

## From Binary to a decentred world: A Study of *The Satanic Verses*

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### Abstract

*Structuralists acknowledge the capacity of the human mind to organize everything into systems of structures. Drawing inspiration from Saussure's ideas of structures in language, Claude Levi Strauss analysed cultures and human societies to reveal the basic structure of 'Kinship' present in all societies. In **The Elementary Structures of Kinship** (1969), Levi Strauss insists that relations among units within the Kinship system or any structure occur in Binary pairs, which are either similar to each other, or different from each other. Jacques Derrida further observes that one part of the pair is always given a higher cultural value than the other; one term is considered positive and the other as negative. In **The Savage Mind** (1962), Claude Levi Strauss explored the structures of human consciousness, to assert that all human beings are capable of the same mental processes. Levi-Strauss rejects the distinction between "primitive" or "savage" people and "modern" people. He insists that the brain is not different. Levi-Strauss' point is that there is no fundamental difference in the ways that "modern" humans and "primitive" people think and perceive reality. He also adds that all normal mature human minds, 'modern' or 'primitive' are capable of complex thought process and deciphering cause-and effect relationships. This theory posits all human minds as perceiving reality with the same critical acumen. Therefore, the binary pairs in all 'signifying system' is perceptible to 'modern' and 'primitive' people as well.*

*One important Binary pair, that shapes our thought process and regulates our lives and society is that of 'sacred/ sacrilege', persistent in religious sphere and encompassing our private and public spheres. In the pair, 'Sacred' holds a positive value and a higher cultural acceptance, while 'sacrilege' is the unacceptable, shameful or negative value associated with the violation of the 'Sacred'. The codes of sanctity that add value to the objects considered 'sacred' and actions and people as being 'sacred' push to the periphery all that is viewed as 'sacrilege' (not sacred). Ferdinand de Saussure in **Course in General Linguistics** (1916) had perceived a principle of arbitrariness in the structure of language and in every human system. He observed that every structure was a result of arbitrary community agreement. Arbitrariness dilutes the certainty or absoluteness associated with the valuation in the Binary pairs. It renders it open to rethinking and thereby restructuring. Therefore, 'sacred/sacrilege' binary as well as the hierarchy in the binary, are arbitrary and consequently subject to be subversion.*

*In **The Satanic Verses**, Rushdie exposes certain binaries and refuses to allow any one dialectic to gain precedence. He also points out the fallacy in the concept of the binaries as the division is often blurred. By creating a narrative where the source of meaning is questioned, he has decentred the world of meaning and deprived it of a secure central source of meaning, allowing interpretations to have a free play. This controversial novel explores classical structuralism and then makes a deconstructive criticism of all meanings.*

**KEYWORDS:** Kinship, Binary, Hybridity, Meaning, Decentred, Deconstructive

Ferdinand de Saussure in his series of lectures on general linguistics between 1907 and 1911, later published as the *Course in General Linguistics* (1916), asserted the arbitrariness of semiotic signs. Saussure examined the inner workings of 'signs' and suggested that signs were composed of sound units (signifiers) and concepts (signified) and the connection between the two was arbitrary. In this system there is also no intrinsic or natural connection between a sign and an object in the world. The essential point is that all 'signs' exist in structural social networks and that meaning does not transcend these networks, rather it is generated by them. "In fact every means of expression used in society is based in principle, on collective behavior or – what amounts to the same thing- on convention" (*Course in General Linguistics*). Using Saussure's Structuralist analysis, Claude Levi Strauss exposed the unconscious structures defining and ordering kinship in social system. He exposed the intellectual categories that take part in shaping social reality.

Levi-Strauss' basic assumption is that knowledge about the real world is the outcome of an encounter between the cognitive ability of the human being and the observed phenomenon of the world. This intervention of the cognitive mind or intellectual thought pattern to put the world in order via observation and classification is shared by Western Scientific thought and the 'savage mind'. In *The Savage Mind* (1962), Levi Strauss argues, that savage thought continually gathers and applies structures wherever they can be used. "The thought we call primitive is founded on this demand for order. This is equally true of all thought but it is through the properties common to all thought that we can most easily begin to understand forms of thought which seem very strange to us" (*The Savage Mind*, 10). The scientific mind is represented by the engineer who asks a question and tries to design an optimal or complete solution. But savage thought resembles a 'bricoleur' who constructs things using whatever materials are available: "... the 'bricoleur' is still someone who works with his hands and uses devious means compared to those of a craftsman. The characteristic feature of mythical thought is that it expresses itself by means of a heterogeneous repertoire which even if extensive, is nevertheless limited. It has to use this repertoire, however, whatever the task in hand because it has nothing else at its disposal. Mythical thought, is therefore, a kind of intellectual bricolage- which can be perceived between the two" (16-17, *The Savage Mind*).

