

Chapter I

The Critical Scene

Salman Rushdie, the Indian-born British novelist was born in Bombay in 1947. He is the author of eight novels — Grimus (1974), Midnight's Children (1981), Shame (1983), The Satanic Verses (1988), Haroun and the Sea of Stories (1990), The Moor's Last Sigh (1996), The Ground Beneath Her Feet (1999) and Fury (2001), and a collection of short stories entitled East, West (1990). He has also published four works of non-fiction — The Jaguar Smile: A Nicaraguan Journey (1987), Imaginary Homelands: Essay and Criticism 1981-1991 (1991), The Wizard of Oz (1992) and Step Across This Line: Collected Non-Fiction 1992-2002 (2002). Salman Rushdie was awarded Germany's Author of the Year Award for his novel The Satanic Verses in 1989. In 1993, Midnight's Children was adjudged the "Booker of Bookers", the best novel to have won the Booker Prize in its first twenty five years.

For well over a quarter century Salman Rushdie has been a gigantic literary figure across the world. His Midnight's Children (1981) has given a new direction as well as orientation to fiction and especially to post-colonial writing. It is primarily the multicultural aspects of his writing, along with several layers of meaning, explicit as well as implicit,

within the intertextual richness of his novels, that has made him the foremost exponent of postcolonial fiction. But for him, postcolonial fiction would have remained where it was. Since he has been a much discussed author, it is supremely difficult to compile a critical overview of critical studies, bearing upon his works. However, as this thesis directly focuses upon the multicultural aspects of his work, attempt will be made to delineate those segments of criticism, directly relevant to the object of this study. Again, such an attempt must be securely foregrounded against the past and current critical scenario, thus providing an apt starting point for the present critical evaluation. But even before we undertake such a venture, it is worthwhile to remember that in the domain of critical observations on Rushdie, the earliest collection of essays may be found in 1982 by Maria Couto in Encounter, Uma Parameswaran in Toronto South Asian Review, and Tariq Ali in New Left Review. Although Midnight's Children was highly acclaimed by critics, it was actually in 1988-89 that the literary world was shaken by controversy over the publication of The Satanic Verses in 1988. It gave rise to what came to be known as the "Rushdie Affair" and highly polemical views began to be expressed, sometimes to the complete exclusion of any mention of his novels. The inter-cultural conflict which ensued had serious repercussions on Rushdie the person as well as Rushdie the novelist. However, with the publication of his later novels Rushdie has emerged from the political and religious quagmire and since has been re-embraced by the literary world.

An overview of existing criticism on Rushdie is a vast project and can be charted under specific genres or types of literary criticism. Rather if we go by decades then a clear picture of the Rushdie canon emerges. During the end of 1980s, one of the most important features of the Rushdie canon may be located in the critical orientation in postcolonial studies sparked off by Bill Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin in their seminal critical enterprise, entitled The Empire Writes Back (1989). Ashcroft *et al.* has shown how postcolonial literature questions the Eurocentric ethos. Postcolonial texts owe their uniqueness to their hybrid character and here Ashcroft *et al.* show and how Rushdie's Midnight's Children "illustrates the possibilities of undoing the assumption of logocentric texts" by mixing the written word with the oral narrative traditions of both ancient India as well as that of the Arabs (1989, 184). Different cultures interact and mediate in order to illustrate the notion that writing is "a social practice with an indelible social function" (1989, 185).

Linda Hutcheon's The Politics of Post-modernism (1989) stresses this hybrid character of Rushdie's notion of history. She opines that Midnight's Children works against the logocentric discourse and against all sense of unity and synthesis, perceived in Western narratives since there is no mediation between "narrative form and social ground" (Hutcheon, 1989, 62). This hybridity gives to Rushdie's Midnight's Children its unique character because it was the first novel of its kind.

In fact, a novel like Midnight's Children works to foreground the totalising impulse of western — imperialistic — modes of history — writing by confronting it with indigenous Indian models of history. Though Saleem narrates in English, in 'Anglepoised-lit writing', his intertexts for both writing history and writing fiction are doubled: they are, on the one hand, from Indian legends, films, and literature and, on the other, from the west — The Tin Drum, Tristan Shandy, One Hundred Years of Solitude and so on (Hutcheon, 1989, 62).

Rushdie's writing has thus made a new departure in postcolonial fiction by bringing together several cultures, both Eastern and Western and several narrative traditions. Thus, once for all, he has challenged what Linda Hutcheon has termed "the impulse to totalise" in fiction writing by his attempt to "contest the entire notion of continuity in history and its writing" (Hutcheon, 1989, 63).

