

GLOBALIZATION: TRACING THE DIASPORIC ELEMENTS IN SALMAN RUSHDIE'S SHALIMAR THE CLOWN

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Abstract: *Salman Rushdie's novel Shalimar the Clown (2005) explores various themes, including love, betrayal, revenge, and the impact of globalization on traditional cultures. The story is set in Kashmir, a region torn between tradition and modernity, and it delves into the lives of its diverse characters, tracing the diasporic elements resulting from historical and cultural shifts. Characters like Boonyi's daughter, India, and Shalimar epitomize the struggle of diasporic individuals to reconcile their heritage with the culture of the adopted land. Their identities are complex, torn between the past and the present. Generally, diasporic characters often experience a deep sense of nostalgia for their homeland. Shalimar's memories of Kashmir reflect a longing for a place that has significantly changed due to globalization and political unrest. Despite the challenges posed by globalization, some characters strive to preserve their cultural heritage. This preservation becomes a way to maintain a connection with their roots amid the diasporic experience. This paper analyses how globalization can lead to identity conflicts and radicalization and how the clash between traditional values and external influences can create tension, often resulting in extreme measures.*

Key Words: *Globalization, Diasporic, Tradition, Modernity, Conflict.*

Shalimar the Clown (2005) is a story of love, revenge, history and politics, cutting across countries and continents. Maximilian Ophuls, the once United States Ambassador to India, who had worked in the Kashmir Valley, is murdered by his Kashmiri chauffeur, Shalimar. During his stint in India, he had fallen in love with and carried on an affair with a married Kashmiri woman, Boonyi Kaul, whose husband was a tightrope walker, Noman. In a kind of poetic justice, many years later, the cuckolded husband finally has his day of revenge as he is the one who slaughters the former Ambassador. Ironically enough, the cosmopolitan diplomat meets his death in a cross-cultural style –like a “halal chicken dinner” (5) at his love child’s doorstep.

The story also contains the tragedy of the idyllic Kashmir, the beautiful valley of Rushdie’s ancestors, being mired in the dirty politics of the subcontinent. It chronicles the devastation and breakdown of the valley through Indian military operations, Islamic insurgency and ultimate divisions among religious lines. Initially, it comes across as a haven of peace and communal harmony reflected by the village of Pachigam. In a shining instance of cultural unity, it accepts and allows the inter-religious marriage of the village headman Abdullah Noman’s youngest son to Pandit Pyarelal Kaul’s only daughter. The inexperienced and naïve mind of the young Noman sees little cause for distinction between their two communities which he considers a mere difference of names—Muslim and Hindu. According to him, “The frontiers between the two words, their hard edges, had grown smudged and blurred. This was how things had to be. This was Kashmir.” (91)

The youngsters are married in the name of *Kashmiriyat* or Kashmiris believe in a common bond that transcends all other differences in Kashmiri culture. Abdullah Noman emphasizes the oneness of the culture. “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” (180). Unfortunately, as it turns out, this paradisiacal setting proves too good to be true. It does not stand the test of time. Kashmir, the bitter bone of contention between India and Pakistan, as far as world politics is concerned,

degenerates into a volatile zone of conflict. The very kind of exclusivity demanded by certain people on the basis of religion, as we've seen Rushdie talk about above, is what is used to brainwash naïve young men of the region to create a Hindu-Muslim divide.

Noman, the jilted lover, already smarting from his wife's betrayal, is a vulnerable target for the fundamentalists. Many unsuspecting and naïve young men like him are recruited, using the religion card, from Pachigam and its neighboring villages for their nefarious schemes. Caught between the iron mullah's hard-liner Islamic group with across-the-border funding and the watchful Indian army, the sanctity of Kashmir hardly stands a chance. The once-innocent society and sanctum of religious and communal tolerance is left wounded and highly polarized. The tussle between the Indian troops led by the Hammer and Mullah Bulbul Fakh's Islamic militants renders the once peaceful valley into a perilous place that is hardly habitable. By telling the story of Kashmir in the novel, Rushdie seems to be showing to his international audience, the tragic downfall of an erstwhile paradise, a story which seldom makes international headlines. He lifts up the locale of Kashmir from obscurity and brings it into the limelight of global readership. Max Ophuls's outburst on national television seems to mirror the author's frustrations at Western indifference to problems in the East.

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. If thoughts of paradise do occur to us, we think of Adam's fall, of the expulsion from Eden of the parents of humanity. However, I have not come to speak of the fall of man, but the collapse of paradise itself. In Kashmir it is paradise itself that is falling; heaven on earth is being transformed into a living hell. (45)

In the presence of the second president of India Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan at the Rashtrapati Bhavan, Max Ophuls attempts to endear himself to the gathering with his eloquence and background. He identifies with the world in general, giving a globalized view of the world's misfortunes:

The loss of one man's dreams, one family's home, one people's rights, one woman's life...is the loss of all our freedoms: of every life, every home, every hope. Each tragedy belongs to itself and at the same time to everyone else. What diminishes any of us diminishes us all. (223)

As Max Ophuls bows his head in a highly emotional moment before uttering these words, the president reaches out and holds his hand. It is this image of hands clasped together that gets imprinted in the minds of the audience as Ophuls is able to endear himself to them. Thus, does he begin his otherwise largely fulfilling public office in India, managing to find a link between himself and a people so far removed from his own roots yet with experiences so similar? Later, when reflecting on the enormity of his future role in appeasing the two hostile nations along the Indo-Pakistani border, he is reminded of his own roots and role across the Franco-German frontier. Finding such common ground, the idea of a collective and universal experience is highlighted. The ambassador's popularity grows so exponentially in his new environment that it makes his fall from grace, when it does come, all the greater.

