

Sense of History in India and its Representation in Rushdie's Fiction

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Abstract: With the advent of Postcolonial studies, a new critical light has dispelled long-cherished belief of the Western world that India is an ahistorical country retrieving native ways of Indian people's relation to their past. What postcolonial theorists have framed conceptually was augmented experientially by the Indian English writers like Salman Rushdie, whose rich texture of narrative and exuberant vision of myth, history, and India's post-independence consciousness have opened up alternative ways of "history". My petty attempt is to show how two major works of Rushdie, *Midnight's Children* and *The Moor's Last Sigh* explores Indians' interaction with "past" and "history", along with difference in theoretical orientations of Indian and Western conceptions of "history".

Keywords: Past, history, myth, palimpsest.

The idea of 'history' is a problematic concept in Indian culture. Here, past is always conceived with unparalleled distinctiveness; quite free of the linear progress of events, what is the idea of history in the western world (although in West 'history' was not always a unanimous concept; divergences were always noticeable). Because of this the 'history-ness' of history in India was always under shroud before the Western Eye. When thought about India they found a historical void; the tumultuous and multilayered world of the "exotic" world baffled them. Western anthropologists used to believe that in India history originated from an ontological chaos. "A long tradition of Western historiography has neatly characterised early India's historical consciousness as essentially ahistorical, for time for early Indians was mythical rather than historical and it was cyclic rather than linear" (Mukhia, 2000). Romila Thapar is of a similar opinion: "At the turn of the eighteenth century and shortly thereafter, the theory which emerged was that the Indian sense of time was entirely cyclic, was tied into an infinity of recurring cycles, and did not therefore recognise historical change; and in the absence of a sense of history there was no differentiation between myth and history" (2000). No particular date or chronology was ever tried to establish by early Indian historiographers or writers before the advent of *Puranas* and epics like *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*. Harbans Mukhia writes, "Even as a conception of the creation of the universe is imagined in the *Rgveda*, the earliest of the four Vedas, the Aryan mythological texts, no referral date is assigned to it there. In some later texts, however, the beginning of time – and therefore of the universe – is established as 12000 years. But time moves in a rhythm of four cycles: the *Sat-yuga* (the age of truth), the *treta* (third), the *dvapar* (second) and the *kali-yuga* (the last age) after which the cycle will begin again. In some versions, these cycles are envisaged in

millions of human years. Thus even as the creation of the universe is conceptualised, its end is not. Cyclical time is thus embedded in the Hindu's very vision of life and universe. It is entirely mythological, counterposed to linear time in history, considered an attribute of the Western historiographical tradition. There is no shared space in-between" (2000). Nevertheless, Indian historiography has changed due to the intersections with many rich cultural and religious powers. It is no longer cyclical. Now, in India reality is a complex construct, not only due to complexity of life in modern consumer society, but due to the complex vision of past. Past is never past in India; it is always one of the major factors, that constitute present reality. Nevertheless, form of Indian history was never exclusively cyclical; this incomplete notion was promoted largely by the "failure" (?) of the early (particularly Western) Indologists to acknowledge the value of the texts of early astronomy, mathematics, even horology, calendars and dating systems, outside Manu's *Dharmasastra*. These texts reveal, according to Romila Thapar, "the construction of knowledge, especially in astronomy and mathematics, and their distance, in some cases, from popular beliefs and also underlines the dialogue between Indian and Greco-Babylonian views. But notions of time are also cultural signals. The reading of these would involve the visualisation of the form of time, the degree to which mythical time is distinct from historical time, the association of time with eschatologies, with utopias or with moral and social decline as reflected in golden ages or the decline of *dharma* and the simultaneous use of different time reckonings" (2000). Whatever we have just read of time is also applicable to the concept of "history", since history and time are evidently linked. "[H]istory is a narrative of human activities of the past, purported to have happened and narrated in the present. Such narrative has an underlying sense of time: it is sequential, moving from the earliest to the most recent. There is a consciousness of change with conjunctures or disjunctures underlying events. Because time is irreversible, the events of the past cannot be altered" (Thapar, 2000). However, what I want to propose is that the linear form of historical progress was not absolutely absent in the ancient Indian historiography. Historical texts like *Harsacarita* of Banabhatta and *Vikramankadeva-carita* of Bilhana confirm my proposal, as they give detail descriptions of the kings and the quasi-chronological development of their dynasty. Apart from this, with the invasion and settlement of Islamic powers brought radical change in the Indian historiography. Harbans Mukhia writes, "Islam...brought an alternative vision of time in India in the beginning of the thirteenth century; it also brought a different tradition of history-writing. Time in Islam is both eschatological and historical, proceeding along a linear trajectory from creation to the Day of Judgement. Usually locating the birth of the universe at 14000 thousand years ago and that of Adam at 7000 years, Islam envisions time both as eternal as well as discontinuous, a juxtaposition of instants, each finite in the context of an infinite totality, until the moment of judgement" (2000). The eternal return of the cycles are visibly absent in Islam. Further, colonial rule, and after that the rise of

