HAROUN AND THE SEA OF STORIES: AN ECOLOGICAL ALLEGORY

Haroun and the Sea of Stories has been acknowledged as an allegory. It has also elements of the fable, the fantasy and the fairy tale. As an adventure story, it has much interest for children in the form of a fantastic adventure tale. But it has a deep underlying meaning and can be read on many levels—personal, political, artistic and above all ecological.

Haroun is unlike Rushdie’s other novels, which are mostly postmodernist texts, not meant to convey any message. They defy any fixed meanings and interpretations and are characterized by inter-textuality and non-linearity of plots and hybridity. But in Haroun, Rushdie has a message to convey. He deliberately chooses the medium of medieval allegory. As D.C.R.A. Goonetilleke points out, “Rushdie, self-consciously Postmodern, appears to hark back to medieval, later and recent allegory, and he substitutes his own levels – children’s story, the political, the mystique of art and the personal” (109). There are, however, ecological overtones in the allegory too. At certain places they are quite obvious and have caught the attention of some critics. As Novy Kapadia writes, “For the environmentalists and the Greens, the allegorical message is...implicit. The whole business of the life/story-sustaining Ocean, so long taken for granted, but now threatened by Khattam-Shud’s insidious army of poison-blenders, is a reminder of the destruction of our environment and natural resources for selfish reasons” (228). Damian Grant also points out that “Rushdie’s metaphor (of Sea of Stories) lends itself to ecological elaboration, as one reads Haroun’s analysis of the polluted waters around Khattam Shud’s shadow-ship” (31).

Let us see briefly how allegory works at different levels and how the ecological level overshadows the other layers in the novel. First, the novel can be read as a children’s story. As a children’s story, it can be classed with Alice in the Wonderland, Through the Looking Glass and The Arabian Nights. Rushdie himself has pointed out that “he wanted to make it (the story) of interest to adults as well as children” (Goonetilleke 108). The story was, in fact, originally meant to be a pure and simple fantastic tale for his son Zafar. Rushdie would read an early version of it to the boy in serialized form at the
boy’s bedtime. Later, however, after all the furore over *The Satanic Verses*, Rushdie brought changes into it and gave it profound allegorical meanings which are beyond the understanding of children. The novel, however, in its present form, retains some elements of a children’s tale. First, the central character in the novel, Haroun, who sets out on an adventure with his father, is a small boy. Then, there are references to *The Arabian Nights*, a book containing stories of great interest for children. The very names of the two main characters, Rashid Khalifa and Haroun are signs that it will be a story of wonders and fantastic happenings. The names are derived from Haroun-Al-Rashid, the fifth Abbasid Caliph (or Khalifa), whose court is associated with the tales of *The Arabian Nights*. Then there are many doggerel, comic events and comic names. It is an interesting mix of fantasy and the everyday world with such characters as the reckless bus driver, politicians, harmless water Gennie Iff, gangsters and the Flying bird. There are doggerel sung by Prince Bolo and Princess Batcheet as traffic precautions.

Another level, on which the story is read, is personal. One cannot ignore the novel’s temporal connections with *The Satanic Verses*. *The Satanic Verses* had created a feeling of anger and hatred against Rushdie amongst the Muslim fundamentalists. Rushdie was declared an anti-Muslim writer and Ayatollah Khomeini, the dictator of Iran issued a fatwa against him, calling on all zealous Muslims to execute Rushdie, so that no one could dare insult the Islamic sanctions. Rushdie had to remain in hiding after the announcement of this fatwa. He felt as if his voice had been suppressed. But two years after this in 1991, he came out with *Haroun*. One can thus trace some personal elements in the novel. The central figure in the novel, Rashid, who loses his power of storytelling, alludes to the author’s own name. Khatam-Shud, the foe of all speech and language can be taken as Khomeni. Some other names in the novel are the same as those of some real persons. Butt the Hoopoe in the novel is the maiden name of Rushdie’s mother, and Soraya is the name of Rashid’s wife (in the novel) and of the beautiful, childless, first wife of the Shah of Iran whom Khomeni deposed.

But these personal elements in the novel should not lead us to think that Rushdie intended the novel to be a personal vendetta against Khomeni. True, there are biographical overtones and undertones in the book. But the book rises above the personal and attains a universal significance through its multi-layered allegory. A critic has read in the novel Rushdie’s corroboration of family bonds. He points out that the final return of
Soraya to Rashid and the happy family reunion thereafter shows that the novel “in one of its dimensions is an assertion of family values” (Goonetilleke 120). As a political allegory, the novel has a universal appeal. The language used by Rushdie is eclectic and international and reaches out across all barriers. The Chup Walas stand for the supporters of the totalitarian form of government, while the Gup Walas stand for democracy that upholds the values of freedom of expression and speech. The war between the Chup Walas and the Gup Walas is thus a war between totalitarianism and democracy. The final victory of the Guppies is a vindication of republican values. Finding such a parallel in the novel, Goonetilleke remarks “The land of Khattam-Shud, represents what the Soviet Union meant to the West during the Cold War and, more recently, what Iran under Khomeni meant, and essentially, what dictatorial regimes throughout history have meant” (120).

