

## Chapter 3

### Post-Colonial Bricolage of Multiculturalism

Multiculturalism . . . is a relatively new coinage but under different guises its implications have long been matters of direct concern to post-colonial nations where diversity and heterogeneity have been the rule rather than the exception.

--C. W. Watson, *Multiculturalism* 108

In *The Moor's Last Sigh*, Rushdie sees to a lot of post-colonialism-specific issues, inasmuch as post-colonialism is always a contested site of a variety of debates. Many different disciplines also find their relations to post-colonialism; no less relevant is multiculturalism to this contested site. However controversial the word multiculturalism is, it is not just often associated with the post-colonial cause, but is open to interpretations as well.

The announced aims of multiculturalism, as Peter Brooker expounds, “are to introduce children in schools and all sections of the community to the different belief systems, customs, crafts and arts of the nation’s heterogeneous population” (144). Much as it is grounded on a respect for cultural diversity, Brooker observes that the policy of multiculturalism is harshly criticized because the critics assert that it is “at best partially enacted and characteristically disguises an assumption of the centrality

of predominantly white ethnic groups or of the dominant culture” (144). Nevertheless, their discussion of multiculturalism as a policy is exclusively limited to and centered on some particular regions, especially Britain. It must be remembered that multiculturalism is supposed to be a much more inclusive word that could designate any forms of multiplicity and pluralism.

A similar argument is made against multiculturalism by Bhabha; Brooker quotes him as saying in an interview that “[m]ulticulturalism represent[s] an attempt both to respond to and control the dynamic process of the articulation of cultural difference” (qtd. in Brooker 145). Out of proper context, Brooker’s quotation here ignores what truly concerns Bhabha about multiculturalism. In another interview with Bhabha,<sup>1</sup> we can fully appreciate that what he goes against is the ostensibly multicultural promise made by Britain, rather than multiculturalism per se. In a nutshell, Bhabha objects to consensus and assimilation that have been made use of in order to recast a new hegemonic power presiding over and hence neglecting cultural difference. He does not choose to redefine the word multiculturalism. Instead, while envisaging Renée Green’s stairwell as liminal space, he claims that “the enlargement of the multiculturalist cause” should “come from posing questions of solidarity and community from the interstitial perspective” (*LC* 3). He hints at the narrowness of multiculturalism in some particular regions and suggests that liminal space could bring about a broader sense to multiculturalism.

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<sup>1</sup> When asked by Paul Thompson about any important differences in the forms of resistance to racism in the United States, Britain, and Europe, part of Bhabha’s reply is as follows:

I feel, in Britain, that the promise of a consensual culture, which is the heritage of welfarist/Labourist traditions—although those traditions are being eroded—produces pluralistic dreams of resisting racism through multiculturalism—a belief that we can educate people out of racism by exposure to or the knowledge of cultural diversity—Indian food, African dresses, and so on. I am less convinced that these ideas of cultural relativism and political pluralism, that are part of this sense of a consensus, are now very effective ideas. (195)

Bhabha chooses to put much more emphases on ‘cultural difference’ which, he asserts, will only be possible in the in-between space. Also, as Gunew notices, “Bhabha emphasises cultural difference instead of cultural diversity, because ‘diversity’ is a conservative concept: often it simply comprises that spectacle of the exotic which is consumed by hegemonic power relations and sustains them” (40). Bhabha’s diction expresses his preference for ‘cultural difference’ over ‘cultural diversity’, and he gives the word multiculturalism an enlarged sense from this perspective of interpreting cultural multiplicity.

In effect, the problem of narrowing down the meaning of culture and diluting its significance is also the chief concern that Rushdie shares in common with Bhabha. When talking about *The Moor’s Last Sigh*, he offers Charlie Rose one way of interpreting the narrative:

[O]ne way of interpreting the story we were talking about, the story of the fall of Granada, is that here is this wonderful, pluralist, civilized culture. When it’s faced with this narrow spectrum, obsessive, very focused fundamentalist attack, it disintegrates, gives up without a fight, doesn’t have a chance. (207)

The juxtaposition of Granada and Bombay in the story discloses that the impetus hidden behind the narrative is the aspiration after “the values of pluralism and multiplicity.”<sup>2</sup> It is evident that Rushdie always exalts the significance of

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<sup>2</sup> When questioned by Charlie Rose about what he has learned from fatwa, the death sentence, Rushdie replies:

There are other things I’ve learned, which is that some of the values that I’ve always most cared about, the values of pluralism and multiplicity and being many things and not being narrow, not defining yourself or your culture narrowly. That can also lead to great weakness of purpose. . . . And I think if these are the ideas that we care about—freedom, tolerance, living side by side with difference and so on—we must also understand how they can create weakness, and therefore, you know, by understanding that, may give us a

multiculturalism to such an extent that “Granada, Bombay and Sarajevo<sup>3</sup> come together in Rushdie’s mind as centres of multiculturalism/secular Islam, centres under siege” (Goonetilleke 143). Rushdie dexterously superimposes the city Bombay of the present day upon another city Granada of the past; these two multicultural cities have some enigmatic meanings when they clash together in the narrative. Like Homi Bhabha, Rushdie seems to redefine what multiculturalism should be like in the novel. And yet, different from Bhabha, he is doing this job in a fictional world, not in a theoretical world.

