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Allegorical Interpretation of Salman Rushdie's *Shame*

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Abstract

Allegory is a notable element in the literature. It is a story in verse or prose with double meaning: a surface meaning and hidden meaning. It is a story that can be read, understood and interpreted at two levels. In this research paper, I will try to find out allegorical elements in Salman Rushdie's *Shame*. Salman Rushdie is an Indian novelist. His is a big name in the field of postcolonialism. He is also known for his inventive ideas and technical mastery. The article will focus upon the characters of this novel and will try to locate the situations where Rushdie has used the allegorical elements.

Keywords- *Allegory, Satire, Symbolism, Nationalism, Personification, Narrative*

Introduction

Allegory is one of the striking elements in literature. The term allegory originated from the Greek term "allegoria" meaning "speaking otherwise". In its broadest sense, allegory can include all literature. An allegory is a narrative in verse or prose. Thus it is a story that can be read, understood and interpreted at the two levels. The first level is the storyline and the second level is moral, political, philosophical or religious. M.H Abrams defines it in *A Glossary of Literary Terms*:

An allegory is a narrative, whether in prose or verse, in which the agents and actions, and sometimes the setting as well, are contrived by the author to make coherent sense on the "literal," or primary, level of signification, and at the same time to signify a second, correlated order of signification. (5)

It is closely associated to the fable and parable. There are two kinds of allegory. The first one is historical or political allegory and the other is allegory of ideas. Political allegory is a form of allegory in which the characters and events represent historical events and characters. In allegory of ideas, abstract entities such as virtues, vices, state of mind, mode of life and type of characters are personified.

Allegory became immensely popular throughout the Western Middle Ages and into the age of Enlightenment in a more satirical form. It loses its power with the rise of realism and romanticism. But it became popular in the modern period as well as postmodern period. Allegory is a narrative strategy which may be used in any literary forms or genres. It developed in the form of satire and science fiction in the modern period. Peter Child describes in *The Rutledge Dictionary of Literary Terms*:

A Major symbolic mode which fell into some critical disrepute in the mid-twentieth century ('dissociated', 'naive', 'mechanical', 'abstract') though it flourished in satire, underground literature and science fiction (4).

Allegory has been an important tool of satire. Allegory and satire are intimately connected. Allegory both conceals and reveals. When a writer deals a political allegory he may protect himself by the element of disguise and at the same time make a satirical revelation through the implied comparison.

In modern literature the allegory is represented into a new form. It contained imagery, metaphor, and simile. Allegory is the translation of ideas into images. Symbols are substitute of images. Allegory becomes an important tool in the postcolonial literature. In postcolonial studies it is used in the form of satire. They re-evaluate history and culture by adapting allegory. Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Wole Soyinka, and Salman Rushdie are eminent postcolonial satirists.

Bill Ashcraft asserts in *Post-Colonial Studies*:

Allegory has long been a prominent feature of literary and mythic writing throughout the world, but it becomes particularly significant for post-colonial writers for the way in which it disrupts notions of orthodox history, classical realism and imperial representation in general. (7)

Fredric Jameson is an American Marxist critic and theorist. He has written an essay in 1986, named *Third World Literature in the Era of Multi-national Capitalism*. In that essay he has suggested that all 'Third World Literatures, indeed all Third World cultural constructions, are 'necessarily' national allegories. But Aijaz Ahmad is the other Marxist critic who does not accept it. He has criticized the homogenizing nature of this statement. Stephen Slemon is also opposite of Jameson's thought. Stephen suggests that, "it simply takes a Euro-centric literary notion of allegory and applies it to colonized societies (7)". He further suggests that "we might rather see allegory as a function of the 'conditions of postcoloniality'." (7)

Allegory has been very popular in Indian English literature. In the modern period Amitav Ghosh and Salman Rushdie have popularised allegory in Indian fiction. Neelam Srivastava discusses in *Postcolonial Indian Novel*:

Allegory acquires a new pre-eminence in postcolonial Indian fiction, emerging as a privileged technique for writers to construct a narrative configuration of events making up the nation's past, and frequently having a satirical function. (4)

Salman Rushdie is an important postcolonial writer who employs allegory in his works. He is a postcolonial satirist and an intellectual author. He is a writer who dares to depict the immoral and corrupt activities that happen in any country. He employs allegory to describe the political, historical, religious and ethical facts which happen in India and Pakistan. Rushdie uses allegory to prove his points. His political allegories mostly portray the violence, corruption, bloodshed and pitiable condition of countries. He deals almost all major political issues of the sub-continent in his novels. In *Midnight's Children* he deals with the politics of India and Pakistan.

