



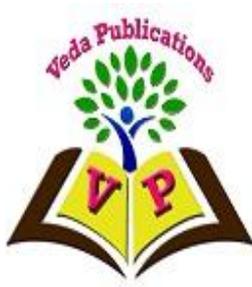
THE USE OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE IN THE SHORT STORIES OF SALMAN RUSHDIE 'S EAST, WEST.

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doi: <https://doi.org/10.33329/ioell.61.155>

ABSTRACT



The language plays an important role in the short stories. Different writers have adapted different means to express their ideas in their stories in English. All languages flourish in a particular environment. If any language has to flourish in a foreign land it needs alterations so as to come to terms with the cultural differences of the land. The non-native speakers face so many problems in depicting their thoughts and themes in a non-native language. Particularly when the Indian creative artist has to depict his theme and ethos in English he has to mould and alter the language to suit it to the Indian characters and situations. He cannot totally write like British writers, because the traditional and situational differences come in his way. So the Indian creative writers have invented their own idiom and usage of English language to suit their creative needs. In the stories, "East, West", Rushdie's uses chaste British expression. There is an effective simplicity and harmonious progression of mood and meaning in his English expression.

Keywords: *Salman Rushdie, British expression, Simple, Harmonious, Native, Non-native speakers of English.*

**INTRODUCTION**

Rushdie's experimentation with language is one of his remarkable achievements. Most reviewers have waxed lyrical over his quality of English and commented that no Indian writer has had the courage to handle English language with such gaiety and joyousness like him. His mastery of language is total and that he has decolonized English more effectively than the other writers. As he writes in his "Imaginary Homelands" about a world which is repressively colonized and also engages with and celebrates a complex inner world he produces an English language world which is not Anglo-centric. As he explains,

"Those peoples who were once colonized by the language are now rapidly remaking it. Domesticating it, becoming more and more relaxed about the way they use it – assisted by the English language's enormous flexibility and size, they are carving out large territories for themselves within its frontiers." (Rushdie 378)

His stories give many numbers of examples as to how marvellously he manipulates the language. Consciously and unconsciously he has done experiment with English language and succeeded eminently in the experiments and innovations. The diction he uses in each story is perfectly suited to the character's voice which in turn is well suited to the story being narrated as is seen in the character of the school teacher in the story, "Free Radio". He also succeeds in facing the two aspects of verisimilitude in language, the problem of conveying the flavour of the idiom and of making clear which is being spoken by the character at any given time, as seen in the stories of "West". Rushdie uses chaste British expression. There is an effective simplicity and harmonious progression of mood and meaning in his English expression. The tone and tenor and flavour remind one of eighteenth century fictional prose of Fielding and Sterne. His experiments with language are one of his remarkable achievements. No Indian writer has had the courage to handle English language with the gaiety and joyousness like him.

His primary education in Cathedral and John Cannon school run by missionaries, introduced him to the Anglophone Indian educational system to the

rhymes from Mother Goose, the adventures of Robin Hood, stylistics of King James Bible and the world of English classics, because the study material of the upper middle classes. Within no time English has achieved a hegemonic status in India which far outdid Macaulay's wildest expectations. At home Rushdie's family used Urdu and at school English and so from childhood he was a bilingual. When questioned about his interest in English language he replies,

"I think it had to do with the fact that, when I was growing up everyone around me was fond of fooling around with words. It was certainly common in my family, but I think it is typical of Bombay, and maybe of India, that there is a sense of play in the way people use language. Most people in India are multilingual, and if you listen to the urban speech patterns there you'll find it's quite characteristic that a sentence with hg-begin in one language, go through second language and end in a third. It's the very playful, very natural result of juggling languages. You are always reaching for the most appropriate phrase." ((Rushdie 1)

So consciously or unconsciously he had done experiment with the English language and succeeded remarkably in his experiments and innovations. While commenting on the problems faced by the Indian writers in writing in English he says,

"...I was really trying to say that the way in which English is used in India has diverged significantly from Standard English. That India had made its own English the way America and Ireland and the Caribbean and Australian made their own English. But even though this is the way everybody speaks in India, nobody had the confidence, when I started writing, to use it as a literary language. When they settled down to write, they would do it in a kind of classical Forsterian English that had nothing to do with the way they were speaking." (Madhusudan Rao 164)

