Chapter One

Introduction

1.1 Background

As it is a commonplace knowledge to any one interested in Indian history, the country called India has been known for centuries as a peaceful and tolerant land. People following different religious beliefs and cultural practices have been accommodated there for many centuries. It was only in the time around and after the Indian independence that the country witnessed a series of the most atrocious religious and communal violence as the Hindus and the Muslims became inimical to each other. The series of communal killing has continued down to the present times. Many writers have produced a good deal of literature in the theme of the religious and communal problem in the country in the twentieth century. In this context, one can claim that Salman Rushdie's fifth novel *The Moor's Last Sigh* (1995) becomes a most suitable example since it is also based with the theme of communal riots in India after its independence.

The misunderstandings between the Hindu-Sikhs on the one hand and the Muslims on the other have taken a large toll amounting to a million in the time of the partition of India into India and Pakistan. There are several indices towards and comments on the political leaders and events of India, including Jawaharalal Nehru, Indira Gandhi, her emergency rule, and her assassination. The Hindu leader Raman Fielding in the novel resembles a real life Hindu nationalist leader Bal Thackarey. Abraham Zogoiby is the representation of the corrupt businessmen with terrorist forces..

The novel *The Moor's Last Sigh* recounts the loss of free and multicultural environment of India, particularly of Bombay, in the wake of the events such as the

murder of the incumbent Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, and the communal strife over the debate of dismantling the mosques in Ayodhya to rebuild the reportedly destroyed Ram Temple. Likewise, the novel is also about the theme of exile, and the experience of migrants as Rushdie, the writer himself, has been an example. The novel treats the problem of fundamentalism giving rise to religious strife. For people like Moraes Zogoiby who are not affiliated to any particular religious sect, India has become an increasingly difficult country to exist in. By establishing this proposition, *The Moor's Last Sigh* presents a severe critique of the forces of jingoism, communal nationalism, fundamentalism, and of the failure of the common populace to set their country aright by choosing the right people at the helm of the nation.

With the publication of *The Moor's Last Sigh*, Rushdie once again has proved his obsession with his life story and the history of India though he talked about quitting writing on Indian themes and subjects in his third novel *Shame*. His novel *Satanic Verses* earned for him the death sentence of the fatwa from the Iranian Islamic supreme leader Ayatollah Ruhollaha Khomeini for unnecessarily and dirtily blaspheming and criticizing Islam. Rushdie has not stopped satirizing on the political and religious problems in the countries of his origin. The present novel proves the controversial writer's knack for offending is still as acerbic as it had been in his first novel.

The Moor's Last Sigh is often interpreted as an ambitious allegory of India's history, from the arrival of the first Europeans onwards to the Independence Movement and also up to the very present times and settings. Specially, the novelist's comment on and harsh criticism of the fundamentalist Hindu personalities has given the autobiographical and political aspect a further push and bend, thereby rendering the novel a religiously satiric work of great significance. As a result of the novel's fiery effect on the Indian readers from all sectors of life, the government had to stop the

public from reading the novel. Consequently, as it is a well-known action of a government taking action against a writer, the Customs Office in India banned the novel soon after its arrival there. Rupa & Co., the chief distributor of the novel in India, had deferred the release of the book in Maharashtra's state capital Bombay, home to the Shiv Sena Hindu nationalist party, until after the Ganapati festival in mid-August. The reason being the depiction of the Hindu deity, honoured in the festival, as a "fat-bellied, wiggle-hipped idol"–a description that was sure to inflame fury in the fundamentalist stronghold of Maharashtra (168). It is remarkable to note here that the novel was not to be found being sold bought in many states of India, including Maharashtra, since it inflamed the Hindu extremist readers to burn the novel.

The novel has many more reference to the Hindu gods and goddesses and personalities, as is the enraging and vilifying the caricature of the Bombay politician Raman Fielding, who reminds the readers of Shiv Sena leader Bal Thakeray. He is depicted as a "fierce illogical man"**,** with a taste for violence (246). No wonder, the intended but of the novelistic satire, Bal Thakeray, understood that he was being ridiculed and readily gave out his opinion that the author had no motherland and therefore no business writing such a book which would hurt the sentiment of the nationalists and religiously-minded Hindu people like himself.

Rushdie was once a victim of religious and fundamentalist forces who were intolerant of his daring comment upon religion, particularly the Islamic forces. Rushdie does not claim to be writing a creative and fictional work, he reveals the fact that he is worried by the political upheavals of India and that the nation is going into the grip of religious leaders and corrupt corporate houses. He makes it pretty clear that one of his major concerns is to examine the religious and political climate of the setting or country he writes about. The novel springs from and circles around the pressing topics of

religion, factionalism, fundamentalism, and religious intolerance, which are serious problems for a country, that want to be run democratically and freely in the modern times. Despite being advanced technologically, the modern world is getting parochial owing to its inhabitants' narrow mental boundaries. Religious intolerance and sectarian politics have rendered the world into a hellish space for aspiring and free minds. A Bombayte Muslim by birth, Rushdie has freed himself from the shackles of nationalism and the manacles of parochialism, as he so boisterously writes in the essay "The Location of Brazil". Realizing the importance of having seen and accepted the differences in the world, he goes on so far as to suggest that crossing the frontier or being a migrant should be made a compulsory training for any person who wants to be raised in a tolerant and democratic set up.

The novel *The Moor's Last Sigh* sorrowfully presents the story of how tolerance and co-existence in the post-independent India was destroyed by the forces supported by the communal politicians. Technically speaking, by making Moraes Zogoiby, 'moor' in the title, narrate the story of the destruction of his family, Rushdie hints at his own plight as an individual whose very existence is embattled owing to his critique of the fundamentalist and religiously intolerant elements in the modern world. The chaotic impacts of communalism and factionalism have endangered the life of Rushdie and many democratic and liberal-minded people like him dauntlessly attack the narrow-minded and divisive communal politicians in India.

1.2 Review of Literature

Criticisms and research writings are not lacking on the novels of Rushdie since he has a universal appeal for his supporters and detractors alike. There have been a plethora of criticisms him different and opposing quarters. It is a positive sign that Rushdie writes on issues that matter to people, whether they like his opinion or not.

Therefore, short and pertinent review of what others have said about the novel under study is presented below.

A history of the wealthy Zogoiby family told through the story of Moraes Zoigby, a young man from Bombay descended from Sultan Muhammad XI, the last Muslim ruler of Andalucia, the novel *The Moor's Last Sigh* is a long chronicle of hatred and passions, intolerance and violence which beset the Indian nation as well as individual lives as that of the Zogoiby family. Rushdie, who has lived a secluded life for more than a decade on the wake of the murderous fatwa decree following the publication of his fourth novel *Satanic Verses*, knows the danger of religious fundamentalism and fanaticism in the modern world. With technology and weapons of murder, the fanatics have become more dangerous than they were before. Rushdie knows the danger of criticizing the fundamentalist forces but he takes interest in them. Therefore, it should come as no surprise that he gives a sometimes blasphemous chronicle of modern India. He has exposed the political and religious reality of the country, which is controlled by corrupt tycoons and intolerant communalists. This is a sorry state of affair as once a beautiful country famed for its naturalness is now being condemned for its unnatural genocide as it was seen during the partition hullabaloo.

It is interesting to note that Rushdie never remained uncriticized and unnoticed even from the very beginning of his literary career. He has always been at the centre of criticism, both for and against him. The credit for this literary and media hype goes to the outspokenness and boldness of his exposing writing. He writes freely on so sensitive topics as the immorality of the religious prophets, the involvement of sexual acts in the religious ceremonies, and the disparaging of the highly revered gods and goddesses. His novels bear in them stingy comments on religious fundamentalism and parochial nationalism. The novel *The Moor's Last Sigh* has been no exception to this

fate. Many critics have underlined this aspect of Rushdie's writings. There has been a plethora of comment, annotations and criticisms on his writings, not the least on the novel. Therefore, some of the related writings along with the scholars and critics are quoted here below to clarify how much importance his novel has garnered in the eyes of the critics and the readers alike.

The critic named Norman Rush searches and studies the similarities between the novelist and his novelistic character named Moor or Moraes who comes from a Portuguese merchant family. Rushj writes extensively on this comparison thus:

> The hapless narrator, Moraes Zogoiby, born, like Mr. Rushdie, in Bombay(but in 1957, 10 years later), has composed these pages during exile and imprisonment in a replica of the Alhambra built and run by a madman (a former protégé of the family) in rural Andalusia. Moraes, nicknamed the Moor, is the last living member of the da Gama-Zogoiby line. Throughout, echoes of Mr. Rushdie's own predicament are hard not to detect. " Here I stand; couldn't have done it differently" is one of the Moor's last thoughts as he roams the Andalusian countryside, following his doomed escape from captivity, annoyed that there are no church doors handy for nailing his creed to. (2)

So, according to Rush, the novel hides a bitter cautionary story within bright, carnivalesque wrappings and humors spread throughout the novel. But the real point of the novel is a sad and threatening revelation that India today suffers dangerously from corruption in terms of administration, intolerance and attitude. The novel forecasts the embattled even endangered existence of the minority such as artists, the Christians, and intellectuals in a land of militant religion that vies with the secular forces to get recognition as a way of life, both worldly and spiritual. The ultimate displacement of

the Christian da Gama-Zogoiby clan is a warning the novel has voiced to those who have ears to hear and capacity to understand. Let each and all heed the warning otherwise, if something substantial to check the communal cancerous disease is not done instantly and wisely, India is going to be a dangerous place to survive.

Ajay Singh, on the other hand, attempts an interesting allegorical reading of the novel and finds similarities between Moraes Zogoiby and the Indian nation. In his words:

> […] the book is a compelling, entertaining read, pregnant with symbols. Moraes is born prematurely with a deformed right: a metaphor of the decaying Congress party, whose election icon is an open palm. He is a large child and ages twice as fast as normal. The message isn't hard to discern: India's hurried birth is leading to its premature destruction, brought on by communal violence. Rushdie's view of India is plainly bleak. "The country that came into being in 1947 is being transformed into something else," he told *India Today*. The novelist will be watching that outcome from a distance. He remains condemned to chronicle the next phase in the ever-changing fortunes of India—which he hasn't visited since the fatwa was imposed – from the faraway perspective of Britain. (1)

Singh notes the way Rushdie makes use of allegory rather than of plot for his novel. Politics, the turbulent politics of India feeds his imagination. As the Moor is handicapped and overmuch grown, so India also is crippled and became free perhaps rather early, before the Indian people became able to choose the right political path for their country.

J. M. Coetzee, himself an African novelist and famous critic as well, emphasizes the technique of writing over or palimpsesting in the novel which is decidedly autobiographical. He writes:

> Rushdie pursues palimpsesting with considerable vigor in *The Moor's Last Sigh,* as a novelistic, historiographical and biographical device. Thus Granada, Boadbil's lost capital, is also Bombay, "inexhaustible Bombay of excess," the sighed-for home of Moraes as well as of the author over whose person he is written. Both are cities from which a regenerative cross-fertilization of cultures might have taken place but for the ethnic and religious intolerance. (3)

Coteze here stresses the fact that the novel is autobiographical because the central character named Moraes undergoes the same fate of exile and threat from the communal elements as Rushdie himself did in real life.

