

Indian Fiction in English
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Lecture - 16
Midnight's children: An introduction

Before I tell you what I have got with me, I want you to quickly tell me what is your understanding of postcolonialism. **"Professor-student conversation starts"** (()) (00:23) in the sense of historical period. It is right after this sense of identity as (()) (00:33) but as a big country and then the writings that belongs to the country. Who are some of the postcolonial writers. Even Ruth Praver some, even outside India, Coetzee. h. What makes his writing postcolonial? It is a narrative that is not colonial Praver's narrative. **"Professor-student conversation ends"**

Okay, that is different postcolonialisms when you talk about different literatures, so broadly it can be said that it is a rejection of the colonial narrative and in a certain sense if you look at for example Midnight's Children as a postcolonial text, there is a rejection of the grand narrative of the nation as well. So, it is both simultaneously working together, rejection of the colonialist historiography and to a certain extent the rejection of the nationalist historiography as well.

This work Midnight's Children has been considered as the text that inaugurated both the postcolonial moment as well as the postmodern moment in writing in English. Postmodernism is also a rejection of all the grand narratives. It is an incredulity towards metanarratives and this work has also been considered as very typically postmodern. There is this postmodern (()) (01:53) Linda Hutcheon, who even coined where to talk about these sort of works historiographic metafiction.

So, this work in that sense it is seized to become a national property. This is no longer part of national literature in that sense, when Rushdie has also become an international celebrity as you know.

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Midnight's Children

- ◆ Published in 1981
- ◆ James Tait Black Memorial Prize in 1981
- ◆ Booker Prize in 1981
- ◆ Booker of Bookers in 1993
- ◆ Best of the Booker in 2008

So, about *Midnight's Children* it was published in 1981 and as soon as it was published, there was an instant kind of recognition and instant celebrity status that this work acquired almost like overnight and this also happens to be his second work. Which was the first one that he wrote any idea? It was a very less known not so successful work called *Grimus*. It was mostly an experiment in science fiction. That was not successful at all.

Only after *Midnight's Children* became a huge success, we started looking at *Grimus* now. There is also like considerable scholarly work that exists on *Grimus* as well. As soon as this was published, it went to win a series of prizes, the important ones being James Tait Black Memorial Prize in 1981 and the Booker Prize in 1981. Its popularity did not end by this moment of winning the Booker prize and we also know the entire gamut of Indian writing in English, Indian fiction in English gets redefined after Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*.

In 1993, again *Midnight's Children* wins Booker of Bookers and in 2008 Best of the Booker. It is impossible not to take a look at this text and if you look at the scholarly body of what that exists it is almost unsurpassed by any other writings which have been published and there have been lot of flack also that this work acquired, it was not really the merit of Rushdie that moment required this sort of a writing and anyone would have written in a similar way. Those sort of things have been there.

Many have rejected the deliberate magic realism that (()) (04:03), but nevertheless now it is difficult to ignore this text. If you want to work again on *Midnight's Children* as a research, you would find it very, very hard to look at newer themes, look at newer frameworks within which you can situate this text because this work is one of those works, which have been like done to death as they say.

There are this companions which have emerged. There are works which look at the intertextual elements and in all of those frameworks, though he is seen as part of Indian writing in English, his persona as well as this text reception has seized to be national. It is now seen as a text which is part of the Gendal postcolonial (()) (04:49) as well as the contemporary world literature. That is a kind of status that *Midnight's Children* enjoys.

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Salman Rushdie

- ◆ British Indian – b.1947
- ◆ International Celebrity. Controversial. Best known face of IE Fiction
- ◆ *Satanic Verses* – Fatwa – 1989
- ◆ *MC* made into movie – 2012 – more controversy
- ◆ *MC* is Rushdie's second novel: (First one *Grimus*)

Salman Rushdie is a British Indian, who was born in 1947. British Indian as far as right now his identity is concerned of Indian origin entirely. Now he is an International celebrity, we have no doubts about that, much has been written about him, not just as a literary writer but also in terms of the political controversies that he caused. You all must be familiar with the fatwa, which was issued against him in 1989 by "**Professor-student conversation starts**" Who issued this fatwa against him? Irans h. yeah Ayatollah Khomeini. "**Professor-student conversation ends**"

If you are not familiar with this controversy, please read up about that. This event also further sort of elevated his status as a celebrity and for a while he even had to remain under cover underground as he puts it for a very long time, his autobiography which came out, he does not really call it as an autobiography. There was his work that he published quite recently Joseph Anton, that is mostly autobiographical in nature.

It also talks extensively about his period, which he had to spend rather anonymously in Britain after the fatwa in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Joseph Anton incidentally is the name that he acquired during that time. He could not really lead a normal life for a long time. The magic of his writing is such that though we may have like lot of reservations against him, the kind of controversy that he has been part of it various points of time, even Joseph Anton, it forces us to sympathize with the author in certain way.

He talks extensively about the way he had been sidelined within India and about his relationships and the entire narrative is pitched in such a way that you invariably sort of feel terribly sorry for that man, but we all know the kind of writings which have been otherwise available about him as part of journalistic writing etc.

This film was made into a movie in 2012, it was made by Deepa Mehta, that again led to a number of other controversies. It was not even shot in India, they could not make the film in India, there were lot of controversies associated with it. There are a number of works that he published after that as well, but it would be rather like safe to say that this is his most famous and most acclaimed work and a number of reviews have come out about his other novels, other works saying none of them could really match up to *Midnight's Children*.

