



**Investigating the Representation of Muslims in Salman Rushdie's Novel**  
*Midnight's Children*

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## Letter of Approval

I hereby certify that *Mst Tasnima Naznin*, with student ID number 192-10-2051, 47<sup>th</sup> batch in the Department of English, Daffodil International University, has successfully fulfilled the requirements for her thesis paper as part of the ENG 431: Project Paper with Internship. The focus of her work was on academic thesis writing, and I provided supervision during the Spring 2023 semester. In my opinion, this work is authentic, and she has independently contributed to it while seeking guidance from various sources, which she duly acknowledges in her research. This achievement would not have been possible without her bravery, consistency, and coherence.

I am immensely grateful for the remarkable work Mst Tasnima Naznin has produced, which significantly contributes to the scholarly literature. It is worth noting that she is one of the few students in her batch to have accomplished such an academic thesis, a fact that I genuinely admire. It has been a pleasure collaborating with her, and I believe that her courage, skills, and ambitions will lead her to great success in the future.

I extend my best wishes to her for all her future endeavors.

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## Declaration

I, *Mst Tasnima Naznin*, affirm that I have thoroughly reviewed the project paper submission guidelines provided by the Department of English at Daffodil International University. I willingly accept all the terms and conditions outlined in those guidelines. The thesis I have authored, titled *Investigating the Representation of Muslims in Salman Rushdie's Novel 'Midnight's Children'*, represents my original contribution to English scholarly literature. Throughout the process of conducting this research, I diligently consulted necessary and pertinent sources, all of which have been appropriately acknowledged and cited within the paper.

This research work was undertaken during the Spring 2023 semester under the guidance and supervision of Fatema Begum Laboni, Assistant Professor, in the Department of English. It was a requirement for the partial fulfillment of my Bachelor of Arts (Honors) degree in English. I confirm that neither this paper nor any portion of it has been previously submitted elsewhere for the purpose of obtaining a degree, scholarship, or any form of publication.

I take full responsibility for the content and integrity of this work.

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Mst Tasnima Naznin

## Abstract

The focus of this research project is on how Muslims and Islamic culture are portrayed in the well-read book *Midnight's Children* by Salman Rushdie. The study identifies the many images of Muslims and analyzes them in light of their sociocultural and historical contexts through a thorough textual analysis. The study examines the dynamics of identity construction, religious practices, and communal tensions as expressed in Rushdie's story, drawing on postcolonial theory and literary criticism. The essay clarifies how Rushdie's fictional world captures the intricacies and paradoxes of Muslim life in post-independence India, defying preconceived notions and Islamophobic prejudices. The study also discusses how Rushdie's life experiences and philosophical beliefs affected the narrative flow, character growth, and thematic inquiries in the book. This study contributes to the larger discussions on representation in postcolonial literature by offering a nuanced interpretation of Rushdie's portrayal of Muslims. It also encourages the reader to reevaluate their views on the diversity of cultures and religions.

**Keywords:** Salman Rushdie, *Midnight's Children*, Muslims, representation, postcolonial literature, India, Pakistan

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

This research paper will look into how Muslims are portrayed in Salman Rushdie's 1981 bestseller *Midnight's Children*, which has received a lot of praise. The book, which addresses the issues of identity, religion, and history in the setting of post-independence India and Pakistan, is a cornerstone of postcolonial literature. This study intends to advance knowledge of Muslim representation in literature and the effects such representations have on society by analyzing how Muslims are portrayed in the book.

### 1.1. Background and Context

Salman Rushdie, a British-Indian author, originally released his book *Midnight's Children* in 1981. The book is a work of historical and magical realism fiction with postcolonial and postmodern undertones. The novel is set in the background of 20th-century India, from the time of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's Emergency declaration in the middle of the 1970s until the country's independence from British colonial rule in 1947. The phrase *Midnight's Children* alludes to a group of 1,001 children with varied magical gifts who were all born in the first hour of Indian independence.

Saleem Sinai, the story's main character, is born at the exact time India gained freedom and learns he has the ability to telepathize. His journey serves as a metaphor for India's experiences and problems because his life is inexplicably interwoven with the nation's past. The issues of identity, nationalism, religion, history, and memory are all explored throughout the novel.

Rushdie's book won the Booker Prize in 1981, and it was named the finest novel among all Booker Prize winners in 1993 and 2008. An important piece of postcolonial literature, *Midnight's Children* is frequently cited while talking about literary postmodernism.

Despite receiving praise, Rushdie's other works and the novel have drawn controversy and criticism, especially in some Muslim communities.

