International Journal of Language, Linguistics, Literature and Culture
Vol. 04, No. 03; 2025
ISSN: 2583-6560

# SALMAN RUSDHIE'S THE SATANIC VERSES: POST COLONIAL NARRATIVES OF IMMIGRATION AND NATIONHOOD

**Vinita Chandra**
Department of English, Ramjas College, University of Delhi, India
Email: vinitamihir@gmail.com

https://doi.org/10.59009/ijlllc.2025.0124

## ABSTRACT

In The Satanic Verses Rushdie constructs identities for the post-Independent India and the previous colonizer Britain. This article attempts a reading of The Satanic Verses to interrogate its construction of an `Indian' identity through its representation of India and the immigrant community in Britain. One of the striking differences in Rushdie's portrayal of India and Britain is the distinct narrative techniques he uses to construct these two spaces. The sections of the novel set in India, especially those dealing with social, political and economic issues, are written mostly in the mode of social realism, and narrative technique of magic realism that is now termed `Rushdiesque' is employed to great effect in the portrayal of Britain. The dynamism of Rushdie's magic realism in comparison with his use of social realism is seen most clearly in the way that he treats the subject of hybridity in the different spaces of the metropolitan center and as compared to the use of social realism to portray post-colonial India. The Satanic Verses embodies many of the characteristics considered emblematic of post-colonial fiction in its narrative of displacement, hybridity, crisis of identity and feelings of alienation and angst. The sections of the novel that are set in Britain portray powerfully the continuation of the oppression of previously colonized peoples by the racist ideology of the dominant culture and the enduring power of the white race to construct its superiority of Self through the debasement of the Other. The novel also eloquently represents the disruption of the western center by the invasion of the previously marginalized, and the affirming hybridity that accompanies this post-colonial phenomenon. But at the same time The Satanic Verses also constructs a national identity for India that shares in many of these characteristics, even though he does not make the structural connections between its pluralistic nature and the violence that ensues from it which he decries.

**Keywords**: Post Colonial Fiction, Salman Rushdie, The Satanic Verses, immigrant narratives, constructing national identities, magic realism.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Salman Rushdie became an international name in literature and academia with the publication of *Midnight's Children* in 1981, but the controversies that erupted after the publication of *The Satanic Verses* in 1988 ensured that discussions of his writings could not be dissociated from the writer himself, After the banning of the novel in India, and the fatwa being issued against him, Salman Rushdie's figure became emblematic of the intricate, multi-layered, shifting discourse of post-coloniality. His persona in an exiled existence itself became a text to be read alongside his novels. The response to *The Satanic Verses* has provoked a militant debate through much of the world, a debate that has forced a complex negotiation of a plethora of issues by those involved in it discursively. One of the more fruitful results of the conflicted response to the novel was the discussion that emerged about post-coloniality and its relation to issues of location, representation, migrancy, legitimacy, authenticity, religious fundamentalism vs `cosmopolitanism' and

Vol. 04, No. 03; 2025
ISSN: 2583-6560

responsibility on the part of writers and audiences. In recent times the lifting of the ban on *The Satanic Verses* in India and the unfortunate attack on the author while giving a lecture in USA has reopened a discussion of the man and his work as a post-colonial novelist.

The debate about post-colonial fiction and its politics of representation becomes crucial in a period when Western countries, many of them previous colonial powers, are fighting internal political battles on the issue of immigration and the changing demography of their nations, which in turn is impacting the rest of the world. It is, therefore, useful to go back to *The Satanic Verses* to do a close reading of those parts of the novel that did not get much attention as they were not connected to the controversy of being anti-Islamic, namely, Rushdie's construction of identities for the post-Independent India and the previous colonizer Britain. The charge against Rushdie of being an `outsider' to India who stakes a fragile claim to authenticity of representation is offset by a large reading public within India that delights in his work, and a following of writers in English who have been inspired by his style in *Midnight's Children*. I will attempt a reading of Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* to interrogate his construction of an `Indian' identity through his representation of India and the immigrant community in Britain.

