CHAPTER IV

SHAME: TRANSGRESSING BOUNDARIES OF FACT AND FICTION
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The country in this story is not Pakistan, or not quite. There are two countries, real and fictional, occupying the same space, or almost the same space. My story, my fictional country exists, like myself, at a slight 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.

*(Shame 29)*

*Shame* appears to stand to *Midnight’s Children* much as Pakistan stands to India. Notwithstanding its shameful history during the emergency, India is likely to remain a magnificent possibility throughout *Midnight’s Children* primarily because of the author’s love and affection suffusing over it. However, entering a world less known and less loved, Rushdie depicts a dystopia of vast wasteland about Pakistan in *Shame* that turns out to be a cold-hearted cleverness. While the sights, smells and sounds that make *Midnight’s Children* so effervescing, or *The Moor’s Last Sigh* so charming, *Shame* definitely misses those generous and authentic details, leaving a really big question how the author’s magical family chronicle can represent the ‘real’ Pakistan.

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Rushdie has reasons to call his novel a fairy-tale, as the setting is really fantastic and miraculous. It begins as a fabulistic story, depicting the mysterious birth of its nominal and peripheral hero Omar Khayyam Shakil, who is born collectively to three unmarried sisters in the remote border town of Q—resembling Quetta—in a fictional country which is “not quite Pakistan” (29). However, the narrative quickly shifts to examine the central metaphor of ‘shame’ about that country which has been shamelessly turned into an immoral captive world of broken dreams and shattered images, a hopeless country “increasingly at war with itself” (87). Thus, by describing cynically what the people of Q assume is stranger than fiction and what some would consider accounts of true lives as those most unbelievable yet haunting of fairy-tales, Rushdie brilliantly achieves an atmosphere of doubt and suspicion regarding any stories that claim to be more exclusively absolute than one of several possible accounts.

While interweaving the structure of the magical family story with the political history of a fictional country, Rushdie suggests various links between bizarre happenings in the fairy-tale and other equally bizarre political events in the narrative, which inescapably identify the fictional country as historical Pakistan. The interlinking of the family stories with the history of Pakistan has, however, a peculiar way of getting entangled. It acquires renewed significance with deliberately designed grotesque characters like Omar and Sufiya. Omar is helplessly grotesque—fat, ugly and scandalous, an inverted rascal or a voyeur who takes advantage of gullible women in the guise of mesmeric medical treatment—who provides a link between fanciful family story and. Sufiya, on the other hand, is a grotesque Beauty who is also a Beast, with a child’s mind in a woman’s body. Omar’s marriage with Sufiya links him to the murky political history of the country headed by two powerful politicians—Prime Minister Iskander Harappa and Chief Martial Law Administrator and President Razor Guts Hyder Raza. The scandalous regimes of these two archrivals are
punctuated with grotesquery and parodies which, in fact, form most of the points of intersection between the fantastic family story and vituperative political invective. The plot showing these two political archrivals as members of a single family—for, Iskander marries Raza’s cousin Rani, though the families of Bhutto and Zia were never connected at factual level—explains, as Aijaz Ahmad has rightly observed, “a wonderful technical resolution for reflecting the monopolistic structure of dictatorial power and the very narrow social spectrum within which this power in Pakistan circulates.” Under their clutch the common people do not have an obvious choice of theirs—they are allowed only to swallow history—and as such Rushdie pushes them to the background in the novel.

The original impulse behind the novel seems to have been derived from Rushdie’s critical attitude against, and satirical reference to, the claustrophobic location in Pakistan. As a migrant in real life and a fantasist and a historian in fiction, Rushdie seems to have gathered his expertise on Pakistani history through personal experience, conscious groundwork and, above all, through his keen sense of instinct. He seems to be deeply concerned with the politics of the subcontinent and, hence, presents realities of public history influencing, and getting influenced by, individuals’ action and aspirations. The image of the writer as both master and victim of public and private material is told really briskly. Citing his connection and predilection with Pakistan, Rushdie tells in an interview to Gordon Wise that like its ambitious predecessor, *Shame* is also based on historical theme: “It seems to me that everything in it has had to do with politics and with the relationship of the individuals and history.”

He attempts to test the tenets of history, politics and art to present the large-scale shame and horror in Pakistan. In the second chapter of the novel the narrator—who is more like Rushdie himself, now living in England—breaks into the story to tell of a recent visit to Pakistan during which he happens to
raise a question about the execution of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto at a party. But a 
friend who had spent many months in jail for social dissention, stops him from 
taking up that discussion any further by giving him a painful under-table kick as 
he suspects that a government informer might be present there. For, one can 
get anywhere in Pakistan as simply as one could know "somebody who knew 
somebody who... might or might not have shared a flat with someone who was running guns to the guerrillas of Baluchistan" (28). Like the labyrinthine corridors 
of the ancient mansion of the protagonist, the palimpsest country remains a 
maze that leaves its inhabitants with a profound and perpetual problem of "what to retain and what to dump" (32). Like the caged people of Pakistan, it has also 
been the narrator-author's wish to write the shameful history of the country anew:

It is the true desire of every artist to impose his or her 
vision on the world; and Pakistan, the peeling, 
fragmenting palimpsest, increasingly at war with itself, 
may be described as a failure of the dreaming mind. 
(87)

But while the narrator is rewriting the scandalous history of the fictional 
country— which is "not Pakistan, not quite"— in the form of a fairy-tale, using 
the dualities of a myth — the Beauty and the Beast, the mythic dimension is 
carefully kept in the background, only to be retrieved and intertwined with the 
real characters and events, to serve his ideational purpose. While depicting 
Pakistan as a tragic "failure of the dreaming mind", Shame affiliates itself 
primarily to the category of political allegory; the shock of the novel lies in its 
fidelity to facts and reality. It is as if Rushdie tells the people of Pakistan, who 
had entered into a world of freedom in 1947, to realize that instead of the 
beauty of a promised 'Land of Pure' their country has been shamelessly turned 

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into an immoral captive world of broken dreams and shattered images, a hopeless country— “the peeling, fragmenting palimpsest” (87). Although one has to agree with the author that the fabulistic account of a country that has been badly damaged by political intrigues and religious fundamentalism, sexual rivalry and gruesome betrayal that can be written about any country and not only about Pakistan, the exact historical setting with thinly veiled names and events and references strongly point to the fact that Pakistan happens to provide all these in abundance and in striking forms. The narrative, turning from a superimposed mythical pattern that revolves round the personal stories of Omar Khayyam and Sufiya Zenobia— the two poles of shame and shamelessness— goes on to depict the vivid world of national history in the side-plot, involving relationship between Raza and Isky. As the narrator excavates piles of history, one finds it comprising personal stories and political destiny of Prime Minister Iskander Harappa (Zulfikar Ali Bhutto) who, in order to keep-off of an army take-over of his regime, commits a grave miscalculation by appointing an incompetent and subservient general Raza Hyder (Zia ul-Haq), the commander-in-chief of the country. As an interesting sequel to such a power politics the latter not only manages to oust Iskander/ Bhutto from power, but eventually becomes president-dictator of his country, hangs his one time mentor, and also sets up a regime of religious bigotry. It is not difficult, in this context, to identify Benazir Bhutto in the person of Arjumand Harappa and her expected return to power after Zia is crashed by fate. The novel abounds in numerous other allusions to people and politics—Hyder/ Zia’s occupation of ‘Aansu- ka- Wadi’ in 1948, Prime Minister Liaquat Ali’s assassination in 1951, Isky/ Bhutto’s trial and many more of such other historical facts— that provide a realistic background to understand the corrupt power politics of contemporary Pakistan.

