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**Literary Theories**

## Analyzing the Language, Translation, and Multilingualism in Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*

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**Abstract:** Language, translation, and multilingualism play a central role in shaping postcolonial English literature. *Salman Rushdie's Midnight's Children (1981)* stands as a landmark text that demonstrates how English can be transformed to express indigenous experiences, cultural memory, and historical complexity. Although written in English, the novel is deeply rooted in India's multilingual and multicultural reality. Rushdie blends English with Indian languages, oral storytelling traditions, myth, and history to create a hybrid narrative voice. This paper examines how multilingualism and translation function not merely as linguistic devices but as creative and political strategies in the novel. By analyzing Rushdie's language use, narrative style, and cultural references, this paper argues that *Midnight's Children* challenges the dominance of Standard English and redefines translation as a means of cultural negotiation. The study highlights how language becomes a site of identity formation, resistance, and hybridization in postcolonial English literature.

**Keywords:** Language, Translation, Multilingualism, Postcolonial Literature, Cultural Hybridization, Salman Rushdie.



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## Introduction

Language is never a neutral medium in literature. It carries within it histories of power, identity, and cultural memory. In postcolonial contexts, language assumes even greater significance because writers often work within languages inherited from colonial rule. English, once imposed as a tool of administration and dominance, has been appropriated and reshaped by postcolonial writers to express local realities and indigenous voices. Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* is one of the most influential examples of this transformation. Published in 1981, *Midnight's Children* narrates the story of Saleem Sinai, a child born at the exact moment of India's independence. Through Saleem's life story, Rushdie intertwines personal memory with national history. What makes the novel particularly significant is its innovative use of language. Although written in English, the novel conveys its message through the rhythms, idioms, and cultural references of Indian languages. This paper explores how language, translation, and multilingualism operate in *Midnight's Children* to represent postcolonial identity, history, and cultural plurality.

## Objectives of the Study

The present study aims to: Examine the role of language in shaping postcolonial identity in *Midnight's Children*. Analyze translation as a narrative and cultural strategy rather than a purely linguistic process. Explore how multilingualism reflects cultural hybridization in the novel. Understand how Rushdie challenges the authority of Standard English through linguistic experimentation. Highlight the relationship between language, power, and identity in postcolonial English literature.

## Research Methodology

This paper adopts a qualitative and analytical research methodology based on close textual reading. The analysis focuses on language use, narrative voice, and cultural representation in *Midnight's Children*. The study is supported by theoretical perspectives from postcolonial studies, translation studies, and cultural theory. Secondary sources such as critical essays, books, and scholarly articles are used to contextualize the analysis. The approach is interpretative, aiming to understand how language and translation contribute to meaning-making in the text.

### **Multilingualism as Cultural Reality**

India is one of the most linguistically diverse nations in the world, and Rushdie captures this reality in *Midnight's Children*. The novel incorporates words and expressions from Hindi, Urdu, and Indian English, many of which remain untranslated. This deliberate choice preserves the cultural richness of the source language and resists linguistic simplification. Words such as *chutnification*, *angrez*, and culturally specific idioms carry meanings that cannot be fully translated into Standard English.

Rushdie's multilingual style reflects the lived experience of Indian society, where languages coexist and overlap. Rather than presenting English as a pure or dominant language, the novel transforms it into a hybrid medium shaped by local influences. This linguistic blending challenges traditional notions of literary English and asserts the legitimacy of multilingual expression in English literature.

### **Translation as Narrative and Creative Process**

Translation in *Midnight's Children* is not limited to converting one language into another. It functions as an internal narrative process through which memories, oral stories, myths, and historical events are translated into written English. Saleem Sinai acts as a translator of both personal and national histories. His storytelling is subjective, fragmented, and often unreliable, reflecting the instability of memory and historical truth. Saleem openly acknowledges that his narrative may contain exaggerations and distortions. This admission highlights the idea that translation, like history, is shaped by perspective and interpretation. Rushdie thus presents translation as a creative act that produces new meanings rather than reproducing original ones. Through this approach, the novel challenges the idea of a single, authoritative version of history.

### **Intertextuality and Cultural Memory**

*Midnight's Children* is rich in intertextual references drawn from Indian mythology, folklore, popular cinema, and political history. These references are woven into an English narrative framework, creating a dialogue between indigenous traditions and Western literary forms. By translating these cultural elements into English, Rushdie ensures their survival within global literary discourse. Intertextuality allows the novel to function as a cultural archive that preserves collective memory. Myths, legends, and historical events coexist within the narrative, reflecting the layered nature of Indian identity. This blending of texts and traditions reinforces the idea that literature is shaped by cultural continuity as well as change.

## **Language, Power, and Colonial Legacy**

Language has always been closely connected to power. During colonial rule, English functioned as a language of authority and control. In *Midnight's Children*, Rushdie reclaims English and reshapes it to express postcolonial realities. By filling English with Indian idioms, metaphors, and narrative rhythms, he challenges its colonial legacy. This appropriation of English reflects a broader postcolonial strategy of resistance. Rather than rejecting English entirely, Rushdie transforms it into a language capable of carrying indigenous experiences. Multilingualism becomes a way of asserting cultural ownership and resisting linguistic domination.

## **Multilingualism and Hybrid Identity**

The multilingual nature of *Midnight's Children* reflects the hybrid identity of postcolonial subjects. Saleem's identity is shaped by multiple influences—religious, cultural, linguistic, and historical. His fragmented narrative mirrors the fragmented nature of postcolonial identity, which cannot be confined to a single language or culture. Hybrid identity emerges as a central theme in the novel. Multilingual expression allows Rushdie to represent characters who exist between traditions, languages, and histories. This hybridity challenges rigid definitions of identity and celebrates cultural plurality.

## **Findings of the Study**

The analysis of *Midnight's Children* reveals that: Multilingualism enhances cultural authenticity and narrative depth. Translation operates as a creative and interpretative process. English is reshaped to accommodate indigenous voices. Language plays a crucial role in constructing postcolonial identity. Intertextuality preserves cultural memory within a global literary framework.

## **Conclusion**

Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* demonstrates the transformative power of language, translation, and multilingualism in postcolonial English literature. The novel shows that English can be reshaped to express non-Western realities without losing cultural specificity. Translation, rather than diminishing meaning, becomes a source of creative expansion. Multilingualism allows multiple voices and histories to coexist within a single narrative. This paper concludes that *Midnight's Children* exemplifies how language functions as a space of cultural negotiation, resistance, and identity formation. By embracing linguistic plurality, Rushdie expands the boundaries of English literature and affirms the place of postcolonial voices within world literature.

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