CHAPTER - III

Disastrous History of a Nation: SHAME
DISASTROUS HISTORY OF A NATION: SHAME

"Shame is a history, but it is only skeletally historical".

- Uma Parameswaran

History is nothing but an interpretation of the historical which implies a synopsis of data – of dates, names, battles, coups, political happenings, religious and traditional paraphernalia, social situations, cultural phenomena, and other details relating to events. The historical brings about an understanding of the past and its relation to the present.

Shame, the third novel of Salman Rushdie, deals with a smaller canvas and the main characters are representations of the real people. The main figures in the story resemble the historical personages, but most of the specific details are not historically true. The exploration of an individual’s as well as a community’s history gets complicated mainly due to three reasons:

(a) Time and space always impose certain restrictions on history. A creative-writer-turned-historian intends to transcend these limitations.

(b) There is a strong likeliness of history turning into a legend.

(c) History encompasses a wide area of study involving various as well as different aspects and happenings in a society.

Rushdie adopts many strategies to overcome the problems of a historical novelist. They include using surrealism and symbolism in the place of realism, discarding chronology, intertwining the past and the present and taking recourse to allegory. The limited abstract world of Shame abounds in symbols and suggestive images, typical of the tales of The Arabian Nights. The narrator of the novel, like that of Midnight’s Children, is a symbol of the country he belongs to. Thus the writer implements a further important strategy of presenting the history of the nation with a lot of human interest.
In addition to the above mentioned features, a strong historical base can provide authenticity to the novel. This is better done when politics, considered a separate branch of study, is recognized to be a part of history. After Rushdie emigrated to the West, he tried to look back on a country where he would definitely be silenced if he tried to write a book like *Shame*. Hence Rushdie has produced an imaginative work which is circuitous, and unchronological.

*Shame* is not written in a chronological order. It jumps forward and backward in time. Rushdie takes care to explain that he is not writing a realistic novel about Pakistan; but calls his fictitious country Peccavistan. “My story’s palimpsest-country has, I repeat, no name of its own...There’s an apocryphal story that Napier, after a successful campaign in what is now the south of Pakistan, sent back to England the guilty, one-word message, ‘Peccavi’, *I have Sind*. I’m tempted to name my looking-glass Pakistan in honour of this bilingual (and fictional, because never really uttered) pun. Let it be *Peccavistan*” (S; p.88). Rushdie rejects historical time and takes the recourse to memory, dream and finally to fantasy. He claims his narration to be at a slight angle to reality; when he says “My story, my fictional country exists, like myself, at a slight angle to reality” (S; p.29). Rushdie says, “*Shame* is all about the correct understanding of time and memory”.¹ He documents history by creating an illusion of fantasy and unreality. Rushdie’s art and vision can be clearly understood, if one can study his method of intertwining the present and the past in the narrative. Rushdie always likes to grapple with the consciousness of ‘time and timelessness’. It is this quest to free history from its temporality that shaped his novels. In *Shame*, he says, “It is possible to see the subsequent history of Pakistan as a duel between two layers of time, the obscured world forcing its way back through what-had-been-imposed” (S; p.87).

Rushdie uses a set of politico-historical and politico-cultural values as his fictional tenor of his protagonists, and cultivates an interest in the reader in the contemporary issues. This fictional aesthetic is merged into the larger matrix of the sub-continental psyche, wherein history forms the foundation as well as an approach to Rushdie’s aesthetic imagination. The unmistakable and profound historical sense of
purpose enables in simultaneously conceiving events and comprehending their human and political significance. It enriches the human context of his fictional plots from their mythical past, thereby defining strategies of political expression. The ensuring concept of history is further extended and casually liberated into a world of timelessness in memory; wherein Rushdie's protagonists venture in quest for political identity. The political, religious and cultural events contributing to the entirety of historical events form the backdrop of the novel and the aesthetic perception of Rushdie is based on a historical sense which is quite obvious as well as a taboo to pronounce. Rushdie's aesthetic world grows from the vacillation between history and timelessness, and finally reaches a state of fulfilment in the atemporal world of fantasy and dream.

The style in which Rushdie fuses and colludes Midnight's Children and Shame are of considerable significance. Both the narratives deal with identical settings, though the aura and intensity of the portrayal of the quest for identity varies from each other. Still the similarity between Midnight's Children and Shame, in the process of understanding all the features that constitute contemporary history, is unmistakable.

After his nostalgic glance at India in Midnight's Children, Rushdie turns to focus his attention on Pakistan in Shame. Thus what Midnight's Children is to India, Shame is to Pakistan and as Sushila Singh rightly pointed out, "Shame is a companion piece to Midnight's Children. The first was a stupendous evocation of the evolution of India since independence; Shame is about what happened to the other part of the country after 1947". In the earlier novel, Midnight's Children, the protagonist of it, had already passed his judgement on Pakistan: "Pakistan ...What a complete dump!" Though the author denies it, the historical development of Pakistan becomes the background for assimilating the different happenings in the novel.

Rushdie critiques the social, religious and political history of India and Pakistan, through a selective representation of events from their past. In comparison with Midnight's Children, Shame has a larger historical core. It provides for a more exhaustive critique of Pakistan's social, religious and political history. Moreover in
Midnight’s Children the history of the protagonist is linked to that of India; whereas in Shame the story is the history of Pakistan. This kind of concentrated focus on selected aspects of Pakistan’s political and cultural history “... is not because of his (Rushdie’s) love for post-modernist technique, but is a known feature of his satiric works”. The shameful aspects of the social, political and cultural scenes of Pakistan are reflected in the lives and activities of its two prominent leaders, Iskander Harappa and Raza Hyder, who represent civilian and military authority respectively.

Though Shame deals with a few issues since the country’s Independence and its post-imperial existence, it concerns about religion, Islamic revival and cultural and moral norms of the country. In the novel Rushdie has explored ‘bi-ethnicity and bi-culturalism’. The novel, as Cynthia Abrioux has rightly observes, “enacts the rejection of all legitimising authenticity based on any one fixed, logocentric, authoritarian form ... (it) is an exemplary incarnation of the modern, post-colonial novel - of the novel as a metamorphosing process itself, where names, nations, narrations are subject to de-formation and re-formation, underscoring the central affirmation of Shame that the human condition is one of flux, not fixity”.

Shame is a mixture of politics, history, satire, fantasy and allegory. It is a novel of fictional distortions. It offers an inner, thematic, fanciful jumbling of historical items. Geography, history and persons are imaginatively recreated to form part of a modern fairy tale. As Sushila Singh rightly points out, “Unfolding the truth about Pakistan, the novel is a queer combination of free flight fairy tale and a savage political indictment”. Thus the fanciful novel covers up an underlying theme of shame; while shamelessness pervades it unobtrusively.

