

The new Indian novel in English: narrative techniques

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Midnight's Children (1981), de Salman Rushdie, es la obra innovadora de la técnica narrativa en la novela anglo-india. Con ella Rushdie inició la experimentación en el uso de la lengua inglesa. La característica principal de la técnica de Rushdie reside en que *Midnight's Children* es un libro difícil porque no sólo es historia política, también contiene elementos fantásticos.

Anteriormente, la novela anglo-india era de corte realista. Con *Midnight's Children* se rompe este patrón para dar entrada a elementos enigmáticos y expresiones misteriosas, siempre a punto de ofrecer una explicación importante al llegar a la conclusión, pero dando una respuesta final ambigua. La posibilidad de interpretar la novela de varias formas permite que el lector pueda ver las cosas desde una perspectiva muy diferente de la del autor.

La nueva novela india en inglés es un fenómeno de la década de 1980. Rushdie modificó la narrativa. Desechó la novela realista y cronológica por ser incapaz de reflejar la inmensidad de la experiencia y la complejidad de la vida. Alegoría, fantasía, realismo mágico, narración fluctuante en el tiempo, usos del narrador y significados múltiples han pasado a ser el modo de escribir.

Salman Rushdie's second book *Midnight's Children* (1981) heralds innovative narrative techniques in Indo-Anglian fiction. It is Rushdie who set the trend for uninhibited experimentation with narrative techniques and usage of the English language. He provided the genre of Indo-Anglian novels with a new direction and renewed confidence. Not surprisingly, the complexity of his narrative technique has been praised in glowing terms by a renowned critic like William Walsh, who says:

Combining the elements of magic and fantasy, the grimmest realism, extravagant farce, multimirrored analogy and a potent symbolic structure, Salman Rushdie has captured the astonishing

energy of the novel unprecedented in scope, manner and achievement in the hundred and fifty year old tradition of the Indian novel in English ¹.

Prior to Rushdie, technical innovations by Indian novelists in English were limited, restricted and in the embryonic form.

Raja Rao was the first to experiment with new narrative techniques in *Kanthapura* (1938). He used a grandmother as a narrator. The old lady had herself participated in the freedom struggle and like many ageing people tended to be very garrulous. Using the first person narrative, the grandmother rapidly moves from episode to episode, with eagerness and anxiety. A similar technique is adopted by Kamala Markandaya in her *Nectar in a Sieve* (1954) where the narrator is again a grandmother who tells the story of her life without showing any rancour at her frequent misfortunes. However, unlike the effervescent narrator of *Kanthapura*, Rukmani, the narrator in Kamala Markandaya's novel is often sad and depressed:

For this I have given you birth, my son, that you should lie in the end at my feet with ashes in your face and coldness in your limbs and yourself departed without trace, leaving this huddle of bones and flesh without meaning ².

In Raja Rao's second novel, *The Serpent and the Rope* (1960), the narrator is an unruffled, unhurried young intellectual who does not just unfurl a story but tends to generalise every observation. A minor technical innovation, which tends to make the narrative either pedantic (very philosophical) or sentimental.

R.K.Narayan in *The Guide* (1958) performed a more daring technical feat. The novelist discards the method of the straightforward narrative, whilst telling the story of Raju the guide, before and after his release from jail. R.K.Narayan uses flashback and the montage technique so often applied in cinematography. For instance whilst getting shaved, Raju unwittingly blurts out the secret of his arrest and conviction. Another instance is when Raju is alone in the temple, before Velan comes to see him. He makes a mental contrast of his present situation with the days spent with Rosie. The narrative swings back in time. The author narrates Raju's first meeting with Rosie and the development of his enchantment with her. The narrative then transits again from the past to the present, as Velan poses the problem about his sister's refusal to marry the man of his choice.