## 2. HYBRID AND HETEROGENEOUS REPRESENTATION OF IDENTITIES

Many of you in Britain speak of victimization. Well, I have not been there. I don't know your situation, but in my personal experience I have never been able to feel comfortable about being described as a victim. In class terms, obviously, I am not. Even speaking culturally, you find here all the bigotries, all the procedures associated with oppressor groups. So while many Indians are undoubtedly oppressed, I don't think any of *us* are entitled to lay claim to such a glamorous position. (518)

Salman Rushdie's representation of India and Britain in *The Satanic Verses* is a complex one based on a multiplicity that is grounded in material conditions rather than a simplistic, polarized construction of these two spaces. The words of the above quote from the novel are spoken by Bhupen, a character who is a poet, a journalist, and a political activist, and they articulate Rushdie's perception of the heterogeneity of positions occupied by Indians as both natives and immigrants. The quote also carries within it a two-pronged warning; one, against collapsing the differences that arise from economic and social disparities within the large, diverse population of India when constructing an Indian identity, and the other against the temptation to inhabit the "glamorous" role of victim when articulating a *trans*national identity for India as the 'Third World', peripheral to the western center. In foregrounding India's internal politics of oppression and aggression, Rushdie is pre-empting the nostalgic move often made by the immigrant narrative of returning home, which is what *The Satanic Verses* is about at one level, a move that attempts to recover an idealized, often romanticized, pure space of origin and belonging in opposition to the hybrid, alien existence caused by the dislocation of immigration.

Reflecting on his position in writing this novel, Rushdie discusses, in an interview in *New York Times*, the hybridity of his own identity as paradigmatic of the global population:

> In writing *The Satanic Verses* I think I was writing for the first time from the whole of myself. The English part, the Indian part. The part of me that loves London, and the part that longs for Bombay. But most of the time, people will ask me - will ask anyone like me - are you Indian? Pakistani? English? What is being expressed is a discomfort with a plural identity. And what I am saying to you - and saying in the novel - is that we have got to come to terms with this. We are increasingly becoming a world of migrants, made up of bits and fragments from here, there. We are here. And we have never really left anywhere we have been.

Vol. 04, No. 03; 2025
ISSN: 2583-6560

In an attempt to do justice to the complexity of this composite identity, *The Satanic Verses* whirls the reader through villages, towns and cities of India and England, and expresses itself multilingually in Arabic, Persian, Urdu, Turkish, Hindi, Sanskrit, standard English and, of course, the delightful "chutnification of English", in Agha Shahid Ali's words, "seasoning it so that the language itself seems surprised, delighted to find itself subcontinentalized" (295). Rushdie's targeted audience seems to be heterogenous as well, for he seldom stops to explain himself to the Westerner in using words, slang or events/places/names that need no annotation for the subcontinental audience. But at the same time it is evident that many aspects of his novel seem to have been written specifically for a Western readership, as in his occupation with issues that arise out of the troubled relationship of the West with the Islamic religion and culture, and also in very consciously writing back to the center and challenging its construction of the people of the subcontinent as subordinate, inferior and always Other.

## 3. MAGIC REALISM AND SOCIAL REALISM AS NARRATIVE TECHNIQUES

Rushdie's representation of India can be roughly divided in three sections: the turmoil of political and social upheavals in post-colonial India together with efforts of concerned citizens in attempting to resolve them in the chapters which deal with Saladin Chamcha in Bombay; the dominant role of spirituality and faith in the supernatural through the Ayesha chapters; and, finally, the larger than life existence of movies and film actors in the imagination of the Indian population through the Gibreel Farishta narrative. This representation of India is situated in a larger, international space through the portrayal of Britain's cross-cultural immigrant community and its socio-political-historical place within the dominant White metropolitan center. I will concentrate on Rushdie's portrayal of the socio-politico-economic reality of contemporary India in his construction of a (trans)national identity for the country through Chamchawalla and his friends, and attempt to place this representation against that of the social and political depiction of Britain through Chamcha and the immigrant community

One of the striking differences in Rushdie's portrayal of India and Britain is the distinct narrative techniques he uses to construct these two spaces. The sections of the novel set in India, especially those dealing with social, political and economic issues, are written mostly in the mode of social realism. Rushdie reports events that are taking place in the conflicted political climate of the country and tries to place them in a socio-historic background. He attempts to bring to life his place of birth, Bombay, by giving concrete details of places and particularities of its culture. In his interview with Amrit Dhillon in *India Today* Rushdie says that *The Moor's Last Sigh* is the first book he has written without going to India; "Fortunately for me, on the many visits I have made before, I have kept very detailed notes, journals and diaries" (138). It is on these concrete, journalistic details that Rushdie mainly relies in his narrative technique of social realism to depict the climate of contemporary India. The sections of Ayesha and The Parting of the Arabian Sea are constructed more like a spiritual narrative with the emphasis on miracles of faith, but there is no radical departure from social realism in these sections either. The narrative technique of magic realism that is now termed `Rushdiesque' is employed to great effect in the portrayal of Britain which is dominated by the figure of Saladin-the-goat.

