

Posthumanism and Artificial Intelligence in Salman Rushdie's Selected Novels

OPEN ACCESS

Volume: 13

Special Issue: 1

Month: August

Year: 2025

P-ISSN: 2321-788X

E-ISSN: 2582-0397

Citation:

Vigneshwaran, C.
"Posthumanism and Artificial Intelligence in Salman Rushdie's Selected Novels." *Shanlax International Journal of Arts and Science Humanities*, vol. 13, no. S1, 2025, pp. 18–22.

DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.34293/sijash.v13iS1i2-Aug.9690>

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Abstract

This paper explores the intersection of post humanist theory with Salman Rushdie's novels Quichotte and Midnight's Children, examining how both works address important posthuman issues like the decentring of the human, the blurring of binary distinctions, and the revolutionary impact of ideology and technology. Quichotte incorporates AI's epistemological effect into its structure and themes, while Midnight's Children uses Saleem Sinai's fractured identity during political unrest to allegorize the posthuman situation. In an era characterized by algorithmic mediation, technological entanglement, and the breakdown of solid ideas of self and reality, the research contends that Rushdie's writing provides a literary framework for comprehending posthuman identity.

Keywords: Western Humanism, Posthuman, Consequences, Postmodern, Philosophical, Technological and Identity

The term "posthumanism" refers to a variety of modern theoretical stances advanced with backgrounds in theoretical sociology, literary studies, philosophy, science and technology studies, critical theory, and communication studies. Posthumanism refers to a number of departures from the fundamental tenets of contemporary Western civilization, particularly a fresh perspective on the human condition in connection to the natural world as a whole. It aims to erode the established distinctions between the technological, animal, and human realms. The term "Prometheus as Performer: Towards a Post humanist Culture?" was first used by postmodern thinker Ihab Hassan, who also provided a groundbreaking definition in an article published in 1977. Related words include the transhuman and the antihuman, each with its own theoretical intricacies.

Posthumanism's rejection of conventional Western humanism is one of its characteristics. While the word humanism itself can refer to a broad range of disciplinary commitments and presumptions that have evolved over centuries from the early Renaissance to the late 20th century, post humanist scholars concentrate on a few essential traits: most importantly, the idea that the proper study of man is man. The distinction between nonhuman creatures and humans is another line that Haraway and other post humanists are concerned in erasing. They believe that the stress on an insurmountable divide between humans and animals is a fundamental aspect of humanism. The dominant Cartesian tradition of dualism maintained that animals

were only extremely complex machines, a component of the material world competing with the mental realm, and that human cognition constituted the essence of the human.

The posthuman frequently draws from and develops from theoretical underpinnings of the postmodern and post structural frame of thought, applying a variety of perspectives that may have a feminist, postcolonial, psychoanalytic, or other origins, and challenging these in relation to the idea of the Other as a non-human being or entity, that is, the construction of self in relation to the Other and into some form of Other. With this approach, they disassociate themselves from anthropocentric notions of culture and society, arguing that many widely held dualities—such as male versus female, true against false, body versus mind, human versus non-human, nature versus culture, etc.—need to be reviewed.

Many theorists support a favourable and hopeful perspective of the symbiosis between humans and machines; it should be noted that some of them consider such changes as abnormal and even disastrous when it comes to the topic of consequences. Katherine Hayles, for instance, highlights the positive aspects of the posthuman situation, particularly those that pertain to the developmental potential that emerges from it and creates avenues for living with flawless machine intelligence. The posthuman subject, according to Hayles, is a collection of diverse aspects that are more likely to enhance the human element than completely replace it.

This focused description highlights another significant aspect that defines posthumanism more broadly. It relates to the various fields that are interested in it, including philosophy, sociology, and cultural studies, as well as the fields that can offer tangible incentives for additional research on the subject, including biology, neuroscience, biotechnology, veterinary medicine, computer sciences, and others. There is a noticeable tendency to abandon Cartesian dualism in favour of a more materialistic perspective, with emphasis on how all these fields frequently intersect and blend.

