

*Hybrid, Memory and Hybridization of Messianic Time in Salman Rushdie's  
Midnight's Children*

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## Hybridity

Starting from physiological definition of hybrid as an inspiration, this paper aims to develop the cultural and social interpretation of hybrid and in-between by Salam Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, especially Saleem Sinai's third principle in the conference. "In the nineteenth century [hybrid] was used to refer to a physiological phenomenon; in the twentieth century it has been reactivated to describe a cultural one" (Robert Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture, and Race* 6). Saleem Sinai's first extraordinary power—telepathic provides a stage for all midnight's children to gather in his mind to express their opinions. In this way, the definition of hybrid transfers from physiological background to cultural and social one by the midnight's children conference. Saleem Sinai who is born with the physiological extraordinary power of telepathic and then by hosting the midnight's children conference he proposes the third principle. Those midnight's children as members in the midnight's children conference would spread ideas and opinions discussed or debated in Saleem Sinai's mental space. They will first influence their parents since they each come from their families. As they grow up, they can accomplish their ideal principles into being in the near future. By these following effects, the power of hybridity has affected the society.

The unexpected juxtaposition of different cultures triggers Homi Bhabha to reflect on the newness of cultural practices and historical narratives. "[Homi Bhabha's] theory is housed in the West, for its in-betweenness cannot be understood without reference to the ideological and institutional structures of colonization" (Edward and Tredell, *Postcolonial Literature* 146). The word "in-betweenness" shows how the colonizer and the colonized are not independent of each other. We could not deny the fact that there are already existing two systems of the East and the West in the cultural perspective. Yet there comes up a new exceptional system, described as "in-betweenness," that has to be read by both understanding of the already existing two systems of the East and the West. If we take the habit of cooking and eating in the text as an example, the tension between doctor Aziz's western medical knowledge and the respectful mother's eastern habitual way of storing draws readers' attention.

Take Partha Chatterjee's description of community in India as an inspiration. The narrative of community substantializes cultural difference and then community voices out their need in anti-colonialist position. "Bhabha's work therefore shows how native resistance emerges because colonial discourse is incomplete" (Nayar, *Postcolonialism:*

*a guide for the perplexed* 29). The colonial discourse is no longer the definite norm that stands for the colonized people. Native resistance speaks out its own voice in the new generation. “[Resistance] is the effect of an ambivalence produced within the rules of recognition of dominating discourses as they articulate the signs of cultural difference and reimplicate them within the deferential relations of colonial power—hierarchy, normalization, marginalization and so forth” (Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* 110).

The hybrid or in-between time starts from the present to the future. The interaction of cultures happens when the dialogue of cultures takes place. The backbone of the talking could be cultural roots from the past but also includes the newness transcending from the present to the future. “Hybrid hyphenations emphasize the incommensurable elements—the stubborn chunks—as the basis of cultural identifications. [...] Such assignations of social differences—where difference is neither One nor the Other but *something else besides, in-between*—find their agency in a form of the ‘future’ where the past is not originary, where the present is not simply transitory” (Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* 217).

In order to enter the future, a community like midnight’s children conference should forsake old stubbornness as ideology and then embrace in-betweenness rather than neither one nor the other. Therefore, a community could offer a sense of belongingness. “Don’t let this happen! Do not permit the endless duality if masses-and-classes, capital-and-labour, them-and-us to come between us! We [...] must be a third principle, we must be the force which derives between horns of the dilemma; for only by being other, be being new, can we fulfill the promise of our birth” (Salam Rushdie, *Midnight’s Children* 255). The third principle is the exception from the norm of duality influenced by the colonial. If members in Midnight’s Children Conference agree to the third principle, their community can help native resistance grows and promotes the unique “in-betweenness” in the society. Midnight’s children can influence people in their surrounding and make the third principle come into reality as they grow up. The third principle can be put into practice in the real space in the society from the mental space in Saleem Sinai’s mental midnight’s children conference.

## Memory

The act of filtering keeps the memory fragments constellated in the dramatic form into permanent memory. The remembering memory constellation stimulates one to connect the story line cross events and time. The connecting of relations helps to depict meaning in each memory fragment. “The manner in which we get to hybridity is through the filter of memory. [...] The act of recalling, it becomes clear early on, is not an exact science; rather it is only through distorted fragments that one remembers and then recreates the past. Saleem compares memory (or the act of remembering) to pickling, which according to him is an ‘impure’ act of love. Pickling makes things new again and this is extremely important because one dies without newness. [...] ‘The art is to change the flavor in degree, but not in kind; and above all [...] to give it shape and form—that is to say, meaning’ (Sabrina Hussumani, *Salman Rushdie: a postmodern reading of his major works* 31-32). The act of pickling of memory is a quality change in memory. The process of pickling filters out essence of one’s memory. The change of flavor is in degree between the old and the new, not in kind which evokes Homi Bhabha’s “merging or in-betweenness.”

