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**Mastering the Art of Keeping Oneself in the News!**

Salman Rushdie has mastered the difficult and somewhat perilous art of keeping himself in the news. Rushdie stands out in the universe of English fiction for politically charged writing. As a storyteller of the highest class, his trademark tendency is to take on sensitive themes from history or current affairs without pulling punches. His characterization, plotting and language flow are not ends in into the viscera of terrorism's interconnectedness - how dots of violence, justice and revenge link together across time and space into blood-soaked lines.

***Shalimar the Clown* Undermined by Its Own Cleverness**

Rushdie’s eighth novel, *Shalimar the Clown*, he carries us spellbound from Hinduism to Nazism, Krishna to Allah, and Kashmir to California. Along the way, he examines and shatters traditional notions of love, vengeance, nationalism, seduction, and betrayal. For a work that affects a certain moral outrage, the phrase ‘brutality is brutality and excess is excess and that's all there is to it’ is uncomfortably close to a trivialisation. *Shalimar the Clown* is a novel that has a great deal to say, but ultimately is undermined by its own cleverness.

**Anger and Fury in *Shalimar the Clown***

*Shalimar the Clown* could also have been called "Fury", but the anger in this book is of an entirely different kind. The novel is an allegory of the rape of Kashmir, told as a story of love's betrayal and vengeance.

When one first lands in it, Rushdie's Kashmir is paradise, “O! Those days of peace when we all were in love and the rain was in our hands wherever we went” (499). In this bucolic valley, Muslims live in peace with their Hindu neighbours and share a common culture, woven of Hindu and Islamic traditions.

This is best illustrated by Rushdie in *Shalimar the Clown* as, “The words *Hindu* and *Muslim* had no place in their story, he told himself. In the valley these words were merely descriptions, not divisions” (91).

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Embodying this syncretic culture is Pachigam, a village of theatrical performers and cooks, where a young Hindu woman, Boonyi Kaul, loves a young Muslim man, Shalimar.

Although the two marry across the religious divide, the seeds of intolerance have already been sown in Kashmir, fostered by the overlapping conflicts, too familiar to all of us in India. Tragedy is set in motion with the appearance of Max Ophuls, the Jewish American ambassador to India, who falls for the lovely Boonyi, and takes her off to Delhi.

Meanwhile, the forces of fundamentalism feed on Kashmir's lost innocence, channelling the anger of poor Shalimar into the outlet of terrorism. The other result of this imbroglio is Boonyi's daughter, who is taken to the west by Max's cold, aristocratic British wife; that girl is India Ophuls, at the end India changed her name as Kashmira as per her mother's wish.

This is the kind of over-laden detail that bends and almost cracks the novel at various points. After Boonyi's betrayal, Shalimar goes mad with jealousy and takes vows and warns her as, "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" (98).

What Boonyi doesn't seem to realise is that she is swapping one prison for another, and beginning a chain of events that will end in multiple murders. Betrayal by his beloved instills a murderous rage in Shalimar. The village declares Boonyi dead to bring his ferocity under control, but he is not ready to forget or forgive. Situation makes a man either go to this extreme or to that extreme.

Shalimar becomes a murderous psychopath moving through fundamentalists' training camps and out along the terror trails. The ensuing, luridly rendered farrago of obsessive revenge never casts the faintest light on the psychology or procedures of terrorism. Every shrieking superlative lessens its impact. There is hardly any descriptive power of Rushdie visible in this work.

### **Our Story is No Longer Our Story**

Rushdie's approach appears:

Our lives, our stories, flowed into one another's, were no longer our own, individual, discrete. This unsettled people. There were collisions and explosions. The world was no longer calm. (61)

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Back in the Kashmir Valley, the Lashkar-e-Pak (LeP) imposes "Islamic decencies" on women, beheading the recalcitrant. In 1989, as the popular insurrection peaks, LeP bars Hindus of Shirmal from watching television with the Muslims and rakes up anti-Pandit violence. The Indian army's crackdown on village after village does not spare Pachigam's once-thriving populace. This is paralleled by the fundamentalists' attacks on Pandits, their properties and temples. Forgotten victims of ethnic cleansing, displaced Hindu minorities are "left to rot in their slum camps to dream of return, to die while dreaming of return, to die after the dream of return died" (297).

