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## The Role of Women Characters in the Select Novels of Salman Rushdie

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### Abstract

Salman Rushdie, a postmodernist immigrant, is considered as one the greatest novelist of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. His apt use of magical realism, incorporates mythology, religion, history, fantasy, and humor into the real world. He narrates his life story and relates it to the national history of India. Rushdie uses the magical realist technique to deal about the postcolonial people of India, and various postcolonial issues. His writing focuses on India's history, politics, and identity as seen through his narrators. There is a blending of fantasy and reality with his fantastical fiction.

Salman Rushdie presents women as strong characters to break free from their oppressive roles through his works. He develops strong female characters who face life with great fortitude and strength rather than meek personality. This research article critically investigates the role of women characters in selected novels by the acclaimed author, Salman Rushdie. A corpus of three major works—*Midnight's Children*, *The Satanic Verses*, and *Shame*—has been selected for detailed analysis. The study aims to illuminate the varying dimensions of women's representation, their influence, and the evolution of their roles in these narratives, serving as mirrors to the sociopolitical realities of their time. The article applies a combined theoretical framework of feminist literary criticism and postcolonial discourse to unpack the intricate characterizations and their wider implications. Findings reveal that Rushdie's women characters are often depicted as multi-dimensional, complex individuals who actively influence the plot and resist conforming to traditional roles. They embody strength, resilience, and liberation in the face of cultural, political, and religious adversities, breaking the mold of passive feminine stereotypes. Despite being enmeshed within patriarchal societal structures, these characters often subvert normative constraints, highlighting the intersection of gender, power, and resistance in Rushdie's novels. Through the use of magical realism, Rushdie juxtaposes reality with the fantastical, further challenging conventional expectations of women in literature. Rushdie's depiction of women provides significant insights into the complexities of postcolonial feminist identities, societal norms, and cultural heritage. His novels, while being grounded in their specific contexts, resonate on a universal scale, enriching the discourse around the representation of women in literature.

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**Keywords:** Magical Realism, Postcolonialism, Identity crisis, Fantasy, Hybridity, Gender roles, Cultural heritage, Power dynamics, Resistance, Patriarchal societal structures, Sociopolitical realities, Cultural adversity

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Salman Rushdie, a postmodernist writer, who emerged as one of the greatest novelists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He propagated a new form of expression and technical innovation in his works. He has written plethora of novels and prose works. His second novel, *Midnight's Children* (1981), winner of the Booker Prize, is often considered as a different kind of literary fiction, which inculcate postcolonial novel, historical novel, and greatly about the magical realism. Salman Rushdie is mainly best known for his magical realist style of writing in his works. His work focuses on the treatment of historical, political, and religious themes in *Midnight's Children*, *Shame*, *The Satanic Verses*, *Fury*, *Haroun and the Seas of Stories*, *The Moor's Last Sigh* and *The Enchantress of Florence* etc. His magic realism method narrates his life story and connects it to the history of India. Salman Rushdie creates real-world information with the help of his fantastical fiction. He does not consider him to be the omniscient because he only perceives things in a fragmented form, which is necessary for any realistic story. In his novels he elaborates about social norm, religious beliefs, cultural practices, familiar and familial relationships, and of the traditional authority. The description of traditional norms has triggered a revolt against these forces of oppression and injustice against women.

Rushdie, a postcolonial writer deals in his novels of Pakistan and India as well as of Western world of the twentieth century. 'Third World Literature' that is remarkable in his reading which is different and superior in narration and construction. Rushdie's form of narrativization is diverse enough for harsh criticism, but despite this, he has been praised for his depiction of the emerging world, especially its women. Postcolonial writers of the Indian English are often considered that they indulged in their writings with the socially marginalized groups including the underprivileged and women of the society. Both male and female writers have highlighted the position of women in literature, society and world culture, accelerating their roles and experiences in the male dominated society.

Rushdie is multidimensional on all ways and not on any one. He is a writer of various time and place. He was born in India and educated in India and England and live a life of multicultural environment of Western metropolises. Consequently, Rushdie has deliberately employed a distinct literary mechanism, predominantly affiliated with a specific epoch in Western historical progression, namely the formation of modern nation-states. In the corpus of his literary works, he engenders a hybridity within his characters, thereby unsettling conventional narrative form. A meticulous examination of his works reveals that the architecture of his text reflects the structural design of the world he has constructed. This academic discourse will engage in an analytical exploration of the feminine characters crafted by Rushdie within his oeuvre.

The postcolonial literature is incorporated by Salman Rushdie as conundrum within the canon of Indo-English literature in his works. On the other hand, he writes for the global readership, especially the west. Rushdie is a translated writer, whose works have been translated for the interested readers. His ability to write in English is very exceptional that very simple sentence can move the reader's mind. In his writings he describes about social norms, cultural beliefs, and of traditional authority of the society. A rebellion has been made against these institutionalized forces of injustice against women by the traditional authority.

