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State and Society: Contesting the Female Public Sphere in Salman Rushdie's *Shame*

Abstract

Over the years, the place and identity of women within the public sphere continue to raise arguments in some post-colonial societies. In Salman Rushdie's *Shame*, set in Pakistan, governing the public sphere remains polemical due to inhibitive socio-cultural, religious and political norms. Using the postcolonial theory and feminism, this paper examines these norms in order to contest and reassert the place of women within the Pakistani public sphere. While assessing the degree of successes that Rushdie's women bring to their societies, the paper interrogates the reasons for their initial exclusion. By examining the state's position and response to the plight of women, the paper hypothesises that *Shame* becomes a lens through which we can read Rushdie's satire on the different levels of chauvinistic interplay between the state and fundamentalists who deliberately dehumanise women. The paper concludes that female activism within the state and the society, changes the socio-political landscape to usher social equality and gender cohesion. A new dispensation that guarantees solutions to women's marital and reproductive rights, childhood betrothal, the all-covering veils (purdah), honour killings and freedom of worship.

Key Words: state, society, postcolonial, public sphere, fundamentalism, gender

Introduction

The word "Islam" which means submission is misinterpreted and misused by many in different societies. The interpretation of "submission" is used negatively by fundamentalists and misogynists in post-independence Pakistan in Rushdie's *Shame*. The public sphere remains a contested space for women and gender role specificities. This is criticized by Rushdie who draws from Islam to show how Pakistani women significantly possess and use divine powers to create a link between the historical and the sacred. His recourse to religion is an appeal for men to understand that Islam instructs gender equity because the disrespect for women exposes a shameful society as he says "wherever I turn, there is something of which to be ashamed of.

But shame is like everything else; live with it for long enough and it becomes part of the furniture" (1983: 21).

By focusing on the plight of Pakistani women in the public sphere, Rushdie identifies himself as a post-colonial feminist because he wants to reverse the fundamentalist notion of "submission" which underlies the Arabic meaning for Islam. The existence of Hindus and Muslims in Pakistan make women's experiences there different from those in other countries. Many fundamentalist groups within these religions segregate and tyrannize women in their daily interactions in the domestic and public spheres. Rushdie's *Shame* therefore discusses the taboos on women who try to articulate themselves thereby satirizing existing fundamentalist norms through authorial intrusion as Rushdie confesses in *Shame* that:

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 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. (1983: 180-81)

Shame is a satire on the corrupt political institutions in Pakistan and the oppressive forces on women seen through the different forms of violence committed on women like physical, sexual, emotional and psychological. With such social problems, there is need for liberal male writers to join women and women's organizations to address and combat the aspects of culture that inhibit equal representation and opportunities for women. Rushdie's satire on these institutions authenticates Frantz Fanon's suggestions about the role of a writer in society. According to Fanon, the writer addresses his own people in a literature whose themes reflect their daily experiences. In a broader sense, John McLeod in *Beginning Postcolonialism* sheds light on the point of convergence between the postcolonial theory and feminism when he posits:

In talking of 'the struggle for change', we can understand that feminist reading practices are involved in the contestation of patriarchal authority. The term 'patriarchy' refers to those systems – political, material and imaginative – which invest power in men and marginalize women. Like colonialism, patriarchy manifests itself in both concrete ways (such as disqualifying women a vote) and at the level of imagination [...]. So, feminism and postcolonialism share the mutual goal of challenging forms of oppression. (2000: 173-4)

From this background, our reading of Rushdie as a feminist is instructed by the fact that he addresses the plight of women, thereby moulding their consciousness to the fact that the fight for women's freedom and feminism is no longer an issue for women alone.

To consider Rushdie a post-colonial feminist, it is important to define who a feminist is. In "The Cultural Designation of Feminism: Theory and Praxis," Nandini Sahu defines a "feminist" rhetorically as someone:

Who recognizes herself, and is recognized by others as a feminist, as the one who has the awareness and knowledge of women's oppression, and has a recognition for women's differences and commonalities. Some feminists argue for a classification that is future oriented – that a feminist must have a notion of social change. (2009: 2)

Another definition of a "feminist" is given by Sarah Gamble in *The Routledge Companion to Feminism and Post-Feminism* who thinks that a feminist is one who holds the view that women are less valued than men in societies that categorize men and women into different cultural or economic spheres. A feminist also "insists that these inequalities are not fixed or determined, but women themselves can change the social, economic and political order through collective action" (2001: 230-31). This study therefore adds that Rushdie's *Shame* is a satire on social injustice and which works in favour of the oppressed in Pakistan and in other former colonies.

1. Governing the Public Sphere and State Formations

The public sphere which is supposed to be an avenue for social cohesion between men and women tends to be a theatre for segregation and torture for Pakistani women in *Shame*. The state and the constitution which have as role to protect and guarantee the safety of her citizens has been diluted by fundamentalist beliefs that relegate the female to the "other." This is evident in the "Sharia laws" passed in Pakistan by General Raza Hyder whom Rushdie represents symbolically as General Zia-ul-Haq in Pakistani history. Ironically, Hyder announces that "God and socialism are incompatible, so that the doctrine of Islamic Socialism on which the Popular Front has based its appeal is the worst kind of blasphemy imaginable" (1983: 248). That is why the fate of women in Pakistan during wars is culturally tolerated: they become tools used to demoralise their warrior husbands by their adversaries.

