

Literature of Violence by Dr. Temjenwala Ao

"The practice of violence, like all action, changes the world, but the most probable change is to a more violent world"
(Arendt 1969: 80).

Abstract

Literature mirrors society. From Anglo-Saxon to the present day we find Literature portrays the working of the human mind. Today, people are mostly forced into issues that challenge their individual existence. Philosophers, educationists, revolutionists, teachers and writers have ventured into theories like Formalism, Structuralism, Feminism, Deconstruction, Semiotics, New Historicism, Marxism, etc. Revolutions in the history of mankind took place with the inspiration of powerful writings. Today there is literary violence and chaos created around the world through the abuse of pen. This paper will bring out the literal meaning of violence. An in-depth study on Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* and Brown's *The Da Vinci Code* will be done. It will discuss how literature can cause violence and unrest. It will also ascertain the thought provoking religious issues contained in these two novels. This chapter will examine the extend and limits of freedom of literature. It will also compare the historical account which the novelists have used. The saying "Pen is mightier than the sword" is appropriate. Literature has been a platform to echo the voices of injustice, violence, the oppressed and the minorities. Literature has power to heal and unite.

Keywords: Violence, media violence, unrest and disharmony, instigator, sacred, fundamentalism, fertility myths, fatwa, creative writing

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1. Introduction

Violence can be defined in many ways. The World Health Organisation (WHO) promotes a broad definition of violence: The intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, mal-development or deprivation. Violence can result in psychological and social problems as well as physical problems, all of which are of concern to communities and place considerable burdens on the health, social and justice systems. This definition recognises that the outcomes of violence are broader than physical injury, disability or death and demonstrates that violence is not only an issue of concern to Police and the justice sector, but to the social sector as a whole. Terror and violence are similar. The outcome of violence is always negative. It causes fear and terror together with hatred. The narrative dispatch and initial disruption in most crime fiction is an act of violence. According to Oxford Illustrated Dictionary, violence is “the quality of being violent or unlawful exercise of physical force” (1998:931). Violence is in itself not just a transgression of law and social order, but additionally it bridges into an integrated discussion about the relationship between structures of society on the one hand and the underlying principles of violent disruptions on the other. Violence in crime fiction, then, stages a struggle between collective norms and individual transgression and, most importantly, the basic link in between the social system and the individual. Violence has always been part of every society. Even during the early period of civilization, the idea of violence was prevalent. Although scientists disagree that violence is inherent to human beings, there is archaeological evidence that both violence and peacefulness are contentions of the primary characteristics. Most frequently, “violence results to destruction of the subject to which this action is being address to. It may cause harm physically, mentally and socially” (www.encyclopedia.com, 2008). There are a lot of possible causes why violence occurs. Part of which is

considering the effect of the media to the human behaviour. The roots of all forms of violence and abuse are founded in the many types of inequality which continue to exist and grow in our society. Violence is a one of the biggest problems for many communities, but the community isn't the real problem, almost all the problems start at homes, and at schools there are many ways of solving them, starting for ourselves and our family, and ending up helping to the other people. Violence is the problem or we are the problem? There are many myths in which it says that violence at home does not affect many people, but it is a sad truth. The term violence brings to memory an image of physical or emotional assault on a person. In most circumstances, the person affected due to violence is aware that a violent action has been performed on that person. There is another form of violence where the affected individual, in most cases are unaware of the violence inflicted upon them. These types of violence are termed as structural violence. Structural violence is a form of invisible violence setup by a well-defined system, to limit an individual's development to his full potential, by using legal, political, social or cultural traditions. The most popular thing in our world today is not family, schooling, religion or even the newest song. The thing that our world seems to be the most attracted to is violence. Throughout the years of evolution and invention, violence has become the most progressive thing in our society. But through humans' natural nature of misguidance we, often use violence as the solution to many problems, and that may be the real problem. Whatever it is used for good or bad, violence seems to be a part of everyday life and no matter how hard we try there is no escaping it. Media Violence is one of the most debated public issues society faces today. Television screens are loaded with the glamorization of weapon carrying. Violence constitute as amusing and trivialized. Needless portrayals of interpersonal violence spread across the television screens like wild fire. Televisions spew the disturbing events such as children being assaulted, husbands inflicting domestic abuse on their wives and children succumbing to abuse by their parents. Scenes of betrayal, anguish, infiltrate the television screen. Violence is an ever present dark

cloud that blots out the sun; a stifling hand over the mouth of the victims of society. The word violence, when looked up in a dictionary, has a list of varied definitions. Violence comes in many different shapes and sizes. A definition that best covers the idea is: any act that show aggression or is intentionally done in the intent of hurting someone. Now this covers the idea of physical, emotional, and mental harm. Violence is a highly controversial idea that is one of the harder concepts to grasp relating to psychology and human nature. Violence is among one of the most malignant act that has been increasing day by day. The world is not seen as a peaceful place to each unique person because of the many diverse religions, cultures, and beliefs that comprise us. Things seen in one's eyes may be something totally different in another's. Quoted by Gandhi himself "One man's food could be another's poison," hence in some religions, terrorism is seen as the acceptable thing to do; yet in others, it may be seen as horrible and horrific. Violence in Literature, linguistic violence are practised today.

Violence and abuse may occur only once, it can involve various tactics of subtle manipulation or it may occur frequently while escalating over a period of months or years. In any form, violence and abuse profoundly affect individual health and well-being. In many respects, twentieth-century literature defined itself by reflecting the prevalent violence of modern society—from the destruction of large-scale warfare to individual crimes of murder, rape, and abuse. Critics of modern literature have generally attributed this trend to both the sensational appeal of violent behavior and its potential to shock readers by shaking their beliefs. Others have emphasized the historical significance of violence in the period following World War II, during which poets and novelists expressed the anxieties of a world that seemed incapable of long-term peace, and in which human aggression threatened to bring about global destruction. By the close of the twentieth century, images of violence in all forms of media had become so commonplace that the destructive potential of the human race seemed a given, making moral solutions to the problem appear unlikely at best. Thus, violence had become a subject that most modern writers who wished

to convey the historical, psychological, and artistic landscape of the modern world could not fail to confront.

In literature, there are some literary works, which instigate people and cause disharmony by thought provoking subjects. Some are anti-religion. Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* (1988) and Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code* (2003) are such novels. They provoke the religious sentiments. Their publication spread violence and terror. Literature is a powerful instrument to move and inspire the minds of the people. At the same time, it can also be an agency or a tool to spread unrest and disharmony.

2. Salman Rushdie's life and works

Salman Rushdie (b 1947) was born in Mumbai of Muslim parents. He immigrated to Britain in 1965, and studied at Cambridge. He worked as an actor and an advertising copywriter before becoming a writer, producing his first novel, *Grimus*, in 1975. He became widely known after the publication of his second novel, *Midnight's Children* (1981). He was awarded Booker Prize for this book. It is a book of fantasia of Indian history in the twentieth century. This was followed by *Shame* in 1983, set in Pakistan. *The Satanic Verses* (1988) caused world-wide controversy because of its treatment of Islam from a secular point of view, and in 1989 he was forced to go into hiding because of a sentence of death (fatwa) passed on him by Ayatollah Khomeini of Iran for blasphemy which was officially lifted in 1998. His later books include a novel for children, *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* (1990), a book of essays, *Imaginary Homelands* (1991), and the novels *East West* (1994), *The Moor's Last Sigh* (1995), *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* (1999), and *Fury* (2001).

