

---

## INVENTIVE STYLE IN SALMAN RUSHDIE'S NOVEL TWO YEARS EIGHT MONTHS AND TWENTY EIGHT NIGHTS

D.DEVI

---

**Abstract:** Salman Rushdie is known for his exclusive inventive style. He is a master of the art of magical realism. Magic realism is defined as a literary style or genre that combines naturalistic details and narrative with surreal or dreamlike elements. The technique of magic realism comes handy where it is possible to blend fantasy and reality. In order to communicate his views even at the time of prohibition, he uses magic realism. In *Two Years Eight Months and Twenty Eight Nights*, magic realism has been employed. Being a master of words and having a good background in history and the world myths he comes out with daring new expressions that convey his views precisely and effectively. Rushdie is fond of old myths and hence he uses old myths to describe contemporary situations. He uses myths in a very playful manner thus debunking myth. Meta fiction, neo-historicism, similes, metaphor and allegory are some of the techniques used in a masterly way by Rushdie in his novels. The present paper aims to show how Rushdie expresses his views using the technique magic realism in his novels, his use of English language and his creativity in coining words.

**Keywords:** Magic Realism, contemporary, techniques, fantasy

---

**Introduction:** Rushdie being multi-culturist and multi-linguist surprises the readers with refreshingly new coinages born out of combinations of two or three languages or simply made out of English. Being a master storyteller bestowed with abundant imagination and vivid expression, he uses a number of techniques like magic realism, meta-fiction, weaving the historical and the contemporary together to bring forth a colorfully textured material.

Salman Rushdie is a post-colonial writer who epitomized the changing attitude towards various conventions in his fictional work through his iconoclastic thinking and a revolutionary style to go with it. As Parameshwaran says: "Rushdie combines realism and fantasy, and, like South American novelists Gabriel Garcia Marquez and Jorge Luis Borges, he roundly satirizes the politics and society of the country in which each novel is set"(2).

Rushdie's works in English are so perfect in terms of language use that it is hard to guess that English is not his mother-tongue. Rushdie's themes are not new; but his expressions are. His use of English is unique and innovative.

The foremost aspect of his style that made him very popular is his use of magic realism. The *Oxford Concise Dictionary of Literary Terms* defines magic realism as a "kind of modern fiction in which fabulous and fantastical elements are included in a narrative that otherwise maintains the reliable tone of objective, realistic report".

Over the past few decades, magic realism has developed into a truly international literary phenomenon. Salman Rushdie stands out among the few other writers who successfully integrate magic realism in their works. Not only is Rushdie one of the most prominent postcolonial writers, but also is generally recognized as one of the most important representatives of magic realism outside Latin America.

In Salman Rushdie's hands, political satire and caricature intertwined with fairy-tale fights of imagination form an excellent pattern of subtle allusions, caprice and humour. Rushdie uses the narrative style of magic realism in which myth and fantasy are blended with real life. He uses the narrative technique of magic realism to shape the distinction between fantasy and reality. He gives an equal acceptance for the ordinary and the extraordinary. He fuses lyrical and, at times, fantastic writing with an examination of the character of human existence and an indirect criticism of society, particularly the elite. Rushdie is one of the greatest magic realists ever who can handle it with dexterity.

Salman Rushdie describes magic realism as an alternative way of approaching the truth. He uses magic realism as a means for finding truth. The factors he uses to find the truth give an element of magic throughout. Rushdie assumes magic realism as an effective tool to solve the problems of post colonialism. So, by connecting and combining

historical events, mythological stories and fictional narratives, Rushdie tries to create and convey a true picture of Indian post colonialism. Rushdie has used magic realism very effectively in his *Two Years Eight Months and Twenty Eight Nights*.

It can be said that Rushdie has used the technique of magic realism with great dexterity and mastery in his *Two Year Eight Months and Twenty Eight Nights*. There is magic realism of a grand level where three worlds are imagined to interact and the impact of which is seen on the happenings of the normal human world, i.e., Dunia. The story covers an unbelievably vast span of time. The descendants of IbnRushd the human and Dunia the jinn are born with special characteristics and special powers. Sometime in the future a battle takes place between the descendants of IbnRushd and Dunia, the non-believers and the descendants of Ghazali a believer. Rushdie supports the non-believers since he himself is a non-believer and supports scientific attitude and puts IbnRushd and Dunia on the side of reason. He foresees a world where there will be no fights in the name of religion, culture etc., and where people will have a scientific attitude. But in the bargain they might lose their ability to dream.

Rushdie through magic realism brings the ancient and the modern together, juxtaposes the Jinn world and the human world. His substitution of One Thousand and One Nights into the Gregorian calendar is matched by his attempt to bring the text's mythological jinn (or genies) into downtown New York and Hampstead Heath. What makes the novel feel strikingly new is the author's attempt to bring the strange, magical elements of his work into the digital age. The unrelenting thunderstorms, murders, and possession of popular literary and financial figures are not hidden in secluded houses and barricaded attics but debated online, in tabloid newspapers and on the rolling 24-hour news channels.

