

## **FACING THE MIRROR OF FUNDAMENTALISM: MALE FAILURE AND SOCIAL FRUSTRATION IN SALMAN RUSHDIE'S *THE SATANIC VERSES***

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### **Abstract**

*This paper traces the origin and implantation of Islam in Jahilia and Yathrib and takes into account its pattern of interaction with other religions as represented in The Satanic Verses. While focusing on the context into which Islam colonises and replaces the political traditions of Jahilia and Yathrib, the paper also examines the novel as an epic of male failure which draws from the conflict between fundamentalist ideology and a modern society founded on the principle of unity between God and mankind; piety and personal devotions. From the point of view of postcolonial theory as conceptual framework, two arguments are possible in this paper. Firstly, that Rushdie's male characters fail because of their inability to adapt to modernism and their refusal to respect the "Constitution of Medina" which regulated relations between Arabian communities. Secondly, that Rushdie's satire on male failure establishes a self-conscious awareness that patriarchy, religious fundamentalism and terrorism are forestalling social cohesion in many societies around the world. From such fundamentalist tendencies therefore, the paper highlights the different conditions under which Muslims may live since the Constitution of Medina did not establish a theocracy, but a religiously pluralist city-state.*

**Key words:** failure, Islam, fundamentalism, patriarchy, post-colonialism etc.

### **Introduction**

The popularity of Islamic fundamentalism in the 1980s became a thematic concern in Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* in which he fictionalises Islamic myths of creation. This paper examines the controversies over the origin of Islam, interrogating whether authors who write about Prophet Mohammad directly report the occurrences in Islamic myths of creation or their understanding of it. It argues that the rise of fundamentalism is because in some cases, postcolonial authors distort, modify or articulate personal opinions and preconceptions. Ironically, Rushdie has not escaped such categorisation, which is why some Muslims view the novel as libel, which desecrates *The Koran*. Rushdie's critique of Islam, problematises the abstract and timeless truths about Islam, questioning the difficulty as to whose name and for whom does the fundamentalist speak? This paper thus discusses the

causes of the schisms in Islam especially the stringent fundamentalist norms that tend to forestall social cohesion within a postcolonial context. As a post-colonial writer, Rushdie's satire is examined by Jeremy Jennings and Anthony Kemp-Welch in *Intellectuals in Politics: From the Dreyfus Affair to SalmanRushdie* who says "the real or 'true' intellectual is therefore always an outsider, living in self-imposed exile and on the margins of society" (4). Therefore, given the complexities that come with criticising an old aged institution like Islam, Rushdie's postcolonial artistic identity can only be completely articulated and established from exile. That is why the "fatwa" contributed in exposing largely, the different levels of male failure and social frustration. Consequently, *The Satanic Verses* become a postcolonial indictment of both pre-and post-Islamic Jahilia, Yathrib and Titlipur in order to articulate and write back the socio-religious identity of the dispossessed, the unrepresented and the forgotten within contemporary Islam.

### **Socio-Religious Identity and Male Failure**

Given the dominance of Islamic fundamentalism in Jahilia, Yathrib and Titlipur, one is expected to see it succeeding. Ironically, patriarchal identity is expressed through male hegemony and lust, which perpetuates the subjugation and objectification of women. Pre-Islamic Jahilia figuratively is a metaphor for gull gutters and the epicentre for adultery, prostitution, loss of faith and revenge. These characteristics reminisce pre-Islamic chaotic Arabian society which Jonathan P. Berkey in *The Formation of Islam: Religion and Society in the Near East, 600–1800* describes that:

Muslims refer to the pre-Islamic period as the *jahiliyya*, the "time of ignorance" before the coming of the Koranic revelation. From a historical rather than a theological viewpoint, the term is an apt one, although for entirely different reasons. (39)

Thus, Rushdie's choice of Jahilia is symbolic of a faithless society characterised by attacks on artists and writers. The fact that chaos reigns supreme, and which artists and poets who are supposed to educate and moralise the masses ironically perpetrate is a call for concern. By writing or singing songs that encourage revenge and jungle justice, Jahilian poets fail to display the self-conscious task of bards that is to educate and entertain. The narrator criticises their new identity that:

A cult of the dead has been raging in Jahilia. When a man dies, paid mourners beat themselves, scratch their breasts, tear hair [...]. And if the man has been murdered his closest relative takes ascetic vows and pursues the murderer until the blood has been avenged by blood; whereupon it is customary to compose a poem of celebration, but few revengers are gifted in rhyme. Many poets make a living by writing assassination songs, and there is general agreement that the finest of these blood-praising versifiers is the precocious polemicist, Baal. (98)

It should be noted that as a poet, Baal's versification contradicts ethics because instead of interrogating and satirising the legitimacy of revenge in Jahilia, he identifies with it as an avenue to amass wealth and attract women's attention. Baal's artistic prowess pushes him into adultery with Hind. When her husband, the Grandee, discovers Hind's adultery, his revenge on Baal is physically brutal as "there is the sound of a cracking rib... Abruptly, Baal's tormentor squats down, grabs the poet by the hair, jerks his head up, whispers into his ear: 'Baal, she wasn't the mistress I meant,' and then Baal lets out a howl of hideous self-pity" (100). This public torture humiliates Baal and his poetic reputation is tarnished. Ironically, Rushdie's Baal does not identify with the vegetation deity, "Baal", who was worshipped around 200 BC according to Israeli, Lebanese and Egyptian myths as Michael Jordan describes in the *Dictionary of Gods and Goddesses* that:

Baal may have originated in pre-agricultural times as god of storms and rain. He is the son of Dagan and in turn is the father of seven storm gods, the Baalim of the *Vetus Testamentum*, and seven midwife goddesses, the Sasuratum. Later he became a vegetation god concerned with fertility of the land. (41)

