

THE PHANTASMAGORIC WORLD OF MOTHERS AS PORTRAYED BY RUSHDIE

Dr. Merily Roy

Head of the Dept of English.
Indira Gandhi Govt Colg.
Vaishali Nagar, Bhilai.
Chhattisgarh

Abstract

In Rushdie's work, an array of female characters are found, who sometimes take a prominent role, sometimes predicts future and at other times gives a steady turn to the incidents of the story. Rushdie had portrayed, females, in every shade and forms, differently in each novel. Women, her dream, her destiny and fulfilled in its 'motherhood'. He explores the world of mother's and gives us a caricature of caring mother and possessive mother. He draws that excessive possessiveness, leads to crush a child's future. While taking us to the journey of phantasmagoric world of motherhood, making us feel the agony, the burden, the responsibility associated with it. Rushdie's eyes are camera, which captures in his photography all the vivid caricatures of women, and even penetrates inside to her actual mental composition, thus we have variety of females in his phantasmagoric world.

Keywords: phantasmagoria, possessive, caricature, explore, portray.

Salman Rushdie in his interview to Uma Chaudhri, speaks about his novel *Shame* and says:

... I was approaching the story of two men through all sorts of characters around them. And it so happened that most of these characters were females- mothers or wives or daughters. There was this kind of galaxy of female characters around both men, who really were the people through whom the story was being seen... (*The Imaginative Maps*, 4).

Traveling in the land of Rushdie's phantasmagoric world, we often meet array of female characters, who sometimes take prominent role, sometimes predicts the future and at other times give a steady turn to the incidents of the story. He has portrayed females in all forms and shades, wrapped up in disguise of phantasmagoria, without which the story seems to be incomplete. Phantasmagoria is a dream world, "a dream- web which is Maya. It is illusion... apparitions... mirage." (*Midnight's Children* 211) and "Maya in its dynamic aspect is called Shakti" (*Midnight's Children* 406) i.e. the women. Thus the journey into the world of phantasmagoria is incomplete without the portrayal of women. The position of women in his novel is illustrated in the following lines: the women are now moving into the centre of my little stage. Epifania, Carmen, Belle and the newly arrived Aurora. They, not the men, were the true protagonist in the

struggle. (*The Moors Last Sigh* 33). This paper studies, Rushdie's portrayal of women as mothers, with reference to his novels.

The curtain of Rushdie's "Phantasmagoric world" opens, where we first of all see a female as "Mother". The most respected term that can be assigned to a woman is of "mother" and her "motherhood". The word itself wraps around, itself a feeling of respect, dedication and purity. Rushdie artistically paints even motherhood in its varied form. In his world of mothers, we find caring mothers, strict mothers, and excessive possessive mothers.

Mother's are by nature caring for their offspring. They go to any extent to protect and bring up their children. Rushdie writes that literally speaking. "Motherhood is the bearing of a great burden" the carrying of and caring for one's offspring. It's a feat which needs patience, dedication, responsibility and care. So he says: 'Women' he sighed resignedly to his daughter, 'What a term'! is there no end to the burdens this word is capable of bearing? (*Shame* 58).

Mother's care or caring mother is appropriately seen in Pamposh Kaul in *Shalimar the Clown*. She even after her death comes to her daughter Boonyi's dream, guiding and caring her. When Boonyi herself was in the lap of mountainous forest, waiting for her death, it was here that she found the company of her dead mother.

A mother's love for her son is seen in Aurora's (*TMLS*) paintings called as "Moors series of paintings". She was the mother who guided her son in every step, cared her, looked after her; she is the mother who at last pardoned her son, even for the humiliation that she had received from, her only son, Moor. Her last painting "The Moor's Last Sigh" showed her love for her son, whom she had pardoned in spite of the hatred she had received from him. These lines reflect the emotions: Aurora Zogoby's last piece her anguished declaration of a mother love that could transcend and forgive the supposed crimes of her beloved child. (415)

Children are often very close to a mother. A mother, when she is not at peace with her family, or surroundings, finds her ultimate consolation in her children. She tries to console her aches, agonies, by transferring her attention towards her children, and she ultimately develops possessiveness for her little ones. Thus Rushdie takes us to the world of "Possessive Mothers". The possessiveness at first takes shape in the form of extra care and love for her children, when they are tender age. As the children grow, they have their own surroundings. Their world, which was previously their home and mother, now gradually enlarges, outside the periphery of their home. Hence initially the mother was child's world but later it includes classmates, friends and much later friends of opposite sex. It is here that mother's possessiveness starts playing its role. She, who finds her ultimate refuge in her child, hesitates to include any other in her world. Rushdie depicts this mother's possessiveness in the relation between Aurora and Moor. Moor, was so close to his mother that he was "the only child she suckled her breast". (*The Moor's Last Sigh* 219). This possessiveness of a mother, especially for her son, was explained by Freud in his "Oedipus Complex". This complex is reflected in the relationship her closeness with her son gets, reflected in her "Moor series" of paintings. Aurora had webbed a fantasy world, in which she and her son reigned. "It was not in her hand to stop her son from growing, and thus she engaged him in her paintings. She painted him into immortality"(221). In her "Moor Series of paintings", she painted Moor, in different forms and time. Her paintings takes us into a "phantasmagoric world" thus Moor's express:

She suckled me, and the first "Moor" pictures were done while I nestled at her breast. Charcoal sketches, water colors... aurora and I posed, somewhat

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blasphemously as a godless Madonna and child... As I grew up, she went on using me as a subject and this continuously, too was a sigh of love. (220).

