

## SALMAN RUSHDIE'S *THE GOLDEN HOUSE*: CLASSICAL WORLDVIEW FOR POSTMODERN TIMES

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Salman Rushdie's name has been identified with magic realism for so long, but it appears that as one gets older, the traditional patterns of life or literature pull one back. In his latest novel *The Golden House*, Rushdie has dropped his signature magic realism and dished out traditional realism. This is not to condemn conventional notion of realism, rather to uphold it as something that was envisioned as integral to the art of novel, way back in 18<sup>th</sup> century England.

The novel still has elements of postmodern style in so far as language and some of the narrative techniques like metanarrative reflexivity, ambivalence, obfuscation, multiple registers, high allusiveness, etc. are concerned. But so far as the thematics is concerned, Rushdie takes a firm stand rather than leave it open-ended. The villain of the piece, a Mumbai mafia don with links to terrorists gets poetic justice in the end. The notion of justice has always been upheld as a humanist ideal in Greek culture – the inspiration behind Western philosophy. That, incidentally, is also the gist of Indian poetics and philosophy. *The Golden House*, thus, marks a watershed in the creative career of Salman Rushdie and upholds the universal and eternal values, which are under attack from the postmodernists.

**Keywords:** Magic realism, Postmodern, Classical, Poetic justice, Metanarrative.

### Introduction

Salman Rushdie is known the world over for his fiction whose superb quality won him the 'Best of Booker' award in 2008 indicating his unchallenged sway over the Booker winning novels in the last 40 years. His appearance on the scene with his magnum opus *Midnight's Children* (1981) was a momentous event for the genre of Indian English Fiction, for, in the words of a critic, it "legitimized and privileged the till then marginalized 'other' and stood the conventional notions of the centre and margins on their respective heads. This text proclaimed the arrival of a new type of Postcolonial – not the Mimic man – not one who has accepted the 'givens' of history and politics, but one who subverted and rewrote histories, smashed the whole sorry scheme of things and moulded new realities" (Bharucha 93).

Rushdie's latest novel *The Golden House* shows him in a surprisingly new avatar. He has not only shunned some of the trappings of postmodern literature, particularly magic realism which he pioneered in Indian English Fiction and which became the hallmark of his novels<sup>1</sup>, but has also espoused clear moral stance. Now this is something that has been valued in Western as well as Indian poetics, but before commenting further, let us go through the storyline.

### Storyline

Terror stalks entire world today, therefore it is natural for an intellectual writer like Rushdie to take it up as the theme of his novel. *The Golden House* is the story of an unnamed mafia don, who grew up in Mumbai and came in contact with known goons given to extorting money from people. Later, he also stepped into the business of real estate where his highhandedness helped him mint money and grow in stature. But when his accomplices turned into terrorists to settle score with the disciplining state, he parted ways with them. The turning point was the terror attack on the Taj Hotel in Mumbai on 26/11 in which he lost his wife who had gone there after a fight with him.

Our don shifts to New York where he had already been investing heavily. It is here that he is acquainted with the narrator who gives him the name Nero Golden and their house the Golden House. The narrator imagines Nero asking his children, in true postmodern fashion, to choose their new identity in the adopted land and so we have the three names from the Greek classics: Petronius, Lucius Apuleius and Dionysus, which are later abridged as Petya, Apu and D for the sake of convenience.

Petya, the eldest, a 42-year-old, broad-shouldered, tech-savvy chap who has a penchant for inventing interesting video games, becomes garrulous after taking liquor (45), otherwise he remains cocooned within his room that is bathed in blue light. The narrator “noted the desperation behind his performance [an unwieldy talk at a house party], the desperation of a mind unable to discipline itself and descending, therefore, into the carnivalesque. A mind imprisoned by itself, serving a life sentence” (46).

Apu, the 41 yr. old middle son, is described as a sober and romantic artist, a poet at par with Deli, as also a promiscuous metropolitan. So, while not at work, “he ran voraciously through the city, embracing it all like a young Whitman, the undergrounds, the clubs, the power stations, the prisons, the subcultures, the catastrophes, the flaming comets, the gamblers, the dying factories the dancing queens. He was his brother’s antithesis” (55).

