

ISSN : 2454-2423

# Glocal Colloquies

**An International Journal of  
World Literatures and Cultures**

**Vol. 3**

**April 2017**

## **Renaissance Women in Rushdie's *The Enchantress Of Florence*: A Postcolonial Study**

**Dr. Punyajit Gupta\***

---

**Abstract:** Postcolonial studies in many ways can be considered as an outcome of friction between two mutually unintelligible cultures of 'Progressive west' and 'Puritan east'. It mainly represents the cultural regeneration took place in overseas European colonies from their derivative status imposed by their European colonial masters. Thus postcolonial representations of centre/margin dynamics often suffer from oversimplified periodization of colonial and post-colonial worlds. This trend overlooks its scope and potentiality to critique the history of exploitations and resistances beyond this colonial- postcolonial ambit. The postcolonial writers of Indian origin like Salman Rushdie, Amitav Ghosh., Rohinton Mistry etc, through their writings have been increasing our postcolonial awareness beyond this periodization. Rushdie adopts magic-realism narrative technique in his novels: *Midnight's Children*, *Shame*, *The Satanic Verses* to evade the influence of teleological colonial clock's ticktocks (Colonial history). In his recent novel *The Enchantress of Florence* (2009) he narrates a suppressed pastiche tale of a beautiful but bold Mughal Princess Qara Koz alias Princess Angelica, the Enchantress of Florence during the time of overlapping Renaissances of the then known World. It also winds up the New World as an essential characteristic of Renaissance of exploring from known to unknown. The novel begins with a European man who came all the way from the West to the court of the Mughal Emperor Akbar to tell His Highness, his tale of a Mughal Princess, known as the Enchantress of Florence! The foreigner's tale ignites the Emperor's curiosity and he revisits the history of his dynasty. This opens up the leaves of a long-suppressed chapter of the Mughal dynasty. The forbidden tale of mysterious Mughal Princess Qara Koz and her life spent in

overlapping Renaissances in different empires. This paper intends to examine the position of women during the Renaissance as depicted in the novel through different elements of postcolonialism.

**Keywords:** Gender, Renaissance, Globalization, Race, Plurality

Gender studies through postcolonial kaleidoscope have been mirroring women exploitation in terms of women empowerment since last century. This radical change mainly took place in European women's lives. The uninterrupted involvement of European men in the World Wars had compelled European women to come forward and step into men's shoes for taking care of their families. Right from their attire to attitude, they changed many things in their life to assume this new role. There begin the journey of modern women, who by dint of their own merit developed their own independent identities. However, these independent identities of modern women are limited to a few and hence juxtaposed their conventional subjugated one. For this uneven picture of independent modern women, wrestling free spaces from the oppressive of patriarchal society, unknowingly glorify their present status in terms of unfortunate women of past and present as well. Henceforth, this composite picture of independent modern women holds themselves as a role model of their time by asserting their superior status on their unprivileged sisters specifically or to any person as a whole. They, in general, take on the dominating and controlling model of Patriarchal social system to distinguish them as exalted few. Thus, we find the anti-patriarchal stance of Feminism-as a forum against the secondary status of women imposed by Patriarchy is not outside the realm of the Patriarchal system of the society. The creative authors and feminist thinkers also express a feminist utopia with feminine language and epistemology, emancipated from the Patriarchal world. But again, this kind of extreme polarity is also not above contention. So the intention of highlighting the rise of independent Feminine identity of our time is to trace back its origin in Italian Renaissance, the harbinger of Modern Europe and to compare it with the status of women in other coinciding Renaissances in different parts of known world in medieval period as mentioned in Rushdie's *The Enchantress of Florence*.

