

# SALMAN RUSHDIE'S TREATMENT OF ALIENATION

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## SUMMARY:

Salman Rushdie has established himself as one of the most provocative modern writers. With four novels -*Grimus* (1975), *Midnight's Children* (1980), *Shame* (1983) and *The Satanic Verses* (1988)- to his credit, he has been recognized as a major novelist delineating the contemporary scene on the Indian subcontinent. The problems treated in Rushdie's novels are of perennial interest, and it is interesting to see how he presents the essential predicament of the modern man. The identification on the part of the novelist with his characters gives verisimilitude to his work and makes his treatment of the dilemma of alienated person so convincing.

## KEYWORDS:

Alienation, angst, plight.

## I

Salman Rushdie has established himself as one of the most provocative modern writers. With four novels -*Grimus* (1975), *Midnight's Children* (1980), *Shame* (1983) and *The Satanic Verses* (1988)- to his credit, he has been recognized as a major novelist delineating the contemporary scene on the Indian subcontinent. Few novels, in recent years, have unleashed so much praise and criticism as *Midnight's Children* did when it won the coveted Booker McConnell Award for 1981. According to a reviewer, "it is a very un-Indian book about things Indian", which presents "a wonderful mix of the beautiful and the grotesque that... only India seems to offer to the Western world"<sup>1</sup>. The novel earned unqualified praise from the *New York Times* which held that Rushdie's masterpiece "sounds like a continent finding its voice". Rushdie's other novels also display, in their own ways, his achievements and limitations as a novelist.

Rushdie has called himself "a fairly political animal"<sup>2</sup>. All his novels except the first, which is ahistorical, have dealt with historical/political themes. Commenting on *Midnight's Children* and *Shame*, Rushdie told an interviewer: "It seems to me that everything in both books has had to do with politics and with the relationship of the individuals and history"<sup>3</sup>. His novels

<sup>1</sup> S. Krisham, «*Midnight's Children: An Un-Indian Book on All Things Indian*», *Aside* (April, 1982), p. 53.

<sup>2</sup> Salman Rushdie's interview with Gordon Wise, *Gentleman* (February, 1984), p. 59.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 57. For a detailed discussion, see R. S. Pathak, «History and the

are, however, something more than historical/political accounts of certain individuals' experiences and reactions. What imparts real significance to them is his intense awareness of the predicament of the modern man. As M. K. Naik points out, "*Midnight's Children*... illustrates the permanent plight of individual identity in the hostile modern world"<sup>4</sup>. This is true of all his novels except *Grimus*. The novelist has portrayed in considerable depth the dilemma of the alienated person. "Such angst. Such loneliness. Such rootlessness", exclaims Dilip Fernandez after going through Rushdie's novels, and adds: "But this is the stuff creation is made of" in the modern world<sup>5</sup>. Unlike historical/political issues, the problems treated in Rushdie's novels are of perennial interest, and it would be interesting to see how he presents the essential predicament of the modern man.

The impact of alienation on the modern man has been corrosive. It can be seen today in its various manifestations, the most conspicuous being: generation gap, compartmentalization of life resulting in schizophrenia, chopping off of human relationships and concerns, personal crisis culminating in stunting of personal development, and so on. Twentieth century -especially the post-war period- has been a period of great spiritual and mental stress and strain, and has rightly been called "The Age of Alienation"<sup>6</sup>. The modern man finds himself in a particularly inhospitable world. As Edmund Fuller suggests, in our age "man suffers not only from war, persecution, famine and ruin, but from inner problem... a conviction of isolation, randomness, [and] meaninglessness in his very existence"<sup>7</sup>. Rushdie's novels have faithfully delineated this very plight of the contemporary society.

The modern man's sense of alienation gets aggravated by his lack of faith and abundance of uncertainty. Diagnosing the malaise, Paul Brunton aptly remarks: "Never before were so many people plunged in so much uncertainty, so much perplexity and unsettlement"<sup>8</sup>. The plight of the modern man has been discussed by Melvin Seeman under a set of five interrelated operational conditions, viz. powerlessness, normlessness, isolation, self-estrangement and meaninglessness<sup>9</sup>. These are in fact different manifestations of alienation. Taviss subsumes them under two kinds, i.e. "social alienation" and "self-alienation"<sup>10</sup>. In Rushdie's novels we come across both the forms of alienation.

