

JRF SPECIAL PDF

Salman Rushdie

1 Rushdie's Biography

1.1 Who He Was

Salman Rushdie is an **Indian-born British-American novelist**, the most celebrated writer of **postcolonial** and **postmodern** Indian English fiction. He is best known for **magic realism** – a style that blends fantastic, supernatural events into a realistic setting, treating the magical as if it were perfectly ordinary. His novels mix **history, memory, and fantasy**, use **fragmented, non-linear narration**, and play with the idea of the **unreliable narrator**.

CONCEPT **What is magic realism?** A narrative style in which magical or supernatural elements appear inside an otherwise realistic world and are accepted as normal. In Rushdie, this means telepathic children or relics with strange powers placed amid real Indian history. The other great name in the genre is the Colombian novelist **Gabriel**

García Márquez, whose *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967) is its most famous example.

1.2 Birth, Family, and Career

Detail	Information
Born	1947 , in Bombay (Mumbai), a few months before India's independence
Nationality	British citizen born in India; later British-American
Education	Cambridge University
Early work	Writer for TV in Pakistan; later an advertising copywriter in England
Period	Contemporary; postcolonial / postmodern

Rushdie was born in **Bombay in 1947** and educated at **Cambridge University**. He worked briefly writing for television in Pakistan, then returned to England and worked at an **advertising agency**. In **1983** he was elected a Fellow of the **Royal Society of Literature**. France made him a **Commandeur de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres** in 1999, and in **2007 Queen Elizabeth II knighted him** for his services to literature.

1.3 The Kind of Writer He Was

Rushdie belongs with **postmodern British writers** such as **Angela Carter** and **Jeanette Winterson**. Their shared hallmark is the use of **fragmented narrative structures with multiple shifts in consciousness, chronology, and location** — storytelling that jumps about in time, place, and

point of view rather than running in a straight line. Rushdie's fiction also reaches constantly across cultures, mixing **East and West**, Indian myth with European ideas.

His new narrative style in English was shaped by an earlier Indian novel: **G.V. Desani's *All About H. Hatterr*** (1948), whose playful, inventive mixing of English with Indian vernaculars influenced Rushdie's own experiments with language.

CONCEPT

Why is he important? Rushdie made Indian English fiction a global force. *Midnight's Children* won the **Booker Prize** and remade how writers tell national history through personal story. He is grouped with the writers who **deconstruct traditional notions of history and subjectivity**, showing how memory and narrative shape our sense of the past.

2 Important Works

Work	Approx. Date	Genre	Significance
<i>Grimus</i>	1975	Fantasy / science fiction	His debut novel ; Flapping Eagle's quest for immortality
<i>Midnight's Children</i>	1981	Magic-realist novel	His magnum opus ; Booker Prize ; " Booker of Bookers "

Work	Approx. Date	Genre	Significance
<i>Shame</i>	1983	Magic-realist novel	Set in a fictional Pakistan; Sufiya Zinobia and Omar Khayyám
<i>The Satanic Verses</i>	1988	Novel	Caused the fatwa ; won the Whitbread Award
<i>The Moor's Last Sigh</i>	1995	Family-saga novel	Four-generation Bombay saga; a response to the Ayodhya demolition
<i>The Ground Beneath Her Feet</i>	1999	Novel	The Orpheus and Eurydice myth set in the world of rock music
<i>Fury</i>	2001	Novel	Malik Solanka's rage and alienation in New York
<i>Shalimar the Clown</i>	2005	Novel	A Kashmiri tightrope-walker turned assassin
<i>The Enchantress of Florence</i>	2008	Historical novel	Links Akbar's Mughal court with Renaissance Florence
<i>Two Years Eight Months and Twenty-Eight Nights</i>	2015	Fantasy novel	The Jinn in a future New York; nods to the <i>1,001 Nights</i>
<i>Joseph Anton</i>	2012	Memoir	His account of life under the fatwa

