

Mapping out the Rushdie Republic

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Some Recent Surveys

Edited by

Tapan Kumar Ghosh
and Prasanta Bhattacharyya

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PREFACE

Salman Rushdie (b.1947) is undoubtedly one of the most accomplished practitioners of contemporary fiction. He rode into the international scene in the early 1980s, and in a very short time achieved such critical acclaim, as had few parallels. The stunning success of his Booker-winning second novel, *Midnight's Children* (1981), which created publishing history, and was hailed as a modern masterpiece/classic, and the globe-shaking controversy aroused by his fourth novel, *The Satanic Verses* (1988), ensured him an enviable place in the literary hall of fame. Rushdie was accepted as a major writer and ranked alongside the wizards of modern fiction like Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Günter Grass and Milan Kundera. His subsequent novels secured this reputation and his non-fictional prose writings validated his celebrity status as a champion of free speech and an indefatigable arbiter in all important political, literary and cultural debates of our time.

Nearly seven hundred journal articles/book chapters on Rushdie's fiction and about thirty monographs on various aspects of his life and works are currently available, apart from countless research papers, dissertations and anthologies of essays. Many more are likely to be published in the future, because of his growing global popularity and prominence. But *Mapping out the Rushdie Republic: Some Recent Surveys* remarkably differs from the existing titles by dint of its seriousness of intent and profundity of content. This critical compendium, planned for both the literati and the laity, comprises some serious and significant research articles on different aspects of the author's works (both fiction and non-fiction), and as such, gives a comprehensive and updated introduction to/reappraisal of Salman Rushdie as a creative writer.

The book is a collection of twenty six research papers and articles divided into three sections. The first section comprises five articles that deal with some major thematic, theoretical and stylistic aspects of Salman Rushdie's works. The second section, comprising fifteen articles, is devoted exclusively to Rushdie's fiction. We have tried to include at least one article on each of his novels and collection of short stories. The third section consists of six articles on Rushdie's non-fictional prose writings, including his memoir *Joseph Anton*, his plays/screenplay and edited volumes of American short stories and post-1947 Indian writings in English, which have either been ignored or marginally touched by the

available titles on the author. A distinctive feature of the book is an interview with a prominent Rushdie scholar, Timothy Brennan, who perceptively shares his views about the novelist and his works. This e-interview was conducted in December 2014 when Prof. Brennan was in Europe on a lecture tour.

Locating Rushdie in the canon of postcolonial and postmodernist literature in English, the book highlights the major issues and debates concerning his fictional art and tries to map out the author's literary journey, beginning with his unique mixture of science fiction, fable and adventure story in the debut novel *Grimus* to project an alternative vision of human society, and his novel attempts to reclaim his imaginary homelands in *Midnight's Children* and *Shame*, through his transition from the East to the West in *The Satanic Verses*, *The Moor's Last Sigh* and *The Ground beneath Her Feet* and delineation of mass migration from the third to the first world and its aftermath in *Fury* and *Shalimar the Clown* to his exquisite snapshot of globalization in *The Enchantress of Florence* and *Two Years Eight Months and Twenty Eight Days*. Rushdie's non-fiction writings are incisive, committed and often very funny. They offer a unique vision of politics, literature and culture in the last decades of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty first. The present volume includes a number of articles on his literary essays, criticism, newspaper columns and travel writing that reveal the novelist as an awe-inspiring and yet controversial thinker and a man of world-shaking ideas.

The editors of the present volume perceive Salman Rushdie as a writer of extraordinary magnitude and breadth, and as one of the finest practitioners in recent times of the craft of fiction. His works cut across geographical and cultural frontiers and overspill the borders that have been erected over the ages between various academic disciplines. They recognize his exceptional virtuosity as a keen observer, and a credible chronicler, of contemporary world history, his enviable projects of cultural translation and the globalized novel, his exploration of the world of permeable frontiers in which we all live, his bold defiance of different kinds of thought policemen and perversions of faith that have tried to strangle intellectual and creative freedom down the ages, his representation of the mundane/real through the magical and, last but not the least, his exemplary skill as a superb stylist of the English language. But, unlike other monographs and collections of essays on Rushdie's works, the present volume offers no uncritical acclaim. It also analyses the drawbacks of Rushdie as an author and the limitations of his art. In sum, this book, with its comprehensive range and impeccable critical rigour, attempts an objective and updated survey of Salman Rushdie as a creative

writer, through a balanced evaluation of his entire literary oeuvre (that the editors euphemistically call ‘Rushdie Republic’), from *Grimus* (1975) to *Two Years Eight Months and Twenty Eight Days* (2015).

We have received spontaneous co-operation from a number of people to complete and publish this book. But we must mention the names of Sisir Kumar Chatterjee, Sandip Ain, Siddhartha Biswas, Shyamal Kumar Chatterjee, Arindam Ghosh, Krishna Kumar Mondal, Debashis Lahiri, Sumalya Ghosh and Rupa and Rishin Bhattacharyya to whom we owe a very special debt of gratitude.

Tapan Kumar Ghosh
Prasanta Bhattacharyya

ABBREVIATIONS

<i>GM:</i>	<i>Grimus</i>
<i>MC:</i>	<i>Midnight's Children</i>
<i>Sh:</i>	<i>Shame</i>
<i>JS:</i>	<i>The Jaguar's Smile</i>
<i>SV:</i>	<i>The Satanic Verses</i>
<i>EW:</i>	<i>East, West</i>
<i>IH:</i>	<i>Imaginary Homelands</i>
<i>HSS:</i>	<i>Haroun and the Sea of Stories</i>
<i>MLS:</i>	<i>The Moor's Last Sigh</i>
<i>GBF:</i>	<i>The Ground beneath Her Feet</i>
<i>FY:</i>	<i>Fury</i>
<i>SAL:</i>	<i>Step across This Line</i>
<i>SC:</i>	<i>Shalimar the Clown</i>
<i>EF:</i>	<i>The Enchantress of Florence</i>
<i>LFL:</i>	<i>Luka and the Fire of Life</i>
<i>JA:</i>	<i>Joseph Anton: A Memoir</i>
<i>TETN:</i>	<i>Two Years Eight Months and Twenty-Eight Nights</i>