If you compare *Midnight's Children* with any of his writings, we will also feel that he could not really bring back the same kind of magic that he could foreground in *Midnight's Children*. This is not to say that this had in anyway affected his fame or affected his success, he continues to be regarded as the best known of face of Indian writing in English and perhaps the International celebrity that Indian writing in English has produced.

This is the broad outline of this novel. It is titled *Midnight's Children* and the story is about midnight's children. So, what exactly happens at midnight. This midnight is also a very direct allusion to the independence that we got at midnight. There are these two boys who were born in a Bombay hospital.

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What happens at midnight?

- ◇ Two boys are born in a Bombay hospital – switched by a nurse – around that time a thousand children are born – midnight's children – all are endowed with unusual gifts
- ◇ 15 Aug 1947 at midnight

They are switched for whatsoever reason by a nurse and around this same time in that midnight hour from 12:00-1:00, about 1000 children are born. So, altogether it makes it on a 1001 children. **"Professor-student conversation starts"** What is the connection 1001 does that remind you of something as, *Arabian Nights*, yes. **"Professor-student conversation ends"**

There are these very deliberate intertextual references within the text throughout. These 1000 children are all part of nation's history and there is a story telling that all of them do and all of these midnight children they are all endowed with unusual gifts. **"Professor-student conversation start"** Anybody who is familiar with the work, what are those unusual gifts? (09:13) people's rights. Yeah and also there was a central character, who was the central character? Saleem Sinai.

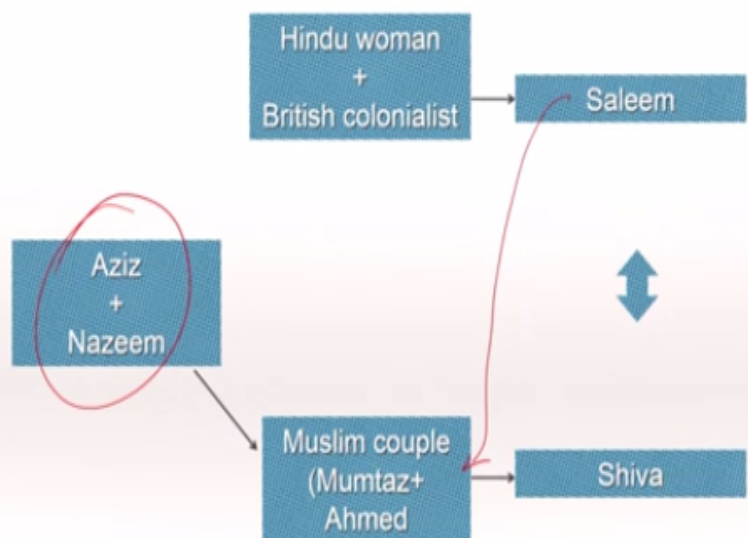
He can even smell things. He has endowed this unusual uncanny ability of smell he has. **"Professor-student conversation ends"** This is the way in which magic realism works here. What is magic realism by the way? Magic realism is a technique through which in a very real

ordinary situation magical supernatural elements are woven into the text. It is not like fantasy which is set in an unreal world, this is a real world and the magical elements are woven into the text as if this is the most common, most natural thing to happen.

There is no big deal about the supernatural elements which are woven into the text. Narrative begins technically at this midnight hour, but it also just like, are your family with Tristram Shandy, where the story begins even before the protagonist is born, it is in the same way and Rushdie also has acknowledged in multiple places that he was immensely influenced by Laurence Sterne and his writing techniques.

Here also the story starts with the previous generation and then it leads on to the life that the protagonist leads.

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This is what happens. This is the older generation with which the story begins, Aziz and Nazeem. Actually, Saleem is a son of a Hindu woman and a British colonialist and Shiva is the son of this Muslim couple Mumtaz and Ahmed, but they get switched at birth. So, Saleem gets raised by this Muslim couple. In that sense, right at the outset, totally challenges the idea of religion and how identity is linked to it. It also exposes some of the promises of secularism that was made at the midnight hour.

This is perhaps the finest story many have agreed, which also narrates the nation in such a beautiful way. Because the protagonist, Saleem Sinai's life is also narrated as an allegory of the nation.

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The Text

- ◆ Divided into three books
- ◆ Book One deals with Saleem Sinai recounting the events till his birth
 - ◆ Imagining the nation - Midnight
- ◆ Book Two has Saleem recounting the various events of his childhood and adolescence till the death of his parents
 - ◆ The mirror of the nation - Nehru
- ◆ Book Three talks about the Widow and Saleem Sinai crumbling away having completed his task
 - ◆ Indira is India

This work is divided into three books. The first book deals with Saleem Sinai recounting the events till his birth. This is like before his birth, which has also been said that this is the book which imagines the emergence of the nation. Book 2 has Saleem recounting the various events of his childhood and adolescence till the death of his parents. Book 3 talks about the widow and the widow is also a reference to Indira Gandhi and Saleem Sinai crumbling away having completed his task.

Because his body is also an integral part in the telling of the story. His body disintegrates as in when he is narrating. He is telling the story to whom and all you will figure out even if you read through, some of the sections, you do not avoid the first chapter, read the first chapter and also if you read excerpts from here and there, some of things may begin to make sense to you.

