

Chapter - VI

**MIDNIGHT'S
CHILDREN**

PART THREE: FREEDOM STRUGGLE AS A DEAD THEME

Makarand Paranjape, views "*Midnight's Children* may be seen as a convenient point of departure, popularizing if not inaugurating a new way of writing India... It seems to me that one way of summing up Rushdie's Children stand for is to call them deconstructionists. Most of them break down or subvert the master narratives of the national, which an earlier generation of novelists so carefully constructed. In the hey days of nationalism, fiction played an important role in giving voice and expression to the needs and hopes of a new nation. Later, several smaller stories to undermine the claims and visions of these grand narratives. Hence, Rushdie and his school are largely deconstructive in their approach. ¹

With the publication of Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, a new sensibility has entered into the Indian English Fiction. It is popularly called postmodernism which holds the view that we have reached the stage of exhaustion or dead. It is manifested in its attitude that the received notions of reality, be it tradition, history, self-etc., are constructs and they are subsequently contested.

The notion of freedom struggle has been contested in some of the novels of 1980s. Hence this part is entitled freedom movement as a dead theme. The most outstanding of them are Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* and Shashi Tharoor's *The Great Indian Novel*. The former is studied in chapter six and the latter in chapter Seven followed by a note on the text's perspective on the theme of freedom struggle.

Chapter - VI

MIDNIGHT'S CHILDREN

Salman Rushdie is one of the most prominent novelists in Indian English Friction. His career as a novelist began with *Grimus* and his latest novel is *Shalimar the Clown*. Between these two, he has published several other novels of the international repute. They include *Midnight's Children*, *Shame*, *Satanic Verses*, *The Moors Last Sigh*, *Ground Beneath Her Feet*, *Fury* etc. Salman Rushdie is a winner of many prestigious prizes and awards. The most notable among them is the Booker of Bookers for his second novel *Midnight's Children* (1981).

Midnight's Children contains the story of three generations of the family of Saleem Sinai who is the protagonist of the novel. He narrates the story to Padma. Both of them work in the pickle factory of Mrs Braganza who was Saleem's former nurse under the name Mary Pierera. Saleem works in the factory during day and narrates the story at night. Aadam Aziz and Nazeem Aziz belong to the first generation, their children and their counterparts belong to the second generation and Saleem Sinai belongs to the third generation. This story structure resembles Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights*, which also deals with the three generations of the Heathcliffs. Though the novel is not narrated in the chronological order of the generations, it is divided into three parts i.e., Book One, Book Two and Book Three. An attempt is made here to

provide a summary of the novel in the descending order of these generations for the purpose of cohesion.

Aadam Aziz returns to Kashmir, his native town, from Heidelberg, Germany, after acquiring a degree in medicine. On his return, he finds his family in crisis. His father is bedridden with the stroke of paralysis and his mother has been managing the gemstone business to take care of the whole family affairs including Aadam's medical education abroad at the cost of her privacy.

One day Aadam is sent for by Ghani, a landowner across the lake through Tai, a local boatman, to attend his daughter, Naseem, who is sick now. Aadam is invited because the family doctor of the Ghani's is not available now. When Aadam reaches there, he is surprised to find that he is not permitted to conduct his check-up directly due to the biased attitude towards the strangers: "You Europe-returned chappies forget certain things. Doctor Sahib, my daughter is a decent girl, it goes without saying. She does not flaunt her body under the noses of strange men. You will understand that you cannot be permitted to see her, no, not in any circumstances; accordingly I have required her to be positioned behind that sheet."² Thus he is permitted to conduct the medical examinations only through the hole in the center of the sheet. This perforated sheet functions as a central metaphor both at the levels of content and form and symbolizes the narrative technique Rushdie is

known for. As he is appointed permanently as a family doctor, his visits also continue and he develops love for Naseem. Their courtship continues for three years. The end of their love coincides with the end of the World War I. Aadam Aziz and Naseem Ghani get married.

The encounter between Tai and Aadam has a great significance in terms of the relationship between the East and the West because they seem to symbolize the East and the West respectively. Tai expresses high indignation towards the invasion of any foreign culture into Kashmir. He looks at Aadam and the materials he is in possession of, like the bag, stethoscope etc., with a high sense of contempt. He is the one for whom progress means disintegration. He prefers a status quo to change. Tai wants to get rid of Aadam from Kashmir for he feels that Aadam's Western outlook is a threat to the cultural heritage of Kashmir. To achieve this motif, Tai decides to give up bath once for all due to which he becomes infected with a skin disease. When Aadam's parents expired, he decided to leave Kashmir and settle down in Amritsar. Thus Tai's wish comes true.

Aadam arrives at Amritsar, when the freedom struggle has gathered momentum under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi whose political strategy '*Hartal*' is found to be very popular. "*Hartal!* Which is to say, literally speaking, a day of mourning, stillness, of silence. But this is India in the heyday of the Mahatma, when even language obeys

the instructions of Gandhiji.”³ Adam decides to attend a meeting that scheduled to be held in Jallianwala Bagh to revolt against the Martial Law of Dyer and escapes from the firing ordered by Dyer, which caused the historic massacre by his fall caused by his sneeze.

By now the family of Aziz has expanded with the addition of their five children. Among them three are daughter, Alia, Mumtaz and Emerald and two are sons, Hanif and Mustafa. They are grown up now. Alia is engaged for marriage to one Delhi based leather merchant by name Ahmed Sinai. Mumtaz falls in love with one Nadir Khan who has been provided with shelter in the underground of their house as he is caught up in a political coup. Consequently, they are married and live together still in the underground. When she falls sick after two years, her father discovers that his daughter is still a virgin. Therefore Nadir Khan leaves the Aziz.

