UNIT 3: SALMAN RUSHDIE: "IMAGINARY HOMELANDS"

UNIT STRUCTURE

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3.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going though this unit you will be able to:

- explain the life of Rushdie and appreciate his works
- list the significant contributions of Rushdie
- describe the essay "Imaginary Homelands"
- discuss the major themes of the essay
- analyse the style of the essay

3.2 INTRODUCTION

This unit introduces you to one of the most famous twentieth century novelists and essayists, Salman Rushdie and his essay titled "Imaginary Homelands".You will be acquainted with the life and works of Rushdie through this unit. It will be followed by a discussion of the essay and a focus on the significant themes that Rushdie has thrown light into the essay. This unit also

provides you ideas about the exuberant writing style of Rushdie whose skillful handling of language is worth mentioning. To begin with, let us now discuss in greater details the life and contribution of this famous writer.

3.3 SALMAN RUSHDIE: LIFE AND WORKS

Salman Rushdie was born in Bombay on 19 June, 1947. He began his studies at Cathedral and John Connor School in Mumbai. At fourteen, he was sent to Rugby School, a public school in Warwickshire, England. His Rugby experience was largely miserable; he found the atmosphere racist and unfriendly. In 1965, he joined King's College, Cambridge for higher studies, where he studied history. Here, he found the student body far more open and diverse and easy to assimilate. He involved himself in theatre through the Cambridge Footlights Club, in which he shared space with the likes of Germaine Greer and David Hare. Even while he was in England, his parents had moved from Bombay to Karachi in 1964, seventeen years after Partition. One of the reasons cited by Rushdie for the move is that the family started feeling insecure in Bombay due to anti-Muslim prejudice. His father's properties were taken over by the government as evacuee properties. Rushdie was strongly opposed to the move; with the selling off of 'Windsor Villa', the house where he spent his childhood by his father, he writes, he "felt an abyss open beneath [his] feet". He could never relate to Pakistan as a 'home', he always felt a sense of belonging to India, Bombay in particular. To borrow a line from *Midnight's Children*, "it was not 'my' country – or not then. Not my country, although I stayed in it– as refugee, not citizen". He says in an interview that *Midnight's Children* originated with a long time idea of writing a novel about Bombay, Bombay in the [19]50s and [19]60s. On the other hand, Pakistan became, in both *Midnight's Children* and *Shame*, "a bleak and unforgiving place in contrast to the wonderfully various and endlessly recreated India".

After Cambridge, Rushdie returned to Pakistan for a brief stay. He started working for Pakistan's television service in Karachi, which was none too happy due to its censorious atmosphere. A screening of Edward Albee's *Zoo Story* that he produced and acted in had to be cut because it mentioned 'pork' and referred to God as a 'coloured queen'. An article he had written for a small

magazine was suppressed without any explanation by the press. He went back to England, took British citizenship, and tried a career, first in acting, then in writing, but eventually joined an advertising agency– Ogilvy and Mather– as a copywriter. He produced his first novel *Grimus* (1975) during his employment at the firm.

It was his second book *Midnight's Children* (1981) that made him famous overnight. It went on to win the Booker Prize in 1981 as well as the James Tait Black Prize, and rose to the status of a literary masterpiece both in and outside India. When Rushdie toured the country in 1983, hundreds of people flocked to see him. Within a year, publishers claimed, the novel had sold 4000 copies in hardcover and 45000 in paperback, quite unprecedented figures for an Indian English novelist.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q1. Why did Rushdie's family move from Bombay to Karachi?

Q2. What was the name of the house where Rushdie spent his childhood?

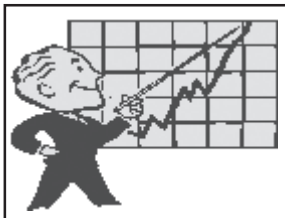
Q3. Why was the reason of Rushdie's unhappy career in the television service of Karachi?

Q4. Which literary work made Salman Rushdie world famous?

