

## Review

# A Study of the Usage of Proverbs as a Literary Device in Salman Rushdie's Selected novels

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Accepted 30 October 2015

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Language is an artist's tool. Salman Rushdie uses language to describe his character's appearances, actions, inner feelings and thoughts. It is appropriate to say firmly that style of writing determines the genuineness and suitability of any literary works. It has also been perceived that effective employment of language in writing determines the expertise of the writers. Salman Rushdie uses proverbs as a tool to convey his intended meanings. The aim of the paper is to evaluate some famous proverbs used in the selected literary texts.

**Key words:** Proverbs, writing, meanings, language, stylistics, Salman Rushdie

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**Cite This Article As:** Devi D (2015). A Study of the Usage of Proverbs as a Literary Device in Salman Rushdie's Selected novels. *Inter. J. Eng. Lit. Cult.* 3(10): 266-268

## INTRODUCTION

Proverbs according to Akporobaro, F.B.O. (2008) is a small adage usually in the form of a moral advice or truth expressed in an aphoristic manner. He goes further to describe it as a means by which ideas could be clearly expressed and explained. Yisa, K.Y. (1998) pronounces that proverb is a short repeated witty statement of experience which is used to further a social end. *Longman Dictionary of contemporary English* (2008) outlines proverb as short well-known statement that carries a truth. The renowned English linguist David Crystal comments on the nature of the proverbs:

The effectiveness of a proverb lies largely in its brevity and directness. The syntax is simple, the images vivid, and thus easy to understand. Memorability is aided through the use of

alliteration, rhyme, and rhythm. (1995:184)

Proverbs could be described as short, popular witty sayings with words of advice or warning. Proverbs could also be viewed as a source of inherent intelligent, code of moral laws and philosophy of both life and social justice.

The paper attempts to identify proverbs in the selected novels used by Salman Rushdie. Proverbs can be identified on the semantic plane, although in this case their manifestation is impossible to determine in objective terms. The paper shows the multifaceted nature of proverbs and how the proverbs are organized by the author. The aim of the paper is to distribute proverbs by Salman Rushdie in four of his novels viz. *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*, *The Moor's Last Sigh*, *Luka and the Fire of Life* and *Joseph Anton: A Memoir*.

The paper focuses exclusively on semantics conveyed by proverbs and the functions which they perform. The following list shows the proverbs selected for the present study from the four of Rushdie's novels under analysis in their recognized forms. The data in the parentheses refers the novels in which the proverbs occur and the relevant pages. The total number of proverbs used below is thirty.

1. A barking dog never bites. (*The Moor's Last Sigh*, p. 58)
2. A drowning man will catch at a straw. (*The Moor's Last Sigh*, p. 213)
3. A house divided against itself cannot stand. (*The Moor's Last Sigh*, p. 1, 34, 49)
4. A word to the wise is enough. (*The Moor's Last Sigh*, p.179)
5. Actions speak louder than words. (*Haroun and the Sea of Stories*, p. 125)
6. An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth. (*The Moor's Last Sigh*, p. 113)
7. Beggars cannot be choosers. (*The Moor's Last Sigh*, p. 302)
8. Big/great oaks from little acorns grow. (*The Moor's Last Sigh*, p.68)
9. Blood is thicker than water. (*The Moor's Last Sigh*, p. 249, 337)
10. Blood will have blood. (*The Moor's Last Sigh*, p. 362)
11. Curses, like chickens, come home to roost. (*The Moor's Last Sigh*, p. 73, 419)
12. Divide and rule. (*The Moor's Last Sigh*, p. 87)
13. Live and let live. (*The Moor's Last Sigh*, p. 351)
14. Love conquers all. (*Haroun and the Sea of Stories*, p. 123)
15. Money talks. (*Haroun and the Sea of Stories*, p. 118; *The Moor's Last Sigh*, p. 150)
16. Once a thief, always a thief. (*The Moor's Last Sigh*, p. 49)
17. Opposites attract. (*Haroun and the Sea of Stories*, p. 125)
18. Patience is a virtue. (*Haroun and the Sea of Stories*, p. 97)
19. The end justifies the means. (*The Moor's Last Sigh*, p. 28)
20. There are no birds in last year's nests. (*The Moor's Last Sigh*, p. 393)
21. There are plenty of other fish in the sea. (*Haroun and the Sea of Stories*, p. 43, 84)
22. They that sow the wind shall reap the whirlwind. (*The Moor's Last Sigh*, p. 322)
23. Tit-for-tat. (*The Moor's Last Sigh*, p. 113)
24. Two is company, three is a crowd. (*The Moor's Last Sigh*, p. 289)
25. Two wrongs do not make a right. (*The Moor's Last Sigh*, p. 365),
26. You can't tell a book by its cover. (*Haroun and the Sea of Stories*, p. 114, 114)
27. Tell a lie about a man once and many people will not believe you. Tell it a million times and it is the man himself who will no longer be believed. (*Joseph Anton: A Memoir*, p.112)
28. If you sit by the river for long enough, the body of your enemy will float by. (*Joseph Anton: A Memoir*, p.532)
29. Our lives teach us who we are. (*Joseph Anton: A Memoir*, p.414)
30. Naught but love makes magic real. (*Luka and the Fire of Life*, p.5)