Work	Approx. Date	Genre	Significance
<i>Knife</i>	2024	Memoir	Reflects on surviving the 2022 attack on his life
<i>Haroun and the Sea of Stories</i>	1990	Children's fable	A boy's quest to restore his father's gift of storytelling
"The Prophet's Hair"	1981	Short story	A magic-realist tale of a sacred relic
"Imaginary Homelands"	1991	Essay	The migrant writer recreating a lost India of the mind

CONCEPT

Order they were published: *Grimus* (1975) → *Midnight's Children* (1981) → *Shame* (1983) → *The Satanic Verses* (1988) → *The Moor's Last Sigh* (1995) → *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* (1999) → *Fury* (2001) → *Shalimar the Clown* (2005) → *The Enchantress of Florence* (2008). *Grimus* is the earliest and *Fury* the latest of this set.

3 Important Works in Detail

Midnight's Children, his masterpiece, is covered on its own in Section 4.

3.1 *Grimus* (1975)

In one line: Rushdie's debut — a young man drinks a magic liquid, gains immortality, and journeys to a strange island

in search of his sister.

Grimus is Rushdie's **debut novel**, a blend of **fantasy and science fiction**. Its hero is a young Indian named **Flapping Eagle**, who becomes **immortal** after drinking a magic liquid. For **777 years, 7 months, and 7 days** he wanders the world, trying out different lives and searching for his immortal sister, until he falls into the **Mediterranean Sea**.

He washes up in another world, on **Calf Island**, home to immortals who are weary of ordinary life but refuse to give up their immortality, all ruled by a strict authority.

EXAM ESSENTIAL

- Rushdie's **debut novel** (1975); a **fantasy and science-fiction** blend.
- The hero is **Flapping Eagle**, who seeks immortality and his lost sister.

3.2 Shame (1983)

In one line: a magic-realist tale set in a thinly disguised Pakistan, built around the linked lives of Omar Khayyám and Sufiya Zinobia.

Shame is a work of **magic realism** set in a fictional version of **Pakistan**. It centres on **Sufiya Zinobia** and **Omar Khayyám**, in a town called **Q** — standing for **Quetta**. Omar Khayyám Shakil is raised by **three sisters — Chunni, Munnee, and Bunny** — who all behave as his mother, so that no one is ever told which of them truly gave birth to him.

EXAM ESSENTIAL

- A **magic-realist** novel set in a fictionalised **Pakistan**.
- Main figures: **Sufiya Zinobia** and **Omar Khayyám**; the town **Q.** stands for **Quetta**.

3.3 The Satanic Verses (1988)

In one line: two Indian actors survive a plane explosion and are transformed — one angelic, one devilish — in a novel whose treatment of Islam triggered a worldwide controversy.

The novel reworks an old story about the **Prophet Muhammad**, in which the devil is said to have tricked him into adding false verses to the Qur'an. In Rushdie's invented version, the prophet-figure is named **Mahound**, and the religion he founds is called **Submission**; under social and political pressure, Mahound utters untruths to gain power and fame. The book is divided into **nine parts**, alternating this main story with recurring dream-sequences.

Its central pair are two Indian actors, **Gibreel Farishta** and **Saladin Chamcha**, who survive a plane explosion but are changed afterwards: **Farishta** takes on an **angelic** appearance, **Chamcha** a **devilish** one. The transformations are ironic — Farishta's halo hides his rage, while Chamcha's demonic look reflects his shame at his Indian roots. By the end, **Chamcha accepts the mixed identity** he had once rejected.

CONCEPT

The fatwa controversy: the novel's treatment of Islam was held to be blasphemous. In **1989 Ayatollah Khomeini of Iran issued a *fatwa*** — a religious edict — calling for Rushdie's death, forcing him into hiding for years under police protection. India, fearing unrest, was the **first country to ban the book's import** under the Rajiv Gandhi government.

