

# Through the Looking Glass: The World of Magic Realism in Salman Rushdie's Works

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**Abstract:** *The impact of Rushdie's incorporation of magic realism is multi-faceted. On the one hand, it has contributed to the emergence of postcolonial literature by offering a unique perspective on the conflicts, challenges, and negotiations that take place in multicultural societies. By using magic realism, Rushdie has redefined the literary canon by embracing non-Western literary traditions and blending them with Western literary influences. On the other hand, Rushdie's works have also opened up debates on the political and social issues of multiculturalism, identity, and the politics of representation. His work has instigated discussions on the theme of cultural hybridity and how it can be accepted and celebrated rather than rejected and oppressed. His use of magic realism has also inspired other writers to incorporate similar elements in their works, leading to the emergence of a new generation of magical realists. Salman Rushdie's use of magic realism has had a significant impact on contemporary literature. His incorporation of magical elements into his storytelling has not only enriched and expanded the boundaries of the literary genre but has also inspired discussions on cultural hybridity, identity, and representation. As a result, Rushdie's works have become a beacon for other writers to follow, leading to the emergence of a new literary tradition in contemporary literature. This paper explores the impact of magic realism in Salman Rushdie's works, focusing on the literary techniques used to incorporate magic realism as an integral part of his narratives.*

**Keywords:** *Magic Realism, Post colonialism, Identity Crisis, Cultural Hybridity.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION:

Salman Rushdie is recognized as one of the preeminent writers of magical realism in contemporary literature. His use of magic realism, a literary genre that presents a coalescence of myth and reality, has made significant and lasting contributions to the world of literature. Rushdie's novels have been characterized by the use of magical realism to explore themes such as colonialism, post colonialism, and identity. A prime example of this approach is Rushdie's seminal work, *Midnight's Children*, which presents a fantastic parallel universe of India, with its own idiosyncratic mythology and history. In *Midnight's Children*, Rushdie uses magical realism to satirize political and social issues, blending humour and absurdity to comment on post-colonial India. Another example is the novel *The Satanic Verses* which incorporates magic realism to emphasize the fluidity of identity and the tenuous nature of cultural and religious boundaries. The novel's use of magical elements, such as the transformation of characters and mythological creatures, serves to highlight the importance of subjectivity in understanding the world and the transformative nature of cultural hybridity. Rushdie's use of magic realism is not limited to his works of fiction, as he has also employed it in his non-fiction work. In his memoir *Joseph Anton*, Rushdie uses magic realism to explore the personal and cultural trauma of living under the fatwa, issued by the Ayatollah Khomeini in 1989. The memoir highlights the psychosocial impacts of living in a state of constant fear, evoking the magical realism genre to convey the surreality of such an experience.

## 2. SHALIMAR THE CLOWN :

*Shalimar the Clown* is a novel by Salman Rushdie that employs magic realism to explore themes of love, betrayal, and political conflict. The novel tells the story of the complex relationship between India and Kashmir, where the characters navigate tensions between different ethnic and religious groups. The use of magical realism in the novel serves to offer a unique perspective on the realities of the world and the power of the imagination to transform it. The novel's central character, Shalimar, is a clown who falls in love with a diplomat's daughter, Boonyi. The story explores their doomed

love affair and the resulting consequences that threaten to shake the very foundation of Kashmir's society. Rushdie uses magical realism to create a metaphorical world, where the fantastical and the real exist in the same space. This use of the genre serves to emphasize the transformative nature of love, as well as the power dynamics of political conflict. One example of the implementation of magical realism in the novel is the representation of Shalimar as a clown. This character serves as a metaphorical embodiment of the marginalized and oppressed in society. Through his whimsical and humorous demeanour, Shalimar uses his clown persona to navigate and change the world around him. His identity as a clown serves to highlight the importance of creativity as a means of combating oppression, and the power of the imagination to redefine the status quo. Rushdie also uses magical realism to comment on the political conflict between India and Kashmir. In the novel, Kashmir is depicted as a battle between the forces of magic and realism, with the latter being represented by India. Kashmir's magical elements are seen as a threat by India, and the Indian government seeks to eradicate them. Through the use of magical realism, Rushdie highlights the difficulty of navigating the differences between different cultures and the role of the imagination in preserving traditions. Finally, the novel employs magical realism to explore the themes of love and betrayal. The novel presents love as a transformative force that can bridge differences between people, while betrayal can lead to a dangerous and destructive power. The novel shows how love can compel individuals to make sacrifices that could transform society, but when misplaced or betrayed, it can lead to grievous consequences. *Shalimar the Clown* uses magical realism to explore themes of love, betrayal, and political conflict. The use of magical realism underscores the importance of creativity and imagination in the face of oppression and the transformative power of love. Through the novel's depiction of Kashmir as a hybrid space, where the real and the magical merge, Rushdie comments on the importance of cultural diversity and the need to preserve a society's cultural heritage. The novel challenges the reader to view the world through different lenses and to consider the power of the imagination to challenge and transform the status quo.