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Individual in the Novels of Rushdie», in R. K. Dhawan, ed., *Three Contemporary Novelists* (New Delhi: Classical Publishing Co., 1986).

<sup>4</sup> *Studies in Indian English Literature* (New Delhi: Sterling, 1987), p. 54.

<sup>5</sup> «Such Angst, Loneliness, Rootlessness», *Gentleman* (February, 1984), p. 105.

<sup>6</sup> See B. Murchland, *The Age of Alienation* (New York, 1971).

<sup>7</sup> *Man in Modern Fiction* (New York: Random House, 1958), p. 3.

<sup>8</sup> *The Spiritual Crisis of Man* (London: Rider & Co., 1972), p. 7.

<sup>9</sup> «On the Meaning of Alienation», *American Sociological Review*, 24/6 (December, 1959), p. 786.

<sup>10</sup> I. Taviss, «Changes in the Form of Alienation», *American Sociological*

For historical reasons, Indian writers in English are particularly susceptible to rootlessness. It is really difficult to specify the precise nature of alienation depicted in Indian fiction in English. "It would be interesting", however, as Melwani points out, "...to examine how far 'rootlessness' is a deep-seated malady, how far a fad and how far a posture. The attempts made so far to portray the effects of westernization are either intellectual, farcical or philosophical. What is required is a portrayal in artistic terms"<sup>11</sup>. The present paper aims at analysing Rushdie's treatment of alienation from this very point of view.

## II

Rushdie's first novel, *Grimus*, is replete with hallucinogenic intensity. Flapping Eagle, the hero of the tale, swallows the elixir of immortality and wanders the face of the earth for over seven centuries. He sees things "most men miss in a mere lifetime". But before he reaches the town of K in the mythical world of Calf island, he suffers the onslaught of the "inner dimensions". He journeys up a mountain where he eventually encounters Grimus. (Grimus is, incidentally, an anagram of Simurg, in Persian mythology the bird with reasoning powers).

Superficially, Flapping Eagle seems to have adaptability and capacity to make compromises. But he almost invariably gets "reduced to the status of a pawn in someone else's game"<sup>12</sup>. Flapping Eagle is ostracized from his tribe because of his ambiguous sex, his birth and pigmentation. "Long estranged", he develops a "rarefied, abstract attitude to life" (p. 269). He comes to realize in due course that his quest has been "A gigantic blind alley. A voyage through the waste land" (p. 90). Frequently haunted by "the weight of his guilt" and "the feeling of futility", on account of which "his morale had been steadily declining", he feels like "an empty man, a Tshell without a Form" (p. 205).

What tortures Flapping Eagle most is the overwhelming "contrariness" of things. He is filled with an intense desire to get to the bottom of contradictions and anomalies of life (p. 157). His efforts to decipher the meaning of life are, however, thwarted on various occasions, and he remains "chameleon, adaptable, confused" (p. 249). We are pertinently told:

To have been so much and done so little. Searching, always searching for the path through the maize.... It had left him half a man, unfound even by himself. It was this lack in himself that was now reaching a time of crisis (p. 90)

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*Review*, 34/1 (February, 1969), pp. 46-47.

<sup>11</sup> M. D. Melwani, *Critical Essays on Indo-Anglian Themes* (Calcutta, 1971), p. 21.

<sup>12</sup> Salman Rushdie, *Grimus* (Frogmore, St. Albans, Herts: Granada Publishing Limited, 1975), p. 220. All subsequent references to this novel are given parenthetically.

