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The Satanic Verses: Ruminations on Freedom of Speech and Expression

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*Abstract***:** Even three decades after the publication of Salman Rushdie's satiric novel, *The Satanic Verses*, the controversies regarding the novel has not come to an end. While many praise novel for its literary merits, the Muslim community across the world regards it as offensive, blasphemous and as an anti-Islamic propaganda. They see the novel as a direct attack on and a conspiracy against Islam by the use of distortion and scorn, which have the effect of alienating Muslims from their faith.

This article analyses Rushdie's satire on the sacred in Islam, namely, the controversial 'satanic verses' that permitted intercessory prayers to three Meccan deities, the

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Muhammad event, the concept of divine revelation and the birth of Islam. Rushdie's narrative progresses by re-telling and re-imaging matters of history and faith by fantasising and fabulating them. The result is that Rushdie's novel becomes a catalogue of multiple layers of conflict; it sets the long-cherished Islamic beliefs against the imaginative and satiric re-interpretation of those beliefs.

Rushdie's handling of the sacrosanct issues of the Islamic faith does not seem to resonate with the spirit of the 'freedom of speech and expression.' In the process, Rushdie overstretches the limits of the freedom of expression. Rushdie's satire in *The Satanic Verses* on what is sacrosanct in Islam does not seem to contribute to any form of constructive or reformative thinking in society; it has only resulted in division and disturbance. Therefore, the article argues that it not only goes against the intent and spirit of satiric literature, but also tends to become spiteful in nature.

*Keywords***:** Freedom of speech, Fatwa, Monotheism, Polytheism, Revelation, Sacrosanct in religion, Re-imaging, Satire.

I**ntroduction**

Deliberating on the concept of the 'freedom of speech and expression,' article 19 of the 'Universal Declaration of Human Rights' states that "everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers" (Morsink, 333). However, one must remember that one's freedom is never absolute; it is to be exercised with utmost respect to other people's right to the same. 'Freedom of opinion and expression' does not embrace the freedom to offend

anyone in any way based on religion, faith, gender, race, social class, appearance, nationality, sexual orientation and so on. With the publication of Salman Rushdie's, novel, *The Satanic Verses* on 26 September 1988 by Viking/Penguin, the issue of the 'freedom of speech and expression' was discussed and debated by the intelligentsia across the world, perhaps as never before. Today, even after three decades, opinions on this novel continues to remain divided. Those who endorse the novel argue that it's narrative is well within the bounds of the author's right to 'freedom of speech and expression.' Those who condemn the novel, on the other hand, argue that it's narrative has overstepped the boundaries of 'freedom of speech and expression' and deliberately offended the religious sentiments of the Muslim community owing to its sacrilegious satirical treatment of the Quran, Prophet Muhammad and Islam.

Satire may be defined as "a literary manner which blends a critical attitude with humour and wit for the purpose of improving human institutions. True satirists are conscious of the frailty of institutions of human devising and attempt through laughter not so much to tear them down as to inspire a remodelling" (Holman, 398). It aims at exposing society's follies and vices in all their manifestations wittily and humorously so as to bring about a much-needed reform in society. For instance, by means of his characteristic Juvenalian satire in his literary works, Jonathan Swift in the early eighteenth century aimed at exposing the follies and vices of humankind in general and thereby curing them of the same, and in doing so, reforming and renewing society. Reforming or renewing society being a supposedly no easy task, Alexander Pope, a contemporary of Swift, through his literary works, tried to deter society from being tainted by follies and vices. Satiric writers make use of literary devices such as parody, caricature, wit, humour, irony, sarcasm, derision,

burlesque, exaggeration, juxtaposition, comparison, analogy, and double entendre in order to ensure that satire achieves its noble end. With its overarching vision and responsibility of reforming society and reaffirming its long-cherished values, satire essentially is therapeutic, reformist and progressive in its approach. It is never otherwise. Therefore, one needs to examine whether or not Rushdie's satire in *The Satanic Verses* is in consonance with the honourable aim of the satiric genre. This article will analyze the credibility of the satiric intent of the novel with respect to the author's right to 'freedom of speech and expression.'

