

# Satire as a Predominant Device in Salman Rushdie's *Shame* and *The Moor's Last Sigh*

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## Abstract

This paper is an attempt to read Salman Rushdie's *Shame* (1983) and *The Moor's Last Sigh* (1995) as postcolonial satire. It explores how satire has enriched postcolonial fiction. Rushdie is acclaimed as the chief exponent of this genre after the publication of *Midnight's Children* (1981), a satiric political novel. Shashi Tharoor and some other novelists have followed him in their satiric works. *Shame* is an attack on contemporary political situation especially Martial Law in Pakistan. The religious orthodoxy has also been satirised in the narrative. It also shows the pathetic condition of Mohajirs (the Muslim who migrated from India). *The Moor's Last Sigh* is written against the background of Bombay. It is a satire on religious occasions particularly Ganesh Chaturthi, social hypocrisy, religious hypocrisy, corrupt clergy of Catholic Church Aurora. Rushdie has highlighted the problems of 'devadasis' in South Indian Temples and terrorism. The political leaders such as Bal Thakeray have also been satirised for their political activities.

**Key words:** Postcolonial fiction, political satire, religious satire, political novel

Satire is form of literature that is an attack on the vices and follies of an individual or society with an aim to reform. The satirist uses techniques such as humour, wit irony and ridicule etc. for this purpose. In Preface to *Satire and the Postcolonial Novel*, John Clement Ball describes satire as "a prevalent but largely untheorized mode of representation in postcolonial fiction" and postcolonialism as "a discourse of opposition to and liberation from coercive European political structures, epistemologies, and ideologies" (3). Geetha Ganapathy quotes, "The term appeared first its composite form in the *Oxford English Dictionary* of 1959 and without hyphen in the *American Heritage Dictionary* of 1959" (3). Postcolonial refers to an era when colonies attained freedom from European colonizers. Postcolonial novel is engaged with issues such as nationalism, resistance, Diaspora and identity crisis. It also depicts the immigrants' problematic situation that was the result of the colonial politics. It is written as a response to the legacy of colonial politics and literature. Franz Fanon describes postcolonial novel as "a reply on a minor scale to the dominating power, the literature produced by natives becomes differentiated and makes itself into a wall to particularism" (237).

Salman Rushdie satirizes the contemporary corrupt politicians in his political novels as well as historical novels. He writes generally on the socio-political issues of Indian sub-continent. *Midnight's Children* (1980), *Shame* (1983) and *The Moor's Last Sigh* (1995) deal with political affairs and historical events. *Midnight's Children* presents various Indian political and historical events such as struggle for independence, the partition of India, Bangladesh war, political scenario of post-independent India, etc. The theme of the novel is based on the Bangladesh liberation movement and Emergency in India. Rushdie satirizes the politics of regionalism in India, censorship of press and people's fear of speaking out about the Emergency. After independence, states were divided by the Government of India on the basis of languages instead of on the basis of natural boundaries

drawn by the rivers and mountains. Rushdie laments on the issue in the narrative, “But the boundaries of these states were not formed by the rivers or mountains, or any natural features of terrain, they were instead walls of words. Language divided us; Kerala was for speakers of Malayalam, the only plindromically named tongue on the earth, in Karnataka you were supposed to speak Kanarese” (*Midnight's Children*, 189). John Clement Ball writes, “*Midnight Children*, for instance, has the sort of fantastic, free-ranging plot and mixed style identified with Menippean Satire”.

*Shame* (1983) is structured into five parts and twelve chapters. It is dedicated to Samreen. It is a political satire on the postcolonial political situations of Indian sub-continent with special emphasis on Pakistan. It begins with the birth of its central character Omar Khayyam Shakil. Raza Hyder and Iskander Harappa are the two major characters of the novel. Raza Hyder and Iskander Harappa represent General Zia and Zulfikar Ali Bhutto (the former Prime Minister of Pakistan) respectively.

