

15

THE CONTRADICTIONAL FACES OF RUSHDIE'S WOMEN IN *MIDNIGHT'S CHILDREN*: THE CONTROLLERS OR THE CONTROLLED?

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Abstract:

*For protuberantly emphasizing on the intramural cosmos of female characters in his novels where women perform a conspicuous part in configuring the destined route of man, Salman Rushdie is globally eulogized. Women appear to be purposefully restrained from receiving the heart-rending connection, although she is correspondingly worthwhile in a male governing community and her devotion and endearment remains unprecedented. In Rushdie's novels, women agonize from a feeling of estrangement and are the sufferer of the despotic orthodox establishment. In spite of their commitment and probity, women are detached through dissatisfied adoration, exasperation, rootlessness, disenchantment and perfidy. Women's posture endures to be abhorrent and repugnant in the life of men. Women characters in *Midnight's Children* carry their womanly obligations homogeneous to that of a man. *Midnight's Children* suggests womanly practice of plenitude and profusion which the female recipient is ineligible to discern and bangs the conception of continuousness, factuality, individuality of the protagonist and concreteness. Feminists assert that novel echoes its own idiosyncrasy of overpowering women, which they abort to observe, being the acceptor of the narrative mode and too preoccupied in the prudent conventional anecdote. The article endeavours to examine the antagonistic stance of the female in Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* and their substantiality in the existence of the male characters with paramount prominence on the characters of Padma, Amina Sinai, Mary Periera, Parvati-the-witch and Brass Monkey.*

Key-words: Rootlessness, female exasperation, restraint, male-domination, overpowering women.

A voluble raconteur with his pious bequest of blabber, Salman Rushdie, the British Indian novelist solitarily recovers the English language to the convention of magic realism which protracted its wings from Cervantes through Sterne to Milan Kundera and Gabriel Marquez. Born in Bombay on 19th June 1947, the event accorded with the precisely substantial occasion in Indian history as approximately a hundred years of colonial dominion was about to be terminated. Having the masterpieces such as *Grimus*(1975), *Shame*(1983), *Satanic Verses*(1988), *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*(1990) to his credit, Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981) propelled him to literary eminence. Characters are taken from diverse receptacle of Indian life in the *Midnight's Children* and the female characters are exceptionally cited at the degree of the raconteur, though a vast analogous space is allocated for the male characters. As the female characters execute an indispensable task in encasing the protagonist's individuality and incur their survival to the principal male character, the virile personas enjoy additional erudite independence. Ostensibly, the female being ambiguous are the sole entities that create the victor. The timbre is stowed for the female characters in *Midnight's Children* through the pronouncement of the narrator, Saleem Sinai in the chapter 'Love in Bombay': "Women have always been the ones to change my life: Mary Pereira, Evie Burns, Jamila Singer, Parvati-the-witch must answer for who I am; and the widow, who I'm keeping for the end: and after the end; Padma my Goddess of dung. Women have fixed me alright, but perhaps they were never central- perhaps the place should have filled, the hole in the centre of me which was my inheritance from my grandfather Adam Aziz, was occupied for too long by my voices"(Rushdie 266).

It is a woman who steers the family to pecuniary solidity when Ahmed Sinai seek refuge in the bottle of jinns and other intoxicants after being crumpled by inauspicious fortune and monetary catastrophe. She contests and triumphs a judicial skirmish for her dipsomaniac husband and acquires plenty by utilizing the currency in the race course. Female characters outrun their male correlate in accomplishment, admonishing potential, housework in the routine enterprise of the concrete macrocosm. After accomplishing to rescue Saleem from the opponent's grasp, Parvati obtain a son by another man since her man is unproductive. On the other hand, the Brass Monkey avenges Evelin for the erroneousness to her brother. Women are arrested in the atrocious blaze of scrupulously inferior force and a faculty that swaddles the sensibility, even though characters such as Amina, Pia Aunty, Mary, Parvati and Padma are ratified as mothers and vigorous facets of Maya. Mary Pereira perpetrates a grave misdeed by swapping the babies while Amina is a deceitful wife like Lila Sabarmati. Born as Mumtaz, Aadam and Naseem's second daughter, Amina Sinai weds Nadir Khan. Mumtaz is divorced and then marries Ahmed Sinai, once the family discovers that they never consummated their relationship. Ahmed later converts her name to Amina symbolizing her newfangled existence. Parvati is an agnostic who procreates her son from Shiva, Saleem's nemesis after luring and enthralling Saleem to marry her. Similar to Parvati, Vanita too reproduces an illegitimate child. Existent disposition and sentiment are repudiated to the women characters by bestowing nicknames like- Reverend Mother, Parvati the witch, Nussie the-duck, the Brass Monkey. The narrator remains the cynosure and rebuffs bashfulness to his recipients and thus installs his own rendition of chronicle and anecdotes. The female characters ensemble two contradictory enterprises and alleviate the author's venture of designing the evolution of the central character.

