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SUBVERSION, SUBJUGATION AND SERVILITY IN SALMAN RUSHDIE'S NOVEL  
'SHAME'

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**Abstract**

Gender issues thematically have been the epicenter and hub of magnetism, for many writers in post-colonial Indian Literature. The core responsibility of the postcolonial novelist is to restructure a feminist discourse as a counter-narrative to the patriarchal authority. This paper investigates the conjunction of postcolonial and feminist elements in Salman Rushdie's 'Shame.' It explores how the female characters attempt to constitute an overall postcolonial counter-discourse. And consequently establish a postcolonial resistance. Female subversion and subjugation and servility has a dormant presence throughout the novel and it is interpreted in terms of 'tradition' and 'honour'—two words which are assumed to encompass the very essence and existence of women in India and Pakistan. But looking at this novel from the feminine predicament one can easily see how Rushdie has dishonored his female characters and pigeonholed them in a stereotypical method. Women begin to locate themselves in the conflict of tradition and modernity and this made them

alienated from self and society. Man-woman relationship, marital discord, gender discrimination, delineation of self, search for identity, male hegemony and female subversion, subjugation, servility, subordination, power and sexual politics constitute the prevalent themes in the fiction of contemporary writers in post-colonial India.

**Keywords:** Gender Issues, Subversion, Servility, Subjugation, Patriarchy, Feminist counter chronicle, archetype.

*"Women," he sighed resignedly to his daughter, "what a term! Is there no end to the burdens this word is capable of bearing? Was there ever such a broad-backed and also such a dirty word" [62-63].*

Gender issues have been the epicenter and hub of magnetism, thematically, for many writers in post-colonial Indian Literature. The feminist treatise especially that of the Third World,

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shares many areas of connection with postcolonial theory and, therefore, the two arenas have been assumed to be associative and even complimentary. Predominantly, both discourses are politically oriented prearranged by a critical struggle against the dark powers of domination as well as social injustice. Proponents of both theorists, additionally, reject the conventional, pigeon-holed, male-controlled systems, which are dogged by the hegemonic forces and thus wage wars of struggle against the apparently absolute supremacy of exclusionist and masculine power and authority. Feminist and postcolonial discourses both seek to re-establish the position of the marginalized and invert the structures of domination.

From a feminist perspective, patriarchy and colonialism are considered an archetypal evils because both mechanically encourage totalitarian and hegemonic beliefs. Accordingly, in the patriarchal philosophy women become alien subalterns endangered by the masculine overpowerment meted out by the colonizer and the colonized alike. The content of Salman Rushdie's *Shame* reflects the subordination of women and their subjugation by patriarchal forces. The term 'patriarchy' as John McLeod says, refers to —those systems -- political, material and imaginative -- which invest power in men and marginalized women (p.173). Feminist critics deal with the issues related to women

(p.250) from the view of enabling them to raise their voices against patriarchy and repressive forms. So, feminism and post colonialism, as McLeod argues, —share the mutual goal of challenging forms of oppression (p.174).

The paper explores the combination of postcolonial and feminist essentials in Salman Rushdie's '*Shame*.' It explores how the female characters attempt to establish a general postcolonial counter-discourse, and consequently form a postcolonial resistance. Women start to relocate themselves between tradition and modernity and this brings about their estrangement both from self and society. Man-woman relationship, marital discord, gender discrimination, delineation of self, search for identity, male hegemony and female subversion, subjugation, servility, subordination, power and sexual politics constitute the prevalent themes in the fiction of contemporary writers in post-colonial India.

Bariamma, literally decoded as the Big Mother, is the matriarch of the Hyder family. She lords over the entire household and yet it is evident that the control she exercises is in the private domain and not in the public eye of women. Bariamma is the one who decides the manner in which other people's stories have to be narrated; it is she who modifies Bilquis's tale of flight during partition. And it is in this manner that