Once the focus of speculative fiction, artificial intelligence today commands a prominent place in intellectual, technological, and cultural conversation. Its impact is seen in almost every facet of contemporary life, from how we perceive reality, truth, and identity to how we build relationships and consume information. Literature has developed to reflect and examine the growing role of algorithms in mediating human experiences through recommendation systems, platforms, and simulated encounters. Though frequently depicted directly—as sentient machines, robots, or dystopian futures—AI's more subtly pernicious impact is revealed in stories that investigate how human consciousness is altered in surroundings that are heavily reliant on technology and algorithmic filtering.

Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* is composed of postmodern Indian literature written in English. It is important to note that the English-language Indian novel is very different from Western novels. It employs realism at first and later on, magical realism as well. This is a distinctive feature that comes from the Indian tradition and cultural context from which the authors evolved.

A postcolonial critical perspective on *Midnight's Children*. Even the novel's explicit plane, which addresses topics like Great Britain's political and historical engagement in India, India's liberation journey, the place of Hinduism in Indian society, etc., justifies the viewpoint that critics have taken. Moreover, the novel's central incident coincides with one of the most important anniversaries in Indian history: August 15, 1947, the day of India's long-awaited independence. Saleem Sinai, the main character of Rushdie's novel, was born on this day, at one minute after midnight. The revolutionary heritage of apocalyptic nationalism, which serves as a framework for the character's reporting on the Indian freedom movement, defines Saleem Sinai. His inner conflict aligns with the political events occurring in the country, which are further compounded by the authenticity question raised by the fact that two boys, Saleem and Sheeva, were switched at

birth. Therefore, Saleem's leadership of the midnight children is an accident, and he must bear the consequences of the prime minister's letter.

It is impossible to deny, though, that politics does serve as a catalyst for the human breakdown of Saleem as a literary figure and a symbol of postmodernity. This places him in the company of other characters in world literature who, in various ways, illustrate the potential outcomes of various processes of human transformation that appear to be typical of a modern frame. In fact, these cases undermine the illusion of unhindered human development in the era of globalization by highlighting politics and technology as the main sources of unease and anxiety in contemporary societies. Whether as a result of technology or their political beliefs, these people stumble through life, detaching themselves from the meanings associated with cultural and human concepts and becoming transhuman.

Saleem represents humanity's limits, highlighting the problems with the status quo and the state's inability to address them. Only humanity itself appears to be able to escape the unavoidable state, and characters within the fictional universe escape by slipping into a sort of post-condition. In terms of theme, style, and structure, *Midnight's Children* can be viewed in three ways at least: as a family saga, the story opens with Saleem's grandfather's memories and other significant events in his family's history; as a historical account, Saleem's life reflects his country's struggles in many ways; and, lastly, and perhaps most pertinently from the perspective of this discussion, as a psychological study of an individual, Saleem's personality and his perception of reality. Being born after midnight on August 15, 1947, Saleem is also the leader of all children who remember ugliness; this aspect of the book makes it difficult to categorize in a precise way. This takes Rushdie toward coquetry with the bizarre, the imaginative, and dreams, of which the author is well aware, based on the phrases that follow:

"So: there were knees and a nose, a nose and knees. In fact, all over the new India, the dream we all shared, children were being born who were only partially the offspring of their parents—the children of midnight were also the children "of the time": fathered, you understand, by history. It can happen. Especially in a country which is itself a sort of dream." (Midnight's Children pp. 158).

Decentring the human as the sole indicator of meaning, intelligence, and agency is the goal of posthumanism, which has its roots in a rejection of anthropocentrism and Cartesian dualism. *Midnight's Children* by Salman Rushdie provides a literary analogy to these theoretical issues when analysed from a post humanist perspective. This dissolving of the posthuman barriers between the self and the Other, between individual identification and collective history, is reflected in the novel's interweaving of individual, national, and mythic narratives. Saleem Sinai's metamorphosis, which was influenced by political and cultural changes, is reminiscent of the posthuman state, where identity is split, created, and inextricably linked to more substantial causes, whether they be ideological, technological, or historical. The novel's combination of the fantastic and the real emphasizes how posthumanism aims to undermine the stability of categories. Ultimately, Rushdie's story and posthumanism theory both emphasize a common desire: to investigate what it means to be human in a world where that meaning is continually being renegotiated.