The dynamism of Rushdie's magic realism in comparison with his use of social realism is seen most clearly in the way that he treats the subject of hybridity in the different spaces of the metropolitan center and post-colonial India. Rushdie tries to foreground the multiple identities that *all* peoples, not just immigrants from one culture to another, inhabit. But the implications of this hybridity seem to differ from one space to another. Thus, if India's hybridity is portrayed theoretically through Zeenat Vakil's book on the subject of Aryan, Mughal and British influences on India's identity, then Britain's suppressed plural identity is narrated through the fantastical

Vol. 04, No. 03; 2025
ISSN: 2583-6560

dreams of Rosa Diamond, its history played out through her timeless existence. Similarly, while political and social atrocities that arise from India's multi-ehtinic population and religious plurality are represented through newspapers and coffee-house discussions, Britain's handling of its hybridity through racist ideology is brought to the fore through the transformation of Saladin into a goat. Rushdie's dependance on concrete details and facts in his attempt to make an "authentic" representation of contemporary Indian reality thus results in a sanitized version of Indian hybridity. At the same time, by allowing the play of imagination in his portrayal of the immigrant community in Britain through magic realism he is able to portray the conflicted nature of multiple identities.

One of the limitations of Rushdie's use of social realism in his representation of India, then, is that he is restricted, for the main part, to reporting or describing political and social circumstances, albeit from a certain perspective; there is little engagement with these events beyond that of sympathy and criticism. On the other hand, his use of magic realism in portraying the socio-political oppression of the immigrant community in London is brilliant in its effect of foregrounding the ideology, history, politics and acts of resistance that encompass it. Saladin's metamorphosis into a goat which keeps growing in size until he bursts out of the room is enormously effective in exposing the way stereotypes function in an imperialistic society. In ` The Other Question--the Stereotype and Colonial Discourse ' Homi Bhabha writes,

> It is the force of ambivalence that gives the colonial stereotype its currency: ensures its repeatability in changing historical and discursive conjunctures; informs its strategies of individuation and marginalization; produces that effect of probabilistic truth and predictability which, for the stereotype, must always be in *excess* of what can be empirically proved or logically construed. (149)

Rushdie grasps the excess on which the stereotype rests and then disrupts it by blowing it out of proportion with the "probabilistic truth" that it is supposed to portray, thus exposing the slipperiness of the "force of ambivalence" on which it relies. The figure of Saladin-the-goat is then able to function as a symbol of racist politics as well as the spirited resistance to it.

## 4. RUSHDIE'S INDIA: ZEENAT VAKIL AND MAHASWETA DEVI'S 'STANDAYINI'

The figure that Rushdie creates to serve as an embodiment of contemporary India is much more diminutive than that of the goat-Saladin. Although Rushdie presents the harsh socio-economic-political reality of contemporary India through the sensibility of Salahuddin Chamchawalla, who has immigrated to England and renamed himself Saladin Chamcha, the burden of this representation rests with Zeenat Vakil, who is consciously constructed as an important signifier of the country's post-Independence identity. The one reference to Zeenat's mother is that concerning her death due to breast cancer, and is one that is very similar to Mahasweta Devi's own reading of her short story, `Stanadayini'. Of Zeenat and Saladin's "first lovemaking", Rushdie writes,

> The first time he touched her breasts she spouted hot astounding tears, the colour and consistency of buffalo milk. She had watched her mother die like a bird being carved up for dinner, first the left breast, then the right, and still the cancer had spread. Her fear of repeating her mother's death placed her chest off limits. Fearless Zeeny's secret terror. She had never had a child but her eyes wept milk. (53)

The reference to the Partition of India, first Pakistan, then East Pakistan, and the Hindu-Muslim riots that engulfed the country in that period, but continue to erupt even today, are clear in the description of the cancerous death of Zeenat's mother. Spivak relates Mahasweta Devi's reading of `Stanadayini', in which the protagonist, symbolically named Jashoda, also dies of breast cancer:

> By Mahasweta Devi's own account, "Stanadayini" is a parable of India after

Vol. 04, No. 03; 2025
ISSN: 2583-6560

> decolonization. Like the protagonist Jashoda, India is a mother-by-hire. All classes of people, the post-war rich, the ideologues, the indigenous bureaucracy, the diasporics, the people who are sworn to protect the new state, abuse and exploit her. If nothing is done to sustain her, nothing given back to her, and if scientific help comes too late, she will die of consuming cancer. (244)

The child that Rushdie creates for this cancer-ridden mother is, then, significantly, an altruistic doctor, bringing "scientific help" to the country. Vakil - which is the Urdu word for lawyer but also means agent - also makes it her project to reclaim Chamcha's Indian self from the Anglicized British persona he has created. Since she is successful in this reclamation of the immigrant protagonist's `innate' Indianness through her values and actions that are portrayed as emblematically `Indian', her character is important in any interrogation of Rushdie's India.