The technique of point of view or multiple narrator is used first by Chaman Nahal in *Azadi* (1975), a second generation novelist. Instead of an omniscient author, the reader gets the illusion of reality from a character within the framework of the novel. Joseph Conrad in his political novel *Nostromo* uses numerous narrators so that a wider grasp of reality is conveyed. Similarly Chaman Nahal, presents a major historical event of the sub-continent, the Partition, with all its human implications through the points of view of two characters. They are the father and the son, Lala Kanshi Ram and Arun, who are the centres of consciousness. Lala Kanshi Ram, benumbed by the news of the death of his daughter, Madhu Bala, and the privations of the refugee camp gains a heroic endurance:

*Many parts of him had died, but there were others still alive, forcefully and affirmatively alive, and he knew he was not defeated*³.

The action in the novel alternates between Lala Kanshi Ram and Arun as centres of consciousness. The point of view of youthful dynamism, romance with Nur and Chandni and an alternate perspective of youth to the holocaust and the traumatic impact of partition is provided through Arun's consciousness. The varying reactions of Lala Kanshi Ram and Arun to events and their interaction, highlight the inner tension between diverse points of view and raise numerous socio-moral, ethical and eternal human questions. It is the use of the narrative technique, the multiple point of view, which made *Azadi* different from and more complex than other novels on the theme of partition written up to the 1970s.

Salman Rushdie's narrative in *Midnight's Children* (1981) goes beyond anything attempted in Indo-Anglian fiction till then. The impetus for such a complex narrative technique stems from the author's realisation that the story of the Indian subcontinent cannot be easily and simplistically rendered. By recognising the complex nature of experience of the Indian subcontinent and by making Indian characters function as centres of consciousness, Rushdie is able to authenticate their experience. The emphasis on the social, political and historical realities of the subcontinent is paralleled by an awareness of the world of magic and spirituality which defies logical narrative. The dilemma of narrative had puzzled E.M. Forster also when he wrote *A Passage to India* (1924). Forster realised the need to deviate from an older narrative tradition that emphasised story and plot, to an awareness of the chaotic and complex nature of experience. This led him to evolve a new theory of the novel, which he expounds in *Aspects of the Novel*:

Expansion. That is the idea the novelist must cling to. Not completion. Not rounding off but opening out ⁴.

So Forster's suggestion that the novelist attempt to communicate through expansion rather than any decisive, conclusive statement, is deployed by Salman Rushdie in his open-ended narrative. Rushdie dispenses with linear narrative and the omniscient author tradition as he provides a buoyant account of over seventy-five years of the history of the Indian subcontinent.

The highlight of Rushdie's narrative technique is that *Midnight's Children* cannot be easily categorised. It can be classified as a significant political history, similar to Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* (1956), Manohar Malgaonkar's *A Bend in the Ganges* (1964), Attia Hussain's *Sunlight on a Broken Column* (1961) and Chaman Nahal's *Azadi* (1975). In each book the respective author transmuted facts of history into significant works of art. However Rushdie's book is not just political history; the realm of fantasy also exists. Ashutost Banerjee says that «*Midnight's Children* achieves a singular synthesis between the recent Anglo-American genre of 'Non-fiction Novel' and the far older one of Political allegory»⁵. This is a very astute and relevant observation, as Rushdie's religious allegory is absorbed into the political, as in India religion has always been used to maintain the *status quo* by the ruling class. *Midnight's Children* also fits into the mode of postmodernist fantasy, based on uncertainty of perception and meaning. There are no easy notions of objective reality. Rushdie's novel is at once experimental, interrogative, confessional, polemical and subjective. There are certain obvious chronological continuities, in the autobiographical and socio-historical dimensions of the narrative. However the book's narrator, Saleem Sinai, is eccentric, with frequent shifts of perspective and drifts of the narrative into dream, nightmare and marginally related incidents. Saleem the narrator tends to see himself schizophrenically, in both the first and third person, so the reality of the character as a separate entity is also marred. So Rushdie's narrative technique blurs clear chronological outlines. The unities of time and place are, for most of the novel, unstable.

Saleem Sinai, adopts various narrative modes to convey experience. Yet the erratic but perceptive Saleem admits his inadequacy as a narrator:

There are so many stories to tell... such an excess on intertwined lives, events, miracles, places, rumours, so dense a commingling of the improbable and the mundane ⁶.