At the personal level the novel tells the shameful story of the dizzy, peripheral hero Omar Khayyam who was expected to deliver his three mothers
from shame (30). Trapped inside the reclusive mansion in the claustrophobia of Nishapur for twelve years, however, he develops a horrific feeling of “living at the edge of the world, so close that he might fall off at any moment” (21), and runs “wildly about like a time traveler who has lost his magic capsule and fears he will never emerge from the disintegrating history of his race” (31). When he finally manages to escape by descending down the dumbwaiter, Omar meets a paragon Farah Zoroaster, shamelessly impregnates the beauty after hypnotizing her, and escapes the infertile and time-eroded labyrinth of Nishapur. However, he is dropped for long stretches of the story till he returns as a doctor while the narrator concentrates on what interests him most—the personal and political destiny of Iskander and Hyder. But the nominal hero belies the gift of gab of the great continental Urdu poet after whom he has drawn his name: “But (I repeat),” confides the narrator, “no rubaiyat ever issued from his pen” (30). On the other hand, his wife Sufiya Zenobia stands up shamelessly to represent “the collective fantasy of a stifled people, a dream born of their rage” (263). Born with the original shame to Raza Hyder and Bilquis Bano, who crave for a son and acknowledge her with rage and resignation, she blushes uncontrollably whenever her presence in the world is noticed by others (116). However, she also blushes for the world and reacts shamelessly, but hers is, in a sense, the manifestation of honour and dignity. Thus, the ‘masculine’ saga of power, patronage, betrayal and death based on historical fact has been balanced by a fantastic ‘feminine’ plot of subjugation and suffering; both involve a history of large scale tragedy that has been written through the roving metaphor of shame and shamelessness.

The novel, like *Midnight’s Children*, examines the related themes of shame and honour, shame and shamelessness as cultural influences that affect the personalities and actions of individuals and determine their identity in Pakistan. Actually the novel takes its name from an Urdu word ‘sharm’ which means ‘self-respect’, or alternatively ‘dishonour’. Hence the opposite of ‘shame’
is 'shamelessness', but it is also 'honour'. Rushdie goes on to say that there are two axes of the story—honour and shame, along which moves the culture, and shame and shamelessness that deal with morality and lack of morality. He makes a deep psychological insight into a number of characters in the novel and combines them with the socio-cultural history of Pakistan; the result is an endless chain of fateful metaphorical links between fact and fantasy, reality and vision. The novel is the fictionalized picture of Rushdie's ideas about Pakistan; it represents a kind of statement—a moderately distorted one but a reckoning with a whole culture and a whole country where shame "engulfs all" (87). In this context it will not be difficult to suggest that while Midnight's Children acts as the 'metaphor of reality' for India, Shame devises the 'metaphor of shame' for Pakistan—"the peeling, fragmenting palimpsest, a failure of the dreaming mind" (87):

Shameful things are done: lies, loose living, disrespect for one's elders, failure to love one's national flag, incorrect voting at the elections, over-eating, extramarital sex, maltreatment of women-folk, examination failures, smuggling, throwing one's wicket away at crucial point of a Test Match: and they are done shamelessly. (122)

It is against this background of a collective experience of shame in a shameless society where the soul has no corners to hide—for shame has become "like everything else, live with it for long enough and it becomes part of the furniture" (28)—that the characters in the novel act, interact and react. Its world is widely comic and wildly cruel, because the shame in Pakistan lies in the disparity between the scale of Pakistan's history and that of the story of the people who determine it. While the people in Rushdie's telling are small, squalid
little creature, the history is really very large. The politicians like Iskander and Raza who are not simply contrasting characters but appear to form an opposition. But the opposition is superficial as both are incarnations of evil. In any case, however, Rushdie is not constructing an intricately complex political allegory but is providing a poignant analysis of the contemporary culture and society of Pakistan—the banality of evil. The politicians butcher innocence and strangle public voice insisting, “there are things that cannot be permitted to be true” (82). They represent shamelessness, acting without honour—on the axis of dishonour—but without shame also. The dynamics of politics in Pakistan points to the fact that power is concentrated in the hands of a minute ruling class that belie the sacred history of a nation which had long years ago made a tryst with destiny to become the ‘Land of Pure’. In fact, the novel dramatizes the themes of shame and shamelessness by examining their complex nature that affects the personality of the characters and determines their identity in the novel.

The fairy-tale begins quite deceptively, not with the miraculous birth of a thousand and one midnight children who represented the hopes and aspirations of independent India, nor with the type of a political allegory that is very much discernible in *Midnight's Children*, but with the mysterious birth of its dizzy, peripheral, inverted and insomniac hero Omar Khayyam who is sidelined by history to be born shamelessly to three mothers—Chunni, Munni and Bunni—but cannot know till to his death which one of them actually begets him. Born in the deathbed of his orthodox grandfather, he is expected of bringing fresh lease of freedom to the captive and claustrophobic world of Nishapur. But unfortunately he carries with him the burdens of history that castrate him so damagingly that instead of producing immortal Urdu ‘shayyari’ he turns to be the poet of his country’s military debacle in Bangladesh:

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This was in the days before the people learned that their side almost always lost, so that the national leaders, rising brilliantly to the challenge, perfected no fewer than one thousand one ways of salvaging honour from defeat. (78)

The image of the ‘national shame’ looms large and embraces the ‘private shame’ of the Shakil household in Nishapur. The three uneducated Shakil sisters, who were virtually imprisoned in the ‘zanana’ wing of the labyrinthine mansion in Nishapur till the death of their father, suddenly decide to celebrate their new found freedom from shameful confinement in a night-long party with the ‘Angrez’ army officers of Quetta cantonment. Omar was born as the result of that shameless encounter between the East and the West.

The novel illustrates the surrounding countryside of Q as a thoroughly infertile spread of land. The references of the land’s infertility suggest the desolation of the countryside and imply the poverty of the town. Nishapur develops into an “infertile and time-eroded labyrinth” (24) after the three sisters lock them in the “hell hole” of the expansive building. When one compares Saleem’s Bombay with Omar’s Nishapur, one gets the idea of Rushdie’s obsessions: Bombay is not only Rushdie’s birthplace but a living metaphor of India’s syncretic identity, its bourgeoning possibility. But Nishapur shuns all possibility of dreams and desires; it stands as a metaphor for the deathlike situation in Pakistan. Moreover, the Shakil home is infertile because the three sisters partake in an immaculate conception. But, one has to blame the unchanging atmosphere of Nishapur and the lack of knowledge and growth within the building on the sterility of the three sisters. The narrator later declares that he “wandered for some four thousand days in the thing-infested jungle that
was ‘Nishapur’, his walled-in wild place, his mother country; until he succeeded in getting the frontiers opened.” (24).

It appears that Rushdie has played out some primal myths about women here: the fear of their sexual and maternal potency is said to rise in proportion to the limits placed on their legitimate socio-political and economic power. In the face of the traditional society of the East very often locking up the female body, and suggesting that the privacy of her genitalia should remain pure until she gets married, Rushdie describes the young unmarried Shakil sisters who satisfy their sexual curiosities secretly in an act of fantasy. Not only does it provide them a voyeuristic pleasure for transforming their interminable captivity into a sort of celebration but also an imagination for dismantling the imposed boundaries of authority and ethics:

...they amused each other by inventing private languages and fantasizing about what a man might look like when undressed, imagining, during their prepubertal years, bizarre genitalia such as holes in the chest into which their own nipples might snugly fit, 'because for all we knew in those days,' they would remind each other amazedly in later life, 'fertilization might have been supposed to happen through the breast.' (13).