INTRODUCTION

While pondering over the problem of finding a suitable title for our book, we have been thinking of something simple but effective. A heavily larded title is inappropriate because it usually kills one's interest in an event, and second, in this present case, a title that smacks of dry scholasticism may perpetuate a rather misleading notion among the common readers of Rushdie being a 'difficult' writer. Despite his stylistic innovations and verbal pyrotechnics, for most of his major writing career, Rushdie wants to impress his readers essentially as a story-teller. This is not to deny the complex nature of the subject or theme of his writing, but the overriding concern has always been to spin a yarn and to direct hereby an interest of the reader in the 'story' of his novels. History and geography, being two important disciplinary forces in his expatriate imagination, we may well see the act of 'mapping out' quite commensurate with the basic endeavour of Rushdie as a writer who devotes himself signally to build up a fictional 'republic' that offers an alternative vision to the official, ethnocentric histories and politicalized geographies of individual nations and the whole world together. The cartographic act is simply aimed at putting into proper critical perspective, this exilic effort of creating a fictive ground—'imaginary homelands,' to be precise—that looks more mythic than real, more imagined than being actual. Plato once theorized his *Republic* in ideal terms. Not in the same way perhaps, but Rushdie tries to create a historicized geography, or a mythic location, which is not ahistorical in the sense, that it is a place where facts and events are tangentially related to the temporal order of the world peopled by men and women who cross the bounden borders of nation and emotion at will, a sort of surreal or hyperreal that draws its credence from the nomadic, though essentially urbane, habits of a diasporic imagination. The Platonic utopia annexed through draconian measures may be a far cry from Rushdie's vision of Bombay and London. The cities often resemble an image of postmodern dystopia with cracks and fissures in their body social wreaked through religious, racial hatred, ethnocentric violence or political bigotry. And yet, in their ideal representation, such places manifest in themselves a cultural mix, a cosmopolitan coherence that celebrates a brand of hybridity which Rushdie champions both as a writer and as a proponent of free speech. In the midst of such a heady, discordant harmony, the perceptive mind

increasingly homes in on a slippery notion of the 'origin'—an idea that exists only via a remote sensing of a possible, probable past that under further scrutiny reveals itself as something not 'pure.' The whole concept of 'purity' looks like a monstrous falsity, when histories and geographies tend to overlap on each other as part of the irreversible, tectonic pulls of clashing or mingling civilizations that pave the palimpsestic path of growth and further progress. This 'progress' does not denote a mere 'improvement' in living conditions or culture, rather it implies a chronological movement forward into a futuristic, ambiguous location that nostalgically looks back to a past that is more imaginary than historical. The half-remembered memories of childhood, newspaper reports and broken pieces of lived images combine together into a collage to be winded and rewinded in an endless process of remembrance that casts a luminous haze onto the image of home and renders it compellingly desirable because creatively constructed with all the hankerings of a diasporic imagination. Rushdie observes that these are like reflections panned across "broken mirrors, some of whose fragments have been irretrievably lost" (Rushdie, 1991, 11). The anthropology and sociology of race and culture reveal the question of 'purity' as a fakery, a misconceived, ill-begotten query thrown at the door of human ontology. Only a paradigmatic reversal of this order of existence would bring in an authentic sense of belonging. However, this sense of belonging in, is like being everywhere and nowhere, since the idea of the essentially fluid nature of human 'root' reached via the notions of the transnational and transcultural made possible through an osmotic transference of emotional and cultural residues past the porous membrane of state territories or borders makes the much-travelled, exilic man an iconic Aladdin flitting across geographies and through histories to weave a chain of narratives that tell as much about the Arabian princess as also about the Chinese monster. Rushdie defends this by observing: "Throughout human history, the apostles of purity, those who have claimed to possess a total explanation, have wrought havoc among mere mixed-up human beings" (1991, 394).

With this onerous task in hand, Rushdie has to behave like the proverbial Renaissance discoverer who has to continually draw and redraw his map as new lands and seas ceaselessly crop up on the face of the world to change its traditionally known physiognomy. He looks like a new-age Donne, intent on discovering the unique geography and interesting history of human essence in "The Good Morrow," while dismissing the contemporary importance and excitement of new-found lands as having no bearing on his creative-emotional agenda. Rushdie is capable of exercising

an equal measure of nonchalance, while propagating his thesis of miscegenation and establishing the mingled character of humanity on a creative plane with his seemingly super-fecund store of imagination—that only recently begins to show some signs of tiredness—while engaging with the task of story-telling. For Donne's special intellect, the map looks like an immensely powerful, appropriately inexhaustible and heavily loaded metaphor that can bend or spread, be squeezed or overlapped, superimposed or redrawn, miniaturized or zoomed in and out in order to serve the creative vagaries of a myriad-minded poet. Travelling a distance of several centuries later, let us see what Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari have to say about the act of cartography with their very postmodern position on the new forms of subjectivity, thought, writing and politics:

The map is open and connectable in all of its dimensions; it is detachable, reversible, susceptible to constant modification. It can be torn, reversed, adapted to any kind of mounting, reworked by an individual, group, or social formation. It can be drawn on a wall, conceived of as a work of art, constructed as a political action or as a meditation (1988,12).

It is the symbolic importance of a cartographic representation that proves to be so attractive for a writer like Rushdie, who keeps on re-drawing and modifying his fictional terrain in terms of significant subversion. The vision is conjured up with all the stratagems of a cultural or political imagination, so much so, that the real is subsumed within the magical—a glimpse of the ideal whose existence depends on the very act of doubting the actual. Once again, we emphasize that the ideal is not to be equated with a realm of perfection.

On the contrary, it is a projection of a possibility born out of a divisive system of exclusion and inclusion—a kind of dialectic, where avowal and denial tend to cancel out each other to hit a synthesized inheritance of loss. With the compelling logic of romance, Rushdie creates a fairy tale in reversal: a utopic world is a far cry from the author's outrageous view of what is probable, but we may not legitimately call it a dystopia either. It is a multifarious, heteroglossic, swirling, racially diverse and temporally shifting cityscape of Bombay—and still later on, London and New York—that packs a punch of history and geography in a distinct combination, a unique and rare composite, where the localized, physically named and therefore geographically recognizable topos extends its body as a conduit along which the past and the present move through as a simple harmonic piston to give motion to the wheels of fictional time that bears an uncanny resemblance with the changing course of history. We may have a fair idea of what Rushdie is up to with his mapping of an idealized Bombay:

In Bombay all Indias met and merged. In Bombay, too, all-India met what-was-not India, what came across the black water to flow into our veins . . . all rivers flowed into its human sea. It was an ocean of stories.

