

**POLITICS OF POSTCOLONIAL INDIAN ENGLISH: META LANGUAGE
AS INDIGENOUS MODE OF SUBVERSIVE DISCOURSE IN RUSHDIE'S
*MIDNIGHTS'S CHILDREN***

Dr. Ram Bhawan Yadav

Assistant Professor

Department of English

Sikkim University

Email- rbyadav@cus.ac.in

Abstract

Using 'English' language, in the colonized countries, has been defined, interpreted and understood as the language of the Empire and therefore, is an issue of central debate in Postcolonial/Third World English Writings. During the period of colonization, colonizers introduced their language (English) for colonial motives. English language was used by them as an imperial tool to enhance, expand and establish their colonial domination for its durability and permanency. They forbade natives to speak their languages (mother tongues) by terming natives' languages as inferior, weak and meaningless. They dominated natives physically by bullet, spiritually by the Bible and mentally by English language. Through language they attempted to control natives' culture, religion and their ways of lives by foregrounding the assumption that physical domination cannot be durable unless and until the natives' culture, religion and the ways of being are controlled.

Key Words: Politics of Language, Meta Language, Indigenous Mode of Language, Midnight's Children

The emergence of native intellectuals in the colonized countries raised the voices against the growing dominance/superiority of 'English' after their flag-Independence. The writers from postcolonial countries use interrogative narrative mode to challenge the established assumptions about colonial language. Their narratives are focused to depict colonial subjects in their writings.

In a sense, nature and motive of postcolonial texts are oriented towards countering or rewriting. It attempts to counter colonial stereotypes by using certain types of narrative that is different in its uses. Postcolonial writers' texts use native aesthetics and indigenous narrative forms to challenge the hegemony of the English language, in the same way as there is no politics without rhetoric, no protest without language and no anti without narrative. Racism and colonialism have used language and rhetoric to discriminate and postcolonialism uses language narrative and particular forms of interrogation to modify and generate alternative forms of narrative, rhetorical

strategies and linguistic forms in order to subvert the occidental omnipresence and omnipotence of English language.

This presentation attempts to look at such employment of colonial English in Indian context in order to interrogate colonial tradition, on the one hand to form a textual tradition, on the other hand. It focuses on language and technique of Postcolonial Indian English fiction. It explores and evaluates the notions of language and technique that Indian English fictions have imitated, adopted, abrogated and appropriated. For this purpose I have selected Salman Rushdie's *Midnight Children* (1981). It will intrinsically focus on the notion of Indian English language as minutely reflected in Indian English literature. First, I study the role of English in India and its relation with the vernacular idioms since the imposition of the former by the British and second I have focused on selected text.

The question of using English language in Indian English literature is inextricably reflected and debated. In the contemporary time, English language is the second official language of India's administrative sphere. India is the second largest country in the world in terms of English speaking population. The literature written in the English language is not radically different from the literature written in the any vernacular languages of India. Indian English literature too is rooted in Indian culture. It is a credible literature that expresses a sensibility associated with vernacular and can be meant for Indian audience living in India or abroad.

The most significant use of subversive textual strategy in the novel is 'meta Language' which is considered as 'the variety of methods' to challenge master's language. This meta-language has been used by Rushdie in four generations of Saleem Sinai's family. When the political intention of the sender is understood by the listener as an imperial or colonising force; when the retaliation is to fight back to challenge the sender of the authority, then it is defined as a postcolonial condition. This definition of postcolonial condition creates in texts the responsibility to subvert colonial language to that extent where language itself seems to fade into silence. This is Meta language, the language that communicates through silence or in other way, challenging the normal way of speech and writing. This can be understood as the obvious articulation of postcoloniality. The spoken language of Saleem creates lacuna when it is compared with the subjects who are compel to speak the imperial language.

