Chapter - 3

Shame

Rushdie defines the word ‘shame’ in its original form. Not the English word shame but the Urdu word Sharam—“a short word, but one containing encyclopaedias of nuance.” At a personal or individual level, the hero Omar Khayyam Shakil continues to be affected by shame and shamelessness throughout his life even when his mothers had banned him from feeling shame at an early age. He is born of three mothers and does not know who his real mother is to the end of his life. Nor does he know who his father is. Though when he enters the world of school he understands that he is an illegitimate child born of a British Officer and one of the Shakil mothers. Like Saleem in Midnight’s Children here too the hero is a Eurasian. The Shakil mothers do not show any feeling of dishonour when O.K. was conceived, but lock themselves up in their large mansion and remain in their self-imposed captivity till the end of the novel. O.K. is born in this prison-like enclosed world of his mothers. And to add insult to injury, he enters life without benefit of mutilation, barbery or divine approval which the Muslims consider a must. Born in the death-bed of his grandfather, his first sight is the spectacle of a range of topsy-turvy mountains which afflicts in him a sense of inversion, of a world turned upside down. “Hell above, Paradise below.” He grows up between twin eternities whose conventional order is, in his experience, precisely inverted. This exposition to the topsy-turvy world reminds one of the topsy-turvy world of Shakespeare’s Macbeth. Here too, it is hinted right in the first chapter that foul is fair and fair is foul, shame is honour and honour, shame in this country of Pakistan.

Fat and frightened, Omar Khyayyam lives with his mothers exclusively for some twelve years and then joins the school and the outer world for the next six years, finally leaving them and the city of his birth for further studies at the age of 18, and visits them only when his brother Babar dies: ultimately returning at the age of 65 to die there. We do not hear of him for a long time, except that he has become an internationally famous doctor, and friend of Iskander Harappa. He marries the daughter of Raza Hyder who ultimately becomes the Chief Martial Law Administrator. The novel begins with his birth and completes the circle with his death in the same room and the same mansion in the city of Q. Though Rushdie says his hero is a peripheral man, a marginal man, not a central figure in the novel, at a different level O.K. and his wife Sufiya Zinobia represent the people of Pakistan who entered into a world of freedom only to find themselves in a captivated world of broken dreams, shattered illusions and religious fanaticism, a shameful world where they cannot reject their religious beliefs nor can wish to be
ruled by Islamic scriptures in their political life. Omar Khayyam, the Eurasian, is not truly a Muslim and hence is bound to live at the edge of this world of Muslims.

The shame that Sufiya Zinobia feels is that of a young woman who has the mind of a child. She is a wrong miracle in the sense that her parents Bilquis and Raza Hyder wanted a son and got a daughter. Bilquis always calls her “shame” and so the child in Sufiya never grows up. But she imbibes and absorbs shame around her and is a personification of shame itself so much so that she blushes at the slightest shameful thing. The beast of this shame is bottled up in her and at times takes possession of her mind, growing stronger gradually. When it first possesses her at the age of twelve with a three-year old mind, she kills Pinky Aurangjeb’s turkeys. She is medicated upon by Omar Khayyam who is 43 and falls in love with her but has not the courage to declare it until she is brought back to him when she tries to kill Talvar Ulhaq, the bridegroom of her sister, Good News. She is now nineteen with a five-year old mind. When O.K. marries her, she is a fully grown young woman of 21 with a seven-year old mind. One feels that she represents the growth of political Pakistan which has not grown to true nationhood. The beast in her too grows and reminds one of Stevenson’s Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. Like Mr. Hyde, she becomes a woman in veil wandering at night and killing urchins after fulfilling her womanly desires. When O.K. realizes this he informs her father Raza Hyder who wants to put an end to the life of Sufiya Zinobia. What a shame that a father wants to kill his daughter. But O.K. the doctor and husband does not like the idea and so decides to keep her in the attic alive, though drugged and chained, so as not to be a danger to others.

Rushdie explains the father’s desire to kill his daughter in the name of honour. A Pakistani father killed his beloved daughter for making love to a white boy in London. Though the story appalled Rushdie, he says that “I, too, found myself understanding the killer… that men will sacrifice their dearest love on the implacable altars of their pride.” He asserts that shamelessness and shame are the roots of violence. The girl who was thus killed in London, Anahita Muhammad haunts the novel since Rushdie finds this sort of happening understandable only in the East. He cites another event of an “Asian” girl travelling in a late-night underground train who was humiliated by a group of teenage white boys. This shame, burning within, bursts out and sets fire to shops, etc. causing wreckage all around, but taking pride in its power. The third ghost inside Sufiya Zinobia is a boy in London who had simply ignited of his own accord without dousing himself in petrol or applying any external flame. The seeds of all the three incidents are to be found in Sufiya Zinobia and thus the character feels shame but at the same time finds power to bring about wreckage all around her. Rushdie also refersto Kafka’s Joseph K (The Trial) who is
stabbed to death. “Like a dog!” he said: it was as if he meant the shame of it to outlive him.” Sufiya Zinobia does not die under a knife but the shame, that all these persons feel, hangs over her, making her all the more powerful when it finally bursts out of her. Only, the writer has to make her an idiot because “idiots are, by definition, innocent”—the only way Rushdie finds of creating purity in what is supposed to be the Land of the Pure (Pakistan). Sufiya grows up, her mind more slowly than her body, and owing to this slowness she remains, “for me” says Rushdie, “somehow clean (pak) in the midst of a dirty world,” a world full of corrupt power and false promises. She blushes uncontrollably for herself and also for the world in which shameful things are done but not felt: “lies, loose living, disrespect for one’s elders, failure to love one’s national flag, incorrect voting at elections … maltreatment of womenfolk. Sufiya absorbs unfelt feelings of shame and thus represents the simple-minded people of Pakistan who feel shame for the shameful actions of their political leaders” (Shame 122).