Bombay was not inoculated against the rest of the country, and what happened else-where, the language business for example, spread into its streets. But on the way to Bombay the rivers of blood were usually diluted, other rivers poured into them, so that by the time they reached the city's streets the disfigurements were relatively slight (Rushdie, 1996, 350).

This apocalyptic, mythical, surreal, magical or even epical description of the city of Bombay perhaps reminds one of Joyce's technique in *Ulysses*. But Bombay is fraught with a different set of meanings in line with Rushdie's postcolonial imaginings. A colonial past leading to a legacy of postcolonialism is freighted along the vehicle of evolving Indian history that accommodates a secular, liberal and vibrant democracy, as does its very opposites, like religious and linguistic fundamentalism with an all-too-obvious communal memory of violence and bloodshed. The city of Bombay as the unfailing locus or nerve-centre of culturally diverse India weaves a corresponding, highly informing story of a very fluid India which is neither this, nor that. No stereo-typical definition may do justice to its very essence. It is *sui generis*, a product of time that makes as much history as it informs a city's geography. Bombay becomes a postmodern crypt that encodes a plethora of ethnic identities and a multitude of stories that partake of an essentially migrant attitude among men who once came out of home to make an originally unknown place their new home. To use a clichéd, though popular term from the discourse of globalization, one may look at Bombay as a 'glocal' space, at once local and national, particular yet transcultural, ethnically or linguistically defined while maintaining universal status of business and commerce, generically international because of a greatly prevalent Anglo-western culture that upholds the efficacy of English as a highly effective and largely accepted mode of human transaction. An almost synaesthetic, greatly variable imagery of rivers and sea and city-streets merge into each other as ever-flowing channels of cultural communication to signpost a new, culturally vibrant India begotten in the crucible of a migrant imagination. The tolerant and secular worldview necessarily chooses the 'middle' path of progress that steers clear of any notion of 'pure,' and therefore, narrow, description of caste and creed that nonetheless enter as a part into the making of a cultural tissue, at once recognized as representative of a very broad spectrum of national identity that ultimately goes on to celebrate the 'impure' nature of Indianness as manifest in the cosmopolitan atmosphere of Bombay. The fine lines of demarcation separating one from the other

become an important network of identity as navigation along this course helps Rushdie shore up his idea of an essentially diasporic and mongrel humanity against the deeply ingrained prejudice of communal character and identity.

Here specifically, the history goes back to the time of colonialism when the English men turned Bombay strategically as the 'gateway' of India. But to be sure, it was not 'global' the way London, with its vicelike control of transcontinental business and merchandise, was in the high age of colonialism. The colonized 'Other' was situated in the vast territory of the subjugated land as a foreign pariah. Incidentally, the transformation of London in the postcolonial age as a global hub of the migrant 'Other' now turns the focus inward as the vast sea of professionals, fortune-hunters and asylum-seekers, though still under the control of a powerful West, transforms the international field into a zone where the once foreign pariah now, has become quite endemic. Moreover, the offsprings of the migrated parents have become autochthonous. The black or the coloured races now claim a legitimate room in a still predominantly white space. But to remain politically correct, it is no longer seen as a racial disruption. While dealing with the issue of ethnic diversity, Rushdie tends to celebrate the same miscegenation that makes Bombay what it is and London for what it has become. It is not in terms of a simple formulaic principle that London gets superimposed on Bombay, its colonial 'Other,' or vice versa, by a sleight of the cartographic arm. Rather, it is the complex metaphorical density of cityscapes as symbols of historical churns that allows glimpses of the west in the east or lets the east come home to roost in the west as colonial curses to haunt the Occidental mind once terribly distressed by the unintended mix-ups and births at the unappointed places. However, the feeling of distress is not like a one-way traffic: in *The Satanic Verses*, Ellowen Deeowen is fictionalized London where reverse colonialism is depicted at its parodic best. In the metrosexual culture of the urban sprawls where the ubiquitous global capital acts as a great homogenizing factor, the descendants of former colonizers, especially the younger generation, seem to be rather forgetful of the old hierarchy and are content to play their only given role as a buyer of goods in the level playing field of consumerism. International multiculturalism, thus, appears to be bound by the unitary culture of global economy that ensures the growth and progress of capital. Saladin Chamcha is the proverbial anglophile, who in this context appears to be most pained by the absence of customary highbrowism, most likely to show up in the behavioural aspects of the master class. The present breed is not even mindful of Englishness as a distinct and reverential category of race. In a clear inversion of colonial

mimicry, Rushdie makes his character-observation succinct and forceful: “For a man like Saladin Chamcha the debasing of Englishness by the English was a thing too painful to contemplate” (Rushdie, 1988, 75). Some pages later, the jibe becomes more caustic and functions like a double-edged blade that cuts both ways. Now the ‘Other,’ the coloured colonized in the shape of Saladin Chamcha plays out the typical role of the English white man in the very midst of the white centre: “The Alps, France, the coastline of England, white cliffs rising to whitened meadowlands. Mr. Saladin Chamcha jammed on an anticipatory bowler hat” (Rushdie, 1988, 86-87). The furor created by the novel leading to the *fatwa* of death sentence issued by Ayatollah Khomeini, the then religious leader of the Muslim world, stemmed from this conviction, that Rushdie’s book is deeply critical of Islamic culture. But what we miss in this heady debate, is the fact that the book is also a trenchant criticism of the aggressive neo-colonialism of the US and UK with a concomitant imperial tendency that now uses a ruthless economic measure to hold down the non-European nations as new colonies for marketing consumer items, trading military arsenal and dumping chemical and other, especially e-wastes. In *Imaginary Homelands*, Rushdie explicates his position and theorizes about hybridity. He suggests that this is “how newness enters the world. It is the great possibility that mass migration gives the world, and I have tried to embrace it. *The Satanic Verses* is for change-by-fusion, change-by-conjoining. It is a love-song to our mongrel selves” (Rushdie, 1991, 394). This sounds like a perfect pitch for the unfolding of the ‘uncanny’ for the *heimlich* is not walled out but found to be firmly located, in fact rooted, within the fold of the *unheimlich*. And just to chart the consistent way the writer keeps on drawing the topography of his fictional republic, let us ponder over some other lines taken from ‘At the Auction of the Ruby Slippers’, which, as a story is placed at the ‘middle’ of the central section of a book of tales significantly entitled *East, West*:

‘home’ has become such a scattered, damaged, various concept in our present travails. There is so much to yearn for. There are so few rainbows any more. How hard can we expect even a pair of magic shoes to work? They promised to take us *home*, but are metaphors of homeliness comprehensible to them, are abstractions permissible? Are they literalists, or will they permit us to redefine the blessed world? (1994, 93)

Rushdie uses only the first part from the nineteenth century proverb “East, West, Home’s best” as the title of his collection of nine stories—three of which are set under the category of East, another three under West and the rest of the three tales focus on the aspects of East in the West. Technically

speaking, the absence of a conjunct in between East and West, not only juxtaposes the two together, as if constituting two parts—two hemispheres, to be precise—of a whole, but also lends a syntactical direction to the historical and geographical movement of the East towards the West. It results into a conjoining of selves that gives Rushdie a further chance to fathom the depths of a new hybridity that does not conform to the old categories of hierarchy and separate living. The gradual sense of loss of a distinct notion about home directly corresponds to a lessening of a sense of Europhobia, and conversely, a gain in Europhilia and that puts the balance on an even keel: two contrary states of mind come to co-exist on the psychic plane and tend to forge a new identity.

However, this new identity is not free from other disturbing social realities that give rise to uncomfortable questions in the perceptive mind. Chelva Kananayakam in the essay “Exiles and Expatriates” strongly upholds the cause and legitimate vision of the exiled position even to the point of lionizing a ‘special insight’ that an ordinary domiciled and settled being cannot enter into:

to be an expatriate or an exile is not to inhabit a void. It is not...to choose the artistic freedom and anonymity afforded by the metropolis. It is, rather, to be granted a special insight, a vision not available to the insider (Kananayakam, 1996, 213).

It is in the fine line between flight and homing in, that perhaps the new existence of the modern homeless nationals is formed and Rushdie always tries to explore this process of being re-born on a piece of earth that no one can really claim to be his own. This sense of belonging to a series of unbelongingness basically constitutes the shape of a global being in the pages of Rushdie’s texts, like *The Ground beneath Her Feet*, *Shalimar the Clown* and *The Enchantress of Florence*. But when an emaciated and gaunt figure of a refugee suddenly pops up before our eyes, in the riveting and tragic spectacle of his daily dealings with Fate caught so sensitively by a reputed lensman for newspapers, we cannot but ask ourselves about the validity of the ‘special insight’ or the glory pertaining to his ‘re-birth’ granted so very eloquently by the new-age theoretician or a very famous novelist, who brands this pathos of uprootedness as a globally recognizable phenomenon and thereby renders it a social merchandise that sells well in the worldwide cultural market. In late 2015 or early this year, the rail station of Keleti, Budapest has started receiving a global attention: hundreds and thousands of refugees that now roam from one place to the other in Europe have become a regularly disturbing feature of intra-continental human traffic and thronged this historically significant place

that was a hub for the unfortunate lot of Jews to be sent to Auschwitz during the time of the Second World War. The refugees of today are forced into makeshift camps and sent to detention centres guarded by heavily armed policemen. The same Europe, that thrives under the banner of democracy based on ethical modes and freedom of existence collectively decided on in the aftermath of the devastating experience of two consecutive World Wars, has to become an inhospitable terrain of ethnic intolerance and xenophobia that ruthlessly represses basic human rights in the name of national security and scarcity of resources. The basic premise of cosmopolitanism that makes Europe what it is after having suffered the innumerable human tragedies, especially in the context of the Second World War prompted a well-warranted reconstitution of its moral self that further endorses its *raison d'être* across the globe. In recent past, the image of the drowned Syrian boy washed ashore has acquired a haunting quality and it emanates from a sympathy that people in today's world still feel about Europe passing through another crisis in human migrancy. But the counter-narrative in this context appears to be very interesting: the suffering and survival of the refugees coming from the troubled region of the Middle East and seeking asylum in the so-called cosmopolitan atmosphere of putative Europe really have a chequered representation. It reflects both accommodation of and resistance towards non-European races, who theoretically deserve a treatment at par with those who traditionally inhabit this so-called 'civilized' part of the globe. A brazen intolerance of the migrant populace is now supported in terms of incriminating evidences—a plethora of videos, photographs and news items showing acts of crime, vandalism and even rape on the part of the unruly group of refugees desperate to pounce on the secured sectors of harmonious living for the sake of bare survival. Strategic references to some sporadic acts of so-called savage behaviour on the part of some Asians, albeit beleaguered, further consolidates the fear of being besieged by a host of alien people owing allegiance to a demonized faith. This is symptomatic of a still deeper fear and distrust: it emanates from a primordial aversion to chaos and contamination. Interestingly, the sheer number of pictures showing the hapless stock of uprooted humanity battling it out on an overcrowded boat or precariously balanced raft held aloft the waves of a grim-looking sea far outweighs the number of images documenting the actual scores of sheltered settlement accorded to a terribly suffering lot. This may have got a lot to do with the politics of effacement—a deliberate attempt at skewed representation of people who do not merit the care of a philanthropic Europe. In this context, Denmark, Poland and Hungary come up with an openly declared motto of hatred