You can try and access some of these from different online sites, but the problem is that this is such a fragmented text that there was no single story which can be told. Even the summary would be like very complicated to read, if you have started accessing those online summaries,

most of them they try to give these chapter-wise summaries, some of the summaries when I was going through them it is more laborious than reading the text itself.

It is as fragmented and as long winded as the text itself is. So, the book 1 is sort of a retelling of how the nation was imagined and book 2 in fact talks about Nehru as the mirror of the nation, about the Nehruvian nation that emerged in the post-independence period. In the novel there are very direct references to real historical figures and real historical incidents. There is even a place where Nehru writes a congratulatory note to this protagonist, but there are lot of unreal elements also which are part of it.

There is a lot of history which he imagines that had happened as well and Rushdie also acknowledges that those were deliberate, may be my memory had failed me. So, he refuses to engage directly with the deliberate flaw as that he had included in the text as well. The third part is that phase, the emergency phase where India becomes Indira and Indira becomes India. It becomes impossible to separate one from the two and he also talks about the emergency phase and in that respect this work is also seen as one of the finest anti-emergency works.

There is also this thing which is said about this novel that there was one couple of lines, which made direct reference to Sanjay Gandhi and Indira Gandhi and he was forced to take that line out, because Indira Gandhi was unhappy about it. In the later editions, it seems that one line which offended Indira Gandhi was not there. I will not give a detail plot summary as such, may be this framework will help you to access the text in an easier way.

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Historical incidents

- ◆ Rowlatt Act, subsequent Amritsar massacre, 1919
- ◆ Transfer of Power, 1947
- ◆ States Reorganisation Act, 1956
- ◆ Indo Pakistani Air War, 1965
- ◆ Bangladesh Liberation War, 1971
- ◆ Smiling Buddha, India's first nuclear test, 1974
- ◆ Emergency, 1975-77
- ◆ Subsequent sterilisation and civic beautification programs

There are certain real historical incidents which are referred to the Rowlatt Act and the Amritsar massacre in 1919, transfer of power in 1947, the States reorganization act in 1956, Indo Pakistani air war in 1956, the Bangladesh Liberation war in 1971, and India's first nuclear test which also was called Smiling Buddha in 1974, the event of emergency two years 1975-77 and the subsequent sterilization and the civic beautification programs that we know about whatever happened after the emergency.

If you look at these set of events, at least some of them they do not have a proper official narrative, like Amritsar massacre or transfer of power how it also had a dark history to it. The horrors of partition and about the state reorganization was not a very neat and tidy process. There were lot of struggles, though it was not a bloody affair, it was not a neat happy affair either. Emergency, another event in the nation where we do not have a proper official narrative.

He tries to narrativise these incidents drawing from history and also imposing a certain personal touch to it.

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- ❖ Two possible kinds of narratives:
- ❖ secular national narrative
- ❖ cosmopolitan narrative

There are two possible, one is secular national narrative, cosmopolitan narrative. There are two narratives which go simultaneously. If you look at the narrative of this novel, there is a secular national narrative on the one hand which makes it a national allegory. There is also a cosmopolitan narrative, which makes it postcolonial in a certain way which also makes the text accessible to non-Indian reader as well.

When you are reading the text, when you are trying to analyze it, you can keep these two like a roadmap through the text. This novel is in fact more than any other thing; it is a critique of the post Nehruvian era. What is the significance of the Nehruvian era? Who was Nehru? Why is the Nehruvian era considered very significant in India's history? Most of the things which were formative to the nation in terms of now when we look back, the foundations of almost everything even the terrible things which are surfacing now the foundations of everything was laid down during that period.

Later this entire era came to be known as Nehruvian and even after Nehru's term as Prime Minister, after his death also this term gets used for a long time. In fact, the first significant breakdown of the Nehruvian consensus about progress, about democracy, about planning, about the growth of the nation all of this happens in the 1970s and the culmination of which we find in the event of emergency. After that a number of critiques about the Nehruvian consensus has come out.

This novel does not entirely critique the post-Nehruvian phase, does not entirely critique the Nehruvian phase, at some level also we get this feeling that it is still upholding the Nehruvian golden age and also like speculating that things would have been better had the Nehruvian project been taken into the completion, but the novel is largely set in a post Nehruvian mood, after the nation seizes to bask in the glory of whatever it began to achieve in the post-independence period.

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Post-Nehruvian

- ◆ Exploits the dialogic possibilities of the novel form - to question the compartmentalisation of religion and politics
- ◆ MC - a visible Nehruvian matrix - development and questioning of Nehru's rationalist premises
- ◆ (Constitution and Discovery of India - considered as 'foundational texts' of the nation)
- ◆ Breakdown of Nehruvian consensus - religion/caste no longer private and/or apolitical

This also very significantly questions the compartmentalization of religion and politics. That was something key in the Nehruvian imagining of the nation that religion need not interfere in the political affairs. Religion and politics should be two separate things. But in the contemporary, we know that there is no way in which one can be separated from the other, may be this forcible compartmentalization had also not really enable people to deal with either of those in an effective way.

Even when Dalit historians talk about how caste had been dealt with in the post-independence period, many feel that it is this separation of the private from the public, which dealt to non-engagement with certain unsettling and uncomfortable factors of the nation. He also questions in this process in Rushdie's novel the process through which Nehru tried to come up with this rationalist premises on which he believed that the nation can really progress.