From fourteenth century onwards we find that depending on overseas trade, waves of social reformation was rolling across the

continents of Asia, Europe and parts of Africa- the then known world. This era of reformation and exploration for new ideas and things is classified as Renaissance in Italy which means rebirth or reawakening of learning. But unfortunately, it had very little impact on the luxurious or the miserable lives of women. For unlike modern women, medieval women were in no position to actively participate in trading overseas, except the likes of Queen of England or Portugal, commissioning different trading companies to trade with other countries of the known world. Hence men took the lion's share of those liberal reforms owing to their active participation in the race of amassing wealth through the voluminous increase of trade and interaction with the traditions of different countries. Therefore, women played a minimal role compare to men of action and enterprise of that time in spreading reformation into the lives of people. So, they failed to derive much benefit from this era of protest and reformation. However, the importance of women in trade was no less. In fact, in those days, women's body became a kind of living publicity of Orient. The amazing stories of Treasure Island or lands were cooked up as spicy women with eternal youth. These stories were marketed in the form of a commodity and were sold like hot cakes of today. They were not only used for auctioning foreign goods and slaves in the slave markets for a better price but also become the talk of the town. This hyped the showcases of the traders and explorer alike for its highest bidder. For example, we find in the novel; a European of dubious origin came to Mughal court to tell a potboiler story of passion, thrill and adventures of a long forgotten Mughal Princess Qara Koz! Bearing Florentine name Angelica and fame as the Enchantress of Florence. Like any good salesman of our time, Niccolo Vespucci, the imposter British ambassador hoarded this cosmopolitan story to earn the passport to the Mughal nobility by claiming himself as a Florentine relative of the Mughals ( he was entertainingly called Mogor dell'Amore in Mughal court) by selling his story to its highest bidder, who is no other than the Enlightened Despot, Mughal Emperor Akbar, a man with ignited mind and vigorous curiosities. "'Sire,' said the Mogor dell'Amore, and his voice trembles just a little as he spoke, 'there is a matter I beg to reveal to you, and you alone'" (Rushdie 108).

But in spite of these strong cultural contacts amongst the countries, particularly in Asia, the presence and worship of organized religions and

their exclusionist policies did not allow an overall flourish of global culture. As for example, the rise and growth of Islam as a regimented political force in the then global scenario. It gradually became a lethal weapon in the hand of different Muslim rulers of different time to spread religious bigotry. They attacked, plundered and demolished other cultures in the name of propagation of Islam as a hallmark of true faith. As a result of it, women being the symbol of a repository of culture, recreation and reproduction; became the war spoil. They were captured, enslaved, molested, forcefully converted to Islam to erase their past memories and culture and sold as commodity mostly in flesh trade. On the other hand, to save women from being looted, their own relatives curbed their independence by restricting their movements beyond the veil. Thus, the free spirit of curiosity and patronage of science among the adventurous Arab-Renaissance culture was eclipsed by the luxurious style of living on Islamic hard lines. After the decline of Arabs, the belligerent Turks and newly converted warlike Central Asian Muslim warlords took over power in Asia. They harboured Renaissances in their own capital, like Istanbul, Samarkand etc at the cost of Constantinople, Bagdad, Persia and the self-content affluent plains of north India. These religious Renaissances in Asia upheld a pan- Islamic culture, which in time become orthodox, and as a reaction to this, other pre-dated religions also become orthodox and reactionist against women. However, in India at that time after much bloodshed, mutual co-existence of different religious communities flared up a great reformation movement. Historian calls it as Bhakti Movement both in orthodox Islam and Hindu religion in fifteenth-century India. It gave birth to humanism under the leadership of great saints and bards like Kabir Das, Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, Sankaracharya, Khwaja Moinuddin Chisti, Guru Nanak, Namdev, Surdas and Chandidas to name a few. This spirit of Humanism culminated into a great synthesis of all religions- *Din-E-Lahi* under the patronage of the Mughal Emperor Akbar the great, as mentioned in the novel. But due to excessive stress on religion and dominance of religious fundamentalists on more or less self ---sufficient agrarian economy consolidate the age-old feudal social structure on people of Asia. Hence self-sufficient Asia precluded her people to feel any kind of necessity of scientific and technical inventions in their life, this feeling took off the wind of scientific advancement from the sails of Renaissances in Asia.

