



**The Paradise of Evil and Paranoia: Unmasking Terror and
Politics in Modern Milieu**

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Abstract

This paper will traverse on how Salman Rushdie's 2005 novel, *Shalimar the Clown* has unveiled politics, Muslim jihadist, terrorism and Kashmir through a sprawling tale of love and revenge. This postcolonial novel debates India's state military presence, the neo-imperialist strategies of post-war US foreign policy, economic globalization and resurgent separatist and terrorist movements with its effect on individual. The novel begins at the end, with the murder of the former American ambassador to India, Maxmilan Ophuls, now a counterterrorist expert, then introduces his murderer, Shalimar the clown, Kashmiri actor and acrobat-cum-terrorist, and Ophuls's illegitimate daughter-India, who draws the curtain to a conclusion as terror-filled and ambiguous. This tinsel and outrageous

storyline hinges us with the unresolved issue of Kashmir, once a paradise, now becomes a land of evil extravaganza. The article mainly argues how Rushdie draws a transitional network of global violence, power-capital, Islamic terrorism and their regional and international impact on politics on a borderless canvas.

Key Words: Kashmir, Politics, Salman Rushdie, Terrorism, Violence

In the 1982 title essay of his collection *Imaginary Homelands*, Salman Rushdie says:

“[T]he real risks of any artist are taken in the work, in pushing the work to the limits of what is possible, in the attempt to increase the sum of what it is possible to think. Books become good when they go this edge and risk falling over it-when the endanger the artist by, reason of what he has or has not, *artistically* dared” (15).

Rushdie dares to interlace religion, politics and mass to plot his fiction; and he forcefully defend his art, the art of comedic criticism of religion. After ‘the Charlie Hedbo Shooting’ he condemned the heinous act by saying that religions, a mediaeval form of unreason, like all other ideas, deserve criticism, satire, and also our fearless disrespect. He adds that satire is an old art to manifest our liberty against tyranny, dishonesty and stupidity. And we see this audacious inclination time and again in his greatest fictions like *Midnight’s Children*, *Shame*, *The Satanic Verses* and *Moor’s Last Sigh*. In his ten years of fatwa, Rushdie has lived with the vehemence of offended Islam, and as a fiction writer should, he has absorbed the experience and found the vehemence within himself. This contemporary political novel, *Shalimar the Clown* which

proclaims such propensity and ardour percolates around the unavoidable world-historical collision between rootless cosmopolitan and theocratic absolutism, between civilization (with its value of secularism, skepticism and relativism) and the gathering forces of new medievalism.

Moreas Zogiby, the wandering, displaced, mixed race narrator of *The Moor's Last Sigh* declared: 'I was nobody from nowhere, like no one, belonging to nothing.' (Rushdie 1995: 388) But, *Shalimar the Clown* is the story of everywhere: California, India, France, Britain, Pakistan, Algeria, the Philippines. It takes place over fifty years, and features Osama bin Laden, Heinrich Himmler, Rodney King and lord Lucan too. It is another post 09/11 novel (like Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, Don DeLillo's *Falling Man*, or Clarie Messud's *The Emperor's Children*) which aims to mark out the mind of a terrorist, as well as one of the most intractable territorial disputes in recent history: Kashmir. But, as Rushdie makes it clear in a note that "everywhere was a part of everywhere else. Russia, America, London, Kashmir our lives, our stories, flowed into one another's, were no longer our own, individual discrete. This unsettled people. There were collision and explosion the world was no longer calm" (37)

Shalimar the Clown is dedicated in loving memory of Rushdie's Kashmiri grandparents. Pachigam, a small village of Kashmir with its elders, and their dynamic and dauntless wives, and the rich array of supporting performers, and the sensation of a childhood spent in the high meadows and narrow valleys, among clear lakes and rivers of snowmelt, under the aspect of shining glaciers and timeless traditions, are evoked with an affection bestowed on few other of the novel's venues. This sentiment goes back to the Mughal emperors who defined Kashmir as a paradise on earth. This affiliation has

repeatedly confessed both as an unconditional love for the place and a growing concern about its fate. Rushdie has always been an adamant supporter of Kashmiri self-rule, and views both the ill-treatment of Kashmiris by the Indian armed forces and Pakistan's sustained interests in subverting the region with its radical Islamic ideology as being at the root of the growth of terrorism in the region. Rushdie broods over the loss of the old Kashmir so keenly that he propels through his ill-named ambassador, the usually cool and Iconic Maximilian Ophuls in a television interview that "in Kashmir it is paradise itself that is failing: heaven on earth is being transformed into a living hell" (Rushdie 2005: 28).

