

**STRIPPING OFF HUMANITY IN SALMAN RUSHDIE'S *SHALIMAR THE CLOWN***

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***Abstract:** This article focuses on the transformation of an innocent clown into an international terrorist in Salman Rushdie's novel 'Shalimar the Clown'. It shows the globalization of terror, intricately mingling lives and countries and finding unexpected and sometimes tragic connections between the seemingly disparate. This article reminds that nationhood and identity are not one and the same. People are too mutable to be contained by borders, too good at shape-shifting, and yet, wars are still fought in spite of this knowledge. Sometimes a person fights for an idea, other times he does so because someone has stolen his wife. The novel delves deep into the roots of terrorism and explores the turmoil generated by different faiths and cultures attempting to coexist and shows the global consequences of actions and emotions like love, honour, betrayal and revenge.*

***Keywords:** Globalization, Terrorism, Turmoil, Revenge, Emotion.*

The world is growing smaller day by day. We hear this idea expressed and witness its reality in our lives through the people we meet, the products we buy, the food we eat and the movies we watch. Salman Rushdie's novel 'Shalimar the Clown' shows private and public, poor and rich, East and West are intimately connected everywhere especially in this age of the globalization of markets, media, state violence and fundamentalist movements. It is post 9/11 novel which aims to describe the mind of a terrorist, as well as one of the most intractable territorial disputes in recent history: Kashmir. But that isn't all, as Rushdie's makes clear in an editorial style insert about globalization--

"Everywhere was now a part of everywhere else. Russia, America, London, Kashmir. Our lives, our stories, flowed into one another's, were no longer are own, individual, discrete. This unsettled people. There were collisions and explosions. The world was no longer calm." (Shalimar the Clown: 47)

In an interview with Michael Enright, soon after the publication of novel 'Shalimar the Clown', Salman Rushdie says---

"In a poor country, power smashes into private lives every single day. Survival is such a big issue. And I have to think about what one can do with that as a writer. I think there is some thing in the form of the novel that wants to be provincial.

The novel wants to be about a small town in which Madame Bovary has an affair. There is something intrinsic to the novel about that. One place, one time, three or four characters and the interaction between those characters- and that is the story of the novel. I think you can't write like that now, and so the problem of how you do write becomes very difficult. »(Enright: 558)

The novel moves from California to Kashmir, France and England and back to California again. The story begins with an assassination of Maximilian Ophuls and then circles back through time before ending near its beginning. The book is divided into five parts, each named after one of the main characters. The story begins in Los Angeles in 1991 where we meet the preposterously, slinky and glamorous India Ophuls. She is 24 years old a proficient athlete and a brilliant student. Her "spare-time pursuits" include weekly boxing sessions, training in the "close combat martial art of Wing Chun" and small arms target practice- but the arrow is her "weapon of choice." However, in slinkiness 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" (Shalimar the Clown: 34), escaped from occupied France in time to mastermind the Bretton woods agreement, and then became a celebrated academician who foretold the end of the Cold war and the rise of the third world's economic powerhouses, before serving for years as the US counter terrorism chief. Along the way, Maximilian Ophuls found time to go to India as the US ambassador. India Ophuls longs for the hidden truth about her lost Kashmiri mother, of whom it is forbidden to speak. "The ambassador had entombed her memory under a pyramid of silence." (Shalimar the Clown: 22)

The former US ambassador to India and subsequently America's counter-terrorism chief is knifed to death in broad day light on the door steps of India's apartment. Rushdie describes Max's role as representative of the United States in the Middle East and depicts a portraits of the type of 'democracy' that his fictional USA wants to implement in that region, given a hint as to the weight these actions would have on the 9/11 attacks and future clashes around the globe.

Max's murder, at first appears to be a political assassination of a Jewish American by a Muslim-Kashmiri fundamentalist turns out to be passionately personal. The culprit is his Kashmiri driver, a man called Shalimar. The story flashes back to more traditional Rushdie territory: Pachigam in Kashmir, a village of chefs and actors who performed the Bhand Pather, the traditional plays of the valley. Shalimar is an acrobatic clown. He is in love with a Pandit's daughter, Boonyi. They are duly censored for their 'rash' behavior, but the families bless the marriage. Abdullah Noman, the father of Shalimar, invokes the concept of Kashmiriness "the belief that at heart of Kashmiri culture there was a common bond that transcended all differences" (Shalimar the Clown: 138) and proclaims "There is no Hindu-Muslim issue. Two Kashmiri- two Pachigami youngsters wish to marry, that's all. A love match is acceptable to both families and so marriage there will be, both Hindu and Muslim customs will be observed." (Shalimar the Clown: 138)

The happily-ever after script is shattered by the visit of former ambassador Max Ophuls to Kashmir. For Boonyi, Max is a chance to escape into a world of erudition and wealth. Her departure into the arms of Max sets in motion the novel's prime force: the rage of Shalimar, which mirrors the rage growing around him in the hills and valleys and channels his rage by training as a terrorist.

