

# A Brief Literary History of Indian Writings in English with Reference to Salman Rushdie's *The Midnight's Children*

S.Kumanan,  
Assistant Professor,  
Department of English,  
Karpagam Academy of Higher Education.

## ABSTRACT:

Literature is one of the finest arts that employs language as a medium of expression. It is essentially an expression of human feelings, emotions, sufferings and joys. Good literature is never outdated and knows no bounds of place and time. It is permanent and universal, in the sense that it appeals to readers across national or linguistic boundaries. Language or culture may be different but human sentiments remain the same in the literatures of the world. Among the literature of the world, Indo-Anglian literature is the dynamic branch and has great inheritance commencing from the Vedas, it has continued to spread its mellow lights and it is the part of Indian literature. In India, there are different languages and literature. Through this paper the researcher would like to focus on the root and brief literary history of Indian writings in English and also the genre of Novel in Indo–Anglian Literature up to the time of Salman Rushdie with special reference to *The Midnight's Children*.

**KEYWORDS:** Indo-Anglian, Salman Rushdie, Indian Literature, Magical Realism.

India is a country where the cultural root is same, though there are marked differences in regional literature owing to the genius of respective languages in which they are written. There are certain movements that have deeply affected each of the regional Indian literatures. Though

there are so many regional literatures in India as there is language but the essential thread is the same and they weave a beautiful organic whole. The fact Indian literatures are a product of a multilingual, multicultural and socio-historical mélange cannot be overlooked. Today Indian literatures reached at the apex of creation with the contribution of regional and national writers. For the better understanding of Salman, it is essential to mention the brief history of Indian writing in English and the contributors of it. And also post independent political setup of India along with the list of the contributors in Indian writing in English, the rise of the new form of literature-novel in India is also necessary to focus.

Salman Rushdie was born on 19<sup>th</sup> June 1947 in Mumbai. He belongs to Muslim family of Kashmiri descend. He is a British Indian novelist and Essayist. His second novel, *Midnight's children* (1981), won the Booker prize in 1981. He said to combine magical realism with historical fiction; Rushdie has been married four times. His first wife was Clarissa Luard. His second wife was the American novelist Marianne Wiggins they were married in 1988. His third wife was Elizabeth; they have a son, Milan. In 2004, he married Padma Lakshmi the Indian American an actress, model, and the host of the American reality-television show *Top chef*. The marriage ended on 2<sup>nd</sup> July 2007. His work is concerned with the many connections, disruptions and migrations between Eastern and Western civilization. Rushdie was the President of PEN American Center from 2004 to 2006. He opposed the British government's introduction of the Racial and Religious Hatred Act, something he writes about in his contribution to *Free Expression Is No Offence*, a collection of essays by several writers, published by Penguin in November 2005. In May 2008 he was elected a Foreign Honorary Member of the American Academy of Arts and letters. He would have become an actor if his writing career had not been

successful. Even from early childhood he dreamed of appearing in Hollywood movies. Rushdie includes fictional television and movie characters in some of his writings.

Rushdie came from a liberal Muslim family although he now identifies as an atheist. “I do not believe in supernatural entities, whether Christian, Jewish, Muslim or Hindu”. His books often focus on the role of religion in society and conflicts between faiths and the religious and those of no faith. Rushdie advocates the application of higher critics, pioneered during the late of 19<sup>th</sup> century. Rushdie called for the reform in Islam in a guest opinion piece printed in the Washington Post and the Times in the mid-August: Rushdie is a critic of cultural relativism. He favors calling things by their true names and constantly argues about what is wrong and what is right. “We all live in stories, so called grand narratives. Nation is a story, family is a story, religion is a story, and community is a story. We all live within and with this narrative.” Rushdie is an advocate of religious satire. Rushdie called the attack as a sequence of “religious totalitarianism” according to him which had caused “a deadly mutation in the art Islam”.