Some of his works include: *Shame*, published in 1983; Rushdie's first full-length work of non-fiction, *The Jaguar Smile: A Nicaraguan Journey*, a travelogue based on his Nicaraguan experience was published in 1987; *The Satanic Verses*, published in 1988 uses Magic Realism and became a 1988 Booker finalist and won the 1988 Whitbread Award for novel of the year; *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* (1990) which won the Writer's Guild Award. Meanwhile, *Midnight's Children* was declared the 'Booker of Bookers' in 1993, the best book in 25 years of Booker history. During this time he also published a collection of essays, *Imaginary Homelands* (1991). The British Film Institute pamphlet *The Wizard of Oz* was published in 1992.A short story

collection by Rushdie *East, West* appeared in 1994.Then in 1995, he published his fifth novel, *The Moor's Last Sigh*, which went on to win the Whitbread Prize for the best novel of that year and the Aristeion Prize in 1996 besides being short listed for the Man Booker Prize for 1995. Rushdie's sixth novel *The Ground Beneath her Feet* was published in 2000. It is based on the Orpheus-Eurydice myth with rock music replacing Orpheus's lyre. His seventh novel is *Fury* published in 2001. The least-known of Rushdie's novels, *Fury* is the story of a Cambridge educated millionaire from Bombay. In 2005, Rushdie produced his eighth novel, *Shalimar the Clown*. This was followed by his ninth novel, *The Enchantress of Florence* in 2008. In 2010, Rushdie produced *Luka and the Fire of Life*, a sequel to *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*.

His latest work *Joseph Anton-A Memoir* (2012) is an extraordinarily frank and honest account of his life after the *fatwa,* a story of how a writer was forced underground, moving from house to house, with the constant presence of an armed police protection team. Published in September, 2015, *Two Years Eight Months and Twenty-Eight Nights* is his latest novel. He has co-edited *Mirrorwork*, an anthology of contemporary Indian writings. He has also co-edited the anthology of *The Best American Short Stories* of 2008.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q5. Name the travelogue by Rushdie based on his Nicaraguan experience.

Q6. Name the latest novel by Salman Rushdie.

3.4 EXPLANATION OF THE TEXT

Rushdie opens his essay with the description of an old photograph that hangs on the wall of his office room. It's a photograph of the old house in Bombay where he was born and spent his childhood. The photograph reminds him of a line in a novel which says that "The past is a foreign country, they do things differently there". But Rushdie sees that in his case it is the reverse which

is true. For him, it is his present which is foreign, in all senses of the term. For him, it is his past that embodies a home, although, he says, it is "a lost home in a lost city in the mists of lost time". Rushdie then goes on to describe his visit to his hometown, Bombay which is the "lost city" referred to in the previous line. He had made the visit after a quite long gap. While going through the telephone directory on an impulse, he found to his surprise as well as delight that it still contained his father's name, number and address. He took this "eerie discovery" as a sign that he was being claimed by his homeland which was trying to show him that it was not a part of his past alone, but has continued significance in his identity and being. When he went next to visit the house of his childhood, the one in the photograph mentioned previously, he was met by an overwhelming experience. His memories of his long lost home were kept alive only through photographs and the photograph of the house with him was taken in black and white. But what he now stood facing in Bombay was a piece of his memory in all its living colours. Rushdie says that that was perhaps the moment when his novel *Midnight's Children* was born. He says that it was born out of his desire to restore his past to myself, not like a black and white movie but on a grand glorious scale, like that of a movie shot in CinemaScope and Technicolor. The city of Bombay was initially a group of seven islands. In the middle of the nineteenth century, the islands were merged into a single land mass mainly through land reclamation under the supervision of the British government. Rushdie, who was born and raised in Bombay, has a special attachment to the city. He says that Bombay is a city built by foreigners upon reclaimed land. Drawing a parallel with his own case, he infers that his expatriate status almost qualifies him to the title of a foreigner. Therefore, he believes, he too has a city and a history to reclaim.

Rushdie then presumes that exiled, expatriate or emigrant writers, like him, are haunted by a sense of loss and an urge to reclaim or look back, even at the risk of getting turned into pillars of salt. The reference is to the Biblical story of the wife of Lot who was turned into a pillar of salt. In the Old Testament, Lot, a nephew of Abraham, is visited by three angels, who ask him to gather his family and flee the city of Sodom, which was slated to be destroyed along with the city of Gomorrah. They were asked not to look back towards the

