

Juxtaposition Of Realism and Myth in Salman Rushdie's *Shalimar the Clown* and *the Enchantress of Florence*

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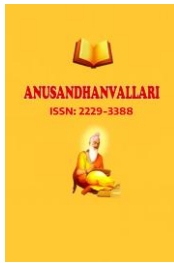
Abstract

Salman Rushdie, the author of many novels and critical essays occupies a pivotal role in the literary arena of contemporary literary world. Since the publication of *Midnight's Children*, Rushdie has been dominating the world of literature as a leading exemplum of postcolonial, postmodern and Diaspora writings. Generally, 'Myth' has two functions – answering the questions of many unknown territories of life such as the presence of the occult elements and encouraging the change in the social orders, traditions and customs for the moral-well-being of humans on the earth. Rushdie as a proponent of magical realism, his world is in between fact and fantasy, the narrative always hovers between past and present, between myth and history and between reality and romance. Rushdie's *Shalimar the Clown* is a rewritten myth of India. By using the codes of modern thrillers, adventure stories, political satires, folklore, and slap stick comedies and myths, Rushdie has recreated the world of Kashmir of 1960 as Kashmir of ancient time. Bringing out the history of 15th and 16th centuries of India and Europe close together, Rushdie, in *The Enchantress of Florence*, has enchanted the minds of readers with his magical realistic spell. Thus, Rushdie has touched the worlds of political history, sociology, mythology and modernity in these novels which enable the readers somehow find themselves as one of the characters of the novels and transcend the boundary of the real world to enter into the world of magical realism.

Key Words: Myth, occult, mythogram, slap stick comedy, enchantment, magical realism, and transcend

Introduction: Sir Ahmed Salman Rushdie, one of the progenitors of the worldwide controversies till date, occupies a central place in the literary galaxy of postcolonial authors. The winner of Booker Prize and the James Tait Black prize both in 1981, the Booker of Bookers in 1993 and the Best of the Bookers in 2008 and PEN Pinter 2014 Rushdie has created a special niche for himself in the world of literature. Since the publication of *Midnight's Children*, Rushdie has been dominating the literary arena as a leading exemplum of postcolonial, postmodern and Diaspora writings. Perhaps these are the reasons why "... the name of Salman Rushdie is so famous internationally that even those who do not generally read literary fictions have heard of him..." (Teverson 4). Prominent for multifarious writings, he himself is a multifaceted personality, often emerges as an unpredictable figure with an unfathomable depth of creativity and criticism. Being an iconoclast, Rushdie never chooses the trodden road but he plunges headstrong into the unexplored territories of literature, yet unattempted.

Discussion: Myth has two main functions. The first is to answer the sort of awkward questions that children ask, such as: "Who made the world? How will it end? Who was the first man? Where do souls go after death? The answer, necessarily graphic and positive, confer enormous power on the various deities credited with the creation



and care of souls – and incidentally on their priesthoods. The second function of myth is to justify an existing social system and account for traditional rites and customs. Salman Rushdie, has perhaps used myths in his novels for the above said two functions. He, in fact, tries to find answers for the riddles behind birth and death and also for the delineation of metamorphism of traditional rites and customs in the contemporary social system. He has used the technique of magic realism in order to amalgamate the real and fictional or mythical world in the novels and thereby enchants the readers with his magical wand, the storytelling power.

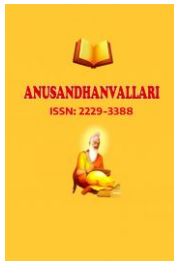
As it is common with the modern writers, Rushdie's main intention is to project his protagonists in this world to face the harsh realities of human life and at the same time his strong motives make his writings more effective and aggressive. Sometimes, his world is full of fantasy and some other times it is full of reality. That is why he is the master of magic realism, a term which is rightly associated with his writings. M. Madhusudhan Rao aptly remarks about the projection of the literary world of Rushdie thus:

The world of fantasy is used to take a longer telescopic view and as an instrument of detachment. But, there is a very thin and almost non-existent aura separating the world of fantasy and facts. Facts are as forceful and unmistakable as the magic of dream is a superabundance of imagination of the reality. The world of myth and fantasy provides the superstructures for an essentially historical narrative. (137)

Rushdie's world is in between fact and fantasy, the narrative always hovers between past and present, between myth and history and between reality and romance. Unlike Henry Fielding or Charles Dickens or Mark Twain, Salman Rushdie is not a complete master of comic-epic in prose but his writings are able to project an epical world which is the mixture of past and present, history and myth, and reality and fantasy. M. Madhusudhan Rao once again remarks: "The narrative world progresses from the past into the present. It is the manner of recovering a lost moment from the realms of Memory. This shuffling of temporal reality creates the illusion of dramatizing a nearly extinct history" (136). In fact, Rushdie's strong hold on myth and fantasy provides him a unique sense of imagination to narrate the reality of human existence with magical effect.

The world of *Shalimar the Clown* as created by Salman Rushdie is full of thrills and enchantments. The myths of India from the Indian epics and the history of the Muslim rule in India which contains the myths created by both the rulers and the people have been recreated by the author in this novel. In fact, the novel is a rewritten myths of India by Rushdie using the codes of modern thrillers, adventure stories, political satires, folklore, and slap stick comedies. For example, the author recuperates an endangered Kashmiri theatrical tradition of the Bhand Pather. The Bhand Pather in *Shalimar the Clown* becomes the representatives of Kashmiriath. The story of this novel centres around the protagonist, Shalimar who acts as the Porus embattlement of a violent hybrid history and a fluid endlessly proliferating narrativity. It is history that is responsible for his fragmentation. Shalimar is the product of discrimination, insidiousness, power-play, moral-turpitude and uncertainties. He proclaims: "I will meet men of power and draw power from them" (235).

Shalimar and Boonyi's love-story provides Rushdie's multi-purpose themes such as historiography, human-relationships and mythogram to the novel. Cordial human relationship exists between the families of Hindus and Muslims living in the village, Pachigam because they consider one another as brothers. The mythical representation of Rushdie is explicit with the creation of the village named Pachigam, a fictional village, which has the scenic beauty of other villages in Kashmir. The families in Pachigam are the migrants from the central Asia and Syria. In Pachigam both Pandit Pyarelal Kaul and Abdullah Noman are the heads and under them the families of the village who are experts in cooking and other arts including theatrical performance make their livelihood: "The word *Hindu* and *Muslim* had not place in their story" (57). They are known for their "legendary *wazwaan*, the Banquet of Thirty-Six Course Minimum" (61) and their performance especially the story of Salim



and Anarkali enchants the audiences. The togetherness of the families in Pachigam with “Pachigam was village of gastronomes” (48) is an example found in the novel to say that the Pachigamis are innocent people before the arrival of the colonial masters and the split in the lives of the people after the arrival of Max, an ambassador. This part of the novel delineates the woes associated with partition.

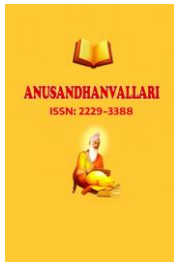
The Indian mythical epic called *The Ramayana* is exploited by Rushdie to delineate the love story of Boonyi and Shalimar. Boonyi gives a different interpretation to Ravana’s effort in abducting Sita and the failure of Jatayu to save Sita from Ravana. She finds faults in Sita’s act of overcoming the warning by crossing the Lakshman-Rekha. Boonyi thinks “that women’s folly undid men’s magic, that heroes had to fight and die because of the vanity that had made a pretty woman act like a dunce” (49-50). She also thinks that the line on the dirty ground delayed the matter or the things that would have happened as destined. So, she wants to cross the ‘Lakshman-rekha’, keeping the femininity in-tact before she is to be married. She invites her lover, Shalimar, the Clown and later Max into her life without any inhibition.

