CHAPTER FIVE

Shame: Reading History through a Female Psyche
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The feminist discourse, especially that of the Third World, shares many areas of intersection with postcolonial theory and, therefore, the two fields have long been thought of as associative and even complimentary. Primarily, both discourses are politically oriented predetermined by a crucial struggle against the dark powers of oppression as well as social injustice. Exponents of both theorists, furthermore, reject the established hierarchical, patriarchal systems, which are determined by the hegemonic forces -- white, male, or both -- and thus wage wars of resistance against the supposedly absolute supremacy of exclusionist and masculine power and authority. Like patriarchy, historical absolutism, afflicting castration (real and metaphorical) is often referred to as a phallocentric, supremacist ideology that tend to subjugate, emasculate, and dominate its victims, reducing them to merely an idle objects of society. The oppressed woman, in this sense, is akin to the colonized subject. In essence, theorists of postcolonialism lead their revolution against colonialism in the political and economic sense while feminists protest, besides, against the sexual bias lurking beneath.

Feminist and postcolonial discourses both seek to reinstate the position of the marginalized and invert the structures of domination. The job of the postcolonial novelist becomes to reconstruct a feminist discourse or a feminist counter-narrative to the patriarchal authority. The term “patriarchy” as John McLeod says, refers to “those systems -- political, material and imaginative -- which invest power in men and marginalized women” (173). Feminist critics deal with the issues related to women
from the view of enabling them to raise their voices against patriarchy and repressive forms. So, feminism and postcolonialism, as McLeod argues, “share the mutual goal of challenging forms of oppression” (174). Feminist criticism aims at questioning the dominant patriarchal ideologies which represent and define “woman” according to male interpretations. Feminism critics and theorists analyze the condition of women under male domination and how gender is constructed, and they try to redefine gender relations. Feminism acknowledges that women are reflected as men’s “other” and silenced by the dominant ideology, so it focuses on how women are represented by patriarchal discourses and gives a fresh look at the ways of recognizing “otherness.”

The following section will provide an overview of various feminist theorists’ thoughts on the issue of women’s silence, and how the silence speak will be discussed in what follows.

Generally, Feminism can be regarded as part of postcolonial discourse, since postcolonial discourse is also a discourse of the marginal that writes back to the centre. Although officially colonial imperialism has come to an end, colonized countries, which seemingly achieve their political independence, are still under the effect of colonialism and colonial culture. The internal colonization prevalent in these countries remained unchanged and the “subalterns” which basically include women are remained marginalized. Feminist scholars always dwell upon the analogy that to be female and native is to be the ultimate other in the fringes of the colonial margin: women are doubly repressed by the colonial force and by their own culture; in both cases women are not allowed voice (qtd. in Watt, “De-mastering Historical Narrative” 97).

From a feminist point of view, patriarchy and colonialism are considered an archetypal evil because both of them automatically nurture totalitarian and hegemonic
beliefs. Accordingly, in the phallocentric philosophy women become alien subalterns jeopardized by the masculine overpowerment meted out by the colonizer and the colonized alike. The subordination of the woman’s role in the making of history, and her imprisonment by patriarchal and colonial forces is the subject matter of Rushdie’s *Shame*.

The raw material of the novel was evidently drawn from Pakistan, however, the country was not named, and the place, events, and persons were fictionally removed to become part of surreal fable. The novel narrates the story of two powerful families which form the ruling class in a fictional country, called “Peccavistan”. The novel tells the relationship between Iskander Harrappa and Raza Hyder, the former symbolizes the feudal system whereas the latter symbolizes the religions system, and the two major powers determine the life of women. *Shame*, in fact, is not specifically about Pakistan. It is about women in all countries. The female plot is inserted in the general structure of the novel so that the exclusion of woman from the social panorama is melodramatically depicted. The structural parallelism of the novel plays a crucial part in the novel. Rushdie mixes the history of woman with the male political one. The focus is to draw a fictional picture of history and mythical values of this society by analyzing and deconstructing the features and assumptions of this society. In other words, myth, history and traditions are readdressed and destabilized. *Shame* is a realistic novel, but its setting is slightly mythologized. The novel contains two fictional and parallel autobiographies: the general story of the nation and women’s own tale. Also, the shift from masculine to feminine narrators takes place and corresponds to a new focus on feminine characters. *Shame* can be regarded as emblematic of subversive postcolonial mode, attempting a subversion of normative national and gendered subjectivity.
The novel destabilizes the patriarchal narrative of history. More obviously, the story of the three miserable frustrated girls, the old Shakil’s daughters, pinpoints how woman is treated as property, and how her sexuality is demonized, denied and at best repressed by the forces of society. She has been taken as a scapegoat by socio-political powers. The novel problematizes the relationship between woman and her own society – these consequences chiefly arises from making use of the patriarchal claims by the “guards of Religion and teaching values” or in Tahmina Durrani’s words “Lords of Feudalism,” for nothing but to subjugate the minorities. Durrani ironically reflects on the socio-political representation of women in the novel, denouncing that this is “… our (Pakistani) politics, our leadership, their values, their mentalities … and their views on women.” (365)

In the history of patriarchy and male-centered state, the national oppression against women has its archetype in the ancient Greek myth. The most obvious form of oppression in the Greek myth is the rape of Philomela. The violent acts in the myth are so incomprehensibly cruel that a social reading forces itself upon the reader. In order to understand the mechanisms behind the cruelty, we will link the crimes to the value system of the Ancient Greeks. Philomela’s tragedy, at first sight, might look like a family drama, but the impact of the story goes much further as Philomela is not just any girl, but a princess of Athens. Her fate is not just sealed by her father and Tereus, but by a nation that permits patriarchy and places nationalism above personal happiness. She is thus oppressed by a nationalist and patriarchal system. Patricia Klindienst Joplin remarks that both sisters, Philomela and Procne “serve as objects of exchange between … two kings: Pandion of Athens and Tereus of Thrace” (264). Procne’s marriage to Tereus revolves not around love, but around politics. Procne is reduced to a symbol of exchange, and this symbolic function makes her an excellent
example of “Lévi-Strauss’ idea that “marriage is the archetype of exchange”. Strauss states that “women are exchange objects, gifts”, or “valuables par excellence”, whose transfer between groups of men “provides the means of binding men together” (qtd. in Joplin 265).

The consequences of that oppression from a feminist focal point endow the story with an extra dimensional significance. Philomela, betrayed by her father, raped and silenced by her brother-in-law, is almost reduced to an extra object in her own story. The only element that saves her from utter silence and oblivion is the tapestry which recounts her side of the events. Though she carefully weaved her tragedy, her side of the story has often been neglected. On top of that, she is accused of seduction and is unwillingly dragged along in an incestuous and adulterous triangle. She is betrayed not only by her father, but also by her other creator, by Ovid himself. He displaces Tereus’s “lust “onto Philomela herself: as Ovid has it, the chaste woman’s body is fatally seductive. We are asked to believe that Philomela unwittingly and passively invites Tereus’ desire” (Joplin 273).

Like Sufiya Zinobia’s father in Rushdie’s Shame, Philomela’s father, in Ovid’s myth, is a national leader. This feature places Rushdie on one scale with Ovid who mockingly portrays the exploitation of nationalism to serve political ends. Although Ovid and Rushdie are separated by two millennia, the essential motifs of their accounts are disturbingly similar. In the discussion of Ovid’s myth, we saw how violence within the family code was linked to the violence on a national level. The novel Shame deals with consequences of oppressive conventions such as muteness, marginality and trauma.

Rushdie’s foremost position as a world writer, who advocates the freedom of the individual as an unbound human subject, places him far beyond the pattern of
postcoloniality. The ending end of him is not the liberation of the postcolonial subject from the shackles of the traumatic colonial past, but rather to find a space of betterment for the individual in the present postcolonial state. He then moves from resistance to reconciliation and from memory to oblivion wherein the past is recalled and an unattained community is imagined to befit an undetermined human individual communication. Hence, his characters are common individuals who revolt against collectivity, patriarchy and tradition. They are dissents who rebel against dictated codes and symbols. Even women are individuals, not class or race. They struggle to redefine their position in the society and to reclaim their role in the making of history. Therefore, the focus on the presence of the woman in the political history of the nation in the novel is a keyword for understanding woman’s position in Rushdie’s socio-political and feminist discourse. For him, the liberation of the nation from the colonial rule is equal to the emancipation of the woman from the domination of patriarchal authority. That is, political suppression is no less tyrannical than patriarchal social exclusion. In either case, the social and political minorities are marginalized, dominated, excluded, and dashed to periphery.

*Shame* stands at the intersection of many of the current debates about postcolonial literature and criticism. It undertakes the modernizing of the “tradition” of pre- and post-independence oppositional writing in English. It is felt that the text has elaborated forms of fictional counter-discourse in order to attack “prevailing orthodoxies” in the context of colonialism. In *Shame*, Rushdie extends his thought into “writing against” the dysfunctioning legacy of colonialism in a nationalist country, fictionalized as “Peccavistan”. He is haunted by a disruptive urge to disclose and denounce, often covertly, all authoritarian models of legitimacy, through fictional re-inscriptions of a new order built on the plurality of competing discourses with their
liberating, linguistic inventions. The novel has established itself as emblematic of subversive postcolonial mode. It attempts a subversion of normative national and gendered subjectivity in the country it projected.

By locating Shame in a feminist discourse, it becomes obvious that if writers write about “his/story”, Rushdie intends to write about “her/story”. The text is read as part of the encounters between the centres and the margins, and the aim of the novel is to empower and privilege the woman and her position in a patriarchal society. Conventionally, historical space is not allotted to woman, and she has been denied as an autonomous voice in society. The novel is a feminist reading of “male history”, its accomplishments and triumphs. It challenges the construction of history as authorial achievements of man.

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

Since Rushdie believes entirely in a social transformation for all, Shame is a project reconstruction of society through a new philosophy which encourages the individuality of men and women, and liberates them from a marginalizing position.
The main concern here is his introduction of a secularly democratic interpretation of social and historical truths. In line with this, he deals with the concepts of sexuality and gender as tools of subversion and critique. So, he finds in a sexualized space a form of redefinition of the individual’s role away from the imposed social constructs and codes. Therefore, sexuality has been redefined as an expression of individuality.

