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A STUDY ON THE ROLE OF SALMAN RUSHDIE TO PRESERVE INDIAN HISTORY

A Study on the Role of Salman Rushdie to Preserve Indian History

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Abstract – History in its varied forms is focused on and is the main thrust area of the research work. The project begins by exploring the nexus between history and fiction through the ages, up to the post modern and post-colonial times. This relationship between history and fiction forms the basis of various histories that are represented in the novels of Rushdie. The representation of politics in literature, political figures and events, are aesthetic representations of facts in fiction. Politics is not always interlaced with the narration; sometimes it is symbolic and often allegorical. Rushdie filters world history, national history, invasions and explorations recorded in historical accounts and the post-colonial interpretations of colonial power - in all his works. The fictional life of the narrator is fused, interspersed, intertwined and even sometimes entangled with his own ancestral history; autobiographical elements from the narrator are interwoven with the author's life. My study further explores the relationship between the private and the public. Culture, myths, religion, tradition, heritage - blend and merge, presenting a curiously hybrid picture. The final area that this study focuses on includes geographical locale, literary allusions and the creative usage of language, highlighting their historical perspective as mentioned in the novels of Rushdie. Thus, the research work is an attempt to bring forth various histories, work on their relevance and draw out their inter-relatedness. The critical framework used is based on the theories of magic realism; inter textuality, historiographic metafiction, indeterminacy, deconstruction, hybridity, fragmentation, parody and so on.

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INTRODUCTION

Among the various literary forms, the connection of the novel with history has been the closest and with far-reaching cultural consequences. There has been constant evolution in the nature and scope of the novelist's engagement with history and vice versa too. The novel established its base by imitating history; it progressed by making massive use of history, incorporating within the fictional frame a large number of actual social, political, and cultural events and happenings; and in its most recent phase it has also interrogated and problematized the discourse of history. History and fiction share social, cultural, ideological contexts as well as formal techniques. As a result, most of our modern-day critics have chosen to study the history-novel fact-fiction connection within the theoretical frames of postmodernism and post-colonialism.

The novelist's active involvement with history stimulated the use and popularization of the generic category of the 'historical novel,' which describes, analyses, and evaluates the connection between history and fiction. It is a form of narrative which reconstructs history imaginatively and as a result both the historical and the fictional characters may appear. It has never had a consistent meaning; in fact, its meaning and scope has changed with every user and

every interpreter. In this relation, Marshall records that Foucault solves Derrida's notion of the endless deferral of meaning by demonstrating the interpretation web of historical, social and cultural contexts. This makes meaning, therefore, a context specific.

Novelists and historians chose to learn from each other; while the novelists took sustenance from history, the historians too showed keenness to benefit from the experiments of the novelists. In order to make history relevant to the common people, they moved away from the dull and effete antiquarianism of their predecessors, and borrowed new methods and styles from the novelists. From the rise of the novel in the eighteenth century until the close of the nineteenth century when historians came to speculate the credibility of history as a discipline of knowledge, novel writing has maintained its relation with history at levels of both content and form. As a result, the relationship between the two became dichotomous, in which history represented the real and novel, the imaginary.

Further, history around 1920's started gaining ground as a mode of reconstruction. And the imagination played a pivotal role in historical and fictive connection. Collingwood stressed that the historian re-enacts the past in the context of his own

knowledge; even while he recreates it, he also criticizes it, he 'forms his own judgment of its value, corrects whatever errors he can discern in it' (Collingwood 215). In other words, fiction as history is a concept of the historical novel which takes on the full challenge of events and gives them a kind of significance that history has instead of dismissing them to periphery.

