

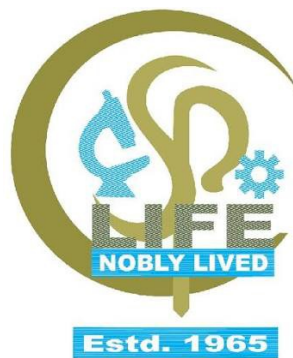
RECONCEPTUALISING ANTIQUITY THROUGH RUSHDIE AND ROY

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Declaration

I do hereby declare that the project report “Reconceptualising Antiquity Through Rushdie and Roy “ is the record of genuine research work done by me under the guidance of Mr. Binil Kumar, Assistant Professor, Department of English, St. Paul’s College, Kalamassery.

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This is to certify that the project work “Reconceptualising Antiquity Through Rushdie and Roy” is a record of the original work carried out by Archit T Niranj under the supervision and guidance of Mr. Binil Kumar, Assistant Professor, Department of English, St. Paul’s College, Kalamassery.

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Contents

	Page Number
Introduction	1
Chapter One: Rushdie's Design of History	5
Chapter Two: The History House of Ayemenem	10
Chapter Three: Contrasting Narratives of Rushdie and Roy	16
Conclusion	21
Works Cited	25

Introduction

Penning down history dates back to the times of Herodotus, the father of history and the author of *The Histories*. Since that time, compiling history using systematic study and collecting materials has become an important activity. Writing became a way of preserving the past. Linda Tuhiwai writes in her essay “Imperialism, History, Writing and Theory”: “Writing or literacy, in a very traditional sense of the word, has been used to determine the breaks between the past and the present, the beginning of history and the development of theory” (Smith 103). In addition to non-fictional historical accounts, people began to fictionalize history.

There are many works of fiction which can be read in a historical context. *A Tale of Two Cities* by Charles Dickens and *War and Peace* by Leo Tolstoy are some of the popular examples of historical fiction. Towards the end of the eighteenth century, a new field of criticism called ‘Historicism’ emerged which later evolved into ‘New Historicism’ in the 1980s. The most fundamental feature of Historicism is that it believes all artworks and literary texts must be placed in a historical context. The critics of New Historicism opine that there is no single history (Habib 265-266).

Postcolonial literature adheres to the above-mentioned views of Historicism and New Historicism. The western academia understands history as an enlightenment or modernist project. Feminists view history as the “story of a specific form of domination, namely of patriarchy, literally ‘his-story’ ” (Smith103). But for postcolonial writers, history of the native was something that was erased, dismissed as irrelevant and ignored. Their history talks about a time when the voices of the colonised were silenced since they were suppressed as ‘uncivilised’ or the ‘barbarians’. Therefore, writing about history for postcolonial writers is a

way of reviving and telling the world about a past that was concealed or lost. Therefore, it is a way of writing back and reclaiming that the past is essential for decolonization (Smith 104).

Imagination aids in blending history with literature. For Toni Morrison, imagination was a way of sharing the world (Smith 111). It is an accepted norm in the field of pedagogy that a concept or an idea becomes clear when it is told in the form of a story or a poem. Likewise, when history is narrated through the medium of art or literature, the spectators and the readers would be able to empathize more effectively than while reading a critical account of a historical event; thus, the literary text is sharing a world that it contains within itself. Two of the most significant postcolonial works of literature that tend to fictionalize history using luminous imagination are Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* and Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*. Both novels paint a vivid picture of postcolonial India.

Midnight's Children, the novel written by Salman Rushdie in 1981 won the Best of the Booker prize in 1993. The novel depicts Saleem Sinai as the protagonist who was born at midnight on 15 August 1947, the same day India got independence. The novel is a kind of Saleem's autobiography that stretches from his birth to thirty years of his life. He goes backwards and forwards in time to unveil family mysteries and narrate the story of India. Saleem claims that he is gifted with magical powers that are related to the time of his birth. Saleem has telepathic powers using which he links all the thousand and one children born at midnight and forms the Midnight's Children Conference. As he acts as a guide to Indian history, he also talks about the partition of British-controlled India into India and Pakistan which later led to the Indo-Pak wars between the two nations during 1965 and 1971. He touches on the major historical events such as the partition of Bangladesh and the emergency rule of Indira Gandhi. He also makes numerous cultural references of both India and Pakistan

including folktales, myths, food, and tradition. Hence, *Midnight's Children* is positioned in a larger historical canvas which makes it a highflying work of postcolonial literature. The novel gained recognition as a postcolonial text only when critical reviews and serious interpretations began to come to the forefront that talked about the novel's suspension of all the pre-conceived notions of historiographic fiction and its unique mode of narration using the literary devices such as magic realism, dream narration, allusion to myths, and metaphors.

