Chapter 4

Recurring Motifs in the Non-Fictional Works of

Salman Rushdie and Rohinton Mistry

At this point, it may be appropriate and indeed profitable to look into the non-fictional works and interviews of Salman Rushdie and Rohinton Mistry. This attempt will help to compile an inventory of the observations, the dreams the hopes and the fears that the author’s have regarding the land of their birth. Such an exercise will indicate the extent to which the issues that engage their serious intellectual interest are repeated, supplemented, complemented or subverted on the fictional canvas.

Rushdie’s passionate involvement with India, his pride over her secular credentials, apprehensions about the persistent threat of communalism and the rapid deterioration of the country in almost all aspects, dominate his non-fictional writings. The narratives also offer sufficient evidence of the author’s lifelong preoccupation with a hybrid, cross-cultural, plural and liberated India. Rushdie makes an eloquent plea for freedom of expression even as he asks people and nations to comprehend that they are indisputably linked by multiple threads and that monocultural and isolated existence is a thing of the past. Very importantly, he suggests that it is time India began to introspect and accept responsibility for its failures in order to reinvent herself to meet the challenges of the new millennium (“Yes, This is about Islam”).

Rushdie has several non-fictional anthologies to his credit. Of these *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981–1991* (1991) and *Step Across this Line: Collected Nonfiction 1992-2002* (2002) reflect the author’s views on the land of his birth. Just as India forms the nucleus of his fiction, his non-fictional writings too reveal how Rushdie remains deeply involved with the nation and its concerns despite having migrated to the West. In fact that is why he claims he wrote *Midnight’s Children*. In an interview to Jack Livings,
Rushdie says that he “always wanted to write something that would come out of my experience as a child in Bombay. I’d been away from India for a while and began to fear that the connection was eroding” (“Salman Rushdie, The Art of Fiction 186”). Thus his first great literary work was written primarily to reinforce his relationship with the nation. He even says that had the novel been rejected by the readers of the subcontinent he would have considered it a failure irrespective of what the West thought of it (Imaginary Homelands 20).

Rushdie’s birth into an Islamic household in India however does not preclude citizenship to a large entity. It is with a sense of pride that Rushdie talks about the continental lineage he enjoyed because of his name. His father Anis had rejected the ancestral name Din Khaliqi Dehlavi and renamed himself ‘Rushdie’ because of his admiration for Ibn Rushd, the twelfth-century Spanish-Arab philosopher of Cordoba who rose to become the qadi or judge of Seville and was also the acclaimed commentator of the works of Aristotle.

From beyond the grave his father had given him the flag under which he was ready to fight, the flag of Ibn Rushd, which stood for intellect, argument, analysis and progress, for the freedom of philosophy and learning from the shackles of theology, for human reason and against blind faith, submission, acceptance and stagnation. … in the tradition of the grand Aristotelian, Averroes, Abul Walid ibn Ahmad ibn Rushd. (Joseph Anton 22-23)

It is easy to dismiss this statement as an exhibition of hollow sentimentalism. But in another context, Rushdie acknowledges the enduring impact that India has made on his life. India is the land where Rushdie was born and where he spent most of his childhood. That is why he often returns to the nation for emotional nourishment. But the ban on his book, The Satanic Verses by the Indian government and the imposition of the fatwa made it difficult for him to return to India and Rushdie grieves this separation. “…one of the greatest hardships of those years of the fatwa was my separation from
India. A decade. It was amazing to me that there was a 10-year period in my life when I couldn't go back” (“The Iconoclast”).

The reason for Rushdie’s return to India – both literally and figuratively – is easy to see. There is a huge utilitarian benefit awaiting him. “I just go there, and it [India] has a big effect on me. It gives me stories to tell” (“The Iconoclast”). Hence it is hardly surprising that India dominates his writings. Rushdie credits the nation especially Kashmir with inculcating in him the concept of secularism - a tolerance of all religions, as embodied in his grandfather’s personality and his early life in the country.

I grew up in a Muslim family in India, and I know what is meant by that other Islam. My grandfather was a very religious man. He went to Mecca for the Hajj and prayed five times a day. Yet he was the most tolerant and open person I ever met. If you go into any Muslim country, you will find that dispute between radical Islam and moderate Islam. It is not a question of how the West perceives the East, but of what's happening inside the East. If you go to Muslims in India, they can tell you immediately about that battle with those other Muslims. For example, the kind of Islam that is being forced on Kashmir is very much a kind of Arabist Islam, which is alien to Kashmir. It is not liked by Kashmiris, who have a more Sufistic tradition, which is much more mystical and much milder. (“The Iconoclast”)

The Kashmir of Rushdie's grandfather represents for the author an alternate Islam - a religion of peace and a model of pluralist tolerance. It blended and merged with Hinduism, with Islamic clerics even compromising on their rigid monotheistic belief, directing their followers to worship at the shrines of the local Hindu saints. Rushdie believes that to a great extent, Indian Islam has continued to retain this identity because a large Muslim population in India is yet to succumb to radicalism.

In his non-fiction Rushdie explicitly states his idea of India:
[m]y idea of India has always been based on ideas of multiplicity, pluralism, hybridity: ideas to which the ideologies of the communalists are diametrically exposed. To my mind the defining image of India is the crowd and a crowd is by its very nature superabundant, heterogeneous many things at once. (*Imaginary Homelands* 32)

Rushdie’s India is a land wherein pluralism of cultures and dialogues between these cultures happen. In his writings, he alludes to the nation’s glorious history, vast geography, mixed polity, diverse economy, assorted ethnicity, multifarious religiosity and eclectic culture. He believes that the nation must base itself steadfastly on the concept of unity through diversity, if it has to survive the onslaughts of regionalism and communalism. “There can be no one way – religious, cultural or linguistic – of being an Indian; let difference reign” (*Imaginary Homelands* 44). Rushdie advocates a hybrid world - a world in which difference and heterogeneity are not only endured but are fêted as a means of cultural newness. He argues that there is no hope for this planet if cultures do not coexist peacefully and that literature ought to set itself the task of promoting cultural interaction. ("Terror Is Glamour")

Thus for Rushdie difference is not an aberration but is central to the idea of India. In fact the author relishes diversity. Even in his fiction Rushdie makes an effort to bring people from different quarters together. “Most of my life I’ve written of cities, but I always felt I wanted to pull off a book that is set mostly in the countryside, which is where most of India lives. I wanted to successfully write about the moral codes. And the way in which people make choices and judgments that are spontaneous and not simplistic, the way they change” (“The Nerve Interview: Salman Rushdie”). That is why in *Shalimar the Clown* Rushdie presents the village of Pachigam where Muslims and Hindus live happily together. The slow strangulation of the community by the Indian military on one side and the jihadis on the other, turns the village’s story into a fable of the death of tolerance.
It is only a natural corollary that the bulk of Rushdie’s writings on India revolves around the nation’s secular status despite the several religions that flourish in the land. Despite his personal irreligiosity “I was brought up in a family where religion was not around. And it just faded in me” (“The Iconoclast”). He reasons it impossible to write about India without discussing religion, as faith is of paramount importance in the nation.

