

SATIRE AS POSTCOLONIAL COUNTER-DISOURSE: LANGUAGE, IDENTITY, AND POWER IN SALMAN RUSHDIE'S SELECTED NOVELS

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ABSTRACT

Postcolonial satire is often treated as a comic mode directed at political or social targets. In Salman Rushdie's fiction, however, satire performs a more consequential function: it unsettles the forms of language and representation through which political, historical, and cultural authority acquires legitimacy. This article examines satire as a form of postcolonial counter-discourse in *Midnight's Children* (1981), *Shame* (1983), and *The Satanic Verses* (1988). Drawing on Homi K. Bhabha's concepts of hybridity and ambivalence, Mikhail Bakhtin's account of carnival and the grotesque, and Michel Foucault's analysis of discourse and power, the study argues that Rushdie's satire does not replace one authoritative narrative with another. Instead, it exposes the instability of apparently settled categories such as nation, history, gender, religious authority, cultural authenticity, and linguistic legitimacy. Through comparative close reading, the article traces a widening movement in Rushdie's satirical practice: from the problem of national history in *Midnight's Children*, through authoritarianism, patriarchy, class, and political morality in *Shame*, to migration, religious authority, cultural displacement, and contested identity in *The Satanic Verses*. Particular attention is given to linguistic hybridity, since Rushdie's transformation of English through South Asian idioms, lexical registers, cultural references, and syntactic play is inseparable from his critique of authority. The article contends that satire in these novels is not merely ornamental or oppositional. It is an epistemological practice that asks who may narrate history, whose language counts as legitimate, and how identities become authoritative through repetition and exclusion. Reading the three novels together therefore positions satire as a structural component of Rushdie's postcolonial aesthetics and as a sustained method of interrogating the relationship among language, identity, and power.

KEYWORDS: Salman Rushdie; postcolonial satire; hybridity; language; identity; power; counter-discourse; *Midnight's Children*; *Shame*; *The Satanic Verses*

INTRODUCTION

Satire has long occupied an uneasy position between entertainment and critique. Its characteristic strategies irony, parody, exaggeration, inversion, grotesque representation, and incongruity create a distance between what institutions claim and what social experience reveals. That distance becomes particularly significant in postcolonial writing, where formal political independence does not necessarily erase inherited hierarchies of language, knowledge, class, gender, or historical representation. The postcolonial satirist therefore confronts a double problem: the continuing effects of colonial structures and the internal forms of domination that emerge within the postcolonial nation itself.

Salman Rushdie's fiction is especially productive for such an inquiry because his novels repeatedly question the possibility of a single, stable account of history, nation, religion, or identity. *Midnight's Children* connects Saleem Sinai's life to the history of independent India; *Shame* constructs a fictionalized political landscape through which Pakistan's authoritarian and patriarchal structures can be examined; and *The Satanic Verses* relocates the problem of identity into a transnational world shaped by migration, cultural translation, religious controversy, and competing claims to belonging. Across these novels, satire is not confined to ridicule of individual political figures. It works more deeply on the languages, narratives, and categories through which authority presents itself as natural.

The present study places satire at the centre of a comparative reading of these three novels. Existing scholarship has examined Rushdie's magical realism, historiographic revision, hybridity, linguistic experimentation, migration, nationalism, and religious representation from a range of theoretical perspectives. Yet satire is often discussed as one feature among many rather than as a principle capable of connecting these concerns. A comparative focus on satire makes it possible to bring together questions that are sometimes treated separately: the narration of national history, the performance of political legitimacy, the regulation of gender, the reproduction of class hierarchy, the authority of religious interpretation, and the instability of cultural identity.

The central argument is that Rushdie transforms satire into a postcolonial counter-discourse. The term counter-discourse is used here not to suggest a simple reversal in which an official ideology is replaced by an equally stable alternative. Rather, Rushdie's satire multiplies perspectives and makes authoritative categories appear constructed, contingent, and therefore contestable. His narrative forms repeatedly frustrate closure: Saleem's unreliable memory unsettles historical

certainty; the grotesque political world of *Shame* exposes the gap between public morality and private power; and the transformations of Gibreel Farishta and Saladin Chamcha in *The Satanic Verses* challenge the idea that cultural identity is an untouched essence.