## **1.2. Research Questions**

The primary research questions guiding this study are:

- a) How are the Muslim characters represented in Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*?
- b) What roles do the Muslim characters play within the novel, and how do these roles relate to the broader themes and messages of the text?
- c) How do the representations of the Muslims in *Midnight's Children* reflect the sociopolitical context of postcolonial India and Pakistan?
- d) What are the implications of these portrayals on the understanding of the Muslim identity and the perception of Muslims in literature and society?

## **1.3. Scope and Limitations**

This study focuses solely on how Muslims are portrayed in *Midnight's Children*. The analysis will mostly focus on Muslim characters and how they are portrayed in the text, despite the fact that the novel has a wide spectrum of people from many religious and cultural backgrounds. Furthermore, the study will focus on the book as a single case study rather than providing a thorough analysis of Salman Rushdie's whole body of work.

## **1.4. Methodology**

Close reading and textual analysis are used in this study's qualitative methodology to investigate how Muslims are portrayed in *Midnight's Children*. The research questions will serve as a guide for the study, which will concentrate on specific passages in which Muslim individuals are depicted as well as the overarching themes and consequences of these depictions. In order to provide context and assist the analysis, the study will also consult secondary sources including scholarly papers and literary criticism. The two main theoretical approaches—Homi K. Bhabha's Hybridity and Ambivalence, and Frantz

Fanon's Decolonization and the Role of Religion—will serve as the foundation for the theoretical framework for this research topic.

This theoretical framework will serve as a framework for analyzing how Muslims are portrayed in Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, offering insight on how the book deals with and navigates postcolonial identity, cultural hybridity, and the effects of colonialism on the Muslim community. The research will offer a comprehensive view of how Rushdie's work represents the difficulties of Muslim identities within the broader context of postcolonial India by integrating these theories.

## Chapter 2

### Literature Review

This section gives a summary of the literature that has been written about Salman Rushdie, *Midnight's Children*, and how Muslims are portrayed in modern fiction. The literature review highlights significant discussions, disagreements, and themes pertinent to the study's topic.

#### 2.1. Salman Rushdie: A Controversial Figure

On June 19, 1947, Salman Rushdie, a well-known author, was born in Bombay (now Mumbai), India. With the help of bizarre characters, dark humor, and a writing style that is immensely expressive and dramatic, his writings examine historical and philosophical subjects. He is a controversial author since his writings typically deal with difficult religious and political topics.

Rugby School and the University of Cambridge are where Rushdie himself acquired his education. In 1968, he earned an M.A. in history from the latter institution. In India, Rushdie's father had a prosperous Muslim business. In the 1970s, he worked as an advertising copywriter in London. In 1975, his first book, *Grimus*, was released. However, his second novel, *Midnight's Children* (1981), a fable set in modern-day India, surprisingly garnered a lot of positive attention from reviewers and readers, establishing him as a well-known author on a global scale. The script for the 2012 film adaptation of the book was written by Rushdie.

His 1983 book *Shame*, which explored modern Pakistani politics, was also well-read. The *Satanic Verses*, his fourth book, received a different response. One of the characters in the novel, which was released in the summer of 1988, was modeled after the Prophet Muhammad. The book's portrayal of the Prophet Muhammad and his interpretation of the Qur'an outraged Muslim community leaders in Britain, who labeled it blasphemous.

Protests over the book began to spread throughout Pakistan in January 1989. One of the characters in the novel, which was released in the summer of 1988, was modeled after the Prophet Muhammad. The book's portrayal of the Prophet Muhammad and his interpretation of the Qur'an outraged Muslim community leaders in Britain, who labeled it blasphemous. Protests over the book began to spread throughout Pakistan in January 1989. The spiritual head of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, officially condemned the book on February 14 and issued a fatwa against Rushdie, calling for the author's death. Under the protection of Scotland Yard, Rushdie went into hiding. He would occasionally pop up unexpectedly, but his movements were restricted.

*Imaginary Homelands* (1991), the children's book *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* (1990), the short story collection *East, West* (1994), and the novel *The Moor's Last Sigh* (1995) are among the works Rushdie produced while still in constant danger for his life. In 1998, some ten years after Rushdie's fatwa was issued, the Iranian government decided that it would no longer pursue its enforcement. He wrote about his experiences under the alias he had used while in isolation in his 2012 memoir *Joseph Anton*.

After re-entering the public eye, Rushdie published a number of further books, including *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* (1999) and *Fury* (2001). The 2002 publication of *Step Across This Line*, a collection of articles he authored between 1992 and 2002, covered a wide range of subjects, from the September 11 attacks to *The Wizard of Oz*. His later works include *Shalimar the Clown* (2005), which investigated terrorism with an emphasis on the controversial Kashmir region, and *The Enchantress of Florence* (2008), a fictionalized biography of the Mughal emperor Akbar. He released the children's book *Luka and the Fire of Life* in 2010, which follows Luka, the protagonist's younger sibling in *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*, as he searches for the fire of life in order to save his dying father. The 2015 movie *Two Years Eight Months and Twenty-Eight Nights* portrayed the devastation caused by a divide between the world of humans and the mythical beings known as jinn. Folkloric analogies and allusions to *The Thousand and One Nights* were abundant in the book, which told a tapestry of interconnected stories to celebrate human inventiveness.