I grew up in a country where almost everybody has deep religious beliefs—including the urban intelligentsia—and where people don’t just think of religion as something abstract, but believe that making offerings to the gods has a direct impact on their happiness and their progress in the world. It’s a country where hundreds of millions of people believe that the gods are directly intervening in their daily lives, so their relationship with the gods is a daily matter, pragmatic. That’s my world; I have to take it seriously. Also, it’s important to enter the heads of people who think in ways that are not your own, and to let that way of thinking determine the outcome of their stories. (“The Iconoclast”)

Nevertheless, Rushdie, believes that religion should be restored to the sphere of the personal, its depoliticization is imperative for any nation to become modern (“Yes, This Is About Islam”). Rushdie vehemently argues for a tolerant religious ambience in all nations. Consequently, he is fanatically opposed to building a state purely on the basis of religion.

There have been various moments in the history of Pakistan when attempts to Islamize the country were resisted strongly by both generals and civilian governments. It's not inevitable that a country full of Muslims will seek to Islamize its structures. But I do think there is a need for a widespread realization among Muslims that you cannot build a state based on religion. Pakistan is proof of that. Here was a state that was built on religion, but a quarter of a century after it
was founded it fell apart, because the glue is not strong enough. (‘The Iconoclast’)

Rushdie blames Gandhi for the Partition (Step Across This Line 176) and also says that the relationship between Nehru and Gandhi was volatile. “They argued about the future of India. And in fact that argument is central to independence, homespun vs steel mills. And by and large India chose Nehru. It may have emotionally chosen Gandhi but practically it chose Nehru” (Tripathi 29). Even in The Moor’s Last Sigh, Rushdie depicts this ideological conflict between India’s two greatest leaders. Gandhi’s ideology of Ram Rajya is ignored by intellectuals like Camoens who feel that religion is detrimental to India. Instead they endorse Nehru’s views on development as the right path for the nation.

With absolute conviction, Rushdie endorses the ethic of the Indian state as secular but simultaneously acknowledges the pervasiveness of religious extremism in his 1991 work Imaginary Homelands. “One of the things I like and still like about India is that it is based on a non-sectarian philosophy” (16). As India is a land where several religions coexist, Rushdie believes that it is important for the state to accommodate all religions rather than permit any one to flourish at the expense of the others. India needs secularism to survive and if sectarian religious politics is permitted to take control, the consequent horrors would be colossal (404). Simultaneously Rushdie also concedes that if “India does not exist, the explanation is to be found in a single word: communalism. The politics of religious hatred” (27). He acknowledges the present day pervasiveness of Muslim fundamentalism along with right wing Hindu radicalism. Both these groups for varied reasons wreak havoc on the nation. “India is increasingly defined as Hindu India and Sikh and Muslim fundamentalism grows even fiercer and entrenched in response” (33).

In his writings, Rushdie exposes the duplicity of both Muslim fundamentalist clergy as well as the political class. He cites the instance of the ban on his novel The Satanic Verses by the Indian government. Rushdie even
regards the fatwa as a precursor in some ways to the large scale terrorist acts that the modern world has faced. He declares that the fatwa was the clearest indication of the threat of Islamic fundamentalism to freedom, pluralism and secularism. “You can see the fatwa as the overture to 9/11. It's not a direct line. Maybe you could say it was not the same piece of music. But in some way it was a harbinger - a small thing before a big thing. The first crow, you know, flying across the sky” (Salman Rushdie: His life, his Work and his Religion).

In an article in *The New York Times* immediately after the 11 September 2001 terrorist attack entitled “Yes, This Is About Islam” Rushdie criticizes President Bush and other Western leaders for claiming that the 9/11 terrorist acts were not about Islam. He declares that this statement was made to appease the Muslim community and to prevent any backlash. The author unequivocally states that it is Muslim fundamentalists’ world over who are responsible for misinterpreting Islam and manipulating it for vested interests. Rushdie categorically puts the blame on radical Islam for propagating the culture of terrorism.

If this isn't about Islam, why the worldwide Muslim demonstrations in support of Osama bin Laden and Al Qaeda? Why did those 10,000 men armed with swords and axes mass on the Pakistan-Afghanistan frontier, answering some mullah's call to jihad? Why are the war's first British casualties three Muslim men who died fighting on the Taliban side? (“Yes, This is about Islam”)

Rushdie maintains that it is the clergy that has caused irreparable damage to a liberal and compassionate religion like Islam by ‘Talibanizing’ it. He also blames politicians for hijacking Islam merely for securing monetary benefits and electoral votes. Thus Islam is being destroyed by the very people who claim to be her protectors. Rushdie also maintains that in modern India, communal politics has become institutionalized. In 1991, the author had accused the Congress party of playing the communalistic card to win elections
and very significantly in 2012 he again denounces the “disgraceful vote bank politics taking place in India” (“Muslims in India are being misled”). Rushdie claims that even though political and religious leaders claim to protect the nation, in reality they are actually insidiously undermining it by subverting India’s historical tradition of tolerant secularism.