Zeenat Vakil is one of the few characters in the novel who Rushdie does not undermine through the use of irony. She is portrayed as a woman "in her thirties [who] was a qualified doctor with a consultancy at Breach Candy Hospital, who worked with the city's homeless, who had gone to Bhopal the moment the news broke of the invisible American cloud that ate people's eyes and lungs" (52). She is thus an educated professional woman with a successful job - Breach Candy is one of the most famous hospitals in India - but uses her elite education and professionalism to help those who do not share her privileges. And above all this, as the reference to the Bhopal Union Carbide fatal gas leak accident illustrates, she has the courage and selflessness to rush into the face of danger at great personal risk in order to offer her services to the country. It is through Zeenat and her activist friends that Saladin - and the reader - is exposed to several materialist interpretations of India's myriad problems, as, for instance, in the coffee house discussion of communal strife in Assam which refers to economic, social, political and historical causes. The novel's section on contemporary India opens with the affirming representation of Zeenat as a conscience of the nation, and closes with the positive image of the human chain organized by the Communist Party of India (Marxist) as an act of solidarity and protest against the escalation of communal violence in Meerut.

Zeenat is also an advocate of Rushdie's philosophy of the ultimate hybridity of all peoples and cultures:

> She was an art critic whose book [was] on the confining myth of authenticity, that folkloristic straitjacket which she sought to replace by an ethic of historically validated eclecticism, for was not the entire national culture based on the principle of borrowing ...? (52)

The construction of Zeenat's character as a modern Indian woman is one that is equally hybrid, representative of the Rushdie's perception of Indian identity. While she stakes a claim of legitimacy for her position as an Indian in opposition to Saladin's hybridized British-Indian identity, she is still trained in, and makes her livelihood from, the western science of medicine; she dresses in western clothes, drives a car, and speaks only in that peculiar brand of Bombay English. Her book is called `The Only Good Indian', "Meaning, is a dead" as she explains to Saladin. "Why should there be a good, right way of being a wog? That's Hindu fundamentalism. Actually, we're all bad Indians. Some worse than others" (52).

Rushdie attempts to locate his representation of India in the material conditions of the contemporary social and political climate of the 1980s. He uses the very effective method of presenting this material mostly through newspaper headlines and city-wall graffiti. He foregrounds the social issues arising from the “war between men and women" in India through an account of the latest `bride suicide' from the *Indian Express*; and of the obsession with fair skin from the matrimonial ads in the papers that proudly offer brides of "wheatish" complexion. The Bofors armaments scandal that ultimately caused the Congress Party to lose the general elections,

Vol. 04, No. 03; 2025
ISSN: 2583-6560

the massacre of Muslims in Meerut, political turmoil in Kashmir, Hindu fundamentalism, corruption of the Imam, communal activity in the constabulary are all crammed together in the daily newspaper. "*Quench the Fire under our Breast*, the signboards cried. *Salute with Reverence those who met Martyrdom from the Bullets of the Polis*. Also: *Alas! Alas! Alas! Awak the Prime Minister!* And finally, the call to action: *Bandh will be observed*, and the date of the strike" (519). Rushdie thus effectively captures the atmosphere of scandal, corruption, social ills, political turmoil and religious conflicts through the condensed version of the newspaper; but the presentation of this material through the medium of journalism and the common man's graffiti functions to counter the effect of unmitigated misery and horror that is usually perceived as overwhelming much of the previously colonized countries, for it testifies to the forces *within* the country that are continually grappling and fighting with these issues through a vigilant press, concerned citizens and, as the reference to the strike illustrates, some sort of political action.

By focusing on the "counterforces at work" (538) through the political activism of Zeenat and her friends, Rushdie is able to move beyond the stereotypical representations of India as 'Third World' with the towering, insurmountable problems of poverty, political corruption, social backwardness and religious warfare. He is able to present these problems as products of specific socio-political circumstances, and thus able to avoid the trap of universalizing them into *the* stereotypical 'Third World' condition. And to some extent, he is also able to present the existence, and therefore the possibility, of alternatives to the problems that plague the country. Thus, if he exposes the discrimination faced by dark skinned women in the marriage market, and the powerlessness of women in general in the Indian society, he also represents a strong, independent, dark skinned woman in Zeenat whose priority does not have to be marriage in order to gain economic security and social acceptance.