Thus, as it is studied in the criticisms quoted above, the major themes to be found in the novel are the threats of communalism and an allegorical representation of India. Clearly, Rushdie's celebration of the city of Bombay and a lament for its becoming like a small village, its turning into an undeveloped and backward, superstitious place by the brutal activities of the sectarian forces. This suggestion is observable even from surfacial reading of the novel. This thesis is concerned with explicating how Rushdie's keen criticism of intolerance and communalism gets expressed in the novel.

The primary tool for my thesis is to study the novel in light of the details which strike out as being politically significant ones and which therefore project the personal view of the novelist under study. For this purpose, the thesis uses the tool of New Historicism and post-colonialism. Rushdie's essay collection *Imaginary Homelands*

will help the researcher in revealing Rushdie's views about the duty and position of a writer as a political being as well as an artist. This reference text will further reveal the similarities between the creator and his fictional character in the novel under study. A glance into the history and historiography of modern India, that is how India has been described, as a multicultural society will also be undertaken to explain the liberal religious and political but radical personal and individual characteristics of the person and writer called Rushdie. Likewise, a general survey of Rushdie's biography, his literary trend, and involvement in Indian political at least in the role of a commentator will be made in the course of furthering this thesis work because that helps in finding out the relation between an artist or writer and her or his society will be made to have a grasp of the writer in the making. I will carry out the thesis from the perspective of multicultural studies. For this purpose, I have tried to explore the autobiographical elements in the novel which reveal much about the writer as a person who is the product of multicultural world and who celebrates the diversity of the Indian nation.

The Novel has very many references to the realities of India such as political incidents and personalities which make it clear that the novel is political work and that Rushdie takes up the role of a political analyst of India. He is thus a politically engaged writer who comments upon the degrading political practices in India, and also wishes for a developed and tolerant world where people would be able to solve religious and cultural differences in a peaceful manner. Thus, by dealing with the history of India, the novel becomes a criticism, a wishful writing and disaster about the future of the world at large.

Chapter Two

New Historicism

2.1 Introduction

As a method of reading and explicating literary texts, New Historicism arose in the United States vehemently refuting the then current text-based or formalistic criticism. It was argued that a new historical approach was needed which would move beyond the narrowly formalistic approach to literature, which excluded political and social circumstances or context. Without taking into account the context of its genesis, the theorists of the new movement argued, 'no work can profitably be read and understood. Actually, New Historicism has been a response not to literature proper but to literary studies; to the question of the materiality of literature (qtd. in Myers 1).

New Historicism is a theory applied to literature that suggests literature must be studied and interpreted within the context of both the history of the author and the history of the critic. The theory arose in the 1980s, and with Stephen Greenblatt as its main proponent, became quite popular in the 1990s. Unlike previous historical criticism, which limited itself to simply demonstrating how a work was reflective of its time, New Historicism evaluates how the work is influenced by the time in which it was produced. It also examines the social sphere in which the author moved the psychological background of the author, the books and theories that may have influenced the author, and any other factors which influenced the work of art.

In addition, New Historicism acknowledges that any criticism of a work is necessarily tinged with the critic's beliefs, social structure, and so on. Most New Historicists may begin a critical reading of a novel by explaining themselves, their backgrounds, and their prejudices. Both the work and the reader are corrupted by

everything that has influenced them. New Historicism thus represents a significant change from previous critical theories like New Criticism, because its main focus is to look at things outside of the work, instead of reading the text as a thing apart from the author.

Those practicing New Historicism draw from other forms of criticism, particularly the writings of Michel Foucault who may be more properly termed a psychological critic. Marxist criticism is also a progenitor of New Historicism.

In regards to the relationship between Marxism and New Historicism, it can be said that the New Historicist often looks for ways in which populations are marginalized through a literary work. The other sources of the movement will be equally familiar to observers of the academic scene. The doctrine of historicity is a Heideggerian motif that came to the movement via the writings of German hermeneutical philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer. The New Historicist conception of ideology is not that of Marx, but rather that of the French structuralist Marxist Louis Althusser— though, in plain fact, the New Historicists seem more directly influenced by expositors of Marxist doctrine like Raymond Williams and Terry Eagleton than by Althusser. Finally, in its general orientation toward scholarship and historical research the New Historicism dances attendance on the figure of the late Michel Foucault. Again, though, the influence of Foucault is a generalized and secondhand one: it permeates the New Historicist conception of history as a succession of episteme or structures of thought that shape everyone and everything within a culture (qtd in Myers 3). But this is no more than to say that Foucault has provided New Historicists with their own episteme. Their works cannot really be said to extend or elaborate upon Foucault's. Nor is it critical of Foucault's concept of the episteme. It merely embraces the concept as a given.

2.2 Trends

Criticisms of this literary theory are mostly levied by those who still practice New Criticism, as well as those who make up the Post-Modernist critics, such as Deconstructionists. The New Critic argues that literature should be read as a self contained work without considering influence. Deconstructionists seem largely annoyed that New Historicists claim to be the only ones who admit that all texts, including their own interpretations, are biased.

The "New Historicism," as by general agreement the movement has come to be called, is unified by its disdain for literary formalism. Specifically, leaders of the movement describe themselves as unhappy with the exclusion of social and political circumstances (commonly known as the "context") from the interpretation of literary works; they are impatient with the settled view that a poem is a self-contained object, a verbal icon, a logical core surrounded by a texture of irrelevance. In this they are setting their jaws against the New Criticism, albeit rather late in the day. But their hostility can never (to use one of their own favored terms) be unmediated. The French *nouvelle critique* and German philosophical hermeneutics have intervened, at least in the history of fashions within the university; and the new movement has arisen at least as much in response to these later developments as to a critical establishment which has made a formalistic view of literary works its official doctrine. Thus the New Historicism in literary study has emerged not so much in the spirit of counter-insurgency as after the manner of a corporate reorganization. It has been a response not to literature but to literary studies. It has been called forth not by the subject matter under study—not by actual poems, novels, plays—but by the institutional situation in which young scholars now finds themselves.

The situation in English as the century entered its final two decades was one that

placed a greater premium on method than ideas. In addition, there was a rising sense that literary study had reached something of an impasse. On one side were the students of the New Critics, still doing readings of long-accepted texts; on the other, the deconstructionists, showing how texts undo themselves. Both seemed remote from the true interests of the new professoriate, which had cut its teeth on the political slogans of the sixties. As Jean E. Howard frankly says in a defense of the new movement, by the early eighties professors had grown weary of teaching literary texts as "ethereal entities" floating above the strife of history (qtd. in Myers 31). For a spell, perhaps, feminism seemed close to solving the dilemma; it appeared to hold out the hope of transforming literary criticism into an agent for social change. But gradually many within the discipline began to awaken to the fact that feminism had no distinctive *method* of its own; the feminist critic knew what she wanted to say about a text, but she had to adopt other interpretive "strategies," as the saying went, to make her themes appear. This began more and more to be the case. Younger critics were having to resort to a tandem operation, using deconstruction or some other variant of poststructuralist method to clear the ground on which an assortment of radical political notions were carted in to raise a new interpretation. But such a procedure left critics anxious lest their interpretations fail to go beyond the already familiar readings of the text. It was in this situation that the New Historicism emerged. It appeared to offer a distinctive approach, a rigorous method, along with the opportunity to salvage one’s political commitments. Indeed, at times the New Historicism seemed almost designed to methodize the political interpretation of literature.

Within the ranks of the New Historicism, literature is considered to be one of the social forces that contribute to the making of individuals; it acts as a form of social control. Although most New Historicists are scrupulous to distinguish themselves from

Marxist critics, the fact remains that the central task of the New Historicism is the same as that of Marxist criticism: first to call into question the traditional view of literature as an autonomous realm of discourse with its own problems, forms, principles, activities, and then to dissolve the literary text into the social and political context from which it issued. In fact, the New Historicism tries explicitly to solve the theoretical difficulty in Marxist criticism of relating the cultural superstructure to the material base. Its claim to newness might be put in terms of its claim to having solved that problem.

2.3 Presumptions

What are the principles—or what Greenblatt calls the "enabling presumptions"—behind the New Historicist method? The movement establishes itself upon four main contentions.

The first is that literature is historical, which means (in this exhibition) that a literary work is not primarily the record of one mind's attempt to solve certain formal problems and the need to find something to say; it is a social and cultural construct shaped by more than one consciousness. The proper way to understand it, therefore, is through the culture and society that produced it. Secondly, literature, then, is not a distinct category of human activity. It must be assimilated to history, which means a particular vision of history. Thirdly, like works of literature, man himself is a social construct, the sloppy composition of social and political forces—there is no such thing as a human nature that transcends history. Renaissance man belongs inescapably and irretrievably to the Renaissance. There is no continuity between him and us; history is a series of "ruptures" between ages and men. Lastly, as a consequence, the historian/ critic is trapped in his own "historicity." No one can rise above his own social formations, his own ideological upbringing, in order to understand the past on its terms. A modern reader can never experience a text as its contemporaries experienced it.

Given this fact, the best a modern historicist approach to literature can hope to accomplish, according to Catherine Belsey, is to use the text as a basis for the reconstruction of an ideology. Such an approach stands traditional historical scholarship on its head. The first principle of traditional scholarship it's generally agreed-upon point of departure—was that the recovery of the original meaning of a literary text is the whole aim of critical interpretation. But the New Historicism premises that recovery of meaning is impossible, to attempt it naive. What practitioners of the new method are concerned with, by contrast, is the recovery of the original ideology which gave birth to the text, and which the text in turn helped to disseminate throughout a culture. This dimension of critical interpretation has been neglected by traditional scholars not merely because the required concept, the "enabling presumption" of ideology, was unavailable to them until recently; in the New Historicist view, it had never been widely attempted because literary texts themselves suppress the means by which they construct ideology. A traditional formalistic approach, treating the text as self-contained, can never locate these ideological operations, also known as "representations." Only a historicist approach, treating the text as one element in the ideology of an age, can hope to lay them bare. (qtd in Myers 32)

Although the movement represents itself, then, as being more faithful to the true, hitherto-neglected nature of literature, in reality its key assumptions are derived from the institutional milieu in which it arose. Its concepts and categories are simply those which, over the last few years, have conditioned a large part of the literary thought within the university. Thus, the New Historicism is critical of the ‘‘enabling presumptions" of its more distant, but not of its more immediate, predecessors. For instance, the movement follows poststructuralism in its assurance that literary works

mean any number of things to any number of readers (the doctrine of the plurality of meaning), freeing New Historicists to find the warrant for their interpretations not in the author's intentions for his work but in the ideology of his age.

Similarly, the New Historicist effort to assimilate the literary text to history is guaranteed by the poststructuralist doctrine of textuality, which states that the text is not aloof from the surrounding context, that there is contiguity, an ebb and flow, between text and whatever might once have been seen as "outside" it. Yet these ideas are obtained secondhand. They are not established by original inquiry or argument. They are simply the precipitate of an academic climate in which a plurality of meanings is recognized as offering the greatest good for the greatest number of literary scholars, and in which the re-assimilation of text to context is the goal of practically everybody.