Simultaneously, Rushdie also notes the rapid growth in Hindu radicalism that considers Hinduism to be under threat from Indian minorities. As Indian minorities increase in numbers through religious conversion and rapid breeding, the Hindus despite being a huge majority in the nation experience pangs of insecurity. This is one of the foremost reasons for the rise in Hindu fundamentalism. Rushdie lambasts the political organizations with Hindu leanings including the Rashtriya Swayam Sevak (Imaginary Homelands 43), the Bharatiya Janata Party (Step Across This Line 184) along with its “thuggish sidekick, the Shiv Sena” (Step Across this Line 184) for propagating the culture of Hindu fundamentalism. He describes the Shiv Sena that governs Bombay as “the most overtly Hindu fundamentalist grouping ever to achieve office anywhere in India” (Imaginary Homelands 31) and its leader Bal Thackeray as displaying hostility towards Muslims (Imaginary Homelands 31). Thus Rushdie senses that India is getting deeply entrenched in both Hindu fundamentalism as well as Muslim radicalism.

Rushdie observes that communalism is a serious threat to the secular fabric of the state. He considers secularism as the only mode to “safeguarding the constitutional, civil, human and, yes, religious rights of minority groups” (Imaginary Homelands 2). He also claims that communal clashes to a certain extent can be attributed to the jealousy of one community over the economic prosperity of another. In Bombay, communal incidents were taking place in areas where Muslims had begun to prosper and move up the economic scale. “Behind the flashpoints like Ayodhya was Hindu resentment of Muslim prosperity” (Imaginary Homelands 29). With deep conviction Rushdie states that fundamentalists of all faiths are the greatest evils of the times and hence if
the nation were to surrender its secularist principles she would simply detonate (Imaginary Homelands 2). Rushdie also affirms that even the interests of minority communities are best served by secular democracy and not by religious communal politics. “Because if you play the game of religious communal politics, you will always be outnumbered. That was the argument Nehru and Gandhi took to India’s religious minorities and it worked” (“Salman Rushdie: His life, his Work and his Religion”). Thus Rushdie does not believe that fundamentalist doctrines are espoused by the larger public in India.

Rushdie’s faith in Nehru and Gandhi’s view is reinforced by the electorate of Uttar Pradesh in the 2012 elections. In an effort to gratify Muslim voters, the Congress Party had refused permission to the author to visit India. However, this act did not translate into votes. The Congress party was totally demolished in the elections. “It was pretty useless electoral calculations. It did not work, Rahul [Gandhi]” (“Muslims in India are being misled”). Rushdie argues that nearly 95% of Muslims and Hindus are not interested in violence. He concludes that it is the unholy nexus between religious fundamentalists and politicians that is damaging the tolerant ambience of the nation.

Rushdie believes his secularist leanings can be attributed to the city of Bombay. “I believe this has something to do with the nature of Bombay, a metropolis in which the multiplicity of commingled faiths and cultures curiously creates a remarkably secular ambience” (Imaginary Homelands 16). It is easy to notice a tinge of pride when the author flaunts his association with the city. “I was born an Indian, and not only an Indian but a Bombayite – Bombay, most cosmopolitan, most hybrid, most hotpotch of Indian cities” (Imaginary Homelands 404). In Imaginary Homelands, Rushdie praises Bombay as a metropolis in which the multiplicity of commingled faiths and cultures curiously create a remarkable secular ambience (16). For Rushdie, Bombay is not just another city but India in the miniature. However, Rushdie feels that over the years Bombay has changed: “… the tolerant secularized Bombay has gone. And I think this new Bombay is still interesting, it’s still a great capital, it’s still a huge
buzzing metropolis, it hasn’t lost that. But it’s lost some essential things about its flavour, which is what I want to write about” (“Salman Rushdie on Bombay, Rock N' Roll, and The Satanic Verses”)

That Kashmir is very close to Rushdie’s heart is also established through the writer’s non-fictional writings. He proudly claims his Kashmiri ancestry even as he tries to comprehend the transformation of the valley from a peace loving place to one of acrimony and hostility.

I have a particular interest in the Kashmir issue because I am more than half Kashmiri myself, because I have loved the place all my life listening to successive Indian and Pakistani governments, all of them more or less venal and corrupt, motivating the self-serving hypocrisies of power while ordinary Kashmiris suffered the consequences of their posturing. (“Kashmir, the Imperiled Paradise”)

The author laments the transformation of this nonviolent multicultural haven into a fertile soil for terror and admits that the novel Shalimar the Clown was a response to this regrettable change.

…. Shalimar was a kind of attempt to write a Kashmiri Paradise Lost. Only Paradise Lost is about the fall of man - paradise is still there, it’s just that we get kicked out of it. Shalimar is about the smashing of paradise. It’s as if Adam went back with bombs and blew the place up. (“Salman Rushdie, The Art of Fiction 186”)

Rushdie’s boundless love for Kashmir becomes apparent when he vividly recounts the agony he underwent to reproduce the horrors of his birth place in Shalimar the Clown.

Then there was a moment when I was writing about the destruction of the Kashmiri village. I absolutely couldn’t bear the idea of writing it. I would sit at my desk and think, I can’t write these sentences. Many writers who have had to deal with
the subject of atrocity can’t face it head-on. I’ve never felt that I couldn’t bear the idea of telling a story—that it’s so awful, I don’t want to tell it, can something else happen? And then you think, oh, nothing else can happen, that’s what happens.

(“Salman Rushdie, The Art of Fiction 186”)

Rushdie analyses the Kashmir problem and unsurprisingly attributes it to the many faults of both countries – India, for rejecting the idea of plebiscite and maintaining a huge army in the valley and Pakistan, for frustrating all peace keeping initiatives. The author believes that it is virtually impossible to restore the valley to its former grace and harmony as both the resident Hindus and Muslims have been tortured and radicalized. But what agonizes the author most is the destruction of Kashmiriyaat: the secular culture of Kashmir. That’s all gone now, and even if there’s a peace treaty tomorrow it’s not coming back, because the thing that was smashed, which is what I tried to write about, is the tolerant, mingled culture of Kashmir. After the way the Hindus were driven out, and the way the Muslims have been radicalized and tormented, you can’t put it back together again. (“Salman Rushdie, The Art of Fiction 186”)

Rushdie not only laments the loss of the secular culture of Kashmir but also the scenic beauty of the place.

