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DIASPORIC SCHIZOPHRENIA REFLECTED IN THE CHARACTERS OF *MIDNIGHT'S CHILDREN*

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ABSTRACT

Diasporic writing occupies a place of great significance between countries and cultures. It depicts new identities among characters because of various boundaries and cultures of various countries. It also causes the dislocation and locations of cultures. Diasporic writing raises questions regarding the definitions of 'home' and 'nation'. . Diasporic writers live on the margins of two countries and create cultural theories. They turn to their homeland for various reasons. Schizophrenia and nostalgia are often the preoccupations of these writers as they seek to locate themselves in new cultures. Here, Schizophrenia is used metaphorically to illustrate artistic and national disease and, literally, to depict the material sufferings of the characters. This paper wants to focus on the sufferings of the major characters in the novel *Midnight's Children* because of their immigration to various places.

Keywords: Diasporic writing the dislocation and locations of cultures Schizophrenia and nostalgia

INTRODUCTION

Salman Rushdie is one of the most important diasporic writers. He has given a new turn both to the Indian novel in English and to the long literary relationship between India and Britain. He was born on 19th June 1947 in Bombay but in 1967 his parents moved to Pakistan, a move which Rushdie never accepted whole-heartedly. He had his higher education in Britain. Thus he belonged to three countries and yet to none. So, a sense of displacement hovers over the works of him. Like Rushdie, the protagonist of *Midnight's Children*, Saleem Sinai, journeys through India, Pakistan and Bangladesh and yet there is no certain place for him to settle down. So, the relocation is the root of problem of every character. They are part of an eternal quest, the quest for some 'imaginary homeland'.

ABOUT *MIDNIGHT'S CHILDREN*

Midnight's Children was published in 1981 in London. It won both the Booker Prize and the James Tait Black Memorial Prize in 1981. It was awarded the Booker of Bookers Prize and the best all-time prize winners in 1993 and 2008 to celebrate the Booker Prize 25th and 40th anniversary. It is a literary response to a

series of real life situations that have been cleverly fictionalized through allusions, disguised as well as direct, to the country's recent as well as not so recent past. At the fictional level, *Midnight's Children* depicts the events and experiences in the lives of three generations of the Sinai family. The account begins with their days in Srinagar and follows their passage through Amritsar, Agra and Bombay to Karachi. At the semantic level, it is far more complex and has intriguing social and political connotations. In this novel, the characters show their identity crisis in a hostile world. Here follows the analysis of each character one by one.

SALEEM SINAI, THE PROTAGONIST AND THE NARRATOR

The chief character, Saleem Sinai's personality, life and career illustrate the entire process of the novel in its various aspects. He is tragically born on the midnight of August 1947 at the time when the mighty British were leaving and India, the myth was waking up to reality. Therefore, he is mischievously handcuffed to history and is forced to accept that his destiny is indissolubly chained to that of his country. He himself tells us, 'Newspapers celebrated me; politicians ratified my position. 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 the closest attention; it will be, in a sense, the mirror of our own". (122).

Being a midnight child, Saleem is born with a divided character. Whether he likes it or not, he will have to play a significant part in the history of the nation. His sufferings start from his birth by the action of Mary Pereira, who changed his nametag with that of another midnight child Shiva. This action condemns him to a life of permanent guilt and loss of identity. Looking at the facts, the reader can find out that Saleem is a product of unholy alliance between a departing colonial Methwold and a poor Hindu woman. Here, his identity is not a pure one but a strange mixture of the East and the West and that too unholy or illegitimate. So, Saleem Sinai remains in quandary, on the horns of dilemma, right from the moment he comes into this world.

The complicated story of his parentage does not end here. Saleem is destined to have more two mothers and several fathers as well. As he himself observes: 'I have had more mothers than most mothers have children' (243); 'all my life, consciously or unconsciously, I have sought out fathers' (426), and 'giving birth to parents has

been one of my stranger talents' (243). Vanita is his biological mother but Amina becomes the mother that brought him up. Mary Pereira becomes yet another one who helps Amina in the baby sitting and it is she to whom he ultimately goes and spends his last days in the pickle factory she manages. Aunt Pia also becomes one of his mother when he was readily accepted as a son to the childless couple. 'I was promoted to occupy the sacred place of the son she never had' (243).

As regards to fathers, Methwold sets the ball rolling by becoming the first one closely followed by Ahmed Sinai who brings him up. Schaapsteker, the German snake doctor cures him with his cobra poison and gives him a new lease of life and becomes another father to him. General Zulfikar in Pakistan also prefers him to his son. Saleem states General Zulfikar became the latest in the line of men who has been willing to call me 'Sonny' or even simply 'my son'. Last in the line is Picture Singh, the snake charmer who along with Parvati rescues him from Bangladesh and brings him to India.

As Saleem grows up, he suffers from a number of personal mutilations. Ahmed Sinai, his father, gives him a mighty blow on his face when he tells that he could hear voices which leaves him permanently deaf in his left ear. He has got quite a disfigured body; face as round as moon with bulging temples; a big cucumber of nose and

a body susceptible to diseases. In his geography class his teacher pulls his hair so hard that a complete patch of it comes out which leaves 'a monkish tonsure, a circle where hair would never grow again'(232). Soon after there is another accident at the school. This time, as a result of a rift with his school mates, Saleem loses the top third of his middle-finger. During the Indo-Pakistan war of 1965 he is hit by the silver spittoon and loses his memory and cannot remember even his name. Six years down the line, he becomes a man dog, a member of the canine unit for tracking and intelligence activities, in short, CUTIA unit. This renders his body fully numb. The only sense that is active is his sense of smell. He is anesthetized against feelings as well as memories.