In effect, Baal's artistry, which ought to have promoted peace to ensure intellectual fertility, instead sows social discord. Failing to identify as a poet par excellence, Baal seeks refuge in the popular brothel in Jahilia called "The Curtain." It is in this labyrinth of profanity that he crowns himself the prophet of lust, and parodies the newly arrived Prophet Mahound by naming the twelve prostitutes after his twelve wives of Prophet Mohammad in *The Koran*. Another level of hatred for Islam is seen through Jahilians who manifest their distaste for Prophet Mahound by frequenting "The Curtain" which ironically experiences a three hundred percent increase in business despite Prophet Mahound's men line the brothel's courtyard, rotating about its "fountain of love much as pilgrims rotate for other reasons around the ancient Black Stone" (381). "The Curtain's" customers wear masks and Baal watches the circling masked figures from a high balcony especially as the "fifteen-year-old whore, Ayesha, is the most popular with the paying public, just as her namesake was with Mohammad" (ibid). By blaspheming the twelve wives of Prophet Mahound, Baal and the prostitutes are arrested and executed according to Islamic law. Baal's poetry therefore is a metaphor for Jahilia's appalling socio-cultural and political mores and Baal's death marks the end of poetry and prostitution because Prophet Mahound decrees that writers and whores are those who spoil the society. If the role of poets and writers is to entertain and moralise the society, therefore, Prophet Mahound's perception of a spiritual and utopic society is definitely grounded on brute fundamentalism. A religious hegemony that denies Jahilians the right to social freedom. The type Frantz Fanon satirises in *Black Skin, White Masks* that people are refused the right to speak which "means to be in a position to use a certain syntax, to grasp the morphology of this or that language, but it means above all to assume a culture, to support the weight of a civilisation" (17-18). The new civilisation that Prophet Mahound imposes especially on Jahilian poets corroborates the subsequent happenings in Rushdie's life

because a fundamentalist reading of his criticisms of certain Islamic doctrines motivated the “fatwa” on Rushdie. That is why the postcolonial critic, G. N. Devy in “Orality and Literacy” argues that:

Even today, in every Indian Village an elder, a man or a woman, who performs the function of keeping the epic alive through the oral mode [...]. Its plot and characters show unity and consistency. Yet even this epic was assimilated into the *sutratradition* of oral narration; and it became a common practice to listen to a learned man narrate the epic rather than read the poem itself. The oral convention grew in range and variety as time passed. (34)

Therefore, since Rushdie has transcended from the oral to the written, religious fundamentalists now find their oral tales being threatened by questions are asked about documented myths. This shows that writers and poets are identified as indispensable forces in the survival and existence of any people. Devy’s declaration establishes writers as those who preserve the lost values of their societies through criticising institutionalised dehumanisation of the subaltern by fundamentalist religions.

Male failure is further identified through men’s impotency and sexual frigidity of male characters who fail to satisfy their wives. Hind’s sexually weak husband, Sufyan, forbids discussing the subject of her dissatisfaction because fundamentalists consider lovemaking strictly to make children. That is why:

Ever since their marriage, the two of them had performed the sexual act infrequently, in total darkness, pin-drop silence and almost complete immobility. It would not have occurred to Hind to wiggle or wobble, and since Sufyan appeared to get through it all with an absolute minimum of motion, she took it – had always taken it. (247)

Hind blames Sufyan’s weakness saying her girl children are the “weakling seed implanted in her by her unmanly spouse” (ibid). Hind’s distaste is further highlighted when she says, “well, considering who made the baby, I should think myself lucky it’s not a cockroach or a mouse” (ibid). Consequently, since Sufyan cannot have a male child, he loses social recognition and Hind orders him to move his bed into the hall. This shows that Hind and other Jahilian women need two types of liberation; firstly, liberation from men’s oppression and secondly, liberation from the restrictions on female sexuality because women should control their bodies because a woman’s body is a woman’s right. Thus, *The Satanic Verses* depicts a society where religious fundamentalism has failed to assert men’s propagated identity and superiority.

Like Sufyan, Saladin Chamchais unable to get his wife pregnant due to some internal deformity, which his wife regrets because:

After ten years, Saladin discovered that there was something the matter with some of his own chromosomes, two sticks too long, or too short, he could not

remember. His genetic inheritance; apparently he was lucky to exist, lucky not to be some sort of a deformed freak. (50)

Despite Saladin's deformity, he continues to flirt around like Billy Battuta whom women pay because he is romantic and vigorous in bed with a predilection for women with enormous breasts and plenty of rumps, whom he "treated badly", as the euphemism has it, and "rewarded handsomely" (260-61). Women pay Battuta because their patriarchal husbands cannot satisfy them, making sexual gratification a delicate subject that facilitates adultery in many homes. Like Battuta, Gibreel Farishta flirts around and he has so many sexual partners to the extent that he forgets their names immediately after sleeping with them. Gibreel's lust hampers his plans of getting married, which influence his career in the movie industry because:

The avalanche of sex in which Gibreel Farishta was trapped managed to bury his greatest talent so deep that it might easily have been lost forever, his talent, that is, for loving genuinely, deeply and without holding back, the rare and delicate gift which he had never been able to employ. (25)

Gibreel's lechery leads to his defilement of *The Koran* in one of his films, an act that fuels confrontations with fundamentalist actors and producers because Gibreel fictionalises the Ramayana story to contain characters that are corrupt and evil instead of pure and free from sin. The fact that he reverses the identities of the different gods, such as the portrait of the lecherous, drunken Rama and a flighty Sita; while Ravana, the demon-king is depicted as an upright and honest man shows that Gibreel is "trying deliberately to set up a final confrontation with religious sectarians, knowing he can't win, that he'll be broken into bits" (539). Several members of the cast walk off the production and give lurid interviews accusing Gibreel of 'blasphemy', 'Satanism' and other misdemeanours. Gibreel becomes the target of religious fundamentalists and the police equally get on Gibreel's trail, investigating his company's tax irregularity. These end with him being ostracised and Gibreel's loneliness degenerates into madness, which ends in suicide.

