

## MEMORY-NARRATION NEXUS: AN ANALYSIS OF NARRATION IN SALMAN RUSHDIE'S QUICHOTTE

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### Abstract

Salman Rushdie's fourteenth novel *Quichotte* is inspired by Miguel de Cervantes' *Don Quixote*. The novel narrates the encounters of its protagonist *Quichotte* during his quest to win the heart of his lover, R. Salma. The narration of the novel, like many other Rushdie's works, interlinks individual memory and collective memory. This research paper aims to analyse the role of memory in the novel *Quichotte*, by applying concepts of memory studies. Memory studies is an academic discipline that studies the nature and role of memory in narrating literature. Memory undergoes the process of encoding, storage and retrieval. The research paper focuses on the exploration of how memories of individuals, culture and social media are often evoked, created, erased, deliberately forgotten, lost, destroyed, broken, returned and reconstructed. The research paper examines the interplay of different types of memory.

**Keywords:** Memory, Memory studies, Individual memory, Collective memory

Memory in literature deals with the past of the literary characters formed by historical, social and political events."Memory is employed in three distinct fashions, which often exist concurrently in a text: first, to establish the validity and importance of a text based on the expertise and reputation of past writers; second, as a means of instilling a feeling of nostalgia in a text; and third, and most universally, as a method of constructing individual and cultural identity." Memory studies in the literature is an interdisciplinary field that is used to analyse the role and nature of memory in narrating events.

While narrating a story, memory plays a key role. At times, the story narrated from memory would not be authentic. It will be filled with some essence of imagination. In the novel *Quichotte*, there is a story within a story. Sam du Champ narrates the story from memory and so the authenticity of this story is a question. In Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, Saleem Sinai, the narrator, modifies history as he could not bring out the events from memory with accuracy. Memory plays a crucial role in the lives of human beings. Memories begin to fade away as time flees. They disappear completely with death. In the time between birth and death, memories can be evoked, created, erased, deliberately forgotten, lost, destroyed, broken, returned and reconstructed."What vanishes when everything vanishes: not only everything, but the memory of everything. "If memories are damaged, a gap or hiatus is formed. These gaps are filled with memories which are being created. There is a chance that they are mere assumptions. At times, false memories are created according to our desires and convenience. In *Quichotte*, the protagonist *Quichotte* is obsessed with watching television shows. So when Interior Event damages her memory of *Quichotte*, he starts creating false memories with what he has seen on television to fill in the gap in his memory.

Sometimes, the memories in my mind would be presented in fragments. It would be a strenuous task to recall them chronologically. Some memories hurt to the core and they leave behind deep gashes. *Quichotte* does not have a fruitful personal life. He does not have a happy family. He has no good relationship with his sister. His love stories are not successful. If he had got a faithful lover, he would have become a father now. He always desires to have a son. All these memories leave deep gashes on *Quichotte*. When memories haunt and distract people tend to erase them. Salma is haunted by the memory of her grandfather. When Salma was a young girl, she was harassed by her grandfather. She is affected by that incident and carries this memory with her. She is reminded of his grandfather when she assumes from the handwriting that the love letter for her is from an old man. The memory of her grandfather haunts her like anything that she wants to erase the memory. So she becomes a drug addict.

People try hard to deliberately forget the regretful past to move on in life. They try to



have control over their memories. Quichotte wants to get rid of the memories of his personal love affairs. So he has deliberately forgotten all the consequences of his lost love. He says, "What had happened had happened- or, he was almost sure it had happened and it was right to bury them deeper than the deepest memory, to place their stories in the funeral pyres of hopes, to seal them up in the pyramid of his regret; to forget, to forget, to forget."

Similarly, the sister of Sam Du Champ prevented her brother from entering her memories. Quichotte does not remember his past related to his sister. It is difficult for him to react suitably to the past in the present when memories are lost. Quichotte says, "It is hard for me to ask for forgiveness for actions I don't fully recall."