Broadly speaking, *Shame* is often viewed as being counter-canonical form because it questions the very nature of “collective” identity through the rewriting of national history. The text offers numerous views of history and provides a place for those who had no choice; it endows the audience with many possibilities of historical reality. It was evidently set against conventional society where woman is not enabled to announce her free individuality. The point here is that there are an awful lot of women in these kinds of societies, who are distorted by social repression and who behave very oddly. In an interview with John Haffenden, Rushdie says, “the book is partly about the way in which women are socially repressed” (*Novelists in Interview* 256). This is the basic foundation on which he builds a parallelism between a woman’s tale and national history in a single narrative. Also, in another conversation with Haffenden, he argues that the novel maintains “two or three starting points which glued together” to form a feminist picture of historical reality. He also explicates:

Another was the title, *Shame*: I kept finding instances of that emotion or concept at work in societies … I began to think that it was one of the most central means of orchestrating our experience … When the book starts, the shame is private and sexual – to do with being pregnant when you don’t know who the father is – and the book develops by building variations on that theme, showing how shame is part of the architecture of the society the novels describes, and perhaps not only that society. I have a feeling it is not peculiar to that east, but I didn’t explore that; I thought that if it were universal the only way of showing that was to be concrete and particular. People who read
the book can decide whether or not it has applications outside the society under discussion. (39-40)

The representation of woman in the text is discussed frequently among scholars. Apart from the fact that whether his female characters are peripheral or central, the novel offers numerous views of history and provide a place for those who previously had no voice. Cynthia Carey-Abrioux in her essay, “Dismantling the Models of Legitimacy: Salman Rushdie’s Shame as a Postcolonial Novel,” comments that the novel uncovers the illegitimacy and brutal authoritarianism of neocolonial regimes, and that it articulated around the dialectical but often farcically exuberant tension between the simultaneous denial of “Meaning” and the inscription of meanings. Abrioux adds that Shame can be read in the light of Fanon’s “theoretical understanding of the link between the colonial model and the mimetic violence of a neocolonial order”. The social code, “Shame”, is dialectically linked to violence,” and this affirms Fanon’s analysis “of how humiliation of a colonized people will paradoxically lead to the desire to imitate the perpetrators in their violence and to an attempted legitimization of it”. Descended from the British colonial period, Shame is an expression of a denunciation of patriarchal culture and its pivots and codes which reinforce the humiliation in the name of honour and purity. Moreover, the title of the novel itself “becomes a model of Rushdie’s subversive dual ethical design which is simultaneously moral and self-mocking.” (68)

Shame is an irony of the patriarchal system. It is also about women whose quest for selfhood is ended up in epiphany of multiple selves. The central character, Sufiya Zinobia, an innocent girl, treated as an idiot, searching for both identity and sexuality, represents a dual quality of beauty and beast, or peace and violence -- the main components of history. Though she is the daughter of a national leader, Raza
Hyder, she is domesticated as a “human pet” deprived from any form of patronage. She started her life as a “retarded” girl, unconscious of her biological self and sexual power. In a simple way, she has been treated by her social environment as an icon of “shame”.

Significantly, the overtone of the novel suggests an ironical development of the concept of “shame” drawn in the title of the novel itself. Therefore, Rushdie surprises his readers with an anti-canonical and counter-image of the “enslaved” woman. Silence does not mean consent. Subsequently, Zinobia once presented as an “idiot girl” has eventually emerged as a voracious actor, bursting in the end of the novel in a bestial passion. She radically transcends the concept of neutrality to a female oriented history. “Shame” is no longer derogatory term attached to Zinobia. She becomes a leading figure to fear of rather than an object of abuse. Through her character, Rushdie offers a promising representation of the postcolonial woman. He represents dynamism of history as well as the instability of its truth. The heroine revolts against the monopoly of truth and the production of knowledge. She experiences tyranny and injustice of deformed social custom, not only the misfortune of her sexual victimization that is the cause of her fallen state. Because she refuses to accept oppressive standards of sexual morality, like Othoon in Blake’s “Visions of the Daughters of Albion”, Zinobia preserves her virginal state of being (‘maid’) precisely because of her lack of physical, mental, or emotional involvement. She rejects the controlled identity of harlot that Maulana Dawood and the “great political patriarch” project onto her, and reclaims her purity in a bold challenge to the established patriarchal order.

_Shame_ tells the tale of repressed women by giving a chronicle of their silent suffering. In Chapter One entitled as “The Dumb-waiter,” we are exposed to the
“imprisoned” in a mansion, Shakil sisters; Chhunny, Munnee and Bunny; the daughters of Old retired Marshal, Mr. Shakil, announcing their potential desire behind the walls. The three sisters have been subjected to subjugation and were imprisoned by their father and treated less than human beings. The social world of them is only their “cage” in a mansion in Nishapur. Their father represents the patriarchal system that denies the individual rights of woman. The tale of the sisters is easily discerned as an irony of the controlling patriarchy in the novel. “Repression is a seamless garment; a society which is authoritarian in social and sexual codes, which crushes its women beneath the intolerable burdens of honour and propriety, breeds repression of other kinds as well” (Shame 173).

The political repression is a dark chapter of the country, projected in the novel, and the acts of the political leaders cannot be concealed, too. The female characters have been interpreted as the slave of the law (moral and theological restraints); their desire is controlled by the law, too. However, they have been invited to realize that emancipation is derived, not from the values of the law, but from their female rights as individual entities. Rushdie gives his female characters a role to narrate their own stories. An interesting instance is the tale of Rani Harappa with her husband, the deposed leader, Iskander Harappa. Rani uncovers the reality of the feudal system’s figures who conduct with women as Lords. She reveals part of her husband’s political life and a chapter of his dark history which is colored by arrogance, corruption and social injustice. The tale of the leader, Iskander, is narrated by his wife herself, and this gives some significance to the woman’s voice and position in a male-centered society because in such a society woman is accustomed to listen and not to argue or narrate. She expresses her individuality by means of her embroidery work which consists of twelve shawls which tell “a thousand and one stories” (Shame 105) of
Iskander, a dictator and man of less integrity. She gives the shawls a title of “The Shamelessness of Iskander the Great” (Shame 191). In these shawls, Rani gave her own interpretation of memories, and they were definitely different from men’s interpretations. She narrates Iskander’s political history, and reveals his betrayal to the nation as well as to her as a loyal wife. He symbolizes patriarchal dominance, political corruption and autocracy.

Rani’s tales of shawls subvert the myth of the “Alexander the Great” and tell us that his ‘glorious’ history is not more than a set of violence, censorship, repression of the opponents, and finally sexual scandals. Significantly, Rani sends these shawls to her daughter, Arjumand Harappa, who follows the footsteps of her father as a mythical model of political hero of the country. Arjumand does not believe anything about her father since she believes in him as her ideal example of life. She then leads a powerful opposition against dictatorial leader, Raza Hyder and his political instruments, showing a real challenge to Hyder’s political culture. She revolts against history, sacrifices her desires and adheres herself to the political future of her country. She started preparing herself as a political leader, following the path of her archetypal father, Iskander. She realizes that a woman has no place in history unless she takes a prominent role in the public world. She, who stands in the way of Raza Hyder’s policy, chooses the way that distinguishes her from the other women, simply because she chooses the culture of confrontation to encounter the patriarchal rule.

Interestingly, Rushdie offers a multi-dimensional analysis of the concept of “shame” within a variety of meanings: shame in its historical pre-text, social con-text, feminine sub-text and political co-text. Through the interpretation of Sufiya’s violence against male oppressors, Rushdie in his Shame seems to promote female activism toward gender equality. Kathryn Hume in her article “Taking a Stand While
Lacking a Center: Rushdie’s Postmodern Politics,” asserts that “Rushdie is fascinated and appalled by tyrants and tyranny” (209-210). Such dictatorship does not exist only between the ruler and the ruled, but also between male and female. The representation of the women in the text is discussed frequently among scholars. Some critics claim that Rushdie portrays an empowering female; others believe his female characters are stereotypical and counterproductive to the feminist project. Nearly all of the criticism involves Rushdie’s postmodern style of writing and assesses his narratological methods in promoting feminism, just as it has been used to determine his perceptions of postcolonial identity formation. In her book, Flights from Realism, Marguerite Alexander argues that Rushdie’s attempts at refiguring the commonly accepted stories are incredibly important because they offer numerous views of history and provide a place for those who previously had no voice. Alexander’s assertion is that the postmodern project offers new voices to an old construction of history though some feminist critics disagree with Rushdie’s fantasy world, arguing that because it is not grounded in reality, there is little room for the feminist project to grow (127).

Sufiya is a feeble, brain-damaged child of the Hyder’s. Omar is a doctor and many years older than her, but he eventually marries her in order to gain control over her “shame” which has manifested as a dangerous and deadly fury. In a daring yet challenging situation, she evolves into a sacrificial character who takes the shame of society upon herself. The shame is then transformed into a deadly magical power. Although she is physically incapable of harming anyone, her rage results in many deaths and torments her family and community. She remains oblivious to the crimes that she has committed. Omar’s marriage to her appears to be out of goodwill but is actually an assertion of control and power over her. Omar attempts to remove the evidence of her shame in the same manner that he has removed it from his own life,
by ignoring it, but shame triumphs over Omar in the end. He is decapitated, as are her other victims. In the novel’s final moment all that is left of Omar is a “giant, grey and headless man, a figure of dreams, a phantom with one armed lifted in gesture of farewell” (*Shame* 286).

As mentioned earlier, Rushdie believes in the impossibility of one version of history. This can be demonstrated here with Sufiya’s alteration of her story to save her honor. When Bilquis, Sufiya’s mother, marries Raza Hyder, she lives with his extended family in “the old village way”. The women all live together while their husbands are away working. In order for Bilquis’ new extended family to accept her, her mother-in-law explains that, “you must know our things and tell us yours” (*Shame* 76).) After marriage, she finds herself:

silenced by the in-law mob . . . and thus acquired the triple reputation of sweet innocent child, doormat and fool . . . but she was also admired, grudgingly, because the family had a high opinion of Raza, the woman admitted that he was a good man who did not beat his wife. (*Shame* 75-76)

However, it is quite difficult to decide that Bilquis is happy in her marriage. By offering the story of her past, Bilquis hands it to them with the understanding that, “the telling of tales proved the family’s ability to survive them, to remain in spite of everything, its grip on its honour and its unswerving moral code” (*Shame* 76). Her stories were altered, when necessary, to “maintain the grip on honor”. They were changed to reflect what they *should* be. The novel ceaselessly offers alternate possibilities and insights into the “ways” that the female characters defend their honor and remove the possibility of shame from their narrative. The narrator is exploring the true manifestation of the roots of the family. He explains,
... stories, such stories, were the glue that held the clan together, binding the generations in webs of whispered secrets. Her story altered, at first, in the retellings, but finally it settled down, and after that nobody, neither teller nor listener, would tolerate any deviation from the hallowed, sacred text. (Shame 76)

The irony is that there is nothing sacred about the text. It was told in one way and then it was passed on through different hands over time. It was edited where the teller saw most fit. Through the exploration of the myth of roots “truth” begins to emerge. The narrator brings to the surface the other stories that are not always told. Furthermore, narrator deals with the issue of the tyrant as one which may exist within himself as “re-shaper” and teller of stories. The story of Bilquis was reshaped by other characters who insisted upon a falsely created narrative, but the creation of stories affects the narrator also. Hume points to an extremely effective moment in Shame when the narrator explains,

Well, well, I mustn’t forget I’m only telling a fairy-story. My dictator will be toppled by goblinish, faey means. ‘Makes it pretty easy for you,” is the obvious criticism; and I agree, I agree. But add, even if it does sound a little peevish: ‘You try and get rid of a dictator some time. (Shame 257)

The narrator is defending his storytelling method as well as the author, who has been assigned the role of “subject”. Politics of tyranny is central to the political struggles illustrated within the story, but the multiple levels of involvement between the narrator of the text and the teller of the story forces readers to question how many dictators are present.

