

Weaving the Self: Independent and Interdependent Identity Construction in Salman Rushdie's *Victory City*

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Abstract—Salman Rushdie's *Victory City* (2023) presents a complex narrative that intertwines historical events, mythology, and magical realism to explore the construction of the ideal self through the protagonist, Pampa Kampana. As a young orphan, Pampa experiences profound trauma, witnessing her mother's self-immolation and enduring abuse, which catalyses her early confrontation with the realities of a patriarchal society. Bestowed with miraculous longevity, prophecy, and mystical abilities, she channels her power into founding the city of Bisnaga, establishing a kingdom, and transmitting cultural knowledge through poetry. This research employs Self-construal theory to examine Pampa's evolving identity, illustrating her transition from independent self-construal, marked by autonomy, resilience, and ambition, to interdependent self-construal, shaped by familial, social, and cultural pressures. Pampa's navigation of gendered social hierarchies and political turbulence exemplifies the tension between individuality and collective responsibility. Her advocacy for gender equality, engagement with erotic art, and promotion of intellectual and cultural pursuits reflect her commitment to redefining women's roles within society. Through this lens, the study highlights how external socio-political forces influence self-perception and interpersonal relationships, demonstrating that Pampa's character embodies both the challenges and resilience experienced by women in historical and contemporary contexts.

Keywords — Salman Rushdie, *Victory City*, Self-construal theory, Identity, Gender equality.

I. INTRODUCTION

Victory City (2023) by Salman Rushdie is a feminist historical magical realism narrative that intertwines mythology, imagination, and history. As Prathyusha notes, "Every time he speaks of queerness or feminism or secularism or dissent (yes, dissent), it is so boastfully written, as though he is proud of the virtues he has leaked into his fictional world" (Parasuraman, 2023). This study examines the notion of the "ideal self" as represented in the novel through

the protagonist Pampa Kampana's aspirations, desires, and personal mythologies. Krippner defines personal mythologies as those which "give meaning to the past, understanding to the present, and direction to the future" (Krippner, 1990, p. 138). In the context of *Victory City*, Pampa Kampana's personal mythology comprises the stories through which she interprets her existence and defines her purpose.

The narrative explores the complex social structures and power dynamics of the fictional kingdom of Bisnaga, alongside the intersection of Pampa Kampana's identity, reflecting the postcolonial nature of the text. Structured as a bildungsroman, the novel traces Pampa Kampana's development while also charting the rise and fall of the Vijayanagar kingdom, which she establishes. Living for 247 years, Pampa documents her life in the *Jayaparajaya*, or "Victory and Defeat," composed in Sanskrit (Rushdie, 2023, p. 8). From childhood, she seeks power and self-determination within a patriarchal society. Witnessing her mother's tragic decision to commit mass suicide after her father's death, nine-year-old Pampa realizes the premature end of her childhood and resolves to survive and assert her autonomy: "She understood that her childhood was over and from now on she must conduct herself as an adult and never commit her mother's last mistake... She would not sacrifice her body merely to follow dead men into the afterworld" (Rushdie, 2023, p. 11).

Endowed with miraculous abilities—longevity, magic, and prophecy—Pampa Kampana becomes a vessel for the deity Parvathi but continues to face adversity, including abuse from the sage Vidyasagar, under whose care she seeks refuge. These experiences shape her determination to establish the Vijayanagar kingdom. Though founded by the Sangama brothers Hukka and Bukka using seeds provided by Pampa, the city is later named Bisnaga by the Portuguese visitor Domingo Nunes. Reflecting

postcolonial tensions, Bukka declares, “‘The day will come,’ Bukka said mutinously, ‘when we will no longer allow foreigners to tell us who we are’” (Rushdie, 2023, p. 36).