Consequently, in Asia, people gradually become more and more conservative in their outlook. As a result of this, women spending their interned lives in seclusion; confinement behind *Purdah* (curtain) system failed to verse them with this new spirit of religious harmony or scientific advancement and thus could not illuminate their mental confinements. In the words of Pt. Nehru:

All this intercourse and common living took place in spite of the caste system which prevented fusion. There were no inter-marriages except in rare instances and even then it was not fusion but usually the transfer of a Hindu woman to the Muslim fold. Nor was there inter-dinning but this was not so strict. The seclusion of women prevented the development of social life. Though Hindu and Muslim men met each other frequently, such opportunities were lacking to the women of both groups. These women of the nobility and upper classes were thus far more cut off from each other and developed much more marked separate ideological groups, each largely ignorant of the other. (Nehru 289, 290)

Meanwhile, Europe was passing through different stages of Renaissances; Italian Renaissances, Swiss Renaissance, French Renaissance, English Renaissance etc. and in the name of Humanism, Europe embraces materialism. The dichotomy between religious fundamentalism and scientific inventions initiated the era of commodity fetishism. As a result, while Asia was heading towards religious Puritanism, Europe and its people were exploring reasons to interpret the world with their newly developed scientific outlook. They set out to explore and exploit her reserves to make a profit. This unbridled rush for exploring new things, lands, culture etc. with a sense of acquiring them rather bagging them for material gain had prompted them to see everything as a sellable item in the market. They colour their new things or knowledge according to their own mindsets to raise their (new things) demands in the European markets. This slavery of consumerism promoted hedonistic culture in the name of the spirit of liberty of Renaissance culture to liberate people from Puritanism of Roman Catholic Churches. This culture very delicately turned women into a commodity. They were superficially raised to the status of desirable

women over others by constant publicity and limited access. In the novel, we find the city of Florence, “‘*Mercatrice, meretice.*’ The city of wealthy traders was also according to ancient custom a city of fabulous whores” (Rushdie 187).

We find that the Renaissance *littérateurs*; artist sculptors etc literally deified the position women of their desire in their works.

Alongside epic, lyric poetry was esteemed as the pinnacle of literary creativity in the Renaissance. The rise of courtly culture in Italy and northern Europe provided scope for the cultivated sensibility of lyric poetry, with its focus on a beloved mistress, whilst also reflecting on the subjective status of the lover-poet. One of its most influential pioneers was the humanist scholar Petrarch. His writing of *I Canzoniere*, a collection of 365 poems written between 1327 and 1374, drew on Dante’s collection of lyrics the *New Life*, Petrarch refined the sonnet, a heavenly stylized poem of 14 lines, broken down into two sections (the octave, or first eight lines, and sestet, or final six lines) with a highly specific rhyme structure. The Petrarch refined the sonnet idealized the female subject at the same time as it explored the emotional complexity of the poet’s identity. Petrarch complained in one sonnet that ‘In this state, Lady I am because of you’. This intimate, introspective poetic style, which allowed the poet to explore his own moral state in relation to either his beloved or his religion (and the two were often conflated) came to influence courtly Renaissance culture and poetry throughout the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries. (Brotton 117)

The beautiful ladies were usually portrayed in their ivory tower looking down at their admirers, appreciating their praise from them. The novel also endorses the Renaissance culture in the city of Florence:

Once, a decade ago in the glory of youth, Niccolo and Ago had worshipped Alessandra as she lounged at an open balcony, looking out at the Arno and leaning forward on a red velvet cushion so that the whole world could admire her noble décolletage, pretending all the

while to read a book that was probably Boccaccio's *Decameron*. (Rushdie 180)

Thus the spirit of re-awakening failed to illuminate the masses from the conventional composite picture of women as the living embodiment of man's desire. Their life resembled like that of puppets – the main attraction of a puppet show, but their strings of narration remained in the hands of the showman. In this respect, the female characters portrayed by Rushdie in his earlier historical fictions representing different historical context seems to lead us to his recent one, *Princess Qara Koz, the Enchantress of Florence*. This posits Princess Qara Koz at the centre of all; both as their origin being a Renaissance Princess and culminating being the latest female portrayal of Rushdie. Perhaps she is in real, modern women portrayed magically in a medieval setting. In this spirit, Rushdie pushes the clock behind to draw her from the scraps of Padma Lakshmi, his former wife. "Rushdie has confessed that his template for Qara Koz was Padma Lakshmi; he is willing to accept without bitterness the idea of a woman with a future being prepared to pursue her destiny, transcending fidelity" (Goonetilleke 182, 183). This overlapping between Rushdie's unhappy married life with Padma Lakshmi and this novel under discussion has been pointed out by Prof. Goonetilleke in his chapter on *The Enchantress of Florence*:

In July 2007 Padma Lakshmi informed him by email that she was leaving him. The announcement was so timed that she would have to be correctly referred to as 'Padma, Lady Rushdie', even after her divorce. Rushdie confessed that writing *The Enchantress of Florence* (2008) saved him from the 'wreckage' of his 'private life'; it was a bit of a refuge. I found that in the end, a lifetime's habit of just going to my desk and doing a day's work and not allowing myself not to do it is what got me back on track? (Goonetilleke 177,178)

This incident and confession of Rushdie also stimulates us to think that his pen portrait Qara Koz is a self-portrait or to be precise the portrait of lovelorn moorings of his melancholic soul. For it bears mark resemblance with one of the most celebrated Renaissance paintings of a beautiful woman: Leonardo da Vinci's *Monalisa*, which according to

some school is a self-portrait of Da Vinci himself. This is evident in the novel when Princess Qara Koz is coming to life in the paintings of Daswanth, the melancholic but ablest painter of Emperor Akbar:

As Daswanth painted Qara Koz growing into the fullness of her young beauty during her captivity, it became plain that some higher power had captured his brush. The beauty of his canvases was so intense that Birbal, looking at them for the first time, presciently said, I fear for the artist, for he is so deeply in love with this bygone woman that it will be hard for him to return to the present day.' (Rushdie, 156)

Thus, the palimpsest tale of Mughal Princess Qara Koz as Angelica, the Enchantress of Florence crudely emerges from the narrative of imposter British Ambassador Niccolo Vespucci. But its Mughal miniature adaptation acquires a new interpretation. At the order of the Mughal Emperor Akbar the great, Daswanth the painter's amazing brush consumes his last breath to whisper in a breath to his ultimate creation: *Qara-Koz-Nama* on his folios; the breathtaking adventures of Lady Black Eyes. In this way, a long forgotten rather suppressed feminine tale of a Mughal Princess, a paragon of beauty is at last released from the palisades of the hegemonic masculine tale of the Princess's stepbrother, the first Mughal Emperor Babar's spiteful ban on her existence in Mughal family tree. The novel takes us back to Transoxiana, where the descendants of nomadic and warlike tribes like Mongols adopted Islam from Arabs, but unlike Arabs, their inclination to intellectual pursuits are less mark. After the decline of the Arabian empire, these quarrelling kings and warlords tried to capitalize on Islamic solidarity and disfigured Islam into a political force. This is reflected in the life of Qara Koz, the Mughal Princess. Rushdie like the protagonists of his earlier historical fictions like Salim Sinai of *Midnight Children*, Sufia Zenobia of *Shame*, the family of Zogoiby's of *The Moor's Last Sigh*, and so forth has also handcuffed the life of the Princess Qara Koz with those of great historical events of the Renaissance world. Thus the life of the Mughal Princess Qara Koz becomes the living embodiment of Renaissance. Rushdie through this *bildungsroman* of the Mughal Princess Qara Koz as born enchantress has revisited the postcolonial concept of viewing a woman figuring larger than the life as a national or cultural

representative. She is presented as if she is the Brand Ambassador of global Renaissance culture. The novel explores the age-old struggle among males, desiring to possess, control and discipline a potential free female body to win the struggle for existence and perpetuate their dominance. These are articulated time and again through the individual relationship between the Princess and her stepbrother and suitors. These duels and duets in gender relationships portrayed in the novel also add a figurative shade of tussle between the free spirit of Renaissance and imperialistic interceptions to propagate their hegemony. This is evident when Wormwood Khan starved Babar out at the besiegement of Samarkand. He compelled Babar to accept an ignominious treaty of surrendering Babur's elder sister, the beautiful Mughal Princess Khanzada to him as war hostage in lieu of safe passage for his family out of Samarkand. The treaty if seen in the postcolonial light, with ease we will be able to establish the difference between standard and practice in the treatment of woman in that age of cultural reawakening in Asia. The standard of deifying a beautiful Princess as a symbol of the lofty culture of a place, for example, equating beautiful Princess Khanzada as the living embodiment of the city of at Andizhan and then later Samarkand is very close to today's national symbol. But in practice, beauty provokes beasts. This propagation of her beauty buckled with the richness of her place Samarkand, arousing desire in her enemy, here Wormwood, the Uzbek warlord to possess and consuming her to satisfy his loins, brings himself as her brother's enemy to her gate. Therefore, her captivity in the hands of the warlord is not a mere example of an act of satisfying the aggressor's loins but symbolically corresponds to the looting of the city of Samarkand, her home and imposes his dominance over Samarkand. It also serves a death blow to Prince Babar male chivalry as protector of not only his sisters as a repository of his family honour, but also of his subject at large. Moreover, Postcolonial studies also endorses in its gender studies, the Feminist claim of women's secondary status in patriarchal society. It further establishes it in the wider context of the emasculation of the history of the conquered races by their conquerors to legitimize their control over conquered race. Most of the time Darwin's survival of the fittest theory in nature surfaced in human societies in post-war systematic attempts made the victorious races or people over the defeated one to appropriate the properties of the defeated one.

