ISSN: 2348-7674

Research Innovator

International Multidisciplinary Research Journal



Research Innovator

A Peer-Reviewed Refereed and Indexed International Multidisciplinary Research Journal

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ISSN 2348 - 7674

Salman Rushdie's the Satanic Verses: the Sense of Futility in Religion

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Abstract

The Satanic Verses is a controversial and ambitious effort of Salman Rushdie. This novel brings controversy and fatwa for Rushdie. The government of India had also banned this novel and soon this novel was also banned in other countries. Rushdie present a series of events related to the religion, Islamic history, migration and the human approach of good and evil. In the novel Rushdie deals with a dangerous subject regarding the Islam and Prophet. Because of his iconoclastic attitude, he dared to speak against Prophet and Islam. Rushdie suggests that the words of Quran were not created by God through the mouth of the Prophet.

Rushdie visualize' that the values of Islam are worthless for human being and these laws doesn't secure any position in ordinary life of a human being. The Muslim community claims Rushdie a blasphemer because he makes statements, about Mahound's sexual activities and the women of Yathrib. Rushdie portrays the human characters with their own good and evil actors. Saladin's character is the example of dreams of a promised land. The characters of this novel aim to presents the futility in religion and sufferings of migrants. It exhibits the rise of Islam, mission and life of Prophet.

Key Words: iconoclastic, blaspheme, futility, Muslim community, Quran

The Satanic Verses is a controversial and ambitious effort of Salman Rushdie. It is most daring work of Rushdie. For this book Rushdie faced fatwa issued by the Iranian leader. By religion Rushdie is a Muslim but because of his revolutionary attitude he revolted against the well-stalled values of Islam and presents Islam and values in his novel. Muslims charged against Rushdie as a blasphemer who did insult or blasphemies in his novel. On the 26, September 1988, the novel the Satanic Verses published in London. This novel brings controversy and fatwa for Rushdie. On 5, October 1988, the government of India banned this novel and soon this novel was banned in other countries. On 14, February 1989, the Iranian leader Ayatollah Khomeini issued fatwa, a death sentence of Rushdie. With the fatwa the worst phase of Rushdie's life

began, he suffered a lot because of the fatwa. The story contains the fate of two main characters Gibreel Farishta and Saladin Chamcha. Rushdie present a series of events related to the religion, Islamic history, migration and the human approach of good and evil. In the novel Rushdie deals with a dangerous subject regarding the Islam and Prophet. Because of his iconoclastic attitude, he dared to speak against Prophet and Islam. Rushdie suggests that the words of Quran were not created by God through the mouth of the Prophet. But it is a work of man. Salman, the Persian, a follower of Mohammad submits that:

"Little things at first. If Mohammad recited a verse in which God was describing as all-hearings, all knowing, I would write, all knowing, all wise, Here's the point: Mohammad did not notice the alterations. So there I was, actually writing the Book, or rewriting, anyway, polluting the word of God with my own profane language."

The novel depicts the loss of faith but on the other hand in his essay 'In Good Faith', Rushdie spoke in defence of *The Satanic Verses*:

"The Satanic Verses celebrates hybridity, impurity, intermingling, and the transformations that comes of new and unexpected combinations of human beings, cultures, ideas, politics, movies, songs. It rejoices in mongrelization and fears the absolutism of the Pure."²

He further stated:

"The Satanic Verses is the story of two painfully divided selves. In the case of one, Saladin Chamcha, the division is secular and societal: he is tom, to put it plainly, between Bombay and London, between East and West. For the other, Gibreel Farishta, the division is spiritual, a rift in the soul. He has lost his faith and is strung out between his immense need to believe and his new inability to do so. The novel is 'about' their quest for wholeness."

However, Rushdie presents his views in favour of his novel, but the novel presents a series of events related to the religion, migration and human approach of good and evil. Through literature he seeks a secure position of belief and loss of faith in religion. It is a revolt against the values of religion and beliefs. It visualizes the rise of monotheistic religion. It is a world lit parody, act of blasphemy and black

homour.