The shawls embroidered by Rani Harappa also record this shameful history of the Pakistani leaders. On one such shawl, the allegorical shawl, which Rani calls “Iskander and the Death of Democracy,” she depicts his hand around the throat of a young girl, small, physically frail, internally damaged, the idiot but innocent Sufiya Zinobia, gasping and empurpled in Iskander’s unyielding fists. Here Rushdie clearly equates Sufiya Zinobia with the spirit of democracy, the true power of the people and leaves no doubt in the minds of the readers what she stands for.

Raza Hyder is frightened to learn that the chained and unconscious Sufiya Zinobia has escaped, the white panther was being mytholo-gized, fantasized and considered illusive. It is in fact “Time’s ghost, the future stalking the forests of the past.” Raza Hyder is frightened that his past—his own daughter, uncared for and unloved, would become his nemesis and ruin him completely. He is perfectly right. When it is known that the white panther is none other than his own daughter, he is almost house-arrested and has to escape disguised in the garb of a woman. Omar Khayyam on the other hand feels proud of Sufiya Zinobia in the sense that she is now free for the first time in her life. He imagined her proud; proud of her strength, proud of the violence that was making her a legend—She had risen above everything she did not wish to hear.”

Rushdie poses here a question: “Can it be possible, that human beings are capable of discovering their nobility in their savagery?” (Shame 254) Does Rushdie suggest here that violence can free Pakistan from the shameful past? The country, the people do not know their real power till they resort to violence, till they break loose from the chains of their past. Rushdie creates a situation where
Raza Hyder (who can be likened to Gen. Zia ul-Haq) has to run away and find shelter in Nishapur where no ray of light or hope penetrates. But Sufiya Zinobia will not kill her father, that is left to Omar Khayyam’s mothers for whom it is a simple act of revenge for the killing of their son Babar.

The last we hear of the beast wandering the roads of Q is that she is following in the footsteps of her husband, catching up with him in Nishapur. Omar Khayyam the peripheral man does not consider himself responsible for any of the events in the life of any of the characters in the novel—Raza, Isky or Sufiya. His failure to act in a responsible manner, to fulfil his wife’s womanly desires, to protect and support her, to share her ills, brings about his death at the hands of his wife. He confesses to doing his job well and to social climbing. But he always remains in the wings watching the drama being enacted and not preventing it. His inaction meets with Sufiya’s action and there can be no hope for him. Perhaps Rushdie suggests that the marginal man, the peripheral man, should not simply stand and watch, but should himself act according to his lights of right and wrong. The suppressed instincts of Sufiya, the fury of the people, will catch up with the rulers and they will have to answer one day. Could not the doctor and the patient join hands to bring about a change in the political life? The allegory appears a little confusing but then the confusing state of affairs in Pakistan may well be mirrored in this confusing manner. Yet the allegory is not sustained throughout and Sufiya simply appears to be the fantasized ideas of Rushdie who creates a substitute reality out of fantasy, obsession and delusion. O.K. and Sufiya Zinobia live not only in the real world, they also inhabit the world of spirits, Sufiya Zinobia being the wrong miracle as is so often emphasized by the writer. When Rushdie says,

“A Beast is born, a ‘wrong miracle,’ within the citadels of propriety and decorum. This was the danger of S.Z: that she came to pass, not in any wilderness of Basilisks and fiends but in the heart of the respectable world,” (Shame 200)

he perhaps implies that Pakistan was a wrong miracle and that the people who dreamt of freedom found themselves chained by the dictators of the country. The cultured world, the westernized world, believing in the values of freedom and democratic principles, not only ignores the plight of the people of this country—the disorder’s avatar but helps strengthen the disorder, the dictatorship, stifling the voice of the chained people. This is the universal shame, Rushdie brings to light. He cites a British diplomat’s wife saying, “why don’t people in Pakistan get rid of Zia you know, the usual way?” “Shame is not the exclusive property of the East, Rushdie comments.
At the political level Iskander Harappa and Raza Hyder—Bhutto and President Zia ul-Haq follows the history of the Moghul empire where a son killing his father to become a king is a common affair. Their empire is built upon the promises which are never kept. Especially Raza promises elections again and again and is known not as chief martial law administrator but as “cancel my last announcement.” Rushdie presents Raza Hyder as someone who meant well but who was guided more by a man like Maulana Dawood than the precepts of administration. Raza always finds two ghosts of Isky and Dawood on his shoulders—the two ghosts who haunt him both in life and even after death. A mention of Danton and Robespierre reveals the conflict that Raza Hyder feels but he is driven by the religious Dawood and feels safe in talking about the Islamic scriptures and imposing its dictates. Rushdie appears to suggest that religious fanaticism is not the right resolution of this conflict. Isky is killed by his orders and he himself dies at the hands of the revengeful witch-like mother of Babar. The country is now in the hands of Arjumand and Haroun Harappa and possibly will continue the same path. The novel is open-ended and we have no glimpse of the future except that of a silent cloud in the shape of a giant grey and headless man—a figure of dreams, a phantom with one arm lifted in a gesture of farewell (Rushdie 34).

