

Islamic Postcolonialism

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*Islam and Muslim Identities
in Four Contemporary British
Novels*

By

Hasan Saeed Majed

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INTRODUCTION

ISLAM AND POSTCOLONIALISM

It could be argued that Islam is among the first to benefit from postcolonial theory. The writings of Frantz Fanon and Edward Said, which provide the solid foundation of postcolonialism, contain many of the themes and ideas that Islam calls for. Fanon's work is highly critical of racism and colonialism and calls for equality and freedom; he writes against colonialism, paying more attention to its psychological aspects. Edward Said, on the other hand, writes about Islam with specific focus on the cultural facets of colonialism. Fanon's psychologically and Said's culturally oriented writings aim at freeing the colonised people from the inside so as to enable them to feel and think independently. This "inside independence" is fully supported by Islam: the religion that has refused to be colonised by western Christianity in the past and by western secularism today. In the colonial period, Fanon writes: "the struggle for national liberty [in the Arab World] has been accompanied by a cultural phenomenon known by the name of awakening Islam" (Fanon, 1997, pp. 95-96). Hand in hand, Islam and the national struggle were fighting against colonialism.¹

However, this relationship between Islam and postcolonialism² was challenged after the publication of Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*. It seems that the Rushdie affair sparked the debate over this relationship for different reasons. *The Satanic Verses*, first of all, which is for many Muslims an unacceptable attack on Islam, is the work of an identified postcolonial writer.³ Secondly, Edward Said, along with other postcolonial critics, supported Rushdie's novel and criticised Muslims' reaction against it. Writers like Said and Rushdie, before the publication of *The Satanic Verses*, were, in a sense, Islam and Muslims' defenders in the West; afterwards, they defended a discourse that attacked Islam. Disappointed by the new position of the postcolonial writers, certain Muslim writers, like Anouar Majid, attempted to delimit the scope of postcolonial theory and the reasons behind its support for Rushdie's book.

Amin Malak, Anouar Majid and Wail Hassan have written about the complicated contemporary relationship between Islam and postcolonialism. Malak refers to the “oddness” of the relationship. And while Majid seems to prefer the Islamic alternatives to the postcolonial ones, Hassan calls for the theorising of the postcolonial limitations and horizons. Amin Malak, in his book *Muslim Narratives and the Discourse of English*, writes, “it is odd that ‘postcolonial theory’ cannot offer insights about the activism of Islam, despite the fact that one of its seminal texts, Edward Said’s *Orientalism* ... is prompted and permeated by a challenge to the colonial representations of Islam as biased constructions whose corrosive corollaries are discernible today in multiple insidious fashions across diverse domains of power” (Malak, 2005, p. 17). In fact, Malak thinks that postcolonialism fails to take religion into account due to its secular stance. He believes that postcolonialism involves a “marginalization of religion as a force or factor with its own complex dynamics [which] reflects privileging a secular, Europe-American stance that seems to shape the parameters of postcolonial discourses” (p. 17).

The limitations of postcolonialism in relation to Islam are discussed by Anouar Majid in his article “Can the Postcolonial Critic Speak? Orientalism and the Rushdie Affair”. From the beginning, it seems that the postcolonial support given to Rushdie’s novel is the motivation behind his article. He informs us: “Gayatri Spivak, Akeel Bilgrami, and Edward Said were, for example, among the postcolonial critics who strongly protested Khomeini’s fatwa on Rushdie, exonerated Islam from such ‘bigoted violence,’ and reaffirmed their ‘belief in the universal principles of rational discussion and freedom of expression’ in a letter to the editor of the *New York Times* (17 Feb. 1989, A38)” (Majid, 1996, p. 8). He thinks that although Islam is a major part of the Rushdie affair, postcolonial critics’ knowledge of Islam is limited. For example, “Spivak, who had defended Islam against intolerance, had not read the most central text of Islamic cultures [the Qu’ran]” (p. 9). In addition, Akeel Bilgrami appears no better: “take the case of Akeel Bilgrami’s reading of the Islamic identity [...] What Bilgrami [as a moderate Muslim] does philosophically is precisely what the modern Orientalist discourse has been doing and continues to do to this day” (pp. 12-13). The postcolonial critics’ lack of Islamic knowledge accompanied by their expertise in western knowledge affects postcolonial theory. Majid believes that “postcolonial theory transforms itself into a discursive gesture that is simultaneously informed and co-opted by the very assumptions of western humanism it questions in

the beginning” (p. 11). As a result, postcolonial critics like Spivak and Said, “appear unsettlingly unreliable to many Muslims” (pp. 9-10).

By the same token Wail Hassan, in his article “Postcolonial Theory and Modern Arabic Literature: Horizons of Application”, focuses on postcolonial theory as western in its limitations, and claims this state of affairs needs to be theorised. He thinks that “postcolonial theory has developed out of four European traditions of thought: Marxism, psychoanalysis, poststructuralism, and feminism” (Hassan, 2002, p. 47). Being a European theory, postcolonial theory always runs the risk of being affected by neo-colonialism, colonial discourse and Eurocentrism. Regarding neo-colonialism, Hassan believes that postcolonial theory “seems to inscribe neo-colonial hegemony by privileging the languages (and consequently the canons) of the major colonial powers, Britain and France” (p. 46). Stretching his analysis, Hassan goes on to argue that postcolonial theory sometimes becomes worse than colonial discourse. “Indeed, in its very attempt to challenge western epistemology, postcolonial theory sometimes homogenizes Asia and Africa in more subtle ways than the older paradigms or colonial discourse itself” (p. 46). In addition, he accuses it of Eurocentrism: “postcolonial theory seems sometimes to deploy a sort of reverse-Eurocentrism. The almost complete reliance on the western tradition of antihumanist critique of metaphysics - from Nietzsche to Heidegger, Foucault, and Derrida - has meant that the ‘non-western’ Other remains inaccessible and unknowable” (p. 51). As a result, the role of postcolonial theory, for Hassan, is limited in the way it deals with issues related to Islam and the Arab World. He writes: “in its narrativizing of the ‘postcolonial world’, postcolonial theory - derived as it is from western secular anti-humanism - is in no better position to offer any deeper insights into the Arab world’s ‘cultural wars’ than the western media, since those wars are fought over the interpretation of Islam, not its decentralization or its deconstruction” (p. 56). He concludes that: “postcolonial theory needs to theorize its own limits and its own horizons” (p. 60).

