

RESISTANCE AND RECONCILIATION: A PERSPECTIVE ON SALMAN RUSHDIE'S THE GROUND BENEATH HER FEET

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The diasporic writers are caught between two worlds, cultures and languages and negotiate for a new literary space in the new land. Their situation involves construction of a new identity in the nation to which they have migrated and a complex relationship with the nation, they have left behind. A voyage into the past is a strategy employed by the immigrant writers to reconstruct and redefine their ethical identity and a sense of self, for survival in a world that is alien and often hostile. They often try to transplant their old familiar environment on the country to which they have migrated and relocate the history, philosophy and vision of their homeland in the midst of myriad challenges and an alien host culture. However, Salman Rushdie, an expatriate Indian writer, contends that, "we (migrant writers) are inescapably international" (Reclaiming" 5) borrowing from world literary sources and not just Indian. He epitomized the dilemma of the Indian writer in England as the simultaneous need to remain an Indian and the necessity to eschew ghettoisation.

In his literary works, Salman Rushdie explores a variety of meanings and identities which come into existence when individuals locate themselves from one culture to another. He is aware of the pain and disorientation involved in migration, he seems to regard immigration as a positive and liberating experience. He feels that a diasporic writer is in a better position than others to appreciate the pluralistic contradictory nature of contemporary experience. In the present age (of wandering), when traditional cultures are being drawn more and more into conflict and confrontation, it is the immigrant writer who is equipped by "double vision" to come up with new literary forms. Rushdie, in his essay, "A Dangerous Art Form" contends that "the ability to see at once from inside and out is a great thing, a piece of good fortune which the indigenous writer cannot enjoy." He feels that homelessness is a condition "to be affirmed, because it allows for more metamorphosis, change, the ability and the need to be other than one was" (Edmundson 70). His novel, **The Ground Beneath Her Feet** is a mesmerizing narrative, in which he operates as a master of metamorphosis, and reflects his sense of resistance and reconciliation as a diaspora. In this novel, unlike some of his earlier works, he not only takes a literary voyage to India but also to England (his new home) and America and portrays his vision of shaking mutating times. This book celebrates hybridity, intermingling, the transformation which is sequel to new and unexpected combinations of human beings, cultures and ideas. His intention here, has been to unify people-white and black, the West and the East, people who have historically been riven by language and its cultural context, politics and geography. The novel is a vivid account of the encounter between East and West, a remaking of the myths of Orpheus and Eurydice, of Kama and Rati, a novel of high and low culture and history.

In this novel, he portrays his ideas through the love story of Ormus Cama, an Indian song writer and Vina Apsara, half Greek and half-Indian, enchanting singing sensation; who are unequivocally and vocally fashioned as doomed lovers. The epic romance is narrated by a photographer Ummed Merchant who is caught up in the quarrels of ages' goddesses and gods. Here one can hear the white noise of Rushdie's loneliness. More than the cracking earthquake imagery, it is the metaphor of his own inevitable 'whitification' that is central. Ormus Cama composes 'At the Frontiers of the skin' and later moves into a freakish world of 'albino spaces', sharply mimicking Rushdie's predicament of having moved West for good—and ill; his sense of resistance and reconciliation in the West. By choosing half — Greek heroine and her mythology, Rushdie undertakes the same tortuous voyage. He wants a passage out of India. At the same time, he constructs in words the lasting simulacrum of a city that is also a state of mind — his Bombay.

The novel subverts through the hybridization of language which is nominally that of erstwhile colonizers but is also been hybridized and indigenized till it becomes an appropriate vehicle of the expression of traumas and aspirations of a post-colonial order. He has transformed language into a new construct. The fragmented world views and subversions and resistance which are present in his earlier novels, **The Midnight's Children**, **The Satanic Verses** and **The Haroun and the Sea of Stories** are offered in **The Ground Beneath Her Feet**, too. This panoramic novel tells myriad tales in Scheherazadic tradition and deals with fictional, ideological and socio-cultural aspects. The present paper, as it analyses the characters, their lives in India, their migration to the West and their relationships, focuses on the novel as a diasporic, feminist, sociological, historical and ethno-religious discourse.