Rushdie wrote *Shame* after his second novel *Midnight’s Children*. *Shame* is the winner of the French Prix du Meilleur Livre Étranger (Best Foreign Book Prize). It was shortlisted for the 1983 Booker Prize.

The Persian translation received an award from an official jury appointed by a ministry of the Iranian Islamic government.

*Shame* is Salman Rushdie’s third novel, published in 1983. Like most of Rushdie’s works, this book was written in the style of magic realism. It portrays the lives of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto (Iskander Harappa) and General Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq (General Raza Hyder) and their relationship. The central theme of the novel is that violence is born out of shame. The concepts of ‘shame’ and ‘shamelessness’ are explored through all of the characters, with main focus on Sufiya Zinobia and Omar Khayyám.

*Shame* discusses heritage, authenticity, truth, and, of course, shame and shamelessness, as well as the impact of all these themes on an individual, the protagonist Omar Khayyám.
The main characters of the novel are of Shakil family – Omar Khayyam Shakil. Chunni, Munnee and Bunny Shakil are the mothers of Omar Khayyam. These three woman pretended to be pregnant at the same time. The three mother’s second son is Babar Shakil.

The second family of the Hyder’s has Raza Hyder (a military man who marries Bilquis as a captain and becomes a general. He murders Babar Shakil). Bilquis Hyder is the wife of Raja Hyder and mother of Sufiya Zinobia and Naveed Hyder. Sufiya Hyder is Raza and Bilquis’s daughter. She embodies shame.

Harappa family member are Iskander Harappa. (politician and playboy who marries Rani Harappa), Rani Harappa (cousin of Raza Hyder and Iskandar Harappa’s wife). Arjumand Harappa is a daughter of Iskander and Rani and Haroun Harappa is the eldest son of Little Mir Hirappa (who promises to marry Naveed Hyder).

Additional characters are Atiyah ‘Pinkie’ Aurangzeb (widowed by President Marshall A and has an affair with Iskander Harappa), Captain Talvar Ul haq (police Captain and polo player who marries Naveed Hyder), Eduardo Rodrigues (a Dominican teacher who becomes the private tutor to Omar Khayyam Shakil), Farah Zoraster (a customs officer’s daughter: She has a child with Omar but is taken care of by Eduardo) and Maulana Dawood (is a mullah and Raza Hyder’s political confident).

‘Shame’ story takes place in a town called “Q” which is actually a fictitious version of Quetta, Pakistan. In Q, the three sisters (Chunni, Munnee, and Bunny Shakil) simultaneously pretend to give birth to Omar Khayyám Shakil. Therefore, it is impossible to know who Omar’s true mother is. In addition, they are unsure of who Omar’s father is as the three sisters got pregnant at a house party. While growing up, Omar becomes mischievous and learns hypnosis. As a birthday present, Omar Khayyám Shakil’s ‘mothers’ allow him to leave Q. He enrolls in a school and is convinced by his tutor (Eduardo Rodriguez) to become a doctor. Over time, he comes in contact with both Iskander Harappa and General Raza Hyder.

Shame is a modern Arabian Nights fable set against a thinly disguised real background. The central symbolic figure is the simple-minded Sufiya (a name meaning “wisdom”). Her father, a rapidly rising army officer, is ashamed because his firstborn child is a girl. Her mother sees Sufiya’s simple-mindedness (the result of a fever in infancy) as a sign of her own shame, retribution for an extramarital affair. Sufiya, a congenital blusher, becomes a sponge who soaks up the shame of those around her and
of those who feel no shame but should. Shame accumulates in the simple mind of the Beauty who is gradually transformed into the Beast of violence.

The Beast first breaks through when twelve-year-old Sufiya bites off the heads of and eviscerates 218 turkeys. Episodes of violence are followed by a rebellion of the body's immune system, which leaves her mortally ill. Dr. Omar Khayyam Shakil, a famous immunologist (and notorious libertine), saves her and falls in love with the ungainly, slow-witted girl. After some years, they marry, but the marriage is not consummated. The struggle within her body continues, and four young men are found beheaded and bespattered with semen stains. Dr. Shakil realizes what is happening and approaches Sufiya's father, General Raza Hyder, who is now President. They agree to keep her sedated in an attic room, from which she eventually escapes. Rumors of a white panther circulate throughout the countryside.

Rushdie's *Midnight Children* is about India, while Rushdie's next novel *Shame* is about Pakistan. This is a fictionalized fantasized portrait of Pak president Zulfikar Ali Bhutto (who appears as Iskander Harappa), Bhutto's appointment of Zia-ul-Haq (Raza Hyder) as his army chief in 1976, Zia’s deposition of Bhutto after the army was called in 1977, the execution of Bhutto and Zia’s islamization of Pakistan.

*Shame* was written at the height of this ‘Islamisation’ programme, and much of the bitter, brooding anger of the novel can be explained by this fact. The satire, however, is not directed at Zia alone, for his serious erosion of the civil rights of women and for his politicised misuse of Islam. It is directed also at Bhutto, who is held responsible for compromising the democratic process sufficiently to allow the military to regain power. *Shame* is thus a double satire on a pair of ‘conjoined opposites’ - the playboy and the puritan, the socialist democrat and the autocratic dictator - who are seen as two sides of the same coin: a Jekyll and Hyde of authoritarian politics.

*Shame* as a novel is a satire of Pak politics in the 1970-80s. Bhutto and Zia are compared to Dr Jekyll and Hyde of authoritarian politics. In English literature, John Dryden, Alexander Pope and Jonathan Swift indulged in this kind; and the same strain is seen in Rushdie’s fiction.

