

Midnight's Children, Shame and The Satanic Verses

Dr Suchitra Awasthi

Salman Rushdie is a force to reckon with in post-colonial literature. He is both an experimentalist and an iconoclast for whom his writings have been vehicles to voice his thoughts about human affairs. Through all his writings, Rushdie has tried to question issues such as fundamentalism, bigotry and restrictions imposed on freedom of speech and expression and for all his liberties and eclectic views, Rushdie not just ransacked materials from various contemporary sources but also brought religions from the world over under his radar, which even included the religion into which he was born. The beauty of Rushdie's writings lies in the fact that Rushdie freely explores myths and legends from all over the world and weaves them in his loom to tell not just interesting stories but also deeper realities of life. However, in this paper, I will be focusing on the myths and legends found exclusively in Islamic cultures that were cherry picked by Rushdie for his works.

Rushdie was born into a Muslim family, which was however a liberal one, in Bombay two months' prior to India's independence. By virtue of his birth, Rushdie had always been quite familiar with the Islamic texts and customs. Later, Rushdie took his Master's degree in Islamic History from the Cambridge University, which contributed a great deal to his better understanding of Islam.

Before the motifs from Islam employed by Rushdie in his works are discussed, let us take a glimpse of the major structure of Islam; Islam is broadly divided into two belief systems, which in many ways are poles apart. On the one hand, there is hardcore Islam; fundamental, staunch and orthodox, while on the other hand is Sufism, its mystical and liberal offshoot. Being a cosmopolitan individual Rushdie has always been eclectic in his views and thus having a multicultural upbringing has

always been skeptical about everything that is orthodox and stereotypical, which also includes hardcore Islam. However, at the same time, Sufism has always enchanted Rushdie, which is more liberal and tolerant in nature. In his novels Rushdie brings to the fore both these aspects of Islam in his own unique way.

In his first novel, *Grimus*, Rushdie draws a parallel between his storyline with the Persian myth of 'Simurg', from Farid-ud-Din Attar's allegorical poem *The Conference of the Birds*. Furthermore, Farid ud-din's poem is quite similar to Bunyan's *Pilgrims Progress*. All these three texts resonate with each other in a unique way as they all deal with the protagonists' quest for spirituality with an eventual merger of the individual with the divine. This mingling of mythologies is the hallmark of Rushdie's oeuvre.

As Sufism is a major strand in most of Rushdie's works, it would be noteworthy to shed some light on the Sufi tradition. In this regard, Richard Cavendish explains the meaning of the word Sufi and he says, "Sufi literally means "the wearer of wool" and long before the beginning of Islam, woolen dress had been traditionally associated with the spiritual life"¹ (2713). Sufism is a mystical offshoot of Islam, an order, as Cavendish further states, whose followers "believe there is no god but God"² (2083). Sufis, thus, consider themselves to be slaves of God and thus their lives' mission is to merge their individual identity with the Almighty and to become one with Him. However, Sufism is not about the final merger of the protagonist with God, but also about the perilous journey undertaken by the seeker before the Divine union with the Almighty.

In Rushdie's novels, the protagonists in their own ways exhibit the traits and quests of a Sufi. In his first novel, *Grimus*, the protagonist, Flapping-Eagle, lives in the fictitious city of Axona with his sister Bird Dog and is dependent on her for emotional support. *Grimus*, the alter-ego of Flapping Eagle, and the godhead who controls the mystical Calf Island of the underworld, comes

* Assistant Professor, Uttarakhand Open University, Haldwani, Nainital, Uttarakhand

disguised to Axona as Sispy and lures Bird Dog to leave Axona. Here again one can witness the "chutnification" of mythologies which is so typical of Rushdie. Bird Dog's abduction is strikingly parallel with the abduction of Sita in Ramayana and the way Flapping Eagle reaches the Calf Island through a hole in the Mediterranean Sea after over seven hundred years of wonderings is Dantesque in structure.