In short, it could be inferred from the criticism of these three writers that the limited recognition of Islam in postcolonial theory is due to the western secular perspective of postcolonial theory. While this is a serious criticism of postcolonialism, it should not prevent us from combining postcolonial theory and Islamic perspectives nonetheless. Here it is important to differentiate between postcolonialism as a literary theory and the cultural backgrounds of the intellectuals who practise it. Regardless of

the western origin of postcolonialism,⁴ it is a literary theory that is open to be critiqued and developed by generating new dimensions to its spaces of study. I intend to argue that the role of Muslim writers should not only be to critique postcolonialism's secularism, but also to practise postcolonialism with the intention of stretching it so as to incorporate Islam, which is a major component of the identity and the native cultures of many countries in the non-western world. Indeed, in spite of their differences, Fanon the Marxist, the secular Said, and Spivak the feminist, each has their own cultural perspective by which he/she practises postcolonialism and develops it.⁵ It could be argued that postcolonialism is a neutral theory which could be practised by secular or Muslim intellectuals, though at present it is secular because those who practise it are secular. Instead of critiquing postcolonialism or the secular postcolonial writers for neglecting Islam or marginalizing it, Muslim writers could practise their own form of postcolonialism – Islamic postcolonialism – in which they emphasise the centrality of Islam in their postcolonial practice. Islamic postcolonialism could provide a new and challenging space for both postcolonial and Muslim writers.

In addition, postcolonialism provides Muslims with an appropriate theory by which to critique the western colonialism which once dominated their countries and still does so today. Hassan believes that “the enduring significance of postcolonial theory, to my mind, is that it has propelled issues of colonialism and imperialism to the forefront of critical and intellectual debates in the West, and succeeded in changing the assumptions of several fields of inquiry within the humanities and social sciences” (Hassan, 2002, p. 59). By rejecting postcolonialism, Muslims might lose the space it provides for them to participate in the process of changing the colonial assumptions which affect the prevailing images of Islam and Muslims in the contemporary world.

Multicultural London in Contemporary British Fiction

In this section I want to establish how much contemporary British fiction is inflected by multicultural and postcolonial perspectives. Sukhdev Sandhu in his book *London Calling* explains how black and Asian British writers like V.S. Naipaul, Jean Rhys and Frederick Douglass imagine London. He states that they “have told stories about black and Asian London from the eighteenth century to the present day” (Sandhu, 2003, p. xx). Despite this long history, these stories, however, were at first “considered ancillary, of minority interest” (p. xxii). London for such

writers is linked with difference. Back home they “were taught about London and its ‘correct meaning’ in tiny village schools thousands of miles away from the actual city whose reality proved to be rather different” (p. xxv). In addition, as a group of writers, they perceive London “in very different ways” (p. xxiii). In fact, “class, race, gender, historical context and personal psychology have all inflected their descriptions of the capital in large and unpredictable ways” (p. xxiii). Despite their differences, Sandhu sums up: “London has been good to people coming from the old Empire, just as they have been good for London” (p. xxvi).

Reflecting the diversity of contemporary British society, contemporary British fiction articulates different experiences and cultures. Since the 1970s, according to Peter Childs, “history and ethnicity have been the strong themes” (Childs, 2005, p. 278). Writing about history and ethnicity in a multi-ethnic and multicultural society leads to the exposure of different histories. Rod Mengham states that “it is one of the central paradoxes of contemporary British fiction that much of it – much of the best of it – is concerned with other times and other places” (Mengham, 2003, p. 1). The immigrant writers in London mirror their own times and the places they live in and write about the world within the diverse cultural spaces that London provides. “Novels of London immigrants are never simply about London: they are also about the homeland that connects to, contrasts with, or otherwise frames the new metropolitan world” (Ball, 2011, p. 237).

Multicultural London has therefore developed an increasingly significant presence in recent and contemporary British fiction. Ball observes that “London has always been a world city, a cosmopolitan place containing a mixture of national and racial others, but it became more and more visibly so over the postwar decades” (p.237). This shift, from a less to a more visible *cosmopolitan* London, informs the position of multiculturalism in contemporary British fiction. The more visible multicultural London becomes, the more multicultural British fiction becomes. As a consequence, multiculturalism has shifted from its previous marginality to its present centrality in contemporary British fiction. John McLeod notes that while in the 1950s and 1960s “multicultural representations of the city [London] constituted a minority or marginal strand in a wider literary landscape”, today “those writers or historians who have little or nothing to say about London’s humdrum diversity seem

increasingly out of touch with the city's history and fortunes" (McLeod, 2011, pp. 243-244).

In addition to multicultural diversity, a further dimension to contemporary British fiction is postcolonialism. If diversity centralises multiculturalism, postcolonialism challenges hegemonic superiorities. Postcolonial literature "has brought to the British novel ... new styles and Englishes" (Childs, 2005, p. 280) as well as new "issues such as decolonization, diaspora, and cultural diversity" (p. 280). In fact, as Nick Bentley observes, postcolonialism does not affect the literature of originally immigrant writers only: "Issues raised by colonial and postcolonial identity could... be extended to include the nations within the United Kingdom. To a certain extent, writers from Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have found themselves to be in a similar 'postcolonial' position in that distinct national literatures have sought to distinguish themselves from both English and the imposition of a homogenous 'British' culture" (Bentley, 2008, p. 19).

Is Rushdie a Colonial or Postcolonial Writer?

By writing *The Satanic Verses*, Salman Rushdie opened up a debate concerning the definitions of the colonial and the postcolonial writer. From an Islamic perspective, we might pose the question: is Rushdie himself a colonial or postcolonial writer? The answer is that in this postcolonial era, "a person can, and does, possess overlapping identities" (Ahmed, 2004, p. 263) and Rushdie is not an exception. By nationality he has been both Indian and British. Religiously or culturally, he is sometimes Muslim and sometimes not. These changing and unstable sites of identity are of course due to the conditions of possibility whereby they are invented. "Human identity", Edward Said thinks, "is not only not natural and stable, but constructed, and occasionally even invented outright" (Said, 1995, p. 332).

Rushdie "was born an Indian and has grown to be an Englishman – by education, place of residence and work, and in terms of his national affiliation" (Trivedi, 2000, p. 164). In India he dreamt of living in England and in England he missed India. As a child living in Bombay, he "wanted to come to England. I couldn't wait" (Rushdie, 1991e, p. 18). But then, after spending many years in England, he still considers India as his home: "It's my present that is foreign, and ... the past is home" (p. 9). For him Bombay is his "lost city" (p. 9), and India was the inspiration for writing

his celebrated novel *Midnight's Children*. Looking at his childhood house in Bombay, years after leaving it for England, Rushdie states: "that was when my novel *Midnight's Children* was really born; when I realized how much I wanted to restore the past to myself" (pp. 9-10).

Rushdie's religious identity is even more complex. His Indian family is Muslim, "but while both my parents were believers" (Rushdie, 1991a, p. 376), "I was never brought up as a believer, and was raised in an atmosphere of what is broadly known as secular humanism" (Rushdie, 1991d, p. 430). At this stage Rushdie is a secular Muslim. He was brought up to be so without, seemingly, any intent from his side. However, when he moved to England, he was able to re-invent his own identity. He reveals:

God, Satan, Paradise and Hell all vanished one day in my fifteenth year, when I quite abruptly lost my faith. I recall it vividly. I was at school in England by then. The moment of awakening happened, in fact, during a Latin lesson, and afterwards, to prove my new-found atheism, I bought myself a rather tasteless ham sandwich (Rushdie, 1991a, p. 377).

