Chapter I

Introduction

A novel of metamorphosis, transgression, revelation, and postcolonial experience, Salman Rushdie’s *The Satanic Verses* has triggered quite a disturbance since its publication in 1988. Regarded as an extraordinary novel by critics, it was a 1988 Booker Prize Finalist. However, *The Satanic Verses* has a notorious reputation among the Islamic community for its blasphemous references. Offended by the implication of Mohammed’s life in the novel, the worldwide Islamic community simmers with rage and launches into a series of ferocious and vengeful actions. With the author’s life threatened and many others’ sacrificed, the well-known Rushdie Affair flavors the novel with a mysterious, terrifying, and awesome atmosphere. At the same time, the affair gives rise to an ardent and long-lasting dispute about the borderline between artistic creation and religious desecration among literary critics and religion fanatics. Among disparate standpoints, a compromise seems to be impossible. Although *The Satanic Verses* generates a huge controversy in literary, political, and religious fields, it is undoubtedly an indispensable and noteworthy text of the twentieth century in that it straightforwardly represents the experience and mentality of diasporic subjects under a postmodern condition and in a post-imperial metropolitan center. In other words, the crucial elements which define *The Satanic Verses* as a novel of great significance consist in the fact that Rushdie explicitly portrays the predicaments and dilemmas which diasporic subjects face up to in a postmodern time when the established is crumbled, the stable destabilized, the pure tarnished, and the homogeneous diversified.

In *The Satanic Verses*, the diasporic identity of postcolonial subjects—with the sense of rootlessness, homelessness, and in-betweenness as its fundamental characteristics—is brought to the foreground. By means of interweaving three seemingly separate yet essentially correlative storylines, Rushdie endeavors to cope with the identity crisis of diaspora as well as the inspiration which the postmodern consciousness gives to the opaque,
unmoored, and abstruse situation confronted by diasporic subjects. On the basis of this framework, the major concern of this thesis is to explore the entire novel principally from three angles: the diasporic experience in a world of disintegration and mutability, hybridity as an inevitable phenomenon, and the diasporic appropriation of the heterogeneous space. The first aspect—the diasporic experience in a world of disintegration and mutability—emphasizes the attempt to explore what inspiration the postmodern elements give to the life experience of diasporic subjects. The second aspect—hybridity as an inevitable phenomenon—highlights the ability of diasporic subjects to generate newness through cultural hybridity and linguistic hybridity. The third aspect—the diasporic appropriation of the heterogeneous space—aims to reveal the nature of space and to suggest the potential agency of diasporic subjects to appropriate the space of the imperial center. Through scrutinizing these three aspects, I would like to chew over the life experience, predicaments, and also the agency of diasporic subjects in *The Satanic Verses*.

**Literary Review**

Over the past twenty years, myriads of literary critics have commented on the keynote of *The Satanic Verses* and have exerted themselves to clarify significant messages which *The Satanic Verses* communicates to the world. Each critic has his/her own interpretations of the text and each reads the text from dissimilar perspectives. Through the interaction, contradiction, and reconciliation of disparate perspectives, the underlying framework of *The Satanic Verses* is beginning to take shape. Among multitudinous critics, Homi K. Bhabha brings up the notion of “foreignness of language” to elucidate the entangled cultural condition and the haunting national memory embodied in those migrant protagonists of *The Satanic Verses*. In “DissemiNation,” Bhabha attempts to redefine cultural difference and in the process of redefinition, to formulate the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized. He expatiates on his notion of cultural difference by means of the process of translation. At the borderline moment of translation, the foreignness of languages as well as
the opaqueness of words exerts an influence on the transfer of meaning, and thus results in
the inescapable moment of untranslatability. As Bhabha indicates,

