



**Novel Insights**, *An International Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies*

A Peer-Reviewed Quarterly Research Journal

ISSN: 3048-6572 (Online) 3049-1991 (Print)

Impact Factor: 4.25(IIFS), 8.2(IJIN)

Volume-II, Special Issue, February 2026, Page No. 101-112

Published by Uttarsuri, Sribhumi, Assam, India, 788711

Website: <http://novelinsights.in/>

DOI: 10.69655/novelinsights.vol.2.issue.specialW.074



## **Negotiating Muslim Women's Identity in Postcolonial India: A Sociocultural Investigation of Anees Salim's Select Works**

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Received: 01.01.2026; Accepted: 20.02.2026; Available online: 28.02.2026

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### **Abstract**

India, one of the South Asian countries, is rich in socio-cultural diversity, including language, religion, class, gender, education, and political discourse. Muslim women's representative Identities depicted in the postcolonial era are attached to especially marginalized groups. They, most of the time, find themselves at the cross-road competing cultural and social forces, struggling with the complex issues of identity and representation. It is acclaimed that literature, as a mirror of society, analyses these dynamic issues. Anees Salim, a famous and intellectual Indian muslim writer, is an exception among contemporary Malayalam novelists. He delves into the lives of Muslim women in the postcolonial era, challenging singular narratives and highlighting their experiences within overlapping structures of patriarchy, community, and postcoloniality in a composite society. This society is marked by both deep tradition and swift modernization in his novels. His novels capture these issues that the Muslim lives face challenges of monolithic representations and shed light on women's experiences within patriarchal, communal, and postcolonial frameworks in a rapidly modernizing yet profoundly traditional society. This proposed study will investigate how Muslim women's identities are negotiated, constructed, and redefined in Anees Salim's works through the lenses of feminist theory and sociocultural criticism.

**Keywords:** Postcolonialism, Muslim, Identity, Sociocultural, Investigation

### **Introduction:**

The country India is one of the South Asian Countries, bordered by Pakistan, China, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Myanmar, etc. Socio-cultural elements in India include language, religion, class, education, landscape, and political discourse. In the socio-cultural sphere, the country is rich and diverse, and the postcolonial era foregrounds the need to research these elements, especially marginalized groups. In this regard, South Asian writers have been enriching English literature since the 18th century. Some contemporary South Asian writers who continue to enrich English literature include Salman Rushdie, Rohinton Mistry, Michael Ondaatje, Amitav Ghosh, Jhumpa Lahiri, Mohsin Hamid, Daniyal Mueenuddin, Arundhati Roy, Tahmina Anam, Monica Ali, Vikram Chandra, and Chetan Bhagat. In my paper, I would like to consider the fictional works of the Indian novelist Anees Salim with a view to highlighting how he handles the individuation process in the globalized world, where the women's identity of an individual has become a crucial one with respect to location,

