

Narration of Nation in Salman Rushdie's Novels: A Postcolonial Reading

Dipanjoy Mukherjee

Assistant Professor, Dept. of English, Chhatna Chandidas Mahavidyalaya, Chhatna, Bankura,
(West Bengal) India

Abstract

Salman Rushdie is one of the most renowned Indian writers and who has through his literary works made noteworthy contributions about the Indian nation. Salman Rushdie even though being an Anglo Indian writer, through his novels has brought into light to the readers, several unknown issues that his motherland India encounters through his extremely creative writing style. This paper will investigate in detail about the narration of nation, magic realism and post colonialism with specific reference to the fictional works of Salman Rushdie. Among numerous fictional works of Salman Rushdie three specific novels namely, *Midnight's Children*, *Shame* and *Shalimar the Clown* have been taken into consideration in this paper.

Key Words: Indian nation, imagination, post colonialism, magic realism, narrative techniques, Salman Rushdie

INTRODUCTION

Salman Rushdie is an Anglo- Indian writer, often writes about the homeland, Rushdie left from when Rushdie was still a schoolboy. Ahmed Salman Rushdie was born in Bombay, India, on June 19, 1947, to a Muslim family. Rushdie was sent to England at the age of fourteen for schooling. Rushdie's family joined with emigrating Muslims, responding to the increasing conflicts between Pakistan and India, by moving to Karachi, Pakistan. These political and religious conflicts extremely affected Salman Rushdie. Accordingly, Rushdie's homeland was certainly doubled between the subcontinent of India and the British Isles, to where Rushdie had got back again to work in an advertising company before Rushdie began the career as a novelist. Rushdie was inspired by the poem of Sufi

"The Conference of the Birds" and published the first novel, namely *Grimus*, in 1975, but it was ignored by the public and the critics. The publication of Rushdie's second novel *Midnight's Children* in 1981 changed the literary fortunes and brought the international acclaim and fame. This novel won the English-Speaking Union Award, an Arts Council Writer's Award, Booker Prize. It was called as the "Booker of Bookers" in 1993 and 2008, accepting and recognizing it as the best work of the Booker Prize in the award history for fiction. Rushdie's third novel, *Shame* was of Pakistani politics and regarded commonly as a political allegory. Rushdie's latest novel *Shalimar the Clown*, was published in 2005. The tradition of magic realism, ideas of history and criticism and foundational narratives were interpreted in Rushdie's famous novels *Midnight's*

Children, Shame and Shalimar the Clown. In this paper, all the three novels, mentioned above, have been greatly discussed and taken into consideration.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH:

AIM:

- i) Aim of the research is to examine in detail about the narration of nation in the fictional works of Salman Rushdie

OBJECTIVES:

Objectives of the research are as follows:

- i) To investigate the contribution of the writer Salman Rushdie in bringing into light the issues encountered by his motherland.
- ii) To explore the narration of nation and magic realism by Salman Rushdie in his fictional works *Midnight's Children, Shame and Shalimar the Clown*.

LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH:

Limitations of the Research are as follows:

- i) This research is restricted to fiction in Indian English literature
- ii) This research focuses on the fictional works of Salman Rushdie.
- iii) Findings of the research considers about narration of nation in fictional works of Amitav Ghosh.

LITERATURE REVIEW:

MIDNIGHT'S CHILDREN:

Rushdie's second novel, *Midnight's Children* (1981) is considered as a panoramic book traversing a period of 70

years in modern history in India. Rushdie was born and brought up in Bombay, a city of multi-culture, which recreates the eclectic and vitality culture of urban India. This novel is a work of 'fiction-faction', by Rushdie who was born in India but settled in a foreign country. Rushdie made an effort to recreate homeland, blending fantasy and fact, reality and vision, desire and memory, time and timelessness. It is a novel of gestures and signs and cunningness of hand narrated with a passion of explaining rather than illuminating meaning. Of historical fiction writing, many other writers followed Rushdie in such a way. Some writers tried to follow Rushdie, whereas other writers encouraged and influenced by the success of Rushdie and tried their hands at various methods and techniques to approach history, thereby generating works which carried the Indian historical novel to considerable height.

