

Linguistic experimentations in Salman Rushdie's Shame

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Abstract: *The use of English language in postmodern and postcolonial period has undergone a significant change. The prominent Indian English novelists like G.V.Desani, Kamala Markandaya, Arundhati Roy, Anita Desai and Salman Rushdie have brought many linguistic innovations and experimentations to bring hybridization and indianization to their language. What contributes, perhaps more than anything else, to the popularity, controversiality and complexity of Rushdie's novels is his linguistic experimentation. The shades of postmodernism and postcolonialism can be easily identified in Rushdie's use of language. The present research paper endeavors to explore linguistic experimentations in Rushdie's Shame (1983) and studies how Rushdie employs suitable narrative language to suit his narrative techniques.*

Keywords: Narrative language, Verbal pyrotechnics, postmodernism, postcolonialism, Lexical exhibitionism

I. INTRODUCTION

Narrative language assumes a central focus in Rushdie's *Shame*. Rushdie is a practitioner of postmodernism in literature. He employs postmodern narrative strategies in his novels. Therefore he uses a kind of narrative language in his novel *Shame* that serves a vehicle of his innovative and experimental narrative strategies. Rushdie is concerned with linguistic power and reconstructs history through language. Rushdie creates an Indian blend of English in his novels as the Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe creates West African blend of English by interspersing his English works with Ibo words. Agnes Scott, a literary critic comments on Rushdie's linguistic techniques that the total effect of Rushdie's linguistic techniques is to mould a vibrant prose whose positive tone makes language a bridge between cultures, enabling a new process of enculturation to take place in the West. Rushdie's stylistic experimentations in his novel *Shame* remind us of G.V.Desani's *All About H. Hatterr* taking the form of the "chutnification" of English language, employing various devices. With his linguistic experimentations in *Shame*, Rushdie attempts to destroy 'the natural rhythms of English language and let other things into it'.

II. ABUNDANT USE OF NON-ENGLISH WORDS

The most exciting feature of Salman Rushdie's language in his novel *Shame* is the abundant use of English with Urdu, Hindi and other words throughout the novel that brings oriental flavor to the novel. Though the novel is abundant with Urdu, Hindi and other words, Rushdie does not provide any glossary or notes to explain the words to the western readers. As Vikram Seth in his *A Suitable Boy* (1993) does not provide any notes, Rushdie too does not think it necessary to provide any kind of explanation. Various non English words used by Rushdie are zenana, jahannum, angrez, mistri, chadar, patangs, sharam, zabar, sharamana, mohajir, bazaar, loo, dupatta, puri, diwan, yara, hushree, gaotakiya, takallouf, chapatti, dhobi, henna, takht, sikh kabab, guddi, khansama, shamiana, lam, mim, lotah etc. Rushdie boldly refuses to provide glossaries or footnotes and shows his resistance to the standard discourse. Rushdie uses various non English words to suit his purposes instead of using English language in accordance with the prevalent trends. Rushdie uses his narrative language tuned in the nuances of ordinary speech. Though the medium of expression is English language, the medium of experience is that of the local languages. Rushdie plays with the narratorial language as he plays with history, reality and memory. About Rushdie's playful linguistic experimentation,

Meenakshi Mukharji writes that it is Rushdie's getting away with the use of mongrel street language of cities, daring to translate idioms and puns mediated by no apology, no footnote, no glossary.' (Mukharjee, 2003, 10)

Rushdie deliberately attempts to combine words and phrases to make compounds, a style later adopted by Arundhati Roy in her *God of Small Things* (1993). Such combination of words and phrases that form compounds are foulmouthed; justlikethat; dontyouthinkso; plenipotentiary; wentwithout saying; gaspingpanting; whoknowswhat; speaknoevil; whereaml; dirtyfilthy; immunosuppressive; fasterfaster and overandover. Rushdie deliberately combines words and phrases to suit his purpose. The extreme use of compound words and phrases show Rushdie's inventiveness and mastery of English language. He can be distinguished as a trendsetter of 'mongrel language'.

III. USE OF VERNACULAR LANGUAGE HABITS

Rushdie uses innovative language rhythms and humorously describes his native experience of Indian vernacular languages. For example: [Y]our fatherji is sending himself of devil; put there, and there, and there; some secret panels which can shoot out eighteen- inch stiletto blades; sharp sharp; such beautiful black black hair you come with; nobody was catting it off under my nose, no sir!; Hashmat Bibi creaked, "always they live in their poor head." Always always he got his cousin's goat, Just like a blush, all over, hot hot .Similarly many vernacular words and phrases such as May your grandsons urinate upon your pauper's grave; He be consigned for all eternity to some desert outpost of jahannum; some borderland of hell; (H)e bore upon his forehead the gatta or permanent bruise; Ek dum. Fut -a- fut. At once, or even quicker. Similarly he attempted translation of vernacular idioms such as [W]hat is kept in her?