## 5. SALAHUDDIN/SALADIN

Through the figure of Salahuddin/Saladin, Rushdie links his representation of India in *The Satanic Verses* to his portrayal of the West and the immigrant's existence therein. If Rushdie foregrounds the harsh socio-political realities of contemporary India, he is also unflinching in his bleak portrayal of the existence of Asian/African immigrants in London, so that there is no easy valorization of one space over another in the form of the simplistic Self/Other binary that informed the writing of colonialist texts. His narrative exposes the impossibility of divorcing the immigrant's status in society from the pervasive dominant racist ideology that surrounds him. The institutionalized racism of this society thus determines the kind of work that the immigrants do professionally, and of course successfully constructs identities for them to which they are forced to conform. Rushdie's perception of the "rebirth" of the immigrant is far less compromising than that of Bhartai Mukherjee's in her immigrant narrative in *Jasmine*. Mukherjee's *Jasmine* was published a year after *Satanic Verses*, and of the immigrant population she writes, "We murder who we were so we can rebirth ourselves in the images of dreams" (29). For Rushdie the naive idealism of rebirthing in the "image of dreams" is inconceivable, nor is it possible for him to sever the two identities of the immigrant so neatly through death and rebirth. Rushdie's concept of the transformation of the immigrant's identity is more complex:

> A man who sets out to make himself up is taking on the Creator's role, according to one way of seeing things; he's unnatural, a blasphemer, an abomination of abominations. From another angle, you could see pathos in him, heroism in his struggle, in his willingness to risk: not all mutants survive. Or, consider him sociopolitically: most migrants learn, and can become disguises. Our own false descriptions to counter the falsehoods invented about us, concealing for reasons of security our secret selves. (49)

Vol. 04, No. 03; 2025
ISSN: 2583-6560

Rushdie portrays contemporary India through Salahuddin Chamchawalla and employs as his representative for present day London Salahuddin's Other, Saladin Chamcha. Saladin, who is actually an actor, is known as the Man of a Thousand Voices and works on television and radio using his gift of being able to reproduce any accent or voice required for characters in commercials and television series. When Zeenat first hears of his work she gasps between peals of laughter, "Those Angrez bastards. They really screwed you up. ...They pay you to imitate them, as long as they don't have to look at you. Your voice becomes famous but they hide your face. Got any ideas why?" (59-60)

And after the airplane crash which only Saladin and Gibreel survive, it is Saladin's fate to be transformed into a goat with horns, hooves, hairy torso and a tail. Saladin soon realizes that he is not alone in his transformation. He finds himself in a hospital surrounded by many other strange beings: a woman who is now mostly a water-buffalo, businessmen from Nigeria who have grown sturdy tails, a group of holidaymakers from Senegal who were turned into slippery snakes and a highly paid male model from Bombay transformed into a manticore among many others. "`But how do they do it?' Chamcha wanted to know. `They describe us,' the other whispered solemnly. `That's all. They have the power of description, and we succumb to the pictures they construct.'"(168). Rushdie thus uses magic realism with great success to exaggerate and deconstruct stereotypes created by the dominant White British society about their previously colonized Others, who have now invaded the master's domain and are asserting their rights as co-habitants of the country. The immigrant's rebirth is then not in the "image of dreams"; it is a much more complex negotiation with the roles and identities constructed for him by the dominant culture.

## 6. IMMIGRANT RESISTANCE TO INSTITUTIONAL RACISM

Rushdie's most arresting portrayal in *The Satanic Verses*, however, is that of his depiction of the immigrant community in London and in their systematic, professional, anti-establishment struggle to counter institutionalized racism against the immigrant population. When Dr. Uhuru Simba, a highly visible immigrant activist, is arrested on trumped up charges in the case of the Granny Ripper Murders, the entire immigrant community organizes itself to fight the injustice. Good lawyers are hired, evidence is collected from government organizations and meetings are held in "the Brickhall Friends Meeting House, packed wall-to-wall with every conceivable sort of person" (413) to decide on the course of action to be taken. This movement, however, has a much more comprehensive goal than just protesting the injustice of this particular case. Dr. Uhuru Simba tells the court,

> we are here to change things. I concede at once that we shall ourselves be changed; African, Caribbean, Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Cypriot, Chinese, we are other than what we would have been if we had not crossed the oceans, ...We have been made again: but I say that we shall also be the ones to remake this society, to shape it from the bottom to the top. We shall be the hewers of dead wood and the gardeners of the new. It is our turn now. (414)

Rushdie's construction of the struggle of the immigrant community against the hegemony of the White government then has at its foundation concrete, material, *effective* tools with which to conduct the battle accompanied by an ideology formed by an utopian vision of renewal and regeneration. His representation of the political activism of London's immigrants then stands in stark contrast to his much less substantial construction of the manner and outcome of political protest by Zeenat and her friends in India through symbolic actions such as the forming of the human chain. The utopian vision that Simba poetically articulates not only forms a goal to aim for

Vol. 04, No. 03; 2025
ISSN: 2583-6560

but also outlines the scope of the task to be undertaken, unlike the sporadic demonstrations to protest particular events that are organized by Zeenat's friends.

