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ROLE OF 'CHOICE' AS EXISTENTIAL PREDICAMENT IN SALMAN RUSHDIE'S *THE MOOR'S LAST SIGH* AND *SHALIMAR THE CLOWN* : AN ANALYSIS

V. VIDYA¹, Dr. K.SATHYA SAI²

¹Full time Ph.D. Scholar, Alagappa Govt. Arts College, Karaikudi

²Assistant Professor of English, R.D.Govt. Arts College, Sivagangai



V. VIDYA

ABSTRACT

The concepts of 'choice', as advocated by two different existentialists, namely Jean Paul Sartre and Soren Kierkegaard, are brought in this paper to discuss the quality of life the main characters of Salman Rushdie's *The Moor's Last Sigh* and *Shalimar the Clown* lead. The choices made by Moor, Boonyi and Shalimar are elaborately discussed to show how their choices, being 'aesthetic' (concentrating on the 'immediate') lead them to despair and their inner-degradations. The other options, these characters could have chosen to make their choices 'ethical' (a choice with absolute will and with acceptance of the power of being, even in the grip of non-being) (Choice 830), are also explored elaborately to show how the characters themselves weave their own destinies. The state of these characters before they make their aesthetic choices is contrasted to the aftermaths of their choices. An attempt is also made to analyze how these characters after their downfalls, brought about because of their aesthetic choices, gather themselves with hope - 'the inward certainty which anticipates infinity' (Dread as Education toward Faith 840). With this kind of hope towering within them, they exit with the slogan - "Now I am ready" - as does a patient say to the surgeon when a painful operation is about to take place.

Keywords: 'being'; 'non-being'; 'meaningfulness'; 'meaninglessness'; 'baptism of will'; 'eternal validity'; 'ethical choice'; and 'aesthetic choice'.

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The concept of 'choice' has gained profound significance from the perspective of existential philosophers. To Sartre, "Man will only attain existence when he is what he purposes to be. Not, however, what he may wish to be. For what we usually understand by wishing or willing is a conscious decision taken - much more often than not - after we have made ourselves what we are." (Choice in a World without God. 835) This paper is an attempt to study the nature and functions of 'choice' and their impact on the future course of

actions in characters' lives in the select novels of Rushdie. The term 'choice', as per the above definition of an existentialist, lends itself to profound inquiry into the choice factor in life. It is not just the act of choice, but the characters' state of being and the consequences of the so-called act of choice are the subjects of discussion in the paper. This paper examines how the role of 'choice' decides the existential predicament of Rushdie's characters like Moor's choice in *The Moor's Last Sigh* and the choices of Shalimar and that of Boonyi in *Shalimar*

the Clown. The existence that these characters attain is not what they purpose to be. They are often not conscious of the state, when they make their choice and do not know where their choices would lead them to, but, when they become conscious of it, they realize their predicament.

The characters in Rushdie's *The Moor's Last Sigh* and *Shalimar the Clown* can also be judged well under the focus light of Cognitive Poetics which aims at reading literature combining linguistics and psychology and finally, leading to better understanding of basic cognitive processes. The Ancient Greek philosopher, Heraclitus and the German Romantic poet, Novalis believed that 'Character is destiny' which lays its foundation on fatalism. George Eliot agreed with the statement that 'Circumstances make character'. The first statement about character means 'Everything is given' while the second means 'Everything is made'. Cognitivist critics like Alan Richardson believe 'Everything is partly given and partly made'. (Barry 311) Examining characters under the focus light of Cognitive Poetics requires close scrutiny of their choices and their consequences.

In *The Moor's Last Sigh*, Moor, the protagonist, does not attain existence, at any point of time, of deciding choice in his life because he does not realize that his life is based on what he purposes to be. He is born with conflicts between his body and self or mind. His potentiality to choose is impaired by his physical deformity and this is always a constraint to his free will to operate. Moreover, his life is spent more on repairing it or in making self-consoling compensation, instead of living a life of his choice. Moor is born with a deformed right hand, cursed with speed of aging and wheezing. He yearns for normality throughout his life – "I set about devising a secret identity of my own." (MLS 152)