In the novel, Rushdie borrows and juxtaposes allusions and myths both from East and West and through this act of intertextuality displaces the purity of the originals with the hybridity of the new. In the text there are myriad allusions which are ample evidence of his transnational, translanguistic bearing. On one hand the relationship between the Indian God Shiva, his new born son Ganesh and his trunkers noddle is explored and on the other, the myth of Prometheus with Zeus' vulture gnawing at his liver is discussed in great detail (Rushdie 199-200). There is a comparison between the abduction of Helen of Troy by Paris and that of the Sita of Ayodhya by the demon king Ravana., parallels between Hanuman, the wily monkey God and devious Odysseus. Sita and Persephone between Iliad and Ramayana are drawn. The central characters, Ormus Cama and Vina Aspara are compared to Orpheus—Eurydie Kama- Rati pair.

...When Kama, the love god, committed the crime of trying to shoot mighty Shiva with a dart of love, the great god burned him to ashes with a thunderbolt. Kama's wife, the goddess Rati, pleaded for his life, and softened Shiva 's heart. In an inversion of the Orpheus myth, it was the woman who interceded with the deity and brought Love —Love itself! back from the dead....So also Orums Cama, exiled from love by the parents whom he had failed to transfix with love 's arrow, shriveled by their lack of affection, is restored to the world of love by Vina. (148)

As Rushdie refers to high and low, Eastern and Western literary and cultural references in the novel, he not only relocates and redefines the 'English novel, but he also resides in the pages of the novel, his migrant, expatriate personality and his sense of resistance and reconciliation. In **Midnight's Children**, he defines his Indian self and in **Shame**, his Pakistani self, in **The Satanic Verses** as he himself puts it, "I am writing for the first time from the whole of myself. The English part, the Indian part". He does the same in **The Ground Beneath Her Feet**, which puts forth his ideology of global cosmopolitanism in myriad ways. In **The Satanic Verses**, one of the central questions is "How does newness come into the world? How is it born? Of what fusions, translations, conjoinings is it made? (8). "Straddling different cultures and texts" his novel advocates an embrace of plurality as the solution to the existing binarism of East and West, a plurality it possesses in its form and theme. "The conscious effort to enter into the discourse of Europe and the West" (Said 260) and mix with it his experiences of the East is of particular interest in Rushdie's works, and in an earlier generation of resistance writing. Said asserts, "I call this effort the voyage in" (261).

The motivations and circumstances which drive people to other countries are as various and complex as their attitudes towards their deracination. Most of the characters in the novel migrate to the West, never to return. Umeed says, "The only people who see the whole picture are the one's who step out of the frame. If he (Darius) was right then this is the subject also. If he was wrong, then the lost are merely lost. Stepping out of the frame they simply cease to exist" (203). On one hand, while Mull Standish, goes to India for spiritual needs and the more he sees of the West the more he realizes that "the best things in life come from the East" (407), on the other hand, Ormus's and Umeed's heart strove towards the West. America, the Great Attractor, pulled both of them.

Vina Apsara, kept on drifting from West to East and then to West. For her, the right place was always the one where she was not. She thought, she was always in the wrong place, in the condition of perpetual loss, she unaccountably took flight and disappeared and then discovered that the new place she had reached was just as wrong as the place she had left. Her traumatic childhood forced her migration to India. Pilo's family ill-

treated her. Hence, her long angry tirade against India, "I hate India I hate the heat . . . I hate the food . . . I hate the poor people I hate the dirt and I hate the smell and I hate squatting down to shit.. . I hate the radio and there is no tv . . (72). Her trust in the world had been horribly eroded. During her stay at Villa Thracia Vina began to believe that she might be able to stand on the solid ground of the love of Merchants' and Ormus'. Therefore, she fell in love with them, their city, country too, which she, in her own way is now able to belong. Her journey to the West in journey back home, a journey towards freedom an extremely positive and liberating experience, as she rocks the world with her mesmerizing voice.

Ormus quits Bombay for England. For him Bombay was something of a hick town, "a hayseed provincial ville". The greater stage, the true Metropolis, was to be found elsewhere, in Shanghai, Tokyo and above all in the fabled city of America, with their pinnacled architecture and the outsize moon rockets. He leaves his homeland for good, without regrets and without a backward glance. As his plane lifts from the native soil, his heart lifts and "he sheds his old skin without a second thought, crosses that frontier as if it didn't exist, lie a shape—shifter, like a snake" (250). England was his immediate destination but not his ultimate goal. His wants to be in America, the prospective land of promise, where, as he himself says, "his new life begins" (255).

