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INDIAN HISTORY AND CULTURE IS REFLECTED IN THE MAJOR NOVELS OF SALMAN RUSHDIE

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Abstract

The Indo-Anglican Fiction writer Salman Rushdie's historical novels "*Midnight's children*", *The Moor's Last Sigh*, *Shalimar the Clown*, *The Enchantress of Florence* and the most controversial historical mythology *The Satanic Verses* reflect the lives of common people pre and after the Independence in India. His novels are about India and its sub-continent with deep insight analysis of the situations. For centuries India was ruled by Kings, Invaders so people' hadn't their own ideology. British colonialism made Indians more miserable. There was no individual freedom and rights to the people. The post- colonialism is a new concept came out of elite intelligentsia, the free independent India where to provide freedom to everybody. The term magic-realism appeared in 1955 by the German critic Franz Rob. Leading novelists of central and South America used the concept to give life to add realistic approach to fictional writings. Alejo Carpentier and Gabriel Garcia and Salman Rushdie are the best examples for magic realism concept users. They used this powerful realistic concept in their writings. Rushdie used this term occasionally to narrate a story for the real facts, people and incidents to fictitious things. It reflects the society and the people at the particular period.

Keywords: Diasporic Literature, Indo-Anglican, Post Colonialism, Magic Realism, Protagonist

Rushdie is an exceptionally postcolonial writer whose fictional work incited different opinions and attracted scholars because of his nuanced representations of reality. His writings defy definition and by this are fluidly sloping between different styles and are pledged into intricate narrative strategy. Besides, his postcolonial project pursues a different look and takes a dissent path usually followed by his fellow postcolonial writers.

As this study will unfailingly show, his postcolonial leanings focus on the concepts of history and myth as a theme and technique to address the postcolonial situation. What distinguishes this research is its unstringing endeavor to study the relationship between the impacts of assumed historical truth on the sociopolitical setup. It reveals that authorial voice of the present postcolonial state continues to be hegemonic due to the chauvinistic

national state agenda. This explains the constant revisit of historical events in Rushdie's novels in various palimpsest modes in order to question the very truth of its archival national stock. On the same track, he resorts to the technique of counter-myth, i.e., myth is countered by an artificial myth, offering a critique of its own. The Mother-Goddess, for instance, in the Indian Hindu mythology is countered by the image of Mother-India. Similarly, Nehruvian secular nationalism is countered by Moorish history of Andalusia. Hence, myth at the hands of Rushdie does not have a specific role to play. Its meaning and function is ambivalent. This brings us back to the composite history of his life which is a mixture of Indo-Pakistani origin of hybrid Eastern-Western culture and multifarious tradition. Therefore, the exploitation of Jungian theory of the archetype seems relevant to studying Rushdie's symbols and characters.

Subsequently, exploring his representation of postcolonial world is a disquietly disturbing but intellectually appealing. While most of the postcolonial writers were interested in portraying the dilemma of postcolonial identity and space, he was steadily working on the historical representation of hegemonic and totalitarian culture altogether. Myth as resistance culture is what underscores his fictional universe. On the other hand, singular truth is rejected on behalf of multiple meanings and views. History is narrativized events and constructed facts coded and encoded through the discourse of power and authority. Its truth is questioned and its authenticity is denounced.

Rushdie in fact shows a more advanced move towards adopting English as a conducive method of writing back to the colonial culture in the first place and to adhere more to a cosmopolitan ideal. Andrew Teverson stresses that since Independence English has been made into one of India's many languages and that a writer like Rushdie does not reproduce the metropolitan version of English unscathed, but, rather, at least in his more, Indian texts – succeeds in localizing it. His main concern is to make the readers re-think and re-imagine the historical past and to examine its values for the present crises. Therefore, myth and history in his novels, discussed,

turn into a field of highly intellectual symposium about the leading civilizations that serve humanity. There are many historical and multiple historical truths. Hence, he emerges as a historian among novelists, not only because he completed his degree in Cambridge in history, but because he knows deeply how history is constructed. He knows perhaps, the impulses and vital incidents that form what is defined as history. Also, he has a critical insight about the major incidents and the major players of past in relation to the complexities of many powers.

Therefore, he tries to remove the subject and get the audience to live an over excited life. His *Grimus* is an excellent example where the dwellers of Calf Island live an authentic experience out of the limits of space and time. His characters in the novel fulfil freely and naturally their desire; they live their desire and not only dream of it. For this reason, it is said that Rushdie's novels deal with the postcolonial issues in a realm of postmodernist world. In his novels, the symbol and image are reality itself. It is a world where there is no mediation between the symbol and the real. Therefore, he has given the Indian fiction a forward step towards new worlds of creativity. The ultimate concern of his approach to myth and history is to deconstruct the concept of reality as a definite construct of history. The treatment of myth and history in his novels is an artistic one which mainly depends on presenting imaginative alternative pictures of reality. His main job is to try to represent the mythical realities of history. The historical reality in his method takes the shape of imaginative pictures.