In *The Savage Mind*, Levi-Strauss explores the structures of human consciousness to make the point that all human beings are capable of the same mental processes. He explores different ways that people organize concepts, such as myth to help them make sense of the natural world (of direct sensory apprehension) and the supernatural (of beliefs, ideas and the unknown). He rejects the distinction between "primitive" logic and the 'reasoning' of modern peoples. Levi- Strauss insists that the brain is not

different. Therefore 'primitive' and 'modern' man share the same binary outlook towards external reality. In *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*, Levi-Strauss insists that the relations among units within the kinship system, or any structures, occur in binary pairs which are either similar to each other or different from each other. Levi Strauss perceives structures consisting of a pair of dialectic notions, that is universal and timeless. It is a universal structure-'binary structure'- as is evident in myths. He gives the example of story of creation in Genesis in his work *The Raw and the Cooked*, where the world is explained by means of binary categories- 'Darkness' is separated from 'light', heavens from air, land is split into earth and water and water is further divided into 'sea water' and 'rain water'.

Salman Rushdie, in his novel *The Satanic Verses*, explores several binaries and refrains from allowing any one notion to be valued over the other. Through a fictional presentation of binaries working in the lives of the protagonists, the protagonists themselves representing a binary pair and their mental universe, where different binaries take shape- Salman Rushdie explores the arbitrariness of the formation of these binaries and through the workings of the novel renders them redundant. The expatriate experience afforded him the knowledge of 'in-between' and in his novel he explored several binaries- personal/ political, east/west, reality/imagination, motherland/exile, self/other, theist/atheist and sacred/profane. Among these opposites, it is the last one that is analysed and explored in detail through various techniques in *The Satanic Verses*. The novel resists any and every kind of absolutism and in the effort to do so, has explored hybridism in everything and begins with a very fundamental question: "How does Newness come into the world?". The answer given by Rushdie is an implicit vote for anything hybrid: "How does 'newness' come into the world? How is it born? Of what fusions, translations, conjoining is it made?" (*The Satanic Verses*, 8-9). Rushdie emphasizes the mixture or fusion of existing things to bring 'Newness' into the world. This fusion does not come without a struggle. The novel opens with two characters falling from a hijacked plane, that had been blown up by a group of Sikh terrorists- "New year's Day or thereabouts, two real, full grown, living men fell from a great height, twenty-nine thousand and two feet, towards the English Channel, without benefit of parachutes or wings, out of a clear sky" (*The Satanic Verses*, 3). The characters' survival of a fall from this great height, is equivalent to a 'rebirth' - "Born again, Spoono, you and me. Happy Birthdays, mister; Happy Birthday to you" (10, *The Satanic Verses*). The continuous emphasis on 'birth' after 'fall' serves to highlight the necessity of 'fall'- although definitely a metaphoric fall from a lofty position of 'purity', 'inadulteration' or 'sanctity', leading to 'birth' out of 'hybridity', 'transgression' and 'mutation'. This metaphor of 'fall' and 'birth' continues throughout the novel and constitutes a perfect mechanism for upsetting or subverting and highlighting notions of 'sanctity' and 'depravity'. Saladin Chamcha and Gibreel's

Farishta are alive after their fall, yet their near-death experience, gives them a feeling of rebirth. Rebirth, despite remaining alive, takes away the division between life and death, quite similar to Claude Levi Strauss' problematisation of 'poison' and the image of the 'male seducer' along the raw/cooked axis in *The Raw and the Cooked*. "Poison" is a natural substance derived from plant and herbs and when it is administered to a human being it becomes a cultural act; and it is a point of "isomorphic coincidence between nature and culture". In a similar vein the "male-seducer", who is devoid of social status and is viewed as acting in accordance with his natural impulses- sexual potency and physical attractiveness- subverts the social order of marriage. His actions de-socialises the woman he seduces. Thus, 'poison' and 'male seducer' are natural elements with potential for interpenetration of nature and culture that is at once destabilizing and dangerous. Characters and events in Rushdie's novel exhibit similar potential and thus destabilize the boundaries between binaries.

In Rushdie's fictional world, the characters have been invested with symbolic significance, in being representatives of secular, hybrid and inauthentic existence. Gibreel is an actor in theological movies, a rag to riches story, who went from being a 'dubbawala' to an actor in the film industry. He plays Gods - the elephant headed Ganesh, the monkey Hanuman and Krishna. Rushdie writes "... for Gibreel had spent 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 offense" (16, *The Satanic Verses*). Gibreel Farishta who played 'Blue skinned Krishna' and other Hindu Gods was actually born as a Muslim-Isma'il Najmuddin. The world of Indian film and television exhibited an interesting secularism, where rigidity of religious sanctity was open to mutation. The secular nature of the film industry and the equally secular approach of the audience seems to be adorably acknowledged by Rushdie. Claude Levi Strauss had stressed on the potential of 'art' to strike a balance between 'Mythical' and 'Scientific' thought and between the practical and the theoretical. (*The Savage Mind*, 23). In his case, the cinematic art form was conducive in bridging communal divide and bringing about a balance in the idealistic desire for a secular society and the practical reality of communal outbursts. For, the religion oriented multitudes, people are either Hindus or Muslims or Christians and actors playing theological roles assume a divine status. However, the immense popularity of stars playing 'Gods', irrespective of their religion or religious understanding, exhibits a hybridity and lack of binary towards religion in the common mindset. The educated or 'scientific' mind regards religion as rooted in blind faith or ignorance and ignores communal divide on grounds of scientific knowledge, but the same is achieved in reality by the uneducated populace, through their unacknowledged hybridity.