It reflects the pathetic socio-economic condition of Mohajirs (immigrant Muslims from India). They struggle hard to for their political rights in the country. “When you leave this house your shame leaves with you, and our dear Duniya, whom you attacked for speaking the truth, will steep more easily. Come on, Mohajir! Immigrants! Pack up double-quick and be off to what gutter to choose” (*Shame*, 85).

In the sixth chapter, brutal mentality of Pakistani Muslims has been shown. The gas fields were discovered in the Needle valley in Q district. The team of engineers, surveyors and gas scientists engaged in the planning of constructing the butane mines visited there and were attacked by the local tribals “who raped each member of the team eighteen point six six times on the average (of which thirteen point nine seven assault were from the rear and only four point six nine in the mouth) before slitting one hundred per cent of the expert gullets, the State Chief Minister Aladdin Gichki requested military assistance” (*Shame*, 91). The chapter further shows the murder of the manager of the cinema, “the knife-sliced garment still contained the appropriate pieces of the cinema manager's body. The genitals had been severed and inserted into rectum. The head never found, nor was the murderer brought to justice” (*Shame*, 103).

Rushdie satirizes the political situations mostly the martial law in Pakistan. He shows how the big political leaders like Chief Minister are arrested when the Martial Law was imposed in Pakistan. Rushdie says: Martial law has been declared. Raza has arrested Chief Minister Gichki and been appointed administrator of the region. He has moved into the ministerial residence with his wife and children abandoning to its memories that cracking hotel in which the last trained monkey has taken to wandering listlessly amidst the dying palms of the dining hall while ageing musicians scratch at their rioting fiddles for an audience of empty tables. (*Shame*, 111- 112)

The novelist comments on the increase of criminality in the capital, Karachi. The Pakistani Army was in power but the smugglers were active and they use scooter-rickshaws to go to coast at night. He says:

The streets were full of the darkened faces of young men who had been drawn to the painted body by her overblown charms, only to find that her price was too high for them to pay; something puritan and violent sat on their foreheads and it was frightened to walk amongst their disillusiones in the heat. The night held smugglers who rode in scooter-rickshaws to the coast; and the Army, of course, was in power. (*Shame*, 118)

Religious orthodoxy has been satirized by Rushdie in the novel. A Pakistani Muslim lived in London and was the father of a girl. He kills his own daughter because she fell in love with a white boy. He says:

Not so long ago, in the East End of London, a Pakistani father murdered his only child, a daughter, because by making love to a white boy 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. (*Shame*, 115)

The novelist represents Pakistan as a repressive society where women are fully deprived of their basic rights. Women in the country have to live with the intolerable burden of honour, propriety and customs. Iskander Harappa tells his daughter, “As a nation, we have a positive genius for self destruction, we nibble away at ourselves, we eat our children, we pull down anyone who climbs up” (*Shame*, 184).

Rushdie criticizes the age difference in marriages and physical abuse of women in Pakistan. A young woman is married to an aged man. Shame (Sufiya Zinobia) was married to Omar Khayyam Shakil who is thirty-one year older than her and yet “she never complained that her parents had chosen for her a man fully thirty-one years her senior, that is to say, older than her own father” (*Shame*, 197).

The second chapter of the novel narrates how the Russian troops entered into Afghanistan and how the arrest and execution of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, on the charge of ordering a political assassination, took place. He was taken from Bagheeragali Rest House to the Kot Lakhpat Jail in Lahore. After the six months trial, he was sentenced to hang till death. Rushdie narrates:

He was kept there in solitary confinement. He suffered from malaria and from infection of the colon. There were bouts of severe influenza. His teeth began to fall out; and he lost weight in other ways as well . .... the trial took place in the High Court at Lahore, before five Punjabi judges.... At the end of six months trial, Iskandar Harappa and also the absent Mr. Haroun Harappa were sentenced to hang by the neck till dead. Iskandar was immediately moved into the death-cell at Kot Lakhpat Jail. He was given just seven days, instead of the usual thirty, to lodge the appeal. (*Shame*, 227-28)

In The Supreme Court, Harappa's lawyers requested for pardon for him but the request was denied and finally, “a hanging in the courtyard of the District Jail at dead of night” (*Shame*, 238) took place.