Meanwhile, rising communal hostility of Muslims against the Pandits leads to a reassessment that the syncretistic Kashmiriness was an illusion underneath which forced conversions, temple-smashing and persecution. About the end of the 1971 Bangladesh war, Shalimar resolves to seek and assassinate Max Ophuls. "The invisible enemy in the invisible room in the foreign country far away: that's the one I want to face."<sup>(Shalimar the Clown: 249)</sup>

For 15 years, he took training as a terrorist. This shy, romantic boy enraptured by myth becomes a cold-blooded warrior with a heart full of napalm. "In the hot coals of his fury, honour ranked above everything else, above decency, above culture, above life itself."<sup>(Shalimar the Clown: 258)</sup> Most noxious of his many mentors in massacre is a character known as the Iron Mullah, a prophet rumored to be made of scrap metal. The mullah inspires Muslims of Pachigam to build a mosque and coercing their women to wear burkas. Soon the community splits like skin sliced through by the rigid as steel mullah. Iron Mullah brainwashes hundreds of Jihadi-recruits that "at the root of religion is this desire, the desire the crush the infidel."<sup>(Shalimar the Clown: 262)</sup>

Most noxious of his many mentors in massacre is a character known as the Iron Mullah, a prophet rumored to be made of scrap metal. He is the only directly allegorical character in the book. Rushdie wants to show that the attraction of the jihad in Kashmir arose out of the activities of the Indian army. One of the most obvious facts about Kashmir is the gigantic amount of military equipment that's there everywhere: tanks, trucks, howitzers, bazookas, huge arms depots, endless arms convoys which go up these little mountain roads for six hours at a time from one end of the convoy to the other. And a lot of the equipment, when it screws up, is thrown away, and there are all these dumps, and just the idea that all of the scrap metal coming to life and becoming the enemy of the tanks is a straight-forward allegory to say that one thing rises out of another. The two horrible people there in the Kashmir story are the Indian army general and the Iron Mullah, who are really two opposite sides of the same coin. The mullah inspires Muslims of Pachigam to build a mosque and coercing their women to wear burkas. Soon the community splits like skin sliced through by the rigid as steel mullah. Iron Mullah brainwashes hundreds of Jihadi-recruits that "at the root of religion is this desire, the desire the crush the infidel."<sup>(Shalimar the Clown: 262)</sup>

The camps emphasize that for a true warrior "economics was not primary, ideology was."<sup>(Shalimar the Clown: 265)</sup> Shalimar graduates from Pakistan to terrorize 'Godless people' in Tajikistan, Algeria, Egypt and Palestine. At the terrorist camp, Rushdie allows us to witness Shalimar's transformation into a killing machine from a romantic hero within a place of little

food, filthy tents and staggering quantities of weapons. His cohorts come from the Philippines, Pakistan, Libya and Afghanistan. Rushdie tells us about the camps he trains in, the exercise he performs, how he is forced to stand naked before Taliban leaders and how the camp is funded by an awkward mixture of Pakistani intelligence, American greenbacks and Saudi sheikhs.

Rushdie moves gracefully and forcefully from a perspective of an indoctrinated terrorist to an Indian General responsible for implementing torture. The phrase of "crackdown" that the Indian army uses really is a euphemism of mass destruction. The novel shows that Indian General treats all Kashmiris as if they are potential terrorists. And we know ourselves, from most recent events in Europe, how important it is to resist treating all Muslims as if they're terrorists, but the Indian army has taken the decision to do the opposite of that, to actually decide that everybody is a potential combatant to treat them in that way. And the level of brutality is quite spectacular. Rushdie portrays these events through the bureaucratic language of military reports, revealing how war remains a "process" for those at the top, stripping it of any humanity. Here is how one man was convinced of his allegiance with extremists:

A Kashmiri school teacher accused of being a militant during a crackdown on his village is described by the colonel as "beaten, obviously. Then his beard was set on fire. Then electricity was offered to his eyes, his genitals and his tongue. Afterwards he claimed to have been blinded in one eye, which was an obvious lie, an attempt to blame the investigators for a previously existing condition. He begged the man to stop. He repeated his life, that he was just a school teacher, which offended them. To assist him they took him to a small stream containing dirty water and broken glass.... He lost consciousness to avoid questioning, so when he woke up they chastised him again. In the end it seemed correct to let him go. He was warned that the next time would be killed. These people were beyond saving. There was no hope for them." (Shalimar the Clown: 365) In this instance, Rushdie captures the syntax of both the oppressor and oppressed the lover and the hater, the hunter and the chased.

