




**Book Review: *Victory City* by Salman Rushdie**  
**INTERACTIVE ARTICLE COVER**




**About the Journal**

<b>Journal DOI</b>	<a href="https://doi.org/10.21659/rupkatha">https://doi.org/10.21659/rupkatha</a>
<b>Journal Home</b>	<a href="http://www.rupkatha.com">www.rupkatha.com</a> 
<b>Indexed in</b>	Web of Science Core Collection™ Emerging Sources Citation Index (ESCI)
<b>Journal Impact Factor (JIF)™</b>	2022: 0.2   5 year: 0.2
	Source:  <b>Journal Citation Reports™ 2023</b>

**About the Issue**

<b>Issue</b>	<b>Volume 15, Number 2, 2023</b>
<b>Issue DOI</b>	<a href="https://doi.org/10.21659/rupkatha.v15n2">https://doi.org/10.21659/rupkatha.v15n2</a>
<b>TOC</b>	<a href="https://rupkatha.com/v15n2.php">https://rupkatha.com/v15n2.php</a> 

**About the Review**

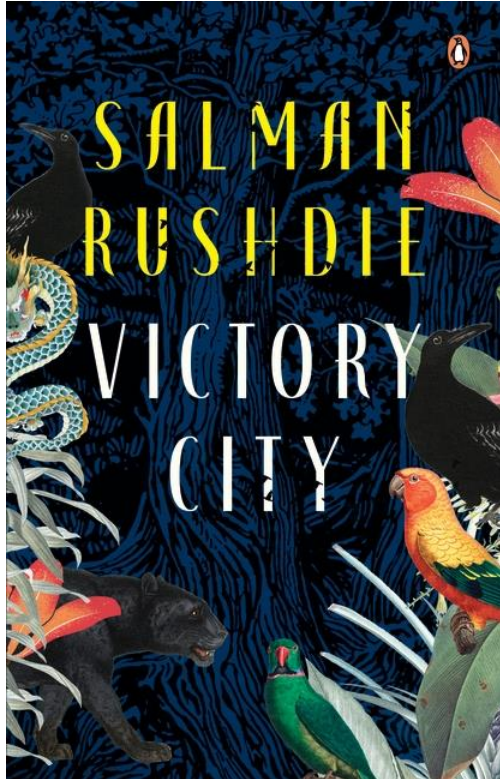
<b>Title</b>	<b>Book Review: <i>Victory City</i> by Salman Rushdie</b>	
<b>Author/s</b>	<b>Ajeesh A K</b>	
<b>Affiliation</b>	Faculty, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, National Institute of Technology Warangal, India.	
<b>ORCID IDs</b>	<a href="https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9801-0826">0000-0002-9801-0826</a>	
<b>Review DOI</b>	<a href="https://doi.org/10.21659/rupkatha.v15n2.03">https://doi.org/10.21659/rupkatha.v15n2.03</a>	<b>Pages:</b> 1-5
<b>Full-text</b>	<a href="https://rupkatha.com/v15n203">https://rupkatha.com/v15n203</a> 	
<b>Full-text PDF</b>	<a href="https://rupkatha.com/V15/n2/v15n203.pdf">https://rupkatha.com/V15/n2/v15n203.pdf</a> 	
<b>Review History</b>	<b>First published 01 June 2023</b>	
<b>Copyright</b>	<i>Author/s</i>	
<b>Licensing</b>	<a href="https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/">Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial 4.0</a> 	

## Book Review: *Victory City* by Salman Rushdie

Salman Rushdie, *Victory City*,

India Hamish Hamilton, Feb/2023, p.352.

INR 699. ISBN: 9780670098460



*Reviewed by*

Ajeesh A K

Faculty, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, National Institute of Technology  
Warangal, India. Contact: [ajeeshak9387@gmail.com](mailto:ajeeshak9387@gmail.com)

---

Victory City, the latest literary masterpiece by acclaimed author Salman Rushdie, is a compelling and thought-provoking work of fiction that delves into the complexities of identity, power, and the struggle between tradition and change. Set in a dynamic city in southern India, the novel presents a vivid and detailed exploration of the lives of several individuals as they navigate the tumultuous waters of a metropolis in transition. Through his exquisite prose and masterful storytelling, Rushdie creates a surreal and dreamlike setting that is both alluring and terrifying, capturing the essence of the miraculous and the everyday as two halves of the same whole.