Rushdie looked at the American immigration experience through the eyes of a wealthy Indian family in his 2017 book *The Golden House*. Miguel de Cervantes' Don Quixote served as the model for his upcoming work, *Quichotte* (2019). In 2021, he released *Languages of Truth: articles 2003-2020*, a collection of his articles. Rushdie's achievements have been honored with a number of accolades. As a consequence of special public voting staged to honor the 25th and 40th anniversaries of the prize, respectively, *Midnight's Children*, the novel for which he won the Booker Prize in 1981, also went on to win the Booker of Bookers in 1993 and the Best of the Booker in 2008. Rushdie received a knighthood in 2007, although both the Pakistani parliament and the Iranian government disapproved of the honor. He obtained American citizenship in 2016.

Salman Rushdie, who is well known for his literary prowess, is not only a well-known novelist but also a significant person in the literature community. His writings have pushed the limits of storytelling and questioned social standards, frequently igniting heated disputes. Rushdie's distinctive writing style blends magical realism, historical fiction, and postcolonial perspectives to produce engrossing narratives that fascinate readers and inspire them to consider difficult subjects.

Rushdie has contributed actively and vocally to cultural and intellectual dialogue in addition to writing fiction. His insightful talks and lectures on subjects like freedom of expression, multiculturalism, and the influence of literature on society have provoked discussion at colleges and literary festivals all over the world. As a result of his openness to participating in public discourse, he has developed into a powerful ally of artistic freedom and a supporter of the persuasiveness of narrative. The influence of Rushdie goes beyond literature. He has served as an example for budding writers, especially those from underrepresented groups, inspiring them to embrace their distinctive voices and question social norms. A new generation of authors has been motivated by his ability to masterfully combine historical details, cultural allusions, and innovative storytelling to explore a variety of themes and challenge accepted literary tropes.

Rushdie's resolve and resiliency have not wavered in the face of adversity, including dangers to his personal safety and freedom. His corpus of work, which continues to strike a chord with readers all around the world, is testament to his dedication to artistic integrity and the quest of truth. Rushdie's literary accomplishments have garnered him a number of significant awards and accolades, confirming his status as one of the most important and enduring voices in modern literature.

In August 2022, Rushdie was attacked while on stage at Chautauqua, New York, and suffered serious injuries. He was scheduled to deliver a speech on how the United States offers asylum to artists who are fleeing their home countries. Rushdie lost one of his eyes as a result of his lengthy rehabilitation. His widely regarded book *Victory City*, which was completed before to the assault, was released in 2023. The magical realism book begins in 14th-century India, when a young girl of nine years old creates a bustling metropolis noted for its egalitarianism while acting as a goddess' vessel. However, it finally fails as a result of avarice and radical religious views. Rushdie is a renowned author whose works will definitely continue to influence literature for many years to come. His influence as a writer, cultural critic, and supporter of artistic freedom is evidence of the ability of writing to question norms, spark debate, and effect change. Without a doubt, Salman Rushdie's literary legacy will live on, leaving a lasting impression on the world of literature as well as the minds and hearts of readers everywhere.

Salman Rushdie's works have been the subject of extensive analysis and debate in literary circles. While he is celebrated for his imaginative storytelling and provocative themes, he has also been a controversial figure. His fourth novel, *The Satanic Verses* (Malak, 1989), incited widespread protests from Muslims around the world, who deemed it blasphemous. A fatwa (a religious edict) was issued by Iran's Ayatollah Khomeini, calling for Rushdie's death. This event sparked a global debate on freedom of speech, the role of religion in society, and the representation of Muslims in literature (Weller, 2009). The controversy surrounding Rushdie has led scholars to examine his other works, including *Midnight's Children*, in the context of his broader themes and provocative style (Boynton, 2021).

## 2.2. *Midnight's Children*: A Seminal Work of Postcolonial Fiction

*Midnight's Children* has been hailed as a groundbreaking work in postcolonial literature, and it has been widely studied for its themes, narrative techniques, and historical context. Critics have lauded the novel for its innovative use of magical realism, which allows Rushdie to explore complex issues of identity, history, religion, and power dynamics in postcolonial India and Pakistan (Brennan, 1989; Rubinson, 1999). The novel has also been praised for its polyphonic narrative style, which reflects the diversity and multiplicity of voices in South Asia (Albertazzi, 1993). Scholars have examined the novel's portrayal of various aspects of postcolonial society, such as the role of women (Samāj et al., 1999), the construction of national identity (Krishnaswamy, 1995), and the impact of colonialism on contemporary India (Rajan, 1997).