It is an intensified metaphor for the kind of drawing together against the kind of closing ranks imposed on them. Here the author shows his genuine concern for the women who feel the real brunt of the socio-ethical repression, and form all kinds of networks of support and solidarity in the form of a defensive mechanism. Later, the same type of female bonding is shown when their
husbands cast the relation between Rani Harappa and Bilquis Hyder aside; their telephonic conversations sound a kind of mutual support, nurturing and positive. Thus, Rushdie appears to rewriting history not simply as a fantastic story emanating from the wild imagination of a single, terribly self-conscious narrator, but as a mass experience of captivity and anarchy in an impossible country.

Rushdie has undoubtedly described the three Shakil sisters with some sort of sympathy, fear and obsession. The responsibility and duty of motherhood make them build a fortress of love and care around their son in order to perfect and retain him within the walls of his mothers' country. Common phrases in the novel such as "motherland," "mother country" and "mother tongue" exemplify the prevalence of conceiving one's place and space in maternal terms. A title within the novel—"Escape From the Mother Country" reaffirms the author's gendering of land and place: the maternity of home appears as means of sustenance and descriptions of fertility. The three mothers lock themselves away from the outside by ordering a padlock requiring the strength of three men to place it on their front door. The size of the lock is a suggestion of the magnitude of their desire to be safe, to shield their child from the incredible force of the outside from which they wish to hide. The curious locksmith Mistri Yakoob Balloch reasons that the girls now need protection after the death of their father, for "invasion has already occurred" (17). Although the locksmith refers to the invasion of the grey-skinned sahibs, more indiscreet invasions on the mothers have actually taken place: their ornate party brings with it the invasion from the "suited-and-booted Angrez officers" (12). One of these suitors invades the body of a sister, which in turn produces an invasion into her womb. These stories of procreation leads to define motherhood as a consequence of the male invasion, abandoning women with both the rubble and loot of warfare — children.
The metaphor of the rubble, however, becomes literal in Rushdie; he doesn't veil the symbol or let the metaphor carry the whole weight of the message, but stretches it very powerfully so that it could bend in different ways for the service of his art. One cannot but relish Rushdie's art of stretching that occurs and reoccurs in the entire novel, giving events and characters some added meaning. By making his style 'off-centring' and his hero purposefully deformed, the author has been able to continue a metaphor by stretching it to its full limit. Omar's first view of the world is of the upside down world of Q, for he was held upside down during birth. This perfectly natural and familiar thing provides the recurring motif of the search for order within the idea of chaos. Like the 'perforated sheet' in *Midnight's Children*, a custom becomes a metaphor to suggest that not only Omar's world is upside down but his view is also an inverted one. However, beyond the literal inversion there always lies the central metaphor of the novel— the country of Pakistan, both a victim and a perpetrator of an inverted vision of life. For, since partition the migrant 'mohajirs', who have been writing the calamitous history of present Pakistan, have sidelined the original inhabitants of the land. Thus the total effect of these inversions becomes cumulative and telling.

Omar's entering life "without the benefit of mutilation, barberry or divine approval" (21) is something no traditional Muslim would like to relish. Moreover, notwithstanding his thorough study of the Oriental occult and voyeurism that reveals to him "both the infinitely rich and cryptic texture of human life and also the bitter-sweet delights of living through other human beings" (45), he fails to write the sacred origin of his country. On the contrary, he feels himself "a fellow who is not even the hero of his own life, a man born and raised in the condition of being out of things" (24). Unlike Saleem Sinai who claims him to be handcuffed to the history of his nation, Omar Khayyam Shakil feels that he is only a 'peripheral' or 'inverted' hero whose perception of life is only a fragmented
version of history. His tragedy, in fact, lies not only in the evasion of historical destiny as an exile, but also in embracing that destiny too violently.

Rushdie goes on to suggest that postcolonial men act revengefully towards women due to their colonized past and their need to somehow assert their diminutive power. Iskander Harappa, the western-educated, and so-called upholder of democracy, acts with shameful colonial attitude, flaunts Pinkie Aurangzeb to disgrace his wife’s modesty. In regards to Omar’s relationship with women, the narrator recalls: “all his subsequent dealings with women were acts of revenge against the memory of his mothers” (35). Forever frustrated by his mothers’ twelve years of protection and imprisonment, Omar holds all women in contempt for his suffering. As a man living in a postcolonial society, Omar’s revenge comes from a memory of his mother country, his unsuccessful home of mothers. Given his original sin and nature of experience, it becomes increasingly clear that Omar needs someone to satisfy him sexually — if not Farah, then Sufiya, or even the Parsee ayah—Shahbanou. Rushdie’s portrayal of the males is increasingly critical, for they all are male chauvinists. Talvar Ulhaq, for instance, selects Naveed to be his wife only because he finds in her immense fertility, her capacity to bear children. He uses her as a tool to gratify his lust for sex and procreation. He impregnates her regularly on the day she is bound to conceive. But the victim commits suicide because of the terror of constant demand on her fertility. Her episode corresponds to the real horrors of traditional patriarch society where demands on female procreativity are really colossal.

That Pakistan is a cage is always projected in every episode throughout the novel. The Shakil sisters are trapped first by their old, orthodox father in the macabre mansion in Nishapur, and then by themselves in the same mansion after their hedonistic pleasure with the army officers. Farah, made pregnant by
Omar, is forced to go away with Eduardo, but returns with neither husband nor child; hers is again an example of imposed exile. Bilquis, like the Shakil sisters, is first caged by her father, and later, is trapped in her sentimentality or her horror of movement. Rani is trapped in the infidelities of her husband and the rise and fall of his political career. Sufiya Zinobia is trapped in her humiliations and urge for violence; her younger sister Good News Hyder is also trapped in the constant demand on her fertility. The younger sister kills herself, the older kills her tormentors, but the cage never quite becomes anything other than itself.

The narratives in the book revolve around women who occupy a very large portion, but it is men who make all the important decisions about them. All the women have lives forced into the striking but narrow grooves made when tyranny presses itself onto individual temperaments. They are not decisive, but victims and somewhat powerless. Rushdie seems not to have been unduly concerned with their unbearable conditions that they are forced to live in; he describes these caged-women with love, understanding and obsession. Bilquis and Rani, like the three Shakil sisters, are really sympathetically drawn. Bilquis at first falls a helpless victim to the mad frenzy of the communalists at the Red Fort during the partition. Her traumatic experience continues as she is held responsible for not bearing Raza a son and heir. In both cases she is a sacrifice at the altar of male chauvinism and religious superstition. Rani, on the other hand, is a victim of her husband’s power hunger and philandering. She is exiled to the Harappa family residence in the provinces while Isky sports with Pinkie Aurangzeb and a galaxy of film starlets who form part of his entourage. But she is not subservient to patriarchy as Bilquis is; she maintains her dignity by embroidering all of the shameful events in the life of her husband’s political career in a series of magically wrought shawls—‘The Shamelessness of Iskander the Great’. She signs them with her maiden name Rani Humayun, not
just an attempt to restore her pre-marital identity, rather what could be seen as a dignified way of passive protestation against deliberate violence and immorality, dissociating herself from Iskander’s moral and political profligacy. Her shawls might not have any effect on Isky’s public stance, yet she does send them to her politically ambitious daughter Arjumand, who is very much attached to her father, as a moral lesion against cherishing any illusion about Isky and, pursuing the violent history of the country too much. Rani’s resistance may seem virtually passive and ineffectual in the immediate context, but hers is definitely one possible alternative to rewrite the sacred history of Pakistan.

