



INTERNATIONAL
STANDARD
SERIAL
NUMBER
INDIA

2395-2636 (Print):2321-3108 (online)

POSTCOLONIAL EXPLORATION: A STUDY OF SALMAN RUSHDIE'S *THE MOOR'S LAST SIGH*

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ABSTRACT

The present study demonstrates the concept of postcolonial exploration in relationship with reading and re-reading of postcolonial aspects of politics, history and identity within the intellectual influence and art-form of Salman Rushdie in *The Moor's Last Sigh*. Many accounts and aspects of postcolonial reading have been taken to express many themes and issues of history, politics and identity. It is an exploration in a form of reading, applied to the works of Rushdie, which demonstrates the extent to which the writings reveal its ideologies and processes. The novel draws a deliberate attempt in mentioning of real historical figures and events including the surrender of Granada by Boabdil, the demolition of the Babri Masjid, the 1993 Bombay riots, the gangster and terrorist Dawood Ibrahim, as well as the modern Indian political organizations like Bal Thackeray and the Shiv Sena in Indian Political history. It traces four generations of the narrator's family and the ultimate effects upon the narrator, Moraes Zogoiby. The novel also reflects upon its own moment of production as part of our engagement with a 'palimpsestic' or multilayered reading of the novel. The study argues and aims at coming to grips with Rushdie's engagement of exploring Postcolonial aspects in relationship with the history, politics and identity of the Indian subcontinent, from his distinct location of a postcolonial migrant writer drawing culturally from multiple spaces, even as he belongs to none completely. The study advances with author's predicament by foregrounding a sense of banishment and impending death, opening and closing the eponymous Moor's narrative with his premature death in exile

Key words: Salman Rushdie, , postcolonial exploration, politics, history, identity, palimpsestine.

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The present study comprises of exploring postcolonial aspects in relationship with the history, politics and identity of the Indian subcontinent, from his distinct location of a postcolonial migrant writer drawing culturally from multiple spaces, even as he belongs to none completely. The novel appears to be the author's predicament by foregrounding a sense of banishment and impending death, opening

and closing the eponymous Moor's narrative with his premature death in exile. The novel also reflects upon its own moment of production as part of our engagement with a 'palimpsestic' or multilayered reading of the novel. A postcolonial text is marked amply by the process of erasure inscription and partial emergence of suppressed discourse. To make a text postcolonial is of course to acknowledge the

doubleness of inscription of its effects. The very term "Postcolonial" contains within it a double time that marks a break from the past – that what happens after colonial rule – and connection to it – a writing back, to, or against the grain of colonial history and its effects. Thus a postcolonial text, by its very definition occupies, a luminal historical space of national emergence: one that looks back towards the violence of colonial inscription and the partial erasure of a pre-colonial past, as well as gesturing towards the more recent violence of nationalist reinscription and the erasure of the colonial past. History, fiction and art are interlayered in an intertextual, multicultural narrative accretion that brings to crisis the politics of representation.

Rushdie is a major contemporary writer, who engages with some of the vital issues of our times: migrancy, Postcolonialism and religious authoritarianism. He is considered a very powerful writer in his complexities of the individual, his collective identity of literature through his works. To know Rushdie, and to get acknowledged with him, one comes through the public reactions that made him famous in *The Satanic Verses* and *Midnight's Children*. The 'Fatwa' by many Islamic scholars from various intuitions made him famous and states about his marked life during many years, which recalled the painful events and moments of his identity through the issues of narration and representation.

The writings of Rushdie raised strong reactions, well before the *fatwa*. One aspect of his life as a postcolonial, postmodern and Indian diasporic writer made his success in tension in the West when he wrote and published *The Satanic Verses*. It received abundant criticism in India for his state of being in literature. Rushdie seems to carry a look of foreigner in India, but represents a true voice in an oblique manner. Rushdie's debate does not spare political personages such as Margaret Thatcher, Benazir Bhutto and Indra Gandhi. He moves into the intersection of the plurality of assistantships, to the intersection of the Eastern and Western traditions of the culture of elite and popular, and his propaganda is unique and idealized. His ideas never gave up to controversy and his works are always anticipated into divided reactions. His

mimesis, satire and irony play an important role in his writing.

Rushdie a postcolonial and a postmodern writer in a magic realistic style, adopts the perspective of a migrant in narrowing down his culture, history, identity, religion and politics in a satirical way. Rushdie's phenomenon will put himself into a force to the new generation of writers in the wake of Anglo-Indian writers in English and his position and identity always argues in his writing from Indo-Anglicans' point of view. It is clear in Rushdie's matter and forms between writing and identifying, blasphemy and affiliation, local knowledge and cosmopolitan look is informed in his wake of writing. Rushdie's individual history and political history reflect like a mirror as Gabriel Garcia Marquez of Aractaca. History after history is traced with Indian parallelism in Amitav Gosh, Rohinton Mistry, Arundhati Roy, Amit Chaudri, Upmanu Chatterji and others. Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* created a new wave of Indian history through parallelism. Amitav Gosh's *The Shadow Lines* traces score of history, beckons violence of tearing, raises division lines to create the identity of Postcolonialism and post independence, the double border with Britain on the one hand and Pakistan on the other. Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* relieves the history of communism in Kerala, while as Rohinton Mistry's *Such a Long Journey* gives the catastrophe of "The Emergency" decreed by Indra Gandhi in 1975.