Language is central to this process. Rushdie's English incorporates South Asian lexical registers, idioms, translated expressions, cultural references, repetition, and wordplay. Such hybridity does more than provide local colour. It relocates English within a postcolonial cultural field and questions the assumption that standardized English possesses neutral authority. In this respect, linguistic experimentation and satire reinforce one another: both unsettle forms that present themselves as stable and self-evident.

The comparative trajectory proposed here should not be understood as a rigid chronological sequence. Nationalism remains important in *Shame*; questions of gender and authority remain central to *The Satanic Verses*; and language and identity run through all three novels. The movement from nation to state to transnational cultural order instead identifies a widening scale of satirical attention. The article therefore asks how satire changes when the object of critique changes, and what that change reveals about the relationship among literary form, political power, and postcolonial identity.

2. Research Problem and Research Gap

Rushdie scholarship is extensive, and any claim to an absolute absence of previous work on satire would be untenable. The more specific problem addressed here is one of organization and emphasis. Scholarship has produced valuable accounts of hybridity, historiography, the grotesque, political authority, migration, religious discourse, and linguistic experimentation, but these dimensions are not always brought together through satire as the principal analytical category. Ball's discussion of satire and the postcolonial novel, for example, is important for understanding Rushdie's use of comic and grotesque forms, while Finney's work on demonizing discourse illuminates the politics of representation in *The Satanic Verses*. Dora-Laskey's analysis of Hindi and Urdu lexical registers helps establish the ideological significance of Rushdie's linguistic hybridity. Trivedi's account of Rushdie's postcolonialism further situates his work in relation to post-independence authority and global migration. The present study builds on such scholarship but shifts the emphasis: it asks what becomes visible when satire itself is treated as the organizing mechanism connecting language, identity, history, and power.

A second dimension of the gap is comparative. Individual studies frequently concentrate on the distinctive historical or cultural problems of one novel. A sustained comparison of *Midnight's Children*, *Shame*, and *The Satanic Verses*, however, permits an examination of how Rushdie's satirical method changes as his fiction moves across national, political, and transnational contexts. The article therefore contributes not by claiming that satire has previously been ignored, but by demonstrating how satire can provide a coherent comparative framework for concerns that have usually been examined in separate critical compartments.

3. Research Questions

- How does satire function as a mode of postcolonial critique in *Midnight's Children*, *Shame*, and *The Satanic Verses*?
- How does Rushdie's satirical method change across the three novels, and what does that change reveal about shifting structures of power?
- How do nationalism, authoritarianism, class, gender, religion, migration, and cultural conflict become objects of satire?
- How does linguistic hybridity contribute to the destabilization of colonial and postcolonial authority?
- What theoretical implications follow from understanding Rushdie's satire as a form of postcolonial counter-discourse?

4. Objectives of the Study

- To examine satire as a structural and ideological component of Rushdie's selected fiction.
- To identify the principal satirical strategies operating across the three novels.
- To trace the changing scale of Rushdie's satire from national-historical critique to transnational cultural critique.
- To examine the relationship between satire and class, gender, nationalism, authoritarianism, religion, migration, and cultural identity.
- To analyse linguistic hybridity as a vehicle for challenging cultural and ideological authority.
- To contribute a comparative account of satire to contemporary postcolonial literary studies.

5. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

5.1 Hybridity, Mimicry, and Ambivalence

Bhabha's account of hybridity provides a useful framework for reading Rushdie because it challenges the assumption that colonial encounters produce two internally coherent and mutually exclusive cultures. Cultural meaning emerges through repetition, translation, imitation, displacement, and difference. The third space is consequently not simply a neutral position between cultures; it is a site in which supposedly stable identities are rearticulated (Bhabha 1994). Rushdie's characters repeatedly inhabit such unstable positions, and their attempts to claim fixed identities often generate contradiction and irony.

