

## The Free Radio

Salman Rushdie

The Free Radio is a short story by Salman Rushdie. He is a very famous Indian English author. This story was published in the collection 'East, West' (1994). This story is about a man called Ramani who was a rickshaw-puller. He falls in love with a character called the thief's widow, depicted as a vicious and malicious woman who has five children. She did not have an amicable relationship with her former husband. The essential part of the story is its narrative technique. Rushdie is often characterised by his **magic-realist** literary technique. It is a special genre of literature in which there is no linear progression of narrative. The elements of the story are hard to believe as it does not make sense but the parts of the story are built from the stories and incidents that happen in the world. In this way it presents a dystopic vision- a dark, satirical picture of the reality.

This story also portrays a dark picture of post-independence India, during the leadership of Indira Gandhi and when she imposed the Emergency in 1975. It was in that time that her younger son, Sanjay Gandhi had implemented the enforced 'sterilization' or 'nussbandi' to all the male population of the country, particularly in the village areas. In this campaign, the local youths would herd the illiterate males of a village and would lure them to perform sterilization in exchange of gifts. This story also starts off from this same area. Ramani, the protagonist is keen to undergo 'sterilization' as he is believed in the false ideals of 'nationalism' and false esteem of pride and satisfaction to undergo sterilization. As he says to the narrator:

'It is not so bad,' Ram said, meaning the *nasbandi*. 'It does not stop love-making or anything, excuse me, teacher sahib, for speaking of such a thing. It stops babies only and my woman did not want children any more, so now all is hundred per cent OK. Also it is in national interest,' he pointed out. 'And soon the free radio will arrive.'

Ramani is promised of a 'free radio' in exchange of his service. Unfortunately the radio is never delivered and it becomes clear that he was duped or cheated. But what is the role of the radio and why has it been so important in this story? Radio is not just a medium of communication- "Yeh Aakasvaani hai..." as Ramani is excited and mimics the broadcaster's voice –

*Yé Akashvani hai,* ' he announced to the streets. 'This is All-India Radio. Here is the news. A Government spokesman today announced that Ramani rickshaw-wallah's radio was on its way and would be delivered at any

moment. And now some playback music.' After which he would sing songs by Asha Bhonsle or Lata Mangeshkar in a high, ridiculous falsetto.

But he is very excited to get the radio as promised by the government. Everyone knows that it's a big lie and no radio will be given to anyone. Yet Ramani believes in this delusion. Why is he excited to get the radio? Is it only because of the power of communication, information, news and musical programs? On the one hand, it was a lure of an attractive world, far ahead world which was unattained. Ramani wanted to flee into that world of charm. At the same time, the radio was a symbol of higher status and wealth. He felt that he would be elevated in the eyes of the ordinary people. In order to attain this, he can go to any extent. The narrator can see the catastrophic end towards which he was going. Yet he was undeterred in his resolution.

The story encapsulates the false hopes of nationalism, the promise of a better world which was clouded under the shadow of Emergency.

Important Questions:

- a) Comment on the title of the story.
- b) Comment on the character of Ramani.