

Salman Rushdie

Biography

Author (1947–)



QUICK FACTS

NAME

Salman Rushdie

OCCUPATION

Author

BIRTH DATE

June 19, 1947 (age 72)

EDUCATION

Cambridge University, King's College

PLACE OF BIRTH

Bombay, India

AKA

Sir Salman Rushdie

Ahmed Salman Rushdie

FULL NAME

Sir Ahmed Salman Rushdie

ZODIAC SIGN

Gemini

Salman Rushdie is a British-Indian novelist best known for the novels *Midnight's Children* (1981) and *The Satanic Verses* (1988), for which he was accused of blasphemy against Islam.

Synopsis

Born on June 19, 1947, in Bombay (now Mumbai), India, Salman Rushdie is a British-Indian novelist. The only son of a University of Cambridge-educated businessman and school teacher in Bombay, Rushdie studied history at King's College at the University of Cambridge. Rushdie's 1988 novel, *The Satanic Verses* (1988), led to accusations of blasphemy against Islam, forcing him to go into hiding for several years.

Early Years

Sir Ahmed Salman Rushdie was born June 19, 1947 in Bombay (now Mumbai), India. The only son of a wealthy Indian businessman and a school teacher, Rushdie was educated at a Bombay private school before attending The Rugby School, a boarding school in Warwickshire, England. He went on to attend King's College at the University of Cambridge, where he studied history.

After earning his M.A. from Cambridge, Rushdie briefly lived with his family in Pakistan, where his parents had moved in 1964. There, he found work as a television writer but soon returned to England, where for much of the 1970s he worked as a copywriter for an advertising agency.

While Rushdie would later become a target of Muslim extremists, the religion was very much a part of his upbringing. His grandfather, a kind man and family doctor, was a devout Muslim, who said his prayers five times a day and went to Hajj to Mecca.

But his grandfather's embrace of the religion was not shrouded in intolerance, something that greatly shaped the young Rushdie.

"You could sit there as an 11- or 12-year-old boy and say, 'Grandfather, I don't believe in god.' And he would say, 'Really? That's very interesting. Sit down here and tell me all about it.' And there would be no kind of attempt to ram something down your throat or criticize you. There would just be conversation."

International Acclaim

In 1975 Rushdie published his first book, *Grimus*, a fantasy and science fiction novel that received tepid reviews. Undeterred by the response, Rushdie kept writing and his second work, *Midnight's Children*, proved life altering.

Published in 1981, the book, which tells the story of India's complicated history through a pickle-factory worker named Saleem Sinai, was a critical and commercial success. The honors included the Booker Prize and the James Tait Black Memorial Prize (for fiction). In 1993 and 2008 it was awarded the "Best of the Bookers," a distinction that made it the best novel to have won a Booker Prize for Fiction in the award's 25 and later 40-year history.

Rushdie's follow-up, 1983's *Shame* won the French literary prize, Prix du Meilleur Livre Etranger, and was shortlisted for the Booker Prize, further cementing Rushdie's place among literature's upper echelon.

The Satanic Verses

In 1988 Rushdie published *The Satanic Verses*, a novel drenched in magical realism and whose main story was inspired in part by the life of Muhammad. Critics adored it. The book won the Whitbread Award for novel of the year and was a finalist for the Booker Prize.

But it also drew immediate condemnation from the Islamic world for what was perceived to be its irreverent account of Muhammad. In many countries with large Muslim populations, the novel was banned and on February 14, 1989, [Ayatollah Khomeini](#), the spiritual leader of Iran, issued a fatwa requiring the author's execution. A bounty was offered for Rushdie's death and for a number of years the writer was forced to live under police protection.

To try and dial back the outrage, Rushdie issued a public apology and voiced his support for Islam. The heat around *The Satanic Verses* eventually cooled and in 1998, Iran declared it would not support the fatwa.

In 2012 Rushdie published *Joseph Anton: A Memoir*, an autobiographical account of what life was like for him during the decade-long fatwa.

Recent Years

Even at the height of controversy surrounding his famous novel, Rushdie continued to write. In all he's written eleven novels, as well as a pair of children's books and published several collections of essays and works of non-fiction. Rushdie's 12th novel, *Two Years Eight Months and Twenty-Eight Nights* was published in September 2015. Overall, his books have been translated into more than 40 languages.