Stained in black and white, the blackness of the female characters wound Saleem to empower him to contest against all abominable instances in life, while the whiteness overtures to assist him to outlast. Amina being reckoned as the meticulous mother as well as the adulterous wife, Mary as affectionate ayah and a miscreant, Grandmother as a tender housekeeper as well as an despotic mother, Parvati as a doting and solicitous companion and a witch and Jamila as an enthusiastic singer as well as cynical to affectionate sensations distinctly details the juxtaposition of white and black colours. Euro-American feminism cannot be the specification for a person whose psyche is carved by Eastern as well as Western perspective as he wrote *Midnight's Children* in a postcolonial Indian backdrop. Rushdie's magnum opus depicts the female characters both as angel and devil unlike the Western literary texts which kingpin a single strand. Woman, who is venerated as an emblem of Shakti in the Hindu pantheon is often looked upon detrimentally. The legitimacy of feminine wisdom moves adrift in the stabilizing delineation of women. Rushdie's works manifest a keen cognizance of women firmness and temperament as he proportionately focuses on an emotive sphere of the female characters and underscores the distinctiveness and pursuit for liberation through the depiction of the profoundly hidden dispute in his characters. Abandonment being the paramount component, both forsakenness and proclamation which leads to the advent of disappointment, despair, insanity, thwart and low esteem of human being prevails as elementary truth of life. Alike his grandfather, Saleem's fate has to yield to the synergy of the tensions of "women and history". Saleem in *Midnight's Children* ceases by signifying the "connection between Mother India" and the mother statures he confronts: "Women have made me; and also unmade. It is, perhaps, a matter of connection: is not Mother India, Bharat-Mata, commonly thought of as female? And, as you know, there's no escape from her." (Rushdie 565) Rushdie's reader has to explore and fathom India through the state-of-the-art approach in the fictive tone, just as Saleem's grandfather explored Naseem. The protrusion of women in men's illustration of torment is performed through the modern maneuver of carnal character alteration. By examining the women as the torturers, impeachers and governors of Saleem Sinai, we can conceptualize his pitiful image. The women proceed but the male twirls 'like a blushing virgin' when Padma offers to wed Saleem. Padma insinuates to afflict Saleem through her abrupt retirement for two days and thus distresses and outrages him. Padma arrives with an elixir of love made with herb to invigorate Saleem's verve and

virility and thus abandon her injured pride. Female impact emerges to be agonizing to the narrator's soul. Saleem's masculinity, passion and sexual urge are ingested by the widow.

The liberating mode is ahead of the female reader's ingenuity and emancipates literature from the shackles of male sovereignty instigated by the male author. The approximation of their men's skill is never enhanced by the women as it is Soraya and Padma who yield to their men with the cognizance of their aberration and culpability while the men refuses to advance for them. Women are squashed by the male in the paternal society while male is entrusted the contingency to judge penalty. Amina is unnerved by her baby in womb and is marked as a perfidious spouse when she clandestinely approaches her ex-husband. Even Saleem as a young child who does not retain any objective to penalize his carouser father who coquette with the Anglo secretaries and fantasize to disrobe them, schemes to punish his mother for her adultery. The population perceives Lila Sabarmati's death as a gallant deed though she is assassinated by her husband. In the parallel civilization where Mary is tormented by a male apparition and Parvati has to succumb for her transgression, Shiva determines his own retribution. Saleem's narration fizzles to make Padma rely on his outlandish tale of midnight's children actions, though Padma is enthralled and bemused with the magnetism of his disposition, recital and far flung elocution. She is incompetent to fathom Saleem the narrator, still she understands Saleem the man. Similar to Soraya in *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*, Padma flounder to grasp the vigor of art and story. We anticipate a chutnification of postmodern metafictional autobiography in Saleem's representation of upper-lower, dream-real, fact-fiction, English-hinglish. Indistinguishable to the multitudinous verities of India, Saleem has several fathers, mothers, sisters and families. As Rushdie's own essence becomes inherent in Saleem, Saleem's India unites with the erudite India of the author wherein rest the chutnification of a postmodern novel. The author's bigotry is sketched through Padma's impotence to master the story which is his own fabrication. The narrator in *Midnight's Children* deployed his cognition and strong ingenuity to generate a prodigious narration which Padma cannot discern or envisage. Padma dictates, "Arre baap just tell what happened, mister!" (Rushdie 594), when she is ineffectual to decipher the thread, the manner of disclosure and the diegesis of the midnight's mesmerizing children. Similar to Soraya who is unable to interpret the irrational stories of her husband, Rashid Khalifa, Padma's brain is infused with unambiguous and pragmatic traditional tales. French Feminist, Luce Irigaray's view in "The Power of Discourse and the Subordination of the Feminine" regarding the employment of false fictive accounts, is postulated distinctly through Soraya as she calibrates herself to Mr. Sengupta's temporal perspective of rational stories, a vision that is fastened to the paternal society's brutal and domineering literary apparatus by the feminist critics. Judith Fetterly in her "On the Politics of Literature" construes Rushdie's characters as cognitively masculine and sensually feminine.

