

The Study of Postmodern Perspectives in Salman Rushdie's *Shalimar the Clown*

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Abstract:

The post colonial, postmodern world is one where myriad worlds and experiences flow, seeping into each other as there are no boundaries or barriers anymore. Today the world is a globalized world where borders have ceased to exist. All concepts of conventionality and rules are broken, and new ones created to give expression to this new phenomenon of rule breaking and free world. Art and literature of this modern world also reflects this trend as is evident in the fiction of Salman Rushdie. The present study attempts to focus on the certain aspects of postmodern perspective in the novel *Shalimar the Clown*. Rushdie's most acclaimed work has been hailed for envisioning an interface between the postmodern and the postcolonial. Both postcolonialism and postmodernism are concerned with the idea of authority. While the former tries to debunk strictures of imperial authority, the latter makes an attempt to debunk authority in general. Postmodernism and postcolonialism are similar in their concerns with decentring, subverting the dominant discourse and interrogating metanarratives. As a result, it is the marginal and the ex-centric that assumes new significance.

Key words: experiences,trend,post modernism,rule,postcolonialism

The very term postmodernism implies a relation to modernism. Modernism was an earlier aesthetic movement which was a vogue in the early decades of the twentieth century. Peter Barry in his book *Beginning Theory* briefs the concept of modernism:

Modernism was that earthquake in the arts which brought down much of the structure of pre-twentieth century practice in music, painting, literature and architecture. In all the arts touched by modernism what had been the most fundamental elements of practice were challenged and rejected thus, melody and harmony were put aside in music, perspective and direct pictorial representation were abandoned in painting, in favour of abstraction, in architecture traditional forms and materials (pitched roofs, domes and columns, wood, stone and bricks) were rejected in favour of plain geometrical forms often executed in new materials like plate glass and concrete (81-82).

Salman Rushdie remains an immense figure in postcolonial and postmodern studies. Regardless of the controversies he raises, he is an acknowledged master of story telling, one who boldly experiments with new techniques, questions long-held beliefs, and opposes dogmatism in his fiction. The strongest evidence of Rushdie's prominence in the contemporary literary scene is the overwhelming scholarly attention he has received. Salman

Rushdie is an eminent postmodernist. A pioneer in the field of Indian English Diasporic Literature, Rushdie's fiction accurately portrays the complex and confusing postcolonial, postmodern world. All his novels represent his interpretation of history and the world, and their influence on life and society. A postmodern novelist that he is, Rushdie reflects the rebellion from conventionality. Like most postmodern writers his fiction too has a touch of unreality and vastness that is needed to project contemporary reality, a reality devoid of borders.

Salman Rushdie's *Shalimar the Clown* [2005] is a historical novel about the birth of Islamic terrorism, based on the hypothesis that modern world events cannot be taken in isolation because everything is connected with everything else. The novel goes to the roots of the contemporary epoch and courageously seeks historical connections. Rushdie abandoned his former poetics and burlesque exaggeration, his conception of history as an absurd grimace, and sets his characters in the merciless world of revenge and retribution, in a history in which it is no longer clear what the cause is and what the effect is, and where the endless cycle of violence leads to an absolute destruction.

The novel *Shalimar the Clown* looks forward 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 divisions. The novel is not only an odyssey from innocence to betrayal but also an affirmation and belief on the resilience and strength of the human spirit, a belief in the future. Truly a trilogy of innocence, betrayal and new beginning, *Shalimar, the Clown* is a story portraying the life cycle of death in life and life in death, a perpetual cycle of birth, destruction and regeneration. It represents a new life, a new beginning with the dissolution of all divisions and segments. Now, 'There was no India. There was only Kashmira, and *Shalimar the Clown*'. (STC398)

Rushdie resorts to the time-tested approach of looking at great events from below. Fundamentalism is confronted with the needs and pleasures of everyday life. The existential experience of simple village people is seen by Rushdie from two angles. On one hand frustration and the rising feeling of the whole world as an enemy, which makes young men fight against everybody because everyone is an enemy, and on the other hand the shock of older people, for whom the new times destroyed their world, ideals and illusions.

Linda Hutcheon argues that "postmodernism is a contradictory phenomenon, one that uses and abuses, installs and then subverts the very concepts it challenges." "Fundamentally contradictory, resolutely historical, and inescapably political", Hutcheon opines that postmodern writing is best characterized by works that are historiographic meta fictions in that they are self-reflexive while at the same time they deliberately tamper with history. Catherine Cundy underscores Rushdie's defiance to being bound by postmodernity and postcoloniality. To classify Rushdie's writing as "postmodernist, magical realist or fantasist" she surmises, "is often to deny its arguments, its formal innovativeness and its political dimension". Rushdie is convinced about the manner in which "the creation of a false category can and does lead to excessively narrow, and sometimes misleading readings of some of the artists it is held to include". He feels that such categories inadvertently divert attention from what actually merits notice.

