



THE CONCEPT OF MISLAID IDENTITY AND THE QUEST OF SELF IN THE SELECT NOVELS OF SALMAN RUSHDIE

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ABSTRACT

The present paper comprises the conception of mislaid identity in Rushdie's novels and the quest of individuals for discovering the self. Rushdie's turf of fiction constitutes a major part and the characters resist to ascertain their distinctiveness but all in futile. The characters that are unable to find their identity do not always know what they are searching for, but still the search persists for some active qualities which burn within them. In his novels, Rushdie tries his best to articulate the identity crisis and concentrates on the submerged internal world of an individual. An ardent observation of the lost identity of individuals in society brings to the forefront the wretched stipulation of their being which at the center of all human beings has miserably been robbed of from their own identity. This paper studies the identity issues in Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* and *Shame*.

Keywords: *Self Identity, Self Analysis, Humanism, Postmodernism*

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Writers in my position, exiles or emigrants or expatriates are haunted by some sense of loss [...] that we will, in short, create fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands, India's of the mind. (Mathur, 1993: 113).

Salman Rushdie is one of the most talked-about novelists of modern times extensively commended for the bold commencement of history, politics and identity for about a period of seventy years covering major incidents of different countries. The predicament of identity crisis plagues many characters, right from the very start in the novels of Salman Rushdie, and also reflects the disjointed self with its autobiographical shades. It is not astounding that the recognition is made and tasted. Salman Rushdie himself is the victim of identity through migraines and cultural disarticulation early in his life in England. Most of his novels deal with the theme of identity in an intimidating world, and the other themes of migrancy edifying heterogeneity, the fragmented and hybrid nature of identity that are uniformly dealt with. He candidly projects:

“As for me, as I grew up, I didn't quite accept my mother's explanation, either, but it killed me into a sense of false security, so that, even though something of Mary's suspicions had leaked into me, I was still taken by surprise when [...] (*Midnight's Children*, 168)

Rushdie is himself the prey of lost identity due to numerous anomalous conditions and occurrences in his life. Indian by birth, English by education and Indian by marriage, English by immigrant – he himself is a mixed identity. Rushdie's importance as a writer is everywhere perceptible, however, it is harder to launch what is accurately that he is famous for - his writings, or the 1989 *fatwa* given by Ayatollah Khomeini in demand of the execution for blasphemy (Profanity) in which he lost his identity, and remained under menace in Britain. When the *fatwa* was issued by many more Islamic scholars, he remained subversive for several years, hide himself with his family in disapproval. The main reason of losing identity was which he wrote in the novel.

Satanic Verses against the beloved Prophet Muhammad and against the conviction of Islam caused the Ayatollah Khomeini to issue *fatwa* against Salman Rushdie. The *fatwa* made him famous, but on the other side, he lost his identity for several years. There are many writers who contract with the theme of identity, but Rushdie has explored the theme of identity in such a way that no one has dealt with it. It is exceptional and appealing that he has portrayed, sketched and inflated the theme of identity among many characters, seems bizarre to all. He makes them play in such a way that it seems real. The characters Saleem Sinai and Adam Sinai of *Midnight's Children*, and Omar Khayyam and Baber of *Shame* are taken for study to highlight the theme of identity crisis.

There are, for example, characters of illegitimate parentage or characters who do not know who their parents are. In *Midnight's Children* the two main characters Saleem (victim) and Shiva (victor), who are both born at the stroke of the midnight when India gained independence, are swapped after their birth by a nurse Mary Pereira who wants to impress a Marxist rebel Joseph D'Costa with whom she is in love with. This way Saleem, who is born to poor parents gets, thanks to the intrusion of Mary Pereira, to grow up in a rich family, and therefore gains a new providence and new prospects in life. Both of them share some common characteristics (such as a big nose and knees or the minute of their birth), but in some other respects they are absolutely opposites.

