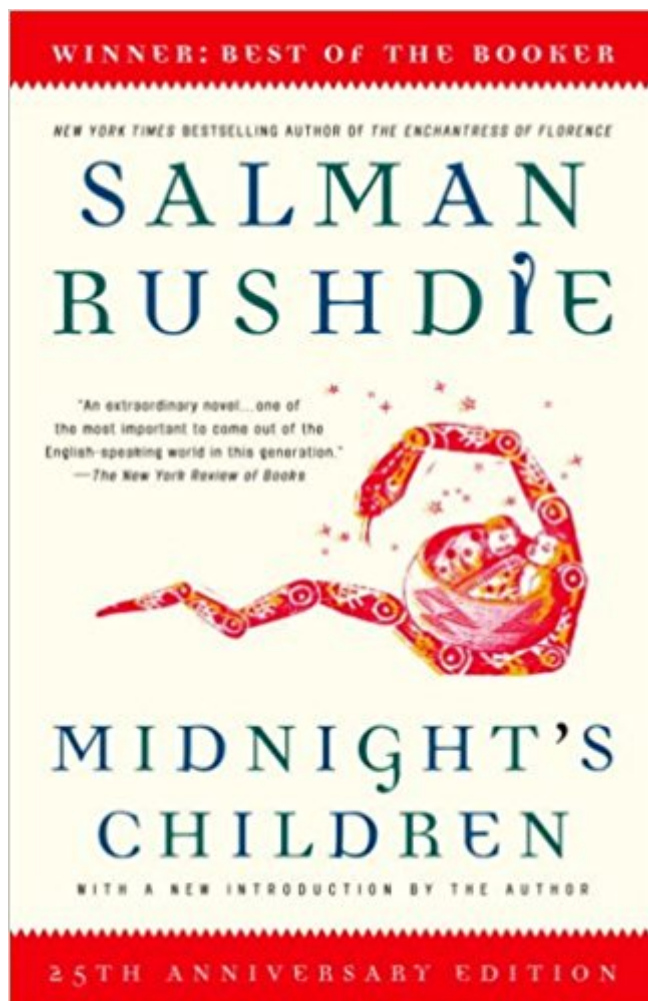


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Midnight's Children: A Novel (Modern Library 100 Best Novels)



Synopsis

Selected by the Modern Library as one of the 100 best novels of all time Winner of the Booker of Bookers Saleem Sinai is born at the stroke of midnight on August 15, 1947, the very moment of India's independence. Greeted by fireworks displays, cheering crowds, and Prime Minister Nehru himself, Saleem grows up to learn the ominous consequences of this coincidence. His every act is mirrored and magnified in events that sway the course of national affairs; his health and well-being are inextricably bound to those of his nation; his life is inseparable, at times indistinguishable, from the history of his country. Perhaps most remarkable are the telepathic powers linking him with India's 1,000 other "midnight children," all born in that initial hour and endowed with magical gifts. This novel is at once a fascinating family saga and an astonishing evocation of a vast land and its people—a brilliant incarnation of the universal human comedy. Twenty-five years after its publication, *Midnight's Children* stands apart as both an epochal work of fiction and a brilliant performance by one of the great literary voices of our time.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Anyone who has spent time in the developing world will know that one of Bombay's claims to fame is the enormous film industry that churns out hundreds of musical fantasies each year. The other, of course, is native son Salman Rushdie--less prolific, perhaps than Bollywood, but in his own way just as fantastical. Though Rushdie's novels lack the requisite six musical numbers that punctuate every