Andrew Teverson observes:

In some respects this focus on Pakistani politics makes *Shame* a companion piece to *Midnight’s Children*: a ‘Pakistani’ fiction to complement the earlier ‘Indian’ fiction. The two novels,
however, also differ significantly in form and in atmosphere. *Midnight’s Children*, is an ebullient, over-reaching, over-crowded fiction in which the excesses of the text strain against the limits of sentence, chapter and book. *Shame*, by contrast, is a cramped, claustrophobic, even paranoid, fiction, haunted by the narratives that it is unable to tell, and oppressive in its unrelenting focus on the narrow social strata with which the novel deals. In formal terms, moreover, whilst *Midnight’s Children* has one narrator who struggles to incorporate everything into his text; *Shame* is a fiction of multiple points of view, none of which has primacy, and none of which will enable the reader to orientate himself or herself in relation to the fiction (Teverson 136).

The result is that whilst in *Midnight’s Children* the reader feels overwhelmed with the possibilities, the numinousness, of the text; in *Shame* the reader feels trapped in a network of textuality and narrative dead ends.

Rushdie himself tells that *Shame* is about a closed society.

*Midnight’s Children*, broadly, may be described as a historical fiction that draws upon carnivalesque and comic modes; *Shame*, by contrast, is more obviously indebted to the darker genres of the Gothic and of tragedy. More particularly, the novel recalls both classical Greek tragedy and Senecan revenge tragedy in its depiction of the violent decline of once noble ‘houses’ and in its representation of a corrupt ‘court’ culture that is unable to contain the cycles of violence that are unleashed by the immoral actions of the protagonists.

The intertextual relationship between *Shame* and tragic narrative gives the novel a number of its distinctive features. Like tragic drama, the fiction develops in five discreet sections (‘acts’) towards an apocalyptic conclusion; it has a pervasive atmosphere of inevitable fatality; and it features men of power whose actions and whose overreaching pride bring destruction to themselves and to their families. *Shame* also includes a number of more minor figures that echo conventional character types in tragic narrative: for instance, Maulana Dawood, the ancient divine, plays the role of the Machiavellian tempter, or malcontent, whose wicked and subversive suggestions help to lead the hero astray. He also, after his death, plays the role of the ‘good angel’ who sits on Raza Hyder’s right shoulder and attempts to direct him along the path of ‘righteousness’, a device derived from the medieval ‘psychomachia’ in which angelic and devilish advisers vie for the soul of the protagonist.
The plot of the *Shame* where a head is killed by his subordinate and the latter suffers recalls the theme of Shakespeare's tragedies *Macbeth*, and *Julius Caesar*, and of course, Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*.

Like the ghost of Hamlet telling that the political condition is worsened in Denmark, the shame situation recalls us that the political condition in Pakistan is degenerated. Rushdie thinks that the creation of Pakistan was unmade.

Conventionally, the hero of tragedy is ennobled by his suffering, and purified by his death. In Rushdie’s tragedy of clowns, by contrast, as in Marlowe’s buffoon-tragedy *Dr Faustus*, the fiction takes its power, ultimately, from a refusal, rather than a fulfilment, of tragical expectations. “It seemed to me that what you had in Pakistan was a tragedy being enacted by people who were not tragic figures’, Rushdie explained to Kumkum Sangari in the year of *Shame*’s publication. He said further,

The Zia-Bhutto relationship is tragic ... but the figures haven’t the stature you can associate with high tragedy. And this did have a very wide application outside Pakistan. It seems to me that one of the characteristics of public life in the present age is that everywhere you look in the world you have situations which you can only call tragedies on a very grand scale, but the leading actors who’re playing out these tragedies are buffoons ... So in *Shame*, the plot is almost unrelieved tragedy, but written in the language of a farce (SRI 65).

Tragedy in *Shame* thus becomes an aspect of Rushdie’s political satire, its function being to make comment on the moral and political failings of those with power in Pakistan by indicating, frequently with a blackly comic effect, the shortfall between tragic grandeur and the deadly banalities of corrupt uses of power.

*Shame* is more a picture of degenerated politics than suffered royal leaders like Ceasar, Oedipus or Agemmenon. These political leaders are 420s, at times third class people.

One of the key images of the novel is the series of eighteen shawls that Rani Harappa weaves whilst under house arrest and sends to her daughter Arjumand (a fictional figuration of Benazir Bhutto) when she too begins to contemplate a political career. These shawls, like the thirty jars of pickle that Saleem makes in *Midnight’s Children*, are receptacles of memory but, unlike Saleem’s pickles, they are not about hope for the future, but about anger and despair for the past. Titled ‘The Shamelessness of Iskander the Great’, they operate as a kind of woven series of political cartoons depicting the life and
violent crimes of Rani’s husband Iskander: his libertinage, his obscenities, his violence, his disregard for
human rights, his strangulation of Pakistan and his contempt for democracy. Perhaps most forcefully of
all, the seventeenth shawl exposes his murderous use of the military to suppress separatist insurgency
in the north west of the country. This last shawl, readers are told, is ‘all in scarlet, scarlet and nothing
but scarlet’ but there is, finally:

Not enough scarlet thread on earth to show the blood, the people hanging upside down with
dogs at their open guts, the people grinning lifelessly with bullet-holes for second mouths, the
people united in the worm-feast of that shawl of flesh and death (Shame 195).

