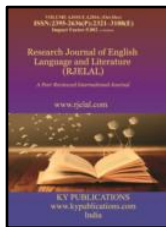




**FICTIONAL REALISM VERSUS MAGIC REALISM :  
A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF SALMAN RUSHDIE'S *MIDNIGHTS CHILDREN* AND  
RAJA RAO'S *KANTHAPURA***

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**ABSTRACT**

Among the challenges faced by postcolonial Indian literature are the presumptions and naïveté of Westerners. The Western reader typically assumes Indians have nothing to write about outside their feelings about Westerners. As much as India is shaped by independence and neo-colonialism, identity cannot be understood purely as a reaction to Euro-American influences any more than by viewing literature produced in contemporary India in a vacuum. Rather, much of contemporary Indian literature seeks to conceptualize identity as an observation of tradition with a vision to the future: identity is formed neither by reminiscing about a Romantic past nor by de-contextualizing the past. Many Indian texts abstract the difficulty of asserting non colonial identity while overcoming colonial history with the use of magical realism and fictional realism . These novels each deploy magic realism and fictional realism as a way to abstract a project of self-making that appreciates a history of colonialism yet seeks to break free from external identifiers. Through magic realism and fictional realism, these novels demonstrate Indian literature's interest in self-making and provide a case for a self-constructed Indian identity. This paper offers a theoretical and historical background associating the conventions of magical realism and fictional realism with postcolonial texts before providing a close reading of two Indian novels Sulman Rushdie's *Midnights Children* (1981) and Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* (1938).

**Key words** : postcolonial, magical realism, fictional realism, de-contextualize, neocolonialism

**INTRODUCTION**

Magic realism or magical realism is an aesthetic style or genre of fiction in which magical elements blend with the real world. Magical realism can be seen as a device biding Indian culture of the past to the contemporary multicultural interface. Rushdie's principal use of magical realism in the text involves the telepathic abilities of saleem and other thousand and one children born at the stroke of midnight on August 15,1947, abilities that enable them to communicate them with each other and in saleem's case to read the mind of those around him.

Realistic fiction or fictional realism is a genre consisting of stories that could have actually occurred to people or animals in a believable setting. These stories resemble real life, and fictional characters within these stories react similarly to real people. Raja Rao's writings consist of several fictional and non-fictional works. Written in English, the literary works give the opportunity to become acquainted with the situation during the time in which the author lived, but also with ancient Indian traditions. Rao's first novel *Kanthapura* presents the crucial historical events of the nineteen-thirties. The

novel focuses on the villagers of Kanthapura who participate in India's struggle for independence. In this term paper the features of the novel will be elaborated. It will have a good look at the credibility of the novel *Kanthapura*, at the East-West conflict as well as at Gandhi's influence on the villagers of Kanthapura.

#### **DISCUSSION**

*Kanthapura* and *Midnight's Children* have been a triumph of narrative art marvelously employed to achieve the ends. The persona and their narration are often the mouthpieces of their creators. So, most often the authors manipulate them to put forth their points of view. Rao employs the old woman narrator, Achhaka to glorify the past heritage of India and deify the earthly characters. for Rao Achhaka is Tirasias and through her visionary experience is seen Nehru as Bharata to Gandhi as Rama who have attained the status of God; and as she believes, they will together slay Ravana (the British rule so that Sita (the Mother India) may be freed. she is a devout Hindu who knows the puranas; she has a good collection of stories from legends and epics which she refers to again and again while narrating the story of her village. She is superstitious garrulous and because gifted with a sense of past, she is a wonderful storyteller who at once grips the attention of the reader-hearer and holds him captive to the end. Apart from her remarkable memory, she has a vivid imagination to be able to visualize what must have happened at the skiffington coffee Estate where she was not present. Saleem, on the other hand, is set in contrast to Shiva; and both although divinely gifted are castrated of their power. Everything seems demoralized there is no denying that Rushdie's mouthpiece is also well-versed in ancient puranic tales. But he does not intend to write a novel of memory nor does he make use of imagination. it is only somewhere along the way he got interested in the process of filtration "so my subject changed, was not a search for lost time, had become the way in which we remake the past to suit our present purposes, using memory as our tool," says Rushdie. Rushdie has one foot in post-modernism and another in India. Having a foot in India he is like Raja Rao but is a step forward when he filters the Indian-

