



Representation of Politics in Rushdie's Novel

The Golden House

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Abstract: Politics has always been a predominant preoccupation of the Indian-English novelists. If literature is concerned with life, and in the act of writing a writer deals basically with life itself, Politics, being part and parcel of life, cannot be totally excluded or left out. If we look at the narrative technique of the writer to present the story, Rushdie resorts to subversive methods like the employment of myth and magic realism to yield new insights into the study of the post colonial politicality of different situations. Any analytical approach to his work involves a process of straightening out the recurrent themes which are all interrelated and dependent upon one another. *The Golden House* is an amalgamation of political and social satire, internal identity struggle and a reinterpretation of historical events. My aim, in the paper, is to analyse the new paradigms of the post colonial political issues inherent in *The Golden House*

Key Words: Predominant, Post-colonial, Politicality, Amalgamation, Literature and Politics, Struggle, Interpretation, Myth and Magic Realism, Paradigm

Politics has always been a predominant preoccupation of the Indian-English novelists. The intervention of literature in portraying the political ideas has been an area of debate among our intellectual circles. Bhisham Sahni in his essay 'Literature and Politics' has tried to mediate the controversy:

"To my mind, there is hardly any scope for controversy on this issue. If literature is concerned with life, and in the act of writing a writer deals basically with life itself, Politics being part and parcel of life, cannot be totally excluded or left out. Like many other aspects of life, politics affects us and gives our lives a direction, at the personal as well as the collective, social level ... In a way the entire socially oriented literature could be termed political literature." (111)

One of the most vital and consistent themes running through Rushdie's novels is the use of politics on the canvas of history in the matter of scope and treatment of his novels. If we look at the narrative technique of the writer to present the story, Rushdie resorts to subversive methods like the employment of myth and magic realism to yield new insights into the study of the post-colonial politicality of different situations. Any analytical approach to his work involves a process of straightening out the recurrent themes which are all interrelated and dependent upon one another. His novels are an amalgamation of political and social satire, internal identity struggle and a reinterpretation of historical events.

In an interview given to Gordon Wise, Salman Rushdie calls himself ‘a fairly political animal’. He admits that though the inclusion of the political material creates problem and it is possible to write books without politics in them but, “It is getting harder, I suspect, because politics invades our lives these days in a way that it once didn’t” (Gentleman 59). For him, politics and the novel go hand-in-hand because the act of writing creates alternative versions of reality. “Works of art”, in Rushdie’s view, “do not come into being in a social and political vacuum”, and so, “they cannot be separated from politics, from history” (IH 92). In the title essay in *Imaginary Homelands*, Rushdie states:

“I must say first of all that description is itself a political act ... the novel is one way of denying the official, politicians’ version of ‘truth’..... So it is clear that re-describing a world is the necessary first step towards changing it ... altering the past to fit its present needs, then the making of the alternative realities of art, including the novel of memory, becomes politicized.” (13-14)

In the opinion of Andrew Teverson, a novel becomes political not by engaging directly in political issues but by describing the world in a way that contests or resists the interpretations of it offered by the more official organs of power (Teverson 15).

The aim of this paper is to discuss the concept and treatment of politics in Salman Rushdie’s novel *The Golden House*. The essence of politics in the novels of Rushdie is generally marked by elements such as class, race, or nation; and he does so by developing a universe of particularities - specific characters, including himself, particular cities, precise periods such as the moment of decolonization and partition (Pal 1).

The events of national and international contemporary politics are inextricably intertwined in Rushdie’s novel *The Golden House*. The political part of the novel seems not only to be a chronicle of America in recent years but also that of India – dealing with the subjects as varied as Sanjay Gandhi’s death, Ram Mandir - Babri Masjid conflict, the Mumbai terrorist attack and the different terrorist outfits masquerading as Islamist militants. The very first paragraph of the novel introduces the political tenor:

“On the day of the new president’s inauguration, when we worried that he might be murdered as he walked hand in hand with his exceptional wife among the cheering crowds, and when so many of us were close to economic ruin in the aftermath of the bursting of the mortgage bubble, and when Isis was still an Egyptian mother-goddess, an uncrowned seventy-something king from a faraway country arrived in New York City with his three motherless sons to take possession of the palace of his exile, behaving as if nothing was wrong with the country or the world or his own story.” (GH 3)

In the novel, Obama’s Presidential tenure ends very soon and creates anticipation of ‘what next’ and then enters this Presidential candidate whose actions and words smell of despotism:

“he exuded a heavy, cheap odour, the unmistakable smell of crass, despotic danger, the kind of scent that warned us, look out for this guy, because he could order your execution at any moment, if you’re wearing a displeasing shirt, for example, or if he wants to sleep with your wife.” (3)

The above passage with its tone of autocratic impudence and dictatorial demeanour unmistakably and very clearly is a reference to Donald Trump. Here is Salman Rushdie at his best as a political critic and analyst.

