

# **صراع الهوية الثقافية ما بعد الاستعمار**

## **دراسة في اعمال سلمان رشدي**

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# **Struggle For Cultural Identity in a Postcolonial World A study in Salman Rushdie's Works**

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### المستخلص

تهدف هذه الدراسة الى تقصي الوسائل التي اعتمدها الروائي - سلمان رشدي . و التي ايد من خلالها الى تهجين الاجناس في العالم رغم الاختلافات التي تم قبولها و تأييدها كوسائل للتجديد الحضاري . وفي القرن الحادي والعشرين ذو الاتصالات الفورية والاقتصاديات العالمية والهجرة الواسعة عبر القارات و التي ازلت الافكار القديمة التي كونت الانتماءات الثقافية . و تبقى هذه الدراسة الى الاستدلال و من خلال المجال الكاتب الذي امن باختلاط الحضارات و عدم حصرها بمكان او فكرة واحدة . و ركز الباحث على رواية " اطفال الليل " و الاحداث السياسية و الشخصية التي اعتمدها الكاتب لتكوين افكاره و التي من خلالها دعى الى مزج الحضارات من اجل عالم ينعم بالسلام مستقبلا .

**الكلمات المفتاحية :** رشدي - الثقافة - الهوية

- التهجين - الهجرة - الصراع - التواصل

### Abstract :

This study aims to investigate the ways in which Salman Rushdie, an English writer, supports a hybrid world which differences and heterogeneity are not only tolerated, but eagerly celebrated as a means of cultural newness. In the 21st Century, instantaneous communication, global economics and increasing migration of people across continents have drastically destabilized old views on the formation of cultural identities .

This study attempts to prove how Rushdie's literary works strongly believe in mixing identities and cultures, rather than limiting identification to a single place or idea. The study focuses on the struggle for cultural identity or the different areas of cultural identity. To do this, the researcher particularly examines Rushdie's novel. He also discusses the ways in which political and personal events have formed his attitudes. Rushdie's novels are clearly dedicated to the idea that cultural blending will create a better and more peaceful world in the future.

**Keywords:** Rushdie, Culture, identity, hybridity, migration, struggle, and communication.

### **1.1. Introduction**

One of the recurring and most pervasive motifs in the narrative of Salman Rushdie is the character's obsessive search for selfhood and identity. This search reflects the struggle for cultural identity in a postcolonial world. His nation's cultural life is still dominated by its former colonizer in Western Europe. Third World Writers feel a need to establish their own voices amid the powerful influence of these cultures. They are forced to use the language and literary structure of the very cultures they are trying to subvert. Postcolonial writers react to this paradox by appropriating the inherited modes for new subversive ends and by recovering what remains of the neglected native literary tradition.

Rushdie easily admits the ambiguity of his cultural and national affiliations, embracing the dislocation and-in-between of his identity as a migrant. Many of his literary works focus on characters who have immigrated from India to UK or America and made great efforts to articulate their own skills. Rushdie traces the derivation of "migration" from Latin migrate to change one's place of living. Rushdie explains that:

... with its roots in the Greek words for bearing across, describes a sort of migration, the migration of ideas into images. Migrants-borne across for translated humans – are metaphorical beings in their very essence; and migration, seen as a metaphor, is everywhere around us. We all cross frontiers; in that sense, we are all migrant peoples. ( Pinter, 1991:278-79)

The postcolonial writer, thus, crosses all sorts of frontiers : Linguistic cultural and more so, the frontiers of time, by juxtaposing explorations of the past with imaginations of alternative presents and futures. In reply to a question in the novel of " how newness comes into the world ? Rushdie believes that transformation based on " the mixture of several relations, the agglutination of fragment, the hybrid patchwork, is an unavoidable necessity of our time ( Mann1995: 282-99) .

The migrant gives different meanings not only to his own reality but also causes reformation of his societies; this is how " newness comes into the world" . His transmigrated ` new` world not only celebrates the presence of all immigrants but also gives a particular ability to the immigrant to identity and understand different cultures.

Rushdie invades populates and colors the dull British city with immigrant figures that not only bring flavor to its tastelessness, but also as

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mentioned earlier – “brings newness”. His immigrant group is itself colored by variety of people from within – from all cultural linguistic, and religious groups.