socio\_politico-cultural scenario through the dangerous membrane of post-modernism. His mouthpiec Saleem is also garrulous but not superstitious and never confirms to the totality of objective reality. Rushdie links the pattern of the novel to Saleem's need to write himself, to imbue his life with some meaning. Saleem cuts history to suit himself, connecting every significant event in post-independence, India to himself, the most important being his birth. Saleem is said to have made including getting his dates and statistics wrong the objective being Saleem's mistakes is two-fold- that Rushdie has saved himself from the reader's censure and that history is never objective. "History is always ambiguous. Facts are hard to establish and capable of being given many meanings." He concludes; so, since remembered truth is as valid as literate truth, everyone has the right to his/her own version of truth. Magic realism is a way of showing „reality“ more truly with the aid of the various magic of metaphors.

Amina is a drift in a sea that consists of "waves of excitement" and "hollow of fear" (midnight's children's 1981, 112p)

Saleem makes a distinction between two modes of connection that join himself to the nation, the „literal“ and the „metaphorical“, a distinction obviously related to that between realism and magic. *Midnight's children* is different from earlier fiction in the sense that unities of time place and characters are unstable, the narrative changes between first person and the third person, natural becomes unnatural or supernatural. The novel is full of hidden clues and old utterance which always seems pointing towards some conclusion. This novel can be described in one way as a fantasy. Fantasy can be said as „a kind of imaginative indulgence which disdains the lofty idealism“ fantasy is close to Coleridge fancy which is concerned with illusion, hallucination and sensory experience rather than concepts, principles and ideals. the characters in the novel are constantly splitting into the doubles and multiples, for instance Saleem multiple mothers and fathers, his alter ego Shiva, Parvati-the witch split and so more. The narrative frame work *midnight children* consist of a tale..... Comprising his life story...which Saleem Saniarecounts orally to his wife

Padma. This self-referential narrative (within a single paragraph Saleems refer himself in the first person "And I wishing upon myself the curse of Nadir Khan...." I tell u Saleem cried, its true" recalls indigenous Indian culture, particularly the similarly orally recounted Arabian nights. In the midnight's children the narrative comprises and compress Indian culture history " Once upon a time ,Saleem muses, there were Radha and Krishna , Ram and Sita , and Laila and Manju; also( because we are not affected by west) Romeo and Juliet, and Spencer Tracy and Katherine Hepburn" in this sentence we can clearly see that characters from Indian culture history are chronologically intertwined with characters from western culture , and the devices that they signify are Indian culture , religious and storytelling , western drama and cinema are presented in Rushdie's text with post-colonial Indian history to examine both the effects of these indigenous and non-indigenous cultures of the Indian mind and in the light of independence.

On the other hand Raja Rao relocated the events in a rural area. Thus, one might wonder why Rao did not select one of India's cities, which - at that time - had been ruled by the British Government. For, in the first instance, the urban population clearly felt the consequence of the British decisions. Rao's choice was connected with the fact that villages had always formed India (Weber, Max. *The Religion of India: The Sociology of Hinduism and Buddhism*. Ed. Hans H. Gerth, Don Martindale, New York: Free, 1967: 111). Long, before India came under the British rule, the village had been the only existing form of a community. The villagers were integrated in various economic and social functions. Due to division of labour, inhabitants of villages had to perform certain tasks. They either sold their hand-made products or they offered their services in exchange for payment (12). But it depended on the affiliation of the caste, which work the villagers had to do. Whereas members of the upper caste like the Hindus were in sophisticated positions like teachers or priests, other persons, who belonged to a lower caste, earned money e.g. by weaving. In the rural area, workers had a particular working-place which separated members of different castes (111). Stratification into