2.1. Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* as literature of violence

The Satanic Verses (1988) can be termed as anti-God. The novel consists of a frame narrative, using elements of magic realism, interlaced with a series of sub-

plots that are narrated as dream visions experienced by one of the protagonists. The frame narrative, like many other narratives by Rushdie, involves Indian expatriates in contemporary England. In writing *The Satanic Verses* Rushdie wrote about his own multiple identities. In an interview, he said:

In writing The Satanic Verses I think I was writing for the first time from the whole of myself. The English part, the Indian part. The part of me that loves London, and the part that longs for Bombay. (Parekh 1990: 73)

This theme of migrant, of being brown in England, is what Rushdie wrote about in the novel. The two protagonists, Gibreel Farishta and Saladin Chamcha, are both actors of Indian Muslim background. Farishta is a Bollywood superstar who specializes in playing Hindu deities. Chamcha is an emigrant who has broken with his Indian identity and works as a voice over artist in England. Gibreel Farishta, is the first protagonist introduced in the novel. He assumes the character of the Angel Gabriel. He has a series of dreams about the founding of a great religious tradition, which is Islam. These dreams begin in the second chapter of the book titled "Mahound." Mahound is an orphan, a businessman living in a city named Jahilia, who through revelation begins to preach a religion named Submission. In another chapter, Gibreel also has a series of encounters with another character, an exile, known simply as "the Imam," who is the Ayatollah Khomeini. Companions of Mahound, named Bilal, Salman, and Khalid, reappear as companions to the Imam. Gibreel also has another dream, this one set in rural India, where an orphaned peasant girl named Ayesha convinces those in her village to a pilgrimage on foot to Mecca. She claimed that they will be able to walk on foot across the Arabian Sea. The pilgrimage ends in a catastrophic climax as the believers all walk into the water and disappear, amid disturbingly conflicting testimonies from observers about whether they just drowned or were in fact miraculously able to cross the sea. Embedded in this story is a series of half-magic dream vision narratives, ascribed to the disturbed mind of Gibreel Farishta. They are linked together by many thematic details as well as by the common motifs of divine revelation, religious faith and

fanaticism, and doubt as to whether any conception of God is rationally justifiable. One of these sequences contains most of the elements that have been criticized as offensive to Muslims. It is a transformed re-narration of the life of the prophet Muhammad (called "Mahound" or "the Messenger" in the novel) in Mecca ("Jahilia"). At its centre is the episode of the *Satanic Verses*, in which the prophet first proclaims a revelation in favour of the old polytheistic deities, but later renounces this as an error induced by Shaitan. There are also two opponents of the "Messenger": a demonic heathen priestess, Hind, and an irreverent skeptic and satirical poet, Baal. When the prophet returns to the city in triumph, Baal goes into hiding in an underground brothel, where the prostitutes assume the identities of the prophet's wives. Also, one of the prophet's companions claims that he, doubting the "Messenger's" authenticity, has subtly altered portions of the Quran as they were dictated to him.

The second protagonist introduced in the novel is Saladin Chamcha. In many ways, he is the opposite of Gibreel. Saladin tries to remove the "Indianness" of Gibreel. On an airplane flight Saladin is horrified to discover that his carefully cultivated British speaking voice has "transmogrified" itself into "the Bombay lilt he had so diligently (and long ago!) unmade" (TSV 34). Though Saladin tries to make himself English, Zeenat (Zeeny) Vakil, his Indian lover always tries to bring him back to "Indianness." Saladin has a tempestuous relationship with his father, Changez, which frames the moving conclusion of the novel. Saladin and Gibreel also have a series of encounters with other Indians living in England. Gibreel continues to dream of Mahound and Submission and the conquest of Jahilia. It is through the revelations of these dreams that the instigator Islamic statements are brought, which led to unrest among the Muslims all over the world. On these dreams, a scribe named Salman deliberately changes the words of the revelation to Mahound. When he is found out, he takes refuge in a brothel where the prostitutes have taken the names and assumed the identities of the wives of Mahound. At the end of the

novel Gibreel commits suicide and Saladin reconciles with his father and begins a new life with Zeenat in Bombay.

In this novel Rushdie uses a great deal of Islamic themes and allusions starting from the title itself. The main cause of unrest in the novel is presented in the second chapter titled "Mahound." It begins with Gibreel Farishta dreaming on the arms of his mother that he is the Archangel Gabriel: "Little devil, she scolds, but then folds him in her arms, my little farishta [angel], boys will be boys, and he falls past her into sleep" (TSV 91). Before he dreams of the Prophet, we are told that Gibreel dreamed of much older things. He dreamed about the creation of satan and his subsequent fall from heaven. Then he dreamed about three goddesses worshipped in pre-Islamic Arabia, al-Lat, al-Uzza, and Manat; about the story of Abraham, Hagar, and their son Ishmael; and about the rediscovery by 'Abd al-Muttalib (the grandfather of Muhammad, who is referred to in the novel simply as Muttalib) of the well of Zamzam, which Muslims believe was originally revealed by God to Ishmael and Hagar to keep them alive in the desert. Finally Gibreel dreams of "the businessman," who with his tendencies toward asceticism was a "strange manner of businessman" (TSV 92). One finds in the traditional Muslim biographies that Muhammad was a fairly successful Meccan businessman before his prophetic career began.

As we read the novel, we find instances where Gibreel thinks himself to be mad and that these thoughts are just what "the businessman...felt when he first saw the archangel: though he was cracked, wanted to throw himself down from a rock, from a high rock" (TSV 92). This is a reference to a tradition about Muhammad as Ibn Hisham puts in the first volume of *Al-Sirat al-Nabawiyah*:

I [Muhammad] thought, Woe is me poet possessed—Never shall Quraysh say this of me! I will go to the top of the mountain and throw myself down that I may kill myself and gain rest. So I went forth to do so and then I was midway on the mountain, I heard a voice from heaven saying, "O Mehammad! Thou art the apostle of God and I am Gabriel." I

raised my head towards heaven to see (who was speaking), and lo, Gabriel in the form of a man with feet astride the horizon saying, "O Muhammad! Thou art the apostle of God, and I am Gabriel." (TSV 106)

After introducing his prophet, Rushdie moves to an important discussion of faith and doubt, which he considers to be the opposite of faith. In the novel doubt is "the human condition" that separates humanity from the angelic order. Again, this is based on traditional Islamic angelology, whereby angels are thought to do only the will of God. Rushdie mentions that Mahound, like Muhammad, was an orphan: "Orphans learn to be moving targets, develop a rapid wall, quick reactions, hold-your-tongue caution" (TSV 93). He also describes Mahound as "a fit man, no soft-bellied usurer he" (ibid, 93). This serves to differentiate Mahound from the rest of the business community around him. Then Rushdie explains the name of the prophet:

His name: a dream-name, changed by the vision. Pronounced, correctly, it means he-for-whom-thanks-should-be-given, but he won't answer to that here; nor, though he's well aware of what they call him, to his nickname in Jahilia down below-he-who-goes-up-and-down-old-Coney [Mount Cone, where he receives his revelations]. Here he is neither Mahomed not MoeHammered; has adopted, instead, the demon-tag the farangis hung around his neck. To turn insults into strengths, whigs, tories, Blacks all chose to wear with pride the names they were given in scorn; like-wise, our mountain-climbing, prophet-motivated solitary is to be the medieval baby-frightener, the Devil's synonym: Mahound. (TSV 93)

This passage draws the attention of the Islamic community. The derogatory statement as observed by many Muslims lie in the translation of their Prophet's name and the manner in which Rushdie applied in his novel. According to Arabic record, the translation of the name "Muhammad" means "praised" or "commendable" (Wehr 1976: 204). The Meccans called him "Mudhammam" which means "greatly dispraised." And according to the *Oxford English Dictionary (OED)*,

the name "Mahound" was a medieval European name meaning "the 'false prophet' Mohammed; in the Middle Ages often vaguely imagined to be worshipped as a god." The word "Mahound" was also used by writers such as Edmund Spenser (1596) and Alexander Pope (1735) (*OED*: 1694). Rushdie applied this term of the "Mahound" in his discursive. Though he did not mean to use it as derision for the prophet Muhammad in the novel, yet the way in which people perceive it was negative. Naming the Prophet "Mahound" is particularly offensive to Muslims. Mahound was a medieval Christian term of abuse for the Prophet of Islam. Rushdie adopts this name "to turn insults into strength" (*SV* 93). In the case of *The Satanic Verses*, Rushdie not only satirized Islam but also invoked tropes outside of the tradition that denigrated Islam such as the medieval era term for Muhammad, Mahound. Rushdie's novel reverts to the old, "disparaging Western name of 'Mahound' for Muhammad and uses motifs drawn from the early European Middle Ages, adding some fictions of his own which proved to be as offensive as those of Voltaire. It is not much consolation to observe that the author relates these as the fantasies of the schizophrenic hero of the novel...The name Mahound or sometimes Mahoun, Mahun, Mahomet, in French Mahon, in German Machmet, which was synonymous with demon, devil, idol, was invented by the writers of Christian play cycles and romances of 12th century Europe. In these writings, Muhammad does not appear as a prophet or even an anti-prophet, but as a heathen idol worshipped by the Arabs" (Reeves 2000:87).