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Bilquis was thus initiated into the family Sabrina Hassumani (2002) in Salman Rushdie: *A Postmodern Reading of His Major Works* observes that Rushdie's "impulse is to deconstruct the colonizer/colonized binary and in doing so to clear a "new" postmodern space." In a close textual analysis he addresses the issues of representation through Rani Harappa and Bilquis, two important characters in the novel. Bilquis, running from the burning fires of partition with only a dupatta to cover her modesty, finds refuge in the arms of Raza Hider who subsequently marries her. Rani Humayun gets married off to the dashing, debonair Iskander Harappa and it is after their respective marriages that we see them getting more and more entrenched in their prescribed roles as wives and mothers. Bilquis is unable to accept the fact that she has given birth to the, 'wrong miracle' Sufiya, rather than the predicted male heir. She slowly withdraws herself and this is symbolic in her wearing the Burqa. The veil actually becomes a shroud, reminiscent of the dupatta, which finally engulfs her sanity (Shame, pp.76-77) Rani Harappa, also like Bilquis, becomes a mere shadow of the woman she once used to be.

**The Objectives:**

- i) To introduce Rushdie's 'Shame' as post-modern feminist Fiction.
- ii) To discuss the central theme of subversion, servility and subjugation,

depicted through the 'Shakil Sisters' and their welded maternity.

iii) To examine the depiction of other female characters in Rushdie's novel *Shame*, with the objective of exploring how Rushdie recognizes women, their circumstance and social status.

iv) To analyze whether Rushdie attempts to bring in a feminist perspective or to give a voice to his female characters in a male dominated world.

**Hypothesis:** This essay proposes to explore the hypothesis - whether Rushdie attempts to bring in a feminist perspective or to give a voice to his female characters in a male dominated world in his novel *Shame*.

**Proposed Methodology:**

This paper investigates the conjunction of postcolonial and feminist elements in Salman Rushdie's *Shame*. It explores how narration, language and the logic of the novel in combination with the female characters constitute an overall postcolonial counter-discourse. Specifically, it discusses the female characters role in establishing a postcolonial resistance. It disagrees with a general skepticism of the author's representation of female characters within Rushdie criticism, and aims to show that characterization and the thematic components of the female characters are of essence to a postcolonial counter-discourse. Let us start by addressing the very core question that the novel alludes to.

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**Literature Review**

An abundance of Literary Reviews exist on Salman Rushdie, but only a few representations have been mentioned in this article - those that particularly deal with the novel *Shame*. B.Sushila Singh,(1989) in "*Shame: Salman Rushdie's Judgement on Pakistan*" studies Pakistan of the 1970's. Cynthia Abrioux, (1985) "*In the Name of the Nation: Salman Rushdie's Shame*", observes that Rushdie speaks about Pakistan with a lot of human interest stories. Sara Suleri, (1992) in "*Salman Rushdie: Embodiments of Blasphemy, Censorships of Shame*," traces a genealogy of colonial discourse, Suleri focuses on paradigmatic moments in the multiple stories generated by the British colonization of the Indian subcontinent. Both the literature of imperialism and its postcolonial aftermath emerge here as a series of guilty transactions between two cultures that are equally evasive and uncertain of their own authority. .S.K. Tikko (1992), in "*Shame: A Modern Comic Epic in Prose*", rightly opines that Rushdie beautifully knits the story of a newly born state from historical happenings and characters involved in a fictional manner with his literary genius. The style of using language and literary genres is significantly good.

He beautifully depicts the contemporary political history and human drama exists in the postcolonial nations by

the use of literary genres such as Magical realism, fantasy and symbolism. Uma Parameswaran, (1990) in "*Salman Rushdie's Shame: An Overview of a Labyrinth*", discusses the political and historical background portrayed in the novel *Shame*, where Rushdie narrates the history of Pakistan since its partition from India in 1947 to the publication of the novel *Shame* in 1983. Indira Bhatt, (1992) in "*Shame: a Thematic Study* ", The Novels of Salman Rushdie, discuss the various themes in the novel *Shame* .Inderpal Grewal, (1994) in "*Salman Rushdie: Marginality, Women and Shame* ", discusses the manner in which Rushdie speaks for Women but does not succeed to empower the women in *Shame*. Timothy Brennan, (1998) in "*Shame's Holy Book*", where timothy brown compares the novel *shame* to the Holy book The Quran. Brendon Nicholls, (2007) in "*Reading 'Pakistan' in Salman Rushdie's Shame* ", deals with the pressures of contemporary civilization and the flux of values which lead to the forceful imposition of simplistic explanations, upon which confused men take action, with the end in view of getting out of the mess of modern day reality.

