

ISSN 2348 - 7674

Research Innovator

International Multidisciplinary Research Journal

Vol III Issue I : February - 2016

Editor-In-Chief
Prof. K.N. Shelke

www.research-chronicler.com

A detailed illustration of a quill pen resting on a scroll of parchment. The quill is positioned diagonally across the frame. The scroll is tied with a red ribbon and has a red wax seal. In the background, a lit candle in a brass holder provides a warm glow. In the foreground, there is a glass inkwell with a quill inside, and a red wax seal with a wooden handle. The entire scene is set on a wooden surface.

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ISSN 2395 – 4744 (Print); 2348 – 7674 (Online)

A Peer-Reviewed Refereed and Indexed

Multidisciplinary International Research Journal

Volume III Issue I: February – 2016

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Single Copy	₹ 600	\$40
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A Study of Fate and Irony in Salman Rushdie's *The Prophet's Hair***Dr. Shivaji Sargar***Professor, Dept. of English, University of Mumbai, Mumbai, (M.S.) India***Shaikh Aashiq Arshad***Research Scholar, Department of English, University of Mumbai, Mumbai, (M.S.) India***Abstract**

Postmodernism is in no way as easily propositioned to comprehend as it is influenced by so many diverse ideas. Fate refers to an accurate that uncontrollably befalls a person. The Greek gods believed in fate and interventions, of a life on an individual has no control over their own destiny. According to Eric Partridge Irony means "Irony consists in stating the contrary of what is meant". In their own way writers have tried to use both of the terms in their writings. East, West is an anthology of short stories by Salman Rushdie. In this book the short story *The Prophet's Hair* is placed in East section. *The Prophet's Hair* is based on the theft of a relic containing a hair of the Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H.). The tale is a fantastic account of the miraculous but disastrous events befalling all those who come into contact to it. The prophet's hair has the spiritual and supernatural power which handles the fate of Hashim's family and Sheikhs in the story. The purpose of the study is to analyze critically the use of fate and irony by the writer, with belief that such study will help to comprehend Rushdie's fictional world.

Key Words: Fate and Irony, prophet's hair, relic, spiritual, symbolism, culture

Postmodernism played an important role in the development of Indian English Writing. It changed the literary landscape of India. Postmodernism in India has evolved considerably and one can easily focus the voices and varied themes and terms used in the prose work. In postmodern era people had involved in their own sources of ideas and divergent thoughts, they believe that the reality is ultimately inaccessible by fact and human understanding it is what and how we make of it. Postmodernist work in English Literature has been studied carefully in the

past but great critical insight is needed to address its relevance in today's broken society. The modes of its reflection are varied in nature; however, all of them aim at holding mirror to life. One of the key features of writing short stories or novel is the use of Fate and chance by the writers across the cultures. Salman Rushdie is one of the renowned writers of Indian Diaspora. The following paper focuses on how Rushdie uses the concept or terms namely Fate and Chance in his story *The Prophet's Hair*. It produces irony in the minds of reader, he get disturbed by the

additional use of fate and chance and also confused from the unwilling chain of accidents.

Normally Fate defines as a power or agency that predetermines and orders the course of events. Fate defines events as ordered or “inevitable” and unavoidable. The fundamental belief that compound the term Fate is there is fixed natural order to the universe and in some conceptions, the cosmos. In historical period Fate personified “Fate spinners” known as the Moirai, Parcae, Norse in Greek, Roman, Norse mythologies orderly. According to their believes the events of the world are fix and settle through the mystic spinning of threads that represents individual human Fates. Events of every time in universe are fixed by Fate are unchangeable by any type of human agency. In this concept any one can have no effects upon their own Fates and the Fates of others. Philosophy on Fate existed since the Hellenistic period with Stoics and Epicureans groups. According to Stoic believes, all actions ultimately went according to a divine plan devised by a God, although humans have free will, but their all actions and things which make them habitable in this world are all a part of the universal network of Fate. Where Epicureans challenged this belief, and believed that men’s actions were voluntary so long as they were rational. Fate has played a notable literary role in Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*, Thomas Hardy’s *Tess of the d’urbervilles*, and in short stories like W.W. Jacob’s *The Monkey’s Paw*. Common theme involved in these works are a protagonist who cannot escape a destiny, their fate has been

sealed. The idea of God controlled destiny plays an important role in many religions. In Islam fate is the decree of Allah.

Irony in broad sense is a rhetorical device, literary technique or event in which what appears on the surface to be the case differs radically from what is actually the case. Irony may be divided into categories such as verbal, dramatic and situational. In the use of ironic forms of simile the author has a place to state the opposite of the truth or denies the contrary of the truth. According to Henry Watson Fowler irony may be define “any definition of irony though hundreds might be given, and very few of them might be accepted- must include this, that the surface meaning and the underlying meaning of what is said are not the same.” In this story the author used two types of the irony, verbal irony and situational irony. Verbal irony means “a contradiction between a statement’s stated and intended meaning” and situational irony could be stated “the disparity of intention and result: when the result of an action is contrary to the desired or expected effect”. This is a relatively modern use of the term, and describes a sharp difference between the expected result and actual results in a certain situation.