memory, ethnicity, race, culture, language, etc. Muslim women, as marginalized, find themselves at the cross-road competing cultural and social forces, struggling with the complex issues of identity and representation. It is acclaimed and recognized literature, as a mirror of society that can be analyzed and raise these dynamic issues. In Indian English literature, among Muslim writers, Anees Salim, a contemporary Malayalam author, secures a prestigious position. He tries to weave portraits of Muslim life, challenging singular narratives and highlighting women's experiences within overlapping structures of patriarchy, community, and postcoloniality in a composite society. This society is marked by both deep tradition and swift modernization in his novels. His novels capture these issues that the Muslim lives face challenges of monolithic representations and shed light on women's experiences within patriarchal, communal, and postcolonial frameworks in a rapidly modernizing yet profoundly traditional society. This proposed study will investigate how Muslim women's identities are negotiated, constructed, and redefined in Anees Salim's works, especially his fictions, which focus on the lives of women in their daily routine, their unnoticed and unvalued struggles, aspirations, and unspoken hopes through the lenses of feminist theory and sociocultural criticism. The author elevates them through dramatic heroism; he also focuses on the textures of their daily existence, allowing their ordinariness to become the source of their strength and emotional resonance. His characterization of women is particularly compelling because of its accessibility and authenticity. The minor, ignorable details are domestic routines, moments of introspection, fleeting desires, and private disappointments. These details, he renders in his fictional women characters, are deeply real and relatable. Readers are invited to recognize themselves in these lives, fostering empathy and emotional connection. So, reading these novels, it feels as if the ordinary becomes meaningful, and the personal acquires universal significance and appeal. Through these women characters, the novelist significantly addresses universal human concerns such as love, loss, identity, and the search for purpose. Women here appear in a simple and constructed way. They are foregrounded and constrained as they undergo a subtle inner conversion. They can navigate the complexities of emotional, social, and moral aspects, journeying through the revelation of their intimacy within themselves. The growth, here, appears quietly, within the self as it is connected through grand public acts. The novelist highlights the women's ordinary lives, tactfully challenging traditional notions of heroism and grandeur. He shifts attention away from spectacle and achievement to honor the dignity, resilience, and quiet courage embedded in everyday female experience. In doing so, his work celebrates the beauty and importance of women's seemingly ordinary lives, affirming them as vital, meaningful, and deeply human. So, this research study will investigate how Muslim women's identities are negotiated, constructed, and redefined in Anees Salim's works through the lenses of feminist theory and sociocultural criticism.

Here, the word 'postcolonial' has sparked extensive debates and contradictions. It has been dismissed as "a most pernicious fiction" (Aidoo 152) that obliterates the world's political, economic, and discursive inequalities. It is depicted as an epistemic methodology that critiques Western structures of knowledge and power. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, an Indian scholar, theorist, critic, and feminist writer, explores in her essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1988) the idea that the subaltern, divided by gender and other hierarchies, lacks a voice and a platform to express their anxieties. Their voices and aspects are suppressed, and it is challenging to recover their identities. The creation of a generalized margin as the other

of Europe in postcolonial studies in the Western academy seems “complicitous in the perpetuation of a ‘new orientalism.’ (Spivak 56) From the perspective of women characters, *The Vicks Mango Tree* (2012) is the first novel written by author Anees Salim. In this novel, he portrays Bhatt, a teacher, as a quiet observer of male desire through female eyes. He is also an aspiring writer, and he lives in an apartment in the Bava house. The house is situated behind the Vicks mango tree. Women surround it. They witness, endure, and silently respond to his long wait for recognition. Here, the central figure is Bhatt, who becomes the artistic struggler. When women around him surround and absorb the weight of emotion, disappointing the unfulfilled, ambitious attitudes that shape female identity in the male gaze, his repeated rejections and representations are revealed. The publishers express the personal failures and also respond to the life suspended in expectation. The book, *Autobiography of an English Literature*, has been written as a manuscript and hidden in a trunk that symbolizes a deferred imagination. So, it shapes and frames the domestic spaces and relationships. In this regard, women's narratives depict waiting in different ways, but not with the same heroic persistence. It is a quiet stagnation that emphasizes everyday influences as the women narrate the conversation, and it awakens the household's emotional climate. Thus, when the novel is read through women's characters' perspectives, the emphasis shifts from the pursuit of literary validation to the unnoticed labor of patience, support, and emotional adjustment performed by women. Women here shape the male character's longing, reframing it for recognition, and it also highlights that male ambition can unfold against a backdrop of women's silent suffering endured in difficult circumstances. Practical realism depicts the unacknowledged resilience within the ordinary rhythms of life, which is shaped and recognized. In Anees Salim's fiction, he paints the female character Samar in different ways. Samar is a young woman who always tries to be a struggler and finds her identity in a society that expects her to wear traditional attire, despite her aspirations. Still, the character is firmly established from a female perspective. Salman Rushdie, an Indian-British novelist, dismisses the appellation ‘Commonwealth Literature’ as a literary ghetto in resisting the construction of the marginal as a new object of investigation that closely echoes Spivak's reservation about the new orientalist discourse. Anees Salim captures the pulse of the literary ghetto in his novel while picturing the women characters.