Rushdie continuously literalizes the moving metaphor of blatant shame—the dehumanization of the female sex in a society that crushes its women beneath the intolerable burdens of honour and propriety—in those touching episodes. One gets the impression that what makes Raza’s rule all the more nightmarish is the constant demeaning of women, which leads to the birth of the violent Beast in Sufiya. In the novel the portrait of the fascist is nuanced by the inclusion of oppressive patriarchy. Bilquis’s father, who has been derisively named Mahmoud the Woman, belittles female sex: “Woman,” he sighed resignedly to his daughter, “what a term! Is there no end to the burdens this world is capable of bearing? Was there ever such a broad-backed and also such a dirty word?” (62). One finds another instance of this sort of literalization when the narrator points to the awesomely shocking signboard placed in front of Sind Club of Karachi: “Women and Dogs Not Allowed Beyond This Point” (69). Alluding to the colonial mentality of the British towards the native Indians, Rushdie seems to say that the neo-nationalists are perhaps more colonial in their attitude and action than their colonial masters. He analyses the history of the postcolonial male-mentality that acts as an absolute entity to capture and colonize the female topos.
However, once the women make their way to the centre of *Shame*, Enright claims in an essay, the narrator has to show 'life within the veil'; he has to show how these women—born into the family of men who ignore them—take revenge on their sons, who take revenge on someone else's daughters, and must explode the false dualities of fairy tales like 'Beauty and the Beast'. Propriety and convention suddenly crack open and give way to anarchic impulses. The moving images such as Bilquis's "dopatta of honour" wrapping around her in the mob fury, or Rani depicting the debauchery and cruelties of her husband on the shawls, are really telling-stories of shame and shamelessness. Equally powerful are those last images of Bilquis, whose adult life starts with forced, fire-propelled nakedness, shrouding herself at the end, an aged woman in black veils, with defeated dreams, so as to maintain the distance between her and the world of the male chauvinism in which she has been caged all her life. Raza's oppression and senseless cruelty literally comes back to him when his daughter Sufiya is metamorphosed into a beast. More irony lies in the strongman's escape under a woman's 'burqua.' Even his brutal killing, the final act of revenge that concludes the tale, is also performed by women—the three Shakil sisters, now aged crones, who had once locked themselves behind the dumbwaiter. "I had thought," writes the author in one of his typical intrusions, "that what I had on my hands was an almost excessively masculine tale, a saga of sexual rivalry, ambition, power, patronage, betrayal, death, revenge. But the women seem to have taken over" (173).

With a view to supporting his ideational purpose Rushdie often uses bizarre image of women, which is stretched to the edge of credibility, turning it to be a roving metaphor of shame and shamelessness. Shame reaches its ultimate embodiment in the person of Sufiya Zinobia, the idiot daughter of Raza and Bilquis. Raza has been so desperate of a son that he refuses to accept the anatomical evidence of his daughter's sex, shrieking at the doctor: "There! I
ask you, sir, what is that?—... “A bump!” Raza shrieked hopelessly, “Is it not, doctor, an absolute and unquestionable bump (90)?” The ‘bump’ later turns to be a monstrous scourge and becomes the heroine of *Shame*. By the age of two she contracts brain fever and becomes retarded; Rushdie seems to have deliberately done this to make her pure: “Couldn’t think of another way of creating purity in what is supposed to be the Land of Pure...and idiots are, by definition, innocent” (120). She derives her name from ‘Sufi’, a mystic cult, and Zainub, the grand daughter of Prophet Mohammad, to embody the possibility of redemption. In the course of the novel, however, Sufiya’s shame comes to refer less and less to her mental retardation, her femaleness or to her family, rather it becomes increasingly focused on the society. She becomes, almost literally, the conscience of a shameless world—a principle of honour.

“Not so long ago, in the East End of London,” Rushdie ascribes the origins of Sufiya to the real world, in London, “a Pakistani father murdered his only child, a daughter, because by making love to a white boy she had brought such dishonour upon her family that only her blood could wash away the stain. The tragedy was intensified by the father’s enormous and obvious love for his butchered child, and by the beleaguered reluctance of his friends and relatives (all ‘Asians’) to condemn his action... (115)” He goes on, “Wanting to write about shame, I was at first hunted by the imagined spectre of the dead body, its throat slit like a halal chicken... I even went so far as to give the dead girl a name: Anahita Muhammad, known as Anna...But finally she eluded me, she became a ghost, and I realized that to write about her, about shame, I would have to go back to East” (116). He further explains why he does that precisely because “All stories are haunted by the ghosts of the stories...These ghosts, like Anna, inhabit a country that is entirely unghostly” (117).
The western readers may not appreciate the immigrant Pakistani father's horrific action because of a different cultural milieu, but the author understands it, not finding it alien to him, having been brought up in the same culture. In a sharp scathing criticism, however, Rushdie asserts that the brutal cultural practices—political chicanery, barbaric killing, racial and sexual prejudice and so on so forth—which the neo-nationalists practise, are actually the very same culture that their colonial masters breath in. In an interview to Glendinning, Rushdie describes an incident that is based not on any newspaper article, but on the experience of his own sister: “During the Brixton riots, alone in a compartment of an underground train, she was beaten up by a group of white youths....The police at Brixton station declined to take action; an overwhelming feeling of shame made her not press her case.” The girl suffers excessively from the emotions of shame; and shame, to say the least, is not the exclusive property of the East.

East or West, shame turned inward often breeds monsters, and that is what happens to Sufiya; she becomes a hideous monster strong enough to wrench the heads off men and animals with her bare hands before disemboweling them. When she fills up with shame, it conflicts with her innocence, and the result is a beast. Sufiya's first outburst comes at the age of twelve when she kills two hundred and eighteen turkeys not merely because they disturb her mother but because her father decides to do nothing about this due to his earlier feeling for Pinkie, and this shame seeps into Sufiya. The next eruption is equally innocent: on the day of her sister Naveed's marriage she twists her brother-in-law's neck out of shape, ruining Talvar Ulhaq's polo-playing career for good. But these explosions do not deter Omar from marrying her; shame and shamelessness unite, Enright thinks, “they are both the repositories of the society” (26).
Rushdie derives the governing metaphor of the escalation of violence—the Beast emerging from the Beast—from the tradition of the Grotesque. This is to hint at the idea that when a woman’s inherent right to be treated not just as a doll but as a responsible personality having an integrated identity is socio-politically suppressed, violence becomes an imminent possibility. The explanation for Sufiya’s first explosion is narrated as “twelve years of unloved humiliation take their toll, even on an idiot” (149). She explodes the second time because “a pouring into her too-sensitive spirit of the great abundance of shame” at the circumstances at which the marriage is taking place (186). The third occasion is when she is already married to Shakil who sleeps not with her but with the maidservant Shahbanou. She rightfully begins to wonder about marriage, sex, and children and about Shakil’s treachery. It is because of this frustration and anger she goes out of the house, picks up four men, has sexual intercourse with them, and kills them one after another. Thus discovering her true self, she becomes the opposite not only of Arjumand, the sexless Virgin Ironpants, but also the opposite of the Muslim male who, in some interpretation of the Islamic ‘sharia’, is allowed to have four wives. The metaphoric implication of this episode is worth quoting:

Shame walks the streets of night. In the slums four youths are transfixed by those appalling eyes...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; and what Shahbanou took upon herself is finally done to Sufiya. 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. And heads hurled high, sinking into the scattered clouds; nobody saw them fall. She rises, goes home. And sleeps; the Beast subsides. (242)
Although in the passage Sufiya becomes the oldest of the misogynist myths—the virgin who is really a vampire, the irresistible temptress who seduces men in order to kill them—the multi-layered novel ushers in a tremendous artistic success by incorporating fantastic events into socially realistic settings. The novel ends with the explosion of evil. She breaks out of the room in the attic when Raza hatched the most shameful deed in the form of Iskander’s murder, given that Isky had been Raza’s onetime patron much less than the executive head of a democratic government. Shame, generated by all this, is a complex emotion containing encyclopedias of nuances, for it presupposes a dichotomy between the observer and the observed. By caricaturing Sufiya and making her grotesque, eccentric and loon, Rushdie intends the heroine to represent the shame felt by the individual, by the nation, and by the writer himself. It is the universal shame that every man should feel, but unfortunately nobody cares to, or perhaps more appropriately, does not muster the courage to do. Sufiya, who now roams far and near unchecked and unencumbered, on the other hand, is a symbol of a whole colonial culture, of the feeling of shame generated by a country where dictatorship has resulted in the dwarfing of the intellectual and moral stance of everyone, downsizing giant men to pigmies (271).