In the novel, the name of the city where Mahound first preaches is Jahilia. In the *Quran* the word 'Jahiliyah' occurs four times (*Quran* 3:148, 5:55, 33:33, and 48:26) and it means "pagan ignorance" or the "Age of ignorance" (Kassis 1983:588). "Jahilia" is the usual Muslim name for pre-Islamic Arabia. The heart of the city of Jahilia is described in the novel as the "House of the Black Stone" (*TSV* 94). This is a reference to the *Ka'aba*, believed by Muslims to have been built by Abraham and Ishmael as the house of worship for the one true God. In the novel, Mahound's chief antagonist is the leader of Jahilia, a man named Karim Abu Simbel,

who is married to a woman named Hind. On his way to meet the poet Baal, whom Abu Simbel will employ to compose poems against Mahound, Abu Simbel meets a sorceress, skilled in “little knots” (TSV 97). This is an allusion to women in Mecca, who according to the Quran (113:1-4) were skilled at casting spells using knots in a thread: “Say: ‘I take refuge with the Lord of the Daybreak from the evil of what He has created, from the evil of darkness when it gathers, from the evil of the women who blow on knots’” (Arberry 1986:668). When Abu Simbel and Baal leave the “House of the Black Stone,” they view several of the followers of Mahound. The following passage from *The Satanic Verses* shows this allusion:

The water-carrier Khalid is there, and some sort of bum from Persia by the outlandish name to Salman, and to complete this trinity of scum there is the slave Bilal, the one mahound freed, an enormous black monster, this one, with a voice to match his size. The three idlers sit on the enclosed wall. “That bunch of riff-raff,” Abu Simbel says. “Those are your targets. Write about them; and their leader, too.” Baal, for all hi terror, cannot conceal his disbelief. “Grandee, those goons—those fucking clowns? You don’t have to worry about them. What do you think? That Mahound’s one God will bankrupt your temples? Three-sixty versus one, and the one wins? Can’t happen.” He giggles, close to hysteria. Abu Simbel remains calm: “Keep your insults for your verses.” Giggling Baal can’t stop. “A revolution of water carriers, immigrants and slaves.... Wow, Grandee. I’m really scared.” Abu Simbel looks carefully at the tittering poet. “Yes,” he answers, “that’s right, you should be afraid.” (TSV 101)

Rushdie’s Jahilia is built entirely out of sand, water is its mortal enemy, and so water carriers are despised. Historically, Muhammad and his companions were regularly reviled and persecuted by the citizens of Mecca. There are a number of other Islamic themes and allusions throughout the book, including a section in which Mahound recites the Satanic verses. Later in the novel, Salman claims that, in the act of copying, he changes the words of the revelation to Mahound and Mahound does not immediately detect the changes. When Mahound does discover

the changes, Salman flees. After the conquest of Jahilia, Salman is brought before Mahound. Salman is not allowed to convert to submission, as Mahound tells him, "Your blasphemy, Salman, can't be forgiven. Did you think I wouldn't work it out? To set your words against the words of God" (TSV 374). However, Salman's life is spared because of the intercession of Bilal. Through all these narratives we find that Rushdie had sound and deep knowledge about Islam. Being himself from Muslim background and his knowledge of Islam helped him to provoke attacks by many Muslims. In an interview, Rushdie stated that "the point is that I am not a religious person any more, formally; but I have remained all my life, very attached to and interested in the subject of Islam. I studied it at university—indeed the place where I first heard about the satanic verses (of which a fictionalized version is in the book) is when I was studying Islam. So it's an image which has remained with me for 20 years" (Appignanesi and Maitland 1989: 40).

Muslims around the world posted resentments stating their reasons. One such contender is Mohammad Hasim Kamaldi, a professor of law in the International Islamic University of Malaysia, who provides his reasons as "The Satanic Verses reviles and defames the Prophet of Islam (saws), the wives of the Prophet (saws) and his leading Companions. The book also contains contemptuous passages concerning the Holy Qur'an and some of the cardinal values and principles of the Islamic faith" (1997:294). Many Muslims considered Rushdie an apostate. At the eleventh session of the Islamic Law academy of the Muslim World League, held in Mecca in February 1989, Rushdie was declared an apostate with a recommendation "that he and his publishers should be prosecuted under criminal charges in a British court" as well as "tried in absentia in an Islamic country under the rules of the Shari 'ah" (Kamali 1997:297). Imagery is another important technique applied by Rushdie which also provoked Muslims. Lamin Sanneh writes: "For Muslims the dream is not a neutral category, or even, as Rushdie claims, a pathological state, which is also how the modern West views the subject. On the contrary, the dream has an exalted place in the Muslim tradition" (1989-90:85). Many Muslims

circulated excerpts from the book that they considered to be offensive. For the Muslims the patriarch Abraham whom Rushdie uses as 'Ibrahim' is held with respect and the way in which Rushdie employed him in the novel arouse hatred. In *The Satanic Verses*, Abraham, the patriarch is presented as:

In ancient time the patriarch Ibrahim came into this valley with Hagar and Ismail, their son. Here, in this waterless wilderness, he abandoned her. She asked him, can this be God's will? He replied, it is. And left, the bastard. From the beginning men used God to justify the unjustifiable. He moves in mysterious ways: men say. Small wonder, then that women have turned to me. –But I'll keep to the point; Hagar wasn't a witch. She was trusting: then surely He will not let me perish. After Ibrahim left her, she fed the baby at her breast until her milk ran out. Then she climbed two hills, first Safa then Marwah, running from one to the other in her desperation, trying to sight a tent, a camel, a human being. She saw nothing. That was when he came to her, Gibreel, and showed her the waters of Zamzam. So Hagar survived; but why now do the pilgrims congregate? To celebrate her survival? No, no. They are celebrating the honour done the valley by the visit of, you've guessed it, Ibrahim. (TSV 95)

For Rushdie, it is inexcusable for Abraham to leave Hagar and the Child Ismail in the desert. And it is for this reason that Abraham is referred to as "bastard." While Muslims may take offense at this insult to a prophet, the fact remains that Abraham is said to have abandoned both the mother of his child in the desert, and to an outside observer, this may not seem like the best thing that one can do for the people whom one loves. The other point that Rushdie makes is that even though Gibreel appears to Hagar and Ismail to save them, people still give all of the glory to Abraham. This is true even in modern-day Islam, in which Abraham is honoured as the patriarch while Hagar is all but forgotten except for once each year during the pilgrimage, when pilgrims re-enact her desperate run between Safa and Marwah in search of water. Clearly, Rushdie is cognizant of and objects to the status of women in the Islamic world. Here, one may say that Rushdie's view is

pro-Islamic but it is anti-Muslim. When one refers to his earlier novel *Shame* (1983) we find him commenting on Islam as: "So-called Islamic 'Fundamentalism' does not spring, in Pakistan, from the people. It is imposed on them from above. Autocratic regimes find it useful to espouse the rhetoric of faith, because people respect that language, are reluctant to oppose it. This is how religions shore up dictators; by encircling them with words of power, words which the people are reluctant to see discredited, disenfranchised, mocked" (*Shame* 1983:251).

Towards the end of the episode on "Mahound" we find the Prophet Mahound in a wrestling match with the Archangel Gibreel. When he came to his senses he jumped to his feet filled with the urgency of his news. "It was the Devil," he says aloud to the empty air, making it true by giving it voice." (TSV 123) Rushdie goes on to write further that the prophet misquoted the Quran and thus in the novel the realization is stated as:

This is what he has heard in his listening, that he has been tricked, that the Devil came to him in the guise of the Archangel, so that the verses he memorized, the ones he recited in the poetry tent, were not the real thing but its diabolic opposite, not godly, but Satanic. (TSV 123)

The prophet after declaring the abrogation of the verses which Shaitan whispered in his ear recited new verses in their place:

'Shall he have daughters and you sons?'

