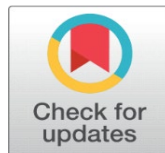
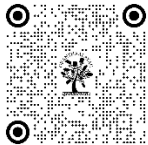


A TREATISE ON CONTEMPORARY WORLD 'AGE OF ANYTHING – CAN – HAPPEN' 'THE TALE OF THE SEEKER THE GRAIL OF LOVE'

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ABSTRACT

Rushdie's latest novel *Quichotte*¹ a literary "embarrass de richesse,"² runs like a picaresque novel of the Spanish writer's *Don Quixote*³ of Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra of the 16th century. In fact, it is a strikingly reworking of Cervantes's work *Don Quixote* and "a retelling of it and a homage to it."⁴ It almost runs like a comic romance that influenced many writers⁵ at a later date including Sam Du Champ, a mediocre writer of spy thrillers. In the Spanish romance *Don Quixote*, has had his wits disordered by inordinate devotion to the tales of chivalry and he calls up on to roam the world in search of adventures on his old nag Rocinat. Accompanied by Sancho Panza, his squire, he, with a view to continuing chivalric tradition, elects a beautiful damsel to be the mistress of the heart. So the most commonplace objects assume in his imagination fearful or romantic forms. He names the peasant girl from a neighbouring village Dulcinea del Toboso an honour about which she is entirely unaware. To set right his mental condition, Sanson Carraseo one of his friends, disguises himself as a knight and defeats Don Quixote who is forced to spend his time to lead the life of a shepherd. On his return journey, he dies though many lengthy digressions enrich the plot of the novel. The Spanish novel with its gripping theme of the confrontation of illusion with reality, bore deep impress on multitudes of writers including Salman Rushdie.

1. INTRODUCTION

Rushdie's latest novel *Quichotte*¹ a literary "embarrass de richesse,"² runs like a picaresque novel of the Spanish writer's *Don Quixote*³ of Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra of the 16th century. In fact, it is a strikingly reworking of Cervantes's work *Don Quixote* and "a retelling of it and a homage to it."⁴ It almost runs like a comic romance that influenced many writers⁵ at a later date including Sam Du Champ, a mediocre writer of spy thrillers. In the Spanish romance *Don Quixote*, has had his wits disordered by inordinate devotion to the tales of chivalry and he calls up on to roam the world in search of adventures on his old nag Rocinat. Accompanied by Sancho Panza, his squire, he, with a view to continuing chivalric tradition, elects a beautiful damsel to be the mistress of the heart. So the most commonplace objects assume in his imagination fearful or romantic forms. He names the peasant girl from a neighbouring village Dulcinea del Toboso an honour about which she is entirely unaware. To set right his mental condition, Sanson Carraseo

one of his friends, disguises himself as a knight and defeats Don Quixote who is forced to spend his time to lead the life of a shepherd. On his return journey, he dies though many lengthy digressions enrich the plot of the novel. The Spanish novel with its gripping theme of the confrontation of illusion with reality, bore deep impress on multitudes of writers including Salman Rushdie.

Like a good old fable, Rushdie's work *Quichotte* opens with Mr. Ismail Smile or alternatively Mr. Smile Smile under his nom de plume, 'a travelling salesman of pharmaceuticals of Indian origin, advancing years and retreating mental powers' (3) becomes addled by his obsession with an American television host *Femme Fatale*, Salma R., a migrant from Bollywood to Hollywood. Smile would like to win the heart of Salma R. with a view to saving the world in almost Monty Python style. Surprisingly, he becomes a victim to a psychological disorder where he finds himself incapable of distinguishing between truth and lies. He develops one-sided passion for Miss Salma R., a certain television personality for whose sake he sets off in his Chevy Cruze, in pursuit of his beloved along with his son Sancho (parthenogenetic offspring, black - and - white in a full - colour universe) and encounters many instances of 'Anything Can Happen' viz vicious racism, the opioid crisis, the mastodon invasion, financial corruption in Big Pharma, the rip in the cosmos, cricket speaking and guns talking etc. After crossing seven Valleys⁶ he reaches his beloved Salma R. He passionately believes in the dictum that he is for her, like Chaucer's Knight, 'her verray, parfit, gentil knyght'. (7) At Rushdie's hand contemporary world symbolises 'the Age of Anything – Can – Happen' (17,79,138,316,369)⁷ where one cannot predict anything or any event including weather, the likelihood of war, or the outcome of elections.