According to Rushdie, Indian soldiers engage in a systematic rape of Pakistani women because the "Zina Ordinances" under "Sharia" law which the government of Pakistan under Raza Hyder adopts. President Hyder who is Rushdie's metaphoric representation of Pakistan's former president,

General Zia-ul-Haq, in *Shame* is the first to introduce "Sharia" law in the country in 1979 since independence. These laws oppress women in the socio-cultural, religious and political spheres of Rushdie's fictional Pakistan seen in cases where:

Unveiled women walking the streets; it demanded firm measures and an iron hand. It is a matter of record that in those days religious students started carrying guns and occasionally taking pot-shots at insufficiently devout professors; that men would spit at women in the street if they went about their business with their midriffs showing; and that a person could be strangled for smoking a cigarette during the month of fasting." (1983: 263)

Apart from the fact that fundamentalist Islamists interpret "Sharia" laws to justify the subversion of the moral institutions in place, allusion to the disappearing girls is significant because the parents abandon them at temples, sell as sex slaves to other parts of the region or kill for unorthodox reasons. As a post-colonial feminist, Rushdie satirises the harshness of this "moral code" and calls for its ban because the subcontinent is fast evolving beyond the confines of cultural exclusivity. Similarly, the female undergoes physical and psychological torture when she is caught up in a rape situation. Fundamentalists use "Sharia" in Pakistan to socially exclude raped victims as Brendon Nicholls in "Reading Pakistan in Salman Rushdie's *Shame*" highlights:

The legal interpretation of rape within the second and third of the ordinances, the 'Zina Ordinance, means that the raped victim's testimony may amount to prima facie evidence of her indulgence in illicit fornication, as might any pregnancy resulting from the rape, while the perpetrator's denial, or even the complete failure to mount a legal defence, might mean that he avoids incrimination altogether. Compounding the difficulty in prosecuting the rapist are discrepancies in the weighing of evidence. Women's testimonies carry only half the weight of a man's. Furthermore, the eyewitness evidence of four Muslim males is required to be implemented. This punishment is the stoning to death of married Muslims, or the meting out of a hundred lashes in public for unmarried Muslims and non-Muslims. (2007: 117)

According to the "Zina Ordinances," women remain victims of rape and sexual harassment because on no occasion will the court of law find four male Muslims ready to testify against another male. Furthermore, Nicholls says circumstantial evidence is not allowed to be part of the testimony, and medical examinations including DNA tests to ascertain culpability are refused

by the clerics in religious courts. Consequently, if such rape results to pregnancy, the girl and her unborn child is disowned or exiled by her family for bringing shame and dishonour to her family and society. Ironically, traditional Muslim men refuse to marry raped or deflowered girls on grounds that although *The Koran* has specifically assigned punishment for adultery, it is silent about the crime of rape.

Meanwhile in *Shame*, the abduction of girls for ransom is another form of violence against the female especially as Rushdie cites the case of a Pakistani oil baron whose daughter is abducted by a terrorist group in return for ransom. When the girl is finally released back into her society, she becomes a marked woman who cannot get married since no one wants to be part of her dishonour. Her exclusion from social interaction is because fundamentalist Islamic laws in Pakistan forbid a man from marrying such a woman since there are possibilities that she is raped by her abductors. Many of such women end up committing suicide as the only way out. As such, Rushdie therefore questions why fundamentalist Muslim use "purdah" to limit their wives given that free movement makes them liberal and gives them the possibility to question religious orthodoxies.

Such fundamentalist ideology is equally carried across to the West as Pakistani parents forbid their girl children from dating or marrying non-Pakistanis. To them, it is dishonour and ironical because despite such parents' knowledge through education, globalisation and enlightenment, they adhere to such fundamentalist practices. It's the case of a Pakistani parent in London who suspects a sexual relationship between his daughter, Anahita, and a white boy and murders her in cold blood. His reason is that not only is it a taboo to fornicate, she does it with an infidel, meaning that:

She had brought such dishonour upon her family that only her blood could wash away the stain. The tragedy was intensified by the father's enormous and obvious love for his butchered child, and by the beleaguered reluctance of his friends and relatives (all Asians, to use the confusing term of these trying days) to condemn his actions. (1983: 117)

The murdered girl's father is rash in decision-making on the grounds that he wants to preserve the honour of his family. It is ironical that despite all proofs that no intercourse occurs, the Pakistani Muslim community in London still lends him their full support. This support shows that the honour of the family is still in place. The murdered girl, like many other girl children thus becomes a victim of the wrath of a tradition that does not rationalise, especially in investigating an apparent cultural practice.

In *Shame*, the narrator tells us that there are times when racial segregation is so enforced that one race gets the other beaten or killed when

they cross territories. The case of Anna Mohammad who is beaten by white boys in one of London's busy subways only recalls Rushdie's experiences in England about the difficulties his Asian sister's face when they move over to London. He metaphorically likens these women to "ghosts" because they have no voice and place, and even the authorities do not listen to stories of their violations and harassment because of racial segregation. He contends that:

These ghosts like Anna inhabit a country that is entirely unghostly: no special 'Peccavistan,' but proper London. I'll mention two: a girl set upon in a late-night underground train by a group of teenage boys is the first. The girl Asian again, the boys predictably white. Afterwards, remembering her beating, she feels not angry but ashamed; she does not want to talk about what happened, she makes no official complaint. (1983: 119)

If the young Anna Mohammad is ashamed of what happens to her, it is because she knows justice cannot be meted on the culprits. Many people least expected Rushdie would satirise the way the British police treated immigrants especially after the support he got from the authorities when the "fatwa" was declared on him in 1989. But as a crusader for social justice, he stops at nothing to also advocate for the place of the Asian woman in Britain. This perspective is further confirmed in *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'* by Judith Butler who points out that liberal ideas have also perpetuated a dualism based on a mind/body split. Indeed, it was the meanings ascribed to the bodies of women and people of colour that were, and in some societies still are, used to justify their exclusion from education and other human rights. Such practices often appeal to the idea of women as equal in worth but naturally different in their biological and social roles.