The novel charts Pampa Kampana’s struggle against patriarchal authority, including her eventual exile and return during King Krishnadevaraya’s prosperous reign. As queen and “mother of the city,” she continues to challenge male-dominated hierarchies while promoting gender equality. Using the Self-construal theory, this study examines how external pressures—cultural, political, and familial— influence Pampa Kampana’s identity, shifting her from independence to interdependence. Ultimately, her journey culminates in the loss of her vision due to ongoing power conflicts, reflecting the persistent challenges faced by women seeking authority in patriarchal societies.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review integrates a diverse range of scholarly articles, dissertations, books, and critical reviews that address the theory of self-construal and its multifaceted societal and behavioral impacts. Additionally, it incorporates analyses and discourse surrounding Salman Rushdie’s *Victory City* (2023).

In their article, “‘I’ Value Freedom, But ‘We’ Value Relationships: Self-Construal Priming Mirrors Cultural Differences in Judgment” (1999), Wendi L. Gardner, Shira Gabriel, and Angela Y. Lee conducted two experiments—one with European-American students and another with students from Hong Kong and the United States. Their study examines how culture, social values, and judgment influence self-construal, highlighting the shift from individualistic to collectivistic self-perception.

The dissertation *The Effects of Revolution on the Advancement of Women’s Capabilities and Freedom* (2012) evaluates *The Hunger Games* trilogy, exploring how revolutionary contexts shape women’s abilities, liberties, and societal roles. Through a Marxist feminist lens, it examines the physical, socio-economic, marital, and political factors affecting women’s equality and critiques enduring patriarchal structures post-rebellion.

The article *Cognitive Poetics: Blending Narrative Mental Spaces. Self-Construal and Identity in Short*

Literary Fiction (2013) investigates cognitive linguistic hypotheses to determine how language shapes literary meaning. It analyses the construction of narrative mental spaces in the short stories *Soldier’s House* and *Big Two-Hearted River*, highlighting the role of counterfactuality and character-driven identity formation through blending theory.

Lynn E. Alden, Leili Plasencia, and Karen W. Auyeung (2014) in *Social Anxiety and the Self* explore how social anxiety affects self-perception, social interactions, and overall quality of life. Their study emphasizes the complexity of self-related cognitive processes and the psychological impact of perceived social judgment.

Aleksandra Pilarska (2014), in *Self-Construal as a Mediator Between Identity Structure and Subjective Well-Being*, demonstrates that interdependent self-construal moderates the relationship between identity structure and subjective well-being differently than independent self-construal. This research shows that self-construal can produce both beneficial and adverse outcomes.

John Tawa et al. (2018), in *Construals of Self and Group: How Racial Nominalism Can Promote Positive Intergroup Outcomes for Interdependent Selves*, focus on interdependent self-construal in racially diverse contexts, highlighting outgroup comfort and the moderating effects of racial essentialism and nominalism. Their findings underscore how interconnected self-construals shape sociopolitical attitudes and multicultural understanding.

Finally, Michael Gora’s critique of *Victory City* (2023), referred to as *Miracle City*, compares it to Rushdie’s earlier novel *The Moor’s Last Sigh* (1996). Gora examines Rushdie’s narrative techniques, historical representations, and the symbolic connection between the author’s real-life experiences and the protagonist’s blindness.

This literature review is organized chronologically, tracing the evolution of research on self-construal from early studies to contemporary analyses. Collectively, these works inform the study by identifying gaps in the exploration of self-construal within fantasy narratives, particularly those emphasizing the tension between individual

autonomy and relational interdependence, as well as the interdependent self-construal of the protagonist.

III. METHODOLOGY

The central aim of self-construal theory, as formulated by psychologists Markus and Kitayama (1991), is to understand how individuals perceive and express their sense of self within the framework of their cultural and social environment. The theory identifies two primary forms of self-construal: independent and interdependent. Self-construal encompasses how individuals define themselves in relation to others, reflecting “what they believe about the relationship between the self and others and, especially, the degree to which they see themselves as separate from others or as connected with others” (Markus & Kitayama, 1991, p. 226).

