

Reading *Shame* in a postmodern age



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Abstract

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THIS research explores the complexity of Salman Rushdie's novel *Shame* in order to understand its textual agenda. The novel's obvious historio-political backdrop is blurred by a declared historiographic metafiction, in which issues of power and gender are coloured by shame. Rushdie manifests shame through the characters of Sufiya and Omar who are both actors and victims of power and gender politics. Rushdie locates his characters in a plot that is faintly identifiable in a post-Partition Pakistan with its patriarchy characterised by frenzied religiosity and military zeal. However, the treatment the characters receive in *Shame* is the like of a fairy tale. In his characteristic ironic tone, Rushdie's *Shame* is a retelling of the fairy tale of the beauty and the beast in contemporary Pakistan. Such dislocation in time and space problematises the reading of *Shame* in a postmodern era. My paper is an attempt to capture the nuance of the text.

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Introduction

WHAT A SHAME?



SHAME is contagious in Salman Rushdie's novel. The human characteristic shame is shared by both male and female protagonists of the novel, Sufiya and Omar. Although these two characters are treated as marginal at the beginning, they soon find themselves at the heart of the matter. Thus their essential emotion, shame, becomes pivotal for the whole novel as well. It seems that by exploring shame with its entire nuance, Rushdie is actually dealing with the creation of Pakistan based on a religious fervor and the consequent emergence of a cannibalistic military. For Rushdie, the history of Pakistan itself is an act of shame. Both Omar and Sufiya are victims of such shameful birth of a nation. In Rushdie's deft handling the birth and growth of the nation parallels the mysterious birth and growth of two individuals. The political chaos that created Pakistan is also responsible for a topsy-turvy situation in which all societal norms are turned upside down. The gender role is a case in point.

Salman Rushdie makes no apologies for the complexity of his text. Undertaking any analytical approach to his work involves a process of unravelling, only to find that the recurrent themes are all interrelated and dependent upon one another.

Ostensibly, *Shame* follows the tumultuous paths of two families, the Harappas and the Hyders, in the newly partitioned Pakistan. Most of the central characters are based upon true political figures, but as the story progresses it becomes evident that the power struggles are actually between the fictional characters Omar Shakil and Sufiya Zinobia, and their relationship with the self-reflexive narrator. Sufiya is a feeble, brain-damaged child of the Hyder's and Omar is named by the narrator as the "peripheral hero" of the story. Omar is a doctor and much older than Sufiya, but he eventually marries her in order to gain control over her shame which has manifested as a dangerous and deadly fury. Rushdie uses magical realism in his text to show the embodiment of shame within Sufiya. This technique inserts magical situations into a setting which is otherwise quite normal. Sufiya evolves into a sacrificial character who takes the shame of society upon herself. The shame is then transformed into a deadly magical power. Although Sufiya is physically incapable of harming anyone, her rage results in many deaths and torments her family and community. Sufiya remains oblivious to the crimes that she has committed. Omar's marriage to Sufiya appears to

be out of goodwill but is actually an assertion of control and power over her. Omar attempts to remove the evidence of Sufiya's shame in the same manner that he has removed it from his own life, by ignoring it, but shame triumphs over Omar in the end. He is decapitated, as are Sufiya's other victims. In the book's final moment all that is left of Omar is a, "giant, grey and headless man, a figure of dreams, a phantom with one arm lifted in gesture of farewell" (286).

This is only the surface of Rushdie's tale. There are multiple layers to the text, all of which work towards the common goal of rejecting a single focus within any story. Rushdie uses postmodern techniques to create an overall sense of discomfort for the reader who never knows if there is any truth. The visibility of the authorial role in the text is one of the primary layers to be considered. It demands an exploration of the social and political hierarchies which serve as controlling forces in the author's creation.

Foucault is exploring the identity of the author and questioning whether an author can be held responsible for the text. Salman Rushdie raises similar concerns in *Shame*. He is an author who is in conflict with the reconciliation of the subject and subjected within his narratives. His stories are biased, just as the histories they recount. Rushdie struggles with the acceptance of a history which has been edited. *Shame* is representative of the struggle to understand the storyteller's role and their relationship to history, as well as an attempt to recognise the responsibility that the author has for the text.

Rushdie's technique of storytelling adds layers to an apparently simple plot, and makes *Shame* a postmodern text. Rushdie illustrates the problem of storytelling through Sufiya's 'soon-to-be' mother Bilquis. When Bilquis first marries Raza Hyder, she lives with his extended family in "the old village way" (74). The women all live together while their husbands are away working. In order for Bilquis' new extended family to accept her, her mother-in-law explains that, "you must know our things and tell us yours" (76). By offering the story of her past, Bilquis hands it to them with the understanding that, "the telling of tales proved the family's ability to survive them, to

remain in spite of everything, its grip on its honour and its unswerving moral code” (76). Her stories were altered, when necessary, to “maintain the grip on honour” (76). They were changed to reflect what they should be. This is a major concern of the narrator, and accounts for the relentless self-reflexivity in his text. He ceaselessly offers alternate possibilities and insights into the “ways” that his characters defend their honour and remove the possibility of shame from their narrative.

The stories in the text, for the sake of simplicity, can be separated into two categories: the plot (the fairy story), and the subplot (the nagging voice of the self-reflexive narrator). As the story progresses, the struggle to gain an understanding of truth takes preference over the plot and the subplot offers an escape from the traditional story.

Throughout the text Rushdie asks his readers to explore the paradigms which shape their understanding of truth. Through the telling of the two incongruous stories, Rushdie is exploring what scholars refer to as “the myth of the nation” (SOURCE). Myth can be understood as a means of identity formation. Morton explains that Rushdie sees the production of postcolonial identity as being a “fictional composite” of traditional and modern views. Through the exploration of history as a societal construct, Rushdie probes for a deeper understanding of the dominant paradigms which have shaped his own perceptions. The incongruity of the stories presented, is emblematic of multiple power struggles. These struggles are evidenced through the subconscious drive of Rushdie’s narrator to present a truthful story.

For a better understanding, we would rather examine the role of history in its present state and the problems that this raises for readers and critics of his texts. Rushdie’s literature is often viewed as being counter-canonical because it does not reflect a cohesive national identity, but rather questions the very nature of identity through the rewriting of national history. Rushdie’s fragmented postmodern narrative technique is a crucial aspect of the “palimpsest” picture that he wants to present, but fragmentation can be quite problematic.

His plot creates the stage from which the true story can be told. A re-evaluation of history is necessary. His representation of the “myth of the nation” is a means of recognising what impedes his growth – what hierarchies exist within him – as a teller of stories. Simultaneously he suggests that a national history cannot be founded upon a false identity, as evidenced through the story of Bilquis. The reliance upon history to unearth identity is possible only if there is certainty on which the history was founded. For Rushdie, any certainty must be challenged.

The struggle for truth is evidenced through the narrator’s obvious unreliability and through the lack of control that the narrator has over what stories will finally emerge. Rushdie’s postmodern fragmented fantasy world is not an excess of belongings; it allows readers to visualise the alternate states of reality present in the text – and the world surrounding them. Through fantasy, Rushdie is able to reject normative views of how history has progressed, and is progressing.

The use of fantasy from a postmodern view-point may be responsible for the feeling of fragmentation. Starting from the early seventies and up until now, a list has been compiled of characteristics one might attribute to postmodernism, which also could describe literary magic realism. The major attributes may include self-reflexiveness, metafiction, eclecticism, multiplicity, discontinuity, intertextuality, parody, the erasure of boundaries and destabilisation of the reader. The author’s vocation can be listed as under:

- Self-reflexiveness (Rushdie alluding to Fitzgerald’s translation of Khayyum while talking to the readers)
- Metafiction (Rushdie differentiated between what is fact and what is fiction although there’s carefully engineered confusion in the novel)
- Eclecticism (a blend of the prevalent writing techniques with literary-cultural theories)
- Multiplicity (of significance of one single event generating levels of meaning)
- Discontinuity (of cultural beliefs and practices against time and place)
- Intertextuality (*Shame* carries within itself the residues of historical anecdotes with events, persons along with literary allusions)
- Parody (of fairy tale plot, romance quest equivalent to coming to the centre from the margins and also the reversal of role-plays)

- Erasure of boundaries (fact with fiction, love with death, realism with magic realism etc.)
- Destabilisation of reader (precarious experience of the postmodern reader)

To further connect the two, magical realism and postmodernism share the themes of post-colonial discourse, in which jumps in time whereas the focus cannot really be explained with scientific profoundness but rather with magical reasoning with obvious post-colonial twists.

The house named Nishapur and its residents including the three Shakil sisters and Omar is full of mystery for the readers and also the neighbours. The owner, three Shakil sisters and the mothers of Omar are mysterious as well. They only comprehended three-one-ness. They reject God, their father's memory and their place in society which enabled them to maintain their standards of behaviour. They never received any proper (in terms of socially established standards) education except of manners, which is why Nishapur – the only country they possess – is excluded from human society. But the oral legend goes on as Nishapur is the house of treasury. A local guide informed Raza Hyder, "But the story is, sir, that in that house is more wealth than in the treasury of Alexander the Great." (101)

And the permanent dwellers of the house are resembled to sinful witches who carry forward witch-fashion by giving birth to their second son, Babar. The witch-fashion of three Shakil

Macbeth. Three witches are mysterious and bestowed with the power of prophecy. Three Shakil sisters are just the replica of these three witches controlling the new Macbeth's sense of history, present and predicament. This has been achieved through Rushdie's postmodern retelling of history. Rushdie's "Indian-ness" and his place in the counter canon, the 'ambivalent' authorship that Rushdie employs, and the gendered subjection of Rushdie's characters who meet in fluid timeline – all can be identified as his methods.



Omar received the advice of being shameless from no fewer than three mothers. His eldest mother introduced him with how the feeling of shame is as “the forbidden emotion of shame” (38). They even denied him the freedom to experience shame.

- We come to see Omar’s fondness for the orient, of things a little out of the line, colourful, curious never dies, rather his interest moves on into hypnotism. Hypnotism is the weapon for exploding the system living in the system. Hypnotism has its first reassurance in its process, as seen in the words of the author: “You will do anything that I ask you to do, but I will ask you to do nothing that you will be unwilling to do” (1983: 52).

Omar is a ‘self-taught prodigy’ with his debut in the spooky house and the result of his self-teaching/-learning was directly focused through hypnotising others. Omar, the voyeur, the hypnotist, does carry on towards medical science and shapes himself up as a doctor.

A legitimised voyeur, a stranger whom we permit to poke fingers and even hands into places where we would not permit most people to insert so much as a finger-tip, who gazes on what we take most trouble to hide; a sitter-at-bedsides, an outsider admitted to our most intimate moments (birthdeathetc.), anonymous, a minor character, yet also, paradoxically, central, especially at the crisis... yes, yes. (1983: 49)

Where the patient is Sufiya, the practitioner of medicine is Omar. Omar, our peripheral hero, comes to the centre by his interest and profession of an immunologist, hypnotist. This top man of the city’s leading hospital and an important chap came this long run of life by ruling over this particular human emotion named shame. He is in the opposite pole than the heroine Sufiya is because of his remarkable shamelessness of his entire life.

