

WOMEN IN FLUX OF CULTURE , RELIGION & POLITICS IN SALMAN RUSHDIES SELECTED NOVELS.

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ABSTRACT:

There have been arguments which try to portray Indian English literature as an alien element to Indian literature. One of these arguments is that it is written in an alien language; and these works are written for the foreign readers who crave for a different kind of taste. Again, they are against the notion of English being used by Indians for creative purpose. Since Indian English literature is the product of writers who are very much Anglicized either in their way of life or in their intellectual make-up, it is far removed from real Indian life, Indian traditions and Indian culture. Thus, according to them, it cannot and does not reflect Indianness or Indian problems; it is not Indian because it does not incorporate Indian spirit.

The present study undertake to explore the women in flux of culture and politics in the novels of Salman Rushdie. In present work, all the major characters are seen through the magnifying glass of Islam. And here, the sincere efforts are being made to find out how Rushdie has portrayed them? And whether depictions of these characters are according to Islamic ideology? However, the women characters caught in the flux of culture and politics, from other novels, also explained, not through the Islamic point of view, but in a general way.

KEYWORDS: WOMEN, POLITICS, RELIGION, CULTURE, ISLAM.

INTRODUCTION TO INDIAN ENGLISH LITERATURE

An honest overview of the contemporary scenario of Indian English literature immediately makes the above arguments cliché. Indian English literature has now started receiving serious attention of literary historians. It is a proof in itself that it is growing in quantity as well as in quality. Despite a general deterioration in the standard of English studies, more people, at present, read and understand this language and an Indian author can now largely depend on Indian readership.

BRIEF SURVEY OF INDIAN ENGLISH LITERATURE

Even a precise survey of the history of Indian English Literature throws light on the various aspects of Indian English Literature. From the very beginning of Indian English Literature, it is easy to trace that the prose writings revolve around various subjects but the society, the culture and the politics in India hold the centre place among all of them. All major prose writers and novelists such as Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Tagore, Vivekananda, Aurobindo, Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan, Raja Rao, Bhabani Bhattacharya, M. Malgonkar, Khushwant Singh, G.V.Desani etc. were involved in social, cultural and political activities in one way or other and had written on the relate issues.

If we begin to focus on culture or cultural representation, we start confronting with a number of issues. On one hand the cultural boundaries are dissipating and therefore it has become impossible to talk of cultures as self-contained and authentic wholes. On the other hand the Post-colonial discourse has put this liberal concept into a margin and postulated a new paradigm on cultural encounters. At present we are witnessing a time in which we are neither able to uphold our own culture nor to compromise with the western culture. Right from the beginning, the British had uprooted our sound cultural heritage. India has had an extremely rich tradition of storytelling, a testament to which is its mythology, folklore and umpteen languages and cultures. But prose fiction as we practise it, is basically a legacy of the West. It was Macaulay's infamous "Minute on Indian Education" (1835) that led to the introduction of education in English by the British. As a result, Indians naturally began to try their hand at writing in English. Indo-Anglian fiction as it is frequently referred to, has a fairly young history dating back to about two hundred years. In the course of this span and particularly in the last few decades, it has established its presence in the international arena. From its early modest beginnings, Indian English fiction (the

most popular component of Indian English literature) has come a long way, winning almost every significant literary award in recent years. Indian English fiction incorporates literature written originally in English by authors of Indian ancestry, nationality or birth and hence it is also associated with members of the Indian diaspora. It took a host of writers to beat new paths for themselves and those to follow. To understand the course Indian English fiction has taken, it is necessary to look at the gamut of work by Indian writers in English. The early foundations can be traced in the political writing of Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Sri Aurobindo, Mohandas Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, and Rabindranath Tagore's work leading to his receipt of the Nobel Prize in 1913. As in the shadowy beginnings of any genre, the beginnings of Indian fiction in English are cloaked in a certain amount of obscurity. Among the early Indian writers who published fiction in English, those that merit mention are KlyashChunderDutt's *A Journal of 48 Hours of the Year 1945* (1835), his cousin ShosheeChunderDutt's *Republic of Orissa: Annals from the Pages of the Twentieth Century* (1845) and Panchkouree Khan's *The Revelations of an Orderly* (1849). Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay's *Rajmohan's Wife* (1864) enjoys the distinction of being regarded as the first published novel in English by an Indian.