Timothy Brennan in his profound study, Salman Rushdie and the Third World (1989) has located the importance of Rushdie in postcolonial studies by explaining why and how he became so successful in the Western world by popularising the subcontinent more than Mulk Raj Anand, Kamala Markandaya and Raja Rao or Nehru could have ever done.

Empire, after all, is not something done to others: it is a relationship, and it is in Rushdie's Britain that the effects of that relationship on the First World are most striking. The imperial leaders of the West for over two centuries have been English-speaking countries whose sense of literary tradition has evaded the global realities Rushdie forces into view (1989, X).

Rushdie's literary ambitions have been aptly summed up in the following comment by Brennan:

His novels — unthinkable before the age of Khomeini, Ortega and Mandela — have made modernist style a vehicle for news extravaganza, street barricade and coup. He has done what few writers in any tradition have done: recorded the totality of neo-colonialism as a world system, with its absurd combinations of satellite broadcasts and famine, popular uprisings and populist rent, forced migrations and tourism. One might say he brings British literature up to date. For he occupies more than any other contemporary writer a special place at the crossroads of the English literary scene; the old 'Novel of Empire' which he transforms and which (as he points out) still exists as television special, film and travelogue for the popular magazines; 'Commonwealth' literature — that fictional

entry created by scholars in the provinces... (1989, XII-XIII).

It is precisely in these cross cultural contexts that Rushdie ought to be placed. In this Brennan shares his critical opinion with Aijaz Ahmad and others by making Rushdie a cultural interlocutor in the realm of politics and literature. As Brennan points out:

‘we do not live in three worlds but in one’, mutually affected and affecting. Obviously, the term (*i.e.*, the Third World) has less to do with what country essentially is...than what it does. It has a political not a sociological meaning (1989, XIV).

In his study Brennan has shown how Rushdie’s “multicultural experience of exile conferred advantages only at the expense of his own identity” in his formulation of such heroes with a hybrid character like the Flapping Eagle (Grimus), Omar Khayyam (Shame), the figure of the ‘Chamcha’ in Midnight’s Children, Saladin Chamcha in The Satanic Verses, Moraes Zogoiby in The Moor’s Last Sigh, Ormus Cama in The Ground Beneath Her Feet and Malik Solanka in Fury (Brennan, 1989, 76). Rushdie’s hybrid text, Grimus is the first novel of its kind in the Rushdie’s genre, which is unique in the manner of its mixing contemporary authors, historical personages and legendary beings “in a kind of international compendium of myth” (Brennan, 1989, 74). It is this display of international influences, “only partially and secondarily rooted

in the East”, that is simultaneously a mapping out of allegiances and an attempt which may direct what fictional forms Rushdie’s ethnic and racial alienation in England might take (Brennan, 1989, 75). Rushdie’s protagonists are all born and located in a multicultural context. They are “Chameleons” or “Changelings”, speaking in all sorts of voices, and incarnating in themselves “all things to all men and nothing to any man” (Grimus, 36). Each word of Rushdie’s characters become the “word of a different being” and he is engaged in an eternal search “for a suitable voice to speak in” (Grimus, 36).

Such themes of cultural plurality and multi-ethnic identity in Rushdie becomes the focal point of critical enterprise of Linda Hutcheon’s another treatise, A Poetic of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction (1988). K.J. Phillips’s essay “Salman Rushdie’s Midnight’s Children: Models for Storytelling, East and West” (1989), Dieter Riemenschneider’s article “History and the Individual in Salman Rushdie’s Midnight’s Children and Anita Desai’s Clear Light of Day (1984), Kelly Hewson’s essay “Opening up the Universe a little more: Salman Rushdie and the Migrant as Story-teller” (1989) and Chelva Kanaganayakam’s article “Myth and Fabulosity in Midnight’s Children” (1987) emphasise the cross cultural contexts of his novels by showing Rushdie’s fusion of myth, history and narratives, belonging to several traditions.

