

# Loss of Paradise: A Critical Analysis of Kashmir Imbroglia in Salman Rushdie's *Shalimar the Clown* And Arundhati Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*

Amrit K. Samra

PG Dept. of English, Govt. Mohindra College, Patiala, (Punjab)

---

## ABSTRACT

This paper deals with the representation of major socio-political issue of Kashmir conflict as represented in Salman Rushdie's *Shalimar the Clown* (2005) and Arundhati Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* (2017). Both the novels depict the repressive and coercive policies being employed by the postcolonial Indian nation state in Kashmir. The paper minutely analyses how the execution of such repressive policies in order to suppress the distinctiveness and native aspirations for an individual collective cultural identity and the right to self-determination has resulted in the alienation and resistance in Kashmir. Thus, the paper offers a comparative analysis of the portrayal of the same issue from the individual perspectives of these authors. At the same time, the paper also analyses the compulsions of the nation state to bring the diverse ethnicities and cultures into the national main stream which gives rise to resistance and violence on the both sides.

**Key Words:** Postcolonialism, postcolonial nation state, Kashmir conflict, violence, repression, brutalisation, culture, syncretism, intolerance, radicalism, terrorism.

---

## INTRODUCTION

Soon after gaining the independence, India as well as the other newly decolonized nation states had to grapple with the complex process of "the formation of post-colonial nation-state and the chaos and often the radical disillusionment that followed soon after" (Gandhi 115). Colonial aftermath was always "fraught by the anxieties and fears of failure which attend the need to satisfy the historical burden of expectations" (05). After gaining the independence, India had to face the pangs of partition, which entailed large scale violence that claimed millions of lives across the newly carved Indo-Pak border. It is often argued that "the story of post-independence years of one of the largest democracies in the world is one of fragmentation, relentless religious intolerance and deep disillusionment" (Sarkar 119). Discussing the events of post-independence, Leela Gandhi (2003) comments that if the independence brought dreams of progress and emancipation, "its double, Partition, told an altogether different story – of mutual betrayal, failure, the systematic rift between Congress and the Muslim league, and the estrangement between Muslims and Hindus" (171). Hence, the process of decolonization was itself beset with many problems.

It is in this background that both Salman Rushdie and Arundhati Roy build up their narratives of exclusion and oppression in Kashmir in their respective texts. Salman Rushdie appears to "refuse any unitary and monolithic notion of India" (Nayar 78) in his *Shalimar the Clown* and other novels. While reinforced by Rushdie's ideas, Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* seems to signal the transformation of its writer into an activist. In their respective texts, both the writers narrate the tales of marginalisation, oppression and dispossession in the postcolonial Indian nation state and offer a portrayal of ethnic and cultural conflict in Kashmir involving the Kashmiri people, Indian security forces and Pakistani sponsored terrorists. Both the texts underscore the resultant violence and devastation of Kashmir and the Kashmiriyat which are being trampled under the pretext of a monolithic nation identity and integrity. Again, both the texts are fraught with the scars of bloodshed, terrorism and state coerciveness.

Historically, Kashmir was left to choose between India or Pakistan or to remain independent by the departing colonial ruler after the decolonisation. But Pakistan claimed Kashmir on the basis of it being a "Muslim majority state" and the Pakistani sponsored "invasion of Kashmir by Pathan tribesmen and Pakistani troops" prompted Kashmir to accede to India with an offer from India to hold a "plebiscite under international auspices" (Chandra 416). The Indian army intervened in Kashmir at the behest of Kashmiri Hindu Maharaja and repulsed the tribal attack up to what is today the

actual line of control, thus, effectively partitioning Kashmir between India and Pakistan. Since then, both the states have been locked in a bitter conflict in order to claim the whole of Kashmir. These historical events and the present three way conflict between the Kashmiri people, the Indian army and the Pakistani sponsored radical militants form the backdrop of the stories of both the texts, which narrate the tragic consequences of these events. While reflecting the tragic fate of the terrorism infested Kashmir, the texts also reflect on the insurgency torn areas around the globe.

*Shalimar the Clown* opens in Los Angeles during 1991 with the assassination of one of its major characters, Maximilian Ophuls by the protagonist of the novel *Shalimar the Clown*. As a metaphorical representation of ordinary Kashmiris, Shalimar the Clown, a cuckolded husband, represents the loss of honour and prestige while being the global face of terrorism at the same time. Rushdie, in this text, also seems to underscore the cosmopolitan nature of human experience when he observes that “[E]verywhere was now a part of everywhere else. Russia, America, London, Kashmir. Our lives, our stories, flowed into one another’s . . . there were collisions and explosions. The world was no longer calm” (SC 37). The reader realises that the lives of all the major characters of the text intersect and collide with one another at many places across the globe underpinning the commonality of their experiences at different points of time. It appears that the violence and repression has become a universal phenomenon as “[E]verywhere was a mirror of everywhere else. Executions, police brutality, explosions, riots: Los Angeles was beginning to look like Strasbourg; like Kashmir” (355).