1. Fatwa and *The Satanic Verses*

Regardless of how many people may have read *The Satanic Verses* (which, in fact, is not only difficult to procure, but also difficult to read), many have praised it for its literary merit. However, the larger sections of the Muslim community across the world have condemned it for its satiric narrative which they argue is offensive to their religious sensibility. Those who condemn the book, regard it as a blasphemous anti-Islamic propaganda. Since there is nothing more sacred for a Muslim than the Quran, Prophet Muhammad and Islam, the scathing satire on all the three in the novel offended as well as enraged the Muslim community in general.

The reaction of the Muslim community against *The Satanic Verses*, culminated in a fatwa (religious edict) calling for the assassination of its author as well as his publishers on charges of blasphemy. It was issued on 14 February 1989 by Ayatolla Ruhollah Khomeini, the then Supreme Leader of Iran, who unfortunately had not read the novel himself. This extreme reaction, as many argue,

was certainly neither in conformity with the spirit of Islam, nor in agreement with the universal human rights to freedom of speech and expression. Therefore, the fatwa was condemned by people from across the world, some of whom were Muslims themselves. It was rather shocking that Khomeini invested himself with authority to condemn a citizen of a foreign country to death without trial.

This fatwa backed by the Iranian Government would be lifted officially only ten years later in 1998 by the then President of Iran, Mohammad Khatami. However, since a 'fatwa' is a religious decision made by a 'mufti,' an Islamic scholar authorized to interpret and promulgate Islamic law, no secular authority can actually lift or nullify it. Therefore, even today, Rushdie continues to be under the sway of the fatwa which today is backed by several Islamic organizations in different parts of the world.

2. The Provocative Narrative of *The Satanic Verses*

Rushdie's controversial novel, *The Satanic Verses*, is named after the apocryphal verses that came to be called 'satanic verses,' which purportedly permitted intercessory prayers to three Meccan deities – al-Lat, al-Uzza and Manat. The author makes his satiric intent obvious in the title of the novel itself. The verses in question were supposedly prompted by Satan to Prophet Muhammad, which the Prophet uttered as the 'word of God,' but later retracted. One finds references to the contentious event of the 'satanic verses' in the Quran, Hadith and in the writings of the early Muslim scholars and biographers of Muhammad, such as, Ibn Jarir al-Tabari, Al-Wakidi, Ibn Sa'ad and Ibn Ishaq. Many among the Muslim community, however, regard this apocryphal story not only as being at variance with Quran, but also disrespectful to the testimony of the Quran. Different verses from the Quran support the theory that this discomforting episode related to the

contentious ‘satanic verses’ in the Quran was a malicious fabrication. For instance, verses 41:42 that says, “No falsehood can approach it / From before or behind it / It is sent down / By One Full of Wisdom / Worthy of all praise.” The Muslim community often quotes this verse in defense of the impeccability of the Quran. Yusuf Ali’s footnote to this verse notes that it means that “God’s truth is fully guarded on all sides. No one can get the better of it by attacking it from before or behind it, openly or secretly, or in any way whatever” (The Holy Quran, 1299).

Islamic tradition and faith hold that the Quran, the eternal ‘word of God,’ existed in heaven, and the Archangel Gabriel revealed it to Prophet Muhammad over a period of twenty-three years. Under the direction of Muhammad, his scribe wrote these revelations down, and thereby, eventually gave it a physical existence in the form of a book for the sake of the believers. Quranic verses like, “We have, without doubt / Sent down the Message / And We will assuredly Guard it (from corruption)” (15:9) are seen as upholding the authenticity and sanctity of the revealed book.