The main protagonist, Pampa Kampana, is a miracle worker, prophetess, and poetess whose tragic loss of sight prompts her to declare that everything she wants is in her words, and that words are all she needs. This sentiment encapsulates the essence of the book, as Rushdie weaves together myth, memory, history, and imagination into a sensual and harmonious tapestry. His characters are complex and intriguing, each struggling to find their place in a world that is changing faster than they can keep up with. Through their experiences, Rushdie explores the power dynamics between social classes, as well as the struggles of the oppressed and disenfranchised.

One of the most striking features of *Victory City* is its use of magical realism. Rushdie employs this literary device to great effect, creating a dreamy and surreal world that is both enchanting and unsettling. The result is a setting that is at once familiar and strange, where the boundaries between reality and fantasy are blurred. This approach allows Rushdie to explore the themes of the book in a unique and creative way, inviting readers to question their own perceptions of the world around them. The writing in *Victory City* is both powerful and evocative, capturing the beauty and complexity of the world Rushdie has created. His prose is rich and poetic, weaving together vivid descriptions and imagery to create a tapestry that is both beautiful and haunting. The result is a novel that is both a pleasure to read and a potent exploration of some of the most pressing issues of our time.

The novel recounts the *Jayaparajaya*, an epic poem written by the 247-year-old prophetess Pampa Kampana, in detail. The dynamic Pampa Kampana, a wise woman, kingmaker, and storyteller who outlives many dynasties before becoming blind, is the protagonist of the book. After finally finishing her epic poem *Jayaparajaya* (Victory and Defeat) on the Bisnaga dynasty, she passed away at the age of 247, and the book starts with her passing. Before she passes away, she hides the manuscript in a clay pot "as a message to the future," only for the unidentified narrator to find it 450 years later.

Nine-year-old Pampa had seen her mother Radha Kampana commit suicide with hundreds of other women after their kingdom had been destroyed by invaders and the king's head had been sent to the Delhi sultan. The orphan girl is given supernatural abilities by the goddess Parvati while she is lost in the forest. She tells her that she will use these abilities "to make sure that no more women are burned in this manner, and that men start considering women in new ways, and you will live just long enough to witness both your success and failure, to see it all and tell its story, even though once you have finished telling it you will die immediately."

The opening few pages set the stage for an amazing story. Pampa aids Hukka and Bukka in establishing the fictional Vijayanagara kingdom, an empire. When Pampa carefully selects her characters and gives them unique backstories, the city comes to life with women playing important roles in everything from warriors to palace guards to attorneys. Here, fiction and history are directly at odds with one another, with the author pointing out that tales have a deeper impact on how we live than do histories.

The novel offers a unique portrayal of the Bisnaga Empire, tracing its origins to the 14th century in southern India when the deity-inhabited Pampa Kampana grew it from enchanted seeds. Despite its utopian characteristics, the Bisnaga Empire is plagued by human folly, as depicted in the frequent wars and dynastic conflicts among its monarchs, the enduring custom of sati, and periods of theocratic persecution that force Pampa Kampana into exile.

Notably, the novel emphasizes Pampa Kampana's role as a guardian angel, advocating for gender equality and religious tolerance, and promoting love and creativity as a countervailing force against the imperial death drive. Rushdie's portrayal of Bisnaga as a land of harmony and cycles suggests the inevitability of extremes, followed by periods of religious syncretism.

The central theme of the novel is the tension between freedom and control, and the struggle to convince mortals that amity is superior to oppression, and magic is superior to faith. Rushdie's writing style emphasizes the importance of literary devices and symbolism to convey complex themes and ideas, making the novel a powerful critique of human nature and the forces that shape society. Ultimately, "Victory City" presents a compelling vision of a utopian society, while acknowledging the persistent challenges that stand in the way of achieving it.

The novel incorporates a rich tapestry of literary techniques, including symbolism and imaginative writing, as well as historical, political, and cultural references. The book's setting is based on the real-life kingdom of Vijayanagar, which existed in southern India from the 14th to 16th centuries and is now recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage Site under the name Hampi. The two brothers who founded the empire, Harihara and Bukka, are given the names Hukka and Bukka in the novel. The renowned Portuguese explorer Domingo Paes, who visited the Vijayanagara empire, is also mentioned in the book, but is referred to as Domingo Nunes instead. The novel's use of this alternate name for the empire, Bisnaga, is derived from a mispronunciation of the word 'Vijayanagara' by Nunes.

