



Cultural Hybridity – Salman Rushdie’s Haroun and The Sea of Stories

Dr.M.Nageswara Rao
Lecturer In English Sri Y.N.College (A) Narsapur – 534 275,
West Godavari District., A.P., India.

Abstract: There is possibility for a new and improved world, one free of cultural isolation and instead full of interaction and integration, and fruitful for a relationship between the two lands of Kahani. It is Haroun’s ability to step outside of the center of the problem, to see the big picture that ultimately enables him to destroy, once and for all, one of the sources of Kahani’s problems. Haroun uses Wishwater to stop the P2C2E that keeps the moon orbiting in a way that restricts the sunlight to Gup and darkness to Chup.

Key words: cultural isolation, interaction and integration, segregation

Narration

In the cross-culturalisation of Indian society they have the “Liberal use of Indian world, creating local colour” (Naik, 106). Haroun’s hybridity, and the consequential objectivity that hybridity gives him, sets into motion the transition of Kahani as a world of segregation to a world of cultural pluralism. But it isn’t Haroun alone that gets this transition going. Other outsiders or hybrids also aid this change. For example, it is Rashid who serves as translator between Mudra and the Guppees. Upon first meeting Mudra, the Guppee army is wary of him, believing that he wishes them harm. They believe that he is advancing towards them saying “murder, murder.” It is Rashid who can see past the surface of what the Guppees believe is happening, past the binaries and the preconceived notions of Chupwalas and see what is actually happening: “‘It’s the hand movements,’ Rashid answered... ‘He has been using the Language of Gesture. As for what he said it wasn’t “murder,” but Mudra. That’s his name. He’s been trying to introduce himself!’” (115). Mudra also aids the transition. He

is certainly not a hybrid but an outsider in his own community. Rashid informs the Guppees that “Mudra is no longer an ally of the Cultmaster’s [Kattam-Shud]. He has become disgusted with the growing cruelty and fanaticism of the Cult of the tongueless... and has broken off relations with Kattam-Shud” (116). Mudra becomes the first friendly contact with the Guppees, working with them to eliminate a common enemy. It is with this exchange that both groups, at the very least the Guppees, see that communication and interaction can actually be the answer instead of segregation and binarism. This exchange is obviously profitable, for working together, Mudra and the Guppees devise a tactical plan to destroy Kattam-Shud. This successful encounter is symbolic of various endeavours that Rushdie believes will become possible when different peoples speak to, and seek to understand, each other. And let us not forget who it was that made it possible: a hybrid, Rashid. Without him, Prince Bolo, leading the army, may have tried to fight him or set his army upon him because Bolo knew that Chupwalas were evil, and



therefore he knew that Mudra was trying to kill them. It took a hybrid's objectivity, the hybrid's ability to think in multiple perspectives, to show the Prince and several Guppees a new truth.

Blabbermouth, the unusual page of the Chatterbox, also helps with the transition from segregation to integration. Rushdie wastes no time in marking her as an outsider in her community. She is a girl breaking the rules of Gup in order to do a boy's work as a page. Additionally, Blabbermouth, an outsider, is very interested in and finds beautiful Mudra: a Chup!: " – By the way,' she added, blushing slightly, 'isn't he something? Isn't he wicked, awesome, sharp? – Mudra I mean" (120). She can look past her people's indoctrination with the idea that all Chupwalas are evil and judge for herself what she finds in her first encounter with a man of the Chup, and she finds that she likes him, and wants to stay by him. It is Blabbermouth that Mudra find perfectly fit to serve as an Ambassador for the new Kattam-Shud-free Chup. He takes her into his employ to learn the language and the customs and serve as a communicator between the two lands in order to expand upon the newly amalgamated world. Clearly, even without Haroun, the hybrid or outsider or non-purists in this story play important roles in bringing and end to the segregation of the Guppees and Chupwalas. Each of them, when they have stepped outside of their own community, or because they were never a true part of any community, are able to see past cultural stigmas and instead see things as they really are.

There is possibility for a new and improved world, one free of cultural isolation and instead full of interaction

and integration, and fruitful for a relationship between the two lands of Kahani. It is Haroun's ability to step outside of the center of the problem, to see the big picture, that ultimately enables him to destroy, once and for all, one of the sources of Kahani's problems. Haroun uses Wishwater to stop the P2C2E that keeps the moon orbiting in a way that restricts the sunlight to Gup and darkness to Chup. This wish, has astronomical effects: Haroun's fairy tale wish has a "sci-fi" effect: as the Moon starts to rotate, sunlight destroys the shadow world, undoes Ayatollah "black magic" (160), and breaks "the ropes...woven out of shadows" (161). when "The coastline of the land of Chup" is "lit up by the evening sun for the first time (164). Haroun, literally, breaks down the greatest barrier between Gup and Chup and, in doing so, unifies the entire moon in an even distribution of sunlight and shadow. Haroun blurred the lines between the two lands; he made the boundaries between them more fluid and permeable. Haroun could have made a great many wishes. He could have wished that Kattam-Shud gives up, and that the Chupwalas remain forever and quietly on Chup, never to bother the Guppees or the Sea of Stories again. He could have wished for the ocean to be free of pollution forever. He could have wished for the Guppees to win the battle on Kattam-Shud's castle. He could have wished for an endless supply of unpolluted stories for his father, and for a quick getaway from Kahani as the battle waged. But he didn't.

