Reconstructing Identity in the Postcolonial Era – Salman Rushdie's Saladin Chamcha

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Abstract: *The present paper focuses on the manner in which Salman Rushdie analyses Saladin Chamcha's process of identity transformation which is specific to the postcolonial era. The character of The Satanic Verses made a choice in his childhood to follow a British cultural model and to deny his Indian roots, but the journey to his native country helps Saladin recover his identity and the U.K. citizen Saladin Chamcha becomes once more Salahuddin Chamchawalla, the inhabitant of the hybrid city of Bombay. At this point, the character acts and reacts according to the pattern of the postcolonial era, reconstructing his reality and his identity.*

Key-words: *postcolonialism, identity, stereotype*

The topic concerning identity in the postcolonial era is largely debated and the discussions are polarized around the specificity of the native /former colonized culture. The present paper's focus on postcolonial representations of national identity is confined to the geopolitical space of India, a land that had to deal with many influences of different extraction. In order to pinpoint some issues concerning the process of reconstructing identity in India, this cognitive demarche will analyze Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*, and will lay stress on the changes in Saladin Chamcha's personality and representations of national identity when confronted with both India and England.

When referring to the postcolonial representations of national identity, one must begin by stating several historical facts of colonialism, with reference to the conquerors' need for legitimacy which led to the creation of mis-portrayals of India and its inhabitants which were considered backward and with no perspective of development outside the borders of the Empire.

The British maneuvers ranged from setting Muslims against Hindus to imposing the loyalist movement which either opposed nationalist trends or attempted to persuade their own kind to be moderate and non-violent and even to be grateful for the colonizers' set of reforms, despite the impoverishment of India's resources and treasures.

In fact in 1821, a British officer under the assumed name of "Carnaticus" wrote in the *Asiatic Review* that: *"Divide et impera should be the motto of our Indian administration, whether political, civil or military."* [1] And this policy was in the spirit of the Secretary of State for India, Lord Dufferin, Viceroy (1884-1888): *the division of religious feelings is greatly to our advantage*.

In addition, one cannot dismiss the Secretary of State for India's suggestion to the Viceroy, Lord Elgin (1862-1863): *We have maintained our power in India by playing-off one part against the other and we must continue to do so. Do all you can therefore to prevent all having a common feeling*. Later on, the Governor General of India (1895-1899) and subsequently Viceroy (1899-1904) Lord Curzon was told by the Secretary of State for India George Francis Hamilton that the British *should so plan the educational text books that the differences between community and community are further strengthened*.

Naturally, in the first years after the independence, i.e. in the first phase of postcolonialism, the people of India attempted to surmount such barriers and to invert the scale of values, in order to assert their superiority and the negative characteristics of the former colonizers.

In his review of Michael Gottlob, *Historical Thinking in South Asia*, Vainay Lal asserts that even historians were involved in such practices of rewriting history, of erasing the negative associations embedded in the notion of *Indian*:

> *If, as was then widely believed, colonial histories were almost invariably contaminated, engendered by the impulse to make history serve as the handmaiden of the state and often animated by wildly indulgent representations of Indians as lazy, intensely emotional people who were predisposed towards viewing themselves preeminently as members of monolithic religious communities, it became almost a moral imperative to install a competing narrative at the heart of the nation-state. […] Early commentators such as Robert Orme and Alexander Daw had represented the Bengalis as effeminate.* (2003: 115)

Thus, leaders remind their people of the common culture and heritage in order to create that *common feeling* that the British feared. In this respect, Jawaharlal Nehru is a perpetrator of representation for a diverse but unified nation of India:

> *I was fully aware of the diversities and divisions of Indian life, of classes, castes, religions, races, different degrees of cultural development. Yet I think that a country with a long cultural background and a common outlook of life develops a spirit that is peculiar to it and that is impressed an all its children, however much they differ among themselves.* (1997: 59)

The second period of the postcolonial trend is temporally located in the last decades of the 20th century and it is characterised by the embattlement of developing a national identity after the foreign rule, with the struggle of detaching from the colonizers, while maintaining strong liaisons with them.

Furthermore, one cannot be oblivious of the fact that postcolonial writers chose to express the realities of the colonizer and that of the colonized by means of magic realism which involves fantastic, mythical elements projected against a realist setting. Thus, issues redolent of religion, of mysticism, bring the reader closer to magic realism, in which the blending of reality and magic is acknowledged and admitted as ordinary.

