
Terror has a History : A Fretful Conceptualization of the Loss of Kashmiriyat in Salman Rushdie's *Shalimar the Clown*

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ABSTRACT

The new global cultural economy has to be seen as a complex, over-lapping, disjunctive order, which cannot any longer be understood in terms of existing center-periphery models creating multiple scapes that are deeply perspectival constructs, inflected by the historical, linguistic and political situatedness of different sorts of nation-states, multinational diasporic communities as well as subnational groupings and movements whether religious, political or economic. The global flow of people across and within nations and borders is generated by a variety of reasons: the reconfiguration of the global economy, displacement and dispossession of marginalized populations etc. The symbolic dimensions of territorial attachment experienced by residents of specific territories, the issues of border location or resource exploitation is only secondary to the unsettled feelings of "belonging" and rootedness within specific places and spaces. They are ready to defend their "homeland" territories to which they lay claim through historical priority, infrequently causing a major political instability, tension and conflict manifesting in the form of terrorism. Salman Rushdie's novel *Shalimar the Clown* (2005) deals with geographical and psychological displacement, transculturalism and the divide created due to violence and uprooting. The novel encapsulates the idea of recovery of lost identities in a way which goes "from roots to routes."

Violence in postmodern times can be seen as a retributory aftermath of the two World Wars that created a bipolar world. In the contemporary world, one of the configurations of the unlawful violence is Terrorism, administered to create fear in order to pursue religious, political or ideological goals. Since terrorism appears in many guises, providing an all-encompassing definition of the term is not an easy task as "one man's terrorist will always be another man's freedom fighter" (qtd. in Shughart 10). Yasser Arafat is quoted in the same article, expressing a similar thought, namely that :

The difference between the revolutionary and the terrorist lies in the reason for which each fights. For whoever stands by a just cause and fights for the freedom and liberation of his land from the invaders, the settlers and the colonialists, cannot possibly be called a terrorist. (qtd. in Shughart 10)

But terror has a history and can be analyzed in terms of causality. Besides, the terrorist is not consciousness-deprived and may be understood in terms of his or her psychological structure. Terrorism has been practiced since earlier times but it was largely directed against tyrannical or despotic regimes and colonial or imperial authorities, targeting the symbols of political authority – heads of state, viceroys, ministers, civilian and military officials, leading political figures, among others. The key feature of latter day terrorism is support for and sponsorship of terrorist groups and exercise of it as a strategy, a means to achieve an objective. The objective is to undermine the foundations of the state, its legitimacy, and its ability to command the people's compliance. In recent years, the world has seen many terrorist attacks or attempted attacks in locations other than where the terrorist (s) originated from. There may seem a peripheral link between globalization and

terrorism, as the concept of globalization has originated from the West that has polarized itself – on the basis of cultural difference, economic prosperity, political resilience (in relation to civilizational backwardness of the under-developed countries), clashing market system and rampant resource availability (in relation to the scantiness within the large parts of the Third World). In regions such as South Asia these concerns are however given added weight due to the existence of traditional border disputes, conventional arms races and nuclear and missile proliferation between certain nation-states.

The clash of civilizations has now revolved around the concept of 'civilization identity' and economic modernization and the social changes that have followed in the recent years have furthered in separating people from their traditional, local and national identities. Today the discord is not between social classes, rich and poor, or other economically defined groups, but people belonging to different cultural entities. The inter-civilizational discords have the potential to escalate into larger, even global conflicts as groups or states belonging to the same civilization come to the aid of their kin. Consequently the Indo-Pakistani dispute over Kashmir has entailed a substantial chance of growing into a larger and more violent conflict between the Islamic and the Hindu civilizations. Modern day terrorism has distinguished into two large types the individualized terrorism and categorical terrorism. In the individualized terrorist act, the victims are targeted because of their individual identities and the terrorist often knows his target by name. The categorical terrorism aims at anonymous individuals belonging virtually to a specific ethnic or religious group, nationality or social class. But both these specifications lack solid evidence on the motivations and intentions of the terrorists, questioning the relevance of their deeds and the driving force and support behind their violent activities.

