

**THE NEW WRETCHED OF THE EARTH: DEFORMED PROTAGONISTS IN
*MIDNIGHT'S CHILDREN, SHAME AND THE MOOR'S LAST SIGH***

Marcel Ebliyilu Nyanchi,
Ph.D. Department of English,
University of Yaounde I, Cameroon
B.P 755 Yaounde, Cameroon,
eblimarcel@yahoo.com

Abstract

*This paper examines *Midnight's Children*, *Shame* and *The Moor's Last Sigh* to argue that Salman Rushdie's protagonists are prophesied, cursed and deformed at birth, first, by sorcerers, second, by nature and third, by their families and societies which makes them the new wretched of the earth. Judging from their intertwined destinies with those of their countries, I contend that their wretchedness becomes an extended metaphor for Frantz Fanon's satire on nationalist bourgeoisies in *The Wretched of the Earth*. As such, each protagonist's physical, psychological or emotional deformity underscores subtexts that delineate the aberrant patterns that mark the end of civilizations, regimes and the beginning of new ones in the Indian subcontinent. From a postcolonial and new historicist perspective, I hinge on the ambiguity over Rushdie's choice of deformed and wretched protagonists, interrogating the extent to which their wretchedness could be lenses through which new modes of behaviour, more appropriate to new situations have to be found and made habitual. The deformities become demands for social cohesion which should be part of the battle against all forms of prejudices and profiling since recent developments in science, technology and modern Indian geo-politics mean that they are moving towards a single world order.*

Keywords: wretched, deformed protagonists, postcolonial, civilizations, new historicism.

Introduction

In *Midnight's Children*, *Shame* and *The Moor's Last Sigh*, Rushdie replicates the history of the Indian subcontinent prior to, and after independence through a literature that imbues social justice for the populace. This paper therefore investigates India's political and historical processes, interrogating why Rushdie's protagonists are prophesied, the mysteries of their births, their physical deformities and their life experiences as metaphors for the rise and fall of civilizations in the region. Using Saleem Sinai, Shiva, Omar Khayyam Shakil, Sufiya Zinobia and Moraes Zogoiby, I contend that their deformities indict institutionalized

dehumanization of Indians by their new leaders; a Fanonian perspective in *The Wretched of the Earth* which Rushdie aligns with because:

It is only from that moment that we can speak of a national literature. Here there is, at the level of literary creation, the taking up and clarification of themes which are typically nationalist. This may be properly called a literature of combat, in the sense that it calls on the whole people to fight for their existence as a nation. It is a literature of combat, because it moulds the national consciousness, [...] because it assumes responsibility, and because it is the will to liberty expressed in terms of time and place. (193)

This Fanonian discipleship is seen through protagonists who represent varied facets of institutionalized forms of neo-colonial hypocrisy in India and Pakistan, the outcome being the dehumanization of children and youths to become “the new wretched of the earth.” Using a three-dimensional approach, I will examine prophecies surrounding the births and causes of deformities in Rushdie’s protagonists, how they are harbingers of falling civilizations and regimes especially as they envision social metamorphoses and cohesion in their countries.

Mysterious Births and Forms of Deformities

In *Midnight’s Children*, *Shame* and *The Moor’s Last Sigh*, Rushdie chronicles the mysteries surrounding the lives of his protagonists who are bards that narrate and participate in their history from the moments of their conception, through births to old age. When Shri Ramram Seth foretells Saleem Sinai’s birth as tied to the political independence of India at midnight of 15 August 1947, “a son ... such a son! And then it comes. A son, Sahiba, who will never be older than his motherland – neither older nor younger” (*Midnight’s*, 108), we understand that Saleem carries the burden and destiny of India. Saleem’s individual worries encapsulate India’s impending problems as:

There will be two heads – but you shall see only one – there will be knees and a nose, a nose and knees ... Newspapers will praise him, two mothers raise him! Bicyclists love him – but, crowds will shove him! Sisters will weep; cobra will creep ... Washing will hide him – voices will guide him! Friends mutilate him – blood will betray him! ... Soldiers will try him – tyrants will fry him. (*Midnight’s*, 108)

Ramram Seth’s prophesy not only precises the sex of the embryo, but reveals the havoc to be wrought by his midnight twin, Shiva. The images of knees, cobra, friends, soldiers and tyrants metaphorically depict the challenges and inertia plaguing the post-colony. Congratulating the birth of Saleem and ascribing it to a new axiom towards fighting the problem of inertia, the Prime Minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru, writes:

Dear Baby Saleem, My belated congratulations on the happy accident of your moment of birth! You are the newest bearer of that ancient face of India which is also eternally young. We shall be watching over your life with the closest attention; it will be, in a sense, the mirror of our own. (*Midnight’s*, 155)

Ironically, Nehru's letter becomes another political propaganda characteristic of the new bourgeoisie because shortly after, the announced prize money is neither given nor Saleem's existence remembered, in fact, he stops being that "mirror of our own." Since Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth* castigates political manipulation of the electorate, Rushdie extends the satire to capture its effect on innocent babies, victimized by institutionalized political manipulation. Like Saleem, the fairy mushroom vendor who prophesizes Moraes Zogoiby's birth and his accelerated growth rate symbolize India's precipitated plunge towards communal violence:

I am going through time faster than I should. Do you understand me? Somebody from somewhere has been holding down the button marked 'FF', or, to be more exact, 'x2'. ... I, Moraes Zogoiby, known as Moor, am – for my sins, for my many and many sins, for my fault, for my most grievous fault – a man living double-quick. (*The Moor's*, 143)

The fact that Moraes is born after four and a half months in the Lord's Central House, Matheran, on New Year's Day, 1957 makes Nehru's civilization precarious. Ironically, he is not premature, but "has been passing too quickly, too. A double-speed existence permits only half a life" (*The Moor's*, 145). This double-speed existence metaphorically depicts the conflicts and corruption that threaten national integration a few years after India's independence.

