

Hallucination And Fantastic Elements In Salman Rushdie's Fiction: A Critical Overview

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ABSTRACT: *An erudite, and often fearless commentator upon the state of global politics today, Salman Rushdie is regarded as one of the most outstanding writers of politicised fiction. He has written critically acclaimed magical realist novels. His Midnight's Children (1981), Shame (1983), and The Satanic Verses (1989) incorporate the technique of fantasy, hallucination and magic realism. It is a style of writing which sometimes describes dreams as though they were real, and real events as though they were dreams. It involves the fusion of the real and the fantastic and the transformation of the common and the everyday into the awesome and the unreal. Magical realism combines realism and the fantastic in such a way that magical elements grow organically out of the reality portrayed. It is viewed by the critics and the readers that the term was coined by a German art critic Franz Roh to describe a somewhat surrealistic painting of a group of German painters in the 1920s. The Nobel Prize Winner Colombian novelist Gabriel Garcia Marquez is regarded as notable exponent and usually acknowledged as the founding father of hallucination and magic realism.*

KEYWORDS: *Fantastic, Grotesque, Hallucination, Magic Realism, Marvellous, Supernatural, Superstitions.*

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An erudite, lettered and often fearless commentator upon the state of global politics today, Salman Rushdie is regarded as one of the most outstanding writers of politicised fiction. He has written critically acclaimed magical realist novels. His *Midnight's Children* (1981), *Shame* (1983), and *The Satanic Verses* (1989) incorporate the technique of fantasy, hallucination and magic realism. Magic Realism is a style of writing which sometimes describes dreams as though they were real, and real events as though they were dreams. It involves the fusion of the real and the fantastic and the transformation of the common and the everyday into the awesome and the unreal. Magical realism combines realism and the fantastic in such a way that magical elements grow organically out of the reality portrayed. It is viewed by the critics and the readers that the term was coined by a German art critic Franz Roh to describe a somewhat surrealistic painting of a group of German painters in the 1920s. There are others who opine that it was neologized by the Cuban novelist Alejo Carpentier in 1949 to describe the matter-of-fact combination of the fantastic and the everyday in Latin American fiction. The Nobel Prize Winner Colombian novelist Gabriel Garcia Marquez is regarded as notable exponent and usually acknowledged as the founding father of magic realism. His delightfully mesmerizing novel "One Hundred Years of Solitude" (1967) is the best, the finest and a leading example of the magical realism in which one of the characters namely Remedios the Beauty unexpectedly ascends to heaven while hanging her washing on a line. In Franz Kafka's novella 'The Metamorphosis' (1915), as Gregor Samsa, a travelling salesman, wakes up one morning from a troubled dream, he finds himself transformed into a monstrous insect. In Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, we come to know that Saleem is "handcuffed to history", and then witness the invasion of his head by the voices of his compatriots. In modern Indian English fiction, there are many varieties of writers such as R.K. Narayan, Arundhati Roy, Dhnavant Shangvhi, Salman Rushdie and many more whose work is categorized as "magical realist" to such an extent that contemporary critics and readers alike are confused as to what the term really means and how wide its borders are. While going through the *Midnight's Children*, we see that the whole novel shuttles between the real and the unreal. Fantastic, Strange and bizarre things happen and characters engage in improbable actions. *Midnight's Children* owes its "magic" one could say, to Garcia Marquez and its "realism" to Gunter Grass. In Indian English fiction, Rushdie has become as important as Mulk Raj Anand and R.K. Narayan. Narayan's fiction is very humorous, entertaining and spiritually purifying whereas Rushdie's fiction is political fiction showing ironically modern world drifting towards total spiritual sterility and utter failure. We can safely say that Rushdie's fantasy is a mental tonic and Narayan's fantasy is spiritual tonic. A very important thing about magic realism in general is what people believe to happen may not be the reality and truth. And sometimes even the incredible occurrences can be true if people start believing in them. There are several instances in *Midnight's Children* in which Saleem tells Padma that even though what he is about to

