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MERGING FACT AND FANTASY IN RUSHDIE'S SHAME

Abstract:

Magic Realism is a form of writing that incorporates magical and mystical elements as real in order to depict a wider form of reality. In present it is used by postcolonial writers to depict the historical past of the nation as well as to unburden the text from the clutches of scientific beliefs and rationality of the West. Salman Rushdie in his novel Shame has aroused an atmosphere of fantasy in a casual way making them appear as day to day affairs and not something extraordinary or supernatural. He has basically made use of hallucinatory methods. The pregnancy symptoms of three Shakil sisters is quite hilarious, though one sister gets pregnant but all the three bear the same symptoms—the swollen womb and vomiting at the same time is very hilarious. Rushdie's magic realism finds its extreme with Sufia Zinobia who can spark yellow lights from her eyes, can copulate with street urchins and can toss the heads of several turkeys at a same time. Exploration of fantasy by the postcolonial writers is an attempt to rescue the text from the scientific and rationalistic beliefs of the West and to bring out the mystical and the magical of which the East was generally esteemed off.

Key words: *magic realism, fantastical, supernaturalism, realistic, scientific*

Magic realism is a literary genre that integrates fantastical and supernaturalism as mundane and realistic. It is a technique used by postcolonial writers like Salman Rushdie, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Toni Morrison, Gunter Grass and many more to disrupt the rationalistic and scientific beliefs of the West with the mythical and magical beliefs of the East. It is a mode of writing that presents the unbelievable like the existence of ghosts, humans could fly on carpets or a huge giant could appear from a small lamp and so on. In a way the movement

also reminds us that life is not only rational and scientific rather mystical and unknown. The magic realist writer mixes fantasy and fiction to give a realistic flavor to the novel. Pramod K. Nayar speech marks Rushdie in this discipline:

What made me become a writer was the simple desire to tell stories...governed by the principle that stories didn't have to be true...Horses were expected to fly and so did carpets...I found that I was writing within a literature that for a long time had shaped an opposite view...a novel had to be mimetic, to imitate the world, the rules of naturalism and realism. (236)

He further comments:

Here Rushdie is referring to the mixture of reality and fantasy that his fiction embodies. And, as his statement above indicates, this choice of form is an anti-western move. Rushdie does not want to imitate any Western form, and turns to his 'own' traditions, from Arabian Nights and others...there cannot be 'normality', or a 'norm', in the magic realist novel. Thus the grotesques of Rushdie and the metamorphosed, monstrous bodies that seem to assimilate various animal, vegetable, and human features...are meant to resist any ideas of a standard human body. (237)

In *Shame* Rushdie has brought together the magic realism with the history of Pakistan to arouse an atmosphere that illustrates a wider form of truth. Rushdie basically uses the hallucinatory strategy of magic realism to imprison, allegorically the chaos of contemporary society, it resembles a dream or a nightmare. The novel *Shame* presents the supernatural happenings in an ordinary way making them emerge as regular affairs and not unnatural or extraordinary.

The novel portray the three Shakil sisters— Chhunni, Munnee and Bunny— and their life full of comic and magical elements. To illustrate, the manner in which these three sisters coped to imprison themselves inside the gigantic mansion with the dumb waiter sliding to the street with directions and bringing back the things desired suggest a flight of the imagination. Within this colossal house, with nobody departing out and no one coming in, the ladies managed to conceive twice. Although both times one of the sisters conceive, all three bear the same signs of pregnancy with the help of cushions and physical contrivances so much so that no one else got to know about the identity of the real mother:

Now the three of them began, simultaneously, to thicken at the waist and in the breast; when one was sick in the morning, the other two began to puke in such perfectly synchronized sympathy that it was impossible to tell which stomach had heaved first. Identically, their

wombs ballooned towards the pregnancy's full term. It is naturally possible that all this was achieved with the help of physical contrivances, cushions and padding and even faint-inducing vapours... when Hashmat Bibi heard a key turning in the door and came timidly into the room with food and drink and fresh sheets and sponges and soaps and towels, she found the three sisters sitting up together in the capacious bed...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. (20-21)