During the 1990s a fresh impetus in cultural studies was imparted by the publication of Homi Bhabha's Nation and Narration (1990). Bhabha's pathbreaking comments on the "liminal image of the nation" which "haunts the idea of the nation", as well as "the language of those who write of it and the lives of those who live in it" created ripples in the domain of postcolonial studies (Bhabha, 1990, 1). The idea of the nation as a monolith and circumscribed cultural entity was challenged. But here we have to admit that it was Rushdie's multicultural approach to nation and community that gave post-colonial literature its appeal and popularity. Bhabha's theoretical standpoint confirmed Rushdie's ideas on transnationality and migration. Bhabha's fresh insight into the "system of cultural signification" which made possible the nation's "coming into being" and which emphasised the consequent "instability of knowledge" formulated anew the notion of "national space" as an arena of conflicting and competing discourse (1990, 2). According to Bhabha, the emergence of the political 'rationality' of the nation as

a form of narrative — textual strategies, metaphoric displacements, sub-texts and figurative stratagems — has its own history (1990, 2).

Bhabha's famous comments challenge the unified and unitary idea of national culture, which exists in antagonism to the "other" that is outside or beyond its boundaries. The question of national borders becomes imaginary and the issue of external/internal becomes in itself a

subject and process of hybridity. Hybridity itself becomes a complex site of meaningful activity, where conflicting cultures interpenetrate and thereby generate new areas of meaning (Bhabha, 1990, 4). Rushdie himself elaborates this state of in-between(ness) in culture and politics as well as literature in his extended collection of essays from 1981 to 1991, specifically from his position as a migrant artist, hovering between nations, cultural entities and ethnic communities. From Grimus to Fury, Rushdie has celebrated this ambivalent space in and between nations, situating his protagonists at the cross roads of a new transnational culture. Such themes have been discussed from textual angles in G.R. Taneja and R.K. Dhawan's edition of a conglomeration of essays entitled The Novels of Salman Rushdie (1992). The appeal of Rushdie's Midnight's Children has crossed all frontiers of nations and Klaus Borner's essay "The Reception of Midnight's Children in West Germany" once again affirms the popularity of Rushdie in transnational contexts. Rushdie's blending of fact and fiction has been brought out in Ron Shepherd's article "The Metaphor of Shame: Rushdie's Fact-Fiction". The relation between history and politics has been the focal point of critical essays by Tariq Rahman ("Politics in the Novels of Salman Rushdie"), R.S. Pathak ("History and the Individual in the Novels of Rushdie"), Satya Brat Singh ("Rudy Wiebe, Paul Scott and Salman Rushdie: Historians Distanced from History") and R.K. Dhawan ("History and the Novel: Some Significant Statements in Imaginary Homelands").

Aijaz Ahmad has projected his detailed considerations of the work of Frederic Jameson, Edward Said and Salman Rushdie and of migrant intellectuals in In Theory (1992). In effect, he has amplified the critical standpoint of Homi Bhabha in his essay on Salman Rushdie's "Shame", where he speaks of the

great prolixity and heterogeneity of cultural productions in our spaces, both of archival and non-archival kinds which simply exceed the theoretical terms of "Third World Literature" (Ahmad, 1992, 125).

From 1990 onwards critical commentary on Rushdie's works are directed towards locating and explaining his position in the realm of "Third World Literature" or "Commonwealth Literature", both of which are pejorative terms and which are modified in a critical overview, which positions Rushdie in the counter-canon of "Third World Literature" (Ahmad, 1992, 125). Indeed, as Aijaz Ahmad explains, Rushdie's position as a novelist becomes ambiguous in terms of his non-Western forms of narrativisation in his texts, that is, his Indianness as against his lines of descent from European modernism and postmodernism. Rushdie belongs both to the East as well as to the West. It is here that Rushdie's idea of migrancy (which has been later explained in his collection of essays entitled Imaginary Homelands) may be explained in fictional as well as real terms. The cross cultural contexts of the migrant artist may, therefore, be located both in terms of history and ontology. Such is the

ideological standpoint of Ahmad, who places Rushdie between two poles of “ideological construction” — the individual’s absolute and mythic freedom and his anchorage in history and politics (Ahmad, 1992, 126-27).

Gayatri Chakraborty Spivak, in her brilliant treatise “Reading the Satanic Verses” in the Postmodern Arts (1995) edited by Nigel Wheale has spoken of The Satanic Verses as a transnational document, since it can never be restricted to nation, religion or a particular cultural divide. She finds it difficult to locate it historically or politically in postcolonial terms. According to her

the general mode for the post-colonial is citation, re-inscription, re-routing the historical. The Satanic Verses cannot be placed within the European avant-garde, but the successes and failures of the European avant-garde are available to it (Wheale, 1995, 221).