But, *Shalimar the Clown* nullifies that once, the scenario was different. The informal doctrine of 'Kashmiriyat', Kashmiriness, the belief that there was a common bond between Hindu and Muslim was at the Kashmiri heart and culture. This communal harmony once knots two hearts, one Muslim boy and another Hindu pundit girl, into marriage. As, Abdullah Noman, the leader of a Felliniesque band of travelling players, proclaims that there is no Hindu or Muslim, they are all brothers. But, at the time of this auspicious outcome, in the early sixties, 'Kashmiriyat' was already under siege. The malicious fanaticism has already started to take its demonic shape.

We must revisit our past history to figure out the root of this bedlam. On the observatory hills at the hillside station of Shimla is located the Viceregal lodge, also known as Rashtrapati Niwas. It was here, in 1947, where a final agreement was reached between the colonial government and the Indian Congress to constitute a free yet divided India. For many, this was a victory-of-sort, tainted with the passage of tragedy. The

long-awaited-for Independence could not bridge the Hindu-Muslim severance, and partition was the only viable solution to those communal difference that had disrupted the master plan once the secular organizations had for a new India.

One cannot deny that communal difference did not exist on the sub-continent, but as Mohammad Omar Farooq (2001) assures, the rise in the power of the Muslim league was significantly aided by the strategic support from the colonial administration whose ulterior motive was to counteract the growing influence of the Indian Congress. Furthermore, our Islamic parties were entire creation of the colonial regime, which, as Farooq indicates, implies that the British played the communal card so as to weaken the independent movement through the archetypal stratagem of 'divide and rule'. This colonial manipulation of an already complex political scenario led to the partition of India, and out of this agreement Pakistan was born, while Kashmir was allowed to accede to her as to India. Perched between the two new nation states, the maharaja Hari Singh, a Hindu ruler with a largely Muslim population procrastinated upon which nation to be absorbed by. The final outcome of this lack of decisive action was a breakdown of law and order and the beginning of a grave conflict between India and Pakistan. Finally, peace negotiation gave way to the subsequent Shimla Agreement in 1972, and from this agreement emerged the actual Line of Control which delimits the Indian and Pakistani sectors of Kashmir. The region, nonetheless, is still a bitter bone of contention between the two nations and a constant international flashpoint of nuclear dimensions.

Shalimar the Clown is divided into five movements, each named after one of the main characters (India, Boonyi, Max, Shalimar the Clown and Kashmira). In this circular narrative structure two characters meet in the first section, the second meets another, and

so on, until a chain of causality has been sketched out. The story begins in Los Angeles in 1991, where we meet the preposterously slinky and glamorous India Ophuls. She is 24, ‘a proficient athlete and a brilliant student’, who is planning a snazzy psycho-geographic documentary about L.A. Her ‘spare-time pursuits’ include weekly boxing sessions, training in the ‘close-combat martial art of wing chun’ and small arm target practice-but the arrow is her ‘weapon of choice’. She is beautiful, of course she sometimes has sex with a ‘super-averagely attractive’ male model whose name she can’t bothered to remember; she watches pornography to help her sleep.

However, in silkiness and glamour her ‘brilliant cosmopolitan father’, ‘a man of movie-star good looks’, puts her to shame. He, “the Resistance hero, the philosopher prince, the billionaire power-broker” (Rushdie 2005: 27), escaped from occupied France in time to mastermind the Bretton Woods Agreement, then became a celebrated academic who foretold the end of the cold war and the rise of the third world’s economic powerhouse, before serving for years as the US ‘counter terrorism chief’. Along the way, Ophuls found time to go to India as the US ambassador, and conceived his daughter there. He told her nothing about her mother, performing to deliver to the young child “homilies such as Sun Tzu the philosopher of war might have to his offspring” (Rushdie 2005: 16). As an old man, he appears in the media to make grand political statements ‘in the florid language of a fading age’. Even in his seventies, he romances the hottest stars of Hollywood, Bollywood and adult entertainment in the penthouse suite he maintains ‘in one of the city’s best hotels’.

Their gilded world is about to be rudely invaded, as the ambassador is slaughtered on his daughter's doorstep like 'a halal chicken dinner'. "Shalimar the clown took off the vending tray, picked up the cloth with the pistol inside and followed him. He was holding the cloth in his left hand and didn't take the gun out because he wanted to know what it would feel when he placed the blade of his knife against the man's skin, when he pushed the sharp and glistening horizon of the knife against the frontier of the skin, violating the sovereignty of the another human soul, moving in beyond taboo, toward the blood" (Rushdie 2005: 274).