Many scholars claim that a literary terrorist novel takes us inside the mind of the terrorist and allows the reader to know and experience why someone chooses terror. Salman Rushdie, perhaps the most controversial and political novelist of our troubled times has crafted an eloquent and engrossing novel about terrorism, lust, revenge and the death of tolerance in our time. The novel *Shalimar the Clown* (2005) brings forth a tale of woe, in which love can bring many people to do violent things, even terrorism. Rushdie's *Shalimar the Clown* is seen as an example of how the contemporary postcolonial/postmodern novel debates multiculturalism, terrorism, the neo-imperialist strategies of US foreign policy and the Indian state's military presence in Kashmir. It has been described as one of the key books of our time, as a novel that delves deeply into the roots of religious terrorism and as an exploration of post 9/11 world.

In *Shalimar the Clown*, Kashmir is presented as an idealized place, valued not so much for its beauty or its cultural uniformity but rather for the manner in which it symbolizes how ethnically diverse societies can create a legacy of tolerance and civilization. Through the novel, Rushdie makes an attempt to say that the existing perturbed world is in need of effective multiculturalism that would stand against the treatises of essentialism. He also acknowledges the porous boundaries between groups, diffused notions of identity, territorialized links between members of different nation states, globalizing patterns of communication and hybrid processes of cultural transformation using elements of crime thriller, sensation fiction and *noir*, to explore the gory dimensions of geo-political violence, practices of terrorism and anti-terrorism.

The central action in the novel takes place in the small hamlet of Pachigam in Kashmir, a territory fought over by India and Pakistan. It is a village of travelling players who are known as *bhand* players. *Bhand pather* is the Kashmiri phrase which translates as

'clown stories', and these travelling players perform basically folk theatre. At the heart of the story however there's a story of betrayed love and revenge. The eponymous Shalimar the Clown is the central character in the novel, and in tracing how he becomes a killer, a potential terrorist, Rushdie attempts to understand the contemporary experience of the destruction of Kashmir. He put it in an interview :

This is a book about a person who starts out sweet and ends up ferocious. And the question is not only why but how. How, in an individual life, can someone begin as a person who would not hurt a fly and end up being someone who cheerfully slits people's throats and cuts their heads off? And the book tries to answer that question. (Enright 2005 :562)

In *Shalimar the Clown*, Rushdie celebrates cultural syncretism by presenting Pachigam as a land of eternal beauty and charm where peace, love and brotherhood characterize the Kashmiri way of life. In Pachigam, Muslims and Hindus live in a peaceful coexistence because "the words Hindu and Muslim had no place in their story . . . In the valley these words were merely descriptions, not divisions. The frontiers between the words, their hard edges, had grown smudged and lured. This was how things had to be. This was Kashmir" (Rushdie 2008, 57). But no matter how tolerant the Kashmir of *Shalimar the Clown* is initially presented, the coming doom can be glimpsed prior to its taking place and the first foreshadowing comes in the guise of the "pot war", a quarrel between Pachigam and the neighboring village of Shirmal. The men of Shirmal attacked Pachigam with the mind to wreak havoc amongst their rivals' cooking equipment during the Wazwaan "the banquet of Thirty-Six courses Minimum"; as Pachigam, originally a village of actors, had also started to provide both food and entertainment, "a rounded service which offered both sustenance for the body and pleasure for the soul" and subsequently "didn't have to share the feast-day cash emoluments with anyone" (61-62). Although no one was seriously hurt but the outcome was astonishing and dreadful :

The pot war horrified everyone in Pachigam even though they had come out on the winning side. They had always thought of their neighbors the Shirmal villagers as being more than a little weird, but nobody had imagined that so outrageous a breach of the place was possible, the Kashmiris would attack other Kashmiris driven by such crummy motivations as envy, malice and greed (62-63).

This incident was deemed to be the pebble that started the avalanche, as predicted by the local prophetess Nazarebaddoor, "what's coming is so terrible that no prophet will have the words to foretell it" (247).

