

THE SAGA OF SAYING AND UNSAYING: A RECONNAISSANCE OF WOMAN CHARACTERS IN SALMAN RUSHDIE'S *THE MOOR'S LAST SIGH*

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ABSTRACT: *"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 women characters in Midnight's Children, The Satanic Verses and Shame, and this forms the base for their dual, split-personalities in Rushdie's The Moor's Last Sigh too. This paper aims to identify the dual elements in woman characters with special reference to The Moor's Last Sigh, and also aims to deconstruct the mystery behind them. It also explores the causes and origins of these dualities with reference to the views of psychoanalysts, Simone de Beauvoir, Ajay Skaria, Nicole Weikgenannt, Chandra Mohanty, Trinh T. Minh-Ha, Alok Patel, Catherine Cundy, and Justyna Deszcz. It also analyses how oppression of women becomes the root-cause for the existence of dual elements in them. The dualities in Aurora Zogoiby, Epifania, Belle and Aoi Ue of The Moor's Last Sigh are examined under the light of J. Hillis Miller's "The Critic as Host" to deconstruct the alignment and design of those dualities.*

KEYWORDS: Creative Courage, Creative Despair, Separate Development, A Made Woman, Self-Erasure

INTRODUCTION

Gender debate has its origin from the period unknown. The consequences of this debate are umpteen in number, and interplay of dualities in women is one among them. Women in Salman Rushdie's novels vividly display multiple dual elements inbuilt in them, and this paper deconstructs the mystery behind split-personalities of women with special reference to Rushdie's *The Moor's Last Sigh*. Just identifying the dual elements in woman characters would be meaningless if the causes and origins of these dual elements are left unexplored. The views expressed by psychoanalysts, Simone de Beauvoir, Ajay Skaria, Nicole Weikgenannt, Chandra Mohanty, Trinh T. Minh-Ha, Alok Patel, Catherine Cundy, and Justyna Deszcz have been skimmed and scanned to throw light on these areas in this paper. Similarly, the study of the interplay of the dual elements, identified in the woman characters in Rushdie's *The Moor's Last Sigh*, would not be complete unless the inclinations behind their interplay are deconstructed. Again, a mere documentation of the roles and causes of these interplays would not be meaningful if the causes of the oppression of women and the possible solutions for overcoming this oppression are excluded from the agenda. Therefore, this paper proceeds to analyze the split personalities of woman characters in this novel after formulating an overview on the roles and causes of dualities in woman characters, and also, the causes of and solutions for the oppression of women, in general as well as in this novel in particular. This paper also analyses how oppression of women becomes the root-cause for the existence of dual elements in them.

"The negative lives from the positive it negates," says Paul Tillich in "The Meaning of Meaninglessness" (946), and this existentialist thought forms the base for understanding the very interplay of counterparts within the women in the post-colonial era as well as in the

fictional world of Rushdie. The monstrous streak in the bold and submissive woman characters of Rushdie's *The Moor's Last Sigh* can be traced out from the absence of their 'creative courage' - the courage to face things as they are and to express the anxiety of meaninglessness - in their confrontations with despair and oppression. In the absence of 'creative courage', the encountered despair or oppression does not take the shape of 'creative despair' (Tillich 945), giving way only to momentary hope which is no way different from mere despair itself. Rushdie's woman characters in this novel, unlike Kashmira in *Shalimar the Clown*, show enormous courage when situation demands, but they choose the path that takes them away from 'creative courage'. As such, they oscillate between dual elements.

"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 their dual, split-personalities in Rushdie's *The Moor's Last Sigh* too. The dual roles played by woman characters in this novel can also be aptly equated with Mahmoud's (Bilquis Hyder's father) comments on the emotions and images that attach to the word 'Woman': "Is there no end to the burdens this word is capable of bearing? Was there ever such a broad-backed and also such a dirty word?" (*Shame* 62) Therein lay the roots of the binarism – being innocent/whore, bold/submissive and shameful/shameless – which women themselves embody like both sides of a coin in *The Moor's Last Sigh*. Labelling the portrayal of woman characters in *Midnight's Children*, as prejudiced on gender basis and offensive, Patel observes that Parvati, Padma and Durga are presented as iconic Hindu Goddesses of power or shakthi or the revolutionary force and at the same time, ironically, as symbols of celibacy, impotence and destruction: "The woman, then, in the case of Rushdie is trapped between the two extremes of the Devi and the Devil." (Patel 87) These remarks of Patel seem applicable to almost all woman characters of *The Moor's Last Sigh*. It is not the descriptive potential of gender difference, says Chandra Mohanty, but the privileged positioning and explanatory potential of gender difference as the origin of oppression that needs to be questioned. Women are taken as a unified 'powerless' group even before the analysis in question which is merely a matter of specifying the context after the fact. This analytic strategy is questioned by the woman characters of *The Moor's Last Sigh*, as they rebel and pop out of their oppression / traditionally assigned territories, momentarily and later, recoil back passively into their shells that are conventionally bound for them. Their rebellion shows their dissatisfaction against their oppressors. Their passivity, interconnected with their rebelliousness, shows their incapacity to withstand the oppression for a long duration. They fail to sustain their success in overcoming their oppression due to their lack of steadfast efforts and willingness. Sometimes, they find their oppression to be too powerful to be encountered and as a result, they recoil back passively. At times, their psychological conditioning to be passive by the oppressors comes as a hindrance for them. As such, they exhibit dual split personalities.

Almost all the woman characters in this novel play the dual roles of being bold when situation demands and submissive when the events recoil back to normalcy. They want to escape out of their shells of tradition and culture, but their own mental blockages and make-up disable them to do so in exerting independent identities. They play the role of a nurturer and a destroyer as Saleem points out:

Women have made me; and also unmade. From Reverend Mother to the Widow, and even beyond, I have been at the mercy of the so-called (erroneously, in my

opinion!) gentler sex. It is, perhaps, a matter of connection ... women have done their best; and also, I'm bound to say, their worst. (MC 565)

Thus, the interplay of dualism is apparent not only in the roles the woman characters play, but also is evident in their mental and physical make-up. In other words, this interplay is internal as well as external. Hillis. J. Miller's theory about opposites stands applicable in this interplay:

The uncanny antithetical relation exists not only between pairs of words in this system, ... but within each word in itself. It reforms itself in each polar opposite when that opposite is separated out, and it subverts or nullifies the apparently the unequivocal relation of polarity which seems the conceptual scheme appropriate for thinking through the system. (443)

Characterization of Uma Saraswati and Aurora Zogoiby in *The Moor's Last Sigh* is a clear subversion of the image of a mother as almost a divine being cherished in the Indian society. These two woman characters reverse the role played by the typical traditional Indian Mother as a Bharathiya Nari, one who bears everything, is loving, caring, and all sacrificing for the sake of her family. The reversal of the traditional roles by these women can be traced out from the origin of the policy of 'separate development' (Minh-Ha 246-247). Apart from changes due to globalization and changing roles played by women in the rapidly changing society, there are other factors that need to be considered in this regard. The concept of 'a made woman' and self erasure in the attempt of trying to 'unsay' (Minh-Ha 246-47) can be attributed to the cause of changes in the roles of these two woman characters.

Aurora's unpleasant childhood, devoid of love and her tensed relationship with her husband, can be taken as the foundation for her being a cosmopolitan mother with little affection towards her children. Moor himself tells that his 'mother was no Nargis Dutt', 'she was in your-face type not serene' and 'was a city girl, perhaps the city girl as much the incarnation of the smartly boots metropolis as Mother India was village earth made flesh' (MLS 139). She marries a man from a different religion, defying even her uncle, Aires. Her spell on Abraham forces him to walk away from his mother and race, and convert himself into a Christian. The desire for 'separate development' shoots up from her discovery of Abraham's extramarital affairs and his underworld business. She ignores all these things as routine happenings and spends more time in her studio with her paintings. Her unsaid feelings are ventilated through her paintings. She gets entangled with, as pointed out by Uma, with Kekoo Mody (number one), Vasco Miranda (number two) and Mainduck (number three). There are reports in the novel that Moor might be an offspring of Aurora and Jawahar Lal Nehru.