Ahmed Sinai, who has already been fixed for marriage with Alia, changes his mind now and prefers Mumtaz to Alia. The Aziz couple also extends the consent and Ahmed and Mumtaz, having changed her name as Amina are married and move to Delhi. The situation, in Delhi, becomes so unfavourable for Ahmed to continue the business that he accepts the suggestion of Dr. Narlikar, who is a friend of Ahmed in Bombay, and shift to Bombay thinking to switch over to the land business.

He purchases a flat in the Methold Estate of the departing Colonial William Methold who has seduced Vinita, the wife of Wee Willie Winkie who is a street singer. The other neighbours are Mr. Homi Catract, Ibrahim and his wife Nussie, the Sabarmatis. By now Vanita and Amina are pregnant and both of them are expected to deliver the children at the same time. As expected, they are brought to the Narlikar hospital in the evening on 14, August 1947 and the children for both are born exactly at 12 p.m when the Freedom for the country is also announced. But the children are switched by the nurse Mary Pierera for the sake pleasing the revolutionary wildness Joseph D'Costa whom she loves. Thus the child born to the Sinai's goes to Wee Willie Winkie as Shiva growing in the street as an orphan and the child born to Vanita goes to the Sinai's Saleem Sinai growing in the rich family in the Methold Estate.

The total number of children born at midnight, i.e., at the time of the birth of Saleem and Shiva are 1001, and all these children are endowed with one extraordinary skill each, which is a gift for being born at the same time of Indian Freedom. To mention a few, Saleem has the power of entering the minds of others at his will, Shiva has the most powerful knees with which he can knock down anybody, Parvati has the magical power to make anybody vanish and appear at her will and Picture Singh is capable of taming any type of snake, including cobra.

Saleem is the most celebrated among the mid-night's children. Though Shiva is also born at the same time as Saleem, the latter is more privileged than the former for his family status and thus Saleem is celebrated as an allegory of India: It has a headline: MIDNIGHT'S CHILD. In the words of Josna E. Rege Saleem is picturised as: "Confidently identifying Saleem's life with the of India itself, the letter links the unlimited potential of the newborn infant both with that of the nascent state,..."⁴

And a text: "'A Charming Pose of Baby Saleem Sinai, who was born last night at the exact moment of our Nation's independence-the happy Child of that glorious Hour!'"⁵ The story of the first generation ends here approximately.

Then Dr. Narlikar motivates Ahmed to try his hands in the business of concrete tetrapods in partnership with him in 50:50 ratio in the profit. Though Ahmed earns a huge income, he is landed into hot water as the government has ordered to freeze his assets, which affects him so much that he takes to drinking day and night and becomes a victim of skin disease causing his whole body turn white. At this juncture, Amina enters into the horse race and makes a lot of fortune in it. She also receives phone calls from her former husband, Nadir Khan and their relationship is revived secretly once again. Saleem, however, discovers it by his exceptional skill.

In the meantime, Alia has migrated to Pakistan where she has embraced nunnery. Emerald is married to Major Zulfikar and they also migrate to Pakistan. Hanif becomes a film producer and marries Pia who has a high repute in the film industry as an actress and singer. Becoming fed up with commercial movies, Hanif switches over to art films for which he has been preparing a script on the story of pickle factory. Mustafa becomes a civil servant in India and marries Sonia who is an half Irani. They down in Delhi in the mansion by name 'Saleem's Fly' sister is born and she is called Brass Monkey by Saleem.

Saleem's grandparents come down to stay with the Sinai's in order to help the ailing son-in-law. At this juncture, the death of Gandhiji is mentioned in a very peculiar style of Rushdie. It is announced in the cinema hall: Pia kissed an apple, sensuously, with the rich fullness of her painted lips; then passed it to Nayyar; who planted, upon its opposite face a verily passionate mouth. . . "This afternoon, at Birla House in Delhi, our beloved Mahatma was killed. Some madman shot him in the stomach, ladies and gentlemen our Bapu is gone!"⁶ During this period now Saleem also falls sick, and when all the hopes of his survival are suspended medically by Aadam Aziz, a miracle occurs, i.e., the boy is saved by Dr. Schaapsteker through his 'poison therapy'. One day, Saleem is injured in his finger and when he is hospitalized, it is discovered that he is not the original child of Sinai's as his blood is

tested to be different from the Aadam Sinai. On hearing this, Ahmed has his heart in his boots. Therefore, Saleem is sent to his uncle Hanif's house where he becomes infatuated with his aunt Pia and goes to the extent of molesting her. Hence he is again sent back to the Sinai's where Mary confesses her misdeed of switching the children in the Narlikars Hospital. Saleem thus learns his real parentage. In the mean time, Homi Cattract, who had a secret affair with Pia, deserts her due to his new affair with Mrs. Sabarmati Lila. It affects Pia so severely that she almost goes mad, and her husband dies mysteriously by walking down from the terrace of their house. Aadam Aziz also grows weak and develops cracks. Finally he also dies. His death is shown to be the cause of the death of Jawaharlal Nehru: "after the death of my grandfather, Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru fell ill and never recovered his health. This fatal sickness finally killed him on May 27th 1964."⁷

Naseem persuades Pia, Amina, to join her with her children to leave for Pakistan along with Major Zulfikar leaving Ahmed behind them, to leave for Pakistan. Naseem and Pia run petrol pump profitably. At this time, Amina receives a telegraphic message stating that Ahmed is seriously ill. So she leaves for Bombay with her children. Ahmed is changed now, that is he shows love and affection towards Saleem, and his health also improves quickly because of the renewed

love between the couple. By now, Ahmed is persuaded to emigrate to Pakistan.

