

## Chapter XI

### Conclusion

The uniqueness of Rushdie's artistic endeavour may be grasped in his contribution both to Indian fiction written in English as well as to fiction written in trans-national terms. He is the only India-born author to be awarded Germany's Author of the Year Award for his novel The Satanic Verses in 1989 and also the only author from the subcontinent to be awarded the Australian Stat Prize for European literature in 1993. In the same year his Midnight's Children was adjudged the "Booker of Bookers", the best novel to have won the Booker Prize in its first twenty five years. Moreover, Rushdie enjoys the distinction of being read throughout the world. His books have been published in more than two dozen languages. But, more than any diasporic author, Rushdie enjoys an intimate relationship with his birthplace, Bombay. When he left India finally in January 1961 he never guessed that his step would change his life forever. But a few years later when he found that his father had suddenly sold Windsor Villa, he was shocked. Rushdie confesses in his collection of essays between 1992-2002, entitled Step Across This Line (2002):

The day I heard this, I felt an abyss open beneath my feet. I think that I never forgave my father for selling that house,

and I'm sure that if he hadn't I would still be living in it. Since then my characters have frequently flown west from India, but in novel after novel their author's imagination has returned to it. This, perhaps, is what it means to love a country: that its shape is also yours, the shape of the way you think and feel and dream. That you can never really leave (Step Across the Line, 195).

Rushdie celebrates his Indian origin even when he is staying in England as its citizen. Having grown up in a tolerant, broad-minded city like Bombay, Rushdie has imbibed a liberal imagination, which shares its kinship with people of different nationalities across the globe. He never forgets the Indian response to his novel about India, that is, Midnight's Children. He writes in "A Dream of Glorious Return":

Midnight's Children (1981) was my first attempt at...literary land reclamation. Living in London, I wanted to get India back; and the delight with which they, in turn, claimed me, remains the most precious memory of my writing life (Step Across the Line, 195).

However, the Indian reception of Rushdie's next novel, The Satanic Verses changed his world and he agonisingly records that he was no longer able to set foot in the country which he has been his primary source of artistic inspiration. Rushdie has never forgotten that India was the first country to ban The Satanic Verses. Again, following the

publication of The Moor's Last Sigh (which had raised a furore in Bombay), when BBC Television attempted to make a prestigious five-hour dramatization of Midnight's Children; they were refused permission to film by the Indian government. However, when the British and Indian governments reached an agreement in 24 September 1998, things changed for him since he was granted a five-year visa one year later. In his accounts Rushdie expresses his great happiness to be in India once more:

‘Exile’, it says somewhere in The Satanic Verses, ‘is a dream of glorious return’. But the dream fades, the imagined return stops feeling glorious. The dreamer awakes. I almost gave up on India, almost believed the love affair was over for good. But as it turns out, not so (Step Across This Line, 196-197).

Rushdie, therefore, is the quintessential migrant who possesses a keen sense of preservation, reading book to his earlier tradition as well as reducing forward to new experiences and countries in a kind of global quest for completeness. He is very fond of saying often that in the process of translation or migration there is always a sense of something carried over or borne across national boundaries. According to Rushdie, nothing is ever lost in translation. In his essay “Step Across This Line” he explains his literary project by situating himself in the midst of cross cultural contexts. He explains that

The crossing of borders, of language, geography and culture; the examination of the permeable frontier between

the universe of things and deeds and the universe of the imagination; the lowering of the intolerable frontiers created by the world's many different kinds of thought policemen: these matters have been at the heart of the literary project that was given to me by the circumstances of my life, rather than chosen by me for intellectual or 'artistic' reasons (Step Across This Line, 434).

Finally, Rushdie's quest for homelands is an eternal one because it is neither there nor here, neither in the past nor in the present since its ambience may be located in the world of imagination. Standing at the confluence of national boundaries as well as historical demarcations, Rushdie is expansive enough to accommodate the conflict of several cultures within him. The writer, according to him is always engaged in overcoming his subjective limitations and like Tennyson's Ulysses constantly searches for new horizons and new experiences:

The idea of overcoming, of breaking down the boundaries that hold us in and surpassing the limits of our own natures, is central to all the stories of the quest. The Grail is a chimera. The quest for the Grail is the Grail (Step Across This Line, 410).