On the other hand, Arundhati Roy's 1997 Booker Prize-winning novel *The God of Small Things* is set in a small village called Ayemenem in Kerala. The novel revolves around the dizygotic twins Estha and Rahel of a Syrian Christian family who were separated at the age of seven for twenty-three years after their cousin Sophie Mol was drowned and their mother's (Ammu) forbidden love affair with Velutha, a member of the so-called "untouchable" community was discovered. Roy in her novel cross-examines the culture of her country especially that of Kerala; talks about its social customs, colonial history and postcolonial condition. Her primary focus is on the caste system which continues to exist in India despite its constitutional ban. The twins share a close bond with Velutha who was also a worker in the pickle factory of their grandmother Mammachi. Their great aunt Baby Kochamma condemns Velutha as he represents her hatred for the lower castes and Communists. She tries to separate the twins from him and later succeeds by filing a false case against him which leads to his death. She also talks about the patriarchal conventions that set rules on relationships. When Ammu and Velutha indulge in an affair, Roy says that she has broken the "Love Laws" dictated by the patriarchy that discouraged intimacy between people of different classes. In *The God of Small Things*, India is a country where "various kinds of

despair competed for primacy. And that personal despair could never be desperate enough.

This project titled “Reconceptualising Antiquity through Rushdie and Roy” attempts to interpret the different ways in which Salman Rushdie and Arundhati Roy have tried to represent history and politics in their masterpieces- *The Midnight’s Children* and *The God of Small Things* respectively. The first chapter “Rushdie’s Design of History” discusses how Salman Rushdie has fabricated his narrative in re-telling the history of India. The chapter also explores how Saleem Sinai, the protagonist, and the narrator has personalized the collective history and claims that he has maintained to hold on to the truth. He has placed factual history in the milieu of a narrative. The second chapter “The History House of Ayemenem” explores on how Roy has compiled the history of a religion, a political ideology, environmental, societal and the political turmoil of a nation in a small village in Kerala called Ayemenem. The village becomes a “History House” that housed descriptions of the historical and political events that were shared by the natives. The section also discusses how the history of Kerala intermingled with the politics of the region. The third chapter “Contrasting Narratives of Rushdie and Roy” explores the excitement of studying further on the dimensions of New Historicism and the application of the same theory in both the texts which depicts a time of post-independent India.

Chapter 1

Rushdie's Design of History

It is well-evident that Rushdie's *The Midnight's Children* is deeply rooted in history since it discusses the birth of a nation, its pre-colonial times and the post-colonial times. What makes this work of fiction different from other historiographic literature is that the structure of language and the narrative mode is used strangely to fictionalises the historical interpretations and thus takes history to the level of enchantment. Rushdie referred to Stanley Wolpert's *A New History of India* while writing the novel (Kortenaar 9). Therefore, it can be extrapolated that Rushdie made use of the factual history to fictionalise it and hence the account on the collective past in the novel is reliable.

The novel can be read as an allegory for a nation that uses imagination in narrating history. The author himself was born in 1947, the same year when India achieved independence. Rushdie in the novel, made Saleem Sinai, the hero of *Midnight's Night's* and India as "identical twins" as he says in his introduction to the novel. Saleem narrates the whole story as if the history of modern India happened because of him. Saleem connects the history of India with the history of the family that raised him. The freezing of Ahmed Sinai's assets, the explosion at Walkeshwar Reservoir which led to the "the great cat invasion" are examples of this. Also, the characters that Rushdie presents in his novel bear the traces of many historical figures, the most important one being William Methwold, Saleem's biological father.

Saleem begins his narrative with the story of Aadam Aziz, his legal grandfather. Neil Ten Kortenaar in his article "Midnight's Children and The Allegory of History" interprets the character of Aadam as a resemblance to Nehru: both hail from Kashmiri families, educated at

Europe, lost the faith of their fathers, and advocated secularism; moreover, both were at Amritsar during the massacre (Rushdie 35). Another significant association of fictional character with a historical figure is that advocate of William Methwold who bears the name of the English colonial administrator who designed the city of Bombay. His leaving from India is synchronised with the Britisher's departing from the nation.