Voyeurism emerged in him as a result of shamelessness. He discovered him as a peeping-tom in the pervert cases mostly. Moreover, his voyeurism nourished permanently as his mothers demanded of spying the world through his eyes.

However, he headed towards his life carrying the '0' with him and ended up as an outsider in every aspects of life, even the realm of his own.

I am a peripheral man. Other persons have been the principal actors in my life-story. Hyder and Harappa, my leading men. Immigrant and native, godly and profane, military and civilian. And several leading ladies. I watched from the wings, not knowing how to act. I confess to social climbing, to only-doing-my-job, to being cornerman in other people's wrestling matches. I confess to fearing sleep. (1983: 283)

Rushdie has manipulated historical events by collapsing the distance between history and individual existence, and also by reducing external phenomena to the status of peripheral occurrences that revolve around the centralising consciousness of the protagonists that revolve around the sentiment known as shame. The word shame comes from the word *sharam*.

... For which this paltry 'shame' is a wholly inadequate translation. Three letters, *shin re nim* (written, naturally, from right to left); plus *zabar* accents indicating the short vowel sounds. A short word, but one containing encyclopaedias of nuance. It was not only shame that his mothers forbade Omar Khayyam to feel, but also embarrassment, discomfiture, decency, modesty, shyness, the sense of having an ordained place in the world, and other dialects of emotion for which English has no counterparts. (1983: 39)

As understood by pathologists and academics, 'shame' is an effect, emotion, cognition, state or condition. The roots of the word shame are thought to derive from an older word that means to cover; as such, covering oneself, literally or figuratively, is a natural expression of shame. And a 'sense of shame' is the consciousness or awareness of shame as a state or condition. Such shame cognition may occur as a result of the experience of shame affect or, more generally, in any situation of embarrassment, dishonour, disgrace, inadequacy, humiliation etc. A condition or state of shame may also be assigned externally, by others, regardless of the one's own experience or awareness. Finally, to 'have shame' means to maintain a sense of restraint against offending others while to 'have no shame' (shamelessness) is to behave without such restraint.

According to cultural anthropologist Ruth Benedict, shame is a violation of cultural or social values while guilt feelings arise from violations of one's internal values. Thus, it is possible to feel ashamed of thought or behaviour that no one knows about and to feel guilty about actions that gain the approval of others. Psychoanalyst Helen B. Lewis argued that the experience of shame is directly about one's self, which is the focus of evaluation. And that in guilt, the self is not the central object of negative evaluation; rather the act performed is the focus. And psychiatrist Judith Lewis Herman concludes that "Shame is an acutely self-conscious state in which the self is 'split,' imagining the self in the eyes of the other; by contrast, in guilt the self is unified."

Genuine shame is associated with genuine dishonour, disgrace, or condemnation. Bilquis running naked in the public place is a shameful act that has been engendered by another shameful act she could not digest. Omar's experience with the shoe-garland is another example of genuine shame. Raza Hayder disgraced by Iskander Harappa in public gathering could be cited also. False shame is associated with false condemnation as in the double-bind form of false shaming; "he brought what we did to him upon himself". Author and TV personality John Bradshaw calls shame the "emotion that lets us know we are finite". (Sufiya blushing whenever she gets the notice of someone else or when she is loved is, in that sense, false shame. Rani Harappa feeling ashamed of herself through an understanding of her own faults from the male POV cannot be genuine shame either.

Now, toxic shame is a variety that describes false, pathological shame. Bradshaw states that toxic shame is induced, inside children, by all forms of child abuse. Incest and other forms of child sexual abuse can cause particularly severe toxic shame. Toxic shame often induces what is known as complex trauma in children who cannot cope with toxic shaming as it occurs and who dissociate the shame until it is possible to cope with. Omar brought up in the close quarters of the four walls not being able to interact with other people makes him a voyeur.

In the 1990s, psychologists introduced the notion of vicarious shame, which refers to the experience of shame on behalf of another person. Sufiya's shame is since her birth – because her being a girl child has to do all with being ashamed of herself as her father and (that's why) her mother expected the child to be boy. And we have seen the effects of the vicarious shame turning Sufiya into a violence-prone woman.

For readers in the postmodern era, reading may appear to be a precarious experience. There can be a question as to what per cent of the reading population truly nourish and practise the postmodern temperament of "all is well" as found in a recent Bollywood film. The reading mass experienced the rise and fall of the Victorians, the modernists with their 'early' and 'high' namesakes. However, one realisation comes from an acknowledgement or belief that humans, at the end of the day full of merry-making and collage-viewing, are essentially romantic at heart. The 'hope-against-hope' motif is still in everyone desperately trying to come out. Looking for symmetry for purpose is still a living endeavour. But when the author talks to the reader and isolates fiction from fact, the readers are constantly stressed with what to believe or what not to, and end up looking for the author's agenda.

Rushdie's next novel, *The Satanic Verses* (1988), was banned in Pakistan, as it was in India and in many other countries, including several Muslim countries. In Bradford in the United Kingdom, the novel was publicly burned by protesters and in Karachi, Pakistan, the police fired into a mass protest and killed ten people. The climax of these protests against the novel was the death 'sentence', the fatwa, declared by the Ayatollah Khomeini on Rushdie, his publishers and translators, with a bounty of \$1.5 million offered to whoever would do the deed. The invitation to murder drove Rushdie into hiding for several years and broke his life and career in two. A great deal has been written about the fatwa and its consequences on Rushdie's writing. Rushdie published several defences of his novel and of his practice as a novelist, and these are alluded to in the chapters of this volume. All these essays were published in *Imaginary Homelands* (1991, 1992), including an essay in which Rushdie 'embraced' Islam as a way of getting out of the impasse.

Rushdie's *Shame* is packed with actions and agenda. The coined phrase *chutnification* has truly been a mixture of diverse elements with various agenda. For example, Rushdie can be argued to be supporting Orientalism in such a way that Oedipus and Electra complexes do not seem to fall at right places; instead a mysterious working of human mind unsettles all that Freud has to claim as is shown in some of the relationships (Naveed Haider and Bilkis' mother-daughter). And then, prevalent social constructs are strengthened and nullified at the same time. Ideological State Apparatus (ISA) are shown to work directly and indirectly. Sometimes it is extremely visible like the scorching sun of the summer and sometimes it's very delicate like the moon beams. All women in the novel are more or less the mirror reflection of cultural constructions. ISAs seem to emerge in them during the 'mirror stage' and at the moment of oedipal crisis. Then there are simultaneous agenda carried by the characters who, we are told, roam around the periphery and strive to come to the 'centre'. This colonial working of the female and a touch of historical reading of 'history' itself make up a dish best served with spices and colour.

Let us have a look at the types of 'shame' that Rushdie has captured in his novel.

Through the figure of chiasmus shame is identified as the recognition of being the object of another's shame. Morphological forms of the word thus indicate changes in meaning that relate to a shifting subjectivity and to the interrelatedness of different subject positions. (Rushdie's Zinobia is also wife to Omar Khayyam, who is immune to the feeling of shame.)

'O shame, shame, poppy shame!' Salman Rushdie, narrativising shame in his novel about Pakistan and post-coloniality, maps its complexity as he tells the story 'in fragments of broken mirrors' (*Shame*, 16, 69). Its English formulation, 'tainted by wrong concepts and the accumulated detritus of its owners' unrepented past', in other words, by the very shamefulness of colonialism, is replaced by the indigenous term *sharam*. Rushdie, investing shame with materiality, gives an ironic listing of political chicanery, its shamefulness reflected into that which Sufiya Zinobia Hyder, the character who embodies shame, blushes for. Such acts as –

... lies, loose living, disrespect for one's elders, failure to love one's national flag, incorrect voting at elections, over-eating, extramarital sex, autobiographical novels... throwing one's wicket away at the crucial point of a Test Match... are done *shamelessly*. Then what happens to all that unfelt shame? (1983: 122)

Throughout the novel, shame is connected to concupiscence, to a pathological female sexuality, so that the idiot Sufiya's release of absorbed shame is also finally brought about through the body, in the voracious sexuality and violence of the mass killer. Omar received the advice of being shameless from no fewer than three mothers. His eldest mother introduced him with how the feeling of shame is as "the forbidden emotion of shame". They even denied him the freedom to experience shame. However, his fondness for the orient, of things a little out of the line, colourful, curious never dies, rather his interest moves on into hypnotism. Hypnotism is the weapon for exploding the system living in the system. Hypnotism has its first reassurance in its process, as seen in the words of the author:

You will do anything that I ask you to do, but I will ask you to do nothing that you will be unwilling to do. (1983: 52)

Omar is a 'self-taught prodigy' with his debut in the spooky house and the result of his self-teaching/-learning was directly focused through hypnotising others. Omar, the voyeur, the hypnotist, does carry on towards medical science and shapes himself up as a doctor. Omar headed towards his life carrying the '0' with him and a "sidelined personality" (1983: 35) and ended up as an outsider in every aspects of life, even the realm of his own:

Omar Khayyam, walled up in 'Nishapur', had been excluded from human society by his mothers' strange resolve; and this, his mothers' three-in-oneness, redoubled that sense of exclusion, of being, in the midst of objects, out of things. (1983: 35)

Rushdie's fascination with the subcontinent highlights his compelling and recurring desire of writing 'the East'. While his representation of characters such as Sufiya Zinobia, Bilquis, Rani, Arjumand and others reveals his gender bias, his representation of the orient from an occidental location allows us to question some of the authorial agenda. My reading of the text is informal by post-structuralist

theories such as psychoanalysis, neo-Marxist attitude of ideology construction and feminism. In particular, I have attempted to view *Shame* as a discursive practice that pits the Orient against the Occident.

Throughout this study, I have tried to locate any existence of a narrator with pervasive neurosis, or an author-narrator who provides a free-indirect-discourse critique of his story. This question became essential to interpreting the representations of women. If emasculation through sexual abuse pathologises the feminine as such, the question of narrative sympathies must colour readings of both the hermeneutic structures of the story and Rushdie's representations of women in general. With this realisation in mind, I have tried to approach the text from an objective point-of-view but am aware that my discourse, which has been a product of the society, might have crept in here and there.

It is fairly understandable that *Shame* evoked an avalanche of debates on the validity (or gross distortions) of Rushdie's depiction of India and Pakistan, while, further, it is of an extreme importance for a detailed reading of Rushdie's fiction to delve into its intertextual intricacies and respond to the challenge of its incessantly multiplying metafictional levels. Therefore, I have consulted literatures on sub-continental history of politics, studied critical appreciations of the Eastern historical changes.

