

Facts and Fables [C1]

L'acclamato scrittore Salman Rushdie riflette sulle sue origini, sull'esperienza dell'emigrazione e sull'importanza della libertà di espressione.

In his new memoir *Knife: Meditations After an Attempted Murder* the seventy-six-year-old author Salman Rushdie revisits the 2022 knife attack that nearly killed him. While the author felt it important to write about what happened, the reason he became a writer, he says, was always to invent stories. In 2023, Rushdie published a new novel entitled *Victory City*, which he'd completed before the attack. Its protagonist is Pampa Kampana, who creates an empire in Southern India and then lives for 250 years! Speaking at a literary conference, Rushdie says that his novels are inspired by the stories he was told growing up in Mumbai. **Salman Rushdie (Indian-English accent):** I grew up with all the Hindu stories as well as stories from the Muslim tradition. There was this collection called the *Hamzanama*, which were adventures of this quasi-historical figure called Hamza. He kills dragons, he falls in love with [fairy princesses](#) and he fights wars against enemies. Then there's the Hindu tradition where you have the *Mahabharata*, the *Ramayana*, the animal [fables](#) of the *Panchatantra*... And all this stuff is given to you as your [heritage](#).

A LONDON NOVEL

Rushdie's novels are also [rooted](#) in history and in place as a means of reflecting on identity today. The author has lived in India, Britain and the US. His early novels, *Midnight's Children* (1981) and *Shame* (1983), are about India and Pakistan. Later books such as *The Golden House* (2017) and *Quichotte* (2019) are about America (although the latter is inspired by Miguel de Cervantes' Spanish classic). *The Satanic Verses* was "an attempt to write a British novel", Rushdie [claims](#), although this was not how it was received. **Salman Rushdie:** It [the novel] suggests that one of the consequences of migration is that it puts into question almost everything about [the self](#). You find yourself in a world of strangers, in a world where the language may not

be your natural language, where the customs may be very different, where the belief systems may be different. Everything that you bring with you is called into question. And one of the things the book tries to question is religious belief, and that's where the trouble arose.

TWO EMPIRES

Other novels approach Spanish and Italian history from Islamic or Indian perspectives. The Moor's Last Sigh (1995) takes its inspiration from the Arab period in southern Spain. The Enchantress of Florence (2008) connects the Mughal Empire, which once stretched across South Asia into North India, with what was happening in Renaissance Italy. **Salman Rushdie:** Very similar developments were taking place: the idea of humanism as well as a kind of artistic and philosophical explosion. So the cultures were actually rather like each other, except they were half a world apart and they didn't know anything about each other. So I thought, what I will do is to create the connection that historically didn't exist, and so I sent my character on a journey.

VICTORY CITY

Rushdie's most recent novel Victory City is set in Southern India, where a medieval empire once dominated the region. **Salman Rushdie:** Victory City has been sitting in my head since before I had published a book. I made a trip to South India in the 70s, travelling very cheaply with very few resources, going on seventeen-hour bus journeys. I came to the ruins of the Vijayanagara Empire near the town of Hampi, and I thought how beautiful they were, and I thought, why was I as a child growing up in India never told anything about this!

UNPLEASANT SPEECH

Rushdie has spent much of his professional life championing freedom of expression. He says that it worries him that if something offends you today it is not debated, but eliminated altogether. **Salman Rushdie:** Half a century

ago it tended to be authoritarian states, authoritarian elements within any state, politically conservative, older people. But now it also comes from young people who seem to believe that it's OK to repress speech which they don't like, and which in many ways they may be right not to like: unpleasant speech. So you find an attack on free expression coming from the left as well as from the right, and from the young as well as from the old, from the [disenfranchised](#) as well as from the powerful.

THE PARTITION OF INDIA 1947

Rushdie's life and early books were profoundly impacted by the partition of India. This was the sudden change of political borders agreed upon as part of the Indian Independence Act of 1947. With the dissolution of the British Raj (the 300-year British [rule](#) of India) there were [provisions](#) made for two self-governing independent states, Pakistan and India, that came into existence at midnight on 14 and 15 August respectively. This included the division of provinces Bengal and Punjab with the majority Muslim districts [awarded](#) to Pakistan and the majority non-Muslim ones to India. Considerable minorities of each religious group were left [stranded](#) in each country and mass migration followed. Between fourteen and eighteen million people are thought to have migrated in a short period of time. Up to two million people may have died as a result of the violence and [upheaval](#). The partition created an atmosphere of hostility and suspicion between India and Pakistan that affects their relationship to this day.

Glossary

- **fairy princesses** = principesse delle fiabe
- **stretched** = estendersi
- **provisions** = misure, disposizioni
- **is called into question** = mettere in discussione
- **Moor** = moro
- **disenfranchised** = privati dei diritti
- **fables** = favole
- **heritage** = eredità
- **rooted** = radicato
- **claims** = affermare, sostenere
- **the self** = il proprio io
- **rule** = dominio
- **awarded** = assegnare
- **arose** = sorgere
- **championing** = sostenere, promuovere
- **stranded** = bloccate, abbandonate
- **upheaval** = scontri
- **Sigh** = sospiro