

# Socio-Political Views in Salman Rushdie's Selected Novels

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**Abstract-** The aims of this research paper is to identify in what forms 'newness' is a part of Salman Rushdie's fiction, as well as an overarching philosophical 'newness' that vindicates Rushdie's anti-humanist view of human existence which is constantly subjected to the authoritarian 'presence' by the modern power structure controlled either by the institution of capitalism or that of religions. As Rushdie is a part of the conditions prevailing in the confluence of post colonialism, postmodernism and neo-colonialism which he attempts to depict, the aim then is to explore his new way of looking at them, through applying anti-aesthetic attitudes to his subject matter. His novels depict a distinctly different world, by his new anti-aesthetic approach. Rushdie is able to present a new perspective of human materiality which is described under the rubrics of postmodernism and/or postcolonialism. One of the significant aspects of Rushdie's literary newness is that in each of his subsequent novels the precipice he looks over is ever more perilous; his imagination is able to perceive and represent it in a new style. In his imagination, Rushdie's world is "post-postcolonial" one.

## INTRODUCTION

Rushdie attempts to formulate order in the midst of this chaos. Rushdie visualizes a history in which the incidence of events is a matter of contingency and therefore loses its causality as well as meaning. In his novels, Rushdie tries to give new meanings and perspectives to these events, thus creates texts contrapuntal to those presented in so called accepted versions of reality. For him individual cultural and national identity becomes difficult because of its claim to an origin which is grounded on absolutism. To unfold the meaning of Salman Rushdie's novels, it is necessary to understand the political and cultural contexts of Rushdie's novels. He had thoughts on a series of literary and following subjects which he has for the most part been reluctant to discuss publicly. Salman Rushdie is famous for his novels like

Midnight's Children (1981) and The Satanic Verses (1987). He won the Booker Prize for Midnight's Children in 1981. In The Moor's Last Sigh Rushdie examines the unsoundness of his assumption that cultural hybridity is an answer to all problems of inter-cultural discord. The cultural hybridity which promised so much to eclectic Rushdie's protagonist Saladin Chamcha towards the end of The Satanic Verses for dissolving the troubles arising from European and Islamic fundamentalisms in metropolitan London turns out to be a chimera in India, a land with a multi-cultural history. The Moor's Last Sigh presents a picture of hybridity going wrong for Rushdie. Under the intense bigotry of Hindu fundamentalism during Mrs. Indira Gandhi's rule, Uma Sarasvati, the affirmed imitator of Aurora Zogoiby's hybrid art, now denounces it when she sees the chance for personal gain if she changes the theme of her painting into a more nationalist and sectarian one. Perhaps the hybridized American continent is able to offer some glimmer of hope for Rushdie as he deals with the non-sectarian power of global capitalism and its inexorable drive for cultural supremacy in The Ground Beneath Her Feet. When Rushdie's character Ormus Cama abandons 'ersatz England' for his new land of plenty in New York, the vista there strikes him as full of the plague of corrupting power of wealth and gluttony, as has been the case in his former countries of residence - England and India. Conceivably, perhaps, it is the nature of civilization which barricades itself within the circumscription of fundamentalism. Rushdie now looks into human nature and its paranoid constitution in Fury and as the thesis argues, he seems to give expression to his disappointment about the way of a world in which tyranny and insincerity of all kinds reign supreme. In my reading of Rushdie's postcolonial critical novelistic discourse, I have borne

in mind Bhabha's precautionary remarks about the dialectical thinking which goes into Rushdie's novels. As Bhabha warns, "do not disavow or sublimate the otherness (alterity) that constitutes the symbolic field of psychic and social identifications" (Location 173). Rushdie as a postcolonial writer represents the incommensurability of cultural values and priorities which in Bhabha's words, "cannot be accommodated within theories of cultural relativism or pluralism" (173). Since Bhabha insists that postcolonial perspectives require that cultural and political identities are constructed through a process of alterity, the time for assimilating minorities to holistic and organic notions of cultural value has severely passed (173). In Bhabha's observation, Jameson has recognized the tendency of "internationalization of the national situation" (173). However, this does not mean the absorption of the particular in the general. These nation theories open up the potential for politics of cultural imperialism, including the cyborg and ethnicities with their attendant complications. In order to construct supporting and cultural identities through a process of alterity, individuals, as Rushdie suggests, must have the freedom to dream. He says in his essay *In God We Trust: The dream is part of our very essence*. Given the gift of self-consciousness, we can dream versions of ourselves, new selves for old ... our response to the world is essentially imaginative (author's italic) ... [and as he says] this behaviour conforms very well to the Hindu idea of maya, the veil of illusion that hangs before our limited human eyes and prevents us from seeing things as they truly are - so that we mistake the veil, maya, for reality. (377-78) Dialectically, Rushdie continues, "Dreaming is our gift; it may also be our tragic flaw" (378). Yet it is this freedom to dream against all orthodoxies that encapsulates in Rushdie's writings his postcolonial and post modern anti-aesthetics. Gibreel Farishta exercises this gift to find some meaning to his tortured denial of Islam in *The Satanic Verses* but this leads him to the precipice of schizophrenia and blasphemous skepticism about the authentic voice of God in the Koran.