Quichotte, like a seeker in quest for the Holy Grail,⁸ makes his adventures from one part of the globe to the other part. The novelist makes the text like a travelogue and also a pilgrimage as he depicts *Quichotte*'s celebration of Holi with the Indian labourers in Mauritius and also his enjoyment along with his friends during the festival Bakr Eid near the Kolahoi glacier in Kashmir. He does not hesitate to travel by road, also by sea down the American coast to Brazil, or Argentina or across the Atlantic Ocean to Europe. He always carries thirteen things with him that are wrapped in an old knapsack thereby arousing curiosity among the visitors. He works without much success for his relative Dr. Smile's pharmaceutical business. By offering a lump sum in severance pay, Smile sacks *Quichotte*. Soon, he indulges in a reverie where he yearns for a son and also for a personal meeting with Miss Salma R. Like Quixote of Cervantes who glorifies the peasant girl of the neighbouring village to be the queen of the empire, he imagines Miss Salma R. to be his lady love. He becomes complacent as he is living in *The Age of Anything – Can – Happen*. He also envisions about a son and gives the name Sancho and says thus:

"O my warrior Sancho sent by Perseus to help me slay my Medusas and win my Salma's heart, here you are at last" (19)

The father yearns for wooing Salma R. and wants to travel on the road along with his son.

The plot now runs on two levels viz., the real life of Brother and the imaginary one of *Quichotte*. One can stretch one's own imagination to Cervantes's story of Don Quixote. Luckily, in Rushdie's work the tale and the teller are yoked together by race, place, generation and circumstance thereby proving the main thrust of the novel viz *The Age of Anything – Can – Happen*. Sam Du Champ makes a balance between two guiding principles of the universe viz paranoia (the belief that the world had meaning) and entropy (the belief that life was meaningless). While he has pain on the spine (22) Quixote has pain with his leg. Even his parents felt uneasy about him for his mysterious looks. With his works like the *Five Eyes Series*, he becomes famous and gives the title by calling him Sam the Sham. The mutual distrust against him pervades among the intelligence services of Australia, Canada, New Zealand, The United Kingdom and The United States. He is not rootless, not uprooted but transplanted. Though his origin was Bombay he had to leave the city by following the roads to America, a fantastic land.

Quichotte in his reverie, (39) develops passion for Miss Salma an exceptional woman, having the family background of stars in Bombay. She migrated to America transcending Bollywood to Hollywood. She with her steely resolve, became very popular in two continents. An American T.V producer was ready to avail himself of her services for his T.V productions. Her change from the generation of silver screen to computer screen in Los Angeles really makes her famous. Her role in spy drama *Five Eyes* became very popular in USA. She was popularly called Salma C.

"Salma C. was depicted in *Time* as a multi limbed Indian goddess with tentacles for arms, the Octopus Woman whose kiss was irresistible even though it killed the men upon whom it was bestowed" (46)

She entertained a special feature called "Immigreat for the Indian Immigrants". (49) Soon, she received a letter from *Quichotte* in which he exhibits his deep love for her thus:

"With this hand I declare my love. In time to come as I move ever closer you will come to see that I am true and that you must be mine. You are my Grail and this is my quest". (51) The letter impresses Salma very much and she anxiously waits for another letter. Soon, Brother's sister left India for London and joined the British establishment against the multitudes of arts, becomes a famous human rights activists. She recalls her stay in London which according to her, is a placid city. As a lawyer, she fights for minorities and the urban poor. She is an idealist and believes in the rule of law. Unfortunately, she discovers recently that London is narrow minded, delusional and people lack in the great virtue of acceptable skin colour, not comfortable to live in at all. Her husband Godfrey Simons encourages her. She has feelings of alienation in the city.