By decolonized discourse the role of Indian women in the postcolonial society has conditioned. The pillars, nationalism and religion have opposed Western colonialism, the characterization of Indian women. Nationalism depicts women as the main bearer of tradition, economic upliftment allows them to create an improvement in their condition, to access the educational system, to workplace and so on. Women are encouraged by Salman Rushdie to fight to break free from their oppressive roles in his writings. In his works, he is effective enough to develop strong women characters who face life's challenges with great fortitude and strength rather than allow their personal obstacles to overwhelm them. In this paper there is focus about injustice and misery faced by the female characters, with special attention to Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, *Fury*, *Shame*, *The Moor's Last Sigh*, *Shalimar the Clown*, and *The Enchantress of Florence* novels.

"It is truth universally acknowledge that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of wife" (Austen, 4). This famous line is taken from Jane Austen's novel *Pride and Prejudice*, that is considered to be the best advocate of women characters. As Jane Austen's heroines find relief after marrying a well settled man, so Rushdie's women characters. In

Rushdie's fictional world women are presented as suppressed by the patriarchal society. They were not given enough freedom to think of their will. They have to follow the rules made by the society. As in *Midnight's Children* most of the women characters are relegated to the background, because they do not have their 'voice.' In Rushdie's writings women were treated as sexual objects.

Rushdie's male world is stiff, while the female character is supple enough that they can be molded according to the requirement of the male world. Rushdie's male characters are very innovative in nature. In Rushdie's novels women character role is very critical in the same novel, at one time they were presented as suppressed by the male society on the other hand they were very strong that they fight for their right in the social structure made by the male-controlled society. They were not given enough right to think of their own future. In Rushdie's fiction there is lack of affection for women. As in *Midnight's Children* Mary commits a delinquency by exchanging babies for the love of her husband Joe. Mumtaz accepts to remarry Ahmad Sinai because she needs the love and social standing that her previous husband, Nadir Khan, withheld from her. The father of Saleem Sinai is not as kind to his daughter Jamila as he is to his son Saleem. In this work, morality and the identities of women characters are also important subjects.

In terms of social realism, *Midnight's Children* illustrates a contradiction that affects how women are positioned in India. In India, women are elevated to the status of worship. They are recognized as the one with great "creation" and "destruction" power. Women are simultaneously subjected to many forms of subjugation. Women are not portrayed as the 'other,' as the miserable ones, as is sometimes implied by the mythicized position of sublimated or exalted women.

*Shame* may be seen as a counterpoint to *Midnight's Children*, which uses the whole South Asian peninsula as its canvas but largely concentrates on India. Politics, mythology, history, and fantasy are all combined in the book *Shame*, which is both somber and humorous. *Shame* is often used to describe Pakistani politics. As well as, of course, the shame and shamelessness of personal and familial honour, *Shame* explores Pakistan's cultural past, authenticity, and honesty.

In the novel *Fury*, written by Salman Rushdie, there are "furies" controlling the postmodern characters. They are destroyed by an unidentified wrath that rises within. Rushdie reveals the principal characters' inner conflicts, which signal doom all around. It seems to be simpler and more accurate to Rushdie's life occurrences. Malik Solanka, the main character, was born in India, had his philosophical education at Cambridge, and by the end, he was living and working as a talk show presenter in New York City. Sara, his first wife, is not content sexually with him. Sara is possessed by the "furies" because Solanka is liked by other women and because he is so preoccupied with dolls that he puts Sara in second place. Malik Solanka, a professor at King's College in London, resides there with his second wife and son, who is four years old. He departs from his family and travels to Manhattan from London. After a fight, he finds himself pointing a knife at his son and his sleeping wife. There are several subplots in this, including references to a string of murders in which affluent young women in New York

are raped and chopped to death. Solanka, who is confused, worries that he could have committed these gruesome atrocities during a drunken frenzy.

In *The Moor's Last Sigh*, an account of twentieth-century India is connected to the Alhambra Palace in Granada, the crimson fort of Mogul India that is reminiscent of those in Delhi and Agra. The narrator, Moraes Zogoiby, describes his escape from detention by his mother's rejected lover Vasco Miranda in this book, which might be interpreted as an allegory of Rushdie's own predicament as a writer hiding under the fear of death. The main character and narrator of the story, Moraes Zogoiby, is descended from a persecuted Jew who had an extramarital liaison with the banished Boabdil on his mother's side. The story does more than just draw comparisons between the past and present. The account of Moraes demonstrates that while conditions in Cochin in the early years of this century were better than those in modern-day Bombay, the violence and brutality were no less severe.