At times, the narrative voice presents an assortment and cross-section of dates, facts and figures related to public and private issues. In sharp juxtaposition, there are also instances when the reader is shuffled between the future, present and the past in a deliberately unchronological manner. This facet of the novel's narrative technique bolsters Rushdie's attempts to vividly present the variety and multitudinousness of India and her people.

As a chronicler, Saleem provokes much of the history he records. In his personal heritage the identity of India itself emerges. The interplay of personal and national histories is the most significant feature of *Midnight's Children*. The interaction of historical and individual forces gives unity to the novel and shapes the narrator. In the later stages of the novel, Saleem Sinai raises a pertinent query about his identity.

Who, what am I? My answer: I am the sum total of everything that went before me, of all I have seen been done, of every time done-to-me. I am everyone everything whose being-in-the-world affected was affected by mine. I am anything that happens after I've gone which would not have happened if I had not come (p.457).

Such a viewpoint arises because Rushdie evinces a mature historical sense. The influence of T.S.Eliot's poem, *Four Quartets* is obvious. Rushdie does not minimise the value of the past. His interpretation of history bears similarity to the opening lines of the Burnt Norton section,

*Time present and time past
Are both perhaps present in time future,
And time future contained in the past⁷.*

The consciousness of history, the awareness of oneself as a blend of past and present, makes the narrator Saleem realise that «history operates on a grander scale than any individual». Saleem is depicted as enslaved by his environment, the perennial victim, doomed to bear the burden of history:

Why, owing to accidents of birth, prophecy etcetera, must I be responsible for language riots and after Nehru who, -Why alone of all the more-than-five-hundred-million, should I have to bear the burden of history? (p.457).

Saleem Sinai raises a fundamental question, the universal mystery of unmerited suffering. «Why me?», he asks, very similar to Job in the Old Testament who also tried to solve the global puzzle of suffering. Job, after protracted suffering and debate, realises that struggle is the keynote even if problems remain unsolved.

Saleem's life is shown as ruled by historical «destiny», inevitability, and limited choice:

No choice? -None; when was there ever? There are imperatives, and logical consequences and inevitabilities, and recurrences;... When options? When a decision freely-made, to be this or that or the other? (pp.503-4).

It is difficult to understand logically the unfolding scheme of events in *Midnight's Children*. Events in the novel zigzag from one matter to another. Some events in India's chequered history, like the partition riots, the wars with China and Pakistan, the trauma of the Bangladesh war, the death of L.N.Mishra, communal hostility and the impositions of sterilisations during the emergency, the Bombay Language riots of 1957, the liberation of Goa, the problem of untouchability, the acquisition of large-scale U.S. aid by Pakistan and the elections of 1962 are represented realistically. However Rushdie's novel is a memory novel and therefore a semi-fantasy, dealing with stark realities. «Memory's truth, because memory has its own special kind. It selects, eliminates, alters, exaggerates, minimises, glorifies and vilifies also: but in the end it creates its own reality» (p.253).

Such a historical perspective enables Rushdie to reminisce backwards and forwards reimagining himself in the persona of the extravagant Muslim, Saleem Sinai, who was born on the stroke of midnight, bringing in India's independence. Saleem Sinai, a highly self-conscious narrator oscillates between the apocalyptic and the expansive. He assumes many identities. He is at the crease with Polly Umrigar at the Brabourne Stadium, he unravels the seamy gossip in Filmfare about the dancer Vyayantimala, he is a Congress party worker, a Kerala peasant who votes for the Communists, a landlord in Uttar Pradesh ordering his peasants to set his surplus grain on fire and starve to death. Saleem becomes the consciousness of the whole country, experiencing the life and times of the multitudes. He is also Rushdie's fictional alter ego. Saleem, like Rushdie, was born at the precise hour of the end of the British Raj. Rushdie's complex narrative technique enables him to sustain the simultaneous identities of Saleem Sinai as a human being and narrator-

protagonist of the novel, capturing within his person the euphoria, expectations, tensions and traumas of Independence. The author's historical perspective and technique of reminiscing backwards and forwards in time enable him to tackle political themes and the ramifications of political decisions, more decisively than ever attempted before in Indo-Anglian fiction.