Nero Golden’s third and the youngest son D is actually born of Nero’s illicit affair with a woman. D is an intellectual, idealist type and so is Riya Z, his friend. However, D is a transvestite and has feminine mannerism also. His identity grows more and more problematic with the passage of time. Hence the use of parenthesis with pronoun ‘he’ (254), which changes to ‘she’ (266).

The family lived almost secluded life till the world around overtook them. In the Golden House, family members did not discuss matters with one another. Nero Golden expected his children to grow up strong like him. He was the master of all and “The ‘boys’, Nero’s sons, came to see him every day, and these were unusual encounters, speaking of his immense authority over them, not so much father-son meetings as cap-in-hand obeisances paid by subjects to their master” (162).

After settling down in New York in the locality referred to as the Gardens, Petya falls in love with a Somali artist Ubah, but in doing this, he unwittingly crosses his brother Apu’s path who had been in love with her, springing from their common interest in arts. Petya, who got infatuated so much by Ubah that upon finding her disinterested in him, tried to commit suicide but was checked in time by his father. Later, he was seen confined to his room, suffering from agoraphobia, screaming in rage all the while.

Rushdie links the plot to contemporary events. Thus, the frequent tornadoes rocking America also find mention here. The Golden family go in their private jet to an island off Hawaii to escape the coming blizzard, where many rich people maintain habitation. At the new year party there, the 74-year old Nero is hooked by a 27-year old Siberian girl named Vasilisa. She spends two nights with him and on the third, gets commitments with regard to his house, car, bank account, etc.! Thus, she takes control of Nero’s life and the Golden House. Vasilisa is an interesting character and is portrayed as a supergirl, a human witch, a “snake”, as the narrator would refer to her. (172).

Rene Unterlindon, the narrator, is a debutant film maker and is an important link in the story as he is at once outside and inside the narrative in the postmodern style. He is not only Nero’s neighbour but also a family member in the sense that he later becomes the father of Vasilisa’s baby, even though he is in love with Suchitra. After the death of his parents, Rene sells his house, but is surprisingly, invited by the Golden couple to stay with them. Now, Vasilisa wanted a baby but the pregnancy was not happening. She thought of a plot. She got Nero’s potency report and doctored it to mean he was fine. For getting a baby,

she had sex with Rene quite a few times in a hotel. When she became pregnant, Vasilisa severed relationship despite her promise to the contrary, leaving Rene pining for his son.

Now, the wheel of fate turns and to Nero's bad luck, Apu visits Mumbai in the company of Ubah and both are murdered by Mastan's men. Mastan was the 'unbribeable' police officer whose career plummeted due to the machinations of Nero Golden's associate Don Corleone (character based on real life don Haji Mastan). The youngest offspring D's identity ambivalence grows despite counselling. Finally, he has to go in for sex change, comes home in woman (Vasilisa's) evening dress, feels he is unwelcome and so commits suicide. Petya goes to watch Halloween parade where a fusillade of shots fired by a maverick kills seven people including Petya, and his psychotherapist Murray Lett.

The past debts have to be paid as destiny dictates. Mastan, the retired police officer, comes calling at Nero's and warns him but is himself killed within 24 hours supposedly by Nero's men. Now is the turn of final justice. The road opposite Golden House is dug for some repair of infrastructure in the neighbourhood. A fire rages later, ostensibly from the underground gas pipes, said to be the handiwork of two Asians including a dwarf (Nero's adversary), which speedily engulfs the entire building trapping Nero, his wife and child in it. Rene had already shifted from the Golden House to a house opposite to it. The child, Vespa, is thrown by Vasilisa through window and is caught by a labourer. So, in the end Rene, Suchitra and Vespa are alive with Vespa having been declared the inheritor of all property and Rene as the guardian by Nero on the day of Mastan's visit. Also survives the movie or the story of these life cycles.

