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Address

•Vikram Nagar, Boudhi Chouk, Latur.
•Tq. Latur, Dis. Latur 413512
•(+91) 9922455749, (+91) 9158387437

Email

•aiirjpramod@gmail.com

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CHIEF EDITOR – PRAMOD PRAKASHRAO TANDALE

Terrorism in Literary Fiction Salman Rushdie's *Shalimar The Clown*

Dr. Auradkar Sarika Pradiprao

Assistant Professor,
Dept. of English,
Shankarrao Chavan College ,Ardhapur
Dist. Nanded.

Abstract

Salman Rushdie's Shalimar The Clown is a story of love, betrayal and terrorism, set against the struggle over Kashmir between India and Pakistan and Kashmiri independence groups. By discussing terror and terrorism and how Rushdie Subverts these terms in relation to identity, violence and the effects on the individual. The novel is set against the backdrop of Kashmiri struggle. The love story of Shalimar and Boonyi, giving it a tragic turn. The path Boonyi chose for herself, sooner or later had to lead only to one destination, and that was imminent disaster for its traveler.

Keywords : Identity, globalization, terrorism, Kashmir, violence.

Salman Rushdie is perhaps, the most controversial and political novelist of our trouble times. The world of Rushdie's fictions and non-fictions accurately portrays the complex and confusing state of postcolonial world. Almost all of his major writings bear the testimony of his understanding and interpretation of history and the world, and their lasting influence on the life of common people. *Shalimar The Clown* the novel published in 2005, but the story set from the 1940s to the early 1991s. Nonetheless, even though the events take place before September 11, 2001, attacks, and the wars that have followed. Some reference to the current war on terror and rhetoric can be seen to reverberate throughout his work; the Kashmiri conflict is juxtaposed to the US-led contemporary war on terror. Moreover, the novel provides some insights into, and criticizes, the way American foreign policy has helped create condition of terrorism. Rushdie renders this very complex phenomenon in the following words :

Everywhere was now a part of everywhere else. Russia, America, London, Kashmir. Our lives, our stories, flowed into one another's, were no loner our own, individual discrete. This unsettled people. There were collisions and explosions. The world was no longer calm. She thought of Housman in Shropshire. *That is the land of lost content.* (Shalimar 37)

Shalimar The Clown is a story of love, betrayal, Vengeance and terrorism, set against the struggle over Kashmir between India, Pakistan and Kashmiri independence groups; a highly complex, bloody and violent struggle that has caused incalculable human suffering and that continues to this day. It is also a story about globalization and its political implications. The novel open in 1991 In Los Angeles, where American ambassador to India, Maximilian Ophuls, is assassinated by his driver Shalimar on the twenty-fourth birthday of his daughter India. Rushdie then travels in both time and space to recount the life stores of Shalimar, Boonyi, and their

respective families in the Kashmiri Village of Shirmal and Pachigam. The reader learns that Shalimar and Boonyi were once madly in love, but when the American ambassador lays his eyes on Boonyi, she leaves Shalimar for him, and Shalimar, not being able her betrayal begins a quest for vengeance.

He is determined to kill her, the man she left him for, and any children the two might have, just as he had promised her years before when he warned her :

“Don’t leave me” he said rolling over onto his back and panting for joy. “Don’t leave me now, or I’ll never forgive you, and I’ll have my revenge, I’ll kill you and if you have any children by another man I’ll kill the children also”.

“What a romantic you are,” she replied carelessly. “you say the sweetest things”. (Shalimar 61)

In this novel Rushdie has brilliantly portrayed the tragic history of Kashmir, the homeland of Rushdie’s maternal grandfather and one time favourite location for Rushdie family holidays, However, most relevant of this discussion is that together in Kashmir the villages Shirmal and Pachigam provide an example of fully functioning bicultural society. This is stressed on numerous occasions. Muslim and Hindus share the land peacefully and harmoniously, and they only quarrel over everyday issues, such as the best way to prepare the banquet. One might say that this harmonious relationship is symbolized in the marriage of the Muslim boy Shalimar the clown, and the Hindu girl Boonyi Kaul. This while around them political tension are rising. Terror and globalization have become increasingly thematized in Rushdie’s fiction and in this novel is his most response to date. Through its intricately interwoven plot and narrative method, the novel attempts to approach the social and political fallout from economic globalization. The novel reroutes postcolonial concerns to highlight the destructive forces of globalization and terrorism. Rushdie examines the postcolonial in a global context and suggest how global flows of capitalism have reframed discourses of nationalism and nationhood. In this respect, the novel positions itself in the nexus of the postcolonial and the global. As Vilashini Cooppan pointsout in “The Ruins of Empire : The National and Global Politics of America’s Return to Rome”.