The transfer of meaning can never be total between systems of meaning, or
within them, for “the language of translation envelops its content like a royal
robe with ample folds. . . [it] signifies a more exalted language than its own and
thus remains unsuited to its content, overpowering and alien.” (163)
Between different languages, there can never be a complete transfer of meaning, for the
untranslatability between diverse languages inescapably occurs and hinders the smooth
delivery of meanings. What the untranslatability of languages suggests is that between
diverse cultures, incommensurability, untranslatability, and the sense of foreignness sway the
process of identification. Taking the “Rosa Diamond” section of *The Satanic Verses* as an
instance, Bhabha contends that Gibreel’s masquerade in the clothes of Rosa’s ex-colonial
husband neither aggrandizes the authority of the West nor consolidates the totality of the
colonial nation. In other words, the undertaking of postcolonial subjects to mimic the
colonial masculinity is doomed to failure, and “a harmonious patchwork of cultures” (Bhabha
168) is nothing more than an absurd fantasy. In comparison with Homi Bhabha, whose
interpretation concentrates on incommensurability and untranslatability of cultures, Ronald
Bush examines postcolonial and postmodern moments in *The Satanic Verses*. Besides, he
employs *Frankenstein* as the archetype of monsters to scrutinize the monstrosity in the text
and the connection between monstrosity and diasporic migrants. In “Monstrosity and
Representation in the Postcolonial Diaspora,” Bush argues that “the vicissitude of national
identity. . . [is thought of as] the essence of Third-World postmodernism” (Bush 239). He
also considers that Rushdie’s arrangement of the monstrosity aims to represent the host
culture’s attitude toward demonized migrants. In addition to probing into the diasporic
identity and the demonized other, Bush is under the impression that the entire novel is about
two divided selves’ pursuit of wholeness, whether they achieve it or not.
Furthermore, Gillian Gane also examines the postcolonial migrancy, postmodern mutability, and the intermingling of incompatible realities under globalization in *The Satanic Verses*. Systematizing dominant discourses within the postcolonial theory, Gane infers that there is always a crevice between the “discourse of the *post* and the *trans*” and the discourse of the *re* (Gane 28). The “discourse of the *post* and the *trans*” (Gane 28) lays much emphasis on fluidity, hybridity, and plurality. On the contrary, the discourse of the *re* accentuates the idea of origin and return and also it worships pureness and absolutism. Bearing in mind these two contradictory trends in the postcolonial theory, she comes to a conclusion that *The Satanic Verses* is itself an ambivalent and fissured text, for “its celebration of migrancy and hybridity is undercut by the nostalgia of its final section” (Gane 43). Although Gane believes that the nucleus of *The Satanic Verses* is “the instability of a postmodern world without foundations,” (Gane 44) she observes that Rushdie’s attitude toward hybridity may not be as positive and optimistic as other critics believe. Allied to her point of view, D. C. R. A. Goonetilleke is dubious about Rushdie’s position on hybridity. Although recently most critics acknowledge that Rushdie applauds the spirit of hybridity in the text, Goonetilleke still believes that *The Satanic Verses* discards hybridity and that the metaphorical meaning of chimera is nothing but illusion. From Goonetilleke’s perspective, Saladin Chamcha, Otto Cone, and Alicja Cone all “turn [their] back on it [hybridity]” in diverse ways (Goonetilleke 82). Different from Gane and Goonetilleke, Jaina C. Sanga holds a more affirmative and optimistic attitude toward hybridity in the text. In her book, *Salman Rushdie’s Postcolonial Metaphor*, Sanga examines respectively themes of migration, translation, hybridity, and blasphemy represented in Rushdie’s novels. In terms of hybridity, she confirms that the notion of mongrelization, or mélange, is a significant motif in *The Satanic Verses*. Although Chamcha regains his Indian root at the end of the story, it does not imply that he rejects hybridity and simply embraces the absolutism of the Pure, for “the notion of ‘Indian’ is itself complexly hybrid; the fact of being Indian does not imply a
monolithic, unitary condition but rather represents a problematic diversity” (Sanga 98). In short, the idea of Indian itself alludes to heterogeneity, plurality, and multiplicity, rather than totality, homogeneity, and consistency. In addition, Sanga has an idea that hybrid moments in the text are embodied in “the idea of doubleness, where characters have a dual identity” (Sanga 94). The doublings of Chamcha and Gibreel, of Allie and Al-Lat, and of Allie and Rekha elucidate the doppelganger motif in *The Satanic Verses.*