Similarly, the text *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, though opens in India and deals with the plight and question of the identity of the third gender, soon takes the reader to the war torn Kashmir Valley under the military occupation of Indian armed forces which are locked in a bitter struggle with the native as well as Pakistani sponsored armed resistance for Azadi, which Roy equates with radicalism. The text also takes the reader across the globe along with a globe trotter terrorist Musa Yeswi who narrates later how the Kashmiris like him made “the Butcher of Kashmir”, Major Amrik Singh to “self-destruct” (MUH 433) along with his family in a small town of Clovis in America. Like *Shalimar the Clown*, *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* also takes the reader to different parts of India and abroad where terrorism and violence have spread their brutal claws which emanated from across the border.

The two major characters in the *Shalimar the Clown*, Shalimar the Clown and Boonyi Kaul are born during the Dassehra festivities in the Shalimar garden where both the Hindus and the Muslims had gathered to celebrate the Dassehra Festival. The text underlines the Kashmiri cultural syncretism where both the Hindus and the Muslims celebrate their festivals collectively and which even allows inter-faith marriage between the Muslim Shalimar and Hindu Boonyi Kaul. At the discovery of a love affair between Shalimar and Boonyi Kaul, Shalimar’s father and village ‘sarpanch’, Abdullah Noman invokes Kashmiriyat and declares that they are all “brothers and sisters” and that there is no “Hindu-Muslim issue” involved in this love affair as there are only two Kashmiris- two Pachigamis who want to marry each other and which is “acceptable to both families and so a marriage there will be; both Hindu and Muslim customs will be observed” (SC 110). The whole village blesses this proposed marriage with a jubilant mood and the tragedy is averted. This marriage is the metaphorical representation of the Kashmiri cultural syncretism which is destroyed after the onslaught of terrorism in Kashmir. The survival of the “giant effigies of the demon king, his brother and his son” after the Dassehra festival in the aftermath of the tribal invasion of Kashmir exemplify that the “time of the demons had begun” (89). It is through such depictions that Rushdie highlights the utter chaos and devastation into which the present day Kashmir has slipped where only the radical preachers of violence, intolerance and hatred like the Iron Mullah, Bulbul Fakh can germinate from the scrapped metal leftover of the military hardware which dots the pristine beauty of the Kashmir valley. Roy also offers a similar picture of the demise of the secularism and cultural syncretism after the arrival of the “cold soldiers from a warm climate” (MUH 316) causing a “complete breakdown of normal life” (358). Roy further notes that the army alienated the ordinary Kashmiris to such an extent that they started considering the Indian army as an army of occupation and thus the dissenting “soft line gradually hardened and the hard line further hardened” (322).

Both the texts depict how Kashmir, which was once a land of beauty, love and cultural syncretism has been devastated to such an extent that it has become a breeding ground for the radical elements and violence. The external warring political ideologues responsible for the destruction of Kashmir and the Kashmiriyat are represented by the Iron Mullah, Bulbul Fakh and Colonel Kachhwaha in *Shalimar the Clown* and Major Amrik Singh, thugs and bigots in *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*. If Rushdie depicts how ordinary Kashmiris are being indoctrinated in violence and fundamentalism by the likes of Iron Mullah, Bulbul Fakh, Roy portrays the assassination of a University Lecturer, Usman Abdullah who represented secularism and cultural syncretism. His killing by the radical terrorist elements signals that “the syncretism of Kashmir that he represented would not be tolerated” (321). Both the texts also bring out the personal face of terrorism. Shalimar the Clown gets transformed into a dreaded terrorist after his personal loss of honour and prestige in the form of the stigma of cuckoldry he has to suffer due to seduction of his wife Boonyi Kaul by Maximilian Ophuls. Similarly Musa Yeswi metamorphoses into a militant commander only after his personal loss in the form of his daughter Miss Jebeen and wife Arifa having been killed in a blind military shootout.