The way Rushdie builds up the fictional world could be readily associated with ‘bricolage’ that Claude Lévi-Strauss discusses in *The Savage Mind*. He distinguishes right in the opening chapter between the sign systems of modern man and those of primitive man. Modern man resembles an engineer who produces things with custom-made tools while primitive man, like a bricoleur (similar to an odd-job man or DIY enthusiast), takes advantage of ready-made materials or odds and ends to make up things, which are hence called ‘bricolage.’ Claude Lévi-Strauss expounds ‘bricoleur’ and ‘bricolage’:

Like ‘bricolage’ on the technical plane, mythical reflection can reach brilliant unforeseen results on the intellectual plane. . . . The ‘bricoleur’ is adept at performing a large number of diverse tasks; but, unlike the

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way of guarding against that attack, that intolerant, narrow spectrum, vicious attack. (207)  
This post-fatwa novel could thus be seen as a celebration of multiculturalism.

<sup>3</sup> The juxtaposition of Granada and Bombay is very obvious in the novel, and it explicitly points out that Rushdie has these cities in mind as a figurative meaning of multiculturalism. Sarajevo is one of these cities, according to one of Rushdie’s statement read out for Sarajevo in New York, in Nov. 1993: There is a Sarajevo of the mind, an imagined Sarajevo whose present ruination and torment exiles us all. That Sarajevo represented something like an ideal, a city in which the values of pluralism, tolerance and coexistence have created a unique and resilient culture. In that Sarajevo there actually exists that secularist Islam for which so many people are fighting elsewhere in the world. (*Step* 249)

engineer, he does not subordinate each of them to the availability of raw materials and tools conceived and procured for the purpose of the project. His universe of instruments is closed and the rules of his game are always to make do with 'whatever is at hand', that is to say with a set of tools and materials which is always finite and is also heterogeneous. (17)

Lévi-Strauss relates 'bricolage' to 'mythical reflection' and argues that myth is a kind of thought that hinges upon the elements lying "half-way between percepts and concepts" (18). To put it in other words, he contends that "[m]ythical thought is therefore a kind of intellectual 'bricolage' (17). As mythical thought lies halfway between percepts and concepts, Lévi-Strauss suggests that for primitive man abstract sign systems and concrete reality are considered to be interdependent. Paradoxically speaking, mythical thought and intellectual bricolage are both concrete and abstract. In this sense, the idea of bricolage can also be subsumed under the umbrella term 'liminal space', for it also illustrates an in-between space where both concrete reality and abstract sign systems are perceptible.

Rushdie makes use of a lot of odds and ends, expressly histories and intertextual materials, to construct the fictional world. These odds and ends are not related to one another, but they altogether lead to a contingent result, the potential of which conveys significant meanings. For example, Flory Zogoiby predicts, a few days before her death, the bombings in the Japanese city of Hiroshima at the end of World War II. This episode resonates distantly with another episode that describes the bombings in the Indian city of Bombay. These two historical events are ready-made materials for Rushdie, and they seem to be irrelevant to each other. Nevertheless, Flory's death nearly coincides with the bombings in Hiroshima, which implies a figurative allusion

to the death of imperialism and colonialism. A couple of years later, India achieves its independence from Britain. Almost at the end of the novel, the bombings in Bombay take place, which appears to recall the memories of the Japanese bombings. Yoked together, these two historical events echo with each other as if to suggest that the destruction results from human evil. Therefore, those ready-made materials that should not have been irrelevant to one another turn out to be the significant pieces that thread plots and episodes together, as befits the author's train of thought. The materials for Rushdie's bricolage are mainly centered upon a multiplicity of cultures in a post-colonial society. This chapter, accordingly, is to explore Rushdie's post-colonial bricolage of multiculturalism in *The Moor's Last Sigh*.