The Indian diaspora in USA plays an important role in the community development work there. Dr.R.K. Smile, prettily known as 'the Little King' is a cousin to Quichotte. He has his credentials in the city of Bombay. Later he moves on to USA and establishes his own pharmaceutical company in Atlanta and other places. He lives with his wife Happy but he doesn't hesitate in having extra marital affairs with the charming women working in his Company. He promotes his business by developing a pain killer that does wonders to cancer patients. He is related to Duleep Smile, a chef in London. In course of time, he brings him to New York along with his English wife. The word Smile is derived from Ismail probably from Karachi. With his donations Dr. Smile becomes very popular in Atlanta. According to him, love is good for business (73). Smile Pharmaceutical In (SPI) dealt with a premier product by name InSmile™, the sublingual fentanyl spray that helped many people and that also brought a lot of wealth for the Company. His wife Mrs. Happy entered the sphere of arts and ventured to make her concern bigger than Coke in USA. In fact, Dr. Smile took inspiration from an Urchin in Mumbai who was selling alcohol. He took a cue from the boy and decided that alcoholic related business is the best business. He became really very successful and prepared his product in many parts of the USA. With his commitment and enthusiasm, he excelled major competitors like Merck and gained confidence throughout the country. Unfortunately, Dr. Smile now known as the Little King, aka Little Big Hands, decided to employ charming women as his executives. In the first session, SPEIK (Smile Pharmaceuticals Expanding Information and Knowledge) he disclosed the secret ethos of the executives who were all "high flying no-frontier guys" (77). Like him Happy his wife, reiterated a statement from T.V which said it is the Age of Anything - Can - Happen. He at last, decided to sack Quichotte, a non-performer who was dreaming an impossible dream of love without promoting his company's sales.

Sancho, Quichotte's imaginary child makes some introspection about himself. He feels sorry as he has not grown with his 70 year old father. He has also a feeling that he is leading the life of a slave. He laments over his lack of a mother and the benefits of mother love. He listens to Don Quichotte on his father's record player. He also earnestly feels that the purpose of Universe might be the creation of a single perfect love. He talks about his dad and his journey and he searches for his ideal lady love. Suddenly like a philosopher, he poses a question 'Who am I'?⁶

Quichotte and Sancho with a view to meeting a charming lady, would cross many valleys.⁷ He is of the firm opinion that his love for Salma R. is unique and distinct as it would bring about complete positive change and transformation on earth. Du Champ the author of the T.V show earnestly feels that 'the decay of the earth in the novel would be a parallel to the decay - the environmental, political, social, moral decay - of the planet on which he lived'. (356) In the first valley (San Fernando Valley), they met Grillo Parlante an Italian insect, (94) sitting on the car roof unafraid and speaking English in an Italian accent. It asked Sancho to address it simply Jiminy. It also wanted to give insula, an Island of the Real. It later gave him consciousness, emotion, perception, self-awareness and capacity to connect to other people. It even provided him with happiness, sadness, anger, fear, disgust, disbelief, trust, faith, beauty and love besides hallucinations. It explained many things about the Universe and also its motto thus: "Give me more. I want it all" (103). Quichotte explained that he was in the valley in search of his lady love. He must pass through seven valleys viz., San Fernando Valley, Sun Valley, Death Valley, Happy Valley, Valley Forge to reach his lady love. In the first valley, the searcher must cast aside every kind of dogma. Soon, an osprey sent them a communication that landed splat on the map of the United States and flew away. Quichotte felt happy as he thought that he had received right guidance. He understood that on the road to New York he would find second valley which was Valley of love.

The letter from Quichotte touched deeply Salma R., his lady love. She made a copy of the letter and read it in the Maybach too many times. She lived alone on the roof of a high ceilinged modern penthouse of the roof of the old chocolate factory. She was proud of her lineage and preferred her American self to the Indian self. She would receive drugs which controlled her health. She had to undergo electroconvulsive shock treatment. She saw tiny green goblins and string like snakes burning between the spider webs and her synapses. In her hallucination, she felt like a Christmas visit from Sanity Claus. Sometimes, she depended on Anderson Thayer whom he called Rumpelstiltskin. After the failure of two marriages,

she tried to protect herself from outside danger. She never had children. In a nut shell, she lived in the world of darkness. She thought that the powerful pain killer TIRF (Transmucosal Immediate -Release Fentanyl) that came from Smile Pharmaceutical inc over in Atlanta would do wonders to her.