People of the pre-Islamic polytheistic Arab world worshipped Hubul also referred to as Allah (the god). Hubal who was believed to be a moon-god was also considered to be the creator god and the leader of the three-hundred and sixty other gods worshipped by various tribes in Arabia. The meaning of the original Arabic word, ‘al-ilah,’ being ‘the god,’ from which came the term Allah, possibly, the term Allah might have been used as a title rather than as the name of a god. Hence, Hubul being the specific name of a god, he being referred to as Allah (the god) is understandable. Hubul (Allah) was worshipped as the lord of the Arabian city of Mecca (the birthplace of

Muhammad) and Kaaba (House of God). The three Arabian deities, al-Lat and al-Uzzan (named after Allah) and Manat were regarded as his daughters. Each of them had a separate shrine near Mecca and its adjoining places. "Hubul (Allah) along with 360 others were being worshipped before and during the days of Muhammad. It looks like Muhammad declared Allah (using the title) to be the only God to be worshipped from then on. With Muhammed using the title Allah, the true name Hubul would be lost" (Jackson, 17).

Those who defend the legitimacy of the 'satanic verses' episode argue that owing to a misguided revelation, or, expediency if one might say so, Muhammad seems to have uttered (as part of the revealed message) that the three Arabian deities — al-Lat, al-Uzza and Manat — are the exalted cranes (intermediaries) whose intercession can be sought. However, by means of another revelation, Allah is believed to have informed him that these verses that accept polytheism should be retracted. In an interview on 27 January 1989, Rushdie said that in the case of Muhammad, there seems to have been "a brief flirtation with a possible compromise – about monotheism – which was very rapidly rejected" (Appignanesi & Maitland, 22). One among the different dream sequences though which the narrative of the novel unfolds is the sequence containing the inventive re-telling and re-imaging of the story of Muhammad, the birth of Islam and Muhammad's alleged short-term flirtation with polytheism. This re-telling and re-imaging through dream sequences becomes for Rushdie a powerful means to launch his satire. Creative re-telling, re-imaging and re-valuing of past narratives are not new; Rushdie has many illustrious predecessors in this field such as James Joyce, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Thomas Pynchon Gunter Grass and so on.

Whenever an issue is linked to history as well as faith, it becomes highly complex and extremely sensitive. Secular, free

and imaginative interpretations of such an issue invariably lends itself to controversies. For Muslims, Muhammad is the mediator of God's revelation — the uncreated word of God, the Quran; the voice that speaks in the Koran is the voice of God; and "The prophet's own speech and action are the agents of revelation and thus charged with divine power and sanctity" (Thomsom, 117). However, with his creative imagination, Rushdie burlesqued the story of Prophet Muhammad, the episode of the divine revelation, the birth of Islam and many other fundamental issues of the Islamic faith, as a believer would argue, with scathing scepticism and disdain. On his handling of the contentious aspect of the Muhammad event in the novel, Rushdie says:

> The one thing you learn as a historian is just how fragmented and ambitious and peculiar the historical record is. So, I thought, well, let's not try and pretend to be writing a history, let's take the themes I'm interested in and fantasise and fabulate them and all that, so that we don't have to get into the issue: did this really happen like this or did it not (Appignanesi & Maitland, 22).

Though it is difficult to arrive at the truth regarding the controversial verses in the Quran, one may look at the issue from historical and sociological perspectives. While Muhammad advocated strict monotheism — worship of Allah, the Quraysh tribe to which Muhammad actually belonged continued to worship al-Lat, al-Uzza, Manat and many other deities compliant with their tradition. Muhammad's stringent monotheism came in conflict with the prevailing polytheism of his tribe. This conflict alienated Muhammad from his tribe. He realized that by compromising his absolute monotheism in favour of the local deities he could not only end the rift between the

Quraysh tribe and himself, but also bring in many more from the tribe to the new faith. Muhammad's supposed utterance of the command to worship the pagan deities (though not mentioned in the Quran) may have been a compromise formula that he worked out at a moment of weakness, or, in other words, at a moment of the supposed 'demonic temptation.' From an Islamic religious point of view, it may be seen as Satan's alleged promptings to insert into the divine revelation the command to seek the intercession of the three pagan deities and thereby lead the faithful astray. In *Sacred Places of Goddess,* Karen Tate notes how "Jibril, or Gabriel, the angel of revelation, informed Muhammad that Satan had used Muhammad's desire for reconciliation with the pagan leaders to insert into the revelation of God the verses about the interceding cranes, otherwise called the 'satanic verses" (Tate, 167).