As Bird Dog disappears, Flapping Eagle loses his sense of belonging in Axona and thus leaves Axona to find his sister. He wanders endlessly in search of his sister and faces hardships, both spiritual and physical, on his journey. Margareta Petersson sees Flapping Eagle's journey only as an external one when she writes that "Eagle moves in an external world; he is sailing on a sea wandering in a forest and finally climbing a mountain"(15)³. However, his journey is both internal and external. The journey is internal as Eagle faces many mental and spiritual obstacles before reaching the end of his journey. In fact, his spiritual hardships are evident even in his early days in Axona. Being an orphan, he is looked down upon by the natives of Axona. He tells us, "Orphans in Axona are like mongrels among pedigree hounds"(17).⁴ Flapping Eagle faces the problem of living as an exile in his native society. The fact that he leaves Axona in search of his sister shows him overcoming the hurdle of attachment to the external world. However, Flapping Eagle is determined to free himself of these trappings. When Mrs. Cramm, a minor character in the novel, dies, she leaves all her property to Flapping Eagle that makes him terribly depressed. At the beginning of the novel, Flapping Eagle is shown as a fickle person, changing his spots and moving from place to place, perhaps because of his own unsurety about his motives, whether to accept the external world or to continue on his path to salvation. His wandering in the sea also provides him with lures that entrap him in a physical world. However, at the end of the novel, Eagle manages to overcome these hurdles also and reaches the Calf Island. After reaching the town of K, which alludes to the legendary Mount Qaf, Flapping Eagle again faces the trappings of an external world that prevent one from attaining spiritual salvation. He is lured into the world of relationships and domestic life. There are contradictory thoughts within him whether to carry on with his "Journey" or to settle down. Eagle tell us, "He had never been an outsider by choice and the desire to be acceptable, to please, which he knew to be within him, created a warring sensation inside" (45).⁴ The desire to be a part of the external world proves too strong for him to resist. Flapping Eagle thinks, "he would abandon his search and make life here if he could" (101).⁵ Flapping Eagle's desire to live a settled life may be due to his earlier

status as a derelict in Axona. Flapping Eagle is lured by the pull of the flesh in his affairs with two prostitutes Elfrida and Irina. However, as realization dawns on Eagle, he is forced to think whether Elfrida and Irina are holding him back from attaining the motive of his journey. He gradually realizes that they are impediments on his journey and thinks of them as "witches weaving their spell, binding him in silken cords" (147).⁵ Elfrida and Irina are the symbols of love and "feminine" trappings that a Sufi must overcome in his quest for God. Although Flapping Eagle wants to settle down, he manages to overcome this hurdle and proceed on his journey. This urge of Flapping Eagle to settle down and be accepted in a foreign shore is autobiographical and reflects Rushdie's desire to gain acceptance in his initial days of immigration in England, which finds a strong resonance with every immigrant. Eagle's inner monsters involve his unstable and unsettled status. They urge him to settle down at K and make it his home. They are too strong for him to resist. The inner conflicts keep troubling him as is evident from his suffering from the Dimension Fever. As Flapping Eagle is not able to resolve his inner conflict, he is helped by Virgil Jones, who is Rushdie's version of Virgil in Dante's *Divine Comedy*.

In Rushdie, one finds the coalescing and juxtaposing of various mythologies which he does to accentuate the "colossal fragmentation of 20th century reality."⁶ Coming back to *Grimus*, with Virgil Jones' help, Flapping Eagle finally manages to reach the top of Mount K. In his final ascent to the summit of K, Flapping Eagle is all alone although Media, his love interest follows him without him being aware of it. Virgil Jones, his guide through the journey in the Island, also leaves him once he has set the fire of quest in Flapping Eagle. Eagle's ascent to Mount K symbolizes the long, arduous and uncharted frontiers that a seeker is compelled to undertake in his spiritual quest.

