



Indian ethos in salman rushdie

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Abstract

In the group of minority-writers, Salman Rushdie occupies a very prominent place. He has very beautifully presented, in his novels and short-stories, the different colours and shades of Indian ethos and sensibility. The most important aspect of his work is his excessively self-conscious effort to connect personal and national histories to come to terms with postcoloniality. For the fulfillment of this approach, he projects particular experiences and power of imagination and focus memory to create the capacity to grapple with the alternative reality of the Third World. His achievement lies in the statement he makes through his fiction that we don't live in three worlds but in one, mutually affected and affecting. Writers in his position are exiles or emigrants or expatriates and are constantly haunted by some sense of loss, some urge to reclaim and look back. His novel *Midnight's Children*, beautifully portrays the lovely picture of the beauty of Bombay city as the reflection of modern India. His novel *The Satanic Verses* brought about a very sharp reaction among the Muslims not only living in India but also abroad. They declared the book as blasphemous. Death-threats were given to him by the spiritual leader of Iran. His famous novel *Shame*, presents the conservative and dirty picture of contemporary politics in Pakistan. His famous novel *Shalimar, The Clown*, represents another fine example of Indian ethos where in disputed Kashmir, terrorism has crept away. Another picture of Indian ethos is nicely portrayed in his novel-*The Enchantress of Florence*, where the fictional picture of the Mughal emperor Akbar is drawn.

Keywords: portrayed, novel, Enchantress, beautifully

1. Introduction

The Oxford English Dictionary defines ethos "as the characteristic spirit and beliefs of the people which distinguishes one culture from the other". Indian ethos is drawn from the *Vedas, the Ramayana, the Mahabharat, the Bhagwadgita and Upanishads*. Right from the *Vedic* age, the two basic universal truths of life have been discovered.

1. The essential infinitude and divinity of all souls.
2. The essential oneness and solidarity of universe and all life. The first truth as expressed in the *Upanishad* is "I am Brahman, the individual soul is Brahman and thou art that".

This is the first truth taught to every child. Modern science has accepted that in this holistic universe, all winds and matters are interconnected at a deeper level. The basic unity of life can't be broken. Love, sacrifice, therefore emerge as the only medium for a meaningful living. On the basis of this holistic visions, Indians have developed work ethos of life. They found that all work physical or mental, meaningful or administrative have to be directed towards single purpose. The manifestation of the divinity in men occurs by working for the good of others, for the happiness of others.

Fragrance of *Indian ethos* and sensibility belonging to the group of minority-writers in *Indo-English* literature is deeply-rooted in the concept of Indian culture, philosophy, patriotic zeal and enthusiasm, moral values of India, Indian imagery, myth, rites, scriptures and different religions of India. Some great minority-writers of this group including *Bapsi Sidhwa, Agra Shahid Ali, Imtiyaz Dhariker, Arif Currimbhai, Atia Hussain, Meena Alexander, Salman Rushdie, Nissim Ezekiel and Khushwant Singh* etc.

responded very well to the Indian ethos with their sense of belongingness to Indian spirit, India and its environment having the sense of being an Indian and doing something for India.

Salman Rushdie was born on 19th June, 1947. He happens to be a *British-Indian* novelist and essayist. His second novel, *Midnight's Children* was awarded the *Booker Prize* in 1981 and was deemed to be "the best novel of all winners" on two separate occasions, marking the 25th and 40th anniversary of the prize. His novels display the different shades of *Indian ethos* displaying the pictures of the Indian subcontinent. He tends to combine magic realism with historical fiction. His literary works incorporate the multicoloured pictures of *Indian ethos* dealing with the many connections, disruptions, and migrations between *Eastern and Western* civilizations. His fourth novel-, *The Satanic Verses* (1988) brought about a major controversy arousing threatening protests from *Muslims* in many Countries. Death-threats were imposed against him. A *fatwa* was issued by *Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini*, the supreme leader of *Iran*, on 14th Feb., 1989 calling for his assassination. He was put under police custody by the *British* government due to security reasons.