All sorts are here, you could tell the Pakistanis because they dressed up to the gills, the Indians because they dressed down, and the Bangladeshis because they dressed badly, “all that pupurle and gogo gold gota that they like. ( imaginary Home – land 361).

The migrant’s identity is manifested by concepts of ethic and radical impurity, mixture, and miscellany, because the migrant in order to survive, must translate himself something different, and recognize, inescapably the fact that he lives between two or more worlds. We see in the novel – *Midnight’s Children* – that he takes on a new identity in order to assimilate into English culture. Rushdie elaborate’s this movement in imaginary Homelands:

A migrant suffers, traditionally, a triple disruption: he loses his place, he enters into an alien language, and he finds himself surrounded by beings whose social behaviour and code is very unlike, and sometimes even offensive to, his own. And this is what makes migrants such important figures: because roots, language and social norms have been three of the most important parts of the definition of what it is to be a human being. The migrant, denied all three, is obliged to find new ways of describing himself, new ways of being human. ( Ibid: 277- 78 )

Rushdie’s multi-dimentional and multi-directional narrative portrays the migration is a phenomenon that is both negative and positive. He vexes his readers as he does his characters by putting them amidst hast of conflicting realities. The reader is put in the midst of the chaotic world of dreams and reality, purity and hybridity.

### **2.1. The Concept of Hybridity:**

Rushdie’s novel- *Midnight’s Children* tries to achieve a personal discourse through the hybridity of the author’s own cultural background. Rushdie seems to be caught between the heritage of Indian epic tradition and the avant-garde experiments of Western modernist and postmodernist discourses. This hybridity is dramatized in the cosmopolitan narrator’s dialogues and through a rich imagery that mirrors the production of literary text. He thematizes the role of all actors in process of literary communication ( the author, the text and the reader

), dramatizing its mechanics within his novel, and proposing a composite identity for the three. Critics argue that the novel – *Midnight's Children* – is an effort to “mediate different cultures, languages and societies [where] there is always the threat of mistranslation, confusion and fear” ( Appignanesi 1990:114 )

Rushdie himself offered various contrastive interpretations of his novel that gave different meanings to his public and private life. He argues for hybridity of culture asserting that in today's postcolonial, postmodern world, no one can or should try to retain a singular identity. According to Rushdie, people do not have to choose either one identity of other; instead, they can live and thrive in the interstices between them ( Rushdie 1994: 211) .

Rushdie is an enthusiastic and optimistic advocate of each rootlessness and hybridity, frequently discussing the potential beauty of the migrant condition ( Mordorossian 2011:16). Rushdie, a dedicated advocate for plurality of meaning, echoes these statements ( Reder 1999: 240 ). He embraces the postmodern concept of the hybrid. In *Midnight's Children*, he presents a vision of India as his ideal hybrid nation. This hybrid nation is a pluralistic imagination, a view of nationhood not as a place where individual and group diversity are subjected to absolutism but where national unity provides instead a common ground for multiple forms of democratic participation ( Hogan 2011 : 512)

## **2.2. The Hybridity of Language**

Rushdie's works reflect the larger debate in postcolonial literary studies about the significance of the language. Many of his novels, all of which are written in English, explore foundational issue of language. His diverse characters – Bombay businessmen, Bollywood actors, East London café owners, artists, musicians – consistently grapple with the implications of speech and language. Ultimately, he uses unique language throughout his novels to emphasize the linguistic hybridity of language in the postmodern age. English, he argues, is no longer the property of the colonizers alone, but is being remade into the global language – English, a language that reflects the truly hybrid nature of today's world. “ All these different lingos cuttocy us off from one another , - only English brings us together” ( Rushdie 1995:22). English, he argues, is only longer the language of the colonizer alone, but is being remade into the global language.

Rushdie's exploration of migrant experience in his novels points out that the loss of language is among the most striking and poignant losses

migrants may undergo. The ambiguous relationship towards language is relevant to the experiences of many people around the world. The issue of language is vital aspect of postcolonial studies in general. Ghosh asserts that the reckoning between authentic vernaculars and hybridized tongues / foreign languages, is as old as the field of postcolonial studies ( Ghosh 1999: 129-53 ).