After being a secular Muslim in India, he is happy now to welcome his "new-found atheism" at the age of fifteen in England. "From that day to this, I have thought of myself as a wholly secular person, and have been drawn towards the great traditions of secular radicalism" (p. 377). Rushdie then clearly acknowledges: "I am not a Muslim" (Rushdie, 1991b, p. 405) "living in the aftermath of the death of god" (Rushdie, 1991c, p. 416).

Yet in spite of his atheism and radical secularism,⁶ Rushdie was at this time apparently aware of the importance of keeping a balance between the freedom he needed to write fiction and the freedom Indians and Muslims needed to live equally in a society affected by racism. In other words, he, as a writer, needs the freedom to write about anything – even Indians and Muslims; and Indians and Muslims, in their turn, need him to help voice their problems. He chooses at this point to perform the two tasks simultaneously. He practises his freedom in his own fiction and, on the other hand, struggles against immigrant discrimination publicly. Then come his two major novels, *Midnight's Children* and *The Satanic Verses*; these were not written from an exclusively Indian or Muslim point of view although they were coloured by them. *Midnight's Children* was written from a secular, not an Indian,⁷ point of view: "*Midnight's Children* enters its subject from the point of view of a secular man" (Rushdie, 1991e, p. 16). Likewise, *The Satanic Verses* was written from a secular, not a Muslim point of view: "*The Satanic Verses* is, in part, a secular's man

reckoning with the religious spirit” (Rushdie, 1991b, p. 396). Although this secular point of view in writing fiction might spark confrontation with devout Indians or religious Muslims, Rushdie insists on his individual freedom as a writer, at the same time as he tries to play his role of helping Indians or Muslims in the public sphere. He states: “Over the last fifteen years I have in fact shown myself to be an ally of Muslims, whether in Kashmir, or the rest of India, or Palestine or in Britain, where I have frequently written and broadcast against all forms of discrimination” (Rushdie, 1991d, p. 431).

The Satanic Verses and Khomeini’s fatwa forced Rushdie to invent, again, another religious identity by declaring his affiliation to Islam. As the fatwa was based on his apostasy from Islam, he thought, after meeting six Muslim scholars in London, that returning to Islam would protect him from being killed. In December 1990 he affirmed his entry “into the body of Islam after a lifetime spent outside it” declaring that “I am able now to say that I am Muslim” (p. 430). Just a year later, he changed his mind: “Rushdie was forced to realize he had made a mistake – incurring criticism on both sides. Almost inevitably, he had to renege on this ‘conversion’, which he did in an address at Colombia University on 12 December 1991” (Grant, 1999, p. 90). As a way of protecting himself from the rigorous criticism from both the western and the Muslim sides, he seemed to prefer not to be thought of as atheist or Muslim, but rather, as a secular Muslim.

These four identities (secularism, Islam, India and England) shape, though at different levels, the hybrid identity that eventually colours Rushdie’s fiction.⁸ Writing about the Indian writers in England, he explained: “We are Hindus who have crossed the black water; we are Muslims who eat pork. And as a result [...] we are now partly of the West. Our identity is at once plural and partial. Sometimes we feel that we straddle two cultures; at other times, that we fall between two stools” (Rushdie, 1991e, p. 15). As one of the “Muslims who eat pork”, Rushdie now is a practitioner of Indian secular Islam. In addition to conservative Islam, there is a traditional secular Islam in India. Feroza Jussawalla suggests: “Islam in India has historically been ‘secularized’ in ways in which it has never been secularized and reformed anywhere else. This ‘tradition’ of reforming or secularizing Islam, which has become synonymous with the practice of Islam in India, goes back to the Mughal Emperor Akbar (1556-1606)” (Jussawalla, 1996, p.57).

This hybrid identity gives Rushdie the right to speak as a westerner at some times and as an immigrant at others. Dealing with the issue of racism in Britain he writes to the white man as one of the immigrants: “British racism, of course, is not our problem. It’s yours. We simply suffer from the effects of your problem” (Rushdie, 1991f, p. 138). However, after the attacks in America, he adopts another voice.

The fundamentalist believes that we believe in nothing. [...] to prove him wrong, we must first know that he is wrong. We must agree on what matters: kissing in public places, bacon sandwiches, disagreement, cutting-edge fashion, literature, generosity, water, a more equitable distribution of the world’s resources, movies, music, freedom of thought, beauty, love. These will be our weapons. Not by making war, but by the unafraid way we choose to live shall we defeat them (Rushdie, 2002d, p. 393).

However, Rushdie’s hybrid identity does not mean that all his writings are inevitably hybrid. The topic of his writing is essential here. When writing against racism in Britain, for example, he writes from an Indian or an immigrant point of view and not from a hybrid one. When writing about “kissing in public places [and eating] bacon sandwiches” as “our weapons” to defeat fundamentalists, he writes as a western not hybrid writer. Therefore, despite the fact of Rushdie’s hybrid identity, he might write from a specific perspective which privileges one identity over the others. In writing about Islam and Muslims, Rushdie’s hybrid identity is superseded by an extreme western and secular identity.

The Satanic Verses is Rushdie’s most controversial novel and, for many Muslims, the work that re-invented the priorities of those identities⁹ which constitute his hybrid identity. Before the novel, he was a secular Asian Englishman writer inspired by Bombay, his lost city, and was happy to write about his imaginary homeland in *Midnight’s Children*. Before *The Satanic Verses*, he was one of those Indian immigrant writers in England who tried to accommodate to the new cultural environment. He showed himself as an ally to Indians, Muslims and Asians who were subjected to racism and discrimination. After *The Satanic Verses*, however, “Regrettably, Rushdie is no longer the voice of ‘third world’ agonies and an activist for persecuted minorities. Now [he is] a celebrity lavishing in elite lifestyle” (Malak, 2005, p. 109). This transformation occurred as “Rushdie subordinates the real anguish of Muslim believers to the titillation of his western readers” (Mazrui, 1990, p. 136).¹⁰

Ben Okri thinks *The Satanic Verses* “refuses to be read from a single angle” (Okri, 1990, p. 78), and Muslims themselves read it differently. Some Muslim intellectuals wrote in support of Rushdie and their writings were collected in the book, *For Rushdie*. In addition, Akeel Bilgrami, for example, in his article “Rushdie and the Reform of Islam” seems to see the conflict over *The Satanic Verses* as a conflict between Islam and progress: “recent history has shown Islam’s public profile to be a real threat to genuine and long-term progressive efforts” (Bilgrami, 1989, p. 175). Bilgrami was clear in stating that Khomeini, who issued the fatwa against Rushdie, is “the single most anti-Islamic person alive on this earth today” (p. 170). On the other hand, there are many other Muslim intellectuals who read Rushdie from another angle. Ali Mazrui in his article: “Satanic Verses or a Satanic Novel? Moral Dilemmas of the Rushdie Affair” thinks: “Salman Rushdie has been perceived by many Muslims as being guilty of cultural treason for writing *The Satanic Verses*. They consider that Rushdie has not merely rejected or disagreed with Islam: almost unanimously Muslims who have read the book have concluded that Rushdie has abused Islam” (Mazrui, 1990, p. 118).

