



The Instrumentality of Fringe Characterisation in Salman Rushdie's *The Moor's Last Sigh*

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ABSTRACT

Character construction in the novel presupposes the imaginative contemplativeness of the author as it is vital in the appraisal of its form, nay, the totality of the author's intentions – a trajectory towards apprehending the ideological platform on which the novel is mounted. The worlds of characters may converge, diverge or even intertwine depending on the conceptual vision of the author. Roundness or flatness of characters, the protagonist-antagonist, hero-foil cleavages, etc. may, therefore, become inconsequential in the writer's creative reflections. The primary concern, as far as widening or thinning out the ideological horizons of the plot is concerned, could be the degree of relationship between the major and minor characters as it impinges on the philosophical construct of the work. The aim of the paper is, in the light of this, an attempt to reveal how Salman Rushdie dispersed character relevance to build the plot of *The Moor's Last Sigh*.

Rushdie, due to his pursuit of regeneration through deconstructionist interconnectivity, the theoretical device that was used in this critique, is not unmindful of the foundational importance of fringe characters in the predominance of the key dramatis personae, especially in coming to grips with the ideological conflict, duplicity and ambivalence that the novel valorizes. This paper is an attempt to validate the strength of the fringe characters towards putting in perspective their indispensability in cutting the Gordian knot that the novel's turbulent interpersonal relationships present.

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Historical relevance of some characters and the contextual influence factor that throws up others are importantly explained to have served as the substructure of the plot of *The Moor's Last Sigh*.

Keywords: Fringe; symbiosis; interdependence; multiplicity.

1. INTRODUCTION

The dynamics in societal re-engineering makes some social theorists argue that the futures of society are explained through contemplations on the interpenetration of behavioural and psychological sensibilities. In other words, "identity, substance, causality and definition are transgressed so that others may be adopted: analogy, relation, opposition and [...] dialogism" (Booker, 1994:251) [1]. Without doubt, in *The Moor's Last Sigh*, Rushdie's Menippean recreative gestures are kindled, especially where causality – the beginnings – though shaken, reflects both "relation" and "opposition" to impel a continuing acclamation of the past and manipulative re-ordering in identity replication. The result cannot be but a "carnivalization" of literary enunciation of culture, in which case

[...] *everyone* participates [...]. All distance between people is suspended in an act of familiarization, which voids [...] all hierarchical structure and its attendant forms of "terror, reverence, piety, and etiquette [...]. Behaviour, gesture, and discourse are thus freed to become eccentric and inappropriate in normal terms. Every kind of misalliance is formed: the sacred [with] the profane, the lofty [with] the low, the great [with] the insignificant, the wise [with] the stupid". (Engblom, 1994:296) [2]

This carnivalized "suspension of all laws, prohibitions and restrictions" (Engblom, 296) is seminal to the construction of the cultural universe in *The Moor's Last Sigh* as many characters manifest these infractions. From the most visible to the least, one could identify emotional bonds of construction, destruction and creativity, all geared towards underlining the concourse of susceptibilities that engage the thematic outline of the narrative. From the artistic, through the ideological, to the moral, some of the characters are presented to be as noticeable as possible, with especial concern for heroic perceptions. Heroic imputations notwithstanding, the creed of interdependence and symbiosis remains imbedded in postcolonial literature to invalidate personality all-powerfulness and omnipotence of the "centre".

Such is Rushdie's characterisation bent in this novel. Without doubt, Aurora, Abraham, Moraes and Vasco's actions, inactions and feelings are constitutive in the plot's conflict structure. The fate of the plot is placed incontrovertibly in their hands, especially in respect of the climactic points through to the denouement. But then, do the middle and the end have life *sans* a beginning? The fount of whatever inheres in *The Moor's Last Sigh* is the fringe appearances of Francisco da Gama, Epifania his wife, Belle da Gama, Camoens her husband, and Aires, all webbed in Frye's description of satire (which the novel is) as "a struggle of two societies, one normal and the other absurd" (quoted in Ball, 2003:10) [3], they being the authors of the violations in carnivalisation earlier referred to. Albeit they fade away as fast as they appear, the vigour and verve in their evanescence say a lot about the progress of events. In identifying how involved they are in this regard, a critique of their influence is done under these subheadings: the da-gama-Zogoiby ancestral trajectory, Epifania's imprecatory force on the novel, fringe characters' ideological aura over the plot, Francisco's artistic lore, radicalism enclosed in the good and the bad: the Belle bequest, Raman Fielding's Mumbai-"ology": Populist smokescreen for power pursuit, and Flory Zogoiby: widening the path of cursedness. Bringing the adversarial foundational and world view-expanding realities of these characters to bear on the novel incontrovertibly proclaims that "the postmodern fiction [...] is not simply a case of novels metafictionally revelling in their own narrativity or fabulation; [it] is a historical and a political act" (Hutcheon, 1998:51) [4], one which underlines the deconstructionist process as an "etymological link between crisis and criticism" (Norris, 1991: x&xi) [5].

2. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

2.1 The Da Gama-Zogoiby Ancestral Trajectory

The inseparability between the society and the individual parallels sometimes the relationship between the past of a society and its future. This is a defining feature of *The Moor's Last Sigh*, as the present glues itself to history, countenancing

the truism that the facts of history are “the relations of individuals to another in society and about the social forces which produce from the actions of individuals results often at variance with, and sometimes opposite to, the results which they themselves intended” (Carr: 1961: 52) [6]. The da Gama-Zogoiby reality alligns itself closely with this contention. The progenitors of the da Gama-Zogoiby dynasty, whose physical presences in the novel are short-lived, set the pace for the ill-fated and windy course of the story. Francisco, Epifania, Belle, Camoens her husband, and Aires are the active participants in the imbroglia, and all are entangled in a war of attrition whose borders of hate bears no circumscription. This da Gama-Zogoiby dynasty is doubtlessly a “far-from-ordinary-klan”, (Rushdie, 1994:13) [7] its extra-ordinariness being animated by power and money passions, queer love affections, an ancestry of art enigmas, a reputation for scandals and a weird companionship with disquieting moral laxity, that is announced in sexual perversions, sodomic relations and shameless philandering. Papa Francisco comes out from this infamy. “Lost in a fog”, (23) the fraternity is enmeshed in crises without end, plagued with epileptic intra-family alliances coupled with individual idiosyncrasies and eccentricities and hurtling progressively towards predestined perdition. So fractured are their susceptibilities that members connive with external forces to undermine family oneness, play up sectarian jealousies and religious biases and delight in redressing grievances through unconscionable murder instruments – a mark of their hideous vindictiveness. Sensitive issues of ideology become highly polemical as each unit guards jealously (in most cases unreasonably) its behavioural tendencies, albeit without any modicum of moderation. All that has been described above continues to influence the sequence of events, leading ineluctably to calamity after calamity. The be-all-and-end-all of the above is the authorial choice mainly of “supreme” or disembodied reality to give literary substance to the understanding of the macabre ways of the da Gama-Zogoiby-Menezes-Lobo vice-filled life.