against the host of migrants while France and England are ready to increase their annual allowance of refugees by very paltry figures. The US, always ready to steal the thunder over its European counterparts when it comes to the question of championing the democratic rights and values, also follows suit by agreeing to marginally increase the number of migrants to be accommodated in its soil for the next couple of years. The united Germany seems to be the only exception though the Chancellor's unreserved avowal of the cosmopolitan ideal of *willkommenskultur* is openly challenged by one of her ministers. All these tend to undermine the tenets of equality, fraternity and liberty that inform the hallowed humanism of Europe that justifiably gave rise, and also credence, to the notion of modern democracy. But the crisis of a great migration tends to betray the popular image of Europe as the world's famous melting pot. When the Middle East or Afghanistan happens to be the centre of terrorism, the despicable acts of crime occur at comfortable distances. But when France, or Belgium for that matter, becomes the hub of terrorist activities—may be at the behest of some groups and individuals ethnically or culturally different—it points invariably to the failure of democracy as an institution that should not have encouraged discrimination against the minority as an inalienably discursive part of behavioural pattern and societal practice. The consequent result of disgruntlement could not be contained or pacified by the dubious practice of European cosmopolitanism or American democracy and cross-continental militancy in the form of terror attacks continues to shake the foundation of Western civilization. Rushdie's faith in the democratic postulates of the West in general, and the UK in particular, is not entirely unfounded, especially in the post-*Satanic Verses* period when his own survival depended upon the unquestionable support given to him by the British Government. Apart from the bane of terrorism, which Rushdie otherwise expresses so well in *Fury*, we could not help asking ourselves about the voice or 'special insight' of persons who are ferried across the borders or check-points, who die insensate even to the throbbing pains of hunger and thirst, and who die after losing the last vestige of human dignity to rudely encroaching hands. Rushdie never shows any particular knack for treating this vast majority of a nomadic type quite artistically in either his fictions or non-fictions. Perhaps, he remains too close to his subject and therefore cannot be led astray by any other unpleasant diversion. Maybe, for the sake of granting an artist his freedom to choose, we should not pose this query at all.

A debate on the points discussed thus far brings the gaze back to our home-grown realities—realities which are as layered as the facts and incidents which enter into their making. In India, the tag of communalism

tends to define, and quite appropriately so, the many kinds of social unrest and acts of violence that arise out of a basic intolerance of the minority populace and culture. If exclusionary politics of Europe creates its own danger, the traditional India keeps its multicultural edifice intact by showing more or less a modicum of tolerance towards dissent. The stark contrast between the number of Indians joining militant outfits and actual Europeans joining terror-groups brings to the fore the increasing fallibility of the cherished institution of European democracy with its concomitant culture of cosmopolitanism. The sense of alarm that Europe suffers from is much of its own creation. Doubtless, more than moral integrity what is needed is a concerted, global effort to stave off the threats of terrorism but the West can hardly deny its role in the creation of a monster that now turns against its own creator. In this context, we must remember that the South-Asian region or the Indian subcontinent has stood witness to the human tragedy of migration and exiled identities that also colours a historically determined, and indeed a postcolonial, consciousness. The Vietnamese Boat People or the Myanmarese Rohingyas may remain beyond the pale of Rushdie's imagination, but he remains a recipient of this consciousness by his very position as the earlier citizen of a country that wrests its independence from the rule of foreign hands to be free and also to be bound, unintendedly, by the various nets of postcolonial realities that as a rule tend to hamper the progress of all former colonies. But cosmopolitanism comes as a rescue, as a panacea to the ills begotten by the narrow politics of nationalism and its undertow of religious or ethnic bigotry. As if sensing the need of the hour, cosmopolitanism takes its birth at the cusp of historical changes, especially during the change of hands that rule. When the Ottoman Empire crumbled and the imperial powers in both Europe and Asia began to raise their heads, the great centres of trade and worship like Cairo, Ankara, Damascus, Mecca and Istanbul became centres of cosmopolitan culture and scholarship that was only second nature to Islamic brotherhood. Seema Alavi in her book *Muslim Cosmopolitanism in the Age of Empire* argues that this unique development in the nineteenth century is like a challenge to the European imperial powers and their colonial ploy to demarcate people in terms of their nationalities and ethnic identities. The Islamic cosmopolitanism, on the contrary, cut across the borders of nations and cultures to create a more powerful link, an interconnectedness that binds an Andamanese or Balinese Muslim with his Egyptian or Turkish counterpart. In colonized India, Maharaja Dalip Singh stood as a human testimony to this cosmopolitan ideal as he continued to show, through his many works and deeds, that cosmopolitanism of the Islamic variety that reached out to

India remained as much accessible to the non-Muslims as to those who practiced the Islamic faith as a way of their religious creed and leaning. This historically credible reality might have encouraged Rushdie to think of Bombay as an Indian cosmopolis that transcends divisive politics and communal disharmony and accommodates men and women of every faith and following. This idea even permeates as late a work as *The Enchantress of Florence* (2008) where, if not Bombay, then the Mughal Court of Akbar the Great in Fatehpur Sikri becomes a seat of cosmopolitan culture that an Italian fugitive with dynastic connections, the English Queen Elizabeth, foreign intellectuals and pilgrims of ‘argument and philosophy’ could access with as much ease as those who were proximate to it. This is revelatory of a great bonding as the Anglican empire of the West and the Mughal empire of the East tend to become glorious mirror images of each other, or at least it is claimed to be so in the missive of the Queen carried to Emperor Akbar, shown to be a man of great imagination, by the Italian Niccolo Vespucci. Despite having completely different imperial set-ups and differences in two great cultures, the Indian cosmopolis in Sikri and the Florentine, Renaissance cosmopolis in Italy brought together by the chance act of stealing a letter by one Vespucci makes a cultural swirl: the mixing of history with fantasy and fable makes the entire Mughal dynasty to take stock of its past that came into being with a typical criss-crossing of other cultures and times that include the settings of Turkish emperors and Mongol despots. The unique circumstances of the time that led to increased navigation and new discoveries of sea-routes and therefore greater possibilities of travel phenomenally helped the two cosmopolises of opposite hemispheres to consolidate the ideal of paving the all-important way to further inclusiveness in community-living. It is mind-boggling to watch how Rushdie brings into being his ideal of a globalized community and culture that forges a unique unity amidst a sea of diversities. Of course, this ideal is imaginary, magical and perhaps exists only on a fictional plane. But one cannot deny the realism of pain-staking research that has entered into every bone and sinew of a structure that has a claim on that part of our mind which has already lent validity to Kubla Khan and his legendary palace.

While endorsing the cause of cosmopolitanism over millennial time and diverse geographies, Rushdie shows, how its very opposite, in the forms of orthodoxy, religious fundamentalism or patriarchal culture produces an unbearable shame that may eat into our vitals.