Bhabha's concept of mimicry is equally relevant to Rushdie's treatment of English. Colonial authority requires forms of repetition, but repetition never produces a perfect copy. The gap between model and reproduction creates ambivalence. Rushdie's appropriation of English exploits that gap by reshaping the language through South Asian idioms, cultural references, multilingual echoes, and altered syntactic patterns. Language thus performs the hybridity represented by the characters rather than merely describing it.

5.2 Carnival and the Grotesque

Bakhtin's theory of carnival offers a second lens through which Rushdie's satirical practice can be understood. Carnival temporarily reverses official hierarchies and permits authoritative figures and institutions to be mocked, exaggerated, embodied, and displaced. The grotesque body similarly resists polished representations of social order (Bakhtin 1984). Rushdie repeatedly uses this logic to render political authority theatrical and contingent. The value of the grotesque in these novels lies not simply in shock or comic excess but in its ability to return abstract institutions to embodied experience.

5.3 Discourse and Power

Foucault's account of discourse adds a further dimension. Power operates through systems that classify knowledge, establish norms, and determine what can count as truth (Foucault 1972). Rushdie's satire repeatedly questions such systems. Official histories, nationalist claims, moral codes, and assertions of cultural authenticity are represented as constructed discourses rather than transparent descriptions of reality. Satire consequently does not merely oppose one statement with another; it makes visible the conditions through which certainty is produced.

6. METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative, interpretive methodology appropriate to literary research. The primary corpus consists of *Midnight's Children*, *Shame*, and *The Satanic Verses*. The analysis combines close reading, thematic analysis, and comparative interpretation. Close reading focuses on narrative voice, irony, parody, grotesque characterization, imagery, linguistic experimentation, and metafictional strategies. Thematic analysis considers nationalism, historiography, class, gender, authoritarianism, religion, migration, and cultural identity. Comparative analysis then examines continuities and differences across the three novels.

The theoretical frameworks of Bhabha, Bakhtin, and Foucault are used as interpretive tools rather than as substitutes for textual evidence. The novels remain the principal objects of analysis, while secondary scholarship is employed to establish critical context and test the article's claims. Because this is not an empirical or quantitative study, no numerical measure of satire is proposed. The methodological emphasis is instead on how particular formal choices produce meanings within specific historical and cultural contexts.

7. *Midnight's Children*: Satire and the Problem of National History

Midnight's Children establishes the most direct relationship between individual narrative and national history. Saleem Sinai's birth at the moment of Indian independence creates a symbolic correspondence between the protagonist and the nation, but Rushdie immediately complicates the correspondence. Saleem is self-conscious, digressive, and unreliable; his attempt to remember the past repeatedly exposes the difficulty of constructing a coherent historical account. The result is not simply an unreliable narrator but a sustained interrogation of the authority of historical narration itself.

The satire emerges from the tension between the desire for a unified national story and the disorder of lived experience. Saleem's memory is selective and unstable, while the nation he attempts to narrate is marked by regional, linguistic, religious, social, and political differences. His body becomes an ironic vehicle for this relationship. Physical vulnerability and excess are linked to national fragmentation, suggesting that the imagined body of the nation is no more internally uniform than the individual body that represents it.

The *Midnight's Children* Conference develops the same tension collectively. The children represent different regions, communities, languages, and classes, and their gathering initially suggests the possibility of a plural national community. Yet disagreement and fragmentation undermine any uncomplicated image of unity. The episode is satirical precisely because it holds two possibilities together: the ideal of a diverse India and the political difficulty of converting diversity into sustained collective action. Rushdie therefore avoids turning pluralism into a sentimental resolution.

