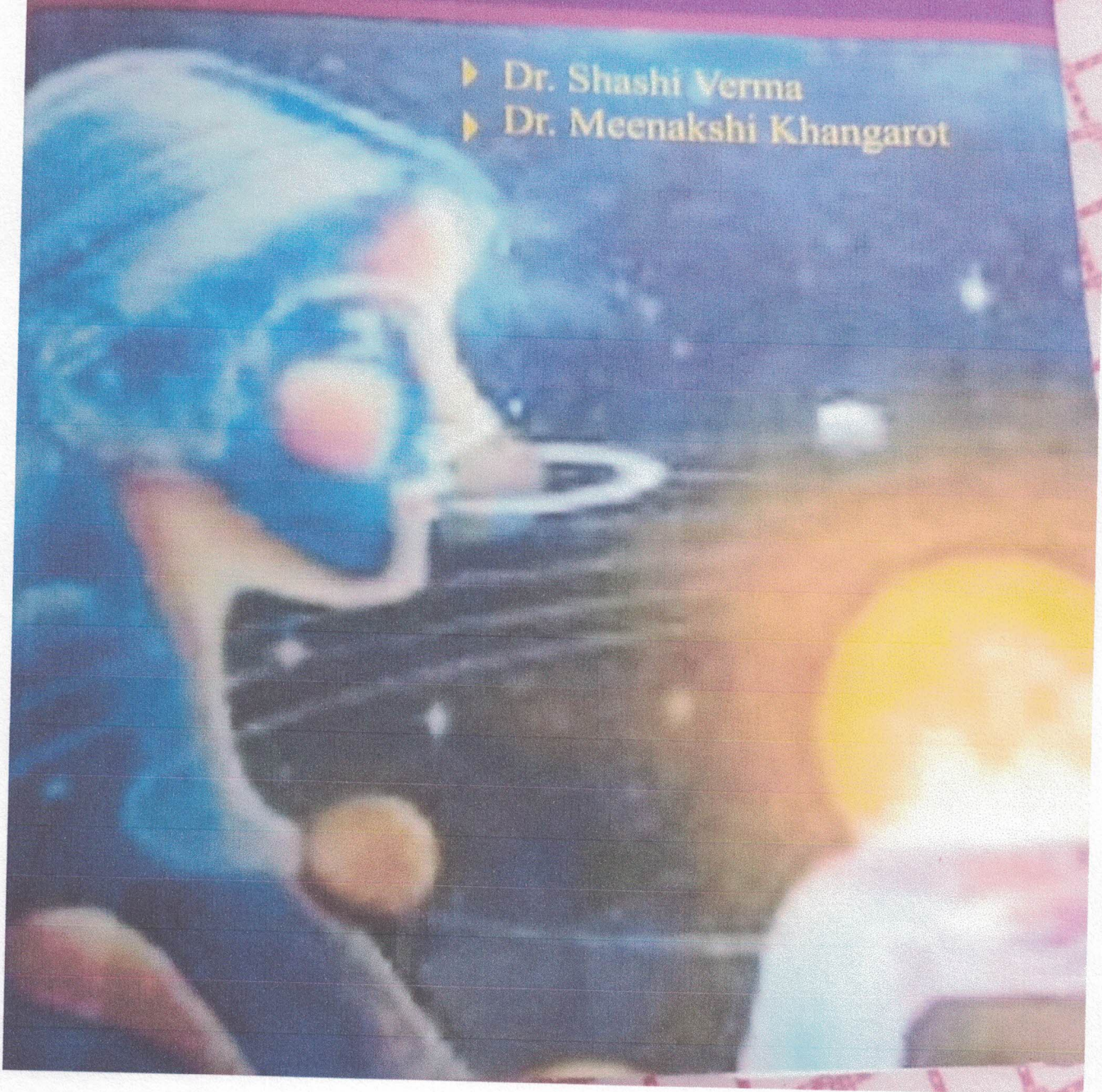


RPH

WOMEN EMPOWERMENT NEW HORIZONS

- ▶ Dr. Shashi Verma
- ▶ Dr. Meenakshi Khangarot



(TMLS) is compared to 'Mother India'. Rushdie writes: It was Mother India herself ... who loved and betrayed and hated and destroyed and again loved her children ... Mother India with Belle's face (TMLS, 61). On the other hand Aurora is pictured as a strong, ambitious, modern lady. She seduces her duty manager, just to marry him, so that he can look after family business. She is also shown to be a caring but strict mother, who is also very social and politically active.