Saleem is called Buddha i.e. the old one because they could feel an air of great antiquity around him though he was only twenty-four years old at that time. During emergency, he is castrated which leaves him impotent throughout his life. However, this is not the end. He is yet to bring up and give his name to Adam Sinai, an illegitimate child of Shiva and Parvati.

AADAM AZIZ, A LATITUDINARIAN

Saleem's grandfather, Aadam Aziz also suffers a lot. He is a liberal minded Muslim who has set aside the old, orthodox ways of the

Muslim world and set off on a progressive path. His stay in the West disturbed his Islamic and Indian beliefs. There is a void in his head because of the war of confrontations between his beliefs and what he learnt from his fellows abroad. This creates a space for his desire and he becomes vulnerable to women and history. He tries to reunite himself with the conventions and traditions of his birthplace but an accident while praying gives him a setback. His gigantic nose in which lay the dynasties hits against the ground while he bent down in supplication to God. The very accident resulted in the loss of his faith in the religion of Islam.

Dr. Aziz's marital life does not turn out to be as good as he expected. Naseem turns out to be a passive partner not responding to his sexual biddings and becoming fat. Brought up in the atmosphere of Pardah customs and traditions, she is cast into a life of impertinence by Dr. Aziz and hence she builds around herself an emotional wall. While Aziz teaches liberal, progressive ideas to their children and tries to keep them free of prejudices, Naseem interjects and buys one Maulvi to give her children the religious instructions. He stops the Maulvi because he teaches intolerance and hatred to his children. He remains an iconoclast throughout his life. In his old age, he curses god for having taken away his son Hanif.

SHIVA, THE WARRIOR

Born at the stroke of midnight and named after the Hindu god of destruction, Shiva is Saleem's rival and counterpart. Switched at birth with Saleem, he is robbed of his affluent birthright and raised in abject poverty. He represents the alternate side of India: poor, Hindu, and as aggressive. As a young child, he is the leader of a street gang and possibly a murderer. He is driven by a determinedly individualist perspective and grows up unable to form any human attachments. Though he is a violent character, he is, nonetheless, a tragic figure, damaged and shaped by the forces of history and class. In the end, Shiva hunts Saleem down and turns his over to everyone in the camps opened during Indira Gandhi's state of Emergency. There Saleem, along with the other midnight's children, is administered an operation that renders him sterile. In this way, Shiva manages to destroy the children of midnight.

NASEEM AZIZ, THE REVEREND MOTHER

Nazeem Aziz is a daughter of a rich but blind land owner called Abdul Ghani of Kashmir. After her wedding to Aadam Aziz, she suffers a lot because she could not shed off the beliefs and customs with which she grew up at her father's place and Aadam Aziz has to fight the life long battle to take away the veils and makes her a

modern Indian woman. The narrow old ways become her long lasting companions. She tries to teach the same narrow-mindedness and intolerance to her daughters also. But, being a liberal minded and western educated young man, he opposes conservatism and bigotry in the household and this often leads to the verbal dual and disharmony in the family. She becomes upset when Dr. Aziz stops the Maulvi tutoring their children because she sees nothing amiss in bringing up her children according to the Muslim traditions and outlook.

. Soon, she gives birth to three beautiful daughters and two sons but the marital bliss and domestic harmony remained illusive dream. She has a mental block in opening up, meeting people or being socially active and being liberal minded. She is opposed to granting shelter to Miyan Abdulla's Lieutenant. But that actually results in the marriage of her daughter. There was hell that breaks loose more so after two years when, it is found out that the man failed to consummate the marriage. Difference opinions often lead to strained feelings and she adopts the device of stopping to talk with her husband to bring him round. At last, She dies a tragic death with the rest of the members of her family in the Indo-Pakistan war when a bomb falls on her house in Pakistan.

ADAM SINAI, THE BIOLOGICAL SON OF SHIVA AND PARVATI

Saleem's son Adam also carries a lot of disturbances because of his personal appearance. On either side of his head there are flab protuberances like sails, and his ears are so huge that when his head pops out, others think for one moment that it is the head of tiny elephant. The child refuses to cry or whimper or talk for a long time and it is thought that he is dumb. Another abnormality is that he possesses a navel which sticks out instead of in and finally the first word that he utters is mysterious Abracadabra. Like his father, he is also mysteriously handcuffed to history as he is born exactly on the day when emergency is proclaimed by Mrs. Indira Gandhi in 1975. And as for his malady, the narrator points out that there is 'something darkly metaphorical in this illness our private emergency was not unconnected with the larger, macrocosmic disease' (422) of the Emergency. Other tell-tale particulars with the child is that he is always unsmiling, grave and prefers to keep his eyes firmly closed. In the end, his disease

vanishes completely with the end of the Emergency.

CONCLUSION

The novel *Midnight's Children* illustrates the permanent plight of individual sufferings in the hostile modern world, which makes it impossible for anyone to remain an island but compels everyone to be part of a continent, with the result that the individual is inevitably 'handcuffed to history'.

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