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**AESTHETIC PORTRAYAL OF POLITICAL DYNAMICS IN
RUSHDIE AND NAIPAUL'S WORKS**

Bhupinder Singh, Ph.D. Scholar, Slient Longowal (Sangrur)

*Jap Preet Kaur Bhangu, Professor, Department of Management and Humanities,
Sant Longowal Institute of Engineering and Technology, Longowal, Punjab*

Salman Rushdie in his works *Midnight's Children* (1981) and *Shame* (1983) and V.S. Naipaul in *India: A Wounded Civilization* (1977) and *India: A Million Mutinies Now* (1990), focus on the dynamics of politics governing all aspects of life; regional and national, personal and social, individual and communal, fictional and historical, past and present, etc. Without locating self on the binary logic that tends to look for ways of reversing the order, these writers instead are interested in portraying simultaneously opposing, contradictory elements and treating them with a liberal dose of parody in order to force a rethinking of ways one perceives identity and history. While Rushdie spins fantastic tales constantly having a mix of the fictional and the historical, Naipaul's recording of 'facts' as conveyed through multiple, often opposing views also hovers on the boundaries between the authentic and the invented. Since both Rushdie and Naipaul focus on India in the pre as well as post-independence times, collectively they provide a wholesome multi-dimensional image of the prevalent dynamics of politics. Instead of having a mimetic mirroring of the social and the political systems, their focus is on an exploration of the way in which narratives and images structure the constructions of self, in the present and the past. Moreover their location in external zones lets them gaze at the native land with 'western' eyes, thus further politicizing the subject. In this paper an attempt has been made to unravel the multi-level dynamics of politics as portrayed in their works.

A study of dynamics of politics would anyway mean engaging in lively and endlessly debated discussions around concepts such as liberty, identity, oppression, resistance, identity, sedition, rights, justice, representation, etc. In today's postmodern world there has been an increasing awareness of the political context of all literary production. Traditionally expected to maintain 'fictional' and 'apolitical' stance, deliberately separate from mass culture of everyday life, literary writers of recent times instead, have been actively involved in writing stories aimed at exploring the prevailing value systems and dominant ideologies of the world around. There is close link between aesthetics and politics. Both Rushdie and Naipaul have given representation to the voice of people through characters drawn from the real life. The writers who choose the political themes for their works of art portray the political problems arising due to political ideologies. A political writer chooses "politics as a legitimate subject matter for his artistic imagination. Politics thus gets incorporated into the artistic fabric of a political novel" (Kaushik, 6). The writer making an analysis and scrutinizing political institutions and the political arrangement find abundant material for their writings. There is a "remarkable mix of situations, incongruent and facile, of human weakness and determination, of affluence and poverty, splendour and squalor, commitment and frivolous patience, ideals and hypocrisy" (Kaushik, 88). The Political and social environment thus provides sufficient matter for the telling of stories. The fictional or non-fictional works having politics as a basic theme illustrate the contemporary proceedings from the political arena. These works however are far from what may be termed as propaganda or mere journalistic commentaries. The credit goes to artistic capabilities and vision of the writers who incorporate story-telling with the existing political practices to narrativise a postmodern discourse.

Political dynamics are dictated and controlled by political men for their political targets. The forces

governing the activities are individuals as also the political parties. Political dynamics thus relate to the formulation and employment of strategies by the leaders of political parties as also those of resistance by the common people or small time minority figures. As both Rushdie and Naipaul project, the employment of political strategies depends on class structure, cultural norms and traditions of the society. As such Ideology, identity, traditions, culture, religion, and economy play significant role in the dynamics of politics. The economic, social and political problems concerning the inhabitants of a particular area and their reaction to those issues becomes the focus of Rushdie's and Naipaul's works.

In addition, the use of religion, region, caste, language, family and the coercive role played by capitalistic forces in politics also gets portrayed in the works of Rushdie and Naipaul. Both the writers Rushdie highlight the harmful impact of politics of the rulers. Instead of having a progressive approach, the post-independence leaders get involved in petty issues. Both the writers have highlighted major issues such as unemployment, poverty, corruption, child labour, lawlessness, and unprincipled political practices, etc., in their works. They have also analyzed the issues related to partition of the two countries and its consequences, dictatorship versus democracy in Pakistan, despotism by way of declaration of Emergency in India by Mrs. Indira Gandhi, and various conflicts due to region, religion and class, etc.