This strategy for exposing tyranny employed by Rani echoes that of Ovid’s Philomela from the
Metamorphosis who ‘wove a scarlet design on a white ground, which pictured the wrong she had
suffered’ at the hands of Tereus. Through Philomela, moreover, Rushdie alludes to yet another revenge
tragedy, Shakespeare’s Titus Andronicus (1594), which employs Ovid’s tale of Philomela and Tereus as a
source for the story of Lavinia, who must resort to drawing the wrongs done to her in the sand, holding
a stick in her mouth, because her other organs of communication have been removed. Both these
allusions place Rani in the company of those women in classical myth and in Elizabethan and Jacobean
revenge tragedies who have been figuratively silenced by corrupt and hypocritical patriarchal regimes
and have been forced to find aesthetic means (writing, painting and embroidering) of responding to
their oppressors.

Feminists think that Shame fails to depict the realities about man-woman relations of Pakistan in
Shame.

Inderpal Grewal, likewise, contends that Rushdie’s exclusive focus in Shame on women who
have been defeated by oppression tends to imply that women in Pakistan under Zia were only the
passive victims of male power when in fact there was a potent and active network of women’s
resistance groups, such as the Women’s Action Forum, that sought to challenge the Zia regime’s
interpretation of the Qur’an’. ‘Rushdie’s narrative’, Grewal writes, ‘though admittedly fragmented, fails
to account for the very useful and powerful practices of opposition that are occurring in Pakistan today,
practices which have been part of the history of women in both Pakistan and India.

Aijaz Ahmad, in In Theory, in which it is argued that the political hopelessness of the novel is
reflected in the hopelessness of its female characters. What we find in Shame, Ahmad argues, is a gallery
of women who are frigid and desexualized. (Arjumand, the ‘Virgin Ironpants’), demented and moronic (the twenty-odd years of Zinobia’s childhood), dulled into nullity (Farah), driven to despair (Rani, Bilquis) or suicide (Good News Hyder), or embody sheer surreal incoherence and loss of individual identity (the Shakil sisters). Throughout, every woman, without exception, is represented through a system of imageries which is sexually overdetermined; the frustration of erotic need, which drives some to frenzy and others to nullity, appears in every case to be the central fact of a woman’s existence.

Then Shame is a failure as it does not speak of promise of change and transformation.

Shame deals with just two political families mainly.

Secondly, and connectedly, we might also affirm again that the fact that Rushdie represents this narrow cross-section of women as politically disempowered because of its complicity (owing to its class affiliations) with corruption and hypocrisy does not mean that he disallows or undermines the attempts of other women in Pakistan, outside of his narrow focus, to empower themselves and seek a more active oppositional role.

Thirdly, we might question whether or not it is true that Rushdie does present all the women in the novel as disempowered. Rani Harrapa, as we have seen, is the one character in the novel, male or female, who is able to speak out in a potent and affecting way against corruption and criminality. Ahmad dismisses this act of resistance as something that only allows her a ‘dignity of resignation’. But how persuasive is this argument? For Rushdie she is the only character who is allowed to speak the ‘truth’ - which is surely a form of empowerment in an environment dominated almost exclusively by deviousness and misrepresentation. A more persuasive critical evaluation of this incident is made by Grewal, who argues that Rushdie gives Rani a measure of power in allowing her to produce her shawls, but that he simultaneously denies her the equivalent powers of self-definition and expression that he allows himself as novelist.

Whilst the description of Rushdie’s novel as a warning against a particular kind of political process identifies it as, broadly, dystopian - like most dystopias, and indeed like most tragedies, the fiction remains, perversely and paradoxically hopeful. Hopefulness, however, is pitched beyond the pages of the fiction into some unspecified future. In the fictional world of Shame there can be no hope for Sufiya, there can be only destruction, and despair; but the novel none the less expresses the hope that there could be a world in which Sufiya Zinobia does not need to suffer in the way that she does, in
which democratically elected governments do not become indistinguishable from military dictatorships, in which those without power are not erased from the consciousness of those with power. There is no indication what this society might be like, other than the negative condition that it will lack those features Rushdie finds undesirable in current social organisations, neither is there any suggestion that it is possible or desirable to conceive of and embody a perfect form of social organisation, since, for Rushdie, the attempt to achieve perfection will result only in intolerance of difference. Nevertheless, the condemnation of imperfection - of that which has the capacity to make us feel shamed - is expressive of the Utopian hope that a society might exist in which such abuses of liberty are removed.

Samir Dayal in his article “The Limitation of Nation and Gender: Salman Rushdie’s Shame” observes thus:

Rushdie’s *Shame* remains particularly interesting for its exploration of the border conditions that define both categories of gender and nation. Their imbrication for Rushdie heightens their liminalities, especially when they evoke the historical backdrop of violence in Pakistan (Dayal 120).

The novel *Shame* focuses on the recent history of Pakistan, nearly synonymous with the travails of the Bhutto clan (which recently re-emerged into the public eye with the ouster of Benazir Bhutto, daughter of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto who was executed by Zia ul Haq, and brother of the recently assassinated Murtaza Bhutto). And Pakistan is impossible to conceive of independently of the figure of borders: most particularly, its partition from India, through Jinnah’s insistence and despite Gandhi’s bitter opposition, marks a moment in history - the year 1947 -that has long been the obsession of the author as well as his own year of birth. More generally, Rushdie gestures towards the political backdrop of border troubles, such as those attending the long division of the territory of East Bengal from West

Pakistan, before the former became Bangladesh. The very figure of Rushdie’s ‘diasporic translatedness’ is crystallized in his conceptualization of Pakistan as a second “home,” irrevocably bound to the metaphor of the border because it lies, spatially and chronologically, “between” his first home (India) and his current home (England), an interstitial space which never quite resolves the question of cultural borders for this “midnight’s child”: where does he really belong? (This is a central question for this author, even if one puts aside the moot question of whether it is possible to “belong” anywhere after *fatwa* has put a price on one’s head.) *Shame*, fittingly, is the most hesitant, most
ambivalent of all his fiction, and thus also luminal in being a watershed in Rushdie’s career. Finally, here Rushdie also tries to negotiate the discourse of the border between Islam and the West that has become a backdrop for so much post-Cold War cultural debate.