After analyzing Homi K. Bhabha's concept of hybridity and ambivalence in postcolonial theory refers to the blending of cultural identities and the resulting ambiguity and tension in postcolonial societies. Hybridity challenges the clear-cut distinctions between colonizer and colonized, and the ambivalence reflects the simultaneous attraction and repulsion towards the colonizer's culture.

In Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, hybridity and ambivalence are central themes embodied in the characters, narrative, and structure of the novel.

**Hybrid Identities:** Saleem Sinai, the main character, personifies the idea of hybridity. His life follows significant historical events in India, further underlining his mixed origins as the child of a Hindu woman who was reared by a Muslim family. As a person and a representation of the country, Saleem embodies the intricate blending of individual, cultural, religious, and national identities.

“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.” - Salman Rushdie, *Midnight's Children*.



This quote reflects the hybrid nature of Saleem's identity, as he sees himself as a product of various influences and interactions.

***Ambivalence:*** The novel reflects ambivalence towards the colonial legacy. For instance, Saleem's grandfather, Aadam Aziz, is educated in Germany and returns to India as a Western-trained doctor, demonstrating the adoption of Western ideas. However, he also experiences a sense of dislocation and estrangement from his own culture, reflecting the tension and unease that comes with cultural hybridity.

“Once upon a time there were Radha and Krishna, and Rama and Sita, and Laila and Majnun; also (because we are not unaffected by the West) Romeo and Juliet, and Spencer Tracy and Katharine Hepburn.” - Salman Rushdie, *Midnight's Children*.

This quote illustrates the ambivalence in the novel, as it highlights the co-existence and blending of Indian and Western cultural references.

***Subversion of Dominant Narratives:*** The narrative technique of the novel also reflects hybridity. Rushdie blends different genres - historical fiction, magic realism, allegory - to tell the story, disrupting traditional narrative forms. This mirrors the hybrid nature of postcolonial societies, which resist being defined by a single narrative.

In conclusion, *Midnight's Children* deeply engages with the themes of hybridity and ambivalence, providing a nuanced exploration of postcolonial identity and the complexities of navigating multiple cultural influences.

Frantz Fanon's work on decolonization focuses on the psychological impacts of colonialism and the struggle for liberation among the colonized. He sees decolonization as a violent, transformative process that disrupts the established colonial order. Fanon also explores the role of religion in colonial and postcolonial contexts, examining how it can be used as both an instrument of colonial control and a means of resistance.

In Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, elements of Fanon's theories can be traced, especially in the depiction of India's struggle for independence and the role of religion in shaping identities and politics.

**Decolonization:** The novel is set against the backdrop of India's struggle for independence, a process that Fanon would describe as inherently violent and disruptive. The birth of Saleem Sinai at the exact moment of India's independence symbolizes the birth of a new nation and a new identity fraught with the complexities and contradictions of decolonization.

“To understand just one life, you have to swallow the world ... do you wonder, then, that I was a heavy child?” - Salman Rushdie, *Midnight's Children*.

This quote reflects the burdens and complexities of decolonization embodied in Saleem's character.

**Religion and Identity:** Religion plays a significant role in *Midnight's Children*, shaping characters' identities and influencing societal and political dynamics. Saleem's Muslim identity, juxtaposed with his Hindu birth mother and the predominantly Hindu nation, reflects the complexity and tension of religious identity in postcolonial India. The novel also depicts how religion can be manipulated for political ends, as seen in the conflicts between Hindus and Muslims that led to the Partition of India.

**Violence and Liberation:** In line with Fanon's theory, the novel portrays violence as an inherent part of the decolonization process. This is evident in the brutalities of the Partition and the Indo-Pakistani War. Such events underline the turbulent transition from colonial rule to independence and the struggle for liberation and identity in the new nation.

“What leaked into me from Amina in those final seconds of our ten months' intimacy was just such a sense of the volatility of the world. If she could -- no less! -- be sent flying from

her bed in the wrong direction, then robbed of her parents, home, husband and child, then what assurance did I have that my own life would proceed in any kind of straight line? Thus it was that I became infected with her a sense of the random hazards of existence”- Salman Rushdie, *Midnight's Children*.

This quote, while not directly referring to violence, emphasizes the inherent uncertainty and volatility of existence in a postcolonial context, where the process of liberation is fraught with hazards and disruptions.

