

Salman rushdie

[Religion](#), [Islam](#)



Sir Ahmed Salman Rushdie is unarguably one of the most controversial contemporary English novelist. His novelistic sensibility is individualistic and entrepreneurial, making him a literary risk-taker even at the age of 58. He hates all orthodoxies-religious as well as literary. His literary iconoclasm has won him a distinguished place in pantheons of worlds contemporary writers. Whereas his religious iconoclasm has made him an infamous figure amongst the Muslims worldwide. He stands for free speech in writings. His novels are often political statements. 'The Satanic Verses' brought this Indian born Muslim uthor violent ire from Muslim world. The novel was interpreted as blasphemous and an insult to prophet Muhammad. Overnight Rushdie became an iconoclast for his blasphemy. It was the first instant in modern times that a government had issued a death sentence 'fatwa, in Islamic fashion' to a foreign national. And the censorship on this novel by the Islamic countries caused much international diplomatic crisis. The Western and the Muslim world was now culturally divided.

The core value of 'freedom of expression' was pitted against the 'intolerance for insult to Prophet. Muhammad', the messiah of Muslims. The novels of Salman Rushdie evoked much controversy even before The Satanic Verses. Rushdie as a writer played the role of an 'antagonist to the state.' Many have called Rushdie an intellectual who criticizes or ridicules nearly everything. It is this intellectual daring that offends and embitters people. His books attack and revile the Gandhis and modern India, the leadership in Pakistan, American foreign policy, fundamentalist Islam and Britain et al. He criticizes the West for their social, cultural and political colonialism. His attacks come with his characteristic non-chalance, typical of him. If Rushdie's

views are to be interpreted, 'insults' are justified as a part of artistic freedom which should ensure liberty to 'offend' cherished beliefs. Rushdie is a self-confessed apostate. This further provokes the ire of Muslim clerics. This essay begins by assuming that 'intellectualism' is not an end in itself and therefore should be sensitized to the needs of global audience. Reason in art should not evoke passions, else, it shall defeat its own purpose. An artists reason should be in harmony with his own passion for art.

In 'Kahlil Gibran's' words, a man's reason and passion are the rudder and sails of the seafaring soul. If either of them is broken he can but toss and drift or be at standstill in mid-seas. There is even a school of thought advocating 'Art for art's sake'. Politicizing art has its own perils. A political statement made through a literary or artistic work in truth further divides the society. History is replete with examples of civil unrest caused when artist makes a political statement through his work of art. Hence, the people are 'right to be offended' by Rushdie's novels.

However, Rushdie's novels have often offended people because of misinterpretation or rumors. He has been considered to be siding with the West instead of the Islamic Orientalists. The language of the book 'English' was a matter controversy. His novels have been considered to be based upon flights of literary imagination, subjectivity and unscientific facts. Hence there have been numerous complaints about the novels inaccuracies; lack of critical appraisals and historical research. The Muslim world limits free speech as a part of its religious ethics and ethos. They are not yet prepared for the concept of free speech and blasphemy against religion. The gulf

between the Christian West and Muslim Middle-East remains and has Historical roots mentioned in the holy books like Bible and Qur'an. Hence any artistic work by an individual iconoclast might be considered as a war propaganda of America and Britain against Islam. What adds fuel to this fire is that despite the passionate protests by the Muslim world many Western governments didn't ban The Satanic Verses. The Western media widened the gulf between the Muslim protesters and Rushdie's supporters. Far from peace making efforts it spiced the affair.

Rushdie earned \$ 2 million USD in the first year of publication of ' The Satanic Verses'. The ' Fatwa' , bans and international protests only gave Rushdie more publicity. The public got the much wanted spice. The West has become immune to taboo and sacrilege. Blasphemy is nothing new. Many controversial and dangerous works of art are freely available in the West. Blasphemy against Jesus doesn't shock the West anymore. The Nazi holocaust portrayed in many films sells defying controversies. There is much cynicism in the West. Perhaps a consequence of too much progress with materialism.

Consequentially, there is utter disregard to human sensitivities. The West just can not understand the cultural apparatus in which the Muslims are brought up. Islam is most sacred to them. Satanic Verses thus caused hurt and anger to the Muslims. The media too turned away from the Muslims during and after the Rushdie Affair. Muslims felt estranged and isolated. The West gauges other societies with their ability to assimilate into their own

society. Muslims were portrayed as narrow-minded ‘fanatics’ and ‘fundamentalists’ because they were ‘anti-democratic’ and ‘anti-liberal’.

