

The Use of Structural Devices in Rushdie's *Shame*

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ABSTRACT

The novel *Shame* discusses various kinds of history, the main being political one of Pakistan from 1947 to 1983. But it is not a record of history per se but it fictionalizes history. For this purpose, the writer uses different structural devices such as fictionalization of history, fantasy, magic realism, irony, mock-heroic style etc. The paper gives ample examples of these devices in a succinct way.

KEYWORDS

Fictionalization of History; Fantasy; Magic Realism; Irony; Mock-Heroic.

Introduction

Rushdie's third novel *Shame* (1983), in a way, is a companion volume to *Midnight's Children*. Rushdie states (Gordan, 1984:57), "that everything in both books has had to do with the relationship of the individuals with history." Rushdie, who has dazzled the world with his extraordinary vision in *Midnight's Children* now surpasses even that triumph in *Shame* (Rushdie: 1983 blurb of the novel) while his *Midnight's Children* is "a stupendous evocation of the evolution of India since independence, *Shame* is what happened to the other half of the subcontinent after 1947." (Sunil Sethi, 1983: 122). The novelist "expatiates upon the sins of Pakistan on the basis of his spiritual bond with that country." (Sushila Singh, 1987: 14). The novel rests on the two poles of shame and shamelessness. The title of the novel with its connotation of the existential angst called shame is reminiscent of Kafka's *The Trial* a work cited within the text. These references to various literary sources are intertwined

into the central idea of shame, the emotion that begins in a sense of guilt and leads to violation of other people, violence to neighbours and eventually to self-destruction and to mere shame. (Taneja, 1992:100)

In this novel, Rushdie discusses different kinds of history such as political, cultural, social, legal, religious, diplomatic, sports, geographical, judicial and economic history. In this paper, I shall discuss the strategies used by Rushdie to present these different histories. Chief among these strategies are magic realism, satire, fable, legend, irony, allegory, symbolism, mythology, metaphors, parallelism and contrast, fantasy, and inversion.

Structural Devices

Rushdie presents historically verifiable episodes and thinly veiled historical personages in *Shame*. The structural devices used are Fictionalization of History, Satire, Fantasy, Mock Heroic Narration, Allegory, Symbolism, Flash-back Technique, and Irony etc.

Fictionalization of History

The uniqueness of Rushdie's treatment of history lies in his creation of fictional reality. For example, the locale of *Shame* is not Pakistan, or not quite.

There are two countries, real and fictional... My story, my fictional country exists, like myself, at a slight angle to reality. I have found this off-centering to be necessary; but its value is, of course, open to debate. My view is that I am not writing only about Pakistan." (S: 29).

The reader knows that on the surface level the country is Pakistan, but at the deeper level, it may be any country where repressive forces are operational.

Another example of an intentionally unsuccessful fictionalization of history is the claim of Awami League to form the Government at the centre in the West Wing because Bhutto's People's Party though won the elections in the West Wing by a thumping majority failed to get even one seat in the East Wing.

The reason why the writer does not succeed in obliterating certain political events from the minds of the reader is because the news is quite sensational. Further, the writer cannot fictionalize history simply by changing the names of personages involved in the events. For example, Rushdie has changed the name of Sheikh Mujibar Rahman, leader of the Awami League in East Pakistan to Sheikh Bismillah and his Awami League Party into People's League. But nobody can miss the equivalence between the personage of the history and the character in the novel. Similarly, every reader knows that the writer is referring to Z.A. Bhutto's People's Party while talking about Popular Front. Tikoo (Taneja, 1992:56-57) rightly observes:

Expressing the very sentiments that the common man in the West Wing expressed over the shift in the

power balance in the two wings of Pakistan, the narrator does not hesitate to attribute it to the "Perfidy of the East" who are angrily described as "savages, breeding endlessly, jungle-bunnies good for nothing but growing jute and rice, knifing each other, cultivating traitors in their paddies." (S: 179) Anyone aware of these historical realities of Pakistan which led to the army crackdown on the East Wing on 25 March 1971, the Indo-Pak War of December 1971 and the emergence of Bangladesh can testify to the unsuccessful fictionalization of the historical reality the writer thought of undertaking.

Satire

Shame is a great social and political satire. Rushdie lampoons, caricatures social and political conditions in Pakistan where democracy was thrown to winds time and again and dictatorship ruled the roost thereby imposing Islamic Fundamentalism and bigotry on the country.