From this family root emerges the turmoil that defines the life of three of the main characters: Moraes the narrator, Aurora his mother and Abraham his father. While all these transpire, the trio is either too young or non-existent to be luminous in the crises; they, however, become outlandish expanders of the debacle; progenies that take the ancestral viciousness to ignoble

ends. What, therefore, obtains in the relationship between the old and the new is “the proliferation of spaces [through] the disruptive spaciality of the palimpsest” (Banerjee: 2002:47) [8], the old still being noticeable beneath the new. Importantly, Salman Rushdie, using this novel as a platform, apprises the literati of dialogic sensibilities as announcing “a necessary *multiplicity* in human perception. This multiplicity manifests itself as a series of distinctions between categories appropriate to the perceiver on the one hand and categories appropriate to whatever is being perceived on the other” (Holquist, 1990:22) [9], a valorizing of the subjectivist propagandizing in postmodernism. Of course, this subjectivity probably has its fount in Emmanuel Kant’s *Critique of Judgment*, where the philosopher argued that “a judgment of taste is not a cognitive judgment and so is not a logical judgment but an aesthetic one, by which we mean a judgment whose determining basis *cannot be other than subjective*” (Kant, 2000: 233) [10]. The wildness of sensitivities notwithstanding, the da Gama-Zogoiby story announces the virility in artistic collaboration for interpersonal development, for it corroborates the assertion that “suffering is indigenous in history. Every great period of history has its casualties as well as its victories” (Carr, 79).

2.2 Epifania’s Imprecatory Force on the Novel

Because “the fantastic is a literature which attempts to create a space for discourse [...] which leads to its problematization of language” (Jackson, 1981:62), [11] thereby developing “the anxiety of existence” (5), Epifania’s transgressive conduct provides the seminal trajectory through which the trepidations, perturbations and tensions in *The Moor’s Last Sigh* image the literary-cultural dynamics of Rushdie’s vision. The matriachal burden of Epifania on the diseased futurity of the Aurora-Abraham life – the epicentre of the tale – is arguably the causal element through which every strand of the plot is connected. Without Epifania’s maleficence, the story-line may be devoid of the complications that arise to give it the desired creative complexity. The incantatory force of Epifania’s words has a great deal of influence on the da Gama-Zogoiby species. The malediction that issues from her mouth on Aurora underscores the turbulence which the latter grapples with throughout her life and it is the thematic foundation on which the plot of this novel rests. Aurora, armed with stoic resoluteness and aware

of the impending doom, does nothing redemptive to extricate herself from the execrable outburst. Abraham her husband, although not oblivious of its impact on him, decides to accept his fate and stand by her. At all events, he is also descended from an execrable family. Aurora's dare-devilry in opening the windows at night to allow mosquitoes to invade her grandmother who is unprotected in her hole-ridden gauze and her subsequent hideousness in causing Epifania's death due to her wilful inaction provoke the matriarch's dying malediction on her that "a house divided against itself cannot stand [...] may your house be forever partitioned, may its foundations turn to dust, may your children rise up against you and may your fall be hard" (Rushdie, 99) This is germinal in understanding the mythic fabulation sequence of events that underlies the tragedies in the work.

Apparently enough, every act of commission or omission by Aurora is geared towards maintaining the sanctity or purity of that curse. The curse leads Aurora to marry another accursed being, Abraham, and pushes her towards meeting with the vile Miranda, getting her completely entangled in the dying wish of her grandmother; and so the road of Epifania's curse is paved. Aurora's children, one of whom is Moraes the narrator, are drawn into their great grandmother's invocatory spell. Moor's (Moraes') deformity is the first sign that Aurora's children will partake of Epifania's execration. Ina's (one of her daughter's) licentiousness and nymphomaniac activities appear to strengthen the curse's hold on the Aurora clan. Abandoning Aurora, she elopes with Jimmy Cash. The parting is complicated by another Aurora curse on her for dating Vasco Miranda. After her goes Minnie who finds her own escape route by giving up her sisterhood in favour of Sisterhood and to spend the rest of her days away from *elephanta*" (210), swaps Aurora for Maria Gratiaplana, the woman at the head of the nunnery. At last, Minnie goes for the novitiate, which informs another curse from her mother: "Let her die... Better a corpse than a nun". (Rushdie, 210) Her last daughter Mynah also steers the self-same course, as she, contrary to Aurora's art-inclined means of redressing wrong, becomes a real advocate and fights crime, like Aurora does in real life. She makes sure her father's partner-in-crime, kolatkar, is jailed, but the divisive curse is invigorated as she is angry at Abraham being absolved – a phenomenal case of a daughter with a deep-seated desire to expose the lawlessness of her father.

The Epifania curse rages on relentlessly and explicates the manner of death of the Zogoibys. Ina, in dire need of Jimmy Cash, is insane. Aurora shows her love for her, even in her mentally deranged state. Moraes' assertion that "had it been offered earlier might have built in her eldest daughter the fortitude to resist the catastrophe that ruined her mind" (Rushdie, 216) seems hollow. Jimmy is stupefied and he quips: "what a family [...] I swear. Absolutely *crack*", "a parting shot [which] was also a prophecy" (216). Moor agrees that Ina's humiliation is "a cracking-point" (216) in his family history. Ina, true to Jimmy's prophecy-like parting shot, goes cracked. Again, manifesting a larger picture of the doom-wish, she dies of cancer, a self-imposed curse, one may agree, because she plans with her mother to disingenuously use "cancergram" (Rushdie, 211) to win back Jimmy's love. Mynah is briefly in jail as she fights the emergency. Afterwards, she is killed systematically during some research work. Aurora's fall is indeed hard, as Epifania has wished – she is killed by Abraham her husband with darts subterraneously. The family is married to blood-letting in its inexorable ramifications. Aurora cries to Moraes during her dying: "*Blood will have blood. Wash my body in my murderers' red fountains and let me R.I.P.*" (362). The curse of division has always plagued the da Gamas as Aurora reveals after Belle's death: "I knew those bastards were just waiting on. Once divided, always divided; in that household it was a fight to the bloody finish" (48, 49).