He uses "the power of the United States of America" (292) to make a visit to the Line of Control, the ceasefire line between India and Pakistan to assess matters firsthand. In Kashmir, discussing plans to facilitate the sale of American supersonic jets at an advantage to India, he lays eyes on Boonyi Kaul Noman, dressed as Anarkali, the famed dancer lover of Prince Salim, for the first time and is mesmerized by her beauty and movements. Leaving aside affairs of war, terrorism, jets, and politics, Ophuls's interest is suddenly aroused by the exoticism and beauty of the Kashmiri dancer. It is not a one-sided reaction as Boonyi, already feeling oppressed in her pleasant but simple life, has found out that the quaint village life of Pachigam will never do for her; "this life didn't begin to satisfy her hunger, her ravenous longing for something she could not yet name" (187).

She longs to be set free from the shackles of the safe and monotonous clutches of her marriage and rural existence. Too ready for the slightest chance of escape, the interested applause of her performance by Max is all the encouragement she needs to jump at the opportunity which, she expects, would lead to her ultimate destiny. So, while the ambassador would assume he was the one seducing the married woman, Boonyi is actually very much in the driver's seat. Despite being unsure of what she wants, she has goals that go beyond the rigid customs of her community and transcend the confines of domesticity and obscurity. Only the phenomena of globalization made it possible for such an improbable pair as the village-bred Boonyi Kaul and the worldly ambassador, a former hero of the French resistance, to meet and eventually fall in love. As a result of Max's official position, international ties are beginning to improve, and the author may be able to make their paths cross.

The Boonyi-Max relationship breaks down the limiting barriers of race, class, language, and generalized culture. Before giving her body to Max, Boonyi stipulates a number of conditions in an effort to improve her life. She wants an education, quality dance instruction so that she may also teach it, excellent housing, and security. She asks for one last favor with naiveté and vulnerability: "Please sir, I want to hear from your own lips that you will keep me safe" (314). Max responds to her demands in Kashmiri after learning some of it for her benefit. "Meh haav tae sae

wath. Please show me the way” (315) in an exchange of each using the other’s language. Later, during intimate conversations, they would often speak to each other without being aware of which language they were speaking as the two tongues blurred into one” (337).

Thus, this East-West interaction also involves a synthesis of languages. Boonyi soon learns that despite having all of her demands met, the woman is still dissatisfied. Her thoughts continue to wander back to the simple life of Pachigam and the people she has left behind despite being confined to the little space of her new flat, nourished with imported chocolates and candies and indulged in the newest clothing seen in Western fashion magazines. She tried to convince herself that the life she had left behind was indeed “her appointed place on earth,” but she was unable to do so. Her emotions warned her that she had made a mistake and had everything backward and upside down what she had thought of as her former imprisonment had been freedom, while this so-called liberation was no more than a gilded cage (320). Although Max falls in love with her, she does not reciprocate. All the privileges that she enjoys through her association with him become grossly inadequate to satisfy her. She longs for Kashmir, for her beloved Pachigam, and for her husband who has never made the attempt to seek her out.

In her inability to speak to Max about her husband, she starts to refer to him as Kashmir and to Max as the Indian armed forces. Using these apt metaphors, the story of the defilement of Kashmir by the Indian armed forces is portrayed through the personal love triangle of Boonyi, Max, and Shalimar the clown. His obsession with her clouds his judgment as Max finds himself repeating her sentiments in the public space, bursting the “bubble of his popularity” (324) when he voices out against the Indian military operations in Kashmir. The Indian media reacted angrily to these critiques, calling him a “Pak-American” (325) and exposing the double standards of America which was itself involved in atrocities against the Vietnamese people.

Boonyi Kaul starts gorging on copious amounts of food while imprisoned in her “liberated captivity” (331), where she has unrestricted access. It’s interesting to note that throughout her cross-cultural relationship, she transforms into a “vegetarian and nonvegetarian, fish and meat-eating, Hindu, Christian, and Muslim, a democratic, secularist omnivore” (333), reflecting a desire for international cuisine in her culinary preferences. The ambassador chooses to end things when she becomes disgustingly obese and Indian opinion of him is at an all-time low. But Boonyi has a secret weapon up her sleeve. She claims to be several months along with Max’s pregnancy. Not only had she outwitted her lover, but also his snake-like assistant, Edgar Wood, in whose presence she had feigned to take daily doses of contraceptive pills. Her weight had concealed her expanding belly.