Similarity between the historian and the novelist reaches its highest point where the historian creates his own picture of the past with the contours and details of his own recreated version. The selected facts vary according to the historian's own reasons, motivations and compulsions. Here, as Collingwood mentions a signified point of difference is that whereas the historian had to build his picture with the things that had happened the latter had no such obligation.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

Ania Loomba's definition of post-colonialism is an innovative term that can be interestingly applied to Rushdie's works. She notes that the prefix 'post' ... implies an 'aftermath' in two senses - temporal, as in coming after, and ideological, as in supplanting. It is the second implication which critics of the term have found contestable: if the inequities of colonial rule have not been erased, it is perhaps premature to proclaim the demise of colonialism. A country may be both postcolonial (in the sense of being formally independent) and neocolonial (in the sense of remaining economically and/or culturally dependant) at the same time.

In the 'temporal' sense, Rushdie's novels are post-colonial as the main body of the narratives occurs after India becomes independent. However, Rushdie's novels clearly depict the influence of indigenous and western cultures and fictions. The east and west are juxtaposed and intertwined chronologically and influence on Indian cultural history can be felt effectively.

The post-colonial works reflect often the idea of postmodernism because often the two converge in some purposes. Both emerge as globally textual practice with the only difference that the post-colonial novels are of geographical nature. Though there is no clear line of demarcation still Roger Berger attempts to draw a clearer line between the two with respect to the idea of authority. He says that postcolonial writers attempt to unmask European authority while postmodernists attempt to unmask authority in general. A postmodernist focuses on aesthetics but a post-colonial writer explores the implications of European authority. If so, then this might explain why post-colonialism is more of a political movement in contrast to a cultural movement, i.e. post-modernism. Rushdie even admits to the postcolonial writer's desire to reconstruct history through language.

This cultural representation which moves out of the premises of family and household to reach masses and general public to embrace all strata's of society, religions, customs and traditions is also represented by Rushdie in his novels. The postcolonial writers are also engaged in remaking the language. Because both non-fiction and fiction are constructed by language, an attempt to reconstruct all literature is in the making too. Tiffin argues that both post-modernism and post-colonialism share strategies but have different motives: A number of strategies, such as the move away from realist representation, the refusal of closure, the exposure of the politics of metaphor, the interrogation of forms, the rehabilitation of allegory and the attack on binary structuralisation of concept and language, are characteristics of both the generally postcolonial and the European postmodern but they are energized by different theoretical assumptions and by vastly different political motivations.

Rushdie's novels are historical meta fictions as they parody national myth and magic realism is the fundamental basis on which they are built. Magic Realism entertains all sorts of binary oppositions like national unification and fragmentation, personal and trivial both take their respective places in his novels, the novels move around centre and periphery, artist/entertainer, author/reader, history/myth, history/elevated are other binaries that are extensively found in Rushdie. Rushdie writes from the margin between the opposites and his magic realism subverts traditional hierarchies, in fact, he de constructs binaries and it is only in this sense that he makes use of post- structuralism. Magic realism itself in the most polarized form is contrastingly co-existing term where 'realism' refers to something which can be empirically proved whereas the word 'magic' admits the existence of the supernatural. The combination of the two disrupts the traditional set-up and it allows in the works of Salman Rushdie the equal co-existence of binaries where neither is subversive or dominant. Many a time the unresolved ambiguities in his novels keep the character moving and the reader's interest remains captured in the progress of the plot. We can conclude most aptly that this technique lead up to an important secret behind the best literature - the balancing of opposites.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

The fictional work of Rushdie can be understood also by the term 'Surfiction' coined by Raymond Federman as his fiction combines features of radical self-reflexivity, surrealism and the French nouveau roman and they celebrate the unreal and the irreal on the same platform. But Wilde's Mid-fiction, though less radical a term, can be best applied to his work. Because his work presents a 'via media between the extremes of realism and reflexivity,' his works of mid-fiction offers solution to three extreme stances of narrative - self-reflexivity' s narcissism, modernism's stream of consciousness and traditional realism's naive representation.

They accept the world's incoherence and fragmentation instead of using art to control it. The self-referentiality, which occurs in certain passages of his novels, is characteristically post-modern. The narrators are very self-aware of their roles in the narrative, and at various times 'step out of the work' as it were, to communicate with the reader. Rushdie abandons linear narrative in all the three works under study *Midnight's Children*, *Shame*, and *The Moor's Last Sigh* and merges fact with fantastic.