This research paper titled "*Subversion, Subjugation and Servility in the Women Characters of Salman Rushdie's Novel 'Shame* " attempts to explore the central theme of subversion, servility and subjugation, depicted through

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the ‘Shakil Sisters’ and their welded maternity; and to examine how Rushdie recognizes women, their circumstance and social status.

**Discussion and Analysis**

The theme of subversion, servility and subjugation, introduced first with the ‘Shakil Sisters; and their welded maternity is sketched out in the Hyder household scenes. Rani Humayun describes the conjugal mating of the women as clandestine; the wives being subjected to sexual embraces of men they are not even sure of being their husbands. This is a huge demeaning of the sanctity of marriage. Omar Khayyam's three mothers are not depicted as individuals but exist in a triumvirate identity under the pangs of shame of an ‘unwed pregnancy’ banishing themselves from the outside. Raza's treatment of Bilquis seems to be more humane than the total disregard and indifference that Iskander shows Rani.

Bilquís power is much more explicit. She actually manipulates her husband Raza at a political level. At times she seems to be ‘pulling the political’ strings and we are left wondering whether there are any limits to her influence or power over her husband, and therefore her nation too. Is there a protagonist in the novel *Shame* is a difficult question to answer? Sufiya Zinobia can be considered so; and perhaps that is the reason Rushdie titled his Novel *Shame*. The central theme

‘Shame’ is synonymous with the character Sufiya, a slightly differently oriented, almost retarded personality. The manner and attitude of her parent’s negativity makes her entire existence one of shame and scandal in the family. She becomes hateful, violent and acts in a shockingly arrogant manner. For example, animal like, she bites off the head of 218 Turkeys, shredding and leaving their remains behind. She takes her violence to the next level when she begins murdering the boys ‘who sleep with her’ when her husband is away. Ultimately she kills her own husband and then explodes in a ball of fire.

This thematic Journey from bad to worse, to not just evil , but ultimate evil that makes her vanish into puff and smoke ,witchlike ,causes the reader to question the credibility of her being cast as the protagonist of Shame. But Rushdie chooses her to be his protagonist because of her stoic suffering and the strength .She can easily be called the exaggerated consequence of the plight of women in Indian and Pakistani society, though she hails from a western, historical perspective. The character of Sufiya is pathetic as she grows up in an environment of lovelessness. Naturally she cannot give what she does not have .So she remains a loveless child cloistered in a woman’s body. This tearing off the necks of 218 Turkeys with her two bare hands is seen as the height of the female narrative in the

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novel. It is of course an allegory that exposes the subjugation of women in the novel. So often the subject of violence, it is surely unexpected that this violence should be finally exposed through the very hands of his most symbolic female character. It represents a dialectic which goes against the innocence and purity of this young woman, which of course makes her actions even more powerful in their symbolism.

. The women are survivors. They are subjected to male dominance, violence and manipulation, but somehow seem to rise above it and remain strong or possibly hardened because of it. Rushdie in *Shame* implies that just as a baby is born through a mother's pain, so the nation of Pakistan's birth is born through the strength and pain of its women in the novel. There is also a marked difference in the way that the strong Asian female characters in the novel are contrasted to the rather watery, weak angers white women.

There are occasions of female empowerment mostly ending in violence and these instances, however distorted, do offer the readers some insight into the psyche of women of the subcontinent. The very fact that Bilquis has an affair with a movie-house owner does indicate that she can act against the normative code of conduct laid down for her kind. The stimulations of an identity other than a wife or mother are there in her but Rushdie fails to explore further possibilities. Ahmad's

assessment of the female characters as being represented ".through a system of imageries which is sexually over determined"<sup>8</sup> is in most part precise. Even though the silent, veiled Bilquis and the dignified Rani invoke our sympathies, Rushdie subverts most of the female characters in such a way that they appear mere caricatures, devoid of any human emotion. Examining the mother-child relationship in the novel is one instance of the above. The identity of women in India and Pakistan are determined by their roles as mothers. 'Matri-shakti' (power of the mother) is seen on par with that of Goddesses and it would be unthinkable for a 'traditional' mother to treat her child the way Bilquis treats Sufiya. And yet throughout the novel we do not come across a single 'normal' or positive mother-child relationship. Omar's three mothers' obsessive need for over protection and closeting subsequently affect his future relationships with women His use of hypnosis to seduce Farah Zoroaster is reflective of his need to exercise ultimate power, domination and manipulation over the female sex. It becomes his tool of revenge against the maternal domination he had to go through in the closed environs of the Nishapur Haveli.

