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## An expository scrutiny of Salman Rushdie's The Satanic Verses

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### Abstract:

Salman Rushdie is considered as a self-reflexive post-modern novelist. He is one of the most persuasive spokesmen in increased tolerance and moral understanding and of cultural displacement. His novel *The Satanic Verses* is one of the relatively few works of fiction to have made a significant and permanent impact outside the enclosed world of literature. It uses the technique of magical realism, with a series of sub-plots that are narrated as dream visions felt by the main character, Farishta. These dreams are chronicles of revelations, religious faiths and fears. My paper wants to focus on the major issues presented through the main characters.

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**Key words:** scrutiny, circumstances, allegory, religious views

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### Introduction

Salman Rushdie, a Kashmiri Muslim-Indian living in the lap of Western milieu, is making endeavours to earn a name in a highly race-conscious Britain. He is a matter of public interest because as a writer he has exposed himself to the international fame by portraying the socio-political concepts in India and Indian subcontinent. In his novels, he deals with the thoughts of national and international theses. His novels mainly evoke the themes of migration, exile, diasporic consciousness, nationalism, multiculturalism, dualism, etc. He is the winner of Booker Prize. My paper aims at presenting the kaleidoscopic view of the novel *The Satanic Verses*.

The publication of *The Satanic Verses* (1988) opens for individual perceptions dared to attempt higher criticism but its aftermath created turmoil in his mind. It is a strongly satirical text which focuses on the condemnation of the abuse of power and authority. It is a complex story, written in a style of „dream-within-a dream“ and contains several stories interlinked with each other. It has invited world-wide protest for its gratuitously offensive remarks against the Prophet of Islam and the holy Koran. It deals with the abuses flourished under Margaret Thatcher's Prime Ministerial watch in 1980s Britain. Specifically, it sets out to explore the impact on Britain's minority communities of lingering Falklands-

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era jingoism and of systematic, institutionalized racism in organizations such as the police force and the media.

This aspect of the novel's politics is to the fore in the scenes that concern one of the novel's two main protagonists, Salahuddin Chamchawala, the Bombay-born actor who has settled in England after an English public school education and endeavoured to become „a good and proper Englishman (43) by anglicized his name to Saladin Chamcha. He is regularly confronted with evidence of British racism. In his career as an actor, he is relegated to voice-over roles, partly because of the skills in mimicry that his cultural location has compelled him to develop and partly because „his face is the wrong colour“ for British televisions (61). His contact with the profession of advertising forces the covert racism of the industry upon his attention.

The Satanic Verses is a fine allegory. Rushdie has used dream-within-a-dream concept throughout the novel. The subject-matter of the novel is fairly varied and several stories are interlinked with each other to form the whole context of the plot. The stories contained in the novel are neither stereo-typed nor predictable. The novel often arouse the feeling of disgust among the readers not just because of gratuitously offensive remark against the Prophet of Islam, Hindu's God Hanuman and holy „Koran“ but also for several sex scenes spreading over the different parts of the novel. Rushdie does not hesitate to name his characters quite identical to the real names. He used the name "Mohound" instead of the widely accepted "Mohammad". He uses other religious names such as Hamaza, Ayesha, Ganesh, Hanuman, etc. in its real form. The battles which the prophet Mohammad had to win in order to convert people were very real.

All characters like the Lat and Manat are the part of Islamic folklore. Rushdie accepts the truth that his personal knowledge of Islamic culture and religion has come into his fictional imagination.

The novel presents mirror images of some religious places. The place Jahilia, the city of sand, is shown to suffer when the camel trains start losing their business to the boats and the ruler Abu Simbel is convinced that only the pilgrimage stands between the city and its ruin. Therefore the council searches the world for statutes of alien gods to attract new pilgrims. But there is no more competition as down in Sheba a great temple has been built, a shrine to rival the house of black stone. The rulers have added the tempting spices of profanity to their religious practices.

Oscillating between the Koranic past and the present, the past throws torch-light on the absurdities of the present. Ayesha, the youngest and most desirable of Mohound's twelve wives appears in the middle of the book living chastely in the harem quarters of the great mosque at Yathrib. She reappears in the several chapters and centuries later, clad only in butterflies, to lead entire village into the Arabian Sea. The sea is expected to part and the pilgrims to go straight to Mecca. The root idea of the novel seems that there is no absolute, and the Heaven and the Hell have no boundaries. It is almost impossible to tell angel and devil apart. Mohound, the prophet, has a tough time telling the difference between the voice of the angel and the Shaitan (devil) on the Mount Coney. In the process, Rushdie takes a very irrelevant look at Islamic folklore and Koranic facts.

Besides the prophet of Islam, Rushdie has depicted the Hindu's religious Gods and Christian's folklore as well. He seems to be

totally devoid of any religious respect while depicting Muslim and non-Muslims gods and goddesses. It appears very sinister when the Prophet Mohound is seen in extra-marital affair with Grandee's wife in a sacred religious place. The Grandee's wife endeavours to justify her illicit relation by saying that her husband is a weak man.