As the story progresses, the struggle to gain an understanding of truth takes precedent over the plot and the subplot offers an escape from the traditional story. Throughout the text, Rushdie asks his readers to explore the paradigms which shape
their understanding of truth. Through the telling of the two incongruous stories, the novel is exploring the idea of history, as a societal construct, it probes for a deeper understanding of the dominant paradigms which have shaped Rushdie’s own perceptions. The incongruity of the stories presented, is emblematic of multiple power struggles. These struggles are evidenced through the subconscious drive of the narrator to present a truthful story, and simultaneously continue to tell the one with which he is the most comfortable. Rushdie cannot deviate from the “hallowed sacred text” yet he does, repeatedly. Ultimately these deviations have led to the questioning of his storytelling. The struggle for truth is evidenced through the narrator’s obvious unreliability and through the lack of control that the narrator has over what stories will finally emerge. Prominently, his questioning of all truths rejects a cohesive national identity and establishes his work as “counter-canonical”. The counter-canon does not exist only in the realm of literary criticism; his relentless questioning of truth extends outward to the problems of the postcolonial nation and his responsibility as the subject and/or the subjected. His fragmented narration is the only way he can present a cohesive picture. It encapsulates the complex identity issues (of the nation and the self) that are dealt with in his texts. Apart from the multi-polyphonic narrative method, the story floats between personal experience and national history of the nation, which inculcates woman’s story and experience as not deviant from the mainstream social and political scenario. This narrative technique allows him to question the confines of historical past and its effect on the present realities.

Woman and history, as conceptual terms, have been analyzed through the technique of fantasy. History in Grimus, Midnight’s Children, The Moor’s Last Sigh and Haroun and the Sea of Stories is fantasized as a flouting term and unstable entity, and a dynamic process lacking center. Likewise, Sufiya Zanobia in Shame is projected
as a product of fantasy that defies fixities, orthodoxies and definition. She is an alter-image of women reality. From Joan Scott’s perspective, fantasy is empowerment rather than a subjection of the female or a limiting of the potential. Samir Dayal believes that through the blurring of masculine and feminine divisions Rushdie is disempowering the female, but Scott acknowledges this disempowerment to be true only if, “historical rootedness is seen as a prerequisite for the stability of the subject of feminism, if the existence of feminism is made to depend on some inherent, timeless agency of women” (286). Thus, through layer upon layer the creation of Zinobia, which can be juxtaposed with the accepted existence of Omar Khyamm Shakil, the narrator is acknowledging that the stories we are often told are no more salient than the ones we try to ignore. The two characters become the primary focus of the novel - while the political upheaval of a country in turmoil encompasses them, the two remain largely unaffected. They become their own story—an unlikely pair thrown together by chance and of course -- shame. They are creations of the present historical realities of the “fairy story”. And they are fictions through which the narrator can attempt to assess the only possible truth.

Actually, Omar Khayamm Shakil is introduced as a product of shame, but spends his entire life turning his back on that reality. He is a demarcation between “shame” and “shamelessness”. He enacts the role of a subversive character that cynically voices the peripheral and oppressed “other”. His birth is retold in a semi-magical distortion of the true events which occurred. The story begins in the “remote border town of Q” (Shame 11). Omar’s soon-to-be mothers are three sisters who live with their father who despises both the indigenous population of the “hellhole” town that they live in, as well as the British sahibs who have colonized it. The narrator explains, “Old Shakil loathed both worlds and had for many years remained immured
in his high, fortress-like, gigantic residence which faced inward to a well-like and lightless compound yard” (*Shame* 12). Mr. Shakil keeps his three daughters in isolation with him until his death, and on that day the sisters joyfully defile the memory of him by throwing a miraculous party to which they invited all of the British sahibs and a few of the most prominent members of the townspeople. It was on this night that Omar was conceived—“or so the story goes”. Months later all three of the sisters were miraculously pregnant. The narrator explains:

I am prepared to swear that so wholeheartedly did they wish to share the motherhood of their sibling—to transform the public shame of unwedlocked conception into the private triumph of the longed for group baby that, in short, twin phantom pregnancies, accompanied the real one; while the simultaneity of their behavior suggests the operation of some form of communal mind. (*Shame* 20)

Immediately the narrator is suggesting the idea of myth creation that Brennan refers to. This is representative of the “myth of the nation” through the formation of the longed for “communal mind”. He is suggesting that the mothers became truly convinced of the miraculous birth of their child because of their intense desire to escape the shame that would ensue had one of them admitted to conception out of wedlock. This view goes back to the reshaping of the story of Bilquis. In order to maintain honor, some narratives must be retold. Clearly, this birth is emblematic of the birth of Jesus to the Virgin Mary. In order for individuals to accept Jesus as a prophet (in the Islamic tradition) or as Christ (in the Christian tradition), he could not have born of a “harlot” so his birth was transformed by the power of myth to become a miraculous event rather than a shameful one. In every line of the text, Rushdie is retelling and re-envisioning lies and truths that have come before, and he entirely blurs the distinction between the two. Through Rushdie’s relentless deconstruction of
the formation of truth, some scholars, like Aijaz believe that there is no truth present in his texts. However, some things in Rushdie’s world are grounded in belief and they are embodied in the character of Sufiya. Her name is given early in the novel—but only as a supplemental fragment of knowledge. She is still seen as a disruption of the story, which is meant to be told. She is merely a part of Omar’s eventual story, but even in her developing stages, the narrator cannot escape her. Rushdie confronts the problem of female subjection within his creation of the story. As a creator he does not know how much control he has over his own perceptions, and his own interpretation of what a story should be. Is he influenced by the “hallowed sacred text” of history? The narrator provides some insight into the problem of his own storytelling:

Once upon a time there were two families, their destinies inseparable even by death. I had thought, before I began, that what I had on my hands was an almost excessively masculine tale, a saga of sexual rivalry, ambition, power, patronage, betrayal, death, revenge. But the women seem to have taken over; they marched in from the peripheries of the story to demand the inclusion of their own tragedies...their stories explain, and even subsume the men’s. *(Shame 173)*

Also, he acknowledges that even he was not ready for the amount of control that the women were capable of obtaining. But, nonetheless, they have. In the beginning of the story, Sufiya was a minor disruption who was magically removed. In the end, she emerges as the one who takes over the tale as it were. Her creation is no less curious than Omar Shakil’s. She is a character who is shrouded in the ambiguous mystery of magical realist technique. It is this mystery that has caused many critics to question her role in the text. However, it is necessary to examine her “fairytales” existence -- her relationship to the other characters as well as her creation -- her relationship with the narrator. She is a member of the politically powerful Hyder family. She was supposed to be the reincarnation of the couple’s son that was stillborn
years earlier, so when they discovered her sex they were dissatisfied at the thought of this female child who should have been a male. Sufiya, “they say” was blushing the day she was born, as if she knew the inevitability of the “shame” which surrounded her very being. It is necessary to compare this acceptance of shame to Omar who chooses to ignore his own shameful manifestation and exist “on the periphery,” always knowing that he is capable of crossing over to the “Rim of Things” but never taking the chance. Sufiya does not have the luxury of choice. Her shame is revealed clearly, for all to see. But her shame does not end with her sex; it begins with it. She magically becomes the “fury” of all of the “shame” surrounding her. It is not her own being that is shameful but the creation of the myth of shame in which those around her participate. When the two-month old she contracts a fever, her mother immediately assumes, we can say she creates, the worst scenario for the outcome of her child, the narrator explains:

Bilquis, rendering hair and sari with equal passion, was heard to utter a mysterious sentence: ‘It’s a judgment,’ she cried beside her daughter’s bed. Despairing of military and civilian doctors she turned to a local Hakim who prepared an expensive liquid distilled from cactus roots, ivory dust and parrot feathers, which saved the girl’s life but which (as the medicine man had warned) had the effect of slowing her down for the rest of her years, because the unfortunate side-effect of a potion so filled with elements of longevity was to retard the progress of time inside the body of anyone to whom it was given. *(Shame 100)*

So this is what becomes of Sufiya Zinobia. Because she was named a source of shame, the myth continues and it grows within her. It becomes her. She embodies the nature—the very essence of “shame”, and her path of destruction is dangerously close. She begins to commit heinous crimes but remains unaware of her involvement in them. At the age of five she is found in the middle of the night at her neighbor’s
chicken coup where she has twisted the necks of dozens of chicken. And later, after her marriage to her “would-be” savior, Omar Shakil, she kills four boys in the same manner as the chickens after having intercourse with each of them.

This vicious portrayal of Sufiya is what Samir Dayal was referring to when he discusses gender issues in *Shame* and the problem of blurring the lines of the feminine and the masculine. Dayal argues, “Men and women in the Third world invariably seem condemned to a stereotypically feudal, patriarchal, or neocolonialist social structure in which women are subordinated” (48). He claims that Rushdie is validating these stereotypes through his feminization of male characters:

Male characters in *Shame* are passivized and feminized, sometimes to the point of inducing a mesmerized or melancholic masochism: the desire for the male self as others appears as masochism. The wish to be destroyed as desired object may well function as a subtext in a narrative of the destruction of men by women in a text written by a man. (50)

Rushdie in *Shame* seems to have been concerned with the exploitation of the common patriarchal fears. According to Dayal, he is reinforcing the male anxiety of a sexually dominant female. So, in this respect, he destroys the possibility of the female agency to have power beyond the fears (and stereotypes) of the patriarchy. In fact, this is the problem that leads Dayal to ask, “Which borders is Rushdie transgressing, exactly, and which borders is he keeping in place?” Aijaz Ahmad develops a similar view concerning the nature of Sufiya as he says, “In this 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, not an object of male manipulation but a devourer of hapless men”( *In Theory* 148). According to these scholars, the characterizations support the dominant beliefs of the controlling forces rather than dispel them. But Sufiya is representative of something beyond myth or stereotype.
However, it becomes clear that Sufiya is a manifestation of reality whereas Omar is a peripheral distortion of reality. Though both readings are, to some extent, part and parcel of Rushdie’s suggestive meaning, his comments on the novel in an interview with W. L. Webb is much more appealing. He clears doubts when he reveals:

…but in the writing of *Shame*, as I’ve said often, the experience that I had writing the novel…and that although there was this sort of central pair opposed male figures, increasingly the kind of action, the moral weight, the dynamic of the novel was through this galaxy of female characters around them -- sort of wives and daughters and lovers and mothers and so forth. And this time it is true to say that something different happens. Which is I think that there are very strong female characters in the novel whose stories are struggling for space against the stories of men in the novel, and quite often explicitly struggling. The female characters say “when is it my turn? (97)

Although the narrator has previously suggested that Omar is the “peripheral hero” of the story, he later returns to acknowledge that, “This is a novel about Sufiya Zinobia…Or perhaps it would be more accurate, if also more opaque, to say that Sufiya Zinobia is about this novel” (59). Omar is given the role of the peripheral hero because the novel cannot be about Sufiya Zinobia—or at least the “story” cannot be about Sufiya Zinobia. She is a woman, she is “shame”. Stories must not be told about “shame”. The contrary and dependent states of opaqueness and accuracy are an incredibly important theme within the novel. History which informs our notions of truth is also incapable of allowing the true story to emerge. She embodies shame because she absorbs the shame which has been imposed upon her. So, who is Sufiya Zinobia? Is she the “hapless devourer of men,” is she the weak feeble minded girl magically transformed into the fury of shame? Actually, she is both of these things in a sense that she has a much larger role. She is “about this novel” in her own opaque way. She is the “corpse of that murdered girl” that composes “the ghost(s) of stories”
(Shame 116). She is the creation of a false imposition of history on to the present day reality. The pretext of the novel is a tragedy occurred in London involving a young Pakistani girl (Anna Muhammad) and her father. The girl had a relationship with a white boy in England and when the affair was disclosed to the father, he murdered her. The narrator discusses his reaction to the crime:

The story appalled me when I heard it, appalled me in a fairly obvious way…But even more appalling was my realization that, like the interviewed friends etc. I, too, found myself understanding the root of the killer ... We who have grown up on a diet of honor and shame can still grasp what must seem unthinkable to peoples living in the aftermath of the death of God and of tragedy. (Shame 115)

