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Salman Rushdie and His Exposure of Shamelessness in *Shame*

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Abstract:

In a nation marred with violence, reeling under the after effects of partition, Rushdie tries to narrate the history of what went wrong. As Pakistan tries to recover from its financial and partitioned crisis, it also battles new ones such as education and morality. Rushdie tries to study the political and social structure of this country to give a life-like and chilling picture of the nation, which may seem like a fairy-tale, but has its roots firmly set in reality. It examines aspects of 'shame' and morality as we know it and questions the idea of 'shamelessness'. The theme of violence begotten by shame is also examined.

Keywords: Historic fiction, Magic Realism, Post-colonial, Political, Partition literature, Trauma, Violence, Satire.

Salman Rushdie is well known as thinker, philosopher, historian and literary artist as he ever feels himself responsible to society and like Robert Frost, remains conscious of the fact that he has 'promises to keep and miles to go before he sleeps'. As a writer he has always been conscious of the hostile critics of his books because he writes freely without bothering for their reactions. A lot of Muslims failed to tolerate his views on Islam as expressed in *Satanic Verses* and Fatwa was issued against him. Yet he didn't lose his mental strength and continued to write for the intellectual pleasure of his readers. He has been an ardent lover of personal liberty and hence preferred to study History in England though he was sent there to study Economics.

As a student of History, he always analyzed the causes and effects of particular events and then related History with culture, music, arts, civilization, science, technical progress, social effects, psychology etc. In other words, History is the nucleus and so many socio-economic, politico-cultural issues remain important for him when he writes about a particular period of history. Of course, like Thomas Carlyle, he selects the event himself and does not want to be dictated what to write and how to reach conclusions. Like Thomas Carlyle, he also analyzed the events of French Revolution and its causes and effects but then Salman Rushdie wrote his impressions in brief whereas Carlyle wrote two volumes on French Revolution. Similarly, he differs from Aldous Huxley while writing the history of India from 1917 to the present day. He knows that risks have got to be taken if truth is to be spoken about politicians and their deeds. Yet he interpreted the major events of Renaissance, Reformation, Industrial Revolution, American Independence, Bolshevik Revolution, Purgation in Russia, world wars etc. In *Midnight's Children* he remarks:

Most of what matters in our lives takes place in our absence. (MC 17)

Regarding the terrible effect of second world war and German involvement in it he says:

Far away the great war moved from crisis to crisis. (MC 26)

In *Midnight's Children* he boldly described the major events of Indian freedom struggle and accepted the contribution of main leaders and volunteers to the cause of freedom. Here he raised his voice against British Imperialism, Colonialism, Fascism, Nazism, Stalinism etc. as he is opposed to human cruelty towards human beings. The events of Amritsar have been portrayed with human touch as more than 1500 innocent men and women were killed by General Dyer on the Vaisakhi Day in Jallianwala Bagh and he returned home with a feeling of satisfaction that he had done his job well. Immediately curfew was imposed in the whole of Amritsar and the surrounding areas lest any provocation should be there.

In this novel he describes the Indian national awakening in true colours and remarks about Civil Disobedience Movement, Non-co-operation Movement and then Quit India Movement. By 1942 many British authorities had realized the fact that India would become a free nation. The author does not hide the violence that spread in India against British authorities. Banks, Post-offices and Railway Stations were attacked to disrupt the working of an align government and many young freedom fighters were hanged. Senior and active politicians were put behind the bar. His *Midnight's Children* was first work of art and it succeeded in its mission. Salman Rushdie elaborates his purpose through Nadir Khan, the poet: ... art must be beyond boundaries. (MC 54) He blames British authorities for their cruelty towards Indians in clear words as he is hater of slavery. In *Home* Salman Rushdie raises another question — What he is writing for? After all he has ideas and events to develop in a novel. He replies this question amicably and says:

... I write for people who feel part of the things I write 'about', but also for everyone else whom, I can react. (H 46)

Regarding art he remarks:

Art is a passion of the mind. And the imagination works best when it is most free. Western writers have always felt free ... we must grant ourselves an equal freedom. (H 48)

In *Shalimar The Clown* he exposed the network of Pakistani terrorists and satirized the American role in Kashmir.