In the 1980's in Britain, he was a supporter of the labor party championed measures to end racial discrimination and alienation of immigrant youth and racial minority. Rushdie supported the election of democrat Barack Obama for the U.S presidency and as often criticized the re-publican party. In Indian politics, Rushdie has criticized the Bharatiya Janata party and its Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

He wrote many novels and some of his novels that gave him more fame are *Grimus* (1975), *Midnight's Children* (1981), *Shame* (1983), *The Satanic Verses* (1988), *The Moor's Last Sigh* (1995), *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* (1999), *Fury* (2001), *Shalimar the Clown* (2005), *The Enchantress of Florence* (2008), *Two Years Eight Months and Twenty-Eight Nights* (2015). His

most famous collections are *Homeless by Choice* (1992, with R. Jhabvala and V. S. Naipaul), *East, West* (1994), *The Best American Short Stories* (2008, as Guest Editor). He also wrote stories for children and those stories too gave him a great success. Those story books are *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* (1990), *Luka and the Fire of Life* (2010). He is also an essayist. Some of his essays and non-fiction are *The Jaguar Smile: A Nicaraguan Journey* (1987), "In Good Faith", *Granta*, 1990, *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism, 1981–1991* (1992), "The Wizard of Oz: BFI Film Classics", BFI, 1992, "Mohandas Gandhi." *Time*, 13 April 1998, "Imagine There Is No Heaven.", extracted contribution from *Letters to the Six Billionth World Citizen*, a UN sponsored publication in English by Uitgeverij Podium, Amsterdam. *The Guardian*, 16 October 1999, *Step across This Line: Collected Nonfiction 1992–2002* (2002), "A fine pickle" *The Guardian*, 28 February 2009, "In the South." *Booktrack*, 7 February 2012, *Joseph Anton: A Memoir* (2012).

For all these works he got many awards. He got Aristeion Prize (European Union), Arts Council Writers' Award, Author of the Year (British Book Awards), Author of the Year (Germany), Booker Prize for Fiction, Booker of Bookers for the best novel among the Booker Prize winners for Fiction awarded at its 25th anniversary (in 1993), The Best of the Booker awarded to commemorate the Booker Prize's 40th anniversary (in 2008), winner by public vote, Commandeur de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres (France), English-Speaking Union Award, Golden PEN Award, Hans Christian Andersen Literature Award (2014), Honorary Patron, University Philosophical Society, Trinity College, Dublin, Hutch Crossword Book Award (India), India Abroad Lifetime Achievement Award (USA), James Tait Black Memorial Prize (Fiction), Kurt Tucholsky Prize (Sweden), Mantua Prize (Italy), Norman Mailer Prize (USA), James Joyce Award – University College Dublin, Massachusetts Institute of Technology

Honorary Professorship, Chapman University Honorary Doctorate – Doctor of Humane Letters, Outstanding Lifetime Achievement in Cultural Humanism (Harvard University), PEN Pinter Prize (UK), Premio Grinzane Cavour (Italy), Prix Colette (Switzerland), Prix du Meilleur Livre Étranger, St. Louis Literary Award – Saint Louis University, State Prize for Literature (Austria), Whitbread Novel Award (twice), Writers' Guild of Great Britain Award for Children's Fiction, University of Liège Doctor honoris causa, Knight Bachelor Kt. 2007.

“I think, since Indian English fiction has now a sufficient number of texts to suffice the needs of its institutionalized teaching, it is desirable to leave out writers who have no stakes in the Indian society. In the past, V.S Naipaul used to be included in this body for convenience-till he made many enemies in India by his crazy travelogues. Just as it is desirable to live Naipaul out of our account, it is also desirable, to leave out writers like Rudhdie, Rohinton mistry, and Bharathi mukherjee out of any consideration of the Indian English literature. If the mere accident of birth was enough of a criterion, we could have happily included Kipling, Lawrence Durrell, and such others and American literature would have included pound and Eliot” (Bharucha and sarang 1994: 12).

All the genres of Indian English literature, fiction is the most developed and well received one in the postmodern period both at home and abroad. Arundhati Roy’s booker prize Award winning novel,” *The God of Small Things*”(1997) Indian English novel has won the international recognition. I should hasten to add the earlier in the nineteen sixties and seventies novelist like R.K Narayan, Raja Rao, Mulkraj Anand, Arunjoshi, Anita Deasi and few others have won recognition both at home and abroad. But Indian English novel as not attractive the attention of readers in our country and abroad, the way it has done in the postmodern period.