cities while escaping. Following their advice, Lot left the city with his wife and daughters. However, while making the escape, Lot's wife looked back at the burning city of Sodom and she was immediately transformed into a pillar of salt. Rushdie, however, says that even if expatriate Indians do engage in the act of looking back, they are always faced by the fact that due to their physical isolation from the home country, they will only be able to capture partial or imaginary versions of their homelands. He says that he was disturbed by this dilemma while writing his novel in North London. He tried to make his description of India as imaginatively true as possible, but then again he is aware that imaginative truth is both honourable and suspect at the same time. Therefore, he does not claim authenticity for the India depicted in his novel, but admits that it is just one of the several possible versions. He says that this is why he made Saleem, the narrator of his novel *Midnight's Children* an unreliable narrator. An unreliable narrator often provides inaccurate details, which is evident to the reader. An unreliable narrator is one whose perception, interpretation, and evaluation of the matters he or she narrates do not coincide with the opinions and norms implied by the author, which the author expects the alert reader to share. Rushdie says that the mistakes of the narrator in *Midnight's Children* mirror the mistakes of the fallible memory of an expatriate writer. His vision too is fragmentary, like that of the writer writing from outside India, who, Rushdie says, has to deal in broken pieces of a mirror, some pieces of which are lost forever.

But Rushdie also points out a paradox here. He says that the broken mirror is just as valuable as a perfectly sound one. He illustrates the point with a personal experience. Before beginning *Midnight's Children*, he was trying to recall for months, as much of the Bombay, Kashmir, Delhi and Aligarh of the 1950s and 1960s as he could, for the purposes of writing his novel. Rushdie was amazed by the amount of things he could recall; bits and pieces of the sights and sounds of the Bombay of his childhood came back to him in all their vivid details even after so many years. Rushdie believes that the partial nature of these memories is the reason which made them so much more evocative for him. In archaeology, the broken pots of the most commonplace objects from ancient times enable the reconstruction of the past, although in provisional

terms. Similarly, the pieces of memories from Rushdie's past acquired immense value for him in his present and their fragmentary quality made them acquire a symbolic and spiritual significance.

The past is like a country from which every person has emigrated. But Rushdie points out that the loss of his past is felt more acutely by a writer who lives away from his homeland or writes in a language which is not native to his ancestors. His loss is made even more concrete by the fact of the rift between the place where he now lives and the place where his past lay.

At this point, Rushdie dismisses his nostalgic strain and reminds himself and the reader that the broken mirror of memory is a very handy tool to work with in the present.

Quoting from *Daniel Martin* by John Fowles, Rushdie points out the importance placed by the human world on 'whole sight' or absolute knowledge. But he points out that human beings are not capable of whole sight; they are fallible creatures who are capable of nothing more than a fractured vision. They try to make sense of the world through fragments drawn from motley sources like scraps, dogmas, childhood injuries, newspaper articles, chance remarks, old films, small victories, people hated, people loved. He says that because of the fact that our perceptions are based on such inadequate materials that we attach such supreme value to them. He says that the statement in Fowles' book is based upon what he calls the guru-illusion, the proclivity to attribute the status of a sage or a seer to a writer and to consider his words as perfect wisdom. He says that those like him, who are culturally displaced, are especially confronted by the provisional nature of all truths and certainties. In Greek mythology, Mount Olympus is believed to be the seat of the nine muses of the fine arts. Rushdie says that modern writers cannot claim to a position as lofty as Olympus. However, Rushdie considers this as rather an advantage for them, as it allows them freedom to describe the world in the way they perceive it in their daily lives.

In *Midnight's Children*, the narrator Saleem Sinai uses the metaphor of a cinema screen to illustrate how the perspective becomes narrower and reality becomes more partial as one moves closer to the actual events. He says that

as the narrative of his novel moves closer to contemporary events, it fails to incorporate a wide perspective. Thus, while depicting incidents like the Emergency, he has had to deal in snippets.

While attending a conference on modern writing at New College, Oxford, Rushdie, along with other novelists were discussing the need for new ways to describe the world. And then the playwright Howard Breton came up with a rhetorical question if literature does nothing more than just describe. All the novelists were completely unsettled by the very germane point raised by Breton. Rushdie applies the question raised by Breton to the case of Indian writers in England who write about India. He asks if these writers too can do no more than merely describe from a distance the land they had left behind or if their very distance provides them the opportunity to do more with their work.