New groups were appearing every day, or so it seemed: Harakats, Lashkars, Hizbs of this or that, martyrdom or faith or glory. The word was that Amanullah Khan had come to Pakistan from England to assume command of the JKLF. Taliban is one of the terrorist organizations. Talib, meaning, 'the student'. Taleem means those who acquired knowledge. Taliban means 'scholar' (443). They are of opinion that they are attending to God's work. They go about propagation to the people of Kashmir that terrorism is an act of God.

### **Depth Psychology or Death Psychology?**

Sigmund Freud in his theory of 'Depth Psychology' formulated the concept of the 'Unconscious' which governs the human psyche. This all powerful and all pervading aspect of the psyche is actually the storehouse of all emotions and desires, both expressible and inexpressible.

Even though the unconscious works in a very dormant and stealthy manner, yet it directs and controls human behaviour to a great extent. In this novel of the unconscious, it is the society which plays an important role. Performing the role of the creator as suggested by Eric Fromm, it, in fact, gives a concrete form to the unconscious through its roles as a 'repressive agent'.

### **Control Over the Psyche**

The control over the psyche is especially more excessive in traditional societies like India or Pakistan where the women have to conform to the preconceived images constructed by the specific social order, their life is in fact a perpetual struggle between the natural instincts and desires of an individual, and the restrictions imposed upon it by the society. This continuous struggle that causes repression of the individual's natural instincts and imposes restrictions, ultimately leads to the state of neurosis or mental breakdown.

Such play of the mind, the inner workings, confusions and dilemmas of the mind has been a very popular and recurrent theme of the novelists starting from the early twentieth century, Chakravarti avers, "Depiction of the unconscious through the portrayal of

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neurotic and psychotic characters by delving deep into their inner thoughts and emotions has become an integral part of modern fiction” (34).

There is after all no other greater mystery than that of the workings of the human mind, with its unfathomable depths and powers. Even Milton in his epic has pointed to this fact when he said, “The mind I its own place and in itself/ Can make a Heaven out of Hell, a Hell out of Heaven” (106).

### **Fall from Grace into Grief**

In Rushdie’s broad sweep, the contemporary history of Kashmir becomes a symbol of a "paradise lost", the passing away of an innocent age. One British critic has commented that Rushdie uses Kashmir's "fall from grace into grief" as a microcosm of a period in which according to Rushdie, "an age of fury was dawning and only the enraged could shape it" (98).

Rushdie introduces the militant leader, and the rest of his motley wrecking crew - the Indian and Pakistani armies, and the quickly quashed Kashmiri nationalists. Rushdie draws his lens wider, he condemns the fundamentalists fueled by Pakistani, Afghan and CIA. (Central Investigation Agency) money and God knows what else, as well as the Indian Army on hand as ostensible protectors. Malign neglect runs rampant whenever open hatred and suppression take brief hiatus.

### **Eating Human Flesh**

Wijenaiké avers, “Humans were not meant to eat each other’s flesh. So why were they fighting and killing each other?” (*Missing in Action* 84). Shalimar is trained as a militant in Kashmir. At the terrorist camp, Rushdie allows us to witness Shalimar’s transformation from a romantic hero into a killing machine within a place of little food, filthy tents and staggering quantities of weapon. His cohorts come from the Philippines, Pakistan, Libya and Afghanistan. Rushdie moves gracefully and forcefully from the perspective of an indoctrinated terrorist to an Indian Army General responsible for implementing torture.

### **Attaining Perfection in Merciless Slaying**

Rushdie’s writing highlights the same which Kamala Wijeratne expresses in her poem *Dear Mabs*, “The weight of history made my shoulders sag its pages heavy with the grim saga of our war-torn races” (quoted in Gooneratne 11). Gradually, Shalimar attains perfection in merciless slaying.”In the hot coals of his fury, honor ranked above everything else, above decency, above culture, above life itself” (258). He crosses the Himalayas to receive sophisticated training from "our Pak allies." The camps run by the

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Pakistani Inter-Services Intelligence emphasize that for a true warrior, "economics was not primary, ideology was" (265). Shalimar graduates from Pakistan to terrorize "godless people" in Tajikistan, Algeria, Egypt and Palestine.