EXAM ESSENTIAL

- The prophet-figure is **Mahound**, who founds a religion named **Submission**; the book has **nine parts**.
- The two transformed actors are **Gibreel Farishta** (angelic) and **Saladin Chamcha** (devilish).
- Its publication led to **Khomeini's 1989 fatwa**; the **Indian government banned** its import.
- It won the **Whitbread Award** for novel of the year (1988).

3.4 The Moor's Last Sigh (1995)

In one line: a four-generation Bombay family saga, narrated by a man who ages at double speed, set against India's communal tensions.

Set in the Indian cities of **Bombay** and **Cochin**, the novel spans more than **four generations** of a family descended from the Portuguese explorer **Vasco da Gama**. Its narrator is **Moraes Zogoiby**, called "**the Moor**," who suffers a strange affliction: he **ages twice as fast** as everyone else and is born with a deformed hand, so that at thirty-six his body is already like a man of seventy-two, near death.

Much of the story turns on the Moor's relationships with the women in his life — above all his painter mother, **Aurora**, and his first love, **Uma the sculptor**. The title carries a double meaning: it recalls the sigh of **Muhammad XI (Boabdil)**, the last Moorish ruler of Spain, defeated and weeping as he left Granada, and it echoes Shakespeare's **Othello**, the Moor of Venice.

The novel is a **political and historical** work about **religious intolerance** and the breakdown of social harmony in India, set against contemporary events including the **1992 Ayodhya demolition**. Alongside **Taslima Nasreen's Lajja**, it was one of the two controversial literary responses to that event.

CONCEPT

Macaulay in the novel: *The Moor's Last Sigh* contains a reference to **Thomas Babington Macaulay**, author of the infamous **Minute of 1835** on Indian education. Bringing in this colonial figure lets Rushdie tie the family's story to the long legacy of British rule in India.

EXAM ESSENTIAL

- Narrator = **Moraes Zogoiby**, "the Moor," who **ages at double speed**; set in **Bombay** and **Cochin**.
- The title refers to **Muhammad XI**, last Moorish king of Spain, and echoes Shakespeare's **Othello**.
- A response to the **1992 Ayodhya demolition**, paired with **Taslima Nasreen's Lajja**.
- It mentions **Thomas Babington Macaulay**, writer of the **Minute of 1835**.

- It won the **Whitbread Prize** for Best Novel (1995).

3.5 The Ground Beneath Her Feet (1999)

In one line: a retelling of the Orpheus and Eurydice myth in which rock music replaces the lyre, following two lovers across a global stage.

The novel reimagines the Greek myth of **Orpheus and Eurydice**, but in place of the lyre — Orpheus's stringed instrument — the central art is **rock music**. It follows the singer **Vina Apsara**, who dies in a great **earthquake**, and her lover **Ormus Cama**, who uses music to keep her memory alive and feel close to her.

Spanning Western and postcolonial cultures, the book mixes **East and West**, drawing on Greek myth, European thought, and modern writers. **Toni Morrison** described it as a "**global novel**."

EXAM ESSENTIAL

- A reworking of the **Orpheus and Eurydice** myth, with **rock music** at its centre.
- Lovers **Vina Apsara** (dies in an earthquake) and **Ormus Cama**; **Toni Morrison** called it a "**global novel**."

3.6 The Enchantress of Florence (2008)

In one line: a European traveller arrives at Akbar's Mughal court claiming kinship, in a novel weaving together Renaissance Florence and Mughal India.

A **historical novel** built on **magic realism**, set in both the **Mughal Empire** and Renaissance **Florence**. A European traveller comes to the court of **Emperor Akbar**, claiming to be his relative and saying his parents came from India and Italy. The book is rich in sex and romance, centred on the **Enchantress**, a figure inspired by the Renaissance poem **Orlando Furioso**. Its characters debate **humanism** and the value of open argument over rule by a strongman, and the Italian thinker **Machiavelli** appears among them. Rushdie called it his "**most researched book**."