“global economy” in postcolonial India, brought new challenges to the earlier cyclic vision of time and history. In the following sections I will try to locate Rushdie's place in this complex but rich scenario of “history” in India and to discuss critically how he relates to the past. I will show how he deviates from traditional Indian (Hindu?) view of history or where he shows conformity and how Islamic historiography engages him in his literary world, primarily in the art of narrative. My reading will exclusively focus on two novels, *Midnight's Children* and *The Moor's Last Sigh*.

What is quite striking to notice in Rushdie's work is that “history” is not conceived in a circular movement, which also demands an even progress of events. As we have already told that the view of the early Indologists was more or less applicable to an earlier stage of that past in India, when communal or ideological differences were not so distinctively mixed. Now, no single Ideological group can demand that the history of India should exclusively be looked from their perspective, neither one refuse to believe that present is peculiarly heterogeneous. A.K.Coomaraswamy maintains that the genius of ancient Indian culture is that it welcomes all alien traditions although not without a strong sense of its own peculiarity. He writes, “Yet this attitude is the criterion of a strong national genius, and in India, since the beginning of her history, it has been steadily maintained. Never averse to a new idea, no matter what its origin, India has never failed to put each on its trial. Avid of new thought, but jealously reluctant to accept new custom or to essay new expression, she has been slowly constructive, unfalteringly synthetic, from the earliest days to the present time” (2012). Coomaraswamy's approach loses its applicability in the present context of multiculturalism in India. He approaches this issue from the standpoint of a dominant religion. Here, Coomaraswamy gives a brief account of India's two most revered epics Ramayana and Mahabharata, and other Puranas. His approach, therefore, is obviously coloured by a particular religious interest. He believes that Brahmanical tradition could successfully harbour all other religious traditions with a peculiar sense of disinterestedness till the advent of Islam in India: “The fault of Indian conservatism, indeed, has been its tendency to perpetuate differences without assimilation. There has always been room for a stronger race, with its own equipment of custom and ideals, to settle down in the interstices of the Brahmanical civilization, uninfluenced and uninfluencing. To this day Kolkata and Mumbai have their various quarters – Chinese, Burmese, and what not – not one of which contributes to, or receives from, the civic life in the midst of which it is set. To this day the Baniya of India is the Phoenix or Phoenician, perhaps of an older world. But this unmixingness has not been uniform. The personality of Buddha was the source of an impulse of religion to China and half a dozen minor nations. The Gupta Empire represents an epoch in which foreign guests and foreign cultures were as highly welcomed and appreciated in India as today in Europe and America. And finally, only the rise of Islam was effective in ending these long ages of intercourse which have left their traces in the faith and thought of the

