

The Migrant in Salman Rushdie's Fiction *Midnight's Children, Shame* and *The Satanic Verses*

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Abstract

Salman Rushdie has always been concerned with giving a voice to the voiceless, by giving the power of description to the disenfranchised, the migrant, i.e. a personage who is often central in his narratives. This paper looks at three of Rushdie's most important works, *Midnight's Children*, *Shame* and *The Satanic Verses*, (which draw heavily on the theme of migration) not only by examining his life, but also through a critical analysis of his deliberate attempt to write in a particular yet distinct kind of manner and language; the themes of "double identity", "divided selves" and the "shadow figures" in the three novels by him.

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Salman Rushdie has always been concerned with giving a voice to the voiceless, with giving the power of description to the disenfranchised, the migrant, i.e. a personage who is often central in his narratives. This paper looks at three of Rushdie's most important works, *Midnight's Children*, *Shame* and *The Satanic Verses*, (which draw heavily on the theme of migration) not only by examining his life, but also through a critical analysis of his deliberate attempt to write in a particular yet distinct kind of manner and language; the themes of "double identity", "divided selves" and the "shadow figures" in the three novels penned by him. Shailja Sharma in her essay 'Salman Rushdie: The Ambivalence of Migrancy' asserts that, "Migration refers not only to the displacements of people in history but to a state of displacement that befalls humankind in general" (p. 597). Rushdie also proclaims, "We all cross frontiers; in that sense, we are all migrant peoples" (1992, p. 279). While that may be true on some

abstract level, as Sharma argues, still we all cross them differently, and thus we are not all migrants in the same way (p. 597). She emphasizes the need to understand these shifting patterns of migrancy's relation to history as they appear in Rushdie's work. She further states,

Rushdie situates himself in a position of perpetual in-betweenness, a migrant caught between three countries, unable to exist comfortably in any one. The trajectory of his work (including his essays and journalism) shows an increasing concern with metafictional issues of representing peripheral histories and experience through a combination of modernist metropolitan and Third World narrative styles adequate to the postcolonial experience. More problematically, his work is often concerned with locating himself in relation to the diaspora culture in Britain, which is reflected most clearly in his essays but also in the pattern of his novels that mirror his own migration and settlement-India, Pakistan, and Britain. (p. 599)

We may see *Midnight's Children*, *Shame* and *The Satanic Verses* as together comprising a trilogy, moving steadily westward, especially in its political concerns, notwithstanding the happy ending of Chamcha and Zeenie Vakil in Bombay at the end of the third novel (2001, 599). In *The Satanic Verses*, the narrative voice poses the question, "how does newness come into the world" (1988, p. 8)? The answer is an affirmation of the process by which Rushdie's art and indeed his identity as a writer has been produced. Newness is a "melange, hotchpotch, a bit of this and a bit of that" (1992, p. 394). Any attempt to explain the features and preoccupations of Rushdie's fiction must take account of the diverse cultural elements that combine to give his work its characteristic style. It becomes important to know about Rushdie's life for a better and judicious understanding of his works, because many of his experiences from his personal life tend to seep into his writing. Rushdie was born in India, schooled in England, forced by his parents to move to Pakistan, and finally exiled back to Britain (1995, p. 95). Rushdie has never been truly accepted in any of his 'homes'. Though, his family spoke Urdu, Rushdie learnt English from the age of five in English-medium schools and was encouraged by his parents to use English at home as the language of everyday discourse. The dual consciousness,

created as a result of this linguistic division, is the source of much of the versatility and play in Rushdie's use of English in his fiction (1996, p. 1). While referring to his light-coloured skin, Cundi says, "It is as if Rushdie embodies in his own person the hybridity which for the cultural theorist Homi K. Bhabha 'terrorizes authority with the ruse of recognition, its mimicry, and its mockery'" (p. 2). For example, in *The Satanic Verses*, Rushdie weaves his own feelings of alienation through one of his schoolboy experiences, wherein he recounts how on the first day of school he was given a kipper for breakfast and not told how to eat it. While in Rushdie's writing, the voice and presence of both writer and creation appear almost parodic of the persona of the 'English gentleman', exhibiting what Bhabha has called "the indeterminacy of diasporic identity" and "the irresolvable, borderline culture of hybridity" (1994, p. 225). Yet Rushdie, like Bhabha and other theorists of cultural identity, abjures the apparent confusion and 'homelessness' implicit in such a characterisation in favour of the idea of hybridity as a positive category. In place of the negative connotations of displacement and dislocation which would seem to be the inevitable result of his removal from Bombay and his family, Rushdie asks his readers, in both his fictional and his non-fictional writings to accept that he has gained as well as lost something 'in translation' (1996, p. 2). He argues that there are distinct advantages to being a migrant for both the writer and the person as a whole. In an interview, Rushdie says,

To migrate is to experience deep changes and wrenches in the soul, but the migrant is not simply transformed by his act, he also transforms the new world. Migrants might well become mutants, but it is out of such hybridization that newness can emerge. (1985, p. 125)

He further explains in "Imaginary Homelands" that migrant writers have a "double perspective" (p. 19) for they are both insiders and outsiders in the worlds they describe. He believes that redescribing the world is a necessary first step to changing it (1992, p. 14). In all three of his novels, (that this paper attempts to examine), this redescription is the prerogative of the migrant narrator, since migration is a painful but emancipating process: "To be reborn, first you have to die" (1988, p. 6). Finally, Rushdie explains that the literary migrant is able to "choose his parents." Rushdie's own include Cervantes,

Kafka, and Melville along with reams of Muslim and Hindu poets and Eastern oral myths (1992, p. 21).