Rushdie and Naipaul, because of their familiarity of the West and the East, attempt to judge the political systems of both sides. Their double vision, they believe enables them to find flaws in the political system of the country of their origin. They find that the political practice of parties and leaders governing India and Pakistan do not have welfare of the people as their aim. As a result, the problems such as poverty, unemployment, oppression of the weaker sections, child labour, etc. remain unsolved though years have passed since the two countries got liberated from the colonial rule. It is noteworthy that both Rushdie and Naipaul have faced criticism and resentment for depicting their countries of origin as inferior and backward with flaws in the political system. Nevertheless it must be acknowledged that both have contributed richly towards a questioning and rethinking of the image of these nations in the western discourse as well as that 'imagined' by the natives themselves.

As Rushdie and Naipaul demonstrate, political manipulation and exploitation has continued in the postcolonial India. Both writers observe that the Indian leaders follow the legacy of the British. The British termed their rule as a 'civilizing mission' meant for making the Indian society better. The modern day rulers also claim that their politics aims at the welfare of the masses. The colonizers exploited the country economically; but the post-colonial politics of the rulers is no different. The self-centred politicians in the post-independence era have further added to the woes and sufferings of the masses. The tall election promises of eradication of poverty, unemployment, corruption, etc. remain mere empty slogans on the pages of the party manifestos. It is manifest that politics affects the community life and fiscal status of the people. In the post-modern world, politics has become the profiteering task of the elite, a complex game, and a tool for self-promotion.

Both Rushdie and Naipaul aim at exposing the self-centred politics of the Indian and Pakistani rulers who use community, religion, and the issues of language and region as their political tools. The writings depict the use of undemocratic and unethical means to grab power. The use of force to silence the oppositional voices is a common practice. The leaders spend their time and energy on trivial issues. The parties and the leaders ignore the real issues concerned with the nation and the people. As compared to the progressive approach of the rulers of the western countries, the rulers of the third world countries are yet to come out of the shackles of petty politics which dampens the progress of the countries. Rushdie and Naipaul thus have brought centre stage the operative politics before and after the independence of the nation.

Rushdie, perhaps the most influential as well as controversial writer of contemporary times, writes out of his personal experiences of life in three nations, i.e. India, England and Pakistan. He considers himself as a displaced citizen, a recluse to all the three countries, yet, this enables him to evaluate the

political and social systems of these countries. Often accused of being Eurocentric, an 'informer' of the West, Rushdie nevertheless has been celebrated for writing immensely provocative works about contemporary history mixed with fantasy and fiction.

Rushdie's fictional works are centred on the themes of politics and political practices, corruption, injustices, despotism, fundamentalism, terrorism, oppression, fragmentation, regionalism, emigration/migration, nationalism, multiculturalism, etc. The use of magic realism makes his work outstanding. Masterfully blending in his narrative, the fantastic characters and events with the historical ones, Rushdie successfully portrays the intricacies of politics. He uses the technique of parody in his narrative of the dynamics of politics. Rushdie's drawing of parallels of history with the fictional accounts makes for a grippingly unique narrative. The fictional characters are linked with the actual political and social figures of both the colonial as well as the postcolonial times. Rushdie's satirical portrayal of the leading political figures arouses interest among readers both from the East and the West. The art of story-telling displays Rushdie's command over the genre, craft, creativity and originality. Rushdie's use of language and parables makes him a much read author.

Rushdie's both works *Midnight's Children* and *Shame* though seemingly a satire on Pakistan and India, point out the ugliness lurking beneath the prevalent self-centred politics. Rushdie in his texts, unveils the strategies, tools, violence, manipulative practices, corruption, moves and counter-moves and political vendetta to remain powerful, etc. For the readers already familiar with the land and the prevalent political discourse, the act of reading becomes a double activity, involving a reading of the written word as well as its evaluation on the basis of knowledge already available with oneself from multiple resources. For readers not versed with the details however, the works are sufficiently enticing and educational. The focus on the traumatic experience of partition and the controversial declaration of emergency leads to narrating of parallel history, bringing into discourse what official history ignores or silences. It may be concluded that Rushdie with his powerful works forces a discussion on political happenings affecting national as well as personal histories in the contemporary lives.