From here on the novel laments on the loss of the eternal beauty and charm of Kashmir that, ". . . was lost . . . like paradise, . . . Kashmir, in a time before memory" (4). The life and world of innocence is betrayed by its own people, who are slowly walking down the path to destruction as embodied in the life of Shalimar, the protagonist too.

Then came the day the Indo-Pakistani conflict over Kashmir began, coinciding the birth of novels, two main protagonists, Shalimar Noman and Bhoomi Kaul, or Boonyi Kaul as she later preferred to be called. On the night of their birth, their families were performing at a banquet, laden with tradition and magic – an event that represents the high point of Kashmir's syncretic cooperation. Pachigam and Shirmal had set their quarrels aside for the time being to perform for Kashmir's ruling Hindu Maharaja on the occasion of Dussehra, celebrating the victory of Lord Ram against the demon king Ravan, in the renowned Shalimar garden. Boonyi's father, Pandit Pyarelal Kaul, Pachigam's Hindu priest exclaims:

Today our Muslim village, in the service of our Hindu Maharaja, will cook and act in Mughal – that is to say Muslim – garden to celebrate the anniversary of the day on which Ram

marched against Ravan to rescue Sita. What is more, two plays are to be performed : our traditional Ram Leela, and also Budshah, the tale of a Muslim sultan. Who tonight are Hindus? Who are the Muslims? Here in Kashmir, our stories, sit happily side by side on the same double bill, we eat from the same dishes, we laugh at the same jokes. (71)

The same night kabailis allegedly supported by Pakistani army attacked Kashmir and marched towards Srinagar, as a result the autocratic Maharaja had to flee and seek Indian help. Rushdie has narrated this account in the form of a rumour:

"An army of kabailis from Pakistan has crossed the border, looting, raping, burning, killing", the rumours said, "and it is nearing the outskirts of the city." Then the darkest rumour of all came in and sat down in the Maharaja's chair. "The Maharaja has run away", it said. (85)

In the midst of this tumult that continued for years Shalimar and Boonyi, who grew into their youth bloomed in love and their youthful affair is condoned by the villages and they are married in the name of Kashmiriyat :

"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." (110)

In the meantime on one hand the occupational Indian army begins to strengthen its occupation and impose its hegemonic rule, symbolized through General Kachhawaha and his Elasticnagar and on the other the Pakistan supported fundamentalist like the Iron Mullah, affecting drastically the non communal social fabric of Pachigam. Bulbul Fakh was a preacher of hellfire and damnation who came to Shirmal, "stirring things up, inciting violence and advocating a firebrand Islam that was positively un-Kashmiri and un-Indian as well", also denouncing Pachigam for its tolerance (122).

However, it is neither the Indian army nor the iron mullahs that are seen by the villages to truly smash the tolerant paradise of Kashmir but instead it is the failed marriage of Shalimar and Boonyi that precisely causes the final down fall of Pachigam and Kashmir. It is with the arrival of Maximilian Ophuls, the newly – appointed US ambassador to India, that provides the final jolt. Boonyi cashing on the opportunity for an escape from the detested parochial village life at Pachigam chooses Max over her husband Shalimar, runs away while performing with her troupe and starts living as Max's mistress in the Roosevelt House at Delhi. This scandalous affair with Max, the fifty six year old American Ambassador leaves Boonyi in disgrace. "My old life like a prison, she told herself savagely, but her heart called her a fool. She had it all upside down and backward, her heart scolded her. What she thought of as her former imprisonment had been freedom, while this so called liberation was no more than a gilded cage" (195). She is left impregnated by him and later abandoned too.