Bombay talkie, they often share basic plot points with their cinematic counterparts. Take, for example, his 1980 Booker Prize-winning *Midnight's Children*: two children born at the stroke of midnight on August 15, 1947--the moment at which India became an independent nation--are switched in the hospital. The infant scion of a wealthy Muslim family is sent to be raised in a Hindu tenement, while the legitimate heir to such squalor ends up establishing squatters' rights to his unlucky hospital mate's luxurious bassinet. Switched babies are standard fare for a Hindi film, and one can't help but feel that Rushdie's world-view--and certainly his sense of the fantastical--has been shaped by the films of his childhood. But whereas the movies, while entertaining, are markedly mediocre, *Midnight's Children* is a masterpiece, brilliant written, wildly unpredictable, hilarious and heartbreaking in equal measure. Rushdie's narrator, Saleem Sinai, is the Hindu child raised by wealthy Muslims. Near the beginning of the novel, he informs us that he is falling apart--literally: I mean quite simply that I have begun to crack all over like an old jug--that my poor body, singular, unlovely, buffeted by too much history, subjected to drainage above and drainage below, mutilated by doors, brained by spittoons, has started coming apart at the seams. In short, I am literally disintegrating, slowly for the moment, although there are signs of an acceleration. In light of this unfortunate physical degeneration, Saleem has decided to write his life story, and, incidentally, that of India's, before he crumbles into "(approximately) six hundred and thirty million particles of anonymous, and necessarily oblivious, dust." It seems that within one hour of midnight on India's independence day, 1,001 children were born. All of those children were endowed with special powers: some can travel through time, for example; one can change gender. Saleem's gift is telepathy, and it is via this power that he discovers the truth of his birth: that he is, in fact, the product of the illicit coupling of an Indian mother and an English father, and has usurped another's place. His gift also reveals the identities of all the other children and the fact that it is in his power to gather them for a "midnight parliament" to save the nation. To do so, however, would lay him open to that other child, christened Shiva, who has grown up to be a brutish killer. Saleem's dilemma plays out against the backdrop of the first years of independence: the partition of India and Pakistan, the ascendancy of "The Widow" Indira Gandhi, war, and, eventually, the imposition of martial law. We've seen this mix of magical thinking and political reality before in the works of Günter Grass and Gabriel García Márquez. What sets Rushdie apart is his mad prose pyrotechnics, the exuberant acrobatics of rhyme and alliteration, pun, wordplay, proper and "Babu" English chasing each other across the page in a dizzying, exhilarating cataract of words. Rushdie can be laugh-out-loud funny, but make no mistake--this is an angry book, and its author's outrage lends his language wings. *Midnight's Children* is Salman Rushdie's irate, affectionate love song to his native

land--not so different from a Bombay talkie, after all. --Alix Wilber --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

“Extraordinary . . . one of the most important [novels] to come out of the English-speaking world in this generation.” The New York Review of Books “The literary map of India is about to be redrawn. . . . Midnight’s Children sounds like a continent finding its voice.” The New York Times “In Salman Rushdie, India has produced a glittering novelist – one with startlingly imaginative and intellectual resources, a master of perpetual storytelling.” The New Yorker “A marvelous epic . . . Rushdie’s prose snaps into playback and flash-forward . . . stopping on images, vistas, and characters of unforgettable presence. Their range is as rich as India herself.” Newsweek “Burgeons with life, with exuberance and fantasy . . . Rushdie is a writer of courage, impressive strength, and sheer stylistic brilliance.” The Washington Post Book World “Pure story – an ebullient, wildly clowning, satirical, descriptively witty charge of energy.” Chicago Sun-Times

A beautiful book. Perhaps one of the most beautiful of all times. Its language gives me the chills; it’s like a slow-paced water that makes its way through every crevice of my brain. I am not a native English speaker, but I’m so glad I learned this language to read *Midnight’s Children*! I don’t think its suave beauty and deep meanings can ever be fully translated!

Throughout Rushdie’s novel the plot is complex and the character’s conflicts rapidly producing. Rushdie displays an amazing talent for writing in this way. The numerous subplots told by Saleem Sinai, the narrator, form an overall character that is relatable with the reader. At times it even seems as if the narrator is speaking directly to the reader by describing his own life and mistakes as simply as if in a one on one conversation. It takes a true master to write this way without producing the impression that the narrator is pointing a finger in the readers face, accusingly or all-knowingly. Rushdie’s style of writing is what, personally, kept me reading. Although the beginning of the book more of resembles a family tree and history book, the information is needed in the long run. After reading through "Book One" of Rushdie’s novel, the book became immensely more interesting. The plot thickened. Tragedy started to befall the world once filled with magical realism. The wonderful *Midnight Child* blessing of powers is shown in a new light. The reader in "Book Two" and "Book

