

POST-COLONIAL LINGUISTIC HYBRIDITY: A STUDY OF SALMAN RUSHDIE'S MIDNIGHT'S CHILDREN

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Abstract

This paper is an attempt to analyze Post-colonial Linguistic Hybridity as adopted by Salman Rushdie in his novel *Midnight's Children*. Since language plays a very important role in shaping people's perception of the world. It was used as an instrument of subjugation and dominance by colonizers. These colonizers usually imposed their native language onto the colonized people to influence their knowledge and understanding. In the postcolonial period the situation has changed radically as the post-colonial writers focus on the problems and consequences of decolonization. They introduced an innovative way of writing by using native linguistic terminology. Salman Rushdie one of the leading post-colonial writers has used numerous native words, phrases, collocations in his novel *Midnight's Children*. This linguistic experiment helped him to provide oriental flavor to the novel and to subvert a language associated with colonial powers.

Key words: Colonialism, Linguistic Hybridity, Hybridization, Decolonization, Creolization

Post-colonialism has become one of the most interesting and challenging fields of study for researchers and academicians. To overthrow colonial hegemony, post-colonial writers have adopted the strategy of 'decolonizing the mind'. As Salman Rushdie, one of the leading Indian post-colonial writers, puts it; "the language like so much else in the colonies, needs to be decolonized, to be remade in other images, if those of us who use it from positions outside Anglo-Saxon culture are to be more than artistic Uncle Toms". Rushdie's article published in the London Times issue of July 3, 1988 is of great significance in this field when he speaks of two waves of decolonizing imposed on English. The first wave includes American and Irish writers like James Joyce, Samuel Beckett, Ralph Ellison James and their contemporaries. The second wave emerged from erstwhile colonies where "English, no longer English language, grows from many roots; and those whom it once colonized are carving out large territories within the language for themselves".

Post colonial writers approach the colonizers language in an innovative way as they re-fashion it to suit their native flavor. These writers have experimented with English and introduced native vocabulary in their works to develop a mixed language or hybrid language. This hybrid language or hybridization refers to linguistic phenomena where words from foreign languages enter into a given language, whether it is the adoption of English words into Asian or African languages or the entry of Asian or African words into English. This concept of hybridity or hybridization of languages was introduced by Mikhail Bakhtin at the beginning of 20th century. According to Mikhail Bakhtin linguistic hybridization "is a mixture of two social languages within the limits of a single utterance, an encounter within the arena of an utterance between two different linguistic consciousnesses, separated from one another by an epoch by social differentiation or by some other factor." (Bahtian, 1981, p.358) Bakhtin further explains the concept of a 'linguistic hybrid' as 'it is obligatory for two linguistic consciousnesses to be present, [...], with each belonging to a different system of language' (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 359) and he makes a difference between unconscious and intentional/conscious hybrids. The former 'is a mixture of two impersonal language consciousnesses' and the latter is 'a mixture of two individualized language consciousnesses as well as two individual language-intentions' (Bakhtin, 1975, 1981). Thus linguistic hybridity has acquired relevance in post-colonial writings. It has encouraged post-colonial writers to project their values and identities in English language by using their native linguistic terminology.

With the emergence of indigenous theories in English writings and incorporation of elements of nativity into post-colonial texts many prominent writers from Africa and Asia contributed in this field. Writers like Raja Rao, Salman Rushdie, Arundhati Roy etc. have given a new field to explore by adapting a new style of writing in English language. They introduced a new style by localizing the English syntax, semantics and other structural aspects of novel writings. By incorporating Indian words, scenes, myths and legends, they suggest replacing the Western notions of writing and give it an indigenous touch. Raja Rao writes in preface of *Kanthapura*: 'One has to convey in a language that is not one's own, the spirit that is one's own. English is really an alien language to us. It is the language of our intellectual make up - like Sanskrit and Persian was before - but not of our emotional make up. . . .' He makes this assertion to enforce and inculcate the post-colonial consciousness that leads to colonized's nationalised culture. He also introduces some strategies for the adaptation and modification of foreign language to make it suitable for the native culture. Salman Rushdie comments on this "We can't simply use the language the way the British did; it needs remaking for our own purposes..... To conquer English may be to complete the process of making ourselves free".

To decolonize English, writers used different tools for liberating their thinking process and expressing approach. This raised the demand to re-interpret the literary canons. Since the foreign setting and narrative mode would not satisfy the reader to experience and adopt the ideas (mock-reality) embedded in the text, writers as well as native speakers began to experiment with the English language to adjust it for local needs. Salman Rushdie uses 'magic realism', a narrative that weaves fantasy and myth into everyday life. Rushdie uses this technique to deconstruct the reality left by the colonizers. He has extensively used magic realism in *Midnight's Children* to fuse fantasy and fiction in Indian background. Saleem's character has magical powers of smell and telepathy which are the characteristics of all *Midnight's Children*. Rushdie juxtaposes the reality and fantasy to project the reality of the socio-political life of the Indian sub-continent in a great artistic manner.

