CHAPTER IV

SHAME
To bring stability in the State, the ghost of Dawood orders Raja Hyder to give a sacrifice to God Abraham. Raja Hyder asks his son-in-law to give a fatal injection to Sufiya Zinobia. Many times Raja Hyder announces elections and postpones them. Unrest spreads all over the country.

How does a dictator fall? There is an old saw which states, with absurd optimism, that it is in the nature of tyrannies to end. One might as well say that it is also in the nature to begin, to continue to dig themselves, in, and, often, to be preserved by greater powers than their own. 10

At last, people revolt against Hyder and his dictatorship. He is compelled to escape in the guise of a woman wearing 'Burkha.' Omar Khayyam guides him to Nishapur where he is put to death at the hands of three sisters.

Shame expatiates extensively on the theme of shame and also encompasses various nuances that are associated

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10Shame, p. 257.
with it. It runs on three levels - the political, the
cultural and the social. On the political level the
novel runs like a document on the contemporary political
situation in Pakistan. It may appear that the novelist
concerns himself with the story of Raja Hyder and Iskander
Harappa, the two powerful political leaders of the country.
One may be tempted to draw parallels in the story of Gen.
Zia and Zulficar Bhutto. The novelist explores in depth
the Iskander-Raja Plot, "a very macho book" - all about
careerism, cops, politics, revenge, assassinations, ex­
cursions, blood and guts."11 He even presents various
strategies employed by these two families - Raja Hyder
and Iskander Harappa. He comes out overtly how shame is
the result of excessive humiliation and that it certainly
leads to violence. Naturally politicians who take recourse
to the methods of repression are bound to fall one day or
the other.

On the cultural level, the novelist draws our
attention to poets and artists who are punished in Pakistan.

11Dilio Fernandez, "Such Angst, Loneliness, Root­
A reputed poet in Karachi is put in jail for his patriotic compositions. Besides being tortured in inhuman fashion, he "had been hung upside-down by the ankles and beaten, as if he were a new-born baby whose lungs had to be coerced into action so that he could squeal." The plight of the poet reflects ostensibly the state of affairs prevailing in Pakistan.

There is the theme of the social moors of the backward and superstitious Islamic society that multiplies shame on shame through limitless repression breeding violence. In fact, this leads to psychological horrors in society. In the words of the narrator,

Repression is a seamless garment; a society which is authoritarian in its social and sexual codes, which crushes its women beneath the intolerable burdens of honour and propriety, breeds repressions of other kinds as well. Contrariwise, dictators are always - or at least in public, on other people's behalf - puritanical.¹³

¹²Shame, p. 28.
¹³Ibid., p. 173.
Thus, the theme of shame as depicted through the book takes on a zigzag trajectory, with interesting results.\(^{14}\)

Rushdie's art of characterization in this novel has drawn considerable critical attention. Omar Khayyam represents the comic vituperation of the murky political history of Pakistan. He is born of three recluse-spinsters who keep secret which of their wombs bore him on his grandfather's deathbed. Born in cloistered **Nishapur**, stranded in shamelessness, he is plagued by a constant fear of falling off the edge of the earth. He is "dizzy, peripheral, inverted, infatuated, insomniac, stargazing, fat."\(^ {15}\) but he is self-educated in "classical Arabic and Persian, also Latin, French and German, all with the aid of dictionaries and the unused texts of his grandfather's deceptive vanity."\(^ {16}\) He later becomes a practitioner of medicine interested in the action of mind over matter. He even attempts to release himself from the bondage of his family's shameful past.


\(^{15}\) *Shame*, p. 25

Omar Khayyam often wants an escape from the oppressive protection of his three virgin mothers in Nishapur. He discovers that the personal shame is only a microcosmic form of the national shame he sees abroad. His ruminations at the end of the novel throw light on his desperate situation:

I can confess to many things. Fleeing-from-roots, obesity, drunkenness, hypnosis. Getting girls in the family way, not sleeping with my wife, too-many-pine-kernels, peeing-tommy-ery as a boy ... I confess to social climbing, to only-doing-my-job, to being cornerman in other people's wrestling matches. I confess to fearing sleep.\(^{17}\)

Sufiya Zinobia is another character in the novel with considerable qualities of shame. Rushdie "personifies in her the shame of Pakistan."\(^{18}\) The novelist had had the first hand knowledge of a Pakistani girl who is murdered by her father in the East End of London for allegedly having made love to a white boy and brought "such a dishonour upon her family that only her blood could wash away the stain."\(^{19}\)

\(^{17}\)Shame, p. 263.