Maintaining chronology in narrating historical events is important as per the traditionally accepted conventions of history as a discipline. "History is regarded as being about developments over time...Chronology is important as a method because it allows events to be located at a point in time...important to go backwards and explain how and why things happened in the past" (Smith 104). But Rushdie, in his postmodernist novel, disrupts this notion by jumbling the historical events, going forward and backwards in time, stopping the clocks, making errors while narrating the events and repeating them. He mainly uses the technique of remembering and forgetting in novelizing history. Saleem Sinai discovers that he made an error while narrating the story. Rushdie, through Saleem Sinai, justifies his intentional disarranging of historical events. As a post-modernist novel, *The Midnight's Children* adheres to the post-structuralist and Foucauldian view that "'history' itself is a text, an interpretation, and that there is no single history" (Habib 266). The protagonist who is also the narrator in the novel leaves it to the readers the task of deriving meaning from the narration. The reader has to compile the events recounted in the novel and arrange it to meaning. Therefore, as the critic David Birch sums up in his article "Postmodernist Chutneys", the novel is an uneven postmodern allegory that rejects every probability of meanings. Twisting the chronology of the narrative is one way of doing so (Kortenaar 28).

Saleem refutes the idea of possessing a single and stable identity or history for the

Indian nation as it is with his case, thus he is sceptical regarding his faith in the country. Having a unified history or identity is not at all achievable in a diverse country like India. Saleem's list of his parents includes people who hold different identities; for instance, Methwold, his real father is an Englishman, who himself has French roots while Ahmed Sinai, his foster father is a Muslim of Indian origin who claims to have Mughal roots. This aspect of Saleem coincides with the characteristic feature of India, which is its diversity.

As said earlier in the essay, Rushdie has tried to personalize the events using several narrative devices. Kortenaar points out an instance where space left vacuum by loss of faith in religion during the postmodern times in India was represented through a metaphor by Rushdie by creating a hole inside Aadam Aziz. To be more specific, Kortenaar terms this as a literalization of metaphor. This hole was temporarily filled by his love for his wife and later by his faith in nationalism (Rushdie 7). The bruise that he receives during the massacre in Amritsar in 1919 is "so severe and mysterious that it will not fade until after his death" (41). The carnage that was supervised by Brigadier R. E Dyer and resulted in the death of many Indians, was represented in the form of a bruise that would never heal, hinting that the day would haunt India forever.

There are other instances of literalization of metaphor by Rushdie in his novel. After gaining independence, the Indian government froze all the assets of Muslims in the country. And this literally froze Ahmed Sinai's balls. Also, the brief-friendly relationship between America and India during the 1950s can be seen in the novel when Saleem falls in love with the American girl Evie Burns. The most important metaphor used by Salman Rushdie in his novel is the organic metaphor of the nation as a body. *The Midnight's Children*, which is auto-biographical in narration, is based on the idea that India, like the protagonist Saleem

Sinai, was “born” on the midnight of 15 August 1947. The birth of a new nation is told in parallel with the birth of the protagonist and thousand other children. Rushdie also juxtaposes the birth of Parvati’s son with the event in history when Indira Gandhi, the Widow, declared a national emergency.

The metaphor of birth belongs to the large canvas of personifying the nation. Kortenaar says in his essay: “Historians speak of growth and maturity, as if the nation were a human child, of direction and progress and dangers, as if the nation were on a journey, of wounds and memory, desire and fear, as if the nation had a psychology” (Rushdie 32). This personification of India makes Rushdie call Jawaharlal Nehru father of the nation and signifies the followed aging of nation when Indira Gandhi declares a national emergency. It is also a common trend to speak of a country as possessing a body while talking about its history or progress. Stanley Wolpert in his book *A New History of India* notes this inclination in the speech and writings of the national leaders also. He quotes Nehru when he supported the partition by saying that “cutting off the head we will get rid of the headache” (qtd. in Wolpert 347). Wolpert says that Gandhi disagreed with the division since he saw that as “the vivisection of his motherland” (347). It also becomes evident that Saleem’s body is sensitive to history. He claims to have inherited this feature from his legal grandfather Aadam Aziz who feels itching in the nose when a historical event is about to take place. This similarity in being sensitive to historical episodes might be the reason why Saleem claim’s himself to be the descendant of Aadam Aziz. The major changes in Indian history are presented in the novel by melding it with magic realism. For example, the rise of the Indian National Congress, whose symbol is a right hand in the country is hinted when a hand falls from a vulture’s mouth, to hit the face of Ahmed Sinai, Saleem’s father.