The fate of Virgil Jones, another important character in the novel, has not been very different from that of Flapping Eagle. Jones's struggle in life has "drained him of a great deal more than energy", and he appears to Flapping Eagle as a "shambling, bumbling, ineffectual" being (p. 100). Jones is, as he himself knows, "a stranger" within himself (p. 123). He would not see any sense in living "the same day over and over again"; only "displaced persons" are "always counter-feiting roots" (p. 87). Ultimately, Jones ceases to see the merit in achievement or heroism (p. 45). He also tends to be somewhat conservative and unadventurous. The urge to fit in has taken over and the spirit of adventure and the passion for long-time search has waned in him (p. 128). He sums up his experiences of life in the following words:

Unfortunately life has a way of sidetracking one's greatest ambitions. Painters, would be artists, end up white washing walls. Sculptors are forced to design toilets. Writers become critics or publicists. [And] Archaeologists... can become gravediggers (p. 44).

This pathetic condition is bound to generate alienation of an acute nature. Rushdie's next two novels have taken up this theme for fuller treatment.

### III

Rushdie's masterpiece, *Midnight's Children*, is a novel about Indian independence partition and its aftermath. It contains the novelist's interpretation of a period of about seventy years in India's modern history. In writing this novel, Rushdie's "aim was to relate private lives to public events and to explore the limits of individuality in a country as big, as populous and as culturally variegated as India"<sup>13</sup>. *Midnight's Children* encapsulates the experiences of three generations of the Sinai family, living in Srinagar, Amritsar and Agra and then in Bombay and, finally, migrating to Karachi. Alongside of the collective history of a nation, we have personal experiences of the narrator, Saleem Sinai.

As Keith Wilson has pointed out, *Midnight's Children* is "the novel of national angst"<sup>14</sup>. Right from the beginning, Saleem is conscious of his historical "centrality", his destiny being "indissolubly chained" to that of his country. He is fully convinced that his birth at "the benighted moment" thrust upon him "at the best of times a dangerous sort of involvement"<sup>15</sup>. He fails to understand, however, the reason for having being born, which always remains "shadowy still, undefined, [and] enigmatic" (p. 193). He

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<sup>13</sup> B. K. Joshi, «It May Be Long, but It's Not Overwritten», *The Times of India* (1 November, 1981), p. 8.

<sup>14</sup> «*Midnight's Children* and Reader Responsibility», *Critical Quarterly*, 26/3 (Autumn, 1984), p. 33.

<sup>15</sup> Salman Rushdie, *Midnight's Children* (New York: Avon Books, 1980), p. 3. Hereafter cited parenthetically.

remembers himself as "a lonely ugly child" (p. 240). He has no doubts whatsoever that he is doomed to lead the life of an exile: "At every turn I am thwarted, a prophet in the wilderness, like Maslama, like ibn Sinam; No matter how I try, the desert is my lot" (p. 471).

In his bravado, Saleem assumes upon himself the self-styled role of a prophet, which may be a highly questionable issue. But one thing is certain: he has to lead the life of a social outcast. Throughout his life, he remains "adrift in this haze of anticipation" of a better life (p. 180). But till the end he remains "consigned to the peripheries of history" (p. 470). He is ultimately flattened like ancestral spittoon by forces beyond his control.

Saleem confesses to have developed uneasy symptoms of schizophrenia (p. 420). He says:

I admit openly I have not been myself of late. I have been a buddha, and a basketed ghost, and a would-be-Saviour of the nation... rushing down blind alleys,... [with] considerable problems with reality (p. 520).

He is nevertheless obsessed with the purpose of life. It was at a very early age that he became "perplexed by meaning" (p. 181). "Everything has shape, if you look for it", he says. "There is no escape from form" (p. 271). His is, however, a frustrated search for meaning or pattern in life, and he does not possess a clear sense of purpose: "I became afraid that everything was wrong -that my much trumpeted existence might turn out to be utterly useless, void, and without the shred of a purpose" (p. 180).

Saleem variegated experiences are such that they only make him "always confused about being good" (p. 239). He neither acquires a philosophical wisdom, like that of a prophet, nor does he understand the commonsense solution to life's problems, like the one suggested by his counter ego, Shiv: "You got to get what you can, do what you can with it, and then you got to die" (p. 264). In this respect Saleem's lot is typical of all alienated persons. He himself admits: I am "so far gone, in my desperate need for meaning, that I'm prepared to distort everything... in my confusion I can't judge" (p. 198). This confusion turns out to be the besetting sin of Saleem's sensibility and conduct.