Both the texts depict that at the onset of Islamic insurgency in Kashmir, Kashmiri people loathed the radicalism and violence preached and practised by the jihadists. The painful transformation of the Kashmiri society from a peace

loving syncretic society into the one infested with violence, hatred, intolerance and revenge is portrayed in terms of quest for martyrdom which “stole into the Kashmir valley from across the line of control . . . whispered the word of war into the ears of doctors and engineers, students and labourers, tailors and carpenters, weavers and farmers, shepherds, cooks and bards” (313). Kashmiri resistance to the Indian domination is depicted as a well thought out option through which the Kashmiris allowed “the rage and shame of the subjugation . . . through their bodies and turn the blood in their veins into smoke” (313). The radical forces like the Iron Mullah, Bulbul Fakh “grafted the language of God and freedom, Allah and Azadi, on their murders and new scams” (314) and radical indoctrination of the ordinary Kashmiris has reached such limits that many of them fail to differentiate between the meanings of the two words. Thus both the texts reflect on Kashmir’s tragic descent into chaos, violence and brutality.

At the same time both the writers also highlight the plight of the Kashmiri women who appear to be the prime victims of the jihadist whirlwind and Islamic terror. Kashmiri women are mandated to adopt and adhere to *Shariya* law and wear “veil” (SC 277) and the women “learn to dress appropriately” (MUH 321). Rushdie also depicts how the Kashmiri women are killed by the jihadists for failing to live according to *Shariya* law on the one hand, while they are apprehended and brutalised by the military personnel as soft targets in order to intimidate their fathers, brothers, husbands and sons from taking to arms. Thus, it appears that the oppression and marginalisation of the Kashmiri women is multi-layered without any hope of emancipation. Apart from the Kashmiri women, Kashmiri pandits are also depicted to be the victims of Islamic terror. Almost the entire pandit population of Kashmir valley had to flee the valley under the fear of execution while the Indian state failed to protect the interests of the Kashmiri women and the pandits. Rushdie questions the failure of hundreds of thousands of Indian military personnel in the valley to provide safety and security to the fleeing Kashmiri pandits, which this mass displacement is termed as a self-imposed exile by the Indian authorities at that time.

Portraying a brutal face of Indian presence in Kashmir, Rushdie depicts how the village of Pachigam and its inhabitants are brutally raped, murdered and the whole village is burnt down along with crops and cattle. Narrating the harrowing tale of the genocide, Rushdie paints the brutalisation in circular and indeterminate sentences. The village has been wiped off the existence, but the village still exists on the map despite the fact that “nothing resembling a human habitation remains . . . there was no Pachigam” (SC 309). Roy also portrays a similar incident of brutality when the military personnel blindly open fire at the peaceful funeral procession of Usman Abdullah, in which dozens of innocent Kashmiris are killed including the daughter and wife of Musa Yeswi. Bringing mass killings of the Kashmiris into light, Roy remarks that as “the war progressed in the Kashmir Valley, the graveyards became as common as the multi-storey parking lots that were springing up in the burgeoning cities in the plains” (MUH 319).

It may be concluded from the above analysis of both the texts that both texts are fictional representations of the ongoing Kashmir conflict and expose the repressive approach of the Indian army, jihadist violence and the destruction of Kashmiriyat. Both the texts appear to be pleas for redressal and reformation of the Indian approach and the Muslim religion for the revival of Kashmiriyat. The epigraph of *Shalimar the Clown* taken from Shakespeare’s play *Romeo and Juliet*, “plague on both your houses” (SC) appropriately summarises the Kashmiri sentiments towards both India and Pakistan. Roy also employs such epigraphs to her chapters in *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, which symbolise the destruction of once paradise like Kashmir valley by the external forces which oppress and trample the Kashmiris’ right to self-determination and Kashmiriyat. At the same time, one must not forget that the right to self-determination can never be granted at the cost of national integration. There is a need to maintain a fine balance between the region and nation, native and national cultural identity, and to win back the alienated and marginalised people into the national mainstream through empathetic approach. By exposing the ills that are plaguing the postcolonial Indian nation state, both the texts may be understood to call for rethinking and redrafting of the national policies in order to deal with such issues fulfilling the aspirations of all the stakeholders.

## REFERENCES

- [1]. Chandra, Bipin, Mukherjee, Mridula and Mukherjee, Aditya. *India since Independence*. Penguin Books, 2008.
- [2]. Gandhi, Leela. *Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction*. OUP, 1999.
- [3]. Nayar, Pramod K. *Postcolonial Literature: An Introduction*. Pearson, 2008.
- [4]. Roy, Arundhati. *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*. Penguin, 2017.
- [5]. Rushdie, Salman. *Shalimar the Clown*. Vintage Books, 2006.
- [6]. Sarkar, Parama. “Re-Imagining the Nation.” *Postcolonial Literatures*, edited by Pramod K. Nayar, Orient Black Swan, 2016, pp. 115-161.