When Flapping Eagle reaches the summit, he eventually has to face Grimus. Grimus is the godhead of the Calf Island who controls the life of the inhabitants of the island. Flapping Eagle's identity, like a Sufi's identity, is merged with the godlike Grimus. Although Flapping Eagle merges with the almost-divine Grimus, yet the union fails to provide a spiritual bliss to him. Instead, this merging proves to be his hardest psychological and spiritual test. Grimus wants to realize ultimate power through Flapping Eagle to further subjugate the people of Calf Island. Flapping Eagle is lured by the I-Grimus (his nemesis) within him to help Grimus realize this power and share it. Flapping Eagle is, thus, torn into I-Grimus and I-Eagle. The I-Gimus within him urges him to side with Grimus but the I-Eagle within him urges him to

break the Stone Rose to destroy Grimus's tyrannical rule. Eagle tells us, "Outside (I-Eagle) was engaged in a furious battle with the I-Grimus within" (250).⁷ Flapping Eagle rejects Grimus' authority and thus, his spiritual union with Grimus too. He destroys the Stone-Rose, which is the symbol of evil, authoritarianism and crime and thus frees the people from the tyranny of Grimus. Although Flapping Eagle rejects the divine merger with the god of Calf Island, he still attains spiritual purity, by becoming a means of bringing about a social and political change for the betterment of the inhabitants of the Calf Island. Rushdie, thus, fuses the Persian myth of Simurg with the Hindu mythology of creation and destruction and, thus, Flapping Eagle's Sufi journey gets a new dimension in its final stage. From a Sufi, in search of divine, he becomes Shiva, the Hindu god of destruction and an instrument who brings about the destruction of an oppressive regime.

Besides this fusion of mythologies, Rushdie also projects his views of a more heterogeneous society through *Grimus*, which hints at Rushdie's love for pluralism. People from different religions, cultures and nationalities come to settle down in the Calf Island. However, the creator of such a heterogeneous society himself becomes a tyrant and subjugates his heterogeneous subjects. Flapping Eagle, being a Sufi by temperament, resents such motives for Sufism stands for tolerance and liberalism. Whereas Islam is a religion that believes in singularity, Sufism seems to be plural in approach. Sufism stands for a liberal approach to religion and a number of Sufi saints are venerated by people from all religions. Sufism sees faith as a personal matter. Religion for them is not only a means to approach God and not just an end, it is an exploration into one's inner dimensions of being which could be attained by listen to the inner sound of silence.

Calf Island is also a heterogeneous place with people from different nationalities and religions. Flapping Eagle's hostility towards Grimus is not only because Grimus is a dictator but also because being a Sufi he cannot see the ruthless suppression of any society. The spirit of tolerance within him forces him to rise up against Grimus and this he does. Rushdie, brought up in a liberal Muslim family and a multicultural city like Bombay, perhaps, expresses his own vision of a heterogeneous, hybrid society and Grimus is punished for subjugating such a society.

Rushdie also expresses his resentment against orthodox, singular societies in his other novels. For instance, in *Shame*, one of the leading characters, Sufiya Zinobia, who is born with developmental issues and thus embodies Shame, punishes people who are responsible for breeding intolerance in society in a similar fashion as Flapping Eagle had done in *Grimus*. The setting of the novel is in the city of Q, which is the fictional counterpart

of the city of Quetta in Pakistan. Sufiya Zinobia metes out justice on stereotypical characters such as Razar Hyder, who is her own father, Maulana Dawood, a cleric and a confidant of Raza Hyder and Omar Khayyam, her husband, as they are all symbols of the machinery that proliferate intolerance and bigotry. Sufiya Zinobia stands for all the marginal folks, especially the women in any retrograde society.

Sufiya Zinobia is a great masterpiece in Magic Realism, which is another forte of Rushdie. Her name itself is derived from "Sufism" which is synonymous with tolerance. Sufiya is an embodiment of innocence and tolerance but is seen by many as a miracle child gone awry. Sufiya has all the ingredients of developing into a rounded character, however, never finds a chance to grow in a regressive orthodox society. Sufiya is a child of nature —innocent and loving—yet she seethes in anger witnessing wrongdoing around her. Exuding traits of Magic Realism, Sufiya blushed red since birth, which is a mark of "shame" in her. In Rushdie's words, "the blood that rushes to Sufiya's cheeks is a symbol of the blood of a nation ready to trickle."⁸ Depicting typical Magic Realism traits, Sufiya grows a beast inside her who eventually has her revenge on her perpetrators, chiefly on Omar Khayyam, her husband. Likewise, the three stifled Shakil sisters, Chunni, Munnee and Bunny, who form the triad of mothers of Omar Khayyam, too seek reek their revenge on Raza Hyder, who is responsible for the death of their second son Babar Shakil. Thus, Sufiya, Chunni, Munnee and Bunny, who represent the voiceless and the marginalized, become instruments of liberation for a greater good in the novel. As the tables turn at the end of the novels, Rushdie gives a clear message to the power mongers that if *status quo* prevails in their repressive hegemonic structure, the masses will take law in their hands and seek revenge.