Shame (1983) is another significant novel of Rushdie. It is a political novel. In it he deals with the politics of Pakistan. In this novel he employs allegory to mock the political, religious and ethical aspect of Pakistan. Politics has been an important theme of his novels. Rushdie employs allegory because he wants to keep him and his book safe. This is very much clear from his statement in this book, "I am only telling a sort of modern fairytale, so that's all right; nobody need get upset, or take anything I say too seriously. No drastic action need be taken, either." (70)

Salman Rushdie employs third-person narrator in the novel. The narrator adopts the form of allegory and fairytale to disclose the reality of Pakistan. Catherine Cundy argues "Rushdie's desires to tell a cautionary tale about the Pakistan elite in *Shame*- a tale that demonstrates the numerous ill bred by oppression and in which violence and corruption gain their just reward- and it is this internal compulsion that contributes to the impression of the text as coded, bearing a predetermined argument." (45)

The novel is set in Q. Q stands for the town 'Quetta' in Pakistan. The aim of Rushdie is not to portray a real situation of Pakistan, but he desires to discuss the oppressive and repressive social and political regimes in the country. That is why he uses a fictional country. Rushdie has remarked:

The country in this story is not Pakistan, or not quite. There are two countries, real and fictional, occupying the same space, or almost the same space. My story, my fictional country exists, like myself, at a slight angle to reality. I have found this of F-centring to be necessary; but its value is, of course, open to debate. My view is that I am not writing only about Pakistan. (29)

The political situation in Pakistan has been allegorized by the narrator. The narrator narrates the multiple generations of Pakistan's national leaders such as Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, Benazir Bhutto, Zia Ul Haq, Ayub Khan and Yahaya Khan. It discloses the corruptions of dictatorial Governments in Pakistan. The novel depicts the political events that happened in Pakistan since its emergence to the

end of Zia's regime-partition of country, East-West conflict through the trial and execution of Z.A. Bhutto in 1977, shooting of Sheikh M. Raheman and his family, six years of General Zia's rule and the like.

Shame is a story of two generations of three families- Shakils, Hyders and Harappas. Raza Hyder, Iskander Harappa, Omar Khayyam, Sufiya Zinobia are important characters in the novel. The novel moves around them. The main plot of the novel deals with the lives of Omar Khayyam and Sufiya Zinobia. The sub plot, however, describes the two significant persons of Pakistan, Raza Hyder and Iskander Harappa.

Iskander Harappa is a political leader of Popular Front Party and Prime Minister. He is husband of Rani, father of Arjumand, and devoted lover of Pinkie. He stands for 'Zulfikar Ali Bhutto'. Iskander Harappa kills his cousin, Little Mir. He also humiliates Raza Hyder. Raza Hyder has killed Iskander to avenge of personal humiliations. Isky is married to Rani, Raza's cousin, and they have a single daughter, Arjumand ("the virgin Ironpants"), who worships her father and becomes politically involved on his behalf.

Raza is married to Bilquis, and their two daughters are Sufiya Zinobia and Naveed ("Good News"). Naveed marries the police captain, Talvar Ulhaq, rejecting an arranged marriage with Isky's nephew, Haroun Harappa, on the eve of the wedding.

Haroun, has rejected Arjumand, Sufiya, is rejected by her parents and her husband. Salman Rushdie calls her "wrong miracle. She is also called "Shame" by her mother. Sufiyay marries a physician, Omar Khayyam. She becomes "a beast" within her. Eventually the beast takes over her body entirely, stalking the countryside as incarnate, avenging violence and bringing down Raza's regime. Rushdie portrays a clear political picture of Pakistan.

Rushdie is away from the country but he has still observed minutely its political situations. He is not satisfied with the military rule. "Corruption", "Oppression", "Violence" and "Military rules" have been leading to political and social repression in Pakistan since its independence in 1947. Pakistan is born after the Independence of India from the British Rule. After Independence, since 1947, many sins are committed by the persons in power in Pakistan. Rushdie speaks about it:

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. Contrariwise: dictators are always or at least in public, on other people's behalf puritanical. (173)

The narrator strongly protests against the political situation in the country. Simple common people are totally dominated by the powerful persons in the country. Rushdie satirizes Raza Hyder and Iskander Harappa. Raza Hyder is supported by Maulana Dawood, the religious fundamentalist,

who gives him all the advices that he needs. The politicians of the country are devoid of honesty, sincerity, faith and compassion. Rushdie satirizes the corruption in the society:

Shameful things are done: lies, loose living, disrespect for one's elders, failure to love one's nation flag, incorrect voting at elections, over-eating, extramarital sex, autobiographical novels, cheating at cards, maltreatment of women folk, examination failure, smuggling, throwing one's wicket away at a crucial point of a Test Match: and they are done shamelessly. (122)

Iskander Harappa is the ablest statesman but he has also his own flaws- weakness for women and power. His involvements are such as sensual activities to pastime, political tricks, tapping telephones of Russian and American Ambassadors, smuggling a 'series of beautiful young boys into British Ambassador's bed,' etc.(185) other than political life he was involved in the 'private lives' of people occupying high political-offices.

