

REVIEW ARTICLE

SHALIMAR THE CLOWN: A LIFE AND WORLD OF VIRTUOUSNESS

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ABSTRACT

The ninth novel of Salman Rushdie *Shalimar the Clown* was published on September 6, 2005 by Jonathan Cape and it is an extensive study of Kashmir. *Shalimar the Clown* is an allegory about how Kashmir has become corrupt through American neocolonialism. Rushdie uses allegory to establish Kashmir as a lost Eden. It is so because Kashmir has lost its glory because of the external influences. Boonyi and Shalimar's marriage represents what Rushdie through Pyarelal sees as the finest quality of Kashmir—it is a region whose people embrace assortment. In this novel the tragic history of Kashmir under domineering Indian rule and fundamentalist lethargy has been explored. Rushdie looks at the dissimilar factors that have increasingly over the period of time wrinkled the much esteemed ideal of Kashmiriyat and brought Kashmir to the threshold of demolition. He does so in an allegorical fashion through the lives of the main characters of this novel Boonyi Kaul and Shalimar, whose lives fall apart with the influx of an American ambassador to India by the name of Max Ophulus. Ridiculing high/official history, claiming Kashmir a part of India, Rushdie subverts it and gives his description of Kashmir history as “Kashmir for kashmiris,” at the same time he blasts the coercion and exploitation that Islamic fundamentalists do in the name of Islam. The use of magic realism in this novel blurs the difference between reality and fantasy leaving the readers tracing for the boundary between the two. An endeavor has also been made to see and evaluate the use of magic realism and other fictitious devices employed in the writing of this novel. Truly a trilogy of virtue, infidelity and new beginning, *Shalimar the Clown* is a story portraying the life cycle of death in life and life in death, an undying cycle of birth, devastation and renaissance. It represents a new life, a new beginning with the termination of all divisions and segments. It is a life and world of virtuousness that is betrayed by its own people, and slowly walks down the path to obliteration as personified in the life of Shalimar, the protagonist and his village, Pachigam. The multicultural, fusion world is welcomed on the perspective, which has no place for any kind of divisions or borders. All divisions suspend and crumble paving the way for the sway of Humanism, for the victory of the vital Life Force present in all of us.

Key Words: Assortment, Crumble, Domineering, Embrace, Endeavor, Obliteration, Personified perspective, Termination, Virtuousness.

INTRODUCTION

Ahmed Salman Rushdie is a British Indian novelist and essayist, born on 19th June 1947 in Bombay (now Mumbai) Maharashtra, to Anis Ahmed Rushdie, a Cambridge educated businessman and Negin Rushdie, a school teacher. They belonged to a Muslim family of Kashmiri descent. Rushdie's early education took place at the Cathedral and John Cannon School for Boys. Rushdie was educated in England and eventually took his M.A. in History from King's College, Cambridge. His career started as a copywriter with the advertising agencies Ogilvy and Mather, and Ayer Barker. He wrote the memorable line “That'll do nicely” which came in American Express, for Ayer Barker. It was while he was at Ogilvy that he wrote *Midnight's Children* before becoming a full-time writer. He is presently working as co-editor of the *Vintage Book of Indian Writing*. He is a fellow of the Royal Society of Literature and *Commandeur des Aets et des Lettres* of France. In 2007 he was knighted by Queen Elizabeth II for his services to literature. The ninth novel of Salman Rushdie *Shalimar the Clown* was published on September 6, 2005 by Jonathan Cape and it is an extensive study of Kashmir. *Shalimar the Clown* derives its name from Shalimar Gardens, in the environs of Srinagar, one of several Mughal Gardens, which were laid out in several parts of undivided India when the Mughals reigned over the

subcontinent. Shalimar is the name of one of the characters featured in the novel. *Shalimar the Clown* won the 2005 Vodafone Crossword Book Award and was one of the finalists for the 2005 Whitbread Book Awards. *Shalimar the Clown* is an allegory about how Kashmir has become corrupt through American neocolonialism. Rushdie uses allegory to establish Kashmir as a lost Eden. It is so because Kashmir has lost its glory because of the external influences. Boonyi and Shalimar's marriage represents what Rushdie through Pyarelal sees as the finest quality of Kashmir—it is a region whose people embrace assortment.

