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### **Politics of Frontiers, Exile, Hybridity and Multiculturalism in the Novels of Salman Rushdie**

#### **ABSTRACT**

Salman Rushdie was the first novelist who used the term “mongrelization” for the first time giving the idea of cultural hybridity. Homi K. Bhabha propounded his theory of hybridity in his famous essay *The Other Question and Location of Culture*. Bhabha’s theory has evoked great interest among the cultural theorists. The modern cultural landscape is a juxtaposition of diverse cross-cultural influences, and the multicultural nature of society has become an inevitable reality. The world is a family today and with the growth of science and technology mobility has become much easier. The modern culture is fluid, hybrid and interstitial, moving between spaces of meaning. Most of Rushdie’s characters are migrants, they cross frontiers, their migrancy is always transgressive, crossing of frontiers, which permanently transforms them. Rushdie’s parameter of diaspora also changes in *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*. In this paper the global vision of Rushdie is explored from the perspective of Post-colonial theory of cultural disruption and multiculturalism. With his hybrid and global characters, Rushdie points towards a future in which the world will be united to face any threat.

**KEY WORDS:** Hybridity, Migrancy, Diaspora, Multiculturalism, Disruption, Frontiers, Mongerelization.

Rushdie believes that when a protagonist dares to cross the frontier, he faces uncertainty of life, his mind is full of fear and anticipation as something new might happen. In *The Satanic Verses* and in *Imaginary Homelands*, Rushdie celebrates "mélange, hotchpotch, a bit of this and a bit of that is how newness centers the world." (394). The idea of cultural hybridity is the product of interaction between "colonizers" and the "colonized." Bhabha contended the colonized individuals are dependent on the colonizers in evolving a new shared culture. In his book *The Location of Culture* (1994) Bhabha explores the forces of cultural change and investigates the growth of modern cultural systems. He argues that in the modern global world no man can live like an island since social interaction and inter-dependence has become a necessity of life. Bhabha critically analyzed the forces of cultural change and "The transnational dimension of cultural transformation" (Bhabha, *Location of Culture*, 75) In the global set up migration, diaspora, displacement, the process of cultural disruption is very common. When a migrant leaves his home land he is fully aware of the diasporic pain of the alien lands.

The famous modern sociologist Zugmunt Bautman wrote *Legislators and Interpreters* (1987), and *Intimations of Postmodernity* (1992), in his *Liquid Modernity* (2000), *Liquid Love* (2003), *Liquid Times* (2007). In all his philosophical works, Bautman propounded new configuration of modern age which he called "Liquid Modernity". His main argument is that liquidity "neither fix space nor bind time" (Bautman, *Liquid Modernity* 2) Bautman's philosophical ideas of protean nature of liquids may be related to Rushdie's sense of the frontiers as "being shifting, temporary and liquid in nature." Rushdie has discussed the famous science fiction *The Making of the Representative for Planet* and *Step Across This Line* (2002) of Doris Lessing to explore the nature of hybridity. He has investigated the origin of migration and his incursion into history of border crossings ends with the remark that "we are living in a frontier time (Lessing, 104) For Rushdie "the frontier is an elusive line visible and invisible, physical and metaphorical, amoral and moral" (Rushdie, 78) He refers to crossing Arthurian legend, the *Fianna* epic tales and argues that any border crossing is "transgressive". Like Bautman, Rushdie contends that "the final frontier they are fated to cross is not space, but time." (78). Bautman also argues thus: "The search for identity is the ongoing struggle" (Bautman, *Liquid Modernity* 82). Rushdie refers to Northrop Frye's archetypal theory and discusses the forces that lead to the migration of people and he observes: "The Grail is chimera. The quest for the Grail is the Grail (Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands* 77). Bhabha uses words like "diaspora, displacement and relocation"

highlighting the dynamic nature of culture. He has punctured the traditional view of historical narratives that cultures rely upon to draw boundaries and define themselves.

Rushdie himself was a product of the diasporic condition. All his fiction is packed with the themes of cultural dislocation, displacement, change and continuity, strangeness and familiarity which the protagonists encounter living in a complex and multicultural world. Salman Rushdie articulates his psychological pain of diaspora in all his novels in a simple and lyrical language. He depicts the challenges of the postcolonial author, his commitment to depict the agony of diaspora who lived and suffered cultural dislocation and homelessness. Rushdie's approach in his novels is cosmopolitan as he took up all the themes of post-colonial society depicting the relationship between colonizers and the colonized. Since the publication of *The Satanic Verses*, he has been fighting a battle for his survival. Rushdie, being a man of diaspora, had earlier been facing an inner battle for existence, but after the publication of the previously mentioned novel, his struggle became both external and internal. He deals with the interior conflicts of colonial identity, living as a permanent outsider, searching for personal authenticity in one or many cultures. He represents the people of the subcontinent who are living in their migrated countries. His essay *Imaginary Homelands* (1992) is considered the manifesto of the immigrant writer as it analyzes the nature of hybridity and its implications.

