

LANGUAGE AND DISCOURSE IN THE FICTION OF SALMAN RUSHDIE

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Abstract

Salman Rushdie, one of the eminent contemporary novelists, represents language as a medium of discourse in his fictional enterprise. His fiction is charged with aesthetic intrepidity and robust innovation in language utilization for the portrayal of his vision of the contemporary milieu. His fiction shares a deconstructive approach towards the establishmentarianism. His ideological confrontation with the narrow and fundamental outlook only substantiates his iconoclastic tendencies with his coruscating and incisive observation of culture and society rank him as a master narrator. In consonance with the resistance literature Rushdie's fiction embodies scathing satires and offers a decolonizing criticism. His gamut of writing and language accentuates the belief in the role of culture in resisting imperialism.

Keywords: discourse, deconstruction, culture, resistance, decolonization, imperialism

Salman Rushdie has revolutionized the reach of fiction in its outlook. There is no denial of his unflinching stance of ardent love for liberty that has invited an extreme form of literary criticism. Underlying the superficial thematic strands, there appears a mode of language extensively employed in his fiction. His practice of literary art encapsulates the tenets of Gramsci's idea of 'hegemony' and is reinforced by Foucault's observation of power relations. These twin ideologies endorse that the dominant social classes establish their dominance not only by using force but also by employing culture that includes language and literature. The entire act of writing by the imperialist classes is done with the mission of establishing subordination of the 'subaltern'. Thus Rushdie's body of writings not only addresses the thematic concerns of representation of the contemporary social milieu but also acts as an act of defiance against the existing cultural representation. It is nevertheless an echo of cultural representation of Edward Said and the critical postulations of Bhabha on mimicry, hybridization and ambivalence.

The use of English, for Rushdie, stands as a signifier, which is juxtaposed to the original intended mission of the colonizer. If Rushdie's texts were to be examined as colonial texts in terms of 'Englishness' it would not be a mere repetition, but adaptation. The

act of adaption is a debunking of the established norms of the authoritarian or prescriptive usage of English. It is apt to recall Bhabha's assertion:

As a signifier of authority, the English book acquires its meaning after the traumatic scenario of colonial difference, cultural or racial, returns the eye of power...paradoxically, however, such an image can neither be 'original'—by virtue of the act of the act of recognition that constructs it—nor 'identical' by virtue of the difference that defines it. Consequently, the colonial presence is always ambivalent, split between its appearance as original and authoritative and its articulation as representative and difference (107).

Rushdie, though writer of fiction in English, attempts a thorough destabilizing exercise which marks a departure from the original Englishness of English. The attempt is post-colonial resistant stance that forms the foundation for his use of language as a discourse. The anti-colonial strategy is created by foregrounding ambivalence. Rushdie purposefully invokes the western aesthetic forms, modes of expression and imitates them for an avowed ideological purport.

Rushdie's ambivalence as an insider and outsider of Indian sub-continent enjoys the privilege of creating or mending English to serve his purpose of destabilizing the tradition. Though he identifies himself as an Indian post-colonial writer, his writings focus on language as an assertion against the tradition and to herald a new trend in the use of English for fiction. 'Fiction' as a form is an exotic model on which Rushdie imposes decolonizing patterns in terms of language. He is seen reworking with English novel as 'instrument of subservience' and can become 'a weapon of liberation' (Rushdie *The Empire* 8).

Rushdie expansively employs 'oral register' as part of his cultural representation in a postmodernist mode. He experiments with the strategies like blending the material from media and by establishing inter-textual strategies. His stylistic ingeniousness is seen in masterly presentation of montage of narratives of the East, oral tradition and appending them with his philosophical moot points. Rushdie's hybridity emanates from his penchant for intertextuality. His perception of aesthetics is a fine blend of heterogeneity. He holds the ardent faith that any attempt to stifle the culture by imposing uniformity only results in artificiality.

Salman Rushdie is a votary of pluriculture and he pitches against the ideological insistence on purity. His advocacy traces the inherent plurality of text: so is the culture of contemporary society. Teverson observes, "...Rushdie's insistence, staged in thematic and aesthetic terms, that all cultures are inherently plural, inherently intercultural, and that any ideological insistence upon purity, separation and singularity is a falsification of culture, just as it would be a falsification of language" (58).

Rushdie employs English altered to cut out his purpose of presentation. He mixes vernacular terms from Hindi, Urdu and other Indian languages in tandem with English. His lexical borrowings include, *angrez, masala, rakshasas, ekdum, zenana, buddha, ayah*, etc. He associates many words of one grammatical category to form a sequence without any punctuation. Instances of this case are, *mother sister lover sibyl friend, yelling jabbering arguing giggling*, etc. Some phrases are combined in the contexts like, *getoutofitsillyoldmooiststhesoddingbeach, blackasnight*, etc.

Rushdie has a keen sense of words and their associated phonetic value in terms of onomatopoeia. In the words like, *khrikk-khrikk, doomboombadoom*, etc., his presentation attains the purpose of driving home the readers. The other striking feature of Rushdie is the destabilizing the standard English and to create new words out of the existing words. There are striking instances of such coinages like, *mediocrely, doctori, suicidally, memoryless, historyless*, etc., that speak his creative zeal in delineating the themes and his anti-colonial strategy.

Rushdie's distortion of language cannot be misconstrued as a tricky use of language, but a post-colonial strategy. It is not only forging the language to convey a sense of newness apart from representing the multi-linguistic scenario of India. The illusory propriety of standard English usage is challenged by dismantling the centrality of imperialistic outlook. The language and style adopted by Rushdie in his fictional work is to communicate his experience of complex cultural reality. Morey sums up as, "Rushdie amalgamates puns, anagrams, loaded names, double meanings and interjections from different languages to problematize the simple correspondence between the signifier and the signified" (35).

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