Sufiya is a fantastic replication of reality -- Anahita Muhammad, known as Anna – the pre-text, who has been referred to as the “Asian face under the eyes of the foe” in the novel. Meanwhile, Sufiya is the narrative text whose story underscores the feminist subtext of woman’s struggle for visibility. The political co-text of the story underlies the contextual reading of the Third World feminist discourse in the elitist postcolonial milieu. The fictional setting of the novel, “Peccavistan”, is nothing but a political satire of a patriarchal system. She emerges out as a prototype of the postcolonial woman whose struggles against dominant patriarchal rule takes the form of salvage of the mythical hero. The narrator acknowledges the birth of this character, as one who manifests from reality. The narrator discusses further his creation of Sufiya:

She danced behind my eyes, her nature changing each time I glimpsed her: now innocent, now whore, then a third and a fourth thing. But finally she eluded me, she became a ghost, and I realized that in order to write about her, about shame, I would have to go back East, to let the idea breathe its favorite
air. Anna, deported, repatriated to a country she had never seen, caught brain fever and turned into a sort of idiot. (*Shame* 116)

With the creation of Sufiya in mind, it is necessary to reevaluate the claims of Dayal and Aijaz. The narrator has even questioned his own authority; he has explained that he has left his country of birth and is now a duel emigrant who has “learned Pakistan in slices.” He says, “I think what I am confessing is that, however I choose 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 missing bits” (*Shame* 69). But the fragmented self is not merely a vagrant, or a postmodern obsession with “unbelongs”, it is a longing to re-envision his own interpretations of truth, masculine, though they may be. He [the narrator] understands that he exists on the periphery and that she has much more “truth” in her narrative than Omar or even himself. Though she is “idiot” in the eyes of others, she can regain her identity and become a new woman since she has a dynamic character and special physical strength.

The overall theme of story is that Sufiya, the prototype of shame, the “hapless devourer of men,” has become something entirely different. She has become “anti myth” and “anti-fairy-story” because she is forced to be each of these things. Her role is completely contradictory. She is the symbol of shame but simultaneously she is the symbol of a reality which exists outside of the historical imposition of shame onto a culture, and specifically onto women. In the following passage the narrator explores the roots of shame—which have no objective nature; therefore, shame itself is fictitious. Shame is a product of historical myth:

Let me voice my suspicion: the brain-fever that made Sufiya Zinobia preternaturally receptive to all sorts of things that float around in the ether
enabled her to absorb, like a sponge, a host of unfelt feelings. Where do you imagine they go?—I mean emotions that should have been felt, but were not—such as regret for a harsh word, guilt for a crime, embarrassment, propriety, shame?—Imagine shame as a liquid, let’s say a sweet fizzy tooth-rotting drink, stored in a vending machine. Push the right button and a cup plops down under a pissing stream of fluid. How to push the button? Nothing to it. Tell a lie, sleep with a white boy, get born the wrong sex ...The button pusher does not drink what was ordered; and the fluid of shame spills, spreading in a frothy lake across the floor. *(Shame* 122)

The “shame” which has imposed itself upon Sufiya finally results in the murder of Omar. It happened so easily, just with the push of a button. Make a selection -- choose a history -- but then it chooses you. She is a product of her historical roots and the narrator’s inability to escape his connection to her and to history. The author, the narrator and Sufiya, do not refer purely, and simply, to an actual individual insofar as (they) simultaneously give rise to a variety of egos and a series of subjective positions that individuals of any class may come to occupy. Rushdie’s fragmented story allows room for multiple histories to exist in one space, and suggests that the myths of a culture can become a phantom with one arm lifted in a gesture of farewell.

Politics and social conventions are not the only deriding factors that hinder woman’s move and visibility. The continuing discourse of religion as divisive factor reveals how transgression within the field of power-relations can threaten the visibility of the discourse of women’s emancipation. Given this, it is not surprising that religion also plays an important, if shadowy, role in the novel. For religion, too, is presented as incurring its fair share of shame and it is not just for the comic value of the scene that Rushdie makes the divine, Maulana Dawood, end up with a necklace of shoes (that is, a symbol of shame) hanging from his neck. Still, the reprimand is not
straightforward -- is anything in Rushdie? Having no religion seems just as bad as having it in excess. The political religious center of the country, mentioned, remains challenged by the demands made at the margins by peripheral men, women, the intellectual, and the indigenous identity of the narrator himself. Intrusion in any form is treated anomaly by the totalitarian centre because power can exist only by containing the subversion it produces:

Nobody was surprised that there were accidents ... well, there were a few voices saying, if this the country we dedicated to our god, what kind of god is it that permits ... but their voices were silenced before they had finished their questions ... because there are things that cannot be said. (Shame 82)

Rushdie portrays in Shame how totalitarian regimes record and suppress the “historical truth” of the times, “No, it’s more than that there are things that cannot be permitted to be true” (82). He questions the issue of ownership and legitimacy of history in Shame, as he asserts the power of the act of writing an alternative history in the present, “… is history to be considered the property of the participants solely? In what courts are such claims staked, what boundary commission’s map out the territories? Can only the dead speak?” (Shame 28) He also reveals the inevitability of multiple interpretations of the past but sees the necessity of the power of the historical imagination to seek stability in the alternative versions as he observes:

Mutant versions of the past struggle for dominance; new species of fact arise, and old, saurian truths go to the wall ... Only the mutations of the strong survive. The weak the anonymous, the defeated leave few marks: ... History loves only those who dominate her: it is a relationship of mutual enslavement [...]. (Shame 124)

Rushdie locates the transformative power of fiction in its capacity to provide alternative versions of the past, and by doing so, he engages in the subversion of the
power entailed by the discursive site of official history. Rushdie encourages readers and characters to have power over the narrative of the author but do not fail to emphasize that the power of any narrative contains its subversion. Rushdie observes the internal politics in the power relations between narrator and narrate, an idea embodied by Omar Khayyam’s hypnotic formula, “‘You will do anything that I ask you to do, but I will ask you to do nothing that you will be unwilling to do.’” (Shame 52)

He is also aware of the political subversion contained in the contested borderline of past and present: “But I am dealing with a past that refuses to be suppressed, that is daily doing battle with the present” (Shame 88). In presenting his digressions into the narrative of his text, he illustrates both the power as a story-teller in the revelations he makes, “The country in this story is not Pakistan, or not quite ... My story, my fictional country exist[sic] like myself, at a slight angle to reality” (Shame 29) and also acknowledges the subjectivation within his own discourse: “Outsider! Trespasser! You have no right to this subject! ... Poacher! Pirate! We reject your authority ... what can you tell but lies?” (Shame 28) It is significant that Omar’s shamelessness is wed to Sufiya’s shame, but it is violence and silence that define the power of their relationship. Rushdie’s central concern lies in revealing the violence ensuing out of the power of shame and the threats of the subversion of shamelessness, “Rushdie says over and over again, within the novel as well as in the interviews which have followed, that the encounter of shamelessness with shame can only produce violence” (Ahmad, In Theory 146).

Hence, violence is the effective strategy of power to contain its subversion, “Between shame and shamelessness lies the axis upon which we turn meteorological conditions at both these poles are of the most extreme, ferocious type. Shamelessness,
shame: the roots of violence” (Shame 115-116). Rushdie also states in an interview of the reciprocal effects of shame and violence thus, “It struck me that if violence engendered shame, it was also true that shame engendered violence” (“PW Interviews” 50). The author-in-the-text describes his shame over the awareness of the murder of a daughter by a Pakistani father in the East End of London “because by making love to a white boy she had brought such dishonor upon her family ...” (Shame 115).

It is worth mentioning here that the entrenched myth of “individual” in the spectrum of Rushdie’s political literary gamut is doubtlessly a response to the “professionalism of patriarchy” as a restraint of participation in the nation’s political life. Shame from this focal point fittingly reflects his concern with the politics of repression as an underlying socio-political façade. The novel dwells on the negotiation between the political forces of the nation and the social forces ingrained in society. In his essay, “The Liminalities of Nation and Gender: Salman Rushdie’s Shame,” Samir Dayal proposes that Rushdie is “a novelist of interiority, and more specifically of what one might call internal borders -- of the “domestic” rather than the international (notwithstanding his cosmopolitanism), the psychological rather than the sociological, and the linguistic rather than the objective (he is a constructivist)”. (39) But this does not mean that when he talks about interior issues, he ignores the world of politics or the public sphere. On the contrary, he attempts to place the externalities such as class, race, or nation in conjunction within a designed universe of particularities. Thus, it is from this aspect that his works “persistently mark the problematic imbrication of gender with nation”. (39) Consequently, regarded as an explorative, psycho-political novel, Shame comes to question the border conditions
that define both categories of gender and nation. This imbrication for Rushdie heightens the illusion and liminality of the historical facades.

In *Shame*, he presents an alternative history, not to counter history, but to reveal how a singular, official truth is improbable. His use of the term “Peccavistan” serves to suggest the inclusions and the political exclusion as set against the actual Pakistan. The power of history of this country is rectified as a palimpsest, which assembles its history by obscuring its other, “To build Pakistan it was necessary to cover up Indian history, to deny that Indian centuries lay just beneath the surface of Pakistani Standard Time. The past was rewritten; there was nothing else to be done.” (*Shame* 87) However, he justifies his vision of the power of rewriting history, “It is the true desire of every artist to impose his or her vision on the world” (87). The nation-state is claimed as “increasingly at war with itself” because of “a failure of the dreaming mind” (87). The acknowledgement here is that the text qualifies as a political novel does not only serve to represent the autocratic regime of a postcolonial country, but can also be applied to the nature of power and corruption in politics in a global sense. Neluka Silva observes that the novel is a representation of resistance in which men and women search for alternative history and that Rani’s shawls represent a symbolic resistance against the centralized system. Silva says, “The shawls expose the artificiality of the nation-state, official historiography and its rhetorical strategies. The controlled terror in the shawls -- objects of beauty after all -- emerges from the fact that fantasy is a close approximation of reality” (193).

The critical intervention is manifested in the relentlessly thematic correlation between the centrality of the woman in the novel and the narration of the national history of the nation. Symbolically, the history of the nation is originated from the
woman’s own identity in which dominance and freedom are the common juncture of both. The story of the nation is a story of the woman in her struggle against the patriarchal domination. Both of the woman and the nation share the common ground of struggling for freedom and resisting oppression. Colonial oppression and patriarchal repression result in violent reactions and different forms of resistance.

The dilemma of the woman in the novel lies in the fact that she suffers the impact of the cultural and historical forces caused by the male-centered system either a religious or a feudal one. The narrative re-examines the political history and its foundations of culture, ideology and religion since these elements imposed themselves upon the woman. In other words, the novel attempts to show us how the woman struggles within these forces and how that struggle in its various forms of suffering may enable her to rewrite her history and regain her identity. He admits that Shame is a fiction about political criticism and affirms that the novel is about “the way in which women are socially repressed” (Haffenden 51). The novel also discusses the situation of women and individuals under the established, traditional and religious system that “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” (Shame 251).