In this novel the tragic history of Kashmir under domineering Indian rule and fundamentalist lethargy has been explored. Rushdie looks at the dissimilar factors that have increasingly over the period of time wrinkled the much esteemed ideal of *Kashmiriyat* and brought Kashmir to the threshold of demolition. He does so in an allegorical fashion through the lives of the main characters of this novel Boonyi Kaul and Shalimar, whose lives fall apart with the influx of an American ambassador to India by the name of Max Ophulus. Ridiculing high/official history, claiming Kashmir a part of India, Rushdie subverts it and gives his description of Kashmir history as “*Kashmir for kashmiris*,” at the same time he blasts the coercion and exploitation that Islamic fundamentalists do in the name of Islam. The use of magic realism in this novel blurs the difference between reality and fantasy leaving the readers tracing for the boundary between the two. An endeavor has

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also been made to see and evaluate the use of magic realism and other fictitious devices employed in the writing of this novel. He also interrogates the appalling history of Kashmir after the separation of India and Pakistan in 1947, and deflates the Indo-Pak claims over the valley of Kashmir. Rushdie, while making use of some of the distinctive postmodern and postcolonial legendary techniques, provides vary versions that subvert the prevailing conversation on Kashmir. The two main protagonists of *Shalimar the Clown*, Noman Sher Noman a.k.a Shalimar the Clown and *Bhoomi* a.k.a Boonyi Kaul Noman, are born in the last night of Kashmir under the Maharaja rule. The night of their birth coincides with a tumultuous occurrence of the Kashmir history. On the night of Boonyi and Shalimar's birth, their families are performing at a banquet laden with tradition and magic-an event that represents the high point of Kashmir's syncretic cooperation. The banquet is laid in the tribute of the Hindu Maharaja on the occasion of Dasehra, celebrating the triumph of lord Ram against the demon king Ravan.

The novel while dealing chiefly with Kashmir has a comprehensive scope and facet concern in Los Angeles and moving inexorably from Los Angeles to Kashmir, to India, France, Germany, England and as a final point back to Los Angeles, with all the four major characters narrowly linked to global developments. *Shalimar the Clown*, the prodigy of Max Ophuls, his assassin and his illicit daughter and yet another woman who links them all, and whose story explains them all, is essentially twofold. On one plane the novel tells the audacious story of Maximilian Ophuls, a man of desirable rational talent and World War II Resistance hero, who later becomes the United States ambassador to India. During his visit to Kashmir, Max Ophuls meets and falls in love with a young *Pachigami* dancer named Boonyi Kaul. The enthusiastic Boonyi seizes upon him as her chance out of the valley and into an unidentified but exhilarating potential. Their outrageous affair has unpredicted and dreadful consequences, since Boonyi is previously married turns Shalimar, a clown and a tightrope walker, into a rage-filled nemesis. Shalimar becomes consumed with hatred toward Max, Boonyi and their dishonest daughter India – Kashmir. Trained as a militant, Shalimar the clown first kills Boonyi, his infidel wife; and then travelling across quite a few countries and fulfilling frequent errands reaches Los Angeles where he comes into the employment of Max as his servile driver and one fine morning slaughters him on the doorsteps of his daughter. After spending many years in the prison, Shalimar lastly manages to escape, thanks to his childhood adventures of rope-walking as a traditional clown. With the purpose of a murder, Shalimar breaks into the house of India- Kashmir. The novel concludes with the two impending assassins pitted, in absolute darkness, against each other. On another plane, a more enthralling one is the narrative of Kashmir itself. Centered on the village of Pachigam where Boonyi and Shalimar grow up, the novel narrates the tragic providence of Kashmir torn amid the disparaging Indian occupation and Pakistan supported armed liberation movement.

The sense of tragedy is heightened by foregrounding the belief that before to her childhood lover, Noman Sher Noman - Shalimar the Clown. Her infidelity turns Shalimar, a clown and a tightrope walker, into a rage-filled avenger. Shalimar becomes consumed with revulsion toward Max, Boonyi and

their unlawful daughter India – Kashmir. Trained as a militant, Shalimar the clown first kills Boonyi, his infidel wife; and then travelling across several countries and gratifying numerous errands reaches Los Angeles where he comes into the employment of Max as his servile driver and one fine morning slaughters him on the doorsteps of his daughter. After spending many years in the prison, Shalimar lastly manages to escape, thanks to his childhood adventures of rope-walking as a conventional clown. With the intent of a murder, Shalimar breaks into the house of India- Kashmir. The novel concludes with the two potential assassins pitted, in absolute darkness, against each other. On another plane, a more gripping one is the narrative of Kashmir itself. Centered on the village of Pachigam where Boonyi and Shalimar grow up, the novel narrates the tragic fate of Kashmir torn between the disparaging Indian occupation and Pakistan supported armed liberation movement.