In *Midnight's Children*, Saleem Sinai claims that "There is no escape from form" (p. 226). Therefore, in order to admit eastern themes, the western novel form must mutate and develop to become something else, i.e. the hybrid post-colonial text (1996, p. 26). In fact, Cundi suggests to apply the understanding of the techniques of an oral storyteller to analyze the form of *Midnight's Children* and proposes to use Walter J. Ong's study of the relation between oral and print cultures, *Orality and Literacy*². Hence, what we come across in *Midnight's Children* are thirty chapters or jars of pickled history, both personal and national, travelling through a twisty and digressive path of time and space to illustrate a link between Rushdie's chosen style of communication in the text and the forms of oral narrative that he seeks to reproduce (1996, p. 28). This rather complex and pickled form of narration facilitates remembering and retelling of his autobiography to Saleem Sinai, considering that he "is literally 'handcuffed to history'" (1980, p. 9). His narrative is simultaneously the story of his own life and a mirror of the life of India. It is significant to note that Saleem consciously avoids a purely linear and chronological mode of narration in favour of one which swings between past, present and future, foretelling the events and characters which will later be revealed along with his own annihilation (Interview with C.P., 1983, p. 20). Saleem relates a substantial part of his personal and family history before he finally gets round to describing his own birth. He leads us backwards and forwards in time between his present standpoint of 1978, back to the events of his grandfather Aadam's childhood, down through the intervening years to the simultaneous birth of himself and of free India (1996, p. 28). The model for this pendulum movement in the narrative is what Saleem calls "the metronome music of Mountbatten's count-down calendar to independence" (1980, p. 106). The complexity of oral narrative, with its swoops, spirals, digression and reiteration, can therefore be seen as the perfect correlative of Rushdie's technique in *Midnight's Children* (1996, p. 28).

Time also exerts its authority over Saleem both within and outside his narrative. Just as the seconds tick down to midnight for India, so Saleem, pursued and compelled by the demands of his critic Padma (within the text itself) and the

cracks that threaten his disintegration, is forced like Scheherazade to preserve his very existence through the continuation of his narrative (1996, p. 29). In many ways, Padma's role in *Midnight's Children* is representative of the separate technical and even cultural demands that writing the novel made on Rushdie. On one hand, she can be seen as an exemplification of Roland Barthes's arguments on the role of the reader subsequent to the 'death' of the author, that someone who holds together in a single field all the traces by which the written text is constituted apparently affirming the text's status as postmodern production (1977, p. 148). On the other hand, she provides a link back to the culture which Rushdie insists informs his work most strongly. Padma, taken on these terms, becomes a vocal and individualised member of the multitude which sits at the feet of the storyteller, hanging on his every word (1996, p. 30). Nancy E. Batty argues that 'Padma's role as Saleem's "necessary ear" should not obscure her status as co-creator of his narrative'³ (p. 54). While interrogating the issues of orality and Padma's role in the text, in relation to the extent to which the individual listening to the discourse of a storyteller coincides with the position occupied by the reader of a text, Walter Ong argues that there is a crucial difference between the position of 'listener' and that of 'reader' (p. 101). One of the formal strengths of *Midnight's Children* is the way in which through its disrupted narrative, Rushdie makes the reader acutely aware of the important part played by his or her own memory in 'reconstructing' the text as meaningful narrative. Memory as the key to constructing narrative is fragile and unwilling to obey external demands made upon it. The demands Saleem makes on his memory are enormous - the process of remembering must be made to speed up, so as not to be overtaken by his own physical disintegration. This fore fronting of memory dictates the form of the narrative. Thus, Rushdie's essay on the errata in the text of *Midnight's Children*, can be read as an illustration of the 'erratic' processes by which the migrant's sense of history reconstitutes itself *through* memory, rather than a description of a postmodern artist's exploration of unreliable narration (1996, p. 32).

It is worth noting, how *Midnight's Children* serves as a testament to the importance of memory in the recreation of history and the constitution of the individual's identity. As Saleem puts it, "morality, judgment, character... it all starts with memory" (1980, p. 381). It is Parvati's memory of Saleem which

gives him back his name, and the memory of his former life symbolised by the spittoon that keeps him in touch with that newly rediscovered identity (p. 32-3). Rushdie describes a similar process where he himself experienced a restoration of the past to him through memory. The sight of an old black and white photograph of his childhood home in Bombay created in him the desire to re-imagine that past and restore it to himself:

But the photograph tells me to invert this idea; it reminds me that its my present that is foreign, and that the past is home albeit a lost home in a lost city in the mists of lost time... It is probably not too romantic to say that was when my novel *Midnight's Children* was really born; when I realized how much I wanted to restore the past to myself, not in the faded greys of old family-album snapshots, but whole, in Cinema Scope and glorious Technicolor. (1992, p. 10)

