that contains the members of the nation is the site of hybridity in Midnight's Children. Rushdie's novel is an extended comment on the conventional notion that India was born on August 15, 1947. But there are more births in Wolpert's standard history of India than any multigenerational saga. In his A New History of India Wolpert writes "(t)he cultural revival had given birth to violent revolutionary offspring" (1989, 261), that British India was "severed as though by caesarian section to permit two nations to be born" (348), that the Republic of India was born on January 26, 1950 (356), and that out of the ashes of the Bangladesh War, "the world's eight largest nation had been born" (390). Rushdie has taken Wolpert's metaphors literally to add the pangs and screams; the forceps and midwives that Wolpert implies but forgets. When India was declared independent, Saleem and Shiva, along

with other midnight's children were born. National and private affairs/births coincide. Similarly, a son is born to Parvati at the same instant when Indira Gandhi declares a national emergency. Saleem virtually relates the two events.

...while Parvati pushed in the ghetto, J.P. Narayan and Morarji Desai were also goading Indira Gandhi; while triplets yelled push push push the leaders of the Janata Morcha urged the police and Army to disobey the illegal orders of the disqualified Prime Minister, so in a sense they were forcing Mrs. Gandhi to push, and as the night darkened towards the midnight hour, because nothing ever happens at any other time, triplets began to screech it's coming coming coming, and elsewhere the Prime Minister was giving birth to a child of her own (M.C. 499).

The metaphor of birth, therefore, is part of the larger metaphor of the nation and is inextricably connected with the figure of the body, as has already been seen. But along with the trope of the nation as a body comes the question of dismemberment.

In other words, the person has a body which must needs be mutilated in order to become liberated as a person/nation. Generally, historians speak of growth and maturity, as if the nation were a human child, of direction and progress and dangers, as if the nation were on a

journey, of wounds and memory, desire and dear, as if the nation had a psychology. Rushdie's novel presents the inversion of history and the dismemberment of the nation as a human child. Rushdie is of the view that the essential nature of the Indian subcontinent comprises the notion of hybridity. The partition of 1947 and the second partition leading to the creation of Bangladesh is a mockery of the principle of hybridity because he has attempted to illustrate both in Midnight's Children and in Shame that the myriad discourses of religion, race and culture form the basis of subcontinent. No religious or racial fanaticism can destroy the heterogeneous composition of Indian culture. Therefore, Rushdie's portrayal of the dismemberment of the subcontinent is a satiric commentary on the political hierarchy of both India and Pakistan. Wolpert in his book has quoted Nehru saying that he hoped that by "cutting of the head we will get rid of the headache" (347). Gandhi, on the other hand, continued to object to what he saw as the "vivisection of his motherland" (Wolpert, 347). Later he quotes Yahya Khan (of Pakistan), who had insisted that "no power on earth" could separate East and West Pakistan, since they were "two limbs of the same body" (Wolpert, 385). This literalisation of the nation as metaphor through the misshapened persona of Saleem and Shiva lies at the centre of the novel.

In the novel another image of hybridity is that of blood. Blood has been variously depicted as "mercurochrome", and blood having the

connotations of sacrifice. The violence of racial conflict results in bloodshed which might be revengeful in nature. It can also be interpreted as a sign of baptism, marking the coming of age. All these meanings of blood presume that blood is shared, so that the blood spilled by some is the same as that flowing through the veins of others who have not suffered direct violence. The dual implications of blood — blood is spilled in sacrifice and blood is shared by people who are genetically related — are invoked by the early nationalist Aurobinda for whom the soil of India was “sacred land to be loved and defended, if need be, with the blood of her children” (Wolpert, 262). Rushdie actually makes these metaphors of blood literal, in this sense, his novel raises the question of identity, which is given by the blood that is carried within one's veins and that gushes forth when the skin is broken when he injures the tip of his finger, Saleem requires an emergency transfusion and an analysis of his blood performed on that occasion, in a chapter called “Alpha and Omega”, reveals that he is not the genetic son of Ahmed and Amina Sinai and not the brother of his sister.

