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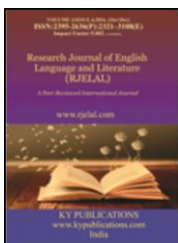
## MOTHERHOOD IN SALMAN RUSHDIE'S NOVEL *SHAME*

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### ABSTRACT

The present study focuses on the changing phase of motherhood in Salman Rushdie's novel *Shame*. The notion of motherhood has conventionally discharged a herculean and extensive connotative function which transcends the pragmatic aspects of the role of women. The heritage that the women pass on generation after generation is that of dependence and yet the tenacity with which the dependent vine clings and survives is the triumph of womanhood. One must learn to interpret a new the experience the mothers have passed on to the child, to see them in terms of struggle, often unconscious, to find and maintain some peace, beauty and respect for themselves as women. She is given high respect and honour in society and myth, legend, religion and tradition. Given the importance of mother in Indian culture, it is not surprising that it should be a major theme in twentieth century Indian English fiction. Much of the aura surrounding the mother in the Vedic, Puranic or the Brahmanic period, is missing though – flushed away by the massive movement of history. Woman is the centre of concern for Salman Rushdie in the novel. The idea behind this is to pay emphasis on woman's perspective as a mother and on the nature of experiences that unravel the relationship between mother and child. The chief motive of the novel is that hatred often comes out of shame and the unhappy relationships become the ill omen of their shame. The concepts of shame and shamelessness are explored through the relationship between the mother and the child.

Key words: Struggle, Womanhood, Culture, Relationships, Individualism, Gender.

### INTRODUCTION

India is a land of culture and tradition. It is known in the entire world for its cultural heritage. In India, the role of a mother is considered to be pivotal. An Indian mother, for ages has been treated like a Goddess, a divine personality. She symbolizes creativity and continuity. She is known as the treasure house of all precious things which influences, shapes and forms the life of a child in the best possible manner and also occupies the power to bring about the change in the entire social-milieu.

According to Usha Bande: "In fairy tales and legends it is the benevolent elderly woman who is always the personification of the mother." Mother puts a very strong and secure hold on Indian people's psyche. The repository of all positive values which influence the quality of life and ultimately transform the society is mother. In her absence, survival of people and society is almost impossible. Even man's spiritual existence is nullified without her. Transgressing her authority is, therefore, both a sin and a vice. Children, male and female, are supposed

to subordinate and submit before her. She is given high respect and honour in society and myth, legend, religion and tradition. Given the importance of mother in Indian culture, it is not surprising that it should be a major theme in twentieth century Indian English fiction. Much of the aura surrounding the mother in the Vedic, Puranic or the Brahmanic period, is missing though – flushed away by the massive movement of history. During the intervening period of foreign invasion and Colonial rule, the ideological foundation laid by our fore fathers still holds fast to an extent. Although the lived realities of life have now tempered the image of mother and it is no longer idealized beyond recognition, the mother, even today, is the cultural sanctifier, the redeeming force, the sustainer of life. In life and literature the mother now no longer appears to be a mother Goddess, a glorified goddess of superhuman strength and weakness, her magnanimity and greed, her powerlessness and her frustration began to manifest.

We might feel that woman's subjection as a wife to her husband is compensated by her dominant role as a mother over her son – a role that gives her true fulfillment. The dominance of woman as a creative principle or mother is reinforced by prehistoric findings. It is however, possible to take a fresh look at this emphasis on the assumption of male supremacy. Certain specific duties performed by male in family, defence of the community against external danger etc., leads to this supremacy. Motherhood is venerated but not fully understood. It is viewed as the completion of a process begun through male initiative and the mother is a figure which merges easily with the background. Mother appears as an ideal and idol to boys. A typical male ideal construct is adoring her and placing her on a pedestal. Mother's single step away from traditional line can send a child hurtling down with a broken image. A child can develop confidence in self as well as in others by the fundamental benevolence of mother. A safe environment, away from hostile world, is provided by mothers. A girl child fails to internalize womanhood if a mother leaves her in lurch. Her sense of identity and self-get lost away. She is left all alone unaided in the hostile world with baffling physical and emotional changes which in

turn gives rise to a confused life. Display of many changes in the portrayal of mothers and mother figures is done by the fast changing Indian society under modern western culture. Jasbir Jain has rightly said about motherhood that "Motherhood actually places a huge burden on a woman, for not only does she has to nurture the child, but her relationship with the child is a strong formative influence on the child."