Rushdie admits that the act of reclaiming the past is subject to the vagaries of the memory on which its reconstruction relies. His essay on unreliable narration in *Midnight's Children* is a study of the tricks which memory plays on the writer attempting to recall the past, and also of the tricks the writer can play on the reader in the name of unreliability (1992, pp. 22-5). Moreover, the flying spittoon which brains Saleem at the end of Book Two and 'liberates' him from his past by inducing a state of amnesia, occasions a loss which is more than a loss of memory. For Saleem to lose his memory is to lose his identity; his link with the past which places him in the social and historical context that outlines his individuality, since memory is the chain which connects the post-colonial subject to his or her disrupted history (1996, p. 35). Further, in *Midnight's Children*, Rushdie uses the metaphor of a movie screen to explain the perception of a migrant: "Suppose yourself in a large cinema, and gradually moving up, ...until your nose is almost pressed against the screen. Gradually the stars' faces dissolve into dancing grain; tiny details assume grotesque proportions; ...it becomes clear that the illusion itself is reality" (1980, p. 394). Although migrants may not be able to determine the precise historical truth of their past, they are able to ferret out what is important in the shaping of their lives through the selective filtration of their memories. Therefore, Saleem as post-colonial artist becomes the spectator on the periphery of society, able to view the actions of others, in his washing-chest or concealed in the clock tower,

because he is literally or socially invisible. This tension between observation and voyeurism becomes even more explicit in Rushdie's next work, *Shame* (1996, p. 41). In *Midnight's Children*, the identity of the post-colonial subject is inseparably linked to that of the nation itself while in his next work, *Shame*, the nation takes precedence over the centrality of any one individual (1996, p. 42).

The formation of positively fluid and hybrid identities continues to be of paramount importance in all Rushdie's subsequent fiction, perhaps nowhere more so than in *The Satanic Verses*. In terms of his own life, Rushdie can be seen to be following a clear if not entirely consciously envisaged journey through elements of his own multifaceted identity with the chronology of his novels - from East to West, from Bombay to Ellowen Deeowen. *Midnight's Children* returned his Indian past to him while *Shame* leads on to the Rushdie family's own destination, Pakistan. In *Shame*, Rushdie desires to tell a cautionary tale about the Pakistani elite "a tale that demonstrates the numerous ills bred by oppression and in which violence and corruption gain their just rewards" (1996, p. 44). The blend of fairy-tale and hard-hitting social realism which characterises both *Midnight's Children* and *The Satanic Verses* is handled less deftly in *Shame* (1996, p. 45). The shift in perspective from the panoramic sweep of *Midnight's Children* to the channeled focus of *Shame's* gaze is reflected in the reader's relationship to the text's central figure (1996, p. 46). Where Saleem Sinai called upon us to see him as occupying a central position in the history of post-independence India - if not, in some instances, as the very motor of its progress - the narrator of *Shame* asks us to view Omar Khayyam Shakil, the text's putative hero, as "a creature of the edge: a peripheral man" (1984, p. 24). Born in his grandfather's death-bed to an apparent triumvirate of mothers, Omar is assailed from the outset by contradictions and inversions; birth and death, the real and the fantastic. The 'world turned upside-down' (1984, p. 21) which he appears to inhabit threatens to plunge him into a void, a nightmarish existence where such a birth and such a childhood presage annihilation of identity (1996, p. 47). In an attempt to lift the threat of this disintegration, Omar assumes an illusory or dream persona, one which the narrative voice refuses to pin down as either good or evil; either "caped crusader or cloaked blood-sucker" (1984, p. 22). Once again, as in *Midnight's Children* and his lecture 'Is Nothing Sacred?', Rushdie plays with the idea of the secret

identity behind which both writers and ordinary mortals hide, reinforcing the sense of their exceptionality (1992, p. 424). For Saleem, the washing basket of invisibility was an ideal place for the observer/voyeur because it was on the periphery of society. Omar occupies just such a space without the necessity for concealment: "From his position at the edge of the school's life, he took vicarious pleasure in the activities of those around him..." (1984, p. 45). Like Aadam Aziz in *Midnight's Children*, sanctioned in his negotiation of the perforated sheet separating him from Naseem, Omar is permitted to probe the secrets of the human body; a figure simultaneously central and peripheral to the mechanics of existence (1996, p. 47).

