Globalization and Multiculturalism in Salman Rushdie's *The Moor's Last Sigh*

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Abstract

The paper attempts to explore the issues of multiculturalism in terms of many forms of identity in the era of globalization. It will also discuss the aspect of cosmopolitanism that diverges from a traditional vision of world citizenship, and challenges the assertion that the global and the local are separate spheres. It aims to show that multicultural identity is a fluid and continuous process of adaptation and reclamation between different cultural communities. In other words, multicultural identity is not a fixed signifier determined by national, ethnic or religious boundaries. I am primarily interested in the relationship between globalization and multiculturalism, yet what will be evident in the subsequent analysis is that states are relevant, and often significant, factors in that relationship. Some aspects of the interaction between globalization and multiculturalism, such as transnationalism may even challenge the state. It is in this context that the fiction of Rushdie represents a vision of cosmopolitanism refashioning the "self" in an ever-changing world. The select novel for this issue of 'globalization and multiculturalism' is The Moors' Last Sigh, which questions the stable, definite and fixed notion of self in the home and the world. The novel emphasizes the possibility of newness, change, and multiplicity in the formation of identity. The formulations of identities shift across time and place, for individuals, group and whole societies. The novels show that the cultural identity of a community or an individual can change, for instance, when one moves from one place to another, marries, or improves one's economic status.

Keywords: globalization, multiculturalism, hybridity, cultural identity, global and local and nation

The Moor's Last Sigh embodies the phenomena of the east and the west encounter, regional and multicultural world-view, Greek myth and contemporary European philosophy along with popular cultures. At certain places, the novels like *The Moor's Last Sigh* provide severe critique of the incidents happened in the last decade of the twentieth century. It focuses on the question whether globalization poses a challenge or threat to belonging, and if so, then what are the phases and patterns of transformation and transition in the novel. In what ways they are different from the traditional concept of belonging? Does globalization maintain a stable ethnic identity or does it alter when alteration finds? I shall focus on these issues from theoretical perspective vis-à-vis the selected novel of Rushdie. The narratives of globalization and multiculturalism give emphasis to the condition of in-betweenness and hybridity that questions the very essence of the concepts of "imaginary homeland" and "imagined nation" by confronting and reinforcing the ideals on which the nation was founded. In order to understand the answer to these questions, it is necessary to understand national self-representation of India from theoretical perspective, that is, the major theorizations of the nation. Rushdie rightly says that '"Home' has become such a scattered, damaged, various concept in our present travails" (Rushdie, East, West 93).

It also explores how Rushdie's representation of two nations, India and Pakistan, evokes Nehru's ideas of the nation in juxtaposition with M. A. Jinnah. For instance, *The Moor's Last Sigh*'s concerns with nation and diversity, which looks at the history of India through the eyes of Moraes Zogoiby and his family, brings the history of medieval to map the

contemporary India and its current cultural practices. In this context, I argue that multiculturalism appears as an empty nostalgia, and Rushdie's embrace of fragmentation is faltering and problematic, and therefore, it is necessary to understand the specificities of Indian history which both coincides with and deviates from the general theories of nation such as that of Benedict Anderson's "imagined communities". It brings them under the ambit of globalization and the complex notion of multiculturalism. It illustrates how globalization affects the condition and contours of belonging—namely, the perceived materials and psychological need to belong, mechanism for negotiating belonging and available options for belonging. The idea of globalization has also been extended to the process of identity construction. The notion of multiculturalism helps to define the transitional dimensions of the self and the other. I reconceptualise these issues in the broader theoretical domains of globalization and belonging. In particular, I take into consideration, the paradigms laid down by Arjun Appadurai, Homi K. Bhabha, and Benedict Anderson towards the idea of globalization, multiculturalism, national consciousness and belonging.

Globalization refers to the extension of a whole range of economic, cultural and political activities across the world landscape. Globalization can be defined as the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa. World statistics reflect the fact that globalization is a double-edged sword; it offers substantial economic benefits, perhaps inevitably, are accompanied by social costs. The people are affected by both the bright and the dark sides of Globalization.