One believes that Rushdie is immersed in fiction’s intricacies; in writing as a process of excavation and innovation, the writer deeply involves himself within the mythical matrix of the subcontinent. He recognises the Hindu goddesses, who are traditionally strong figures or even indomitable ones, as primal power incarnate. By comparing Sufiya to the goddess Kali, Rushdie attributes her with a force of character. She is white whereas Kali is black, and she is not an embodiment of the goddess, but she resembles Kali in her fierce aspect, the fury rather than the goddess and, like Kali, she is ubiquitous. Kali is represented with a hideous and terrible countenance, dripping with blood,
encircled with snakes, hung round with skulls and human heads, while Sufiya moves "on all fours, naked, coated in mud and blood and shit, with twigs sticking to her back and beetles in her hair" (286). Commenting upon Sufiya's genesis in an interview with Dillip Fernandez Rushdie tells:

I suppose Sufiya Zenobia came about because I wanted some kind of incarnation of the ideas the book dealt with. You have to make the connection between shame and violence. If you push people too far and if you humiliate them too greatly, then a kind of violence bursts out of them. I wanted somehow to enclose that idea inside one person.

Thus, one finds that the idea of 'shakti' has been amalgamated with Sufiya to conceive her as a force field, a principle that may augur the idea of self-emancipating woman and, possibly bring a sanitization to the world of conspiracy and chaos. Kali is one of the most formidable and overpowering goddesses of the Hindu pantheon, whose very first mythological function is to combat demons who threaten the stability of the cosmos. She massacres demons desiring to mate with her, and who exists independently, not needing masculine protection or guidance, represents a true feminine vision. Likewise, Sufiya's mystical exploits show her as being independent of men and relationships with them; she is terrifyingly powerful and stands opposite to the image of the pygmy-men of Pakistan. In fact, she challenges the stereotyped view of women—Bilquis or Naveed are only two prototypes of them—prevalent in the subcontinent. She embodies the lurking of extraordinary power that is repressed in women who are forced into shameful, submissive and socially demeaning roles. But even if Sufiya's violence sometimes appears pointless, many will find—as Brennan does—in it a terrible truth about totalitarianism.
Her bestiality has much redeeming quality about it. As a whole, it suggests that in a country where people are daily fed upon “a diet of honour and shame” (115) what one calls miraculous can happen both as fact and metaphor.

It may be seen as a taut balance between the excess of imagination and the unconscious and those of history and politics. One gets this idea when one finds resemblance between Sufiya’s sado-masochistic exploits and Kali’s heroics. Psychoanalytically speaking, sado-masochism is a ubiquitous defense strategy employed by marginalized or peripheral persons who find it otherwise impossible to derive satisfaction and restore self-esteem amidst a labyrinth of malice, chaos and shame. But Rushdie faces an added disadvantage of a clear predisposition when he makes Sufiya neurotic. The masochist-neurotic seems to convert everything into painful experience; ever deeply s/he submerges in misery and violence. The aim of all masochistic suffering is satisfaction although it is hardly ever attained except in sexual fantasies and perversion. Rushdie in his interview to Una Chaudhuri also hints at this point: “Can it be possible that human beings are capable of discovering their nobility in their savagery?” Aizaz Ahmad ponders in the same way and thinks that the grappling with the needs of social regeneration becomes weak and remote especially when the shamed conscience of a community or a country is deposited in one person who is physiologically incapable of intellection (146). While it should be appreciated that it is not the duty of the writer to give us any solution to a problem although s/he may peel on and on the serious nature of a problem, readers increasingly feel that Rushdie is hinting at a mob violence, when he makes Sufiya “a rumour, a chimera, the collective fantasy of a stifled people, a dream born of their rage” (236). This is a sort of realization that dawn on Omar Khayyam’s dream thus:
Across the peripheries of the land that years had passed before her various legends had been able to encounter one another, to be united in his thoughts, forming the pattern which uncovered her night-obscured shape. "Sufia Zinobia", he said to the open window, "I can see you now". (254)

But though Omar thinks that he has discovered the true self of Sufiya, he himself is guilty of suspecting and suppressing history under the carpet. He looses his way completely, and descends "upon the cohorts of history like a wolf (or wolf-child) on the fold" (30). But history never forgives anyone who chooses to be laid aside or turns a cold shoulder to its calls.

In the novel Rushdie concerns himself not only with freedom in that country which is "not Pakistan, or not quite" (29) but also basic human freedom to experiment with new modes and forms of expression. That is why he moves the narrative at such a terrific speed in a churning manner as to prevent the reader from keeping the threads while generating an assurance within him of being fully conscious of material facts. It happens with an excellent fictionalization of fact which is his constant moving from the real fictional and back, and this very much accounts for the grip the story has on its readers. In fact, Rushdie has created an excellent piece of New Journalism in the novel, which permits him to fictionalize the fact in such a way that even while the reader enjoys descriptions as fantastic as he is conscious of the verifiable facts of history incorporated therein.

Such mingling of the real and the fictitious makes the latter more convincing and acceptable. By the portrayal of exaggerated characters— "monsters and clowns" as Rushdie calls them— his dislike of Pakistan, the
unmentionable country across the border, is quite apparent. He calls it "the new moth-nibbled land of God"—"a few insect-nibbled slices,"—"Al-Lah's new country: two chunks of land a thousand miles apart. A country so improbable that it could almost exist" (61). This humour at the expense of "Allah's new country," which has nothing really religious about it, is coupled with an explanation of the name of Pakistan, showing how its letters stand for its provinces. There is no mention of any purity ("Pak") associated with the other country. On the other hand, Rushdie associates it with sin by giving it the title of "Peccavistan" (88).

One might be tempted to call the novel a 'comic epic' because the vacuity of values that have been illustrated in the narrator's "Piccavistan" is very much like the real Pakistan. Rushdie catalogues in detail and with apparent relish the numerous aspects of the seamy side of the life and politics as in the real history of Pakistan. Revealing his disapproval of the dainty and delicate books written earlier on Indian subcontinent Rushdie, in an interview with Kaufman, asserts the genuine need of metafiction to tell the massive facts about it: "It seemed to me that if you had to choose a form for that part of the world, the form would be the comic epic." But the factual identities of the events and characters are suppressed or thinly veiled so that the readers may not be able to relate them exactly to the contemporary history of Pakistan, and more importantly, not to be censored. He chooses to put his material into a comic vein, though he would prefer to call it a fairy-tale; with obvious tongue in the cheek he defends his avoidance of their portrayal for fear of possible prosecution against him:

If I had been writing a book of this nature, it would have done me no good to protest that I was writing universally, not only about Pakistan. The book would
As everything is sought to be done by the narrator-author, the reader is required only to go along the course of the narrative as envisaged by the former. It happens in the manner of electronically timed traffic lights that blink to caution the traffic, flashing this direction one moment and the other the next, hypnotizing one into keeping one's sight glued to them for fear of missing an unpredictable moment that may cause one's fall, particularly when one is positioned on the edge.

