

Loving in Parts: Reading Fragmented National Imaginary and Diasporic Schizophrenia in Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* and *Shame*

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Abstract

India has been conceived as an 'imaginary homeland' to diasporic writers, who exist at the fringes of national existence because of their self-exiled status. This paper is devoted to the fragmented vision of the many Indias that emerge after battling conflicts of interest and imagination in the writings of one of the most celebrated diasporic authors of our times—Salman Rushdie. What I propose in this academic endeavour is that the imaginary homeland created by Rushdie is far from the homogenous organic entity of the modern nation state. On the contrary, Rushdie's exiled imagination seeks to reassemble the jigsaw of the nation in a somewhat erratic manner whereby its holistic modalities stand suitably problematised. The standard diasporic nostalgia that critics prescribe as the staple post-colonial diet begets a perverse twist in the very conception of the idea of the 'country', since the schemata of that national imaginary stands always already shattered in the discourses that are spun out of a migrant mind. His experiences, therefore, both as an insider and an outsider, remain imperative in the (de)construction of an entire nation's fate. In *Midnight's Children* and *Shame*, he unpacks the lethal forces of history that have navigated this prehistoric landscape of loss, the way the subcontinent has survived manhandling for centuries and has consequently emerged battle-weary and scarred. The subsequent fragmentation of the topographical areas of the nation, following each war has symbolised, over the new century, the significant dismantling of the nature of the nation state, the fissures in its post-colonial frame, and the deep psychological crisis in the post-national psyche. The paper is therefore an endeavour to undertake an analysis of a diasporic author's imaginarium of his own splintered existence in tandem with his mother nation, and an effort to comprehend the quasi-historical and mythical treatment of the theme of the nationhood itself.

Keywords: diaspora, nation, myth, memory, history, fragmentation

A name means continuity with the past, and people without a past are people without a name.

- Milan Kundera, *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*

...why does one love one's country? Because the bread tastes better there, the sky is higher, the air smells better, voices sound stronger, the ground is easier to walk on. Isn't that so?

- Bertolt Brecht, *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*

Homelands create diasporas. Diasporas, in their turn, can also create homelands, or as Salman Rushdie might contend, 'imaginary homelands'. What I propose in this academic endeavour is that the imaginary homeland created by Rushdie is far from the homogenous organic entity of the modern nation state that both India and Pakistan have, post-independence, sought to evolve into. On the contrary, Rushdie's exiled imagination seeks to reassemble the jigsaw of the nation in a somewhat erratic manner whereby its holistic modalities stand suitably problematised. The standard diasporic nostalgia that critics prescribe as the staple post-colonial diet begets a perverse twist in the very conception of the idea of the 'country', since the schemata of that national imaginary stand always already fragmented and splintered in the discourses that are spun out of a migrant mind. To that extent, the fragmentary nature of the imaginary homeland becomes symptomatic of the post-modern, and also, to that extent, post-national, schizophrenic tendencies of the diasporic writer, who envisions in the disjointed national framework a reflection of his own temperamental disconnect. In the process, the author reveals to the dutifully ignorant 'citizens' the utter *constructedness* of the democratic, topographically contained unity of the nation by exposing the fissures that are carefully concealed beneath the plastered walls—walls that have metamorphosed into barbed wire fences.

To explicate the argument, I would venture to consider as two elucidative examples the two most extraordinary metaphors that Salman Rushdie deploys—that of the perforated sheet and the dismemberment of bodies—which encapsulate the symptomatic splintering of both the self and the 'other'—the imagined nation. For I find in Rushdie the nation posited as the category of the 'other' in terms of which the self is then to be delineated. It is in the juxtaposition of the solitary self with the multitudinous nation that brings out a common watershed region where both may interact and flow into each other. Each confounds the other's potential for existential possibilities by exposing the fluidity of its entrails, the malleability of its bones, the incessant reshaping of its 'permanence' by historical contingencies. The individual and the nation are constantly kneaded by some invisible, cosmic, temporal force that re-orientes them to suit each other's needs. They are born and reborn into each other's imagination:

Oh, spell it out, spell it out: at the precise instant of India's arrival at independence, I tumbled forth into the world....thanks to the occult tyrannies of those blandly saluting clocks, I had been mysteriously handcuffed to history, my

destinies indissolubly chained to those of my country.... I was left entirely without a say in the matter.