### **A Multicultural Superimposition: Spain and India**

Moraes narrates the whole family saga in Spain, albeit most of the story takes place in India. Almost all the story is narrated in retrospect, like a metaphor that resonates with Moraes's returning to his remote ancestors' place to reclaim his mother's paintings and also with Aoi Uë's removing the top layer of Miranda's first portrait of Aurora to let her image emerge again from beneath the weeping Arab in Miranda's own image. The novel begins with the sentence--"I have lost count of the days that have passed since I fled the horrors of Vasco Miranda's mad fortress in the Andalusian mountain-village of Benengeli"—that inaugurates the whole story written by Moraes while he is imprisoned in Vasco Miranda's little Alhambra. Moraes's death

frames the story, like Shaharazad<sup>4</sup> in *The Thousand and One Nights*. Moraes is imprisoned not just in Miranda's redoubt, but also in the prison cell of the past, as he enunciates, "So, in writing this, I must peel off history, the prison of the past" (*MLS* 136).

The name of the Spanish village 'Benengeli' also alludes to one of the narrators of Don Quixote, Cide Hamete Benengeli. Moreover, Moraes describes his great-grandfather "as ill-at-ease with domesticity as Quixote" (*MLS* 17). These references to Don Quixote conjure up an image of anachronism. Rushdie's anachronism, however, is surely different from Quixotic anachronism. In *The Moor's Last Sigh*, he superimposes the present upon the past and modern India upon Moorish Spain so as to find what is in-between those sedimentary layers. He reminds us of these superimpositions via Aurora's paintings even to the last. Vasco uncovers a stunning fact to Moraes at the little Alhambra:

'If she [Aurora] was killed, she said, she wanted the murderer brought to book. So she had concealed his portrait under her work in progress. Get the picture X-rayed, she said to me, and you will see my killer's face' He [Miranda] was holding the letter in his hand. . . . 'Take a look.' Vasco waved the pistol at the X-ray images. . . . 'It's my father.' I said, and it was. I sat down heavily on the cold stone floor. (*MLS* 416-17)

The stunning fact in-between Rushdie's arrangement of these superimpositions is his

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<sup>4</sup> In *The Moor's Last Sigh*, Rushdie uses another spelling, Scheherazade, for Shaharazad. The connection between Moraes and Shaharazad is made explicit:

'Let's re-live the old times together,' he [Miranda] proposed, gaily. 'If Zogoibys are to be wiped off the face of the earth—if the wrong-doings of the father, yes, and the mother, too, are to be visited upon the son—then let the last Zogoiby recount their sinful saga.' Every day, after that, he brought me pencil and paper. He had made a Scheherazade of me. As long as my tale held his interest he would let me live. (*MLS* 421)

enunciation and celebration of multiculturalism by means of finding a spatiotemporal site in history that could offer a possible answer to the question as to what multiculturalism should be like.

Aurora's painting is always a collage of different cultures, in which Rushdie vehemently reminds his readers of modern India's umbilical cord with Moorish Spain. When the two images are overlapped and even fused together, they become so enigmatic that Moraes utters, "The Alhambra quickly became a not-quite-Alhambra; elements of India's own red forts, the Mughal palace-fortresses in Delhi and Agra, blended Mughal splendours with the Spanish building's Moorish grace" (*MLS* 226). This artistic collage is simply part of Rushdie's overall collage that he maneuvers for a multicultural world through post-colonial lenses. The narrator Moraes, whose father is Spanish-Jewish-Arabic-Berber-Indian and whose mother is Portuguese-Catholic-Mongolian-Indian-Christian, seems to be a modern chimera, but it could well be true in a multicultural society. This is also what Bhabha recognizes in Rushdie to be a "monstrous inventory of ill-assorted persons, places, and things that become part of a luminous order as soon as he places them together" (qtd. in Taylor 211).

The analogy between the past and the present demonstrates Rushdie's fervent desire to trace back to the past and to resort to Moorish Spain as a model of multiculturalism. Or rather, contrasted with another multicultural society, modern India could strike its multicultural root much more deeply. More important, Rushdie may want to point to a future route for the multicultural society in India through the admixture of time and space. Cantor argues that "Moorish Spain appears to have solved the problem that has figuratively and literally torn India apart in the twentieth



century” (324). The post-Independence sectarian violence, in the narrative, leads to the catastrophic explosion in Bombay. Also, Rushdie is eager to remind his readers of the intolerance of a multicultural society has been a disastrous factor in the partition of the South Asia, which is obvious when he deliberately mentions Ayodhya in the novel:

Those who hated India, those who sought to ruin it, would need to ruin Bombay: that may have been so. And it may have been that what was unleashed in the north (in, to name it, because I must name it, Ayodhya<sup>5</sup>)—that corrosive acid of the spirit, that adversarial intensity which poured into the nation’s bloodstream. (*MLS* 351)

The real problem that tears the post-Independence India apart is communalism and ultranationalism. Raman Fielding<sup>6</sup> is the man who makes the problem even worse. He is one of the founders of Mumbai’s Axis and builds up his own political power by hiring strikebreakers and associating with the underworld. He is also an ultranationalist whose aim is to purge India of non-Hindu residents and rebuild an aboriginal nation. He has been arranging paramilitary activities to achieve his political aims. While serving Fielding as a cook, Moraes observes:

He spoke of a golden age ‘before the invasions’ when good Hindu men and women could roam free. ‘Now our freedom, our beloved nation, is

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<sup>5</sup> Ayodhya is a “city in the North of India where on 6 December 1992, fanatical Hindus destroyed the Babri Masjid mosque, an incident which started a whole series of often extremely violent encounters between Hindus and Muslims” (“Reference in *The Moor’s Last Sigh*”)

<sup>6</sup> He is also nicknamed ‘Mainduck’ because his signature is a frog. Raman Fielding can be seen as Bal Thackeray. Goonetilleke offers a detailed comparison:

Fielding is a fictionalized equivalent of Bal Thackeray, who is behind the Shiv Sena (an organisation named after the army of a seventeenth-century Maharati warrior) coalition government in Maharashtra. Rushdie alters his appearance and name in a contrary vein. Thackeray is light-skinned and slender; Fielding is dark and paunchy. Thackeray is a Maharati name. Rushdie plays upon a coincidence of his sharing the surname of the Victorian novelist William Makepeace Thackeray. Rushdie switches English novelists, calling him after a different, earlier writer, Fielding. (142)

buried beneath the things the invaders have built. This true nation is what we must reclaim from beneath the layers of alien empires. (*MLS* 299)

Fielding aspires after cultural authenticity and tries his level best to bring India to the pristine state. However, his ambition and seemingly eloquent utterances eventually proves to be spurious and contradictory to himself:

The eager young things from Malabar Hill agreed enthusiastically [with Fielding's remarks]. Yes, indeed, a campaign for divine rights! What could be smarter, more cutting edge?—But when they began, in their guffawing way, to belittle the culture of Indian Islam that lay palimpsest-fashion over the face of Mother India, Mainduck rose to his feet and thundered at them until they shrank back in their seats. Then he would sing ghazals and recite Urdu poetry—Faiz, Josh, Iqbal—from memory and speak of the glories of Fatehpur Sikri and the moonlit splendour of the Taj. An intricate fellow, indeed. (*MLS* 299)

In fact, it is not Raman Fielding who is intricate; rather, it is India that is intricate. Before the British raj, India has been colonized by Portuguese and the Dutch. And later, it is influenced by the French. Well before the above invasions, it is ruled by Mongols. Taj Mahal has been reckoned as part of Indian culture and one of its most remarkable wonders. Moraes plays on words by interrogating colonial terminology by saying, “[H]ow could we be discovered when we were not covered before” (*MLS* 4). Likewise, how can India be purged of all the invaders in order to be culturally pure when it is never pure? Fielding has no other choices but to admit, “If the new nation is to be born, there is much invader-history that may have to be erased” (*MLS* 364).

In response to Fielding's remarks and also to the ultranationalist activities and

sectarian violence, Moraes replies with melancholy, “After two thousand years, we still did not belong, and indeed, were soon to be ‘erased’—which ‘cancellation’ need not be followed by any expressions of regret, or grief” (*MLS* 364). These helpless words ring far back with Epifania’s curse whispered into Aurora’s ear—“a house divided against itself cannot stand” (*MLS* 99). When the da Gama family is divided into two halves, the curse seems to be true. It later becomes a warning against not just the partition of the family but also the partition of the nation. Most of the turbulences in India, Rushdie suggests, result from the intolerance of a multicultural society. Just as Moraes comments on the explosions in Bombay, “[w]e were both the bombers and the bombs” and “[t]he explosions were our own evil” (*MLS* 372). Therefore, Kuortti contends that “[t]he violence in which the mongrel Bombay was lost does not come from outside, not from the colonial rulers, for example, or from an external enemy” and that “[t]he malady is within the system, in Shiv Sena’s fundamentalism” (206).

Those fanatics’ intolerance of multiculturalism is a catalyst for Rushdie’s resorting to Moorish Spain as a model of multiculturalism. Certainly, he does not reckon it as an absolutely ideal society for a full development of multiculturalism. Even though the multicultural society in Moorish Spain is most unlikely to live up to the standard of today, at least it is prosperous owing to its tolerance of cultural difference. Moorish Spain hence provides Rushdie with an alternative for the turmoil stemming from sectarian violence. Cantor gives a historical picture of what Moorish Spain is like:

In one form or another, Moorish rule lasted nearly eight centuries in Spain, and during much of that period, Muslims, Christians, and Jews were able to live together in relative peace and harmony and to spur each

other on to ever greater cultural achievements. In such diverse areas as architecture, astronomy, medicine, mathematics, music, literature, and philosophy Moorish Spain equaled and frequently surpassed contemporaneous cultural developments across the Pyrenees in Christian Europe. (325)