But the narrator in *Shame* never claims to be an out and out reporter. Rather he intrudes into the story in his own right, gives his personal opinion and never lets the reader know that he is fabricating an illusion. This is a very common strategy used by Bertolt Brecht in his 'theatre of alienation'. More than winning his audience to his side and even while doing so Brecht makes it clear that he is using every effort to remind the audience that it is in the theatre, witnessing a show that can mix up real and fictional at ease. Likewise, Rushdie makes his narrator intrude his personal opinions, destroy the illusion of reality in the narrative and pour invective on the excessive repressive forces in Pakistan. Hinting at the possibility of a suitable narrative form, therefore, he writes:

> Fortunately, however, I am only telling a sort of modern fairy-tale so that's all right: nobody need get upset, or take anything I say too seriously. No drastic action need be taken. either. (70)

The dream-nightmare rhetoric, which Rushdie employs in this novel, has been one of the principal obsessions with the American writers for quite
sometime; whether native or emigrant i* had never been a dominant narrative strategy with Indian writers. Rushdie is, claims Hoffenden, the first Indian English writer who has employed the dream-rhetoric as the nerve center of his story. He has concerned himself with the quality of life on the sub-continent after its liberation. In his earlier novel *Midnight's Children* he has concentrated upon the current of life that is supposed to flow through India. He finds it, however, a stagnating pool in which identity or ideology is the prime casualty. He finds India a huge pickle-jar in which different species are immersed into a liquid that would soften their irritants and strains. Except for his bitter vituperation on the Emergency, *Midnight's Children* may be read as a great compliment to the Indian experiment in democracy that seeks to eliminate all the irritants and their pungency out of India as one community. India as an experiment in co-existence has to be understood for a better future in which different peoples would still be integral part of one whole, floating and sinking together in the great flow towards a common destiny.

It is understandable that Rushdie is trying to grapple with the conflict within his mind between the historically verifiable reality of his past life and the reality that he wants to achieve in his work rather imaginatively. His nostalgic views on the need and its concurrent difficulties resurface from time to time in the authorial incursions; he declares Pakistan as "a place insufficiently imagined... a miracle that went wrong" (87). He seems to be ashamed of both the idea and the reality of Pakistan from its very genesis. His repulsion for communal violence is expressed elsewhere in *Midnight's Children*, especially where the protagonist's mother saves the life of one Lifafa Das by making her first announcement of the fact of her pregnancy before a violent Muslim crowd. The Rani of Cooch Nahin and Mian Abdullah— two of his idealized characters in that novel— are both openly opposed to the idea of Pakistan along with a third such character the boatman Tai who loses his life standing between the
armies of India and Pakistan. Thus *Shame*, like *Midnight’s Children*, clearly projects Rushdie’s point of view at least in this count; he believes that the religious basis on which the very foundation of Pakistan has been laid is ill conceived.

Rushdie links up the dictatorship syndrome with religious fundamentalism in *Shame*. The portrait of the fascist as a military dictator and religious bigot is allegorically done in the figure of Raza Hyder/Zia ul-Haq. Pakistan under Zia had turned into a nightmarish surreal land, Rushdie hints this in *Imaginary Homelands*, where armaments were openly traded in the country’s black market, where police and military actively supported drug peddlers, where the dictator imposed “his Islamisation programme...the ugliest possible face of faith”. In the fictional novel, he describes the fascist as a religious leader who is not merely content to control people’s bodies, but their minds. “Autocratic regimes find it useful to espouse the rhetoric of faith,” the narrator tells in the novel, “because people respect that language, are reluctant to oppose it. This is how religions shore up dictators; by encircling them with words of power, words which people are reluctant to see discredited, disenfranchised, mocked” (251). Thus Raza is seen heeding to the dictates of the fundamentalists, banning books, censoring all television programmes except theological lectures. He strictly imposes praying five times a day, shoots down beggars, and muzzles any kind of opposition ruthlessly.

When Raza ousts Prime Minister Iskander Harappa in a coup, he proclaims that the Army’s role is that of an honest reference or umpire. But it is more than a joke when his self-styled acronymic position CMLA stands for not only Chief Martial Law Administrator but also Cancel My Last Announcement, in popular usage. Along with the dictatorial syndrome Rushdie portrays another important aspect of dictatorship, which is typically oriental — turning religion into an instrument for winning popularity and retaining power. Raza’s six-time
namaaz a day, and his swearing on the Koran on the national television are instances of it. His followers, in order to legitimize his rule and project an image of himself as a God-fearing ruler, exploit the namaaz-scar on Raza's forehead. He himself brazenly justifies the introduction of Islamic law and punishment and, more shamelessly, uses these as instruments of terror. Like all Eastern dictators usually do, he also works in close collaboration with priests and godman like Maulana Dawood. The narrator not only despises such an unprincipled stance but also identifies it as the real reason for the socio-political topsy-turvy, the cage-like situation, in Pakistan; his dissociation seems total:

So-called Islamic “fundamentalism” does not spring, in Pakistan, from the people. It is imposed on them from above. Autocratic regimes find it useful to espouse the rhetoric of faith, because people respect that language, are reluctant to oppose it. This is how religions shore up dictators; by encircling them with words of power, words which the people are reluctant to see discredited, disenfranchised, mocked. (251)

Rushdie often targets priests, religious practices and hypocrites for mockery in the novel. One really gets an impression of the narrator-author's disapproval of religiosity in the ingenious episode of the Maulana's humiliation in the chapter 'A Necklace of Shoes': “the fateful necklace hanging around the divine's accidental neck” (43). Likewise, the Shakil sisters' disregard of certain religious practices— whispering the name of God to the newborn, removing the foreskin “like banana peel” (21), and the Islamic concept of Paradise— is made fun of in the novel (77). The universal abuse and exploitation of religion is also hinted at in the last words of Maulana Dawood, possibly suggesting his vision of Mecca being covered with shit (206).
The dictatorship syndrome is shown, but with the fictional strategy of caricature and irony. Raza Hyder appears to belong to the world of punch with his "energy enough to light up a street" (65-66), his forehead marked with a namaaz-created wound, black pouch under his eyes looking like sunglasses, and a waxen bulbous moustache. Similarly, his rise to power, his prevarications, his making false statements and promises, his hanging of Iskander, his blaming the opposition for everything that goes wrong, his fear of his own progeny and, lastly, his terrible end like that of a legendary demon. All these cruel and ugly incidents and repulsive physical details, which form a paradigm of the rise and fall of dictatorships, are portrayed with amusement and irony. But the prevailing narrative mode remains as gleeful as it is ironic or indignant. One finds some wonderfully comic episodes where Rushdie particularly delights in palpable absurdities such as those resulting from Hyder's attempt to impose Islamic fundamentalism upon his country after seizing power. When asked by a British television interviewer if the reinstitution of such Islamic punishments as flogging and the cutting off of hands might not be seen "in certain quarters" as barbaric, he smiles into the camera and counts off three reasons why such practices are not barbaric: "Number two . . . We will not simply order people to stick out their hands, like this, and go fataakh! with a butcher's knife. No, sir. All will be done under the most hygienic conditions, with proper medical supervision, use of anaesthetic etcetera " (245).

Likewise, a good deal of mock-epic satire on the political events is devised to supple bitter narrative projects in the novel. What may appear to have been a high military achievement of Hyder has been subverted and subjected to a brilliant satirical attack— he has succeeded in capturing " a mountain valley so high and inaccessible that even goat had difficulty in breathing up there"; but he was so intrepid, so tremendous, that "all true patriots had to gasp...the fighting was fierce as ice—and with twenty men only he took the valley" (79).