The partition of India and Pakistan is one of the vital landmarks in the context of Indian history. Rushdie's novel talks for the minority who suffered. To show that not all Muslims embraced the division, Rushdie writes: "Mian Abdullah, the Hummingbird, had created the Free Islam Convocation almost single-handedly. He invited the leaders of the dozens of Muslim splinter groups to form a loosely federated alternative to the dogmatism and vested interests of the Leaguers. ... Mian Abdullah opposed the partition" (Rushdie 56). He also talks about the erased reminiscence of the Muslims who opposed partition and hoped for secularism.

Another prominent aspect of the novel is the absence of Gandhi in the novel. Kortenaar observes that Rushdie favours the secular country envisioned by Nehru to the one imagined by Gandhi. The novel refers to Gandhi only once when he was assassinated that must have included by Rushdie to signify that he provoked inborn and ridiculous forces that were out of his regulation (Kortenaar 46). Along with the historical narration of India, Saleem's narration also includes the descriptions on Pakistan.

To conclude, *Midnight's Children* is Saleem's and the country's journey for freedom. "It is the cry for freedom against tyranny. The forces of tyranny include fundamentalist religious forces, but also death-dealing and coup-plotting military generals, and Indira Gandhi when she declares the Emergency" (Kortenaar 42). Rushdie provides the choice to select between Shiva and Saleem as the face of India although the narrator himself prefers to adhere to Aadam Aziz and himself.

Chapter 2

The History House of Ayemenem

Arundhati Roy, unlike Rushdie, paints her story in a slightly smaller canvas in *The God of Small Things*. She focuses on a small village of Ayemenem in the Kottayam district of Kerala. But the themes discussed in the novel are of a wider scope. The novel traces the history of patriarchy in India. It also explores the life of the untouchables and feudal class; the arrival of Christianity and Communism; the Anglophilic life that attracted the rich sections of Indians as a result of the British colonization. These subjects are relevant in the political context of Indian history. Roy has blended the personal life of the characters and the politics of Kerala with the history of the region. The major plot of the novel takes place in two times – during the 1960s when Estha and Rahel were children of seven and in 1997 when they become adults.

Roy has skillfully set the novel in the background of Christianity. The religion gained recognition in India by the missionaries as a by-product of British colonialism. *The God of Small Things* has its focus on the Syrian Christians of Kerala. Tradition says that after the Resurrection, Saint Thomas the Apostle is supposed to have arrived in Cranganore in AD 52. He taught the Gospel to the people of these areas and converted them to Christianity. The Namboodiri Brahmin families were among the first ones to convert and Syrian-Christianity set its roots in Kerala since then (“The Beginnings of the Syrian Christian”). The novel is set in the backdrop of a Syrian-Christian family in Ayemenem where Estha and Rahel, the twins spend a brief yet the life-changing period of their childhood. Roy talks about the history of the Syrian Christians in Kerala. She also connects the history with the personal life of the twins. The tradition that existed or continues to exist in India was primarily based on the

myth of the creation of Purusa mentioned in the *Rig Vedas*. It was from Purusa that the Hindu tradition believes that the cosmos and the four social classes were created. Sarkeri and Rahman quote Wendy O' Flaherty in their article "Intermingling of History and Politics in *The God of Small Things*" that to talk about this creation:

When (the gods) divided the Man, into how many parts did they disperse him? What became of his mouth, what of his arms, what were his two thighs and his two feet called? His mouth was the Brahmin (the priest class), his arms were made into nobles (ksatriyas), his two thighs were the populace (vaisyas), and from his feet the servants (sudras) were born. The moon was born from his mind; the sun was born from his eye. (138)

Roy gives an objective account of the history and at the same time fictionalizes the historical interpretations. It is evident that Roy has maintained to relate the factual history with the life of the characters in the novel. She narrates the history of the untouchables before their conversion to Christianity through the memories of Mammachi. She then moves on to give a more informative account of history. Although the Indian Constitution of 1950 abolished the caste system, it continued to prevail in society. In order to prove this, Roy places Velleya Pappen's (Velutha's father) grandfather among the early Christian converts in the low castes. Velleya Pappen represents the submissive attitude that was inherent in the people of his community. Velleya Pappen is loyal to his masters. He was so grateful to Mammachi for she sponsored his glass eye that "he felt that his eye was not his own" (Roy 76). Whereas Velutha represents the youth of the underprivileged who wanted to rupture the existing norms of the caste and class difference.

The novel also explores the reasons for the success of the Communist Party in India.

