



Post-modern traits in the novel of Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children.*

Kalyan Kishor
Barman

Research Scholar, Department of Studies in English, North Bengal
University, Siliguri

KEYWORDS :

Post-modernism has been defined as-- " a style and movement in art, architecture, literature etc. in the late twentieth century that reacts against modern style, for example, by mixing features from traditional and modern style." post-modernism is a complicated term emerged as an area of academic study in mid 1980s of the last century. Its scope is very wide and comprehensive. It includes literature, fine arts, architecture, sociology, music, fashion and many other aspects of society. Commenting on post-modernism Terry Eagleton remarks : "Post-modernism takes something from both modernism and the avant-garde, and in a sense plays one off against the other. From modernism proper, post-modernism inherits the fragmentary or schizoid self, but eradicates all critical distances from it, countering this with a pokerfaced presentation of bizarre experiences which resemble certain avant-garde gestures. From the avant-garde post-modernism takes the dissolution of art into social life, the rejection of tradition, an opposition of high culture as such but crosses this with the unpolitical impulses of modernism. It thus unwillingly exposes the residual formalism of any radical art from which identifies the disinstitutionalization of art and its reintegration with other social practices, as an intrinsically revolutionary move. Post-modern art stands for reflexivity and self-consciousness, fragmentation and discontinuity, ambiguity, simultaneity and an emphasis on the destructed, decentered and dehumanized subject"

English fiction in 1990 was chiefly influenced by the wave of post-modernism which brought radical changes in the Indian English fiction. Indian English fiction writers can not deny the same effect in their writings. Post-modernism was a continuation of modernism, a revolt against authority and signification. J.F. Lyotard defines post-modernism as: Incredulity towards meta-narrative. This incredulity is undoubtedly a product of progress in the science: but that progress in turn presupposes it to the obsolescence of the meta-narrative apparatus of the meta-narrative, apparatus of legitimation corresponds, most notably, the crisis of metaphysical philosophy and of the university institution which in the past relied on it. The narrative function is losing its functions- its great hero, its great dangers, its great voyages, its great goal, it is being dispersed in clouds of narrative language elements- narrative but also denotative, prescriptive, and so on [...] where, after meta-narrative, can legitimacy reside? (Lyotard: 79)

In the recent period, contemporary novelists borrowed and adapted Euro-American post-modernism in an indigenous way to appreciate the sheer narrative, linguistic and technical experiment, made in their fiction. The purpose of this paper will be to examine how post-modernism has determined and developed the Indian novel in English and the certain novelists. Indian writing in English has stamped its greatness by mixing up tradition and modernity in their art. The novels written in late 20th century, especially after the second world war are considered as postmodern novels.

Salman Rushdie is one of the best known post modernist in India.

He is immensely influenced by the political and cultural milieu of post independent India. Cultural fragmentation, colonial and neo-colonial power structure, materialistic off-shoots of modern civilization, dying of human relationship, social injustice, blending of facts and fantasy, search for love and security are the major preoccupations in the writings of Salman Rushdie. As per post modernists national boundaries are hindrance to human communication. They believe that nationalism causes war. So postmodernists speak in favour of globalization. *Midnight's Children* centers around multiracial and multiethnic is-

suues as wandering cosmopolitan who roves around and like Rushdie his characters like Adam Aziz, Saleem, Mia Abdulla did not approve the Partition of India and forming of Pakistan. Mia Abdulla popularly known as hummingbird sacrificed his life for united India.