Although it rarely discusses it specifically, Salman Rushdie's *Quichotte* provides an especially nuanced examination of the cultural and epistemological ramifications of artificial intelligence. Rushdie incorporates artificial intelligence's impact into the novel's philosophical foundation, character development, and structure rather than portraying it as a physical entity or the main narrative agency. The protagonist's parasocial fixation with a celebrity, his metafictional fabrication of his imagined son, and his immersion in digital media all demonstrate the subtle yet potent influence that artificial intelligence-driven systems have on subjective experience.

Artificial intelligence does not appear as a major character or overt narrative device in Salman Rushdie's *Quichotte*, but its impact is evident in the book's themes, structure, and philosophical

implications. The text serves as a postmodern investigation of reality, identity, and consciousness in a society influenced by digital media, algorithmic culture, and ubiquitous technological mediation. The impact of artificial intelligence on human perception, desire, and narrative production is evident in Rushdie's fictional world, despite the fact that he avoids explicitly mentioning AI or including sentient computers into the story.

The titular protagonist, Quichotte, is a man who is so engrossed in digital culture and television that he almost exclusively uses mediated images to form his perception of the world. In the real world, curated media, driven by Artificial intelligence systems and recommendation algorithms, can have a significant impact on human behaviour and emotional orientation, as demonstrated by his compulsive love for Salma R, a television personality he has never met. Quichotte's hallucinations are not just symptoms of his own insanity.

Quichotte's imagined son, Sancho, is one of the novel's most notable artificial intelligence-like characters. Sancho, a fictitious character in a fictional universe who progressively gains self-awareness, is created by Quichotte's imagination rather than by biological means. His increasing awareness, inquisitiveness about his own reality, and ultimate yearning for independence are analogous to philosophical debates concerning machine sentience and artificial intelligence. In a world that appears more and more unreal to him, Sancho wonders about his beginnings, his mission, and his position in it. A particular interpretation of this metafictional character's awakening is a symbolic meditation on artificial intelligence becoming self-aware, a situation that has emerged as a major topic in discussions of the existential and ethical ramifications of artificial intelligence development. In this way, Sancho is not a machine; rather, he serves as a metaphor for an artificial intelligence being that develops cognitive independence, prompting the reader to consider what sentience, agency, and authenticity really are. The intricate, cyclical storytelling of Rushdie's Quichotte likewise reflects AI logic. Stories within stories abound in the book. For example, Brother, a character who is also a part of the main plot, creates Quichotte.

"Sometimes I feel like I'm being written by the story itself, a passenger in my own narrative, unsure where I end and it begins." – (Quichotte- Salman Rushdie)

The novel also explores the idea of posthuman identity, in which characters no longer fall under conventional classifications of human subjectivity. Sancho is a prime example of a posthuman figure—a character whose life is determined by narrative rather than natural or biological truth, akin to the Artificial intelligence-generated personalities or digital avatars who occupy online places. With this character, Rushdie foreshadows the intricacies of awareness and feeling in non-human entities that interact with human issues, akin to advanced artificial intelligence systems that mimic affect, empathy, and conversation.

Salman Rushdie's Quichotte is a complex literary reflection on the ubiquitous yet frequently imperceptible impact of artificial intelligence on the formation of human identity, awareness, and perception. Rushdie incorporates Artificial intelligence's essence into the novel's narrative structure, interpersonal interactions, and thematic concerns rather than introducing it through overt symbols like robots or autonomous systems. The novel reflects the recursive feedback loops of algorithmic systems and the fuzziness of the lines separating fact and fiction in a post-truth era through Quichotte's obsessions with technology, Sancho's metafictional awakening, and the recursive stacking of stories within stories. As a result, Quichotte starts to reflect and critique a world that is becoming more and more mediated by algorithms—a world in which memory, meaning, and desire are filtered through artificial frames. By delving into these facets, Rushdie challenges readers to think about the existential and moral consequences of living in a world where artificial intelligence is widely used without needing to be perceived.

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