The Emergency intensifies the political dimension of the satire. The contrast between democratic ideals and concentrated political power becomes visible through irony, exaggeration, and grotesque representation. Political authority appears dependent not only on institutions but also on slogans, ceremonies, symbols, and carefully managed narratives. By making these forms strange or excessive, Rushdie exposes their performative character. The target is consequently larger than an individual ruler: it is the system through which political legitimacy is staged and naturalized.

8. Language, History, and Satirical Resistance in *Midnight's Children*

Rushdie's revision of national history is inseparable from his revision of English. Hindi and Urdu lexical forms, idiomatic structures, repetition, wordplay, and culturally specific references interrupt the expectation that literary English should remain standardized and transparent. Dora-Laskey's reading of such linguistic hybridity in terms of Bhabha's third space is particularly useful here (Dora-Laskey 2016). The significance of these features lies not simply in their regional flavour but in the way they redistribute linguistic authority.

The satirical effect arises because official discourse often depends on the appearance of clarity and uniformity. Rushdie's language instead produces multiplicity. A formal political expression can acquire comic force when placed beside vernacular association; an inherited idiom can change its resonance when transported into a new context; and culturally specific references can unsettle supposedly universal claims. English is neither rejected nor passively inherited. It is appropriated, transformed, and made answerable to postcolonial experience.

This linguistic hybridity therefore performs an epistemological function. It raises questions about who has the authority to define legitimate English, legitimate history, and legitimate national identity. The linguistic and political arguments of

Midnight's Children consequently reinforce one another: the novel destabilizes official history partly by refusing to reproduce the linguistic conditions through which official authority traditionally speaks.

9. Shame: Authoritarianism, Patriarchy, and Political Morality

Shame redirects Rushdie's satirical attention towards Pakistan, authoritarianism, patriarchy, and political morality. Its fictionalized geography and allegorical mode create distance from straightforward political realism, but that distance does not reduce the political force of the novel. Instead, exaggeration allows contradictions within political and social life to become more visible.

A recurring satirical structure is the gap between public morality and private conduct. Political authority presents itself through discipline, respectability, and moral legitimacy, while powerful characters reveal insecurity, obsession, hypocrisy, or violence. The grotesque quality of authority emerges from this contradiction. The political figure is not merely ridiculous; the figure becomes ridiculous because the performance of legitimacy cannot conceal the instability beneath it. The concept of shame operates simultaneously at personal, familial, gendered, and political levels. Women are frequently positioned as carriers of family honour, while male authority can remain comparatively protected. Rushdie's satire exposes the unequal distribution of moral responsibility by showing how codes presented as safeguards of social order can themselves reproduce domination. In this respect, gender is not an isolated theme but part of the wider structure through which legitimacy is produced.

Class further complicates the political satire. Authority is supported by wealth, family connections, social privilege, institutional position, language, dress, manners, and public ritual. By exaggerating these performances, Rushdie makes hierarchy visible as a repeated social practice rather than a natural condition. Shame consequently demonstrates how postcolonial power can reproduce internal divisions even after formal colonial rule has ended.

10. Modernity, Industrialization, and Postcolonial Contradiction

Rushdie's treatment of modernity resists the idea that technological or institutional development automatically produces emancipation. Modernization can coexist with poverty, inequality, cultural anxiety, and authoritarianism. This tension is particularly important in a postcolonial context because colonial rule frequently justified itself through narratives of technological and civilizational superiority.

The satirical object is therefore not modernity itself but the rhetoric that converts modernization into proof of social progress. Urban mobility may coexist with alienation; technological development may coexist with unequal access; and political modernization may coexist with authoritarian practice. By exposing these contradictions, Rushdie connects modernity to the broader questions of class, language, and political power.

11. The Satanic Verses: From National Critique to Transnational Satire

The *Satanic Verses* expands Rushdie's satirical field beyond the nation-state. Its movement among Britain, South Asia, migration, memory, dream, and religious history places cultural displacement at the centre of the question of identity. Gibreel Farishta and Saladin Chamcha embody contrasting responses to migration and assimilation, while their transformations challenge the assumption that identity can be reduced to a single national or cultural origin.