A Palestinian American philosopher and literary critic, Edward Said, wrote *Orientalism* (1978), which examined the cultural representations that underpin Orientalism. He critiques how the Britishers comprehend the Orient. This idea of Orientalism is especially relevant when exploring the characters Safia and Razia in *Vanity Bagh* (2013). Safia, a widow, reflects the burden of widowhood in the conservative Muslim community, while Razia is caught between the push for freedom and the constraints of family and societal expectations. Actually, the novelist disagrees with Muslim women characters as mere stereotypes, instead portraying them as victims, villains, or a symbol of otherness. He depicts those characters with individuality, flaws, and complexities, making them relatable and human. In the novel, Salim draws the character Imran Jabbari, the narrator, and a young man from a Muslim family. It is expressly uttered that this neighborhood is nicknamed ‘Little Pakistan’ in a derogatory sense. Salim wrote this fiction as both a dark comedy and a sharp critique of society that practices communalism. Here, the author draws the character Imran and follows his life as a journey towards the false allegations of being a terrorist in Hindustan, where

various communities live. To portray the young Muslim male character, Anees Salim cast Imran, who is often considered suspicious because of his Muslim religious identity in India. The author painfully penned this grim reality in his novel, as quoted: "The world is split into two; those who think I am guilty and those who pretend they don't." Anees Salim experienced two incidents: one was the incident of the American terrorist attack, and the other was the Babri Masjid Controversy, which was demolished by an aggressive movement. Through the character Imran, the novelist sharply critiques the pervasive stereotypes about Muslim. In this respect, the above two incidents affect and impact a lot on Muslim. After the post-9/11 and post-Babri Masjid era, Muslims suffer, and the character Imran's humor and defiance offer a counter-narrative to the dominant discourse of fear and prejudice that makes him a literary personality resisting against this stereotype and becoming a political figure of resistance, uplifting the fallacy committed by non-Muslims.

The brilliant gem of postcolonial critics and literary theorists is Homi Kharshedji Bhabha, who wrote *The Location of Culture* (1994), in which he analyzed the identities of colonizers and colonized through culture. The identities of the colonized are fractured, unstable, and hybrid. The concept of hybridity arises from the amalgamation of different cultures. Bhabha defines hybridity in fashion alongside postcolonial critics. The identities of the colonized are fractured, unstable, and hybrid, as described in this book. The concept of hybridity arises from the amalgamation of different cultures. Bhabha defines hybridity in fashion alongside postcolonial critics. Migration and identity are intimately associated with the culture of any individual or group; for what one is occasioned as much by the place of origin as by the place of destination. Identity formation is an ongoing process, and both indigenous and immigrant people change it as cultural transformations shape their beings. The immigrants always try to maintain a balance between the culture of the homeland and that of the hostland, which leads to the emergence of in-betweenness, as Bhabha terms it, the "third space of enunciation" (Bhabha 37). Thus, the negotiation between the two cultures ultimately helps form a hybrid identity. Bhabha further claims that this, "may open the way to conceptualizing an international culture, based not on the exoticism of multiculturalism or the diversity of cultures, but on the inscription and articulation of culture's hybridity" (Bhabha 38). Here, in Anees Salim's novel *The Blind Lady's Descendants* (2014), the characters Arifa and her daughter Zainab are caught between the traditional expectations of Muslim heritage and the desire for independence, representing the generational shift in postcolonial India.

The novelist depicts the theme of memory, loss, and trauma that are often intersected with the Muslim women who faced and experienced the partition, where they are forcefully displaced and marginalized. Anees Salim's novel *The Blind Lady's Descendants* captures this woman's perspective, and the novel's narrator, Amar, grapples with his past. Amar's family history and his Muslim identity make him complex and disturbed because of the narrow, derogatory gaze of society's other members as depicted in the novel. Anees Salim describes this reality and poignant exploration of alienation as structured in the novel, formed as a suicide note laced with dark humor and introspection. As quoted in the novel: "In our family, the stories we told were always punctuated with a sigh, as if life itself was a long, drawn-out breath we were waiting to exhale". This reference shows the broader condition of Indian Muslims, where they are caught and stuck between historical trauma and contemporary challenges, disillusioned and depressed. The novelist draws on the decline in