Rushdie further satirises the traffic of girls and the sale of human body parts. In *Shame*, he contends that the business of disappearing girl children had been going on in the country's shanty towns and slums for many years with several theories about these disappearances. Popular opinion holds that the girl children are abducted to the golf to provide cheap labour or to be exploited by Arab Princelings in worse, unnameable ways, "Some people maintained that the parents were the culprits that they were doing away with the unwanted members of their outsized families" (1983: 227). According to Rushdie, the mystery has never been solved, no arrests made, no slave-trade conspiracies unearthed. As such, "it became a fact of life: children simply vanished, in broad daylight, into the air. Poof! Then they found the headless bodies" (ibid). By satirising this barbarism committed on innocent girls, Rushdie conforms to the views of the New Historicist, Lois Tyson in *Critical Theory Today: A User-Friendly Guide* that "the literary text

shaped and was shaped by the discourses circulating in the culture in which it was produced" (1999: 292).

Educationally, in the Pakistani public sphere, the education of the girl child to higher levels is inhibited on the grounds that educated women do not make good housewives since they have developed brains and can object to the decisions of their husbands. Fear of the possibility of having educated but unmarried girls push parents to restrict the movements and education given to their girls as is the case of the three Shakil sisters – Chunni, Munnee and Bunny. In *Shame*, they are kept inside the labyrinthine mansion in "Nishapur" until their father's dying day and until they reach maturity. The narrator says they are virtually uneducated and imprisoned in the Zenana wing where they amuse each other by inventing private languages and fantasising about what a man can look like when undressed. Bilquis Hyder's discussion of the disadvantages of female education with her husband who is President. In her opinion:

A woman does not have to be a brain box. In many opinions, brains are a positive disadvantage to a woman in marriage. She likes to go to the kitchen and help the khansama with his work. At the bazaar, she can tell good vegetables from bad. You yourself have praised her chutneys. She can tell when the servants have not polished the furniture properly. (1983: 168)

Ironically, Bilquis who is the first lady believes that an educated woman has brains which are not necessary for the smooth running of her marital home. This explains why she will probably have a job and will not be able to effectively handle her marital obligations, and equally reveals that Bilquis supports the oppression of women by patriarchy. It can thus be argued that the continuous practice of "Sharia" in Muslim societies is partly because some elderly women still think it can best control their young girls against sexual promiscuity in modern societies. This is their excuse for the fact that educated women cannot make good housewives, whereas the evidence in this era of globalisation proves otherwise.

From a feminist approach therefore, the house becomes a metaphor for the imprisonment of women in the medieval form of Islam which Rushdie satirises in his writing. The house is also a metaphor for Pakistan, a country that is noted for its harsh laws against women. According to Ahmad Aijaz in "Rushdie's *Shame*: Postmodernism, Migrancy and Representation of Women," the sense that Pakistan is a cage is already there, in the opening episodes of *Shame* where the Shakil sisters, the three mothers of the peripheral hero, Omar Khayyam, are "cloistered twice over: first by their father, the patriarch of the macabre mansion, with whose death the book begins, and then by themselves, after their one hedonistic night in which their son is conceived" (1991: 1465). Arguably, it is for this reason that

Spivak's crusade to liberate the subaltern from the shackles of patriarchal conditioning and social stigma was not listened to as John McLeod quotes her in *Beginning Postcolonialism* when he says:

It is not so much that subaltern women did not speak, but rather that others did not know how to listen, how to enter into a transaction between speaker and listener. The subaltern cannot speak because their words cannot be properly interpreted. Hence, the silence of the female as a subaltern is the result of interpretation and not a failure of articulation. (2000: 195)

The absence of many well-educated women who could advocate feminism weakened the movement and revealed the awareness that feminism needed to adopt a more robust approach like an interdisciplinary or eclectic exploration of women's empowerment. Given the complicated nature of religious fundamentalism, this approach would possibly come from courageous male writers and personalities whose ideas transcend misogyny and bring out innovative approaches that revisit subaltern silence by suggesting possible means through which men can listen to women and understand the forms of violence committed against them publicly.

In the same light, Mustafa Kirca in "Postmodernist Historical Novels: Jeanette Winterson's and Salman Rushdie's Novels as Historiographic Metafictions" suggests why women's achievements are hardly represented in the works of male writers. Kirca continues that:

When history is analysed 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 either 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, feminisms see history as an oppressive, phallogocentric grand narrative which should be deconstructed. (2009: 26)

Just like Kirca, Suparna Bhaskaran highlights in *Made in India: Decolonisations, Queer Sexualities, Trans/National Projects* that women in the public spheres were categorised along with "lower castes as subjects of social reforms and welfare, instead of being recognized as autonomous agents of change" (2004: 34). The emphasis was on recreating new space in pre-existing feminine roles of caring. Moreover, caring was examined from a sexual perspective since women do not have sexual freedom, despite their protests against homosexual identities like "Hijra", "Danga", "Double Decker", "Panthi" and "Kothi" among different communities in the

subcontinent. Part of Rushdie's uniqueness is his ability to satirise the different perspectives from which these sexual identities create problems for women especially in the public sphere.