In conclusion, while *Midnight's Children* does not strictly adhere to Fanon's theories, it embodies several aspects of his thoughts on decolonization and the role of religion, offering a complex portrayal of postcolonial identity and the struggle for liberation.

### **2.3. The Portrayal of Muslims in Contemporary Fiction**

The representation of Muslims in contemporary fiction has been a subject of growing interest, particularly in the post-9/11 world. Scholars have studied the ways in which Muslim characters are depicted in literature, noting that representations often oscillate between the extremes of the oppressed victim and the violent extremist (Rudacille, 2017; Ahmad, 2015). There is an increasing awareness of the need for more nuanced portrayals of Muslims that challenge stereotypes and provide a deeper understanding of Muslim experiences and identities (Moghul, 2017).

In the literary landscape following the events of 9/11, there was a notable increase in the publication of novels that delved into the various forms of Islamism, also known as Political Islam. These novels sought to explore the intricate dynamics between the Western world, which prides itself on its secular nature, and the East, particularly the Muslim world, often accused of harboring religious terrorism that poses a threat to the secular order. It comes as no surprise that a considerable number of such novels emerged, given the prevailing belief that the 9/11 attacks were a direct consequence of the complex relationship between the West and the Muslim world. These literary works center around

Islam as their subject matter, examining its ramifications on both Western societies and Muslims themselves, who find themselves introducing Islam to the West. Alternatively, these novels may focus on individuals or groups of Muslim youths who espouse a fundamentalist ideology rooted in their religion, courageously challenging what they perceive as a godless and materialistic Western culture.

This allows the novelists to explore various issues of Islam and Islamic fundamentalism. However, these novels draw their conclusion in two different ways; 1) either they support the dominant, mainstream discourse, i.e., various Islamic teachings and their recent interpretations encourage violence against non-Muslims and promote fanaticism, or 2) they subvert the general perception regarding Islam as a threat to the world and a religion that promotes violence. Among the list of such novels are: *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007) by Mohsin Hamid, John Updike's *Terrorist* (2006), *The Snow* (2006) by Orhan Pamuk, *The Last Jihad* (2006) by Joel C Rosenberg, *Prayers for the Assassin* (2006) by Robert Ferrigno, *Windows on the World* (2006) by Fre'de'ricbei Gbeder, *Once in a Promised Land* (2007) by Laila Halaby, *The Last Night of a Damned Soul* (2004) by Salimane ben Aissa, *The Attack* (2006) by Yasmina Khadra etc.

John Updike's *Terrorist* (2006) projects Islam unfaithfully. The representation of Muslims in John Updike's *Terrorist* is complex and multifaceted. John Updike's *Terrorist* is a novel centered around a young Muslim-American, Ahmad Ashmawy Mulloy, who becomes radicalized. Ahmad, the protagonist, is raised by an Irish American mother and an absent Egyptian father in New Jersey. He developed a deep, individualistic understanding of Islam, largely influenced by his imam at the local mosque, Shaikh Rashid. Updike portrays Islam as a religion open to personal interpretation, an aspect often true in real life as different people may interpret religious texts in their own ways. However, Ahmad's interpretation leans towards the extreme end, shaped by his vulnerabilities and the radical teachings of his imam.

Initially, in the novel, Updike seems to embark upon a much-debated post-9/11 task of exploring terrorist ideology in its complex form, but he ends up supporting the dominant,

mainstream discourse, i.e., Us versus Them. He finds various Islamic concepts as the main cause of promoting the terrorist ideology and puts the whole onus on them to produce a conservative, fanatic, and bigoted culture. Through the Muslim characters of the novel, he presents a Wahhabist interpretation of Islam. He reveals his Neo-Orientalist views regarding Islam and the Muslim world, although he never claimed to be one. To him, Islam essentially does not have a wider scope; it is non-inclusive in nature and essentially a fanatic religion. In one of his interviews, he claims, Islam does not have as many shades of gray as the Christian and other Judaic faith does. It is fairly absolutist, as you know, and you are either in or not (interview with Louise Witt). The statement appears to be greatly influenced by the Orientalist representation of Islam, and this is exactly what he does in his novel *Terrorist* with various literary techniques and devices.

Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is a complex narrative that explores themes of identity, alienation, and the collision of Eastern and Western cultures. Changez, the protagonist, is a young Pakistani Muslim man who, having been a successful and assimilated member of American society, becomes disenchanted and disillusioned following the events of 9/11. His evolving identity and a growing sense of alienation serve as a critique of the post-9/11 world, particularly the West's often flawed perception of Islam and Muslims.

Hamid depicts Changez as a character who struggles with the polarized identities thrust upon him. On one hand, he's a Princeton graduate and former valuation analyst at a prestigious New York firm, embodying the American Dream. On the other hand, he's a Pakistani, Muslim, and another in the eyes of his adopted homeland after 9/11.