The theme of Sufism also forms the underpinnings of Rushdie's most critically acclaimed book *Midnight's Children*, the book that won him the Booker of the Bookers prize. In the novel Rushdie again alludes to Farid-uddin Attar's *Conference of the Birds* at a number of places. Aadam Aziz's father, (Aadam is the grandfather of the protagonist Saleem Sinai) the gem-dealer Aziz sahib, seems to be a sort of a Sufi mystic who passes on his liberal outlook to his posterity. Like his father, Aadam Aziz is also an egalitarian. Aadam studied medicine at the prestigious Heidelberg University and having been exposed to the Western world, he loses his faith in hardcore Islam. However, he owes his allegiance to Sufism, and supports people like Mian Abdullah, a liberal politician who is the founder of the Free Islam Convocation, an organization dedicated to resisting the Partition of India along religious lines. Mian Abdullah is also a Sufi mystic,

who evokes the image of Hoopoe leading other birds to the mythical Qaf Mountain in Attar's *Conference of the Birds*. However, Mian Abdullah is stabbed to death by the fundamentalists, but his liberal spirit continues to thrive in his protégé, Saleem Sinai, the protagonist of the novel. Saleem like Mian Abdullah and his grandfather Aadam, is an egalitarian spirit. Furthermore, the quest of Saleem, is analogous to that of the Hoopoe in *Conference of the Birds*. Like the Hoopoe, the wisest of all the birds in Attar, leads all the other birds to the mythical Qaf mountain, to seek oneness with God, Saleem takes it upon himself to call a conference of all the 581 Midnight's Children, all possessing magical powers like him, with the aim to create a new India. However, Rushdie gives a twist to his narrative by showing that Saleem's conference disintegrates because its Hoopoe, i.e. Saleem, is forced to go to Pakistan with his parents. In this regard, Clarke writes "Saleem's Midnight Children Conference is a curious version of Attar's *Conference*, for it merges magic with mysticism and it adds a pessimistic twist to Attar's notion of annihilation." (70)⁹ Saleem, although raised in a Muslim family, is the son of an Englishman born illegitimately to a Hindu mother. Thus, he seems to have inherited from three religions and is therefore a tolerant individual. However, the disintegration of the Midnight's Children's Conference, which was being led by Saleem, hint at the fault lines that had begun to surface after three decades of India's Independence, the time the novel came out.

Rushdie plays with the number 30 again in *Midnight's Children*. As in cosmology, the numeral 30 denotes the cycle of time, it also gains great significance in *Midnight's Children*. The reference to the thirty birds in Attar's *Conference*, resonate with three important things in the novel, viz. the 30 years of India's Independence, the 30 chapters of the book and the chronological age of Saleem, all of which hint to both the accomplishments and the unfulfilled resolutions which 30 years of Independence had brought with it.

The Sufi quest for tolerance is also the chief motif in the children's fantasy *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*. The book was written as a part of Rushdie's promise to his son Zafar and was written during the days he spent in hiding after the *fatwa* was imposed on him. The book, however, is an allegory in which Rushdie puts forward his views on the freedom of speech in society and on artistic freedom. Catherine Cundy, in this regard, states, "It is the coalescing in the guise of a narrative for children, of debates about freedom of expression and the liberty of the artistic imagination." (86)¹⁰

Rushdie also borrowed heavily from Islamic texts for his most controversial novel, *The Satanic Verses* (1988). In the novel, Rushdie audaciously, however covertly, tries to

question the validity of certain elements of Islam and also brings certain passages from the *Quran* under the radar. A *fatwa* (death sentence) was issued on him by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, the Iranian cleric. The infamous publicity of *The Satanic Violence* bred violence and stirred outrage among the Muslims worldwide. As a result of the *fatwa* that was imposed upon Rushdie, he had to go into hiding for 10 long years. However, the Westerners were sympathetic towards Rushdie and came to his rescue, defending his artistic freedom in a number of ways.

