

# [Rushdie and the sea of metaphors](https://assignbuster.com/rushdie-and-the-sea-of-metaphors/)

As easy as it is to take advantage of simplicity, some authors understand the depths of the complex world enough to transcend boundaries and speak to both the fruitful guiltlessness of youth and the world’s seeds, hardest to swallow. In 1990, renowned British-Indian novel writer and essayist, Salman Rushdie published Haroun and the Sea of Stories, following the controversy of his last novel The Satanic Verses, (which earned Rushdie a fatwa from the spiritual leader of Iran- Ayatollah Khomeini- ordering his execution) The Story involves a boy named Haroun- the son of a famous story teller-who, after his parents split up and his father loses his storytelling skills, escapes to another planet where stories come from. Aided by a water genie named Iff and a bird-machine named Butt the Hoopoe, Haroun finds himself at the center of a war waged by an evil figure called Khattam Shud who pollutes stories and language. Almost every aspect of the story can be read into more deeply than just its literal function within the book. The relationship between Haroun and his father mirrors the way that the fatwa affected Rushdie’s family. The character of Khattam Shud and his demand for silence serve as commentary on the role that power and religion have on freedom of speech. Haroun and the Sea of Stories is an artistic response to the universally relevant topics of free speech and oppression as they affect Rushdie personally and the world as a whole.

A huge theme in Haroun and the Sea of Stories is the influence and power of politicians and how they affect art and free speech. After Rashid loses his skills, he is hired by two politicians to campaign for them. He finds himself unable to speak to the crowds and uninspired by any feelings of positivity which is all the politicians want to hear. This metaphor almost speaks for itself, voicing the concept that many governments claim to allow free speech under the unspoken guideline that art can only be propaganda. Rushdie dared to challenge this and was silenced and oppressed for it. By showing how Rashid is not allowed to voice his sadness, Rushdie expresses his own lack of inspiration and frustration, being silenced by his government. These themes are further expanded upon later in the novel when Butt the Hoopoe questions the restrictions of speech that are placed on the Chupwallas who are at war with the Gups. Butt asks, “ What is the point of giving persons freedom of speech if you then say they must not utilize them same? And is not the power of speech the greatest power of all? Then surely it must be exercised to the full” (Rushdie, 119). Rushdie’s voice comes through here, criticizing the fatwa and all limitations on freedom of speech in the real world. This shows how Rushdie tells a story about a broken family, a sad allegory for Rushdie’s emotional state and the way he had been personally affected by real world issues.

Rushdie’s 1988 novel The Satanic Verses lead to the infamous fatwa, placed by Ayatollah Khomeini, demanding Rushdie be killed. Rushdie writes about this through metaphor in Haroun and the Sea of Stories. The character of Khattam Shud is an evil powerful figure who is against all use of expression and language. He has waged war on the Gups who tend the Sea of Stories and foster imagination and creativity. His menacing reputation is given a dark context in the novel. “ Khattam Shud is the enemy of all stories, even of language itself. He is the prince of silence and the foe of speech” (Rushdie, 92). By portraying Khattam-Shud as such a profoundly evil character in the novel, Rushdie harshly criticizes oppressive leaders and ‘ enemies of speech’. In the end of the novel the Chupwallas are defeated by the Gups because they cannot communicate with each other due to their anti-speech practices. Rushdie narrates, “ Many of [the Chupwallas] had to fight their own shadows! And as for the rest, well, their vows of silence and their habits of secrecy had made them vicious and distrustful of one another…The upshot was that the Chupwalas did not stand shoulder to shoulder, but betrayed one another, stabbed on another in the back, mutinied, hid deserted” (Rushdie, 185). The things that made Khattam Shud strong, made the Chupwalas weak, in turn making Khattam Shud weak when it really counted. This scenario can be applied to real world leaders, specifically the Ayatollah. Critic Alison Lurie of The New York Times expands upon Rushdie’s real-life connections to the fictional Khattam-Shud in her review of the novel. “[Rushdie] has survived death threats from his own Khattam-Shud”(Lurie). Lurie directly compares the story to the real world, asserting that Rashid represents Rushdie and Khattam-Shud represents the Ayatollah. She further illustrates the connections, adding, “ If there is one encouraging conclusion to be drawn from the recent fate of Salman Rushdie, it is that literature has power- so much power that it is dreaded by dictators” (Lurie). Lurie speaks of Rushdie’s fatwa as a recent event, giving a first hand reaction to history. In the novel, the Gups won the war because the Chupwallas feared speech. This parallel’s Lurie’s claim that literature has won because the Ayatollah fears speech.

This shows how Haroun and the Sea of Stories conveys beliefs and emotions deeper than what is literally written by using metaphors to depict universal real world issues and how they affected Salman Rushdie personally. Rashid and Haroun’s relationship represents that of Rushdie and his son and Khattam Shud and his cult of anti-speech worshipers depict, not only the Ayatollah but all oppressive leaders with excess power and control. In fiction and in reality, freedom of speech and the ability to express are always necessary for a society to function properly and stealing them from a person is like polluting their creative sea.

## Works Cited

Lurie, Alison. “ Another Dangerous Story From Salman Rushdie.” NYTimes, The New York Times, 11

Nov. 1990, www. nytimes. com/books/99/04/18/specials/rushdie-haroun. html.

Rushdie, Salman. Haroun: and the Sea of Stories. London, Granta Books, 1991.