This is one of the most comical examples of Rushdie's flight of the imagination, which helps to reveal the strong relationship between the three sisters. Their first son Omar is also given extraordinary qualities as the child possess a strange pastime of mesmerizing the manservant and the maid servant of the domicile. Once he respite Hashmat Bibi into a state of trance so much so that she imagines herself "floating on a pink cloud. 'You are sinking deeper,' he intoned as she lay upon her mat, 'and deeper into the cloud. It is good to be in the cloud; you want to sink lower and lower.'" (34) Rushdie has derived such devices like the art of mesmerism, floating on a cloud and opening the entrance doors on the single command of voice from Asian legends like "Alf Laylah wa laylah, and the Travels of Ibn Battuta and the Qissa or tales of the legendary adventurer Hatim Tai." (33)

The wildest form of Rushdie's magic realism is portrayed in the novel's heroine, Sufia Zinobia. She embodies both the realistic and imaginative characteristics. She resembles her real-life model, Zian, the disabled child of Zia Ul Huq, but Rushdie's use of magic realism confers beastly qualities on Sufia. Sufia's eyes suggest these qualities: "Yellow fire behind her close eyelids, fire under her fingernails and beneath the roots of her hair" (243); and "...the coming and going of little pricks of yellow light...as if they were two beings occupying that air space, competing for it, two entities of identical shape but of tragically opposed nature." (235) Sufia is portrayed as completely demonic, and she does not spare anyone who assaults the dignity of her family. At the age of twelve, with the mind of a three year old, she kills two hundred and eighteen turkeys belonging to Pinky Aurangzeb, who had disturbed her (Sufia's) mother's peace of mind. Later, Sufia badly twists the neck of her would be brother in law Talwar Ulhaq and bites it so hard that she has a morsel of his skin and flesh between her teeth, only because the self- planned marriage of Good News and Talwar had brought shame to the family of Raza Hyder. In the third incident Sufia copulates with four street urchins and then kills them.

“The four bodies were all adolescent, male, pungent. The heads had been wrenched off their necks by the same colossal force; literally torn off from their shoulders...they were found in a rubbish dump near a slum. It seemed that the four of them had died more or less simultaneously. The heads were never found.”(216)

Fourthly and lastly Sufia uses her power on her husband Omar Khayam Shakil, who has kept her unconscious for years by injecting sedatives and given her wifely rights to the maidservant Shabanou. This makes Sufia violent and ferocious towards Omar, “The door blew open. And in the darkness, erect, watching the approaching glow, and then she was there, on all fours, naked, coated in mud and blood and shiny, with twigs sticking to her back and beetles in her hair...she rose up on her hind legs with her forepaws outstretched...the furnace burned...and as he stood before her, unable to move, her hands, her wife’s hands, reached out to him and closed.” (286)

It is the widespread Asian belief in supernatural that Rushdie has explored through his magic realist style. Through out the novel Omar tries to repress the demon in Sufia either by wrapping her in mattress or keeping her out cold. But it is lastly Sufia who triumphs, giving a shift to Omar by escaping through his clutches. Omar too felt that his learning was not enough to control the superhuman power in Sufia; “From the flickering points of light he began to learn that science was not enough, that even though he rejected possession-by devils as a way of denying human responsibility for human actions, even though God had never meant much to him, still his reason could not erase the evidence of those eyes, could not blind him to that unearthly glow, the smoldering fire of the Beast.” (235)

Thus we find that it is the illogical and mythical Sufia who wins over the rationalistic and scientific Omar. Through the conflict between Sufia and Omar, Rushdie wants to reflect the conflict between Oriental and Occidental culture, suggesting that it is not always the West that wins by education and rationality but many a times the imaginative and the supernatural East takes the lead if over-suppressed.

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