The third phase is in fact a neocolonialism that is influenced by globalization and thus it perceives cultural / identity differences as complementary realities rather than opposing ones.

At this point, such a perspective on Self /Other, East /West is changed in the work of postcolonialist writers who are influenced by globalization and thus perceive cultural / identity differences as complementary realities. The binaries are deconstructed and their world is one of impurity, melange and hybridity and a good example in this respect is represented by Salman Rushdie with his *Midnight's Children*, *Satanic Verses*, *Shame* etc.

Identity is a recurrent theme in the literary work of Rushdie who considers that reality is an artifact, a construct, and binaries have to be deconstructed. This idea is emphasized in Sabrina Hassumani's *Salman Rushdie – A Postmodern Reading of His Major Works*:

> *"The Satanic Verses" asks two major questions, both of which have to do with identity: "What kind of idea are you?" "Are you the kind that compromises, does deals, accommodates itself with society, aims to find a niche, to survive; or are you cussed, bloody-minded, ramrod-backed type of damnfool notion that would rather break than sway with the breeze?" And, "How do you behave once you win?". Rushdie's response to the issue of identity is to reveal it as a construct rather than an essence. In Midnight's Children, he reveals the protagonist Saleem Sinai to be a social, political and cultural construct; similarly, in The Satanic Verses, he exposes the protagonist Chamcha's pre-devil and devil character to be construted by the dominant British culture, and his later, transformed "identity" into Salahuddin Chamchawalla to have been shaped by alternative influences*

> *such as the independent, strong, intelligent daughter of Indian immigrants, Mishal, his Indian friend, Zeeny, and his father, Changez. Key elements in Chamcha's transformation are his will and anger that allow him to break out of the restritive "victim" category into which he has been thrust by the dominant British discourse.* (2002:66)

In fact, in *The Satanic Verses* the reader finds two opposing attitudes and two national representations of postcolonial Indians: on the one hand there is Gibreel Farishta, a famous actor of theological movies, who is at peace with his culture, and on the other hand there is Saladin Chamcha who seems to continue the loyalist trend of the colonial era, embracing Britishness and rejecting his own culture.

The moment of the characters' fall following the plane crash is an overt statement of these beliefs. Thus, Gibreel sings the patriotic song *Mera Joota Hai Japani*, while Saladin chooses the first stanza of *Rule, Britannnia!* by James Thomson (*When Britain first, at Heaven's command /Arose from out the azure main; /This was the charter of the land, /And guardian angels sang this strain: /"Rule, Britannia! rule the waves: /"Britons never will be slaves."*):

> *"O, my shoes are Japanese," Gibreel sang, translating the old song into English in semi-conscious deference to the uprushing host-nation, "These trousers English, if you please. On my head, red Russian hat; my heart's Indian for all that." […]Mr. Saladin Chamcha, appalled by the noises emanating from Gibreel Farishta's mouth, fought back with verses of his own. What Farishta heard wafting across the improbable night sky was an old song, too, lyrics by Mr. James Thomson, seventeen hundred to seventeen-forty-eight. ". . . at Heaven's command," Chamcha carolled through lips turned jingoistically red white blue by the cold, "aroooooose from out the aaaazure main." Farishta, horrified, sang louder and louder of Japanese shoes, Russian hats, inviolately subcontinental hearts, but could not still Saladin's wild recital: "And guardian aaaaangels sung the strain."* (1998:5-6)

The choice of these lyrics is not done at random, each of the songs being representative of a cultural model. In fact, after the moment of independence, Indians represent themselves as a proud people and as a ruling people who ascend to their own throne and this idea is mainly represented by the song *Mera Joota hai Japani* in the filmic production of 1955, *Shree 420*, starring Raj Kapoor:

> *My shoes are* Japanese*, /These pants are* English*, /The red hat on my head is* Russian*, /However, my heart is* Indian*. / My shoes are* Japanese*, /These pants are* English*, /The red hat on my head is* Russian*, /However, my heart is* Indian*. /My shoes are* Japanese*. /I go out into the world /My head held high, /My head held high. /Where does my destination lead, /Where will I settle down, /God only knows, /God only knows. /Persevering, we will keep going / Like a river in flood. /My shoes are* Japanese*, /These pants are* English*, /The red hat on my head is* Russian*, /However, my heart is* Indian*. /My shoes are* Japanese*. /Up and down, round and round /Goes the eternal wave of life, /Goes the eternal wave of life. /Foolish are those who sit apart /Asking the way to the homeland, /Asking the way to the homeland. /Keeping moving is the story of life, /Stopping is a sign of death. /The red hat on my head is* Russian*, /However, my heart is* Indian*. /My shoes are* Japanese*, /These pants are* English*, /The red hat on my head is* Russian*, /However, my heart is* Indian*. /My shoes are* Japanese*. /We will be rulers, heir apparents, /Spoilt princes of the heart, /Spoilt princes of the heart. /We*

ascend to the throne /Whenever we set out mids, /Whenever we set out mids. /Our faces are well known, /The world is amazed by us. /The red hat on my head is Russian*, /However, my heart is* Indian*. /My shoes are* Japanese*, /These pants are* English*, /The red hat on my head is* Russian*, /However, my heart is* Indian*. /My shoes are* Japanese*.* [2]

The patriotic theme of the song became famous and it was often quoted by personalities with domains of activity rather different from the movie arena, including Salman Rushdie who makes reference to these lyrics in both *Midnight' Children* and in *The Satanic Verses*.

In his early childhood, Salahuddin Chamhawalla resented the city of Bombay and tried as much as possible to ignore his Indian roots and to follow a British cultural model and the result was the transformation into Saladin Chamcha:

> *Salahuddin Chamchawala had understood by his thirteenth year that he was destined for that cool Vilayet full of the crisp promises of pounds sterling at which the magic billfold had hinted, and he grew increasingly impatient of that Bombay of dust, vulgarity, policemen in shorts, transvestites, movie fanzines, pavement sleepers and the rumoured singing whores of Grant Road who had begun as devotees of the Yellamma cult in Karnataka but ended up here as dancers in the more prosaic temples of the flesh. He was fed up of textile factories and local trains and all the confusion and superabundance of the place, and longed for that dream-Vilayet of poise and moderation that had come to obsess him by night and day.*
>
> *The mutation of Salahuddin Chamchawala into Saladin Chamcha began, it will be seen, in old Bombay, long before he got close enough to hear the lions of Trafalgar roar. When the England cricket team played India at the Brabourne Stadium, he prayed for an England victory, for the game's creators to defeat the local upstarts, for the proper order of things to be maintained. (But the games were invariably drawn, owing to the featherbed somnolence of the Brabourne Stadium wicket; the great issue, creator versus imitator, colonizer against colonized, had perforce to remain unresolved.) (37)*

The excerpt above reveals the antagonistic positions of Britishness and Indianness by laying stress on specific cultural elements. Thus, the Western lifestyle is characterised by tranquility, poise and moderation, while the Eastern one is represented by *confusion and superabundance*, transvestites, movies, dust, policemen in shorts, textile factories and trains.

The enumeration of these Indian realities is intended to bring to the fore cultural elements that build up identity on the territory under analysis. Thus, the reference to the transvestites is not done without purpose: it has to do with the *hijras* and this sends back to the very age of the Mughal Empire, when they were first acknowledged, and to the Kama Sutra, where their practices are described in detail.

Their mentioning also makes a connoisseur think about their traditional roles in ceremonies since they perform at religious sermons, at births and at weddings to bring people good luck. More than that, the reader who is aware of the complexity of Indian culture, has to bear in mind the powers of the hijras who are often feared by their fellow citizens because the so called androgynes can bless, curse and they can even see the future.

The quote also mentions another element of the Indian culture – the Yellama cult – which is endowed with deep meanings. The devotees' initiation ceremony consists in a ritual characterised by the fact that the followers must identify themselves with the poor and the unfortunate, and by the fact that the so-called *devdas* have to attend to these

people's needs. This includes serving the sexual urges of men, and this is why the devotees are often mistaken for prostitutes.

The fact that the trains are mentioned is not without importance since Indians most commonly use this means of transportation to commute. However, for anyone with insight on means of transportations in this part of the world, trains mean a tremendous number of people crowded on the stairs and even on top of the vehicle with no regard for comfort or safety.

