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JODHA'S 'OBJECTIFIED' EXISTENCE IN SALMAN RUSHDIE'S *THE ENCHANTRESS OF FLORENCE*: AN ANALYSIS TO DEBUNK VIRILIZATION IN WOMEN

Dr. V. VIDYA

Assistant Professor, Bishop Heber College, Tiruchirappalli.

E-mail: vidyarameshbharath@gmail.com

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Dr. V. VIDYA

ABSTRACT

“Beauvoir argues that all psychoanalysts allot the same destiny to woman - that of undergoing a conflict between her masculine and feminine tendencies – so that, in asserting her independence within this binaries, she can only become virilised.” (Tidd 61) Jodha, in *The Enchantress of Florence*, hops between her masculine and feminine tendencies and finally, her virilization in this process makes Akbar reject her and go in search of a new mate. This paper aims to probe into the causes of the dual-personality of Jodha and her exit from Akbar's palace under the theories expounded by Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* and J. Hillis Miller in “The Critic as Host”.

Keywords: ‘objectification’; ‘facticity’; ‘contingency’; virilization

“It is a recurring feature of his work that women are invoked to prove a point about social injustices and inequities, and then effectively demeaned ... by the writing itself.” (17) This is how, Catherine Cundy concludes about the delineation of woman characters in *Midnight's Children*, *The Satanic Verses* and *Shame*, and this forms the base for the dual, split-personality of Jodha in *The Enchantress of Florence* too. Salman Rushdie projects the ‘objectified’ existence of women in real life through Jodha's fantastical existence, her dual personality and her struggle for survival under patriarchal oppression in this novel. He deliberately weaves her as a fantastical figure rather than projecting her as a historical figure to debunk the harsh realities of the lives of women in general. One is made to reflect with awe and wonder while scanning through Jodha's struggle for existence – If this is the predicament of Akbar's favourite queen, then what would be the quandary of ordinary women in reality? This paper scrutinizes the ‘objectified’ existence of Jodha's disposition under

the theories expounded by Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* and J. Hillis Miller in “The Critic as Host”.

“Beauvoir argues that all psychoanalysts allot the same destiny to woman - that of undergoing a conflict between her masculine and feminine tendencies – so that, in asserting her independence within this binaries, she can only become virilised.” (Tidd 61) Jodha, in *The Enchantress of Florence*, hops between her masculine and feminine tendencies and finally, her virilization in this process makes Akbar reject her and go in search of a new mate. This paper aims to probe into the causes of the dual-personality of Jodha and her exit from Akbar's palace.

Jodha's personality in this novel serves as a conducive platform for the interplay of dualities. The causes of this interplay and the roles they serve can be well understood in the limelight of Beauvoir's feminist theories. Beauvoir's loud cry over women's pathetic predicament -

They [women] have no past, no history, no religion of their own [...] they lived dispersed among the males, attached through residence, housework, economic condition and social standing to certain men – fathers or husbands – more firmly than they are to other women. If they belong to the bourgeoisie, they feel solidarity with men of that class, not with proletarian women; if they are white, their allegiance is to whitemen, not negro women [...] the bond that unites her [woman] to her oppressors is not comparable to any other. The division of the sexes is a biological fact, not an event in human history. (Tidd 54)

gets a clear and vibrant echo in Rushdie's *The Enchantress of Florence* in his description of Jodha's fantastical existence –

She was a woman without a past, separate from history, or, rather, possessing only such history as he had been pleased to bestow upon her, and which the other queens bitterly contested. The question of her independent existence, of whether she had one, insisted on being asked, over and over, whether she willed it or not. If God turned his face away from his creation, Man, would Man simply cease to be? That was the large-scale version of the question, but it was the selfish, small-scale versions that bothered her. Was her will free of the man who had willed her into being? (EOF 61)

The counterpart of dependence in Jodha pops out then and there even in her limited universe: "... she was herself as well ... She was not subservient." (EOF 61) Even the counterpart of subservience in her is not her own. She was not subservient, not because she willed to be that, but because Akbar, her creator and lover, 'did not like subservient women' (EOC 61).