In fantasy literature, protagonists often articulate their personal experiences, shaping the narrative by foregrounding their ambitions, struggles, and transformations. Independent self-construal is particularly relevant in examining such character traits, though characters may occasionally exhibit a blend of independent and interdependent orientations.

The narrative of Pampa Kampana in Salman Rushdie’s *Victory City* (2023) offers a fertile ground for exploring these dimensions. The novel traverses themes of human experience, power, and mythology while situating the protagonist’s identity within broader societal, spiritual, political, and cultural contexts. Pampa’s life is marked by persistent adversity—from witnessing her mother’s tragic demise at a young age to confronting systemic gendered oppression—shaping both her independent and interdependent self-construal. This study emphasizes the dynamic interplay between Pampa’s evolving self-perception and the external pressures she encounters, highlighting how personal identity is continually negotiated in response to cultural, political, and familial forces.

The Self: Independent Self-Construal

Self-construal theory posits that individuals understand and interpret their identities in relation to their social environment, with two primary orientations: independent and interdependent self-construal. An independent self-construal is characterised by a focus on personal uniqueness,

autonomy, and self-reliance, rather than conformity or dependence on others. In Salman Rushdie’s *Victory City* (2023), Pampa Kampana embodies this independent self-construal through her extraordinary abilities and relentless pursuit of power in Bisnaga.

Pampa’s early life is marked by profound trauma—the loss of her mother and her own abuse at the hands of the sage Vidyasagar—which fuels her indomitable spirit. Her desire for recognition and validation is evident: “I am the mother of Bisnaga... I want my true nature to be recognized. I don’t want to be invisible. I want to be seen” (Rushdie, 2023, p. 226). This insistence on acknowledgment underscores her resilient and self-reliant nature, highlighting her determination to assert her individuality within a culture that often values dependency.

Her independence extends to her resistance against superstition and religious orthodoxy. Pampa opposes the restrictive beliefs of her first husband, Hukka Raya I, and challenges the sage Vidyasagar’s manipulation of religion for political gain (Rushdie, 2023, p. 74). Even her supernatural longevity, granted by the goddess Parvathi, becomes a source of psychological struggle, as she perceives her unnaturally prolonged life as a curse: “‘The story of a life... if the middle is unnaturally prolonged then the story is no longer a pleasure. It’s a curse’” (Rushdie, 2023, p. 67).

Pampa’s independent outlook also manifests in her advocacy for cultural and aesthetic pursuits, including the incorporation of eroticism as a legitimate artistic and spiritual expression. She challenges prevailing religious and social orthodoxies, drawing on Puranic and Vedic narratives to illustrate the union of eroticism with transcendence (Rushdie, 2023, p. 88). Her artistic and cultural interventions reflect both autonomy and foresight, emphasizing personal agency over blind adherence to tradition.

Despite societal pressures, political turbulence, and patriarchal norms, Pampa maintains her individual agency. She navigates romantic and marital complexities, preserving her relationship with Domingo Nunes alongside her obligations as Hukka Raya’s wife, illustrating her ability to balance personal desires with social obligations. Over her 240-year life, she strives to establish a feminist utopia in Bisnaga, advocating for women’s equality,

education, and participation in governance and warfare (Rushdie, 2023, p. 94).

Ultimately, Pampa Kampana's relentless pursuit of recognition, power, and autonomy exemplifies an independent self-construal. Her determination to ascend the throne of Bisnaga, assert her individuality, and shape her realm according to her vision reflects a strong, self-sufficient identity that resists societal and cultural constraints, marking her as a striking example of a self-reliant, individualistic protagonist.