Levi-Strauss developed a general theory of the human mind, with regard to the opposition between binaries. He transformed the idea of oppositions into a more semiological and symbolic approach. According to Levi-Strauss, human beings process information on three categorical levels: the real, the symbolic and the imaginary. He treated culture as a system of communication in which thought is carried back and forth across these three structural levels by means of language. Things, animals, persons, times and spaces set apart as 'sacred' are in Levi-Straussian terms symbolic bridges that carry thought back and forth on these three structural levels and become represented not only in ritual, but also in myth, epic and fiction.

Despite the respectful secularism, Rushdie does not drop his play with 'sanctity' and 'profanity'. When Gibreel took alcohol offered by Rekha Merchant, she teases him "... surely Gods should not partake of alcohol, and he answered ... the champagne is only for outward show, the moment it touches my lips, it turns into water" (27, *The Satanic Verses*). After an accident and stay in hospital, Gibreel undergoes a metamorphosis, which contributes to his recovery. During his stay at the hospital he called upon God to give him a sign that God was beside him. But disappointed by the lack of a divine response, he felt a surge of anger towards God and felt a sense of emptiness. He realized "...he was talking to thin air, that there was nobody there at all, and then he felt more foolish than ever in his life ... . But he felt nothing, nothing nothing, and then one day he found that he no longer needed there anything to feel" (30, *The Satanic Verses*). Neither the symbolic, nor the imaginary explanations were capable of redeeming him, he was caught between faith and faithlessness. Enraged by this sense of emptiness he commits the sacrilege of eating pork, as soon as he left the hospital "...stuffing the dead pigs into his face so that rapidly that bacon rashes hung out of the sides of his mouth" (30, *The Satanic Verses*). Gibreel tries to find evidence of the non-existence of God and "... he now stood in the dining hall of the city's most famous hotel, with pigs falling out of his face" (*The Satanic Verses,3*). He justifies his act of eating pork (sacrilege) by asserting that since no thunderbolt struck him, there was no God to punish him: "No, thunderbolt. That's the point" (*The Satanic Verses,31*). Gibreel's dilemma after the fall is between faith and faithlessness, but Saladin Chamcha was only concerned about his desire for 'vilayat'. Saladin desired for a "dream 'vilayat' of poise and moderation that had come to obsess him by night and day" (*The Satanic Verses,37*). By his thirteenth year Salahuddin Chamchawala was convinced that he was destined for "cool vilayat full of crisp promises of pounds..., he grew increasingly impatient of that Bombay of dust, vulgarity of 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" (*The Satanic Verses, 37*). The gross reality of excess instills in Salahuddin a desire for the opposite- the sobriety

of England. An interesting structure emerges from Salahuddin's imagination: India/England, vulgarity/coolness, motherland/exile, Indianess/Englishness- whatever is undesirable in his motherland is remedied in 'vilayat'. The opportunity to go to England, the country of his dreams, was given by his father, who offered to give him an English education. An ambiguous attitude is evident in the utterance " I accuse him of becoming my supreme being, so that what happened was like a loss of faith" (***The Satanic Verses***, 41). His love and respect for his father supplemented with the loss of faith in a supreme being. The human/divine binary comes to surface because of his father's surprising benevolence and love in making his dream come true. The journey from India to England was a mere five and a half hours, but from 'Indianness' to 'Englishness', posed a distance that was immeasurable. The travel is not merely traversing long geographical distances, but traversing cultures and economic structures. Overwhelmed with happiness and gratitude, Salahuddin felt a devotion towards his father, " I accuse him of becoming my supreme being, so that what happened was like a loss of faith..." (41, ***The Satanic Verses***). But this father worship soon disappeared, in an attempt to conceal roasted chicken in his coat, that he bought at a London joint, as he was unable to continue fasting along with his father. The heat of the chicken in his coat gave rise to a rage within him, which lasted for more than two decades and made him a thoroughly secular man, who did not believe in God and instilled in him an intense desire to become a "goodandproper Englishman" (43, ***The Satanic Verses***). The custom of fasting, is a symbol of sanctity of the body. Saladin's inability to keep up with his father's spirit of 'holiness', and purchase of food on the sly makes him angry at not being able to be himself- he is lacking in piety in terms of his own culture and lacking in being an Englishman. His anger, at being compelled to conceal food in his coat- makes him all the more ardent to become a 'goodandproper Englishman'. Piety that puts hunger pangs to shame is unacceptable to an interrogating mind and especially to a person already frustrated with the notions of sanctity. Later, Saladin's decision to stay back in England widened the gulf between him and his father. Deeply grieved with his son's betrayal and his wife, Nasreen's death, Changez Chamchawala develops a faith in the supernatural and became a recluse to stay away from demons who could steal his son's body, a world unsafe for a man of faith. This transformation of a father, from a secular to a God-fearing one, was difficult for Saladin to accept.

Salahuddin's inclination for being an Englishman at the exclusion of everything is due to his cognition of the world in terms of opposites. The exasperating 'excess' in India makes him desire the 'sobriety' of England. Inability to keep up with the demands of sanctity of religion, infuriated him enough to become completely Godless. His decision to remain in England, hurts his father and from a secular man he turns into a God-fearing one. It needs to be noted that the middle path is not even considered by father

or son. Salahuddin's desire for England, his dedication and obsession, receive a rude shock, when he faces racial discrimination. He is introduced to England that was "Visible, but Unseen". A hybrid world of immigrants, whose ancestors had made significant contribution towards the growth of England. Saladin's father too does not acknowledge his son's dilemma and remains adamant in blaming his son.