Furthermore, Omar Shakil's conception in *Shame* on the night the Shakil sisters – Chhunni, Munnee and Bunny – celebrate the death of their erstwhile patriarch and tyrant father as freedom from seclusion becomes an opportunity to socialize with people outside their home. Ironically, the price for this freedom is sexual capitulation which results in one of the three sisters getting pregnant for an undisclosed progenitor. A pregnancy whose gestation period and delivery are mysteriously kept secret even to the progeny as Omar describes his birth:

They felt identical pains; in three wombs, a single baby and its two ghostly mirror-images kicked and turned with the precision of a well-drilled dance troupe ... suffering identically, the three of them – I will go so far as to say – fully earned the right to be considered joint mothers of the forthcoming child. (*Shame*, 13)

It is mysterious that all three undergo labour pains, suckle the child interchangeably with Omar growing up and dying without knowing who exactly amongst the three Shakil sisters is his true mother. Later on, Omar's sibling, Babar Shakil, is equally born and bred under similar conditions and never singling out his true mother amongst the three sisters. This suspense symbolizes the uncertainty that looms post-independence India. Conclusively, the births of Rushdie's heroes mark the end of difficult civilization – Saleem born at midnight of August 15, 1947, the day of India's independence from Britain, Moraes born on New Year's Day, 1957, marking the beginning of a new year. Omar Shakil is conceived the night his mothers celebrate the death of their father and his inhibitive laws towards women's education and social interaction. Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru in his "Tryst with Destiny" speech

delivered to the Constituent Assembly on the eve of independence thinks these are positive signs and says:

At the stroke of the midnight hour, when the world sleeps, India will wake to life and freedom. A moment comes, which comes but rarely in history, when we step out from the old to the new; when an age ends; and when the soul of a nation long suppressed finds utterance... We end today a period of ill-fortune.” (1)

Ironically, their births become symbols of new communal problems India and Pakistan caused by political hypocrisy, escalating into pogroms and the destruction of property. These births could articulate postcolonial subtexts as critics like Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin in *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-colonial Literatures* say the term ‘post-colonial’ cuts across cultures affected by imperial aggression. Rushdie uses his protagonists to metaphorically represent the empire writing back since their life stories:

Emerged in their present form out of the experience of colonization and asserted themselves by foregrounding the tension with the imperial power, and by emphasizing their differences from the assumptions of the imperial centre. It is this which makes them distinctively post-colonial. (2)

Ashcroft et al. use the postcolonial theory to focus on the struggles of colonized peoples to regain their lost identities by deconstructing the Centre/Margin and Self/Other binary. Since postcolonial critics decry all forms of domination, Rushdie’s satire taps from the great well of Indian cultures and religions as Anita Desai describes his protagonists as “symbols and archetypes so that their histories are lived out at several levels at one time” (*Midnight’s*, xi).

As archetypal heroes, the mystery at Saleem’s birth begins when his father, Ahmed Sinai, mistakenly loses grip of a chair that falls and shatters his toe exactly when he is born. Shiva’s mother, Vanita, hemorrhages and dies minutes after his birth. The nurse, Mary Pereira, swaps the name tags of Saleem and Shiva, sending Saleem to Amina Sinai while Shiva goes to Vanita. Consequently, poor Saleem becomes privileged while rich Shiva condemned to poverty. The remaining one thousand and one midnight children who inspire the title of the novel are endowed with various mystical qualities. Omar’s tripartite mothers who jointly breastfeed him is contrasted with Sufiya’s rejection by her parents as Bilquis Hyder condemns her size “is that all, my God? So much huffery and puffery to push only this mouse? ... the wrong miracle” (*Shame*, 88), and Raza Hyder disappointing shriek after examining her nether zones “there! I ask you, sir, what is that?... A bump! Raza shrieked hopelessly” (*Shame*, 89). Sufiya’s rejection is accentuated by her incurable brain fever that renders her parents’ disappointment more potent. Accordingly, Raza’s fundamentalist ideology which prioritizes male children lends credence to ‘Sharia laws’ to justify the idea of shame and shamelessness that permeates the novel. Consequently, girls in Rushdie’s novels are segregated by socio-political, religious and cultural institutions as Timothy Brennan’s *Salman Rushdie and the Third World: Myths of the Nation* opines:

Since the patriarchs of the clans described in *Shame* (Harappa, Hyder) are the chief historical villains of recent Pakistani history, and since the *Quran* is the text that gives Pakistan its authority as a nation, Rushdie launches his assault on the politics of the Pakistani state from a novel whose formal features have been burrowed from that same *Quran*, in its being both a Holy Book and a specific product of Islam. (125)

Rushdie's deformed protagonists strangely symbolize man's inhumanity to man, reason why Saleem's extraordinary large nose puzzles Ahmed Sinai who comments "never before in my family has there been a nose like it!" (*Midnight's*, 197). Saleem's nose which sends out a lot of goo that drains "armies of handkerchiefs, regiments of nappies found their way into the large washing chest..." (*Midnight's*, 157) articulate the filth and individualism governing the new leadership. Moreover, Saleem's eyes that does not blink fortifies his telepathic powers that dissect people's minds and dreams.