Indian people” (2012). One significant ground on which Coomaraswamy's idea of Indian conservatism dwindles in postcolonial India is multiculturalism. In postcolonial India it is not possible to remain uninfluenced by and uninfluencing the other. Instead, what each and every group or community has deeply acquired are both a feeling of oneness with the other and a strong urge to express differential attitude. This multicultural vision of the present comes parallelly with a multilayered vision of the past. What is quite striking in Indian historical consciousness is that here past is never past; it is always present; and no escape is possible from the presence of the past. In his introduction to Ranjan Ghosh's book *A lover's Quarrel with the Past*, Frank Ankersmit draws upon the self-referentiality of past in India. On this ground he makes a distinction between Western and Indian historiographies: “The difference had best be expressed in terms of *referentiality*: in the West accounts of the past – however mythological or whimsical these accounts may sometimes be – all purport to refer to a past reality. The (tacit) assumption always is that there is, or rather has been a past, now outside our reach, but that is referred to in our histories of it. History in India, however, is predominantly *self-referential*. Stories focus here the listener's or the reader's attentions on *themselves* rather than on what they about” (Ghosh, 2012). This explication of different historical outlooks is very interesting. For Western historiography past essentially carries a sense of “pastness” with it, while in India historiography is solely concerned with the always present past, the “presence” of the past. Whereas in the Western historiography text effaces itself by referring to an unattainable truth, Indian historiography usually is influenced by self-referentiality of the historical texts. Apart from this, there is no clear-cut demarcation line between history and myth in India. Indian historical consciousness is stuffed with semi-historical or mythical materials. Here, history does not mean only dry historical facts; rather history, myth, and popular story merge into each other in such a way that both lose their peculiarities. Epics, like *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, which supply at large Indian popular beliefs and myths, are also traditionally regarded as a great contributor to the history of India. To quote Coomaraswamy, “The *Mahabharata* is the result of the greatest of the efforts thus made to conserve in a collected form all the ancient beliefs and traditions of the race. The name *Mahabharata* itself shows that the movement which culminated in the compilation of this great work had behind it a vivid consciousness of the unity of the Bharata or Indian people. For this reason one finds in this work great effort made to present a complete embodiment of the ideals to be found in the social organism, religion, ancient history, mythology, and ethics of the Indian people” (Coomaraswamy, 2012). In India mythology is not only a subject of anthropological/antiquarian research; its presence in the Indian cultural psyche is never exhausted. It has a major function in the formation of cultural representation. To quote Coomaraswamy again: “For, in India, mythology is not a mere subject of antiquarian research and disquisition; here it still permeates the whole life of the people as a

controlling influence. And it is the living mythology which, passing through the stages of representation of successive cosmic process and assuming definite shapes thereafter, has become a powerful factor in the everyday life of the people – it is this living mythology that has found place in the *Mahabharata*” (2012). And who is not familiar with the famous Bengali proverb, “Whatever is not in the *Mahabharata* is not to be found in the land of Bharata [India]”? (Coomaraswamy, 2012). This suggests that in India a strict chronological order is not maintained while representing events of the past. What we have just discussed is a characteristic mark of the narrative technique in Salman Rushdie. He has a peculiar sense of narratology and provides a grotesque terminology to this purpose, “chutnification of history.” The narrator Saleem writes in *Midnight's Children*, “My special blends: I've been saving them up. Symbolic value of the pickling process: all the six hundred million eggs which gave birth to the population of India could fit inside a single, standard-sized pickle-jar; six hundred million spermatozoa could be lifted on a single spoon. Every pickle-jar...contains, therefore, the most exalted possibilities: the feasibility of the chutnification of history; the grand hope of the pickling of time! I, however, have pickled chapters. Tonight, by screwing the lid firmly on to a jar bearing the legend Special Formula No.30: 'Abracadabra', I reach the end of my long-winded autobiography; in words and pickles, I have immortalized my memories, although distortions are inevitable in both methods. We must live, I'm afraid, with the shadows of imperfection” (Rushdie, 2013). Here literature, memory of the past and chutney come together to make this literary autobiography. Grand narrative of history is pulled down to the level of the individual. However, what needs elaboration is the parallel between chutney and history or historiography. In chutney you will not be able to dissociate the taste of one ingredient from the other; it's a product of intensification; all ingredients combine to form a peculiar taste. To quote Saleem's musings on chutnification again: “What is required for chutnification? Raw materials, obviously – fruit, vegetables, fish, vinegar, spices. Daily visits from Koli women with their saris hitched up between their legs. Cucumbers aubergines mint. But also: eyes, blue as ice, which are undeceived by the superficial blandishments of fruit – which can see corruption beneath citrus-skin: fingers which, featheriest touch, can probe the secret inconstant hearts of green tomatoes: and above all a nose capable of discerning the hidden languages of what-must-be-pickled, its humours and messages and emotions....at Braganza Pickles, I supervise the production of Mary's legendary recipes; but there are also my special blends, in which, thanks to the powers of my drained nasal passages, I am able to include memories, dreams, ideas, so that once they enter mass-production all who consume them will know what pepper-pots achieved in Pakistan, or how it felt to be in the Sundarbans...believe don't believe but it's true. Thirty jars stand upon a shelf, waiting to be unleashed upon the amnesiac nation” (Rushdie, 2013). As he calls it in *Imaginary Homelands*, Indian culture is “a rich mixture of traditions – in exclusive, and excluding, Hindu terms” (Rushdie, 1992). In *Midnight's*