Indian English novel add its luxuriant growth in the hands of Amitav ghosh, Uppamanyu Chatterjee, sasi Tharoor, Vikram Seth, sasi deshpande as and a few others in the 1980's and after. Salman Rushdie's "*Midnight Children*", a novel that won booker's booker prize can be set to be the epoch- making book that has revolutionalized Indian English fiction in postmodern period. And yet I do not consider Rushdie as an Indian English writer-of Indian origin or Diaspora and can be best described as British American Indian writer.

The first think that strikes us is the broadening of the thematic range of Indian English novel. East - west encounter which is explained in terms of hybridity in relationship by post-colonial critics, takes 'a Space' in postmodern Indian English fiction. When the world has become a 'global village', no culture or society is pure or insular today. Critics like Edward said, and Homi k. Bhabha have inspired the novelists to write more and more about cultural encounter between the East and the West.

Vikram Seth's contribution was *the golden gate* and an *equal music* in the post-1980 era love, sex, and marriage or the failure of it is some of the leading themes in Indian English novel. The description of love and sex is very bold and rather unconventional. Shiva K. Kumar's *A River with Three Banks* depicts love and sex without any inhibition. The case with Manju kapur's *Difficult Daughters*. Marriage as a social institution has lost its sanctity and relevance in the post-1980 era. Lack of faith in religion and declining moral standard and behavior are some of the predominant themes in postmodern novel. Corruption in public as well as private lives of individuals too appeals to our novelist and they write novels on this theme. Employing national myths and making allusions to national epics like Mahabharata.

Apart from love, sex and contemporary reality, Indian English women novelists have also written feminist novels. Shashi Deshpande's contribution is *that long silence*, a novel that seeks to bring men and women on par in our society. Women novelists assert the rights of women to live their life in their own way. Let me begin with Amitav Ghosh, a novelist, and full of promise, potentiality and magnificent achievement. His important novels include *Shadow Lines* (1988), *An Antique Land* (1992), *The Calcutta Chromosome* (1996) and *The Glass Palace* (2000). Ghosh has employed the technique of magic realism and carried forward the Rushdie tradition. Amitav Ghosh shot into fame with the publication of his first novel, *the circle of reason* in 1986. Apart from his Bengali background, his knowledge of Bangladesh, London, and middle-east helped him to give a realistic touch to his novels. His second novel, *the Shadow lines* for which he got the Sahitya Academy award for the year 1989, is a good example of 'magical realism,' the theme of the novel is restricted to the people of a very small cross section of an upper middleclass Bengali family. The orthodox Bengali family is depicted at three stages-before partition, after partition, and in recent times. The first part of the novel "going away" deals with the family's exit from Dhaka during the riot ridden days of the partition and the second part, home coming deals with the grandmother's futile attempt to rescue her only living uncle 'Jethamosai' from their ancestral home surrounded by Muslim refugees who would become violent at times. Ghosh's originality lies in his depiction of communal strife in Calcutta and Bangladesh. He seems to say that there is a very marginal difference between fiction and suggestion is that there is a 'shadow line' between reality and imagination. And reality is multifaceted. If the major themes of Ghosh's first two novels *the circle of reason* and *the shadow lines* is nationalism, political freedom and international relations, the themes of his third novel, *in an antique land* relate to religion, its meaning and practice, various religious traditions and inter-continental

cultural intermingling. The scholar protagonist gathers a lot of information about various cultural ethics and practices. He brings out parallels among Hindu, Muslim and Jewish cultures.

