



**A PSYCHOANALYTIC EXPLORATION OF CULTURAL TRAUMA AND IDENTITY
IN SALMAN RUSHDIE'S *SHAME* AND *THE GROUND BENEATH HER FEET***

By Manvi Bhambhani

Abstract

The postcolonial era is marked by a variety of identities, cultural clashes and the lasting impact of past trauma, resulting in a wide range of experiences. Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, *The Satanic Verses*, *Shame*, *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*, provide deep insights into postcolonial identity and the impact of colonialism on individuals, especially in the context of South Asia. This study takes a psychoanalytic approach to Rushdie's novels, particularly focusing on 'Shame' and 'The Ground Beneath Her Feet', in order to uncover the intricate relationship between identity and cultural trauma within the stories.

Beginning with postcolonial identity and the importance of cultural hybridity, the analysis focuses on *Shame*, illustrating how the concept of cultural trauma serves as a way to understand the evolving nature of identities in light of historical changes and its effects on the characters' psyche. The analysis in *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* examines the effects of immigration on the psychology of the characters and how it affects their behavior. It explores globalization and cultural blending as forces that transform the identity of the characters.

This psychoanalytic study encourages readers to examine intricate identities in a postcolonial context, pushing the readers to understand the portrayal of characters in a specific manner.

1.1 Introduction

Known for his captivating narratives that explore the intersection of identity culture and history and the intricate nature of human existence in postcolonial environments, Salman Rushdie is a prominent figure in literature. Two of his works targeted in this research, *Shame* and *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* offer reflections on human psychology amidst the backdrop of postcolonial societies.

Shame by Rushdie features characters who explore the intricate themes of power corruption and the interplay between personal and public identity in a highly political and socially discordant world. The characters are also shown to navigate a land of conflicts and contradictions (hinting at Pakistan) in the novel. *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* transports readers on a mythological journey through music fame and mythology through the lens of magical realism and deep exploration.

Both books revolve around the theme of identity and its close ties to cultural trauma. Drawing on the insights of Sigmund Freud, the researcher employs a psychoanalytic approach to examine how cultural trauma affects an individual and collective psyche while also influencing identity formation. Freud can provide valuable insights into the psychological conflicts that shape our identity particularly in light of cultural trauma and exposure to postcolonial cultures through his ideas on the unconscious mind, repression and the Oedipus complex. Additionally, Freud emphasized the importance of memory and unconsciousness in shaping behavior especially in postcolonial societies struggling with cultural colonial legacies.

This paper delves into the reasons that affected the mind of the colonial subject and how colonization still affects the masses as a collective body who have been through great trauma. It explores themes of identity and culture shock in Rushdie's *Shame* and *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* using psychoanalytic theory to provide deep insights in the novels. By scrutinizing characters, protagonists as well as narrative structures in Rushdie's works, we will explore the search for meaning and identity in a rapidly changing world.

1.2 Relation between Postcolonial Literature and Psychoanalysis

When postcolonial literature is examined using a psychoanalytic perspective, it provides valuable insights into the psychological effects of colonial trauma and the intricacies of postcolonial identities. This cross-disciplinary method, which merges postcolonial theory with psychoanalysis, illuminates different facets like trauma, identity, power dynamics, cultural mixing, language, and depiction.

A crucial reason for utilizing psychoanalysis in examining postcolonial literature is to comprehend the profound effects of colonial trauma. Researchers apply psychoanalytic concepts to investigate the psychological impact of colonization on individuals, which can result in challenges related to identity, cultural disconnection, and acceptance of oppressive beliefs. Frantz

Fanon's influential texts, such as *Black Skin, White Masks* and *The Wretched of the Earth*, demonstrate this method, as Fanon uses psychoanalytic viewpoints to analyze how colonialism affects the mental state of the colonized.

One crucial element of psychoanalytic examination in postcolonial literature is the effort to reveal hidden histories and identities. Psychoanalysis, which concentrates on revealing suppressed desires and memories, aids researchers in bringing to light marginalized stories and addressing the impact of colonialism. Through the utilization of psychoanalytic ideas, researchers delve into the various layers of identity, memory, and knowledge overshadowed by colonial accounts, offering a detailed comprehension of postcolonial subjectivities and the lasting effects of historical oppression.

In addition, a psychoanalytic viewpoint helps in studying power struggles and opposition in postcolonial settings. Scholars explore how characters in postcolonial literature defy dominant beliefs by examining resistance tactics, the development of identity, and power hierarchies. This interdisciplinary method underscores the relationship between personal actions and systemic influences, enhancing our grasp of postcolonial stories.