After the Rushdie Affair the anti-Islamic sentiment was reborn in the West. The anti-Islamic tradition has been depicted in Western literature even in the Medieval period. Rushdie offended the Muslims with direct derogatory references to Prophet Mohammad and his companions. The texts in his novel ‘The Satanic references’ cast aspersion on the chastity of the supremely revered prophet Muhammad. He rebukes the Muslim society to the extent of calling it Jahil (Ignorant). Western critiques use their own yardsticks to measure Muslim reactions and literary attacks on them. Muslims have been continually offended by Rushdie. Adding insult to injury his publishing company, Random House, announced publishing a new paperback edition of The Satanic Verses on April the 7th 1998; the day Muslims celebrate Eid Ul-Adha, the holiest day of the Islamic calendar (Abdul Adil's article 'Rushdie Provokes Muslims', The Muslim News, 24th April 1998).

Rushdie's adventures with the pen don't end up with ‘The Satanic Verses’. He paints a dismal and grotesque picture of Pakistan. Many orthodox patriotic Pakistani Muslims would protest it. He describes Pakistan as being caught between obscurity and march towards modernism. In the novel ‘Shame’ he makes a mockery of the political turmoil, military coups, corruption and censorship on art in Pakistan. In his characteristic style he chooses the characters of his novels based upon real life political figures. He writes political satires that insensitively ridicule these political figures and the political establishments themselves. In ‘The Moor's Last Sigh’ Salman

Rushdie lashes at Hindu fanaticism. Rushdie's 'Hindu fanatic character' is convinced of eliminating Muslims from India. Bombay bursts into flames of communal riots.

He comments Bombay is no more the city of his youth days - the bustling metropolis. He now describes it as a city of religious fanatics and mafia dons. The book is about the country departing from harmless and innocent way of life. In the novel the downfall of a family portrays the downfall of a nation. The Rushdie compares Hindu fundamentalism with the Nazi racist ideology justifying minority genocide. Rise in Hindu fervor, popularly known as 'the saffron surge' can be considered as a representation of a Hindu political stance. His comparative analysis with Nazism in

World War -2 Germany is taking things a little bit too far. This might offend many Hindu conservatives. In this way Rushdie exaggerates the spurt in Hindu activism to the extent of being destructive to India as a secular nation. In 'Midnight's Children' he accuses Indira Gandhi, the Prime Minister of India of assuring the Hindu majority vote by appropriating the images of Hindu Goddesses. He accuses right wing Hindu's of distorting History and accuses them of taking revenge from History. He criticizes all political parties in India on some or the other ground and spares none.

Conclusion : Thus, it is reasonable to conclude that the people are right in being offended by Rushdie's novels. He doesn't censor his own flamboyant spirit as a writer. His personal dislikes bias his literary works. Iconoclasm should be ventured if it is tolerable. Rushdie's daring intellectual attacks in his literary works reflect his insensitivity towards people's core beliefs. What

offends people even more is that he doesn't regret the damage that people assume he causes. Perhaps he is too ahead of the people in time. A fact that he himself doesn't realize.

The gulf between the liberal West and the predominantly Oriental. East can't be bridged overnight. Especially not with a few strokes of the pen. In an ideological conflict between these two rival parties other groups with vested interests make gains. For example : the Western media, the oil companies etc. 9/11 and it's aftermath have heightened the tension and sensitivity in the relations between the West and the Muslim world. In this scenario his novels could be even more offensive. They could act as catalysts and trigger violent protests. The 9/11 terrorist attack has once again opened the wounds and the scars left by crusades in the course of History. Rushdie is anti-establishment. He has to take this stance as he is by nature against all orthodoxies. His works are political statements in themselves. The political satires he writes win him political ire. He makes rivals not only out of individuals and groups but also out of political establishments. Even the purpose of his intellectual activity, journey and destination are unknown. Sheer intellectual activity leads nowhere. Intellect is like a knife that cuts both ways. It hurts both the parties. The sea of life can be crossed only in an arc of faith.