She insists that the praxis and politics of life can never be consonant with the aesthetic dimension of a work of art. On that, there can be no specific context of history, biography, psychology, politics and religion, in which the writer may be foregrounded. No system of cultural signification can solely legitimise a text in this manner or may be said to possess it. In this context she analyses The Satanic Verses from a postmodern angle and judges it to be a hybrid text, sandwiched between two identities: migrant and national. She has analysed The Satanic Verses as many complex, fragmented national representations mixing the tragic

and the comic genres. It is unique because it illustrates the ambivalence of the “postcolonial” who may “keep himself completely separated from the metropolis in the metropolis as the fanatic exile” (Wheale, 1995: 224). Throughout her study she has undertaken to highlight the several roles of the migrant as exile, as social reformer, as metropolitan, as a transgression, as a representative and critique of Islam, as an instance of male bonding and unbonding, and has encapsulated the status of the migrant as paradigm.

In Colonialism/Postcolonialism (1998) Ania Loomba has argued that nationalist struggles as well as pan-nationalist movements can never be understood within the parameters of current theories of hybridity. But it is also true that identity can never be explained in terms of roots, history and ethnicity but also has reference to theories of hybridisation, pluralism and tolerance. Loomba cautions us against facile notions of hybridity, migrancy and exile, which position themselves against ideologies of nation and ethnicity. We should rather attempt to

locate and evaluate their ideological, political and emotional valencies, as well as their intersections in the multiple histories of colonialism and post-coloniality (Loomba, 1995, 183).

In this context, Loomba’s criticism on Rushdie’s The Moor’s Last Sigh occupies a hybrid status; between a celebration and a critique of competing versions of the Indian nation. Indeed, the lineage of Rushdie’s

Moor “invokes the intricate histories of such a hybridity” (Loomba, 1995, 208).

Satish C. Aikant in his essay “Salman Rushdie’s Midnight’s Children: The Middle Ground of Diaspora in Post-Colonialism” claims that one of the defining and sustaining coordinates of post-coloniality in the domain of Third World Literature is migrancy. Just as earlier postcolonial critics, Aikant insists by way of qualification that migrancy is both a geographical and an ontological condition. He locates Rushdie in a multiplicity of subject positions. A diasporan writer used his exile/ self-exile to amalgamate the universal and the national strands to create an art that would embody his real as well as imagined experience. A migrant writer, at any rate, carries a baggage of memories that must find some transmutation into a proper narrative framework (1996, 213).

The 1990s have witnessed a heavy emphasis on the theme of hybridity and cross cultural contexts in the domain of critical works on Rushdie. He has been re-read and re-interpreted by scholars like Fletcher who has edited Reading Rushdie: Perspectives on the Fiction of Salman Rushdie (1994), Michael Gorra (After Empire: Scott, Naipaul, Rushdie, 1997), Luisa Juarez Hervas (“An irreverent chronicle: History and Fiction in Salman Rushdie’s Midnight’s Children”, 1995), Jean M. Kane (“The Migrant Intellectual and the Body of History in Salman Rushdie’s Midnight’s Children”, 1996), Fritz-Wilhelm Neumann (“The Moor’s Lash Sigh: Rushdie’s Intercultural Family Saga”, 1999), Tim Parvell (“Salman

Rushdie: from colonial politics to postmodern poetics”, 1996) and Aruna Srivastava (“The Empire Writes Back”: Language and History in Shame and Midnight’s Children, 1990).

The close of the twentieth century also witnessed the publication of a collection of essays on Midnight’s Children (1999) with Meenakshi Mukherjee as its editor. The collection contains diverse essays bearing on the novel’s cultural and historical aspects like Harish Trivedi’s “Salman the Funtoosh: magic Bilingualism in Midnight’s Children”, Neil Ten Kortenaar’s “Midnight’s Children and the Allegory of History”, Richard Cronin’s “The Indian English Novel: Kim and Midnight’s Children”, Josna E. Rege’s “Victim into Protagonist? Midnight’s Children and the Post-Rushdie National Narratives of the Eighties”, and Rukshini Bhaya Nair’s “History as Gossip in Midnight’s Children”, among others. In her brilliant introduction, Meenakshi Mukherjee has outlined Rushdie’s cross cultural contexts:

Salman Rushdie’s biography is part of postmodern history today. The circumstances of his spatial dislocation and consequent cultural hybridity are shared by other diasporic writers of the world, but when in 1989 his life became the site for a clash of civilisational forces — between orthodox Islamic and liberal humanist world views — Rushdie became the focal point of a major public debate.... For the next few years, everybody — regardless of whether one

had read his book or not — felt compelled to take positions on what had come to be known as ‘the Rushdie affair’ (1999, 13).