Many of these ideas fell on the fertile artistic ground. Battles between animals had been a common theme in art since the ancient world. But in the nineteenth century, they came to symbolise the cutthroat competition in human society, as well as the tragedies arising from the hostility of nature. (Darwin)

In this regard, the women and children being the cultural identity and the standard bearer of the cultural identities respectively is by far the most important property of any race is readily appropriated to obliterate the characteristic features of the conquered race. This is another way establishes women significant role in biologically and culturally reproducing and consolidating the existence of any race or nation despite her subaltern status in any patriarchal society. Hence they are protected from the enemies. So here in the novel, the act of surrendering of Babar's sisters as war hostages symbolizes in one hand emasculation of Babar's legacy in Samarkand, but on the other hand legitimizes the rule of the Uzbek chieftain Lord Wormwood on Samarkand, who would be forcefully appropriating Babar's sister in his captivity to reproduce heir to rule Samarkand and thereby permanently eliminating Babar chance to regain his throne in Samarkand.

Wormwood Khan had heard the legend of the beauty of Babar's elder sister Khanzada Begum and sent a message saying that if Khanzada was surrendered to him then Babar and his family could leave in peace. Babar had no choice but to accept, and Khanzada had no choice but to accept Babar's choice.

Thus she became a sacrificial offering, human booty, a living pawn like the slave girls of Akbar's pachisi court. However, in that last family gathering in the royal chambers of Samarkand, she added a choice of her own. Her right hand fell upon her little sister's left wrist like the claw of a roc. ' If I go, ' she said, ' I will take Lady Black Eyes to keep me company...If Khanzada was to be Wormwood Khan's prisoner, and she, Qara Koz, was to be Khanzada's, then the little slave girl, the mirror, would be hers.

The painting is an allegory of the evils of power, how they pass down the chain from the greater to lesser. Human beings were clutched at, and clutched at others in their turn. If power was a cry, then human lives were lived in the echo of the cries of others. The echo of the mighty deafened the ears of the helpless. But there was a final detail to be observed: Daswanth had completed the chains of hands. The mirror the slave girl, her left wrist captured in her young mistress's firm grasp, with her free right hand had seized hold of Khanzada Begum's left wrist.

They stood in a circle, the three lost creatures, and by closing that circle the painter suggested that the clutch or echo of power could also be reversed. The slave girl could sometimes imprison the royal lady. History could claw upwards as well as down. The powerful could be deafened by the cries of the poor. (Rushdie 155,156)

This incident portrayed by Daswanth betrays how the identity of Renaissance women in Asia is encapsulated in sexuality and is pitted against male muscle power, the only homogenous identity of Renaissance men in Asia? This hegemony of male muscle power at its one stroke could turn the life of any women; transform any legendary Princess into a mere ordinary person as we find in the novel that how the result of the battle of Samarkand had sealed the fates of Legendary Mughal Princesses as war captives and are treated at par with that of the mirror; a dummy attendant of the Princess Qara Koz? Daswanth's miniatures also reveal to us the way patriarchal muscle power imposes sexuality as the lone identity of women probably it is the only passport to women empowerment. This crisis of women's identities and space in patriarchal society enable the patriarchal society to confine women and impress them to accept a sexual identity as the only identity. Thus, the muscle dominated male society of Renaissance from their own perception of endless competition for power draws a static picture of their women competing with each other to become the most desirable one, to be adored and worshipped. In this regard AminaYaqin in her essay on "family and gender in Rushdie's writing" while discussing on the deployment of sexual identity on women has pointed out Michel