As the focus changes to America’s political predicament, it is revealed that the US is becoming increasingly unpopular in Asia due to the ongoing Vietnam War, and that protests against the war are also being led at home by figures like Martin Luther King. As a result, the US government has no compassion for what is described as the “godless American’s exploitation of an innocent Hindu girl” (339), as this connection turns into a sort of metaphor for Vietnam” (340). Maximilian Ophuls is forced to make a very humiliating exit from his brief stint in India after resigning in disgrace from his well-known position. Peggy Ophuls finally experiences a triumphant moment when she negotiates an unfair bargain with Boonyi. She conceals herself in her efforts to generate money from America and Europe for orphans all over India, well aware that her childless marriage is a charade. Her popularity among the populace surges as a result of being referred to as “Peggy-Mata, mother of the motherless” (304), a term that combines English and Hindi.

The rejected wife, whose feet did not fit the Cinderella slippers worn by the Kashmiri dancer, has the final laugh since Rumpelstiltskin gets to retain the child. The rejected wife had a fondness for fairy tales and frequently saw her life through their prism. Peggy Ophuls demands ownership of the child in return for assisting Boonyi during childbirth and ensuring her safe return to Pachigam. It is a harsh but magical realist realization of the hope she once had of having her own child to bring back from India. Despite Boonyi’s preference for Kashmira, Peggy, also known as the Rat, adopts the child and names her India.

The actual beginning of the book takes place in Los Angeles, California, and is a typical magical realist account of the now 24-year-old India’s unusual dreams, hallucinations, and somnambulant visions. She has a deep desire to learn more about the mother she never met. In addition to the name, she also asks whether it is appropriate to “hang people’s birthplaces round their necks like albatrosses.”

...felt wrong to her, it felt exoticist, colonial, suggesting the appropriation of a reality that was not hers to own, and she insisted to herself that it didn’t fit her anyway, she didn’t feel like an India, even if her colour was rich and high and her long hair lustrous and black. She didn’t want to be vast or subcontinental or excessive or vulgar or explosive or crowded or ancient or noisy or mystical or in any way Third World. Quite the reverse. She presented herself as disciplined, groomed, nuanced, inward, irreligious, understated, calm. She spoke with an English accent. (7)

She seems to stand out as a highly suitable representative for globalization because she is the daughter of a Kashmiri lady and a French father, speaks with an English accent, was raised by an English mother, lives in Los Angeles, and has a name that sounds like “India.” Her father, who is now 80 years old, is dating Zainat Azam, a well-known Indian movie actress, in another cross-cultural engagement. Along with personal happenings, the narrative also includes news and events from around the world. India witnesses her father’s murder and the dejected expression on Gorbachev’s face as a result of the attempted communist takeover of the Soviet Union. When the future great leader Nelson Mandela emerges from jail emaciated and tall, she sees a reflection of her father in him. Later, she changes her name to Kashmirira because it is what her original mother had called her. She meets Yuvraj Singh, a young handicraft merchant, while on her trip to Kashmir in search of her maternal ancestry. They start an “intercontinental love affair” (639) together. She realizes that her problem goes beyond time and space when she returns to Los Angeles and finds herself caught up in the fallout from her father’s murder. She stopped considering this to be an American tale. It was a tale from Kashmir. She owned it” (605). Kashmirira is able to make the decision that it is within her rights to put an end to the tale that is being appropriated by the Western media among the cacophony of voices reporting the ambassador’s killer being arrested alive. The novel’s epilogue features a scene straight out of a best-selling thriller. As the assassin of her parents sneaks up on her, knife in hand, Kashmirira is prepared for battle, bow and arrow in hand, and she unleashes the arrow of retaliation.

The lines between time and space are blurred in Rushdie’s novel. A minor incident could have a larger global impact. Shalimar was originally seen of as a benign character because he “would not-he could not! hurt any living soul” (80). However, before he can get revenge on his betrayed wife and lover, he transforms into a deadly worldwide assassin and terrorist weapon. Salman Rushdie exposes the brutal side of globalization in *Shalimar the Clown* by weaving topics of Kashmiri nationalism, terrorism, and neocolonialism into a more intimate tale of love and retribution. The failure of Maximilian Ophuls as an ambassador and his connection with Boonyi illustrate the inadequacy of the Western intellect to comprehend Indian issues. People like Max reside “somewhere in between.” between the regular activities and the recollections. In the nation of lost happiness and tranquilly, the location of misplaced calm, between yesterday and tomorrow” (13–14). The rootedness of such individuals emphasizes their universal identity as residents of the world, not of a specific region.

The globe appears much smaller with the removal of political, social, and economic boundaries, especially for the author. Through his characters, historical backgrounds, themes, the blending of East and West, investigation of postcolonialism, and language use, globalization is reflected in his work. Rushdie exemplifies hybridity as an immigrant writer from India who had a Western education and now resides in England. Through his works, which are universal in scope, he has been recognized on a global scale.

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