This incident may give rise to the following interpretations. One of them may be that the nation is imagined of a family sharing a common blood. Thus both Nehru or Jinnah might be referred to as the Father of the Nation. In both India and Pakistan the metaphor of national bloodlines has been dangerously misappropriated and the history of the nation confused

with the history of a single family. The metaphor of national bloodlines contains the essence of hybridity because different races and cultures have been subsumed under it. Therefore, such hybridity can never be confined within a single family. Moreover, both Aadam Aziz and Nehru signify hybridity in a different sense. They are from Kashmiri families; both have been educated in Europe, have lost their fathers and uphold a secular ideal and both were present at Amritsar at the time of the massacre. Containing in themselves the disparate nature of foreign and indigenous cultures as well as the ideals of secularity, Aadam and Nehru illustrate in themselves the cross currents of history and culture.

An investigation into the origins of Saleem and Shiva reveals the complex and hybrid nature of personality and state. Both in terms of national and personal history, Rushdie is inclined to present before us an alternate genealogy which signals his rejection of genealogy and the issue of pure unalloyed birth where national history is concerned. We come to know that Saleem's genetic father was a profligate English hypocrite who had taken advantage of a poor Hindu's wife and who left right at the moment when Indian independence had been declared. This is actually a literalisation of the metaphor used by Tariq Ali when writes that "(t)he new state was.... Indian in its colour, composition and make-up, but its pedigree was unmistakably British" (Ali, 1985, 78). Rushdie's alternative genealogy of Indian history therefore shows his rejection of both the

established version of national history as well as a rejection of the Indian nation-state as the bastard product of England's violation of the subcontinent in political and sexual terms. It is to be noted that such historians like Partha Chatterjee and critics like Gayatri Chakraborty Spivak constantly resist the nation-state as a bourgeois invention having no meaning for the mass of people, living within India. Kortenaar has commented on Rushdie's portrayal of an alternative genealogy in the following manner:

However, Rushdie's alternative genealogy, a debunking of the standard narrative of Indian history, draws attention to its own fictionality as well. When Mary Pereira confesses to Saleem's family the switch she perpetrated when Saleem was newly born, she exclaims that Saleem was the natural child of Vanita and her husband, the ministered Wee Willie Winkie. Mary could not have known about Vanita's adultery with the Englishman Methwold. Saleem has invented this parentage. The account of the baby switch does not give us a final true version of events, but is itself another fiction (1999, 38).

Rushdie's presentation of alternative genealogy is, in many ways, a confirmation of hybridity. Thus Saleem's legal grandfather, Dr. Aziz, is named after the main Indian character in Forster's A Passage to India;

Wee Willie Winkie the legal father in Saleem's alternate genealogy, bears the name of the English boy-hero in a story by Kipling. In this way, both parentage and identity is subjected to a rewriting of other fictions and becomes a fiction itself. Kortenaar remarks that

Even the rejection of genealogical succession and of history involves a choice of narratives. The radical stance that sees Indian history as a rape is itself dependent on a metaphor (1999, 38-39).

The subject of history in Midnight's Children becomes a competing account of different texts. This mongrelisation of history gives to the novel much of its hybrid status. We have seen the elaborate constructions of interlocking metaphors in this novel have been based upon the provision of an alternative view of history, which combines both the metaphorical and the literal. In this connection Rukmini Bhaya Nair in her essay "History as Gossip in Midnight's Children" has shown how Rushdie has created a satire, history and religious discourse and which largely conflict with each other, resulting in a fragmented ethos. She has the following comment to offer on Rushdie's employment of speculative gossip, which uses history as both a pre-text and a pretext.

In selecting satire as a formal technique of fictional representation, the writer may be committed, by the very terms of his craft, to the appropriation of a reality that is

reified in other powerful modes of discourse such as the historical or the religious. By analysing the manner in which history is retold as satirical gossip in Rushdie's Midnight's Children, this essay attempts to demonstrate how Rushdie created therein a unique narrative such an appropriation.... It is my contention that the perspectives adopted by Rushdie's characters in Midnight's Children on the events, personal and eventualities of history are typically those of voyeurs, secret sharers. An eavesdropper hears a different story from one that is publicly mooted and the narrative that s/he consequently produces has the flavour of lip-smacking gossip rather than bland documentation.... (Thus the) telling of the untellable is the voyeur's vocation (My parenthesis) (1999, 50-51).