disclose is unbelievable, but they must believe him. The use of fantasy by magic realists is intended to question the place of reality in art. In the past, fantasy was often dismissed as being fit only for children. After centuries of oblivion, fantasy is suddenly centrestage in the Western world. New discoveries show that reality cannot exist independent of the observer. The West, it looks like, is having second thoughts about the solidity of the factual universe it earlier swore by. Eric Rabkin defines fantasy as a genre in which the protagonist displays a hesitation in the presence of the supernatural. He cites Alice in Wonderland as one of the best examples of fantasy. He categorically left out tales like Arabian Nights because they did not display the mandatory hesitation in the presences of the marvellous. Instead, they took the marvellous for granted.

Rushdie once said that in Garcia Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, the arrival of a train is greeted with utter incredulity whereas the ascension of a character called Remedios the Beauty to Heaven is not. Rushdie named this the "village" world view. Now in Rushdie's novel one may come across several characters who share this world view. One can't miss the reference to Padma's response to the Reverend Mother's ability to enter her daughter's mind in *Midnight's Children* because Padma accepts this without blinking. The fact is that we need a Padma to make the marvellous real. The birth of prodigious children, blue skinned Tubriwallahs and half snake-half human doctors, strange prophecies, the central fantasy of Salim's gift for hearing voices are seen by Padma or his foster mother Mary Pereira. What is true according to Mary includes fortune tellers prophesying the birth of a two-headed son, sadhus awaiting the arrival of the Blessed One, little girls speaking in the language of birds and cats. One could dismiss these beliefs as the superstitions of the illiterate. But the problem comes when a Prime Minister is spotted soliciting the help of astrologers in drafting the country's first Five Year Plan, or when a young woman with a consciously secular upbringing succumbs to the prophecy of a Ramram Seth with the cobrawallah, monkeyman, bone-setter surrounding him. Instead of hesitation, one finds a belief in the supernatural that cuts across class, caste and gender lines. As Saleem puts it, even a "literate person in this India of ours" is not "immune from the type of information I am in the process of unveiling". Saleem might be a skeptic like his creator Rushdie, but this does not make him immune to the uncanny mysteries of the marvellous. The difference lies in that where a Padma or Mary might swallow marvellous happenings without the slightest hesitation, Saleem might require to justify his position through philosophical argument.

Rushdie's magic realist mode is, by his own admission, a strategy to overcome the limitations of the historical testimony of a young boy's unreliable memory. Here the strange and the improbable is not only the natural subject matter of fiction but the bizarre and uncanny is also accepted as the 'real'. Miracles and improbabilities, of the kind *Midnight's Children* abounds with are accepted, at certain levels, without scepticism. In the modern Indian English fiction, Rushdie is often classed amongst the exponents of magic realism who has put sensations in the pages of his so called controversial novels that have magical settings and characters with magical powers. He is regarded as a trend setter who has developed a new trend by mixing free flowing fairy tale with uncivilized political accusations. In most of his novels, the theme is of unfinished and fragmented identity in an unfriendly and hostile world. Almost all his novels examine and explore his so called "Chutnification of history" as well as the various interpretations the magic realism of the novel has lent itself to readers of his fiction. Never in his works we feel that we are reading a work of cheap thought. Throughout his novels whether it is *Grimus*, *Midnight's Children*, *Shame* or *The Satanic Verses* – he is bold, frank and full of courage to picture, what he wishes to share with his readers. Being a fantastic magical novelist, he fantasises the fantasies. He can be straightforwardly compared with writers like Gunter Grass & Milan Kundera.