CULTURE, RELIGION & POLITICS IN SALMAN RUSHDIES SELECTED NOVEL

Sabrina Hassumani in her book "*Salman Rushdie: A Postmodern Reading of His Major Works*" attempts a close textual analysis of Rushdie's five major novels: *Midnight's Children*, *Shame*, *The Satanic Verses*, *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*, and *The Moor's Last Sigh*. It focuses on the manner in which Rushdie is a postmodern writer whose subject is the postcolonial moment and makes the point that unlike many other contemporary subcontinental authors writing in English, Rushdie recognizes that practicing identity politics leads to nativism and nationalism, categories he rejects because they merely invert the colonizer/colonized binary, leaving violent hierarchies intact. His impulse, instead, is to deconstruct the colonizer/colonized binary and in doing so attempt to clear a "new" postmodern space."

The fiction of Salman Rushdie has now been examined and analysed from a variety of perspectives. A review of the books and journal articles reveals the proliferation of postcolonial criticism of works addressing exclusively the political/social consequences of the fatwa following the publication of *The Satanic Verses*, of magical realist readings, and books labelling Rushdie as a traitor and as an "Uncle Tom," with Western writers celebrating what they perceive of as Rushdie's "reason" versus the fundamentalism of Islam. My reading of Rushdie is informed by poststructuralist and postmodern theory and focuses on the manner in which Rushdie is a

postmodern writer whose subject is the postcolonial moment. Reading him in the context of poststructuralist/postmodern theory not only allows me to address the issues of representation that Rushdie raises very effectively in his major political novels, it also facilitates my discussion of the manner in which he pushes the boundaries of the modern novel.

Michael Gorra in his book “After Empire: Scott, Naipaul, Rushdie” explores how three novelists of empire--Paul Scott, V. S. Naipaul, and Salman Rushdie--have charted the perpetually drawn and perpetually blurred boundaries of identity left in the wake of British imperialism. Arguing against a model of cultural identity based on race, Gorra begins with Scott's portrait, in *The Raj Quartet*, of the character Hari Kumar--a seeming oxymoron, an "English boy with a dark brown skin," whose very existence undercuts the belief in an absolute distinction between England and India. He then turns to the opposed figures of Naipaul and Rushdie, the two great novelists of the Indian diaspora. Whereas Naipaul's long and controversial career maps the "deep disorder" spread by both imperialism and its passing, Rushdie demonstrates that certain consequences of that disorder, such as migrancy and mimicry, have themselves become creative forces. *After Empire* provides engaging and enlightening readings of postcolonial fiction, showing how imperialism helped shape British national identity--and how, after the end of empire, that identity must now be reconfigured.

The book **“Between Cultural Imperialism and the Fatwa: Colonial Echoes and Postcolonial Dialogue in Salman Rushdie's *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*”** by EvaKonigsays--The first novel Salman Rushdie published after going into hiding was *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*. Many reviewers and critics have assumed that the novel must be a creative response to the death sentence pronounced by the Ayatollah Khomeini of Iran and have consequently interpreted it as an allegory of free speech or of literature. While this novel is undeniably an allegory at some level, a more careful analysis reveals that its allegorical surface is ambiguous and invites a different reading. In fact, Rushdie simultaneously sets up and deconstructs such a simple allegorical interpretation.

