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## VIOLENCE, REVENGE AND TRAGEDY IN SALMAN RUSHDIE'S 'SHAME'

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### ABSTRACT

Sir Ahmed Salman Rushdie, Indian – born British – American writer of novels in English is a world renowned personality was born in Bombay on 19<sup>th</sup> June 1947. He became a controversial writer as his novels contain religious and political themes. His father was a successful business man in India. Rushdie earned his education at rugby school and Cambridge University where he obtained M. A., degree in History in 1968. He began his career in an advertising agency as a copy writer. His first novel Grimus and second novel The Midnight's Children were published in 1975 and 1981 respectively. The novel 'Shame' was published in 1983, it portrays the social, political and historical background of Pakistan. This paper aims to bring out the theme of 'Revenge and Tragedy' found in the novel based on the analysis of the content and characters.

Key Words: Post-colonialism, Shame, Violence, Tragedy, Revenge.

### INTRODUCTION

The novel written on the style of magical realism is based on fictional and mythological movement associated with the style of writing which blends magical or panoramic events into realistic mode of writing and presentation. Post-colonialism refers the period after the evacuation of the British from the colonies it had established around the world. Post-colonialism is a wide term used by literary personalities to denote and describe the contemporary project or assignment to reclaim and rethink the history of the people who had been subordinated and treated as secondary citizens in their mother country during the colonial supremacy. The novel consist multiple aspects like history, politics, and social background while Revenge and Tragedy are also occupying the major part and add effect to the current of the novel. The characters woven by Rushdie in the

novel symbolize, resemble and reflect the normal minded people living around and can be witnessed in the daily walks of life.

Janne Van Doorn, states in her research article published on the title 'Anger, Feeling of Revenge, and hate' that these are negative emotions expressed in embarrassing situations which alters the behavior and approaches towards the people around that creates disadvantages. Revenge is a strong passion performed by a person as an outlet of his negative emotions and to direct himself or herself into a balanced state. When group hatred is considered, it is the member of group who expresses it on opposite group on behalf of the group he or she belongs to, which will be the collective emotion of the group and will be advocated by all the members. Fischer, Halperin, Canetti, and Jasini (2018). The prime characters of the novel, Chhunnie, Munnie and Bunny called the unified sister, daughters of Mr. Old Shakil and mothers of Omar Khayyam, Sufiya Zenobia, the heroine and simultaneously anti-heroine, Raza Hyder, husband of Bilquis and Sufiya's father nourish and exhibit their hatred and subsequently tend to avenge their enemies are built with these negative emotions.

The three young daughters of Mr. Old Shakil, develop hatred against their father as he holds them in house imprisonment under the care of a Parsee Ayah and with strict implementation of Islamic rules in Nishapur of the city Quetta of Pakistan, known by the symbolic name 'Q'. The sisters live an isolated life completely alienated from the outside world and grow negative emotions against their father who completely hates his daughters and calls them 'Whores', "Whores, the old man cursed them, 'don't count on it.' (Salman Rushdie, Shame. P-14) and the city 'Q', is addressed by him 'hell hole'. The sisters discuss strange things in their isolation such as the 'Nude body of men' and at times they expose their naked body to one another, burn their menstrual blood and vow to remain together on all occasions throughout their life. In retaliation, the hatred against the old man is cunningly watered and nourished in them; they eagerly expect the demise of their father at the earliest and pronounce magical spells of incantation.

Mahmoud, Bilquis' father and owner of the cinema is very obstinate and refuses to stop showing the film which contains romantic and sacrilegious contents in spite the strong and continued protest and riot from the religious supporters. The agitation goes out of control and as it culminates into violence, the cinema is planted a bomb by an anonymous person which kills innumerable persons including Mahmoud. The stubborn nature of Mahmoud pays the price in the form of Bombing and loss of invaluable lives. Bilquis suffers out of mental agony and trauma as the incident made profound impact in the emotional stability of Bilquis. The unheeding nature of Mahmoud to the repeated warning and riot initiated by the violent mob leads to bombing and is avenged ending his life a tragedy.

Raza Hyder and Bilquis couple is extremely happy on the news that she has conceived a baby and anticipates the birth of a baby boy. Raza Hyder receives the news that Bilquis has delivered a daughter and explodes his emotions of frustration and screams severely at the doctor. Sufiya is described as a wrong miracle also watches the strange reactions and unhappiness in her parents over the gender of their child born. "The

heroine of our story, the wrong miracle, Sufiya Zenobia, was as small a baby as anyone had ever seen.”(Salman Rushdie, Shame. p-89). Bilquis speaks awkwardly that she suffered so much to deliver this mean birth which is meaningless. “Is that all, my God? So much huffery and puffery to push out only this mouse?”(Salman Rushdie, Shame. p-89). This strange feeling and discrimination shown towards her by them forces her to feel ashamed and makes profound and irreparable impact.