Midnight's Children is regarded as a fairy tale full of grotesque elements, a fairy tale with a difference due to its attempts to take the readers to the unreachable reality of the situation in the political and social world. The whole novel is like a beautiful fountain of fantasies related to the realities of life. We find in it various instances of fanciful prophecies of the events which are going to occur in near future. The whole novel is in fact a mixture of fantasies and real. Rushdie has transformed his dreams into reality, mystery into magic, truth into fantasy and fantasy into prophecy. The novelist candidly writes about national and domestic life, coated with allegorical elements and colours of fantasy, "*In fact, all over the new India, the dream we all shared, children were being born who were only partially the offspring of their parents, the children of midnight were also the children of love ... It can happen ... in a country which is itself a sort of dream.*"

Saleem, the protagonist, is gifted with the supernatural power of entering the other people's mind. He represents the intellectual, imaginative Indian, who can think, feel and communicate with others. His mind is a parliament of various viewpoints. The novel is full of fantastic ironies and ironical fantasies. At the age of ten, Saleem begins to realize that he has the ability of telepathy. He is able to communicate in his head with other children born in the same night. He finds out that all the midnight children have some supernatural ability. They can dazzle others with their superhuman beauty. There are others who have the power of true sorcery, and yet know the secrets of alchemy. They can travel in time, perform magic and transform themselves at their will. These miracles are recounted quite naturally, without any surprise or doubt. The basket in which Saleem travels from Bangladesh to Bombay, the voices of midnight children in Saleem's head or Parvati the Witch's spiriting him from Pakistan to India in a basket are clearly magic.

Saleem organizes the conference of *Midnight's Children* inside his head. All the children participate and take their's and Saleem's powers as absolutely normal. In magic realist texts, the magic really happens. According to the summary of magic-realist elements "*wonders are recounted largely without comment, in a matter of-fact way, accepted as a child would accept them, without undue questioning or reflection*". When magic mingles with reality everything is possible and nobody wonders. By inserting magic into reality Rushdie tries to avoid being attacked for criticising the politics of the nation and at the same time he tries to somehow free his narrative from realism, from something that is given and required of a novel.

In the last part of the novel, there is an episode in which Saleem is enlisted in the Pakistani army as a sniffing Man-dog on account of his extra-ordinary sensitive sense of smell. Here it is without any doubt a fantasy where the narrative slides completely into dreams. Saleem alongwith the three boys of his group, gets lost in the Sundarbans of the Ganges delta which is a densely magical place, populated by voices, ghosts and apparitions. As the jungle closes in on them, "like a tomb", the group realises that they are lost and enter a world where time and space disappear. Saleem himself records that "he entered a realm possessing the quality of "absurd fantasy" and surrendered ... to the terrible phantasms of the dream of forest." Rain begins to fill the boat, so they pull onto dry land. Drinking the rain that falls from the leaves, the insane logic of the jungle infects them. The days pass in a haze. Ayooba sees the ghost of a man he killed and the ghost's fluids drip onto his arm, paralysing it. All the four begin to see the ghosts of the people they have arrested. After the nightmares, they become overwhelmed by nostalgia and begin to see images from their past. Wandering through the jungle, they come across an ancient Hindu temple dedicated to the goddess Kali. Inside the temple, four beautiful "identical" girls visit them and the boys abandon themselves to "the women of their most contented dreams". The dreamlike experience, tinged with sexuality and religion, continues as "the daughters of the forest" return night after night and silently bring these lost boys to an "incredible united peak of delight". Saleem realizes that the temple is on the verge of falling apart and hence they flee from the temple head back to the boat, where an enormous, massive and mysterious tidal wave carries them out of the Sundarbans. The miraculous wave that carries Saleem and his companions out the jungle seems a befitting example of magic realism. Finally, though the dream forest grants Saleem freedom from time and place but he appears to be a victim to a social and political world.