Though the period covered in *Shame* is from 1947 to 1983 but in fact Pakistan belongs to the century so far as the ethos of the country is concerned. Hence the 20th century of the present-day world is really the medieval 14th century in Pakistan in terms of values and thought processes.

Shame is the story of Isky (Bhutto) and Raza (Zia), two presidents of Pakistan; the story of how Bhutto seeking to perpetuate his power by keeping the army in his pocket appointed "the most incompetent general" as commander in chief so that he need not fear insubordination or an army take over. But "the idea that a general is likely to remain in your pocket is a very stupid and dangerous idea."

Zia ousted Bhutto, had him hanged, and set up a regime of religious bigotry. In the larger context, the novel shows the corruption and violence of all dictatorships – Bhutto’s and Zia’s and their predecessors. The narrator commenting on the alleged Swiss accounts of former president Ayub Khan States:

...or about the issue of Time magazine (or was it Newsweek?) which never got into the country because it carried an article about President Ayub Khan’s alleged Swiss bank account... (S: 70)

Commenting on the satirical device employed in *Shame*, Parameswaran (2007:88-89) rightly observes:

Within the Isky-Raza story, Rushdie packs an arsenal of satire: indiscriminate and groundless police arrests (Talvar Ulhaq); the farce of elections where re-counts set right those results which prior coercion had failed to bring in line (S:178); Raza’s Gichki-Needle Valley ruthlessness (S:102-04); Haroun Harappa’s rich-boy tantrums (S:147-50); bribery as a part of Customs Officers’ life styles (S:51); Isky’s “diplomatic” persecution of Soviet and American ambassadors (S: 185) being some of the notable episodes.

The narrator satirizes the western diplomats and governments for supporting the military dictators in Pakistan. The narrator regards it a shameful act on the part of the western democratic governments to support dictatorship after the occupation of Afghanistan by Russian forces:

As to Afghanistan: after returning to London, I met a senior British diplomat at a dinner, a career specialist in ‘my’ part of the world. He said it was quite proper, ‘post-Afghanistan’, for the West to support the dictatorship of

President Zia-ul-Haq. I should not have lost my temper, but I did. It wasn’t any use. Then, as we left the table, his wife, a quiet civil lady who had been making pacifying noises, said to me, ‘Tell me; why don’t people in Pakistan get rid of Zia in, you know, the usual way.’

Shame, dear reader, is not the exclusive property of the East. (S: 29)

The narrator makes a good-humoured attack on rich people’s display of learning. Omar Khayyam’s Shakil’s grandfather bought a huge library from Colonel Arthur Greenfield but his love of learning was sham. This library remained unused completely. Omar Khayyam was the first person to use it.

Fantasy

The narrator states that “like all migrants he is a fantasist.” (S: 87) He builds imaginary countries and tries to impose them on the existing ones. He selects his material from history and then fantasizes it and by doing so converts Pakistan into something like Peccavistan. This is what he calls the palimpsest on the real existing country (S: 87).

Iskander Harappa has to face criticism from his own daughter, Arjumand, who is not herself a husband hunter but a watchful and steady observer of Isky’s ability to rise in political career. She dislikes her politician- father’s weakness for women and his being a “polygamist” interested merely in “marriages and concubines.” (S: 183). While comparing the character of Isky with that of another political figure in Pakistan, the narrator fantasizes and diverts attention by referring to Isky’s other activities that are found in the lives of great politicians. For example, he draws attention to Isky’s sensual dalliance, indulgence in political gimmicks, bugging

telephones of Russian and American Ambassadors, playing communist recordings of Chairman Mao to the American Ambassador and the Western recording "Hail to the Chief" to the Russian Ambassador, smuggling a series of beautiful young boys to the "British Ambassador's bed." (S: 185) Screaming at and expelling cultural attaches for conspiring with religious fanatics etc. These incidents speak volumes about the whims of dictators influencing the politics of the country and the world.

Certain parts of the novel come close to the exaggeration and escape from logic which characterizes the literature of non-sense. Certain fantastical events are presented below. Brigadier Raza Hyder was driven directly from the station to the inner sanctum of the President, Field Marshal Mohammed A., where according to some reports he was hugged affectionately and had his cheeks pulled in friendship. While others hinted that the blast of angry air issuing from the keyholes of that room was so intensely hot that Raza Hyder, standing to attention before his outraged president, must have been badly singed. (S: 119) This hot air highlights the temper of moody dictators in a fantastical way. Another example is that of the infant Sufiya's hot blushes, burning her own clothes and making the bath water so hot that it scalds the hands of her attendant:

The affliction was real enough. Miss Shahbanou, the Parsee ayah whom Bilquis had employed on her return to Karachi, complained on her first day that when she gave Sufiya Zinobia a bath the water had scalded her hands, having been brought close to boiling point by a red flame of embarrassment that spread from the roots of the damaged girl's hair to the tips of her curling toes. (S: 121)

"The hot blushes of Sufiya highlight the unfelt shame of the world" (S: 122) around her.