(*Midnight's Children*, 9)

The first instance that I intend to discuss in this context is the incident of the “perforated sheet” (*MC*, 9) that is recounted at the very commencement of *Midnight's Children*¹ (1980). It is indeed from this very event that my paper derives its titular impetus—the concept of ‘loving in parts’. Lest we feel that the analogy between the perforated sheet and the author’s fragmented national imaginary may be a tad little far-fetched and overdrawn, it is imperative to note what the narrator Saleem Sinai has to say about the unlikely source of his discursive exercise:

Consumed multitudes are jostling and shoving inside me; and guided only by the memory of a large white bedsheet with a roughly circular hole some seven inches in diameter cut into the centre, clutching at the dream of that holey, mutilated square of linen, which is my talisman, my open-sesame, I must commence the business of remaking my life...

(*MC*, 9–10)

The perforated sheet has been thereby implicated at the very centre of the discourse of the individual and the nation; indeed it is instrumental to the very history of their birth. It is the ‘open-sesame’—the entry point to the grand narrative of national imaginary, since it embodies the author’s fantastical interaction with his ‘imaginary homeland’. The perforated sheet is the screen of the expatriate author’s private fantasy, which has in it the black hole of a distanced nostalgia that sucks in every other aspect of his life to give it the shape of a void which cannot be filled. The perforation is that very lack, which, despite the excesses of the discourse, refuses to close its yawning chasm. The migrant author’s vision of the homeland is mediated, indeed, constituted by this very lack. Consequently, in the novel we find that Doctor Aadam Aziz, the narrator’s grandfather, uses this very perforation to get a glimpse of his future wife, Naseem:

‘You will kindly specify which portion of my daughter it is necessary to inspect. I will then issue her with my instructions to place the required segment against the hole that you see there. And so, in this fashion the thing may be achieved.’

(*MC*, 23)

In the author’s eye, the nation remains an embodied presence, and more often that presence is that of a woman. This is not only because of the fact that the woman’s body is homologically equivalent to the body of the nation as the primary contestatory site for the greatest of historical battles to fight themselves out, but also because both the woman and the nation are objects of intense fascination and longing. The woman is the only way to expound the materiality of the nation, which is otherwise existent only as an amorphous concept floating somewhere about the theoretical horizons of post-coloniality. In this case, Naseem is unwittingly metamorphosed into the personification of the India that Rushdie imagines since her recalcitrant body becomes the carrier of the desire invested in the modern nation state—a desire that is as much political as erotic. In fact, for the political desire to have potency and virility, it must needs be somewhere strongly informed and motivated by an erotogenous impulse. The migrant author himself is somewhere Aadam Aziz, who enjoys a curious voyeuristic pleasure out of directing

his male gaze through the unintentional bioscopic outlet that shows the mystery of the being that is the woman-and-the-nation. The incipient voyeurism of the situation is what visibly excites Doctor Aziz's rampant imagination even as "on each occasion he was vouchsafed a glimpse, through the mutilated sheet, of a different seven-inch circle of the young woman's body" (*MC*, 25). The nation, or at least its idea, is therefore 'young', and embodies the sweet pubescence of a 'woman's body'. Similar to Doctor Aziz, Rushdie also plays the peeping-Tom, who concentrates his attention on one part of the country at a time, before he is in a position to execute a mental integral calculus to assemble the parts and in the process form a land of his dreams:

So gradually Doctor Aziz came to have a picture of Naseem in his mind, a badly-fitting collage of her severally inspected parts. This phantasm of a partitioned woman began to haunt him, and not only in his dreams. Glued together by his imagination, she accompanied him on all his rounds, she moved into the front room of his mind... but she was headless, because he had never seen her face.