Moor's physical defect is one of the factors which makes great influence in the formation of his behavior and personality. At the age of seven and half, he enters adolescence. He develops face-fuzz, and adam's apple, a deep bass voice and fully fledged male sexual organs and appetites. At ten, he finds himself trapped in a six-foot six body of a twenty-year-old giant. This results in forming a

person who is a bundle of anxiety and uncertainty about self. Confusion is so deep rooted in Moor's case due to the following reasons which shows that he has not yet evolved fully to a conscious state in which he can acquire all faculties essential to make the right choice. Being a right-handed entity, Moor finds it hard to learn to write with his left as it would have been for any righty in the world. He accepts and digests the fact that at ten, though he looked twenty, his handwriting was no better than a toddler's early scrawls – "This, too, I overcame." (MLS 153) What was hard to overcome for him was the feeling of being in a house of art, surrounded by makers of beauty, both resident and visiting. He feels like a 'closed book' among his beautiful sisters, artist mother, business magnet father, artist Uma Sarasvati and other thoroughbreds. The pain, he experiences, is due to the fact that he cannot follow them where they went for their 'greatest joy' – "What was harder still was the feeling of being ugly; malformed, wrong, the knowledge that life had dealt me a bad hand, and a freak of nature was obliging me to play it out too fast. What was hardest of all was the sense of being an embarrassment, a shame." (MLS 153-154)

Moor's choice of Uma Sarasvati, in spite his mother's resistance, to gratify his lust and his thirst to be loved in a loveless world, results in disinheritance of him by his parents. Later, he narrowly escapes death at the hands of Uma. His rejection by his parents makes him reject the world. The denial of parental love and shelter make him deny the same to his victims when placed in Hazare's XI.

His deformity is transformed into ability by Lambajan who coaches him to box with his deformed right hand. He could have become a professional boxer and a champion, if he had used his newly acquired skills appropriately, but, his boxing skills are misplaced and misused. Moor's placement in Hazare's XI to form part of his masked avengers brings him unlimited delight wrapped in simplicity of his new life, which he revels. He abandons his life quest for an unattainable normality with great relief and joy. He unleashes his entire wrath he had banked in him by the circumstances and emotional complexities of his

previous existence on his victims. He is relieved of all resentments, resentment at the world's rejections, at the overheard giggles of women and at teachers' sneers when he sees his victims screaming with fear and pain. Moor's much unexpressed wrath at the withdrawal of shelter, love and attention by his parents finds its expression as inward grimaces when he renders his victims unconscious with a single hammer-blow. He starts taking pride in keeping his outward expression neutral, impassive and void while hitting others: "Like time, I did not speak. The beating was its own language and would make its own meaning plain." (MLS 307) As a beater, he harbours the notion with pride that to beat is a kind of exaltation, a revelatory act. His revelations are hued with a feeling of disgrace of plunging downwards, not like an angel but like an ordinary man: "My tumble is not Lucifer's but Adam's. I fall into my manhood. I am happy so to fall." (MLS 296) Moor does not wish to be excused for the new choice he has made in life. At the same time, he does not wish to stop either: "No more! Finish! I want to get on with the story." (MLS 297) Moor's agony at the rejection of him by the world makes him reject the world, and he resolves to study Fielding closely and follow him 'like a road'.

Moor's focus on the 'immediate', makes him lose his parents' love forever. He chooses Uma in spite of his mother's warnings to gratify his lust, his immediate need, without examining the long-term consequences. He is thrown out from his parents' protective zone to land up into different captivities, the rest of his life - Uma's catastrophic love, Bombay Central, Raman Fielding's Lalgau villa, Tin-man Hazare's XI and finally, in Vasco-Miranda's castle in Benengali. He is abandoned all alone in a loveless world where he too learns to be loveless. Once thrown out from his parents' protective zone, the under-world dons like Raman Fielding and Tin-man Hazare become his guardians. In their company, he chooses to gratify his fury of rejection by his parents. He chooses to be loveless and heartless just to quench his anger of rejection. He learns in the company of Raman Fielding and Tin-man Hazare to speak the language of beating with an outward neutral, impassive and void expression. His choice of Uma transforms him

from a passive model of his mother's paintings into a masked avenger in Hazare's XI and later, into a tragic figure in Vasco's captivity, lamenting - "Me? I never got the right help. Nor, until now, did I ever find my Chimene." (MLS 428) His choice to be loveless makes a heartless beater.