A fascinatingly arduous and varied connection is depicted between the author and the listener that of adoration and chaser-chased which appreciates as well as decries the female through the flamboyant tale. Padma's affection towards the narrator is lively as she gets entangled in the cobweb of the narrator's charisma while auscultating his enraptured story. Parvati and Padma can be seen within the similar panorama as Padma who is amply nurturing is also steered by hedonistic delight at the same time. Padma being a model of sexuality and avid listener develops into the imperative need of the narrator while for Padma, the narration persists to be the emotional staple. Padma as an expedient feminist is one of the robust characters among the women in the novel. She is ascendant as she is the recipient of the autobiographical recital and undertakes all concerns for her tenderness towards Saleem. Saleem appear to shun Padma's unfathomable fidelity and declines to convey an utterance of gratitude even though she executes all household responsibilities of cooking and making food and bed for him. Padma's presumption of acquiring equivalent emotive reverberation from Saleem gets scorned and she becomes crestfallen and discontented. Padma acts as an associate, nurturer and cohort while Saleem's temperament hints to be conjoined with women. It becomes quite glaring that like Padma, all the women plays a pivotal function in Saleem's life.

Saleem disregard Padma's allegiance persistently and clings to his egoistic fibre while remaining mindful of Padma's yearning and impassioned feeling towards him. Padma is portrayed as a faithful, ardent, conscientious and virtuous conventional woman in the novel who is effective, sanguine and anxious towards Saleem's amelioration. While writing is contemplated to Saleem's prerogative, Padma is protruded as ignorant and uneducated. Padma is mocked for her crudeness and is regarded insignificant for her household competence by Saleem, who views the mass, civilization, cultivation and statesmanship of India vigilantly.

By delineating the female reader in the dissentious reflection of a listener and advantaging the male vision and perspective, *Midnight Children* louses itself in the mainstream masculine literary dominion. Saleem emerges to be a multicoloured character- snotnose, stainfaced, baldy, sniffer, buddha, piece of the moon, while, female characters are makers or unmakers of Saleem, Janus-faced figures. As a reader's predilection and appetite succour in creating efficiency, he can also have a stake in construction of the postmodern world. Saleem ponders on relinquishing Padma's crudeness and credulity when Padma's "necessary ear" abandons him and he endures "necessary counterweights to my miracle laden omniscience". Thus, Padma who is a listener-cum-creator is disposed minor approbation in the creation of Saleem. Saleem's perception of Padma intercepting him from escalating with the sensible stance and coarseness are garrulous identical to his extravagant account. The female characters are laden with despondency as in *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*, the little son scuffles to restore the rationale behind her mother deserting her husband for bizarre and eccentric tales. While Nadir Khan and Saleem are cerebrally and aesthetically abundant but sexually passive, Padma, Parvati and Amina Bibi have scholarly or creative paucity but are adequately procreant. Rushdie's piece of implicit patriarchy cascades into formational polarities. While Mary, the old ayah makes delectably mouth-watering chutneys, the chutney formed by the narrator is intellectually content as well. Padma typifies a fragile sufferer of a male hegemony, while Saleem is observed to be the ardent proponent of patriarchal society. Padma craves for impassioned reciprocation and is willing to receive him with all his flaws and is reluctant to desire any worldly amenity. Yet she is an oblivious desolate entity with emptiness. The female sentiment is vigorously bared when she is obligated to surrender herself to Saleem's impulses. Even the readers remain enmeshed in Padma's dilemma, desperately seeking the panacea in the dismal domain. The captivating narrative makes us contemplative and generates perpetual impact on the readers.

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