Salman Rushdie’s Midnight’s Children:  
A Unique Amalgamation of Christianity,  
Hinduism & Islam 

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Abstract

Salman Rushdie, the famous as well as notorious writer won the prestigious Booker Mc Connell Prize in 1981 for his second novel Midnight’s Children (1980). The novel was well received both in India & abroad with enthusiastic & almost unanimous acclaim not only by ordinary readers but also by literary critics as well. The reasons behind this popularity are the religious controversies over The Satanic Verses. The religion also made a powerful impact on Midnight’s Children. But in Midnight’s Children Rushdie’s views on religion are different from that of The Satanic Verses. Here, he amalgamates Hinduism with Christianity & Islam. Rushdie has constantly mixed the popular tradition of Indian culture which has a remarkable bearing on the novel. Thus, Saleem, the protagonist of the novel is a product of the truly hybrid Indian society. He is partly Hindu, partly Muslim & partly Christian, suggesting thereby the intermixing of various religions. Moreover, Rushdie incorporates a number of mythical characters & incidents in the text. This is the secret of his success & it is for this reason the western readers & critics would choose Rushdie as an interpreter & authentic voice of the third world countries which Timothy Brennan in his Salman Rushdie & Third World: The Myth of the Nation described as Third World Cosmopolitan (104).

Key Words: Amalgamation, ohi, nourished, exchange prototype, surrogate, colossal, telepathy, etc.

Since the declaration of the Booker of Booker to Salman Rushdie’s Midnight’s Children, critics have begun to experiment upon the various aspects of Rushdies art in this novel. For instance, Tariq Rahman deals with politics, Ron Shephard & ML Pandit with fantasy, Ashutosh Banerjee with narrative technique. Nel Ten Kortenar discusses Midnight’s Children as an allegory on history. R.S. Pathak explore’s Rushdies delineation of the relation between individuals and history in the novel. Similarly, Goontilleke talks on Rushdies use of myth in this novel. The present paper attempts to address the issue of amalgamation of religions — Hinduism, Christianity & Islam, which perhaps, shade all the other important aspects and perhaps, contribute more than anything else to the prosperity of this work.
Salman Rushdie appears as a wonderful master of amalgamation between Hinduism, Christianity & Islam in *Midnight’s Children*. This technique, we observe in the situation in which Rushdie shows the illicit relationship between Vanita, a poor low caste Hindu woman with a white European named William Methwold in the absence of her husband Wee Willie Winkie. As a result of their union, Vanita becomes pregnant and this unborn child is the result of the amalgamation between Hinduism & Christianity. Secondly, we find Rushdie’s blending of Hinduism & Christianity with Islam. In the midnight on August 14, 1947, Vanita’s childbirth pain started and she was taken to Narliker Nursing Home in Bombay. But unfortunately she was unable to give birth the child till the last hour of next night i.e midnight on August 15. At the same time, Amina a Muslim woman, wife of Ahmed Sinai was in labour in that Nursing Home. Both of these women gave birth their respected child at the last stroke of midnight on August 15, 1947 after which India became independent. Shiva is the genetic son of Ahmed & Amina and Saleem Sinai is the genetic son of William Methould & Vanita. Now a Christian woman Mery Pereira exchanges their name-tages. Thus, a Muslim child (son of Ahmed & Amina) was nourished as Shiva by a Hindu mother under the Hindu rule-regulations. On the other hand, a Hindu-Christian hybrid child (son of Methould and Vanita’s) Saleem Sinai was brought up by a Muslim mother under Islamic Sharia. Thus, Shiva was Saleem and Saleem was Shiva.

Salman Rushdie in *Midnight’s Children* not only amalgamated the Hindu-Muslim and Christian people but he also mixed up the Hindu mythology, Christian mythology and Islamic mythology. In the beginning of the novel we are told that Adam Aziz, Saleem’s grandfather had a nose that was comparable only to the trunk of elephant headed Ganesha (Rushdie 8). In the last page Saleems son Adam Sinai is described as the true son of Shiva-Parvoti-the elephant headed Ganesha (Rushdie 500). Moreover, Saleem is also said to have a cucumber like nose. Thus, Salam Rushdie, ties the Muslim people with Hindu myth of Ganesha.