The following novels have the greatest number of proverb quotations:

*The Moor's Last Sigh* (20) *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* (6) *Joseph Anton: A memoir* (3) and *Luka and the Fire of Life* (1). Formal and semantic modifications are very common in proverb use and, what's more, it is claimed that proverbs in the modern age exist primarily in their modified forms (Mieder 1993: 58), which may be verified in literary uses of proverbs as well. The figures quoted above do show that in Rushdie's novels proverbs appear in their modified forms more often than in their canonical structures. Rushdie does not create anti-proverbs but he attempts to invent quasi-proverbs that are forms structurally similar to common proverbial representations. For instance: "If people have no taste, the best things are a waste" (*Haroun and the Sea of Stories*, p. 52)

As they ran along corridors, up staircases, down staircases, through galleries, into courtyards, out of courtyards, along yet more corridors, Haroun puffed, 'In the first place, I wasn't "judging the book by the cover", as you suggested, because I could see all the Pages –and, in the second place, this isn't the "real world", not at all.' (*Haroun and the Sea of Stories*, p. 114) Here the modifications may result in minor or considerable semantic changes.

"Since proverbs have by default a generalizing function, which is expressed in their surface structure by various types of markers of universality" (Dobrovol'skij and Piirainen 2005: 61), In the example below, the marker of universality of "Two wrongs do not make a right" – the present simple tense – is replaced with the past tense. "Violence was violence, murder was murder, two wrongs did not make a right: these are truths of which I was fully cognisant." (*The Moor's Last Sigh*, p. 365)

Micro function and Macro function are the two classifications of proverbs. Example of macro functions of proverbs in Rushdie's novels. Let's see the following two examples: "A house divided against itself cannot stand" and "Blood is thicker than water." The first organizes the first chapter of *The Moor's Last Sigh* and additionally serves as its title "A House Divided". The proverb is actually used in its complete form when uttered by

Epifania (*The Moor's Last Sigh*, p. 99) to comment on the fate of the Da Gama family and that of Abraham Zogoiby. The proverb refers not only the story of a house divided by the bitter disharmonies but even cruelty described in the first chapter of the book which also functions as an impending curse over the lives of the characters throughout the whole novel.

Allegorically, the proverb can also be applied to India. The protagonist of the novel, moves to the idea of division within a nation which leads to the disintegration of a tolerant society and the death of pluralism. So this proverb is applied, on one level in the novel, to the immediate circumstances of the families, but on another level, to a more general idea permeating this and other novels by Rushdie – the two functions are thus interpretatively combined.

## CONCLUSION

A detailed study of Rushdie's disposition of proverbs shows a close relationship between the proverbs' standard use and their particular functions in the novels. It means that Rushdie's distribution of proverbs in his novels does not diverge from the standard, which can be understood here as the sum total of the previous uses of proverbs, resulting in the established clarifications of their meaning and use. Stylistically speaking, the uses of proverbs in Rushdie's novels do not suggest any withdrawal from the standard, which shows that Rushdie does indeed like using proverbs not only in their regular forms but also with their familiar meanings.

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