

SALMAN RUSHDIE AS A CHILDREN'S WRITER: READING *HAROUN AND THE SEA OF STORIES* (1990) AND *LUKA AND THE FIRE OF LIFE* (2010)

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Sir Ahmed Salman Rushdie borne in India in 1947 is an English Booker Prize-winner author. With the publication of *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* in 1990, he took his way in the realm of children's literature. Recently he has included one more fanciful fiction in the list of his children's literature, i.e. *Luka and the Fire of Life* (2010). As we know that Rushdie wrote *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* for his elder son, Zafar, who was ten year old two decades ago. The book was written after the publication of *The Satanic Verses* (1988) which was banned in India. In 1989, Supreme leader of Iran and some Muslim scholars also issued a *fatwa* to kill the writer as well as the publishers of the book due to *The Satanic Verses* controversy. It is believed that his work, *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*, is a representation of his feelings and thoughts of that time. And, thus, there is an allegorical theme. Similarly the latest one is gifted to his young son, Milan, and also full of autobiographical elements. However, the remarkable point is that in the name of gifting his sons, the writer has provided a valuable service to the world of children's literature.

In the present time, there is a long list of such writers who are constantly writing for the children. As far as the place of Rushdie among the children's writers is concerned, it may be a sort of overstatement to include his name in the writers' list of the first water. But, among the Booker prize winner Indian English novelists in the present scenario, he is the only author who has intentionally penned some works for the children. There are many attributes which are essential for the children's literature. There are also many types of the children's literature. It may be divided on the basis of technique, tone, content, etc., and in this way, categorized into six categories: (1) picture books, (2) traditional literature, (3) fiction, (4) non-fiction, (5) biography, and (6) poetry (Anderson 2006). On the basis of different interests of children according to their ages, another type of categorization is possible. In the present paper, there is an attempt to examine the books (*Haroun and the Sea of Stories* and *Luka and the Fire of Life*) from the children's literature viewpoint. Keeping in mind the objective, the paper also tries to trace out some issues which make the books successful.

Rushdie did a lot in order to provide true pleasure to his readers through the books. Due to the different interests of children age 0-18, it is not an easy task to write a winning book for children. While he was "writing *Luka and the Fire of Life* for his youngest son, Milan, he grew worried about a character called Nobodaddy – a devil who assumes the figure of Luka's ailing father in the book (Galehouse 8)." In an interview, he shares it:

I was worried that Nobodaddy might be too frightening. There are no boys in America pretending to be Luke Skywalker because they all want to be Darth Vader – so we know children respond well to the scary, wicked characters. But what 12- and 13- year olds don't like is to be disturbed. Being scared can be delicious, but being disturbed can be upsetting. I worried that Nobodaddy

might be on the wrong side of that line. But I gave Milan the first couple chapters of the book, and he said Nobodaddy was his favorite character. ... It gave me permission to just go for it. (Galehouse 8)

Thus, by genre, his works written for children are fictions which are full of fantasies and adventures. As we know that the works are written by the author for his own sons, and gifted to them when they were of 13 year old. As a result, these are appropriate for children age 13-18, and fall into the category of young-adult fiction. It is also noteworthy that same atmosphere and repetition of some important characters in the latest one proves it the sequel of the earlier published book, *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*. Launching the book-series or sequels has been a frequent trend in the field of children's literature that is also followed by Salman Rushdie.