Her downward 'separate development' takes place within the sheltered province of Abraham. She does not move out, nor does Abraham. Unlike a typical virtuous Indian woman, she has a retaliating attitude and is quite dominating in the marital relationship. Abraham remains a 'colourless phantom hanging around the edges of tumultuous Aurora's court' (MLS 169). Though Aurora's great passion for her husband had cooled rapidly after Moor's birth, she submissively clings to him and the reason for which she is not unaware of: "Aurora was not unaware that her lavishness required maintenance, so that she was bound to Abie by her own needs. Sometimes she came close to admitting this, even to worrying that the scale of her spending, or the looseness of her tongue, might bring the house down." (MLS 170)

Abraham-Aurora relationship is closely related to the parable of the scorpion and the frog in which the scorpion, having hitched a ride across a stretch of water in return for a promise not

to attack his mount, breaks his vow and administers a potent and fatal sting. The result is that both the frog and the scorpion, in other words, Abraham and Aurora, begin to drown with the murderer's apologies to the victim: "I couldn't help it ... It's in my nature." (MLS 170) Though she humiliates her husband that he suffers without protest, she is well aware of her submissiveness and its cause, too:

Men in our part of the world! ... All are either peacocks or shabbies. But, even a peacock like my *mor* is as nothing compared to us ladies, who live – o in a blaze of glory. Look out for the shabbies, I say! They – tho are our jailers. They are the ones holding the cash-books and the keys to the gilded cage." (MLS 169-70)

Any prominent feature / characteristic, like 'Parasite', always calls up its apparent 'opposite'. It has no meaning without its counterpart. There is no parasite without its host (Miller 441-42), and so is there any element without fissured or fused counterpart in it. As both word and counterword subdivide and reveal themselves each to be fissured already within themselves (Miller 441), so are the other elements and their counterparts as are exemplified in the portrayal of Aurora: Her love and passion for Abraham result in a retaliating and dominating attitude towards him, the cause being his extramarital affairs and his underworld business. Her emboldened entanglement with other men, a sign of hatred and a subdivision of love, structures her counterpart behaviour of submissively clinging to her husband for her lavish maintenance and other reasons.

Her rapid swinging moods in her 'Olympian, immortal unconcern' (MLS 171), her confidence of her genius, her beauty as merciless as her tongue and as violent as her work, her hawk-swoops, and rococo riffs and her great set-piece ghazals of cursings, coated with her cheery stone-hard smile anaesthetizes her victims, ripping out their innards, and this is how Moor documents his experience with her: "(Ask me how it felt! I was her only son. The closer to the bull you work, the likelier you are to be gored.)" (MLS 171) She strides around her victims as 'an inebriated prophetess' (MLS 171) with her ego tiding high, as Moor records, Abraham is tougher than any frog, who, in spite of her stinging habit, does not drown. He never ceases to love her as fiercely as on the day of their first meeting: "... everything he did, he did for her. The greater, the more public her betrayals, the more overarching, and secret, grew his love." (MLS 170) This is more so as her abuses directed towards him in public are blotted with 'a diamond smile' that suggested she was only teasing and that her constant belittlements were concealers of adorations, too enormous to express: "... it was an ironising smile that sought to put her behaviour into quotes." (MLS 170) But this act of abusing, smiling and teasing was never completely convincing as she is often seen drinking and cursing everybody. All she does and she speaks are no faults of hers, but that has been transferred to her as an inherited property from her mother, Belle: "*You will see, Aurora had said. From now on I am in her place.*" (MLS 171) In spite of all this, she is recorded as 'irresistible' probably because of her weakness of allowing her grief and pain so often come out as anger, and later, permitting herself 'the luxury of letting rip'. (MLS 177) She feels a huge rush of apologetic affection for the people she hurt in a way proving that all her 'good feelings could only swell up in her in the aftermath of a ruinous flood of bile'. (MLS 177) This soft side of hers makes her irresistible - "... And we spent our lives living up, down and sideways to her predictions ... did I mention that she was irresistible?" (MLS 172) It is this quality of Aurora that makes Moor forgive her for all her follies and shortcomings. This quality of hers keeps the Aurora-Abraham bond alive. Even though they no longer sleep in the same bed, they look forward for each other's good opinion the most: "... my mother needed Abraham's approval as much as he longed for her." (MLS

172) This mutual understanding touches Moor and makes him forgive them both wholeheartedly for their follies. She remains, as Moor records, the 'light' of their lives, the 'excitement' of everybody's imaginations, and the 'beloved' of everyone's dreams: "We loved her even as she destroyed us. She called out of us a love that felt too big for our bodies, as if she had made the feeling and then given it to us to feel – as if it were a work." (MLS 172)

Aurora's passive nature can be felt when she puts on artistic clothes that looked unnatural upon her, to win Abraham's good opinion. But, later she asserts her secret identity, the voice of which came from Vasco Miranda. Initially, Aurora is dragged towards naturalism because the spirit of the age demanded it and her husband has a special preference towards it. Instead of meekly surrendering to the wishes of her husband, she analyses her inner voice, its likes and dislikes. Vasco reminds her of her instinctive dislike of the purely mimetic which had tried to turn her back towards the epic-fabulist manner, an expression of her true nature. As a result of this analysis, she decides to pay attention, once again, to her dreams and the dream-like wonder of the waking world. Finally, she takes Vasco's tips and makes Moor the centerpiece of her art. These bold changes in her feelings towards Abraham, the darkening violence within her and her self-destructive gifts bewilder Abraham and those surround her. Yet, Abraham continues to be her 'uncomplaining protector' (MLS 182). He is always the first one to inspect her work and Aurora's saga of 'separate development' continues under Abraham's uncomplaining protection. But, Aurora boldly steps out at times, from his protective zone to sort out issues. The danger of violence and fire-attack, the results of wrath ignited by her *The Kissing of Abbas Ali Baig* painting, is averted by her in a single telephonic conversation within half an hour, without Abraham's aid and without leaving *Elephanta*, her abode, though Moor records this victory of hers as defeat: " 'Wait on,' my mother told him. 'This little frog-face, I know how to fixofy. Give me thirty ticks.' ... 'How much?' she asked. And Mainduck named his price." (MLS 233)

Aurora's dual nature of being bold and submissive allows her to play the dual roles of being a nurturer and a destroyer. The void she creates in Vasco, Abraham and Moor confirms this. After her death, Vasco and Abraham become recluses: "... they both sought to bury the pain of her loss beneath new activity, new enterprises, no matter how ill-conceived." (MLS 328) Therefore, the interplay of dualism in Aurora's persona is not only seen on both sides of the boundary line that separates these binary opposites, but also between inside and outside this boundary line. Aurora herself becomes the boundary itself, the screen which is at once a permeable membrane connecting inside and outside, confusing them with one another, allowing the outside in, making the inside out, dividing them but also forming an ambiguous transition between one and the other. (Miller 441) It becomes difficult to locate and assess her thoughts, actions and relationships with others as good or evil, villainous or heroic, desirable or undesirable, conventional or traditional, intentional or unintentional, destructive or constructive, masculine or feminine, etc.

The harsh and tougher side of Aurora is seen on surface in action when she commits the cold-blooded murder of her grandma, Epifania, by 'inaction' (MLS 64). When she reads Abraham's written document to surrender their first born male child to Flory (her mother-in-law) to be reared as 'a male Jew of Cochin' (MLS 112), with a sense of justice as the maid of Belmont denied Shylock his bloody pound, Aurora commands Abraham to move out of her bedroom, declaring with determination that there would be no children while Flory remained alive. Her unsaid grief and anger get expressed in her paintings and drawings:

... in the following months, however, her work- drawings, paintings, terrible little skewered dolls moulded in red clay – grew full of witches, fire, apocalypse. Later, she would destroy most of this ‘Red’ material, with the consequence that the surviving pieces have gained greatly in value ... (MLS 115)

When Abraham mewls piteously at her locked door and later, he tries to win her heart back with old love songs sung by a hired ballad-singer (and mouthed idiotically by himself), Aurora’s terrorizing and romantic attack leaves him permanently with a limp. Her attack, throwing flowers first, the water from the flower-vase, next, and finally, the vase itself symbolizes her character and role. The flowers thrown represent her romantic peppery loving nature; the water reveals her role as a nurturer; and the vase, a heavy piece of stoneware reflects her role as a destroyer. This incident makes them both move in diverging paths where Abraham’s misery and obeisance and Aurora’s humiliations remain constant:

Misery was etched in every line of his face, misery dragged down the corners of his mouth and damaged his good looks. Aurora continued, contrastingly, to blossom. Genius was being born in her, filling the empty spaces in her bed, her heart, her womb. She needed no-one but herself. (MLS 116)