His novel *Shame* confirms that satire is the plasma of his blood and marrow of his bones. Here he is more vitriolic than Johanthan Swift and Alexander Pope. Many novelists have written a lot of novels about Indian life. But the life of Pakistan has been painted mostly by Urdu novelists. Bapsi Sidhwa wrote a few novels about the miseries of Muslim poor women and pointed out that many citizens wish to migrate to U.K., U.S.A., France etc. as

life is hell there. Rushdie's venture in *Shame* is a continuation of *Midnight's Children*, both in its political bearings and in the choice of the fabulous as an appropriate and comprehensive mode for reflecting Indian reality, a mode which calls upon the native elasticity of the reader. Situated halfway between that great Columbian magical realist, Marquez, and the vagaries of contemporary Western postmodern fiction, it is a point of departure which is both promising and suspect.

Salman Rushdie visited Pakistan several times as his close relatives live there. In *Shame* he chose the period of 1947 to 1983. After partition in 1947 many Indian Muslims reached there with high hopes. Unfortunately, many of them felt mentally shattered as they had lost their relatives and friends on way to Pakistan. Quite a large number of Indian Muslims were strangers here and found themselves virtually in hell. There was nothing new about 'new Pakistan' and there were no shelter homes for the refugees. Nobody looked after them in times of sickness as the conditions of Pakistan's hospitals were pitiable. Sometimes the physicians were not there and sometimes medicines were not available in the hospital store. Roads were shattered and the public transport system was unmanageable. Refugees soon realized that they were unwanted there. The shops and houses as left by Hindus, had already been occupied by the natives. Women were kidnapped and girls were sold in brothels. Many uneducated fanatics did not support the issue of female education. A lot of them were taught lessons from *The Quran* and none of them dared to come out of purdah. In *Shame* Salman Rushdie first exposes Pakistan of 1947 as it was in a pitiable condition. The political leaders captured political powers and soon adopted foul means to earn money. Unfortunately, they were not afraid of local authorities as no new appointments were made. I.P.C. could not be changed overnight and Muslim Laws were obeyed. Violence was rampant and corruption appeared to be beyond control. The financial resources of new Pak government were scarce though Indian government paid a lot of amount to improve their economy.

Salman Rushdie laments the fact that there was no shameful among people as well as the authorities as nobody obeyed law. Nobody bothered to

improve the lot of poor masses though the poor Muslims offered Namaz five times a day to request Almighty Allah to grant wisdom to authorities. As a broad-minded political thinker Salman Rushdie observed that a lot of promises were made at the time of elections several times in Pakistan. But the military dictators were not the least prepared to entrust power to elected members of Parliament and the Legislative Assemblies. There were a lot of promises at the time of general elections and the same were forgotten just after the elections. The author was badly shocked to see that the finance minister and the Prime Minister never made serious economic plans to develop industries, agriculture and transport in the country. Consequently, it was futile to hope for the growth of export and import. Drugs were popular as Hashish and opium were grown there. The result was that drugs-mafias captured economic means of the nation. The most lamentable fact was that issue of education was totally ignored. No new universities were established and the old educational institutions were not fully financed by the government. The result was anarchy in the whole nation though the nation was new Pak and democratic. He was badly shocked to see that democratic values were suppressed by foul means to make money. Judges of courts of justice found themselves under political pressure as cases were compelled to be postponed for many years. Lamp of justice was extinguished and hence darkness was terrible, unbearable to Salman Rushdie.

As a matter of fact, *Shame* is not a traditional novel with a story ending happily with the marriage of lover and the beloved. It can be classed with P.B. Shelley's *The Necessity of Atheism*, Matthew Arnold's *Culture and Anarchy* and V.S. Naipaul's *Magic Seeds*. But it is having a serious moral purpose as Salman Rushdie does not revolt against ethics and tries his level best to make the best ideas prevail. His tone is pathetic as more than 80 percent people in Pakistan are virtuous, God-fearing, sacred, followers of law, philanthropists, optimists, hopeful of bright future of Pakistan and mankind, haters of general violence, lovers of democracy, calm and quiet and request Almighty Allah to grant wisdom to the rulers of the nation. They are lovers of equality, liberty, fraternity and universal brotherhood.