There are number of good things about that, but also the flip side of this is all the more visible in the post-Nehruvian phase, especially after the emergency period, may be some of those things we will also hear about in the presentation in the next two classes. He also talks about a way in which these two works Constitution and Discovery of India, that is Indian constitution and Discovery of India is the text authored by Nehru and these two texts are considered as foundational to the nation.

There is a way in which the narrative of the nation's progress has been told to us in such as way that the Discovery of India, it seizes to be a text authored by one of the Indians, but it becomes a foundational text in imagining the nation itself. At some level, we feel Rushdie subscribing to that and he also departs from that quite significantly. We will not go into the details of this.

This novel also says there is a breakdown of this Nehruvian consensus where religion, caste are no longer considered as private or apolitical categories. They are very political; they are also categories which need to be engaged with in the public sphere by private individuals.

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MC vs. the nation

- ◆ Emergency - reassessment of the meaning of Indian democracy (MC read as an anti-emergency novel)
- ◆ addressing an ever-widening gap between state and nation
- ◆ Rise of Right-wing politics

He also talks about this ever-widening gap between state and nation. **"Professor-student conversation starts"** What is the difference between the state and the nation? It is imagined. What is imagined? Nation. Do you want to elaborate on that? (()) (20:48) Yeah because if you

look at any nation which emerge even before the nation emerges, it is first imagined. There is Benedict Anderson who first talk about nation has imagined communities. **"Professor-student conversation ends"**

Regardless of the political territory, the nation first exists in the imagination and this is why a number of problems of the nation are also glossed over. Because in the imagination, it is a unified unit, it is a unified territory, it is a unified set of people, it is a homogenous set of people, which are imagined and this novel addresses the widening gap between the state and the nation. It does not feel inhibitive to talk about this gap, if you compare Midnight's Children with the other works produced from India.

There is a need to continue to talk about this imagined community. There is a continued need to foreground the aspects of the nation, which were important even before the nation emerged and in the post-independence years. But, here he is fearless in that sense to talk about this gap between the state and the nation and also talking about how the state failed in a certain way in responding to this imagination which was there in the first place.

He also addresses the rise of the Right-wing politics in a critical way, which is why there is a character whose identity is fragmented in a way. It is a predominantly Muslim character who is at the surface level, but we also know that if you get to the heart of it, the formation of the identity is not very easy. It is not entirely in terms of a lineage in terms of blood. It is not an entirely a Muslim character.

He also problematizes the idea of the secular, how the identities are categorized and the rise of different kinds of politics in comparison with the different identities that emerge. There is a way in which he also talks about the Nehruvian India as a secular past.

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- Nehru's India: a secular past

He critiques it, but there is still a falling back on the Nehruvian model, wondering whether that would have been the perfect way to take this nation forward.

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- ◇ code-mixing and hybridisation of language - English and Urdu
- ◇ references to language riots in Maharashtra

Some of the things, which you would be constantly hearing in connection with this text code-mixing, hybridization of language. There is this continuous use of English and Urdu. He is also the first Indian English writer who had stopped bothering about using the King's English or the Queen's English. He very generously mixes registers, codes, he is not very reverential about the kind of language that he is using and there are also references to language riots in Maharashtra.

There are references to a lot of these fragmentations of identities in terms of religion, in terms of caste, in terms of personal political affiliations, in terms of language, so on and so forth. It would be possible, though you know the idea of the secular can be critiqued at various levels within this novel.

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Secular narration

- Narrated from a minoritarian perspective - trajectory of Muslim identity (but of course multiple parentage - Hindu and British)
- narration begins in 1915 - Saleem's grandfather's loss of faith
And my grandfather, turching upright, made a resolve. Stood. Rolled cheroot. Stared across the lake. And was knocked forever into that middle place, unable to worship a God in whose existence he could not wholly disbelieve. Permanent alteration: a hole.
- radical juxtaposition of world views - 'unreliable' narrative voice
- endorses a radical or minoritarian secularism - similar to Said's secular criticism

There is also a way in which this novel can be seen as participating in this mission to come up with the secular narration, just when the ideas of secularism were facing a lot of threat, a lot of danger in the post emergency era. Rushdie himself has acknowledged in some of his own writings and some of his interviews that one of the impetus was also the emergency for writing this novel.

The post-emergency had refashioned the secular self within India in particular ways and the way in which secularism began to be understood was very different in the post-emergency era. When you look at Indian writing in English in general until this moment we were talking mostly about post-independence and now there is another marker suddenly to talk about. Independence ceases to be the only big thing that happened in the nation, independence and partition.

Now we have emergency which seize the breaking down of all of those promises on which the nation was supposedly built in the post-independence period. This novel in that sense is also narrated from a minoritarian perspective. There is a trajectory predominantly of Muslim identity

which is being foregrounded, but this is of multiple parents as we know. He was raised by a Muslim couple, but the parents are Hindu and British.

The narration also begins in 1915, it also significantly begins with an event which results in Saleem's grandfather's loss of faith. Those things are also narrated with a lot of irony, a generous dose of irony and you also find many of those things very hard to believe. It is not as if life changing things occurred in his life for him to lose his faith. It is a very trivial silly thing that happens which we will not go into that in detail.