Though, Suchitra Awasthi dubs Aurora as ‘not a typical virtuous Indian woman’ (112), an indifferent mother, a subversion of a traditional Indian woman with ‘the elements of ruthlessness, hatred and indifference’ (111) and as a ‘contrast to an all bearing Mother India’ depicted by Mehboob Khan in his blockbuster *Mother India*, at times the counterpart features of an indifferent mother and woman emerge to the surface in different shades and forms. Her forecast of the future of her offspring is tinged with sympathy, love, grief and helplessness: “Poor kids are such a bungle, seems like they are doomed to tumble.” (MLS 172) Her painting, *The Death of Chimene*, whose central figure is a female corpse tied to a wooden broom, after disinheriting Moor, is again a snapshot of a broken mother’s heart, all cluttered and frazzled out. The substitution of Moor’s metaphorical roles as ‘a unifier of opposites’, ‘a standard bearer of pluralism’, a symbol of the new nation by his ‘semi-allegorical figure of decay’ (MLS 303) in Aurora’s paintings constituting the ‘*Moor in Exile*’ sequence, is a reflection of her inconsolable helplessness, dejected and broken self, mourning the loss of her son, and her grief and pain taking the shape of anger:

Aurora had apparently decided that the ideas of impurity, cultural admixture and *mélange* which had been, for most of her creative life, the closest things she had found to a notion of the Good, were in fact capable of distortion, and contained a potential for darkness as well as for light. This ‘black Moor’ was a new imagining of the idea of the hybrid – a Baudelairean flower, it would not be too farfetched to suggest, of evil ... (MLS 303)

Her grief and pain that shoot up as anger, have their origin in her deep unexpressed love for her son and thus, creating a linear chain of unexpressed love, grief and pain, anger and hatred leading to the disinheritance of her son.

‘*The Portraits of Ayxa*’, a series of self-portraits by Aurora, is nothing but the exhalation of the anguished, magisterial, appallingly and unguarded self, engulfed in wild erotic despair, whose very immediate origin can be traced back from her son’s betrayal and the actual origin from her love for Moor: The paintings in the series of ‘*The Portraits of Ayxa*’ a phantom figure – Ayxa / Aurora – is often seen haunting Moor in garbage, which lays explicit her unsung and

hidden love for Moor. The Ayxa / Aurora is hovered by faint translucent images of a woman and a man, whose faces are left blank, indicating her inability to cope up with her loss and defeat. (MLS 304) Here, submissive seclusion in her studio in painting the paintings of her grief and pain stands in direct contrast to her roles played in murdering Epifania by her deliberate 'inaction', averting all alone the violence and disgrace of her painting *The Kissing of Abbas Ali Baig* was expected to bring with just a phone call to Fielding, her public humiliations directed towards Abraham, her direct physical attack on Abraham with a vase causing permanent limp in him and her freaking out freely, at times to 'eat some other khansama's dish' (MLS 177). Showering back of 'humanity' (MLS 315) on Moor in her last work, *The Moor's Last Sigh*, is her showering of forgiveness and blessings on Moor, designating her quality for which she remains 'irresistible', and Moor records it thus after her death: "I never knew a stronger woman, nor one with a clearer sense of who and what she was, but she had been wounded ..." (MLS 315) This adorable quality is not to be found even in the role of the traditional Indian mother depicted by Mehboob Khan in his blockbuster *Mother India*. Bad Birju is not only cast out from his mother's love but also shot dead by his mother in the movie, which gets her the image of an aggressive treacherous annihilating mother who haunts the fantasy life of Indian males. In contrast, Aurora submissively secludes herself and ventilates her revenge, anger, frustrations, wild erotic despair, defeat, etc. through the refreshing windows of her paintings and pieces of art, which are revaluated and praised after her death. Absence of abstract harlequin and junkyard collage in her last work, *The Moor's Last Sigh*, indicates her complete exhaustion of her wild erotic despair and anger. The portrayal of her son, lost in limbo like a wandering shade and soul in Hell and herself behind him, no longer in a separate panel, looking frightened and stretching out her hand reveals her absolute forgiveness and her longing to unite with her son. The reappearance of the tormented Sultan Boabdil, not as a berated figure, standing reunited with her and her son unveils all the counterpart qualities of an indifferent and ruthless mother, wife and human being. Thus, Aurora, as labelled by Suchitra Awasthi, is not a typical traditional Indian Mother or a *Bharathiya Nari*, one who bears everything, is loving, caring, all sacrificing for the sake of her family. The tags of being too daring, hateful, indifferent, uncaring, dominating, etc. do fit her personality at times, but not always. The presence of the counterparts of these tags cannot be denied on any grounds. Her paintings, right from the days she suckled baby Moor to her last painting called *The Moor's Last Sigh*, depict the binary roles she plays in real life, the role of a nurturer and a destroyer by alternating her bold, daring and submissive nature:

It showed the truth about Aurora, her capacity for profound and selfless passion as well as her habit of self-aggrandisement; it revealed the magnificence, the grandeur of her falling-out with the world, and her determination to transcend and redeem its imperfections through art. Tragedy disguised as fantasy and rendered in the most beautiful, most heightened colour and light she could create: it was a mythomaniac gem. She called it *A Light to Lighten the Darkness*. (MLS 220)

Aurora's sense of justice in exhibiting love and hatred, and punishing her beloved victims, dazzling beauty, diamond-smile, ability to handle moments of crisis all alone, artistic genius for which she is given state funeral, quality of recoiling back for patch-ups, art of handling men and women in self-defense and above all her ability to forgive, expressed indirectly in her last painting, make her dazzle like a bright star even after her death:

My mother Aurora Zogoiby was too bright a star; look at her too hard and you'd be blinded. Even now, in the memory, she dazzles, must be circled about and about.

We may perceive her indirectly, in her effects on others- her bending of other people's light, her gravitational pull which denied us all hope of escape, the decaying orbits of those too weak to withstand her, who fell towards her sun and its consuming fires. (*MLS* 136)

Her roles as a nurturer and as a destroyer, and her image as a refuge and escape are equally cherished and appreciated by her near and dear ones:

If she trampled over us, it was because we lay down willingly beneath her spurred – and – booted feet; if she excoriated us at night, it was on account of our delight at the sweet lashings of her tongue. It was when I finally realized this that I forgave my father; for we were all her slaves, and she made our servitude feel like Paradise. Which is, they say, what goddesses can do. (*MLS* 172)

These dual roles of hers and their inter-relations form a triangle, not a polar opposition. There is always a third to whom the two are related, something before them or between them, which they divide, consume, or exchange, across which they meet (Miller 444) to create a nurturing destroyer or a destroying nurturer and to provide an escaping refuge or a refuge in escape. Aurora as a nurturing destroyer or a destroying nurturer neither sheds the qualities of a nurturer nor a destroyer. Similarly, she in the process of providing an escaping refuge or a refuge in escape, sheds neither of these roles, with an ambiguous division / consummation / exchange of characteristics of these polar opposite roles when they confront each other. As such, it becomes impossible to categorize Aurora as a nurturer or a destroyer and as the one providing refuge or escape. All her perfections and imperfections - her capacity to love and hate, forgive and punish, smile, tease and humiliate, etc. – fuse, defuse and sometimes propagate parallel to overlap randomly later, making it difficult to categorize the characteristics of Aurora.

The way Aurora takes the place of her mother, Belle, after her death, leaves her family and the staff of the household in Cabral Island open-mouthed in wonder as if they had seen her mother's living ghost. The bold and the aggressive side of Aurora make entry only when there is a kind of injustice in the air. This is evident in her confession of her deed in a high ascending shriek – "... it-was'nt-them-it-was-Me." (*MLS* 58) - when the staff of the household is tortured by Aires to solve the riddle of lost ivory-tusks and Ganeshas. She comes running to confess her deed, and her guilt fills her with shame and makes her incapable of meeting the eyes of the assembled staff. But, she faces the assembled members of her family, including the impassive Epifania with her head held high and an assertive voice:

'Don't call me baby,' she answered, defying even him. 'It is what my mother always wanted to do. You will see: from now I am in her place. And Aires – uncle, you should lock up that crazy dog, by the way, I've got a pet-name for him that he really deserves: call him *Jaw-jaw*, that all-bark-no-bite mutt.' (*MLS* 58)

She welcomes her punishment and banishment, once she establishes herself as a reincarnation of her dead mother's ghost, as the true moment to make public her inner-self. She becomes a doting figure among the domestic servants after saving them from Aires's interrogation, who smuggle all the delicious items out the kitchen for her along with her favourite instruments – charcoal, brushes, paints, etc. She decides to endure her sentence of room arrest for a week by herself. Even her ex-jailbird father, who could not fight to keep his daughter out of the lock-up, hangs his head and obeys her command of keeping away from her premises during punishment. But, she recoils back with love to her father, possessing the same force and

intensity which she shows in her anger and hatred towards him while enduring the punishment. Her dual nature is explicit in confronting her family members boldly and later, accepting the punishment of room arrest without making any protest. She invites her father, Camoens, at the end of the period of house arrest, to view her art on the walls and ceilings of her room. Even the seeping black lines drawn by her reflect her inner rebellious nature: each and every figure drawn in sweeping black lines transformed themselves constantly; the lines drawn were muscular and free, teeming and violent; the earth was red; the sky was in purple and vermilion; there were huge blocks of colour that filled the figures; forty different shades of green could be seen; and the figures drawn were human as well as animal, real and imaginary.