Rushdie has used shawl as an allegory to disclose the reality of Iskander Harappa. Rani Harappa, wife of Iskander, is an important character in the novel. She is rejected by her husband. Rani Harappa is not happy with Iskander because he has illegal relationship with Pinkie Aurangzeb. Rani told her daughter about the nature of her husband. She says: "he was international rough and bastard number one." (S, 108)

She has woven eighteen shawls. The narrator says that the shawls are, "An epitaph of wool" and "of memory". She has selected a title to the shawl and the title is: 'The Shamelessness of Iskander the Great.' She has also put her signature. The signature is her own name: Rani Humayun. In these shawls she has depicted evil and corrupt nature of Iskander Harappa. She is aware of Iskander Harappa's all activities. She says:

I knew him, he hide nothing from me, I saw the white girls in the village swell and pop, I knew about the small but regular donations he sent them, Harappa children must not starve, and after he fell they came to me. (192)

In the badminton shawl she discloses his illegal relationship with other women. She says:

... the great man lay unclothed, while all about him the pink-skinned concubines cavorted, their sporting outfits falling lightly from their bodies; ... the female figures seemed unable to bear the confinements of white shirts, brassieres, gym shoes, they flung them off, while Isky lounging on his left flank, propped up on an elbow, received their ministrations. (192)

Iskander Harappa was cruel person. He slaps politicians, religious, common person and his companion in front of his wife. This evil nature is depicted skilfully in the second shawl. She says: "Iskander a thousand times over raising his hand, lifting it against ministers, ambassadors,

argumentative holy men, mill-owners, servants, and friends.” (S, 192) The office of Iskander is symbol of power and glory. He deals everything by his secret agents from this office.

In the torture shawl, she depicts the violence of his jail. In this jail victims are treated as animal. Iskander was in the favour of police. He deserved that police should be powerful than the Army. He provides them better equipments. The white shawl depicts that, “it showed policemen, because he had given them new uniforms, white from head to toe, white helmets with silver spikes, white leather holsters, white jackboots up to the knee, ...white bottles with white labels, white powders sniffed from the white backs of gloves, he turned a blind eye, understand, he wanted the police strong and the Army weak. (193)

The narrator compares Iskander's mouth with Abyss. The shawls of international depict the shameful activities of Isky. Rushdie satirizes him for this activity: “Isky grovelling at primrose Chinese feet, Isky conspiring with Pahlevi, embracing Dada Amin; eschatological Iskander, riding an atomic bomb; Harappa and Shaggy Dog like cruel boys slitting the throat of an emerald chicken and plucking the feathers from its east wing, one by one.” (193) Isky wanted to win in the election at any rate. His aim is to punish his enemies.

The allegorical shawl reflects the evil activity of Isky. It depicts “... Iskander and the Death of Democracy, his hands around her throat, squeezing Democracy's gullet, while her eyes bulged, her face turned blue, her tongue protruded, she shat in her pajamas, her hands became hooks trying to grab the wind, and Iskander with his eyes shut squeezed and squeezed, while in the background the Generals watched, the murder reflected by a miracle of the needlewoman's skill in the mirrored glasses they all wore... (194) Iskander Harappa is arrested in Little Mir Harappa's murder case. He hanged in the middle of the night. He is punished for his human and illegal activities.

Raza Hyder is another significant political leader in the novel. He stands for “General Zia ul-Haq” .Z. A. Bhutto kills his political opponent Kasuri to achieve his political goal of rising to political power. Zia ul-Haq arrests Z.A. Bhutto in Kasuri case and takes over the regime of Pakistan. Later he executes Bhutto and become the President of Pakistan. Raza Hyder stands for “General Zia-ul-Haq”. Salman Rushdie regarded Zia ul-Haq as “one of the cruellest of modern tyrants”. He criticizes him in his book *Imaginary Homeland*:

... He was gigantic enough to be able to grab the whole of Pakistan by the throat. Now, after an eternity of repression (even the clocks ran slowly under the pressure of Zia's thumb), that sad, strangulated nation may, for a few moments, breathe a little more freely. (53)

The political ambition of Raza Hyder covers the major portion of the novel. After the declaration of the ‘Martial Law’ and imprisonment of the Chief Minister Gichki, Raza becomes the

‘chief administrator’ of the region. He is supported by Maulana Dawood who is a religious fanatic. Dawood gives him all the suggestion that he needs. Rushdie satirizes both of them. Rushdie says that the politician and religious people have misled and cheated the common and innocent people in the country in the name of God and religion. They make the life of common people hell.

After becoming the President of his country, he has “banned booze”, “old beer brewery”. He changed suddenly “television schedules” and televisions were suddenly broadcasting only “theological lectures”. He gives the instructions to people to offer prayer to God. If they forget to pray, they would send to jail.

