

## THE WORLD OF POLITICAL AND DOMESTIC HISTORY IN A MOMENT OF POSTMODERNIST PRACTICE: A STUDY OF *SHALIMAR THE CLOWN* BY SALMAN RUSHDIE

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“We who live in these luxury limbos, the privileged purgatories of the earth, have set aside thoughts of paradise.”

“Yet I tell you that I have seen it and walked by its fish-rich lakes. [...] In Kashmir it is paradise itself that is falling; heaven on earth is being transformed into a living hell.” (SC. 28).

### **Abstract:**

*Shalimar the Clown* (2005) is an extensive study of the situation in Kashmir by Salman Rushdie. It derives its name from Shalimar Gardens - in the environs of Srinagar, one of several Mughal Gardens - which were laid out in several parts of the country when the Mughals reigned over the subcontinent. The name *Shalimar* means abode of joy. In *Shalimar the Clown*, there is no hope for the continuity of the idea of Kashmir outside the fiction. Kashmiriness is annihilated without deliverance, and the slogan “Kashmir for the Kashmiris” becomes a joke, “a moronic idea” (SC. 101), “no longer an option” (SC. 311). Given this, it is barely astonishing that *Shalimar the Clown* is so persistently severe, and that the comedy obvious in Rushdie’s earlier novels is visibly, and perhaps deliberately, lacking. Salman Rushdie’s fiction is described as postmodern, accurately because it questions realist modes of knowledge and illustration. Rather, by focusing on Rushdie’s use of formal literary devices such as variable narration, digression, sarcasm, recurrence, satire, allegory and intertextuality, this chapter considers how Rushdie’s novel *Shalimar the Clown* questions about the historical, social and political worlds it presents. Salman Rushdie’s handling of narrative techniques in *Shalimar the Clown* appear to be concerned with politics. The novels have passages of overtly political narrative. His narrative technique is most confidentially based on realizing the world of political and domestic history in an instant of postmodernist practice. Rushdie’s use of postmodern devices in his novels reveals the innovation of his insight and awareness of the human predicament in the postmodern age. Allusions, magical realism, distortion and imitation and the presentation of layers and layers of connotation have all turn into a narrative mode of his novel. Finally Rushdie wants to communicate that there is a request to the Indian army not to develop the location in Kashmir, a plea to blend Muslims to

seek to enhancement their religion, and a plea to European and North American politicians to create a global political context that helps rather than hinders their progress.

**Keywords:** postmodern, history, political narration etc

The world of political and domestic history in a moment of postmodernist practice: A study of *Shalimar the Clown* by Salman Rushdie

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*Shalimar the Clown* (2005) is an extensive study of the situation in Kashmir by Salman Rushdie. It derives its name from Shalimar Gardens - in the environs of Srinagar, one of several Mughal Gardens - which were laid out in several parts of the country when the Mughals reigned over the subcontinent. The name *Shalimar* means abode of joy.

According to S. Prasannarajan,

“*Shalimar the Clown* brings back to fiction the grandeur of narrative, and reaffirms the narrator’s status as the unauthorized - and unmatched – biographer of the midnight nation”. It is another “[...] last hurrah for a lost world where the performance of history is matched by the passion play of those who can’t survive it, and where few come out alive from the whirl of love and madness, of fantasy and fanaticism, of revenge and re-tribution” (70).

Rushdie voices the thought of a borderless world and its implications. He makes a comprehensible account of the extravagant and despoiling struggle over the valley of Kashmir, combined with an indistinct depiction of Islamist Jihadis terrorism. There is also a second plotline - a love story, a generational drama and tale of obsession, adultery and revenge woven in with the larger story of Kashmir. It is a profoundly a personal novel that evokes the Kashmir that was the homeland of Rushdie’s grandparents, Dr. Abdullah alias Babajan and Amir Unnissa Butt alias Ammaji, to whom the book is dedicated. The novel presents the story of the communalization of the disputed Indian territory of Kashmir since partition, through the experiences of a set of characters from the fictional village of Pachigam.

Rushdie has portrayed the recent tragic history of Kashmir with poignancy and understanding in the novel. In the story of his characters is entangled the story of Kashmir, its life and culture, and the relapse of this Paradise. Making the 'personal bleed into the political', Rushdie has once again voiced his apprehension for the modern world at large and Kashmir in particular, mourning the loss of love, innocence and brotherhood.