Still on another level, the novel is also about the theory and process of writing and the significance of fictions. “What is the use of stories that are not even true?” (Haroun 20) The question is posed a number of times in the novel. When Haroun poses this question to his father Rashid, the latter goes completely off-balance and loses all his powers of story-telling. Finally, however, when he has recovered his powers, he gives an answer to the question. He says that people don’t believe the politicians, even if they speak the truth, but they believe storytellers even if they tell lies. The reason is that their stories are conceptually and ideologically true. Further, in the course of the novel, Rashid explains the process of writing stories to Haroun. He says that the same stories have been there in the world permanently. They have existed, as if they were in the communal mind or the spiritus mundi or “The Ocean of the Streams of Story” (Haroun 51) of humanity. These stories are common to all mankind. The writer with his imagination juggles and shakes them up and gives them new forms. The theory that Rushdie suggests in the novel is similar to that given by T. S. Eliot. Thus while sailing on the sea of stories, Haroun finds that “different parts of the ocean [contain] different sorts of stories, and as all the stories that [have] ever been told and many that [are] still in the process of being invented [can] be found there, the Ocean of the Streams of Story [is] in fact the biggest library in the universe” (72). All new stories are born from the old—it is the new combinations that make them new. Thus the beauty of stories is that they are (like water itself) recyclable. The author needs to have an attuned mind to get supply of story waters. When Haroun
asks his father wonderingly how his subscription for supply of story waters has stopped, Rashid answers, “It is a process too complicated to explain (P2C to E)” (57). Rashid means to say that it is some kind of mental and imaginative blockage that has stopped the subscription and as a result the supply of story waters.

The novel is thus, as Goonetilleke points out “an effervescent, readable and entertaining story” which “both children and adults are likely to enjoy” (122). The most interesting aspect of the novel is that it can be read from an ecological viewpoint also. In fact, the storyline of the novel has clear ecological overtones. It belongs to the tradition of The Arabian Nights. Herein, Rushdie interestingly builds ecology into fantasy. Haroun’s adventures take him among mythological beasts, evil as well as good spirits, supernatural moon and seas and magical landscapes. These adventures, on an allegorical level are, as Damian Grant points out “a fictive reflection of real problems in the real world” (94).

Gradually, the personal and political problems are relegated to the background and the ecological problems come to the forefront. The central metaphor in the novel is ‘The Sea of Stories’. This sea is the supplier of all the stories in the world. It is located on an imaginary moon, called The Moon Kahani. It has a huge underwater fountain of shining white light from where it receives its supply. This idea is derived from the 11th century Kashmiri Poet, Som Deva’s Kathasarit Sagar or ‘The Ocean of the Stream of Stories’. Rushdie makes a reference to it in Midnight’s Children as well. This magical sea is the fountainhead as well as storehouse of all stories. But this metaphor, in the course of the novel, is gradually made literal and given ecological overtones.

Let us see how ecological allegory runs in the novel and how the fairy-tale storyline and contemporary ecological problems are inter-woven in the story. On the surface level, the novel is the story of a poor family comprising three members. The family lives on the ground floor of a small house in a city known as Alifbay. Rashid, the father is a storyteller, and story-telling is both his profession and avocation. He has a beautiful wife, Soraya and a son called Haroun. Haroun is a resourceful, adventurous and intelligent boy. There is a clerk, Mr. Sen Gupta, who lives in the same house with his fat wife, Oneeta. As a result of Sen Gupta’s provocation, Soraya loses faith in her husband’s profession of story-telling. She undermines the profession and runs away with that clerk. This shock and Haroun’s question ‘what is the use of telling stories which are not even true’, deprive Rashid of his powers of telling stories. Dejected and shaken, he tells
Haroun that his subscription to the powers for the supply of story waters has been cut off. Haroun then takes his father to Kashmir, thinking that the magical, pristine and enchanting beauty of the valley will help Rashid get back his power of story-telling. But he fails to achieve this here, because the land has now been polluted by human intervention. So he goes to the Moon Kahani (another fantastic moon) to restore the story water supply of his father. Finally, he succeeds in his venture and Rashid’s gift of the gab is restored. Soraya too returns home and there is a happy family re-union.