castes determined the members' social position (30). Religious affiliation depended on birth (6). When a child descended from Hindu parents, then it likewise became a Hindu, too. But if a person belonged to another religion, he or she could not be a member of the Hinduism. In the village, the caste hierarchy was the "bearer of stability" . For centuries, religion had encompassed almost every facet of life. Spiritual experience and upholding Indian traditions gave the population reliability in a time, when their country came under the governance of Britain, and when the technical progress of the West was overflowing India . In the years after the beginning of the British Imperialism, the rural community provided orientation and steadiness in times of economic growth, rapid changes and disorder. The British, however, regarded India as underdeveloped, precisely because India was mainly rural. India reflected the opposite of the "modern and progressive Britain", where various towns were heavily industrialized . The inhabitants, however, connected the characteristics of India, neglected by the British, with India's vigor and individuality . Furthermore, being considered to be the opposite of the city, the village took on an increasingly important role. In contrary to the city - basically associated with immorality and perfidy - the village, however, featured authenticity and naturalness, because the members of the society, their traditions and Indian values remained just as they had existed before the enforced influence resulting from the British rule . Raja Rao's first novel becomes interesting for people who want to gain knowledge about the Indian rural life, because the community is displayed "as a 'peasant society'" (28). The novel begins with a vivid description of the village Kanthapura which is "high on the Ghats" and "in the province of Kara" (Rao, Raja. *Kanthapura*. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1993: 1). The village is divided in five districts, namely in a "Brahmin quarter", a "Pariah quarter", a "Potter's quarter", a "Weaver's quarter", as well as a "Sudra quarter" (5). From this point of view, it results that every caste group has a particular social environment and an area in the "caste ridden traditional rural society", where its members live and work. By portraying the landscape and

introducing her acquaintances, the narrator Achakka, an old woman of the village, takes the reader on a walk through the village. Mentioning the vicinity like the Tippur Hill, the river Himavathy and the red Kenchamma Hill, the novel creates a tranquil atmosphere. Unfortunately, the noise caused by labour, when Indian goods are shipped off across the sea, destroys the peaceful tranquillity for a moment (Rao 1993: 1). But as soon as the carts, which contain Indian commodities, have reached the hilltop, calmness returns to Kanthapura. This implies that the economical and political British intervention into the Indian daily life heavily disturbs the villagers.

#### CONCLUSION

Through the above discussion we can say that *Midnight's children* and *Kanthapura* fits into the mode of postmodern fantasy. Both the novels are experiential, interrogative and subjective as well. *The midnight children* are a magic realistic device emphasis to the continued struggle to come in terms with identities and polarities of the post-colonial. However, the text in both the novels is hybridized and must fall between the extremes of postmodern polarity on one hand and the desire to root narrative between national specifics on other. The individual voice is creeping progression of time and history nevertheless, the text conclusion is open ended. There may be no such thing as single national identity in the contemporary world, where media communication link cultures and countries, there is perhaps an interchange of culture, to various degrees between all countries. This delicate ambiguity is emphasized in the final sentence of the text, which link magic with realism, realism with history, history with individual and regional identity. *Kanthapura* and *Midnight's Children* both have been a triumph of their times and both made their authors' debut as novelists earning them a world fame and recognition. Indian English novel is a part of truly Indian novel and not a fragile extension of English fiction. It has now reached a youthful stage, and its movement as expected is being evaluated in terms of current trends in the world stream of fiction and criticism. The glimpses of the creative world of the great masters of Indian English novel would reveal that the novel would reveal that

the novelists constitute a cosmopolitan group representing various religions, communities, professions and views. They come from East, west, south and north. They belong almost the every community in India. The Hindus, Muslim, the Sikh, the Christen and the Parsi, and they represent every shade of opinion. Orthodox liberal progressive, Gandian, communistic and socialistic. They interpret every segment and strata of human society the luxurious life of Maharajas, Nawabs, industrialists and landlords; and the problems of untouchables, etc.

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