The description of Babar Shakil in the "Impossible Mountains" (S: 131-32) borders an exaggeration, nonsensical and fantastical. Babar joined the force of guerrillas and remained hidden in the Mountain.

Babar grew beard... wrote poetry, rested between raids on military outposts... thanks to the exigencies of that dislocated existence, was able to discuss in his note books the relative merits of copulation with sheep and with goats. There were guerrillas who preferred the passivity of sheep; for others the goats' greater friskiness was impossible to resist. Many of Babar's companions went so far as to fall in love with four-legged mistresses, and although they were all wanted men they would risk their lives in the bazaars of Q. in order to purchase gifts for their loved ones: combs for fleeces were acquired, also ribbons and bells for darling nannies who never deigned to express their gratitude. (S: 131)

Babar's expressed his greatest love for a popular singer whose voice he had only heard her sing on a crackling transistor radio and whom he had never seen.

Raza Hyder was responsible for shooting Babar dead.

Before his death the guerrillas noticed that their bearded comrade's skin had begun to give off a yellow light; the little buds of new wings were visible on his shoulders. (S: 132)

The emitting of yellow light from Babar's dead body and emergence of new wings on his shoulders borders on fantastic. The three Shakil sisters had a contraption called "The Dumb Waiter" installed in their big mansion. Through this device they used to get provisions transported without being seen. The image is gradually stretched so that each step links plausibly

with the preceding: one, from winches to inside switch to secret panels with eighteen-inch stiletto blades "Sharp Sharp." The Shakil sisters could have devised the dumb waiter as the equivalent of Repunzel's hair in the fairy tale.

Allegory

An allegory is a narrative in which the agents and action and sometimes the setting also, are presented by the writer 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 (Abrams, 2007: 5)

There are two types of allegory: In Political or Historical allegory characters and actions represent historical personages or events. In the allegory of ideas, the literal characters represent concepts and the plot allegorizes an abstract doctrine. In the second type of allegory of ideas, the central device is personification of abstract entities such as virtues, vices etc.

In *Shame* both types of allegory can be found. The political rulers of Pakistan are thinly veiled. Isky Harappa represents or allegorizes Zulfikar Bhutto; Raza Hyder represents Zia-ul-Haq; Arjumand represents Benazir Bhutto; Rani Humayun or Harappa represents Begum Nusrat Bhutto; Peccavistan represents Pakistan. All these characters allegorize real political personages of Pakistan. General Shaggy Dog for Yahya Khan, Sheikh Bismillah for Sheikh Mujibar Rahman, Q for Quetta, K for Karachi and Peccavistan represents Pakistan.

In the second type of allegory of ideas Sufiya allegorizes shame and Shakil represents shamelessness. Shakil's shamelessness develops peripherally but Sufiya sense of shame permeates all aspects of the novel. Sufiya is the fusion of three figures: a Pakistani girl killed by her

father for making love to a white boy in London; a boy in a newspaper report who apparently ignited himself without any external fuel or flame and an imaginary girl conjured up by Rushdie's musings on subway assaults, who, unlike other victims springs back on her attackers in a frenzy of strength and tears them limb from limb. Sufiya can be likened to the spirit of Pakistan blushing at the indignities heaped upon her by her own kith and kin who had expected her to be something other than she was and who turns out to be, because of their actions and attitudes, wild, the Beast within breaking out of her. Her lack of mental development and her emotional instability could well be Rushdie's statement on Pakistan.

Another allegory in *Shame* is the British-India-Pakistan connection. Omar's three mothers could represent India, West-Pakistan and East Pakistan or India, Pakistan and Britain. His father was English.

Rani Harappa embroidered eighteen shawls in which she recorded the shameful history of Pakistan. In one of allegorical shawl known as 'Iskander and the Death of Democracy' she depicts Iskanders hand around the throat of a young, small, frail and mentally challenged girl - Sufiya Zinobia. Here it seems the narrator equates Sufiya with the spirit of democracy the true power of the people and this democracy was killed by the military rulers of Pakistan including Zulfikar Bhutto.