### Postmodern Traits

Rushdie is a writer of these postmodern times and his novel *The Golden House* exhibits postmodern traits in so far as style is concerned. Now postmodernism, as its high priest Jean-Francois Lyotard opined in his report *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, is the negation of all grand narratives of our times like Marxism, Freudism, etc. (Bertens 142-43). On the literary front, the impact of postmodernism followed the notion of deconstruction advanced by the French philosopher Jacques Derrida in the late 1960s. Briefly, it can be said of the impact on literature that

Postmodernism stands for freedom from tradition and authority. No centre, definite terms, boundaries or absolute truths exist. Truth is relative and subjective. The margins are as important as the centre. It stands for the contingent, the subversive and the functional. Irreverence towards authority, indeterminacy, experiments in techniques, eclecticism, pastiche, magic realism, collapse of demarcation between fact and fiction, non-recognition of boundaries, belief in relativity of critical approaches are some of the other hallmarks of Postmodern literature. What Postmodernism challenges are old style liberalism, its high moral tone with tradition and its high attendant notions of purity and authenticity considered implicit in the conventional forms of social life. (Malik & Batra 51).

Postmodernism negates the difference between the high and low art and is frequently found lacking in coherence and depth, being immersed in what Baudrillard called 'simulacra' – "where the image or the model becomes more real than the real" (Woods 26). Postmodernism got reflected as a stylistic hallmark, as Barry Lewis stipulates: "In literary terms, postmodernist fiction itself became perceptible as a kind of 'style' and its characteristic techniques and themes came to be adopted without the same sense of breaking new ground" (170). Magic realism can be considered as an important style marker of postmodernist fiction<sup>2</sup>.

Salman Rushdie is widely acknowledged as the pioneer of postmodern style in Indian English Literature. One can trace in him traits like "magic realism, intertextuality, meta-fictionality, extravagant farce, multi-mirrored analogy and a potent symbolic structure, the idea of reality as provisional and partial, the presence of deconstructive markers and practices etc." (Rajagopalachary 1-2). Here, in this novel, Rushdie does not use magic realism, save in the form of a 2-page insert, but he does play some postmodern metafictional and reflexive tricks as in obfuscating the identity of the narrator, who, the novel

states, has been “hiding behind the first-person plural, and may do so again” (22), flashes credentials like a visiting card (“I offer this brief CV now so that the reader may feel in good hands, the hands of a credible and not inexperienced storyteller”: 34); asks readers for patience (“Patience: I will not reveal all my secrets at once”: 39); knows his mental faculty will be suspected (“I say this while I am still in full possession of all my mental faculties”: 130); questions self about the logic of the story (“Plausible. And yet one is not wholly convinced”: 138), etc. This is to assure the reader in the postmodern spirit that the worlds outside the text and inside are not different.

The narrator, being placed outside the Golden family, can feign ignorance about intimate matters but later he is sucked into the vortex; thus he is outside as also inside the narrative. Rushdie also displays circularity and ambiguity in narration while referring to the city of Bombay, from where the protagonist Nero Golden had migrated. The name of the city and country India are kept in abeyance until page 19 as “the city that could not be named in the country that could not be identified” (16). After page 19, this self-imposed gag is lifted, but again, for reasons known to him only, Rushdie goes in for anonymity of city and country on page 114.

Rushdie has created postmodern situation in which people of different nationalities come together in New York which they call home – imaginary homelands – as Rushdie postulates in his book by the same name. There is the Indian mafia don as the protagonist, along with his sons, his new Russian wife Vaselisa, the Bulgarian narrator, the retired Burmese diplomat, the Australian doctor, the Somali girlfriend of Apu, et al.

Postmodernity converges with contemporaneity, with the now and the near, with our ephemeral and immediate experience as it mocks the veracity and claims of permanence of hallowed texts, of revered icons and the biblical promises. In this context, the narrative itself becomes suspect and turns into metanarrative. The metanarrative underlines the postmodern present in the lives of the characters too. The characters in *The Golden House* lead their lives within the binaries and they are conscious of these. “Even as my personal happiness increased, so did my unspoken self-criticism,” remarks Rene. (260). Commenting on the poststructuralist instability of semantics, the narrator says to Apu: “...the word spiritual, which was now applied to everything from religion to exercise regimes and fruit juice, needed to be given a rest, for perhaps a hundred years or so” (226).

