
**MULTICULTURALISM: ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT IN INDIAN WRITING IN ENGLISH WITH
SPECIAL REFERENCE TO SALMAN RUSHDIE'S THE MOOR'S LAST SIGH**

N. RAMESHCHANDRA SRIKANTH

Abstract: In my presentation, I have focused on Origin and Development of Multiculturalism in Indian Writing in English with Special reference to Salman Rushdie's *The Moor's Last Sigh*. Here my thrust is to envisage a paradigm shift from post-colonialism towards Multiculturalism as a 'Literary Construct'. Since the 1970's, the nature of Literary Canon formation, and opposed to established Literary Canons has become a leading concern among critics of diverse theoretical view points, weather Deconstructive, Feminist, Marxist, Postcolonial, New Historicist or Multiculturalism. A widespread change is that the standard canon of great books, not only literature but in all areas of humanistic study has been determined less by artistic excellence than by the politics of the power. As a result the demand is 'to open the canon' so as to make it Multicultural instead of Eurocentric.

Key words: Hybridity, multiculturalism. Post-colonialism

Indian writing in English has become an indispensable component of literary and cultural studies in India, Projecting the Multilingual composition of Indian society with all its multiple facets. Diversity of the Nation and its implicit unity came to be appreciated by highlighting some of the problems faced by a Multicultural Society like India and further focused on shifting traits of Multicultural Society. Multiculturalism is best understood as a perspective on or as a way of viewing human life. As human beings are culturally embedded and live within a culturally structured world and organize their lives and social relations in terms of culturally derived system of meaning as significance. Since each individual realizes a limited range of human capacities and emotions and grasps only a part of the totality of human existence, it needs other cultures to help it understand itself better, expand its intellectual and moral horizon, stretch its imagination and so on. Most importantly every culture is internally plural and reflects a continuing conversation between its different tradition and strands of thoughts. Cultures grow out of conscious and un-conscious interactions with each other and define their identity partially multicultural in their origin and constitution. This can be highly attributed in fiction of Salman Rushdie's and other contemporary Indian Writers in English. This Multicultural perspective of cultural embeddedness of human beings, the inescapability and desirability of cultural pluralism and multicultural constitution of each cultural is the prime focus in Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, *Shame*, *The Satanic Verses*, *The Moor's Last Sigh*, *The Enchantress of Florence* etc., There is a great paradigm shift of cross cultural identity and the 1980's and 1990's saw a renaissance in Indian Writing in English with the advent of this multiculturalism spearheaded by Salman Rushdie with his path breaking novel *Midnight's Children* in 1980, followed

by other contemporary Indian Writers in English as a part of Indian Diaspora. Earlier writers like Nirad C Choudhary, R.K. Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand and Raja Rao used English in its classical and Eurocentric form. However, Rushdie with his pidgin English created a new trend in writing as well as an ambassador to multicultural concerns. Among other writers, Vikram Seth came into lime light by his novels *The Golden Gate*, *A Suitable Boy*, *An Equal Music* and *Two Lives* depicting the canon of multiculturalism based on post Independent India and lives of young professionals in America. Its Arundhati Roy's debut book *The God of Small Things* radically changed perceptions and meticulously carried on the elements of multiplicity in her book. Other writers Rohinton Mistry's writings about parsi community, V.S. Naipaul's critical assessment of developing countries like India or the Caribbean of Muslim Fundamentalism, Amitav Ghosh' most lyrical and insightful works on the effect of colonialism on the native people, Jhumpa Lahiri's much debated topic of cultural identity of Indians in far off land, Shashi Tharoor's a non fictional chronicle of multicultural dynamics of India's past and its projected future, Upamanyu Chatterjee's realistic portrayal of India genuinely emphasizes the traits of multiculturalism to a great extent. In all their writings a deep and profound knowledge of completely different cultures might serve as a mirror. In post independent Indian Literature in English, most of the writings depicted and has regard for westernization as the only panacea for their quest for modernity, but at the same time these writers hold the Indian indigenous value system portrayed multiculturalism in their writings. This aspect of multiculturalism also sustains human rights in every culture, leaving apart different approaches, different emphases and different formulation leaving no scope for cultural imperialisation. Multiculturalism in The

