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Decoding the elements of conflict and violence to restore peace in rushdie's novel Haroun and the sea of stories

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Abstract---The canvas of Children's Literature presents strokes of vibrant motifs coupled with creativity and fantasy. The gripping and bewildering magnum opus of Salman Rushdie, Haroun and the Sea of Stories, heralds the political scenario of India. The novel is a fitting reply to Rushdie's fatwa and censorship of Satanic Verses. Behind a palliative and hilarious account of fantasy fiction, Rushdie renders a subtle portrayal of sublime aspects such as conflict, violence and peace. The paper concentrations on reinstating Johan Galtung's Theory of Peace and Herbert C. Kelman's Theory of Conflict, evident in the Rushdie's Haroun and the Sea of Stories. Reinforcing and reviewing the contradictory and distinct characteristics of Gup and Chup cities are one of the salient portions of paper. Concepts such as Group theory, physical and psychological violence embedded in the novel are analyzed and explored. The paper also throws light upon factors that restore peace and elements that pave way for conflict resolution.

Keywords---theory of conflict, theory of peace, group theory, physical and psychological violence.

Introduction

'Children's Literature' has caused 'Oceans of ink to be spilt' reflects Peter Hunt in his *Encyclopedia of Children's Literature*. (Shinde 29) The Creative stream of Children's literature erupts from the spring of an imaginative mind that is influenced by fantasy and fiction. Fantasy fiction has occupied a huge space in the chamber of children's literature. Interpreting the psyche of a child's mind, understanding its thought process, analyzing its creative spirit are one of the primordial functions of children's literature. 'Children's literature' becomes defined as containing, both in form and content, the 'needs of children' (Hunt 23). The most captivating source of Children's literature is Indian folklore such as Panchatantra, Animal Fables, Stories of Vikramaditya and Birbal, most of which have been primarily oral narratives. As a traditional vehicle, these stories have transferred social and moral instruction across generations, depicting the social structures like economic, political, cultural and legal systems of a nation.

The Indian English writers hold a massive share in fascinating the multitude of children. In the cult of entertaining children, Salman Rushdie secures a prominent and remarkable position, amidst the other noteworthy writers like Ruskin Bond, R.K. Narayan, Vikram Seth, Anita Nair and Geeta Mukherjee. The creative genius of Rushdie speaks volumes through his incredible oeuvre of literary craft and he is rightly acclaimed for allegorical depiction of characters, humour and effusive narrative style. His plots have been satirical and sensitive, scraping the delicate nerves of politics and social structure. Edward in 'Independent on Sunday' proclaimed the novel *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* as "Rushdie's most eloquent and compelling gesture as a writer, father and citizen". Further, Rushdie's astonishing novel *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* (1990), is no exception in mocking the political, economic and social structure of the Indian society of the 20th Century. Based on the theme of Censorship and also as a fitting reply to fatwa, the novel embarks on the contemporary issues like war and conflict. The novel brings out the influence of imagination and the supremacy of words. Dualism is one of the prominent aspects of the novel, highlighting the juxtaposition of light and dark, good and bad, silence and speech, creative and destructive aspects and peace and conflict.

This paper attempts to bring out the juxtaposition of peace and conflict in the novel *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*. When Haroun travels to another moon named Kahani, to retrieve the power of storytelling of his father Rashid, he learns about the conflict between the two cities of Kahani, the Gup and Chup. A constant friction between these two cities have resulted in a war as Khattam-Shud, the Prince of Silence and the ruler of Chup poisons the Sea and attempts to plug the source of story. He also captures the Princess Batcheat who is betrothed to the Prince Bolo. The war and conflict between the two cities, Gup and Chup forms as one of the primordial crisis of the novel. Johan Galtung, the father of peace studies, illustrates that conflict arises due to contradictions, behaviour and attitude. "According to Galtung, conflicts erupt because of the basic human needs. He refuses the idea of scarcity and refers to politics as a main determinant of priorities, goals and programs of development. These programs are almost the main reason of conflict between state and society" (Al- Abedine 85). He also emphasises that the way people think also encourages conflict.

The conflict in the novel arises due to the behaviour of Soraya, wife of Rashid and mother of Haroun, who leaves her husband and elopes with her neighbour Mr. Sengupta. This act of Soraya destructs the structure of the family, leading to a psychological distress of Haroun and Rashid. As a result, Rashid becomes emotionally weak and disturbed, causing him to lose his ability to tell stories. According to Galtung's theory of *Violence, Peace and Peace Research*, it can be viewed as "Psychological violence: the destruction of things as a foreboding or threat of possible destruction of persons, and the destruction of things as destruction of something very dear to persons" (Galtung 170). The psychological violence not only affected Rashid but also has traumatised Haroun to a greater extent, in a way that he is unable to concentrate on anything more than eleven minutes. The agony has left him to change his behaviour constantly after every eleven minutes. In the case of Haroun, the psychological violence has caused a conflict in the mind, leaving him disturbed and devoid of a peaceful mind.