There are some steps of progress in the economically unprivileged section of society, though very less compared to that of the economically dominant group, in their ways of living. The escalation of poverty threshold of the poor people attempts to compete with that of the rich, and later attempt to reverse and interrogate globalization. Arjun Appadurai terms such journey of growth as "grassroots globalisation" or "globalisation from below" (Grassroots Globalisation and the Research Imagination 15). Homi K. Bhabha, in his introduction to *The Location of Culture*, considers it as "the Trinidadian variety" of cosmopolitanism because it "emerges from the world of migrant boarding-houses and the habitations of national and diasporic minorities" (*The Location of Culture* xvi), or regards it as a "vernacular cosmopolitanism" (*The Location of Culture*xvi) because it challenges the corporate development, interrogates the "division between central, canonical cultures and everyday cultures," and measures global progress from the minoritarian perspective. In this context, Bhabha writes further:

> Its claims to freedom and equality are marked by 'a "right to difference in equality'" rather than diversity founded on a 'dual economy'. Such a 'right to difference'... does not require the restoration of an original [for essentialist] cultural or group identity; nor does it consider equally to be a neutralization of differences in the name of the 'universality' of rights.... A right to difference-in-equality can be articulated from the perspective of both national minorities and global migrants... (*The Location of Culture* xvii)

Jurgen Habermas says that globalisation divides the world society into "the winner beneficiary and the looser countries". This binary pole represents, as a matter of facts, a complete gamut of possessed and dispossessed in the era of globalisation, where the latter could not respond with a responsibility to the global challenges, but on the contrary, the former constructs its structural development on what was once the source of survival for undeveloped people or nation. This complex relation can be described in the Lacanian terms as "imaginary," which in this context stands for innocent and poor people, and "Symbolic," that represents rich people. In the clutches of globalization, the strata of society which belongs to "imaginary" group are trapped by the powers of deception of the signifier, "symbolic". At this point the notion of global citizenship and capitalism collapses (The Global Difference 259).

With the changing Indian realities in the context of globalization and immigration, national identity as well as the literature is bound to change. We have emerged from the darkness of illiteracy to near universalization of elementary education: from darkness of superstition and colonial subjugation to the realization of 'selfhood'; from the trauma of partition to the celebration of multiculturalism and inter-culturalism, from under-developed country to an emerging nation; from the borrower of technology to the domineering status in science, technology and software engineering; from a country of indentured labourers to a capable Diaspora abroad.

What globalization tends to do is increase difference, but it liberates difference from geography. People used to a certain pattern or model of difference. Different peoples are different, and they live in different places. So there's what Tibet looks like, there's what Mexico looks like, and there's what India looks like. We rapidly identify difference with locale. But that's only one kind of difference. Another kind of differences show up in the paths we choose to take through our lives, and we believe that individuals will always wish to choose different paths for their lives.

Benjamin Barber opines that one of the problems of globalization and cultural borrowing and cultural mimicry is that they depend, not on isolated cultures, but on authentic cultures. And I quite agree that the "authentic" culture is itself a cultural product of earlier cultural interactions, so it's not the fixed item that critics sometimes suggest. When we borrow across cultures, we are, as Plato would suggest, on a second or even at third level of reality, so we're distancing ourselves. And at some point of time, diversity becomes increasingly simulated, and the authenticity from which those experiences come essentially disappears.

Appadurai says, "The central problem of today's global interactions is the tension between cultural homogenization and cultural heterogenization". He further continues, "Most often, the homogenization argument subspecialties into either an argument about Americanization, or an argument about commoditization..." (295). Appadurai in his essay, "Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy," counters the functioning of center-periphery model for "a complex, overlapping, disjunctive order" (296) in the era of the new global cultural economy and transnational world relationships. Extending the logics of Benedict Anderson's imagined national communities to global scale, he formulates the notion of "imagined world" to describe the condition of contemporary world pertaining to the global economy, and transnational communities forged through networks of diaspora, migration, technology, electronic media, ideologies, and global capital. In this regard, he identifies five dimensions of global cultural flow: 1. *Ethnoscapes*(the movement of people from one country to another developing a keen interest in migration of across cultures and borders) 2. *Technoscapes* (the influence of large multinational companies promotes the flow of technology and cultural interaction), 3. *Financescapes* (business of different products and changing the value of capita across the border), 4. *Mediascapes* (role of electronic and print medias to distribute and broadcast information, i.e. newspapers, magazines, television stations, and film production studios), and 5. *Ideoscapes* (movement of different ideologies across the border)