Rushdie was fascinated by the paradoxes inherent in the revealed word of God. "At the very beginning of Islam," says Rushdie in an interview, "you find a conflict between the sacred text and the profane text, between revealed literature and imagined literature. For a writer, that conflict is fascinating and interesting to explore. So that's what I am doing, exploring" (Appignanesi & Maitland, 23). Rushdie's novel is a catalogue of multiple layers of conflict; and it sets some of the long-cherished Islamic beliefs against his imaginative and satiric re-interpretation of those beliefs.

Though polytheism is strictly prohibited in the Abrahamic religions – Judaism, Islam and Christianity – Islam underwent a conflict between monotheism and polytheism in its infancy after which monotheism prevailed. "In the Muslim view … the most heinous sin against God that a human can commit is that of *shirk*, 'associating' some other thing or being with the Almighty and Omnipotent himself. Thus, idolatry, or any kind of polytheism is abhorred …" (Neusner, Chilton, & Graham,

248). As mentioned earlier, even though the questionable utterance of Muhammad regarding the three goddesses seems to have originally been accepted as divine revelation, following a supposed instruction from God, it is argued that Muhammad soon retracted this command. Accordingly, the revelation in Surah 53:19-20 reads, "Have ye seen / Lat, and Uzza / And another / The third (goddess), Manat?" instead of the supposedly original verses known today as the satanic verses that say, "These are the exalted cranes (intermediaries) whose intercession is to be hoped for" (Tate, 167). Verses 22:52-53 in Quran refer to the satanic verse episode:

> Never did We send /An apostle or a Prophet / Before thee, but, when he / Framed a desire, Satan / Threw some (vanity) / Into his desire: but God / Will cancel anything (vain) / That satan throws in / And God will confirm / (And establish) His signs / For God is full of knowledge / And Wisdom.
>
> That He may make / The suggestions thrown in / By Satan, but a trial / For those in whose hearts / I a disease and who are / Hardened of heart: verily / The wrong-doers are in a schism / Far (from the Truth) (The Holy Quran, 22:52-53).

Though Quran and Islam do not approve of the worship of any deity other than Allah, in Rushdie's novel, when Grandee Abu Simbel, the leader of Jahilia (Mecca), realizes that the monotheism proposed by Mahound (Muhammad) would be the future religion, he cajoles Mahound to accept with the permission of Allah the worship of "three of the three hundred and sixty idols" that "are worthy of worship" in the city (Rushdie, 105). The

Arabic word, 'Jahilia,' meaning 'ignorance' connotes to the Islamic notion of the 'Age of Ignorance' prevailing in Arabia before the birth of Islam. Since Jahilia, in the novel, stands for the holy city of Mecca, Grandee Abu Simbel's suggestion gains a symbolic significance in the narrative. Through the mediation of the controversial Gibreel (when Gibreel Farishta, a Bollywood actor and a character in the novel sleeps, he dreams that he is Archangel Gabriel and utters divine revelations to Mahound) it is revealed to Mahound that the deities – Lat, Uzza, and Manat – are "the exalted birds, and their intercession is desired indeed" (Rushdie, 114). If one of the fundamental prohibitions of Islam is the worship of idols and deities, in the novel, ironically enough, Allah seems to approve of this worship. For the Muslim community, this supposed divine approval is an insult against Allah and his Prophet. "The wronging of God or his Prophet must be far more serious than any offence Rushdie might have committed against ordinary mortals" (Fletcher, 322).

The novel tells us that with the adoption of the pagan goddesses into Islamic faith, the number of the followers of Islam began to increase; Abu Simbel himself and his wife, Hind, embraced Islamic faith. However, as Mahound realizes that Abu Simbel may abandon Islam, he declares, after consulting the Archangel, that the first revelation regarding the pagan deities was the work of the Devil. He says, "'It was the Devil … 'The last time, it was Shaitan'" (Rushdie, 123). The omniscient narrator comments saying, "This is what he has *heard* in his *listening*, that he has been tricked, that the Devil came to him in the guise of the archangel, so that the verse he memorized, the ones he recited in the poetry tent, were not real thing but its diabolic opposite, not godly, but satanic" (Rushdie, 123). In place of the 'demonic revelation,' Mahound comes up with verses that ask, "Shall He have daughters and you sons? … That would be a fine division! These are but