Rushdie is always at loggerheads with those in power. In his words he has always seen his role as a writer "as including the function of antagonist to the state."¹¹ His previous two books, *Midnight's Children* and *Shame*, had lashed out to the repressive acts carried about by totalitarian regimes in India and Pakistan respectively, and in *The Satanic Verses* too his intentions were somewhat similar. However, Rushdie has always claimed *The Satanic Verses* to be a book about "migration, metamorphosis, divided selves, love, death, London and Bombay."¹² Although a majority of the Muslims may have read the book, the title of the book was enough to spark off vehement protest.

To understand the controversy behind *The Satanic Verses*, it is imperative that the reader has the knowledge about the issue. The Satanic Verses refer to certain verses between verses 20 and 21 in Surah An-Najim of the *Quran* that had been removed by Prophet Muhammed on the pretext that they were spoken to him by the devil in the garb of God. These verses permitted prayer to three pre-Islamic pagan Meccan goddesses, Al-lat, Uzza and Manat, which was a violation of monotheistic Islam. It is believed that Mohammed accepted the three pagan deities to gain support of certain Arabic tribes and incorporate them into his fold and once they accepted Islam, he removed these verses dedicated to them citing them as "Satanic". The incident is a moment in the Prophet's life when he accepted polytheism for a while, even if for personal gains. If the Prophet renounced polytheism seeing it as Satanic and ungodly, Rushdie by rejecting monotheistic Islam promotes plurality through polytheism as Clarke points out "the narrator is champions the goddesses." In fact, the narrator sees himself as God and the three deities rejected by Mohammed as his daughters. The narrator says that they [he and his daughters] "sang from hell below his soft seductive verses." (10)¹³

In fact, the Satanic narrator positions himself even above God as Clarke writes:

In his bid to usurp power from God, the narrator argues that he deserves to take God's place because God is unjust to women... He makes Al-Lat [his daughter] "Allah's opposite and equal" and makes himself the father of the goddess. The narrator by doing so hits at the status of females in Islamic society as he had

also done in *Shame*. Rushdie revives the forgotten pagan deities in his novels to question monotheism and the suppression of women in Islamic societies...The narrator champions polytheistic female figures not because he believes in gender equality or cultural pluralism, but because these figures are alternatives to monotheism in general, and to the monotheism of Islam in particular."¹⁴

The Satanic Verses is the story of two Indians Saladin Chamcha and Gibreel Farishta who immigrate to Britain. Both these protagonists meet on a flight from Bombay to London, which is eventually hijacked and thereafter bombed over the English Channel. However, both the protagonists miraculously survive this terrorist attack and make it to England. The novel is replete with elements of Magic Realism, one of which being that Gibreel is transformed into the angel Gabriel and has a series of dreams, one of which is the subversive version of Islamic history which includes the episode of the expungement of The Satanic Verses. Besides this, there are quite a few other instances in the novel which point to Rushdie's non-conformist attitude towards Islam. Sub-section of Gibreel's dream is about a "business man turned prophet" (93)¹⁵, which obviously refers to Mohammed. Rushdie further hurts the sentiments of the Muslims by using the term 'Mahound' for the Prophet, a term which was used by the Christians for the Devil in the Middle Ages. Over the course of the novel, Rushdie not just confines himself to insulting the Prophet but he also degrades Mohammed's wives in his novel by creating a brothel named Hijab that has 12 whores who are named after Mohammed's 12 wives. Rushdie further links the brothel to Ka'aba and as the Muslims perform 'tawwaf' in which they circumambulate the Ka'aba during their pilgrimage to Mecca, the customers who come to the brothel also have to perform a similar circumambulation. "Curling around the inner most courtyard of the brothel rotating around its centrally positioned fountain of love much as pilgrims rotated for other reasons around the ancient pillar of stone" (381).¹⁶