Chapter One

A FAIRY TALE



SHAME'S "fairy story" is the story of two families the Hyders, and the Harappas. The heads of household are based on the Pakistani political leaders: Zulfikar Ali Bhutto (Iskander Harappa) and his predecessor General Muhammad Zia-al-Haq (Raza Hyder). The turmoil surrounding these two political leaders is also analogous to the critical conversation surrounding most of Rushdie's work. Bhutto represented the modern ideals of democracy and socialism. The General, who had Bhutto executed after overthrowing his leadership, advanced the Islamisation of Pakistan and established a more centrally controlled government. The two men represent the clash between intellectual modernism and the adherence to ideological convictions. Both men are equally destructive to their families and themselves. Iskander Harappa engages in debauchery and infidelity throughout the text while insisting on a new country and promoting science and "modern thought". Raza Hyder turns his back on anything that is not a part of the image of nationalism that he promotes. This clash is central to the Bhabba's assertion that, "Hybridity is heresy" and it brings to surface the complex issues surrounding identity formation.

Rushdie's retelling of history is more than a question of excessive myth or productive decentering. It delves into the deepest aspects of human nature and the formation of identity. So on many levels, Rushdie's postmodern retelling of history becomes more than creative literary technique. The crux of his work lies in the nature of identity formation. The suggestion that identity formation is based upon a myth of nationhood is not easily accepted by the subject promoting the "myths" or by the subjected who is searching for identity. Rushdie's "fairy tale" characters reflect the levels of identity formation. Iskander Harappa represents the struggle to move forward to a new concept of identity, whereas Raza Hyder wants to maintain (or create?) a place where identity can find solid ground. At the stories' end, both men are dead, and they are both responsible for the destructive paths they pursued. Modernism does not reign as the harbinger of Truth.

Omar Khayamm Shakil is introduced at the onset of the "fairy-tale" plot of *Shame*. He is the product of shame but spends his entire life turning his back on that reality. His birth is retold in a semi-magical distortion of the true events which occurred. The

story begins in the “remote border town of Q.” Omar’s soon-to-be mothers are three sisters who live with their father who despises both the indigenous population of the “hellhole” town that they live in, as well as the British sahibs who have colonised it. The narrator explains, “Old Shakil loathed both worlds and had for many years remained immured in his high, fortress-like, gigantic residence which faced inward to a well-like and lightless compound yard”. Mr. Shakil keeps his three daughters in isolation with him until his death, and on that day the sisters joyfully defile the memory of him by throwing a miraculous party to which they invited all of the British sahibs and a few of the most prominent members of the townspeople. It was on this night that Omar was conceived – “or so the story goes” (we are dutifully informed by the narrator). Months later all three of the sisters were miraculously pregnant. The narrator explains, “I am prepared to swear that so wholeheartedly did they wish to share the motherhood of their sibling – to transform the public shame of unwedlocked conception into the private triumph of the longed for group baby that, in short, twin phantom pregnancies, accompanied the real one; while the simultaneity of their behaviour suggests the operation of some form of communal mind”. Immediately the narrator is suggesting the idea of myth creation that Brennan refers to. This is representative of the “myth of the nation” through the formation of the longed for “communal mind”. He is suggesting that the mothers became truly convinced of the miraculous birth of their child because of their intense desire to escape the shame that would ensue had one of them admitted to conception out of wedlock.

This view goes back to the reshaping of the story of Bilquis. In order to maintain honour, some narratives must be retold. Clearly, this birth is emblematic of the birth of Jesus to the Virgin Mary. In order for individuals to accept Jesus as a prophet (in the Islamic tradition) or as Christ (in the Christian tradition), he could not have been born of a “harlot” so his birth was transformed by the power of myth to become a miraculous event rather than a shameful one. In every line of the text Rushdie is retelling and re-envisioning lies and truths that have come before, and he entirely blurs the distinction between the two. Through Rushdie’s relentless deconstruction of the formation of truth, some scholars, like Aijaz believe that there is no truth

present in his texts. However, some things in Rushdie's world are grounded in belief and they are embodied in the character of Sufiya Zinobia. Her name is given early in the novel – but only as a supplemental fragment of knowledge. She is still seen as a disruption of the story which is meant to be told. Sufiya is merely a part of Omar's eventual story, but even in her developing stages the narrator cannot escape her.

Readers come to learn that Omar was “Born in a death-bed, about which there hung the ghost image of a grandfather who, dying, had consigned himself to the peripheries of hell; his first sight the spectacle of a range of topsy-turvy mountains... Omar Khayyam Shakil was afflicted, from his earliest days, by a sense of inversion, of a world turned upside down. And by something worse: the fear that he was living at the edge of the world, so close that he might fall off at any moment”. Omar is attributed similar characteristics as the grandfather, insofar as his inability to choose. This is why Omar is named the “peripheral hero” by the narrator. The narrator is sympathetic to Omar because, as the narrator acknowledges that, he too exists on the periphery, (as a dual emigrant) incapable of seeing the “missing bits”. An interesting relationship is established between the two characters (Omar and the narrator) because both of them are incapable of accepting the true state of their “peripheral existence”. In the story, Omar peers through his grandfather's telescope, beyond the “border town of Q,” and sees the horizon which convinces him he must be near the “Rim of Things,” but in his nightmares there is nothing but a void beyond this Rim. There was no possibility of life beyond the acknowledgement of his shameful existence. So he decided at the age often to sleep as little as possible. The narrator and Omar's situation parallels nicely. Because they are unable to accept their questionable identities they try to tell the story with which they are the most comfortable. However, as readers are being introduced to the complex world of the young Omar, Sufiya's story begins to emerge. Sufiya is still unborn at this point in the “story” and will remain to be for ten years, but she has already begun to consume the narrator's thoughts. His mention of Sufiya is set off in parenthesis, which signifies immediately that she is disrupting the overall flow of the story, but nonetheless her presence cannot be ignored:

His wife, the elder daughter of General Raza Hyder, was an insomniac too; but Omar Khayyam's sleeplessness is not to be compared with hers, for while his was willed, she, foolish Sufiya Zinobia, would lie in bed squeezing her eyelids shut between her thumbs and forefingers, as if she could extrude consciousness through her eyelashes, like motes of dust, or tears. And she burned, she fried, in that very room of her husbands and his grandfathers death, beside that bed of snakes and Paradise... a plague on this disobedient Time! (1983:17)

Metafiction is fiction that self-consciously reflects upon its fictional status and comments upon its own use of narrative conventions. Rushdie's position is that of Omar Khayyam the poet who is lost in Fitzgerald's 'translation'. This narrative device is most often identified with male postmodernists, even though metafiction's potential to subvert the conventions of literary discourse would seem to make it an attractive genre for feminist writers. However, it remains a fair argument to say that *Shame* comes closer to postmodern fairy tale narratives with obvious re-workings:

I had thought... that I had on my hands... an almost excessive masculine tale, a saga of sexual rivalry, ambition, power, patronage, betrayal, death, revenge. But the women seem to have taken over; they marched in from the peripheries of the story to demand the inclusion of their own tragedies, histories and comedies... to see my 'male' plot refracted... (1983: 173)

In the popular fairy tale, Snow White herself is first innocent, or white; she meets her apparent death from eating the red side of the poisoned apple, analogous to menarche (or sexual knowledge, like Eve's); she goes into the 'seclusion' of death, although the dwarfs will not bury her in the 'black' ground; and she is revived by a kiss on her red lips, signifying marriage and nobility. Unlike the religious and national origins treated in myth and legend, fairy tales are a narrative form that engages with personal and social origins. Moreover, the instability of fairy tales – historically contingent, forever reworked by the new teller – allows for the kind of artistic manipulation. In its original oral incarnation the folk tale marks the social initiation of a young woman, and celebrates her coming-of-age. It is also, importantly, a warning.

The popular fairy tale 'Beauty and the Beast' stands as a model for a plot rich in opportunities for expressing a woman's anxieties about marriage, but, in recent years, it has turned into a story focused on the Beast rather than on Beauty. Sufiya stands her ground:

... but that he guessed that the creature inside her, the hot thing, the yellow fire, had by now consumed her utterly, like a house-gutting blaze..... [Omar] woke up, but the dream refused to leave him. It hung before his eyes, that spectre of his wife in the wilderness, hunting human and animal prey. (1983: 242-253)

"The beast inside the beauty." writes Rushdie, "Opposing elements of a fairy-tale combined in a single character."

Another staple of the fairy tale is cannibalism. Cannibals magnify the normal in a hyperbolic fashion. And the issue of survival through eating spreads across this dark and bewildering place. Food – procuring it, preparing it, cooking it, eating it – dominates the material as the overriding image of survival; consuming it offers contradictory metaphors of life and civilisation as well as barbarity and extinction. However, if making love to humans can be seen an equivalent to food consumption and the pleasure it brings, killing the humans may very well be argued as cannibalism.

This performance, a masquerade of sorts, is one of the most important tropes in the works of the postmodern gothic tradition. Sufiya, through the acts of violence and self-revelation, can choose both her identity and her destiny. She chooses to become one of the defining characters of the horror genre – the impure, the interstitial being in the attic "to administer the drugs that turned her from one fairy-tale into another, into sleeping-beauty instead of beauty-and-beast" (1983: 237). She strays from the path, choosing the pleasure principle over the reality principle, choosing what is pleasurable and sensual over duty and responsibility. Giving her this choice disrupts the conventions of the fairy tale and maps out another way to view the stories, as a literal way to construct (her)self.

Chapter Two

A POLITICAL ALLEGORY



SHAME offers, albeit deliberately, a fragmented reality of Pakistan. Previously, he engaged with a similar project of re-writing the history of an undivided India in *Midnight's Children*. Both novels share certain common features. Catherine Cundy contends:

As with Rushdie's other fictional enterprises, it is a case of content dictating form. The nature of his arguments demands representation and explication through forms which display a corresponding tone, whether of chaos, confusion, fantasy, or moral or political didacticism. Rushdie desires to tell a cautionary tale about the Pakistani elite in *Shame* – a tale that demonstrates the numerous ills bred by oppression and in which violence and corruption gain their just rewards – and it is this internal compulsion that contributes to the impression of the text as closed, bearing a predetermined argument. (44)

I think Cundy is right in her assessment that Rushdie's *Shame* is a darker book because it deals with a very dark place called Pakistan. The question of a more compassionate or complex representation does not arise, for the "content" is dictating the way the story must be told. It is instances such as these when the text must become a site of inundation by incorporating particular aspects of Pakistani history, especially the instances that might complicate this reductive view of Pakistan by the writer and the critic alike.