Male failure is equally read through the novel's satire on suicides prevalent in the English society in the 60s when gambling was en vogue among the upper class. Men gambled entire fortunes and many who lost resorted to suicide, like Pamela Lovelace's parents who gambled everything they had. They "committed suicide together when she had just begun to menstruate, over their heads in gambling debts [...] she was abandoned, lost, her parents couldn't even be bothered to wait and watch her grow up, that's how much she was loved" (50). Lovelace's disappointment is so intense that she constantly mourns and curses ever being born into the home of gamblers. This trauma affects her love life and she fears of ever having children. Similarly, Allie Cone's father, Otto Cone, commits suicide in England because he fails to make his family live like aristocrats. The narrator says Otto Cone forces his family to dress, speak, interact and behave like those in the upper class meanwhile Allie enjoys living her commoner life. Failing therefore to get his family identify with his purported faked



lifestyle, Otto Cone commits suicide as Allie says, “Otto Cone as a man of seventy-plus jumped into an empty lift-shaft and died” (298). Ironically, Alicja Cohen who is Otto Cone’s wife confesses that her husband’s death liberates both her and Allie, and Alicja immediately ditches their ritualistic false lifestyle and enjoys the pleasures of life freely. Arguably, the false lifestyle projected by Changrez and Otto Cone is backed historically because in the 60s, it was en vogue for educated Indians to imitate British culture and behaviour. Such historical paradigm resonates what Simon Malpas and Paul Wake in *The Routledge Companion to Critical Theory* say about Paul Hamilton’s definition of historicism’s double focus that is “to explore the extent to which any historical enterprise inevitably reflects the interests and bias of the period in which it was written” (57). Therefore, Changrez and Cone symbolise British aristocratic enterprise in India, which is why they tend to fake a number of things just to gain respect. Rushdie’s satire on India’s educational establishment is similar to Rachel Bailey Jones’s *Postcolonial Representations of Women: Critical Issues for Education* wherein education is informed by the inequities of colonialism and the post-colonial’s attempt to create a balanced understanding of global relationships and movements because:

Education has been a field that has proven relatively resistant to postcolonial critique [...]. It is vital that as we educate in an increasingly global and transnational context, we take the time to interrogate the historical links between colonialism and education and examine the ways that neo-colonial forms of power infuse our practice. (1)

To these critics, failure in education has effects on future generations. This is evident in the text because the failures of Otto Cone and Changrez impact the notoriety of their children, which is symbolic of popular disappointment in the corrupt Indian educational system run by people like Cone and Changrez who have adopted faked socio-religious identities. From the above examples, we see a series of disappointments and failures, on the part of both parents and their male children. Due to these disappointments, many Indians tend to fundamentalist Islam that launches jihads on such establishments and consequently, embrace doctrines that stifle social cohesion.

### **Faith Held Hostage**

The notion of faith in *The Satanic Verses* is controversial to many because Rushdie’s recourse to the origin of Islam attempts to shed light on mythical issues that have exposed Islam on the pinnacle of attacks and criticisms from several parts of the world. This is because the interpretation of some Islamic sanctities is most often, not very clear. Admittedly, contemporary scholarship is trying to trace the origin of *The Koran* and many attest to varied degrees of nuances that abound the first compilations. The religious critic, Robert Van Voorst, highlights in *Anthology of World Scriptures* that thanks to the intervention of Caliph Uthman, Islam was prevented from extinction because:

After Mohammad's death in 632, and the battle of Yamamah in 633, it was feared that knowledge of *The Koran* (still mostly recited orally) might die out. The process of recording all of it in writing began under the first Caliph, Umar. But different versions arose, with consequent disputes over which Koran was better. To end these troubles, Caliph Uthman (644-656) commissioned respected and learned men to produce a single recognised version using the best manuscripts and the memories of those with recognised knowledge of *The Koran*. This version became the only authorised text recognised by the Muslim community, believed to be a true copy of the 'Mother of the Book'. Other texts were systematically collected and destroyed. (289)

This controversy between Islamic scholars explains Rushdie's contradictory narrative in *The Satanic Verses*. Rushdie argues in *Step Across This Line: Collected Nonfiction 1992-2002* that from his studies of the birth and growth of Islam, the religion has been associated with mistakes and failures. Confirming this claim, Gregory McNamee, in "Literature Held Hostage: The Holy War Against Salman Rushdie Turns 10", asserts that ancient Islamic tradition provides subtexts for *The Satanic Verses* containing provocative stories of "Muslim djinns, martyrs, seers and angels who act rather more human than an orthodox believer might wish them to" (3). Explaining the meaning of the Arabic word, "Islam", which is "submission", McNamee says Muslims have been taken hostage, colonised and terrorised into belief by fundamentalists. Rushdie's biographer, Timothy Brennan, in *Salman Rushdie and the Third World: Myths of the Nation*, opines that since childhood, Rushdie criticised Islamic practices that he deemed unfair and "drew Arabic pictures of Allah to resemble pictures of naked women and later on conducted a full-scale study of Islam's history in Cambridge University" (15). Islamic history reveals successive instances of submission and why Rushdie satirises the perpetration of such subjugation, especially the reading given to the appearance of the archangel before Hagar and her son, Ismail. Accordingly, Ibrahim's maltreatment of his wife, Hagar, is because she is seen as a witch as the narrator says:

After Ibrahim left her, she fed the baby at her breast until her milk ran out. Then she climbed two hills, first Safa then Marwah, running from one to the other in her desperation, trying to sight a tent, a camel, a human being. She saw nothing. That was when He came to her, Gibreel, and showed her the waters of Zamzam. So Hagar survived; but why now do the pilgrims congregate? To celebrate her survival? No, no. They are celebrating the honour done the valley by the visit of, you've guessed it, Ibrahim. (95)

The failure of fundamentalists to establish that Hagar is a witch as purported is the reason why Archangel Gibreel rescues them because of their innocence. Although pilgrims visit the hills she spent time on to pay tributes, ironically, the tributes are not to Hagar and Ismail, but to Archangel Gibreel for appearing on the mountain. Fundamentalists have completely twisted this divine visitation, which means that Muslim women's achievements are

hardly celebrated by Islamic fundamentalists because this is a man's world. Given that Islam is one of the major religions in India, many women feel subjugated and held hostage by their cultures and religions. That is why a postcolonial critic like Gayatri Spivak in *The Post-Colonial Critic: Interviews, Strategies, Dialogues* satirise such practices saying:

When I think of the masses, I think of a woman belonging to that 84% of women's work in India, which is unorganized peasant labour. Now if I could speak in such a way that such a person would actually listen to me and not dismiss me as yet another of those colonial missionaries that would embody the project of unlearning about which I've spoken recently. (56)

Like Rushdie, Spivak is more concerned with the dehumanisation of women within Indian religions and cultures given that it has reached a point where the women are sceptical about their eventual liberation. Therefore, we can argue that it is in highlighting the failures of male hegemony that Rushdie interrogates the place of Islam within the context of globalisation as a metropolitan and multicultural religion geared towards social cohesion.

This paper further revisits male failure at the time of Islamic evangelisation through the patriarchal nature of Titlipurians, which is exposed by their refusal to be Islamised by a woman. When Ayesha announces archangel Gibreel's decision that every man, woman and child should prepare for a pilgrimage to Mecca to kiss the Black Stone in the Ka'aba at the sacred mosque, many men refuse to believe. They manifest their refusal by blocking the road for the pilgrims with broken bicycles and in response, Ayesha prays to Allah for protection. The narrator says:

Ayesha walked towards the mob as if it did not exist, and when she reached the crossroads, beyond which the clubs and knives of the enemy awaited her, there was a thunderclap like trumpet of doom and an ocean fell down out of the sky. The drought had broken too late to save the crops; afterwards, many of the pilgrims believed that God had been saving up the water for just this purpose, letting it build up in the sky until it was endless as the sea, sacrificing the year's harvest in order to save his prophetess and her people. (490-91)

The storm, which symbolises Allah's wrath, increases the faith in pilgrims and confirms Ayesha as His true servant. Rushdie celebrates Allah's choice of Ayesha to guide the pilgrims to Mecca, which becomes a satire on Titlipurian fundamentalists who appropriate religious leadership on sex basis. Ayesha's success articulates the position of Joel Kuortti's *The Satanic Verses: To Be Born Again, First You Have to Die* that Rushdie's novel argues that men have failed because of the exclusion of women's contributions from important religious events in *The Koran*. Kuortti reiterates that what Rushdie calls "satanic verses" are transliterated from Arabic "tilk al-gharaniq al-'ulawainnashafa'ata-hunna la-turtaja," which translated into English gives "these are exalted females whose intercessions are to be desired" (134). He goes further that these verses are said to have been added to the fifty-third "Sura" of *The Koran* entitled, "Surat-annajm," "The Star," in order to "acknowledge



the validity of the goddesses Al-Lat, Al-Manat and Al-Uzza". Ironically, the verses were later withdrawn and denounced as "satanic" by fundamentalists who refused to associate women with certain glories in Islam. That is why contemporary schools of thought of Islamic historians and anthropologists still argue over the content of the first versions of *The Koran*.

Ayesha's pilgrimage is symbolic of spiritual challenges, which men who are weak in faith cannot accomplish. The fact that Mirza Saeed, Muhammad Din, Mr Qureishi and Sri Srinivas, fundamentalists from Titlipur end up abandoning the trek preferring to travel in an air-conditioned Mercedes-Benz only depicts how men are weak in faith. Their decision to continue by car is because they believe Ayesha is an impostor whom they must discredit. Their plans fail because when Ayesha gets to the sea, she prays and the water body opens up for the true pilgrims to go across to Mecca. Muhammad Din's failure is read as he describes this miraculous opening of the sea to the police:

I saw it with my own eyes; I saw the sea divide, like hair being combed; and they were all there, far away, walking away from me. She was there also, my wife, Khadija, whom I love. This is what Osman the bullock-boy told the detectives, who had been badly shaken by the Sarpanch's disposition [...] the water opened, and I saw them go along the ocean floor, among the dying fish.' Sri Srinivas, too, swore by the goddess Lakshmi that he had seen the parting of the Arabian Sea (504).

Here, the symbolic incident, which could be alluded to that of Moses in the Bible, pits the integrity of women's prophecy against that of men arguing that men in the novel fail because they are less pious than women are. Furthermore, Ayesha's forgiving nature is celebrated when she later comes back to rescue the ill and lonely Mirza Saeed from Peristan to Mecca which confirms that Saeed fails because of his fundamentalist stance. A stance that continues to perpetrate the type of fundamentalism that has taken Islam hostage over the years and now makes it a cult of death. A cult whose archaic doctrine cannot adapt to contemporary realities and whose definition of freedom largely is inhibitive to the present civilisation. That is why Julia Kristeva suggests in *Crisis of the European Subject* that:

If we are to construct a civilisation that is not solely one of production and commercial trade, we must redefine what we understand by 'freedom'. The freedom that we have to reconstruct ... should be an auto commencement, but with the other ... The freedom of desire that is the desire for objects, knowledge and production, joined with the freedom to withdraw into intimacy and mystical participation. (159-160)

Accordingly, freedom should be based on the principle of competition and equal opportunities and religions should ensure that this basic human right prevails. It is this freedom that Rushdie advocates, but which unfortunately has made *The Satanic Verses* to remain a libel to some fundamentalist Islamists who keep demanding Rushdie's execution.