In this process creolization is one of the linguistic phenomena that represent a hybridized form of languages in subject communities. This term emerged in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries during European colonial practices. The word Creole has descended from the Latin, *creare* means 'to produce, or to create'. The Creole language flourished in coastal regions of America, Western Africa, Goa, and along the West coast of India. In present scenario almost every language has, somehow, gone through the process of creolization. Professor Ayhan Kaya in a seminar "Analysis and Discussion of the Concept of Creolization" comments on the creole language as the mixed language of slaves and their masters, which has been constructed for a need of proper communication. Kaya remarks: "Out of reduced form of dominating language and surviving elements of local indigenous languages, a lingua franca evolved which was handed on from generation to generation and expanded to a Creole language, composed of 'African-derived grammar and European derived vocabulary' [qtd. from Mega Vaughan's *Creating the Creole Island*]" (Kaya 5). With the passage of time 'the creole continuum' or the 'post-creole continuum' came into existence as a linguistic process where 'decreolization' occurs, i.e. to approximate the creole to its parent language. It provided the base for alternative language in response to the language of the colonizer. Bill Ashcroft et al in *The Empire Writes Back*, discusses the creole-continuum as a post-colonial strategy and mechanism in the cultures where different communities speak in different languages. Further they discussed that the colonizer's language (the English) is divided into (i) English and (ii) english(s). If the first one is practice of language from the colonial perspective; the second one means the varied forms of innovative uses and victories over the first. This clearly means that in former colonized communities, the English language has been first adopted then approximated for their national and cultural consciousness. This results in emergence of various other dialects (englishs) of the English (parent language).

In *Midnight's Children*, Rushdie has made innovative use of English language. In this novel he uses Hindi and Urdu words that illustrate his strategy of "Indianising, revitalizing and decolonizing English language." (Chatterjee, 253) Rushdie has done this firstly to situate the novel in its geographical location, India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, and secondly to subvert a language associated with colonial powers. He uses vocabulary in the text that shows the mixed culture of the country. According to Meenakshi Mukherjee *Midnight's Children* is a 'theoretical discourse about nation, history and their narrativity.' She calls it 'the paradigmatic post-colonial text subverting the notions of received historiography and indigenizing both the

language and the narrative mode of the colonizing culture.' It is the deliberate effort which in the words of Mennakshi is 'the quintessential fictional embodiment of the postmodern celebration of de-centring and hybridity.' (Meenakshi)

Rushdie's exercise with linguistic hybridity begins with his talk about Islam, about the sacred book of Muslims, i.e. the Quran and some Arabic words like 'ramzan' for fasting month, 'Allah' for God, etc. In Muslim community when Nadir Khan divorces to Mumtaz (Amina), he writes as, "Talaq! Talaq! Talaq! . . . I divorce thee, I divorce thee, I divorce thee" (MC 78-79). After seeing bad condition of slum Amina expresses with surprise: "Allah-tobah" (MC 105). When women heard about Gandhi's death they expressed with grief "Hai Ram, Hai Ram" (MC 196). A long list of Hindu gods and goddesses like--Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva, Rama, Krishna, Ganesh, Hanuman, Parvati, Padma, etc are mentioned in the novel. Saleem talks about, "Brahmans' secret book, the Atharva veda" The references are also made to Christ and Christianity. A common way of exchanging greetings in Indian culture is tick tock, "Sabkuch Tick Tock". While addressing a person with respect, say, "Hey Maharaj! ...Let me in great sir" (MC 85). Instead of mummy and daddy, as is conventional in the English culture, Saleem calls his parents as, "I think Ammi, Abboo, I really think- . . . (MC 227). Naseem uses the word(s) 'Whatsitsname' numerous times in her speech. Saleem comments about it as, "I don't know how my grandmother came to adopt the term as whatsitsname as her leitmotif. . . . I like to think of it as an unconscious cry for help . . ." (MC 49). Saleem once says, "God knows what else: I see no cracks" (MC 83), and about 'Ravana Gang' he says, "Ravana . . . A gang of ne'er-do-wells" (MC 92). Besides, Ahmad Sinai once addressing to people in Methwold Estate, says, "Ladies, ladahs"(MC 136). And the words like 'cousinji,' 'motherji,' 'thees,' 'ees,' etc. are also used. These and other words and sentences in the novel are shown as influences from native vernaculars and constructions of Indian English. Such words, phrases and expressions provide an amount of authenticity and credibility to the Novel.