Children, Saleem's narrative is a rich mixture of "memories, dreams, ideas" etc., just like "chutney". At the same time Rushdie denies that his story is "history". His aim is to play with "historical shapes" while representing the story of his life. Saleem's task is not to give oracles, although he adopts an oracular language. In *Imaginary Homelands* he writes: "Saleem Sinai is not an oracle; he's only adopting a kind of oracular language. His story is not history, but it plays with historical shapes" (Rushdie, 1992). A more stringent example of this multilayered vision of past as well as presence of the past are the paintings of the later novel *The Moor's Last Sigh*, which Aurora, mother of Moraes Zogoiby, draws, when she is locked in a room by her family for several days, which comes as a punishment after she reveals that she has thrown away ivory-tusks and Ganeshas of her uncle Aires. The narrator, which in turn happens to be Aurora's own son Moraes Zogoiby, notes: "...she had put history on the walls, King Gondophares inviting St Thomas the Apostle to India; and from the North, Emperor Asoka with his Pillars of Law, and the lines of people waiting to stand with their backs against the pillars to see if they could join their hands behind them for good luck; and her versions of erotic temple-carvings, whose explicit details made Camoens blanch, and of the building of the Taj Mahal, after which, as she unflinchingly showed, its great masons were mutilated, their hands cut off, so that they could never build anything finer; and from her own South she has chosen the battle of Srirangapatnam and the sword of Tipu Sultan and the magic fortress of Golconda where a man speaking normally in the gatehouse may be heard clearly in the citadel and the coming long ago of the Jews. Modern history was there too, there were jails full of passionate men, Congress and Muslim League, Nehru Gandhi Jinnah Patel Bose Azad, and British soldiers whispering rumours of an approaching war; and beyond history were the creatures of her fancy, the hybrids, half-woman half-tiger, half-man half-snake, there were sea-monsters and mountain ghouls. In an honoured place was Vasco da Gama himself, setting his first foot on Indian soil, sniffing the air, and seeking out whatever was spicy and hot and made money" (Rushdie, 1997). Events of the past are juxtaposed with events of the present and future. In *Imaginary Homelands*, Rushdie writes, "My India has always been based on ideas of multiplicity, pluralism, hybridity" (1992). What is demanded to handle this rich mixture of ethnic and historical traditions is an equally multidimensional, pluralist and hybrid vision of art or "palimpsest". Ian Buchanan defines that "palimpsest" is "A manuscript written on a piece of any material (paper, parchment, stone, vellum, etc.) which has previously been written on, but whose surface has been cleaned to make way for the new text. Common in the Middle Ages before paper became widely available, today it is generally used as a metaphor for a text with more than one layer of meaning, an allegory for example" (2010). The Moorish paintings of Aurora symbolically forms the scaffold of Rushdie's narrative structure, and if stretched further, his vision of history. We quote J.M. Coetzee to elaborate the palimpsest project further: "Thus Moares is worked into a

series of paintings of 'Mooristan', a place where (in Aurora's free and easy Indo-Joycean English) 'worlds collide, flow in and out of one another, and washofy away...One Universe, one dimension, one country, one dream, bumpo'ing into another, or being under, or on top of. Call it Palimpsestine." (2002)