Both Gibreel and Saladin are in a situation of 'in-between'- between faith and faithlessness and between two cultures. Their respective journeys continue to be so after their fall. Gibreel Farishta and Saladin Chamcha fall from the airplane on the private beach of an eighty eight year old woman- Rosa Diamond. While Gibreel gets up with unexpected enthusiasm and positivity, bordering on deliriousness; Saladin is awestruck, and in tears, feeling dizzy and threatened. "He was in a void, and if he were to survive he would have to construct everything from scratch, would have to invent the ground beneath his feet before he could take a step ..." (136,SV). Among the physical transformations that the two chief protagonists undergo, the two most notable are- a distinct golden glow around the edges of Gibreel Farishta's head and a 'bump' on Chamcha's temples. Saladin Chamcha had once possessed a face that had an angelic hue- 'so round and cherubic' (*The Satanic Verses*,139), but after the fall there was 'fearfully discoloured swellings' (*The Satanic Verses*,139) on his temples. The changes in the appearance of the protagonists after the fall compel the readers to consider them in terms of Angel and Devil. While Saladin is arbitrarily arrested by the police on charges of illegal immigration and subjected to severe police brutality, Gibreel remains in Rosa diamond's beach house. Saladin, in his mutant condition of half-goat and half-human was not considered bewildering. His transformation is treated as banal. Saladin becomes a frightening and unpleasant creature, once he comes into contact with British police. But Saladin had enjoyed a life of first class British citizenship and was married to a British woman, prior to the airplane crash. His experience of Britain before the crash was a delusion, from which he has a painful recovery. The change comes when Saladin states his name and profession and membership of various social groups and his car registration number. The officers were more concerned to dump him at a medical facility at the detention centre. In the hospital, Saladin is accepted by the other migrants, who resembled his mutant condition. Rushdie introduces elements of Magic Realism to provide an 'objective correlative to the migrant condition. At night Saladin met a figure with a human body, but its head was that of a ferocious tiger with three rows of teeth. Saladin was told about 'Moaner Lisa', a woman who had been made blind, a woman who was mostly a water buffalo. There were businessmen from Nigeria, who had grown tails and holiday makers from Senegal, who had converted into snakes. The figure seemed to suggest the question : "... these mutations were the responsibility of- of whom? How could they be?..." (173,*The Satanic Verses*). The answer "They describe us ... That's all. They have

the power of description, and we succumb to the pictures they construct” (174, *The Satanic Verses*). Racial hybridity is subject to discrimination for its lack of purity and authenticity, but later Rushdie writes about them for their significant contribution to the growth of the country. At the Club Hot wax, one mile from Shaandar Café, Saladin found wax works of ‘history’- figures of great men and women, unacknowledged by History. There was Mary Seacole, who did significant work during the Crimean war, but was scarcely recognized. There was Abdul Karim, the Munshi who was close friend to Queen Victoria and was to be promoted by her, but was put down by her racist ministers. Other figures- all people of colour- black clown of Septimus Severus, George iv’s barber, the slave Grace Jones, Ukawsaw Crommiosaw, the African prince who was sold for six feet of cloth, Ignatius Sancho- son of a slave and the first African writer to be published in England. All the figures were migrants of the past, who were never recorded by ‘History’. This cataloguing is actually an argument in favour of acceptance and acknowledgement of migrants in England. The Club Hot Wax with wax figures of significant men and women of different ethnic origin is symbolic of a counter Madame Tussaud’s in London.

Saladin takes refuge in the attic of ‘Shaandar Café’, a café run by a Bangladeshi immigrant family- Abu Sufiya and Hind. The London presented here is the diasporic suburb of Brickhall (a combination of Brick Lane and Southall, areas in London known for their Asian communities) and it is amidst these Asians that a “full developed devil, a horned goat-man” (259, *The Satanic Verses*) came to stay. But, despite the refuge and the support that Sufiyan and others at Shaandar Café bestow on him, it is not gratitude but disgust that Saladin feels towards his hosts,. “You’re not my people. I’ve spent half my life trying to get away from you” (262, *The Satanic Verses*). It is the same distance and disgust he felt as a young boy in Bombay, and his heart was agitated and that manifested in physical convulsions where London appeared to be ‘Hell’- “The city of London, transformed into Jahannum, Gehenna, Muspelheim” (262, *The Satanic Verses*). He even insults Mishal and Anahita’s hospitality and refers to his breakfast of ‘Masala Dosa’ as foreign food and explains his choice as being ‘British’. Ironically, Saladin exhibits an urge for authentic ‘Britishness’ when he was an Indian by birth. He subscribes to the ethnic binary of British/Indian, where being British held a greater prestige. For Saladin, being British was not merely a change in geography or accession to a legal status, but in adapting and accepting the British way of life- “I have struggled in my fashion, to find my way towards an appreciation of the high things, towards a small measure of fineness” (*The Satanic Verses*, 269). But the experience of re-birth, provoke a change in his idea of moving forward beyond the past. Change, now appeared to him like a burden, something inescapable and something that did not allow him to go back to his past. “He had been reborn into the knowledge of death; and the inescapability of change, of things-never-the-same, of no-way-back, made him



afraid. When you lose the past you're naked in front of contemptuous Azaraeel, the death-angel. Hold on if you can, he told himself. Cling to yesterdays" (*The Satanic Verses*, 269). Saladin's attempt at getting his life back by calling his colleague Mimi Mamoulian and Hal Valence end in futility. The harrowing experience perhaps is to remind him of the need to continue with the past and not reject it wholeheartedly.