Silence in the novel is one of the modes of communication which is practised by four generations of Saleem's family: Naseem, Ahmed, Brass Monkey, and finally Aadam. We notice how Saleem through the means of silence or the absence of spoken and written words, is able to explore or discover his world. The method of using silence commences with the Reverend mother who is angry the way her children are being taught by her husband. "He fills their heads with I don't know what foreign languages, whatisthename, and other rubbish also, no doubt" (42). She cannot sustain even Nadir Khan's hide in her house where her unmarried daughters live, for this can be considered as defilement of the cultural values, if not the physical defilement of daughters. Saleem's presentation of this woman in the novel is very strong, outspoken opponent of change and supporter of traditional values. Her husband in her final pregnancy tries to help her. Her response for this assistance is like this. "This, whatsitname, is a very heavy pot; and if just once I catch you in here, whatsitname, I will pull your head into it, and add some dahi and make, whatsitname, a korma" (41). It is significant to say that Naseem has maintained pre-colonial position that helps postcolonial subject to shrug off the figurative chain of oppression. It is her desire to return to a time, unfettered by Europe that she cannot have in modern, post-colonial context. She is not a *chamcha* and her being is not to incline to serve colonial master. She becomes silent for three years when Aziz chides her like this "bellows, be silent, woman" (53). Her complainants and allegations are silenced, and her attitude remains unchanged. Her silence simply means her desire to regain pre-colonial India.

The second generation of 'silence as language' is practised by Ahmed, who in the beginning represents potential power. Saleem's father gradually loses this power under the influence of colonial power. In Methwold's estate, he finds himself chained by the European desire to maintain things the way they were under colonial rule. Ahmed, who finally becomes silenced financially and sexually and impotent, buys a "bulbul" which Alice identifies as "nothing but a talking budgie, some crook in Chor Bazar must have painted the feathers" (203). This indicates the silence of his generation. The bird's singing voice remains silent despite Ahmed's encouragement, but just like *Chamcha* who chooses to mimic the language of the oppressor rather than speaking for their people: "his own self-same voice: sing little bulbul sing!" (203). This kind of replication of his own mimicry leads Ahmed into a place of virtual silence where his only articulations are "nonsense words, showing a marked preference for the naughty childhood names

of excreta” (337). In this way, Ahmed is reduced to a language that expresses a condition of quite literary shit.

The third generation is represented by Brass Monkey, who later becomes Jamila, the singer. As a child Saleem’s sister has “the gift of talking to birds and to cats . . . From birds she learns how to sing; and from cats she learns a form of dangerous independence. This combination of language makes her proficient to get success in post-Independent Pakistan. But this is not a complete free articulation because she refuses to listen or speak the language of love. Brass monkey uses the language of pure violence when she physically defeats the cats’ killer, an act which permanently eliminates American girls’ domination over the children of Methwold’s estate.

The fourth generation is represented by Saleem’s son, Aadam, “a child who heard too much . . . rendered dumb by a surfeit of sound” (420) does not speak a single word from his birth in the same way as Saleem refuses to close his eyes until he realises it was impossible to “to face the world with his eyes open all the time” (125). His spirit is broken, perhaps, by the failure of children of midnight to perform in the active literal mode (238-239). Aadam discovers a new language and new sound with which to express the needs, desires, and identities of his generation. He does find this voice.

Abba . . . father. He is calling me father. But no, he has not finished, there is a strain on his face, and finally my sons, who will have to be a magician to cope with the world I am leaving him, complete his awesome first word cababba
(459)

Aadam’s first articulation is not Indian and, although not English, it is inscribed with the meaning of “magic” in this language. But, it should be noted that silence breaks sense with the sense of time, not just the description of linear time, but a time for the new generation.

This new language is the linguistic result of fourth generation uninfluenced by the forbears. It is the composite result of the language used by previous generations. Hanif’s language, telephonic language of Amina who first avoids then compels to adopt and finally abandons. Amina uses the telephone but cannot speak. Here the use of telephone becomes an instrument to show disconnection rather than communication. When Amina wants to abandon telephonic communication, she is reprimanded by her son’s action. Saleem writes the colonial language to the commander Sabarmati in a note and indirectly writes his mother of the warning she heeds. The

