

Food, Identity and Ethnicity in Salman Rushdie's *Grimus*

L. Raja, Ph.D. Scholar and Dr. K. Sindhu, Assistant Professor

=====

The novel opens with Virgil Jones, a man devoid of friends who lives a lonely life. While sitting on a small beach away from the Mediterranean Sea, he sees a body floating in the sea and brings that body ashore in a state of unconsciousness. He and Dolores O Toole find the person as Flapping Eagle, the protagonist of the novel. The rescue of Flapping Eagle shows Jones fellow feeling and concern for a person in distress. Eagle formerly known as Joe-Sue, narrates his past before Jones and O Toole. Joe-Sue and his sister were Axon Amerindian orphans, who were determined to lead a free life. Because they were detached from their tribe “for three reason: First his confused sex, second the circumstances of his birth and third his pigmentation” (G - 18).

Joe- Sue was rejected by the society because he was a hermaphrodite born from a dead-women. The people of Axona are a dark skinned race and short height. Whereas Joe was fair -skinned and tallish. This interprets how people of confused sex are treated by the society. The orphans are also regarded as bad omen in the society. Both brother and sister called themselves as Flapping Eagle and Bird- Dog, respectively as a mark of their emancipation.

Bird-Dog was sitting on a mass of rock, a grown-women of thirty-four years, three months and four days in wearing old clothes, her hair falling blackly over the olive face. She has two small bottles. The one in her right hand was full of bright yellow liquid. The one in her left hand was full of bright blue liquid. Color was brought up everywhere, except in her skin. She felt a cloud pass across the sun.

Bird - Dog comes across one Mr. Sispy, a peddler, who gave her two bottles - one carrying yellow - liquid and the other blue - liquid. On swallowing the yellow elixir, one becomes immortal and swallowing the blue elixir one meets with one's death perpetually. It exhibits human desire to live longer. Bird - Dog consumes the yellow elixir and elopes with Sispy in order to remains as his captive servant. Before her departure, Joe - Sue has a clash with a bird on the Stone-Rose and is named as Flapping Eagle by his sister.

Flapping Eagle and Bird -Dog consume the yellow elixir to remain immortal to find out his lost sister. His quest for his sister brought him to the Calf Island. His quest made him aware of the presence of several levels of existence. At the bottom, there is an ordinary world where Joe - Sue and other

Axonians have their origin. However, a number of inhabitants are shifted to Calf Island after drinking the elixir of life and becoming immortal. The elixir of life comes from the third world the world of gorfs. The gorfs are stones and thus do not really have life. They are the most sensible forms of life in their galaxy who neither need food nor atmosphere. It is with the help of gorfs that *Grimus* gets possession of the elixir of life. *Grimus* thus has created Calf Island a place where both East and West confront each other. Moreover, Virgil Jones describes *Grimus* as Middle European a refugee on doubt. Thus, he resembles Flapping Eagle who is an exiled representative of the civilization of the Native American tribe. Eagle is an exile inside an alien culture who is also unable to find his own cultural roots and identity and at the same time inept of adapting himself to the norms and values of Western culture.

Grimus belongs to the team of men who find the Stone Rose and the elixir of life. Deggle and Virgil Jones are the other two persons who help him in getting the possession of Stone Rose. *Grimus* cleverly dominates and throws out Virgil Jones ejects Nicholas Deggle and becomes the chief exploiter of the Stone Rose. *Grimus* has created Calf Island as a place for the immortals. The island is an embodiment of Paradise. It is green and fertile which gives joy and happiness to its inhabitants. In the beginning, it acts as a utopia for the men living in it. However, the utopia proves to be untrue and everything goes wrong after just a couple of months.

Some people commit suicide and others turn against *Grimus*. The pictures of life in K function as a parody of social, religious and political utopias. Although “K is a town of obsession, the town was full of reprobates and degraded types, Selfish decadent people that no decent woman would want to be near” (G, 41). Flapping Eagle, the protagonist, has sexual relationship with many women in the novel. Even incest between brother and sister has been expressed by the author. These are the situations which delineate the immoral activities in the present society. The domination of *Grimus* over the Gorfs is vividly presented, hence Stone Rose displays his political power and exploitation. *Grimus* stands for Western Super power in the novel.

The novel also highlights the problems of the migrants who seek their own identity in alien lands through the quest of Eagle. Undoubtedly the author expresses his own plights through the character of the Eagle. The quest of the protagonist resulting in the ascent of Mount Kaf not only means the emigrant’s gradual ascent on the social status in the metropolis. The theme of migration and transformation of character which especially we find in the character of Flapping Eagle, expresses authors attempt for cultural fusion and pluralism. However, the process leads to dislocation of root and culture.

=====

References

1. Salman, Rushdie “*Grimus*” published in Great Britain in 1975 by Victor Gollancz Vintage Random House, 20 Vauxhall Bridge Road, London.
2. M. Syed. “Warped Mythologies: Salman Rushdie’s *Grimus*”. *Ariel*.vol.25, No. 4, Oct 1994, p.136.
3. Swain, Baijayanti. *Critical Analysis of Salman Rushdie’s Novels* published in India 2016 by Dattsons, Jawaharlal Nehru Marg Sadar, Nagpur.

=====

L. Raja, Ph.D. Scholar

Department of English

Periyar University, Salem-11

rajateach007@gmail.com

Dr. K. Sindhu

Assistant Professor

Department of English

Periyar University, Salem-11

=====

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 19:1 January 2019

Editors: Dr. V. Sangeetha, Dr. B. J. Geetha, Dr. K. Sindhu, Dr. S. Boopathi and Ms. S. Sneha Sri

Food in Literature: Papers Presented in National Seminar on Food in Literature, 2019

L. Raja, Ph.D. Scholar and Dr. K. Sindhu, Assistant Professor

Food, Identity and Ethnicity in Salman Rushdie’s *Grimus*