names you have dreamed of, you and your fathers. Allah vests no authority in them" (Rushdie, 124). In the process, Rushdie seems to reduce the issue of divine revelation to Muhammad's opportunistic pragmatism for gaining religious, social and political mileage — an idea a believing Muslim would find hard to accept. Describing the novel as an attempt to address the migrant experience in Britain, M. D. Fletcher argues, "Rushdie's interests centrally include explorations of how migration heightens one's awareness that perceptions of reality are relative and fragile, and of the nature of religious faith and revelation, not to mention the political manipulation of religion" (1).

With much sarcasm, Rushdie makes the divine revelation wear the garb of opportunism yet again as Mahound and his followers reach Yathrib after having fled from Jahilia on account of the persecution of Muslims there. Salman, the scribe to whom the Prophet dictates the revealed verses, says, as Mahound finds Muslim women being influenced by the progressive women of Yathrib, "bang, out comes the rule book, the angel starts pouring out rules about what women must do, he starts forcing them back into the docile attitude the Prophet prefers…" (Rushdie, 367). Thus, the Archangel seems to be revealing what the Prophet wants him to reveal and what would cater to his patriarchal mindset and society. Therefore, Salman calls Quran, "those revelations of convenience" (Rushdie, 365).

When Gibreel wryly says (about the conflicting revelations regarding the worship of the three local deities), "*it was me both times, baba, me, me first and second also me*. From my mouth, both the statement and the repudiation, verses and converses, universes and reverses, the whole thing, and we all know how my mouth got worked," (Rushdie, 123) Rushdie makes the Quran

appear as the most absurd religious book one can think of. Furthermore, Rushdie not only puts into the mouth of the Archangel the vulgar language of the streets, but also depicts the Archangel like a fraud. Satire such as this, irrespective of the intention of the writer, strikes hard at the foundations of the long cherished Islamic faith.

In the background of the controversy of the 'satanic verses,' the name of the novel, *The Satanic Verses,* suggests that Prophet Muhammad was unable to distinguish the angel from the devil, the divine revelation from the demonic interpolation, and that the Quran as the revelation of God is questionable. By turning the name, Muhammad, into a "Devil's synonym: Mahound," which is a "demon tag," and calling him "the medieval baby-frightener" (Rushdie, 93), Rushdie establishes Muhammad's demonic association, and thereby underscores the theme of the satanic verses. Muslims regard the wives of the Prophet as mothers of the entire Muslim community. By giving the prostitutes in a brothel called 'the Curtain,' the names of the wives of the Prophet, Rushdie depicts the Prophet as a cuckold and Muslims as the illegitimate children of their fallen mothers. To add insult to injury, the term, 'the Curtain' itself is a reference to the 'hejab' or veil worn by Muslim women.

The process of revelation itself is thoroughly lampooned. On the one hand, the revelation seems to emerge from the tormenting and recurring day slumber of Gibreel Farista, the Bollywood actor who in his dreams metamorphoses himself into the Archangel Gibreel (Gabriel). This is no respectful depiction of the Archangel of God. What is ironical and even farcical is that "Gibreel feels paralyzed by the presence of the great Prophet and thinks, "I can't make a sound I'd seem such a goddamn fool" (Rushdie, 111). On the other hand, this hallucinatory dream is dreamt together with Mahound as they lie together in a homosexual embrace, a sort of "wrestling

match" between Mahound and the Archangel Gibreel (Rushdie, 123). It is difficult to ascertain who among them is the actual dreamer. In fact, neither of them knows who the dreamer is and who the dreamed. This infamous process of revelation is depicted mixing the third and the first person narrative in a stream-of-consciousness style in order to fuse the boundaries between the dreamer and the dreamed.