On the other hand we find in society the grand narratives of history, economics and ethics. On the other hand, there is speculative gossip, through which the grand narratives have been effectively subverted. Such sub-versions/subversions of history and religion have been enacted through the creation of doubt about established version of facts. Gossip actually consists of a fragmentary telling of parts of story. It also involves the bystander into making moral comments. Gossip gives rise to interest in the trivias and such secondary details run counters to

main narratives. It also functions as exposed by revealing the lapses of people. In this way the discourse of gossip legitimises blasphemies, obscurities, and scatological details. Finally, gossip functions as an undermining discourse; as something which takes place behind the scenes, where the trust between teller and listener becomes implicit (1999, 53). Functioning as a form of “apostasy text”, it acts as a critique of any form of authoritarianism in politics, religion and society. In this way the hybrid nature of historical discourse may be understood as the official grand narrative of the nation-state and the apostasy text of the gossip, which runs counter to it. History, then may be said to enact its own subversion/sub-version in such secondary narratives. It can either reject it or engage itself in conflict. The complicated status of historical narratives has been questioned in Midnight's Children by gossip, which operates, as Rukmini says, as a form of “interventionist discourse” (Mukherjee, 1999, 54). In Midnight's Children the boatman Tai, Padma, Durga among others turn gossip, into secondary narratives and stories. In Shame Rushdie compares gossip to water, which characteristically oozes to find all sorts of work places. In any case, history is manifested through the dialectical oscillation between the languages of sacralisation and blasphemy.

This mongrelisation of history takes place at several sections in the novel. Initially, the fragmentation of history may be located in the metaphor of the “perforated sheet” through which Saleem's grandfather

Dr. Aadam Aziz originally glimpses parts of a patient, who later became his wife. In this way, the shifting, changing mirage-like dreams constantly defamiliarise the contours of history as we know it in our making moment. We come to know history by acquainting ourselves with its myriad portions, imaginatively restructuring the missing links.

So gradually Doctor Aziz came to have a picture of Naseem in his mind, a badly-fitting collage of her severally-inspected parts. This phantasm of a portioned woman began to haunt him, and not only in his dreams. Glued together by his imagination, she accompanied him on all his rounds, she moved into the front room of his mind, so that waking and sleeping he could feel in his fingertips the softness of her ticklish skin on the perfect tiny wrists on the beauty of the ankles; he could smell her scent of lavender and chambeli; he could hear her voice and her helpless laughter of a young girl; but she was headless, because he had never seen her face (M.C., 23).

We have already noted how the grand narratives of history and religion produce their own sub-version/subversions. However, it is important to understand Rushdie's stance behind such critique of established versions of history. In all what he has said and written, it remains a fact that Rushdie exemplifies the type and characteristics of the

migrant artist, who crosses continents, nations and cultures. He has often said that he had abruptly lost his faith in his fifteenth year, when he was at school in England (I.H., 377). In his essay "In God We Trust" in the collection of essays, Imaginary Homelands (1991), he has explained how he has rejected religion in favour of art with reference to the subtle co-existence and mingling of the fantastic and the real in all forms of life.

As for religion, my work, much of which has been concerned with India and Pakistan, has made it essential for to confront the issue of religious faith. Even the form of my writing was affected. If one is to attempt honestly to describe reality as it is experienced by religious fact, then the conventions of what is called realism are quite inadequate. The rationalism of that form comes to seem like a judgement upon, an invalidation of, the religious faith of the characters being described. A form must be created which allows the miraculous and mundane to co-exist at the same level — as the order of event. I found this to be essential even though I am not, myself, a religious man (I.H., 376).

Midnight's Children embodies Rushdie's supreme attempt to embody the miraculous and the mundane through the medium of hybrid language. He has opened a Pandora's box of infinite possibilities by

inventing a magic language which uses the medium of English but incorporates many ideas and terms from Indian languages. Rushdie's unique and gargantuan enterprise has been explained by Professor Harish Trivedi in his essay "Salman the Funtoosh: Magic Bilingualism in Midnight's Children" in Mukherjee's collection of critical essays on the novel.