Moor's Last Sigh: In *Moor's Last Sigh*, Salman Rushdie describes the journey of Moraes Zogoiby (Moor), a half Christian, half Jewish narrator living in India. His struggle for identity takes him from Bobay to Spain, as religious clashes and cultural conflict nearly tear Moor (and India) apart. Rushdie portrays his narrative with post modern and post colonial themes and techniques, giving Moor's struggle a sense of epic proportions. Here Rushdie palimpsests Moor's struggle to establish his identity over the identity crises of historical icons and cultures. The value of pure multiculturalism as a remedy against social conflict is highly appreciable in this novel. While Rushdie suggest the dangers religious of fundamentalism, he also suggest new found doubts about the advantages of pluralism and cultural hybridity. ushdie introduces major characters from across India's religious spectrum and other characters like Aurora, Moor's brilliant, Christian mother, a famous artist fighting to define herself between the east and the west. There is Abraham, Moor's Crooked Jewish father, and there is a Raman Fielding or Mainduck, A radical Hindu Nationalist with a British Surname; Between the story lines, Rushdie initially inserts famous characters from past, blurring the progression of time; references of Vasco de Gama, Martim Luther and Don Quixote meticulously glorified the cultural hybridity and plurality of element in cultural construction. The critic Cantor (2003: 137) says that for Rushdie, "All cultures, and especially Indian is Palimpsestic in nature" and he continues 'New Cultural Forces do not displace or erase prior ones, but simply write over them.' Amidst the historical wanderings by Moor, by Muhammad xi the Sultan who surrendered Islamic dominance of Iberia, ran from his Christian conquerors, the jews of spain also ran, Christopher Columbus set sail to discover a new route to the east from the same spain clearly presents Rushdie's Marvellousness in discovering a new age of colonialization. He creates a direct lineage for Moor related him to booth Sultan and another Spanish explorer, Vasco de Gama. Here Critic Stephen Baker writes 'The Mish-mash of influences, the juxtaposition of the European and the Indian can be said to represent a form of multiculturalism, absorbing the historical and cultural forces of west European literary cultural on coloniased societies' and in post colonial India, often, religion and politics could not be separated; Camoens (Moor's grand father), for example, dreams of an independent India which could be 'above religious because secular, above class because socialist, above caste because enlightened, above hatred because loving'. Here Moor describes, After Camoens death "There was no room for a man who did not want to belong to a tribe, who dreamed...of peeling off his

skin and revealing his secret identity... The secret, that is, of the identity of all men.... Of standing before the war-painted braves to unveil the flayed and naked unity of the flesh"

Rushdie attacks on Hindu fundamentalism through Raman Fielding, A Hindu who lives with one foot in politics and the other in the criminal world. He is the embodiment of mixing power and religious intolerance. Rushdie also condemns the attitude of Abraham, corrupted by his new found money and power in his search for an identity, Moor seeks to escape the binds of religion and desires to attach him to all other Indians. But India refuses to unchain itself from its religious shackles and Moor escapes to spain. Moor flees India as Boabdil ran from Spain, as the story ends, the Moor/Boabdil parallel can be read as Rushdie's admonition against the dangers of fundamentalism and rigid definitions of self. Through the description of the fading Muslim Alhambrah at Granada, Rushdie evokes the value of 'The fabulous multiple culture of ancient history' "The Alhambrah, Europe's red fort, sister to Delhi's and Agra's..... Like a testament to..... our need for flowing together, for putting an end to frontiers, for the dropping of boundaries of the self... I watch it vanish in the twilight, and its fading, it brings tears to layers" (Rushdie, Salman. 1995: 433). Thus in *Moor's Last Sigh* Rushdie highlights the problems with the blind multiculturalism and suggests dissolution of self identity to pursue tolerance and peace in unrealistic at best. This religious fanaticism is also attacked in his other novels *Midnight's Children* and *Satanic Verses* in similar grounds. Critic Deepika Bahri writes,

"Rushdie embarks...admitted by in a mood of trademark tolerance..... on an examination of the hazards of interminancy and cultural pluralism under pressure from the need to articulate a modern determinate identity".