Don't say anything, Mohound. I am Grandee's wife, and neither of us is your friend. My husband, however, is a weak man. In Jahilia they think he's cunning, but I know better. He knows I take lovers and he does nothing about it, because the temples are in my family's care. Let's Uzza's, Manat's. They shall call them Mosque (120).

In the chapter two, Rushdie refers to a prophet born in a desert which is obviously about the Christian's god Lord Jesus Christ. The birth of the prophet is very much similar to the actual birth of Jesus Christ. The name of the mother, Maryam, is also the same: "A prophet, Isa, born to a woman named Maryam, born of no man under a palm-tree in the desert. Stories that made his eyes shine then fade into distantness" (118).

Gibreel Farista is a famous hero of religious films of Bombay. He is shown to role the character of Lord Ganesh. The hero is shown to be in avalanche of sex. He had so many sexual partners that it was not uncommon for him to forget their names even before they had left his room. After Gibreel played the role of Ganesh in six movies, he became so popular that many young ladies asked him if he would keep the Ganesh mask on his face while they made love with him but he refused out of respect for the dignity of the God. Consequently, Rekha, the wife of a ball-bearing manufacturer, also comes into his contact and undergo extra marital relations. When Rekha found betrayed in her love, she abuses him by calling "lafanga", "haramzada". "salah" and accused him of "fucking the sister".

Rushdie holds the faith of reincarnation common in almost all religions. Buddhists

believe that the soul of former Lama transmigrated into Lama after demise of old religious guru. Lord Vishnu has undergone several rebirth are found in Christian's mythology also. In the first chapter, Rushdie affirms the belief of rebirth common in all religions by depicting Lord Vishnu, Dalai Lama and Jesus Christ:

Reincarnation, for frenzied Gibreel, was a term beneath whose shield many nations gather a babeling" phoenix-form-ashes, the resurrection of Christ, the transmigration, at the instances of death, of the soul of Dalai Lama into the body of a new born child.... Such matters go mix up with the avatars of Vishnu (84).

Salman Rushdie considers the extra-marital relations are not bad in the society. He doesn't see anything wrong in even holding an illegitimate child. In chapter five, we see how Mishal Sufyan undergoes illicit sexual relation just because her husband was unable to provide a

child. She deliberately avoids contraceptive precautions to become pregnant. She is not ashamed at all to hold the immature bastard in her womb. In chapter three, Jumpy Joshi is seen in immoral acts with a widow Pamella Chamcha. Though Rushdie chooses to write on Indian sub-continent and native characters, he sometimes completely ignores social norms of the place. This is the reason that Pamella takes out two bottles of wine and drink with her lover Jumpy Joshi before making love with him. She was further seen totally dry-eyed and composed after hearing the message of her husband's demise in a plane accident which is absolutely an abnormal conduct for a widow.

Rushdie is aware of social inequality in Indian society. He highlights the problem of untouchability among Hindu. He shows us how caste people called scheduled caste, are put to humiliations by upper caste men. Many scheduled caste people change their religion out of frustration. Rushdie in The Satanic Verses depicts as to how the lower caste men are not allowed to fetch water from the village's

common well. He ironically says that these water tight social divisions are the main cause of social tensions in Indian society. This is the reason that Osman in chapter four, decides to relinquish Hindu religion and accepts Islam as he thinks that it would do good for him.

Rushdie deals almost every aspect of society confronting a common man in day-to-day life. Politics is his prime concern and almost every novel deals political issues at length. Rushdie thinks that politics has invaded every walk of life in our social life. His novels deal with almost all the major political happenings of Indian sub-continent. In this novel, he portrayed Emergency in India, Bangladesh liberation war, national movement, politics of Siva Sena in Bombay, Kashmir problem, social inequality, Muslim League – almost all major political events are discussed at length. All important political figures – Indira Gandhi, General Zia, Rajiv Gandhi, N.T. Rama Rao, M.G.R., Amitabh Bachchan, etc. are conspicuous in the novel.

Rushdie was condemned worldwide for misrepresenting Islam religion and misinterpreting Koranic messages. In the chapter six, the death of prophet is described and the last words put into his mouth are his thanks to the heathen goddess, Al Lat. This is offensive to an average Muslim fundamentalist as would be as a fictional account of Mahatma Gandhi's death, after hitting by the assassin's bullet, he exclaimed instead of Hai Ram, "get me ox soup"(109).

One of the fine things that strike the readers of this novel is the multiplicity of the narratives contained within it. The apparent multiplicity can be reduced to two main narrative strands. First, there is the story which occupies the present tense of the narrative, and constitutes the real world framework in which the two central characters, Saladin Chamcha and Gibreel Farishta live. Second, there is the narrative which describes Gibreel Farishta's dream life and comprises a number of other narratives, among them the story of Mahound n

Jahilia. Though the sections in which Mahound and Jahilia figure occupy a relatively small proportion of the complete text, they have come to dominate discussion of the novel because of the importance of

the issues they have raised. In comparison to questions of blasphemy, of censorship, of state terrorism and of the responsibility of the writer, it seems trivial and formalistic to raise literary issues like the question of the unity of a work of art.

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