

Salman Rushdie's Novels: Themes and Techniques

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Abstract

The name of Salman Rushdie has become synonymous with the new novel in Indian writings in English. Although now he is a British citizen of Indian origin, Rushdie mainly draws on the South Asian region as the geographical setting of his novels. It seems he has not been able to serve his umbilical cord with the homes respectively. It is not just a sentimental attachment, but a very healthy pragmatic concern for the social and political life of the people of the region. Rushdie's political engagement, however, is not just registered in subject matter he chooses to address; his political arguments are, in fact, inseparable from his conception of the nature and function of the art. Hence in this paper attempt has to be made to objectively assess the major novels of Salman Rushdie in the light of the critical responses of the variegated at times contradictory, hues to fiction.

Keywords: Salman Rushdie; Indian writing in English; postcolonialism; politics; history; globalization

Introduction

Salman Rushdie, a Bombay born London based novelist is ranked among the world's best novelists like Milan Kundera, Gracia Marquez, Gunter Grass, John Irving and V.S. Naipaul. He established himself as one of the best novelists of the world. Among his works with just six novels – *Grimus*, *Midnight's Children*, *The Satanic Verses*, *The Moor's Last Sigh*, *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* and *Shame*, he has emerged as a major novelist delineating the contemporary scene on the Indian sub-continent. His novel *Midnight's Children* (1980) has unleashed the torrent of praise when it won the 1981 Booker Macon all prize. Rushdie's two novels – *Grimus* (1975) and *Shame* (1983) have also shown a kind of talent found in world class novelists. *The Satanic Verses* (1988) finally made Rushdie the best known writer of the world, though forced him to live in fugitives under heavy security since Iran's spiritual leader late Ayatollah Khomeini called for his death for his alleged blasphemy in the Novel.

Salman Rushdie emerges as one of the major novelists who deal with politics, history, nation and the gripping stories. Although his first novel *Grimus* (1975) a science fiction passed off almost unnoticed by the reading public, his two subsequent novels *Midnight's Children* and *Shame* are highly acknowledged and awarded. Both the novels are historical, political novels dealing with the history and the politics of India and Pakistan respectively. According to Rushdie, "For every text; there is a context, (Rushdie's *Imaginary Homeland*, 92) and the context was of course political and intellectual besides post colonialism and post modernism.

In *Midnight's Children* Rushdie seems to be talking about politics in a style similar to that of Milan Kundera. The plot of *Grimus* is more a historical, whereas *Midnight's Children* is more on the lines of *Bildungsroman* (a novel form dealing with a person's early development) The hero of the novel Saleem was born on the stroke of Midnight and hence the novel was named as *Midnight's Children*. The novel is called as "autobiographical as the hero Saleem and Rushdie were born in the same part of the city Bombay at the same time. In the novel, that is a direct collision with the individual with history. It is the moment in Indian history in which Saleem spent his childhood claiming that he in same way can influence his great historical events. The Bangladesh Liberation Movement and Emergency in India have greatly influenced the theme of the novel. The Part III of the novel is directly a more political book than the earlier parts of the book. *Shame* (1983) banned in Pakistan is different from Rushdie's earlier book. At that time he shows tendency to upstage the plot with his own presence. *Shame* contains a number of stories; each story is somehow interlinked with each other. Commenting on the novel Rushdie says, "I don't feel that while writing *Shame* or *Midnight's Children*", I discovered myself as a political novelist. It seems to me that everything in both the books has to do with politics and with the relation of the individuals and history. In fact, both *Shame* and *Midnight's Children* closely follow parallels or thematic pattern. The role of Omar Khayyam and Shakil in the novel *Shame*

is identical with that of Saleem Sinai in the *Midnight's Children*. Both the novels represent Rushdie's satirical venom applied with merciless comic vituperation to the political repotrage of scenario in the two countries.

Moreover, Rushdie has used Indian historical events as a literary device to present and expose the human predicament in Indian society. He presents the common rhythm of life through the various aspects of Indian life. He sketches lively scene, the absurdities, the pretension and the outer excitements and the traditional make up of the situations touched with his Indian historical events. His authentic descriptions are marked with intense realism. His characters at the prime stage of life are wonderfully innocents and show distinctive artistic presentations. Rushdie can cause to work as miracle using even a modest language resource with honesty and confidence. His themes, characters dialogues of straight forward statements are able to carry the feeling and atmosphere of Indian society. He uses common English idioms without bringing any change in their structure. His language is perfectly capable of presenting the ideas and suitable amusement of the readers of the east and the west. He uses a lot of Indian words, e.g. Gunda, Chup, Amma, Takht, etc. His vocabulary is large and adequate enough to deal with the range of subject matter. All these factors combined together have placed his name at the top among all the Indo-English novelists.

Another literary product of his hibernation was Rushdie's sixth novel "The Moor's Last Sigh" (1995) wrote fourteen years after *Midnight's Children*. The novel is historical embodiment of the darken, less giving assessment of India's post-independence political life. "The Moor's Last Sigh" in a conspicuous departure from the concern of the earlier Indian fiction dismisses the emergency into deliberately cursory sentence. The most obvious representative of the optimistic pluralise sensibility in *The Moor's Last Sigh* is the flamboyant, middle class, socialite painter Aurora Zogoiby whose vision of India seeks ultimately to affirm an India in which "Jews, Christians, Muslims, Persis, Sikhs, Buddhist, Jains" are allowed to co-exist peacefully in the same aesthetic space (*The Moor's Last Sigh* 227).

Emerging out of hiding after the threat of the fatwa melted down in 1998. Rushdie published two novels

The Ground Beneath Her Feet (1999) and *Fury* (2009) both of which take globalization as a central theme. Globalization is a term that has been used extensively in recent decades to refer to the growing interconnectedness of the world economic, political and social system. In *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* Rushdie suggests that global interconnections between divergent localities have gained a new distinctive character because the world is 'speeding up'.

Rushdie's subsequent novel *Fury* (2001) is a departure from *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* in many ways. The slum salute to Bombay progressively made in *The Moor* as *The Ground* climaxes in *Fury* as the protagonist MalikSalanka's Bombay childhood is barely explored . Correspondingly Rushdie also makes a formal shift. From the diachronic narrative method of the ground which like many novels by the author bridges several generations and several historical periods towards a synchronic narrative arrangement in *Fury* in which the story moves literally between two parallel locations New York Hampstead, the imaginary Island of Lilliput-Blefuscu and the fantasy world of Galileo.

The novels of Salman Rushdie are essentially literary pieces of narration which also try to do some socio-political analysis through iroy, wit, humour satire and allegory. It is through the sheer force and effectiveness of his writing that Rushdie has attracted both, harsh criticism as well as plaudits and still remains one of the most popular read criticized as applauded modern English novelist all over the world. Although Rushdie writes as a third world cosmopolitan, his casmopolitanism allows fresh and independent conception about history, nation, nationhood, self, identity, nativity and about a homelessness that is also a worldliness about a double edged post colonial responsibility.

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