After his mother left home, Haroun found that he couldn't keep his mind on anything for very long, or, to be precise, for more than eleven minutes at a time. Rashid took him to a movie to cheer him up, but after exactly eleven minutes Haroun's attention wandered, and when the film ended he had no idea how it all turned out, and had to ask Rashid if the good guys won in the end... his mind was always wandering off somewhere and leaving his body behind. This created certain difficulties, because many interesting and some important things take longer than eleven minutes: meals, for example, and also mathematics examinations. (Rushdie 10). With respect to Galtung's theory, Peace is also disturbed by physical violence, "Under physical violence human beings are hurt somatically, to a point of killing...when a person is imprisoned or put in chains, but also when access to transportation is very unevenly distributed" (Galtung 169). The physical violence, reflected in the novel is indeed one of the primary factors of conflict in the novel. The kidnapping of Princess Batcheat by the ruler of the City Chup, Khattam-Shud instigates war between the two cities. Not only she is kidnapped but also is threatened to be made as a sacrifice. "As the Chupwala soldiers hauled the Princess away, I heard them say a terrible thing... 'The Great Feast of Bezaban is coming soon', one of them said answered Rashid. 'Why not, on that day, offer our Idol this Guppee Princess as a sacrifice? We'll stitch up her lips, and rename her the Dumb Princess – the Princess Khamosh'" (Rushdie 40).

Another aspect of Psychological violence, as stated by Galtung, is destruction of things. Destructing something that is owned by a person is truly a poignant violence against the owner. In addition, demolition of a resource that is utilised by a community is certainly an unjustifiable offense and violence. Such activity when carried out by a group of people over the other would result in conflict and war. Rushdie's novel clearly brings out this aspect and proves the perception of Galtung. In the novel, a war breaks out when the ruler of Chup city, Khattam-Shud tries to destruct the sea of stories by poisoning it. In addition, he even tries to plug the stream which is the source of stories. "These are the Poison Blenders," Khattam-Shud was saying. "We must make a great many poisons, because each and every story in the Ocean needs to be ruined in a different way. To ruin a happy story, you must make it sad. To ruin an action drama, you must make it move too slowly. To ruin a mystery you must make the criminal's identity obvious even to the most stupid audience. To ruin a love story you must turn it into a tale

of hate. To ruin a tragedy you must make it capable of inducing helpless laughter” (Rushdie 60).

Rushdie by portraying this episode highlights the censorship that was imposed on the novel *The Satanic Verses* in 1989. He was accused of blasphemy and was issued a fatwa by Ayatollah [Ruhollah Khomeini](#) of Iran. The above given words and episode personify fatwa and censorship. He ironically portrays how his freedom of speech and expression is curbed or poisoned. The poison represents the censorship and the ruining of the sea represents his accusation and banning of books. Galtung theory proposes another vital aspect of violence namely structural violence. Structural violence may be a condition of social injustice imposed on the people due to various reasons like political, economic and cultural. “The word violence we shall sometimes refer to the condition of structural violence as social injustice” (Galtung 171). Exploitation is an alternative form of structural violence imposed by the powerful ones over the powerless. Having surfeited with satirical expressions, the novel throws light upon the political scenario of India, where the politicians hire the ‘Shah of Blah’ Rashid to narrate stories that interest audience, in order to secure votes from the people. It is indeed a method of exploitation the people through the gift of gab and an absolute act of brain washing. “My enemies hire cheap fellows to stuff the people’s ears with bad stories about me, and the ignorant people just lap it up like milk. For this reason I have turned, eloquent Mr Rashid, to you. You will tell happy stories, praising stories, and the people will believe you, and be happy, and vote for me” (Rushdie 19).

Rushdie brings out the conflicting perceptions of the inmates of the cities Gup and Chup. Gup is a city where people engage in conversations and debates for every aspect, where in the Chup city people engage in silence. The two cities exhibit contradictory regulations and principles. Rushdie exposes the distinct features of Gup and Chup through Haroun’s astonishment as he is bewildered when war breaks out. He thinks, ‘How many opposites are at war in this battle between Gup and Chup!’ he marvelled. ‘Gup is bright and Chup is dark. Gup is warm and Chup is freezing cold. Gup is all chattering and noise, whereas Chup is silent as a shadow. Guppees love the Ocean, Chupwalas try to poison it. Guppees love Stories, and Speech; Chupwalas, it seems, hate these things just as strongly.’ It was a war between Love (of the Ocean, or the Princess) and Death (Rushdie 47).

The people in the cities are heterogeneous and their opinion and beliefs differ in multiple aspects. The purpose of their life itself differs to a greater extent, for instance the people of Gup believe in expression of ideas and speech, whereas the people in Chup believe in stillness and silence. The Gup is a place that is filled with light, on the contrary the Chup is occupied with darkness. These heterogeneous attitudes gives rise to conflict and violence between the cities. In her article ‘Western Theories on Conflict Resolution and Peace Building: A Critique’, Yasmine Zein Al – Abedine, refers to the views of Galtung, “first – individuals are different, and second- this heterogeneity affects their behavior and their performance. Based on this idea, Galtung affirms that violence is more natural and normal than peace, which means that in order to coexist together peacefully and to cooperate, humans are in need of mandatory rules to conduct their behaviour and to orient them towards peace” (Al- Abedine 85).

It is certain that a heterogeneous group may disagree and disapprove of each other's opinions and belief and may involve in conflict and war. There are two main theories that could mediate peace and reconciliation between the contradictory factors. The theories are Conflict Resolution theory by Herbert C. Kelman and Theory on Peace by Johan Galtung. In 1963, Kelman introduces a concept namely 'Group Therapy' that paves way for Conflict Resolution. "The group therapy, according to Kelman, has an effective role and is able to change any defective social situation by choosing the suitable treatment program. This group has all duties that could help in affecting people behavior, such as; exercising pressure, offering suggestions, emphasizing the positive side of change in order to convince people that it is for their well-being, presenting a role model, and making new information accessible" (Al- Abedine 83).

Rushdie depicts two kinds of society in the novel, one that succumbs to the verdict of the ruler and the other that engage in discussions and analyse the scenario. The city Chup falls under the first category and the City Gup attaches itself to the second category. The Shadow warrior of the Chup City remarks that "Don't think all Chupwalas follow Khatam-Shud or worship his Bezaban,' Mudra said in his silent, dancing way (and Rashid translated his 'words' into ordinary speech). 'Mostly they are simply terrified of the Cultmaster's great powers of sorcery" (Rushdie 50). As both these cities encompass a group of people with heterogeneous mind-set and thoughts, these two cities approach the situation that is discrete and poles apart. Rushdie illustrates two different types of society that is governed by a dictator and a democratic ruler. Kelman's concept of group therapy is revealed in the social structure of Gup, where the people are provided with the opportunity to discuss, analyse and criticise the scenario and strategies planned. It is a society where information is accessible and disseminated evenly, and further the people understand that the decisions are made for the wellbeing of the community. This is evident by the following lines, "the Guppee armada proceeded on its merry way, with all its members busily dissecting General Kitab's most secret battle-plans (which, of course, he cheerfully revealed to anyone who cared to ask). These plans were itemized, scrutinized, rationalized, analysed, mulled over, chewed over, made much of, made little of, and even, after interminable wranglings, agreed" (Rushdie 46).

As per Kelman's ideology, borders between nations seem to be a critical issue which needs to be addressed and solved. He believes that it is the best possible way to solve issues and bring peace is by demolishing the borders. Peace is vital and significant for a productive and promising future of the nation. According to Galtung, a nation is said to be peaceful when it is devoid of destruction and violence. It also promotes mutual benefit and harmony and also paves way for reconciliation and resolution of conflict. "Galtung distinguishes between different types of peace thinking, which could be divided into three main groups; personal, national and global types" (Al- Abedine 86). As illustrated by Galtung, in the novel, the people in the two cities aim at bringing peace both personally and nationally. Haroun, Rashid and Prince Bolo strive to end the war and bring peace due to various personal reasons. Haroun attempts to end the war by making a wish so as to bring peace to the soul of his father, Rashid. Rashid attempts to bring peace to regain his story telling ability. The Prince Bolo aspires to win the war and bring peace to retrieve his betrothed lady love Batcheat. Considering the

national aspect, peace is expected by the people of both the cities, so as to recover the sea from poisoning and live a comfortable life without destruction and violence.

Rushdie in the end of the story elucidates the vitality of peace and living with mutual benefits. Though the two cities engage in conflict and war, reconciliation is sort after the death of the tyrant ruler Khattam – Shud. The people of the two cities aspire to live a beneficial life complementing each other. Rushdie foresees a future where nations support each other across the world. His vision is revealed through the lines of the novel, “Peace broke out. The new government of the Land of Chup, headed by Mudra, announced its desire for a long and lasting peace with Gup, a peace in which Night and Day, Speech and Silence, would no longer be separated into Zones by Twilight Strips and Walls of Force” (Rushdie 73).

Thus, the novel indicates aspects of violence, conflict and peace and exquisitely portrays the beauty, colorfulness and charm of two cities and people. Rushdie's craftsmanship is beyond comparison and he has captivated the minds of the children and adults through striking episodes and instances. This novel is indeed a process of bringing peace to Rushdie's mind, for having been separated from his son for few years. A splendid portrayal of fantasy and imagination that aims at establishing a peaceful connect between a father and son. Rushdie has indeed carved a niche in the hearts of the young readers and has fascinated them with an exciting masterpiece. “Though there is darkness and silence at the center of Chup, most of Haroun and the Sea of Stories is full of comic energy and lively verbal invention. . . . Though [the book] is sure to be enjoyed by children, it also contains amusements for adults” comments Alison Lurie, in her Review in The New York Times.

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