Saleem betrays at times characteristics of an "anti-hero". He had "acquired a miraculous gift", but chooses to "conceal his talents". This is not because of any humility but because of an abysmal self-estrangement. He fritters away his remarkable talents "on inconsequential voyeurism and petty cheating" (p. 204). He is not even clear about his place in the scheme of things and finds himself "elusive as rainbows, unpredictable as lightning, [and] garrulous as Ganesh" (p. 234). He remains all along "an unfortunate fellow with a face like a cartoon", fatally "gripped by some deep malaise" (p. 385).

Saleem's self-estrangement is partly the outcome of his abnormally morbid nature and partly of his nurture and inheritance. The Reverend Mother, we are told, led a lonely life "like a large smug spider" (p. 41). The

whole household was very often torn by the conflict between grand-paternal scepticism and grand maternal credulity (p. 124). Saleem's father was "unnerved, adrift, unmanned" (p. 397). Similarly, his mother became the victim of the "spirit of detached fatigue" (p. 393) and, in due course, "fell apart" (p. 393). Saleem's sister Jamila, too, despite her faith and vocation, was not really different from the other members of her family. Like them, she was filled with "the pain of exile" and "the lovelessness of life" (p. 472). Saleem himself suffers from a strange weariness - "a general fatigue so profound" (p. 391) that he becomes "adrift, disorientated" (p. 389). A time comes when he forgets even his name, which is the most significant emblem of one's identity. In the hostile world he is flung to live, he feels that he is "cast as a ghost" (p. 29). He particularly draws attention to his pathetic condition:

Please believe that I am falling apart.... I mean quite simply that I have begun to crack all over like an old jug.... In short, I am literally disintegrating, slowly for the moment, although there are signs of an acceleration (p. 37).

Saleem is constantly haunted by his "special doom", which he finds "impossible to ignore" (p. 143). "I am empty and free", he reiterates (pp. 409-10). He feels that he is "pulled up by his roots to be flung unceremoniously across the years, [and] fated to plunge memoryless into an adulthood whose every aspect grew daily more grotesque" (p. 414). Towards the close of the novel he comes to realise that he will have to "jerk towards my crisis like a puppet with broken strings" (p. 509). Saleem's is thus the predicament of an alienated person.

In *Midnight's Children* the novelist has taken special pains to thrash the issue of Saleem Sinai's identity and his predicament in a hostile world. The protagonist's identity, as revealed in the novel, is shown as fractured and fragmented and merged and superimposed. His incurable sterility makes his case particularly pathetic. His plight has been suggested in various ways. The two important parameters are Saleem's personal appearance and his heredity, both of which have been particularly highlighted by the novelist.

There is something uncanny about Saleem's personal appearance. As he himself tells us, his "large moon-face was too large: too perfectly round" (p. 124). This is worsened by "something lacking in the region of the chin" (p. 124). Both these features are symptomatic of his lack of will power and barrenness. That Saleem is not all a piece is indicated by certain glaring physical details. The birthmarks "spread down my western hairline, a dark patch coloured my eastern ear", the "rampant cucumber of the nose" and "temples like stunted horns" (p. 124) indicate lack of harmony in his face and personality and also his being reduced to animal level. His unblinking eyes and legs that were irretrievably "bowed" (p. 149) are also expressive of his passive and unstable nature.

As for his heredity, Saleem himself confides, he "had more mothers than most mothers have children" (p. 243). "All my life", he further says,

"consciously, or unconsciously I have sought out fathers" (p. 426), and "giving birth to parents has been one of my stranger talents" (p. 243). Besides his real mother Vanita and his putative mother Amina, the midwife Mary Pereira, who performed baby-swapping and gave a new life to Saleem, was a kind of mother to him. In due course of time, he was entrusted to the care of his aunt Pia and was thus "promoted to occupy the sacred place of the son she never had" (p. 243). Saleem's "fathers" outnumber his "mothers". The "mischievous perversity" of a dream "confused Amina about the parentage of her child" and "the child of midnight" was given "a fourth father [Nadir Khan] to set beside Winkie and Methwold and Ahmed Sinai" (pp. 127-28). The German "snakedoctor" and his uncle General Zulficar gave new lease of life to him. And the snake-charmer Picture Singh, who rescued him from Bangladesh, was "the last in the line of men who have been willing to become my fathers" (p. 378). This state of affairs eloquently testifies to Saleem's lack of roots and identity crisis. Like his father, he himself had, metaphorically speaking, a "brittle" life.