\(^{19}\)Shame, p. 123.
Sufiya Zinobia seems to have grown out of the corpse of the murdered girl in England. Caught between two cultures, she becomes a sacrificial scapegoat in expiation of the guilt her parents feel for having transplanted themselves in an alien land.

Through the disfigurement of Sufiya, Rushdie creates an oppressive world that becomes really grotesque. The reader no longer recognises her as a character, as "she evolves into a myth and a legend, a beast, lusty for kill stalking the country, naked, matted with grime and blood."²⁰

Sufiya Zinobia becomes a typical human emotion of shame in the novel. To comprehend her is to acknowledge savagery as a constituent element in national makeup. Rushdie traces the origins of Sufiya's shame thus:

And once upon a time there was a retarded daughter, who for twelve years had been given to understand that she embodied her mother's shame.²¹

Sufiya experiences the forbidden emotion, shame, the nuances of which contribute to rarified sensibility.

²¹Shame, p. 135.
In the words of the novelist, these nuances are "embarrassment, discomfiture, decency, modesty, shyness, the sense of having an ordained place in the world."  

Rushdie dwells upon the triggers of violence within Sufiya. The first outburst is a demonic wringing of necks of Pinkie Aurangzeb's two hundred and eighteen turkeys. The second outburst is an attempted wringing of the neck of Naveed's husband Talvar. There are subsequent instances of violence. The novelist seems to think that, if Sufiya who is shame, is alienated in Pakistan, what remains then is unalienated shamelessness. He indicates this in his question and answer:

What's the opposite of shame? What's left when 'shamam' is subtracted? That's obvious; shamelessness. 23

Through the story of Omar Khayyam and Sufiya Zinobia the novelist has presented an axis which lies between shame and shamelessness.

22Shame, p. 39.
23Ibid., p. 39.
The greatness of the novel lies in the recreation of contemporary Indian history. The novel contains vivid presentation of history in the plot involving the relationships between the two important architects of Pakistan's history - Raja Haidar and Iskander Harappa. In the words of R.S. Pathak,

The novel tries to highlight complex networks of transcultural relationships between the individual and historical forces.  

The treatment of events as well as characters is artistic in terms of history. For example, the novelist talks about various historical situations that obtain in Pakistan:

History was old and rusted, it was a machine nobody had plugged in for thousands of years, and here all of a sudden it was being asked for maximum output. Nobody was surprised that there were accidents ... No, It's more than that; there are things that cannot be permitted to be true.  


25  Shama, p. 82.
Rushdie runs wildly about like a 'time traveller who has lost his magic capsule and fears he will never emerge from the disintegrating history of his race.'

Some of the characters in the novel seem to negate history. Omar Khayyam descended upon the cohorts of history like a wolf on the fold. To Raja Hyder, the recalling of history is merely a 'rite of blood.' Bilquish is suspicious of history and pushes the past away like a poor relation.

The uniqueness about Rushdie's treatment of history also lies in his idea of illusionary fictional reality. For example, the locale of Shame is not Pakistan, or not quite. There are two countries, real and fictional, occupying the same space. My story, my fictional country exists, like myself, at a slight angle to reality. I have found this off-centring to be necessary, but its value is, of course, open to debate. My view is that I am not writing only about Pakistan.26

26 Shame, p. 29.
We know that on the surface level the country is Pakistan, but on the deeper level, it may be any country where forces of repression operate. It is here that the novel transcends the confines of the particular. As the novelist says:

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. And to come back to the 'roots' idea, I should say that I haven't managed to shake myself free of it completely.  

This shows how the novelist sorts out events judiciously and gives imaginative colourings to his plot. As Timothy Brennan rightly observes, "as though fearing reprisals, Shame hides history in allusive references to the past which are buried in casual placenames and family titles, and ironic reincarnations of figures from legend."

Rushdie narrates the events in the novel in the manner of a fairy tale. He states that his story draws on

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27 *Shame*, pp 87-98

things that have been happening and that he would make his novel realistic. In his own words: "And now I must stop saying what I cannot write about, because there is nothing so special about that; every story he chooses to tell is a kind of censorship.... I must get back to my fairy story because things have been happening while I have been talking too much."²⁹ The narrator's delineation of the political situation in Pakistan reads like a modern fairy tale. For example, God was thoroughly disillusioned with the performance of 'politics' in Pakistan. So in his third visit, he turned Yahya into a cockroach and swept him under a carpet, but, a few years later, he noticed the situation was still pretty awful. He went to Gen, Zia and offered him supreme power ..... So God said, "answer me one question and I'll flatten Bhutto for you like a chapati."³⁰ This truly shows the deteriorating political situation in Pakistan. The narrative reads like a modern fairy tale because only in fairy tales God transforms men into an animal or an insect.