### **3. HAROUN AND THE SEA OF STORIES :**

*Haroun and the Sea of Stories* is a children's book that explores the power of storytelling through the literary device of magic realism. The novel tells the story of a young boy named Haroun who embarks on a magical journey to restore the storytelling abilities of his father Rashid, who has lost his magical gift. Rushdie uses magical realism to explore themes of creativity, imagination, and the power of stories. The novel's central premise is the power of storytelling to transform reality, and Rushdie employs magical realism to illustrate this concept. In the novel, literal places and objects come to life, such as the Ocean of the Streams of Story, a sea made up of stories, and a mechanical bird, Butt the Hoopoe. The inclusion of these magical elements serves to enhance the narrative, taking the reader on an imaginative journey into a fantastical world. Furthermore, the use of magical realism highlights the importance of creativity and imagination in the storytelling process. The narrative portrays storytelling as an act of creation, with the characters in the novel being creators of their own narratives. For instance, the character of Rashid is presented as a creator of his own stories, which are based on his real-life experiences. By using magical realism, Rushdie creates a connection between the power of storytelling and creativity, underscoring how the imagination can shape the world around us. The novel's use of magical realism also serves to comment on the political climate of the time of its publication. Rushdie wrote the novel at a time when he faced criticism and threats of violence for his previous novel, *The Satanic Verses* which some Muslims saw as blasphemous. The magical elements in *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* can be seen as a metaphor for the creative freedom that Rushdie and other artists were fighting for at the time. The novel celebrates the power of imaginative storytelling and underscores the significance of artistic and literary freedoms. Moreover, the novel uses magical realism to blur the lines between reality and fantasy, as well as truth and fiction. Through the inclusion of fantastical elements, it becomes difficult to determine what is real and what is not. This is evident in the character of the Water Genie, Iff, who is initially presented as a myth. Throughout the novel, the reader is unsure if Iff is real or if he is a product of the characters' imaginations. The novel uses magical realism as a literary device to explore themes of creativity, imagination, and the transformative power of stories. By intertwining the fantastical with the real, the novel celebrates the power of storytelling, highlighting the importance of creativity and imagination in our lives. The book underscores the significance of artistic and literary freedoms and encourages readers to embrace their own creativity and storytelling abilities.

### **4. THE SATANIC VERSES :**

*The Satanic Verses* is hailed as a prominent example of a work of literature that expertly blends reality and the fantastical. In the novel, Rushdie uses magical realism to explore themes of identity, religion, and diaspora. The use of magical realism is vital to the development of the novel's complex narrative, which is set in a range of locations across the world. The novel's opening sequence, in which two characters fall from an airplane, sets the tone for the entire novel. The characters' fall is a magical realist event that leans towards the fantastical. The incident results in one of the

characters, Gibreel Farishta, acquiring mystical powers. The powers he possesses are linked to his identity as an actor as well as his Muslim faith, which is a central theme in the novel. Similarly, the character of Saladin Chamcha also undergoes a metamorphosis, which involves him transforming into a goat. The use of magic realism here serves as a metaphor for the character's identity crisis, symbolizing his feelings of alienation as a British-born Muslim who struggles to feel connected to both his birthplace and ethnic heritage. Another significant use of magic realism is in the dream sequences, especially those that depict Prophet Muhammad's life. In the novel, Rushdie traces the historical events that led to the creation of the *Satanic Verses* which resulted in the Prophet facing harsh criticism. The use of magic realism in this instance blurs the line between fact and fiction, emphasizing the power of storytelling to shape cultural identities and traditions. Furthermore, Rushdie uses magical realism, particularly in the depiction of the character Mahound, to explore the complexities of religious beliefs and their relationship with political power. The novel portrays Mahound's life as a story, a blend of fact and fiction, which highlights the malleable nature of religious beliefs. The use of magical realism in *The Satanic Verses* also serves to highlight the experiences of the diaspora, which are an essential theme in the book. The novel explores the impact of migration and the challenges that arise from such displacement. The magical realist elements in the novel contribute to an atmosphere in which characters feel as if they are in a kind of limbo, suspended between different cultures, beliefs, and realities. The blending of reality and the fantastical in the novel emphasizes the power of storytelling and the ways in which myths and legends can shape both personal and cultural identities. The novel's use of magical realism also serves to emphasize the experiences of the diaspora, highlighting the challenges and complexities that arise from displacement and cultural alienation.