His 'aesthetic choices' focused on the 'immediate' (Choice 830) pushes him to a world of utter lovelessness and hopelessness. He could have continued with the mantra of embracing the inescapable given by boy mahaguru Lord Khusro Khusrovani Bhagwan - 'Embrace your fate'; 'Rejoice in what gives you grief'; 'That which you would flee, turn and run towards it with all your heart'; 'Only by becoming your misfortune will you transcend it'. (MLS 163) He could have scanned Uma's remarks about his mother or he could have at least resisted her influence on him instead of falling as a prey to her. He could have utilized the golden opportunity of flourishing as a successful businessman when he is asked to look after the Baby Softo Talcum Powder business by his father. All these options could have constituted what Soren Kierkegaard labels as 'ethical choice' (Choice 830) : " ... the baptism of the will which lifts up the choice into the ethical ..." (Choice 831) These choices do not become ethical choices just because they constitute the 'good', but, because they would have involved his absolute will since they constitute the 'good'. (Choice 831) In choosing any one of these choices, Moor would have succeeded in choosing himself 'absolutely' ensuring 'eternal validity' (Choice 831) and such a choice is ethical. All these choices insure his well-being in the long run ('eternal validity').

At the age of fourteen, Shalimar, in *Shalimar the Clown*, had taken his professional name, Noman Sher Noman after the expiration of apprenticeship, setting Noman the child aside to be his 'new adult self' (SC 46). He is shown with dreams, filled to the brim, to make his father feel proud of him. He is his father's 'lucky charm' (SC 58) and 'magic talisman' (SC 58) which made Abdullah Noman say, "With you beside me I am invincible." (SC 58) His great expectations - "My father's love was the first phase ...It carried me as far as the treetops. But now it's your love I need. That's what will let me fly." " (SC 58) - are transformed into his

shattered aspirations in prison because of his 'aesthetic choices' he makes later:

"He gave me his same, leonine middle name," Shalimar the assassin wrote many years later, "but I do not deserve to bear it. My life was going to be one thing but death turned it into another. The bright sky vanished for me and a dark passage opened. Now I am made of darkness, but a lion is made of light." He wrote this ...Then he tore the paper to bits. (SC 59-60)

The love between Shalimar and Boonyi, expressed through 'the silent careful language of forbidden desire' (SC 47), takes the shape of a debate, as it subdivides into desire and restraint: "The shadow dragons were fighting over him, Rahu the exaggerator and Ketu the blocker battling for mastery of his heart." (SC 60) But, Boonyi's interpretation of life gives the story a different direction and the desire takes over them, finally in the meadow of Khelmarg. The inner debate between desire and restraint in Boonyi results in the triumph of desire:

It was better to be done with magic lines and to confront your destiny. Lines in the dirt were all very well but they only delayed matters. What had to happen should be allowed to happen or it could never be overcome. (SC 50)

Their consummated love, after the desire's dragon head had won over them, is followed by Shalimar's resolute declaration, almost resounding like an oath: "Don't leave me," he said rolling over onto his back and panting for joy. "Don't you leave me now, or I'll never forgive you, and I'll have my revenge, I'll kill you and if you have any children by another man I'll kill the children also." (SC 61) This oath becomes the main cause for his 'aesthetic choice' to plunge into international terrorist activities to enable and equip himself to kill Max and Boonyi later.

He chooses hatred and revenge instead of love and forgiveness when Boonyi betrays him. Boonyi's return from Max's captivity to seek Shalimar's forgiveness and love does not change his resolution for revenge. His look has hatred and contempt mingled with grief, hurt and 'a terrible, broken love' and 'something else, something she

didn't understand' (SC 222), when Boonyi returns back to their village. This something else had already provoked him to leave Pachigam to kill Boonyi which is temporarily put off by his brothers' convincing words. He ceases to love her, but, is unable to throw her out, still hating her for deserting him.

Even when he is miles apart from her, he greets her every night. His hatred for Boonyi caused by her infidelity further subdivides into pangs of love and revenge. His heart burns with revenge and fury, but, he is unable to get away from her either: "*There you are*, he greeted her every night. *You can't get away from me.*" (SC 258) Revenge takes the shape of beastly acts as he joins the terrorist's group in Pakistan, but he continues his telepathic conversation with her:

But he couldn't get away from her either. He spoke to her silently as if she were lying by his side, as if his knife were at her throat and he were confessing his secrets to her before she took them to her grave, he told her everything, about the finance committee, the billeting, the impotence, the fear. It turned out that hatred and love were not so very far apart. The levels of intimacy were the same. (SC 258-59)