The Midnight's Children and *The Moor's Last Sigh* illuminate a significant part of Indian conception of history against the background of its genealogical difference from the Western idea of history. At the core of modern Western conception of history is the active participation of man in the process of its linear progress. Man is always at the centre of world phenomena. On the contrary, in traditional Hindu eschatology man is instructed to get over from temporality. A.W. Entwistle notes, "Indifference to the Western conception of history, to the idea that man can be its subject and agent, actively working to change the human condition, is cited as a distinguishing trait of Indian civilisation" (1985). It has always been the case, since all traditional religious literature in India conceives of the phenomenal world as afflict imposed upon the soul. Rushdie's account of Saleem's life goes strongly against this orthodox eschatology. His life is immediately entangled with the history of the nation. Both are like twin brothers. In the "Introduction" to the *Midnight's Children* he writes, "If he [Saleem] and India were to be paired, I would need to tell the story of both twins" (Rushdie, 2013). He is born at midnight, at the precise moment of India's arrival at independence. Saleem writes, "On the stroke of midnight, as a matter of fact. Clock-hands joined palms in respectful greeting as I came. Oh, spell it out, spell it out: at the precise instant of India's arrival at independence, I tumbled forth into the world. There were gasps. And, outside the window, fireworks and crowds. A few seconds later, my father broke his big toe; but his accident was a mere trifle when set beside what had befallen me in that benighted moment, because thanks to the occult tyrannies of those blandly saluting clocks I had been mysteriously handcuffed to history, my destinies indissolubly chained to those of my country. For the next three decades, there was to be no escape" (Rushdie, 2013). What is significant here is that the dialogue between Saleem and history is not a happy one. Since beginning there is a sense of confinement, and consequentially a desire of temporal freedom on the part of Saleem (note 'handcuffed to history'). As if he is involuntarily performing his role in history. His search for form or meaning of his life unexpectedly has resulted in the history of the nation, which he regrets: "...Saleem, ever a striver for meaning, suggested to me that the whole of modern Indian history happened as it did because of him; that history, the life of his nation-twin, was somehow *all his fault*" (Rushdie, 2013). In ancient Indian historiography an incompatible relationship is seen between history (symbolised by temporal scheme) and man. The change in historical events is thought to enthrall the spiritual progress of changeless man, whose only destiny seems to transcend the limitations of time and assert its immortal essence. S. Radhakrishnan once wrote, "The heart of religion is that man truly belongs to another order, and the

meaning of man's life is to be found not in this world but in more than historical reality. His highest aim is release from the historical succession denoted by birth and death" (1967). Entwistle writes, "Integrating oneself in a transcendent, static, timeless, and quiescent wholeness is contrasted with the suffering that arises from being involved in dynamic, creative, but ultimately degenerative time" (1985). Although at first, link with history was a matter of pride for Saleem; congratulatory letter from Nehru was always kept as a token of glory. Soon things start changing leaving him in utter despair; the swift rush of events look unbearable to him. After he returns from the horrible experiences of war-torn Bangladesh, where he becomes a part of the atrocity led by General Tiger Niazi, with the help of magicians Picture Singh and Parvati, who hides him in a basket, a realisation occurred to him, and he realizes the difficulty of being the part of history. The following passage clearly shows how the realisation affects him: "Something was fading in Saleem and something was being born. Fading: an old pride in baby-snaps and framed Nehru-letter; an old determination to espouse, willingly, a prophesied historical role; and also a willingness to make allowances, to understand how parents and strangers might legitimately despise or exile him for his ugliness; mutilated fingers and monks' tonsures no longer seemed like good enough excuse for the way in which he, in fact, everything which I had, until then, blindly accepted: my parents' desire that I should repay their investment in me by becoming great; genius-like-a-shawl; the modes of connection themselves inspired in me a blind, lunging fury. Why me? Why, owing to accidents of birth prophecy, etcetera, must I be responsible for language riots and after-Nehru-who, for pepperpot-revolutions and bombs which annihilated my family? Why should I, Saleem Snotnose, Sniffer, Mapface, Piece-of-the-Moon, accept the blame for what-was-not-done by Pakistani troops in Dacca? ... Why, alone of all the more-than-five-hundred-million, should I have to bear the burden of history?" (Rushdie, 2013) History had produced Saleem and India on 15 Aug, 1947 with the promise of fulfilment, but has now degenerated and with it has taken down the twins too. Within last 24 years the nation fought several wars with the neighbour and corruption has started to break the democratic system. The twin in the meantime has lost his home, his family, his love, even the memory too; apart from this he passes through a traumatic experience in the jungles of Sundarban. A very unsettling relationship between history and man is shown here, which is not very asynchronous with the ancient Indian view of history. In *The Moor's Last Sigh* the cry for an "authentic existence" or a life of singularity (read Heidegger's *Being and Time*) is more palpable. Moraes Zogoiby is crushed under the burden of the mega saga of his "jewholic" (his mother Aurora is a Christian and father Abraham a Jewish) family. Since his birth he has been in a problematic relationship with time ("as a metaphor of history", see Thapar). Born deformed with the right hand as a club and growth two times faster than that of a normal man, Moraes lives through a burning hell. History always haunts him. He is nicknamed "Moor" by his mother after the historical figure of Boabdil