Thus we can find Rushdie's Utopia of tolerance and multiculturalism forced upon the population by imperial power and Rushdie acknowledges the difficulties associated with implementations such ideals on society. Moor's description of Aurora's Art, Uma, Moor's lover, A Fraud; Aurora's painting of her ancestors along side St.Thomas The Apostle, Indian Jews along side the Muslim league, The Hindu's of Congress along side Vasco de Gama are the strong examples of Rushdie's fear of unhindered pluralism and his departure from a deem of multiculturalism to a more realistic view of intercultural relations. In embodying this view point intertextually in *The Moor's Last Sigh*, Rushdie effectively carries some of the formal optimism of the earlier novella into the later 'grownup' work; in the Moor, the depict 'the tragedy of multiplicity destroyed by singularity, the

defeat of many by one" (MLS, 408). The most obvious representative of the pluralist sensibility in this novel is the flamboyant, middle class, socialite painter Aurora Zogoiby, whose art work, like Rushdie's writing, is palimpsestic in style and hybrid in its sources. Rushdie's critique of rootless pluralism in the Moor seems more sustained and vituperative than elsewhere. The principal reason for this is that Rushdie's satire in *THE MOOR* is directed as much at liberal cosmopolitans in India who have sought to accommodate the fanatical right as it is the fanatical right themselves. Hence, the pluralist of the novel, whether they are represented affirmatively or critically by Rushdie are at one point or another, compromised by their association with the far right. Rushdie's critiques of the Shiva Sena in this novel drew cries of outrage in Bombay. Rushdie packs his fiction with allusions to various Indian films, Actors, orienting towards metropolitan hybridity. In choosing references from films, the name "Mogambo" a bond-esque Indian Hero in *Mr. India*, Rushdie writes that his name is

"Carefully chosen to avoid offending any of the country's communities, it's neither Muslim nor Hindu, Parsi nor Christian, Jain nor Sikh"

as this film highlights the artificiality of the modern form of multiculturalism. On the one hand, Rushdie is against the religious fundamentalism that threatens Indian Society and suggests cultural hybridity as its remedy. But Rushdie also departs from an unqualified advocacy of such hybridity. Towards the conclusion of *The Moor's Last Sigh*, as Trousdale, a critic suggests, the city of Bombay (now renamed Mumbai by the Hindu right) is symbolically assaulted by a series of terrorist bombs. During the assault a number of characters of Rushdie's fiction are violently killed. Rushdie feels that the Bombay of his earlier fiction is in the process of being eradicated signifying "These explosions were our own evil" (Sigh's Moraes),

"We have chopped away our own legs, we engineered our own fall. And now we can only weep, at the last, for what we were too enfeebled, too corrupt, too little, too contemptible, to defend"

(Rushdie, Salman. 1995: 372-3). A world where every individual and nation can develop a strong identity while maintaining conflicting impulses, as Camoens does—that world is Rushdie's Utopia, a world standing on the middle ground between the fundamentalism of India and cultural dearth of Spain. And while Rushdie may not yet identify the path to that middle ground, at least he identifies a destination through this literary canon of multi culturalism. Rushdie's themes of migration and dislocation on post colonial identities, rejection of the notion of a homogenous national identity in *Midnight's Children*, *Shame*,