The fiendish transformation, the brush with brutality, the exposure to 'Brickhall', unnerve his faith in Britain and rejection by his former colleagues fuel his frustration. He blames Gibreel's irresponsibility and indifference for his fate. But considered objectively, "Brickhall", "Clubwax" and police brutality towards immigrants were existent in London, irrespective of whether Saladin was affected by them. Perhaps, his physical transformation augmented his psychological transition into a man with the potential to cause devastation in the life of another. This is an instance of symbols creating reality. The physical metamorphosis into 'Goat' makes a devil out of him. Gibreel's increasing schizophrenia is accompanied with an angel-like halo around his head, that perhaps make him rescue Saladin out of the fire with the awareness that it was Saladin who was messing with his head. Neither protagonists exhibited any extremities in their mental disposition towards their lives. It is only after their fall and the transformation in their appearance, that their mental dispositions fit into the appearance they have been transformed into. The 'symbol' differs from the linguistic sign in not being wholly arbitrary, for there is a rudiment of natural bond between signifier and the signified. To cite an example, the symbol of justice, a pair of scale, could not be replaced by just any other symbol. In the chapter titled "Immutability and Mutability of the Sign" in the book *Course in General Linguistics*, Saussure observes: "The signifier, though to all appearance freely chosen with respect to the idea it represents is fixed, not free, with respect to the linguistic community that uses it. The masses have no voice in the matter and the signifier chosen by language could be replaced by no other ... No individual even if he willed it could modify in any way at all the choice that has been made, and what is more, the community itself cannot control so much as a single word; it is bound to the existing language" (*Course in General Linguistics*, 71). One of the reasons for the immutability of the sign is that language is inherited by us from preceding generations: "A particular language state is always the product of historical forces and these forces explain why the sign is unchangeable i.e why it resists any arbitrary substitution" (*Course in General Linguistics*). The continuation of linguistic signs and the collective inertia towards innovation of language, makes changes difficult and confrontational. In cultural codes, too, there is a collective resistance towards change. The convention being arbitrary does not follow any other rules other than that of tradition and as it is based in tradition, it is arbitrary. Therefore, all rules, all symbols, all relationships, all 'binaries' are arbitrary and almost immutable because there is a collective inertia towards change.

What Rushdie persistently seeks to do is unsettle our cognitive process to take a new approach to inherited notions of the world. The binary approach to everything is severely problematised through the focusing on the 'in-betweenness' of every idea and every situation. Focus on the hybridity of the culture and people and language compels a reassessment of the way we perceive the world. Perhaps, Rushdie places his hope in the contradictory influence of time on language. He works with binaries everywhere, only to prove the fallibility of the idea. This novel has been developed around two contrasting male characters, whose lives are intertwined and who represent opposite traits like good and evil, cosmopolitan and national, extrovert and introvert. Saladin Chamcha is a proper, ethical, upright, pseudo-englishman who turns into a devilish goat. But, he maliciously destroys his successful friend, Gibreel by making use of his jealousy and insecurity. He destroys the actor by reciting verses on their intimate life over the telephone, enraging his jealous temperament. This novel, like most Rushdie novels recounts a confused, ambiguous conflict between Good and Evil. Associated with themes of 'good' and 'evil' is the theme of power and desire mixed with ideas and belief. Ayesha's belief in herself and the faith of the villagers in her ability to part the Arabian Sea gives her power over the villagers, to impose her will on the naïve villagers. Rushdie is concerned with the power bestowed by faith or convention to anything that is considered 'sacred'. In the matter of 'words' and belief, Rushdie is warning his readers to be careful in giving power to them. In the episode, where the scribe, Salman, tests the divinity of the prophet by substituting his own words, he flees as he was certain that Mahound would kill him—"It is his words against mine". The conflict here is between theocracy and secularization of ideas. The scribes' words held no significance over the words of the Messenger of God. The words of the messenger were theocratic, while Salman's words were the words of doubt and secular ideas. Between Mahound and scribe too is a binary between mystical revelation and logical reasoning. Mahound is a single minded businessman with the single objective – to spread the message of Allah. Saladin, too was single minded in his obsession with Englishness. Rushdie depicts both Mahound and Saladin in their single-mindedness as shrewd. They do not indulge in open exhibition of wrath, rather their method is suppressed and calculated. Mahound gives orders to execute "writers and whores" (*The Satanic Verses*, 405), potential threats to his new regime. Saladin, too, remains close to Gibreel, camouflages his anger and manipulates Gibreel's jealousy to an insane proportion, while involving an absolutely harmless woman in the midst. The divine/ethical person becomes manipulative and destructive, thus defying 'good and evil' and 'sacred and sacrilege' binaries. The same person is capable of doing good and committing evil or worshipping the 'sacred' and indulging in 'sacrilege'.