The events of the novel take place in India, London and Middle East. The Satanic Verses contains the approach of two characters Gibreel Farishta and Saladin Chamcha. Gibreel, the biggest star of Indian movies was born in Poona. In his Gibreel played many roles theological movies. Gibreel injured on the shooting spot. He admitted into hospital and began to haemorrhage. The whole India prayed for the superstar. Gibreel regained his health but he had lost his faith. At this moment Gibreel meets Alleluia Cone, who gives meaning to his life and changes his life. The protagonist Saladin Chamcha, born in a wealthy family has the talent of voice. Saladin is an immigrant in Britain and... established actor on British Television. The novel opens with the two characters Gibreel and Saladin tumble down from the sky because the plane they have been flying in just has been blown up the terrorist who have hijacked it. Both escapes by the Rekha Merchant who is floating on the flying carpet. Rekha Merchant was the beloved of Gibreel and she committed suicide. Rekha Merchant's ghost appears on flying carpet. Gibreel and Saladin landed on the South Coast of

England. This is the beginning of new life on the new soil. Saladin grows horn on his head and he becomes a monster and Gibreel dreamed about Prophet and other events Gibreel sang:

"To be born again, sang Girbreel Farishta tumbling from the heavens, first you have to die. Ho Ji! Ho Ji! To land upon the bosomy, earth, first one needs to fly. Taa-taa! Taka-thun! How to ever smile again, if first you won't cry? How to win the darling's

love, mister, without a sigh? Baba, if you want to get born again."⁴

Gibreel aims to present the rise of monotheistic religion and exhibits the life and struggle of Prophet Mohammed. The dream sequences of Gibreel are most controversial aspects of the novel. The surroundings of dreams are clearly a parody of Islamic history, the life and struggle of Prophet and his mission and faith of Islam. In true sense The Satanic Verses is a parody of Mohammed's life. It contains the events of contemporary social and religious context.

"His name: a dream name, changed by the vision. Pronounced correctly ... to his nickname in Jahila down below- he who goes up and down old Coney. Here he is neither Mahomet not Moe Hammered, has adopted, instead, the demon tag the farangis hung around his neck. To turn insults into strengths, Whigs, Tories, Blacks all chose to wear with pride the names they were given in scorn; likewise, our mountain- climbing, prophet motivated solitary is to be the medieval baby frightener, the Devil's synonym Mahound. That's him, Mahound the business man, climbing his hot mountain in the Hijaz: The mirage of a city shines below him in the sun "5"

The city of Jahila and traditions based on the surrounding of Mohammed and rise of Islam in seventh century. In the novel the question raises about the truths of Prophet and his preachings. The ruler of Jahila his beautiful wife Hind opposed the Mahound and his preachings. So they encourage poet Baal to satirize Mahound through his poem. The locales of Jahila worshiped the three pagan idols Al-Lat, Manat and Uzza. Mahound criticized the three goddess. On the Mount Cone, Mahound wrestles with Archangal Gibreel. It visualize the confusion or dilemma of Mahound.

"Then Gibreel and the Prophet are wrestling, both naked, rolling over and over, in the cave of the fine white sand that-rises around them like a veil. As if he's learning me, searching me, as if I'm the one undergoing the test."

Prophet Mahound defeats the Archangel Gibreel and declared that the verses recited by the Gibreel were not godly but satanic. Mahound returned to Jahila and preaching the people. Rushdie criticized the values of Islam and raises the question about Prophet and his mission. He exhibits the sense of futility in Islam and the rise monotheistic religion. He creates the city of Jahila which symbolize the holy city Macca which he visualizes the centre of worthless practices, a whore house and a place of gambling, loud songs or leading a life without any purpose. Mahound destroyed the temples of Al Lat, Hind and Grandee of Jahila seems to submit:

"Have you thought upon Lat and Uzza, and Manat, the third, the other? After the first verse, Hind get to her feet; the Grandee of Jahila is already standing, very straight. And Mahound, with silenced eyes, recites; they are the exalted birds, and their intercession is desired indeed."

Mahound leave the city of Jahila and it is the rise of new religion or a beginning of new empire or values.

"From the peak of Mount Cone, Gibreel watches the faithful; escaping Jahila, leaving the city of aridity for the place of cool palms and water, water water. In small groups, almost empty- handed, they move across the empire of the sun, on this first day of the first year at the new beginning of Time, which has itself been born again, as the old dies behind them and the new waits ahead." ⁸

The flight of Mahound from Jahila corresponds to the Prophet Mohammad's flight from Macca to Madina. The Satanic Verses is a war between good and evil, devil and angel and between beliefs or disbeliefs. Prophet Mahound returns to Jahila after quarter century. In Jahila where the beautiful witch Hind continues reign of terror over the city. In Yathrib Prophet Mahound has become obsessed by restrict laws. These rules resembles with the traditional laws of Islam. Mahound's follower Salman, the Persian encountered with poet Baal and depicted as a scribe recording revelations of the Quran as they 'are dictated by the Prophet Mahound.