His approach to myth and history is made through negotiation and reconciliation. He combines between the contrasted terms, mainly myth, the fixed belief, and history, the dynamic process of human experience. In this, he differs from the other Indian writers for he does not idealize, or is holistically upheld to mythical icons. His treatment of myth is ambivalent and tricky in the sense that he de-mythicalizes mythical image in one place and re-mythicalizes it in another in order to create a meaning. For instance, the national leaders whatever they offer for their countries. Generally, he makes balance between the postmodern representation of

myth as an ideological force and humanistic and cosmopolitan view of myth as an individually universal human concern. As a postcolonial writer, he uses myth to negotiate and interrogate the dominant discourse of authorial official history and culture as a tool of memory and oblivion simultaneously. Therefore, he subverts the nationalist claims and criticizes their political promises for people as we have seen in *Midnight's Children* in particular and ridicules them in *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* and *The Moor's Last Sigh*. It might also be noted that Rushdie is one of the few postcolonial novelists who shifts the use of myth from the merely interpretation of words into the real political experience. His using of a potent mythical language in his novels empowers his thought and activates his inventive space. He gives myth a social and political meaning. He contextualizes myth in the realist situation and revives its form and concept by using it in reference to the social and political situations and finally draws his own truths values. Historical truth for him is not ultimate. He uses a dialogic method as a dialectical foundation of his argument. As such, we can easily comprehend his negotiable strand of thought and parallel structure he usually follows in representing reality and its counterfeit, or in his exploring the space of the national and the individual. He stands as an observer, giving his characters of different and opposing opinions to freely express themselves and reach the truth. His method is not to take a stand of the issues of discussion, but to resolve the contrasted opinions. He acts as a neutral man who appreciates the different arguments of people as democratic traditions suggest. Also, Rushdie appears as a good reader of history and a novelist who introduces his captive tales of the mythical past as is seen in his *The Moor's Last Sigh*, his tales of the golden metropolis, Granada, Cordoba and Castile in Andalusia as well as Bombay and Cochin in India. He introduces himself as a time-traveler.

Since myth and history occupy an importance in his novels, he always invites his characters and heroes to develop a consciousness of history and mythical history. The consciousness of history is a sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal together. This makes an individual conscious of his

place in time, of his own contemporaries. Rushdie does not minimize the value of the past. He insists that what you were forever who you are. His approach is recreation of the past. His aim is to give history or past a historical sense. What is history without meaning? To recreate the past, implies a desire to percept the past in relation to present. The aim of this perception is to give meaning to history. Fictional reality is another major approach of Rushdie's treatment of history and representation of reality. Another point worth mentioning about this treatment is his notion of fictional reality. While recording historical truths, he is not in favor of giving a more transparent of truth or transcript of reality.

Generally, Rushdie deals with the issue of artists in relation to the political force. He compares himself to his projected hero, Moor. The narrator is divided between many cultural and political forces which cause a big confusion to him. Painting is his only device to express his split between pluralism and singular fundamentalism. This split is at the heart of the postcolonial thought. The narrator might feel that there is a certain culture and pattern of life imposed upon him. History, for him is not a linear progression of events in a chronological order or re-telling of great events, but a poetic awakening of the people who figure in these events and of gods and goddesses who bless them in absentia. The first impression is a pervading sense of nostalgic recalling, in the guise of a family album, a recollection of remembrances put into a whole. But the memories of Rushdie's protagonists are a bunch of loosely connected mental images that constitute the very essence of his self. He provides us with history which is better than the history written by professional historians because it examines the social and psychological motivations of people who make history. It is in this juncture that while the historian attempts to communicate facts, the novelists would communicate sensation. The one stresses action, the other reaction.

Another point related to historical treatment in his novels is that he offers many possible realities to give a universal validity. There are many possible ways and versions of reality. Reality is so many viewpoints and perspectives. Much of his own fictional work hinges on his concept of the nature

and the role of socio-political materials pertaining to various periods of history. Also, he is a writer who follows and adopts his new method of magic realism in dealing with reality and history. This is the method which is so dear to his heart. Moreover, he is really a political writer whose main concern is political reality in relation to the individuals 'position and their own roles in what is produced by politics. His novels revolve round how political forces affect and are affected by the individuals. Also, they reflect the political issues and the relationship between the political activities and factors and the individuals in the first place. Further, he exploits his fictional writing to criticize or evaluate the political scenes in the Third World countries.

