

Binary Oppositions and the Technique of Duality in Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* and *Shame*: Compare and Contrast

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ABSTRACT

The present paper deals with the aspects of 'Binary oppositions' and 'Duality' employed by one of the most famous diasporic and post-colonialist novelists Salman Rushdie in his two popular novels *Midnight's Children* and *Shame*. The characters are the specimen of these aspects, especially Saleem who is closely associated with Shiva, who is just like his alter ego. The duality between them is unavoidable because they cannot be separated from each other. Both these novels are rich in terms of binary oppositions as these help the readers in understanding the history. Although both these novels are different in the subject matter, yet the aspects of dualities and binary oppositions are quite apparent. These two novels have the similar historical frameworks, and have same fundamental concerns. Both these novels have the expressions of the transformations that colonialism has brought. Thus, the topic is chosen to discuss these aspects in a feasible length.

Keywords: *Binary Opposition, Duality, Circular, Religious Custom, Historical Frameworks, Polarities, World of Sadness*

Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1980), is internationally acclaimed and has won numerous awards, the most precious being the Booker prize. It is a highly imaginative and inspired commentary on life that is lived in a specific period of past, and thus it becomes a mirror of the thoughts of author as well as readers. Similarly, *Shame* which is another feather in Rushdie's hat is published one year after *Midnight's Children* is also written in similar style by Rushdie. Both these novels have great impact on readers and the critics as well, *Midnight's Children* being the superior one.

Although we know Salman Rushdie for his *Midnight's Children* but his other novel *Shame* is equally well-written. Even though the latter one is published one year after the former one, both of them have so many things in common despite story - telling and plots are different. The main

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themes and productive principles are moderately identical. However, both these novels are harmonizing to each other in the way they show dissimilarity yet in great immediacy to each other.

In terms of treating the things, Rushdie has employed the technique of duality in both these novels. These two novels have the similar historical frameworks, and have same fundamental concerns. Both these novels have the expressions of the transformations that colonialism has brought. The narratives have the individuals with the realization of these transformations that lead them to figure out the sense of time, veracity and selfhood. The main quandary in doing this is to put forth some of the grave issues like whether these characters are able to fight against the notion which is very much leaned towards the cultural and traditional factors. The other thing is what if the people of our civilization do not want to the change that these characters are trying to force. However, the characters and the aspects that are shown here are really epitomize the consciousness of the country as a whole. If we analyse both these books together, we would certainly notice that there is a binary opposition between these two texts, in which the images, characters and situations work totally antithetically to those in the other.

The technique of binary antagonism is pretty much noticeable in terms of its structures where it completes the full circle. In case of Saleem, his search of reality and real meaning of life makes him stronger enough to bear all the hard blows imposed upon him by the destiny. He proves to be victorious against all the adversities. On the contrary, Omar who is without any vision or imagination has to struggle a lot and ultimately has to die. In this light, *Shame* does have a spherical narrative form. The story starts and ends with collapse and demise. It opens with the description of the gothic mansion, and closes with it as well. Surprisingly, Omar's journey starts from this place and ends here too when his wife kills him. Sufia, after the death of Omar, dies too. As against this, When Saleem is lost in Bombay, and is separated forever from Padma and Aadam, he has the feeling that his end is near but he knows it very well that whenever his story ends, Aadam's story will start, and it will go on and on 'until the thousand and first generation' (MC, 463).

The authenticity shown by Rushdie in both these novels is replicated in the diametrical opposition between these characters. Majority of Rushdie's characters in *Midnight's Children* are equipped with the supernatural or special powers that metaphorically explain the extended and existing religious custom of mystical India. The myths of different cultures like Islam, Hinduism, and Christianity have also been displayed and are associated with these characters in order to show the long heritage of India as a nation. However, in *Shame* on the contrary, the characters are especially presented as having major defects in either substantial or mental make-up. Thus, the commanding or strong aspect of the first novel is replaced by the means of deformities in the

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second novel. Although *Shame* takes place in Pakistan, the characters and the myths are just like ours, indigenous.

Like *Midnight's Children*, Rushdie has used similar structural designs to generate an opposite world of sadness, grief, collapse and loss. Omar and Sufia are presented having a relationship opposite to Saleem-Padma relationship. Similarly, Iskander Harappa and Raza Hyder, like Saleem and Shiva, are cousins turned rivals in the politics. Thus, these kinds of dual-oppositions can be noticed in other motifs as well. Rushdie has done exceedingly well in terms of creating this sort of association because it helps the readers to understand the connection in better way. However, both these novels are beautifully presented by the novelist.

Midnight's Children is a story situated in India and *Shame* takes place in Pakistan. Thus, the stories of two peoples of India and Pakistan are pretty much different mainly because they handle their past in diametrically opposite ways. Although Pakistan and India have different histories and cultures, dualities have been presented with special intention and that is us to make the people aware about the circular existence of cultures and heritage. *Shame* talks about the rotations of fates of the characters whose lives rotate around grim obsessions unredeemed by the imagination.

As far as *Midnight's Children* is concerned, the aspect of duality is unavoidable because Saleem and Shiva cannot be separated from each other, they are presented as having the polar opposite element. Rushdie has done this for special purpose. However, it is not so that he has not created space between these polarities, he has certainly created a space by rearranging them. The characters are both: lucky and unlucky, cursed and blessed, and in a way, masters and victims too. What Rushdie has used to paralyze these ever existing dualities is the concept of diversity as a universal remedy. We all know that he is a big fan of history being repeated and revised in his novels; consequently, here he has depicted certain events that are very important in the Indian History. The important events like Indian sovereignty, Partition, wars with Pakistan and China, the birth of Bangladesh, the Emergency etc. have been discussed in a new light by the novelist.

So, after analyzing both these novels in terms of having binary oppositions we can say that Rushdie has carefully observed all the events, characters, situations and other aspects in order to create similarity in opposition. Both these novels have been similar yet different and that is the beauty of them as a whole. Any reader can understand this if he/she read these novels well. Both these novels have lots of things in common despite of having different subject matters. However, Rushdie has successfully managed to work upon what he wants. The things under discussion are quite apparent when we observe the themes minutely.

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