The murderous fury of Shalimar, his possession by the devil, burns fiercely in him and carries him forward to murder Max and Boonyi, but, his bond with Boonyi remains constant and unbreakable as he sheds tears after killing Boonyi. His 'aesthetic choice' to kill Max and Boonyi to gratify his fury and heal his broken heart makes him a prisoner of fury, hatred, shame and repentance throughout his life which turns him into an embodiment of death itself: "... his voice ... a voice but a disembodied nonverbal transmission, like a wild screech full of static and internal dissension, hatred and shame, repentance and threat, curses and tears; like a werewolf howling at the moon." (SC 340) His fury does not get gratified even after killing Max and Boonyi. It gets extended towards Kashmira though her voice and emerald eyes remind and rekindle the love he had for Boonyi: "He wanted to reach out to her. He didn't know what he wanted. She let her hair down and there were tears in his eyes... she was the same and not the same, but she was still alive ... He didn't

know what he wanted.” (SC 323) But, soon he is reminded of his oath which suppresses the capacity to love in him: “How beautiful she was. He would love her if he still knew how to love. But he had forgotten the way. All he knew now was slaughter. *I'll kill the children too.*” (SC 323) He decides to kill Kashmira too: “He had no answers for her. He was in inchoate, contradictory, storm clouded. He was a hunted animal living in a ravine, like a coyote, like a dog. He was starving and thirsty. He was venom and blood.” (SC 341) Shalimar's hatred and revengeful acts are put off, finally, when Kashmira kills him with her golden bow and Kashmira- Yuvraj love affair is set free to bloom in its natural form. Thus, the pure love of Shalimar passes through various subdivisions of its own self within itself, allowing osmotic mixings and hymeneal bondings among themselves, which finds proof in Shalimar's final letter to Kashmira on her thirtieth birthday, putting the past into the present tense: “*Everything I am your mother makes me*, the letter began. *Every blow I suffer your father deals.*” (SC 392)

His choice of revenge instead of forgiveness and love makes him burn with fury for many years. He could have tried to understand Boonyi's suppressed ambitions to improve her dancing skills and acquire higher standards of education and given his support in fulfilling her hidden desires. He could have forgiven her and accepted her when she returns back to their village repenting and regretting for her past decisions. Even Boonyi's exile into the world of the Living Dead and her decay as a secluded ghostly figure in the abandoned and ruined hut of Nazerabaddoor in Pachigam does not change his revengeful feelings. His choices focused only on the 'immediate' gratification of his fury brings vast devastations: death of Max and Boonyi at his hands, death threat to Kashmira, mass killings when he joins the terrorist's group, agonized existence of his parents and Boonyi's father, Kashmira's orphaned existence, and so on. Therefore, he lives 'aesthetically' and not 'ethically' (Choice 830), giving no room for 'eternal validity' and 'the baptism of will' in making his choice. (Choice 831) In this regard, Shalimar's choice cannot be considered as a choice at all since an 'aesthetic choice is either entirely

immediate and to that extent no choice' (Choice 830).

At the age of fourteen, Boonyi, in *Shalimar the Clown*, is described as 'thunder and music' (SC 101) put together. The 'music' in her makes her fall in love with Shalimar. Boonyi loves Shalimar because she finds him to be the 'most beautiful boy', handsome, funny in his clowning, pure in his singing, graceful in dancing and gravity-free on the high rope and wonderfully gentle by nature:

This was no warrior demon! He was sweet Noman ... She loved him because his choice of name was his way of honouring her deceased mother as well as celebrating the unbreakable connection of their birth. She loved him because he would not – he could not!- hurt any living soul. How could he cause her harm when he would not harm a fly? (SC 50)

The 'music' in Boonyi blinds her even when Shalimar declares to take revenge if she happened to leave him in future: “ “What a romantic you are,” she replied carelessly. “You say the sweetest things.” ” (SC 61) Desire takes over her, which is fuelled by her dead mother's vision of the 'unshackled future' (SC 53) and 'vision of freedom' (SC 53) that could not be entered in her life time. The words of her dead mother's ghost, calling itself the dream of the mother, embolden Boonyi to cross the 'powerful line' (SC 50): “ “A woman can make every choice she pleases just because it pleases her, and pleasing a man comes a poor second, a long way behind,” she said. “Also, if a woman's heart is true then what the world thinks doesn't matter one jot.” ” (SC 53)