The mythical element is explicit when Shalimar is trained to walk in the air without balancing himself on a rope, like other rope-walkers. This, in fact, is the central attraction of the performance during the performance. Yet another attraction is the enactment of the love-story of Salim and Anarkali by Shalimar and Boonyi. The troupe is also known for performing traditional plays depicting the lives of kings: “There were many requests for the actors to perform the traditional plays. The dramatization of the reign of Zain-ul-abidin, the fifteenth century monarch known simply as Badshah, “the great king” as especially in demand” (69). The myth of sky-dragon in the form of Rahu and Ketu and the Indian myth about snakes and the school of ants which hoards the treasure of gold in the underground are some of the myths exploited by Rushdie in order to show how myths play crucial role in the lives of people of Pachigam.

Abdullah’s wife Firdaus Begum believes in the myth of snakes and she can predict the future sensing the approach of snakes in her dream or in her half-waking mind: “Snakes loomed large in Firdaus Begum’s world-view and therefore in her family’s too.... Under the shivering Himalayas,.. there was a lost city where the snakes hoarded gold and precious stones. Malachite was a snake favourite and its possession bestowed good fortune on the possessor; but only if the stone had been found, not bought” (56). Firdaus often narrates the story of snake cities and “treasure-laden anthills” to her children. She tells her children that her people who are the Iskander’s progeny travelled from Greece to India taking the gold dust from the anthills.

The story of Shalimar Garden with its magical tree built by Jehangir also supplies one of the myths in the story. A magician narrates the story of the mythical tree to the people of Pachigam who have arrived at the Mughal’s Garden. He informs about the tree to the people of Pachigam who comes to the Shalimar Garden for the demonstration of their culinary art and dramatic performance. He informs that there is a tree in paradise which is found in the Shalimar Garden of Jehangir and that gives shelter and sustenance to all those who are in need. He also informs that “there exists a cousin of that celestial *tooba* tree. According to legend the location of the earthly tooba was revealed by *holy pirs* to the Emperor Jehangir and he built the Shalimar Bagh around it” (76).

The love-story of Salim and Anarkali is a myth and that alludes to the love-story of Boonyi and Shalimar. Boonyi is forced to abandon the normal life after her tryst with the American ambassador, Max. She is punished to live on the hills of Kashmir leaving behind the village, Pachigam. In the mythical story, Anarkali is walled alive for the reason that she had loved Salim which was against their culture. And like Anarkali, Boonyi is punished to live a lonely life on the hills of Kashmir. But in *Shalimar the Clown*, Shalimar takes revenge on Boonyi for her trespass. Shalimar kills her and she also happily welcomes her end in the hands of Shalimar.

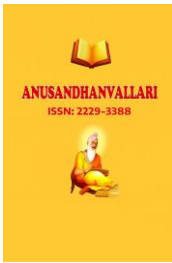


The title, *Shalimar the Clown* alludes to postmodernism, but the novel moves beyond postmodernism. The title evokes the double meaning – the clown is the hero as well as the clown. In the later part of the novel, Shalimar turns to political violence from the personal world of revenge. Rushdie tends to play the acrobat-clown walking on the tightrope between the satiric fables, ridiculing the characters and the political history of the world, especially India through the character, Abdullah, who is alluded to Abdulla of contemporary Kashmir. The words of Abdullah in the novel: “He’s is still young enough to have the idea of that he can change history whereas I am getting accustomed to the idea of being useless” (312) can be taken as the words of the present Abdulla of Kashmir. Yet the world of *Shalimar the Clown* spans in global perspectives. The story of a deep love has been over-shadowed by many fatal agents in the form of many different post-modernist realities. Hence, Rushdie’s thought of globalization of cultural perspectives especially bringing closer together the eastern and western myths is quite effective in this novel.

Rushdie’s *The Enchantress of Florence* published in 2008 creates a new debate in the world of literature. Bringing out the history of 15th and 16th centuries of India and Europe close together, Rushdie has enchanted the minds of readers with his magical realistic spell. Enchantment or control of minds can be done through special root called mandrake, and scents and oils is one of the literary elements used by Rushdie which gives a kind of magical spell to the story and it also helps in forming the atmosphere of magic realism. The history of Akbar’s rule in India and Queen Elizabeth and Kings of Florence in Europe is delineated by the author through a lens of magic realism, since the real history of wars and victories are slightly altered by him to fit to his leitmotif: “Rushdie’s tenth novel, *The Enchantress of Florence* seems a historical fiction from formalist point of view but its thread unties the mystery of the art of storytelling. It reexamines the art, its function and effect. It discusses the function of stories and the significance of the storyteller” (Valiur Rahaman 26).