In *Shalimar the Clown* he turns to a place close to his heart, to Kashmir as a lost paradise. As Eden gifted with natural and manmade beauty persistently engaged with Rushdie's imagination.

The novel is an ode to the plain, peaceful life of the valley, the land of Rushdie's roots, a land of eternal beauty and charm, that, "[...] was lost [...] like paradise, [...] Kashmir, in a time before memory" (SC. 4).

The sweep of Rushdie's canvas extends from Kashmir, to the 1960s in Strasbourg and Paris of World War II, to present-day Los Angeles. Through the saga of a personal catastrophe, Rushdie explores the obstinate issue of Kashmir in recent history and by this means, concerns of nationalism, religious intolerance, and imperialism. The theme of the war on terror can be found in this novel, diverse aspects are highlighted in each of them. As a result, this novel is by far the least unambiguously apprehensive with the contemporary war on terror.

'India', 'Boonyi', 'Max', 'Shalimar the Clown' and 'Kashmira' – are the important sections in *Shalimar the Clown* each named after a major character in the novel. The story portrays the heaven that once was Kashmir, and how the political affairs of the sub-continent rip apart the lives of those caught in the middle of the battle ground. It is the issue of Kashmir that is central in *Shalimar the Clown*.

'*Shalimar the Clown*' delves deep into the roots of terrorism and explores the commotion generated by different faiths and cultures attempting to coexist. Within a mere cohort nations go from near peaceful cultural and religious reception to violent conflict. In this novel the globalization of terror has been shown intensely. Rushdie has given shocking explanation of the global consequences of human emotions such as love, betrayal and revenge. We are able to discriminate the author's own mixed feelings and we recognize that Rushdie predictable continues to work within the precincts of the western conurbation while at the same time retaining thematic and political connections with a national setting because even though bearing all the attractions of the alien, the magical and the other, Rushdie also participates in aesthetic language recognizable to Anglo-American literature.

Like his earlier novels, '*Shalimar the Clown*' cuts transversely different time periods and territories, demanding the legacies of empire, nationhood and developing new empires. '*Shalimar the Clown*' engages with the repressions and exclusions that the postcolonial state imposes on its margin, exemplified in the abiding 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

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groping transnational terror networks, and their regional and international impact on politics, cultures and identities.

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*Shalimar the Clown* is, in definite ways, the extension of Tai’s story with obvious deep insights. Here too we see the extermination of the idea of Kashmir (heaven on Earth) as it is caught among violent and opposing political interests. Here too, it is the normal village Kashmiris who suffer and die as a result of antagonisms that are fostered and manipulated by far-away national leaders in search of uniformly distant national ideals. Apart from these striking similarities there are some differences too, conversely.

Here Rushdie makes a very relevant point: that Kashmir’s problems stem not from intrinsic Hindu-Muslim antipathy, but from a Hindu-Muslim antipathy that has been brought into being by political processes and historical forces. Though this point is well made, however, the implication that Kashmir, before the 1940s, was a paradisiacal zone of tolerance and harmony, in which the only conflicts result from squabbles over cooking pots, seems a delayed idea.

Rushdie moves elegantly and vigorously from a standpoint of an indoctrinated terrorist to an Indian General accountable for implementing persecute. The expression of crackdown that the Indian army uses actually is a euphemism of mass destruction. The novel shows that Indian General treats all Kashmiris as if they are possible terrorists. And we know ourselves, from most current events in Europe, how imperative it is to resist treating all Muslims as if they’re terrorists, but the Indian army has taken the verdict to do the opposite of that, to essentially decide that everybody is a budding participant to treat them in that way. And the level of viciousness is quite spectacular.

The Eden lost in the novel is Kashmir. As the closed in valley is claimed both of her insistent neighbors, viz, India and Pakistan, the resultant struggle results in a catastrophe not only of a definite way of life but also of life itself in this conflict zone of the world. However, as detained, the tragedy does not stem from an internal Hindu-Muslim altercation but because of some external forces operating for political gains.

