



Salman Rushdie's View On Religion

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Abstract

Salman Rushdie, an acclaimed British Indian author, has consistently expressed complex views on religion, often reflecting his own secular humanist beliefs. Rushdie's perspectives are deeply influenced by his multicultural background and personal experiences, including the infamous fatwa issued against him following the publication of his novel "The Satanic Verses."

Rushdie critiques religious fundamentalism and dogma, arguing that they can impede intellectual freedom and personal liberty. He often highlights the dangers of conflating faith with politics, suggesting that such intersections can lead to authoritarianism and violence. Rushdie advocates for a clear separation between religion and state, emphasizing the importance of secularism in protecting individual rights and fostering a pluralistic society.

In essence, Salman Rushdie's view on religion is characterized by a staunch defense of free expression and secularism, coupled with a recognition of the profound impact of religious traditions on human culture and individual lives. He urges for a more open and tolerant approach to religious differences, advocating for dialogue and mutual respect in a globalized world.

Keywords Faith, Dogma, Pluralism, Religious Freedom, Truth, Doubt

Introduction

Salman Rushdie, one of the most significant literary figures of the late 20th and early 21st centuries, has had a career marked by remarkable achievements and profound controversies. He is the author of fifteen novels, including *Midnight's Children* (which he won Booker Prize and Best of the Booker), *Shame*, *Satanic Verses*, *The Moor's Last Sigh*, and *Quichotte*, all of which were shortlisted for the Booker Prize, a collection of stories, *East, West*; a memoir, *Joseph Anton*; a work of reportage, *The Jaguar Smile*, and three collections of essays, most recently *Language of Truth*. His many awards included Whitebread Prize for Best Novel, which he won twice; the Pen/Allen Foundation Literary Service Award; the National Arts Award, the French Prix du Meilleur Livre Etranger, the European Union's Aristeion Prize for Literature, and the Italian Premio Grinzane Cavour. He is a member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters, a fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, distinguished Writer in Residence at New York University, and a former president of PEN America. His books have been translated into over forty languages.

His View on Religion

Salman Rushdie, one of the most influential writers of our time, is known for his richly imaginative storytelling and fearless exploration of controversial themes. Among these, his views on religion stand out due to the profound impact they have had on his life and career. Rushdie's family was not particularly religious, embracing a more secular and liberal outlook on life. This upbringing allowed young Salman to explore various cultural and intellectual avenues without the constraints of strict religious orthodoxy.

Rushdie came from a liberal Muslim family, but he is an atheist. In a 2006 interview with PBS (public broadcasting service), Rushdie called himself a "hardline atheist".

In 1989, in an interview following the fatwa, Rushdie said that he was in a sense a lapsed Muslim, though "shaped by Muslim culture more than any other," and a student of Islam. In another interview the same year, he said, "My point of view is that of a secular human being. I do not believe in supernatural entities, whether Christian, Jewish, Muslim or Hindu."

In December 1990, Rushdie issued a statement reaffirming his Muslim faith, distancing himself from statements made by characters in *Satanic Verses* that cast aspersion on Islam or Prophet Mohammad, and opposing the release of the paperback edition of the novel. Later, in 1992, he cited the release of the statement as perhaps his lowest point, regretting its language, which he said he had not written.

Rushdie advocates the application of higher criticism, pioneered during the late 19th century. In a guest opinion piece printed in *The Washington Post* and *The Times* in mid-August 2005, Rushdie called for a reform in Islam.

What is needed is a move beyond tradition, nothing less than a reform movement to bring the core concepts of Islam into the modern age, a Muslim Reformation to combat not only the jihadist ideologues but also the dusty, stifling

seminaries of the traditionalists, throwing open the windows to let in much-needed fresh air. ... It is high time, for starters, that Muslims were able to study the revelation of their religion as an event inside history, not supernaturally above it. ... Broad-mindedness is related to tolerance; open-mindedness is the sibling of peace.

Rushdie is a critic of moral and cultural relativism. In an interview with Point of Inquiry in 2006, he described his view as follows:

“We need all of us, whatever our background, to constantly examine the stories inside which and with which we live. We all live in stories, so called grand narratives. Nation is a story. Family is a story. Religion is a story. Community is a story. We all live within and with these narratives. And it seems to me that a definition of any living vibrant society is that you constantly question those stories. That you constantly argue about the stories. In fact the arguing never stops. The argument itself is freedom. It's not that you come to a conclusion about it. And through that argument you change your mind sometimes.... And that's how societies grow. When you can't retell for yourself the stories of your life then you live in a prison.... Somebody else controls the story.... Now it seems to me that we have to say that a problem in contemporary Islam is the inability to re-examine the ground narrative of the religion.... The fact that in Islam it is very difficult to do this, makes it difficult to think new thoughts”.