Dilly Hormuz's maledictory reference to the blighted aura that refuses to leave the da Gama-Zogoiby axis – "I wish you well on your hard road" (217) – is a mind-boggling attestation to the abominable course of events in which Moraes is driven. The word "hard" is a reminder of Epifania's curse on Aurora – the predestination to a "hard" fall. However, this time around, this cursing wish is on Moraes to keep the light of the family damnation glowing. Apart from his prenatal malconception, the hard road noose on him becomes increasingly tightened in his unbending craze to wring normalcy out of his abnormal and short-lived sojourn on earth. The fire of Moor's "minute-by-minute fear of death" is tended by his love relationship with Uma – an affair Aurora despises. This love-hate episode sparks off the scandal that would consume the filial connection between Moraes and his parents – a sorry tale of revelation and counter-revelation to undermine integrity. It all begins with Uma exposing Aurora's whoring with Kekoo Mody,

Vasco Miranda and “that MA bastard, Mainduck” (Rushdie, 256). To exacerbate issues, Uma out-rials Aurora in an art exhibition. A long drawn-out war brews. Aurora is exasperated, and she being so strong-willed and controversy-prone, commissions Minto to dig up (though conflicting versions exist) the nasty past of Uma’s philandering with Abraham, Jimmy Cash, and at the same time with Moraes, her parentage, history of insanity and blackmail route to derive sexual pleasure. Mynah also unravels her homosexual status. Unknown to Moraes, the script as regards the “hard road” is being dramatised without hindrance, and there is no let-up, for Uma, unpenitently, confirms what Moraes never wants to believe. They separate but re-unite after Jimmy’s fatal injury in an auto-accident in which Uma is involved. For being rigidly persistent on an affair that his parents, especially Aurora, disapprove of, he is greeted with this startling dialogue between him, his mother and father: “From this moment on,” said Aurora Zogoiby, “you are no longer our son. All steps to disinherit you have been put in place. You have one day in which to collectify your effects and get out. Your father and I never wish to see you again”. “I support your mother fully”, said Abraham Zogoiby. “You disgust us. Now get out of our sight” (278).

The last statement above is the aftermath of Uma’s destroying the bond between Moraes and his parents. On Uma’s prompting, she and Moraes try to re-enact the Romeo and Juliet myth. Uma does by swallowing the death-pill, but the other pulls back from the brink because in his cogitation, “to die would not immortalize that love, but devalue it” (Rushdie, 281). He later discovers Uma to be a scoundrel of the deepest dye in her traitorous and ravenous zeal to destroy him. In fact, she does. She delivers a tape which contains a “during-an-orgy-of-sex-animated” hate-imbued words of Moraes against Aurora – “Fuck her. Yes I want to. God I do. Fuck my mother. Screw her. Screw the fucking bitch” (321) – to his parents. Moraes is “devoured” by desire, the desire to love in fact, but Uma, “like the great predator that she was, she had been most eager to devour the most elusive prey” (320). Nothing except permanent rejection by his parents could have resulted from this. The words: “go, get thee from hence and never return any more” (321) pronouncedly thaws, with harrowing finality, the bond between Moraes and his parents. He realises that Uma’s Romeo and Juliet-like concoction is a deceptive and tragic “fifty-fifty” (321) wager to see him killed, and not

a manifestation of true love. He admits at last that Aurora, through her prophetic potency, “saw the truth of her (Uma) from the start” (Rushdie, 320) but it never dawns on both mother and son that the spiritual and divine vigour of Epifania’s curse (issued presumably years before the birth of Moor) on Aurora is too demonically dynamic to be wished away. It is instead being revived with the passage of time.

Moor, in a reflective mood, hits the nail right on the head regarding his irreversible stress of life: “How then could I have turned out to be anything but a mess? [...] And to blossom into a handsome young man when in reality I was still a child was a *double curse*. It [his ugly right hand] first denied me the natural fruits of childhood, the smallness, the *childishness* of being a child [...] By the age of twenty-three my beard had turned white; and other things, too, had ceased to function as well as they once did”. (Rushdie, 162) (First emphasis mine)

2.3 Fringe Characters’ Ideological Aura Over the Plot

Moving in a concentric circle from hope to hopelessness, *The Moor’s Last Sigh*, in one sense, reads like Bakhtin’s Menippean satire theory in postmodernist “decentering of the ideological world” (Ball, 135), exploiting such “Bakhtin-friendly concepts as multiplicity, hybridity, pluralism, impurity, transformation and newness” (125), so as to be “intensely involved with the socio-historical moment” (Booker, 251) contemplation of Menippean satirical dicta. Fringe characters’ influence in this novel is most gripping in respect of not just the commitment to ideological bias, but to philosophical nebulousness. A peep into the world of the hero-apparent, Aurora, and some of those contesting against her for heroic preeminence reveals how deeply attached they are to some ideological positions, though laced with emotive negativity, hate-borne in the extreme. Aurora’s life abundantly images this, especially in respect of her philosophical dubiousness and eclecticism, which is provoked by self-aggrandizement. Uma’s relationship with the Zogoibys also underscores that omnivorous instinct for ontological hues. However, all this leaning toward ideological posturing, both in their agreeable and disagreeable shades, have their base in the minor characters; in fact, in some cases, it is genetically founded. That Epifania could be accurately represented as “the troublemaker-in-chief” presages the chaos in her fraternity long

after her demise. (Rushdie, 1994:33) Her damning pronouncement on Aurora, apart from the plagues of destruction that are primordially imbedded in the da Gama people, oils the wheels of the plot. Also imaged as the “most severe and least forgiving of mothers” (32), “she swallowed the news of his [Francisco’s] death without a tremor. She ate his death as she had eaten his life; and grew” (24). Unfortunately, she grows into the garbage bin of history; sadly enough, her execrable growth is mirrored in the topsy-turvy existence of her progenies. She does not really love her husband (Francisco). Their relationship throughout Francisco’s life is frosty. Their differences are basically ideological. While Francisco supports self-governance, being a member of the Home Rule League, Epifania is assertive that in her “God-fearing christian House, British still is best” (23). She argues that “what are we but Empire children? British have given us everything, isn’t it – Civilisation, law, order, too much” (18): Epifania personalises the ideological difference, and it becomes a source of hatred for even the person of Francisco her husband.