*In the Calcutta chromosome* (1996) Amita Ghosh pleads for the emancipation of women. He makes mangala, sweeper-women the protagonist of the novel. He highlights women's problems and carves out a rightful place for them in the society. "Ghosh's latest novel *the glass palace* is about the rise and fall of imperial powers in the twentieth century. It is located in different parts of Burma, Malaya, and India and the characters of this novel belong to three generations. A lot of research has gone into the making of the book. Upamanyu Chatterjee sought into prominence with the publication of his first novel. *English August: an Indian story* (1992). Subsequently he published two more books, *the last burden* (1993) and *The Mammaries of the welfare state* (2000), *English August*. An Indian story has an appropriate when the hero is alienated from his land and people. Both thematically and technically this novel breaks a new ground. The novel combines the consciousness of the novels of uprooted self and the latter's hybridity and intellectual idiom. If the place of action of contemporary novels has shifted from the village to the whole action of it takes place in three places-Delhi, Calcutta, and Madras, a district township akin to R.K. Narayan's Malgudi. It depicts the encounter of an urban youth with provincial India and gives an account of a twenty-four year old I.A.S trainee posted at Madras, which according to the protagonist is "mad, no!" It realistically records the protagonist's sense of isolation, rootlessness and cultural dislocation. It also depicts identity crisis which is so common with the present-day youth. His second novel *the last burden* (1993) Upamanyu Chatterjee deals with the basic structure of Indian society-that is, the family. How the 'family' which was the nucleus of Indian society all through the ages, has become "a burden" is the theme of this novel. It deals with an Indian middle class family that settles down in a new place after



the partition. The mammaries of the welfare state reveals the grim reality that encompasses a country, where the poor and the downtrodden lead a miserable life. People at the helm of affairs enjoy life and are insensitive to miseries of the underprivileged class.

Shashi Tharoor is a major novelist in the post-1980 period with three novels such as *the great Indian novel* (1989), *Show business* (1994) and *riot* (2001) to his credit. The great Indian novel, Modeled on the Mahabharata is an ironic portrayal of the contemporary Indian political situation. Tharoor makes use of a national myth to create a contemporary novel. The theme of the novel goes beyond a usual communal riot and seeks to examine issues of complex nature such as religious fanaticism, cultural collision and above all, the trajectory of history.

Vikram Seth created history in more than one way. He is the first Indian English novelist to write a novel titled *the golden gate* (1986) in verse, for which he won sahitya academy award for the year 1988. Again he is the first Indian English novelist to get a fabulous amount of rupees two corers as advanced for his epoch-making novel *a suitable boy* (1993). The golden gate heralded a new era in Indian English fiction. It deals with the longing for love, affection and sense of belonging on the part of John, the Silicon Valley executive. Most of the characters experience loneliness in life and hence they search for meaning and emotional fulfillment the happy ending of the novel, therefore, seems to be contrived. Seth's third *an equal music* novel, was published in 1999. In the authorial note included in the novel, Seth states: Music to me is dearer even speech. When I realized that I would be writing about it I was gripped by anxiety, only slowly did I reconcile myself to the thought of it (1999). It may be mentioned here that music is also the theme of two other contemporary Indian English novels- that is, Rushdie's *ground beneath her feet* (1999) and shashi deshpande's *small remedies* (2000). The title, *an equal music* is taken from John Donne's sermon describing life after death. In heaven there will

be, “no sun nor darkness nor dazzling but one equal light, no noise nor silent, but one equal music.” Regarding the epigraph John Carey writes: But an epigraph might have been taken from another great English poet, Tennyson: “deep as first love, and wild with all regret.’ Seth’s story of love and loss can hold its own the vicinity of that marvelous line (the Sunday times 2 April (1999).

The story of the novel opens in London with an upcoming musician, Michael Holme, a 35 year old violinist from Rochdale playing with the Maggiore Quartet and giving music lessons to a group of not-so-enthusiastic pupils with one of whom he is carrying on a desultory affair. The novel has a turbulent love story full of passion and pathos. Seth had successfully integrated this love story with the story of music can alleviate the sufferings in life caused by the unfulfilled love. Hence, ending of the novel kindles a hope in human heart: Music, such music, is a sufficient gift. Why ask for happiness: why hope not to grieve? It is enough, it is to be blessed enough, to live from day to day and to hear such music- not too much, or the soul could not sustain it-from time to time(1999:381) The magic realism technique popularized by Salman Rushdie attracted a large number of novelists of the postmodern era by Rukun Advani, looking through glass(1995) by Mukul Kesavan, the memory of elephants (1998), and Asylum, USA(2000), both by Boman Desai are some of the important novels written in the technique of magic realism. The magic realism technique may give the novelist the widest possible scope for the exercise of imagination, but in that process, he always stands in danger of losing his hold on the structural values of fiction.