In comparison with those critics who examine hybrid moments in *The Satanic Verses,* Peter Kalliney provides a unique observing position. In “Globalization, Postcoloniality, and the Problem of Literary Studies in *The Satanic Verses,*” Kalliney argues that Rushdie overlooks the class story of the text in order to highlight “his grand narrative of national identity and postcolonial migration” (Kalliney 68). From his viewpoint, the transnational mobility—the pungent consequence of globalization—proclaims the reality of the contemporary existence and catalyzes the discovery of one’s identity. However, the strategy of mobility in *The Satanic Verses* “simultaneously seeks to deploy and undermine the socially overdetermined role of class” (Kalliney 55). Citing Chamcha as an example, Kalliney contends that in the very beginning, the admirable Englishness in which Chamcha believes is an example of class story: “bowler hat and Saville Row tweed suit” (Kalliney 69). But the working-class and vulgar immigration officers smash his impression of Proper London. Besides, Chamcha’s sojourn in Brickhall community—an area inhabited by poor and dispossessed people of color—prompts him to undergo an essential metamorphosis and then to retrieve his Indianness. Therefore, Chamcha’s cultural identity is associated not only with national identity but also necessarily with class relations. Kalliney acknowledges that Rushdie exerts himself to portray the instability of migrancy and the social, cultural mobility. However, in the process of probing into mobility, Rushdie “tends to obfuscate the class story upon which the novel relies” (Kalliney 56). Kalliney’s conclusion renders a dissimilar and distinctive interpretation of the text. After the careful perusal of these influential and
momentous critiques given above, it is plausible to define *The Satanic Verses* as a text which hinges on cultural difference, the untranslatability and incommensurability of cultures, hybridity, migration, and the postmodern condition. On the basis of these fundamental ideas, the major concern of the following exploration will go a step further and delve into themes of deconstruction, hybridity, and heterogeneous space in *The Satanic Verses*.

**Chapter Organization**

On the basis of former critical discussions about *The Satanic Verses*, I would like to further explore the novel from three angles: the diasporic experience in a world of disintegration and mutability, hybridity as an inevitable phenomenon, and the diasporic appropriation of the heterogeneous space. The underlying thread which links the three sections together is the idea of diasporic identity. Throughout *The Satanic Verses*, Rushdie ruminates over an abstruse but crucial question: “*What kind of idea is he? What kind am I?*” (Rushdie 111) This poignant question expresses the contemporary apprehension about a tottering foothold in a time that is characterized by unreliability, capriciousness, opacity, and uncertainty. In addition, this question also heralds the end of unchanging essence, stability, and totality. With this question reiterated throughout the text, Rushdie creates an atmosphere in which an interrogation mark is appended to everything that is originally viewed as definite. Among people all over the world, diasporic subjects who go through the uprooting and transgressive process of frontier crossing have the profoundest experience of identity crisis. The question of identity has constantly haunted diasporic subjects for generations and tortures them with a dilemma between assimilation and maintenance of the culture of the homeland. Hence, I would like to investigate this intricate and bewildering diasporic experience from the perspectives of postmodernity, hybridity, and heterogeneous space.

Chapter II, “A World on the Mover: the Postmodern and Diaspora,” is divided into two parts: the postmodern and diaspora. The first part of this chapter, which tackles the concept
of the postmodern, elaborates on the concept of postmodernity, its impact on the notion of identity, and the embodiment of the postmodern elements and the spirit of postmodernity in *The Satanic Verses*. This part aims to explain that transience and fragmentation—the salient features of postmodernity—usher in a new age without foundation. The original dominant, peremptory, and absolute metanarrative collapses and is replaced by contingent, transient, and discordant small narratives. Besides, the condition of postmodernity, together with the overwhelming global circulation, has a great impact on the contemporary lifestyle, identity formation, and the way of thinking. In this postmodern age of discontinuity, metamorphosis, and deconstruction, it is hard for contemporary people to ascertain who they really are. In a word, the concept of identity is transformed from an originally permanent, immovable, and integrated entity into a fugitive, mutable, and palimpsest-like space. The second part of this chapter, which is concerned with diaspora, underscores the diasporic experience and the identity crisis confronted by diasporic subjects in the postmodern era. Ensuing from transnational migration and frontier crossing, diaspora represents the mobility and mutability of the postmodern phenomenon. In the process of transnational migration, diasporic subjects perceive the palimpsest-like identity—a concept influenced by the postmodern consciousness. The disruption, fragmentation, transience, and mutability celebrated by the postmodern echo the displacement, disenchantment, and dislocation of diaspora. In other words, this vision of fluctuation, uncertainty, fracture, and displacement is best embodied in diasporic subjects, for they bear compatible or incompatible memories, emotions, and cultures in the process of transnational frontier crossing.