However, he says that these questions have political implications and hence they should be answered at least partially in political terms. He states that description itself is after all a political act. He cites the black American writer Richard Wright who once wrote that black and white Americans had incompatible and contesting descriptions of reality. Rushdie infers from this that the first important step towards changing the world is re-describing it. And particularly during times when the State tries to manipulate descriptions of reality to fit its own purposes, then, Rushdie says, that the creation of alternative realities of art, including the novel of memory, becomes a political act. He quotes the writer Milan Kundera who had commented that the struggle of man against power is no different than the struggle of memory against forgetting. Rushdie asserts that writers and politicians are natural rivals. Both keep trying to make the world in their own images and both fight for the same territory. Rushdie considers the novel as one way of challenging the official, politicians' version of truth. He uses the 'State truth' about the war in Bangladesh as an example; the Pakistani state has maintained that no atrocities had been committed during the civil war in East Pakistan and the statement is corroborated by many intellectuals as well. He also cites the example of Indira Gandhi's denial of many atrocities committed during the Emergency, like forced sterilisations.

Rushdie believes that literature can and perhaps must expose the truth concealed by official facts. But he has doubts whether expatriate writers like him are completely capable of carrying out this role or if they are at all entitled to speak on the matters of a country and society from which they are thousands of miles away. He answers his own questions by saying that a book is not justified by the writer's right to speak on a certain matter but on the quality of the work that he has produced. He points out that many books arising out of direct experience may turn out quite ordinary while extraordinary work has been produced by authors writing from a distance. He says that certain themes cannot be reserved for certain groups only in literature. And as far as risks are concerned, he says, the real risk of the work is taken in the course of composing the work, in attempting to make it an excellent work of art. He says that books prove their worth when they stretch themselves to the limits of what it is possible to achieve and when the author dares to artistically reach out for those limits.

Defending the case of Indian writers in England, Rushdie sums up the main argument underlying G. V. Desani's book *All About H Hatter*. The book seems to proclaim the irreversibility of the fact of the migrations that took place in the fifties and sixties of the twentieth century. Rushdie asserts that the expatriate community will not accept their exclusion from any part of their heritage, and that they have a right to lay claim both to English culture as well as the culture of their home country.

Rushdie makes a clarification about the slightly defensive note in his last few remarks about the work and entitlements of expatriate Indian writers. He says that the expatriate writers suffer from a certain amount of guilt whenever they look back at their country. He says that there are moments when they regret having moved away from their homeland and it makes them feel like post-lapsarian men and women, those who have been expelled from Paradise. He says that they are Hindus who have crossed the forbidden black water and Muslims who eat the forbidden pork. They now belong partly to the West and their identity has become plural and partial at the same time. However, he also highlights the benefit that their position affords them. He says that if one of the

agendas of literature is to find new angles at which to enter reality, the distance of these writers from their home countries provides them with such angles.

Rushdie explains that the angle at which his novel *Midnight's Children* enters its subject matter is from the point of view of a secular man. He says that one of the things he liked and still likes about India is its non-sectarian philosophy. He further says that he was not brought up in a narrowly Muslim environment and he does not consider Hindu culture to be either an alien entity or superior to Islamic heritage. He believes that it has something to do with the cosmopolitan and secular nature of the city of Bombay, where he grew up. In *Midnight's Children*, the protagonist Saleem Sinai makes an eclectic use of material from various sources. Rushdie believes it may not have been as easy for him to do this had he been writing the book in India instead of from outside it.

Rushdie then goes on to clarify another criticism made against *Midnight's Children*; the book is accused of portraying a pessimistic image of India. But he claims that he does not see the book as despairing or nihilistic. That may appear to be the point of view of the narrator, but it is not necessarily the view of the author. He says that his aim was to create a tension between the form and content of the narrative in his book. He says that the story does lead to a despairing end, but the book has been designed to echo the Indian talent for non-stop self-generation. The multitudinous form of the narrative, he says, stands for the infinite possibilities of the Indian society and he considers this as an optimistic counterweight to Saleem's personal tragedy.

Rushdie then goes on to explain that not all Indian writers in England hail from India, some of them are Pakistani, some Bangladeshi and even West, East or South African. Thus, the word 'Indian' has come to stand for a rather loose concept. He says that in the future Indo-British fiction is going to be produced as much from London, Birmingham or Yorkshire as from Delhi or Bombay.

Rushdie then comes to the issue of the dispute over the use of the English language among postcolonial writers. Rushdie calls for a change in the attitude towards the English language. Addressing the prolonged debate over the appropriateness of the English language to Indian themes, Rushdie admits that

the language cannot be used for Indian purposes in the form in which it was used by the colonisers or native speakers, and therefore, he says, it needs refashioning to adapt it to Indian themes and experiences. He says that the writers who do use English do so in spite of their ambiguity towards it or perhaps because of it. He thinks that they perhaps find in the linguistic struggle traces of the tug of cultures within themselves and of the influences on their societies. He believes that in a way, conquering the English language might complete the project of achieving freedom for the postcolonial man.