Arjumand Harappa cannot get along well with her mother Rani. Naveed 'Good News' Hyder, the epitome of female fertility, cannot bear the burden of ever-

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increasing motherhood annually and ultimately commits suicide leaving behind a litter of motherless waifs. The shame of motherhood is presented from different angles. The Shakil Sisters cloister themselves from the world instructing their illegitimate son Omar not to feel shame because of their deed; Omar's shamelessness becomes instrumental in making Farah Zoroaster pregnant but the shame of being an unwed mother lies solely with her. Bilquis feels ashamed of being a mother to a daughter who in fact should have been a son. Naveed unable to live in shame for being reduced to a reproducing machine ends her own life. In all the above instances we see that the shame—actually an ineffectual translation of 'sharam', which, in Indian context, is more a code of conduct than embarrassment—of being a woman and a mother is considered a very normal emotion experienced by the women. The narrator affirms masculinity by translating shame as a feminine emotion. Trying to emulate her father Arjumand Harappa, the daughter of Iskander and Rani, negates her very own feminine existence and is thus nicknamed 'Virgin Iron pants' by the narrator. She is in so much awe of her father that she wishes to continue his work even after his death. Spurned in love by her cousin Haroun she swears off men completely. She feels that by rejecting her femininity she would be able to gain the same respect and admiration shown to men in the novel

namely her father. Rushdie has denied that the character of Arjumand is based on Benazir Bhutto, daughter of the deposed Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto satirized as Iskander in the novel. Till the time *Shame* was written, Benazir was still trying to get into politics but with little success. Her rise to power in the later years directly corresponds to her subsequent marriage and motherhood. In Indian and Pakistani society the respect for a woman increases manifold once she attains the status of a mother. Benazir realized this and the results were evident in her eventual political victory and becoming the Prime Minister of Pakistan. Sohail Inayatullah correctly assesses her situation when he remarks that "...[A]s a single woman, she would always be situated by critics in the land of Western whoredom. Although she had initially tried to locate herself at the other end of female archetypes, that of the Amazon or hero, and later as the daughter of a Great Man, her father Zulfikar Bhutto; it was as a mother that she finally found political success. This was because in a nation afraid of female sexuality, of sexuality as such, an Amazon could never last."

It is interpreted in terms of tradition and honour—two words which are thought to encompass the very essence and existence of women in India and Pakistan. The notions of 'honour' and 'shame' are such a dominant force in governing the behaviour of these women that any

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deviation from these norms is perceived as shameless and unbecoming of the definitions associated with a 'traditional woman'. 'Sharam' is identified as a sign of a woman's purity; in a way suggesting that a chaste woman would not have the stirrings of sexuality within her.

Fadia Faqir informs the readers that this concept finds roots in Islamic fundamentalism which considers women as simply objects of desire whose presence on earth is to satisfy a man's need for carnal pleasure and procreation. This attitude towards women only adds insult to injury and deprives her of any identity and self-respect. But this is not surprising especially from a writer like Rushdie. He states that the Islamic court attributes to women only 'half the status of that of a man According to Fadia Faqir, "already existing Islam is misogynous and strives to restrict women to a small, private space." Ahmad echoes this idea when he refers to the novel '*Shame as* 'a misogynous text'. Unable to express her sexuality the character of Sufiya Zinobia, who is shame personified, gives vent to her frustration in the totally gruesome yet comic episode of the turkey beheadings. Sufiya takes her outrage and violence to the next level when she mates with four youth on the streets and then kills them all after the act.