Multiculturalism is related to communities containing multiple cultures. The term is used in two broad ways, either descriptively or normatively. As a descriptive term, it usually refers to the simple fact of cultural diversity: it is generally applied to the demographic make-up of a specific place, sometime at the organizational level, e.g. schools, businesses, neighborhoods, cities, or nations. As a normative term, it refers to ideologies or policies that promote this diversity or its institutionalization in this sense, multiculturalism is a society "at ease with the rich tapestry of human life and the desire amongst people to express their own identity in the manner they see fit." Such ideologies or policies vary widely, including country to country, ranging from the advocacy of equal respect to the various cultures in a society, to a policy of promoting the maintenance of cultural diversity, to policies in which people of

various ethnic and religious groups are addressed by the authorities as defined by the group they belong to. However, two main different and seemingly inconsistent strategies have developed through different Government policies and strategies: the first focuses on interaction and communication between different cultures. Interactions of cultures provide opportunities for the cultural differences to communicate and interact to create multiculturalism. (Such approaches are also often known as interculturalism.) The second centers on diversity and cultural uniqueness. Cultural isolation can protect the uniqueness of the local culture of a nation or an area that contributes to global cultural diversity. A common aspect of many policies following the second approach is that they avoid presenting any specific ethnic, religious, or cultural community values as central.

The Moor's Last Sigh concerns with the way in which "a national definition has to struggle to incorporate the individual". It does so by inventing historical and ethnic categories in their attempts to create cultural cohesion. The constructive history of nation made the novel the paradigmatic site for "imagining" the national foundations. A marked preoccupation with history and an urge to re-visit and critically re-examine the past has been at the crucial concern of the novel. The identity of the narrator Moor is allocated and imposed from outside, where memories are systematically suppressed in the pre-colonial past, and the urge to revisit the past becomes indispensable for the processes of reconciliation and identity reconstruction. By the time Moor tells his story to the narrator-in-exile, he is "alone now, motherless . . . appear[ing] to lose his metaphorical role as a unifier of opposites, a standard bearer of pluralism, ceasing to stand as a symbol – however approximate – of the new nation" (Rushdie, *The Moor's Last Sigh*, 66).

Thus, Moor is polarized between his story and History, wherein his long-awaited vision of family (i.e., national) unity stands in bleak contrast to the rupture body politic of the Zogoiby family. The greater the layers of deceit underlying his family's history, therefore, the lesser the Moor's inclination to piece together the fractured narrative of his past. The idea of nation in *The Moor's Last Sigh* can be aligned with the position adopted by Fanon in his essay "On National Culture," in which he insists that the "nation is not only the condition of culture" but "a necessity," since "the re-establishment of the nation" will not only "give life to national culture" but "make such a culture open to other cultures" (197). The novel, in its study of nation through narratives, attempts to change the conceptual object itself. What Bhabha says in theory, Rushdie does in the novel. In order to offer a comprehensible illustration I would quote them. Bhabha says: "If the problematic 'closure' of textuality questions the 'totalization' of national culture, then its positive value lies in displaying the wide dissemination through which we construct the field of meanings and symbols associated with national life" (3).

Moreas comes to see the New Bombay (and all India by extension) as a simulacral city succumbing to an invisible, greed-driven entrepreneurial class and mammon-minded intellectual élite. He questions "the 'totalization' of national culture" and shows multiple lying of tales upon tales, in the form of palimpsest that constitutes India:

> The city itself, perhaps the whole country, was a palimpsest, Under World Beneath over World, black market beneath white; when the whole of life was like this, when an *invisible reality* moved phantom wise beneath *a visible fiction, subverting all its meanings* . . . how could any of us have escaped that deadly layering? How trapped as we were in the hundred percent fakery of the real . . . could we have penetrated to the full, sensual truth of the lost mother below? How could we have lived authentic lives? How could we have failed to be grotesque? (Rushdie, *The Moor's Last Sigh*, 184)