There are numerous words in the novel used for code-mixing. Aziz's mother addresses her son while "reclining on takht", means a seat. While ordering to bodyguards Gani says, "Enough of this tamasha!"(MC 32). When Adam Aziz gives something in dowry to his daughter and says to Ahmad Sinai, "we are not crorepatas you understand" (MC 84). Once Amina's house is burgled and she refers to one of missing things as "bejewelled Samovar " (MC199). Saleem once refers to four annas and chavanni ; and he says about Jamila (Brass Monkey) that "she loved bread, chapatis, parathas, tandoori nans" (MC 438). There is reference given to "Zenana chambers . . ." (MC 447), during the engagement ceremony of Nawab's elder daughter with the son of General Zulfikar in Pakistan. On painted posters is the advertisement of new film "Gai-Wallah means Cow-fellow" (MC 60). Saleem is called Chand-ka-tukra (MC 144) by Reverend Mother and little-piece-of-moon (MC 78) by Mary Pereira. Pereira is called as "little mausi, little mother" (198), by Sinais; she once refers to Saleem's urinating as, "his poor little soo-soo" (MC174)! In the slum, children are pulling hard the "pallu of her (Amina's) Sari" (MC 106). When Padma offers food to Saleem on desk, she says, " Eat, na, food is spoiling" (MC 24). Mary says to ghost of joe, "go go na". Mrs. Dubash, the wife of a Physicist, is related to 'untidiness' in the novel; by this, the word 'dubash' is used as verb that means 'to make mess'. Mary says to Saleem, "Oh Saleem you have dubashed your room again . . ." (MC 177).

Using the technique of metafiction, Rushdie consciously tries to to destroy 'the notion of the purity or centrality of English' by inventing new forms of existing English words or by effecting 'Creative hybridization.'(Chatterji 254) The slangs from the local vernaculars are introduced in the text. For instance, Tai says to Aziz "Nakkoo, Listen, Listen . . ." In Nawab's celebration, members of opposite political party are called "badmashes". Amina in fury tells Saleem, "You blackman! Goonda"(MC 277). Besides, words like Yara!, baba!, baap re, etc. are used to show the indigenous effects of the language. Further, the word to word translation is used in some expressions as, "Madman from somewhere" (MC 166). Mary says to herself, "Donkey from somewhere" (MC159). Adapting the English language with Indian vernaculars, the author contributes to the process of decolonization.

The practice of introducing native diction in foreign language and using foreign diction for native experiences makes the novel interesting for both writers and readers. As Salman Rushdie says in his introduction to *Midnight's Children*, "[W]ith that immodest proposal, the novel's characteristic tone of voice, comically assertive, unrelentingly garrulous, and, I hope, a growing pathos in its narrator's increasingly tragic over-claiming, came into being (x)". He has used the hasty native style of storytelling while using breathless long sentences. He has deliberately adopted the practice of using lesser number of articles and other punctuation marks within the structure of English language. There is colloquial tone with natural pauses in sentences; "But they'll never let up until . . . thirteen fourteen fifteen . . . O God O God the fog dizzy and falling back back, seventeen eighteen nineteen, Twenty". (MC 421-22) There are long sentences: "At midnight, Saleem awoke to find that he still clutched the magical parchment of Mutasim the handsome in his right hand; and since the wind from north is still blowing gently through his room, he made up his mind to creep, in the chappals and dressing-gown, through the darkened passages of the lovely palace, past all the accumulated debris of the decaying world, rusting suits of armour and ancient tapestries which provided centuries of food for the palaces one billion moths, giant mahaseer trout swimming in glass seas, and the profusion of hunting trophies including tarnished gold teetar-bird on a task plinth which commemorated the day on which an earlier Nawab, in the company of Lord Curzon and party, had shot 111, 111 teetars in a single day; he crept past the statues of dead birds into the zenana chambers where the women of the palace, and then, sniffing the air, he selected one door, turned the handle and went aside." (MC 450). This shows that the speaker is in hurry to complete great endless tale like those of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. There are only commas (,) except one semi-colon (;) in the whole paragraph to show the verbal nature of language. His conscious craftsmanship, which aims at decentring and hybridity is vivid in *Midnight's Children*. And his skill at 'decentring' and 'hybridity' is best seen when he employs these Hindi, Urdu and Arrabic words abundantly.

In conclusion, Rushdie's numerous experiments with the English language have made *Midnight's Children* a highly challenging and complex work of fiction. Along with the content and innovative treatment, these linguistic experiments have enabled Rushdie to capture the topmost position among the post-colonial writers in the world, and one of the best writers in Indian sub-continent. His linguistic experiments in *Midnight's Children*, strange and surprising at times, have attracted readers and reviewers all over the world and have projected Indian English fiction to great heights in the present-day highly competitive literary world.

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