The whole novel is intermingled with incidents of sexual oppression and also

suppression where women were bred with such a strict father that he did not let his daughters step out of the 'Zenana' (women quarters) and when they did after his death it led to such consequences which were deemed to have brought shame upon the family honour. The Shakil sisters celebrate their freedom—that of sexual exploration and ironically enough this freedom results in their self-confinement for the rest of their lives. Rani Harappa, the young, outspoken, mischievous girl, is reduced to a mere plaything that Iskander uses and displays from time to time. Bilquis is probably the only character with some grit and spark in her. She has an affair with the movie-house owner resulting in the birth of Naveed. But her sexuality is stifled within the larger framework of tradition. Bound within the confines of honour and shame, she cannot get past the fact that she bore Sufiya, the wrong miracle, and slowly fades away into her own silence. Arjumand, tries to stifle her own female sexuality and in a way becomes the female spokesperson of her oppressive male counterpart. Sufiya is the only other female character who does give vent to her frustration at being unable to explore and express her femininity and also the shame that she has been ordained to feel for her family, her nation and her entire race. But Sufiya is a problematic character. Even though she could be called the heroine of the novel, Rushdie does not give her any voice. Her thoughts are interpreted and

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conveyed to us through the narrator who is obviously a man.

The wakening of her latent sexuality is presented as the rousing of the Beast within her. It is this Beast which eventually takes over her completely and transforms her into a quasi-mythical legend thus again robbing her of any identity as a woman. Rushdie also seems to articulate that such repression ultimately culminates in violence. Repression is a seamless garment; a society which is authoritarian in its social and sexual codes, which crushes its feminist beneath the intolerable burdens of honour and propriety, breeds repressions of other kinds as well....In the end, though, it all blows up in your face. (*Shame*, page 173) His narrator can see women only in extreme terms—either as casualty to their sex or as caricatures trying to step out of their prescribed boundaries. Through Sufiya, Rushdie's tries to present that violence as the only option left for women in the subcontinent to give vent to their fear, oppression and shame.

Sufiya turns to violence to strike back against the shame she feels for the deeds of her community but by transforming her into this fantastical mythical creature Rushdie **subverts** the whole premise of women's empowerment. Inderal Grewalin her essay "*Marginality, Women and Shame*" states that Rushdie's novel, instead of helping in the formation of a cultural heritage that

celebrates the battle against oppression of women, seems part of a culture that exists to defeat this struggle by presenting its futility. According to her, any text, which aims at revamping the status of women, should cease to quote tradition as a code of honour and conduct expected from it. In the novel, Rushdie's narrator tells us that Sufiya Zinobia came into being after he witnessed a few episodes of violence against Asians in Britain.

i) In the first case a father kills his own daughter (Rushdie even gives her a name Anahita- 'Anna' Muhammad) for having had a sexual liaison with a white boy.

ii) In the second case the story is the same except here it is the mother who carries out the violent act. These girls are seen to have bought shame and dishonour on their family by indulging in sexual conduct with a boy from another race. Rushdie deals with the shame that the respective families had to undergo because of their offspring's misconduct but he does not address the whole issue. What is more disturbing is the fact that the narrator can relate to the emotions that gripped the father when he learnt about the affair leading to the subsequent killing of Anna. How can the narrator then present us with a story, which seems to understand the oppression faced by the women at the hands of their own kind?

iii) The other ghosts within Sufiya come from the instance of rape of an Asian girl

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by four white youths and the spontaneous psychosomatic immolation of a boy. The raped victim feels ashamed rather than angry about the experience and does not even report the crime fearing the shame that would be associated with her family because of the incident. The psyche of the raped girl can be traced to the Islamic fundamentalist beliefs, as is also evident in many other cultures, that a woman must conduct herself in an appropriate manner so as not to attract attention of strange men. In a way it lays the blame squarely on the woman for having drawn towards her the licentious gaze of men and the ensuing act of sexual violence. The helplessness and the anger that the raped girl and Anna must have experienced during their ordeals gets manifested in Sufiya who turns to violence as a means of giving an outlet to the shame that she feels for her own community. Her act of killing the four adolescents after having sex with them is the revenge of the unnamed raped girl and an ironic convoluted sense of revenge on the Muslim community, which allow a man to have sexual communion with four women under the cloak of marital respectability.