Rushdie shows as to how a divorced Muslim lady Shahbano was deprived of her right of maintenance by her husband. In Shahbano Case, Indian Supreme Court passed judgment in her favour and as a result Indian Muslims protested. Rushdie depicts this problem and says:

During the next four years, that is to say the period of the Presidency of Raza Hyder, Omar Khayyam Sakil grew old. Nobody noticed at first, because he had been grey for years, but once he had turned sixty his feet, which had been obliged for most of their lives to bear the impossible burden of his obesity, staged a revolt because in the aftermath of the departure of Shahbanou the ayah, when he had been deprived of the mint teas and nocturnal nourishments of her loyally, he began to put on weight again. (*Shame*, 243).

*Shame* is not only an attack on Zia for his corrosion of the civil rights of women and for his politicized misuse of Islam but also at Bhutto who is responsible for compromising the democratic process to allow the military to regain power. Andrew Teverson describes *Shame* as “a double satire on a pair of ‘conjoined opposites’ – the playboy and the puritan, the socialist democrat and the autocratic dictator – who are seen as two sides of the same coin: a Jekyll and Hyde of authoritarian politics” (132) .

Rushdie reflects his socio-political awareness in *The Moor's Last Sigh* (1995). Divided into four parts and twenty chapters, the novel is dedicated to E.J.W. It is a religio-political satire. In "Salman Rushdie Surrenders", Hillel Halkin describes it as "a thematic sequel to *The Satanic Verses*". The novel begins with the tale of Moor (Moraes Zogoiby) is a spice trader. Rushdie shows social stratification in Indian society during the freedom struggle: the division of people on the basis of their economic status. Because of such differential treatment in Indian society, Epitania was taken aback when Mrs. Annie Beasant and Bal Gangadhar Tilak invite dock-labourers, tea pickers, coolies, workers and bourgeoisie in the same club to discuss demand for a separate Indian Parliament in order to determine bright future of the country. Rushdie elaborates the situation:

In 1916 Francisco da Gama joined the Home Rule campaign of Annie Beasant and Bal Gangadhar Tilak hitching his star to the demand for an independent Indian Parliament which would determine the country's future. When Mrs. Beasant asked him to found a Home Rule League in Cochin and he had the nerve to invite the dock-labourers, tea-pickers, bazar coolies and his own workers to join as well as the local bourgeoisie, Epifania was quite overcome. Masses and classes in the same club! Shame and scandal! Sense is gone from the man, she expostulated faintly, fanning herself, and then lapsed into sullen silence. (*The Moor's Last Sigh*, 19)

Rushdie exposes the hypocrisy and unusual happenings going on in Indian society. He highlights the religious hypocrisy and exploitation of common people in religious places and condemns the Catholic Aurora who "with lace-covered head, and smelling strongly of sex and pepper, awaited her lover by Vasco's tomb; Oliver D'Aeth, bursting with lusts and resentments, skulked in the shadows" (*The Moor's Last Sigh*, 96). The sex-starved young priest makes an effort to exploit the innocent girls. Driven half-mad by his sexual instinct, he tries to overpower the young and beautiful widow, Elphinstone. Many men had earlier knocked the young widow's door with lustful intentions but she had refused them gently. Rushdie describes:

And the young priest, unable to approach her, unable to leave her be, driven half-mad by her powerful odour, felt the widow Elphinstone recede to the back of his mind, even though, at only twenty-one, she was a handsome woman, by no means without admirers. *We may not have much but we are choosy*, she had told him. Many men knocked at a young widow's door, not all of them with gentlemanly intentions. *Many call but few are answered, she said. A line must be drawn that is not easy to cross.* (*The Moor's Last Sigh*, 96-97)

