

## **Reimagining History: The Historical Sense in Salman Rushdie's Midnight's Children**

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### **Abstract**

Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* is not merely a novel of personal or national identity; it is a profound commentary on the nature of history and memory. This article explores the concept of "historical sense" in the novel, focusing on how Rushdie reinterprets and reconstructs Indian history through magical realism, personal narrative, and cultural memory. Using the protagonist Saleem Sinai as both a participant and observer of historical events, Rushdie challenges the linearity and objectivity of historical record. The novel demonstrates how personal and collective histories intertwine, and how storytelling becomes an act of resistance against official historiography. By examining these elements, the article sheds light on how *Midnight's Children* serves as a postcolonial intervention into the politics of history-writing.

### **Keywords**

Salman Rushdie, *Midnight's Children*, historical sense, postcolonial literature, magical realism, historiography, cultural memory, narrative identity

### **Introduction**

Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981) is often celebrated for its stylistic innovation and narrative complexity, but its most enduring contribution lies in its treatment of history. The novel engages with what T. S. Eliot termed the "historical sense" — an awareness not just of the past, but of its continuing presence. However, Rushdie redefines this idea through a postcolonial lens, proposing that history is not a fixed record, but a fluid and contested space where memory, myth, and narrative collide.

### **The Role of Saleem Sinai: The Historian as a Storyteller**

Saleem Sinai, the novel's narrator, positions himself as the chronicler of the Indian nation's birth and growth. Born at the exact moment of India's independence, he believes his life is inextricably linked to national events. This metaphorical connection underscores Rushdie's central theme: that personal narratives are entangled with historical ones. However, Saleem is an unreliable narrator — forgetful, inconsistent, and self-aware. His flawed memory and imaginative digressions highlight the subjective nature of history, suggesting that storytelling can often convey a deeper truth than factual records.

### **Magical Realism and the Rewriting of History**

Rushdie employs magical realism not to escape reality, but to reinterpret it. The fantastical elements — such as the telepathic conference of *Midnight's Children* or Saleem's hyper-sensitive nose — serve as allegories for political and cultural phenomena. These surreal

techniques challenge the realism associated with official historiography and invite readers to question whose version of history is being told. In Rushdie's framework, magical realism becomes a tool for reclaiming silenced voices and alternative truths.

### **History as a Collage of Memory and Myth**

Rushdie's narrative blurs the line between history and memory. For example, the portrayal of the Emergency period under Indira Gandhi is both politically charged and intensely personal. Saleem's castration during this time symbolizes the repression of dissent and the manipulation of history by authoritarian power. The novel's temporal shifts, digressions, and metafictional commentary further suggest that history is not a chronological sequence but a fragmented and selective recollection. Myth, rumor, and fiction become valid historical documents within Rushdie's literary historiography.

### **Postcolonial Critique of Official Historiography**

*Midnight's Children* can be read as a critique of colonial and nationalist narratives that seek to impose singular versions of the past. By presenting history through the fractured lens of Saleem's experience, Rushdie undermines the authority of linear historiography. He suggests that history in postcolonial societies is a site of struggle — between remembering and forgetting, between the colonizer's archives and the people's stories. This aligns with postcolonial theorists like Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Spivak, who argue that rewriting history is essential for cultural decolonization.

### **Language, Narrative, and the Politics of Remembering**

Language plays a crucial role in shaping historical consciousness in *Midnight's Children*. Rushdie's hybrid prose — blending English with Indian idioms, cultural references, and vernaculars — mirrors the hybridity of postcolonial identity and history. This linguistic fusion resists the homogenization of colonial discourse and reflects the diverse, often contradictory, narratives that constitute India's past. The act of storytelling itself becomes political, emphasizing that who tells the story — and how — determines what is remembered and what is erased.

### **Conclusion**

In *Midnight's Children*, Rushdie does not merely recount the history of modern India; he reclaims it. Through the subjective narration of Saleem Sinai, the use of magical realism, and a fragmented narrative structure, Rushdie exposes the limitations of official historical accounts and champions a pluralistic view of the past. The novel affirms that history is not a monologue but a polyphony — a conversation between memory, myth, fiction, and fact. Ultimately, *Midnight's Children* exemplifies how literature can serve as a powerful medium for reimagining history and asserting cultural identity in a postcolonial context.

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