According to Barbara Harlow, Rushdie’s *Shame* is a part of protest literature. It offers a subversion of Pak’s self-image:

This raises immediately the question of Rushdie’s standpoint: from where, one might reasonably inquire, is he effecting this subversion — from within the culture or from without? What is his perspective on his second home? Such questions point up the politics of “situation” as alibi and as credential, a politics that has dogged Rushdie, not only in the *Satanic Verses* affair but also now after the publication of *The Moor’s Last Sigh*. If after *Satanic Verses* Rushdie was attacked for his allegedly unflattering representation of what is dear to Muslims, after the more recent book he has been attacked for being hostile to the rhetoric of Hindu fundamentalism and Hindutva: Bal Thackeray, a contemporary Hindu nationalist lampooned in the novel in the character Raman “Mainduck.” Fielding, has objected “Rushdie as “a man with no homeland” and therefore no right to criticize. Is Rushdie maligning the Hindu majority in India and demonizing Islam *from* a Eurocentric or cosmopolitan perspective? (Barbara 121).

Rushdie belongs to India, Pakistan or England, we do not know. After the fatwa where does he belong to this world or the next world. Such is his identity crisis, and the protagonist Omar Khayyam’s in Pakistan.

In *Shame*, Rushdie’s deliberate exploration of liminality blurs normal categories, dismantles conventional definitions and boundaries of nation-ness and belonging, reconstructs simple divisions of masculine and feminine, and thematizes subjectivity as *enigma*. Timothy Brennan insists that Rushdie is a cosmopolitan writer, but in *Shame* (as in *The Moor’s Last Sigh*, *Midnight’s Children*, and *The Satanic Verses*), Rushdie’s ambition is even more to re-imagine and trouble received notions of belonging in nation-ness or to particular zones - Pakistan or India; -London or Bombay - not so much from a cosmopolitan unanchored perspective as much, as from within the interstitial spaces of those zones themselves.

To stress ambivalence is to recognize the problematic of complicity. An author’s recognition of his own complicities is a form of self-ironization, a heightened self-consciousness.
Sara Suleri understands Rushdie’s ambiguities and ambivalences in a related but distinct way. “Given the topicality of his particular subject” in *Shame*, she writes, Rushdie’s “self-disliking allegory” of a former Pakistani president’s execution “faces complicated and ambivalent problems of representation.” As she explains,

On the one hand, it must write out of the uneasiness that besets postcolonial fiction, as it confronts the discursive difficulty of containing the referents of novelty and of history within a recognizable grammar. On the other, it must take on as its fictional provenance a series of events so sensational, so violent in its currency as gossip, that the text is impelled to construct elaborate defenses against the lure of melodrama by focusing obsessively on its own literariness and its status as a formal artifact (Suleri 174).

Suleri’s description of Rushdie’s narrative as “self-disliking allegory” echoes Brennan’s diagnosis of a “sense of self-reproach.” But Suleri goes a little further than Brennan in arguing that Rushdie fetishizes the “glamorous” expectation of censorship, and thus licenses his narrative’s “peculiar structure.” Or, to put it another way, the fetish of censorship is structured like a “schizophrenic anticipation of audience” - it ambivalently situates the narrative between the poles of a Western audience and a subcontinental audience.

Suleri notes Bhabha’s caveat about the productivity of power - that it is “crucial to construct (that power’s) regime of ‘truth,’ not to subject representations to a normalizing judgment,” for “only then does it become possible to understand the productive ambivalence of the object of colonial discourse—that ‘otherness’ which is at once an object of desire and derision, an articulation of difference contained within the fantasy of origin and identity.”

Brennan and Suleri seem to agree, then, that there is on the one hand Rushdie’s critique of nationalism, of fundamentalism (represented by General Raza Hyder), from a cosmopolitan perspective. On the other hand, there is an animus, partly self-directed and partly directed against the Westernized, elite sensibility of Harappa, playboy of the (post-colonial) Eastern world. This disjunction is a site of anxious ambivalence, encapsulated in the problem of complicity.