Moreover, Saleem's sexual impotence which puts Padma's search for herbs "which your manhood could be awakened from its sleep" (*Midnight's*, 245) in futility is compounded by his friends, Ayooba and Farooq, inability to electrocute his penis to virility to reveal a society that does not appreciate procreation:

While the current passed up into him through his nether cucumber, apparently unnoticed, so that he was filling up with electricity and there was a blue crackle playing around the end of his gargantuan nose; and Shaheed who didn't have the courage to touch this impossible being who could absorb electricity through his hosepipe screamed. (*Midnight's*, 449)

Here, Saleem's impotence satirizes new leaders who disregard children in a postcolony noted for inhumane treatment towards children. Therefore, why need children who would not ensure continuity and be leaders of tomorrow?

Furthermore, Omar's extra-ordinary behaviour could result from the upside-down position he is held by the ankle by his three Shakil mothers at birth "Omar Khayyam Shakil was afflicted, from his earliest days, by a sense of inversion, of a world turned upside-down. And by something worse: the fear that he was living at the edge of the world, so close that he might fall off at any moment" (*Shame*, 14). Omar's psychological trauma is because he neither understands which of the three sisters his mother is nor who his father is, resulting to his examination of the Angrez men he comes across for his possible unknown male progenitor. Moreover, Omar's failed plans for his wife, Sufiya Zinobia, who contracts a type of mysterious brain fever at birth that defies conventional medicine but responds to a local potion that has "the effect of slowing her down for the rest of her years, because the unfortunate side effect of a potion so filled with elements of longevity was to retard the progress of time inside the body of anyone to whom it was given" (*Shame*, 100). She thus gets mature in age but remains immature in mind. Sufiya epitomizes Western indirect rule which Fanon describes "the former mother country practices indirect government, both by the bourgeoisie that it upholds and also by the national army led by its experts, an army that pins the people down, immobilizing and terrorizing them" (140). The incarceration of Sufiya by

her parents and husband bestializes her anger because “lurking inside Sufiya Zinobia Shakil there was a beast. We have already seen something of the growth of this unspeakable monster; we have seen how, feeding on certain emotions, it took possession of the girl from time to time” (*Shame*, 208). Sufiya’s anger becomes potent when her father imposes Sharia law in Pakistan authorizing the killing of unwanted family members to preserve the “honour” of families and do away with “shame.”

According to Akbar Noor Akbar Khalil and Ahmed Sheikh Mushood in “Political Manipulation in Human Rights Violations: A Case of Honour Killings in Baluchistan, Pakistan” families agree to kill ‘unwanted’ members of their genealogy with perpetrators hardly being punished by law. In their opinion, if a “father, brother or husband kills his wife, sister or daughter, they sit together and resolve the case before it goes to the police for investigation, or even if it goes to the police later on, the men have the power to withdraw the case” (37). Ironically, the law enforcement apparatus and the judiciary deal with these crimes with extraordinary leniency, thereby creating loopholes for murderers in the name of “honour” to kill without punishment. That is why Sufiya escapes from the basement where her father and husband chain, sedate and try to kill her.

On his part, Moraes Zogoiby who is born four and a half months after conception has a right hand with “fingers welded into an undifferentiated chunk, the thumb a stunted wart. (To this day, when I shake hands, I offer my unexceptional left, inverted, the thumb pointing towards the floor)” (*The Moor’s*, 145-146). Moraes’ precipitated birth affects his looks because at thirty-six, he develops white hair, a gaunt face and an elongated body compared to a man seventy:

By the age of seven-and-a-half I had entered adolescence, developing face-fuzz, an Adam’s apple, a deep bass voice and fully-fledged male sexual organs and appetites; at ten, I was a child trapped in the six-foot-six body of a twenty-year-old giant, and possessed, from these early moments of self-consciousness, by a terror of running out of time... What was harder still was the feeling of being ugly; malformed, wrong, the knowledge that life had dealt me a bad hand, and a freak of nature was obliging me to pray it out too fast. What was hardest of all was the sense of being an embarrassment, a shame. (*The Moor’s*, 152-154)

Moraes’ precipitated growth could be a political subtext satirizing India’s post-independence plunge into corruption and destruction. That is why Rushdie recourse’s to mysteries, deformities and unusual circumstances that surround the births of protagonists in the three novels is his repudiation of Bombay which lacks town planning, making slums unhealthier and impossible, a hideout for all categories of crimes and social ills. Bombay therefore symbolizes a lawless country, a civilization and a regime at the precipice, which contradicts rendering the traditional song of “prima in Indies”.

Deformities as Signs of Falling Civilizations

The births of Rushdie's protagonists – Saleem Sinai, Shiva, Omar Shakil, Sufiya Zinobia and Moraes Zogoiby – predict the end of civilizations and dictatorial regimes. Through these characters, Rushdie pits levels of social disillusionment in Indian and Pakistani leadership whose pillaging can only alluded to Fanon's stereotypes:

The ranks decked-out profiteers whose grasping hands scrape up the bank notes from a poverty stricken country will sooner or later be men of straw in the hands of the army, cleverly handled by foreign experts. In this way, the former mother country practices indirect government, both by the bourgeoisie that it upholds and also by the national army led by its experts, an army that pins the people down, immobilizing and terrorizing them.(140)

To facilitate their plunder, the socio-cultural, economic and political wellbeing of the postcolonies become teleguided from the so-called "mother country" in connivance with the new leaders. Such systematic exploitation by the elite class is problematized by Ranajit Guha in "On Some Aspects of the Historiography of Colonial India" that:

Both these varieties of elitism share the prejudice that the making of the Indian nation and the development of the consciousness – nationalism – which informed this process were exclusively or predominantly elite achievements [either] credited to British colonial rulers, administrators, policies, institutions and culture [or] to Indian elite personalities, institutions, activities and ideas. (37)