As a consequence of these perceptions of Indianness, the character made an ideal of Britain, and the shame he experienced in his teens in a British hotel as a poor Indian boy who had to bring in a fried chicken to feed him and his father made Saladin desperately desire to be an Englishman:

> *When he brought the chicken into the hotel lobby he became embarrassed, not wanting the staff to see, so he stuffed it inside doublebreasted serge and went up in the lift reeking of spit-roast, his mackintosh bulging, his face turning red. Chicken-breasted beneath the gaze of dowagers and liftwallahs he felt the birth of that implacable rage which would burn within him, undiminished, for over a quarter of a century; which would boil away his childhood father-worship and make him a secular man, who would do his best, thereafter, to live without a god of any type; which would fuel, perhaps, his determination to become the thing his father was-not-could-never-be, that is, a goodandproper Englishman. Yes, an English, even if his mother had been right all along, even if there was only paper in the toilets and tepid, used water full of mud and soap to step into after taking exercise, even if it meant a lifetime spent amongst winter--naked trees whose fingers clutched despairingly at the few, pale hours of watery, filtered light. (43)*

Even though he was warned against the British customs according to the Indian representation of the colonizers as dirty foreigners (*When the impossible happened, and his father, out of the blue, offered him an English education, _to get me out of the way_, he thought, _otherwise why, it's obvious, but don't look a gift horse andsoforth_, his mother Nasreen Chamchawala refused to cry, and volunteered, instead, the benefit of her advice. "Don't go dirty like those English," she warned him. "They wipe their bee tee ems with paper only. Also, they get into each other's dirty bathwater."*), Saladin – the child didn't care and changed his appearance to look calm and somehow contemptuous and even altered his manner of speaking in order to attain 'Britishness':

> *Once the flight to London had taken off, thanks to his magic trick of crossing two pairs of fingers on each hand and rotating his thumbs, the narrow, fortyish fellow who sat in a non-smoking window seat watching the city of his birth fall away from him like old snakeskin allowed a relieved expression to pass briefly across his face. This face was handsome in a somewhat sour, patrician fashion, with long, thick, downturned lips like those of a disgusted turbot, and thin eyebrows arching sharply over eyes that watched the world with a kind of alert contempt. Mr. Saladin Chamcha had constructed this face with care -- it had taken him several years to get it just right -- and for many more years now he had thought of it simply as _his own_ -- indeed, he had forgotten what he had looked like before it. Furthermore, he had shaped himself a voice to go with the face, a voice whose languid, almost lazy vowels contrasted disconcertingly with the sawn--off abruptness of the consonants. The combination of face and voice was a potent one; but, during his recent visit to his home town, his first such visit in fifteen years (the exact period, I should observe, of Gibreel*

> *Farishta's film stardom), there had been strange and worrying developments. It was unfortunately the case that his voice (the first to go) and, subsequently, his face itself, had begun to let him down. (33)*

However, these changes were not enough to become British and his Indian self appears against his will in his English scattered with Hindu terms and in his accent as well:

> *At this point an air stewardess bent over the sleeping Chamcha and demanded, with the pitiless hospitality of her tribe: _Something to drink, sir? A drink?_, and Saladin, emerging from the dream, found his speech unaccountably metamorphosed into the Bombay lilt he had so diligently (and so long ago!) unmade. "Achha, means what?" he mumbled. "Alcoholic beverage or what?" And, when the stewardess reassured him, whatever you wish, sir, all beverages are gratis, he heard, once again, his traitor voice: "So, okay, bibi, give one whiskysoda only."* (34)

The Hindu terms are placed here for the purpose of demonstrating that the core of Saladin's personality is still Oriental, and in order to make this idea a pervasive one, Rushdie chose several terms which are most commonly used in India such as *accha* (a complex term with several meanings, i.e. 'good', 'I understand', 'oh?', 'listen') and bibi ('lady').