The act of covering up what exists underneath is technically called a ‘palimpsest’. This word is generally used about manuscripts, usually on parchment, where the original writing had been erased or washed away and replaced by a new text. Rushdie uses this word metaphorically to reflect the attitude of Pakistan in trying to repress its past by re-writing official history.
The re-written history of Pakistan represents characters as heroes and martyrs and makes religion legitimate. But the metaphor suggests that there is a text beneath its upper writing. Rushdie views the history of Pakistan as a struggle to repress the past and portray a new history that has been imposed on it. While discussing the origins of Pakistan, Rushdie observes: “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” (S; p. 87). According to him, Pakistan is ‘a peeling, fragmenting palimpsest’ (S; p. 87). The covered, repressed writing deals with the violence, oppression and injustices. A palimpsest obscures what is beneath the surface, that is, the multiplicity of people, languages and cultures. Masquerading something is done out of shame; shame to acknowledge one’s links to history.

The masquerading themes of shame and shamelessness shape and control the novel Shame. The novel mythologizes “the acts of shame and shamelessness committed when another new nation was created by partitioning the Indian sub-continent, dividing people from people and resulting in communal riots and physical and moral scars on individuals, families, neighbourhoods, towns and cities”. Rushdie affirms that Midnight’s Children is ‘a novel of memory’, whereas Shame is ‘a novel about truth’.

Rushdie’s Shame reflects the emotions of embarrassment, humility, decency, repentance of hostile words and sense of guilt for a crime. He enumerates shameless acts like untruths, ill treatment of women or gender bias, smuggling, lack of patriotism, and incorrect way of exercising franchise; ironically and politically. Rushdie tries to show how shame is a part of “the architecture of the society that the novel describes”. He says; “Shameful things are done; lies, loose living, disrespect for one’s elders, failure to love one’s national flag, incorrect voting at elections, over-eating, extramarital sex, autobiographical novels, cheating at cards, maltreatment of women-folk, examination failures, smuggling, throwing one’s wicket away at the crucial point of a Test Match: and they are done shamelessly” (S; p. 122).
The novel *Shame* covers the time span of thirty six years – from 1947 to 1983– from the partition and the birth of the new country to the present, the year of the publication of the novel. The story requires and is provided with a narrator of multi-cultural background, who sketches a country containing the external features of the history of Pakistan over a period of thirty-six years after the establishment of the country. The author, however, has his own reservations over the literal as well as historical interpretation. The writer weaves the story of the fictional country by fictionalizing the factual events collected from history. The narrator emphasizes the multi-cultural, multi-lingual, multi-religious and multi-political background of the country he has created. The novel is partly told in two ways – one, as the narrator does and the other as done by different characters. The narrator with the help of his two-level narration leads to the truth.

Rushdie’s interest in gathering and chronicling information about Pakistan, wherein two types of government characterize its functioning, is awesome. In the beginning, he mentions that the nation is divided into an East Wing (later to become Bangladesh) and a West Wing, separated from one another by the Indian landmass. According to him Pakistan is a “…fantastic bird of a place, two Wings without a body, sundered by the landmass of its greatest foe, joined by nothing but God” (S; p. 178).

After the creation of Pakistan on August 14th 1947, every effort was made to wipe out its past history and rewrite it. As Nila Shah has rightly observed, “Rushdie has picked up the thin thread of the story from the eve of the partition of the subcontinent and woven a tale, which spins around the events that have destabilized the new born country in three decades since then. The fictionalization and deliberate change of names ultimately turn out to be a story of Pakistan covering the history of initial years of the country”.

The parallels between the story and the historical events also seem to be made obvious by the author himself. The puritan Raza Hyder is made to embody the dictatorship, the west-oriented dissipated Iskander Harappa, the corrupt democracy. The historical Bhutto has become the character Iskander Harappa. The ancient city
Mohenjo-Daro in the novel has been split into two parts. Little Mir Harappa lives on the Daro Estate and Iskander on Mohenjo. Mir is the name of one of Bhutto’s sons. Thus, the real history has been reversed into the fiction. A further parallel between fiction and history is that Haroun Harappa leads terrorist activity from Kabul, like Bhutto’s sons. Rushdie avows he is not writing a realistic novel for fear of being dumped and banned. He further observes, “...The book would have been banned, dumped in the rubbish bin, burned. All that effort for nothing! Realism can break a writer’s heart. Fortunately, however, I am only telling a sort of modern fairy-tale, so that’s all right...What a relief?” (S; p.70). As in the case of Gabriel Garcia Marquez and the other Latin American writers, Rushdie chooses the fantastic and magic realistic mode of telling the story to present the contemporary reality. His fear of choosing such a mode is not unwarranted as his later novel *The Satanic Verses* got banned by a number of countries.

The theme of **Shame** refers to the sub-continental history of post-partition period through “complex networks of transcultural relationships between the individual and the historical forces”. The novel concentrates on three related families – the Shakils, the Hyders and the Harappas. The story opens in the imaginary town ‘Q’ – Quetta in Pakistan with the miraculous birth of Omar Khayyam, the protagonist of the novel. The novel begins with his birth and ends with his death in the same mansion – Nishapur; and in the same room. He is born as the common son of three sisters – Chhunni, Mumee and Bunny. Using the mode of magic realism to tell the fairy story, Rushdie predicts the ambiguity of the birth of a Pakistani citizen through the birth of Omar Khayyam. As Sara Suleri has rightly interprets, “...Omar Khayyam, born out of a trinity of mothers, signifies that fresh arrival of the Pakistani citizen, born neither of Britain, nor of India, nor of Pakistan, which is still too new to be true”.

Omar Khayyam’s birth is a mystery. Nobody ever discovers the mother of Omar Khayyam, not even the child. When he enters the school, he understands that he is an illegitimate child born of a British officer and one of the Shakil sisters. It reflects the highly opposed creation of Pakistan, born through the policies of British Crown
and the efforts of Jinnah, one of the Muslim leaders. He "...shares the problems of questionable parentage with Saleem Sinai", the protagonist of *Midnight's Children*. Omar Khayyam is instructed by his mothers not to have a sense of shame. Hence, he embodies shamelessness till the end of his life. As the story unfolds the theme of shame depicted at different levels is made obvious and the readers get an inkling that Rushdie aims at portraying the collective shame of a country.

The second section of the novel ‘The Duellists’ makes the formal announcement of the key elements in the plot. “This is a novel about Sufiya Zinobia, elder daughter of General Raza Hyder and his wife Bilquis, about what happened between her father and Chairman Iskander Harappa, formerly Prime Minister, now defunct, and about her surprising marriage to a certain Omar Khayyam Shakil, physician, fat man, and for a time the intimate crony of that same Isky Harappa…Or perhaps it would be more accurate, if also more opaque, to say that Sufiya Zinobia is about this novel” (S; p. 59).