Rushdie's canvas also beautifully and accurately paints "Hindu Women", in their varied forms and colors. Rushdie seems to be a master in his painting the world of Hindu women. In this world of Hindu Women, he takes us to the flight of Paradise, where resides the deities, the Goddess and Rushdie artistically compares the women with the different form of Hindu deities, collectively known as "Shakti".

Rushdie's "Phantasmagoric World", now takes us to the abode of Shakti's, in the varied names, and forms. First of all Rushdie points out that India is a place where the land, the country itself is personified as woman, in form of a mother. Thus India is referred as Mother India. This comparison of a country with woman puts the woman in line of country, who is the giver, protector, defender and who also has the power to bear, to sacrifice.

Thus in Rushdie's "Phantasmagoric world", the females in form of 'Shakti', are those who make their own destinies, who are the source of energy and inspiration for the society, family and her man. It is she who makes or turns the destiny of the man around her. She is the woman, who is strong but soft in heart, who have immense power, but down to earth. She is the home maker, a perfect spouse, having immense understanding, tolerance and caring. Really Rushdie correctly puts about woman, "what creatures we are, we woman, never for one moment at peace when our men lie sick and low" (MC 192).

Rushdie's caravan lands in the world of "Suffering Women". Women, in the form of daughter, wife, mother, are suffering in the hands of man. It is she, who thinks that she is born to suffer and sacrifice. She has to look over the comforts of the family, specially husband, whether willingly or unwillingly. She adjusts and trains herself to love her husband bit by bit. Thus Amina (MC) reconciles with her destiny and put all her efforts to love her husband.

She began to train herself to love him, to do this she divided him mentally, into every single one of his component parts, physical as well as behavioral, compartmentalizing him into bits and verbal ties and prejudices and dislike... in short, she fell under the spell... she resolved to fell in love with her husband bit by bit. (68).

Women apart from making all her effort, in putting all her emotions to love her man, also try to unite the family and not break it. Thus to save her family from getting shattered, she even overlooks her husband's infidelity. Aurora (TMLS) prefers to keep mum, even after knowing about her husband's outways stories, only to maintain the peace of the family. Thus Rushdie questions; and replies:

Why did she never confront Abraham about his infidelities? I ask you to consider that in spite of all her free thinking bohemian ways, Aurora zogiby was still in some deep recess of her heart, a woman in her generation, a generation that would find such behavior tolerable, even normal, in a man; whose woman folk shrugged off their pain, burying it beneath banalities about the nature of the beast and its need periodically to scratch an itch. For the sake of family! (223).

Thus the women for the sake of family, adjusts herself to her man. She tries to be indifferent, even after knowing his infidelity. Thus she bears and is capable of bearing endless pain. She smiles concealing her grief knotted inside her heart, because she knows, she needs her male counterpart to carry on the family life. These lines from Rushdie's (TMLS) accurately reflect the situation.

Women averted their eyes and kept their grief knotted in trust of fabric at the end of a dupatta, or buttoned up in a small silk purse, like small change and the house hold keys. And it may have been too, because... she needed him to take care of business. (223).

The sacrifices the women does, gradually kills herself, slowly like a termite which hollows her like a piece of wood. She encloses herself in the cocooned shell, but still lives on, wearing a mask of smile, covering her eyes. Though her sacrifices may go unnoticed by the family members and even by her husband, who thinks "A man is for power and a woman for pain" (Ground, 460) but they are not unnoticed by her children.