Thus the scope of Newness that Salman Rushdie's literary work encompasses in the postcolonial context is so multidimensional that it is able to interpellate many conventional trajectories of cultural thoughts, such as European, Islamic and Hindu, with his

characteristic ways of interrogation and introspection. As is well documented, the locus of Rushdie's literary journey has taken him through the ideological terrains which generations of postcolonial migrants, located in the disjuncture of the dissolution of European imperialism, face constantly. Due to what Fredric Jameson terms "demographies of the postmodern" (356), migrants to the West from former colonies are located in what Michel Foucault terms the interstices of cultural diversity in which all old ideas are subject to new insights gained in the condition of postcolonial anxiety and postmodern schizophrenic fragmentation. *The Satanic Verses*, as Rushdie declares, "gives a migrant's-eye view of the world" (394), provoking "radical dissent and questioning and reimagining" (395). Rushdie poses himself as a "modernist, urban man", who accepts "uncertainty as the only constant, change as the only sure thing" (405). The representation of the Muslim migrant community as culturally hybrid is a source of blasphemy for Islamic fundamentalists. In *The Satanic Verses*, the deracination of the Muslim Sufyan family from its pure Islamic roots is an outrageous anathema to such fundamentalists. Hind's old world is crumbling in the reality of this modern city, which represents, as a character in the book says, "the locus classicus of incompatible realities" (404). The drama in *Brickhall* and its *Shaandaar Cafe* which concern Rushdie's characters is portrayed in "a narrative of borderline conditions of culture and discipline", as Homi Bhabha would describe it (213). This scene depicts how human beings forced to live on the margins of metropolitan society lead a double life with a journey of transnational migration and dwelling within the diasporic ghetto which resembles what Jameson describes as the "spatial thirdness" (Jameson 372). In this space the newness of cultural practices and historical narratives is registered by "intersection", a "generic discordance", "unexpected juxtaposition" and "semi-autonomization of reality", according to Jameson. Mrs. Sufyan's setting of the *Shaandaar Cafe* has taken on its own auto-pilot. She despairs about the loss of Control over the destiny of her family which she once exercised in Bangladesh before immigrating to England. The 'new' reality of family life in *Brickhall* continues to distance itself from the once familiar reality of Islamic conditions. The migrants of *Brickhall* ghetto are viewed by the

metropolitan colonial ideology as its other, the 'Devil' (Satanic Verses 257).

Rushdie explores the nature of this 'Other' in his novels; it is impersonal but represented in his literature as the faithfulness to an ideology which, recalling Louis Althusser's definition, conditions the imaginary relationship to its adherent's material conditions of existence. It is that ideology which cannot flourish without the aid of the notion of difference in absolute terms from other ideologies, which must be obliterated at any cost for its own survival. Ideology thrives on people's anxiety and alienation, on the principle, as Rushdie says, that the world is clearly either "This or not that" (396). Thus, as a new literary form, Rushdie attempts to create metaphors of the conflict between different sorts of authors, and different types of texts, like the literary and spiritual, as in *Shame* and *The Satanic Verses*, between literature and politics as in *Midnight's Children*, *Shame*, *The Moor's Last Sigh*, *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*, and to a certain extent in *Fury*. With reference to *Midnight's Children*, Rushdie affirms this political and literary elision in *Imaginary Homelands* when he declares, "Writers and politicians are natural rivals. Both groups try to make the world in their own images; they fight for the same region. And the novel is one way of denying the official, politician's version of truth" (14).

In *Shame* Rushdie adopts the Koranic literary style which begins with the genealogy of its characters. This style exemplifies Rushdie's postmodern newness, what Jameson terms, "generic discordance", which subverts not only the traditional English literary canon but also questions the opening notion of a theocratic state by satirizing the very idea of family history which hides many ignominies from the outside.

#### REFERENCES

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