The novel presents the complex layers of Changez's identity, showing that being Muslim is just one facet of his character, not a defining trait. The title, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, indicates this struggle and alienation, playing with the Western fear of 'Islamic fundamentalism'. Hamid's representation of Muslims challenges the monolithic and often negative perceptions of Muslims in Western media. He presents Changez as a multifaceted individual whose journey is more of an internal struggle with identity rather

than a journey toward religious fundamentalism. This nuanced portrayal invites readers to question their own assumptions and biases. The novel does not depict Islam as a religion in detail but rather uses Changez's identity as a Muslim to highlight issues of xenophobia, prejudice, and misrepresentation that many Muslims face in the post-9/11 world.

In the context of *Midnight's Children*, the portrayal of Muslims has been discussed within the broader themes of identity, history, and post-colonialism. Scholars have noted that Rushdie's representation of Muslims is characterized by complexity and diversity, as the novel features a wide range of Muslim characters who defy simplistic categorizations (Brennan, 1989; Clark, 2001). Additionally, the novel has been studied for its exploration of the intersections between religion, politics, and identity, particularly in relation to the tumultuous history of India and Pakistan (Moss, 1993; Gorra, 1997).

## **2.4 Conclusion**

Overall, the literature on Salman Rushdie, *Midnight's Children*, and the image of Muslims in modern fiction provide a solid framework for investigating how Muslims are portrayed in *Midnight's Children*. By providing a detailed examination of Muslim representation in the book and considering its implications for a more comprehensive interpretation of the book, this research paper intends to add to these conversations.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Identity & Role of Religious Affiliations**

In *Midnight's Children*, Rushdie delves into the intricacies of identity and the role of religious affiliations, particularly as they pertain to the novel's Muslim characters. Through the lives and experiences of these characters, the novel explores the formation of identity and the impact of religious, familial, and societal factors on individual and collective identities.

#### **3.1. Saleem Sinai: A Muslim Protagonist**

Saleem Sinai, the novel's protagonist, is a Muslim born at the precise moment of India's independence. Throughout the novel, Saleem's identity is inextricably linked to the fate of the nation, and his personal story becomes an allegory for the postcolonial history of India and Pakistan. As a Muslim protagonist, Saleem embodies the complexities and contradictions of post-independence Muslim identity. His character challenges the notion of a monolithic Muslim identity as he navigates various religious, cultural, and political affiliations throughout the novel. Saleem's experiences serve as a lens through which readers can explore the intricate and often contentious dynamics of religious identity within the context of postcolonial South Asia.

#### **3.2. The Importance of Family and Community in the Formation of Identity**

*Midnight's Children* places significant emphasis on the role of family and community in shaping individual and collective identities. The novel's Muslim characters, such as Saleem's grandparents, Aadam and Naseem Aziz, and his parents, Amina and Ahmed Sinai, are products of their families, communities, and the broader sociopolitical landscape. Through their relationships, struggles, and interactions with others, Rushdie highlights the complex web of factors that contribute to the formation of identity. For instance, Saleem's mixed heritage, with roots in both India and Pakistan, demonstrates how family and

community affiliations can blur religious and national boundaries, complicating the notion of a singular Muslim identity.

### **3.3. The Politics of Naming and the Fluidity of Identity**

The novel explores the fluidity of identity through the politics of naming. Rushdie's characters often have names that carry symbolic weight or reflect their complex identities. For example, Saleem's name, derived from the Arabic word Salim, meaning peaceful, can be interpreted as a reflection of his role as a mediator between conflicting forces, such as the Hindu and Muslim communities. Similarly, the character of Shiva, Saleem's foil and rival, bears the name of a Hindu deity, despite being a Muslim. By playing with names and their meanings, Rushdie underscores the fluid and multifaceted nature of identity, challenging the notion of fixed religious affiliations.

In conclusion, *Midnight's Children* offers a rich exploration of identity and the role of religious affiliations in the lives of its Muslim characters. Through the experiences of Saleem Sinai and other characters, the novel challenges simplistic notions of Muslim identity and highlights the complex interplay of personal, familial, and societal factors in shaping individual and collective identities. By examining the novel's treatment of these themes; this research paper aims to contribute to the broader understanding of Muslim representation in literature and the implications of such portrayals on society.



## **Chapter 4**

# **Religiosity & Intersection of Personal-National Histories**

*Midnight's Children* delves into the complexities of religiosity and its impact on both personal and national histories. The novel explores the myriad ways in which religion shapes the lives of its characters and intersects with broader historical events.