In spite of the fact that Rushdie's representation of post-Independence India as characterized through Zeenat is one that emphasizes the potential for change and hope, Zeenat herself is only a marginal character in the novel in comparison with the others. Rushdie puts little effort in developing her as a character beyond what is essential for her function in the novel as a symbol for the country's identity. She does not have the dynamism of, for instance, the Sufyan girls, Mishal and Anahita, who are representative of the hybrid identity of second-generation immigrants in London. Indeed, Zeenat and her friends, Bhupen and George, remain at the level of cardboard characters in spite of the specific Bombay/Left-wing activist details Rushdie lavishes on them, partly because the novel gives them little space in which to develop, even at the level of parody. George Miranda, the Marxist film-maker, in his stained kurta, and his girlfriend, Swatilekha who spouts theoretical pholosophy, are both familiar types of educated, elite left-wing activists. But Rushdie does not foreground their elitism, or the necessarily token nature of their political activism. They are among the few characters who remain static from their first appearance in the novel to its closure, and are thus restricted to the function of a set-piece, presenting, with little involvement with the rest of the narrative, a certain aspect of India.

The limitation of the narrative technique of social realism that Rushdie uses in his representation of India is most obvious when contrasting the stilted, heavy political conversations of Zeenat and her friends to the delightfully lively ones of Mishal and Anahita with Saladin-the-goat. Zeenat's friends' dialogues bear the burden of putting forward theories which their characters are not able to bring to life. Criticizing Bhupen's book of poems, George's girlfriend, Swatilekha, who reminds Salahuddin of Mishal Sufyan, says,

> `These days...our positions must be stated with crystal clarity. All metaphors are capable of misinterpretation.' She offered her theory. Society was orchestrated by what she called *grand narratives*: history, economics, ethics. In India, the development of a corrupt and closed state apparatus had `excluded the masses of the people from the ethical project'. As a result, they sought ethical satisfaction in the oldest of the grand narratives, that is, religious faith. `But these narratives are being manipulated by the theocracy and various political elements in an entirely retrogressive way.' Bhupen said: `We can't deny the ubiquity of faith. If we write in such a way as to pre-judge such belief as in some way deluded or false, then are we not guilty of elitism, of imposing our world-view on the masses?' (537)

This dialogue reads more like a political pamphlet than a conversation between characters with individual personalities. In contrast, Mishal Sufyan's declamations emerge from within the personality Rushdie creates for her; she speaks with passion, rebellion, daring, audacity:

> `Thatcherism has its effects,' she declaimed, while Chamcha, who no longer had the will or the words to argue with her, to speak of justice and the rule of law, watched Anahita's mounting rage. - `No pitched battles these days,' Mishal elucidated. `The emphasis is on small-scale enterprises and the cult of the individual, right? In other words, five or six white bastards murdering us, one individual at a time.... It's our turf,' said Mishal Sufyan of that Street without a blade of grass in sight. `Let `em come and get us if they can.' (284)

Rushdie is clearly presenting a theory to explain the shift in the pattern of inter-racial hostilities in London, just as the dialogue between Bhupen and Swatilekha is meant to offer the different cases to be made for the exploitation of religious faith by the ruling powers along with its central importance to the masses. But while Bhupen and Swatilekha are merely given the role of putting forward two different arguments in a rather detached, sterile fashion, Mishal's declamation is

Vol. 04, No. 03; 2025
ISSN: 2583-6560

located within the structure of immigrant politics as they form part of the novel's plot, and her involvement with it. By the time her declamation comes to an end, she and her sister are rolling on the floor and pulling out each other's hair because Anahita accuses her of frequenting the Hot Wax disco, the den of rebellious immigrant activity, where Saladin finally turns back from goat to human being.

The physical fight between the two sisters is also symbolic of Rushdie's dynamic representation of the contradictions and conflicts between cultural and political viewpoints within the immigrant community, and the process of struggle and suppression that lies behind the multi-faceted identity of this community. The friction and struggle for power within this community, its internal politics, is referred to a number of times, and this background makes much more effective its unity under a common cause. The scene of the sisters' fight ends with Chamcha concluding, "*Trouble brewing*," and Rushdie is thus able to interrogate the predicaments of this community rather than merely reporting them. Swatilekha and Bhupen's argument ends with Zeenat pacifying an angry Bhupen, and Swatilekha apologizing for having "too much college education" (537). Through this harmonious co-existence of divergent political views, Rushdie circumvents addressing domestic India politics and the manner in which they function to exclude and suppress on the one hand and impose homogeneities on the other.