In Pakistan, the Sinai's stay with Amina's spinster sister Alia who is still nourishing her vengeance on her sister for she has married Ahmed who was actually her fiancé. Ahmed starts a new trade in 'towels manufacture' under the name of 'Amina Brand'. Brass Monkey becomes a so popular singer that she is regarded as 'Pakistan's Angel' and 'Bulbul-of-the-Faith'. Her voice is filled with ardent patriotism so much so that her song creates a profound love for the motherland among the people. She, now under the pseudo name Jamila Singer, is fallen in love with three persons. They are Mutasim, the son of a Nawab, Zafar, her own cousin, and Saleem Sinai, her brother respectively. She is depicted to have controlled herself from attaining puberty in order to escape from marrying Mutasim. Consequently, the first two give up their efforts to woo her. But Saleem, alone, is not able to forget her till the end even though his advances towards her are rejected and condemned by her.

Saleem undergoes the process of purification of his own notion. It means that he loses the power of memory to the extent of not being able to remember his own name. He is called Buddha at this time. But he is endowed with the power of 'sniffing' because of which he is enrolled in the expedition to trace Muj-ur-Rehman, and the expedition

of succeeds. He, then, is conducted into the forest called 'Sundarbans' by an accident where he, along with the other three Shaheed Dar, AyooBa Baloch, and Farooq Rashid, undergoes a peculiar experience of being entertained in love making with the women who appeared as supernatural beings. Somehow, they come away from the jungle. Saleem is identified in the march carried out by the army troops by Parvati, the witch who is a colleague of Saleem, in a sense, and helps him to regain his lost memory by calling him by his name. As he is regarded as the leader of the midnight children, Parvati and Picture Singh is brought to India by them through the magic of Parvati in her magic basket.

On his return to India, he visits his uncle Mustafa who is in Delhi working as an officer in the civil service. Though his uncle takes him in, sympathizing with him, for he has lost all the members of his family, except his sister in the Indo-Pak war, his wife, Sonia, does not like to entertain him and abuses him for his false identity. Mustafa also joins his wife, and Saleem is sent out of their house, when he is seen by them with Parvati in his room.

He goes to the ghetto along with Parvati and Picture Singh and stays with them. By now Shiva has become a powerful person in the Indian politics. He is a close confidant of Mrs. Indira Gandhi. As he is physically also strong, he takes the advantage of the political status and

cuckolds as many men as possible. Many women are, among the high class, shown to be carrying his foetus. Parvati also becomes a victim of Shiva's passion and consequently becomes pregnant. The irony is that the women are deserted by Shiva as soon as they become pregnant. Parvati develops a peculiar sickness after she is abandoned by Shiva.

Picture Singh feels that marriage is the only remedy for Parvati to overcome from her sickness. Therefore he persuades Saleem to marry Parvati. Parvati gives birth to a son on the same day on which Emergency is declared by Mrs. Indira Gandhi, and dies in childbirth. Saleem is arrested and castrated along with the remaining midnight children under the family planning programme by the government. Saleem has begun to disintegrate as his body develops cracks all over and he grows thinner every day. Uma Parameswarn comments support the view on Saleem as follows... the metaphor, by extension, applies to India's strength and creativity, just as the cracks that Saleem claims to have are symbolic of the many cracks in the edifice of national unity".⁸

His son, Aadam Sinai, also is affected by ill health. A washerwoman, Durga, comes to their rescue by feeding them her breast milk. Though Aadam Sinai improves in his health, Saleem suffers from the body cracks perpetually. Sita, to whom Saleem has been narrating the story, is shouldered with the responsibility of rearing Aadam Sinai. Though Sita knows that Saleem is impotent she appeals to him to marry

her at least for his own health's sake, for there is a need of someone to look after him at this moment of disintegration. But Saleem takes her for a ride by the trick of beating about the bush.

Treatment of Freedom Struggle in *Midnight's Children*

The narrative of *Midnight's Children* is woven around the theme of Freedom. This assumption may be conformed in the first page of the novel only:

I was born in the city of Bombay...once upon a time. No, that won't do, there's no getting away from the date: I was born in Doctor Narlikar's Nursing Home on August 15th, 1947. And the time? The time matters, too. Well then: at night. No, it's important to be more... On the stroke of midnight, as a matter of fact.⁹

That the main theme of *Midnight's Children* is the notion of freedom becomes clear in the above illustrations. But the novel is confined not only to the theme of freedom but it also dwells upon the decadence of such freedom. In order to depict the failure of freedom in Modern India, the narrative depends not only upon the contemporary condition of India but also on the period of freedom struggle under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi. The narrative covers the history of

India from the time of freedom struggle to the emergency. So as to highlight the failure of freedom. As a result *Midnight's Children* emerges not only as a novel of contemporary politics but also a novel of freedom. Hence a study is undertaken to observe the depiction of freedom struggle and its impact on Modern India in the following part.

Though the narrative begins with the depiction of the birth of Saleem Sinai as an alter ego or a symbol of free India on 15th August 1947, the narrative does not move in a sequential progression. Instead, it moves in the reverse direction instantly and begins to depict the biography of Aadam Aziz whose life happens to correspond with the history of Indian freedom struggle under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi.

The period of the freedom struggle is purposefully subsumed in the episode of Aadam Aziz to create the impression that the narrative is not just the story of Saleem Sinai's grandfather but also that of the national movement. Aadam Aziz is a foreign return from Germany with a degree in Medicine. His services are hired by Mr. Ghani to attend to the illness of his daughter Naseem in Kashmir. During his periodical visits to render treatment to her, they fall in love with each other. When Mr. Ghani learns this, he makes arrangements for their marriage in the subsequent days.

After their marriage the couple moves from Kashmir to Amristar. At this point the Freedom Struggle is skillfully incorporated in the narrative:

Now, looking out of his window, he sees it echoed on a wall opposite; and there, on the minaret of a mosque; and in the large black type of newsprint under a hawker's arm. Leaflet newspaper mosque and wall are crying: *Hartal!* Which is to say, literally speaking, a day of mourning, of stillness, of silence. But this is India in the heyday of the Mahatma, when even language obeys the instructions of Gandhiji, and the word has acquired, under his influence, new resonances. *Hartal - April 7*, agree mosque newspaper wall and pamphlet, because Gandhiji has decreed that the whole of India shall, on that day, come to a halt. To mourn, in peace, the continuing presence of the British.