Postmodern novels celebrate Diaspora. Like Amitav Ghosh Salman Rushdie highlights the theme of diaspora in *Midnight's Children*. The story moves from Kashmir to Agra then to Bombay and from Karachi to Dhaka. Sinai family moves from place to place and do not stick to any particular place. Saleem however finds that Bombay and India is his only satisfaction. He does not like Karachi and does not find Dhaka as his sweet home. Magical Realism is one of the chief Postmodern traits best exemplified by Rushdie. It had been started by South American Novelists like Gabriel Garcia Marquez and Isabel Allende. In this technique magical and unreal elements play a natural part in an otherwise realistic environment. Rushdie successfully blends facts and fiction to create a magical realistic environment. He describes the killing of hummingbird in a very magical realistic manner which heightens the beauty of the novel—"six new moon came into the room, six crescent knives held by men dressed in all black, with covered faces. Two men held Nadir Khan while the other moved towards hummingbird". The entire episode is described in a magical realistic manner. The whole incidents of the novel pass before our eyes that we often mistake the story as dream or reality. Anita Desai in Washington post writes: "*Midnight's Children* burgeons with life, with exuberance and fantasy. It has the same effect on the eyes and the ears as magnificent circular performance—a scene that is filled with colour, zest, daredevilry and loud bravado. The language is as full and copious as a flood or fire of tremendous proportion. Blurring of genre is one of the major preoccupations of postmodern novel. No particular text has been followed in *Midnight's Children*. Oriental and western texts have been made use in this novel. The narrative has been borrowed from *Punctantra* and *Kathasritsagar*. The bizarre and the fantastic blur the boundaries between real and improbable in the novel. We can see the predominance of mythical and fantastic creatures like beast-human, witches, djins coexisting with the human. His characters are in a constant state of flux and metamorphosis. Saleem is transformed into a she dog CUTTIA 'canine unite for tracking intelligence'. Post-modernism celebrates itself in Fragmentation. In *Midnight's Children*, Salman Rushdie emphasizes pieces and fragments—both fragmented characters and objects—which symbolize a fragmented India. The perforated sheet serves as a major form of fragmentation, through which Adam is introduced and falls in love with Nasseem. This fragmented love is passed down in the family also. Saleem acknowledged that he too is fragmented. Saleem's life is broken into two parts; that of old India and that of the new. Religiosity in Adam is also fragmented. After hitting his nose while praying he, "he resolved never again to kiss the earth for any God or man" (p- 4). The country itself is fragmented into India and Pakistan.

Post-modern novels are called 'hybrids'. *Midnight's Children* is no exception from that. It includes combination and mixing of multiple, seemingly opposing elements in a manner that maintains the various elements characteristics which melt together to create some new element. Hybridity of country is presented through the multiple narrative heritage; Hindu myths and legends, Sufi metaphors, Christian and Islamic motives, folklores, oral tales etc. There are also tales of prophet Mohamed and Jesus Christ. India is described in new myth; a collective fiction and Saleem states there are so many stories to tell, too many such an excess of interlined lives, events, miracles, places and rumours. Saleem himself is truly cosmopolitan. He is partly Hindu partly

Muslim and partly Christian intermixing of various religious and cultures that make up India.

Post-modern novels fuse facts and fantasy. Fantasy is a subversive medium which provides an alternative view of history. Killing of Miyan Abdulla was described in a fantastic language which straight narrative would become ugly and grotesque. Post-modern novelists often use actual historical events and actual historical characters taking part in their novel. In *Midnight's Children* many historical characters such as Indira Gandhi, Sekh Mujibur Rahaman, Sanjay Gandhi, Babu Jagjiban Ram, Morarji Desai, Jayprakash Narayan, take part in the course of narrative. Many historical incidents such as Jalianwala Bag massacre, forced castration by Indira Gandhi, partition of India, Indo-pak war, theft of Moahmad's hair from Hajratbal Mosque, surrender of Pakistani fauj to Sam Manekshaw are part of the text. Presence of the author is one of the conventions of postmodern novels. *Midnight's Children* is in the first person narrative. Throughout the text we feel the presence of the author.