Trivedi has indicated that the Kenyan novelist Ngugiwa Thiong'o wanted to write back at the Empire in his own Gikuyu, instead of English. But he has shown how Rushdie has attempted to strike back at the Empire through his use of English. Apparently, his use of English, might be interpreted as a concession to the multinational language with its implications of liberalisation and globalisation of the subcontinent. Rushdie's brilliant hybridisation of English language has enabled him to conquer English by using it as a medium. Trivedi writes:

However, Rushdie's claim to "conquer English" had a more strictly textual and stylistic dimension as well. It is reported that when Martin Amis was once asked what it was that Rushdie had and he did not, he had pointedly answered: 'India'. It was this India represented by its major language Hindi-Urdu which Rushdie seemed to want to interpolate into his English as a strategy for conquering it, rather as a Trojan horse.... Rushdie's solution in

Midnight's Children was to bring in India, not only as the grand theme but also as part of the medium. It could be argued that the single most remarkable novum that Rushdie introduced in his use of English here was his incorporation of some Indian, *i.e.*, Hindi-Urdu/Hindustani words, phrases and collocations. He did not subvert English from within, in the trendy radical catch-phrase of his youth; rather, he changed it from without (1999, 73).

Rushdie's hybridisation of English was successful since it came just after the wave of the Raj nostalgia, the BBC TV series on the Empire, the novels by Paul Scott and M.M. Kaye; Attenborough's Gandhi and David Lean's picturisation of A Passage to India. In his essay "Outside the Whale" in Imaginary Homelands Rushdie has forcefully denounced them all at some length (87-106). However, the cultural context was just ripe for Rushdie's experiment. He locates his fictional experiment in the wake of "Raj revisionism" and "the rise of conservative ideologies in modern Britain" (I.H., 92).

In his novel Rushdie often uses a Hindi word, which is bracketed together with an English translation placed immediately before or after it, for instant intelligibility. Sometimes, a Hindi and an English word are juxtaposed to form a phrase or, more visibly, a name, for example, Picture Singh. "In another variation, traditional names such as Padma and Ganesh

are evoked, and allusions made to their etymological or mythical aspects, so that the bilingualism of the novel is set in the wider control of biculturalism" (Mukherjee, 1999, 74). Trivedi explains how the introduction of Hindi words and phrases, to which the Western reader would not have had access on his own, outlines the cultural difference between him/her and the author and which no other device can. Such instances lead to what is known as hybridity, where on the one hand cultural difference is pronounced and on the other, the foreign reader is also insisted to acquaint himself with the temper of Indian cultural currents through his enrichment of vocabulary, permitted by the author. In other words, Indian culture may be foreign to outsiders but at the same time, those readers from outside the subcontinent may also claim to acquire authentic knowledge of India, hitherto denied to them. Trivedi has drawn our attention to the use of foreign words as a badge of authenticity in Indian English writing prior to Rushdie, especially in R.K. Narayan, Raja Rao, Mulk Raj Anand and more categorically in G.V. Desani's novel All About H. Hatterr (1948). But it remains indubitable that Rushdie's "bilingualism made a greater impact than that of any previous Indian writer, on his Western readers certainly" (Mukherjee, 1999, 75).

The self-sustaining academic activity of compiling a grand gloss of all the Indian words, phrases and allusions in the novel has been undertaken by the Canadian critic Neil Ten Kortenaar. His list collated by

Harish Trivedi includes place names (144 items, including Amul Diaries, Bandung, Chhamb, Dadar and the Vindhyas), historical figures (178 items, including A.V. Alexander, Catherine of Braganza, Rajiv, Sanjay and Maneka Gandhi, Iltutmish, Indra and Isa), a list of words from the Indian languages (33 items, including baap-re-baap, bhang, bhangis, charas and falooda), words to do with religion (112 items), literary and cultural allusions (139 items, including the Arjuna Indiabike, Coconut Day, Golden Bengal), and names of characters which are "Rushdie's rather than Saleem's allusions" (94 items) (Mukherjee, 1999, 75-76).