Shiv K. Kumar made his mark as a novelist with the publication of his first novel, *The Bone's Prayer* in 1979. Subsequently, he published three more novels titled, *Nude Before God* (1983), *A River with Three Banks* (1998) and *Infatuation* (2001). *A River with Three Banks* deals

with violence-the communal holocaust that followed the partition of India in 1947. As in e. m. Forster's a passage to India, so in kumar's a river with three banks, characters from three religions-Hinduism, Islam and Christianity are portrayed with insight and precision. Arun joshi won sahitya academy for his novel the last labyrinth for the year 1982. Two of his five novels were published in the post-1980 period-the last labyrinth in 1981 and the city and river in 1990. He is different from other Indian English novelists in his approach to life. What really sets him apart from others is his existential vision and attitude to human existence on earth. Exploration of the possibility of human achievements and search for identity forced him to lead a life of exile. Life and death are not mere binary opposites for him.

Anita desai published a number of novels such as *clear light of day* (1980), *the village by the sea: an Indian family story* (1982), *in custody* (1984), *Baumgartner's Bombay* (1988), *journey to Ithaca* (1995) and *fasting, Feasting* (1999) in the last two decades of the twentieth century. Clear light of day is about two sisters, bimla and Tara. The novel begins with Tara's visit to old Delhi, their ancient family home and ends with the departure of her family. Arundhati Roy created history by winning booker prize for her novel *the god of small things for the year 1997*. She is the first Indian English novelist to win this coveted award since her novel has been acclaimed as an outstanding novel in the whole range of Indian English fiction, I would like to make an elaborate discussion of it in an objective manner.

Postmodern Indian English fiction has a very luxuriant growth with nearly a hundred written by Indian English novelists and writers of Indian Diaspora. Post-1980 Indian English fiction is postmodern and post-colonial fiction with a new exuberance of language resulting in the creation of an Indian English idiom. And its emphasis on history and myths of the land, and above all, sexual frankness. References to history as we find in kiran nagarkar's cuckold, to

myths as in shashi tharoor's the great Indian novel, to imperialist design as in amitav ghosh's the glass palace and to sexual frankness as in arundhari Roy's the god of small things and manju kapur's difficult daughters are new modes of writing in Indian English fiction. Contemporary reality and political scenario attract context are depicted with objectivity and as a result the texts become 'worldly.' In fact, postmodern novels are written keeping in mind the elite audience both at home and abroad. To use Edward said terminology we can say that postmodern novels are 'in the world and about the world, hence, worldly'.

The Partition of India was the partition of the British Indian Empire that led to the creation of the sovereign states of the Dominion of Pakistan (which later split into Pakistan and Bangladesh) and the Union of India (later Republic of India) on 15 August 1947. "Partition" here refers not only to the division of the Bengal province of British India into East Pakistan and West Bengal (India), and the similar partition of the Punjab Province into West Punjab (West Pakistan) and East Punjab (now Punjab), but also to the respective divisions of other assets, including the British Indian Army, the Indian Civil Service and other administrative services, the railways, and the central treasury. In the riots which happened the partition in the Punjab Province, between 200,000 and 2,000,000 people were killed in the retributive genocide between the religions. UNHCR estimates 14 million Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims were displaced during the partition; it was the largest mass migration in human history. The term *partition of India* does not cover the later secession of Bangladesh from Pakistan in 1971, nor the earlier separation of Burma (now known as Myanmar) from the administration of British India, nor the separation of Ceylon (now Sri Lanka). The coastal area of Ceylon was part of the Madras Presidency of British India from 1795 until 1798, when it became a separate Crown Colony of the Empire. Burma gradually annexed by the British during 1826–86 and governed as a part of the British

Indian administration until 1937, was directly administered thereafter. Burma was granted independence on 4 January 1948 and Ceylon on 4 February 1948.