*Two Years Eight Months and Twenty-Eight Days* takes place over two repetitions of its eponymous time frame. Our narrator tells us, from a millennium in the future, of gaps and gateways that open between the novel's two worlds: Earth and Fairyland (Peristan). One such gap opened up between the worlds in the 12th century when IbnRushd, an exiled Aristotelian Islamic philosopher, was met by one of the shape shifting creatures in human form called Dunia. She slipped through the gaps, fell in love with IbnRushd, a supremely rational being, and spent one thousand

and one nights creating an enormous brood of half-human, half-jinni children. These children of the world, or Duniázát, "the people of the world" ' who spread across the world — "the children of Duniya's children climbed into ships in Cadiz [...] or walked across the Pyrenees, or flew in magic carpets, sailed the seven seas and climbed high mountains and swam mighty rivers and slid into deep valleys and found shelter and safety wherever they could, [...] becoming a tribe that was no longer a tribe, adopting every religion and no religion..." (TET 13). This novel introduces the theme of the immutable permanence of migration - of people, their stories, ideas and identities, making this perhaps the most grandly ambitious novel of Rushdie. Migration itself becomes a storied narrative. The narrative includes the entry of a princess and four male jinns into the human through the gaps between the worlds, in the future time. The four male jinn, the followers of Ghazali aim to establish faith through fear and thus paving the way for religious fundamentalism.

The opening chapter gives a portrayal of an ageing writer living in exile due to an ongoing battle with extremist Islamic doctrine. The next chapter moves on to the contemporary New York and London which renders not only space but also a nexus between the past and the present that helps the author include many of the themes that could be expected from him. The reader is lead into a clash of civilizations: of Rushd's coherence and Ghazali's incoherence, of rationality and reason against the savagery of religious extremism. Through the lives of the descendants of Dunia, Rushdie highlights the position of the migrant in a world at war with itself. There are a number of magical elements in the novel like the levitation of Geronimo after cataclysmic storm, the confrontation of Jimmy with his own fictional creation Nataraj Hero, detection of corruption by a baby with miraculous powers and the creation of thunderbolts by an angry lady to kill the family of a lover who jilted her and many more. There are also jinnies with revenge motive and a desire to destroy the human world. These evil jinnies have created a "Foundation" and teamed up with "a murderous gang of ignoramuses [...] the Swots [who] had studied deeply the art of forbidding things [...] painting, sculpture, music, film, journalism, hashish, voting, elections, individualism, disagreement, pleasure, happiness, pool tables, clean-shaven chins

on men, women's faces, women's bodies, women's education, women's rights" (TET 14).

These various magic elements have been brought in to discuss some aspects of reality and the differences in human nature and attitude. They also point to some real life situations, exhibiting man's intolerance to the 'other'. Through Geronimo's levitation and the challenges he faces Rushdie brings out the attitude of the multitude to a man who is divergent. Some think of his inconvenience as a special power, and one jealous; some others think of it as a disease and keep away from him. Ella's fingers having the power to produce thunderbolt signifies the anger that can destroy.

Though magic realism is used more often but less effectively by some of the recent writers and though criticized for overuse, Rushdie seems to privilege the magical as the primary mode with which to represent postcolonial or repressed subjects. The technique of magic realism has helped Rushdie present the contemporary problems of intolerance to minority, religious totalitarianism and also racial discrimination.

In *Two Years Eight Months and Twenty Eight Nights*, Dunia represents the 'world' and Duniyat, the descendants of Dunia or in other words, the people of the world. Nirmal changes his name to Normal because he is very normal. There are strange names like Nataraj Hero, Storm Doe and the language is a mixture of Hindi and English as are some of names:

"Then they 'ldekho him all right.(TET 65)

"He is Dil-Ka-Shehzada."(TET65)

"Tata for now." (TET 67)

Rushdie does not believe in the sacred and high seriousness and hence there are colloquial and common expressions. Rushdie challenges the normalcy of language and of English literature by twisting and harnessing words and sentences thus straining to match the furious complexity of the novel.

He borrows words from many fields the technicality of which creates problems for the common reader. His stories are fragmented and there are jumps in time and space which also adds to the level of obscurity. However, one cannot but admire his depth of thought and wide knowledge that is unfurled in the process of his writing. His intertextuality adds to the intensity of his style.