The recounting of these episodes also brings to light the emigrant experience in the United Kingdom. It highlights the double racism that the Asian women have to undergo in their dealings with the white populace. During earlier times when the Indian subcontinent was still under the imperialist rule, the colonizers were very

vocal about the oppression of the native woman and in some cases even tried to put an end to the practice of Sati (widow-burning) and child marriages. It was then considered the 'White Man's Burden' to civilize these oriental savages and what better way than to tell them to treat their womenfolk with respect and dignity. But this agenda had deeper motives. The imperialists wanted to emasculate the colonized men by trying to give power to the women thus furthering their imperial ambitions. But now when the status quo has changed and the Colonialists find themselves facing similar situations in their own country they let it pass as domestic violence and issues relating to specific cultural practices.

But Rushdie extracts an almost <sup>12</sup> sadistic pleasure in a counter-racist move by presenting the whores used by Mir Harappa as western women in an attempt to strike a contrast between the chaste, dignified wife, Rani, sitting at home waiting for her husband to return, while the husband is romping around with a memsaab (white woman) wannabe Pinkie Aurangzeb. Later in the novel Iskander realizes that in order to gain political success he would have to give up not only Pinkie but also his other whore, his westernized lifestyle, and embrace his culture and traditions for people to accept him as their leader. But he just exchanges one mistress for another. He renounces his love for Pinkie for a greater

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love—that of history. But the point to note is that the plight of Rani remains the same. Rushdie's attempt to present a female point of view fails miserably. (I had thought, before I began, that what I had on my hands was an almost excessively masculine tale, a saga of sexual rivalry, ambition, power, patronage, betrayal, and 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, obliging me to couch my narrative in all manner of sinuous complexities, to see my 'male' plot refracted, so to speak, through the prisms of its reverse and 'female' side. (*Shame*, 173) But is the 'male' plot really refracted? Do women actually get a voice? The narrator of the novel is very obviously a man and his attempt at inclusion of women in the narrative is quite ineffective. First of all, the readers get to know the women in the novel only through this male narrator; secondly we do not get the feeling that the narrator can relate to the experiences of these women in a manner other than a male perspective. We especially get this idea when he talks of the murder of Anna Muhammad. He can relate to the shame and anger felt by her father; he can even visualize Anna in her day to day life, going about her mundane affairs but in no way can he empathize the pain, anger, horror of her ordeal. His vision of her is a very superficial one. Also, he does not

present us with any incident, which might lead us to believe that there is a future for this fight against oppression. Coming back to Sufiya and her progressive degeneration into this grotesque monster, we are left to assume that the only option available for women to strike back is that of violence. He seems to suggest that it is this violence, which is threatening the very masculinity of our present society. This kind of violence finds roots in the popular Asian culture where women once oppressed beyond the realms of sanity, resort to violence as means of ending their trauma.. It is almost like good triumphing over evil. So even in Sufiya's case Rushdie renders her to a state of mythical existence and the readers are aware at all times that her character is too fantastical to be true. She does, in her own way, avenge the wrongs done to the ghosts invading her character but she does not provide a hope for the continued efforts put in by the Feminist project.

There are instances of female empowerment in the novel (give examples in the novel) but women are still bound in tradition and honors. The novel presents us with women who are still bound within tradition and honour. In Islam, it translates as passivity on the woman's part; she accepts it as her fate to live within the confines of her role as a wife and a mother. This becomes her private sphere. The move towards the public Sphere i.e. an attempt to record her gender role would be seen as a

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transgression. Even the women who try it in the novel, as discussed earlier, find themselves condemned to a life of utter passivity in their private hell.

The same argument can be applied to the women characters in *Shame*. Rushdie offers these say in his novel; even though he suggests that women have taken over from the male plot—that is another matter—their actions and thoughts are restricted within the limits of what their tradition allows them to do. Bilquis does convey her criticism of Raza but she does it in a silent manner—the only choice available to her. Rani's embroidered shawls, which provide us with a visual commentary on her husband's wrong acts never, see the light of day. Her means of expressing herself through art is also silenced and in her case by none other than her own daughter. And Sufiyya's violent actions, as discussed earlier, can hardly be registered as a positive movement. She does move out from the private space to the public sphere but at what cost.