The novelist reacts against the sexual disharmony and age differences in the Indian society caused by a couple of unequal ages. Abraham Zogoiby who is about thirty six years old, is seen undergoing a sexual intercourse with a girl of fifteen years of age. Rushdie explains this unusual happening:

After the fifteen years young spice trade heiress entered the bedchamber of her lover the twenty one years older duty manager dressed in nothing but moonlight, with garlands of Jasmine and likely-of-the valley plaited (by Old Josy) in and out of the loose black hair which hung down behind her like a monarch's cloak, reaching almost to the cool stone floor over which her bare feet moved so lightly that for a moment the awestruck Abraham thought she was flying:

after their second spice fragrant love-making, in which the older man surrendered completely to the will of the younger woman, as though his ability to make choices had been exhausted by the consequences of the act of choosing her. (*The Moor's Last Sigh*, 99)

The novelist highlights the sufferings of 'devadasis' in South Indian Temples. He throws light on the pitiable condition of poor people. They donate their daughters to the temples because they are not able to afford nurturing them. The Karnataka Goddess, Kellamma, is not capable of protecting Her young poor devotees. He reflects:

I regret to say, especially from those shrines dedicated to the worship of certain Karnataka Goddess, Kellamma, who seemed incapable of protecting her poor young ‘disciples’... it is a matter of record that in our sorry age with its prejudice in favour of male children many poor families donated to their favoured cult-temple the daughter they could not afford to marry off or feed, in the hope that they might live in holiness as servants or, if they were fortunate, as dancers: vain hopes, alas, for in many cases the priests in charge of these temples were men in whom the highest standards of probity were mysteriously absent, a failing which laid them open to offers of cash on the nail for the young virgins and not quite-virgins and once-again-virgins in their charge. (*The Moor's Last Sigh*, 183)

Rushdie satirizes the communalization of religious occasions, particularly Ganesh Chaturthi and levels his attack on Shiv Sena leader Bal Thackeray for his regional and communal politics. He says, “By that time Ganesh Chaturthi had become the occasion for fist-clenched, saffron-head banded youth thugs to put on a show of Hindu-fundamentalist triumphalism, egged on by bellowing Mumbai's Axis' party politics and demagogues such as Raman Fielding, a.k.a. Mainduck (Frog) (*The Moor's Last Sigh*, 124)”. He calls him ‘Mainduck’ who takes unnecessary advantages of such occasion to serve his political ends. This lampooning caused serious controversy in Mumbai and the several copies of the novel were burnt by the Shiv Sainiks. He says:

His old nickname from the cartoonist days was never used in his presence, but throughout the city his famous frog-symbol vote for Mainduck-could be seen painted on walls and stuck on the sides of cars.... He held his court beneath a gulmohar tree in the garden of his two-storey villa in the Lalgum suburb of Bandra East, surrounded by aides and supplicants, besides a lily-padded pond, and amid literally dozens of statues of Mumbadevi.... And in his low cane chair with his great belly slung across his knees like a burglar's sack, with his frog's croak of voice bursting through his fal frog lips and his little dart of a tongue licking at the edges of his mouth, with his hooded froggy eyes gazing greedily down upon the little beedi-rolls of money with which his quaking petitioners sought to pacify him... he was indeed a Frog King, a Mainduck Raja whose commands could not be gainsaid. (*The Moor's Last Sigh*, 231-232).