The need to inundate works about the Islamic periphery is even more urgent now, in the context of European and American Islamophobia. While analysing the archetypal roots of the names of the main characters, Brennan suggests that Raza Hyder, the dictator in the story, besides being the thinly-disguised comic version of the real dictator General Zia-ul-Haq, has a compound name sharing attributes of two important terms from the Indian History. Thus, *Raza* an alternate form of 'raja' suggesting the British Raj that ruled India from 1858 to 1947. And *Hyder* Ali, the infamous ruler of Mysore, a freebooter from the South. In this passage, a character's first name, Raza, which is a Persian name and has no linguistic relationship to Sanskrit Raja – they could not even be cognates and have never been known be cognates – are merged and extended to suggest roots in the British Raj. On the other hand, Hyder Ali, considered a hero by the Indian Muslims for his long fight against

the British, is converted from a native hero into someone whom the British see as a freebooter, hence privileging metropolitan history over the history of the periphery. Eminent critique Shamsad Mortuza aptly says –

What could have been a revenge tragedy becomes a black comedy in the Rushdiean treatment. Rushdie's attempts to labour to grab the real world in the fictional attire finally start making sense. We identify Raza Hyder as President Ziaul Haq, Isky Harappa as Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, Arjumand as Benazir. Before we start boasting of our findings, Rushdie shrewdly eschews any such resemblance: "The country in this story is not Pakistan, or not quite..." (2001: 115)

In the case of *Shame*, most critics accept Rushdie's representation of Pakistan without question and extrapolate from that assumed truth. Almost all of them tend to think that it is the place – Pakistan – that imposes the style of writing and narrative techniques adopted by Rushdie while writing *Shame*. Hence, *Shame* is read as a form of mimetic fiction that uses fantasy, satire, and grotesquery in coming to terms with a real life situation – its raw materials – so bizarre that it could, in Rushdie's words, "break a writer's heart" (1983: 68). The dark humour and grotesque fictional world of *Shame*, in fact, becomes a much gentler representation than the real life Pakistan. To inundate this broad critical consensus, one must first recognise the two sources of the consensus: the text and Rushdie's own words about the text. One can read the text to assess the validity of the reading, but it is also useful to trace Rushdie's statements outside the text.

Rushdie's narrator confronts the problem of female subjection within his creation of the story. As a creator he does not know how much control he has over his own perceptions, and his own interpretation of what a story *should be*. Rushdie's narrator provides some insight into the problem of his own storytelling. The narrator acknowledges that even he was not ready for the amount of control that the women were capable of obtaining. But nonetheless they have. In the beginning of the story Sufiya was a minor disruption who was magically removed. She has now begun to take over the tale as it were. So, "Who is Sufiya Zinobia?"

Sufiya Zinobia's creation is no less curious than Omar Shakil's. She is a character who is shrouded in the ambiguous mystery of Rushdie's magical realist technique. It is this mystery that has caused many critics to question her role in the text. However, it is necessary to examine Sufiya's "fairy tale" existence (her relationship to the other characters) as well as her development as a character (her relationship with the narrator).

Sufiya is a member of the politically powerful Hyder family. She was supposed to be the reincarnation of the couple's son that was stillborn years earlier, so when they discovered her sex, they were dissatisfied at the thought of this female child who should have been a male. Sufiya, "they say" was blushing the day she was born, as if she knew the inevitability of the shame which surrounded her very being. It is necessary to compare this acceptance of shame to Omar who chooses to ignore his own shameful manifestation and exists "on the periphery," always knowing that he is capable of crossing over things but never taking the chance. Sufiya does not have the luxury of choice. Her shame is revealed clearly, for all to see. But Sufiya's shame does not end with her sex; it begins with it. Sufiya magically becomes the fury of all of the shame surrounding her. It is not her own being that is shameful but the creation of the myth of shame which those around her participate in. When the two-month old Sufiya contracts a fever, her mother immediately assumes (or creates?) the worst scenario for the outcome of her child, the narrator explains:

Bilquis, rendering hair and sari with equal passion, was heard to utter a mysterious sentence: 'It's a judgment,' she cried beside her daughter's bed. Despairing of military and civilian doctors she turned to a local Hakim who prepared an expensive liquid distilled from cactus roots, ivory dust and parrot feathers, which saved the girl's life but which (as the medicine man had warned) had the effect of slowing her down for the rest of her years, because the unfortunate side-effect of a potion so filled with elements of longevity was to retard the progress of time inside the body of anyone to whom it was given. (1983: 100)

So this is what becomes of Sufiya Zinobia. Because she was named a source of shame, the myth continues and it grows within her. It becomes her. She embodies the nature – the very essence of shame, and her path of destruction is dangerously

close. Sufiya begins to commit heinous crimes but remains unaware of her involvement in them. At the age of five she is found in the middle of the night at her neighbour's chicken coup where she has twisted the necks of dozens of chicken. And later, after her marriage to her "would-be" saviour, Omar Shakil, she kills four boys in the same manner as the chickens after having intercourse with each of them.

Rani, Bilkis and Naveed Hyder can be understood as the perfect sculptures effected by patriarchy. Rani, wife of Iskandar Harappa and mother of Arjumand, is a 'real woman', or what a woman should be like. She is brought up in the perverted dormitory of Bariamma and then married to a well-known playboy and gay named Iskander Harappa. She stopped complaining after the first sentence uttered by her husband in the bride chamber: "Get one thing clear, you don't pick and choose my friends" (1983: 80).

Throughout her life, she was deprived of her husband's company and city life. She was thrown into the distant village of Mohenjo after the birth of her first and only daughter Arjumand and kept there until death. She was used shamefully whenever her husband and her daughter needed her. Though she is a trophy-wife, she has to suffer six years of being homebound for her husband's wrong political actions. She is such a passive observer that she only sees all the misdeeds of her husband and swallows all of them. Her vocal expressions against all those misdeeds were portrayed only through eighteen shawls during those long six years of being homebound. She is so muffled that she could not complain even though she sees the evidence of Iskandar's murder.

Another ISA is Bilkis Hyder. Bilkis learned, practised and achieved some dreamy notions of and about life. Movies of her father's theatre and Kemal also are responsible for making this fairytale land in her. She used to think of herself as queen or a princess and followed the actress's movement in movies and practised it literally and ritualistically. Her father Kemal also spoiled this motherless daughter out of affection: "Why do you lift your hand, daughter? A princess does not serve" (59)

And when the bomb blasted, her father died; she started walking all naked through the street among hundreds of people. She was only unconsciously conscious about 'dupatta'. Her dupatta was there around her neck protecting, ironically, her *izzat* or honour. Later she could not adjust in Bariamma's place for long because of her distinct, already matured or seasoned ISA about the first son. She was hunted by shame; the ISA at the end of her life again. She started wearing veil always even in domestic quarters.

Naveed Hyder, *Good News Hyder*, is the typical ancient ISA of women. The uprising and high number of maternal production of her is just the example of this. In fact, *Shame* is ruled by three male gazes. The author is male. He has created all her female characters. If he does not want to support patriarchy or if he does not want to act as a feminist, his phallogocentric language, knowledge and the lack of female experience would not be supportive enough for his intention.

As it is a postcolonial fiction, the risk of the target reader is male. Because, historically speaking, females were barely educated in that very period. Even the female characters here in the novel are not educated. Farah and Arjumand are the only literate and described as ambitious girls.

These ISAs about women, such as what a woman should be like or how a woman should behave, are influenced by two most important characters of *Shame*. Arjumand, the virgin iron pant, always avoided femininity in her. She always cross-dressed, cut her hair short and did not wear any jewellery. She followed and practised boyish manners and attitude. When she went to boarding school, ironically some other girls fell in love with her. The craziest one was kidnapped by local boys when she became habituated to wait for Arjumand at a shop.

She always participated in political activities with her father. Whenever the risk of assault came while visiting fields, she answered with her keen marshal art. The boys or group subjected to this marshal art learned a lesson always. So her father, Iskandar

Harappa never had to worry about her only daughter. He never entered her territory with do's and don'ts instead let her be what she wanted to be.

She breaks all the notions of girly attitude finally when she started pursued the soldiers physically and psychologically when she and her mother were homebound at Mohenjo. Insult was a frequent phenomenon for her:

'This woman's body,' she told her father on the day she became a grown woman, 'it brings a person nothing but babies, pinches and shame.' (107)

Sufiya Zinobiya, daughter of Bilkis and Raza, and the heroine of *Shame*, is the sole liberated character of all those man-made ISAs. She was extremely mature after the very birth of her own self. She was supposed to be a boy but just because of her gender change, she became the shame of her mother and bore the blush in herself via the influence of her mother. However, she breaks the chain of ISA from over her by behaving like a child. Her mental maturity is three-year-old when her body is twelve.

What forces moved that sleeping three-year-old mind in its twelve-year-old body to order an all-out assault upon feathered turkey-cocks and hens? (139)

Sufiya Zinobia, the wrong miracle, had torn off two hundred and eighteen turkeys' heads and then reached down deep into their bodies to draw their guts up through their necks with her weapon – her hands, while she was sleepwalking. Her brain was asleep only in parts, and was called into action through the agency of the external senses, owing to some peculiar cause – this could have been a word pronounced, a thought, or picture lingering dormant in one of her cells of memory. This hypnotic state became a life-parody with Omar's profession but what is 'wrong' with Sufiya?

Another case of breaking the ISA about being a universal 'woman' or 'feminine' is shown at the wedding of Sufiya's sister. Her too-sensitive spirit felt shame of her parents because her sister breaks the ISA of being a good bride and marry the person

the parents selected rather she physically met with Talvar Ulhaq and chose him to marry while she engaged with Haroun Harappa. Sufiya's excessive shame made her a racist. She had grabbed captain Talvar Ulhaq by the head and began to twist, to twist so hard that he screamed at the top of his voice, because his neck was on the point of snapping like a straw.

She got revenge over her husband for staying with Shahbanou and not to play with her as a wife. She can't work out that she is a wife and has her own husband. She went out of home and had sex with four adolescent males and then wrenched off their necks. By doing this act of violence, she breaks the ISA of women as the suppressed one and incapable of doing revenge and violence.

The concept of marriage is another ISA in this subcontinent, which is reflected in *Mame*. Marriage is in culture to host cases of love but to most, it brings benefits. We see that marriage with benefits in the cases of Bilquis-Raja and Rani-Iskandar. Naveed Hyder and Haroun Harappa were engaged to do another marriage with benefits but later that engagement was not brought under wedlock.

Now, benefits have many faces: life security, financial solvency, social status and so on. Especially for Bilquis, it was out of love and sympathy for Raja Hyder the army person. Rani Hyder and Iskandar Harappa's marriage was just a social bonding and benefits for both the families. Naveed Hyder and Haroun Harappa's engagement was not for the benefit of their families. The marriage was for a chance for Raja to improve his career under Harappa's uncle and prime minister.

Beside Bilkis' daydream of being a queen – a belief nurtured and cherished in the environment of her father's house and by her father mostly, Mahmoud the Woman. This is how she *becomes* a woman, as she is the subject of patriarchal ISA. Suddenly the castle of dream tumbles down with the advent of reality. Rushdie mockingly criticises and portrayed the woman in colonial set up. His characters are bound to face the problem with their identity and existence – what is alluded between fact and

fiction. Clarification started working well in this phenomenon of their characters. But, as always, unexpected and contrary ways have dimensions and diversity.