But at school he was more independent and more forceful with his opinion, and his English articulation had changed from its original Bombay



accent to the more superior sounding English, that older Indians associated with the former British colonial officials. So he picked up chaste British English expression. Abundant felicity of expression and passionate interest made Rushdie's use of English more enjoyable. He has chosen English as a medium for recording and analysing history, which is the outcome of his creative consciousness, where English expression is instinctively synthesized, without any deliberate effort with the Indian reality at various levels, from its mythical past to the contemporary situation, with equal ease. He has achieved a greater success when compared with Raja Rao, R.K.Narayan and Mulk Raj Anand, in using the English language in depicting the Indian situation and setting. When Raja Rao, R.K. Narayan started writing, the proportion of creative writing by the Indians itself, was in a state of exploration and experimentation, whereas when Rushdie started to write in English this has not only been answered but also the capabilities and achievements of Indian writers in English have been fully established beyond any doubt. The only problem he faces is in depicting the Indian scene and setting, as he is living in a non-Indian English setting, he has to find the Indian roots from outside. His agonizing expatriate roots in an English world adequately make his creative expression in English flawlessly and adequately perfect through his Indian imagination. As it could be seen in his use of language in the stories, set in the 'East' part, in the volume of stories *East, West*. In the story "Good Advice is rarer than Rubies" he gives a vivid description of the scene in the buses on Pakistan Roads,

"On the last Tuesday of the month, the dawn bus, its headlamps still shining, brought Miss Rehana to the gates of the British Consulate. It arrived pushing a cloud of dust, veiling her beauty from the eyes of strangers until she descended. The bus was brightly painted in multicoloured arabesques, and on the front it said 'MOVE OVER DARLING' on green and gold letters; on the back it added 'TATA-BATA' and also 'O.K. GOOD-LIFE', Miss Rehana told the driver it was a beautiful bus, and he jumped down and held the door open for her,

bowing theatrically as she descended." (Rushdie 5)

Rushdie gives a vivid description of how the buses in Pakistan and other Asian countries are painted and coloured with appropriate words 'move over darling' and 'Tata Bata' etc, he also uses the words like 'sahibs', 'pukka', 'bibi', 'Daddyji' etc to convey the South Asian flavour. He uses a hybrid language –English generously peppered with Hindi, terms to convey the themes that could be seen as representing the vast canvas of India and Pakistan.

Rushdie concentrates all his creative endeavours in language to find the roots in a native soil through an alien medium, English. His mastery over English language with abundant creativity is surely his contribution to the Indian fictional prose. The most striking achievement of him is his ability to create an Indian atmosphere and Indian world through the use of idiomatic British English without so painfully resorting to the practice of translating of Indian idioms into English or literally transporting the Indian physical world into the fictional world, as done by other writers like Mulk Raj Anand and Raja Rao. There is a kind of similarity between Raja Rao and Rushdie. Both of them are the landmarks in Indo-English literature, and give an authentic delineation of Indian life and attitudes and if there is any variation it is because of the diversity of the Indian life. Just as Raja Rao gives the Brahmanic Sanskrit flavour to the language Rushdie gives the Urdu flavour. In the story "Free Radio" he presents the typical Indian situation seen in the remote villages. It is done through the narrator of the story who is a retired school teacher who spends his days under a banyan tree at the centre of town, smoking his hookah and keeping his ears open for various tidbits of gossip. As an elderly man in the village the narrator of the story tells the story of Ramani, the protagonist,

"I say: who listens... Exactly, nobody, certainly not a stone-head like Ramani the rickshaw-wallah. But I blame the widow. I saw it happen, you know, I saw most of it until I couldn't stand any more. I sat under this very banyan, smoking this selfsame hookah, and not much escaped my notice.



And at one time I tried to save him from his fate, but it was no go.” (Rushdie 19)

The description is typical of the Indian story telling. The language Rushdie uses is also typical of Indian expression. The words he uses, ‘stone-head’, ‘rickshaw-wallah’, ‘selfsame’, ‘no go’, and the expressions like ‘I saw most of it until I couldn’t stand any more’, to convey the meaning of helplessness are typical of India. A.K.Rao rightly comments on his Indianisation of English,

“Rushdie is trying to de-colonise the language by tapping the interlingual syntactic resources and achieves a tremendous measure of success as Desani or Raja Rao has, in attempting to Indianise the language of the Empire. However he has an edge over them because he has looked at the whole problem of the language from the point of view of a Westerner who has had first-hand knowledge of the living idiom of speech, and its creative distortions and enjambments.”(Rao 11)

His mastery of the language is total and that he had decolonized English more effectively than the other writers. In an interview with Dave Weich he says of the experiments he made in the field of language.