This differing mode of representation of the two spaces is not confined to the portrayal of contemporary politics; Rushdie's perception of the histories of the two nations is based on the same premises. Through Gibreel and Rosa Diamond Britain's history is exposed as one constructed consciously as a continuist national-historical narrative by the ruling elite, suppressing the voices of the minorities, of the marginalized. Rushdie uses Gibreel as the Angel Azraeel, Rosa Diamond's dreams of Argentina and the activist politics of the immigrant community to reveal the conflicted nature of the space in which these different histories and identities clash and grapple with each other in order to be heard. In contrast, India's hybridity and multiplicity, which is presented mainly through Zeenat's ideology, is idealized as harmonious, balanced, uncontested. Zeenat's book claims that "the entire national culture [was] based on the principle of borrowing what-ever clothes seemed to fit, Aryan, Mughal, British, take-the-best-and-leave-the-rest"(52). Commenting on Rushdie's "essentially plural or secular concept of Indianness" in *Midnight's Children*, Kumkum Sangari comments in her essay, `The Politics of the Possible', that he "even appears at times to grasp Indianness as if it were a torrent of religious, class and regional diversity rather than a complex articulation of cultural difference, contradiction, and political use that can scarcely be idealized". (239)

## 7. DISPERSING AND INTEGRATING

In his reading of this novel Bhabha concentrates on the unsettling of the national-historical narrative of Britain by the disruptive presence of the post-colonial subject and the resulting "emergence of a hybrid national narrative" (318). His analysis is based on the character of Gibreel Farishta, whose post-colonial mimicry in masquerading in the ex-colonizer's clothes exposes the cracks and absences of Britain's continuist national history. Bhabha poetically concludes this essay by saying, "If I began with the scattering of the people across countries, I want to end with their gathering in the city. The return of the diasporic; the postcolonial" (319). Since Bhabha's aim here is to debunk the myth of pure origin of the nation through the disruptive, redefining presence of the marginalized post-colonial subject in the Western center and the recognition of hybridity and multiplicity that this entails, he disregards the oppositional move that Rushdie makes in his creation of Saladin's character and his construction of India's hybridity which is not perceived as a post-colonial phenomenon. Zeenat's references to India's Aryan, Mughal *and* British past in locating its hybrid nature, and Saladin's father's ancient art collection of *Hamza-nama* cloths in

Vol. 04, No. 03; 2025
ISSN: 2583-6560

which "you could see the Persian miniature fusing with Kannada and Keralan painting styles, you could see Hindu and Muslim philosophy forming their characteristically late-Mughal synthesis" (70) point to Rushdie's perception of India's *fundamentally* hybrid nature. Zeenat's theory of the hybridity of the Indian identity dating back to the coming of the Aryans is not an unfamiliar one within India where the multiple differences in language and culture are too obvious to be disregarded, and attempts by more powerful groups to create any kind of monolithic identity has always been decried as fundamentalist. The discourse of difference is then not as radical or unsettling to constructions of nationhood in India as it is in the postcolonial Britain that Bhabha speaks of. Saladin's rejection of his British-Indian identity as a disguise or mask rather than an internalized integration of the two cultures in his journey home, though less representative of the immigrant's narrative, forms the novel's conclusion, and reverses Bhabha's move of the gathering of dispersed people in the cities in *his* closure of `DissemiNation' :

> Zeeny's re-entry into his life completed the process of renewal, of regeneration... His old English life, its bizarreries, its evils, now seemed very remote, even irrelevant, like his truncated stage-name. `About time,' Zeeny approved when he told her of his return to *Salahuddin*. `Now you can stop acting at last.'" (534)

Saladin's decision to return home to India functions on a multiplicity of planes, bringing together many of the concerns of the novel. At one level Saladin's rejection of his British-Indian creation in favor of his earlier Indian self serves to underline the connection between Rushdie's representation of the two sites in which these identities are located, as they are situated as alternatives to each other. Saladin's renunciation of his life as an immigrant in the First World in order to adjust to the myriad of problems associated with the Third World is then a telling commentary on the predicament of the population that ventures to make the move from margin to center. However, Rushdie is not really making a general sweeping statement about the desirability of living in India over London; that is, there is no valorization of one space over another inherent in Saladin's decision to return to his homeland. Rushdie is very careful to locate Saladin's decision within the narrative of class and economics. If Saladin chooses to return to the Third World, it is one in which he has inherited enormous property and wealth, and does not have to concern himself with the material details of finding a job or a house. Bhupen's words, quoted earlier in the paper, outline specifically the difference that class makes in the individual's position as victim according to where he is located. Saladin, who has been victimized in every possible manner in the West in spite of being a British citizen, belongs to the elite, privileged, and what is more important, wealthy class in India, what is commonly perceived as the oppressor class. His wealth and privilege allow him to be in the position of making a choice between India and London, one that is not afforded to most other Indians, and probably to very few immigrants. If *The Satanic Verses* is read at one level as a novel of coming back home, it also qualifies and circumscribes this narrative making it absolutely dependent on the structure of class as it exists in India and Britain. The narrative of the desirability of making the move from the First World back to the Third World would have little to stand on if this class structure were to be dismantled.