Ideological contrasts effectively create a chasm between the couple. Epifania detests his wide-minded zeal to give. She is greatly disturbed by it. She is only open-handed with troublemaking. Francisco’s obsession with art does not go down well with her. She wails: “Your art-shaft, Francisco [...] it will blindify me with ugliness” (16). The narrator adds the word “venomously” (16) to amplify the manner in which she reacts to Francisco’s art life. Epifania’s envenomed living is one of contradictions. In her, confusing philosophical perceptions of separating appearance from reality are not a subject of unease. Firstly, although she respects Britain, her heart “belonged to Portugal” (26), where she is descended from. Again, she professes some sort of austere existence, but in real sense, she sadly, for personal reasons, promotes a degenerate value of asceticism. She identifies with the unsavoury face of “Rushdie’s impulse for inclusiveness [...] what leads to his notion of hybridity” (Hassumani, 2002:116) [12], a core behavioural inclination of the da Gama-Zogoiby stock. Francisco’s ideological imperative to merge manner with content in redefining the internal decoration visuals of his house’s small chapel makes her angry. He removes in the process

the gilded altarpiece with the little inset paintings in which Jesus worked his miracles [...] and the china dolls of the apostles, and

the golden cherubs posing on teak pedestals and blowing their trumpets, and the candles in their glass bowls [...] and the imported Portuguese lace on the altar and even the crucifix itself (Rushdie, 25),

which Epifania calls “all the quality stuff” (25).

Francisco ideally believes one does not have to place vivid Christian symbols in a temple before ideal Christian values are noticed in the person. To him, “shape and colour not only took the place of content but [also] demonstrated that, properly handled, they could in fact *be* content” (25) (Emphasis not mine). He instead replaced them with “wooden pews” and “fixed giant paper cut-outs to the walls, trying to install in the temple the simplicity that goes with the simplicity of Jesus Christ. An incensed Epifania objects. She contends “that Jesus and Mary (have been) lockofied in the box-room”, therefore a desecration of Christianity. A day after the demise of her husband, she instructs a reversal to her own *status-quo ante*, and burns all Francisco had put in place. She then redefines simplicity to suit her animosity to her dead husband: “from now on [...] it is the simple life for us. Salvation is not to be found in Little Man Loincloth and his ilk” (26). A discerning Moor knows better:

[...] the simplicity she sought was anything but Gandhian, it was the simplicity of rising late to a tray of strong, sweet bed-tea, of clapping her hands for the cook and ordering the day’s repasts, of having a maid come in to oil and brush her still-long but quickly greying and thinning hair, and of being able to blame the maid for the increasing quantities left each morning in the brush; the simplicity of long mornings scolding the tailor who came over to the house with new dresses, and knelt at her feet with mouthfuls of pins which he removed from time to time to unloose his flatterer’s tongue; and then of long afternoons at the fabric stores, as bolts of magnificent silks were flung across a white-sheeted floor for a delight, cloth after cloth flowing thrillingly through the air to settle in soft fold-mountains of brilliant beauty; the simplicity of gossip with her few social equals, and of invitations to the ‘functions’ of the British in the Fort district (Rushdie, 26).

Belle da Gama, Aurora’s mother, also with an eye to doctrinaire deceit, tells Camoens her

husband that “it will cost a fortune to keep your mama in her simplicity” and that if she has her way “it will cost-o us our youth as well” (27). Epifania receives her just deserts when “Francisco left her nothing except her cloths, her jewellery and a modest allowance” (27). She is to be dependent on the goodwill of her sons. She moans: “Even after death [...] he slaps me on both sides of the face” (27). It is rumoured that, shamefaced, she wants to jump into River Ganges “double-quick” (27). Her later attempts to “redress” Francisco’s “wrongs” fall through. Matrilineal legal principles do not favour her. Exacerbating her situation is the fact that her wish for Aires, the beloved of her two sons, to have children does not materialise. Epifania’s characterisation is better interpreted as moral duplicity than ideological oscillation. Her religious credentials are an insipid and ignoble antipode of what she professes. Her political predisposition is filled with hate campaign and not a result of well thought-out philosophical convictions. Hers is maternal treacherousness demonstrated immoderately. Moraes, her grandchild, talks of the calm – which involves the quietness of the usual rage of the elements and veld sensibilities – that pervades his household after the storm that was her life died out with her death:

One hard truth must be told: After Epifania died, life increased. Some long sequestered sprite, of gaiety perhaps, returned to Cabral Island. It was obvious to everyone that the quality of the light had changed, as if some filter had been removed from the air; brightness burst out, like a birth. In the new year the gardeners reported unprecedented levels of growth, along with a marked decline in infestations, and even the least horticultural of eyes could see the great cascades of bougainvillaea, even the least sensitive of noses could smell the newly resplendent growths of jasmine and lily-of-the-valley and orchids and queen-of-the-night. The old house itself seemed to be humming with a new excitement, a new sense of possibility; a certain morbidity had departed from its courts. Even Jawaharlal the bulldog seemed to mellow in this new age (64, 65).

If Epifania tends toward an ideology to place her “self” above others, Francisco da Gama’s hue is understandably for the common weal. However, out of being ignorant about the workings of the world, he blunders in manifesting his conviction. He is essentially a symbol of why an individual

should deploy the various facets of the mental faculty before plunging into the intricate web of ideological sloganeering. His innate and boundless philanthropic ideals make him a protégé of Bertrand Russel’s modernist philosophy and the nationalist political commitment of Mrs. Annie Besant. His dogmatic reception of their thoughts defines his world-view, and he religiously acts it out in nationalist activities, declaring his disdain for British colonial rule, countenancing Pandit Nehru’s criticism of Indian National Congress. However, he does (contrary to the narrator’s analysing) confuse appearance with reality, despite having “his eyes fixed on the future”. The narrator affirms it when at the beginning he sees him as a “hero material from the day he was born, destined for questions and quests” (Rushdie, 17), but concluding analysis on him, an impassioned Moraes is of the view that “Stars can fall; heroes can fail; Francisco da Gama did not fulfil his destiny” (19).