In Chapter III, “Neither the One nor the Other: Cultural Hybridity and Linguistic Hybridity,” the concept of hybridity is thoroughly examined from two aspects: cultural hybridity and linguistic hybridity. The first part of this chapter, which goes around cultural hybridity, delves into the potentiality of cultural hybridity and the impact of border position on migrants’ identity formation. Mélange, or hybridization, is a process of the intermingling
of originally incongruous, contradictory, and heterogeneous factors. The phenomenon of hodgepodge in a postmodern world makes absurd the confidence in homogeneity, authenticity, and pureness. Involving the process of border crossing or category intercrossing, hybridization reveals that the traditional dichotomy ossifies the way of thinking. Thus, without the process of territorial transgression, newness finds no access to the world. Diasporic subjects, in the course of transnational migration, are compelled to deal with an awkward in-between situation in which they belong to neither the one nor the other. Re-inscribing and reshaping their individual identity in this liminal space, diasporic subjects are bound to undergo an experience of rootlessness. But simultaneously, they will recognize that the in-between space is an animated representative of the latent capacity of boundary crossing and that this space will offer them myriads of alternatives and possibilities which transcend the confinement of binary opposition. The second part of this chapter, revolving around linguistic hybridity, highlights the linguistic appropriation and counterattack deployed by diasporic subjects. It is widely acknowledged that language is a primary, indispensable, and immediate medium to express one’s cultural identity. In the process of imperial colonization, the linguistic interpenetration, fusion, and even abrogation transform one’s cultural identity. Also, language correlates with the power structure and then serves as a direct means to make the colonized obediently remain within the colonizer’s grid. However, postcolonial subjects are capable of appropriating the dominant linguistic rules and diction of the imperial center. In a battle between capitalized, dominant English and lowercase, multiple English, postcolonial critics intend to discover boundless possibilities lurking in this deliberately linguistic code, English. In The Satanic Verses, Rushdie makes use of exquisite techniques of expression to demonstrate that diasporic subjects use the linguistic appropriation and hybridity to “[write] back to the centre” (Ashcroft unpaged acknowledgments).

In Chapter IV, “Thinking over Space: Heterogeneity and Diasporic Appropriation,” the
concept of space in *The Satanic Verses* is meticulously investigated from two aspects: the heterogeneous nature of space and spatial appropriation by diasporic subjects. The first part of this chapter, which deals with the heterogeneous nature of space, elaborates on the concept of space and then stresses the indeterminate, mutable, discontinuous, and heterogeneous nature of space under the influence of the postmodern consciousness. In a word, space is no longer an innocent, passive, and inert “environmental ‘container’ of human life” (Soja 79). On the contrary, it is a dynamic, dialectical, and active arena which is rife with ideology and politics. The heterogeneous and fragmented nature of space reveals that a complete and all-inclusive panorama is no longer possible. Simultaneously, it calls our attention to the postmodern collage which is made up of disparate, incompatible, and contradictory perspectives. It subverts the primarily rigid view on space and then generates boundless possibilities. The second part of this chapter, which is concerned with spatial appropriation by diasporic subjects, probes into the agency of diasporic subjects to alter the configuration of space and to create their own spatial meanings. Although city planners have already constituted methodical spatial orders, users of city space can always reshape the configuration of space which is suitable for their use. In other words, even if diasporic subjects are located in a space of power, domination, and manipulation, they in no circumstances become “docile bodies” (Foucault 138). On the contrary, diasporic subjects are able to appropriate the space, to elude the surveillance, and to rebel against the imperial authorities.

In a nutshell, the issues enumerated above (the diasporic experience in a world of disintegration and mutability, hybridity as an inevitable phenomenon, and the diasporic appropriation of the heterogeneous space) are the major concern of my thesis. The concern for the diaspora situation serves as the underlying thread which links these elements together. These elements help to clarify how the diasporic identity is influenced by the condition of postmodernity, how diasporic subjects relocate themselves in this hybrid situation, and how
they appropriate the heterogeneous space and create their own spatial meanings.