Right after Saladin articulates these Hindu words, he feels uncomfortable, he remembers his representation of Indianness and the result consists in the character's being appalled at the possibility of becoming what Zeeny Vakil calls *the wogs*:

> *What a nasty surprise! He had come awake with a jolt, and sat stiffly in his chair, ignoring alcohol and peanuts. How had the past bubbled up, in transmogrified vowels and vocab? What next? Would he take to putting coconut-oil in his hair? Would he take to squeezing his nostrils between thumb and forefinger, blowing noisily and drawing forth a glutinous silver arc of muck? Would he become a devotee of professional wrestling? What further, diabolic humiliations were in store? He should have known it was a mistake to _go home_, after so long, how could it be other than a regression; it was an unnatural journey; a denial of time; a revolt against history; the whole thing was bound to be a disaster. […]*
>
> *Damn you, India, Saladin Chamcha cursed silently, sinking back into his seat. To hell with you, I escaped your clutches long ago, you won't get your hooks into me again, you cannot drag me back.* (35)

The paragraph above cannot but be a revealing note of what Saladin conceived of his fellow Indians who were perceived as uncivil people who used coconut oil on their hair and who didn't even blow their noses properly.

At the same time, Saladin is exposed to religious beliefs as indicators of his homeland's culture:

> *The seatbelt light came on, the captain's voice warned of air turbulence, they dropped in and out of air pockets. The desert lurched about beneath them and the migrant labourer who had boarded at Qatar clutched at his giant transistor radio and began to retch. Chamcha noticed that the man had not fastened his belt, and pulled himself together, bringing his voice back to its haughtiest English pitch. "Look here, why don't you. . ." he indicated, but the sick man, between bursts of heaving into the paper bag which Saladin had handed him just in time, shook his head, shrugged, replied: "Sahib, for what? If Allah wishes me to die, I shall die. If he does not, I shall not. Then of what use is the safety?"*

The paragraph states covertly the Islamic belief in a fate written by Allah and this pattern of thought is in fact the nucleus of the Arabic concept of *maktoob* (i.e. 'it is written'). The faith in the absolute power of Allah is also a key-element that defines the Muslim community of India.

Still, his father's collection of art reminds him of the hybridity that characterises Indianness and of the great civilizations that contributed to the birth of Indian culture:

> *The pictures also provided eloquent proof of Zeeny Vakil's thesis about the eclectic, hybridized nature of the Indian artistic tradition. The Mughals had brought artists from every part of India to work on the paintings; individual identity was submerged to create a many-headed, many-brushed Overartist who, literally, _was_ Indian painting. One hand would draw the mosaic floors, a second the figures, a third would paint the Chinese-looking cloudy skies. On the backs of the cloths were the stories that accompanied the scenes. The pictures would be shown like a movie: held up while someone read out the hero's tale. In the _Hamza-nama_ you could see the Persian miniature fusing with Kannada and Keralan painting styles, you could see Hindu and Muslim philosophy forming their characteristically late-Mughal synthesis.* (70)

The melange of distinct influences that form the great Indian culture, in other words the idea of unity within diversity which is specific for the subcontinent, is pointed out by simply placing together Persian art with Kannada and Keralan painting styles, since it is well–known that the population of Kerala is opposed in thought to the Islamic tradition. The very *Hamzanama* i.e. *The Epic of Hamza,* is a point of reference for Islam since Hamza is none other than the Prophet's uncle. This means that the notion of synthesis is at the core of Indian art, and implicitly, at the core of Indian culture.

In fact, the heterogeneous nature of this particular culture which was a melting pot of British, Arab and Aryan influences over the Hindustan civilization does not elude Zeeny Vakil's consciousness:

> *She was an art critic whose book on the confining myth of authenticity, that folkloristic straitjacket which she sought to replace by an ethic of historically validated eclecticism, for was not the entire national culture based on the principle of borrowing whatever clothes seemed to fit, Aryan, Mughal, British, take-the-best-and-leave-the-rest? - had created a predictable stink, especially because of its title. She had called it _The Only Good Indian_. "Meaning, is a dead," she told Chamcha when she gave him a copy. "Why should there be a good, right way of being a wog? That's Hindu fundamentalism. Actually, we're all bad Indians. Some worse than others." (54)*

After being exposed to his native habits, language and people and after his encounter with Zeeny Vakil, the supporter of the idea that the Indian nation is a united nucleus of civilisation that needed the sacrifice and the street riots to prevent segregation, Saladin is lost in a state of confusion, although his inner-self tells him that this is in fact his nature, his home. This is Rushdie's attempt to *mirror the state of confusion and alienation that defines postcolonial societies and individuals (*Fawzia Afzal Khan qtd. In Hassumani:58*)*:

> *"Give up on me," he begged her. "I don't like people dropping in to see me without warning, I have forgotten the rules of seven-tiles and kabaddi, I can't recite my prayers, I don't know what should happen at a nikah ceremony, and in this city where I grew up I get lost if I'm on my own. This isn't home. It makes me giddy because it feels like home and is not. It makes my heart tremble and my head spin." (58)*

However, Zeeny does not quit showing him the right path towards his identity, even if this means that she has to be cruel at times:

> *"You know what you are, I'll tell you. A deserter is what, more English than, your Angrez accent wrapped around you like a flag, and don't think it's so perfect, it slips, baba, like a false moustache."*
> *"There's something strange going on," he wanted to say, "my voice," but he didn't know how to put it, and held his tongue.*
> *"People like you," she snorted, kissing his shoulder. "You come back after so long and think godknowswhat of yourselves. Well, baby, we got a lower opinion of you." (53)*

Step by step, Saladin begins to acknowledge, although not necessarily at a conscious level, that he is an Indian and it is Zeeny who sees these glimpses of Indianness in her lover:

> *"Listen, George is too unworldly," Zeeny interrupted. "He doesn't know what freaks you guys turn into. That Miss Singh, outrageous. I told her, the name's Khalida, dearie, rhymes with Dalda, that's a cooking medium. But she couldn't say it. Her own name. Take me to your kerleader. You types got no culture. Just wogs now. Ain't it the truth?" she added, suddenly gay and round-eyed, afraid she'd gone too far. "Stop bullying him, Zeenat," Bhupen Gandhi said in his quiet voice. And George, awkwardly, mumbled: "No offence, man. Joke-shoke."*
> *Chamcha decided to grin and then fight back. "Zeeny," he said, "the earth is full of Indians, you know that, we get everywhere, we become tinkers in Australia and our heads end up in Idi Amin's fridge. Columbus was right, maybe; the world's made up of Indies, East, West, North. Damn it, you should be proud of us, our enterprise, the way we push against frontiers. Only thing is, we're not Indian like you. You better get used to us. What was the name of that book you wrote?"*
> *"Listen," Zeeny put her arm through his. "Listen to my Salad. Suddenly he wants to be Indian after spending his life trying to turn white. All is not lost, you see. Something in there still alive." (54)*

Rushdie constructs his characters in an antagonistic pair: thus, Saladin Chamcha's opposite is Gibreel Farishta, the famous actor of theological movies which represented in filmic versions the melting pot of religions specific to India:

> *More than halfway, many would have argued, for Gibreel had spent the greater part of his unique career incarnating, with absolute conviction, the countless deities of the subcontinent in the popular genre movies known as "theologicals". It was part of the magic of his persona that he succeeded in crossing religious boundaries without giving offence. Blue-skinned as Krishna he danced, flute in hand, amongst the beauteous gopis and their udder-heavy cows; with upturned palms, serene, he meditated (as Gautama) upon humanity's suffering beneath a studio-rickety bodhi-tree. On those infrequent occasions when he descended from the heavens he never went too far, playing, for example, both the Grand Mughal and his famously wily minister in the classic _Akbar and Birbal_. (16-17)*

In his movies, Gibreel impersonates deities without any sense of discrimination between the Hindu and Buddhist traditions. The former is represented by Krishna with his flute – a classical image for his followers – and the gopis, that is the shepherdess who accompanies this god, while the latter is represented by Gautama and the bodhi-tree.

Still, his Islamic education is the background of his future evolution and later on of his suicide:

> *From his mother Naima Najmuddin he heard a great many stories of the Prophet, and if inaccuracies had crept into her versions he wasn't interested in knowing what they were. " […]*
> *Sometimes, though, he caught himself in the act of forming blasphemous thoughts, for example when without meaning to, as he drifted off to sleep in his cot at the Mhatre residence, his somnolent fancy began to compare his own condition with that of the Prophet at the time when, having been orphaned and short of funds, he made a great success of his job as the business manager of the wealthy widow Khadija, and ended up marrying her as well. As he slipped into sleep he saw himself sitting on a rose-strewn dais, simpering shyly beneath the sari-pallu which he had placed demurely over his face, while his new husband, Babasaheb Mhatre, reached lovingly towards him to remove the fabric, and gaze at his features in a mirror placed in his lap. (22)*

The very first hint of Islamic education is represented by the fact that his mother told him stories about the Prophet since this is a common practice in Muslim households. His fundamentalist views are foreseen in his identification with Mohamed and his destiny. The very parallel Gibreel draws between his adoptive father and Khadija – the Prophet's first and most virtuous wife – is very interesting in the sense that the two characters share only their wealth and ability to save their partners from poverty.