Quichotte must make another journey to another valley, the valley of Love where he and Sancho witnessed disturbances and unpleasantness, overtly signs of racism. Sancho saw brown people who greeted 'Salaam aleikum', Namaskar. Unfortunately a drunk Whiteman pounced upon the Indians calling them 'fucking Iranians', and 'terrorists', and screaming, 'get out of my country'. Soon the drunk Whiteman shot the two Indian men at the bar, along with another man who tried to intervene when the inner mind of the protagonist pondered over the turbulent situation in America. "For some of us, the world stopped making sense. Anything Can Happen. Here can be there, then can be now, up can be down, truth can be lies. Everything's slip-sliding around and there's nothing to hold on to". (138) This reveals America's gun-death pandemic that obtained in States like Kansas. Unfortunately, he became a victim to the displeasure of a white lady as she suspected that the Indians in Turbans and Beards played mischief in the USA. He confessed that he had cast aside ALL dogma, belief and disbelief. He faced many disturbances at Lake Capote. Even Sancho entertained the idea of 'Anything can happen' (138) where so many untoward things occurred. Later, he got the idea of passing through the Valley of love. His love was "rather Love itself, the purity of the grand essential phenomena, the subject unattached to any specific object, the heart of the heart, the eye of the storm, the driving force of all human and much animal nature, and therefore life itself." (140)

Sancho imagined the feeling of racial discrimination in the red States. He felt that Brown was the colour of love. Unfortunately, in the third valley viz., the Valley of knowledge, all worldly knowledge was discarded. But knowledge of the Beloved helped them. (p148) Sancho encountered a woman called Beautiful from Beautiful. Quichotte gave the idea that the only antidote to human life was love. It is interesting to note how a father (Quichotte) and his parthenogenetic offspring (Sancho) headed towards doom. Quichotte approached Salma R. modestly and philosophically. In The fourth valley, the Valley of Detachment where they would give up all their desires. They encountered racial discrimination in Kansas.

Dr. Smile a millionaire, met Mr. Anderson Thayer and discussed the world of stardom in Bombay (159). He narrated the details of the 'Opioid Awareness Programme' and introduced himself as a reporter to Washington Post to cover the proceedings. He who was affectionately called Little King, blamed the media for not cooperating with doctors. Quichotte sent Salma a photograph of himself. Soon, she told her staff to develop the photo and preserve it. Later, a dismal account of Salma is described (169). Surprisingly Dr. R.K. Smile decided not to reveal the personal life of Salma who left Bombay for career in Hollywood. Like the Lady of Shallot, (173) she felt that curse had fallen up on her. She depended very much on drugs only.

"This was the lover who never disappointed you, the friend who never failed you, the partner who never cheated on you.... loyal, honest and true. Sleepy, relaxed, joy. Here it came. Turn off your mind, relax and float downstream". (174)

The letter Quichotte sent to Salma laid stress on a union between her and him in eternal delight. The cosmos would achieve its goal and would therefore have a peaceful end. He and Salma would ascend together beyond annihilation, into the sphere of Timeless. Quichotte preferred Love but not all worldly knowledge. (A clear case of hallucinatory realism.) "And now rising – sinking to even natural, to forgive". (176)

Quichotte made a small halt in New Jersey where he seemed to pass through Maya (The Veil of illusion) a state of illusion in an episode involving phantasmagoria including a talking statue of Hans Christian Anderson and a loquacious machine gun. He narrated how Maya would rip the veil from our eyes so as to enable us perceive the truth. According to him, the truth was put before us to overcome so that The Beloved might be obtained. The references to the crisis of Mastodons that walked would draw the attention of the readers markedly.

Luckily, Quichotte in his peregrinations drove to another valley called the fifth valley (?) where he witnessed many revelations. He continued his gripping interest in Miss. Salma R. who aligned herself with the television called "the God that goes on giving". (194) He had been living with a glowing company of T.V friends. At last, love brought him to USA. Sancho stirred out and walked down the streets methodically. After a while, the lady Trampoline was in touch with him. Smile - Smile must meet his sister. So he watched many programmes on T.V. He exhibited his objective of life thus: "What else was his quest but an effort to extract hidden meaning from the world and by doing so earn himself the happy ending for which he so desperately yearned". (203) He imagined that the world would come to an end leading to disintegration and instability. He was electrified by Evel Cent's performance. He was happy that Evel Cent was almost close to his goal. But he drafted a letter to his sister. (205) Unfortunately, some white men found that Sancho was staring at them. They

beat him and left him alive. Sancho decided to leave the place immediately and his father Quichotte yearned for seeing his beloved.