*Shalimar the Clown* is a political novel with a love story at its center that takes place in Kashmir. Shalimar, Max Ophuls, Boonyi, and India, Ophuls' daughter, are Rushdie's four main characters in this novel. Rushdie focuses on Kashmir, an area where there has been turmoil since the India-Pakistan partition and where violence has significantly grown recently. Shalimar and Boonyi are passionate about Pachigam, a tiny yet well-known town of performers and caterers. Although they practice different religions, this has no impact on their marriage. When Boonyi discovers that marrying Shalimar will result in her serving a life sentence in imprisonment, their fairy-tale romance quickly comes to an end. She has aspirations that won't be satisfied in the little town she will spend the rest of her life. That's, when she starts looking for a way to run away.

After murdering Boonyi, Shalimar finds a way to enter the USA. Here, she makes a job application to be Max Ophuls' driver before openly shooting and murdering him in front of his daughter, India. India, who was appalled by the horrific death of her father, travels to Kashmir in quest of answers and learns about her family's past. She also starts to feel something for a Kashmiri man named Yuvraj. Shalimar is a prisoner in the USA, and when she comes back, she writes him vile letters instead of using arrows or knives. In the book's last chapter, Shalimar makes her way out of prison and returns to her house. She is waiting for him with her bow and arrows, ready to kill if necessary.

*The Enchantress of Florence* by Salman Rushdie likewise has an enigmatic female character. It describes the enigmatic Italian stranger Mogor's journey to Akbar's imperial capital, Fatehpur Sikri. The trickster-traveler is multilingual and appears to be destitute. But there were several ways he might demoralise Akbar. Characters like Qara Koz, Mogor dell' Amore, Argalia, and Ago Vespucci have traversed the globe and linked many regions together. When Mogor narrates the tale of the enchantress Qara Koz, later known as Angelica, and spins the tale of a Muslim lady travelling to Europe while using different men to get by, he reveals his brilliance as a storyteller, similar to Sheherezade of *The Thousand and One Nights*.

Together, Mogor dell' Amore and Emperor Akbar show us two Renaissance worlds- Florence and Fatehpur Sikri, the West and the East, sensual yearning and cerebral enchantment-

that are bound by the enigmatic character of Qara Koz, an enchantress who is both Eastern and Western.

From the standpoint of feminist literature, Salman Rushdie is an important postmodernist author since every one of his works includes female characters in some way. Almost all of Rushdie's novels have an Indian setting, but almost all of them also have representations of women that reflect a global worldview. The fusion of Western and Indian concepts has an impact on how women are represented in his literature. His female protagonists typically come from the Indian subcontinent and follow a particular Third World kind of feminism.

Because of such an assessment and the fact that Rushdie is a writer with a range of perspectives, life experiences, and academic accomplishments, the research at hand will be a unique endeavour. The research will be acceptable and helpful since Salman Rushdie's evolution and presentation of female characters display typical Indianness. Rushdie has come under criticism for portraying women as inconsequential people. In light of the aforementioned criticism, the aim of this research is to look at how women are depicted in a number of Salman Rushdie's novels.

The presence of women in Rushdie's works is acknowledged before being examined in depth. One of the key objectives is to look at the writings from a female perspective and, if it's feasible, to explain how Rushdie evolved into a feminist writer. In order to analyse how women are depicted while following the story from the perspective of each character, the psychological, sociological, and archetypal perspectives have all been used. Women's Predicament gives a comprehensive examination of how female characters struggle both inside and outside of the roles they perform. Women express their ambition to become independent as strong, capable women through their interactions with tradition, modernity, and their personal disputes with families and society. He regards women as warriors, sufferers, and ultimately winners because of their unwavering spirits and conciliation-oriented outlooks.

The purpose of this paper is to better understand how women are subjected to a lifelong apprenticeship in the construction of gender roles from a young age and how, as a result of being praised for playing the role of a selfless, compassionate, and nurturing person, they are restricted to the confines of their homes. Indian women are expected to put up with a range of challenges while giving of themselves to others in order to maintain the web of connection and guarantee that no one is left alone. Indian women still have a long way to go before they can assert their identity as distinct individuals with their own goals, wants, dreams, and perspectives on what it is to be a person. Rushdie, who represents modern Indian women, gives a picture of the struggles women encounter in patriarchal society and how they deviate from the standard to discover who they are.

When a reader closely examines Rushdie's books, they will see that he also expresses the idea that women who attempt to marry in accordance with their own preferences, regardless of their status, education, or intelligence, are likely to ruin their chances in both the worlds in which they rebel against male dominance and the one in which they embrace it. Rushdie, on the other hand, portrays her as honest, bold, practical, and determined.

Thus, Salman Rushdie's works provide a multitude of chance for additional study. The representations of femininity in the author's books may be chosen for analysis. Additionally, it will be looked at how writers from the Diaspora and writers from India interpret traditional and cultural themes differently. It could be useful to critically evaluate Salman Rushdie's novels.

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