Doctor Aziz notices a soldierly young man in the street, and thinks - the Indian have fought for the British; so many of them have seen the world by now, and been tainted by Abroad. They will not easily go back to the old word. The British are

wrong to try and turn back the clock. 'It was a mistake to pass the Rowlatt Act', he murmurs.

Aziz, with Tai in his head, does not feel Indian. Kashmir, after all, is not strictly speaking a part of the Empire, but an independent princely state. He is not sure if the hartal of pamphlet mosque wall newspaper is his fight, even though he is in occupied territory now.¹⁰

In the above illustration some important factors with regard to the freedom movement and the tendency of common people towards the freedom struggle are vividly reflected. Firstly, the style of Gandhi's functioning to fight against the British is revealed. Gandhi is portrayed as dictatorial in a very subtle way because the illustration clearly indicates that Gandhi has enjoyed monopoly in the matters concerning the movement for freedom. Secondly, it also highlights the influence of Gandhi cast on not only the people but also on the non-living things like the walls. There is a pinch of satire on Gandhi's style of functioning. Finally, the indifference of the common people towards the programmes of Gandhi is portrayed through the reaction of Naseem. She responds to Gandhi's call for 'Haratal' movement is characterized by peculiarity. It is so because she does not see 'Haratal'

as anything beyond the ritual silence, which is observed on the occasions of death or chaos.

Even with regard to Rowlatt Act she differs from her husband. Her husband feels that it is wrong on the part of British to pass Rowlatt Act to suppress the rights of the natives but she is totally ignorant of such a familiar act as Rowlatt Act. And she considers it nonsense without knowing what it means. This is represented through her utterance of the word wrongly as 'Rowlatt'. Thus *Midnight's Children* shows the first sign of it is being novel of freedom struggle by assimilating the popular events like 'Haratal' and 'Anti Rowlatt Act' in the narrative pattern.

Subsequently yet another important event of freedom struggle is inducted in the narrative. It is none other than "Jalianwalla Bagh" massacre. The massacre is narrated photographically as:

Brigadier Dyer's fifty men put down their machine
- guns and go away. They have fired a total of one
thousand six hundred and fifty rounds into the
unarmed crowd. Of these, one thousand five
hundred and sixteen have found their mark, killing
or wounding some person. 'Good shooting, 'Dyer
tells his men, 'We have done a jolly good thing.¹¹

This description reveals an important factor of the tendency of the text towards the freedom struggle. There is a complete lack of seriousness in the depiction of the massacre. It is a well known fact drawn from the text of history that the massacre was the severest blow by the Marshall, not only on the lives of several thousands of people but also on the mind of Gandhi in his approach to fight against the British. After this event a great change takes place in Gandhi who decides to withdraw the mass agitation against the British, lest the people are killed. But this depiction is characterized not by sentiment but by humour.

The humour is evident in the portrayal of Aadam Aziz on this occasion. He goes to Jalianwala Bagh garden Indian anticipating bloodshed. As a Doctor he carries medicine (mercurom) to attend to the victims of violence. Though he is amidst the crowd which falls prey to the guns of Dyer's soldiers he escapes from death. This is humourously portrayed as he is saved by his fall caused by his phenomenal sneeze. When he returns home his wife notices the red stains on his shirt over his chest and becomes panic that he has been wounded in the massacre. On the contrary it is not the bloodstains but the stain of medicine, which he has carried for the victims of the massacre, which is found on his shirt in reality. This whole incident of the tragic massacre has been given a humorous depiction. In addition,

the narrative has not paid any attention to the patriotic spirit of the people who have assembled in Jalianwala Bagh garden. On the contrary it presents the people who are occupied with selling and eating. This deviates the seriousness of the massacre into a farce. Meenakshi Mukherjee opines the Jallianwalla Bagh incident as follows: "... although the violence is real, the blood shed by real bodies occurs with a significance that can only be described as metaphorical..."¹²

Then there are only a few observations on the events like the Quit India Movement, Partition and the Role of Subhash Chandra Bose in the freedom struggle in a subtle manner. Among these the theme of partition alone is elaborated in the forthcoming episodes of the narrative. Though these references are not expanded in detail they do appear important in understanding the impact of freedom struggle on the Modern free India in the later part. In a way they perform as a preface to the theme of freedom struggle as a dead concept in the episodes to come later.

Decadence of the Ideology of Freedom Struggle in *Midnight's Children*

Midnight's Children is woven around the theme of freedom but as a dead theme. It sets out to drive home the point home that freedom is not sustained in the post-Independent India. The notion of freedom is

absent in political, social and religious aspects of Indians. In other words there is a betrayal of the principles of freedom struggle, which in turn, suggests that the notion of freedom has become extinct. To justify this assumption, a study of the novel is undertaken to trace how the principles of freedom are betrayed in such fields as politics, society and religion.

In the politics, the narrative portrays that most of the national leaders are betrayers of the principles of freedom struggle. Jawaharlal Nehru is the foremost in this series of leaders. It is needless to state that Jawaharlal has been chosen as the first Prime Minister of India as a reward for his yeoman service in the freedom struggle. It is said that Mahatma Gandhi himself has recommended Nehru for the premiership.

