

## Exploring the Impact of Migration and Diaspora in our Nation : Revisiting Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*

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### Abstract

This paper takes a holistic view of the theme of Migration and Diaspora in respect of India. Mass migration from Bangladesh and Nepal to India in the twenty first century and its phenomenal outcome and effect in social and political contexts have emerged with multiplicity of histories, variety of culture and a deep instinct for survival. This paper aims to explore the sense of alienation and rootlessness, identity and historical memory and the dilemma of belongingness. The concept of coming and going is being theorized and immigrants and emigrants are compelled to be aware of the plight. Along with it, the plight and predicament of the native have also been miserable. In this way, my paper focuses on diasporism and migrated literature in search of food and other necessities only for the essence of life. The sole purpose is to depict the actual position of the migrants what they get and lose through their psychological and physical crisis. As an immigrant moves from place to place, his identity becomes hybrid and fluid because of his geographical displacement. Salman Rushdie, an Indian born British novelist has made a deep impression on this explorative theme through his novel *Midnight's Children*. This novel sets the context of search of imaginary homeland through actual history as with historical fiction. Here like Rushdie himself, the protagonist Saleem Sinai wanders among three countries i.e. India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, but is unable to find a proper place to live in. Thus the theme of the novel correlates the rootlessness of the migrated people of our state.

**KEYWORDS:** Migration ,Diaspora, Immigrants, rootlessness, displacement.

#### INTRODUCTION:

Migration is a pattern of population movement in respect of length, composition, or cause, either across an international border or within a state. It comprises the migration of refugees, displaced persons, uprooted people, and economic migrants . Migration is considered an important global issue, as roughly one out of every 55 individuals in the world is a migrant today . With access to modern transportation and telecommunications, more people are motivated and able to move.. According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM),some 192 million people are living outside their place of birth, representing about 3 per cent of the world's population. Undocumented migration is harder to track, but the International Labor Organization (ILO) estimates that there are 15–30 million irregular immigrants internationally.

When migrants integrate and affix broadly within their adopted homeland ,the adopted homeland becomes more diverse and migrants have a better chance of being valued as enriching society and introducing complementary cultural traits. Ground realities in India,

however, indicate that this has not happened and the influx of migrants from Bangladesh and Nepal has raised concerns. For the Indian state, the security implications of large-scale migration from both Bangladesh and Nepal are varied but inter-related. This situation of present migrant people of India is synonymously experienced through world famous writer Salman Rushdie's novel "Midnight's Children".

### **CROSS BORDER MIGRATION : INDIA ,NEPAL & BANGLADESH:**

Cross-border migration is a big challenge for many countries, both in terms of the magnitude and variety of migration patterns and processes. If appropriately managed, migration can greatly benefit the individual as well as his/her source and destination communities. In contrast, poorly managed migration can result in various social,cultural, and economic difficulties, including public health problems such as HIV/AIDs, TB, and malaria.Nevertheless, migration is a natural process during the socioeconomic transformation of a country and can not be stopped without any strong measure, which is not feasible in a democracy . In addition, there is evidence that a city's migrant population makes a significant contribution to its economy, catering to labour demands at lower cost . Although migrants are exposed to new risks, migration in the first instance reduces vulnerability and contributes to a secure livelihood and harvest failure, and food shortage.This desk review was undertaken to synthesize available evidence on programmes, policies, and research related to migrants in the South Asia region, specifically India, Bangladesh, and Nepal.

#### **Nature of Migration : India, Bangladesh, and Nepal**

According to a UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs report (2009), India was projected to rank ninth in terms of number of international migrants in 2010 and to account for 2.5 per cent of all international migrants. The cause behind this basically is that India shares a common border with Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, Myanmar,Nepal, and Pakistan and thus is one of the most sought-after destinations by immigrants. As a result it is evident that there happens huge influx of people from neighbouring countries such as Bangladesh, Nepal, and Tibet. The nature of migration from Bangladesh and Nepal to India has been dissimilar because of their different historical backgrounds, geographical variants, ethno-religious affinities, political systems, and bilateral arrangements with India. It is found that that geographical contiguity, socio cultural affinity, the kinship factor, and historical reasons have left the Indo-Bangladesh and Indo-Nepal borders vulnerable to migration.

India has a 4,097-km border with Bangladesh along the states of Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura, and West Bengal. Of this, only around 1,500 km is fenced, leaving a major portion of the border porous and easy for illegal migration. Bangladeshi migrants are therefore mostly concentrated in Assam and West Bengal. A study highlighted that most Bangladeshi migrants, irrespective of their country of destination, migrated between the ages of 25 and 35 years and spent about half their lives in the host country before returning to their native country.

Similarly, India and Nepal share an open and porous 1,900-km border that runs along the states of Bihar, Sikkim, Uttar Pradesh, and West Bengal. Migration between Nepal and India has been easy because of the open, porous border and strong familial links. According to recent estimates, there are approximately one million Nepalese working in India, and they mostly work as unskilled permanent or seasonal labourers. The survey shows that more than 3.3 per cent of Nepal's total population were out of the country, with more than 77 per cent of those in India. Most Nepalese respondents migrated for the first time between the ages of 16 and 20 years. Several studies have shown that the choice of destination for most Nepali migrants was Mumbai.