The vast, sprawling narrative of a nation's, at times three nations', history for a span of about sixty-two years (1915-1977) has been made compact because of some special devices. There are frequent summaries of previous events to refresh the reader's memory. There is use of repetitive imagery and fortuitous parallelisms. The passage which narrates the fight of Saleem's Sister (nicknamed Brass Monkey) with Evie Burns is an example of the use of parallelisms in Rushdie's technique. The blood on Evie Burns' face is linked to the blood spilled on the street of Bombay by rioters. In such a manner, Rushdie imposes integrity on disparate material. The stained and perforated bridal sheet of Naseem Aziz, symbolising the Purdah, Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru's letter to Saleem, the latter's umbilical cord preserved in brine, the spittoon and the washing chest are some of the innumerable objects Rushdie uses as symbols binding together people and situations, otherwise wide apart in time and space.

It is such experimentation in technique which makes *Midnight's Children* a radical departure from what had been previously written by Indian novelists in English. Earlier Indo-Anglian fiction, had been mostly realistic fiction, adapted to local requirements. In *Midnight's Children* the older forms of fiction are broken. The novel is full of cryptic clues and arcane utterances, always on the verge of uttering some important explanation or of reaching a decisive conclusion but the final answer is ambiguous. The presence of several modes of interpretation in the novel allows the reader to identify with a perspective on the subcontinent very different from that of the author.

Salman Rushdie's third novel *Shame* (1983) is about the life of men and women, and the quasi religious-political indictment and handling of political themes in *Shame* is even sharper and more pronounced than in *Midnight's Children*. Experimentation in technique is not as uninhibited as in his previous novel. *Shame* is a combination of a free-flight fairy tale and a savage political indictment. To expose the murky political history of Pakistan, the narrator-persona and the fictional hero Omar Khayyam Shakil are forms of the projected alter ego. The ambivalence between the real and the imaginary, author and persona is very veiled and thin. The narrator is almost Rushdie himself. The political allegory is severe as

Rushdie wants to expose the late Zia-Ul-Haq's Pakistan. Using a fairy tale analogy, he creates a convenient facet to analyse the gloating absurdities taking place in the progressive 20th Century. The happenings are supposedly taking place in the fourteenth century.

Political allegory exists throughout the novel. Many characters in *Shame* are recognised as important names in the recent politics of Pakistan. Iskandar Harappa is Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, Raza Hyder is Zia-Ul-Haq, Rani Harappa is Nursrat Bhutto, Arjumand Harappa, the «virgin Ironpants» is Benazir Bhutto, General Shaggy Dog is former President Yahya Khan and Sheikh Bismillah is Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. The fairy tale story and contemporary politics are judiciously juxtaposed in the novel. The lyrical outpourings of the persona often reflect the feelings of Salman Rushdie, especially the shame of «sharam», of the murky politics of Pakistan and the social nuances of a feudal, superstitious Islamic society. To ensure some distancing between his subjective feelings and the reflections of the persona, Rushdie uses an experimental technique. His narrator explains at length the form of his story. It is emphasised that it is not a realistic story. The narrator says:

The country in this story is not Pakistan, or not quite. There are two countries, real and fictional, occupying the same place. My story, my fictional country exists, like myself, at a slight angle to reality.... I have not given the country a name. And Q, is not really Quetta at all⁸.

In spite of this charade, Pakistan is revealed as the fictional country of Q. Under the guise of a suspense thriller and of fairy tale fantasy, *Shame* exposes the bleak and sordid society in Pakistan, the corruption of both army and civilian rule, neo colonialism, the dependence on foreign aid, religious fundamentalism as chauvinist political strategy, US support of Islamic fundamentalism, the projection of Pakistan in the Western media and the festering violence leading to a kind of horror at Pakistan's impending break up.