The excerpt also sets light on the representation of the Indian woman who is supposed to be a sari – dressed demure person who is shy even when confronted with her own husband's desire of watching her.

All these aspects are hints that Gibreel will become an illustration of absolutism, of a non-fluid character who refuses to adapt, to break free from the chains of good vs. evil, God vs. Devil etc., and his inability to reconstruct his identity leads to his death.

Gibreel and Saladin begin their transformation along with their airplane crash above England, according to the principle *to be born again…first you have to die* (3). Saladin's transformation into a devil is revealing of what he thinks of his own identity. After the crash, he is exposed to the Colonizers' reality where he is nothing but a brown skinned intruder and where skinheads molest his kind.

He realizes that the former colonizers act from a position of power which can actually transform the coloured people. When the character asks the manticore how this process takes place, he is faced with a clear-cut answer: *They describe us… That's all. They have the power of description, and we succumb to the pictures they construct.* (168)

When he finally understands that he must break out from the prison of the British culture, Saladin cannot see himself to be evil: *No more thinking myself evil. Appearances deceive; the cover is not the best guide to the book. Devil, Goat, Shaitan? Not I.* (257)

Subsequent to his encounter and his experiences with Gibreel Farishta, Zeeny, and the reality of England as the dominant culture, the U.K. citizen Saladin Chamcha becomes once more Salahuddin Chamchawalla, the inhabitant of the hybrid city of Bombay. At this point, the character acts and reacts according to the pattern of the postcolonial era, reconstructing his reality and his identity.

In opposition with Gibreel, Saladin discovers what Rushdie intends to be a third principle characterized by the erasure of the binaries Self /Other, Good /Evil, East /West and this fact ensures his power to reconstruct his identity and thus his survival.

Notes

1. http://iref.homestead.com/Divide.html
2. Original song: *Mera Joota Hai Japani, / Yeh Patloon Inglishtani, / Sar Pe Laal Topi Roosi, / Phir Bhi Dil Hai Hindustani. / Mera Joota Hai Japani, / Yeh Patloon Inglishtani, / Sar Pe Laal Topi Roosi, / Phir Bhi Dil Hai Hindustani. / Mera Joota Hai Japani. /Nikal Pade Hai Khulli Sadak Par Apna Seena Taane, / Apna Seena Taane./ Manzil Kahan, Kahan Rukna Hai,Uparwala Jaane, / Uparwala Jaane. / Badte Jaayen Hum Sailani, Jaise Ek Dariya Toofani. / Sar Pe Laal Topi Roosi, /Phir Bhi Dil Hai Hindustani, / Mera Joota Hai Japani, / Yeh Patloon Inglishtani, / Sar Pe Laal Topi Roosi, / Phir Bhi Dil Hai Hindustani, / Mera Joota Hai Japani. / Upar-Neeche Neeche-Upar Leher Chale Jeevan Ki / Leher Chale Jeevan Ki /Nadaan Hai Jo Baith Kinare, Pooche Raah Watan Ki, / Pooche Raah Watan Ki. / Chalna Jeevan Ki Kahaani, Rukna Maut Ki Nishaani / Sar Pe Laal Topi Roosi, / Phir Bhi Dil Hai Hindustani, / Mera Joota Hai Japani, / Yeh Patloon Inglishtani, / Sar Pe Laal Topi Roosi, / Phir Bhi Dil Hai Hindustani, / Mera Joota Hai Japani, / Honge Raaje Rajkanwar Hum Bigde Dil Shehzade, / Bigde Dil Shehzade. / Hum Singhasan Par Ja Baithen Jab Jab Karen Iraade, / Jab Jab Karen Iraade. / Surat Hai Jaani Pehchani Duniya Walon Ko Hairani / Sar Pe Laal Topi Roosi, / Phir Bhi Dil Hai Hindustani, / Mera Joota Hai Japani, / Yeh Patloon Inglishtani, / Sar Pe Laal Topi Roosi, / Phir Bhi Dil Hai Hindustani, / Mera Joota Hai Japani.*

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