The novel's satire is consequently directed at demands for cultural purity. The migrant may occupy several cultural locations at once and yet remain an outsider in each. Bhabha's concept of hybridity helps clarify this instability, but Rushdie gives the theoretical problem a narrative form: cultural translation becomes embodied, often painfully, in characters whose identities are repeatedly reinterpreted by themselves and by others.

The treatment of religion requires particular analytical precision. A critical reading should distinguish criticism of religious authority, institutional interpretation, political absolutism, and claims to exclusive representational authority from a generalized rejection of religion. The novel's significance for the present argument lies in its representation of contested authority: who may interpret belief, history, revelation, and cultural identity, and what happens when one interpretation claims exclusive legitimacy.

The controversy surrounding *The Satanic Verses* also demonstrates that literary satire does not remain safely within the fictional world. Representation can become a site of conflict over offence, freedom, identity, authority, and belonging. The real-world reception of the novel therefore reinforces, rather than replaces, the textual argument: satire can destabilize categories precisely because those categories possess material and political consequences.

12. Migration, Identity, and the Politics of Representation

Migration intensifies the problem of representation because migrants negotiate more than one cultural vocabulary. Memories of the homeland, experiences in the host society, inherited language, acquired language, and social expectations do not necessarily coincide. Rushdie represents this condition through transformation, narrative fragmentation, linguistic shifts, and competing cultural references. The migrant body and voice become sites of negotiation rather than stable signs of origin.

Satire and hybridity converge most clearly at this point. A demand for pure cultural identity appears contradictory because identities are historically produced through movement, exchange, translation, and unequal relations of power. Yet Rushdie does not reduce hybridity to an uncomplicated celebration. His novels also represent exclusion, alienation, and the psychological costs of displacement. Satire remains double-edged: it questions rigid categories while revealing why those categories continue to matter socially and politically.

13. The Evolution of Rushdie's Satirical Method

A comparative reading reveals a widening scale in the objects of Rushdie's satire. *Midnight's Children* concentrates on national history and the contradictions of post-independence state formation. *Shame* sharpens the focus on authoritarianism, patriarchy, class, and political morality. *The Satanic Verses* extends the field to migration, religious authority, globalization, cultural displacement, and contested representation.

This movement can be provisionally described as Nation → State → Transnational cultural order. The formulation is not a claim that each novel abandons the concerns of its predecessor. Rather, it identifies an expanding field of reference. Nationalism remains relevant to *Shame*, while gender, authority, and language remain central to *The Satanic Verses*. What changes is the scale at which contradiction is represented. Structures first encountered as national problems increasingly become connected to mobility, discourse, religion, and global cultural exchange.

The comparative significance of this trajectory is that satire becomes a formal bridge between apparently different political contexts. The same underlying question recurs: how does authority make itself appear coherent when social experience remains heterogeneous? Rushdie's answer is formal as much as thematic. He uses unreliable narration, grotesque characterization, linguistic hybridity, parody, and narrative excess to prevent authority from achieving final closure.

14. Characterization as a Vehicle of Satire

Characterization is central to Rushdie's satirical method because social contradictions become visible through embodied individuals. Saleem Sinai is simultaneously narrator, participant, historian, and unreliable interpreter. His narrative excess prevents the novel from establishing an uncontested historical perspective. In *Shame*, political authority is complicated by family structures, private motives, and gendered expectations. In *The Satanic Verses*, Gibreel and Saladin embody contrasting forms of cultural displacement, making identity visible as a process rather than a fixed possession.

Rushdie does not reduce these characters to simple allegorical symbols. Their psychological and social dimensions remain important. Satire gains force precisely because historical and political contradictions are encountered through individual behaviour. The characters therefore operate at two levels at once: they remain fictional persons while also making larger structures of power legible.