However, he soon realizes that the British Indian writer does not have the option of rejecting the English language anyway. For the British Indian child, English is the language he or she will grow up speaking, perhaps as the first language. He believes that the English language has central importance in the forging of the British Indian identity and must be embraced in spite of everything. He calls the expatriate person a 'translated man'. But he does not want to believe that translation only leads to loss, but insists that something is also gained in the process.

Rushdie explains how being an Indian writer residing outside the country always poses problems of definition and identity. They are faced with questions like how to preserve their culture without falling into the trap of becoming too narrow in outlook, how to think about bringing in changes within the community and that too without risking being swamped by British culture, what could be the spiritual or practical consequences of blocking out Western ideas and practices and the single existential question that subsumes all the other questions: how are they to live in the world. Rushdie does not wish to prescribe any answers to these questions. His purpose is to highlight the issues that need to be considered.

He then talks about the relationship between the British Indian writer and the majority white culture which surrounds him. He says that like many other Bombay-raised middle-class children of his generation, he grew up with a certain romantic idea of England. He was extremely enthusiastic about going to England in his teens. And he admits that it has not entirely let him down, although he knows that is only because of his hailing from a privileged social

class, his unnaturally fair skin and his British accent. He knows that without these advantages, it would have been a very different story for him because the real England is not as romantic as the image he had in mind before arriving. However, Rushdie says that many white Britons refuse to own up the fact and insist that the romantic image is the reality. He then recounts an incident when a professional humourist made a culturally insensitive comment in a live radio programme with him and tried to justify their racial prejudices against brown people. Rushdie's intention is to show the blatant prevalence of racism in British society.

Citing the African American writer Richard Wright, Rushdie explains that black and white depictions of society are no longer compatible. In other words, different cultures have different ways of understanding and describing the world. One way of dealing with the problem, he says, is the mixing of fantasy and naturalism in art. But irrespective of the technique, he says that Indian writers outside the country are capable of bringing in a kind of double perspective into their work. They are not capable of providing 'whole sight' but they can offer this stereoscopic vision instead.

However, Rushdie also warns the Indian English writer to look out for the danger of succumbing to a ghetto mentality, of limiting themselves within narrowly defined cultural boundaries. And this, he says, leads to the question of identifying the audience for whom one is writing. He states that in his own case, he has never had a particular set of readers in mind. But in the case of *Midnight's Children* he admits that he would have considered the book a failure had it not received the kind of appreciation it did from the readers in the subcontinent, irrespective of what response it had generated among Western readers. Thus, he says that along with the African American writer Ralph Ellison, he writes for people who can identify with his work as well as anyone else his work is able to reach. He also calls for a broad approach as far as selection of theme is concerned. He says that apart from the literary tradition of their mother country, Indian writers in England can also lay claim to the tradition of immigrant writers in England like Swift, Conrad and Marx. But he also points out that the novel itself has turned into a very international form in

literature and writing novels inevitably makes one an international writer. He believes that one of the most pleasant freedoms enjoyed by the literary migrant is that he can pick his own set of literary predecessors. His own chosen forebearers include Gogol, Cervantes, Kafka, Melville and Machado de Assis – a list that includes writers from multiple linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

In the conclusion of his essay, he alludes to a section from the novel *The Dean's December* by Saul Bellow. In the novel, the central character hears a dog barking wildly and he imagines that through his barking the dog is protesting against the limits of his experiences as a dog and perhaps praying for the universe to open up a little more. Rushdie knows that the writer is using the dog only as a metaphor for the human individual and says that the desire of the dog to experience a broader universe is the desire of every Indian English writer in England.

3.5 MAJOR THEMES

The major themes of the essay are as discussed below :

Cosmopolitanism :

Cosmpolitanism is an ideology which proposes that all human beings are equal citizens of a single human community encompassing the entire world or cosmos. One who adheres to this philosophy is called a cosmopolitan person. In a cosmopolitan community, people belonging to different cultural or national backgrounds enjoy equal membership and live in a relationship of mutual respect. At the heart of the philosophy of cosmopolitanism is the idea of accommodating difference and respect for the 'Other'.