The novel encompasses a wide range of perspectives and can be interpreted in various ways by its readers. Rushdie's writing is adaptable, accommodating, and all-encompassing, allowing the novel to fit into the nooks and crannies of the reader's perspectives. The work serves as a reminder of the conflicts between the plural, the pleasant, and the free and the fundamentalism, extremism, ignorance, and intolerance that oppose them.

The novel can be seen as a utopian future without patriarchy, one of peace, unity, and equality. Alternatively, it could also be a protest against historical oblivion and the erasure of the past or a critique of nationalism that attempts to whitewash history. It may be perceived as a celebration of storytelling as a divine profession and the power of words and memories, where Rushdie employs fiction to cure the multitude of its unreality, or it could simply be viewed as a genuine piece of art created for art's sake.

While Rushdie has faced criticism in the past for undermining the history of female subjugation and exoticizing and fetishizing female characters and bodies in his earlier works, "Victory City" overtly emphasizes equality and freedom for women, serving as an attempt to sanitize his murky history with feminism.

Despite the political conflicts that have forced Rushdie into controversy, he has always championed the title of storyteller, "that modest spinner of yarns." Victory City is undoubtedly a work of cheery fabulism that places a greater emphasis on "magic" than "realism." Rushdie creates a cozy setting in which readers can conceive of a future that is better than their own. However, the novel's themes and Rushdie's writing style suggest a critical exploration of human nature and societal issues, urging readers to reflect on their own perspectives and beliefs.

In his earlier collection of essays, *Languages of Truth* (2021), Rushdie states that because "the realist tradition is doomed to a kind of endless repetitiveness," authors "must turn to irrealism and find new ways of approaching the truth through lies". Salman Rushdie's advocacy for magical realism in his writing is a reflection of his belief that reality, as it is conventionally understood, is often too restrictive to fully capture the complexities of human experience. His literary career has been dedicated to exploring the boundaries of what is possible within the confines of traditional storytelling, using magical realism to create alternative worlds that are both familiar and fantastical.

While some may argue that the genre of magical realism has been exhausted, Rushdie's work suggests otherwise. His use of magical realism has evolved over time, taking on different forms and serving different purposes. In novels like *Midnight's Children* and *The Satanic Verses*, magical realism is used to create a sense of the surreal and to explore the cultural and political tensions of postcolonial India. In *The Enchantress of Florence*, Rushdie blends magical realism with historical fiction to create a vivid portrait of the Mughal Empire.

In *Victory City*, Rushdie employs magical realism to explore the nature of truth and the ways in which it can be manipulated and distorted. The novel's convoluted histories and fantastical elements serve to highlight the subjective nature of truth and the power dynamics at play in society.

While the use of magical realism may no longer be as novel as it once was, Rushdie's continued experimentation with the genre demonstrates that there is still much to be explored. As readers, we may have grown accustomed to the genre, but Rushdie's work reminds us that there are always new ways to approach the complexities of human experience, and that magical realism remains a valuable tool in this pursuit.

It is also worth noting that the novelty of magical realism may be more apparent to readers in the West, who have been steeped in the tradition of realism for centuries. For readers in India and other cultures, where storytelling traditions have long incorporated elements of magic and

fantasy, magical realism may not be as groundbreaking. Nonetheless, Rushdie's work in this genre speaks to a universal desire to find new and innovative ways to explore the complexities of the human condition and offer insight into contemporary society's and humanity's potential for both progress and self-destruction.

---

Ajeesh A K is a Faculty, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, National Institute of Technology Warangal, India. He received his master's degree in English Language and Literature from Madras Christian College, Chennai, India in 2018 and is currently pursuing his doctoral degree from Vellore Institute of Technology, Vellore on transnational aesthetics. He is also employed as a faculty in the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, National Institute of Technology, Warangal, India, where he handles diverse courses such as Media and Language, Creative and Critical Thinking skills, Communicative English and Research writing and professional ethics. His research interests include domains such as hyperreality, posthuman studies and gender and identity studies.

---