

Statement in support of Salman Rushdie

Sunday 14 August 2022, by [Southall Black Sisters](#) (Date first published: 13 August 2022).

Southall Black Sisters (SBS) strongly condemns the violent attack on Salman Rushdie who has sustained life-changing injuries. While the motives of the attacker are still not clear, it is likely that the fury with which he reportedly attacked Rushdie was motivated by religious fervour.

This incident will send shivers down the spine of the writing community, particularly those writers who may be committed to writing about politically and religiously sensitive issues.

Beyond the importance of protecting our cherished freedom of expression, we would like to draw attention to the wider political context to this attack. We are deeply concerned about the rise of religious fundamentalism and its impact on women's freedoms. It is women who are the first to feel the chill of religious fundamentalism when their precarious freedoms begin to atrophy. As we mourn the first anniversary of the takeover of Afghanistan by the Taliban, this fact is ineluctably true.

Long before the wider society woke up to the problem of religious extremism in their midst, perhaps from the mid-1980s onwards, SBS was becoming aware of the growing religious restrictions on the women they were seeing.

When the fatwa against Rushdie was issued by Iran in 1989, SBS realised that this was the not just an isolated case of religious fervour. We set up an organisation, Women Against Fundamentalism, a group of white and black feminists from a range of political traditions, ethnic and religious backgrounds. The group felt strongly about the need to tackle the resurgence of fundamentalism in all religions worldwide, partly to challenge the demonisation of Islam by the state and the liberal intelligentsia and partly to develop an effective strategy to fight reactionary religious forces in all our communities. Although it campaigned against Hindu, Catholic and Jewish fundamentalism, those campaigns did not get the same level of publicity. As a result it became identified with being anti-Islamic by the anti-racist lobby who saw it as feeding into Islamophobia, exactly the opposite of what WAF wanted to achieve.

The fallout from the Rushdie affair was the widespread growth of religious identities at the expense of racial and gender identities. Secular anti-racists began to declaim, even reclaim, their Muslim identity. Muslim women increasingly adopted the hijab as a symbol of pride in their religious identity. The left displayed a reluctance to challenge reactionary forces within our communities because it might be seen as racist.

Just as the literary community fears that this attack will make the organisers of literary events more cautious about who they invite, we have seen that the state has gone to some lengths to appease demands by religionists, attempting unsuccessfully to separate the 'moderates' from the 'extremists' and concede essential public spaces which is extremely problematic for women.

We wish Salman Rushdie a complete recovery.

August 13 2022

Southall Black Sisters (SBS)

SBS Management Committee

P.S.

- Southall Black Sisters. August 13 2022:
<https://southallblacksisters.org.uk/press-release/statement-in-support-of-salman-rushdie/>