CHAPTER - 5

Conclusion
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The meteoric rise of Salman Rushdie with the publication of his tour de force Midnight's Children brought him shoulder to shoulder with the novelists of the stature of Gunter Grass, the German novelist of The Tin Drum, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, the Colombian author of 'One Hundred Years of Solitude' and Nobel Laureate for literature, 1982 and Mario Vargas Llosa, the Peruvian author of Time of the Hero and The War of the End of the World. He surpassed all the Indian writers coming under the category of so-called Commonwealth Literature which Rushdie denounces and scorns to be subsumed and categorized with. There can be no two opinions that Salman Rushdie, irrespective of his being of an Indian origin, is a cosmopolitan, an international writer. He equally belongs to East and the West and the two diametrically opposite cultures have profoundly conditioned his identity and his writing.

The present thesis critically covers various aspects of Rushdie's genius as a writer with special reference to Grimus,
The Jaguar Smile a political book, Midnight's Children (his
tour de force) and Shame.

At the invitation of Liz Calder the editor with Victor
Grollancz Publishers he wrote his first novel Grimus (1975) to
enter the science fiction competition. The novel, though not
much significant, paved the way for his most brilliant novel
Midnight's Children, that is considered his masterpiece. The
source of Grimus is a twelfth century Sufi narrative poem by
great Sufi Saint Fariduddin Attar entitled Mantiquat Tair
(Conference of the Birds in English rendering) for Rushdie's
roots are in his Eastern / Islamic background.

Its counter part in Western, specifically in English
literature is Bunyan's Pilgrim's progress. The characters all
being birds, the central character is Flappping Eagle, a bird.
The 29 birds are provoked by hoopoe to make a pilgrimage to
the god. They embark on a journey, passing through valleys
climb the mountain to meet god at the top but they find no god
there. The god is called Simurg. They accuse hoopoe of
bringing them on a wild goose chase. 'Simurg' in Pasian means
30 birds. It means if the thirty birds become one they become
god of their quest. Ironically, Rushdie has played an anagram on ‘Simurg’ which in turn became *Grimus*, the title of the book.

Rushdie has borrowed only the central theme and even certain elements of the plot. His intention however, was ‘to take a theme out of eastern philosophy or mythology and transpose it into a western convention’.¹ The Western convention is borrowed from Dante’s *Divina Comedia*. As Rushdie is the product of migration, inhabiting and addressing both the East and the West, the world of his mother country and that of his adopted country, belonging wholly to neither one nor the other, he is obsessed with the theme of migration. Hence the novel is set on an island in the Mediterranean, straddling the West and the East. The book reflects how tremendously Rushdie is well read both in Eastern and Western lore.

Virgil Jones – an intellectual with a tongue too large for his mouth (G.p.13) has two Christian names viz. Virgil reminding classical Roman poet, and Chanakya (reminding the name of the ancient Indian sage). *Grimus*’s first three epigraphs are from T.S.Eliot, Fariduddin Attar and Ted Hughes, respectively. The book changes into a narrative set in the American South. Rushdie satirizes pleasure-seeking and jet-
setting, the two prominent features of American Society. Rushdie also takes up the themes of exile and migration.

The present study takes up the basic theme of the birds’ search of a god and then deals with the sub-themes such as (i) Female sexuality; (ii) Migration and Exile, (iii) Science Fiction and (iv) Fantasy, Symbolism and Allegory. Rushdie’s well-readness, reflects in his employment of various themes in his inchoate novel *Grimus*.

*Midnight’s Children* is a unique novel in the sense that unexpected and overwhelming changes in Western attitude towards India and Indian literature became manifest by the sensational publication of Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* in 1981, In the words of Claus Borner: 'It was something like a Copernican turning point in the history of literature and ideas'.

There can be no denying that the world-wide, acclaim of *Midnight’s Children* is a very rare and even more sensational phenomenon. The grandiose and unanimous reception of *Midnight’s Children* in Europe and in the US is well known.