It is earlier said that Saleem had a colossal nose. Through this prodigious nose, Saleem was given the power of telepathy, which fortune teller said— ‘Voice will guide him’ (Rushdie 87-88). ‘It is the ability to look into hearts & minds of man’ (Rushdie 200). It is by this power Saleem discovered the illicit affairs of his mother with her ex husband Nadir Khan. It is by this power Saleem participated in ‘Midnights Children Conference’ (M.C.C.) in the secrecy of midnight. Now if we go to the Islamic mythology, we find that Prophet Mohammad was given the ‘Ohi’ i.e. message by Zebrail Farista. This ‘Ohi’ was similar to Saleem’s telepathy. Again, Saleem’s participation in Midnight’s Children Conference in the secrecy of nights can be compared to Prophet Mohammad’s visit to Miraz. In the Christian
mythology, Jesus Christ is the prototype of Saleem because like Saleem Jesus Christ is in dubious parentage as the Christians believe that Jesus is the child of God whereas the Muslims believe that it is the miracle of Allah. If Saleem is Jesus, then William Methould is God, which is acceptable in the Catholic Church as they believe in the ‘Holy Trinity’ i.e. the father God, son-Jesus & Soul human being are one.

Saleem is also an amalgamation of both Jesus & Prophet Mohammad. It is evident through Sadhu Ramrams prophesy- ‘two mother raise him’ (Rushdie 87-88). When the Sinais eventually discovered the Mery Pereira’s guild, she gave up her job at Narlikar Nursing Home & devoted her life to bringing up baby Saleem as a surrogate mother. If we reject the title ‘Pereira from Mery Pereira, then the real name will be Mary who was the mother of Jesus Christ. Another mother who nourished Saleem is Amina which is the name of Prophet Mohammad’s mother.

Although Shiva’s forefathers are Muslims, as a result of Mary’s crime he is nourished by Hindu parents and now he is considered as a legendary figure of Hinduism. Though in Midnight’s Children Shiva had nothing to do with Shiva myth but the rivalry between Shiva and Saleem could be compared with the legendary rivalry between Shiva and Brahma. Similarly, Saleem’s forefathers are Hindu-Christian but he had to practise Islam and being a Muslim, he considered Padma as his Muse or Saraswati, the Goddes of creative art (Goonetillek). At the ending of the novel in chapter XVIII entitled – ‘A Weeding’, we notice that Parvoti a Hindu girl becomes pregnant as a result of her union with Shiva (a Hindu in practice but biologically Muslim). But at the request of Picture Singh, Saleem married the helpless girl Parvoti and saved her honour. Then Parvoti converted to Islam and took her name Layla.

The character of Brass Monkey (Jamila Singar) as shown in ‘Midnight’s Children’ is also amalgamation of Islam and Christianity. In spite of her Muslim background, Brass Monkey under the influence of Christian ayah and European school friend dooned a nun’s outfit and rosary and went around the home singing Christian Hymns. She even fasted in the period of Lent instead of Romjan. Thus, Brass Monkey is the amalgamation of both Christianity and Islam. Again in Sundarbon the three boy soldiers—Ayoba, Farooq, Shahid and Buddha Saleem in a situation entered the huge Hindu temple of Kali and laid down at her feet. Thus, being boy shoulder from the Muslim background and their prayer to Kali for help indicates that Salman Rushdie’s ‘Midnight’s Children’ is nothing more than amalgamation of religions.

Salman Rushdie is an Indian by birth. In Midnight Children he wished to represent the Indian society. But going to represent the Indian society, he amalgamated Christianity, Hinduism and Islam, which is his great mistake as an Indian. But it is true that India is a country of diversity of religion. So, to represent the Indian society accurately, no religion can
be rejected. But what he should have done here is to raise the common minimum programme among these religions. Instead, he amalgamated these religions. In the surface level Rushdie shows the religious rivalry but in deeper level his sole aim is to amalgamate these religions. This technique sometimes baffles the readers to understand this combination. Whatever may be, Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* is a strange amalgamation of Christianity, Hinduism and Islam.

**References**