As one reads between the lines of the fantastic tale, one cannot fail to spot ecological undertones. The very first lines of the novel describing the city of Alifbay, in which Rashid lives with his family indirectly refer to the toxicity pervading the metropolis because of its polluted environment. The lines are as follows:

There was once, in the country of Alifbay, a sad city, the saddest of cities, a city so ruinously sad that it had forgotten its name. It stood by a mournful sea full of glumfish, which were so miserable to eat that they made people belch with melancholy... It was a city full of mighty factories in which 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).

Obviously, Rushdie is here describing the life of a mega industrial town. The smoke here hangs like bad news because of the toxic and polluting agents contained in it. This ‘over civilized’ and over industrialized town has not only caused problems of pollution, but also of human neurosis. Later, we are told that the entire metropolis leads an unhappy life. Only Rashid Khalifa, also nicknamed the Shah of Blah and Ocean of Notions, has maintained his cheerfulness because of his gift of telling stories. Further, while describing the city, Rushdie makes clear references to its polluted state. “Now when the rains [come] to sad city, life becomes a little easier to bear. There [are] delicious pomfret in the sea at [that] time of the year, so people [can] have a break from the glumfish, and the air [is] cool and clean, because the rain [washes] away most of the black smoke billowing out of the sadness factories” (21).
Throughout the novel, Rushdie makes use of ecological metaphors to describe the personal. Thus, while Rashid wanders around the city and the country telling stories, Soraya stays home “turning cloudy and even a little thunderous and brewing up a storm” (16). The wellspring of all stories, the collective conscious mind, is also described in terms of the natural phenomenon. When Haroun asks Rashid where the stories come from, Rashid makes ridiculous drinking noises, glug, glug, glug and answers “from the great story sea... I drink the warm story waters and then I feel full of stories” (17). The stories are supplied to him by an invisible tap installed by one of the water Genies.

At times the non-human is described in human terms, thus suggesting that the human and the nonhuman worlds are interconnected. After Rashid and Haroun make a plan to go to the valley of K (Kashmir), where it is hoped that Rashid will get back his story-telling powers, Rushdie remarks “In the town of the G (Jammu), and the valley of K, the weather is still fine; whereas here the air is too weepy for words” (24). But the valley of K, Rushdie says, is different “There are fields of gold and mountains of silver and in the valley there is a beautiful lake, whose name, by the way, is Dull” (25). Rushdie has deliberately distorted the name of the lake Dal, to suggest the changes that have come there due to human intrusions into it.

Rashid and Haroun go to the town of G on the invitation of some politician to canvass for his forthcoming elections. They are picked up from the bus stand by two men and taken to the place of the rally. The sight of the human beings at the rally is described in terms of ecological metaphors. “They [arrive] at a thick forest of human beings, a crowd of people sprouting in all directions like leaves on jungle trees. There [are] great bushes of children and rows of ladies arranged in lines, like flowers in a giant flower bed” (26). Rashid stands on the stage “in front of that vast jungle of crowd” (26). The lines are suggestive of the rising pressure of population in the valley, which at one time was a beautiful natural habitat.

By describing the human in terms of the natural, Rushdie seems to sound ironical. Possibly, he is trying to convey how human beings have mushroomed everywhere. Further, Rushdie’s attention is focused on the toxic and over-populated environment of the town G. Describing its bus stand, he writes “in the courtyard of the buses, small dust-clouds [are] rushing back and forth like desert whirlwinds” (32). Haroun realizes that “these clouds [are] full of human beings” (32).
From the town G, Rashid and Haroun go to the valley K to canvass for another unpopular political leader, ‘Buttoo’. The signboard that welcomes them before they enter into the valley does not read Kashmir, but ‘Kosh-Mar’. It seems that some miscreant has daubed it deliberately. Rashid tells Haroun that the word ‘Kache–Mer’ in the ancient language of Franj means “the place that hides a sea” (40). But someone has deliberately distorted it and made it ‘Kosh-Mar’, which in the same language means a nightmare. The distortion seems to suggest that the valley has lost its old pristine, natural beauty due to human encroachments on it, which have thrown everything off balance and made the valley nightmarish. On reaching the valley, Rashid finds it changed from his last visit, when he had found it “the most joyful of places” (42) but now, “it [is] plain that trouble [has] found its way up here now” (42). Rashid’s son Haroun too finds “a bad feeling in the town” (42). He can “smell it on night air when the fumes of cars and trucks have faded away and the moon makes everything look clean” (42). Again, here is a reference to the toxicity of the city.