Her painting parodying the scene of Last Supper in which the family servants carouse wildly at the dining table while their raggedy ancestors stare down from the portraits on the wall and the da Gamas serving as waiters, being treated badly, reflects her soft and rebellious nature, softness directed towards the oppressed and the rebellion against the oppressors. Similar is her painting of Taj Mahal in which she unflinchingly shows its mutilated masons. Each and every line she draws echoes endlessly that the metamorphic line of humanity was the truth. On the whole, her paintings record the rage of the women, the tormented weakness and compromise in the faces of the children and the passive uncomplaining faces of the dead. All the inputs of world's anger, pain, disappointment and little of its delight, at a tender age, are downloaded into her painting canvasses which give room for a silent conversation between her and her father: "... when you have learned joy, he wanted to say, then only then your gift will be complete, but she knew so much already that it scared the words away and he did not dare to speak." (MLS 60)

Aurora's nature that is soft but assertive, that is bold and submissive, that has the capacity of loving and hating with the same intensity, which swings between parting away and recoiling with the same speed for patch-up and that consists of punishing, abusing, cursing, hurting, and finally, reconciling, forgiving and reuniting, too, conquers everyone. These peculiar qualities are seen in the depiction of Mother India, in her room walls and ceilings: Her vision of Mother India is seen with her garishness and her inexhaustible motion; she is portrayed as capable of both loving and betraying, nurturing and destroying; her conjoining and eternal quarrel with her children, whom she loves, is shown stretched long beyond the grave; her stretch over the mountains looks like exclamations of the souls; the rivers over which she stretches is full of mercy and disease; some of the lands are infertile and drought ridden and some are shown with oceans, water-wells, coco-palms and rice fields; and her birds exhibit brutality as well as sweetness. Aurora's Mother India, on the whole, is the one who could be monstrous, a worm rising from the sea, turn murderous, dance with cross-eyed and Kali-tongued while thousand died. The absence of any God, Christ, angel, saint or other divinity in the landscape of her drawing shows her aggressive rebellious hues of her personality. The presence of Mother India with her mother, Belle's face in the very centre of the ceiling at the point where all the horns of all lines drawn converged, depicts the softer side of hers – longing for her dead mother's love and her capacity to shower motherly love on others, in other words, her capacity to love and to be loved:

Queen Isabella was the only mother goddess here and she was dead: at the heart of this first immense outpouring of Aurora's art was the simple tragedy of her loss, the unassuaged pain of becoming a motherless child. The room was her act of mourning. (MLS 61)

Aurora allows Uncle Aires and Carmen to stay in Cabral Island forgetting their past harsh behaviours. After Carmen's death, Uncle Aires is given shelter at *Elephanta* and later, is buried next to Carmen in Cabral Island by Aurora. She takes pity on him and sets aside all the old family resentments. She provides him the most lavish guest room, softest mattress and quilt and the best view of the sea. Aurora's feelings during the funeral service – "But her heart wasn't in it. The quarrels of the past were long forgotten." (MLS 203) – offer a loud cry against Suchitra Awasthi's stamp on Aurora of being the complete subversion of the typical traditional Indian woman. This act of Aurora, her capacity to forgive and embrace the present, inherited from her mother, Belle, is a replay of earlier act of forgiving Abraham, after Flory's death. The play of counterparts in Aurora's characterization and their inter-relations in question form a chain, 'that strange sort of chain without beginning or end in which no commanding element (origin, goal, or underlying principle) may be identified, but in which there is always something earlier or something later to which any part of the chain on which one focuses refers and which keeps the chain open, undecidable'. (Miller 444) Aurora's characterization, instead of having blocks of air-tight compartments with fixed and stagnant elements, forms a chain: She is bold and aggressive in her confession; she is humble, yet inwardly strong in embracing her punishment; she is assertive and bold in facing and sometimes, in defying her family members, but, a doting figure among her domestic servants; the lines in her paintings reflect her inner strength which is muscular, free, teeming and violent (a pack of overlapping elements); she is soft towards the oppressed and rebellious towards the oppressors; she longs to be loved and is also capable of loving; she defies the presence of God, but longs for motherly love; she is not a complete subversion of the typical traditional Indian woman, yet not a complete typical traditional Indian woman; and she is the one who can accept punishments humbly, denounce punishments by forgiving and pronounce punishments by her sense of justice and rage. This chain of counterparts does not stop here. It is ever ready to accept many more such counterparts, and therefore, remains undecided and unconcluded. This is more so, because Aurora's contribution to the chain continues even after her death till the end of the novel. Nothing in the chain suggests her predominant nature and nothing in the chain suggests the voids in her personality, making it impossible to pass any solid assessment.

Aurora's bold and rebellious nature supplements rigidity, masculinity and novelty to her feminine existence. Her submissive and ever forgiving nature supplements a touch of softness, flexibility and traditionalism to her urbanized existence in Bombay. Her role, as a nurturer, supplements positive connotations, whereas her part, as a destroyer, supplements negative connotations to her personality. Her capacity to provide refuge supplements magnificence and grandeur, whereas her potential to provide escape supplements a heroic stroke to her personality. Her aptitude to love, help and forgive, and her capacity to abuse, rebel and punish defer each other constantly in her, making her a prolific domain of uncanny antithetical elements. The interplay of dualities in Aurora typically exemplifies the creative construction of the 'new woman' – undoubtedly resourceful, resilient and at times ruthless, monstrous, men-harming and unpredictably witch-like demonstrating 'gratuitous violence', attacking 'for some reason' (Weikgenannt 78) and making her aggression look rational, reciprocal and manageable.

Epifania in *The Moor's Last Sigh*, as a bride, at the dawn of the twentieth century, disappointing many mothers, being the cause of great jealousy and landing as the fattest catch of all in Cabral Island on Moor's great-grandfather Francisco's arms, always believed that she had a talent for magnificence, though her earlier years came to be marked with penury. It could be this confidence which, instead of making a rich man like Francisco 'decently revolted' (MLS 15)

by empty bank accounts of her much-reduced trader family and their cheap jewellery and costumes, made 'Francisco da Gama, Epifania's defunct spouse' (MLS 15)

Epifania's suppressed discontents, as Moor records, breed in her as a vindictive rage – this rage is inherited and transferred on to her next generations, often as an indistinguishable form of true, murderous hatred. Her 'suppressed discontents', their cause being her husband's out of elements, tastes and decisions, become the origin of her oppression of others in the family later, including Francisco, leading them nowhere but their downfalls – Francisco ends up in jail and later, 'watery death' (MLS 15) whereas Epifania is murdered by Aurora, 'committed by inaction' (MLS 64).