When desire takes over love in the case of Boonyi and Shalimar, they both are locked in the wedlock of marriage arranged by their parents and villagers. As such, she finds herself arrested in the captivity of love. The 'thunder' in Boonyi tempts her to escape before her wedding with Shalimar. While the wedding arrangements are going on, she sits wide awake, staring furiously at the ceiling, wishing the walls of the house to dissolve so that she could escape. The marriage seems to her 'a lifetime jail sentence' (SC 114) as she is overwhelmed by claustrophobia. Besides her deep love for Shalimar, her married life, village life, life with her father

chattering away by the Muskadoon and with her friends dancing their gopi dance, life with all the people in Pachigam, she was longing for something: "... life with all the people amongst whom she had spent ... was not remotely enough for her, didn't begin to satisfy her hunger, her ravenous longing for something she could not yet name ..." (SC 114) She longs for a fairy, a djinni or a piece of once-in-a-lifetime luck so that 'she would move faster than fortune' (SC 114), '*away from this slow death and slower life, away from Shalimar the clown*' (SC 115).

Boonyi's adventurous and ambitious streak combined with her love for freedom, inherited from her mother, makes her reject this captivity. She finds, later on, torn apart between binary opposites- whether to remain faithful to Shalimar and rejoice captivity or to betray him to join Max and celebrate freedom. She chooses the latter, in accordance to her inner free spirit, and her choice of freedom has further subdivisions, too- captivity in freedom and freedom in captivity. There is irony in this, because Boonyi's daring was the single quality Shalimar admired the most. He had fallen in love with her, in large part, as she was rarely afraid, she reached out for what she wanted and grabbed it and didn't see why it should elude her grasp. This same quality of Boonyi crashes and smashes them down to bits and Shalimar notices this, long back, that the loss of her virginity had given birth to something reckless in her, which he equates with a kind of 'wild defiant uncaringness' (SC 93) and 'a sudden exhibitionism' (SC 93) leading towards folly.

Yes, he was right in foreseeing her recklessness as Boonyi casually bids good-bye to him while boarding the bus to Delhi to join Max: "... she knew it was an ending. He understood nothing, did not foresee the breaking of his heart." (SC 190) His true and intense love blinds him completely to suspect her and her traitorous soul. The reason why Boonyi leaves him is that she knew his love, though true, would lead her nowhere and 'would change nothing, would not take her where it was her destiny to go' (SC 190). Boonyi had always given him her best and he always felt lit up in return. Boonyi never received anything best which she thought she deserved. In fact, Shalimar had never made an attempt to know what she wanted, but in Max's

case, Boonyi knew what he wanted and Max offered them in abundance, though for a short span of time. True love and loving truly is not adequate to keep the love alive, fresh and eternal, but knowing to love, mastering the art of receiving and reciprocating love and leading the loved one to reach his/her destination are the true hallmarks of true love, in which Shalimar miserably fails. Shalimar, in the love-story, plays the passive role of a grabber and Boonyi remains the 'grabbee' (SC 45), and this causes an irreparable crack in their relationship: "She gave him her best, brightest smile and he lit up in return, as always. This was how she would remember him, his beauty illumined by love." (SC 190)

Boonyi in her pursuit to become a grabber, to attain the status of a skilled dancer and to acquire higher standards of education, to her surprise, finds herself captive in Max's custody, which she had misunderstood for freedom: "... her heart scolded her. What she thought of as her former imprisonment had been freedom, while this so-called liberation was no more than a gilded cage." (SC 195) The tinsel world of Max throws a spell of enchantment around her. When Max, during the passage of time understands that Boonyi did not love him and that she had only exposed her body like any common whore, there is a crack in their relationship which leads to his abandonment of Boonyi later.

Boonyi's choice of false freedom, a clear example of an 'aesthetic choice' focused on the 'immediate' (Choice 830) leads her to inner degradation:

Don't ask for my heart, because I am tearing it out and breaking it into little bits and throwing it away so I will be heartless but you will not know it because I will be the perfect counterfeit of a loving woman and you will receive from me a perfect forgery of love. (SC 194)

Her inner degradation leads her to a situation, devoid of happiness and hope, where only misery reigns. She slides towards ruin, slowly first and with gathering speed later. Her misery is seen at its height when she accuses Max helplessly on the day of their last meeting: "I am your handiwork made

flesh. You took beauty and created hideousness ... I am the meaning of your so-called love, your destructive, selfish, wanton love.” (SC 205)