Rushdie in his narrative manipulates language and makes extensive use of uncommon words and phrases and forms of punctuation, creating a hybridized narratorial language. Rushdie undermines the conventional forms of language, invoking new rules. He destabilizes the traditional use of language and invokes a language which is especially 'Rushdishque'. About his manipulation of language in *Midnight's children*, Rushdie tells in an interview conducted by Jean-Pierre Durix:

"The way in which English language is used in that book is very striking; it showed me that it was possible to break up the language and put in back together a different way... I found I had to punctuate it in a very peculiar way, to destroy the natural rhythm of the English language... that sort of thing just seemed to help to dislocate the English and let others into it"..... (Durix :2000,10).

Rushdie challenges the normal course of language used in English literature by twisting words and sentences to constrain them to the apoplectic complexity of the novels. Rushdie continuously attempts to reinvent language with his special use of figure of speech, puns and other verbal artifacts throughout the narratives. Rushdie attempts the manipulation of language to able achieves its renewal. He disfigures, manipulates language and questions our use of it and causes awkward reaction in reader's mind. Rushdie also employs oral Indian narrative tradition to narrate his tales that gives him enormous scope for linguistic innovation. Rushdie subverts language by comingling comic-serious, modern-ancient, high art-popular culture, advertising, cinemas, parody, Hindi-Urdu-English with his great sense of wit, humor to create a language which can be called typical 'Rushdisque'. Brian McHale calls Rushdie's technical language as "lexical exhibitionism".

Rushdie advocates his use of hybridized narrative language in an article in London Review of Books:

We can't simply use the language in the way the British did: itneeds remaking for our own purpose. Those of us who use English language do so in spite of our ambiguity towards it, or perhaps because of that, perhaps because we find in that linguistic struggle a reflection of other struggles taking place in the real world, struggles between the cultures within ourselves and the influences at work upon our societies. To conquer English may be to complete the process of making ourselves free (Rushdie: 1992, 19).

IV. EXTENSIVE USE OF PARENTHESIS

Use of parenthesis is a very significant feature of Rushdie's style. He uses parenthesis for a number of purposes in his writings. Parenthesis is used to bring in extra-information like In the following example. Parenthesis is used to import additional Information about Mr. Shakil –

The fierce sun of his financial incompetence (which he had successfully concealed for decades behind his imposing patriarchal facade, his filthy temper and the over weening hauteur which was his most poisonous legacy to his daughters) had dried out all the oceans of cash, so that Chunee, Munnee and Bunny spent their entire period mourning settling debts for which [.....] (S, 14)

Parenthesis is used as an effective narrative device to arouse reader's interest by giving future information. For instance:

Meanwhile two wives are abandoned in their separate exiles, each with a daughter who should have been a son (more needs to be said about young Arjumand Harappa, more will certainly be written about poor, idiot Sufiya Zinobia). (104)

Further, Parenthesis is used very creatively to give parallel information.

We who have grown up on diet of honour and shame can still grasp what must seem unthinkable to peoples living in the aftermath of the death of God and of tragedy : that men will sacrifice their dearest love on the implacable alters of their pride. (And not only men. I have since heard of a case in which a woman committed the identical crime for identical reasons). (11)

Elsewhere Parenthesis is used as a reminder of previous incident of the novel. Parenthesis is used to bring clarity of time of the narration so that the reader is not confused. As Rushdie jumps between past, present and future, Parenthesis acts as the indicating medium. In the example below the entire paragraph is put in parenthesis. This paragraph talks of Raja and Ikey's daughter's while in the narration Rushdie's characters Raja and Iskey are still young.

(Here I should explain the matter of daughters who- should - have - been - sons, Sufiya Zinobia was the 'wrong miracle' because her father had wanted a boy; but this was not Argument Harappa's problem. Arjumand, the famous Virgin Ironpants' regretted her female sex for wholly non-parental reasons. 'This woman's body she told her father on the day she became a grown woman, 'it brings a person nothing but babies, pinches and shame.) (106-107).

