

THE NOVELS OF SALMAN RUSHDIE: A POSTCOLONIAL IMPRESSION

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The novels of Salman Rushdie are the true representative of postcolonial fiction. He embodies in his own life and in his writings the conundrums of the postcolonial author, writing within the traditions of Indo-English literature while simultaneously appealing to the conventions and tastes worldwide, especially a Western audience. Since the publication of *The Satanic Verses*, he has been fighting a battle for his survival. Rushdie, being a man of diaspora, had earlier been facing an inner battle for existence, but after the publication of the previously mentioned novel, his struggle became both external and internal. The condemnation and support surrounding the death sentence issued against him epitomize the postcolonialist's delicate and constant battle to balance the demands of conflicting cultures. He not only contends with these external struggles, but he also deals with the interior conflicts of colonial identity, living as a permanent outsider, searching for personal authenticity in one or many cultures. He is the spokesperson for the people of the subcontinent who are living in their migrated countries. Throughout his career, he has struggled to speak to the mainstream in both Britain and Asia while mimicking and commenting on that same mainstream from the margins. Religiously and culturally diverse worlds of both India and Britain offer Rushdie a wealth of concerns and themes that consistently refract and refract throughout his works.

In his novels, Salman Rushdie deals with various national and International themes, but his primary focus is his motherland and its subcontinents i.e. Pakistan and Bangladesh. Themes such as migration, exile, diaspora, nationalism, multiculturalism, dualism etc. appear in his novels from the very first page. His writings have become the focus of a certain kind of struggle for cultural identity in Britain and other Western states.

In his magnum opus novel *Midnight's Children*, Salman Rushdie picks up several postcolonial and postmodern agenda. Though the novel is an agglomeration of various themes, it is a novel about postcolonial India. *Midnight's Children* is a fantasized version of the historical

reality of India that spans from the Jallianwala Massacre of 1919 to the period of Emergency imposed by Indira Gandhi in 1977. Though before the publication of Rushdie's magnum opus, several novelists had depicted Indian history; Rushdie's introduction of magical realism and supernatural elements makes it characteristically his novel. It is partly the biography of Saleem Sinai, partly autobiography of Salman Rushdie and completely the biography of India.

By introducing the narrative techniques of Gabriel Gracia Marquez, Salman Rushdie intermingles fact and fiction so fantastically that sometimes it becomes a Herculean task to differentiate between truth and invention. Probably this was the reason that *Midnight's Children* became a trend- setter as soon as it was published.

In *Midnight's Children* Rushdie deals with displacement and rootlessness. Rootlessness that occurs due to routelessness is the main source of identity crisis and almost all the major characters whether it is Saleem Sinai, Shiva or Padma or Parvati suffer from this psychological disease. The novelist himself is the victim of same ailment. Saleem Sinai, like his creator, wanders from one place to another, from Bombay to Karachi to Bangladesh then again Bombay. Rushdie himself returns to India time and again, not the geographical India but "India of the mind".

In fact, *Midnight's Children* paves the way for the other novels of Salman Rushdie. He has been unable to disengage himself from this substantive text while writing other novels. For instance, *Shame* is a shorter version of its predecessor *Midnight's Children*. *Midnight's Children* is a novel about postcolonial India, in the same fashion as *Shame* is about Pakistan. The former deals with the colonials and postcolonial situations of India, while the later with an "insufficiently imagined country": unavailing Pakistan.

Shame is more a treatise on diaspora than merely fiction and Rushdie's authorial intervention makes the novel a discourse rather than an entertaining fiction. At the same time, it is a most overtly political novel, in which Rushdie takes the theme of the ailing Pakistan. It is the novel where the novelist deals with the feminine aspect of postcolonial theory; how they are doubly marginalized and how they are in the clutch of patriarchy.

In both these novels Rushdie's representation of history displays his multiple visions that replace the uni-linear version of official history. Rushdie's history is the history of memories version rather than the written version. Magic realism is his adopted tool and by exercising this in a novel way, he excels from his other counterparts. He never describes the past but remakes the past to suit his present purpose, using memory as his tool. *Midnight's Children* and *Shame* are to some extent, the history of India and Pakistan respectively. But his novels move beyond the bounds of history for the purpose of finding universal significance of historical forces that are

operating at a particular phase of time. He manipulates the truth to fictionalize it and thus makes the real unreal and vice versa.

The third novel of Rushdie is *The Moor's Last Sigh*, more postmodern and less postcolonial, though Rushdie does not deviate from his favorite themes. The protagonist and narrator Mores inherits the mixture of races and creeds that is India. His mother Aurora has the blood of Portuguese invaders as well as Catholicism in her veins whereas his father is one of the last Jews of Cochin and a descendant of Boabdil, the last Moorish ruler of Spain. The entire family mimics the chaotic diversity of South India.

Throughout the narrative Rushdie celebrates this hybridity, multiplicity, and multiculturalism. In this saga, the novelist presents a family that splits on the ground of nationalism and anti-nationalism and this division resembles the divisions in the country at large. Rushdie shows how in the same family there are two types of people pro-Empire and freedom loving.

This novel is also an attack on the parochial Hinduism that is led by Shiv Sena in Maharashtra. The people of Shiv Sena have led India towards its unwanted destination, towards a religious country instead of a secularist one. India is known for its multi-ethnicity, its multi-religions and its multi-culturalism (for this India Morose is the character); but the fundamentalist Hindus and Muslims have led it astray. This India is against the India that was dreamt of by its freedom fighters Nehru and Gandhi.

Though the novel delineates the post-colonial history of India, its metaphoric divisions, its linguistic divisions yet it attacks India as a pseudo-secularist nation.