Rushdie shows that most Indians of the new generation do not think of English as the invaders' language, but rather as just-one of means they have to hand (Rushdie 1991: 64). He then, asserts English has become an Indian language, he adds that the real language debate occurring in modern India is not about the use of English, but rather the dominance of Hindi over the many other vernacular languages. He concludes that English is essential in India, if only because it permits two Indians to talk to each other in a tongue which neither partly hates ( Ibid, 65). English in sense, is able to unity such a uniquely heterogeneous nation.

In fact, Rushdie uses the issues surrounding English in India to construct that the hybrid national identity that he so desires for India. According to Michael Gorra – *Midnight's Children* explores a complicated set of questions about cultural identity and allegiance, yet Rushdie further complicates them by locating them in the ground of the novel's language itself ( Gorra 1999:191). The emphasis on language and linguistics carries throughout the novel, recurring in images, themes and metaphors. As shown in *Midnight's Children*, language is a crucial location for the discussion of cultural hybridity. Rushdie eagerly celebrates this hybridized form of English that has been re-formed into an Indian language. He displays that the English language can be and is being transformed to represent all varieties of cultures and experiences.

The pace of life and the interconnectivity of nations and cultures have increased remarkably, even in that short span of years during this time, Rushdie has written about these historical and political changes as they occurred. His works have evolved to reflect the changing nature, migrancy and national identity during the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries.

Newness as an idea, can come into the world through the hybridity of the nation, the individual person and the language. Hybridity allows for new combinations, new mixtures and new relationships to form between formerly disparate peoples and ideas. This newness of cultures and understanding is, as Rushdie states the great possibility that mass migration gives to the world (Rushdie 1991: 394 ). Homi K. Bhabha (

1994 : 325 ) states the migrant can live within the empowering condition of hybridity. The content of Rushdie's novels clearly reveals that his desire in writing is ultimately to say something about all human life, not just migrant life. His subject nothing less than life, with all of its pain and loss and joy and triumph. In his inequality of language Rushdie mentions that the inequality leads to a problematic relationship of the writer and his novel with his audience – an unequal translation of the East to the Westernized reader. But the relationship of the writer and his audience is also problematic and varying as in Rushdie's own words :

. . . I have ideas, people, events, shapes, and I write “for” these things, and hope that the completed work will be of interest to others. ... I would say that I write “for” people who feel part of the things I write “about” but also for everyone else whom can I reach . ( Imaginary Homelands 19 – 20 )

In this novel, Rushdie argues “ My India has always been based on ideas of multiplicity, pluralism, hybridity .... To my mind the defining image of India is the crown, and a crown is by its very nature superabundant, heterogeneous, many things at ones“ ( 32 ). The practice of more than twenty major languages and other minor dialects in India is itself a source of plurality. In *Midnight's Children* “that there are many versions of India as Indians” ( 323 ), and they speak more than one language . thus “Indiannes“ is presented as a very complicated idea that relates to and is dependent on the plurality and heterogeneity of hybridity.

The language of the novel – *Midnight's Children*, is equally vexing the oriental and occidental audiences: the postcolonial Indians finds it puzzling with all its post – modern references, whereas the Occidental audience is baffled by the abundance of eastern cultural, religious and social references with all their complications, privy only to an Indian audiences – an unequal translation to both audiences. The postcolonials settled in the new culture and started affecting or changing it as if it were a revenge of the formerly colonized peoples .

Rushdie examines the various interpretations of migrations in the novel that affirms the importance of migration and translation . He considers that Islam itself is a hybrid culture and therefore can variously be translated and interpreted. Islam in his view, wears different garbs in different countries, cultures and sect. In this light the religion is (unconsciously) evolving and reimagining itself in different time, lands and circumstances, like the dream of the migrant – to avoid being

static. Unfortunately, his translation of the Islamic narrative was interpreted as blasphemous and made him a writer on the run .