Psychoanalysis is also helpful in examining the cultural contradictions and blending in postcolonial literature. The presence of conflicting cultural influences is a key element in postcolonial works. Psychoanalytic ideas can help clarify the uncertain cultural identities of characters, dealing with themes of belonging, displacement, and cultural compromise.

Moreover, psychoanalytic analysis highlights the significance of language and representation in molding postcolonial identities. Scholars explore the portrayal of colonial subjects and the impact of language on subjectivity in postcolonial settings by utilizing Lacanian concepts of language as a symbolic system. This methodology critically examines the development and discussion of postcolonial identities through linguistic and symbolic frameworks.

In postcolonial narratives, psychoanalytic analysis examines the motivations, desires, and internal conflicts of characters. Scholars deepen our understanding of the psychological aspects of postcolonial literature by delving into the characters' psychological depths and uncovering the intricacies of their actions and decisions.

The combination of postcolonial theory and psychoanalysis offers a strong foundation for comprehending the psychological intricacies of colonial and postcolonial experiences. Researchers use psychoanalytic ideas to reveal the impact of colonial trauma, bring to light

suppressed histories and identities, examine power dynamics and resistance, explore cultural mixture and uncertainty, study language and representation, and delve into the motivations and conflicts of characters. This interdisciplinary method enriches our understanding of the complex relationship between individual psychology and larger sociocultural frameworks in postcolonial literature and culture.

1.3 Shame – Through a Psychoanalytic lens

The story of *Shame* opens in a grand mansion known as Nishapur, where a young boy named Omar is raised in seclusion by three enigmatic sisters. Despite his vow to never experience shame, Omar leads a tumultuous life while also achieving renown as an immunologist. He strikes up a friendship with Iskander Harappa, a prominent politician, and the two embark on numerous escapades. Iskander weds Rani Humayun and enters the political arena, eventually becoming a formidable force. Iskander's adversary, Raza Hyder, also has a troubled history and two daughters: Sufiya and Naveed. Sufiya, grappling with mental difficulties and an enigmatic "Beast" within her, undergoes severe outbursts. Against a backdrop of political unrest, Iskander ascends to prominence, yet the nation is rocked by scandals and upheavals. Sufiya's conduct deteriorates, culminating in tragic incidents involving her union with Omar and subsequent incarceration. Ultimately, Raza overthrows Iskander, sparking a succession of violent clashes that result in calamity for numerous characters, including Omar and Sufiya.

In his work *Shame*, Rushdie uses Pakistan symbolically to represent the lasting impact of Partition, examining its violent origins and gripping storyline. Rushdie, as noted by Brennan (1989), delves into the deep-seated communal scar left by the events of 1947, utilizing magical realism to illustrate the resurfacing of buried memories from Partition. This blurs the distinction between personal and communal trauma experiences, as observed by Parashkevova (2003). Through Sufiya Zinobia's descent into madness, Rushdie depicts Pakistan's suppressed pain, highlighting the connection between cultural trauma and national identity. Rushdie vividly portrays the transference of collective trauma through individual narratives.

Rushdie portrays the difficulties his characters encounter in developing coherent identities in postcolonial India and Pakistan. The main female character, Sufiya Zinobia, represents the breakdown of individuality as a result of colonial rule. Parashkevova (2003) explains that her conflicted self comes from the challenge of finding belonging between her native and colonial cultures. This inner turmoil, as Fanon (1967) discusses, underscores the struggles faced by colonized individuals navigating multiple cultural worlds.

Sufiyya Zinobia's insanity originates from her struggle to harmonize her fragmented sense of self with the impacts of colonial history. Sufiyya Zinobia's long period of not speaking mirrors Freud's idea of repression. In the narrative, her silence functions as a way to protect herself from the trauma she experienced. For example,

"Sufiyya's defiance was a constant thorn in her father's side, a reminder of his failure as a parent and a leader. He could never quite tame her rebellious spirit." (Rushdie, 2008).

Freud's idea of the ego and superego can be related to the situation here, as General Raza Hyder's effort to manage Sufiyya's rebellious nature mirrors the inner struggle between his wish for control and his ethical conscience. Raza Hyder's endeavors to quash Sufiyya's independence and uniqueness might originate from his own lingering emotional wounds and uncertainties about his capabilities as a leader and parent. Sufiyya's sense of self is influenced by her resistance against oppressive social standards and anticipations, illustrating Freud's beliefs on the ego's function in balancing between hidden impulses and the outside world. The character Raza Hyder adds complexity to this inner conflict by embodying unchecked desires and instincts. Raza's treatment of Sufiyya serves as a stark example of the negative consequences of unrestrained desires and impulsive actions.