A casual glance into Sufiya Zinobia’s family background introduces her mother Bilquis and her grandfather Mahmoud Kemal, who lived in Delhi. During the partition, Mahmoud Kemal’s theatre is blown up by religious fanatics for showing films that cross the religious division. It is an episode that reflects the prevailing hot and fluid condition of the bifurcated country. Rushdie narrates the communal stirrings in Delhi before partition where “…the authorities rounded up by any Muslims for their own safety, it was said, and locked them up in the red fortress, away from the wrath of the stone washers. Whole families were sealed up there, grandmothers, young children, wicked uncles…moved through the Red Fort in the parallel universe of history…” (S; p.64). As S.K.Tikoo has rightly opines, “Although, historically speaking, the causes of the partition were many, Rushdie presents only a casual picture of the communal disturbances that were to be witnessed on the eve of the great divide when bombs had begun exploding in different places”. The explosion kills Mahmoud Kemal, strips Bilquis off her clothes, burns up her eyebrows and she is forced to escape naked and enters the Red Fort. Bilquis is rescued by and married to Raza Hyder, a military man, who represents the greedy military generals of Pakistan.
Raza and Bilquis are forced to leave the country when it is divided, and flies to the West Wing of Pakistan. From a historical perspective, Rushdie’s aim is to connect the religious fanaticism with the sufferings experienced by the people due to partition.

The partition of India was a shameful act which was a result of the selfishness of the megalomaniac politicians. It also reflects the haughty and reckless attitude of the divide and rule policy of the Britishers. Rushdie portrays the shamelessness of the politicians through the characters like Bilquis. The ‘shame’ which Bilquis felt so strongly at the time of the bomb-blast, runs parallel to that of the newly born country of the ‘pure’. Captain Raza Hyder temporarily succeeds in clothing the shame of his bride and takes her to Pakistan, where, in the house of Bariamma, Raza Hyder’s grandmother, she is compelled to tell the story of her shame. Thus her marriage introduces her to the dynastic Hyder family.

Bilquis, ‘whose life had blown up, emptying her of history’ (S; p. 67), symbolises the plight and status of a Pakistani migrant. As Nila Shah rightly puts it, “...her denuded body, with just a dupatta of modesty around her and with the signs of congealed blood oozing from many cuts and scratches, represents the plight of an uprooted migrant”. Like her husband Raza Hyder, she is periodically called ‘mohajir’, an immigrant. She is without roots, dreaming of stability.

From another perspective, naked Bilquis also symbolizes Pakistan, “the Land of the Pure”; for nakedness is purity. Rushdie describes that she has been emptied of history which reflects the Pakistani inclination to disown the unified Indian history. And the dupatta she uses to cover herself might be the trials to officially re-write history i.e. the palimpsest. And ‘the signs of congealed blood oozing from many cuts and scratches’ are symbols of the violence that took place during the partition. Pakistan after trying to disown its roots of Indian history is left cordless, hanging on to religion for survival. Similarly, Bilquis is orphaned because of her father Mahmoud Kemal’s death and so she clings on to Raza Hyder, a religious fantasist, for her survival.
The partition of the subcontinent into India and Pakistan becomes the core of the novel. By delving deep into the thoughts of the individuals, who have been victims of the partition, the novelist draws out their innermost senses of shame, shamelessness, hope, despair, ambition and anguish besides banking upon their optimism at the rise of a new country. Like the naked Bilquis who fled to Pakistan, the Indian Muslims also wanted to believe that they had arrived in a wholly new country. For those already living in that part of the subcontinent which became Pakistan, however, confusion arose. The natives realized the truth that Pakistan was not as pure as the Garden of Eden.

Rushdie knows that Pakistan made a vain attempt to reject its past which was ‘open’ and ‘pure’ and tried to garb itself in a history; a kind of concocted pseudo history based on religious fanaticism. He uses motifs like violence, shame and shamelessness that help in the reality of narration. They indicate that the development of the country is moving in the wrong direction. The gradual growth or development of these motifs results in the central theme of the novel – repression; with inversion and exile as ancillary motifs. Into these themes and patterns of tragedy, Rushdie successfully configures history. He structures both the central and peripheral characters in an equally skilful way.

Rushdie portrays the characters in an appreciably realistic way. Like Sufiya who is born to Bilquis as ‘a wrong miracle’ (S; p. 89), Pakistan is also created on either side of India. Pakistan is described by Rushdie as a product of ‘the miracle that went wrong’ (S; p. 87). Its creation was something that was much fought against and unforeseen till the last moment. Much was expected from the leaders of Pakistan, who wanted to separate themselves from India. They claimed religious differences to be the reason against staying united. Pakistan which was given freedom, a day prior to that of India, was expected to fare well. But time showed that the miracle went wrong since it chose wrong options like religion, for politically administering the country.

Sufiya’s birth is preceded by the symbolic still birth of a male child, who is strangled by the umbilical cord in Bilquis’s womb. He is dead before he is born. The narrator explains that the dead child obtains a kind of life through the parents’ fantasy
and belief. Similarly, the idea of a country born out of religious fanaticism is prone to be still born. The baby supposed to be born healthy and kicking is strangulated by its source of nutrition, the umbilical cord resembling the country which was denied of its energy after Independence. But the irony is that the parents, the founders of Pakistan, had a fantastic imagination that it is alive. They did not realise that the sustenance they provided to their child, religion, did not allow it to live. Thus Rushdie asserts that Pakistan is built on unstable or shaky foundations of cheating, illusions and violence from the beginning.

Similar qualities are reflected in the lives of the other characters also. Rushdie portrays the characters in a complex way by intertwining realism and symbolism. Raza Hyder’s cousin Rani is married to Iskander Harappa, a land owner and a playboy. Iskander gradually interests himself in politics. Rani Harappa is alienated from her husband soon after her marriage and gets confined to his vast country estate for most of the novel. Arjunand, the daughter of Rani Harappa, whose refusal to accept feminity earns her the nickname ‘The Virgin Iron pants’, plays a more significant presence in the life of Iskander. Rani spends most of her time embroidering the shawls that depict the political oppression and cruelty of Isky’s regime. The shawls, woven by Rani Harappa, symbolically articulate a suppressed memory of Iskander Harappa’s infidelities, violent conduct and abuses of political power also. The eighteen shawls she embroiders that are entitled ‘The Shamelessness of Iskander the Great’ not only encompass realism, but also symbolism that makes the work allegorical. For instance, one of the shawls depicts the abortive military campaign against East Pakistan. The shawl portrays Harappa and Shaggy Dog as cruel boys cutting open the throat of an emerald chicken and pulling the feathers from its east wing. As Brendon Nicholls has rightly observes, these shawls are “the best indication of the seamlessness of oppression. The shawls with their secrets function as an aspect of the theme of repression. They are patiently worked expressions of how chauvinism and political suppression converge”. They are all concentrated expressions of the fact that Pakistan has followed the wrong direction.
Rushdie asserts that repression has been the way of life in Pakistan. It is a repression of all sorts - repression of human rights, repression of democracy, repression of women, and repression of proper education - which has made Pakistan rigid, unstable and violent. Bhutto, who founded the Pakistan People's Party (PPP), declared his fanaticism in his speech on October, 1966: "Islam is our faith, democracy is our policy, socialism is our economy. All power to the people". Rushdie in his Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism confirms that the other ruler portrayed in the novel, Zia-Ulhaq, Islamized Pakistan constitutionally. He "was one of the cruellest of modern tyrants...Pakistan under Zia has become a nightmarish, surreal land, in which battlefield armaments meant for the Afghan rebel are traded more or less openly on the country's black markets". In the same essay, Rushdie further adds, "The medieval misogynistic stultifying ideology which Zia imposed on Pakistan in his 'Islamization' programme was the ugliest possible face of the faith and by which most Pakistani Muslims were, I believe, disturbed and frightened".