As said earlier, Shame is personified in the novel by Omar Khayyam Shakil's bride Sufiya Zinobia. Sufiya Zinobia has been variously interpreted by the critics. We have already given two interpretations. She is shy girl who blushes continually and her hot blushes sometimes set her on fire. She is an allegorical figure who blushes for the whole nation. After the military debacle, she stalks the country by night like a vampire and wrings people's necks. One is inclined to read allegorical meaning into

this marriage and its consequence. Omar Khayyam, the illegitimate child of the romance between Pakistani mother and English military father, becomes an immunologist of some distinction, but can produce nothing for his country symbolized his wife.

Magic-realism

According to Abrams (2007:195-96), the term magic realism was originally applied to a school of painters in the 1920s is now used to describe the novels of Jorge Luis Borges in Argentina and those of Gabriel Garcia Marquez in Colombia, Isabel Allende in Chile, Gunter Grass in Germany, Italo Calvino in Italy and John Fowles in England.

These writers interweave, in an ever-shifting pattern, a sharply etched realism in representing ordinary events and descriptive details with fantastic and dreamlike elements together with materials drawn from myth and fairy tales.

Omar Khayyam Shakil was an illegitimate son of three Shakil sisters and a British military officer. All the three mothers suckled the baby.

They were all wearing the flushed expression of dilated joy that is the mother's true prerogative; and the baby was passed from breast to breast and none of the six was dry. (S: 21)

The juxtaposition of realism and magic in the suckling of Omar Khayyam by six breasts that never went dry is an instance of magic realism in the novel.

Sufiya Zinobia suffered from brain fever which made Sufiya receptive to all sorts of things that float around in the ether enabled her to absorb, like a sponge a host of unfelt feelings. As a result of this, Sufiya blushed uncontrollably and she blushed for the world. Miss Shah Banou, the ayah of Sufiya, whenever she gave her bath, the water had scalded her hands, "having been brought close to boiling point by a red

flame of embarrassment that spread from the roots of the damaged girl's hair to the tips of her curling toes." (S: 121) The input of fantasy in the description has created magic realism in this excerpt.

Raza Hyder had Isky hanged but after his death Isky's ghost kept haunting him. Raza organized a Pan-Islamic conference soon after the death of Isky. But Isky ghost did not leave Raza alone. Wherever he went or even during sleep, the voice of the ghost was heard in his left ear. He got some relief when he heard Maulana Dawood's louder voice in his right ear which made it possible for him to live with the ghost of Iskander Harappa.

Irony

According to Abrams (2007:135-36), irony is used in the sense of dissembling or hiding what is actually the case not to deceive but to create an artistic effect. Verbal irony is a statement in which the meaning that a speaker implies differs sharply from the meaning that is ostensibly expressed. In structural irony, a duplex meaning and evaluation of a work of art is sustained.

There are several examples of verbal, situational and structural irony in the novel. It is generally expected that in a new country, it is the original inhabitants who should write the history. But in case of Pakistan, a newly formed nation, it is the mohajirs who wrote the history and became leaders and ruled the roost, which is quite ironical:

It was the ones who really were new, the distant cousins and half-acquaintances and total strangers who poured in from the east to settle in the Land of God, who took over and got things going. (S: 81)

Another example of irony occurs in case of Rani Harappa. Rani Harappa, after her marriage is confined to Isky's mansion in Mohenjo. Isky sometimes lands there with his entourage of pimps and floozies. In this house, everything is governed by takallouf,

a form of tongue-tying formality, a social restraint so extreme as to make it impossible for the victim to express what he or she really means.

According to Bayapa Reddy (Taneja, 1992: 98), there are several layers of irony in the novel. The description of the 40th day celebration of the death of old Shakil, father of the three sisters, is ironically done. The dumb waiter, ironically, is not a man but an instrument of communication with the outside world at the time of the three sister's confinement. Another example of irony is that Moulana Dawood is decorated in his own town with the Necklace of Shoes. Ironically God does not find a place for himself in Pakistan which is thought to be a holy country of God. Then there are instances of verbal irony in the novel. Omar Khayyam is the name of a famous Persian poet and in naming the peripheral hero of the novel as Omar Khayyam Shakil, one expects that he must be a poet writing poetry but we know he writes no poetry. The very name of Pakistan suggests that it must be a holy place but in fact it turns out to be a centre of brutality and grotesqueness. Sufiya Zinobia is a beauty but her actions are that of a beast. To comprehend her is to acknowledge savagery as a constituent element in national make-up, recognition of which shatters a nation's concept of itself.