2. The Sphere In-Between: Power, Status and Exclusion

The harshness of patriarchal tradition is further expressed in the domestic sphere. Rushdie's *Shame* satirises the traumatising experiences of Pakistan women in the hands of their husbands and in-laws. In Pakistan, a marriage is considered successful when the couple bears male children. To these traditionalists, the plight of the girl child begins the moment she is born. It is believed that girl children are harbingers of bad luck and men feel angry and disappointed the moment their wives give birth to girl children. Preference for a male child, especially to people of the upper class is partly based on knowledge that a leader or a rich man without a son is considered a weakling. It is the situation with President Raza Hyder in *Shame*. His disappointment is heightened when his wife gives birth to a girl child to the point that he confronts the doctor in charge. He is misled into believing that as head of state, he must have a male child, but his doctor is certain that the "matter of sex is beyond dispute" (1983: 89). The thought of a female child comes to Hyder like a bombshell, though he argues with the midwife that "mistakes are often made" (ibid). As a leader who introduces and upholds "Sharia" laws in the political and religious life of Pakistan, Hyder feels disappointed when his child named Sufiya Zinobia also turns out to be an imbecile. He spends the rest of his life taking out his anger on his wife, Bilquis, for not giving him a son to the point that they separate homes. Furthermore, Sufiya spends the rest of her life locked up in a secluded room in the presidency until Hyder attempts to kill her by lethal injection in order to preserve the dignity and honour of his family. The treatment given to Sufiya is symbolic of atrocities men commit on their girl children in order to justify religious and social conveniences.

Ironically, some women join their husbands in promoting such patriarchal constructs that reject handicapped or girl children. This is the case of Bilquis Hyder, the wife of the president and the supposed mother of the nation. She who is supposed to protect such girl children tends to maltreat her own Sufiya Zinobia because she is mentally retarded. She calls her daughter a 'shame' to her family and treats her like mud in the presence of friends and relatives as she says:

Well then: Sufiya the moron blushed. Her mother said to the assembled relatives, 'she does it to get attention. O, you don't know what it's like, the mess and anguish, and for what? For no reward. For air. Thank God for my Good News.' But goof or no goof, Sufiya Zinobia – by blushing furiously each time her mother looked sidelong at her

father – revealed to watching family eyes that something was piling up between those two. (1983: 125)

The mother's hatred for the sick daughter is so intense that she openly tells everyone that she prefers Good News, the normal daughter to the sick Sufiya. Bilquis discriminates between her own children and accepts that Hyder secludes her. They agree to kill her in order to protect the honour of their family. Their pride leads to their downfall because the decision to kill her only enrages the beast that resides in her which ends with their escape from the presidency and eventual deaths. If Rushdie empowers the mad Sufiya to root all evil from the country, it is a message to people who discriminate between children because they cannot live up to their expectations. As a mother and First Lady, we expect Bilquis to accept the mad Sufiya as an example to many other families that murder children to protect their honour as Noor Akbar Khalil and Mashood Ahmed Sheikh in "Political Manipulation in Human Rights Violations: A Case of Honour Killings in Baluchistan, Pakistan" highlight that "honour" killing was once an unusual custom but has more recently evolved into a common practice in "which men kill sisters, daughters, or other female family members to avenge a 'shame' or 'dishonour' she is accused of bringing upon her family or tribe" (2010: 36). Through this incident, Rushdie satirises the "honour" and "shame" phenomenon that exists in Pakistan and possibly why he titles the novel that handles this fundamentalist construct as *Shame*.

Furthermore, the nexus of power within the domestic sphere is seen in cases where if women try to object the decisions of their husbands, they are physically restrained and seriously beaten. Ironically, wife beating is a common phenomenon in Rushdie's fictional Pakistan to the extent that the definition of a good man in society depends on whether he beats his wife or not. In *Shame*, Bariamma is happy when she learns that as a young Major in the army, Raza Hyder has never beaten Bilquis, a situation which makes the wife to be:

Admired, grudgingly, because the family had a high opinion of Raza, the women admitted that he was a good man who did not beat his wife. This definition of goodness alarmed Bilquis, to whom it had never occurred that she might be beaten, and she raised the subject with Rani. 'Oh yes,' her cousin-in-law replied, 'how they all hit! Tharaap! Tharaap! Sometimes it does your heart good to watch. But one must also watch out. A good man can go bad, like meat, if you do not keep him cool. (1983: 73)

Even though men beat their wives in these societies; many women have internalised this culture and are comfortable with it rather than fighting against it. Women are thus partly responsible for some of the violence

committed on them and it becomes clear that this "giving in" also results from their inability to receive basic education. Secondly, many women simply accept the idea that they deserve to be beaten because *The Koran* clearly stipulates that:

Men have authority over women because Allah has made the one superior to the other, and because they spend their wealth to maintain them. Good women are obedient. They guard their unseen parts because Allah has guarded them. As for those from whom you fear disobedience, admonish them and send them to beds apart and beat them. Allah is high, supreme. (4:34)

This is the harshness of "Sharia" on women which fundamentalists tend to implement in Pakistan. For the men who cannot beat their wives, it is becoming a common practice in the Pakistani society that husbands douse their wives with acid to permanently deform or disfigure them. As such, women who object to domestic oppression are doused with acid and in many cases, since they cannot endure the psychological trauma that goes with their deformities, many commit suicide. On the other hand, the perpetrators of such actions most often go free due to police corruption.