2.4 Paradigms

Literary works are both what a culture produces as well as what reproduces the ideology. The term "representations" is misleading insofar as it suggests a mimetic theory of literature. Nothing could be further from New Historicist truths. In fact, the New Historicism presumes that artistic fiction does not imitate human action; it mediates it. That is, fiction is defined as the lens through which a certain portrait of the human experience is brought into focus. And as mediation rather than as imitation of social practices, it can thus be said to *shape* rather than to *reflect* an age understands of human experience and potentiality. But the apriorism of ideology in New Historicist thought raises large questions. The principal one is this: How does the critic know that the ideology located in the work of literature under discussion genuinely belongs to the past? How can he be sure that the ideology is not simply his own political sympathy which has been injected into the work and then ‘‘located" there by means of an ingenious selection of the evidence? These questions occur spontaneously to anyone

who reads very widely in New Historicist writing, so much of which expresses a politically currant *ct* sympathy for exploited peoples, powerless women, workers, slaves and peasants. Indeed, it is clear that the New Historicism's categories of history are the standard academic ones. Although the movement is publicly contemptuous of the periodization of academic history, the uses to which New Historicists put the Foucauldian notion of the episteme amount to very little more than the same practice under a new, improved label. A historical age is conceived of as a structure of thought held together by the same discursive practices. But the extent and duration of an *épistéme* is never fixed, and how one can be distinguished from another is never explained, except by the use of such labels as "Renaissance" or "Victorian England." (qtd. in Myers 34). Problems like these are not confronted, because academic categories in which New Historicist thinking occurs act something like ear-stoppers against unwelcome sounds.

What the New Historicism offers to students of literature is the joy of new explanations, new paradigms. It does not designate an unexplored area of scholarly investigation. It does not raise new problems, new questions. If its attempts to "historicize" literary study were merely an inducement to look into new kinds of documents, to ask about the relation of literature to social history in a new way, the movement would perform a service for scholarship. But it does not. The New Historicism cannot be considered a new subspecialty within the discipline of English in the same sense as the older subspecialties of textual criticism or Renaissance studies. It is instead an academic specialty in the same sense that feminism is—a school of interpretation predisposed to find the same themes in every work it reads and to explain them always in the same terms. The specialization, in other words, is not a disciplinary but a bureaucratic one. It seeks to establish a new jurisdiction in a reorganized

university. At such a juncture, the question of method becomes a matter of group loyalty. New Historicists like to picture themselves as challenging "the institution of criticism"— breaking loose from what Jane Tompkins describes as "the extremely narrow confines of literary study as it is now practiced within the academy."(qtd. In Myers 36). In reality, however, the movement is another step toward the reconfinement of literary study. As jobs are created for New Historicists and space in the critical journals is set aside for their essays—as academic decisions are increasingly made on the basis not of scholarly competence but of methodological affiliation— the pressure on younger scholars and graduate students to enlist in the movement becomes enormous: that way employment, advancement, and prestige lie. It seems to worry no one that this might take away from individual scholars the determination of what sort of research to pursue and put it in the hands of hiring committees and editorial boards. Yet such a state of affairs can only end by narrowing the possibilities for fruitful scholarship and abridging the academic freedom of those who would go their own way.

The late seventies and early eighties faced a plethora of interpretations seemingly coming from two diametrically opposing sides. The New Critics, on the one hand, were busy in explicating all texts as self-sufficient, autonomous being. On the other hand, the poststructuralists, especially the deconstructionists, after the fashion of Jacque Derrida, were all set to expose the fundamentally unstable and internally contradictory nature of literary texts. There was an intellectual confusion as to whether anything was comprehensible or more or less definite. At such times New Historicism arose to give a direction to the muddled state of criticism. It was a method of the political interpretation of literature.

New Historicism considers literature as a social force that contributes to the making of individuals. The fact that New Historicists attribute the directive role to

material or economic conditions in the production of literature takes them very near to Marxist critics. Both have the same central assumptions: first to call into question the traditional view of literature as an autonomous realm of discourse with its own forms and principles and then to dissolve the literary text into the social and political context from which it issued. In fact, New Historicism is not 'new'; it follows on the same path already set by Marxism, in that it also relates literature, a product of human consciousness and imagination, with the material condition of the society in which the writer is born and raised. As D. G. Myers, a scholar in this field, writes:

> In New Historicist interpretation, as a consequence, history is not viewed as the cause or the source of a work. Instead, the relationship between history and the work is seen as a dialectic: the literary text is interpreted as both product and producer, end and source, of history. One undeniable side benefit of such a view is that history is no longer conceived, as in some vulgar historical scholarship, as a thing wholly prior, a process which completes itself at the appearance of the work. At the same time, though, it must not be thought that the New Historicism dispenses with the cognitive category of priority. For the New Historicist it is ideology, not history, which is prior. The literary text is said to be a constituent part of a culture’s ideology by virtue of passing it on; but the ideology nevertheless exists’ intact’ intelligible, in a form separate from (and therefore prior to) the work. If it didn’t, the critic could not discern a relationship between work and ideology; and if the ideology were not prior to the work, it wouldn’t be a historical relationship. (182)

However, New Historicism does not view history as the cause or the source of a work, as the excerpt from Myers clarifies. Instead, it views the relationship between history and the work as dialectic one: the literary text is interpreted as product and producer, end and source, of history. Literature is shaped by history and in turn tries to create or guide history too. This reciprocal influence of literature denies both the extremes, the autonomy of literature as well as its purely directive and propagandist role. To some extent, literature is free from outside factors; it is product of the creative faculty of the human mind. But in the final analysis the creative and critical orientation of the writer themselves is conditioned by the materiality of their life. That is so because the writers and their consciousness both are based on a particular socio-political milieu the escape from which is practically impossible for them.

The historiography of Indian nationalism has for a long time been dominated by elitism—colonialist elitism and bourgeois-nationalist elitism… share[ing] the prejudice of that the making of the Indian nation and the development of the consciousness – nationalism that confirmed this process were exclusively or predominantly elite achievements. In the colonialist and neo-colonialist historiographies these achievements are credited to British colonial rulers, administrators, policies, institutions, and culture: in the nationalist and neo-nationalist writings – to Indian elite personalities, institutions, activities and ideas. (Qtd in Spivak 71)

Thus, even after the Indian independence the elitist discourse remains a faithful supporter of the colonial discourse. This is to say that the mainstream historiography fails to take into account the contribution of the commoners in the making of a nation. But writers like Rushdie, unlike the Orwellian detachment ftrom politics, are fervently engaged in fighting back both the colonial and the fundamentalist legacies for a better and open society.

Chapter Three

Religious and Communal Antagonism

3.1 Diversity and Pluralism in India

If we look closely at the root, the root cause of the violence and clashes we are having in modern times, we see that most of them stem from the fact that people are just incapable of accepting the existence and right of people who happen to be born in another country, rather importantly in other culture. The antidote to such conflicts and bloody violence is a radical and genuine reformation in the mentality of people in the way they perceive truth, others, and themselves. Born with innate shortcomings and limitations as we human beings are, we need realize and accept our limits and capacities. Often, as our everyday experiences tell us, we are not infallible judges of the matters concerning the physical world. And still far be it for us to be truly cognizant of the complexities, possibilities and confusions in the realm of beliefs and opinions. We can never positively hope to be omniscient and omnipotent. What is given to us is to accept our limitation, and understand life and world from the limited perspectives we have got, and not to forget the fact of our limited world vision.

Rushdie is too careful to let his readers miss this point. He makes painstaking explanation of this rather philosophical looking but really practical fact. Rushdie occupies a distinct position in Indian English literature. Though born in India, he was outside the country of his birth from early on. He never settled in India for any remarkable span of time. But he knew his home city and country any way. So much so is he interested in things Indian that he cannot help directly referring to political and cultural practices in Pakistan and India. He has always seen and appreciated India as a vast country, which has always been and can go on accommodating people from

diverse culture. A true diasporic community that Bombay has remained, it has sheltered the Jews who long ago came there searching safe heaven from the Roman Empire in the past. The presence of the Jewish people in this land is a historical fact too. As recently as the mid twentieth century, many jaws returned to Israel, their homeland lost for two thousand years, and have been reestablished, as God had promised to them.

At this stage, this thesis turns to the novel under consideration to see from textual facts whether what has been proposed at the beginning stands out as correct or not. Rushdie's political comets and concerns are found in abundance in the novel. This chapter is divided into three subchapters so as to elaborate the interrelated but different aspects of the novel. Here, in what follows below, the thesis deploys the tools discussed and elaborated earlier to interpret and analyze the text in question, and proves that the hypothesis set at the beginning was a tenable one. For this purpose, biographical and autobiographical details as well as the critical commentaries expressed by the writer at several occasions as regards his view and assessment of the country of India, its politics, and the general threat the present world is undergoing owing to the resurgence of the religiously die-hard elements, are brought into focus so as to elucidate how the novel *The Moor's Last Sigh* is a serious work of art that makes ample comment on human nature and destiny in an incomprehensible world in general, and in a religiously assaulted country in particular. Here I have used the critical tools of pluralism and hybridity to elaborate the text. To be specific, Rushdie is uncompromisingly critical and skeptical of the human folly of taking culturally determined views of the world as the right way of finding truth, holding on to one's culture though that might mean to go on embracing the rotten and stinking parochial values of differing religions and often irreconcilably opposing religions.

It is comforting to know that in a world beset by the problem of people getting more and more intransigent and die-hard concerning the question of collective co-existence with groups and people of differing and different cultural and religious background, Salman Rushdie has dared to point at the folly and parochialism of the modern humanity despite their being educated and exposed to the outside world.

The novel itself speaks about the combination of the Jewry with the natives of India. His story is the story of the fall from grace of a highborn crossbreed. Moraes Zogoiby, called 'Moor', for most of my life the only male heir to the spice trading and big business crores of the da Gama-Zogoiby dynasties of Cochin, has to suffer banishment from his beloved city (qtd in Rushdie-moor 1). A mini-exodus scene is depicted concerning their arrival in India. Abraham Zogoiby tells of his engagement with Aurora. The mother, Flory Zogoiby is not pleased:

> On the one side, the synagogue, Flory and history on the other, Abraham, his rich girl, the universe, the future –all things unclean. Closing her eyes, shutting out abrahamic odour and stammerings, she murmured up the past, using memories to forestall the moment at which she would have to disown her only child, because it was unheard-of for a Cochin Jew to marry outside the community; yes, her memory and behind and beneath it the longer memory of the tribe …the white Jews of India, Sephardim from Palestine, arrived in numbers (ten thousand approx.) in Year 72 of the Christian Era, fleeing from Roman persecution. Settling in Cranganore, they hired themselves out as soldiers to local princes. Once upon a time a battle between Cochin's ruler and his enemy the Zamorin of Calicut, the Lord of the Sea, had to

> be postponed because the Jewish soldiers would not fight on the Sabbath day. (*The Moor's Last Sigh* 70-71)

After recounting the episode in the life of the grand parents of his protagonist, Rushdie immediately expresses his longing for those far away days of harmony and prosperity when all the castes and creed could live together. What a "prosperous community", a flourishing country India had been! And, in the year 179 CE, King Bhaskara Ravi Varman I granted to Joseph Rabban the little kingdom of the village of Anjuvannam near Cranganore. This leads to a really free, cosmopolitan character to this country. The novelist himself is amazed at the relatively liberal and progressive character of this sub-continent, for India has hosted people from a number of religious and political creeds and castes. It is interesting to observe here that India had never before been an exclusive nation:

> Christians, Portuguese and Jews; Chinese tiles promoting godless views; pushy ladies, skirts-not-saris, Spanish shenanigans, Moorish crowns … can this really be India? Bharat-mata, Hindustan-hamara, is this the place? War has just been declared. Nehru and the All-India congress are dreaming that the British must accept their demand fro independence as a precondition for Indian support in the war effort; Jinnah and the Muslim League are refusing to support the demand; Mr Jinnah is busily articulating the history-changing notion that there are two nations in the sub-continent, one Hindu, the other Mussulman. (*The Moor's Last Sigh* 87)

Rushdie is obsessed with India and particularly with Bombay, his birthplace and a great city of diverse people. He cannot help expressing his appreciative remarks here and there in the novel for this wonderful city. He makes it a point to remark, in more

than one occasion and over time in different occasions in different genre of writings, that the Bombay he knew as a young man was a true cosmopolitan city. Actually, for him the idea of India is materialized, more correctly, apotheosized in the character and build of Bombay, the central city of India. Himself a migrant to other countries, he thinks it only right that he takes the liberty of writing on Bombay though there has been a gap between himself and the city of his birth. As he writes in his essay "*Imaginary Homelands*" which also names his critical commentaries volume, "Bombay is city built by foreigners upon reclaimed land. I, who had been away so long that I almost qualified for the title, was gripped by the conviction that I, too, had a city and a history to reclaim"(*Imaginary Homelands* 10). He feels quite at home to be near the memory of the city.