V. LENGTHY SENTENCE STRUCTURES

Rushdie uses long periodic, highly subordinated sentence which suits the oral-story telling tradition:

Afterwards, when he recovered, he was never able to move his head to the left. Sufiya Zinobia Hyder the incarnation of her family's Shame and also, once again, its Chief cause, fell limply into her fiancé's arms, and Omar Khayyam had assailant and victim taken immediately to hospital, where Talvar Ulhaq remained on the critical list for one hundred and one hours, while Sufiya Zinobia had to be brought out of her self-induced trance by the exercise of more hypnotic skill than Omar had ever been required to display. (171).

A lot of action is stated in one long sentence changing the complexity of narration.

A Short inventory of the effects of the wedding scandal : the stiff neck of Talvar ulhaq, which terminated his career as a polo star, the birth of a spirit . . . of forgiveness and reconciliation with Raja Hyder, who found it hard to ostracize a man whom his daughter had almost killed, so that Talvar and Good news were not, after all cast out of the bosom of that accursed family; also the accelerated disintegration of Bilqui's Hyder, whose breakdown could no longer be concealed, even though she became, in the following years, little more than a whisper or rumour, because Raja Hyder kept her away from society, under a kind of unofficial house arrest. (171)

The longest sentence used in the novel is the one which describes Rani Harappa's eighteen embroidered Shawls (191-195), collectively, entitled 'The Shamelessness of Iskander the Great'. External scaffolding is provided by the Shawl's being introduced individually as the torture shawl', 'the swearing Shawl', 'the allegorical shawl' and so on. And within this over all unity, phrases and clauses create structure of discrete parallelism, rise to periodic climaxes, and cohere in identifiable sub-units the length of normal sentences and paragraphs. Consider for instance the following brief extract.

.....and the election shawls, one for the day of suffrage that began his reign, one for the day of his downfall, shawl swarming with figures, each one a breathtaking life like portrait of a member of the Front, figures breaking seals, stuffing ballot-boxes, smashing heads, figures swaggering into polling booths to watch the peasants vote, stick-waving, rifle-toting figures, fire-raisers, mobs..... it was an act of accusation on the grandest

conceivable scale and of course he'd have won anyway, daughter, no question, a respectable victory, but he wanted more. (193)

The Cohesion achieved by 'Shawls, one for the day of.... one for the day of shawls,.... figure figures..... of figures', and the variety achieved by figures breaking seals, stuffing ballot-boxes, smashing heads, as opposed to stick waving, rifle-toting figures, these two similar yet dissimilar grammatical units being kept apart by one of roughly equal length in which figures' is qualified by a single participial phrase. Finally a dramatic structure for the whole gigantic sentence is supplied by the interpolated and italicized asides to Rani's daughter. They also serve to remind us that this is a prose translation of the language in which Rani writes her shawl. And these expressions of her silently accumulated anger she has spend many careful years composing so its only fitting that Rushdie's prose style should reflect that care. The two qualities of Coherence and anger, characterize the novel's other long sentence, in which Rushdie lists the absurdities he would be obliged to satirize if his subject were the real Pakistan than his 'fairy-tale' one (69-70). And it is this coherence and anger, in large measure that distinguishes this novel from its predecessor.

VI. SUBVERSION OF OFFICIOUSNESS OF LANGUAGE

Curses, abusive languages are features of *Shame*. This subverts the officiousness of languages and makes the language sound shameful. This using of foul language and curses enhance the theme that Rushdie has set to depict in the novel. Rushdie not only violates the grammatical rules but also violates code of 'takallouf'. Perhaps this style was the best manner to describe shame. As the novel opens the reader finds the dying Old Shakil cursing his daughter "Whores", the dying man cursed them, don't count on it.(14) Each time Farah Zoroaster opens his mouth foul words falls off her mouth. She says to Omar, "I Shit on your words. Your balls dropped t too soon and you got the hots, no more to it than that. Don't load your family problems on me." (29) Mir Harappa's languages crosses all boundaries of decency when he speaks regarding his brother Isky to his Sister-in-law, Rani.

VII. CONCLUSION

Rushdie is a postmodernist who deliberately plays a linguistic game to undermine the conventional forms of language. In his novel *Shame*, he has a whole new weapon in his armory. He gives his linguistic virtuosity full play. Rushdie's lexical exhibitionism is eminent in *Shame*. The novel shows verbal pyrotechnics. Rushdie has been praised for his energizing use of language. In Indian English writing, Rushdie is regarded an initiator of an extraordinary and revolutionary use of English language that has been viewed as a subversive strategy in terms of the Empire writing back in retaliation.

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