"Amid the palm-tree of the oasis Gibreel appeared to the Prophet and found himself spouting rules, rules, rules until the faithful could scarcely bear the prospect of any more revelation, Salman, Said, rules about every damn thing, if a man farts let him turn his face to the wind, a rule about which hand to use for the purpose of cleaning one's behind. It was as if no aspect of human existence was to be left unregulated, free. The revelation- the recitationtold the faithful how much to eat, how deeply they should sleep, and which sexual positions had received divine sanction, so that they learned

that sodomy and the missionary position were approved of by the archangel, whereas the forbidden postures included all those in which the female was on top, Gibreel further listed the permitted and forbidden subject of conversation, and earmarked the parts of the body which could no he scratched no matter how unbearably they might itch."

This chapter is the most controversial part of the book. Through the voice of Salman, the Persian, Rushdie criticized the values and laws of Islam. He blames that the laws are the product of the mind of a businessman riot of any Angel or God.

"And Gibreel the archangel specified the manner in which a man should be buried, and how his property should be divided, so that Salman, the Persian got to wondering what manner of God this was that sounded so much like a businessman. This was when he has the idea that destroyed his faith, because he recalled that of course Mahound himself had been a businessman, and a damned successful one at that a person to whom organization and rules came naturally, excessively convenient it was that he management decisions of this highly corporate, if non-corporeal, God"¹⁰

Rushdie visualize' that the values of Islam are worthless for human being and these laws doesn't secure any position in ordinary life of a human being. The Muslim community claims Rushdie a blasphemer because he makes statements, about Mahound' s sexual activities and the women of Yathrib:

"... And after the end of the war, hey presto, there was the Archangel Gibreel instructing the surviving males to marry the widowed women, lest by remarrying outside the faith they be lost to Submission. On such a practical angel, Salman sneered to Baal ... but after his wife's death Mahound was no angel, you understand my meaning. But in Yathrib he almost met his match. Those women up there: they turned his beard half white in a year. The point about our Prophet, my dear Baal, is that he didn't like his women to answer back, he went for mothers and daughters, think of his first wife and then Ayesha: too old and too young, his two loves."11

Prophet Mahound was preaching the words of Angel Gibreel and Salman the Persian write down all the rules but he polluted the words of God with his own dirty language. Mahound comes to know about his act, he issued a death sentence for Salman, He admits that Salman the Persian answered: "It's his Word against mine." 12

Mahound had established himself Prophet and his God is the true God. In his consideration other pagan idols are useless so his follower destroyed the temple of the pagan idols.

"... Have you heard of Lat, and Manat, and Uzza, the third, the other? They are the Exalted Birds ... 'But Khalid interrupted her, saying, 'Uzza, those are the Devil's Verses, and you the Devil's daughter, a creature not to be worshipped but denied." ¹³

Lat, Manat and Uzza, these three deities worshiped by the pagan Arabs and these

are the glorifying verse of Holy Quran but Rushdie visualizes these deities written under the influence of Satan and never the part of Quran. Bilal manages to save Salman from execution and failed to find out the poet Baal. Baal hiding in the brothel of Jahila named Hijab. The twelve prostitutes of the brothel leading the same names as Prophets wives have the names. Rushdie creates another controversy to place twelve whores, who each takes the names of and fit the description of the twelve wives of the Prophet.

These twelve wives of Mahound performing acts as prostitutes. The act of circling the Kaba during the Haj. The similar action is performed in the brothel by its waiting clients:

"... it was not politic to form a queue in the street, and so on many days a line of men curled around the innermost courtyard of the brothel, rotating about its centrally positioned Fountain of Love much as pilgrims rotated for other reasons around the ancient Black Stone." 14

Baal became the husband of twelve wives of Mahound and made love to each of prostitutes in turn. Salman visits to Baal and tells him a story that implies the real Ayesha may have been unfaithful to Mahound. The brothel Hijab raided, Baal twelve whores arrested and and imprisoned. Baal condemned to death. Meanwhile, Hind trained herself in the magical power necessary to defeat him and she took her revenge. She sends goddess Al Lat to destroy the Prophet. And she completes her revenge upon him.

In the novel Rushdie deals with a dangerous subject regarding the Islam and Prophet:

"with Mahound, there is always a struggle, with the Imam, slavery; but with this girl, there is nothing." ¹⁵

He revolts against faiths and the different position of power and distrust through his character as Mahound and Ayesha or Mirza Saeed. The other dream of Gibreel deals with the story of contemporary prophetess Ayesha in an Indian village Titlipur. She is nineteen years old an orphan girl. The landlord Mirza Saeed lusts after Ayesha when he sees her in his garden on his fortieth birthday. Ayesha miraculously changed her appearance and become a saint. Butterflies are the only covering she has on her body.