Mock-heroic

Mock-heroic lies in treating a trivial subject in heroic, elevated or epic style. The novel presents the political ambition of Raza Hyder, who takes over as Chief Administrator of the Needle Valley with the declaration of the Martial Law and the arrest of Gichki, the Chief Minister. While the situation in the fictional country is quite disturbing, the narrator shifts back in a mock-heroic manner to the state of affairs prevalent in Pakistan. The narrator quotes a joke in this instance. God once visited Pakistan and found a sorry state

there. He asked Ayub Khan about it who blamed the civilians. God removed the politicians. He came back to find the situation worse. This time he asked Yahya Khan for an explanation. Yahya blamed Ayub and his sons. So, God wiped out Ayub. Third time the situation was still worse. So, he agreed with Zulfikar to restore democracy. He annihilated Yahya. As the situation didn't improve, he gave supreme power to General Zia and asked him to answer one question. And as we all know no improvement took place in Pakistan. Each ruler proved worse than its previous ruler and so on and so forth. The situation remained as bad as ever.

The novel represents a critique of the political scenario in Pakistan. The army rulers had become autocratic and dictatorial. The political development instead of liberating the masses contained more and more threats and coercion and turned them more towards religion. The rulers had shown their erotic and political ambitions. On the very night, Iskander and Haroun are sentenced to death by hanging; Begum Talvar Ulhaq commits suicide in her parents' bedroom. It is not only highly ironical but also appropriately mock-heroic because Talvar was the main prosecution witness against Iskander. It is needed a fine instance of retributive justice put in operation in the novel. According to Tikko (Taneja, 1992:62), the writer uses language in such a way that it creates mock-heroic effect. He compresses words in one breath: "longago", "gasping panting", "wentwithout saying", "immunosuppressive", "whistlingshistling". This way he obliterates the barriers of language to the expression of thought. He also employs commonplace Urdu vocabulary in English-thought context. The switching occurs in words as "shaitan", "badmash", "Angrez" etc. The changeover helps him to achieve some of the comical and satirical effects by deflations and exaltations. Bilquis, who considers herself as a princess before her

marriage (and someone comparable, by implication to the brave soldier-queen Jhansi-ki-Rani) is deflated to Khansi-ki-Rani (Queen of Coughs) or Omar Khayyam Shakil (recalling the most poetical name of the Persian poet Omar Khayyam and his Rubaiyat) to a bastard and the lovers of a most mentally retarded sick patient who wins international acclaim. The comical effect is also produced by employing literary allusions which are pornographically parodied, for instance in the description of the “forty thieves” in Bariamma’s dormitory parodying the famous Arabian Night’s Tale of “Ali Baba and The Forty Thieves”. To achieve the comic-satirical effect the writer does not hesitate to hurl insults at anyone he chooses. In veiled references he calls Indian Hindus the “stone washers” (idol-worshippers) or “gaiwallahs” (cow-owners or cow-worshippers), and the fundamental mullah, Maulana Dawood, “the ancient divine around whose chicken-thin neck had once hung a necklace of shoes.” (S: 98)

Omar Khayyam Shakil, as he was growing in the house, felt like going to his grandfather’s study. He discovered that:

Mr Shakil’s air of great learning had been a sham, just like his supposed business acumen; because the books all bore the ex libris plates of

a certain Colonel Arthur Greenfield, and many of their pages were uncut. It was a gentleman’s library, bought in toto from the unknown Colonel, and it had remained unused throughout its residence in the Shakil household. (S: 33)

Conclusion

In this paper, an attempt was made to refer to different kinds of history, the main being political history. This novel is, in fact, on the dismal bleak and dictatorial political situation of Pakistan after partition. The very purpose of creating Pakistan was defeated by one dictatorial ruler after the other who imposed military rule and stifled democracy in collusion with the orthodox Islamic fundamentalism which resulted in checking the growth and development of Pakistan as a nation state. The novel presents not only political history of Pakistan but also social and cultural history. As literature is not a record of history but it fictionalizes history. Various structural devices such as fictionalization of history, satire, fantasy, and allegory, magic realism, irony, and mock-heroic style were also discussed which have made this work a great work of art.

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