The motif of fragmentation is present throughout the novel. But in no case, is it so prominent as it is in the case of Saleem. He is fully aware of his problems and plights, misfortunes and discordances, so typical of a rootless person. This is how he looks at himself finally:

I'm tearing myself apart, can't even agree with myself, talking arguing like a wild fellow, cracking up, memory going, yes, memory plunging into chasms and being swallowed by the dark, only fragments remain, none of it makes sense any more (p. 503).

This is the height of self-alienation. This represents, in brief, the plight of Saleem's "clock-ridden, crime-stained birth" (p. 4).

#### IV

Rushdie's third novel, *Shame*, depicts the contemporary political situation in Pakistan. The main plot of the novel revolves round the lives of Omar Khayyan Shakil and Sufiya Zenobia. The side-plot, however, involves relationships between two important architects of Pakistan - Raza Hyder and Iskander Harappa (who are, in fact, based on General Zia and Zulficar Ali Bhutto respectively). Much of the novel is, as Rushdie himself suggests, "all about careerism, cops, politics, revenge, assassinations, executions, blood and guts"<sup>16</sup>. But the novelist's portrayal of the psychological crisis of some of his characters is of no less interest.

Rushdie makes it a point to tell us that the society in Pakistan is, by and large, repressive - "a society which is authoritarian in its social and sexual codes, which crushes its women beneath the intolerable burdens of honour and propriety"<sup>17</sup>. Iskander Harappa once told his daughter: "As a nation we

<sup>16</sup> Dilip Fernández, *opus cit.*, p. 103.

<sup>17</sup> Salman Rushdie, *Shame* (Calcutta: Rupa & Co., 1983), p. 173. Hereafter cited parenthetically.

have a positive genius for self-destruction, we nibble away at ourselves, we eat our children, we pull down anyone who climbs up" (p. 184). It is against a background like this that characters like Sufiya Zenobia and Omar Khayyam Shakil act and react.

Rushdie has shown how shame (i.e. *sharam*) is a part of "the architecture of the society that the novel describes"<sup>18</sup>. Many people in countries like Pakistan, he points out, grow upon "a diet of honour and shame" (p. 115). "But shame is like everything else; live with it for long enough and it becomes part of the furniture" (p. 28). Angular persons like Sufiya are typical products of an unfortunate cultural climate like this, in which:

Shameful things are done: lies, loose living, disrespect for one's elders, failure to love one's national flag, incorrect voting at elections, over-eating, extramarital sex, autobiographical novels, cheating at cards, maltreatment of women folk, examination failures, sin ugglng, throwing one's wicket away at the crucial point of a Test Match: and they are done *Shamelessly* (p. 122).

Sufiya's violence may seem to be blind and pointless. It illustrates, however, a well-known historical truth about individual and social alienation. At times she symbolises mob violence, "a rumour, a chimaera, the collective phantasy of a stifled people, a dream born of their rage" (p. 263). Rushdie establishes an unmistakable connection between shame and violence. He writes: "If you push people too far and if you humiliate them too greatly, then a kind of violence bursts out of them". Sufiya's bestiality is nothing but an outrageous expression of her impotent rage arising from her estrangement. Omar Khayyam, moved by her pathetic condition, wonders: "Can it be possible... that human beings are capable of discovering their nobility in their savagery?" (p. 254). There is, however, nothing really noble about her.