'That would be a fine division!'

'These are but names you have dreamed of, you and your fathers. Allah vests no authority in them.' (124)

The prophet faces the consequence of his misdeed. His wife who was seventy years old was dead. The Grandec of Jahilia institutes a policy of persecution that advances too slowly for Hind. The name of the new religion was 'Submission' (TSV 124). The *Quran* is the sacred book of the Muslims. The Muslim law (Shari at-e-Islam) is based on four foundations or principles; The Quran, Ahadith (the Traditions of the

Prophet, Ijma' and Qiyas. Among this four, the Quran is the chief book. Anything beyond the teachings of the *Quran* is not tolerated. It is claimed; Allah kept on revealing His word to him in parts (Surahs 17:106; 25:32, 33). The revelation continued at Mecca as well as at Medina. It is claimed that Qur'an was brought to the first heaven on the Night of Power (Lailatul-Qadr) and since then Gabriel kept on revealing it to him piece-meal till his death (Surah 97:1-5;25:32). After a brief cessation revelation (the period being termed 'fatra') the process was re-established and continued till Muhammad's Death; but every time the mode of revelation was different. At times Muhammad saw Gabriel while the latter read out the words of Allah to him. Sometimes he simply heard Gabriel's voice. At times he heard the sound of a bell through which the words of the angel reached his ears mysteriously. Sometimes the word was revealed to him in dreams and on other occasions it as revealed straight into his heart. So, the Muslims consider the *Quran* as the word of Allah. The very act of using the name of the prophet Mohammed and the *Quran* in a secular manner angered the sentiments of the Muslims all over the world.

Charlie Wesley in his essay 'The Function of "Good" and "Evil" in *The Satanic Verses*: A Query' writes:

Throughout The Satanic Verses, Rushdie alerts the reader to the problem of communicability within language, and its function within relations of power. Considering this problem, the question must be asked: is Salman's "all-knowing, all-wise" akin to Mahound's "all-hearing, all-knowing?" Initially, the ideas seem similar but when considering this passage closely, we can surmise that "hearing" has a much different set of connotations than "wise". (Zamora, 2010: 138-139)

Rushdie parodies Muhammad's prophecies by re-writing them as part of a dream that Gibreel has. In his dream, Gibreel encounters the scribe "salman," who writes down the words "Mahound" (Rushdie's parody of the prophet Muhammad) relays to him from his visions. In *The Satanic Verses* it states, "Salman began to notice how

useful and well timed the angel's revelations tended to be, so that when the faithful were disputing Mahound's views on any subject... the angel would turn up with an answer, and he always supported Mahound ... he would just lay down the law and the angel would confirm it afterwards" (TSV 376-77). Noticing this, and anticipating something "fishy" Salman (the character) begins to change what Mahound transmits to him. Discussing the transcription of Mahound's words, Salman says;

If Mahound recited a verse in which God was described as all-hearing, all-knowing, I would write, all-knowing, all-wise. Here's the point: Mahound did not notice the alterations... but, good heavens, if my poor words could not be distinguished from the Revelation by God's own Messenger, then what did that mean? (379-80)

Kushwant Singh said in *Outlook*,

The Satanic Verses could well have been listed among his best, but for the faux pas of gratuitously offending Muslim susceptibilities. His knowledge of Islamic theology is sound: there is evidence that there were some verses which had not been revealed to the Prophet by Allah, but inserted by evil design and were expunged from the Quran. But he should have known that Muslims would not tolerate the slightest insinuation on the characters of the Prophet or his wives. The outcome of his folly was Ayatollah Khomeini pronouncing a fatwa of death on him and the book being banned in all Muslim countries, as well as in India. (2008: 80)

The distortion of Quran and the tarnishing of the image of Prophet Muhammad in the novel instigated violence. Rushdie's depictions of the Prophet Muhammad, and several other elements of the novel, are considered highly controversial and blasphemous. Perhaps most offensive to Muslims, in *The Satanic Verses* is the presentation of the brothel at Jahilia as a city staffed with prostitutes who take the names of Muhammad's wives. Since Muslims believe that the wives of the Prophet are the 'Mothers of all believers,' they esteem them. Daniel pipes an observer said: "As the prophet of Rushdie's novel lies dying, he is visited by the Goddess al-Lat,

indicating either that al-Lat exists or the prophet thought she did" (TSV 65). He is of the view that these elements triggered hatred and violence amongst the Muslims. There was worldwide unrest demanding the ban of the book. By October 1988 letters and phone calls began to come into Viking Penguin from Muslims angry with the book and demanding it be withdrawn. By the end of the month the book was banned in India and Muslims in England began to protest the novel. One saw a global networking of Muslims, inspired by events that began in India. Parekh commented on the protestors as "not so much their intolerance as their timidity, not their feeling of rage but a sense of hurt, not their anger but their distress" (1990:75). On 14 January 1989 in Bradford protestors burnt the book in the presence of the media and international publicity was achieved. And the ban was followed by countries like Bangladesh, Sudan, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Kenya, Thailand, Tanzania, Indonesia and Singapore. The last nation which banned the book was Venezuela in June 1989. In the United States, the FBI was notified of 78 threats to bookstores in early March 1989 and scores of other bookstores received death threats. While there was already a considerable amount of protest by Muslims in the first months after the book's publishing, the fatwa issued by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, the Supreme Leader of Iran, created a major international incident. Although Khomeini did not give the legal reasoning for his judgement, it is thought to be based on the ninth chapter of the *Quran* called 'At-Tawba, Verse 61': "Some of them hurt the prophet by saying, 'He is all ears!' say, 'It is better for you that he listens to you. He believes in God, and trusts the believers. He is a mercy for those among you who believe.' Those who hurt God's messenger have incurred a painful retribution." His fatwa issued on 14 February 1989 read as:

In the name of Him, the Highest. There is only one God, to whom we all shall return. I inform all zealous Muslims of the world that the author of the book The Satanic Verses—which has been compiled, printed, and published in opposition to Islam, the Prophet, and the Qur'an—and all those involved in

its publication who were aware of its content, are sentenced to death. I call on all zealous Muslims to execute them quickly, wherever they may be found, so that no one else will dare to insult the Muslim sanctities. God willing, whoever is killed on this path is a martyr. In addition, who has access to the author of this book, but does not possess the power to execute him, should report him to the people so that he may be punished for his actions. May peace and the mercy of God and His blessings be with you. (Pipes 1990:27)

After Ayatollah Khomeini's fatwa, Canadian Muslims began to protest the book. They demanded for the total ban of the book by the Canadian government under the existing hate literature law. Several days after the fatwa was declared Iranian officials offered a bounty for the killing of Rushdie, who was thus forced to live under police protection for the next nine years. On March 7, 1989, the United Kingdom and Iran broke diplomatic relations over the Rushdie controversy. Though Rushdie signed a declaration affirming his faith in Islam and called Viking-Penguin publisher of *The Satanic Verses*, neither to issue the book in paperback nor to be allowed for translation, the damage was already done. Rushdie employed magic realism to bring coherence in the novel. He is a diasporic writer and he blended history and imagination to bring about his alienation and hybridity. Rushdie Says, "One day, perhaps, the world may taste the pickles of history. They may be too strong for some palates, their smell may be overpowering, tears may rise to eyes; I hope nevertheless that it will be possible to say of them that they possess the authentic taste of truth....that they are despite everything, acts of love" (1981:531). Though the novel did not directly caused uproar and resort to violence yet for some people it was the profanity used by Rushdie that hurt their sentiments.

3. Dan Brown's life and works

Dan Brown, author of *The Da Vinci Code* was born on June 22, 1964. Brown grew up as the eldest of three children in Exeter, New Hampshire and graduated from Phillips Exeter Academy, a decidedly up-market school where his father was employed as a math teacher, in 1982. His mother, Constance, was a professional

musician principally involved in performing sacred music. Although Dan Brown actually attended local public, (i.e. open-enrolment), schools until the ninth grade he nonetheless lived with his family on the Exeter campus and participated in a college related life that was also informed by Christian values- singing in the church choir and attending church camp. He then attended Amherst College, graduating with a degree in English and Spanish in 1986 and spent several subsequent years attempting to establish himself as a singer-songwriter and pianist with only marginal success.