The sub-continental history always provides him manifest examples of political myopia and cravenness that go on to create a monstrous situation. In fact, if he shows an early knack for approving cosmopolitanism, he

develops an equally contemporary concern for how a lack of it may turn out to be counterproductive. *Shame* is the novel that came out in 1983 and follows the publication of *Midnight's Children*. If the earlier novel celebrates India's, especially Bombay's, variegated existence till the days of Emergency, in the latter work it is Pakistan, and not India, which is shown to be a country that deals in the business of shame. The human metaphor for this rampant act of shame is Sufiya Zenobia depicted as a deformed and retarded girl born into a very politically active family. Her female self conceives and then gradually gives rise to a kind of unprecedented monstrosity born out of the widespread element of shame that also defines the national essence of Pakistan. Rushdie shows the way this monstrosity comes over her:

the brain-fever that made Sufiya Zenobia preternaturally receptive to all sorts of things that float around in the ether enabled her to absorb, like a sponge, a host of unfelt feelings (Rushdie, 1983, 122).

As a former colony, that got its independent identity along a communal line of action, the history of Pakistan is replete with many acts of dastardly behaviour and shame that the social leaders did perpetrate and still continue to do so against their own people and nation. The country, which never has been able to develop a cosmopolitan culture, is immersed in a pool of unchecked corruption and nepotism and this existential condition foredooms its hope for a revival or happy progress. But this series of shameful acts finally get channelized into a human agent, who in turn, morphs into a Gothicized monster capable of unleashing a murderously vengeful action that does not leave any memorial imprint in Zenobia's mind. This is something unique. If this is like a rabid condition, then the very agent, who spreads it, also remains its first victim. So, the contamination that manifests in Sufiya Zenobia also turns against her and like cancer slowly eats up from within. Rushdie resorts to a mode of Gothic representation while describing this monstrous phenomenon:

Once in a blue moon, something goes wrong. A Beast is born, a 'wrong miracle,' within the citadels of propriety and decorum. This was the danger of Sufiya Zenobia: that she came to pass, not in any wilderness of basilisks and fiends, but in the heart of the respectable world. And as a result that world made a huge effort of the will to ignore the reality of her, to avoid bringing matters to the point at which she, disorder's avatar, would have to be dealt with, expelled—because her expulsion would have laid bare what-must-on-no-account-be-known, namely the impossible verity that barbarism could grow in cultured soil, that savagery could lie concealed beneath decency's well-pressed shirt (*SH* 200).

Like it happens in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, it is civilization itself which produces its uncanny double and a sort of dialogue between the norms of decency and the acts of barbarism seems to be always on in such situations. The birth and deeds of a monster, once again, are related to the questions of power, or for that matter, powerlessness. And sometimes, it is the innocence of the giant creature that leaves him unfit for the mainstream culture and pushes him further to the periphery. The innocence of Sufiya Zenobia is of another kind: she does not have any memory of her acts of bloody murder and violence. This is one bliss that her monstrous fate grants her and symbolically this brings to the surface the continual measures of denial and disavowal that the public figures of Pakistan make when it comes to the question of honest acknowledgement of responsibility for the many deeds of criminal brazenness and shame. The monster, by his very position, inhabits a zone of in-betweenness which is determined by his hybrid nature. A distorted, overblown figure with a semblance of humanity may, in the postcolonial context, come to represent a stereotyped subject-race that is being continually consigned to the margins by the powers that be. While the humane qualities of the Frankensteinian monster make him a strong contender for readerly sympathy, the almost robotic nature of Sufiya Zenobia exonerates her of all the supposed murders she commits and helps turn our gaze to the dark underbelly of civilization loath to confess its role in the birth of self-begotten and self-destructive shame. But in one important count, the monster of Mary Shelley and Rushdie's Zenobia are similar: while Victor Frankenstein, in an important sense, externalizes his own monstrous self while creating his being, Sufiya Zenobia stands as an express human symbol of Pakistan's monstrous accumulation of shame that lies otherwise hidden under the clever camouflage of social niceties that civilization has devised for itself. Since it is customary for leaders to deny the blame for their role in piling up one misdeed after the other, so, the consequent, guilt-ridden shame gets re-territorialized within a monstrous and bloated body. In fact, this becomes synonymous with Pakistan's actual geography and a cartographic angle is developed in the text that is drawn on a time-frame known as the colonial history. The seeds of corruption, as it were, are already sown during the time of Pakistan's birth. India, Pakistan, and later Bangladesh are the babes born of a forced Caesarean section carried out at the behest of an imperial power that followed the dictates of its own vested interests. So, the map that defines Pakistan now is an artificial, extraneous existence thrust upon it by the whims of colonial rulers. Therefore, the apparent foreignness of Zenobia's freakish birth can be likened to the very moment of her country's own birth out of an original,

organic whole that has become a relic of the past—indeed a haunting past that casts its shadow on its present history.

For one, Rushdie is a writer who never tells a simple tale simply. And this is as true of his fiction as of his non-fiction. He also has edited *The Vintage Book of Indian Writing: 1947-1997*. In 1991, he has published a collection of critical essays and writings named *Imaginary Homelands*, which till date, has remained as the best possible clue to his writerly mind and art. *Step across This Line: Collected Non-Fiction 1992-2002*, the second volume of essays came out in 2003. The death-threat that the *fatwa* of 1989 carried and the next nine years of continual hide-and-seek constitute the substance of the memoir *Joseph Anton* that came out in 2012. The name has not only been used as a clever cover-up for Rushdie's actual identity, but is also indicative of the writer's preferential love for two famous world-authors—Joseph Conrad and Anton Chekhov. The Nicaraguan experience and Rushdie's very brief love affair with communism found expression in the travelogue *The Jaguar Smile*. Through all these varied attempts, however, it is the Scheherazade in Rushdie that speaks through: what he enjoys about is the core or essence of a story that gets told and re-told in its many formats and structures. Like Scheherazade, the 'story' of *Joseph Anton* is narrated in the teeth of danger while in the last work entitled *Two Years Eight Months and Twenty-Eight Nights: A Novel* the same pattern is repeated, though not with the former's felt pangs of immediacy of danger. The title of the novel once again refers back to the legendary 1001 Arabian Nights—the total days, or nights to be precise, are derived by adding the total number of constituent parts indirectly raised in the referred time span of the title. The conviction about the mixed nature of identity, the continual dealings with hybridity and avowal of cosmopolitanism ultimately lead, Rushdie the writer, to embrace the idea of story with no physical specifics. Rushdie has bred the concept of the 'globalised novel' as a new genre of fiction that appropriately arises out of a world which technology has rendered a 'global village.' It may not be to everyone's liking and the detractors of Rushdie often dub this as a clever ploy to compensate for the gradual drying up of creative juice, which in recent times has forced the writer to have become repetitive, and for more scathing observers, dry and boring.