Umeed's departure from the countly was a forced exile. Initially, he wondered whether on account of the smothering love of his parents for Bombay or some inexplicable feeling in himself that he began to look out to sea and dream of America. He confesses that he was insanely jealous of Bombay where he was born because it was his parents' love, the daughter they never had. Bombay seemed to him like his rival or like "his mother's womb" and he had to go abroad to get himself born. Later, he fell in love in with his own country and also Vina. After an assault on Anita Dharker, he was compelled to leave the country, as his life was at risk. "Umeed himself admits, "I didn't go of my own free will. As it happens I was driven out, like a dog. I had to run for my life" (203). In the West, initially he felt disoriented, "Disorientation is the loss of East" (176). He is haunted by the past memories — of his homeland, and says, "the day doesn't pass when I don't think of India, when I don't remember childhood scenes" (416). He remembers Dara Singh wrestling Sherpa Tenzing waving from the back of an open car outside Kamla Nehru Park, and can smell the sweet jasmine—scented ozone of the Arabian Sea" (417). However, he reconciles himself to the West and realizes that the past is past, gone forever. Sir Darius Cama feels sad at the end of British rule and dreams of England and its great mansions and thinks of shifting his family to England. He got an opportunity to go there when his paper was accepted for publication and presentation. However his promised land did not fulfil his promises, he was completely disillusioned, flew back to Bombay without delivering his paper and returned the papers pertaining to knighthood to the British Consulate. For Sir Darius "somewhere better" was England, but England turned against him and left him shipwrecked" (163).

The novel is also an ethno-religious or minority discourse and is a microcosm of Parsis in India. The central character, Ormus Cama and his parents. Sir Darius Cama and Lady Spenta are Parsis. The feelings of ambivalence and alienation of Parsis in the host country are portrayed. The text grapples with the problem of how they reacted to the conflicting calls of Gandhi's anti-imperial movements and their old loyalties to the Raj. Sir Darius represents the voice of some Parsi people who were happy with the Parsi British rule and asserts. "Let them have their independence elsewhere, Bombay isn't India". Most Parsis, felt bereft at the end of Empire and the resultant loss of special status, they enjoyed during the colonial period. The offered resistance to the hegemonic forces of the dominant Hindu community and marginalization at the national level and were therefore engaged in the creation of their own space.

Interspersed with the story of the novel are the details of the ancient Zoroastrian religion, their beliefs and the holy book. Lady Spenta Cama became blasphemously convinced that the monster of the Lie, Ahriman or Angra Mainyu, was gaining the victory over Ahura Mazda and the Light, inspite of what was prophesized in the great books, the Avesta, the Yasna and the Bundahish. There is also a reference to the Parsi funeral rites and death rituals, vultures hovering over the dokhna, the Tower of Silence, in the gardens of Doongerwadi on Malabar Hill. "Between the Parsi and the vulture there exists the great binding intimacy of last things" (). Rushdie describes the rooms lined with the portraits of the famous dead, the long funeral hall, the pallbearers,

the nassasalars, the Parsi priest, the sandalwood man and the fire which is the representation of Parsi god but is not god. The novel is not just a literary text but also a source of socio-cultural details.

-- The novel focuses on the life of Vina Apsara and is a feminist discourse. Born as Nissa Shetty to a Greek-American mother and an Indian lawyer, she grew up in America. She led a traumatic childhood. Her father Butcher Shetty was sent to jail, lost his job, abandoned his family. Her mother was rescued by John Poe, a widower with four kids and Nissa Shetty became Nissy Poe. Dejected, after the murder of her entire family including her mother, she was sent to the distant relatives of her mother, the Egiptuses in Western New York State and accepted a new name, Diana Egiptus, without regret. She was ill-treated and rejected by the family and she was sent to India because no American options remained. Hence, her migration from West to East. Pilo Doodhwala, seduced by the glamorous prospect of acquiring an American niece, agreed to take her in and on finding her poor and badly connected tortured her and threw her out, and Merchants' moved by her tragic plight accepted her. She tries to break away from her past and forges a new identity for herself. "From now on I'll be whatever have I choose" (84) and declares her new name in Vina Apsara and casts away her old skin. She decides to resist and not to take injustices lying down and is determined to shake the world by her enticing music.