Epifania takes charge of the household to impose her decisions on her husband and other members, when Francisco returns back as a shattered hero from prison and when he sinks into introversion and despondency after his requested resignation from the banned Home Rule League. She moves 'in swiftly for the kill. (Literally, as it turned out.)' (MLS 22) in the name of love: " 'Ours was a love-match,' she told her dejected spouse during an interminable island evening with only the radio for company. 'For love or what else I gave in to your fancies? But see where they have brought you. Now for love you must give in to mine.' " (MLS 22) From then on, for five years, all the so called 'detested follies' of her husband are shut down. Her coming to power with her son Aires, offers a direct contrast to what she was when she entered Cabral Island as a bride. The pictures of devil-women and giant canvasses, that looked like as if an accident had befallen with the paint, were to be accepted as decent stuff by Epifania to please her husband. Though these paintings and pictures blinded her with ugliness, looking like calamities, Epifania was passively obliged to put on the walls and in the courtyards and look at them 'as new ways to be beautiful' in the new world that was full of questions, according to the philanthropist, modernist, nationalist and the lover of art, Francisco, a 'hero material' 'destined for questions and quests' (MLS 17). She had to submissively act out the commands of her gullible husband, at the smack of his hand on the breakfast table, of 'moving East' or 'going West' (MLS 16), once his madhouses namely 'papery East' and 'pointy West' (MLS 22) were constructed. Epifania could only wail uselessly when her husband, 'handsome as sin but twice as virtuous' went too far and free with his philanthropy – funding orphanages, opening free health clinics, initiating elephant conversation schemes, etc. Her new discoveries about her husband and his new activities left her blinking, appalled and provoked, but, as a passive observer and agitator: "She fought him every inch of the way, and lost every battle except the last." (MLS 17) She waits passively and patiently till the last opportunity comes her way when her husband becomes a national laughing-stock from an emerging hero because of his scientific theories about Fields of Conscience and 'bols', and thus, finally, ending his political career with a 'puckered look common in men convinced that the world has inexplicably done them a great and unjustified wrong' (MLS 22). She is left free to make changes till Belle, Camoen's future bride, makes her entry to break Epifania's taboo. With Belle's entry order changes, rekindling Epifania's rage, once again. Thus, Epifania remains passive till her husband becomes a tragic figure. The way she takes charge of the household from her husband with her sweet words in the name of love leashes out both shades of her personality- boldness and submissiveness - simultaneously. Her rage and boldness reign without any oppression till Belle makes Camoens her project. Her impassive nature continues till Belle takes charge of the household and the family business when Aires and Camoens are sentenced for fifteen years. Epifania's wild rage comes to full focus light when her husband dies: "Epifania swallowed the news of his death without a tremor. She ate his death as she had eaten his life; and grew." (MLS 24) This offers a striking contrast to her reactions when her sons are sentenced and released after nine years from

prison. She faints in the courtroom when her sons are sentenced for fifteen years of imprisonment and cries out in delight when they are released. Her ruthless decision to imprison her motherless grand-daughter, Aurora, for a week on rice and water diet, and her insulting remarks on Belle (suffering from lung cancer) when she spits bloody sputum into a chrome spittoon - "I suppose so now you've hooked the money you don't need the manners." (MLS 49) – once again present her in a contrasting shade.

Aging Epifania, at prayer, when her sons are jailed, projects her benevolence and its counterparts, in different shades, drifting randomly and thus, bringing within the framework of her personality an interplay of dualism: "Epifania ... entered into a kind of ecstasy, an apocalyptic frenzy in which guilt and God and vanity and the end of the world, the destruction of the old shapes by the hated advent of the new, were all jumbled up ..." (MLS 46). On one hand, she laments for being banished in her house behind the piles of sacks by Belle, and on the other hand, she expresses rage on Belle's taking charge of everything: "... she she she, everywhere and evermore, she..." (MLS 46). She laments her inability to dismiss her servants for their newly acquired behaviour towards her for their wages are being paid by Belle, but, she indirectly declares her revenge, too: "... but I can wait, see, patience is a virtue, I'll just bide – o my time." (MLS 46) She hurls down curses on Lobos and at the same time, laments her pathetic state of being repaid in destructive terms by Carmen with whom she believes she had tried to befriend with generosity. Her curses, laments and revengeful fury are, all of a sudden, replaced by her sense of guilt at the thought of the dead (could be her husband and those who lost their lives in the Menezes-Lobo war). She is overcome with a sense of having sinned and the dead seem to be accusing her. She bows down for the mercy of God and protection, and she is seen sleeping without mosquito-nets as a kind of self-imposed punishment to express her penance, a direct contrast to her decision of banishing the motherless Aurora to her room for a week on rice and water diet. She intends to continue her penance and the self-imposed punishment even after the release of her sons, but, just the opposite happens. She forgives herself of her sins and drapes around herself once again with her usual 'protective billow of nocturnal mist' (MLS 47). She denounces her self-imposed punishment of sleeping without mosquito-nets under the false excuse that many years of disuse of these nets would have resulted in moth holes, making them perforated.

She, becoming as submissive as possible, begs during her prayers for mercy:

Lord, I have sinned, I should be scalded with hot oils and burned with cold ice, have mercy on me Mother of God for I am the lowest of the low, save me if it be your will from the chasm the bottomless pit, for in my name and by my doing was great and murderous evil unloosed upon the earth..(MLS 46)

Later, she is seen giving a merciless remark on Belle which puts an end to any possibility of reunions in the divided family. Her sharp accusation, dented towards Belle of lacking in manners, when she spits bloody sputum at a meal of family reconciliation, organized at the request of her son, Camoens, shatters all the hopes of family reunion. This offers an ironical contrast to her behaviour in the past when her sons are put in jail: "*Lord, my hair is falling out, the world is broken, Lord, and I am old.*" (MLS 47)

The uncertainty in her thoughts, actions, decisions and even in her prayers is tinged with play of counterparts. She swallows her husband's death without tremor, but faints in the courtroom, shocked with the sentence imposed on her sons. She begs for mercy from God, placing herself

as ‘the lowest of low’ (MLS 46) under the charge of Belle, but soon becomes ‘impassive Epifania’ (MLS 58) after Belle’s death.

Epifania succumbing pathetically to her tragic death unleashes her final torrent of roaring curse – “...*a house divided against itself cannot stand, ...may your house be for ever partitioned, may its foundations turn to dust, may your children rise up against you, and may your fall be hard; ...*” (MLS 99) - which operates dominantly and falls on her sons (Camoens and Aires), daughters-in-law (Belle and Carmen), grand-daughter (Aurora), great grand-daughters (Ina, Minnie and Mynah) and great grand-son (Moor). Belle dies of lung cancer before the curse is openly announced, whereas water claims Camoens’s life, as it did in Francisco’s case. Carmen dies a mystic death, the very next day she dreams of Prince Henry beckoning to her, having her last tea with Aires in their island garden. Aires breathes his last breath at *Elephanta*, soon after modelling for the painting, *You Can’t Always Get Your Wish*. Aurora dies a mystic death dancing at the Ganesh festival. Moor voluntarily surrenders himself beside the graves of his ancestors. Moor’s sisters vanish like fragmented filaments one after the other.

Epifania’s special talent for magnificence, suppressed discontents, vindictive and murderous rage, her swift move ‘for the kill’ (MLS 22), her dismay and shock at her new discoveries about her husband, passive observations and agitations at her husband’s crazy thoughts / decisions / actions, patient obeisance of her husband’s chaotic instructions, her transformation into ‘impassive Epifania’ (MLS 58) when her husband deteriorates into a tragic figure, her re-transformation into passive Epifania when Belle takes charge of the household, her final alteration into ‘impassive Epifania’, once again, after Belle’s death, her torrents of curses, revengeful fury and punishments, her guilt-stricken and pathetic laments at prayer when her sons are imprisoned, her self-imposed punishment to sleep without mosquito-nets and its casual termination when her sons are released, her plea to God for mercy and forgiveness and her draping of her usual ‘protective billow of nocturnal mist’ (MLS 47) after Belle’s death, her insulting remarks on Belle which puts off the chances of family reunion forever, and finally, her passive exit ‘committed by inaction’ (MLS 64) comprise the uncanny double antithetical elements as found in the prefix ‘para’ (Miller 441). All these binary opposite elements in Epifania, like the prefix ‘para’, form the boundary line separating / categorizing themselves. It becomes difficult to appraise and record emphatically Epifania’s preponderate characteristics. She becomes ‘at once a permeable membrane connecting inside and outside, confusing them with one another, allowing the outside in, making the inside out, dividing them but also forming an ambiguous transition between one and the other’ (Miller 441). She resembles the words with ‘para’ as prefix such as parachute, paradigm, parasol, the French paravent (screen protecting against the wind), and parapluie (umbrella), paragon, paradox, parapet, parataxis, parapraxis, parabasis, paraphrase, paragraph, paraph, paralysis, paranoia, paraphernalia, parallel, parallax, parameter, parable, paresthesia, paramnesia, paregoric, parergon, paramorph, paramecium, paraclete, paramedical, paralegal and parasite that undergo ambiguous transitions and where the other meanings of the words attached to the prefix ‘para’ are always there ‘as a shimmering or wavering’, making them ‘refuse to stay still in a sentence, like a slightly alien guest within the syntactical closure where all the words are family friends together’ (Miller 441). Similarly, operation of all these binary opposites that are inbuilt in Epifania result in a kind of ‘shimmering or wavering’, refusing any sort of constancy / certainty in her thoughts, decisions and actions as it is experienced in the presence of an alien guest surrounded and enclosed by family friends.