#### DISCUSSION

Mother-child relationship always occupies an important place in Indian Writings in English. Relationship is an important aspect in the existence of every individual. If we look at the delineation of human relation in art and literature, we shall find that emphasis has been laid on changing roles and perspective of mothers and how the changed circumstances, changed the way they look at their children. Salman Rushdie, one of India's eminent novelists, in the novel *Shame* (1983), focuses the attention on contemporary Pakistan, by embarking frivolously shrouded political personalities from the real life. In the novel, Rushdie provides an insight of societal and political life in Pakistan. He is mordant of the communal affairs of the nation which are the consequent of the tyrannical, oppressive and flagitious legislative proceedings of the rulers of Pakistan. The novelist with his deep critical insight projects before us the shaping influences of culture in the form of honour and shame, shame and shamelessness. Rushdie himself has stated in the novel that the country he is referring in the book is not Pakistan and also the novel is not a feminist novel but there is no denying from the fact that women holds a significant position in the novel. Rushdie characterizes the murky illustration of the social milieu of Pakistan in which women have to encounter hazardous excruciation and despotism and repression becomes the talk of the town. The prominence on the social, political & historical materiality of the sub-continent is emulated by an apprehension of the arena of delusion and legerdemain which flout the insightful and sequential recital.

In the novel, *Shame*, the vignette of women is pinched solicitously than the vignette of men. The narrator in the novel *Shame*, alloyed his expatriate

influence with the stature of Pakistan and his convincing of its anecdote to the formulation of the "insufficiently imagines" (287) nation and concentrates his inquisitiveness on the predicament of women in Islamic culture. The alliance amidst men and women is sketched as the antithesis between the Centre and the margin or the congruity amidst the master and slave. Woman is for private affairs and man is for public. In the novel, *shame* is predesigned to be a provisional peculiarity for women and generations of women are apprenticed to endure from a sagacity of female skimpiness which is another fudge of patriarchy. In a patriarchal society, things are often judged from men's point of view, the voice of the women made silenced.

*Shame*, is a clear reflection of the power structure of patriarchy. Patriarchy, not only controls the happiness, independence and actions of women but it also shapes and influences their personalities. The perception of society towards a female body in a traditional society is highly influenced by culture. According to Jasbir Jain, "Culture is one category that goes on to influence all facets and aspects of life- behavior, identities, responses and epistemologies. How we 'know' and respond to the outside world is governed in the large measures by cultural constructs." The novelist in the novel is trying to give voice to the women of the same culture, race and history. The halo around motherhood is clearly missing in the novel. Bariamma, in the novel *Shame*, is considered to be a mother figure in the Hyder family. She is gray-haired aged lady in the household. In spite of it, she has her own interdiction. Although Bariamma keeps lot of power inside the family affairs and appraised as the deity in the household yet the dominion she possess, is limited to the inner province and not in the exterior province. She is the one who shows gender bias despite being a woman herself and dictates the customs according to which other people's personal life have to be disclosed and discussed in public. "The telling of the tales proved the family's ability to survive them, to retain, in spite of everything, its grip on its honour and its unanswering moral code."(76)

The novelist also flings to reconnoitre the contention of womanhood with the simulation of

Omar's three mothers. The delineation of the three mothers enunciates the peruser to postulate that women have with their preference and resources, modified the accepted definition of motherhood. Rushdie lays emphasis on the idea of individualism and endeavors to bequeath them their individual identities by permitting them names, Chunni, Munni and Bunny but their individual identities are restrained by the pertinency initially with their father and after his demise by their son Omar. They cope with their unfettered child-bearing by shunning to tattle the identity of the genuine mother "they began to weigh the same, to feel exhausted at the same moment and to awake together, each morning, as if somebody had rung a bell"(20). They had the convulsion at the similar juncture and their son took birth behind sealed aperture. Then it "was passed from breast to breast, and none of the six was dry"(S,21). They reared Omar in desolation without the foothold of any men in their life, renouncing the notion of men as the centre of the world. Salman Rushdie bestows them the courage to bring into this world their illegitimate child against the cloistered of the external sphere. According to Seema Bhaduri, "In *Shame*, the women are confined in prison-like mansions in the name of purdah, while their husbands indulge in libidinal orgies and political stunts."