The setting for the opening chapters of *Shame* is the border town of Q - a more generalised and anonymous location than the Ellowen Deeowen of *The Satanic Verses*, but which can be identified with Quetta in Pakistan. Geography and topography are as central to the construction and argument of *Shame* as they are to Rushdie's other texts (1996, p. 47). The narrative voice informs the reader that the text's treatment of Pakistan is a matter of 'off-centering': "The country in this story is not Pakistan, or not quite. There are two countries, real and fictional, occupying the same space. My story, my fictional country exist, like myself, at a slight angle to reality" (1984, p. 29). The division of India after independence to allow for the formation of Pakistan, and the subsequent secession of Bangladesh, has confronted writers in the subcontinent with the image of a land mass separated by divisions which seem more imagined than concrete. This idea of 'imagined' divisions, is taken up by the writer Amitav Ghosh in his novel *The Shadow Lines* where Calcutta and Dhaka seem split only by the ethereal divisions of the title, and in which the narrator states that "a place does not merely exist, ... it has to be invented in imagination" (p. 27). These shadow lines, the frontiers that cross the thematic, textual and geographical terrain of *Shame*, are everywhere apparent. There is the boundary line on the frontier patrolled by Farah Zoroaster and her father; the hinterland of 'respectable' society where those who have transgressed against its rules must live out their days (1996, p. 48). For Omar Khayyam Shakil there is however, the fearful border between sleep and waking which is patrolled with a watchful eye on the approach of nightmares and the void beyond, while Hyder makes a dual journey across the frontiers of sanity and madness, life and death.

Omar's own circular trip back to his home, Nishapur, is linked to his terror of the frontier (1996, p. 49). Though a peripheral man, the world still has an edge to it, a limit over which it is still possible for him to slip into oblivion:

“he ought to know that the border is the edge of his world, the rim of things, and that the real dreams are these farfetched notions of getting across that supernatural frontier into some wild hallucination of a promised land” (1984, p. 268).

Just how much control this schema exerts over the narrative is illustrated by Rushdie's own remarks on the subject of textual frontiers:

You know how *Shame* uses ideas of the frontier a lot, the frontier is like a trap, people faint when they get near it and beyond the frontier is the void, and so on? Well, having set up that idea it seemed that the characters had accepted it more than I had, so whenever I got them anywhere near the frontier, they would refuse to cross it. (1985, p. 110)

Within the general framework of the narrative in *Shame*, the stories of the individual protagonists assert their right to be told and to leave their imprint on the shape of the collective narrative. *Shame* reinforces Saleem Sinai's declaration in *Midnight's Children* that an individual's sense of personal history is the “glue of personality” (1996, p. 51). Alongside these stories are the gaps or holes which help to delineate the pattern of the textual fabric. For every story recounted there are countless untold alternatives (1996, p. 52). “All stories”, the text informs us, “are haunted by the ghosts of the stories they might have been” (1984, p. 116).

It almost reads like the argument of a deconstructionist; that what is missing from the text, its absences, articulate as much if not more than what is present...An alternative angle on the presence/absence dualism is that offered by the 'feminisation' of the 'masculine' plot. (1996, p. 52)

The stories of the women's lives which provide the framework for the exploits of the heroes, are seen as the natural obverse of the intended male-centered universe, “the “male” plot refracted, so to speak, through the prisms of its reverse and “female” side” (1984, p. 173). The fascination/obsession with the domestic and sexual power of women which is always present in Rushdie's work, is more evident in *Shame* than anywhere else. The text's declared project

to voice the silenced stories of Pakistan's oppressed women is often admired by critics without consideration of the way it is undercut by the representation of the women themselves. Anuradha Dingwaney Needham, for example, celebrates "the complex ways in which *women* and their *histories* are recovered and inserted into the 'alternate' history of Pakistan" (1996, p. 52).

But Omar's resentment of his peripheral position in relation to his mothers serves as yet another instance of the blend of confusion, frustration and even outright hostility towards the relative autonomy of women which surfaces in Rushdie's fiction. Rape often bursts through as the ultimate signification of this resentment - Flapping Eagle's rape of the goddess Axona and Omar's assault on the hypnotised Farah Zoroaster. Sexuality is explored and exploited by rendering the woman in the equation effectively powerless. (1996, p. 53)

However, even if Rushdie fails in successfully articulating a female narrative of Pakistan's history, it is nevertheless true that it is in *Shame* that a coherent and positive image of the migrant post-colonial subject is projected. Both the real and fictional Pakistans were born out of the experience of migration - the mass migrations, particularly in Punjab, following the partition of India in 1947, which led to the splitting of Rushdie's own family. Thus, the concept of migration for Rushdie builds in layers upon that initial movement of peoples, i.e. the historic migration of the prophet Mohammed's followers - the *Mohajirs* - out of Mecca and into Medina during their early persecution. Migration, flight and dislocation are perpetual themes in Rushdie's writing and the means by which he seeks to express the peculiar sensibility of the migrant writer as it searches for new forms, new techniques, new worlds in which it can define itself (1996, p. 57). Rushdie writes of the migrant as one who is rooted in ideas and memories rather than places and material objects and who has a profound mistrust of what constitutes 'reality' (1992, p. 125). The narrator of *Shame* provides a long digression on the relationship between migration, flight and gravity, "I have a theory that the resentments we *mohajirs* engender have something to do with our conquest of the force of gravity. We have performed the act of which all men anciently dream, the thing for which they envy the birds; that is to say, we have flown" (1984, p. 85). Gravity, for Rushdie, is the physical force that corresponds to the more abstract notion of 'belonging'. To

oppose gravity is to be like the migrant, to engage in 'flight'. *Mohajir* or migrant is a title and identity that Rushdie continues to employ for all the uprooted and displaced characters who people his texts (1996, p. 57). Cundi suggests, a large part of *Shame's* concern with migration and belonging, centers on the loneliness of internal exile for those out of political favour, for example, the exile of Farah Zoroaster and Eduardo Rodrigues to atone for her sexual 'indiscretion' and the act of destruction which forces Bilquis out of her old world and into a new one. Though Bilquis adjusts admirably to the role of Mrs. Raza Hyder at first, her own increasing sense of dislocation, brought about in part by her failure to 'locate' herself firmly in the role of good Muslim wife by producing sons, is figured in her paranoid fear of the Loo wind. Although she ceases to have any contact with it, she still clings desperately to her furniture and possessions, longing for fixity in a world that threatens her with dispersal and disarray.