Midnight's Children is considered to be an autobiography. The fiction is about some political events and Indian history during the period of its action. This novel contains most of the important political events between 1947 and 1978; it is not similar to the historical novels done by earlier works of the writers of fictional history as the events in the fiction are not reproduced but merely noted, not explained but merely positioned into the fabric of the account. The epic proportion of 552 page novel glances at the subcontinent of India through the eyes of a man born at the blow of the hour of Indian Independence. Saleem is extremely self-conscious narrator. Saleem is Rushdie's alter ego and an allegorical rendition of the independence of India and the existence of

Saleem is actually the history of independence. Saleem is by turns strident, coy, aggressive, rebellious, fatalistic, grave and flippant. Rushdie is obliged to charge Saleem with superhuman perception, extraordinary power of thoughts willingly to make the all-knowing accounts of 12 various lives and the life of the country credible as approaching from a single witness. In fact, broken into pieces, the bane of the society of India and politics, rushes through the technique and theme of the novel. Saleem is connected to history by various modes of links, through numerous relationships, both metaphorical and literal. Saleem does not appear to lack an identity, but it is in which several identities press upon Saleem- a reflector of the multiplicity and fragmentation of Indian society and the uncertainty of religious, regional, social, and parochial names below which India suffer. Saleem's existence covers the time from independence to the raising of the emergency, but endearing spots of the past times are also able to be seen through the unlocked sesame of the pierced bed sheet.

The fiction along with the narrative of the *Midnight's Children*, is the story, which encloses the experience of the three peer group of Saleem's family, living in Srinagar then in Agra, and in Bombay, before the ultimate migration to Karachi. The narrator explains the narrative of three generations to Padma, the girl friend of the narrator. The narrator told the story to Padma by sitting in a pickle factory at night. Saleem flaunts the ability to grasp the attention of the readers. Saleem is skilled with supernatural power of invading other people's minds. He says:

And there are many stories to tell, too many, such an excess of intertwined lives events miracles places rumours, so dense a commingling of the improbable and the mundane! I have been a swallower of lives; and to know me, just the one of me, you'll have to swallow the lot as well. Consumed multitudes are jostling and shoving inside me.

Saleem Sinai is at the centre of multiple stories and he finds himself in conflict with the murky political realities around him. In his disillusionment he tries to recreate history through his memory by creating correspondences between national events and his personal life:

Memory is truth, because memory has its own special kind. It selects, eliminates, alters, exaggerates, minimizes, glorifies and vivifies also; but in the end it creates its own reality.

The numerous experiences of the protagonist reveal how identity suffers and identity crisis in a hostile world is shown as mistaken, confused, subjected to oblivion, fractured and completely lost. As O.P Mathur comments:

He does not seem to lack an identity: it is only that multiple identities press upon him- a mirror of the fragmentation and multiplicity of Indian society and the confusion of social, religious, regional and parochial identities under which Indians suffer..... Saleem also represents the intellectual, imaginative Indian who can think, feel and communicate with others, whose mind is a parliament of various viewpoints.

The conception of nation is the idea of a shared community or an “imagined community”. The postcolonial societies could create a self-image through the “imagined community” which could find to escape the tyranny of the society of imperialism. *Midnight’s Children* written by Salman Rushdie is as the foundational book depicting the Indian Nation. In this novel, the birth of the protagonist Saleem coincides interestingly with the official birth of the nation. The protagonist Saleem Sinai proclaims that his personal history is “handcuffed” to the history of the nation. Saleem reinforces Rushdie’s idea of the nation as imagined community when he speaks of India as a country dreamed into existence by a “phenomenal act of collective will”

The glue of imagination is the basic ingredient that is needed for the outset of a nation. But to think a nation without any history or criticism cannot be dreamed of.

*I had a sound colonial education, ...
and either I’m nobody or I’m a nation, ...
I had no nation now but the imagination.*

Aadam Aziz, the Rani and Saleem Sinai with their in-between cultures and interstitial identities challenge the idea of a monolithic, homogeneous nation-state. Nation is represented as a myth, the product of a collective imagination which has inherent heterogeneity. For Saleem, India becomes:

A dream we all agreed o dream; it was a mass fantasy shared in varying degrees by Bengali and Punjabi, Madrasi and Jat, and would periodically need the sanctification and renewal which can

only be provided by rituals of blood. India, the new myth- a collective fiction in which anything was possible...