As an Islamic country, sexual violence is manifested in the domestic sphere in respect of fundamentalist Islam which sanctions the position of the woman during the sexual act by divine laws under the "Hadith." The "Hadith" are collections of works of Mohammad and the first Muslims which are not included in *The Koran*. These collections are used as a supplement to *The Koran*, to help interpret Islam in certain communities. The actual collection of what is today known as "Hadith" became a systematic science about two centuries after the death of Mohammad. Ali Kecia in *Marriage and Slavery in Early Islam* examines how pre-modern Muslim legal writings presented a model of spousal relationships in which parental relations were peripheral and children were secondary. He continues that:

A wife's main duties to her husband were to obey him and be sexually available. In exchange, he fed, clothed, and housed her... In fact, their central notion about marriage was that the marriage contract granted a husband, in exchange for payment of dower, a form of authority or dominion over his wife's sexual (and usually reproductive) capacity. (2009: 6)

With this stigmatised position, Kecia believes slaves and women are overlapping categories of legally inferior persons constructed against one another and in relation to one another – sometimes identified, sometimes distinguished. Slavery was frequently analogised to marriage: both were

forms of control or dominion exercised by one person over another. The contracting of marriage was parallel to the purchase of a slave, and divorce parallel to freeing a slave. Marriage and slavery intersected at the institution of concubinage, which legitimised sex between a man and his own female slave and made any resultant progeny free and legitimate.

Given that Pakistan is an Islamic country, it is important to note that Islam as a religion shows respect and compassion to the woman especially in the domestic sphere. But in many societies, sects within the religion collude with patriarchal traditions to use certain fundamentalist aspects of the religion to justify their domination and maltreatment of women. Those who adhere to a confrontational view of "Sharia" tend to ascribe many undesirable practices to it and the religion, overlooking custom and culture. Fundamentalist Islamic societies believe "Sharia" is God's law, but they differ as to what exactly it entails. Anitta Kynsilehto in *Islamic Feminism: Current Perspectives* argue that scholars challenging patriarchal readings of *The Koran* and the "Hadiths" demonstrate that it is not the texts themselves, but rather their "interpretations that allow for patriarchal traditions to persist. *The Koran* contains principles of gender equality and wider issues of social justice thus laying grounds for challenging patriarchal traditions" (2008: 4). This accounts for why modernists, traditionalists and fundamentalists all hold different views of "Sharia," and why different countries and cultures have varying interpretations of "Sharia" as well.

Moreover, physical violence on women can be seen when they get married as it is expected of them to bear many children even at the expense of their health. In *Shame*, the pride of a man depends on the number of children he has, and especially males. This practice is satirised by Rushdie through Talvar Ulhaq, the famous police chief who gets married to the president's daughter. The narrator tells us that due to his many children, he puffs up with pride while Naveed Hyder (his wife) on her part disintegrates under the awesome chaos of their numbers until President Hyder advises:

'Fourteen kids with the same birthday,' he told the couple as sternly as he could manage, 'what do you think you're up to? Haven't you heard of the population problem? You should take, perhaps, certain steps [...]. So Hyder felt ashamed and shut his mouth, and in the fifth year Good News' womb released six more new lives, three males, three females, because Talvar Ulhaq in the pride of his manhood had chosen to ignore Hyder's remark about too-many-grandsons; and in the year of Iskander Harappa's fall the number rose to twenty-seven children in all, and by that time everyone had lost count of how-many-boys-how-many-girls. (1983: 218)

Naveed Hyder depreciates physically and psychologically due to the children and resorts to suicide in order to end this expectation. It is ironical that Hyder who implements "Sharia" in Rushdie's Pakistan is alarmed by the rate at which his son-in-law tortures his daughter through childbearing, especially as the law prohibits the use of condoms and other contraceptives to prevent pregnancy. The death of his daughter through suicide and the later transformation of Sufiya into a beast signal the beginning of President Hyder's downfall. Naveed's successive children is a metaphor for the high rate of corruption that ruins the Pakistani economy during the six years of Hyder's reign which Rushdie only compares with Naveed Hyder's fecundity.

From another perspective, the dress which Hyder encourages women to wear is part of "purdah" which the men use as a means of oppressing women. "Purdah" is originally a Persian word that means "veil" or "curtain" and therefore refers to veiling and separation, sometimes to the values about the proper behaviour of women inside and outside the household. M.S. Joy in "The Veil as a Metaphor for Repression in Salman Rushdie's *Shame*" points out that the term has positive as well as negative connotations. In a positive sense, it means a curtain or a veil to maintain, "privacy and purity from prying eyes. In a negative sense, it is a form of social restraint through which the individuality of the woman is erased by making her anonymous behind a veil and free interaction with the opposite sex is prevented" (2006: 12). Joy adds that 'purdah' laws seclude women from men and from the sphere of public duties. Marnia Lazreg in *Questioning the Veil: Open Letters to Muslim Women* examines the effects of the continuous use of the veil on its wearer and highlights that:

The veiled women I grew up with, including my mother, frequently complained about the heat trapped in their full white veils. The women wearing black veils, socks, and gloves suffer even more, as the black colour absorbs the heat of the sun instead of reflecting it. The Afghan burqa, which covers the face with its gridlike woven pane, and the niqab, which leaves only a slit for the eyes, are equally inconvenient in hot weather, in addition to being difficult to manage: the long dress usually bunches up against and between the legs, preventing a woman from taking long steps or running. (2009: 104)

The veil perpetuates and symbolises the culture of gender inequality through symbolic interaction and by the same token, instils in a woman an inchoate sense of her insignificance as a social being. To Lazreg, when a working woman willingly takes up a hijab, she is telling her male colleagues "I respect your deep-seated desire to see me covered" (ibid). She is also expressing her agreement that she is inferior to the men even though she may be more competent or more skilled. Since the world of work is organized on the principles of merit and competence, not gender, the hijab

has the symbolic effect of diminishing the importance of formal equality in the workplace, especially in Pakistan.