Continuous contact with England justifies the many wretched children on the streets, and a civilization characterized by "cripples everywhere, mutilated by loving parents to ensure them of a lifelong income from begging" (*Midnight's*, 100). Social hardship makes the begging industry to bloom given that the severity of a child's deformity determines how much he/she makes a day for the parents. Amina's adventure into Ramram Seth's vicinity exposes her to this modern form of domestic slavery justifying why the very broken and crippled children earn more money than other slum-dwellers:

Children tugging at the pallu of her sari, heads everywhere staring at my mother, who thinks, It's like being surrounded by some terrible monster, a creature with heads and heads and heads; but she corrects herself, no, of course not a monster, these poor poor people – what then? (*Midnight's*, 81)

Therefore, any new regime wherein parental obligations are not met due to social hardship is doomed to fail. Amina further expresses her embarrassment upon realizing that the majority of the blinded children are girls:

Look, my God, those beautiful children have black teeth! Would you believe, girl children baring their nipples! How terrible, truly! And, Allah-tobah, heaven forefend, sweeper women with... no!... how dreadful!... collapsed spines, and bunches of twigs, and no caste marks; untouchables, sweet Allah! (*Midnight's*, 100)

The "begging industry" becomes a safe haven for abandoned girls who are exposed to all sorts of atrocities and social anomalies like rape, kidnapping, murder and extraction of human

body parts for ritual sacrifices and food, illicit arms trade, early pregnancies, drug abuse, armed robbery resulting to the rise of what is now called “Slum dog Millionaires.” These are the new lords of the slums who coordinate underground the numerous illicit transactions in the streets. The deplorable social situation pushes many Indians to drinking as a form of expiation like Ahmed Sinai who:

Blurred the edges of himself by drinking the green bottles and red labels of his servants... At six o'clock every evening, Ahmed Sinai entered the world of the djiins; and every morning, his eyes red, his head throbbing with the fatigue of his long-night battle. (*Midnight's*, 167)

Ahmed's drunkenness is a metaphor for the general frustration as peoples' dreams are deferred. Frustration accounts for why out of the one thousand and one children born at the midnight hour of independence, four hundred and twenty die after their births. Those that survive rely on mystical powers because British colonial administration created more social problems to Indians as Trevor Royle in *The Last Days of the Raj* opines:

1943 was a time of torment and gross affliction. Hardly a day passed between May and October without new horror story breaking in THE STATESMAN or the HINDUSTAN STANDARD; sleeping beggars, too weak to move were eaten alive by jackals, starving families sold their children into slavery for pittances, walking skeletons roamed the streets near the Sealdah Bridge and the lower Circular Road, while relief agencies, and hospitals, faced by impossible numbers of the sick and the destitute, were forced to give up the unequal struggle. (107)

Consequently, many children were sold to slavery and destitution made Britain to grant independence to the region because communal and castes problems from 1935 until independence and partition in 1947 became apparent. Ironically, independence only intensified social disillusionment which was compounded by religious and racial violence as:

In the days after the destruction of the Babri Masjid, justly enraged Muslims/fanatical killers... smashed up Hindu temples, and killed Hindus, across India and in Pakistan as well. There comes a point in the unfurling of communal violence in which it becomes irrelevant to ask, 'who started it?' (*The Moor's*, 365)

Religious violence heralded the loss of human lives and property, escalating in the first war between India and Pakistan over Kashmir in 1948. The problems Saleem faces in the Midnight Children's Conference (MCC) symbolize those of India and Pakistan. That is why in her attempt to rid India of corruption and segregation; Indira Gandhi's state of Emergency targets and arrests the midnight's children responsible for India's post-independence problems as Saleem posits:

Statistics may set my arrest in context; although there is considerable disagreement about the number of 'political' prisoners taken during the Emergency, either thirty-thousand or a quarter of a million persons certainly lost their freedom. The Widow said: 'It is only a small percentage of the population of India.' (*Midnight's*, 552)

Ironically, Gandhi's arbitrary arrests which earn her the name "the Widow" becomes a political mistake because she equally engages in corrupt practices that lead to her demise. By arresting and killing the midnight's children who are Rushdie's source of hope for India and "also the children of the time: fathered, you understand, by history" (*Midnight's*, 118), I argue that Rushdie vilifies Gandhi's wretchedness who subverts the young and thwarts their future. This contradicts Nehru who thinks the children are a "step out from the old to the new; when an age ends; and when the soul of a nation long suppressed finds utterance" (1). Rushdie describes Gandhi's dictatorship in "The Assassination of Indira Gandhi" in *Step Across This Line: Collected Nonfiction 1992-2002* that:

During her time in office, power has systematically been removed from the states to the centre; and the resentment created by the process has been building up for years. The trouble in the Punjab began when the Congress I leadership persistently refused to discuss the then very moderate demands of the Akali Dal Party for the restitution to the state government of powers which the Centre had seized. There can be no doubt that this intransigence was a major contributing factor to the growth and support for Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale's terrorists, and of the whole sorry process which resulted in the attack on the Golden Temple. (42)

Gandhi's refusal to decentralize power causes her administration's impeachment by opposition groups, many of which later develop into terrorist organizations. These terrorists who attack for religious reasons result in military intervention and the state of emergency that precipitates what Gandhi detractors consider unjust arrests, prison sentences and numerous deaths. That is why Rushdie reduces Gandhi to a widow by taping from the prejudice about Gandhi's widowhood. Gandhi's demonization in *Midnight's Children* succeeds because Rushdie stereotypes her widowhood, combing widowhood and witchery to make this vilification potent in the novel. Accordingly, the closer Gandhi is identified as the Widow in *Midnight's Children*, the more obvious her Emergency is condemned especially when Saleem and the midnight's children who according to Nehru symbolize "in a sense, the mirror of our own" (*Midnight's*, 237) are tortured, vasectomized and their magic annihilated by Gandhi's agents. Saleem says:

I had a visitor. Creak of door, rustle of expensive chiffon. The pattern: green and black. Her glasses, green, her shoes were black as black [...] I have my own name for her: she was the Widow's Hand. Which one by one and children and mmff and tearing little balls go. (*Midnight's*, 437)

Rushdie's nation implicitly criticizes Gandhi's discriminatory practices during her Emergency period resulting to the accusations in the 1971 elections that she and some Congress I leaders attempted electoral fraud. History books, newspapers, radio-programs "tell us that at two p.m. on June 12, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi was found guilty, by Judge Mohan Lal Sinha of the Allahabad High Court, of two counts of campaign malpractice during the election campaign of 1971" (530). Suggestively, Rushdie's historicity of India taps from

Michel Foucault's *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* to assess the importance of memory new historicism:

History, as we know, is certainly the most erudite, the most aware, the most conscious, and possibly the most cluttered area of our memory; but is equally the depths from which all things emerge into their precarious, glittering existence. Since it is the mode of being of all that is given us in experience, history has become the unavoidable element in our thought. (219)

Historically, after Gandhi's defeat in March 1977 and through her influence in 1984, Indian troops stormed the Sikh Golden Temple used as a hide-out for terrorists. The Sikhs saw this as a desecration of their religion and gods, enraging Gandhi's Sikh bodyguard who assassinated her in cold blood.

In Pakistan, Old Mr. Shakil's death marks the end of Islamic fundamentalism that restricts social interaction in women. While alive, Chhunni, Munnee and Bunny, "had been kept inside that labyrinthine mansion until his dying day, virtually uneducated, they were imprisoned in the zenana wing..." (*Shame*, 5) by Old Shakil whose 'purdah' veils and restricts free interaction for his daughters. According to M.S Joy in "The Veil as a Metaphor for Repression in Salman Rushdie's *Shame*" 'purdah' deals with the "privacy and purity from prying eyes... It is a form of social restraint through which the individuality of the woman is erased by making her anonymous behind a veil and free interaction with the opposite sex is prevented" (12). These restrictions push the daughters to hate their father and ironically, on his dying bed, Chhunni asks "father, we are going to be very rich now, is that not so?" (*Shame*, 6). Most probably, the riches she refers to are not only financial, but emotional and free social interaction. Mr Shakil is celebrated posthumously in a party during which one of his daughters' sexual escapade results in a pregnancy and the baby becomes Rushdie's peripheral hero, Omar Shakil.

Omar's peripherality becomes potent when he instead finds favour in General Raza Hyder's dictatorial regime accused of ritualistic deaths and military coups because "not only Prime Ministers got shot from time to time, throats got themselves slit in gullies, bandits became billionaires..." (*Shame*, 80). The Pakistani experience confirms Fanon's critique on the nexus of Indian and Pakistani politics because fifteen years after independence:

Official sources revealed that just one and a half per cent of the country's companies owned over half of all private capital, and that even within the elite one and a half per cent, just twenty companies dominated the rest, and within these twenty companies there were four super-groups who controlled, between them, one quarter of all the share capital in India. (*The Moor's*, 180)

These companies whose hidden shareholders are government officials engage in sorts of illegality and thwarting any attempts at resisting or exposing their underhanded machinations mercilessly. That is why Philomina Zogoiby and her Forum Against Oppression of Women (FAOW) members are killed in a disguised gas accident attempting to investigate the ill-treatment of women workers. Zogoiby's courage and fate is symbolic of Benazir Bhutto's

whose 2002 electoral disappointments did not deter her return on October 18, 2007 for parliamentary elections. Bhutto's escape from two suicide bombings in a Karachi rally resulted in 136 casualties and at least 450 people injured. On December 27, 2007, Benazir Bhutto's Rawalpindi rally ended when she was assassinated by a gunman and suicide bomber killing 20 people and injuring more. President Musharraf who considered Bhutto a political threat was accused of masterminding Bhutto's assassination. Philomena's killing, President Raza Hyder's 'Sharia laws' and his dismantlement of the legal system to replace with religious courts, as well as his elimination and precipitated burial of Prime Minister Iskander Harrapa overnight signal falling civilizations Rushdie's novels. Rushdie satirizes the Pakistani debacle through God's visit her different presidents:

God came down to Pakistan to see how things were going. He asked General Ayub Khan why the place was in such a mess, Ayub replied: 'its these no-good corrupt civilians, sir. Just get rid of them and leave the rest to me.' So God eliminated the politicians. After a while, He returned; things were even worse than before. This time He asked Yahya Khan for an explanation. Yahya blamed Ayub, his sons and their hangers-on for the troubles. 'Do the needful,' Yahya begged, 'and I'll clean the place up good and proper.' So God's thunderbolts wiped out Ayub. On his third visit, He found a catastrophe, so He agreed with Zulfikar Ali Bhutto that democracy must return. He turned Yahya into a cockroach and swept him under a carpet; but, a few years later, he noticed the situation was still pretty awful. He went to General Zia and offered him supreme power: on one condition. "Anything, God" the General replied, "You name it." So God said, "Answer me one question and I'll flatten Bhutto for you like a chapatti." Zia said: "Fire away." So God whispered in his ear: "Look, I do all these things for this country, but what I don't understand is: why don't people seem to love me any more?" (*Shame*, 113)