Globalization theory’s emphasis on its own newness and newly mobile, transborder forms and nations and cultures that emerge in the wake of the twin territorial project of imperialism and nationalism strikingly reproduces the version of postcolonial studies that purports to announce the end not just of empires but of nations too, and the ascendance of new hybrid forms of identity over previous regimes of binarized difference. (81)

The novel’s plot link their different stories and geographies, suggesting that in a narrative of globalization and international terrorism characters must think of their existence in relation to each other. The global nature of the narrative is immediately apparent from the novel’s range of geographical location which span the world. Starting in Los Angeles, the action moves to Kashmir and Delhi, 1940s Strasbourg and France, 1960s London, back to Kashmir, the Philippines, and reaches its climax in 1990s Los Angeles. Just as the novel moves over the globe effortlessly, it

collapses time, bridges different timelines, in developing different but converging narrative strands. In comparing and contrasting Shalimar and Max the novel discuss different forms of terrorism playing with different meaning of term. Defining terrorism is notoriously difficult because of the different political agendas by which the term can be framed. For instance, the newspaper coverage terms like “terrorist”, “guerrilla fighter” and “insurgent” are often used interchangeably. As Bruce Hoffman notes in *Inside Terrorism* :

Virtually any especially a bhorrent act of violence perceived as directed against society – whether it involves the activities of anti-government dissidents or governments themselves, organized – crime syndicates, common criminals, rioting mobs, people engaged in militant protest, individual psychotics, or lone extortionists – is often labelled “terrorism”. (1)

The fact that Shalimar is by no means a fundamentalist Muslim, is already brought up early in the story, when the young tightrope walker is thinking about his and Boonyi’s blooming relationship. The words Hindu and Muslim had no place in their story; but in the valley these words were merely descriptions, not divisions. Contrary to what Boonyi had expected the villagers even support her and Shalimar when they plan to get married. Shalimar’s father Abdullah does not regard them as a Hindu-Muslim couple. Two Kashmiri, two Pachigami, youngsters wish to marry and both Hindu and Muslim customs observed. The couple’s relatives, who come from outside of Pachigam and Shirmal, do make some objections to this mixed marriage; they quarrel for several days over the food, the ceremony, the clothes, until Abdullah declares that there will be two dedding days to satisfy each party. When Pandit Pyarelal sees his daughter withering away, while the violence in the village is only increasing, he begins to wonder if this idea of harmony he once so cherished, is but an illusion. The idea of *Kashmiriyat* is not yet lost, when Salimar’s mother, Firdaus visits Pyarelal to remind him of their friendship and their loyalty to one another. As for Shalimar, his actual religious beliefs are not mentioned; as an actor, he merely pretends to be Jihadist in order to one day get close to Max, via the Jihadi training camp.

Max’s family was a well known Jewish household in a strongly Jewish neighbourhood, but he has never considered himself a religious man. Considering his life in France during the Second World War, and the fact that his parents were killed in Nazi medical experiments, it would be preposterous to claim that his Jewishness is irrelevant. The novel is set against the backdrop of the Kashmiri Struggle, which can be traced back to the partion of British India in 1947, one can expect some very strong criticism on not only the India and Pakistani government, but also the American government. Morton Stephen considers this historical and geopolitical backdrop of the work significant :

It marks a failure in US Policy to either comprehend or influence the ongoing conflict in Kashmir, and by using twentieth century Kashmir as a setting, attention is drawn to the competing narratives of cold war geopolitics, western imperialism and religious fundamentalism nd religious fundamentalism that circumscribe the region. (321)

There is a scene where Max is designing a plan to encourage India-Pakistani multilateralism. Rushdie details the logic of India involvement and military intervention in Kashmir and ties it to a discourse of nationhood and nationalism. Kashmir is seen as an integral part of Indian union and to suggest otherwise is to seriously challenge its authority. Rushdie shows that this logic is paradoxical and absurd. For Kachhwaha, the idea of “Kashmir for the Kashmiris”, and self-determination of their own political future, which was promised in a referendum and is denied to this day, is nothing but ludicrous. Yet through the absurdity of his logical reasoning, the absurdity of the argument is reversed. General Kachhwaha is quick to dismiss any challenge to the unity of India.

Where did that king of thinking get you ? If Kashmir, why not Assam for the Assamese, Nagaland for the Nagas ? And why stop there ? Why shouldn't towns or village declare independence, or city streets, or even individual houses ? Why not demand freedom for one's bedroom, or call one's toilet a republic ? Why not stand still and draw a circle round your feet and name that selfistan ? (Shalimar 101-102)

Yet all the regions he cites long standing secessionist movements fighting for self determination. Here, Rushdie highlights complexities of the Kashmir problem, the question of a nation's integrity and the methods by which this integrity is guaranteed. This further complicates the novel's debates about terrorism by raising the question of whether there is difference between state-led terror about terrorism by militants, and the problematic nature of what constitutes a legitimate use of violence in liberation struggles. The President's Rule, enabled by article 356 of the Indian constitution, empowers the central government to exercise direct control over a state, if the state government fails to function in accordance with the provisions of the constitution. Rushdie argues that the rise of separatist terrorism in India accelerated after the Emergency, as religious politics started to enter mainstream politics. Ashis Nandy further elaborates this point when he associates this phenomenon with a change in perception about the designations “India” and “Indian” :