Rushdie reflects his perspective through Rani Harappa, who sees Pakistani history as a grotesque nightmare. Rani Harappa acquires a heavily emphasized role in the novel, since she preserves the past, unlike the others who try to repress it or even burn it. Similar to Nusrat Bhutto, wife of Z.A. Bhutto, who worked tirelessly for the well-being of her fellow citizens, Rani Harappa offers her services to the realisation of truth in the novel. When Arjumand tries to preserve the memories of her father Iskander as a real martyr, Rani presents the historical evidence to Arjumand. But Arjumand is reluctant to accept truths.

Taking recourse to history, Rushdie in his essay Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism comments that Benazir Bhutto in her book Daughter of the East was unwilling to admit that her martyred parent committed any sin. Rushdie observes, "The resulting omissions from the story are as revealing as the bits she puts in. She manages, for example, to get through her entire account of her father's government without once mentioning the little matter of genocide in Baluchistan...She fails entirely to mention Bhutto's strenuous efforts at election rigging in 1977...Worst
of all, she falsifies Bhutto’s role in the events leading to the secession of Bangladesh."20

Harping upon the development of his women characters, Rushdie simultaneously echoes his concerns for the subdued nation and condition of Pakistani women. Women like Sufiya, Bilquis and Rani and their histories can be taken as “alternate histories of Pakistan”.21 Sufiya has been “stricken with a brain disease that dislocates her time sense, further underlining her association with a Pakistan, progressively unable to take its place in history”.22 Thus individual histories, when combined, contribute to societal history, which in turn makes the national history. Hence the histories of the individual characters portrayed as icons in Rushdie’s Shame, converge to provide the history of the nation.

Rushdie subtly and ironically reflects the prevailing political background through the story line. Rani Harappa and Bilquis belonging to the two main families-Hyders and Harappas - discussed in the novel, arrange for a matrimonial alliance between Iskander’s nephew Haroun Harappa and Hyder’s younger daughter Naveed or Good News. There is a political motive behind arranging the alliance. The offer of securing Haroun Harappa for a son-in-law is beneficial to Raza Hyder, either way. Firstly, the match would please the President, Marshal A., Raza Hyder’s boss; because Haroun Harappa’s father was very close to Marshal A. Secondly, Haroun Harappa hated his father and had close ties with Iskander. Iskander on his part was trying to secure political power and it was known to Raza. So securing Haroun as a son-in-law would speak for him near Iskander. His position in the army would be safe. But when Naveed discovers that Haroun has no ambitions, she claims Tulvar Ulhaq, the captain and the great star of the police team, as her future husband. As a result, the two families are disunited over the failure of the proposed alliance between them.

Rushdie thus introduces true occurrences with the bemused air of someone who finds them much stranger than fiction. Perhaps the only way to understand realities is to make up stories about them. During his years in power, Iskander creates a Federal Security Force and appoints Tulvar Ulhaq as its head. The clairvoyancy of
Talvar Ulhaq enabled Iskander to compile detailed information on issues of bribery, conspiracies, tax evasion, student sects, homosexuality and treason. Clairvoyancy made it possible for Talvar to arrest a future traitor before he committed his act of treason, and thus ironically save the fellow’s life.

Rushdie subtly presents the interplay between the oppression and violence in real Pakistan. He draws parallels between Sufiya and Pakistan. Sufiya, overcome by shame, physically attacks her sister’s husband Talvar, during their marriage, by burying her teeth into his neck. Omar Khayyam, in the meanwhile has fallen for his destiny by marrying the afflicted eldest daughter of Raza Hyder, whom he had treated in his profession as a doctor. Sufiya, burdened with her family’s shame, gradually discovers the hidden path which links shame to violence and a great beastly force is unleashed. Finally, towards the end, she kills her husband Omar Khayyam Shakil, a person incapable of feeling any shame. The increased violence at last becomes impossible to control. Her violence is expressed when both family and political turmoil raging from shame erupt. Her actions mirror the gathering storm on the political scene. Thus Sufiya functions as an image or the soul of Pakistan.

The novelist tactfully portrays the shameful activities like obscenity, permissiveness and debauchery as a guise to present the historical events of Pakistan. The novel reflects the historical facts of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and Zia-Ulhaq (in the novel Iskander Harappa and Raza Hyder respectively) representing the two presidents of Pakistan. The way Bhutto tried to perpetuate his power by empowering incompetent persons to higher positions in the army, the manner in which Zia ousted him by setting up a regime of religious bigotry and the other political events in the book are spun around this thinly veiled Isky-Raza story contributing to the history of the country. The other characters in the story also represent the great names in the political history of Pakistan – Marshal A. as General Ayub Khan, General Shaggy Dog as Yahya Khan, Sheikh Bismillah as Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and Arjumand Harappa as Benazir Bhutto.

The canvas of the narrative covers the events from the partition in general, but more precisely from the time of the East-West conflict. The subsequent events like the
overthrow of the President Ayub Khan, the martial law of General Yahya Khan, the rise of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, the military action against the tribesmen of Baluchistan in the nineteen seventies, the military coup and the downfall of Bhutto, the dictatorial regime of General Zia and his attempt to Islamize the country are all woven into the texture of the narrative. Rushdie comments on Soviet aggression of Afghanistan, the genocide in Bangladesh, the fundamental Islamic revolution of Khomeini against the monarchy of the Shah of Iran and of his family and its exodus from India to Pakistan after the partition, the general elections in Pakistan, the Bangladesh war etc. As T.N. Dhar has rightly points out, “In Rushdie’s estimation both Bhutto and Zia represent the worst period in Pakistan’s history for they grew bigger and uglier as the country started growing fast in a stupid way”. Therefore the major part of the shameful history of Pakistan gets connected with their rise to power. Thus Rushdie fictionalizes the real and justifies his imaginative treatment of history.

The characters in the novel have derived traits from the historical ones, though the factual and fictional biographies differ in many ways. Ensuring a strong factual base from the historical data secured, comparisons can be drawn with the events also.