Belle, in *The Moor’s Last Sigh*, is described as beautiful, loudmouthed and characteristically outspoken right from her entry into the Cabral Island. She remains almost a passive spectator

of Menezes – Lobo war till the da Gama brothers are sentenced for fifteen years of imprisonment except once drenching Epifania and Carmen with cold water and yelling a bold attack at them: “ ‘Since you could start-o these evil fires with your scheming,’ she said to them, ‘then it is with you that we must begin to put them out.’” (MLS 38) While Epifania faints in the courtroom and Carmen weeps when they hear about the punishment period of da Gama brothers, Belle remains dry-eyed and hard-faced: “Belle had her own ideas about how civilization should be restored, and she wasted no time.” (MLS 41) She alone goes to see the lawyers of the da Gama Trading Company, the appointed trustee of Francisco da Gama’s last testament and persuades them to divide the family business into two immediately. She rightly reads the situation that if the da Gama Company remains a single cell, the disharmony and discord introduced by Aires, Epifania and Carmen will finish it off. She thinks that the division of the family business into two and taking charge of one of them will save at least half of it: “If we do not live separately, then we will die together.” (MLS 41)

While lawyers busy themselves with the proposal of halving the family business, Belle, with one-year-old Aurora on her hip, divides the grand old house into two divisions, leaving nothing without dividing: “...even the lizards on the walls were captured and evenly distributed on both sides of the great divide.” (MLS 42) She uses sacks of spices and white lines to indicate her newly established frontiers. The meticulous division of all the belongings including the chart of hours on the wall of the kitchen which bisected the week, day by day and her assertive demand on respecting these demarcations puts Belle in a different focus of light. However, she avoids division of the family chapel. This reveals her sentimental feelings that chapel is not a divisible property. Her sense of fairness and honesty in dividing the property demands applause along with the sense of responsibility she displays in the absence of her husband. Epifania and Carmen, after their stay for a week in prison, meekly obey Belle. The recent events leading to the imprisonment of da Gama brothers exhaust their strength to stand against the fury of Belle’s unleashed will.

Belle’s striking abilities and mental strength, accompanied by determination in taking charge of her jailed husband’s fortunes at the age of twenty one, render all meek protests of Epifania look like mere sneezing and unconvincing: “... let the whole she-bang go to pot or sell up, I don’t care! I just will see to it that my Camoens’s fifty will survive’n’ thrive.” (MLS 42) Even the allocation of the destroyed fields to their allocated fifty by Belle could not be counter argued by Epifania and Carmen. The vicissitudes, she faces during the next few years to get back the business from the public administration, are husbanded well by Belle with months of haranguing, wheedling, bribing and flirtations. She refuses to sell the property during moments of crisis, instead she goes to every field, every orchard and every plantation to win back the confidence of the employees. She appoints trustworthy managers whom the work force would follow with respect but without fear. The banks are convinced successfully by her to lend money. The departed clients are bullied back with new dealings. With all this, she becomes ‘the mistress of small print’ and is nicknamed as ‘queen Isabella of Cochin’ (MLS 43). Her dislike of her new nickname and her insistence on being called as ‘Belle’ brings out her gentler, humbler and softer side of her personality, offering a sharp contrast to her new ways of dressing in men’s trousers, white cotton shirts and her husband’s cream fedora: “...she was never plain; and, more than any local princess, had earned her royalty.” (MLS 43) She reaches the peak of admiration when she reunites the other fifty of Aires with that of her husband in the fairest way. She buys the property of Aires with twice the actual price whereas she could have bought them out for next to nothing, keeping in mind that her husband would not do such a thing to his brother, Aires, under any circumstances. Here, her respect for her husband’s sentiments, her

feverish efforts to save the 'Aires fifty' as she had on rescuing her own, and her success in proving 'how, in life fifty plus fifty equals fifty' (MLS 44) elevate her to the place of an angel, but, revelation of the other counterparts in her, dilute this elevation. Her imperfections in certain aspects stand in direct contrast with her perfections in other aspects which make explicit her dual split personality, proving the statement of Moor about her: "She wasn't perfect." (MLS 44) The adorable part – she is tall, beautiful, brilliant, brave, powerful, hard-working, victorious, meticulous in planning and manipulating, capable of standing and fighting for her rights as well as that of others with sound sense of justice, persuasive and above all, a loving wife and mother (though at times she left her daughter at home in seclusion) – in opposition to her detestable part – she smokes frequently when her husband is in prison, becomes increasingly foul-mouthed without any restraint on her language, drinks occasionally leaving her unconscious, sprawled like a tart on a mat in the backwoods; she becomes the toughest nut, extending intimidations and strong arming of suppliers, contractors, rivals, etc. into her business methods; and she becomes unfaithful shamelessly and casually without discrimination or restraint – once again conform Moor's recordings: "Queen Isabella was no angel, no wings or halo in her wardrobe ..." (MLS 44) In contrast to these recordings of Moor, the angelic counterparts in her, filling the very core of her being, once unfurled, make her imperfections and perfections dissolve and fuse to neutralize each other. Only the angelic counterparts in her emerge prominently and the rest get discarded. She agrees to dismantle the barriers on her husband's request to heal the cracks of family disputes. She gives up her dissolute philandering ways of 'hunting tiger' (MLS 44) forever. Aires is allowed to join them once again in their family business. A meal of reconciliation is organized in the long-disused grand dining hall which is ruined by Epifania. All this, she does on Camoen's requests and when her lung cancer forces her to cut down her professional activities, she assures her husband to be always with him and to be always ready to compensate with double the amount of what gets unfilled / lost / emptied.

Belle's graceful exit when death approaches her, perspires out her bold and soft characteristics. Even at the threshold of death, she desires to be like El Cid Campeador of Spain, who, when mortally wounded, asks his beloved Ximena to tie his dead body to his horse to give an impression to his enemies in the battle-field that he was alive:

Then tie my body to a bloody rickshaw or whatever damn mode of transport you can find, camel-cart donkey-cart bullock-cart bike, but for godsake not a bloody elephant; okay? Because the enemy is close and in this sad story Ximena is the Cid. (MLS 52)

The dynamism and heroism, she exhibits in both living and dying, is due to the random interplay of the bold and submissive characteristic counterparts that composes her dual personality. Belle's entry and exit consist of only thirty pages (MLS 22-52) in the novel, but, she is seen engaged in so many tasks and her actions are binary in nature: she is seen drenching Epifania and Carmen with cold water, and later, she dines with them for a meal of reconciliation; she expresses her perfect fairness and sense of justice in dividing the family property, and later, she is seen bribing, wheedling, flirting, extending intimidation, strong arming to run her business successfully; she remains dry-eyed and hard-faced when husband is sent to prison, but, on his return, she embraces him and gives him a loving welcome; she divides the da Gama Company and takes charge of her Camoens's fifty, leaving the other fifty go to pot, but, later, buys the Aires's fifty, paying twice the price and pays as much attention as she gives to her share; she allows Aires to join the family business after his release from prison on her husband's request and later, the same Belle rebukes Aires and expresses her displeasure towards his writings in