Throughout the essay, Rushdie keeps addressing the issue of the ambiguous identity of the Indian English writer. He believes that the multiple heritages that the migrant writer is heir to enables him to occupy a cultural space, which is not defined by narrow cultural differences but enables the co-existence of multiple cultures in a cosmopolitan spirit.

Diasporic Consciousness :

The term diaspora originates from an ancient Greek word that means 'to scatter about' or 'to disperse'. In current usage the term refers to a group of

people who have voluntarily migrated or been forcefully dislocated from their homeland. A diasporic community perceives itself as a community in exile; it maintains cultural and political ties with the homeland and generally harbours hopes of returning. Salman Rushdie identifies himself as a person belonging to the Indian diaspora and his literary works manifest elements of a diasporic consciousness.

One of the foundational concerns in the essay "Imaginary Homelands" is Rushdie's desire to reclaim his 'homeland' through his literary exercises : "It may be that writers in my position, exiles or emigrants or expatriates, are haunted by some sense of loss, some urge to reclaim, to look back, even at the risk of being mutated into pillars of salt". He talks about the intense sense of loss faced by a writer who is out-of-country and out-of-language, which, he says, "is made more concrete for him by the physical fact of discontinuity, of his present being in a different place from his past, of his being 'elsewhere'". A person from a diasporic community constantly feels alienated from the host culture, but he is also alienated from his home culture. This leads to a sense of identity crisis among the diasporic population.

However, Rushdie likes to see in this ambiguity of culture and identity a particular advantage to the diasporic writer; he believes that geographical and cultural isolation can provide them with previously unexplored angles of entering literature. He says that the position of migrant writers is that of "translated men" but he believes that while something does get lost in translation, other things are gained in the process.

Literature and Memory :

In the beginning of his essay "Imaginary Homelands", Rushdie explains how his visit to his ancestral house in Bombay led to being born in him a desire to reclaim his past through a literary project, and since his past, as he saw it, was inseparable from the Bombay and India of his past, his project would involve a reclaiming of the city and the country too. This is how, he says, his novel *Midnight's Children* was born. But Rushdie also admits that the process of looking back contains its own dangers; he says that the fact of the physical alienation of diasporic writers from India hinders them from reclaiming an

authentic version of India or Bombay. Instead, they will end up creating fictions, "not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands, Indias of the mind".

He says that the Indian writer who writes from outside India has to deal with the world of his homeland in fragments, like pieces of a broken mirror, "some of whose fragments have been irretrievably lost". However, he also highlights the fact that the fragments of memory are not any less valuable for that matter. He says that the partial nature of his personal memories of India rendered them more evocative, in his words, "fragmentation made trivial things seem like symbols, and the mundane acquired numinous qualities". He does not recommend dismissing the broken glass as a mere mirror of nostalgia, but considers it a useful tool with which to work in the present.

Post-Colonialism :

Postcolonialism or Post-Colonialism is the study of the effects of colonisation on cultures and societies around the world. In the words of M. H. Abrams, it refers to the critical analysis of the history, culture, literature, and modes of discourse that are specific to the former colonies of England, Spain, France, and other European imperial powers.Salman Rushdie generally writes from a conscious postcolonial and diasporic position.

In "Imaginary Homelands", he deals at some length with the issue of one crucial colonial legacy as far as literature is concerned "the use of the English language in postcolonial societies". Postcolonial societies have constantly displayed ambivalence towards the continued use of the English language. Rushdie says that the Indian writers who do use English do so in spite of their ambiguous feelings towards it, or even perhaps because of it. In fact, the language used by Rushdie in his fictional works is not the standard or 'correct' English, but it is flavoured with local coinages and idioms which better expresses the experiences of the societies of the subcontinent.

Nationalism :

Salman Rushdie often engages with ideas of the nation and nationalism in his fictional works. In simple terms, nationalism can be defined as a desire by

a large group of people (such as people who share the same culture, history, language, etc.) to form a separate and independent nation of their own (Merriam Webster). Thinkers since Ernest Renan in the nineteenth century have argued that nations are not 'natural' entities. In his influential book *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (1983) Benedict Anderson puts forward a theory about the constructed nature of nations. He defines the nation as "an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign". He calls it an 'imagined community' because the members of such a community will never know each of the other members personally, and yet, they assume an affinity with the other members through a popular mental image of solidarity. Rushdie is also aware of the contemporary critiques of the concepts of nation and nationalism. It is significant that he chooses to call his essay "Imaginary Homelands". It is because of the imagined nature of the nation that it is possible to have multiple versions of a single nation. Rushdie says that the India that he has tried to recreate in *Midnight's Children* was his version of India, "a version and no more than one version of all the hundred millions of possible versions".