Sam Du Champ, the author was called Brother. He was sorry as his only son deserted him and went elsewhere. He was “learning that just as a real son could become unreal, so also an imaginary child could become an actual one, while, moving in the opposite direction, a whole, real country could turn into a ‘reality’ – like unreality.” (217). Some people appreciated the detective books written by him as he entertained in his books “considerable suspension of disbelief.” (222)

The references to Sister of Sam Du Champ pervade the entire chapter. The sister who suffered from cancer worked relentlessly to wipe out racism. In course of time, Sancho and his father moved on to another place where Quichotte’s half-sister Trampoline lived. She was tall and she received her brother warmly. They recalled their experiences in India. She was surprised to see Sancho. Quichotte was not quite at home in the house of his sister. Trampoline lived in The Gould Industries building that was a 100 year old building. She welcomed Quichotte and recalled their experiences in the past. She became inquisitive about Sancho. Quichotte told her that he had crossed five valleys and yet to cross two more valleys to reach Salma R. As a victim to cancer she needed sympathy and love. She noticed sexual violence against South Asian women in New York. To her article in the New York Times on the sexual violence against women, she received many death threats. Various bodies demanded her “to make a public apology to all Indian, Pakistani, Bangladesh and Sri Lankan men, the ones living in those countries and the ones in the diaspora too”. (257) Her meeting with Evel Cent, a florid futurologist, roused some curiosity. His original name was Awwal Sant, his real Indian name. He always was obsessed with the nature of reality. He commented that with the appearance of holes in space – time, connoted the coming victory of Nothing over Everything. He was aware of NEXT “Neighbour Earth Xchange Technology”. (262) He championed the cause of escaping into the Neighbouring Earths. There was discussion between Salma and Evel Cent. Slowly Quichotte entered the sixth valley, which was the Valley of Wonderment, in which the perfect love would come into being, and that would bring about the happy ending we all wanted.

The sister narrated the family story while living in London city. She at first, faced the populism, a movement where people started waving a new flag to go - back from England which was for the English only. Brother thought about the importance of love. He experienced the state of hallucinatory realism⁸ where he encountered with the giant death angel, ‘a bare skull visible within a black hooded robe, standing on the horizon and holding the aircraft in one hand and shaking it. The death angel bowed in recognition of the gesture, and let the jumbo jet go. With a brief final shudder, the aircraft settled back into its course’. (280) The Sister narrated her interest in the preservation of human rights in London. She even related her husband’s work as a judge. Brother narrated the story of Quichotte, an ageing T.V addict and a lover of an unknown woman. The sister asked him about his writings. Interestingly, he narrated that he very much wanted “to take on the destructive, mind –numbing junk culture office time just as Cervantes had gone to war with junk culture of his own age.” (289) He was also writing about obsessional love, father-son relationships, sibling quarrels, and unforgivable things. Brother commented that he was concentrating on writing about obsessive love, father –son relationships, about Indian immigrants, racism towards them and end of the world. He also gave an account of his research on American opioid epidemic. The sister commented that she was damn afraid of her pain. Brother paid compliments to her by stating that she was a respected attorney and that her husband was a good judge. Brother and sister exchanged the narration of their experiences in India long ago. There was a reference to Miss. Salma R. who was grabbed by her grandpa. Soon, Sancho witnessed a cricket that started conversing in Italian. Brother and Quichotte were no longer two different things, the one created and the one creating. Brother is a part of Quichotte and equally Quichotte is a part of the Brother. (304) There was a family tea party with the members viz., Daughter, Brother and the Judge.

The novel has the features of a fantasy. Reference to the transmogrified mastodons’ invasion (?) is a case in point. One can’t imagine how human beings are metamorphosized into mastodons which cause havoc in the New York City. Similarly there are references to the rip in the cosmos. Sancho also wonders whether cosmos has been ripped at all. It has the qualities of metafiction also. ‘He doubts everything and he believes everything’, Don Quixote says of Sancho Panza.

Brother under the influence of vodka and grief, saw his reflection speaking to him thus: ‘The world no longer has any purpose except that you should finish your book. When you have done so, the stars will begin to go out’. (308) Quichotte thought that he was a lover and that he desired only the love of his Beloved. (309) He felt that that he was a changed person: ‘the gallant night, the mystical amant, the Galahad quester, the seeker of the Grail of love, gathering his strength as he prepared to make, at long last, his tryst’. (310) Evel Cent, the scientist entrepreneur commented that the

cosmos was crumbling. So the high proportion of human race must be transported to a parallel earth. Quichotte trusted him and also believed in the Age of Anything – Can – Happen (316) anything could happen. In the novel we find serious thought content as the authorial voice says that the fabled world of the gods was the real one, while the supposedly actual world inhabited by human beings was an illusion, and maya, the veil of illusion. (329) Dr. R.K. Smile had two stories to be handed over to Salma. The first one is about the common city in the past and the second one was the American story. News spread about the arrest of Dr.R.K. Smile, chairman and CEO of Smile pharmaceuticals Inc for his use of powerful opioids, an unscrupulous practice. Quichotte remembered the last valley viz, the Valley of Poverty and Annihilation. The chapter ends with the words 'mine is love story and love will find a way'. (337)