newspaper columns; she is seen walking to each and every corner of the plantation under her control to win back the confidence of the employees, and on the other hand, in her business transactions, she is often shamelessly unfaithful; she drinks, smokes like volcano, and freaks out at night and all these philandering ways are given up totally for her husband's sake; she creates barriers to divide the property and dismantles them; she divides the family business, property and the family itself, but, gets ready for family reunion, forgetting and forgiving their past deeds; she is seen making a dramatic and heroic entry at the age of seventeen into the Cabral Island as a future bride of Camoens, breaking the Epifania's five-year-old taboo and very soon, she makes her tragic exit because of lung cancer; she enters with sparkling eyes and excitement into the da Gama family and dies in great pain, 'savagely angry with death for arriving too soon and behaving so badly' (MLS 51); and she is adjudged as beautiful, loudmouthed and outspoken during her early stages of her entry, but towards the end, she is seen 'pale of face' and 'red of eye', wrapped in shawls coughing profoundly; and she, bubbling with hope and enthusiasm, is welcomed by Francisco's blessings with his tired hand on her lovely head at the very outset and towards the end, she dies with her husband and daughter on her side, her husband sending his anguished hope, love and dreams about dawning of a new world, a free country, secularism, etc., and her daughter promising to fulfill her last wish – to transform the story of El Cid Campeador into reality to scare away their real life enemies. The very fabrication of her make-up consists of a variety of ringlets in a variety of shades that confirms Miller's hypothesis about the existence of 'uncanny antithetical' (Miller 443) elements within each word itself. This is more so, because her attitude and behaviour towards Epifania, Carmen and Aires differ and are also antithetical on different occasions. Her end brings out both the softer and bolder side of hers – she faces death with her daughter's promise to fulfill her last wish and transfers in a silent language all the roles she wanted to play in her lifetime to her daughter, who accepts them with the same determination and trust as is with the sender: "It was Belle all over again, of course; Belle, returning, as foretold, to occupy her daughter's body." (MLS 171) Belle weathers the storm in the da Gama Company by herself whereas her daughter, Aurora marries the duty manager, Abraham Zogoiby and lets him weather the storms of the business dealings. Belle's beauty forms a ringlet ready to welcome ringlets that are similar as well as dissimilar to it. She is loudmouthed and outspoken, and this constitutes another ringlet to be joined with the ringlet of her beauty. Her own ideas of civilization, intrepidity and prudence in handling business affairs in the absence of her husband, her discreetness in halving the family business and her meticulousness in dividing the house and other properties, form ringlets to usher in ringlets of her imperfections such as her smoking and drinking habits, foul and unrestrained language, and her shameless unfair and unfaithful methods of handling her business affairs. The ringlets of her sense of fairness and responsibility and her respect for husband's sentiments are smoothly and naturally accommodated along with other ringlets within her. The ringlets of her capacity to manipulate, to plan in self-defence in advance and also to forgive her foes (Epifania, Carmen and Aires) add a significant array to the interplay of dualities within her very make-up. The most astounding ringlet in her make-up is that she never tries to attack or take revenge when she smells injustice and danger from her relatives. Instead, she looks for safety measures and later, forgives them wholeheartedly. Her true love for her daughter and husband, religious termination of her dissolute philandering ways on her husband's release from prison and her graceful exit with the wish to die like El Cid Campeador of Spain fabricate new ringlets that are always left 'open-ended' (Miller 445) for her role is taken over by her daughter, Aurora, after her death.

As Miller advocates his views about interplay of counterparts, Aoi Ue, a Japanese fellow-captive of Moor in Vasco's Benengeli tower, is a captive dwelling place of the host who is both

the eater and eaten (Miller 442). Her courage, inventiveness, serenity, generous strength, warmth, her formality and precision (MLS 423), uncomplaining iron discipline, calm composure and her self-control amidst the hideous circumstances of chained existence, constitute the host who also contains in himself the double antithetical relation of host and guest, guest in the 'bifold sense of friendly presence and alien invader'(Miller 442), for she often lets herself shake, weep and jitter under the frightening effects of Moor's story set down on paper. Her fear and helpless tears constitute the guest in her who is both a friendly and an alien invader: "Often I stared across at Aoi Ue as she worked. This woman who was both intimate and stranger... So we would hate each other, and turn furiously away." (MLS 430)

Character of Aoi Ue constitutes ringlets of binary opposites with her optimistic philosophy of life, fear and defeated love inscribed, against and within, with her disillusionment and bewilderment at the appalling accounts of the full truth about the story in which she is unfairly trapped. She is horrified by the stories of the Zogoibys and the da Gamas and their downfalls. Her disgust, horror, her piercing look at Moor and restlessness, expressed at the inability of Moor's ancestors to 'know how to be calm' (MLS 428), are the configuration of the 'guest' figure who exerts both his friendly presence and alien invasion. The reasons, supplied for the appearance of the 'guest' figure, account for its natural and friendly presence. On the other hand, the appearance of the 'guest' figure, offering all binary opposite features that are found in the 'host' figure, accounts for its strange alien invasion. This 'guest' figure becomes more prominent as she moves closer to the completion of the tasks allotted by Vasco Miranda: "... our fear hung lower over us and dripped into our eyes ... Aoi, too, often had to stop work, and drag herself off, chain clanking, to huddle against a wall and compose herself again." (MLS 428) On one hand, Moor records the heroic role played by her, without whose presence he would not have lived to tell his tale. He refers to her as an amazing woman who glowed through his dark existence like a beacon: "I clung to her, and therefore did not sink." (MLS 419) Though a beacon beyond doubt for Moor, she screams and runs helplessly when she encounters death through Vasco Miranda. This fear and helplessness peep in through her 'host' figure as a 'guest', as a friend and also as an alien or foe. It becomes difficult to visualize a woman, who had spoken about the power of silence in maintaining one's self-respect to Moor and had refused to allow her captivity to define her, suddenly getting frightened. Her words - "We are greater than this prison ... We must not shrink to fit its little walls. We must not become the ghosts haunting this stupid castle." (MLS 424) - make her pleas towards Moor for defence when Vasco proceeds towards her with his gun, appear really out of place and look like a 'guest' in the guise of an alien invader, invading into her personality, to make room for her split personality. On the contrary, she provides refuge to Moor at the time of his entry into Vasco's captivity. She nurtures him when he feels death approaching and quailing at him with her soft murmurs, songs and jokes. She becomes his nourishment by day and a pillow at night. She shapes his life by framing a timetable to which she adheres strictly and makes Moor also to do so: "In the hideous circumstances of our chained existence she provided our necessary disciplines, and I unquestioningly followed her lead." (MLS 423)

Her physical appearance and her philosophical mental make-up constitute the host-guest relationship, as discussed by Miller. Her tiny, slender and pale body, smooth unlined, oval and ageless face, and two smudge-like eyebrows positioned usually high give her a permanent expression of faint surprise, making her age seemingly range doubtfully between thirty to sixty. The intrusion of her philosophical and optimistic attitude into her youthful physical appearance constitutes the 'guest' figure which flickers both as a friend and a stranger / foe, simultaneously:

Her name was a miracle of vowels ... Aoi Ue: the five enabling sounds of language, thus grouped ('ow-ee-oo-ay') constructed her ... She was no chit of a girl but a formidably contained woman – indeed her self-possession ... became my mainstay, ... Nor was she the wanton drop-out type, but, rather, the most orderly of spirits. Her formality, her precision, awakened an old self in me, reminding me of my own adherence to ideas of neatness and tidiness. (MLS 423)

When Moor's giddy and aching body gives its absolute message, - 'the jig was nearly up' (MLS 424) – she comes as a ray of hope to Moor. She plays word-games, memory-games, pat-a-cake, etc. She holds Moor without any sexual motive to provide warmth and refuge. Her declaration, in a rather philosophical tone, that defeated love is still a treasure, and those who choose lovelessness have won no victory, alienates the counterpart that constitutes her youthful tiny physical structure. This philosophical make-up is alienated when she gives practical reasons for overcoming fear. She comforts Moor when cockroaches and other creatures make him shudder and weep with fear in their sleeping place. She exhibits stoic endurance in facing the dirty creatures and cockroaches which moved over their bodies like dirty fingers, yet, she is subservient in carrying out the tasks given by Vasco: “She, most fastidious of women, led by example, neither twitching nor complaining, displaying an iron discipline, even when the roaches tried to burrow into her hair.” (MLS 426) Her submissiveness and fastidiousness merge with fear and courage in her uncomplaining obedience to Vasco's commands. She looks very comfortable in her rootlessness in his death-cell: “... how easy in herself! So it was conceivable that the self was autonomous, after all... Undeserved as her fate was, she faced it. And, for a long time, did not let Vasco see her fear.” (MLS 427)

She gets into jitters of fear when Moor discloses the mutual hatred and betrayals that had gone down his ancestral tree. Her horror at knowing what his family members had done to each other down the ages is greater than her captivity in Vasco's tower because it showed her what they were capable of doing in future to themselves and to her. In spite of all her fears, her composure and her self-control are sought to be Moor's 'lifebuoy' (MLS 427)

'This lady of the vowels' (MLS 428) with her calm and stoic composure offers a direct contrast to the tragic and clownish enactments in real life by the da Gamas and the Zogoibys and that is why, Moor wishes that Aoi Ue save them in their next lives (MLS 428) by orchestrating their measures of brightness and possibility in fighting out their dark counter-forces.