### **4.1. The Role of Religion in the Formation of Individual and Collective Narratives**

Throughout the novel, religion plays a crucial role in defining individual and collective identities. Characters often grapple with their religious beliefs and affiliations as they navigate the shifting political and social landscape of postcolonial India and Pakistan. For example, Saleem's family members engage in various religious practices and rituals, which shape their understanding of themselves and their place within the larger society. Religion also serves as a driving force behind major historical events, such as the partition of India, which in turn profoundly affects the lives of the characters.

### **4.2. The Complexity of Religious Beliefs and Practices in a Diverse Society**

*Midnight's Children* highlights the complexity and diversity of religious beliefs and practices in South Asia. The novel's Muslim characters represent a wide range of perspectives and experiences, reflecting the multifaceted nature of the Muslim community. By showcasing the diversity of religious practices and beliefs among Muslims, Rushdie challenges the notion of a monolithic Islamic identity and underscores the importance of understanding the complexity of religious experience within a diverse society.

### 4.3. Religious Tolerance and Intolerance in the Novel

Rushdie's novel also addresses the themes of religious tolerance and intolerance. While there are instances of peaceful co-existence and interfaith friendships in the novel, such as the relationship between Saleem and his Hindu companion Padma, there are also moments of religious tension and violence. The novel portrays the dangerous consequences of religious extremism, as well as the potential for understanding and cooperation among people of different faiths. By exploring these themes, *Midnight's Children* offers a nuanced examination of the role of religion in shaping personal and national histories. *Midnight's Children* by Salman Rushdie deals extensively with the theme of religious tolerance and intolerance. The novel, set against the backdrop of India's struggle for independence and the subsequent partition, illustrates the complex dynamics of religious co-existence, tensions, and conflicts.

**The Multi-religious Fabric of India:** Rushdie presents the cultural and religious diversity of India through a variety of characters. The family of Saleem, the protagonist, includes people of diverse religious backgrounds. His biological father is a British colonial, and his biological mother is a Hindu, but he is raised in a Muslim family. This signifies the inherently pluralistic and multi-religious nature of Indian society.

I was abruptly overwhelmed by the memory of my abrupt grandmother, whose family had fallen, through the generations, into a crack between religions, who had persisted in a long obstinacy and refused to be categorized as either Moslem or Hindu. (Book 1, The Perforated Sheet)

***The Violence of Partition:*** The Partition of India and Pakistan represents the peak of religious intolerance. The violence and displacement caused by this political decision, driven by religious divisions, are portrayed vividly in the novel. This event serves as a critique of religious intolerance and its devastating impacts.

The frontier was to run along rivers for a considerable distance, and where it crossed the river was to be decided by the Boundary Commission. Everything was terrifyingly provisional; anything might be changed. (Book 2, Tick, Tock)

***The Struggle of Religious Minorities:*** The struggle and suffering of religious minorities, particularly Muslims in post-independence India and Hindus in Pakistan, is also highlighted in the novel. The character of Aadam Aziz, a Kashmiri Muslim, represents the plight of religious minorities in a predominantly Hindu India.

To Aadam Aziz, he said, 'So you're back. I've heard all about your little adventures. I hope you've finished sowing your wild oats. Because here you are. There's no escape. You're stuck. You are a Kashmiri. Poor you!' (Book 1, The Perforated Sheet)

**The Syncretism of Indian Culture:** Despite the violence and divisions, Rushdie also highlights the inherent syncretism of Indian culture. This can be seen in the character of Padma, who, despite being a Hindu, falls in love with a Muslim man, Saleem. Their relationship symbolizes the potential for religious tolerance and harmony in Indian society.

Padma, who has been banished from my bed, has become a woman of property; having no jewelry of her own, she has taken to wearing my silver spittoon on a chain around her neck. (Book 3, The Buddha)

Through these various depictions, *Midnight's Children* explores the tensions and possibilities between religious tolerance and intolerance, revealing the complex dynamics of religious co-existence and conflict in postcolonial India.

## Chapter 5

# Representation of Muslims in Postcolonial Literature

*Midnight's Children* contributes to the broader discourse on the representation of Muslims in postcolonial literature, particularly in relation to themes of identity, history, and the impact of colonialism.

### **5.1. *Midnight's Children* as a Commentary on the Partition of India**

*Midnight's Children* by Salman Rushdie is a complex narrative that explores the historical, political, and personal consequences of the Partition of India in 1947. As a metaphorical commentary on this significant event, the novel portrays the effects of partition on various levels.

***Personal and Collective Trauma:*** The protagonist, Saleem Sinai, is born at the exact moment when India gains independence and is partitioned. His life becomes an allegory for the life of the new nation - torn apart by divisions and struggling with a new identity. The birth of Saleem and the birth of independent India are intertwined to indicate the birth pangs of a new nation and the individual.