“The new Salience of terrorism has come at a time when a sizeable section of the Indian Populace has begun to think of India Primarily as a nation-state and secondarily as a civilization with its own political language and values”. (135)

The novel is a beautiful story of Pachigam, a small village in Kashmir situated in the surrounding beside the river Muskadoon, a quiet and peaceful village. The people of this village hourly communicate with the richness of Mother Nature and thus lead a life of happiness and contentment. But this blissful oblivion is not immune to the harsh realities of life when insurgency first reared its ugly head in the form of Kabalis from Pakistan. The seed of distrust and hatred shown by the fundamentalists and extremists, the by-products of a savage and cruel dissection of the nation, gradually take enormous forms and engulfs the whole valley in its fire. Partition of the nation did not only carve out two nations out of one but it also created a sharp division between two communities Hindu and Muslim. The partion between these two nations was not solely based

on geographical accounts but it also accounts for some deep psychological trauma, which still reverberates in the minds and hearts of two nations two communities and people.

Parallel flashback take us back to Max Ophuls' early days in Nazi occupied Strasbourg. Max's flamboyant heroism in the French resistance gives him a quasi-mythical stature, the same stature to Shalimar's revenge. The incidents in the novel are beaded with the surprising events and the narrative shrills the reader's mind. Boonyi finds in Max an opportunity to escape from Pachigam and explore something different. She seduces Max and paves her way to Delhi to become his mistress. Shalimar unable to bear this personal loss swears to kill his wife and her love. Boonyi after forsaking her husband finds herself contaminated and lost. Realizing what she has done, Boonyi reprimands Max, represents the American imperialism and economic globalization.

Look at me, she was saying. I am your handiwork made flesh. You took beauty and created hideousness, and out of this monstrosity your child will be born. Look at me. I am the meaning of your deeds. I am the meaning of your so-called love, your destructive, selfish, wanton love. Look at me. Your love looks just like hatred. I never spoke of love, she was saying. I was honest and you have turned me into your lie. This is not me. This is not me. This is you.
(Shalimar 205)

Boonyi breaks the established moral values of her village, Pachigam, and escapes with May. She detests her village and is eager for liberation, and thus she accepts the ambassador Max's offer of change 'in search of a future'. Our pity evokes for Shalimar who remain sticks to his exclusionary particularistic identity. Shalimar's identity gets mamocked, forces to reconstruct him into another human being. All the major protagonists in the novel become global and cosmopolitan character. This reveals that this kind of globalization generate hybridism, where persons have complex multifaceted identities. They face challenge of negotiating a blend of sometimes conflicting modes of being and belonging within the same self. Under conditions of hybridity every identity gets reconstructed. Shalimar's personal loss launches his quest of Max, the invader of his village, his life, his heart. Max snatches his wife whom she had loved so intensely. Max ophuls, a bullish diplomat who has a shrewd negotiating skill, and the charm and sexual energy, that he may be able to understand India and Kashmir. The story of Max, the Resistance hero, is related to the reader through his own memoirs that set him up as a romanticized war hero.

Max Ophuls was a living flying ace and a giant of the Resistance, a man of movie-star good looks and polymathic accomplishment, and in addition he had moved to the United States, choosing the burnished attractions of the New World over damaged gentility of the Old. (Shalimar 161)

Max and Boonyi's affair is leaked out when Boonyi is pregnant with Max's child. This defame Max's position and nation he represents. Boonyi gives birth to a girl child and names her "Kashmira". Max enraged wife snatches Boonyi's daughter. Kashmira later becomes India Ophuls. Boonyi is grown fat and thrown back to Kashmir as a waste trash to her village. Now her village has no place for her as they all had declared her dead after her betrayal. She is a living and walking

dead person. Shalimar murders her in the hills, she meets this tragic end. One wrong move and she is without identity, home, village and name. The novel questions the manner in which one can address the paradigms of domination of resistance that have emerged of the experience of colonialism and anti-colonial movements and with which postcolonial studies has become preoccupied. This is further highlighted by the response to the attack on the World Trade Centre, and the terror attacks in London and Mumbai.

As Ania Loomba argues :

“These violent events are also part of the phenomenon we think of as globalization, which has provided fresh grounds for examining the relevance of postcolonial perspectives to the world we now inhabit”. (213)

In *Shalimar The Clown*, “the wild justice” of revenge is justified. The faith in revenge, Shalimar chooses simple solutions of his past, and Kashmira’s identity promised to seek justice with less blood. The character replaced revenge with forgiveness, this novel revolves around the same fundamental belief of justice is viewed as achievable goal.

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