the socio-economic sector, where political invisibility is found within the Muslim community, as depicted in the character Amar, who struggles to reconcile his personal failures with the weight of familial and communal expectations that mirror the larger tensions of a community facing a financial crisis. Still, in the novel *Vanity Bagh*, the novelist describes the shifting landscape of South Delhi, a place marked by rapid urban development, migration, and socio-cultural collisions. Here, the main narrators and residents of *Vanity Bagh* discuss past identities and contemporary realities. This aspect of the novelist is shaped and recognised, mirroring Bhabha's idea that identity is never static but always 'in process'.

The novelist Anees Salim is famous for his distinguished prose qualities, such as his lyricism, quiet humour, and intimate emotional connections. Those qualities are shaped and reframed by memory, care, and endurance viewed through the gazes of feminist perspectives. Women belonging to the Muslim religion are not only representatives of the community's faith and beliefs, but also fully realised people with strong, unique voices, desires, and inner conflicts. Anees Salim draws the female characters through the first-person narrative technique and confessional mode storytelling. He considers women characters to be readers inhabiting these voices and fosters empathy foregrounded by thought, feelings, and lived experiences rather than abstractions.

In *the Blind Lady's Descendants*, the act of remembering family history takes on particular resonance when imagined through a woman's consciousness, one often entrusted with preserving memory across generations. Here, the novelist tries to draw women's painful situations, and the narrator's descriptions reflect that "We carried our stories like heirlooms, passing them down from one generation to another, polishing them with tears, embellishing them with laughter". This aspect we find in the echoes of women's labor. They bear the pain and protect this. Then they transmit familial narratives. For them, memory is not passive nostalgia but an emotional inheritance. This memory is shaped and framed by sacrifices, affections, and unrevealed pains. Here, the strength lies in the author's ability to weave together the personal and political aspects of women's lives. There is a clear depiction of private emotions as inseparable from public realities, in which tragedy is mitigated and softened by irony.

On the other hand, suffering is tempered by wit, as the women here, portrayed as characters, survive and resist without grand gestures. Thus, they show humor that becomes a form of quiet defiance and a way to assert individuality amid constraint. Through these layered voices, Salim creates narratives of remarkable depth, where women's perspectives enrich the complexity of Muslim identity and reveal resilience within vulnerability. Simone de Beauvoir, a prominent socialist and theorist, wrote *The Second Sex* (1949), where she explores the historical, cultural, and existential construction of women as the 'other' in a male-dominated society. If we look at Anees Salim's novels, we find that *The Small Town Sea* delves into the lives of various kinds of Muslim women. These female characters are discussed and shaped by patriarchal constructions that coexist with history, culture, and literature. The character Ammi, here, is central to the exploration of her quiet resistance to patriarchal norms, offering a subtle feminist critique. As "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (301) is said by Simone de Beauvoir, Ammi, and her daughter Raziya are the fitful in the novel. Salim's novel *The Small Town Sea* delves into the lives of various Muslim women whose identities are shaped by the patriarchal constructions of history, culture, and existence. In the narratives of these two characters, Ammi and her daughter,

Raziya, the novelist questions the boundaries imposed on Muslim women's roles within the family and community. The novelist also shows Islam as a subtle, unspoken drive, framing the women's worldviews and other characters' decisions with neither polemic nor didacticism, but with quiet daydreams that influence their daily lives. Salim eschews overt religiosity or theological debates, focusing instead on the cultural and existential dimensions of faith. In the novel, the protagonist reflects on his father's rituals, prayers, and deeply personal connection to faith: "My father's voice would rise and fall in rhythm with the verses he chanted, his face turned toward the sea as if it were the Qibla itself." Here, Islam is not merely a set of religious practices but a source of solace and identity. The father's prayers are intertwined with nature, reflecting his rootedness in both spirituality and the physical world. Such portrayals resonate with the lived experiences of many Muslims, where faith is deeply personal yet inseparable from everyday life.