Vina succeeds in carving a niche for herself, in the world of music. Extremely ambitious, she suddenly disappeared from the Merchants' home who helped her in the moments of distress and loved her immensely. With the help of Persis, she left Bombay, completed her apprenticeship in the coffee bars and clubs of London and then moved to New York, her homeland. There, she shared star billing with Joan Baez but felt alien. She changed direction again, becoming an early pioneer of the trail, where the worlds of art, film and music met. Once she stepped ahead, she did not look back. She appeared regularly on the cover page of magazines and made a space for herself in the West. She proved herself as a staunch feminist. She clenched her fist against racial injustice and sang from political platforms in the aftermath of racial troubles in America. She was a fierce, witty speaker on behalf of women's rights and against the sloppy imperium of men.

After Vina dies in the earthquake, goddess Ma, a guru, says that there has always been a women keeping things together in all cultures "Our Indian earth mother parted her lips to receive Sita. Our Greek mother Persephone sits besides Hades. Our beloved Vina, has joined these women to hold up the earth from below" Rushdie portrays her as a strong feminist and elevates her to the level of goddess.

The intense love relationship between Vine Apsara and Ormus Cama is central to the novel. Rushdie narrates their story like a sagacious story-teller. Nineteen year old Ormus, the most handsome young fellow in Bombay fell for enchanting twelve years old Vina and discovered the common trait music in them. Vina narrates the Mexican story of the origin of music and says. "I am the winged serpent and this is the house of sun and you are music" (94). Music formed a bridge between their worlds. Their meeting transformed both of them -- Ormus lost interest in all other females of the species and never regained it, even after Vina's death and Vina for the first time in her life found a man whose approval she constantly needed and to whom she turned, for everything, she said or did. "He became the meaning of her life and she of his" (112). Their profound love for each other reminds one of Shakespeare's Antony and Cleopatra. Describing their love Rushdie says, "He loved her like an addict : the more of her he had the more he needed. She loved him like a student, needing his good opinion playing up to him in the hope of drawing forth the magic of his smile" (113). Vina thought that Ormus is her perfect lover, she follows him and he feels that without her love, terminally alienated, he might go horribly wrong.

Ormus is unable to reconcile himself to his life, in absence of Vina. When Villa Thracia got burnt and Vina was found missing Ormus was totally shattered and feels that his life has become meaningless and he even talked of self- immolation. He says, "I am going to find her. No limit to where I'll go. To the end of the earth. And even beyond" (178). After her death in the Mexico earthquake he sank in a bout of depression, from which he could never rise, he was "already dead and in Hell". He deeply yearned for her resurrection. Similar in the case with Vina. On hearing that Bombay has been rocked by the earthquake, she returns to Bombay. She is jolted into a realization that Ormus is the only man for her and the fear that he might be dead

or injured has overridden all the uncertainties that had driven her always. Later on, when Ormus sank into a deep coma after a car accident in England, Vina flies back into his life and saves it. It seems he was waiting for her sleeping all those those long years. She says that he did not wake up until she made her appearance and compares herself with Rati, who saved Kama, the God of love. Their's is an immortal love story.

Shattered family structures ill effects are portrayed and its through the family of Camas. After the cricket ball, hit Virus, his mind was effected he retreated into an impassive silence. He moved into the mystery of inner space and had no time for play. His mother became nervy and unsettled and withdrew into a spiritual world which seemed a better habitation than her own. "What a cricket ball started could not be stopped" Sir Daruis, also withdrew from daily life, gave up his practice (as an advocate) and retreated into the sumptuous library of classical texts. Due to Virus's strange silence the family structures broke down everthing in the family was topsy turvy. Ormus was not cared for by the parents; his mother continued to be distant as events neutered her maternal feelings towards him. During his early years, he was imprisoned in an emotional isolation so oppressive that he temporarily lost his ability to sing.

The novel probes deeper into the causes of the facts which engender the feelings of violence and rebellion in Cyrus and he grows up to be an abnormal person. He did not receive the love and encouragement from his father, who berated his children regularly on the subject of the decay of Parsi youth. He accused the next generation of decadence, of defeatism, of weakness and homosexuality and spared no efforts to please him. His love was not reciprocated; rather when he topped the class, instead of encouraging words, he heard an angry tirade from his father on the decline of intellect of the Parsi children. Unable to blame his father for these cruelties, (his mother was lost in mysticism and his brother Virus was cacooned in silence), he directed all his anger towards Ormus instead, "If Daddy hadn't been up all night waiting for Ormus to get himself born, them it is certain-sure that his hit would have gone straight down one of those stupid hecklers throats" (46). Cyrus offered resistance to this kind of family set-up by becoming violent. On hearing five year old Ormus melodious song, he went insane and clutching his pillow he went to Ormus's bed, intent on murder. The cruelties which were inflicted on him by his father, were directed by him to the others. As his punishment for his attempted smothering of Ormus, he was sent to a boarding school which based its methods upon the true British primiciples of cold baths, regular beatings and high quality academic instruction, which helped him to develop into a full blooded psychopath. In school, although his academic performance improved dramatically, he had murder and rebellion in this eyes. When it was discovered that he was responsible for the gruesome tragedy that occurred in school — the mass murder of nineteen innocent children, all smothered in bed he was sent to Tihar Jail.