Malcolm Bradbury in the Guardian Books rightly observes: “With the publication of *Midnight’s Children* it was clear that
a rare thing had happened; we had suddenly seen the emergence of a major writer. That book's extraordinary scale and fertility, its span of styles from free bouyant fantasy to murderous social invective, its mixture of radical aesthetic experiment and political courage, its power of illuminating the English language with the metaphors, myths and sheer loquacities of Indian writing made it a remarkable intervention. ³

The main thrust of the present study is on the link between the destiny of an individual and the country that won the freedom simultaneously. In Rushdie's phraseology the protagonist of the novel Saleem Sinai (prototype of Rushdie himself) is 'handcuffed to history' (M.C.p.9). Interestingly, a country is treated as an individual and an individual as a country a creative facility of magic realism. Its sterling quality is that its literary importance is matched by its fetching readability, as Valentine Cunningham observes in Times Literary Supplement. "What makes Midnight's Children so extraordinarily important, and moreover... what makes it so vertiginously exciting a reading experience, is the way it takes
in not just the whole apple cart of India and the problem of being a novel at all.\textsuperscript{4}

Through Salman Rushdie's \textbf{Midnight Children} India has found her new powerful literary voice, her Gunter Grass (of Tin Drum fame). What the rave-reviews reveal 'a certain rhetorical monotony and repetitive vocabulary' which often overlap each other which can be epitomized as a composition of autobiography, family saga and authentic history.

The present study deals with the significance of Saleem Sinai (Rushdie in other words) – an individuals being conterminous with the birth of a free India. In Rushdie's phraseology Saleem (real Rushdie) was handcuffed to India for both were born on August 15, 1947 (M.C.p.9). Rushdie creates a fictional world which is highly symbolic of historical reality. The central theme with Rushdie is not social criticism but the presentation of certain phases of history in the course of which the world and human nature have undergone radical and irrevocable changes. Saleem's life since his birth, concomitant with that of an Independent India, runs parallel to the Indian history until the year 1975.
There is similarity between Saleem – Hero of *Midnight’s Children* and Oskar Magerath the hero of Gunter Grass’s *The Tin Drum*. Saleem like Oskar Mazerath is a Peeping Tom who is all the time and everywhere present as an eye-witness to political and private events, but it is at the same time a basically human experience which is global. Saleem Sinai’s gradual amputation is symbolic for the loss of freedom, sanity and individuality in modern man. He, in the end, spends his days preserving chutneys and his stories on history, is symbolic of India’s dried – up hopes. But in comparison with Gunter Grass’s Oskar Mazerath, Saleem Sinai is much more of a compassionate realist. German Critic Renate Schostack observes: ‘Rushdie’s world, his fictional setting, is the big city, an environment where cosmopolitanism is unavoidable. It makes for modernity, for topicality and highlights a facet of India and ‘Indianness’ which in Indo-Anglian writing has certainly not been neglected but not very often been associated with The eternal, rural immutable, the real India (Compare Premchand’s *Godan*).5

Bath matter and manner of the novel are important. There are reviewers whose sensitive approach does justice to
the literary achievements of the novel as well as to its relative non-Western qualities, as the German grand old man of letters Hans-Egon Holthusen stresses the narrative principle of Scheherazade – physical self-preservation and justification by story-telling – he links it with the classical example of European non-linear narration, The ‘Life’ and ‘Opinions’ of Tristram Shandy, and he draws intelligent parallels between Rushdie and Gunter Grass. With both the presentation of ‘matter in abundance’ is also ‘manner’ the excessive fullness of their world is a constitutive condition of creativity.6

The birth of an individual connected with history is dealt with various techniques such as ‘Magic Realism’ Fantasy, Allegory, myth and fable. Though Rushdie is not the inventor of the literary technique called ‘Magic Realism’, he has culminated it to perfection.