Foucault's argument on sexuality as a historical construct to understand sexuality as fixed concept and to probe in her own words "the historicity of the subject in order to reflect on the present"( Yaqin 64) . She elaborates Foucault's argument

"In his study of the history of sexuality in European culture, Michel Foucault shows the multiplicity of institutional discursive traditions which feed into the larger discourse of sexuality. He argues that sexuality should not be considered as a 'pre-existing' phenomenon but should instead be thought as a 'historical construct'." ( Yaqin 64)

This drastic change in the fortunes of Princess Qara Koz brought to her by her elder sister's jealousy and her step brother's inability to protect her from his enemy left a permanent to etch in her mind. She was forcibly introduced to her sexual identity by her family members by surrendering her as a consort of war hostage, her elder sister Princess Khanzada Begum to her brother's enemy, who humiliated her by giving her to his water carrier. Her unusual type quickly learned the lessons about the ways of the world like any ordinary orphan girl child of her time sold in a brothel; hence she could not afford the luxury of childhood innocence. This lack of home deprived her of, in the words of Edward Said, filial feeling arising from biological bondage to home. But interestingly she has affilial feelings, which according to Said mean feeling arising from cultural bondage to family or place as we find in spite of the fact that she abandons her Mughal family and vice versa. For instance, she never abdicates her title of Mughal Princess throughout her floating life revolving around the known and the new world. So whenever fate offered her chance to assert herself, she with the self-esteem of a Princess carved out her destiny by making the most of her sexuality without looking back and bothering for others.

According to Prof. DCRA Goonetilleke:

In *The Enchantress of Florence*, gender issues are prominent. Qara Koz makes use of men. She abandons her Indian family to be with the Persian conqueror. She leaves him to join Argalia when he defeats the Persian, who tells his body servant 'that a woman so beautiful should not be tender, this I did not expect. I did not

expect her to turn away from me so casually as if she were changing a shoe' (P.250). She is making use of Argalia at the beginning, but later falls in love with him, which she reveals to him (and the reader) at the end of their relationship. Argalia is in love with her and gives himself to her totally and enduringly. Yet she is faithful only in so far as she will be able to work out her own destiny. Near death, he is aware that she discards him and leaves him to hold the fort while she escapes. (Goonetilleke 182)

Therefore, by juxtaposing the independent identity of Princess Qara Koz with the stereotype identity of women of different Renaissances, the novel explores the facts that they were mainly framed by good/bad binaries in male imagination. Men exercise power to erase the old and impose a new identity on women to dominate them and sometimes this cycle is completed, when another men for some purpose retrieves the original identity of any particular woman and restore it to her. For example, we may refer to the character of a brothel girl in Florence with a deployed memory or identity known as memory palace committed suicide out of shame when Ill Machia retrieved and restored her own identity:

Almost at once the palace of memory began to murmur in her sleep. Her voice strengthened and Niccol`o realized she was telling the last story, the story that was embedded in the very doorway of the memory palace that had colonized her brain, the tale that had to be told as she passed her out through that doorway and reawakened to ordinary life: her own story, which unfolded backwards, as if time were running in reverse. With growing horror he saw rising before him the scene of her indoctrination, saw the necromancer of Stamboul, the long –hatted long-bearded Sufi mystic of the Bektashi order, adept in the mesmerist arts and the building of memory palace, working at the behest of a certain newly minted Pasha to commit that Pasha's exploits to his captive lady's memory- to erase her life to make room for Argalia's no doubt self-aggrandizing

version of himself. The Sultan had given him the gift of this enslaved beauty and this was the use he had made of her (Rushdie 236)

*My name is Angelique and I am the daughter of Jacques Coeur of Bourges, merchant of Montpellier....While my brothers and I were trading with the Levant I was abducted by pirates and sold into slavery to the Sultan of Stamboul.* (Rushdie 237)