or Muhammad XI, last Sultan of Andalusia, whose Arab-Islamic dynasty in Iberia came to an end by the Catholic Monarchs of Spain in 1492, when he was betrayed by his own court- men. History portrays a sentimental picture of Boabdil, as he was infamously reported to have turned back to his just lost town Granada with tearful eyes and a sigh after he handed over his town to Ferdinand without any battle. It is that he is then reproached by his mother in the following way: "Well may you weep like a woman for what you could not defend like a man." Nevertheless, he suffered another betrayal by his lover, a Jewish exile, who spent a few years with him in his exile but left him stealing his crown and carrying his child in her womb immigrated to India. From this anonymous betrayer descended the famous Zogoiby family. He could never attract fortune as his title "Zogoiby" means "unfortunate". This history recurs in case of Moraes Zogoiby. Whatever once happened to Boabdil now befalls Moraes. This is a return of the mythical world of Alhambra to modern India and vice versa; history returns in the life of Moraes and he fulfils a cyclical action by visiting the earlier Moor's place. He is never sure of his mother's emotional stance; he does not know if ever his mother loved any one, if yes, then who it is; it remains a mystery for him. He is also betrayed by his lover, Uma Sarasvati as she always pretended to love him and hid from him her wretched past life. Apart from this, she also betrayed him when she convinced him to commit suicide together, but intended to give him the poisonous pill while she herself took the fake one. Luckily he survived as she mistakenly took the fatal one. He witnesses the falling down of his family's empire amidst bomb explosions in Bombay and sighs, just like Boabdil before him. He believes that for this downfall no one is responsible except us: "We were both bombers and bombs. The explosions were our own evil – no need to look for foreign explanations, though there was and is evil beyond our frontiers as well as within. We have chopped away our own legs, we engineered our own fall. And now can only weep, at the last, for what we were too enfeebled, too corrupt, too little, too contemptible to defend" (Rushdie, 1997). Like Boabdil he also faces exiles. The famous words of Boabdil's mother to her son after his surrender recur when he fails to save his fellow prisoner Aoi Ue from Vasco Miranda. Pointing gun at him, Miranda says, "Well may you weep like a woman," he told me, "for what you could not defend like a man" (Rushdie, 1997). The history closes when he escapes death and fulfils his historical destiny. As I have already told in the Abstract to this essay, my aim is not to foreground only the divergences, but to show overall how Rushdie's thought or story criss-crosses the sense of history or of past in India.

It is not unexpected that Western historians or Indologists should find incoherence or factual uncertainty in Indian historiography, because Indians relate to their past in a different way from the "logocentric" Western historiography. We have already given a hint of how these two historiographical traditions differ from each other (see discussion of Frank Ankersmit). Since its beginning mere facts were not essential parts of the narration of the past in classical Indian historiography; facts

were always subsided in favour of their meaning or for the sake of story. The Indian counterpart of English “history” is the Sanskrit word “*itihasa*”, which is defined by the translator of Upanishads, Max Muller with the term “*itihasa-purana*” as “the reading of old stories” or “collection of legends and traditions, or the old book of traditions.” “History”, on the other hand, is derived from the Greek word “*historia*”, which means “a learning or knowing by inquiry; an account of one's enquiries, history, record, narrative.” The contrast between the etymological sense of the two historiographical traditions is apparent; while “history” demands factual accuracy, “*itihasa*” is more concerned with stories and myths. Dr. Ranjan Ghosh has elaborately discussed this polarisation of facts and myths: “So polarisation of myth and history and secular distinction between ‘facts’ (and science) and ‘fiction’ (and literature), which are the characteristic features of European modernity, are not integral to early Indian historiography. Much of traditional Indian history has, in fact, been embedded within cultural forms such as myths – forms in which historical consciousness awaits to be prised out – making it, thereby, evident that the factors that have resulted in ‘modern historical consciousness’ were not present in traditional India...the unflinching commitment to the ‘factual’ is nonexistent in (Indian) sub-continental culture. Hindus did not preserve records as diligently as the Chinese did; what the Hindus felt worth preserving was the meaning of events, not a record of when the events took place. It is the particularity and meticulousness of historical details that do not bother the Indians much. They care more for the truth of the experience or the soundness of doctrine than the circumstances that gave it birth” (2012). Nila Shah also emphasises the “conceptual difference between Indian and Western notions of history. [...] Significantly, the idea of history as a linear progression of events, a master narrative with a value of unity, homogeneity, totality, closure and identity has never appealed to the Indian mind nurtured on the concept of *karma* and *dharm[a]*” (Chakrabarti, 2007). To quote Ashish Nandy in this regard, “because they faithfully contain history, because they are contemporary and, unlike history, are amenable to intervention, myths are the essence of a culture, history being at best superfluous and worst misleading” (Chakrabarti, 2007). It is this mythical nature of Indian history what surfaces as a distinguished part of Rushdie's Narrative strategy. Facts were exploited to emphasise native way of storytelling. In *Midnight's Children* not only he flirts with facts, but discloses this flirtation later strangely without any attempt to rectify them. He calls it “unreliable narration” in the collection of his essays *Imaginary Homelands*. In *Midnight's Children* the narrator Saleem says that the story of Ramayana was took down by Ganesha sitting at the feet of the bard Valmiki, although Ganesha performs the work in Mahabharata: it is also a wrong fact given by Saleem that the founding goddess of Bombay Mumbadevi (hence Mumbai) has lost cultural importance in modern city, as she is still worshipped by the people, particularly on Mumbadevi Day. And the list of wrong facts or observation goes on. Then why are all these