Although Salim's works are framed as literary narratives, from the perspective of his women characters, they resonate deeply with the politics of everyday survival in contemporary India. Muslim identity, as experienced by these women, is shaped not only by faith but by the constant awareness of social vulnerability and exclusion. The socio-political marginalization of Muslims forms the unspoken background of their lives, felt in moments of fear, restraint, and self-censorship, whether amid the communal unease of *Vanity Bagh* or the muted discrimination encountered in *The Small-Town Sea*. In this age of globalization, there are massive displacements of people and cultures worldwide. As a result, the long-standing notion of nationhood with one ethnicity, one culture, and one language is fast falling apart. There was a wave of migration from the Third World to the First World, driven by the search for greener pastures and a desire to avoid persecution and tyranny. In this context we may invoke the authority of John McLeod who once claimed, "...it is not wrong to say that England and other colonizing countries have accepted many people as immigrants from once colonized countries for many reasons" (McLeod cited in Khachi: 6). McLeod has further clarified, "Some of them came to work, some came to study or run away from the deficiencies of their homelands and some came after their relatives who moved before them" (McLeod cited in Khachi: 6). Moreover, due to economic instability and political upheavals, there was huge population movement from Eastern Europe to Canada, the USA, and to the other West European countries from the beginning of the twentieth century. Besides, with the advent of modern technology, it has become both feasible and fashionable to come in contact with other cultures, and man has been enabled to borrow/adopt any custom or practice from any other culture. Naturally, society has gradually become pluralistic in every respect. Irial Glynn and J. Olaf Kleist claim, "The recognition of diversity and of various heritages informing the lives of people in immigrant countries has led many governments since the 1970s to co-opt multiculturalism not just as part of the fabric of society but as a policy of incorporation" (The Memory and Migration Nexus 5). To put this comment into perspective, multiculturalism has become the subtle strategy to promote assimilation on the one hand, and prevent disaffection on the other. This socio-cultural condition described above is shaped and marked by migration, fractured nationhood, and the rise of multiculturalism. It finds a subtle yet powerful fictional articulation in Anees Salim's novels. He doesn't always depict literal transnational migration from the Third World to the First World. His works deeply engage with the psychological, cultural, and existential displacement. Globalization occurs within postcolonial India itself.

His fiction rather explores what may be called internal diaspora. It is a condition in which individuals feel alienated within their own homeland due to social and economic marginalization, religious minorities status, and global capitalist aspirations. For instance, in *The Vicks Mango Tree*, the protagonist, Abu, navigates grief, poverty, and aspiration within a small-town Muslim household. Geographically branded, the characters inhabit a globalized imagination shaped by consumer culture, migration dreams, and inherited colonial histories. Abu's family is longing for economic mobility or narrative reinvention that mirrors the larger migratory impulse described by John McLeod. A microcosmic Muslim neighborhood in a contemporary Indian city is presented in the novel *The Vanity Bagh* in a similar way. The characters are not necessarily immigrants to the West if they are culturally placed in the nation. The idea of homogenization, as a distinctive quality, raps 'one nation, one culture' that collapses in the face of their lived plural realities.

The novelist critiques the myth of a unified National identity by foregrounding fragmented, hybrid, and marginalized subjectivities. In *The Blind Lady's Descendants*, intergenerational memory becomes a crucial motive. This novel captures the legacy of a dysfunctional Muslim family as it navigates postcolonial language, global capitalism, and moral ambiguity. Here, displacement is both temporal and spatial; characters draw strength from their past even as they struggle to situate themselves in a rapidly modernizing present. This resonates strongly with Irial Glynn and J. Olaf Kleist's observation that multiculturalism has become both a policy of inclusion and a subtle mechanism of assimilation. Salim's characters often experience inclusion as conditional. They are visible as minorities but seldom empowered as equal citizens.