In the main, Francisco displays his ignorance of Karl Marx’s dialectical analysis of bourgeoisie-commonalty conflict as he “invites dock-labourers, tea-pickers, bazaar coolies and his own workers” (19) to join his Home Rule League, mixing wheat with the chaff. His wife, Epifania, a personality of lower intellectual quantity, is even more discerning. She says in derision, “masses and classes in same club! [...] sense is gone from the man”. (19) Francisco’s belief-structure sprouts recognisably from his love for books and he celebrates this inspiration from the intellect by presenting position papers to idealise his linguistic and socio-political convictions. During his jailbird spell, he is amply opportune to write to humanize. Unknown to him, context determines the success of convictions. He is indeed “so full of theses, never a church door to nail them to”. (3) In another sense, his theorising is devoid of the contextual space for relevance. His prison papers are the last straw that breaks the back of his paper attempts at societal restructuring. He is forced to resign his membership of the banned Home Rule League. Papa Francisco’s “watery death”, being the first “to go out of his element and drown” (15), creates the atmosphere for “the family’s long slide” into doom, which is rooted in “family rifts and premature deaths and thwarted loves and mad passions and weak chests and power and money and the even more morally dubious seductions and mysteries of art” (14).

Papa Francisco’s progressivism enjoys the full acquiescence of his second son, Camoens, his soft-spokenness nonetheless. A chip off the old

block, Camoens toes the path of ideological non-discernment like his father, and this is bequeathed to his daughter, Aurora, who takes it to the dizzyest of heights, thereby becoming the dominant mouthpiece of the author's glorification of ambivalence. Empowered and emboldened by the anti-Epifania stance of Belle his wife, Camoens is ruffled out of his political docility. Influenced by the political maelstrom in the moribund Soviet Union, he grows outwardly uncomfortably with passive non-violent resistance. His obsession with politics makes him exhibit crass nonchalance to the decaying fortunes of the family business – an attitude the narrator describes as “*ridiculous and ludicrous*” (Rushdie, 29). (Emphasis not mine) He heightens the tempo of his political engineering. Dogged by the error-filled application of his book-compliant ideas to contemporary reality, he falls into the self-same critical blunder like his father. He delivers talks with radical titles like “*Forward!*” and “*Terrorism: Does End Justify This Means?*” (28) Such is his monomania for Marxism that he shows his dissatisfaction with the dramatisation of the legendary speeches of V.I. Lenin by some privileged élite group of Soviet actors who believe that they can have their own domesticated version. Again, he fails to comprehend the distance between histrionics and the real thing (29). His local theatrical attempts are a flop. He could only succeed in coming up with “Babeling Lenins, their beards coming loose in the heat” (31), either they are under- or over-dramatised as Belle disappointedly opines in “the Too-Tall Lenin, the Too-Short Lenin, the Too-Fat Lenin, the Too-Skinny Lenin, the Too-Lame Lenin, the Too-Bald Lenin [...] Lenin the Toothless [...]” (29). No wonder, he is, surprisingly though, called “a confused fool of a boy” (32), by his mother, Epifania, the latter herself a symbol of confusion.

Confuted by Vladimir Ilyich for creating nothing but a “satirical caricature”, he further demonstrates his discomposure and denounces the Soviet Revolution. Consequently, he renounces communism, complaining that it is not “the Indian style” (31). Indeed, he

is a timid soul who could only be a revolutionary firebrand in the company of a few friends, or in the privacy of his study, in the writing of secret papers which – perhaps fearing a repeat of the jeers that finished off Francisco – he could not bring himself to print; a nationalist whose favourite poets

were all English, a professed atheist and rationalist who could bring himself to believe in ghosts [...] (Rushdie, 32).

Afterwards, the Nehru ideology captivates him and makes him a “Congresswallah” (31). The narrator's estimation of him provides the reader with an insight into his ideological “doubleness”, though the former will like to justify it as a measure of his beauty, its fruitlessness notwithstanding. His willingness to permit the co-existence of conflicting impulses, the indwelling contradiction in his egalitarian ideals and the Olympian reality of his social position (he being a member of the *noblesse oblige*) and “his fierce love of English literature, his deep friendships with many Cochin English families, contrasted with his fierce determination that the British *imperium* must end” (33) enunciate the arguable position that he is of no fixed ideological persuasion. The epithet “millionaire flirting with Marxism” (32) aptly describes his vacillation. Desite his “doublenesses” (32), his thoughts salutarily permit that “Everyone should live well” (32).

Aires may be judged to be a thinly developed member of the da Gama nuclear household. Unsurprisingly, his vista over philosophical affairs in the novel is invariably thin, he being somehow aligned to the narrow world-view of Epifania. He charts the conservative course of Epifania; he is an ardent supporter of British hegemony like her. He is very vociferous in condemning Jawaharlal Nehru and his Congress Party. He argues thiswise: “Where in this India are the democratic institutions to replace the British Hand, which is, I can personally avow, benevolent even when it chastises us for our infantile misdeeds?” (50). His advocacy of a “liberal alternative” is a confused equivalent of Epifania's muddled-up political suppositions. He is not seen to have presented any alternative. He is instead exultant at a paper editor's opinion that “India had ‘better submit to the present unconstitutional government rather than to the more reactionary and furthermore unconstitutional government of the future’” (Rushdie, 50). To spite Camoens' support for Nehru's option of radically upturning the British status quo ante, he names his British bulldog Jarwaharlal. An absolute sense of dependency, another phrase for political immaturity and compromised individuality, and a vacuous business mentality, character identities of Aires, unequivocally take him off the life-changing and newness vehicle that drives the plot of the story. In symbolic thinking, Aires, like

his politics, can be described as being unproductive due to his not having any child. His wife, Carmen, also shut out of reckoning before the novel develops its climactic strands, is the least psychologized of the foundational da Gama-Zogoiby clan, the rest being Francisco, Epifania, Camoens and Belle. She resents the obsequiousness of Aires to Epifania. Her contributions to literary proceedings, albeit mainly negative, are the involvement of her Lobo people in the tragedy that is the da Gama house on Cabral Island and that she “dreamed of diddling Camoens’s side of the family out of its inheritance by fair means or foul” (13).