Though Nehru is a freedom fighter of a high grade, the narrative shows that he has not remained faithful to the principles of the freedom struggle. To depict the process in which Nehru causes a set back to the notion of nationalism, Nehru's earlier image as a being concerned with the well being of the nation is narrated. Here Nehru's letter is incorporated thus as:

Jawaharlal Nehru wrote: 'Dear Baby Saleem, My belated congratulations on the happy accident of your moment of birth! You are the newest bearer of

that ancient face of India which is also eternally young. We shall be watching over your life with closest attention; it will be, in a sense, the mirror of our own'.¹³

Jawaharlal Nehru fails to remain faithful to his own vision. He emerges as a self-centered politician by misappropriating the power vested on him by the people. His interest is confined to retain himself in the position of the Premier for which he stoops so low to indulge in the booth capturing in the elections. It is narrated in the following:

On election day, 1957, the All-India Congress was badly shocked. Although it won the election, twelve million votes made the Communists the largest single opposition party; and in Bombay, despite the efforts of Boss Patil, large numbers of electors failed to place their crosses against the Congress symbol of sacred-cow-and-sucking-calf, preferring the less emotive pictograms of the Samyukta Maharashtra Samiti and Maha Gujarat Parishad...

One member of the Midnight's Children's Conference played a minor role in the elections. Winkie's supposed son Shiva was recruited by-well,

perhaps I will not name the party; but only one party had really large sums to spend-and on polling day, he and his gang, who called themselves Cowboys, were to be seen standing outside a polling station in the north of the city, some holding long stout sticks, other juggling with stones, still others picking their teeth with knives, all of them encouraging the electorate to use its vote with wisdom and care ... and after the polls closed, were seals broken on ballot-boxes?.¹⁴

It clearly indicates that the Congress Party under Nehru's leadership has hired goondas to capture the booths in the 1957 election and suggests the hard won freedom has been honoured in the breach. In a way, it amounts to recolonizing under the pseudo-democracy.

Besides, the narrative throws light on the crisis of nationalism in India during the Nehru's prime ministership. It is reflected in the depiction partition. Partition appears to be disease, which has been infecting the country from the day of our freedom and it has caused deterioration of nationalism. One instance of this is the bifurcation of Gujarat State on the linguistic line:

After the general election, the Central Government continued to shilly-shally about the future of

Bombay. The State was to be partitioned; then not to be partitioned; then partition reared its head again. And as for the city itself-it was to be the capital of Maharashtra; or of both Maharashtra and Gujarat; or an independent states of its own... while the government tried to work out what on earth to do, the city's inhabitants decided to encourage it to be quick. Riots proliferated (and you still hear the old battle-song of the Maharattas-*How are you? I am well! I'll take a stick and thrash you to hell-rising above the fray*); and to make things worse, the whether joined the melee.¹⁵

The government, which has the responsibility, to safeguard the solidarity of the country by paying proper attention to the sensitive issues like language, runs with the hare and hunts with the hounds. It is a mockery of the sacrifice of the nationalists, like Patel who struggled hard to unify the states lest the country should be subjected to further bifurcation on the line of language. India, being a multilingual country, faces the threat, if the same method is applied to all the language groups, the country would be broken into numerous fragments as there are hundreds of language variations within the languages leading to the formations of thousands of dialectic states, as on the linguistic states

model. This ultimately causes a set back to nationalism. In this regard Kathaleen Flangan's comment is worthy of note:

Parts of society factions like the language marchers who in 1956 demanded the partition of Bombay along linguistic boundaries (199) do as much, in Rushdie's novel to make the state of India unviable.¹⁶

Then the novel depicts the deterioration of the ideology of the Freedom Struggle in the episode of Mrs. Indira Gandhi. During her tenure, she is portrayed to misuse her power to declare Emergency, which deprives the people of their right to assemble and to speak. It amounts to betraying the principles of the Freedom Movement in a sense. The detention of people under Emergency is described:

Statistics may set my arrest in context; although there is considerable disagreement about the number of 'political' prisoners taken during the Emergence, either thirty thousand or a quarter of a million persons certainly lost their freedom.¹⁷

Saleem is regarded as an embodiment of all the 1001 children of the midnight and as a metaphor of free India. He is captured and kept in the prison during the Emergency period. It, hence, denotes symbolically that India as a nation is made captive. In the act of

highlighting the misuse of political power and its consequent impact upon the country, the attitude of the novel to subvert the notion of nationalism is explicit. Timothy Brennan is correct identifying as a postmodern subversion of the nation of free nation:

Concern with the ideology of nationalism as an expression of state violence brings us to a quality of the present condition that is submerged in most accounts of post-modernism-namely, the technology of repression. Here the fragmented individual is quite literally the product of an active repressive apparatus.¹⁸

The disintegration of the notion of India as a free nation reaches the climax when they are subjected to sterilization. The sterilization under the Family Planning Programme in 1979 and the Emergency together affected the nation reducing its condition to that of an impotent. Though one tends to feel that the novel is against the regime of the Congress in general and against Mrs. Indira Gandhi in particular, a close reading of the novel will help one to decipher that the novel does not spare other political leaders also. Who were responsible for the disintegration of nation?. One such instance of attack on the Janata Party is worth noting:

It was only later that I learned how the tattered hopes of the nation had been placed in the custody of an ancient dotard who ate pistachios and cashews and daily took a glass of 'his own water'. Urine drinkers had come to power. The Janet party, with one its leaders trapped in a kidney machine, did not seem to me (when I heard about it) to represent a new dawn.¹⁹

Salem claims that he is the sum total of India when says:

I am the sum total of everything that went before me, of all I have been seen done, of everything done-to-me. I am everyone everything whose being-in-the-world affected was affected by mine. I am anything that happens after I've gone which would not have happened if I had not come. Nor am I particularly exceptional in this matter; each 'I', every one of the now-six- hundred-million-plus of us, contains a similar multitude.²⁰

But he loses all and falls prey to the government's vengeance by being subjected to castration. His fall has to be seen as the fall of the nation. The novels response to the members of Nehru family as 'These Nehru's will not be happy until they have made themselves hereditary Kings'

clearly indicates that the national movement is an utter failure. Hence the novel can be viewed as a parody of the notion of nationalism.