It is the epochal peak that draws Rushdie's attention. Aside from that, Rushdie may incline to probe the depth of the complicated intersection of multiculturalism and colonialism. In spite of the multicultural achievements in Moorish Spain, it must be remembered that the Moors (of mixed Arab and Berber descent) are the invaders that conquest and rule Spain by force of imperial power. By stark contrast, post-Independence (or post-colonial) India seems to head towards monoculturalism because of communal turbulences. When India is still part of the British Empire, however, a multicultural society is paradoxically promised to the colonized. Moraes is of Moorish descent, and yet Rushdie arranges for him to trace back to his origin. Figuratively, Moraes is journeying the other way round. Likewise, Rushdie seems to suggest that what we always take for granted should be rethought the other way round so as to get a deeper understanding. Superimposing India upon Moorish Spain, Rushdie makes clear what lies in-between the two images—what is located in the interstitial space must be hybrid. That is, imperialism does not necessarily result in a monocultural society, and nationalism is not necessarily a promised land for multiculturalism. On top of that, Rushdie disturbs as well the fixity of binarism that the invaders are always Europeans while the invaded are non-Europeans.

It is not that colonialism and imperialism could call forth a prospect of multiculturalism that is considered to be truly gratifying. As a matter of fact,

multiculturalism can be defined in a variety of ways. What emerges in Moorish Spain can be thought of as ‘imperial multiculturalism’. Matušítk argues that such a “powerful multicultural country homogenizes its territory, fashioning a univocal nation-state” (107). This is what Bhabha regards as negative aspects of some multicultural societies. Nevertheless, Rushdie employs the remote image of Moorish Spain in the narrative as a figurative icon that lends itself to an enlightenment of multiculturalism in India. Just as Moraes insistently repeats, “Bombay was central,” (*MLS* 372), Rushdie’s attention is definitely centered on India, instead of Moorish Spain. For Rushdie, the dualism (India/Spain) could well be more inspiring and thought-provoking. For example, after the explosions, Moraes laments Bombay:

Bombay was central; had always been. Just as the fanatical ‘Catholic Kings’ had besieged Granada and awaited the Alhambra’s fall, so now barbarism was standing at our gates. O Bombay! . . . Like Granada—al-Gharnatah of the Arabs—you were the glory of your time. But a darker time came upon you, and just as Boabdil, the last Nasrid Sultan, was too weak to defend his great treasure, so we, too, were proved wanting. (*MLS* 372)

To reminisce about Moorish Spain is to subtly substantiate what India is now in for. What terminates the culmination of multiculturalism of Moorish Spain is the fanatical Catholic Kings who commit themselves to implementing religious purification. Thenceforth, Moors and Jews have been expelled from Spain. And yet, those exiles finally see the light at the end of the tunnel in India. Rushdie suggests that people still can savor the freedom brought about by a multicultural society even under the British raj. Ironically, Bombay becomes Troy when colonization is over. All the predictions of

Rushdie's Cassandras disregarded previously have altogether turned out to be true calamities. As a cultural and religious minority, the Gama-Zogoiby family has been cursed or warned by a few figures. Emily Elphinstone, the widow, predicts that "[o]ne day India will turn against them" (*MLS* 98); Vasco Miranda forecasts that India will eat them (*MLS* 167); Epifania Menezes whispers her curse that "a house divided against itself cannot stand" (*MLS* 99). In the wake of the explosions, Moraes slobbers over the shattered city, and concludes by saying, "We were our own wooden horses" (*MLS* 372). It is the fanatical ultranationalism and sectarianism that put an end to a multicultural society in India, just as the fanatical Catholic Kings in Spain. In the narrative, what occurs in Bombay seems to stage Watson's observations concerning the oscillations between multiculturalism and nationalism:

In broad terms and allowing for exceptions, nationalism in most regions of the world was clearly more significant in the first half of the [twentieth] century: it was instrumental in persuading populations within the boundaries of one nation to mobilize against those of another, or, in colonial circumstances, to expel from within the nation dominant groups who owed their presence to military conquest in the recent past. It was only after the Second World War and decolonization in the 1950s that multiculturalism began to make its impact felt in Asia, Europe and America. (18)