Sufiya has been described in the novel as "the wrong miracle" (p. 89). She is so thoroughly self-estranged that her "body's defence mechanisms have declared war against the very life they are supposed to be protecting" (p. 142). An external manifestation of her psychic problems can be seen in her tendency of having "blushes like fires" (p. 121). Her brain-fever enables her "to absorb, like a sponge, a host of unfelt feelings" (p. 122). Sufiya's psychological problems have made her so uncontrollable that she is compared by Iskander Harappa to "an impetuous river" which cannot only inundate the plains but also cast down trees and buildings (p. 256).

Omar Khayyam Shakil's case is even more complicated. His lot is similar to that of the man who has "lost his way completed" and runs "wildly about like a time-traveller who has lost his magic capsule and fears he will never emerge" (p. 31). Shakil seems to have come to this world at a wrongtime, descending upon "the cohorts of history like a wolf (or a wolf-child) on the fold" (pp. 32-33). It is his "distressed psychological condition" that makes

<sup>18</sup> Dilip Fernández, *opus cit.*, p. 105.



him "the victim of mental disorder" (p. 143). As he grows along, his alienation from his society and his self becomes all the more unmitigable.

It may be remembered that right from his early days, Shakil was afflicted by "a sense of inversion, of a world turned upside down" (p. 21). Trapped inside a "reclusive mansion" and suffocated by his mothers' "three-in-oneness", he grew into "a spoiled and vulpine brat". Having no illusions about his childhood, Shakil remembers it "as a lover, abandoned, remembers his beloved" (p. 40). Even during his dreams, he plunges into the void and is reminded of his worthlessness (p. 22). The novelist has particularly emphasized his "unstable wilderness", informing us that he "grew up between twin eternities, whose conventional order was, in his experience, precisely inverted" (p. 23). Like Saleem of *Midnight's Children*, Shakil was very often plagued by his "sense of being a creature of the edge - a peripheral man" (p. 24). Painfully conscious of his "congenitally isolated self", he once described himself as "a fellow who is not even the hero of his own life; a man born and raised in the condition of being out of things" (pp. 25, 24). In the town of Q., Shakil always finds himself "an outsider" and "homeless" (p. 47). For his uncanny personal habits, he is accused of "being ugly inside as well as out, a Beast" (p. 144). Persons like Omar Khayyam, we are reminded, are "monsters in a civilized society" and are condemned to walk on the "utmost rim" of the earth (p. 199). Summing up his impressions about Shakil, the novelist writes: "I am no less disappointed in my hero than I was" (p. 198). Much of this dissatisfaction may be due to his protagonist's incurable alienation and its repercussions.

It may also not be inappropriate to remember that some other characters in the novel also suffer on account of their self-estrangement, thanks to their "dislocated, rootless" country (p. 81) and "the bizarre atmosphere of that horrified and dislocated time" (p. 169). Most people in such a context are "falling away... like rocket stages" (p. 238), and find it very difficult to "emerge from the rubble of their exploded identity" (p. 38). Shakil's mothers are nothing less than "psychological centaurs, fish-women, hybrid", affected severely by a "confused separation of personalities" (p. 40). Even Raza Hyder does not fare significantly better. Initially, he appears to have "a boulder-like quality" - "an indeflectible sense of himself" (p. 67). Later on, however, his self-control gives way and he begins to feel "around him the enclosing emptiness of the void" (p. 257). Raza's wife, Bilquis, is even more rootless. Despite her show of queenly composure, she behaves "as though she were standing on a crumbling outcrop over an abyss" (p. 103). She is ultimately reduced to "less than a character, a mirage, almost a mumble in the corners of the palace" (p. 209). Sufiya, Shakil, Raza and Bilquis - all are victims of the same malaise, which manifests in each case in a different form and assures varying proportions.

## V

Alienation, as Meenakshi Mukherjee rightly points out, is "a very common theme" in Indian Fiction in English<sup>19</sup>. Rushdie's alienated characters convey, in varying degrees, a sense of unhappy frustration mainly from their social milieu. He has ruthlessly presented their social tragedy and psychological trauma. He wields irony and satire with competence, and his command over language enables him to depict crucial events and character-traits without melodrama. His treatment of the rootless person's problems and plights keeps on becoming complex from novel to novel. So comprehensive and sure is his grasp over the psyche of his characters and social forces shaping them that a reviewer of *Midnight's Children* has maintained that "India has found her Günter Grass". Rushdie has also been compared to Milan Kundera and Gabriel García Márquez.