Much to Raza Hyder’s shock and to shatter his melancholic mind and broken heart, the message that Sufiya has fallen in brain fever is conveyed to him. Sufiya recovers from brain fever but informed by the doctors that she would remain in childlike mental condition for the rest of her life. Raza and Bilquis couple instead of showing love and compassion towards her, nickname her ‘Shame’ as she is with illness, while her younger sister Naveed is nicknamed ‘Good News’ as she is physically and mentally strong so as to mention Sufiya indirectly that she is disabled. In spite of the deliberate discrimination and hatred shown by her parents, Rushdie has portrayed Sufiya as most kind and emotionally attached towards her parents and considers her parents’ shame as her shame. The difference shown by the people and her parents between the two daughters Sufiya and Naveed strains and affects their smooth relationship.

Gaze harassment or staring harassment is a kind of violent attack on the mental and emotional strength of a person which collapses the grit, confidence that helps him or her to be emotionally stabilized makes feel discomfort. People who belong to higher community or who consider themselves greater than others have the strange and awkward habit of looking down at others vertically. Sufiya Zenobia blushed at times she felt that strange look was thrown at her which aroused her hidden furious emotion of shame and it happened when Duniyad Begum stared at her. Rushdie mentions, “That moron, Bilquis shouted beneath the amused gaze of Duniyad Begum and the rest, ‘just don’t even look at her now! What is this? Anyone puts eyes on her or tells her two words and she goes red, red like chilli! I swear.” (Salman Rushdie, Shame, p - 121).

Naveed is betrothed to Haroun Harappa but refuses to marry him because of her love on Talvar Ulhaq. Raza and Bilquis are ashamed through the behavior of Naveed because her refusal to accept Haroun as her husband as decided by her parents. The profound shame of Sufiya’s parents requires an outlet and it is expressed by Sufiya. “Blushing is slow burning. But it is also another thing: it is a psychosomatic event. I quote: A sudden shut down of the arterio-venous anastomoses of the face floods the capillaries with the blood that produces the characteristically heightened colour. People who do not believe in psychosomatic events and do not believe that the mind can influence the body by direct nervous pathways should reflect upon blushing, which in people of heightened sensibility can be brought on even by the collection of an embarrassment of which they have been the subject as clear as an example of mind over matter as one could wish for.” (Salman Rushdie, Shame, p - 123).

The wrath born out of shame accumulated in Sufiya makes her blush and the beast that has been growing fertile appears at the wedding ceremony of Talvar Ulhaq and Naveed. The somnolent demon of shame that had occupied Sufiya Zenobia emerged on the day she butchered the turkeys, made a visit once more on the wedding day. An ardent flame that blushed under her skin spread all over her body and she grabbed Talvar's head and twisted, he screamed at high pitch because she had almost detached his head from the torso, but the people around saved him which left him in a condition devoid of permanent cure to turn his head properly. The large crowd that had gathered to bless the wedding couple witnessed a strange and horror spectacle, a revenge of a woman whose heart and soul had been badly damaged and injured. Rushdie asserts through Sufiya that the negative emotion pushed into a person through insult and humiliation based on the defect found in the physical feature or disability or illness haunts him or her and when retaliated it turns into violent beast to revenge and subsequently end in tragedy.

Rushdie has portrayed Iskander Harappa as a power seeking and ambitious man who craves for dictatorship and political power. Iskander chooses the indirect and dishonest path and stealthily ascends to power by employing his charismatic quality; he succeeds in gathering people of the country against the diminishing familiarity of Marshal A. As all politicians do, he criticizes the wealthy land lords, aristocratic people and supports the poor and middle class, he also gives up his favourite entertainments like animal fights, his dance to disco songs as he realized they are the image spoiling aspects, above all he starts distancing himself from Omar who does not have reputation in the country due to his mothers and his birth. As part of his plan, he strives too hard to improve his image, to create an impression as an honorable man and to earn the sympathy of the citizens. He resembles and stands as an exemplification of usurpers who intrigue to gain power and overthrow the regime. Futility, cruelty and selfishness are his natural characteristics that he had hidden deliberately behind his charismatic exposure were brought to limelight.