The Self in Relation: Interdependent Self-Construal

The interdependent self-construal framework posits that individuals in collectivist societies derive a significant portion of their identity from social interactions. Their primary focus lies in nurturing relationships and integrating into the broader social fabric, and they often exhibit traits described as "sociocentric, holistic, collective, allocentric, ensemble, constitutive, contextualist, connected, and relational" (Markus & Kitayama, 1991, p. 227). In *Victory City* (2023), Pampa Kampana's navigation of cultural, religious, and societal constraints exemplifies the tensions inherent in balancing personal autonomy with collective obligations.

Pampa experiences ambivalence in her dual roles as both the creator-mother of Bisnaga and a parent to her daughters. She oscillates between nurturing and strictness, reflecting the interdependent self's sensitivity to social expectations. Rushdie observes, "She had raised her daughter to be better than men, better-educated than any man and more outspoken, and they could also ride horses better than men and argue better and fight harder and more effectively than any male warrior in the army" (Rushdie, 2023, p. 104). Through this deliberate cultivation, Pampa seeks to empower her daughters to excel in a patriarchal society, aligning her maternal duties with broader social ideals.

Rushdie further highlights the interplay between love, equality, and relational identity: "In love the other is united with the self, and becomes the equal of the self, and therefore to love the other is also to love the other in the self, for they are equals, and the same" (Rushdie, 2023, pp. 229–230). Pampa's experiences illustrate the interdependent self's preoccupation with social connections and collective goals, where individual actions are shaped by the expectations and norms of the surrounding community (Gudykunst & Lee, 2003).

Pampa's sense of inadequacy as a mother is influenced by external judgments rather than internal assessment. Having witnessed her own mother Radha's self-immolation, she anticipates the difficulties of parenthood and struggles with emotional detachment and bitterness. The narrative portrays her enduring confrontation with grief, loss, and societal pressures, reminiscent of themes explored in Haruki Murakami's *Kafka on the Shore* (2002), where fate, prophecy, and the interplay of reality and subconscious shape personal and relational experiences.

The interdependent dimension of Pampa's identity is further complicated by her concealed relationship with Domingo Nunes, highlighting the weight of societal scrutiny on personal choices: "Domingo Nunes, and the three daughters whose father he had been, a father pushed into the shadows, his paternity never recognized. I wronged him" (Rushdie, 2023, p. 184). Here, Rushdie underscores the interconnectedness of familial bonds and the complex consequences of social norms, illustrating how cultural expectations influence decisions and shape psychological burdens.

Although Pampa's offspring inherit certain supernatural traits, their lineage does not extend into a formal dynasty, reflecting the limitations imposed by social and cultural conventions. The narrative emphasizes the tension between traditional and modern values, illustrating the continuous negotiation between individual desires and collective expectations. In this regard, Rushdie's use of magical realism parallels Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967), portraying the friction between modernity and tradition and highlighting the inextricable links between personal identity and social context.

Through Pampa Kampana's journey, the interdependent self-construal is vividly illustrated: personal identity is deeply entwined with social relations, collective obligations, and cultural norms, revealing the nuanced and dynamic interplay between individual agency and societal expectations.

IV. CONCLUSION

Salman Rushdie's *Victory City* (2023) presents a compelling exploration of identity, power, and resilience through the extraordinary life of Pampa

Kampana. The character of Pampa embodies a complex interplay between independence and interdependence, reflecting both the universal human struggle for self-definition and the culturally specific constraints imposed on women in historical patriarchal societies. From her traumatic childhood, in which she witnesses her mother's death and suffers personal abuse, Pampa emerges as a character of remarkable fortitude and intellectual acumen. Her trajectory demonstrates the significance of Self-construal theory in understanding the ways in which individuals construct their sense of self in response to social, political, and cultural environments. Initially, Pampa's identity is strongly independent: she exercises autonomy over her decisions, expresses personal ambitions, and seeks recognition for her creative and political accomplishments. Her pursuit of the throne, her engagement with cultural and artistic projects, and her advocacy for gender equality exemplify her self-reliance, determination, and forward-thinking nature. These traits highlight the relevance of individualistic self-construal in contexts where societal norms often restrict the agency of women.