(*MC*, 25)

And so it is that Naseem had already become the 'phantasm of a partitioned woman' that was India. The use of the word 'partitioned', as the reader may have already noted, is somewhat operative. The author's inability, or incapacity, to visualise the nation as a whole at least partly emerges from the fact that he is intensely aware that the modern post-independent state that he aspires to capture is always already fragmented, after the Partition of 1947, into at least three corpuses separated by the morbid imaginary fences that cut through the "softness of her ticklish skin" (*MC*, 25), transforming the perfect symmetry of the organic body into a mangled ugliness of gaping, bleeding wounds. Perhaps this is the reason why "Rushdie would stubbornly cling to his heritage which includes both a British-born Indian and also a member of this post-diaspora community to draw on its roots just as all the world's community of displaced writers has always done" (Aikant, 215).

Meanwhile, the illusion of whole that has been shattered for him must be shattered for the others as well, especially those who enjoy the blissfully ignorant civilian status in the sprawling expanse of the democratic cradle. For them, as also for Rushdie, the nation is a 'badly-fitting collage', where some parts have been coerced together to form an elusive corpus of completion. Indeed, it is, and has always been, a near-impossibility for the national citizenry to have a complete, unadulterated, and historically viable picture of their nation at all, not only because of the fluidity of its ever-shifting defining boundaries, but also because of the impractical *colossium* of its gigantic expanse. The singular author/citizen imaginarium is thereby forced to take recourse to 'loving in parts' the nation which resists totalisation, refusing as consistently and resolutely to be imagined whole as it does materially. In the process, says John J. Su, Rushdie "asserts the promise of a unified India collapsed in the face of sectarianism cultivated by the nation's own leaders" (Su, 549). The perforated sheet becomes imperative in its exposure of the real nature of the democratic union called India, whereby the voyeur can actually have access to the nation-as-it-is, which is an assembled illusion of collectivity. The perforated sheet is a veritable deconstructive tool which throws each part of the body-politic into sharp, individuated relief where they are no longer a part of a syntactical whole to be held together and governed by the grammar of the modern nation. It serves

as a microscope, with the individuated parts of the nation mounted on the slide for close scrutiny and inspection so that diseases may be diagnosed and suitably treated, which is the only viable political solution usually followed when any of the individual 'state' of the country undergoes unrest or upheaval. Put under such an analytical lens, the political desire invested in the modern nation state becomes considerably deflated and diminished, even as the individual is left to find his/her bearing while being pitted against the sprawling monstrosity of the ostensibly unified, topographically contained entity of a national landscape.

The sheet, in a way, therefore, performs the same distinctive function of that of the authorial imagination—rendering the nation into an anarchic, chaotic and de-ordered space which can be shaped and re-shaped according to memory and fantasy:

As for me: I, too, like all migrants, am a fantasist. I build imaginary countries and try to impose them on the ones that exist. I, too, face the problem of history: what to retain, what to dump, how to hold on to what memory insists on relinquishing, how to deal with change.

(*Shame*, 87–88)

The quantitative dismemberment of the body-politic is also therefore symptomatic of the author's own inability to derive the fullness of the sublime national vision, even at the climactic moment of artistic enlightenment. Instead, in a flash of epiphanic self-revelation, he can only detect his own fractured consciousness in the scourge of his disintegrated homeland:

...I made my narrator, Saleem, suspect in his narration; his mistakes are the mistakes of a fallible memory compounded by quirks of character and of circumstance, and his vision is fragmentary. It may be that when the Indian writer who writes from outside India tries to reflect that world, he is obliged to deal in broken mirrors, some of whose fragments are irrevocably lost.