Sancho became self-reflective and meditative also. He also thought that something went wrong with him as he had been facing many problems in USA. But he aspired to the hand of Miss Beautiful of Beautiful, Kansas. Suddenly he heard the voice of Grillo Parlanta, a cricket which started conversing with him in Italian. He thought that he was a parthenogenetically created, unrecorded person without any birth certificate. He felt that he was crossing America in the name of love. His dialogue with blue fairy really helped him in knowing about himself. He understood that love made a very important part in life. He noticed that some disturbing changes in himself. He thought that love would pave the way for him. The sandwich lady told him about two stories viz, life and times. While they were getting down the passengers experienced that the sky was falling. Slowly he reached a two – storey building where his lady love Beautiful from Beautiful lived.

Sam Du Champ, the author felt unhappy as he was a victim to tragic events in London. He learnt from his sister the nature of true love. (Expand?) He meditated thus: 'The world no longer has any purpose except that you should finish your book. When you have done so, the stars will begin to go out'. (356) The author recalls Evel Cent, a scientist who envisaged the end of human life and the decay of the earth. The decay which the scientist and the author grabbed many facets like the environmental, political, social and moral decay. He also recalled his sister's words about his health. Agent Oshima, a Japanese American Gentleman also spoke to him about his son. The author commented on his work that encompassed many other authors. Quichotte and Sancho slowly reached Powers Bar and Grill where they came across embarrassing situations from white Americans who suspected them to be terrorists. The author felt that he wrote his own story. Quichotte and his son reached a building having the notice Salsa Trading Company. The author felt that the world was now merged with the world outside himself. It was indeed the Age of Anything - Can – Happen. (369)

The book ends with an impending catastrophe that would be experienced by the entire world. With the operation of the great second law of thermodynamics, entropy had begun to decrease. Quichotte was reminded of the seventh valley viz., the valley of Annihilation where the self disappeared into the Universe. 'The world was falling apart, a great roaring maw of nothingness had appeared in mid-air near the storeyed secular spire of the Empire State Building, and the city was full of screaming mouths and running feet and fallen figures being trampled in the stamped'. (371) Quichotte and Salma met near Central Park where the former told the latter that his gun was a talking gun. Some abnormal thing happened near the Metropolitan Museum. Suddenly 'Nothingness burst through the somethingness of the world, roaring like a fire, and then increasingly familiar giant, bullet-hole shape was all that was left..... carefully curated history of the human race was gone, and with it a part of the meaning of life on earth'. (377) Quichotte felt happy as he had attained Miss Salma R. In the end, he realized that everything was coming to an end. Evel Cent, a scientist told Quichotte that he was the Cassandra of the human story. (384) Evel Cent, Quichotte and Salma were alone in the room. The novel ends with the meeting of Quichotte with Salma. 'He (Quichotte) grasps her hand. She squeezes his hand. A long quest comes to an end. Here they stand in the Valley of Annihilation, with the power to disappear into the universe. And just possibly into something new'. (389) It appears as though that the novel has "a parallel story line about my characters' creator and his life, and then slowly shows how the two stories, the two narrative lines become one. (Rushdie's interview in 'the multiverse of Rushdie's Quichotte', Salil Tripathi, live mint.com, 23rd August, 2019). The main point illustrates how Quichotte's love for Salma serves as a panacea for the ills that are in the offing due to technology and collapse of old structures.

A Philosophical Novel

Barthes stirring account of death of the author has given scope for the interpretation of the text in different ways by ignoring the author. Rushdie's latest novel Don Quichotte may lend itself many interpretations like a treatise on contemporary world, a novel of multiverse, a viable text on the opioid crisis in the USA, the lawlessness that obtains in the modern world, a text on multiplicity of linguistic nuances, a treatise on modern romance, an authentic text on racism and cyber terrorism, an allegory of love, a panacea to the ills of contemporary society etc. The greatness of the text lies

in the fact that it doesn't easily lend itself to first reading as it demands a minimum knowledge of languages like Urdu, Persian, German, French and Latin. Though it did not win any award it stands as a classic in the minds of the readers of English all over the world. In the light of this, one may interpret Rushdie's 17th novel Quichotte that has a powerful postmodern metafictional tenets.