There is this section where he talks about and my grandfather, this is a description of a moment which leads to his loss of faith and this happens right after he offers his prayers. And my grandfather, lurching upright, made a resolve. Stood. Rolled cheroot. Stared across the lake, and was not forever into that middle place, unable to worship a God in whose existence he could not wholly disbelieve, permanent alteration, a hole.

It is not as if something really happens and something very trivial happens which I wanted to figure out may be in the next presentation you will get to know. Something very, very trivial happens and he makes this life changing decision. This beginning is very significant to the novel *Midnight's Children*, because we have a character who is predominantly a Muslim, whose identity is Muslim. But, that is not really tied with his ideas of faith.

It explores the fallacies of the ways in which identity works. It also talks about how secularism has not been defined in a proper way. It is still defined in terms of religious identities, faith. What happens to a person, a citizen, who rejects his faith and retains his religious identity? Those are some of the things which the novel very ironically explores and there is an unreliable narrative voice. I hope one of them will be talking about the unreliability of this text.

Rushdie himself has said there are lot of errors in it, because I am just writing from my memory, my memory could fail me. If you have a better memory, you can write another one. Whenever the flaws in the text or the deliberate errors in the text were pointed out like that, he even has written a very small essay on this the Errata in *Midnight's Children*. I think I have given that as

part of your reading material, take a look at that. Just about three pages, I think one of them will also be talking about the unreliability of this narrative voice.

What he does is, when he is trying to reject the model of secularism which is available to us, he is also endorsing a different kind of radical secularism, minoritarian secularism as some of them have put it.

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Radical secularism

- ♦ MC's radical secularism - the story of India told by a muslim, a minority - tries to re-think an India in which Muslim does not function as the name of minority
- ♦ MC - presents a version of India which is both India and Pakistan
- ♦ Saleem - a middle-class boy with a christian ayah, Hindu and Muslim parents living in the cosmopolitan city of Bombay, a young man who fights in the army

In this radical secular approach, the story of India is told by a Muslim, a minority. He also tries to rethink an India in which the category of the Muslim, the identity of the Muslim is not just in terms of minority. There is also a narration of an India, which is both India and Pakistan at the same time, which is why may be strategically he begins the narration before the moment of independence. In order to access the story of Saleem Sinai, it is important to know what happened before that.

In other level, allegorically he is also telling us to know the history of this nation, which was born at the midnight hour on 15th August, to know the history of this nation you need to go back to the early 20th century. There is no isolated history that this nation owns. It is a fragmented multiple history, which is shared by both India and Pakistan, which is why he was not really acceptable to the nationalist historians. He was not really acceptable. Rushdie was not really acceptable to the nationalist ones.

He also rejects those tendencies of nationalism even in the introduction that we took a look at. He talks about how those nationalist tendencies will not be useful for taking the literature of the nation forward and this is also why is that that he associates with the regional writers. May be that this protagonist Saleem Sinai is also this perfect example of a fragmented identity and also the multiple influences, which has shaped his identity.

He is a middle class boy with a Christian ayah, Hindu and Muslim parents, he is living in the cosmopolitan city of Bombay. He is also a young man who fights in the Army. So, his identity is fragmented. His identity cannot be pinned down to one particular term or one kind of compartment in anyway.

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Muslim secularism

- ◆ MC - makes space for Muslim secularism - counter narrative to the majoritarian secular perspective
- ◆ (commonsense - Muslim identity as a post-Partition creation)
- ◆ Muslim secular space - denied by Nehru and Discovery of India - talks about the inability of the Muslim elite to modernise itself

Nehru finds that 'since British rule came to India, Moslems have produced few individuals of the modern type' (Nehru 1946: 413).

- ◆ MC - an interesting historical account of Muslims prior to their transformation into minority after Partition
- ◆ Saleem's grandfather - 'not much' of a Muslim, weary of Muslim league

He predominantly talks about a secular space, which needs to be carved out for the Muslim. This becomes important because he is writing at a point when nationalism is associated, nationalism is seen as privilege of the nationalist Hindu and he is also writing at a time when there is a need for rewriting the nationalist history is being envisioned. Because subaltern studies also happen during that time.

We have no direct kind of evidence to prove that Rushdie influenced subaltern studies or subaltern studies influenced Rushdie. There is a very little dialogue that we can find between

them, but nevertheless that was also the time when the nationalist historiography was being reimagined, rewritten from different quarters.

There is a work by Priyamvada Gopal, where she quotes from Nehru Discovery of India and there she also identifies this thing about how Nehru says since British rule came to India, Muslims have produced few individuals of the modern type. There are lot of these deconstructive textual analysis, which has been done of Nehru's work, which also exposes some of the biases which were inherent.

One really does not know what kind of position Rushdie takes with respect to his critique of the post-independence period, whether he is entirely endorsing the things that Nehru said or is he taking some of the progressive things from the Nehruvian ideal and rejecting the idea of secularism, which he talked about which also excluded the Muslim from participating in the secular institutions of the nation.

He also talks about Saleem's grandfather, who is not much of a Muslim. He is also weary of the Muslim league. It is not as if by virtue of being a Muslim, he is readily a part of Muslim league in terms of his political affiliations. He is tired of both his Muslim identity and also the politics that is foregrounded by something like Muslim league.

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Postcolonial?

