

Hegemonic Powers: A Post-colonial Study of *Midnight's Children*

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Abstract:

In the period of the Renaissance, British trade flourished and reached its zenith with the outward expansion of colonialism. Britain dominated the nineteenth century, but after the world wars, colonial power could neither exert the mode of control necessary to maintain its hold over the territories overseas nor morally justify its colonial hold on these territories. In the 1950s, the colonised nations vigorously asserted themselves, and as a result, colonialism began to decline. Consequently, these marginalised civilisations resisted colonial exploitation and subjugation. The Western ideology in the last few centuries has shown an additional existential interest in Indian religion, art, culture and philosophy. Colonialism as a state of mind remains even after the formal ending of the British Raj, as the ideology of the Indian people is still triumphant in the past. It still haunts the present, and the post-colonial natives try to escape from the past. Now these natives want to create a space for themselves. The oppressed subjects of the post-colonial world try to get rid of the hangover of the colonial past and thus want to realise the present world themselves. The oppressed subjects of the colonial world were treated cruelly and exploited by the imperial structures of power. The present paper tries to critically explore hegemonic power structures in Salman Rushdie's *Midnight Children*.

Keywords: Hegemony, Midnight Children, Colonialism, Marginalisation.

Content:

In post-colonial literature, the ruling class is presented as a manipulator of power, culture, norms, values, beliefs and tries to impose its own dominant ideology. This class further tries to justify the social, economic and political hold on the native society and culture. Etymologically, the word hegemony has been derived from the ancient Greek word "hegemonia", which means leadership and rule. Here, the word conveys the implied means of power and rule rather than direct domination by use of force and military rule. The hegemonic power structure in the early nineteenth century included geographical and cultural dominance by European countries over Asian and African countries. It means the denotative meaning of hegemony remains dominance.

In the modern context, hegemony was used by the Italian Philosopher Antonio Gramsci. He was a Marxist philosopher and used this term in context with psycho-cultural implications on the part of the native population. In this respect, Gramsci says that the hegemonic powers who were dominant at that particular time also tried to convince those exploited natives in a manner to justify their position as subalterns, which was natural and even universally acclaimed. This resulted in a kind of situation that could not be changed so easily. Finally, many other cultural organisations also pacified the native people to accept their lot. Here, the definition of hegemony provided by Raymond Williams proves the above - mentioned point:

Hegemony is a concept which at once includes and goes beyond two powerful earlier concepts: that of 'culture as a whole social process' in which men define and shape whole lives; and that of 'ideology' in any of its Marxist senses, in which a system of meanings and values is the expression or projection of a particular class interest. (108).

It means hegemony has a more percussive edge than a simple ideological concept. Williams describes that this term completely absorbs us, and even hegemonic thought fills our minds with a kind of consciousness about its main purpose. So, more precisely, hegemony involves a kind of nature which is clearly ubiquitous and even amorphous.

The post-colonial world has two fundamental features in common. The first is the impact of the colonial experience on the native's consciousness and psyche. The other is the increasing awareness of the peculiar present-day problems of the post-colonial world and the growing concern with the need to confront them. The coloniser consciously worked to break the spirit of the rebellion against imperial rule by educating the natives suitably and by engendering an inferiority complex and diffidence in them vis-à-vis their own culture and traditional values.

In *Midnight's Children*, Salman Rushdie presents the post-war trauma and the impact of imperial forces through the central character of Saleem Sinai. He cries for freedom against tyranny. The forces of tyranny include fundamentalist religious forces.

Rushdie presents tragic victims, whose entanglement with personages central to history brings about massive disaster. Saleem Sinai in *Midnight's Children* finds himself at the end of a rumbustious life, which is in imminent danger. This is literally the disintegration and cracking up of a personality. He is haunted by uncertainty, and nothing lives up to his expectations in his life. Saleem's anguish is voiced in the last few pages of the novel as the river below:

Abracadabra, but nothing happens, we do not turn into toads, angels do not fly through the window, the rod is just flexing his muscles, I shall see his miracles. (547)

Rushdie presents details of the disturbances created in the common man's life due to the emergency imposed upon them by the authorities; it functions as a metonymy ambivalently trooping colonial and post-colonial world. The passing on of the colonial mantle to the Indian petite bourgeoisie, which not only inherited political power from the colonial masters but also many of its peculiar colonial accoutrements after independence, is amply demonstrated.