Under the circumstances of its publication, it is understandable that many readers of the novel assume its main significance to lie in exposing the mechanisms of dictatorship that oppress free speech in general and freedom of the imagination in particular. Clearly, Rushdie's readers were expecting to find a creative response or reaction to his personal situation in his new work. As the history of literature shows us, writers working under oppressive regimes often write allegorically, transposing their message into elaborate codes to elude detection by censors.

Examples abound in the literature of the Soviet era, not to mention Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* in recent American literature. However, it is important to point out that although *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* was published in 1990, it was conceived to entertain his young son Zafar while he was writing *The Satanic Verses*, that is, long before the fatwa was pronounced on him. Moreover, the two novels clearly share similar artistic and political concerns which most interpreters of Haroun have ignored. Strikingly, this description would fit Haroun just as well since it also deals with issues of cultural and political confrontation, of boundaries and languages, of exclusion and identity, of interpretation and (re)definition. In this paper I will first explore the aspects of *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* that seemingly lend themselves to a simplistic reading as an allegory about free speech, while simultaneously presenting a critique of the allegorical interpretation. Then I will offer a postcolonial analysis that sheds light on those elements of the novel which are often glossed over in the allegorical interpretation. I will argue that Haroun, generally considered a minor work, in fact achieves a good deal more than a narcissistic retelling of Rushdie's suffering under the fatwa and that it clearly continues the political and aesthetic concerns of his earlier work.

The interpretation of the novel as an allegory about democratic and artistic freedom is favoured in the Anglo-centric world. In the shadow of the fatwa, the novel tends to be seen as the author's plea for the unfettered expression of the imagination. Accordingly, the evil Cultmaster Khattam-Shud is considered to be a portrait of the Ayatollah Khomeini.

The book *Midnight's Diaspora* by Daniel Herwitz is a distinguished collection of intellectuals, writers and public figures provide fresh insights into the complex political and cultural meanings of **Salman Rushdie's** writing—and the celebrated writer responds. Twenty years after Ayatollah Khomeini declared a fatwa against him, Salman Rushdie remains the world's most controversial and perhaps most famous living novelist. Far more than an acclaimed author, Rushdie is a global figure whose work is read and studied by a wide variety of constituencies—both for its extraordinary literary achievement and for the insights it affords into the most significant political debates of our time. This important collection of essays and interviews brings together a distinguished group of critics and commentators, including Rushdie himself, to explore the political and cultural contexts of Rushdie's novels— Pakistan, India, Mumbai, exile and the many milieu of Islam. While the two substantial interviews with Rushdie illuminate his thoughts on literary and political subjects that he has for the most part been reluctant to discuss in public, each of the essays offers a distinct and often highly original take on Rushdie and his work. This

combination of fresh perspectives and historical and political context will appeal to a wide array of readers interested not only in Rushdie's own work but also in the many contentious political issues it raises.

CONCLUSION

Women characters are all-pervasive in the works fiction of Salman Rushdie. In the novels like *Midnight's Children* and *Shame*, one can come across with the more women characters than the males. In many of his novels, women characters are at the helm of all significant affairs. The women have been kept in focus; it appears, because Rushdie recognizes her as the genesis of all ideas, actions and a great shaping force. One cannot sideline women characters and their roles while studying the fictions of Rushdie. Thus exploration of the aspects like political, cultural, cannot be done in isolation without focusing on the phenomenon of women characters. Many male characters owe their existence to her and are directly or indirectly influenced by her. She is also a propagator of culture and belief through the male characters. She always acts as a model, no matter, whether her influence is positive or otherwise.

Salman Rushdie is an ardent crusader for women's rights and strengths. He delineates the freedoms and oppression faced by women in their traditional roles, and portrays a diversity of strong women who make their own space, and reach out for controlling their own destinies sometimes despite and sometimes because of traditional codes of conduct. Rushdie puts forth various roles of women in his novels.

Rushdie has stressed invariably the positive and optimistic aspects of his cosmopolitan footing. He has dealt extensively on the historical, social and political problems of his countries—one should say India and Pakistan.

Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* draws a lot upon Indian politics while *Shame* hits out at the political mess in Pakistan. In both these novels, the emphasis is on ridiculing the politics, which reduce the individual to a puppet. This is reality, which cannot be wiped out from the face of earth.

Rushdie believes that religion has always been a potent weapon in the hands of those ruled India, and therefore his religious allegory is absorbed quickly into the political. In *Shame*, Rushdie has mixed the political and cultural ideas with that of Islam and a muslim state Pakistan. The failure of Pakistan as a political and cultural dream has turned into a nightmare.

In *Midnight's Children*, Rushdie has transformed his own plight involving birth in the partition year 1947. In *Shame*, he depicts the fate and fortunes of two families—Raza Hyder and Iskander Harappa. The story is of excessive humiliation operating on different levels in Pakistan.

On the social level, it works on the backwards and superstitious Islamic society that multiplies on shame through limitless repression breeding violence, that leads to psychological horrors in the society. Rushdie says:-

Repression is a seamless garment, a society which is authoritarian in its social and sexual codes, which crushes its women beneath the intolerable burden of honour and propriety.....(Shame, 173)

Rushdie hits out at the plight of women in Pakistan from the platform of shame. In *Shame*, women are portrayed as the victims of the system, which is extremely oppressive. They are trapped in a social set up which is unbearably authoritarian in its Social and Sexual codes. For Pakistan's future Rushdie advocates the imposition of new laws for the sustenance of state in the wake of the destruction of old laws, like Islam and autocracy. How can Islam be an old law. Though it is as old as fourteen hundred years but its ideas are still new. Rushdie has looked at Islam from a very narrow angle. To understand Islam, one should have a right vision.

Rushdie accuses Islam of suppressing the desires of woman. This view is highly objectionable because in the light of Islamic injunctions, both men and women are equal. If Islamic system is viewed under right perspective we will admit that this is the most balanced and just view in regards to man's social life. Islam can *never crush woman beneath the intolerable burden of honour and propriety*. On the contrary, a woman in Islam can enjoy a high state of honour and position.

Islamic law is a rational law, flexible, that can be changed according to circumstances. Rushdie has ridiculed the very objective underlying the system of *pardah*. *Purdah* is meant to protect her from evil glances, which means a woman should live with high morals, dignity and prestige. Even her sexual desires can be satisfied under the sacred union of marriage.

Rushdie's women in *Shame* observe *Purdah* from the world outside their mansion, and inside the old isolated mansion, their dignity is ruined by a 'common-man.'

Rushdie has portrayed the dark and evil aspects of the system of *Purdah*. He however has failed to glorify the brighter side of it, which is actually the main law and objective of Islam.

A sensible and clear study of Islam shows that a man is not allowed to marry the sisters together. Even if by law he is allowed to keep four wives, he has to divorce his first wife to marry her sister. But Rushdie has ridiculed and mocked the basic system of Islam.

It is a grim reality that Pakistan, under the strict Islamic Shariyat, has imposed certain rules on its people. Rushdie has painted it with fine colours, but at certain points he called the religion as detestable.

It is true that imposition of any religion forcibly can create resentment, but Rushdie's stand against religion is undesirable and full of contradictions. The very essence of Islam lies in its basic values, its human attitude towards woman, as in Islam a woman is not an embodiment of shame, but is a picture of nobility, honour and grace.

Rushdie hits at the plight of woman in Pakistan from the platform of *Shame*. Even, in *Midnight's Children*, his attitude towards the system of *pardah* is not desirable. He sees not only the white side of reality but the darker side too.

On the contrary, woman in Islamic conception is a symbol of love, serenity and modesty. She should therefore get an opportunity to develop her natural abilities to the maximum, within the social framework, so that she may play her role effectively in the development of civilization. Thus in Islam a woman enjoys a place of honour and dignity. She has been elevated and honoured from disgrace and shame, to the place of dignity and honour in society.

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