Rushdie's litany of honors and awards are considerable, including honorary doctorates and fellowships at six European and six American universities. In 2007 [Queen Elizabeth II](#) knighted him. In 2014 Rushdie was awarded the PEN/Pinter Prize. Established in memory of the late Nobel-Laureate playwright Harold Pinter, the annual award honors a British writer for their body of work.

Rushdie has also maintained a fiery tongue and pen. He's been a fierce defender of freedom of expression and was a frequent critic of the US led war in Iraq. In 2008

he publicly regretted his embrace of Islam in the wake of the criticism of *The Satanic Verses*.

"It was deranged thinking," he said. "I was more off-balance than I ever have been, but you can't imagine the pressure I was under. I simply thought I was making a statement of fellowship. As soon as I said it, I felt as if I had ripped my own tongue out."

Rushdie has been married four times and is the father of two sons, Zafar (b. 1979) and Milan (b. 1997).

His first published [novel](#), *Grimus*, appeared in 1975. Rushdie's next novel, *Midnight's Children* (1981), a fable about modern India, was an unexpected critical and popular success that won him international recognition. A film [adaptation](#), for which he drafted the screenplay, was released in 2012. The novel *Shame* (1983), based on contemporary politics in [Pakistan](#), was also popular, but Rushdie's fourth novel, *The Satanic Verses*, encountered a different reception. Some of the adventures in this book depict a character modeled on the [Prophet Muhammad](#) and portray both him and his transcription of the [Qur'ān](#) in a manner that, after the novel's publication in the summer of 1988, drew [criticism](#) from Muslim [community](#) leaders in Britain, who denounced the novel as blasphemous. Public demonstrations against the book spread to Pakistan in January 1989. On February 14 the spiritual leader of revolutionary [Iran](#), Ayatollah [Ruhollah Khomeini](#), publicly condemned the book and issued a [fatwa](#) (legal opinion) against Rushdie; a bounty was offered to anyone who would execute him. He went into hiding under the protection of [Scotland Yard](#), and—although he occasionally emerged unexpectedly, sometimes in other countries—he was compelled to restrict his movements. Despite the standing death threat, Rushdie continued to write, producing *Imaginary Homelands* (1991), a collection of essays and criticism; the children's novel *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* (1990); the short-story collection *East, West* (1994); and the novel *The Moor's Last Sigh* (1995). In 1998, after nearly a decade, the Iranian government announced that it would no longer seek to enforce its fatwa against Rushdie. He recounted his experience in the third-person [memoir](#) *Joseph Anton* (2012); its title refers to an alias he adopted while in seclusion.

Following his return to public life, Rushdie published the novels *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* (1999) and *Fury* (2001). *Step Across This Line*, a collection of

essays he wrote between 1992 and 2002 on subjects ranging from the [September 11 attacks](#) to *The Wizard of Oz*, was issued in 2002. Rushdie's subsequent novels include *Shalimar the Clown* (2005), an examination of terrorism that was set primarily in the disputed Kashmir region of the Indian subcontinent, and *The Enchantress of Florence* (2008), based on a fictionalized account of the Mughal emperor [Akbar](#). The children's book *Luka and the Fire of Life* (2010) centres on the efforts of Luka—younger brother to the protagonist of *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*—to locate the titular fire and revive his ailing father. *Two Years Eight Months and Twenty-Eight Nights* (2015) depicts the chaos ensuing from a rent in the fabric separating the world of humans from that of the Arabic mythological figures known as [jinn](#). Reveling in folkloric allusion—the title references *The Thousand and One Nights*—the novel unfurls a tapestry of connected stories celebrating the human imagination.

In *The Golden House* (2017), Rushdie explored the immigrant experience in the United States through a wealthy Indian family that settles in [New York City](#) in the early 21st century. His next novel, *Quichotte* (2019), was inspired by [Cervantes](#)'s *Don Quixote*.

Rushdie received the [Booker Prize](#) in 1981 for *Midnight's Children*. The novel subsequently won the Booker of Bookers (1993) and the Best of the Booker (2008). These special prizes were voted on by the public in honour of the prize's 25th and 40th anniversaries, respectively. Rushdie was knighted in 2007, an honour criticized by the Iranian government and Pakistan's parliament.