Disintegration of Values in Society

Freedom is viewed as having caused an adverse effect on the society in this novel. There is a sly portrayal of the professionals in India at advent of freedom. Dr. Norlina, who is a doctor by profession, is involved in land and tetrapods business. The judges are corrupt. This is manifested in the episode of Ismail the lawyer who justifies his act of bribing the judges as:

‘Nothing comes out right in life,’ he tells his duck of a wife, ‘unless it’s forced out.’ Applying this philosophy to his legal career, he embarks on a career of bribing judges and fixing juries.²¹

Ahmed Sinai’s wife Ameena is portrayed to be gambling in the horse race. The social problems such as poverty, unemployment, casteism are not contained in the free India. On the other hand, they are highlighted to be multiplying. The height of irony is found in portraying the scarcity of the basic amenity like, water as the novel sarcastically states as: “the water shortage had reached the point where milkmen could no longer find clean water with which to adulterate the

milk.”²² And regarding the practice of untouchability, the observation appears as:

Brahmins began to feel uneasy at permitting even their thoughts to touch the thoughts of untouchables; while, among the low-born, the pressures of poverty and communism were becoming evident...²³

They clearly indicate that the notion of Freedom is dead:

This independence is for rich only; the poor being made to kill each other like flies. In Punjab, in Bengal, Riots, poor against poor. It's in the wind.²⁴

Disintegration in Religion

Religion fanaticism is instrumental for the partition of the subcontinent into India and Pakistan, which is a sure, set back not only to the freedom struggle but also to the freedom itself. The implications are manifested in several instances.

First, it has paved the way for the breed of unpatriotic attitude. It is reflected in the response of Amina to the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi. Mahatma Gandhi has been identified as the father of the nation (India) worldwide by the virtue of his leadership in the National Movement to win Independence for India. He has been worshiped as

the Mahatma across the country. When a person such as Mahatma Gandhi is assassinated, the Muslims are relieved from the fact that the assassin is not a Muslim instead of grieving the demise of the father of the nation. It indicates very clearly that the nationalists are by betrayed as soon as the freedom is attained. This has to be regarded as a set-back to the sacrifice of our freedom fighters.

Second, the two-national theory paved a way for the one partition namely Pakistan and Bangladesh. Nation formation on the basis of religion alone is proved to futile in the case of Pakistan. The people of East Pakistan (Bangladesh) who identify themselves with India with regard to culture and language wage a war of independence against Pakistan for separate nationhood as Bangladesh. In the ensuing battle, there is an instance of fratricide which is depicted:

at a maidan in which lady doctors were being bayoneted before they were raped, and raped again before they were shot. Above them and behind them, the cool white minaret of a mosque started blindly down upon the scene.²⁵

The next instance of fratricide due to the partition is found in the episode of Shiva. Shiva is born actually to the Muslim couple Ahmed Sinai and Amina but exchanged with Saleem Sinai who is actually born to the Hindu couple - Wee Willie Winkie and Vanita by the nurse.

Thus Shiva is a Muslim by birth. He is hired Indian government to support Bangladesh in the battle with Pakistan and Shiva kills Pakistani soldiers without knowing that he is himself a Muslim. This amounts to committing fratricide, which Uma Parameswaran observes aptly as:

The episode has to be read thus: Shiva is actually the son of Ahmed and Amina Sinai, and Amina has always been a Pakistani at heart and she is at this time an immigrant in Pakistan. The Bangladesh episode in history was a civil war, the eastern arm of Pakistan rising against the west-based government and the western arm trying to put down; it was a civil war of Muslims killing fellow Muslims. Thus Shiva, born of Muslim parents and fighting for East Pakistan, is a Muslim Killing his fellow Muslims.²⁶

When this instance is examined in depth, one can comprehend this fratricide is caused by the lack of stability in both the individual and identity. Saleem is not Muslim by birth by he aligns himself with Pakistan and fights against Bangladesh. Shiva, who is a Muslim by birth, aligns with Bangladesh and ruins the West Pakistan. Thus

nationalism has become suicidal in this regard where by the text's attitude towards freedom as a dead theme becomes explicit.

Midnight's Children attempts to show the failure of the freedom struggle and that the notion of freedom as being dead. In order to comply with this theme, it dwells upon the generations belonging to both the pre and post-Independence India. After portraying a few events of freedom struggle, the narrative concentrates on various phases of free Indian and exposes that the ideology on which the National Movement built up and the dreams of our nationalists are utterly defeated by the heirs. Therefore it is concluded that freedom struggle and notion are dead themes in *Midnight's Children*.

It is obvious that the aim of the freedom fighters is to establish a free nation where the principles like sovereignty, unity, equality and an overall prosperity are to be achieved. For this cause the nation has indulged in various ways of war against the Colonial Rule at home. From the day of Sepoy Movement to the day of Indian Independence innumerable sacrifices have been made by our nationalists. Though the dream of them to see the mother country from the subjugation of foreign rule has become true the other aspirations such as the above mentioned have not been attained. The narrative addresses to these aspects through out the novel.

The first feature of the failure of freedom struggle is shown in the continuation of imperialism in the disguise of Home Rule. Jawaharlal Nehru has been portrayed as the first betrayal of the ideology of freedom struggle. He misappropriates the power rested on him by the people of India. He misuses the power of Prime Ministership for continuing in that position. The problems of nation are not paid the required attention by him. Like the British he also indulges in Divide and Rule for matters of selfishness. He does not hesitate to corrupt such institutions as electorates to see that his party wins the elections. Dividing the country on the basis of linguistics is also shown as political strategy to fulfill his vested interests. The novel makes the following comments, which is worthwhile to note as how Nehru has betrayed the ideology of freedom struggle called: "These Nehru's will not be happy until they have made themselves hereditary kings!"²⁷

This explains that Jawaharlal Nehru has sustained the imperialistic rule in the disguise of his Prime Ministership. It is force that India was freed from the subjugation of foreign rule only for subjugating it under the political leaders of our own country. Though Jawaharlal Nehru himself has been regarded as a forefront freedom fighter for the freedom of India, he has become a hypocrite by denying the same freedom to the country by his desire for being the Prime Minister eternally.