In *Tales from a Vending Machine*, globalization appears in its most ironic form. The novel's absurd humor exposes the commodification of identity and the mechanical routines of urban life. Migration here becomes metaphorical. The individual decides and migrates from authenticity to artificiality, from community to isolation. The vending machine itself symbolizes late capitalist culture-automated, transactional, emotionally sterile-reflecting the broader condition of globalized modernity. What distinguishes Salim's treatment of migration and multiculturalism is his focus on everyday lives. Rather than grand narratives of exile, he depicts subtle forms of cultural negotiation: language shifts, consumer habits, aspirations for foreign education, and the silent burden of minority consciousness. His Muslim characters frequently embody what Homi Bhabha terms "hybridity-occupying an in-between space where Identity is constantly renegotiated. They are shaped simultaneously by Islamic traditions, postcolonial Indian realities, and global media influences. Moreover, Salim implicitly questions whether multiculturalism genuinely protects diversity or merely manages it. His fictional worlds suggest that pluralism, though celebrated in rhetoric, often coexists with economic inequality and communal suspicion. The aspiration to migrate-whether physically to Western nations or socially into upper-class urban spaces-reveals a crisis of belonging within the nation-state. Thus, when read against globalization and migration theories, Anees Salim's novels become significant literary documents of postcolonial identity politics. They dramatize: What gives Salim's critique particular force is his refusal to speak over these women with overt political commentary. Instead, he allows their ordinary routines, silences, and emotional negotiations to reveal how marginalization operates. For women, prejudice is rarely loud or spectacular; it is embedded in daily interactions, in the careful modulation of speech, dress, and movement. By foregrounding

such lived experiences, Salim enables readers to encounter Muslim women not as abstract symbols but as complex individuals whose identities are continually shaped by social and political pressures. In *Vanity Bagh*, communal tension is sensed rather than proclaimed, and women perceive it most acutely through space and domestic life. The neighborhood's constricted lanes, the watchful eyes of neighbors, and the unspoken rules governing women's mobility all become markers of exclusion. When Imran observes, "The lanes of Vanity Bagh were narrow, as if they had been built to contain our dreams," the metaphor resonates powerfully with women's experience: their aspirations are confined not only by physical space but by the intersecting forces of gender, religion, and politics. Through this spatial imagery, Salim reveals how Muslim women inhabit a landscape where identity is regulated, and where personal dreams must be constantly negotiated within shrinking social boundaries.

A distinguished professor and postcolonial transnational feminist theorist, Chandra Talpade Mohanty, wrote her seminal essay "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses" (1986), in which she discusses all women of the third world as a single, collective other in Western feminist scholarship. She also criticizes Western feminism for considering Third World women as a homogenous group. The characters in the novel *The Odd Book of Baby Names* (2021), Zoya and her supporting companions, Sumaya and Shabnam, are found to be struggling to navigate their roles in a rapidly changing society. Zoya's journey is deeply tied to societal expectations, religious constraints, and personal desires. Her relationship with her family and the tension between tradition and modernity symbolize the deeper conflict within Muslim communities, particularly for women seeking to assert their individuality.

Poststructuralist and Gender theorist Judith Butler argues for a performative approach in the book *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, where gender is not something inherent or biological but rather something that is performed through repeated actions, behaviors, and language. The novelist depicts the competing sociological aspects of the political landscape, emphasizing women characters in his fiction and showing women's identities in a time of flux. He raises these feminist issues in his novel *The Bellboy*, highlighting the intersection of gender, religion, and class, where they struggle to position themselves on an equal footing with males. They are seen in the novel struggling to negotiate their position in society. The main female character is Sayeed, who is considered and portrayed as caught between tradition and modernity. Ammi, another important character, plays a pivotal role in confronting patriarchal expectations. She also performs poignant reflections on this struggle. While navigating oppressive systems, these women also show agency in shaping their lives. Similarly, in *Tales from a Vending Machine* (2013), the young narrator, who is a spirited, winsome, occasionally muddled girl named Hasina, works at an airport vending machine where she reads a lot and wants to lead a modern, self-reliant life; she daydreams about battling a terrorist who tries to "kidnap" the plane she is piloting. But she also weeps when she hears of the execution of Saddam Hussein and thinks of the destruction of the Twin Towers in terms of an exciting film, with the top of the building crumbling smoothly to the ground like a wedding cake. The novel critiques the patriarchal forces that control women's bodies and identities while also depicting a community striving to preserve its identity in a rapidly transforming India.