The study shows that Rushdie treats history as a construct, made up of many contributing factors. He has sometimes resorted to link the personal life of his protagonist with the historically famous event; a technique which he employs to burlesque history. Also, it is relieved that he has consecrated his life, at great risk to the postcolonial re-writing of world history. By this it is meant that he wants to liberate history from the imposed views which even cannot be justified or examined by concrete evidence. So, his job becomes to re-write and question all that is given as absolute truths. Moreover, he deals with history from the angle of criticism as in *The Moor's Last Sigh*. He uses the remote past of history in Spain to criticize the recent/current present of India's history for the absence of tolerance. In dealing with history in this novel, he also wants to convey a valuable historical message. That is, the collapse of any civilizations is products of the mentality of erosion, which refuses to recognize the other views. The concept of myth in the novel is expressed through the mediation of allegory and metaphor.

The novels covered in this thesis are attentive to questions of class position and identity formation, especially as produced by categories of nation, gender, class, and/or sexuality. However, they take up different orientations toward the nation; make use of different aesthetics and narrative strategies, and/or articulate different ideological positions in identifying postcolonial problems and resolutions. Rushdie also is one of the few postcolonial novelists

who shifted the use of myth from a mere interpretation of words into a real political experience. He gives myth a social and political meaning and contextualizes myth in the realist situation. He revives the form and concept of myth by using it in reference to the social and political situations. In the end, he draws his own an alternative fictional truth out of mythical truth. This fictive-historical truth drawn by Rushdie, especially in his *Midnight's Children*, is a meaningful truth in people's actual life. It is a reality that directs the attention of the reader to appreciate and work out.

Rushdie is not the first writer who deals with myth and history in his novels, but what deserves attention from readers and critics is his exceptional ways of treatment. His primary interest is the political history of the subcontinent, and also the essential myth related to its culture and society. He does not aim to write the history of India and the subcontinent because it is known to everybody. Rather, he aims to narrate new stories of social and political history and create his new versions of realities. He deals with history from the angles of allegory, metaphor and satire as new thematic issues. Basically, his concept of history is affected by forces and factors, namely culture, politics and ideology. History is a system that he parodies and challenges in his fiction. Actually, it can be said that his novels, particularly *Midnight's Children* and *Shame*, emerge out of the engagement in the discursive use of history that has been dominant in literary theory and criticism. The overt political issues that find place in his novels are seen as the direct outcome of the interest in postcolonial studies in literary theory. Accordingly, the novelist's *Midnight's Children* and *Shame* are concerned with Eastern cultural traditions and history; and this shared quality of the novels makes them in turns the objects of the postcolonial literary criticism.

In his reading of the postcolonial situation, Rushdie does not only debunk the colonial image of history but also denounces the collective forces imposed upon the individual either in the name of culture or in the name of nationalism. He believes that there should be options and choices for the individual to choose his own life and draw his own destiny. In his novels, he condemns the tragic

disasters that threaten and even destroy the individual's life. He expresses sympathy toward the individual's loss and failure. He also liberates his novels from the restrictions of timeliness because he wants to extend the horizon of the individual. The mythical worlds of his fiction can be studied as symbolic expressions of the internal conflict of the individual with his social environment. What is interesting in this kind of treatment is that a writer brings resolutions to the individual's own crisis.

History and marginality are of utmost importance as themes in postcolonial writing and it is the general tendency that an attempt to insert historical events by the postcolonial writer is to subvert the events and thus to undermine the ideology behind them. Rushdie draws on a variety of postcolonial theories to create new ways of conceptualizing the past and to generate alternative forms of writing which encompass its difference from the Western way and its presentation and its pluralism. The accounts of the historical events depicted in his novels contradict their already known official versions. By means of creating the alternative explanations and accounts, he subverts the historical accounts of the colonizer. Consequently, rather than playing the Western game of history and attempting to write -- or rewrite -- a history of the subcontinent, he has challenged Western history on alternative grounds. This feature in his fiction is in line with Spivak's concern about the inadequacy of the Western ideas to represent the third World, so instead of the already existing representational systems, he offers alternative narratives. His use of English in his novels, in the same way, should be seen as the appropriation of the colonizer's tool to write back because it is known that Rushdie is able to bend English language and to give it a new, hybrid shape to serve his purpose of representing the cultural identity of India.

Rushdie writes in English for a predominantly European audience. Paradoxically, he writes within a tradition which denies his literary authority. European literature assumes a chronological priority over Indian (English) mythmaking. It is assumed that in the historical time scheme, England has already created India's mythological identity. But India, like most independent entities, wishes to create its own

identity. Thus Rushdie, like other Third World authors, is in the position of needing to use the existing stories while correcting or modifying them. Saleem, like Rushdie, is engaged in creating an alternative and competitive mythology for India and its literature. This is a new genesis of India and its identity, requiring a new mythology. He appropriately uses and misuses the Biblical genesis as one of his subtexts.

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