The publication of *The Satanic Verses* and its aftermath created a panic in Salman Rushdie's mind. And perhaps this is the reason that his post *The Satanic Verses* novels are less penetrative than the prior ones. Hindu Fundamentalists also banned *The Moor's Last Sigh* in some parts of India due to its attack on Shiv Sena's supremacy. But after his colonial and postcolonial narration, he went towards global and pop and Jazz music. In *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*, he deals with global themes and Greek myths that have become global in this postmodern era. Rushdie begins with the death of the female protagonist Vina Apsara on the fourteenth of February 1989, the day Fatwah was decreed on him by the Muslim fundamentalist leader, Ayatollah Khomeini.

The Ground Beneath Her Feet conceives a frontierless world, a post national space. Rushdie has always been an urban and metropolitan writer but in this novel the metropolitan cities like Bombay, London, New York either do not figure at all or they are merely in the background.

Rushdie's parameter of diaspora also changes in *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*. For representative migrants of this novel crossing frontiers are valueless because music is beyond restraint. Before this novel, all migrant characters had been suffering from a psychological trauma and migrancy was a political act but in *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*, Rushdie advocates a thesis of the post-frontier in which frontiers are abstract rather than geographical or psychological. With his hybrid and global characters, Rushdie points towards a future in which the world will be united to face any threat. But fortunately or unfortunately Rushdie himself is unable to step across the frontiers and it seems that he is still lingering in his parochial world from which he is destined not to come out.

Shalimar the Clown is his return to the Indian sub-continent that he left in *The Ground Beneath Feet* and *Fury*. The novel demystifies the political upheaval of Kashmir that resulted due to the interference of America. The novelist delineates the story of post-colonial Kashmir and explains the reasons why the paradise became hell, how the Hindu-Muslim unity came under suspicion, why and how the citizens of paradise started becoming terrorists and what role India and Pakistan played in creating the chaos and commotion. Through the story of Shalimar and Boonyi, Rushdie displays the Hindu-Muslim harmony that existed before independence.

The central theme of the novel is the making of a terrorist as terror becomes a global phenomenon and a cause of concern worldwide. The effort to look into the mind and get under the skin of a terrorist becomes an artistic challenge that the novelist has dealt competently in the *Shalimar the Clown*.

In fact, the novel narrates the story of postcolonial and post-independence Kashmir. Since Rushdie is a political novelist, *Shalimar the Clown* is a blending of realism and magic realism. Like *The Moor's Last Sigh*. Rushdie again imagines a composite culture where race, religion and identity do not matter as in the idea of Kashmir. The novelist shows in the novel how gradually the composite culture is destroyed by both military and militancy. Before 1947, there was no point of dispute between Hindu and Muslim. They used to celebrate each other's festivals. But the independence of India and Pakistan transformed this paradise into a battle field where ignorant armies and citizens are being killed by their own citizens.

In his last venture, Rushdie presents adventures of colonizers. *The Enchantress of Florence* is a novel that is set in medieval India, at the time of the Mughal Emperor Akbar, the Great at the time when colonizers began to arrive and establish their trade. As is customary with Salman Rushdie, he never adheres to a single theme in his fictions. So is the case with *The Enchantress of Florence*. Salman Rushdie mixes up past with present to create a better future. The novel is set in sixteenth century India, it delineates the colonial situations and conditions Magor dell Amore is the representative of white colonialists, who lands on the shore of India and

makes his way to Sikri to the court of Akbar and succeeds in befooling the wisest king. The female protagonist of the fiction Qara Koz seems to represent the counter discourse to the colonialism. The colonial enterprise was a product of western androcentric imperialist desire. Qara Koz, on the other hand is a woman of Asian blood who manages to bring the whole of Florence, the epitome of western civilization of that period under her influence. She represents the subversion of the colonial enterprise. If for the colonizers, the oriental, Qara Koz represents all those qualities for she is an enchantress and enchantment is neither rational nor scientific.

The novel has a helical structure and intertwines two stories, which then go in diverse directions. Mogor comes to India and becomes closer to Emperor than his nine jewels. In the same way Qara Koz goes, from central Asia to Europe and becomes the heartthrob of Europeans. But in the end Mogor is exposed as liar and has to leave India. This was the condition of colonizers; they came, established themselves and were forced to run away.

As Rushdie's earlier ventures, his latest fiction is also riddled with various layers of meaning. Identity crisis, multi-culturalism, humanism, feminism, post colonialism and decolonialism are the recurrent theme of this novel. In this novel Rushdie attacks colonial Empire with its own tool, and to some extent he succeeds.

As a staunch de-colonialist Salman Rushdie takes each and every step for the decolonization of the mind. Decolonization is a psychological process; he advocates freedom rather than geographical or political freedom.

Language is one of the tools of decolonization and Rushdie is the master of exercising this device. He takes the words of Hindi, Urdu and other regional languages and englishizes them without any reference or notes. He in his first major novel *Midnight's Children* demonstrates the complexities and dilemmas that the project of indianising the resources of English language entails. In each of his novel he inters mingles words from several origins and tries to make them perfect. Thus, he becomes the leader of postcolonial authors who have taken the oath of provincializing English, who are determined to subvert the master's tool in order to make it as their own.

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Rushdie's second novel, *Midnight's Children*, depicts the condition of India through the voice and family of Saleem Sinai, a child born at the moment of India's independence. His momentous birth endows he and 1001 other children born close to the stroke of midnight with special powers. Saleem believes his birth, marked by a letter from Prime Minister Nehru, determine that his fate is bound up with the nation's. Amanuddin, Syed. "The Novels of Salman Rushdie: Mediated Reality as Fantasy." *World Literature Today* 63:1 (1989): 42-45. Cundy, Catherine. "œ