Rushdie believes that an immigrant writer must take the risk of pushing creativity to "the limits of what is possible, in the attempt to increase the sum of what it is possible to think" (15). Cultural displacement is inevitable as the immigrant writer is forced to accept "the provisional nature of all truths, all certainties" (12). The postcolonial writer is, according to Salman Rushdie, is liable to develop a fragmentary vision of reality because of his or her experience of displacement and homelessness. This fragmentation conditions the perception of the past, history, memory and fractured identity. Rushdie seems to consider this cultural displacement an essentially positive and liberating experience; the fact that he "straddles two stools" of culture frees him from a unilateral vision of both the world and his art and permits him to further encompass the two stools of fiction and reality. Rushdie's conviction is that "the migrant intellects roots itself in its own capacity for imagining and reimagining the world" (280) leads to the experience of the intangible nature of reality. Rushdie explains this situation through the protagonist Elfrida in *In Grimus* (1981) who after listening to a story, says:

I don't like it . . . It's too pretty, too neat. I do not care for stories that are so, so tight. Stories should be like life, slightly frayed at the edges full of loose ends and lives juxtaposed by accident rather than some grand design. Most of life has no meaning so it must surely be a distortion of life to tell tales in which every single element is meaningful?" (Rushdie,149).

In *Shame* (1992) Rushdie talks about the relationship between the imaginary country of his novel, his "fairyland" or "looking-glass Pakistan" expressing his ambivalence towards to the ultimate consequences of cultural alienation. Sometimes he appears to believe that reality itself is a construct of fiction, "that it does not exist until it is made, and that, like any other artifact, it can be made well or badly, and that it can also, of course, be unmade" (280). In the critical analysis of Rushdie's fiction, hybridity,""ambivalence," and "mimicry" often operate and discussed. In the words of Todd Rushdie is "a cultural broker" and a serious global writer depicting the dilemmas of the diasporas living in the post-colonial society. In *East, West*, Rushdie talks about the hybrid of human experience itself, and its ability to slip beyond from all the forces that seek to define it empirically. According to Linda Hutchinson, it is the result "of negotiating the many dualities and multiplicities" that have come to de. ne immigrants and post-colonials (vii).

Rushdie's work is has been focused on themes of globalization, migrancy, and cultural hybridity.

The themes of cultural hybridity, mimicry and ambivalence have inspired many critics and theorists to write on Rushdie." Said praised hybridity as creative, unconventional, methodologically liberating and eccentrically enlivening neither erase the awkwardness of such efforts nor alleviate the "envying those around you who have always been at home, the notion of hybridity describes the process of constructive fusion and mixture of cultural identities, knowledge, languages, races, sexualities, and ethnicities" (6). In this sense, hybridity is akin to what Mikhail Bakhtin termed the unconscious "organic" or unintentional hybridization Hybridity

In the modern novels James, Forster, Cary, Lawrence, Joyce, Greene, Rhys are concerned with the pin of diaspora. Young begins with some theoretical considerations about the nature of hybridity and culture. He shows that the defining feature of culture is difference - that "culture never stands alone but always participates in a conflict ridden economy acting out the tension between sameness and difference" (53) This economy is "perpetuated by the (typically) heterosexual transgression of racial lines, hybridity, which at once organizes and collapses cultural . For Bakhtin hybridity "is a mixture of two social languages (Bakhtin, 365).

Rushdie was a true migrant writer. He recounts his experiences with migration, as he travelled from India to England in his childhood and later to America. He has documented his personal diasporic experiences in all fiction and non-fiction. He observes thus: “His writing “[has] to do with where [he] came from, and trying to lay claim to it and to understand it in a new way.” (17) In his article “Homeless is Where the Art Is,” Rushdie addresses the experiences of the migrant, and claims that *East, West* “is the defining image of the 20th century. In the words of Stuart Hall

Cultural identity is a matter of becoming, as well as of being. It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture. (225)

In an interview shortly after the publication of his *East, West* (1994), Rushdie revealed that the book’s title was inspired by his personal connection to its subject matter. Rushdie uses *Midnight’s Children*, to examine the internal fractures within India, depicting all the divisive activities of the Hindu and the Muslims who felt displaced after they got independence. His novels depict the struggle of people to define their relationship to a new nation Pakistan. Linda Hutchinson has called Rushdie’s fiction as “historiographic meta-fiction, his treatment of history is in terms of subversion, revision or parody” has provoked many critics and theorists. In his novel *East, West* Rushdie explores that the migration is a reality as the science and technology has progressed by leaps and bounds. Young generation is adventurous and in search of employment the young men and women leave their homeland and go to the alien land for higher education and for employment since the world today is a global village. In his novel *Midnight’s Children* Rushdie depicts the oppressive colonial policies highlighting the partition violence in India and Pakistan; the scenes of the burning houses and sexual oppression of women are indeed heart rending. In these two texts, Rushdie addresses the fluid and uncertain nature of cultural and national identity.. Both *East West* and *Midnight’s Children* explores the myth of cultural and national identity as he says: “Neither nation nor culture is fixed entities, as the stories reveal, their statuses are as uncertain as they are important” (Salman Rushdie, *Midnight’s Children* 123).

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