Researches on the cross cultural contexts of Rushdie’s fiction continue even today. David Punter’s treatise entitled Postcolonial Imaginings (2000), highlights Rushdie’s essential hybridity by associating it with the production of monsters in art and literature. With the instance of Frankenstein before him, he positions Rushdie within the discourse of power, illustrating how he has been instrumental in creating such violent fictions bordering on irrationality and which are essentially hybrid in origin. With regard to such monstrosity of hybrid “forms” he makes the following comment:

Rather we might say they represent those genuinely ‘hybrid’ forms that stand, as it were, at the boundary of what is and what is not acceptable, what is to be allowed to come to the warm hearth of society and what is to be consigned to the outer wilderness (Punter, 2000, 111).

According to Punter, it is these endless waves of political corruption and nepotism that had transformed women like Sufiya Zenobia into a monster.

Ismail S. Talib in his penetrating research on The Language of Post-colonial Literatures (2000) has located in Rushdie the characteristics of a hybrid author by comparing him favourably with James Joyce, who,

like him, represents for many postcolonial writers the central figure of the writer, standing outside the English tradition and yet successfully blending the English language to accommodate his Irish subject matter and language. Rushdie, like Joyce, is a hybrid author since he uses the machinery of English language to embody his cultural difference. Like Joyce, Rushdie writes back at the empire, using its very medium to undercut its ideological supremacy (Talib, 2002, 28-29).

Rajeshwar Mittapalli and Joel Kuortti has recently edited a series of new critical insights entitled Salman Rushdie: New Critical Insights (2003) in two volumes which contain exhaustive analyses on Rushdie's cross cultural contexts. There are illuminating essays on Grimus by Peterson and Joel Kuortti, on Midnight's Children by John Clement Ball and Paolo Piciucco, on Shame by Mujeebuddin and Neluka Silva and on Rushdie's later novels like The Moor's Last Sigh and the Ground Beneath Her Feet by J.C. Ball, Balaswamy, Celia M. Wallhead, Michael Hensen and Mike Petry among others.

In spite of such rich heritage of critical opinion bearing on Rushdie's hybridity, much remains unexplored. At best, most critics have stressed on an isolated aspect of his hybrid vision. They have yet to extend their analysis to a consistent exploration of Rushdie's major novels and critical essays. Moreover, the issue of hybridity has not been explained from all possible angles by such critics. This thesis seeks to locate and explain the status of the migrant artist in relation to his own

birthplace and that of his adopted country. The migrant artist inhabits an arena where conflicting cultures intersect, cancel each other or produce their own symbiosis, which is never permanent but subjected to change as always. Cultural constructs are forever subject to mutation and qualification. Rushdie is the epitome of the migrant artist, who is always at the centre of conflicting claims of disparate cultures. He has become the site of cultural contests. Ideologically, he belongs to no particular culture or nation. It is the aim of this dissertation to explore this externally shifting, chameleon-like character of Rushdie in his critical essays and in his novels. His works are full of cultural cross currents because of his encyclopaedic nature. No other author in recent times has written in so familiar terms about India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Britain, South America and the United States. Rushdie seems at home in all of these nations. It is his unique stamp of hybridity that has given postcolonial literature its multi-cultural dimension. It is also the objective of this thesis to show how Rushdie brings together different national cultures, races and ideologies into a rich cultural symbiosis.

This dissertation takes off from previous cultural studies on Rushdie and raises some fundamental questions ignored earlier by critics. This study raises and answers the questions as to how far Rushdie's characters are able to identify a specific country and culture as their own homeland. It investigates whether at all it is possible for the migrant to fix his roots in an adopted country and to what extent does he become



alienated from his mother country. It also delineates the subject of identity in relation to considerations of home in cross cultural contexts. It attempts to show how the search for identity transcends geographical boundaries and the demarcations of time. It also explores the migrant artist's creation of imaginary homelands instead of real ones in fictions. An important aspect of this study is its adumbration of the basis of the migrant's personality as being acentric and ahistorical since Rushdie likes to quarrel with history. Rushdie's fictions pose themselves as alternatives to history, because the very environment in which characters find themselves in Grimus, The Satanic Verses and Midnight's Children belie the very basis of reality.