



THE SOCIAL PARADIGM AND DIASPORA IN THE NOVELS: SALMAN RUSHDIE

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ABSTRACT

The social mechanisms individuals use to understand themselves as part of a social group. Because different socio-cultural and literary perspectives have conflicting notions of “self,” whether reality is determined culturally, politically, or both becomes important to evaluate how these views are presented and represented through voices in novel form. The paper looks at the ways Salman Rushdie approaches and views identity as mediated and misrepresented by socio-political and cultural institutions of power in his novels.

It becomes convenient for educational systems, political advocates, and custodians of culture whose logic is... Oppression, regardless of the corrosive attitudes and practices it engenders, is expected and almost acceptable as human behaviour. It should come as no surprise to writers and scholars that these behaviours find adequate spaces to incubate; advances and disciplines in the technological field being no exception.

The circumstances appear to provide profitable situations for power, where a critical awareness of the destruction to ourselves and the environment is ignored. It is not in the interest of the oppressive forces and those in the dominant position in social hierarchy to affect or put into practice critical perspectives. Rather, the domestic and public realities of those lowest on the social strata, and the existence of stratums, are likely.

This cultural struggle and misunderstanding of identity might be the case simply because it is through cultural and political tensions that these identities are formed and fixed. The point here is that





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what is considered labelled identity might actually be social reproductions

of attitudes and behaviours that are designed to culturally and politically disrupt. In light of this socially divisive way of constructing identities in opposition to one another, the question becomes how people develop a new self-critical and socially conscious attitude toward the normal cultural practices.

Keywords : Culture, perspectives, behavior, environment, considered

Which people begin to question their self-constitution and by extension, question the authority of social institutions as categories that hope to impose identities. The characteristic of these categories that should come under heavy scrutiny is their claim to represent the 'truth' or knowledge based on the authority. The questioning of authority and identifying the failures of social and political structures might begin through concerning one's self with the outside the socially situated identities that are provided by politics, culture, class, sex, race and so on.1

The space and dialogue made available to writers who critically engage these issues offer the opportunity to view identity formation as being adequately or inadequately incorporated and represented in the world. In this way, it is possible to look at identity not as absolute and uncompromising facts of society, but more as imaginative constructs or ideas, that themselves undergo an evolutionary process. It is from this position that readers begin to engage the work of Salman Rushdie, whose body of writing it seems, aims at criticizing aspects of identity and society that are terrifyingly abject, irrelevant, but to which people maintain a strong emotional attachment so that it is difficult to understand one's self outside the meanings and definitions that society has provided.

The problem with identity, as it is read in Rushdie's novels, is that the notion of liberty and freedom is founded upon network of laws and an association with a centralized, but conflicting idealism. This means that those who are not associated with or reflect any similarity to a politicized identity, like an American-ness for example are regarded as dispossessed and alien to the concept of freedom. To be American is to be free. While the logic may come across as one that is simple and irrefutable, to designate a civilization



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wrought with contradictions is how it represents itself. Rushdie stirs this notion in his novel *Fury* when the character Malik regards the modern accouchements of American society with some contempt.

In all of India, China, Africa and much of the southern American continent, those who had the leisure and wallet for fashion-or more simply, in the poorer latitudes, for the mere acquisition of things would have killed for the street merchandise of Manhattan, as also for the cast-off clothing and soft furnishings to be found in the opulent thrift stores.²

Though the theoretical connections to the problems of internal social categories are not mentioned in this quote from the text, the global implications are not to be denied. By identifying with the material preoccupations of the upper echelons of American society, Rushdie underscores the consequences of global and internal politics, classism, and racism and so on. Since the American has either assumed or designated itself the moral, ethical, political centre of international identity, it is appropriate and justified to evaluate how its socio-political practices continue to shape and determine the realities both within its own systems and abroad.

Most of American contemporary media, social and political culture remains controversial and the difficulty is increased when the understanding of racism, classism and so on dissolve into a national identity; being construed as 'the way things should be.

No doubt it is ambitious argument to locate the fallacy in this perspective, but when the identity is interwoven with an error and that error is perceived as fact, the romance and obsession with the fragments might be too engrossing to detach readily. Yet, Rushdie is able to locate the tragic imperfection in the self-conception of the cosmopolitanism that represents American-ness, or other global powers and institutions for that matter.

In *Fury* Malik is able to notice how the attitudes of a consumer culture are condescending toward those surviving at the lower end of the social ladder. The character says: "America insulted the rest of the planet... by treating such bounty with the shoulder-shrugging casualness of the inequitably wealthy".

The irony here is that though the character is able to identify the gross misappropriations of wealth and obvious abuse of power, he is unable to separate himself from its influence. It is here that an interesting tension emerges when the idea of liberalism comes to be represented by the image of America and other dominant countries residing in a similar privileged position. With recognizing an identity and freedom based on the association with privilege and the excess of cosmopolitanism comes the need to embrace the conflict and the real exploitation of other groups. This becomes a supposed and accepted fact that maps out and defines the socio-cultural and political situations of American society. The conflicted nature of



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such inclusiveness, as reflected through Malik becomes a distinctive characteristic, which itself becomes a contrasting point of view when it comes to the notion of freedom, liberalism and identity. If countries like America are actually the signs and symbols of freedom that their cultures claim to represent, then questions and matters of identity should not be a frequently entertained dilemma.