Bhutto’s counterpart in the story, Iskander’s rise in the novel is significant. He rises to the post of Foreign Minister in President A.’s government. When political situation in Pakistan has deteriorated, Field Marshal A. ordered troops into the streets to restore peace. An agitation against Field Marshal A. leads to the transfer of power into the hands of General Shaggy Dog. To pacify the mob, General Shaggy Dog puts Marshal A. under house arrest and promises to restore democracy through democratic election.

Rushdie incorporates the actual happenings that took place in Pakistan following Ayub Khan’s downfall and Yahya Khan’s seizure of power. General Ayub Khan became the President of Pakistan and ruled from 1958 to 1969. In 1958, Bhutto became the youngest Pakistani Cabinet Minister. He was given charge of the energy ministry by President Muhammad Ayub Khan. He was subsequently promoted to head the ministries of commerce, information and industries. Bhutto became a close and trusted advisor to Ayub Khan, rising in influence and power despite his youth and
relative inexperience in politics. In 1962 he was appointed Pakistan’s Foreign Minister. The Tashkent Agreement between Ayub Khan and Indian Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Sastri created a major political furore against Ayub Khan’s regime. Though initially Bhutto joined Ayub to negotiate this peace treaty, his criticism of the final agreement caused a major rift between him and Ayub Khan. Bhutto resigned in June 1967 while expressing strong resentment of Ayub Khan’s rule. Following Ayub Khan’s resignation, Yahya Khan became the new President.

Iskander Harappa’s transformation into the most powerful force on the political scene resembles Bhutto’s rise in the politics of Pakistan. Iskander’s rise is engineered by the support he receives from his old articles on international affairs “analysing his country’s requirements from the great powers, the Islamic world and the rest of Asia, following these up with an arduous programme of speeches... his notion...of a close alliance with China had gained wide public support that he was running the nation’s foreign policy without even being a member of the cabinet” (S, p. 150). All these details remind the actual foreign policy adopted by Pakistan. This policy increased tensions in Indo-Pak relations and ensured perpetuation of military rule in Pakistan.

One of the clever strategies adopted by Iskander to fight elections and to weaken President A. is the formation of a political party ‘Popular Front’ which is similar to ‘Pakistan People’s Party’ (PPP) started by Bhutto in 1967. Iskander’s party wins the elections obtaining support from poor and radical people as well as from the rich and conservative. Popular Front wins a dominating position in West Wing; while the People’s League of Sheikh Bismillah Khan wins an outright victory in East Wing.

The first free elections in the history of Pakistan were held in 1970. An event of the recorded history that cannot be forgotten is the tussle between the political parties to form the government at the centre. The PPP won in West Pakistan, while the Awami League of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman won in the East Pakistan. Rushdie highlights the exploitative policy of the West Wing, which compelled the East Wing people to fight for their right. But it sent off different ripple in the politics of Pakistan. Iskander Harappa exploited the situation to his benefit. But Benazir Bhutto
in her Daughter of the East places blame on Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, leader of Awami League who declared independence of East Pakistan in 1971. He was arrested by the Pakistani army on the order of Yahya Khan, then President, for implementing secessionist political activities.

Rushdie fictionalises the historical realities of Pakistan which led to the army crackdown on the East Wing on 25th March 1971, the Indo-Pak war of 1971 and the emergence of Bangladesh; “The West in a state of shock, the sound of one Wing flapping, beset by the appalling notion of surrendering the government to a party of swamp aborigines, little dark men with their unpronounceable language of distorted vowels and slurred consonants; perhaps not foreigners exactly, but aliens without a doubt. President Shaggy Dog, sorrowing, dispatched an enormous Army to restore a sense proportion in the East” (S; p. 179).

It seems that the writer has made use of newspaper reports of the period. It is once again evident from his comments on the situation in the country when India supported the struggle of the East Wing: “...the idolatrous nation positioned between the Wings backed the Eastern bastards to the hilt, for obvious, divide-and-rule reasons. A fearful war. In the West, oil-refineries, airports, the homes of God-fearing civilians bombarded by heathen explosives” (S; p.179). Rushdie even criticises Pakistan army’s failure in the war. President Shaggy Dog is held responsible for the unconditional surrender and defeat of the army. He had to quit the political scene and Iskander Harappa becomes the President.

All these events resemble the transfer of power from Yahya Khan to Bhutto. Bhutto, who already served as a minister in Ayub Khan’s Cabinet, distanced himself from Yahya Khan’s regime on the issue of East Pakistan. Bhutto condemned Yahya Khan for failing to protect Pakistan’s unity. Yahya Khan resigned and transferred power to Bhutto, who became the President, army commander-in-chief as well as the first civilian Chief Martial Law Administrator.

In the novel, Prime Minister Iskander Harappa promotes Raza Hyder to the rank of General and places him in command of the army. The narrator comments,
"This single error proved to be the undoing of the ablest statesman who ever ruled that country which had been so tragically misfortune, so accursed, in its heads of state" (S; p. 181).

Bhutto, after assuming power, appointed General Tikka Khan as the new chief of the Army Staff. He ordered the army to suppress a rising insurgency in the Province of Baluchistan and North West Frontier Province. He officially recognised Bangladesh in 1973. He took on the mantle of Prime Ministership in 1973. He appointed the then Brigadier Mohammad Zia-Ulhaq to replace General Tikka Khan, surpassing five generals senior to Zia. Bhutto began facing considerable criticism from all quarters and his popularity started to wane.

It seems that Rushdie closely follows the political developments that took place in Pakistan during particular periods of its history when one regime was succeeded by another. Iskander is dethroned by a coup directed by Raza Hyder. The political motive behind Iskander’s trial is the political ambition of Raza Hyder. The criminal allegation brought against Iskander is his involvement in the murder of Little Mir Harappa by his son, Haroun Harappa. Iskander is sentenced to death.

The actual correspondence to the details of the similar event in Pakistan is easily noticeable. On July 5th 1977, the military led by General Zia staged a coup. He relieved Prime Minister Bhutto of power, and held him in detention for a month. Bhutto, after his arrest, was similarly charged against conspiracy to murder Ahmed Raza Kasuri, political opponent of Bhutto, while the latter was travelling with his son in a pre-election campaign in Sind. Kasuri’s son filed a case in the High Court. On March 18, 1978, Bhutto was declared guilty of murder and sentenced to death. In 1979, Bhutto was hanged at the Central Jail in Rawalpindi.

The most sensational event in Pakistan that hangs heavily on the narrator’s mind is the execution of Bhutto which he incorporates into the story. In his words; “One evening, soon after my arrival, I visited an old friend, a poet. I had been looking forward to one of our long conversations, to hearing his views about recent events in Pakistan ... I really wanted to get the low-down on things and at length I brought up
the stuff that was on my mind, beginning with a person about the execution of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto” (S; p. 27).