As a creative historian of the contemporary socio-psychological ethos, Rushdie is concerned with an unimpassioned portrayal of the problem of alienation and does not bother to suggest any solution to it. His characters' problems are chiefly "the everyday human problems which arise from character-and-environment" and their interplay (*Midnight's Children*, p. 238). These rootless persons are simply "broken promises; made to be broken" (p. 523). What makes their lot even more pathetic is the fact that they have no choice but to face the music. Saleem asks:

No choice? -None; when was there ever? -There are imperatives and logical consequences, and inevitabilities, and recurrences; there are things-done-to; and accidents, and blugeonings-of-fate; when was there ever a choice? When options? When a decision freely-made, to be this or that or the other? (pp. 503-504).

Rushdie's characters may not be heroic, but they faithfully represent the predicament which most modern people have to face today in one way or the other.

There is, moreover, a psychological validity behind Rushdie's delineation of rootlessness. The extent of temperamental and experiential identification between Indian novelists in English and their characters is really striking. "One strongly suspects", writes Meenakshi Mukherjee, "that is so because the novelists themselves like their protagonists, feel alienated from these [i.e. Indian] values"<sup>20</sup>. John Wain also finds them "always haunted by a sense of loss and estrangement"<sup>21</sup>. Rushdie is no exception to this trend. In spite of his schooling at Rugby, his university years at Cambridge and his two-pronged rootlessness, he looks at his "Indianness" in a nostalgic way<sup>22</sup>. He

<sup>19</sup> *The Twice-Born Fiction* (New Delhi: Heinemann, 1972), p. 83.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 91.

<sup>21</sup> «A Visit to India», *Encounter*, 16/5 (May, 1961), p. 7.

<sup>22</sup> Rushdie told one of his reviewers: «The novel is in a crisis.... I cannot return to India. I don't feel like an Indian novelist», *The Times of India* (1 November, 1981), p. 8. In a different context, Rushdie is reported to have remarked: «Yes, the uprooting made me very sad. I was very angry when my parents sold our house [in Bombay] and

has had a special affection for Bombay, where he was born and brought up and had his early education. The "diseased reality" of his Pakistan years comes to his autobiographical hero Saleem "like a terrible, occult series of reprisals for tearing up our Bombay roots" (p. 403). As it is evident from *Shame*, Rushdie equates himself free of the idea of roots (pp. 87-88). He remarks: "I, too, know something of this immigrant business. I am an emigrant from one country (India) and a newcomer in two" (p. 85). This identification on the part of the novelist with his characters<sup>23</sup> gives verisimilitude to his work and makes his treatment of the dilemma of the alienated person so convincing<sup>24</sup>.

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Saleem Sinai, unable to forgive Karachi for not being Bombay, is very much like what I feel.... The novel [*Midnight's Children*] is written to sort of reclaim my roots, that part of my life. Yes, the writing of the book was a kind of high romantic way of paying a debt to India I felt I owed», *The Sunday Standard* (14 June, 1981), p. 6.

<sup>23</sup> In the interview given to Gordon Wise, Rushdie said that «the unnamed narrator of *Shame* is a good deal closer to me than the named narrator of *Midnight's Children*», *Gentleman* (February, 1984), p. 59. The identity between Saleem of *Midnight's Children* and its author, however, (including their names) is undeniable.

<sup>24</sup> Rushdie's latest novel, *Satanic Verses* (Viking, 1988), has been banned in India, Egypt, Pakistan and South Africa. The novel has been called by the novelist his «most serious book», which is «also the most comic», *India Today* (15 September, 1988), p. 157. Rushdie regards his last three novels as parts of a trilogy. In an interview he told Sharabani Basu: «In this book [i.e. *The Satanic Verses*] I have, for the first time, managed to write from the whole of myself.... This book is a rounding off of a body work that I have been engaged in for the last five years». *Sunday* (18-24 September, 1988), p. 86.