The Muslim- Hindu unity and harmony in the village is glorified as an ideal state of “Kashmiriyat”, “a regional spirit of communal harmony and cultural syncretism” (Yamuna. 295). In the novel the Surpanch (headman) Abdullah Noman speaks of this Kashmiriyat in the following words: “Abdullah then mentioned Kashmiriyat, Kashmiriness, the belief that at the heart of Kashmiri culture there was a common bond that transcended all differences”. (SC. 180). This model of Kashmiriyat is further invoked by the romantic love between Shalimar, a Muslim boy, and Boonyi, a Hindu girl. At the age of fourteen, Boonyi decides to accomplish her love for Shalimar. Egged on by the ghost of her dead mother, “Go to him [...] and fade into nothing,” (SC. 85) she slips out of her house at night into the wooded hillside of Khelmerg in search of her childhood love Shalimar like “a shadow in search of a shadow [...] who would love and protect her” (SC. 85). When the youthful passionate love affair of Shalimar and Boonyi is exposed by Gopinath Razdan, the spy-turned-suitor of Boonyi, the whole village comes out in prop up of the two lovers. Rather than reacting with annoyance, the families bless their marriage in a touching last gasp of Kashmiriyat:

So we have not only Kashmiriness to defend but Pachigaminess as well. We are all brothers and sisters here,” said Abdullah. “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 a marriage there will be; both Hindu and Muslim customs will be observed” Boonyi in the hunting lodge at Dachigam implicit that her dance was changing her life, that what was being born in the eyes of the moonstruck American ambassador was nothing less than her own future. By the time he got to his feet and commended stridently and long, she knew that he would find a way to bring her to him, and all that was left for her to do was to formulate a single preference, a single act of will, yes or no. Then her eyes met his and blazed their answer and the point of no return was passed (SC. 296). Cashing on the chance of an escape from her ostracized parochial village life at Pachigam, Boonyi choose Max over her husband Shalimar and starts living as Max’s mistress in the Roosevelt House at Delhi. After negotiating the covenant of wants and desires, Boonyi offers herself entirely to Max. This scandalous concern with Max at Delhi leaves Boonyi in dishonor. Max seduces her, impregnates her and shortly abandons her. The cuckolded husband Shalimar, resentful by the loss of his wife, joins a

militant group backed by Pakistan and gets involved in a guerilla clash. He launches on a journey into the most impulsive parts of the subcontinent and becomes trained as a guerilla fighter, thus channeling his rage against Boonyi, Max and their illicit daughter India-Kashmira.

Max Ophul's seduction of a Kashmiri girl Boonyi Noman and the ensuing licentious adventures, his stuffing and glutting her with food and comestibles and his losing interest and abandoning her is an allegory of American interest in the third world nations of the world. According to Taverson, "America's power seduces, its affections imprison, its commodities corrupt, and it abandons once it has taken what it wants. Boonyi is thus a product of America's love for the world" (Taverson, p. 219). After Max's indifference to Boonyi, Rushdie makes Boonyi herself speak indignantly to Max: 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 so-called love, your destructive, selfish, wanton love. Look at me. Your love jokes 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." (SC. 337)