But they are fed up with the administration of dictators who promised them a life of security. General Zia-ul-Haq, General Ayyub, Tikka Khan, Yahiya Khan, General Pervez Musharraf etc. failed to give a perfect shape to Pakistan. Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto was arrested, tortured and finally hanged and it created two groups in Pakistan — One that justified the hanging and other that opposed this brutal justice. His daughter Benazir Bhutto won elections but the rigid and conservative people failed to adjust just in 'the regime of a woman and finally she too was killed. Pakistan authorities fail to control their terrorists and their ring leaders.

These terrorists are a threat to India, Afghanistan and the natives as they torture the innocent people, rape their daughters, demand money from citizens for buying latest weapons and kill the Indian soldiers. Virtuous citizens ask a few pertinent questions such as — When will real democracy be restored in the nation? Will there be rule of law in the nation at any stage? Who is responsible for pitiable shape of higher and lower education in the country? Will their children be able to study Law, Medicine, Business Administration, Engineering, Technology, Humanities etc. like the Europeans? Will banking system be free from fraud? Who will obey the fundamentals of Pak constitution? Will the nation always depend upon foreign aid from Iran, Turkey, China etc.?

While Salman Rushdie admits that he is not writing about Pakistan and its system. (S 29) He just laments for the poverty of masses, ignorance of young people, illiteracy of poor people, lack of discipline etc. He feels shocked seeing the miseries of minorities as their number has considerably decreased. Christians survive here with a sense of fear lest they should be tormented on religious ground. Quite often the ministers are killed by their opponents. It means that there is no liberty of expression there. True news are suppressed and one wonders — How do the editors of Pakistan's newspapers and media people survive? The question of unemployment has never been solved there. Nagendra Singh Nathawat says:

Women are treated as sex objects. Pakistani people are no exception to this. Pakistani people when they went

abroad to work for a while and when they returned, they brought with them white women. These white women were not treated more than concubines and they were given the status of number two wives in the villages. (MNSR 104)

Salman Rushdie confirms:

Repression is a seamless garment; a society in which authoritarian in its social and sexual codes, which crushes its women beneath the intolerable burden of honour and propriety, breeds repression of other kinds as well. Contrariwise: dictators are always — or at least in public, on other people's behalf-puritanical. (S 173)

As people have no personal and political liberty Salman Rushdie remarks:

Pakistan is not Iran. (S 250)

His most sarcastic remark about Pak's situation is:

Hell above, Paradise below. (S 23)

This remark is highly thoughtful as one fails to understand whether citizens survive in hell or paradise? Who is throwing stone from above? Is everything well on earth?

Salman Rushdie paints the situation of Bariamma great house where forty men get in to sleep there. Nearly twenty women are already sleeping in the courtyard and moral accidents often take place due to darkness of night. Now Hyder Raza requests his wife to adjust here for some days as he has to join his duty. Nagendra Singh Nathawat elaborates:

The political history of Pakistan is a history of martial law and administration. She had the privilege of only brief spells of civilian law and administration. The marital law of Ayyub Khan was followed by Yahya

Khan's and then by Zia-ul-Haq's military regime. In between came the democratic regime of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. (MNSR93)

As a writer Salman Rushdie admits his problems:

Realism can break a writer's heart. (S 70)

But his personal and emotional tragedy is higher than this as he can't afford to paint the fairy world of Houries and fake Paradise that does not exist anywhere. After all shame is not a 'piece' of furniture'. (S 28)

In this novel he blames the crooked policies of Z.A. Bhutto that resulted in the birth and establishment of Bangla Desh under the leadership of Mujeebur Rehman. Indian government supported the cause of East Pakistan and had to suffer financially. Then riots broke out in Pakistan and army had to face the anger of citizens.

Thus, *Shame* is a sublime work of art and the author's main tools are social, political and economic criticism. Satire has been used as a major weapon to expose the shamelessness of political authorities of Pakistan with a view to mend the system and establish a healthy society.

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