Through *Shame*, Rushdie insists that the personal – the sphere of private life – is a site of political struggle. His writing becomes a radical moment as he puts much of his energy into fighting for women's autonomy in the areas of sexuality and procreation. He sees the control of sexuality and procreation as fundamental to women's oppression and focuses on the economic aspects of the problems. That is why I argue that as a feminist, Rushdie condemns men's use of biology to define and justify women's inequality as natural. Here, he uses biology to instead define a field of competing discourses to the meaning of womanhood. These discourses structure institutional practices and redefine the status of Pakistani women vis-à-vis men. In doing so, his female characters produce and reproduce power relations that, from a feminist perspective contradict patriarchal hegemony.

3. Female Activism, Ascendancy and Social Order

The struggle to equal rights and opportunities is one that has been going on for years in Pakistan. As noted in *Shame*, many cultural practices continue to inhibit women from articulating themselves and asserting their place in society which feminists criticize. The advent of emancipation and globalisation has exposed women to education and other opportunities where they can meet the husbands of their choices, without waiting for their parents to arrange marriages to unknown or at times old husbands. Along these lines, this study argues that Rushdie encourages metamorphosis in women who compete with men in different domains in life. This view conforms with bell hooks' interrogative preoccupation in *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Centre* that feminists ought to work to end all forms of oppression. To accomplish this goal, it is necessary to combat domination because feminism should be considered a:

Liberation struggle must exist apart from and as a part of the larger struggle to eradicate domination in all its forms. We must understand that patriarchal domination shares an ideological foundation with racism and other forms of group oppression, and that there is no hope that it can be eradicated while these systems remain intact. (1984: 22)

From our reading of Rushdie, we can therefore argue that the defining characteristic that distinguishes Rushdie's struggle to liberate women in Pakistan is his concern with sexism and why we think women and men must share a common understanding of what feminism is, so as to make it a powerful mass-based political movement. As such, hook's ideas tie with Rushdie's writing given that he comes from a region where racial, religious

and caste segregation dominates. At this juncture, it is important to highlight that in the context of this study, the postcolonial theory and feminism move together to counteract all forms of oppression and subjugation especially when examined from the perspective of Bill Ashcroft et al. in *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures* as they posit:

The history and concerns of feminist theory have strong parallels with post-colonial theory. Feminist and post-colonial discourses both seek to reinstate the marginalised in the face of the dominant, and early feminist theory, like early nationalist post-colonial criticism, sought to invert the structures of domination... (1989: 175)

The case of Pakistan is peculiar because the country has several religions and caste groups that segregate each other. Ironically, amongst these different groups, women retain a doubly stigmatised position.

To assert the place of women, Rushdie depicts in *Shame* how women work relentlessly in the nation-building exercise in Pakistan. The predecessors of Iskander Harappa refuse to give women positions of authority in government which is why during Harappa's campaigns, he criticizes such exclusion and makes the fight against the marginalisation of the woman folk one of his major concerns. To realise his promise, after his ascension to power as Prime Minister, Harappa empowers his daughter, Arjumand Harappa, who is a seasoned lawyer to handle the problem of tax evasion as a step towards his commitment to fulfil his promise to empower women and also ensure social cohesion. The narrator tells us that she becomes active in the green revolution and throw "Zamindars out of their palaces, opened dungeons, led raids on homes of film stars and slit their mattresses with a long two-edged knife, laughed as the black money poured out from between the pocketed springs" (1983: 191). For those she takes to court, she prosecutes the enemies of the state with a scrupulous ferocity that gives her the nickname "virgin iron pants" by her enemies. The nickname "iron pants" is a metaphor for her courage and ability to transcend the gender role which patriarchy imposes on women in Rushdie's Pakistan.

Furthermore, Rushdie negotiates racial barriers in Pakistan through female characters who accept to have whites as co-wives. In *Shame*, he depicts the kind nature of Pakistani women who are indifferent about their men marrying white women when they go to work overseas. The fact that they return home with white women who are accepted by their Pakistani wives to integrate their cultural system is indicative of racial harmony. The accommodating nature of Rushdie's Pakistani women is seen when the narrator tells us that:

In those days, many of the villagers had gone west to work for a while, and those who returned had brought with them white women for whom the prospect of life in a village as number-two wives seemed to hold an inexhaustibly erotic appeal. The number-one wives treated these white girls as dolls or pets and those husbands who failed to bring home a guddi, a white doll, were soundly berated by their women. The village of the white dolls had become famous in the region. Villagers came from miles around to watch the girls in their neat, clean white giggling and squealing as they leapt for shuttlecocks and displayed their frilly panties. The number-one wives cheered for their number-twos, taking pride in their victories as in the successes of children, offering them consolation in defeat. (1983: 158)

Rushdie's women in *Shame* understood that in order to build a peaceful and cohesive society, they need to accept white women as their sisters, regardless of the errors committed in the past by slavery and colonialism. Given that Islam is a religion which preaches polygamy, Rushdie's women encourage their husbands to marry across racial barriers in an attempt to end racial segregation and promote cultural globalisation. Rushdie's desire for Pakistani women to come together in order to educate white women can be complemented with Trinh T. Minh-ha's discussions in "Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism" that:

Women of today are still being called upon to stretch across the gap of male ignorance, and to educate men as to our existence and our needs. [...]. Now we hear that it is the task of the black and Third World woman to educate white women in the face of tremendous resistance, as to our existence, our differences, our relative roles in our joint survival. (qtd in *Post-colonial Studies Reader*, 2006: 247-48)

Rushdie's female characters are tolerant and ready to educate Western women about bridging the stereotypical dichotomy of one race dominating the other as a new form of civilisation emanating from the East.