Unlike Saladin Chamcha, Gibreel Farishta, enjoys the attention of Alleluia Cone, and receives offers for being the lead protagonist in films. This fills Saladin with a cruel

anger and he vows to take revenge. In the chapter 'The Angel Azrael' Rushdie deals with the binary of 'Good' and 'Evil'. Rushdie tries to explore the nature of evil, the reason for the growth of evil intentions, its proliferation and absolute possession of a human soul with many faculties, well formulated in a single phrase "the enigma of Iago" (*The Satanic Verses*, 439). Satan or 'Shaitan' puts words in Mahound's ears, that contributed to the satanic verses episode. Mahound expiates for his weakness and accepts the risk of persecution, overcomes the fallibility and moves on to the uncertain future. The Biblical Satan, too, unable to fight God, resorts to machinations and manipulations to create a discord in paradise. Satan manipulates Eve, into desiring the fruit of the forbidden tree, that leads to her sinning and expulsion from the Garden of Eden. The method of Satan, in both instances, is not upfront challenge or elaborate altercation, but initiating a desire in the mindscape that leads to a tragedy. Immanuel Kant believed that the failure of the human being to observe moral law is symptomatic of a character that has been corrupted by an innate propensity to evil, which is to subordinate the moral law to self-conceit. This propensity according to Kant, corrupts an agent's character as a whole, and is the innate "source" of every other "evil" deed. In *Religion Within the Boundaries of the Reason*, Kant postulates, three basic predispositions- animality, personality and humanity- that serve as motivations for choices (good and bad) and which have an ethical significance. To have an original predisposition to do good and yet be capable of committing evil, suggests that the corruption of human nature is a corruption of one of the above mentioned three dispositions. Humanity is concerned with the practical and therefore the calculative aspects of life. This predisposition creates the inclination to compare oneself with others and assess if one is equal to another or more happy in comparison with other. Since it relates to others in terms of its concern for happiness, it is manifestly egocentric. By itself 'Humanity' does not constitute evil, rather our predisposition for 'Humanity', creates the possibility for self-love and self-conceit.

Saladin's propensity for evil is aroused only when he sees Gibreel's prosperity and well-being. Gibreel was doted upon by Alleluia Cone, adored by everyone at the party-Battuta and Sisodia. Even his agent, Charlie Sellie, was batting her eyelids like an eighteen year old at Gibreel. What bothered Saladin acutely was that Gibreel was always derisive of everything English, but he was indeed "London's conqueror" and could " ... see no value in the world now falling at his feet" (*The Satanic Verses*, 440). While Saladin who had always admired London and made it his life's ambition to make the place his own, was living a peripheral life and seeing London "kneeling before his contemptuous rival!" (*The Satanic Verses*, 440). Things were such that Saladin longed to be in Gibreel's shoes, while Gibreel was absolutely oblivious of Saladin or his footwear. The complete insignificance of Saladin to Gibreel underlines the discrepancy in fortune that was bestowed to them by London, and yet both arrived in London as

victims of the same airplane crash, on the same spot and at the same time. Yet, fate, or luck favoured only one. Comparison of their individual happiness provokes in Saladin an intense anger and hatred towards Gibreel. But Saladin's desire for revenge is rooted in Gibreel's betrayal in Rosa Diamond's hall when Chamcha "horned and captive", was dragged away by the police and Gibreel only stared blankly and did nothing about it. Gibreel's act of inaction and blank stare was "beyond forgiveness"; Gibreel's obliviousness about Saladin's whereabouts after the arrest was cause for further hurt and injury. Kant isolates in *Religion Within the Bounds of Mere Reason* 'impurity' of the human heart, as a type of evil. Here Kant refers to actions which are in accordance with the moral law or legally correct, but involved ulterior motives. Saladin responds to a telephone call by Allie Cone and agrees to visit Gibreel in their retreat in Durisdeer, a remote village, and accompany and help them in their isolation. He observes Allie and Gibreel, and behaves like a friend to them, but all the while plotting revenge. Saladin goes hiking with Gibreel and listens to Gibreel's explicit details of his carnal relationship with Allie and a tremendous insecurity brewing in his mind. Later, he pushes Gibreel to the brink of insanity by referring to these details in anonymous phone calls. While pondering over why Saladin was filled with an intense desire for revenge, Saladin was able to figure out many reasons. Gibreel Farishta's offence of being silent on Rosa's stairs was an 'inexpiable offence', but so also was the fact that they were more like 'conjoined opposites', 'each the other's shadow'. While one wanted to transform into a complete English man, the other preferred to remain close to his roots. While Saladin was a hapless fellow who was continually punished for crimes he did not commit, Gibreel the 'angelic' was adored by all and got away with everything. While Chamcha was sober and less than life size, Gibreel was loud and vulgar and obviously larger than life. Such disparities would only inspire in Saladin 'neo-Procrustean' lusts, to cut Gibreel down to size and stretch himself; and thereby bring things to scale. The unforgivable nature of Gibreel's treason lay in the fact that Gibreel had seen Saladin in worst circumstances of hijack, fall and arrest; in which his essential vulnerable self was exposed. One might even say that Gibreel preferred continuity, despite his several stage-names, performances and metamorphoses. Gibreel fearing the leaking of his dreams into his wakeful life, remained to his roots. But, Saladin chose to re-invent himself, he revolted against history, which could be phrased as being 'false'; this induced in Chamcha a falsity – a sort of 'evil', while Gibreel remained true to his traditions, or an untranslated man, that is 'good'. But such ideas of 'good' and 'evil' arise from notions of the self being ideally homogeneous, non-hybrid creature, which might not hold much truth. But assessment of the reason for Saladin's vengeful ire towards Gibreel, could bring to light one inevitable truth; that evil is not very much beneath our consciousness as we generally believe it to be. That is, as Kant put it, evil is inherent in all human beings and 'not against our natures' (*The*