Three" starts to feel the pressure that Saleem feels, as well as even some of the pain. (If the reader decides to commit to the book completely.) All in all, I loved the book. The writing style was fantastic, the characters were relatable, and the plot was complex enough to challenge my own skills. Yes, the book is difficult, but the effort put into reading it is worth every page. However, for any future readers I have some advice: 1) Keep a family tree of the character's relations to each other during "Book One". The tree would help when Saleem makes allusions to his past to explain a certain point or his own personal reaction to an event. 2) Brush up on the Indian Independence and the British-Colonial Rule. Islam and Hinduism knowledge would aid the reader too, but isn't as in demand as the ruling classes and how they stand in the terms of control over their freedom and way of life. Finally--3) Read the book while sitting in a favorite spot. The book's plot is too complex for reading on the bus or a few pages every few days. The reader needs to be totally invested in the book and be willing to put in the time. For all of Rushdie's future readers, enjoy the novel!

Having read the "Satanic Verses" a few years ago I definitely waited too long to pick up "The Midnight's Children". For anybody who can appreciate the literature and prefers a gourmet meal to chicken fried steak- stop reading reviews and start this book right now- it is a masterpiece. BTW - to those who give it three stars or fewer- I can only hope that they write something better and show us what a good novel should be- forgive my sarcasm. Initially the book may not be the easiest to read, as although the story is told mostly in chronological manner, it is interwoven with obscure at the time glimpses of the future. In Rushdie's world everything is connected, no thing is too small or inconsequential. Ideas, objects and small events initially loosely connected shape Saleem's life. As the story develops everything starts coming together, making sense, no longer obscure. Therefore the book becomes easier and easier to read and even more engaging the further you get into it. The reality and fantasy are tied together in this novel- typically for this author, fantasy serves to highlight and magnify the reality. The life of the protagonist, Saleem Sinai is magically tied to the life of the nation as he is born in the exact moment when India is born as a nation independent from the British rule. In the same hour 1000 of other children possessing supernatural abilities are born in India. Some say that the idea of magical children is not fully utilized by the author or perhaps even unnecessary, as the reality of the times is captivating enough. This is debatable, but in any case don't expect the magical children fighting villains, this is not Avengers or Fantastic 4. The extraordinary abilities of the children are more a curse and a source of misfortunes than they are a blessing as the world is not ready for them. Superstition, backwardness of the adults, causes them to pass the suffering on to the children. The adults "make children the vessels into which they pour their

poisons" of unhappiness, prejudice and intolerance. As the protagonist grows up, the insults from surrounding him adults and his own peers are replaced by much worse mayhem unleashed on him and the whole nation by the politicians and tyrants. As such the broken life and body of the midnight's child becomes a mirror of what happens to the fractured nation, divided by languages, religions and political ambitions. In this aspect the novel is a powerful accusation and the author takes no prisoners, historical figures even the reverend ones come under the fire of his literary weapons. Even though the optimism of the people is shown as a disease and completely unjustified the author leaves room for a sliver of hope- symbolized by the little Aadam. The use of visions, prophecies, colors, objects loaded with meanings, historical events and psychological insights along with rich and almost poetic prose create a book that is full of impact and should not be passed.

Despite its rave reviews, the author's writing style or "voice" in which every sentence contains a multiplicity of parenthetical, sometimes extraneous, statements forced me to abandon the novel as slogging through the maze was just too tiring to be enjoyable.

A great (and very Indian) sense of the ridiculous backed by strong descriptive powers. Somehow the most unlikely events become believable in the context of the quality of the writing, which is however somewhat self-indulgent and pleased with itself.

If this is your first time reading a Salman Rushdie book it's definitely a struggle. He will jump right into things and the "magical" aspect of magical realism will confuse you even more. He may jump through time, expect you to know historical contexts, and throw in a significant amount of symbolism. A simpler book in the magical realism genre would be a better first step. Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* is a good read and easier to follow. That said, once you start appreciating his work, it's easy to see why this is one of the best books ever written. The author's prose makes you want to put the book down after a paragraph as each sentence seems to dance to the story he tells.

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