Many Muslims have criticised or attacked the novel for the distorted image of Islam it presents; in addition some non-Muslim critics have foregrounded the Orientalist stereotypes used in the novel. Stephan Morton, for example, in *Salman Rushdie: Fiction of Postcolonial Modernity*, states that the novel attacks Islam and reinforces Orientalist stereotypes. He argues that “parts of the novel can be read as a thinly veiled, if ambivalent, attack on Islam and the Prophet” (Morton, 2008, p. 29). He also believes “for many critics of *The Satanic Verses* what was particularly offensive about the text was its tendency to rehearse Orientalist caricatures of Islam” (p. 62). The novel, then, “seems to reinforce Orientalist stereotypes of Islam rather than challenging them” (p. 64). According to Richard Lane in his study *The Postcolonial Novel*, “The chapters [*Mahound* and *Return to Jahilia*] utilize colonialist and, derogatory names: for example, ‘Mahound’ being an archaic way of referring to the Prophet Mohammed (derived from the sixteenth-century French Mahun) and ‘Jahilia’, the Arabic word for ‘barbarism’, being used by Rushdie with reference to Mecca” (Lane, 2006, p. 86). Moreover, along with many Muslims, Morton and Lane are not inclined to exonerate this attack on Islam as an exercise in literary fiction. For Morton, such justification is underwritten by secularism and colonialism. He writes: “to read *The Satanic Verses* as a work of literary fiction would thus seem to be to read the novel in terms of a secular cultural tradition, which is

imbricated in the history of European colonial modernity” (Morton, 2008. P. 67). Lane, however, reads the issue from a postcolonial perspective. He states:

The crude western journalistic answer to Muslim readers – which can be reduced to the formula or statement: ‘it’s just a novel’ – shows how there is a concomitant lack of awareness of the postcolonial novel as a vehicle for ideological and political resistance and change. In other words, if *The Satanic Verses* is ‘just a novel’, some kind of hermetically sealed purely self-referential device, then, bizarrely, that means that it can have no impact upon ideas and processes of being in the world (Lane, 2006, p. 84).

From an ideological perspective the novel is an attempt to discuss the issues of belief and unbelief, Islam and secularism, and by challenging Islam indirectly to privilege secularism. Islam is depicted as the negative other to positive secularism. The two historical characters, Salman the Persian and Baal, lose their faith (Islam for Salman and Al-Lat for Baal) and become atheist and secular. In addition, the two contemporary characters, Gibreel Farishta and Salahuddin Chamcha, were formerly Muslims who have lost their faith and become atheists. The point being promoted here is that apostasy and atheism are as old as Islam itself. Secularism is strongly linked with atheism in the novel. When Gibreel Farishta decides to leave Islam, “he loaded his plate with all of it [pork, hams, bacon] with the gammon steaks of his unbelief and the pig’s trotters of secularism” (Rushdie, 2006a, p. 29). Similarly, after his decision to embrace the secular, Salahuddin Chamcha feels that there is something inside him which “would boil away his childhood father-worship and make him a secular man, who would do his best, thereafter, to live without a god of any type” (p. 43). The negative depiction of Islam in the novel provides the justification for both to reject Islam.

Focusing on binaries between Islam and secularism is one of the techniques used in the novel, especially in the characterization of Salahuddin Chamcha. After becoming secular, Chamcha thinks: “I am a man to whom certain things are of importance: rigour, self-discipline, reason, the pursuit of what is noble without recourse to that old crutch, God. The ideal of beauty, the possibility of exaltation, the mind” (pp.135-136). Islam and secularism are opposites here. While Islam is “old”, the newness and modernity of secularism could be inferred. In addition, while secularism appreciates “beauty”, “reason” and “the mind”, it is implied that Islam does the opposite. Elsewhere in the novel, Islam is depicted as superstitious and secularism as the only viable option for the real world.

On Chamcha's way to London we are told: "this was precisely the type of superstitious flummery he was leaving behind. He was a neat man in a buttoned suit heading for London and an ordered, contented life. He was a member of the real world" (p. 74). The different ways of life of the secular Chamcha and his Muslim father are quite significant too. While Chamcha lives an active life by being a modern and civilized individual who graduated from London University and works as an actor, "his father's preoccupation with the supernatural had continued to deepen, until finally he had become a recluse, perhaps in order to escape this world in which demons could steal his own son's body, a world unsafe for a man of true religious faith" (p. 48). Islam destroys the life of Chamcha's father and this outcome justifies Chamcha's leave-taking from Islam and his embrace of secularism.

The conflict between Islam and secularism (or atheism) is represented by the conflict between the Prophet and Baal in addition to the conflict between the Imam and Ayesha. The conflict between Islam, represented by the Prophet himself, and Baal the atheist poet, is from the foundation years of the faith. At his trial, "Baal stood face to face with the Prophet, mirror facing image, dark facing light" (p. 391). Jailed and sentenced to death Baal still insists on his freedom to think and speak. "I recognize no jurisdiction except that of my Muse; or, to be exact, my dozen Muses" (p. 91). Writing "Muses" with capital "M" signals the holiness of muses for Baal in comparison to the holiness God represents for the Prophet. Before dying Baal tells the Prophet, "'whores and writers, Mahound. We are the people you can't forgive.' Mahound replied, 'Writers and whores. I see no difference here'" (p. 392). It is clear from this exchange that Islam here stands against the freedom which writers and whores try to practice in Mecca and which is of such great importance in a secular society. Moreover, Baal the poet is not the only person who fights for these freedoms; Hind, the well-known whore, does the same. To resist the attack of the Prophet and his followers, Hind "herself is prepared to fight beside [the people of Jahilia] and die for the freedom of Jahilia" (p. 371). Her relationship with the writers is exceptional as she "had slept with every writer in the city" (p. 361).

The conflict between Islam and secularism is not just historical; the conflict between the Imam and Ayesha is its contemporary version. Living in exile in London, "the bearded and turbaned Imam [is] frozen in time, translated into a photograph; denied motion" (p. 205). Ayesha, however, is an "icon [...] of a woman of exceptional force [...] a powerful woman, his

enemy, his other [and] they plot each other's deaths" (p. 206). They cannot live peacefully together. Ayesha has her own state and her own crimes and the Imam calls his people to rise against her state. It is:

A revolt not only against a tyrant, but against history. For there is an enemy beyond Ayesha, and it is History herself. [...] History the intoxicant, the creation and possession of the Devil, of the great Shaitan, the greatest of the lies -- progress, science, rights -- against which the Imam has set his face. History is a deviation from the Path, knowledge is a delusion, because the sum of knowledge was complete on the day Al Lah finished his revelation to Mahound (p. 210).

