

Salman Rushdie: Exile, Defense & Unification

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“Exile is a dream of glorious return. Exile is a vision of revolution ... It is an endless paradox looking forward by always looking back. It is a ball hurled...” (*Rushdie*, 212)

Exile simply means being away from one’s own home. Home here implies to both state and country. The person, devoid of his home, is not allowed to return and if returns is condemned to severe punishment and even death. Here the issue that I am up to take is the theme of exile in Rushdie’s works and how he defends himself and the writers of his ilk writing about their natives.

Salman Rushdie is a candid, impassioned and torrid writer and his works are an important track of a writer’s noetic and subjective odyssey. My reference here is to his *“Imaginary Homelands”*. A quasi-biographical work, an accumulation of essays and papers, has not left even a single aspect of social and literary topics to be touched upon. The work screens a beamy range in this concern. I found it quite incisive, probing, penetrating, eloquent and lively. There are strong enough excerpts which make the work welcome to anyone who has dealt with him and his ideas of the cultural and political plight of an emigrant. “...Rushdie emblemize significant shifts over the course of the century, from a modernist expression of almost universal deracination, to a post-Auschwitz disarticulation of home and subjectivity” (Outlandish, Isreal)

The troth of the expatriates is perceptible in many of his works like *“Imaginary Homelands”*, *“Midnight’s Children”* and *“Shame”*. In his view exile whether from one nation to another, from one culture to another or even from a village to city is the most shaping figure of the 20th century. On the convoluted situation of this emblematic figure, Mr. Rushdie owns a unique authority to speak, for he has been both an insider and outsider and “the other”, being a Muslim in preponderantly Hindu India, then as an Indian emigree to Pakistan and then as an Indian-Pakistani residing in U.K. and after the publication of his polemical *“The Satanic Verses”* as a wrongdoer to Islam, hidden, charged for an incurable religious injury.

The impact of this process of immigration, be it self-imposed or situational, reverberate down the years and is felt even more intensely today. The historical fury of the colonial epoch still echoes in the literature of the offspring(s) of the moved and deportees. All the victims of this genre of literature come under the genre of being called “post-colonials” as they share a common bond and can feel the pain of the common wound given to them by being expats both from their roots and themselves. Here I recall some lines from *R. Parthasarthy’s “Rough Passages” (Homecoming)*-

“My tongue in English chains...
I return, after a generation, to you,
I am at the end...
hunger for you unassuaged”

(R. Parthasarathy Homecoming, lines 3-6)

These lines hold the same notion as the ones stated by Mr. Rushdie in his “*Imaginary Homelands*”;

It may be writers in my position, exiles or emigrants or emigrants or expatriates are haunted by some sense of loss, some urge to reclaim... in short create fictions not actual villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands, Indias of mind.

Rushdie throughout his works specifically in “*Midnight’s Children*” centers his focus on the inquisitive position tenanted by all these writers. As per my opinion I found him defending himself in this way and justifying his ways and writings being an expat. The other issue that Rushdie and all other postcolonial writers take up in their writings is that what kind of impact does the process of moving leave on the mover’s identity and his relationships both with the *roots* and *leaves*. He speculates that the act of migration transforms an individual as well as his relationship with both the countries and consequently their own identity is at loss. It is usually thought that they lose the ‘Real connection’ with both the left and acquired country. However in ‘*Imaginary Homelands*’, we see Rushdie taking a new stand and asserting that through the process of moving from one country to another and acquiring the diaspora identity, although taken as negatively many a time, is actually seen as a source of potential and strength. Though in “*Shame*” he gives us another and real speculation of this element, saying;

... It is the fate of a migrant to be stripped of history, to stand naked amidst the scorn of strangers upon whom they see rich clothing, the brocades of continuity and the eyebrows of belonging... (Rushdie, *Shame*, 63-64).

Whereas in “*Imaginary Homelands*” he opines totally different thing tagging the expat with an entirely positive notion where he highlights the fact that because the migrants are not enwrapped in ‘continuity’ and ‘belonging’, they can see the life in a quite different way. Their perspective is unique, which gives them a keener insight as they own the authority of concocting the aspects of both their native and adopted homes and cultures and in this way they exploit their diaspora identity at its best. Being an immigrant then is seen as a site of greater and brighter opportunities for the writer of this genre has sojourned across the wide-wide sea and so many lands observing the microscopic realities of both the places. This quality is visible in almost all of his work from “*The Grimus*” to the latest one- “*Shalimar-the Clown*”. He has acquired the ability to put down facts about both his parent’s place and his present one, from the position of being both a quasi-insider and outsider. As he states in “*Imaginary Homelands*”;

Our identity is at once plural and partial. Sometimes we feel that we straddle two cultures at one time, we fall between two stools. But, however, ambiguous and shifting this ground may be it is not infertile territory for a writer to occupy... (Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands*, 15)

With his works Rushdie paved the path for postcolonial literature in India. He began the task to decolonize English from English. Diasporic works click the two polarities of their experience: exile and homeland. All diasporic literature is assaying dialogues between the two signs. Thus as longing for belonging is one of the chief concerns of the writings by diasporic

writers and so of the postcolonial writers'. All the characters of Rushdie like him brood between two cosmos: both clamber in their new lands and then both are forced to leave them. (Saleem in *Midnight's children* is a speculation of Rushdie himself)

Despite myriad fissures between the two entities one fruitful outcome and the need of the hour too, is the abstract but rigid lines that were drawn and existed have been vanished and razed. Rushdie pledges the macrocosm to open all the doors and cross all the hedges. All the writers of his class have attempted to fetch both the hemispheres nearer so as to merge them in one. In the novel "*The Enchantress of Florence*", he realizes the motif of Quara Kor's coming to the Westward as he puts;

She comes here for her own free will in hope of forging a union between the great cultures of Europe and the East, knowing she has much to learn from us and believing too, that she has much too teach... (Rushdie, *Algeria*, 276)

The dream of diasporic authors and Rushdie himself to a certain extent has come to be true. Now the wall of Berlin cease to exist and people are free to see the world according to their personal perception and view point.

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