2.4 Francisco’s Artistic Lore

If Aurora inherits vileness indirectly from Epifania, her grandmother, the artistry that she relies on to outmanoeuvre her rivals, and which serves as the thematic emplacement of Rushdie’s creative decision to link art (and its ghoulishness) with psychosis, is a direct inheritance from her grandfather, Francisco da Gama. The *pater familias* of the da Gamas, Francisco epitomises the fecund imagination that calls to mind the mythicization of the dynasty’s debacle. Seminal is his contention that “old beauty is not enough [...] old places, old behaviour, old gods. These days, the world is full of questions and there are new ways to be beautiful”. (Rushdie, 16, 17) The craze for newness fills his whole being. “Ill at ease with domesticity” (17) and being vivacity personified, this questing phenomenon’s peripatetic consciousness encourages him to dump academic life for a boisterous and winsome family business experience, “becoming an adept of the age-old da Gama art of turning spice and nuts into gold”, (17) and, of course, gifted with the hypersensitive olfactory organ to perceive money even from outer space. His thirst for heroism remains unquenchable until his poetic depth is externalised, materialising in his patronage of the arts. A connoisseur of fictive virility and at the vanguard for the uplift of creative virtuosity, he hosts a coterie of artists whose creations conform with his image of the preternatural. His house becomes a repository of their “pictures of devil-women, with both eyes on the same side of their noses, and giant canvases had befallen with the paint”. (16) All these fear-inducing visuals he relishes. Epifania, his venomous spouse, confesses his art could blind her “with ugliness” – referring to its aesthetic devilry. Such is his distaste for the ordinary, commonplace aspects of living. This

extraordinariness he passes on to her granddaughter, Aurora, whose fantasy fiction Moraes her son also agrees is blinding. Between Francisco and Aurora is erected the superstructure of the ideals of insubstantiality in *The Moor’s Last Sigh*, Aurora’s art reflecting “her personal and political views which are informed by Francisco’s and Camoens’s secular and East/West perspectives” (Hassumani, 119).

The progenitor-progeny connexion in Francisco’s ancestral inheritance is the substructure of the mythification of the plot structure of *The Moor’s Last Sigh*. Though supernaturalism is an heirloom in the Francisco lineage, a grand picture of the ghoulishness that is pervasive in the storyline is made palpable in that characters outside the da Gama clan have traits of this Francisco unorthodoxy.

2.5 Radicalism Enclosed in the Good and the Bad: The Belle Bequest

Belle is the most potent elucidation of “radical dualism” (Ball, 23) in this work. She typifies the extremes of the good and the bad, one that is inclusive of “a self-reflexive undermining of the hierarchies of value” (27), a cardinal function of satirical writing that *The Moor’s Last Sigh* is. Aurora images this contradictory phenomenon most; but unfortunately, “when extremes of high and low are merged, the high elements will descend toward the level of the low elements” (23). Early in the narrative, Belle obliquely admits this much. As the plot unfolds, Aurora receives the baton of this “dualistic ambivalent ritual” (Engblom, 296) from her mother, and with it nurses her secret and overt battles. The upshot: in her, “the human is reduced to animal, desire becomes appetite” (23) but probably due to her affective obduracy to explain “a distinctive oppositional creativity” (Hai, 1999:17) [13] that is associated with women’s marginality; this leads to the hero-apparent being in the throes of affective disorder, a psychological impairment that makes her a subject of contradictory behavioural states, leading inexorably to “the mock-crowning and subsequent un-crowning of the carnival king” (Engblom, 296), a status that she occupies in the work. In Belle (Isabella Ximena da Gama) is packed the intransigence, debauchery, and war-mongering tendencies that are inbred in Aurora. The latter, whose escapades permeate the fabric of the plot, glories in her mother’s militancy and she proclaims its continuity in her after Belle’s death, accentuating the relevance of her (Belle’s) exiguously developed personality in the friction

that the story is later enclosed in. Belle comes into the da Gama family to strengthen the progressivism of Papa Francisco. By extension, Aurora's overly ideological militancy is traceable to having been a genetic copy of two progressivist forebears.

Belle's husband, Camoens, is the immediate inheritor of her forward-looking views. She starts by trying to inculcate civility in the Menezes and Lobos who are at war over the spice fields of the late Francisco. "Since you could start-o these evil fires with your scheming, [...] then it is with you that we must begin to put them out" (Rushdie, 38), she furiously arbitrates. She is so frustrated with the pugnacity in the family that she divines a contrast between "their education and breeding" and the fact that they "behaved like dogs" (50). Her grandchild, Moraes, after the bloody battle between the Meneze and Lobo in-laws, equally expresses shock and shame at the contradiction already pointed out by Belle. He ruminates: "My family has been under many clouds. What sort of family is this? Is this *normal*? Is this what we are all like?" (40). The cloudy situation of the Belle era becomes thundery when his mother, Aurora, and those in her own epoch have a firm grip on the plot. While Epifania and Carmen agonise over the fifteen years jail term meted out to Camoens (Belle's husband) and Aires (Carmen's husband), Belle is unfazed. To her, life must continue but not in the bestial manner that triggered the blood-letting. She "had her own ideas about how civilization should be restored" (Rushdie, 41). Armed with the shrewdness of a business magnate, she in the absence of Camoens and Aires (the brothers who inherited the Francisco property on a fifty-fifty basis) negotiates with the government – since the Francisco lands and companies have been placed under public administration – so as to claim them. She does not only re-claim them, but also reclaims them, restoring investor-confidence into her husband's fifty percent, earning the nickname "Queen Isabella of Cochin" (43) for it. She, almost gratuitously, buys up the other fifty-percent from Aires, that had been under the shadow of absolute collapse. From Gama Trading Company, Camoens Fifty Percent Corp. (Private Limited) emerges. Aurora, by extension Abraham, later inherits the new company and her "mother's fearless tongue" (14).