Magic Realism which has been dealt with in this thesis exhaustively, is a term coined by Franz Roh (1925), to describe tendencies in the work of certain German artists of the ‘new sachlichkeit (new objectivity) characterized by clear cool, static, thinly-painted, sharp focus images, frequently portraying the imaginary, the improbable or the fantastic in a realistic or
rational manner. The term was adopted in the United States with 1943 exhibition at the New York Museum of Modern Art, entitled 'American Realists' and 'Magic Realists'. The term was adopted to describe the works of such Latin American writers as Borges, Garcia Marquez and Alejo Carpentier and elements of it have been noted in Gunter Grass, Italo Calvino, Fowles and other European writers.⁷

Salman Rushdie employed the technique of Magic Realism in his *Midnight's Children* and *Shame*. As the technique shows, Rushdie's novel, especially *Midnight's Children*, deals with a strong narrative drive, in which the recognizably realistic mingles with the unexpected and the inexplicable in which elements of dream story and mythology combine fairly with the everyday, often in a mosaic of kaleidoscopic pattern of refraction and recurrence.

Fantasy, myth and fable are important constituents of Magic Realism. Allegory also is a part of Magic Realism but Rushdie is averse to include it as a technique on the grounds that in India allegory is overworked and hence is a misused cliché. He is against the term allegory. However, the novel can justly be called a political allegory. In Magic Realism fantasy
goes hand in hand with the real situation, here the history and politics of India, in particular and the Indian – subcontinent in general, have been mingled with warp and woof of the novel which has been pin-pointed with various episodes in the earlier chapter. Here it also needs to be mentioned that Rushdie’s childhood influence of the Arabian Nights’ and its story-teller, Scheherazade, keeps recurring from time to time.

Rushdie was influenced by G.V. Desani, author of All About H.Hatterr whose style and language Rushdie admired without any reservation. He was all praise for Desanis linguistic innovations.

Rushdie’s portrayal of women is unique. This aspect has also been dealt with critically in the present study.

Rushdie has employed the recurring leit motif of ‘snakes’, which has been analysed psychologically. He is also a past-master in coining names such as Picture Singh and Qasim the Red though not without a method in madness. All these are a part of the ‘fantasy’ which he created taking the novel to the heights of a modern classic. All these aspects have been thoroughly proved in the present study.
Rushdie's third novel under discussion in the thesis is *Shame* (1983). It presents a fabulous account of events in an unnamed country that strongly and closely resembles with Pakistan. Rushdie examines the related themes of honour and shame and shamelessness as cultural influences that affect the personalities and actions of individuals in Pakistan. The various characters are the dramatis personae of the real political drama of Pakistan during Z.A. Bhutto and Zia-ul-Haque, including Bhutto's execution at the gallows. *Shame* is a mordant and caustic satire on Pakistan as a polity.

While *Shame* lacks the sweeping scope of *Midnight's Children*, Rushdie's stylistic techniques are similar in both books. In Shame he weaves an elaborate multilayered plot that many critics found rich and intriguing. However, some critics objected to Rushdie's presentation of actual events. This is not fair and justified as Magic Realism dictates to mingle myth with reality which Rushdie has resorted to faithfully and scrupulously. Some critics asserted that he was more interested in constructing an intricately complex story than in providing a serious examination of contemporary Pakistan. Nevertheless, *Shame* was generally received enthusiastically and many found
it a poignant artistic analysis of Pakistan culture and society. Rather more than insight into Pakistan’s culture and Society, the novel manifests Rushdie’s extraordinary insight into political affairs of Pakistan of those days. It goes without saying that Midnight’s Children is about India and Indian setting, Shame is about Pakistan and Pakistani setting.

The political allegory begins with the miraculous birth of Omar Khayyam to three joint mothers (Three Sisters – Chhunni, Munnee and Bunny). But his significance is drowned by the rivalry of two persons. One is Iskandar Harappa (Zulfikar Ali Bhutto) and the other Raza Hyder (General Zia).

As Midnight’s Children is rich in allusions to Indian history so is Shame replete with references to the Pakistan political scenario. Rise and fall of Bhutto, Zia’s rise at the hands of his benefactor Bhutto and then Bhutto’s overthrow from power by Zia and then his execution by Zia. All this has been depicted in the chapter-1 entitled as ‘Political Warp and Woof’. Shame has been analysed as a political satire of the intrigues which have wracked Pakistan’. It is also a fable, verbal play, myth, social history, a saga of revenge, a roman-a-
clef' in the words of Ken Adachi which he expressed on the occasion of The Authors' Festival.