Beauvoir's views that 'one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman' (Tidd 65) gets exemplified in Akbar's creation of Jodha who is his 'single waking dream' (EOC 60): " So: the limitless beauty of the

imaginary queen came from one consort, her Hindu religion from another, and her unaccountable wealth from yet a third. Her temperament, however, was Akbar's own creation." (EOC 57) Yet, Jodha asserts her uniqueness and a special identity with her artificially created temperament. She is perfectly attentive, undemanding and endlessly available, and with all these qualities, she surpasses all real women around in Akbar's palace. She is feared for her perfection and her uniqueness; she becomes 'irresistible' for these qualities; she becomes the best object of best love of Akbar; and these very qualities make her the object of hatred of other women in the palace. She exerts her immortal presence in spite of her controlled and conditioned temperament: "She was an impossibility, a fantasy of perfection." (EOC 57) Thus, she becomes an embodiment of not one, but a series of rings, each ringlet ringing her counterpart characteristics namely, her dependent and independent existence; her willed existence by Akbar and her existence by her free will; her not being subservient and being subservient; her limitless beauty, Hindu religion and her unaccountable wealth, accountable for her unique special identity and her artificially created temperament; her perfect attentiveness, undemanding nature and endless availability, contributing lavishly to her immortal presence and her conditioned temperament; and her predicament as the best object of best love of Akbar and as the object of hatred of other women. Each of these rings is always ready and welcome to receive the next, and on the whole, remains open ended, always having the possibility of having another link added. (Miller 445-46)

Rushdie's inclination in the portrayal of Jodha, comprising dualities within her, can be well understood when discerned through Beauvoir's views on women's 'objectification' (Tidd 58). Jodha's objectified existence and her attempts to come out of it to exert her identity become the real source for her dual split-personality. Beauvoir's main argument concerning women's biology is that women have been obliged to experience their body as 'facticity' rather than 'contingency' (Tidd 56). This means that women do not choose how they 'exist' their bodies because their embodiment has been pre-defined by

patriarchal society. Woman's relationship to her body is, therefore, culturally produced. In her account of female biology in *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir adapts Merleau-Ponty's argument within the context of gender: "Woman, like man, is her body; but her body is something other than herself." (Tidd 58) In other words, a woman's experience of embodiment is separated from her transcendence. A woman is rewarded for alienating or reducing her transcendent subjectivity to her physicality in a patriarchal society that traditionally promotes woman's 'objectification' (Tidd 58). Rushdie's portrayal of Jodha as a fantasy figure and her 'objectification' shows Rushdie's sense of social responsibility towards feminist movements.

In the absence of Akbar, Jodha wanders the palace quarters alone like a lonely shadow glimpsed through latticed stone screens. She becomes nothing but a piece of cloth blown by breeze. She becomes inactive and a non-existent being (an immortal in Akbar's presence) and is seen in the nights standing under the little cupola on the top storey of the Panch Mahal and scanning the horizon not for an angel / God / Superman to free her from her fantastic captive existence but 'the return of the king who made her' (EOC 58) – a reminder of the term 'made woman' by Minh-Ha.

The counterpart of passivity and non-existence within Jodha take charge, the moment Akbar starts approaching her after his victories in the battlefields. With his approaching steps towards her, she feels her pulse quickening and coming to life to become immortal once again: "She felt herself strengthen, solidify. Doubts fled from her. He was coming." (EOC 61) As he approaches, she starts regaining her sense of feeling; she is able to feel the power of his approaching need; she is able to feel his foot-steps in her blood; she is able to see him in her; and she grows larger as he walks towards her. In other words, all her six senses become operational only in Akbar's presence, indicating her complete dependence, but, at this stage, her real nature and free spirit peeps out through her too and thus, Rushdie keeps the interplay of dualities alive amidst complete 'objectification' of Jodha by the pure act of will of Akbar: "His power over her was far from absolute ... Her nature rushed into her like a flood.

She was not subservient." (EOC 61) She finds herself filled with blood and rage, provoking her to scold him for his long absence. She proceeds as she had planned, though for few moments she withdraws them when she senses something awkward and experimental in his speech. She dresses herself in ordinary day clothes to exhibit her individuality and independent nature. She feels honoured when Akbar descends himself from his plural existence (We) to the singular (I) presence. His descent emboldens her to assert herself over him and men in general with daring comments as: " 'A man doesn't know what he wants. A man doesn't want what he says he wants. A man wants only what he needs.' " (EOC 62-63) These bold and scalding words on men puzzle the Emperor Akbar and put him out who had come from the battlefield expecting that his reference to himself in the singular (I) would make her swoon with joy. On the contrary, Jodha feels honoured, yet, refuses to acknowledge his descent, and utilizes the situation to make it conducive for her attack on the emperor and the men in general. When Akbar brings in a revolutionary and an erotic newness in his tone and speech to silently put his message across her that it is important to keep a good woman down to stop her from getting away, she misses the actual intention of the newly acquired tone of Akbar because of her over-confidence: "She did not. She believed she knew what aroused him, and was thinking only of the words she had to say to make him hers." (EOC 63) Instead, she makes a false but a bold move of asserting her independent existence, segregating herself from other queens, whom she refers as 'dolls' waiting for Akbar, 'prettifying and squealing and pulling one another's hair' (EOC 63). As such, she becomes an exemplification of 'enclosed exchange', 'intimate "nestling" domesticity' and 'domestic enclosure' (Miller 445-46) among the ringlets of counterparts, namely her inaction and non-existence in the absence of Akbar and her immortal existence in his presence; her complete 'objectification' by the 'pure act of will' (EOC 59) by Akbar and her assertion of her individuality and independent nature; and her existence as a lonely shadow and a piece of cloth blown by breeze in the absence of Akbar and her solidified existence with the approach of Akbar.