Rushdie considers the partition of the country as disastrous for the masses of both India and Pakistan. Saleem narrates the events before the partition of India through Amina Sinai's nightmare in which she saw bloodshed in certain areas of Punjab. Saleem shows how Vanita who had "unproductive labour for eight hours" and then the "first pangs hit her just as, hundreds of miles away M.A Jinnah announced the midnight birth of a Muslim nation . . ." (111 *Midnight's Children*,) Rushdie portrays how the communal riots badly hit the masses especially in the bordering state of Punjab.

Rushdie successfully makes visible the gap existing between theory and practice as he portrays political rulers functioning as per personal ambition instead of thinking in terms of welfare of the common masses. They are always on the look out to derive ways and means to remain in power. The note of disenchantment and drabness in Rushdie's novels depicts the degeneration of politics in modern India. He rightly points out in his narratives that the political practices, strategies and policies of post-independence leaders are in no way different from those of the colonizers. The colonial politics aimed at maintaining political hegemony over Indian masses. The politics of the leaders of post-independence India aim to create divisions among the different sections/communities. Rushdie's works reflect the conflict between the religious communities. The politicians pretend to be secular but they are always using the communal card in their actual politics. They aim to win over the majority community as that would be indispensable to sustain power. Rushdie also demonstrates how the political leaders and parties make a mockery of democracy. He describes how Iskander uses force to win elections. Even after the win he is not satisfied as he wanted the opponents squashed "like cockroaches under his boot" (193, *Shame*). The politics of manipulative practices has become the order of the day. The use of money and muscle power makes a mockery of democracy. While there is no uniform civil law, the administrative agencies such as police or judiciary, etc. sometimes operate under arbitrary politics. Rushdie also highlights how gender prevalent in

politics as per social norms is patriarchal. Rushdie shows that in the game of politics, there is no place for individualism, principles and moral values. The allegiances of the men yearning for political supremacy are only transitory. Rushdie's texts emerge as a documentation of the present-day political scenario of India and Pakistan.

Like Rushdie, Naipaul also writes works which explore the dynamics of politics. Unlike Rushdie who mixes the fictional with the historical, Naipaul writes about political and social events as seen through the eyes of multiple narrators/witnesses. Naipaul also writes about the land of his forefathers, i.e. India to portray the predicament of the people in a nation on the threshold of a new history. Being an outsider, he often is impatient about and intolerant of the religious, regional, caste-based and linguistic divisions present in the Indian society. Naipaul's works portray the implications of the established dynamics of politics that have 'wounded' the nation. He has highlighted the political issues and problems of Indian democracy. But he also highlights the fact that real problem lies elsewhere:

The crisis of India is not only political or economic. The larger crisis is of wounded civilization that has at last become aware of its inadequacies and is without the intellectual means to move ahead. (18, *India: A Wounded Civilization*)

Visiting India, all he can focus initially is on poverty, conflicts, and clashes due to religion, caste, region and corruption. The disintegration of Indian society according to Naipaul is due to the turmoil and disturbances caused due to ethnicity, language and regional differences which has become a great hurdle in homogenizing the Indians. Indian political, social and economic crisis can be attributed to the above mentioned differences. It may be argued that interactions with a few persons or sections of society as done by Naipaul, cannot be considered as representative of the Indian society or culture. Naipaul's condemnation of his own cultural ancestry displays lack of emotional bond yet the fact that he chooses to write about India indicates his attachment. His earlier travelogues portray a gloomy picture of India, however his mood changes while writing *India: A Million Mutinies Now*.

