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**Rushdie and Magic Realism:**

**M**AGIC REALISM is a widely used term in literary discussions, especially of novels written in the 80s and 90s of the 20th century. Gabriel Garcia Marquez and Salman Rushdie are some of its prominent practitioners. It is a narrative technique of blending reality and fantasy. It provides freedom for the novelist to digress from drab reality to romance without losing track of reality, and it became a rage in the 80s and the 90s. It was new. Earlier novelists stuck to purity of form, which ruled out any digressions. Gustave Flaubert, with his chiselled, fine-filed and precise sentences, produced a realistic novel about the tragic story of an unfortunate woman. However, "realism," as Rushdie says, "can break a writer's (and reader's) heart." Likewise, the single-minded exploration of the interiority of an individual can be cloying. Therefore, the post-modernist writers did away with earlier methods and resorted to a thick mix of multiple stories in a mock-heroic and ironical style.

Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* is a prominent novel in this respect. It is a complex and allegorical novel about the story of a liberal Kashmiri Muslim called Dr. Aziz and his fluctuating fortunes. Dr. Aziz, with his wife Naseem moves to Amritsar, Agra, Delhi, Bombay, Karachi, and back to Bombay, where he ends up with his son Saleem Sinai, born at the moment of Indian independence, at a pickle factory run by a Parsi woman named Mary Pareira. It is profusely splashed with comic and amusing characters like Tai. Tai is very old, so old that he has lost the count of years and connected himself with Isa, who, he says, had a beard reaching his balls and was bald as an egg on his head.

They are blessed with three daughters called Alia, Mumtaz, and Emerald. When they come of age, they get married. Mumtaz marries Nadir Khan, a refugee from the law and sheltered in Ahmed's godown. Emerald marries Zulfikar, a government official. When he comes to know that Nadir Khan was hiding in Ahmed's godown, he raids the premises. Nadir Khan escapes, leaving a note of the thrice-repeated word *Talaq*. Meanwhile, Ahmed Sinai, son of a merchant, gets into a relationship with the Ahmed family and is drawn towards Alia. But when Mumtaz's divorced, he decides to go for Mumtaz, and they get married. Mumtaz is rechristened as Amina. In Delhi, Amina becomes anxious to know whether she can bear a child as she had shown no signs of child bearing in her previous marriage and goes to a soothsayer. The description of her visit to the soothsayer has all the characteristics of magic reality. Amina Sinai sluggishly reaches the upper reaches of a huge chawl, a broken-down tenement building in which Lifafa Das and his three cousins, a bone setter, a monkey dancer, and a snake and man goose man, with all their paraphrenia, have a small room at the very top. There, sitting in a small room, is Ramram, six inches above the ground. He predicts a son for Amina Sinai—"a son, Sahiba, who will never be older than his motherland, neither older nor younger. The snake and mangoose charmer, monkey dancer, bone-setter, and peep-show walla were stunned because they had never heard Ramram like this. Ramram continues in his singsong high-pitched tone—" There will be two heads. He tells Amina that the birth of her son will be treated as the birth of Jesus Christ. Ramram's forecast comes true

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because her son is born at the very moment independent India is born, and right before his birth, a sadhu appears at Buckingham Villa and announces, " I have come to await the coming of the one. The Mubarak-He who is blessed. It will happen very soon. Such scenes and situations abound in the novel.

In *Midnight's Children* the characters are not men and women of blood and flesh, but some airy stuff with weird looks. Ahmed Sinai, Saleem's father, moves from place to place, and that is all readers know about him. Amina is blessed with a much-longed for son, but instead of focusing on her feelings, the story moves to Mary Pareira swapping her child with the child of Wee Willie Winsky and Vanita, and again to the illicit affair between Vanita and Methwold, an Englishman, who, in a bid to pack up and leave for England, sells his bungalow to Ahmed Sinai. Vanita's exchanged son becomes Shiva, a major and an arch enemy of Saleem.

Saleem's uncle lives in Pakistan and invites him to join him. Saleem goes to Pakistan and, because of the people around him, joins in the civil war. Soon, Saleem becomes disillusioned with the politics of the dispensation and longs to return to Bombay. A woman called Parvati helps him escape, much in the same way Shivaji escaped from the prison of Aurangzeb. Saleem marries Parvati, who converts to Islam.

As Saleem was born at the moment of India's Independence, Saleem's son, Aadam Sinai, was born on the night of the declaration of Emergency by Indira Gandhi, and Rushdie turns his gaze on her and finds her to be a witch, a widow. In Rushdie's magic reality, history is not bygone but hugely distorted to suit his fancy. His magic realism is an ingenious art of digression, distortion, hyperbole, and hybridity. However, it is not likely to last for long. This is because the thick mix of many styles and high-blown narrative does not satisfy the readers who thirst for purity of style, perceptive narration of social reality, in-depth characterization, and speculation about existential issues in evocative language. The signs of its decline in popularity are now evident.