From the perspective of women characters, Hasina's life is shaped by responsibility, emotional labor, and quiet resilience, which the novelist shows as the grim reality of Indian society. Here, Hasina's family is fractured and burdened as she supports her twins' educations. She lives with a sibling. She has a learning disability, and looks up to her cousin Eza, even as family relationships are strained by a bitter property dispute involving Eza's mother and Hasina's father. She has caught up in these domestic tensions. She has to carry the heavy burden. She is struggling to hold on to her own youthful desires. Hasina is also ambitious for this while she is in crisis. From the novelist's perspective, Hasina embodies the complexity of ordinary women. She also empowers women's dignity as they negotiate their survival and selfhood. Hasina performs her duty with an amalgamation of weary defiance and fierce aspiration. She approaches her job as an escape and sees her profession as an assertion of identity. As a woman character, she is marked, and her voice is considered to be marred by mispronunciations, humor, and naive observations. The novelist presents her as a beautiful simpleton, and the simpleton's surface arouses suspicion of emotional intelligence masking. This increases the inner strength. The novelist allows the character Hasina to narrate her own story. Through this, Anees Salim empowers women's voices, a power that is often dismissed and misunderstood. But the author tactfully depicts in his writings that it arouses consciousness in society. Here, the unexpected and surprising ending unsettles readers, unsettling their assumptions, and reinforces the author's larger dream that their lives can't be simply divided and categorized. They have their own stories that defend and resist closure. Certainly, their stories are categorized and easy to judge.

Women characters play a crucial role in Anees Salim's novels, where intergenerational conflict serves as a powerful lens through which Muslim women navigate their lived experiences of faith, freedom, and family duty. In the view of the women characters, Islam is not simply inherited. It is constantly negotiated and felt. Islam is reshaped within everyday life. On the other hand, the women characters, especially the younger ones, play the pivotal role and find themselves at the crossroads of tradition and change. Religious elders guide women's personal desires and aspirations, and their moral and spiritual aspects often clash with social norms. These conflicts are reflected perfectly in Anees Salim's novel *Tales from a Vending Machine*. In this novel, the novelist portrays Hasina Mansoor as a young Muslim woman who works at an airport vending machine. Women want to live their own way and strive to fulfill their aspirations and desires. But familial responsibilities make them chain their desires and wishes. In this novel, Hasina expresses her quiet struggles and speaks from within her consciousness to achieve independence. This independence yet remains deeply entangled with social and familial responsibilities and the religious rituals that people expect of women. She wrote her sufferings and feelings in a diary, where she records and infuses them with humors, irony, and emotional vulnerability. These are considered a space of self-expression that denies her in public life. In the quote from the text, when she says, "God must be busy, I thought, managing the traffic of prayers that rise like smoke of the devout. Mine must have taken the wrong turn". Then she shows no disbelief. But a woman whose intimate frustration with feelings makes it unheard and unseen. The novelist perfectly presents this situation in his novel.

So, through Hasina, the novelist portrays her as an irreverent woman who expresses her experience in an apathetic tone, reflecting a gendered struggle in which she claims spiritual agency rather than rejecting Islam. She makes humors that resists and questions the