Although Chacko, the twins' uncle was a "self-proclaimed Marxist", he fails to explain the massive welcoming of Communism in Kerala and in Bengal (Roy 65). The narrative tries to theorize this phenomenon, just like any non-fiction history book. Roy discusses two theories on account of this. The first one is that Marxism replaced Christianity- it substituted Marx for God; Satan was replaced by the bourgeois and Church with the Party. The method and intention of both of them remained similar – to bring out a classless society. Communism succeeded more than religion in fulfilling the purpose. She mentions that the Hindu community had to tune themselves with this change and the Syrian Christians, who comprise twenty per cent of the population was inclined towards the Congress Party.

Another theory Roy puts forth is that the high literacy rate in Kerala was due to the arrival of Communism. The author then continues her narration talking about the Communist Government of Kerala headed by E.M.S Namboodiripad. Roy again blends the collective history with the personal by narrating how communist ideology followed by E.M.S Namboodiripad influenced Chacko. Roy also talks about a communist march in the novel to prove the above point. Dilip Menon in his work *Caste Nationalism and Communism in south India: Malabar, 1900-1948* says: "The career of the party has been characterized by political pragmatism rather than permanent affiliations of any kind. There have been conjectural and tactical partnerships with parties and groups of all hues, justified by theoretical legerdemain" (193). Comrade K. N. M. Pillai represents the politicians who made use of the Communist ideology to advance in their political careers. His political ambitions are heightened when two of his fellow members were expelled from the party as they were suspected to be Naxalites. His Communist ideology is made flexible to suit his practical life. He was in friendly terms with the people at the Ayemenem House and also canvassed the workers of the

Paradise Pickles and Preserves factory to revolt against their masters. Marxism was introduced to Kerala with an intention to eradicate class and caste division. But, in Kerala, it grew as another power institution. Politicians like Comrade Pillai adopted the Marxist ideology to fuel their political career and to gain power. They won't let the ideology hinder their professional life. The following text from the novel proves this:

Comrade K. N. M. Pillai never came out openly against Chacko. Whenever he referred to him in his speeches, he was careful to strip him of any human attributes and present him as an abstract functionary in some larger scheme. A theoretical construct. A pawn in the monstrous bourgeois plot to subvert the revolution. He never referred to him by name, but always as 'the Management' as though Chacko was many people. Apart from it being tactically the right thing to do, this disjunction between the man and his job helped Comrade Pillai to keep his conscience clear about his own private business dealings with Chacko. His contract for printing the Paradise Pickles labels gave him an income that he badly needed. He told himself that Chacko-the-client and Chacko-the-Management were two different people. Quite separate of course from Chacko-the-Comrade. (Roy 121)

The novel also presents Velutha who represented the younger generation of the Paravans that wanted to rise from their deteriorated living situation by receiving education and embracing Communism. In *The God of Small Things*, Velutha is suspected to have joined the Naxalites when he leaves Ayemenem for four years. Velutha is killed by the police due to two reasons. One, he represented a lower class community and embraced an ideology that would question the power structures that existed during that time. Many activists were tortured, abused and murdered by the police accusing them as Naxalite revolutionaries. Second, his affair with Ammu was a protest against the patriarchy that set rules for

relationships. His relation with Ammu itself can be considered as a personalized form of revolution against existed biases of a patriarchal society.

Relating to Smith's essay, it could be said that "History is patriarchal" in *The God of Small Things* (Smith 106). The novel contains female characters who were the victims of patriarchal power control. Mammachi was a victim of domestic violence. Ammu was ignored by her father, denied education and betrayed by her husband. She had no prospects or security. The laws like the Travancore Christian Succession Act of 1916 and the Cochin Christian Succession Act of 1921 denied the heritage claims of the Syrian Christian Women. Roy was able to relate the insecurity faced by Ammu since her mother, Mary Roy who was a divorcee and daughter from a Syrian-Christian family, went for an appeal against these discriminatory laws at the Indian Supreme Court in 1986. Therefore, Roy relates this indiscrimination existed in the society with Ammu. All of the properties of the Ayemenem House went to the son, Chacko. He says: " 'What's yours is mine and what's mine is also mine' ". And all of Ammu's thanks for her condition of hers goes to the " 'wonderful male chauvinist society' " (Roy 57). Rahel is also in a similar situation since she also has no locus standi, what the twins misunderstand as "Locusts Stand I" (Roy 57). Ammu was also expelled from her house for breaking the "Love Laws" by having an affair with Velutha, which was not tolerated by the aristocratic family of Ammu.