Although "Belle wasn't perfect, [...] foulmouthed, smoked like a volcano and was no angel" (44), her impatience with Camoens' docility in the face of Epifania's overbearing control of the family

purposively stimulates the feminine face of the novel's progressivist agenda. She is averse to the softspokenness and trepidity of Camoens. She rouses him out of his Francisco-inspired nonchalance with her "toughest of nuts" (44) stance, which transcends "the male-female distinctions [in] dual oppositions that Rushdie consistently attacks" (Booker, 1994:252), a remarkable feature of the "traditional liberal feminism" (252) of Rushdie's broad-minded being. She literally encourages her husband to join some Soviet Revolutionary-inspired groups, having vowed that "So, so. I must save one da Gama at least" (Rushdie, 1994:24). Within days, Camoens mutates into an ideologue of Leninism and violent radicalism. Belle goes beyond intellectual ideological transformation of Camoens. Sartorial ideology, appearing as co-referential index of high-class business and modernity, concerns her in his development. He in "simple khaddar clothes" does not please her. She gives him a lecture on jet-age developmental niceties: "Darling, get out of fancy dress [...] Our national effort is to run a good business and look after our workers, not to dress like errand boys" (54).

Belle may be "unangelic" in matters relating to business, for she could employ various strong-arm tactics like intimidation to secure success, and fraudulent conservatism as espoused by Epifania, she, besides Francisco the patriarch and Camoens, openly propagates the humanist philosophy. Fed up with the attritional regime under which each member of the family languishes, Belle surmises, with compunction, that since "this family has been through too much, now we must start to heal" (48), agreeing with Camoens that Aires must be re-established in the family business. Again, pandering to "exhortation" from her new-found emotive leaning towards her husband, she stops philandering. Before bowing to tuberculosis, she admits to being addicted to "Too many cigarettes. A bad habit" (48). All these, one may argue, are elements of hubris, or generally considered, hamartia because they are events that immediately preceded her quietus. She leaves the scene very quickly, bequeathing much of her virtues and failings to her only child, Aurora, the apparent tragic icon.

2.6 Raman Fielding's Mumbai-"Ology": A Populist Smokescreen for Power Pursuit

Though he contests for heroic relevance, Fielding's presence in the story is marginal but

his marginality could be deceptive; Aurora and Abraham are primary witnesses to this. Raman Fielding's presence in this novel, though devoid of the surrealistic indoctrination of the author, pervasively gives prominence to the falsity that many a political leadership represents. Like Uma, he, also called Mainduck, impacts so much on the Zogoibys. Unlike Uma, his quest is to have a grip on a larger existential terrain no matter the odds. Any competitor, conscious or unconscious, as regards his sole aim of conquering Bombay, is an enemy. While Uma plays the fiend on the Zogoibys perhaps to douse the fire of Aurora's glory, Mainduck's passion is to deploy politics as a Machiavellian weapon to render Aurora and Abraham insignificant in the eyes of Bombayites. Against Aurora, it is a matter of envying a feminine irrepressible and confident pursuit of identity. As for Abraham her husband, Fielding is up against the godfather of crime in its totality. He is uncomfortable with somebody who is not in power but is overwhelmingly wielding power. Fielding is obsessed with exterminating such a threat. A fake populist scheming is nurtured through religion so as to be politically preminent.

Through Hindu fundamentalism, the unenlightened Mumbai populace is bamboozled into identifying with a personalist but selfish political campaign. Taking advantage of the popular passion for cricket by not just his Hindu tribe but all rival religions, Mainduck communalistically becomes a champion of the Hindu proprietary ownership of its Bombay face. Summed up, Mainduck's political philosophy is religionistic and communalistic for all ends but people-oriented. When Aurora comes up with *The Kissing of Abbas Ali Baig* painting, Fielding puts on his populist attire to fight what he sees as a desecration of Hinduism, "claiming it was flagrantly displaying a pornographic representation of a sexual assault by a Muslim "sportman" on an innocent Hindu maiden (Rushdie, 232). A crook that he is, only a bribe from Aurora could pacify his corrupt guts, using religionism as a cover for illegality.

The ramifications of Fielding's political philosophy are fathomable in his competition-to-be-evil-genius struggle with Abraham. Fielding understands that to beat a big rogue like Abraham demands the craftiest of evil machinations. He plants moles in Abraham's house for that purpose. Lambajan Chandiwala is one of them. Mainduck develops a culinary strategy, a form of "invisibility", to complement

his other devices of fighting Abraham. His thuggish followers are covertly employed as kitchen staff. Their overt mission is to silence all dissenting voices, especially those who want to disarrange the power structure that is insentient towards the masses. His is one of hideous self-denials:

He was against the corruption of the congress (1) and for 'direct action', by which he meant paramilitary activity in support of his political aims, and the institution of a bribery-system of his own. He derided the Marxist analysis of society as class struggle and lauded the Hindu preference for the eternal stability of caste (299).

Moraes does not know the apparent duty of Changiwala (their gateman) in their house until much later when he is released from prison into his arms. The narrator is shocked to see how complicit the Mumbai police are in Mainduck's evil-mindedness. The fullness of Changiwala's identifying some meaningfulness in the hitherto unmeaning right hand of Moor comes to light in Mainduck's house. Changiwala has, during his spell at the Zogoibys, lectured Moor on how he can create an identity of pugilism from his unfortunate right hand. Being coopted willy-willy into Mainduck's strike-breaking and opposition-destroying activity, Moraes is elated at discovering relevance though in the wrong place. He relishes the comforting view that "I found for the first time in my short-long life, the feeling of normality, of being *nothing special*, the sense of being among kindred spirits, among people like-me, that is the defining quality of home" (305) (Emphasis not mine). In Moraes' quest for a meaningful identity, home is redefined, as there seems to be "an inextricable connection between a sense of place and the notion of identity" (Banerjee, 40). In his deconstructionist exercise, he sees some goodness in Raman Fielding's theoretical norm of secrecy as one's source of power: "that it is not the civil social norm for which men yearn, but the outrageous, the outsize, the out-of-bounds – for that by which our wild potency may be unleashed. We crave permission openly to become our secret selves" (Rushdie, 305). That secrecy which Moor now delights in he secures through being one of the MA's elite enforcers, alongside Tin-man Hazare and Chhaggan Five-in-a-Bite. Moor expatiates on the emotional conflicts that attend the newness in his development:

I admit it: I am a man who has delivered many beatings. I have brought violence to

many doorsteps, the way a postman brings the mail. I have done the dirty as and when required – done it, and taken pleasure in the doing. Did I not tell you with what difficulty I had learned left-handedness, how unnaturally it came to me? Very well: but now I could be right-handed at last, in my new life of action I could remove my doughty hammer from my pocket and set it free to write the story of my life. It served me well, my club. [...] Can you understand with what delight I wrapped myself in the simplicity of my new life? For I did; I revelled in it. At last, I told myself, a little straightforwardness; at last you are what you were born to be. With what relief I abandoned my lifelong quest for an unattainable normality, with what joy I revealed my super-nature to the world! Can you imagine how much anger had been banked in me by circumscriptions and emotional complexities of my previous existence – how much resentment at the world's rejections, at the overheard giggles of women, at teachers' sneers, how much unexpressed wrath at the exigencies of my sheltered, necessarily withdrawn, friendless, and finally mother-murdered life? It was that lifetime of fury that had begun to explode from my fist. (Rushdie, 305, 306).