Meanwhile, back in Pachigam her cuckolded husband Shalimar, embittered by the loss and infidelity of his wife joins a militant outfit backed by Pakistan and gets involved in a guerilla conflict. He launches on a journey into the most volatile parts of the sub continent and becomes a trained fighter. His elder brother Anees Noman had also joined the Kashmiri insurgent group prior to Shalimar. Gradually, the tolerance of Kashmir starts to smash. Little by little people give in to the threats to appease the militants and dividing lines begin to form, leading Pyarelal Kaul to succumb to doubts:

Maybe Kashmiriyat was an illusion . . . May be the tolerant reign of good king Zain-ul-abidin should be seen – as some pandits were beginning to see it – as an aberration, not a symbol of unity. Maybe tyranny, forced conversions, temple – smashing, iconoclasm, persecution and genocide were the norms and peaceful

coexistence was an illusion. (239)

When Boonyi returns to Pachigam, leaving back her daughter Kashmira Noman to Peggy Ophuls, the childless wife of the Ambassador, who had forcibly taken her away from Boonyi, transporting her back to her village with just a baggage of unwishful memories, she encounters Shalimar, her husband and wonders :

What was that look on his face? She had never seen such a look before. Humbly she told herself that it was the look she deserved, in which hatred and contempt mingled with grief and hurt and a terrible, broken love. And something else, something she didn't understand. (222)

Shalimar's mother Firdaus too was horrified at his dispositions when he had reacted violently after learning of his wife's infidelity with the American. She had told her husband Abdullah that, "he has an anger in him that would end the world if it could" (230). Shalimar was surely in rage, "The truth was that he had stopped loving Boonyi the instant he learned of her infidelity, stopped dead like an unplugged automation, and the immense crater left behind by the destruction of that love had at once been filled by a sea of bile-yellow hatred" (236). Shalimar is not at all a forgiving person and all he wanted was revenge. He had warned Boonyi after consummating the first time in Khelmerg Meadow, "Don't you 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" (61). Boonyi assumed that her lover was demonstrating strong feelings for her, as she believed Shalimar to be handsome, tender, funny, a pure singer, a graceful dancer and tight rope walker and best of all a wonderfully gentle natured man. "This was no warrior demon ! . . . She loved him because he would not – he could not ! – hurt any living soul. How could he cause her harm when he would not harm a fly?" (50). But Boonyi's elopement had broken something inside Shalimar. He switched from one extreme to another, from absolute love to absolute hate and it seemed that his whole identity was concentrated around this core of hatred, making it his driving force. It seems though he was fed on the perception that by eloping with the American Ambassador, Boonyi had dribbled on her husband's honor and in his mind, "[h]onor ranked above everything else, above the sacred vows of matrimony, above the divine injunction against cold-blooded murder, above decency, above culture, above life itself" (258).

Shalimar's motives for murdering people were private and ostensibly had nothing to do with ideology as opposed to the prospective terrorist lesson taught by Maulana Bulbul Fakh :

Ideology was primary. The infidel, obsessed with possessions and wealth, did not grasp this, and believed that men were primarily motivated by social and material self-interest . . . The true warrior was not primarily motivated by worldly desires, but by what he believed to be true. Economics was not primary. Ideology was primary (265).

Although Shalimar, for instance, is neither motivated by nationalist fervour nor by religious zeal. The fight for a religious cause just provides a platform for Shalimar to cross over to the other side, to reach his target in America. Shalimar wanted to win back his honor and manliness by killing the persons who took these characteristics away from him. In an interview Rushdie explains that his main character is a typical example of what happens in the mind of a *Jihadist*. They live in a society where honor is still very important and they are willing to kill to defend that honor.

The most essential characteristic of the person who commits terror of this kind is the idea of dishonored manhood. I try to show this in my novel. The character Shalimar picks up the gun not just because his heart gets broken, but because his pride and honor get broken by losing

the woman he loves to a worldly man of greater consequence and power. Somehow he has to rebuild his sense of manliness. (Rushdie, NPQ, 7)

Shalimar leaves Pachigam carrying nothing, just a knife and was not seen again for fifteen years. He continued to, "nurse this heat, the hot coals of his fury", as he believed, "Sooner or later he would find his way to the American ambassador as well and his honor would be avenged" (258). He had joined the Pakistan militancy group that was headed under Maulana Bulbul Fakh, the radical preacher, who was also a trained terrorist and mean while his brother Anees had joined the Indian insurgent group that comprised of young Kashmiri Muslims. Both of them had allied with insurgent groups to fight back the Indian army and the dearth it had caused to their valley in the name of '*azaadi*'.