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8 Empowered Women in the Creative world of Rushdie's Novels

Dr. Merily Bhas

Rushdie's females are mature and modern, in the sense that they belong to middle class but they have hidden in them shaking ambition and dreams, and that's why dead Prospero (Shalimar) comes to daughter's dream and says:

A women can make every choice she places, just because it pleases her, and pleasing a man comes a poor second, a long way behind, she said, "Also, if woman's heart is true than when the world thinks doesn't matter" (53)

"A woman can make every choice, she pleases" is another aspect of Rushdie's Phantasmogoric world of females. Aurora, made her choice to indulge in physical relation with her duty manager, and make him emotionally captivated, so that he would have to marry her. And he does so even at the cost of leaving and breaking the heart of his widowed mother. Aurora does this because she needed Abraham's (duty manager), to run her business. Vina (The Ground), makes her choice to be in love with Cama, makes her choice to go into an agreement, and also in several affairs, to live on her own choice and to reach the top as a singer

Boonyi (Shalimar) made her choice to marry a Muslim, to have an adventure and glamour. In Shame, Shakil sisters, made their choice to become unmarried mother, and they do so, without feeling Shame. In Midnight's Children, Pia who is an actress makes her choice "to be the first women" (250) of Homi Catarack, so as to rise in the field of her filmy career

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In the same novel, Lila Sabarmati, wife of Commander Sabarmati, makes her choice to have extra marital affair with Homi Catarack, a wealthy film producer.

Rushdie, in his novels had picturized that though "Women make their own Choices" but on doing so, she always had received shame, humiliation, disgrace and even death. Boonyi, received her death by her husband for making her own choice of betrayal. Lila Sabarmati, her lover Homi Catarack were shot by her husband Commander Sabarmati, her lover (i.e. lifelong humiliation and death, to message the ultimate consequences of ... a scandal, yes, scare, I was the puppet-master ... I only wanted to 262)".

Rushdie portrays woman, not only of various categories and types, but also woman from different religious beliefs. His Phantasmagoric World of woman also depicts "Muslim woman", their predicament, their restrictions, their world. His stage consists of a whole lot of Muslim women, like Sufiya, Rani Harappa, Arjuman, Naseem, Alia, Mumtaz and many others. Rushdie, while describing Muslim women, highlights the repression, that is levied on them, by various ways. Thus he writes: "Repression is a seamless garment, ... which crushes its women beneath the intolerable burdens of honour, and propriety, breeds repression of other kinds also" (Shame, 173) it is well acclaimed that the norms and codes for Muslim women are more rigid, but inspite of that Rushdie adds:

I hope it goes without saying that not all women are crushed by any system, no matter how oppressive. It is commonly and I believe, accurately said of Pakistan, that her women are much more impressive than her man ... Their Chain, nevertheless, are no fictious. They exists, and they are getting heavier. (Shame 189)

Rushdie's stories also include a whole lot of "Christian as well as Parsi Women", such as Marry Periera, Sister Floreas, Epifania, Isabelle Souza, Flory, Philomina, Christina etc. All along he also peeps inside their life, their beliefs, their sentiments and what pops out is their boldness, their struggle leading towards their strong establishment. That's why perhaps, Mary Periera (MC) could successfully run the Pickle factory, and Belle

Now we enter into the Rushdie's Phantasmagoric world, where we have "revolting women, powerful women", a women quite different from the suppressed, scarifying ones. If a woman is again and again humiliated and if she is made to feel shame again and again, she becomes violent. As in anguish, leads to the development of a strength, to take revenge. Rushdie in his interview with Uma Choudhuri states:

People who feel, over a period of time, a shame or one made to feel humiliated ... will eventually become violent as a result, although they may not be themselves be violent people ... there was a character who suffered ... excessively from emotional shame and as a result became capable of a violence. That was much greater than her physical strength. Where did it come from? The strength came from shame and not from herself. And so she was capable of performing extraordinary acts of strength without knowing quite how she did it. And then what happens is that violence takes over, because it becomes like a drug, like a habit, you know. It begin to take over until she becomes a kind of beast ... (Imaginative Maps, 6).

Rushdie's emotions for women's gets expressed in these lines. I have always believed myself fortunate to have come from sprawling Indian family dominated by women... in my writing, I have repeatedly sought to create female characters as rich and powerful as those I have known. The man in my books is rarely as flamboyant as the woman. (Step across this line, 375).

So we are not astonished, that he adorns women in the position of Shakti's i.e compares her with diety or Goddess. He says India, "Imagine herself as a woman- Bharat Mata, Mother India". (Step 377). He further adds that she is "Devi", the mother goddess in her most terrible aspect, possession of Shakti of the Gods". (MC,430). Our lady is a manifestation of OM. (MC, 438).