## 5. MIDNIGHT'S CHILDREN :

*Midnight's Children* is a classic novel that tells the story of a young boy named Saleem who was born at the exact moment Indian independence was declared. The novel is celebrated for its use of magic realism - a genre that blends the real and the fantastical. Rushdie uses this technique to tell the story of India's post-colonial experience, exploring identity, memory, and the relationship between history and mythology. Throughout the novel, Rushdie uses magical realism to create parallel universes that highlight the complex and often contradictory nature of India's socio-political reality. For example, the novel's opening pages describe a world that is torn between tradition and modernity, where ancient myths and legends collide with contemporary landmarks and pop culture references. The use of magic realism in *Midnight's Children* also serves to examine themes of identity and cultural conflict. Saleem's telepathic powers, for instance, are used as a metaphor for the breakdown of communication and understanding that occurs between different communities in India after independence. Saleem's struggles with his powers, which he believes to be a curse, are reflective of the many ways in which people in India struggle to reconcile their cultural legacies with the realities of modern life. Furthermore, magic realism in *Midnight's Children* highlights the importance of memory and mythology in shaping our understanding of history. As Saleem divines the past, present, and future using his superhuman abilities, Rushdie shows how personal memories and collective memories can be shaped by myth and legend. The novel emphasizes the importance of storytelling and oral tradition to preserve a culture's history and identity. In *Midnight's Children*, Rushdie also uses magic realism to heighten the emotional impact of certain events. For example, when Indira Gandhi declares a state of emergency in India in the 1970s, Saleem's nose begins to grow uncontrollably, a visual metaphor for the rise of censorship and repression that ensued. By using magic realism, Rushdie is able to create powerful and visceral imagery that conveys complex emotions and themes. Through this genre, Rushdie is able to create a vibrant and imaginative world that explores complex themes such as identity, cultural conflict, and the relationship between history and mythology. His use of magical realism serves as a critique of India's post-colonial experience, highlighting the challenges and contradictions that arise from the country's diverse cultural and social landscapes.

## 6. CONCLUSION :

Salman Rushdie is widely regarded as one of the most celebrated authors and champions of magical realism in literature. In his works, Rushdie weaves intricate narratives that challenge the boundaries of reality and push the boundaries of the imagination. Through the use of magic realism, Rushdie creates an alternate universe that is both captivating and thought-provoking. Magic realism is a literary genre characterized by realistic settings infused with supernatural or surreal elements that are seamlessly integrated into the narrative. This technique allows authors to explore themes of identity, cultural conflict, and social injustice using a unique narrative style. Rushdie is known for his extensive use of magic realism in his works, some of which are *Midnight's Children*, *The Satanic Verses*, and *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*. In *Midnight's Children*, Rushdie employs magic realism to explore themes of history, identity, and memory. The novel focuses on the lives of children born at the stroke of midnight on the eve of India's independence from Britain. The protagonist, Saleem Sinai, possesses telepathic abilities and is able to communicate with other children who were born at the same moment. Through these supernatural elements, Rushdie creates a metaphorical representation of India's

post-colonial identity crisis, where tradition collides with modernity. In *The Satanic Verses*, Rushdie uses magic realism to create a surreal world where the boundaries between reality and fantasy blur. The novel follows the lives of two men, Gibreel and Saladin, who survive a tragic plane crash. Both men are transformed into supernatural beings, and their journey through the surreal landscape of their dreams is used as a metaphor for cultural conflict, faith, and the challenges of the immigrant experience. In *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*, Rushdie creates a magical allegory that celebrates the power of storytelling. The novel tells the story of a young boy named Haroun who travels to a magical world to help restore the "Sea of Stories," which has been polluted by a sinister cult. Using magical realism, Rushdie creates a fantastical world where storytelling is the key to change, and where the power of imagination can transform reality. The use of magic realism in Rushdie's works serves multiple purposes. It allows him to comment on issues of identity, culture, and politics while creating a rich and imaginative world that captures the reader's attention. Magic realism also serves as a tool for Rushdie to challenge the reader's assumptions about the world, opening their minds to new ideas and ways of thinking. Rushdie's extensive use of magic realism in his works has made him a prominent figure in contemporary literature. By blurring the line between reality and fantasy, Rushdie creates a vibrant and imaginative world that explores complex themes such as identity, cultural conflict, and social injustice. His works are an invitation for readers to embrace the power of the imagination and to explore new and magical worlds.

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