One such passage can be illustrated from *Two Years Eight Months and Twenty Eight Nights*:

In the year 1195, the great philosopher IbnRushd, once the Qadi, or judge, of Seville and most recently the personal physician to the Caliph Abu UusufYaqub in his home town of Cordoba, was formally discredited and disgraced on account of his liberal ideas, which were unacceptable to the increasingly powerful Berber fanatics who were spreading like a pestilence across Arab Spain, and sent to live in internal exile in the small village of Lucena outside his native city, a village full of Jews who could no longer say they were Jews because the previous ruling dynasty of al-Andalus, the Almoravides, had forced them to convert to Islam. IbnRushd, a philosopher who was no longer permitted to expound his philosophy, all of whose writing had been banned and his books burned, felt instantly at home among the Jews who could not say they were Jews. He had been the favourite of the Caliph of the present ruling dynasty, the Almohads, but favourites go out of fashion, and Abu Yusuf Yaqub allowed the fanatics to push the great commentator on Aristotle out of town. (TET 5)

In the story of IbnRushd and Ghazali in *Two Years Eight Months and Twenty Eight Nights* again, a myth of the past is used to describe the religious violence in the contemporary India not only between theists and atheists but also between followers of different Gods Salman Rushdie deserves great praise for his vivid descriptions of people, landscapes and events. His idiomatic and figurative expressions make his style vibrant and photographic. Here are some examples.

His description of Dunia, the Jinni brings before our eyes a Jinni in the form of human being with extra ordinary powers: "She was a supernatural creature, a jinnia, of the tribe of female jinn, the jinire: a grand princess of that tribe, on an earthly adventure, pursuing her fascination with human men in general and brilliant ones in particular".(TET 6)

His juxtaposition of the different aspects of Alexandra, her routine act with her thought process makes it an interesting description that brings out her character accurately:

The Lady Philosopher, wrapped as she was in theories, dedicated to the triumph of the worst-case scenario while eating truffled pasta and breaded veal, her head full of the mathematical formulae that provided the scientific basis for her pessimism, became herself a sort of abstraction, his chief source of income and no more. (TET 45)

It is a very different but a more powerful description of his feeling about a place that has changed very much in *Two Years Eight Months and Twenty Eight Nights*, when he describes 'Mumbai': "After the long years away their home town was a shock to the eyes, as if an alien city, 'Mumbai', had descended from space and settled on top of the Bombay they remembered.(TET 33)

Rushdie's masterly description of Geronimo's realization of the sudden, magic levitation he had after the storm comes as a proof of his greatness as an artist. Rushdie describes the gradual development of fear in Geronimo of the strangeness in him, his suspicion and confirmation of what has happened to him: It was on the Wednesday after the great storm that Mr.Geronimo first noticed that his feet no longer touched the ground...(TET 20)He swung his legs out of bed and stood up. Something did feel different then. He was familiar with the texture of the polished wooden floorboards in his bedroom but for some reason he didn't feel them that Wednesday morning...(TET 21)The accelerator and brake felt oddly cushioned beneath his booted feet, as if they needed a little extra pressure from him this morning. (TET 22)

Most of Rushdie's novels have been written in third person narration. His *Two Years Eight Months and Twenty Eight Nights* is narrated by an omniscient narrator. It is natural in the other novels since the story is about someone else's experience. And since there is magic realism, the story moves to and fro and the protagonists are found in the real world and in the magic world and hence there is time jump and space jump.

*In Two Years Eight Months and Twenty Eight Nights*, he imagines a world in the future time without religious cultural, political and gender wars which emerges as a result of battle between reason and unreason, between Jinnis of light and the dark. His novels have the fable form and are multi-layered.

Rushdie's word power and narrative capacity distinguishes him as a master story teller. He conveys his thoughts powerfully and effectively with his wondrous capacity for imagination and expression. Rushdie takes the reader in the magic carpet of words with its surprising ups and downs swishing through the air into an intellectual world of logic and practicality, a world more civilized than the present, a world of peace and unity, a world of light envisioned by him.

### References:

1. Rushdie, Salman. *Two Year Eight Months and Twenty Eight Nights*, London, Penguin Books, 2015.
2. Books, 2015.
3. Vaishnavi.Pokuri, Dr. Vishu Divya, Universality in Gloria Naylor's 'Mama Day'; English Studies International Research Journal : Volume 3 Spl Issue (2015) ISSN 2347-3479, Pg 40-42
4. Parameswaran, Uma. "Biographical Highlights." Salman Rushdie's Early Fiction. (Jaipur: Rawat Public - actions, 2007): 2 Print.
5. Ramnath Srinath, Cultural Isolation As Depicted in Anita Desai's Bye -Bye Blackbird. ; English Studies International Research Journal : Volume 3 Spl Issue (2015) ISSN 2347-3479, Pg 43-46
6. Baldick, Chris. *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2001. Print.
7. "Two Years Eight Months and Twenty Eight Nights." Rev. of *Two Years Eight Months and Twenty Eight Nights*, by DebanjanChakrabarti. Dna E-paper 27 Sept. 2015: n. pag. Web.
8. M.Vanisree, Dr.G.Mohana Charyulu , Spirit of Camaraderie in Shashi Deshpande's Binding Vine; English Studies International Research Journal : Volume 3 Spl Issue (2015) ISSN 2347-3479, Pg 47-50

D. Devi

Associate Professor

IFET College of Engineering / Anna University