Rushdie uses a magic realist technique to fictionalize some of the historical events and show them in a new unfamiliar way. Critics have pointed out magic realism, with its characteristic mixing of real and fantastic, as one of the points of accord between Postmodernism and Post colonialism. On the night when the Seventh Sarkar, the magician, was going to present his grand magic trick of “hiding from view” (SC. 140) the whole Shalimar garden, Pakistan army blows up the power station at Mohra plunging the whole valley in pitch darkness. Like most postmodern writers his fiction too has a touch of unreality and vastness that is needed to project contemporary reality, a reality devoid of borders. In his novel, he voices this concept of a borderless world and its implications.

Salman Rushdie's handling of narrative techniques in *Shalimar the Clown* appear to be concerned with politics. The novels have passages of explicitly political narrative. His narrative technique is most intimately based on realizing the world of political and domestic history in a moment of postmodernist practice. Rushdie's use of postmodern devices in his novels reveals the originality of his insight and awareness of the human predicament in the postmodern age. Allusions, magical realism, parody and pastiche and the unveiling of layers and layers of meaning have all become a narrative mode of his novel.

Salman Rushdie's fiction is described as postmodern, accurately because it questions realist modes of knowledge and illustration. Rather, by focusing on Rushdie's use of formal literary devices such as variable narration, digression, sarcasm, recurrence, satire, allegory and inter textuality, this chapter considers how Rushdie's novel *Shalimar the Clown* questions about the historical, social and political worlds it presents.

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In the novel national and regional space is rewritten as a space of complex assorted, pluralistic experiences that coherent and produce “constructions” of cultural and national identity. Hybridity can be understood as an in-between space which is not slender by rigid demarcations of identity but is rather a site for being and becoming, an articulation of a plurality of nations, cultures, languages that engage and confront one another in a creative play of meaning and representation.

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Salman Rushdie's *Shalimar the Clown* moves beyond the now typical postcolonial issues to explore multiculturalism, globalization, terrorism, and neo-imperialism. It deals with the appalling history of fundamentalism, terrorism, and military violence in Kashmir. The issue of religious fundamentalism has been an object of critique in almost all his novels.

Behind this univocal world space, predictable by radical religious or nationalist or globalized discourses lie an embarrassment of mellow, different and often subsumed local narratives. The inclination to silence or erase local stories, often unsuspectingly can fuel and reinforce religious radicals and fanatics. In *Shalimar the Clown*, Rushdie enumerates the stories that have been appropriated or erased by the global culture in the name of homogenization and amalgamation. The novel can be considered a political allegory in which the characters are metaphorical extensions and repercussions of global-local politics. Through the interface between the global and the local, Rushdie attempts to celebrate the variability of identity and the vigor of spaces.

With this novel harking back to a place dear to him — the Kashmir of his grandparents, Rushdie returns to his roots. As a political novelist occupied in the re-examination of history, he makes an overwhelming examination of a doomed love in a doomed region. It is his response to the threat of the striking subject of fundamentalism. It may be too far-fetched to expect a happy ending in the context of present day Kashmir. The novel does seem to hold out a ray of hope for Kashmira. She meets Yuvraj Singh in India and is progressively convinced that their love has a chance. The end finds Kashmira equipped to deal with Shalimar, her potential assailant. Closure is not to be expected with Rushdie. However, such an end that holds out the prospect of new beginnings is a rare one in Rushdie's corpus of work.

His fiction portrays the complex and confusing world. All his novels signify his interpretation of history and the world, and their influence on life and society. Rushdie reflects the rebellion from conventionality. Like most of the writers Rushdie's fiction too has a touch of unreality and immensity that is needed to project contemporary reality, and a reality devoid of borders.

The novel is not only an odyssey from innocence to treachery but also an assertion and belief on the buoyancy and strength of the human spirit, a certainty in the future. Truly a trilogy of innocence, betrayal and new beginning, *Shalimar the Clown* is a story portraying the life cycle of death in life and life in death, a continuous cycle of birth, annihilation and rejuvenation. The multicultural, hybrid world is welcomed on the prospect, that has no place for any kind of divisions or borders. All divisions dissolve and disintegrate paving the way for the sway of Humanism, for the victory of the indispensable Life Force present in all of us.

Finally Rushdie wants to communicate that there is a request to the Indian army not to develop the location in Kashmir, a plea to blend Muslims to seek to enhancement their religion,

and a plea to European and North American politicians to create a global political context that helps rather than hinders their progress.

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