

Shalimar The Clown : Training The Root Of Terrorism In Kashmir

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Abstract:

Terrorism one of the greatest problems of modern era, is a long debated issue in Indian English Writing. This Research article, *Shalimar the clown: Tracing the root of terrorism in Kashmir*, aims to analyze the root cause of perpetuation of terrorism in Kashmir Valley after the partition of India and Pakistan 1947. At the same time it traces the issue of terrorism in global perspective and highlights its connection with other terrorist activities all over the world. It also focuses on the role of wrongheaded corrupt politicians of India and Pakistan in making Kashmir a hub of terrorist activities. Rushdie also examines the exploitation of Kashmiri inhabitants at the hands of Indian Armed forces as well as the plight of Kashmiri people. It also seeks to analyze America's role at international level and her interference around the globe that paved the way for terrorism across the world. Rushdie has convincingly presented through *Shalimar the clown* that how circumstances compels a jovial clown, Shalimar, to adopt the path of violence after the perfidiousness of his better half Boonyi.

Keywords: Terrorism, Violence, Fascism, politics.

Rushdie has portrayed the recent tragic history of Kashmir with poignancy and sensitivity in his novel *Shalimar The Clown*. In the story of his characters is intertwined the story of Kashmir, its life and culture and the

degeneration of this Paradise into Hell. Making the ‘personal bleed into the political’ Rushdie has once again voiced his concern for the modern world at large and Kashmir in particular, lamenting the loss of love, innocence and brotherhood. In fact the novel, *Shalimar The Clown* looks to several beginnings reflecting on what has been lost in Kashmir, it also looks forward to a time when the words Muslim and Hindu will once more be merely ‘descriptions’ rather than ‘division’. (Cowley 27).

Shalimar The Clown is not a level for the faint-hearted and Rushdie pulls no punches. Rushdie’s own family roots lie with his beloved grandparents in Kashmir and he feels the tragic mutilation of the region all the more bitterly. Rushdie is at pains to show the irreparable evil that has been done by both sides. While the focus of the world news has been on the wars in Palestine, Afghanistan and Iraq, the ruin of Kashmir has been largely overlooked as a mere sideshow by the western media. But the intensity of the destruction of a whole culture and the 3,20,000 Hindu pundits driven into refugee camps in exile have been no less real for all that. The novelist uses all his art to show how narrow-mindedness and dogma gave place to self-righteousness and fanaticism. As he says in the novel *Shalimar The Clown*’s epitaph in a quotation from Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*, a plague on both your houses.

The beginning of the end occurs at a grand folk festival in the Shalimar Gardens. The festival is ruined by the freezing snowfall and by the panicky rumours that a murderous guerilla army is invading from Pakistan. Two babies are born during this festival and one mother dies in childbirth. The two babies are Boonyi and Shalimar. For fourteen more years the rift between the two remote villages is plastered over and a semblance of peace and harmony prevails. But then the adventurous, bold Boonyi gives herself to Shalimar and insists on marrying him. She initiates the destruction of an inter-racial and inter-religious harmony of the religious, as Rushdie says, ‘The time of demons had begun’ (89).

It seems that the foolish vanity of Boonyi in longing the glamour of the cosmopolitan world and the equally foolish and compulsive womanizing of ambassador Max Ophuls herald the destruction of the delicate fabric of the whole of Kashmiri

society. But this is the only personal moral fable. Historically, Islam, characterized by intolerant Puritanism and fundamentalism meets the West, marked by Laissez-faire licentiousness and individual self-indulgence. The tragic explosion that follows this clash is inevitable.

Rushdie seems to suggest that Kashmir, prior to the political dramas that have transformed it in the twentieth century, was a heaven, a paradise of peaceable village traditions, and multi-cultural, multi-faith tolerance. Shalimar is a Muslim, Boonyi a Hindu, and they consort in secret because they fear repercussions. But the villagers decide to allow their marriage: “ We are all brothers and sisters here” (110). Shalimar’s father argues:

There is no Hindu-Muslim issue. Two Kashmiri-Two Pachigami- youngsters with 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. (110)

Ophul’s seduction of Boonyi, and his oversupply of goods and his desertion of her seems to show how America first seduces and corrupts with its commodities, and then deserts it after having extracted out what it had wanted. Boonyi is thus a product of America’s love for the world. She voices Kashmir when she speaks these words to Ophul.

You took beauty and created hideousness . . . 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.(3)

Rushdie has dedicated this novel *Shalimar The Clown* to his Kashmiri grandparents. Kashmir has always had great fascination for the writer and the tribute he has paid to it has unearthed his attachment and love for the place. The agony he experienced at its decay is visible in the following lines:

Kashmir was an integral part of India. An integar was a whole and India was an integer and fractions were illegal. Fractions caused Fractures in the integar and were thus not integral. Not to accept this was to lack integrity and implicity or explicitly to question the unquestionable integrity of those who did accept it. Not to accept this was latently or patently to favour disintegration. (119)

Rushdie's vision of Kashmir a paradise on earth is introduced in the 'bad story' of Shalimar the terrorist. The Kashmir of the days of Rushdie's grandparents was full of fun and frolic, peace and harmony, beauty of human life and nature, incarnated in the village of Pachigam. All the festivals of the Hindus and the Muslims were celebrated together, and Abdulla Noman the father of the future terrorist, plays the part of Lord Rama. The narrator recalls the day:

Who tonight are the Hindus? Who are the Muslims? Here in Kashmir our stories sit side by side on the same double bill, we eat from the same dishes, we laugh at the same jokes. (71)

The terrorists causing the ultimate ruin to Pachigam like that of Rja Rao's *Kanthapura* by the British oppressors, touches Rushdie's heart-strings and makes him express his pro-Indian slant though the mouth of Col. Kackchwaha, partially even at the Indian stand:

Kashmir was an integral part of India . . . Not to accept this was to lack integrity and implicity of explicitly to question the unquestionable Integrity of those who did accept it . . . When the truth and integrity Conflicted it was integrity that had to be given precedence. (96)

Rufhdie is also clear about Pakistan being the source of the terrorists or Mujahideens and also of the weapons they have. The American Ambassador to India Max or Maximillian Ophuls, a fictitious character, has been helping these operations. It is conveyed to Shalimar by a boy Zahir and also admitted by Ophuls himself in his last speech by calling these terrorists "Pakistan sponsored fanatics" (385).

To shift the focus from the Pakistani terrorists to the making of an Indian terrorist-intially a smart, handsome and lovable boy Shalimar-one has to return to the village Pachigam. Ambassador Ophul's visit to the village changes the whole situation. Soon he becomes enamoured of the beauty of Boonyi who happens to be Shalimar's wife. Herself bored by the 'prison' of a 'paradise' and eager to see the world, Boonyi, like Eve, is easily tempted and eagerly accepts the Ambassador's offer of a change. She quietly leaves with him, soon to become his pampered sex-object. In spite of all his precautions, she becomes pregnant. Now he makes her pack up to Pachigam where, having been already declared dead, She is made to lead an isolated life like that of a ghost. In course of time, she gives birth to a girl who is named 'Kashmira' there and later 'India' a name given to her by Max Ophuls, her biological father. The two names given to the same girl symbolize the oneness of Kashmir and India, thus contradicting the stand of the terrorists.

Rushdie's novel *Shalimar The Clown* provides a bracing education. It suggests that no place can dwell for long in isolation. Unless the residents of a locality understand precisely how they fit into an expanded landscape of near and far, they will be manipulated and made to serve the purposes of others. The erosion of Kashmir occurs through the intrusive designs of India, Pakistan, radical Islamists, and the United States in the figure of Max Ophuls.

After keenly observing the global scenario in terms of terrorism and counter-terrorism, Rushdie suggests that the whole world is full of unrest and violence: "Everywhere was a mirror of everywhere else. Executions, police brutality, explosions, riots: Los Angeles was beginning to look like wartime Strasbourg: like Kashmir" (335). As such, Rushdie's sense of historicity has a sense of continuum without lacking sense of specificity. It is, in other words, the integrating fictional vision of Rushdie, which in a flash can see the present in terms of the past and vice versa thereby envisaging the future in terms of which direction the humanity heads.

Rushdie uses history to juxtapose the contemporary situation in Kashmir with reference to the sad plight of the Kashmir pundits who were forced to leave the valley. They stand displaced even today. Durind early Nineties, even Pundit Pyarelal Kaul had to conjure up the picture of Kashmir, which was an earthly paradise till some time ago. Ye

recapitulates the crystal lakes, walnut, Poplar, chinar and apple trees along with the mighty peaks. He also sees himself on the top of Mount Shankaracharya and feasting his eyes on gentleness, time and love. His heart is filled with so much delight that he starts considering the idea of moving out into the valley to enjoy its ethereal charm. The saddest Rushdiean stroke comes with Pyarelal Kaul's decision not to go into the valley due to the havoc wrought upon it by insurgency, counter-insurgency and cross-border terrorism:

No, he would not ride out into Kashmir, did not want to see her scarred face the lines of burning oil drums across the roads, the wrecked vehicle, the smoke of explosions, the broken houses, the broken people, the tanks, the anger and fear in every eye. Everyone carries his address in his pocket so that at least his body will reach home (305).

Rushdie is profoundly hurt and genuinely concerned given the situation that has emerged in Kashmir in *Shalimar The Clown*. The destruction of its exquisite, virginal charm can move any sensitive individual to tears. Rushdie has remarkably problematised the ravaging of Kashmir in terms of gross border terrorism, insurgency and counter-insurgency. However, he emphatically states the fact that geo-political tug-of-war between India and Pakistan apart, it is Kashmir and innocent Kashmir's who have been paying the price; it is Kashmiriyat which has been ruptured; and the peaceful co-existence of the Kashmiri Pundits and Muslims has been grossly insulted.

Rushdie is deeply upset over the global terror unleashed by the misinterpretation and misrepresentation of Islam by iron mullahs across the globe. As a literary artist, Rushdie knows that "one of the great possibilities of the novel" is the speaking of the 'suppressed truths' (5). Rushdie has been daring to tell such truths for quite some time now. Thus, through his novel, *Shalimar The Clown*, which is by and large politically charged Rushdie offers a corrective and interventionist discourse. As evident in *Shalimar The Clown*, Rushdie's metaphysical vision runs parallel to his political vision.

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