He has followed the suggestions of Maulana Dawood. Hyder ordered to ban movie. He was against the freedom of women. Women protested against God for their rights. But Maulana Dawood, a religious fanatic, was not happy for their protest. He advises to Raza Hyder to stop this protest:

... Maulana Dawood screamed in his ear that he was a weakling; he should strip the whores naked and hang them from all available trees. But Raza was circumspect; he told the police to avoid hitting the ladies on the breasts when they broke up the demonstrations. (249)

Raza Hyder has arrested Noor Begum who was the leader of the organiser. He charged on her for exporting women and children. Raza Hyder is “merciless barbarian” who can follow any means to achieve his goal. He exploits religion to achieve name, fame and power. The narrator gives remarks on the importance given to the Army during the martial law Government of Raza Hyder:

To achieve stability-in-God's-name he placed Army officers on the board of every major industrial enterprise in the country; he put Generals everywhere, so that the Army got its fingers deeper into things than it had ever done before. (249)

Raza Hyder achieved his barbaric activities to control revolutionaries against him. English interviewer asked Raza Hayder, “...have you a point of view about the allegation that your institution of such Islamic punishments as flogging and cutting-off of hands might be seen... as...barbaric (245)? Raza, with a smile replied:

It is not barbaric’...a law in itself is neither barbaric nor not barbaric... these are not laws, my dear fellow, which we plucked out of the wind. These are the holy words of God, as revealed in sacred texts. Now if they are holy of words of God, they cannot also be barbaric. (245)

The dictators in Pakistan severely punished those people who raised their voice against their barbarism. They made people fool taking the name of God and religion. They further said punishments are the holy words of God. Thus, religious fundamentalism’ murdered the spirit of ‘democracy’ in Pakistan.

Arjumand Harappa is another rising political leader in the novel. She is the daughter of Iskander Harappa. She stands for Benazir Bhutto who was the daughter of Zia ul Haq. Rushdie regards Benazir Bhutto as “Daughter of the East.” (IH, 56) Rushdie calls her brave woman, “She is a brave woman, has had a hard life and come a long way as a politician from the experienced days when she would issue Zia with ultimatums she would not enforce.” (IH, 56)

Arjumand Harappa is a worshipper of her father Iskander. He provides better education and environment for her development. He always motivates her. He states her, “it’s a man’s world, Arjumand. Rise above your gender as you grow. This is no place to be a woman in. (S, 126)” She rejects her gender. Arjumand helps her father in politics. She accompanied him on his diplomatic rounds. She is well educated and professional. She is qualified in law. Rushdie has portrayed her positively. She becomes the good leader for people. She “became active in the green revolution, threw zamindars out of their palaces, opened dungeons, led raids on the homes of film stars and slit open their mattresses with a long two-edged knife, laughed as the black money poured out from between the pocketed springs.” (182)

She punished the enemies of the state. She scolds her father for his illegal relationship with women. The narrator remarks: “Polygamist, she punched his leg, ‘what an old fashion backward type at heart! It’s just marriage and concubines you want. Modern man, my foot. (183)”

Sufiya Zinobia is the daughter of Raza Hyder. She stands for the ‘rage’ of the people. It is Sufiya Zinobia who is responsible for the destruction of Hyder’s rule. She brings death and destruction all over by turning into a monster. Raza Hyder flees to Quetta in veil to save his life but he meets a terrible death there.

The other main characters in the novel symbolises the innocent people of Pakistan. Bilquis and Rani Harappa are the wives of tyrants. Both are rejected by their husbands. Haroun Harappa is the follower of Iskander. Rushdie depicts the real condition in the society of Pakistan. He criticizes on the corruption of the leaders who are responsible for this condition.

Rushdie does not hide anything. He discloses the corruption in the election: “confusion of people who have lived too long under military rule, who have forgotten the simplest things about democracy! Large numbers of men and women were swept away by the oceans of bewilderment, unable to locate ballot boxes or even ballots, and failed to cast their votes.” (178) Thus, Pakistan fails to achieve the aims of democracy. People are always in fear and confusion. They are unable to cast their vote in election. Rushdie has mocked at the Pakistani government for the rise of the population. Naveed Hyder, the daughter of General Raza Hyder, gave birth to 14 children in four years of her marriage. She is child producing machine for her husband.

In conclusion it can be said that Rushdie satirises the corrupt politics and religion in Pakistan by employing allegory. He warns the politicians and religious fanatics not to test the tolerance capacity of the people. It may be harmful for one and all. Rushdie satirises Raza Hyder, Iskander Harappa and Maulana Dawood who are exploiting the common people of Pakistan in the name of religion. They are corrupt. So that Rushdie is a fearless writer who discloses the reality of Pakistani political leaders.

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