Rushdie further reflects that the son, is not only mother's world, but also becomes her confessor, her friend and outlet of her emotions. Aurora puts all her effort in caging back those times, the time of tender age. Aurora puts all her energy so, that her child may remain close to her. She shares her moments, her secrets and even confess to him those very private hidden memories that was inscribed in her heart. How beautifully Rushdie portrays the innocent, clean, pious but intense relation of a mother and son. How accurately Rushdie paints with his magic brush, the "phantasmagoric world", where a mother and a son resides. It is the world, which is sonorous like a music, which has the hymn of poetry, a world which is just like a paradise. Thus "Moor" expresses his love for his mother:

So, like the hymn- writes, let me with a gladsome mind praise her, for she was kind,. For her mercy are endures... in spite of speeding and crippled limb and friendlessness I had a happy childhood in Paradise... my job was born in our collaboration, in the intimacy of those private hours, when she talked of everything under the sun...I learned the secrets of her heart as well as her mind (221).

The mother, son's intimacy is also reflected, when she tells Moor about the intense relation between her and her husband, before marriage that brought them together which led to their marriage. "I learned...now she feels for my father about the great sensuality... in a... godown one day (221). In this passionate world of hers, she is the empress, and she prohibits entry of any other woman, may it be her son's girlfriend or lover. Her love towards her son, gradually takes the form of jealousy towards other females. Thus Moor says: Aurora in her maternal jealousy of her son's first true love has created... cry of pain, in which a mother's attempts to show her son the simple truth about himself... (247).

The truth is this, that he son, like a young bird, who had just learned to fly, longs for a flight. He has been told about the world of love, closeness by his mother, and so wants to experience it for himself. Moor says "I wanted such a love for myself, I thirsted for it" (221). He believed that his mother, who was so close to him, would accept his love and help him. Here he was wrong. So he says "I thought my mother would help, alas! I was wrong"(221).

It is here, that a confrontation stars between a mother and son and his lover. Aurora persuades her son to be alert form Uma(his lover), when she says: "you must break her magic spell...or you are done for. She is a rakshasa form the Ramayana, and for sure she will cook or fry you goose (267).

Rushdie does a realistic, picturisation, of a mother's possessiveness, when he says, at first she cautions her child, when it doesn't work, she threatens him of the consequences and says: "that little fisherwoman has her hook on you and like a stupid fish you... she wants to play. Soon you will be out of water and she will fry of you in Ghee and ginger- garlic, mirch masala" (246).

When warning and threatening, doesn't prevent her son's flight, she throws her last dice. Rushdie is really a great artist, a magician, who can take us to any extent, and draw a true picture of those remorse sentiments that adorns of women in form of a mother. Aurora used her last straw, because her possessiveness had taken its highest peak, she did not want to be defeated by the women, who came in to her son's life recently. Mother and son had shared a very close

intimacy and she ponders after all what's left, that her girl friend can take from Moor? What new can Moor show to her? His mature body? Thus Aurora, in her ecstasy of possessiveness, declares to paint him in "Nudity". This is the highest realm of mother, son relation, which Rushdie and only Rushdie could paint.

On the morning of Uma's first visit, mother had decided, she wanted to paint me in the nude. Nudity was nothing special in our circle; over the years many of the painters and their friends had posed for one another in the buff. (245)

This is the highest peak of a mother-son relation, where mother urges to paint her son in nude. It doesn't portray obscenity; rather it reflects vastness and depth of a mother's love for her son. If we turn pages of the epic *The Mahabharata* we get example of Gandhari and her son Duryodhan. Gandhari, had kept her eyes covered, as her husband was blind. She did not want to see the world, as her husband also could not see the world being blind. Gandhari's eyes developed into a store house of immense energy and her sight could make one immortal. When Duryodhan, her son was about to leave to the territory of battle field, her mother, Gandhari, wished to see him in "Nude" to save his life, and make him immortal. Aurora too, wanted to paint "Moor" in "Nude" before he wanted to proceed to the territory of closeness with Uma. It is to protect her son, from the aura of Uma, to safeguard him from her. Thus Rushdie webbed the delicate, but unbreakable bond of a mother's for her child.

In this paper travelling in the phantasmagoric world of Rushdie we get a glimpse of females, as a mother. We studied his caricatures of mother as possessive mother, for whom the world is a shell where she resides with her child. Rushdie, is an artist, who writes for females, raises his voice for females and supports females, because he says "I have always believed myself fortunate to have come from a sprawling Indian family dominated by women" (*Step Across*, 375).

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