The novel is interspersed with a number of derogatory innuendoes towards Islam and is satirical in tone and thus hits at the religion in which he has little faith and questions the very basis of the revelations when the narrator shows Salman the Persian, a Persian disciple of Mahound, changing the *Quranic* Revelations without the Prophet noticing it. Like Rushdie, Salman, the Persian has little faith in the Revelations. He tells the dissident poet Baal, "the closer you are to the conjurer, the easier to spot the trick" (363) and that the Revelations were "revelations of convenience" (365) and that the Prophet would "first lay down the laws and the angels would confirm afterwards" (364).¹⁷

Rushdie has always been a champion of multi-

culturalism and plurality and has, through his writings, vouched for the same, even if he had to risk his own life for it. In *The Satanic Verses*, he questions the very basis of the *Quranic* Revelations that form the backbone of Islam. Roger Clarke is of the opinion that in the novel, Rushdie puts on the mantle of the satanic narrator as he conveys his "satanic" ideas through Saladin, who is Satan incarnate to bring the loss of faith in Gibreel. If Satan is a fallen angel, Gibreel is God's own angel taking his divine message to Mohammed. However, in the novel, Rushdie alters this myth by showing that Gibreel in spite of being the messenger of God, loses his faith in Him. Both Gibreel and Saladin choose the 'diabolic' paths, for the 'satanic' narrator wishes them to do so with the motive to make his readers question the validity of bizarre practices that the clerics carry out in the name of religion and to maintain a *status quo*. However, if in the novel Gibreel loses his faith in his hard-core religion, Allie Cone, his beloved, who has a Sufistic temperament, comes to his rescue. Allie is an attractive English mountain climber, who takes care of Gibreel at the time he was being treated for schizophrenia.

As the novel unfolds, it becomes evident that it is the Satanic narrator who enjoys full control over the lives and thoughts of the characters of the novel. The Satanic narrator also plays the role of a serpent and alienates the already insane Gibreel from Allie, who could have helped Gibreel in regaining his sanity. Rushdie's comparison with Satan is established as the narrator shows contempt for the *Quran* and the Prophet and thus seems to be attempting to write his own version of the *Quran*. In this regard, Timothy Brennan points out, "*The Satanic Verses* projects itself as a rival *Quran* with Rushdie as its prophet and the devil as its supernatural voice" (152).¹⁸ Brennan also points to the narrator being a Satan when he writes, "the narrator of *The Satanic Verses* turns out to be none other than Satan himself" (195)¹⁹ and that "there are indications in the book that the narrator is, in fact, Satan" (196).²⁰ Rushdie, thus, expresses his antagonism towards a monotheistic religion in which he did not have much faith and thus challenges the authority of the Prophet and his "Revelations". Rushdie's siding with Satan in the novel is reminiscent of Milton being "of the devil's party without knowing it."²¹ Both Rushdie's Gibreel and Milton's Satan are anti-establishment protagonists like their respective authors. Like Milton, who was a supporter of the Commonwealth during his days, Rushdie too has Leftist propensities who questioned the authority, whether religious or temporal, through his writings. In his essay "In God We Trust", Rushdie talks of his loss of faith in Islam while he was studying in England and proclaims, "quite abruptly I lost my faith" (397).²² Brennan also speaks of Rushdie "being a fallen Muslim" and that

he lived "a childhood of blasphemy" and that it was rumored Rushdie "liked to draw the Arabic script for 'Allah' so that it resembled the figure of a naked woman." (194²³) Gibreel's loss of faith is similar to Rushdie.

Like Rushdie, his protagonist Gabreel is also born in multicultural Bombay. Furthermore, being a mythological movie star he is exposed to polytheism, contradictory to the monotheistic religion into which he was born. Thus, he is unable to reconcile between his religious and professional lives. Perhaps the exposure to multiculturalism and polytheism creates a doubt within him regarding the religion into which he was born.