Further, ecological concerns are revealed indirectly by describing the non-human in terms of the human. Haroun thus “smells unhappiness on the night air” (47) and finds “the mist positively stinking of sadness and gloom” (47). There is a green yellow mist hovering over the valley. Rashid smells a strange smell and asks, “Who made that smell?” (47). Haroun replies, “It’s a mist of misery” (47). Rashid sinks into silent wretchedness when he finds “the green-yellow mist with the toilet stink rushing towards them across the lake” (47). The lake and the land are called “positively temperamental” (47), responding to human moods. Haroun has already been told the story of “The Moody land” (47) by Rashid. So, Haroun at once remarks that the valley of K must be that “Moody land, a magical country that changed constantly, according to the moods of its inhabitants. In the moody land, the Sun would shine all night if there were enough joyful people around... And when people got angry, the ground would shake, and when people were muddled or uncertain about things the Moody land got confused as well—the outlines of its buildings and lamp posts and motor cars got smudgy…”(48). What is narrated in the story seems to be actually taking place on the lake where Haroun and Rashid have come out for boating along with the politician Snooty Buttoo.

To attribute human emotions to inanimate objects and to see the reflection of human moods in nature has been called ‘Pathetic Fallacy’ by John Ruskin. So here,
Rushdie also seems to be committing pathetic fallacy as he describes the lake reflecting and responding to the moods of the rowers. Rashid, however, changes his stance and shows that the external too affects the internal i.e. the consciousness of man. The external is presented not only as reflection of the psychic states of man as most of the anthropocentric literature does. We are told that there is toilet smell that comes rushing towards the lake. So, it is the external polluted environment that determines the human moods and affects human consciousness. In fact, the whole description of the Moody Land and the Dull Lake on which they are rowing reveals some kind of interaction between the human and the non-human world, the internal is shown as affecting the external and vice-versa. The external nature is represented in animistic terms, and we have a rare example of how Rushdie can build fantasy into ecology. The whole novel is a fantastic tale with underlying ecological implications.

Again, while talking to Buttoo, Rashid and Haroun suggest that there is a deep interaction between human beings and nature. Haroun especially is of the opinion that nature responds to the moods of human beings. He again refers to the story of the ‘Moody and Temperamental Land’ (narrated to him by Rashid) in which the mood of the land changed in accordance with the mood of human beings. Haroun thinks that a ‘mist of misery’ envelopes their boat, and the lake looks dull, because Rashid is sad. So he asks if that is the place (i.e., the lake) the story of the Moody Land is about. Rashid at first tries to put off Haroun by saying that it is just a story. But when he finds the lake and the valley responding to his moods, he comes to believe his own story. In other words, he admits that there is an interaction between the internal and the external and vice-versa. Thus when Buttoo becomes furious, the lake becomes rougher and the water becomes hotter and more violent. But Buttoo is a corrupt politician, representing the colonizers of the world. So, he opines that there is no such bond between human beings and nature. He tells Rashid emphatically “surely you don’t believe the lad’s hocus-pocus...freak weather conditions came and went. No more to be said” (50). As an exploiter of the world and nature, he cannot believe nature to be alive and having interactions with human moods. But Haroun knows the truth. He has a strong faith in the fact that there is an interaction between the internal and the external and vice-versa. Later, he feels that ‘the smelly mist’ blowing from the hills towards the lake is also affecting their moods.
As the story proceeds, the ecological undertones become more and more prominent. At night, the water Genie comes to the houseboat where Rushdie and Haroun are putting up. In the morning, Rashid is to address a rally in favour of Buttoo. The water Genie has been sent by Walrus to turn off the tap from which Rashid gets his supply of story water. The reason is that he has stopped his subscription for this supply. Haroun, however, wakes up and catches Iff in the act of disconnecting the supply. Haroun catches hold of the disconnecting tool and blackmails Iff, demanding that he be taken to the wellspring of supply of story waters. Iff agrees to take him to the Moon Kahani where there are two cities, the Chup city and the Gup city, which are divided by a twilight wall. As the Chup city always remains on the other side of the sun, it always remains dark there, while the Gup city faces the sun, so there is always light there. There is Ocean of Streams of Story comprising different strands of different colours, each strand representing a different tale. Iff tells that Haroun will have to accompany them to this place to set things right for his father, Rashid. Both Iff and Haroun reach first the Kahani Moon, riding on the back of the bird, Butt the Hoopoe, and then have to sail across the Ocean of Streams of Story to reach the Gup city.

What follows then is a story that becomes overtly ecological at times. Iff tells Haroun that the story water of the Ocean has magical powers. By drinking a cup of story water from a stream, a person can restore his spirits. Haroun is offered a cup and told that he would dream the number one Princess Rescue Story. But as Haroun drinks the water, he dreams a dream in which he finds himself turning into a monster. Finally, he finds himself turned into a spider. The princess, who is imprisoned in the fortress, comes out with a sharp knife, threatening to kill the spider if it does not get away and go back home. Haroun feels that he finds his grip loosening on the tower wall and then the princess has chopped one of his arms and he falls down. When he tells this dreadful story to Iff and Butt, they think that something has gone wrong with story water that has made the stories distorted, contrary to expectations. Now they are worried that the Chupwallas must have started polluting the story water. “It’s pollution”, says the Water Genie gravely. “Don’t you understand? Something, or somebody, has been putting filth into the ocean. And obviously if filth gets into the stories, they go wrong...Hoopoe. I’ve been away on my rounds too long. If there are traces of this pollution right up here in the Deep North,
things at Gup city must be close to crisis. Quick, quick! To speed ahead! This could mean war” (75).

