

## PICARESQUE NARRATION TECHNIQUE: SPECIAL REFERENCE TO SALMAN RUSHDIE'S *MIDNIGHT'S CHILDREN*

---

**Nadukuditi Sudheer Kumar<sup>1</sup>**

**G. Visali<sup>2</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>Assistant Professor of English, Bapatla Engineering College, Bapatla, Guntur (Dt), A.P., India

<sup>2</sup>Assistant Professor of English, Department of English, DIET, Vijayawada, A.P, India

---

### **Abstract:**

This Research paper aims at the analysis of picaresque technique, its origin and development with special reference to Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*. The first part of the paper explains the picaresque novel technique and Salman Rushdie's able application of the technique in his novel *Midnight's Children*. The second part of the paper deals with the episodic elements that substantiate the research claim, which claims that the technique is well adapted in the novel. The third and the last part of the paper gives the concluding remarks about the picaresque narrative technique and its effectiveness in order to open further research on the other novels that used the technique effectively.

**Keywords:** Picaresque, Narration Technique, Episodic etc

### **Introduction:**

The picaresque technique of narration is always intriguing just like the novel that has been written using the technique. Somnadh Sarkar (2006) interprets "The picaresque novel (Spanish: 'picaresco', from 'pícaro', for 'rogue' and 'rascal') as a popular genre of novel that originated in Spain and flourished in Europe in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries and it has continued to show its impact on modern literature". Therefore, the picaresque novel is a biography of rogue, which happens in episodes, a clever and amusing adventurer of a person who faces so many misfortunes and ends on a satisfying note. The story happens in the first person as an autobiography. The story happens in sets of episodes and series of thrilling incidents take place as the story progresses. The protagonist wanders from place to place as more and more twists and turns take place in his or her life. The adventures pave a way for the rogue to come across different people of different social statures. Hence, he or she comes across the ills of society.

"I spend my time at the great work of preserving. Memory, as well as fruit, is being saved from the corruption of the clocks" (Rushdie 2006:44)

---

Before *Midnight's Children*, Picaresque novel proper reappeared in such mature realistic novels as Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*, Charles Dickens's *The Pickwick Papers* Mann's *Confessions of Felix Krull*, Nikolay Gogol's *Dead Souls*, and Thomas Mann's *Confessions of Felix Krull*.

“Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* experiments with the modern techniques in the literature. In a sense, it has been considered innovative writing which digresses from the earlier fiction. He did not follow the traditional conventions of fiction. The novel *Midnight's Children* may be interpreted as ‘autobiographical buildings roman’ and a ‘picaresque narrative’ (Northrop Frye 2001:7).

Salman Rushdie is one of the renowned writers of the world who has significantly contributed to the literary world. Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* was bestowed with the prestigious Booker's Prize. One of the major reasons for the instant success of the novel is its narration technique. The novel depicts India's transition from British colonialism to independence and the subsequent partition of India. The post-colonial political and social condition is well depicted by the writer and the political and social events of India after independence are very well connected with the events in the life of the protagonist, Saleem Sinai's life. The novel tells the life story of the protagonist, Saleem Sinai who was born at midnight of 15th August 1947.

Through the character of the protagonist, the novel presents a commentary on the effects of India-Pakistan partition that took place after India's independence, which affected millions of people, who had to migrate to the places which they do not belong to. One of the key features of the picaresque narration is that the protagonist feels lonely and a sense of vacuum comes all over his head due to the migration, which happens to Saleem Sanai, throughout the novel. The novel can be seen as an attempt to re-evaluate and re-examine the history and thereby to find the solution for the creation of a harmonious and well-balanced society. “The present piece of work seems obsessed with his idea of migration. Migration, diasporic feeling, rootlessness and a new kind of sensibility born out of these factors – what is new, typical and unique of our age is loneliness and sense of vacuum that comes with the individual migration or migration of comparatively smaller groups. In a real sense everyone is away from the roots- where have all the roots gone. There is nothing in this novel that can ordinarily be called a “home”. Sometimes the novel seems confused and one is not sure about the city or village. Its goes back and forth from Bangladesh to Calcutta, then the Middle East to Kerala. The story moves in a very uncertain atmosphere. The novel can be called an eternal chronicle of restlessness, uncertainty and change.” (UK Essays)