Mainduck begins to experience reversals when he discovers that Moraes is acting true to Chhaggan's blood-is-thicker-than-water analysis of the narrator, for he (Moraes) refuses to spy on his father, Abraham. "Without a modicum of grace", they part ways, with Moraes insinuating that "he [Mainduck] may very well have intuited that information about his activities may be flowing in the opposite direction" (337). Furthermore, Mainduck's intended heroic to bring Nadia Wadia to her knees by agreeing to his sexual overtures is another factor on his road to ignominy. To his utter dismay, Nadia superciliously scoffs at him. "*I wouldn't kiss him if he was the last frog in town*" (344), she vows, agreeing importantly with a feminist banner that "men are so necessarily mad that it would be crazy, through a further twist of madness, not to be mad oneself" (386). Fielding's immediate response is to send Sammy Hazaré after the beauty queen.

The "Tin-Man" (Rushdie, 356) and other "team captains of the MA's special operations" (345) for the first time disregard his instruction. Hazaré is consequently sacked. Coincidentally, both Hazaré and Moraes are the instruments of his

(Mainduck's) fatal bow. While Moor starts it, by breaching his security to kill him, the "Tin-Man" finishes it off by suicidally setting his house ablaze. In spite of everything dark about Mainduck, Moraes philosophises about the prevalence of the humanity of humankind in the inhuman. He is not dismissive of the incontrovertible suggestion that "they are not inhuman, these Mainduck-style Hitlers, and it is in their humanity that we must locate our collective guilt, humanity's guilt for human beings' misdeeds" (297).

2.7 Flory Zogoiby: Widening the Path of Cursedness

Flory's contribution to the tale may be sparse, but without her, the artery of the damnation that is thematically germane to expounding the form of the novel may have been constricted. Her son Abraham taking her blighted legacy to another ill-starred character Aurora in marital union reinforces the accursed foundation of the plot in its course towards a concentric cycle of doom. Between Abraham and Flory Zogoiby exists the zenith of maternal perfidy, the secret of which lies in the sorcery of Flory. Married to Solomon Castile, Abraham's father, she acquires a warlike fame for daring men to cross the boundary of her inherited belligerence, during which she goes by the sobriquet "Flory-the-Roary" (Rushdie, 74) – defender of the feminine minority. Obviously "Epifania da Gama's opposite number" (73) and turning Solomon into a hen-pecked husband, she forces the latter to flee his matrimonial home – a misalliance reputedly titled the "Misjudgment of Solomon", (75) a paradoxical allusion to the sagacity of his biblical namesake. Against cultural dictates, their son Abraham, at seven years old, drops his father's name, Castile, for Zogoiby, his mother's – an event which marks the ascendancy of Flory in family and church affairs. Imposing her Adonis image on Abraham, she disowns the latter for dishonouring her instruction not to marry Aurora due to sectarian differences. Her witchcraft wickedness really comes alive when insolvent Abraham goes to her for help. She demands not only for its financial equivalent in return but also for Abraham's first child, for she assumes she has already lost Abraham. The death-knell to her gory being is tolled when her inquiring son desires to know his family name because he believes the Zogoibys are twenty-two years behind the Castiles.

The unfortunate Sultan Boabdil story through a decoded parchment unveils the horrible secrets

to Flory's criminality and the hidden crown and dagger. She goes mad, kept in a sanctuary that takes care of the mentally deranged; she is inadvertently burnt to death by an inmate who committed suicide – a horrendous end to a life of infamy. Very unpalatable is the fact that Abraham has already drunk sufficiently from her crime-infested blood, having "learned secrecy from his mother" (Rushdie, 81), that his viciousness becomes legendary in Indian history. His disastrous death is in conformity with an ancestral villainy. Flory's history of the fallen Boabdil and "the uneasy jewellery of shame" (79), Moraes importantly unveils, "provided me with my nickname and my mother with the theme of her most famous series of paintings, the "Moor Sequence" that reached its triumphant culmination in the unfinished, and subsequently stolen masterpiece, *The Moor's Last Sigh*" (77).

3. CONCLUSION

Interestedness in "transformational rules which govern the relationships among elements in the structure" coupled with "the historical antecedents of the current structure and its constituent elements" (Fulbrook, 2002:44) [14] underscores the dispersal of character superiority and inferiority complexes. This cognition inspires combining bourgeois fixity with a vibrant force of change as a continuing obsession in postmodernist literature. From this critique, the passion seems to be growing, for Rushdie tries to argue for the contention that the farrago of continuity and an inevitable sense of dynamism, especially in character structuring, makes a society, having in mind the indispensability of the contributory destructiveness and constructiveness of every of its members, no matter how short-lived any of them is. To this end, Rushdie leans toward Rabelaisian strategies of "inversion, fusion, and mixing of the profane and the holy, the ridiculous and the sublime, the pious and the grotesque" (AL-'AZM, 1994:264) [15] in *The Moor's Last Sigh* to draw attention to the novel's intermingling of characters, allowing the seepage of sensitivities to break the bounds of time in order to heighten the ideals in a particular period so as to salvage a decaying future and invigorate interconnectivity that is hallowed in human relations. This omnibus conviction, routed through temporal and generational fixedness, opens access to fluidity of emotions that is natural to man, giving life to the doctrinal bedlam that holds sway in *The Moor's Last Sigh*. It is important to note that this fluidity of emotions is a

consequence of the characteristic "instabilities of the real world" (Waugh, 1984:5) [16], which "metafiction flaunts and exaggerates and thus exposes the foundations of the instability" (Waugh, 5).

COMPETING INTERESTS

Author has declared that no competing interests exist.

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