In 1983, he was elected a fellow of the *Royal Society of Literature*, the U.K.'s senior literary organization. In Jan. 1999, he was appointed *Commander de of France*. In June, 2007, he was awarded *Knighthood* by *Queen Elizabeth II* for rendering his services to literature. In 2008, he was ranked 13th by *The Times*, among the 50 greatest *British* writers since 1945.

Since 2000, he has been living in the *U.S.A*. In 2015, he was named *Distinguished Writer in Residence* at the *Arthur L. Carter Journalism Institute of New York University*.

Formerly he used to teach at *Emory University*. In 2012, he got elected to the *American Academy of Arts and Letters*. He happened to be born in *Bombay* on 19th June, 1947, in a prosperous businessman *Muslim* family. His fame shot up by leaps and bounds as an *India-born British* writer whose allegorical novels display the historical and philosophical issues deeply-coloured in *Indian ethos* by means of surreal characters, brooding humour and an effusive and melodramatic prose-style. He dealt with *Indian ethos* very deeply under the light of sensitive, religious and political issues and that made him a controversial figure. He received his education at *Rugby School* and at the *University of Cambridge*, where he received an *M.A.* degree in history in 1968. During 1940s, he kept working in *London* as an advertising *Copywriter* throughout the maximum time. His first published novel *Grimus*, came to light in 1975. His next novel *Midnight's children* (1981) deals with a fable about modern Indian. It brought to him an unexpected critical and popular success and an international fame. The novel *Shame* (1983) deals with contemporary politics in *Pakistan* with wide popularity. His fourth one *The Satanic Verses* received a huge controversy. Some of the adventures in this book portray a character modeled on the *Prophet Mohammed* and sketch out both him and his transcription of the *Quran* in a manner, that after its publication in 1988's summer drew threatening criticism from *Muslim* community leaders in *Britain*, who denounced it as blasphemous. *Public* demonstrations against the book spread to *Pakistan* like a wild fire in Jan 1989. On 14th Feb, 1989, the spiritual revolutionary leader of *Iran*, *Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini*, publicly condemned the book and issued a fatwa against him for his assassination. Later on he went missing under the protection of *Scotland Yard*. Despite death-threats, he kept writing, producing *Imaginary Homelands* (1991), a collection of essays and criticism. In 1998, after nearly a decade the *Iranian* government withdrew its *fatwa* against him following his return to public life, he brought about the publication of novels- *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* (1999) and *Fury* (2001). He also wrote *Step Across This Line*, a collection of essays between 1992 and 2002 on subjects ravaging from the September 11 attacks to *The Wizard of Oz*. His subsequent novels include *Shalimar the Clown* (2005), an examination of terrorism that crept away in the disputed *Kashmir* region of Indian subcontinent. *The Enchantress of Florence* (2008) unveils the picture of a fictionalized account of the *Mughal* emperor *Akbar*. Thus this novel portrays the historical picture of *Indian ethos* during the *Mughal Dynasty* at the time of *Akbar's reign*. He got married with so many *Rajput* beauties. The children's book *Luka and the Fire of Life* (2010) reveals a different shade of *Indian ethos*. His another famous novel *Two Years Eight Months and Twenty Eight Nights* (2015) deals with the confusion emerging from a rent in the fabric separating the world of humans from that of *Arabic Mythological* figures known as *Jinn*. In *The Golden House* (2017), he has beautifully scattered the fragrance of *Indian ethos* by exploring the immigrant experiences in the *U.S.A.* through a wealthy Indian family that gets settled in *New York City* in the early 21st century. He was knighted by the *British Queen* in 2007, a honour strongly criticized by the *Iranian* government and *Pakistan's* parliament.

The Indian poet *Nissim Ezekiel* comments that every writer has to face the question- "*Who am I*" regarding his writing,

The identity question is very much significant in understanding *Rushdie's* novels. Addressing the question, "*Who am I?*" he says--- "*I my own case I have constantly been asked whether I am British or Indian. The formulation 'Indian-born British Writer' has been invented to explain me. But my new book deals with Pakistan. So what now? 'British-resident Indo-Pakistan Writer? You see the folly of trying to contain writer inside 'passports'.*"¹

There are three major aspects of *Rushdie* as a writer

1. His work as complex literary texts.
2. The concept of freedom of expression as supported by liberal-humanists as the literati.
3. The death-sentence against the author causing chaotic situation.