Arguably, the fact that in Pakistan, Muslim men are allowed to marry as many as four wives without the women objecting is an aspect of religion that this paper which Rushdie rebels against through Sufiya Zinobia who makes love to four men at the same time. She beheads immediately after sex to exercise her strength, an action that surprises everyone. They are found in a rubbish dump near a slum. It seems that the four of them died more or less simultaneously. "The heads were never found." He says four husbands come and go and then her hands reach for the first boy's neck. The others stand still and wait their turn. And heads "hurled high sinking into the scattered clouds, nobody saw them fall. She rises, goes home. And sleeps; the Beast subsides" (1983: 228-32).

The fact that Sufiya Zinobia kills the four men is a metaphor for her anger and hatred for patriarchy which gives men the right to handle women like objects and commodities that can be disposed of at will. Through her actions, the impending attack on the President and her husband, Omar Shakil, make them run away from the presidency. Their flight from the presidency is humorous in that they dress in women's garments in order to avoid recognition from the angry crowd outside and police control along the road. Examining the strength of Sufiya and how her actions invert the laws of Islam which are sacred, Abdulrazak Gurnah in the "Introduction" to *The Cambridge Companion to Salman Rushdie* says:

She tempts four nameless men to have sex with her, inverting the right of Muslim men to take four wives, and then she pulls their heads off [...]. Her humiliation at the hands of men who should have loved her, her father, Raza Hyder, and her husband, Omar Khayyam Shakil, have turned her into a beast. Rushdie celebrates Sufiya's violence as liberation, or makes Omar Khayyam Shakil ponder along these lines, but the real force behind this figuration of women is not so much to suggest a route to fulfilment, but to issue a warning to the rulers of Pakistan. Out of the encounter of shame and shamelessness, will come violence. (2007: 5)

Gurnah is of the opinion that Rushdie uses Sufiya to reveal how she stands up against patriarchy and exploitations of all forms in the hands of men. Rushdie's approach to liberate women resulted to religious and political problems in Pakistan in 1983 which only ended with the banning of the book by the regime in place. They did not appreciate the perspectives from which Rushdie captured women's empowerment, arguing that his actions were attempts to instigate women towards a rebellion, but all of these died down when his publishers took the government to court.

To further celebrate the importance of women, Rushdie discusses how the downfall of the Hyder regime in *Shame* is precipitated by the beast that resides in Sufiya Zinobia. Given that mad children and imbeciles are abandoned or killed by their families in order to preserve their honour, Rushdie empowers the rejected daughter to become the saviour, not only of her family, but the entire nation. The failure of the numerous hunting expeditions to kill the mysterious beast reveals her mystical prowess which results to the deaths of many of her hunters. News of its killings frightens the president and his collaborators out of the presidential palace and its strange calmness after the president's escape is described as follows:

She did not attack the empty palace. She was not caught, nor killed, nor seen again in that part of the country. It was as if her hunger had been satisfied; or as though she had never been more than a rumour,

a chimaera, the collective fantasy of a stifled people, a dream born of their rage; or even as if sensing a change in the order of the world, she had retreated and was prepared to wait a little longer, in that fifteenth century, for her time. (1983: 279)

If the mysterious beast remains silent after the departure of President Hyder, it is because its mission is accomplished. We can thus conclude that Rushdie uses the portrait of the beast as an irony to buttress the fact that the mad Sufiya becomes an important member to her family and the nation. Lastly, he wants to subvert the idea of "honour killing" as Noah M. Landow contends in "The Bizarre and the Miraculous in Rushdie's Fiction" that Rushdie gives here, incidentally a good reason for not writing *Shame* as a realistic fiction. However, the surreal world of the novel blurs ironically into ours in consideration of the fact that *Shame* was indeed "banned, dumped in the rubbish bin and burned. So he has demonstrated, yet again, his proficiency at distorting reality until it becomes fantasy, and in this case also distorted fantasy until it becomes reality" (2001: 3).

Moreover, women in *Shame* are responsible for toppling the dictatorial regime of President Raza Hyder. The overnight escape of Hyder from the presidential palace and his eventual death comes as a result of angry women out for revenge. The desire for revenge pushes the three mothers – Chhunni, Munnee and Bunny to cast a spell that makes their son, Shakil, to lure Hyder into taking refuge in their home. Let it be recalled that the president is running away from the ghost of his mad daughter, Sufiya Zinobia. Ironically, the fleeing president dresses in a woman's clothing to avoid recognition as the narrator contends:

Bilquis Hyder says, 'put these on'. Shakil seizes, rushes into his womanly disguise; Bilquis pulls the black fabric over her husband's head. 'Your son became a daughter,' she tells him, 'so now you must change shape also' [...]. The President is passive, allows himself to be led. Black-veiled fugitives mingle with escaping servants in the darkened corridors of the house. How Raza fell; in chaos; in women's clothing; in black. (1983: 278)