*Satanic Verses, 442*) and Saladin in fact set out to destroy Gibreel, because it was possible to do so and that too with ease; as Rushdie puts it “ ... the true appeal of evil being the seductive ease with which one may embark upon that road” (*The Satanic Verses, 442*). Rushdie breaks down the stereotypes of ‘good’ and ‘evil’ and explores the motivations for both. This resists any kind of moral judgment as both have their reasons.

The primary binary of ‘sacred’/ ‘profane’ is explored in the episodes that revolve around Gibreel’s dreams. Rushdie provides a fictional presentation of the initial days when Islam came into being. The revelations of the Prophet, the conversion of ‘Jahilia’, the shrewd offer of Abu Simbel that made the Prophet almost compromise his ideology, the reference to the Satanic Verses incident, the retraction of the prophet, the internal struggle of the Prophet, confession of the scribe for having altered the words of the Prophet, the flourishing of ‘The Curtain’- a brothel where the inmates impersonated the Prophet’s wives, the poet Baal assuming the role of the Prophet in ‘the Curtain’ etc are responsible for the profanity that enraged the world and caused bloodshed everywhere and even cut open the wound of “clash of civilizations”. As the entire fictional presentation is posited in the nightmares of a schizophrenic individual, Rushdie has his disclaimer, that somewhat absolves him from all responsibility of truthful presentation in his novel . Within the authorial narrative of Gibreel’s dream, the voice of the characters in the dream tell of the impending trickery about to happen and contribute to the first offense of calling the ‘Prophet’ by his ‘profession’- ‘businessman’. Within the dream, Gibreel dreams of Archangel Gibreel revealing the spring of Zamzam to Hagar and also viewing the Prophet as a young child. Gibreel is confused between ‘sleeping’ and being ‘aware of sleeping’ and ‘dreaming his own awareness of his dream’ , leaving him in a state of panic and feeling insane and readers’ are clueless as to what voice they should rely on. In one paragraph the authorial voice describes Gibreel in his panic stricken condition “ ... O God, he cries out, o all-good Allahgod, I’ve had my bloody chips, me. Got bugs in the brain, full mad, a looney tune and a gone baboon” (*The Satanic Verses, 94*), and then quite abruptly readers are exposed to Gibreel’s dream of the Prophet receiving his divine revelation “He’s coming: making his way up Cone mountain to the cave, Happy Birthday: he’s forty-four today. But through the city behind and below him throngs with festival, up he climbs alone” (Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses, 94*). Again without warning or explanation, the authorial voice puts forth a question and then provides the answer to the question. Rushdie writes the ‘Question’ as if to draw the readers’ undivided attention to the significance of the query “Question: What is the opposite of faith? Not disbelief. Too final, certain closed. Itself a kind of belief. Doubt” (Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses, 94*).

Rushdie puts forth a philosophical question on the nature of ‘faith’ and what constitutes the opposite of ‘faith’. Between narrations of a dream and ‘dream-within-a-dream’,

Rushdie posits philosophical questions, that prevent the reader from considering the text as 'fiction' or 'philosophy'.

Paul de Man, a major driving force behind the critical movement of deconstruction observed in his essay '*Literature and Language: A Commentary*' (1972), that there could be no authoritative centre in a text, no core or central or fixed meaning, no single point of view as more important than the other and there could be no fixed or starting point for 'reading' or inferring meaning. One cannot exactly conclude what *The Satanic Verses* is about, whether on racism in England, a religious or philosophical debate on the validity or revelations of the Quran or the nature of 'faith', 'doubt', 'belief' itself. The competing voices in the book do not allow for any certainty of meaning. This multiplicity or inconsistency is what leaves literature open to critical debate and several deconstruction of meaning. Paul de Man refers to Derrida's restoring of the complexities of reading literature to the dignity of a philosophical question, and thereby subverting the philosophy/fiction hierarchy, in his book *Blindness and Insight*. In his book *Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke and Proust* (1979), he deconstructs the binary opposition between philosophy and literature, which has traditionally dominated Western thought since ancient Greece. While philosophy has been considered to be dealing with the 'truth', literature has been said to be a work of fiction and therefore has earned the status as 'non-truth'. But de Man's assertion that the language of 'Philosophy is figural', and that philosophy uses the same language as literature and is therefore open to the same sort of rhetorical analysis as literature, blurs the distinction between discourses of 'literature' and 'philosophy'. Rather literature for de Man is equivalent to 'philosophy' as all literary texts produce knowledge.