Shiva is the leader of the children gang where numerous boys are older than him. Saleem gets repeatedly bullied by other children and when Evie Burns ostracizes him from their crowd for trying to meddle with her thoughts, he has to be avenged by his sister. The son of a beggar, Shiva is determined, ruthless and he makes tremendous career when, he becomes Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's desired general. Saleem, on the other hand, gets manipulated by others, is irresolute, on no account actually figures out how to use his magical gift, and wonders through the complete way in the book with losing amazing. He loses his magical gift, his parents, and the love of his sister, his



reminiscence and to conclude his wife Parvati. He is a defeatist who makes no endeavor to control his life aggressively; he just takes the disasters as they come. Saleem suffers a shock and an absolute amnesia after the city he lives in is bombed and the majority members of his family dies there. He forgets everything about his earlier life and he also loses his human skills and manners. By that time he has previously lost his magical gift of telepathy and has gained a superhuman sense of smell in its place. He is sent to an exceptional army unit which uses dogs for penetrating.

Saleem becomes a man dog. So not only does he mislay his self, he also loses his humanity and becomes an animal. But not just any animal; he becomes a dog which is in Muslim culture considered an unclean animal (Muslims for example cannot touch anything a dog has touched). The identity in the novel does not end here; another swap of a child is made when Saleem's wife Parvati runs away from her husband and conceives a child (Aadam Sinai) with Shiva who then kicks her out. She returns to Saleem, who takes care of Aadam after Parvati's death. So Aadam is a double-swapped child who by transaction returns to his original family and he is named after Saleem's grandfather who really is Aadam's biological grand grandfather. Many comparable situations of convoluted parenthood occurs in *Shame* where one of the three sisters Shakil gets pregnant illegitimately by unlawful relationship, they vow a sort of oath that they will not let the secret out and the oath makes the bond between them so strong, they become like one person. They all begin too thick in their waists, feel the labour pains when giving the birth, breast-feed the child and heave him as if they were all his mothers. Twenty years later the same triple pregnancy occurs and Omar's brother Babar is born. The three sisters make their acquaintance so tight that they become nearly interchangeable. They will by no means expose the truth and has obscured the real distinctiveness of Omar. They comprehend this when Omar Khayyam first tells them he wishes to abscond home and they start to quarrel what to do:

In the chaos of their rejuvenation the erroneous heads ended up on the wrong bodies; they became psychological centaurs,

fish-women, hybrids; and of course this confused separation of the personalities carried with it the implication that they were not discrete, because they could only be comprehended if you took them as whole (*Shame*, 40)

Another character who is too suffered a lot is Naveed Hyder Talvar. She gives birth to twenty seven children in six years. There is an absolute mess in her old age, she feels hassled with their numbers who were in huge numerical. It is very intricate to handle such a large numerical, to feed, to handle, to call, to manage and to recognize. It is perceptible that they have lost their identity in their lives. It seems she has hired an army of ayahs:

"Begum Naveed Talvar, the former Good News Hyder, proved utterly incapable of coping with the endless stream of humanity flowing out between her thighs-[...] Her old personality was getting squashed by the pressure of the children who were so numerous that she forget their names, she hired an army of ayahs and abandoned her offspring to their fate, and then she gave up trying. No more attempts to sit on her hair: the absolute determination to be beautiful which had entranced first Haroun Harappa and then Captain Talvar faded from her features, and she stood revealed as the plain, unremarkable matron she had always really been." (*Shame*, 207)

Shame is a satire on a pair of "conjoined opposites"- the playboy and the puritan, the socialist democrat and the tyrannical dictator, who are seen as two sides of the same coin. *Shame* is a companion piece to *Midnight's Children*; the former is a "Pakistani" fiction and later is an Indian one. The two novels, however, also vary considerably in form and in atmosphere. *Midnight's Children* is a disturbed, over-reaching, and over-crowded fiction in which the excesses of the text damage alongside the limits of sentence, chapter and book. On the other hand *Shame* is a restricted, claustrophobic, even fearful fiction haunted by the narrative that is unable to tell, and domineering in its inexorable focus on the narrow social strata with which the novel deals.



There is a one narrator in *Midnight's Children* who strives and struggles to incorporate everything into his text and *Shame* has multi narrators.

Midnight's Children and *Shame* can be read as postmodernist novels where Rushdie demythicizes the ecstasy of Independence and so-called self-reliance. Yet, it is never too imperative to highlight the overarching perspective which is democratic and human in spirit, with no final judgment or moralizing because the future cannot be conserved in a jar. The universal appeal of the text lies in its demystification of historical process, its repudiation to allow the expediency of ideological closure and depicts psychologically the issues of identity.

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