One thing the migrant can try to use to locate him or herself after migration are possessions. To lose them, leave them behind or abjure their influence is to threaten oneself with dislocation, loss of 'belonging' (1996, p. 58). Omar Khayyam Shakil's way of destroying the tyranny of Nishapur and its suffocating history is to literally destroy the artifacts which represent it. The tears he sheds at this act of wanton vandalism, register his own implicit understanding of the loss at the very moment that he wills it. Unlike Saleem Sinai's globe and Saladin Chamcha's lamp, the broken artifacts do not register a cherished connection with the past but are merely "the corpses of (Omar's) useless massacred history" (1984, p. 32).

Saladin Chamcha and Gibreel Farishta, the free-falling protagonists of *The Satanic Verses*, provide the most direct image in Rushdie's fiction of the post-colonial subject in collision with his world (1996, p. 67). Their descent on England, the "fabled country of Vilayet" (1988, p. 35) from the wreckage of a hijacked aircraft, is replete with the tensions of their condition - on one hand, defying the laws of gravity, on the other, "just two brown men, falling hard, nothing so new about that you may think" (1988, p. 5). This fall encapsulates the process of transmutation, or translation as described in *Shame*, whereby the migrant's identity is transformed through the very act of migration. Gibreel, famed for his halitosis, is granted full movie-star perfection, while Saladin receives the gift of foul breath along with that of sprouting horns as he begins to

assume demonic characteristics. Here the flight, the journey downwards to earth, illustrates the active processes of change that take place in the migrant as he moves between cultures (1996, p. 68). Saladin, as he sits on the aeroplane prior to the explosion, seeks a typically English form of cultural identity which slips from him like a mask. Hybridity is the end of his journey, while mutation, physical and metaphorical, is the tumultuous process he must pass through *en route* (1996, p. 68). The zone in which the changes to the two men occur is “illusory, discontinuous, meta-morphic” (1988, p. 5). It is an arena of transformation and translation but one which, through the idea of discontinuity, introduces a jarring note into this process of change. The struggle with discontinuity of identity takes place within a twilight zone for both men. Their identities, their selves, are at this point porous and vulnerable, open to both positive and negative possibilities of transformation – “there was a fluidity, an indistinctness, at the edges of them” (1988, p. 8). In order to ascertain the extent to which Rushdie has achieved a positive reassertion of the migrant's identity in *The Satanic Verses*, Cundi indulges in a detailed comparison of the text with V. S. Naipaul's *The Enigma of Arrival* published the previous year.

Both *The Satanic Verses* and *The Enigma of Arrival* illustrate the migrant's problems of self-contextualisation - of being both located and dislocated, having to orient himself to his new surroundings and of feeling alienated from them, as well as from aspects of his own history and identity. (p. 69)

The specific topography of *The Satanic Verses* also suggests a greater commitment on Rushdie's part to his arguments about migration. The Vilayet of *The Satanic Verses* moves away from the curious paralleling of *Shame*. With its capital, the mysterious Ellowen Deeowen, it is both imaginative territory and geographical reality - both the arena onto which the fantasies of the migrant are projected and the harsh reality which confronts them when they literally come down to earth (1996, p. 69). Cundi suggests that the imaginary, fantasised nature of Vilayet, the migrant's preconceptions about his new home and the identity he invents to coincide with those preconceptions, are concerns of both *The Satanic Verses* and Naipaul's *The Enigma of Arrival*. For Naipaul, this reinvention of identity leads to the process of mimicry that he describes in *An*

Area of Darkness. He states that it “is a mimicry not of England, a real country, but of the fairy-tale land of Anglo-India” (p. 57). For Rushdie however, the two are not so easily separated; the real and the imagined, England and Vilayet, fade in and out of each other. Saladin and Gibreel are both actors, both adept at mimicry of one kind or another; cultural chameleons (1996, p. 69). Saladin's personality is “a half-reconstructed affair of mimicry and voices” (1988, p. 9). With his female counterpart Mimi Mamoulian, he monopolises the market for advertising voice-overs, creating multiple unrealities of identity for commercial exploitation. To his Indian lover, Zeeny Vakil, his personality is like a palimpsest; a slate wiped clean of its Indianness and reinscribed by Anglophilia. Gibreel's identity as star of the Bombay talkies seems equally an affair of temporary and transient construction, as figured in the decaying images of him on street hoardings. His speedy disintegration after disappearing from the set of his latest film is likened to the death of God - the failure of an image to continue to inspire belief in its existence. Like the text itself, Gibreel's identity within and outside his films, breaches the interfaces between fantasy and reality, mortal and deity, sacred and profane (1996, p. 69).