These endeavours did, however, lead him to live in Los Angeles where he taught Spanish at Beverly Hills Preparatory School to supplement his income and where he also met Blythe Newlon. This lady, - twelve years his senior, was then employed as Artistic Director of the National Academy of Songwriters. As their relationship developed Blythe used her influence in attempts to further Dan Brown's musical career. It happened, however, that despite Brown's accepted musical talents, (four CDs of his music were produced and his backers spoke of him as 'the next Barry Manilow'), his somewhat preppy and slightly reserved manner contributed to an overall inability to gain sufficient appreciation as a performance artist to justify continued efforts to establish himself professionally. In 1993, he decided to return to New Hampshire and secured a teaching job, in English, at Phillips Exeter Academy, Blythe Newlon accompanied him.

Dan Brown puts his writing career down to reading a copy of Sidney Sheldon's *Doomsday Conspiracy* which he had found on the beach whilst on holiday in Tahiti in 1994, saying, "I finished the book and thought, 'Hey, I could do that'." In 1995 Dan Brown and Blythe, (now describing herself as an art historian), wrote, under the pseudonym Danielle Brown *187 Men to Avoid: A Guide for the Romantically Frustrated Woman*. The following year Dan Brown became a full-time writer, Dan Brown and Blythe Newlon were married in 1997, he published his first thriller, *Digital Fortress* in 1998. He went on to write *Angels and Demons* and *Deception point*. In the early pages of *Deception Point* there appeared an Acknowledgement

where Brown thanked “Blythe Brown for her tireless research and creative input.” *The Da Vinci Code* which seems also to have benefitted from such “research and input” was published in March 2003 and sold 6,000 copies on the first day - going to the top of the New York Times’ Best Seller list in the first week of publication. (The New York Times literary staff had, in fact, been so taken with their preview copies that they had actually openly endorsed it as a “wow” just prior to publication).

Dan Brown and his siblings donated \$2.2 million to the Phillips Exeter Academy in 2004 establishing the “Richard G. Brown Technology Endowment”, to help “provide computers and high-tech equipment for students in need” to honour their father, who had taught there for 35 years. Richard G. Brown in his day had also been a ‘best seller’ having written the celebrated (in relevant circles) mathematics textbook *Advanced Mathematics: Precalculus with Discrete Mathematics and Data Analysis*. His abilities as a teacher of math had even led to his being awarded the “Presidential Award for Excellence in Science and Mathematics Teaching” by President George H. W. Bush.

The sales figures for *The Da Vinci Code* kept on growing - to the extent that it became established as the fastest-selling adult novel ever with some 40 million copies sold that had reputedly earned Dan Brown around £140 million by early 2006. A deal has also been struck with Columbia Pictures for a multi-million pound film adaptation of *The Da Vinci Code*, starring Tom Hanks as Langdon and directed by Ron Howard.

3.1. Brown’s *The Da Vinci Code* as literature of violence

The *Da Vinci Code* created chaos in different parts of the world, especially in the Christian dominated areas. There were slogans for banning the selling of the book. It crested much communal disharmony as it misinterpreted and misused the Christian code of conduct and sanctity. It is a thriller story involving secret

societies, conspiracies, the Catholic Church, and the fictional “truth” about Jesus Christ. Here is the author’s own summary:

A renowned Harvard symbologist is summoned to the Louvre Museum to examine a series of cryptic symbols relating to Da Vinci’s artwork. In decrypting the code, he uncovers the key to one of the greatest mysteries of all time . . . and he becomes a hunted man. During the course of the novel it is alleged that the Catholic Church is perpetuating a major, centuries-long conspiracy to hide the “truth” about Jesus Christ from the public, and it or its agents are willing to stop at nothing, including murder, to do so.

The Da Vinci Code is a gripping tale of a succession of murders most foul. The Prologue opens the saga of the hidden truth. The curator who was assassinated thought to himself, “If I die, the truth will be lost forever” (*TDVC* 19). It takes the readers from the mythological times to the immediate present. The saga begins in the present moment but regresses as far back as mythological times ‘frequently jumping over times, turning the accomplishment of many years into an hour glass. It may be said to bridge the entire human history and civilization as it touches both the most primitive symbolism and the latest science and technology with references to the GPS tracking and talk of the electronic leash. It is full of action, suspense, mystery, murder and mayhem. The action of the novel travels back and forth from Paris to Rome and London and beyond. From the dawn of man’s mythical consciousness, the reader is taken on a whirlwind tour covering sacred mysteries buried beneath Solomon’s Temple. Thence we take a giant leap to the times of Jesus and the still more important persona of Mary Magdalene, the bearer of the mystery of the sacred feminine. The most hallowed mission of humanity thereafter is conceived in terms of safeguarding the bloodline of Mary Magdalene. All history, science and art are ransacked and re-interpreted in terms of this mysterious and sacred charge. The Crusaders and the Knight Templars in their time had preserved in tact this secret and sacred knowledge from the depredations of the predatory enemy of the sacred feminine, the Church of Rome. In their anxiety and foresight

to preserve the sanctity and secrecy of the sacred feminine, the Crusaders under their French leader Godfrey of Bouillon founded a secret society by name the Priory of Sion.

The plot of the novel opens in Paris, the cultural capital of the world. It takes the reader on a tour of the world-famous museum the Louvre, with its enormous artistic treasures. The novel is stacked high with cultured and sophisticated dialogue about the world's supreme artists such as Leonardo da Vinci and Caravaggio and their immortal masterpieces. The novel delves deep into specialists fields such as etymology, semantics, cryptology, semiotics, folklore and myth. The characters too are highly cultured and sophisticated: the curator of the Louvre, a Harvard professor, a cryptologist and even a member of the British aristocracy.

The novel unfolds in the present time with the sensational murder of Jacques Sauiere, the renowned curator of the Louvre. The living Sauniere, unknown to the public, had been leading a kind of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde life. In his public life he was the distinguished savant and connoisseur of art and the renowned curator of the world famous Louvre in Paris. Unknown to the public as Grandmaster of the Priory of Sion he had all along been closely guarding the secret lore of the ancient truth of the sacred feminine. The premature revelation of this fateful truth could topple Christianity and deal the death knell to the church. The position of the murdered victim constitutes the strangest of puzzles. As his life ebbed out with the bullet wound in his stomach, he mustered himself to shape his limbs into a replica of Leonardo da Vinci's famous drawing of the Vitruvian Man. And in invisible ink he had left encrypted not only the location of the Priory's secret but also the necessary directions as to how to get there.

It is left to the last surviving heir of Jesus and Mary Magdalene, Agent Sophie Nevue, the granddaughter of the murdered man, to decipher the code and retrieve the secret of the eternal feminine. It soon transpires that the murder of Sauniere is not an isolated one. It is but one of a quartet of such crimes and linked to more serial murders. The French police are out to catch the culprit. As in most fiction

crime Captain Bezu Fache and his team are on the wrong scent from the beginning. Robert Langdon, the Harvard academic whose name figures in the murdered man's mysterious message is the obvious suspect. Owing to Agent Nevue's clever machinations, the police are sent on a protracted wild goose chase and even after hundreds of pages they are still seen hunting their prey without a single catch to their credit. From one perspective the plot of the novel appears complex and much drawn out. Yet from another point of view it is seen as the pursuit of a single mystery; the most ancient of mysteries. And it still remains as a modern mystery. After all these murders and pursuits and chases, the mystery never seems to be solved. In the end the apocalypse that would have destroyed the church fails to materialize and the secret is forever lost. Brown in his novel seeks to indoctrinate with some sort of pseudo-truth that is contrary to all known facts. The instigating element in the novel lies in the distortion of the life of Jesus, who for the Christians is their saviour and redeemer. In the novel, the person of Jesus has been discounted, deflated, debased and vulgarised. He whom the church holds aloft as the Son of God, the Saviour of the world is represented as no more than a sorry performer in a harlequinade! Generally, a work of fiction is purely the product of the author's imagination. *The Da Vinci Code* raises fundamental moral issues that should concern all serious creative writers and their audience. A question that arises is, does the cloak of pseudo-fiction absolve the author of all moral responsibility? In the book, a Jewish carpenter by name Jesus of the tribe of Judah married Mary Magdalene of the tribe of Benjamin. His posthumous daughter baby Sarah was carried off to England and the Merovingians are the said Sarah's descendants. The historical Merovingians were a Frankish dynasty established by Clovis, which reigned in Gaul and Germany from about AD 500 to 751. Their dynastic name is derived from Merewig, grandfather of Clovis. No lineal descent is traceable from any supposed issue of Mary Magdalene. Brown very creatively blended politics and history to show that the marriage between Jesus and Mary Magdalene happened to preserve the hierarchy of the two clans –Judah and Benjamin.