History and politics in this novel, as in his other novels, are always correlated and they explain each other. In this case, woman’s history becomes a challenge to the traditional and patriarchal visions of history. In the postcolonial discourse, woman’s history, among many other kinds of history, such as subaltern history and black history, is a crucially reverberated concern to be explored. Rushdie is ardently involved in this dynamic shift from what is termed as “total” or “dominant” history
into the fragmented or “democratic” history. In this “new” history, there is no denying of the partiality and the particularity of the stories, and, by extension, of all stories and of the subjects of those stories. This history also refuses the dictates of a single central narrative that legitimates the quest for dominance. The defense of the subject—elites—in the past, their own hegemony in the present—is a repudiation of the possibility of contest and conflicting interpretation, a refusal of change, and a rejection of the possibility for what is termed by Joan Wallach Scott as “democratic history”. The version of democratic history includes an account of conflicting ideas.

It should be also remembered that the main scope of the postcolonial novel is to discuss and analyze the cultural components of society. In this direction, history becomes the basic material of Rushdie from which he emerges to reconstruct the contemporary societies in his fictional universe. But the major question is still connected with the idea of narration. The postcolonial novelist thinks that what we have received as “history” was based on racial, social prejudices and discriminatory facades that ignore and marginalize the other cultural identities. The postcolonial critics view history as a thing which was written either by the colonial/imperial circles or by the patriarchal ruling and dominating class. As a result, the received version of history was considered a representation of dominant culture in which many errors were committed, among of which is the exclusion of woman and the ignorance of her position in society. This type of history is also described as a singular narrative form.

In his essay, “History as Usual? Feminism and the New Historicism,” Judith Lowder Newton maintains that feminist historians both draw upon and helped to generate “postmodern” assumptions in their development of a “New Woman’s History”, for example, they sought to challenge traditional, masculine, “objective history” by making woman visible, by writing woman into history. This might well
mean that traditional definitions of “history” itself would have to change. In feminist history, sexuality and reproduction, both constructed, both seen as sites of power and struggle were central to the subjectivity of woman and men both. (153)

In fact, both feminist and postcolonial discourses seek to reinstate the position of the marginalized and invert the structures of domination. The job of the postcolonial novelist is then to reconstruct a feminist discourse as a counter-narrative to the patriarchal authority. The term “patriarchy” as John McLeod defines, refers to those systems--political, material and imaginative--which invest power in men and marginalize women” (173). Feminist critics deal with the issues related to women from the viewpoint of enabling them to raise their voices against patriarchy and repressive forms. So, feminism and postcolonialism, as McLeod puts it, “share the mutual goal of challenging forms of oppression” (174).

The text sheds lights on the female characters and gives them some leading roles to narrate their own stories. Thus, *Shame* has established itself as an emblematic instance of subversive postcolonial mode. That is, a subversion of normative national and gendered subjectivity in the country he projects. In this novel, there is an attempt to rewrite the history of the nation and its women, too. Since history is a cultural construct in the political discourse, its truth is a by-product of knowledge power constellations. As a result, his counter-narrative technique employs the narratology of multiple narrators in which all men and women can raise their voice and express their desire for a free life. The attempt is to enable the female characters to resist the male-dominance culture and achieve some kind of individuality as modern patterns of women. “The past was rewritten; there was nothing else to be done” (*Shame* 87).
Rushdie’s literature is often viewed as being counter-canonical because it does not reflect a cohesive national identity, but rather, questions the very nature of identity through rewriting national history. His fairy-tale characters reflect the levels of identity formation. Iskander Harappa represents the struggle to move forward to a new concept of identity whereas Raza Hyder wants to maintain a place where identity can find solid ground. On this parallelism between the national identity and the women’s existentiality, Sabrina Hassumani holds the view that the central idea of the novel is “how one-sided historical views can lead to violence” (48). Hassumani observes that Bilquis and her daughter, Sufiya Zinobia, and the three Shakil sisters become victimizers because of their one-sided interpretation of history. She ascribes this to the travails of patriarchal worldview of society. In this view nation as well as gender do not have a specific identity of their own and are imbricated enclosed within the fence of imposed ideology – social, political, religious. Therefore, these women were exposed to and instructed with and one particular view of life in a way that they were not allowed to discover their identities. The basic view is that the political history is pervasively patriarchal--male-centered and is organized in such a way to subordinate women to men in all cultural domains, especially familial and religious ones.

A thematic vision to be discerned from this is the power of woman’s telling as a counter-narrative to the patriarchal one. Rani narrates through her embroidery work a different kind of history and gives her own interpretations, as a woman, of what happened. The audience then is invited to listen to her tales which are no less important than those unfolded by the official authority. Really, her “tales of shawls” subvert the myth of the “Alexander the Great” and tell us that his “glorious” history is in fact a set of moral hypocrisy, military aggression, censorship, repression of the
opponents, and finally sexual scandals. She is exposed as a silent judge who traces the cruelty and misdeeds of dominating official power. Her embroidery works provide a metaphorical narration of woman’s history. Metaphorically speaking, her shawls narrate the history of the woman that was silenced by the oppressive official system of the society, represented by the despotic leader, Iskandar Harappa. The marching of periphery people to the centre works in both ways: they are either shown as the victims of historical events, experiencing the effects of them, or they may change the course of the imaginary history of the nation narrated in the novel. But she starts leading an opposition against Raza Hyder and his men, showing a great challenge to their power. Actually, she revolts against the conventional history of woman and sacrifices herself to the political future of her country. She is radically repulsive against the traditional function of the woman. She refuses to marry because marriage for her is a submission to the male-centered society. She acts as a dissent who realizes that a woman has no place in history unless she takes a prominent role in the public world. She stands in the way of Hyder’s policy and chooses the way that distinguishes her from the other women in the country. Unlike the other women in the novel, she chooses the culture of confrontation.

The story of Zinobia embodies the political history of the nation which is full of failure and frustration. She suffered the humiliation which turned her into a beast and a supernatural being, shattering the world of shame. In fact, she hysterically rebels against the imposed norms and values. Regardless whether she is aware of her identity or not, she breaks the silence and the naïve innocence and draws a beginning end to the repressive history. Substantially, her shift from the world of “innocence” to the world of “experience”, putting in mind Blake’s reflections (“Songs of Innocence” and “Songs of Experience”) in which Blake depicts the radical shift of English people
from the life of simplicity, naïve, and exuberance, before the “Industrial Revolution” into the life of Slavey, Materialism and Rationality, this is the main concern of the novel that summarizes Rushdie’s astute feminist style and discourse. In fact, the feminist style in the novel is based on a dialectical method of negotiating and redefining given concepts and assumptions regarding women's history. Among these concepts are the concepts of “shame”, “innocence” and “sexuality”.

She experiences the manifestations of these concepts through the duality of “passion”. In terms of desire, she works toward the total fulfillment by aggressively raping her men, and reinforcing her sexuality by way of libidinal domination. She invariably sexualizes the pathways of her men and forcefully reconfirms her will and power. “[s]he slew the turkeys” (*Shame* 134). The “turkeys” scene is highly symbolic in this regard. In terms of violence, she brutally finishes off her men advertises her power as a prototypical figure to be acknowledged and feared of. Subversively, she moves from the stereotypical image of “shame” and “innocence” to the anarchical image of “experience” and “maturity”. She starts her life as a “retarded” girl, oblivious of her identity and self, and ends up as a maturely experienced woman, fully aware of her history and duties. Beside this, the scene explicates how patriarchal power is retreated to a subservient position of “political entertainment” and social illusions of authority that is ended under the “strong woman’s hand”. Her violent sexuality changes her from a sleeping beauty girl into a subject that changes the course of history or, at least, draws the first step for the female generation which would come later. Her action can be discerned as a symbolic rebellion against patriarchal history.
At any rate, the treatment of the idea of “beauty and beast” in the novel seems to have been an echo of Angela Carter’s novel, *The Bloody Chamber*. Carter deals with the idea from a sexual point of view. She suggests that a woman’s beauty under the power of desire converts into a beast. In her novel, she represents that the potential nature of woman consists of two dual elements, beauty and beast. “Beauty agrees to go to the Beast… Beauty will be erotically transformed into an exquisite animal herself”. (qtd. in Rushdie, *Step Across This Line* 43)

From the topological perspective, Bilquis Kemmal, unlike her daughter, Zinobia, represents the first feminist generation whose story is also directly linked to the political scene in the story. She submits herself to her husband because she believes in his power and authority and feels that a woman needs a protection from man as she is a “weak human being”. Conceptually, the first generation highlights the power of “purity” and “feminine”. In the following passage, we see her recording the romantic happiness with her husband, General Raza at the day of marriage:

> When I woke up, she said it was daytime and I was wrapped in an officer’s coat. But whose do you think, goof, of course his, your own father Raza’s…Raza arriving in the hall of public audience came to attention before Bilquis, who was decently coated; he clicked his heels, saluted grinned … so proud, like a king. (*Shame* 65)

Moreover, to Bilquis, marriage means a complete submission to husband. However, it is quite difficult to decide if she is happy in her marriage. What is significance in her character is that she has the power of narration; she recounts her history and her family’s. In fact, in the character of Bilquis, the text has criticized the fundamental Pakistani society. Before her migration to Pakistan, “the Land of the Pure,” she had enjoyed the heterogeneous life of India, where she lived with her father, Kemmal. In the new country, she turns into a submissive character to the
homogeneous socio-political norms which reflect the conventional history of the nation. Though she is presented as a submissive conventional woman who sees in her male partner security and protection, she does not afford to narrate her past when she enjoyed “open life of cinema and theatre”. She has also the courage to confront the “inquisition scene” with her mother-in-law in which she spoke of her historical past and identity. Hassumani comments on this scene by remarking that “repression breeds repression”. She evinces that this idea occurs, not only from men to women, but also from women to women. In other words, a woman can be a victim and a victimizer at the same time. A visible instance of this victimizer/victim binary is Bilquis’s suffering under the humiliation of her mother-in-law, Bariamma. (51). Bilquis, a migrant, was treated as a strange one who does not fit into an established community. This situation is influenced by a largely male-centred narrative.

Another traditional female character in the novel is Naveed Hyder, Bilquis’s elder daughter and Captain Tavlar ul-Haq’s wife. Her feminist identity is crushed beneath the masculine selfishness. She is a woman who sacrifices her fertile youth for the revered conventions and for her husband, the military man of Raza Hyder, her father. At first, she performs the role of an ideal woman in a patriarchal society by giving birth to many sons. Soon she realizes that she has been turned into just a ‘baby-machine’. She decided to end her life as an expression of rejection of this mechanical life run by patriarchal authority. Thus, male history is always discriminatory against woman. It minorizes her as a body for desire, as a flesh for satisfaction and as a mechanic tool of child production. Naveed has sacrificed her life to the social authority termed as “husband”. Officially, this patriarchal social unit called “husband” has usurped the power of his subject “wife”. So, the treatment of woman and history has been examined in the text within the discourse of power-feminism relationship.
Ideas such as subject and object, oppressor and oppressed, victimizer and victimized have been deployed. The political history of the nation has been exposed in parallel with story of the woman.

An interesting woman who plays a leading role in the novel is Pinkie Aurengzeb, the whore who is involved in a physical relationship with both of Iskander and Raza and their men. The novel relates the fictional name to the real historical name of the Moghal ruler, Aurangzeb who ruled India in the ancient past. Her name is insistently chosen to project juxtaposition between Aurangzeb of the Islamic history and that of the contemporary secular one. Furthermore, her acts destabilize the culture and ideology of the emperor, Aurangzeb. The narrator intends to create secular values as a reaction to the imposed traditional and patriarchal ones. In this parallelism, the text rewrites the woman’s history and redeems the intellectual errors committed against her. Pinkie, in fact, is not a simple woman, who has an illicit relationship with political leaders and military Generals, but is an influential woman whose history is connected with the political history of the ruling class. She represents the power of sexuality. Sexuality here is revealed as a prevailing force against centrality of the phallic. Moreover, she can be read as subversion of the myth of religiosity and purity. She has been endowed with secular qualities. She acts against the religiously social code called “shame” which defines the space of woman.