- ♦ MC - transcends postcolonial national borders
- ♦ (large time frame - 1915 to 1977— deliberate - to recuperate a common past for the Indian subcontinent before and after Partition)
- ♦ in MC - appropriation of Muslim funds by the so-called secular govt - foregrounded as an important moment of rupture

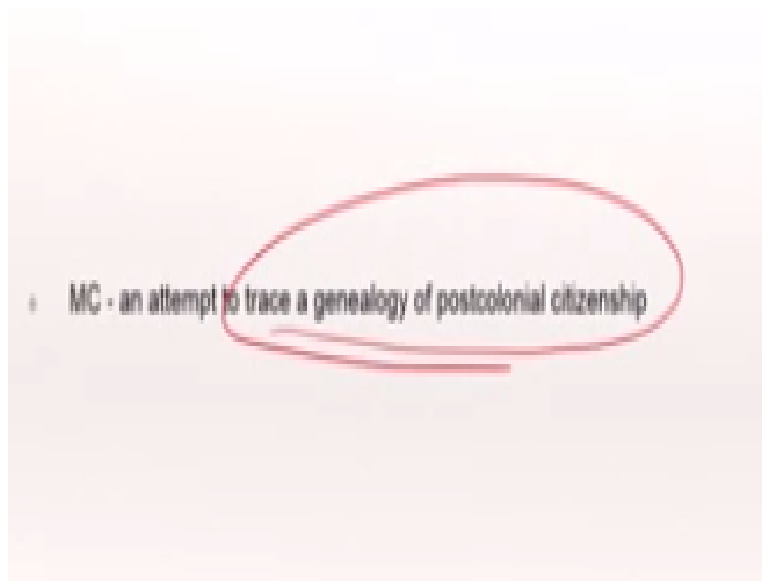
I blame myself entirely; we made ourselves too public. These are bad times, Sinai bhai – freeze a Muslim's assets, they say, and you make him run to Pakistan, leaving all his wealth behind him. Catch the lizard's tail and he'll snap it off! This so-called secular state gets some damn clever ideas.

('We are a secular state,' Nehru announced and Morarji and Patel and Menon all agreed: but still Ahmed Sinai shivered under the influence of the freeze).

The text also talks about the disillusionments that the Muslims faced in the post-independence period. There is this place where Saleem Sinai's father says, "I blame myself entirely, we made ourselves too public, these are bad times. Sinai bhai, freeze a Muslim assets, they say and you make him run to Pakistan leaving all his wealth behind him. Catch the lizard's tail and he will snap it off. This so-called secular state gets some damn clever ideas. We are a secular state, Nehru announced and Morarji and Patel and Menon all agreed, but still Ahmed Sinai shivered under the influence of the freeze."

There are these references to lot of historical instance, lot of historical figures, and there is a lot of irony in this and Rushdie is clearly not endorsing the idea of nationalism which is currently prevalent, but one is not too sure what exactly he is rejecting and what he is embracing. He is not too much on the radical side either. He is not entirely rejecting the nationalist historiography, but only certain aspects of which, which have given rise to a skewed kind of secular nationalist discourse.

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This is also being seen as an attempt to trace a genealogy of postcolonial citizenship. This is seen as the poster novel of postcolonialism in that sense.

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- › Reality of mixed tradition vs. the fantasy of purity
- › Saleem - oscillates between belief and scepticism
- › magicians living in Delhi - muslim ghetto in the shadow of the Friday mosque

Saleem Sinai learned that Picture Singh and the magicians were people whose hold on reality was absolute; they gripped it so powerfully that they could bend it every which way in the service of their arts, but they never forgot what it was.

In terms of the magic realist elements even this character Saleem, he often shifts between a belief and skepticism and those are seen as very regular common occurrences, but there are certain supernatural elements, which are built into it. The novel talks about magicians living in Delhi, about a Muslim ghetto, which is in the shadow of the Friday mosque. Lot of those things are part, there are almost like everything that could be talked about India is part of this novel.

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Intertextual

- ◊ Marquez' One Hundred Years of Solitude ✓
- ◊ Grass' Tin Drum ✓
- ◊ Sterne's Tristram Shandy ✓
- ◊ Ramayana ✓
- ◊ Mahabharata ✓
- ◊ Koran ✓
- ◊ Manto's short stories ✓
- ◊ Nehru's speeches ✓
- ◊ newspaper accounts of cases such as Nanavati murder

In the textuality of this text, there are lot of intertextual references to Marquez 100 years of solitude, Tin Drum, Tristram Shandy, Ramayana, Mahabharata, Koran, Saadat Hasan Manto's short stories, Nehru's speeches, and a lot of newspaper accounts. The veracity of all of these,

because sometimes even quotes and misquotes all of that is part of the narration. Those are also deliberate strategies. He does not really comment on those things.

This work has also been seen as an example of the postcolonial exotic in sense of the Booker event is seen as a continuation of the imperial literary condescension. The imperial master still validating the work in certain ways, because the Booker event was also very instrumental in catapulting this work to fame and also in Rushdie being this redefining figure in Indian writing in English and may be again after we discuss the novel that would be appropriate to come back to this discussion and postcolonialism itself has been seen as a market strategy in terms of the global literary market.

I am not talking about the idea, the concept of postcolonialism, but writing for the postcolonial market has also been seen as a strategy.