In the face of intractable religious fanaticism and political extremism, Rushdie intimates, such abstract notions as hybridity, plurality, multiculturalism, and liminal subjectivity may potentially be vacated of their historical significance and resistive value. The

rich examples of hybridity in the novel are depicted through the contact of the Eastern and the Western traditions in India. Rushdie shows that the European tradition such as Christmas takes on a new meaning in an Indian context, and simultaneously it is brought closer to its original meaning:

> "Christmas, that Northern invention, that tale of snow and stockings, of merry fires and reindeer, Latin carols and *O Tannenbaum*, of evergreen trees and Sante Klaas with his little piccanniny 'helpers,' is restored by tropical heat to something like its origins, for whatever else the Infant Jesus may or may not have been, he was a hot-weather babe; however poor his manger, it wasn't *cold*; and if Wise Men came … they came, let's not forget it, from the East". (Rushdie, *The Moor's Last Sigh,*62)

The story of Granada's downfall provides the background for the failure of India's pluralism. In fact, this story is woven into the narrative of *The Moor's Last Sigh* to represent modern India and for the ruptures of cultures not only in India but in the modern world. The significance of the Granadan theme is considered as Rushdie's engagement with the competing discourses of fundamentalism and pluralism in India's national and cultural history. The novel also conjures the history of Arab Spain as a viable multicultural model that the author wished for post-independence India. Rushdie's postmodern superimposition of many countries' history and India's national narrative in *The Moor's Last Sigh* is both a nostalgia for an exotic and lost Golden Age and a postcolonial hybridity as an empowering subject position. Removed from its Moorish setting and grafted onto India's national history, Boabdil's legend not only indexes the imbrications of various historical and national narratives, but it also helps re-think the relationship between modern memory and the past, politics and representation, in the articulation of a contemporary hybrid subjectivity.

Rushdie's treatment of the myth of hybridity and multiculturalism as the opposite version of the myth of authenticity is manifest in Aurora's Moor paintings. Superimposing public commentary with personal experience, Aurora's paintings are divided into three phases. The first phase (1957–77), which she painted between Moraes's birth and Indira Gandhi's electoral defeat, is defined by their colourful, optimistic variations upon the Boabdil story. The second phase (1977–81), established her as India's uncontested artistic voice, but marked by a sense of loss and despair. The third and final phase (1981–87), presents "'the dark Moors,' those pictures of exile and terror," in which the Arab King becomes for the first and last time her primary subject matter (Rushdie218). Aurora's final Moor paintings begin to exhibit a postmodern sense of disintegration and fragmentation:

> "Aurora had apparently decided that the ideas of impurity, cultural admixture and mélange which had been, for most of her creative life, the closest things she had found to a notion of the Good, were in fact capable of distortion, and contained a potential for darkness as well as for light…. This "black Moor"….became a haunted figure, fluttered about by phantoms of his past which tormented him though he cowered and bid them be gone. Then slowly he grew phantomlike himself…. was robbed of his lozenges and jewels and the last vestiges of his glory; obliged to become a soldier in some petty warlord's army….reduced to mercenary status where once he had been a king, he rapidly became a composite being as pitiful and anonymous as those amongst whom he moved. Garbage piled up, and buried him". (Rushdie, *The Moor's Last Sigh,* 303)

To conclude, the fiction of Rushdie deconstructs simplistic construction of nation, culture and identity based on tradition, geographical origin, and cultural location, thus, it challenges the very categories on which the national identities are forged. Rushdie's narrative de-narrates the nation by not making distinction between fantasy and realism. The nation is

neither romanticized nor sentimentalized, but it is nevertheless acknowledged as a palimpsest construct in the imagination. In this way, the narrative of the novel embodies the trends of non-narration, that is, it does not follow a linear, realistic and progressive structure of narrative. The breaks in narrative open multiplicity and heterogeneity leading innumerable interpretations of the novel. In consequence, what Saleem Sinai calls "the chutnification of history" in *Midnight's Children* has now become Aurora's "junkyard collage" in *The Moor's Last Sigh* (315). It also asserts Stuart Hall's sense of the postcolonial relation with the past as "always-already 'after the break'". The novel evinces Hall's awareness of that relationship as "always constructed through memory, fantasy, narrative and myth" (226). Rushdie's own art is the best example of the cultural hybridity and multiculturalism he celebrates. For Rushdie, all culture, and especially Indian, is palimpsest in nature.

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