(*Imaginary Homelands*, 10–11)

Rushdie therefore successfully dissociates his narrator from the "epic tradition dating back to Virgil that imagines the hero as the founder of the nation" (Su, 550). Instead, Rushdie becomes the writer-hero who becomes responsible for a post-structural dissolution of the category of the nation by deconstructing its existence and selectively preserving its materiality in the formaldehyde of his memory, as he says claims:

The broken mirror may actually be as valuable as the one which is supposedly unflawed... I am not gifted with total recall, and it was precisely the partial nature of these memories, their fragmentation, that made them so evocative for me. The shards of memory acquired greater status, greater resonance, because they were remains; fragmentation made trivial things seem like symbols.... The broken pots of antiquity, from which the past can be sometimes, but always provisionally, be reconstructed, are exciting to discover, even if they are pieces of the most quotidian objects.

(*Imaginary Homelands*, 11-12)

In his turn, with each slice of memory, Rushdie breaks away a piece of the nation, and reconstitutes the derelict edifice in accordance with the greater legitimacy of his private

fantastical landscape, much as Dr Aziz's enamoured mind had reconstituted his beloved features. In his dissociation of the narrator-hero from the formative or constitutive work in the actual making of the nation, Rushdie also refuses to attribute any political meaning to the status of national history as coherent, linear and teleological. The nation and its history, both lie fragmented, as Saleem confounds chronology and stumbles along his profuse, endlessly proliferating narrative in bits and pieces, trying to tendentiously fit them into a jigsaw of his own (un)making. The instructive voice of Anita Nair tells us as much:

Let me tell you, an exile is a creature who, in spite of being banished from his land, never ever manages to sever his ties with the place where his umbilical cord lies buried. A pitiful being, who combines one part memory and two parts imagination to create a land so magical, so unique, that he can never truly belong to the present...

(*The Better Man*, 93)

As her conspiratorial tone suggests, she is actually letting us in on a secret. In Rushdie, the entire discourse of the nation is generated out of, and evolved around this secret core—not of nostalgia, but of procreative pleasure. Being born out of the body of the nation, the migrant author now gives birth to the new nation within himself. Like a prism, the perforated sheet of imagination stands between the writer and the nation, and shows him slices of that unforeseen spectacle that also seem to complete his own personality, just as it had done to Aadam Aziz:

In short: my grandfather had fallen in love, and had come to think of the perforated sheet as something sacred and magical, because through it he had seen the things which had filled up the hole inside him...

(*MC*, 27)

Like Aadam Aziz, Rushdie has fallen into the habit of loving the nation in parts, and it is not entirely a coincidence that, like Aziz's "headless" (*MC*, 25) darling, Rushdie's India also lacks the head—Kashmir, where, incidentally, the event of the perforated sheet occurs. Kashmir is the material embodiment of the decapitation-syndrome that has hit the nation state since its inception, and in war after debilitating war, it has lost a little piece of its northernmost parts—its vital cerebral processes—to its detractors. Kashmir, India's paradise, is lost to it. This is the very final illness that Doctor Aziz *diagnoses* Naseem with, and it is the same disease that plagues the nation—the "headache" (*MC*, 27) which never seems to go away.

Disintegration and decapitation are themes that run throughout *Midnight's Children* and *Shame* (1983). Saleem Sinai himself, portraying his very existence as miraculous and unsustainable, continually asserts that he is physically decomposing even as he relates the tale. His fatalistic contention is finally realised when he disintegrates as a result of his disease, but his chronicle remains, fragmented and unstable as it is, as the material container of national meaning. Saleem's death, and the secret of his Anglo-Indian birth, says Jean M. Kane, starkly dramatises the illusion of coherence upon which "postcolonial nationality rests, as...[it] debunks conceptions of blood and race as the unifying constituents of national identity" (Kane, 96).