I’ve never seen anywhere in the world as beautiful as Kashmir. It has something to do with the fact that the valley is very small and the mountains are very big, so you have this miniature countryside surrounded by the Himalayas, and it’s just spectacular. And it’s true, the people are very beautiful too. Kashmir is quite prosperous. The soil is very rich, so the crops are plentiful. It’s lush, not like much of India, in which there’s great scarcity. But of course all that’s gone now, and there is great hardship. (“Salman Rushdie, The Art of Fiction 186”)

The author notes that along with its beauty and secular ambience the valley, has been deprived of its major industry: tourism, both foreign and domestic. With increase in militancy and growing demand for a separate state Kashmir has been transformed into a veritable hell.

Rushdie argues that since Partition, Kashmir has been the crux of India’s problem with Pakistan. He considers the Partition “an avoidable mistake, the result not of historical inevitability or the true will of the people but of political antagonism between Gandhi and M. A. Jinnah” (Step Across This Line 176). He also feels that Partition has poisoned the subsequent history of relations between the two countries of India and Pakistan. Thus the author unequivocally attributes the Kashmir imbroglio to the clash of perspectives of Mahatma Gandhi and M. A. Jinnah and also to separatist sentiments fomented by growing extremism. However, very perceptively the author comments that the Kashmir issue is not an isolated problem: “Kashmir is a microcosm for what’s happening everywhere else in the world today with regards to growing extremism” (“The Nerve Interview: Salman Rushdie”). Rushdie advocates that it is in the nation’s interest that the Kashmir issue is defused at the earliest.

So here we are in a newly dangerous world, in which nuclear powers are actually going to war. In such a time, it is essential that the special case status of Kashmir be recognized and used as the basics of the way forward. The Kashmir problem must be defused once and for all, or else, in the unthinkable worst-case scenario, it may end in the nuclear destruction of Paradise itself and of much else besides. (“Kashmir, the Imperiled Paradise”).

Rushdie does not justify terrorism on any grounds. This is because he believes that violence ends up killing innocent people and no matter what the rationale, terrorism cannot be validated.

But there’s one thing we must all be clear about: terrorism is not the pursuit of legitimate goals by some sort of illegitimate means. Whatever the murderers may be trying to achieve,
creating a better world certainly isn’t one of their goals. Instead they are out to murder innocent people. If the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians, for example, were to be miraculously solved from one day to the next, I believe we wouldn’t see any fewer attacks. ("Terror Is Glamour")

He also firmly believes that negotiations cannot be held with terrorists like Osama bin Laden and his successors. “You cannot conclude a peace treaty with them. They have to be fought with every available means” ("Terror Is Glamour"). In the aftermath of the 11 Sept. 2001 terrorist attacks on the US, Rushdie expresses support of the US military interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq. The US, according to Rushdie, guarantees freedom against “tyranny, bigotry, intolerance, [and] fanaticism (Notaras “Glib Satire of Contemporary Life in the US: Fury by Salman Rushdie”). He feels that it is very easy to criticize the foreign policies of the US and the UK but the present circumstances offer no better solutions. Nevertheless by 2006 he changes his stance choosing to condemn the United Kingdom and the United States for perpetrating violence in different ways. He considers the Middle East policies of these two nations fatal.

This is the problem with politicians [George Bush and Tony Blair] who by nature tend towards being authoritarian. When they are given the chance, they go too far. We have to watch out there. I find it deeply depressing that the Anglo-American politics and Arab politics are currently corroborating each other -- that is: their worst prejudices. ("Terror Is Glamour")

Rushdie even looks into the factors that contribute to the making of a terrorist and opines that very few join for ideological reasons. The author opines that there are several people who are simply attracted to terrorism and find it very awe inspiring.

Terror is glamour -- not only, but also. I am firmly convinced that there’s something like a fascination with death among suicide bombers. Many are influenced by the misdirected image
of a kind of magic that is inherent in these insane acts. The suicide bomber’s imagination leads him to believe in a brilliant act of heroism, when in fact he is simply blowing himself up pointlessly and taking other peoples lives. ("Terror Is Glamour")

Rushdie also notes that there are also people in Kashmir who were joining the resistance movements because they were being denied the basic amenities of life. He also attributes the terrorist attacks in London to young men whose integration into society had failed ("Terror Is Glamour"). Thus Rushdie indirectly indicts politicians for failing to implement basic welfare schemes and thereby aiding and abetting terrorism. However, what portends doom for the future according to Rushdie is that “social discrimination no longer plays any role -- it's as though anyone could turn into a terrorist” ("Terror Is Glamour"). Thus Rushdie condemns terrorism as it is not a solution to any problem and suggests that if terrorism is to be defeated nations must take on board the secularist-humanist principles without which freedom will remain a distant dream. The author even fears that Kashmir could become the site for nuclear war. It is almost ironic that the author’s grandfather’s beloved symbol of peace, love and understanding gets metamorphosed into the most plausible cause of nuclear war anywhere on earth. Thus Kashmir which represented for the author a symbol of pluralism and tolerance is reduced to the brink of becoming a smoking radioactive husk.

Rushdie’s attitude towards Pakistan is totally in contrast to his love for India and Kashmir. This revulsion for Pakistan is brazenly displayed in the satirical portrait of the nation and its people in Midnight's Children and Shame. In Joseph Anton he says:

Nor was this book [Shame] written with love; his [Rushdie’s] feelings towards Pakistan were ferocious, satirical, personal. Pakistan was that place where the crooked few ruled the impotent many, where bent civilian politicians and
unscrupulous generals allied with one another, supplanted one another and executed one another … (60)

An important part of Rushdie’s non-fiction is dedicated to his incessant fight for freedom of expression. “No writer ever really wants to talk about censorship. Writers want to talk about creation, and censorship is anti-creation, negative energy, uncreation, the bringing into being of non-being, or, to use Tom Stoppard’s description of death, ‘the absence of presence’” (“On Censorship”). Rushdie says that the creative act requires freedom.

The author feels that India has become prone to a growing intolerance to freedom of expression. The atmosphere of candidness is being replaced by the rise of religious sectarianism and by the gutless response of the authorities to protests by religious groups. “India was a society in which for a long time, ideas of free expression were very entrenched. When independence came, there was an atmosphere of openness. I have the terrible feeling that things are going the other way” (“India becoming prone to Intolerance of Freedom”). Thus for Rushdie, freedom of expression becomes the cornerstone of India’s plurality and democracy. In fact he notes that India had always had a long cultural and religious tradition of accepting free speech which like most other values is on the decline now. At the India Today Conclave, Rushdie reiterates that “a combination of religious fanaticism, political opportunism and, I have to say, public apathy is damaging that freedom upon which all other freedoms depend: the freedom of expression” (“Muslims in India are being misled”). He proclaims that India should not become a totalitarian state, instead should move towards liberty and open discussions of ideas. In plural societies it is imperative that avenues for unfettered literary expression should be permitted.