Rushdie ‘chutnified’ the Indian language and history with the acute sense of humour and created metaphors of nationhood. Postcolonial writers could challenge the narrative realism and could show an alternative reality by using magical techniques of realism; there is a traverse between magical realism and Postcolonialism. The magical realism is used in the postcolonial structure and function and to tackle the postcolonial issues and factors, in the work of Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children*. It is a tool to address political and social issues by turning away from the literary tradition and narration of western style and hence asserting the own sense of reality and identity.

SHAME:

The political adventure of Rushdie, *Shame* (1983) reveals the trauma of migration which he has been meeting throughout the life. *Shame* is about migration. At many places, Rushdie becomes noticeable as the narrator who explains the deplorable stages of migrants’ state; as he admits in the interview with Ashutosh Varshney. Rushdie says that

It is a novel about changes of the communities and individuals below the compulsion of migration...and willing to speak about the immigrant community in London especially the immigrant community of South Asia and at that period of time what he wanted to say about it is, “Here’s this enormous

community of people who are, it seems, invisible- their concerns, their lives you know, their fears, and so on, somehow invisible to the white population”.

Rushdie has not been worked to shiver off the concept of identity and roots, like all migrants. Roots, as Rushdie says in *Shame*, are “created to keep the people in place”. The roots guide the migrant to be in touch of the nativity and the influence of the pedigrees cannot be destroyed easily.

In the novel *Shame*, Rushdie furnished the assessment of socio-political living in Pakistan. The lifeblood of politics in most of the novels of Rushdie is basically showed by the elements like race, class or nation; and Rushdie does so by improving a universe of originalities- particular characters, including Rushdie, specific cities, precise periods like the moment of partition and decolonization. Rushdie predicted the characters of *Shame* as symbolic representations for Pakistan. Each and every character in *Shame* is illustrated in some way or the other emblematically considering the historical period or history of Pakistan. Several critics have acknowledged the two male protagonists- Raza Hyder and Iskander Harappa as representing Zia ul-Haq and Zulfikar Ali Bhutto accordingly. Bhutto was considered to be the progressive and powerful leader getting into power in Pakistan after the civil war. Nevertheless, a military regime led by Mohammed Zia ul-Haq, the Islamic fundamentalist overthrew Bhutto in 1977. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto was imprisoned and hanged with the utmost secrecy later, causing great remonstrations and anxiety in the public of Pakistan in the

political scenario. The channel of events resembles all the happenings. The entire story presented in a fictional nation of ‘Peccavistan’ that of course resembles Pakistan. *Shame* is about Pakistan and the people who governed Pakistan. Rushdie’s implementation of mythic mode in *Shame* combines myth, history, fantasy and politics in a way which it becomes comic and serious at once. Rushdie expounds, “A sort of fairy tale which is modern, the novel is an outset of the nation which is not quite or not Pakistan.” Rushdie explains a ‘not-quite Pakistan’ after 37 years from colonial rule of its independence.

The country in this story is not Pakistan, or not quite. There are two countries, real and fictional, occupying the same space, or almost the same space. My story, my fictional country exists, like myself, at a slight angle to reality. I have found this off-centering to be necessary; but its value is, of course, open to debate. My view is that I am not writing only about Pakistan.

The central characters in this novel are based on real political figures, but when the story flourishes it becomes evident that the struggles for power are between the fictional characters Sufiya Zinobia and Omar Shakil, and the link with the narrator’s self-reflexiveness. Sufiya Zinobia is a brain damaged, feeble child and Omar is the “peripheral hero” of the story, named by the narrator. The character Omar is a doctor and several years elder than Sufiya, but Omar marries Sufiya eventually to gain control over Sufiya’s shame that has showed as a deadly and dangerous fury. Salman uses

magical realism in this novel to manifest the personification of shame within Sufiya. This kind of technique pits magical realism of situations into the outset that is otherwise quite normal. The character Sufiya is developed as a sacrificial character in this novel which carries the shame of society upon Sufiya. In this novel, the shame is then changed into a fatal magical power. Sufiya remains unaware of the crimes and mistakes which have been committed by her; Omar's marriage to Sufiya seems to be out of benevolence but is an assertion actually of power and control over herself. Omar makes an effort to achieve, to take away the evidence of Sufiya's shame in the same way which has removed it from the own life, by skipping it, but shame wins over Omar in the end. In *Shame*, throughout the novel the male characters try to dominate over the women characters in their lives. The novel gives vent to patriarchal violence that tends to dehumanize and repress women; Sufiya is a metaphor for the violence and shame that ends Pakistani dictatorship. As she is both the victim and perpetrator of violence Sufiya represents the duality of human condition.