Cyrus, wanted to take revenge on his father, who discouraged him at every step, he broke out of the prison, disguised as a Syrian priest and committed the cruel act of parricide and surrendered before the police. Towards the end of the novel, Madonna, a American social worker, who visited Indian jails, wanted to release him from the jail by marrying him and then setting him free. However, he refused, because once out of jail, he will murder her, his own twin brother and his ultimate target Ormus. However, when he discovered that after Vina's death, Ormus in half dead he thought he is set free from the imperative of a life time.

There are glimpses of abysses below the surface of things in **The Ground Beneath Her Feet**. Twins can talk to each other from beyond the grave and murder can be committed by an anonymous murderer or perhaps by telepathic instruction. Ormus can hear his dead twin Gayomart singing songs, who has a great singing voice and immense vocal range. In Gayo he found the Other into which he dreamed of metamorphosing, the dark self that first feulled his art. Ormus was murdered by a tall dark-skinned woman, with red hair who just disappeared. The narrator of the story explains that the killer was Vina Apsara herself. He says, "I think she came and got him because she knew how much he wanted to die. Because he couldn't bring her back from the dead, she took him down with her to be with her, where she belonged" (511).

In this tragic saga where most of the characters die -- Vina becomes the victim of the earthquake, Ormus is murdered by an anonymous murderer, Ameer Merhant dies after a prolonged illness, Vivvy Merchant, unable

to bear the separation commits suicide, Umeed Merchant, the photographer who also loved Vina, is left alone with his memories to narrate the epic romance. After Vina's death, in a state of dejection, he recalls a day at Juhu Beach and twelve year old Vina in Stars and Strips swim suit, her words "I love the sea", her blossoming into womanhood and their loving relationship. He remembers that his place was in the corner of Vina's and Ormus's life and he was in the shadow of their achievements. He paid his tribute to Vina by assembling the show of her photographs, *After Vina*. He says Vina in her death "transcended all frontiers of race, skin, religion, language, history, nation, class" (480). The narrator's voice is filled with stories, anger, wisdom, humour and love and is perhaps the book's true hero.

Myriad voices and versions of history are presented in the novel, thereby subverting the prestige of native narratives and legitimizing the voice of the immigrant writers. It explicates Rushdie's nostalgic perspective of India's colonial and post-colonial history and gives a glimpse into the historical events of America, too. He synchronizes the history with the life of Vina Apsara, the Merchants and the Camas' family. He mentions the Quit India movement of 1942, the end of British empire in 1947, the agony of partition massacres and the counterpointing ecstasy of the Indian festivities, in 1960, the state of Bombay was divided, while new Gujarat was left to its own devices, the Bombayites were informed that their city was now the capital of Maharashtra. The novel is replete with the events of Indian history which are mentioned chronologically as the story proceeds. As in Rushdie's **Midnight's Children**, Nayantara Sahgal's **Rich like Us**, Rohinton Mistry's **A Fine Balance**, the excesses of Mrs. Gandhi's dictatorial emergency are described. Mr. Gandhi's forced sterilization, People's Car Scam of 1970's, the Swedish Canon Scam of 1980's, Stock Exchange Scam of 1990's also figure in the narrative. With Indian history, he gives an insight into the corruption in India. Anita Dharkar, the photo editor of the Illustrated Weekly was beaten and raped, when she published photographs of Pilloo's goat scam. She was defiled for the crime of possessing integrity and for moving against the current. He also writes about the narrow escape of the President of the United States and later of the assassination President Bobby Kennedy and his elder brother and predecessor, Jack.

The Ground Beneath Her Feet depicts both East and West and regards immigration as a positive experience, which allows for metamorphosis and change. Rushdie's marvellous story-telling capacity that feeds on pop culture, history, Indian and Western myths, his adroit mastery of language, his epic range makes this novel a mesmerizing narrative. Through this narrative he portrays his ideology of global cosmopolitanism and his sense of resistance and reconciliation as a diasporic writer.

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