On one hand, she is shown to lack 'a conqueror's interest', and on the other, she is seen surveying down majestically through a stone-screen covering a high window on the upper storey of her quarters at the great walled courtyards of the Seat of Public Audience where the foreign travellers, merchants and priests of the West gathered to boast about the majesty of their lands, the gods and kings. She mocks at them and their paintings of the mountains and valleys. She compares their paintings and pictures with the beauty of the Himalayas and the Kashmir valley and adjudges them as 'half-things'. She exhibits her high and refined taste and aesthetic sense as she laughs at the foreigners' paltry approximation of natural beauty and for employing 'half-words to describe half-things'. (EOC 59) In other words, she adjudges their art as lacking completeness and wholeness, and based on their paintings, she refers that their kings are savages. She does not hesitate to stand in direct and striking contrast to her creator and the Emperor of the Universe, Akbar, in expressing her disinterest in and taste for the foreign travellers and their stories. Yet, she passes an intelligent and factual comment, hurting neither the sentiments of the East nor the West: " 'We are their dream,' she had told the emperor, 'and they are ours.' " (EOC 60) This individuality does not last permanently. It gets engulfed in the arbitrarily dominant power of 'the Perfect Man' (EOC 58): "She was his mirror because he had created her that way but she was herself as well." (EOC 61)

Freedom is difficult for women, as Beauvoir puts it, because they are not used to assuming full responsibility in society and they, therefore, lack the patronage and experience from which men benefit. This practical difficulty faced by women is portrayed in Jodha's attempts to limit her universe within the walled palaces and curtained corridors for her fears of ceasing to exist that her transgression might result in: "Let the rest of the world be for others. This square of fortified stone was hers." (EOC 60) She is described as fortunate for she does not have the desire to leave the walled premises of the palace. Yet, her suspicion that the spell of Akbar on her would be broken and she would cease to exist if she tries to cross the boundaries of the palace indicates

the lurking desire in her of being free. She is confident that she can assert her successful existence, outside the palace, independently only if Akbar 'were there to sustain her with the strength of his belief' (EOC 60). Here, her confidence of existing outside her little universe with the supporting hand of Akbar shows her in a situation where she is torn between fear and desire of being free. Her thoughts - "Perhaps she could do it if he, ..." and "Fortunately, she had no desire to leave." (EOC 60) - place her in a combat zone where the interplay of dualities in her very being pulls her poles apart. Therefore, she is seen, on one hand, comforting and consoling herself with all the possibilities of travel, she requires, offered by the labyrinth of walled and curtained corridors of the palace. On the other hand, she honours herself by declaring the fortified little universe to be hers. Thus, each one of the binary opposite pairs, set in action within Jodha, serves a purpose of portraying the status of woman and their inner struggle in a patriarchal society. They create triangles, not mere polar oppositions, as authenticated by Miller (444). Her lack of 'a conqueror's interest' and her majestic survey of the foreign travellers and their paintings place her at a different plane, with the masculinity and femininity in her forming the base of the triangle with their encounter. Her portrayal as lacking the desire to be free outside the palace and harbouring such a desire in the form of suspicion place her in a different possibility zone where she can be shown to be capable of performing both the roles traditionally authenticated to men and women. Her judgement about paintings, high tastes and aesthetic sense, her disinterest in foreign travellers and her fears and desires of being free along with her sorry status of honouring herself by declaring the fortified little universe to be hers and comforting / consoling herself with all the possibilities of travel within the walled corridors, all put together produce a similar effect. The dualities in her toss her to a third sphere with their interplays where she shimmers as an enslaved empress.