Their stance has pushed many to interrogate the actual doctrines of Islam given that the many schisms that have developed within the religion Prophet Mohammad founded.

### Questioning the Authenticity of Prophecies

The controversies over Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* arise from his portrait of Prophet Mahound, a character in the novel as a metaphor for Prophet Mohammed, the founder of Islam. The fact that Prophet Mahound in his evangelisation recognises and accepts the goddesses in Jahilia – Al-Lat, Uzza and Manat–, which contradicts the fundamental culture of Jahilia, is considered a failure by many men. Mahound's encounter with angel Gibreel questions the complexity over spiritual and physical battles because he insists to the archangel the need to recognise these goddesses, Al-Lat, Uzza and Manat, so that those who worship these goddesses will tend to follow Islam. He argues thus:

I too, have much to gain. The souls of the city, of the world, surely they are worth three angels? Is Allah so unbending that he will not embrace three more to save the human race? I don't know anything. Should God be proud or humble, majestic or simple, yielding or un-? What kind of idea is he? What kind am I? (111)

Prophet Mahound's questions debunk the integrity of prophecies showing that many revelations are not from the archangel. Ironically, the fact that he convinces the archangel to understand the need to accept prophecies from these goddesses just because Jahilians worship them, which becomes a political strategy to galvanise more Muslims. That is why Mahound returns from Mount Cone and informs the impatient crowd about the archangel's decision "they are the exalted birds, and their intercession is desired indeed" (114). Prophet Mahound plays a form of cunning diplomacy because he knows directly refuting the three goddesses will generate opposition from their followers. This explains why Jonathan P. Berkeley assesses how the growth of Islam carries degrees of doubt and the lack of authenticity as a colonising religion saying:

It is also true that Islam itself only took shape through a process of dialogue with the other faith traditions. Indeed, it is misleading to speak of the 'appearance' or 'rise' of Islam, if those words convey a sense of unproblematic apparition as sudden as that of the Arab warriors before the bewildered Byzantine or Sasanian armies. It would be safer to say that Islam 'emerged', gradually and uncertainly, over the decades – an 'ill-defined period of gestation' – which followed the death of the Prophet Mohammad in 632. (57)

Prophet Mahound misleads the entire community to believe that Allah recognises their female deities as his archangels. That is why throughout *The Satanic Verses*, Rushdie interrogate many doubtful prophetic instances that have raised controversies about the authenticity of Islamic history. While one school of thought argues that Prophet Mohammad wrote the revelations as soon as he received them, another claims he was an illiterate and they

were written down by wise people after his death in 632 C.E. Robert E. Van Voorst examines these controversies and highlights that:

The next stage in the development of *The Koran* was its oral transmission in prophetic utterances to Mohammad's followers. Mohammad spoke to them the words that Gabriel asked him to speak, which are often introduced in *The Koran* by the imperative "Say" [...]. *The Koran* in its final form bears witness to some difficulties in composition: substitution of verses, new revelations that cancel out other ones, and long periods between revelations. (289)

One of such revelations was Mohammad's acceptance of women's important role in the spread of Islam in Mecca because in pre-Islamic Mecca, people worshipped gods and goddesses. Since fundamentalist Islam is another form of colonialism, Mohammad eventually declared those goddesses or "Daughters of Allah" as "Satanic." Thus, Prophet Mahound's refusal of Al-Lat, Al-Manat and Al-Uzza becomes a glaring metaphor for Prophet Mohammad which shows how fundamentalist Islamists systematically subdued women. Zeev Maghenin "Islam from Flexibility to Ferocity" argues that it is the radical nature of Islam that accounts for its failures, which are reflected in Prophet Mohammad's revelations because:

Islamic tradition considers the Prophet Mohammad to be more than just the mouthpiece of Koranic revelation; this aspect of his career – his duty to convey celestial messages to his flock – is not particularly impressive or interesting, and we have in fact only one or two descriptions of Mohammad receiving a divine communication in the entire classical literature. His most important role, a role which created almost single-handedly the vast corpus of Islamic law and lore, is as "*uswahasana*", the "Excellent Exemplar." The behaviour of Mohammad, in other words, is supposed to be the model for all Muslims for all time, both as individuals and as a collective. (38)

Ironically, Prophet Mahound's behaviour in *The Satanic Verses* interrogates his stance as an "excellent exemplar" and puts the authenticity of his revelation to question, especially his attitudes and his inability to control the drinking and lecherous habits of his disciples. In their Islamisation campaigns, Prophet Mahound's followers, Khalid and Hamza, turn to alcohol and in their drunken state shout and abuse people along the streets in the name of Islam. This attitude weakens and discredits Islam especially as Prophet Mahound equally drinks alcohol, gets drunk and sleeps in the gutter. Hind rescues Prophet Mahound and brings him to her house and the next morning, she tells Mahound "I was walking the city streets last night, masked, to see the festivities, and what should I stumble over but your unconscious body? Like a drunk in the gutter, Mahound I sent my servants for a litter and brought you home. Say thank you" (120). Hind advises Prophet Mahound on how to curb the irresponsible nature of his disciples and the faithful beginning from their perspective of sex and lust since alcohol stimulates lust. Rushdie satirises Prophet Mahound's injunctions on sexual pleasure

especially for women when Mahound gets into a trance and reveals the role of the female during sex:

The revelation – the recitation – told the faithful how much to eat, how deeply they should sleep, and which sexual positions had received divine sanction, so that they learned that sodomy and the missionary position were approved of by the archangel, whereas the forbidden postures included all those in which the female was on top.(364)

Given that it is a woman who rescues Prophet Mahound, it is ironic that in his revelation women are instead reduced to sex tools for the gratification of their husbands without any permission to experience sexual pleasure on their part. Socially, women should be allowed whatever position they consider pleasurable during sexual intercourse. This is because orgasm is a mysterious phenomenon especially as sex is not all about making children, as fundamentalists want women to understand. Through Mahound's revelations, Islamic fundamentalists confine women to their homes as a way of colonising their sentiments, resulting to psychological violence. Islamists base their arguments on the "Hadith" which are collections of works of Mohammad and the first Muslims who are not included in *The Koran*. These collections supplement *The Koran* and what is today known as "Hadith" became a systematic science about two centuries after the death of Mohammad. Ali Kecia in *Marriage and Slavery in Early Islam* examines spousal relationships saying that the husband received "in exchange for payment of dower, a form of authority or dominion over his wife's sexual (and usually reproductive) capacity" (6). Kecia thinks such stigmatised position projects slaves and women as overlapping categories of legally inferior person constructed against one another and in relation to one another – sometimes identified, sometimes distinguished. This makes slavery to be analogised to marriage because both are forms of control or dominion exercised by man over woman. As such, some women may be pushed into adultery, when they do not feel sexually satisfied which is another level of controversy.

As such, the social dissatisfaction that comes with the revelations and laws of Mahound on women remains a contested premise in the reading of Islamic laws and sanctities. Ezat Mossallanejad examines the disagreement among Islamic scholars regarding the punishment for adultery in *Islam and Consecrated Tortures in Muslim Diaspora: Gender, Culture and Identity* and points out that as the most sacred book of Islam, *The Koran* does not prescribe stoning as the punishment for adultery. There is not a single verse to this effect, but it is used by several Islamic states to punish adulterers, arguing that the majority of Sunni and Shi'a theologians, including the four Sunni Imams – Abu Hanifa, Shafeyi, Malek and Ahmad Hanbel – hold that the order for stoning to death still exists since:

Prophet Mohammad himself had stoned to death adulterers and adulteresses. In some Islamic countries, stoning is consecrated by religion. It is considered a virtuous action done to please God, and is committed against ordinary people, and

especially women. The perpetrators are sure that they are doing the right thing, that it is the work of God. (72)

In Mossallanejad's opinion, some crimes punishable by stoning in certain countries include homosexuality and adultery; sometimes an accusation such as being a pornographer or prostitute is enough grounds for punishment. Stoning remains a legal punishment in a number of countries regulated by the rules of "Sharia." The following countries are notorious for stoning: Afghanistan (under the Taliban and even today), Bangladesh, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Sudan, Nigeria and Mauritania. Ironically, most of the cases remain unreported and undocumented because the victims are mostly women. The method is simple: a hole is dug and in the case of a man, the victim is buried in it up to his belly; a woman is buried up to her armpits. Then a group of people throw stones at the victim from all sides. Those who practise "Sharia" base their arguments on the "Hadiths," which is why moderate Islamic countries contest them because they are not written in *The Koran*. The issue of punishment against adultery remains controversial in many Islamic countries as some prefer one hundred lashes while others advocate the stoning to death of both parties.

Understanding that some of Prophet Mahound's revelations are politically motivated, some Jahilians show their distaste by refusing his future prophecies. A case is Prophet Mahound's revelation from Allah to ban the consumption of pork because it is satanic. Jahilians who paradoxically increase their consumption of pork do not welcome it, thereby an increase in sales as the narrator puts it that:

From the disgruntled butcher, Ibrahim, came the news that in spite of the new ban on pork, the skin-deep converts of Jahilia were flocking to his back door to buy the forbidden meat in secret, 'sales are up', he murmured while mounting his chosen lady, 'black pork prices are high; but damn it, these new rules have made my work tough'. (377-378)

The daring nature of the faithful in eating pork justifies Mahound's failures because Jahilians now question the authenticity of his prophecies. Prophet Mahound's economic laws are also considered biased by Jahilians especially when dealing with how people are supposed to be buried and how the property of the deceased should be shared. Consequently, women and girls are the most affected as far as inheritance and owning property is concerned. Mahound is accused of coming up with a business-like archangel who "handed down the management decisions of this highly corporate if non-corporeal God" (364). These revelations increasingly make Jahilian women to question their place within Islam, thereby making the religion another form of colonisation of their rights.

Prophet Mahound's failure is compounded by his inability to quickly decipher that the verses revealed to his followers are satanic from "Shaitan." Mahound's inability to retrieve the verses shows the impending predicaments on Jahilians after realising that "he has been tricked, that the devil came to him in the guise of the archangel, so that the verses he memorised, the ones he recited in the poetry tent, were not the real thing but its diabolic opposite, not godly



but satanic” (123). The failure of Mahound to retrieve the satanic revelations symbolise Satan’s hold on Jahilia. To highlight the failures of the Prophet in Jahilia, he is betrayed by his secretary, Salman, who documents the revelations as the Prophet dictates. Salman changes the revelations for a long time without the Prophet noticing, even after he reads out what he has written to him, which means that the Prophet has no mastery of his revelations. Citing some of the changes he does on the revelations, Salman says, “I changed a bigger thing. He said Christian, I wrote Jew. He’d notice that surely; how could he not? But when I read him the chapter he nodded and thanked me politely... so I went on with my devilment, changing verses” (368). The Prophet’s failure to differentiate between what he listens to, from what he dictates to his secretary is another point of controversy. Riaz Hassan examines internal conflicts in early Islam in “Conceptions of Jihad and Conflict Resolution in Muslim Societies” saying that during the expansion of Islam, and the subsequent fragmentation of its empire, “it became apparent that Islam also had internal enemies who threatened the faith either as apostates or because they refused to meet their Islamic obligations such as payment of *zakat*” (131). Therefore, Salman the secretary, just like Salman Rushdie the author, is considered an apostate. Nevertheless, if one looks at these accusations from a postcolonial critical perspective, it can be argued that the transition from the oral to the written verses is bound to witness some internal metamorphoses. This argument is further sustained by G. N. Devy’s “Orality and Literacy” that:

During the progression from the oral to the written, literary forms tend to lose some of their formal features and cultural identities, and, at the same time, to acquire some new ones. To that extent, a distinction can be made between the two linguistic manifestations of a society’s creative imagination. Oral literature, unlike written literature, is not an exclusively verbal or lexical art. (31)

It can be argued that Salman is just a manifestation of the debate over the exact revelations of Prophet Mohammad. Many people believe they have been modified over the years for different reasons. Evidently, Salman’s actions are geared towards artistic and aesthetic pleasures, which thus form an integral part of the community’s daily life. These verses carry an imprint of the supernatural as conceived in the imagination and myths of Jahilia and Yathrib.

Due to his critique on Islam, fundamentalists consider Rushdie as an apostate. Michael Gorra in *After Empire: Scott, Naipaul, Rushdie* assesses the charges levied on Rushdie saying that Muslims are angry because he says *The Koran* is not the exact word of Allah as dictated by the angel through the mouth of Prophet Mohammed, but was instead written by man. To Gorra, Rushdie sets fiction against a particularly “powerful, absolute and peremptory myth – a myth that governs a part of his own life” (151). He does it as a way of examining a conflict between purity and pluralism, monologue and dialogue, orthodox answers and sceptical questions – the very conflict that *The Satanic Verses* itself has provoked. Gorra concludes that Rushdie’s portrait of the conflict between Salman and the Prophet symbolise the eternal

battle between good and evil, with one originating from the other. This could be alluded to the *Holy Bible* as Judas betrays his master, Jesus. Thus, the question of the authenticity of the prophesy reveals that the implicit conflict of values Rushdie poses between Salman and Prophet Mahound account for the complications Islam continues to generate. Such complications arise from the doubts over the prophet's integrity as a man and as a messiah.

### **Mahound the Prophet and Mahound the Man**

Our analyses of Rushdie's satire on Islam centres on an interrogation of the decisions Prophet Mahound takes as a man and as a prophet. Concerns arise about the prophet as a lustful person especially as he encourages his fellow soldiers to adopt such attitudes. This is controversial because many Islamists try to refute Prophet Mohammad's lust. In *The Satanic Verses*, Rushdie uses Prophet Mahound's lust to symbolise a patriarchal system that gives men the right to prostitute and marry as many wives as possible since Prophet Mahound encourages polygamy in his preaching as the narrator says:

In spite of the ditch of Yathrib, the faithful lost a good many men in the war against Jahilia... And after the end of the war, hey presto, there was the Archangel Gibreel instructing the surviving males to marry the widowed women... Salman cried, we were even told it didn't matter if we were already married, we could have up to four marriages if we could afford it, well, you can imagine, the lads really went for that [...]. Salman drunkenly confided, but after his wife's death Mahound was no angel, you understand my meaning... Those women up there: they turned his beard half-white in a year... he went for mothers and daughters, think of his first wife and then Ayesha: too old and too young, his two loves. (366)

Salman here is worried about this decision to transform women to spoils of war, whether it is Allah's revelation or another fabrication by Prophet Mahound. This is an allusion to Prophet Mohammad's attack on the Jewish tribe of Qurayza in 627CE killing 800 men and marrying off some of their wives and children to his soldiers while others were sold as slaves. Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* satirise the betrothal of young girls to old men in the name of religion, which is common in Jahilia, and how men inhibit women's right to equal opportunities in life. Prophet Mahound further tries to justify his lechery to his wife by getting into a trance in order to get revelations as Salman narrates:

He told Baal about a quarrel between Mahound and Ayesha, 'That girl couldn't stomach it that her husband wanted so many other women,' he said. 'He talked about necessity, political alliances and so on, but she wasn't fooled. Who can blame her? Finally, he went into - what else? - one of his trances, and out he came with a message from the archangel. Gibreel had recited verses giving him full divine support. God's own permission to fuck as many women as he liked. So there: what could poor Ayesha say against the verses of God? You know what

she did say? This: ‘Your god certainly jumps to it when you need him to fix things up for you. (386)

Arguably, the divine is used to serve Mahound’s lustful vision against the female. However, Ayesha’s response that Mahound needs God to fix things for him shows her doubts and this depicts the Prophet as a symbol of weak spirituality. As such, the failure of Baal and Mahound because of their lust for women parallels the lust the Prophet had in Islamic mythology, which Islamic scholars tried to remove from the first versions of *The Koran*. In his study of Islamic history, and especially the life of Prophet Mohammad, Robert E. Van Voorst says the most extensive view of the personal life of Mohammad that *The Koran* offers is on his marriages during the Medina period. Earlier, in Mecca, “the prophet was married only to Khadija, of whom *The Koran* does not speak. In Medina, Mohammad had many wives and concubines which became controversial” (295). That is why fundamentalists use religion to justify male prostitution and their stigmatisation of the woman folk.