Indian Writing in English has flourished only twenty years ago. Many Indian writers have got popularity and worldwide fame in this era. Salman Rushdie is renowned for his novels namely *Midnight’s children*, *Shame*, *Shalimar the clown* etc. *East, West* (1994) is an anthology of short stories by him. The book is divided into three main sections

'East' 'West' and 'East,West', each section containing stories from their respective geographical areas. The Prophets Hair is second story of east section of this book. Central place of the story is Hazrat Bal mosque Srinagar in Kashmir. *The Prophets Hair* is a story about religious relic and how it affected those who came into contact with it. The people of the town believed that the hair belongs to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). No religion or saint are immoral, all preach the same and that is love and humanity but ironically the hair presented as something dangerous and harmful, something which transforms people in negative way.

The Prophet's Hair is based on the theft of a relic containing a hair of the Prophet Muhammad. The tale is a fantastic account of the miraculous but disastrous events befalling all those who come into contact to it. Hashim the protagonist found a small vial while he is leaving his house carries it inside. Found that the vial contains the famous relic which was stolen from the Hazrat Bal mosq previous morning. He became greedy and does not return it to the actual place. This is where his role of fate begins; he turns into hypocrite from a secular person. He has two children Atta and Huma, and his wife. After coming into contact with the hair the whole family get disturbed. Hashim start to offer five times namaz, reading the holy book and forced to the family to do the same. "At five o'clock the next morning the moneylender (Hashim) forced his family to rise, wash and say their prayers. From then on, he began to pray five times daily for the first

time in his life, and his wife and children were obliged to do likewise (247-48). It is the effect of holy hair, and by fate this family came into contact with it. Ironically what Hashim says and what he does is opposite. His intention is to live honorably in the world for that his plan is "set great store by living honorably I the world" (2845). But his treatment with his debtors was very cruel, if they are unable to pay the latest installment of interest. "That afternoon, a trembling debtor arrived at the house to confess his inability to pay the latest installment of interested owned, and made the mistake of reminding Hashim, in somewhat blustering fashion, of the Quran's strictures against usury. The moneylender flew into rage and attacked the fellow with one of his large collection of bullies (2848 par3-4, 2849). We can observe in these paragraphs that Hashim is against the Quran's order; he flies into a rage and attacks the fellow who reminds him his actions against the law of religion. It's shows that his business is violent and threatening, Islam is only an external part for him, his business is strictly forbidden by Quran. He has greed for silver vial more than the holy hair, though the Prophets hair is a secular rare object, was in it. Hashim tells his son Atta about the hair, and he becomes kind of possessed by the hair, after that family begins to fall apart from his rude treatment. Atta feels the change and decided to remove the hair and return it to where it was. He steals the hair from his father's safe, when he reaches his destination he discovers that the hair is no longer there. By fate he had a hole in his pocket which it fell out of. It

does again by chance or luck Hashim found one more same hair and gets back the hair in home. Here, it's difficult to believe how Hashim get the same hair, the author uses bonus role of fate and chance which is usually not happened. The same effect continues and everyone is unhappy in the family, their happiness gets changed into sadness and anger. Hashim's personality completely changed. He goes from a great businessman and loving husband and father, becomes abusive to his family and clients.

Huma devises a different plan to hire the best thief Shiekh Sin, to steal the hair from her father. When Huma decides to take a thief ironically did not share the plan with her own brother and mother. It was not the magical power of the hair, Huma can stop the disaster. At mean while when Shiekh is near to steal the hair in darkness Atta cries out and story turned towards a bad end. "Huma tries to save her family, but the plan failed out of Atta's voice. As the thief comes to Hashim's house' Atta cries out Thief! Thief! Thief!" oddly for three times. (2851 par3). It may be by chance but it produced an unbelievable result. The things escalate dramatically, in darkness Hashim ends up Huma, his own daughter without realizing it until he turns on the light and then stabbed himself also and died. Shiekh Sin the thief runs away with the hair and again by fate or chance loss his life as he has hunted down by the police. Ironically Sheikh's four sons are crippled by their father, but they earned money by begging and make living for whole family. "as they dragged themselves around the city, they earned excellent

money in the begging business. (2850) In this way they are earning more than a healthy person, and without any harm. Shiekh Sin's wife was blind. It's their fate when Shiekh Sin brought the hair at their home after stolen, his blind wife is cured and his handicapped four children have blessed by hair and healed from their disabilities, the only people who gain from the relic.

It's ironical that the Prophets hair has supernatural power which handles the destiny of both of the families which is usually not happened. It may be their fate and natural cause. Presenting the comparison between two families, Hashim's rich and sheikh's poor families, Rushdie set a contrast and show every type of human being is affected by the hair. Relocation of the relic changed the hair's meanings however, it's not the object itself which changes the meanings but human beings. Hashim a greedy merchant changes the relic from the religious value to a secular object. Here the dominance of human power on spiritual power is observed, whereas, in other parts of the story the relic is dominant on humans Fate. The hair remains an ironic object in whole story. At the beginning when it was stolen from the shrine to the outside world, people worshipped it for their fortune but it is difficult to understand, Is the hair fortunate or unfortunate? Many people suppose that they would be blessed if they hold the icon but it is not true. In the case of Hashim who want to benefit from the spirituality of religion, for him, the proper way is to follow its true guidance and implement its orders. Hashim passes the

hair, became a strict religious person and instead of bringing a true religion in his life, he leads the family to a disaster.

Conclusion: Rushdie shows an additional use of Fate and Chance in the story, at some place which is reached near to non-belief and also intertwine numbers of ironies in his craftsmanship. An important

lesson of iconoclasm and superstition is also hiding in the story. People believe that they could have good luck if they hold the icon, instead of obeying the real preaching they only believe on superstitions. Religion, a method of living wage, is to help people guide a blissful life, a better perceptive no to trust it blindly.

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