Rushdie writes abundantly about Bombay India not only in his reminiscences and essays, but also in his novels. Bombay, as the novel *The Moor's Last Sigh* too notes more than once, is central both geographically and culturally ever since its existence:

> Bombay was central, had been so from the moment of its creation: the bastard child of a Portuguese-English wedding, and yet the most Indian of Indian cities. In Bombay all Indians met and merged. In Bombay, too, all-India met what-was-not –India, what came across the black water to flow into our veins. Everything north Bombay was North India; everything south of it was the South. To the east lay India's east and to the west, the worlds west. Bombay was central; all rivers flowed into its human sea. It was an ocean of stories; we were all its narrators, and everybody talked at once. (*The Moor's Last Sigh* 350)

So, nothing is more liked by the novelist and nothing is more interesting to him than Bombay, which is central to his imagery of a developed and democratic land. This

thetical statement that Bombay was central is quite emphasized by the novel. While other parts of India were boiling in the heat of communal riots and strife, Bombay somehow retained it crowded but commonsensical temperament. This is a noticeable portion the novel dedicates in celebrating the openness of Bombay to people from all denominations. It seems some magic was "stirred into that insane-soup" so that "certain harmony emerged from that cacophony."(*The Moor's Last Sigh* 350) While other cities in India were ruined by the communal conflicts, Bombay some how succeeded in retaining its rationality. In Punjab, Assam, Kashmir, Meerut, Delhi, Calcutta, to name some volatile areas, from time to time people from one religious group slit their neighbouir's throats and took warm showers in the blood. They killed each other for being circumcised and they killed for not being circumcised. Similarly, other indicators of one's culture and religion, such as beard, hair-cut, colour of skin, clothes and language determined at times whether one was worthy of living, a decent living or of dying. Even at such times, Bombay embodied the noble principle of "live-and- let-live" throng its overcrowded streets.

Despite the penchant Rushdie has for Bombay and India, he is a free intellectual. The liking Rushdie has for his birthplace should not lead one to suspect his height as person who has crossed the black waters and has tasted the forbidden, inedible items. He is quick to warn his readers not to fall into the pit of parochialism by creating frontiers of minds and sleep snugly wallowing in the mistaken conviction verging on dogmatism that whatever we have come to inherit by our accidental birth in particular culture, class, and caste or, in the larger scale, continent and country is always right. In his well-known essay "*Imaginary Homelands*" he names these dangers of "elephant traps" of turning radically to one's so-called past ad heritage and becoming an intolerant person instead. Therefore, he advises the intellectuals to get free

of such traps, which come to us in the form of protecting our national identity, and legacy and cultured which, if analyzed objectively, amount to nothing special but bubbles of cheap emotionalism and narrow-minded fear of the others:

> Of all the many elephant traps lying ahead of us, the largest and most dangerous pitfall would be the adoption of a ghetto mentality. To forget that there is a world beyond the community to which we belong, to confine ourselves within narrowly defined cultural frontiers, would be I believe, to go voluntarily into that form of internal exile which in South Africa is called the 'homeland'. (*Imaginary Homelands*19)

To preserve the cardinal virtues of Bombay, that is the virtues of tolerance, hybridity, multy-religiosity and multy-ethnicity, differences and the capacity to live with all those differences—this is the only way of regaining the atmosphere of communal harmony and peace in the boiling land beset by violence born of religious and cultural rivalries boosted particularly by the Hindu nationalist power centres such as the Mumbai Axis.

The novel celebrates, as it were, diversity as shown by the city of Bombay and a lament for its decosmopolitanization. Referring to its destruction by bombing the narrator assumes a remorseful, sad and self-pitying tone while he turns to the ominous desolate present and still more desolate future of a city once so renowned for its mongrel virtues. A sort of jeremiad follows the destruction report; the loss of such a city as Bombay cannot be lightly taken by a person who has written and fervently advocated for liberal culture in the world.

> Bombay was central; had always been. Just as the fanatical 'Catholic Kings' had besieged Granada and awaited the Alhambra's fall, so now barbarism was standing at our gates. O Bombay! *Prima in Indis!*

> Gateway to India! Star of the East with her face to the West! Like Granada –al-Gharnath of the Arabs – you were the glory of your time. But darker time came upon you, and just as Boabdil, the last Nasrid Sultan, was too weak to defend his great treasure, so we, too, were proved wanting. For the barbarians were not only within our gates but also within our skins. (*The Moor's last Sigh* 372)

The lively city, the most liberal city of Bombay, in fact, as the excerpt tells, the first city of India, is endangered. We cannot alone blame any outsiders for all the act of violence. The enemy, the devil might as well be inside us. We too are to blame if we do not fight the infiltration of inhuman elements in our mentality and society. It is our business to ensure that we crate a society, which understands the value of compromise and peace. We have to undertake the responsibility of morally responsible citizens. To preserve the characteristics that define cities like Bombay is all our, the novelist seem to be telling his readers. Bombay, so to speak, epitomizes what is modern, prosperous, but also what is human and permissive of differing and different ways of life regarding taste, belief and culture. This also represents Rushdie's idea of a democratic world.

3.2 Indian History in Rushdian Literature

As a writer, Salman Rushdie defies the notion that a writer should remain intact from the political realities and development of events around her/him. Rushdie, as always, writes of the political independence and the aftermath in India. This political theme is inseparable from his novel *The Moor's Last Sigh* too. Therefore it is necessary to grasp his political outlook before one fruitfully explores the themes in the novel. For this purpose, the reverence to the similarity between Moraes Zogoiby and India can be studied. But before that an excerpt from his critical essay collection is helpful in fundamental premise.

In his essay "Outside the Whale" which parodies George Orwell's "Inside the Whale", Rushdie argues that writers have always been at a continual conflict with the politicians who are given to misleading the general public with a misleading and falsified version of history. Orwell had concluded that the writers are inside the whale, meaning they are and should be free from world affairs. True art, he argued, has nothing to do with politics and that "a writer does well to keep out of politics" (94). But in direct contrast to Orwell, Rushdie advocates an actively political and engaged status of writers anywhere in the world. As he makes a humorous but insightful note in this context, there are no safe corners in the modern world; everything is linked with everything and all are the members of the same spaceship threatened by missiles and rockets:

> We live in a world without hiding places; the missiles have made sure of that. However much we may wish to return to the womb, we cannot be unborn. So we are left with a fairly straightforward choice. Either we agree to delude ourselves, to lose ourselves in the fantasy of the great fish, fro which a second metaphor is that of Pangloss's garden; or we can do what all human beings do instinctively when they realize that the womb has been lost for ever—that is, we can make the very devil of a racket. Where Orwell wished quietism, let there be rowdyism. (90 *Imaginary Homelands*).

Rushdie cannot see literature being treated as a separate, unsocial entity in the context of his times. Therefore it is common to note the political motif drawn to the literary one in Rushdie's writings. He sees the writers and the politicians at odd with each other. That is so because the politicians always try to mislead the people but the writers try to tell the truth and thereby defy the falsified political version of history.

The deformed hand of Moraes Zogoiby, born in 1957, ten years after the birth of India as a sovereign nation state, can be severally interpreted. One of the tenable readings can be a political reading of the novel in terms of Indian history. As the Moor gets prematurely aged at a double quick rate, so was India freed, without making adequate preparation for the partition situation. This resulted in the massacre of millions of people merely for communal distrust, rage and hatred. Likewise, the Moor's double quick ageing makes him a misfit for the society. He becomes noticeable for the religiously fundamentalist forces and has to flee from his country hoping to find a refuge in the land that used to be his ancestral one.

We find the interesting suggestion in the invalid or swollen condition of the hand too. It is the right hand that is deformed. Right hand in any society means normally, the most trusted, trustworthy, and helpful power, the means for achieving a destination. If one's right hand is paralyzed one cannot perform well. Likewise, for the Indian nation—irrespective of one's political preferences—it has been a political fact that the Congress Party, protected by no less a national figure than Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi and at party level by no less a statesman than Jawaharlal Nehru himself, was central to the making or ruining of India in the first two decades. Interestingly enough, the party had palm as its emblem in the election. Palm is the foremost important part of the hand. If the palm is deformed, the whole hand becomes handicapped. If the party with palm as its election emblem fails to lead the nation adroitly, then the whole nation fails. This is what exactly happened, if one were to believe Rushdie's interpretation. Pakistan failed and will fail as long as it encourages despotism by suppressing the political and intellectual freedom of the people. India failed because of the failure of the Congress leadership to stand for a pluralistic, pro-republican policy. Rather, the party has slowly drifted away under the sway of

powerhouses, big house, the influence of the people like the Cashondelivery and company.

This dissatisfaction with the failed and family dynasty spreading politics of India is of much concern to Salman Rushdie. The leaders have forgotten their pledge to people and are centered in the petty family interests of lengthening their grasp on the power forever. This is not something unnoticed by the post-colonial critics of nationalism. Once a unifying force, the leaders have betrayed a hope for the oppressed people, this feeling of nationalism after political decolonization of the nation. The same leaders who vowed to share the fair portion of the joys and sorrows of their people slowly tend to forget their high ideals and visions as they get caught in the quagmire of power politics, nepotism, personal pride and general human fallibility. Frantz Fanon has aptly assessed the process leaders of the people get disoriented from their missions and commitments:

> The people who for years on end have seen this leader and heard him speak, who from a distance in a kind if dream have followed his contests with colonial power, spontaneously put their trust in this patriot. Before independence, the leader generally embodies the aspirations of the people for independence, political liberty, and national dignity. but as soon as independence is declared, far from embodying in concrete form the needs of the people in what touches bread, land, and the restoration the country to the sacred hands of the people, the leader will reveal his inner purpose to become the general president of that company of profiteers impatient for their returns which constitutes the national bourgeoisie. (Fanon 81)

The leaders or stakeholders in the business of power-mongering of the country feel no qualm whatever in knocking the doors of underworld dealers in contraband, religious fundamentalists, and corrupt tycoons to get finance for elections and donations. Every kind of alliance and underhand deals are made to get money, muscle and media for elections campaigns.