Rushdie doesn’t stop at the political scenario of the U. S. talking about Barack Obama and the haughty Donald Trump but traverses continents to deal with the political situation of his homeland i.e. India. He goes on to talk about another recent event which is more politico-economic than historical – the Aadhar System:

“*Aadhar* is a twelve-digit social security ID number allocated to each Indian citizen for his or her lifetime and its use is mandatory in all property and financial transactions, allowing the citizen’s involvement in such transactions to be electronically traced.” (21)

Economy guided by political considerations finds an echo in the following lines:

“... his mastery of such terms as ‘Tom Yum Goong’, the Thai term for the crisis, and his ability to discuss the fate of exotic currencies, the collapse of the baht, the devaluation of the renminbi, and to have an opinion on whether or not the financier George Soros had caused the collapse of the Malaysian economy by selling the ringgit short.” (46)

His political concerns know no limits. He talks about the weaknesses of the American electoral college:

“The anachronistic weakness of the American electoral college; the stupidity of non-electoral college students; the sexiness of Margaret Thatcher; and the ‘twenty-five percent of Americans’ – on the far right of the political spectrum – ‘who are certifiably insane’.” (47)

About the election when Barack Obama was elected President, he has this to say:

“..... the November night when Barack Obama was elected President. On that night I had been in a Midtown sports bar where a well-known doyenne of Upper East Side society, a Republican, was jointly hosting an election night party with a distinctly downtown Democrat film producer. At 11 p.m., when California declared and pushed Obama over the finish line, the room exploded with emotion, and I realised that I, like everyone else, had been unable to believe that what was happening would really happen, even though the numbers had clearly indicated an Obama victory a couple of hours earlier. The possibility of another stolen election was not far from our thoughts and so relief mingled with elation when the majority was definite.” (52-53)

Rushdie not only talks about the democracies of America and India, he also has to say something about the Communists and their oppressive regime:

“At the age of twelve I learned that the town was forbidden to all non-Russians and so also not so easy to leave. So I understand the Communist oppression and also the after-wards not-Communist oppression.” (89)

About politically fed corruption he comes out plain and straightforward:

“She doesn’t trust the dealer. She has been sent paperwork certifying that the items were legally exported from India but these documents can be illicitly obtained. In the old days before the Indian Antiquities and Art Treasures Act, she says, it was actually harder to smuggle stuff out, because people were not sure who to bribe. But since 1976 the exporters know which inspectors to deal with, so it’s more straightforward.” (97)

Rushdie has a piercing insight into the mind and slush that Indian politics has become. He devotes a whole page traversing the whole gamut of ideologies, from Leftists to the Rightists:

“In the beginning, ‘Suchitra said, sitting by my bedside while I groaned that my head hurt. In the beginning there was the official Communist Party of India-CPI. But India has a population problem and its left parties also ignore birth control. So after the CPI there was the CPI(M) the Communist Party of India (Marxist), and the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) aka CPI (M-L). Enough parties? Babe, the party’s only just getting started. Try to keep up. Now there is the of Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) Liberation, plus the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) Naxalbari, and also the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) Janashakti, and in addition the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) Red Star, and let us not forget the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) Central Team, or neglect to mention the Revolutionary Communist Centre of India (Marxist-Leninist-Maoist), to say nothing of the Communist Party of United States of India or the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) Red Flag, or the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) New Initiative, or the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) Somnath, or the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) Second Central Committee, or the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) Bolshevik, Kindly continue to pay strict attention. There is proliferation among other groupuscules as well. There was the Maoist Communist Centre

which merged with the People's War Group to form the Maoist Communist Centre of India. Or possibly it was that the Maoist Communist Centre of India merged with the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) People's war and founded the Communist Party of India (Maoist) these distinctions can be hard to make. I tell you all this to explain the decision of my Bengali mother and father, two intrepid capitalistically inclined entrepreneur types trapped in Calcutta among the many-headed Ravana of the Communist Party of India (Uranium-plutonium), the nuclear- fission warheads of the left, to run away and settle in the Atlanta suburb of Alpharetta, Georgia, which is where I was born. This would perhaps have been a good idea, and in fact economically speaking it was a good idea because they succeeded in a wide range of enterprises, beauty salons, clothing stores, a real estate agency, psychic-healing services, so you see they also proliferated. But unfortunately around them the political institutions of the Hindu right were also being fruitful and multiplying on fertile American soil, expatriate branches of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh sprouted up, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad flowered, the Bhartiya Janta Party thrived, as did fund-raising organisations funneling dollars toward the same. My parents escaped from one whirlpool only to be sucked into another and when they started going to RSS gala dinners and speaking admiringly of the barrel-chested person they called NaMo, I had to love them and leave them and make my escape" (153-155)

Rushdie has rightly endorsed in one of the interviews that his books have everything to do with politics. We can quote Frederic Jameson's opinion on Rushdie's novels that they conceive of the political perspective, not as an auxiliary to other interpretive methods current today... but rather as the absolute horizon of all residing and all interpretation' (Jameson 17).

The novel has the mention of the 2G Spectrum Scam that shocked the country only few years back. Here we get the meaning of '2G spectrum' and also know about the companies involved in it:

"“Hey, Petya,’ I went over to say, ... ‘what do you know about 2G Spectrum?’ A ripple of confusion passed over his face, ... ‘Telecommunications kerfuffle,’ he said. ‘Shall I recite the list of companies involved? Adonis, Nahan, ..., Allianz, Idea, Spice, S Tel, Tata.” (GH 119)

Rushdie gives us the politics when Babri masjid was demolished and the riots exploded thereafter:

“In December 1992 Nero was on the Kipling with Zamzama Alankar again. The mosque built by the first Mughal emperor Babar in the northern city of Ayodhya had just been destroyed by Hindu activists who claimed that it stood on the mythological site of the birthplace of Lord Ram, ...” (GH 328-29)

To conclude, it can be said that most of Rushdie's novels are always strongly connected to the history and politics of India and world although they are fictions. He uses different methods and treats the facts loosely to interpret them in his own way. The characters and events in his books are fictional but they are very often a transparent allegory of the real events and persons. His novels are metaphor itself to rewrite the history, politics and several critical struggles. The postmodern techniques in his narratives allow him to question the historical and political past and its effect on the present realities. We can say that Rushdie gives the political phenomena of Indian subcontinent through *the Golden House*. The novel describes the political events of not only India but world also. In the novel the description of politics is not quite exact; it is sometimes overt and sometimes cursory and covert.

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