15. Gender and the Politics of the Body

The body is repeatedly politicized across the three novels. In *Midnight's Children*, Saleem's body becomes associated with national fragmentation and historical vulnerability. In *Shame*, women's bodies are linked to family honour, patriarchal regulation, and social morality. In *The Satanic Verses*, bodily transformation becomes a means of representing cultural displacement and unstable identity. Across these different contexts, power becomes visible through attempts to regulate what bodies signify and how they may behave.

The satirical treatment of the body challenges political abstraction. Institutions speak in the language of nation, morality, law, and order; Rushdie repeatedly returns these abstractions to embodied experience. The grotesque therefore exposes the distance between polished political language and the material realities produced by political and social regulation. Gender belongs within this wider argument because gendered bodies are among the principal sites where authority becomes socially enforceable.

16. Linguistic Hybridity as Satirical Resistance

Language provides one of the strongest links among the three novels. Rushdie's English is heterogeneous, incorporating idioms, translated expressions, cultural references, repetitions, slogans, wordplay, and multilingual echoes. Such practices challenge the assumption that English remains the exclusive property of its colonial history. The language is appropriated and transformed by postcolonial speakers and by the cultural contexts in which they write.

The satirical force of linguistic hybridity lies in its disruption of uniformity. A formal political phrase may become comic through vernacular association; an inherited expression may acquire a different force after translation; and a culturally specific reference may expose the limits of a supposedly universal statement. Language thus becomes an arena in which ideological authority is negotiated.

The significance of this practice can be understood at three levels. Aesthetically, it generates verbal energy and comic possibility. Culturally, it represents identities formed through contact and translation. Politically, it questions standardized linguistic norms inherited from colonial structures. These levels converge in satire because disrupting linguistic hierarchy also disrupts the authority of the discourses carried through that hierarchy.

17. Satire as Counter-Discourse

From a Foucauldian perspective, Rushdie's satire can be understood as counter-discursive because it challenges the systems through which categories acquire authority. Official discourse often stabilizes distinctions such as citizen and foreigner, believer and unbeliever, modern and traditional, male and female, or colonizer and colonized by presenting them as natural. Rushdie repeatedly crosses these boundaries. His characters move among cultural positions, his language shifts between registers, and his narratives move across historical and national borders.

The importance of this mobility is that the authority of a category frequently depends on its appearance as fixed and inevitable. Satire makes the construction visible. Once a category appears constructed, it becomes open to question. This does not mean that Rushdie supplies a final alternative system. His counter-discourse instead creates an interpretive space in which competing memories, identities, and histories can coexist.

The political value of such plurality should not be underestimated. A plurality of perspectives is not necessarily politically neutral when official power depends on the concentration of interpretive authority. By refusing to let one narrative claim final legitimacy, satire interrupts the mechanisms through which historical and cultural certainty is produced.

18. COMPARATIVE DISCUSSION

Read together, *Midnight's Children*, *Shame*, and *The Satanic Verses* reveal three interconnected dimensions of Rushdie's satire. The first is political: nationalism, authoritarianism, hypocrisy, and institutional power are subjected to irony, parody, and grotesque exaggeration. The second is cultural: fixed ideas of tradition, authenticity, modernity, religion, and belonging are destabilized. The third is linguistic: standardized English is transformed into a heterogeneous medium that both reflects and produces cultural plurality.

These dimensions cannot be separated completely. Political authority depends upon language; cultural identity is narrated through language; and national identity is produced through stories, slogans, histories, and institutional discourse. Linguistic experimentation therefore becomes political intervention. Rushdie's satire operates most effectively at the point where language and power meet, because that is where claims to legitimacy are formulated and circulated.

The comparison also demonstrates the limitations of a simple colonizer-versus-colonized model. Postcolonial power operates internally through class, gender, religion, nationalism, family structures, and political institutions. Rushdie's satire exposes these internal mechanisms without losing sight of the colonial histories from which they emerged. The result is a more complex model of postcolonial critique in which power is distributed across institutions, discourses, identities, and everyday performances.