The classic metaphor of the kind of ‘headless’ deconstruction is, however, found in no other novel but Salman Rushdie’s *Shame* (which he wrote immediately after *Midnight’s Children*) in the strange fit that breaks upon Sufiya Zinobia, which I will take up in a few moments. What was only a subtle explication of the national riddle in the earlier novel became a full-fledged engagement with the contradictions that are promulgated within the national landscape—this time in Pakistan. It is difficult, if not impossible, to make a politically correct analysis of the novel. Let it suffice to say that the same splintering that Rushdie had witnessed in the Indian scenario has reified itself to form a subcontinental epidemic of sorts. Pakistan, whose existence as a nation had been rendered contingent upon its being wrenched away from the body of a larger mother country, is characterised by the malady of fragmentation since its birth:

[Pakistan] was a word born in exile which then went East, was borne across or trans-lated, and imposed itself on history; a returning migrant, settling down on partitioned land, forming a palimpsest on the past. A palimpsest obscures what lies beneath. To build Pakistan it was necessary to cover up Indian history.... It is the desire of every artist to impose his or her vision on the world; and Pakistan, the peeling, fragmenting palimpsest, increasingly at war with itself, may be described as a failure of the dreaming mind.

(*Shame*, 87)

The nation is now directly linked with the immigrant’s experience, since the country is truly a realm of *mohajirs*, who had all, all once belonged to a different state, and a different state of mind. The migrant’s experience and its uprooted, fragmentary nature becomes the articulative space to find an analogy for the ruptured national experience at last:

When individuals come unstuck from their native land, they are called migrants. When nations do the same thing... the act is called secession. What is the best thing about migrant peoples and seceded nations? I think it is their hopefulness.... And what’s the worst thing? It is the emptiness of one’s luggage. I’m speaking of invisible suitcases...we have come unstuck from more than land. We have floated upwards from history, from memory, from Time.

I may be such a person. Pakistan may be such a country.

(*Shame*, 86–7)

This “looking-glass Pakistan” (*Shame*, 88), this nation of migrants, becomes another perforated sheet, constructed around a hole, and refracting away fragments of itself in all its visibility, being cognisable only in parts, as Aadam Aziz’s bride was. Consequently, the narrator remarks:

Although I have known Pakistan for a long time, I have never lived there for longer than six months at a stretch... I have learned Pakistan in slices, the same way I have learned my growing sister... I have felt closer to each successive incarnation than to the one before.... I think what I’m close to confessing is that, however I choose to write about over-there, I am forced to reflect the world in fragments of broken mirrors...I must reconcile myself to the inevitability of the missing bits.

(*Shame*, 69)

And again the nation is loved in parts. Apart from the fact that Salman Rushdie uses the same metaphor of the broken mirrors for both the countries, each ostensibly (and with supreme irony) the antinomy of the other, what I also find is the curious tendency to again draw a parallel between the nation and the woman. Not only does the narrator compare the development of the nation to the growth of his sister (“on my good days, I think of her as Pakistan”, *Shame*, 68), he invokes and creates out of the thin, fictive air of narration a certain creature called Sufiya Zinobia, who will henceforth carry on her delicate conscience the onus of the failure that her nation has become. Her fate was decided by the etymology of her very name—Sufiya—a saint, who “is a person who suffers in our stead” (*Shame*, 141) as the author helpfully informs us. Her suffering takes the form of an unprecedented violence that racks her tiny frame and makes her mortally ill:

They found her in the aftermath of the Loo...amidst the corpses of the birds....Sufiya Zinobia had torn off their heads and then reached down into their bodies to draw their guts up through their necks with her tiny and weaponless hands....everybody was standing gaping at the spectacle of the bloodied girl and the decapitated creatures...

(*Shame*, 138)

The narrator claims that “Sufiya Zinobia had chosen the form of her own end” by internalising the plague of “unfelt shame of those around her” (*Shame*, 141). The question remains though—what is this terrible upsurge of shame that she feels obliged to induce within herself? It is the shame of an entire nation, which is stinging under the mortification of having been able to achieve nothing out of the decapitation of 1947, whereby they had seceded from India. Initially, it must have had all the hopes of a self-conscious teenager forever at pains to evade intrusion into its private space and to emphasize independence from the authority of a millennia-old ancestor. But with time, hopes are cruelly murdered, and all that remains is the shame of loss, which still rankles after four decades of getting-used-to-ness. The ‘Shame’ grows out, like poison ivy, from personal tragedies, from political instabilities, from economic devastation, from social corrosion, from cultural degeneration...from the death of all dreams. The shame is the failure of the principles on which the edifice of the nation was constructed, but more than that, the failure in the face of the precedence set by the high-and-mighty neighbour which had to be lived up to. It is the shame of the aborted fantasy of the land-of-the-pure, of Pakistan. It is the shame of witnessing an already abridged nation crumble beneath the façade of its power, and being reduced to dust, like Nishapur:

Wherever I turn, there is something of which to be ashamed. But shame is like everything else; live with it for long enough and it becomes part of the furniture. In ‘Defence’, you can find shame in every house, burning in an ashtray, hanging framed upon a wall, covering a bed. But nobody notices it any more. And everyone is civilized.

(*Shame*, 28)

And since it all began in fragmentation and division, partition and apportioning of proprietary rights, it had to end in a similar fashion. Sufiya Zinobia, daughter of her

mortified nation, embarks therefore on a rampant decapitating spree, tearing heads in an echo of her own inner fragmentation and turmoil:

Shame walks the streets of night. In the slums four youths are transfixed by those appalling eyes, whose deadly yellow fire blows like a wind through the lattice-work of the veil. They follow her to the rubbish-dump of doom, rats to her piper... Down she lies... Four husbands come and go. Four of them in and out, and then her hands reach for the first boy's neck. The others stand still and wait their turn. And heads hurled high, sinking into the scattered clouds; nobody saw them fall.

(*Shame*, 219)

The 'headless' state of the mangled bodies comes as a shock and revelation to the readers, as they finally begin to see where the cycle of violence set in motion is going end:

The four bodies were all adolescent, male, pungent. The heads had been wrenched from their necks by some colossal force: literally torn from their shoulders. Traces of semen were detected on their tattered pants... the heads were never found.

(*Shame*, 216)

Her final regenerative attempt by coupling with four men (in an ironic reversal of the Shariat law which allows a man to have four wives, which Aijaz Ahmed also points out) is also her last straw. The nation is sterile. Its procreative powers had been exhausted by expending them in the production of Raza Hyders and Iskander Harappas. The feminine instinct of nurturing that aids the envisioning of the woman as mother, and by extension, the nation, is severely undercut by the murderous impulse of Sufiya. She represents a nation gone crazed, being enmeshed, insists Aijaz Ahmad, "in the logic of all-embracing violences" (Ahmad, 127). The violence is not merely visceral in its intensity, but epistemic in its nature, suffusing the landscape in various forms- the descriptions of Partition, the armed rebellion of Baluchistan, the massacre of Babur Shakil and his compatriots, the murder of Sindbad Mengal and Little Mir, the execution of Iskander Harappa, the suicide of Naveed Hyder, the ingenious despatching of Bilquis and Raza Hyder and the final murder of Omar Khayyam Shakil. The text is littered with unwarranted and unredeemed corpses, as the nation itself is.

The ultimate act of violence, however, is not attributed, as could be expected, to the demented figure of Sufiya. That honour belongs to the three Shakil sisters, who in what Aijaz Ahmad rather reductively terms their "sheer surreal incoherence and loss of individual identity" (Ahmad, 144) embody for me the undivided, non-partitioned soul of the subcontinent before it was triumphantly sequestered into three. They even conceive together miraculously in their "uniquely passionate solidarity" (*Shame*, 19), so as to become the possessors of a collective motherhood, and their 'life' (one life, as everything is shared) is defined and dictated by the exigencies of that precious function:

But who was pregnant?

...Nobody ever discovered, not even the child that was born. [...] Now the three of them began, simultaneously, to thicken at the waist and the breast; when one

was sick in the morning, the two began to puke in such synchronized sympathy that it was impossible to tell which stomach had heaved first. Identically, their wombs ballooned towards the pregnancy's full term. [...] In spite of biological improbability, I am prepared to swear that so wholeheartedly did they wish to share the motherhood of their sibling...that, in short, twin phantom pregnancies accompanied the real one; while the simultaneity of their behaviour suggests the operation of some form of communal mind.

