

Psycho-Social Impact as a theme in the Novel *Joseph Anton*: a Memoir

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Abstract:

The text Joseph Anton: A Memoir highlights the theme of psycho-social impact on Rushdie due to the reaction of the publication of his novel *The Satanic Verses* (1988), the need to have freedom of expression and speech and the prevailing socio-political has driven him to forced exile and the prevailing socio-political situation that has driven him to forced exile and aftermath of his psychological depression resulting from alienation of *fatwa*. It mainly focuses on how Rushdie is affected psychologically and emotionally by *fatwa*. It deals with his life experiences. There is psychological validity behind Rushdie's delineation of rootlessness and sense of unhappy frustration resulting mainly from social milieu.

Memoir is your truth created from your memory and your experience

Lisa Dale Norton

Rushdie's treatment of sensitive religious and political subjects made him a controversial figure. He begins his memoir with the present day situation. Then, he narrates his past experiences. Past is related to present. The beginning of the memoir shows his difficult and painful situation. It is similar to Shakespeare's opening scene in *Hamlet*. Rushdie does not know what is happening around him. He says that he is a 'dead' man. This single word expresses his painful and pitiable condition. Even in valentines' Day, he does not

have space to spend time with his wife. After the announcement of *fatwa*, he is asked to give a live interview by CBS television, which creates a kind of weird feeling in himself. He is telephoned by many people. He is very depressed. In his own house, he has no safety. The news he hears galvanised his body like electric current.

Erik Erikson, who was influenced by Sigmund Freud opines that from childhood a person experiences a psycho-social crisis which could have a positive or negative impact in one's personality. He points out the roles of culture and society which may generate conflicts in one's identity. The author undergoes the psychological issues such as: trust vs. mistrust, autonomy vs. shame, industry vs. inferiority, identity vs. role confusion, intimacy vs. isolation, generativity vs. stagnation, ego integrity vs. despair. The author could face the problems with his hope, will, purpose, competency, fidelity, love, and care. In this memoir, the author's first task is to determine the specific theme he wants to pinpoint and investigate, or the precise period in his life that encompassed a great personal transformation that he wants to show.

Rushdie is compared to the bird. One bird comes down to roost on the climbing frame. It is unique. After the plague begins, it is easy for people to see the first bird as a harbinger. After that, the first bird is just a bird. Rushdie is a famous and well-known writer all over the world. He received the booker of booker prize for his second novel *Midnight's Children*. Then little by little, he flourished in his career. His writing skill as well as his style is unique. But the announcement of *fatwa* makes him helplessly move from house to house, country to country to hide him. One's up and down depends on other human beings' views. He is famous in the world. Suddenly, everything is changed. People easily erase one's past and construct a new version.

The publication of *The Satanic verses* is a turning point of his life. Many countries banned the book. The people who called him as a powerful writer, rebuke him by calling him

as ‘Satan Rushdy’. People are hunting for the mistakes of others. They are not ready to acknowledge one’s positives. Instead, they try to put an end to an individual’s growth. His fame as a writer has been thwarted by the people. People’s characters change from time to time. They are not stable. But Rushdie has strong mind. He does not change his will and determine his career. In practice, people are only for money and fame and not for character.

Rushdie has no wrong intention. He just writes what he thinks; he expresses his own thoughts in his writings. In this difficult situation, he has no idea to make a plan. He goes for his friend Bruce Chatwin’s memorial service. That time, the journalists are pushed their way towards him. They ask many questions about *fatwa*. He is tired of explaining to them that it is not an apt time for an interview as he is mourning for his friend’s death. The questions of the journalists instil more pain to him. They just want to get information from him by any means. If they undergo the same situation then only they understand his inner turmoil. Media can change one’s position. People blindly believe without verifying the facts and even media, for its own benefits corner him with numerous questions unanswerable, “he stood there blinking and directionless” (9). The world has changed with advent of science and technology the world has got many positive changes, but people’s mentality is still the same as before.

Rushdie recalls his childhood memories. His father tells many stories to him. He is inspired by his father. His mother is a gossip of the world class. She stops gossiping when he becomes a writer because she thinks that he makes all her gossips written in his works. It is very funny movement for him. In his childhood, he enjoyed his life to the core. Once he had bitter experience at Rugby school, like Jawaharlal Nehru’s in Harrow. He feels uncomfortable in an ethos that seemed to him racist and insensitive. Alienation is a lesson he learned in many situations again and again. From his childhood, he has been suffering from loneliness because of his circumstances. He is unhappy though he did well in his academic. He expresses his feelings and emotions about an important event at school. Many students

undergo these problems during their school or college time. People brought nothing into this World, and cannot take anything out. People come to visit the world, when visa is over, they go back. All people are one family in the house of god. Nothing is perfect on earth that depended on human beings.