Rushdie's chutneyfication of history and of narrative is, therefore, part of his hybrid art and literary world. Trivedi remarks that Rushdie's bilingualism and biculturalism does indeed form a peculiar crux when his works are translated into any Indian language and especially into Hindi (Mukherjee 1999, 78). Although the Hindi translation of Midnight's Children had nearly sold out within a year of its publication, it has been noted by Trivedi that Rushdie has not made any great waves in Hindi; the entire appeal of Midnight's Children may be located in the Western World rather than the Orient. Thus, according to Trivedi,

The whole orientation of his narrative seems to suggest that it is addressed not to an Indian insider but to a Western outsider. The shocking novelty and the precious rarity of the novel which arose from the 'Indianness' of the text as

well as the author, and which helped make it such a huge sensation in the West, can hardly be experienced as such in India, whether by someone reading him in English or in translation.... Perhaps no man is a prophet in his own land and language, especially when he has turned his back upon them, and certainly not for the same reasons for which he has become a prophet in a foreign land and language (1999, 81).

What Rushdie has actually done is to encourage a whole new generation of Indians to start writing in English, and each one of them is marked by his hybrid character since they write in a bilingual medium. Rukun Advani, in his essay "Novelists in Rushdie" has blasphemed by saying that "as everyone knows in the beginning there was Rushdie, and the word was with Rushdie" (Advani 1991, 15-16). In this way, Rushdie may be said to have let loose Indian Anglophone tongues. He has launched a plethora of "Indo-Anglian novels" and he has imparted confidence to all his successors the confidence to spice their English at least nominally with elements which are distinctly not English. Rushdie has inspired a generation of hybrid writing which may aptly be termed, after Trivedi, as "Rushdification" and which actually means the decolonisation of English language or its subsequent "Indianisation" (Mukherjee, 1999, 88). Through its bilingual character, Rushdie's fictions

as well as that of his followers illustrate the sub-version/ subversion of the English language. Ironically, it is seen that the use of English gives rise to the need for a bilingual/multilingual language, which may suggest, however subliminally, or paradoxically that English is not the only language in the world. The process of colonisation through the imperial language has been turned upside down by Rushdie. He has made this possible by creating an ideological space inhabited by both the coloniser and the colonised, and where both can touch each other and interact. Hybridity becomes a site of writing where multi-cultural forces operate but are never reducible to one single language. This "interstitial indeterminacy" of the in-betweenness of the author reflects the ideology of the migrant artist, who experiences the fact of being "translated" or being "force across" nations and continents (Mukherjee, 1999, 86).

In most of his fictions as well as critical writings, Rushdie shows that the migrant artist's nature betrays a kind of ambiguity or doubleness. Bhabha writes,

This liminality of migrant experience is no less a transitional phenomenon than a transnational one; there is no resolution to it because the two conditions are ambivalently enjoined in the 'survival' of the migrant life.... The subject of cultural difference becomes a problem that Walter Benjamin has described as the

irresolution, or liminality, of 'transition', the element of resistance in the process of transformation 'that element in a translation which does not lead itself to translation' (1994, 224).

Trivedi has pointed out that while the literally 'transitional' aspect of a character like Saladin Chamcha and the extraneous dimension of 'hybridity' as religious 'heresy' may make the Satanic Verses a textually illustrative of "the trials of cultural translation" in Bhaba's interpretation, it is not evident that anything even half as a problematic begins to happen in Midnight's Children. Trivedi's judgement may be taken as a passing comment, not to be taken too seriously because throughout his essay on "Salman the Funtoosh" he has not only emphasised Rushdie's hybridisation of the English language but he has stated in no certain terms that some of the images in Midnight's Children do actually depict the very condition and idea of hybridity. He writes in the same essay that

Of all the images of multi-cultural hybridity that Rushdie's work contains, perhaps none is more representative than one he borrows from the Hindi film Shree 420, which he uses at the beginning of The Satanic Verses and which, as he has elsewhere suggested, 'could almost be Saleem's theme song (1999, 89).

However, Trivedi in his analysis of the novel indicates another aspect of Rushdie's fiction. He states that Rushdie's hybridity often inclines to the comic, playful, dramatic, rather than serious. Such performative quality about his prose has also elicited the following comment from Catherine Cundy:

Rushdie in Midnight's Children asks us to admire the display of literary fireworks, conjuring tricks and fantastic items pulled from the artist's hat (Cundy, 1999, 43).