mistakes? A great number of reasons follow. One of the most important reasons is that the narrator searches for meaning by writing his life from his memory; he wants to create his own “history”, like all other ancient Indian writers, who were very fond of turning them into living legends by drawing fictional pedigree or their own past lives. In *Imaginary Homelands* Rushdie writes, “Saleem's greatest desire is for what he calls meaning, and near the end of his broken life he sets out to *write himself*, in the hope that by doing so he may achieve the significance that the events of his adulthood have drained from him. He is no dispassionate, disinterested chronicler” (1992). Here, writing is synchronous with “*remembering*”, which most often brings false events to life. What the writer found exhilarating amidst this memory game in the persistence with which his brain has followed the track/ trick of memory. But behind all these is Rushdie's view of how an Indian relates to his or her past. At one point his art of story-telling merges with the hidden principle of India's historical narration of the past. “History is always ambiguous. Facts are hard to establish, and capable of being given many meanings. Reality is built on our prejudices, misconception and ignorance as well as on our perceptiveness and knowledge. The reading of Saleem's unreliable narration might be, I believed, a useful analogy for the way in which we all...attempt to 'read' the world” (Rushdie, 1992). His approach to reality, and thereby back to reality is an obvious departure from the Islamic sense of “history”. In the early days of Islam in Arabia people had a strong concern to preserve written documents like contracts in temples or private shelves. This suggests the amount of importance the early Arabian scholars attached to the authenticity or accuracy of the written documents in an initial stage of Islamic historiography. Gregor Schoeler writes, “The purpose of depositing an important document in a temple or in any other revered site is clear: it draws attention to the nature and character of its content and, more importantly, it confers on the document the status of an authentic, perdurable, reproducible original, one that can be consulted by anyone, at any time” (2009). Mukhia writes, “...medieval [or Islamic] Indian historiography is very strict about the chronological sequence of events, a feature first developed in the Arab tradition. Indeed Arab historians date an event by the year, the month and the day, not failing to take note of even the day of the week of its occurrence....The pervasive cantering of the spread of Muslim power, use of the hijri calendar and a very strict adherence to the chronological sequencing of events are then the defining characteristics of historiography in medieval India” (2000). Rushdie's sense of history is, therefore, radically opposite to Abul Fazl, who records history of the Divine era of Akbar with accuracy and details in *Akbar Nama*. Instead he is more concerned with the “literary representation of history”. Throughout this essay I have tried to show how the Indian idea of “history” or historiography was negatively represented by the Indologists. Together with this, the distinctiveness of the Indian historical consciousness has also been represented here. For Indians “history” is not only history, it is also present. I have also shown

how the narratives of *Midnight's Children* and *The Moor's Last Sigh* show a complex picture of "history", which is quite different from the ancient Indian historiography, even from the view of history that his own religious clan hold, and how *The Moor's Last Sigh* intricately wields historical concepts like "transcendence" and "eternal return". Rushdie, therefore, exhaustingly draws on Indian historical concepts and at the same time endeavours to show that these concepts have been replaced by more complex ones in the present time. Hope I will continue exploring this complex historiographical scenario in India and bring out more junctions where Rushdie encounters "history". Finally, all the conceptual or factual incoherence or any other mistake in this essay befalls as my own responsibility, not of the theoretical traditions or the thinkers I have taken recourse to.

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