Further, the label of *mohajir* or migrant, rehearsed in *Shame*, cannot be applied to Gibreel in the same way as it can to Saladin. Saladin has fulfilled his desire to leave India, to make the journey from Indianness to Englishness, while Gibreel is making the trip in order to pursue the mountain climber Allie Cone with whom he is infatuated. But Gibreel's acting career in the the ologicals, personifying the various avatars of the Hindu pantheon, has seen him employed to perform constant reinventions of identity. His very name, like Saladin's, is reinvented (1996, p. 70). Cundi states,

Name-changing and its consequences is a fundamental trope of post-colonial writing...The relinquishing and reacceptance of names as the index to identity is as crucial to such texts as it is to all of Rushdie's fictions. Saladin, who was Salahuddin and will be once again, is able to consolidate the diffuse elements of his identity by the end of the text. Gibreel, who was Ismail but who is forever alienated and disconnected from that former self, remains incapable of drawing together his shattered, schizophrenic personality. His adopted persona has been that of the fulfiller of dreams, first the dream of his mother that he

should be an angel - a *farishta* - then the dreams of thousands of cinema-goers. (p. 70)

While death for Naipaul, highlights processes of change and decay; for Rushdie in *The Satanic Verses*, it seems more positive, providing closure for the unfinalised Saladin, a sense of realness (1996, p. 72). The death of his father Changez draws together past and present for Saladin, reaffirming the validity of Saleem Sinai's declaration in *Midnight's Children* that "what you were is forever who you are" (1980, p. 368). Saladin's first trip to England with his father is crucial for establishing the alienation between them, rather between him and his native country India. Once again, memory plays a crucial part in Rushdie's writing as the force which shapes the migrant's sense of history. History is a crucial aspect of Rushdie's texts and memory is for him the key to the reconstruction of the migrant's distorted history, In *Shame* he writes:

all migrants leave their pasts behind, although some try to pack it into bundles and boxes - but on the journey something seeps out of the treasured mementoes...until even their owners fail to recognise them, because it is the fate of migrants to be stripped of history. (1984, p. 63)

For Gayatri Spivak, the disrupted narratives and dream sequences in *The Satanic Verses* are indicative of the disruptions caused to identity by imperialism. In reading *The Satanic Verses*, she states,

the confident breaching of the boundaries between dream and waking in the text - not merely in the characters can earn for *The Satanic Verses* a critic's subtitle: 'Imperialism and Schizophrenia'. Not because empire, like capital, is abstract, but because empire messes with identity. (p. 49)

However, as Cundi suggests, the theme is given a twist in *The Satanic Verses* by its association with forms of alienation specific to the post-colonial subject.

Saladin's identity has been disrupted from the outset. His voice-overs and his role in The Aliens Show are externalised forms of his reinvention. Underlying them is his desire for cultural assimilation and his obsessive pursuit of Englishness which alienates him from his father and from Zeeny. (1996, p. 76)

England and the British Empire may have defined themselves but Indianness, like the post-colonial subject, is defined by others, usually in negative terms.

Saladin becomes subject to this process after his demonic transformation i.e. the dehumanisation of the alien or other taken to its extreme. In the detention centre with the other designated aliens, he experiences a nightmarish encounter with the manticore i.e. a bizarre amalgam of different creatures, demonstrating the dehumanisation of the migrant's identity by the coloniser (1996, p. 77). "They have the power of description, and we succumb to the pictures they construct" (1988, p. 168). Gibreel in his schizophrenic state sees "fictions masquerading as real human beings' on the streets of London" (1988, p. 192). In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Frantz Fanon defined it in the terms of the clinical psychologist as "a regular and important mental pathology which is the direct product of oppression" (p. 201). Ashis Nandy in *The Intimate Enemy* sees the roots of this pathology embedded deep within the minds of both ruler and ruled. For Nandy, colonialism results in a division of the mind into the "self and the not self", mirrored, in both the characterisations and the structural divisions between dream and waking (p. 107). Gibreel's inability to distinguish between dream and reality leads to his treatment for paranoid schizophrenia, while Saladin's demonic persona is seen by his friend Jumpy Joshi as psychological breakdown, loss of sense of self (1988, p. 253). Both Nandy as theoretician and Rushdie as writer see this division as a defence mechanism on the part of the post-colonial subject. For Nandy, the subject becomes 'other' or alien to himself in order to, as he puts it, "disaffiliate the violence and the humiliation he suffers from the essential constituent of his self, making his world 'partly dream-like or unreal'" (p. 109). *The Satanic Verses* virtually paraphrases this: "A being going through life can become so other to himself as to be another, discrete, severed from history" (1988, p. 288), while Gibreel's mental confusion illustrates the defensive impulse of the schizophrenic; "his splitting of his sense of himself into two entities, one of which... by characterizing it as other than himself, (he) preserved, nourished, and secretly made strong" (1988, p. 340).