Rushdie is an advocate of religious satire. He condemned the Charlie Hebdo shooting and defended comedic criticism of religions in a comment originally posted on English PEN where he called religions a medieval form of unreason. Rushdie called the attack a consequence of "religious totalitarianism", which according to him had caused "a deadly mutation in the heart of Islam". He said: “Religion, a medieval form of unreason, when combined with modern weaponry becomes a real threat to our freedoms. This religious totalitarianism has caused a deadly mutation in the heart of Islam, and we see the tragic consequences in Paris today. I stand with Charlie Hebdo, as we all must, to defend the art of satire, which has always been a force for liberty and against tyranny, dishonesty and stupidity. 'Respect for religion' has become a code phrase meaning 'fear of religion.' Religions, like all other ideas, deserve criticism, satire, and, yes, our fearless disrespect”.

When asked about reading and writing as a human right, Rushdie states: "...there are the larger stories, the grand narratives that we live in, which are things like nation, and family, and clan, and so on. Those stories are treated reverentially. They need to be part of the way in which we conduct the discourse of our lives and to prevent people from doing something very damaging to human nature." Though Rushdie believes the freedoms of literature to be universal, the bulk of his fictions portrays the struggles of the marginally underrepresented. This can be seen in his portrayal of the role of women in his novel Shame. In this novel, Rushdie, "suggests that it is women who suffer most from the injustices of the Pakistani social order." His support of feminism can also be seen in a 2015 interview with New York magazine's The Cut.

Throughout his career, Rushdie has been an outspoken critic of religious dogma and fundamentalism. He has argued that rigid adherence to religious doctrines can stifle creativity, critical thinking, and individual freedom. In interviews and essays, Rushdie has often emphasized the need for a more open and questionable approach to religious beliefs. Rushdie is a strong advocate for secularism—the separation of religion from politics and public life. He believes that secularism is essential for protecting individual freedoms and ensuring that diverse religious and philosophical views can coexist peacefully. Rushdie's support for secularism is evident in his writings and public statements, where he often calls for a more inclusive and tolerant society. While critical of religious fundamentalism, Rushdie has also expressed support for efforts to reform and modernize religious traditions. He recognizes the importance of religious beliefs for many people and acknowledges that faith can be a source of comfort and inspiration. However, Rushdie advocates for interpretations of religious texts that are compatible with modern values of human rights, equality, and freedom. Despite the controversies and threats, Rushdie has continued to engage with religious themes in his writing. His works often explore the complex relationships between faith, doubt, and identity, reflecting his nuanced understanding of religion's role in human life. Through his characters and narratives, Rushdie invites readers to consider the multifaceted nature of religious belief and its impact on individuals and societies.

Rushdie asks always two great questions on religion

- a) Where did we come from?
- b) Now we are here, how shall we live?

According to Rushdie “all religions are giving answer to the first question through beautiful stories, genesis is beautiful story and in Hinduism shiva creating world is beautiful story... these are beautiful stories but not truth”.

Rushdie explains that religious teaching is always against happiness and pleasure, it is just like militarization of religion. Children needs help of elders to correct them instead of elder, world created God, when we remove god from world then only real human possibilities will arrive.

During a section in Emory University Rushdie said that he is more interested in polytheism than monotheism because in polytheism there are different and beautiful stories....

After attack on 12 august 2022, in his latest book “Knife” he mentions about the message that he received from people, he says that “many people prayed for me, even though they knew I was a godless bastard”. Then again he speaks about miracles in the same book “I also want to think about miracles and irruption of miraculous into the life of someone who didn’t believe that miraculous existed, he said”.

After the attack Rushdie shares about the moment that: “I have never belived in the immortality of soul and my experience at Chautauqua confirmed that”. His thoughts were not about soul, hell or heaven but about his loved one.

Conclusion

As an author he is still atheist in his thinking and writing, but his thoughts have some different after the attack that we can experience in his book “knife”. He thought about miracles, and he expressed it in the book, at the same time his experience after attack he says that there is no immortality of the soul because his thoughts were not about soul or after life but about his dear ones. His belief in relationship with humans has increased, that is why he expressed that he experienced both the worst and goodness of human beings while he attacked. There was one person tried to kill him and many people came to save him who were strangers to him...

Every Religion in its essence teaches to love the others, same teaching said by Salman Rushdie through his experience to love everyone as human.

Bibliography

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