As we have mentioned above Rushdie's stylistic techniques are similar in both the books *Midnight's Children* and *Shame*, in the other chapters we have dealt with these techniques with special stress on Roman-a-clef and Magic Realism. Roman-a-Clef (French for novel with a key) is a novel in which real persons or events appear with invented names. In the case of Shame Iskander Harappa stands for Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, Raza Hyder for Zia-ul-Haq and Shaggy Dos for Yahya Khan, Rani for Nusrat Bhutto, Arjumand for Benazir Bhutto, etc. Either deliberately or for lack of tact, Rushdie could not put the veil properly on the face of 'isky' behind whose veil peeps unmistakably the face of Z.A. Bhutto, the martyred prime Minister of Pakistan.

Critics like Michael Gorra have also observed that *Shame* contained elements of a Picaresque novel, with which the present thesis writer has differed, presenting cogent argumentation for the dissension.
Magic Realism has been exhaustively discussed as a technique with reference to *Midnight’s Children* as well as *Shame* in the thesis.

In the subsequent chapters the characters both male and female are thoroughly critically discussed.

Rushdie stands out one of the greatest exponents of post-modernist as a novelist, depicting and delineating the characters as if men and women from the real life. All this has been shown in the chapters on Shame.

The critically appraised and evaluated book has been clubbed with *Grimus* in this thesis is not a novel but a book based on political travels. It is *The Jaguar Smile* – A Nicarguan Journey. But the narrative reflects sparks and streaks of a novel, which has been focused critically in this thesis in the chapter on The Jaguar Smile. The opinion of the present thesis writer corroborates with that of critic Prof. Sam Solecki who has observed: “The writing (in Jaguar Smile) reminds us we are reading a book by one of the premier novelists of our time. In fact some of the vignettes sound as though they are taken from *Shame* or from a contemporary
Latin American novel by Julio Cortazar or Gabriel Garcia Marquez.

Like Naipaul, Rushdie travelled Nicaragua in pursuit of politics and history. Hence Rushdie's first travel book is political in intent written with a literary flavour. We are told that Rushdie undertook the journey to Nicaragua in July 1986 to observe with his own eyes, as first hand, the Sandinista Revolution. He was the guest of The Sandinista Association of Cultural Workers.

Owing to his status and stature of a major novelist of international fame he had an instant access to the powers that be from Minister of Culture Ernesto Cardinal to President Daniel Ortega.

His conversation with the leaders of the revolution about such matters as: the fear of US attack on Nicaragua, the Contras; the criticism of writer Mario Vargar Llosa, press censorship and land reform, The Cuban excesses, ill-treatment of writers in Russia have been examined critically in this chapter in the thesis. Though a sympathizer of the Revolution and the Government of Nicaragua, Rushdie asks difficult
questions and finds himself dissatisfied with the answers he receives from the leadership. Yet he is not disaffected with the revolution and the revolutionaries.

Rushdie gets a pleasant surprise when he meets a fan of Tagore in Nicaragua (Managua) who pronounces his name as Tagore (Tagoray). Rushdie’s spontaneous reaction was: 'I was taken aback. What was old Rabindranath doing here, with this accent on his final ‘e’?' (J.S.p.56). Rushdie saw Gandhi’s ghost in August Cesar Sandino.

Rushdie labels Nicaraguan culture as ‘martyr’s culture’ and ‘blood culture’, referring to the heroic fight of the poet Leonel Rugama against the might of tyrannical Somoza’s. He vividly depicts the history of tyranny of Somozas. Every Indian in Spanish, Rushdie reveals, is called a hindu for a hindu means an Indian. Rushdie is not a blind admirer of the Revolution. He asks difficult questions and has serious reservations about Cuba and Fidel Castro who is the role model for Nicaraguan leadership. Rushdie throws light on how Cardinal was converted to a ‘Revolutionary’.
The fan of Tagore was scornful of fantasy as he says to Rushdie deprecatingly when Rushdie suggested to him 'many people think of Latin America as the home of anti-realism':

Fantasy? No Sir, You must not write fantasy. It is the worst thing. Take a tip from our great Tagore. Realism, realism, that is the only thing (J.S.P.56).