The Max- Boonyi plot serves as a successful allegory of US concern in Kashmir affairs. This involvement has a disconcerting impact, registered through the distortion of lives of Boonyi and her husband Shalimar. While Max abandons Boonyi mortified, heavy and shapeless, intolerable to her husband and family, he circuitously drives Shalimar into the hands of fundamentalists, thus bringing a upheaval in their private lives. Their lives fall apart, leading them all to a hopeless end. Like Rushdie's previous novels, *Shalimar the Clown* is rich in allegorical parallels. Like Saleem Sinai and Omar Khayyam Shakil playing as metaphors for India and Pakistan in *Midnight's Children* and *Shame* correspondingly; Boonyi too is a factual metaphor for Kashmir in *Shalimar the Clown*. In the novel, Boonyi stands out as the most tragic figure and "She clearly represents Kashmir in its beautiful and then tragic aspect" (Yamuna. 302). She is not merely jilted and abandoned by her appealing American suitor, but also discarded and overlooked by her husband and her family. In fact, under a well hatched conspiracy, the whole village closes ranks in declaring Boonyi dead formally. Like Boonyi, who is destroyed both by her American suitor as well as her own people, Kashmir becomes a subject as a result of "a three way power struggle between US interests, the Indian army and Islamic insurgents from Pakistan" (Taverson. 219). Thus Rushdie can be seen writing current history of Kashmir in the form of a intricate comic allegory. The Eden lost in the novel is Kashmir. As the closed in valley is claimed both of her belligerent neighbors, viz, India and Pakistan, the resulting struggle results in a devastation not only of a definite way of life but also of life itself in this argument precinct of the world. The epigraph at the beginning of the novel "a plague on both your houses" taken from Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* foreshadows the plot with a probable tragedy. However, as detained, the tragedy does not branch from an inner Hindu-Muslim disagreement but because of some peripheral forces operating for political gains. The nuisance begins on the night when In *Shalimar the Clown*, Rushdie uses some chief historical figures and incidents as signposts and weaves a illusory story round them. The imperative figures of Kashmir's

social and political history emerge in different shapes in *Shalimar the Clown*. It reminds the reader that besides the world of reality, there is a fictional world where all real events take place in a fictional manner.

Shalimar the Clown is a novel about loss- the loss of a absolute way of life. Under a compound set of forces the tranquil life of Pachigam, or for that matter the whole of Kashmir, comes to an end as the assorted but serene and pleasant society falls apart, disbelieve spreads like wild fire, life becomes despicable and death and annihilation visits too often. The ugly turn of events at Shalimar garden gives Rushdie an occasion to voice his fears about the coming times as Abdulla Noman prophesies "the world he knew was disappearing; this blind, inky night was the incontestable sign of the times" (SC. 145) The essential tragedy highlighted in *Shalimar the Clown* is the disintegration of Kashmir, the alteration of an Eden into a hell. The story of Shalimar and Boonyi recapitulates this tragedy on an individual point. Rushdie uses all the devices of a postmodern novelist to write "his" version of the tragic history of Kashmir razed and ravaged by the cold-blooded and malicious marauders from both India and Pakistan. By incorporating the views and opinions, aims and aspirations of ordinary Kashmiries, Rushdie interrogates the official description of history that justifies Indian control over Kashmir and debunks the myth of chauvinism and national veracity that are used as a discussion to strangle all the rebellious elements with force. By accommodating the confined point of view and by asking some suitable questions, Rushdie's adaptation of Kashmir story has been able to subvert the prevailing discourse on Kashmir.

Truly a trilogy of virtue, infidelity and new beginning, *Shalimar the Clown* is a story portraying the life cycle of death in life and life in death, an undying cycle of birth, devastation and renaissance. It represents a new life, a new beginning with the termination of all divisions and segments. Now, "There was no India. There was only Kashmira, and *Shalimar the clown*." (SC. 398) The multicultural, fusion world is welcomed on the perspective, which has no place for any kind of divisions or borders. All divisions suspend and crumble paving the way for the sway of Humanism, for the victory of the vital Life Force present in all of us.

Conclusion

The novel ends with this failure to unite. Shalimar has just broken into India's home with a knife to kill India, and India is armed with a bow to guard herself. At this point, mutual recognition is not even an option. Either India or Shalimar will probably kill the other. As the last line of the book states, —there was only Kashmira and *Shalimar the clown* (SC. 398). It is only the two of them together, but they are part separated entities. Through the novel, Rushdie expresses "[...] sadness for the ideal that has been lost in Kashmir and in so many parts of the Muslim world, the ideal of tolerance and secular pluralism." (Cowley, 2005:27). The novel is an ode to the simple, idyllic life of the valley, the land of Rushdie's roots, a land of eternal beauty and charm, that, "... as lost...like paradise, ...Kashmir, in a time before memory." (SC. 4) which is portrayed as the model world with its unique way of life, its 'Kashmiriyat', where differences and divisions were non-existent; a world unscathed by abhorrence and collectivism.

Peace, love and brotherhood exemplify the Kashmiri way of life. It is a life and world of virtuousness that is betrayed by its own people, and slowly walks down the path to obliteration as personified in the life of Shalimar, the protagonist and his village, Pachigam.

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