*The Golden House* is a postmodern text in the sense that the use of allusions from literatures of the world as also reference to artistic works of all-time standing, placed alongside quotes from contemporary popular verbal and visual media make this work a pleasure to read and cherish. So, we often see the scattered allusions to Shakespeare, Aeschylus, Sophocles, Roman myth sitting comfortably with the recent news of escape from the Minnesota jail of two murderers! (261). As in Rushdie's other novels, Hindi film music (*Tuhi Meri Shab Hai...*) is heard in a Manhattan street (128). Rushdie completes the background of the song and tells us that it is from a 2006 Kangana Ranaut-starrer *Gangster*. (102-3). An overload of references, however, hinders the flow of narrative at times:

As I stared at Vasilisa Golden silhouetted against a window beyond which lay the winter waters of the Hudson she looked to me like one of the goddesses of the screen [...] like Jeff Daniels in *The Purple Rose of Cairo*. I thought of Ornella Mutti bewitching Swan in Schlöndorff's film of Proust; of Faye Dunaway as Bonnie Parker with her sensually twisting mouth captivating Warren Beatty's Clyde Barrow; of Monica Vitti in Antonioni shrinking erotically against a corner and murmuring *No lo so*; of Emmanuelle Beart clothed in nothing but beauty in *La belle noiseuse*. I thought of the Godardettes Seberg in *Breathless* and Karina in *Peirrot le fou* and Bardot in *Le mepris*, and then I tried to rebuke myself, reminding myself of the powerful feminist critiques of new wave cinema, Laura Mulvey's 'male gaze' theory ... (177).

Mixed language use is the condition of the postmodern fiction as there is blurring of boundaries between serious and popular fiction. *The Golden House* uses a mix of literary and colloquial forms. It is not bombastic as it was in *Midnight's Children* or *The Satanic Verses*. Ironic understatements, which subvert meaning in poststructural sense, abound like while talking of the family life of the Sicilian aristocrat Vito, Rushdie notes: “...disillusioned by Palermo, by the Mafia and by his father too, grew up to make his

home in New York and became determined to lead the opposite life to his father's, utterly faithful to his wife Blanca, but refusing to spend a single evening stuck alone with her and the children at home" (34).

But Rushdie can bring up emotions through conventional rhetoric where needed, as for example, while talking of the violence in America:

I walked the streets in a blind rage and all at once it was as if all the anger gathering in the air poured into me too, I could feel it, the anger of the unjustly dead, the young men shot for walking in a a stairwell while black, the young child shot for playing with a plastic gun in a playground while black, all the daily black death of America, screaming out that they deserved to live, and I could feel, too, the fury of white America at having to put up with a black man in a white house, and the frothing hatred of the homophobes, and the injured warmth of their targets... (146).

### Issue of Identity

An important theme touched upon in the novel is identity. The question of identity has become extremely vexed as postmodernism marks the fluidity of identity whereas postcoloniality underlines its importance in our times. "God is dead and identity fills the vacuum," comments Riya in the novel. (72). Indeed, for the migrant in any country, it becomes a matter of life and death. We find the contemporary world riven by identities based on class, caste, sex, colour, race, religion and, most of all, politics. It can be seen as a disruptive construct that is outcome of political tensions in oppressive societies where the majority tries to impose its norms on the minorities. It becomes "decisive and a strategic, deliberate mode of separation and the practices and methods of keeping cultures and social groups separated" (Marfield 44). Quoting Nasser Hussain, Marfield explains, "As is the practice in modern cosmopolitan society, the tendency of the dominant culture is to romanticize the link between culture and identities. Thus, ideological and social constructed forms such as African-American, Asian-American and so on become a necessary discursive practice in expressing and accentuating differences" (55). However, the hyphens in these constructs as in the theoretical emblem 'postcolonial' point to postmodern ambivalence only.

