



GROTESQUE WOMEN: FICTIONALIZED WORLD OF SALMAN RUSHDIE'S *SHAME*

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ABSTRACT

This paper encapsulates the representation of women in Salman Rushdie's *Shame*. Salman Rushdie, one of the celebrated post-colonial fictionists, presents grotesque women who are variegated and unique in their nature. Unlike the traditional portrayal, Rushdie resorts to delineating of women as ambitious, bizarre, grotesque and are thoroughly deconstructed to counterweigh the male protagonists and antagonists.

In order to delineate his perception of women, Rushdie creates a stratum of women drawn from different roles of a society. In *Shame* the narrative centres in Pakistan, yet a satirist's version of Peccavistan, a make believe fictional arena, invented by Rushdie. The characters focussed are drawn from a few families of social standing, who are thinly veiled and are recognizable by dwelling themselves in a fictional world which is neither true nor false.

Rushdie undertakes to interweave private and public demeanor of his dramatic persona. Strikingly the parent child relationships are monological. The range of characters: Arjumand, Rani Harappa; Bariamma; three matriarchs, the Shakil sisters; Sufia Zinobia, a monstrous female beast, are the queer creation of Rushdie. They flout the power dynamics of patriarchy and proffer deconstructed women of Salman Rushdie's vision.

Key words: post-colonial, deconstructed, monological, patriarchy

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Shame written as a sequel to *The Midnight's Children* is a perspective of a migrant writer who delves deep into picturing the problems of an imaginary nation 'Peccavistan'. Even a cursory reading unveils the vivid portrayal of the other part of the sub-continent. Strikingly, a nation carved out of the sub-continent has immigrant population of twelve million at the time of partition. Set in a post-colonial nation the migrant characters tell multiple narratives which reflect shame in the lives of characters. *Shame*, intrinsically a postmodern narrative, where history is written from multiple perspectives. Rushdie, taking this cue, traces the

episodic history of Pakistan in the post-partition era. The narrative covers three generations of two families, Raza Hyder and Iskander Harappa. Raza Hyder, a celebrated military general and Iskander Harappa, a representative of upper class play-boy, who in the later time turns into a politician. They resemble real time persona Zia-ul-Haq and Zulfikar Ali Bhutto.

The protagonist Omar Khayyam, unlike other heroes, is a deliberately relegated to be a peripheral hero. Even from his birth, his parenthood is a mystery. He is unable to figure out his mother among the three sister of Nishapur, Chunni, Munnee

and Bunny. The fate of Omar Khayyam is truly displaced along with his wife Sufia Zinobia. He is seen as, "Dizzy, peripheral, inverted, infatuated, insomniac, stargazing at what manner of hero is this". (Shame, 2)

The women are created to indicate the power of the oppressed. Rushdie's representation of women is no way complete, but it scarcely fails to capture a segment of Pakistani ruling class, narrowly two families. The women represented as observes Aizaz Ahmed:

... gallery of women who are frigid and desexualised(Arjumand, the Virgin Ironpants), demented and moronic(Sufia Zinobia), duelled into nullity (Farah), driven to despair (Rani, Bilquis) or suicide (Good News Hyder) or embody sheer surreal incoherence and loss of individual identity (the Shakil sisters). (144)

The narrative, though begins as a masculine turns into a saga of women. The women characters come to foreground. The women who are oppressed bounce back and dominate in their turn. It is observed that the woman is a victim and victimizer simultaneously.

Bilquis, a darling of her father's dreams, is the daughter of Mohmoud, who owns a 'cinema talkies' in Delhi. Cinema for Rushdie is a volatile space that can offer ample scope for imagination. It is perhaps a space where the fact and fiction; illusion and reality cross in to each other. Bilquis is at home "grandeur befitting a dream-empress", and earns the compliments of street children as "khansiki-Rani". In an explosion caused by bomb during partition, her dreams are shattered.

...the walls of her father's empire puffed outwards like a hot puri while that wind like the cough of sick giant burned away her eyebrows(which never grew again), and tore the clothes off her body until she stood infant naked in the street... (Shame 59)

She had to follow her destiny to move to Pakistan with her husband Raza, the then celebrated army officer. She acquires a "disease of fixity". As Raza rises in ranks, Bilquis gives birth to still born baby, where in the dreams of Raza Hyder

getting a son is shattered. In the mean time Bilquis is taunted by her in-laws as she is an omen and shame to her family. The members of her joint family accuses her as "fugitive from that godless country over there". Baramma insults Bilquis as "mohajir" (an immigrant). Bilquis who has undergone tremendous torment in the family turns into victimizer. She calls her daughter "my shame".

The birth of Sufia Zinobia further worsens Bilquis' fixations. Sufia's mysterious malignancy grows in demonic proportions. Rushdie employs a supernatural element in order to fortify his narrative fluidity. Sufia's supernatural self is created from Anahita Muhammad, the murdered daughter of a Pakistani in London. Sufia's growth as commented:

My Sufia Zinobia grew out of the corpse of that murdered girl, although she will not (have no fear) be slaughtered by Raza Hyder. Wanting to write about shame, I was at first haunted by the imagined spectre of that dead body, its throat dead body, its throat slit like a hala chicken, lying in a London night across a Zebra crossing slumped across black and white, while above her a Belisha beacon blinked, orange, not orange, orange.(Shame 213)

Sufia Zinobia's character is a creation of Rushdie's nihilism. She is beyond redemption, mentally retarded. Hated by mother as 'shame', gradually evolves into a 'beast'. It is utter hopeless that shrouds the character of Sufia.

Sufia evolves into a variegated beast. She is the object of shame from her mother. She witnesses her father's adulterous relation with Pinkie Aurangzeb. In a traumatic expression of her repressed anger over her family and society as well, she 'pulls off' 218 turkey necks and rapes four youth and ultimately releases her husband Omar Khayam Shakil on their wedding night.

Omar Khayam Shakil is a migrant, who attempts to leave his past to oblivion. His mothers, Shakil sisters also form a point between real and unreal world. They were repressed by her father in the Zenana wing of Nishapur. The result of Old Shakil's hatred for Angrez, imprisons his three daughters in a fortress like house. Paradoxically, they further withdraw themselves after the death of their father. Their life among the archaic objects

makes Omar Khayam Shakil abhor his nativity. It is strange that their motherhood is interchangeable. Their identical appearance and strange behaviour perplex the people of Nishapur and it becomes impossible to identify who is pregnant and who gives birth to Omar Khayam Shakil. There is a mystery over the biological fathers of Sahkil and Babar. It is a 'hybrid monstrosity'. Omar Khayam Shakil rejects his past, whereas the Shakil sisters, Chhunni, Munnee, and Bunny reject future to confine themselves to the past. Their other son Babar turns into a guerrilla fighting for separation. The Shakil sisters avenge Babar's murder by killing Raza Hyder.

There is a kind of othering in every woman character. Almost all the women character turn out to be victimisers. Though they themselves face the hardship with family members, fate, migrancy, rape, oppression, humiliation, yet they inflict pain on others. Rushdie undertakes to interweave private and public demeanour of his dramatis persona. Strikingly the parent child relationships are monological. The female characters: Arjumand, Rani Harappa; Bariamma; three matriarchs, the Shakil sisters; Sufia Zinobia, a monstrous female beast, are the remarkable creation of Rushdie. They flout the power dynamics of patriarchy and proffer deconstructed women of Salman Rushdie's vision.

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