### **Finding One's Own Worth in a Negative Manner – A Paradigm of Terrorism**

Anees, the brother of Shalimar was ignored by his family members. Whatever he did, to make people laugh ends futile. Gradually he was eaten up by loneliness. When terrorist approached him, he felt that something hidden in him was found out by the terrorist and he was worth and important for this organization. That paved the way for him to join the terrorist group and he helps his brother Shalimar too.

It's a short paradigm that how terrorism captures the minds of the people and thrust into terrorism. "I cleanse myself of everything except the struggle! Without the struggle I am nothing!" (437). This statement, though said by Shalimar, captures the essence of the ideology behind Anees's struggle.

### **Wily Diplomacy**

"Ambassador Maximilian Ophuls, 'the Flying Jew,'" (125) writes Rushdie, the man who had flown the Bugatti Racer to safety, murmured to the Indian Foreign Ministry delegation about the various ways in which it might be possible to structure a deal for the high-speed jets. He, 'the Resistance hero, the philosopher prince, the billionaire power-broker', escaped from Occupied France in time to mastermind the Bretton Woods Agreement, then became a celebrated academic who foretold the end of the Cold War and the rise of the Third World's economic powerhouses, before serving for years as the US 'counter-terrorism chief'.

Ambassador Max Ophuls is a man of an ambiguous character. The onset of his appearance as an ambassador depicts that he is a man of genuine kind. While he was speaking at the Rashtrapati Bhavan banquet in his honour, he refers to the conflict in Kashmir and he says, "Each tragedy belongs to itself and at the same time to everyone else. What diminishes any of us diminishes us all" (223). This shows that he is very concerned for the welfare of the people in India. But soon his other face glistened as a terrorist. Here people failed to notice his real character which was highly corrupted. Even his blood was ruined by the name of terrorism. Rushdie vividly portrays him as, "Ambassador Max Ophuls, who these days was supporting terror activities while calling himself an ambassador for counterterrorism, had been in charge of liaison with Talib the Afghan's branch of the Muj" (445). He was not true to his country as well as India. For him, situation moulded in a corrupt manner.

### **Usual Rushdie**

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*Shalimar the Clown* has the usual Rushdie punch lines, unexpected inflections, punned names, wildly funny situations and almost normal craziness, alternating with truly brilliant passages on the nature of power, the emptiness of urban existence and the loss of a dream-like Kashmir. It is above all a tale of how the construction of the enemy can spiral into a global enterprise with global fatalities.

### **Freeing Self from Confinement: Assert Yourself**

This saga of repression, neglect and exploitation that has continued through the ages in the dominated egoistic society ruled by obsolete and partial codes and laws finally need have an end. To overcome and bring an end to the repression imposed upon each other and society, it is necessary to strengthen the resolve to free the self from all kinds of confinement physical as well as psychological, and Shashi Deshpande says in one of her novels, "Assert Yourself. Don't suppress it. Let it grow and flourish, never mind, how many things it destroys in the bargain" (115).

### **No Winners, No Losers!**

The horror that *Shalimar the Clown* depicts demands to be screamed, word by word, at the minarets, mandirs, steeples and congresses of those who facilitate killing, rape and torture - and at those who have not the courage to ask of their rulers, of their religions, of themselves: why is that?

Rushdie explores the psyche of the terrorist and by doing so lays bare the intrinsic mechanisms that contribute towards the creation of a terrorist. In this manner Rushdie seems to support the currently emerging view that the only way to root out terrorism is to question: Why do people leave terrorist groups? Answer to this question will reveal the disenchantment that terrorists feel once they enter the inner bowels of terrorist organizations.

By the end of this journey, Rushdie instills in his readers a realization that when all masks and motives are stripped away, there are no winners and losers, only interconnected individuals with a present to be lived and a past to be learned and retold.

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S. Jenefa Kiruba Malar  
Department of English  
Sarah Tucker College  
Tirunelveli – 627007  
Tamilnadu, India  
[jeneccg@gmail.com](mailto:jeneccg@gmail.com)

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