The Enchantress of Florence sets in the Renaissance Italy and Akbar’s India, exposes mythogram of ancients and that of moderns. The scenes are neither European nor Indian, just as the characters are not quite historically accurate. The novel begins with the arrival of mysterious yellow-haired stranger who called himself Mogor dell’Amore, the Mughal of Love, at the palace of Fatehpur Sikri – the city built by Mughal emperor Akbar the Great in the sixteenth century – claims to tell bewitching stories and secret recounting only to the emperor. His real name is Niccolo Vespucci – cousin of Amerigo and namesake of Niccolo Machavelli. He reported that he has journeyed from his birthplace in the New World via Florence to Mughal Hindustan with a desire to tell a secret story which contains a real history of a character called Qara Koz who is a relative of Akbar. He also claims that he is also a relative, uncle of Akbar since he is the son of Qara Koz. Thus, Mogor dell’Amore claims kinship with Akbar saying that he is the uncle of Akbar. Though the story perplexes Akbar, yet he listens to his Niccolo’s story, about his great-aunt, Qara Koz and confirms about it from the words of his mother, Hamida Bano and aunt, Gulbadan Begum.

Mogor dell’Amore bold stratagems, artistic and magical narration bewitches Akbar. His art of telling the digressive weaving and unweaving of a story that captivates the emperor’s attention, which is the art of author’s own. The author has articulated the art of narration artfully by juxtaposing the present and the past, and the East and the West. A reference of *Arabian Nights* by Shaharзад is made by the author through the storytelling art of Mogor dell’Amore. His bewitching story introduces not only Akbar’s great-aunt, Qara Koz who was the sister of Babar, who established the Mughal kingdom in India but also about the life of Babar and his two sisters, Khanzada Begum and Qara Koz. In fact, Qara Koz who is the Enchantress of Florence at where she is addressed, Angelica. The life story of Qara Koz ultimately becomes Mogor dell’Amore’s story who claims that he is the only son of Qara Koz. Qara Koz, perhaps was one way or the other connected to the great warriors and the childhood friends



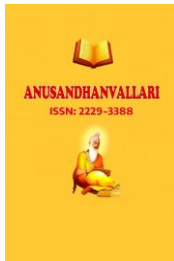
of Florence namely Antonio Argalia, Niccolo il Machiavelli and Ago Vespucci and their lives have become hers when she controls them under her magical spell.

The bewitching beauty and the black eyes of Qara Koz have the capacity of bewitching people and even the Nature under her spell. Her power of enchantment brought her the name, 'Enchantress of Florence'. Rushdie has fully exploited the literary tool, magic realism in this novel whenever Qara Koz, or Lady Black Eyes plunges into action and makes the plot move. Qara Koz through her magic has created a mirror image called Mirror who exactly looks like Qara Koz. In fact, Mirror is the shadow of Qara Koz and she also like Qara Koz married, slept and lived with, Qara Koz's men namely Shah Ismail, Argalia, and Ago. However, Qara Koz alone has the magical power of enchantment but not the mirror image. While Qara Koz fails to give children, Mirror gives birth to a daughter through Ago and she is named Qara Koz. Hence, her son, Niccolo Vespucci is made to believe that she is the son of Qara Koz, the enchantress. This truth about Mogor dell'Agore's birth-secret is revealed in the last few pages of the novel when the real Qara Koz in a form of apparition or in Akbar's imagination, appears before Akbar and explains him about the birth secret of Niccolo Vespucci. The appearance of the ghost of Qara Koz in front of Akbar, after three generations, is one of the magic realist's parts in the novel as in Shakespeare's plays the appearance of apparition and that gives a kind of eerie atmosphere to the novel, even at the close of it:

But that night in his brocade tent the hidden princess came to him, Qara Koz, her beauty like a flame. This was not the mannish shorn-haired creature she has become to escape from Florence, but the hidden princess in all her youthful glory, the same irresistible creature who had entered Shah Ismail of Persia and Argalia of Turk, the Florentine Janissary, Wielder of the Enchanted Lance. That night of Akbar's retreat from Sikri she spoke to him for the first time. (440)

Myth and magics overshadow the historical part in *The Enchantress of Florence*. The mythical belief of people such as magical spell caused on people using mandrake roots, oil and scents is much exploited by Rushdie throughout the novel. Like Shakespeare, Rushdie has used supernatural elements like appearance of ghost of Qara Koz in her youthful form, to appear in front of Akbar after three generations. In fact, people all over the world believe in the presence of ghosts and angels and this belief is much developed by Rushdie in this novel. The magical power of Qara Koz can cause spell on people. And with her curse, the enchantress made the river of Florence dry up and in the later part of the novel Skeleton the whore and Mogor dell'Amore have made the lake in Sikri to get dried up are some of the mythical elements delineated by Rushdie in this novel. In fact, in the beginning Skeleton applies oils and perfume on the body of Mogor dell'Amore in order to bewitch people and to reach the court the Akbar, easily.

The creation of a beautiful queen called Jodha by Akbar in his imagination, living with her in a special quarter in the palace and making the other queens and people of the palace believe that Jodha is a real Rajput queen whom Akbar loves a lot, are also the magic realism in the novel. Lighting the lamps of in Skeleton's house by singing a particular raag called raag Deepak and the "angel-voiced sisters Tana and Riri" (390) who gave life to the dying Tansen by singing songs are permeating with magic realism. In the later part of the novel, the replacement of Jodha by Qara Koz is also one of the magical spells which bewitches Akbar: "I have come home after all," she told him. 'You have allowed me to return, and so here I am, at my journey's end. And now. Shelter of the World, I am yours.' Now Akbar becomes the tool in the hands of Qara Koz the bewitching queen and so he mutters, "Until you're not, the Universal Ruler thought. My Love, until you're not." (442-43). Thus, myth and magic are predominant tone in the novel.



The stories in *The Enchantress of Florence*, although historical in nature, they have good impact on modern life. The world of history is particularly linked with the stories of the world of national origin in the case they can be Greek or Hindu or Muslim. These stories evoke emotional and patriotic feelings on the one hand and antic feelings on the other hand. For example, Akbar believes in the greatness of his empire for many things. On the other hand, he also bears the load of many repulsive traditions present in his empire. Though he believes in Almighty, yet he questions the presence of God, the Supreme power. Like *The Mahabharata*, this is a story of war and history, yet it is a story which revolves around the enchantress queen Qara Koz, as in *The Mahabharata*, the storyline revolves around Droupati. Like Droupati, Qara Koz also possesses bewitching beauty and so Akbar when informed about the queen, he ordered Dashwant, the painter to give life to her, from the words of Niccolo Vespucci: "Paint her into the world", Akbar, exhorted Dashwant, "for there is such magic in your brush that she may even come to life, spring off your pages and join us for feasting and wine" (149).

Conclusion: Thus, Rushdie's world covers a wide range of politics, culture, and tradition, modernity, magic, myth, reality, and imagination. He would like to present his continuous search for his imaginary homelands in this world. There is an epic panorama in his presentation of his world in the novels. In *Shalimar the Clown* and *The Enchantress of Florence*, he seems to erase the borderline between the past world and the present, the East and the West to show the great continuity and commonality which are essential for the continuation of universe. He propounds his views that the present world does not leave the impact of the past because there is a continuous modification of culture, tradition, convention, and so many things that guide and guard people all over the world. Rushdie has touched the worlds of politics, sociology, mythology and modernity in his novels and so the readers somehow find themselves as one of the characters of the novels and transcend the boundary of real world to enter into the world of magic realism.

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