One fact that renders the novel something more than a pure fiction is the political relevance it has with India and also Rushdie's resemblance with the double quick ageing and atheist Moraes Zogoiby. Rushdie's knack of offending cannot quite be lost. Take for example the reference to the annual Hindu festival of dancing in the honor of one of their gods:

> Once a year, my mother Aurora Zogoiby liked to dance higher than the gods. Once a year the gods came to Chowpatty Beach to bathe in the filthy sea: fat-bellied idols by the thousand, papier-mâché effigies of the elephant-headed deity Ganesha or Ganapati Bappa, swarming towards the water astride papier-mâché rats—for Indian rats, as we know, carry gods as well as plagues. (*The Moor's Last Sigh* 123)

For a devout, even for a normal believer in the deity, this description is bound to prove disgusting. The only explanation could be that the novel is the narration of the Moor so it can be overlooked as an infidel's blasphemy. The real thrust, however is upon the forces which are hell bent on establishing their true religion and who have for that purpose established a party. Aurora wanted to destroy the religious dance by dancing her pornographic dance but instead the devotees saw infinite devotion in her "swirling skirts" (*The Moor's Last Sigh* 124). She became the star attraction of the festival. Another family reference to that festival will clarify even more:

> By that time Ganesha Chaturthy had become the occasion for fist-clenched, saffron-headed young thugs to put on a show of Hindu-fundamentalist triumphalism, egged on by bellowing 'Mumbai's Axis' party politics and demagogues such as Raman Fielding, a.k.a. *Mainduck* ('frog'). 'You're not just a tourist sight now,' I gibed. 'You're an advert for the Beautification Program.' This attractively-named MA policy involved, to put it simply, the elimination of the poor from the city's streets; but Aurora Zogoiby's armour-plating was too strong to be pierced by so crude a thrust. (*The Moor's Last Sigh* 124-25)

Such comment can easily be elicited by a person who can so vociferously and proudly declare the fall of himself from the grace of god buy his own activities which are totally against the scripture and religious moral. At another place, Rushdie notes how people like him have crossed the frontiers set by religions and man-made, may be even God-made strictures. They are Hindus who have crossed the black waters; they are Muslims who have tasted pork. The act of crossing black water s and eating pork suggest experiencing freedom. Freedom from religious narrowness is highly prized in the modern times. It gives an individual space to live the life one wants to live. It also opens new gates for a foreign country and great opportunity. But the purists cannot tolerate such acts of apostasy and threaten the adventurers.

Commenting on the political condition of India, Rushdie does not spare any leader of national stature. All are depicted as engaged either in fraud, or prostitution, or intrigues. Even M. K. Gandhi was shot dead at one of the richest industrialists of India, which speaks much about Gandhi's reliance e upon the rich in carrying out his politics. The political parties rely more on the powerhouses, the syndicates of rich businessmen or on the religious-motivated factions. They, therefore, overlook improprieties on the

part of their succor-providers' many crimes. The novel does not miss to comment on this aspect of India's sociopolitical character. To quote shortly: "what was interesting was how much the city's blue-bloods care for Fielding" (*The Moor's Last Sigh* 299). Fielding here refers to Raman Fielding, nicknamed the Mainduck or toad, who leads the Maharastra-based Hindu nationalists. Power centers are at his guesthouses at a regular basis. He who is against unions, in favor of breaking strikes, against working women, in favor of sati, against the corruption of the Congress (I) and for direct action, by which he meant paramilitary activity in support of his political aims, this man gets warm pats on his back by the parties with Hindu agenda, not least the BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party) which even lead the country for four years in a coalition. In short, the Hindu nationalist forces are hell-bent on declaring India a Hindu only nation. And this, Rushdie warns, is the failure of India as secular democracy. This is the crux of Rushdie's literature centered in India, his imaginary homeland.

3.3 Religious and Communal Antagonism

India was a peaceful country, historians generally agree, before the independence that gave birth to religious division. The relatively harmonious and peaceful co-existence of Hindus and Muslims in India for centuries was suddenly disrupted around the first quarter of the twentieth century as rumors appeared about Ayodhya being the birthplace of Lord Ram. The Muslims had been occupying the place as a site for mosques, and suddenly the Hindu intellectuals came up with the history of the land as the birthplace of their Lord Rama. The mosques there were dismantled overnight, provoking Hindu-Muslim killings in almost all parts of India where these two communities co-existed. The novel as well as one of his essays of Rushdie makes an explicit reference to this. First, to quote from the essay "The Riddle of Midnight: India, August 1987" included in the collection mentioned earlier:

> There is a medium-sized town called Ayodhya in the state of Utter Pradesh, and in this town there is a fairly commonplace mosque named Babri Masjid. According to the *Ramayana*, however, Ayodhya was the home town of Rama himself, and according to a local legend the spot where he was born—the Ramjanmabhoomi—is the one on which the Muslim place of worship stands today. The site has been disputed territory ever since independence, but for most of the forty years the lid has been kept on the problem by the very Indian method of shelving the case, locking the mosque's gates, and allowing neither Hindus nor Muslims to enter. (*Imaginary Homelands* 27)

The Ayodhya dispute has not been resolved as yet, despite the involvement of the supreme judicial body of India. The claimed holy place has given birth to profane killings born of the violent uprising between the two communities in the two decades from the late eighties. The followers of the two religions had been living in more or less perfect harmony for centuries despite their die-hard religious beliefs, which are quite conflicting on many sensitive issues. The Hindus and Muslims shared the same site for some time after the reported vision of Ram by a Muslim worshipper. But to the devil with such old news that ultimately would engender a cycle of communal killing in the vast sub-continent! Rushdie is unhappy that India has not devised a practical and once-for-all solution to this violently disputed place as yet. The supposed "Ramjanmabhoomi" has become the bone of contention. The Hindus are hell-bent on toppling the Muslim domination over exactly the same spot where once the temple of their lord Ram stood. The Muslims do not want to let alone the place either.

Both sides are equally hell-bent on capturing the place exclusively for themselves. There is no sign of any party in the direction of relenting even a whit to

resolve the crisis. They are foolhardily ready to risk and ruin their present for some conjectured to be foggy past. This is so because of the blinding power of bigoted religious indoctrination that there is no place for compromise regarding one's religion and culture. The humanitarian sensibility has been deadened. The same concern is expressed in the novel too making the assumption of the thesis solidly founded that the novel is rooted in political comments Rushdie has to deliver concerning the nation of India. Rushdie and the likes of him are worried over this issue. Once even Muslim could have vision of Hindu lord Rama in a dream and now people are getting hot over the revelation of the dream. What an ironical bend of event takes place. The issue is raised thus:

> Nobody could even be sure, some commentators dared to point out, that the present-day town of Ayodhya in U.P. stood on the same site as the mythical Ayodhya, home of Lord Ram in the Ramayan. Nor was the notion of the existence there of Ram's birthplace, the Ramjanambhoomi, ancient tradition – it wasn't a hundred years old. It had actually been a Muslim Worshipper at the old Barbs mosque who had first claimed to see a vision of Lord Ram there, and so started the ball rolling; what could be a finer image of religious tolerance and plurality than that? (*The Moor's Last Sigh* 363)

It is an inspiring idea at first to think that a Muslim dreams of a Hindu god, but the same becomes the origin of one of the most bitter upsurge and wave of communal violence in India. Thus, it was a Muslim who first had a dream in which he knew that the Babari Masjid site was also the site of Rama's birth. A Muslim had the vision of a Hindu deity. What an appealing idea? But the same vision was misinterpreted, and thus instead of harmony, religious intolerance arose there.

Having set Rushdie's stand in perspective, we can see how it is that politics is almost always drawn into play in Rushdian literature, even in the most fantastical or imaginative of his writing, even when he is not writing by way of analysis from a critical perspective. Therefore, it is not surprising, even though in his essay "In Good Faith" Rushdie speaks of the novelist's right to write as s/he pleases, to see the link between poetics and politics is an entangling and engaging one in Rushdie's writing. The writer is doing something more than creating fantasies even in the most imaginative sort of writing because, as Rushdie argues, "a book is a version of the world" (Rush 412).

The novelist is open to political criticism and accepts all possible criticisms too. He takes no special precaution in making or avoiding political references in his novel. Rather, he creates space for such direct comments on the political aspect of India. In the beginning ventures of her in the domain of art works, of painting, Aurora invites her father to see her drawings which surprise the proud father of the juvenile artist. She had put history on the walls, so to speak. The pictures contained King Gonophores inviting St Thomas the Apostle to India; and from the north Emperor Ashoka with his Pillars of Law, and the lines of people standing in wait against the pillars. She had painted the building of the Taj Mahal. To represent her south origin, she had chosen to depict Tipu Sultan and the magic fortress of Golconda where a man speaking normally in the gatehouse maybe heard clearly in the citadel. The arrival of the Jews long ago in the Indian subcontinent was another subject of her artistic treatment. The novel makes the observation about modern Indian history too as depicted in the art works of Aurora da Gama. The paintings reveal the multiple and multicultural character of India:

> Modern history was there too, there were jails full of passionate men, Congress and Muslim League, Nehru Gandhi Jinnah Patel Bose Azad,

> and British soldiers whispering rumours of an approaching war; and beyond history were the creatures of her fancy, the hybrids, half-woman half-tiger, half-man half-snake, there were sea-monsters and mountain ghouls. In an honoured place was Vasco da Gama himself, setting his first foot on Indian soil, sniffing the air, and seeking out whatever was spicy and hot and made money. (*The Moor's Last Sigh* 59)

The persons in the paintings have real life suggestions: the passionate men are the political leaders of India, struggling for independence and of the Indian people from the clutches of the British Empire. The leaders are identified by their real name. The far away history of the first European arrival for settlement in India, of the Portuguese sailors and merchants is touched by the paintings. This is in reality more than a fictional elaboration. Rushdie the novelist make his character create such picture of India. This plural, multicultural idea of India is Rushdie's one of the most frequently treated and much beloved theme that can be found in almost all of his novels, not least in *The Moor's Last Sigh*.

This vast country has a fault, the defect of failure of modern education. People there are not free of their narrow-minded beliefs. Therefore, religious appeals easily misguide them in matters related to faith. So, many religious factions are operative there for their own selfish motive in the name of protecting their religion and culture. Conservative religious powers in India have not become powerful for nothing; they have been protected and cashed by the politicos. For example, the MA boss Raman Fielding, the "fierce, illogical man", is under the protection and guardianship of the many powerhouses that are there to control and chalk the fate of the commoners (*The Moor's Last Sigh* 297). It is well known in South Indian politics to condemn an unfair election procedure as 'Bihari' style because this state of India is so notorious for

corrupt politics. Indian politicians harbour hooligans and tycoons for their success in the elections.