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Similar narrations of the novel

- ♦ Trotter-Nama by Allan Sealy -1988
- ♦ Written, but NOT published before MC
- ♦ Originally had a narrator born at midnight
- ♦ "two writers responding to the same historical moment. They have read the same book, but the book is India. We do not write, but are written" (Sealy)
- ♦ The Shadow Lines by Amitav Ghosh

There were also similar narrations around this same time, Trotter-Nama published by Allan Sealy. The novel was published in 1988, but it was written much before that and Allan Sealy is said that he comes across the novel and then he decides to change some of the aspects because that also originally had a narrator who was born at midnight.

Rushdie also talks about how it is just a historic accident that he became the first one to publish such a novel because he says he came across at least half-a-dozen writers from different parts of India, who were conceiving of a similar novel, which is why he himself believes that may be this sort of a novel was begging to be narrated by the nation. Because at least half-a-dozen other regional writers were also conceiving this idea in multiple ways.

Again this was the first one to get published, so there is absolutely no use talking about what the fate of Rushdie or *Midnight's Children* would have been if some other novel had got published before that. Allan Sealy in one of his interviews, he writes two writers responding to the same historical moment. They have read the same book, but the book is India. We do not write, but are written.

Rushdie also pretty much echoes the same thing in most of his works like whenever he is questioned about the inclusion of certain events or the exclusion of certain events, either he says these are the things that I remember or he says these are the things that India has begged me to write about. *Shadow Lines* by Amitav Ghosh also, though the narrative framework is a little different that is also a retelling of the nation's history.

We could in fact trace a number of works which also again rewrite the nation, retell the nation's story in different ways after Rushdie.

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Books of the Times

By John Leonard MIDNIGHT'S CHILDREN. By Salman Rushdie. 446 pages. Knopf. \$13.95.

It is impossible to resist a novel that contains the sentence "My sister the Brass Monkey developed the curious habit of setting fire to shoes." Or one that will pause to observe, as it considers an unhappy India, "Sacred cows eat anything." According to "Midnight's Children," guilt is a fog, optimism is a disease, freedom is a myth, fried spiders cure blindness and "Gandhi will die at the wrong time." Nevertheless, Salman Rushdie chortles.

We have an epic in our laps. The obvious comparisons are to Gunter Grass in "The Tin Drum" and to Gabriel Garcia Marquez in "One Hundred Years of Solitude." I am happy to oblige the obvious. Like Grass and Garcia Marquez, Mr. Rushdie gives us history, politics, myth, food, magic, wit and dung. He adds, in no particular order, a blind art lover, a poet who is verbless and impotent, some vultures and cobras, a peep show and many clocks, telepathy and the nose as a genital organ.

This is the review of the book that appeared in New York Times, this was in 1981. This is what was written about the book in 1981.

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His children of midnight were born on Aug. 15, 1947, at the stroke of independence for India. Saleem Sinai tells us, "From the moment of my conception, it seems, I have been public property." And why not? Didn't Nehru himself send a personal letter of congratulation? Won't Saleem himself be a "mirror" of the new nation? 1,001 Gifted Children

This is the reception that it got in the west. It is impossible to resist a novel that contains a sentence, "My sister the Brass Monkey developed the curious habit of setting fire to shoes." Or one that will pause to observe as it considers an unhappy India, "sacred cows eat anything." According to Midnight's Children, "guilt is a fog, optimism is a disease, freedom is a myth, fried spiders cure blindness, and Gandhi will die at the wrong time."

Those are some of the other things the obvious comparisons are to Gunter Grass and a lot of scholarly work also exists in that sense about Gunter Grass and Marquez. "I am happy to oblige the obvious. Like Grass and Marquez, Rushdie gives his history, politics, myth, food, magic, wit and dung." Towards the end in fact this protagonist also has a connection with pickle. That is a way in which it includes the grandest narrative and also the most trivial of things from that.

The protagonist also considers that he is handcuffed to history and this phrase has been quoted and misquoted in lot of works after *Midnight's Children*. He also uses this phrase chutnified history and the phrase has been used to talk about his language as well. The chutnification of English and how Rushdie makes it possible after *Midnight's Children*. He adds in no particular order a blind art lover, a poet who is verbless and impotent, some vultures and cobras, a peep show and many clocks, telepathy, and the nose as a genital organ.

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says one character. Saleem, considering the future, wonders: "Was genius something utterly unconnected with wanting, or learning how, or knowing about, or being able to?" Such a subcontinent doesn't have a chance. Since 1947 it has been a bad Indian movie.

Fragmentation is the theme of the novel, from the sheet with the hole in it through which Saleem's grandfather is permitted to glimpse portions of the body of the woman he will marry, all the way to a dismembering of history. "We are a nation of forgetters," Saleem says, and he isn't even sure of his own father. He is reading aloud, like Scheherazade, his dreams, as if to impress a departed wig.

Mr. Rushdie isn't nice, although he is funny and vulgar. The world of "Midnight's Children" is not at all genteel, as the world of Anita Desai tends to be. It is the shadow in Paul Scott's mirror or, perhaps, what E. M. Forster heard in the cave, with a lot of symbolic curry added - the clocks, the dreams, "the ambiguity of snakes," the moon and the silver spittoon, the fishermen and the clowns. He is asking: who broke us apart, and why must we die, fragmented, for a failed India? And 1,001 Plots

Why failure? Mr. Rushdie plays many games; the reader needs to be a loyal modernist. "Midnight's Children," with its 1,001 plots, is an exercise in criticism. Saleem is at once Suneman, Sinbad and Pinocchio. not to mention Buddha. Eating, he sneaks of "nickled _____

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Right from the beginning, the comparisons have not been with other Indian English writers, but the comparisons were either with other postcolonial writers or other figures who were already established canonical writers. Even at a later point, the comparison is always whenever Indian writing in English is talked about and if Rushdie is also mentioned, it is always about whether the other writers are matching up to this standard. But, Rushdie's work per se, it has never been compared with any other Indian English writer.