He awoke to scream and light and open windows, women running everywhere while the midget Giulietta screeched into his ear, 'what did you do to her?'.... 'God damn you,' said Giulietta the *ruffians*. 'It was impossible to stop her. She ran from the room where you slept on like a rotten corpse, and nobody could get in her way.' (Rushdie 239, 240)

Thus we find that even in the age of Renaissance, the women, in general, were largely dependent, confined to their home or at home in their professions for example entertainer as their only world and nothing beyond it. Despite progressive breezes blowing in the Renaissance societies of that time, women were given the Hobson's choice of security, which left them traditional rather stagnant, aloof from progressive thoughts of that age. As a result, the huge disparity in thinking between women and men developed, which is evident in strained but enduring conjugal life of Ill Machia and his wife and in different plane Emperor Akbar and his real queens. Instead of educating or reforming the wives the enlightened husbands starting from Ill Machia to Emperor Akbar initially insists on their Renaissance instinct of exploring to satisfy their quest for an ideal wife, who would be able to catch up their latest illumination. Ill Machia being a well-read person of Florence, the seat of Renaissance whiling away for his ideal sexual partner who would be suiting his temperament followed the essential characteristics of Italian Renaissance to explore the outer world. For example, He visited the whorehouse for his ideal partner.

But Emperor Akbar, the most powerful enlightened despot adopted the model of spiritual quest of Renaissance culture of his land, India. He introspects for his ideal wife, to whom he would be presenting himself on the equal term as an individual and not as the king of all kings. He by

amassing all the good qualities of his wives had it painted into a portrait of Jodhabai his fictitious queen, his other self. But even Jodhabai failed him, as she is only the manifestation of his desires for an ideal wife. She is not independent of his experiences. Her destiny begins and ends with him. Therefore she could not catch up with his ever-increasing curiosity to know the unknown. Hence she was replaced by the enigmatic Mughal Princess Qara Koz. Her diverse origins from different narratives from various narrators, for example, more or less matching narratives from a foreigner Niccolo Vespucci who calls the Mughal Princess, the Enchantress of Florence whereas Princess Gulbadan Begum, the aunt of the Emperor recalls her as Princess Qara Koz or Lady Black Eyes and then her life's intuitive portrayal in painter Daswanth miniatures as a born enchantress, an incarnation of *Alanqua*, the ancient Sun god of the Mongols indicates her palimpsest life history. She being the maker of her own destiny for sake of love was always independent from any control of masculinity culminates in herself all the feminine symbol of sexuality of Renaissance. She cultures Lesbianism with her dummy the mirror and held it as a utopian concept of the expression of feminine love, "The love between women was more durable than the thing between women and men" (Rushdie 326).

This was quite unthinkable at her time, which is much akin to Emperor Akbar's utopian religious concept of *Din-E-Lahi* can be considered as new Feminist ideal. On the other hand, Emperor Akbar's desires for Mughal Princess Qara Koz as his ideal wife, unlock a new chapter of love or incest? Because according to his aunt Princess Gulbadan Mughal, Princess Qara Koz is his great aunt, a stepsister of his grandfather the first Mughal Emperor Babar. This prompts us to draw parallel with Sophocles' Oedipus, but here it is reversed. Princess Qara Koz's tales ignites her great-nephew Mughal Emperor Akbar's passion. This kind of mutual attraction is not uncommon among relatives who are meeting after a long separation from each other or dug out from oblivion. This is evident in the relationship between Shalimar and his so-called stepdaughter India before the revelation of their actual relationship in Rushdie's another novel *Shalimar the Clown*. Again if interpret a Female body as a site of culture, then in the novel Princess Qara Koz represents before the Emperor his ancestral land of Fargana, it's own Renaissance culture as manifested in miniature painted by his artist Daswanth. But

our Emperor Akbar, the harbinger of Indian Renaissance in his reign, like a true connoisseur going ahead of his time admires rather fall in love of Mughal Princess Qara Koz alias Angelica, the Enchantress of Florence's achievements for globalization of love of a free women, as painted in *Qara- Koz-nama* which equals his own. Prof. Goonetilleke elaborates this in his essay titled "The Enchantress of Florence":