## 8. CONCLUSION

Rushdie's portrayal of Indian political activism against atrocities and injustice and the miracle of spiritual faith then conclude with equal pessimism, foreclosing the avenues of change that Uhuru Simba's Utopic speech so eloquently opens out for the immigrants in Britain. Rushdie's construction of the "counterforces at work" against the communal strife and political corruption in India is based on the actions of individuals rather than the institutions on which the country is structured. His style of reporting events in a journalistic manner instead of engaging with the conflicted social and political spaces from which they emerge prevents him from being able to

Vol. 04, No. 03; 2025
ISSN: 2583-6560

represent the possibility of change in socio-political unrest on a more broad based, permanent scale, as he is able to do successfully in his representation of activist politics in England. His positive narratives of spiritualism and political activism are founded on the idealism of the individuals involved and are therefore bound to be ultimately ineffectual in bringing about any real change in material terms. In absence of any plausible alternative to those presented through spiritualism and political activism, the majority of the population can thus only turn to the celluloid glamour of movies represented by Gibreel Farishta and the vicarious pleasure of living through the scandals of movie stars in order to find relief from their problems. The most viable alternative to the nation's predicaments seems to be simply striving to forget them through the silver screen. In spite of the affirmative representation of many aspects of India in this novel of journeying back home, the only positive outcome that Rushdie's narrative constructs is in the "regeneration" and "renewal" of Salahuddin through his stay in the country, and his decision to return home.

*The Satanic Verses* embodies many of the characteristics considered emblematic of post-colonial fiction in its narrative of displacement, hybridity, crisis of identity and feelings of alienation and angst. The sections of the novel that are set in Britain portray powerfully the continuation of the oppression of previously colonized peoples by the racist ideology of the dominant culture and the enduring power of the white race to construct its superiority of Self through the debasement of the Other. The novel also eloquently represents the disruption of the western center by the invasion of the previously marginalized, and the affirming hybridity that accompanies this post-colonial phenomenon. But at the same time, *The Satanic Verses* also constructs a national identity for India that shares in many of these characteristics, even though he does not make the structural connections between its pluralistic nature and the violence that ensues from it which he decries. 40 years after the novel first appeared the issue of the hybrid identities of immigrants either displaced from their homes or migrating for a better life to the previous colonizing countries in the West has become far more vexed with both resistance to racism and racist policies becoming forces to reckon with. Decades after decolonization across much of the globe the unequal equation of power between what came to be known as First and Third worlds after decolonization remains and Rushdie's work and the field of post-colonial studies thus urgently need to engage discursively with these issues.

**REFERENCES**

[1] Rushdie, Salman. *Midnight's Children.* Jonathan Cape, 1981.
[2] Rushdie, Salman. *The Satanic Verses.* The Consortium, Inc., 1992.
[3] Marzorati, Gerald. "Salman Rushdie: Fiction's Embattled Infidel." *The New York Times*, 29 Jan. 1989, sec. 6, pp. 24, 353.
[4] Ali, Agha Shahid. `The Satanic Verses: A Secular Response.' *The Yale Journal of Criticism,* 4.1 (1990): 295-300.
[5] Dhillon, Amrit. `Interview of the Fortnight: Salman Rushdie.' *India Today,* September 30, 1995: 136-139.
[6] Bhabha, Homi. `The Other Question--the Stereotype and Colonial Discourse.' *Screen* 24.6 (1983): 18-36.
[7] Spivak, Gayatri. *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics*. New York: Routledge, 1988.
[8] Mukherjee, Bharati. *Jasmine*. Grove Press, 1989.
[9] Sangari, Kumkum. 'The Politics of the Possible'. *Cultural Critique*, no.7, 1987, pp. 157–86. *JSTOR*, https://doi.org/10.2307/1354154.
[10] Bhabha, Homi. `DissemiNation: Time, Narrative and the Margins of the Modern Nation.' *Nation and Narration.* Ed. Homi K. Bhabha. London: Routledge Press, 1991. 291-322.