According to Merivale, in "Midnight's Children and Tristram Shandy" (1986) in Mukherjee's collection of essays on the novel, this colourful and dramatic character of Rushdie's hybridity may be explained by his continuation of the real and the fantastic. Rushdie has perpetuated the genre of magic realism (in his novel Midnight's Children), which he has inherited from Gunter Grass and Gabriel Garcia Marquez. Patricia explains that

With the help of Rushdie's recent critical collection, Imaginary Homelands, we can now piece together the views that underlie his magic realism, expressive as it is not only of a specifically 'third-world consciousness' but also of the more generally 'international' and 'migrant' status that he claims to share with, among many others, Gunter Grass. Such a writer is free to choose his

parents... (from) a polygot family tree (I.H., 20-21); in this way, I suggest, Saleem's terertextual relationship to Oscar is a genealogical allegory of Rushdie's 'choosing' of Grass. And for the 'migrant' writer, magic realism is the appropriate mode, for it provides the 'stereoscopic vision' with which he can 'see things plainly' enough to 'invent the earth beneath his feet' (I.H., 19, 20, 149). Thus, Rushdie finds the marvellous in what, like Macondo, is magic precisely because it is real (302), 'imbuing the... world (and the world of the text) with... radiance and meaning (251) by means of his "translation" of Grass (1996, 130).

And here it may be noted that according to Rushdie the act of translation does not imply Bhabha's idea of "the element of resistance in the process of transformation" or "that element in a translation which does not lead itself to translation" (1999, 224). In his collection of essays, Imaginary Homelands Rushdie locates the etymological meaning of translation in the Latin equivalent for the word, which carries the connotations of "bearing across". Thus he opines that

"Having been borne across the world, we are translated men. It is normally supposed that something always gets lost in translation; in clinging, obstinately to the notions that something can also be gained

(I.H., 1992, 17).” Rushdie reminds us that we are not simply Indians, but Indians, who have been the recipient of a hybrid culture. And that, after the British had left India, we are preoccupied with the task of a linguistic struggle, which is actually a reflection of other struggles taking place in ourselves as well as in our society. Herein lies the crux of the mystery surrounding the novel. Midnight's Children has been written from a kind of “double perspective” where the author is a migrant and an outsider as well as an insider both by virtue of his umbilical chord and his emotional attachment to his birth-place and which he is never likely to forget. This has been well illustrated in his recent collection of articles, entitled Steps Across This Line.

This hybrid nature of Rushdie's art has been explained variously in terms of intertextual strategies and the astonishing density of allusions to both Tin Drum and other Indian, Eastern texts, not to speak of other Western stories. Rushdie's “bricolage” of texts, both Western and Indian, which has been amply illustrated in his “totalising intertextuality” may, in Patriacia's words, be either an act of “inverting the processes of ‘colonial’ domination” or the act of “displacing the ‘overt cosmopolitanism’ of which Brennan, more judgementally speaks” (1999, 130). In all this Rushdie may seem to be echoing Gunter Grass's assertion that his status belongs to those people who had entered the conditions of metaphor.

They may be said to be always writing at the frontier between different cultures of other nations (1999, 130).

In this context, Patricia in her essay "Midnight Children and Tristan Shandy" thoughtfully outlines the act of translation by Rushdie in Midnight's Children, which is as flamboyant as it is skillful, and is a "bricolage" of themes, topic, events, characters, images, fictions — of which Marquez's One Hundred Years of Solitude (1967) and Grass's The Tin Drum (1959) are two most significant instances of 'Magic Realism' (1999, 116). In her brilliant analysis Patricia has traced the hybrid appeal of Rushdie's novel to the strategies of Marquez and Grass. She explains that

In its multiplied fantasies, its introductions to the supernatural into the everyday, its hauntings and its 'traffic of the dead' (Marquez, 378), its characters fatally crushed by their obsessions, and above all in its apocalyptic vision of the extinction of a family from the earth, standing synecdochilly, at its conclusion, for a more general apocalypse, it is indeed a most 'Marquezan' book, and its magic is largely a 'Marquezan' magic. But insofar as 'its mimetic quotient' can be seen for the most part as an imitation of history, its 'realism', in the sense of its literary

strategies for imitating history, owes more to The Tin Drum. In books where ambiguous paternity forms a large part of the search for origins (and in a metafiction where 'origins' must also be metatextual ones), the putative father of Rushdie's hero-narrator, Saleem Sinai, must be (by a somewhat subtler genealogical model of intertextuality) Grass's dwarf, Oskar, even though, metaphorically speaking, Saleem thinks of himself as 'fathered by history' (1999, 117).

