

RUSHDIE, SALMAN, *Midnight's Children*, 1995, Random House

Memory has its own special kind.
It selects, eliminates, alters, exaggerates,
minimizes, glorifies, and vilifies also;
but in the end it creates its own reality,
its heterogeneous but usually coherent version of events;
and no sane human being ever trusts
someone else's version more than his own. (*Midnight's Children*, 1995: 268)

Looking back at India's past beyond the realm of academia, Salman Rushdie's imaginary saga *Midnight's Children* is the starting point for the investigation about India's current cultural and political situation, which is strongly influenced by historical events and nowadays by modernization and development processes in a time of neocolonialism, globalization, and transnationalism. Rushdie's postcolonial and postmodern novel *Midnight's Children* draws a picture of the time since around 1915 and explains India's situation after it gained its Independence from the British colonizers; it describes Gandhi's *Quit India* movement, the violent partition of India into the new states India and Pakistan, and the *State of Emergency* from 1975 to 1977 through the eyes of Indian people. In his intensely political and consciousness-rising novel, Rushdie critically analyzes so-called realities through the deconstruction of history as he writes in *Midnight's Children* "Reality is a question of perspective; the further you get from the past, the more concrete and plausible it seems - but as you approach the present, it inevitably seems more and more incredible" (*Midnight's Children*, 1995: 211).

The research focuses on different aspects of colonialism and postcolonialism, portraying, theoreticizing, and analyzing their influence on the process of identity building and cultural formation. Postcolonial theory responds to the dominant master discourses of imperial Europe in history, philosophy, and linguistics, including discussions about migration, slavery, oppression, resistance, representation, difference, race, gender, and place. Thus, postcolonial studies seek to identify, value, and empower what colonialist discourses label the barbarous and primitive. The questions of colonial study and postcolonial theory are not exclusive to their subjects, but are essential for any study which is concerned with recovering the histories and perspectives of marginalized people. In *Midnight's Children* Salman Rushdie refers to this discourse by arguing: "In a kind of collective failure of imagination, we learned that we simply could not think our way out of our pasts" (*Midnight's Children*, 1995: 148).

Salman Rushdie's approach to the story of the Indian midnight's children is that of one who is looking at the events from outside but with much insight view and knowledge, which makes the novel *Midnight's Children* extremely tension-loaded and controversial. Through his imaginary novel, Rushdie tries to explain the process of regaining identity through literature, to confront the realities of the past, to be aware of the collision of reality and fiction, and to start an emancipating process through the pre-adaptation of the own language or dialect. He describes in his magical-realistic fiction that "In a country where the truth is what it is instructed to be, reality quite literally ceases to exist, so that everything becomes possible except what we are told is the case" (*Midnight's Children*,

1995: 414). Accordingly, his novel can be analyzed as a way of co-opting political and literary power, because he de- and reconstructs India's latest past by analyzing post-colonial issues such as identity, the loss of the self, migration and fragmentation through displacement, and the difficulty of facing one's historical past. In *Midnight's Children* the narrator Saleem then argues: "So that the story I am going to tell, (...), is as likely to be true as anything; as anything, that is to say, except what we were officially told" (*Midnight's Children*, 1995: 425). Rushdie further concentrates in his research on the legitimization of the power of authority arguing that "It is possible to create past events simply by saying they occurred" (*Midnight's Children*, 1995: 564). Rushdie's work further exhibits the concept of responsibility the Spanish philosopher Vicent Martínez Guzmán writes about in his essay *The Philosophical Foundation of Globalization* in which he argues that we don't have excuses, only responsibilities.

While Salman Rushdie mourns the missed opportunities since the time of India's Independence, he also celebrates variety and values difference in his magical narrative, writing about processes of awareness and emancipation, rebirth, passion, hope, and love, expressed through his fictional characters who are struggling with their own fate. The symbolic figures in his work of fiction are therefore possible voices, which portray the countless diverse colonial, postcolonial, and nowadays globalized voices. Although his characters are fictional, they are, to a certain extent, authentic and overcome Western attributions and descriptions. Besides, the author's magical realistic writing style expresses a genuinely *Third World* consciousness, which provides a liberating response to the codes of imperial history and its heritage of fragmentation and discontinuity, when he points out: "Europe repeats itself, in India, as farce (*Midnight's Children*, 1995: 235).

The growth of the imperial colonial British empire was intrinsically bound to the development of the Other, establishing the native, primitive, peripheral, and marginal as its antitheses, which led to a privileging exclusive norm and to the naturalizing of constructed values such as civilization and humanity. One of the major purposes of this analysis is to look at the ways in which the discourse of Otherness privileges direct and indirect (structural and cultural) violence towards the Other. Otherness is never given, but always constructed and the mechanisms of repression and projection are central parts in constructing Others, as for instance 'Third World as Other,' 'woman as Other,' and 'Third World woman as Other.' The constructions of Otherness further always go along with constructions of the self and thus the images of self and Other are so closely interlinked that they are hard to crush. In his novel, Salman Rushdie gives voice to the voiceless and hopeless by giving them the power of description. In consequence, he is bringing them from the margin to the centre, concentrating on the spaces which Others can gain or where they already have attributed value to their own discourse by displacing the standpoint of normative social behavior and by recovering their own voices. The narrator in the novel therefore argues: "It's a dangerous business to try and impose one's view of things on others (*Midnight's Children*, 1995: 269). In *Midnight's Children*, Rushdie refers to the process of construction the Others as following: "All the best people are white under the skin (*Midnight's Children*, 1995: 228) or "Even blackies know white is nicer, don't you think so?" (*Midnight's Children*, 1995: 85). Being aware of India's representation as Other in East/West, colonized/colonizer binary, Salman Rushdie refuses to reproduce India and Indians as Other who are primitive and/or

inferior as well, instead, he demonstrates how the Indian as Other is the other face of Western modernity/postmodernity. Through his writing, Rushdie shows that there is a cultural, religious, and historical intermixing - not only between the non-West and the West, but also within India. He argues that: “There are as many versions of India as Indians” (*Midnight’s Children*, 1995: 341). Rushdie creates an alternative space, a *third space*, to a binary system that defines India as devalued Other. He constructs within his novel a postmodern space of a so-called *third principle*, which is a space that attempts to include both sides, centre/periphery, inside/outside, superior/inferior, dominant/dissident, master/slave, religious/secular, and to foreground hybridity over clarity and openness over closure. Saleem, the narrator of the novel argues once: “We,’ I cried passionately, ‘must be a third principle, we must be the force which drives between the horns of the dilemma; for only by being other, by being new ...!’ (*Midnight’s Children*, 1995: 323).

The analysis of the novel *Midnight’s Children* allows breaking through the Western academic frame of thinking, by going beyond a Western academic analysis and beyond the realm of academia, promoting a critical investigation of historical facts and constructed realities. This procedure opens the possibility of creating or recreating spaces for a new challenging complexity and perspective of the research, leading to alternative ways, realities, and spaces of thinking, which finally, hopefully, contribute to the creation of more peaceful societies, based on equality and justice.

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