ROLE OF NATIVE OR NARRATEE IN RUSHDIE’S MIDNIGHT’S CHILDREN

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ABSTRACT

The narratee, the imagined person whom the narrator is assumed to be addressing in a given narrative. The narratee is a notional figure within the ‘space’ of the text itself, and is thus not to be confused either with the real reader or with the implied reader (who is addressed by the implied author at a separate ‘level’). Narratees are often hard to identify clearly, since they are not usually described or characterized explicitly. In some works, though, they appear as minor characters, especially in a frame story (e.g. the Wedding Guest in Coleridge’s ‘The Rime of the Ancient Mariner’), and in some they even function as narrators as well: Lockwood, the narratee of Nelly’s embedded narratives in Wuthering Heights, is the narrator of the story as a whole. Whereas Rushdie has employed Padma to whom the Sutradhar (narrator) Salim narrates his story. Having Salim tell Padma helps Rushdie simulate the story telling situation he wishes to create at the same time, it is very clear that Salim is writing down the story, which Padma cannot read. The use Padma is an excellent strategy.

Keywords: Notional; Implied; Explicitly

INTRODUCTION

Padma is the narratee or audience for Saleem as well his beloved. As a beloved, she is assertive and demanding and coming from the working class, her liaison with Saleem symbolically represents the ideal of “marriage” of the classes. As one who comes from the working class, Padma has few inhibitions and speaks openly on all matters with Saleem, including taunting him about his “useless another pencil”. Saleem is attracted to her inspite of her emotional outbursts against his ineffectiveness as a lover and narrator. As Saleem’s narratee she is an index for the way the reader responds to his story, much like King Sharyar in A Thousand and One Nights to Scherherazade’s tales. Both the teller and these tales are explicitly mentioned in the novel so as to recall them reference point for the reader.

Despite their uneasy relationship she and Saleem have great personal chemistry. One can’t do without the other. Padma briefly disappears from Saleem’s life (but not from his narrative) because he keeps talking of her) over a disagreement regarding Saleem’s use of words into “love” to describe her feelings towards him. Saleem’s pronouncement—“I know that[Padma]is… hooked…My story has a by the throat ”(38)

is borne out when Padma does return to his side to fulfill her role as his as he narrates and confidante. And also Saleem is constantly tailoring his narrative to retain Padma’s interest. As Nancy Betty points out his efforts are very much “ like a lover engaged in sexual conquest”. He doesn’t want her to desert him. So, he keeps her “hooked” to his story by adjusting his narrative strategies so that he keeps getting the right response from her. Padma does several things at once first of all, she is still rooted in the story-telling tradition from which Saleem has been uprooted. She naturally expects Saleem’s story to follow the rules of all other stories she has heard before. However, she has no clue as to how novels
are written. This gives Saleem the perfect opening for giving her a lecture on how novels should be written. More important, Saleem is as much a bablog as Rushdie or the readers. The story Saleem writes “in an angloposed pool of light” might stretch the credibility of his anglicized readers. Padma, however, fits totally in the miracle laden universe. Saleem as well as Rushdie are always a bit hesitant in the presence of the incredible. Padma’s love for superstitions however, co-exists with “a down-to-earthery”.

Padma stands for the view of the ordinary uneducated Indian people who do not question the marvelous the same way as anglicized Indians do. Rushdie and Saleem both need a Padma character to make marvelous events in the novel credible. The gap between the Saleem’s consciousness and Padma’s consciousness also shows how Saleem is distanced from the knowledge system of his people. Saleem valiantly attempts to enter Padma’s world, which he almost does by marrying her in the end.

OBJECTIVES

1. To discuss the critical concept of characters and characterization in Midnight's Children.
2. To understand how Midnight's Children demonstrates Rushdie's characterization borrowed from oral narratives.
3. To understand the role or importance of a common spectator / reader / audience / listener / narrate / nati.
4. To acquire the critical perspective of Padma as a character and narratee who helps unfolding Rushdie's novel.

CONCLUSION

Padma represents a lively and spirited woman, a loyal friend with a carefree, untamed nature. She adds depth to the narrative by her queries and responses in a way which is very different from the way characters in western fiction do. Padma is indispensable to the novel because she is his Nati, the live interactive audience of an oral narrative who both listens and creates a traditional story teller’s tale.

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