The History House in Ayemenem stands as the "Heart of Darkness" in the novel. In an interview given to Praveen Swami, she explains about this metaphor:

... the metaphor appears in *The God of Small Things* as a reversal of Conrad, a kind of laughing reference to 'Heart of Darkness'. It is saying that we, the characters in the book are not White men, the people who are scared of the Heart of Darkness. We are

the people who live in it; we are the people without stories... In Ayemenem, in the Heart of Darkness, I talk not about the White Man, but about the Darkness, about what the Darkness is about. (qtd. in Bhatt 98)

The History House was the haunted house where the English man Kari Saipu lived. He adopted the native ways of living- an allusion to *Heart of Darkness*- and was a paedophile. Years later, The History House gets transformed into Hotel 'Heritage' where the western tourists come to entertain themselves. Thus, the remnants of colonialism became the heritage of a region. The Kathakali artist becomes a "Regional Flavour" (Roy 231). He dances for them. His livelihood is dependent on these western tourists, similar to the colonial times. "He tells stories of the gods, but his yarn is spun from the ungodly, human heart (230). Through the Heritage Hotel and the Kathakali artists, Roy shows that Kerala is "God's own country" for the tourists while it remains as the "Heart of Darkness" for the natives.

In conclusion, history in *The God of Small Things* explores the patriarchal power structures and also about the religious and political advancements that promised to destroy these power relations. The characters are carefully used by Roy to develop her novel in a historical and political background. Roy's rich language and skillful storytelling technique blend the personal experiences of the fictional natives of Ayemenem with the history of Kerala. She amalgamates personal turmoil with the political history and the novel attains a dark shade -it is the 'Heart of Darkness'. The history and memories of the past traumatize the characters, hindering their progress. Mammachi, Baby Kochamma and the police are seen as history's henchmen who punish those who violate the laws set by the culture. Roy ends the novel with hope, thus calling to redefine the history.

Chapter 3

Contrasting Narratives of Rushdie and Roy

The critical practice of New Historicism is a mode of “literary” history whose “literariness” lies in bringing imaginative operations closer to the surface of nonliterary texts and briefly describes some of the practice’s leading literary features and strategies (Laden 1). Owing to the ravelled and unresolved relationship between text and context, there has been a long-running debate about the disciplinary limits between history and fiction. The history of literary theory can be viewed as a continuity of hypothetical conflicts between textualism and contextualism. It was during the 1980s the concept of New Historicism flourished, mainly dependent on the theories of Michel Foucault which was based only a critique of history. But with the involvement of Stephen Greenblatt, known as the father of New Historicism we witnessed the unquestionable growth of this theory as part of post-modern literature and culture studies. It welcomed the breakdown of genres and invited the analysis of discontinuities, linking anecdotes to the disruption of our understanding history. Though one of the most powerful disciplines of contemporary literary criticism, New Historicism has faced severe criticism from various quarters. Can history be represented by “the textual traces of the past?” Can New Historicism escape the apparent structural closure of Foucault’s historical theory? (Bristol 1985). Are genealogical readings of New Historicism not merely examples of “arbitrary connectedness” between texts and histories? (Cohen 18-46). Heavily falling question-marks have made the whole movement of rambling formation in New Historicism a codified discipline and a careful puzzle to be handled.

Even though it was Stephen Greenblatt who coined the term New Historicism in his book *The Power of Forms And Forms of Power in The Renaissance* (1982), he, towards his later days of career, confessed that the term New Historicism was an accidental one and preferable term was 'Cultural Poetics'. New historicism approaches every text as a debate which highlights factual situation. Besides, the literary work is understood and evaluated as a verbal entity of the cultural references of particular time. It is thought that these socio-cultural reflections in texts endorse and inflate the power structures of bourgeois and the slavery of proletariats of a society.

Comparing both the novels we find that *Midnight's Children* is much more 'magical' than *The God of Small Things*. *Midnight's Children* is a work which synchronises the story of the protagonist with the story of a nation. Saleem is presented with multiple genealogies and each of them is connected with Indian history in one or the other way. He shifts his focus from one to the other to suit his storytelling. He rejects his genetic descent and favours his legal parents. Saleem in the novel says that his biological father, William Methwold was a wicked English hypocrite who exploited a poverty-stricken Hindu wife and who left India when the nation gained independence. This becomes a metaphor as Tariq Ali writes in his work *An Indian Dynasty: The Story of the Nehru Gandhi Family*:

The British had departed and the Mountbattens were soon to follow, but what was the shape of the country they had left behind? Their most important gifts to the new India were two centuries with a combination of paternal affection and discipline: the Indian Army and the Indian Civil Service. ... The new state was therefore Indian in its colour, composition and make-up, but its pedigree was unmistakably British. (74)