However, Pampa's journey also illuminates the transformative impact of interdependence on identity construction. Throughout her 247-year lifespan, she navigates intricate social dynamics, including familial responsibilities, political alliances, and societal expectations. Her relationships with her daughters, her strategic management of the city of Bisnaga, and her negotiations with religious and political authorities illustrate the interplay between personal autonomy and social obligation. As Self-construal theory suggests, her interdependent tendencies emerge in response to external pressures and collective responsibilities. The novel thus portrays Pampa's identity as fluid and adaptive, capable of balancing individual desires with communal expectations. This duality not only provides a nuanced portrayal of her character but also mirrors the lived experiences of many women who must reconcile personal ambitions with societal constraints.

Rushdie's use of magical realism and historical allegory further enhances the thematic depth of Pampa's development. The miraculous gifts bestowed upon her, including longevity, prophecy, and mystical abilities, serve both as a metaphor for human potential and as a narrative mechanism for

exploring the intersections of power, culture, and gender. Her artistic engagement with eroticism, temple architecture, and poetic expression challenges normative boundaries and asserts the importance of aesthetic and intellectual autonomy. These elements of her identity reinforce the notion that self-construction is not merely an internal process but is profoundly shaped by cultural and historical contexts. By embedding Pampa's narrative within the socio-political and mythological framework of Bisnaga, Rushdie underscores the ways in which external structures influence individual self-perception and agency.

Furthermore, Pampa's experience highlights the enduring relevance of feminist critique within historical fiction. Her struggle to assert authority in a male-dominated society, coupled with her efforts to educate and empower her daughters, demonstrates a conscious engagement with gender equality. The novel situates her ambitions and resilience against a backdrop of historical patriarchy, exploring how cultural norms, familial obligations, and political hierarchies shape the opportunities and limitations available to women. Pampa's commitment to establishing a feminist utopia within Bisnaga represents an assertion of both individual and collective agency. Her actions reflect the interdependence of self and society, emphasizing that meaningful empowerment requires negotiation between personal desires and communal responsibilities. Through this lens, Rushdie offers not only a historical allegory but also a commentary on contemporary struggles for gender equity.

The integration of Self-construal theory into the analysis of Pampa's character provides a valuable framework for understanding the psychological, social, and cultural dimensions of identity formation. Her independent self-construal highlights autonomy, ambition, and self-recognition, while her interdependent self-construal underscores relationality, social obligation, and collective responsibility. The dynamic tension between these modes of selfhood exemplifies the complexity of human identity and the adaptive strategies individuals employ to navigate structural constraints. Moreover, the novel's emphasis on narrative, memory, and personal mythology illustrates the ways in which storytelling can shape self-understanding, moral reasoning, and cultural continuity. Pampa's poetic endeavors, her chronicling of historical events,

and her engagement with myth function not merely as literary devices but as mechanisms through which identity, power, and legacy are negotiated and preserved.

In conclusion, *Victory City* portrays Pampa Kampana as a multifaceted protagonist whose development exemplifies the interplay of independent and interdependent self-construals within a patriarchal and historically contingent society. Her life story embodies resilience, ambition, and creativity, while also illustrating the ways in which social structures, familial ties, and cultural expectations influence selfhood. Rushdie's narrative underscores the importance of reconciling individual and collective identities, demonstrating that empowerment and self-realization require both personal agency and social awareness. By situating Pampa's journey within historical, mythological, and magical realist frameworks, the novel offers a profound meditation on identity, gender, and power. Ultimately, Pampa Kampana serves as both a historical allegory and a symbolic representation of women's ongoing struggles for autonomy, recognition, and equality. Her character exemplifies the enduring tension between independence and interdependence, revealing the intricate and adaptive nature of self-construction within complex social and cultural landscapes.

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