That the novel's desire for the theme of Indian quiddity, vastness and mongrel existence is too apparent to escape even a superficial observation is made explicit on several occasions. The following citation relates to the idea of India as the mother has rugged as well as smooth qualities due to her responsibilities and burdens on the one hand, and her tender motherhood on the other:

> And it was all set in a landscape that made Cameons tremble to see it for it was Mother India, Mother India with her garishness and her inexhaustible motion, Mother India who loved and betrayed and ate and destroyed and again loved her children, and with whom the children's passionate conjoining and eternal quarrel stretched long beyond the grave;… Mother India with her oceans and coco-palms and rice-fields and bullocks at the water-well, her cranes on treetops with necks like coat-hangers, and high circling kites and the mimicry of mynahs and the yellow-beaked brutality of cows, a protean Mother India who could turn monstrous, who could be a worm rising from the sea with Epifania's face at the top of a long and scaly neck; who could turn murderous, dancing cross-eyed and Kali-tongued while thousands died; but above all the horn-of-plenty lines converged, Mother India with Belle's face. (*The Moor's Last Sigh* 61)

The richness and vastness of India as a country verging on a continent is well known in the world largely because of what is termed by Edward W. Said as oreientalist, writings of any sort on the east. In the west, there is a good deal of writing on India, its arty, religion, culture and wisdom. India is sometimes celebrated as a land

that produces spices, and learned gurus. On the other hand, it is condemned as a hot subcontinent, a land of heat and dust, of poverty and squalor.

This is one tender aspect dealt in the novel. But the brutal reality of political corruption and unholy alliance with mafias and underworld tycoons made by the leaders is trouble some for the progress of a country like India. What was interesting to note was how much the city's blue bloods cared for Fielding. There was a steady stream of visitors from Everest Villas and Kenchanjunga Bhavan, from Dhaulagiri Nivas, Nanga Parbat House and Manaslu Mansion and all the other super-desirable super-high-rise Himalayas of the Hill. He was against unions, in favour of breaking strikes, against working women, in favour of sati and against poverty in favour of wealth. He was against 'immigrants' to the city, by which he meant all non-Marathi speakers, including those who had been born there, and in favour of its 'natural residents', which included Marathi-medium types who had just stepped off the bus. When such a person is under the protection of political leadership who want to utilize him as a reliable vote bank, there can be no question of him being controlled by the state mechanism.

Mainduck, a play upon the Indian word 'meduck' for frog is the nickname given to Raman Fielding, the leader of the Hindu nationalist faction Mumbai Axis (MA). Formerly a cartoonist, obese in build and an unfounded hatred against the Muslims and Christians, Fielding echoes Bal Thackeray, the Shiv Sena leader who whipped the anti-Muslim riots in the nineties. Though the naming reminds one about the British novelist Henry Fielding, he has claimed his father to be a man of literary interest, Raman Fielding is neither an art lover, nor a fielder. He is an instigator of violence and hatred against non-Hindus. Violence and corruption are at the guiding centres of the Indian nation is one point the novel emphasizes while pondering upon the unsettling public

life there and the backwardness of the nation as a whole. Abraham Zogoiby, a great industrialist, is really getting richer and more powerful by engaging in secret, illegal business of drugs and armaments. He is an example of such black-market controlling billionaires in India who are the real ruler of the country from behind the curtain. The politicians are like puppets in their hands who act in accordance with the interest of the tycoons.

The Moor visits Raman Fielding for the purpose of gaining a job or like that. The gangster is suspicious at first of the intention of the possibly useful candidate, and asks about the Moor's father's profession. He confides to the unsuspecting son the secret dealings of Abraham Zogoiby who is high in his 'Siodi Tower' meaning the 'Cashondelivery' tower; who has cast his only child from his bosom, the depth of whose evil-doings and the breadth of his heartlessness are beyond imagination. The Maratha-centered Hindu goes on propounding how the Islam and Christians are plotting against the Hindus:

> You will come to know. Drug, terrorism, Musulmans-mughals, weapons-systems-delivery computers, scandals of Khazana Bank, nuclear bombs. Hai Ram how you minorities stick together against Hindus, how good-natured we are that we do not see how dangerous is your threat. But now your father has sent you to me and you will know it all. About the robots even I will tell you, the manufacturer of high-technology minority-rights cybermen to attack and murder Hindus. And about the babies, the march of minority babies who will push our blessed infants from their cots and grab their sacred food. Such are their plans. But they shall not prevail. Hindustan: the country of the Hindus! We shall defeat the Scar-Zogoiby axis, whatsoever the cost. We shall

> bow their mighty knees. My zombie, my hammer: are you for us or against us, will you be righteous or will you be lefteous? Say: are you with us or without?' (*The Moor's Last Sigh* 295)

The threatening tone has clear significance; whatever may be the immediate meaning of that. For example, the underlying meaning of Fielding's speech is that India is only for Hindus no other community should try to assimilate themselves in this Hindu land. But the audience is more interested in gaining a shelter for him than in calculating the far reaching threats of his possible employer. So, Moraes accepts the offer to work for the fellow's gang. He has to utilize the opportunity of getting out of the intolerable life in Indian jails. This life with underworld boss is forced upon him, he thinks, as a consequence to his mother's carelessness of her children. Motherhood is an important concept in India; the country a s mother, mother as country. Therefore, it can be inferred that his fate is conferred upon him by his country that is loosing balance, like Aurora did while dancing in the Ganapati festival, because of the impact of corruption, parochialism and failure of the leadership. Moor takes up the proposal of Mainduck and this assumes an antagonistic relation with his father.

> Unhesitating, I embraced my fate. Without pausing to ask what connection there might be between Fielding's anti-Abrahamic tirade and his alleged intimacy with Mrs. Zogoiby; without let or hindrance; willingly, even joyfully, I leapt. Where you have sent me, mother –into the darkness, out of your sight –there I elect to go. The names you have given me –outcast, outlaw, untouchable, disgusting, vile –I clasp to my bosom and make my own. (*The Moor's Last Sigh* 295-96)

The moor represents, as we have noted in the biographical aspects of the novel, the novelist himself remarks the Moor as directed at Indian nation which has quoted

above. Likewise, The Moor has created darkens in the lives of the millions of youth who wanted to live a life of love and harmony but who were forced into the margin, segregation and apathy by the nation; and who therefore took to terrorism, rebellion and revolt. When there is no space for a kind hearted, good-natured youth to live a fair life, the frustration can easily mislead her /him into the path of terrorism and revenge. The Moor also turns to the gangsters like Raman Fielding for utilizing his massive physical power.

Industrial big houses and industrialists are in liaison with the underworld powers for their security and expansion of their business. The length of his father's arm means the access the criminal powers have achieved into the Indian politics. They are now able to guide and control the policy of the government. They can establish and dissolve governments. And they choose such politicians and parties, which act according to their wish. In short, India is either being manipulated by religious fundamentalism, or by coteries of hoodlums and hooligans. This is a serious and ominous foreboding regarding the future of so volatile a nation as India consisting of so opposing elements as Hindus and Muslims, Christians and the Sikhs too. Once the slender bondage of harmony and tolerance among them is broken, the Indian nation will be ruined by communal conflicts. It will not be able to survive as a functioning democracy in the world. In the past, often there have been great threats of Hindu-Muslim violence. Somehow they have been controllable. But the possibility of such riots is still there.

After having the visit with the Hindu leader fond of Christian fond Muslim dog names, Moor, with the knowledge about his father imparted by Mainduck, Moraes observes his father's smelly dealings. Zogoiby also thinks it time to confide to his son what business he is really running. This aspect of Zogoiby is brought to notice by

creating a scene in which Fielding confides secretes to the Moor regarding his father. The Moor, employed by Mainduck for his extra strong right hand, has not known how much powerful his father Abraham Zogoiby is. One day he gets a note and is forced into guessing who his father the businessman might have been in all those years:

> The note under my pillow made me wonder what else might or might not be true, for there in the sanctum of the Under World I had been shown, by this casual demonstration of the length of my father's arm, that Abraham would be a formidable antagonist in the coming war of the Worlds, Under versus Over, sacred versus profane, god versus mammon, past versus future, gutter versus sky: that struggle between two layers of power in which I, and Nadia Wadia, and Bombay, and even India itself would find ourselves trapped, like dust between coats of paint. (*The Moor's Last Sigh* 318)

The suspicion is made by Rushdie about the character of big houses in India, as to the fairness of their business and link with the underworld. This suspicion of the Moor regarding his father was to be attested as a true one as Dom Minto, another member of the underworld controlled by the Gujarat fanatic Raman Fielding, reveals. Abraham had been leading and uniting the Muslims for countering the power of the Hindu gangsters:

> But now, with my own ears, I had heard Dom Minto name *my father* as the biggest dada of them all. Mogambo! The moment I heard it, I knew it was true. Abraham was a natural commander, a born negotiator, the dealmaker of dealmakers. He gambled for the highest stakes; had even been willing, as young man, to wager his unborn son. Yes, the High

> Command did exist, and the Muslim gangs had been united by a Cochin Jew. (*The Moor's Last Sigh* 331)

The Muslims are thus in league with the business power centers of the under world for gaining strength to fight the Hindu stronghold in India. Everywhere is seen power mongering, corruption and underhand dealing. The most cancerous disease is corruption. Then the threat of fanaticism comes. No power can match this power of corruption. The writer recalls the eccentric painter Vasco Miranda who had once commented in a piquant fashion "corruption was the only force we had that could defeat fanaticism" (132). What this statement means is fanaticism is the greatest trouble for India, but even greater is the problem of corruption.

The businessmen of India are under political protection because they pay large sums of money for the running of parties. Abraham Zogoiby, who apparently runs an export business of some harmless baby powder, exemplifies the case. But the staple business is something else, far from being legal and harmless. The story need to be told in some detail to see what was the mode of illegal trafficking of contraband narcotics and drugs under the garb of exporting Baby Softo talcum powder. Abraham himself admits to his being the tycoon in the world of such trades. The Moor reports that in the matter of the Baby Softo narcotics scandal, Abraham Zogoiby – as he confirmed during their 'briefing sessions', with a wide, shameless grin – had received a complete exoneration by the investigating authorities. There was no question that the Softo company's talcum powder exports had been used as cover for the dispatch overseas of rather more lucrative white powders, but in spite of Herculean efforts by narcotics squad officers it had been impossible to prove that Abraham had been aware of any illegal activity. Certain minor functionaries of the company – in the canning and dispatching departments – had been shown in the pay of a drug syndicate, but thereafter

"all investigations simply hit a wall" (*The Moor's Last Sigh* 333). The investigation was checked in the midle by the power of underhand dealing. The corrupt bureaucracy cannot unearth the root of the narcotic dealers in the cover of producing materials for babies.

Khazana Bank, as Abraham confides to his son, is ready to invest in arms deal anywhere. At last Abraham's invisible city, built by invisible people to do invisible deeds, was nearing its apotheosis. The threat of invisible bomb is there. This happened to take place in Indian history when then prime minister was exploded dead with other hundreds by a suicide bomber. In May 1991an all-too-visible explosion in Tamil Nadu added Mr Rajiv Gandhi to the list of his family's murdered dead, and Abraham Zogoiby – whose decisions could at times be so incomprehensibly dark as to suggest that he actually believed he was being funny – chose that awful day to 'brief' the Moor on "the existence of the secret H-bomb project" (*The Moor's Last Sigh* 335).