It is supremely ironic to think that Saleem might be handcuffed to history but Salman is not. Midnight's Children depicts the history of India since independence and this history has been inscribed in the fantastic autobiography of a man who had much of his education in England, who was born in India as a Muslim and whose family now resides in Pakistan. Again, Rushdie is a trespasser because he not only belongs to England but also the United States of America. It is interesting to note that Saleem is born to an Englishman and a low-caste Hindu, but is brought up in a Muslim family who believe that he is their son. In the novel, Saleem is shown to have multiple parents in his uncle and aunt, in a German expert of snake venom, in his mother's first husband, and in the snake charmer, Picture Singh. Saleem's hybrid origin is symbolic because it echoes

Rushdie's multicultural ambience in which he moves, lives and has his being. It is paradoxical to note that because he is an outsider, the whole of India is available to Rushdie. On one level, the novel might be said to be a product of the deranged fantasy of a megalomaniac who believes that he contains within himself a nation. Rushdie puts the entire nation within Saleem. Rushdie's novel is characteristically impudent, and it tries, as both cause and effect of its impudence, to swallow India whole, to vie with Krishna and ingest worlds. It is also characteristically fantastic. For Rushdie, India is an "imaginary country", a "mass fantasy", a "collective fiction", a country that could never have existed "except by the effort of phenomenal collective will — except in a dream we all agreed to dream" (M.C., 111). Rushdie as the migrant artist has therefore been successful in portraying the extraordinary diversity and hybridity of India. This has been encapsulated in the character of Saleem who accommodates the experiences of more than 600 million of his fellow countrymen.

In this sense the important events in modern Indian history occurred because Saleem was their agent. Thus he affirms that "the war happened because I dreamed Kashmir into the fantasies of our rulers; furthermore, I remained impure, and the war was to separate me from my sins" (M.C., 404-405). Saleem, in fact, controls political movements in Pakistan also. In the coup of Ayub Khan, for instance, Saleem assists in

troop formation and directs their movements by shuffling pepperpots around a banquet table in a demonstration for Ayub's generals.

What began, active metaphorically, with pepperpots, ended then; not only did I overthrow a government — I also consigned a president to exile (M.C., 349).

Similarly, in the separation Bangladesh, Saleem confesses,

I remained responsible through the workings of the metaphorical modes of connection, for the belligerent events of 1971 (M.C., 420).

Thus, it is this mingling of history with myth, psychology, satire and fantasy that gives to Midnight's Children much of its hybrid status. In other words, as Homi Bhabha in Nation and Narration has indicated that

The 'locality' of national culture is neither unified nor unitary in relation to itself, nor must it be seen simply as 'other' in relation to what is outside or beyond it. The boundary is Janus-faced and the problem of outside/inside must always itself be a process of hybridity, incorporating new 'people' in relation to the body politic, generating other sites of meaning and, inevitably, in the political process, producing unmanned sites of political antagonism and unpredictable forces for political representation....

What emerges as an effort of such 'incomplete

signification' is a turning of boundaries and limits into the in-between spaces through which the meanings of cultural and political authority are negotiated. It is from such narrative positions between cultures and nations, theories and texts, the political, the poetic and the painterly, the past and the present, that Nation and Narration seeks to affirm... (1990, 4).

Rushdie as a migrant artist is in a unique position to maneuver through the in-between spaces not only between nations and communities but also among those in-between spaces within a nation itself. Indeed, politics, myth, nationalism, fiction and history become a rich site of cultural interaction, which transcends boundaries of race, creed, religion and nation. Midnight's Children is a supreme testimony to this confluence of cross cultural contexts.