"She had attained a kind of agelessness, because her hair had turned as white as snow white her skin has regained the luminous perfection of a new born child's and although she was completely naked the butterflies had settled upon her body in such thick swarms that she seemed to be wearing a dress of the most delicate material in the universe."

After a long sleep one day she informed to Sarpanch Muhammad Din Archangel Gibreel comes in her dream and bless me with greatness or divine powers, Osman, the lover of Ayesha feels sad because his beloved now is in the grip of Archangel. Ayesha becomes close to Mishal Akhtar, wife of Mirza Saeed. Ayesha informed her that she is dying of breast cancer. Mirza Saeed opposed Ayesha and her beliefs. Ayesha disappears for a week and after seven days she announced to make a foot pilgrimage to Macca. She expected that the sea will be parted for the villagers and they shall

across the ocean to Macca. Saeed opposed this mystical walk of Ayesha. Mirza Saeed cannot stop his wife from going but decides to accompany them in hopes of somehow saving her.

The wife of Sarpanch Muhammad Din, Khadija died during the pilgrimage and he blamed Ayesha that you have killed my wife. Ayesha declared herself a messenger of God and becomes rude. One disaster after another assails the pilgrims following Ayesha in her march to the sea; but she insists on continuing, as does Mishal. Mishal Akhtar determined to complete the pilgrimage because she is in belief that this is the only cure of her breast cancer.

Mirza Saeed tries to persuade Ayesha to accept airplane tickets to complete the pilgrimage to Macca but she refuse. Ayesha becomes more and more ruthless and behaves like a devil or evil soul. One child found on Mosque steps and an Imam announces that "It is the devil's child." ¹⁷

Ayesha and Imam allow the congregation of the Mosque to stone it to death. Such a harsh and bitter reality of religion and human approach. Mirza Saeed wants to save his dying wife but he fails to do that. Ayesha leads the villagers to the Arabian sea and her destination is Macca. The horrified Mirza Saeed watches as his wife and other walk into the sea and are drowned.

"Human beings in danger of drowning struggle against the water. It is against human nature simply to walk forwards meekly until the sea swallows you up. But Ayesha, Mishal Akhtar and the villagers of Titlipur subsided below sea level; and were never seen again." 18

Other witnesses claim that the sea did

miraculously open as Ayesh had expected and the group cross safely. But Ayesha and others drowned in the sea and their bodies floating to shore. Mirza Saeed returns home and starves himself to death. In his dreams he joins his wife and Ayesha in their Pilgrimage to Macca. This is the last day of Mirza Saeed's life. Along with the religion Rushdie highlighted the theme of migration and the haughtiness of British racism. The migration questioned the past, humiliated and loss of human identity. The

main character Gibreel and Saladin both

seek for true identity and worth of their

inner sense. In true sense they struggle in

life for the search of true values.

"The city of Jahilia is built entirely of sand, its structures formed of the desert whence it rises. It is a sight to wonder at: walled, four gated, the whole of it a miracle worked by its citizens, who have learned the tricks of transforming the fine white dune sand of those forsaken parts- the very stuff inconstancy. of unsettlement, quintessence of shifting, treachery, lack-of from and have turned it, by alchemy, into the fabric of their newly invented permanence. These people are a mere three or four generations removed from their nomadic past, when they were as rootless as the dunes, or rather rooted in the knowledge that the journeying itself was home. Whereas the migrant can do without the journey altogether; it's no more than a necessary evil; the point is to arrive."19

In the opening page of the novel Rushdie raises the quest for identity. He raises the question: "Who I am? else is there?" ²⁰

Migration represents the hope and something new but it becomes the worst faculty of life and creates the feeling of homelessness or rootlessness. In the novel this theme presented by characters and their different situations. Saladin Chamcha, an immigrant in London, a man of a thousand voices and a voice but in true sense he has not his own voice or identity. He is an actor on British television but have the dilemma for the true identity in this world.

Rushdie had experienced the pain of migration and homelessness. The novel exhibits the fears and affects of Indians and Pakistanis in London and the harshness of British views. The novel also summarizes the condition and status of immigrants.