Salman Rushdie has always engaged with contemporary politics and debates in his fiction, often in the form of caustic satire, and his latest work *Quichotte* is no exception. *Quichotte* is a postmodern rendering of Miguel de Cervantes' picaresque novel *Don Quixote* written in the 16th century. The eponymous protagonist Quichotte is a travelling pharmaceutical salesman of Indian origin, working in America. His name is Ismail Smile, but he adopts the name Quichotte from the French opera *Don Quichotte* by Jules Massenet. He sets out on a chivalric quest to win the heart of a famous TV star, Miss Salma R, the femme fatale who is also of Indian origin like him. Quichotte brings his son Sancho into existence through his imagination, and together they travel across America. The characters of Miss Salma R and Sancho correspond to Don Quixote's Dulcinea and Sancho Panza. Rushdie introduces a metafictional story within the story in the form of Sam Duchamp (mostly referred to as 'Brother' in the novel), a spy thriller novelist, who is actually writing the story on Quichotte. The parallel life story of this author, who is also from Bombay like Quichotte, intersects with that of his fictive creation, as they both attempt to salvage the strained relationships with their sisters. Besides the topical concerns of contemporary issues, Rushdie exposes the post-truth condition where the moorings of reality have been lost. In *Imaginary Homelands*, Rushdie stated that "Facts are hard to establish, and capable of being given many meanings. Reality is built on prejudices, misconceptions and ignorance as well as on our perceptiveness and knowledge." (2010, p.25) This seems to be an almost perfect diagnosis of the current post-truth situation which he terms as the "Age-of-Anything-Can Happen".

Maggie Ann Bowers notes that "Rushdie's novels provide commentary on the dangers and pitfalls of contemporary cultural politics and attitudes." (2013, p.90) Rushdie presents an intricate tapestry of characters whose lives are interlaced with each other and who act as mouthpieces evoking the concerns and afflictions of the contemporary world. Rushdie also alludes to a vast array of characters and works of art drawn from both 'high' and 'low' culture. This postmodern pastiche makes heavy use of irony and sarcasm to critique the loss of depth to the mere surfaces, a predominant characteristic of contemporary culture as Sister laments: "But now discontinuity ruled. Yesterday meant nothing and could not help you build tomorrow. Life had become a series of vanishing photographs, posted every day, gone the next. One had no story anymore. Character, narrative, history, were all dead. Only the flat caricature of the instant remained, and that was what one was judged by. To have lived long enough to witness the replacement of the depth of her chosen world's culture by its surfaces was a sad thing." (Rushdie, 2018, p.236)

Salman Rushdie makes use of disorders related to memory in this novel. Quichotte's damaged memory makes him create false memories. Salma has bipolar disorder and the treatment for this disorder would cause memory loss. Memory being damaged or lost can be regarded as a way to escape from reality. Both Quichotte and Salma are not satisfied with their lives and yearn for an imaginary world. Garde Hansen describes media as "the first draft of history", recording events as they happen, negotiating history and memory. But Salman Rushdie claims that social media has no memory. The sister of Sam du Champ is falsely accused of racism. There are many allegations against her. She faces such an embarrassing situation. She receives hate mail and treats. She is the burning sensation of social media. Later she is set free by law but by that time social media has no memory of her. But the media is now busy with new sensational news. Salman Rushdie also talks of how culture is gradually changing. The memories are created based on the culture. But culture is dynamic. So as culture changes, memories change. The past is always susceptible to being forgotten. "Even then, half a century ago, the culture was already beginning to be a thing without memory, lobotomized, with no sense of history. The past was for dead



people.”

People often collect objects that are connected with their memorable people or events. Memorabilia becomes close to the heart. They remind us of the events concerning this object, now and then. They keep our memories fresh. Quichotte says, “I own thirteen objects which open the doors of memory. Some family photographs, a ‘Cheeta Brand’ matches, a stone head from Gandhara, a hoopoe bird”. Some words can be connected with memories of the past. When Quichotte teaches new words to his son Sancho, his old memories are evoked. A writer brings about autobiographical elements in his work intentionally or unintentionally because the personal memories are still fresh in his subconscious mind. Salman Rushdie was born in Bombay and his protagonist, Quichotte is also born in Bombay. Rushdie’s marriage life is not successful and Quichotte is shown as an unmarried man who has met with several love failures. He brings out the historical events, culture and tradition of his own country while narrating the events.

The paper attempts to trace the role and nature of memory in the main character of the novel, Quichotte. Memory acts as a driving force in our lives. Memories stored in our subconscious mind are either short-term memories or long-term memories. Happy, sad, haunting and distracting memories fill our minds. Any sort of memory can be evoked, created, erased, deliberately forgotten, lost, destroyed, broken, returned and reconstructed. Kirkus Reviews comments on the novel Quichotteas “A meditation on storytelling, memory, truth, and other hallmarks of a disappearing civilization....”

#### Works Cited

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