The immense use of magic realism, personification and metaphors might have resulted

in this. Unlike Saleem Sinai, the omniscient narrator does not find himself perplexed with arranging the events of history. The language used by Roy in *The God of Small Things* is rich and she explains on the ordinary things in lush detail. Roy relates the history of her country with the ordinary people in a village. When the British came to Malabar, a number of Paravans, Pelayas and Pulayas (among them Velutha's grandfather, Kelan) converted to Christianity and joined the Anglican Church to escape the scourge of untouchability. ...They were known as the Rice Christians.... They were made to have separate churches, with separate services, and separate priests. As a special favour they were even given their own separate Pariah Bishop. After Independence they found they were not entitled to any government benefits like job reservations or bank loans at low interest rates, because officially, on paper, they were Christians, and therefore casteless. (Roy 73- 74).

The history is interpreted in such a way that it examines how the lives of the common being are problematized. Another point is that in both the novels, history is stored in the names of buildings and characters- The History house, The Buckingham Villa, Methwold, Widow etc.

The sexual mistreatment of women by the colonialists is portrayed differently in both novels. Vanita becomes the victim of sexual exploitation and gives birth to Saleem who is fathered by William Methwold, an Englishman who leaves the country soon after independence. But Ammu in *The God of Small Things* refuses to be a victim when Mr. Hollick, her husband's superior officer makes a proposal to him to send Ammu to his bungalow to be "looked after" (Roy 42).

Both *Midnight's Children* and *The God of Small Things* discuss the influence of different political ideologies after India's independence. While Communism gained great

prominence in Kerala and it is a land of famous Communist leaders, the ideology had less impact on a wider national canvas. *Midnight's Children* which tells history from a national perspective shows us that the supporters of Communism were either killed or threatened—examples being Joseph D'Costa and Nadir Khan. Congress gained more acclaim in the national level. The novel adheres to the ideologies of a secular state as put forth by Nehru while Indira Gandhi's notions are ridiculed. *Midnight's Children* expresses this more explicitly by calling her the Widow.

Midnight's Children and *The God of Small Things* use the English language to represent the history of modern India. In his early works Greenblatt highlights the relation of language to reality. His essay 'Marlowe and the Will to Absolute Play' he tries to explain the connection of Marlowe's characters through language. According to Greenblatt, words which were once spoken or written enter into a form of journey that takes them away from the point of origin. Greenblatt notices how language keeps us at a distance from the past which also forces us to understand the meaning implied. In the opening of 'Marlowe and the Will to Absolute Play' the quotation from the journal of merchant John Sarracoll raises a number of questions for Greenblatt at the linguistic level, questions which he says “are all met by the moral blankness that rests like thick snow on Sarracoll's sentences” (Greenblatt 194). The language is an alternate which lacks in qualification and evokes a sense of inhuman hand at work. This is because the lingual communication has a temporary cultural aspect, a point which Greenblatt stresses on to raise his questions about the text's assumptions.

For Rushdie, to write about India in any of its native language again tries to divide the country. Saleem in the novel says: “But the boundaries of these states were not formed by rivers, or mountains, or any natural features of the terrain; they were, instead, walls of words.

Language divided us...” (Rushdie 261). Rushdie’s use of the English language isolates him from a particular region in India and would enable him to project the theme of national identity, since Saleem Sinai represents India as a nation. Meanwhile, Arundhati Roy in her novel has nativized the foreign language. Her novel has characters which are anglophiles. It can be deduced that one of the purposes of using English as the medium in the novel was to show the English influence in the Indian scenario. Roy has skilfully nativized the English language and has tried to explain the vernacular terms and usages.

“Indigenous people want to tell our own stories, write our own versions, in our own ways, for our own purposes.” (Smith 103). Both novels portray a different sense of history. *Midnight's Children* and *The God of Small Things* exhibit their own versions of history. It is at the same time simple and complicated to differentiate the personal and the political. The novels combine both personal and collective history by adopting a particular delivery of language, narrative mode and techniques.