‘War with whom?’ Haroun [wants] to know.
Iff and Butt [shiver] with something very like fear.
‘With the Land of Chup, on the Dark Side of Kahani’ (75).

Butt the Hoopoe answers without moving its beaks. “This looks like the doing of the leader of the Chupwallas, Khattam-Shud, the cultmaster of Bezaban” (75).

The story seems to suggest that the Chup city stands for the mega industrial military civilization of the west, while the Gup city Wallas stand for the environmentalists who have taken up a struggle against the polluters to save the environment. It appears that Khattam-Shud is a megalomaniac scientist or political leader bent upon destroying the planet. As Joel Kuortti points out “What is envisaged in the image of Khattam Shud is the Apocalypse, the End, the finish of everything” (35).

Further, describing the habitat of the Chupwallas, Iff tells that it always remains dark there. They live in permanent night, as the Sun never shines on their side of the moon. This land is always frozen. The inhabitants of the Gup city, on the other hand, are “all bird and animal-like figures” (showing their bonds with nature). There are birds with snake-heads and peacocks-tails, flying fishes, dogbirds” (81).

As Iff and Haroun sail further along, Butt the Hoopoe tells Haroun that there is a Floating Gardener in the Ocean. Haroun has a brief conversation with this Mali, and asks him what his job is. Mali, the Floating Gardener answers, “untwisting twisted Story Streams. Also unlooping same... Floating Gardeners, you can say, are like the hairdressers of the Sea of Stories. Brush, clean, wash, condition...” (83).

Now Iff asks a volley of questions to Mali “what is this pollution? When did it start? How bad is it?” (83). Mali answers the questions in sequence, “Lethal. But nature as yet unknown. Started only recently, but spread is very rapid. How bad? Very bad. Certain types of story may take years to clean up” (83). “For example?” Haroun asks, “Certain popular romances have become just long lists of shopping expeditions. Children’s stories also. For instance, there is an outbreak of talking helicopter anecdotes” (83).
Though they are talking of stories, their talk is suggestive of the pollution that is ruining our planet. The old stories (highlighting the beauties of nature and lofty human emotions) have become polluted with the ideas of the technological world. Instead of nature, fairies and other such things, the children’s stories now are marred by ‘an outbreak of talking helicopter anecdotes’. Further, while telling Haroun about the origin of all the streams of stories in the wellspring located near the Moon’s South Pole, Iff asks in a worried tone, “If the source itself is poisoned, what will happen to the Ocean—to us all?” (87). Iff bemoans, “We have ignored it for too long, and we now pay the price” (87). His talk again suggests that man has ignored the planet for a long time in his race for industrial growth and now he is facing the consequences of pollution.

When both Iff and Haroun reach Gup city, they find people very upset there. Meanwhile, Rashid too reaches there with the help of his own powers. They find everybody upset and worried because of two reasons. First, it is about the poisoning of the Ocean by Khattam-Shud, and second, the Princess Batcheet, Prince Bolo’s fiancee, has been kidnapped by the people of the Chup city and kept as prisoner in the citadel of Chup, the Ice Castle of Khattam-Shud. So they want that the poisoning of the Ocean should be stopped and the Princess should be got released. General Kitab’s following lines spoken in this regard bear an ecological message. He says, “We have sent messages to Cultmaster Khattam-Shud… These messages concerned both the vile poison being injected into the Ocean of the Streams of Story, and the abduction of Princess Batcheet. We demanded that he put a stop to the pollution and return within seven hours the kidnapped lady” (91). Carrying further this talk, the Walrus tells the crowd gathered there, “Extreme urgency is of the essence… The poisons that are spreading so rapidly will destroy the entire Ocean if steps are not taken to get to the bottom of the problem”. “Save the Ocean!” [cries] the crowd (91). The whole idea of saving the ocean from pollution and poisons reminds one of the ‘Save the Ganga’ project in India on which the Government spent many hundred crore rupees and the British authorities who came to help India withdrew from the project for want of cooperation from India.