Readers receive the sense of Orientalism in Omar's view of life especially about his root. Omar's three mothers never disclosed the name and identity of his biological father, neither does he gets to call anyone as father. Mystery heightens in the case that he also does not know which one of the three Shakil sisters is his biological mother. This history of his rootlessness becomes the story for others and haunts him throughout his entire life. He adopted the rootlessness which is common to the 'fair sex' of the subcontinent as they have to lead the life of a nomad leaving their parental resident and going onto the husband's without, however, owning/possessing any wealth or property to call their won. Omar is made a man who is without the knowledge of his ancestry.

As we have noted above, Rushdie lived only very briefly in Pakistan and everything he had had to say about that country by 1983, in *Shame*, expressed his repulsion. The failure of the state of Pakistan has a domestic allegory in the squabble between two powerful families, only thinly disguised to represent that of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto (Iskander Harrappa) and of Zia ul-Haq (Raza Hyder). But the force of Rushdie's critique of Pakistan as an oppressive and authoritarian society is focused on the treatment of women. However, let us not forget that the author is an expatriate and expressing his ideologies in English before all else. Rushdie says about his hero and maybe his own alter ego:

Outsider! Trespasser! You have no right to this subject! ... I know: nobody ever arrested me. Nor are they ever likely to. Poacher! Pirate! We reject your authority. We know you, with your foreign language wrapped around you like a flag: speaking about us in your forked tongue, what can you tell but lies? I reply with more question: is history to be considered the property of the participants solely? In what courts are such claims staked, what boundary commissions map out the territories? (1983: 28)

Rushdie's argument suggests a gendered sense of 'honour', a public sense in which men fraudulently disguise cynicism by investing honour in the conduct of women, in

the process dictating to them, while conducting themselves with cruelty and self-indulgence. Women, who are required to submit to what has been invested in them and are made inadequate by this submission, feel shame. Sufiya Zenobia cannot prevent herself blushing for shame, and is a literal representation of this gendered condition, which is attenuated further by making her retarded by illness to a permanent mental age of a six-year-old. So her blushes, in other words, are not from a heightened moral sense but the metaphorical conditioning of her gender.

Rushdie's argument, humiliation and shame will inevitably lead to violence, which says much about the oppression of women in Pakistan (and Islam) as about the whole society. It is Sufiya who demonstrates this argument. The first occasion is when she tears off the heads of 218 turkeys, 'then reached down into their bodies to pull their guts up through their necks'. Later, in the novel's closing stages, she fulfils what this early outburst of prodigious violence promises. She tempts four nameless men to have sex with her, inverting the right of Muslim men to take four wives and then pulls their heads off:

Shame walks the streets of night. In the slums four youths are transfixed by those appalling eyes, whose deadly yellow fire blows like a wind through the lattice-work of the veil. They follow her to the rubbish-dump of doom, rats to her piper, automata dancing in the all-consuming light from the black-veiled eyes. Down she lies... Four husbands come and go. Four of them in and out, and then her hands reach for the first boy's neck. The others stand still and wait their turn. (1983: 219)

The position of the author as the subject is the crux of Rushdie's necessity for off-centering. The Narrator highlights this exploration telling a story about a country that is not "Pakistan, or not quite". The narrator explains that, "There are two countries, real and fictional, occupying the same space. My story, my fictional country exists, like myself, at light angle to reality. I have found this off-centering to be necessary; but its value is, of course, open to debate. My view is that I am not writing only about Pakistan (22)". Rushdie frequently uses the narrator's voice to defend his message. His defence is so convincing that it seems that Rushdie's narrator could be speaking directly to the critics who question his methods of off-centering. He acknowledges the "off-centering" as necessity, because of the

inevitability of the “missing bits”. So he chooses to tell many stories, and question each of them. Throughout *Shame* readers will be introduced to multiple stories, all of

In *Shame* Rushdie has presented a fictional country that is based on Pakistan – but it is also Pakistan. Some authors use obscure metaphors in their fiction writing so that readers may participate in a journey of discovery. Many of Rushdie’s metaphors are far from obscure. He insists that readers re-evaluate what they have already known to be true. This adds to the critical attacks surrounding his work and consequently, to the defensive tone of the narrators question in *Shame*, “Who commandeered the job of rewriting history?” (86) The novel itself is a rewriting of history, and many critics struggle with whose history Rushdie is telling. Rushdie is writing as a “dual immigrant”. His narrator lives in London he and is telling the story of a “country that is not Pakistan – or not quite,” because he does not know if he has the right to tell the stories. His ambiguous authorship becomes problematic and many critics wonder what perspective he is writing from. In the first place Indians don’t figure in these novels, except as that familiar sea of dark faces, the sea of humanity beating against the ubiquitous citadel’s of the white man’s presence. This highlights the problem of Rushdie’s inclusion in the canon of postcolonial literature as well as the problem of ambivalent authorship. The author’s questioning of all Truths rejects a cohesive national identity and establishes his work as “counter-canonical”. As a member of this counter-canon, Rushdie is on the outside again, and his status as the teller of stories is questioned because he is viewed as a member of the western world looking back at his homeland. The counter-canon does not exist only in the realm of literary criticism. Rushdie’s relentless questioning of Truth extends outward to the problems of the postcolonial nation and his responsibility as the subject and/or the subjected.

Aime Cesaire addresses this view of “the other” in a book entitled *Discourse on Colonialism*. He proposed that the only history is white and that the only ethnography is white. It is the West that studies the ethnography of the others and not the other way round. Although Cesaire’s book was published in 1972 when much of the world was politically controlled by Western powers, the postcolonial nation still suffers

beneath the weight of its former colonised state of being. There is still a fear of the “ubiquitous white man’s presence”. Some believe that Rushdie’s counter canonical style is reinforcing the patriarchal control, and that his retelling of history is a promulgation of the myth rather than a criticism of it. However, Rushdie’s self-reflexive narrator tells the stories of “the other”. He allows room for these stories to emerge. The narrator’s story necessitates the Truth of the subplot over the plot, or “the other” over the West. The narrator is emblematic of the author’s struggle to uncover an identity that is unimpeded by the dominant beliefs and myths which have distorted a solid perception of reality. ‘Shame’ – the collective shame of the subcontinent – is embodied by the three mothers of Omar: Chunni, Munni and Bunni, who are woven into three syllables *shin re mim* embodying ‘sharam’, i.e., shame. Rushdie’s undertone goes as far as the three countries Bangladesh, India and Pakistan share common history being a colony and then a tumultuous history of political segregation. Omar’s three mothers sharing the common dwelling and connecting human agency with each other in avid symmetry creates a metaphor for these three nations that shared common platform and predicament prior to 1947.

Chapter Three

A STORY OF A WOMAN



THE clash of ideological conviction and intellectual modernism was exposed to larger audiences upon the release of the novel *The Satanic Verses*. Sara Mainland says that *The Satanic Verses* resulted in Rushdie being “handcuffed to history with a price on his head”. Ironically the tyrant “history,” does keep him handcuffed and submissive, even fearful of his life. Because of the fragmented stories which serve as metaphors, *Shame* could be considered the blasphemous predecessor of the notorious novel, but it is much less controversial on the surface. Although Rushdie uses postmodern techniques to create an incredibly cynical environment, it is less offensive than a rewriting of the Qu’ran. But both novels are questioning the power history has in forming our present realities. Ultimately, one could hope that as the myth of the control of history over present reality floats away there is room for something else to emerge, and it becomes evident throughout the text that the story which should be told is the story of the women. The oppression of the postcolonial nation as a whole is evidenced through the emergence of these stories, and Rushdie’s narrator recognises the importance of telling them:

I hope it goes without saying that not all women are crushed by any system, no matter how oppressive. It is commonly and, I believe, accurately said of Pakistan that her women are much more impressive than her men.. .their chains, nevertheless, are no fictions. They exist. And they are getting heavier. *If you hold down one thing you hold down the adjoining*. In the end, though, it all blows up in your face (181).

Although the narrator expresses the desire to explore female subjectivity, many critics have debated whether the author was successful in his illustration of the feminine.

First of all, the term *Sharam*, a word from Urdu, is clearly posited as a term the “nuances” of which cannot really be grasped through a translation, for “shame” is, after all, a “paltry” translation. More important, the philosophical paradigm on which this almost untranslatable term is projected is that of Manichean aesthetics. The term as a social construct becomes an ontological condition reducible only with reference to its exact philosophical other – shamelessness – thus easily necessitating the two terms as diametrically opposed. What becomes clear through this rendering of the

term “shame” is that there is no grey area, no ambivalence or overlap. One could either be full of shame, or shameless; there is no space between these poles.

This binary view also surfaces in explaining the question of women’s representation in *Shame*. To most of the critics, Rushdie happens to be the champion of Third-World women, for his texts are fraught with stories of women dealing with their “repressed” lives within the postcolonial world. These images are clearly foregrounded in *Shame*. I maintain that the question of women in Rushdie cannot be dealt with without dealing with what most of his texts elide, or do not highlight.

The representation of the women in *Shame* is discussed frequently among scholars. Some critics claim that Rushdie portrays an empowering female; others believe his female characters are stereotypical and counterproductive to the feminist project. Nearly all of the criticism involves Rushdie’s postmodern style of writing. It assesses its effectiveness in promoting feminism, just as it has been used to determine his perceptions of postcolonial identity formation. The two are certainly not mutually exclusive. His stylistic endeavours inform the ways in which his texts are read. In Marguerite Alexander’s book, *Flights from Realism*, she argues that Rushdie’s attempts at refiguring the commonly accepted stories are incredibly important because they offer numerous views of history and provide a place for those who previously had no voice. She says this is because “there is a greater awareness of the unreliability of all narratives, whether purporting to be fact or fiction, and a corresponding impulse to expose the process by which narratives are made. They share an unwillingness to attribute too much to individuals, but instead examine the forces which shape the terms of individual action” (127). Alexander’s assertion is that the postmodern project offers new voices to an old construction of history. But some feminist critics disagree with Rushdie’s fantasy world; they believe that because it is not grounded in reality, there is little room for the feminist project to grow.

This tension of imbalance has roots in the concept of the Male Gaze – an aspect of power inequality as shown with certain twists in *Shame*. Gaze theory includes not only the suggestion that women on film and on stage typically are represented from

the perspective of the male spectator but also the counter-proposition that female spectators possess the potential to look in a way different from their male peers. There is debate as to how and when female spectators are enabled to look differently and thus to realise a subjectivity of their own. The theory suggests that male gaze denies women the human agency, relegating them to the status of objects. Hence, the woman reader and the woman viewer *must* experience the text's narrative secondarily, by identifying with a man's perspective.

In feminist theory, the male gaze expresses an asymmetric (unequal) power relationship, between the viewer and viewed, gazer and gazed, i.e. man imposes his *unwanted* (objectifying) gaze upon woman. Second Wave feminists argue that whether or not women welcome the gaze, they might merely be conforming to the hegemonic norms established to benefit the interests of men – thus underscoring *the power* of the male gaze to reduce a person (man or woman) to an object.