Omar Khayyam, a character, embodies the ego by acting as a mediator between the id and the external world. While navigating Pakistani society, Omar must balance his own aspirations with societal expectations. Despite this, he faces inner turmoil similar to the conflicts outlined by Freud. The tension between his relationship with Sufiyya and his political ambitions highlights the struggle between personal desires and familial and national duties.

"Omar found himself torn between the allure of his mathematical pursuits and the intoxicating pull of love. Each equation solved brought him closer to academic acclaim, yet each moment spent with his beloved filled him with a longing for something beyond the confines of scholarly success."

Freud's theory of the id, ego, and superego can be used to examine Omar's inner struggle. The id represents his basic desires, like his need for love and companionship. The ego, on the other hand, symbolizes his logical side, which focuses on his academic goals and ambitions. The superego, shaped by society's norms and cultural standards, could intensify Omar's internal conflict by causing feelings of guilt or anxiety when he prioritizes personal needs over professional achievements.

Omar's challenges also symbolize more extensive concepts of cultural trauma and identity in the story. The societal expectation to adhere to traditional roles and expectations could be a factor in Omar's inner struggle as he wrestles with the conflict between following his dreams and obeying societal standards. Further, historical conflicts or societal disruptions, known as cultural trauma, might impact Omar's self-identity and mold his views on achievement and satisfaction.

Shame incorporates magical realism, mythology, and historical elements to provide readers with a unique insight into the emotions of the characters. The inclusion of magical realist elements, such as Iskander Harappa's character that represents the clash between tradition and modernity, embodying both the allure and the corruption of power.

The historical aspects, specifically the political turmoil, serve as external forces that shape the characters' mental well-being and identity at large. Rushdie's characterization of the individuals in the story follows Freud's structural model of the mind, delving into the interplay between primal instincts, societal norms, and personal identity.

"Iskander was a man of contradictions...He danced on the edge of madness, his laughter a mask for his pain." (Rushdie, 2008).

Iskander's erratic behavior and his ability to navigate the complexities of Pakistani politics with ease highlight his enigmatic and unpredictable nature, blurring the lines between reality and illusion, encouraging readers to contemplate the intricacies of identity.

1.4 The Ground Beneath Her Feet - Through a Psychoanalytic lens

The Ground Beneath Her Feet, published in 1999, is a postcolonial novel written by Salman Rushdie that focuses on the intertwined lives of Vina Apsara, Ormus Cama, and Rai Merchant. Vina, a talented singer hailing from Bombay, achieves success alongside her partner Ormus as they navigate the challenges of the music industry in various locations and eras. The title of the novel serves as a metaphor for stability amidst ongoing change, reflecting the struggles faced by the characters and the transformative nature of music. Rushdie employs elements of magical realism to blend reality with myth, delving into themes such as love, identity, and the power of storytelling. Through Rai's perspective, the novel subtly touches upon issues of cultural trauma and identity, capturing the complexities of postcolonial experiences.

Ormus Cama represents Freud's theory of the subconscious mind by striving for musical greatness and navigating complicated relationships. His deep-rooted desires influenced by his Indian background and past experiences are evident in his artistic endeavors and romantic

involvements. One example is his relationship with Vina Apsara, which becomes a platform for internal struggles related to love, self-identity, and celebrity status. Likewise, Rai Merchant's quest for self-awareness mirrors Freud's belief that the unconscious mind influences conscious actions, as he confronts issues surrounding cultural belonging and emotional wounds from his childhood.

Freud's ideas about trauma and repression offer a perspective into the psychological complexities of the characters, especially in how they deal with past traumas and hidden emotions.

"Vina's erratic behavior seemed to stem from a place of deep-seated pain, her actions often mirroring the chaos of Partition." (Rushdie, 1999). Vina Apsara's unpredictable actions and selfsabotaging behaviors are a result of suppressed memories and feelings linked to the Partition of India.

"Ormus's songs were haunted by the ghosts of his past, the echoes of Partition lingering in every chord he played." (Rushdie, 1999).

"Rai sensed that his own struggles with identity were intricately tied to the historical wounds inflicted by Partition, influencing his relationships and artistic endeavors." (Rushdie, 1999).

Similarly, Ormus and Rai grapple with their own traumas, which impact their artistic pursuits and connections with others.

The Freudian theory can be used to examine the effects of postcolonialism on the characters' mental well-being, particularly in relation to cultural identity and power dynamics. Ormus and Rai's struggles as Indian immigrants in the Western music scene reveal their deepseated yearnings for approval and recognition of their culture. Vina's multiracial heritage emphasizes the psychological impact of colonialism on how individuals view themselves.