Jodha is described as 'immortal' (EOC 62) for she is a creation of love itself. Yet, this act of creation yields freedom to be the person, Akbar had created. She is free, as everyone is, 'within the

bounds of what it was in their nature to be and do' (EOC 61). Thus, there is a conflict between what she is actually and what she is assumed to be by others, her real status as a woman and a queen and the real purpose for which she is created, what she desires to be and she fears to be, the grandeur with which she is created and her helpless limited existence, and the perfections which make her look impossible and irresistible and the imperfect perfections with which she is controlled by her creator / lover. Though the limited space allocated to Jodha is to be solely owned authentically by her, she has to combat many plots in Akbar's absence. She is not free and safe even in her authenticated zone, in the absence of her creator. She is described as a sorceress, the sorceress of herself, yet, she is not powerful enough to put off the fire of distrust that surrounds her. She constantly finds herself in the combat zone, but, she does not succumb to the treacheries. She fights and defeats all her foes in the absence of Akbar. Yet, she feels herself fading away and becoming meaningless without him. The very next moment, she realizes her strengths too: "She was the scholar of his need. She knew everything." (EOC 62) Her existence is impossible without the will of Akbar, but, she exerts her full force of her will (that too, in the absence of Akbar) when her survival is put to stake in her struggle with the other queens in the palace. With her sorcery and will power, she confirms her existence against the other queens of Akbar: "The other queens did not exist. Only she existed." (EOC 62) She is a bit hesitant in talking about these 'other queens' (in Akbar's absence), but, rivals against this hesitancy and openly declares them as mere 'dolls' in the presence of Akbar.

Beauvoir interprets women's position as absolute 'Other' as the result of a process of 'becoming'. This pathetic 'becoming' of a woman is echoed in the portrayal of Jodha. Akbar, after his return from the wars, moves straight towards Jodha instead of the other queens because she is the one who pleases him the most: "She was full of him, of his desire for her ..." (EOC 62) Though Jodha is a puppet in the hands of Akbar, her individuality gets reflected in her personality then and there. She does not love him because he is her creator. She does not love him out of fear of ceasing to exist without his

will. She does not love him because he is the Universal Ruler: "She loved him because he never dismissed her opinions, never swatted them away with the majesty of his hand." (EOC 60)

She does not have the audacity to leave the palace in which she had been born a decade earlier. At the same time, she does not flatter Akbar, even when her spell of enchantment on him is broken at the moment she mentions about his other queens. She is born as an adult, yet, in truth, she is described as both his wife and child. In playing the dual role of a wife and a child, she does not submit to him absolutely. To hold the magic on him, she pours all the force of her eyes and not flattering words (that would have pleased his ego) when she finds him clouded over at her daring mention of other queens in the palace as dolls, beautifying themselves in their doll houses. She achieves a momentary success in holding him with her magic, but, is unable to retrieve him completely from his shifting self: "She understood that he had changed. And now everything else would change as well." (EOC 65) When she unleashes her hidden beauty and drops her silk veil, he gets lost. Yet, this surrender is only momentary. On one hand, she declares her confidence in her charms: " 'When a king imagines a wife he dreams of me.' " (EOC 64) The next moment, she yearns to listen to his longingness felt in the lonely army tents and his imitations of her movements in his imagination there. This shows her love for being flattered, harbouring her dislike to flatter her only man she needed to enchant. She does everything to extract flattering words from Akbar to embalm and soothe her captive predicament. When she does not receive the usual flattering words from him, she gets ready to face her defeat: "She waited for him to say it, but he didn't. Something was different. There was an impatience in him now, even an irritation, an annoyance she did not understand." (EOC 65) This offers a countering effect to her earlier daring attempt to transgress her pre-defined, authenticated and restricted domestic territory. Her daring talks about 'If history had gone down a different path ... and maybe that would have been an improvement' (EOC 64), make the operation of counterparts, constituting the qualities that could lead her to victory as well as defeat, within her more

vibrant. As soon as, she gives her opinions on the futility of wars, destructions caused in the wars waged by Akbar and the improvements that would have taken place if he had not waged wars on his foes, she finds herself in the danger zone. This leads to immediate disapproval from him and later, elimination from the topmost position in Akbar's list of his favourites. Her situation in the danger prone zone of patriarchal society makes her oscillate between counterparts, putting her in a state to wage a constant war within her. As such, she becomes the embodiment and epitome of interplay of dualities, finding it difficult to identify herself with any of these.