In Rushdie's *Shame*, Sufiya is made as a debased character – facing social pressures as being mentally naïve from her start. So, what we find her doing cannot be appreciated precisely because she is hardly ever in a decisive and confident position. The politics of the author is that Sufiya performs the acts of violence in her unconscious feats. Not everyone is realistic – that is understandable, if not acceptable. However, trying to posit equality through violence imbalances the whole of Sufiya's vocation, and sadly, all her sufferings. In women's collective history, this is not just Sufiya. The history of suffering is muffled through an act that society looks down upon. Logically, no one comes to Sufiya's rescue. The reader is busy looking at her making love to adolescents or tearing turkey heads.

Gazing and seeing someone gaze upon another provides us with a lot of information about our relationship to the subjects, or the relationships between the subjects upon whom we gaze, or the situation in which the subjects are doing the gazing. The mutuality of the gaze can reflect power structure, or the nature of a relationship between the subjects. Although it may appear that "gaze" is merely looking at, it may signify a psychological relationship of power. Here the gazer is superior to the object

of the gaze. This form of gaze can be the sexual gaze by a man towards a woman, or the gazing of an image of a woman in some text or in the media. This harks back to binaries of male/active, female/passive.

From the male perspective, man possesses a gaze because he is a man, whereas, a woman has a gaze *only* when she assumes the male gazer role, when she objectifies others by gazing at them like a man. However, Sufiya establishes a different grammar of her own theory of gaze. This does not conform, nor does it need to, to the established diction of the male gaze prevalent in her society. She twists the neck of her brother-in-law at a social gathering. She kills the four adolescents with whom she experienced physical pleasure. Her language is vital – violent too. The *sharia* of Islam that permits polygamy for men is apt to negate the same position in case of women. Shamsad Mortuza finds out obvious connotations of the Islamic *sharia* being reversed:

Sufiya... takes four men at a time before killing as vindication for her husband's illicit affair with her old maid. The use of "four" distantly connotes the provision of marrying four women under Sharia laws. The same religious implication is echoed in the very name: Sufiya echoes the Sufi sect of Islam. Everything in and about Sufiya poses threats to the existing order, the Bethlehem of traditional values created over the years by the male domain and extremities of religion. (2001: 113-4)

How tragic is it for the character that the readers cannot concentrate on her personal suffering but are constantly reminded of the author's agenda! However, marriage is shown a mystery to Sufiya. Relation is an unconquered land to her. This is no subaltern looking for power in silences or inactions. Sufiya's power is in taking control over it and then playing the destructive role on/with it. As long as women are used to being treated like objects, it is okay for men to be with a tunnel vision. But when the male gender gets a little taste of their own medicine, cry foul. It is so scary to them because it undermines the psychological mind control they have implicitly assumed was their right as males. However, questions remains if Sufiya can be credited for her acts of madness that has method targeted to oust the patriarchy.

Male gaze in relation to feminist theory presents asymmetrical gaze as a means of exhibiting an asymmetrical power relationship, that is, the male gazing upon a female renders the female having an unwanted gaze upon her. However, this may not necessarily be the case; many societies have women who enjoy being gazed upon, models and beauty pageants in Western society for example, have women who are willing to be gazed upon. Rushdie is aware of this culture and makes use of this in his own way. Rani Harappa and Navid Hayder of different generations show us a growing tendency of favouring the male gaze. In *Mohenjo*, Rani's discovery and acknowledgement of her faults pave the ways for shame and guilt that ISAs of the male dominated society impose at will.

The gaze can be characterised by who is doing the looking. Arguably, *Shame* accounts for at least four types of gaze. Firstly, the spectators gaze: the spectator who is viewing the text. This is often us, the reader of a certain text. We gaze upon different characters from the both gendered points-of-view. A female reader would gaze upon Omar in his adolescence, upon Iskander and Omar when they are together; a male reader would linger on three Shakil sisters when they fantasize, Bilquis during her naked walk in public and also the episodes in Bariamma's dwelling. Secondly, there is intra-diegetic gaze, where one person depicted in the text is looking at another person or object in the text. This is shown in the cases of Sufiya and Rani. Omar too:

... the women of the country began marching against God... they needed careful handling. So he trod cautiously, even though... he should strip the whores naked and hang them from all available tress. (1983: 249)

Thirdly, there is extra-diegetic gaze, where the person depicted in the text looks at the spectator, such as an aside, or an acknowledgement of the fourth wall. Omar's commentaries and statements directed to the readers allow him a power position. We are time again reminded by Rushdie that *Shame's* elements parallels that of a metafiction. Omar's advantage in talking to the readers is a surprising power position

from that angle. And finally there is Rushdie's 'camera gaze' – the gaze of the author / director, i.e., his agenda.

Initially, Sufiya is the shame of her mother. She is the shame of not being the right sex, of not being the expected son for their parents. After a short period of shouting at hospital over confusion that Raza and Bilquis's newborn baby could be a son, Raza comes to know that it is a daughter – the miracle of life for Bilquis, which went wrong. The baby is ashamed for her parents. She was too easily ashamed at her being the wrong sex.

And at this point – when her parents had to admit the immutability of her gender, to submit, as faith demands, to God; at this very instant the extremely new and soporific being in Raza's arms began – it's true! – to blush. (1983: 90)

Bilquis admits in her own voice even when Sufiya is just two years: "I must accept it: she is my shame." Sufiya is the only pure and clean (*paké*) in the midst of a dirty world because she was caught by an idiotic fever and became idiot after that. And idiots are innocent by definition. (1983: 120)

Sufiya blushed for the first time at her own birth for being the "wrong miracle". Ten years later she blushed again tremendously at her family surroundings for being loved by elders. The ancient lady of the family find her lips had been mildly burned by a sudden rush heat to Sufiya's cheek while she intended to kiss Sufiya. Sufiya got ashamed for two reasons – when her existence got noticed by others or when she was loved, and also when she felt ashamed for others. At her birth she blushed because she felt her mother's shame. And as she was growing up, she loved to be loved and became red when she was loved. Bilquis, her mother, says, "Anyone puts eyes on her or tells her two words and she goes red, red like a chilli!" (1983: 121)

The idiotic brain fever makes Sufiya such an idiot that she preternaturally receptive to all sorts of things that float around in the ether. She finds herself like a sponge, a host of unfelt feelings, which are floating around her. These unfelt feelings are the

emotions mostly embarrassment – shame of the shameless world – that should have been felt, but were not. As she was host of all those unfeeling feelings, i.e., shame, she was named ‘shame’.

Being a miracle-gone-wrong, Sufiya, also known as Shame (1983: 197), had discovered in her unconscious self the hidden path that links *sharam* to violence. In her 12 years, she felt shame for her mother again who was not being treated as a beloved wife. Bilquis was irritated with turkeys of Pinkie but Raza did not take any step for soothing the irritation, rather his silences supported Pinkie. Sufiya felt this humiliation of her mother which turned out by the act of violence of tearing off two hundred and eighteen turkey heads and then reached down into their bodies to draw their guts up through their necks with her tiny and weapon-less hand.

She felt the shame of her family again when her sister Good News Hyder being engaged to Haroun for marriage got physically attached to Police Captain Talvar and turned down her family’s choice Haroun at the wedding day. As Sufiya linked up her feeling of shame and embarrassment to violence unconsciously, she twisted the head of Talvar very violently.

Later, Sufiya / Shame felt shame for not having conjugal ties as husband-wife with Omar and also for her husband’s deeds. She goes out wildly in the dark with veil over her and makes love to four adolescent boys only to sever their heads soon after.

Sufiya is not in the centre of the novel, though she is in the main plot and our protagonist. She is marginalised where others are in the centre relishing attention. Her being the subject of marginalisation started since her birth by being the wrong sex. And her roaming through the isles of periphery is strengthened by her being caught with a brain fever at the age of two. Though she shook off the fever by ayurvedic medicine, this drug engendered another illness in her – a psychological bout. It slowed her mental age down. She started growing up physically in a normal pace but the psychological bent of her mind grew in slow order. She finally became a

retarded child with a mature body. She stayed as her family's shame made into flesh and blood. She always received the least of care and attention and was treated as a miracle-went-wrong especially by her own mother. Everyone ruled around her and she is marginalised ultimately as intending to coming into the centre is human nature, retarded repressed Sufiya also wanted to come into the centre unconsciously. That's why at her primary age, she got blushed after being looked at/noticed and loved. Later her repressed content of her mind unleashes through acts of violence and incest.

Sufiya who takes responsibility of the world's unfelt shame and blushed on behalf of them. These activities of her are psychosomatic events defined as the workings of mind over matter. (1983: 123)

Shame is considered one aspect of socialisation in many societies. Shame is enshrouded in legal precedent as a pillar of punishment and ostensible correction. Shame has been linked to narcissism in the psychoanalytic literature. It is one of the most intense emotions. The individual experiencing shame may feel totally despicable, worthless and feel that there is no redemption. In addition, shame is often seen in victims of child neglect, child abuse and a host of other crimes against children who are coming in terms with their 'mirror stage' of growth.

Jacques Lacan argued that the concept of the gaze is important in his 'mirror stage' of infantile psychological development; children gaze at a mirror image of themselves (a twin sibling might function as the mirror-image), and use that image to co-ordinate their physical movements. He linked the concept of the gaze to the development of individual human agency. One of Freud's quote runs like "The aggressive impulses of little girls leave nothing to be desired in the way of abundance and violence." Sufiya, for so long burdened with being a miracle-gone-wrong, a family's shame made public, had discovered in her unconscious self the 'hidden path that linked sharam to violence'. When she got back to consciousness, seeing the devastation around her, she faints echoing her mother on that far-off day when Bilquis found herself naked in the crowd and passed out cold for shame. Now the reason of her doing this violence can be her trial, like a good daughter, to rid of her mother of the gobbler plague or the proud outrage of her father; Raja Hyder ought to have felt, but

refused to do so, preferring to make allowances for Pinkie. Whatever the reason can be, as a daughter she breaks all the ISA about a woman with the acts of violence.

Rushdie's women in *Shame* are not mere ciphers, though they are given a problematic agency. The novel's 'peripheral hero' has three mothers: three sisters who had spent their lives in a huge blank-walled house shut off from the outside world. The house is a metaphor, no doubt, for the detention of women in the medieval form of Islam which Rushdie ascribes to the idea of Pakistan. The house is called Nishapur, the birthplace of the eleventh-century Persian poet Omar Khayyam, and has rambling rooms with forgotten books which, perhaps, represent arrested learning. The three sisters rebel against their incarceration by going to a dance in the British 'lines' and returning with a joint pregnancy, whose outcome is Omar Khayyam Shakil, whose self-indulgence knows no shame. Rani Harrapa, Iskander Harrapa's wife, knits a shawl in which she records her husband's murders. Good News Hyder, Raza Hyder's other daughter, kills herself because she cannot prevent her husband fathering more babies on her. If all these are problematic and, to some extent, tragic forms of agency, it is Sufiya Zenobia who is given its most grotesque form.