The last novel may raise echoes of *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*, but the riveting quality of narrative that makes *Haroun* a gripping work of fiction is somehow missing in Rushdie's last work, unfortunately giving credence to the critics' recent opinion on the writer's works. In the year 1992, Angela Carter had described Rushdie as the most remarkable British author. At that point of time, Rushdie lived up to that reputation by

showing a fecund imagination which, in combination with his stylized writing full of verbal pyrotechnics, could produce an impressive array of works. But the post-*fatwa* existential situation turned the entire intellectual, political and media attention to this self-styled champion of free speech, liberty and democracy. Almost a quarter of a century later, Rushdie still manages to write, and write a lot, and of course, he stays in news but mostly for the salacious, controversial details of his private life. On sober judgement, we may say that the writer may betray some signs of retardation as far as producing a new masterpiece is concerned, but to this date, he remains one of the most impressive writers of the world, simply on the strength of his entire oeuvre and the brilliant style that characterizes his unparalleled prose.

However, Rushdie has never failed to attract the critical gaze. Timothy Brennan is one important critic who has hailed Rushdie as a new-age writer who appeared after the formal dissolution of the British Empire as one among the 'Third World cosmopolitans' in the book *Salman Rushdie and the Third World: Myths of the Nation*. The proximity of Rushdie and his ilk to the mandarins of Western notions and culture ensures his popularity on the basis of an ethnic difference which is like coming across "familiar strangeness" (Brennan, 1989, viii) without having the potential of making a radical change in Occidental perception. This is what it takes to constitute a Third World Intellectual for Brennan. This intellectual in question would definitely work for proper restoration of a hitherto marginalized voice but in a way that will never put in doubt the veracity of the Western view about the world and its men in general. Of course, the Third World writer has his or her typical advantages as he or she can be at the same time inside and outside the Western societal frame of existence and may therefore gain into a more comprehensive view of race, identity and nation with cosmopolitanism always informing them or reaching out to a more tolerant and accommodative idea of humanity. Despite the political pose of such writings including that of Rushdie's, Brennan contends, they are, by their very quality of being highly saleable cultural goods in the Western literary market remain largely ineffective as a weapon of change. The efficacy of cosmopolitanism gets mired in the vicious pool of Western consumerism which has its own, and a very effective, way of blunting the edges of legitimate protest. The theorizing looks suave, the literary products remain works of a sophisticated mind and imagination, and yet there is a significant lack—a lack of pulsation born out of an emotional bonding between the writer and the migrant people for whom he or she primarily writes. No one can deny a Rushdie, his discovery of a vagrant imagination and still the perceptive reader sees

the sneaking presence of an evasive tactic that does not allow the writer to be in the very midst of existential horrors and be an authentic narrator of it. The reputation of Rushdie as an author of transnational identity does augur well for a timely attempt at writing about the horrific experience of a distraught lot who are fleeing from death in their own countries to embrace an equally inimical fate in foreign lands. Syria or Iraq may remain distant from Rushdie's present periphery, but his very image calls for an involvement that issues out of a genuine concern. We are not committing the mistake of confusing Mr. Rushdie's identity with that of a social messiah, nor do we disagree with his choice in not donning the mantle of a public intellectual. But he, being largely seen as the champion of free speech and concomitant human rights, makes his absence in any relevant forum of debate rather conspicuous. The major problem lies in his way of addressing such an issue: it is basically aimed at catering to the Western taste and inclination, and according to Brennan, does not directly address those about whom it is written. This is not to deny Rushdie his initial achievements, but it is true that he could not carry it further, and for many, has now become a vapid and boring practitioner of a form of literary art that has become too predictable to guarantee an abiding interest. The failure of European cosmopolitanism in extending help to the presently needy and migrant lot does not elicit a single line of criticism from the man who should have otherwise felt the void in the democratic set-up of the continent in its present political context. He seems too happy to let his putative imagination be bandied around in the huge pool of market economics that still keeps his works afloat as part of its own neo-colonialist business agenda.

If Brennan firmly suggests the limitation of Rushdie's political intent emanating from his very position or location as Third World Intellectual, it is Bishnupriya Ghosh who comes in strong defence of the writer's brand of cosmopolitanism in the book *When Borne Across*. Ghosh, in a postmodernist sweep, argues that "despite the glare of international visibility" the cosmopolitanism of writers like Rushdie engages "in a literary politics that interrupts [its] own global circulation" (Ghosh, 2004, 20). She would even contend that the forces of globalization that tend to undermine local culture are successfully thwarted by Rushdie's style of writing under the broad banner of South Asian consciousness. The Marxist critics, prominent among them being M. Keith Booker, are inclined to follow the critical line developed by Brennan for obvious reasons. In one of the essays included in the volume *Critical Essays on Salman Rushdie*, edited by Booker himself, he says that, despite the early sympathies he had for Rushdie for the "transgressive" quality of