When Rushdie tells his father about his literary aspiration, his father hesitates thinking of the society and his close wide. Many parents are like his father. They always think about society and impose their desire on them. Every child has his own individual talents and desires, but their parents never allow them to pursue that in fear of their reputation.

The world is filled with gossips and violence. There is small space for happiness. People are very eager to listen to other's life story from which they can make a new version of story. There is no one perfect to make judgements on others as critics have commented on *The Satanic Verses*: "The book was the devil's work and the author was the devil" (11). Rushdie does not write anything for his own purpose. He expresses his ideas through his works. He does not compel the people to believe or follow his words. If he does mean also people have no rights to kill or abuse him. In the eyes of god all are equal; no person in this world has the power to take the life of others. People call him as a dog and a bastard. In his memoir he has mentioned the hatred of a small boy towards him by the following words "the twelve year old boy explaining to the cameras that he was ready to kill the bastard personally" (182). It shows how the society has poisoned the innocent small boy's nature and heart. As a grown up man his forced exile makes him "feel sad to be so grievously separated from community, from India, from everyday life, from the world" (IH 414).

Ettore Capriolo is the translator of the Italian editor of *The Satanic Verses*. He is violently kicked and stabbed by Iranian man. The Japanese translator of *The Satanic Verses* Histoshi Igarashi is found murdered in lift near his office. Through this, readers can

understand that how people are very arrogant and how they are very angry on the Rushdie. Rushdie feels guilty and he is very much depressed thinking of the mentioned events. Through the other characters' expression, feelings and pain, one can understand Rushdie's painful situation and life. His life is like a drama, it has thrill, violence, love and passion. The readers are eagerly waiting for the climax.

The shape of Rushdie's life has changed. He suffers of uprootedness till the end. He is a Bombay boy, who made his life in London among the English. But he often feels cursed by a double unbelonging. In the world, millions of migrants face many problems, problems of homelessness, hunger, unemployment, disease, alienation and fear. But he is the luckiest man among the migrants.

Yeats said, "the intellect of man is forced to choose/ perfection of the life or the work" (38). Rushdie's is in this miserable condition. Rushdie has to fight a battle for his own life. He moves from house to house. He thinks that to live like this would be worse than death. He needs to find a place of his own. His publishers and translators are also threatened by *fatwa*. His own life is fractured under the pressure of these events. His literary world is cracked. He has to run away and hide like a terrified rabbit. *The Satanic Verses* robbed his joy and happiness is in threat not because of fear but because of sense of deep disappointment. In present situation, he gets power from the thought that he must live until he die. Rushdie is called blasphemy. Blasphemy has been at very root of western culture true. The trails of Socrates, Jesus Christ, and Galileo have all been blasphemy trails. Rushdie has lived in stressful circumstances.

Tariq Ali unkindly describes Rushdie as being a 'dead man on leave' (177). When Rushdie's mother died a Pakistani newspaper and article said that all those who had been at her funeral should beg forgiveness of God. Because "She was the mother of the apostate author" (87). The Pakistani film "International Gorillay" is produced by Sajjad Gill. It is the

story of a group of local heroes who have taken vow to find and kill an author called 'Rushdie'. "The quest for 'Rushdie' forms the main action of the film and 'his' death was the film's version of a happy ending" (255). Both his life and death become a property of other people. It is very horrible for Rushdie to see his own death in the film. But also he does not give up his courage. His friends and other people wonder how he faces all these problems without any fear. Though the situation is not favourable for him, he tries his level best to create a secured and safe ambience for him. As a writer, he employs his literary genius to express his view on various topics. There is no fault in expressing his opinions freely. But people, instead of evaluating his work as just a piece of literary work, dethrone him by accusing him of blasphemy. Though he faces many bitter experiences as a consequence of his book *The Satanic Verses* in the course of his life, he never seems to lose his will power. He is almost like a Christ figure who resurrects himself whenever needed.

During the *fatwa* time, Rushdie receives happiness only from his son Zafar. His son is very much depressed during the demonstration. As a small boy his understanding is different from others. He requests the people to ask about his father's views directly to him. Rushdie always cares and feels about his son. He speaks to his son regularly at phone. One day his wife and son have not attended the phone. That time he behaves like a mad. "He was not aware of weeping his face was wet" (160). Though his marriage life is failed as a father he is succeed in his life. Parents are living god. Rushdie has played and spent time with his son. His son's smile is the only strength and best nourishment to him in the world.