"Also-for there had been more than a few migrants aboard, yes quite a quantity of wives who has been grilled by reasonable, doing-their job officials about the length of and distinguishing moles upon their husband's gentalia, a sufficiency of children upon whose legitimacy the British Government had cast its everreasonable doubts mingling with the remnants of the plane, equally fragmented, equally absurd, there floated the debris of the soul, broken memories. sloughed off selves. severed mother tongues, :violated, untranslatable, privacies, jokes, extinguished futures, lost loves, the forgotten meaning of hollow, booming words, land, belonging home."21

In most of Rushdie's novels migration becomes the symbol of human conditions. Rushdie suffers much in his life as a migrant. His family was left India and moved to Pakistan. Rushdie also moved to England for his education where he experienced the race difference in England. In *The Satanic Verses* Saladin Chamcha also experienced this bitter truth and harsh the immigrants as monster and devil. Saladin abandons his native city Bombay and flies to England and tries to identify with English people. When Gibreel and Saladin tumbled down from the sky, they landing on the English soil, Saladin grows horn on his forehead and turns into a hairy goat and become a monster.

"The immigration officers arrest Saladin as an illegal immigrant and humiliated. Saladin admitted in a secret hospital where human animal experiments being carried. Time to take stock of the situation, 'he told himself. Α auick physical examination informed him that his new, mutant condition had remained unchanged. This cast his spirit down, and he realized that he had been halfhoping that the nightmare would have ended while he slept, He was dressed in a new pair of alien this time of pyjamas, undifferentiated pale green colour, matched both the fabric of the screens and what he could see of the walls and ceiling of that cryptic and anonymous ward. His legs still ended in those distressing hoofs, and the horns on his head were as sharp as before ... he was distracted from this morose inventory by a man's voice from nearby, crying out in heart rending distress; 'Oh if ever a body suffered

In the hospital Saladin befriended by a physiotherapist and escapes from the hospital. Saladin' s English wife Pamela

Lovelace betrayed him and engaged with her new boyfriend Jumpy Joshi. The novel presents reality with the blending of imagination and trying to expose new possibilities of human life. The character of Rosa Diamond occupies an important position in the novel. When Gibreel and Saladin fall from the plane to the British South coast they end up with her. Rosa and his husband Don Enrique Diamond lived in Britain. Rosa Diamond had migrated from Argentina. She had the memories of her past and she resembles them with her present. Gibreel and Saladin were hiding in her house when police arrested him. In the novel Rushdie criticizes the policy of British racism and haughtiness of Britishers.

"Violent incidents began to occur more frequently attacks on black families on council estates. harassment of black school-children on their way home, brawls in pubs. At the Pagal Khana a rat-faced vouth and three of his cronies spat over many people's food; as a result of the ensuing affray three Bengali waiters were charged with assault and he causing of actual bodily harm; the expectorating quartet was not, however, detained. Stories of police brutality, of black youths hauled swiftly into unmarked cars and vans belonging to the special patrol groups and flung out, equally discreetly, covered in cuts bruises, spread throughout the communities."23

Rushdie portrays the human characters with their own good and evil actors. Saladin's character is the example of dreams of a promised land. Saladin breaks up with his father and tries to make his life

himself. In the end he returned to his father and his native city to rediscover himself when his father was on death- bed he capture his roots in the last section of the novel:

"He stood at the window his childhood and looked out at the Arabian Sea. The moon was almost full; moonlight, stretching from the rocks of Scandal Point out to the far horizon, created the illusion of a silver pathway, like a parting in the water's shining hair, like a road to miraculous lands. He shook his head: could no longer believe in fairy tales. Childhood was over, and the view from the window was no more than an old and sentimental echo. To the devil with it! Let the bulldozers come. If the old refused to die, the new could not be born."24

After one and half year Saladin returns home. His father Changez dying of cancer. Saladin heard that Gibreel is making films based on his dreams about Ayesha and Mahound. Changez Chamchawala died and Saladin inherited his father's estate and become a rich person. His Indian mistress Zeenat Vakil sympathies with him and make her return to Saladin. Meanwhile a dispute over a film on Indian sectarianism has become the centre of a censorship Depressed Gibreel controversy. returned to Bombay. He tries to make satanic version of Ramayana. This film creates controversy and Gibreel goes entirely mad and kills Allie Cone and Sisodia. Gibreel visited Saladin and he confesses then shoots himself. This is the tragic end of Gibreel Farishta Saladin gets back to his roots. The characters aims to presents the futility in religion and sufferings of migrants. It exhibits the rise of Islam, mission and life of Prophet. It raises the question about the truth of Islam and its preachings.

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