The concept of multiple narrative voices is an important theme in Rushdie's works. In his Lecture, 'Is Nothing Sacred?', he writes: "Literature, is the one place in any society where, within the secrecy of our own heads, we can hear voices talking about everything in every possible way" (1992, p. 429). Beyond the wider arguments of those voices is the disruption and subversion of

language itself. For example, in *The Satanic Verses*, Jumpy Joshi, socialist and amateur poet, is infuriated with the lawyer Hanif Johnson whom he feels is unwilling to grasp the importance of this issue of language for the migrant:

Hanif was in perfect control of the languages that mattered: sociological, socialistic, black-radical, anti-anti-anti-racist, demagogic, oratorical, and sermonic: the vocabularies of power. (But you bastard you rummage in my drawers and laugh at my stupid poems. The real language problem: how to bend it shape it, how to let it be our freedom, how to repossess its poisoned wells, how to master the river of words of time of blood: about all that you haven't got a clue). (1988, p. 281)

What is worth noting here is that, even within the course of such a diatribe, he is playing with words, the structure of sentences, and attempting to reclaim some of the coloniser's preconceptions about migrants (1996, p. 82). The text's own movement through the reinvention of identity, to rebirth, is linked to Jumpy's desire to rework Powell's metaphor. Ultimately, it is the deployment of polyphony that provides the opportunity for effecting a positive reconstruction of the divided migrant identity. The use of a novelistic form which can contain a multiplicity of voices, allows for the establishment of an identity that is inclusive rather than exclusive; capable of embracing past and present, memory and history, rather than, having to renounce or dissociate oneself from one's origins (1996, p. 82). For Rushdie, the implications of this strategy extend beyond the discussion of migrant identity to define our expectations of literature itself. As he puts it in 'Is Nothing Sacred?', "the only privilege literature deserves - and this privilege it requires in order to exist - is the privilege of being the arena of discourse, the place where the struggle of languages can be acted out" (1992, p. 427).

Rushdie's fiction consistently embraces contradictions, thereby, privileging the plural over the singular and the polyphonic over the monologic, specially through the careful construction of dual oppositions, like the snakes and ladders of Sinai's children's game, only to deconstruct those oppositions by demonstrating that the apparent polar opposites are in fact interchangeable and mutually interdependent (1990, p. 978). One of the most important way in which Rushdie launches his attack on dual thinking is through the use of paired

characters, wherein the characters in Rushdie's texts, tend to be shadowed by doubles, for example, Saleem Sinai and his alter ego, Shiva (1990, p. 978). There are a number of important pairings in *Shame*, including Iskander Harappa and Raza Hyder, Harappa and Maulana Dawood, and Rani Harappa and Bilquis Hyder. Similarly, in *The Satanic Verses*, Rushdie puts forth an extremely complex and sophisticated pairing of Gibreel Farishta and Saladin Chamcha. Further, the central plot line of *Shame* involves the literal transformation of Naveed's beautiful sister Sufiya Zenobia Hyder into a beast who hypnotizes and seduces young men, then rips off their heads with superhuman strength (1990, p. 979). In *Midnight's Children*, Saleem Sinai is at one point used as a "man-dog," employed by the Pakistani "Canine Unit for Tracking and Intelligence" to sniff out enemies with his redoubtable nose (1990, p. 979). *The Satanic Verses* actually features a number of such human-beast hybrids, the most striking of which is the mysterious metamorphosis of Chamcha into a devilish goat like beast (1990, p. 980). M. Keith Booker remarks: "Bizarre as they may seem, these kinds of transformations are quite central to the Menippean tradition to which Rushdie is such a clear heir" (1990, p. 980). And Mikhail Bakhtin notes, "the folktale image of man throughout the extraordinary variety of folkloric narratives-always orders itself around the motifs of transformation and identity" (1981, p. 112). Bakhtin notes that such transformations allow the representation in a short-hand form of the development and change of the individual as he goes through life: "Metamorphosis serves as the basis for a method of portraying the whole of an individual's life in its more important moments of crisis: for showing how an individual becomes other than what he was" (1981, p. 115). Booker states:

Thus, such metamorphoses powerfully question the view of the self as a stable, self-contained entity by showing the drastic changes that the self can undergo in the course of life. The ability of the self to be transformed into something that was formerly alien to itself interrogates the boundary between self and other, challenging the validity of even that fundamental duality. (1990, p. 980)

In Rushdie, the boundary between self and other is always problematic. His characters tend to be complex, multiple, and highly variable. Thus, Saleem

Sinai explains the difficulty of relating his life in any simple way by the fact that he, like Whitman, contains multitudes, "I have been a swallower of lives; and to know me, just the one of me, you'll have to swallow the whole lot as well. Consumed multitudes are jostling and shoving inside me" (1980, p. 4). In *The Satanic Verses* Rushdie again employs this image of jostling multiple selves:

O, the conflicting selves jostling and joggling within these bags of skin. No wonder we are unable to remain focused on anything for very long; no wonder we invent remote-control channel-hopping devices. If we turned these instruments upon ourselves, we'd discover more channels than a cable or satellite mogul ever dreamed of. (1988, p. 519)