The different coups indicate social disillusionment which tantamount to spiritual bankruptcy given that their leaders aptly fit Fanon's gamut of "nationalist bourgeoisies who [...] hasten to make their own fortunes and set up a national system of exploitation, and bar the way for unity" (132). Ironically, retributive justice is seen as a bourgeoisie like President Hyder escapes from the statehouse wearing an all covering veil, offered to him by his wife who is a victim of 'purdah laws' that impose veils on women. Raza's death in the vengeful hands of the Shakil sisters ends his exploitative regime and reign of terror. In conclusion, the uncertainty that looms myth-ridden India as perceived through Rushdie's deformed protagonists articulate why people are "seized by atavistic longings, and forgetting the new myth of freedom reverted to their old ways, their old regionalist loyalties and prejudices, and the body politic began to crack" (*Midnight's*, 245). These cracks which signal a nation at the precipice becomes Rushdie's projected vision for a new social order which will hinge on India's conglomeration of heterogeneous peoples as its strength, rather than a weakness.

A Vision for a New Civilization in Protagonists

The physical, psychological and emotional deformities in Rushdie's protagonists equally signal new civilizations in the Indian subcontinent. By making his protagonists articulate the socio-cultural, political and religious problems in the region, Rushdie draws inspiration from Fanon who sees the need for intellectuals to articulate the will of their people:

If a man is known by his acts, then we will say that the most urgent thing today for the intellectual is to build up his nation. If this building up is true, [...] it is national liberation which leads the nation to play its part on the stage of history. It is the heart of national that international consciousness lives and grows. And this two-fold emerging is ultimately the source of all culture. (199)

I read Rushdie's novels as attempts to push through Fanon's agenda in the Indian subcontinent especially because native intellectuals like Kéké Kolatkar, Morarji Desai in *Midnight's Children* epitomize forms of individualism. That is why in "Columns: June 1999, Kashmir" in *Step Across This Line: Collected Nonfiction 1992-2002*, Rushdie addresses the problem of individualism through the wishes of Kashmiris:

What Kashmiris want, and what India and Pakistan must be persuaded to offer them is a reunited land, and an end to lines of control and warfare on high Himalayan glaciers. What they want is to be given a large degree of autonomy, to be allowed to run their own lives (a dual-citizenship scheme, with frontiers guaranteed by both Pakistan and India, is one possible solution). (275)

It is incumbent on the new generation of leaders and intellectuals that in order to secure peace in the region, they need to curtail the external forces that threaten social integrity. Rushdie's novels satirize the destruction of this organic community by secularists and Islamic separatists based in Pakistan and the militantly hyper nationalist Indian state. These clashes erode "Kashmiriyat" (*Shalimar*, 110) or the spirit of Kashmiriness, through pain and dehumanization by terrorists and Indian soldiers invade, arrest, rape and murder Kashmiri women and young girls in public.

Furthermore, the problems encountered by Saleem Sinai and Moraes Zogoiby as handicaps in school reiterate the problem of education in the region. Basic education which is suppose to be free for every child – handicapped or normal – is not enjoyed by Saleem because his teacher, Mr. Emil Zagallo, and his peers poke fun of his deformity in class. Consequently, fear of stigmatization accounts for the high illiteracy rate amongst disable children in the subcontinent. Rushdie's satire educates the new civilization of intellectuals as Neera Chandhoke in "Democracy and Well Being in India" affirms:

On 28 November 2001 a rather momentous bill was passed by the Lok Shaba [...].The sub-clause guaranteed that the State shall provide free and compulsory education to all children of the age of 6-14 in any manner as the State, may, by law, determine [...]. Furthermore, article 51 A of the Constitution has been amended by adding clause (K) that lays down that parents and guardians should provide opportunities for education to their children in the age group six to fourteen years. (33)

These bills mandate parents to educate children because The National Policy on Education which was updated in 1992 and the 1992 Program of Action both reaffirm the Indian government's commitment at improving literacy levels. The government is therefore providing special attention to children because they are the future of the nation.

Moreover, through Rushdie's protagonists, he tries to encourage the new civilization to reconcile the age old religious and caste differences. In *The Moor's Last Sigh*, Rushdie engages religious unity imaginatively through visual arts. Through the paintings of India's most celebrated female artist, Aurora Zogoiby, she gets national and international recognition when her paintings are displayed in the Prince of Wales Museum in replacement of artifacts collected from other colonies. The fact that it is the first time the institution recognizes and honours a living artist, pushes the politician, Raman Fielding, to announce in Bombay that:

Let everyone see today what we do for minorities. Is it a Hindu who is given this honour? Is it one of our great Hindu artists? No matter. In India every community must have its place, its leisure activity – art et cetera – all. Christians, Parsis, Jains, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jews, Mughals. We accept this. This too is part of ideology of Ram Rajya, rule of Lord Ram [...]. Therefore I say with some authority that art and beauty must serve national interest also. (*The Moor's*, 260-61)

The underlying ideology is art that valorizes and serves national unity without necessarily prioritizing a particular sex, caste or religion. Her painting of the Alhambra on Malabar Hill in Bombay celebrates the pastoral, India's red forts, the Mughal palace-fortresses in Delhi and Agra which she calls "Mooristan," or places where worlds collide, flow in and out of one another. Her conception of one universe, one dimension, one country and one dream becomes her "Palimpsest" (*The Moor's*, 226). By refracting Indian history with the history of Moorish Spain, Aurora creates a hybrid image of India suggestive of a transnational dialogue that encapsulates a new and more accommodating image of a hybridized culture.