Boonyi's miserable situation, caused due to 'enslaving solitude' (SC 195), leads her to decay (both physical and mental). In Max's 'liberated captivity' (SC 201), her beauty dims, her hair loses its lustre, the chewing of tobacco ruins her smile, her mind gets clouded with opium, her skin coarsens, her teeth rots, her body odour sours, her head rattles with pills, her lungs are full of poppies and her bulk increases every week, every hour. The general education she had requested as part of her deal with the ambassador ceases as Boonyi lives with her belly full of food and her head in a chemical spin always, which is an 'astonishingly self-destructive behaviour' and 'a deliberate suicide attempt' (SC 203). The jewel of Kashmir, thus, decays into 'a stinking foam mattress' (SC 203).

Instead of choosing Max as her ladder to climb the heights of her ambitions, she could have confided her desires to her husband, Shalimar, who chooses a name for himself to honour her deceased mother as well as to celebrate the unbreakable connection of their birth and who plans to bring good luck to her for all the days of their lives. Boonyi, herself, had acknowledged him to be the 'most beautiful boy', handsome, funny in his clowning, pure in his singing, graceful in dancing and gravity-free on the high rope and wonderfully gentle by nature. She could have confided in her father - a teacher and a lenient ever-caring and ever-loving father - or her father-in-law, who had supported her affair with Shalimar in spite of their different religions and other factors. Her mother-in-law, too, continues her support even when the facts about their love-making before their marriage are revealed. Even the villagers show their consent and cooperation in this regard. Above all, she is completely trusted and is given complete freedom to travel to New Delhi to give a dance performance with other girls of her troop. Under such favourable conditions, she should not have opted for the company of Max for the immediate gratification of her ambitions. As such, her choice being purely an aesthetic one leads her to a tragic fall. Had she chosen Max 'absolutely' with 'the baptism of will'

(Choice 831), she would not have returned back to her village with the hope of joining her husband, Shalimar. Similarly, she does not choose Shalimar 'absolutely' either, for she betrays him in between to join Max. Her choice of freedom also has a similar effect. Her choices of Max, Shalimar and false freedom, when scanned under Kierkegaard's concept of choice - "The aesthetic choice is either entirely immediate and to that extent no choice, or it loses itself in the multifarious." (Choice 831) - lack the spirit of choosing absolutely, concentrating only on the momentary aspects.

Boonyi's decay, finally, pushes her to live like a ghostly figure in the secluded, abandoned and ruined hut of Nazarebaddoor in Pachigam, where her phantom mother becomes her perpetual companion:

She slowly became competent in practical matters, but her hold on reality grew correspondingly more erratic, as though something inside her refused to grasp that the world in which she was getting to be so self-sufficient would never turn back into the one she wanted, the one in which she could fold her husband's love around herself while also wrapping him up in hers. (SC 238)

When pushed into this world of the Living Dead, all humanly feelings and acts of hers dwindle away from her. She goes outdoor naked on summer nights and dances with her dead mother like wolves, challenging Shalimar to love her or kill her: "She could do this because everybody knew she was mad." (SC 241)

When all humaneness in Boonyi becomes numb, she waits, though defenseless, vulnerable and fragile, like a 'thunder' for the thunderbolts of Shalimar to befall her. Boonyi, in her exile in Nazarebaddoor's hut, could have opted for other ways to reach her death, but, the 'music' of her love for Shalimar makes her to wait for him. As soon as she senses his proximity, she prepares herself like a poem for his arrival. Her preparations are like songs of waiting, set to the tune of music of her love: She prepares a meal out of the last kid goat, dressed with her choicest herbs; she bathes in the mountain stream and braids her hair with flowers; she wears

no clothes intentionally so that he could read her body like a book and know that she loved him still; she stirs the pot of food on the low fire, waiting to remind him of the time spent by the Muskadoon, of what had happened in Khelmarg and of the village's bold defense of their love; and finally, when he comes, she greets him and commands him to kill her

This analysis of choices, made by different characters, in the select novels of Salman Rushdie converges on Kierkegaard's views about choice:

The choice itself is decisive for the content of the personality, through the choice the personality immerses itself in the thing chosen, and when it does not choose it withers away in consumption ... So it is with a man. If he forgets to take account of the headway, there comes at last an instant when there no longer is any question of an either / or, not because he has chosen but because he has neglected to choose, which is equivalent to saying, because others have chosen for him, because he has lost his self. (Choice 829)