We love to flaunt our identities inspired by narcissism of the tallest order. Rushdie refers to the Museum of Identity<sup>3</sup>, which further underlines the importance of identity as the

mighty new force in the world, already as powerful as any theology or ideology, cultural identity and religious identity and nation and tribe and sect and family, it was a rapidly growing, multidisciplinary field, and at the heart of the Identity Museum was the question of the identity of the self, starting with the biological self and moving far beyond that. Gender identity, splitting as never before in human history, spawning whole new vocabularies that tried to grasp the new mutabilities. (72).

It is these 'mutabilities' that are in focus at the end of arguments. Postcolonial theory shows identity is relative in the context of the colonizer and the colonized or the dominant and the dominated. The issue is discussed in the novel in some depth with references to the mythical notions of *ardh-narishwar* or grammatical particles denoting sex. The conversation between D, Riya and Ivy Mantel hinges on the issue of D's sexual identity:

Or maybe transfeminine, because you're born male, identify with many aspects of femaleness but you don't feel you actually are a woman.'

'The word woman is being detached from biology. Also the word *man*.'

'Or if you don't identify with woman-ness or man-ness maybe you're non-binary.' (111-12).

They discuss the grammatical pronouns used in different languages for denoting sex. Finally, Riya sets his doubts to rest with the words: "You can choose who you want to be, sexual identity is not a given. It's a choice" (112). Elsewhere, D and the professional psychologist debate what is woman, mind-body problem, choice and freedom, etc. (250). Nero, like anyone from the older generation, is unable to

comprehend the idea of mixed sexual identity like women without women's parts, man with surgically constructed organs. (307).

### **Classical Worldview**

The discussion on identity is, however, to be qualified in that Rushdie's characters hardly change; their inner identity remains stable. They are flat in Forster's terminology and so the fluidity of character remains confined to discussion only. The characters, in fact, come out larger than life. Despite the fact that the protagonist is a former don, Rushdie, through his skilful narration, is able to win over reader's empathy for him. One tends to agree with the critic who avers:

For all its literary bravado, the brilliance of its practised riffs, this latest Rushdie novel is not about attack or even showing off. It is a work of mourning: Greek tragedy, Greek threnody. Speaking of which, Greek myth and Roman history laminate this novel all over with their dark gold: Jason and his Argonauts chasing the Golden Fleece, Apuleius' story of metamorphosis in *The Golden Ass*, Roman Emperors, Furies, Muses, Hubris, Nemesis, the gods Dionysius and Pan, you will recognise each of them in these bloodied pages. (Nair)

Indeed, the novel upholds the classical viewpoint. The foremost concern of classics from Aristotelian days to Renaissance period and onward to the eighteenth century practitioners of neo-classicism had been the human being and how he could and should be made perfect. 'Know thyself' was the motif of ancient Greek humanism which inspires all western thought. While values like morality, justice and courage were high in hierarchy, hubris was placed at the lowest level. In Homer, we find "moral reflections on the behaviour of men, the foolishness of mortals, the misery and transitoriness of life, and the wickedness of injustice" (Thilly 9). It is the same with Hesiod, who in his *Works and Days* attacks the foibles of his time and presents moral maxims, as also with others like Aesop (of *Aesop's Fables*) and the gnomic poets. Horace believed literature to be a vehicle of instruction as well as delight, and this is what best fits Rushdie's novel under discussion here.

The moral slant in literature was viewed favourably and indeed practised by the neo-classicists of the 18<sup>th</sup> century England like Alexander Pope and Dr Samuel Johnson, et al, for whom ancient Greek and Latin masterpieces were classics or ideals for them to follow. Poetry was designed "to yield both instruction and pleasure to the people who read it. Not art for art's sake, but art for humanity's sake was a central ideal of neoclassic humanism" (Abrams 184). The moral approach continued to hold sway until the 19<sup>th</sup> century realist movement caught on in literature sending ideals based on antiquity out of use. However, morality cannot be totally banished from the world, so we have literary figures and critics like Mathew Arnold, T.S. Eliot, Paul Elmer More, and lately Yvor Winters, Edmund Fuller et al. Irving Babbit, a known humanist and Eliot's teacher wrote in his essay "Genius and Taste": "Truly great literature conforms to standards, to the ethical norm that sets bounds to the eagerness of the creator to express himself" (138).