As a world-famous novelist, his fame shot up by leaps and bounds during 1980s. During this decade, *Smt. Indira Gandhi* was reelected as *India's* premier, the *Zia* regime consolidated power in the aftermath of the execution of *Zulfikar Ali Bhutto*, *Britain* in the early throes of the *Thatcher* revolution and *United States of Ronald Regan* as the still unregenerated cold warrior. He believes that bad times produce good books.

Before writing the novel *Midnight's children*, he wanted to cherish his memories of the most loved city *Bombay*. He spent many months in this city trying simply to capture the spirit of *Indian ethos* as much as possible of the *Bombay* of the 1950s and 1960s as he could. He recollected the remembrances of clothes, worn by the people on particular days, school-scenes and whole

2. *Salman Rushdie, Imaginary Homelands (London: Grant, 1991), P. 67*

passages of *Bombay-dialogues*. He also recollected the memories of advertisements, film-posters, the neon jeep sign on *Marine Drive*, toothpaste ads for *Binaca*.

With reference to the spirit of *Indian ethos*, he is intended to challenge the imposition of an imperialist view of *Indian's* history. The *Indian* vision of the cultural ethos of the country is nicely represented in his novel—*Midnight's Children*. In this novel, *Saleem*, the narrator points out ----- "*He was the child of a father who was not his father, but also the child of a time which damaged reality so badly that nobody even managed to put it together again.*"²

In his narrative, *Salman* attempts to capture the *Indian* urge to "*encapsulate the whole reality*". (75) Presenting his view of history, he claims that history-making involves the "*swallowing*" of lives:

I am the sum total of everything that went before me, of all I have been, seen, done, of everything done-to-me. I am everyone everything whose being- in-the world affected was affected by mine. I am anything that happens after. I have gone which would not have happened if I had not come. Nor am I particularly exceptional in this matter, each "I", everyone of the now-six- hundred-million plus of us, contains a similar multitude. I repeat for the last time to : to understand me, you will have to swallow a world (383).

Life in the literary world has never been the same ever since the publication of his fourth novel, *The Satanic Verses*, leading to a chaotic problem of reading, explaining and responding to a troubled and troubling text. The critic, *Amin Malak*, has convincingly argued---- "*While operating within a postmodernist, counter-culture context, The Satanic*

Verses daringly

3. Salman Rushdie, *Midnight's Children* (London: Pan, 1981), P. 420

presents *itself as historiographical metafiction. It displays various tropes and encompasses 'multiple layers of signification'* [3].

His work is guided by the postmodern views on history, which "*confront the problematic nature of the past as an object of knowledge for the present*" [4].

For him, history is selective, narrative, reconstructive discourse that challenges the dominant versions of representative and provokes a counter discourse. Like all post modern writers, he sees 'reality' as an unfinished project, a flux phenomena that resists limits and closure and remains open to all sorts of renderings. Hence, one is aware with a shock, of the clash of cultures and the conflict of representations.

Under the deep effect of suffering and disappointment, Rushdie happened to write *Haroun* and '*The Sea of Stories*'. In his review of the novel, Khushwant Singh writes--- "*Haroun and the Sea of Stories is Salman Rushdie's answer to Imam Khomeini and his other tormentors. He may have tendered an apology to the Muslims for hurting their feelings with The Satanic Verses but like Galileo, in his heart of hearts, he still feels that he had every right to write what he did*" [5].