Conclusion

This dissertation “Re-telling History by Rushdie and Roy” attempts to interpret the different ways in which Salman Rushdie and Arundhati Roy have tried to represent history and politics in their masterpieces- *The Midnight’s Children* and *The God of Small Things* respectively. For example, the following excerpt is from the novel where Roy describes the plight of the untouchables (which includes the Pelayas and the Paravans) before and after the arrival of Christianity:

Pappachi would not allow Paravans into the house. Nobody would. They were not allowed to touch anything that Touchables touched. Caste Hindus and Caste Christians. Mammachi told Estha and Rahel that she could remember a time ...when Paravans were expected to crawl backwards with a broom, sweeping away their footprints so that Brahmins or Syrian Christians would not defile themselves by accidentally stepping into a Paravan’s footprint. In Mammachi’s time, Paravans, like other Untouchables, was not allowed to walk on public roads, not allowed to cover their upper bodies, not allowed to carry umbrellas. They had to put their hands over their mouths when they spoke, to divert their polluted breath away from those whom they addressed.

When the British came to Malabar, a number of Paravans, Pelayas and Pulayas (among them Velutha’s grandfather, Kelan) converted to Christianity and joined the Anglican Church to escape the scourge of Untouchability. ...They were known as the Rice Christians.... They were made to have separate churches, with separate services, and separate priests. As a special favour they were even given their own separate Pariah Bishop. After Independence they found they were not entitled to any government benefits like job reservations or bank loans at low interest rates, because officially, on paper, they were Christians, and therefore

casteless. Even when Roy focuses on a small village of Ayemenem in Kerala to paint the wide canvas of the social reality in India she never fails to add the references of Indian historical and political context. *The God of Small Things* discusses other issues such as The Communist march that happens in the novel is against Indira Gandhi's Green Revolution. Concealed behind the name of "Green Revolution, pesticides and fertilizers were used to grow crops which had serious after-effects in the future. The river in Ayemenem which once was bursting with rich aquatic life is polluted with the chemical effluents by the time of the twins return to the village. The novel traces the globalization and technological progress in Kerala through tourism and TV. Roy also tells the Anglophilic behaviour that prevailed among the richer class of Indian society where they go to watch English movies and the twins are taught English rhymes. She talks about the religious advancements, the political turmoil of the nation such as the coming of Christianity and Communism in Kerala and how the first one could replace the other. Hence it can be inferred that Roy's narrative has bridged its characters with the historical context.

In *Midnight's Children*, Saleem Sinai rewrites or attempts to elevate himself and his family into a prominent position in history, despite his position of being a victim of the colonized and the postcolonial times. Saleem presents himself and his life parallel to his country. Saleem and the country grow together representing multiple identities. The historical events in India become personalized experiences for Saleem. This enables the readers to feel like they are witnessing it along with Saleem. The first-person narration also helps in this. Salman Rushdie tells the story of India as a legend, for Saleem considers India, "the new myth--a collective fiction in which anything was possible, a fable rivalled only by the two other mighty fantasies: money and God" (150). This style of narrative helps the reader to

imprint the historical events in his/her mind more effectively than a non-fictional historical version. Rushdie also adds humour to the narration of the history in order to criticise the incidents and persons, an example being Rushdie's humorous connotations like calling Indira Gandhi "Widow". Like Saleem, India's history was written before its birth since "most of what matters in our lives takes place in our absence" (17). Saleem relies his trust on memory for "Memory's truth because memory has its own special kind. It selects, eliminates, alters, exaggerates, minimizes, glorifies, and vilifies also; but in the end, it creates its own reality, its heterogeneous but usually coherent version of events; and no sane human being ever trusts someone else's version more than his own." (292). In short, Saleem represents his country India. He has compiled the factual information with fiction using literary devices to celebrate and satirize history. The scattered moments in the novel represented through metaphors and magic realism contributed to the construction of a whole historical narrative. Thus, Salman Rushdie has structured his narrative in such a way that history and fiction are synchronized.

The acceptance of a book even in its creative or aesthetic judgment depends on limited yet important factors such as its language and narration, originality and life relations, above all an escapism created by the writer for their readers. Even when the work is based on a real life event or historical facts and findings, the acceptance and life of a work is clearly gifted by its audience.

When *Midnight's Children* and *The God of Small Things* being represented as fictionalized factual writings which hold politics of post-independent India as its soul and effectively narrates the situation through carefully crafted characters who brings out the task of relativity much more easier to its readers. Both the novels even if originally published years apart was never failed to claim its global and regional acceptance as well as criticisms.

Midnight's Children was bit more a part of international debates when compared to *The God Of Small Things*. This difference occurred because Salman Rushdie focused more on India as a large canvas while Arundhati Roy excelled in expressing her writers freedom giving more attention to her much known surroundings of Kerala where she spent most of her young days. Both the novels are still being read, discussed, acknowledged and criticised widely with due respect to the writer's freedom of expression and shocking originality flaunted by both the notable writers of our generation.

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