As the story proceeds further, it becomes certain that a war is imminent between the Gupwallas and the Chupwallas. However, of the two issues on which the war is to be fought, the first one i.e. the poisoning of the Ocean is given more importance. The other issue, the release of the Princess Batcheet, is taken lightly and, in fact, given a mock-
heroic treatment for comic effect. The main concern in the novel seems to be the saving of the Ocean from pollution. When Bolo requests that first his fiancée should be saved, he is treated jovially. Both Haroun and Rashid too join the forces of the Chupwallas in their battle against pollution. They are more bothered about saving their planet from poisoning than about saving Batcheet. They forget for the time being their own personal problem and the purpose for which they have come there. Ignoring Prince Bolo’s pleadings to first save his beloved, Batcheet, the Guppee armada comprising the Pages, Water Genies, Floating Gardners and Plentimaw Fishes, Goopy and Bagha, climb into the long Barge-Birds to sail across the lagoon to reach the Chupwalla’s coastlines. On the way, they talk aloud and their talk shows that they are more concerned about saving the environment than Batcheet.

Saving Batcheet! What a notion!
What matters is to save the Ocean!
That’s the plan to set in motion
…find the source of the poison potion!
The Ocean’s the important thing…
Worth more than the daughter of any king (118).

That is what their talk is, revealing that the story about Batcheet and Bolo forms only a sub-plot introduced for comic effect. The chief concern in the novel is pollution in its various forms. Only it has been presented under the garb of fantasy.

As the Guppee armada reaches the coastline of the Chup city, they find that “it [is] a bleak-looking thing and in these coastal waters the Ocean of the Streams of Story [is] in the filthiest state… The poisons [have] the effect of muting the colours of the Story Streams, dulling them all towards greyness…the poison [is] cooling the Ocean down” (122). Goopy and Bagha panic at this and remark, “If this goes on, we’re all lost!” After landing on the seashore the Guppees find that no birds sing on those twilight shores, the air smells stale and full of stench. The trees are leafless and “[look] like sallow ghosts” (122). The whole description smacks of the harmful and poisoning effects of the pollution.
Allegorically, the battle between the Guppees and Chupwallas can be taken as a battle between the polluters or the builders of the mega industrial-military civilization and the environmentalists. Thus we have in the novel, “Guppees love the Ocean, Chupwallas try to poison it...it is a war between Love and Death of Ocean” (125).

Further, the Guppee armada gets the information that the king of the Chupwallas, Khattam-Shud, is plotting the total ruination of the Ocean of Streams of story in the old zone of the Chup city. Khattam Shud has two selves -- his real self and his shadow self. While his shadow self controls the old zone, his real self-controls the citadel of the city in the new zone. Here, the Princess Batcheet has been imprisoned along with the statue of Bezubaan. The Chupwallas plan to seal the lips of the princess. The General Kitab has got all this information about the new zone. Anxious and worried about his beloved, Prince Bolo says, “Batcheet, my love, my only girl. Her cherry lips must be saved from the Cultmaster’s needle, and without any delay” (136). However, they have no information about the old zone. They are extremely worried. The general says anxiously that they want someone to go and investigate in this zone. Haroun offers to do this job. He takes charge of the expedition to the old zone to save the Ocean from total poisoning. He agrees to act as a spy on behalf of the General Kitab. The news he brings about the plans of Khattam-Shud can be read allegorically as nothing short of a working of an ecocatastrophe. Talking to General Kitab, Haroun says, “...well, it turns out I may be too late, because the whole Ocean’s going to be dead any minute if we don’t do something...may be it isn’t too late for me to do a bit” (137).

Haroun’s words are suggestive of the immediate need to save the planet from an environmental apocalypse. The attempt of the Chupwallas to seal the lips of the Princess Batcheet may be taken as an attempt made by industrialists and colonizers motivated by economic greed to suppress and silence the protests of the environmentalists against the protests of the former involving damages to the environment.

The General Kitab along with a part of the Gupees army proceeds towards the new zone of the Chup city to fight a battle for the freedom of the Princess Batcheet. Haroun along with Iff, Butt the Hoppoe and the two Plentimaw fish, Goopee and Bagha, goes towards the old zone to save the Ocean from further poisoning. The nearer they get to the South Pole of the Moon Kahani, the more poisonous the water gets. It becomes difficult for the Plentimaw Fish to go further. The Mali, the Floating Gardener has to
remain behind, as “the waters of Ocean [are] growing thicker by the mile, thicker and
colder; many of the Steams of Story [are] full of a dark, slow moving substance that
[looks] like molasses...” (140). The lines indirectly suggest how difficult it is to live in
the midst of pollution. The two Plentimaw Fish, in fact, start uttering piteous whimpering
noises and confess that they had never thought that it would be so bad and they would
feel so terrible. That is why they decide not to move further.