Rushdie expresses his version of the reality of Pakistan by the method of indirection. Like Joseph Conrad and Franz Kafka, in *Shame* Rushdie uses the oblique method of expression. Though dealing with historical facts more contemporary than in *Midnight's Children*, the novel is not written in chronological order. The zig-zag movements in time are deliberate. To debunk the political and theological dictators and female dictators in Burqa in provincial Pakistan, Rushdie resorts to explosive visions of protest. The end of the novel is like a fantasy. Rushdie's own

passion seems predominant as he dreams the end of dictatorship in Pakistan. The Head of state flees the country at the fall of the government, hiding his face in one of the macabre veils his own tormented wife had sewn. The fictional heroine Sufiya Zenobia Hyder highlights Rushdie's premise that the wages of extreme repression are violent retributions beyond calculation. She is a weird creature, a child's mind in a grown up attractive woman's body which enamours Shakil strongly so that he marries her. Yet there is a fiend lurking within her and she is associated with the uncanny, lurking mythical leopard of destruction. Towards the end of the novel there is a deterioration in Sufiya Zenobia. She becomes a symbol of disorder. The melodramatic violence of killing four slum youths after raping them is a devastating comment on conservative Muslim sexual repression and the sexual hypocrisy in Zia's regime. The macabre ending is seen as an inevitable conclusion in a repressed society. Unlike the «terrible beauty» of Yeats' *Second Coming*, Sufiya Zenobia is reduced to a macabre whore, associated with images of dirt and squalor.

Why does Rushdie have to resort to dream fantasy and zig-zag movements of time to tell his tale? The answer is provided by the narrator's monologue about a poet friend in Karachi:

Since my last visit to Karachi, my friend the poet had spent many months in jail, for social reasons. That is to say, he knows somebody who knows somebody who was the second cousin by marriage of the step uncle of somebody who might or might not have shared a flat with someone who was running guns to the guerrillas in Baluchistan. You can get anywhere in Pakistan if you know people, even into jail (p.28).

This seemingly humorous monologue aptly reveals the repression in Zia's regime and the necessity for oblique expression. In the «Acknowledgements» section at the end of the book, Rushdie expresses his concern for his benefactors, as the main reason for such caution. With grim irony he says,

It [this book] owes a good deal to the entirely non-financial assistance of many others, my gratitude to whom will perhaps best be expressed by leaving them unnamed (p.287)⁹.

Parody is an effective technique used by Rushdie in his exposure of political history both in *Shame* and *Midnight's Children*. Zia-Ul-Haq CMLA (Chief Martial Law Administrator) is parodied into Cancel My

Last Announcement. Zia himself is parodied as «Razor Guts» General Hyder Raza. Benazir Bhutto is referred to as «Virgin Ironpants» and Nusrat Bhutto as «Penelope-like Rani Harappa». Former President Yahya Khan becomes President Shaggy Dog. There are even parodies through literary allusions. Many of Saleem Sinai's soliloquies in *Midnight's Children* parody lines of T.S.Eliot's poetry. For example: «No: I'm no monster. Nor have I been guilty of trickery. I provided clues», (p.136) echoes *The Love Song of J.Alfred Prufrock*:

No; I am not Prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be; Am an attendant lord, one that will do to swell a progress, start a scene or two, Advice the prince...¹⁰.

In *Shame* the narrator's striking phrase describing Rani Harappa's artistry in her shawl, as «the portrait of the artist as an old crone» (p.194) effectively parodies James Joyce's title *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. The smutty dialogue between Omar Khayyam and Farah Zoroaster is a parody of a courtship, not a real one. The use of parody adds to the guise of fantasy writing, is used for oblique political comments, facilitates story-telling and is yet another example of uninhibited experimentation of technique by Salman Rushdie.

Nina Sibal's first novel *Yatra* is much influenced by Salman Rushdie's technique. Published in London in 1987 and in Delhi in 1988, *Yatra* also experiments with narrative technique. The influence of Rushdie is obvious, as Nina Sibal traces transition and change in contemporary India. Just like in Rushdie's novels, the narrative hurtles back and forth in time and place. Ancestral history and political events are juxtaposed throughout the novel. *Yatra* is also the voyage of discovery of one woman, Krishna Chahal.