Saleem Sinai’s pickled memory, which is in the form of parts and fragments, constitutes his alternative history. The cause of his memory in parts and fragments is the multiplicity quality. “Who what am I? My answer: I am the sum total of everything that went before me, of all I have been seen done, of everything done-to-me. I am everyone everything those being-in-the-world affected was affected by mine. I am anything that happens after exceptional in the matter; each ‘I,’ every one of the now-six-hundred-million-plus of us, contains a similar multitude. I repeat for the last time; to understand me, you’ll have to swallow a world” (Salam Rushdie, *Midnight’s Children* 383). His cosmos has the feature of mixing colors, races, regions and value systems which we can detect since the beginning of the text. Multiplicity is like chemical effect contributing to pickling of memory because Saleem Sinai has suffered from amnesia. His memory is rebuilt by Parvati-the-witch. Her memory of him brings him back his real name and the memory of his past. She has known him since *Midnight’s Children* Conference developed by his extraordinary ability of mental communicating power. His inner image presenting in the *Midnight’s Children* Conference as the big nose leaves strong impression on her so she recalls his name by the moment she sees his big nose.

## Saleem Sinai’s Alternative History

The form of Saleem Sinai’s history is a hybrid of the “eastern themes” and “western

novel form” that in order to achieve “the hybrid post-colonial” discourse. “Indeed, Salam declares in *Midnight’s Children* that ‘there is no escape from form.’ In order to admits eastern themes, the western novel form must mutate and develop to become something else entirely; the hybrid post-colonial text” (Catherine Cundy, *Salman Rushdie* 26). The form of hybrid post-colonial text indicates its content.

Considering the hybridization concept of values in eastern culture, and western culture, we can find out those merging elements, such as “heroism” in the east, and “comic and critical treatment” in the west. The tradition of heroism is related to the tradition of storytelling in India, while the comic element evokes Bakhtin’s narration theory. “The nature of heroism is one of the concerns of the book. Heroism is something that is very alive in Indian culture and narrative tradition” (Goonetilleke 32). Besides, “Rushdie’s treatment of Indian Independence in comic terms and his critical view of India’s leaders is, in one way, linked to Western tradition” (Goonetilleke 36). Bakhtin’s narration theory also mentions that the comic in the novel can break boundaries of classes, and thus salvation occurs. The messianic hybridization occurs in the mixture of east and west narration in methodological view.

Like Saleem Sinai who has multiplicity quality, the India owns the mixture of traditions. “Rushdie states: My view is that the Indian tradition has always been, and still is a mixed tradition. The idea that there is such a thing as a pure Indian tradition is a kind of fallacy, the nature of Indian tradition has always been multiplicity and plurality and mingling...” (Goonetilleke, *Salman Rushdie* 44).

When it comes to the hybrid body, Saleem Sinai is built up on the east persona of Brahma and transformed to the western figure. “Saleem, as Brahma (the god who dreams the word) makes a comment on this, too: ‘Reality is a question of perspective; [...] the illusion itself is reality’” (Kuortti, *Fictions to Live in: narration as an argument for fiction in Salman Rushdie’s novels* 76). Saleem Sinai hosts the *Midnight’s Children* Conference and proposes the third principle in order to open a third space. The action of regaining memory triggers Saleem Sinai to write and preserve his alternative history. His memory is transplant by the Parvati the witch’s. His alternative history evokes “illusion” and brings about messianic hybridity against the grand history, a kind of norm, in the mixed form. His illusion of his alternative history for him is a kind of myth or reality.