Now only Butt the Hoopoe, Iff and Haroun go ahead, but they are taken prisoner
by the Chupwallas. The Chupwallas take out the instrument from Butt’s head and
incapacitate her to sail on the Ocean. Thus Haroun and Iff are left alone. They find a
colossal black wall of ice in front of them. On reaching near the wall, they find that it is
“a colossal ship, a vast one-mile long ark-like vessel, the flagship of the Cultmaster”,
(148) from where he operates to poison the Ocean and control the world. They are forced
to go on the ship and are presented before Khattam-Shud by the Chupwalla soldiers. On
the way, Iff is extremely disturbed to see the condition of the Ocean. His remarks can be
taken as ecological concerns of the writer regarding the present condition of the planet,
the origin of pollution and man’s foolish neglect of the planet. On seeing everywhere in
the Ocean the thick dark poison which is obliterating the colours of the Steams of Story,
Iff finds his grief overflowing and says, “It’s my own fault... We are the guardians of the
Ocean, look at it! The oldest stories ever made, and look at them now. We let them rot,
we abandoned them, long before this poisoning. We lost touch with our beginnings, with
our roots, our wellspring, our Source... And now, look, just look! No colour, no life, no
nothing, spoilt!” (146). There is also a floating jungle on the surface of the Ocean,
reminding one of some denuded and spoilt jungle of our planet. “Only a few roots and
weeds, most of them badly burned and corroded by the poison-acid, [are floating] on the
surface of the Ocean here” (147).

In the remaining part of the story, we find Haroun overtaking Khattam-Shud and
undoing his plans to permanently poison the Ocean of Streams of Story. Khattam-Shud
intends to accomplish his plans in a two-pronged way. First, he has big machines that
produce pure and unmixed poison. He would mix this poison into the Ocean. Second, he
is making a very big plug, the size of a football stadium to fit into the hole from where
fresh Steams of Story spring forth. By closing this hole, he wants to permanently close
the wellspring, the source of fresh streams.
Throughout this fantastical story, there is an undercurrent of allegorical meaning. Khattam-Shud appears to us a mad scientist like Grimus, living on some other fantastical planet (called the Moon Kahani in the story) and intending to destroy our planet by permanently stopping the supply of fresh ‘Story Water’ here. He may also be taken as a leader of the propagators of the industrial-military civilization. Haroun’s final victory over him allegorically stands for the triumph of the environmentalists. In other words, it stands for the dawn of realization of follies on the part of man with regard to his relationship with nature and the environment. Man will have to change his modes of living. He can no longer go on exploiting nature for his economic greed.

Let us now observe the references and lines in the story where these allegorical meanings are indirectly or sometimes overtly suggested. As Haroun is brought before Khattam-Shud on the deck of the ship, he finds here “great numbers of gigantic black tanks or cauldrons each with its own team of maintenance operators. Pipes and ducts [lead] into and out of each of these... Small mechanical cranes [are] positioned by each cauldron, too, with buckets hanging from maliciously sharp-looking hooks” (151). “Those must be the poison tanks”, Haroun guesses and he is right. He finds that the cauldrons are brim-full of the black poisons “that [are] murdering the Ocean of Stories, “It’s factory ship”, Haroun thinks with a shudder, “and what it makes is far worse than the sadness factories back home” (151). The whole description of the ship appears like the description of a large factory on the earth producing some toxic gases for modern chemical warfare. To Haroun, it appears a gigantic version of a factory in his town producing smoke that hangs like bad news over the town.

Further, Haroun finds in that factory ship hundreds of Chupwalla workers “in their zipped lips, cloaks and hoods, attending to the tanks and cranes on the deck, performing a series of mindless, routine jobs: checking dials, tightening joints, switching the tanks’ stirring mechanisms on and off again, swabbing the decks...“(152). What Haroun notices about these “scurrying, cloaked, weaselly, scrawny, snivelling clerical types [is] that they [are] actually up to nothing less than the destruction of the Ocean of the Stream of Stories itself” (152). Another thing that surprises Haroun about all this is “that the worst things of all can look so normal and, well, dull” (152). He finds all the workers there ‘hissing’ and not speaking in a normal tone.
What Haroun’s remarks suggest is that for the people working in factories causing pollution, everything looks so normal that they are unaware of the consequences of what they are doing. Further, their hissing like snakes emitting poison reminds one of factory chimneys emitting smoky poison. Our hierarchical culture based on man’s arrogance that he, being the most superior creation of God, has the right to dominate over and exploit nature is reflected in Khattam-Shud’s attitude. Thus while talking to Haroun about his intention of making the Ocean of Stories dead completely by releasing new poisons of anti-stories into it, Khattam-Shud says, “when black ice freezes over its (Ocean’s) surface, my victory will be complete” (160-61). Haroun asks him with wonder:

‘But why do you hate stories so much? ...Stories are fun.’
‘The world, however, is not for Fun’, Khattam Shud [replies]. ‘The world is for controlling’.
‘Which world?’ Haroun [makes] himself ask.
‘Your world, my world, all worlds’, [comes] the reply.
‘They are all there to be Ruled’ (161).