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The mountain terrain is mock-heroically named Aansu-ki-Waddi. These are undoubtedly part of a technical resolution that shows the blatant lie and hypocrisy that envelops the country from where there is no respite. It also attempts to create fictional equivalents of the literal facts of recent Pakistani history, which tends towards parody, portraying powerful politicians as buffoons or cartoons.

In an interview published in *Times Book Review*, Rushdie reveals that what interests him in regard to Bhutto and Zia is not so much the personalities of the two men as the tendency to individualize the moral failures of the ruling class. Raza is not so much a personality as a type whereas Iskander is a personality. He, like Bhutto, is a self-contradictory man, the scion of an enormously wealthy landowning family, coming from the Sind province of Pakistan. Patrician and Westernized, he adopts cheap populist stances—rhetorical speeches, bad language, histrionics—in order to muster popular support to further his political career. While Bhutto really deserves a place in history at least for the way he rescues his country from defeat, demoralization after the 1971 war with India, when the eastern part of Pakistan secedes from the mainland to form its separate national identity as Bangladesh. Rushdie thinly veils this national shame under the project of a sentimental oeuvre or a sort of self-glorification by Isky who bursts into political rhetoric:

At a rally attended by two million people, Iskander Harappa unbuttoned his shirt. 'What have I to hide?' he shouted. 'They say I have benefited; but I have lost fully half my beloved country. Then tell me, is this gain? Is this advantage? Is this luck? My people, your hearts are scarred by grief; behold, my heart bears the same wounds as yours.' Iskander Harappa tore off his shirt and ripped it in half; he bared his hairless breast to the
cheering, weeping crowd. (The young Richard Burton once did the same thing, in the film Alexander the Great. The soldiers loved Alexander because he showed them his battle scars.) (180)

On the campaign trails, Isky, like Bhutto, often rips off his jacket or vest or even his shirt and proclaims his willingness to die for his fellowmen. “Come on, fire bullets at me”, he shouts to the uproarious cheer of the crowd, “I am prepared to die for the sake of the people” (182). For, he knows fully well that such histrionics are the real arsenals that could transform his personal shame to mass support: “People could see it in Isky, he was plainly full of the stuff, up to the brim, it spilled out of him and washed them clean” (181). It appears that Rushdie is writing for two different reading publics: at one hand, he is warning his Pakistani readers against being taken in by histrionics too much, and the Western readers, on the other hand, would find Isky an epigone through the parallel to Alexander.

His first name—Iskander, alluding to Alexander the Great, and the surname—Harappa, referring to the ancient Indus valley civilization, suggests the amalgamation of Western and Eastern components in his personality as well as, by ironic contrast, his own debasement of the heroic and culture. His dissolute life as a playboy—also lends ‘Iskander’ an under-lying appropriateness because Alexander in personal life — not a part of the legend — was no less dissolute. With calculated brilliance he has cultivated the art of seeing the need to change his ways completely if he has to save his political career, he repudiates both Omar and Pinkie. But his shrewdness belied him; at a time when Raza’s career had slumped, he picks him up from the wilderness and appoints him Commander-in-Chief of the Army: “He will be my man. And with such a compromised leader the Army can’t get too strong” (181). But this political
miscalculation proves to be the undoing of the shrewdest politician of Pakistan "which had been so tragically misfortunate, so accursed, in its heads of state" (181). However, the protégé becomes the supplanter, even the executioner, of his patron. These ironies are true to history.

The ironies in the roles of Raza and Isky, however, make situation really tragic—tragic for them as well as for Pakistan, but the figures themselves are low grade and comic. Rushdie's intention seems clearly to write a book whose story is more or less unrelieved tragedy but at the same time a farce. May be his purpose is not to produce cartoons, but his basic technique remains the cartoon. Isky and Raza are presented as buffoons, but what they inflict on Pakistan is not farcical but tragic. The failure of Pakistan as a political and cultural dream has turned into a nightmare. The soldiers like Ayub, Yahya, Zia take to politics in alliance with fanatic and pseudo mullahs like Dawoods while politicians like Iskander indulge in murders. There is an exchange of roles between the soldier and the politician in which the soldier has proved himself a better politician besides retaining his material qualities.

Of the legends that contribute to the history of a postcolonial nation, it sometimes seems that all are true and none is reliable. The postcolonial author must convey this paradox effectively within what is, essentially, just another legend. 'Magic realism' often results since fantasy becomes a virtual necessity when representing the meshing of two cultures, because at least two separate realities, both of which are relevant and neither of which is completely accurate, work simultaneously. One may argue that facts are facts, and that they remain uncontestable; but the choices a storyteller makes in presenting data are all-important to their interpretation. In the long run, it seems there is no such thing as complete accuracy, and perception outweighs so-called reality in importance. Sometimes by juxtaposing local history with world events, and sometimes by
juxtaposing two or more versions of the same events or locales, a postcolonial author presents a story with so many facts that it necessarily becomes unclear.

Shame remains as an eclectic collection of a vast number of characters, anecdotes and fascinating snippets of factual information, few of which seem, at first glance, directly interrelated. As the novel progresses, however, Rushdie weaves together these seemingly unconnected realities into a coherent whole. His narrator performs an integral role in this construction. While in Midnight's Children the protagonist remains all through the live-center of consciousness and acts as the real narrator, in Shame the narrator has been the novelist himself. The intervention of the narrator-novelist helps the reader shift his/her focus swiftly from one centre of consciousness to another—from, say, Shakil sisters to Farah to Sufiya to Omar and so on—to get a wide range of kaleidoscopic vision. This technique makes handy provision for constructing fictional and historical narrative together in one plane; the fabulistic and realistic modes in the novel are not compartmentalized but intertwined.

The narrative within the novel is controlled transparently by repeated, direct, personal interventions on the part of the narrator who is Rushdie himself. But total identification may take away, as Dillip Fernandez has rightly hinted at, much of the charm that one is likely to derive from the narrative duplicity of the novel. The self-conscious authorial intrusion, which is characteristic of a postmodernist style, gives the reader of Shame a degree of intimacy with Rushdie. Viewed analogously, his intrusive remarks can be seen as optical instruments with which to construct a coherent message behind the novel. He informs the reader of the ongoing juxtaposition between fantasy and reality that provides the tension within the novel. The narrator gives the reader a sense of clarity and continuity by revealing the author's reasons for the endless myriad of images within the novel. Without such a friend the reader would be hopelessly lost.
within the book's chaotic structure. By analyzing the voice of the narrator-novelist in the novel, one can appreciate Rushdie's intentions for the structure of *Shame*:

> As for me: I, too, like all migrants, am a fantasist. I build imaginary countries and try to impose them on the ones that exist. I, too face the problem of history: what to retain, what to dump, how to hold on to what memory insists on relinquishing, how to deal with change. (92)

From the fairy-tale the narrator-novelist suddenly shifts to a kind of 'Time-Out Agitprop' in order to interpose, sharply comment as the enlightened man of the world. One may object to the way he breaks into the narrative now and then to comment on politics or ethics. Moreover, one may pose the question whether the narrator-author possesses a right to his subject:

> Outsider! Trespasser! You have no right to this subject!
> ...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? (23)

However, the relatively small dosage of self-referential writing interspersed into large blocks of factually presented narrative makes *Shame* really challenging and effective. Using the self-conscious voice, the narrator-author makes important and similar points about his right to personalize or represent history. *Shame* echoes a sentiment that most likely prevails in postcolonial nations—nations exercising their right to take part in the telling of history as they see it:

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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? (23)

But when an author calls for the reader's scepticism of stories within a story, subtly pointing as evidence to contradictory information or unlikely authority, the inevitable challenge that follows is to convince the reader to accept the author's own account, which is, after all, just another story. Rushdie, however, bypasses this option, choosing instead to highlight the problem. Beyond using admittedly unreliable and contradictory characters' stories and legends to place together supposedly believable accounts, the narrative voice that he has created plays active role within the text as self-referential storytelling characters, throwing in constant reminders of their presence. Casual asides like "I have found this off-centring to be necessary" (29), or "I cannot prove or disprove the foul story" (13), and "I am unable to clear away the improbabilities" (16); addresses directed at the audience such as "Dizzy, peripheral, inverted, infatuated, insomniac, stargazing, fat: What manner of hero is this?" (25), or "Believe me when I tell you" (26), and "Shame, dear hero, is not the exclusive property of the East" (29); self-conscious mystification of the text like "How hard to pin down the truth, especially when one is obliged to see the world in slices...I'll leave it to the readers..." (116-117); and an onslaught of questions directed at no one in particular, are some of the tools that Rushdie frequently uses in Shame not only to cover up any omission that could easily be the consequence of his half-formed knowledge about Pakistan coming "in slices" (69), but to avoid any retribution while examining the nightmarish experiences of repressive syndrome in that country.
For Rushdie Pakistan is a “looking glass” through which he can cross over, when he likes, into an amusing world of make-believe and fantasy. He, however, does not carefully distinguish among the group of related terms ‘fantasy’, ‘myth’, ‘fairy-tale’, ‘miracle’, ‘fable’, ‘dream’, and so on. The terms suggest two interrelated meanings: a departure from fictional realism, and a sense of exasperation, despair and wonder in the face of an impossible country that is so far outside the moral and intellectual constraints of the observer. But the looking glass, on the other hand, really helps him in an exploration of the self and a recognition and confirmation of his physical alienation. The narration makes it plain that Rushdie is aware of the fact that there are many ‘loose ends’ in the novel, which need urgent connections. This is no flaw in a postmodern novel. Rushdie admits: “Although I have known Pakistan for a long time, I have never lived there for longer than six months at a stretch. Once I went for just two weeks ... I am forced to reflect that world in fragments of broken mirrors ... I must reconcile myself to the inevitability of the missing bits” (67) (70) — a warning to the reader of the novel as fiction as well as history.

The “broken mirrors” in Shame, as one observes, are the equivalent of the perforated sheet in Midnight's Children; one has to gather and try through them to see if reality could be remade. Rushdie chooses Omar, a voyeur, to be the narrator-protagonist as his profession appropriates to his partial and peripheral character. The narrator-novelist comments:

What Eduardo saw in Omar is the possibilities of his true, peripheral nature. What's a doctor, after all? — a legitimized 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... anonymous, a minor character, yet also,
paradoxically, central, especially at the crisis. (49)

"Legitimized voyeur" applies to the writers too, and refers to the literary allusiveness embedded in Shakil's forenames. But how far his magical family chronicle can be about the real Pakistan is a question many will ask, which Rushdie keeps tantalizingly open. However, if he were to be believed—with a tremendous amount of risks involved— one would find that sometimes legends make reality and become more telling than the facts.

The reality recorded in Shame may be, as the narrator-author very often suggests, an "imaginary truth", but it is not all so imaginary. What is more important, however, is that the novel crystallizes a good deal of sound sense and a deep sensibility which is both subcontinental and universal: Shame does not only relate to Pakistan, it relates to India, and also relates to most of the Third World as an idea. The fantastic reveals not only the deepest shame, but also the gravest of fears. Like all fantasies, Shame explores the underside of the conscious world and, by imagining and interpreting an inverted, topsy-turvy culture, arouses horror. The example of stretching of a realistic reference to its extreme is seen in Bariamma's house where Bilquis has to share a cavernous bedroom with forty other females. The elderly chaperone looks the other way so her 'girls' may get some fun with their husbands in the dark. Her loud snore continues only till the last husband leaves the room. This dormitory episode is undoubtedly an exaggeration of the joint-family set up as one also gets a realistic picture in Attia Hosain's Sunlight on a Broken Column. But Rushdie stretches the image of this private activity still further not only to negate the secret act but also to suggest a horrific picture: in the darkness of the dormitory, "who would know if her real husband had come to her? And who would complain?" (73). Furthermore, a negation of the concept of purity at the national level, and privacy
at the private level has been suggested: "when pregnancy occurred they did so as if by magic, as if all conceptions were immaculate and all births virgin" (74).

Rushdie juxtaposes pieces of town gossip to create the mystical setting of *Shame*; many different accounts admittedly have contributed to the sketches of his peculiar characters and their actions. His narrator develops large portions of plot in passages introduced by shaky statements like "Tongues began to wag" (45) and "Gossip is like water. It probes surfaces for their weak places until it finds the breakthrough point so it was only a matter of time before the good people of Q. hit upon the most shameful and scandalous explanation of all" (48). After many passages of dubious accuracy comes the express intention of the narrator to "get back onto solid ground" (50); thereby, the fictional and historical accounts appear similar and not openly definitive, but the tone of the text that follows remains unchanged in its gossipy nature. Although the veracity of his statement cannot be verified, there are no passages in the novel that make the reader suspicious of any duplicity on the part of the narrator. In the entire book the narrator is employed to aid the reader in constructing a coherent vision of the novel’s content. But he tries to maintain a self-conscious distance to avoid a sort of mimesis.

In *Grimus* Rushdie has revealed that he doesn’t care for stories that are so tight. Stories should be like life, slightly frayed at the edges, full of loose ends and lives juxtaposed by accident rather than some grand design. Most of life has no meaning. So it must surely be a distortion of life to tell tales in which every single element is meaningful. It is really terrible to see a meaning or a great import in everything one does, everything that happens to one. If this is what Rushdie believes, one should not try very hard to find meaning in every fantasized event and action of the characters in the novel. In fact, one feels
that the meaningless, confusing and chaotic situation in the novel creates the right type of atmosphere for the people who inhabit this novel. One finds an example of mystification of fact in the naming of the last section of the novel—"In the Fifteenth Century"—gathering the impression that he has gone back six centuries in the past, when Macbeth’s witches roam the harems of the dilapidated mansion in Nishapur. Moreover, the reference to the Islamic Calendar indicates the repressive life of the people dragged backward and chained to the Middle Ages— the world where heroes are clowns and clowns are heroes, where fair is foul and foul is fair, where life is full of turmoil and suffering, but there is little hope of escaping from the shameful existence. It also permits Rushdie to transgress the boundaries of fact and fiction in true postmodernist spirit, and suggests two periods and cultures existing simultaneously: the Hegiran fifteenth century with its suggestion of the medieval hangover and out-datedness alongside the modern twentieth century. The boundaries of the past and the present are not blurred but remain, are challenged and are investigated.

The novelist’s sensibility in Shame appears to be basically Indian—democratic, secular and humanistic. In fact, throughout the novel the nightmarish and monochromatic Pakistani reality has been examined, satirized and ridiculed from the perspective of one who has his ‘roots’ fixed in undivided India, drawing sustenance from its values. He looks back with nostalgia at the old world of his Indian childhood as a ‘continuity’ and a ‘reality’ as different from the facts of his present ‘faraway life’ as ‘illusions’. His “looking glass” really helps him in an exploration of the self and recognition and a confirmation of the basically Indian features of his thoughts and attitudes: shame and rage dominate Shame just as love and tolerance suffuse Midnight’s Children.
NOTES AND REFERENCES


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