The demise of Jawaharlal Nehru also has failed to free the Nation from the clutches of family rule. Two years after the death of Jawaharlal Nehru his daughter Mrs. Indira Gandhi ascends to the power of Prime Ministership. During her regime the disillusionment of freedom and the death of nationalism are heightened. She also misuses the electorates and in her declaration of Emergency and implementation of Family Planning programme India is portrayed as suffering a deathblow on freedom. Virtually the whole country is subjected to slavery. The fundamental rights are denied to the people. Thus the dreams of our patriots are made to suffer the greatest defeat in the hands of the pseudo democratic leader. The worst part of the tragedy is that all these atrocities are caused by the leader of congress party which has its origin the Indian National Congress which has sacrificed many things for the freedom of the Nation.

The successor of Indira Gandhi - Morarji Desai who is also a freedom fighter in Gandhian mould does not do any good for assuring freedom to the nation. The narrative makes sarcasm of Morarji Desai in portraying him not as the guardian of the nation. But as man who is making experiment with a urine therapy by drinking his own urine. His failure as the Prime Minister has to be seen as failure of the ideology of freedom struggle for he is projected more as a Gandhian than as a politician.

The failure of the principles of freedom struggle has been portrayed in the theme of partition too. It is obvious to saying that the primary object of freedom struggle to win back the sub-continent as a whole from the foreign rule. Indeed until the 1940's there was not idea of dividing the nation into two. The two nation theory has appeared only very late at the advent of Mohammad Ali Jinnah. When recalled it becomes clear that the Muslims, Sikhs, Hindus has had a united stand and worked together under the banner of Indian National Congress for the freedom of the sub-continent. In accepting the two-nation theory what is defeated is nothing but the ideology of the national movement.

The narrative depicts not only the partition of India into India and Pakistan into Pakistan and Bangladesh in the depiction of the partitions the narrative clearly reveals how the doctrine of non-violence has been spread across the sub-continent. While the Hindus and Muslims have indulged in the mutual distraction on the eve of partition of India and Pakistan, the Muslims have been indulging in killing their own kid and kin. Thus the novel suggests that the ideology of national movement has been betrayed not only once but also twice.

Yet another instance of betrayal of nationalism is portrayed in the sustaining of admiration for the whites and in hybridity. It is done in the episode Colonel Methowld. He is a departing Colonial at the advent of independence. He sells his palace to a group of people with a

condition that they should not replace his furniture in the palace and damage the palace in the future. The buyers include Ahmed Sinai, Homi Catrack, Ismail Ibrahim. They buy the palace and maintain it as it was without changing anything in it. This shows that our minds are not yet liberated from our admiration for the foreigners.

In the creating of Saleem Sinai the device of hybridity has been employed which is not only the example of hybridity but also that of the continuation of foreign race in India. It is so because Saleem Sinai is born from the union of an Indian mother Vanitha and an English father Colonel Methowld. From Saleem Sinai the race of English continues. In creating a son of an English as the protagonist the narrative strongly suggests that India is still under British influence. Therefore it must be regarded as a failure of the dream of our Nationalists.

The decadence of the freedom struggle ideology is presented in an unprecedented manner in the narrative. A new concept called business nationalism is shown to have replaced the patriotic nationalism after the Indian Independence. This is portrayed through the creation of such characters as Ahmed Sinai, Dr Narlikar and Lord Khusro. The first two characters indulge in manipulating the Independence of India as an opportunity in making money through purchasing lands. Dr Narlikar appears as a philanthropist outwardly. He renders free services in his

hospital for the delivery cases. Saleem Sinai is born in his hospital. Shiva is also born in his hospital.

In reality Dr. Narlekar is a businessman. It is he who invites Ahmed Sinai from Delhi to Bombay. He advises him to purchase the lands of the departing English men. Since the lands are available at cheaper rate. In addition he also induces him to become his partner in the business of tetrapods. Ahmed Sinai achieves prosperity quickly. It shows that they do not share the sense of patriotism since they have regarded freedom as a chance for their own benefits.

Lord khusro's portrayal is another instance of changing nationalism as a business. He is a school dropout. It is Saleem Sinai provides him the story books with which he develops some sort of magic. Later he projects himself as an incarnation of God. He becomes the most popular Godmen, despite the fact that he knows nothing about spiritualism. He misuses his Godmen image to collect money from his deities. He becomes so affluent that he is in the procession such luxurious as car, bungalow etc. Besides the donation from the local followers he also gets a huge some of money from foreign deities:

In the name of maternal love, he truly became Lord Khusro, the most successful holy child in history; in no time at all he was being hailed by crowds half a million strong, and credited with miracles;

American guitarists came to sit at his feet, and they all brought their cheque books along. Lord Khusrovand acquired accountants, and tax havens, and a luxury liner called the *Khusrovand Starship*, and an aircraft – *Lord Khusro's Astral Plane*.²⁸

A sage in the traditional way is one who scarifies everything for the welfare of the world and is meant to spread the wisdom to all. But Khusro is contrary to the traditional image of a sage. He is pretending to be a Godman only for the purpose of material benefits. While three fourth of the Indians are under the poverty line, here is a sage who is leading such an affluent life as that of a millionaire. This shows the lack of concern for the poor in a man like Khusro for whom freedom is a means of exploitation. In these instances the gratitude of people in the free nation for the patriots is lacking. In other words the nation, which was dreamt by the freedom fighters to breed the children to build a strong nation creating an overall development has met with utter failure by producing only the people like Ahmed Sinai, Dr. Narlikar and Lord Khusro who are only selfish.

