



**A PSYCHOLOGICAL JOURNEY THROUGH DREAMS FOR ARTISTIC SELF-
ASSERTION: A PSYCHOANALYTICAL PERSPECTIVE OF RUSHDIE'S
HAROUN AND THE SEA OF STORIES**

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ABSTRACT

Freudian psychoanalysis works upon the notion of the 'unconscious' – a mind beyond the surface-consciousness. Associated with this is the 'dream work' – a process by which real events or desires are converted into dream images. Yungian view associates wish fulfillment and the projection of an ideal ego with collective unconsciousness. That repressed elements can find expression through art and that self-realization comes through divergent experiences in reality and in dreams have been suggested in Rushdie's Haroun and the Sea of Stories. At the outset the novel is that of a story teller Rashid, but his predicaments, his loss of gift of gab objectify the hardships that of an artist. For most of the part the story is mired in fantasy as most of the action takes place in their dreams. The allegory of 'Gup' city and 'Chup' city and the 'Ocean of Stories' and the ultimate restoration of the story-telling power mark a tripartite Freudian journey from id to ego. Soraya, the wife represents the realistic world of consciousness and it is through the expression of his unconscious desires that Haroun is able to get over his psychic block. Further, the author's allusion to the Arabian Nights connotes a journey and mythic representation of the individual seeking a way for self-reflection and self-assertion.

Key Words *Psychoanalysis, Freudian, unconscious, id, ego, super-ego, stories, fantasy, Kahani, story-telling, ocean of stories*

INTRODUCTION

Psychoanalytic criticism is the tendency of studying literature through the techniques and parameters of psychoanalysis. Initially Sigmund Freud suggested it as an aid for curing neuroses but latter psychoanalysis has been developed and modified in order to interpret

ARINDAM GHOSH

1P a g e



human behavior and cultural conscience. To Freud literature and other artistic activities are driven by same mechanisms as dream. Accordingly Freudian psychoanalysis is based on the notion of ‘unconscious’ which is evident in his analysis of Hamlet’s dilemma. Uncouth past events, conflicts, psycho-sexual desires, which are socially uncensored, are ‘repressed’ and only get outlet through dreams, sexual obsession or artistic creativity. He also suggested three levels of human psyche – ‘ego’ (the consciousness), ‘super-ego’ (the conscience), and ‘id’ (the unconscious. ‘Sexual symbolism’, ‘condensation’, ‘displacement’, ‘latent content’, ‘manifest content’, ‘sublimation’ etc are some important ideas and concepts in the process of psychoanalysis. According to psychoanalytic study certain motifs like ‘infantile sexuality’, ‘Oedipus complex’, ‘libido’, Freudian slip, ‘penis envy’ etc are of much concern. Ernest Jones (applied Freudian theories in *Hamlet and Oedipus*), Carl Yung (approached archetypal criticism through unconscious), Jacques Lacan (reinterpreted Freudian Psychoanalysis through structuralism) are the major critics. The psychoanalytic critics while analyzing literary works: deal with the conscious and unconscious mind and foreground the ‘covert’ elements of the text as its ‘real’ context; closely examines the unconscious motives and feelings of the author and his characters; demonstrate ‘classic psychoanalytic symptoms’ in the phases of character’s development; give prominence to the ‘psychic’ content over the social or historical.¹

“Publishers Weekly” and “Library Journal” observed regarding Rushdie’s *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*:

... an eloquent a defense of art as any Renaissance treatise ... saturated with hyperreal colour of ... classic fantasies ...

... more a postmodern fairy tale ... The story is allegorical rather than realistic, the characters emblematic and two-dimensional. Poignant parallels between Rashid’s predicament and Rushdie’s own situation
(HSS Reviews)

The work is a political allegory centering on Haroun, the son of Rashid. The title has allusions both of *Indian Kathasaritsagara* and the *Arabian Nights*. The basic story is that Rashid, the master storyteller (also known as ‘ocean of stories’ or ‘the Shah of Blah’) is robbed of his gift for story telling as his wife has clandestine affair with Mr. Sengupta, who poses the antithetical question: ‘what’s the use of stories that aren’t even true’ (HSS 20). Haroun goes with his father to the Dull Lake on a political trip, where a genie promises him to take to the land of ‘kahani’. Haroun with the aim of restoring his father’s storytelling gifts drinks water from the ocean of stories. But as the water was supposedly poisoned by the ‘cultmaster Khattam-Shud’ (148) Haroun had to undergo a horrendous, nightmarish experience. Khattam-Shud who wants to lord over the world oppresses the Gup city where in



lies the source of the story-water. The Guppies whose occupation is storytelling are apparently threatened and cornered by the Chupwalas whose chief is Khattam-Shud. Through a ridiculous war Haroun becomes able to stop the source which is poisoning the ocean of stories. As a reward the Guppies granted Haroun's wish for restoring his father's capacities of fabricating stories. The tale is provided a happy ending with Haroun's mother returning to the family.