It is not only the western classics that espouse morality as something important, but the Indian classical works too stress moral principle not only in literature but in all knowledge-imparting texts<sup>4</sup>. In fact, dharma itself is defined in moral terms – as that which ought to be practised (*ya dharyate sa dharma*). Thus, the moral end is not religion-specific in the sense that it cannot be identified with any organized religion<sup>5</sup>. This dharmic (based on dharma) view should inform literature, according to the Indian poetics.

### **Moral and Philosophical Issues**

Rushdie's classical proclivity is further substantiated by his focus on the moral and philosophical questions which have always stared mankind in the eye. This novel debates lofty questions and mysteries

of life and world – self, society, literature, etc. – from different perspectives, all of which raises its stature above the run-of-the-mill novels. Almost every character, including Nero, grows philosophical. Apu is already devoted to mysticism. Rene and Suchitra discuss the goings-on in the Golden House and elsewhere in the world in philosophical vein. At one place, Suchitra remarks to Rene: “Be profound. Own your tragedy. Find your freedom. Resolve your ambiguity” (285).

In Chapter Two, the protagonist asks the key moral question: “What is a good life?” This is something that would be miles away from a postmodern mind. “The question (overt or implied) now asked by the professionalist student, the State, or institutions of higher education is no longer ‘Is it true?’ but ‘What use is it?’”, notes Lyotard (51). This is the world of utilitarians now, but Rushdie’s answer underlines his worldview: “In these our cowardly times, we deny the grandeur of the Universal, and assert and glorify our local Bigotries... In these our degenerate times, men bent on nothing but vainglory and personal gain — hollow, bombastic men for whom nothing is off-limits if it advances their petty cause — will claim to be great leaders and benefactors, acting in the common good...” (7). The novel, therefore, is a critique of postmodern thinking.

The conflict between good and evil does not require the mediation of religion, as the narrator observes: “I had been brought up by those dear departed Belgians [his parents] to believe that ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ were ideas that came naturally to the human animal, that these concepts were born in us, made. We believed that there was a ‘moral instinct’: hard-wired into the DNA in the way that, according to Steven Pinker, the ‘language instinct’ was. This was our family answer to the religious allegation that persons without religion could not be moral beings, that only the moral structure of a religious system validated by some sort of Supreme Arbiter could give human beings a firm grip on good and evil” (147). The narrator seems to be airing Rushdie’s views, who, while answering an interviewer, said:

...there’s a lesson there that you can’t avoid learning about the power of religions and fanaticism to unleash this kind of horror. I think it’s quite clear that in my life, or anybody in my generation, anybody growing up in independent India in the last half century, knows that. They know about the capacity that lurks inside that religious belief when pushed to the extreme to unleash extreme violence. (Deena 21).

Rushdie perceives the postmodern world from a classical moralist’s position. It becomes evident even in his views on contemporary politics. Rushdie comes down heavily on the Trumpian kind of politics that controls the world today. Rushdie’s assessment is that “The world outside the haunted house had begun to feel like a lie. Outside the house it was the Joker’s world, the world of what reality had begun to mean in America, which was to say, a kind of radical untruth: phoniness, garishness, bigotry, vulgarity, violence, paranoia, and looking down upon it all from his dark tower, a creature with white skin and green hair and bright, bright red lips” (278). This postmodern world is not to Rushdie’s liking, for he believes in classical values of truth and morality.

## Conclusion

Summing up, it can be said that the novel *The Golden House* has the format of a postmodern thriller that is full of chases and murders, but the message enshrined is the classical one that has been valued in all literatures, whether Western or Eastern until postmodernism raised its head: It is that human action or character becomes one’s destiny. Fate justly punishes you for evil deeds. This is also the gist of the *Karma* theory upheld in Indian philosophy and justice is the value upheld in ancient Greek literature. Surprisingly, this is clear to Nero – a proud man – who confesses to Riya towards the end of the novel: “You accuse me and I am guilty of it and fate has punished me by taking my children. One child dead at the hands of my enemies, one by his own hand, one at the hand of a madman, but all three are my punishment and my burden to bear forever, yes, and their mothers too” (336). Nero Golden is, thus, wiser but it is too late and he also meets his doom for having set the wheel of justice in motion the moment he chose the evil course in life. Rushdie’s worldview castigates the protagonist’s hubris. Rene comments,