The Ground Beneath Her Feet explores the inner worlds of the characters by combining magical realism, mythology, and history. Ormus's music represents their fears and desires at a profound level, and mythological themes such as Orpheus and Eurydice bring depth to their connections. The historical allusions create a rich setting for the characters' individual growth, highlighting societal shifts and their pursuit of self-discovery. The magical elements, such as Vina's mysterious origins and Ormus's otherworldly talents, reflect the characters' attempts to navigate the cultural landscape and reconcile their personal histories with broader social forces.

To conclude, Rushdie's book explores the human mind through the lens of Freudian theory, bringing attention to topics such as cultural identity, trauma, displacement, and postcolonialism. By adopting Freud's psychoanalytic approach, the novel deepens our insight into the internal

battles faced by the characters in a society rife with cultural conflict and the weight of history. The combination of magical realism, mythology, and historical elements in the novel adds layers to the examination of the characters' feelings and ideas, providing symbolic depictions and cultural backgrounds to their encounters.

1.5 Conclusion

Using a psychoanalytic approach in Salman Rushdie's novels *Shame* and *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*, proves useful in exploring the intricate layers of meaning embedded in the postcolonial texts. It allows postcolonial and psychoanalytic scholars and readers to delve into the psychological impacts of immigration on both individuals and society.

At first, investigating cultural trauma through a psychoanalytical lens offers valuable perspectives on the enduring impact of immigration on a community. Such a method aids in comprehending how historical traumas are internalized, transmitted through generations, influence one's individual and group identity, and influence their emotions and self-perception. By exploring repressed memories and utilizing psychoanalytic theories like repression, we can witness how repressed trauma presents itself in characters' minds, influencing their behaviors and relationships and ultimately how it helps in shaping someone's identity.

Additionally, psychoanalysis offers a thorough insight into the process of identity formation within a postcolonial setting, shedding light on the difficulties of balancing various cultural influences and conflicting aspirations. Rushdie's characters often embody a hybrid identity, reflecting the diverse nature of postcolonial societies where different cultural elements converge. By utilizing the psychoanalytic perspective, we can explore the intricate emotions linked to these identities, illustrating how the characters grapple with sentiments of displacement, cultural seclusion, and the yearning for acceptance. In *The Ground Beneath His Feet*, the protagonist finds himself in a globalized society where cultural boundaries are blurred and identities are in a constant state of flux. Psychoanalytic concepts like ego development provide valuable insights into the protagonist's struggles in his search for identity and his endeavor to remain true to himself.

Further, Rushdie's works are filled with characters who challenge dominant beliefs and question established power hierarchies, embodying the spirit of rebellion often seen in postcolonial literature. Through the use of a psychoanalytic approach, we uncover the underlying motivations that drive these acts of defiance and analyze how characters navigate internal conflicts between conformity and rebellion. By examining the connection between personal perceptions and

broader sociopolitical influences, we gain a deeper understanding of the various forms of power and resistance present in postcolonial societies.

Moreover, the psychoanalytic method enables an analysis of language and intricate representation in postcolonial literature, demonstrating how colonial language molds individuality and reinforces predominant ideologies. Rushdie's novels are rich in linguistic innovations and allusions to other works of literature. The variety of voices and discussions within the settings is apparent. When viewed through a psychoanalytic lens, we investigate how language operates as a tool for resisting authority, shaping the development of identities, and influencing the interpretation of cultural knowledge.

In conclusion, utilizing psychoanalytic theory in postcolonial literature offers a thorough and intricate method for comprehending culture shock, identity development, power relationships, and language within a stable context. By merging postcolonial theory with psychoanalysis, scholars are able to unveil underlying connotations in literary works like *Shame* and *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*, exposing the emotional consequences of colonialism and the ongoing fights for liberation within postcolonial societies. This approach also offers a more profound insight into how literature portrays and interprets the intricate nature of human psychology.

Bibliography

1. Freud, Sigmund. *The Ego and the Id*. W. W. Norton & Company, 2010.
2. Freud, Sigmund. *The Interpretation of Dreams*. Basic Books, 2010.
3. Freud, Sigmund. *Civilization and Its Discontents*. W. W. Norton & Company, 2010.
4. García Márquez, Gabriel. *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. Harper & Row, 1970.
5. Parashkevova, Tsvetanka. "Magic Realism and Cultural Trauma in Salman Rushdie's *Shame*." *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, vol. 39, no. 4, 2003, pp. 408-421.
6. Rushdie, Salman. *Shame*. Vintage International, 2008.
7. Rushdie, Salman. *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*. Henry Holt and Company, 1999.