Despite being repeatedly attacked by the political class and religious fundamentalists, Rushdie refuses to be intimidated. While talking to the celebrated writer William Dalrymple, Rushdie categorically states that he will not permit religious gangsters and their cronies in the government to prevent him from visiting the nation. “My overwhelming feeling is disappointment on
behalf of India” as religious extremism prevents free expression of ideas, and politicians connive with these groups for narrow electoral reasons. He also censures the extremists whom he labels as the real enemies of Islam (“On Censorship”). Thus Rushdie asserts that only when freedom of expression is established in the nation can India proudly proclaim itself as a democracy.

After Rushdie was prevented from attending – or even speaking via video link – at the 2011 Jaipur Literary Fest over fears of violent protests he discusses the dangers involved in propagating cultural terrorism.

This is a case of the world turned upside down. What's happening here, tonight, is what I would call 'normal'. A writer of Indian birth, who loves this country, who has spent much of his life writing about it, shows up to talk to an Indian audience about India. I would call that normal. What is abnormal is for that to be prevented. And we seem to be in danger of getting this upside down. (“Salman Rushdie Defends Free Speech in Rousing Address in Delhi”)

Subsequently, in an interview with the news channel NDTV, Salman Rushdie laments the downward slide that he has witnessed in almost all spheres in the nation. He feels that economically India may have scaled great heights but culturally and in terms of freedom it is worse than before. “In a country where intellectual and artistic heritage is one of the greatest aspects of its culture, how can it be that India which has so rich a heritage of art and intellectual thought can become a country which is intolerant of the expression of artists and of thinkers?” (“I'm Returning to India, Deal with it”). At the 2012 India Today Conclave, Rushdie declares that it is time that the idea of India is renewed.

He notices similar trends throughout the globe and laments the general deterioration in civil liberty. In the course of the Arthur Miller Freedom to Write Lecture on 6 May 2012, as part of the PEN World Voices Festival, Rushdie rejects censorship of all forms. He says that it is the duty of great art to question, subvert and dismantle traditional stereotypical notions.
...the growing acceptance of the don’t-rock-the-boat response to those artists who do rock it, the growing agreement that censorship can be justified when certain interest groups, or genders, or faiths declare themselves affronted by a piece of work. Great art, or, let’s just say, more modestly, original art is never created in the safe middle ground, but always at the edge. Originality is dangerous. It challenges, questions, overturns assumptions, unsettles moral codes, disrespects sacred cows or other such entities. It can be shocking or ugly or to use the catch-all term so beloved of the tabloid press, controversial. And if we believe in liberty, if we want the air we breathe to remain plentiful and breathable, this is the art whose right to exist we must not only defend, but celebrate. Art is not entertainment. At its very best, it’s a revolution. (“On Censorship”)

In his essay “In Good Faith” Rushdie takes a stand for oppressed artists such as the Iranian writer Ahmed Kasravi, the Egyptian Nobel Laureate Naguib Mahfouz (Imaginary Homelands 412); for oppressed peoples such as the Chinese, the Romanians and the Arab people (Imaginary Homelands 413). Rushdie also expresses his anger at the increasing assault on creative works of artists by religious groups in the nation. In an interview to the news network CNN-IBN on 24 Jan. 2013 Rushdie describes this as “Cultural Emergency” and adds that culture is the new target as artists do not have gangs to defend themselves. Hence culture and art become an easy prey to attack (“There is a Cultural Emergency in India, says Salman Rushdie”).

Despite his immense love for the nation, Rushdie refuses to be confined to a particular state or identity. Instead he considers himself the epitome of cosmopolitanism – a world citizen and gives himself global credentials.

I’ve always had more affinity to places than nations. I suppose if you were asking me formally, I would still think of myself as
a British citizen of Indian origin. But I think of myself as a New Yorker and as a Londoner. I probably think of those as being more exact definitions than the passport or the place of birth. (Salman Rushdie, The Art of Fiction 186)

This intricate connection between the east and west is central to Rushdie’s writings. The Rushdian universe is a shrinking planet where everybody’s life is interconnected.

This was what had happened to the shrinking planet: people—communities, cultures—no longer lived in little boxes, sealed away from one another. Now all the little boxes opened up into all the other little boxes, a man’s job in one country could be lost because of the machinations of a currency spectacular from a faraway land whose name he didn’t know and whose face he would never see, and, as the theorists of the new science of chaos told us, when a butterfly flapped its wings in Brazil it could cause a hurricane in Texas. (Joseph Anton 69)

In fact he considers Bombay as the city that inculcated in him this cosmopolitan culture because in Bombay, Western and Eastern influences fuse. The author comments that his stories unite different parts of the world sometimes amicably, sometimes in conflict, and sometimes it is an amalgam of the two. Rushdie however observes a problem with these stories.

The difficulty in these stories is that if you write about everywhere you can end up writing about nowhere. It’s a problem that the writer writing about a single place does not have to face. Those writers face other problems, but the thing that a Faulkner or a Welty has - a patch of the earth that they know so profoundly and belong to so totally that they can excavate it all their lives and not exhaust it—I admire that, but it’s not what I do. (Salman Rushdie, The Art of Fiction 186)
He cannot do it because he lives in a far more intricately connected world than either Faulkner, Welty or their contemporaries had done.

Rushdie claims that he tries to show people how their lives and experiences are connected, irrespective of caste, creed or colour. He attempts to bring the people of the world together and show how similar their lives are. “It’s one thing to say it, but how can you make a reader feel that is their lived experience? The last three novels have been attempts to find answers to these questions: *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* and *Fury* and the new one, *Shalimar the Clown*” (“Salman Rushdie, The Art of Fiction 186”). Rushdie even considers the 9/11 act of terror on America as a “hinge moment because it showed us that we are now inescapably involved with each other. That we can’t disengage” (Bill Moyers on Faith & Reason). Thus for Rushdie the world is intrinsically networked and man made barriers cannot break the connection between people. Rushdie even cites the instance of the Lebanese capital of Beirut that had once been an open, sophisticated and cosmopolitan city. However civil war has changed everything. “It is well within everyone’s living memory. The global decay of tolerance is the real tragedy of our time” (“Salman Rushdie on Terrorism and Bloody Kashmir in *Shalimar the Clown*”). Thus what is happens in Lebanon and Kashmir can happen anywhere.

Rushdie declares that despite improvements in several quarters at the materialistic plane, India has miles to go. In *Step Across this Line* he says the nation continues to be besieged by illiteracy, child labour, infant mortality, caste system (176), female infanticide (377), burning brides for dowries, ritual child sacrifice, communal violence (176), Kashmir and Sikh separatism, public corruption, regional rivalries, tension between the Centre and the states and the external pressures of bad relations with Pakistan. Rushdie also fears that due to the pervasiveness of corruption and communal violence, the nation will lose its democratic credentials.

Of course, I fear in India the recurrence of communalist or regionalist inter-community violence. I fear the long-term
damage to a democracy that can be done by mass corruption. I think corruption is in a way a subversion of democracy and the commonplace view in India is that corruption is everywhere. In a sense, you could say, that is not a democratic society. If money, favour and privilege is what makes the place work, then that's not a democracy. At least it runs the danger of being no longer able to call itself a democracy. (“A Fantasy Called India”)

The author blames both the political class for its indifference towards the struggles of the common man and the citizens of the nation for being passive and apathetic. In his 2012 address at the India Today Conclave, the author unambiguously blames the political class for the country’s maladies and suggests that the idea of India should be forged anew.

India deserves to be led better than it's being led. It deserves leaders who can bring her back to the non-sectarian, non-communal land which the nation's founders envisaged. And here, at the gatherings like this one, the idea of that India can be, not so much forged as renewed. Forged anew. And it can be done only if all of us have the ability to speak our minds. (“Salman Rushdie's full speech at India Today Conclave 2012”)

Rushdie says that it has become a common practice to blame the West for all the ailments of the nation. He reminiscences that when he was growing up in India, Pakistan or the United States was held guilty for all that went wrong in the nation. Rushdie calls these reactions hackneyed and reductive and says that the nation should learn to be accountable, accept responsibility for its failures and seek to eradicate them. Pointing fingers at other nations does not produce solutions; on the contrary it only aggravates the problem.

The premise was, let’s just assume that our problems are of our own making and then exacerbated by this or that superpower. At that point you get back responsibility for your own life. It
puts the tools back in our own hands. It's kind of infantilizing to say that everything comes from the outside. ("The Iconoclast") Rushdie even believes that to a large extent all nations are governed by the criterion of self-interest. “You can't look to a superpower as a moral arbiter, because its job is not morality. Its job is the preservation of its sphere of influence” ("Salman Rushdie: His Life, his Work and his Religion"). Thus India needs to address her problems and seek solutions for them. The author believes that despite the numerous hurdles the nation faces, it will survive.

But I always believed -- I still believe -- that India would come back. I never believed that the loss of India was forever. Because India is not Iran, it's not even Pakistan, and I thought good sense will prevail in India because that's my life experience of Indian people and of the place. ("Salman Rushdie's full speech at India Today Conclave 2012")

Thus the author has immense faith in the nation. He believes that India’s secular democratic principles will flourish over all fissiparous tendencies. The country has always bounced back after serious threats to its integrity - whether it be the external crises of the wars with Pakistan and China or the internal crises like the Emergency or communal clashes. The author confidently asserts that the idea of India will survive.

I think, in a way, the strength of the nationalist idea is shown by its ability to survive the extraordinary stresses that it was placed under. I think the stresses of things like communalism, the high degree of public corruption, of regional rivalries, of the tension between the Centre and the states, the external pressures of bad relations with Pakistan -- these are colossal pressures which any state could be forgiven for being damaged by. I think the thing to say about the success of the idea is that it remains an idea though people might not find it very easy to give a simple definition of it. But that it does exist and that it is something to
which people feel they belong, I think is now the case. That it survives these stresses is an indication of the strength of it. ("A Fantasy Called India")

Nevertheless, he believes that if India is being let down it is by the political class. In his 2012 address at the India Today Conclave, Rushdie lambasts the political establishment for its narrow and sectarian political vision.

India deserves to be led better than it's being led. It deserves leaders who can bring her back to the non-sectarian, non-communal land which the nation's founders envisaged. And here, at the gatherings like this one, the idea of that India can be, not so much forged as renewed. Forged anew. And it can be done only if all of us have the ability to speak our minds. To speak freely without fears of religious or governmental reprisals. The human being, let's remember, is essentially a language animal. We are a creature which has always used language to express our most profound feelings and we are nothing without our language. The attempt to silence our tongue is not only censorship. It's also an existential crime about the kind of species that we are. ("Muslims in India are being Misled")

In a subsequent interview with NDTV Rushdie accuses the politicians who boycotted his talk - including Union Finance Minister Pranab Mukherjee, Uttar Pradesh's new Chief Minister Akhilesh Yadav and Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah of behaving in an anti-democratic fashion. Thus Rushdie believes the way forward for the nation is to have an enlightened and visionary political class.

In comparison to Salman Rushdie, Rohinton Mistry does not have any major non-fictional works to his credit. He appears reticent by nature and the interviews he has given are few and far between. Nevertheless they do reveal his views on the nation and other related issues. What appears rather striking is
that Rohinton Mistry considers himself a Canadian writer and yearns to write a novel based in Canada. Again, all that the author claims to be doing in his novels is to tell a good story. Mistry also confesses that his novels are not researched in the formal sense of the word. Instead, he relies on newspapers, magazines, chats with visitors from India and with people on his infrequent visits to India. However, what he mostly depends on for material for his fiction is memory and imagination (qtd. in Parsi English Novel 44). Equipped with such arms he sets out to criticize the political set up in the nation and also the educational scenario.

Like Rushdie, Rohinton Mistry too is full of praise for his native land and its literature. He too upholds the nation’s hybridity and secular culture and hails the supremacy of the concept of Indianness over regional and religious identity.