> But when he has rested he enters a different sort of sleep, a sort of not-sleep, the condition that he calls his *listening*, and he feels a dragging pain in the gut, like something trying to be born, and now Gibreel, who has been hovering-above-looking-down, feels a confusion, *who am I*, in these moments it begins to seem that the archangel is actually *inside the Prophet*, I am the dragging in the gut, I am the angel being extruded from the sleeper's navel, I emerge, Gibreel Farista, while my other self, Mahound, lies *listening*, entranced, I am bound to him, navel to navel, by the shining cord of light, not possible to say which of us is dreaming the other. We flow in both directions along the umbilical cord (Rushdie, 110).

What is revealed appears to be the promptings of Mahound's own mind. Mahound tells Salman, "Often when Gibreel comes, it's as if he knows what's in my heart. It feels to me, most times, as if he comes from within my heart: from within my deepest places, from my soul." The exceedingly caricatured Archangel of God is afraid of Mahound the businessman, who comes to receive the revelation. "Gibreel's fear, the fear of the self his dream creates, makes him struggle against Mahound's arrival, to

try to put it off … and the archangel hold his breath" (Rushdie, 109). The angel's thoughts at this moment are rather discourteous. *"Mahound comes to me for revelation,"* says Gibreel, *"asking me to choose between monotheist and henotheist alternatives, and I'm just some idiot actor having a bhaenchud nightmare, what the fuck do I know, yaar, what to tell you, help. Help"* (Rushdie, 109). Rushdie depicts the Archangel of God as an ineffectual charlatan with a vulgar tongue. The archangel's use of demeaning language in order to parody the fundamentals of Islamic faith is an enormous embarrassment for the Muslim community. As Richard Webster argues, "It is such extreme language, which is potentially the most violent and the most insulting registers available to Western writers, which, in the pages of *The Satanic Verses*, is brought into conjunction with some of the most sacred traditions of Islam" (93).

Rushdie makes fun of the concept of divine revelation in the Quran further by making Salman surreptitiously tamper with what the Prophet dictates to him, and by depicting the Prophet as absolutely incapable of identifying the deliberate falsification of the original. Salman says:

> Little things at first. If Mahound recited a verse in which God was described as *all-hearing, all-knowing,* I would write, *all knowing, all wise.* Here's the point: Mahound did not notice the alterations. So there I was, actually writing the Book, or re-writing, anyway, polluting the word of God with my own profane language. But, good heavens, if my poor words could not be distinguished from the revelation by God's own Messenger, then what did that mean? What did that say about the quality of the divine poetry? … So the next time I change a bigger thing. He said *Christian,* I wrote down *Jew.*

> He'd notice that, surely; how could he not? But when I read him the chapter he nodded and thanked me politely … So I went on with my devilment, changing verses …. (Rushdie, 367-68).

He further reports that the longer he worked as the scribe for Mahound the worse it got. It would take the Prophet some time before he discovers that Salman has been setting his own "words against the Words of God" (Rushdie, 374). Such delay in discovering the malicious interpolation questions the credibility of the Prophet to engage in the most holy enterprise – giving a written form to the revealed word of God. The Quran being an infallible book for the Muslims, lampooning the Quran, the angel who mediated the revelation, the prophet who uttered the revelation and the very process of revelation itself, Rushdie derides the foundation of Islamic faith. The question is whether the right to freedom of speech and expression gives the author liberty to distort and ridicule the religious faith and practices that a community considers as sacrosanct.

While the author may argue in favour of creative freedom, it is important for him to know how far is too far. Rushdie's satire on the laws laid down in the Quran as guidelines for the faithful is certainly impudent. The omniscient narrator of the novel says, in Yathrib as the faithful lived by lawlessness, "Mahound – or should one say the Archangel Gibreel? – should one say Al-Lah? – became obsessed by law" (Rushdie, 363). This statement suggests that the laws laid down in the Quran might as well be the laws of the Prophet himself or of the Bollywood actor-turned-Archangel Gibreel rather than the laws of Allah. Furthermore, these laws are the result of an

obsession with law itself rather than a heavenly intent. With total disrespect to these laws, Salman says with disdainful humour that out of this obsession came, "rules about every damn thing" (Rushdie, 363). As Gibreel specifies rules for every aspect of human life, Salman wonders what "manner of God this was that sounded so much like a businessman" (Rushdie, 364). He loses his faith as he realizes that before becoming a religious leader and a prophet, Mahound had been a successful businessman, and therefore, "organization and rules came naturally" to him and he would obviously employ a "business-like archangel, who handed down the management decisions of this highly corporate, if non-corporeal, God" (Rushdie, 364).