In the novel, it is suggested that after Iskander’s arrest, his wife Rani Harappa, and daughter Arjumand Harappa are kept under house arrest for six years – two years before and four years after the execution. Arjumand obtains power and influence after Raza Hyder’s fall. All these are close renderings of the historical events that occurred in Pakistan. After Bhutto’s execution, his wife Nusrat Bhutto and his daughters were held prisoners in a police camp. Benazir Bhutto took charge of PPP and became the Prime Minister of the country in 1988.

‘Might is right’ has been the politics of the world during most times in history. Though there is a frantic return to democracy at times, it has been only a masquerade for a short time. Democracy, the most refined form of government, becomes successful only when the entire population of the country is educated and possesses common sense. Till then, this hide and seek with tyranny, autocracy, dictatorship and family rule is a must in the political history of any nation. Pakistan definitely is not an exception to it. Rushdie’s Shame is “an urgent, courageous and committed act of protest against the democratic deficit in Pakistan”.24

Framing constitutional rules, regulations and statutes has been the jurisprudence of governing nations. Making laws flexible to suit the needs of the ruling has also been in vogue. Different tactics are adopted to assume power. In Shame, the facts occurred or the characters that succoured them clearly prove it. Iskander Harappa and Raza Hyder, the two main historical images portrayed, are dealt with in stinging tones. The political events in the novel are related to the rise and fall of the leaders who are mainly army generals, except Iskander Harappa. The army rulers had become increasingly autocratic and dictatorial. Raza Hyder is an advocate of military power. It is evident during his excesses in the Needle Valley when he says to Chief Minister Gichki, “Sir, you must place the law in my hands. Carte Blanche. At certain moments, civil law must bend before military necessity” (S; p. 101). The political development in the country turned them towards religion. Instead of leading
the country towards democracy, they had moved it towards religious fundamentalism. Veritable facts provide the needed base for discussion.

In the political scenario of Pakistan, there is a succession of leaders engaged in bringing about coups. But the last coup bringing Raza to power inaugurated a new trend, 'the so-called Islamic fundamentalism'. This was strongly supported by military administration. The political leaders presented in the novel are despotic, not democratic. They are rooted in the past, refusing to extend into the present. Rushdie makes use of politics prevailing in Pakistan to highlight the fact that the scheming political leaders are not interested in the welfare of the people, but in grabbing and enjoying power. They do not offer any hope for the people. The social life is characterized by communal riots, coups and Islamization. Seema Bhaduri is of the opinion that "Rushdie's Shame reconstructs the sordid political history of Pakistan bringing to light the deep socio-cultural imbalances that have shaped this country." 25

Rushdie has been very much disturbed by tyrants and tyranny from the beginning of his career. In his first three novels, *Grimus, Midnight's Children* and *Shame*, Rushdie makes an attack on the power-hungry tyrannical leaders of India and Pakistan. As a post-modern writer, he tries to find an effective action against tyrants. In *Shame* he observes: "How does a dictator fall? There is an old saw which states, with absurd optimism, that is in the nature of tyrannies to end. One might as well say that it is also in their nature to begin, to continue, to dig themselves in, and, often, to be preserved by greater powers than their own...My dictator will be toppled by goblinish, faery 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'" (S; p. 257).

The most interesting feature of the army rule in Pakistan has been that the generals legitimised it by linking it with religion. When Raza Hyder imprisoned Iskander Harappa and consolidated his power over the state, his main purpose was to put the country on a firm foundation of faith. The strategy Raza applies in reaching his goal is Islamization. His close aide, Dawood, is shown to be a personification of his religious fanaticism. Rushdie's portrayal of General Raza Hyder is very much
similar to Zia-Ulhaq. Raza Hyder’s origin and early career deviate from Zia’s; but Raza’s resemblance to the historical character increases as he enters the political scene. General Zia, a religious bigotry, believed that only religion could improve the state of affairs and put his ideology to severe and unrestrained practice.

Rushdie suggests that religious fanaticism is not the right solution to this conflict. As T.N. Dhar points out, “The main thrust of Rushdie’s censure of the regime of Zia is that he used religion to perpetuate himself in power and revived medieval barbaric laws and practices.” General Raza felt safe in talking about the Islamic scriptures and imposing its dictates. General Raza justified measures like flogging and cutting of limbs as injunctions of God. To a team of foreign journalists he is reported to have said: “These are not laws…which we plucked out of the wind. These are the holy words of God, as revealed in sacred texts. Now if they are holy words of God, they cannot also be barbaric. It is not possible” (S; p. 245).

Islamization of Pakistan under General Raza’s regime included curbs on consumption of liquor, rescheduling of TV programmes, promotion of religion through media, discouraging donations to politicians, allowing charities and even incarcerating beggars; because “God and socialism were incompatible” (S; p. 247). Citing the name of God, he invoked the principle of stability for the country only to put Generals everywhere. Consequently, Raza Hyder crushes individual liberty and punishes women moving out unveiled in the streets and people going against the norms during fasting months. The army’s hold on the lives of people was so deep that there was no freedom to an individual. Even Raza’s own men who conspired a revolt against him are liquidated overnight. As the narrator visualizes the consequences of such imposition, he remarks, “...the ramming-down-the-throat point stands. In the end you get sick of it, you lose faith in the faith...And then the dictator falls, and it is discovered that he has brought God down with him, that the justifying myth of the nation has been unmade. This leaves only two options: disintegration, or a new dictatorship” (S; p. 251).
It is pointed out; Pakistan could not go the way of Iran. Rushdie does not approve of Zia's imposition of religion on people and administration, seeking "a convenient and dependable exploitative ideology to maintain status quo, which people found difficult to oppose". In an interview Rushdie says, "Zia cloaks what he does in the language of faith, and because people respect the faith they do not want to question what he does; that's the way religion legitimises tyranny, the way Islam linguistically protecting Zia". It cannot be said that Rushdie is against the organisation and working of states on Islamic principles. Rushdie even "suggests that such principles could have provided the basis for a possible unity of what had been left of the country after it got split into two".

Thus Shame delineates the absurd political system in the history of Pakistan. It is a despotism in which there are no fixed values. Iskander Harappa who tries to impose perfect political order in the country, never himself follows the rules. Though he professes democracy, he grooms his child Arjumand to take his place. In spite of preaching freedom to the people, he again draws a line demarcating that liberty. His actions are an indication of his egotism that he is beyond rules and laws. Raza Hyder, on the other hand, uses religion to realise his political fantasies. So the narrator comments, "So-called Islamic 'fundamentalism' does not spring, in Pakistan, from the people. It is imposed on them from above. Autocratic regimes find it useful to espouse the rhetoric of faith, because people respect that language, are reluctant to oppose it. This is how religions shore up dictators; by encircling them with words of power, words which the people are reluctant to see discredited, disenfranchised, mocked" (S; p. 251). The people of Pakistan are repressed and become helpless. They remain mute spectators when the monsters terrorize them. They live in a political system which does not allow them to nurture their political skills. They get used to maintain a stoic silence even in the face of adversities, unheard of before. It is only nature, in the form of Sufiya Zinobia that provides a solution to the atrocities committed.