The Imam and Ayesha, Islam and secularism, are opposites. The Imam, who could be seen as a fictional version of Khomeini and his revolution, are not against the Shah and America only; they are against history, too. Islam here is shown as the Imam who "denied motion" (p. 205) and revolts against "progress, science [and] rights" (p. 210).

One of the techniques used in the novel to undermine Islam is to challenge and insult its sacred and holy pillars: God, the Prophet and the Quran. The depiction of God in *The Satanic Verses* is influenced by two ideas. First, "the death of God" (p. 16) and second, "where there is no belief, there is no blasphemy" (p. 380). Here there are two stages: the novel tries to undermine the idea of the very existence of God in the first stage. It sometimes describes God as only "thin air" (p. 30) and sometimes as "a ghost" (p. 368). At this stage, there is no God, or, as mentioned above, it is the stage of "the death of God" (p. 16). In the second stage, however, the novel tries to trivialise the idea of believing in God as a way of justifying or calling for the idea of unbelief. The focus here is not on God's existence; it is on the descriptions of God. Blasphemy, in the novel, is a result of unbelief and as there is no belief in God, so there is no need to show respect to God or religion. However, blasphemy could be seen as a technique used to confiscate the belief of the believers by depicting what the novel shows as negatives of God. In other words, imaging God negatively is not just a result of unbelief; it is an indirect way of calling the believers to embrace unbelief by trivialising their belief in God. According to the novel, God is "cruel" and "vicious". When Mishal is suffering from cancer, "the location of the cancer had proved to [her] the cruelty of God, because only a vicious deity would place death in the breast of a woman whose only dream was to suckle new life" (p. 232). In addition, God is described as a God of "vengeance" and "revenge". When Gibreel Farishta

is ill, he thinks “enough, God, his unspoken words demanded, why must I die when I have not killed, are you vengeance or are you love?” (p. 30). And after losing his faith in God, “Mr. Gibreel Farishta on the railway train to London was once again seized as who would not be by the fear that God had decided to punish him for his loss of faith by driving him insane” (p. 189). This kind of negative depiction of God in fact goes back to the first days of Islam. God at that time was described as “the Destroyer of Men” (p. 373) and Hind told the Prophet “Yours is a patronizing, condescending lord” (p.121).

In addition to the secular/atheist attack on religion Rushdie mounts against Islam, he also deploys Orientalist denigration of the Prophet in the novel. He is “Dajjal” (p. 371) and a “false prophet” (p. 371) and the way he is depicted amounts to proof of this insult. His not being a proper prophet justifies dealing with him like any other person without feeling the need to accord him respect. In fact, the mere employment of insult is, in itself, a technique used to show the Prophet is false. The Prophet here is denied respect because he is not a prophet. From the beginning, the Prophet was unable to differentiate between revelation and insanity. “When he first saw the archangel [he] thought he was cracked [and] wanted to throw himself down from a rock” (p. 92) and it was Khadija, his first wife, “who convinced him that he was not some raving crazy but the Messenger of God” (p. 321). Khadija’s viewpoint is crucial and without it the Prophet would not have thought himself a prophet – in fact the whole religion would have been false if Khadija’s viewpoint had been incorrect. In addition, at times the Prophet cannot differentiate between the Devil and Gibreel the archangel. One day “he [is] tricked, that the Devil came to him in the guise of the archangel” (p.123). In addition, apart from the revelation, the Prophet’s belief in God is depicted as weak. Gibreel says: “Mahound comes to me for revelation, asking me to choose between monotheist and henotheist alternatives” (p.109). And as a result of his failure to convince people to follow Islam in the beginning, “misery infects [him and he] has been shaken” (p. 107). A true prophet cannot operate with such a weak personality and this low level of belief. The Prophet is described as “a magician - nobody could resist his charm” (p. 367) and, as Salman the Persian puts it: “the closer you are to a conjurer, [...] the easier to spot the trick” (p. 363). Not only is he a false prophet or a magician, “he is not to be trusted” (p. 371) and without honour too. While the Prophet was preparing to attack Jahilia (Mecca), Hind wonders “Can honour be expected of a man who is preparing to storm the city of his birth?” (p. 371)

Though the so-called 'Satanic verses' appear in a few early Arabic sources the term was revived by western Orientalist scholars, notably the missionary William Muir in his biography of the Prophet (1858). The incident of the Satanic verses functions in the novel as proof of the ability of the Devil to insert his own verses into the Quran which eventually question the holiness of the whole Quran itself. To resolve the conflict between the believers and the unbelievers in Jahilia (Mecca), Abu Simbel, the leader of the unbelievers, suggests that the Prophet admits the goddesses Al-Lat, Manat and Uzza. The Prophet discusses the issue with his close friends and clarifies that "It is not suggested that Allah accept the three as his equals. Not even Lat. Only that they be given some sort of intermediary, lesser status [and in return] all Jahilia's souls will be ours" (p. 107). His friends suggest that he asks Gibreel. In a gathering consists of the believers and the unbelievers, the Prophet brings the answer:

At this point, without any trace of hesitation or doubt, he recites two further verses. 'Have you thought upon Lat and Uzza, and Manat, the third, the other?' -- After the first verse, Hind gets to her feet; the Grandee of Jahilia is already standing very straight. And Mahound, with silenced eyes, recites: 'They are the exalted birds, and their intercession is desired indeed.' As the noise -- shouts, cheers, scandal, cries of devotion to the goddess Al-Lat -- swells and bursts within the marquee (p. 114).

After a while, however, the Prophet discovers that "he has been tricked, that the Devil came to him in the guise of the archangel, so that the verses he memorized, the ones he recited in the poetry tent, were not the real thing but its diabolic opposite, not godly, but satanic" (p. 123). The main point here is that the Prophet could be tricked by the Devil. This means that the Quran is not fully sacred and there might be some other satanic verses which are not yet discovered. The infallibility of the holiness of the whole Quran is therefore challenged here.

In addition to the satanic verses, the role of Salman the Persian in writing the Quran provides another possibility of tricking the Prophet. In the novel, Salman is the writer of the revelation, another example of Rushdie deploying an idea of Orientalist provenance. However, "when he sat at the Prophet's feet, writing down rules rules rules, he began, surreptitiously, to change things. [...] Here's the point: Mahound did not notice the alterations. So there I was, actually writing the Book, or rewriting, anyway, polluting the word of God with my own profane language" (p. 367). In short, as Salman confesses, "I was writing the Revelation and nobody was noticing" (p. 368). Although the Prophet

eventually discovers what Salman has been doing, the incident, as mentioned in the novel, gestures toward several different points which together tend to challenge the holiness of the Quran. The first is that the Devil is not the Prophet's only enemy or challenger; that his close friends could do what the Devil could not. Secondly, the revelation is undermined from beginning to end by the Devil and Salman. Thirdly, if Salman could insert his own words into the Quran while being with the Prophet himself, then anyone could insert their own words after the death of the Prophet.

