



## Domination of Westerners and their Ideologies in India: Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*

Uruthi Pouniah M N<sup>1</sup>, Dr. Manju Kumari K<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> II M.A English Literature, Department of English-SF (UG & PG), Nirmala College For Women, Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu, India.

<sup>2</sup> Assistant Professor, Department of English-SF (UG & PG) Nirmala College for Women, Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu, India.

### ABSTRACT:

Being an Indian-born British American novelist, Sir Ahmed Salman Rushdie is known for his powerful language who frequently combines magical realism with historical fiction. His critically acclaimed novel, *Midnight's Children* (1981), a historiographic metafiction, depicts India's transition from British colonial rule to Independence and partition combined with fictional fantasies. Even after the exit of Britishers from India, western culture and customs are imposed on the Indian people which led to the suppression of Indian culture and tradition. Though the British people left India after Independence, the presence of westernization remained during postcolonial India. This paper primarily focuses on the strong effect and domination of British Colonialists' western ideas and how they affected the Indian subcontinent during the postcolonial period with reference to the novel *Midnight's Children*.

**Keywords:** Colonialism, Postcolonialism, Westernization, Influence, Independence.

India had been under the control of the Britishers for more than 200 years. The Britishers not only dominated the Indian people but also dominated the rich culture and tradition of India. The Britishers influenced the Indian people to follow their culture and customs. Few people supported it, leading to the downfall and suppression of Indian tradition, and few were against it. Rushdie portrays a new India in his novel through the eyes of the protagonist, Saleem Sinai. Rushdie depicts the two conflicting cultures – Eastern and Western which were the effects of Colonialism.

The novel *Midnight's Children* was narrated by the protagonist, Saleem Sinai who was born at the stroke of midnight on August 15, 1947, which makes his birth parallel to the age of independent India. He narrates his story and relates it to the history of India. Hence this novel can be considered the autobiography of the narrator Saleem and the new India. The new India was portrayed to be the hybrid version of Eastern and Western ideas and practices. The new India can be compared to the narrator Saleem for being a hybrid offspring because he is not completely Indian. He was an illegitimate son of the Britisher Methwold and a woman named Vanita. Though Saleem was born to the poor Vanita, a midwife named Mary switches Saleem and Shiva in either place who were born at the same time. This made Saleem, be brought up in a rich family. Hence Saleem can be compared to New India.

The effect of British Colonialism started in 1915 in the novel, where he starts telling the story of his grandfather Adam Aziz. Since Adam Aziz was an educated Doctor from Germany, he followed the western ideologies in India even after returning from Germany. His actions show how greater he was influenced by western ideologies. His education made him completely westernized. His western education dominated his own culture, making him think that India which doesn't follow western ideals was uncivilized.

“Now, returning, he saw through travelled eyes. Instead of the beauty of the tiny valley circled by giant teeth,

he noticed the narrowness, the proximity of the horizon; and felt sad, to be at home and feel so utterly enclosed.” (5)

The above lines describe how greater Doctor Aziz was influenced by western ideas. Preoccupied with the thoughts of western ideals, Doctor Aziz was not able to praise his own motherland's beauty rather he criticized the appearance of Kashmir.

The character Tai represents the old tradition of India and he condemns Doctor Aziz's western ideas and education. Tai feels desperate when

Doctor Aziz changes his lifestyle to modern western practice. Tai, the boatman gets furious when Adam diagnoses the patient with the stethoscope instead of the powerful nose which he considers to be the most powerful thing in the human body. This shows how staunch he was in the old tradition of India. Tai cannot accept the fact that Doctor Aziz was carrying a western-style bag filled with the instruments that were used by a western doctor. "To the ferryman, the bag represents Abroad; it is the alien thing, the invader, progress" (19). The above lines which were said by the narrator of the novel describe the hate of old people towards westerners and their influence.

The Kolis, the ancient fishermen were said to be the first inhabitants of Mumbai. They named their place Mumbai and Mumbabaisince they worshipped the goddess 'Mumbadevi'. But when Mumbai was invaded by the Portuguese, they renamed it Bom Bahia which was later called 'Bombay' by Britishers. Not only Britishers but also other westerners came to India and dominated the Indian ideologies. The name 'Mumbai' refers not only to the place but also to the Kolis' cultural heritage and identity. But when the colonizers dominate, they not only change the name but also demolish the cultural identity of the individual or the society.

William Methwold, a British general, wants to sell his estate, including beautiful mansions. But he was ready to sell his property only if the buyer agrees to his two conditions. The first condition was that the entire contents of Methwold's inside the mansions should be retained even after the sale and the second condition was that the property will be officially handed to the buyer only after the independence. This shows the superiority of Methwold over the Indian people. This strongly represents the domination of British colonialism.

Methwold, while leaving his estate, insists the new owners Ahmed Sinai and Ameena Sinai to follow the British custom of having a cocktail in the garden. "You'll take a cocktail in the garden?", Methwold is saying, 'Six o'clock every evening. Cocktail hour. Never varied in twenty years.' (126). Though the custom of having a cocktail was not found in the Indian tradition, Methwold insists them to have it. The couple Ameena and Ahmed, incorporated the custom of having a cocktail in the garden every day, though they were not interested earlier. This shows the dominance of British Colonialism in postcolonial society.

The cultural legacy of the British can be one of the important things that remained in postcolonial India. The people who were living in Methwold's estate represent the state of mind of the people who lived in postcolonial India. At the time of independence, they thought of destroying the western ideologies inside them but later after a few days of the independence, they started adopting the western practices that were earlier followed by the Britishers. In postcolonial India, western practices and ideologies captivated the mind of the Indians in the name of 'Modernization'. They believed that modernization would give them the status of educated and well intellectual positions.

One of the worst effects of this domination of British Colonialism was partition. This partition led the Muslim people to migrate from India to Pakistan. The narrator Saleem moves to Pakistan and in the later part of the novel, he returns to India with the help of a witch named Parvati. This shows that, though the Indian people change their lifestyle to modern and western practices, they never intend to leave their motherland.

This novel *Midnight's Children* also insists that 'A New India' was born after independence and it was a blend of Old India and British India. Westernization didn't change the country entirely but altered the country with a blend of Indian and Western ideologies. Rushdie beautifully portrays the domination of Westerners and their influence in India and tells about the strong effect of colonialism in India and how it has changed the cultural practice of India.

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