“ There’s a certain point at which I felt that I’d done enough of that as I felt fresh. Your relationship to language shifts as you go through your books and as you get older. I thought, Well, I know how to do that and, if I want to I can do that now, but it’s more interesting to look at this other thing to try to make the language more capacious, to try to bring into it every kind of material.” (Rushdie 64)

His stories like “Free Radio”, “The Courter” and “The Prophet’s Hair” give many examples of how marvellously he manipulates with the language. The diction he uses in each story is perfectly suited to the character’s voice which in turn is well suited to the story being narrated as in the case of the narrator of the story “Free Radio”. Almost all of his characters except in the first two stories in the first set of stories are well educated and know English very well. So he does not face any problem in depicting the characters in other stories. In the first story the

protagonist Miss Rehana, though an illiterate speaks so well like an educated woman “Miss Rehana,’ she told him. ‘Fiancée of Mustafa Dar of Bradford, London.....I see, Thank you.” (Rushdie 8)

Miss Rehana, though works as a maid servant in a house, speaks perfect English. English, Hindi, Urdu seem to be the three main languages used by the characters in his stories. Rushdie uses the Urdu words in conversations and does not mind to give translations because they look natural to the vernacular of the characters. There are so many words like, ‘ Arre’, ‘jalebi’, ‘begum sahib’, ‘Fataakh,Fataakh,’ , ‘bakvaas’, etc which convey that the protagonists are typical Indian Muslims. Even in the story “The Courter”, his protagonists speak Urdu words very frequently. Words like, ‘Hai,’ ‘Allah-tobah’, ‘Abba’, ‘banhomie’, etc are used to suit the characters. He even discusses in detail how the Indians, particularly the Muslims faced difficulty in understanding the colloquial English and formal English in London. The protagonist’s father also faces so many problems in the streets of London, even is slapped by the sales girl in a medical shop.

Rushdie succeeded in making use of two aspects of verisimilitude in language, the problem of conveying the flavour of the Indian idiom and of making clear what is being said by the characters at any given time. In this respect Rushdie succeeded in using the authentic language as he has depicted a wide range of characters from different societies. He never cared to give relevant English words. Rushdie’s characters belong to a wider span of social classes it is difficult to make a clear distinction between those who can speak English and those who cannot.

Very often Rushdie is accused of writing ‘unreadable’ prose. But in his stories in East, West he wants to prove that he can write readable prose and also in the realist mode, if he wishes to. Though he writes bowdy, outsize, polyglot stories, he never uses abusive words in his stories. His characters do not utter the abusive words.

Though Rushdie likes music and poetry there are such poetic references in his stories except in the story “Yorick” a riddle comes out of the mouth of Yorick,

“Nor liquid, nor solid, nor gassy air,
Nor taste, nor smell, nor substance



there.

It may be turned to good or ill.

Pour it in an ear, and it may kill."
(Rushdie 77)

Though he is not very particular about the use of poetry in his stories he likes music. So there are so many musical references in his stories, particularly of pop music, Rock and roll. He has used rock and roll in his novel "Ground Beneath her Feet"

Thus Rushdie describes a world which is repressively colonized and also he engages with and celebrates a complex inner world in his stories. He produces an English language world which is not Anglo-centric. He explains in his Imaginary Homelands that,

"those peoples who were once colonized by the language are now rapidly remaking it, domesticating it, becoming more and more relaxed about the way they use it assisted by the English language's enormous flexibility and size, they are carving out large territories for themselves within its frontiers." (Rushdie 64)

So throughout the essay he discusses using English language as decolonized, which involves two continuous acts, that a colonized person when he uses English, he thinks that he is suing his master's language, and secondly how can one express oneself in a largely Anglophone world. He further says that "to conquer English may be to complete the process of making ourselves free." (Rushdie 65)

CONCLUSION

Thus Rushdie uses chaste British expression. There is an effective simplicity and harmonious progression of mood and meaning in his English expression. The tone and tenor and flavour remind one of eighteenth century fictional prose of Fielding and Sterne. His experiments with language are one of his remarkable achievements. Most reviewers have waxed lyrical over his quality that no Indian writer has had the courage to handle English language with the gaiety and joyousness like him. His primary education in Jon Cannon School run by missionaries introduced him to the Anglophone Indian educational system. From his childhood he was a bilingual. He experimented with English and succeeded remarkably well in his experiments and innovations.

India has made its own English as the way America and Ireland and the Caribbean and Australia had made their own languages. The only problem that Rushdie faces in depicting the Indian scene and setting as he is living in a non-Indian English setting, he has to find the Indian roots from outside.

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