He only acknowledges two writers who had influenced him, Laurence Sterne and G. V. Desani, who wrote all about H. Hatterr in the 1940s after Rushdie acknowledges G. V. Desani and all about H. Hatterr, it comes back into print. That is a kind of power that Rushdie has not just as an author, but also as a person who has a power to remake, reinvent cannon.

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Why failure? Mr. Rushdie plays many games; the reader needs to be a loyal modernist. "Midnight's Children," with its 1,001 plots, is an exercise in criticism. Saleem is at once Superman, Sinbad and Pinocchio, not to mention Buddha. Eating, he speaks of "pickled chapters." We are reminded that "no audience is without its idiosyncracies of belief." Unspoken words cause bloat. His ear, the woman Patma who must listen to him read aloud his autobiography, deserts him for a while, and he is unmoored. Of himself, he says:

"I was a radio receiver, and could turn the volume down or up; I could select individual voices; I could even, by an effort of will, switch off my newly discovered ear." The signals he is receiving are from the children of the midnight clock; they will die with the nation; they will burn like chess

These sort of reviews continued to happen in the western scenario, may be India was a little late to respond to this sort of mega reception that Rushdie was receiving at least for a while even scholarly works did not really come out, but by the end of the 1980s, this sort of his position was further solidified and cemented. Initially, the booker was also seen as yet another colonial gesture, many did not want to comply to that. But, now we know there is no going back.

There is no point in wondering whether this is actually a well-written text or not. But, this is the reception and this has been now seen as a national allegory and if you want to see it in any other

way, it is harder also now. Even if you are really bent on seeing other narratives in this, now we have been so blinded by the plethora works written about *Midnight's Children* that it is difficult to even access the work in isolation without considering the frameworks of postcolonial writing.

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Unspoken words cause bloat. His ear, the woman Patma who must listen to him read aloud his autobiography, deserts him for a while, and he is unmoored. Of himself, he says:

"I was a radio receiver, and could turn the volume down or up; I could select individual voices; I could even, by an effort of will, switch off my newly discovered ear." The signals he is receiving are from the children of the midnight clock; they will die with the nation; they will burn like shoes.

If I understand Mr. Rushdie, he is equally outraged by (1) the English imposition on India; (2) Indira Gandhi's "emergency," which did away with liberal democracy in India, and (3) the novel itself, which can't find out how to explain partition and fragmentation and a hole in the spiritual heart. We occupy this hole, and laugh while clenching fists. I wish Mr. Rushdie's children, all of them orphans of history, would take over the world at dawn. This novel - exuberant, excessive, despairing - is special.

Illustrations: photo of Salman Rushdie

There are these three things that this review highlights. If I understand Mr. Rushdie, he is equally outraged by the English imposition on India. Indira Gandhi's emergency which did away with liberal democracy in India and the novel itself, which cannot find out how to explain partition and fragmentation and a hole in the spiritual heart. This is how this novel becomes postcolonial and postmodern at the same time.

It is a metafiction, there is self referentiality. The novel is unhappy about the novel and the novel is unhappy about the nation as well. There is an article by Jon Mee, who talks about the Indian English novel in the 1980s and 1990s. In the first paragraph, right in the first line he says if 1980s and *Midnight's Children* has witnessed the second coming of Indian writing in English then Rushdie is its messiah. That is a sort of state that has been accorded to him.

That is a very well acclaimed article by Jon Mee. Throughout the work, though he is talking about the novel of the 1980s and 1990s, Rushdie emerges as the most important figure. Even when the other works are being talked about, it is always in connection with Rushdie. Either it is Rushdie-isc in a certain way or it moves away from Rushdie in particular ways.

Rushdie quite inadvertently that essay was written in the late 1990s. By then he emerges not just as the most important figure, he also emerges as the yardstick, the standard against which the rest of Indian writing in English is evaluated and judged. In the post 1990s phase, some of the feminist critics have written against the consideration of Rushdie as a central figure in such a way that the other kind of writings have not been able to emerge at all.

Because either one writes about the nation and gets recognition. If one is not writing about the nation, it is also seen as an inadequacy as a failure, because one is not competent enough to talk like that. Even in this review that we took a look at you saw the direct comparison between Rushdie and Anita Desai. Because before Rushdie, Anita Desai was the best known International face from India and after Rushdie emerges as the most famous, the most visible one, Anita Desai's work is also seen lesser in terms of, though she also enjoyed a wide readership, it is not seen as grandiloquent as profound as Rushdie's works are.

I hope you will take a look at the novel to get a feel of his narration. Please read the first chapter at least before you listen to the presentations and also I think it would be rather dumb to do an entire course on Indian fiction in English and not to have read Rushdie at least partially. Get a sense of that and I do not think they also will be able to cover the critical ground which talks about the novel because much has been written, difficult to bring all of them together.

So, mostly it will be a general discussion based on a couple of themes that they would highlight. You also read up and if you have more things to talk about, let us take a look at that in the next couple of sessions.