Both books, *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* and *Luka and the Fire of Life*, revolve around a family headed by a storyteller, Rashid Khalifa. There are also some common themes which has been popular in the world of children's literature. Filial love is one of some common themes in both of the books. In the first one, Haroun with his father, Rashid, and mother, Soraya, lives in the country of Alifbay, a very sad city. Due to its saddest sadness, the city has forgot its own name. Rashid Khalifa is famous for his "never-ending stream of tall, short and winding tales" that spread cheerfulness throughout the sad city. His fans call him "the Ocean of Notions", and for his rivals, he is "the Shah of Blah". He is loved by the political leaders. In fact, the leaders have no credibility of their own among the people of the city. Therefore, they try to engage him in their political rallies in order to attract a large audience. His son, Haroun, is anxious to know where his father's stories come from. Soraya does not find herself happy with Rashid because he has no touch with hard ground realities. One day Soraya runs off with Mr. Sengupta who is her neighbor. The extreme mental suffering of losing his wife and Haroun's questioning the usefulness of stories are too much for Rashid to bear. He opens his mouth, and finds that he has lost his talent of storytelling. Haroun decides to bring back to him his talent of storytelling. Haroun starts his adventurous journey and reaches at Kahani, Earth's second moon kept invisible by a P2C2E (Process Too Complicated To Explain). It is the Ocean of the Streams of Story, i.e. the source for all storytellers who subscribe through P2C2E. The process is controlled by the Walrus who is the Grand Comptroller of the city of Gup (a land of perpetual sunshine). Unfortunately, Khattam-Shud, the Prince of the dark and silent land of Chup is polluting the Sea of Stories. Haroun leads the way in a brave attempt to save the Sea of Stories with Iff, the Water Genie; Butt the Hoopoe, a mad bus driver; and Mali, a Floating Gardener, and some other interesting companions. Finally, he becomes successful. We find that Soraya has come back to her farmer life, and Rashid has regained his talent of storytelling due to Haroun's adventurous journey.

Similarly, the second book, *Luka and the Fire of Life*, revolves around Rashid Khalifa's twelve year old youngest son, Luka, who has accidentally disregarded a powerful supernatural being. In retaliation, the shape-shifter puts Luka's father into a deep and dangerous sleep. To save his father, Luka following his elder brother's heroic adventures begins another adventurous and exploratory journey. He enters into the Magic World from where he steals the Fire of Life with the help of Nobodaddy, Dog the bear, Bear the dog, the Insultana of Ott, etc. in order to revive his father. Finally, the story ends with the promise of happiness. In this way, it is right to say that the filial love is a common theme running in both of the texts.

The concept of 'home' has been a celebrated theme in the works of the transnational writers. In other words, a mental or emotional state of refuge or comfort through the construction of imaginative 'home' is frequently found in the works of such writers. Rushdie as a transnational writer also confesses that the subject of home is naturally found almost in all his works. Hence, he is aware that children as well as adults get pleasure from stories that narrate about going home. The author utilizes his talent in order to allure children in the present books composed for the children. He says:

The subject of home is something which is, to some degree, in everything I've written. Where is it? Is it a place you make up yourself? All of us have an idea of home that changes – a home we're born into and, later, a home that we make. In this book [*Luka and the Fire of Life*], it's an attempt by Luka to preserve the home. (Galehouse 9)

Alongwith the themes of filial love and 'home', there are some other themes like the art of storytelling and its utility, allegorical theme (an account of Rushdie's life and contemporary society represented through the fables), etc. which are common in both texts. Storytelling and its utility can be taken as a dominating theme in the stories. In fact, both stories revolve around a storyteller, i.e. Rashid Khalifa. In *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*, the writer expresses his views on the talent of storytelling at many times. For instance, we note in the beginning of the novel that Haroun often takes his father's stories as lots of different tales juggled together. He thinks of his father as a juggler. In the mid of his adventurous journey, he realizes how the juggling is a kind of storytelling:

It occurred to Haroun that Blabbermouth's juggling reminded him of the greatest performances given by his father, Rashid Khalifa, the Shah of Blah. 'I always thought storytelling was like juggling,' he finally found the voice to say. 'You keep a lot of different tales in the air, and juggle them up and down, and if you're good you don't drop any. So maybe juggling is a kind of storytelling, too.' (109)

In order to illustrate the passage, Rama Kundu writes:

The supposedly trivializing comparison between storytelling and juggling gains significance in the theoretical context of the discourse which involves the idea of story-telling as a balancing act towards harmonizing the varied heritages that an author has got to handle. (148)

As far as *Luka and the Fire of Life*, there are also many examples which bear testimony to the importance of storytelling in the world. During his exploratory trip of the Magic World, Luka suggests the badly-behaved gods that the original alternate reality is to give ancient stories a modern touch or look:

Wake up and smell the coffee, old-timers! You're extinct! You're deceased! As gods and wonderful creatures, you have ceased to be! ... Listen to me: it's only through Stories that you can get out into the Real World and have some sort of power again. When your story is well told, people believe in you; not in the way they used to believe, not in a worshipping way, but in the way people believe in stories – happily, excitedly, wishing they wouldn't end. You want

Immortality? It's only my father [a storyteller], and people like him, who can give it to you now. (181-182)

However, in the latest novel, it is interesting to read how the writer merges the earlier employed themes with the narrative in a differentiated manner, and presents his latest story with a fresh appearance. In the answer of the query, it is well explained metaphorically through the fable of fish in the writer's own novel, *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*, that new stories are born from old and it is the new combinations that make them new:

Iff replied that the Plentimaw Fishes were what he called 'hunger artists' – 'Because when they are hungry they swallow stories through every month, and in their innards miracle occur; a little bit of one story joins on to an idea from another, and hey presto, when they spew the stories out they are not old tales but new ones. Nothing comes from nothing, Thieftlet; no story comes from nowhere; new stories are born from old – it is the new combinations that make them new. So you see, our artistic Plentimaw Fishes really create new stories in their digestive systems.... (86)

As we know that the concept of internationalism is not new in academic discourse about children's literature because of the successful attempts made by Paul Hazard (who gave the concept of a 'universal republic of childhood') like scholars. Positively, it is necessary for young readers to experience a range of different cultural understandings, otherwise their perception of their own remains narrow and impoverished. In this context, Latrobe writes:

Today's children perceive the world from the perspective of photographs taken in outer space. They understand the concepts of lands and waters without national boundaries – boundaries that were never capable of limiting the flow of air or ocean currents or ideas. It is therefore especially appropriate that the highest prizes for children's literature should be international, representing the universality and diversity of children and their literature and offering young readers books and ideas that flow as freely as ocean currents. (Latrobe 101)

Rushdie also believes in the concept of internationalism. He takes recourse to some specific ways through which he merges this concept with the narratives. For example, in both of the stories, he deliberately interconnects literary and cultural heritages from across the globe with each other in order to prosper the idea of internationalism in the children's literature. In *Luka and the Fire of Life*, he presents a mythological adventure. During his adventurous trip, Luka faces ancient gods of Greece, Rome, South America, Scandinavia, Japan, Egypt, India, and other cultures as both friends and foes. His language also works as an effective tool for this purpose. Words are used from various languages which not only represent the different cultures, but also allure the international readership. It is also noteworthy that due to the popularity of the books among the children, and atmosphere of the stories which suit to modern technology, the writer has received many suggestions from the videogame companies for converting the stories into videogames (Galehouse 9).

To conclude, Rushdie creates his literature in a broad framework. Therefore, there may be other angles from which the books may be read or examined. But, without a doubt, it may be said that with the publication of the present books, the writer has entered into the arena of international children's literature with the purpose of securing 'the fire of life'.

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About the names in this book. Haroun and the sea of stories. Salman Rushdie was born in Bombay in 1947. He is the author of several novels for adults, including *Midnight's Children* (winner of the 1993 Booker Prize), *Shame* and *The Satanic Verses* (winner of the 1988 Whitbread Prize for Best Novel). In 1990 he received the Writers' Guild Award for *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*. Salman Rushdie is an Honorary Professor in Humanities at Massachusetts Institute of Technology in the USA, and a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature. His books have been translated into many different languages.