“After Hubris comes Nemesis: *Adrasteia*, the inescapable” (261). This justifies the punishment which makes the message classical and universal.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Talking of magic realism, one notes its prevalence in most of Salman Rushdie's novels. The use of magic realism informs the storyline of his first novel *Grimus*, which pictures a magical Calf Island where immortals live who can also undertake celestial travel. The story is basically about Flapping Eagle, an Indian who drinks a magic potion and lives for more than 700 years. In *Midnight's Children*, the protagonist and all those born on the midnight hour of Aug. 15, 1947 possess telepathic powers. In *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*, the protagonist gains extra vision as a result of an accident. In *Satanic Verses*, in the first chapter, Gibreel and Saladin Chamcha are shown falling from the aeroplane, with the latter transforming into a goat-like creature. In *Luka and Fire of Life* also, we find the entire scenario is marked by things linked to magic, as for example, flying carpet, the city of Dreams, the land of Lost Childhood, River of the Magic World, etc. In *The Enchantress of Florence*, the human turns into a witch. Rushdie, however, did not use this technique in *Fury*, his seventh novel published in 2001. Fantastic happenings are the staple of Rushdie's fiction which take place “without the narrator registering surprise or commenting on their strangeness” (Faris 281), thus fulfilling the condition of a magical realist text.

<sup>2</sup> Barry Lewis, in his essay in the anthology *Routledge Companion to Postmodernism*, identifies these markers of postmodernist fiction as temporal disorder, i.e., blending of history with fantasy; pastiche; fragmentation or the breaking up of plot, character, setting and theme, which were earlier considered the cornerstones of fiction; looseness in chaptalization; obsession with dread of existence and of losing freedom; and the permeation of text and the world, with author or real historical personages entering fiction.

<sup>3</sup> The replacement of traditional museums by identity museums has been trending lately. Rice Hall of George Washington University explains: “...the notion of the traditional museum as we've come to know it – a cold, looming temple of glass-cased collections from an antiquated, imperial past – has given way to a proliferation of museums designed to celebrate the shared experiences of a particular ethnic, racial, or religious group. But [...] ‘identity museums’, whether they focus on Asian Americans, Jewish Americans or other groups, are creating a distorted cultural narrative that is far from black and white marble” (Hall).

<sup>4</sup> Knowledge in Indian tradition is suffused with socially relevant and useful values. Regarding the purpose of literature, “Most Indian theorists are agreed on literature's purpose being the promotion of commonly accepted ends of life. Bharata [the first great theoretician in Indian drama] at the very beginning in no uncertain terms asserts that literature is a discourse of knowledge – *pancam veda* – a knowledge text. The art experience therefore is perceived as a transforming experience as the *ananda* (joy) experienced is illuminating, enlightening, liberating – the experiencer acquires new, affirmative cognition and thereby escapes from his narrow self and his inherent worldly tendencies and becomes nobler than he actually may be” (Kapoor 163-4).

<sup>5</sup> Professor Makarand Paranjape avers that the concept of dharma is different from religion: “Modern secular religions like Humanism or Marxism have a *dharmic* element in them. Dharma is common to Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism, the indigenous religions and to Zoroastrianism, Islam and Christianity, faiths which have their origins outside our land but which have many local adherents now. That is why, the faith of this country is known as *sanatana* dharma, the eternal dharma, and is not to be identified with any one form of what has now come to be known as Hinduism” (85). Taking up the works of two authors – Raja Rao and Salman Rushdie, Paranjape comments that “a Raja Rao or a Salman Rushdie despite their totally dissimilar values and philosophies, may be seen as similar in that they both wish to act upon society, to alter it in ways they consider good and beneficial. Both are, in that sense, practitioners and teachers of dharma, though one is traditional, the other modern; one Vedantic, the other Leftist; one religious, the other secular; one majoritarian, the other minoritarian, and so on” (96).

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