In the course of training as a *jihadi*, Shalimar happens to encounter a Filipino Muslim, Janjalani Abdurajak Abubakar, who later acts as the link to the American Ambassador. Janjalani belonged to Basilan, the small island to the southwest of the main Mindanao island ... "it was a place of grinding poverty where gun law had begun to rule. The Christians controlled the economy and the Muslims were kept poor" (269). The plight of Basilan, Philippines somewhat mirrored that of Kashmir and in the character of Janjalani, there seemed a fine deficit between a freedom fighter and a terrorist, as discussed earlier, that both fight for the cause of freedom, where in the freedom fighter fights for the nation, the terrorist fights in the name of nation. "Everyone's story was a part of everyone else's" (269). Shalimar gets accessed to the fact that, "the Americans bring in weapons to kill the Russians" ... "Thus even the infidel can be made to do the work of God. They send their important people to deal with us and think of us as allies. It is amusing. Ambassador Max Ophuls, who these days was supporting terror activities while calling himself an ambassador for counter terrorism ... A tiger leapt up inside Shalimar the clown whenever he heard that name, and caging it again was hard" (272-73). Years pass, Shalimar travels to distant lands on terrorists missions. He had become, "a person of value and consequence, as assassins are. Also his secret purpose was achieved. He had passports in five names and had learned good Arabic, ordinary French and bad English, and had opened routes for himself, routes in the real world, the invisible world, that would take him where he needed to go when the time for the ambassador came" (275).

Here, Rushdie makes a very pertinent point: that Kashmir's problems had stemmed not from inherent Hindu-Muslim antipathy, but an antipathy that had been brought into being by political processes and historical forces. However, the problems in Kashmir, seem too present, too rooted in a long history of antipathies, for readers to suspend disbelief sufficiently in the interests of the broader symbolic scheme. The people of Kashmir have to bear the atrocities of the twin forces of nationalism and religious fundamentalism. It proves thus that not only extremism or fundamentalism can be detrimental for the country; nationalism can also endanger life and freedom when taken in the stringent sense concerning itself only with selfish aim of possession and power.

Shalimar returns to Pachigam, on the seventh day of its crackdown, accompanied with Bulbul Fakh and other terrifying iron commandos. He silently climbs the hill, toward the deserted hut and kills Boonyi. He manages to cross the Line of Control and 'after that the real world ceased to exist for Shalimar the Clown' (319). In a series of plunges into the phantom world, Shalimar finally arrives in Los Angeles to become the chauffeur of Max Ophuls, the Ambassador who was now the US counterterrorism Chief.

Rushdie has clearly drawn a parallel between Shalimar and Max (who belonged to a family of Ashkenazi Jews living in Strabourg, France. During World War II, Max fails to save his Jewish parents from death in a German camp, at the hands of Nazis. He then

throws a bomb at the home of a member of Nazi association); both are driven by feelings of anger and hatred to turn to violence, while that turn is facilitated by an ongoing conflict around them. However, another crucial difference between the two would be : Shalimar does not seem to flinch from bloodshed ,whereas Max recognizes that he does not have it in him to take lives out of revenge, instead he becomes a forger, a man with fluid, multiple identities turns to be a disgraced American Ambassador who is now the chief of US Counterterrorist activities. Max's double standards become public knowledge only after his assassination at the hands of Shalimar.

Hereby, the novel underscores that there are various possible motivations for engaging in terrorist acts and that the sources of these pain – inducing conflicts might be mere personal grudges. 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 malevolent marauders from both India and Pakistan. Thus the novel is an ironic and somewhat flippant restatement of the cliché of history repeating itself.

Postmodern texts not only recuperate multiple counter- hegemonic histories, but also consider history as a textual artifact. In other words, they expose how history gets constructed through co-opting "concrete" and "local" narratives and Shalimar the Clown is no exception. In it larger historical process – the upheavals in Kashmir and Strasbourg – and their inconclusive outcomes are shown to be magnifications of the personal conflicts of the characters.

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