most significant and interesting language that Saleem develops in the novel is the language used with midnight children. The chest washing episode in the novel in which the normal structure is “inverted by the mind” (161), Saleem begins to hear the voices “deafening many tongued terrifying, inside his mind” (162). Saleem finds out that “voices could be controlled” (164). And this control grows still further when he frees himself from the bondages of the words, when “language faded away, and was replaced by universally intelligible thought –forms which far transcended words” (168). Where the politics of the country is enmeshed in the linguistic battle (“Language divides us”), Saleem is able to formulate the union with the children of midnight: “Siamese twins with two bodies dangling of a single head and neck, the head could speak in two voices, one male and one female, and every language and dialect spoken in subcontinent”(198). Saleem’s telepathy is true postcolonial spirit when he not only “cribs an entire English essay from Cyrus” (171) but in order to avoid suspicion changes the language of adding “mediocre touches of my own” (172). This process of taking language from colonial context and suiting it according to varying situations seems to be postcolonial symptom. The use of English, as used by Padma is also significant in the projection of postcolonial language. Finally, *Midnight’s Children* is Rushdie/Saleem’s ‘act of love’ that produces a textual strategy to subvert or challenge the imposed imperial language.

Works Cited and References:

- Ahmad, Aijaz. *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures*. London: Verso, 1992. Print.
- Ashcraft, Bill, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin. *The Empire Writes Back*. London: Routledge, 1991. Print.
- Bharucha, Rustom. “Rushdie’s Whale”. *Massachusetts Review*. 27.2 (1986). 212-237, Print.
- Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture*. New York: Routledge, 2005. Print.
- Britton, Celia. *Edouard Glissant and Postcolonial Theory: Strategies of Language and Resistance*. Charlottesville: Virginia University P, 1999. Print.
- Cowley, Jason. “Why We Choose Arundhati.” *India Today*. (27 October 1997): <http://www.india-today.com> .Web. 4 July 2010.
- Danial, L.G. “A Crisis of Identity: From Marginal Man to Visionary.” *Chimo*. Newsletter From Canadian Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies. 15 (1987). P 1-11. Print.

- Deleuze, Gilles, and Flexi Guattari. *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*. trans. Dona Polan. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota P, 1986. Print
- Desai, S.K., ed. *Experiment with Language in Indian Writing in English (Fiction)*. Kolhapur: Shivaji University P, 1974. Print.
- Ganesh, Latha. "Rushdie and Roy" in Explorations. Arundhati Roy's *The God o SmallThings*. eds. Indira Bhatt and Indira Nityanandam. New Delhi: Creative books, 1999. 98-112. Print.
- Kachru, Braj B. *The Indianization of English: The English Language in India*. Delhi: OUP, 1983. Print.
- Karahcmeti, Indira. "Salman Rushdie's Midnights' Children and an Alternative Genesis" *Pacific Coast Philology*. 1.2(1986): 81-84. Print.
- Kumar, Amitava. *Passport Photos*. Berkeley: University of California P, 2000. Print.
- Mukherjee, Meenakshi. *The Perishable Empire: Essays on Indian Writing in English*. New Delhi: OUP, 2002. Print.
- . *The Twice Born Fiction*. New Delhi: Pencraft International, 2005. Print.
- Nihalani, Paroo, R.K. Tagore, and Priya Hosali. *Indian and British English: A Handbook of Usage and Pronunciation*. Delhi: OUP, 1979. Print.
- Paranjape, Makarand. "Beyond Nativism: Towards a Contemporary Indian Tradition Criticism" in *Nativism: Essays in Criticism*. New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1997, 153-176. Print.
- Parneswaran, Uma. "Salman Rushdie in Indo English Literature." *The Journal of Indian Writing in English*, 12.2(1984). 15-25. Print.
- Rajan, Rajeswari Sunder, ed. *Issues in Post-Independence India*. New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1999. Print.
- Reder, Michael, ed. *Conversations with Salman Rushdie*. Mississippi: University P of Mississippi, 2000. Print.
- Roy, Arundhati. *The God of Small Things*. New Delhi: Penguin Book, 1997. Print.
- Rushdie, Salman. *Midnight's Children*. London: Vintage, 1995. Print.
- . *Shame*. New York: Vintage, 1983. Print.
- , and Elizabeth West, eds. *The Vintage Book of Indian Writing: 1947-1997*. London: Vintage, 1997. Print.