So the escaping president who disguises as a woman with his closest friend and wife board a bus for the outskirts. The moron daughter who transforms as a beast has succeeded to oust a dictatorial regime and destiny conveys them to the home of Shakil's three mothers whose revenge is sweet. It is the spell of the three mothers that bring the fleeing president to seek refuge in their house in Nishapur where they butcher him. When Hyder and his wife are entangled in their trap, the three women kill them and vanish mysteriously from the face of the earth, never to be seen again, not in Nishapur, or anywhere on earth. They desert their home, but keep their

vows of retreat, crumbling, into powder under the rays of the sun, or growing wings and flying off into the impossible mountains of the west. The narrator says women are formidable as the three Shakil sisters never do less than they intend. The three Shakil sisters fantasised avenging the death of their son for over twenty years. These scenes reveal Rushdie's effective use of suspense and makes him a complicated story teller who allows his readers to determine whatever interpretation they feel convenient. Mystical experiences are often seen to follow events which can be described as prerequisites or methods. Such events are often dramatic or tragic, and they help to shape a mystic's life, thereby revealing that Rushdie's characters in *Shame* indulge in mystical practices as a consequence of some befallen tragedies, and also as a means to satisfy deep-seated aspiration.

As earlier mentioned, in *Shame* Arjumand is named the "virgin iron pants" because of her courage and physical strength. The government of General Hyder arrests her and Haroun after the death of Iskander Harappa because they are a potential threat to Hyder's leadership. That is why after the death of General Hyder, they are released and asked to form a new government of national unity. The task of rebuilding Pakistan is not an easy one as Hyder instituted policies and Islamic laws (Sharia) that divided and plunged citizens into hardship and misery. Relations between the different castes seemed very confrontational and Pakistani citizens saw no hope for the future. Harappa is a metaphor for Benazir Bhutto who had the difficult task of rebuilding the nation. Rushdie in an article "In God We Trust" in *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991* contends:

The Benazir Bhutto government has inherited a derelict state – a militarised, gangster-infested theocracy. Ms Bhutto must construct, at high speed and in unfavourable circumstances, nothing less than the institutions and processes of a modern nation-state. That is; history must be excavated from beneath the rubble of dogmatism and tyranny. Her best hope for success may lie in the realisation of all Pakistan's citizens, Sindhis as well as Pathans, Punjabis as well as Balochis ... And if enlightened self-interest does guide Pakistanis to back away from that precipice, then the first constructive step will have been taken towards the making of a state with real reason for being – let us say, a post-Islamic Pakistan. (1992: 387)

Over the next decade, she alternates power with Nawaz Sharif to prove that women's empowerment depends on the collective solidarity in the public sphere as well as individual assertiveness in the private. She makes sure women's organisations and social movements in general have important roles to play and are able to raise questions about forms of injustice that are taken for granted to such an extent as to appear natural. According to the narrator in *Shame*, during Arjumand Harappa's regime in Pakistan, the

health sector which has always been a problem to women and especially expecting mothers is improved upon. She encourages women's groups to sensitise more women in rural areas on health issues as she was doing before ascending to the helm of the nation. It can be concluded that in post-independence Pakistan, the reign of Benazir Bhutto is fictionalised in *Shame* as Arjumand Harappa. With the death of General Zia-ul-Haq (fictionalised as General Raza Hyder) in a plane crash in 1988, Benazir Bhutto, daughter of former Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto (also painted as Iskander Harappa) was elected as the first female Prime Minister of Pakistan. Pakistanis were tired of successive and brutal military regimes and her coming to power was received with euphoria because she was seen as a blessing to Pakistan. Rushdie's portrait of Arjumand in *Shame* continues in the footsteps of Benazir Bhutto as she brings several social changes.

Conclusion

This paper has argued that Rushdie puts women in control of their bodies and emotions, reproductive capacity and sexuality within a discourse of individual rights. Contemporary feminism, like its historical antecedents, tends to bridge the public-private divide in which issues related to sexuality and reproduction are viewed as private questions of individual choice. In *Shame*, Rushdie gives due attention to other forms of power from the perspective of class, race, girl child discrimination and marriage as they affect choices and reveal potential effectiveness in bringing about social change. For example, having children and a career are seen as basic feminist rights. Fundamental changes in the structures of working life, the sexual division of labour and provisions for domestic and child-care responsibilities would be necessary to enable all women to have children and do acceptable paid work.

In Pakistan, women can only achieve these rights if they are given a place in mainstream education because challenges to the feminist discourse of educated free choice have come from a range of alternative feminist perspectives. Consequently, Rushdie subverts the broader strategy of male control of women's bodies. Sexuality and reproduction are precisely those areas that Rushdie tends to place beyond politics in the realm of the private and the personal. In the Pakistan, we can argue that Rushdie introduces a secular feminism that seeks to eliminate discrimination against women and oppose the dowry system and subsequent "dowry deaths." That's why feminism becomes an issue discussed in postcolonial societies which helps as an intellectual form of commitment and a political movement that seeks to situate within particular histories and peoples the fight for justice for women, the end of sexism and an implementation of equal opportunities and rights for women at all levels of human interaction. The case of Pakistan is peculiar to this study in that there are different forms of patriarchies. In conclusion,

Rushdie's satire on patriarchy contributes to recognise difference as it struggles to redefine its meaning so as to attend to the macro politics of global economic and political systems and processes. In this respect, the future of feminism in Pakistan will depend on its ability to identify and develop new definitions of power and new patterns of relating across all forms of differences which our reading of Rushdie as a post-colonial feminist introduces. To this study therefore, feminism's crusade to liberate women requires bold persons, be them writers or not, but who are not afraid of the socio-cultural and political institutions that subjugate women to stand for the woman's cause in societies in this region.

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