***Violence and Displacement:*** The Partition led to unprecedented violence, displacement, and upheaval. Rushdie depicts this through the experiences of various characters in the novel who suffer from the repercussions of the event. The massacres, migrations, and communal riots are portrayed in brutal detail, showcasing the human cost of political decisions.

***Identity Crisis:*** The Partition created a significant identity crisis among the citizens of the new nations. Religious and communal identities became the cause of division and violence.

Characters like Saleem struggle with their multiple identities – Hindu, Muslim, British, and Indian – reflecting the identity crisis of the nation itself.

***The Impact on Future Generations:*** The novel also explores how the event of partition impacts future generations. The *Midnight's Children*, those born in the first hour of India's independence, are said to possess magical abilities, symbolizing the hopes and expectations of the new nation. However, they are also shown as being burdened by their nation's complicated history.

***Political Commentary:*** Rushdie doesn't shy away from political commentary in the novel. The process of partition and the people involved in it are critiqued. He presents the political leaders as flawed characters, adding a layer of complexity to the historical events. Thus The novel serves as a powerful commentary on the partition of India and its lasting effects on the lives of millions of people, particularly Muslims. Rushdie illustrates the traumatic experiences of displacement, violence, and loss that many Muslims faced during this tumultuous period, highlighting the complexities of religious and national identity in the aftermath of partition.

## **5.2. The Identity Crisis of Religious Minorities in Postcolonial Societies**

*Midnight's Children* explores the identity crisis faced by religious minorities in postcolonial societies. The novel's Muslim characters often struggle to reconcile their religious beliefs with their national identity, particularly as they confront the political and social realities of post-independence India and Pakistan. Through the experiences of these characters, Rushdie underscores the challenges faced by religious minorities in postcolonial societies and the importance of understanding the complexities of their identities.

### **5.3. The Role of Literature in Shaping Perceptions of Muslims**

Literature has a substantial role in shaping perceptions of different cultural, ethnic, and religious groups, and this includes Muslims. It is a powerful medium for communicating ideas, ideologies, experiences, and perceptions about the world. Literature has the capacity to either foster understanding and tolerance or reinforce stereotypes and prejudices, depending on how characters and narratives are developed and presented.

Finally, *Midnight's Children* highlights the role of literature in shaping perceptions of Muslims, both within and beyond the South Asian context. By offering a nuanced and multifaceted portrayal of Muslim characters, Rushdie challenges stereotypes and promotes a deeper understanding of Muslim experiences and identities. The novel thus contributes to the broader discourse on the representation of Muslims in literature and the implications of such portrayals on society.

## **Chapter 6**

### **Findings & Discussion**

This research paper has examined the representation of Muslims in Salman Rushdie's novel *Midnight's Children*, exploring the complexities of identity, religiosity, and the intersection of personal and national histories in the context of postcolonial South Asia. In this concluding section, the key findings of the study are summarized, and implications for future research are discussed.

#### **6.1. Key Findings**

The analysis of *Midnight's Children* reveals that the novel offers a nuanced and multifaceted portrayal of Muslim characters, challenging stereotypes and promoting a deeper understanding of Muslim experiences and identities. The protagonist, Saleem Sinai, embodies the complexities and contradictions of post-independence Muslim identity, navigating various religious, cultural, and political affiliations throughout the narrative. The novel also highlights the importance of family and community in shaping individual and collective identities, as well as the fluidity of identity through the politics of naming.

Furthermore, *Midnight's Children* explores the role of religiosity in the formation of personal and national histories, underscoring the diversity of religious beliefs and practices in South Asia, as well as the themes of religious tolerance and intolerance. Finally, the novel contributes to the broader discourse on the representation of Muslims in postcolonial literature, particularly in relation to the themes of identity, history, and the impact of colonialism.

#### **6.2. Implications for Future Research**

This study lays the groundwork for future investigations into how Muslims are portrayed in literature, both inside and outside of the South Asian milieu. This analysis could be expanded upon in the future by looking at how Muslims are portrayed in other works by

Salman Rushdie or other postcolonial writers. It would be beneficial to compare *Midnight's Children* to other books that examine Muslim lives and identities.

Additionally, researchers could look into how *Midnight's Children* is received by Muslim readers, determining how the portrayal of Muslims in the book compares to readers' own experiences and perceptions. This line of research may provide insight into how literary representations affect how Muslims are perceived and understood in society.

### **6.3. Conclusion**

In conclusion, this research paper has demonstrated the significance of Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* in the broader discourse on the representation of Muslims in literature. By offering a complex and nuanced portrayal of Muslim characters, the novel challenges stereotypes and promotes a deeper understanding of Muslim experiences and identities, ultimately contributing to a more informed and empathetic understanding of the diverse Muslim community.



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