In addition to its attack on the sacred in Islam, the novel presents Islam as women's oppressor following and confirming Orientalists' claim on this issue. The position of women in Islam is depicted in the novel through the relationship between the Prophet and his own wives or other women. Sitting with Baal, Salman the Persian relates what happens between the Prophet and his wife Ayesha one day:

That girl couldn't stomach it that her husband wanted so many other women. He talked about necessity, political alliances and so on, but she wasn't fooled. Who can blame her? Finally he went into -- what else? -- one of his trances, and out he came with a message from the archangel. Gibreel had recited verses giving him full divine support. God's own permission to fuck as many women as he liked. So there: what could poor Ayesha say against the verses of God? You know what she did say? This: 'Your God certainly jumps to it when you need him to fix things up for you.' Well! If it hadn't been Ayesha, who knows what he'd have done, but none of the others would have dared in the first place.' Baal let him run on without interruption. The sexual aspects of Submission exercised the Persian a good deal: 'Unhealthy' he pronounced. 'All this segregation. No good will come of it' (p. 386).

This conflict between the Prophet and his wife summarises the complicated position of women in Islam according to the novel. There are two perspectives here: the male and the female. From his perspective, the Prophet wants to marry a lot of women for "political" reasons. For Ayesha, however, this is unacceptable and unjustifiable. Until now and before the divine support, the conflict is imaged as a normal one between a man or a politician and his wife. In other words, these are the normal or the natural positions of a man and a woman. The divine support for the Prophet's viewpoint, then, comes at the expense of the natural position of women as represented by Ayesha. Ayesha's angry reaction against the divine support could be read as an expression of the inability of Islam to understand her natural viewpoint as a woman. As Salman said, Islam in this depiction is accused of "segregation". Moreover, the divine support

for the Prophet's viewpoint might signal that God, over the issue of women, supports what males prefer without interfering to bring change. In other words, God supports the Prophet when the Prophet should be the one who follows the divine decrees. The position of women in Islam, then, is essentially established by the Prophet who receives "permission to fuck as many women as he liked". Another point is that Ayesha, despite being one of the Muslims' mothers according to the Quran, could not accept the Prophet's viewpoint which means that even devout Muslim women are against their position in Islam. As a result, it could be inferred that the issue of women in Islam is not linked with devoutness; it is linked with being women. In short, women, regardless of their level of belief and their closeness to the Prophet, are against the position of women in Islam.

In contrast to Ayesha's clear (theoretical) resistance, some Muslim women have no choice but to accept polygamy, especially given that the Prophet uses God to justify his stand on women and to make them submit. Salman the Persian explains: "The point about our Prophet [...] is that he didn't like his women to answer back, he went for mothers and daughters, think of his first wife and then Ayesha: too old and too young, his two loves. He didn't like to pick on someone his own size" (p. 366). Therefore, when the women in Mecca begin to be more independent like the women in Yathrib, "the angel starts pouring out rules about what women mustn't do, he starts forcing them back into the docile attitudes the Prophet prefers [...] the faithful women did as [the Prophet] ordered them. They Submitted: he was offering them Paradise, after all" (p. 367). In addition to the Prophet Mohammed, the novel mentions that the Prophet Ibrahim employed God in a similar way with his wife Hajar. "In ancient time the patriarch Ibrahim came into this valley with Hagar and Ismail, their son. Here, in this waterless wilderness, he abandoned her. She asked him, can this be God's will? He replied, it is. And left, the bastard. From the beginning men used God to justify the unjustifiable" (p. 95).

Following another Orientalist idea, the novel presents Islam as an aggressive and threatening religion. Khalid, one of the close friends of the Prophet, is the significant character here. He is described as the "military chief of staff" (p. 375) and "the General" (p. 391) who implements the orders of the Prophet. After losing his faith, Salman the Persian fled, but finally Khalid caught him and brought him to the Prophet. "Khalid, holding him by the ear, holding a knife at his throat, brings the immigrant snivelling and whimpering to the takht. [...] The Prophet begins to pronounce the sentence of death" (p. 374). In addition to Salman, Baal and

his twelve wives are other victims of the aggressiveness of Islam. Baal's wives, in particular, "had been sentenced to death by stoning to punish them for the immorality of their lives" (p. 391). Khalid is described as "a fool" by the Prophet himself, when one day he "loses his temper. "'You're a fool,' he shouts at [Khalid]. 'Can't you ever work things out without my help?' Khalid bows and goes" (p. 375). This statement demonstrates several significant points. Firstly, it proves that Khalid's aggressiveness is linked with the Prophet himself as Khalid cannot "work things" without the Prophet's "help". Therefore, it is not only Khalid who is aggressive; it is the Prophet and Islam which he comes to represent. Secondly, described as a "fool", Khalid here could be seen as representative of those Muslims who just follow Islam without thinking. It could be inferred that Muslims cannot discuss or refuse; moreover they cannot be peaceful because their religion asks them to be aggressive. Thirdly, Khalid's reaction towards the Prophet's insult is significant; he just "bows and goes". He is very weak here and this weakness with the Prophet contradicts his aggressiveness towards non-Muslims. Khalid, probably, attempts to hide his real weakness by showing his aggressive side to others in order to gain some respect from the people or from the Prophet himself.

It could be argued that the different reading of *The Satanic Verses* among Muslim intellectuals is due, partly, to the position they adopt towards secularism in their Muslim identities. Generally speaking, secular Muslim intellectuals seem to support Rushdie more than those Muslim intellectuals who do not consider secularism as part of their identity or who make 'Muslim' their first identity. The novel sparked a debate among Muslims themselves on the issue of defining the meaning of Islam and being Muslim in the West in general and in Britain specifically. Muslim and secular Muslim intellectuals interpreted Islam differently as they read the relationship between Islam and the West from different perspectives. While Muslim intellectuals read the West from an Islamic perspective, the secular Muslim intellectual read Islam from a western secular perspective. Arguably, one of the reasons for the differences in reading *The Satanic Verses* among Muslims in general is to be accounted for by the different perspectives they employ.

We might have expected postcolonialism to have been helpful here as it offers a further perspective to *The Satanic Verses*. Apart from the debate over Islam and its relationship with the West between Muslim and secular Muslim intellectuals, postcolonialism might have provided some common ground and agreed terms of reference as colonialism and its aftermath neo-

colonialism are largely agreed threats to Islam and Muslims. In Edward Said's *Orientalism*, one of the foundational books for postcolonialism, Islam is a major theme. Reading the allegations of misrepresentation of Islam in *The Satanic Verses* from a postcolonial perspective requires us to return to the core of postcolonialism.