Postmodernism is a complex contemporary phenomenon. It can be described as a socio-cultural and literary theory. It is a shift in perspective that has manifested in a variety of the disciplines including the social sciences, art, architecture, music, literature, fashion, communication, technology and elsewhere. Post modernity is a term used to describe the socio-cultural implication of postmodernism. It is generally agreed that the post modern shift in perception began sometime in the late 1950s and is probably still continuing. Post modernism can be associated with the power shifts and dehumanization of the post-second world War era and the onslaught of consumer capitalism. Salman Rushdie's fiction is described as postmodern, precisely because it questions realist modes of

knowledge and representation. Rather, by focusing on Rushdie's use of formal literary devices such as unreliable narration, digression, irony, repetition, satire, allegory and intertextuality, this chapter considers how Rushdie's novel *Shalimar, the Clown* questions about the historical, social and political worlds it presents.

Salman Rushdie's handling of narrative techniques in the select novel *Shalimar, the Clown* appear to be concerned with politics. The novels have passages of explicitly political narrative. His narrative technique is most intimately based on realizing the world of political and domestic history in a moment of postmodernist practice. Rushdie's use of postmodern devices in his novels reveals the originality of his insight and awareness of the human predicament in the postmodern age. Intertextuality, allusions, magical realism, parody and pastiche and the unveiling of layers and layers of meaning have all become a narrative mode of his novel.

This characteristic feature of the genre appeals mostly to postcolonial writers because the colonized people are argued to be silenced by the official dominant discourse in history. In this context, postcolonial historical fictions can create alternative histories of the colonized, conflicting with the monolithic history of the colonizer. As this study argues, those historical novels which are written by postcolonial novelists that include references to the colonizer's version of historical facts, with a critical distance, can destroy the monolithic accounts of the past by means of introducing the suppressed voices of others whose histories have been silenced under the hegemony and the monology of colonizer's history.

In line with the postmodernist view of historiography and historical novels, Rushdie's *Shalimar the Clown* have been analyzed as historiographic metafiction. It has been argued that these texts include historical material along with metafictional self-reflexivity with the purpose of subverting the Eurocentric history writing. These postmodernist historical novels should be regarded as texts where a synergy is created through their postmodern and postcolonial revisions. Written to celebrate the collapse of upper case History, these novels open the way to private histories of individuals in history whose stories have remained untold.

Shalimar the Clown is a novel about loss- the loss of a complete way of life. Under a composite set of forces the idyllic life of Pachigam, or for that matter the whole of Kashmir, comes to an end as the heterogeneous but peaceful and harmonious society falls apart, distrust spreads like wild fire, life becomes cheap and death and destruction visits too often. The ugly turn of events at Shalimar garden gives Rushdie an opportunity to voice his fears about the coming times as Abdulla Noman prophesies 'the world he knew was disappearing; this blind, inky night was the incontestable sign of the times'

After the happenings of night at Shalimar garden, as the paradise on earth- Kashmir falls under the clutches of Indian army and Pakistan supported extremists ushering in an era of unabated deaths and communal violence, Rushdie makes a prophesy that, 'The time of the demons had begun'. On the one hand the occupational Indian army begins to strengthen its occupation and impose its hegemonic rule, symbolized through General Hammerdev Kachwaha and his Elasticnagar, and on the other hand the Pakistan supported fundamentalists of Iron mullah affect a drastic change in the non-communal social fabric of the Pachigam society.

By accommodating the local point of view and by asking some valid questions, Rushdie's version of Kashmir story has been able to destabilize the dominant discourse on Kashmir. However, the version that Rushdie writes is not the ultimate reality of Kashmir. There are many things and realities that Rushdie takes for granted. For example, in the novel Rushdie presents the maharaja era as peaceful and happy state, the loss of which is mourned by the people of Kashmir. The fact of the matter is that maharaja was an autocrat and people were up against him since 1931.

Again, in the novel Rushdie focuses on the ideal of Kashmiriyat, the spirit of communal harmony and cultural syncretism that has been lost with the advent of pro-freedom resistance in Kashmir. This seems to be a far of contrivance. The spirit of Kashmiriyat still exists in Kashmir and people from different religions still live, pray and celebrate their festivals together. The American hand in Afghanistan and other such countries can be considered relevant, however, so far as the American involvement in Kashmir politics is concerned, it is a mere exaggeration.

The article analyses the depiction of postmodernism in Salman Rushdie's book '*Shalimar the Clown*'. Postmodernism refers to a way of life, feeling and state of mind, and is used to describe movements in various disciplines such as literature, visual arts and philosophy. Information on the postmodern literature in India is given, along with the characteristics of postmodern literature. It looked for the metafictional elements of the texts, stressing self-reflexivity, non-linear narrative, and parodic intention to pinpoint the refraction and the co-existence of plural voices that problematize the boundary between history and fiction, and question the monology and claim to objectivity of historical representation. Both these novels reflect the postmodernist interrogation of objective reality. Both strive to challenge the old established realities whose truthfulness we take for granted, and both force their readers to question them.

One could safely conclude that history writing cannot avoid a connivance with certain factors like the writer's subjectivity, cultural forces, and his political leanings and, of course, the discursive nature of representation. Historiography and fiction writing, even though different genres, share the same site at the creative level where the boundary line between fact and fiction is blurred.

The deferral of death in *Shalimar the Clown* attests to the postmodernist sensibility that Benjamin refers to. Death in *Shalimar the Clown* is more communal than an individual experience. Communities live under the shadow of death; but the violence that generates this ambience is by and large a product of personal resentment.

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