To add to the list of references about the inaction of the government bodies concerning the illegal dealers, the novel talks about a certain Khazana Bank International (KBI) patronized by the dealers in arms and drugs dealers. Among KBI's largest clients were a number of gentlemen and organizations whose names featured on the most-wanted and most-dangerous lists of every country in the free world – but who, mysteriously, themselves seemed free to come and go, to board commercial airplanes and visit bank branches and receive medical treatment in the countries of their choice, without fear of arrest or harassment. The novel explains that their shadow-accounts were "maintained in special files, shielded by an impressive battery of passwords, software 'bombs' and other defense mechanisms, and in theory at least could not be accessed through the main computer. The Moor cannot help commenting, "Abraham's arm had grown long indeed" (*The Moor's Last Sigh* 335).

This shows how much powerful the underworld has become in India. They can blast the prime ministers, make their hydrogen bombs and deceive the whole state mechanism or blackmail it to ignore their business. The free existence of the Khajana Bank Limited, which has unlimited control and power, is an open threat to the Indian government. But the state is helpless.

To counter this danger from the alliance of Scar and Zogioby, the Muslims and the corrupt tycoon Jews, Mainduck also had furthered his alliance with the religious powers at national and regional levels. To observe:

> The truth is that by 1991 Mainduck' stratagems had far more to do with the religious-nationalist agenda than the original, localized Bombay-for-the-Mahrattas platform on which he had come to power. Fielding, too, was making allies, with like-minded national parties and paramilitary organizations, that alphabet soup of authoritarians, BJP, RSS, VHP. (*The Moor's Last Sigh* 337)

The history of political India is mostly the history of political intrigue, of the policy of divide and rule, of murder and corruption. Thus, the Hindu leader also knows that without a broader Hindu unity they will not be able to hold down the growing power of the Muslims and Jewish alliance. So, he makes connection with the national parties which have nationwide recognition. The BJP stands for Bharatiya Janata Party, the party which, under the leadership of Mr Atal Bihari Vajpayee, headed the Indian government for some years around the turn of the century. VSP stands for Vishwa Hindu Parishad, the umbrella organization of the Hindus worldwide.

Rushdie is not at all happy to see a new form of dynasty in post-independence India. The nation, formerly ruled by different dynasts, is now disorderly being run and ruled as if it were a private piece of property of the Nehru family. Specially, after the

second time enthronement of Jawaharlal Nehru's daughter Indira Gandhi, the minorities of the country such as the Muslims and the Sikhs experienced hard times. There was the news of forced sterilization upon the Muslims, of the destruction of the Golden Temple of the Sikhs. Some states headed by pother parties, mostly the communists, underwent emergency and president's direct intervention. Corruption reached its brazen level high. Nepotism and favouritism damaged the bureaucracy of the largest democracy of the world. A note here from the novel speaks much in this direction:

> Silence in paradise: silence, and an ache. Mrs. Gandhi returned to power, with Sanjay at her right hand, so it turned out that there was no final morality in affairs of state, only relativity. I remembered Vasco Miranda's 'Indian variation' upon the theme of Einstein's General Theory: Everything is for relative. Not only light bends, but everything. For relative we can bend a point, bend the truth, bend employment criteria, bend the law. D equals mc squared, where D is for Dynasty, m is for mass of relatives, and c of course is for corruption., which is the only constant in the universe—because in India even speed of light is dependent on load shedding and vagaries of power supply. (*The Moor's Last Sigh* 272)

The corruption, nepotism and favouritism rampant in India and protected by the leaders is touched upon in the above quoted lines. This everything is for the relative is the embodiment of the practice of nepotism, so infamously pervasive in the South Asian countries. The practice of giving posts to one's relatives whether or not they are publicly and fairly chosen has ruined the bureaucracy of South Asian countries. Even great leaders are accused of nepotism and favouritism while appointing personnel in

governmental service. Indira Gandhi became a notorious example of a corrupt, proud and intolerant leader of India. She could not acquire the height of her father, Jawaharalal Nehru, the first prime minister of independent India. So, visionary a leader as Nehru was to prove wrong in choice of his daughter as his successor in capacity of India's prime minister. Worse, Indira was not the last in the line of continuing the dynasty her son Rajiv was made to take on the job of piloting the vast nation for the mere virtue that he was Indira's son. This family cult is not yet out of possibility, looking at the presence of Sonia Gandhi as the leader of Congress (I) in the present Indian parliament. The murder of Indira by a member of the Sikh community lead to series of persecution of the whole community, and that lead to the suicidal bomb killing of Rajiv Gandhi. The novel also reports the bombing of Bombay, reminiscent of the politically motivated bombings aimed at the incumbent government leaders. This killing proved the last straw for a nation already experiencing discontents from the minorities.

The Moor visits the spot to kill Fielding shortly after the murder of Henry Fielding by Sammy Hazare, his former employee,. But since he had already been killed, he comes out and finds that he has to go to Spain for retrieving the lost pictures of his mother. He has to hide from the police too, since they suspect him to be the murder of Fielding. He was the last person noticed in the room of the killed person. So, he makes everything ready and leaves the country just in time to escape the chain of riot at home in the wake of the blasts in the town of Bombay, the central, most metropolitan city of India. There is a finality-evoking description of the bombing of Bombay:

> Bombay blew apart. Here's what I've been told: three hundred kilograms of RDX explosive were used. Two and a half thousand kilos

> more captured later, some in Bombay, others in a lorry near Bhopal. Also timers, detonators, the works. There had been nothing like it in the history of the city. Nothing so cold-blooded, so calculated, so cruel. Dhhaaiiiyn! A busload of schoolkids. Dhhaaiiiyn! The Air-India building. Dhhaaiiiyn! Trains, residences, chawls, docks, movie-studios, mills, restaurants. Dhhaaiiiyn! Dhhaaiiiyn! Dhhaaiiiyn! Community exchanges, office buildings, hospitals, the busiest shopping streets in the heart of town. Bits of bodies were lying everywhere; human and animal blood, guts, and bones. Vultures so drunk on flesh that they sat lop-sidedly on rooftops, waiting for appetite to return. (*The Moor's Last Sigh* 371-72)

Tower workers started spilling madly into the streets. The Cashondelivery tower burst like a firework in the sky rain of glass knives began to fall stabbing the running workers through the neck, and the back. Many workers had been trapped in the tower by the blast. Lift became inoperative, stairs collapsed and there were fires and clouds of clack smoke. Many tumble to death trying to jump out of the tower. The whole city was indeed blown to pieces.

This catastrophe does not seem to be controlled by a single particular power center, as all parties are affected. Both rival groups that of the Hindu and the Muslim and Jewsih are killed, along with the neutral commoners. Many of Abraham's enemies were hit – policemen, MA cadres, and criminal rivals. The novelist, scandalized, asks: "Hindu and Muslim areas were both attacked; men women, children perished, and there was nobody to give the dignity of meaning to their death. What avenging demon bestrode the horizon, raining fire upon our heads? Was the city simply murdering itself?" (*The Moor's Last Sigh* 372). The narrator is too perturbed to remain a passive

observer; he wants to probe into the cause of this inhuman murder whoever was the precipitator. He puts some questions regarding the death, the murderer and the whole act of violence. These questions ring long even after the reading of the novel has been over because they are always pertinent to any one interested in promoting world peace ad understanding.

> Here's what I want to know: who killed Elephanta, who murdered my home? Who blew it to bits, and 'Lambajan Chandiwala' Borkar, Miss Jaya He` and Ezekiel of the magic copybooks along with the bricks and mortar? Was it dead Fielding's revenge, or freelance Hazare'', or was there some more profound movement in history, deeper down, where not even those of us who had spent so long in the Under World could see it? (*The Moor's Last Sigh* 372)

Such a scene of carnage is shocking to any one with sense and sensibility. The novelist is very much disturbed by this scene of massacre. He asks the question who was in the control of such a terrible catastrophe. Many people died, innocent people die. The parties involved in murderous war with each other also shared the experience of inhuman death. Who gained anything from this murder? People simply went mad for hatred and revenge.

There was a nocturnal burglary at the Zogoiby Bequest, and the four select paintings including *The Moor's Last Sigh* by Aurora, all belonging to the Moor cycle, were stolen. The Marxist, or in her own designation, post-Marxist critic Zeenat Vakil tried to make it a nation treating issue by urging on the media to highlight the theft. But for the availability of Henry Fielding to make a connection of the theft of the pictures and the fall of the mosque at Ayodhya in relation to the mergence of a pure holy Hindu nation, the incident would just have passed by unnoticed. What logic the illogical made

was interesting for his line of thinkers, but it was offensive for the Moor and the likes of him who are from the minority cultural religious groups. The fanatic had commented on the Doordarshan: "when such alien artifacts disappear from India's holy soil, let no man mourn,' he said. 'If the new nation is to be born, there is much invader-history that may have to be erased" (*The Moor's Last Sigh* 364). This comment hurts the sentiments of people like the Moor that is the spokesperson of the writer who writes: "So we were the invaders now, were we? After two thousand years, we still did not belong, and indeed, were soon to be 'erased' – as which cancellation need not be followed by any expression of regret, or grief. "Mainduck's insult to Aurora's memory made it easier for me to carry out the deed upon which I was resolved" (*The Moor's Last Sigh* 365). Thus, a softhearted large-sized boy turns into a calculating undertaker, a criminal. This is the negatively transforming power of violence and hatred. The world today teems with Osama bin Laden and Moraes Zogoiby who were not originally violent but were compelled to be so by their extreme feelings of hated toward the foreigners and corrupt leaders who compromised with the interest of the people.

3.4 Voices for Unity and Forbearance

The novel strongly voices the idea of a world, not necessarily utopian or ideal and perfect in all its forms, but at least tolerant of diversities and differences. The novelist expresses his dream and desire of a liberal, enlightened world in the near future. His whole life has been a struggle for a free world. But some scholars such as Samuel P. Huntington contend that the world is growing more communal instead of liberal.

Underlining the priority people started to give to their religion and culture in a postmodern/ post-Cold War world, Professor Huntington published *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (1996). In this work of sociology that

studies and interprets antagonistic/friendly relationship between and among people, societies, and nations along civilizational lines, Huntington has tried to prove that 'cultural identity' has always been the central concern of people striving to preserve their existence and uniqueness. In his own words, "In the post-Cold War world flags count and so do other symbols of cultural identity, including crosses, crescents, and even head coverings, because culture counts, and cultural identity is what is most meaningful to most people" (*Huntington* 20). Throughout the text, Huntington keeps on pointing out how ideological and economic considerations are secondary to cultural ones, the reason being that culture provides answers to people seeking meaning and stability. And this culture is closely linked with the soil and society where one is born. To preserve their belief in themselves, people turn back to their cultural uniqueness that can be found in its originality and purity only in the land of its origin—the land inhabited by the majority people from their own tribe or group. Huntington's observation appears too religion-centered at the cost of other motives such as economy, education and, not least, the freedom seeking and all-inclusive type of internationalism:

> In the post-Cold War world, the most important distinctions among people are not ideological, political, or economic. They are cultural. Peoples and nations are attempting to answer the most basic question humans can face: Who are we? And they are answering that question in the traditional way human beings have answered it, by reference to things that mean most to them. People define themselves in terms of ancestry, religion, language, history, values, customs, and institutions. They identify with cultural groups: tribes, ethnic groups, religious

> communities, nations and at the broadest level, civilizations.
>
> (*Huntington* 21)

Despite the relevance of what he has said, as the contemporary violent acts done merely for religious motives such as the bombing of the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center by Islamic members, and the dispute between Pakistan and India, and the killing between the Israelites and the Palestinians, we say that this kind of notion is not going to help establish peace in the world. Instead of producing en lightened humanity fro the new times, we would be entering into another obscurantist era if we let superstitions and religious beliefs guide our very life among people of different cultural an religious background. Professor Huntington has also made the flawed and potentially enmity-arousing observation that "for people seeking identity and reinventing ethnicity, enemies are essential" (*Huntington* 21). It is the beauty of plurality, of the existence of multiple culture and customs which confer hue of life to the creation of God or of nature, as we might be inclined to believe as per our capacity and proclivity. Rushdie is among those who cannot accept Huntington's thesis that the world is being realigned along cultural and civilizational lines. For that to happen would mean humanity is receding into barbarism and darkness rather than following, rugged though it has been, a trajectory of enlightenment.