19. Findings

- Satire functions as a central mode of postcolonial critique across the three novels, exposing the gap between official ideology and lived experience.
- Rushdie's satirical field widens from national-historical contradiction in *Midnight's Children*, through authoritarianism and patriarchy in *Shame*, to transnational questions of migration, religious authority, and cultural identity in *The Satanic Verses*.
- Characterization converts abstract political and ideological contradictions into embodied experience, particularly through Saleem's unreliable narration, the grotesque political figures of *Shame*, and the transformed migrant identities of *The Satanic Verses*.
- Linguistic hybridity functions simultaneously as an aesthetic strategy, a representation of cultural negotiation, and a challenge to standardized linguistic authority.
- Rushdie's satire does not simply ridicule its targets; it creates interpretive space for competing memories, identities, and historical narratives.
- Satire operates epistemologically by questioning not only what is represented but also who possesses the authority to represent it.

20. Theoretical Implications

The study has several implications for postcolonial literary theory. First, it positions satire as more than a peripheral stylistic device. Irony, parody, grotesque inversion, unreliable narration, and linguistic excess actively shape how political and cultural realities are represented and contested. Second, it suggests that hybridity should be understood not only as a thematic condition but also as a formal strategy. Rushdie's heterogeneous English performs the cultural negotiation represented by his characters.

Third, the study demonstrates the complementary value of Bakhtinian and Foucauldian approaches. Bakhtin helps explain how comic degradation and inversion disturb official hierarchy, while Foucault clarifies how authority operates through systems of knowledge, classification, and discourse. Bhabha's account of hybridity and ambivalence then provides a vocabulary for understanding why the boundaries being satirized are unstable in the first place. Taken together, these approaches illuminate satire as a counter-discursive practice rather than merely a comic technique.

Finally, the comparison suggests that postcolonial satire is historically and geographically responsive. Its objects shift as structures of power change: from national history and post-independence state formation, through authoritarianism and patriarchy, toward transnational configurations of migration, religious authority, and cultural identity. These are not isolated domains but interconnected sites of contestation.

21. CONCLUSION

Read together, *Midnight's Children*, *Shame*, and *The Satanic Verses* demonstrate that satire in Rushdie is a sustained mode of postcolonial counter-discourse. *Midnight's Children* destabilizes national history through Saleem's unreliable narration and through the ironic correspondence between an imperfect body and an imperfect nation. *Shame* turns political authority and patriarchal morality into grotesque spectacle, exposing the gap between public legitimacy and private conduct. *The Satanic Verses* extends the inquiry into transnational space, where migration, religious controversy, and cultural translation make the instability of fixed identities impossible to ignore.

Across the three novels, linguistic hybridity is inseparable from this political critique. Rushdie's English is transformed through vernacular idioms, multilingual echoes, repetition, and cultural references. The resulting language challenges the assumption that standardized English is neutral or universally authoritative. Satire and linguistic experimentation therefore converge as forms of resistance: both make apparently stable structures strange enough to be questioned.

The principal contribution of the comparative argument is consequently to understand satire as an epistemological practice. Rushdie does not simply ask readers to laugh at political leaders, institutions, or cultural orthodoxies. He asks them to reconsider the processes through which history becomes authoritative, identities become legitimate, and certain voices acquire the power to define reality. The movement from nation to state to transnational cultural order demonstrates

an expansion rather than a replacement of these concerns. Satire remains the connective form through which their contradictions become visible.

Future research may extend this argument to Rushdie's later fiction and to the relationship between satire, globalization, digital culture, magical realism, historical fiction, and the contemporary circulation of literary controversy. Such work could further examine how satirical forms respond to changing media environments and to new configurations of cultural authority.

Declarations

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Ethical Approval

This study is based on published literary texts and secondary scholarly sources and does not involve human participants, animal subjects, or identifiable personal data. Formal ethical approval was therefore not required.

Data Availability

No new empirical dataset was generated or analysed. The primary materials consist of published literary works and secondary scholarship cited in the reference list.