Another mother figure, Bilquis decides to embrace the arms of Raza Hyder who afterwards conjugates her. Bilquis, finds herself helpless to acquiesce with giving birth to the mistaken prodigy Sufiya and incapable to give birth to the presaged successor of the family in the form of the son, deliberately repudiates in the inner self within the couching of shroud is symptomatic of her inner retrenchment from the outside world. The cover literally becomes a cerement, evocative of the dupatta, which finally plunges her sanity. There are numerous illustrations of enhancing the status of women but unfortunately largely culminating in assault, brutality and these instances, however exaggerated, overtune the readers few acumen into the inner space of women of the subcontinent. The novelist also emphasis on the substantiality that Bilquis develops an affair with a local person of the town demonstrates the regularizing protocol

speculated for the women like her. The cords of integrity excluding the role of a wife or mother are there in her but Rushdie flounders to scrutinize farther prospects.

The novelist constitutes all the women in the novel equivalent to mere caricatures, devoid of any human emotion. The crucial aim of the author is to probe into the investigation of the mother-child affinity in the novel. The identities of the women whether of India or of Pakistan is greatly influenced by their role as mothers. The traditional concept shows that mother is all powerful and her strength is often compared with that of Goddesses and it would be unimaginable for a 'traditional' mother to bring up her daughter the way Bilquis brings up Sufiya. Consequently, there is not even one single instance where one can find the relationship between Bilquis and Sufia, a normal relationship. This relationship is often defined as a relationship which is devoid of love, affection and sacrifice. A child who is not loved and cared, likely to develop the sense of seclusion and in worse cases, develops a negative attitude towards life and people. The mental state of Sufia is the outcome of her difficult relationship with her mother. According to Jasbir Jain, "Motherhood is egocentric; it gives a sense of power, power that women may not necessarily wield in the wider social world. The wish to control the child is camouflaged as concern and manifested as caring, but it is also a fulfillment for the ego. It is here where a woman feels indispensable." (60) Similarly, Omar's three mothers' enslaving urge for unnecessary armament and sequestering subsequently impinge his future relationships with women. His entrapment of Farah Zoroaster by mobilizing of hypnosis, is resultant of his urge to examine the supremacy, the patriarchal power and control over women. Jasbir Jain further observes that "Patriarchy, despite the power vested in it, has its own compulsions. It is these compulsions, the myths of superiority and the need to protect them, which drive it." (5) His entrapment becomes his mechanism of retaliation to resist the maternal control he had to endure in the corked vicinity of the mansion of Nishapur. The domination of the mother during the impressionable years leads the child to psychological insecurity which finds release in two ways. One is through constant and

recurrent dreams and the other is through the act of defiance.

#### **CONCLUSION**

There are more instances in the novel which defines the failure of motherhood, Arjumand Harrapa can not flourish well coping with the traditional viewpoint of her mother Rani. She has her own visions to fulfill rather to accept the established norms for a girl child. Another woman character, Naveed 'Good News' Hyder, who is from the beginning considered to be the paragon of female prolificacy, is not ready to underpin the freight of ever-expanding motherhood each year and eventually accepted death abandoning behind the debris of motherless orphan. According to Uma Parameswaran, "Rushdie uses authorial intrusions to comment on specific social and political ills." Salman Rushdie is aware of many constraints present in the traditional Indian and Pakistani social milieu and that is why emphasis upon freedom for women. In order to perform the function, the novelist delineates the delicate issue of motherhood from numerous dimensions. The Shakil sisters secluded themselves from everyone directing their unlawful son Omar not to sense any kind of disgrace on his birth and also because of their mother's activities; Omar's audaciousness encourages him in causing the pregnancy of Farah Zoroaster but the feeling of shame of being an unlawful mother rests entirely on her. The individuality of Farah Zoroaster is not defined. In the novel, woman is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not him with the reference to her. On the other hand, the status of a mother of a son is very high in comparison to a mother of a girl child. Bilquis is full of remorse and disgust to have a daughter who in reality should have been a son. In the novel, the word 'Shame' is discussed as a code of conduct for women. Women are expected to have the virtue of 'Shame' which is a lame translation of the Islamic word 'sharam' and is implemented only on women. According to Pradip Kumar Dey, "In Shame, the portraits of women are drawn more sympathetically than the portraits of male (husbands). The reader is concerned mainly with Rushdie's representation of women in the text because women occupy so large a portion of all the narratives in the book." The

novelist in the novel also certifies the prescribed roles for men and for women by defining shame as a feminine emotion and any discrepancy from the defined role is considered as shameless. The entire novel is dispersed with the examples of physical assault and marginalization of women where they are not permitted to vocalize their feminine desires.

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