But Rushdie has not the hope that one day people be free of such petty communal considerations. This vision is expressed in the novel too. At the death hour of his wife Belle, Cameons tries to reassure her of the emergent world order, which is a new world in the real sense of the world. The novel presents a sad and pathetic picture of that partying moment at the crossroads of life and death, of present and future, of hope and hopelessness:

> At night he sat with Belle and he would cough, wiping her brow, and he would whisper to her about the dawning of a new world, Belle, a free country, Belle, above religion because secular, above class because socialist, above caste because enlightened, above hatred because loving, above vengeance because forgiving, above colour because multi-colored, above poverty because victorious, over it, above ignorance because literate, above stupidity because brilliant, freedom, Belle, the freedom express, soon we will stand upon that platform and cheer the coming of the train, and while he told her his dreams she would fall asleep and be visited by specters of desolation and war. (*The Moor's Last Sigh* 51)

We can see that this is in fact only the wishful thinking of the Moor, of the title who is once again the writer himself. This speaks volume about vision of the world which really is free of all mundane and narrow barriers of caste, creed and class, in diametrical contrast with the real world with strife and intolerance. Rushdie's vision of a new world can well be encapsulated in the concept denoted by the term mooristan which signifies a free land. This ideal place would incorporate, not merely in phrasing but in reality, the concept of diversity in unity. People free of shackles of nationalism and manacle of patriotism, people with tolerant and educated worldview irrespective of their culture and religion, are the deserving and perspiring denizens of such a land. For this the experience and act of migration, literal and metaphorical, of the crossing the frontier of one's religious an national domain so that one can see the world takes difference and varieties, a mosaic of people and cultures, to make itself, can be realized by the desirable inhabitants of this free world. This means, we have crossed the

parochial boundaries of religions and cultures we had by our accidental births into the so and so family and society.

It is the sorrowful feeling of the writer that renders the novel a moving account of the bitter reality of India looked from an intellectual perspective. Rushdie's elegiac representation of Bombay owes something to his exile from his native city. Moraes Zogoiby suffers because of his parents, especially of his father's involvement with the underworld and the enmity he has earned from the Hindu nationalists. The destruction of Bombay means the end of Moraes's life there; he feels as if a world for him has ended. He would leave it for Spain:

> As my aeroplane banked over the city I could see columns of smoke rising. There was nothing holding me to Bombay any more. It was no longer my Bombay, no longer special, no longer the city of mixed-up, mongrel joy. Something had ended (the world?) and what remained, I didn't know. I found myself looking forward to Spain – to Elsewhere. I was going to the place whence we had been cast out long ago. Might it not turn out to be my lost home, my resting-place, my promised land? Might it not be my Jerusalem? (*The Moor's Last Sigh* 376)

The reference to the Jerusalem only deepens his sense of being a diaspora, a people dispersed from their land. This is a befitting terminology both for the Moor and the novelist, Rushdie himself. They both are individuals who have cut off relations with their homelands in search of imagined, more meaningful lands. After arriving in Spain, Moraes tries to assume a Jewish identity but find it fake. He what he is: a nobody from nowhere. Here is the moment when he gets to accept his true identity:

> I am a Jew from Spain, like the philosopher Maimonides, I told myself, to see if the words rang true. They sounded hollow. Maimonides's ghost

> laughed at me. I am like the catholicized Cordoba mosque, I experimented. A piece of Eastern architecture with a Baroque cathedral stuck in the middle of it. That sounded wrong, too. I was nobody from nowhere, like no-one, belonging to nothing. That sounded better. That felt true. All my ties had loosened. I had reached an anti-Jerusalem: not a home, but an away. A place didn't bind but dissolved. (*The Moor's Last Sigh* 388)

The title of the novel is often mentioned in the paintings and in the Moor's run-away moments from the castle of Vasco Miranda: "Now, therefore, it is meeting to sing of endings; of what was, and may be no longer; of what was right in it, and wrong. A last sigh for a lost world, a tear for its passing. […] A Moor's tale, complete with sound and fury"(*The Moor's Last Sigh* 4). The wistful sigh is for a lost world that as the novel shows is Bombay. Therefore, after the bombing of Bombay, Moraes leaves India to get the four paintings stolen by Vasco Miranda who now lives in the Spanish town of Benengeli. The old artist has gone through serious mental disorder, keeps aloof, and has hired some loyal girls to take care of the entire mansion. He has even imprisoned an art technician for removing the layers from Aurora's painting as if hoping to find some secret of her art and learning it himself. Aurora had written a letter to Miranda before she died or rather was killed. She had told him to see inside her painting incase she should die; for she had portrayed her murderer therein. The murderer happens to be Abraham Zogoiby, as Moraes easily recognizes from the contours of the picture. The mad artist too is no less devilish. He imprisons Moraes along with the woman. Finally, Moraes writes the story (which is the novel itself) of his life, knowing every day the two of them are awaiting their death at the hands of the crazy artist. And as was evident, Miranda shoots the woman dead, and as was a patient

of the nerves, is himself shocked to death. This incidence lets Moraes escape from the ghostly mansion. This is the point alluded to by the first sentence of the novel: “I have lost count of the days that have passed since I fled the horrors of Vasco Miranda’s mad fortress in the Andalusian mountain-village of Benengeli”. (*The Moor’s Last Sigh* 3)

This same person, as the novel tells us, speaks so earnestly of the golden age before the invasion when good Hindu men and women roamed free. Fielding’s Bombay Municipal Corporation had arranged to give their girl a big send-off to the beauty final’s in Granada Spain.

In his explanatory essay entitled “The Riddle of Midnight: India, August 1987” Rushdie asks the question: “Does India exist?” his answer is yes; but if it does not, then the explanation is to be found in a single word: communalism which is “the politics of religious hatred” (*Imaginary Homelands* 27). What has characterized India as a vast subcontinent has been the temperament of tolerance there for centuries. If India loses that characteristic, then she is worse than failure; it is her demise, extinction of existence, as it were. So the importance of multiculturalism and religious freedom and tolerance is accentuated in Rushdian literature, be it novels or critical essays as those collected in *Imaginary Homelands*. The sigh of the moor and the novelist is a wishful desire for a society and a world, which is modern, enlightened and tolerant of differences. But the sigh was not the last sigh of the novelist, as he has kept on writing books on this theme.

Chapter Four

Rushdie's Patriotism

A novel told through the perspective of a hunted, minority, physically deformed, doubly quickly ageing character Moraes Zogoiby, *The Moor's Last sigh* is all about the troubles the nation of India had to undergo consequent to its independence from the British Raj in the fateful night of August 15, 1947. The novel is read and interpreted as a political allegory. It is a condemnation of the visionless, shortsighted leadership as well as the religiously fundamentalist forces trying to carve a niche in the secular democracy. The novel touches upon such diverse themes as love, God, art, politics and their impact in the lives of the individuals as well as the nation, and the world.

The Moor in the title of the novel is interpreted to be the writer himself; holding godless views, valuing freedom and love, and both incurring danger from the fundamentalist elements resemble each other greatly. The Moor is on the run, with a last minute escape from the death captivity of one mad artist Vasco de Gama. Rushdie too remained undergrounds for a decade, as a consequent to the publication of his novel *Satanic Verses*. He still is endangered from the Islamic fundamentalists. Rushdie lives now in the western metropolises. Recently he has been knighted in recognition of his contribution to literature in English, and honored with the title of 'sir'. His life is a wonder for people of his own country. Likewise, Moor lives out unique fate: he is doomed to go through his life at double-speed. Aged thirty-six, but with the physique of a seventy-two-year-old, he narrates the fantastic story of his life within a family who exemplify the glorious plurality of India. His mother, India's greatest artist, comes from a Portuguese line descended on the wrong side of the sheet from Vasco da Gama, the

first European to land on India in search of trade area. His father is one of the most ancient communities of Cochin Jews, and is also an illegitimate descendant – possibly – of Boabdil, the last Moorish Sultan of Granada, expelled from Spain in 1492 by Ferdinand and Isabella. Moraes, like his ancestor Boabdil, looks back at the end of his life upon his brilliant, ruined family and India he knew as young man, a lost paradise of possibilities which has been ruined through the human sins and shortcomings of hatred, factionalism, and ethnic and religious intolerance.

All in all, the political and personal philosophy as advocated by the double quick growing Moor and art philosophy as advocated by the artist mother have affinity with the modernist and liberal philosophy espoused by Rushdie the writer. Therefore, the reading of the thesis that the novel *The Moor's Last Sigh* is written in the defense of a pluralistic world is justified. The communal conflicts are too bloody, too disgusting to allow the reader to be apathetic to the incidents of violence and murder. We are compelled to side with the writer and condemn the violence. India needs to get back the old identity as a nation where varieties of castes, creeds and cultures can accommodate in a harmonious environment.

Rushdie writes to arouse awareness in the readers of the world and of India as well that without such a liberal and multicultural world, peace is not possible. For advocating religious tolerance and the supremacy of a hybrid culture, he suffered much; he even got the death warrant called fatwa from the fundamentalists. But he was not silenced, and kept on speaking, writing and encouraging people for his version of a free world. Political corruption, strife, the hypocrisy and pettiness of national leaders also are uncovered in his novel. Truly speaking, the present novel is an exposure of how India has nearly become a failed nation due to the selfishness and shortsightedness of the political leaders , the parochial views of the religious gurus and the ignorance of the

public of the time. Rushdie's love for his nation is apparent in his major writings, all of which make India and Pakistan the central setting. He cannot help commenting on the life, business, governance, and politics of these two countries whatever theme he may be writing on. Rushdie's aim in doing so is to improve the condition of human rights, freedom of expression and press, and the correction of the national leadership of the two countries. His sighs it seems, will be forever for his lost homelands. He is sorry that once a peaceful multicolored nation is doomed by the onslaught of communal violence. The novel *The Moor's Last Sigh* is thus an elegy for the lost idea of India. As a nation, that embodies unity in diversity.

Rushdie, as we see from his novels and critical writings, always writes with the conviction of patriotism that he is fighting for a good purpose. He is not ready go give in to despair. As a person born in India, and as a vehement supporter of freedom and democracy, Rushdie wants India to survive as a true democratic nation. It is possible only if India cures itself of the festering disease of communalism. This is the message of the novel too, as found this research.

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