Midnight's Children, Perspective of Freedom Struggle

Avadhesh K. Singh notes that "Altogether in a novel of 552 pages, there are 55 references to Indian history."²⁹ They include Gandhi's

'Hartal' against the continued presence of the British in India, the passing of Rowlatt Act followed by R.E. Dyer's dastardly act on 13th April 1919, Quit India Movement, Viceroy Wavell, Atlee Government, Mountbatten's proposal to divide the nation, the transfer of power, Nehru's speech, unfurling the flag, the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi, Nasser's sinking of ships at Suez, Muslim's fleeing India, Nehru's five year plan, Nambudripad, DMK, states re-organization committee in 1955, All India Congress Party elections, communists coming up against the Congress, Congress symbol of the cow and the sucking calf, Bombay's partition struggles, the announcement of a coup in Pakistan, the incidents in Rawalpindi, the occupation of Goa and Sino-Indian border clashes, Krishna Menon's statement of using force to eject China and Chinese advancing and beating the Indian forces on October 20, 1961. Indian forces in tatters, massive inflation into Kashmir and Butto's denial of Pakistan's intervention in Kashmir, war with Pakistan, battle for Lahore, cessation of hostilities, Pak's vanquished Niazi, victorious Indian General Sam Manekshaw's meet, Tikka Khan's emergence, Indira Gandhi's landslide victory, Mujib's arrest, Mukti Bahani and ten million refugees in India, the birth of Bangladesh, America's intervention, Pak soldiers on Bangaladesee, Indira basking in her full glory on 16th December 1971, the railway Minister Mishra's death in a bomb blast, Jayaprakash Narayan,

Morarjee forming Janata Govt, Allahabad Judgement against Indira Gandhi on 12th June 1972, Morarjee asking President Ahmed to sack Indira, Indira's marriage to Feroz Gandhi in 1952, Feroz's criticism of the Govt, and TTK's resignation. These references indicate that the narrative dwells upon the theme of freedom. However the emphasis is laid more on the misuse of the hard earned Independence for India from the British. In other words the notion of freedom is found to be dead in the post-Independent India which is manifested in the depiction of an unprecedented set back to the dreams and aspirations of Swaraj.

Midnight's Children has been widely identified as a post-modernist novel. It is so because the perspective of *Midnight's Children* on the received notion of reality of freedom struggle or nationalism is understandably subversive. It attempts to show that the notion of freedom struggle and freedom subsequently is only a human construct. It unfolds the constructedness of such notions as the above in depicting them as dead. It is in conquered with the post-modernist tendency of regarding the traditional realism as extinct.

In order to establish this post-modernist perspective of the freedom struggle, freedom, partition and the life of free India being devoid of any substance of validity. Hence the glorious history of national movement under the eminent leadership of Gandhi has been

reduced as non-entity with confining to a few events of that movement in the narrative. The severest blow on the heroic image of national movement is explicit in the depiction of the death of its most popular leader Mahatma Gandhi not only in the wrong part of the narrative but also in the wrong venue. The first news of Gandhi death is communicated ironically in the stills on the film screen in the cinema theatre. In addition Gandhi's death has been depicted not as a national tragedy. Indeed, it is feared that assassination of Gandhi might cast communal violence, which is numerously narrated:

This afternoon, at Birla House in Delhi, our beloved Mahatma was killed. Some madman shot him in the stomach, ladies and gentlemen-our Bapu is gone!

The audience had begun to scream before he finished; the poison of his words entered their veins - there were grown men rolling in the aisles clutching their bellies, not laughing but crying, *Hai Ram! Hai Ram!* - and women tearing their hair: the city's finest coiffures tumbling around the ears of the poisoned ladies - there were film-stars yelling like fishwives and something terrible to smell in the air - and Hanif whispered 'Get out of here, big

sister – if a Muslim did this thing there will be hell to pay’.

But for every snake, there is a ladder: and finally the radio gave us a name. Nathuram Godse, ‘Thank God’, Amina burst out, ‘It’s not a Muslim name!’

And Aadam, upon whom the news of Gandhi’s death had placed a new burden of age: ‘This Godse is nothing to be grateful for!’

Amina, however, was full of the light-headedness of relief, she was rushing dizzily up the long ladder of relief... ‘Why not, after all? By being Godse he has saved our lives’!³⁰

With regard to the notion of freedom also the narrative is post-modernistic. Saleem Sinai is shown as a symbol of free India by depicting that he is born at the exact hour India is born free. Along with Saleem a thousand more children are born. But all of them become miserable in the passage of time. Saleem Sinai develops a mysterious crack all over his body and begins to disintegrate and decay. Shiva who is an alter ego grows on the street. He becomes a bodyguard of Mrs. Indira Gandhi only to disintegrate later. Paravati the witch becomes a victim of Shiva’s seduction and dies miserably while delivering her

child. This suggests that the freedom has caused disintegration to India. Therefore the perspective of freedom movement and freedom can be regarded as only subversive where by the narrative becomes post-modernistic.

The political leaders of free India are also portrayed as the betrayal of freedom struggle and patriotism. The freedom, which is won from the British rule, is lost during the governess of our own nationalists. By depicting freedom has being dead during the regimes of Jawaharlal Nehru, Mrs. Indira Gandhi and Murarji Desai, the perspective of the narrative on the notion of freedom is satirical.

In the portrayal of the continuation of the Britishers influence on the people such as Ahmed Sinai, Vanita etc., the narrative, rules out the belief that India has attain freedom. By showing the degradation of the spirit of nationalism into business nationalism through the depiction of selfish motto of Ahmed Sinai, Dr. Narlikar and Lord Khusro the narrative negates the prevalence of national spirit in the country. Thus, the narrative asserts that the traditional understanding of the freedom struggle and freedom is only a constructed one. Hence it negates the very conventional idea of nationalism.

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