Bhutan, Nepal and the Maldives, the remaining present-day countries of South Asia, were unaffected by the partition. The first two, Bhutan and Nepal, although earlier being regarded as *de facto* princely states, they later signed treaties with the British designating them as *independent states* before partition, and therefore their borders were unaffected by the partition of India. The Maldives, which had become a protectorate of the British crown in 1887 and gained its independence in 1965, was also unaffected by the partition. Late in 1946, the Labour government in Britain, its exchequer exhausted by the recently concluded World War II, decided to end British rule of India, and in early 1947 Britain announced its intention of transferring power no later than June 1948. However, with the British army unprepared for the potential for increased violence, the new viceroy, Louis Mountbatten, advanced the date for the transfer of power, allowing less than six months for a mutually agreed plan for independence. In June 1947, the nationalist leaders, including Nehru and Patel on behalf of the Congress, Liyaqat Ali and Suhrawardhy representing the Muslim League, and Master Tara Singh representing the Sikhs Tara Singh joined as 5th member representing Akalis later on agreed to a partition of the country along religious lines in stark opposition to Gandhi's views. The predominantly Hindu and Sikh areas were assigned to the new India and predominantly Muslim areas to the new nation of Pakistan; the plan included a partition of the Muslim-majority provinces of Punjab and Bengal. The communal violence that accompanied the announcement of the Radcliffe Line, the line of partition, was even more horrific.

Of the violence that accompanied the Partition of India, historians Ian Talbot and Gurharpal Singh write: There are numerous eyewitness accounts of the maiming and mutilation of victims. The catalogue of horrors includes the disemboweling of pregnant women, the slamming of babies' heads against brick walls, the cutting off of victims limbs and genitalia and the display of heads and corpses. While previous communal riots had been deadly, the scale and level of brutality was unprecedented. Although some scholars question the use of the term 'genocide' with respect to the Partition massacres, much of the violence manifested as having genocidal tendencies. It was designed to cleanse an existing generation as well as prevent its future reproduction." On 14 August 1947, the new Dominion of Pakistan came into being, with Muhammad Ali Jinnah sworn in as its first Governor General in Karachi. The following day, 15 August 1947, India, now a smaller *Union of India*, became an independent country with official ceremonies taking place in New Delhi, and with Jawaharlal Nehru assuming the office of the prime minister, and the viceroy, Louis Mau.

*Midnight's Children* is Published in 1981 book by Salman Rushdie that deals with India's transition from British colonialism to independence with the partition of British India. It is considered an example of postcolonial literature and magical realism. The story is told by its chief protagonist, Saleem Sinai, and is set in the context of actual historical events as with historical fiction. *Midnight's Children* is a loose allegory for events in India both before and, primarily, after the independence and partition of India. The protagonist and narrator of the story is Saleem Sinai, born at the exact moment when India became an independent country. He was born with telepathic powers, as well as an enormous and constantly dripping nose with an extremely sensitive sense of smell. The novel is divided into three books.

The book begins with the story of the Sinai family, particularly with events leading up to India's Independence and Partition. Saleem is born precisely at midnight, 15 August 1947, therefore, exactly as old as independent India. He later discovers that all children born in India between 12 a.m. and 1 a.m. on that date are imbued with special powers. Saleem, using his telepathic powers, assembles a *Midnight Children's Conference*, reflective of the issues India faced in its early statehood concerning the cultural, linguistic, religious, and political differences faced by a vastly diverse nation. Saleem acts as a telepathic conduit, bringing hundreds of geographically disparate children into contact while also attempting to discover the meaning of their gifts. In particular, those children born closest to the stroke of midnight wield more powerful gifts than the others. Shiva "of the Knees", Saleem's nemesis, and Parvati, called "Parvati-the-witch," are two of these children with notable gifts and roles in Saleem's story.

Meanwhile, Saleem's family begins a number of migrations and endures the numerous wars which plague the subcontinent. During this period he also suffers amnesia until he enters a quasi-mythological exile in the jungle of Sundarban, where he is re-endowed with his memory. In doing so, he reconnects with his childhood friends. Saleem later becomes involved with the Indira Gandhi-proclaimed Emergency and her son Sanjay's "cleansing" of the Jama Masjid slum. For a time Saleem is held as a political prisoner; these passages contain scathing criticisms of Indira Gandhi's over-reach during the Emergency as well as a personal lust for power bordering on godhood. The Emergency signals the end of the potency of the Midnight Children, and there is little left for Saleem to do but pick up the few pieces of his life he may still find and write the chronicle that encompasses both his personal history and that of his still-young nation; a chronicle written for his son, who, like his father, is both chained and supernaturally endowed by history.

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