Rushdie takes help of mockery, mimicry, parody, magical realism, fairytales, intrusive and unreliable narrators, histories and palimpsests to spew up his disgust of the political situation in 1970s Pakistan along with his personal challenges as a migrant storyteller.

SHALIMAR THE CLOWN:

Salman Rushdie is, possibly the most political and controversial novelist of the troubled and hard times. The fictions and non-fictions of Rushdie portray accurately

the confusing and complex state of postcolonial world. All of the major writings bear the evidence of the interpretation and understanding of the world and the history, and the lasting effect on the life of humanity in general. *Shalimar the Clown* (2005) is the most engaging book of Rushdie. Rushdie is grappling imaginatively here, for so long a celebrant of postcolonial diversity and hybridity, of cultural merging and fusion, in the wars and fights that have followed. This literature is an attempt to demonstrate the fact that today the world is globalized and the borders seem to have ceased to exist. To show that the world has become borderless due to globalization and its accompanying technological developments, in his *Shalimar the Clown*, Salman Rushdie voices this concept of a borderless world and its implications:

Everywhere was now a part of everywhere else. Russia, America, London, Kashmir. Our lives, our stories, flowed into one another's, were no longer our own, individual, discrete. This unsettled people. There were collisions and explosions the world was no longer calm.

Salman Rushdie's *Shalimar the Clown* is seen as an example of how the contemporary postcolonial novel debates multiculturalism, globalization, identity, tradition, terrorism, neo-imperialism and Islamic radicalism. Through *Shalimar the Clown*, Salman Rushdie attempts to celebrate the fluidity of identity, the dynamism of spaces and the interaction between the global and the local. As is the case in all Rushdie's fictions, the political

conflicts with which he is primarily concerned are played out micro-cosmically in the lives of his central characters. In this instance, Western interest in Kashmir is ciphered by the European-born, Jewish-American Ambassador to Kashmir, Maximilian Ophuls, who in his younger days fought in the resistance against the Nazis, but who latterly has become a secret negotiator for American interests around the globe. His involvement in Kashmir is registered through his impact upon the lives of Boonyi, whom he seduces, impregnates and abandons, and the eponymous Shalimar, her husband, who, embittered by the loss of his wife, becomes involved in guerrilla conflict. Having trained in Afghanistan using weapons that Ophuls has himself provided when the US was covertly arming Islamic terrorists after the Russian invasion in 1979, Shalimar becomes an assassin in Europe and the US, and finally murders Ophuls on the doorstep of his daughter's apartment block. Ophuls' seduction of Boonyi, and their subsequent relationship – during which he gluts her with goods and comestibles before abandoning her out of hand when he loses interest in her - can clearly be read as an allegory of America's relationship with what Rushdie calls in *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* (1999) "the back yards of the world". America's power seduces, its affections imprison, its commodities corrupt, and it abandons once it has taken what it wants. Boonyi is thus a product of America's love for the world, and when she speaks, she speaks in the voice of Kashmir. "I am your handiwork made flesh."

Indeed, in *Shalimar the Clown*, all the character identities perhaps, are fully incorporated within the diasporic identities and so-called hybrid. It is analysed and constructed within the postcolonial discourse, and considering to the coexistence of conflicting traditions and cultures, and in the paradigm of cognitive and conceptual mixture by Mark Turner and Gilles Fauconnier. The conceptual metaphors ruling the elaborate plot are LIFE IS A BATTLE and LIFE IS A JOURNEY. The first thing can be applicable to the Lives of India and Max, while the second one concerns the narrative of *Shalimar the Clown* at different levels. In the novel, *Shalimar the Clown* structure, function and time passing are organized in a circular structure considering to the Indian conception of time.

CONCLUSION:

To conclude, it can be considered that Salman Rushdie's novels are always strongly connected to criticism, politics and history of Pakistan and India although they are fictions. Rushdie uses various methods and terminologies and treats the facts closely, executes them in his own way. The events and the characters in the books of Rushdie are fictional. The novels of Rushdie are metaphors itself to reframe the politics, history and various critical struggles. The techniques of postmodernism in all the narratives of Rushdie permit to question the political and historical past and its influence on the present realities.