Just like Rushdie himself, Saleem (The main character in the play, *Midnight's Children* ) is a perfect representation of the hybrid man , born with – multiple allegiances and identities ( Gupta 2009: 32). He is a character of mixed backgrounds – the son of colonial named William Methwold and a poor Indian woman, yet raised as son by middle – class mother. Throughout *Midnight's Children*, Saleem alters the facts of Indian's history, mixing up dates or altering the reasons and consequences in order to fit the specific story he wants to tell.

Saleem is illegitimate son as an Englishman and a Hindu woman, and is raised by a Muslim family. His triple ancestry thus combines the three cultural heritage of India. He identifies seven different characters as being his “fathers”; Methwold ( his real father), Ahmed Sinai ( his putative father ), Willie Winkie ( his real mother's husband ), Nadir Khan ( his putative mother's first husband ), Scheepsteker ( The German “snake-doctor” who cures him), general Zulfikar ( his uncle), and picture Singh ( snake – charmer). For Saleem's mothers, the novel refers to Vanita ( his real mother ), Amina ( his putative mother ), Mary Pereira ( his mother's mid – wife ), and Pias ( his childless aunt ).

Hybridity allows for new combinations, new mixtures and new relationships to form between formerly disparate people and ideas. This newness of culture and understanding is, as Rushdie states, - the great possibility that mass migration gives to the world ( *Imaginary Homelands* 394 ).

### **3. Race, Place and Religion**

Muslims intellectuals and politicians had dreamed to have their own homeland where they could be free the oppression of the Hindu majority that dominated India. In spite of the efforts of Indian leaders who desired a nation that could rise above religious differences, the colony was officially divided along religious lines in 1947.

*Midnight's Children*, ultimately, serves as a harsh criticism of the sad results for a nation which refuses to accept the flexibility of hybridity. HomiBhabha believes that a nation containing one single homogenized national culture is no longer tenable ( Homi 1994: 7). According to Patrick Hogan, a view of nationhood as a place where individual and group diversity are subjected to absolutism but where national unity provides instead a common ground for multiple forms of democratic

participation. In this view, the nation doesn't need to repress the natural heterogeneity of population but can actively embrace it.

This sort of nation can only be achieved through violence and repression (Ibid). He adds that the extremity of nationalist movements, as in Syria during the eighties and nineties, proves that the very idea of a pure, ethnically cleansed national identity can only be achieved through the death. The nation must remove any history, culture, or people who do not fit into that national identity, or else the nation will not be legitimate by its own standards.

A person's identification with categories as race, sex, religion and nationality and economic class are not the result of introspection. Rather, they derive primarily from explicit or implicit imputation. A child cannot look into a mirror or into his or her heart and discover that he or she is Indian or Pakistani, Hindu or Muslim. These are categories he/she learns from others, directly or indirectly (Hogan 2011: 517). Thus Pakistani and other nations that desire a pure identity, must first use violence to purge any impurities and then must train its people to accept that new version of the truth through religion.

Rushdie asserts that autocratic regimes find it useful to espouse the theoretic of faith, because people respect language, are reluctant to oppose it. This is how religions shore up dictators, by encircling them with words of power which the people are reluctant to see discredited, disenfranchised, mocked (Rushdie, 1983 : 57). The faithful Muslims of Pakistan, in Rushdie's perspective were too afraid to confront leaders who used the rhetoric of religion to justify their actions and eventually lost even the ability to see the truth behind their lies.

### **Conclusion**

Salman Rushdie, Bombay-born and England-bred, pictures a country torn up by conflicts driven by ethnical, religious and territory issues that had kept the Indians in a continuous tension and that finally led to the splitting of their country and of the people on religious grounds. The conflicts also led to a severe spiritual stagnation and to a deep confusion at a consciousness level. Thus Rushdie ironically satirizes the politics of regionalism in India, not on boundaries drawn by rivers and mountains, but on the basis of language. Ultimately, this novel serves as a harsh warning of the bitter consequences for a nation which refuses to embrace the freedom and flexibility that come with hybridity. In this novel he presents a vision of India as his ideal hybrid nation. This is the

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real picture of Iraq which is torn up to the conflicts of ethnicity, religion and territory issues, that have kept Iraq in a continuous tensions.

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