In *Shame* the narrator and fictional hero, Omar Khayyam Shakil, is almost Rushdie himself. In *Midnight's Children* Saleem Sinai is Rushdie's alter ego. The heroine of *Yatra*, Krishna Chahal is half-Greek, half-Indian, like Nina Sibal herself. Yet the novel is not a fictionalised autobiography, but a mixture of daring imagination, concrete reality and magical realism. Nina Sibal aptly delineates a parallel between Krishna's history and the history of the nation. In this aspect, her handling of technique is similar to Rushdie's. In *Midnight's Children* Saleem Sinai, born at the hour which ends the British Raj, sustains the identities of a narrator and becomes the consciousness of the whole country. Saleem Sinai, however, assumes many identities. In *Yatra*, Nina Sibai concentrates on the use of metaphor.

The darkening skin of Krishna Chahal is an apt metaphor for the increasingly murky politics of India. Krishna's «padyatra», becomes a Gandhian metaphor. Like Gandhi's Dandi march, it is a movement with a purpose. Walking becomes a metaphor of life, a journey, a quest to understand the feminist movement.

Like Rushdie, her mentor, Nina Sibal also refers to contemporary political events. There is reference to the ecological movement, the «Chipko» movement. Krishna's involvement in the «Chipko» movement reveals several facets of Nina Sibal's technique. Her use of symbolism is revealed. The Chipko women with Krishna, known piously as Krishnaji, are symbolic of an overwhelming desire for self-preservation and self-liberation. In this episode, layers and layers of meaning emerge, characteristic of Nina Sibal's style and technique. Krishna's darkened skin becomes a metaphor for terrestrial devastation, soil erosion, landslides and deforestation. Known as «the woman of trees», Krishna becomes symbolic of the destruction of ecology due to human greed and carelessness. The mystical element is also revealed. Krishna becomes a deity because of her involvement in this movement. Such an image makes her a potential candidate for the Tehri seat for Parliament, a potential politician. It is also an oblique reference to the interplay of religion and politics in contemporary India. Finally Krishna and the Chipko movement become symbolic of Indian women, searching for a new identity. With an effective use of image, symbol and poetic evocation, Nina Sibal aptly handles complex contemporary politics, the problem of ecology, and feminist identity. Historical events in India, since Partition are referred to obliquely and directly, without distracting from the overall story of Krishna Chahal.

The use of magical realism, due to the influence of García Márquez and Rushdie, is also very obvious and effective in Nina Sibal's *Yatra*. The beautiful green-eyed boy Prakash, incestuous lover to his aunt Kailash Kaur, the slaughtered lovers locked lovingly together, Rai Bahadur Bhim Lal, called the snake, as he dodges invaders and crawls up mountain paths, to reach the safety of Srinagar during the Partition riots, and the blood of brother Manmohan Singh, flowing across the courtyard to the room where sister Swaranjit Kaur sits weaving her «Khes» are all whimsical but effective images with a distinct García Márquez and Rushdie touch.

The Circle of Reason (1986) by Amitav Ghosh is specifically a contemporary work. Like Garcia Marquez and M.Vargas Llosa, a facility for story telling is the hallmark of Amitav Ghosh's novel. The basic technique used in this novel is the well-told story, a tradition as old as

Homer's epics. Around the bare outlines of the plot which moves over continents, are clustered an infinite number of stories ranging back and forth in time. Each story, whether it moves backwards or forwards in time, continues and subtly explains any ambiguities in the previous story. Story telling is Amitav Ghosh's main narrative technique. The stories interplay with time, enabling the author to achieve an original synthesis of different concepts of time.

Amitav Ghosh does not use the conventional, chronological narrative or dissolve time into a kind of duration, where past and present are indistinguishable. Instead the novel starts in the past with Balaram's excitement at exploring the shape of the skull of his nephew, popularly known as Alu. It then moves further back in time, exploring Balaram's relationships with his group of friends, all in their mid-thirties, and returns again to Balaram's relationship with Alu. The novel then moves forward to the present with Inspector Das interviewing Gopal, a friend of Balaram's and then narrates the early years of Balaram's life, including his years at Presidency College. Each story is a distinct episode and yet unfolds in linear time, creating an overall final experience. Connections are made subtly, episodes being linked by a certain vision of life and process of understanding. The final experience is an extraordinary achievement in which past and present co-exist, whilst constantly asserting their difference.