### **Reasons for Migration**

Migration is an important livelihood strategy, mainly for the poor in many of the world's poorest countries. Employment opportunities and higher wages were the driving forces for migration from Bangladesh and Nepal to India. The main pull factors for migration were economic opportunities in India. More than 80 percent of respondents in India and 90 per cent of migrant households in Nepal perceived migration to India as beneficial for the family. Other common benefits of migration cited in different studies were better educational opportunities for children, better household/food availability, and ability to afford health services. The social influence of friends and neighbors who are also migrating to India is a pull factor.

Lack of employment and business opportunities at home were reported as main push factors. Bangladeshi migrants chose India because it was cheaper and easier to migrate to than going to another country to earn better wages/income. Poor socioeconomic status, caste-related discrimination, and lack of employment opportunities push large groups of young Dalits to migrate to India for employment.

A study in the Tangail and Chittagong areas of Bangladesh reported high migration propensity in the study areas, with almost every second household having at least one member working overseas. Migration has been practiced for generations, and being a migrant or a family member left behind is for many people not an exception but rather a routine and integral part of their lives. Migration has also been spoken of as a rite of passage—it is almost expected that someone will migrate. In some households in Nepal, every male member of the family had done so.

### **Migration theme correlates Salman Rushdie's "*Midnight's Children*":**

Salman Rushdie throughout his works focuses on the curious position occupied by the migrant or the exile. The central issue is that Rushdie and other postcolonial thinkers believe that the act of migration is one that profoundly changes the individual, transforming the relationship of the migrant with both his or her home country and new host country, and impacting their identity massively as a result. Issues such as "home" and "belonging" are crucial in this sense, as migrants find that their idea of "home" becomes detached from their home country, as they are not allowed to "belong" there

anymore. However, at the same time, they definitely do not "belong" in their host country, and this is often unfortunately manifested through prejudice or racism. However, this new diaspora identity, although it is thought of negatively by many, is actually viewed as potentially a position of strength.

*Midnight's Children*, paved the path for postcolonial literature in India. Rushdie began to decolonize English from the English and his programme is still in furtherance by him as well as from others. Like Salman Rushdie, the protagonist Saleem Sinai wanders among three countries i.e. India, Pakistan and Bangladesh but is unable to find a proper place to live in. *Midnight's Children* is a narrative of displacement and rootlessness that is caused by relocation. Many of its characters are migrants drifting from shore to shore in search of some "imaginary homelands" and obviously, the author identifies himself with his migrant personae.

Diasporic writing captures the two invariables of their experience: exile and homeland. All diasporic literature is an attempt to negotiate between these two polarities. The writings of exiled/immigrant writers undertakes two moves one temporal and one spatial.

Exploding the myth of home Salman Rushdie speaks of "imaginary homelands, Indias of the mind" (IH 10). In the process of searching the homeland, Rushdie as well as his characters lost their roots, routes and identity. All *Midnight's Children*, Saleem, Shiva, Padma, Parvati face a calamity of identity, disintegration of disposition, geographical as well as cultural dislocation.

Cultural displacement has forced the immigrant writers to accept the provisional nature of all truth and certainties. It is almost impossible for migrants to be unable to call to mind his native place and nativity emotionally. Consequently, this displacement constitutes a double identity that is at once singular, plural and partial. In *Imaginary Homelands* Rushdie echoes:

Our identity is at once plural and partial. Sometimes we feel that we straddle two cultures, at other time we fall between two stools. But however, ambiguous and shifting this ground may be it is not an infertile territory for a writer to occupy.

In *Midnight's Children*, he pictures this trauma of fluid identity. In his first migrated country Saleem becomes a dog; a member of the Cutia Unit. Consequently, his body has gone fully numb, the only sense active being his sense of smell, "anvaesthetized against feeling as well as memories" (*Midnight's Children* 353). His fellow soldiers start calling him 'Buddha' because there hung around him an air of great antiquity" (349), though he is twenty four year old at that juncture. Here Saleem Sinai is presented as the microcosm of all the diasporic generation; how they are treated in the newly inhabited territories; how the venom is thrown upon them and the current example of this venom throwing is Australia. Saleem, being the mouthpiece of his creator, expresses the feelings that Rushdie feels while living in an adopted land.

The same identical crisis and psychological gap of Saleem Sinai is experienced in consequent those of migrated people of Nepal ,Bangladesh and India .As such of Sinai 's family , the Nepalese and Bangladeshi suffer from their traumatic ambiguity and nostalgic numbness in their mind and soul . The characters of the novel migrate to the other states or other country experiencing identical crisis as the characters of our today's

migrated people included to Nepal ,Bangladesh or India. Rushdie's "Midnight's Children "is really the reflective microcosm of rootlessness and familial traumatic crisis of modern migrational phenomena of our today's India. Both emotional and physical dislocation and cultural disintegration feed both in Rushdie's society and our India's migrated society .

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