The most tremendous thing which has been granted to man is the freedom to choose. If one desires to save it or preserve it, says Soren Kierkegaard, it can be done through unconditional and complete resignation to give it back to God, and oneself with it. If one gives way to temptation and looks at freedom of choice with egoistic desire, then the freedom is lost. The idea of freedom then becomes '*idee fixe*' (Choice 834) and one has to live like a rich man who imagines himself to be poor and die of want. Boonyi's choice of Max's captivity, Moor's choice of Uma and his position as a beater, and Shalimar's choice of revenge go parallel with this concept of Soren Kierkegaard. Their choices become their snakes of inner degradation. "In fashioning myself I fashion man," says Jean Paul Sartre (Choice in a World without God 835), taking the concept of 'choice' as enumerated by Soren Kierkegaard a step ahead. Existentialism puts every man in possession of himself as he is and his existence is a kind of responsibility to be entirely shouldered by him. When a man chooses for himself, he chooses for all: "What we choose is always the better; and nothing

can be better for us unless it is better for all." (Choice in a World without God 835)

Resignation of an individual is a will that cannot escape the whole mankind. Similarly, an action of an individual becomes a commitment on behalf of all mankind. In other words, an individual is responsible for himself and all men, says Jean Paul Sartre (Choice in a World without God 835). Based on these concepts of Sartre and Kierkegaard, it can be concluded that one creates his/her own Ladders and Snakes, though fate sometimes seems to interfere. Boonyi's decisions to join Max and later on, return to her village leave an everlasting impact on her husband and her family members. The snakes which she creates for herself through her free will to choose leads to trains of snakes - her disgrace, fury and revenge in her husband which further lead to his international terrorist activities, disgrace to her family members, abandonment of her girl child and its childhood agonies, etc. Shalimar's choice leads to mass killings, the pathetic end of Max and Boonyi and the cause of death threat for Kashmira. Similar are the cases of Max's abandonment of Boonyi. They all live with the anguish that is called 'the anguish of Abraham' and a kind of 'self-deception' (Sartre 836).

Almost all the characters (exceptions like Kashmira) in these two novels of Rushdie make choices who lack 'the inward certainty which anticipates infinity' (Dread as Education toward Faith 840). Moor allows others to make his choices and he mounts his ladders of faith and hope only towards the end of their lives. Moor reaches this kind of hope and faith towards the end when he lays his head down beneath his ancestors and closes his eyes, according to his '*family's old practice of falling asleep in times of trouble, and hope to awaken, renewed and joyful, into a better time*' (MLS 434).

Boonyi mounts this ladder of faith and hope when she moves away from Max, abandoning her child and reaches Panchigam. She waits with absolute certainty that Shalimar would come one day and free her from her sins:

He said: Don't leave that hut, the place of your exile, or you will release me from my oath and I will return, I will certainly know and I will certainly return. She said: I'll stay

here and wait and I know you will return.
(SC 259)

Similarly, Shalimar mounts on his ladder of faith and hope which is, unlike that of others, directed towards destruction as he joins the terrorists' group:

We all make ourselves up now, we don't have to be ourselves any more ... I will learn the subtle arts of deception and deceit of which you are already a mistress and I will perfect the art of death. The time for love is past ... It is impossible to cross the mountains. We are crossing the mountains. We are impossible. We are invisible and impossible and we are going over the mountains to be free. (SC 260-61)

He slithers down the snake which he assumes to be his ladder when he kills Max and Boonyi. To some extent, he is freed from his murderous rage and possession by the devil when he kills them both. He is absolutely freed from this prison of fury and revenge when Kashmir's arrow, again an embodiment of 'inward certainty which anticipates infinity' (Dread as Education toward Faith 840), hits him. Thus, Saleem Sinai, Moor, Qara Koz, Boonyi, Akbar and Shalimar climb their ladders of victory and emerge victorious by anticipation of faith, as said by Soren Kierkegaard only towards the end. Their ladders of hope and faith, thus, become a 'serviceable spirit' (Dread as Education toward Faith 841) which leads them where they want to go. They all move ahead towards their respective destinations with the slogan, "Now I am ready" as does a patient say to the surgeon when a painful operation is about to take place. As said by Soren Kierkegaard, the dread in these characters enters into their souls and searches them thoroughly, constraining out of them 'all the finite and the petty' (Dread as Education toward Faith 841), and leading them where they would go.

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