Sufism again finds an echo in *The Satanic Verses* through Allie's God Mountain, Everest, her London apartment, which stands for the mythical Qaf mountain of Attar's. Her God Mountain is however, twenty nine thousand feet high, one thousand feet short of Attar's figure of thirty. Allie is a symbol of a tolerance, mysticism and sympathy, the three hallmarks of Sufism. Clarke, in this regard, states thus, "Allie's temperament is antithetical to the violent and puritanical zeal of characters such as Tavleen (one of the hijackers of the plane) and the Imam (a ruthless cleric) in the novel, and she avoids the dogmatism and intractability of Eugene Dumsday, Mahound or Hind. Indeed, she remains closest to Sufyan in her open-minded sympathy" (176).²⁴ The Satanic narrator seems to exert a total control over the other characters but Allie is free from this control. The Satanic narrator does his best to stop her from climbing the God Mountain. Allie nearing the peak sees "rainbow looping and dancing in the sky, the radiance pouring down like a waterfall from the sun"(199)²⁵ and becomes convinced that she is in the presence of angels. However, the vision is broken due to "a noise a loud sharp report like a gun" (199).²⁶ Her mystical experience is broken and her upward climb to unite with God is halted. Halted in her pursuit Allie, thus, remarks, "snapped me out of it. I had to yell at Pam until he, too, shook himself and we started down" (177).²⁷ Although Allie is denied the divine bliss by the Satanic narrator, she replaces it with her love for Gibreel. She says, "Denied mountains by my weak banded feet, I'd have looked for the mountain in him establishing base camp, sousing out routes, negotiating ice-falls crevasses, over-hangs I'd have assaulted the peak and seen the angels dance" (314).²⁸ Allie is a true symbol of Sufi love. Gibreel finds solace in her after losing his faith. Allie tries her best to get him out of his confusion and takes him closer to divinity. When Gibreel breaks her miniature Everest, she readily forgives him. At the end of the novel Allie dies mysteriously, being pushed from or shot on the roof of Everest Vilas which was symbolic of her God Mountain or the Qaf Mountain. Thus, dying on the roof of Everest Vilas, she attains divinity like a Sufi. Although

it is uncertain as to who pushed or shot her, it is hinted that Gibreel pointed his finger at her before her death and he may be behind her death. The fact that Allie, a symbol of a Sufi mysticism, is killed, perhaps, by Gibreel, shows the opposition of a tolerant liberalism of Sufi cult by a confused monotheistic religion-Islam.

Rushdie in *The Satanic Verses* also puts forward his Sufi leanings through Sufyan. Sufyan is in sharp contrast to his wife, who is more concerned with money than learning. Sufyan instead of being a hardcore Muslim is open to all religions and learning. He "swallow[s] the multiple cultures of the subcontinent" and has a "pluralistic openness of the mind." He can thus "quote effortlessly from the *Rig-Veda* as well as the *Quran-Sharif*, from the military exploits of Julius Caesar as well as the Revelations of St. John the Divine" (245).²⁹ As told earlier, the word Sufi means wearer of wool, Sufyan's Sufi propensities are evident again when he even sympathizes with the devilish "Gibreel in a sheepskin Jacket" (244).³⁰ Like Allie, Sufyan also becomes a victim to an intolerant society when his Shaandar café is burnt to ashes in racial violence and he dies inside. Thus, through the annihilation of figures such as Allie and Sufyan, Rushdie again points out as to how the spirit of tolerance is being crushed even in the postmodern times by the machinery of fundamentalism.

On examining the various motifs, symbols and legends that Rushdie has used repeatedly and in varying forms over the course of his novels under study, it becomes clear that his apparent opposition to totalitarian regimes and bigotry is not a mere imitation of the Western attitudes, nor is it based on superficial and conventional superficial views. Through the myths and motifs that Rushdie employs in the novels examined in this study, it can be ascertained that Rushdie has a sound knowledge of Islam; Rushdie had earned his master's degree in Islamic history from Cambridge, and he employs Islamic figures and myths like the myth of the Kaf Mountain, the Simurg myth, historical accounts of the Prophet Mohammad and Islam, all discussed in this chapter to voice his most deeply felt convictions as a moral and thinking human being.