"A Friend in Need is a Friend indeed" is a golden word. This proverb becomes true in Rushdie's life. Friendship is an everlasting gift. Good friends are hard to find. Rushdie has gifted friends. He is always supported and secured by his friends in all situations. His friends pick him up when he is down, brighten his day when the skies of his life look gray and bleak, get him out of a jam. His friends are his part of life. He can't live and vanquish the problems

without his friends' aid. His friends do not expect anything from him like money or praise. They execute everything from their heart with true love. He says that his friends are really the ones protecting him. Rushdie is the luckiest person. "Without his friends he would have been forgotten, spiralling downwards into madness; or else a homeless wanderer; waiting for the assassin's bullet to find him" (288). Bill Buford says that Rushdie's friends are always around him like an iron cycle, and inside that ring he will be able to lead his life. Rushdie is thankful to his friends for taking care of him in the crucial situation. People may feel jealous about Rushdie's friends.

One has some bitter or sweet memories in one's life. A memory is a snapshot taken by heart. It makes a special movement forever. Rushdie offers the reality of experience by expressing his self in the form of memoir. The epigraph to *Joseph Anton* is enough to particularize the theme and substance of *Joseph Anton* which relates to Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, Act 2, Scene I, "And by that destiny, to perform an act; where of what's past is prologue; what to come in yours and my discharge". It recalls about Antonio rationalizing Sebastian about the past of life which might be affected by fate and destiny but they can decide future on the basis of past or last play of fate. It reflects the themes of his Memoir. Rushdie is referred to as Joseph Anton. He thinks that it is his second birth name and an outcome of condemning days and nights of *fatwa*. The name differs from both biological and social birth. It is the name of a literary intellectual body that lies within him, and beyond him.

Rushdie proposes in his memoir a study on commitment and inherent paradoxes, he being continually at grips with restraint, silence and hiding. The memoir's narrative technique consists in exposing, for each challenge he has to face; a history is loomed in the memoir. The memoir highlights and denounces the moment in history when the values of 18th century are put to test, thus making his personal experience truly significant in time and space.

In the beginning, he thinks like a writer and strongly convinced of the power of the words and arguments “words had got him to his mess, the words would get him out of it” (212). But his views alter inevitably as he enters the world of diplomacy and politics. “He was learning the limitations of languages. He had always believed in its omnipotence, in the power of the tongue. But language would not get out of this” (252). A wide spectrum of British, America and Indian societies is represented in the memoir.

Political commitment is fulfilled in the part of the memoir, which feature Rushdie’s political coming of age as he enters the world of actual politics. He becomes his own advocate and engages in a political campaign for which he needs to learn the language and the tricks. The author’s task is driven by the desire to reconstruct and reclaim the achievements of the enlightenment. Rushdie shows a cheerful willingness throughout the memoir to show off his less than dignified side. This memoir remains ambiguous and puts into question the reliability of the narrator in a project that is as much political as it is aesthetic. Historical comparison and references frame Rushdie’s memoir. The memoir shows that the public sphere of the contemporary intellectual is everything but unique. It is organised around identification process that are at once diverse and conflicting.

At the end of the memoir, after his alias is passed away, Rushdie walks the streets without his protection team. In the memoir, the author has tried to demonstrate the very vocation of the writers who had been to grasp the present time as premonitory and transitory. He is outraged by the attempt by the labour party to extend the blasphemy law to Islam. “The Blair government continued to try to find ways of making it illegal to criticize religion” (521). Memoir is a text of literary references that expresses not only the title and his author but impacts on the mind of the readers. Rushdie’s memoir contains recollection of scraps interwoven in such a way that it reflects a life in a chain of incidents that affects the smooth flow of life. *Joseph Anton* is a book written from the security present day, but it rattles with

the terror of the moment and is unique among literary memoirs, because its author is unique among other authors.

Joseph Anton is the great advent of writing about the self - a unique self -keeping engrained selves of cast, section, society, nationality, internationality, humanity, and the sense of cosmopolitanism. The memoir tells the readers about all his inner and outer stigmatic experiences whether he felt once in the society or isolation.

The overall structure of the memoir is straightforward, the order is chronological. The memoir is inordinately long, the drama of the fatwa, and the obvious hell of living in its shadow. The memoir is carefully crafted on the double layer of the public and the intimate, highlights the force of circumstances. In his memoir, Rushdie justifies himself constantly and exposes realities and reactions against him.

Works Cited

Rushdie, Salman. *Joseph Anton: A Memoir*. London: Vintage Books, 2012. Print.