There is no national culture. But that’s all right. What keeps India together, I think, is the idea of India as a secular nation where different languages, different cultures can co-exist peacefully. Or not so peacefully, sometimes. That is the idea. The encouraging thing is that poll after poll, even in villages where illiteracy can be very high, when people are asked, how do you identify yourself? They identify themselves as Indians. (“Back in Bombay”)

The author also acknowledges the role played by both his family and the rich Indian culture in making him the kind of person he is. Nevertheless, he does not elaborate on it.

I had been fully formed by my own culture and my own family. At one time I thought this was the culture of the West but I now know it was something different. It was the Indian version of the West and it was mine. (Gekoski)

Along with Indian culture Mistry also eulogizes Indian literature which he considers as the body of writing emanating from the diverse languages spoken
in the country. He refuses to confine Indian literature merely to the works of those writers who have migrated to the West and written in English. He believes that regional literature too plays a significant role in defining India (“Back in Bombay”).

Despite his immense love for the nation and its culture, Rohinton Mistry claims that he left India about a month after the state of Emergency was declared by Indira Gandhi, to pursue a career in Toronto. He explains that this migration was prompted by lack of adequate opportunities in the nation in the early nineteen seventies. India was not where the action happened, the West offered good prospects and migration appeared to be the only solution. “Opportunities were limited in Bombay. To make something of your life you had to go away ….you were the outpost, and life was elsewhere – not where you were” (Gibson). Although he visits India and mines it for his fiction he considers it a very strenuous undertaking to move back. “It would be another migration and I think one in a lifetime is enough” (Mazzocco “Rohinton Mistry became an Author almost by Chance”). Thus the author does not wish to relocate back to the nation. In fact the stay abroad has been so long that he considers himself more a Canadian writer than an Indian one.

I’m referred to more often as a Canadian writer than an Indian writer. Or – what is it they say? A Canadian-writer-born-in-India. And I’m certainly more of a Canadian writer than an Indian writer, because I have no sense of being part of any group or school or generation of Indian writers. But that doesn’t really interest me at all. All I try to do is tell a good story. (“Back in Bombay”)

While discussing A Fine Balance with Oprah Winfrey Rohinton Mistry says:

In some ways, A Fine Balance was just another book for me. An attempt to tell a good story. And that's what I like to do. Why did I select that time period, The Emergency? I suppose it was because I had just finished a novel which was set four years
earlier. I thought the next important watershed in Indian history is 1975—The Emergency. And it would be interesting to see what happened, how people lived and how their lives were really impacted by that. (1)

Despite upholding his Canadian credentials, Rohinton Mistry is very loquacious when he talks about Bombay. In fact it forms the locale for all his fictional works. Like Rushdie, Mistry considers Bombay as symbolic of India and extols the city’s secular culture. “Bombay always represented the hope of India. … I use the past tense because the last ten years there is a question mark. Look if people can live in Bombay cheek by jowl then they can do it in the rest of India (Foley). Thus Bombay for the author embodies India secularism. In an interview to Paul Wilson too Rohinton Mistry emphasizes the international culture of Bombay. “You see Bombay is so cosmopolitan you can find everything there, absolutely everything” (“Giving Free Reign - Paul Wilson speaks with Rohinton Mistry”).

At Oprah Winfrey's Book Club, Mistry says that he continues to write about India and specifically Bombay despite having left the country 26 years ago. “It remains my focus and makes it all worthwhile because of the people...their capacity for laughter, their capacity to endure” (3). In his talk with Oprah Winfrey, Mistry characterizes Bombay as a crowded city due to a high density of population with people living on the streets or in slums or being just homeless. He laments the increasing gap between the wealthy and the poor and the plight of the people as streets are controlled by local gang leaders. Nevertheless, the author notes that the Bombay he left behind has moved forward in unimaginable ways (3).

My Bombay is rooted in fact, but I am writing about a city that has disappeared. In 1975, when I left, its population was less than half of what it is today, and that transforms a city in unimaginable ways. If I’d never left I would have adjusted and learned the mechanism of coping as the other 14 million
inhabitants have. Today when I go back I feel like a marathon runner who’s no longer in training. (Gekoski)

He also feels that living in Toronto has given him a certain advantage. “I feel Bombay is very close to me. Living outside of Bombay is helpful to me in one way … living in that frenetic city getting through the daily grind, probably wouldn’t have the heart or the energy to write”(Foley). Reflecting on his future novels, Rohinton Mistry observes that he would like to write a Canadian novel. He observes that it is the city of Bombay and the memories associated with the city that act as an obstacle and prevent him from writing. “It keeps getting in the way. When I finished Such a Long Journey I thought that, yes, perhaps my next book would be set here [Canada]. That didn’t quite happen. The same thing after A Fine Balance. So maybe the next one. I’m as certain as I can be. But it may be that elusive Holy Grail. We’ll see” (“Back in Bombay”). It is worth mentioning in this context that Mistry’s next novel Family Matters is also based in Bombay, thus showing the immense potential of the city.

Although all three of Rohinton Mistry’s novels touch upon a few crucial political events in Indian history, the author concedes that his focus is almost exclusively on the Parsis. “I must write about what I know best. In that way, I automatically speak for my ‘tribe’” (qtd. in Morey 173). Having lived in a Parsi Baag in Bombay, Mistry tries to recreate the experiences he personally had. In an interview with Ali Lakham at the Vancouver International Writers Festival the author categorically states that when the Parsis have disappeared from the face of the earth his writings will “preserve a record of how they lived, to some extent” (qtd. in Dodiya 36). The author adds that to a great extent all fiction is autobiographical, “imaginative ground through the mill of memory. It is impossible to separate the two ingredients” (Gekoski). The author is probably referring to the rich Parsi tapestry in his fictional works. In fact the plot for his first novel Such A Long Journey was derived from the doubts and uncertainties raised within the Parsi community about the Nagarwala case.
The central plot in *Such A long Journey* was taken from something I’d heard my parents and their friends talking about in 1971 at home. A Parsee Major had embezzled money from a bank to finance the resistance movement in East Pakistan. Within our community the main question was ‘How could a Parsee have done this?’ (Gekoski)

Thus Mistry acknowledges the overwhelming presence of the Parsi race and culture in his novel and alludes to the autobiographical nature of his writings. Nevertheless in his second novel *A Fine Balance* Mistry brings together all sections of society including the subaltern. He spells out his intention to Oprah Winfrey. “Perhaps my main intention in writing this novel was to look at history from the bottom up, from the point of view of people like Ishvar and Om. The dispossessed. The hungry. The homeless. I wanted to see what it meant to them to live during this time of the Emergency” (3). Thus Mistry tries to represent India in all her heterogeneity in his novels.