The question raised by various readers and critics of Rushdie is: “Who is the ideal woman in the novel?” Actually, his concern is not to prescribe or advise, but to offer possibilities and alternatives. He believes in the idea of plurality in the face of singularity, the individuality in the face of collectivity, and the dynamic process against the fixed conventions. Therefore, we cannot find an ideal woman in this novel
that represents the author’s view. All, are equally significant, and all are representative of his projected thought.

In the feminist and postcolonial discourses, classical texts and assumptions that legitimized the privileging hierarchy and patriarchy have been reread, revisited and restructured. This offers the possibility of reconstructing the given canon itself. The subversion of the patriarchal literary forms themselves has also been an important part of the feminist project. Mujeebuddin Syed in his essay entitled as “Centres and Margins: Shame’s ‘Other’ Nation” remarks that Rushdie’s *Shame* is “concerned with presenting an alternative view of history” (135). By the same token, Neluka Silva in her essay entitled as “The Politics of Repression and Resistance in Salman Rushdie’s *Shame*,” observes that one of the major purposes of Rushdie’s *Shame* is to rewrite and cover up the history of the nation (151). This implies that the structure of the novel supports Rushdie’s idea of subversion. Rushdie intends to offer new possibilities of the postcolonial reality. On the other hand, Masood Ashraf Raja in his essay entitled, “Salman Rushdie: Reading the Postcolonial Texts in the Empire,” asserts that *Shame* marks a visible progress in Rushdie’s postcolonial thought in the course of Indian novel development. Raja explores that the novel can be read as “an imagined version of Pakistan, which could be partially true” (9). He considers the text as an advanced form of “modern tale”. However, he describes it as a “grotesque fairy tale” (9). By this is meant that *Shame* creates an unpleasant image of the country whose contemporary history is led by thought of singularity and exclusion of woman.

The novel, in brief, can be viewed as a counter-canonical form because it does not reflect a cohesive national identity, but questions the very nature of identity through the rewriting of national history. The depiction of women in the novel is a foundation stone of a new transformational history. Aside from the debate whether the
female characters are central or peripheral, their acts and attitudes impart a significance announcement for change toward a healthier history of a nation. The relationship between the postcolonial theory and the concept of history has been clearly reflected in the narrative. The novel comes to rearrange the components of history and to explore what is important for the individual and society. Moreover, it comes to emphasize the position of the individual in the making of history against the official spell of collective history. On the other hand, the novel highlights the power of narration as a protesting tool of feminist discourse. The woman has the power to narrate her story, express her identity and resist the authority of history.

The novel’s advocacy of the freedom of individual, in general, and the woman, in particular, as an unbound human subject places it far beyond the pattern of postcoloniality. The liberation of the postcolonial subject from the shackles of the traumatic past is a vital human concern. Hence, *Shame* attempts to subvert any pre-fixed definitions against women by the traditional masculine narrative. Since Rushdie believes fully in the social transformation for all, he seeks in his fictional representation of a woman, as in his *Shame*, a reconstruction of society through a new philosophy which encourages the individuality of men and women, and to liberate women from the marginalizing position. But the ultimate aim is also to make women recognize by consciousness that they were marginalized, and that they have to start realizing their womanhood. Hence, the novel’s male and female characters are common individuals who revolt against collectivity, patriarchy and tradition, struggling to liberate themselves in a repressive world. Even women are individuals, not class or race. They study their experience as the experiences of the individuals.

As a postcolonial form of resistance narrative, *Shame* narrates woman’s resistance and challenge to the traditional values in different ways. The women’s
situation in the novel is not entirely frustrating because they are not totally powerless. From the novel itself, we have seen several examples that the women showing a real progress in this resistance. It is a realistic novel but the setting of the novel is slightly and mythologized. Structurally, it contains two fictional autobiographies in which female narrators relate their own stories; the feminine voice appears as the obvious medium through which to tell a woman’s story. Also, the shift from masculine to feminine narrators takes place and corresponds to a new focus on feminine characters. The voice of the female characters, despite the impact of the masculine protagonists, is overheated, and the female heroines explore a variety of means of expressions to convey their voices within the frame of the narratives.

This feminist strand is mostly presented through the metamorphosis of Shakil girls from submissively idle figures to socio-politically engaged individuals. This new position of the woman is contrasted with the traditional view under the male-governed society. The novel’s society is a secular world where “shame” is looked at as a form of social repression of individuality and as an exclusionary tool based on religiously identifying principles. Secular identity is identified in relation to cultural space not to nation, religion or ethnicity. Apparently, feminists believe that the patriarchal oppression is a gender act, and they concentrate their attention on male gender oppression for female gender strength. They also reveal that the oppression of woman is sexual. Male culture has turned woman’s body into objects for male desire. Woman is reduced to a mere thing of beauty and sexuality. An obvious instance in Shame is Captain Talvar Ulhaq, Naveeda’s husband, who treats her as a machine of child production, and before that as a body of desire.

As an anti-history novel, Shame pits its truth against the politicians’ version, and its fabulous tale gives a lie to the official truth. This artistic journey through myth
and fable has been marked by awareness that to produce a mythic Pakistan is to traverse. The novel attempts to represent the exclusionary history of patriarchy male supremacy. The ruling elite wings exclude each other from the political scene. In the context of postcolonial literature, this is frequently the case. Many postcolonial authors delve into the issue of gender when expressing their ideas about postcolonialism. How can an individual, that lives in or has history with a certain country or region which has been colonized, shape his or her identity? In the work of many postcolonial authors, gender is one of the best tools to use when exploring identity. In this novel masculinity and femininity are important factors in how certain characters function. This growing desire to define identity as it relates to the characters is not only confined to the individuals in the story, but it is also an issue relevant to the postcolonial nation as well.

Therefore, the relationship between Omar and his three mothers (Chunni, Munnee, and Bunny) is central to common theme of the story. The title of the novel, and the fact that the mothers decided to raise Omar to feel no shame are a primary aspect of the novel. It is a theme that recurs constantly throughout the story and affects nearly every character. The reason why Omar’s mothers to have raised him in this way is their attempt to rebel against the kind of upbringing they had. Their father was a very bitter man who did not hesitate to express his shame and his anger towards his daughters and the world around him. The three mothers desire to rid themselves, as well as Omar, of the oppression they were subjected to, is directly comparable to people’s dreams of cultural freedom for their next generation. So , they raise Omar without a father to reject any feelings of shame regardless of the consequences. As Omar journeys through the story, he uses his shameless upbringing as a means of justifying his actions. This all ties into the complex process of defining identity.
Omar’s lack of a strong father affects his masculinity and causes him to act in a way that his culture would view as weak, or “feminine.” However, the text does explore the political history with relation to women’s through the relationship between Iskander and Raza and Pinkie. It portrays the two male characters as having conflicting political views. Their differences are amplified due to their simultaneous relationship with the same mistress, Pinkie. This is another instance of how gender is used to express femininity and, furthermore, weakness in the story. The mistress, who possesses feminine qualities, represents the lack of strength, or the apparent weakness, between the two political figures and the ideals they represent. Iskander is depicted as a democrat who supposedly wants the best for people while Raza is shown as a militant individual with a strong belief in tradition. Each of them battle over the mistress and for control of the nation.

The writer is not attempting to insult the female gender or those with feminine qualities. He is simply constructing a metaphor to convey a message of concern toward the people in general; a message that says there is a serious lack of strength and unity in that region both politically and socially. In that same sense, he constructs another metaphor in Sufiya Zenobia. Her personality directly contrasts with the personality of Omar whom she ends up marrying. While he was raised to not feel shame, she has been surrounded by it since she was born. As a result, she feels the shame of other characters and reacts violently to it several times throughout the novel. She seems feminine and weak on the surface, but reacts with anger and passion in a much more masculine way than Omar. Her violent reactions to shame mirror the riots of the young Pakistani citizens in response to their country’s constant turmoil. In fact, this type of violence is illustrated effortlessly in the novel:
Looking at the smoking cities on my television screen, I see groups of young people running through the streets, the shame burning on their brows and setting fire to shops, police shields, cars. They remind me of my anonymous girl. Humiliate people for long enough and a wildness bursts out of them. (*Shame* 117)

The political and social undertones represented by the characters tie into the ideas of gender and identity as they to postcolonialism. Accordingly, Sufiya, “the ghost of a story”, the “corpse of a murdered girl” and the “hapless devourer of men” has become something entirely different. She is the creation of a false imposition of history on to the present day reality. She has become “anti-myth” and “anti-fairy-story” because she is forced to be each of these things. Her role is completely contradictory. She is the symbol of shame but simultaneously she is the symbol of a reality which exists outside the historical imposition of shame onto a culture, and specifically onto women. In other words, this fragmented story allows room for multiple histories to exist. Moreover, *Shame* can be described as a journey of self-realization or individual’s re-positioning. Sufiya, for example, eventually realizes that her identity should not be gained from what others define, but what she herself is, regardless of others’ viewing gaze. She represents the floating-upwards from history, from society, from one’s time. Hence, the novel celebrates postmodernism not as a form of escapism, but as a form of political engagement in the envisioning the position of the individual. There is this intermingling and intermixing between the cultural, the religious, and historical. According to Justyana Deszcz, his subtlety as a postmodern writer lies in the fact that he emerges as a storyteller who is “implicated in processes of cultural formation, of recycling fairy-tale frames used to make sense of culture” (29). A national history cannot be founded upon a false identity, as evidenced through the story of Bilquis. The reliance upon history to unearth identity is
possible only if there is certainty on which the history was founded. For Rushdie, any certainty must be challenged. As he states in an interview with Bill Moyer:

One of the things a writer can do is to say: Here is the way in which you’re told you’re supposed to look at the world, but actually there are also some other ways. Let us never believe that the way in which people in power tell us to look at the world is the only way we can look, because if we do that, then that’s a kind of appalling self-censorship. (4)

This philosophy is one which is clearly expressed in Shame. From a feminist perspective, political and national history is represented as an exclusionary and cruel history. In fact, the text provides such a set of statements in authorial interventions: “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 honor and propriety, breeds repressions of other kinds as well” (173); “Shamelessness, shame: the roots of violence” (115); “Humiliate people for long enough and a wilderness bursts out of them” (117); “In the end, though, it all blows up in your face” (173). When history is analyzed from the feminist point of view, it is clear that historical records are the narratives of “great men” and the wars they fought or lands they conquered, which, of course, indicates that men have always kept the centre in historical narratives. Women are absent in the accounts of the past or always represented from a male point of view in the monolithic discourse of history that does not allow their difference. Therefore, feminism sees history as an oppressive, phallocentric grand narrative which should be deconstructed:

Feminists have long criticized traditional accounts of the past for excluding women: they have provided supplements to existing histories, and replacements as well. They have offered critical analysis of the reasons for women’s exclusion. They have argued that attention to women would not only
provide new information, but exposes the limits of histories written only from the perspective of men. (Scott 12)

The novel is an anti-male narrative ideology. The women in this story are palimpsests both covering and revealing the Third World history and male shame. They wear the shame of their history as much as its shame is written on their souls by the men in their lives. The intrusive and unreliable narrator implicitly reminds us that it always matters who tells the stories of history. *Shame* is closely connected with the concept of a palimpsest, which Rushdie describes in the novel as a “Pakistani” condition. It serves as a good illustration of the idea that “postmodern intersexuality is a formal manifestation of both a desire to close the gap between past and present for the reader and a desire to rewrite the past in a new context… It directly confronts the past of literature -- and of historiography. It uses and abuses those intertextual echoes, inscribing their powerful allusions and then subverting that power through irony” (Hutcheon, “The Pastime of Past” 484). As the narrative reveals, women marched in from the peripheries of the story to demand the inclusion of their own tragedies:

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

The complexity of the power relations of the discourse of sexuality, as the text implies, establishes itself in terms of the subversion, which it produces. The narrative of sexuality affirms itself as a political act when it reinforces the power of the periphery to subvert the power of the center. Repression is not monolithic, and that
sexual norms and public life are closely interrelated. The shame that keeps women under a male system of control results in creating the tension between power and subversion. Thus, the women enact within the language of patriarchy but do not subordinate themselves to its hierarchy and it is with the sanction of the patriarch’s authority that they migrate from the periphery into the centre.