To divulge the fons et origo of this sacrilegious enterprise the narrative treks back to Kashmir, Pachigam, a small village of chefs and actors who perform the 'Band Pather', clown stories, the traditional plays of the valley. Noman Sher Noman popularly known as Shalimar the Clown is a performer and tight-rope-walker who falls in love with a beautiful dancer Bhoomi Kaul, known as Boonyi. Although the children are then duly censored for their imprudent behavior, they are blessed with marriage. But, Boonyi is far from happiness. She knew that she would not get anything out of this village life. The free unbridled spirit inherited from her mother coupled with her youthfulness ill-marks the love story of Shalimar and Boonyi, giving it a tragic turn. Times flows; She comes under the influence of Max, an American ambassador to India. Mesmerized by Boonyi's beauty, Max arranges for Boonyi and her friends a dance performance in Delhi. The show is only a pretext for Ophuls to get close to her. She has been waiting for such occasion. She enters a extra marital relationship with Max in the hope of a better life. As is customary with such superficial relationship the attraction starts waning soon.

Boonyi becomes increasingly alienated and depressed in her 'liberated captivity', finding solace in drugs and food. She tells:

"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 was honest and you turned me into your lie. This is not me. This is not me. This is you" (Rushdie 2005: 205).

So, degeneracy intrudes into the individual territory. The innocence of life in the valley gradually transgresses the boundaries of that innocence and simplicity in the name of false hopes and dreams, and is ultimately betrayed in the process. Betrayal leads to a loss, a loss of identity and hopes, leading to a metamorphosis of life and individual. "Self-creation in times of conflict, one of Rushdie's themes..."(Roth 2005: 19).

Shalimar also goes in the process of mutation. He still loves Boonyi but out of hatred he joins the extremist, Al-Qaida, pretending to believe in their cause. He literally prepares himself for the eventual aim of his life, to kill Maxmillian Ophuls. The fight for a religious cause provides Shalimar a platform to cross over to the other side easily, to reach his target in America and eliminate him. Like the crusades that were undertaken in by-gone times, the author here tries to unearth the hypocrisy of terrorism and their sacred bloodshed. In this novel his invention of the 'iron mullah', Bulbul Fakh, a zealot literary made of metal, is excellent caricature, and the mullah's speech inculcating warrior zealotry is frenzied in its disconnection from anything the West calls civilization.

Rushdie also slays regional and international politics, acting behind all this genocide. But, violence begets violence. Life can be shaped out of love, not violence, irrespective of any kind of faith or religious beliefs.

Death of a transcultural love-tale, death of innocence, death of shrine Kashmir- Salman Rushdie has crafted the time of demon in *Shalimar the Clown* and handily personified them as well. One is Colonel Hammirdev Suryavans Kachhwaha, a ‘swaggering Rajput’ officer representing the Indian army’s unpopular and increasingly brutal presence in Kashmir. Kachhwaha’s camp is called Elasticnagar because of its well-established tendency to stretch as the soldiers flood in, requisitioning more space, and filling the valley with barracks and military hardware. This influx leads here to the creation of other demon:

“[T]he Islamic radicalization of Kashmir. The Indian army has left heaps of discarded military hardware rotting in junkyards. Then oneday by the grace of God the junk began to stir. The man who were miraculously born from these rusting war metals, who went out into the valley to preach resistance and revenge, were saints of an entirely new kind. They were iron mullahs” (Rushdie 2005: 115).

Hindu-Muslim coexistence that Gandhi had hoped would prevail in postcolonial India gave way, in Kashmir to sectarian battles, fitfully halted by United Nations-arranged ceasefire, and to terrorism aligned with global Islam. *Shalimar the Clown* addresses other issues into the baggage of South Asian politics: the globalization of the power of the US after the conclusion of the Cold War, and the emergence of new ideologies of

violence such as those given their most grotesque embodiment in the attack on New York in September, 2001, 26/11 in India and so many including London and Mumbai.

How far evil may evolve into can never abolish life force. It lives on the hearts of people, like it does in Kashmir. Kashmir embodies the advent of a new inception from the chaos and turmoil of betrayal to the arrival of a bright new dawn, full of hope and regeneration. Her presence is an indication the author tries to delineate that Kashmir will not be lost; it will emerge from the darkness into the light of true freedom and hope for all its people, a new life.

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