Subjectivity, in *Shame*, is overdetermined by nation, race, class, as well as gender. It is neither singular nor simple. Rather it refers to the occupation of multiple subject positions, even when “one person” is at issue. In this sense the
strategic articulations of selfhood reveal the “self as irreducibly differential, fragmented from a theoretical and never actualized” unitary self. Rushdie’s narrator seems to hint at this fragmentary and perpetually incomplete selfhood even when he casually remarks that: “Although I have known Pakistan for a long time, I have never lived there for longer than six months at a stretch. .. I have learned Pakistan in slices, the same way as I have learned my growing sister..... I must reconcile myself to the inevitability of the to write about over-there, I am forced to reflect that world in fragments of broken mirrors ... I must reconcile myself to the inevitability of the language evocative of Milan Kundera, to an unbearable lightness of being: “I, too, know something of this immigration business. I am an emigrant from one country (India) and a newcomer in two (England, where I live, and Pakistan, to which my family moved against my will).And I have a theory that the resentments we mohajirs engender have something to do with our conquest of the force of gravity. We have performed the act of which all men ancienly dream, the thing for which they envy the birds; that is to say, we have flown” (89-90). As he goes on to say, he is “comparing gravity with belonging” (90). The best thing about migrants is their “hopefulness,” and the worst thing is “the emptiness of one’s luggage. ... we have come unstuck from more than land. We have floated upwards from history, from memory, from Time”. What is being described is the emptiness - and the riddle — of the category of identity and the relocation of subject in the interstitial zoneof an imaginary homeland, within the very symbolic of “migrancy” and dispersal: a figurative diaspora.

Shame explores the adjacency of different sites of ambivalence - for instance between history and farce, between discourses of gender and sexuality, and the discourse of a new nation’s self-assertion. A particularly troubling problematic is the expression of masculinist nationalism predicated on the projection, in both senses of the word, of violence onto women, as diacritically related to the inscription of the postcolonial subject and “nationness.”

Rushdie’s evident disenchantment with Pakistan as nation (but what does it mean to be disenchanted with a nation?), and his questioning of its metaphorically and geographically defining boundaries, is homologous with his deflation of a rhetoric of phallic self-sufficiency, a rhetoric that bolsters “nation-ness” in the patriarchal Symbolic. Rushdie’s deflation, while it is itself necessarily phantasmatic, is crystallized in the novel as a disparagement of male characters, of masculinity as such.
This is one instantiation of the narrator’s general modus operandi: “I, too, like all migrants, am a fantasist. I build imaginary countries and try to impose them on the ones that exist”. This is not of course to say that the subordination of women, and the corresponding hegemony of men, is merely imagined. But I am arguing that Rushdie recognizes and goes further than merely thematizing what Inderpal Grewal has suggested is the symptomatic oppression of women, the “oppression and neglect” of Rani Harappa, Bilquis, “Good News,” Arjumand the “Virgin Ironpants,” and Sufiya Zinobia. And although, as Grewal argues, “there is a disjunction between the mode of inclusion in which the narrative is written and the authoritative stance of the writer [that] breaks down a coalition between the writer and women”, I suggest that on the contrary the narrative undermines the authority attaching to masculinity - the fulcrum of the writer’s “authoritative stance” in Grewal’s own formulation.

The deconstruction of maleness is admittedly a necessary step in a larger deconstruction of the phallocentric confidence in the nation, as Rushdie clearly understands. Shames narrator, Rushdie’s counterpart, says pointedly that,

I had thought, before I began, that what I had on my hands was an excessively masculine tale, a saga of sexual rivalry, ambition, power, patronage, betrayal, death, revenge. But the women, seem to have taken over; they marched in from the peripheries to demand the inclusion of their own tragedies, histories and comedies, obliging me to couch my narrative in all manner of sinuous complexities, to see my “male” plot refracted, so to speak, through the prisms of its reverse and ‘female” side . . . the women knew precisely what they were up to — [. . .] their stories explain, and even subsume, the men’s (Shame 173).

What is entailed by such a re-seeing of plot is a re-narrativization of the parallel phenomena of the symbolic and literal emasculation of men and the masculinization of women.

Feminism has since the late 1960s challenged men, as Victor Seidler writes, to “raise” the level of their “consciousness,” although consciousness-raising is awkward for men because “the culture, politics and forms of association we inherit have been created for men and by men”. Rushdie’s novel seems to be asking the question of how it feels for a man to be the object of violent sexuality, or of sexual violence. Here Rushdie seems to be asking the unaskable: that men, especially subcontinental men, should reconsider their notions of masculinity and the implied trappings of power and therefore violence.
Rushdie seems to ask himself the liminal questions Stephen Heath asks about his own writing: “Do I write male? What does that mean? We have learnt - from semiotics, psychoanalysis, deconstruction, the whole modern textual theory - not to confuse the sex of the author with the sexuality and sexual positioning inscribed in a text” (Jardine and Smith 25). But Heath also cautions that these questions apply differently to male and female bodies: “For today, telling the truth about the male body as freeing subject is Utopia, about the female body actuality” Men’s in (-) difference about writing or reading as gendered subjects works, as Elaine Showalter observes, as a sort of taboo against male self-analysis. Showalter draws upon male theorists such as Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Peter Schwenger to the effect that the taboo has been so strong that masculinity cannot imagine itself without feminizing itself, or threatening masculinity itself. As she notes,

“many feminists worried that male critics would appropriate, penetrate, or exploit feminist discourse for professional advantage, without accepting the risks and challenges of investigating masculinity, or analyzing their own critical practice” (Showalter 6-7).

In an essay that attempts to define a poststructuralist and postcolonialist theory of Third World self-determination, R. Radhakrishnan maintains that “underdevelopment in one area has been the result of overdevelopment elsewhere; we need only look briefly at the history of colonialism, imperialism, racism, and sexism to reach this conclusion” (“Poststructuralist Politics” 327.) Drawing upon Partha Chatterjee’s essay “The Nationalist Resolution of the Women’s Question,” Radhakrishnan observes that

“the conjuncture wherein the women’s question meets up with nationalism raises a number of fundamental questions about the very meaning of the term ‘politics.’ Why is it that the advent of the politics of nationalism signals the subordination if not the demise of women’s politics? Why does the politics of the ‘one’ typically overwhelm the politics of the ‘other’? Why could the two not be coordinated within an equal and dialogic relationship of mutual accountability? (“Nationalism” 78)

Rushdie’s work stages such a dialectic between nationalism and the question of gender; but it is the contradictions and ambivalences of the dialectic which make Shame fascinating.