### Hybridization of Messianic Time

The form of Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* is the single mode that is close to western fiction but has eastern oral storytelling tradition and heroism inside as a speaking subject. The content of his novel reveals Walter Benjamin's messianic power. "Rushdie's magic realism is not the combination of two different modes but a single mode that highlights its internal division" (Ten Kortenaar, *Self, Narration, Text in Salman Rushdie's Midnight's Children* 10). If we compare "the single mode" to constellation, we can infer that there is a clue of line connects stars and then become a constellation so the afterwards storytelling or myth is produced. "As the subtitle of Brennan's study of Rushdie, 'Myth of the Nations,' reminds us, the nation—every nation—retains a strong component of the Messianic time supposedly left behind by modernity" (Ten Kortenaar 23-24). The storytelling or myth of a constellation offers a meaning to the abstract relation of a constellation, a nation or an organic one. "What is intended by this frame is that the Messianic is descriptive of the power that enables the 'event' to have an afterlife; its capacity to live on is explicable in terms of Messianic power" (Andrew Benjamin, "Time and Task: Benjamin and Heidegger Showing the Present" 28). Saleem Sinai lives on by the act of storytelling. He collects memory as his alternative history mainly because he is aware of the importance of one's background and memory after he recovers from the destruction of the amnesia's syndrome. After his experience of amnesia, his life comes to the stage of overall transformation. The rebuilt memory is constellated that a clue of relation connects each snapshot in memory and then the constellation is spread and then makes a plane which triggers a storytelling or myth afterwards. By the process of retelling personal history, one's memory has an afterlife. One gains the possibility of messianic time from the past to the present so as to the future.

Saleem Sinai could be views as the spilt subject because he coincidentally owns the lack of "complete" memory reality. He by the help of parvati the witch narrates his alternative history as a product in order to reach the hidden truth, his memory, identity or roots. "Scheherazade told stories to save her life. Meanwhile, she also gave birth to children. Saleem can neither hope to save his life, nor can he beget children. What he desires, however, is emphatically to give meaning to his life. So he embarks on his writing mission" (Kuortti 77). The meaning of Saleem Sinai's alternative story resides in the fact that he is a switched baby. Through the extraordinary power—telepathic, he founds Midnight's Children Conference to gather and unite members of midnight's



children. One of the members Parvati the witch even later on rescues his identity and memory. Yet it is also the mental communicating power—telepathic and the midnight's children conference that leads him to the “allegorical” truth that his rival in the conference, Shiva, is actually the child of Saleem's present parents and his grandfather, Aadam Aziz, who is the beginning main character in Saleem's alternative history.

Saleem Sinai's alternative history crosses the time from Aadam Aziz's love story to the birth of Aadam Sinai. Saleem Sinai adopts Aadam Sinai, who is the biological son of Shiva and Parvati the witch, while Parvati is his wife. Thus, the action of adoption is both hybrid and messianic for Saleem Sinai. His act of adoption is of compensation meaning. Aadam Sinai can be seen as a new generation presenter beyond the bitter memory of hardship in the India Independence time point. For one thing that he reinforces his relationship with his present parents and Grandfather Aadam Aziz by adoption which can be seen as a kind of hybridization concept of kinship. He consciously accepts the kinship with Aadam Sinai transcending blood kinship ideology. In the meanwhile, his adoption connects again the blood line of Grandfather Aadam Aziz, who can be read as a person of progress idea by mixing the eastern tradition and west medicine. For the other thing that he can therefore save himself from the guilty of being at Shiva's position in his adopting family which is messianic for him.

The philosophy of Walter Benjamin works from constellated image to image as snapshots. Each constellation constitutes the fragmentary structure of memory chain so as to the alternative history. “Walter Benjamin's conception of allegory as a form of nonmimetic rupture provides a theory for reading the fragmentary structure of *Midnight's Children* as both a critique and a revision of the historical context framing the novels' composition” (Todd Kuchta, “Allegorizing the Emergency: Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* and Benjamin's Theory of Allegory” 205). The composition structure of *Midnight's Children* is fragmentary and historical, like the representation of memory recovery. This inference shares the characteristic of the novel, “fragmentary.” What triggers Parvati-the-witch to recall all the memory of Saleem Sinai is the image of Saleem's nose, which is a part of his whole body. A person's alternative history is constructed by parts. This explains the design of chapters in the novel, *Midnight's Children*. There are gaps among each chapter, but the coherence exists and this connects all of them in a book. As Saleem Sinai is the narrator in the

book. The hybrid body is represented via the book.

Because of the time point of his birth, Saleem Sinai's life is closely related to the "time" in grand History. "Saleem is Time-directed, Time-conscious as also self-conscious of it" (Taneja and Dhawan, *The Novels of Salam Rushdie* 135-136). His alternative perspective of history is parallel to the India History since the Independence moment. The principle inside would be the messianic hybridity which means all merging together within a new nation responding to the new time. Saleem Sinai is "self-conscious" of time so that he concretizes those moments of time into his alternative history recording his messianic salvation through firstly, hybridization of relationships; and secondly, hybridization of concept of time, which helps him to seek the "roots" in the hybrid of mythical ancestors' stories and current historical events. His alternative history endows people messianic power to live on in the post-colonial time.

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