(*Shame*, 19–20)

It is the pre-Partition dream of subcontinental nationhood that the undivided nation had dreamed. It is the three-as-one birthing of a singular national dream, when India, Pakistan and Bangladesh had not separately conceived of national ambitions, but had been supremely content with the collaborative aspiration of mothering a healthy child which will not be allowed to “feel the forbidden emotion of shame” (*Shame*, 38) of its bastard birth. It is the most complete embodiment of the nation-as-mother, which finally resorts to disintegration when an attempt is made by their son's ‘birthday wishes’ to distinguish it into three individual parts:

And there is an even stranger matter to report. It is this: when they were divided by Omar Khayyam's birthday wishes, they had been indistinguishable too long to retain any exact sense of their former selves—and, well, to come right out with it, the result was that they got divided up in the wrong way, they got all mixed up.... In the chaos of the regeneration, the wrong heads had ended up on the wrong bodies; they became psychological centaurs, fish-women, hybrids; and of course, this confused separation of personalities carries with it the implication that they were still not genuinely discrete, because they could only be comprehended if you took them as a whole.

(*Shame*, 40)

The soul of the subcontinent, which, though ‘divided up the wrong way’ prematurely, and for spectacularly wrong reasons, finally comes together—wreaking a grotesque act of vengeful dismemberment on Raza Hyder, one of the architects of that division, as punishment meted out for the untimely demise of their second child, Babur:

...the three sisters pulled down the lever, acting in perfect unison, so that it was impossible to say who pulled fast or hardest, and the ancient spring-releases...worked like a treat, the secret panels sprang back and eighteen-inch stiletto blades of death drove into Raza's body, cutting him into pieces, their reddened points emerging, among other places, through his eyeballs, adam's apple, navel, groin and mouth.

(*Shame*, 282)

This spectacular revenge, planned with cool, clinical precision, is very unlike the frenzied violence perpetrated by Sufiya. It seems, therefore, as if the deceased soul of the collective subcontinental nation had took its turn to inflict the same outrage of forceful dismemberment and abbreviation that had been imposed upon it by regularly chopping up slices of it according to the latest cartographic whims. The disjointedness of the national landscape finally gets etched upon the fragments of the individual body, like a

lurid embroidery done in blood and gore, in a final pronouncement of “judgment” (*Shame*, 286).

To that extent, *Shame* becomes a novel not only about the author’s own splintered imagination and the light of that very fragmented gaze in which he holds the national space. It becomes a novel of those very parts which have been separated and quarantined away from each other, and somewhere still merge in their collective suffering of an incomplete, fragmentary existence:

The country in this story is not Pakistan, or not quite. There are two countries, real and fictional, occupying the same space, or almost the same space. My story, my fictional country exist, like myself, at a slight angle to reality. I have found this off-centring to be necessary; but its value is, of course, open to debate. My view is that I am not writing only about Pakistan.

I have not given the country a name.

(*Shame*, 29)

Rushdie’s writings, therefore, both as an insider and an outsider, remain imperative in the (de)construction of an entire nation’s fate. In *Midnight’s Children* and *Shame*, he unpacks the lethal forces of history that have navigated this prehistoric landscape of loss, the way the subcontinent has survived manhandling for centuries and has consequently emerged battle-weary and scarred. The subsequent fragmentation of the topographical areas of the nation, following each war has symbolised, over the new century, the significant dismantling of the nature of the nation state, the fissures in its post-colonial frame, and the deep psychological crisis in the post-national psyche. His writing, thus, remains invaluable to our endeavour to undertake an analysis of a diasporic author’s imaginarium of his own splintered existence in tandem with his mother nation, and an effort to comprehend the quasi-historical and mythical treatment of the theme of the nationhood itself.

Notes

¹ Henceforth referred to as *MC* in parenthesis for the purposes of textual referencing.

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