This conversation also clearly brings out man’s arrogance and what he has been doing over ages and ages with nature and the environment. He has been trying to control the world by exploiting nature for his selfish ends. Further, Khattam-Shud tells Haroun more about his plans. He tells how hundreds of his minions are engaged in building a plug to completely shut off the wellspring of story waters. Haroun asks how his men will enter the poisonous sea without being poisoned. Khattam-Shud replies that they have special poison-proof suits in which they can swim in the most poisonous waters. This reminds us of the masks which people have to wear in polluted metropolitan cities today to protect themselves from pollution.

Meanwhile, Mali, the Floating Gardener, reaches there on the deck of the ship and dodging the attention of the Chupwallas, he breaks the generators that provide electric supply to machines producing poison. Then Haroun snatches a poison-proof suit so that he can enter the Ocean waters below that ship where Khattam-Shud’s army is trying to plug the wellspring of fresh story waters with the help of his will power. He makes the Moon Kahani turn so that the Sun starts shining on the Chup City. The Chupwalla army
cannot see in light and are almost blind. The ice ship starts melting and crumbling. The machines producing poison too break down and poison gets evaporated. The plug that is yet incomplete falls harmlessly on the ocean bed. The source of the stories is thus left unblocked. Haroun also recovers the mechanical brain of Hoopoe and it is refitted into his head. After thus forestalling all the nefarious designs of Khattam-Shud, Haroun says joyfully, “Mission accomplished” (174). Driven by Goopee and Bagha, Hoopoe takes Iff and Haroun back to the Chup city where a battle is being waged by the General Kitab against the armies of Chupwallas for the freedom of Princess Batcheet. Finally, the Guppees win this battle and Princess Batcheet is freed from the captivity. Khattam-Shud too melts away and loses his existence. Haroun’s last remark, ‘mission accomplished’ suggests allegorically the accomplishment of a world-wide mission to cleanse the planet of all pollution and the end of all such policies and plans of the industrialists, politicians and militarists, as lead to pollution of the planet and loss of ecological balance. “It’s curtains for him (i.e. Khattam-Shud), he’s history, good night Charlie (Khattam-Shud)… From now on, Kahani will be a sensible Moon with sensible days and nights”, (176) remarks Haroun. After many an age, the coastline of the land of Chup city is lit by the evening Sun. This final victory and accomplishment of the mission of restoring order on Moon Kahani is suggestive of attaining the utopian ideal, when people of the planet earth have started living sensibly, and as a result, a complete ecological balance is restored. How it will take place is a “Process Too Complicated To Explain (P 2 C T E)” (179).

Both Haroun and Rashid return home, with the latter’s powers of story-telling restored to the original state. Everything, in fact, is restored to an orderly state. Soraya returns home and the family are reunited happily. The city of Alifbay, which had lost its name, too gets back its name and identity. It seems that rehabilitation of ecological order sets right all other orders— personal, social and political. The idea is that most human problems, including what today we call existential ones, have ecological roots.

The allegorical form of writing has been popular in English literature ever since Spenser’s *Fairie Queene*. Jonathan Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels*, John Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress* and Herman Melville’s *Moby Dick* are some of the world famous allegorical writings. All these works are anthropocentric. They convey meanings that are moral, political, spiritual or religious. Rushdie’s *Haroun* is unique in the sense that herein the author’s concerns are ecocentric to a large extent. It is the first allegorical writing in the
world with underlying ecological meanings. The external is here more important than the internal. In fact, the social and the political or all that is human is here connected with the external. A reestablishment of order in the external leads to a reestablishment of order in the internal and not vice-versa, as is the case in most of the anthropocentric literature.

We can say that Rushdie views the world in an ecological context in this novel. He envisions a victory for the environmentalists who are engaged in a war against the mad race for the exploitation of the resources not only of this planet but also of other satellites and planets like the Moon (the Moon Kahani in the novel) the Mars and so on. Rushdie is thus critical of the modern civilization, though in an allegorical manner. In his next novel, *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*, we find him outrightly condemning the landscape and the environment, which is saturated with the artifacts of man's own making, post-industrial eco-systems and waste. In such an environment, human identity too is found at the brink of neurosis, and the planet, on the verge of an environmental apocalypse. But while in *Haroun*, Rushdie fantasizes a triumph for the environmentalists, in *The Ground*, he sounds pessimistic and projects a bleak ecological future of the planet. He seems to be writing about the emergence of "a thoroughly unnatural age", (Phillips 213) marred by ecological upheavals and human afflictions.