Sufiyya steadily progresses towards becoming a Machiavellian. She arrives at her destination when she murders her own husband in his childhood home. Her punishment is that she explodes into a ball of fire and vanishes from the face of the earth as she was perceived as evil personified that even the universe eliminated her.

This downfall is mirrored by the story of the Hyder and Harappa regimes and their rise to power. Just as Sufiyya's character experiences the downfall from innocent victim to full-blown demon, so also these young men become corrupted by their desires for political and social power, and when they're done, one of them is hanging the other for imposing a dictatorship—and the government is left completely unstable. These stories are placed in a fictional version of Quetta, Pakistan, so there is probably some real connection between the book's moral and political themes, and Pakistan's history.

**Conclusion:**

*Shame* is a woman's tale in which woman speaks power to society. It is also a telepathic narrative of woman's quest for selfhood. The female characters in the novel experience the catharsis of epiphany and self-realization. All of them are complex characters who undergo several processes of emancipation and transformation. Ironically, the narrative ends in a matriarchal image with Zinobia in a fury and rage slaying her husband: —...the power of the Beast of Shame cannot be held for long within any one frame of flesh and blood, because it grows, it feeds and swells until the vessel bursts. (Shame 286). Here, the aim of the novel is to show that man is not always victorious, and history is not always —male. Also, to affirm that nothing is exceptionally phallic,

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and that feminist discourse defies definition and labelling. Since Rushdie believes entirely in a social transformation for all, *Shame* is a project reconstruction of society through a new philosophy which encourages the individuality of men and women, and liberates them from a marginalizing position. (Shame 256)

*Shame*, in fact, is not specifically about women in Pakistan. It is about women in all countries. The issues of female discrimination, misogyny, religious fundamentalism and a universal insight of women as representatives of their culture and tradition, not only in their own countries, but also in their expatriate western societies are dealt with. Central to the novel is women's relationship to "motherhood" and identity, apart from whether or not a man was a father to the child, disrupting all sense of "truth". 'Shame' and 'shamelessness' are central themes, and come to rest in a woman so "mad with untruths" she starts uncontrollably pulling the heads off chickens... a central food source.

The female plot is inserted in the general structure of the novel so that the exclusion of woman from the social panorama is melodramatically depicted. The structural parallelism plays a central part in the novel. Rushdie mixes the history of woman with the male political one. The focus is to draw a fictional picture of

history and mythical values of this society by analyzing and deconstructing the features and assumptions of this society. In other words, myth, history and traditions are readdressed and destabilized. *Shame* is a realistic novel, but its setting is slightly mythologized. The novel contains two fictional and parallel autobiographies: the general story of the nation and women's own tale. Also, the shift from masculine to feminine narrators takes place and corresponds to a new focus on feminine characters.

*Shame* can be regarded as emblematic of subversive postcolonial mode, attempting a subversion of normative national and gendered subjectivity. The novel is interspersed with various pictures of female life in the Harrapa and Hyder families. Long story short, the women are severely disenfranchised and in need of support. The shame that Sufiya's father felt toward her is coupled by a sense of misogyny among the family. When Harrapa and Hyder gain control, the implication is that women will be severely disenfranchised, because secretly, the women in their family are deeply unhappy and mistreated.

The main concern here is his introduction of a secularly democratic interpretation of social and historical truths. In line with this, he deals with the concepts of sexuality and gender as tools of

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subversion and critique. So, he finds in a sexualized space a form of redefinition of the individual's role away from the imposed social constructs and codes. Therefore, sexuality has been redefined as an expression of individuality the novel that Rushdie has created in *Shame* can be viewed essentially as an allegory on the birth of Pakistan. Right from the start of the novel we see snapshots of the history upon which this nation was built. The legacy of the British Raj is a particularly strong motif, for example, the high status buildings created by the British as symbols of power are conspicuous throughout the novel in their crumbling state. They are like ghosts of a former order, since the British have departed. There is neither the political will nor the financial will to maintain these 'white elephants' of colonialism once the new nation is born, yet still they remain, a throw-back to the past. They are symbols of oppression, and represent the shame of the colonizer. The idea of being 'born into shame' is also a consistent theme throughout the novel.