The novel runs like a metaphysical novel where it openly draws its own functional status. Some of the features are an exhibition of the novelist's learning, use of farfetched comparisons, perplexing the minds of the lovers with philosophical notations, an effective use of authorial voice, making through provoking comments, on the contemporary society.

Like a good old fable, Quichotte opens with Mr. Ismail Smile or alternatively Mr. Smile Smile, 'a travelling salesman of Indian origin, advancing years and retreating mental powers' (3) who becomes addled by his obsession with American TV shows. Surprisingly, he becomes a victim to a psychological disorder where he finds himself incapable of distinguishing between truth and lies. He develops one-sided passion for Miss Salma R, a certain television personality for whose sake he undertakes many journeys. In his imagination he gives his pseudonym, Quichotte who would be her lady love's Guinevere who would carry her to Joyous Gard. He also imagines that he is for her, like Chaucer's Knight, 'her verray, parfit, gentil knyght' (7) Rushdie's metaphysical vision springs up as he calls the modern age 'the Age of Anything - Can - Happen' (17,79,138,316,369) He makes an emphasis on the term which leads us to the world where one cannot predict anything or any event including weather, the likelihood of war, or the outcome of elections. Besides dwelling upon the calamitous situation in the universe he comes out with (A woman might fall in love with a piglet unmasked as criminals. 7-8)

It is pertinent to note that in the Age of Anything can Happen (Rushdie makes a sweeping generalization by calling it the generation of Netflix - and - chill) uncertainty and calamity pervade. The term pervades the entire novel with a view to laying stress on the prevailing conditions in the modern world. Quichotte feels elated that he lives in a world of chaos and confusion and a world devoid of rules, the place where reality is in flux. Soon he sees a magic child in black and white but fashionable and he is astrologically related to the monochrome inhabitants of Tierra del Fuego. The boy wears sun glasses and looks like an American boy in a checked lumber jack shirt and denim jeans with turn-ups. Quichotte joyously raised his own voice and sang along with his joy. He named the boy Sancho, 'my son, my sidekick, my square! Hutch to my Starsky, Spock to my Kirk, Scully to my Mulder..... O my warrior Sancho sent by Perseus to help me slay my Medusas and win my Salma's heart, here you are at last'. (19)

Similarly the American wife of Dr. R.K. Smile comments rightly that in the age of Anything - Can - Happen she always protects the interest of her husband. She often use T.V announcing that in the age of confusion anything can happen thereby connoting uncertainties and unexpected calamities in the world. As the one interested in Dr. R.K. Smile she would make everything possible for her husband. The truth is Dr. R.K. Smile's SPEIK an opioids became very unpopular and many Doctors in the USA started assailing him leading to chaos and confusion in the world of health.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

None.

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- Creative writers like Terry Gilliam (*The Man Who Killed Don Quixote*), Jules Massent (a French opera) on *Don Quichotte*, Sam Du Champ, (an American Detective) took a cue from the original Spanish work.
- One is reminded of Bunyan's *Pilgrims Progress* where the protagonist faces many ventures to save humanity. Similarly Rushdie seems to bring out the calamitous atmosphere that obtains in the contemporary world.

The reference of this expression many a time reinforces the main theme of the novel which lays stress on contemporary world.

In Christian legend Grail is portrayed to have possessed miraculous hearing powers. So the quest for the Holy Grail was made by the seekers. Though similar objective may not be in the mind of the protagonist in the novel one may stretch one's own imagination in the protagonist's belief in the power of love of Salma R.

This is a deep philosophical query in Indian philosophy where a particular school called Advaita lays stress on the oneness of God and the duality of soul and body. Great religious leaders like Adi Shankara propounded a theological concept where in the oneness of God is laid stress upon. Other seers like Ramana Maharshi meditatively used to raise the question 'Who am I'?

The expression valley in religious literature connotes a solitary place and a land of wilderness. Read Book of Jeremiah.

A condition where the person remains in a state of hallucination and suddenly comes back to the state of reality. Mo Yan a Nobel prize in literature for his book Red Sorghum describes the protagonist often indulging in a state of hallucinatory realism.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

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