The failure to successfully negotiate social relationships might not only be classified as a failure to engage the issue of diversity, but might also be a purposeful method of not addressing the practices of exclusion. Rushdie, through Malik, explains the failure and the limitations on perspective when the character begins to epitomize the principles of consumerism and social indifference he previously rebuked. The novel says that Malik became “This creature of his own imagining... born of his best self and purest endeavour, was turning before his eyes into the kind of monster of tawdry celebrity he most profoundly abhorred”. Rushdie is aware of the disorientation and general perplexities of the being involved or participating actively in a society that defines itself by how it separated people and not sincere attempts at unification.

Although Rushdie's personal history and critical view on the cultural practices of India allow him to understand cultural displacement as having positive features or outcomes, the right and ability to partake in the discovery of a different way of thinking about the meaning of identity; one that finds itself disassociated with partial perspectives and is more aligned with the power of imagination. The writing of *Midnight's Children* for instance, Rushdie's first popular novel, becomes a radically different way of understanding how national identities are more corrosive and suppresses human potential more than cultivates possibilities.

The main character in the novel, Saleem, becomes the embodiment of Indian nationality being born at the moment India receives independence. The character, however, quickly becomes an illusion of coherence, which in turn becomes the metaphor for discrediting the idea of a national identity. Saleem is portrayed as a character with many mental and physical abilities, but whose incapacity to understand himself and the world around him prevents him from 'finding his voice' and realizing his potential to perform 'good things' with his abilities. Saleem's impossible circumstance begins to represent the unlikelihood that a national identity could be realized or fashioned from a society that embraces corrosive divisions. Jean M. Kane in *The Migrant Intellectual and the Body of History* explains what Rushdie hopes to communicate that the social philosophy of Western cultures in particular is a means of constituting and perpetuating the ideals of self-ignorance. Kane says.

Saleem Sinai exemplifies this collective, revisionary, and somatic subject. Portraying his very existence as miraculous and unsustainable, he continually asserts that he is physically decomposing as he relates his tale. His conditions underscore the impossibility of the novel's imaginative and political project to fashion



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a nation from the diverse subcontinent. Saleem's fatalistic contention is finally realized when he disintegrates as a result of this disease. His chronicle alone remains as the material container of national meaning.³

Kane interprets the person, Saleem, as the diminutive and philosophical representation of the principles embraced by a national identity. It becomes the demand of an individual's personal identity to coalesce or be forgotten for the sake of nationalism. Kane argues that the immediate conflict is associated with the juxtaposition. However, it is common practice of globally dominant cultures to impose such imaginative dissimulation. Such social and political practice not only brings the delusion of national identity into the discussion, but argues the unreliability of diametrically opposed social realities once thought to be concrete and commonsense reasoning.

I. Salman Rushdie message for modern man : A forecast

Rushdie imagines the main character in *Midnight's Children* to meet the literal and specific demands of the national imagination and the reasoning of modern governments. The attitudes, general principles and group affiliations are centred and marked by a maternal connection to country. In short, your country's constitution determines your identity. As a matter of fact, the difficulty of finding a person who does not affiliate himself with maternal connections to social categories of his country reflects the difficulty of articulating an identity that is not affected or determined by binary oppositions or social categorizations.

The material worlds that politics and culture engender rely heavily on its historical tendency to mark and demark. And while in some cases it could be the best interest of society that identities assumed specific and constructive functions, they appear to have equally negative effect. For one, and as mentioned before, the thought of opposition holds a veil of ignorance, determines and embodies the social life of many. Kane goes on to describe Saleem as the human that explodes with internal contradiction and is unable to manage the demands or divergent principles of being a human being and nationalism. Kane writes:

Where [Saleem's] experience cannot fund a merging of nation, voice, and body, of personal memory and cultural distance, the author assumes a romantic relationship to the body of the subcontinent. Saleem's political ineffectiveness as an adult takes the form of emotional and physical impotence, as he cannot overcome incestuous attachments to figures who represent a united India. It is in this context that the narrator pits textual production against biological procreation as a superior method of national formation.⁴

Under this kind of pressure it is difficult, almost impossible, to imagine an identity that is able to properly engage the internal conflicts and social contradictions that emerge from negotiating the desires and agenda of nationalism and an identity apart from political identification.



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The success of political discourse thus far has been its ability to communicate, have influence over and obscure the social factors and points of contradiction between self-understanding and the institutionalized veil of ignorance.

In *Midnight's Children*, Saleem acknowledges the disparity between nationalism and the human condition and why the conversation on the sociability of the human subject is one that is inundated with imaginative references that are irreconcilable. Saleem says.

A human being, inside himself, is anything but a whole, anything but homogeneous; all kinds of everywhithing are jumbled up inside of him, and he is one person one minute and another, the next. The body, on the other hand, is homogeneous as anything. Indivisible, a one- piece suit.⁵

The awareness and magnitude of this condition are far reaching in the fact that without having the capacity to 'name' and interpret the political foregrounding precisely, an individual remains internally conflicted, but externally understands the self as 'one-piece' suit participant with particular but limited individual interests.

Looking at Malik from *Fury* and Saleem from *Midnight's Children* readers come to notice how Rushdie identifies the real and profound limitations of identities that are an imperative or necessary part of power dynamics in the relationship between the self and the political world.

The limitations and problems with identity continue to be the factor that decides and determines the ways in which the political forces designate entire groups and the nature of the relationships between them as well. For example, when the discourse and identity of the dominant group is considered, which inarguably would be the white population of America; it is known that the privilege of their position allows the social and territorial marking of their own. Because of this position of privilege and influence, the white population if America understands and engages "otherness" according to the categories of exclusion of which they are not a part. While the main focus here is how the social practices within cosmopolitan and so-called democratic society affect groups in a general way, it helps to ascertain the point where such systemic anomaly is located.

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