He presents the church as a conspiring body. The church is a gigantic conspiracy, intent on forging documents, rewriting history, disseminating misinformation instead of spreading the Truth of Jesus' Evangelism. Though the church as a whole may be said to be held up to ridicule in the novel, in particular it is the Roman Catholic Church that is given a short shrift. In the novel, the Roman Catholic Church is the mafia and every priest and prelate in that world-wide Communion a mafia too. The Papal prelature of Opus Dei (Latin word for God's work) is depicted as the very villain of the piece, out on a killing spree with demonic ferocity and determination to safeguard its territory and protect its vested interests. Here is an excerpt of a conversation between Bishop Manuel Aringarosa and a reporter:

'Many call Pous Dei a brainwashing cult,' reporters often challenged. 'Others call you an ultra conservative Christian secret society. Which are you?'

'Opus Dei is neither,' the bishop would patiently reply. 'We are a Catholic Church. We are a congregation of Catholics who have chosen as our priority to follow Catholic doctrine as rigorously as we can in our daily lives.'

'Does God's Work necessarily include vows of chastity, tithing and atonement for sins through self-flagellation and the cilice?'

'You are describing only a small portion of the Opus Dei population,' Aringarosa said. 'There are many levels of involvement. Thousands of Opus Dei members are married, have families and do God's Work in their own communities. Others choose lives of asceticism within our cloistered residence halls. These choices are personal, but everyone in Opus Dei shares the goal of bettering the world by doing the Work of God. Surely this is an admirable quest.' (TDVC 50-51)

The Catholic community as a whole is presented as a tyrannical force in the person of bishop Aringarosa. According to the "fact" page in the novel, the Vatican prelature known as Opus Dei is a deeply devout Catholic sect that has been the

topic of recent controversy due to reports of brainwashing, coercion, and a dangerous practice known as “corporal mortification.” Opus Dei has just completed construction of a \$47 million National Headquarters at 243 Lexington Avenue in New York City. The novel goes on to describe Opus Dei as “a Catholic Church” and portrays it as an order of monks with members serving as assassins, one of whom (a “hulking albino” named Silas) is a key character in the book. According to Opus Dei's U.S. communications director, Brian Finnerty:

The real Opus Dei was founded in Spain in 1928 by a Catholic priest, St. Josemaría Escrivá, with the purpose of promoting lay holiness. It began to grow with the support of the local bishops there and was approved as a secular institute of pontifical right by the Holy See in 1950. Opus Dei's work has been blessed and encouraged by Pope John XXIII, Paul VI, John Paul I, and John Paul II. In 1982, John Paul II established it as a personal prelature of the Catholic Church after careful study of its role in the Church's mission. The culmination of the Church's support for Opus Dei and its message came with the 2002 canonization of its founder. Pope John Paul has called Opus Dei's founder “the saint of ordinary life.” (On the Priory of Sion: www.priory-of-sion.com)

There is a large number of inaccuracies in the picture of Opus Dei painted by the novel. Some of the most significant are catalogued and critiqued by Finnerty:

The author evinces a remarkable lack of understanding of the structure of the Catholic Church and its various component institutions. Besides his mischaracterization of Opus Dei as “a sect,” he variously calls it “a Catholic Church,” a “congregation,” a “personal Prelature of the Pope himself,” and a “Personal Prelature of Vatican City.” Opus Dei places special emphasis on helping lay people seek holiness in their daily lives. It has no monks, nor any members anything like the novel's creepy albino character named Silas. The author's descriptions of Opus Dei's “practices,” as represented by Silas's bloody purging rituals, are at best grossly distorted and at worst fabrications. He

has taken pious accounts of the penances of some of the Church's great saints, including St. Josemaria Escriva, and transformed them into a monstrous horror show. The idea that Opus Dei entered a corrupt bargain with Pope John Paul II-bailing out the Vatican Bank in exchange for status as a personal prelature-is offensive and has no basis in reality. (On the Priory of Sion: www.priory-of-sion.com)

The loudest scandal unearthed by Brown is that Jesus was no celibate as the church proclaims and all Christians believe, but that on the other hand, He was very much a married man. Brown's creation of the character of a married Jesus is one of a classical fallacy. The following questions arise in the plot of Brown: By what logic does Brown arrive at the conclusion that Mary Magdalene represents the sacred feminine? How does the Grail come to represent the sacred feminine if it holds the blood of the Man Jesus and not of the Woman Mary Magdalene? Whether Mary is not only the sign and symbol, but also the vessel that holds the sacred feminine? The novel's principal theme the mysterious and mythical sacred feminine harks back to pre-historical times. When primitive man looked at the phenomenal world he endowed it with magic and mystery. The sun, the moon, and other heavenly bodies and indeed all the wonders of nature filled him with awe and wonder and worship and he ascribed to them divine status. Primitive man conceived the phenomenal world in terms of circularity and recurrence. The regular recurrence of the seasons, the birth, growth, decay and death of all living beings and things were mysteries beyond his simple understanding.

The earliest known myths of man, namely the fertility myths were an attempt on the part of primitive man to come to terms with these amazing terms. Some anthropologists have sought to see the narrative of Jesus, His death and resurrection as a myth. But Jesus of Nazareth if not a mythological figure, he is very much a historical figure. *The Da Vinci Code* is a celebration of paganism and denigration of Christianity. It endeavours to retrieve, revive and to give a new lease of life to an ancient and moribund mythology and a long since deflated, disbanded and discarded paganism. The episode where Langdon and Sophie go to the house

of Sir Leigh Teabing, a historian, to ask for his help we find, Teabing telling them the legend of the Grail, starting with the historical evidence that the Bible didn't come straight from God but was compiled by Emperor Constantine. He also cites evidence that Jesus' divinity was decided by a vote at Nicaea, and that Jesus was married to Mary Magdalene, who was of royal blood, and had children by her. Teabing shows them the hidden symbols in 'The Last Supper' and the painted representation of the Magdalene. He tells them that the Holy Grail is actually Mary Magdalene's body and the documents that prove Mary's bloodline is related to Jesus. He says he thinks Saunier and the others may have been killed because the Church suspected that the Priory was about to unveil this secret.

While the packaging of the novel is modern, even state-of-the-art, the product itself is antique. The novel proposes that, contrary to what the scriptures affirm, in the beginning instead of the Word there was the pagan mystery of the sacred feminine shall endure and survive as the only Absolute Truth.