Incredulity towards metanarrative is highlighted by the postmodern novelists. J.F. Lyotard says—"simplifying to the extreme I define post-modern as incredulity towards metanarrative." Truth is elusive, can not be comprehended, so small narrative is preferred instead of metanarrative. Truth in *Midnight's Children* is presented through various angles. Pastiche is the favourite style of postmodern. In *Midnight's Children* many genres like cinematography, detective fiction, war fiction, pop culture etc. have been incorporated. Rushdie used oriental and Western texts in the novel. He is indebted to few works like *thousand and one night*, Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*, Gunter Grass's *Tin Drum*, Rudyard Kipling's *Kim*. Rushdie also owes his narrative device to *Punchtantra* and *Kathasarit Sagar*. Temporal distortion is the narrative style of postmodernism. The author jumps backward and forward. It uses a nonlinear technique. It is frequently used in film known as flashback. The narrative began in the middle with the birth of Saleem. Then the pre-independence incidents of Adam Sinai are conveyed in the flashback.

Postmodern novelists like Amitav Ghosh and Salman Rushdie advocate liberal ethics. *Midnight's Children* is a saga of liberal ethics and rational thinking. Adam Sinai did not approve the formation of Pakistan only for religious cause. Humming birds sacrificed his life for this cause. Adam Sinai discarded the home tutor for teaching bigotry. Maximalism has been the favourite trait of postmodern novelists. *Midnight's Children* gives us excess. Saleem is not only one identity but he is in excess. Saleem brought with him enormous amount of baggage, of history of family etc. Irony, playfulness, black humour are the hallmarks of post modern novelists. The facts and situations are presented in vein of irony. The fate of the country after independence is presented in the vein of mockery and irony. A free country after two hundred years of slavery imposes emergency in a naked way. Sanjay

Gandhi forces men to castration. Postmodern novelists lavishly utilize myth and folk lore in their novels in order to heighten the narrative beauty. In *Midnight's Children* Rushdie used various myths and folk lore. Boatman Thai represents one of such myth. He never bathed in his life and his bodily odour is so disgusting that birds flew from garden and flowers fainted. Saleem is converted into a she dog 'CUT-TIA' for his extraordinary power of smelling. Brash monkey, as much animal and human had a gift of talking to birds and cats.

Postmodern novelists bear a liberal view of ethics and religion and do not advocate for any particular religion. All religions are valid and are the means of human salvation. Adam is a liberal minded man. He does not believe in fanaticism. Saleem though being a Mohamedan has good knowledge in Hindu scripture and Christian ethics. In *Midnight's Children* Rushdie does not advocate any dogmatic truth. He searched for a critical knowledge of the society. Rushdie believed that absolute knowledge is unattainable—"Truth itself is a contingent affair and assumes a different shape in the light of differing local urgencies and conviction associated with them." (Fish-207) Rushdie approached to create truth from multiangle. "Text does not merely reflect social reality but create it" (Pallerson-260) Self-conceptualization and rational logic are spurned by Rushdie. Rushdie preferred to rely on opinion rather than facts. Postmodern novelists often dare to question the traditional authority as it is often corrupt and false. Rushdie preferred to be critical about traditional establishment. Adam Aziz after injuring his big nose discarded the habit of prayer. Like Amitav Ghosh he preferred to be an intellectual rather than a devout follower of any particular religion. Postmodern novelists do not believe in illusion. They are disillusioned people. Rushdie is disillusioned about modern science, technology and government. Postmodern novels bear a paranoid attitude. This paranoid attitude came from the idea that society can not be properly explained or understood. The chaos of the society gave a paranoid atmosphere in *Midnight's Children*.

Historiographic metafiction is one of the preoccupations of postmodernism. Actual historic characters and events serve as background of postmodern novels. Like Amitav Ghosh Rushdie utilizes history. Through the story of Sinai family the history of Indian subcontinent found expression. All the major events of Indian history—from the independence to declaration of emergency by Indira Gandhi have been eloquently expressed in *Midnight's Children*. Thus from the above examination we can say that *Midnight's Children* is the best example of postmodern novel. All the important traits known to be postmodern have been found expression in this novel.

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