

Constructing The Nation: An Outline of Salman Rushdie's Shame

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The concept of Nation is a booming question among postcolonial writers that includes the nation's central constructs and its artistic, philosophical, theoretical discourses. Postcolonial writings generally deal a nation's geographical, economic, political and cultural themes and initiate how a nation represents both in the case of its own people and another world. Postcolonial literature tries to reconstruct the nation without colonial framework.

Postcoloniality brought marginalization of certain groups/classes and dominated other ethnic groups, communities, races, and classes and it became disempowered or colonized in the independent nations. In this regard, Gyanendra Pandey argues: "... minorities are constituted along with the nation- a nation constructs and colonizes specific communities even as it claims political independence as a postcolony" (608). The literature of postcoloniality configures 'nationhood' mainly under three heads and they are constructing the nation, cultural identity and postcolonial subalternization. The concept nationhood depends on various kinds of themes like modes of construction, role locality, community and space, issues of cultural identity, the role of religion and spirituality, postcolonial elites, marginalization of certain communities and so on.

A nation consists of its territorial sovereignty, boundaries, maps and routes as the primal idea. So the idea of space is an integral aspect of a nation which connects the issues of community, cultural identity and nationhood. So a writer is inter-located within the space of the home in a postcolonial literature which deals about the concept and notions of home. According to the viewpoints of CLR James in his essay *The Artist in the 'Caribbean'*: "... the writers like Lamming and Naipaul are objectively circumscribed. They do not qualify as 'great' because they live abroad and write for a foreign audience." (188)

Pramod K Nayar in his book *Postcolonial Literature: An Introduction* argues that postcolonial writers locate the self firmly within communities and their spaces. Space for many of them is living space, brought alive through relationships, emotions, histories and memories (71). The Indian writers are strongly tied to emotional bonds and personal relationships which can be visible throughout their works.

The individual, family, community and nation are all imagined in terms of landscape and spaces. The postcolonial writings deal with the issues of political independence, democratic and corrupt political-social-economic and also the matters of personal relationships. The birth of a nation depends on its culture, myths, dreams and so on. Thus, Rushdie comments on the birth of a nation:

It is an extra festival on the calendar, a new myth to celebrate... a country which would never exist except by the efforts of a phenomenal collective will except in a dream we agreed to dream... India the new myth- a collective fiction in which anything was possible, a fable rivaled only by the two other mighty fantasies- money and God. (111)

Benedict Anderson has the concept of nation as an imagined community. Thus, he argues: "... the novel was a technical form for representing a kind of imagined community that becomes the nation" (77). Anderson depicts this notion and argues that nations are only an act of imagination because we connect to the people in other parts of the territory only in terms of imagining them. We can have the contact and think that they are fellow Indians that we get information from writings, film, talk and speeches. But at the same time there is not at all a geographical or cultural connection with them and thus it's only an imagination with the feeling that they are all Indians.

A novel or a poem provides an image of a nation by shaping the public imagination of belonging, territory and nationhood. CLR James opines on the role of a

writer as: "... the writer exercises an influence on the national consciousness which is incalculable. He is created by it but he himself illuminates and amplifies it, bringing the past up to date and charting the future" (185). As Rushdie insists Postcolonial writers are well aware of the construction of a nation. Salman Rushdie's novel *Shame* is a companion piece to *The Midnight's Children*. Rushdie remarks: "that everything in both books has had to do with politics and with the relationship of the individuals and history". Thus, the novel inter links in-between two poles of shame and shameless.

The story of *Shame* shackles the fate and fortunes of the families of Raza Hyder and Iskander Harappa. The character Omer Khayyam Shakil is born as the common son of Munnee, Bunny and Chunni who shared an automatic symptom of pregnancy. Later he gets out marrying Sufiya Zinobia, the daughter of Raza Hyder, and later Raza Hyder becomes the President of the country by dethroning Iskander Harappa who was later hanged. It is caused for the paralysis of democracy and consequently, here the story ends with the revenge of three mothers with the help of Omer Khayyam.