'The Leonardo da Vinci' that Brown depicts is a gross misinterpretation and ludicrous caricature of one of the supreme geniuses of the European Renaissance. As a past Grandmaster of the Priory of Sion, it is alleged that he had embedded in his perennially fascinating creations such as 'The Last Supper', 'Mona Lisa', and 'Madonna of the Rocks' – hidden in the background and invisible to all others except those initiated into the secrets of the society – the secret of the sacred feminine. According to Brown's interpretation, through Mona Lisa's eternally intriguing quizzical expression the artist was really cocking at the denizens of the Vatican while outwardly paying obeisance to them. So the Leonardo of the novel is the very antithesis of the artist's personality presented by art historians such as Giorgio Vasari and Walter Pater. His master creations pored over by Giorgio Vasari to Kenneth Clark, the twentieth-century interpreter of the Renaissance genius, is glibly set aside as irrelevant. The novel claims to unravel for the first time the mystery of Leonardo's art. Leonardo's *The Last Supper*, like many others on the same theme, is plainly no more than the artist's impression of the scene. The only authentic

reports we have of this scene is from the *New Testament* as presented by the gospel of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. The narrative in John's gospel make it quiet explicit that the disciple leaning on Jesus' bosom was John, the son of Zebedee. The text in the *Bible* which justifies that the disciple was John is:

One of them, the disciple whom Jesus loved, was reclining next to him. Simon Peter motioned to this disciple and said, "Ask him which one he means." Leaning back against Jesus, he asked him, "Lord, who is it?" ("John" 13:23-25)

The pronoun "he" explicitly shows that the disciple was a male and not as projected by Brown. It is absurd to claim that the figure represents Mary Magdalene, the personification of the sacred feminine. There is no mention of any relic of the Last Supper called the Holy Grail in Primitive Christianity or in the *Bible*. Brown in his narrative presents this relic in a factual manner by implementing the sources of history. The novel portrays Jesus as merely a teacher of righteousness. The leaders of the Jewish communities, the Rabbis, the Pharisees, the Doctors of the Law and the Sadducees were all teachers of righteousness. What happens in the novel is that the historical Jesus whose words and deeds as told by eye-witnesses and recorded by the canonical four Gospels disappears. In its place, we are presented with Jesus, the teacher of righteousness. Jesus was not only the expositor of divine righteousness, but also its supreme exemplar. There is no evidence to link Jesus with the teacher of righteousness of the Dead Sea Scrolls. The real importance of the scrolls is three-fold. First and foremost, they throw a flood of illumination on the text of the Hebrew Scriptures. Second, they refresh our knowledge of Judaism contemporaneous with Christianity. Finally, as far as Christianity is concerned they have substantially augmented our knowledge of the background of early Christianity. The scrolls lend no support to the enemies of Christianity who proclaim from the housetops that they destroy the very foundations of Christianity.

The unholy trinity of the novel's principal characters constitutes the prime protagonists of the primitive concept of the sacred feminine. Most of the erroneous

notions –erroneous from the Christian point of view –emanate from them. The source of a major share of such fantastic and lopsided ideas is Sir Leigh Teabing. For instance, he advances the incredible intimation that holographs left behind by Jesus of his own writing texts. He goes on to add that chronicles and journals of Jesus’ contemporaries too are in abundant supply.

Christianity is unforgivably and unfavourably conceived in the novel as though it were a continuum of the fertility myths and some of their manifestations in sexual licentiousness and turpitude. It is scandalous to allege that Christianity demonized all demons instead of denigrating womanhood; it exalted womanhood and ennobled the role of woman in the family and the community. In reality, neither Judaism nor Christianity can be accused of degrading the female sex. The *Bible* makes it quite explicit that the Hebrew Matriarchs such as Sarah, Rebecca and Rachel enjoyed an honoured and prominent position in the management of their households and the Patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob invariably heeded their wishes. A group of women was among Jesus’ devoted admirers and friends. He had tender affection for his female friends and in his conception of the family the woman occupied an important role.

The attack that the novel makes on the Judaeo-Christian doctrine of Original Sin is quite unwarranted. The proclivity to do evil innate to unredeemed human nature cannot be explained or understood except by postulating some such doctrine as that of the Original Sin. This doctrine is no old wives’ tale, but fully borne out by universal human experience. Viewed purely from a secular point of view it is the distilled essence of human experience. The *Da Vinci Code* sets out with the laudable ambition of solving some of history’s most baffling mysteries. The novel depicts the Roman Catholic Church as a ruthless mafia contrary to all facts of the church’s compassionate mission. In the novel, the excruciating purgation of sins is projected in the wildest imaginary way. After assassinating the Grand Master, Silas says “I must purge my soul of today’s sins.” The lines that follow explain the violent nature of the book which instigates the feelings of the Roman Catholics:

Even so, Silas knew, absolution required sacrifice. Pulling his shades, he stripped naked and knelt in the centre of his room. Looking down, he examined the spiked cilice belt clamped around his thigh. All true followers of The Way wore this device – a leather strap, studded with sharp metal barbs that cut into the flesh as a perpetual reminder of Christ’s suffering. The pain caused by the device also helped counteract the desires of the flesh...clasping the buckle, he cinched it one notch tighter, wincing as the barbs dug deeper into his flesh. Exhaling slowly, he savoured the cleansing ritual of his pain. Pain is good, Silas whispered, repeating the sacred mantra of Father Josemaria Escriva – the Teacher of all Teachers. Although Escriva had died in 1975, his wisdom lived on, his words still whispered by thousands of faithful servants around the globe as they knelt on the floor and performed the sacred practice known as ‘corporal mortification.’ (TDVC 29-30).

When the common man thinks of the Roman Catholic Church today the images that come to his mind are those of Pope John Paul II, a man of peace and goodwill revered throughout the world and the saintly Mother Teresa of Calcutta. In the novel Brown presents an episode where he says that all true followers of *The Way* wore a device “a leather strap, studded with sharp metal barbs that cut into the flesh as a perpetual reminder of Christ’s suffering. The pain caused by the device also helped counteract the desires of the flesh...clasping the buckle, he cinched it one notch tighter, wincing as the barbs dug deeper into his flesh. Exhaling slowly, he savoured the cleansing ritual of his pain. *Pain is good*, Silas whispered, repeating the sacred mantra of Father Josemaria Escriva—the Teacher of all Teachers. Although Escriva had died in 1975, his wisdom lived on, his words still whispered by thousands of faithful servants around the globe as they knelt on the floor and performed the sacred practice known as ‘corporal mortification’”(TDVC 29-30). It is difficult to reconcile these images with Brown’s portrayal of the Roman Church as history’s longest and most notorious and murderous mafia. So, the book as a whole is violent and instigates people. Although a work of fiction, the book claims to be meticulously researched, and it goes to great lengths to convey the impression that

it is based on fact. It even has a “fact” page at the front of the book underscoring the claim of factuality for particular ideas within the book. As a result, many readers-both Catholic and non-Catholic are taking the book’s ideas seriously. The problem is that many of the ideas that the book promotes are anything but fact, and they go directly to the heart of the Catholic faith. For example, the book promotes these ideas: Jesus is not God; he was only a man; Jesus was married to Mary Magdalene; She is to be worshiped as a goddess; Jesus got her pregnant, and the two had a daughter; That daughter gave rise to a prominent family line that is still present in Europe today; The *Bible* was put together by a pagan Roman emperor; Jesus was viewed as a man and not as God until the fourth century, when he was defiled by the emperor Constantine; The Gospels have been edited to support the claims of later Christians; In the original Gospels, Mary Magdalene rather than Peter was directed to establish the Church; There is a secret society known as the Priory of Sion that still worships Mary Magdalene as a goddess and is trying to keep the truth alive; The Catholic Church is aware of all this and has been fighting for centuries to keep it suppressed. It often has committed murder to do so; and that the Catholic Church is willing to and often has assassinated the descendents of Christ to keep his bloodline from growing. Teabing said to Sophie “if the Church finds the Holy Grail, they will destroy it. The documents and the relics of the blessed Mary Magdalene as well....all evidence will be lost. The Church will have won their age-old war to rewrite history. The past will be erased forever” (*TDVC* 358). In the course of the novel, the writer cleverly puts it in a thrilling manner the descendants of Jesus and Mary Magdalene. Sophie’s and Langdon’s research leads them to the discovery that Sir Isaac Newton is the knight they are looking for, the one buried by a Pope, because they learn he was buried by Alexander Pope. They go to Westminster Abbey, where Newton is buried. There, the Teacher lures them to the garden with a note saying he has Teabing. They go there only to discover that Teabing himself is the Teacher. Teabing suspected that Saunière had decided not to release the secret of the Priory of Sion, because the Church threatened to kill

Sophie if the secret was released. Wanting the secret to be public knowledge, he had decided to find the Grail himself. Teabing gives Langdon the cryptex and asks Langdon and Sophie to help him open it. Langdon figures out that the password is *apple*—the orb missing from Newton’s tomb. He opens the cryptex and secretly takes out the papyrus. Then he throws the empty cryptex in the air, causing Teabing to drop his pistol as he attempts to catch it and prevent the map inside from being destroyed. The papyrus inside the second cryptex directs Sophie and Langdon to Scotland, where Sophie finds her brother and her grandmother. During the reunion, she discovers that her family is, indeed, of the bloodline of Jesus and Mary Magdalene. Sophie’s grandmother said that her parents were “from Merovingian families—direct descendants of Mary Magdalene and Jesus Christ” (*TDVC* 579). In order to protect their family her parents and their ancestors changed their names of Plantard and Saint-Clair. According to Brown “Their children represented the most direct survival royal bloodline and therefore were carefully guarded by the Priory” (*TDVC* 579). The novel thus gives the message that the lineage of Jesus and Mary Magdalene is still survived and that the Roman Catholic Church will do anything to stop this truth from being revealed. And it is this factor that caused resentment and violence throughout the Christian dominated areas.