Author Contributions

Kavita Singhal conceptualised the study, conducted the close textual analysis, and drafted the manuscript. Dr. Dheeraj Kumar contributed to the theoretical framing, supervised the research, and revised the manuscript for intellectual content. Both authors read and approved the final version.

Final Scholarly Verification Note

This version has been revised for stronger scholarly precision and publication readiness. The comparative argument has been sharpened, close-reading claims have been tied to identifiable episodes and formal features, and bibliographic entries that could not be independently verified have not been presented as confirmed. Page numbers for quotations from the three primary novels must be inserted from the exact editions used by the authors before submission. This is essential because pagination varies across editions.

Important source-checking decisions: Ball's 2003 Routledge monograph is a verified source on satire and includes a chapter on satire and the Menippean grotesque in Rushdie's novels. Dora-Laskey's 2016 article and Trivedi's 2023 Cambridge chapter have also been verified. Ben-Yishai's article was corrected to its published venue, *Modern Fiction Studies* 48.1 (2002), rather than the inaccurate bibliographic form in the supplied draft. The previously supplied entries for Krishnaveni et al. (2025), Çelikel (2019), Sadiq (2012), Schwenz (2017), and some repository-style references should be independently checked against the original publications before being retained; they are not treated here as essential evidence.

Appendix: Close-Reading Map for Final Submission

The following map identifies passages and episodes that should carry the article's principal textual evidence. Exact page numbers must be supplied from the editions actually cited in the reference list. This prevents fabricated pagination and gives the final manuscript a defensible primary-text apparatus.

Midnight's Children opening birth/narration

Use Saleem's account of his birth at midnight and the deliberately self-conscious narration to show how the novel turns national chronology into an unstable personal story. The critical point is not simply that Saleem is unreliable, but that his narrative excess makes historical authority visible as an act of selection, arrangement, and interpretation.

Midnight's Children Midnight's Children Conference

Analyse the conference as a miniature of plural India. Its promise of collective identity is undercut by disagreement, regional difference, and competing forms of power. This episode should be used to demonstrate why Rushdie's satire is ambivalent rather than merely celebratory.

Midnight's Children Emergency sequence

Focus on the transformation of political power into spectacle, including the rhetoric, symbols, and bodily consequences of the Emergency. Connect the grotesque and the political without reducing the episode to a general statement about dictatorship.

Shame fictionalized national setting and narrator

Use the novel's deliberate distance from straightforward realism to examine how allegory and satirical exaggeration expose political contradiction. The narrator's interventions are especially useful for discussing the instability of historical representation.

Shame women, honour, and political morality

Close-read the treatment of female characters and the distribution of shame and honour. The key argument should be that gendered morality is part of the same authority structure that legitimizes political power, rather than a separate 'women's issue.'

Shame public virtue/private conduct

Select a passage in which political respectability conflicts with private behaviour. Analyse the gap between rhetoric and conduct as a satirical mechanism, then connect that mechanism to the Bakhtinian grotesque and the politics of legitimacy.

The Satanic Verses opening fall from the aircraft

Use the impossible fall and transformation of Gibreel and Saladin as an entry point into the novel's refusal of stable boundaries between reality, dream, nationality, and identity. The scene can support the article's argument that satire works through formal destabilization.

The Satanic Verses Saladin and cultural assimilation

Close-read Saladin's relation to language, accent, Englishness, and return. The analysis should distinguish voluntary cultural adaptation from the racialized expectations imposed by the host society.

The Satanic Verses London migrant episodes

Use the migrant representation and the novel's grotesque transformations to examine how institutional and cultural power produces the 'outsider.' This is where the argument about discourse and representation should become most concrete.

The Satanic Verses Mahound/Jahilia narrative

If retained, this section should be handled with exceptional textual and contextual precision. The article should analyse narrative authority, historical reconstruction, and competing claims to truth rather than making a generalized claim about Islam or religion.

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