Like Salman Rushdie, even Amitav Ghosh displays a mature historical sense. *The Circle of Reason* presents history as a collective memory, a link between past and present. The past, a reference point for understanding what is happening, is equally dependent on the present to determine the perspective. For instance, Dantu, one of Y. Balram's friends, a secondary character in the first part of the novel, emerges again as Hem Narain Mathur, in the third section. An understanding of the history of Dantu leads to a better grasp of the immediate concerns of his part in section three. Everything is seen in relationship, both internally and with other areas. The final picture that emerges is dependent on the way the novelist looks at life. History is fashioned by the way people collectively perceive their inheritance. For example, Balram, the idealist bhadrakok is representative of an important historical outlook, just as Bhudev, the lumpen Congressman, represents another historical tendency. There is fluidity in time and history. Thus there are no absolutes for Amitav Ghosh, which enables him to break away from the constraints of conventional realism. So *The Circle of Reason* does not create any symmetrical patterns or designs or evolve any overall theory. Instead it

organises visions of life, by exploring connections, distinctions and possibilities. This is a daring technique adopted by Amitav Ghosh, which helps the flow of the story.

The influence of García Márquez and Rushdie on Amitav Ghosh is distinct. However, Amitav Ghosh with his freshness in story telling, is more concerned with intellectual curiosity than lyricism of style. The technique is not one of unveiling layers of meaning, but an overall curiosity is created beyond the «what nextism» of Rushdie. There are always fresh disclosures and subtle connections between the numerous stories. Overall the novel has three stories, evolving around three characters. In the first section, «Satwa: Reason», the story of Balram the idealist entranced by the Life of Pasteur and his entanglement with the Congressman Bhudev is told. The second part, «Rajas: Passion», revolves around Zindi, the practical trader who is the focus of a community of Indians in the Middle East and Alu, the nephew and only survivor of Balaram's family. In the third section, «Tamas: Death», Mrs. Verma defies rational scepticism to create an Indian community life in the desert. Finally, Alu, Zindi and Jyoti Das, the Police officer who considers Alu a terrorist and trails him from the first part, leave Mrs. Verna in search of destinations of hope. The story of Alu and Jyoti Das is the main source of continuity. Thus the scope of the novel is formidable, but Amitav Ghosh's narrative technique, his freshness of ideas and the genius of his stylistic concerns and unrestrained experimentation in narrative technique is an indication of development in Indo-Anglian fiction. The new Indian novel in English is a phenomenon of the 1980s. The trend setter was Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*. The narratology has altered. Realistic fiction and the chronological narrative have been discarded as being insufficient to convey the vastness and complexities of experience and life. Allegory, symbols, fantasy, magical realism, narrative fluctuating backwards and forward in time, the compelling use of narrators, fluency in story telling and the unveiling of layers and layers of meaning have all become a mode of writing. Experimentation with the English language, the use of parody and sheer invention have resulted in the formation of a new language, of rhythms which increase the humour and multitudinousness of the new Indian novels in English. Inserting vernacular language habits into sentences intoned in flawless English is also effectively used in the narrative. Salman Rushdie in *Shame* says: «... would not get away with their whistling-shistling» (p.61) and Amitav Ghosh in *The Circle of Reason* writes about how ASP Dubey tells inspector Jyoti Das, «Why all this reading - sheading?» (p.153). Salman

Rushdie, Amitav Ghosh, and even new novelists like Nina Sibal, Wikram Seth, Pratap Sharma, Alan Sealy, Upamanyu Chatterjee have all experimented with narrative techniques to present new sensibilities, meanings and themes. Slick craftsmanship and continuous experimentation with narrative technique have created new dimensions and possibilities for the Indian novel in English.

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