Akbar's actual wives and his harem could satisfy his loins but they cannot appease his aspiring mind and loneliness. Hence he creates Jodha, an imaginary queen, and later Qara Koz. Jodha is his ideal, and he conceives her as a complement to the male, not as an entity in herself. In fact, he conceives two images of her. When Akbar realizes the possibility of sharing the experience of being an individual, who identifies himself with the first person singular and not the royal 'we'-called for by his apprehension of himself as more than mere man, and as the force which both rules and protects his people, and so either contains or subsumes them- as he becomes aware of himself as 'I' and goes in quest of Jodha for love, his change presumably changes her. She is individual too, keen on asserting an image of her own. So their reunion is less than satisfactory since her responses do not correspond to his need. The dialogue in Akbar's mind produced by these two images of Jodha indicates that he feels some kind of lack in his ideal. At the end of the account of Qara Koz, he who feels the need for a new ideal finds it in her. The millennium issue of *Femina* hails Akbar as 'one of the earliest Indians to practise gender equality. (Goonetilleke 183)

Thus, we find that there was little or no place for women aspiring for independent identity in the Renaissance societies of east and west. Those aspirations were negated into some simplified unfamiliar categorizations of either divine or devil. This is evident in the journey of Mughal Princess Qara Koz as the Enchantress of Florence in search of her identity. We have discussed how Qara Koz with an independent identity of a foreign Princess in her stay at Florence was first apprehended by common people as a witch then loved as an enchantress

and lastly hated her as a witch again. This is befitting with the context of constant conflict between gender stereotypes imposed by patriarchal society through its different institutions and independent feminine identity. Thus during the Renaissance period, the existence of beautiful and bold women like Princess Qara Koz works as an embodiment of re-awakening of women independent from masculine control is always an awe-inspiring unreal and incomprehensible foreign entity in the imaginations of male dominated societies of the East and the West as well. The only way left to suppress those women who used to choose their ways defying male diktats was to force them to relocate themselves in the society was through identifying themselves with their male relatives. Thus Rushdie's fertile imagination retrieves a layered concocted Renaissance history of facts and fictions and presented us a sketch of the rise of humanism and its conflicts with the existing social taboos of that time.

#### WORK CITED

- Bahri, Deepika. "Feminism in /and postcolonialism" *The Cambridge Companion To Postcolonial Literary Studies* eds. Neil Lazarus. Chennai: Cambridge University Press, 2006 199-220 Print
- Brotton, Jerry. *The Renaissance A Very Short Introduction*. New York: OUP, 2005. Print
- Darwin, Charles. "Endless forms and visual arts" < <http://www.darwinendlessforms.org/gallerydarwin/struggle-for-existence/>> dated 1<sup>st</sup> April 2014
- Goonetilleke, D.C.R.A. "The Enchantress of Florence": *Salman Rushdie*. Newyork: Palgrave Macmillan. 2010 Print
- Johri, N, Dr.A. *A Social History of England*. Delhi: Doaba House Booksellers and Publishers. 2000 Print
- Lane, Richard J. "The Rushdie Affair: Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*" *the postcolonial novel*, Cambridge: Polity Press 2007 83-96 Print
- Loomba, Ania. *Colonialism/Postcolonialism: the New Critical Idiom*. London/Newyork: Routledge, 2005. Print
- Nayar, Pramod K. *Contemporary Literary and Cultural Theory*. Delhi: Pearson. 2010 Print
- . *Postcolonial Literature: An Introduction*. Delhi: Pearson, 2008.
- Nehru, Jawaharlal. *The Discovery of India*. New Delhi: Penguin Books Pvt. Ltd. 2004
- Rushdie, Salman. *The Enchantress of Florence*. London: Vintage Books. 2008 Print

- . *Shalimar the Clown* London: Vintage Books. 2006 Print
- Tripathy, Jyotirmaya. "Feminist Utopia (?): Space-Making and Other Possibilities": *Journal of Contemporary thought: Special Number Space and Speciality Public Space, Private Space, Hybrid Third Space* eds Sura P. Rath Baroda: Forum on Contemporary Theory. Number33, Summer 2011. 137-152 Print
- Yaqin, Amina. "Family and gender in Rushdie's writing": *The Cambridge Companion To Salman Rushdie* ed. Abdulrazak Gurnah. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2007. 61-74 Print

---

\*Assistant Professor (Guest Faculty)  
Central University of Jharkhand  
Ranchi, Jharkhand