Uma Saraswati is an immoral girl who is a sculptor by profession. She has no regard for the sexual social norms expected by the Indian society. She is a student at M.S. University in Baroda. Rushdie highlights her sexual abuse and the child abuse problem in Indian society. She belonged to a Gujrati Brahmin family. Her mother and father committed suicide leaving her alone. She was, thereafter, looked after by his father's colleague and the so-called 'Uncle' who has sexually exploited her from the age of twelve for his favour. She has been involved in love affairs with several faculty members and she wrote to their wives about love affairs that led to divorces and separation. Rushdie explains:

She came from a respectable-though not by any means wealthy Gujrati Brahmin family, but had been orphaned young. Her mother, a depressive had hanged herself when Uma was twelve and her school teacher father, driven mad by the tragedy, had set himself on fire. Uma had been rescued from penury by a kind 'Uncle' actually, not an uncle, but a teaching colleague of his father's-who paid for her education in return for sexual favours (so not ‘Kindly’, either). (*The Moor's Last Sigh*, 265)

The novel contains pungent satirical remarks on the Mumbai's famous political leader of Shiv Sena, Bal Thackeray. In chapter sixteen, there are bitter remarks on Bal Thackeray and his communal politics in Bombay. Rushdie shows how Bal Thackeray claims ‘Hindustan’ being a country for Hindus. Aijaz Ahmad writes, “The Shiv Sena... Its members have appeared ‘as anti-communist goon squads; as sons of the soil and self-styled representatives of the Maratha community in Maharashtra, saving the homeland from migrants from other parts of India’” (346). Amy L. Friedman notes, “A character briefly reappears from Rushdie’s *The Moor’s Last Sigh*

(1995), the former newspaper cartoonist turned dangerous Hindu-nationalist extremist, Raman Fielding” (129). Rushdie comments on his political activities and says:

He was against unions, in favour of breaking strikes, against 'working women', in favour of Sati against poverty and in favour of wealth. He was against 'immigrants' to the city by which he meant all non-Marathi speakers, including those who had been born there, and in favour of its 'natural residents', which include Marathi-medium types who had just stopped off the bus. He was against the corruption of the Congress (1) and for 'Direct action', by which he meant paramilitary activity in support of his political aims, and the institution of a bribery-system of his own. He derided the Marxist analysis of society as class struggle and lauded the Hindu preference for the eternal stability of caste. In the national flag he was in favour of the colour saffron and against the colour green. He spoke of a golden age before the invasions' when good Hindu men and women could roam free. (*The Moor's Last Sigh*, 298-299)

Rushdie throws light on the failure of family planning mission on the Muslim population. The Shiv Sena workers started saying that the Muslims are refusing 'Hum do Hamare do' (we two and our two) slogan as they want to increase their population. The novelist explains the situation, “MA workers went into the tenements and slums to tell Hindus that Muslims were refusing to co-operate, with the new policy. If we are two and we have two but they are two and they have twenty-one, then soon they will out number us and drive us into the sea” (*The Moor's Last Sigh*, 339).

The novel has been written against the background of Bombay. Rushdie criticizes terrorist attack and communal riots in Mumbai. The terrorists use three hundred kilograms of RDX explosives for bomb-blast. He also throws light on the communal tension between Hindus and Muslims during cricket matches played between India and Pakistan. He explains:

[N]othing so cold-blooded, so calculated, so cruel. Dhhaaiiyn! A busload of schoolkids. The Air-India building. Dhhaaiiyn! Trains, residences, chawls, docks, movie-studios, mills, restaurants, Dhhaaiiyn! Dhhaaiiyn! Dhhaaiiyn! Commodity exchanges, office buildings, hospitals, the busiest shopping streets in the heart of town. Bits of bodies were lying everywhere, human and animal blood, guts, and bones. Vultures so drank on flesh that they sat lod-sidely on rooftops, waiting for appetite to return. (*The Moor's Last Sigh*, 371-372)

To sum up it may be said that *Shame* is a satire on the postcolonial political situations of Pakistan especially on democracy and Martial Law. *The Moor's Last Sigh* gives an account of major political disturbances such as Communal riots, Bomb blasts, strikes of labourers in factories and social problems such as sexual exploitation of girls by the sex-starved priests in churches, communal colouring of 'Ganesh Puja' in Mumbai, the communal tension between Hindus and Muslims during cricket matches between India and Pakistan. It presents the real pictures of national movement led by the leaders like Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Annie Beasant.

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