Rushdie's novels are pitted against the intolerance of any form, be it temporal, as in the case of *Midnight's Children* and *Shame*, or religious, as in *The Satanic Verses*. Rushdie has always been a free thinking individual, and has advocated egalitarianism and pluralism through his novels; Instead of propagating an orthodoxy, he advocates tolerance, as it is evident from his love for Sufism. Owing to his own status of a multilateral cosmopolitan, he believes in a pluralistic society; a society which is free from the fetters of repressive ideologies. His polytheistic leanings are evident from his fascination with multiple

mythologies from different cultures and religions. Any form of orthodoxy breeds suppression of the masses at the hands of the oligarchs, as is evident in *Midnight's Children* and *Shame* and this results in a general unrest. It also curbs one's creativity and snatches the freedom of speech as is shown in *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*. Through the motifs, Rushdie has used from Persian and Arabic histories in his novels, Rushdie professes a middle path of life. Moreover, his treatment of the themes discussed in this paper also brings out his truly eclectic and heterogeneous outlook. Rushdie juggles dexterously between mythologies and even metamorphoses characters taken from one mythology into characters of other mythologies, as is evident in the transformations of Flapping Eagle, Saleem Senai, Saladin Chamcha, Gabreel Farishta, *et al*, and therein lies his forte and uniqueness. To conclude, Rushdie's use of the Islamic myth, therefore, is absolutely central to his deepest conviction as a man and thinker. His myths are not just an addition of "local colour" to attract a Western audience as is sometimes thought but convey his deeply thought concerns for humanity.

Notes

1. Cavendish, Richard. *Man Myth & Magic—The Illustrated Encyclopedia of Mythology, Religion and the Unknown* (Vol. 8—NORT—PSYC). New York: Marshall C. Corporation, 1983.
2. *Ibid.*
3. Peterson, Margareta. "Grimus And the Alchemical Tradition". *Salman Rushdie—New Critical Insights*. Ed. Mittapalli and Kuortti. New Delhi: Atlantic Publisher & Distributors, 2003. 1-29.
4. Rushdie, Salman. *Grimus*. London, U.K.: Vintage, 1996.
5. *Ibid.*
6. Quoted in Fawzia Afzal-Khan, *Cultural Imperialism and the Indo-English Novel: Genre and Ideology in R. K. Narayan, Anita Desai, Kamala Markandaya and Salman Rushdie* (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 1993, p. 154.
7. Rushdie, Salman. *Grimus*. London, U.K.: Vintage, 1996.
8. <https://literatureessaysamples.com/sufiya-zinobia-as-a-symbol-in-salman-rusdie's-Shame>. (Last Access on 30 September 2020)
9. Clarke, Roger Y. *Stranger Gods*. London: McGill's Queen University Press, 2001.
10. Cundy, Catherine. *Salman Rushdie*. Manchester, England: Manchester University Press, 2000.
11. Rushdie, Salman, *Jaguar Smile*; New York: Viking, 1987, p.50
12. Ian Richard Netton (1996). *Text and Trauma: An East-West Primer*. Richmond, UK: Routledge Curzon.
13. Clarke, Roger Y. *Stranger Gods*. London: McGill's Queen University Press. 2001.
14. *Ibid.*
15. Rushdie, Salman. *The Satanic Verses*. London, U.K.: Viking, 1988.
16. *Ibid.*
17. *Ibid.*
18. Brennan, Timothy. *Salman Rushdie and the Third World Myths of the Nation*. London, U.K.: The Macmillan Presses, 1995.
19. *Ibid.*
20. *Ibid.*
21. Milton-of %20the %20Devil%27s%20Party.pdf. (Last access on 30 September 2020)
22. Rushdie, Salman. *In God We Trust. Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1992*. London, U.K.: Granta, 1991.
23. Brennan, Timothy. *Salman Rushdie and the Third World Myths of the Nation*. London, U.K.: The Macmillan Presses, 1995.
24. Clarke, Roger Y. *Stranger Gods*. London: McGill's Queen University Press. 2001.
25. Rushdie, Salman. *The Satanic Verses*. London, U.K.: Viking, 1988.
26. *Ibid.*
27. *Ibid.*
28. *Ibid.*
29. *Ibid.*
30. *Ibid.*