This is Rushdie's world, his world created by the osmosis of his thoughts, where no shameful deeds are done towards women, they are not maltreated, and if they are, she is strong enough like Shakti to avenge hershame. Rushdie wanted a peaceful, united world. He raises his voice against, shamefulness prevailing in the world and says : Shameful things are

done, lies , loose living, disrespect for one's elder, failure to live one's national flag, incorrect voting at election... maltreatment of women folk...they are done shamelessly. (Shame 131).

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The children look upon her with esteemed respect, "Thus Moor (in *The Moor*) had such respect for his mother, and so he express:

She knew about Abraham's temple girls ... Man who wears a keep-o-secret should not babble in his sleep, "She muttered vaguely one day. "I got so bored of your Daddy's night lingo that I moved out of my bedroom. A lady needs rest. And I look back upon that proud, busy woman ... telling me something else beneath those casual sentences. I hear her admitting that, she who refused all compromises ... had settled for Abraham in spite of his weakness of flesh. (222)

Even after making compromises, sacrifices, abridging operation with her counterpart, keeping dumb towards the tortures levied on her, has she able to safe ground herself respect in the male dominated society? Has she able to protect her chastity? Has she able to resist the forcible physical harassment of a male? Rushdie writes:

There is no hope for women in the world, because whether you were respectable or not, the men got anyway, no matter how hard you try to be the most proper of ladies, the man would come and stuff you full of alien unwanted life. (*Shame* 228)

Physical harassment, molestation, kills a woman internally and emotionally. The act may have given the male, pleasure for some time but it gives the female insult, humiliation, pain for a life time. If the act results in unwanted conception, it's like a life time agony for her. If the act may require both male and female, but the aftermath consequences are suffered only by the female. She becomes a matter of ridicule and shame for the society and her family. Such situations has been displayed by Rushdie in the character of Farah Zoraster (*Shame*) and Zoon Misri, and Boonyl Kasi in *Shalimar the Clown*. The following citation confirms it:

After hypnotizing Farah Zoraster, Oscar has sex and impregnates her. An outraged head master called her into his office and expelled her for calling down shame upon the School (*Shame*, 48) On being brutalized, the women starts hating herself, she starts hating her 'womanhood'. her grief and agony is accurately detailed by Rushdie, who thinks, her femininity, her body, which is the source of attraction for male, and thus is a mean to bring her shame and humiliation. Arjumand in *Shame*, remarks in the same

veils when she thinks: Arjumand ... regretted her female sex for ... " This woman body " she told her father on the day, she becomes a grown woman, it brings a person nothing, but babies, plagues and shame (114).

Now, the shifting series of images, of Rushdie's Phantasmagoric world, draws us more close to the world, which is a 'Man's world', and there dance, amuse, smile, as directed by males. Her sentiments and emotions play no role. It is a world, where the woman's life is devoid of thrills and incidents and is stereotyped. They play their role inside the fixed periphery. Thus Rushdie points out: "... Many women, ordinary decent, respectable ladies of the type of whom nothing ever happens, to whom nothing is supposed to happen except marriage, children, death. (*Shame* 66).

This is the restricted women's world, where each line is chalked out by others, she only acts according to the role assigned. Rushdie vividly describes a woman, and her life in his novel *Shame*.

After she marries, she finds herself, "silenced by the in-laws-males... and thus acquired the triple reputation of sweet innocent, doormat and fool... the woman admitted that he was a good man who did not beat his wife. This definition of goodness alarmed Bilquis... but one must also watch out. A good man can go bad, like meat, if do not keep him cool... (*Shame* 78).

It is the favour of the suffering, women, that Rushdie raises his voice. he blows his trumpet and asks them to rise above the superficiality of gender discrimination. Thus he alerts them and warns them, when he says "it's a man's world ... rise above your gender as you grow. There is no place to be a woman in..." (*Shame* 136).

Every torture has a limit, has an end. Doesn't the continuous hammering makes a iron hot? How much cool and patience she may have, she at last revolts and her rage, her anguish, takes a turmoil and thus Moor, remarks about his mother and says: The mother I knew, the mother I came to know during all those days ... was not to take anything in life lying down. She was a confronter, a square up a have out. (*T.M.S.*, 223)

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