Shalimar comes back to Pachigam and kills Boonyi who gave birth to the illegitimate child of Max. Then he moves to Philippines and with the help of Abu Sayyaf, he is sent to United States. There he ingratiates himself to Max as a driver and slaughters him. Shalimar is arrested and sentenced in Los Angeles. India Ophuls crafts a psychological torture for her parents' killer through an avalanche of hostile accusatory letters. "A female demon was occupying his head, jabbing hot shafts into his brain." (Shalimar the Clown: 375)

Alive for six years on death row, Shalimar escapes prison in a jail-break and heads straight to quench his thirst for India's blood. In the final frame of drama, India, Reincarnated with her mother's given name, Kashmira, shoots Shalimar down with an arrow from her golden bow before he can plunge yet another knife into another prey.

Revenge is an ancient and powerful engine of narrative and once Rushdie gets around to starting it up, it carries the novel along to an expected but nevertheless harrowing climax of ghastly violence. When it burst out one was not murdered by strangers. It was our neighbors, the people with whom we had shared the high and low points of life, the people with whose children our children had been playing just yesterday. These were the people in whom the fire of hatred would suddenly light up, who would hammer on our doors in the middle of the night with burning torches in their hands. Though Rushdie emphasizes that Shalimar's assassination of Max Ophuls is a personal revenge, he extends the allegory and symbolism from the personal into the universal. From its focus on Kashmir and the India- Pakistan conflict, the novel moves into the broader realm of all recent world events and the novel begins to break down thematically. "Everywhere's story is now a part of everywhere else." (Shalimar the Clown: 399) Rushdie says, in a statement which echoes throughout the novel.

Shalimar, for example trained in Philippines to work with Abu Sayyaf, a group aided by Libya and Malaysia. India Ophuls sees her father as Nelson Mandela in a dream. The Los angels riots, 9/11, Rodney king and Reginald Denny are seen as part of the interconnected violence throughout the world, and even the 1974 murder of nanny in England by Lord Lucan is brought into the thematic mixture. The novel clearly shows the manipulative way the hegemonic power exerts its dominance over geopolitics, historical, political and personal ramifications of these actions. At the end of his eventful life and just before his death, Max Ophuls expresses the vision of the world; he believes the new millennium will herald:

"He tried to believe that the global structures he had helped to build, the pathways of influences, money and power, the multinational associations, the treaty organizations, the frameworks of cooperation and law whose purpose had been to deal with a hot turned cold, would still function in the future that lay beyond what he could foresee." (Shalimar the Clown: 20)

'Shalimar the Clown' delves deep into the roots of terrorism and explores the turmoil generated by different faiths and cultures attempting to coexist. Within a mere generation nations go from near peaceful ethnic and religious acceptance to violent conflict. In this novel the globalization of terror has been shown brilliantly. Rushdie has given shocking description of the global consequences of human emotions such as love, betrayal and revenge. We are able to discern the author's own mixed feelings and we perceive that Rushdie inevitable continues to work within the precincts of the western metropolis while at the same time retaining thematic and political connections with a national background because even though bearing all the attractions of the exotic, the magical and the other, Rushdie also participates in aesthetic language familiar to Anglo-American literature.

In 'The Independent' Rushdie had questioned the Official Story of Islam, trying to open it up to the mixed, metaphorical dream-worlds of the modern metropolis — and for that, he had

to be butchered. “It’s one thing to criticize the way in which the American government is behaving, or the British government, and I have a lot of criticisms of that — in fact, nothing but criticisms”, he says now. “But it’s another thing to fail to see that an enemy actually exists and is extremely serious about what he wishes to do”. ‘Shalimar the Clown’ extends his arguments about cultural and economic globalization, resurgent separatist and terrorist movements and its impact on individuals from *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* (1999) and *Fury* (2001). Like his previous novels, ‘Shalimar the Clown’ cuts across different time periods and territories, challenging the legacies of empire, nationhood and emergent new empires. Yet the novel focuses on Kashmir and international terrorism reframes Rushdie’s earlier arguments. ‘Shalimar the Clown’ engages with the repressions and exclusions that the postcolonial state imposes on its periphery, exemplified in the continuing struggle between India and Pakistan over Kashmir. By discussing “terror” and “terrorism” Rushdie subverts these terms in relation to identity, violence and the effects on the individual and reroutes postcolonial paradigms by examining transnational terror networks, and their regional and international impact on politics, cultures and identities.

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