A striking instance of immasculation occurs in the case of Arjumand Harappa, who tellingly earns the man-threatening nickname “the virgin Ironpants,” is the most beautiful of women, she had rejected
all suitors; so many indeed that “although she was barely twenty years old the city’s matchmakers had already begun to think of her as being on the shelf. And in spite of her bound and still apple-sized breasts, Arjumand carried off the palm. . . . Loathing her sex, Arjumand went to great lengths to disguise her looks”. Arjumand is increasingly identified, as she matures, with the threat, the machismo, even, which her father Iskander Harappa represented in his prime. As the formidable Chairman’s daughter, and as a great beauty, she is extremely eligible; but she is also formidable in the way her father was. When Arjumand goes “to great lengths to disguise her looks,” she is also displacing her father, impersonating him, and transgressing a border well-marked in most Islamic cultural milieux;

“She cut her hair short, wore none of that storehouse of subconscious male cosmetics or perfume, dressed in her father’s old shirts and the baggiest trousers she could find, developed a stooped and slouching walk” (Shame 169-70).

Similarly the fictional representation of Benazir Bhutto, Ironpants, becomes a threat to entrenched masculine power in a variety of ways that mimic the ways in which Benazir had to downplay her image as a “Westernized” woman to be accepted in this context. A version of the man-destroying goddess Kali with a highly developed social consciousness, Ironpants ,

Qualified in the law, became active in the green revolution, threw zamindars out of their palaces, open eddungeons, led raids on the homes of film stars and slit open their mattresses with a long two-edged knife, laughed as the black money poured out from between the pocketed springs. In court she prosecuted the enemies of the state with scrupulous ferocity that gave her nickname a new and less ribald meaning . . .” (Shame 199).

The conflation of the sexual with the social here is unmistakable. Arjumand is at once the do-gooder reformist and the frigid bitch. Her association with Kali (whose formidable appetite for killing men is nothing if not also a figure, for sexual appetite) is captured with graphic appropriateness in the image of the laughing woman with a knife spilling the black money as Kali spills the dark blood of men.

Later on she becomes truly a socially “competitive” threat in the sense that Seidler (following Adorno) describes: a threat to the male-dominated political and economic sphere. Adorno’s point was that men at least instinctively understand competition to be always combined with the threat of violence - of castration (Seidler 133). In Shame, competition is not just social and economic but sexual.
The fear of the phallic woman’s threat to marriage (the microcosm for society) sublates the fear of the socially anarchic power of unrestrained female sexuality.

It is in the light of Rushdie’s avowed feminist stance that we must understand the Shakil sisters, who, like other women in the novel, wield their power in troubling ways. *Shame* opens with a description of the sisters Shakil, strong and ultimately threatening women who live on society’s periphery. One of them conceives Omar Khayyam Shakil in a liaison with (horrible to declare) one of the sahibs from the Angrez Cantonment (“The imperialists!”). In order to maintain their place outside the society’s mores, they commission Mistri Yakoob Balloch to make a lethal dumb-waiter (a precious postcolonial pun?) that would allow them to winch items directly from the street; after the work is accomplished, Balloch is disposed of casually by what appears to be peritonitis, “or some such thing.” Clearly the Shakil sisters are able to control their own destiny; they do not depend on male history to determine their lives and are immune to gossip about their private lives. They live a parallel “her-story”; they are authoresses of their own “stories,” and authorize an alternative narrative. Rushdie’s declared sympathies in *Shame* are clearly feminist. The narrator observes that repression is a “seamless garment,” so that 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 . . . ”. Rushdie’s narrator qualifies his point, saying that, “I hope it goes without saying that not all women are crushed by any system, no matter how oppressive. It is commonly and, I believe, accurately said of Pakistan that her women are much more impressive than her men . . . ”. This is not to say that women of the subcontinent have achieved a satisfactory and final victory over their circumstances: “Their chains, nevertheless, are no fictions. They exist. And they are getting heavier”. Rushdie’s linking of authoritarianism in social and sexual codes, perhaps more than most other features of his work, articulates a defining characteristic of the diasporic Indian novelist. So also is his association of the nation’s debilitation with the breakdown of the ancient regime of patriarchy.

Rushdie’s novel *Shame* offers no positive alternative; violence in the novel must play itself out through to its apocalypse. But that this is an appropriate position for a postcolonial novel to find itself in at this moment in, at this phase in the development of that emergent genre. It is important not to underestimate the decentering of the postcolonial world.

*Shame* builds up an impressive case against right-wing traditionalism that gained new currency in the sub-continent in the 1980s and 90s and has not lost out yet. Ironically enough, the Indian novel in
English after the international fillip provided by *Midnight’s Children* has not looked back. It has taken off into intellectual abstractions, soaring far above pressing ground realities of the region. Not many novels of the 1980s and 90s, bring into critical spotlight regressive practices like female infanticide, bride burning, honour killing etc. Rushdie in *Shame*, makes the existence of the Nation incumbent on progressive reformism. In that, he is looking back, in terms of concerns - though not of form and style - to writers like Mulk Raj Anand.

In *Shame* there is an anecdote that serves to indicate the difference between the West and the East.
References:


