



CHILD-TO-ADULT CROSSOVER: RUSHDIE'S *HAROUN AND THE SEA OF STORIES*

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ABSTRACT

Crossover simply means crossing over from one genre to another. The present paper examines crossing over from children's literature to adult literature. The phenomenon can be explained by taking a hybrid text, Rushdie's *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* (1900). *Haroun* is usually considered as a children's book (Rushdie also) but it has political overtones. It can be considered as a socio-political allegory. Through the portrayal of fantasy and adventure Rushdie subverts the conventional child adult roles. Intertextual elements also demand the adult readership. It is a 21st century phenomenon. The proliferation of Harry Potter books gave currency to the new term. These texts question the conventional child-adult dichotomy. It appeals to children and adults. So it has relevance in publishing phenomenon also.

Keywords: Crossover, children's book, adult readership, fantasy, adventure, allegory

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"I am almost inclined to set it up as a canon that a children's story which is enjoyed only by children is a bad children's story."

-C. S. Lewis

The beginning of the 21st century witnessed a new phenomenon, the crossover- the adults and children reading the same books. The entire matter can be understood by simply looking into the enormous success of J. K. Rowling's Harry Potter books. Harry Potter books are one of the best-selling adult and children's books in these days. The proliferation of such books itself gives currency to the new term 'crossover'. Crossover means crossing over from one genre to another. If we take the dictionary meaning there were crossovers from ancient time onwards. The present term and the movement stand for the crossing over from children's literature to adult literature. It can really be defined by what it does, rather than what it is. It is a fiction which crosses age boundaries, and it is thought to have

existed before a particular name is given to it. These Janus-like texts remove the border line between two traditionally separate readerships that is children and adults. The present cross over phenomenon noticeably commenced with the advent of Harry Potter. The term, crossover fiction, helps the existence of these hybrid books aimed at the young and old. It becomes a global trend. It helps to blur the border lines between adults and young people in the contemporary society. It even transforms literary canons and the concepts of readership.

Haroun and the Sea of Stories (1900) is a children's book by Salman Rushdie. The year of publication of *Haroun* is important; it came just after *The Satanic Verses*. Rushdie himself claims that he wrote it for his son (Beckett 102). Many people thought he even selected a harmless genre. In an interview Rushdie says: "*Haroun* came in the first place from fragments of stories that I used to tell my

son-Zafar, who was at that time 10 or 11.... Haroun is my son's middle name...." (Maurer 134).

Rushdie himself claims to have written it to fulfil a promise to his son. Some critics accept that claim because it was essential for him to change the genre to flee from political and religious controversies.

Rushdie subverts conventional child-adult role in *Haroun*. He questions conventional child-adult dichotomy. It is a multifaceted tale and is enjoyed by all ages. Through this novel he also becomes a successful cross writer. He was able to present complex moral, philosophical issues in simple manner. The recurrent features of popular crossover fictions are present in *Haroun*. It is remarkable that the same author wrote *Midnight's Children*.

It is a crossover because it can be read as a socio-political allegory. Some people consider the *Haroun* as an allegory of author's personal situation that could be understood only by adults. It allegorically represents the several problems existing in the present society especially in India. These problems are narrated in the view point of the young protagonist Haroun. The allegorical nature of the work demands readership mainly from adults.

The protagonists of the popular crossover fiction are on a stage between childhood and maturity. S/he inhabits both the worlds. Harry Potter series begins with the 11 year old boy and grows a year old in each book. The protagonist Haroun Khalifa, young, curious, courageous, and outspoken is a child of 11 years.

The portrayal of fantasy and adventure is a remarkable feature of crossover fiction. *The Little Prince*, *Alice in Wonderland*, *Peter Pan*, and *The Wizard of Oz* are not only for children but also for adults. Though they are written with extreme simplicity and clarity they are with great profundity and multiple layers of meaning. The fantasy genre is popular with both adults and children. Rushdie in his book *Step across This Line* says:

When I first saw *The Wizard of Oz* it made a writer of me. Many years later, I began to devise the yarn that eventually became *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*. I felt strongly that if I could only strike the right note-it

must be possible to write the tale in such a way as to make it of interest to adults as well as children. The world of books has become a severely categorized and demarcated place, in which children's fiction is not only a kind of ghetto but one subdivided into writing for a number of different age groups.(5)

Crossover books try to make the magical mundane and the mundane magical. *Haroun* is a work of magical realism. It evokes the magical realism of *Midnight's Children*. The story begins:

There was one, in the country of Alifbay, a sad city, the saddest of cities, a city so ruinously sad that it had forgotten its name. ...In the north of the sad city stood factories in which (so I'm told) sadness was actually manufactured, packaged and sent all over the world-which never seemed to get enough of it. Black smoke poured out of the chimneys of the sadness factories and hung over the city like bad news. (15)

The production of "sadness" in the novel shows the narrative power of Rushdie. The power of storytelling lies at the heart of the crossover fiction. Nowadays, so called adult literary novelists lack the true narrative power. Literature becomes monotonous. But good children's literature is replete with the spirit of narration. The power of narrative drive makes the children's books popular. Rushdie uses fantasy and fable as narrative modes.

Intertextual elements once again demand the readership from adults and make the work a crossover. The title "The Sea of Stories" is the English equivalent of Kathasaritsagara." There are references from Baum's *The Wizard of Oz*, Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and J.M. Barrie's *Peter Pan*. Another obvious reference is to *One Thousand and One Nights*. There is a luxurious houseboat named "The Arabian Nights plus One" in the novel. There is a dedication inside the cover of *Haroun*. Rushdie could rarely see his son Zafar due to the fatwa imposed on him. So he dedicates the story to Zafar. But the dedication itself shows the multilevel nature of the work:

Zembla, Zenda, Xanadu:

All our dream-worlds may come true.
Fairy lands are fearsome too.
As I wander far from view
Read, and bring me home to you.

The shadows of real and unhappy events in the author's life lead to the most joyful children's fantasies. On the surface level *Haroun* is a lively comic tale. Haroun's father's name is Rashid and it is an anagram "Rushdie". Rashid's sorrow causes to forget his name and loses the ability to speak. Then here Rushdie considers his own life. Haroun even rescues his father and thus saves his stories also. It is highly self-reflexive. The story also criticises the current scenario. Political corruption and corrupt politicians are parts of the novel where Haroun is with his adventures.

Haroun follows the pattern of the classic folk tales. The hero Haroun travels to strange lands to save his country and to cure his father's illness. He travels to "Kahani" to restore this father's storytelling power. The puns, anagrams, wordplay and lively verbal inventions echo earlier children's classics. Like other children's classics it also contains amusements for adults and thus Rushdie tells a good story in a surprising way. The prose style is elegant and beautiful. Children and adults get a pleasure in reading.

Crossover fiction appeals to both children and adults. It has ability to appeal to a wider range of humans. The broader the world in the novel, the larger will be the readers. There is a continual exchange between the world of child and adult literature. Many children's classics are originally intended for adults. *Sleeping Beauty*, *the Arabian Nights* and *the Grimms' Tales* are not written for children only. *Haroun* seems to be read by more adults than children. The hybridisation of child and adult perspectives can be seen in the novel. True literature has no specific target audience. Good literature appeals to a greater number of people, all kinds of people, and of all period. Adults may not be satisfied with their current trends in adult literature and they want to seek their solace in the known and familiar children's literature. Many readers and authors have expressed their frustration with a great deal of adult literary fiction. They discover the pleasure of a good story in children's books.

Crossover books are part of publishing phenomenon also. Some critics are in the opinion that, it is just a marketing tool of publishers who want to sell their books to a wider audience. They prove it by showing the mass sales of Harry Potter books. Crossover fiction satisfies the need of both adults and children. Publishers are surely interested in promoting crossover fiction because it is commercially successful. Thus child-to-adult crossover has become a market trend in recent years.

Some critics have a strange opinion that adults are becoming 'infantilised' by reading children's books and it will lead to the end of civilisation. In their opinion adults reading children's books is backward looking and regressive. Because of this crossover fiction gets a mixed reception in academic sphere.

The future of the term "crossover" itself is in doubt. Though publishers celebrate its market, readers and academics are not devoid of ambiguity. There is a mass of newspaper articles about crossover fiction but there is not much academic research on crossover fiction. Anyway crossover fiction exists as long as the division between children and adult fiction exists and it is indisputable that the number of crossover texts is increasing. The popular culture and the present broader cultural context make the crossover fiction flourish. So it is a worthy subject for debate and discussion. *Haroun's* fun, colourful and charming adventure make it a story for kids but it has also a lot of allegorical and political base and make the adults to enjoy. *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* inhabit the same imaginative space of the great works like *Gulliver's Travels*, *Alice in Wonderland*, and *The Wizard of Oz*.

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