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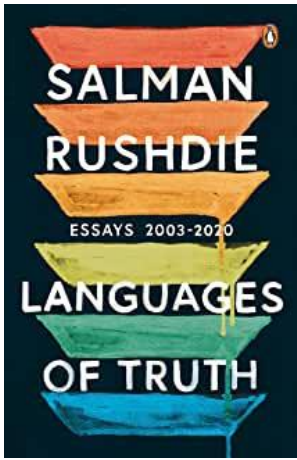
Book Review of Salman Rushdie's *Languages of Truth* by P K Panda

*They say they, speaking of them, to make me
think it is not I who is speaking.*

Samuel Beckett

As a stamp of his style Rushdie sparkles with a kaleidoscopic exuberance in this collection of essays as he did in his *Step*

Across This Line: Collected Essays From 1992 to 2002,



published in 2002. It does not matter what you foreground to make you interested in and what can contribute to your disagreement. The subjects of Salman Rushdie's collection of non-fiction range from *The Wizard of Oz*, U2, India and Indian writing, the death of Princess Diana and football, to twentieth-century writers including Angela Carter, Arthur Miller, Edward Said, J. M. Coetzee and Arundhati Roy.

In a similar orientation and magnitude in this collection the subject matter of his discussion ranges from personal encounters with some great writers Cervantes and Shakespeare and even a painter of Indian Origin, Bhupen Khakhar to the four hundred year old *Hamjanama*, a collection of 1400 painting ordered by Akbar the great and executed by hundreds of artists from India and abroad in a magnum opus. Rushdie's exploration of the theme of frontiers: crossing them, breaking taboos makes this collection similar to that of his previous collection mentioned. For example, he explores the condition of livelihood of a community of eunuchs and transgender in a Mumbai slum to make the civilization give them some space in its thinking if not in their neighborhood in the physical surrounding.

He boisterously mingles material from Eastern fable, Hindu myth, Islamic lore, Bombay cinema, cartoon strips, advertising billboards, and Latin American magic realism. And gives almost a verdict like a judge if such material (along with other

authors of the past) as he has produced in this book as a matter of 'revisiting' gives a headache to the readers: " A headache after reading would not...be an inappropriate response, though it should be added in fairness that there are headaches that feel worthwhile..." (p. 113). His mind hovers across the world of literature from Beckett (p.113) to Tagore (p.233) without any insufferable injunctions for the readers to amend in their perceiving the ideas he wishes to throw mercilessly for consumption without any compunction.

One overwhelmingly problematic area in the books of nonfiction by Rushdie most of the reviewers do not notice is the number of books he alludes to directly or indirectly. Implying invariably though, that he has gone through them. This is incredible for scholars who know what it takes to read through such a diverse and numerous publications and take note of the points in any form to make use of them without paying an internet game of sorts.

It can be possible to think for a writer like him alone to note that the title pages of the three greatest novels of the 18th century, written almost two hundred and fifty years ago — *Robinson Crusoe*, *Gulliver's Travels* and *Tristram Shandy* have no mention of the names of their authors. And in the same vein, he compels the readers to think, one needs to know, in a shock, how many women lost their lives in the ancient story of *One Thousand and one Nights*, which is so popular down the ages and what it signifies now. As a warning I can say, you can read Rushdie's arguments with much interest and little agreement.

One can call it a Rushdie's treatise about everything in general and nothing in particular given the range and orientation of the essays. This can be proved by his exhortation in Emory University commencement address compiled in this volume: "We are language animals. We are dreaming creatures. Dream. Speak. Reinvent the world (p.282). In almost all the essays, he recounts anecdotes emotionally charged which has an intellectually reconditioning experience for the readers. One can read these following sentences to have a feel of such a reading experience. "I was denied by circumstance the right to stand beside my mother's grave. Consequently, I still felt immortal, and immortals deal differently with the subject of mortality, knowing themselves to be immune from strange incurable affliction" (p.113).

This volume of Rushdie needs a special mention to be noted by the literature students and teachers in the academy. He makes a blatant statement: "If you are not a writer, don't worry: this book won't teach you how to be one. If you are a writer, I suspect it will teach you a lot." But I feel the word 'suspect' in this statement is a spoil sport. It is difficult to agree with him in this count. At best one feels like an "incompetent puppeteer." At best one can surmise that this book is endowed with insights into a writer at work and the recurring trials he or she has to stay put till he finds their proverbial wings of fame to soar higher. It can also, from a different orientation, be considered as a treatise on story, storytelling and storytellers as we had in Somerset Maugham's *The Summing Up*.

Penguin has done its part in adding yet another title to its armory of publications of nonfiction by a giant who chronicles

subjective; his being infected with Covid (p.348) and objective narrative even in his essays with the same exquisite fervor that binds the reader to race through the pages and devour it. His effusive and melodramatic prose style makes it possible for the reader to ride the waves sometime in surprise and in others in shock.

Prof. Prasanta Kumar Panda

Prof. Prasanta Kumar Panda is a faculty of Indian Institute of Technology (BHU), Varanasi, since 2002. He has the distinction of publishing specialised papers in diverse areas of Professional Communication, Emotional intelligence, Technical Writing, Literary Theory and Creative Writing.

He is an honorary Editor-in-Chief of ***Nuances: A journal of Humanistic Enquiry*** (ISSN-2395-0943). His name figures in the advisory board of ***Platform***. A Bi-Lingual Magazine Based on Literature and Culture (ISSN- 2347-5242), ***Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Sciences*** (ISSN -2394-0123) and in the editorial board of ***IOSR Journals of Humanities and Social Sciences*** (International Organization of Scientific Research) e-ISSN-2279-0837, p-ISSN-2279-0845.

He writes poems in English and has two volumes titled: *Confused Confessions* and *A Blueprint of Retrospections*. His poems have appeared in different journals in India and abroad and half a dozen are translated into other Indian languages. He was a participant poet in 39th World Congress of Poets in 2019. He is honoured with an award 'Sahityashree' at the 12th International Festival of Writers, Indore (Oct. 2018).

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