EXAM ESSENTIAL

- Set in **Akbar's** Mughal court and Renaissance **Florence**; blends history with **magic realism**.
- The **Enchantress** is inspired by *Orlando Furioso*; Rushdie called it his "**most researched book**."

3.7 Other Works

In one line: the further fiction, the children's fable, the short story, and the essay that round out Rushdie's range.

Fury (2001) is set in **New York** and follows **Malik Solanka**, a former academic struggling with inner rage, violence, and alienation. **Shalimar the Clown** (2005) takes its name from the **Shalimar Gardens** near Srinagar and from its central figure, a Kashmiri villager called **Shalimar** who performs as a **tightrope-walker**. **Two Years Eight Months and Twenty-Eight Nights** (2015) is a **fantasy** set in a future **New York City**, where a storm reveals that strange forces belong to

the **Jinn**; its title (which adds up to **1,001 nights**) nods to the *Arabian Nights*.

Haroun and the Sea of Stories (1990) is Rushdie's **children's fable**, written for his son, about a boy who journeys to restore his storyteller father's lost gift. "**The Prophet's Hair**" is a **magic-realist short story** about a sacred relic and the transformations it works on those who possess it. **Knife: Meditations After an Attempted Murder** (2024) is the **memoir** in which Rushdie reflects on surviving the **2022 attack** that nearly killed him.

CONCEPT

"Imaginary Homelands": the title essay of Rushdie's 1991 collection. He argues that the migrant writer, cut off from the homeland, can only build "**imaginary homelands, Indias of the mind**" — recreating a lost country from fragments of memory. The essay is a key statement of his views on **migration, memory, and the writer's relation to the past**.

4 Midnight's Children

This is Rushdie's magnum opus and his most important work, so we will study it carefully.

4.1 The Big Idea

In one line: a boy born at the exact moment of India's independence finds his life magically bound to the fate of the new nation.

Midnight's Children (1981) is a **postcolonial, postmodern, magic-realist** novel about India's passage from British colonial rule to **independence and Partition**. It is a **semi-autobiographical** account of the night of **14–15 August 1947**, when India "awakened to freedom." The narrator and hero, **Saleem Sinai**, is **born at the stroke of midnight** as India becomes independent, and his life runs in parallel with the history of the nation.

This is the novel that won Rushdie the **Booker Prize** in **1981**. It is held up as the classic example of **postmodernism** in fiction for its **magic realism**, its non-linear timeline, and its **unreliable narrator** — Saleem himself.

CONCEPT

"Chutnification" of history: Rushdie's own image for what the novel does. Saleem ends up working in a **pickle factory**, and he likens his storytelling to **pickling, or "chutnifying," the past** — preserving memory in jars, spiced and reshaped rather than kept "factually" pure. The term names the novel's blending of personal memory with national history.

4.2
Key Numbers and Facts

Item	Detail
Published	1981
Born at midnight	Saleem Sinai , on 15 August 1947
Children born that night	1,001 , of whom only 581 survive

Item	Detail
Saleem's powers	Telepathy , then (after an operation) a powerful sense of smell
Major prizes	Booker Prize (1981); " Booker of Bookers " (1993)
Genres	Postcolonial, postmodern , magic realism

CONCEPT

What is the "Booker of Bookers"? A special award given in **1993** to mark the **25th anniversary** of the Booker Prize, naming the best of all winners so far. *Midnight's Children* won it, confirming its status as the outstanding Booker novel. (A later "Best of the Booker" vote in 2008 again chose it.)

4.3 The Story

The book opens with **Saleem Sinai**, now **thirty-one** and fearing his body is failing, deciding to tell his life story to **Padma**, his listener and companion. He reaches back to **Kashmir in 1915**, before his own birth, to his grandfather **Aadam Aziz**, a German-trained doctor who first sees his future wife **Naseem** only piece by piece, through a perforated sheet, as he treats her, and marries her after finally seeing her face in 1918.