As a creative writer, Rushdie takes it up as his responsibility to present a critique on the politics of the Indian subcontinent. He aims at presenting a proper perspective of religion and politics. In an interview with John Haffenden Rushdie
says, “I do think that if the state has a chance of surviving, it has to remove religion from itself, and when it does that it has a chance of removing the generals”. He firmly believes that Islamic revival has failed to unite Sindhis, Baluchis, Punjabis and Pathans under the religious banner imposed by autocratic rulers for their convenience. He strongly propagates the great ideals of French Revolution – Liberty, Equality and Fraternity and considers them alternatives to Islamization. He avows, “Few mythologies survive close examination... only two options: disintegration, or a new dictatorship... no, there is a third, and I shall not be so pessimistic as to deny its possibility. The third option is the substitution of a new myth for the old one. Here are three such myths, all available from stock at short notice: liberty; equality; fraternity. I recommend them highly” (S; p. 251). Thus Rushdie suggests that “...his nods to the Left are mostly a pious wish for equalizing social disparity rather than ideological commitment”.

Rushdie’s alternative to the crippling process of autocratic power - liberty, equality and fraternity - cannot claim to be perfect and can become successful only when used judiciously and prudently. Aristotle’s version of power-centred politics ‘Power corrupts; Absolute power corrupts absolutely’ is highly illustrative in the politics of Pakistan, as portrayed in Shame.

Rushdie presents realistic details of Pakistani political events, including the sensational execution of Bhutto, creatively for the development of the historical plot in the novel. But Rushdie vehemently denies that he is not for writing in a realistic vein. He says, “How much real life material might be compulsory! ... for example, the long ago Deputy Speaker who was killed in the National Assembly when the furniture was flung at him by elected representatives ... or about the issue of Time magazine (or was it News week) which never got into the country because it carried an article about President Ayub Khan alleged Swiss bank account... or about genocide in Baluchistan... or about the extra hangings... that were ordered purely to legitimize the execution of Mr. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto... or about smuggling, the boom in heroin exports, military dictators, venal civilians, corrupt civil servants... Imagine my difficulties” (S; pp. 69-70).
But, while expressing his opinion on gender politics, Rushdie is clear-cut in his tone. This gender politics is an abnegation that reflected the social status of the ‘weaker sex’. Rushdie says that *Shame* is “...partly about the way in which women are socially repressed”. In the novel, Rushdie explains that a country, where women are so badly repressed as in Pakistan, can never be democratic because such a society does not recognise or accept freedom as a principle in human relationships. Such a society “... will always remain brutal and authoritarian and is always tortured by guilt and shame”.

Rushdie’s concern for the women in *Shame* originates from his understanding of their underscored social status. It is characterized by certain features. Firstly, women have a low social acceptability, because the society is governed by the feudal codes of honour and respectability. It is a male-dominated world in which women do not count. It is reflected in Raza’s bluster at the time of Sufiya’s birth when he continuously draws attention to her gender. Sufiya has to live with neglect and later the humiliation and oppression.

On the other hand, Rushdie observes that “Repression is a seamless garment; a society which is authoritarian in its social and sexual codes, which crushes its women beneath the intolerable burdens of honour and propriety, breeds repressions of other kinds as well” (S; p. 173). When religion also sharpens itself against women, then their condition becomes deplorable. As T.N. Dhar has rightly points out, “The intrusion of Islamic codes in the lives of women distinguished the plight of Pakistani women from women in other repressive societies”. The demands of faith put additional burdens on them and diminished their role and place in society. The novel establishes the fact that women are conscious of the hostile attitude of the society towards them. Iskander tells his daughter Arjumand that she should forget that she is a woman. “It’s a man’s world, Arjumand. Rise above your gender as you grow. This is no place to be a woman in” (S; p. 126).

Thus the most sensitive critical issue, the repression of women or gender politics, has been adversely sustained through *Shame*. Catherine Cundy is consistently critical of this aspect of Rushdie’s work. According to her, “Rushdie’s
readiness to inflate female sexuality is declared in *Grimus*, repeated in *Midnight’s Children* and confirmed in *Shame*, where the blend of confusion, frustration and even outright hostility to women is more evident... than anywhere else”.35 She further stresses that the treatment of women in Rushdie’s novels “serves more as a revelation of Rushdie’s psychology”36 than it contributes to the fiction.

Raza’s eldest daughter Sufiya Zinobia has no human, historical image. But as observed by Uma Parameswaran, “Sufiya becomes the personification not only of Pakistan, but also of all countries where the political climate is conducive to dictatorship’.37 She also represents the collective consciousness of repressed people—gender-wise and generally. She reflects various forces of repression at work—the political, the religious and the social. The beast, which is nurtured within her, is nothing but a terrifying picture in her imagination. The beast is a metaphor for the shame starting on a small scale and fuelled by various social and political reasons. The phenomenon representing the stunted political growth of Pakistan bears a resemblance to Sufiya who does not grow to true womanhood. Both are a result of the maltreatment by the political and parental guardians respectively. As Indira Bhatt has rightly suggests, the Sufiya phenomenon “…represents the growth of political Pakistan which has not grown to true nation-hood”38. Pakistan has been passing through trouble and turmoil in the fields of religion, social, and gender intolerance or prejudice for various reasons. It is evident from Sufiya’s attitude and behaviour. The unrestrained gender violence of Pakistan is slanderous to the nation’s very existence.

Rushdie understands that the role of a woman in a country like Pakistan is confined to the home and as any other religion observes she is a mere chattel. But he is surprised to find women in *Shame*, slowly playing an active role in a typical patriarchal world. Rushdie comments, “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. It occurs to me that the women knew precisely what they were up to” (S; p. 123).

Inderpal Grewal opines that “What Rushdie writes for is the improvement in the lot of Pakistani women”39 and then accuses him of failing to deliver. For Anuradha Dingwaney Needham, Rushdie doesn’t create “a utopian or visionary space for women; he seeks rather to expose the particular and horrifying conditions of their oppression” 40.