History is witness to the persistence of colonial attitudes in the form of the continuance of the unchanged colonial laws actually framed to contain the native. Saleem's attempt at rewriting history and in doing so resisting the state apparatus of ideologies both in colonial and post-colonial context is in fact an attempt at opening the universe a little more. This is an assertion at the same time of his own 'self' and self-worth at large:

Am so far gone, in my desperate need for meaning, that I'm prepared to distort everything to rewrite the whole history of my times purely to place myself in a central role? (479).

The colonial hunger for power and wealth blinded the hegemonic power structures. Religious and racial discrimination between the native and the colonial power is quite apparent. People are differentiated into groups based on religion and race. With European colonial expansion and nation-building, the superiority of the white race clearly implies that black men must

remain cheap labour and slaves for them. Colonial regimes manipulated as well as created ethnic and racial discrimination. In *Midnight's Children*, Salman Rushdie shows racial antagonism taking wings in the due course of colonialism in India.

Salman Rushdie's masterpiece *Midnight's Children* is a novel that discusses everything about Indian Independence, the partition and its aftermath. India became independent of British rule after a long struggle. The complete text is Rushdie's interpretation of a period of about seventy years in India's modern history, dealing with the events leading to the partition of the country. Further, Rushdie, through a nostalgic lens, views his own shattered past and wishes to recreate the lost vision in a new form. Rushdie, through Saleem, shows the interrelatedness of the personal and public as this helps him to resolve the post- independence dilemma. Saleem saw his own life and its structure in fragments. Saleem begins by relating the tragedy of Aadam Aziz, his grandfather, who functions as a symbol of the colonised man in comic, mythic and surreal terms:

Above all, the ghostly essence of that perforated sheet, which doomed my mother to learn to love a man in segments and which condemned me to seemingly own life, its meaning, its structures in garments (107).

Rushdie's work reflects Saleem's mental uncertainty in accepting the post-war world of the two nations. One significant consequence of Saleem's fate is the peculiarly fragmented life for which Saleem is, of course, responsible. A sense of ambiguity and uncertainty is also connected with casual operations as created by the starting claim which Saleem makes about the interestedness of ambiguity and uncertainty is also connected with casual operations as created by the starting claim Saleem makes about the interrelatedness of his own life with history of modern India. The parallel drawn between Saleem's growing up and the development of the newly independent India could be best understood through the character's distorted memory. Saleem lives a completely confused kind of life. He is enlisted in the Pakistan army as a man-dog on account of his extraordinarily sensitive smell. Saleem's transmogrification into a man-dog suggests some deep self-loathing: Yes they will trample me underfoot the numbers marching one two three, four hundred million, five hundreds, six, reducing me to specks of voiceless dust just as all in good time they will trample my son who is not my son and his son who will not be his and his who will not be his until the thousand and first generation. (552)

In *Midnight's Children*, Salman Rushdie also gives an account of the Jallianwala Bagh incident in which Brigadier-General Dyer ordered firing at a crowd of Indians Amritsar, the rule of the Congress in India, the language riots between Gujarati and Mahathi speaking people in Bombay, the imposition of Ayub Khan's Martial Law in Pakistan in 1958, the Sino Indian war in the Himalayas in 1962 the rigging of the elections by Ayub Khan in 1964, the Indo Pakistan wars in the Rann of Kutch, in Kashmir and then on the western border in September 1965, the emergence of Sheikh Mujibur Rehman as the leader of Bangladesh, the 1971 military action by West Pakistan forces in East Bengal the armed conflict between the Indian troops and the Pakistan troops in 1971 and the declaration of the Emergency and the flouting of the laws of human right by Mrs. Indra Gandhi in 1975.

These incidents present a distinctive personality that is revealed through Saleem's reactions to events and other personalities in which he speaks in his own right. Saleem Sinai takes good

care to establish his position as an unprejudiced observer of the politics of India and Pakistan. He does so by being scrupulously truthful and nationalistic from a religious or cultural point of view. This shows that in a hegemonic power structure, the opposition of power is still an illusory concept and follows what is just allowed by the dominant political realm in the form of hegemonic reproductions of the colonial past.

Conclusion:

Thus, this is the struggle between classical imperialism on one hand and the native culture's resistance on the other; there is both a kind of stubborn confrontation and a crossover in the above discussion, and it may proceed further. Many of the post-colonial writers bear their past within themselves as scars of humiliating wounds. But through their voices, the silent native speaks and acts on the environment that still exists on the territory taken back from the hegemonic powers of the empire. This position of resistance can also be viewed as the beginning of the process of decolonization which questions the economic, political, social, cultural and racial impositions of the time of the British Empire. So, a conscious effort to resist empirical hegemonic power structures and values is visible in *Midnight's Children*.

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