Such a mixing of identities occurs in a particularly explicit way in *Shame* during the gestation of Omar Khayyam Shakil. One of three sisters is bearing him (we never learn the identity of the father), but the other sisters are so close that they share the experience with her, helping her to bear the stigma of unwed pregnancy (1990, p. 981). No one can tell the real pregnancy from the phantom ones, and neither the reader nor Omar Khayyam ever learns which of the three sisters is his true biological mother. And years later, when the sisters begin to argue over Omar Khayyam's fateful birthday wish to be allowed to leave their barricaded home and enter the outside world for the first time, they discover that such arguments are made difficult because even they have reached the point where they themselves cannot tell apart (1990, p. 981). Booker argues that, in *The Satanic Verses*, all identities are radically unstable, with most of the characters being shown to bear artificially- created identities that they themselves have largely made up (1990, p. 981). "Fictions were walking around wherever he went, Gibreel reflected, fictions masquerading as real human beings" (1988, 192). This artificiality of identity is particularly strong in the case of Chamcha, who has made up his name, changed his voice, even changed his face in order to try to fit in better in Britain (1990, p. 981). As a result, his identity is hopelessly multiple, as emphasized by his professional role as the "Man of a Thousand Voices and a Voice", "Once, in a radio play for thirty-seven voices, he interpreted every single part under a variety of pseudonyms and nobody ever worked it out" (1988, p. 60).

By successfully blending English and Indian voices, Rushdie manages to

empower the migrant. In *Imaginary Homelands*, Rushdie writes, "We can't simply use the language the way the British did; it needs remaking for our own purposes...to conquer English may be to complete the process of making ourselves free" (p. 17). With his brilliant word plays and supreme command of the language he fuses his Indian childhood with his Cambridge education. Rushdie recreates the English language by combining it with Indian colloquialisms and Urdu and Hindi words. One of his techniques is to "(insert) Indian vernacular habits into flawless English intoned sentences..." (1985, p. 191). By combining the oral and literary traditions of East and West, Rushdie legitimates the migrant experience and allows the migrant the opportunity to "describe himself back out of the corner" (1992, p. 16). In *Shame* the narrative voice declares, "I... am a translated man. I have been borne across. It is generally believed that something is always lost in translation. I cling to the notion ... that something can also be gained" (1984, p. 29). The idea of translation as a metaphor for the migrant's condition was expanded in a conversation between Rushdie and the German writer Ginter Grass in the British Channel Four television series *Voices*. Rushdie says:

I discovered that if you look etymologically at the meaning of the word metaphor and the word translation... it turned out they meant the same thing. See, translation from the Latin means to carry across. Metaphor from the Greek means to carry across... this comes back to my pre-occupation with the idea of migration. People are also carried across. (1987, p. 6)

What is important for Rushdie's growing embrace of hybridity and the positive aspects of being borne across frontiers is that, as Anuradha Dingwaney Needham puts it, for Rushdie, as for the narrator of *Shame*, habitation on borders... is "not infertile" (p. 617). Further, Shailja Sharma states: "Insisting on the literary fecundity of his multiple belongings, Rushdie uses the postlapsarian world of the immigrant to politicize his novel of memory, which encompasses both East and West" (p. 603). Thus, I would like to conclude with one more quotation from Shailja Sharma, wherein she says: "Rushdie, whose entire career is based on the questioning of historical givens and beliefs, invokes the metafictional trope of migrancy to invoke an absolute of rootlessness and hybridity" (p. 605).

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Endnotes

¹ In England he was considered very foreign and 'exotic' at Rugby public school and subsequently at Cambridge; back in India he was ridiculed by his peers for his perfect British accent and

considered brainwashed and corrupted by the materialistic West; in Pakistan he is still considered an infidel and a blasphemer (1995, p. 96).

² Ong explains how oral narratives such as the Ancient Greek form of epic, the products of a primary oral culture, never proceeded to develop linear plots, and that Horace's injunction to begin in medias res (literally 'in the middle of things') had more to do with necessity than a deliberate diversification from an established norm. According to Ong, the good epic poet displays the tacit acceptance of the fact that episodic structure was the only way and the totally natural way of imagining and handling lengthy narrative and possession of supreme skill in managing flashbacks and other episodic techniques (1996, p. 27).

³ Nancy E. Batty provides an illuminating discussion of the art of suspense as practiced in *Midnight's Children*, and Rushdie's deliberate invocation of Scheherazade's plight at the hands of King Shahryar in *The Thousand and One Nights*, whom she must keep continuously entertained by her stories if she is to save her own life. Batty sees the relating of Saleem's tale to Padma as a form of seduction where consummation is deferred for as long as possible. 'Saleem tailors his narrative for Padma: like a lover engaged in making a sexual conquest, Saleem adjusts his strategies of seduction according to the response which those strategies elicit.' (1996, 29-30)

⁴ The classic work of Menippean human-animal metamorphosis is Apuleius's *The Golden Ass*, and the transformation of Chamcha into a goat like beast parallels the transformation of Apuleius's Lucius into an ass in a number of important ways. Like Chamcha, Lucius undergoes considerable hardship and severe mistreatment while in this animal state, but later regains his humanity. (1990, p. 980)