Having exposed the horrifying condition of women oppression, Rushdie also provides a solution in the form of Nature, where Sufiya is selected to implement it. Her violent acts slowly increase. Her husband Omar Khayyam tries to imprison her, but she escapes. Having escaped she prowls around during nights murdering people. These nocturnal escapades are immensely damaging to her father Raza Hyder’s existence as the head of the state. Hence he wishes to see her dead. Towards the end of the novel, Raza Hyder, Bilquis and Omar Khayyam escape from the country and they arrive at the town ‘Q’. Bilquis dies of fever. Raza’s body is cut into pieces by stiletto blades operated by the three Shakil sisters as an act of revenge for having killed their second son, Babur Shakil. Raza is shown to fall a victim to his own religious beliefs and violent policies which he implemented during his reign. After the death of Raza Hyder, the Shakil sisters vanish. An explosion takes place in Nishapur in which Sufiya Zinobia and Omar Khayyam are burnt. “If the images of cruelty, perversion and waste dominate the narrative, it is because the reality of Pakistan is unpleasant, repressive and exploitative”.41

In spite of presenting all the negative facts, Rushdie lures the readers into reading the book. He achieves the impossible by using historical allusions and magic realism with great aplomb. As the narrator wants to give an image of the country and of its past, the ancient history of the country is evoked throughout the novel in the names and actions of the characters. Timothy Brennan is of the opinion that “Shame hides history in allusive references to the past which are buried in casual place names and family titles and ironic reincarnations of figures from legend”.42
The ex-major general Iskander Mirza of Punjabi bureaucracy returns in the figure of Iskander Harappa. He is alluded to in Midnight’s Children also as Brigadier Iskander. The surname ‘Harappa’ alludes to the ancient “Harappan civilization that borders Bhutto’s family estate in Sind Province”.43 The famous Macedonian conqueror Alexander who invaded India in 326 B.C. gives his name to a chapter entitled ‘Alexander the Great’ that deals with the rise of Bhutto.

‘Hyder’ refers to the legendary hero, Hyder Ali of Mysore (1761-1782), a free booter from the South. As Timothy Brennan has rightly points out, “Raza, an alternate form of ‘raja’ of course suggests the ‘Raj’ – the British governmental authority that ruled India from 1858 to 1947”.44

Omar Khayyam Shakil takes his name from the famous medieval Persian poet, astrologer and also by legend a doctor. The name Sufia is based on the Muslim mystical sect ‘Sufis’. As Timothy Brennan observes the name is appropriate for her because “the sect has usually been forced by persecution to live a semi-clandestine existence”.45

Rushdie alludes to some of the great Mughal rulers like Babar, Aurangzeb and Humayun. Pinkie Aurangzeb, Iskander’s mistress; and Babar, Omar Khayyam’s brother recreates the last great Mughal monarch Aurangzeb and another emperor Babur respectively. Mahmoud, Bilquis’s father alludes to Mahmud, the founder of the Ghaznavid dynasty who conquered Lahore in 1010 A.D. All of these names “exhibit a kind of nearness to history, but escape becoming entangled with in the formulas of historical narrative... (and) obliquely suggest the archaeological sediments of once-absolute power, whose fragmented legacy is unearthed or re-articulated in the present as ironic decline. There is here an unmistakable hint that any autocracy – civilian or military, secular or Islamized – might heed such cautions from history and exercise restraint in the interests of longevity”.46

Besides historical allusions, Rushdie uses magic realism lavishly to heighten the effect of narration. Though history is always considered to be scientific and authentic, no historical document is out of ambiguity and irregular. As it is the
Victorian who always write and record the history, it is always one dimensional and partial. The selfishness and the parochial temperament of the historians are responsible for making history more creative than authentic. So Salman Rushdie observes, "History is always ambiguous. Facts are hard to establish and capable of being given many meanings. Reality is built on our prejudices, misconceptions and ignorance as well as on our perceptiveness and knowledge". In a way many historians have made history more a fantasy than a reality. But Rushdie uses fantasy to present the reality in an amazingly perceptive method. And in some novels, he dovetails history and fantasy which ultimately turn to magic realism.

Magic realism is a term which denotes two contrasting words, the former which is not reality or truth and the second which is reality, the fact. The manner in which Rushdie combines these two contrasting features to build on the basic structure can also be viewed as a technique of escapism from ethical and ideological responsibility.

Rushdie not only attempts to shake off narrative responsibility, but also imbues the same features in his characters. The birth of Omar Khayyam is one such instance. His father is hinted to be a Britisher and the identity of his mother is also a mystery. He is said to have been conceived by one of the three Shakil sisters. His conception or birth is not truly revealed. All the three sisters appear pregnant, experience all features of carrying a child and all three go into labour. The ultimate birth of the hero remains a mystery, as the truth is not disclosed. This appears more a fantasy than reality. Rushdie successfully clubs the birth of Omar Khayyam to the fantastic thought, thereby making it appear real. Reality is thus revealed in an exaggerated manner.

Another instance, wherein Rushdie uses magic realism to portray his ideas and thoughts, is through the character of Sufiya Zinobia. She is introduced into the story as a child who was much awaited. But once born, she is rejected shamelessly by her parents. This is somehow instilled into the baby and she starts blushing, right at birth. This is something that is hard to comprehend. She grows physically, but remains retarded psychologically. Even then, she feels the shame of all her family members
and tries to undo it. The manner in which she retaliates to every action of shame is highly supernatural. The manner in which she kills the turkeys of Pinkie Aurangzeb, attempts to strangle her brother-in-law by twisting his neck and four unidentified, decapitated youths are all a figment of fantasy thawed into reality. Her ill-treatment at the hands of her parents as well as the betrayal of her husband drives the blushing Sufiya to turn into a beast. The dilemma she faces, though true in projection, is said to have resulted in the fantastic beastly invasions which are hard to accept as reality.

The birth of children to Sufiya's sister Naveed in profusion is likened to the growing population of the country. This profusive birth of children appears quite unbelievable. Unable to bear the strain, Naveed commits suicide; maybe in a way symbolising what lies in store for Pakistan. The birth of children is acceptable as reality, but the profusion and the steady increase only mystify the reader.

Another mystery which baffles the reader is the clairvoyancy of Talvar Ulhaq. 'Clair' in French means 'clear' and 'voyance' is 'vision'. Having a clear vision is a sign of common sense. But being able to see something that cannot be accounted for is beyond the natural. Talvar is said to possess this clairvoyance, which enables him to root out thieves, murderers, dons and political plotters from carrying out their schemes. This quality enables him to help his father-in-law clear his political path. Though considered the sixth sense or extra sensory perception, this quality is magnified to fantasy level in recognising the white panther. This ultimately brings about the closure of the novel. Talvar's mighty perception bears a strong resemblance to that of Pakistan, which is forever over-responsive to the neighbouring activities.

Throughout his narration, Rushdie thus attempts to combine the unreal and the fantastic with the objective facts of political Pakistan. Through his subjective speculation on guerrillas and angelhood, Rushdie seeks to create this perspective, which indeed becomes the very essence of the novel. His attempt at restructuring and reconstructing the sense of nation's shame in itself by projecting its shameless acts may be considered as another palimpsest account by Rushdie. The interlacing of shame and shamelessness provides an axis upon which lives of people turn. When conditions turn extreme, shamelessness and shame- the roots of violence- erupt,
disclosing the bloody trail of Pakistani history. Rushdie not only dramatises his
disgust and anguish at the negative aspects of the political and cultural history of
Pakistan, but also asserts that someday people would be drawn to the old myth of
liberty, equality and fraternity.
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27. Ibid., p.200.
34. Ibid., p.201.
36. Ibid., p.55.


45. Ibid., p.212.