Satanic Verses and *The Moor's Last Sigh* reveals historiography and national history in multicultural atmosphere. As a narrator of the *Shame* asserts, "I too like all migrants, am a fantasist, I build imaginary countries.... I too face the problem of history" thus asserts Rushdie's sense of reinforcement in political agenda in which the plural and alectic migrant identity is offered as a way out of racisms and xenophobic nationalism which bedevil contemporary society. Perhaps Rushdie's view point of multiplicity in achieving sovereignty at universal level may be the answer for some of the problems affecting contemporary India. The images self conscious narration, conspicuously arcane or technical language, long lists of objects used to create either a cramped and busy world or a barren and empty one and grammatically incorrect or "back - broke" sentences in *The Moor's Last Sigh* and in almost all his novels exemplify his inner revelation towards his quest for identity in this genre of hybrid multiplicity. Quick moulds of situation, with a bare minimum of words, into a rich, full in environment or a barren bleak one encourage the true spirit of multiculturalism, a new genre of literary canon. Rushdie packs his fiction with allusions to various Indian films, Actors, orienting towards metropolitan hybridity. Ultimately, Rushdie presents a difficult contradiction, a contradiction best summarized by Cantor, Paul A. (2003: 137). Rushdie celebrates the clash of cultures...as long as it involves a serious engagement of the cultures and results in a genuine fusion of antithetical traditions, styles, ideologies...Yet Rushdie cautions against a false hybridity of culture, in which the common currency is literally money and the cultural components are unified only by being reduced to a basket of commodities and thus emptied of all genuine content. Thus in *The Moor's Last Sigh*, Rushdie leaves the reader with this unanswered contradiction raising criticism in some minds on his value as a pluralist, post colonial writer. Here we can ponder and find answer to his earlier position with this genre of multiculturalism and a more subtle understanding of India's complex cultural interaction, a grand design offered by Rushdie in his fiction ignoring the complexities of that culture. But in reality, the Human condition is tense with contradictions and self doubts. When Camoens are against occupation, hostile to many English families, Rushdie does not indict him—he praises him,

"To me the doubleness in grand father Camoens reveal his beauty; his willingness to permit the co-existence within himself of conflicting impulses is the source of his fall, gentle humanness" (Rushdie, Salman. 1995: 32).

References:

1. Bahri, Deepika. (2003). Before and After Midnight: Salman Rushdie and the Subaltern Standard. *Native Intelligence: Aesthetics, Politics, and Postcolonial Literature*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 152-199
2. Baker, Stephen. (2003). You Must Remember This. Salman Rushdie's *The Moor's Last Sigh*. Bloom's Modern Critical Views: Salman Rushdie. Comp. Harold Bloom. Philadelphia: Chelsea House, 233-246.
3. Brennan, Timothy. (1989). Salman Rushdie and the Third World: Myths of the Nation." London: Macmillan, P-81.
4. Cantor, Paul A. (2003). Tales of the Alhambra: Rushdie's Use of Spanish History in *The Moor's Last Sigh*. Bloom's Modern Critical Views: Salman Rushdie. Comp. Harold Bloom. Philadelphia: Chelsea House, 121-144.
5. Guillory, Johan. (1993). "Cultural Capital: The Problem of Literary Canon Formation
6. M.H. Abrahams (2011). *A Hand Book of Literary Terms*. London: Wadsworth Publications, 42-44
7. Parnell, Tim and Salman Rushdie. (1996). From Colonial Politics to Postmodern Poetics. *The Literature of British India*. Manchester: Manchester UP, 241-2.
8. Rushdie, Salman and Elizabeth West, eds. (1997). Introduction' in the *Vintage Book of Indian Writing 1947-1997*, London: Vintage.
9. Rushdie, Salman. (1981). *Midnight Children*. London: Picador.
10. Rushdie, Salman. (1984). *Shame*. London: Picador.
11. Rushdie, Salman. (1995). *The Moor's Last Sigh*. New York: Vintage Books.
12. Rushdie, Salman. (1991). *Imaginary Homelands: Essay and Criticism, 1981-1991*. London: Granta Books.
13. Vinita, Damodaran & Co. (2000). *Post Colonial India – History, Politics & Culture*. Manohar Publishers.
14. Ahmed, Imtiaz. ed. (2000). *Pluralism and Equality: Values in Indian Society and Politics*. NewDelhi: Saze Publications.

Ph .D Research Scholar in English & Lecturer in English
Govt. Degree College (Men), Thorroor, Warangal.