REFERENCES:

PRIMARY SOURCES:

- 1) Rushdie, Salman. *Midnight's Children* (1981). New York: Random House, 2006. Print
- 2) ----- . *Shame* (1983). London: Vintage Books, 1995. Print.
- 3) ----- . *Shalimar the Clown* (2005). London: Vintage Books, 2006. Print

SECONDARY SOURCES:

- 1) Abdullah, M.A.S. (2014) Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*: Connection between magical realism and Postcolonial issues. *International Journal of English and Education*.
- 2) Vol: 3. Issue: 4.
- 3) Ahmad, Aijaz. (1991) "Rushdie's *Shame*: Postmodernism, Migrancy and Representation of Women." *Economic and Political weekly*. Vol: 26. No: 24. PP: 1461-1471.
- 4) Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections On the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso, 1983
- 5) Choudhuri, S.M. (2011). "Death was not the End": resentment. history and narrative structure in Salman Rushdie's *Shalimar the Clown*. *Otherness: Essays and Studies* 2.1
- 6) Dascalu, C. E. *Imaginary Homelands of Writers in Exile: Salman Rushdie, Bharati Mukherjee and V.S. Naipaul*. New York: Cambria Press, Youngstown, 2007. Print
- 7) Dwivedi, O. P. (2009). Nation and History: A Postcolonial Study of Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*. *Journal of Alternative Perspectives in the Social Sciences*,1(2), 498-522
- 8) Freeman, H.M.(1995). Metaphor Making Meaning: Dickinson's Conceptual Universe, in *Journal of Pragmatics* pp. 643-666
- 9) Herwitz, D & Ashutosh, V. *Midnight's Diaspora: Encounters with Salman Rushdie*. New Delhi: Penguin books, 2009. Print.
- 10) Malak, Amin. (1989). Reading the Crisis: The Polemics of Salman Rushdie's "The Satanic Verses". *ARIEL: A Review of International English Literature*, Vol. 20 No. 4.
- 11) Mathur, O.P. "A Metaphor of Reality: A Study of the Protagonist of *Midnight's Children*." *Indian English Literature: Since Independence*. Ed. K. Ayyappa Panicker. New Delhi: IAES, 1991. 69-78. Print
- 12) Mattoo, N. Indianness in *Midnight's Children*: Rushdie's View of an 'Amnesiac Nation', *The Indian novel in English: Essays in Criticism*. Ed. R.S. Singh. Delhi: Arnold Heinemann, 1977. Print
- 13) Raja, M.A. (2010). Salman Rushdie: reading the Postcolonial texts in the Era of Empire. *Postcolonial Text*, 5(2).
- 14) Richardson, A. (1999). Cognitive Science and the Future of Literary studies. *Philosophy and Literature*, 23(1), 157-173.
- 15) Rushdie, S. & Berger, J. *Imaginary Homelands*, P.210
- 16) Sanga, Jaina C. *Salman Rushdie's Postcolonial metaphors; Migration, Translation, Hybridity, Blasphemy, and Globalization*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2001. Print
- 17) Sarma, M. Interweaving Personal and Political History in Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* and Rohinton Mistry's *A Fine Balance*, *The Criterion: An International Journal in English*, Vol.6, No. 2, pp.86-91.

- 18) Singh, S.K.(2012) Salman Rushdie's Shalimar the Clown: Tragic tale of a Smashed World. *Lapis Lazuli-An International literary Journal*. Vol: II. Issue: I.
- 19) Slemon, S. Magic Realism as Postcolonial discourse, in L.P. Zamora and W.B. Faris(Eds.), *Magical realism: Theory, History, Community*(pp 407-426). Durham & London: Duke University Press. 1995.Print
- 20) Stadler, Florian (2009). Terror, globalization and the individual in Salman Rushdie's Shalimar the Clown in *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, Vol. 45(2):191-199.
- 21) Sujatha, S.K. Re-Presentation of India in Salman Rushdie's 'Midnight's Children' and Amitav Ghosh's 'The Shadow lines'. *Associate Editor*,41
- 22) Tiwari, J.K. From Routes to Roots: Diaspora in the Novels of Salman Rushdie. *The Criterion: An International Journal in English*, Vol.2, No. 2.
- 23) Walcott, D. (1992). *Collected Poems 1948-1984* (London; Faber & Faber, 1992), pp 346-350
- 24) Yaqin, Amina. "Family and Gender in Rushdie's Writing" *The Cambridge Companion to Salman Rushdie*. Ed. Abdulrazak Gurnah. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007. 61-77