The family moves to **Agra**; their daughter **Mumtaz** marries, is left by her first husband, then weds **Ahmed Sinai** and takes the name **Amina**. In **Bombay**, on the night of independence, two boys are born in the same nursing home. A nurse, **Mary Pereira**, **swaps the two babies' name-tags**, so the child raised as Saleem by Amina and Ahmed is not in fact their son — their real child is **Shiva**. Every child

born across India in that midnight hour has a magic gift: Saleem has **telepathy**, and can hear and gather the other "midnight's children" in his mind; Shiva has miraculous strength in his knees.

After a blood transfusion reveals he cannot be his parents' child, Saleem is sent away. The family moves between India and **Pakistan**; a nose operation cures Saleem's sinuses but **destroys his telepathy**, leaving him instead with an extraordinary sense of **smell**. An explosion kills his parents and wipes his memory. He joins the **Pakistan army**, which uses his nose to track people, and fights in the jungle during the **1971 Bangladesh war**, where his memory returns and his whole unit dies but him.

Back in India, he reconnects with **Parvati**, another of the midnight's children, and finally marries her to give a father to the child she has conceived by **Shiva**. Under **Indira Gandhi** and the **Emergency**, the midnight's children are rounded up; with Shiva's help Saleem is seized and made to give up their names, and their powers are taken from them. Parvati dies in childbirth. At the end Saleem, running a **pickle factory** in Bombay, marries **Padma**, tells her his story — and dies on his **thirty-first birthday**, on India's Independence Day, exactly as foretold.

4.4 The Characters

Saleem Sinai

- The **narrator and protagonist**, born at the **stroke of midnight on 15 August 1947**
- Gifted first with **telepathy**, later with a powerful sense of **smell**

- His life is **bound to the nation's**; he dies on his **31st birthday**, as predicted

Shiva

- The **real son** of Amina and Ahmed, **swapped at birth** with Saleem
- Has magical strength in his **knees**; grows into Saleem's rival
- Fathers the child that Saleem will raise

Padma

- Saleem's **listener and companion**, to whom he narrates the whole story
- A grounding, earthy presence — associated with the "**tastes and smells**" of the novel; he marries her at the end

Aadam Aziz

- Saleem's **grandfather**, a doctor trained in **Germany**
- Courts **Naseem** through a perforated sheet; the family saga begins with him in **Kashmir, 1915**

Amina (Mumtaz) and Ahmed Sinai

- The couple who **raise Saleem** as their own, not knowing of the swap
- **Amina** is Aadam's daughter, renamed on her marriage to **Ahmed**

Mary Pereira

- The **nurse who swaps the babies' name-tags**, changing both boys' destinies

- Remorseful afterwards, she becomes a devoted carer to Saleem; later runs the **pickle factory**

Parvati

- One of the **midnight's children**, with magical powers
- Helps Saleem return to India and marries him; dies giving birth to Shiva's child

CONCEPT

Most-quoted lines: two lines capture the book's spirit. "*To understand just one life, you have to swallow the world*" — meaning a single life cannot be told without the whole history around it; and "*Most of what matters in our lives takes place in our absence*" — that the forces shaping us are often set in motion before we arrive or beyond our sight.

5 Criticism

Critic / Source	What they said
Booker Prize jury (1993)	Named <i>Midnight's Children</i> the " Booker of Bookers ," best winner in 25 years.
Toni Morrison	Called <i>The Ground Beneath Her Feet</i> a " global novel ."
G.V. Desani (influence)	His <i>All About H. Hatterr</i> shaped Rushdie's experimental narrative style in English .
Ayatollah Khomeini	Issued the 1989 fatwa against Rushdie over <i>The Satanic Verses</i> .

CONCEPT

Rushdie among the postmodernists: critics group Rushdie with **Angela Carter** and **Jeanette Winterson** as **postmodern British writers**, sharing the use of **fragmented narrative with shifts in consciousness, chronology, and location**. *Midnight's Children* is regularly set beside **John Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman*** and **Graham Swift's *Waterland*** as a novel that **deconstructs traditional notions of history and subjectivity**.