Sufiya's humiliation at the hands of men who should have loved her, her father Raza Hyder and her husband Omar Khayyam Shakil, have turned her into a Beast. Rushdie celebrates Sufiya's violence as liberation, or makes Omar Khayyam Shakil ponder along these lines, but the real force behind this figuration of women is not so much to suggest a route to fulfilment, but to issue a warning to the rulers of Pakistan. Out of the encounter of shame and shamelessness will come violence. Not surprisingly, *Shame* was banned in Pakistan, although it was short-listed for the Booker Prize.

Women as Matriarchs

In *Shame*, Rushdie depicts Bariamma as the matriarchs of their families. Although this may seem odd in such a male-dominated society, in southern India matriarchy is actually a common family organisation, and women even own property jointly with men. Historical records dating back to early south Indian people frequently include

metronyms, perhaps signifying a lingering influence of the old Dravidian mother right in an otherwise patrilineal ordering of society.

As Mothers

Due to Hinduism's strong influence in Indian society, a woman's foremost role in life is becoming a mother; moreover, her value depends upon her ability to give birth to sons. Any power she wields comes from her ability to procreate, not from her dominance over men. An example of this attitude is evidenced in *Shame* when Bilquis Hyder laments over her inability to produce a male child: "He wanted a hero of a son; I gave him an idiot female instead . . . I must accept it: she is my shame." (1983: 101).

Rushdie also toys with the nature of mother-son relationships in Indian and Pakistani society, emphasising the perversion of their closeness. In the novel, for example, the three Shakil mothers dote over their only son Omar, keeping him "excluded from human society by [their] strange resolve" (1983: 29). Furthermore, the stereotypical mother resents her son's new wife for monopolising his affection and tries to disrupt any opportunities for intimacy in the new marriage. Bariamma's nocturnal segregation of the married couples in *Shame* exemplifies this unusual attachment.

As Wives

According to J.P. Singh in her book *The Indian Woman: Myth and Reality*, one of the most notable developments of recent times has been "finding refuge in the age-old Indian wisdom: for the most part ignore your husband. Live your life as if he were not there". Arranged marriages necessitated such sentiment, especially in order to withstand a husband's physical abuse, cruelty, or apathy. Rani Harappa privately deals with her husband's secret homosexual liaisons in the face of Iskander's long absences and sexual disinterest.

Indian and Pakistani wives also become part of their husband's family when they marry; in this arrangement, wives must obey the older women in the family and comply with all their demands. Living under the matriarchal rule of Bariamma, Rushdie writes that Bilquis Hyder "was given more than her fair share of household

duties and also slightly more than her fair share of the rough edge of Bariamma's tongue".

As National Figures

As noted in the book *Women and Politics in Islam*, which covers the trial of Benazir Bhutto, the Quranic stand on women leaders is in staunch opposition: "A nation that appoints a woman as its ruler shall never prosper" says the Bukhari commentary on the Quran. Yet a number of women have attained high political positions in both Pakistan and India. Benazir Bhutto, former Prime Minister of Pakistan, is the model for the character Arjumand "the Virgin Ironpants" Harappa in *Shame*. Although Rushdie portrays her as a woman resentful of her female body – "it brings a person nothing but babies, pinches, and shame", Bhutto herself told to *Newsweek* that it is "the people who resent me [that] do so because I am a woman."

By following her father Zulfikar Ali Bhutto into political leadership, Benazir and her literary counterpart "the Virgin Ironpants" highlight an interesting trend in South Asia politics: the family connection. According to Rozina Visram in her book *Women in India and Pakistan*, the reason women have been able to overcome social obstacles and reach high political offices may be family relationships. Both the prime minister of Sri Lanka and Bangladesh (Sirimavo Bandaranayake and Khaleda Zia, respectively) came to power after the murders of their husbands, for instance.

In Rushdie's *Fury*, the author explores *male* rage through figures of archetypal femininity. The two central tropes in the novel are mythical "Furies" and "living dolls"- either cyborg creations or "real" women dollified and finally murdered by their male lovers. Charting the move from "doll" as representation of the "real" thing to "living women [who] wanted to be doll-like, to cross the frontier and look like toys" (*Fury* 74), Rushdie concludes: "Now the doll was the original, the woman the representation" (74). Does this reversal further reinforce women's positioning as objects, or does Rushdie offer a critique of this objectification of women?

I aim to employ Donna Haraway's reading of the cyborg figure (in *A Manifesto For Cyborgs*) as a revolutionary option for women and confront it with Rushdie's

depiction of female characters in his novel as either embodiments of monstrous fury, or as Goddesses able to assuage male fury by the sheer power of their sexuality. Does Rushdie's tale of cyborg women or women as cyborgs manage to transcend the binarities he sets out in his text? Or are the android women created by the great doll-maker (namely the author), still left straddling the boundary between "monster" and "angel"?

Although the narrator has previously suggested that Omar is the "peripheral hero" of the story he later returns to acknowledge that, "This is a novel about Sufiya Zinobia... or perhaps it would be more accurate, if also more opaque, to say that Sufiya Zinobia is about this novel" (1983: 108). Omar is given the role of the peripheral hero because the novel cannot be about Sufiya Zinobia – or at least the "story" cannot be about Sufiya Zinobia. She is a woman, she is shame. Stories must not be told about shame. The contrary and dependent states of opacity and accuracy are an incredibly important theme within the novel. History which informs our notions of truth is also incapable of allowing the true story to emerge. Sufiya embodies shame because she absorbs the shame which has been imposed upon her. So, "Who is Sufiya Zinobia?" Is she the "hapless devourer of men," is she the weak feeble minded girl magically transformed into the fury of shame? She is both of these things in a sense but for the narrator, the creator of the tale, she has a much larger role. She is "about this novel" in her own opaque way.

Sufiya Zinobia is "the ghost of a story that might have been" she is the "corpse of a murdered girl". Sufiya Zinobia is the creation of a false imposition of history on to the present day reality. The narrator explains that while living in London a tragedy occurred involving a young Pakistani girl and her father. The girl had a relationship with a white boy and when the father found out he murdered her. The narrator discusses his reaction to the crime:

Sufiya Zinobia is the product of creation, but she is a creation of reality. The narrator explains his interpretation of the crime and how it would be viewed from Western eyes, how they would see the "Asian face under the eyes of the foe" and he explains

hat she then becomes Sufiya Zinobia. And consequently becomes “about this novel”. The narrator acknowledges the birth of this character, as one who manifests from reality. He even names the girl “Anahita Muhammad, known as Anna”. The narrator discusses further his creation of Sufiya (or his inability to ignore her?):

She danced behind my eyes, her nature changing each time I glimpsed her: now innocent, now whore, then a third and a fourth thing. But finally she eluded me, she became a ghost, and I realised that in order to write about her, about shame, I would have to go back East, to let the idea breathe its favourite air. Anna, deported, repatriated to a country she had never seen, caught brain-fever and turned into a sort of idiot. (1983: 116)

The narrator has even questioned his own authority; he has explained that he has left his country of birth and is now a dual emigrant who has “learned Pakistan in slices.” He says, “I think what I am confessing is that, however I choose to write about over there, I am forced to reflect that world in fragments of broken mirrors... must reconcile myself to the inevitability of the missing bits” (66). But the fragmented self is not merely a vagrant, or a postmodern obsession with “un-belonging”, it is a longing to re-envision his own interpretations of truth, masculine, though they may be. He understands that he exists on the periphery and that Sufiya has much more “Truth” in her narrative than Omar or even himself. He acknowledges her status to him as “innocent, guilty, whore” because these are each different manifestations of her. Constantly in flux along with history – every moment – new identities – new perceptions.

The narrator is questioning the story of Sufiya Zinobia and the presence of shame within her. Sufiya, the “hapless devourer of men” has become something entirely different. She has become ‘anti myth’ and ‘anti-fairy-story’ because she is forced to be each of these things. Her role is completely contradictory. She is the symbol for shame but simultaneously she is the symbol for a reality which exists outside of the historical imposition of shame onto a culture, and specifically onto women. In the following passage the narrator explores the roots of shame – which have no objective nature; therefore, shame itself is fictitious. Shame is a product of historical myth:

Let me voice my suspicion: the brain-fever that made Sufiya Zinobia preternaturally receptive to all sorts of things that float around in the ether enabled her to absorb, like a sponge, a host of unfelt feelings.

Where do you imagine they go? – I mean emotions that should have been felt, but were not – such as regret for a harsh word, guilt for a crime, embarrassment, propriety, shame? – Imagine shame as a liquid, let's say a sweet fizzy tooth-rotting drink, stored in a vending machine. Push the right button and a cup plops down under a pissing stream of fluid. How to push the button? Nothing to it. Tell a lie, sleep with a white boy, get born the wrong sex... The button pusher does not drink what was ordered; and the fluid of shame spills, spreading in a frothy lake across the floor. (1983: 122)

The shame which has imposed itself upon Sufiya finally results in the murder of Omar. It happened so easily, just with the push of a button. Make a selection – choose a history – but then it chooses you. Sufiya is a product of her historical roots and the narrator's inability to escape his connection to her and to history. The Author, the Narrator and Sufiya, “do not refer purely, and simply, to an actual individual insofar as (they) simultaneously give rise to a variety of egos and a series of subjective positions that individuals of any class may come to occupy” (24). Rushdie's fragmented story allows room for multiple histories to exist in one space, and suggests that the myths of a culture can become “a phantom with one arm lifted in a gesture of farewell”.

The question of women in Rushdie's fiction cannot be studied without measuring the *silences* of his texts. If read within the construct that Rushdie provides us – the images of women in repressed societies – then the results can be totally misleading. One look at the women in *Shame* is enough to prove that not a single one is capable of true agency. The women in *Shame* are in Goontilleke's words “not decisive; they are victims and, except for Rani Harappa, powerless” (63). Similarly, Ahmad captures the image of the female representation in the following passage:

In general, moreover, what we find is a gallery of women who are frigid and desexualized (Arjumand the ‘virgin Ironpnts’), demented and moronic... dulled into nullity (Farrah), driven to despair (Rani, Bilquis) or suicide (Good News Flyder)... throughout, every woman, without

exception, is represented through a system of imageries which is sexually over-determined; the frustration of erotic need, which drives some to frenzy and others to nullity, appears in every case to be the central fact of a woman's existence. (144)

There is something terribly wrong with this representation of the Pakistani woman. In fact, the view that Rushdie is positing is quite alarming, for it elides the agency of more than half the population of Pakistan. Now within the paradigm that Rushdie suggests – the state of women in a repressive society – it might seem possible, but this conclusion can only be reached if one were to believe the Rushdie text as all encompassing and didn't dwell on what the text elides, what it refuses to talk about. We must therefore inundate the text.

The text, for instance, elides the history of the women's movement in Pakistan. Regardless of their limited choices in a male-dominant society, women have contributed substantially in the day-to-day existence of Pakistan. While they may not have the same chances or opportunities that women enjoy in the West, they have made great progress. The women's situation in Pakistan is not a static, fossilised cultural phenomenon, but rather a struggle in flux. *Shame*, of course, takes no account of this, thus petrifying the situation in the imagery of despair, restriction, and total lack of agency.