The novel is an attempt to speak to history; it lays a great emphasis that a national history cannot be founded upon a false identity in the sense that it is attained at the expense of certain minorities. The reliance upon history to nurture identity is possible only if the history proclaimed stands itself on a firm ground. The novel, therefore, falls back, for its dramatic excitement, on the tension between reality and appearance. In reality, the “guardians” of morality and purity behave differently from the way they speak and preach. Precisely they represent a rupture in facts and a link in the series of myth. *Shame* can in one sense be read as an attempt to create a mythology for the nation. Military coups and fanatical bombings are juxtaposed with a clairvoyant police chief and a girl in whom the shame of the nation is incarnated in Sufiya, who is possessed by a beast which rips men’s heads from their shoulders. She turned by the curse of an unjust society into a symbol of sexuality and destruction. She is the creation of a false imposition of history on to the present day reality and, thus, her very existence becomes dangerous to reality that falls back for continuity on myth.

When a male author attempts a feminist representation in a novel that is preoccupied with further issues of the social stigma, one should expect that his story should handle the theme of power and domination, somehow, outside the gender polarity. A prominent feature of the novel is that the feminist narrative is embedded within the general political and social complexity. Constituting a subaltern, subversive
discourse against the general stream of masculine political history, the dilemma of women is highlighted and given a specific position as a counter-narrative. Another feature is the approach that brings the historical and fictional characters together. Rushdie uses an allegorical method that projects the historical characters and setting on the fictional ones, the aim is to offer a space of freedom for the narrator to manipulate and state out his beliefs that would reconstruct the current prevailing and repressive systems. In general, the “metahistory” serves to represent a microcosmic setting of the colonial authorities that exercise their power against the colonized people (including women) and gives a new picture of the practices of the colonizers (including patriarchs).

Thus, although the writer entrusts his pen to the male narrator, he does not deprive women of subjecthood. The subversion of the paternal ideology through the rewriting of the beauty-and-the-beast tale is an example of how enriching and stimulating the dialogue between feminism, postmodernism and postcolonialism. As Rushdie’s work testifies, these movements all focus on overcoming various sorts of oppression and only such an all-embracing strategy may prove effective. *Shame* raises our awareness of the structures of individual and social masculine plotting. Its protagonist also speaks as a woman who effects her feminine difference and defines for herself a private and political space not “outside civilization and away from men” (Hirsch 144). In this sense, it is clear that the feminist dimension of the novel is not at all subordinated to the political agenda, the disparagement of official history. Rather, it is the specificity of women’s journey toward selfhood that becomes both priority and symbolic in the postcolonial society, the fact that the novel deploys well.
The story partakes in the process of questioning patriarchal oppression and testifies to the existence of feminist poetics within his oeuvre. It encourages readers to reflect on what seem untouchable fairytale sexual politics, and in particular on the frequent fairytale objectification of women as sexual possessions. In more general terms, through such identifications Rushdie wishes, however discontinuous his resoluteness may appear, to oppose the dominance of representation produced by any majority. At the same time, he probes the possibilities and risks inherent in the male involvement in feminism, and hopes that the vantage points he offers enlarge the reader's imaginative reach towards other forms of experience, all the more so as they are conveyed through the familiar fairytale scripts. Significantly, the male-female relationships he presents can be seen in terms of fairytale scenarios. Rushdie attempts a feminist fairytale reconfiguration of the struggle against the masculine establishment of power that becomes acknowledged as paralleling general interrogations of oppression and marginalization.

Such an understanding of feminism, in which men and women are not presented as brutally vindictive adversaries, seems a welcome incentive to a shared responsibility, a reaching out to the “other” that is convergent with the some feminist plea not to estrange one sex from the other, but to empower both men and women. Indeed, the mutual recognition of Sufiya and Omar seems a promising alternative to the system based on “the need for attachment and mastery and lead to authority and domination” (Hirsch 161). Such an attitude prevents one from experiencing the inevitable uneasiness stemming from the fact that, although individuals may have a sense of transcending paralyzing social norms, they still define themselves with reference to past “notions of male hegemony and of harmony between essential mythical archetypes that conceal the unique nature of people in history” (Zipes 118).
Despite its inner contradictions, *Shame*, an occasionally misogynist, but nevertheless a woman-focused and transgressive paraphrase of the patriarchal fairytale pre-text as a starting point of change, could serve as a restitutive impulse to look for other, albeit provisional, solutions, at least in the realm of fairytale writing. This is so because what counts is not whether one's allegiances can be clearly defined as feminist or not, but whether one engages in the act of exposing women’s stories. This is so even if sometimes the only possible self-identification is through women’s “relation to men—either through adoption or reaction against (sometimes both simultaneously) male codes of behavior and values” (Needham 153).

The novel appropriates women’s miserable stories as a mode of critique to destabilize the authority of those in positions of power. The emblematic portrayal of the female characters in the novel does acquire a significant fictional status. Each character is a correspondent emblem of elements from nation’s history. Thus, the three mothers of Omar Khayyam Shakil represent the three major schisms in the country's culture -- Indian, Pakistani, and English. Bilquis signifies Muslim Pakistan. Her daughter, Sufiya Zinobia, is post-Partition Pakistan who is “split in two like the hair she will later divide to its roots”, anticipating the emergence of Bangladesh. However, there is a sense of hesitancy in Rushdie’s depiction of a country that is not quite Pakistan in their eagerness to discover perfect correspondence between the text and its referent. Such an approach, although certainly fruitful, pays little attention to what is at stake in the narrative strategies used to fictionalize this particular referent. The novel’s narrator is keen to register a disjunction between real and fictional worlds that opens a gap between them. The novel’s narrator certainly provokes comparisons to be made between the narrative and
realist history. But it also urges a resistance against asserting equivalence between the real and fictional realms.

Sexualized politics is another focal point in the text. Bruce Dunne believes that sexuality is categorized according to social hierarchies; adult men on top; women, boys and slaves below. This categorization, according to Dunne, is made by social power. He also reveals that the religious authority dominates the concepts and meanings of sexual relations. He further comments that the traditional societies repress the open sexual relations and promote the segregation and exclusion of woman in the name of public and political reservation. He makes the point that the domain of licit sexuality is placed in service of the patriarchal order. He also asserts that a family’s honor in an Islamic society is linked to prematurely female virginity. He concludes his argument by saying that sexual relations in the Islamic history were and continue to be “male-authored” and organized to confirm the political power and social hierarchy and that the social institutions in the modern period still control sexuality in these countries (8-11). Dunne’s ideas have a close relevance to this novel which condemns what is termed as the “male dominance” sexuality in the society and criticizes the patriarchal authority against woman’s sexuality.

Indeed, our sexual myths are reflections of our attitudes towards society, and even towards humanity itself, for there can be no separation between sexuality and society. Culture and myths are mutually dependent, myths are products of society culture, and sexuality is part of this culture. Also, the meaning of sexual myth is a product of social culture, as a society changes, its myths also change but it is overly simplistic to suggest that there is causal relationship between the two. Furthermore, myth is a product of culture and the two are succinctly connected. Sexuality and its related concepts: morality, purity, illicit, and chastity are shaped and created by
society culture and its male dominating powers in the course of history. In this respect, the position of the woman and her independent identity becomes a target of this novel and also of many postcolonial observations.

*Shame* as a novel for study and literary analysis is of an importance in its theme concerning the relationship between three avenues: religion, power and sexuality -- the common subject of several studies in the field of modern fiction. The truth is “hidden” behind the controversial debate and discussion of the three avenues. The relation between literature and these three elements can be seen by the ways in which stories can present allegories, philosophies, and truths hidden in various stories. It can also be argued that inclusion of supernatural elements can help portray a different reality that mainstream religious concepts can neither explain nor adequately describe. In patriarchal societies, this kind of writing is usually found in women’s literary works.

The key word of this analysis is “shame”, which implies a prohibition of having sex outside the social and religious norms. Also, the analysis of myth as a sexual tale is intensified by Joseph Campbell’s definition of myth as “public and private dreams which are symptomatic of repressions of infantile incest wishes” (*Myths to Live By* 12). Repression creates a myth of desire in a traditional society as a counter-part to the power and religion. This idea seems to be applicable to the tale of the female characters of the novel, they find themselves haunted and motivated by a power of sexual curiosity and discovery of the self.

There is a conflict the between internal desire of the women and the culture of society. Their desire is natural and intrinsic, but society culture is an external force which represses their desire. Now they seem that they are entirely under the
patriarchal family. The three “arrested” girls dream of a romantic life and emotional freedom. They feel as though they were in a jail because their freedom is chained by traditions. In Q town the society creates a myth of sexuality and controls its meaning. Women are forced to obey and not even allowed to argue. The myth of sexuality created by society is based on the idea that any freedom of sexuality may spoil and deform the purity of woman and cause a disorder for society. However, men and women are showing an internal conflict between the imposed religious codes and the personal desires for sexual freedom. This conflict between the “internal” and the “external” is obviously shown in the very beginning of the novel. This is a story of sexual depravity and imprisonment as justified by the orthodoxy of “purity”, a belief which must be accepted, without argument, as a religious determinism. This is the power of social codes which turns the “town of Q” into a “locked” town, a town in which women are imprisoned and deprived from seeing the lights of freedom. From this reality emerges a myth of sexuality, and a woman’s desire becomes a mythical tale in the town.

In the remote border town of Q., which when seen from the air resembles nothing so much as an ill-proportioned dumb-bell, there once lived three lovely, and loving, sisters. Their names . . . but their real names were never used, like the best household china, which was locked away after the night of their joint tragedy in a cupboard whose location was eventually forgotten, so that the great thousand-piece service from the Gardner potteries in Tsarist Russia became a family myth in whose factuality they almost ceased to believe. (Shame 11)

But, the daughters imprisoned, by their father until his death, do not surrender forever. They start a journey of discovery -- discovery of self and identity; they realize after their father’s death that female desire is part of their identity. A sexual
myth then would be someone’s dream that he or she wants to fulfill. Sexual myth can be simply defined as dreams and ideas about sexual pleasure and desire satisfaction. It can also be defined as a physical and mental desire that dominates one’s way of thinking and behaviour. It is, in other words, a form of dream which needs to be fulfilled or an articulated desire which expresses human need. Obviously, it can be argued that sexual myth can be an articulation of desire, which is reflected in the words, and behaviour of the individual. From a feminist perspective, it is an articulation of power against patriarchy. Thus, the scope of this argument is to trace this phenomenon through the acts of a character in relation to the social situation. In the case of the Shakil sisters as a prominent example in the novel, they begin to ask themselves naïve questions about what a woman is and what she wants.

