



e-ISSN: 2319-8753 | p-ISSN: 2347-6710

IJIRSET

International Journal of Innovative Research in
SCIENCE | ENGINEERING | TECHNOLOGY

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF INNOVATIVE RESEARCH

IN SCIENCE | ENGINEERING | TECHNOLOGY

Volume 10, Issue 1, January 2021

ISSN INTERNATIONAL
STANDARD
SERIAL
NUMBER
INDIA

Impact Factor: 7.512

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Salman Rushdie's The Golden House; A Post-Modern Reflection of the Fragmented Identity

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ABSTRACT: This paper delves on how the novel by Salman Rushdie, *The Golden House* brings on the problem of identity crisis to the fore. The central characters struggle with their new identity and falter in their new roles. Underneath all their struggles there is an underling yearning for the search for their roots; a hope for revisiting the past; a wish to undo and rectify a bygone mistake. The author brings out all the predicaments in a fragmented way of Post-modern narration, ranging from Greek mythology, continental backdrop to the changing political set-up.

KEY WORDS: identity, immigrant, jumpstart, gender, agoraphobia, Vespaian

I. INTRODUCTION

The *Golden House* written by Salman Rushdie, is a commentary on the Socio-political scenario of two countries, i.e., America and India at large. In the novel, *The Golden House*, Salman Rushdie deals with the fate of an incognito family hailing from Mumbai, trying to feel its feet in New York, with the backdrop of America's altering political setting. The main character is Nero Golden and his children Petya, Apu, and D form the Golden family in the novel, and their encounter with events in New York City and in Mumbai, India, which is seen with the eyes of their neighbour, René who wants to document their rise. The book begins with the win of Barrack Obama and the next eight years, on the eve of another election in which the lead contender refers to himself as "the Joker". Obama's America is a different land to the one, with the Golden's story end, the onset of Joker era. There is a sense of hope at the beginning of the novel, across the nation and within the Golden household as elderly Nero and his sons settle into their new home in Greenwich Village. Each of the Golden children carries a substantial and largely silent burden on their back. The Golden's arrive with a hazy past, having fled an unknown city – later revealed to be Bombay/Mumbai – as well as an unknown threat, bent on beating the destiny, but unable to do so. At the centre of each character's predicament resides the question of identity. Here Rushdie puts his finger on the existential crisis of our times and wades through the uncertain winds. The Golden's are immigrants, refugees of a dubious past, who have abandoned their ties to their native land and chosen new names for themselves, looking for a jumpstart in a land of opportunities. The eldest son, newly named Petronius, is known as Petya; Lucius Apuleius becomes Apu; and Dionysus is D. Father becomes Nero, ill-fated emperor of Rome.

Petya is the oldest, an alcoholic who is brainy yet suffers from anxiety that prevents him from leaving the safety of the house. The second oldest, Apu Apu, Nero's middle son, a handsome, successful artist, suffers the hollow loss of the exile, and longs to return to the land of his birth. D the third son mulls over with his gender identity, can not decide over it. René, the neighbor and the narrator takes a keen interest about the Golden family, decides to make a movie about their new found American lifestyle.

René observes the Golden children grow even more profound and grave. Petya and Apu both romance a lady named Ubah which creates a rift between them. D takes a liking for Riya and worries about how the uncertain gender identity would influence that relationship. Nero, who looks for a heir, finds love in Vasilisa Arsenyeva, a Russian expatriate, eyeing on Nero's wealth

Once Nero and Vasilisa are married, D becomes more conscious about his gender and decides to go with the natural flow. Owing to the death of René's parents in a car accident, René comes to live in the Golden House. He begins, with the help of his new girlfriend, Suchitra, to seek meaning of life, in an otherwise meaningless trajectory. Meanwhile, Vasilisa has trouble conceiving a child with the aged Nero. Vasilisa who has a plan for a heir which would ensure the inheritance of Nero's fortunes, secretly seduces René. She gets him to father her child, that will be seen as Nero's. René, reluctantly, agrees, unwontedly breeches the code of trust, that of Nero and his girl friend, Suchitra.

Petya, once he learns from the shocker that Apu and Ubah slept together breaks away from his Achilles heel, agoraphobia. He vows revenge on Apu. But Apu decides to move back to Mumbai to visit his childhood home. But the trip proves to be his nemesis. Apu is killed in Mumbai. Apparently his father Nero who had a bad past, having underworld connection, owed something to the goons. His father's bloody past consumes Apu's life. Vasilias announces she is pregnant, which makes Nero is happy, though he would not be able to fathom that Rene's is the real father of that baby. D's journey of self awareness continues. She transitions to living as a woman full time, but the trauma of her experience, her past, and the family predicament is too much to bear. Unable to come to terms with her reality, D commits suicide.

Vasilias names her son, Vespasian. René feels deceived by Vasilias. He laments over his guilt, of Vasilias's scheming, of his shortcomings, and of the anguish over the baby's name Vespasian. Nero grieves the death of Apu and D. He reveals his past as a member of the underworld and his role in the death of his first wife; this led, years later, to Apu's death, and now Nero brings the blame on himself for the twin deaths in his family. Distracted by Nero's confession, René admits having slept with Vasilias and the likely fathering of baby, Vespasian. Upon learning this, Suchitra leaves him. René cannot forgo the affinity of Suchitra, and repents over his mistake. He realizes his true feelings for her, sets out to get her back and succeeds in it. Catastrophically, the Golden House, catches fire and burns down, ending the lives of Nero and Vasilias. The baby survives, and René and Suchitra pledge to look after him.

At the heart of all vicissitudes and whims of the characters a painful vanity could be observed and Rushdie seems to showcase the problematic lives of the refugees, haunted by their futile travel away from the roots, and to seek shallow shelter in a bubble which is alluring yet unreal.

Plurality and the quest of identity form the crust of The Golden House. the backdrop of Obama rule to that of Trump, the American politics shift from solidity to mahem. the lives of the members of the Golden family is too altered Nero seeks redemption with a new wife. The elder son comes out of his flaw to witness this reality too strong to take in. Apu goes in search of solace but pays the price dearly for his father's troubled past. D representing the central dilemma of the novel, too is bedazzled by the glare of expectation and is consumed by his inability to prove his mettle. Nero who tries maverickally to create a meta-world and to set things right, subsequently failing in realizing his ambition. Vasilias is truncated by fire. Only Rene and the baby, herald a new sunrise. It is indeed a post-modern novel, where multiple voices, heterogeneous references, multifarious spheres collide each other to create a hubris, only to increase the density of information which bombard the reader's mind with innumerable allusions until identifying each of them becomes a gargantuan task. Just like the characters in this novels transform themselves and move towards the other extreme, the surviving truth, if it could be termed so, is the only transcending reality changing itself with every turn of the event. Yet Rushdie ends the novel with a sense of hope with the baby the Rene couple. Thus The Golden House is all about the pursuit of identity.

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**Impact Factor:
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