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# Indian Independence and the Lasting Influence of Colonization

Salman Rushdie's influence on postcolonial literature has already been recognized by his inclusion in the Norton Anthology. His included writings offer a unique perspective on the influence of British colonialism on Indian culture and language. However, the Norton could also benefit from the inclusion of sections from one of Rushdie's most influential novels, *Midnight's Children*. Not only does *Midnight's Children* highlight the tension between Britain and India before and after Indian Independence, but Rushdie does so by using Modernist features, such as self-reflexivity, psychological tunneling, and non-linear narration. This blend of Modernist style and postcolonial subject matter make *Midnight's Children* the perfect work to include in the Modernist Norton.

Although the entire novel is too lengthy to include in the anthology, chapters seven and eight, "Methwood" and "Tick, Tock," serve as a great stand-alone section that perfectly captures the tension between British and India at the moment of independence. In this section, Saleem's family is moving to Bombay, where a British aristocrat, William Methwood, is selling many of his estates to Indian families for very cheap. Methwood only has one request: until the very day of Indian independence, the residents of his estates must leave everything exactly how it is. Before independence, they are not allowed to change or throw out any items in the estates. At first, the new residents are upset with the requirement, but over time they find themselves adjusting to the habits imposed upon them by Methwood. For example, Methwood requires they observe cocktail hour every night at six, and soon the new residents "slip effortlessly into their Oxford drawls" as Methwood comes to "supervis[e] their transformation" every evening (109). Not only are the Indian residents attempting to imitate what they feel is a more aristocratic accent, they find themselves changing their actions as well, religiously observing the rituals that they originally found ridiculous. Even as they look forward to India's independence from Britain, they find themselves becoming more British. Methwood's character also gives us a glimpse into the British perspective of colonization. He is "dead against" independence, and he points out all the benefits of English rule that "built [. . .] schools, railway trains, [and] parliamentary systems" (105). He points out that even the "Taj Mahal was falling down until an Englishman bothered to see to it" (106). It is clear that Methwood represents the typical English view that colonization and British rule were beneficial for India.

In addition, these chapters include an interesting section that deals with tension between Christianity and Hinduism. A recent convert to Christianity, Mary Pereira, visits a confessional and asks a priest what color skin Jesus had. The priest tells her that Jesus was "the most beauteous, crystal shade of pale sky blue" because he had been told by his superiors that when

recent converts "ask about color [. . .] tell them blue" because the "Hindu love-god, Krishna, is always depicted with blue skin" (114). This attempt to build a "bridge between the faiths" backfires as Mary points out, quite reasonably, that people are never born with blue skin. The real reason Mary is asking this question is because her boyfriend, Joseph, has told her to "leave the white gods for white men" (116). This section illustrates the, sometimes ridiculous, efforts that Christians went to in an effort to convert Indians as well as a common view that Christianity was a white religion. The influence that colonialism had not only on the political structure of India, but on the religious structure of India is perfectly captured by this chapter.

These chapters also illustrate examples of non-linear narration, self-reflexivity, and psychological tunneling. For example, the conversation that Ahmed Sinai has with his wife about purchasing Methwood's property is intermixed with the conversation between Ahmed and Methwood (106-107). There's no clear indication who is speaking, and the reader has to puzzle out the speaker based on context clues. In addition, Saleem, who is recounting his story to Padma, often stops his story to reflect on it with her. This continual self-reflexivity further blurs the line between past and present. For example, after Saleem recounts the conversation that Mary Pereira has with the priest, he switches abruptly to the modern day, saying, "Tomorrow I'll have a bath and shave [. . .] in a phrase, I'll look my best" (117). The story is happening in the present just as much as it is happening in the past. The reader spends a lot of time in Saleem's brain and becomes acquainted with his innermost thoughts and feelings.

Finally, these chapters link very well with Rushdie's thoughts about the influence of Britain and the English language on Indian identity. In "English is an Indian Literary Language," Rushdie points out that the"children of independent India seem not to think of English as being irredeemably tainted by its colonial provenance. They use it as an Indian language, as one of the tools they have to hand" (881). English culture is a part of Indian culture, and this influence is . In *Midnight's Children*, when Saleem is born, we discover that, instead of being the biological son of Amina and Ahmed Sinai, he is in reality the illegitimate son of Methwood and a poor Indian woman (131). The idea of India being the illegitimate child of Britain ties in very well with Rushdie's arguments about the continued influence that English has on India. British colonization is a part of Indian heritage that is inescapable.

Rushdie's writing is engaging and thought provoking, and the inclusion of these chapters in the Norton Anthology would greatly benefit students by promoting in depth discussion and analysis about both postcolonial thought and Modernist formal features. Reading this section from *Midnight's Children* would give students a greater insight into the many complex factors that influenced Indian independence as well as the tangled ties that bound (and still bind) India and Britain together.

Works Cited

Rushdie, Salman. “English is an Indian Literary Language.” *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, edited by Julia Reidhead and Marian Johnson, 10th ed., vol. F, W. W. Norton & Company, 2018, p. 881.

Rushdie, Salman. *Midnight’s Children.* Random House, 1981, pp. 101–33.