Haroun understood that the source of the problem between Gup and Chup was the division itself, and Kattam-Shud. Gup and Chup, because of their divisions, have simply grown into two very different



cultures. Before, the light barrier prevented any sort of cultural exchange. Each world was equally "real," but each valued something different. Also, such an implication implies that there was a triumph of Gup over Chup, or as if the Chupwalas in total were destroyed instead of a few power-hungry evildoers. Haroun's actions and the subsequent reorbiting of the moon should not be read as a triumph over any one side. Gup, the light or democratic or speech side, does not "win" anything since it was their super technology that was destroyed. After all, it was their technology was keeping the problem alive in the first place. According to Mudra, Chup was under the rule of a tyrant at the time of the poisoning of the Sea of Stories and the kidnapping of the Princess, a tyrant with whom the people of Chup were growing increasingly frustrated. Therefore, there can be no winning or losing for Chup and Gup in a war against each other person, only against Kattam-Shud. Rather, both sides won and lost something: what both sides lost was a segregated and uniform culture, and, in doing so, won the benefits of plurality. In the end, it was never that one side is evil and the other is not. It's that neither side really understands the other, and this misunderstanding and inability to gain further understanding is the problem.

Haroun and the other hybrids serve as key players in the paving of a path toward communication and understanding because they, having stepped outside of their own communities or because they have always been between one, have had to learn to function with multiple perspectives of the world and its experiences. Also in *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*, Rushdie seems to

indicate that a transition from cultural segregation and purism to integration and pluralism is powerful and inevitable: If Haroun had been in Gup City at that moment, he might have enjoyed witnessing the consternation of the Eggheads in P2C2E House. The immense super-computers and gigantic gyroscopes that had controlled the behaviour of the Moon... had simply gone crazy, and finally blown themselves apart. 'Whatever is doing this,' the Eggheads reported to the Walrus in consternation, 'possesses a force beyond our power to imagine, let alone control' (159).

Rushdie is giving his readers a message. A transition in the world is coming, integration will take place, and all boundaries we have set between us must and will break. This is a change "beyond our power to imagine, let alone control." As more and more people in this world fall between boundaries and cultures, and we must say that there will be more for that is the only option for a world growing increasingly more connected via technologies and international business enterprises, the boundaries themselves may become obsolete entirely, or at the very least, will become more fluid. Our very own "super computers" and "gyroscopes" that draw lines, that create concepts of "us" and "them" will eventually go berserk and blow themselves apart. All of the world will eventually be equally basked in sunlight and in darkness. According to Rushdie, the breaking of boundaries will lead us to a nation that doesn't define itself by those boundaries, but instead seeks to incorporate and interweave different strands of culture to create a nation that is richer for its diversity. It is no coincidence that hybrids and outsiders instigate the transition of Kahani from a



place of segregation to a place of fruitful interaction. Rushdie was deliberate in this choice. Clearly, he sees hybrids and outsiders as the leaders in creating the ideal world he envisioned in *The Moor's Last Sigh*. They are able to see outside and beyond cultural norms, values, and practices, and are more easily able to understand issues objectively and to make connections than those who are culturally singular. Therefore, hybrid migrants or other outsiders must be the ones to lead the world to transition for that very reason. There is no one else who can. In order to help the world make the first steps toward cultural pluralism, one must, according to Rushdie, make the choice to step outside, or to think outside, (or must already be outside) of their cultural predispositions, to really see things from another's point of view, to deliberately become an outsider in order to gain the ability to make these connections.

Haroun's description of the Sea of Stories is rich with implications that everything is better, healthier and alive when diverse individuals are allowed to incorporate among themselves freely. The Sea of Stories is beautiful because of the intermingling colours. Better, yet, each story remains separate but permeable. Stories "weave in and out" of each other and, in doing so, create new stories from them. The story sea becomes richer and richer with narratives as these boundaries are permeated. In other words, "The story sea... represents the idea of a nation that is redefined in each moment of its existence and is able to incorporate new strands into the national narrative as they become part of the ongoing performance of national life" (Teverson, 461). Teverson also makes the connection between Rushdie's Sea of

Stories and cultural boundaries and purism. "...the borders and boundaries we have erected around the stories of different peoples and nations are permeable.... It is in this respect that the story sea as an image of Rushdie's hybrid sources comes to reflect one of the dominant arguments presented in the plot of *Haroun* - that the establishment of strict and impermeable boundaries between different cultures gives a false impression of the 'purity' of each culture and prevents cultural groups from discovering that their respective social narratives provide as much of a basis for dialogue and communication as they do for segregation and separation" (458). In this way, the Sea of Stories reinforces Rushdie's ideas. Rushdie is trying to show us how beautiful a world such as one that functions like the story sea, like Aurora's art and how much more improved such a world is when boundaries are permeable, and different factions intermingle. Rushdie seems to ask us to think of the possibilities, think of what we, as humans different but equal, might accomplish if only we learned to talk to each other, and to not fear "otherness." Thus Rushdie truly presents true culture in his novella *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*. He aptly placed cultural relevance in the novel.

References :

Brah, Avtah. "Thinking Through the Concept of Diaspora". The Post-colonial Studies Reader. edited by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, London and New York: Routledge. 2013, PP 443-446.



Hall, Stuart. "Cultural Identity and Diaspora". The Post-Colonial Studies Reader, edited by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, Helen Tiffin, London and New York: Routledge, 2013, PP 435-438.

---. "Cultural Identity and Diaspora" Identity: Community, Culture, Difference, Ed.J. Rutherford, London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990.

Rushdie, Salman. "Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism" London: Vintage, 1981-1991.

---. "Haroun and the Sea of Stories". London Granta, 1990; New Delhi: Penguin Books, 1990.