Postcolonial writers, and Rushdie himself, think that colonialism still exists. In his article "The Empire within Britain" in his book *Imaginary Homeland*, Rushdie describes Britain as "the new colony"¹¹ (Rushdie, 1991f, p. 138) and "the new Empire" (p. 138) as the "attitudes [of the colonial period] are in operation right here" (p. 130). He believes that "British thought, British society, has never been cleansed of the filth of imperialism" (p. 131) and "Britain is now two entirely different worlds, and the one you inhabit is determined by the colour of your skin" (p. 134). In addition to racism and depending on it, "the stereotyping goes on" (p. 138). He finally warns the British white people that unless they eradicate "the prejudices within almost all of you, the citizens of your new, and last, Empire will be obliged to struggle against you. You could say that we are required to embark on a new freedom movement" (p. 138). This clear depiction of the supposed colonial attitudes that still exist in Britain¹² strengthens the need to read the current British cultural discourse from a postcolonial perspective.

There are indeed many reasons that encourage Muslims to read *The Satanic Verses* from a postcolonial perspective. The first is Rushdie's description of Britain as a "new colony" and of himself, being one of the Indian writers in England, as "partly of the West". Secondly, postcolonial critics read colonial literature and even the literature that might seem to be without any connection to colonialism. *The Satanic Verses* does not appear colonial since its author is a postcolonial writer. However, "Postcolonial re-readings of literary works have in some instances focused upon texts that might seem hardly to deal with colonialism" (McLeod, 2000, p. 145). Thirdly, Rushdie's negative personal experience of Islam, especially when he left Islam at the age of fifteen to belong to "secular radicalism" (Rushdie, 1991a, p. 377), perhaps became the source of his understanding of Islam. For Rushdie, it seems, became a non-believer because he did not find Islam deserved following. He therefore developed his own negative point of view towards Islam and through this wrote *The Satanic Verses*. He acknowledges: "*The Satanic Verses* is a serious work, written from a non-believer's point of view.... Let believers accept that, and let it be" (Rushdie, 1991b, p. 413). In addition, what encourages Muslims to read

Rushdie's controversial novel postcolonially is that there are writers like Ziauddin Sardar and Meryll Wyn Davies who in their book *Distorted Imagination* describe the novel as a one which "fits neatly into, indeed in a logical culmination of, the well-known tradition of Orientalism" (Sardar and Davies, 1990, p. 3).

In fact, Islam for Rushdie, particularly as concerns controversial issues between the West and the Muslim world like terrorism and the Danish Cartoons, is mainly negative unless there is a need for him to consider it as positive. To begin with the exception, Rushdie defends Islam, arguably, when there is a threat or an accusation. Under the threat of being killed after Khomeini's fatwa, Rushdie wrote his unique article "Why I Have Embraced Islam" in which he declared his Islam and praised Islam by stating that "what I know of Islam is that tolerance, compassion and love are at its very heart" (Rushdie, 1991d, p. 432) and the Muslim community's "values have always been closest to my heart" (p. 430). In addition, he defends Islam when he finds himself accused of being Muslim, such as when "he encounters a statement from the Jewish Defense League, a journalist who tells British Muslims to move to Tehran, or an Indian professor of literature who quotes Sanskrit without translation and insists on calling all Muslims 'Moghuls'" (Almond, 2003, p. 1147).

Apart from that, Islam for Rushdie, especially after writing *The Satanic Verses*, is mostly negative.¹³ In the beginning, Rushdie writes about Islam as he writes about issues in relation to India and Pakistan. "As for religion, my work, much of which has been concerned with India and Pakistan, has made it essential for me to confront the issue of religious faith" (Rushdie, 1991a, p. 376). But then he begins to write about Islam and the West from his secular perspective. Rushdie is well aware of the polemical image of Islam in the West. He acknowledges: "what 'Islam' now means in the West is an idea that is [...] merely medieval, barbarous, repressive and hostile to western civilization [...] Not much has changed since the Crusades" (p. 382). However, his image of Islam in his fiction and non-fiction works seems not to be any different. "Throughout his novels, Rushdie's characters and narrators express rejections of Islam" (Almond, 2003, p. 1139). He "is happy to expose the cruelties, blindness, and errors of Islam" and "content to paint Islam as backward, intolerant, medieval, and aggressive" (p. 1147).

In his non-fiction works, Rushdie is more strident in voicing his rejection of different elements of Islam. As unbeliever, he thinks that

“faith must, ultimately, be a leap in the dark” (Rushdie, 1991c, p. 416). Rushdie’s position towards Islam becomes clearer after the publication of *The Satanic Verses*, the attacks in America and with the publication of the Danish cartoons. After the conflict over *The Satanic Verses*, he accuses Islam of being against freedom of thought. “Human beings understand themselves and shape their futures by arguing and challenging and questioning and saying the unsayable; not by bowing the knee, whether to gods or to men” (Rushdie, 1991b, pp. 394-395). In his article “In God We Trust” which he wrote in the early nineties, Rushdie criticised the western idea of Islam as “united, unified, homogeneous, and therefore dangerous [...] whereas [...] any examination of the facts will demonstrate the rifts, the lack of homogeneity and unity, characteristic of present-day Islam” (Rushdie, 1991a, pp. 382-383). Strangely, however, when America was attacked in September 2001, Rushdie criticised the West for not accusing Islam, as a religion, of terrorism: “to maintain its coalition against terror [the US] can’t afford to allege that Islam and terrorism are in any way related. The trouble with this necessary disclaimer is that it isn’t true. [...] of course this is ‘about Islam’” (Rushdie, 2002c, p. 395). In addition, he welcomed the American occupation of Afghanistan in spite of widespread western public disapproval. He wrote: “America did, in Afghanistan, what had to be done and did it well” (Rushdie, 2002a).

By the same token, the Danish cartoons published in 2006 revealed further animus against Islam. In discussing Rushdie’s reaction towards these it might be helpful to remember two of Rushdie’s ideas regarding the Prophet. Talking about Islam in the West, he said: “we are back in the demonizing process which transformed the Prophet Muhammad, all those years ago, into the frightful and fiendish ‘Mahound’” (Rushdie, 1991a, p. 382). In “Is Nothing Sacred?” his answer to the title’s question is “no, nothing is sacred” (Rushdie, 1991c, p. 416). As a compromise, it could be said that Rushdie is against dealing with the Prophet as a sacred person and, at the same time, against portraying him as “the frightful and fiendish ‘Mahound’.” However, when the Danish cartoons outraged Muslims by portraying the Prophet as “the frightful and fiendish ‘Mahound’”, Rushdie accused Muslims of supporting Islamism, a movement that for him was like fascism, Nazism, and Stalinism. In addition to other writers and intellectuals, Rushdie signed a statement published in the French Newspaper *Charlie Hebdo* accusing Islam of totalitarianism: “After having overcome fascism, Nazism, and Stalinism, the world now faces a new global threat: Islamism”. Those outraged Muslims, according to the statement, believe in “religious totalitarianism” and are “theocrats” as “it

is not a clash of civilisations nor an antagonism of West and East that we are witnessing, but a global struggle that confronts democrats and theocrats” (BBC News, 2006).