Rushdie continuously plays with his pen by mentioning and portraying the places, swindling back his individual and collective memory and experiences language through identity and narration, thus creating history. Rushdie's centre of thought revolves around the heart of postcolonial hybridity, by capturing the secular thoughts of Nehru's tolerance and multiplicity. The human rights era under the term "The Emergency", the resurgence of eighty years, Hindu fundamentalism, religious violence, riots of Bombay in 1990 and vanished dreams of difficulty, has been followed by Rushdie. Rushdie works are a *tour de force*, as the way he chooses and crosses. The narrative and cultural tradition of mixing the myth with his fictional narrative is a sacred, comical, political and

in a satirical way. Rushdie became popular, both in the East and in West, when he wrote *The Satanic Verses* and *Midnight's Children*. The narrative voice and collective identity is to create new realities, realities that always burst, disturb and transform the varied things, to make fame and wealth. Rushdie starts as a crossroad in the writing cosmos to make the things boil up to the level and his readings carry an incredible outlook, which creates misunderstanding for which he never bothers.

A postcolonial writer assumes the position of writing, which includes his art of narration, magic realism and portraying the past and present without any fear. Being under the system of *fatwa* given by many Islamic scholars, especially Ayatollah Khomeini, he wrote the novel *The Moor's Last Sigh* in 1995 and the idea is borrowed from an Irish writer James Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake*. The idea and scene of the novel are located at the very end which is at the same time beginning itself. There is a flow of events in writing description at the end of the text and a start of impulse. The novel is unique and peculiar, starts with the end and gets concluded with a beginning.

Moraes Zogoiby, the protagonist of the novel is imprisoned in a tower in the town of Benangali where he composes his memories forever. The novel is set in four episodes and the fourth episode of the novel reflects with Dante through a series of regions both geographically and imaginary. The novel begins in a Cochin region where Portuguese and Jewish have their antiquity in India, a region which is rich in cultural crossroads. In the second part of the novel, the protagonist moves to Bombay, where he lives first in the heavenly heights of the city to fall next in the depths, and gets imprisoned in the city. There is an explosion in the Bombay riots during 1990's; he is transported for a life time to Spain. To Zogoiby, Spain is the imaginary fatherland, the country of his putative ancestor Boabdil, the Moor Sultan of Granada, who was exiled at last from the Spanish Peninsula in 1492. Moraes Zogoiby, the most deserted character states at the initial stage in the novel:

"Mine is the story of the fall from a grace of a high-born cross-breed: me, Moraes Zogoiby called 'Moor', for most of my life

the only male heir to the spice-trade-'n'-big-business corers of the da Gama-Zogoiby dynasty of Cochin, and of my banishment from what I had every right to think of as my natural life by my mother Aurora..." (5)

The 'Moor' Moraes Zogoiby is a Jewish-Christian-Indian-Portuguese, a mixing pot of cultures, while approaching to Benangali, he loses his capacity to talk about himself. Benangali is a place of the plural and distorted identity, where Zogoiby completely loses himself, and is not able to talk about himself and his belongings, because his links are in themselves dissolute. Benangali is in fact a town of cursed ones where one can see tourists speaking all the languages, talking continuously on the streets, located with many restaurants and shops to cheer, but not for Zogoiby. He approaches in a grim manner and utters that he had arrived in a place where one forgets himself, or precisely loses himself.

The Moor's Last Sigh is written under the sign of Dante's *Divine Comedy* and *Inferno*, and is very difficult to discern the allegorical interpretation that conceals the episode, which is facing a position of extreme isolation. Zogoiby gets stalked by death, loses contact with any reading community, left on a passage of track that resembles uncertainty and loss. Zogoiby becomes the portrait of Rushdie himself, confronted to a personal position of an extreme seriousness and it designates and justifies the position of Rushdie as a postcolonial, postmodern magic realist, who is truly publicized globally in a reading community. Rushdie is a complex writer to understand the reality of his unique interpretation who does not abandon the hope of a happy future in pluralism. Rushdie proposes in his novels the positive and negative variants of places and identity configurations. The hell of the Benangali in the novel is only a variety of the series of places across Cochin and Bombay that materialize different forms of plurality. The places offer the space of dreams on the occasion of a nightmare. 'Palimpsestine' and 'Mooristan' evoke the idealism of Aurora, the mother of Zogoiby, the dream of a nation across and a real reminder. *The Moor's Last Sigh* is a conspicuous departure from the concerns of the earlier Indian fiction; dismisses

the Emergency by Indra Gandhi in 1975 in two deliberately cursory sentences: "The Emergency ended. Life went on"(235). Rushdie's conceit is apparent in the novel:

Civilization is the sleight of hand that conceals our natures from ourselves. My hand, gentle reader, lacked sleight; but it knew what manner of thing it was. So blood-lust was in my history, and it was in my bones. Violence was violence, murder was murder, two wrongs did not make a right; these are truths of which I was fully cognisant. Also: by sinking to your adversary's level you lose the high ground. In the days after the destruction of the Babri Masjid, 'justly enraged Muslims'/ 'fanatical killers' (once again, use your blue pencil as your heart dictates) smashed up Hindu temples, and killed Hindus, across India and Pakistan as well. (365)

Rushdie depicts the present political scenario, traces the historical narrative in paradigmatic way, and expresses the fear of tolerance of cultural diversity in India which is increasingly scoured in coming decades. Rushdie's writing is palimpsestic in style and hybrid in sources and, the crystal clear representation of the pluralistic sensibility of the bold, showy, middle-class, socialistic painter Arurora Zogoiby in *The Moor's Last Sigh*. Arurora is obviously a picture of considerable empathy in the novel, since it is her vision of India that Rushdie seeks ultimately to affirm - an Indian in which "Jews, Christians, Muslims, Parsis, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains" are allowed to co-exist peacefully in the same aesthetic space (227). Vasco da Gama portrays an equivalent 'swarm' on Moraes bedroom walls, by contrast, it is motivated solely by "his fondness for imaginary worlds whose only natural law was his own sovereign whimsicality" (173). It is obvious from the words of Rushdie:

They were talking roosters, booted pussies and flying red-caped Wonder Dogs; also great galleries of more local heroes, for he gave us more than we had bargained for, adding djinns on carpets and thieves in giant pitchers and a man with the claws of a giant bird. He gave us a story-oceans and

abracadabras, Panchantantra fables and new lamps for old. (152)

The figure of the Moor painted by her mother Aurora is the embodiment of 'Palimpsestine', the place where 'worlds collide' to 'follow in and out of one another' (226). The new nation is transformed into a semi-allegorical figure of decay. Rushdie asserts:

Aurora had apparently decided that the ideas of impurity, cultural admixture and melange which had been, for most of her creative life, the closest things she had found to a notion of the Good, were in fact capable of distortion, and contained a potential for darkness as well as for light. This 'black Moor' was a new imagining of the idea of the hybrid - a Baudelairean flower, it would not be too bad farfetched to suggest, of evil. (303)

The novel draws a deliberate attempt in mentioning of real historical figures and events including the surrender of Granada by Boabdil, the demolition of the Babri Masjid, the 1993 Bombay riots, the gangster and terrorist Dawood Ibrahim, as well as the modern Indian political organizations like Bal Thackeray and the Shiv Sena. It traces four generations of the narrator's family and the ultimate effects upon the narrator, Moraes Zogoiby. The title is taken from the story of Boabdil (Abu Abdullah Muhammad), the last Moorish king of Granada. The spot from which Boabdil last looked upon Granada after surrendering is known as *Puerto del Suspiro del Moro* (pass of the Moor's Sigh). Moraes Zogoiby is in fact a translation of Arab which means 'unfortunate one'. According to the legend, it is said that the misfortune of the Zogoiby dates back to the Boabdil who cried as a woman since he was not able to defend as a man. Zogoiby divides a similar history to one of the Cervantes's *Don Quixote*. His ancestry is veiled in the mystery of his father, but it seems that the origin was there of Boabdil, the Moorish and the Jewish woman. Rushdie insists on the crossroads, to the origin of any identity that assumes the mixture of an emblematic importance. Rushdie displays his numerous linguistic sources in his writing cosmos that make the universe of Rushdie, a multilingual of the migrant existence in a postcolonial output.

The Moor's Last Sigh suggests the existence of a postcolonial migrant author in a mixed community, created by his narratives. The novel draws the attention of the readers through out the text, though the isolation of the living dead writer (Rushdie) at the end of the novel is an imaginary outline to the readers. *The Moor's Last Sigh* is based on the permanence of all these narratives of Dante, Shakespeare, Scheherazade, Cervantes, the American comic strips and the Hindu mythology. It tends overwhelmingly, to emphasize the destructive effects of rapacious economic globalism in India. It is a bitter and severe criticism against corruption, hypocrisy, violent crime and secret links with back alley politics. *The Moor's Last Sigh* supports the success of Rushdie's first novel *Midnight's Children* through that Rushdie has been in ascertaining his mind and art be followed in the present work too.

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