²⁹ *Shame*, p. 73.
As in a folk tale one sometimes notices a straightforward narration in the novel. For instance, the narration of the location where Pinky Aurangzeb raises the turkeys is highly direct and straightforward.

Once upon a time there was a plot of land. It was attractively situated in the heart of the first phase of the Defence Service Officers' Co-operative Housing Society, to its right stood the official residence of the national minister for education, information and tourism, an imposing building whose walls were clad in green onyx marble streaked with red, and to its left was the home of the widow of the late Joint Chief of Staff, Marshal Aurangzeb. And once upon a time there was a retarded daughter, who for twelve years had been given to understand that she embodied her mother's shame. Yes, now I must come to you, Sufiya Zinobia, in your outsize cot with the rubber sheeting, in that ministerial residence of marble walls, in an upstairs bedroom through whose windows turkeys gobbled at you, while at a dressing table of onyx marble your sister screamed at the ayah to pull her hair. 31

31Shane, pp 133-135.
Another instance of the use of narration of a fairy tale is as follows:

There once lived three lovely, and loving, sisters. Their names ... but their real names never used ... And one day their father died.\textsuperscript{32}

One notices the multiple technical devices employed by the novelist in this novel. At one place the novelist takes a recourse to a summary narrative to delineate a stretch of past life. This is evident in his account of three sisters and their cloistered life in Nishapur:

The three girls had been kept inside that labyrinthine mansion until his dying day; virtually uneducated, they were imprisoned in the zenana wing where they amused each other by inventing private languages and fantasizing about what a man might look like when undressed.\textsuperscript{33}

Rushdie does not hesitate to employ the technique of displaying specific and continuous details to narrate a crisis. One notices this in the description of the death of Omar Khayyam:

\textsuperscript{32}Shame, p. 11

\textsuperscript{33}Ibid., p. 13.
His body was falling away from her, a headless trunk, and after that the beast faded in her once again, she stood there blinking stupidly, unsteady on her feet, as if she didn't know that all the stories had to end together, that the fire was just fathering its strength. 34

Another technique employed by the novelist is 'the device of gossip.' Here the narrator-character is unable to recollect from his memory and naturally he takes the help of gossip. For example Old mother Chunni tells her sisters how she got the invitation cards of the musical party printed and distributed and how the guests swarmed into her richly decorated house to drink and dance. But, she is unable to remember what actually happened at that party. So the main narrator takes the help of gossip to interlink the threads of his story. The 'good people' of O indulge in gossip by saying that Farah might be the illicit daughter of Eduardo. They soon shut up their mouths because they find no trace of physiological similarity between the two.

By using the method of multiple narrative designs - a fairy tale, immediate scene gossiping and straightforward narration - the novelist succeeds in fictionalising the

34Shame, p. 286.
social and political events of Pakistan. Thus, it becomes "as much a representation of the real and as an eruption of the fantastic."  

There are layers of irony in the novel. There is the use of the situational and verbal irony here. The description of the 40th day celebration of the death of old Shakil, father of the three sisters, is ironically done. The Dumb waiter ironically, is not a man but an instrument of communication of the three scandalised sisters to communicate with the outside world at the time of their confinement. Another instance of irony is that Moulana Dewood is decorated in his own town with the Necklace of Shoes. The details regarding Raja Hyder's family are also ironically given. Ironically God does not find a place for himself in Pakistan which is thought to be a holy country of God.'

To give a few instances of verbal irony, Omar Khayyam is named after a poet with an expectation of courting the Muse but ironically no quatrains issue forth from his pen.

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Pakistan indicates a holy place but in the novel it turns to be a centre of brutality and grotesqueness. Sufiya Zinobia is a beauty as well as beast. As the novelist rightly explains, to comprehend her is to acknowledge savagery as a constituent element in national make-up, recognition of which shatters a nation's concept of itself.