*Midnight's Children* portrays the life and experiences of three generations of a Muslim family, living in Srinagar, Amritsar, Agra, Bombay and Karachi. Saleem Sinai, the central

---

character works at a pickle factory who narrates along with his life experiences the events like Quit India Movement, Muslim League activities, Riots, five-year plans, Pakistan war to his wife Padma. Saleem Sinai, the protagonist of the *Midnight's Children* who belongs to a Muslim family represents a marginalised voice. His identity is fragmented that he cannot escape from the injustice happened to him at the same time he is unable to trace out his roots. During the war between India and Pakistan, Saleem Sanai asks his sister on whose side they are, for which she replies, that she was clear and he was the one to decide. In the same way, Many a time he confronts with the history and roots of identity:

“I, Saleem Sinai, later variously called Snot nose, Stain face, Buddha and even Piece - of-the-Moon had become heavily embroiled in Fate -at the best of times a dangerous sort of involvement.” (Rushdie 2006:3)

Another feature of Picaresque narration is that the story happens in episodes and historical events. Rushdie deals with a series of historical events before Indo- Bagh tragedy; the quit Indian Movement; the formation of Muslim League and its role in national politics leading to partition and the riots and bloodshed on the aftermath of partition, etc. After Independence he dwells linguistic basis; Chinese Aggression and Pakistan war; liberation of Bangladesh and above all the proclamation of emergency etc. One of the major events which individual, as it is national insignificance, is that of Jallian Walla Bagh massacre. The lion of Kashmir founded his political outfit in fanatic nature of Muslim league formed by Mohammed Ali Jinnah. Rushdie makes passing reference to Gandhiji's death at the hands of Godse.

“The novel's fragmented structure is shown through the so-called chutnification of language and history, the magical realism, the multiple stories, the fragmented objects like the perforated sheet, the fragmented characters like Aadam Aziz that has a visible hole in him and a hybrid identity due to his years in Germany”. (Almestad 2015:23)

Moreover, the protagonist, Sanai has a rather confusing family background, as he has three mothers, which could be a symbolic gesture that India is portioned into three by the time Saleem comes to know that his biological mother is different from the one who nurtured him up and Saleem himself is full of cuts and bruises over his face, hence representing a metaphorical parallel of India. One of the important features of the novel is the fact that it is post-colonial and the impact post-colonial reality has on content, the narrative technique. Even after the war and the partition of India, Saleem goes through the effects of Emergency and civic beautification in New Delhi. He loses his wife and son. As in every Picaresque novel, the narrator finds solace in the climax; the protagonist meets Mary to find solace.

### **Conclusion:**

By analyzing the Picaresque narration technique through the novel *Midnight's Children*, it is clear that the technique helps to throw light on the ills of the society through the pain of the protagonist, who has to move from one place to the other. The story also shows a considerable part of the growing up period of the protagonist as well as the growing melancholy in society. It

---

is indeed a helpful technique to capture the attention of the historicity of text through exploring the author's birth time, family background, educational background and religion, and by analyzing the textuality of history through focusing on the historical events depicted in the novel. The narration spurs a sense of suspense and after reading the novel the hangover of the story lingers in the mind of the reader that is primarily because of the narrative style. Further research on the technique shall bring out more features of it. Interested scholars may examine other novels like *Huckleberry Finn* that are narrated through this technique.

### References:

- "Amitav Ghosh, The Circle Of Reason." All Answers Ltd. ukessays.com, November 2018. Web. 8 March 2020. <<https://www.ukessays.com/essays/english-literature/amitav-ghosh-the-circle-of-reason-english-literature-essay.php?vref=1>>.
- Almestad, Liv Olava. "Unpublished Master Thesis". Duo.Uio.No, 2015, <https://www.duo.uio.no/bitstream/handle/10852/58967/Master-Thesis-by-Liv-Olava-Almestad.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>. Accessed 6 Mar 2020.
- Frye, Northrop, and Harold Bloom. Anatomy Of Criticism. Princeton University Press, 2001, p. 6.
- Rushdie, Salman: Midnight's Children. Vintage Books. London. 2006
- Sarkar, Somnath. "Picaresque Novel: An Analysis ~ All About English Literature". Eng-Literature.Com, 2006, <https://www.eng-literature.com/2016/01/picaresque-novel-analysis.html>. Accessed 6 Mar 2020