Post-modern Literature :

Postmodernism is seen as a continuation as well as a revolt against Modernist approaches to literature and tries to offer a challenge to the elitism of modernist 'high art' by recourse to the models of 'mass culture'drawn from various sources such as film, television, newspaper cartoons, and popular music. Salman Rushdie displays this postmodernist tendency in his works by constantly diluting the distinction between 'high art' and 'low art' in his creative works. In "Imaginary Homelands", he describes memory as a "shaky edifice" which is built out of "scraps, dogmas, childhood injuries, newspaper articles, chance remarks, old films, small victories, people hated, people loved…"

In "Imaginary Homelands" he tries to offer his explanation of the need to mingle fantasy and reality in literature. He says that in the multicultural environment of the society today, fantasy or the mingling of fantasy and naturalism is one way of dealing with the issue of presenting a competent

description of the complex modern society. He says that the technique offers writers "a way of echoing in the form of our work the issues faced by all of us: how to build a new, 'modern' world out of an old, legend-haunted civilization, an old culture which we have brought into the heart of a newer one".

3.6 STYLE AND LANGUAGE

Salman Rushdie is known for his exuberant style of writing and a playful, highly experimental use of language in his fictional works. However, we find none of that in this essay. Written in 1981, he wrote this essay shortly after the publication and grand success of his second novel *Midnight's Children*. The essay makes use of simple,lively and lucid prose. The essay is very allusive; he uses logical arguments with examples drawn from his as well as other writers' works to illustrate his points. Rushdie is basically trying to address questions and issues faced by the Indian writer who writes in English and resides outside his home country.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q7. What are the major themes of the essay?

Q8. Write a note on Rushdie's style.



3.7 LET US SUM UP

After reading this unit, you have become familiar with Salman Rushdie, one of the leading writers to have fascinated his readers worldwide. Prior to his profession as a writer, he tried in acting also. You have learnt about the life of Rushdie after reading the unit and have become familiar with his major works including novels like *Grimus, Midnight's Children, The Satanic Verses, Haroun and the Sea of Stories, East West, The Moor's Last Sigh*, etc. You are also familiar with the essay "Imaginary Homelands" and the significant themes that the essay reflected. Well known for his brilliant handling of language, Rushdie wrote the essay in an allusive and logical way. This essay is noted for the use of simple, lively and lucid prose.



3.8 FURTHER READING

1. Rushdie, Salman. (2010). *Imaginary Homelands: Essay and Criticism (1981-1991)*. Vintage Books: London.

Website: www.salmanrushdie.com



3.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q1 : One of the reasons cited by Rushdie for the move is that the family started feeling insecure in Bombay due to anti-Muslim prejudice. His father's properties were taken over by the government as evacuee properties.

Ans to Q2 : 'Windsor Villa'.

Ans to Q3 : Due to its censorious atmosphere, he was unhappy. A screening of Edward Albee's *Zoo Story* that he produced and acted in had to be cut because it mentioned 'pork' and referred to God as a 'coloured queen'.

Ans to Q4 : It was his second book *Midnight's Children* (1981) that made him famous overnight.

Ans to Q5 : *The Jaguar Smile: A Nicaraguan Journey.*

Ans to Q6 : *Two Years Eight Months and Twenty-Eight Nights.*

Ans to Q7 : Nationalism, Post-Colonialism, Literature and Memory, Cosmopolitanism, etc.

Ans to Q8 : Salman Rushdie is known for his exuberant style of writing and a playful, highly experimental use of language in his fictional works.



3.10 MODEL QUESTIONS

Q1. Give a detailed explanation of the essay titled "Imaginary Homelands" by Salman Rushdie.

Q2. Write a note on the following topics:

a. Salman Rushdie's Novels

b. Imaginary Homelands

Q3. What are the major themes of the essay "Imaginary Homelands"?

Q4. Write short notes on:

a. Diaspora

b. Post-Colonialism

c. Postmodernism

Q5. Give a sketch of Rushdie's notion of diasporic consciousness?

Q6. Show after Salman Rushdie, how is literature related to memory?

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