Rushdie also employs the technique of parallels and contrasts. We may include in the list of parallels the following: Just as the evil days have fallen on Pakistan, the families of the main characters in the novel are doomed to unforeseen circumstances. Just as one notices the confrontation between the two families - Raja Hyder and Iskander Harappa - one observes similar confrontation between the forces of shame and shamelessness. The deformity of Sufiya Zinobia is contrasted with the charming nature of Good News. There is also a contrast in temperaments between Omar Khayyam and Babar.

Just as Midnight's Children concerns itself with the political scene that obtained in India, Shame delineates
the events that happened since independence in Pakistan. While recording the events the novelist likes to send his message also. He aims at showing how shame is a part of the architecture of the society in a country like Pakistan where

Shameful things are done: lies, loose living, disrespect for one's elders, failure to love one's national flag, incorrect voting at elections, over-eating, extramarital sex, ... smuggling, throwing one's wicket away at the crucial point of a Test Match, and they are done shamelessly. 36

Through the story of Sufiya and Omar Khayyam, the novelist throws light on the absurdities that obtain in the world of repression. In *Shame* Sufiya Zinobia, "seems to blush for everyone in the novel and is understood as being what the novel is about. She is a human animal decapitating and killing everything from turkeys and babies to her husband." 37

Through the fusion of fact and fiction, Rushdie mesmerises

36 *Shame*, p. 122.

the readers. The two political figures acquire universality of appeal because of their careful employment of various strategies in the realm of politics.

It is, perhaps for the use of language that Rushdie's Sheesha has earned itself a place in the literary halls of fame. One finds in the novel nasty and crude expressions of cynical frankness. For example, old Shakil calls his three daughters 'whores' and condemns his city as 'a hell hole.' Hasmat Bibi curses the owner of a mulge thus: 'May your grand sons urinate upon your pauper's grave.' Isky Harappa abuses Raja Hyder by calling him 'a seducer of his grand mother's pet mongrel bitch.' The employment of scandalous and foul language "has both structural and thematic significance."38

The novel bristles with felicitous phrases. The chapters themselves are fraught with such felicities of expression. For example, Bilquish Raj has an unforgetably powerful nick name of Khansi-ki-rani or Queen of Coughs.

The place where the three sisters look forward to transact their amorous affairs is called the 'Dumb-waiter.' The description of the doctor and instruments of medical students is fraught with felicitous expressions:

What's a doctor, after all? - A legitimised voyeur, a stranger whom we permit to poke fingers and even hands into places we would not permit most people to insert so much as a finger tip, who gapes on what we take most trouble to hide; a sister - at - bed sides, an outsider admitted to our most intimate moments, birthdeathetc., anonymous, a minor character, yet also paradoxically, central, especially at the crisis.  

This passage shows that Rushdie has succeeded eminently in the use of felicitous expressions in his language.

Rushdie does not hesitate to use a few Urdu expressions with a view to adding Indian sensibility to his novel. For example, the pawn-broker is called 'a wide eyed chalack sahib.' Naveed Hyder comments on marriage thus:

"Marriage is freedom, you stop being someone's daughter and become someone's mother instead, EK dum, fut-a-fut, pronto."  

Raja Hyder and his people wept with

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39 *Shame*, p. 49.

pride. He "has taken the Amsu-ki-wadi. These expressions add the Indian flavour to the language and intensify the meaning of the novel.

The novel abounds in quotations and references to a variety of literary sources. His aim is not to collect quotations and make references but to raise echoes. What interests him is the penumbra of universal sentiment around the particular expressions used by these famous authors. He almost weaves these into the central motif of shame. 'The Dumb waiter' that echoes the absurdity of the Harold Pinter play documents the unexpressed fears and tensions of the three sisters. The references to 'a Hanged Man' remind us of Fraser's The Golden Bough which offers a comparative study of the beliefs and institutions of mankind. "Affairs of Honour" suggest medieval knight errantry. 'The women in the Veil' alludes both to the Bible and to the Hawthorne story about the veiled minister. 'Judgment Day' is an allusion to the dooms day, a concept common to all religions. The title of the novel with its connotation of

41 shame, p. 79.
the existential angst called shame, is reminiscent of
Kafka's *The Trial*, a work cited within the text (p.113).
These references to various literary sources are inter-
twined into the central idea of shame, the emotion that
begins in a sense of guilt and leads to violation of
other people, violence to neighbours, and eventually to
self-destruction and to more shame.

To conclude, one may say that Rushdie's *Shame*
deals with the central motif of shame that runs through
the psyche of several characters as a subterranean force
and finally acts as a shuttle that pulls into shape several
strands of the shameful story of 'shame.'