As the novel discernibly pinpoints, the interpretation of the value in each official religion is based on social norms. For a patriarchal society like that in the novel, the destiny of religious interpretation lies with the male figures -- fathers, brothers, or the male leaders. Furthermore, in order to legitimize the norms that are constructed from the male perspective, cultural values that exist in old legends, epics or manuscripts are also interpreted in ways that limit women’s freedom to express their ideas. This is the starting point by the sisters and, after that, the other female characters (Shakil sisters, Arjumand, Pinkie, Naveed, Rani, Bilquis, Farah Zoraster, and finally Sufiya Zinobia) to search for answers to what has been “repressed” by the patriarchal authorities in society and within the family. Sexual myth in the light of this can be simply defined as cultural attitudes and views of society shaped by religion or other institutional powers toward the sexual relations between men.
There is a real clash between the personal desire and the collective tradition and between men who introduce themselves as “protagonists” and women who are always expected to celebrate the victories of men over their mind and flesh. The novel juxtaposes the sexual and political power in this society. Men and women try to act and behave according to the established codes of society. As a result of this, women are shown as though they were arrested by the chains of traditions; their sexual desires are either ignored or repressed by the patriarchal figures. The men, on the other hand, appear as the leading force in society who have sufficient power over women, and behave as patriarchs. They express their sexuality despite the artificial restrictions, simply because they have always been the source of power and authority. Yet, the female figures show some challenge of the religious discourse directed by “Maulana Dawood” who calls for a “pure society”. It is in fact a rational discourse covered by the political power and the power of religion. Female characters, such as Pinkie Aurangzeb and Arjumend Harappa, appear as powerful women who act against their destiny, and realized that “[h]istory loves only those who dominate her” (Shame 124). Therefore, such leading female characters make their own decision and their own myth of desire.

The myth of sexuality has been resolved for Arjumand; however, this myth has been located within a struggle in the field of politics as a female political leadership which defeats by her mind and body the “male protagonists”. In the same vein, Pinkie is seen as a woman who “come[s]to enjoy the war against her body” (Shame 126), and she defeats by her exceptional power of sexuality the “Alexander god-myth of Harappa to which she will only be able to give free rein after his death...” (Shame 126). This is a kind of power by women in the novel in confrontation with the power of society and religion. The women resist and their
bodies speak with a language of desire. Their tales of sexuality represent human strengths against their weaknesses. They struggle to make their own mythical tales, resisting the male power. Also, they resist their destinies, till they defeat the masculine claims, and narrate their “sexual rivalry, ambition, power, patronage, betrayal, death, revenge” (Shame 173). Social repression fails to silence the sexual passion inhabiting the women mentioned, who live by myth of sexuality and by discovering its secrets. Their passion proves that a woman can be a maker of her future, her choice, and her myth of desire. For this reason, the narrator admits that:

> [t]he women seem to have taken over, they marched in from the peripheries of the story to demand the inclusion of their own tragedies, histories and comedies, obliging to count my narrative in all manner of sinuous complexities, to see my ‘male’ plot preferred, so to speak, through the prisms of its reverse and ‘female’ side. (Shame 173)

In the main, sexuality in the novel is shaped and controlled by power and authority. This myth also differs from one social class to another. The ruling class members in the novel break the rules of morality on many occasions. Instances from the novel show that the “big” people violate the principles and values of morality, and that they have loose sexual relations. What is seen to be disapproved for the public might become permitted and accepted for the political elite. We have presented several examples of “immoral” sexual relationships among people from the higher class which affirm the fact that the meaning of morality changes in this context to meet the desire of the political elite. Such kinds of legends and myths have been deconstructed by a counter-narrative represented by resisting responses of female characters in many occasions in the novel. Though Religion and political power act together against the women’s freedom in the novel, they show a success
understanding of the myth made by society and, in the end, seem to de-cipher the traditional codes and their myths, legends, and superstitions.

Actually, the text explores the institutionalized system of sexuality as a power that aids the visibility of the domination of the patriarchal order. The myth of woman as a passive human actor is subverted in the text. The sexual articulation as a resistance of the patriarchal power is a potential site for the representation of power relations. Insurgence of female sexuality as a variation of revolt qualifies itself as a strategy of power as well as a method of persuasion. This insurrection is a strategic form of power in the form of transgression. Zinobia becomes unconsciously a sort of a rioter and a transgressor who exerts resistance to a system of social order. But the necessity to transgress is created or encouraged by the authorities who sanction social control. The nation-state involves apparatuses and institutions, which collectively contribute to a riot. As a form of reclaiming her position in the sociopolitical setup, woman in the novel’s world are galvanized to defiance to make their power visible. This insurrectionary attitude destabilizes the idea of patriarchal authorial control.

The myth of freedom -- “free woman”, “free individual” and “free society” -- constitutes the cornerstone in understanding Rushdie’s fictional concerns. Roughly, myth of sexuality as a transgressive social code is subversively re-energized as a vital deconstructive way against the dominant religious institutionalized discourse that clothes the patriarchal system in the society. The novel exposes how the power of freedom in the postcolonial society submitted itself to the subversive fundamentalism upon which the institution of religion relied on for its exercise of power: However, the narrative asserts that it is not the power of patriarchy by itself that successfully controls “shameless” women, but rather it is the discourse of female sexuality which
by virtue of its submission to honor as the code of normalization that permits the existence of the power of patriarchy. Moreover, power of patriarchy can exist only in relation to subversion because the shame a woman feels pertains not only to her sense of honor but also to the family honor which in turn includes the honor and thereby the shame of the male members. In his article, “The Limits of What is Possible: Reimagining Sharam in Salman Rushdie’s Shame,” Jenny Sharpe discusses the normalized social norms of sexuality through which patriarchy assigns the code of shame to women who transgress normality:

So long as women experience sharam, family honor is preserved, and in this sense a woman’s honor is but an expression of her husband’s or father’s. A woman who submits to feelings of shame is one who does not step out of line. If she should behave without shame, that is, shamelessly, then family honor is restored only by punishing the transgressor.

Ahmad describes the women in Shame as resisting figures. He says, “But women are not, in any fundamental sense, mere victims of history; much more centrally, women have survived against very heavy odds, and they have produced history” (In Theory 150). Therefore, the transgression of socially normalized code of female sexuality is a threat to the power of patriarchy, since a woman who refuses to submit to shame subverts the power of the male. Hence, power produces a subversion, upon which it depends and contains within itself. The sexual deviance from societal and legal standards is aimed at in order to make the power of the normality of sexuality which threatens the power of the nation-state. The violence perpetuated by the patriarchal authority is a strategy to contain the silence of feminity within the limits of its power. Joel Kuortti observes of this naturalization of female sexuality thus, “The sphere of life reserved for women is defined and restricted by society and its collective institutions” (111). The state institutionalizes female sexuality through
the ideological power exerted by institutions and state policies such as family planning and population control. Though it is a differential power that circulates in the male and the female zones, power stems out of the system of control that makes male and female identity artful process. *Shame* critiques how women who do not transgress the limits of passive roles are treated as normal within the discourse of sexuality, whereas those women who reveal aggressive behavior tend to be defined abnormal as seen in the juxtaposing of Sufiya and Naveed, *Shame* and *Good News*. In addition to this, Rani Humayun expresses a form of feminist attitude and resistance of repressive culture through her creative work of embroidery.

... in the name of never-another- East-Wing, the bodies sprawled across the shawl, the men without genitals, the sundered legs, the intestines in peace of faces .... *I have lost count of the corpses on my shawl, twenty, fifty, a hundred thousand dead, who knows*. (Shame 194-95)

Silva describes Rani’s work as a mark of woman’s transformation into independence: “her single but powerful act of defiance finds expression in the eighteen shawls she embroiders ... each shawl intricately captures the debauchorous, violent and inhuman acts of her husband’s career” (157). It is of significance that the “veil” and the “shawl” metaphors of female clothing represent the conformity and transgression of female sexuality. Rani foregrounds the dependence of the “patriarchal nation-state” (158) as premised upon female sexuality.

The text reveals political inclinations present in the discourse of sexuality, which tend to be defined within a Foucauldian system of control. The strategies of social control that seek to control aspects of female sexuality and gender identity through a notion of normality are strategies that are produced and identifiable within the transformative narrative of an independent nation-state. However, these
normalizing discourses and disciplinary strategies are challenged by women who internalize, reproduce, and challenge these strategies of social control. Ahmad also observes the woman’s resistance occurred within the power relations of the nation-state, though the country is perceived, “as a space occupied so entirely by power that there is no space left either for resistance or its representation” (In Theory 127). In the text, the power of “shame” seeks to silence “shamelessness” in order to create an order of the discourse of honor, and sexuality is an institution which engineers identity of the subject in the text. The discourse of sexuality fashions individuals into genders and create divisions to enforce order.

Broadly speaking, by defending the woman’s right to realize her sexual identity and practice it freely, the novel deconstructs the patriarchal systems that victimize and reify women. It, besides, uncovers how the sexual ideology perpetuates the dominant thoughts initiating a subversive postmodern agenda of discontinuities, paradoxes, and multimodalities and paving the way for emancipatory departures from previous representations of women, encouraging readers to reconstruct gender perspectives and identities. The male-centered tradition of sexual life in Shame reveals the disaster resulting when men control sexuality over women who are treated as subordinate beings. The sexual myth in Q is, then, a product of society culture that establishes the moral codes, such as honor, purity, shame and modesty. The author’s vision gives a hint that sex is a myth that dominates the fictional world of the novel. To explain this, the social construction of the society is, theoretically, built on taboos of several kinds, which forbid any “sexual diversion” or even open talk. But since repression always ends up in outburst, the acts of people show different things; they break the rules of those taboos and sacrifice their value for the sake of sexual desire and power. Accordingly, the society portrayed in the novel appears as corrupted by pursuit of
desire whether it is sexual oriented or a desire for political power. In other words, “shame” is a mode of life that social hierarchy feeds on, and at the same time, it is a religious rule that is liable to be broken to fit into the sensual and political desire.

Although the novel’s representation of women still give raise to many controversies, the question of women in Rushdie’s fiction cannot be studied without measuring the silences of his texts. If reading within the construct that Rushdie provides us—the images of women in repressed societies—then the results can be totally misleading. Looking at the women in Shame is enough to prove that not a single one is capable of true agency. The women in Shame are in Goonetilleke’s words “not decisive; they are victims and, except for Rani Harappa, powerless” (63).

However, sexual myth in Shame is a tale of multiple desires which rise from the cradles of political and religious authority. The imposed value of “shame” seems to have been a fertile land of this pattern of myth because it serves in its growth instead of erosion. Since the fictional world of the novel is governed by polarities: beauty and bestiality, reality and unreality, purity and deformation, shame and sexuality appear as two sides of the coin. Rushdie is not attempting to insult the female gender or those with feminine qualities. He is simply constructing a metaphor to convey a message of concern toward the people of the Third World in general; a message that says national integrity and solidarity can never be realized while a great category of society still lacks emancipation.
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