The above observations are derived from Watson's generalization of the global experience. It may help to elucidate the reason why Rushdie chooses to superimpose India upon Moorish Spain. Nationalism is often considered to be instrumental, for it can create national unity when a region is being colonized. Nevertheless, it is an

expedient means to accelerate decolonization and to help form a nation. Once a nation is thus formed and independent, all the cultural groups would change their focuses. It is multiculturalism that can serve as the enunciation of cultural difference. Francisco and Camoens are anxious to mobilize against the British raj by drumming up for support of nationalism. That can be justified and fully understood. Nevertheless, ultranationalism gets to be much more vehement after independence. Rushdie therefore suggests that it is the nation's own evil that makes itself splintered. He seems to warn against the sectarian turbulences by presenting the history of Moorish Spain as a mirror. After the Catholic Kings reconquer Spain, they put an end to multiculturalism that is supposed to be the maintaining power for a nation. The narrative is certainly not a retelling of history; in the narrative Fernando and Isabella are not heroes in Spanish history but villains in Rushdie's fictional world. Coetzee offers a perspicacious understanding of the juxtaposition of Moorish Spain and India:

The palimpsesting of Moraes over Boabdil supports a less trite, more provocative thesis: that the Arab penetration of Iberia, like the later Iberian penetration of India, led to a creative mingling of peoples and cultures; that the victory of Christian intolerance in Spain was a tragic turn in history; and that Hindu intolerance in India bodes as ill for the world as did the sixteenth-century Inquisition in Spain. (15)

The superimposition of India upon Moorish Spain is therefore a celebration of multicultural tolerance on the one hand. On the other hand, as Singh supposes, Rushdie's "vision of a shifting, hybrid landscape goes against the grain of totalizing narratives of both colonialism and nationalism" (169).

### **Eclectic Conflation of Pop Culture and High Art**

Timothy Weiss argues that “[p]op culture, the surreal, and literary fantasy are three other categories of imaginative material in the novel” (Weiss). Although there is no problem with the argument, I would rather think of the imaginative material as Rushdie’s eclectic conflation of pop culture and high art. Weiss also provides an interesting point of view—“Moraes’s plight is Rushdie’s plight” (Weiss). It reminds us of what Rushdie mentions in an interview about Moraes and Aurora. He tells Charlie Rose that he “would say he’s [Moraes] not the only person in this book who’s a bit me because I think the character of Aurora, the painter, even though she is a girl, has some of my ideas” (206). What Rushdie reveals can be proved to be true in the narrative in many ways. Aurora’s palimpsestine project for paintings, for one, is also Rushdie’s palimpsestine project for writing. If this narrative is seen as Aurora’s paintings, Moorish Spain is the image that is painted much earlier and hidden underneath the image of India. Only in carefully removing top layers, be it possible or not, could one realize the intricate relations and transformations among those overlapped images.

In addition to the palimpsestine project, Aurora in her career as a painter continually shifts her feats of painting from one style to another. Her ‘Moor in exile’ sequence could be seen as connected with Rushdie’s artistic counterpart in representing the fictional world:

The ‘Moor in exile’ sequence . . . constituted the most important work of Aurora Zogoiby’s later years. In them she abandoned not only the hill-palace and sea-shore motifs of the earlier pictures, but also the notion of ‘pure’ painting itself. Almost every piece contained elements of collage,



and over time these elements became the most dominant features of the series. The unifying narrator/narrated figure of the Moor was usually still present, but was increasingly characterised as jetsam, and located in an environment of broken and discarded objects, many of which were ‘found’ items, pieces of crates or vanaspati tins that were fixed to the surface of the work and painted over. (*MLS* 301)

This explanatory passage is not only to shed light on Aurora’s paintings, but also to elucidate how and why Rushdie makes use of innumerable intertextual references to construct the whole narrative. Rushdie, like a bricoleur, makes do with a multitude of ready-made ideas to reconstruct an epic-like story.

As Moore-Gilbert indicates, “[a]nother way in which postcolonialism can be approached . . . is by way of its relations with other ‘postisms’” (5-6). Rushdie’s post-colonial narrative is, in the mean time, a post-modern bricolage. And also, Rushdie’s bricolage is to playfully mixing up all kinds of sources of popular culture and high art. This kind of admixture, over again, reflects one of Rushdie’s consistent philosophies, that is, masala or hodge-podge. Thus, one of the purposes, for him, is to echo the spirit of multicultural tolerance. Once again, his vision has transgressed the native boundaries of India, for he not only employs Hindu deities to flesh out his narrative, but also uses pop culture and high art from around the world to represent a multicultural and cosmopolitan world in his narrative. Eyal Amiran quotes Rushdie as saying, “we have come unstuck from more than land. We have floated upwards from history, from memory, from time” (287). It further explains why he always frees himself from the limits of time and space in the narrative by means of overlapping Moorish Spain and India and mixing up pop culture and high art.

The idea of palimpsestine project may be derived from Rushdie's knowledge of Rembrandt's oeuvres. One of Rembrandt's self-portraits is overpainted by his pupil as a flamboyantly dressed Russian aristocrat. Later on, the owner of the self-portrait invites a few researchers to carefully and gradually remove the top layer that is added by Rembrandt's pupil. However, the task is not quite successful because the self-portrait cannot be left completely intact, hence a hybrid image that contains the traits of both Rembrandt himself and the Russian aristocrat. Much later, the researchers use X-ray and infra-red photography to remove the top layer, albeit it proves to be unsuccessful.<sup>7</sup> I am deeply convinced that Rushdie's idea of palimpsest must have been inspired by the self-portrait of Rembrandt because there are a few conspicuous similarities between Rushdie's fictional arrangements and Rembrandt's self-portrait. Vasco Miranda's first portrait of Aurora is severely protested by Abraham because he portrays her as a very sexy and comely woman. That hence provokes jealousy in Abraham. Miranda is taken to task for his presumptuous attitudes, so he is forced to cover Aurora's image with his own image disguised as a weeping Arab. Besides, Rushdie may be eager to show his readers that his palimpsesting Moraes over Boabdil, India over Moorish Spain, Bombay over Granada, is all associated with, or rather inspired by the anecdote, so he creates an episode for Moraes to know who kills his mother Aurora. In that episode, Miranda divulges the surprising answer to Moraes by showing him a picture sent by Aurora when she is still alive. She tells Miranda that the person on the picture must be the killer if she is killed someday. Miranda gets the picture X-rayed in order to have the figure appear on the picture. To Moraes's surprise,

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<sup>7</sup> For relevant information, visit the following URL:  
<http://www.shareholder.com/bid/news/20030311-103550.cfm>

the killer is his father Abraham.

Turning the anecdote into a palimpsestine project is not remotely a whimsical and insignificant decision for Rushdie. This may be one little piece of Rushdie's collage narrative, but it gets to be one great move to let him easily incorporate many important issues in the narrative. He uses the idea to characterize Aurora, to assert post-colonial hybridity, to bring forth the problems of nationalism and sectarian violence, and also to accentuate the significance of multiculturalism by superimposing India on Moorish Spain. Throughout the novel, an unnoticed anecdote eventually serves a lot of Rushdie's ends and needs.

Rushdie's collage narrative not only includes pieces of high art like Rembrandt's anecdote, but also adopts and adapts many pieces of pop culture. For example, Epifania often sings out loud the lyrics, "Booby Shafto's gone to sea-ee / Silver bottles on his knee-ee / He'll come back to bury me-ee / Boney Booby Shafto"<sup>8</sup> (*MLS* 11). However, Belle jeers at her by grading her song "[f]our b-minuses" (*MLS* 11). This small episode is delineated in a comical vein, and this piece of Rushdie's collage does not seem to be serious. He seems only to poke fun at Epifania, but the episode also lends itself to his post-colonial bricolage. As a sexagenarian, Epifania looks far more ridiculous when she is singing nursery rhyme. Nevertheless, this episode rings allegorically true as the readers get to know she is an Anglophile. Most of all, when Francisco advocates nationalism and contends that the British must leave, Epifania calls herself the British Empire's child. From this perspective, the nursery

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<sup>8</sup> The original lyrics of the nursery rhyme is as follows:  
 Bobby Shaftoe's gone to sea,  
 Silver buckles at his knee;  
 He'll come back and marry me,  
 Bonny Bobby Shaftoe!

rhyme is more than just an intertextual reference; it is a blurred copy of the British culture, hence mimicry. This case of mimicry is not just a colonial or post-colonial phenomenon, but also a hybrid representation of multicultural interactions in an individual.

Another example is the figure, Lambajan Chandiwala, who has a wooden leg. While the strikes in Bombay are going on, Aurora decides to go down there to sketch what they are like. She drives her car and inadvertently crushes his leg broken. Later on, he becomes one of her servants at Elephanta. His name is an inter-lingual joke. Because of his broken leg, Aurora nicknames him Lone John Silver, but chooses to translate the name into a native language. “Lamba” means “long”, “jan” sounds like “John”, and “chandi” means silver. Also, “wala” means “fellow”. He also has a parrot, as Lone John Silver does in Robert Louis Stevenson’s *Treasure Island*.

Rushdie employs this fictional character to turn the upside down. Under the British raj, the da Gama-Zogoiby family are subordinate to their British rulers. However, in their household Long John Silver, a British literary product, is serving as their servant. Rushdie further allegorizes his broken leg and extends this allegory both to the sacrifices made by the colonized to regain freedom and to the deadend of ultranationalism:

The first point to note is that people’s limbs got detached more easily in those days. The banners of British domination hung over the country like strips of flypaper, and, in trying to unstuck ourselves from those fatal flags, we flies—if I may use the term ‘we’ to refer to a time before my birth—would often leave legs or wings behind, preferring freedom to wholeness. Of course, now that the sticky paper is ancient history, we find

ways of losing our limbs in the struggle against other equally lethal, equally antiquated, equally adhesive standards of our own devising—Enough, enough; away with the soap box! (*MLS* 129).

Every single piece of this collage work dexterously fits in the whole narrative and renders the story much more complicated. Lambajan Chandiwala is first delineated as a comic cartoon figure with a name created through Aurora's mischief. All that seems to be light-hearted and imaginary at first drastically turns out to be solemn and down-to-earth. This is what Rushdie consciously intends the narrative to be. When interviewed by Charlie Rose, Rushdie talks about the verbal dexterity:

I've always tried to find a very fluid language, which can, amongst other things, make very quick transition from comedy to tragedy, from danger to comfort, so that the reader is kept a little off balance as to whether he should laugh or cry. And I feel in this book the language does work well for me. (207)

In fact, the quick transition should be supplemented with yet another literary skill I am discussing in this section, that is, a transition from pop culture to high art, or the other way around. Throughout the narrative a great number of allusions to pop culture and high art go from *Divine Comedy* to superman, from Disney cartoons to Shakespeare, from Hindu deities to the Messiah, from Arabic tales to Spanish epics. All the allusive references converge together in the narrative as if to echo with the multicultural comprehensiveness in a single character, Moraes. Like what Rushdie attests in *The Satanic Verses*, *The Moor's Last Sigh* reifies as well his personal philosophy—"Mélange, hotchpotch, a bit of this and a bit of that is how newness enters the world" (*IM* 394). The "newness" celebrated by Rushdie is multiplicity and

plurality not just in a novel but also in a multicultural world. He makes them visible in the narrative via masala. At the beginning of the book, he engages a variety of images of masala or spice<sup>9</sup> with the narrative whereby to usher in the perplexing and complicated lineage of the da Gama-Zogoiby family. As discussed previously, he also makes other transitions between the private (family) and the public (nation). Taken together, some of Rushdie's literary feats show that he knows what it means to represent a multicultural world of "cultural difference" that Bhabha exalts throughout

*The Location of Culture:*

The borderline engagements of cultural difference may as often be consensual as conflictual; they may confound our definitions of tradition and modernity; realign the customary boundaries between the private and the public; high and low; and challenge normative expectations of development and progress. (*LC* 2)

The borderline here is discussed under the framework of liminal space. And also, the transitions and the acts of crossing the borderline in the novel could be seen as the activities in the liminal space.

Bhabha discusses "cultural difference" under the framework in order to assert that culture is impure and incommensurable. The argument is quite similar to Rushdie's hodge-podge multiculturalism in a series of his works. His hodge-podge multiculturalism, as Joppke and Lukes suppose, "has the advantage of taking culture as it meets the eye: always in flux, impure, and hybrid" (10). Even though he is not a theorist of multiculturalism, his consistent philosophy and aspiration for a

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<sup>9</sup> Rushdie uses a variety of crops and spices to accentuate what Aurora says in the opening chapter—"They came for the hot stuff" (*MLS* 5). A diversity of crops and spices also reinforces Rushdie's hodge-podge multiculturalism. They include cardamom, cashew nuts, cinnamon, ginger, pistachio, clove, karri, fenugreek, jute, capsicum, plantain, areca nuts, cumin, etc.

multicultural society is imparted through a series of his novels, including *The Moor's Last Sigh*. Because he insistently and consistently tints his works with a vein of hodge-podge, *The Moor's Last Sigh* is probably the culmination thus far. Some certain theorists of multiculturalism have worked hodge-podge in their discussion of multicultural analogies.<sup>10</sup> Once again, Rushdie contributes new definitions to multiculturalism by means of the narrative where to devise his unique way of superimposing India on Moorish Spain and a masala-style concoction of pop culture and high art.

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<sup>10</sup> There are a few analogies made between the abstract idea of multiculturalism and tangible things so as to shed more light on the term 'multiculturalism' that remains undefined in some ways to this day. The melting pot is one of those analogies, but it is blamed for its assumption of assimilation, by which Gordon and Newfield denote "the means and ends pursued by immigrants or marginalized citizens who wish to join the existing economic and political mainstream" (80). Another analogy, salad bowl, as Watson sums up, means that "different constituents retain their distinctive flavours and forms but the dish as a whole is recognizably *sui generis*, having its own distinctive character as a result of its unique blending" (4). In effect, 'salad bowl' is similar to 'mosaic'; Joppke and Lukes distinguish between 'mosaic' and Rushdie's personal devisal 'hodge-podge':

[Mosaic means that] [e]ach brings its own ethos, arts, ideas and skills to a community that welcomes and encourages diversity and grows stronger by taking the best from it. They respect each other as mutual partners. 'Hodgepodge' is about the intermingling and fusion of cultures, even within the same individual; 'mosaic' is about the coexistence of distinct cultures held by separate groups. (8)