It can be argued that one of the consequences of Prophet Mahound’s inability to retrieve the satanic verses is the death of his wife. The narrator says, “the Prophet’s wife, seventy years old, sits by the foot of a stone-latticed window, sits upright with her back to the wall, dead” (124-125) which symbolises punishment from God. The punishment is compounded by the decision of Hind and her husband, the Grandee, to persecute Prophet Mahound and his followers if they stay in Jahilia on grounds that the Prophet has “brought us the Devil himself, so that we could witness the workings of the Evil One” (125). Prophet Mahound’s persecution in Jahilia is an allusion to Prophet Mohammad’s flight “Hijra” to Medina in 622 CE. The narrator describes Mahound’s escape thus:

From the peak of Mount Cone, Gibreel watches the faithful escaping Jahilia, leaving the city of aridity for the place of cool palms and water, water, water. In small groups, almost empty-handed, they move across the empire of the sun, on this first day of the first year at the new beginning of Time, which has itself been born again, as the old die behind them and the new waits ahead. And one day Mahound himself slips away. (126)

The inability of Angel Gibreel to help the persecuted faithful shows Mahound’s failure as a prophet which is further complicated by the three goddesses, Lat, Manat and Uzza, whom he earlier refused to recognise as they attack him in the form of winged creatures with long claws which they pierce and bite him. Brian May examines this pilgrimage in “Memorials to Modernity: Post-colonial Pilgrimage in Naipaul and Rushdie” and says in *The Satanic Verses*, Rushdie looks past both nostalgic reveries and utopian dreams, reaching across recognised cultural differences. This means that the defining features of the postcolonial condition especially the “condition of the postcolonial artist; writer or intellectual is that of a religious and broadly cultural alienation or dislocation brought about by Westernisation” (243). The actual pilgrimage depicted is not chiefly a pilgrimage of the alienated, but traditional exercises in “Haj” and Himalayan ascent respectively. Nevertheless, Rushdie’s

narrative attention is not to one or more of the devout, but to a particular individualised Mahound. He is an impostor, who is indeed alienated, and who chooses not to participate in the nativist devotions he witnesses.

The escape and eventual death of Prophet Mahound in the hands of Hind celebrates the power of her spirituality because Hind secludes herself for two years and two months studying the spiritual texts that give her the powers to kill Mahound. It is important to note that these spiritual texts give her the power to cast a fatal spell on Mahound who falls seriously sick and:

Within an hour the news arrived that the Prophet, Mahound, had fallen into a fatal sickness that he lay in Ayesha's bed with his head thumping as if it had been filled up with demons [...]. Not long afterwards he died. Ayesha went out into the next room, where the other wives and disciples were waiting with heavy hearts, and they began mightily to lament. (393-394)

The death of Prophet Mahound in the hands of Hind reveals the triumph of her spiritual power because Mahound's spiritual powers are faked and so Allah cannot rescue him. Rushdie satirises male failure in *The Satanic Verses* as a way of humanising Indian Muslims to understand the important roles women play in their lives because he knows that if he demonises them, they will become more demonic.

### **Conclusion**

From the foregone analyses, we have argued that the origin and implantation of Islam in Jahilia and Yathrib faced serious resistance because of its fundamentalist dogma. Given that Jahilia and Yathrib were polytheistic societies with several goddesses, this paper has argued that according to Rushdie in *The Satanic Verses*, part of the failures of Islam was because Prophet Mahound and his male followers segregated Muslim women, thereby not guaranteeing the principle of unity between God and humankind; piety and personal devotions. By focusing on the failures of male hegemony in establishing a socio-religious identity, we have argued that the Islamic faith in the novel has been held hostage as a way of protecting the lust of the Prophet. By interrogating Mahound's prophetic visions, we have established the novel as a critique on fundamentalist Islam. This is what stands out because while some critics focus on how Rushdie blasphemes *The Koran* and the socio-political reactions from the subcontinent and abroad, others praise Rushdie for clamouring for artistic freedom, especially as religious interference and threats inhibit writers from fictionalising social, religious and political realities. This is because the religious traditions in pre-Islamic Arabia were polytheistic, thereby creating much debate among critics and historians. Significantly, the events of those years are foundational, and the narratives that reconstruct them undergird the institutions and ideas that have come to constitute fundamentalist Islam. This paper therefore has focused on this phase of writing in Rushdie's life to argue that Islamic history can be fictionalised, especially in bringing out the

differences between Mohammad the prophet and Mohammad the man especially through the possible failures of fundamentalist Islam in ensuring socio-religious cohesion in ancient Jahilia and Yathrib. Unfortunately, this perspective quickly attracted the “fatwa” on Rushdie who went into hiding, an act that postcolonial critics condemned because they identified with Rushdie. Ngugi, waThiongo’s *Decolonising the Mind: The politics of Language in African Literature* indicts such religious edicts saying:

The struggle for the freedom of expression should not be left to writers and artists. The fate and destinies of artists reflect that of the society as a whole. The struggle for the freedom of the artist is the struggle of the freedom for all. Let me put it in another way. It is true that no writer or artist is free for as long as there is anybody in prison, exile, or victims of death squads. But it is also true that none of us is free as long as there is any artist in prison or exile or a victim of death squads and race terrorism of any kind. The artist and society are bound to each other for ever. (81)

From a postcolonial critical perspective therefore, it has been established that as a religion that still galvanises many followers today, several issues of dogma need to be redefined in order to secure social cohesion in Islamic states. We can conclude that male failure and social frustration in *The Satanic Verses* caused by the unclear nature of the history of Islam which is compounded by lingering uncertainties involving the Koranic text itself because Muslims have different accounts of how the verses were revealed to Mohammad for about twenty years of his prophetic career. Such ideological differences have created schisms within Islam resulting to cults of death that continue to terrorise contemporary societies whose belief systems are considered, “alien”.

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