From these different incidents Rushdie’s position towards Islam can be summarised as follows: from his early years in England he appeared to develop according to the climate in which he was writing. It is striking that his sympathetic anti-racist position of the 1980s was superseded by the hard-line anti-Islamism of the 1990s and 2000s. In fact, Rushdie in the 1980s, as a subject of racism himself, was against racism in general whether practised on Muslims or Blacks. He was not merely sympathetic to Islam or Muslims; he was sympathetic to all racism’s victims. On the other hand, we can say that residually he was always critical of Islam, but his critique needed the appropriate climate to appear. His relation towards Muslims changed. In the 1980s he showed himself as sympathetic to them because of racism. But then, in the 1990s and 2000s, he becomes one of those writers who justify, culturally and militarily, wars against Islam and Muslims under the guise of freedom.

From a postcolonial perspective, Rushdie’s position towards Islam is similar, in a sense, to Conrad’s position towards Africa. Both Conrad and Rushdie are immigrant writers and “mastered English and used it to write about the relationship between culture and imperialism” (Yacoubi, 2005, p. 202). Reading Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* from a postcolonial perspective, Chinua Achebe in his important article “An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*” provides an example of a postcolonial reading which could be applied to Rushdie’s works in general and *The Satanic Verses* in particular. One of the main tasks of postcolonial reading is to look “at writers who dealt manifestly with colonial themes and [argue] about whether their work was supportive or critical of colonial discourses” (McLeod, 2000, p. 23). Reading Rushdie from the same perspective, following Achebe’s treatment as a model,¹⁴ might shed a light on the relationship between Rushdie and colonial discourse and whether it is supportive or critical.

Achebe, impartially, praised some aspects of Conrad’s writing: “I do not doubt Conrad’s great talents” (Achebe, 1997, p. 120). However, he criticises any estimation of the novel as a great work because of its racism. “The question is whether a novel which celebrates this dehumanization, which depersonalises a portion of the human race, can be called a great work of art. My answer is: No, it cannot” (p. 120). Achebe clearly, from a

postcolonial perspective, judges *Heart of Darkness* using his African eyes, not the western ones which could see the greatness of the novel. Postcolonially, then, the novel should be read through the previously colonised, not the coloniser's, eyes. This approach could be applied to the two well-known works of Rushdie: *Midnight's Children* and *The Satanic Verses*.

Although there are Indian readers who like it and British readers who do not like it, *Midnight's Children*, which portrays Rushdie's version of India, was generally celebrated in Britain and criticised in India. Rushdie described his writing of this novel as follows: "what I was actually doing was a novel of memory and about memory, so that my India was just that: 'my' India, a version and no more than one version of all the hundreds of millions of possible versions" (Rushdie, 1991e, p. 10). In spite of Rushdie's acknowledgment that "his India" is just one of millions, his India has made such a dominant impression as to block others and that is why "his version of India is often taken to be the 'real'" India" (Trivedi, 2000, p. 156). Rushdie's India, which meets western expectations, does not seem to meet Indian ones. He writes: "the book [*Midnight's Children*] has been criticised in India for its allegedly despairing tone. And the despair of the writer-from-outside may indeed look a little easy, a little pat. But I do not see the book as despairing or nihilistic" (Rushdie, 1991e, p. 16). Here, there are, generally, two main groups of people consisting of the British or the westerners who were previously colonisers; and the Indians who were previously colonised. Being a hybrid writer, Rushdie's western-welcomed books seem to indicate to which group he belongs more. It is widely-known that Rushdie's "books have been differently (and generally better) received in the West than in India. For example, while *Midnight's Children* has been read by many in the West as an affectionate celebration of India, *India Today* described it as 'one of the most ferocious indictments of India's evolution since independence'" (Trivedi, 2000, p. 164). This dispute between the British and the Indians over reading Rushdie's books resembles the dispute over some novels which were written in the colonial period. As Ralph Crane points out: "British and Indian readers may well approach novels like *Kim* and *A Passage to India* with different attitudes, and the novels may well mean different things to each" (Crane, 1992, p. 10).

Rushdie's success in the West after the publication of *Midnight's Children* may have encouraged him to portray India and Islam, the religion of millions of its citizens, in a similar way. Welcomed in the West,

Midnight's Children was criticised in India. *The Satanic Verses* was banned there. It is worth noticing that the government ban was supported by Indian intellectuals of different religious persuasions. As Mazrui writes:

The Indian government's ban on *The Satanic Verses* has been supported by a large number of distinguished Hindu, Sikh, Christian as well as Muslim intellectuals of the country. A letter to *The Indian Post* was signed by J P Dixit, Nissim Ezekiel, Jean Kalgutker, Vrinda Nabar, Vaskar Nandy, V Raman and Ashim Roy. Was India's ban of the book a case of building a repressive society? *The Times of India* answered: 'No, dear Rushdie, we do not wish to build a repressive India. On the contrary, we are trying our best to build a liberal India where we can all breathe freely. But in order to build such an India, we have to preserve the India that exists. That may not be a pretty India. But this is the only India we possess' (Mazrui, 1990, p. 130).

The celebrity of Rushdie's books in the West¹⁵ is similar, in a sense, to Conrad's. In spite of Conrad's colonial portrayal of Africa, Chinua Achebe noted that Conrad's contribution "falls automatically into a different class – permanent literature – read and taught and constantly evaluated by serious academics. *Heart of Darkness* is indeed so secured today that a leading Conrad scholar has numbered it 'among the half-dozen greatest short novels in the English language'" (Achebe, 1997, p. 114). Rushdie, similarly, is widely respected in Britain. He received, in addition to many literary awards, the Booker Prize in 1981 for *Midnight's Children* and in 1993 he was selected as the Booker of Bookers. His writings, awards and the media focuses on him made Harish Trivedi opine that: "Salman Rushdie is perhaps the best-known contemporary writer in the world" (Trivedi, 2000, p. 154). For Akbar Ahmed, in his book *Postmodernism and Islam*, Khomeini's fatwa against Rushdie played a role, "after the fatwa, anything Rushdie did would be major news ... It was not surprising, then, that Rana Kabbani's lonely criticism ... was savaged by the literary establishment" (Ahmed, 2004, p. 167). Using Achebe words, Rushdie is, like Conrad, "so secured today".

Achebe argues that Conrad did not create his own image of Africa; he simply brought "the dominant image of Africa in the western imagination" to his novella and explored it (Achebe, 1997, p. 123). Akbar Ahmed thinks that Rushdie's "knowledge of Islam is limited and usually derived from a cursory reading of the Orientalists" (Ahmed, 2004, p. 164), while Amin Malak comments: "Rushdie's utilization of Orientalist fabrications seems to the ordinary Muslim reader [...] flattering to those prepackaged stereotypes about Islam" (Malak, 2005, p. 109). From a postcolonial