Although Rohinton Mistry’s fiction appears to be inundated with facts pertinent to the Zoroastrian faith, in his interviews he claims to be immune to the religion.

I am not a practicing Parsi but the ceremonies are quite beautiful. As a child I observed carefully in the same way as I did my homework, but it had no profound meaning for me. Zoroastrian is about the opposition of good and evil. For the triumph of good, we have to make a choice. We can enlist on the side of good by prospering, making money and using our wealth to help others. (Lambert “Touched with Fire.”)

He reiterates this in an interview with Geoff Hancock where he states that he writes with neither an audience nor a message in mind and that politics and religion only come in a secondary way. All he tries to do in his fiction is to tell a good story (“Back in Bombay”). Incidentally Mistry throws light on the political set up in the nation. He says that he based his second novel *A Fine*
Balance on the Internal Emergency of 1975-77 as he considers it the next important watershed in Indian history after the Bangladesh War. He thought that it would be interesting to see what happened, how people lived and how their lives were affected by the Emergency. He comments that the Emergency caused immeasurable suffering to a huge population (Winfrey). Very significantly he praises the personal and administrative qualities of the then Prime Minister but considers the imposition of the Emergency as a totally wrong decision.

The system was out of control. And it went out of control because the rule of law was suspended in a bad move by Indira Gandhi, a brilliant person, a good leader, who did a lot of good for the country. But I think when the Emergency was declared, she had become frustrated by the obstacles presented by this slow and messy and tedious process of democracy. We have to admit that democracy is messy. But it's the only way, or you see what happens. ... The villain is injustice. And that's the villain anywhere in the world where there is discontent and suffering. (Winfrey 5)

Rohinton Mistry severely criticizes the Shiv Sena party for its autocratic leadership and hate politics in his fictional works. Mistry also condemns the religious tensions that prevailed in India after the destruction of the Babri Mosque. He lambasts the Shiv Sena, a Hindu nationalist group for triggering the violence. “They are more right wing, more vociferous, more violent than the ruling Hindu nationalist party [Bharatiya Janata Party]” (Foley “Rohinton Mistry on Bombay Life and the 1993 Riots in Family Matters”). However, the party is severely chastised in Family Matters after it criticizes the author's novel Such a Long Journey for making disparaging comments about the Shiv Sena and the Marathi people. Following the ban imposed by Mumbai University on this novel, Mistry once again lashes out at the Shiv Sena. Rohinton Mistry accuses the party of following “its depressingly familiar,
tediously predictable script of threats and intimidation that Mumbai has endured since the organization’s founding in 1966” (“Oh, what a sorry book-burning spectacle”). He advises the youth leader of the party to refrain from following the beaten path of violence and bloodshed. Instead, he recommends that the party should work towards development and progress (“Oh, what a sorry book-burning spectacle”).

Rohinton Mistry rejects the criticism that his novels depict a rather bleak picture of India. He says that his fiction appears so because it includes the lower classes. Mistry says that he wants to embrace more of the social reality of India in his works as seventy five percent of Indians live in villages. He opines that these people have not been sufficiently represented in fiction perhaps because most writers are from the middle class. He says that as his characters hail from impoverished backgrounds with little education, there is a limit to what they can attain from society. Nevertheless, despite the odds they persevere and move on with their lives.

Given the parameters of my characters' lives, given who they are, how can you expect them to have any more happiness than they have found? I think that the ending is a hopeful one: The human spark is not extinguished. They continue to find humor in their lives. This is an outstanding victory in their case.

(Mazzocco “Rohinton Mistry became an Author almost by Chance”)

Mistry is a die hard optimist when it comes to the fate of his characters. he says that “there are thousands and thousands of Ishvars and Oms in India today, people who keep going relentlessly in spite of the odds, and this is why I am hopeful.” (Gibson). However, the Australian writer/critic Germaine Greer criticizes A Fine Balance saying she hated it. “It's a Canadian book about India. What could be worse? What could be more terrible?” Mistry retorts that Greer’s comments were silly and justifies his presentation of the Emergency and the lower classes in A Fine Balance. He even makes a retort in Family
...when a character reflects that there are foreign critics who come to India “for two weeks and become experts” (210).

The author also criticizes the educational set-up in the nation following the hasty banning of his book *Such A Long Journey*. He condemns the expeditious decision by Mumbai University to do away with his book from the syllabus. “… a political party demanded an immediate change in syllabus, and Mumbai University provided deluxe service via express delivery, making the book disappear the very next day” (Deshpande “Rohinton Mistry protests withdrawal of book”). Rohinton Mistry observes that the University as a seat of learning, occupies an exalted position in civilized society. It is the defender of academic independence and freedom of expression. Instead, Mumbai University has come dangerously close to institutionalizing the ugly notion of self-censorship. Hence the author feels that the Vice-Chancellor should take remedial action to remove the blot.

However, in the midst of all this pandemonium the author sees a ray of hope in the nation. It is the coming together of ordinary citizens to raise their voice against the injustice of the narrow and divisive politics of the Shiv Sena. Civil society has responded, in Mumbai and elsewhere, with outrage, questions, petitions; it is inspiring to see. The stand taken by teachers, citizens groups, bloggers, journalists is exemplary. Who knows, it may even educate the main actors about the workings of a real democracy (Deshpande “Rohinton Mistry protests Withdrawal of Book”)

Thus a reading of Salman Rushdie’s non-fictional works discloses his close proximity with the nation, his love for his birth place Kashmir, the threat of terrorism both at the national level and the global level, the increase in intolerance, the erosion of values in the political zone and the rapid deterioration of the nation’s secular credentials. Despite all these problems Rushdie believes that India will override these fissiparous tendencies. Rohinton Mistry also
expresses his love for the nation and spell out the nation’s secular culture
nevertheless he also that through his novels he tries to record the Parsi race for
posterity. He also considers himself more of a Canadian than an Indian writer and
expresses the desire to write the great Canadian novel.