Haroun and the Sea of Stories was a direct reaction to the censorship and fatwa by Ayatollah Khomeini who charged Rushdie of anti-Islamist bias for his *The Satanic Verses*. The novel is Rushdie's protest and self-assertion as an artist; and Haroun becomes his mouthpiece in laying bare the strategies, passions, struggles and hardships in the process of creation. But the novel embodies a semi-psychological journey from the world of reality through the world of dreams to the physical world again, and thereby verges on fantasy. Now fantasy meaning 'appearance, phantom, mental process, perception, imagination' (qtd. in Gray), in literature suggests dealing with "imaginary worlds of fairies, dwarves, giants and other non-realistic phenomenon. A fantasy world may be an entirely consistent parallel with the ordinary world" (ibid.); and hence comes under psychoanalytic treatment. After the initial worldly predicaments the setting of the story is shifted to the fairy land of fantasy.

The physical presence of the valley of K (which resembles Kashmir and the Dal Lake) gets blurred through a dreamy sequence in which Haroun and his father share the same proceedings. Actually Haroun was deeply touched by his father's predicaments and his desire to get back his mother intermingles with his father's pining for his lost gift of storytelling. All these repressed motives gets outlet through their dreams and their consequent transportation into that land with the interference of deities and fairies and shadows. The Gup City, ruled by Mr. Chattergy may stand Rashid's for Rashid's inspiration and motivators who acknowledge his endeavours; the analogy is quite clear as the 'ocean of stories' flows beside it. The writer's block (in oral version) that Rashid faces has been interpreted through the imaginary cultmaster poisoning the stream of stories (again imaginary stories running against anti-stories). These are the elements and conflicts that hamper his secondary imagination. However, artistic craftsmanship prevails over deflections and diversions which is what is portrayed through Haroun being able to restore his father's supply of stories.

Rushdie sometimes mentioned about the origin of Haroun:

A story I told Zafar my son. It was not so much a bedtime story but a bath-time story, something I'd tell him when he was in bath, or while I wrapped him in towels. I would have these basic motifs, like the sea of stories but each time I



would improvise – not only to please him but to test myself to see if I could just say something and take it elsewhere. (qtd. in Krishnan web).

In a sense the composition of the tale is a test of author's own imaginative faculties and how challenging it was (and would have been), becomes clear once we judge it against Khomeini's 'fatwah'. Now, it is not impossible to deduce that Rashid's restored gift of gab through denouncing his patron, Butto, is actually the moral victory Rushdie himself gained over cynicism and censorship. The rejuvenated father and son returns to reality only to find that their excursions into dream have effective results in transforming the world of their reality: the saddest land Alifbay converted into a happy place, retaining its resemblance to 'Kahani'. The returning of normalcy is the author's psychological victory: Soraya, the wife who initially failed to appreciate artistic credo returns back to her husband, adding soothing effects on artistic consciousness of Rashid. And the journey itself becomes a Freudian journey from 'ego' (the real world and Rashid's predicaments) through 'super-ego' (the land of genies and fairies and their conflicts) to 'ego' (the transformed Alifbay, the restored gift, and the wife returning to Haroun).

Rashid and Haroun's consciousnesses always longed for getting back those story-telling capacities which in turn is projected into their sub-conscious selves and gets its outlet in the fairy world. Soraya with all her nagging disapproval of fantasy stands for realistic consciousness of a common person. But she might have been Rashid's real world inspiration (the princess Bolo of the Gup City) who has fled away with Sengupta (in dream Bolo is captured by the Chupwallas who are epitomes of darkness and somberness and, Sengupta may be projected as their leader Khattam- Shud). The conscious cravings build up father-son rapport and there is no wonder that his father's succession to 'the gift of gab' also cures Haroun of his psychic disease of inattentiveness. On a broader scale if we try to discover authorial intention into the text, the fictionalized version of Rashid and Ayatollah Khomeini (the name Rashid may allusively suggest of legendary Caliph Haroun-al-Rashid, famous for his creativity). That the novel is not an entirely fictionalized fantasy tale and that under the veil of the protagonist's psychological journey Rushdie's own predicaments have been enacted becomes obvious through the author's own words: "As you have guessed, Rashid told the people in that park the same story as I have just told you" (qtd. in Ghosh web).ⁱⁱ

ⁱ For theoretical issues I am indebted to the volumes of p. Barry and M. gray which I cited bellow.

ⁱⁱ N. Ghosh carries out psychoanalytical treatment of the novel I took some of the concepts and ideas from his essay.



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