4. Amin Malak "Reading the Crisis: The Polemics of Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*" Ariel 20.4 (Oct. 1989), P. 176

1. Linda Hutcheon, "Challenging the Conventions of Realism: Post-Modernism in Canadian Literature," *The Canadian Forum* (April 1986), P. 37
2. Khushwant Singh, "Salaam Salman," *Indian Express, Magazine*, 21st Oct., 1990, P. 4

Haroun and the *Sea of Stories* is Rushdie's flight to freedom— into that realm where defeating the forces of the *Dark* (silence), a writer enjoys full freedom of expression. As a strategy, he adopts the narrative mode of fable and the stance of a fantasist. In *Shame*, the writer conferred— "*Realism can break a writer's heart. Fortunately however, I am only telling a sort of modern fairy tale, so that's all right : nobody need get upset, or take anything I say seriously. No drastic action need be taken, either. What a relief!*" [6].

Commenting about *Midnight's Children*, Uma Parameswaran employs the phrase--- "*the decolonizing of English*". "*There is a deep organic unity between language, history and writing. Indian concepts of time and the philosophical thinking beautifully reflect the spirit of Indian ethos in their language for example, yesterday is the same as the word for tomorrow English as the language used by the imperialists coloured, displaced, and obscured India's own languages. Consequently, while having inherited a very rich literary tradition, Indian English writers must be constantly conscious that they are progressing to displace their own tradition. They are not only working in, but also preferring the language of their former colonizers*" [7].

He is very well aware of this diversion. He highlights this problem very well impressively through irony and modified use of language. In *Midnight's Children*, he wishes to make a very deep correlation between the uneasy political

situation and chaotic historical sense of India and Pakistan historically, he takes *India and Pakistan* very differently. In *Shame*, he displays that

1. Salman Rushdie, *Shame* (London, Pan., 1983) P. 70
2. Aruna Srivastava, "The Empire Writes Back" : Language and History in *Shame* and *Midnight's Children*," *Ariel*, 20.4 (1989) PP. 62-78

Pakistanis happen to suffer from a lack of history as migrants (63). He obscures that creating a new national history of Pakistan is very much confusing and problematic. "*It is well known that the term "Pakistan", an acronym was originally thought up by a group of Muslim intellectuals. P for the Punjab is A for the Afgans, K for the Kashmiris, S for Sind and the tan,*" they say, *for Baluchistan..... So it was a ward born to exile which then went East, was borne-across or translated and imposed itself on history, a returning migrant, settling down on partitioned land, forming a palimpsest on the past. A palimpsest obscures what lies beneath. To build Pakistan it was necessary to cover up Indian history, to deny that Indian centuries lay just beneath the surface of Pakistani Standard Time. The past was rewritten: there was nothing else to be done*".

He tends to switch back again and again to his perplexity of an Indian English writer. He knows that he will never be able to sever his connections with the east: "*I tell myself, this will be a novel of leave-taking, my last words on the East, from which many years ago, I began to come loose. I don't always believe myself when I say this. It is part of the world to which, whether I like it or not, I am still joined, if only by elastic bands.*" (28)

He very strongly wishes to claim that books are interim reports from the sensibility of writer and it is always in a fast-changing process in accordance with the changing reality. *Haroun* is well-written in his response to the immediate. This one is brilliantly Modelled with 12 chapters in the form of 12 stories around a central theme with the central figures of a father and a son, *Rashid and Haroun*.

His fascination with *Aesop's Fables* and *Panchtantra* is evident from his first novel *Grimes* crystallizing ultimately in the marvellous feat of *Haroun* and the *Sea of Stories*. About the element of fantasy, Rushdie says--- "*I build imaginary countries and try to impose them on the ones that exist. A fantasist normally abstracts or extrapolates things from the real world with a view to pursuing their imaginative logic. Simultaneously he has something to say. As he further say,*" the writer has a kind of vision which he tries to project on to other people, and the fit between that vision and other people's is the tension between the writer and the reader. As a writer, I am trying to say, "*that is the shape of how it is, and the more I can persuade you that is how it is, the greater my success*" [8].

5. John Hafferden, *Novelists in Interview* (London: Methuen, 1985) P. 247

6. References

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8. Srivastava Aruna. *The Empire Writes Back : Language and History in Shame and Midnight's Children*", Ariel, 1989.