The protagonists equally propose national unity through intermarriages. In *Shame*, Pakistani women encourage their men to marry white women overseas whose reception and integration into mainstream Pakistani culture suggests racial harmony as:

In those days, many of the villagers had gone west to work for a while, and those who returned had brought with them white women for whom the prospect of life in a village as number-two wife seemed to hold an inexhaustibly erotic appeal. The number-one wives treated these white girls as dolls or pets and those husbands who failed to bring home a guddi, a white doll, were soundly berated by their women... The number-one wives cheered for their number-twos, taking pride in their victories as in the successes of children, offering them consolation in defeat. (*Shame*, 158)

In order to build peaceful and cohesive civilizations, women now look beyond race and religion because Islam accepts polygamy. By encouraging their husbands to marry across racial barriers, Pakistani women assert an educative cultural globalization to white women as Trinh T. Minh-ha in "Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism" opines:

Women of today are still being called upon to stretch across the gap of male ignorance, and to educate men as to our existence and our needs [...]. Now we hear that it is the task of the black and Third World woman to educate white women in the face of tremendous resistance, as to our existence, our differences, our relative roles in our joint survival. (247-48)

The women here tolerate and educate Western women about bridging the stereotypical dichotomy of racial dominance, thus articulating a new form of civilization emanating from the East. This becomes a form of post-Orientalism that springs from Edward Said's *Orientalism*. Arguably, Rushdie's protagonists now introduce a "new self" by adapting to new cultures as Homi Bhabha contends in *The Location of Culture*:

The borderline work of culture demands an encounter with 'newness' that is not part of the past and the present. It creates a sense of new as an insurgent act of cultural transition. Such acts do not merely recall the past as social calls or aesthetic president. It renews the past, refiguring it as contingent 'in between' space, that innovates and interrupts the performances of the present. (9)

Edward Said and Homi Bhabha thus inspire Rushdie in their attempts to celebrate geographical positioning in human and cultural intercourse.

Moreover, given that agriculture and preserving an eco-conscious civilization is imperative for the subcontinent's large population, Rushdie's protagonists encourage women to engage in large scale plantation agriculture like Isabella Zogoiby who tries to save her family's plantation business from collapse. She:

Went to every field, every orchard and every plantation under her control and won back the confidence of the terrified employees, many of whom had bolted for their lives. She found managers whom she could trust and whom the work force would follow with respect but without fear. She charmed banks into lending her money, bullied departed clients into returning, and became a mistress of a small print. And for the rescue of her fifty per cent of the Gama Trading Company she earned a respectful nickname: from Fort Cochin's salons to the Ernakulam dockside, from the British Residency in old Bolgatty Palace to the spice mountains, there was only one Queen Isabella of Cochin. (*The Moor's*, 43)

Isabella's attempts to revive her husband's spice plantation convinces men and charms banks with realistic business proposals which marvel Bombay residents to see a woman excelling in large scale spice business. Isabella symbolizes a new civilization of women who need to actively participate in plantation agriculture.

Judicially, since Indian bourgeoisies twist the laws to their favour, and inhibit freedom of speech and press, Rushdie's protagonists repudiate this phenomenon through Philomina Zogoiby who heads the Forum Against Oppression of Women (FAOW). Her activism dismantles corrupt and segregatory government officials, businessmen and institutions when:

She qualified as an advocate ... whose purpose was to expose the double scandals of invisible people and invisible skyscrapers out of which he had done so well. She took Kéké Kolatkar and his cronies at the Municipal Corporation to court in a landmark case that lasted many years and shook the old F.W. Stevens Corporation building [...].

Years later, she would succeed in putting old Kéké in jail. (*The Moor's*, 212)

The severity of Zogoiby's activism is seen when she prosecutes her own father for fraud without reservation because FAOW advocates total transparency. Like Philomina Zogoiby, Arjumand Harappa's activism encourages the Pakistani green revolution wherein she throws "zaminders out of their palaces, opened dungeons, led raids on homes of film stars and slit their mattresses with a long two-edged knife, laughed as the black money poured out from between the pocketed springs" (*Shame*, 191). Her ferocious prosecution of white-collar criminals attracts some repugnance from corrupt aristocrats who nickname her the "virgin iron pants." The name is a metaphor for her courage and ability to transcend the gender roles patriarchy imposes on Pakistani women.

Politically, the new civilization empowers women because Indian politics was a male affair until 1969 which marked the unexpected and triumphant entry of Indira Gandhi after the death of Jawaharlal Nehru and the division in the Congress Party over his replacement. Rushdie recalls this division and Gandhi's brilliant move in "A Dream of Glorious Return" in *Step Across This Line: Collected Nonfiction 1992-2002* that "she resigned from her own party, formed Congress I or Indira Congress, took most of her M.Ps with her, called a general election and destroyed the old guard at the polls" (203). The Indian populace welcomed her victory with euphoria because the country inevitably needed a change of government. Indira Gandhi's courage is compared to Benazir Bhutto's by Sani H. Panhwar in *Benazir Bhutto: Selected Speeches 1989 – 2007* when he revisits Bhutto's speech in New Delhi on March 24, 2007 about election manipulations:

In the last election of October 2002, I was not allowed to fight that contest. Yet despite international observers calling the elections "flawed", the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) which I head, was still the largest vote getter at nearly 26 % of the vote almost similar to that of the Congress Party in the elections of 2004. Unfortunately the Parliamentary session was indefinitely postponed to fracture my support. If not I would have formed a government like Mrs. Sonia Gandhi did after the 2004 election. (559)

I argue that Rushdie's choice of deformed characters satirizes male politicians in the subcontinent as patriarchal and corrupt. Indira and Bhutto's campaign propagandas address poverty and corruption, justifying their nationwide support. Rushdie fictionalizes Gandhi and Bhutto because they have inspired women in the subcontinent as Preet Rustagi in "Women and Development in South Asia" examines the changes that women's participation in politics from 1947-2000 have brought:

The region of South Asia has had the largest number of women leaders who have been heads of the nation (Indira Gandhi, Sheikh Hasina, Benazir Bhutto, Srimavo Bandaranaike and Chandrika Kumaratunga). The first female head of any nation in the

world, as early as in 1960, was from South Asia, in Sri Lanka [...]. The experience of India's amendment to its Constitution (the 73rd and 74th Amendments introduced in 1992), reserving one-third seats for women in its local governance structures, generated tremendous interest in the other countries of the region. In 1997, both Nepal and Bangladesh introduced women's reservation in local bodies. While it was 20 per cent in Nepal, in the case of Bangladesh it was one-third seats in all four tiers of local government. In Pakistan also, one-third seats are reserved in local bodies, which is visible in the current figures of women's political participation. (7)

As an outcome of women's movements in many South Asian countries, the demand for positive intervention in the reservation of seats for women in government structures is increasing. According to Rustagi, this policy challenges the deep-rooted patriarchal traditions wherein men wield power since the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Acts reserve one-third of the seats for women. In 2005, the Women's Reservation Bill was passed, providing 33% reservation for women in Parliament and State Assembly. Therefore, in spite of the visibility of women at some echelons of government, the overall public participation of women still remains low in the Indian subcontinent, reason why Rushdie's protagonists advocate professional education which will expose them to the competitive economic world outside their societies.

Conclusion

If Fanon's satire focuses on imperialists and neo-colonial leaders who exploit the masses, Rushdie extends this satire by portraying India and Pakistan through the lens of children protagonists whose innocence and deformities articulate institutional realities about levels of exploitation and subjugation in their societies. If we consider the voice of a child as the voice of God, and if children of today are the future, therefore, the deformities of Rushdie's protagonists in *Midnight's Children*, *Shame* and *The Moor's Last Sigh* are subtexts that question the discourse of metamorphoses. Through deformed protagonists, Rushdie subverts and interrogates the need for the reproduction of dictatorial and hegemonic power, wherein he advocates an end to such civilizations by how proposing new modes of behaviour, more appropriate to new situations can be found and made habitual. The protagonists demand for equal status embattles all forms of prejudices, advocating equal opportunities for all since recent developments in science and technology are re-orientating the human race towards a single world order. The protagonists are carving a niche for political unification and a single world intellectual culture because many nations are accepting the secular aspect of intellectual culture. Such a unified world culture requires that religions and cultures harness their attitudes towards this emerging unity, most especially, fundamentalist Islam and Hinduism. These deformed protagonists therefore represent a number of things, according to your point of view; but above all, I view them as forces that modernize contemporary economies and true hopes of freedom in the Indian subcontinent.

Works Cited

- Ashcroft, Bill et al. *The Empire Writes Back*. London: Routledge, 1989.
- Bhabha, K. Homi. *The Location of Culture*. London and New York: Routledge, 1994.
- Brennan, Timothy. *Salman Rushdie and the Third World: Myths of the Nation*. New York: St. Martins, 1989.
- Chandhoke, Neera. "Democracy and Well Being in India." United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD), 2005.
- Fanon, Frantz. *The Wretched of the Earth*. New York: Penguin, 1967.
- Foucault, Michel. *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*. New York: Random House, 1973.
- Guha, Ranajit. "On Some Aspects of the Historiography of Colonial India." *Selected Subaltern Studies*, ed. R. Guha and G. C. Spivak, Oxford: Oxford University Press: (1988):37-44.
- Joy, M.S. "The Veil as Metaphor for Repression in Salman Rushdie's *Shame*." January 27, 2006, April 10, 2009
<http://www.shvoong.com/books/114642-veil-metaphor-repression-salman->
- Khalil, Akbar Noor and Mushood, Ahmed Sheikh. "Political Manipulation in Human Rights Violations: A Case of Honour Killings in Baluchistan, Pakistan. *Pakistaniaat: A Journal of Pakistan Studies*. Vol. 2, No. 2, (2010): 36-43.
- Min-Ha, T. Trinh. "Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism." *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*. 2nd Ed. Eds. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin. London: Routledge, (2006): 246-49.
- Nehru, Jawaharlal. "Tryst with Destiny." *The Vintage Book of Indian Writing 1947-1997*. Eds. Salman Rushdie and Elizabeth West. London: Vintage, 1997.
- Nyanchi, Marcel Ebliylu and Mbuh Tenu Mbuh. "New Ways of Perception: Aurora's Painting and National Imaging in Salman Rushdie's *The Moor's Last Sigh*." *Subalternspeak: An International Journal of Postcolonial Studies*. Vol. III Issue I, Oct. 2014.
- Panhwar, H. Sani. ed. *Benazir Bhutto : Selected Speeches 1989 – 2007*. California: n.p, 2009.
- Royle, Trevor. *The Last Days of the Raj*. London: Penguin Group, 1989.
- Rushdie, Salman. *Midnight's Children*. New York: Random House, 1981.
- . *Shame*. New York: Henry Holt Company, 1983.
- . *The Satanic Verses*. London: Viking Penguin, 1988.
- . *The Moor's Last Sigh*. London Random House, 1995.
- . *Step Across This Line: Collected Nonfiction 1992-2002*. New York: Random House, 2003.
- . *Shalimar the Clown*. New York: Random House, 2005.

Subalternspeak: An International Journal of Postcolonial Studies

(Online ISSN 2347-2013)

Vol. III Issue II, Jan. 2015

Rustagi, Preet. "Women and Development in South Asia." *South Asian Journal*
No 4 April-June 2004.