What is Rushdie's modus operandi to recount his stories - the fact is stranger than fiction? Sam Solecki has been fully justified when he observes:

"In most cases Rushdie simply tells a story or describes a scene in a manner that lets people and events speak for themselves". 9

Rushdie meets poets and writers of Nicaragua and he inter alia sheds light on the role of a writer vis-à-vis a government, especially when the government is the product of a 'Revolution'. He corroborates with Naipaul in his view 'revolution devours its own children'. At the hindsight it proves prophetically true.

Rushdie has no inhibition or embarrassment in portraying a woman with the largest breasts: 'Oh, Miss Mary',
she said, 'I was worry when I see you comin' 'cause I did not have my brassiers on. These days I only puts on when I has company and you done take me by surprise'. Miss Pancha had the largest breasts I had seen in my life, and Mary told me later, you could not actually tell the difference when the bra was on' (J.S.p.138).

His visit to Bluefields and its description in coruscating prose shows Rushdie at his best.

Rushdie closes his book on the following note.

"I had left Nicaragua unfinished... a country in which opposing forces of creation and destruction were in violent collision".

Thus the book, though a travelogue, is thoroughly examined pinpointing its beauty of prose, reading like a novel of high calibre and with insights into politics.

Rushdie, as it has already been argued, is a solitary example from the writers of Indian origin settled in the west, who has established himself as a distinguished voice amongst the contemporary writers of fiction.
He certainly has his roots in India. The socio-political, historical and cultural ethos of India plays a predominant role in determining the dimensions and directions of his literary endeavours along with his western upbringing. His western exposures and experiences also, as is manifested by his fictional and non-fictional writings, constitute an integral part of his vision as an artist par-excellence.

Rushide is one of the very few contemporary practitioners of fiction from India who judiciously synthesize the oriental and occidental aesthetics of the art of fiction. His fiction stands as an authentic testimony to his invariable rapport with the Eastern as well as the Western literary sources. As a curious writer, he often takes a recourse to the classics or classical literature or classical literary trapes.

His use of Persian tradition, Sufi tradition and fantastic stories, myths and mythological innuendos on the one hand and his masterful exploitation of Western classics like Pilgrims Progress Dante's Divine Comedy and writings of Virgil, attribute colourfullness to the texture of his fiction. This also attribute authenticity to his position as one of the prominent post-modernist writers.
Rushdie's place amongst the contemporary writers, therefore, is an issue of crucial importance. In terms of his thematic concerns, fictional devices and stylistic and linguistic pre-occupations, he cannot be placed with the Indian novelists in English. Nor can he be conveniently placed amongst the Indian immigrant writers settled in the West. Although he noticeably shares with them certain themes and techniques, the tone of his fiction, his intellectual insistence, thematic persistence and linguistic excellence grant him a place that could have been occupied by Rushdie alone.

His fictional locale, milieu and cultural ethos has roots in India. But his thematic treatment is characterized by Western intellectual intensity. He is, therefore, often placed with the writers of wider global context. He is, rightly placed with Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Gunter Grass, Vargas Llosa and others.

As a established post-modern novelist Salman Rushdie problematises the issues in his fiction that are perceptibly political and intellectual in nature. The prevailing global, socio-historical and cultural reality constitutes the basic components of the structure of his fiction and crux of his vision. In terms of
linguistic and fictional paraphernalia, Rushdie is overtly and assertively unconventional. Like most post-modernists, he is playful, self-reflexive, satirizing and devastatingly mocking simultaneously.
REFERENCES:


3. Ibid.


5. Ibid. p.18.


9. Ibid.