One of the central characters, Omar, is born out of wedlock and to one of three sisters, we never find out which is the mother. The shame is evident in the way that they barricade themselves into their mansion and retreat from the outside world. This shame from birth could be said to mirror the greatest tragedy and therefore shame that happened during the birth of the

nation of Pakistan itself. As the displaced peoples moved between India and Pakistan in 1947 when the new nation of Pakistan was created, there was massive bloodshed on religious grounds as the groups clashed during the migration. Over a million people died in the 'birth-throws' of Pakistan and the free India. Just as a mother pays the price of the birth of her baby in blood, pain, sweat and tears, the people of these two great nations paid in the same way at their birth.

**References:**

- Abrioux, C.C. "In the Name of the Nation: Salman Rushdie's *Shame*," Commonwealth 18.1 (1995).
- Aijaz Ahmad in *In Theory* says, "[I] living in the contemporary milieu of the British Left, he has not remained untouched by certain kinds of feminism; and he is clearly aware, and quite capable of effective narrativization, of many kinds of women's oppression in our societies."
- Aijaz Ahmad calls *Midnight's Children* and *Shame* "novels of leave-taking: not from the East, surely but, more particularly, first from the country of his birth (India) and then from that second country (Pakistan) where he tried, half-heartedly, to settle down and couldn't."

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- Ahmad sees Bilquis and Rani as ".paltry, shallow creatures themselves, capable of nothing but chirpy gossip (in the elite actress manner, inertia or, at best, a tawdry affair with the owner of the local movie-house."
- Aijaz Ahmad uses this failure on Rushdie's part to invoke any form of regenerative uplifting to severely criticize the novel as a misogynous piece of work.
- Brennan, T. "Shame's Holy Book" Reading Rushdie: Perspectives on the Fiction of Salman Rushdie, edited by M.D. Fletcher Amsterdam Atlanta, GA: Rodopi, 1994
- Chandra Talpade Mohanty "average third world woman" as one who ".leads an essentially truncated life based on her feminine gender (read: sexually constrained) and being poor (read: ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, religious, domesticated, family-oriented, victimized, etc.)."
- Fadia Fakir says that "Already Existing Islam" calls for the Muslim woman to be ".Masturah a word meaning 'chaste', with connotations of "hidden" and "silent".
- Grewal, Inderpal. "Marginality, Women and Shame." Reading Rushdie: Perspectives
- on the Fiction of Salman Rushdie. Ed. D.M. Fletcher. Editions Rodopi, 1994: 123-144. Print.
- Hassumani, Sabrina. "Salman Rushdie: A Postmodern Reading of His Major Works." Ed. Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2002. Print
- "Neither teller nor listener would tolerate any deviation from the hallowed sacred text. This was when Bilquis knew that she had become a member of the family; in the sanctification of her tale lay initiation, kinship, blood." (Shame, page 76-77)
- Rushdie, Salman. Shame. London: Jonathan Cape, 1983. Print.
- Sohail Inayatullah, "Islam, Postmodernism and Other Futures: A Ziauddin Sardar Reader
- Edited by Sohail Inayatullah and Gail Box well, Pluto Press:London, Sterling , Virginia ,2003
- Timothy Brennan, "Shame's Holy Book", p.212. (Timothy Brennan compares the novel to Quran)
- Salman Rushdie and the Third World: Myths of the Nation", London: Macmillan, 1989. Print
- The 'White Man's Burden' to civilize these oriental savages and what better way than to tell them to

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treat their womenfolk with respect and dignity.

- What is Shame about? Rushdie himself claims it is not a book about Pakistan as *Midnight's Children* is about India; it is not a "portrait of a nation, it's a portrait of a ruling class"; and it is certainly not a feminist novel even though women occupy a large part of the narrative.

- [https://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/jspui/bitstream/10603/190455/11/11\\_fifth%20chapter.pdf](https://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/jspui/bitstream/10603/190455/11/11_fifth%20chapter.pdf)
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