Catholics are concerned about the book because it not only misrepresents their Church as a murderous institution but also implies that the Christian faith itself is utterly false. It offends the Christian belief as a whole. Some of the offensive claims of *The Da Vinci Code* pertain directly to the Catholic Church. The remainder strike at the Christian faith itself. If the book’s claims were true, then all forms of Christianity would be false (except perhaps for Gnostic/feminist versions focusing on Mary Magdalene instead of Jesus). So, the book as a whole is violent and instigates people. Mass protests came out demanding the ban of the book all over the world, especially in the Christian dominated states. Consider the following quotations, all of which predate the Council of Nicaea which asserts the truth about Christ to the Christians:

Ignatius of Antioch: "For our God, Jesus Christ, was conceived by Mary in accord with God's plan: of the seed of David, it is true, but also of the Holy Spirit" (Letter to the Ephesians 18:2 [A.D. 110]). Tatian the Syrian: "We are not playing the fool, you Greeks, nor do we talk nonsense, when we report that God was born in the form of a man" (Address to the Greeks 21 [A.D. 170]).

At least one part of the globe looks set to escape the spell of *The Da Vinci Code* after an Indian state announced today it would ban Dan Brown's bestselling book on blasphemy grounds. The following are the various responses about the novel from different parts of the world. Rashmee Roshan Lall posted an article in *Times of India* which read as:

Punjab's decision came a day after the government of predominantly Christian Nagaland banned sale of the novel and screening of the film based on it, saying the content was blasphemous. "The book is blasphemous. It has portrayed Christ and the Christian faith in a highly objectionable manner," Nagaland education minister Imkong Imchen said. However, Punjab government decided to ban its release in the state quoting "intelligence inputs", which predicted violence in case the movie was shown in the state. Though so far, the state had not witnessed any large-scale protest against the movie, the Catholic Church Diocese of Jalandhar sought a ban on it on Thursday morning, following which the decision was taken. The home department order on Thursday said, "The decision was taken after the Christian community expressed strong resentment against the alleged objectionable contents of the movie. So, there was a possibility of violent confrontation at some places, particularly those having sizable population of Christians." (25 May 2006:1-2)

For Lebanon's Catholic information centre, whose criticism apparently led to the ban, it struck too deeply against Christianity. The Centre's president, Father Abdou Abu Kasm, said in *The Guardian*: "There are paragraphs that touch the very roots of Christian religion... they say Jesus Christ had a sexual relationship with Mary

Magdalene, that they had children. Those things are difficult for us to accept, even if it's supposed to be fiction" (2004: 13).

On being asked of their response to the book the common answers people posted on the net were:

It is irresponsible and offensive for Brown to impugn the faith of countless Catholics in this fashion. He has no solid evidence to support these contentions, and in the absence of such evidence it is unacceptable to smear the faith of millions with these charges.

A comparable smear would be saying that Lutherans have been murdering the descendants of Luther or that Jewish leaders have been murdering the descendants of Moses. If such charges were made, particularly with no evidence, they would be regarded instantly as vicious and bigoted slanders against what other people hold sacred. Claiming that Catholics have been killing the descendants of their God is a vile and unacceptable assault on their faith. People of all faiths should regard Dan Brown as the viciously bigoted man that it takes to make this kind of charge. (www.Cracking The Da Vinci Code)

It is not a defence to say that *The Da Vinci Code* is a work of fiction. Fiction can't change the basic facts about major historical figures without being subject to criticism. People would be outraged if Doubleday printed a novel portraying Adolph Hitler in a positive light. Christians have a right to be outraged when the basic historical facts about Christ are falsified. Congress MP from south Goa Churchill Alemao said, "People are unhappy with the film. Jesus Christ is God not only for Christians. He is also revered by other communities." U.S. Catholic bishops launched a website, JesusDecoded.com, refuting the key claims in the novel that were about to be brought to the screen. The bishops are concerned about errors and serious misstatements in *The Da Vinci Code*. The film has also been rated morally offensive – by the [United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' Office for Film and Broadcasting](http://www.USCC.org), which denounced its depiction of both the Jesus-Mary

Magdalene relationship and that of Opus Dei as “deeply abhorrent.” The Peruvian Episcopal Conference (CEP) declared the movie—and the book—as part of a “systematic attack on the Catholic Church”. Furthermore, the Archbishop of Lima, the controversial Cardinal and member of Opus Dei Juan Luis Cipriani, urged his community not to see the film: “If someone goes (to see the movie), they are giving money to those who hurt the faith. It's not a problem of fiction; if truth is not respected, what arises we could call white glove terrorism.” Pakistan banned *The Da Vinci Code* for showing what officials called blasphemous material about Jesus. Christian groups, along with the Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal held protests against the book and the film calling for a global ban. (“[Pakistan bans Da Vinci Code film](#)”. *BBC News*. June 4, 2006) Christian groups in Buddhist dominated Thailand protested against the *The Da Vinci Code* and called for it to be banned. On May 16, 2006, the Thai Censorship Committee issued a ruling to ban the book and the film too. From all the cited instances, we find the damage caused by the book amid speculations of its popularity.

As we read further, we see that the book takes great pains to create the appearance of factuality, including placing the infamous “fact” page at the beginning of the novel. Brown has stressed the ostensible accuracy of the book on his website and in interviews. This is not a case where an author and a publisher have produced an ordinary novel. They have gone to great lengths to mislead people into thinking that the novel has a historical basis. They deserve especially sharp criticism for this, and when criticism is made they cannot hypocritically hide behind the “It’s just fiction” allegation after having made such extensive efforts to convince the reader that it is not “just fiction.”

4. Conclusion

Though the writers may claim that *The Satanic Verses* and *The Da Vinci Code* are fictions, a work of art, yet one cannot deny the fact that they caused turmoil and violence. Writings at the expense of communal disharmony should be avoided.

There is enough space in fiction for creativity and variety which can imbibe the seeds of peace and harmony through non-violent way of writing. Fiction presents real life in rather smudged lines. Its attempts to render reality are sometimes even laughable, because reality is so much more complex and unfathomable and many a time fiction is a pale imitation of it. Both Brown and Rushdie wrote their novels tracing history both religious and political. Though woven with the fabric of imagination and fantasy, the religious element which they applied underneath the plot caused the damage. No greater war was ever fought than in the name of religion. A book can irritate and annoy, stir people up, even do harm; it can cause both laughter and tears and at the same time entice people. Literary lovers who love to venture into new dimensions keeping in mind the creativity of human mind will love these books. But a book should never be the cause of hatred or be the cause of death sentence upon its author. The power of written material will cause both positive and negative vibrations. Religious concepts should be presented in such a way that it generates harmony and peace. Beneath the surface of these books termed as literature causing violence, one can also agree that the literary art employed cannot be fathomed. Rushdie and Brown also elevated the art of creative writing and the freedom of imaginary expression to a high pedestal.

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Dr. Temjenwala Ao is an Administrator, Straightway Christian Mission Centre, Nagaland: Mokokchung. She has done Ph.D. in English on the topic, "Literature of Revolution, Violence and Protest." Area of interest: literary theory and criticism, folktales, rhetoric and contemporary art and ideas.

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