Aoi Ue, retreats back from Moor once he reveals all the facts about his ancestors. She reads all that is put on paper by Moor, though she says she did not want to read them. She fills herself with more horror and disgust as she reads. Her refusal to Moor's request for forgiveness and absolution alienates her earlier priestly behaviour of offering refuge, warmth and practical reasons / solutions to him to get rid of fear. Her exit-behaviour and mental make-up reach the state of extreme alienation to her earlier entry-behaviour. She offers a horrifying sight, brushing away all sorts of comforts offered by Moor, as her task allotted by Vasco reaches completion: “... it was indeed a horror to see that strong woman weaken.” (MLS 428)

Thus, Aoi Ue offers a double antithetical relation of a host and a guest in a bi-fold sense (Miller 442), where her entry-behaviour is intruded by her binary opposite exit-behaviour, offering a random interplay of counterparts. Beneath her youthful appearance, stoic philosophic mind set and calm composure (Host) lurk her fear and disgust (Guest) in a hidden state. It is set afloat to the surface by the horrifying accounts of Moor's past. Her plea for defence and survival, towards the end, confirms Miller's views:

A host is a guest, and a guest is a host. A host is a host. The relation of household master offering hospitality to a guest and the guest receiving it, of host and parasite in the original sense of “fellow guest”, is inclosed within the word “host” itself. A host in the sense of a guest, moreover, is both a friendly visitor in the house and at the same time an alien presence who turns the home into a hotel, a neutral territory. (Miller 442-43)

To sum up, almost all the women characters in *The Moor's Last Sigh* display split-personalities. Aurora, in spite of her artistic genius and beauty, finds it difficult to survive without any male support. She marries Abraham, the manager of her ancestral property, to take care of her, her property and provide shelter, though she harbours love for him at the bottom her heart. It is under his uncomplaining protection, she continues to pour her rebelliousness and anger over her limited existence into her paintings, even after she comes to know about Abraham's extra-marital affairs and his underground illegal business dealings. Her anger over this and her inability to step out from Abraham's protective zone become the cause of the interplay of dualities in her personalities. At times, her independent spirit peeps out for a while, but, she passively recoils back to her studio and expresses her suppressed feelings in her paintings. The cause of her murder at the hands of her husband could be assumed to be his jealousy over her popularity or her unbridled independent spirit that peeps out of her then and there. Therefore, Aurora's attempts to resist the patriarchal oppression become the cause of her dual nature. Epifania's impassiveness and rude behaviour in her later years are the expression of her suppressed feelings and desires during her early days of her marriage. She finds it impossible to live a life of her own during her initial years of her marriage, but, when her husband turns into a diminished figure after his return from prison, her powers grow. She begins to assert herself, but, this takes her to the other extreme of her feminine existence. Minh-Ha's term, 'separate development', befits her. In her 'separate development', she drifts towards a witch-like existence. Similarly, Belle moves out of her authenticated zone of passivity and dependability for her and her daughter's survival when her husband is put in the prison for many years. As such, in the absence of her husband, the feminine and the masculine, the good as well as the evil, and her passivity, sense of fairness and justice along with her foul business tactics flicker within and mark her personality. When her husband returns from prison, she recoils back to her authenticated zone of passivity and dependability. Aoi Ue's existence in Vasco Miranda's captivity is also marked with interplay of dualities. All her courage, artistic genius, philosophical mindset and optimism become meaningless under Vasco's oppressive power. Yet, her unique qualities peep out even in this oppressive atmosphere and hence, the interplay of dualities within her.

Each of the dual aspects in these woman characters namely, boldness-submissiveness, good-evil, love-hatred, the monstrous and the angelic, motherliness-unmotherliness, etc., like a membrane, divides inside from outside. This division, passing through 'a hymeneal bond' and 'an osmotic mixing' (Miller 443), results in formation of a 'new woman' (Weikgenannt 67), who is a source of life and death, a devilish angel, an angelic devil, a motherly mother, an unmotherly mother, a joyful sorrow, a sorrowful joy, a pleasurable suffering, a suffering pleasure, a destroying nurturer, a nurturing destroyer, an epitome of refuge, shelter and escape, destroying one's identity, a tuner / toner of destiny being also the controller / capturer of one's destiny, a Snake in the form of a Ladder, a Ladder in the form of a Snake, lovingly constructive, lovingly destructive, lovingly revengeful, revengefully lovable, shamelessly shameful, shamefully shameless, powerlessly powerful, powerfully powerless, lovingly humiliating, humiliating lovingly, lovable but violent, harmlessly harmful, harmfully harmless, and so on.

These woman characters clearly exemplify Paul Tillich's statement – "The negative lives from the positive it negates." (Tillich 946) They are invoked to raise voice against social injustices and inequities, and then effectively demeaned later. They become the word 'Woman' that carries endless burdens and broad-backed dirt with it. They constitute the destiny, as inferred by the psychoanalysts, allotted to them through the conflicts between their masculine and feminine tendencies, resulting in their virility when they assert their independence. They are undoubtedly resourceful, resilient and at times ruthless, monstrous, 'men-harming' and unpredictably witch-like demonstrating 'gratuitous violence', attacking 'for some reason' and making their aggression look rational, reciprocal and manageable, as mentioned by Ajay Skaria in "Women, Witchcraft and Gratuitous Violence in Colonial Western India". (Weikgenannt 78) They constitute the powerless group because of the meaning their activities acquire through concrete social interactions. They constitute the 'made woman' group, at times, trying to un-make themselves to have 'separate development' (Minh-Ha 246-47) and then, re-make themselves, to once again, fit into their traditional moulds. They are sexually over-determined, driven frenzy and to nullity on the other hand, with their erotic needs. They are dispersed among the males, having no past, no history, and no religion of their own. As Beauvoir views, they are not born, but rather forced to become women. They are trapped between the two extremes of the Devi and the Devil. Though they are willing dupes of the sexist politics of India, as Charu Verma has pointed about Padma, they are 'indispensable commodities' (159-60). The concept of 'a made woman' crowns them all, and their self-erasure in their attempts of trying to 'unsay'(Minh-Ha 246-47) can be attributed to the cause of changes in the roles of these woman characters. They are dehumanized, removed with force from their positions, relocated, re-educated, redefined, and humiliated by having to face the necessity to force themselves to falsify their reality and voice by trying to 'unsay' it. They are forced to dwell in a position of you 'will be said' (Minh-Ha 246-47) when they try to say something.

As a result of interplay of dualities, the women in *The Moor's Last Sigh* emerge as a new category – 'new woman'. The configuration of the 'new woman' becomes a potpourri of binary opposites, preparing a stage for duets and a combat ring for duels of these binary opposites. This play of dualities, in the hands of Rushdie, receives a scintillating effect as they are not confined to their respective spheres when they are in operation, instead each one of the binary opposite pairs, set in action, serves a purpose, and therefore, they create triangles, not mere polar oppositions. A third sphere is created in the emergence of a different woman in the hands of Rushdie which is related to both the elements in the pair, taking positions sometimes before them or between them as they divide, consume and exchange across when they meet. Therefore, it would be appropriate to conclude about these woman characters of *The Moor's Last Sigh* with Weigel's statement that there is a strong sense of subordination with regard to even the strongest woman. (11)

When deconstructed further, the dualities in these woman characters convey innumerable significations and it would be inadequate to just conclude that Rushdie is critiquing the politics of patriarchy. Rushdie's intentions in constructing the dualities in his woman characters seem entirely different for he defends in his interview with Gardon Wise regarding this issue: "If you push people too far and you humiliate them too greatly, then a kind of violence bursts out of them." (Purushotham 84) The real purpose of constructing 'the blushing and the Beast' (Purushotham 84) goes beyond all immediate significations to synchronize with what Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar have put forward: "... for every glowing portrait of submissive women enshrined in domesticity, there exists an equally important negative image that embodies the sacrilegious fiendishness [...] the cunning of the serpent ..." (28) Another

signification lies in Rushdie's own words: "Repression is a seamless garment; a society which is authoritarian in its social and sexual codes, which crushes its women beneath the intolerable burdens of honour and propriety, breeds repression of other kinds as well ..." (*Shame* 173) This finds an even more explicit expression in Keith Booker's words that as long as women are oppressed, men cannot have true freedom either. (Deszcz 38) A similar signified is to be found in Judith Butler's comments on Beauvoir's claim:

... to be a woman is ... to become a woman, but because this process is in no sense fixed, it is possible to become a being whom neither man nor woman truly describes ... it is an internal subversion in which the binary is both presupposed and proliferated to the point where it no longer makes sense." (Deszcz 39-40)

Through configuring dualities within his woman characters, Rushdie seems to willingly subscribe to a view that if gender is not an immobilized cultural category but an incessant and repeated action, then it 'is a kind of cultural/corporeal action that requires a new vocabulary that institutes and proliferates present participles of various kinds, resignifiable and expansive categories that resist both the binary and substantialising grammatical restrictions on gender' (Deszcz 40).

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