Rushdie's second novel *Shame* closely parallels the pattern in which Omar Khayyam Shakil's role is identical with that of Saleem in *Midnight's Children*. Both are supremely grotesque vehicles for linking fanciful tale and murky political history. Inspired by the twin fountains of fantasy and prophecy, Rushdie's art is witnessed in winding purely magical episodes in this novel. *Shame* presents the magical shifting of one's shame to another person and thus personifies an abstract concept to a human being. Though Rushdie declares at the outset that the country mentioned in the novel is not Pakistan yet the novel is usually described as a satire and political allegory targeting Pakistan's ruling classes of the times. The central theme of the novel is the violence that is born out of shame. There are characters that 'stand' for 'shame' and 'shamelessness' – Sufiya Zinobia and Omar Khayyam Shakil respectively. The novel realistically shows the political situation in Pakistan and contains a clear picture of two important personalities of Pakistan history – Raza Hyder and Iskander Hirappa, who are infact based on General Zia and Zulfikar Ali Bhutto respectively.

Magic realism is closely connected with a nation's mythology and religion. Most of the miracles, ghosts and metamorphoses come from the mythology and tradition. In *Shame* there is the image of mirrors. Magic realist novelists usually represent the division between two worlds. "*The magical realist vision exists at the intersection of two worlds, at an imaginary point inside a double sided mirror that reflects in both directions.*" These two worlds can be either real 'and magic' or the world of the dead 'and the living'. The image of mirrors is repeated several times in *Shame*. Looking into the mirror has been symbolized mostly looking into one's past as well as the other's world. "*When she heard this, Bilquis set her lips in a tight and bloodless smile, and her eyes stared ferociously through the mirror on the wall which divided her on the empires of her past.*" Again in the novel Sufiya imagines in her dream the metamorphoses of her nanny and her husband into fishes. There is also the angel—devil relationship and metamorphoses into an angel. Omar's brother, in the novel, who lives in the mountains with the guerillas turns into an angel before he dies.

The *Satanic Verses* deals with the notions of fall and metamorphoses that become real. Rushdie has used the hallucinatory devices of magic realism to try to capture, metaphorically, the sweep and chaos of contemporary reality and its resemblance to a dream or nightmare. Magic realism is omnipresent in the novel and the reader is always aware of its presence owing to imperceptible references to miracles and many other magical happenings. The novel begins with two Muslim men, Gibreel Farishta and Saladin Chamcha, falling from the sky after the plane they were on exploded. During their fall one sprouts an angelic halo, and the other, a tail and horns and then they take the roles they will be carrying through the whole story. One becomes devil, the other angel – two sides of the same coin. The metaphor of a fall from the sky is often interpreted as an unexpected entrance to a new environment. In *The Satanic Verses* fall and entrance really take place. What is impossible in Realism is not only feasible but also realized in Magic Realism. One of the ingredients of magic realism is literalization of metaphors. The magic happens when a metaphor is made real and in this novel the fall

is made real and characters are thrown down to survive and change their lives by entering a new life. "To be born again, sang Gibreel Farishta tumbling from the heavens, 'first you have to die. Ho ji ! Ho ji ! To land upon the bosomy earth, first one needs to fly.'" At the outset of the novel, Gibreel Farishta, has lost his faith. He is forced in a series of tormenting dreams to play the role and his namesake, the archangel Gibreel. As the angel, he interacts while dreaming with Mahound in the desert at the time of the foundling of Islam.

In the fictitious city of Jahilia there appears an orphan girl named Ayesha who subsists on a diet of butterflies and is always surrounded by thousands and thousands of butterflies. They encircle the girl who claims to be a prophetess and serve as her clothes. The myth and their present service are a sufficient proof for the people to believe her, since the butterflies are a sign that she does have connections with another world, that she really is visionary. The most amazing elements of magic realism are figures of the ghosts who live in the gap between two worlds -- the world of the dead and the world of the living. In The Satanic Verses the ghost of Rekha Merchant who is Gibreel's ex-lover, pursues him wherever he goes. She had killed herself because he had deserted her and now she wants to revenge herself. "What do you want", he burst out, 'what's your business with me?' 'To watch you fall', she instantly replied. 'Look around', she added, 'I've already made you look like a pretty big fool'".

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