Naipaul's overall attitude however is that of looking down at India as an inferior country. He finds that the divisive politics of Indian leaders has led to the creation of boundaries among people belonging to different communities/castes, regions and speaking different languages. Naipaul is not very hopeful of Indians being able to forge unity as a nation. Naipaul describes how the religious and political conflicts leads to violence. Naipaul gets the knowledge from Anwar who describes about the clashes between Muslim and Hindu communities:

...clashes between children which turn into blood feuds with adults, and I feel helpless to do anything about it. Fights take place between neighbours all the time. When they are Hindus and Muslims - Hindus are in a minority here - it turns into a communal riot. It gets very bad during cricket matches. (32, *India: A Million Mutinies Now*)

It's true that India has suffered a lot due to the internal conflicts. Instead of working for the Nation's development Indians indulge in infightings on the name of religion and community. Naipaul's adverse judgments on India and her public have led to his facing sharp criticism from critics who feel that a visitor like Naipaul cannot be said to possess an Indian sensibility. As such he is perceived to be portraying a dogmatic view of Indian politics and society. Due to his double identity, Naipaul has double ideology leading to cultural and ideological conflicts. It may be argued that Naipaul's portrayal of India is based on his interviews/interactions with a few individuals and groups. It is difficult to pass judgment on the basis of opinions formed from a select group of people. Naipaul's condemnation of cultural ancestry makes it clear that he is not emotionally tied to the land of ancestors. His narratives depict a Eurocentric viewpoint about India. Naipaul as a diasporic writer is seen as a man showing his 'superiority' by portraying the negativity in the Indian political and social system. Naipaul however is attached to the land of his forefathers as he also points towards the negative influence of colonial domination on Indian culture. Naipaul thus presents a view which may be taken as that of an outsider. His sensitive understanding of multiple issues regarding

India could not have been possible without his having the ability to be one with the people. He has his gaze at India even if mostly it is judgmental often without sympathy but insightful and eventually optimistic. Naipaul in the final analysis may be writing for the west only even though at the same time he expects the reader to possess a familiarity with the subject.

Naipaul's disillusionment with India is quite evident from his writings. He may be seen as a man who is not emotionally tied to India. But Naipaul's judgment about India cannot be ruled out simply on the basis of his being an outsider. Having experience of two nations and two cultures, Naipaul is in a position to judge the Indian society, its political and social problems and the areas in which the nation needs to work upon for further progress. He comes out with startling truths about Indian society and politics of the rulers. Naipaul's writing in English about India is a political act. Writing in the language of the other, he may be seen as serving the interests of the former colonizer or else indulging in a financially viable activity. Moreover his self-assumed role of an evaluator of the prevalent dynamics of politics, though full of insight, nevertheless reflects an underlying political overtone also.

Both Rushdie and Naipaul point out towards the menace of corruption that has posed the biggest threat in India. The leaders before independence considered politics as a noble activity. They were simple and straightforward and were ready to sacrifice for the cause of the nation. The leaders of independence era are no more considered honest. They are seen as shrewd tacticians indulging in all sorts of corrupt practices. They retort to manipulative practices to remain in power while the masses serve as their tools. The Indian politics according to Naipaul and Rushdie is no longer based on principles and issues as it has become a personality driven game. Economic problems of the people lead to the problem of unemployment. Naxalite and militant movements are resultant of the unrest among the unemployed youth. The writers also make an analysis of the contentious issues concerned with the minority communities.

Rushdie and Naipaul thus have created a multi-dimensional, complex body of work that explores the dynamics of politics in the contemporary times. They deploy different styles to their writings; however both have been successful in pointing towards India as a rich source of subject material suitable for art. By assuming subject position for themselves, they have thus been able to turn the tables on the colonizer. No doubt their explorations reveal multiple gaps, faults and problems prevalent in the society, yet the treatment also indicates a maturity of perception as they are quite at home taking an unsparing look at themselves. There is a fair analysis of the deficiencies and shortcomings which by itself acknowledges scope for improvement. Ultimately pointing towards the dangers in the way politics is practiced, is also to assert an abiding faith in democracy. Though writing as outsiders, at the same time, Rushdie and Naipaul may be seen as writing from within the narrative of the nation, questioning, parodying and revising the prevalent dynamics of politics, thus richly contributing to the contemporary literary discourse.

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