authority of rigid interpretations of faith while still yearning for connection and meaning. Hasina, here, is an epitome of women's voices, serving as a representative and advocate for their empowerment. Anees Salim, a sympathizer towards women, bases the predicament of young Muslim women. Muslim women must reconcile belief with autonomy; they are devotees with desires, and they traditionally depict the realities of a modern, mobile world. In doing so, women's inner lives emerge as sites where Islam is lived, challenged, and reimagined on their own terms. In India, Muslims are viewed with suspicion, as is found in Anees Salim's novels. When the perspectives of Muslim women characters are read, the novels become acts of reclamation and humanization. They are not passive or inactive, nor are they a fixed symbol. They are dynamic, and they can think. They can feel that each individual whose daily life is counted as strong resistance. These narratives seek to reduce the negative concept or idea about Muslim women held by people. By centering their emotional worlds, relationships, and moral choices, Salim challenges the dehumanizing gaze that often defines public discourse around Muslim identity. From a woman's standpoint, this humanization is deeply political. Women characters experience prejudice not only as members of a marginalized community but also through gendered scrutiny of their bodies, beliefs, and behavior. Salim's refusal to sensationalize their faith allows these women to exist beyond imposed binaries; neither hyper-religious caricatures nor secular rebels. Instead, their lives unfold in spaces of ambiguity, negotiation, and self-reflection. Salim's nuanced portrayal of faith and identity is especially meaningful for women because it affirms Islam as a lived, personal experience rather than a rigid doctrine. Their relationships with belief are shaped by care, doubt, ritual, memory, and choice, revealing the diversity within Muslim womanhood itself. By offering these intimate counter-narratives, Salim's fiction fosters empathy and dialogue, encouraging readers to see Muslim women not as ideological battlegrounds but as agents of meaning-making in a deeply polarised society.

### **Conclusion:**

After the above discussion, it can be concluded that India, one of the South Asian Countries, is rich in socio-cultural elements, and the postcolonial era foregrounds the need to research marginalized groups, such as Muslim women, who struggle with the complex issues of identity and representation depicted in Anees Salim's novels. He tries to weave portraits of Muslim women's lives, challenging singular narratives and highlighting women's experiences within overlapping structures of patriarchy, community, and postcoloniality in a composite society. In his novels, society is marked by both deep tradition and swift modernization. His novels capture these issues that the Muslim lives face challenges of monolithic representations and shed light on women's experiences within patriarchal, communal, and postcolonial frameworks in a rapidly modernizing yet profoundly traditional society. Muslim women's identities are negotiated, constructed, and redefined in Anees Salim's works, especially his fictions, which focus on women's daily lives, their unnoticed and unvalued struggles, aspirations, and unspoken hopes through the lens of feminist theory and sociocultural criticism. The author elevates them through dramatic heroism; he also focuses on the textures of their daily existence, allowing their ordinariness to become the source of their strength and emotional resonance. His characterization of women is particularly compelling because of its accessibility and authenticity. So, by centering ordinary women, Salim subtly challenges traditional notions of heroism and

grandeur. He shifts attention away from spectacle and achievement to honor the dignity, resilience, and quiet courage embedded in everyday female experience. In doing so, his work celebrates the beauty and importance of women's seemingly ordinary lives, affirming them as vital, meaningful, and deeply human. In postcolonial India, the novel oeuvre situates itself at the fertile intersection of gender and identity. Though the women characters are minor here, they play a significant role, as the novelist portrays them to challenge dominant narratives. This approach offers instead a space where Muslim women's voices, however faint or fragmented, emerge as powerful agents of meaning, memory, and resistance. From the perspective of the women characters, the novelist portrays Islam and Muslim life as a quiet yet profound act of truth-telling. The novels chronicle a journey through the joys and sorrows of daily life. These novels also highlight the struggles of Muslim women and give their characters a remarkable depth of emotion. The author Anees Salim considers women characters beyond stereotypes of oppression and suppression. But they appear in their complete individuality as daughters, workers, thinkers, and mothers. Each character plays a significant role in negotiating faith, family, and selfhood in their own way. In foregrounding these women's perspectives, the novelist confirms inclusion and empathy as lived practices rather than abstract ideals. In a world increasingly fractured by identity and suspicion, Salim's female characters remind readers of shared humanity, felt in everyday gestures, emotional bonds, and quiet acts of courage. Their stories underscore the complexity of Muslim womanhood and, by extension, of all human lives, offering a compelling reminder that literature can bridge divides by listening closely to those whose voices are too often marginalized or unheard. Through a feminist and sociocultural lens, Salim's works not only contribute to the discourse on Muslim women's identity but also amplify the need for more inclusive and intersectional approaches in literary and cultural studies.

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