Chapter Four

CONCLUSION



In 1978, American scholar Edward Said published his influential and controversial book, *Orientalism*. He used the term to describe a pervasive Western tradition, both academic and artistic, of prejudiced outsider interpretations of the East, shaped by the attitudes of European imperialism in the 18th and 19th centuries. Said was critical of both this scholarly tradition and of some modern scholars. In *Shame*, the potential doses of Orientalism come in through abstract and scattered understanding of diverse elements.

Rushdie brings some distinct flavours of Orientalism in the novel and seems to be an avid supporter of it though he is not a Western author. The idea is portrayed strongly with the description and development of three Shakil sisters. As the most important condition of Orientalism, they remain mysterious up to the finishing of the novel. These Shakil sisters are developed as mysterious in their characters and dissolving with one another so intricately that a reader and even the other characters of the novel have tough times identifying them individually. They are weird in manners and in their psychological understanding and perception of the world and worldly matters; their being weird gets disclosure first to the readers when their father is in the deathbed; they dare to ask if he was leaving for them a lot of wealth where in actuality he kicked the bucket with huge debts. Then come their bizarre idea and practice of physical relationship ritual. They preferred to fantasise in the broad daylight in company of each other about those unreal bits and pieces of physical relation.

They love to keep mystery alive and they are fond of peculiarity, which attracts attraction among the people, native and neighbours alike. They celebrate their father's death, avoiding the reality of the pressure of debts and celebrate their most wanted seemingly absurd freedom.

They applaud the chance of getting themselves free with the expression / assertion of lurking physical desire. In the party thrown by them, only the British Sahibs and other prestigious men were invited and entertained by the mountain of food and beverage which remain untouched even after the party. And the only result of the

party was their fatherless first son Omar Khayyam Shakil. Later on their teaching to Omar about shame, for not being ashamed of myth in his life proved to be a real lesson for Omar engendering in him a peculiarity seen never before.

Omar was not being able to know about his father in his 65 years of life. He even did not know who is his biological mother. Even the maid and the servants were in utter confusion. The Shakil sisters were so perfect and rhythmic in predicting and practising child bearing marks and signs that servants could not even guess who really was carrying Omar. However, if we think that for child birth it's hard to fool human eye, a dangerous possibility lurks in the mind. What if all three of them carried babies and killed two of them? The possibility of this assertion does diminish the three sisters as scheming beasts but it also buys them an indemnity under their plan to oust the set norms of the post-colonial times that men brought under their control for another colonial invasion - this time internal. This was the three sister's way of arguing against being doubly colonised.

The mystery of giving birth to another son Babar who is never introduced and kept in touch with Omar is added with this controlled motherhood and mysterious fatherhood. A touch of Orientalism remains with these two sons' self-learning of themselves in the house of totally illiterate people. Only the ancient are literary of their grandfather remains there with the human teacher and helping hand.

These three Shakil sisters and collective mother of our peripheral hero Omar remains mysterious till the end of the novel. Those three old women succeeded in getting their revenge of the murder of their smallest and beloved son Babar though their life-long mystery about the fatherhood of their two sons were revealed to Omar at his hallucination during his malaria.

On the other hand, Orientalism retreated to white women by brown male writer Rushdie. For him, white women are mysterious as we see in typical novels about the sub-continent. Orientalism has been used by Omar when he persuades white women

by offering happiness like Omar's "unspoken promises of the mysteries of the East" (1983: 128).

In an essay on Salman Rushdie's novel *Shame*, Aijaz Ahmad claims the misogyny of Rushdie's representation of women is misogynist because of the way in which the female characters are overwhelmingly characterised by "madness, sexual frenzy, nullity of being, [and] fevers of the brain" in contradistinction to a representation wherein "women are not, in any fundamental sense, mere victims of history; much more centrally, women have survived against very heavy odds and have produced history." (*In Theory*, 150). "There is something fatally wrong with a novel in which virtually every woman," Ahmad continues, "is to be pitied, most are to be laughed at, some are to be feared...but none may be understood in relation to those projects of survival and overcoming which are none other than the production of history itself." (151)

Sympathetic to Ahmad's commentary on the lack of the agency of women in the novel, yet attentive to the way in which *Shame* registers the oppression of women in Pakistan, let us take up the question of what it means to write a feminist national history that acknowledges both the constitutive power of women in producing history, and their marginalisation – as a constituency – from access to privileged ways of producing history.

Shame unfolds, unleashes the Beast onto the shameless world. An interesting interpretation of the worldly-versus-otherworldly structure of this novel would be the interwoven tyrant / democrat, innocence / beastliness, male / female, spiritual (mystic) / atheistic (in case of Omar's three mothers, equalling the satanic) oppositions. These operate on at least in two levels of the novel: on the level of the plot and on the level of the underlying commentary, referring the first level to the otherworldly terrain. Here the tyrant executing the democrat, an opposition that the implied author foregrounds in the Raza Hyder / Iskander Harappa's adversity, turns out to be on a deeper level an opposition of orthodoxy and godless hedonism. The tyrant / democrat opposition can dim the truly devilish espousal of the two former

friends, then enemies. The name of the peripheral hero, Omar Khayyam Shakil, is likewise his three mothers' devilish reversal of the name of the poet renowned for his mystical visions, as he himself not only uses his prodigious mind for ends more dire than creation of verses, but also turns out, on the otherworldly plane, to be the chief agent of evil, the Beast's prey.

Rushdie's fragmented narration is the only way he can present a cohesive picture. It encapsulates the complex identity issues (of the nation and the self) that are dealt with in his texts. His postmodern techniques allow him to question the confines of an historical past and its effect on the present realities. Kathryn Hume defends Rushdie's postmodern perceptions of 'Truth in her article "Taking a Stand While Lacking a Centre: Rushdie's Postmodern Politics" she asserts that "Rushdie is fascinated and appalled by tyrants and tyranny, and has been from the start of his career. As a postmodern writer, however, he finds effective action against tyrants difficult to conceive" (209-210). She goes on to say that "Postmodern humanity is decentred: how can it take a firm stand against tyranny if decentering removes any solid basis for belief in ethics and political position?" So while Rushdie urges his readers to question reality, he must simultaneously acknowledge that he has no solid ground to stand on. Furthermore he must deal with the issue of the tyrant as one which may exist within himself as "re-shaper" and teller of stories. The story of Bilquis was reshaped by other characters who insisted upon a falsely created narrative, but the creation of stories affects the narrator also. Hume points to an extremely effective moment in *Shame* when the narrator explains, "Well, well, I mustn't forget I'm only telling a fairy-story. My dictator will be toppled by goblinish, faerie means. "Makes it pretty easy for you," is the obvious criticism; and I agree, I agree. But add, even if it does sound a little peevish: 'You try and get rid of a dictator some time'" (210). Rushdie's narrator is defending his storytelling method as well as the author, who has been assigned the role of "subject". It is not known who assigned these roles, but it is waiting to be uncovered, somewhere beneath the palimpsest tale. Dictatorship and tyranny are central to the political struggles illustrated within the "fairy story," but the multiple levels of involvement between the narrator of the text and the teller of the story forces readers to question how

many dictators are present. Nonetheless the narrator tells readers the story – as he should.

Rushdie's deliberate exploration of liminality may have blurred the normal categories, dismantled conventional definitions and boundaries of nation-ness and belonging. It may also have deconstructed simple divisions of the masculine and feminine, and thematised subjectivity as enigma. However, we must not overlook the multiple levels of storytelling and metaphor within the text. Most importantly it does not address the creation of Sufiya Zinobia and her relationship with the narrator. Sufiya is representative of stereotypical fear of the patriarchy. This is acknowledged by the narrator himself, but that makes her ability to outlive the confining view of her nature that much more empowering.

Sufiya is a product of fantasy. From Joan Scott's perspective, fantasy is empowerment rather than a subjection of the female or a limiting of the potential. Dayal believes that through the blurring of masculine and feminine divisions Rushdie is disempowering the female, but Scott acknowledges this disempowerment to be true only if, "historical rootedness is seen as a prerequisite for the stability of the subject of feminism, if the existence of feminism is made to depend on some inherent, timeless agency of women" (286). When one takes into account Scott's idea of fantasy as an empowering mechanism, it is necessary to look at Rushdie's project in a different light, with a postmodern slant – of course. Amina Yaquin suggests that Scott's argument offers a valuable contextual read of Rushdie's work. She claims, "It is interesting to juxtapose Scott with a feminist rereading of Rushdie's novels which on the basis of a shared feminism, try to reclaim women's histories from the clutches of the male narrator, particularly in *Shame* without sufficiently allowing for experiential differences to do with geographical context and class" (65). Again, it is necessary to understand the author's struggle: "I have been a swallower of lives; and to know me, just the one of me, you'll have to swallow the lot as well."

The elements of misogyny that so many critics find in Rushdie's texts are actually a postmodern representation of his own struggle with beliefs in the dominant paradigms. *Shame*'s self-reflexive narrator is emblematic of this struggle for identity.

Now that we have finally made it through layer upon layer let us explore the creation of Sufiya Zinobia juxtaposed with the accepted existence of Omar Khyamm Shakil. Through these fictional characters, the narrator is acknowledging that the stories we are often told are no more salient than the ones we try to ignore. The two characters become the primary focus of the novel – while the political upheaval of a country in turmoil encompasses them, the two remain largely unaffected. They become their own story – an unlikely pair thrown together by chance and of course – shame. They are creations of the present historical realities of the “fairy story”. And they are fictions through which the narrator can attempt to assess the only Truth possible.

This vicious portrayal of Sufiya is what Dayal was referring to when he discusses gender issues in *Shame* and the problem of blurring the lines of the feminine and the masculine. The author says that, “Men and women in the Third world invariably seem condemned to a stereotypically feudal, patriarchal, or neocolonialist social structure in which women are subordinated” (48). Aijaz expresses a similar view concerning the nature of Sufiya, he says, “She becomes in this passage then, the oldest of the misogynist myths: the virgin who is really a vampire, the irresistible temptress who seduces men in order to kill them, not an object of male manipulation but a devourer of hapless men” (1468). According to these scholars the characterisations support the dominant beliefs of the controlling forces rather than dispel them. But Sufiya is representative of something beyond myth or stereotype. However, it becomes clear that Sufiya is a manifestation of reality whereas Omar is a peripheral distortion of reality.

Surprisingly, through these fragments and snapshots Rushdie achieves a holistic picture of the time and place in the cultural history of the sub-continent. What is more, he – being in exile – finds his place in it too. So the notorious ‘beast’ as understood by Muslim clerics is after all slouching towards the target Bethlehem:

[Rushdie] bleeds in shame and writes like a shameless writer. The end result is the violent outburst of a migrant writer writing from exile. He hurls his literary cannonballs to augment his place in the canon. The reign of the slouching beast, however rough he is, over Bethlehem is simply a matter of time. (2001: 116)

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