In a playful comic tone, Rushdie dwells on the notion of 'faith', 'doubt' and the consequences of 'doubt'. He insinuates at the difference in persistence of doubt between 'humans' and 'angels' and implies that "Human Beings are tougher nuts", who doubt even what is visible to their eyes. Unlike angels, Humans have a 'will', they often exert. Rushdie sums up the origin of doubt as "To will is to disagree; not to submit; to dissent". But soon attributes these talks of 'doubt', 'will' and 'dissent' to the Devil or "Shaitan interrupting Gibreel". The readers are therefore left bewildered as to whose voice they were listening to – the 'authorial' voice or the voice of the 'Devil'/Shaitan'. Just as the 'authorial' voice goes 'in' and 'out' of the narrative, some of these voices are that of the devil and the readers are left confused as to whose voice they are listening to. Not only the authorial narrator, the Satanic narrator too moves in and out of the text and this prevents any kind of certainty of 'authorial' intention or unity of meaning and draws attention to the presence of the 'otherworldly'- (God and Devil) simultaneously in the text. Considering this aspect, the narrative structure of *The Satanic Verses* is akin to what Paul de Man calls allegory of reading, in which the rhetorical organization of a literary text draws attention to the text's misunderstanding. In *The Satanic Verses*, by combining the worldly and the otherworldly in the novel, Rushdie prevents readers from deciding with any certainty

whether a Satanic narrator has possessed Gibreel Farishta or whether Gibreel is a prophet or whether he is suffering from any mental illness.

The history of Western metaphysics has laid great stress on the 'Being' as presence in all the sense of the word. The presence of a 'Being' at the center gives meaning to any structure, which facilitates a coherent system that allows elements to function within the structure. Gibreel and Mahound, both seek divine help- Mahound asks Gibreel about his dilemma about the three Goddesses and Gibreel seeks answers to provide to Mahound. But God does not appear to Gibreel " ... he never turns up, the one who kept when I was dying, when I needed him. The one it's all about, Allah Isvar God" (*The Satanic Verses*, 113). Rushdie seems to deprive the two essential theological seekers of any centre or 'Being' or 'Presence'. In his discussion on 'structure', Derrida in his essay "Structure, Sign and Play" drew attention to the significance of 'centre' of any structure- "The function of this centre was not only to orient, balance and organize the structure- but above all to make sure that the organizing principle of the structure would limit what we might call the 'play' of the structure". The notion of an all-knowing divine figure with answers to all questions and being the point of origin, is disrupted with the 'archangel' and 'prophet', both seeking divine help. By denying Gabriel, the angel-like ability, and by presenting him as a nervous anxious and scared of the Prophet, Rushdie denies Mahound any divine revelation, thereby leaving most questions open-ended. Gibreel himself is at a loss to understand what he must say – "My lips moving, being moved by. What? Whom? Don't know, Can't say. Nevertheless, here they are, coming out of my mouth, up my throat, past my teeth: the words" (*The Satanic Verses*, 114). The origin of knowledge or absolute truth is denied here. Derrida opined- " And even today the notion of a structure lacking any centre represents the unthinkable itself" – but, Rushdie had dared and executed the 'unthinkable' act of conceiving a story about divinity without a central divine figure.

In Levi- Straussian terms the idea of the 'sacred' is like the numerical value zero. In itself it signifies nothing, but when joined to another number it is filled with differential significance. Jesus Christ can be compared to the numerical value zero, in himself he signifies nothing, but acquires meaning and acts as a source of meaning when joined to different aspects of value in Christian category systems. Similarly every religious figure is a culturally established symbolic bridge whereby the oppositions such as male/female, life/death, pure/impure, inside and outside of the sanctuary, inside and outside of the human body are brought into differential relationships. Levi Strauss analyses why certain values and their ritual performance assume sacred character and opines that it is necessary to conceptualise sacred as a category-boundary which becomes actual only in social situations when the inviolability of such categories as person, gender, marriage, nation or justice, liberty, purity, propriety are threatened and are in danger of losing their legitimating authority as moral foundations of society and social life. By blurring certain boundaries that separate binaries Rushdie upsets the foundations of inviolable social relationships, that deny the opportunity to make judgments about statuses of persons,

animals or objects in a specific cultural category and to assess their cultural significance in relation to ultimate unquestionable and unfalsifiable postulates. Rushdie challenges binaries in his novel and in the last binary mentioned in this paper he questions the idea of a 'source' and enthusiastically puts forward the idea of a world without a central divine figure. Like classical Structuralists', Rushdie admits to the system of binary in every human relationship and cultural production and even analyses the falsity of the claim. But like the Post-Structuralists Jacques Derrida who put forth Deconstructive criticism, Rushdie goes on to narrate a story that denies the existence of a transcendental signified or a divine centre. Rushdie has written a fiction about the philosophical fiction of a secure ground which is the source of all meaning. Through his Deconstructive criticism, Derrida has shown that any text inevitably undermines its own claim to have a determinate meaning and licensed the reader to produce their own meanings out of it by an activity of 'semantic freeplay'. Rushdie has written a fiction that is deconstructive in itself by resisting any finality in meaning in any aspect of this multilayered narrative and by giving readers the opportunity to question the reliability of the narrator itself.

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