Midnight's Children is a novel that is at once experimental, confessional, polemical and subjective; a clever blend of history, autobiography, political allegory and fantasy. The magical aura of fantasy is superimposed on a world of history and facts. Fantasy is brought forth with the birth of the pioneering Saleem Sinai and his imaginary *Midnight's Children's Club* (like the *Marylebone Cricket Club*). Their activities and their world are realized in the rarefied atmosphere of fantasy and reality.

Mistakes and inaccuracies result from a fallible memory compounded by Saleem's idiosyncratic character. *Midnight's Children* was not meant to be an authoritative history of post-independence India even though some segments of Rushdie's South Asian public wanted to read it in that way. Instead, Saleem, the unreliable narrator, reflects the difficulty of really remembering what the truth is. Saleem, like his creator Rushdie, suggests that imaginative truth is both honorable and suspect.

Rushdie often writes of the mirror reflecting the world, and Saleem here uses the broken mirror of memory, some fragments reflecting truthfully, others only refracting distortions and some completely lost. Three historical aspects of the novel are surcharged with shame in his next novel by the same name i.e. *Shame*. In this brilliant novel, first published in 1983, Rushdie gives us a lively and colorful mixture of history, art, language, politics, and religion. Set in a country 'not quite Pakistan,' the story centers on the family of two men -one a celebrated warrior, the other a debauched playboy-- engaged in a protracted duel that is played out in the political landscape of their country. The shame of the novel is firstly the shame of the murky politics that created an untenable country- 'the famous moth-eaten partition that chopped up the old country and handed a few insect-nibbled slices of it...' (*Shame* 61). The second aspect of shame dealt in the novel is the shame of cultural transplant that is reflected in Rushdie himself who becomes a 'voyeur'-projected in his alter ego, Omar Khayyam Shakil. Finally, and perhaps the most prominent intended theme is the shame of the social mores of the backward, feudal, superstitious Islamic society that multiplies shame on shame through limitless repression breeding violence. It creates psychological horrors, both in private and public life. That *Shame* is a hybrid novel is problematised by its relation to allegorical forms of

writing. It is pointed out that the text shifts between reality/ unreality; Pakistani Peccavistan; fiction and factual narrative interventions, and this is evidence of the strongly representational mode. Examples are plenty in Rani Harappa's eighteen shawls, each of which depicts allegorical frames. Critics like Brennan insist on Rushdie being an allegorist, relying on the mode to convey the social, political, and national arguments of the author and justify authorial intervention in the texts.

CONCLUSION:

From the above research we can conclude that Rushdie is an enigmatic contemporary writer who can be called a 'somatic encyclopedia' oozing the history of not only his nation, his family and ancestors but also the geographical filigree ornated by literary sparkles. If his narrator's ancestral history exhibits his autobiographical details, his concern displays the interests of the masses also. His novels contain perhaps an exceptionally high proportion of real historical events, directly represented or readily recognizable public figures, and constant resemblances to the known facts of his own life. The histories are contemporarised with author's incorporation of contemporary literary theories. Rushdie preserves Indian history in the form of a pickle with the ingredients of politics, geography, literature and so on, hoping that 'One day the world may taste the pickles of history.'

The novelist, the essayist, the travel writer and the screenwriter, the martyr for free speech and purveyor of story as the political statement, Rushdie has not only achieved the singular distinction of being recognised as an artist in his own lifetime but he is also arguably the most prominent novelist of the late 20th century, both for his literary achievements and for the controversies surrounding them. Like Marquez in Spanish, Rushdie has taken history as his subject and fictionalised it, thus instituting a new genre. He has received almost every award in the course of a near 3D-year career and has become the living image of the romantic writer; worldly, erudite and knowing, equally at ease with the purveyors of pop culture and the intellectual arbiters of the literary taste, and a scabrous critic of colonialism, be it political, social or cultural. Despite his deep connection to the events of his time he remains somehow removed from the ordinary sphere of existence; abstract, aloof, distant.

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