Iskander assumes power through successfully victory in elections as the head of Peccavistan, the imaginary name of Quetta, Pakistan but known as 'Q' in the novel. Iskander appoints Raza Hyder, who is his right hand as the military officer and advisor. As the best time of Iskander alters its course, he loses his political supremacy, favour of people, power and Raza Hyder consolidates his influence and power against Iskander Harappa and seizes the government. Subsequently, Iskander is punished with imprisonment and sentenced to death based on the verdict of the court for his conspiracy against the government and usurping power through unjust and immoral means which ends his life tragically. It becomes vital and worth mentioning that the rivalry between these two great men of the novel is multiplied and enmity becomes intense as they compete for Pinkie Aurangazeb.

Babar, younger brother of Omar becomes a rebel as he is saturated over the political status of the country. He violently opposes Raza Hyder and involves himself in revolutionary activities. As one of the efforts of his mission opposing the existing state of affairs of the government, he gathers a military force and travels to a mountain to fight against the military regiment under Raza Hyder's leadership but ultimately dies being shot by Raza Hyder and ends his life in tragedy.

Naveed, sister of Sufiya's life also becomes a tragedy. After her marriage with Talvar, she is destined to lead a life to deliver – a – baby – a – year. In all, she gave birth to twenty seven children. The non-stop child birth completely destroys her health and her beauty due to that she is found emotionally disabled and her life ends tragically as she commits suicide.

As a result of the violent outburst of Sufiya in the wedding of Talvar and Naveed, Omar himself becomes her doctor and continuously applies sedation to her. Omar turns his life into new altered path giving up debaucheries and succeeds in marrying Sufiya. As Sufiya continues to blush and remain in childlike mental state even after marriage, Omar keeps her in sedated condition and avoids sexual intercourse with her. Instead, he develops illicit relationship with Shahbanou, Sufiya's nursemaid. Sufiya's becomes suspicious as Omar avoids intimacy with her, not sleeping with her and refraining from her, further, the strange sound from Shahbanou's room confirms that they involve in sexual intercourse.

Sufiya's realization over the immoral relationship between Omar and Shahbanou, her inability in fulfilling her duty as a wife deeply impacts her mind and she becomes insomniac. The terrible passion constructed around shame and the beast that has been growing in her emerges violently as she blushes, she being infuriated like a wild beast hypnotizes many men and brutally murders them after having sex. Sufiya leaves the house and frightens people who encounter her in many villages on the way of her journey towards the capital city. On hearing the news about Sufiya's arrival of furious Sufiya, Raza Hyder, Omar and Bilquis disguise and flee to Nishapur in search of a shelter and protection. It is Sufiya's turn to retaliate for all the injustice done by her parents by discriminating and nicknaming her and Omar who cheated her by involving in immoral relationship with her nursemaid and his continuous application of sedation to keep her passive.

The culprits reach Nishapur and are welcomed by the three sisters. Omar's mothers express their dissatisfaction and wrath to him for his friendship with the murderers of his brother Babar and marrying their daughter. The aversion and vengeance nourished by the three sisters on Raza Hyder and Bilquis is accomplished as they murder Bilquis in the chamber where was staying and Raza is stabbed to death in the Dumbwaiter which they had specially designed as an arrangement to stay away from the outside world.

“They were his last words. ‘We asked for these arrangements,’ Munnee Shakil said as the three sisters each placed a hand upon one of the levers, ‘thinking self-defence is no offence. But also, you must agree, revenge is sweet.’ The image of Sindbad Mengal flashed into Raza’s mind as the three sisters pulled down the lever, acting in perfect unison, so that it was impossible to say who pulled first or hardest, and the ancient spring-releases of Yakoob Balloch worked like a treat, the secret panels sprang back and the eighteen-inch stiletto blades of death drove into Raza’s body, cutting him to pieces, their reddened points emerging, among other places, through eyeballs, adam’s apple, navel, groin and mouth. His tongue, severed cleanly by a laterally spearing knife, fell out on his lap. He made strange choking noises; shivered; froze.” (Salman Rushdie, *Shame*, p - 282).

Omar Khayyam is put in a terrible situation to confess his sins to the interrogator Sufiya Zenobia. He confesses his sins in writing in his own words. Omar confesses his sins to Sufiya who interrogates him and subsequently punishes him with death by snatching his head away from his body.

“I can confess to many things. Fleeting – from – roots, obesity, drunkenness, hypnosis. Getting girls in the family way, not sleeping with my wife, too-many-pine-kernels, peeping-tom merry as a boy. Sexual obsession with under-age brain-damaged female, resultant failure to avenge my brother’s death. I didn’t know him. It is difficult commit such acts on behalf of strangers. I confess to making strangers of my kin. (Salman Rushdie, *Shame*, p - 283).

Thus, the three sisters and Sufiya revenge their enemies and end their life in tragic note.”

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