Basically the story moves on three levels- the political, the cultural and the social. On the political level the novel covers the contemporary political situation of Pakistan with the story of two powerful political leaders of that country Raza Hyder and Iskander Harappa. On the cultural level the novelist puts the glimpse upon the fate of a Karachi poet who was put in jail for his patriotic son: "... he had been up-side down by the ankles and beaten, as if he were a new born baby whose lungs had to be coerced into action so that he could squeal." (28)

As the cultural issue, the pathetic plight of the poet reflects the state of affairs prevailing in Pakistan. On the social level, the novel focuses on the mores of backward and superstitious Islamic society and the breeding violence. The narrator says:

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 character Omer Khayyam represents the comic vituperation of the murky political history of Pakistan

who is born of three reclusive spinsters. He often wants an escape from the oppressive protection of his three virgin mothers in Nishapur. His remunerations at the end of the novel throw light on his desperate situation: "I can confess to many things. Fleeing-from-roots, obesity, drunkenness, hypnosis. Getting girls in the family way, not sleeping with my wife, too-many-pine-kernels, peeping tommery as a boy... I confess to social climbing, to-only-doing-my-job, to being corner man in other people's wrestling matches. I confess to fearing sleep." (33)

The novel explores the recreation of contemporary Indian history, which consists of Pakistan history, including the life of Raza Hyder and Iskander Harappa. The novel treats the events and characters in artistic terms, of history and historical aspects and situations in Pakistan as:

history was old and rusted, it was a machine nobody had had plugged in for thousands of years, and here all of a sudden it was being asked for maximum output. Nobody was surprised there were accidents... no, it's more than that: there are things that cannot be permitted to be true. (82)

Omer Khayyam descended upon the hearts of history like a wolf on the fold. Raza Hyder thinks recalling of history is merely a rite of blood. Therefore, it is to be noted that some of the characters seem to negotiate history and at the same time the illusionary fictional reality is the common treatment in Rushdie's work. Obviously, the country Pakistan is mentioned in the novel *Shame* as the forces of repression operate. The novelist says:

I build imaginary countries and try to impose them on the ones that exist, I, too face the problem of history: what to retain, what to dump how to hold on what memory relinquishing, how to deal with change. And to come back to the roots idea, I should say that I haven't managed to shake myself free of it completely. (12)

The novel represents a shifting to the making of postcolonial Pakistan and the same is explicitly allegorical: "the country in this story is not Pakistan, not quite. There are two countries real or fictional, occupying the same space, or almost the same space" (24). The title of the novel itself means 'sharam' and Sufiya comes to embody shame and murderous consequences repressing it. Rushdie says, her union with her husband and representation of Pakistan are all the parts of an amalgam of shame and shamelessness.

Thus, the novel depicts ‘the physical and physic landscape of the East’ and thus Rushdie reminds us that the ghost that inspired his story ‘inhabits a country that is entirely unghostly: no spectral ‘Peccavistan,’ Proper London. Shortly we can say that the story is not about Pakistan but about three London incidents that provided inspiration for his literary excursions into ‘Shame’: the murder of a daughter by Asian father, shamed by her relationship with a white boy, the racists beating by white boys of a young Asian girl too ashamed to speak about and finally, a boy found in a parking lot, apparently burned to death by igniting his own accord. In this regard, Rushdie says: “... between shame and shamelessness lies the axis upon which we turn; meteorological conditions at both these poles are of the most extremes, ferocious types.” (124)

The conjunction of shame and violence among the neighbours upon one another are a recurrent theme in the literature of partition. Sufiya Zinobia “is willing the damage to herself ... a suicidal rebellion” (143). Rushdie has tried to criticize for the putative misogyny taking particular reference to the character Sufiya and she becomes the victim of the gendered nature of shame and violence of Partition where women were subjected to violence “in a way that they became the representative countries, indelibly imprinted by the Other” (291). We can say that Rushdie’s novel *Shame* deals with the central motif of shame that runs through the psyche of several characters as subaltern force and finally acts as a shuttle that pulls into shape several strands on the shameful story of ‘shame’.

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