Conclusion

Ali Khamenei who succeeded Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini as as Supreme Leader of Iran in 1988 asked Rushdie to apologize and disown the novel as a mark of regret, and in doing so seek forgiveness for his offence against Islam from the enraged Muslims across the world. However, the fatwa would remain effective even if he apologized and disowned the novel. At this juncture, Rushdie issued the following carefully worded response.

> As author of *The Satanic Verses* I recognize that Muslims in many parts of the world are genuinely distressed by the publication of my novel. I profoundly regret the distress that publication has occasioned to sincere followers of Islam. Living as we do in a world of many faiths this experience has served to remind us that we must all be conscious of the sensibilities of others (MacDonogh, 132).

Rushdie's response while appeasing some, enraged some others further, for some interpreted the response as only a tactic

of adding insult to the already injured Islamic sensibility. Even before the publication of the novel, Rushdie was aware that the novel would meet with extreme reactions from the Muslim community. "I expected," he said, "that the mullahs wouldn't like it. But I didn't write it for the Mullahs … obviously I have a view of the world which is not theirs. I insist on my right to express it as I think fit" (Appignanesi & Maitland, 21). Rushdie's re-telling and re-imaging of the sacrosanct issues of Islamic faith, however ingenious it might be, does not resonate with the spirit of the 'freedom of speech and expression.'

Article 295 A of Indian Penal Code states that whoever deliberately and maliciously tries to outrage or insult the religion, religious feelings or religious beliefs of any class of citizens of India, by words either spoken or written or otherwise shall be punished with imprisonment, or with fine or with both. When India banned the novel in defence of the religious sentiments of its Muslims, Rushdie wrote to Rajiv Gandhi, the then Prime Minister of India, "that the book isn't actually about Islam, but about migration, metamorphosis, divided selves, love, death, London and Bombay" (Fischer & Abedi, 388). The Muslim community was not satisfied with this explanation.

Rushdie was incensed by the fact that "Almost all the people who are being so insulted and provoked and disgusted have not really read the book" (Appignanesi & Maitland, 32). Reacting to Rushdie and foreshadowing the sentiments of the Indian Muslim community, Syed Shahabuddin, a member of the Indian parliament in the Government headed by Gandhi, who initiated the ban on the novel in India said:

> Yes, Mr. Rushdie, we are a religious people …. Call us primitive, call us fundamentalists, call us superstitious barbarians, call us what you like, but your book may serve to define, what has gone wrong with the western civilization — it has lost all sense of distinction between the sacred and the profane …. Yes, I have not read it, nor do I intend to. I do not have to wade through a filthy drain to know what filth is" (Fischer & Abedi, 388-89).

One should certainly not get carried away by the emotional outbursts like that of Shahabuddin against the novel. Instead, one should come up with an informed and mature stand on the matter, which unfortunately seldom happens when a complex literary work such as *The Satanic Verses* from a writer as famous as Rushdie is wrapped in a controversy based on its religious content. The Muslim community across the world continues to regard *The Satanic Verses* as a direct attack on and a conspiracy against Islam by the use of "distortion and scorn, which have the effect of alienating Muslims from their faith" (Pipes, 127). Attempt to discredit Islam and to tamper with its doctrines, they argue, had been made before, "but the Rushdie book exceeded all others in its audacity and in its scope" (Pipes, 127). I think, there is certainly some truth in the observation of the Muslim community regardless of the fact that few among them may have read the novel. Rushdie's satire in *The Satanic Verses* on what is sacrosanct in Islam does not seem to contribute to any form of constructive or reformative thinking in society. At least, even three decades after its publication it has not done so. Instead, it has only resulted in division and disturbance in society. Therefore, I think it goes against the intent and spirit of the satiric genre. This is where Rushdie's novel seems to overstep the boundaries of the author's right to 'freedom of speech and expression.'

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