his writing, on later, and more sober, reflection, he found the same anti-rationalist and largely mythic quality of his writing as something indirectly endorsing “the ideological structures deployed by Western capital during the decades of the Cold War” (Booker, 1999, 286). Aijaz Ahmad in his book *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures* makes a trenchant criticism of Rushdie’s *Shame* as politically inappropriate. However, Jaina Sanga argues against Ahmad in a typically poststructuralist fashion and finds the colonial and postcolonial metaphors of Rushdie as very effective and politically correct as they help in “problematizing entrenched versions of reality” (Sanga, 2001, 4). In an interview given to Kumkum Sangari, Rushdie has curiously denied his role as a political writer: “I know you have complained of not finding a coherent political ideology in *Shame*—and in that sense I’m certainly not an ideological writer” (Chauhan, 2001, 71). Given the ideological thrust in Rushdie’s writing, the denial implies a conscious absence of a Marxist agenda in his writing: he would, as if, like to short-circuit a system of cultural thinking but would never get over-concerned with the possible removal of that system. Political transformation—not to speak of a revolutionary change—remains beyond the pale of Rushdie’s working principle as a writer. At best, he remains an accurate, highly satiric recorder of political misdeeds and at worst, a resigned observer without a strategy for showing the way to a change. A novel like *Shame*, in this sense, is not just an attempt at pandering to the prejudicial views of the West that are prone to define a formerly Eastern colony only in terms of its ingrained corruption and ineradicable sloth. Actually, to be honest with Rushdie, Pakistan can be any country in the world, rife with corruption as he sees this ubiquitous element having a global reach that does not spare even the West. But he draws flak because of his rather meagre offering of Western locales, excepting *The Satanic Verses*, as areas for unfolding human action, despite the writer’s avowed position of disbelief in geographical specifics. Recent critics like Sarah Brouillette opine that the Rushdie of the 1980s and the one after the year 2000 are two different writers especially in terms of the political sensibility. Gone are the days of Leftist sympathies found in such good measure in a work like *The Jaguar Smile* published in 1987 when we decide to browse through *Fury*, a work of 2001, though both the works almost concern themselves with a similar subject. For Brouillette also, the key to understanding this lies in the change in Rushdie’s location as a writer—his socio-economic context and quite in the manner of Brennan, she suggests that his increasing dependence on Western sponsorship and help makes for “a more solipsistic interest in the status of authorship and origins within the field of cultural production for a global market”

(Brouillette, 2005, 140). We may sum it up with the further observation of Andrew Teverson, who in his monograph *Salman Rushdie*, faces this aspect in the writer rather squarely:

Rushdie's location *within and against* dominant aesthetic and ideological formations has meant that he has been able, consistently to disrupt those formations by adopting denunciatory political rhetorics, but that, because he is unwilling—or perhaps unable—to step outside those discursive formations, he is not a writer who has thought it his role to propose constructive alternatives (Teverson, 2010, 215).

In *Midnight's Children*, Rushdie's criticism of congress politics during the time of Emergency has been interpreted in politico-communal terms and led to an early banning of the book. Writing *The Satanic Verses* taught Rushdie the bitter lesson of 'getting 'exiled' from his own self in a very literal sense. But *The Moor's Last Sigh* is another significant work, written fourteen years after the publication of *Midnight's Children*, where he tries to be political, or at least, ideologically inclined and criticizes the rise of Hindu fundamentalism that now has maligned and speckled the ideal cosmopolis Bombay in post-Emergency India. The Rightist forces of Hindu fundamentalism have turned Bombay into a communally degenerate Mumbai. Quite symbolically, some of the characters that appear in Rushdie's early Bombay fictions are killed here: Zeenat Vakil has been a resident of Bombay in *The Satanic Verses* and Adam Braganza shares the same city as his dwelling in *Midnight's Children*. Saleem had a friend during his boyhood days named Cyrus Dubash who later became Lord Khusro. They all meet a similar fate during the time of terrorist bomb blasts. In an important sense, they are taken off because Rushdie no longer equates the Bombay of present times with his idea of a modern, multi-cultural cosmopolis. The source of the bombs is deliberately kept a mystery in the text and it is immaterial whether Abraham Zogoiby can be held guilty for setting them off. In the Bengali novella *Herbert* written by Nabarun Bhattacharya, the accumulated sin, frustrated Left ideology and increased leaning towards a consumerist culture of an entire generation of Kolkata-dwellers are let out through the symbolic explosion of hidden bombs, sewn into the bed-mattress of Herbert and put on to the pyre along with his dead body as part of Hindu death-rituals. Not so anti-climactically, and definitely not enacted on an individual, rather localized scale as in the case of Bhattacharya's fiction, but on a broader mass level of action, the explosions in Rushdie's text do represent an emotive, and ideological, fin-de-siècle of his writerly oeuvre: it denotes an end of Rushdie's dream, signifying the auto-generated dread that thickly overlays

the psyche of the city-residents as their love for filthy lucre and preference for fundamentalist politics have eroded the cosmopolitan fibre and transformed the multicultural and Anglophonic Bombay into a racially, and more parochially descriptive term 'Mumbai.'

The Ground beneath Her Feet and *Fury* are two following novels which can be seen as an antidote to the corrupt and capitably driven violent atmosphere of a dystopic Bombay highlighted so significantly in *The Moor's Last Sigh*. Global mass culture cannot escape the bane of global consumerist culture, and in fact, the former, to a great extent, is the product of the latter. But Rushdie is keen to depict tolerant, accommodative and humanely cosmopolitan tendencies in such a worldly manifestation that may from time to time transcend the counter-pulls of the Hydra-headed global capital, with all its economic sorceries affecting the celebration of multiplicity and diversity in human living. In the words of Teverson:

Whilst earlier novels thus tend to explore the impact upon individuals and communities of the experience of being between multiple traditions, *The Ground* and *Fury* turn more explicitly to consider the impact upon the producer of cultural works of the experience of being caught between the demands of the global market and the imperatives of local self-expression (Teverson, 194).

Ormus Cama, the gifted musician and his photographer friend Rai or Umeed Merchant fall in love with the half-Indian and half-American beauty Vina Apsara in *The Ground beneath Her Feet*. All of them are linked to the city of Bombay. A magical real charting of history sees both Cama and Vina riding the crest of a globally sweeping pop fame. A car-crash leaves Ormus in a coma while Vina dies in an earthquake on the Valentine's Day. Ormus finally recovers with the addition of a hallucinatory vision to his being while Vina is immortalized by her fans and followers. Now, Rai starts telling their love-story in the manner of a pop-presentation of the original Orpheus myth with the legendary lyre turning into the formation of a musical association between Ormus and Apsara named VTO which carries an all too obvious reference to the famous band U2. The heady concoction of music, love and story-telling mounted on a pop-platform is, thus, Rushdie's answer to the hegemonistic politics of global capital that ruthlessly puts into action homogenizing forces of market economy that assumes as varied a phenomenon as the humanity to be a 'consuming machine gobbling up any item that fulfils its hunger for commoditization. In *Shalimar the Clown*, the killing of Max Ophuls, the US counter-terrorism expert and ambassador to India, by the