On one hand, she is the object providing refuge and escape for Akbar. On the other side, she becomes the cause of his annoyance, impatience and irritation as she hurls bunches of insults talking about his old and tired looks instead of congratulating him on his victories. She is the object of admiration, best love and attention. She is the epitome of profound knowledge and wisdom, yet, the cause of resentment and jealousy in her rival queens. She is the creation of Akbar's love, but, the cause of hatred in her rivals. She is an embodiment of patience and tolerance as she waits for Akbar in his prolonged absence, battling with her rivals. She loses her patience, tolerance and control over her tongue when Akbar returns back provoking her to talk about the improvements that would have taken place if Akbar had not defeated / destroyed his rivals. She is often seen pondering over the question of her existence: "Did she exist only because of his suspension of disbelief in the possibility of her existence? If he died, could she go on living?" (EOC 61) Soon afterwards, she accepts her approaching defeat, even before she is defeated. She predicts her future defeat from the changes she notices in Akbar's usual talks. Her bold attempts, to assert her identity by discussing about politics, wars, improvements, laws, punishments, gods, history, consequences of wars waged by Akbar, etc., make Akbar to dream and go in search for new love, a clear sign that his love for Jodha has been lost, and turn towards the novelty of a foreigner's (Mogor dell' Amore's) story. Yet, her exertion of enchantment over Akbar is described as undeniable, even amidst

his search for new love. His disillusionment after his visit to a brothel in his dream makes him seek Jodha, once again, and to possess her with a fury that was lacking in their meeting ever since he returned from the wars. The next day, when Akbar turns away to listen to the stories of Mogor dell' Amore, she is seen contemplating her situation passively and with bewilderment: "*She wondered ... if this wild passion was a sign of his return, or a gesture of farewell.*" (EOC 192)

Jodha is thought to be a perfect companion, helpmate, an erotic tiger and a perfect woman with all that no man could wish for more: "She was his masterpiece, or so he had thought for a long time, a dream made flesh, a traveller from the world of *khayal*, fancy, whom he had brought across the frontier of the real." (EOC 388) This same Jodha is left to walk out of his sphere, without a word of protest. Her inability to understand silence (unlike Qara Koz, Lady Black Eyes), her way of chiding or teasing Akbar and her superior tastes for art, politics, improvement, etc. (areas traditionally meant for / authenticated for men) altogether make her a feminine counterpart of Akbar himself. Seeing a rival in her, Akbar turns towards a more submissive, yet, powerful woman, Qara Koz, who did not speak or giggle or chide or tease. In other words, Qara Koz performed only the duties / actions traditionally authenticated to women: "She brought with her a scent of jasmine, and simply sat down beside him, did not touch him, and watched the day begin, ... in that instant they became a single person, he was united with her as he had never been with any woman ..." (EOC 389-90) His response – "*Until you're not ... My love, until you're not.*" – to Qara Koz's loving gestures and words – 'I am yours' (EOC 443) - rings as a warning, rather than words of love, not to dare to slip out of her traditionally authenticated sphere, which otherwise would result in disowning her.

Jodha's independent spirit supplements a unique identity and originality to her, whereas her dependency supplements an element of 'objectification' to her existence. Her unreal and fantastical existence supplements aesthetic touch to her being, whereas her real existence supplements logicity and rationality to her subsistence. The

description of Jodha as an immortal supplements aesthetic delight and thus, she transcends her historical existence. Her existence as a mortal supplements a realistic touch and thus, adds credibility to her historical existence. Her inner masculinity to transcend her limited existence supplements the elements of novelty to her personality, whereas her feminine characteristics to rule only the limited territory allotted to her supplements the elements of traditionalism that are permitted by patriarchy. Thus, the binaries in her defer each other, giving new dimensions to her personality.

Thus, the encounter of counterparts in the portrayal of Jodha creates a third sphere where the newly formed elements retain the characteristics of both the elements in each of the binary pairs, taking positions sometimes before them or between them as they divide, consume and exchange across when they meet. (Miller 444) Her immortal free existence within the limited boundaries; her perfections which make her look impossible and irresistible, and the imperfect perfections with which she is controlled by her creator / lover; her inability to put off the fire of distrust that surrounds her in spite of her being a sorceress; her love for being flattered, harbouring her dislike to flatter her only man she needed to enchant; her confidence in her charms and her yearning to listen to his longings as a proof of her enchanting powers and her subsequent disappointment when Akbar does not express it; her patience and tolerance oscillating between extremes in the presence and absence of Akbar; and her bold elocution about politics and improvements and acceptance of her defeat even before she confronts defeat, lead to a unique interplay of dualities where they consume and exchange each others' characteristics as they meet. In this third sphere, she flickers as independent and dependent, patient and impatient, bold and submissive, immortal and mortal, real and unreal, and a subject and an object of love, beauty, hatred, jealousy, wisdom, perfections and imperfections. This results in a blurred image of Jodha, disabling any kind of rigid classification.

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